

Communicare

Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Communicare awaits articles to be published in Communicare 31(2), December 2012. Articles should be submitted to the Editor-in-Chief.

Guidelines for the submission of articles

1. Contributions must be submitted in English.
2. All articles (average length of 6 000 words) are to be submitted via email to communicare@uj.ac.za:
 - The material should be prepared in Microsoft Office Word.
 - Text should be in Times New Roman, 12pt and justified.
 - 1.5 cm line spacing should be used throughout the article.
 - Margins should have the following measurements: left (2,5 cm); top (2 cm); right (2 cm) and bottom (2 cm).
 - Tables and figures should be included in the text. Please attach the original file in which these graphics were generated (e.g. PowerPoint). Furthermore, ensure that the number of a figure or table corresponds with the number of the section under which it appears and the source appears after the figure/table.
3. All articles must be accompanied by an abstract of between 100 and 150 words in English.
4. The first page should contain the name(s) of the author(s), the title of the article and the name of the author and address(es) to whom correspondence should be addressed. The abstract should also appear on the first page. The article itself should start on a new page.
5. All references must be done according to the APA style and carefully checked for completeness, accuracy and consistency.
6. All articles submitted to Communicare should be original contributions and should not be under consideration for any other publication at the same time.

EDITORIAL

In this issue of *Communicare*, a number of authors explore various aspects of message content in a variety of contexts. The emphasis in this edition is on message-creation strategies as they pertain to contexts that range from the institutional to the personal. It seems particularly relevant to focus on message content amid the emergence of new technology that has enabled the public at large to access and afford new means of interaction and communication via the Internet's intelligent web services and fast broadband. Greater access has resulted in a proliferation of so-called user-generated content that refers to media content created and published by amateur (or non-institutional) communicators who have previously simply been content consumers. Clearly, phenomena such as these specifically challenge institutional communicators to reconsider their message strategies, and to revise top-down approaches to determining message content.

In the first article, Oksuitycz challenges one such approach when she explores the need for greater transparency in stakeholder communication at the South African Reserve Bank (SARB). Her study reveals that the SARB has achieved a relatively high level of economic and policy transparency but lower procedural and political transparency. The results also indicate that, despite an increased demand for accountability of organisations to a broad spectrum of stakeholders, the SARB directs most of its communications to a relatively limited group of stakeholders.

Broersma and Jansen explore content selection of persuasive HIV counselling and testing messages for students at a previously disadvantaged university in South Africa. The outcomes of their study suggest that in trying to convince black students in South Africa to go for HCT, the developers of promotion messages should focus on the students' susceptibility to HIV, on how to deal with the possibility that their parents would not approve of their going for HCT, and on how to cope with a possibly disadvantageous test outcome.

In her article, Van der Merwe discusses the appeal of the soap opera, *7de Laan*. Against the backdrop of its diverse audience base and the dominant conventions of *7de Laan*, she investigates what it is that draws Afrikaans and non-Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers to *7de Laan*. Through the use of reception analysis, this article explores the sense-making practices employed by the seemingly diverse audience.

In the final guest article, Malden presents a case study of a super music brand – Queen, and its brand director, Freddie Mercury. As de Klerk argues in the preface to this article, Freddie Mercury perhaps was far ahead of his time in understanding that music and the show were a reflection of the social and complex world around the group, and a way of making sense of, and giving sense to, the eccentric and eclectic audiences to whom they were playing. Malden argues that such controversial and trend-setting behaviour that makes a brand stand out, is one of the most important ingredients in creating a successful personal brand, one that embraces the courage and daring to be different, and the inherent risk involved in doing so. From Malden's case study of Freddie Mercury, it is clear that such personal branding entails looking at oneself as a product and then employing all the managerial and marketing techniques any successful business would to make their product the brand leader.

Prof Sonja Verwey

Editor-in-Chief: *Communicare*

The transparency of the South African Reserve Bank: a stakeholder approach

ABSTRACT

The South African Reserve Bank (SARB) is a central bank. It is the public institution responsible for managing the South African monetary policy. Any decisions taken by the bank and how these decisions are communicated affect all the participants in the economic activity of the country. This study undertook a thematic analysis of the media releases, monetary policy statements and SARB Governors' speeches delivered between 2008 and 2009. It revealed that the SARB, through having achieved a relatively high level of economic and policy transparency, achieved lower procedural and political transparency. The results also indicate that, despite there being an increased demand for the accountability of organisations to a broad spectrum of stakeholders, the SARB directs most of its communications to only a relatively limited group of stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the economic crisis highlighted numerous shortcomings of corporate governance and generated calls for greater transparency and accountability from financial institutions – including central banks – to key stakeholders. In order to cope with the increased public demand for exposure, central banks are actively attempting to establish the standards for corporate openness, disclosure and transparency (Christensen, Morsing & Cheney, 2008: 129).

In the globalised world economy there is, on the one hand, a trend towards international harmonisation of governance mechanisms (Solomon, 2010: 202); on the other hand, even though transparency is one of the key aspects of the management of accountability, the levels of transparency differ from bank to bank – depending on the bank’s interpretation of the concept – which further manifests itself in the bank’s communication with stakeholders. This creates a huge challenge in terms of reconciling the trend in organisations towards broadening the spectrum of stakeholders, and the more traditional views that the key stakeholders of the central banks are the financial sector and the country’s government on whom the central bank should focus its communication effort. This should be further explained in terms of the global historical changes regarding the transparency of central banks, which traditionally were extremely secretive about their conduct.

Worldwide, central banks’ policy in respect of disclosing monetary policy has, since the 1980s, undergone a significant shift. The reasons cited for the change are external pressures and the economists’ better understanding of the monetary policy transmission mechanism (Broaddus, 2001: 2; Dennis & Williams, 2007: 69). Since 1990, a number of central banks, known as “inflation targeters”, from countries as diverse as New Zealand, Canada, Albania, Poland, the Philippines and South Africa, to name but a few, have adopted inflation targeting as a framework for conducting monetary policy. The said banks have also made a point of regularly announcing both specific inflation objectives and further also other monetary policy objectives that reflect changing social purposes, prevailing political interests and ideologies.

1. CENTRAL RESERVE BANKS AND THEIR ROLE

Apart from increasing market stability and efficiency, the literature mentions the following objectives for central banks (Arnone, Laurens, Segalotto & Sommers, 2009; Bernanke, 2008; Bernanke, Laubach, Mishkin & Posen, 1999; Cukierman, 2002; Montes, 2010; Stasavage, 2003; Williams, 2010):

- Assuring price stability (low and stable inflation)
- Indicating long-term inflation objectives and consistency, short-term signalling
- Publishing macroeconomic forecasts
- Assuring long-term monetary policy consistency
- Creating liquidity money for the commercial banking system
- Stimulating economic growth

- Fighting deflationary pressures
- Preventing economic bubbles
- Reducing the cost of disinflation

Achieving these goals is, however, no mean task because of a variety of factors, among which is uncertainty.

2. UNCERTAINTY

Central banks face much uncertainty when making decisions. Montes (2010) points out three broad forms of uncertainty: state-of-the-economy uncertainty, model uncertainty and strategic uncertainty. Uncertainty about the state of the economy arises from the information-related imperfections: quality of data or delays in data acquisition. Model or parameter uncertainty stems from the fact that there is no, one single model that provides an accurate description of economy and the policy transmission to the economy (i.e. how long it takes each variable to have an effect). Strategic uncertainty arises from both the interactions between the different economic agents and the outcomes of such interactions. Economic uncertainty and particularly model uncertainty are difficult to overcome; however, communication of the banks' strategies and goals can reduce strategic uncertainty (Montes, 2010).

Communicating monetary policy, which seems to be the main focus of the central banks' communication, poses numerous challenges. In order for monetary policy to be effective, banks should publish extensive information about their strategy, analysis, and decisions. In addition, Cukierman (2002) points out that not only is the amount of information important, but also the timing and the disclosure of the economic model(s) used as a basis for the bank's decision. However, the latter is rarely disclosed by central banks. Cukierman (2002) attributes this lack of transparency to the fact that, considering the current state of economic knowledge, there is no, one correct model of economy that can be used, which leads to a considerable discretion on the part of bankers in terms of monetary decision making.

3. TRANSPARENCY OF CENTRAL BANKS – THE SECTOR CONCEPT

Transparency can be perceived as the desire of organisations to represent themselves in coherent and legitimate ways amid both legal requirements and stakeholder expectations (Christensen, 2002: 163). Osborne (2004) defines *transparency* as allowing stakeholders to have an insight into the system and to understand decisions taken by the organisation. Poole (2003: 1) describes *central bank transparency* as "conveying accurate information including all the information market participants need to form opinions on monetary policy that are as complete as possible". Philips and Young (2009: 37) distinguish between different degrees of transparency. *Radical transparency* poses some disadvantages for organisations, such as loss of competitive advantage and exposing intellectual property. *Controlled transparency* involves the managed release of information from the organisation, while *institutional transparency* refers to the information made available to the public in response to legal and statutory requirements. Christensen (2002) differentiates between

internal transparency (information available to internal stakeholders) and *external transparency* (communication directed at external stakeholders).

Florini (2002) points out that transparency reflects a continuum of organisational behaviour, where, at the one end, there is radical transparency in which everything is open to public scrutiny, and, at the other end, there is extreme secrecy. Most organisations operate somewhere between these two extremes, and the precise degree of transparency is left to deliberate organisational choices. These choices are determined by a variety of factors like the critical assessment of pressure groups (Christensen, Morsing & Cheney, 2008), prevailing practice in similar organisations, the discretion of the organisational decision makers, and the availability of technology that allows organisational information to be disseminated with unprecedented ease and reach. Faust and Svensson (2001) argue that although the transparency of central banks holds benefits for society it does however make the banks' reputation more vulnerable.

Calls for greater transparency in the way central bank decisions are made have resulted in more openness with regard to how the monetary policy of a country is communicated. After decades of secrecy, central banks started opening up in the 1980s. Broaddus (2001) attributes this greater openness to advances in the knowledge about how monetary policy is transmitted, a greater public demand for information, and expectations of greater openness in government in general.

The objective of transparency in terms of central bank policy is the increased stability of the markets (Broaddus, 2001). Hall (2008) links stability to the issue of trust, which he defines as "a social phenomenon that fundamentally relies upon intersubjectivity of shared social understanding between trusted and trusting". Trust in financial stability in terms of long-term inflation expectations is important to businesses and households with regard to long-term investments, which are often represented as the 'rational' objectives of the market players. Empirical research has revealed that central bank transparency is associated with a number of economic effects: lower inflation, lower unemployment, lower cost of disinflation, lower inflation variability and an improvement of forecasting accuracy of the private sector (Crowe & Meade, 2008). There are however voices questioning the economic benefits of central bank transparency. Turdaliiev (2009) argues that while the standard approach in economics is to treat all players in the economy as a homogenous group, his research on the effect of central banks' transparency on workers and producers has provided some evidence that transparency affects different groups differently.

3.1 The dimensions of central bank transparency

Crowe and Meade (2008) assert that transparency in the case of central banks refers both to explaining monetary policy to the public and to the process of decision making. The requirements, both legal and statutory, are that a central bank should be "internally compelled even legally obliged to publish all internal documents and data, in particular those that are instrumental in its monetary policy decisions and relate to its status of independence" (Issing, 2005: 67).

Crowe and Meade (2008) identify five aspects of transparency:

- Political transparency (the relationship between government and the reserve bank)
- Economic transparency (the release of economic information including forecasts)
- Procedural transparency (publishing information acquired via transcripts, minutes, etc. on how the Monetary Policy Committee arrives at its decisions)
- Policy transparency (information of the policy decision once the decision has been reached and timing of the information release)
- Operational transparency (publishing information regarding policy transmission mechanisms, assessing the accuracy of past forecasts and accounting for past errors)

The primary means of achieving organisational transparency is through communication with stakeholders. Transparency can therefore be described as “a condition shaping corporate communication” (Christensen, 2002: 164).

3.2 Stakeholder approach to Reserve Bank transparency

In terms of the stakeholder approach, the organisation is responsible to a wide range of stakeholders – people “who depend on the organisation to fulfil their own goals and on whom, in turn, organisation depends” (Johnson & Scholes, 2002: 206). The stakeholder approach to managing organisations is associated with the landmark work of Freeman, who is credited with the origins of stakeholder theory (Walsh, 2005). Stakeholder theory can be presented in a number of ways: a descriptive approach is used to describe specific organisational characteristics and behaviours; an instrumental perspective is used to identify connections between stakeholder management and the achievement of organisational objectives; and, a normative approach provides guidelines on how organisation ought to behave (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). However, the usefulness of such separation of the stakeholder theory is questioned by Freeman (2008) who proposes an integrated approach to business and ethics. The theory is applicable not only to large corporations but also to small businesses and to non-profit and government organisations (Phillips, Freeman & Wicks, 2003).

The literature indicates two main approaches to qualifying who organisational stakeholders are. The narrow view proposes that only those parties that have a direct influence on organisational interests should be considered (Clifton & Amran, 2011). These are often referred to as *primary stakeholders*, which typically comprise shareholders, employees, customers, government, financiers and sometimes communities. The broad view of the stakeholders includes other parties, including local communities, the media, even the ecosystem and future generations (Clarkson, 1995; Clifton & Amran, 2011), as exemplified by the following definition:

Stakeholders are persons or groups that have, or claim, ownership, rights, or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present, or future. Such claimed rights or

interests are the result of transactions with, or actions taken by, the corporation, and may be legal or moral, individual or collective (Clarkson, 1995: 106).

There are numerous ways of classifying organisational stakeholders. For example, Esman (in Gregory, 2009: 23) classifies organisational stakeholders according to the types of linkages they forge with the organisation, namely normative, enabling, input, output or diffused. Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) focus on the three attributes of stakeholders: power, legitimacy and urgency of claims. These attributes – although socially constructed, variable over time, mutually intersecting and dependent on managers' perceptions – help organisations decide how to respond to different stakeholder groups. Clifton and Amran (2011: 131) point out that organisational focus on powerful stakeholders may come at the cost of low-power parties. Dunham, Freeman and Liedtka (2006) caution against dividing stakeholders into legitimate and illegitimate ones, and suggest that all interests are legitimate. They propose that, depending on the nature of relationships, organisations should adopt a varied ethical stance and use cooperation, collaboration or containment when managing stakeholder relationships. While the stakeholder approach does not propose that all stakeholders should be treated equally (Phillips, Freeman & Wicks, 2003), it does however require that organisations consider their impact on a broad group of stakeholders and then find creative ways to create value for all concerned – to the extent to which such is indeed possible (Parmar, Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Purnell & De Colle, 2010).

A breakdown of the concept of *community as a stakeholder* helps to address a broad spectrum of stakeholders who cannot be classified as traditional primary stakeholders. Dunham et al. (2006) identify four types of communities: communities of place, communities of interests, virtual advocacy groups and communities of practice. The organisations need to build different types of relationship with each of these communities. This includes different ways of communicating with each type of community.

The stakeholder approach provides an integrated way of incorporating the interests of multiple stakeholder groups, reflecting social, economic and environmental activities. Furthermore, it focuses on an organisation's two-way relationship with stakeholders and postulates including the considerations for these relationships into an organisation's strategy (Choo, 2009; Parmar et al., 2010). This has proved to be a complex matter for central banks in that their decisions affect the entire country in which there are a multitude of stakeholders, often with conflicting expectations and also varied communication needs. Further, in line with current financial policy, the bank often needs to make decisions that are either unpopular or affect stakeholders adversely. Thus, from the power-relations perspective, the relationship between reserve banks and their various stakeholders are asymmetrical, with banks having considerable power to make decisions without any input from the stakeholders. At the same time, both the banks and the stakeholders face much uncertainty in terms of the consequences of the banks' actions on the various stakeholders.

While it is accepted that transparency reduces the uncertainty and builds credibility, it nevertheless is a discretionary issue entailing what and how central banks communicate with their publics. The choice and timing of information that banks choose to disclose are the result of intersubjective interactions that create shared meaning about how the banks should communicate with various stakeholders. These choices are, to a large extent, intersubjective and result from a shared understanding of real phenomena. Hall (2008: 36) states that “preferences and social purposes of powerful social actors inform the construction and stability of institutions and systems of governance” including those of central banks. All of these aspects have an impact on the communication between the Reserve Bank and its publics.

4. PROFILE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN RESERVE BANK

The South African Reserve Bank acts as a central bank for South Africa and its banking institutions. A public entity, viewed as a national asset, the Reserve Bank is responsible for formulating, implementing and managing the country’s monetary policy. Generally, the Reserve Bank of South Africa has a degree of autonomy designed to serve the nation. As a means of entrenching and maintaining the bank’s independence, private investors hold shares in the Reserve Bank. However, unlike any other businesses with shareholders, profit maximisation is not the objective of the bank (Marcus, 2010). Private shareholders have no direct role in the operations of the bank. This particular structure and policy are designed to sustain the bank’s independence and to ensure that no dominant shareholder exercises undue influence over the control of the bank.

A board of 14 directors representing commerce, finance, industry and agriculture manages the Reserve Bank. Seven of the directors are elected by the bank’s shareholders. The country’s president appoints the governor, three deputy governors and three other directors to the board. The bank’s role, management and functions are regulated by the South African Reserve Bank Act of 1989.

In addition to dictating and managing monetary policy, the bank is a custodian of two types of reserve:

- National reserves – held in foreign currency and precious metals
- Contingency reserves – built over a period of time to empower the bank to deal with adverse conditions and unexpected shocks

The bank also regulates the supply of money by influencing its costs by fixing interest rates. In 2000, in line with similar moves by other central banks, the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) adopted inflation targeting as its official policy.

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of the present research was to explore current trends in SARB transparency as expressed through the way in which the bank communicated with its stakeholders by means

of the selected means of communication during the height of the financial crisis between 2008 and 2009.

In this article, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the stakeholder groups most frequently addressed by SARB?
2. What are the prevailing themes in the Bank's communications?
3. Which dimensions of transparency identified by Crowe and Meade (2008) are applicable to the SARB?

6. RESEARCH METHOD

The South African Reserve Bank uses a variety of channels and methods to communicate with its publics. These range from press conferences, public lectures and media releases to Internet-based communication. The SARB maintains a corporate website, which, as well as other information, contains press releases, monetary policy statements, speeches by governors, various documents and reports. For the purposes of the study on which this article is based, a thematic analysis of the media releases, monetary policy statements and governors' speeches delivered between 2008 and 2009 was conducted. This particular period coincides with one of the worst global economic recessions since the Great Depression. The sample included 14 Monetary Policy Committee statements, 17 speeches and 18 press releases. Other documents were excluded from the study. Data were analysed qualitatively using the following steps: *comprehending* – acquiring the full understanding of the setting and study topic; *synthesising* – drawing together of different themes and concepts from the research, and forming these into new integrated patterns; *theorising* – reducing data, identifying links and values in the data, and attempting to establish links with theory (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

7. RESULTS

The analysed documents vary in terms of content and intended audiences. Some, like monetary policy statements, are standardised in terms of content and are published regularly; press releases and speeches, on the other hand, are published as the need arises.

