



SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

“The Unveiling of Consumer Perceptions”

A qualitative study on how consumers view racial representation by iconic brands

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Abstract

This thesis examines how consumers perceive race representation by iconic brands, aiming to bridge the knowledge gap in the areas of cultural branding, consumer culture, and ethics within sustainability. Currently, there is limited research on the intersection of cultural branding and ethics within sustainability, particularly regarding racial representation. Given the growing importance of ethics and moral values among consumers and the complex diverse societies that characterise the marketplace, it is crucial to explore how iconic brands align with ethical principles when portraying race. This study recognises the responsibility of iconic brands to represent race without perpetuating prejudice, stereotypes or stigmatisation.

Drawing on literature from cultural branding, consumer culture, and ethics within sustainability, this research integrates various streams of knowledge to gain a comprehensive understanding of iconic brands, racial identity and companies' ethical responsibilities. The literature highlights the role of iconic brands in brand activism, the influence of race in consumer identity construction, and the expectations placed on brands in terms of ethical responsibility.

The methodology employed qualitative focus group discussions with Generation Z (1996-2010) and Millennial (1980-1995) participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds residing in southern Sweden. The choice of Sweden as a research location is significant due to its recent influx of migration, providing insights into the experiences of Swedish migrants with global brands.

The findings reveal that consumers perceive race representation by iconic brands as the commodification of ethnicity, misrepresentation of race, and a lack of alignment between brand image and company actions. Inconsistencies and flaws in race representation were also identified, highlighting the need for brands to reflect society accurately and support the racial communities they use in their branding.

This study contributes to the literature on cultural branding, consumer culture, and ethics within sustainability by integrating these streams of knowledge. It emphasises the ethical responsibility of iconic brands in racial representation and examines consumer perceptions of their adherence to racial diversity. By prioritising the consumer perspective, this research aims to contribute to the betterment of society and offers valuable insights for brand managers. The context-specific approach of studying Swedish migrants adds to the uniqueness and relevance of this research in understanding the dynamics of race representation by iconic brands.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

In contemporary society, the phenomenon of multiculturalism has emerged as a consequence of globalisation and technological advancements, leading to interconnected and diverse societies (Mulki & Jaramillo, 2011). This increased diversity has sparked discussions revolving around race and its impact on various aspects of society, including institutions and the marketplace (Walsh, 2012). Given its historical ties to colonialism and discrimination, race holds significant influence, capable of fostering both strong connections and divisions within society (Nkomo, 1992). Many researchers such as Crockett (2022) consider ethnicity and race as jointly “ethno-racial” and often use “race” to demonstrate both meanings. For the sake of this paper, the researchers will interchangeably use race and ethnicity to demonstrate the joint “ethno-racial”. The incorporation of racial representation within the marketplace can have an impact on the way a particular culture or racial identity is perceived and can play a significant role in the social integration of minority racial identities (Antioco, Vanhamme, Hardy and Bernardin 2012), therefore brands need to be aware of their input in creating a good vs bad racial image. This was witnessed recently in Sweden, where a recent immigration influx has elicited a varied consumer reaction, specifically to brands using multicultural marketing in response to the increased diversity (Ulver & Laurell, 2020). The reciprocal relationship between racial diversity and the inclusion of specific racial groups necessitates that brands comprehend their influence and impact within society and the ways in which consumers perceive their efforts.

This pressure on companies to represent a race in the ‘correct’ way, relates to how consumers view a business's social responsibility. This belief in responsibilities varies depending on the ethical perspectives held by individuals, businesses, society, and institutions and shifts depending on what is considered morally right and owed by a business (Crane and Matten 2016, p.5). Although the notions of ethics and business have been seen as contradictory (Duska, 2000), there has been an increased awareness of ethics in business, particularly among the younger generations, Y (“millennials”, born between 1980 and 1995) and Z (born between 1996 and 2010), such as the prioritisation of ethical consumption and expectation for diversity and

inclusion to be integrated into all aspects of a business (Mahapatra, Bhullar & Gupta, 2022). As the largest workforce demographic, these consumers are known to vote with their wallets and engage in virtue signalling (Berthon, Lord Ferguson, Pitt, & Wang, 2023). Society and consumers as a whole have developed a greater sensitivity towards ethical behaviour in the marketplace, with a particular focus on brand-mediated moral values (Luedickef, Thompson, & Giesler, 2010). Notably, Millennials and Gen Z hold considerable influence in the market, as Millennials represent a substantial consumer group and Gen Z's purchasing power continues to grow (Fromm, 2022). Moreover, being digital natives, these generations have played a significant role in popularising online phenomena such as "cancel culture" (Martinez, 2021), whereby celebrities and businesses are held accountable for what consumers deem unethical behaviour (Clark, 2020).

While the inclusion of race and other ethical responsibilities may be viewed as additional aspects of a business's obligations, it holds particular importance for iconic brands. Researchers (Holt, 2004; Moormon, 2022) argue that iconic status is bestowed upon brands when they engage in brand activism by giving back to the community and addressing prevailing myths and ideologies concerning ethical issues, including racial inclusion. Nonetheless, numerous iconic brands have fallen short in this regard, as many consumers continue to face harmful racial stigmatisation within the marketplace (Veresiu & Giesler, 2018). This misalignment suggests a disconnect between iconic brands' perceived ethical and racial representation endeavours and consumers' actual perceptions. Therefore, it is essential for these brands to comprehend the varied perspectives through which consumers interpret their efforts in racial representation. Consequently, this study aims to explore and understand the diverse ways in which consumers perceive the racial representation initiatives of iconic brands.

1.2 Problemitisation

The three streams of literature discussed are cultural branding, consumer culture, and ethics within sustainability.

The first stream of literature on cultural branding is defined by Gustaffson (2017) as the managerial process of creating iconic brands that use powerful, symbolic myths from society to convey relevant ideologies. While studies within cultural branding literature (Holt, 2004; 2006,

Moorman, 2020; Tortelli, Keh, & Chie, 2010; Pineda, Sanz-Marcos & Gordillo-Rodríguez, 2022; Cova and D'Antone, 2016; Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry & Kemper, 2020; Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017) do not directly mention race, they do discuss the how iconic brands address socio-cultural conflicts and embodying myths and ideologies pertaining to ethical issues. Race, however, is a relevant ethical issue and as such should be addressed in the realm of cultural branding and how iconic brands use it.

Literature within cultural branding such as Holt (2004) outlines the seven axioms of iconic brand creation, which include being activists and leading in culture. Moorman (2020) expands on this by discussing the seven lenses that guide companies in deciding to what extent they want their brand to be involved in political issues. Tortelli et al. (2010) research found that the higher the level of iconicity, the stronger the associations between the brand and the values that are important in that culture. Similarly, Pineda et al. (2022) also demonstrate the power of nationality in becoming iconic. Though these works of literature pertaining to cultural branding are fundamental in showing that aspects like culture and nationality play a role in iconicity, they do not recognise the symbolism of race in generating or maintaining iconicity.

Furthermore, within cultural branding Cova and D'Antone (2016) used Nutella as an iconic brand in their research and found that its strong brand community prevented it from falling victim to an ethical scandal. However, Testa et al. (2017) found that brands are vulnerable to losing symbolic power due to negative events and scandals, which can lead to de-iconisation. This is important to this study as it shows the impact of ethical scandals on iconic brands.

Though all the above literature is relevant to cultural branding, there is a lack of research on how using racial representation adversely may impact the brand.

The second stream of literature is consumer culture, specifically within consumer identity and race studies. Identity as a whole has been studied within different strands of literature such as psychology, sociology and anthropology with the inspection of identity from an internal individual perspective and the consequences in a wider social aspect (Freud 1919; Tajfel and Turner, 2004; Giddens 1991; Bourdieu 2010; Butler 2009; Goffman, 1959; cited in Chau, 2018). However, consumer culture has reviewed identity within the marketplace, with the view that consumers are identity seekers and makers, and interact with the marketplace for resources of identity construction, where the use of external objects, concepts, experiences and narratives are

used as a resource for consumers identification and can change and evolve over time (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988; Larsen and Patterson, 2018; Hill and Stamely, 1990; Joy Sherry, John, Mick, Glenn and Arnould, 2003; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Schau, Gilly and Wolfenbarger 2009). Similarly, identity has been reviewed with a structural lens, where certain influences such as age, social class, and gender interplay within the marketplace, and effects how individuals utilise marketplace recourse for their own construction as well as in wider society (Levy 1981; Holt 1997; Üstüner and Holt, 2010; Thompson and Üstüner, 2015). Identity construction has also examined the effect of others and the collective identity, specifically in relation to social class and gender (Beckwith, 2003; Thompson and Üstüner, 2015).

Identity in regards to race has briefly been explored, however, where race within the marketplace is becoming a myth, perpetuating certain narratives, such as the colourblind myth (Salter, Adams and Perez, 2018) and the white privilege myth (Bhopal, 2018), where dominant white identities are constructed as the ideal or “norm”, thus subsequently diminishing other identities (Davis 2018). Race has been explored as an arena for stigmatisation, where racial identities are degraded, discriminated against and exploited within society (Henderson and William, 2005; Rogers 2006; Hasinoff 2008). Racial identity and discrimination within the marketplace have also been reviewed in consumers' reactions to marketing attempts at incorporating and representing these races (Kanter 1977 cited in Gustason, 2008; Stroshine and Brandi, 2011; Grant 2017; Versiu and Giesler 2018; Wooten 1995; Cui 2001). Racial identity construction has had strong influences from psychological, sociological and historical perspectives and journals, due to the socio-historical influences surrounding race. However, there is limited research on specifically iconic brands representing race, and how this subsequently affects consumers' identity construction.

The final literature stream focused on Ethics within sustainability sheds light on the ethics of representation and marketing communication within the context of race. While various studies (Bonera, Corvi, Codni, and Ma, 2017; Burgess, Wilkie, and Dolan, 2022; Aydon Simmons, 2009; Windsor, 2006; Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005; Ayozie, Ndubueze & Uche's, 2011; Borgerson and Schroeder, 2002) acknowledge the significance of race representation and its negative consequences, such as perpetuating stereotypes, exoticism, and stigmatisation, they do not

specifically explore the ethical implications of racial representation when undertaken by conglomerates like iconic brands.

In general, the sustainability literature stream underscores the importance of considering race in ethics, both internally and externally, and the varying degrees to which representation is implemented (Bonera, Corvi, Codni, and Ma, 2017; Burgess, Wilkie, and Dolan, 2022; Aydon Simmons, 2009; Windsor, 2006; Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005; Ayozie, Ndubueze & Uche's, 2011; Borgerson and Schroeder, 2002). However, it fails to incorporate the consumer perspective regarding how iconic brands uphold racial representation.

In summary, this thesis explores three main streams of literature: cultural branding, consumer culture, and ethics within sustainability. The cultural branding literature focuses on the creation of iconic brands that use symbolic myths to convey ideologies. While this literature addresses socio-cultural conflicts and ethical issues, it lacks a direct discussion on race representation. The consumer culture literature examines identity construction in the marketplace, including the role of external objects and narratives. Although race is briefly explored, there is limited research on how iconic brands representing race impact consumer identity construction. The ethics literature stream emphasises the significance of race representation and its negative consequences but does not specifically explore the ethical implications of racial representation by iconic brands.

Overall, there is a need to incorporate the consumer perspective in understanding race representation by iconic brands.

1.3 Knowledge gap

This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap in the areas of cultural branding, consumer culture, and ethics within sustainability. Currently, there is a lack of research that explores the intersection of cultural branding and ethics, particularly in relation to racial representation. Given the increasing importance of ethics and moral values among consumers, it is crucial to examine how iconic brands align with ethical principles when it comes to representing race. Although cultural branding emphasises the idea of brand activism, there is limited literature specifically addressing the issue of race representation by iconic brands. Given their influential role in shaping culture, iconic brands have a responsibility to represent race without perpetuating stereotypes.

Likewise, within the realm of ethics within sustainability, previous research has discussed the impact of morals on ethical purchasing and the branding efforts of firms. However, there is a scarcity of literature focusing on consumer perceptions of racial identity and how they perceive ethical branding in terms of racial diversity in iconic brands.

The primary aim of this study is to understand how consumers view race representation by iconic brands, thereby contributing to existing consumer research. By gaining insights into the consumer perspective, this thesis provides valuable information on how iconic brands can use race representation to establish a meaningful connection with consumers and contribute to the betterment of society.

1.4 Research purpose and aim

In brief, based on the research question; “How do consumers view racial representation by iconic brands?”

This study’s aim and purpose are to understand how consumers view iconic brands using race representation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a literature review for this study, focusing primarily on the concept of cultural branding, Consumer culture and Ethics within sustainability, which is highly relevant to the research. The largest literature stream of this thesis is cultural branding and how it pertains to iconic brands that encompass their anxieties and desires pertaining to personal identity. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to branding in general, followed by a discussion of cultural branding literature related to ideology, the Myth market, and iconic branding. This study specifically focuses on how consumers perceive iconic brands in relation to race representation. While most literature on cultural branding approaches the topic from a brand management perspective, this study considers the consumer perspective to be crucial as it may conflict with how firms approach race representation. After exploring different perspectives on iconicity, the

chapter delves into the concept of iconic brands as brand activists, examining relevant literature on this aspect. The subsequent sections cover topics such as iconic brands as parasites, the process of de-iconisation, and the anti-consumption of iconic brands. Once literature on cultural branding has been established, the second stream of literature on consumer culture is introduced. This begins with an overview of the overall concept of identity and race, providing background on past literature in these areas. It then delves into the literature on racial identity projects, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of race and identity myths in the context of cultural branding. Research on race and identity myths plays a crucial role in understanding how consumers perceive their use by iconic brands. The final stream of literature focuses on ethics, which is not typically connected to cultural branding but holds significant importance for this study. The chapter presents an overview of ethics within sustainability literature, followed by discussions on ethics of representation, ethical marketing alignment, and ethical issues in marketing communication. It is essential for readers to understand how ethics in branding relate to iconic brands, particularly considering the use of race by iconic brands and its implications.

2.2 Cultural Branding

In his 2004 work, Holt presents four different branding models: mind-share branding, emotional branding, viral branding, and cultural branding. Mind-share branding, developed in the 1970s, emphasises the importance of owning a simple, focused position in the consumer's mind to succeed in mass communication (Holt, 2004, p. 15). This model identifies the brand's distinct constellation of abstract concepts in the consumer's mind, with managers ensuring that the brand is consistently evoked in every activity over time (Holt, 2004, p. 20). Simplifying a brand to a few abstract notions runs the risk of overlooking essential components, including emotional factors, which may contribute to its status as an iconic brand (Holt, 2004, p. 20).

Emotional branding, developed in the 1990s, builds upon the assumptions of mind-share branding by emphasising how a brand's essence should be communicated to forge an intimate connection with consumers (Holt, 2004, p. 21). This model consists of narratives and tactics that demonstrate an empathetic understanding of consumers' inspirations and life circumstances, generating warm feelings of community among brand users (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006). Storytelling is an essential part of emotional branding, with brands inspiring and

captivating consumers by showing genuine understanding and playing a proactive role in their lives (Thompson et al, 2006). However, emotional branding may lead to problems such as the development of doppelgänger brand images, as well as a disingenuous feeling to consumers when the brand does not live up to its emotional branding image (Thomson et al, 2006).