7.1 Monetary policy statements

Monetary Policy Committee statements are released bi-monthly and the key items covered include:

- Recent developments in inflation
- The outlook for inflation
- Monetary policy stance

Generally, the monetary policy statements are designed to explain and justify the bank's stance on the interest rates decision for the period under review. Developments in inflation

are monitored and discussed in the context of the current global economic recession using standard measures and indices like the Consumer Price Index (CPIX). The outlook for inflation deals with the bank's prediction of behaviour of key economic indicators. These predictions are based on both internal and publicly available economic data and information. However, the bank does not provide any information about the models used to arrive at those predictions. Monetary policy statements indicate short-term inflation targeting, yet do not cover the bank's long-term monetary policy. The language and the nature of monetary statements indicate that they are directed at the publics that have knowledge and understanding of the economy.

7.2 Speeches

The Reserve Bank speeches for the period analysed were delivered predominantly at special conventions, award ceremonies and public lectures at institutions of higher learning (such as universities and business schools), or delivered at international conferences. In any country and even more so in a developing country like South Africa, the majority of the population does not have easy access to such venues. As a result, the audience for the speeches of the bank's governors would predominantly consist of financial specialists or people with at least some expertise in economics and business. The bank governors deliver speeches to various audiences across the country and internationally. The analysis of the speeches reveals that, although they cover a wide variety of topics, there are some recurring themes present in most of the speeches. Therefore, although the researcher subdivided the speeches into seven thematic categories mainly on the basis of their titles, the content of the speeches overlaps.

The speeches delivered by the Reserve Bank governor or the deputy governors in 2008-2009, can, in terms of audiences, be grouped in the following categories:

- International financial forums (3) – Namibia, Zanzibar, Turkey
- Financial, economic and banking sector (6)
- Universities (3)
- Memorial lectures (2)
- Industry (3)

The following topics were covered in the speeches:

- Economic crisis (5)
- Monetary policy and inflation targeting (3)
- Economic outlook (3)
- Reserve management and exchange rate (1)
- Model-building and forecasting in times of high uncertainty (1)
- Economic environment for exporters (1)
- Future of banking in Africa (1)
- Role of central banks (1)
- Reflections on social and economic development in South Africa in the past 15 years (1)

7.2.1 *The main themes*

The analysis of the speeches indicates that there are three distinct themes present in most of the speeches delivered during 2008-2009.

Theme 1: Economic crisis and economic outlook

As the researched period (2008-2009) covered the height of the economic crisis, that topic dominated the SARB governors' speeches at that time. On several occasions, the governors emphasised that unlike previous crises, which started in developing economies, the 2008-2009 economic crisis originated in the USA and spread first to other Western economies, with developing countries being affected last. In 2008, many speeches referred to the causes of the crisis, which were discussed in different levels of detail, depending on the main focus of a speech.

At the time, the consequences of the crisis were mainly considered from the point of view of the markets, rather than in terms of its impact at the grassroots level:

... one should point out immediately that some part of the turmoil – an upward adjustment to the risk premia imbedded in the prices of a range of financial assets – should be welcomed as a normalisation of affairs ...

... the financial market's turbulence has resulted in slower economic growth, and is projected to continue doing so ...

A related theme was the reassurance that the South African economy had limited exposure to the problems that caused the economic crisis in the USA and other developed economies: "... in the case of South Africa, however, the effects of this turmoil in international financial markets, so far, have been indirect". Similarly, in a public lecture, Reserve Bank Governor Tito Mboweni asserted that the Common Monetary Area (RSA, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland) "seems in some respect to enjoy safe haven status". This tone applied particularly to speeches delivered during the first half of 2008.

It is interesting to observe that in 2008 the word 'crisis' was hardly used, while the term 'turmoil' seemed to be preferred. The economic outlook that emanated from the speeches was fairly positive in that although the economic indicators were worsening, there was a recurring message that South Africa would fend off the recession. This was explicitly expressed in September 2008: "Any notion that the South African economy is soon to enter a recession must be rejected firmly." However, a month later Governor Mboweni warned that "it is too early to draw the lessons from the crisis that is yet to run its full course". The tone of speeches gradually changed to emphasise the uncertainty of prediction, turmoil in the markets, the effects of globalisation, the need to abandon the overreliance on mathematical economics models and the need to seek new approaches to managing the world economy. It was not until 2009, when the statistical economic data worsened and South Africa officially entered the period of recession in the last quarter of 2008 and the first half of 2009, that the word 'crisis' was used more prominently in Governor Mboweni's speeches.

It should be noted that throughout the period in question, the limited impact of the crisis on the South African financial system was emphasised on numerous occasions:

- ... the domestic financial system has not been impacted directly ...
- ... our interbank market is working normally, the capital adequacy ratios are strong and no bank has had to approach the South African Reserve Bank for any extraordinary assistance ...
- ... to date, South Africa's banking system has remained largely shielded from the direct effects of the global crisis ...

The consequences of the economic situation, the context of global financial regulation and cooperation, the need for introducing structural changes, a need for more power to central banks, and compliance with international laws, regulations and policies were discussed. However, no concrete changes were discussed in any of the speeches.

Theme 2: Monetary policy

The references to the economic situation of the time and to SARB policy responses were an integral part of almost all of the speeches, with three of the speeches specifically focusing on monetary policy and on the role of the central banks in the economy. In these addresses, the governors reiterated the position of the SARB as an "inflation targeter", emphasising the long- and the short-term benefits of consistent inflation-targeting policy as the best-known mechanism for achieving price stability and sustainable economic growth:

- ... we would still want to pursue price stability ...
- ... our policy objectives would therefore remain the same ...

As the crisis deepened, the limitations of inflation targeting as a way of achieving financial stability became apparent. The speeches emphasised the SARB's commitment to maintaining a steady inflation-targeting framework, especially in 2008 when the inflationary pressures were the highest since the policy had originally been adopted in 2000: "... the ... SARB will continue to focus its monetary policy decisions based on the inflation outlook ..."

Several speeches extolled the merits of this approach with detailed analyses of the technical indicators of the policy and the possible consequences of adjusting the policy in terms of changing the inflation targets.

However, in 2009 there were signs that the monetary policy was under some scrutiny. This was illustrated by the following:

- Slave-like adherence to an invariant policy stance is unlikely to yield optimal outcomes when circumstances change dramatically – as they have in recent times.

Nevertheless, the policy, although now presented as imperfect, was, in the absence of more effective alternatives, presented as the best available option:

Price stability may be not a sufficient condition but ... it is a necessary condition for a solid foundation for sustainable growth and prosperity.

Theme 3: Uncertainty

In the analysed speeches, numerous implicit and explicit references were made to uncertainty and complexity:

- ... our meeting ... occurs during a period of considerable uncertainty ...
- ... the crisis prospect for the international economy is difficult to assess ...

By 2009, in light of the deepening economic crisis, the references to the uncertainty of the outcomes of the policies became more pronounced. Though the references to the three types of uncertainty – economic, model and strategic – can be identified in the speeches, they do however differ in terms of the frequency with which they are mentioned.

Economic data uncertainty is the least openly featured theme. The SARB does not explicitly acknowledge the shortcomings and imperfections of its knowledge regarding the current state of the economy. However, statements expressing the need for “filling the gaps in information on global financial flows” and “ ... we are facing a significant and probably permanent change in relative prices globally ... ” implied that the SARB was aware of data shortcomings. Economic data uncertainty is best observed by comparing the SARB predictions at a certain point in time with data retrospectively available for that specific period. In September 2008, the following observation was made: “The current rate of the economy may be somewhat lower than had come to be expected but is still strongly positive and will remain so.” However, in November 2009 the governor pronounced that “South Africa was not immune to global economic crises, [and that] the economy [had] contracted for three consecutive quarters”. Elsewhere he noted that “as increasing numbers of developed and emerging economies moved into recession ... South Africa would not be able to avoid spillover effects thereof. The only thing, which was uncertain, was the magnitude of the spillover”.

Model uncertainty was referred to in several speeches, but one speech delivered in 2009 by the governor (“Renewed challenges for model builders and forecasters in times of extreme uncertainty”) was devoted entirely to that topic. Various aspects of uncertainty were mentioned in that speech:

- ... the current financial crisis has forced us to make a major re-assessment of the way in which we have generally perceived the economy to work ...
- ... we must be aware of the limitations of models ...
- There are significant differences between the models, depending on different views on how the economy is seen to function ...
- ... forecasts are by definition surrounded by uncertainty ...

Notably, this particular speech was made in 2009 when the extent of the global financial crisis became apparent. The references to model uncertainty are also present elsewhere:

In the past decade ... the financial world was taken over by mathematicians, statisticians, engineers and scientists. These professionals have made breakthroughs in the development of sophisticated risk management and valuation techniques ... But we have probably over-relied on these models.

The strategic uncertainty was indicated from different perspectives in different speeches as indicated by some of the relevant quotations:

... the good news is these relative price adjustments will eventually come to an end. The bad news is that we do not know when and what the long term levels are going to be.

Monetary policy decisions are made under conditions of uncertainty. Unfortunately, some periods are more uncertain than the others.

... the challenges we are faced with certainly escalated in recent times ...

... there continues to be much uncertainty regarding the strength and sustainability of the recovery ...

... as increasing numbers of developed and emerging economies moved into recession ... South Africa would not be able to avoid spillover effects thereof.

The only thing, which was uncertain, was the magnitude of the spillover.

7.2.2 Specific industry addresses and other themes

Three speeches were directed at the representatives of particular industries. While they also contained references to the three themes identified above – economic crisis, SARB policy and uncertainty – the said speeches also included some industry-specific themes.

- The address to the Cape Pomological Association in 2008 discussed the issues affecting fruit growers and exporters: the current economic situation, world food prices and exchange rate policy.
- The address to the Road Freight Association Convention in 2009 highlighted those economic developments in 2009 that led to domestic and international economic slowdown and the consequent contraction in global trade. The second part of the address focused on the SARB policy responses to the deteriorating economic situation. The speech neither directly referred to nor made any predictions with regard to the impact of the economic situation on road transport in South Africa.
- The African Banking Industry Address included discussions on the role of central banks and on changes in respect of international standards. The speaker mentioned banking supervision and regulation and the regional economic arrangements affecting banking in countries belonging to the Common Monetary Area, the South African Customs Union and the Southern African Development Community.

7.3 Media releases

The SARB annually issues a limited number of media releases that are posted on the SABS website. In 2008, there were nine such media releases and, in 2009, there were 10. They varied in length and in the detail of their content. Press releases normally deal with issues not covered in regular publications and their content can be grouped under the following categories:

- Appointment of senior officials
- Statements regarding Monetary Policy Committee meetings
- Announcements regarding circulation of banknotes and coins
- Announcements regarding the release of various reports, such as annual bank supervision reports and financial stability reviews
- Media releases regarding meetings between the governor and selected stakeholders such as the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) and the Banking Association
- Media releases covering other ad hoc issues
- Release of gold and foreign exchange reserve figures
- Governor Tito Mboweni's nomination to the ANC list of candidates
- Statement on the governor's terms of office

8. DISCUSSION

SARB stakeholder communication faces numerous communication challenges, not least in terms of choices regarding what, how and when to do so. It appears that the SARB remains true to its official policy of inflation targeting and it consistently emphasises the value of this approach as opposed to other possible foci such as the exchange rate and reserves management. Despite recent criticism of the inflation-targeting approach that resulted from the recent financial crisis, this particular focus is in line with the perspective adopted by all countries that currently follow this policy.

As the mainstream discussion in the central bank's sphere focuses on the creation of consistency and on the financial stability of markets, it becomes clear why the financial community are the main recipients of the messages that are tailored to their needs. This seems to be accepted practice among central banks elsewhere, and, either by choice or imitation, the said practice is also applied by the SARB. Although we are all 'economic actors', very little SARB communication is directed at other publics. However, there are some limited attempts to expand the communication to beyond the traditional audiences – notably the meeting between the governor and NUMSA.

Because the Internet is indicated to be the most preferred means of communication, points to the fact that there already is filtration of certain layers of society and of stakeholders. This means that those stakeholders without access to the Internet cannot receive direction from the bank itself, but rather obtain information that has been processed and framed by the media. This poses

a problem for the bank in terms of the consistency and control of the messages reaching the intended publics.

There is a clear bias in terms of publics targeted by the SARB. How the information is presented and the topics that are covered in the analyses indicate that the bank targets the financial sector. The general public relies on the interpretation of the result by specialists like financial analysts, business analysts, and the financial press. This is an indication that SARB focuses on building relations with specific communities of interest and that it mainly targets opinion leaders when communicating with the stakeholders. Because this is so, it is clear that the band of stakeholders whom the bank considers in its communication strategy is limited. This once again supports the view that the nature of central bank transparency is discretionary.

In terms of Crowe and Meade's dimensions of transparency (2008), the SARB has better transparency indicators than have many foreign banks. There is relatively low political transparency, as the influences of the executive power (the government) on the policy are not explicitly discussed. In contrast, there is high economic transparency in that policy is often discussed, as indicated in the sample of the studied SARB messages (notably in speeches). Similarly, the SARB takes care of policy transparency by publishing regular Monetary Policy Committee reports without however revealing the actual models used for decision making. It has also been noted that Monetary Policy Committee reports mainly discuss short-term policy and do not address long-term policy issues. The procedural transparency of the SARB is rather low because no minutes or transcripts of the meetings are publicly available. There is some degree of operational transparency as the bank sporadically publishes its evaluation of the accuracy of its past predictions.

In general, the issues covered are almost standard issues and reflect the intersubjectivity of the standard economic management parameters. It is clear that these statements are designed for and aimed at specific groups of stakeholders – these are people with a defined level of understanding of economics and economic factors, probably as a result of the assumption that the financial sector is the primary SARB stakeholder. This somehow contradicts the view that the economy consists of individual players whose aggregate actions comprise the economy. However, the focus on the financial sector supports Hall's notion that "economic institutions and governance systems always privilege some actors and disprivilege others" (2008). As a result, most of the population are left to their own devices in attempting to comprehend the economic policy of the country mainly by inferring the policy from the transmission mechanism, or else they never question the status quo and accept it on the grounds of trust in the "expert system" (Hall, 2008). On the other hand, one should consider asking which of the stakeholders, apart from the traditional publics in terms of SARB communication targets, demand or expect information regarding monetary policy. Christensen (2002) questions the audience's demand for transparency and their capacity to process information. He maintains that most publics are not interested in organisational procedures and practices.

On the organisational side, the correct, consistent policy and related issues result in public trust in the institution and consequently contribute to its reputation. The value of information for the

SARB's reputation depends on the audience's ability to process the information or the meaning that the audience assign to it: "Although information is a precondition for knowledge and insight, to make sense of information the publics need knowledge and insight" (Christensen, 2002: 166). This is especially true in the case of specialised fields like monetary policy and economics.

The choice of venue and occasion for the Reserve Bank's speeches is indicative of its selective and targeted choice of audience for communication of monetary policy. This could be considered to be limited transparency in that the cross-section of stakeholders addressed is not fully representative of society. The choice of venues for the speeches should ensure variety and wider representation of diverse stakeholders. While these speeches are published on the Internet to ensure that the bank's policy is easily available to a broader spectrum of stakeholders, these documents do however not reach a broader audience. This is so because not everyone has Internet access, and the documents' content and format are moreover not always easy to understand.

Christensen (2002: 166) warns against equating information with communication, as such an approach would reflect a mechanical view of communication where messages are simply transferred from the sender to the receivers without considering the recipients' prior knowledge and their ability to process the information. The decision as to which information is relevant and how it is presented, simplified and categorised therefore becomes a strategic issue.

9. CONCLUSION

The objective of transparency is to "establish a consensual system of meaning" (Christensen, 2002: 167) between the South African Reserve Bank and its stakeholders. However, this system is subject to co-definition among different organisations in the same field. Central banks around the world set and comply with standards for disclosure and create a shared understanding of what transparency of central banks means. When the standards become institutionalised, they provide guidance for organisations' behaviour through imitation of other similar organisations. However, such intersubjectively created industry standards may, without consulting a broad spectrum of stakeholders, contribute very little to satisfying the broader strata of society.

The SARB is clearly following the best of the existing 'standards' and has achieved high levels of transparency in terms of these. The SARB publishes economic forecasts, including forward-looking analyses; it also publishes information regarding the risks of the forecasts and also a wealth of documents and reports that it makes publicly available, mainly through its website. However, the bulk of this information is not accessible to the majority of the South African population either through their not having access to the sources or because such documents are directed at people with an understanding of the economy and its terms of reference. Yet the majority of the citizens of the country are affected by SARB decisions and they are themselves economic players. Although central banks have made great strides towards transparency, their focus remains on a narrow band of stakeholders, namely those in the financial sector. In order to achieve truly significant transparency levels, the South African Reserve Bank needs to increase its focus on communication with a broader stakeholder base. This calls for changing the

standards of transparency and making the SARB's communication with the public more inclusive and accessible to wider sections of society. Last but not least, the SARB needs to develop communication systems with its stakeholders that will truly respond to the values and needs of all of those stakeholders.

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“Why should I?”: on selecting the content of persuasive HIV counselling and testing messages for students at a previously disadvantaged university in South Africa

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to discover what specific beliefs of students at a South African university should be addressed when trying to persuade them to go for HIV counselling and testing (HCT). The participants were 113 students from a previously disadvantaged university. The students completed a questionnaire that included questions about participants' HCT intentions and about possible predictors of such intentions. Students' HCT intention proved to be positively related to their perception of having control over their HCT behaviour (self-efficacy), and to their perception of social pressure towards going for HCT (perceived norm). The students' belief that they would not be either too afraid or too stressed to go for HCT contributed positively to their self-efficacy, as did the belief that they would be able to deal with the possibly disadvantageous outcome of the HIV test. The students' belief that their parents would approve of their going for HCT proved to be a strong and positive predictor of their perceived norm. Furthermore, perceived susceptibility to HIV/AIDS was positively related to HCT intention, and stigmatising attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs) was negatively related to HCT intention. These outcomes suggest that in trying to convince black students in South Africa to go for HCT, developers of promotion messages should focus on students' susceptibility to HIV, on how to deal with the possibility that their parents might not approve of their going for HCT, and on how to cope with a possibly disadvantageous test outcome.

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INTRODUCTION¹

On 1 December 2009, the South African president announced “a massive campaign to mobilise all South Africans to get tested for HIV and to ensure that every South African knows their HIV status” (SANAC, 2010: 6). According to the new governmental approach, HIV counselling and testing remain voluntary but health care workers are obliged to explain to patients the importance both of knowing their HIV status and of habitually testing for HIV (SANAC, 2010: 7). As an indication of this shift towards provider-initiated counselling and testing, the abbreviation VCT (voluntary counselling and testing) was replaced by HCT (HIV counselling and testing).

HEAIDS (2010) – a report on a comprehensive study carried out between 2008 and 2009 into HIV prevalence (the proportion of HIV-positive individuals) and related factors in the higher education sector in South Africa – advocated a similar approach. One of the conclusions of the said study was that “at high prevalence institutions [...] promotion of VCT should be aimed at everyone knowing their status” and that “VCT services should continue to be promoted in the institutional context but moves should be made towards an opt-out approach where HIV testing becomes routine for those using clinic services. [...]” (HEAIDS, 2010: 112). Like all other major studies in South Africa, the HEAIDS Report indicated a concentration of the prevalence of HIV among black South Africans. Although the HIV prevalence reported in the HEAIDS study in general was much lower than in other recent studies, it was still considerably higher among black students (5.6%) than among white (0.03%), Indian (0.3%) and coloured students (0.8%) even if the patterns of infection were the same (HEAIDS, 2010: xi, 105).

In discussing the strategies to be followed in order to ensure that people from the target group present themselves for testing, SANAC (2010) mentions a number of messaging guidelines to be used in the campaign. Most importantly, the guidelines state that:

Messaging will focus on the benefits of testing and disclosure between partners, the positive support systems available. Messages will remain positive and hopeful and forward-focused. They should not delve into questions of discrimination, stigma or confidentiality issues lest by trying to tackle these things, it only further entrenches them (SANAC, 2010: 12).

There is no mention here or elsewhere in the SANAC documents of sources that were used for developing the guidelines for the new messages about VCT (hereafter, except in citations: HCT). It remains unclear, therefore, whether a literature study or new empirical research was carried

¹ The data for this study were collected by the first author, who wrote her MA thesis as part of a project called HACALARA (HIV/AIDS Communication Aimed at Local And Rural Areas; see www.hacalara.org), with financial support from SANPAD, the South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development. The second author was the supervisor of the MA thesis.

out in order to investigate what kind of information in the campaign messages may or may not be expected to be helpful towards persuading the target group to present for testing.²

This article reports on a quantitative study carried out at a previously disadvantaged university in South Africa³ to discover the beliefs that best predict black students' intentions to be tested for HIV and that should therefore be addressed in HCT promotion messages. The article ends with a short comparison between the outcomes of the study to the message guidelines in the SANAC documents.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Despite understandable pessimism about the effects of mass media health campaigns that may sometimes exist among, for instance, those responsible for managing and financing such campaigns, recent research indicates that mass media health campaigns are proving to be more and more effective. In his retrospective of research in this field over the years 1996 to 2005, Noar (2006) concludes that "literature is beginning to amass that targeted, well-executed health mass media campaigns can have small-to-moderate effects not only on health knowledge, beliefs and attitudes, but on behaviors as well". He adds that "[these effects] can translate into major public health impact given the wide reach of mass media" (Noar, 2006: 21). Based on a systematic international review specifically devoted to the effects of HIV and AIDS mass media campaigns, carried out between 1998 and 2008, Noar et al. (2009) conclude that in eight of ten studies that were based on designs involving control groups, the campaigns that were assessed proved to be successful. These studies "demonstrated impact on key safer sexual behaviors such as condom use or HIV testing or impact on behavioural intentions to engage in these behaviors" (Noar et al., 2009: 36).

An important question, then, is how to develop messages that may be used in successful mass media campaigns. Noar et al. (2009) stress the importance of distinguishing between decisions on the content of such messages (*what to tell*) and on their format (*how to tell this*). For both purposes, a theory-based approach creates the best options: "In fact, it is likely that messages

² Efforts were made to establish contact with SANAC (South African National AIDS Council), in order to obtain information about the sources for the message guidelines. Unfortunately, no such information was received.

³ At the time when the data for this study were collected, the authors were not informed that the university at which this research was carried out, had an ethics committee that had to grant permission for studies like this one. Only after the manuscript of this article had been completed, was the existence of the said Ethics Committee brought to the authors' attention. Upon a request nevertheless to be allowed to publish the results of the study, the committee turned down the request on the grounds that approval could not be granted retrospectively. No objection was however raised against a publication in which readers would be informed that the participants were students at a previously disadvantaged university in South Africa, while no mention would be made of the specific university where the data had been collected.

based on both behavioural theories, which specify message content, and message design theories, which specify how particular kinds of messages can be designed to be persuasive with a target audience, will be most persuasive and effective” (Noar et al., 2009: 37). Yzer (2008), in his discussion of the possible relevance of theoretical frameworks for the development of ways to address the complexity of HIV/AIDS communication, makes a similar distinction when he proposes to differentiate between the process of choosing message content (*message strategy*) and the process of designing the message “in a creative process that requires choices about structure, style, presentation and layout elements that resonate with the particular audience” (Yzer, 2008: 53-54)

As a theoretical basis for deciding on the message content, Yzer (2008) proposes the integrative model of behavioural prediction (from here on: IMBP) (see also Fishbein, 2000; Fishbein & Yzer, 2003; Manganello & Fishbein, 2009). The IMBP integrates three main behavioural theories: the health belief model (Janz & Becker, 1984; Rosenstock, 1974), the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), an extension of which is the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), and the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977). Despite differences in focus, these influential theories⁴ display several important similarities and, taken together, they identify a limited number of variables that make it possible to predict health behaviour. It should be noted, however, that the IMBP and its underlying theories are specifically suitable for predicting *planned behaviour*, i.e. behaviour based on conscious reasoning (such as going or not going for HCT), and less so for predicting habitual behaviour based on patterns and routines that are performed more or less automatically (such as smoking, eating fat food on a regular basis, or always taking the same route from home to work).

The IMBP is discussed below as the theoretical basis for finding possible predictors for black students’ intentions to be tested for HIV and, via that route, for making well-informed decisions about the content of persuasive messages aimed at this specific target group. Figure 1 presents the IMBP.

⁴ See, for instance, these conclusions from O’Keefe (2002) in his textbook on persuasion theory and research: “The TRA [Theory of Reasoned Action] and the TBP [Theory of Planned Behaviour] have undergone extensive empirical examination, with repeated and widespread evidence. [...] In illuminating the underpinnings of behavioral intention, the TRA and the TPB provide manifestly useful applications to problems of persuasion, primarily by identifying potential points of focus for suatory efforts” (O’Keefe, 2002: 130-131).

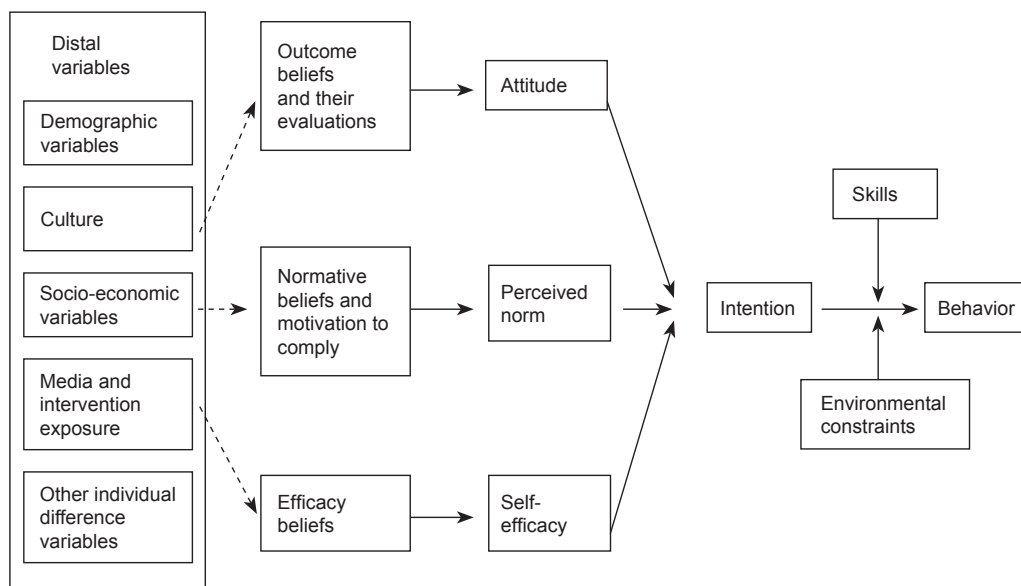


Figure 1 IMBP: Integrative model of behavioural prediction (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003)

The IMBP suggests that “behavior is most likely to occur if one has a strong intention to perform a behavior, if a person has the necessary skills and abilities required to perform the behavior, and if there are no environmental constraints preventing behavioral performance” (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003: 166). According to the IMBP, an individual’s intention may be predicted from three global types of perceptions: attitude, perceived norm and self-efficacy. Each of these global perceptions may in turn be predicted from underlying beliefs and evaluations. Insight into these beliefs and evaluations is of great importance when trying to effect behavioural change in a target group. As Yzer states:

Ultimately, behavior change is the result of changes in beliefs about performing the behavior. HIV prevention messages cannot directly change attitude or other global perceptions, but they can change the precursors of those perceptions. [...] Thus, if one seeks to employ HIV prevention messages to change a particular HIV-risk behavior, those messages should be designed at the level of changing specific beliefs about the behavior. Because beliefs will differ between behaviors and populations, it is essential to understand a behavior from the perspective of the target population before one attempts to change the behavior (Yzer, 2008: 52).

The first global perception in the IMBP, *attitude*, is a function of outcome beliefs and evaluations, i.e. “beliefs about the likelihood that [the behaviour] results in certain outcomes, and an evaluation of these outcomes in terms of good or bad” (Yzer, 2008: 52).

The second global perception in the IMBP is *perceived norm*. Before forming an opinion on a certain behaviour, an individual might consider whether significant others like family, friends and the community view the behaviour as 'good' or 'bad'. Such normative beliefs will be more influential when an individual is motivated to comply with the norms and expectations of significant others, such as family or friends, than when a person does not feel the urge to comply (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003). Perceived norm relates to its underlying beliefs in the same way as attitude does; normative beliefs predict perceived norm with regard to a certain behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein: 1980).

Self-efficacy is the third global perception included in the IMBP. This perception of being capable of performing a particular behaviour is based on efficacy beliefs, i.e. an individual's perceived belief of being able to perform the behaviour in specific challenging or facilitating circumstances (Yzer, 2008). For example, someone can be very confident that he/she has the skills and abilities that are necessary to perform the behaviour even in difficult circumstances, which leads to a high level of perceived self-efficacy. It should be noted that self-efficacy is not necessarily the same as actual skills, as someone can misjudge what he/she is actually capable of (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003).

Attitude, perceived norm, self-efficacy and their underlying beliefs are often called *proximal variables*. According to most behavioural theories and empirical evidence, these variables are the most important predictors of intention and behaviour (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003). In the IMBP, the proximal variables are clearly distinguished from the so-called *distal variables*. Distal variables do not necessarily have a relationship with intention or behaviour, but they might indirectly be related to intention via the proximal variables. As Yzer (2008: 53) explains, distal variables are defined as such because there are not theoretical reasons to expect that these variables always and in the same way shape specific beliefs. Distal variables may include a wide variety of both personal individual-level variables and community-level variables. Examples are demographic characteristics such as age, gender and education level, but also personality traits, moods and emotions, knowledge about the subject, stereotypes, stigmatising attitudes, perception of own risk, and shared culture (Swanepoel, 2005; Yzer, 2008). The IMBP posits that *if* a distal variable is related to behavioural intention, this relation must be via one or more beliefs and global perceptions (Yzer, 2008).

It is important to note that the IMBP does not imply that each global perception always has the same weight in determining behavioural intention. The relative importance of global perceptions as predictors of a particular behaviour varies among different behaviours and among different populations. Yzer (2008: 51) gives the example of condom use as a type of behaviour that may be "particularly guided by attitudinal influence in individual cultures, and by normative influence in collectivistic cultures". The same possible variation applies to underlying beliefs and distal variables; differences between populations may be explained by differences in contextual background variables (Yzer, 2008: 51-53).

2. EARLIER THEORY-BASED STUDIES INTO PREDICTORS OF HCT BEHAVIOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA

To our knowledge, only a few studies have to date been undertaken on the predictors of HCT uptake in South Africa, that have also explicitly related the design of both the study and the analysis of the results to a theoretical framework such as the IMBP or one of its precursors.

Swanepoel, Burger, Loohuis and Jansen (2008) asked 75 University of Pretoria students from various ethnicities to complete a questionnaire that included questions about their intentions in respect of HCT and into the possible predictors for such intentions. They employed the IMBP as the theoretical framework for determining the specific questions to be asked. It was found that black students in their sample evidenced a stronger intention to go for HCT than did white students, and that students who had already gone for HCT were more willing to have themselves tested (again) than were students who had not yet considered going for HCT.

Swanepoel et al. (2008: 100-101) furthermore found that the predictors of HCT uptake differed for various subgroups in the student population from which a sample had been taken. For the black students in this study, the belief that they would be able to go for HCT was an important predictor of intention for HCT uptake. For the white students other beliefs turned out to be related to such intention: their expectations, for instance, about being able to live a normal life, and about being able to handle negative responses should they test positive, and also their expectations about negative economic consequences should they turn out to be infected.

Swanepoel et al. (2008: 100-101) also found a clear difference in respect of beliefs that appeared to be relevant predictors between, on the one hand, students who had already considered going for an HIV test (or had even done so in the past), and, on the other, students who had up to then never considered taking the test. For the first group, practical considerations appeared to be important predictors of their intentions: the extent to which they expected HCT to be an effective means of determining their status and thus of protecting their health and the health of others, and also their knowledge (or lack thereof) of a site where they could be tested. For the second group of students, however, the predictors of their HCT intentions were of a more personal nature: the extent to which they considered themselves to be at risk of HIV/AIDS; their trust in the confidentiality with which the medical staff would treat the outcome of a test; and, in case they would test positive, their expectations about being able to handle negative responses and about being able to take antiretroviral therapy (ART) for the rest of their lives.

Tempelman and Vermeer (2009) carried out a study into the predictors of South Africans' intentions to be tested starting from the *theory of planned behaviour* (TPB) as presented in Ajzen (1991). The study was carried out at the Ndlovu Medical Centre in Elandsdoorn, a township in Mpumalanga. At this medical centre, HIV counselling and testing are integral parts of an AIDS-awareness programme for people in the area. The researchers collected information about the variables related to the decision of inhabitants of the area to go or not to go for counselling and testing.

Tempelman and Vermeer (2009) developed a questionnaire that included items measuring the participants' attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural controls, knowledge, anxieties, intentions and their past behaviour. The participants were 346 people, aged between 14 and 67 years, recruited in the township area at community events, in schools, at taxi ranks and in the aforementioned medical centre.

Tempelman and Vermeer (2009) carried out two separate regression analyses: one aimed at finding the best predictors of past HCT behaviour, and the other aimed at predicting intentions regarding future HCT behaviour. In the first regression analysis, it was found that four variables had thus far significantly contributed to the participants' testing behaviour: gender (women were more likely to have gone for counselling and testing than were men); age group (older people were more likely to have gone for counselling and testing than were younger people); knowledge (people with a higher level of knowledge regarding HIV, AIDS and testing were more likely to have gone for counselling and testing – but it should be noted that the level of knowledge already appeared to be relatively high); and, attitude (the more positive an individual was regarding going for counselling and testing, the greater was the chance that this individual had already previously performed this behaviour).

In the second regression analysis, Tempelman and Vermeer (2009) found that two variables significantly contributed to the participants' intention of going for counselling and testing: attitude of the participant towards HCT, and subjective norm (the individual's perception of social pressure to go for an HIV test). Those who appeared to have both a positive attitude about going for counselling and testing and also a positive subjective norm were more likely to have an intention of being tested than were those with less favourable scores on the aforementioned variables. No statistically significant relation was found between perceived behavioural control (the participants' ideas about their ability to carry out the behaviour in question) and HCT intention.

The discussion section in Tempelman and Vermeer (2009) stresses the importance of new research into the role of perceived risk in predicting the intention to go for counselling and testing. These authors also underline the necessity of paying more attention to the TPB variables that underlie the intention to go or not to go for HCT rather than maintaining a prolonged strong focus on knowledge about HIV/AIDS and testing.

Swanepoel (2010) discusses a number of problematic issues in the design of South African HCT campaigns targeted at students and he strongly pleads for more research into the predictors of South African students' HCT uptake. Referring to the IMBP, Swanepoel illustrates how the predictors that are presented in this model have an impact on individual-level decision making regarding HCT, and he argues that empirical studies into the said predictors are required. These new studies should also assess "what other variables could be at stake in the uptake of VCT and how different target groups within the whole body of South African students prioritise these in their decisions to go for VCT" (Swanepoel, 2010: 121).

We agree with Tempelman and Vermeer (2009) and with Swanepoel (2010) about the importance of gaining more insight into the predictors of HCT behaviour in various target groups. We thus decided to carry out a new study into the predictors for HCT intention in a specific subgroup of the South African population.

3. THE PRESENT STUDY

This study aimed to determine how, in a group of black students in South Africa, the intention to go or not to go for counselling and testing might be predicted from the proximal and the distal variables in the IMBP.

3.1 Participants

The participants were students from a previously disadvantaged university in South Africa. The sample comprised 113 participants of which 56 were male and 57 female. The average age of the participants was 20.5 years, with the minimum age being 17 and the maximum being 32. Most participants were first-year students (74.2%); 11.5% were second-year students, 8.8% third-year students; 3.5% fourth-year students; and 1.8% had been studying at the university for more than four years. The sample included mother-tongue speakers of ten different languages, this indicating varying cultural backgrounds. Participants were enrolled in a large variety of educational programmes (29), with the largest group coming from the Faculty of Social Sciences.

3.2 Material

A questionnaire was developed so as to include items related to the three global perceptions contained in the IMBP, i.e. attitude, perceived norm and self-efficacy. Also included were items related to beliefs, which, according to the IMBP, might underlie the said global perceptions: outcome beliefs, evaluations of outcome beliefs, normative beliefs, motivations to comply, and efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, the intention to go for HCT was measured, and a number of items were added in order to measure variables that, in view of earlier studies – such as those by Boshamer and Bruce (1999), Van Dyk and Van Dyk (2003), Kalichman and Simbayi (2003), Birdsall, Hajjiyannis, Nkosi and Parker (2004), Swanepoel (2005), Verheij and Jansen (2010), and Swanepoel et al. (2008) – might prove to be relevant distal variables.

The items were presented as statements that had to be valued on a Likert scale, ranging from (1) "I strongly disagree", to (5) "I strongly agree".

Behavioural intention

The following statement was used as an indicator of HCT intention: "I will take an HIV test within the next three months."

Global perceptions: attitude, perceived norm and self-efficacy

Three statements were used for measuring attitude towards HCT: "VCT is useful", "It is wise to go for VCT" and "It is important to go for VCT" (Cronbach's alpha = .77). One statement was included to measure perceived norm: "People who are important to me think it is good to go for VCT." One item was used to measure the participants' self-efficacy with reference to the ability to undergo an HIV test: "I think I would be able to go for VCT."

Underlying beliefs

For measuring the *outcome beliefs* that could possibly underlie the attitude towards HCT, eight statements were used about the likelihood that going for HCT would result in certain outcomes. Factor analysis (extraction method: principal component analysis; rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalisation) revealed two factors with an eigenvalue over 1; the two factors accounted for 68.7% of the variance. Six items loaded on the first factor: "Should I test HIV positive, I can learn to accept that"; "Should I test HIV positive, I will manage to consistently take anti-retroviral medicine for the rest of my life"; "Should I test HIV-positive, I expect that I will be able to cope with the physical side effects of antiretroviral medicine"; "Should I test HIV positive, I will be able to take care of myself"; "Should I test HIV positive, I am able to plan a good future for myself"; and "Should I test HIV positive, I believe I will still be able to realise my dreams". Two items loaded on the second factor: "Should I test HIV positive, I fear that I will be stigmatised and discriminated against"; and "Should I test HIV positive, I fear that I will be rejected by my loved ones". The first factor was called *coping expectation* (Cronbach's alpha = .89), the second factor was called *fear of rejection and discrimination* (Cronbach's alpha = .77; $r = .62, p < .001$).

Four items were included to measure different *normative beliefs*, i.e. the extent to which the participants believed that specific (groups of) significant others would hold the opinion that it is good to go for HCT: "My parents think it is good to go for VCT"; "My friends think it is good to go for VCT"; "My family thinks it is good to go for VCT"; and, "My community thinks it is good to go for VCT".