Viral branding, a more recent model, focuses on the paths of public influence, assuming that consumers have more influence than firms in the creation of brands (Holt, 2004, p. 28). By convincing people to make a brand their own through influencers, firms can spread the brand like a virus through their social networks (Holt, 2004, p. 29). Identity branding seeding brands with the right consumers who may develop the brand's value, letting the consumer forge what the brand stands for (Holt, 2004, p. 29). However, Holt (2004, p. 28) states that brands which gain popularity through viral branding and create a “buzz”, can be at risk of fading quickly from consumers’ minds. In order to maintain interest and excitement around a brand, its story must originate from an identity myth that endures over time (Holt 2004, p. 34).

Finally, cultural branding, the most recent model, places communication at the centre of customer value (Holt, 2004, p. 36). This model emphasises the importance of stories and myths in bonding consumers emotionally to the brand and establishing it as iconic. Brands that successfully apply cultural branding, while having a history that extends for more than a decade, can establish themselves as iconic brands (Holt, 2004, p. 37). By becoming a historical actor in society, the brand's continuous effort to lodge a transcendental brand essence in consumers' minds creates an identity value made through a particular context (Holt, 2004, p. 37). According to Holt (2004), establishing a myth around a brand is crucial for generating a sense of identity that resonates with contemporary social issues and engages consumers.

Cultural branding differs from other branding models as it focuses on using a myth that has been developed in society in accordance with what consumers are experiencing while creating an outlet for these myths to be expressed through the brand. This bonds consumers emotionally to the brand and finalises the purpose of this model in making the brand an iconic brand.

Furthermore, Gustaffson (2017, p. 107) defines Cultural branding as the managerial process by which brands become iconic, and It is the one strategic branding paradigm to be found within

consumer culture theory (CCT). Therefore by using myths that are relevant to consumers, iconic brands need to compete in myth markets to stay successful over time. Further literature on the myths and the myth market will be expanded on, in this section of the literature review, but first, literature on ideology will be reviewed to have a better understanding of cultural branding as a whole.

2.2.1 Ideology

Knight (2006) argues that the term ideology has undergone several transformations in the 20th century. Originally, ideology was defined as a coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs or values associated with liberal democracy. However, as the fight against fascism and communism took place, the meaning of ideology shifted to connote any belief system. The concept of democratic ideology was contrasted with totalitarianism, and the negative connotations of ideology began to dissipate. Despite this, new perspectives have continued to change the core values structuring ideology (Knight, 2006). Bristor, Lee, & Hunt (1995) present that dominant racial groups (e.g. Caucasian, men) use ideology to justify their power over other minority racial groups. Bristor et al. (1995), showcases how media, such as advertising plays a role in perpetuating this dominant group ideology because it communicates racial prejudice through omission, stereotypes and overall negative portrayal of minority races.

Another example of literature is Carrington, Zwick & Neville (2016) which states that ethical consumption is an important ideological function and argues that the gap between attitudes and behaviours in ethical consumption serves to support the very neoliberal market rationalities that ethical consumerism aims to challenge. Carrington et al. (2016), support its argument by drawing on the critique of ideology and examining the concepts of interpellation and ideology. It proposes that the gap between attitude and behaviour serves two functions: reinforcing the belief in the consumer as an empowered individual who can change the world with ethical consumption and perpetuating the idea that capitalism has the potential to save consumers from the problems it creates, creating an illusion of a just and sustainable world.

As to the mention of Neoliberalism, Fitchett, Patsiaouras & Davies's (2014) literature pertains to Neo-liberal political ideology and is characterised by the privatisation of state-owned assets, deregulation, and reducing state involvement in most aspects of social life. Neo-liberal ideology

gained prominence in the mid-1970s and early 1980s and challenged and reversed many principles of post-war social democratic economic practices. Through the influence of this ideology, widespread privatisation of public utilities like water, energy, and telecommunications as well as state sectors such as transportation, education and healthcare.

Presenting a more critical lens to the concept of ideology Eckhardt, Varman & Dholakia (2018) share that ideology is deceptive, because it emerges from the material structure of society. Eckhardt et al. (2018) present that the concept of ideology does not attribute to any particular group but is a systemic necessity in any socioeconomic order and does not inform every social practice and is not present everywhere. They state that “the force of the term ideology lies in its capacity to discriminate between those power struggles which are somehow central to a whole for of social relations and the discursive naturalisation of the historically contingent circumstances are some of the main dimensions of ideology” (Eckhardt et al. 2018; Eagleton, 1991).

In the context of CCT, Arnould & Thompson (2005) offer four strands of ideology: mass-mediated marketplace ideologies, mobilisations of ideology, consumption ideology, and the ideology of affluence and self-control. Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies refer to the ways in which media shapes cultural values and beliefs related to consumption. Mobilisation of ideology describes how social movements mobilise around beliefs and values related to consumption. Consumption ideology refers to individual beliefs and attitudes towards consumption and how they shape identity and social relationships. Lastly, the ideologies of affluence and self-control emphasise the importance of consumption for achieving social status and success and the importance of restraint and discipline in consumption practices. These different ideologies may shape consumer choices and behaviours. As this study delves into the insights of consumers, it values Arnoulds & Thompson’s (2005) four strands of ideology as relevant for this study, however, it does not disregard the other works of literature in terms of ideology.

2.2.2 The Myth Market

The concept of the Myth Market may attain to other streams of literature. However, this study will only present a select few works of literature that highlight the understanding of the Myth Market through Cultural branding so as to stay relevant to the study.

Holt (2004, p. 8) defines identity myths as “useful fabrications that stitch back together otherwise damaging tears in the cultural fabric of the nation”, where they “address cultural anxieties from afar, from imaginary worlds rather than from the worlds that consumers regularly encounter in their everyday life”. Holt (2004) argues that iconic brands perform these marketplace myths, and eventually consumers perceive that the symbolic salves to their anxieties reside in the brand's markers such as its design elements, enabling them to use and construct their identities. Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2010) argues that to practice and operate marketing for the future, brands need to explore the hearts and minds of consumers, and therefore their anxieties and desires too. However, Arsel and Thompson (2011) argue that these myths are not always soothes anxieties and can often acquire stigmatising connotations that pose detrimental effects on consumers’ identity projects and that they are not always a source of attraction. The concept of identity projects will further be expanded in the identity section of the literature review, however, despite these countercultural identities that pose threats, brands that operate with these myths often share the same underlying narrative and ideals about being authentic, independent and self-expressive (Holt, 2006).

Holt’s (2004) definition of an identity myth, as well as the structure of the myth market, is focal to understanding this study. According to Holt (2004), Identity myths are created based on changing ideologies that companies discover and use to become iconic brands. This study aims to understand how consumers perceive iconic brands that use race representation, therefore the concept of myths which can very well pertain to race representation is vital to understand. The concept of race and identity myths will be further explored in the identity & race literature stream portion of the literature review.

2.2.3 How Iconic Brands Differ from Brands

Murphy (1992) proposed that branding has evolved to encompass three functions. Firstly, it serves as a means for the legal system to acknowledge the importance of brands to consumers and producers. Secondly, it extends to encompass a range of services, such as financial or retail

services, that can be considered branded products that distinguish themselves from competitors. Lastly, branded products or services differentiate themselves from each other through increasingly intangible as well as tangible factors (Murphy, 1992, p. 1-2).

Branding has long evolved from just marketing property and ownership. Instead, branding has now become an integral aspect of business practices regardless of industry and products (Appiah & Ozuem, 2019). Though the ability to recall a brand's name displays a “strong” brand, this limits what is known of branding to just a logo (Davies & Chun, 2003).

There are more subjective associations to branding based on imagery, symbolism and reputation (Appiah & Ozuem, 2019).

According to Davies & Chun (2003), a brand may act as a differentiation mark, person, and asset. Branding as a differentiation mark is the symbols and logos which consumers may recognise the brand for, and distinguish them from competitors. However, the brand as a person describes branding as having attributes of personality (Davies & Chun, 2003). Humanising a brand gives complexity and scope to the brand's concept. This allows companies with similar products to be divisible by the personalities of the brand projects (Davies & Chun, 2003; King, 1973), In turn, this builds a relationship between the consumer and the brand.

Lastly, the brand may be seen as an asset, meaning it holds financial value by being able to buy, sell and rent said brand to third parties, indicating that it is an intangible economic value (Davies & Chun, 2003).

Overall, consumers purchase products from specific brands not just because of the functionalities of the product but what this product means and symbolises (Torelli et al. 2010). Brands are symbols that become part of individual identities and have become a source of social identity to facilitate the expression of individual values (Torelli et al, 2010).

Holt's Cultural branding conceptualised iconic brands as consumer brands that became a consensus expression of particular values held dear by some members of society (Holt, 2004, p. 4).

According to Holt (2004), Iconic brands differed from other brands because they carry a heavy symbolism to consumers, who frequently relied on them to communicate who they aspired to be. Though all brands can be seen as symbols with deeper meaning, iconic brands adhere to using relevant myths in order to become iconic.

Holt conducted systematic historical research on six iconic American brands, which revealed that all these brands followed a set of tactical principles (Okoeguale, 2022). These principles are known as the seven axioms, which highlight the characteristic features of iconic brands. Each axiom though originally curated by Holt (2004), can be seen in the table below, along with a short description of each. A longer description of each axiom can be found in [Appendix A](#) using other relevant literature adhering to the components of the axioms. However, axiom five will be further elaborated in this chapter as it is the one axiom which closely relates to ethics. Ethics within sustainability being a key literature stream within this study, makes the fifth axiom of iconic brands the most relevant to expand on. The axioms include the following:

Axiom number	Axiom component	Short description	Literature
1	Iconic brands address acute contradictions in society	This process involves an analytical cultural selection that allows brands to discover untapped myth markets during specific periods.	Holt, 2006
2	Iconic brands perform myths that address these desires and anxieties	Iconic brands utilise modern myths to naturalise the status quo and contain otherwise destabilising changes in society. Mythmaking has become an extension of cultural expression that creates a foundation for cultural architecture or even a mythical society. Iconic brands gain cultural power by expressing identity myths that provide collective salves for major contradictions in society.	Holt, 2006
3	Identity myths reside in brands which consumers experience and share via ritual action	Shared rituals among consumers strongly influence brands as they serve as the lens through which consumers interact with the brand's value systems.	Stratton & Northcote (2016)
4	Identity myths are set in populist worlds	Populist worlds are places where people create identity myths that reflect cultural contradictions. These worlds provide subculture outlets for	Gustafsson (2017, p.108)

		individuals to express their identity projects in varying degrees of extremity.	
5	Iconic brands perform as activists, leading culture	This approach has enabled consumers to express and engage with their political values, ranging from veganism to environmentalism.	Koch (2020) cited in McCrown-Young 2017; Ulver, 2019)
6	Rely on breakthrough performances, rather than consistent communication	As ideologies throughout time change, identity myths change too. Brands that rely on consistency tend to make incremental adaptations to maintain brand preference among existing customers, but this may lead to erosion of brand equity because it does not address shifting socio-cultural expectations or challenges faced by consumers, resulting in perceptions of irrelevance. On the other hand, brand relevance provides consumers with a perceived need or desire, which increases the brand's value and strength.	Beverland et al (2015)
7	Enjoy a cultural halo effect	Iconic brands enjoy a halo effect because it delivers such a powerful myth that consumers find useful in cementing their identities and in turn solidify their quality reputation.	Holt (2004, p.10)

Table 1: Axioms of iconic brands (source: Holt, 2004 adapted by the authors)

2.2.3.1 Iconic Brands perform as activists, leading culture

The fifth axiom is a relevant component of an iconic brand to this study. Though There is no particular ethical component to making an iconic brand, Holt (2004) does state that iconic brands perform as activists.

Moorman's (2020) literature conceptualises seven ways in which iconic brands can adhere to brand activism, which guides companies in deciding to what extent they want their brands to be involved in political issues. These lenses influence the types of information companies focus on when making such decisions. The first lens is the brand authenticity view, where brand activism requires companies to act in a way that is consistent with their brand identity and authentically connects with their target audience. The second is the corporate citizen's view, which sees brand political activism as fulfilling a company's responsibility to contribute to the world in which they operate. The cultural authority view, which is the third lens, justifies brand political activism by acknowledging that brands are powerful cultural actors and have cultural authority, which establishes an expectation of involvement in social issues. The fourth lens, the calculative view, suggests that brand activism should only be pursued when it helps the company "win" in the marketplace. The fifth lens is the brand as educators view, which sees brand activism as a way to teach customers new ideas and behaviours to bring about social change. The sixth lens is the political mission view, which suggests that social change is the company's reason for being, and its products and services are tools for facilitating change in the world. Finally, the employee engagement view argues that brands can help companies attract and retain employees and increase productivity.

All of the lenses Moorman (2020) has identified may be relevant to this study's research question. This study recognises that different iconic brands may adhere to one or more of these lenses and because this study is not focusing on a particular iconic brand, but iconic brands as a whole, it considers all lenses as equally relevant. It is vital to note that Moorman (2020) states that not all brands have such authority, and only truly iconic brands can use activism as a means to further distinguish themselves from competitors. Moorman's (2020) seven lenses can be seen in the table as follows:

Len numbers	Lens name	Description
1	Brand authenticity view	Brand activism requires companies to act in a way that is consistent with their brand identity and authentically connects with their target audience.
2	Corporate citizen's view	Brand political activism as fulfilling a company's responsibility to contribute to the world in which they operate.
3	Cultural authority view	Justifies brand political activism by acknowledging that brands are powerful cultural actors and have cultural authority, which establishes an expectation of involvement in social issues.
4	Calculative view	Brand activism should only be pursued when it helps the company "win" in the marketplace.
5	Brand as educators view	Brand activism as a way to teach customers new ideas and behaviours to bring about social change.
6	Political mission view	Social change is the company's reason for being, and its products and services are tools for facilitating change in the world.
7	Employee engagement view	Argues that brands can help companies attract and retain employees and increase productivity.

Table 2: Seven brand activism lenses (Source: Moorman, 2020 adapted by the authors)

Koch (2020) uses the brand Oatly as an example of using a typically unremarkable product as a socially significant food consumption object. This approach has enabled consumers to express and engage with their political values, ranging from veganism to environmentalism (Koch, 2020 cited in McCrown-Young, 2017; Ulver, 2019). By becoming a prominent player in the emerging

myth market related to food system change, Oatly has established itself as an iconic brand, at the forefront of cultural debates over countervailing ideals and ideological appeals (Koch, 2020; Holt, 2002, 2004). This brand has achieved this status by leveraging an uncontested market space to position itself as a leader in plant-based food production (Koch, 2020).

These works of literature are relevant to this study as it adheres to how iconic brands stay iconic by leading in specific activism movements, this can relate to sustainability movements such as the case of Oatly.

However, Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry & Kemper's (2020) literature proposes a brand activism typology that shows different degrees to which each quadrant depicts a form of brand activism. The four quadrants are divided into the following: Absence of brand activism, silent brand activism, authentic brand activism, and inauthentic brand activism.

The absence of brand activism concludes that brands lack adopted prosocial corporate practices or activist messaging and operate without consumer expectations of brand activism.

Silent brand activism is the embrace of sociopolitical causes as part of the firm's core missions, however, operating quietly behind the scenes, these brands are often smaller and have less power in the marketplace.

Authentic brand activism adheres to authenticity because its brand purpose, values, activist marketing messages and prosocial corporate practices are aligned.

Lastly, inauthentic brand activism embraces activist marketing messaging without explicit brand purpose and values and is perceived as insincere, deceptive, and unethical. Vredenburg et al. (2020), give an example of this as "woke washing" where brands attempt to align with socio political causes without a genuine commitment. The typology is seen as the following:

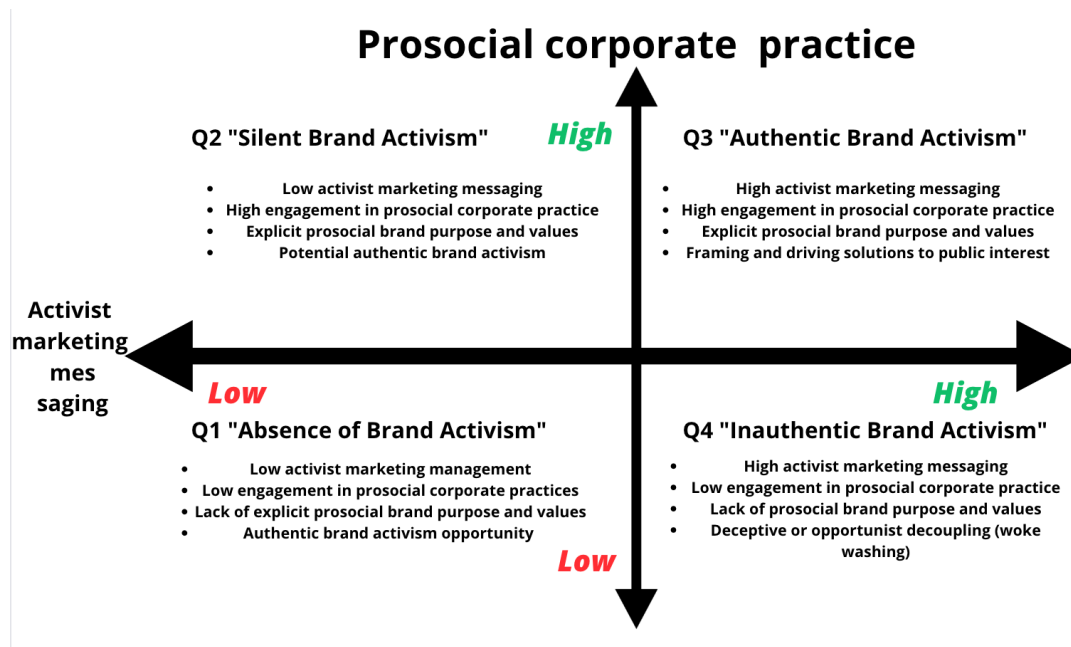


Figure 1: Brand activism typology (source: Vredenburg et al. 2020, adapted by the authors)

Though Vredenburg et al. (2020) show that brands may adhere to different degrees of brand activism, this literature contradicts Moorman (2020) as it states that smaller, fewer power brands can adhere to silent brand activism, whereas, Moorman (2020) presents that only truly iconic brands can adhere to brand activism. Though Vredenburg et al. (2020) state that inauthentic activism can adhere to unethical practices, it does not further elaborate on ethics within the literature. This study positions both streams of cultural branding and ethics together, so it may evaluate how consumers perceive iconic brands, making this typology relevant literature to employ.

The next section of this literature review will take upon literature which elaborates on iconic brands and the relevance of culture.

2.2.3.2 Iconic brands and the relevance of culture

Although Holt's axioms of iconic brands are useful for creating iconic brands, Torelli, Keh & Chiu (2010), define brand iconicity as the extent to which a brand symbolises the values, needs, and aspirations of members of a particular cultural group. They suggest that highly iconic brands

can connect diverse elements of cultural knowledge and act as reminders of culturally relevant values and beliefs. Torelli et al. (2010) developed a method to measure brand iconicity that considers how consumers use iconic brands to manage their social identity and judge the level of a brand's iconicity. Torelli et al.'s (2010) measurement of brand iconicity explores cultural symbolism correlated with branding to help brand managers by using a consumer perspective in their research. The findings show that iconic brands are distinct from brand familiarity but with involvement. They also suggest that likeable brands can increase their iconicity by strengthening their associations with important cultural values and broadening public awareness of such associations. Similarly, Torelli and Shavitt (2010) found that culture plays a significant role in shaping people's perceptions and attitudes towards power. They discovered that individualistic cultures tend to associate power with personal gain and status, while collectivistic cultures see power as a means to benefit and help others.

Both passages demonstrate the importance of culture in shaping people's perceptions and attitudes towards iconic brands and power. The relevance of this literature extends to understanding how people of different cultures may perceive iconicity in brands. As race and culture are concepts that align together, it is relevant to consider the importance of culture in consumer perception of iconicity.

However, Torelli et al. (2010) do not mention race and how consumers of different races may view iconic brands. There is limited research on this as well as how consumers view iconic brands that depict race. According to Holt (2006), iconic brands may use certain ideologies like parasites that take advantage of other strong cultural forms and use their influence to promote their own ideas. By appearing everywhere and being repeated often, brands can change new cultural ideas into widely accepted norms. Literature on iconic brands as ideological parasites will be further elaborated in the next section.

2.2.3.2. Iconic brands as ideological parasites

Holt (2006) posits that iconic brands gain their cultural power by tapping into and reinforcing broader cultural myths or ideologies. These myths serve as collective remedies for major societal contradictions and offer a shared sense of identity and meaning. For instance, Jack Daniel's whiskey became an iconic brand due to its association with the gunfighter myth, a revision of America's frontier myth that was particularly resonant in the 1950s. According to Holt (2006),

mass media like films and television programs are the primary agents that promote these identity myths, and iconic brands become successful when they are linked to a thriving Myth Market. Holt (2006) argues that iconic brands rarely rework existing symbolism, and other cultural products such as films, television programs, and novels, do the majority of the ideological heavy lifting in modern culture.

Similarly, Pineda et al. (2022) discuss the power of iconic brands in creating cultural value and providing consumers with links to their identity. Brands can use identity myths, communication campaigns, and cultural vanguardism to achieve iconic status. For example, PdT, a patriotic fashion brand in Spain, has achieved iconic status by wrapping itself in the Spanish flag and using nationalist appeals to address social and political issues. The brand has successfully created a populist world by using coded symbols that appeal to the Spanish patriotic imagination. Pineda et al. (2022) highlight how iconic brands can be overtly political actors that contribute to the mainstreaming of nationalism.

These studies are relevant in understanding how iconic brands may leverage ideologies to serve their interests. For instance, Pineda et al. (2022) demonstrated how nationality ideology can be utilised by an iconic brand to attain iconic status. While this literature is pertinent, it does not delve into the use of race by iconic brands in their quest for brand activism and ethical leadership. Nonetheless, it highlights the influential ideological role that iconic brands play in society (Holt, 2006). However, this may lead to anti-consumption action targeting them. This raises concerns as iconic brands become increasingly entwined with ideologies and anti-consumption movements grow. The next section of the literature review will further explore this topic.

2.2.3.3 Iconic Brands VS Anti-Consumption Concerns

Cova & D'Antone (2016) suggest that anti-consumption is on the rise due to the depletion of societal values and environmental degradation caused by consumption. Their research on the Nutella palm oil scandal revealed how brand enthusiasts may respond to criticism in three ways: neutralisation, interiorisation, and adhesion, in an attempt to resist negative effects and generate brand content. However, the brand may also lose some supporters and face the risk of becoming

generic. Although Cova & D'Antone (2016) demonstrate that iconic brands can survive ethical scandals, they are still at risk of losing their iconic status. Therefore, it can be argued that iconic brands may need to embrace brand activism and an ethical standpoint to maintain their iconicity. Cova & D'Antone (2016) is a relevant study, as it shows how iconic brands survive ethical scandals and the possible repercussions of going through an anti-consumerism scandal. However, this study aims to explore how iconic brands are perceived by consumers when using race representation, therefore It is important to note that an iconic brand like Nutella did not meet its downfall due to a scandal. Though this is linked to sustainability narratives and not ethical scandals such as those related to race, this may have differentiating consequences and will be further examined in this study. The next section of this literature review will focus on how iconic brands can lose their iconic status and the repercussions of de-iconisation.

2.2.3.4 De-Iconisation of Iconic Brands

Testa, Cova & Cantone (2017) state that an iconic brand becomes one by delivering innovative forms of cultural expression by offering a compelling myth, a story that can be of help to a large group of people – often a nation- in resolving tensions in their lives. This is how Holt (2004) describes iconic branding. However, Testa et al. (2017), elaborate by arguing that building an iconic brand is a slow process and it can be reversed. This is similar to Cova & D'Antone (2016), which show through their research that an Iconic brand like Nutella may survive anti-consumerism movements, however, they are still at risk of becoming generic.

Testa et al. (2017) found four outcomes in their research on the de-iconisation of brands. The first outcome is that brands had a loss in cultural relevance due to changes in consumer preferences or shifts in cultural trends. Second, they experience a loss of symbolic power often due to negative events or scandals that damage the brand's reputation. Third, the brand has a loss of social influence because they no longer are innovative or trendsetting. Fourth, the companies lose economic value, which occurs when the brand fails to adapt to market conditions. Overall, Testa et al. (2017), found that the de-iconisation of iconic brands had significant and long-lasting consequences such as loss of market share, revenue and brand equity.

Literature such as Thompson et al. (2006) discusses the concept of brand doppelgänger image as disparaging images and stories that circulate due to popular culture. Thompson et al. (2006) give the example of Starbucks, a popular American coffee chain, which started as a small cafe and

evolved into a large corporate chain, which a multitude of consumers felt was misaligned to what Starbucks' identity was from the beginning. Through this doppelgänger brand, images emerged through anti-brand activism and bloggers. This is similar to the literature of Cova & D'Antone(2016), which showed how Nutella experienced anti-consumerism pursuits due to a scandal, rather than a misalignment of brand image. However, these two brands survived anti-consumerism and are still iconic today.

To stay iconic, brands must stay on top of cultural trends and avoid the four outcomes of de-iconisation. Though both literatures discuss ways in which brands may become vulnerable to de-iconisation, both perspectives are through the brands, rather than how consumers would perceive iconic brands. Though it is a management perspective, it still stays relevant to this study as it adheres to how brands have the potential to lose iconicity through loss of social influence, brand reputation, scandals and changes in consumer preference. Cova & D'Antone (2016) currently lack information on whether iconic brands can lose iconic status (de-iconicity) if they are seen as unethical in regards to representing race by their consumers. This makes the concept of de-iconisation become essential for brands to ensure they remain relevant.

The next section of this literature review will elaborate on the subject of identity and racial identity.

2.3 Consumer Culture

This section of literature explores how consumers construct their identity within the marketplace, specifically regarding racial representation. To understand this, it is important to grasp how past literature has defined identity construction, and the ways individuals utilise resources as doing this enables companies to adapt accordingly in their representation of these identities before moving on to racial identity.

2.3.1 Past Literature on Identity

Identity within the stream of consumer culture and behaviour, has been influenced by a range of different academic streams such as psychology, providing an internal view of identity through theories of the ego, as well as in a social context (social identity theory) (Freud, 2019; Tajfel and Turner 2004). In addition, sociology and anthropology, examine identity on a wider scale with acknowledgement of the importance of society and institutions in shaping identity (Giddens

1991), and the effects of the varied levels of performance of identities within different social contexts (Goffman, 1959 cited in Chau, 2018), along with identity being a byproduct of structural influences such as social class (Bourdieu, 2010) and Gender (Butler, 2009). Consumer Culture Theory and Consumer behaviour have adopted these foundations in identity literature, however, specifically reshaped it to fit the context of consumption and how identities operate within the marketplace (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

Within consumer culture, consumers are viewed as identity seekers and makers, utilising the marketplace for resources, otherwise known as consumer identity projects (Larson and Patterson 2018). Belk (1988) argues that the marketplace enables these consumers to perform certain identities through the utilisation of tools and possession that reflect the extended self due to its symbolic value for internal and external identification. Through possessions such as body parts, characteristics, physical products, people and places, meaning and the sense of self are attached to these possessions. He further goes on to explain that the formed identity is susceptible to changes in time, contamination from other people, loss of possessions and new meanings, as well as having the ability to construct multiple sleeves at once. While Belk (1988) demonstrates the agentic ability for consumers to create, as well as lose their identity in the marketplace, it is only reviewed from a dimension perspective, this being in regards to a consumer who is from a dominant identity. Additionally, the literature reviews identity in the form of 'narratives', however, there is a failure to recognise the historical social impact it has on identity, specifically a non-dominant identity like a racial minority. Contamination of identity is also mentioned by Belk who is influenced by Goffman (197 cited in Chau 2018) through concepts such as violation of personal space, touching, noise pollution, staring, body excretion, as well as the use of possession from others. However, there is a lack of research on the contamination of the self and identity when misrepresented in the marketplace. Hill and Stamely (1990) also review the impact of possession and rituals when constructing an identity, however, unlike Belk, they review the homeless, a non-dominant vulnerable group. Here, the homeless were considered consumers, portraying similar behaviours with having interaction within the marketplace. Certain rituals and possessions such as shelter, foraging for food, and hygiene rituals were consumption patterns that defined these vulnerable identities, further revealing the way consumers are identity seekers and makers. While demonstrating how stigmatised homeless identities construct their

identity within the marketplace, the study subjects of the homeless affect a smaller consumer population, than consumers of colour, where the weight and influence of historical prejudice and discrimination based on phenotypes have been long-standing.

Identity has also been reviewed from the perspective of it being influenced by consumption based on experiences (Joy et al, 2003; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) name this theory as the experiential view, where every product, no matter how mundane, provides an experience that affects an individual's identity, as a result of carrying symbolic meaning. Here, the consumer is not just an information processor but also brings their own “input”, in the form of individual differences and past experiences, that affect how individuals consume and construct their identity. While this paper does not intrinsically link to racial identity, it demonstrates the individual experiences each consumer brings, and how this will affect marketing efforts, as a result of identities not all being the same due to consumers not being uniform information processors. Joy et al, (2003), demonstrate this concept of individual experiences brought by the consumer, by addressing the link between assessing consumers on both reasoning and feeling.

Consumer culture has also explored how identity is fluid and can change. Schau, Gilly and Wolfinbarger (2009) found that consumers at every stage of life utilise different symbolic materials and resources. This was demonstrated through retirees, who in their late age reconstructed who they were. This was done in two ways: either identity was revived, or a new identity was completely launched. Schau et al. (2009) used retirement to demonstrate how a triggering event could affect the (re)shaping of an individual's identity, however, they only explore identity reconstruction as a result of a “triggering event”, rather than factoring in long-standing issues such as racially historic stigmatisation and the effect this has on the fluidity of racial minorities identity construction.