Two items were used to measure *efficacy beliefs* with regard to HCT: "I would be too afraid to go for VCT" and "Going for VCT would be very stressful for me". For both items, all scores were recoded such that high scores indicated a positive efficacy belief and low scores indicated a negative efficacy belief. Since these items essentially asked the same question, and the scores indeed proved to be clearly related (Cronbach's alpha = .77; $r = .62, p < .001$), it was decided to construct one combined efficacy-belief variable, called *confidence in going for HCT*.

Distal variables

Based on earlier studies (see above), five *distal variables* were included that might possibly relate to underlying beliefs: perceived severity of HIV/AIDS, perceived susceptibility to HIV/AIDS, fear of inappropriate behaviour of medical staff, stigmatising attitude toward PLWHA (people living with HIV/AIDS), and knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

For measuring *perceived severity of HIV/AIDS*, the following two items were included: "It is dangerous to get infected with HIV" and "HIV/AIDS is a very dangerous disease" (Cronbach's alpha = .73; $r = .59, p < .001$). One item was used to measure *perceived susceptibility to HIV/AIDS*: "I am at risk of getting infected with HIV". Two items measured *fear of inappropriate behaviour of medical staff*: "Should I go for VCT, I fear that the clinic staff will give my test results to other people" and "If I test HIV positive, I am afraid that the hospital staff will have very negative attitudes towards me when I go for medical help" (Cronbach's alpha = .66; $r = .50, p < .001$). *Stigmatising attitude toward PLWHA* was also measured using two items (scores were recoded): "People who have HIV/AIDS have nothing to feel guilty about" and "People who have HIV/AIDS are like everybody else" (Cronbach's alpha = .79; $r = .65, p < .001$).

Knowledge about HIV/AIDS was measured by means of twelve questions about how the disease can spread and about possible treatment. Participants could answer "Yes", "No" or "I don't know" to each question. Four examples of such knowledge-related questions are: "Must a person have many different partners to get HIV/AIDS?"; "Can a person get HIV/AIDS by sharing kitchens and bathrooms with someone with HIV/AIDS?"; "Does washing after sex help to protect you against HIV?"; and, "Is there a cure for HIV/AIDS?" Participants could score twelve points here (one point per correct answer). There were no points for incorrect answers or for answering, "I don't know". All scores were transformed into scores on a scale from 0 to 1. The higher the score, the higher a participant's knowledge about HIV/AIDS was deemed to be.

Pre-test of the questionnaire

A pre-test of the questionnaire was carried out with ten first-year students, both male and female. The students were asked to complete the questionnaire and to write down any remarks they had. The participants were specifically asked whether the instructions had been clear enough, whether they had understood every question, whether they had encountered any problems while completing the questionnaire and whether they had been able to remain focused. All participants indicated that they had understood the questions and instructions, and that they had encountered no problems while answering the questions.

3.3 Procedure

The data were collected in May 2009. Students were recruited at different locations on campus. After a short introduction, questionnaires were handed out to those students who were willing to participate. The time needed to complete the questionnaire varied considerably among participants. Some finished the task within ten minutes, while others took almost half an hour to do so. The average time required to complete the questionnaire was approximately fifteen to twenty minutes.

The 113 students who participated in this study were either invited to do so during an English lecture (permission was given by the lecturer), or at various places on campus. During the

English lecture, about 200 students from various faculties (mostly in their first year) were present; 100 questionnaires were handed out randomly to students who were willing to participate. Most students were enthusiastic to participate; there turned out to be more volunteers than the required 100 participants. Of the 100 questionnaires that were returned, 12 questionnaires had to be excluded from data analysis because of contradicting or missing answers, so that there were 88 questionnaires with data fit for analysis. The second set of 25 usable questionnaires were collected by inviting a total of 30 students at other places on campus – e.g. in the computer centre near the library or in one of the student residences – to participate in this study. One of the latter group of students indicated not being able to participate because of lack of time, and four other questionnaires had to be excluded from data analysis because of contradicting, missing or inconsistent answers. All of the responses were anonymous.

4. RESULTS

To analyse the data, a hierarchical regression analysis was first run using HCT intention as the dependent variable (see Table 1 for the relevant descriptives).

**Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviations (N=113)
(scale 1-5, except for 16. Knowledge about HIV/AIDS: scale 0-1)**

Variable	M	SD
1. HCT intention	3.56	1.29
2. Attitude	4.52	0.81
3. Perceived norm	4.37	1.00
4. Self-efficacy	4.10	1.20
5. Coping expectation	3.99	1.06
6. Fear of rejection and discrimination	3.10	1.44
7. Normative belief regarding parents	4.27	1.02
8. Normative belief regarding friends	3.88	1.33
9. Normative belief regarding family	4.20	1.05
10. Normative belief regarding community	3.73	1.31
11. Confidence in going for HCT	3.19	1.40
12. Perceived severity of HIV/AIDS	4.43	1.07
13. Perceived susceptibility to HIV/AIDS	2.64	1.67
14. Fear of inappropriate behaviour of medical staff	2.15	1.25
15. Stigmatising attitude toward PLWHAs	1.90	1.25
16. Knowledge about HIV/AIDS	0.82	0.13

We found that entering the three global perceptions, namely attitude ($M = 4.52$; $SD = 0.81$), perceived norm ($M = 4.37$; $SD = 1.00$) and self-efficacy ($M = 4.09$; $SD = 1.20$) led to significant quantities (20%, $F(3, 95) = 8.09$, $p < .001$) of explained variance in HCT intention ($M = 3.57$; $SD = 1.29$). Of the three global perceptions, self-efficacy ($\beta = .31$; $p = .001$) and perceived norm ($\beta = .27$; $p = .007$) were significant predictors of HCT intention; attitude, however, was not ($p = .97$). As the second block, we entered the seven underlying beliefs that were measured. This did not lead to a significant increase in the explained variance (from 20% to 26%; $p = .44$), this indicating that there was no relation of the underlying beliefs to HCT intention, other, that is, than via global perceptions. Next, the five distal variables were entered. This led to a significant increase in the explained variance in HCT intention (from 26% to 37%, $F_{\text{change}}(5, 83) = 2.85$, $p = .02$). Further analysis revealed that there was one distal variable that significantly contributed to this increase, namely *perceived susceptibility* ($\beta = .32$; $p = .01$). This result indicated that perceived susceptibility ($M = 2.64$; $SD = 1.67$) did not relate to HCT intention via global perceptions and underlying beliefs, but that a direct relation existed between the distal variable in question and HCT intention.

Next, two hierarchical regression analyses were run in which the global perceptions that had proven significantly to contribute to the explained variance in HCT intention served as dependent variables. In the first analysis, the dependent variable was self-efficacy. Entering the seven underlying beliefs as a first block led to a significant amount of explained variance (24%, $F(7, 91) = 4.20$, $p < .001$). There were two underlying beliefs that significantly contributed to the explained variance in self-efficacy: *coping expectation* ($\beta = .27$; $p = .01$) and *confidence in going for HCT* ($\beta = .27$; $p = .01$). Entering the five distal variables as the second block did not lead to a significant change in explained variance ($p = .27$), this indicating that there was no relation of the distal variables with self-efficacy other than via its underlying beliefs *coping expectation* ($M = 3.99$; $SD = 1.06$) and *confidence in going for HCT* ($M = 3.19$; $SD = 1.40$). Subsequently, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed with perceived norm as the dependent variable. Again, entering the seven underlying beliefs as a first block led to a significant amount of explained variance (41%, $F(7, 91) = 9.02$, $p < .001$). The only underlying belief that significantly contributed to this variance in perceived norm proved to be "My parents think it is good to go for VCT" ($\beta = .44$; $p < .001$). Entering the five distal variables as the second block once more failed to lead to a significant change in explained variance ($p = .88$), this indicating that there was no relation of the distal variables with perceived norm other than via the participants' underlying belief that their parents would approve of their going for HCT ($M = 4.27$; $SD = 1.02$).

Finally, three non-hierarchical regression analyses were performed, in which the dependent variables were the underlying beliefs that had proven significantly to contribute either to the explained variance in self-efficacy or to perceived norm: *coping expectation*, *confidence in going for HCT*, and the participants' belief that their parents would approve of their going for HCT. As predictors, the five distal variables were used. There proved to be no significant contribution of this set of distal variables to the explained variance in the participants' underlying belief that their parents would approve of their going for HCT ($p = .48$). However, it was found that the set of five distal variables significantly contributed to the variance explained in both *coping expectation*

(13%, $F(5, 93) = 2.74, p = .02$) and confidence in going for HCT (24%, $F(5, 93) = 5.96, p < .001$). Further analysis revealed that the only distal variable that significantly and negatively contributed to coping expectation was *stigmatising attitude toward PLWHA* ($\beta = -.41; p < .001$). *Stigmatising attitude toward PLWHA* ($M = 1.90; SD = 1.25$) also proved to be the only distal variable that significantly and once again negatively contributed to the explained variance in confidence in going for HCT ($\beta = -.29; p = .005$).

5. DISCUSSION

In the target group on which this study focused – students at a previously disadvantaged university in South Africa – HCT intention proved to be positively related to two global perceptions: the participants' perception of having control over their HCT behaviour (self-efficacy), and their perception of social pressure in respect of going for HCT (perceived norm).

In conformity with the IMBP, underlying beliefs were not directly related to HCT intention, but only through global perceptions. The participants' belief that their parents would approve of their going for HCT, proved strongly and positively to be related to their perceived norm. The participant's belief that they would not be too afraid or stressed to go for HCT positively contributed to their self-efficacy, as did their belief that they would be able to deal with a possibly disadvantageous outcome of the HIV test.⁵

From the five distal variables that were included as possible predictors of HCT intention, two did indeed prove to be just that: *stigmatising attitude toward PLWHAs* and *perceived susceptibility to HIV/AIDS*. An individual's *stigmatising attitude* was negatively related to both the belief that he/she would be able to deal with the consequences of a disadvantageous test result and the belief that he/she would be able to go for HCT. Via these two beliefs, *stigmatising attitude* was negatively related to self-efficacy, and ultimately to HCT intention. Contrary to what the IMBP assumes, *perceived susceptibility* proved to be directly related to HCT intention, and then not through a global perception and its underlying beliefs.

⁵ It should be noted that the belief of being able to deal with the consequences of testing HIV positive – being based on the IMBP – was expected to function as an outcome belief related to HCT intention via attitude, but proved to be so via self-efficacy. In view of the subject matter of outcome beliefs (the likelihood that the behaviour may result in certain advantageous or disadvantageous outcomes) and the subject matter of self-efficacy (the capability of performing this behaviour), it does not seem illogical that in this case feeling able to cope with a disadvantageous result of the behaviour (here of having tested HIV positive) bears a close relation to feeling capable of carrying out such behaviour (here of going for HCT). The correlation that was found to exist between the variables coping expectation and confidence in going for HCT ($r = .42; p < .001$) points in the same direction, i.e. the more capable a member of this population feels of being able to cope with the possibility of testing HIV positive, the stronger will be his/her conviction of indeed being capable of going for HCT.

6. CONCLUSION

According to the outcomes of this study, promotion messages aimed at convincing black students in South Africa to go for HCT should focus primarily on a number of variables, which prove to be related, directly or indirectly, to HCT intention. These variables are the students' belief that their parents would approve of their going for HCT; the fear and the stress they may expect to experience when going for HCT; their self-confidence in respect of dealing with a possibly disadvantageous outcome of the HIV test; their possible stigmatising attitude toward PLWHAs; and their perceived susceptibility to HIV/AIDS. Mean scores and standard deviations for all of these variables leave room for improvement (see Table 1), which might be achieved by a well-informed and targeted HCT campaign.

As indicated in the introduction of this article, SANAC guidelines state that HCT promotion messages "will remain positive and hopeful and forward-focused [and] should not delve into questions of discrimination, stigma or confidentiality issues", because "... by trying to tackle these things, it only further entrenches them" (SANAC, 2010: 12). However, in view of the relevance as was established in this study of the students' fear both of going for HCT and of a possibly disadvantageous outcome, and moreover in view of the relevance of their perceived susceptibility to HIV and their own possible stigmatising attitude towards PLWHAs, it would be foolhardy to keep silent about these themes – at least not when communicating with a target group similar to the students involved in this particular study. By contrast, only when addressing variables that prove to be relevant for HCT intention in this group, promotion messages may be expected to contribute successfully to positive HCT decisions.

It should be noted here that this study was conducted in only one South African region, and among participants from only one specific target group. Possibly, if the study had been performed in other South African regions or with other target groups, different results would have been obtained. However, comparing the outcomes of this study with the findings reported in earlier studies of this nature, a number of similarities are interesting. As in this study, Tempelman and Vermeer (2009) found perceived social pressure to be a predictor of HCT intention. According to Swanepoel et al. (2008), referring to a group of black students comparable to those interviewed in the present study but coming from a different university, HCT intention was positively related not only to their self-efficacy in going for HCT and to their perceived susceptibility to HIV, but also to their self-confidence in dealing with the possible consequence of testing HIV positive. Even if similar outcomes were found in the present study, a relatively new outcome here was that HCT intention among black South African students was positively affected by the belief that their parents would approve of their going for a test, and that this was moreover negatively affected by a possibly stigmatising attitude towards PLWHA.

This study illustrates how a theoretical framework – such as the IMBP – may be used for collecting the type of information required for well-informed decisions regarding the content of health messages. The next step in making such messages effective is to design a message format based on information-processing models, for example the Elaboration Likelihood Models (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and message-effect theories, such as those on narratives (Green, 2006) and

exemplars (Zillman & Brosius, 2000). It is the combination of such theories with behavioural models, such as the IMBP, that may be expected to be the best breeding ground for successful health messages in mass media campaigns (cf. Cappella, 2006; Yzer, 2008).

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The appeal of *7de Laan*: selected viewers' self-identified reasons for watching¹

ABSTRACT

What is described as 'a major leap of faith' by producer Danie Odendaal (Labuschagne, 2010: 62) has turned out to be somewhat of a cultural phenomenon. For one, *7de Laan* was, at the time of the study, the most popular Afrikaans soap in that it reached a bigger audience than any other Afrikaans soap, such as *Binneland*² (M-Net and KykNET)³ and *Villa Rosa* (kykNET) (TVSA, 2010). It further held its own in the fiercely competitive timeslot of 18:30 during which two other soaps, namely *Isidingo* (SABC 3)⁴ and *Rhythm City* (e.tv), were then broadcast. The soap has also received the Voters' Choice Award for best soap opera two years' running at the South African Film and Television Awards, thereby confirming its popularity. Although initially commissioned for the upper-income category (De Lange, 2007: 3), *7de Laan* now has a much wider audience base, which includes viewers from different socio-economic, racial and language groups. Using reception analysis as point of departure, this study used in-depth interviews with a cross-cultural sample of viewers to describe the appeal of *7de Laan*.

¹ This article is based on Van der Merwe's PhD thesis entitled *Making sense of 7de Laan: selected interpretations of an Afrikaans soap*, supervised by Dr Michele Tager.

² Formerly entitled *Binnelanders* and *Binneland Sub Judice*.

³ According to tvs.co.za, the series aired simultaneously on M-Net and kykNET for the first six seasons. In April 2011, M-Net was split into two channels, M-Net Satellite and M-Net Terrestrial, and the show was moved to M-Net Terrestrial for Season 7, airing simultaneously on kykNET (Binneland, n.d.).

⁴ Since the completion of this research, some schedule changes have taken place. In October 2011 *Isidingo* was moved to 19:30, while the American soap *The Bold and the Beautiful* was moved to the 18:30 timeslot. *Binneland* is also broadcast at 18:30.

INTRODUCTION

The soap opera genre undoubtedly has a massive presence within the South African broadcasting context. On any given day, South Africans can tune in to 12 different soaps across the three public channels and e.tv.⁵ These channels broadcast a mix of locally produced and American soaps. From week to week, soaps vie for the top programme spot on their respective channels. Quantitative audience data lead us to deduce that South African audiences have a taste both for imported *and* locally produced soaps. Yet especially locally produced soaps have become the flagships of their respective TV channels. *Generations* (SABC 1), *Muvhango* (SABC 2), *7de Laan* (SABC 2) and *Isidingo* (SABC 3) are currently among the most-viewed programmes on their respective public service channels. On e.tv, the free-to-air channel, both *Scandal* and *Rhythm City* feature among the top five programmes. According to the official viewing figures for 14-20 February 2011 (TVSA, 2011), *Generations* was watched by 4 466 000, *7de Laan* by 1 772 000, *Muvhango* by 2 190 000 and *Isidingo* by 818 000. On e.tv, the estimated viewership for *Rhythm City* was 1 586 000 and for *Scandal* 1 833 000. The only American soap to be ranked within the top ten for the given week was *Days of our lives* (SABC 3) with 822 000 viewers.

The *7de Laan* audience profile especially makes for interesting reading. A few aspects of the audience profile stand out, for example the fact that it only marginally draws in more female (57%) than male (43%) viewers and that 35% of the total audience is older than 50 years (C. de Vos, personal communication, August 28, 2008). This stands in contrast to what has been established within the American context, namely that the connection between soaps and women remains overwhelming (Brunsdon, 1997) and that the soap opera audience there predominantly constitutes viewers between the ages of 15 and 40 (Warhol, 1998). Another interesting fact concerning the *7de Laan* audience profile – especially given the fact that the soap is predominantly Afrikaans – is the almost equal spread between white (33%), coloured (35%) and black (31%) viewers.⁶

Some of the general soap opera conventions include a focus on personal relationships, a complex and intertwined web of relations, and a fairly wide variety among its characters in terms of age, relationships and attitudes. These conventions are also present in *7de Laan*. It has a multicultural cast, but there are more white than brown or black characters. The co-existence of different cultures is portrayed as being uncomplicated and the view taken of the new South Africa is decidedly utopian (Milton, 2008: 265). The soap highlights the unifying role of Afrikaans in post-apartheid South Africa and indigenous languages feature only briefly, thus creating the

⁵ Due to the low penetration of pay television in South Africa, the majority of South Africans watch programming on the public service channels SABC 1, 2 and 3, and the private free-to-air channel, e.tv. According to quantitative audience data released by SAARF, SABC 1 has 18 million viewers, e.tv comes in second with 13 448 million, SABC 2 is a close third with 13 184 million, SABC 3 has 9 143 million viewers, and DStv 4 733 million. Of the DStv channels, M-Net is the most watched channel with 1 092 million viewers (as cited in Ferreira, 2010). Those with access to DStv have even further access to locally produced, British, and Indian soaps.

⁶ The remaining 1% is made up of Indian viewers.

impression that Afrikaner identity is something exceptional (Van Coller & Van Jaarsveld, 2009: 31). The permanent characters, although not all Afrikaans, speak Standardised Afrikaans. Different dialects are neutralised as much as possible.

Against the backdrop of its diverse audience base and the dominant conventions of *7de Laan*, the question arises as to what precisely it is that draws Afrikaans and non-Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers to *7de Laan*. Apart from the impressive viewership figures and brief comments by journalists and viewers in public forums, little else is known about either *7de Laan* or the sense-making practices employed by the seemingly diverse audience in that no research has, as yet, been published to determine the audience perspective. Van Coller and Van Jaarsveld (2009) hint at one possible reading of *7de Laan* in respect of identity construction, albeit not from an audience perspective. These authors (2009: 30) argue that *7de Laan* is built around the idea of 'relax and relate', while Jooste (2005) argues that *7de Laan* provides 'guilt-free' Afrikaans television.