The impact of structural factors within the marketplace and identity construction has been reviewed by researchers such as Levy (1981). He demonstrates through the food industry, how consumption of certain foods functions as a communication tool or language for revealing structural hierarchy and traits such as class, gender and age, with consumption acting as a

symbolic meaning transfer for social hierarchy. Levy (1981) reveals the impact consumption has as a form of symbolically signalling larger structural traits, demonstrating to oneself and others an identity as well as reinforcing norms and associations in the marketplace. This literature explores these concepts through the consumption of food with the effect of creating narratives based on structural influences of gender, age and social class. However, they ignore the impact of the structural influence of race and the effect of racial narratives in the marketplace. Holt (1997), who was influenced by sociologist Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital reveals a similar dialect between the marketplace and identity construction in relation to structural influences but factors the influence of others in this construction. Here he reviews taste and consumption can create feelings of collective similarities and differences between consumers. With his six dimensions of distinguishing consumption style, consumers use resource materials to place themselves and others into collective identities, which Holt expresses as low cultural capital (LCC) and high cultural capital (HCC).

Üstüner and Holt (2010) have also explored consumers using taste as a way to construct an identity and social signal, but they examine how consumers actively consume to align their identity with a collective or culture, specifically with Turkish women from a less industrialised country (LIC), depending on whether they were HCC or LCC. The women would consume certain materials in a certain manner, to signal their status, either aligning with Westernised standards (Western myth) or local national traditions. Similarly, Thompson and Üstüner (2015) found the significance of the collective identity as an act of defiance, to challenge stigmatised identity roles. Their research shows the unity of the "derby grrrls" in defying and challenging gender roles in the marketplace through resignifying gender roles through consumption. Their research contributes to the literature on collective identity by illustrating how marketplace performances can serve as a site for identity formation and negotiation. Additionally, collective identity and identity projects have been specifically associated with identity politics. Cerulo (1997) argues that identity-based movements can focus on the expansion of freedom and choice, rather than achieving a particular end goal of emancipation or other specific objectives. Beckwith (2003) further explores this through her work on the collective identity of working-class women during the Pittson coal strike. The women felt two clashing collective identities, identifying as a woman and working class. Here, Beckwith (2003) adds to collective identity literature by

revealing how an individual can have multiple collective identities that can also contradict one another and affect the way consumers construct their identities. While this paper specifically looks into social class and gender, it can have transcending resources for the impact and influence racial identities feel in the marketplace, specifically within a multicultural society, where different identities are often running at the same time or clashing.

The existing literature review of identity demonstrates the complexity of identity within the marketplace, and how multiple factors such as time, structural influences (age, class, gender), others and experiences influence one's identity. Additionally, it is acknowledged that the marketplace plays a critical role in shaping identity construction by providing symbolic and mythic resources, such as iconic brands, that aid in the formulation of identity projects. This literature review provides a knowledge base that acknowledges the complex and multifaceted nature of identity construction within consumer culture. It highlights the need to consider the experiences and perspectives of individuals, which relates to racial minorities in understanding how they engage with and perceive racial representation in the marketplace. By incorporating insights from identity literature it facilitates a deeper understanding of the consumer's role in shaping and challenging racial representation within iconic brands. The next section will delve deeper into the phenomena of race, and racial representation within the marketplace.

2.3.2 Brief Background of Race

The concept of race has been debated throughout history, specifically in the last century. The definition of race has been divided into two phenomenons, biology and socially constructed (Thomas, Cross and Harrison (2018, p. 158). From a biological perspective, race has been construed as a concept based on physical characteristics that act as differentiation signals to other races (Greaves, 2009). Race as a social construct builds on the biological definition of race, however it nodes to the importance and influence of socio-political conditions that help construct a racial identity (Graves, 2009). This phenomenon of race is accepted by social constructivists, who believe the construction of one's race is a mixture of heredity traits, socio-economic lens and a level of autonomy of the individual as well as constructing the meaning as a collective (Cerlo, 1997). Similarly, the definition of ethnicity has referred to individuals of the same race who also share these socio-political conditions that form a culture, through a set of traditions and

historical narratives (Thomas, Cross and Harrison, 2018). Many researchers such as Crockett (2022) consider ethnicity and race as jointly “ethno-racial” and often use “race” to demonstrate both meanings. For the sake of this paper, like Crockett (2022) the researchers will interchangeably use race and ethnicity to demonstrate the joint “ethno-racial”.

2.3.3 Racial Identity Projects

Waters (1990, p. 44-46), argues that as a result of race being a social construct, individuals and groups can decide to adopt or stress certain traits of racial identity, thus suggesting a level of personal choice. This reinforces this viewpoint that individuals construct their racial identity projects, through marketplace resources, on the bases of their social environment. Alternatively, through Racial Formation Theory created by Omi and Winant, posits a strong socially constructed lens on race and henceforth accredits racial projects as a product of the political and socio-historic process (HoSang, LaBennett and Pulido, 2012, p. 91). Crockett (2022) introduces and synthesises two variants of the Racial Formation Theory (RFT). Here Crockett (2022) integrates the macro-structural context of racial formation and the mechanism of racial projects in directing resources to challenge or reinforce racial inequality at a micro, meso and macro level. Individuals, groups, networks, organisations, or institutions in various roles can initiate, and create racial projects (Crockett, 2022). Bone, Christensen and Williams (2014) build on this concept demonstrating the ability to construct and change your racial identity, through their research on how ethnic minorities are affected by systematic restrictions. These restrictions are a result of socio-political and historical factors that shape the moulds of identity archetypes for racial minorities. However, they also demonstrate the ability of individuals to alter certain traits to fit certain racial roles through the use of the marketplace revealing the ability to construct and shape (to an extent) racial identity.

2.3.4 Race and Identity Myths

Certain identities, collective or individual, are viewed as dominant identities and perceived as desirable narratives (Weinberg and Crockett, 2018). Thompson (2004) argues this is due to the power of discourses that create ideal mythic archetypes for individuals to ‘play’ through consumption practices as a result of obtaining desired individual and communal identities. As mentioned earlier by Holt (2004), the marketplace creates desires and anxieties, where brands are

then free to create myths as a soother. Certain identities are viewed as dominant identities, which are socially acceptable and desired, and staying aware of these archetypes can lead to undesirable stereotypes or stigmatisation from other individuals or groups (Goffman, 1959 cited in Schau, 2018). In turn, researchers (Salter, Adams & Perez, 2018; Wooten, 1995: Bhopal, 2018, Hasinoff, 2008; Crocket, 2018) have explored how race has become a myth, with certain races being viewed as desirable, and others being viewed as stigmatised racial groups. Salter et al. (2018) found that racism occurs regularly within cultural practices, artefacts, institutional realities, discourses and the marketplace. They found that marketplace representation was often a form of racial discrimination, due to the interlinked connotation of historical beliefs of racial superiority and inferiority. As a result, they found certain brands in the past have attempted to build on these anxieties by creating “colourblind” myths, which consequently served as a means to rationalise inequality, making it possible for consumers to accept racial inequality.

Bhopal (2018) on the other hand found that as a result of living in a post-racial neoliberal society, racial representation has coincided with the white privilege myth, an outcome of white, middle-class citizens (ideally men) being the dominant desired identity within society. Bhopal (2018) goes on to further explain the way Neoliberalism has legitimised racism within society, by perpetuating white superiority and privilege as the ideal identity archetype through institutions and the marketplace. Davis (2018), through her paper “selling whiteness”, reveals the racial discourses within the marketplace, where racial hierarchies are maintained through perpetuating powerful norms that idealise dominant white identities and marginalised non-dominant people of colour. She demonstrates the deep-rooted institutional effect race has on the marketplace, which in turn affects the identities of minority groups. Specifically when brands decide to market to multiculturalism, it often leads to harmful stereotypes. Similarly, Burton (2009) found “whiteness” is embedded into the marketplace, upholding dominant groups' privilege within society. Burton (2009) further challenges the ways in which we view consumer research and consumption as a whole, arguing that it is all through a white privilege perspective.

As a result of these dominant identity archetypes, other races that failed to assimilate closely to this ideal were either stigmatised or racial stereotypes were created as a way to make sense of the multiple identities around them (McCall and Simmons, 1966 cited in Houkamu, 2006). Harris,

Henderson and Willaim (2005) found that the marketplace was an arena for the stigmatisation of identities, whereby consumer racial profiling and a scale of discrimination (ranging from subtle degradation, overt degradation, subtle denial, overt denial and criminal treatment) was witnessed. They found 40% of all customers of colour were treated with suspicion in the marketplace, while the highest reaction towards people of colour was overt denial, where consumers of colour were outrightly denied service due to racial discrimination. Rogers (2006) explored how society and the marketplace interacted with race and culture. Here he found a range of interactions, demonstrating a varying form of cultural appropriation, ranging from cultural exchange (exchange of symbols and artefacts through reciprocal and balanced power) cultural dominance (absence of reciprocation), cultural exploitation (exploitation of cultural symbols, an act derived from colonising culture), commodification (owning, selling cultural objects as a commodity rather than issues of sacrilege) and transculturation (the hybridisation of cultures- the fusing of cultural forms). Within the marketplace, the commodification of races is apparent, and racial representation usually encourages harmful stereotypes such as fetishising exoticism, which perpetuates neo colonial relations (Rogers, 2006). The commodification of race and generating harmful stereotypes is also portrayed by Hasinoff (2008) who reviews the harmful effect of America's Next Top Model (a reality television show that aired on the CW network in the United States from 2003 to 2015, that was created and hosted by supermodel Tyra Banks and it aimed to find the next top model in the fashion industry) has on racial representation. Hasinoff (2008) found the racialisation of women was to be sold as a commodity that encouraged Eurocentric beauty ideals of white women, by forcing the models who were women of colour to alter their physical appearance in correspondence. Ethnic models that failed to do so were voted off and stigmatised, thus demonstrating the deep-rooted effect of stereotyped racial representation on identity construction within society.

Weinberg and Crockett (2018) identified four strategies/models companies can take to incorporate non-dominant identities within the marketplace. These consist of “The United Nations Model” (the demonstration of actively displaying multiculturalism and diversity within advertisement), “Cultural Normalisation Model” (subtle representation of non-dominant identities in the same way as dominant identities), “The Cultural Appropriation Model” (cultural representations of non-dominant identities) and “The Effortful Accommodation Model” (authentic portrayal of non-dominant identities).

While these strategies appear to be solutions to racial representation within the marketplace, researchers have found consumer perception of brands actively portraying race to be mixed. Veresiu and Giesler (2018) found consumers were not passive recipients of cultural messages and multiculturalism can often lead to reinforcing the us vs them mentality, specifically through fetishisation. In addition to this Grant 2017 found that the use of non-dominant identities within the marketplace and institutions can often feel like a form of “tokenism” if not portrayed correctly. Kanter (1977 cited in Grant, 2017) defined tokenism as practices such as an organisation having few non-dominant identities (which account for less than 15% in comparison to the overall population) as a way to portray a level of diversity that is superficial. This was explored in her study of women to men ratio in the workforce. She mentioned there were four types of populations in the workforce, uniform (where all individuals are homogenous), skewed (one group having more dominance than the other), tilted (one group has a slight dominance over the other) and balanced (a 50:50 ratio) (Grant, 2017). Within environments where there is a skewed population, whereby one dominant identity outweighs the other is where tokenism takes place. Kanter (1977 cited in Gustafson, 2008) argues that tokenism creates different dynamics whereby individuals feel like a token in regards to visibility and performance (their position is questioned and doesn't have the same weight of influence as dominant identity), social isolation (actively isolated due to their non-dominant identity) and assimilation (less likely to be given assignments to non-dominant identities). Strohine and Brandi (2011 cited in Gustafson 2008) found that the lack of literature on racial tokenism has led to researchers viewing it in a similar binaural manner as gender, where there are only two forms of racial identity, white and non-white. However, they found that internal and external perception of racial tokenism varies depending on non-dominant race. While Grant (2017) argues that tokenism has no intrinsic negative connotations, society has the perception of companies using diversity by tokenising non-dominant identity in a negative light.

Wooten (1995) found that depending on who racial minorities are with (i.e. their race, Caucasian or mixed race) can affect their portrayal of their race and acceptance of certain representations. The findings from the experiments found that minorities often would adjust their distinctiveness depending on their surroundings. Therefore this is something to consider during marketing

campaigns for racial representation. Alternatively, research conducted by Cui (2001) found that the integration of minorities within the marketplace was not accepted willingly by the dominant identity consumer (Caucasian), and there was a “white backlash” (p. 27). This demonstrates the sensitive nature of the topic of racial representation, making it vital that marketing campaigns be careful to avoid stigmatising and marginalising certain racial groups.

By comprehending the significance of racial identity within the marketplace, it enhances knowledge regarding how consumers shape their identity, which structural and agentic influences affect this process, and how the market presently employs these racial archetypes. Despite research on racial archetypes and stereotypes and their impact on different racial groups, there remains a lack of literature on how brands can utilise this knowledge to promote ethical practices in their representation of race. The next section will look into how the literature on ethics within sustainability, in order to gain insight into consumers’ perspectives on the responsibility of specific brands in representing racial identities in an ethical manner.

2.4 Ethics within Sustainability

The significance of ethics is underscored in this study, as it is crucial to explore how consumers perceive iconic brands in terms of race representation and whether it aligns with ethical standards. Iconic brands serve as brand activists and play a leading role in shaping culture, making this understanding even more important (Holt, 2004; Moorman, 2020). Therefore it is integral to understand the concept of ethics and how this pertains to branding. For a better understanding of ethics, this section of the literature review will start with an overview of ethics. This will be followed by ethics of representation where the ethical considerations that go into representing races by brands are acknowledged, as well as the different degrees to which firms may adhere to representation. Next within ethics of representation, alignment of internal and external representation and the importance of this for the brand as well as consumers will be discussed. Last, ethical issues in marketing communication will be presented as the problems that firms come across when delivering external branding towards their consumers.

2.4.1 Overview of Business Ethics

Sustainability ethics encompasses the exploration of moral principles and values that shape human behaviour and decision-making throughout history (Crane and Matten, 2016). Ethics, as a subject, holds significance across various disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, and business, as scholars strive to establish a rational foundation for morality. Within the realm of ethics, different theoretical frameworks and perspectives influence the understanding of morality, notably consequentialism and non-consequentialism (Crane and Matten, 2016). This section aims to present a concise overview of ethics, specifically within the context of business, while placing a particular emphasis on its relevance to representation and marketing communication. Consequently, this study intends to contribute to the field by examining the intersection of ethics and marketing. However, to provide a foundational understanding of ethics and to grasp the broader context of its implications for business decisions, particularly within marketing, a brief review of different ethical schools of thought will be presented.

2.4.1.1 Ethical Frameworks and Theories

Consequentialism, as a moral theory, centres around assessing the moral worth of an action based on its intended outcomes, goals, and effects (Driver, 2012, p.5). Within this perspective, different ethical theories emerge. Friedman (2007) exemplifies ethical egoism, the first within the consequentialist framework, wherein moral and ethical obligations are centred around the maximisation of self-interests and associated with attaining the utmost personal gain. This perspective is intricately linked to the concept of rationality (Shaver, 2002; Woiceshyn, 2011). Bentham (1815 cited in Renouard, 2010), developed the second theory within consequentialism, known as utilitarianism. Here morality is based on maximising the utility or happiness of the highest number of people and for the growth of society. Therefore from this perspective, a business's ethical responsibility is to what brings the greatest good for society and the number of people.

The second ethical framework is non-consequentialist theories, with the belief that morality is based on reasoning about an individual's rights and duties to one another (Crane and Matten, 2016). Philosopher Kant (1724-1804 cited in Denis, 1997) heavily influenced the theory of ethics

of duty, asserting that morality is an immutable obligation towards others based on a set of moral principles, such as human dignity and universal laws that are consistent with duties towards others and oneself. Certain theorists such as Freeman (1994; cited in Werhane and Freeman, 1999) argues business and ethics are intrinsically linked, as business decisions and practices have profound effects on the surrounding environment and stakeholders and therefore there is a level of duty towards these multiple stakeholders, including consumers, employees, shareholders, the environment, government, civil society, and competitors. Locke (1632-1704 cited in Brady and Dunn, 1995) argued for the ethics of rights and justice. This was centred around natural rights such as rights to life, freedom and human dignity. The notion of human rights is a common and important concept to business ethics on a practical level (Brady and Dunn, 1995).

There are also alternative perspectives on ethics, such as ethics of virtue that date back to Aristotle (cited in Bertland, 2009). Virtue ethics revolves around the concept of moral virtues and actions that emanate from individuals of virtuous character, intricately tied to inherent traits and qualities. Similarly, feminist ethics, often referred to as ethics of care, has been influenced by Gilligan's work (1982, as cited in Liedtka, 1996). This ethical framework places emphasis on the importance of relationships with others and highlights the responsibility towards others. Ethics of care recognises the interconnectedness and interdependence among individuals and the significance of nurturing and maintaining relationships. Stakeholder theory is also influenced by ethics of care, as a result of the recognition of interdependence between corporations and other stakeholders such as communities, environment, employees and consumers (Liedtka, 1996). As a result, a corporation's ethical responsibility is to ensure organisations act with care rather than in an exploitative manner.

An individual's theoretical viewpoint and beliefs regarding morality and ethical responsibility significantly shape their personal conduct and expectations from others, including businesses and societies. Theoretical perspectives on morality provide individuals with a framework for understanding and evaluating ethical dilemmas and guiding their behaviour accordingly.

2.4.1.2 Ethics in Business

Business ethics, defined by Crane and Matten (2016) as “the study of business situations, activities and decisions where issues of right and wrong are addressed” (p. 5), has increased in the last few decades as a result of businesses gaining momentous power, as these organisations can provide major contributions as well as harm to society and the environment. As the study of business ethics expands, scholars such as Duska (2000) have raised concerns about the seemingly contradictory nature of the terms "business" and "ethics." Duska (2000) argues that this perceived oxymoronic view of business ethics is often subjective and influenced by individual perspectives regarding whom businesses owe their responsibilities.

Corporations have increasingly embraced ethical behaviours, exemplified by the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) introduced by Carroll (1979, cited in 1991). Carroll (1991) presents a visual representation of CSR in the form of a pyramid, which delineates different layers of responsibility. At the foundation of the pyramid lies economic responsibility, essential for a business to function effectively and meet the expectations of stakeholders such as shareholders, employees, and customers. Following this, legal obligations dictate that organisations must adhere to legal requirements. Both economic and legal responsibilities are considered obligatory for businesses. Ethical responsibility, situated above legal compliance, encompasses societal expectations that surpass mere legal obligations, urging companies to act ethically based on their own initiative rather than solely driven by self-interest or legal mandates. Once ethical responsibilities are fulfilled, companies can engage in philanthropic endeavours that contribute to the betterment of employees, local communities, society, and the environment. Carroll's (1991) CSR model represents a traditional framework in which ethical and philanthropic actions are seen as reactive responses to societal demands. Burke and Logsdon (1996) offer an alternative perspective, portraying it as a strategic positioning strategy employed by companies. Their viewpoint underscores the importance of integrating CSR into a company's core mission and objectives, while explicitly articulating the benefits it brings to the organisation. By doing so, companies can engage in proactive planning, anticipate future challenges, make voluntary ethical decisions, and enhance their visibility in terms of business activities. Burke and Logsdon (1996) argue that CSR can serve as a strategic tool for companies to align their actions with ethical values, thus gaining a competitive advantage in the marketplace. In the context of this thesis, CSR holds significance as it represents a manifestation of ethical conduct. It primarily

involves the internal evaluation of a company's obligations and the strategic utilisation of CSR for economic advantage. This understanding of CSR is essential for comprehending the dynamics of ethical representation in iconic brands from the perspective of consumer perception. The ethical efforts of a brand, as reflected through its CSR initiatives, can significantly influence its reputation among consumers (De George, 2000).

Understanding ethical theories is essential when studying how consumers perceive ethical efforts, such as race representation and a company's values conveyed through CSR missions in iconic brands. These theories offer a framework for analysing and evaluating moral judgments and actions. Researchers can utilise these theories to examine how consumers' viewpoints, guided by ethical lenses, reveal their expectations regarding brands' virtuous behaviour, relationship-building, and responsible portrayal of race. Overall, a comprehension of ethical theories facilitates a comprehensive exploration of consumer attitudes towards race representation by uncovering the underlying ethical considerations and values that shape their perspectives. The next section within the literature on ethics will focus on ethical representation and marketing communications.

2.4.2 Ethics of Representation

Schroeder & Borgerson (2005), recognise that theoretical, methodological, and strategic implications of representational conventions such as face-ism, idealisation, exoticisation, and exclusion contribute to understanding the ethical implications of marketing communications. They proposed that marketers should broaden advertising persuasion models to incorporate the cultural aspects of representation. This entails reflecting on how identity is portrayed in marketing communications, examining who is excluded from marketing imagery and the reasons behind it, addressing the ethical concerns surrounding identity representation, recognising the educational impact of marketing communication, and analysing marketing communication through an ethical lens.

Burgess, Wilkie, & Dolan (2022) state that diversity marketing literature does not establish a specific conceptualisation of varying brand approaches to diversity, however, the concept of brand approaches to diversity and its related themes are investigated in areas such as brand

activism, CSR, cause-related-marketing (CRM), advocacy advertising and “woke-washing”. “Woke-washing” is a term that has previously been mentioned in the cultural branding portion of the literature review by Vredenburg et al. (2020) who describes “woke-washing” as a brand's attempt to align with sociopolitical causes without a genuine commitment. Burgess et al. (2022) use the same definition for “woke washing” in their literature and note that, despite the numerous benefits of diversity initiatives for brands and society, there is still a significant gap between consumer expectations of diversity and brands' perceived efforts to embrace diversity. Burgess et al. (2022) created a typology which brands may follow to adhere to diversity as the following figure:

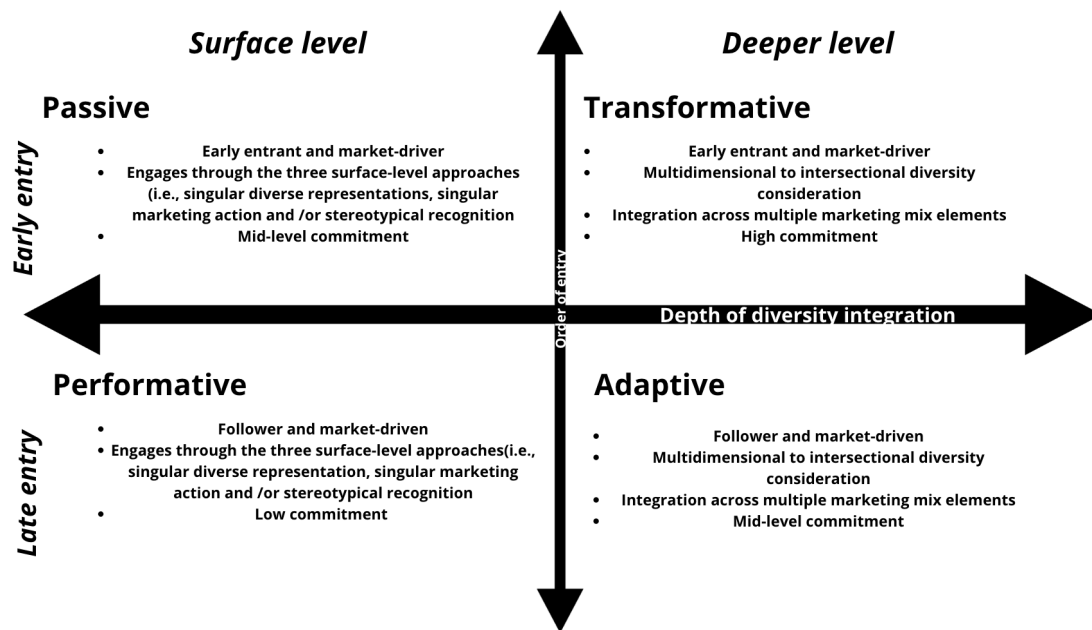


Figure 2: Diversity typology (Source: Burgess et al. (2022) adapted by the authors)

The first approach is a transformative approach, which means that the brand actively reflects and integrates complex and diverse identities across all aspects of its marketing. These brands challenge dominant perspectives, invest more resources, and adopt initiatives early to become leaders in approaching emerging forms of diversity. They have a deeper-level approach to diversity and strive to avoid exacerbating harmful representations.

A second approach is an adaptive approach, which means that brands reactively reflect and integrate diverse identities across their marketing mix. They still exhibit deeper-level diversity

with an ongoing commitment to understanding the complexity of diversity, but they adopt diversity initiatives only after early entrants have shown how.

A third approach is a passive approach, which means that a brand has committed to pursuing diversity but engages through surface-level ways such as singular diverse representations, singular marketing actions, and/or stereotypical recognition. These brands exhibit mid-level commitment but do not evolve their approach to diversity beyond the early stage.

Lastly, the performative approach refers to a brand's efforts to create the appearance of diversity and inclusivity, without actually making any significant changes to their practices or addressing systemic issues related to diversity. This approach is often seen as superficial or insincere and can be viewed as an attempt to capitalise on social movements or to appeal to a diverse customer base without a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion. The performative approach typically relies on symbolic gestures or tokenism (as defined in the race & identity portion of the literature review), such as featuring a diverse cast in an advertisement, without making meaningful changes to the company's culture, policies, or practices. It is often criticised for reinforcing the status quo and maintaining power imbalances, rather than challenging them.

The literature by Burgess et al. (2022) is highly relevant to this study as it examines how brands implement diversity in various ways and how consumers perceive these efforts. It provides insights into the extent to which different brands incorporate diversity into their ethical branding practices. However, the literature does not focus exclusively on racial diversity but encompasses diversity in all aspects. Considering diversity in a broader sense may not be the best method to gain a deeper understanding of racial representation, as it may vary when focusing on racial diversity exclusively. Additionally, the study does not consider the cultural branding perspective of iconic brands and how they are viewed as brand activists. Iconic brands arguably have a greater responsibility to genuinely display representation compared to other brands, given their symbolic value and use of identity myths (Holt, 2004). Therefore, adhering to a transformative typology would be the only acceptable approach for them to maintain their iconic status. Furthermore, Burgess et al. (2022) adopt a brand management perspective, focusing on how firms internally implement different degrees of representation. This perspective solely considers the internal viewpoint of the firm. However, this study aims to understand the consumer perspective on how iconic brands are perceived in terms of race representation.

According to Windsor (2006), ethical responsibility falls between mandatory compliance, such as economic and legal responsibility, and desirable philanthropy. This is because society and stakeholders expect companies to go beyond legal obligations and engage in impartial moral reflection and self-restraint. Unethical managers cannot be trusted to fulfil their fiduciary responsibilities, and philanthropy may be viewed as a strategic tool for corporate goals rather than a genuine act (Windsor, 2006).

Ethical responsibility within CSR can be both internal and external, as discussed by Aydon Simmons (2009). Aligning external and internal branding strategies that incorporate CSR can be beneficial, as external branding can provide customers with functional, economic, psychological, and ethical benefits. Aligning these benefits with internal ethical responsibility, such as affinity with organisational values through perceived congruence of ethical dealings with employees, customers, and society, creates a symbiotic relationship where satisfied stakeholders become advocates (Aydon Simmons, 2009).

Aydon Simmons (2009) suggests that a holistic approach that aligns both internal and external responsibility nurtures relationships between customers and employees and underpins the company's success. A brand can be defined as the overall promise that the organisation projects, together with the experience that the brand delivers, with a requirement to achieve alignment between the two (Aydon Simmons, 2009).

Therefore, in the context of ethical responsibility in the representation of race, it can be argued that for a company to achieve optimal success, diversity within race needs to align both internally and externally to nurture a relationship between the company and its consumers.

2.4.4 Ethical Issues in Marketing Communications

Crane, Matten, Glozer and Spence (2016, p. 346-354) present that marketing communications have raised concerns regarding their social and cultural impacts. Advertising is argued to be intrusive and omnipresent and creates artificial wants, along with marketing communications reinforcing consumerism and materialism, creating an ideology where consumption is equated with happiness and identity. Marketing communication is also criticised for fostering insecurity and dissatisfaction by presenting unattainable standards of life. Furthermore, Crane et al. (2016) state that advertisements can portray social stereotypes, a biased and limited representation of

certain groups of people. It is argued that marketers solely reflect on the social norms of a target audience (Crane et al., 2016; Greyser, 1972), however, it is abundantly clear that it is in a firm's interest to portray what is “desirable” to their consumers. As this study pertains to how consumers view race representation in iconic brands, it is important to consider these ethical issues typically distributed through marketing communications.

However, Ayozie, Ndubueze & Uche's (2011) literature discusses the connection between integrated marketing communications (IMC), advertising, and marketing ethics, considering what is right and wrong. Ayozie et al. (2011) acknowledge that there are difficulties reaching a common ground on defining ethics and morality in marketing, although it places great importance on marketing communication and emphasises the ethical concerns within marketing such as excessive consumerism, increased costs, perpetuating stereotypes, offensive advertisements, deceptive practices and unethical targeting of specific groups such as children. Again, the use of stereotypes as a concern is mentioned within marketing communication concerns, and as iconic brands use more race representation in their branding efforts, it is interesting to note if consumers share these views of ethical marketing communication concerns.