Given the dearth of research regarding *7de Laan's* appeal, this article is aimed at describing selected viewers' self-identified reasons for watching or the spontaneous associations (Hargrave & Gatfield, 2002: 16) that these viewers make when talking about the role of *7de Laan* in their daily lives. More specifically, the research aims to provide some insight into how these selected viewers – representative of different language groups – (re)organise themselves within post-apartheid South Africa.

1. SITUATING 7DE LAAN WITHIN THE SOAP OPERA GENRE

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an overview of the entire soap opera genre, it is necessary briefly to locate *7de Laan* within the genre. Although generally argued that American and British soap opera models have come to dominate the soap opera landscape, Liebes and Livingstone (1998) developed a model of subtypes, which provides a more nuanced understanding of the genre and its conventions. The 'dynastic model' – e.g. *Dallas* – emphasises the conservative family network and would generally include economically and politically powerful families. The 'community soap' – e.g. *Coronation Street* – includes ordinary families and celebrates the working class. The 'dyadic model' – e.g. *The Bold and the Beautiful* – draws heavily on melodrama, while the structure of relationships changes continuously as characters experiment with new forms of partnerships.

According to my reading of *7de Laan*, this specific soap opera is closely aligned to the community model/British realist soap opera. In contrast to the American soap opera model, the community here is held to be more important than the family. In many cases, the community *becomes* the family, while social bonds are the most dominant of the relationships portrayed. Like the community soap, *7de Laan* presents an idealised version of living together, and class and race differences, especially, are underplayed. Upward mobility is possible within the community but is, at the same time, restricted to the community. While social issues are from time to time included in the storyline, *7de Laan* mostly steers away from gender-specific issues, and also from homosexuality, AIDS, and overtly political issues. Sexual intercourse, though implied, is never shown. The use of

time parallels real time and not much is made of the past. Characters rather than story drive this soap. The story is built around a rather large cast of permanent characters. Guest appearances by local celebrities, artists and sport stars blur the line between fiction and reality. Female types include: Madel, the matriarch; Charmaine, the motherly figure; Gita, the powerful villain; Hilda and Matrone, the comics; Aggie, the upwardly mobile type; and, Paula, the egocentric exhibitionist. The males in *7de Laan* are portrayed as good listeners and they communicate their feelings to their friends. Male types include: Neville, the businessman; Oubaas, the father figure and comic; Marko, the ladies' man; Altus, the metrosexual; and Xander, the young professional with strong morals and values.

According to Cantor and Pingree (1983: 48), an important distinction to be made is the one between prime-time and daytime drama soaps. Within the specific SABC programming schedule and production context, however, no clear distinction is drawn between prime-time and daytime soaps. Whereas locally produced soaps are scheduled as part of the prime-time schedule, all imported soaps and the repeats of locally produced soaps are shown as part of the daytime schedule. Locally produced soaps on the SABC – *Generations*, *Isidingo*, *7de Laan*, and *Muvhango* – are scheduled for the slot between 18:00 and 21:30, a time slot classified as part of the prime-time schedule. Independent suppliers produce local soaps and, except for *Muvhango*, these are broadcast five times a week. These soaps also do not take breaks but continue throughout the year. Audience figures indicate that the viewers of these soaps are mixed, with only slightly more female than male viewers (Welch, personal communication, May 25, 2009). Similar to the American prime-time soaps, the local soaps *Isidingo* and *Generations* focus on power and money, *Muvhango* deals with family relationships, while *7de Laan* is centred on personal relationships within the community, a focus largely associated with daytime soaps.

2. AUDIENCE RECEPTION

Although it has been clearly established and thus generally accepted that the television audience is active in all kinds of ways (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998: 29; Morley, 1993: 13), the “powerful text-active audience” tension remains largely unresolved in critical audience studies (Hermes, 2010; Lewis, 2002; Morley, 2006). The overarching and still pressing question as to just how interpretatively active audiences actually are forms the backdrop to this research. The aim here is not, however, to determine which – the text or the audience – is the more powerful entity. Instead, it concurs with Livingstone's view (1998: 26) that the interaction between the viewer and the text is “a site of negotiation between two semi-powerful sources” in which varying degrees of authority exist between representations, contexts, audiences and spectators (Kuhn, 1997: 152). Within the context of the soap opera, the text provides an “immersive story world” (Ford, 2007) that empowers the viewer to construct his or her own meanings (Allen, 1985). The soap opera viewer therefore responds differently and assigns different meanings to any given soap opera text (Ang, 1985). Interpretations are divergent in that viewers draw on cultural knowledge and expectations, and on gender, age, racial, sexual, and class identities to make sense of any given soap opera text (Kuhn, 1997: 56).

There are a number of popular models for thinking about the audience/text relationship. Recently the debate regarding the strengths and weaknesses of Hall's encoding/decoding model (1974) has gained momentum, with scholars like Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) and Barker (2006) suggesting that the model be abandoned altogether. Others, like Moores (1993), Morley (2006) and Michelle (2007), in turn, are wary of such a stance. The search for the ideal model or typology of audience responses is therefore still on. In the final analysis, the present research has established that the concept of *viewer investment* (Barker & Brooks, 1998: 225), together with the following modes of reception – transparent, referential, mediated and discursive (Michelle, 2007) – and also the concepts of *involvement/engagement/immersion* and *distance* happen best to explain the audience-text relationship for this particular sample of soap opera viewers.

This research, in essence, is an audience study and therefore does run the risk of neglecting the role of the text in meaning construction. Although I recognise that the soap opera text is characterised by multi-narratives (Modleski, 1979, 1982) – structured in such a way that certain readings are proposed over others (Livingstone (1998: 37) – this research is not aimed at attempting to determine what readings are proposed over others, or are dominant. I concur with Sam Ford who argues that “the artistry of the soap opera can only be understood through the eyes of the audience” (2007: 17). I am here not concerned with the text's construction of the ideal viewer but rather with audience meaning and the pleasure associated with watching *7de Laan*.

3. METHODOLOGY

In line with the aim of the study, the most appropriate method was considered to be an audience reception analysis within the critical tradition, which is also the most widely acknowledged research design for investigating the use and significance of media texts by the audience (Rasmussen, 2004; Schrøder, 1999). This method is in essence a qualitative research method that provides in-depth description, explanation (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 1), understanding and comprehension (Bryman, 2004: 266) of the social world of real viewers.

The primary data-collecting method opted for in this study was that of semi-structured, in-depth interviewing. As this research set out to describe the self-identified reasons for watching, individual interviews – that allow for the exploration of individual responses (Gillham, 2005: 5) – were preferred to focus groups, which run the risk of being patchy and incomplete (ibid.:69). In this research, no attempt was made to recreate or track a situation similar to the ordinary TV and/or soap opera viewing situation. Instead, informants were requested to situate themselves within a context not observable by the researcher by describing both the room in which they watched TV and the conversation that usually took place when they were watching *7de Laan*. Method triangulation was achieved by requesting informants to complete a pre-interview questionnaire, one that provided data against which to check the interview data. I found participants to be more articulate in their written responses to questions, but felt that these responses were much more limited and lacked depth. Additional information regarding the appeal of *7de Laan* was gained from *7de Laan* producer, Danie Odendaal, and line producer, Colin Howard. Though being unavailable for in-depth interviews, they nevertheless completed questionnaires comprising open-ended questions.

A total of 44 in-depth interviews⁷ were conducted with a convenience sample of both Afrikaans and non-Afrikaans viewers. The aim of this study – in accordance with work of this nature – was therefore not to generalise its findings, but rather to focus on identifying “certain practices, within certain contexts, rather than on trends, differences and generalities” (Livingstone, 1998). In order to ensure the crossover nature of the sample, a fairly equal white/black racial representation was achieved. Informants were from different racial and cultural backgrounds and many different language groups were represented in the sample: English, Afrikaans, Setswana, Tshivenda, isiZulu, Xitsonga and Sesotho. Although generally *7de Laan* viewers are distributed relatively equally over the nine provinces, a significant number (20%) of these viewers live in Gauteng (Welch, personal communication, May 25, 2009). For logistical reasons, a convenience sample was drawn from viewers in Johannesburg and Pretoria. It should also be noted that not all of the the informants originally came from Johannesburg or Pretoria, which further served to diversify the sample. Only consenting adults with at least a Grade 12 qualification were included in this study. The anonymity of all of the participants was guaranteed.

The sample was skewed in terms of gender – a by-product of snowball sampling – in that only five of the informants were male. The sample was further skewed because the Afrikaans informants were mostly white. Future research should ensure that the coloured voice is also represented.

The aim of interpretative research of this nature is not to attempt to find the objective or the scientific truth; it is rather one of constructing interpretation (Ang, 2006: 185) based on viewers' naturally occurring perceptions (Ruddock, 2001: 140). The data were analysed using Cresswell's data-analysis spiral (2007) that comprised the following interrelated steps: (1) data managing; (2) reading and memoing; (3) describing, classifying and interpreting; and (4) representing and visualising.

4. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The aim of this audience study was to attempt to find and use “member categories” (Hermes, 2010: 391) to explain the appeal of *7de Laan*. This reception study with its emphasis on the process of interpretation – in line with ethnographic sensibilities – also took into account the sociocultural context of the informants. My understanding of ethnography therefore corresponds to Merriam (2002: 9) who defines ethnography by the lens through which data are interpreted and not by how data are collected.

4.1 Getting to grips with viewing

Although some of the informants conceded that they had not really given much thought to why they watched *7de Laan*, most of them were nevertheless able to explain their reasons

⁷ The interviews were conducted by the author between 14 February and 7 April 2009. Interviews each lasted between 30 and 70 minutes. Eleven of the interviews took place at the informants' homes; two interviews were conducted in my home and one in a coffee shop. The remaining interviews were conducted at the informants' places of work and in my office on the campus of the University of Johannesburg.

for watching. In three cases, informants struggled to come to grips with or specify in concrete terms their reasons for viewing. This is consistent with Ang's (1985: 85) assertion that viewers themselves find it difficult to offer an explanation for the pleasure of watching soaps. In these three cases, the complex relationship between soap viewer and soap opera is highlighted. Drawing on Hargrave and Gatfield's research of British soap opera viewers (2002: 8), one could argue that these viewers had an *ironic* relationship with *7de Laan*. *Ironics* tend to be more critical in their reception of soaps, while simultaneously displaying high levels of engagement. Such viewers use irony⁸ to cope with the contradictions between, on the one hand, the unflattering public discourse on soaps, and, on the other, their own experience of finding pleasure from watching (Ang, 1985: 96). In all three cases, informants moved between two extremes, namely distancing and immersion. It is exactly "this kind of apparent contradiction of feeling" (Tager, 1997) that holds the key to these viewers' viewing pleasure. The response of informant Vera serves to illustrate this:

I will never be able to explain why I am watching *7de Laan*. I just can't stop watching; at times it is funny and at other times I am really critical about it [*7de Laan*], thinking to myself, 'what are they doing?' But I am not too critical it seems because why then I am still watching?

(27-year-old white public relations officer)

Questioning the motives for viewing might be used as an attempt to detach oneself culturally from the programme or to show cultural superiority to what is still viewed by some as a bad and inferior object that is poorly made and unrealistic. Vera's ambiguous relationship with *7de Laan* can further be the outcome of negative external stimuli. Vera admits often hiding the fact that she has watched *7de Laan*: "[E]veryone mocks *7de Laan* and in some circles I am embarrassed to admit that I watch, because people are of the opinion that it is superficial." It must however be noted that none of the informants apologised for viewing. Spence (2005: 55) similarly reports that "watching soap operas has seldom been described to me as either a duty or a serious wrongdoing". Not only is the soap opera one of the most resilient forms of storytelling (Allen, 1995: 1), but its audience is equally resilient in that, despite the negative public perception of soaps, many people find a space for it in their lives (Brown, 1994: 172).

Another *ironic* viewer, Annie – a 32-year-old white female teacher and actor – turns Van Coller and Van Jaarsveld's idea of "relax and relate" on its head when asserting that she does not identify with the representation of post-apartheid South Africa and, more specifically, Afrikaans people in *7de Laan*. "I don't know why I watch. It irritates me, and yet, I join in when this is discussed and it's rather interesting. Because [though] it irritates me that I do this, I nevertheless do it. I more or less know exactly what's afoot: that feeble Altus has

⁸ It should be noted that a critical response to aspects of the soap is not limited to ironic viewers, but these viewers seem to be critical more often. The least critical are so-called loyal viewers who seem to be critical by distancing themselves from the text when in their opinion the text deviates from a well-established convention.

gone and done it again, and 'did you see that', and blah, blah, blah, but I don't identify with this. All the while it's a matter of 'this 'isn't me, and yet I watch it.'" The pleasure she derives seemingly lies 'outside' the soap in the fact that watching it leads to interesting conversations. Kilborn (1992), Hargrave and Gatfield (2002), and Madill and Goldmeier (2003) have also documented the use of soap operas for social interaction.

In an isolated case, one informant in this study – Lucy, an accounts executive – showed a strong emotional reaction to watching, noting that she became upset with herself for watching: "At times I get cross with myself for watching. At the beginning, there were some good strong storylines. Sandra was a wonderful vixen and I miss Madel, but the waiters irritate me immensely. At the beginning, it was good entertainment but now it's getting tedious and predictable. I miss a good vixen." Drawing on research by Hargrave and Gatfield (2002: 8), one could argue that Lucy has a *dismissive* relationship with *7de Laan*. While the said authors found *dismissives* to be more critical in their reception of soaps, they however demonstrated lower levels of engagement than did the *ironics*. In Lucy's case, she reads in the mediated mode that supposes that she is highly attuned to generic form (Michelle, 2007) – in this case the specific generic convention of the inclusion of a vixen.

Research has established that, in general, the soap opera audience is loyal. A telling news story from India illustrates the loyalty and long-term commitment to watching soaps. It was namely reported that an Indian woman had divorced her husband on grounds that he did not allow her to watch her favourite soap opera (Woman divorces over soap opera ban, 2009). In the present study, not even the most critical of the informants – like Liela, Vera and Lucy – reported being able to stop themselves from watching. According to Lucy, "[T]hey have included so much nonsense and [yet] I continue watching".

4.2 Serial gratification: the gift that keeps on giving

In some cases, the appeal of *7de Laan* was linked to the pleasure of watching soap operas or TV in general. What has been established in this research is in keeping with Hartley's contention (2004: 525) that television 'teaches' us to continue watching. Through serialisation – a characteristic of the soap opera genre – repeated consumption of a particular soap opera is encouraged. The success of soaps is very much balanced on the premise of being able to draw in the audience year after year. To capture something of the efforts on the part of the viewer to 'seek out' storylines that draw them in, the label *serial gratification* (Kielwasser & Wolf, 1989) is used. Some informants in this study reported watching out of curiosity. One specific ongoing storyline that kept informants coming back for more and often sparked renewed interest in the programme was the on-again-off-again relationship between Altus and Paula.

The flipside of serial gratification is *serial fatigue* or *irritation* – resulting from drawn-out or overfamiliar storylines – an aspect that is well documented in this research. In such cases, informants developed mechanisms – such as channel-hopping or watching less frequently –

to deal with the irritation associated with serialisation. Some adopted an attitude of playful interaction, whereby they made fun of unrealistic storylines and certain conventions, such as characters shopping in a boutique despite their meagre earnings or hanging around in coffee shops all day long, while they supposedly work for a living. Such playful interaction with the text often occurred in a social setting.

4.3 *Sharing the 7de Laan viewing experience*

Part of the appeal of watching soaps is the social and participatory nature of watching (Miller, 1995: 216). Informants in this study also reported the social nature of soap watching. Even informants with TV sets in their bedrooms reported preferring to watch with the rest of the family.⁹ In this research, informants reported watching with siblings, children, grandchildren, spouses¹⁰, roommates and friends¹¹. For many viewers the appeal of watching soaps in general is enhanced by the associated soap talk that is often characterised by speculation and playful interaction. JL (student), for example, noted the relational potential of soap talk in that it was seen to connect mother and daughter through soap-related play: “[While watching] we would probably be like making jokes and wonder what they are up to. My mom will always speculate whether, like, one of the new characters is any good. She’s always got like a feeling about them.” This experience is consistent with Gillespie’s argument (1995) that soaps invite conversation in that interweaving storylines accommodate speculation about characters’ futures.

The trend towards communal consumption and cross-generational interaction reported by many informants can possibly be explained by the fact that *7de Laan* is generally perceived to reflect morally acceptable behaviour. Stella (pensioner), for example was appreciative of the fact that one could watch *7de Laan* with one’s children and grandchildren without being

⁹ Even those who live alone made attempts to share the viewing experience with others, like Liela, who communicated via SMS with a fellow-viewer: “I would even SMS my sister if there is something really preposterous on *7de Laan*. Say ‘Watch that! See what they did’.”

¹⁰ *7de Laan* was not perceived as being overly feminine or produced with a specifically female audience in mind. This broadened its appeal for men and women to watch together. For the married male informants in this study, watching *7de Laan* was associated with spending time with their wives. Because of the small male sample in this study, future research should endeavour to investigate *7de Laan*’s appeal for its rather substantial male audience. Males seemed to be less willing to acknowledge that they watched and therefore snowball sampling, as used in this research, might however not have been the best way to recruit such informants.

¹¹ In some isolated cases, the viewing ritual is also symbolic of time ‘for myself’. In such cases, it is difficult to determine whether the appeal lies with the soap or with the ritual. One such example is Adri (58-year-old teacher) who had returned to work after 15 years after having raised her children. Habitual viewing gave her a sense of power: It is my personal half an hour because it [*7de Laan*] is fun and entertaining. It is not necessarily the most satisfying or stimulating time, but it is OK and it has been established in our household that even if my husband listens to music, he will switch it off when it is time for *7de Laan*. Nobody ever objected to this; they respect it without me ever saying a word about it.

embarrassed: "They don't jump into bed every five minutes; there is some fooling around but nothing more than that."

7de Laan is also seemingly a bridge between people of different backgrounds as can be seen in the case of one of the black informants who reported using *7de Laan* to connect with white viewers in her university residence.

So now I can actually speak to my friends at Res in Afrikaans sometimes. And they also help me and show in that way that South Africa has improved: 'No, you don't say it like that, you say it like this, because you see with Afrikaans this and this changes'.

(Thuli, a 19-year-old female student)

O'Shea (2004) similarly reported that the university students in her study had enjoyed the communication in the common room sparked by watching soaps. The informants in O'Shea's study watched *Generations* and, contrary to Thuli's experience, it was used purely to mediate black students' relationship with other black students. Thuli's use of *7de Laan* to aid integration illustrates the serial's potential to spark conversation across cultural and language barriers. Van Coller and Van Jaarsveld (2009: 31) agree in noting that, through *7de Laan*, "Afrikaans becomes this wonderful bridge between people and communities".

This is however not true for everyone: in an isolated case one of the white informants noted that she did not speak to her domestic workers about *7de Laan* even though she knew that they watched, which serves to highlight that the road to a transformed South African society is indeed a long and winding one.

Isi: I know of no-one but myself who watches *7de Laan*. So, I won't discuss it with anyone else. I know my domestics watch it. My black domestics.

Interviewer: Now would you discuss it with them?

Isi: No, I don't speak to them (ha-ha).

Although Isi was able to tolerate blacks and whites living and working together in her favourite soap opera, she was not able to follow suit and connect in a similar way with the domestics working in her house. At some level, Isi might be slightly uncomfortable with her response as indicated by the nervous, short burst of laughter at the end of her response. The question that presents itself is whether it is still the case that black viewers – who, historically, have had to be more adaptable – are still more committed to bridging the gap between 'us' and 'them'. Isi's resistance to engaging with her domestics could be compounded by the fact that *7de Laan* chooses to portray Maria, the domestic worker in *7de Laan* in line with its politically correct utopian representation of post-apartheid South Africa. On the one hand, Maria, is still the typical domestic, who caters to her employer's every whim and secretly uses the Van Zyl's telephone for private chats; on the other, though, she is seen to be attending family and community functions, trying to establish a business of her own and having tea and scones at the local coffee shop.