Borgerson and Schroeder (2002) propose that businesses should avoid practising marketing in bad faith if they genuinely want to address societal crises instead of worsening them. In addition, they discuss how minority groups are frequently depicted in exoticised and tokenistic ways, which is aligned with the literature review's section on race & identity, resulting in invisibility and reflecting the complex relationship between identity and representation in oppressive environments. They stress the importance for organisations, particularly those expanding globally, to be mindful of these issues and acknowledge that awareness is the first step. They also highlight the significance of enhancing visual and semiotic literacy in societal marketing. While marketing communication often relies on shocking images to provoke a response from consumers, Borgerson and Schroeder (2002) argue that exceptional marketing should not solely rely on this approach. As iconic brands are recognised globally, it becomes crucial for them to be aware of societal issues. However, as society becomes more ethically conscious, it is worth exploring whether truly iconic brands can maintain ethical portrayals of race representation in the eyes of consumers.

2.5 Conclusion of literature review

By integrating these streams of literature (cultural branding, consumer culture, and ethics within sustainability in branding and marketing), a comprehensive understanding of how consumers perceive iconic brands concerning race representation. Cultural branding literature helps us understand what makes a brand iconic and the role iconic brands play in activism (Holt, 2004; 2006; Moorman, 2020, Torelli et al, 2010, Pineda et al, 2022). The exploration of race and identity within consumer culture provides insights into the implications of identity in the marketplace (Belk 1988, Hill and Stamely, 1990, Joy et al, 2003, Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, Schau et al, 2009, Levy 1981 Holt, 1991, Üstüner and Holt, 2010, Beckwith, 2003,) with a specific focus on race (Greaves, 2009, Cerlo,1997, Crockett, 2022, Bone et al 2014) including the dominant race's ideology and the stigmatisation of ethnic minorities (Burton 2009; Davis 2018; Salter et al 2018; Harris et al 2005; McCall and Simmons, 1966 cited in Houkamu, 2006; Rogers 2006; Weinberg and Crockett 2018; Grant 2017; Wooten 1995; Cui 2001). Finally, the ethics within sustainability literature sheds light on the expectations placed on brands in today's society and the role of race in ethical considerations (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005; Aydon Simmons, 2009; Windsor, 2006; Borgerson and Schroeder, 2002; Crane et al., 2016; Burgess et al., 2022). Therefore, the authors used these streams of literature to guide their understanding of what to look for in the data findings. The next chapter of this study delves into the methodology section of the thesis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by introducing the research approach, followed by the research strategy and type of research employed in this study. The research design and data collection method will then be presented, including the sampling method and data sampling technique. This is then followed by a discussion of the design of the focus group questions, the method used for data analysis, and finally, the validity and reliability of the chosen research methods.

3.2 An Inductive Research Approach

When conducting research, there are three different approaches to theory development, deductive, inductive and abductive (Saunders and Lewis, 2018 p. 111). The deductive theory is a top-down approach that usually involves clarifying theory at the beginning of a study and testing it through different hypotheses. An inductive approach is a “bottom-up” technique, “where inductive reasoning moves from specific observations to broader generalisations and theory”, while an abductive approach entails a combination of the two (Saundersna and Lewis, 2018, p. 113). This study aimed to explore the variety of ways in which consumers perceive racial representation in iconic brands by relating to their own experiences within the marketplace. While existing literature has examined consumer perspectives on racial representation, cultural branding and ethics, there is limited research specifically on iconic brands. Consequently, little is known about how iconic brands portray racial representation, especially in the context of Swedish customers. As a result of a lack of synthesis between the three streams of literature, there is a lack of a theoretical model that can build a “top-down” fixed approach needed in deductive and abductive research. Instead, this thesis utilises a collection of theoretical and literary insights that act as a guide. Therefore an inductive approach was used for this research. In addition by employing an inductive approach, a comprehensive understanding of the various experiences and perspectives shaped by different environmental conditions was sought through research(Saunders and Lewis, 2018, p. 113). The research involved participants from diverse racial and national backgrounds to facilitate a deeper comprehension of the research context, particularly how racial representation within iconic brands is perceived. Given the potentially sensitive nature of topics related to race, an inductive approach provides necessary flexibility to be able to shift the emphasis of the research as the study progresses. It allows the researcher to acknowledge that participants' willingness to open up and share experiences might require adapting the research emphasises. As both a deductive and abductive approach would require following existing theory and frameworks more strictly, only an inductive approach can offer this level of flexibility and was therefore deemed most appropriate for this thesis.

3.3 A Qualitative Research Strategy

Qualitative data is characterised as an interactive and interpretive process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021, p. 189), which is advantageous for this research question as it aims to understand how consumers perceive race representation by iconic brands, influenced by their own interactions and interpretations. While a quantitative approach is known for providing more structure, particularly when employing theoretical frameworks (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017), and aligns with descriptive studies by generating quantifiable data that enhances our understanding of the world (Saunders and Lewis, 2018 p. 116), this study prioritises an exploratory approach where participants can express their individual experiences and social relations, which are often considered difficult to quantify. Therefore, a qualitative research method was employed.

3.4 Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research Design

In order to achieve this qualitative methodology a phenomenological research type was found to be best suited for this study because it is based on the humanistic research paradigm (Mapp, 2008 cited in Denscombe, 2017). This research type has a goal of enquiring data on lived experience and stresses that only those that have experienced phenomena can communicate them to the outside world (Mapp, 2008 cited in Todres and Holloway, 2004). As this study encourages participants to relay and express past experiences in regard to race and iconic brands, the phenomenological research type was deemed most appropriate. Wojnar & Swanson (2007) describes seven phenomenological approaches from the Encyclopedia of Phenomenology by Embree, 1997. These are transcendental phenomenological, naturalistic phenomenology, existential phenomenology, generative historicist phenomenology, genetic phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology and realist phenomenology. Based on the definitions of these seven types of phenomenology ([Appendix B](#)) Hermeneutic phenomenology was deemed most appropriate.

A hermeneutic phenomenology approach is used in this study because it extends beyond knowledge of core concepts and essences when it comes to understanding the human experience. While phenomenology is usually paired with in-depth interviews in order to extract this deep knowledge, hermeneutic phenomenology emphasises that an individual cannot separate

themselves from the many contexts that influence their choices and give meaning to their lived experiences, especially in relation to the broader social, political and cultural context (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). As a result, this hermeneutic phenomenology was utilised through focus groups, as an attempt to further demonstrate this relationship to wider society. This will be elaborated on in section [3.5](#). Through this type, researchers attempt to uncover these deeper meanings that interact within a society, through the co-construction of meaning with others.

However, this research design is cross-sectional research which limits the ability to explore the dynamic nature of meaning-making processes. Nevertheless, a cross-sectional study is suitable for measuring “snapshots” within time specifically when exploring data from multiple groups and types of people such as variables like gender, race and socioeconomic factors such as class (Saunders and Lewis 2018, p. 130). Therefore cross-sectional research design is optimal for this research aim, due to gaining insights from different races.

3.5 Method of Data Collection: Focus Groups

In order to achieve the aim of this study, the researchers chose to engage with four different semi-structured focus groups as the qualitative method for data collection. Easterby-Smith et al (2021 p. 196) define focus groups as a group interview whereby researchers attempt to extract valuable insights into the reaction of a particular group of people towards a phenomenon, issue or common experience. Focus groups typically involve a small group of 6-8 individuals who are facilitated to engage in a group discussion focused on a specific topic, usually guided by a mediator, whose interaction with the group is determined by whether it is un/semi/structured (Wilkinson, 1998). This study aimed to understand how consumers interpret iconic brands using race representation, therefore it is important to understand that there is an interplay between the individual experiences of the consumer as well as the social forces in consumer culture (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). While in-depth interviews would provide a deep insight into an individual's thoughts and interpretations of wider society (Easterby-Smith, 2021, p. 196), the researchers have decided to utilise focus groups instead. Despite the inherent limitations of focus groups, such as the logistical challenges involved in gathering participants and organising sessions (Gibbs, 1997), the researchers in this study were fully aware of these potential issues. However, considering the nature of the research and the specific objectives of the study, the

researchers firmly believed that focus groups were the most appropriate and effective method for collecting data. Gibbs (1997) claims that the primary objective of focus groups is to comprehend the attitudes, emotions, convictions, encounters, and reactions that emerge during social interactions and group settings, providing an array of perspectives and processes. Therefore as a result of this study exploring topics in consumer culture and race, where the interplay between individuals, collectives and social experiences is explored through co-created meaning (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Cerlo, 1997), focus groups have been considered an optimal method for facilitating the expression of individual emotions and experiences, while accounting for group influence. Additionally, race as a phenomenon is a complex behaviour. According to Queirós et al (2017), focus groups are a very popular and useful method to investigate complex behaviours. They suggest that focus groups offer advantages over individual interviews, as they enable researchers to obtain results more efficiently. Moreover, focus groups promote social interaction among participants, thereby stimulating discussions on specific topics and generating insights that might have been overlooked in individual interviews. This approach also allowed researchers to capture and analyse interactions that are representative of those found in broader societal contexts. While there are limitations to focus groups such as the collective voice shaped by normative discourses, dominant participants and the influence of the moderator (Smithson, 2000). In contrast to interviews, focus groups provide a distinct advantage by creating a theory that is based on the actual experiences and language of the participants (Smithson, 2000). This feature becomes particularly relevant when investigating issues faced by minority groups, as homogenous minority group settings such as focus groups can effectively validate and amplify opinions due to shared group experiences (Smithson, 2000). Consequently, as a result of this study engaging in conversations on racial discourses and the exploration of non-dominant identity participants, the utilisation of focus groups emerged as the most suitable method for data collection.

3.6 Purposive Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was deemed the most appropriate approach for participant selection in order to explore how consumers view racial representation by iconic brands, it was optimal to gain perspectives from a range of different races. Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) define purposive sampling as a form of non-probability sampling design where the criteria for inclusion in a

sample are defined, and entities are first screened to see whether they meet the criteria for inclusion. According to Taherdoost (2016), the sampling process steps consist of first clearly defining a target population, then selecting a sampling frame, choosing a sampling technique, determining the sample size, collecting the data and assessing the response rate.

This research was conducted in southern Sweden as a result of rising tensions in the political climate due to the influx of immigration (Ulver and Laurell, 2020). The first sampling criterion was having participants residing in Sweden with different ethnic backgrounds and immigration statuses were vital to display a variety of opinions from the consumer perspective. Secondly, as stated in the background of this paper Gen-Z is currently the largest generational group comprising 32% of the global population and has the significant buying power, therefore being of high interest to Marketers (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022; Dabija, Bejan and Dinu., 2019) and Millennials are currently the majority of the workforce in companies, giving them an internal as well as external perspective of ethics (Chatzopoulou & de Kiewiet, 2021). Therefore this study consists of Gen-Z and Millennials within the age range of 18 to 32 years of age. As a result, each participant was screened for these two criteria.

A wide demographic of different racial backgrounds as well as different genders gave this study a greater chance of gaining more perspectives. The sample size consisted of twenty participants, five for each focus group. Each group had at least two different genders, and each group was categorised by their racial characteristics. The groups were divided as the following:

Focus group number	Amount of participants per group	Ethnic group	Nationality	Age	Genders	Pseudo names
Focus group 1	5	Caucasian	Sweden Australia Ireland Italy Italy	27 23 25 23 22	Male Female Male Female Female	Tyrion Gemma Cody Bella Molly
Focus group 2	5	Mixture of races: Black, Caucasian and Arab	Tunisia Ivory Coast Somalia Serbia United States of America	27 27 26 27 27	Female Male Male Female Male	Georgia Philip Allen Meredith Sean
Focus group 3	5	Mixed race with Caucasian and Asian	Indian-Croatian Malaysian-British Chinese-British Indian-Swedish Swedish-Singaporean	22 22 18 18 18	Male Male Male Male Female	Joshua Kliff Zorro Jerry Sarah
Focus group 4	5	Mixture of ethnic races: Black, South Asian, Hispanic	Colombian Somalia Singaporean Ghanian Gambian	30 29 26 24 32	Male Female Female Female Male	Johny Harriet Delilah Penny Jordan

Table 3: Focus group description table (Source: the authors)

3.7 Data collection

According to Krueger (1994 cited in Turney and Pocknee, 2005), focus groups follow these characteristics; they involve people, they are conducted in a series, participants are homogenous and unfamiliar with each other, focus groups are a data collection procedure, they are intrinsically linked to qualitative data and they have a focused discussion. This research study used the majority of Krueger's characteristics when collecting data, however, there are some similarities and differences.

Focus groups were utilised as a means of qualitative data collection and were conducted in a series (conducted more than once to ensure patterns are noticeable). This study conducted four focus groups each pertaining to five participants. Having a small size group was utilised to

increase communication and is often recommended for sensitive topics (Albrecht, Johnson and Walther 2013 cited in Morgan, 2012). Krueger (1994 cited in Turner and Pocknee, 2005) emphasised the importance of homogenous groups with participants being unfamiliar with each other. This is due to enhancing a permissive and non-threatening environment that encourages participants to open up while maintaining anonymity to reduce participant bias (Krueger 1994 cited in Tuner and Pocknee, 2005). The researchers coincided with this by conducting three groups in a homogeneous manner, this grouping was based on a combination of phenotype characteristics (i.e. skin colour) as well their nationality. In the first focus group, individuals with Italian, Irish, Australian and Swedish backgrounds and all of the Caucasian race. The second group consisted of a mixture of races, made up of Caucasians, Black and Arabic, with nationalities from Serbia, Ivory Coast, Somalia, Tunisia and America. The third focus group consisted of people of mixed race, specifically mixed Caucasian and Asian and were British-Malaysian, Croatian-Indian, Swedish-Indian, British-Chinese and Swedish-Malaysian. The last group was all people of colour with ethnicities such as Latin, Black and Indian from Colombia, Gambia, Ghana, Somalia and Singapore. There were also heterogeneous aspects such as focus group three being a mix of both Caucasian and people of colour. Albrecht et al. (2013 Cited in Morgan, 2012) argue that focus groups are a means of collecting more ecological data that is more likely to reflect the wider world. Therefore, the researchers decided to engage in one heterogeneous group, due to racial representation not operating in isolation, but rather within an intricate and multifaceted fabric of our diverse society. Group two's "mixing of races" was an attempt to create an environment for interesting interactions and the exchange of ideas and opinions between the racial groups. All focus groups had both male and female participants which also added a heterogenous aspect to the discussions.

Once participants were screened for the two criteria (mentioned in section [3.6](#)), they were each messaged individually through social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook Messenger to check for their availability. Here, the researchers felt the limitations of focus groups mentioned by Gibbs (1997), as the coordination and organisation for four focus groups and 20 participants were visible. Researchers had to be exceptionally organised and particular, however, due to not being able to accommodate all participants to join a physical

focus group, two of the groups were conducted virtually through the platform Google Meets. Once these individuals confirmed participation and time, a consent form was sent to them.