Audience reception of Maria, a domestic worker, is also of interest. Although it cannot be disputed that black domestic workers are very much a part of everyday South African life, some informants noticed a bit of a twist when it came to this particular character. As explained above, Maria is not only portrayed as a servant but is shown to be very much her own person and someone who aspires to making a better life for herself. She is positively viewed by informants as part of the soap family, as the stable one, who keeps everyone together. Yet respondent Danene questioned the plausibility of some aspects of the Maria storyline: “Maria’s whole guest house thing is somewhat far-fetched. Because she was never like very intelligent or showed any initiative” (21-year-old white female student).

4.4 7de Laan perceived as being distinct from other soaps

Although, as stated in the *Introduction*, *7de Laan* echoes some of the general soap opera conventions, some of the informants in this study described it as being different from soaps in general and decidedly distinct from other South African soaps. The majority of the informants appreciated this uniqueness and found it appealing. While most informants reported preferring international to local content, they however preferred local soaps to American soaps¹². These latter soaps were mostly received negatively and criticised for their unrealistic storylines, overdramatic approach and lack of morals and values.

4.4.1 More grin, less grim

Among the most commonly reported reasons for watching soap operas figure relaxation, escapism and diversion. It should however be noted that *7de Laan* – with its perceived unique balance between humour/light-heartedness and drama, and between fantasy and reality – is specifically geared towards relaxation and diversion from the harsh realities of daily life in South Africa. Some informants, mostly whites, explained that their liking of *7de Laan* was based on it affording them an opportunity to relax and escape from their daily lives: “There are not that many dramatic events happening and therefore [it is] relaxing,” said Danene. Isi (65-year-old retired librarian) agreed: “It is not that dramatic. It is relaxing – like reading a serial”. Nelia (accountant) likewise found watching *7de Laan* relaxing and it appealed to her to be able to “watch without having to think”. Similarly, Noleen regarded *7de Laan* to be “easy entertainment”, which made it possible to relax while watching.

¹² South African television broadcasts a mix of local and international soaps. At the time when American imports dominated the soap opera scene, the Australian soap opera, *Neighbours*, was also broadcast. The American soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful* – broadcast on SABC television since 1987 – and *Days of our Lives* – broadcast since 1992 – both still continue to have a loyal following. The American soap opera *All my children* has also been broadcast on SABC 3 since 2001, and, when a few years ago the broadcaster reported that it would terminate its broadcasting of the serial, there was such a public outcry that the decision was reversed. The free-to-air channel, e.tv, broadcasts the American soap *The Young and the Restless* as part of its late-afternoon schedule, in the same time slot as SABC 3’s *Days of our Lives*.

For the majority of the informants, being able to relax while watching *7de Laan* was more important than being confronted with hard-hitting and controversial storylines. Apparently, the appeal of *7de Laan* was that it did not require much effort or deliberation from the audience. One must however be careful not to equate effortless viewing with passive viewing. Informants were in fact aware of discrepancies between the 'real' world and the 'soap' world and this was often part of *7de Laan's* appeal: some took pleasure in fantasising about 'what might be', especially when it came to living in an imagined close-knit multicultural society like Hillside (the fictional setting of *7de Laan*). *7de Laan* was described as being safe and not progressive. While some were critical of the fact that *7de Laan* did not test boundaries, more of the informants were appreciative of this aspect. Others used the discrepancies between the 'real' and the 'soap' world to demonstrate their superiority over the text and make fun of it, or to interact jokingly with fellow viewers.

Other South African soaps like *Isidingo* – which also showcases a multicultural cast and (at the time of this research) was broadcast at 18:30 – is seen as being potentially too serious or political¹³. According to Lydia (58), a housewife, *7de Laan* was not supposed to be a programme that made some kind of social or political statement. She stated: "I think we get enough of that, I don't think I'd be interested in watching it then. I've had enough of that with other things." Bo, a female project manager declared that "[I]f you want social issues you watch *Isidingo*". What is possibly at work here is the underlying fatigue some South Africans have of being politically correct. They would probably prefer the focus to be on reconciliation in accordance with the 1990s' Truth and Reconciliation Commission rather than on the pangs of remorse about the past (truth).

What is also significant here is that each soap opera generates its own set of expectations, which the audience then uses in meaning construction (Allen, 1995: 85). Mode switching is evident in that informants come to expect gritty storylines from say *Isidingo* but, at the same time, they are overtly critical of serious storylines in *7de Laan*.

4.4.2 *Afrikaans but not exclusively so*

Within the current broadcasting environment – in which Afrikaans as a broadcasting language has been largely marginalised – it came as no surprise that most of the Afrikaans informants found it appealing that everyone, irrespective of race or nationality, spoke Afrikaans and spoke it well at that.

¹³ Many of the *loyals* did not watch other soaps and were therefore less likely to compare *7de Laan's* representation of the real world with representations in other soaps. This is a possible contributing factor to this group's generally uncritical reading of the text. Because *non-loyals* who watched other soaps had the benefit of comparison, they tended to be more critical of *7de Laan's* representation of the real world. In general, multiple-soap viewers explained their preference for a particular soap by contrasting its conventions with those of another soap. For example, many preferred *Egoli* and *Isidingo* to *7de Laan* because of their inclusion of current affairs and controversial storylines.

The appeal was, however, strengthened by the fact that *7de Laan* is not exclusively Afrikaans. For some, this meant that Afrikaans could be enjoyed without feelings of guilt resulting from the exclusion of other languages. Tarin, a lawyer, did not think Afrikaans should be privileged over other languages: “We live in a multilingual country, you know; so you can’t get uptight about Afrikaans, but not about Sotho or the other languages.” Notably, black viewers found the frequency with which languages other than Afrikaans were used on *7de Laan* to be irrelevant. What mattered to them was that these other languages were indeed included. Given the history of the language, these viewers seemed to view any attempt at including other languages in an Afrikaans programme to be better than no attempt whatsoever. Accordingly, the informants in this study made mention of and expressed appreciation for the fact that Marko – one of the white characters – spoke isiZulu. In my opinion, Marko’s subsequent departure left a gap. This was the case because he spoke an indigenous language and so demonstrated that learning a language was not a one-sided matter in that only black characters are made to speak and learn Afrikaans. Producers should therefore look for opportunities to have white characters learn an indigenous language or at least a few words. In line with *7de Laan*’s light-hearted approach, another option could have been to have Klara, the character from Bucharest, learn a few Sesotho or isiZulu words.

4.4.3 *Recognisable but flexible interpretation of setting*

7de Laan further allows for heightened identification with the setting, something that appealed to some informants in this research. Although *7de Laan* is set in a fictional suburb, the opening credits show images of the real-life neighbourhood of Melville in Johannesburg. As little further mention is made of Melville, or of Johannesburg for that matter, and no outside shots are included, informants in this study were able to associate Hillside with different settings – in some cases small towns and rural areas in South Africa – which heightened the appeal. This is in line with producer Danie Odendaal’s intention of naming the soap *7de Laan*, as many town and cities in South Africa have a street called *7th Avenue*. Future research could investigate how non-Joburgers relate to the setting.

Within this familiar though flexible setting, the focus on neighbourliness is to some extent part of *7de Laan*’s appeal. Neighbours get along, look out for each other and are all equals, irrespective of race. The fact that the community is made up of working-class people adds to the appeal. Mention was made by some of the informants that this was in contrast to American soaps and other local soaps that tended to focus on glitz and glamour. Colin Howard, line producer of *7de Laan*, agrees that the appeal of *7de Laan* is the fact the “all viewers can relate to the middle class, working, suburban characters” (personal communication, April 30, 2009). In addition, *7de Laan* was found to show a ‘softer’ side of Johannesburg, which, for some, had lost its sense of neighbourliness in that people often lived very secluded lives. Maggie, a secretary from Randburg, nostalgically associated *7de Laan* with the Johannesburg of her youth: “It was a different Johannesburg that I grew up in, that I went to school in ... We knew the families around

us. We went to the same schools, we went to the same churches or synagogues or whatever. And it was a different, gentler, nicer Johannesburg too, and that's how I see *7de Laan*."

5.5 *7de Laan as a learning tool*

Armstrong (2000) maintains that soaps have – both intentionally and unintentionally – been sites for learning. It is a well-documented fact that soap viewers use soaps in social learning and to aid in problem solving (Compesi, 1980; Lemish, 1985; Perse & Rubin, 1989) but, compared with other identified uses – like watching for relaxation and passing the time – reports in the literature of learning are less prominent. In the current study, it was mostly younger informants who reported that they had learned something from watching *7de Laan*. The very same informants reported watching TV precisely because they wanted to learn something. One could therefore argue that the general reasons for watching TV are linked to the reasons for watching specific programmes. The general motives for watching TV, in turn, also influence sense making. If one watches TV mostly to escape and relax, one will not bother to try to learn something from watching *7de Laan*. However, if one's intention is to watch TV to learn and be informed, one might look for valuable information and opportunities for learning when watching *7de Laan*. Modes of TV viewing therefore exert a stronger influence than does the relationship with a specific genre when it comes to using TV as a learning tool.

4.5.1 *Improving Afrikaans skills*

Many non-Afrikaans informants reported being urged by a teacher to watch *7de Laan* to improve their Afrikaans skills. To them, *7de Laan* was primarily a learning tool, and only subsequently did they come to enjoy watching it. There were, however, those participants who did not have to be coaxed into learning Afrikaans, as they wanted to learn it of their own volition. Thuli was one such a participant: "[It] helps me learn the language because it actually sounds really nice. When I listen to people speak Afrikaans, I want to know what they're saying. At least, if I watch *7de Laan* they have the subtitles there and I know what it means and I can learn and say it next time" (Thuli, a 19-year-old female student). Lida, an isiZulu-speaking female, held that *7de Laan* helped her to use Afrikaans words in the right context: "If you watch *7de Laan* and then you will go, 'Wait a second, the Afrikaans word for *root* and *carrot* is the same word'." Given the fact that during apartheid, black students were forced to study Afrikaans, which led to the fierce resistance, especially in 1976, the reactions and attitudes of these informants are somewhat surprising and contrast sharply with the findings from Pitout's 1998 reception analysis of the soap opera *Egoli*. Here, the general consensus among black respondents was that there was too much Afrikaans in this soap (at that stage the viewer language distribution was 70% Afrikaans and 30% English). One even stated: "... [W]e do not want to listen to a language that caused so many problems for us in the past" (1998: 74).

The differences in attitudes between the two studies are most probably attributable to the lapse of a decade between the two studies and a concomitant mellowing of harsh divisions. Thus, while some Afrikaans informants reported hiding the fact that they

watched *7de Laan*, black informants in this study could actually be classified as proud ambassadors of *7de Laan* and of the Afrikaans language. Through public advocacy, non-Afrikaans viewers in this study not only wanted to sway others to watch, but were in fact challenging the perceived narrow-mindedness of others regarding Afrikaans and Afrikaans people.

My friends often ask, 'Why do you watch this for crying out loud? You don't even know Afrikaans!' I'm like, 'Oh, but I can always read.' There are some things they'll never understand.

(Thuli, 19-year-old female student)

You know, at times my friends find it so weird for me to be watching *7de Laan*, you know. And I'll be like, 'No guys, it's nice. Try watching it. Leave your perceptions of it. Just watch it and you'll get the storyline; you'll just love everything about it'.

(Mimi, 20-year-old female student)

I will try and influence people by saying, 'No, no you must watch *7de Laan*. It is nice.' And sometimes, when I am around people that don't watch *7de Laan*, I will just come up with the topic, 'Did you see what happened on *7de Laan* last night?'

(Kiki, 19-year-old female student)

These viewers used *7de Laan* as a tool for public discourse and debate and they showcase something akin to what Joke Hermes might call culture citizenship¹⁴ in which viewers take active steps towards a better world. In these viewers, the producers have a valuable resource for building their brand. They could, for example, through a competition or campaign of sorts, consider identifying and then employing brand ambassadors.

4.5.2 *Observational learning*

The social usefulness or problem-solving capacities of soap operas have been well documented (Compesi, 1980; Greenberg & Woods, 1999; Kilborn, 1992; Lemish, 1985; Livingstone, 1988; Perse & Rubin, 1989). Some informants – mostly the younger ones – reported having gained insight into how to deal with certain problems, relationship issues, situations and people in general. Ntsiki (18), for example, learned from watching *7de Laan* that things do not always work out the way you want them to: "I have also learned from watching that one should have people around you that care about you." Mabel, a student, reported that she occasionally acquired some hints regarding how to act in certain situations, while Kiki (19), a Setswana-speaking student said: "I gain experiences that I think I will be able to carry through in the future and learn what life

¹⁴ Culture citizenship is defined as "the process of bonding and community building, and reflecting on that bonding, that is implied in partaking of the text-related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticizing offered in the realm of (popular) culture" (Hermes, 2005: 11).

is really like.” It is possible to deduce that Kiki saw the world presented on the soap as a parallel universe and therefore a possible avenue for learning about life. One can thus conclude that soaps in general, and *7de Laan* specifically, can be seen as a rich source of vicarious experiences. It provides a ‘parallel world’ (Gledhill, 1997: 371) to ‘work through’ (Ellis, 2000) aspects close to one’s own world.

4.5.3 *Parent-guided learning*

An important aspect of *7de Laan*’s appeal is that the text – within the context of family viewing, provides parents with opportunities for guided learning. For example, one of the informants reported that she used what she perceived to be the morally questionable behaviour of characters to advocate an alternative value system. Lina (lecturer) explained that she used the time to educate her children by taking her cue from what was happening on *7de Laan*: “I watch with my teenage daughters and try through my (sometimes sarcastic) commentary to impose an alternative value system.” Chriszelda de Vos, SABC 2 brand manager, states that *7de Laan* can be seen as being, to a certain extent, educational: “Parents have also mentioned that they use certain storylines from the soap to educate their children on how they need to handle specific situations” (personal communication, August 28, 2008). Family soaps like *7de Laan* therefore provide ample opportunity for guided social learning. Being perceived as a tool for learning however does come with a huge responsibility on the part of the producers – one of which producer Danie Odendaal is well aware: “One can’t say or do anything irresponsible. One realises that, for many people, one is the only place where they are going to learn that they have certain choices and that they can take certain decisions. One has a whole range of social responsibilities. It really frightens me ... sometimes it gives me sleepless nights” (as cited in Beyers, 2007: 86).

4.6 *The appeal of critical viewer engagement*

Part of the appeal of watching soap operas is either hating or mocking them (Ang, 1985) or voicing a critical response (Livingstone, 1988) to what plays out on screen. Through the issues presented in *7de Laan*, viewers are confronted daily with having either to review or to reaffirm their stance regarding issues like rape, suicide, street children and infidelity. What also became evident during the interviews was that viewers reflected on issues that were not represented in the text, like homosexuality, Indian characters¹⁵, intercultural romantic racial relationships and linguistic diversity. It is beyond the scope of this article fully to unpack the different critical responses and I will here only refer to some examples of critical engagement.

¹⁵ At the time of this research, no Indian characters were included in *7de Laan*; since then, however, two Indian actors have joined the cast. The audience response to these characters is an interesting avenue for future research, especially if one takes into consideration the fact that these characters mostly speak English – which represents quite a radical move from the dominant characteristic of *7de Laan*, namely that almost everyone speaks Afrikaans and speaks it well at that.

One critical response was made in respect of the lack of linguistic realism in *7de Laan*. In the soap opera, difference – also in terms of spoken dialects – is often underplayed, rather focusing on that which unites and not that which divides. For the most part, the informants in this study generally did not have a problem with Standard Afrikaans and some even applauded the producers for their efforts. In one isolated case, Hano, an Afrikaans-speaking viewer, wanted to see more language diversity.

It's sometimes a bit unrealistic when you have these blacks who speak Afrikaans, you know. I think that this isn't so, you know. You have these wonderful Afrikaans accents. I mean, I would rather prefer them to speak broken Afrikaans or perhaps switch over to English, and say, "I'm sorry, but I don't speak Afrikaans all that well." I think they should perhaps address some of those issues so as to make it more natural, to make it more representative.

(33-year-old white male lecturer)

Another aspect that elicited a critical response was that of the utopian view of living portrayed in *7de Laan*. While the informants in this study were aware of the discrepancies between their perceived reality and the fictional representation of a multicultural South Africa in which people of different races and backgrounds lived in harmony – it is also true that viewers living specifically in post-apartheid South Africa need a space to vacillate between fiction and reality. In such a space, they would be able to deal with the sociopolitical issues of a society in transition – one characterised by a distinct 'in-betweenness'. In this regard, locally produced soaps have a significant role to play in providing just such a space.

The acceptance by some of the black and the white informants of the utopian view of living together should be framed by an understanding of who these audience members are, their history, their current reality and what they need to do in order to survive and reproduce (Press as cited in Murphy, 1999: 217) within the new South African context. While most white informants in this study were aware of the past inequalities, they did not necessarily want to be reminded of them. Black informants in this study were similarly aware of the past, but were more interested in dreaming about a better future: "Right now, we really are not one, but everyone just thinks about themselves. But a world like Hillside is possible, we just have to work at it together (Ntsiki, student)." Informants – like Ntsiki – dreamed about a harmonised future as a way to survive in the current reality in which divisions and misunderstandings are still very much a part of everyday South African life.

The admittedly small number of informants who rejected this utopian view – all of them white Afrikaans informants – articulated a need for *7de Laan* to interrogate rather than sugar-coat current-day realities and not to idealise the new South Africa.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Speculation is rife when it comes to the appeal of *7de Laan* with media commentators, scholars, journalists and actors each hazarding an opinion. The present research is however the first to bring an in-depth understanding of the appeal of *7de Laan* from the audience's perspective. It would indeed be ill advised to regard *7de Laan* as being merely candyfloss; it certainly does provide opportunities for public debate and personal reflection. It is an especially useful avenue for reflecting on post-apartheid South Africa and on how viewers deal with representations of the new South Africa in locally produced TV content.

From the above discussion, it is possible to deduce that *7de Laan* appeals to different viewers in different ways. In the final analysis the concept of *viewer investment*, i.e. the ways in which audiences are concerned about the historical and socially situated ideals for viewing pleasure (Barker & Brooks, 1998: 225), best explains the audience-text relationship in this particular sample of *7de Laan* viewers. The specific reasons for watching that have been identified above are linked to the reasons generally associated with soaps, like using soaps for social interaction, for problem solving and simply watching to relax. Other, more specific uses associated with this specific case study – like honing Afrikaans language skills and a preference for programming in Afrikaans – also feature in the literature. According to Ruiz (1984), there are three possible attitudes towards a language: language as a right, language as a resource and language as a problem. Especially black informants saw Afrikaans as a resource for connecting with Afrikaans people in South Africa. They used *7de Laan* as a learning tool to learn Afrikaans and to understand something of the way Afrikaans people interact. While other languages and their rights have gained prominence in South Africa, there seems still to be the perception that Afrikaans can and will (still) open doors for black South Africans. While Fourie (2007: 242) argues that one is able to learn about different cultural and social norms by watching South African soaps, in the case of *7de Laan* this is – except for a few storylines like the Mandela and Alice wedding – still very much a one-sided affair with a strong emphasis on Afrikaans language and culture.

Viewing *7de Laan* was a planned activity, with informants – except for the so-called ironic viewers – being able to identify specific reasons for watching. And, while no-one apologised for viewing, some did however interrogate their reasons for watching. These informants constantly moved between attitudes of involvement and detachment, while others demonstrated slightly less yet still significant movement between engagement and detachment. Even those who were dismissive and critical of *7de Laan* nevertheless watched and could not see themselves stopping, which points to the persuasive nature of soap watching. However, the persuasive nature of soap watching should not be equated to seeing soap opera viewers as being mere passive consumers who can easily be manipulated. All the participants moved between the 'soap' world – i.e. reading in the transparent mode – and the 'real' world – i.e. reading in the referential mode – but never lost sight of the fact that they were indeed dealing with fiction.

Even if the soap audience – more so than other audiences – is seen as a reference group in the development of storylines, audience power is relative in comparison with that of the broadcaster

and the producer. Additionally, only a small percentage of the viewing population use such power. In my sample, not one of the informants reported ever having attempted to influence or respond to a storyline, further questioning whether they, as outsiders, would indeed have any impact or be able to add anything. Abet, for example, was seemingly less active in her engagement – within the scope of the genre and her personal needs – as she mostly took what was offered to her: “As an outsider I can’t criticise. Danie Odendaal is an intelligent man who is very involved with the production. For the genre [soap] and for family entertainment it is good enough for me” (56-year-old lecturer).

When it comes to *7de Laan*, the impact of audience participation is moreover at best uncertain. According to its producer, Danie Odendaal, “We naturally always try to keep our fingers on the pulse regarding our viewers. But sometimes we simply have to turn a deaf ear and take a risk!” (personal communication, September 4, 2008). And although ‘new media’ technology like the Internet, provide increased opportunities for audience interaction, *7de Laan* shies away from using the interactive features offered by web technology. A former version of their website provided an open forum, but it was later decided to remove the forum. In an interview, Annelie Uys, *7de Laan* Web Editor, gave the following reason: “We have found that a chat function provides people who do not like *7de Laan* with a medium for maligning the soap, for insulting our viewers, or for simply passing tasteless remarks. Thus, with a view to promoting good publicity, we had to remove the chat function from the web page.” Similarly, the decision not to have a *Facebook* fan page is based on the fact that the production team do not want to expose their actors to negative publicity. Says Annelie: “Criticism of the writers and the script writing, that we can take, but we do not want to expose the actors to this. We do for example get letters that say that this one is too fat and that one something else. We don’t want that kind of thing to be perpetuated on the web” (personal communication, July, 10, 2011). Fan discourse is thus completely ignored on this platform, with no effort being made to discover what fans are saying and discussing.

For this sample, activity largely remained in the domain of the private viewing setting of the viewers, except, that is, in the case of the non-Afrikaans speaking viewers who discussed the soap with non-viewers. Future research could interrogate the nature of both private and public soap talk, as only anecdotal evidence was given of these and other social interactions related to viewing *7de Laan*. The participants in this sample were active in comparing different soaps with one another and thus actively engaged with the texts through commenting, laughing, and playful interaction. Pleasure and a sense of empowerment were felt in their being able to predict what would happen next and also through opportunities to defend and criticise storylines. Ultimately, the audience always still has the power either to switch off or to switch to another soap – as was indeed done in two instances in this sample.

This study has revealed quite a rich array of facets and nuances that characterise the appeal of *7de Laan* for the selected viewers. In some ways, the soap mirrors most of the conventional characteristics and traditions of the soap opera genre – which clearly appealed to the viewers. It does however display some very distinct features, making for a unique South African experience – which equally appealed to the viewers. It would therefore not make sense to tamper with the

recipe. As Liela (journalist) put it: "My instinct would be to try and change everything. But that's the recipe and you have to accept that. So maybe I would just take away [some] of the frivolity. But [then] maybe that is part of the appeal."

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PREFACE

The Fred factor – the insightful marketing story about a man who changed the world of rock

The editors of *Communicare* have made the decision to depart from its normal editorial policy and to publish the following non-refereed case study of a super music brand – *Queen*, and its brand director, Freddie Mercury. This is written in a unique personal style by Aubrey Malden, a college contemporary of Freddie Mercury's who studied marketing and advertising with him and who witnessed the making of the band and brand, from an insider's perspective. Aubrey is himself a marketing expert and author. This article follows several riveting presentations on the said topic by Aubrey and his partner, John Griffin, to spellbound audiences throughout the country.

The paper provides an instructive and provocative insight into lessons not only in music branding, but also in the art (and science) of branding itself, which can provide valuable guidelines to those who study the creation of personal music brands – an area in which practically no formal studies have to date been undertaken – as NRF Nexus searches NRF revealed. It certainly appears that the success of *Queen* was no accident, but the result of careful research and a deliberate branding exercise, of which the brand choreographer, Freddie Mercury, appeared to have had intimate knowledge.

As the fascinating case study unfolds, every marketing principle prescribed in textbooks over the years comes alive through larger-than-life, spectacular examples, the way only *Queen* could 'explain' them. While these principles may not be new, the way in which they are executed by Freddie and *Queen* brings home, once again, the true lessons of branding, i.e. to stand out, you have to be different, you have to shine through the clutter. Positioning is everything, and once you have it, you have to pursue it single-mindedly, relentlessly, through sheer hard work and through practice that makes (near-) perfect. Indeed, as Malden says, but a few others understood the DNA of a super brand: Steve Jobs of *Apple* and Richard Branson of *Virgin*.

At a deeper level, Freddie Mercury perhaps was far ahead of his time in understanding that music and the show were a reflection of the social and complex world around them, and a means of making sense of, and imparting sense to the eccentric and eclectic audiences to which they were playing. This they did through everything from their wardrobes, to their logo and even the lighting on stage. Their music was collaborative, and their performances encouraged participation from the crowds. Their spectacular shows were the forerunners of what today would be called 'experiential marketing'. Perhaps, in the final analysis, Fred as a brand director, had already then

instinctively understood what many brands are still struggling to understand in the unpredictable post-modern society in which we find ourselves today: in order to retain the high ground, and to recover lost ground, you have to engage, allow the crowds to co-create and, above all, remain in their midst – shockingly so.

From whichever vantage point (semiotic, phenomenological, critical, cybernetic, autopoietic, etc.) communication scientists want to study the presentation and transmission of meaning through signs and symbols, music and music brands provide fertile, and relatively unexplored, territory. Music and its brands evoke different meanings at different times. Woodstock, in the wake of the Vietnam War, could have told us to ‘make love, not war’; punk music, in the wake of the nuclear threat later on, could have said, ‘give up, there’s nothing’. Perhaps more research is required into what music, and the music brands that survived the test of time – as Freddie Mercury and *Queen* did – say about the times we live in, and how we make sense of them. Malden’s paper may inspire us to dig deeper than the marketing lessons and uncover the hidden meanings behind the greatest music brands of our times.

The Fred factor – the insightful marketing story about a man who changed the world of rock

BACKGROUND

So often we seem to speak in abstracts about marketing. We may all nod our heads when it comes to the importance of the basics of digging and delving into the marketplace and thoroughly researching the competition and looking at trend analyses. When we moreover talk about the importance of positioning our brand and differentiating it by means of both an impactful name and packaging that really do express the brand's character, its DNA, we may all nod our heads again.

Unearthing "insights" seems to be the currency of the day, but who is unearthing these? For, to unearth an insight, one must be armed with a gift (not a book of rules) and that gift is intuition.

So who really has done it well? What lessons can be learnt? The late Steve Jobs did it with *Apple*. Richard Branson, too, has done it with *Virgin*. And Farrokh Bulsara also did it. Who? Farrokh Bulsara, an introverted immigrant who came to England. He took a lack-lustre band and turned it into the greatest rock band the world has ever known and in the process, he transformed himself into arguably the most flamboyant, most outrageous, the greatest rock star the world has ever known. This he did from nothing – and with practically nothing. How did he do it? He did it with incredible personal courage by overcoming his shyness and he did it with the courage and insightful intuition of a great marketer.

How do I know this? Well, I watched it happen, for I studied with Farrokh Bulsara, the man who followed the marketing rules, who was obsessed with doing it well.

So, here is what we can learn.

THE SHY IMMIGRANT

I first met Fred in 1966 when I became a student at one of London's top art schools, Ealing School of Art. I was there to study advertising and marketing. Fred was there to study fashion design, one floor below me, with my brother Mark. Fred and Mark were the only boys amongst a veritable harem of girls.

Fred, born in Zanzibar and educated in India, was one of the shyest people I have ever met (and indeed – wait for it – he remained extremely shy, offstage, right up to his death in 1991). He was achingly self-conscious about his buck-teeth and consequently rarely smiled with an open mouth, lips usually sealed. He was often very quiet (perhaps encumbered by a slight sibilant lisp when he spoke) and he was a bit of a loner, as fellow student John Gotting said, “I knew Fred as this quiet, reserved bloke.”

I was, at that time, Social Secretary of the Student’s Union (later I was fortunate enough to be voted in as President) and, as such, was responsible for hiring the bands that came to play at our Wednesday lunchtime gigs, and our dances and Rag balls. The bands we hired made us the focus of a lot of attention throughout London. This was the environment in which we studied and in which we played. We had a ball.

Fred could always be seen listening and looking intently at the bands we had engaged. There he would be, usually dressed in a boring white shirt and Levi jeans and desert boots, and, when it was a little cold, a beige pullover. Amongst the plethora of top-flight bands we hired were *Cream*, *Pink Floyd*, *Jimmi Hendrix*, and *The Who*. In fact, Pete Townsend, the guitar-wielding lead guitarist of *The Who* was an ex-Ealing student, as were many other musicians of the time, including the band *Bonzo Dog Do Da Band*.

London was red hot with pop music at the time – red hot with the music of the “Swinging Sixties”. Music pervaded the corridors of our college and the clubs and pubs that surrounded us in London. It was all pervasive, it was everywhere, and Fred was quietly enchanted by it all. So he, the shy immigrant who had a dream, began his research of the marketplace.

I noticed a pattern emerging.

FRED’S RESEARCH

With my brother Mark in tow, he would visit all the clubs to see what the trends were. Off they went to the Green Man Pub to see *The Who* again, to see Elton John (then Reg Dwight) at the Crawdaddy Club in Richmond, or *The Small Faces* (with Rod Stewart) and the *Rolling Stones* at Eel Pie Island in Twickenham and at the Marquee Club in Wardour Street, close to Soho, in the middle of London.

Fred was obviously briefing himself on the competitive environment. He was doing it personally, and he was immersing himself. Today, clients talk about “immersions” as though they were something new. He was getting off his butt and seeing what was out there – not paying some researcher to do it for him! As John le Carre has said, “A desk is a very dangerous place from which to watch the world.”

In addition, Fred would spend long hours listening to and discussing the latest bands, not only the live bands but also those he could listen to on the jukebox – the one in The Castle Inn opposite our

College and the jukebox in the College's Noisy Common Room, so called because the jukebox would be playing in competition to the old upright piano we had had installed. The sound of the table football would be rattling away in the corner, punctuated with the occasional dull thud of the wooden ball as it hit the back of the goal accompanied by the cheers of the onlookers and the two or four players. The pinball machine's electronic whirrs and the hectic bell ringing – as some student either hit the jackpot or thumped the side of the machine in disappointment – added further decibels.

GETTING CLOSER TO PRODUCING THE RIGHT PRODUCT

I also observed Fred getting much closer to the bands we hired. Whilst most of us drank beer and attempted to court the various college beauties at the different gigs we put on, Fred would get close to the bands. I would see him leaning against the stage during their performances, transfixed, and analysing every chord, lyric and harmony. Then, at the end of their set, he would approach a band member and start chatting. I particularly remember him approaching David Kossoff's son, Paul, who played in a top-line band called *Free*. Paul was shaking his head. I think Fred was asking whether they wanted a singer. Paul was saying no.

Fred did not give up easily. Still without a band and with his frustrations growing, he hung around a band called *1984*, which we frequently hired for some of our gigs. In the band were two guys called Brian May and Tim Staffell. Tim studied with us at Ealing. They (*1984*) were reasonably slick but were not a "stand-out band". Like every band of the time, they wore the uniform stage dress of the time – jeans and T-shirts – and stood in the standard pose of the era, concentrating on their music, looking ultra-cool, staring at the floor, sometimes even with their backs to the audience.

It was about this time that Fred made his first move. He left the Fashion School and moved upstairs to, as I remember Fred saying, "Where the rock stars come from," i.e. the Advertising and Marketing School. This was also where Tim Staffell studied.

We should all have taken a hint on where Fred's sights were set. Not one of us did. After all, why should we take notice of the shy boy whom we occasionally saw walking down the corridor playing an 18-inch steel ruler, mouthing the strumming and the plucking of the strings, as though it were a guitar?

He had also befriended many of the budding musicians there, including Chris Smith and Nigel Foster. By this time, Tim Staffell was a base guitarist for another band called *Smile*. In the band, take note now, were two other guys, Brian May (from *1984*) and Roger Taylor. *Smile* were also nothing special, and if you have time get onto You Tube and listen to their rendition of their own song 'Step on me'. Neither the composition nor the execution can be said to be outstanding. It is no different to the plethora of musical compositions around in those days. In fact, I would venture to comment that it is good enough to make a cat wail.

When Fred was in his second year, he made another significant and frankly gargantuan move. This time it was a business move and quite a public statement. Moreover, I remember it very well, he simply said, "I'm leaving." "And what are you going to do?" we asked. It was a commitment that would drive this shy boy forward to fame. "I'm going to be a pop star," he lisped. And then added, for extra impact, "I'm going to be mega." We sniggered. He did not even have a band. He could play the piano; he could not really play the guitar other than a few stumbling chords; and, he certainly could not sing. He was far too shy for that.

THE TEST MARKET

On Friday October 31 1969, I saw Fred performing for the first time. And he, and his band, *Wreckage* were awful. Embarrassingly so.

Fred had approached me, as he wanted a gig for his new band at the college. I could not offer the normal venues, like Ealing Town Hall or the Green Man Pub. His new band simply were not a drawcard.

We therefore set them up in the Noisy Common Room. To entice a good audience we even laid on "free booze". Many people showed up and wished they had not. The only good bit was when Fred, who had made a white suit for the occasion (aided by the tailoring skills acquired in the fashion school) lay on his back and dangled the microphone down his throat and wailed. Most of the students took little notice and carried on reading their newspapers, drinking beer or wishing they could play table football, tweak the pinball machine or play the jukebox instead.

What did impress me was Fred's courage, but that was about all. As fellow student, Chris Smith, said of Fred's performance with *Wreckage*: "10 out of 10 for trying."

GETTING THE PRODUCT RIGHT

If Fred and his band of the future were to be, as he promised, "mega" then he had better have an offering that would appeal to all types. His product offering would have to be very eclectic.

Fred's own musical tastes were already broad and I had noticed him listening to everything from soul to blues, to country and western, to ballads, to rock and even swing and opera. His record collection was also broad, from 'Stones to *Beatles*, Led Zeppelin to Elvis, David Bowie, Liza Minnelli, Tom Jones, *The Who* and the real classics, like Beethoven and the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan.

What he needed now was a band that could deliver this broad spectrum of music. He found that band right under his feet – thanks to his persistence and a fortuitous moment. But, as they say, you make your own luck.

It was around 1970 that Tim Staffell, bass guitarist and lead singer of Smile, left the band saying, "The longer it (the band *Smile*) went on, the more success eluded us." As Tim left, Fred leaped

into the gap. At last he had found his own band, even though Brian May said that Fred was, “Good on showmanship. Not to sure about the singing.”

Roger Taylor added, “Some people found Fred’s vibrato rather distressing.” It was however Fred’s ability and courage that won them over. “Freddie was there saying ‘I’ll sing and do that’ ... and we gradually went ... ‘OK’,” says Brian May.

As musicians, Brian and Roger also had broad tastes and this was just what Fred needed. They just needed a little brand focus and direction – and Fred was there to give it. It started with a name and a concept board.

LOOKING FOR THE NAME

Every professional marketer knows the value of a good name and that its purpose should be to position and differentiate. How many of us however go the extra mile to conceive a name that does what it should do?

Again, the late Steve Jobs did it when he called his company *Apple*, (the name inspired by his own fruitarian habit). Bear in mind that the safer contenders were called *Exectec* and *Matrix Electronics*. How boring are those names? How “samey” are they? Would they have shone through the clutter? Nope. How about *Virgin*? Does it not differentiate and shine through the clutter, as every good brand name should?

Be bold. Be different. Have a name that projects an image, one that begins to deliver and impart a concept and character to the product.

So Fred steps in and starts to refurbish the brand with a new name and positioning.

The early contenders for the name were: *Build Your Own Boat* (which I think was Brian’s), *The Rich Kids* (which I think was Brian, Roger, and Fred’s) and *The Grand Dance* (which I think came from Fred – taken from CS Lewis’s trilogy, ‘Out of the silent planet’).

But, out of those names, you would have very little with which to build a brand and a brand’s behaviour. I guess the stage could have a partially built boat on it for the first name, or the band could always dress up in expensive clothing for the second ...

In the end there was no comparison, and *Queen*, the name proposed by Fred, it was. As Fred said, “The concept (interesting he uses the word ‘concept’ – just like a marketer) of *Queen* is to be regal and majestic. We want to be dandy. We want to shock and be outrageous.”

The band had, through Roger Taylor’s own admission, taken in the psychographics and circumstances of the youth of that time (their mega target audience), saying, “It was just a reflection of the social world we were in at that time ... In those days there was a pretty eccentric crowd ... it just seemed to fit it.”

Of course, a good name that does differentiate does sometimes and quite usually shock and does make one feel uncomfortable, as *Virgin* and *Apple* did in their day. Fancy calling a robust and highly technical computer after an easily bruised *Apple* or an airline after a woman who has never had sexual intercourse!

And the *Queen* name did make the band uncomfortable.

"I didn't like the name originally and neither did Brian," said Roger Taylor. Barry Mitchell, bass guitarist at the time, simply said, "Oh, you brave, brave boy!"

Yes, be brave when you come up with those new brand names and give them a meaning you can grasp hold of and express in everything you do, or say.

Fred did. He took the name stage a step further too. He showed the band and John Anthony, Audience and Repertoire Director at Mercury Records (no association with Fred's surname soon to be changed to Mercury) a concept board, as any brand director would, a board that communicated the dream. "Freddie showed me copies of *Queen* (the fashion magazine). He said, 'This is what we are about. It's not just the name; it's the pictures, the articles, the whole thing. This is how we want to behave.' He had the whole thing planned out in his head."

He was, as I have discussed and defined in my book, 'Things the brand gurus don't want you to know', constructing a brand from the product offering upwards, adhering to the maxim: A brand is a product dressed in a relevant suit of clothes. He was dressing it in the relevant suit of clothes.

The next step was the logo. Fred's logo.

NOW THE LOGO

I think it is practically unheard of for a rock band to have a logo but that did not deter Fred. Driven from the "I want to be dandy" and the "We want to shock and be outrageous", Fred turned his hand to practically ripping off the Royal Coat of Arms, the coat of arms used by Elizabeth, *Queen* of England. It was Fred's own design and it depicts John Deacon and Roger Taylor as two lions for the Zodiac sign, Leo, and Brian as a crab for Cancer. Fred, a Virgo of course, depicted himself as two fairies.