Focus group one and two was held in person, while focus group three and four was conducted online using computer-mediated communications, due to logistic reasoning. For the in-person focus groups, location is important as it had to create a safe and welcoming atmosphere that has a neutral connotation for the participants (Powell and Single, 1996). Therefore the physical focus group location was held at one of the researchers' homes. To encourage participants to feel comfortable, participants had a period before the research took place, where the ability to conduct an informal conversation and the opportunity to integrate with other group members along with refreshments were provided (Powell and Single, 1996). Focus group three and four were conducted virtually through the application Google Meets. Murray (1997, p. 542) defines virtual groups as "discussions that are undertaken using computer-mediated communications, with no face-to-face meetings between participants". One positive of virtual focus groups is the ability to group people together, whose opinions and ideas would otherwise never have crossed (Murray, 1997). This was witnessed with the inclusion of group three's mixed-race group, where members revealed a notable observation that they had never engaged in conversations with such a large number of mixed-race individuals within a single chat forum. Furthermore, Turney and Pocknee (2005) argue that virtual focus groups create more democratic participation, enabling all participants to state their opinions and views, which might otherwise be overlooked. In addition to this, virtual focus groups had a faster turnaround due to eliminating travel (Rupert, Poehlman, Hayes, Ray and Moultrie 2017). However, virtual focus groups are open to certain limitations such as vulnerability to technological issues such as poor connection, and the lack of ability to provide a physically comfortable environment (Nobrega, Ghaziri, Giacobbe, Rice, Punnett, Edwards, 2021). However, the researcher acknowledged these limitations and took necessary precautions to address them. This included being prepared with multiple meeting links using different platforms like Zoom, Google Meets, and Facetime. Additionally, efforts were made to recreate the informal nature of physical focus group discussions within the virtual environment

Data for the focus group was recorded through the app "VoiceRecorder", with one researcher acting as interviewer, while the other acted as a note taker, collecting notable themes. The roles

between the two researchers remained the same to ensure continuity across all four focus groups, due to having variables of different racial groups and online/offline meetings. Focus groups have the unique characteristic of interaction between group participants, however, during topics of sensitivity and heterogeneity in attitudes, a moderator presence is advised (Gronkaer, Curtis, Crespigny and Delmar, 2011). Therefore, the focus groups were conducted in a semi-structured manner, with the researcher utilising a topic theme guide and visual prompts to elicit conversation between group members. The moderators' role primarily involved ensuring that the conversation stayed on track and aligned with the topic guide. Whenever the discussions veered too far off-topic, the researchers gently redirected the conversation back to the research aim. This approach allowed for a participant-driven and open dialogue, enabling the exploration of diverse perspectives and experiences related to the research topic.

3.8 Question Design: Prompt choices

In this study, a focus group topic theme guide was employed, supplemented by a visual prompt in the form of a collage featuring Disney films from various decades (see [Appendix C](#) for visual prompt). Prior to conducting the focus groups, the participants were not explicitly informed about the research aim, particularly focusing on race. The researchers intentionally withheld this information, aiming to allow discussions on racial representation to emerge naturally during the sessions. According to Knodel (1993), focus groups should have broad concepts that can be examined in focus, in order to have the ability to be flexible, due to the researcher most times improvising off comments and questions. This was taken into consideration, therefore while a thematic topic guide and prompt were ready, the researchers were also flexible with the time spent on the two sections. The first half of the focus group primarily involved the participants' initial reactions and reflections on the visual prompt. It was in the second half that the participants were presented with questions aligned with the themes identified in the literature review. This approach aimed to explore and elicit participants' perspectives and experiences related to racial representation without priming or influencing their responses from the outset.

3.8.1 Visual prompts: Disney Cartoon Timeline

The Walt Disney Company is an American entertainment company founded by Walt Disney and Roy O. Disney in 1923. It began as an animation studio, producing animated films that have the

ability to create immersive and engaging experiences. Disney's iconic status and enduring legacy, spanning several decades, have allowed it to successfully navigate significant social disruptions, such as World War Two, adapt to technological advancements like the internet, and respond to evolving societal changes that influence consumer preferences (Walt Disney History n.d).

Through cultivating its brand image over the last nine decades, Disney has crafted a powerful rich brand image, through logos, characters and symbols that have been used as an identity recognition and appeal due to producing its wide variety of human experiences through its films (Griszbacher, Kemeny and Varga, 2022). Disney has been a subject of research due to its significant influence on early character development (Griszbacher et al., 2022), shaping consumer perceptions of right and wrong through socialisation (Bryman, 2004). It is recognised that certain storylines and narratives within Disney's content contribute to societal constructions of "madness" (Beveridge, 1996), perpetuate negative stereotypes and stigmas (Lawson & Fouts, 2004; Robinson, Callister, Magoffin and Moore 2007), and reinforce gender, racial, and sexual orientation stereotypes (Towbin et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Disney has had a complicated past with representing certain cultures, specifically, non-dominant ones have tended to be portrayed in a negative light (Towbin et al., 2004). Disney over the years has incorporated a diversity of race, however, it is usually portrayed in a negative and stereotypic way which further marginalised minority racial groups (Towbin et al., 2004). However, over the last decade, there has been an increase in the cultures and races portrayed by Disney, with the release of films representing specific cultures such as Maori culture in *Moana* and Mexican culture in *Coco*. This transformation within the iconic Disney brand was demonstrated to the participants, which showcased the gradual incorporation of diversity throughout the decades. This longstanding history, coupled with Disney's impact on early identification and socialisation processes, provides an ideal context to examine how consumers respond to companies' efforts to diversify and its implications for their own identity construction. Additionally, the visual depiction of racial representation within Disney served as a critical factor in stimulating participant introspection and fostering dialogues concerning their personal interpretations and experiences, not only within the context of other iconic brands but also within the broader societal landscape. The inclusion of well-known and cherished Disney characters further served to evoke a personal and emotional connection, prompting a more profound

exploration of participants' attitudes and perceptions regarding racial representation in the marketplace. The cultural significance of Disney and examining the evolution of racial representation, the researchers sought to gather insightful data that would address the thesis question and contribute to a deeper understanding of consumers' perspectives on this topic.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

Once the focus groups were conducted, the researchers went over the notes taken and created a summary of overall themes and thoughts that occurred during the focus groups. Then once all data was collected from the four focus groups, and recorded through “VoiceRecorder”, the data was transcribed through the app “Transkriptor”. The transcribed data was cross-referenced with the notes in order to find and identify dominant themes. Coding was utilised during the analysis, with researchers following Knodels' (1993) division of analysis- a mechanical part (physical organising and subdividing data) and an interpretive part (determining criteria for data organisation). Here code mapping (the process of coding) was utilised (Knodel, 1993) within each individual focus group and then cross-referenced for larger themes between the overall four focus groups. The researchers developed an initial set of codes to use as identification, that acted as an overarching theme, with subtopics within each. As a result of having four different focus groups with different characteristics, it was important to make intragroup and intergroup comparisons, noting the similarities and differences (Knodel, 2013). The coding was done manually through the application Miro.

3.10 Quality of Data

In research, the quality of data is contingent upon the pursuit of good validity, reliability, and generalisability, as highlighted by Winter (2000). Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) argue that by prioritising high validity and reliability, researchers are able to enhance the objectivity and credibility of their studies, instilling confidence in the accuracy of the findings.

3.10.1 Validity

Saunders and Lewis (2018) define validity “as whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about” (p. 134) While Johnson (1997) correlates it with plausibility, credibility,

trustworthiness and defensibility. This study aims to understand how consumers interpret iconic brands using race representation, and it is important to consider several factors that may affect the validity and reliability of the research findings. The validity of the research can be examined from two areas, internal validity which refers to the “degree to which a researcher is justified in concluding that an observed relationship is causal” (Johnson, 1997 p. 6), and external validity refers to the generalisability of the research findings. However, this research does not aim to generalise populations as qualitative research is “virtually weak in the form of population validity” (Johnson, 1997 p. 8). This is especially true due to the sensitive topic of wanting to understand individuals’ personal experiences in regard to race. Saunders and Lewis (2018) found the factors that influenced validity include subject selection biases, testing effects, mortality concerns, and ambiguity about causal direction.

Subject selection biases can occur during the selection of research subjects, which can result from particular researcher biases and therefore affect the internal validity. As a result, the results can end up being unrepresentative towards the research population. The criteria for inclusion in the sample were defined based on different racial backgrounds and age ranges and were conducted through purposeful sampling. However, there is a possibility of overlooking certain perspectives or excluding specific demographic groups. To minimise this bias, the researchers attempted to obtain a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as different genders, were included to ensure a diverse representation of consumer perspectives.

The validity of research findings can be compromised by the presence of testing effects, which refer to the influences that the data collection process itself may exert on the subjects (Saunders & Lewis, 2018, p.134). These effects have the potential to influence respondents' answers and, consequently, impact the overall validity of the results. For instance, moderators and the interactive nature of focus groups can easily influence participants' responses, making them susceptible to environmental changes and potentially affecting the outcome. In order to address this issue and mitigate potential biases, the researchers made efforts to establish a replicable and non-threatening environment that fostered open and honest discussions. Although there were variations in the environment due to convenience, with two focus groups conducted in person and the other two virtually, the researchers ensured consistency in other aspects of the process.

They utilised a clear focus group question topic guide for all sessions and assigned specific roles to the researchers, such as one serving as the note-taker and the other as the interviewer. This approach helped maintain objectivity and minimise the impact of testing effects. By employing the same topic guide and ensuring consistent roles within each focus group, the researchers aimed to maintain uniformity throughout the process and minimise potential discrepancies in testing effects across groups.

Saunders and Lewis (2018) identified additional factors, namely morality, history, and ambiguity, that can pose challenges to the validity of research findings. Morality refers to the loss of subjects during the research process, potentially leading to biased or incomplete results. History pertains to the influence of specific historical events that occur during the research, which can impact the findings. However, in the present study, which is not a longitudinal investigation but rather conducted within a short time period, the factor of history is of less relevance.

Ambiguity involves the confusion surrounding the causal flow and cause-and-effect relationships. In the current cross-sectional study design, which examines consumers' perceptions of iconic brands with regard to race representation, the collected data does not establish causality but rather provides insights into consumers' interpretations. Therefore, the focus is on understanding how consumers perceive and interpret the relationship between iconic brands and race representation, rather than establishing a direct cause-and-effect relationship.

Although the study did not focus on population generalisability, it aimed to enhance naturalistic generalisability. Naturalistic generalisability seeks to establish generalisability by capturing similarities in people and circumstances, thus mirroring the complexities of real-world settings (Stake, 1990). To achieve this, the study included a heterogeneous focus group comprising individuals from multiple races, with the intention of replicating the diversity found in a multicultural society and capturing a range of opinions. By incorporating this approach, the study addressed external validity, which pertains to the extent to which the findings can be comparable to real-world contexts.

3.10.2 Reliability

Easterby-Smith et al (2021) define reliability as the degree to which data reproduce consistent stable findings under different circumstances. Saunders and Lewis (2018) describe four principal factors that influence the reliability of a study. These are participant error, participant bias, researcher error and researcher bias.

Participant error refers to individual variables that can influence research outcomes, including past experiences, moods, and the potential impact of the time of day on measurements and data collected. While it was not feasible to conduct the research at the exact same time for all participants due to accommodating their schedules, the researchers made efforts to minimise other variables and promote consistency in participant responses. For instance, they aimed to create similarity in the virtual focus groups and in-person focus groups by ensuring factors such as the provision of the same food (in the physical groups) and allowing ample time for socialisation before commencing the research. By implementing these measures, the researchers sought to reduce the influence of participant error and enhance the reliability of the collected data.

Participant bias poses a potential threat to the reliability of research findings, as participants may provide unreliable information in order to present themselves more favourably in the eyes of the researchers and their social circles. Building on the findings of Wilkinson (1998), which suggest that pre-existing social groups are more inclined to share truthful and sensitive information, the researchers deliberately formed focus groups consisting of participants who had some level of an acquaintance or pre-established relationship. This strategic grouping aimed to mitigate the influence of participant bias. Additionally, by organising three of the focus groups into homogenous racial groups, the researchers aimed to foster a sense of safety and shared experiences, creating an environment where participants felt more comfortable sharing certain experiences that they may have felt judged for in heterogeneous groups. Furthermore, all participants were notified that their identity would be confidential and protected. These efforts were undertaken to minimise the potential impact of participant bias and enhance the credibility and depth of the collected data.

Research errors that pose a risk to reliability were addressed through the implementation of consistent and distinct roles for the researchers, as mentioned earlier (e.g., one as the note-taker and one as the interviewer). Additionally, to mitigate this risk, all notes were summarised after each focus group and cross-referenced with the transcripts and recordings to ensure the capture of all relevant meanings and maintain data coherence and clarity.

Researcher bias, which challenges reliability by introducing inconsistencies in data interpretation, was tackled by clarifying the research objectives between researchers before each focus group, in order to remember the wider perspective of the study to ensure an unbiased investigation and analysis of data. Johanson (2008) suggests reflexivity as a means to address researcher bias, involving critical reflection on potential biases carried by the researchers. In this study, the fact that both researchers are women of colour could potentially introduce biases, both positive and negative, across the focus groups, influencing the levels of openness observed. To address this, additional reflexivity was undertaken before and after conducting focus groups and analysing data, aiming to ensure that personal lenses would not affect the interpretation of data. By implementing these strategies, the researchers sought to minimise research errors and biases, thereby enhancing the reliability of the study's findings.

3.10.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations hold particular significance in qualitative studies, as emphasised by Roshaida and Arifin (2018), given their in-depth nature. In the context of this research on race, the potential for evoking sensitive information and emotions from participants is heightened. Therefore, the researchers exercised extra care and sensitivity in addressing ethical concerns.

Easterby-Smith et al (2021 p. 173) argue there are key ethical principles to ensure research is conducted in an ethical manner. The researchers took these principles into consideration when conducting the focus groups. To ensure no harm comes to the participants of the study all participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, which also minimised any potential conflicts of interest. Prior to the focus group sessions, participants were provided with a background of the study with information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, and how their data would be used. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring

that they understood the nature of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. However, in order to allow participants independent expression in response to the prompts and avoid leading questions and bias, the researchers intentionally refrained from explicitly mentioning the study's orientation around race. Nevertheless, participants were informed that potentially sensitive topics could be discussed and that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. To facilitate this, an ethics consent form was administered to all respondents prior to their involvement (refer to [Appendix D](#)). Following the completion of the focus group sessions, the researchers ensured full transparency by providing participants with a comprehensive briefing on the research aims and questions. This additional step aimed to further clarify the purpose and aim of the study, ensuring that participants were well-informed about the research they had participated in. During this briefing, the researchers reiterated the importance of informed consent and once again informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study. Importantly, participants were made aware that they retained the option to withdraw their participation even up until the deadline for the thesis submission. This served as a reminder that their autonomy and agency in the research process were respected throughout.

Throughout the focus group sessions, respect for the participants was maintained, taking into account cultural and linguistic barriers. Given the diverse cultural backgrounds of the participants, standardised English was predominantly used. However, recognising that some participants had English as their second language and Swedish as their first, one researcher was proficient in both languages to address any language-related issues that may arise. Furthermore, while researchers wanted conversations to flow freely between participants, the focus group was semi-structured, enabling researchers to intervene and direct the conversation if they felt the topic was turning harmful or upsetting other members. By adhering to these ethical measures, the researchers aimed to uphold the well-being and rights of the participants, ensuring respectful and responsible conduct of the study.