It is interesting to note that, when I was searching on the Internet for a good reproduction of the *Queen* logo, I came across a page that displayed on the left hand side of the screen, a massive *Queen* logo under the heading "Famous logos". To the right were the logos, much smaller than *Queen*'s, of *Apple*, *Coca Cola*, *BMW*, and *Nike*, etc. *Queen* is still playing in that world-famous brand arena – arguably as famous, if not more so than those I have just mentioned.

So, with the logo done, the brand was almost complete.

The final positioning of the brand was to give the lead singer, Fred (Farrokh) Bulsara, a new surname. Something regal that was to reflect the brand leadership and character of the brand name *Queen*. So Fred changed Farrokh to Mercury, the quicksilver of metals. Said Brian, “Fred had written a song, ‘My Fairy King’, and there’s a line in it that says, ‘Oh mother Mercury what have you done to me’. It was after that that Fred said, ‘I’m going to become Mercury as the mother in this song is my mother.’ We were like, ‘Are you mad?’”

He also changed the way he dressed and behaved. His clothes became more flamboyant, more regal, more outrageous – again reflecting the character of the brand he had described on the concept board. Even when fronting the group in tiny village halls, military bases and provincial pubs, Mercury thought and acted like the star he believed he was. “He was like a young (re-born) lamb, so enthusiastic,” said Roger Taylor. “Freddie was his own creation. He made himself.”

Fred the young, gauche, shy immigrant had shed his skin and changed his name from Farrokh Bulsara to Freddie Mercury, Rock Star (I believe he even changed his name in the passport at the same time and changed his professional description too, to ‘Rock Star’). The transformation from introvert to extrovert butterfly was complete. As Brian May observed, “Changing his name was part of him assuming a new skin. For the public he would become a god.”

“RUDE, IT’S MEANT TO BE DEAR!”

Fred also packaged the band that reflected his outrageous positioning: he dressed them in frocks. Mark Blake, author of “Is this the real life, the untold story of *Queen*,” says, “In those days most of the bands dressed in T Shirt and Jeans. One of the things that Freddie looked at was not just the sound, but the image ... he was the one that marched them off to Zandra Rhodes.”

Zandra Rhodes, a 34-year-old fashion designer had premises in Fulham Road, just a couple of miles from Fred’s home. Up and coming at a jet’s pace, Zandra was designing dresses exclusively for women. Said Zandra, “It was quite wonderful after dressing ladies to be asked to do something for men.” Prior to going to see Zandra, Fred had to ask for the cash to buy the band’s outfits. So off he wiggled to Bob Mercer, EMI’s Audience and Repertoire Director, cap in hand. Said Bob, when Fred asked for the weighty amount of money at that time of five thousand pounds, “Five grand (for dressing the band) f***ing hell!”

Fred commented on the episode: “When I started off, rock bands were all wearing jeans and suddenly here is Freddie Mercury, in a Zandra Rhodes frock, with make-up and black nail varnish. It was outrageous.”

And outrageous it was, part of the brand character, in fact.

And the target response? When Fred appeared in his new kit, a body-hugging catsuit, split open from chest to just below his navel, curvaceously hugging his body, buttocks and everything else in sight, a Melody Maker journalist remarked that he thought that it was all a bit rude. And Fred’s delighted response? “Rude ... it’s meant to be dear!”

MORE THAN MUSIC, A SHOW

Fred understood that to be really successful, the target audience did not just want to see a good old concert, they wanted a spectacular show. As Fred said in a one-on-one interview in our possession, “People want to be entertained. And I know one way people don’t want to be entertained is for people just to come on and play their songs. We have a lot of visual theatrics.” In this particular interview Fred, interestingly, is wearing what I was so used to see him wearing – no Zandra Rhodes frock but jeans and a white shirt, sleeves rolled-up, just like he wore at Ealing, and more or less the clothes he often wore offstage, when relaxing.

Fred continues, “All the greatest acts have used it (visual theatrics) in one way or another ... we are performers.” Notice the words he uses: ‘acts’, and ‘visual theatrics’ – the words of a marketing man and of a businessman. Mark Blake observed, “He was there to perform, it was show business. He was camping it up, but away from the stage he was a hard-nosed businessman.” It immediately separated the *Queen* brand of music from others. They set out to be entertaining and outrageous, and Fred positioned himself as a cheerleader. In many concerts he would challenge and woo the crowd to follow his goading chants – a short phrase first sung by Fred then mirrored by the crowd. The phrases would become increasingly difficult until the crowd could no longer follow Fred’s extraordinary versatility of pitch. Smiling, he would say to the exasperated crowd, “F*** off.” They would roar with laughter. Fred, the once shy introvert had 100,000 people eating out of his hand. He loved it. They loved it. What a show.

What entertainment too.

In fact, *Queen*, in homage to their business as entertainers would often open a show with the number, “Let me entertain you”. The lyrics are a reflection of the brand’s promise:

“Ladies and gentleman we’d like to say hello. Are you ready for some entertainment? Are you ready for a show?

“Can I rock you, can I roll you? Can I dance with you in the aisle?

“Let me entertain you.”

POSITIONING THE BAND AS THE BIGGEST ROCK BAND IN THE WORLD

When I was studying advertising and marketing, I remember my lecturer saying, “If you want to be a brand leader you better behave like a brand leader.” That is exactly how *Apple* behaved, right from Day One (see the *Apple* 1984 commercial on You Tube, a mega production that only ran once in the Super Bowl and made a huge impact worldwide) and that is exactly how Fred and *Queen* behaved from Day One, even at those small gigs in pubs and town halls.

Queen invested large amounts of money in their brand. They had the biggest lighting rigs in the world, and they did not hire the rigs, they bought them. That way, they could have the best state-of-the-art rigs as they hit the marketplace.

As Fred said in another interview in our possession, “I personally do a lot of research ... especially on the lights ... everyday I ask the lighting man to do something new.” In this particular interview, he talks enthusiastically and very knowledgeably about what the lights can do for the show. He is thoroughly involved in the staging of the event. How many lead singers of a band have ever been that involved? Once they had finished with the rigs, they would sell them on to lesser bands.

In those days, they also had the biggest stage. For example, on April 17 1975 they arrived to play in Japan at the Nippon Stadium. With them arrived a stage 140 feet long, 100 feet high and a gaping cavern 40 feet deep, deep enough to be festooned with a gargantuan and glittering array of state-of-the-art lights. The band alone had over 100 tons of equipment, which was all flown in, along with the 100-strong staging crew. Every gig equalled an enormous military exercise.

TOURS THAT POSITIONED THEM AS THE NUMBER-ONE LOVED BAND IN THE WORLD

To be Number One, Fred also realised the band would have to be loved worldwide, so they would take their show, and their particular brand experience and expose it worldwide. Not just to the normal venues – London, New York, and continental Europe – but to unexpected venues and countries. These included Hungary, Japan, Ireland, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Austria, Canada, Switzerland, Mexico and the unknown territories – at least to *Queen*’s competitors – of Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil, where they would move over 100 tons of equipment by air, sea and road, and even through the jungles of Southern America. There were no political or logistical boundaries for the band. As well as their gear, *Queen*’s crew had to lug 100 rolls of artificial turf to cover the precious pitches of South America’s football stadiums. “Supergroupo Numero Uno” read the headline in the Brazilian national paper, *The Sun*. *Queen* had positioned themselves as Number One and that was the target audience’s response: Number One! The total audience who watched *Queen* in South America (live at the concerts and live on TV) was an estimated 30 million.

Queen played in over 290 shows worldwide. In England, where most bands would play in one prime venue in London, *Queen* played in over 20 different venues from the south to the north of the country. In the US, they played in over 20 different locations and in Japan, they played in 13. Fred summed up it simply, by saying, “We’ll play huge gigs in new territories.”

SONGS THAT POSITIONED THEM AS NUMBER ONE

The brand’s behaviour was certainly audacious and, as Melody Maker put it, full of “cocky regal arrogance”. Indeed, that arrogance expressed itself further in terms of long-term brand reinforcement and positioning. They composed two songs to elevate and consolidate their position in the world of rock: ‘We are the champions (of the world)’ composed by Fred, and ‘We will rock you’, composed by Fred and Brian.

“‘We are the champions’ is the most egotistical song I’ve ever written,” admitted Fred. Inspired by the crowd sing-alongs at football matches, he wanted to write something for the masses. Something they could get involved in and something that made a brand leadership statement.

Brian May said he was shocked when he heard the lyrics and remembers saying, “You can’t do this Fred, you’ll get killed.” Fred said, “Yes we can.” The song became, as Brian May said, “[A]n international anthem for sports, politics ... everything”. Today it continues to earn millions in residuals for Fred’s estate. From the song’s quiet and almost ballad-like opening to its powerful and explosive ending, it never has a hint of that shy boy, full of self-doubt whom I once knew as Farrokh Bulsara.

The one line in the song that grabs me by the lapels, “No time for losers”, clearly is one that drove Fred onwards and upwards, like some powerful mantra. Looking in the rear-view mirror of life was not for him; he was firmly focused on looking through the windscreen of his, and the band’s future. And it was on a speedy roll ...

‘We will rock you’ was another audacious composition, this time composed by Fred and Brian. Brian was inspired by the idea of audience participation, making the audience an extension of the band and the band’s experience – ‘experiential’ we would call it in today’s marketing terms. Listen to the song and you will hear no drums on the track, just clapping and the stomping of feet.

These two songs, apart from being among the biggest money earners in residuals and usage fees (watch a football or rugby match today, or any World Cup game of practically anything, and those two songs will always be present) became beacons of positioning for the band.

TO BE MEGA YOU MUST APPEAL TO MANY

When Fred and *Smile* had found each other, he – in marketing terms – had found the right ‘production facility’. Brian, Roger and John were all fine musicians. What they lacked was a brand vision, a direction and an inspiration to point them and mould them in the right direction. Part of that inspiration was to encourage what Brian, Roger, John, and indeed Fred, had inside themselves.

Brian was a former schoolteacher and had a Bachelor of Science Degree. Being studious by nature, he considered playing the guitar to be a serious business. And so was his music. He was eclectic in his musical tastes. He could play the ukulele from the very early age of five. Later he added a Spanish guitar and the electric guitar in a variety of wide-ranging styles, from blues, to ballads, to rock and roll, and reggae. He even had an affection for the classics, with a particular liking for *The Planets Suite* by Gustav Holst, an obvious link with his fascination with the stars.

John Deacon was interested in electronics, and built his own radio and tape recorder. He first picked up a guitar – the rhythm guitar – at the age of 13, and then migrated to the bass guitar, buying an expensive EKO bass: “There was a lot of groups starting up ... The only way you could stay ahead of the rest of them was to make good music, which meant you had to have good equipment.”

Roger Taylor began playing the ukulele at the age of eight. At 11, he landed a scholarship to Truro Cathedral School where, surrounded by the classical sounds of Handel, Mozart and the like, he, as a chorister, had to sing at all school functions including Sunday matins and evensong in the Cathedral. He had a fine voice. He took up the guitar later, learning the rudimentary chords. He then took to bashing his mother's pots and pans with knitting needles – in what was the start of his drumming career.

All four, including Fred, were passionate about music. All types of music – the essential ingredients to be able to appreciate and compose in a variety of styles that would appeal to a broad target market. The broader the market, the bigger the sales.

Mark Blake comments on how Fred looked at everything as though it were a campaign. No two songs were ever the same. In his book, he refers to the fact that they “had magpie-like tastes, “in music and in life. They were unconcerned about musical boundaries.” In fact, of the more than 150 songs they composed, they hurdled even the most complex of compositional styles. Witness such songs as ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ and ‘Barcelona’.

Mark Blake further makes the following observation about Fred's musical taste and influences: “He could borrow from Shirley Bassey, or Liza Minnelli. He was a huge fan of the film ‘Cabaret’. He would also borrow from Led Zeppelin and the Beatles.”

Queen also flirted with and flitted from heavy rock, opera, jazz, light madrigals, rock and roll, funk, soul, and gay disco, and the styles of Robert Plant, Elvis Presley and Lata Mangeshkar. On a good day, Fred, even did an improvisational scat, which still today makes the hairs on the back of my neck rise and the tears fall down my cheeks. A mixture of jazz, Bebop, Zanzibar wailing and I am not sure what else, it demonstrates a voice that is able to extend from the deepest bass to the most enchanting and engaging of falsettos I have ever heard. The band follows him with remarkable and intuitive changes of style and tempo, demonstrating highly accomplished musical agility. Unfortunately, as far as I know, it is not on CD, but I have a DVD copy that I cherish.

Their recipe of courage and determination and backed by sound musical education and appreciation allowed them to deliver time and again a forever changing repertoire that had the broadest of reaches, over an almost staggering 20-year period. As Fred might have said, “It was our job, dear.”

MAINTAINING THE NUMBER-ONE POSITION

All were fanatical about being Number One and maintaining that position, as Roger Taylor said, “We always said we wanted to be the biggest band in the world. That was the object of the exercise. What else are you going to say? We'd like to be the fourth biggest?” Notice Roger's choice of words: he uses “object” and “exercise”. These are hardly the words of just a rock star, more likely the words of a businessman and a brand builder who understood the band's mission.

At recording sessions, they all brought in their own compositions and shared their conceptual thinking on the production of the songs. At first, all compositions were attributed to the member who wrote the original idea/song. They later realised that this was an unfair way of attributing the compositions. As they all collaborated, they then decided that each song would be attributed to all of them, and songs simply became labelled '*Queen*'.

They were meticulous in the final recording of the songs. Long before that, they honed them for hours, sometimes arduous hours. But they were always collaborative. Though critical of one another's work, criticism was always constructive and commercially orientated.

Fred, again dressed in jeans and an ordinary white shirt, sleeves rolled up, says in another one-on-one interview in our possession, "Sometimes I feel it's not (commercially) right. In the case of Roger's track, 'Magic,' he (initially) did it in a totally different way. I felt there was another commercial streak. I realised he was going away to L.A. for a week ... so I changed it ... he said he liked it ... I don't mind if they do that with mine. We all help each other."

In a fly-on-the-wall video of the four of them in a session, Fred spends about 20 minutes taking Roger Taylor through his paces on a two-second snare drum riff. They literally perfect every beat of the drum, recording it and re-recording it until Fred at last says, "Oh, that's nice, come and have a listen."

Of course, as in any collaborative process, sometimes the sessions got heated. "Four cocks fighting. Lovely," said Fred.

BRANDS MAKE MISTAKES. HOW DO YOU RECOVER?

In 1984, *Queen* – fired-up by their insistence and their thirst to play on the whole world's stages (regardless of the political situation), – made a fatal mistake. They played at Sun City. Because of the ghastly apartheid system in South Africa, the Musicians' Union had been instructing its members not to play in South Africa. Yet *Queen* did just that.

Queen was booked for a series of nine shows that would go on in the 6200-seater Superbowl. Such was the immediate sell-out of tickets that an additional 1,000 standing-room-only tickets were released for each performance. Although Fred's voice broke down after the third show, it was rested and *Queen* came on for the remaining performances. To those who attended the show it was an amazing, glittering and extravagant success, and Fred – complete with a pair of big balloon-like false breasts (mimicking a character from Britain's 'Coronation Street' TV series) – was thrilled to have come to South Africa.

However, the British Press did not share this sentiment – especially the *New Musical Express*, who vilified *Queen* and referred to South Africa as "vile, fascist imagery".

Upon their return to the UK, Brian May made a heartfelt, eloquent speech to the Musicians' Union General Committee insisting that *Queen* were seriously opposed to apartheid and had insisted that they had agreed to play only to a mixed-race audience at Sun City. *Queen* were nevertheless fined by the Musicians' Union. To add further salt to the wound, they were also not invited to play at the gig of the year, namely the recording of the Bob Geldof supergroup, *Band Aid*. Their record, 'Do they know it's Christmas', was an impassioned plea to the world to help Ethiopia, which was at the time caught up in a vicious and deadly famine.

The band *Queen*, shunned by the top musicians and many of the public, vowed to get involved in the next charity 'do', to rebalance the equity of the group in the minds of the public and of their peers. Their chance came when Bob Geldof began putting together 'Live aid', the next, multi-country, famine-relief event for the benefit of relief in Africa. *Queen* were not the headline band and they were due to come on at 18:40, a time when it was still bright sunlight and when the staging effects and lighting rig could add little drama to any band's performance. At that point in time, Live Aid had only collected around 250,000 pounds in donations. *Queen* had their sound engineer tweak the volume up a tad – in keeping with the biggest band in the world, they had to have the biggest sound. Then *Queen*, led by Fred, came on and gave, what Mark Blake described as "a[n] Olympian performance". Bob Geldof, down in his cups because of the initial low rate of donations, looked up and smiling said, "What the f**k is that!"

It is believed that 95% of the world's TV audience watched their performance. Then the donations came pouring in. It is reported that after their gig, the sum of 50 million pounds was collected and Sir Elton John was heard to say, "You bastards, you stole the show." *Queen* had rebalanced the perception about them and undone the harm they had caused themselves by playing at Sun City.

Lesson learnt: watch *where*, and *how* you do your business and display your brand. You can recover lost ground, if you know *what* to do to and *how* do it.

BUT PRIVATELY SPEAKING

When we control the brand, or represent it, we must be true to its values, publicly. However, privately we may have a totally different personality, as Fred indeed did.

My brother, Mark – who knew Fred well from 1966 right until Fred's death in 1991 – said, "Fred had two personalities, his private one and his personal one." Brian adds, "For all his acid wit and lively banter he could just as easily slip back into shyness," as could be seen at some of the 'after parties,' in themselves huge productions, all of which reflected the band's brand personality, but often, during the extravagant and flamboyant evenings, you could see Fred, quite uncomfortable amongst the throng.

Says Fred in another interview we have (and he says it hesitatingly and quite nervously too), "Everyone looks at me on stage and thinks that's how I am. Arrogant. And when you look at me

now, I'm really quite boring." He continues, "That's my stage persona. That's the only way I like to do it on stage ... most of the time I leave that face back of the stage. I just become myself, boring."

My brother and I never ever saw him as arrogant offstage. Always polite, highly intelligent, amazingly humble and quite shy. Intelligent enough to know how to market a brand and make it the biggest success story in the history of rock.

CONCLUSION

The initial foundation stone of *Queen* (*Smile*, with Brian May and Roger Deacon) was one of many rock groups of the time. They lacked direction and competitive edge. They had no driving, discernible brand character or focus.

Queen did not achieve fame and fortune by accident:

- Fred overcame his shyness and became the band's brand director.
- He researched the market.
- He analysed the trends and the competitors.
- He found the right ingredients to form a different band.
- He positioned the band.
- He gave them a name that differentiated them.
- He had a vision and shared it with all those brand custodians around him – the band and its management.
- He was ruthless in the way he held on to those beliefs and values.
- He did not follow the status quo (in dress, musical style or performance).
- The band invested their profits into the brand (staging, lights and dress).
- The members were all perfectionists.
- To be Number One, the band members behaved like Number One performers.

Fred adhered to what we, at Forensic Marketing, call 'The Iceberg Principle' – the above or below activities that could sink or help a brand swim. This involves a checklist of items, which in the case of *Queen* comprised the following: the eclectic music they played, the logo they designed, the appearance of the band, the charities in which they were involved, and, where they took their shows.

Yet, if there were one word that could sum up the lessons, it would be courage: the courage of a shy, buck-toothed immigrant and individual who had the courage to be a real brand leader and do things radically differently. And that is what makes brands winners.

REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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