3.10.4 Methodological limitations

When conducting research, researchers should obtain a level of reflexivity of the study to ensure data produced is of the highest quality (Tracy, 2010). One form of reflexivity that the researcher partook in is recognising the limitations of the methodology. Limitations occur with every

methodological choice, however, what matters is the researchers' awareness and the ability to reduce where ever possible. A notable constraint of this study lies in the narrow age range of the participants, specifically targeting individuals between 18 and 32 years old. While the objective of this study was not to produce generalisable results, due to investigating individuals' unique experiences and interpretations, the exclusive age range of this group could restrict the inclusion of diverse perspectives that may exist across different age ranges. Nevertheless, heterogeneity and diverse perspectives were included in other ways such as race and gender.

Another limitation was the heterogeneity across the location of the four focus groups, with two conducted in person and the other two online. Krueger (1993 cited in Morgon, 2013) argues that the physical location of focus groups can negatively affect focus groups. While researchers attempt to mitigate this discrepancy, the variation in environment between online and offline has the potential for evoking different attitudes and behaviours from participants, thus a limitation of this study.

Furthermore, due to the nature of the focus group being held as a collective with the interviewee present, there is always the risk of the influence of the collective voice shaped by normative discourses and participant bias (Smitherson, 2000). Nevertheless, the researchers were aware of the limitations associated with focus groups but still believed it was the best option for this particular research aim. In addition to this, the dominant view of focus groups is that participants should not know each other to decrease the risk of participant bias, and this could act as a limitation. However, it is worth noting that given the sensitivity of the research topic, the researchers believed that participants' familiarity fostered a sense of safety and comfort. This, in turn, may have encouraged deeper and more interactive data, allowing participants to engage in meaningful exchanges.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the potential influence of researcher bias. Krueger (1993 cited in Morgon, 2013) noted that the quality of research can be jeopardised when the moderator is too closely connected to the subject matter. Given that the research focused on issues surrounding racial representation, two women of colour who have been exposed to stigmatisation within the marketplace, could have subconsciously introduced bias into the data collection

process. Similarly, this can have both a positive and negative effect on participants’ responses. Nevertheless, by recognising these limitations the researchers can actively attempt to reduce them whenever possible.

3.10.5 Qualitative quality check

Once the limitations of the study are recognised, it is important to ensure that the quality of data can be improved wherever possible. The researcher employed Tracy's qualitative quality checklist to ensure the collection of high-quality data throughout the study.

Tracy’s Eight Big Ten Criteria for excellent qualitative research	Definition	The Current study
Worthy topic	<p>“Good qualitative research is relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative. Current political climates or contemporary controversies can spark research. Guba and Lincoln (1989, 2005) recommend topics that may provide “educative authenticity”—a raised level of awareness similar to Schwandt’s (1996) “critical intelligence” that has strong moral overtones and the potential for moral critique.”</p> <p>- Cited in Tracy 2010 p840</p>	<p>The focus of this study revolves around examining consumers’ perspective of iconic brands using racial representation. Given the current political climate characterized by heightened multiculturalism and the significant influx of immigration in Sweden, as well as the global increase in racial tensions exemplified by events like the Black Lives Matter movement and the death of George Floyd in 2019, the issue of racial inclusion and the mitigation of harmful stereotypes in the marketplace has become particularly significant. Consequently, the</p>

		topic under investigation holds great relevance and importance.
Rich Rigor	<p>“Descriptions and explanations that are rich, explains Weick (2007), is bountifully supplied, generous, and unstinting. Richness is generated through a “requisite variety” (Weick, 2007, p. 16) of theoretical constructs, data sources, contexts, and samples. Connection to the richness, rigour also conveniently provides face validity—which is concerned with whether a study appears, on its face, to be reasonable and appropriate (Golafshani, 2003)” cited in Tracey 2010 p841</p>	<p>To obtain a comprehensive and reliable dataset, this research utilised a methodology that involved conducting four semi-structured focus groups. The participants were strategically divided into four distinct focus groups, with three groups consisting of individuals from the same racial background and one group comprising individuals from different racial backgrounds (focus group 2 representing a diverse range of races). By deliberately incorporating this variation in focus group composition, the research aimed to facilitate the emergence of diverse perspectives and insights. Each focus group session lasted for a minimum of one and a half hours, allowing for in-depth exploration of specific topics and fostering meaningful discussions among the participants within each group.</p>
Sincerity	<p>“Achieved through self-reflexivity, vulnerability, honesty, transparency, and data auditing...Sincerity means that the research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher’s biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research.” cited in Tracey 2010 p841</p>	<p>The researchers demonstrated transparency and honesty in their data collection process by providing consumers with a debriefing, clearly communicating their intentions and informing them that the data would be used for a university thesis. Furthermore, recognising the potential influence of their own biases, the researchers implemented a consistent practice of self-reflexivity throughout the study, particularly during data</p>

		collection and analysis. This self-reflexivity aimed to acknowledge and critically examine any personal biases that could impact the research process, ensuring a more objective and rigorous approach to data interpretation.
Credibility	<p>“Credibility refers to the trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings...Qualitative credibility is instead achieved through practices including thick description (in-depth illustration that explicates culturally situated meanings), triangulation or crystallisation (assumes that if two or more sources of data, theoretical frameworks, types of data collected, or researchers converge on the same conclusion, then the conclusion is more credible Denzin, 1978), and multivocality and partiality (analyzing social action from the participant’s point of view and open to a variety of options) Cited in Tracey 2010 p842-844</p>	<p>Credibility was established through the researchers' thorough preparation in understanding the cultural implications of race and identity construction within the marketplace prior to conducting the focus groups. This enabled them to capture culturally situated meanings and anticipate potential sensitive topics that might arise during the discussions. Additionally, the researchers employed a triangulation approach by conducting three separate focus groups, each representing a different perspective. This enabled them to gain a deeper understanding of consumers' personal perspectives and interpretations by considering multiple viewpoints. Participants were explicitly informed that all experiences are valid, and they were encouraged to share diverse points of view, if they felt comfortable doing so, in order to capture a range of voices and perspectives. Moreover, the participants themselves came from various parts of the world, contributing further to the diversity of perspectives and enriching the research findings.</p>
Resonance	<p>“Refers to research’s ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience. Even the best-written report is unable to provide direct insight into the lived experiences of others</p>	<p>The researchers explicitly communicated to the participants that all experiences are valuable and encouraged them to share openly during the focus groups. It is worth noting that the potential</p>

	<p>(Schutz, 1967). However, researchers can engage in practices that will promote empathy, identification, and reverberation of the research by readers who have no direct experience with the topic discussed. The potential of research to transform the emotional dispositions of people and promote greater mutual regard has been termed “empathic validity” by Dadds (2008).” Cited in Tracy 2010 p 844-845</p>	<p>researcher bias, stemming from the researchers being women of colour, may have positively influenced participants of colour to feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences. This could have potentially created an environment conducive to open and honest discussions regarding race and identity. Moreover, in terms of transferability, the use of the Disney prompt allowed participants to draw on their own experiences beyond the specific example provided, thereby enhancing the applicability of the findings to their broader life experiences</p>
<p>Significant Contribution</p>	<p>“When judging the significance of a study’s contribution, researchers gauge the current climate of knowledge, practice, and politics, and ask questions such as “Does the study extend knowledge? ” “Improve practice? ” “Generate ongoing research? ” “Liberate or empower? ” cited in Tracy 2010 p845-846</p>	<p>The research topic of racial representation and inclusion in iconic brands holds significant importance, particularly for consumers of colour who have often felt neglected and marginalised. Exploring this topic is crucial in addressing the experiences and concerns of these consumers. Ethical responsibility on the part of companies regarding racial representation becomes paramount as it plays a crucial role in liberating and empowering these consumers. By promoting inclusive and diverse portrayals, companies have the potential to positively impact the lives and perceptions of individuals from diverse racial backgrounds</p>
<p>Ethical</p>	<p>“ethics are not just a means, but rather constitute a universal end goal of qualitative quality itself, despite paradigm.” Cited in Tracy 2010 p. 846-848</p>	<p>Ethical considerations played a central role throughout the research study. Procedural ethics were diligently followed to safeguard the well-being of the participants. This included obtaining informed consent, ensuring no harm or deception occurred during the study, and</p>

		<p>upholding the principles of confidentiality and privacy. Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, situational ethics were carefully considered to address the potential emotional impact on participants. The researchers were mindful of relational ethics, fostering a respectful and open relationship between the researchers and participants, as well as creating a supportive environment among the participants themselves. By upholding these ethical standards, the researchers aimed to maintain the integrity of the study and prioritise the welfare and rights of all involved.</p>
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Table 4: Tracy’s Eight Big Ten Criteria for excellent qualitative research (source: the authors)

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings from the focus group discussions, and be categorised into three major themes: Commodification of ethnicity, Misrepresentation of race and Inconsistency between external brand image and company actions. Within these three larger themes are the sub themes pertaining to the findings.

4.2 Commodification of Ethnicity

The initial emergent theme from the research findings pertains to the perception among respondents that brands frequently engage in the commodification of race when incorporating racial representation in their external marketing efforts. Respondents expressed that commodification manifested in the form of companies prioritising financial gain over genuine intentions when leveraging racial aspects. The second theme that emerged from respondents pertained to the feeling that companies failed to positively impact the racial communities,

creating the sense that racial representation is a form of exploitation solely driven by profit reasons. The next two sub themes will explore the responses from respondents.

4.2.1 Monetising Race

A prevalent viewpoint among the respondents was that when brands incorporate racial representation, it is primarily driven by a desire to maximise profits rather than genuine social responsibility or other motivations:

“Yeah, they are all thinking about the big profits on the line. I think they'll stop at nothing to meet those profits (referring to iconic brands using race).”- Cody group 1

“From going from here [60s] to here[90s] to here [2010], I only think they want the money”.- Allen group 2

Cody implies a scepticism towards the intentions and motivations behind the portrayal of race by iconic brands. It suggests a concern that the representation of race may be driven primarily by commercial interests rather than a genuine commitment to accurate and respectful depiction. Similarly, Allen argues the changes to Disney's adoption of multiple races come down to monetary reasons as *“they only want the money”*. The notion of companies only adopt this calculated strategy as a means to generate profit is also noted by participants in focus groups 2,3 and 4:

I feel like[iconic brands] can see that we can make more money by targeting different demographics and it more about the value of “We actually view these people who are worth our time and they can bring us money as in previously during the 50s and 60s ethnic people from all backgrounds were viewed as there is no profit there's no point”- Meredith focus Group 2

“Nike, for example, they include a lot of races, whether it be, Islamic culture, black people, white people, whatever, they spend billions on advertising a year. And you have to wonder whether it's because they just want to widen their fishing net to make sure that more people buy their brands

and more people feel inclusive. Iconic brands are that high up in the money food chain they have one thing in mind and it's just to get more profit. So I think that brands do it not because it shines somewhat of a good light on them but because they just want to widen their net, get more people to be consumers.” - Joshua Group 3

“Now when they have ethnic consumers they can make money off, they have to start including them more. It's not out of the good of their heart or pity towards them.” Harriet Group 4

The market for non-dominant ethnic identities throughout history has been regarded as a commodity, but the value of these identities has fluctuated throughout time dependent on the society's value of these identities (Castille, 1993). Here Meredith, Joshua and Harriet all recognise the intrinsic motivation behind these companies using ethnic minorities in marketing campaigns as a result of these non-dominant identities having an increase in value from companies and society. Meredith particularly makes this apparent through her highlighting the fact that these races have always been present, however, it is the sudden increase of value that has created this surge in companies' diversifying marketing activities. Joshua and Harriet's analysis highlights the strategic exploitation of race by companies that commodify racial identities to “*widen their fishing net*” by incorporating not only white consumers but also other races. This practice can be likened to the research conducted by Castille (1993) on the commodification of Native Indian identity. Castille's study revealed how market forces and companies, driven by colonialist ideologies, capitalised on Native Indian identity, creating false and distorted identities referred to as “paper tribes” (Feraca, 1990, as cited in Castille, 1993). These fabricated tribal identities were exploited for their symbolic and hegemonic purposes, ultimately serving the profit-driven agenda of these companies. Harriet's comment captures the unethical exploitation of race by companies as their incorporation of race is “*not out of the good of their heart*”. This demonstrates companies lack empathy and accountability to consumers as their interests are primarily driven by ethical egoism of self-interests rather than genuine benevolence.

4.2.2 Failure to Support the Racial Communities they use

Several respondents expressed the view that iconic brands' portrayal of race was characterised by commodification and appropriation, as a result of failure to actively give back to the communities or ethnic minorities they draw inspiration and profit from. Many felt that iconic brands had a level of responsibility to give back to the community, culture or ethnicity they have taken from, which according to them they currently are not doing:

“But the thing is when I've seen my siblings, the younger kids and stuff, how they've looked upon a black princesses and black dolls, it is important for their growth and who they will become in society, and I think a big brand that has this much influence should make sure they give back to their consumers, and one way is to make sure they represent kids like my little sisters so they grow up knowing they can be this or this. And I think majority of these big brands currently don't do that”- Allen group 2

Here Allen acknowledges the social psychological influence Neoliberal consumer culture has on individuals, which has been explored by McDonald, Gough, Wearing and Deville (2017). They state through the marketisation of Neoliberalism, different identities such as certain races are portrayed in the marketplace as desirable and almost purchasable. The commodification of these racial identities impacts the way consumers view and value themselves. This can be seen through Allen's recognition that his sisters' values and self-worth within society are dependent on the market's portrayal of them. He takes on a perspective of ethics of care whereby companies have the responsibility to “give back to their consumers' ' as a way to inhibit exploiting them as persons and companies are seen as relational rather than as self-sufficient individuals. However, he recognises the lack of prioritisation companies put on representing non-dominant identities as a result of being an idealised market where values are prioritised through profits and self-interest (Held, 2002), rather than cultivating the relationships between individuals and communities.

“Personally, I think if brands really had good intentions like giving back to the people and if they were actually doing this for true representation, and not to get more money, but unfortunately I don't think that's the case, but they definitely should [give back to the community]” - Georgia focus Group 2

Georgia shares her opinion that the use of brands using racial representation is beneficial when a company has good intentions and if they were actually portraying a “true” i.e. authentic, representation. In doing so the brand is giving back to society, however, she admits a lack of likability that occurs in today's society.

Respondents Gemma and Harriet from focus groups 1 and 4 both perceived a juxtaposition between iconic, global brands and presenting ethical behaviours such as giving back to the community:

“Yeah, I don't think the two go together (iconicity and ethics), because when I think of ethical brands, they're usually small businesses. Iconic brands are corporate machines, whereas purchasing from a small business gives back to the community it represents. Iconic brands using race still doesn't make them ethical.” Gemma Group 1

“As a society, we need to take a stand against this and force these companies to change their ways. Though there's smaller brands, maybe not at a global scale we can buy from, it's so much more expensive. Unfortunately, giving back to our own community is a luxury. And iconic brands are just more accessible.” Harriet Group 4

Here both respondents feel a pattern between the size of the brand and the ability to give back to the community. Gemma argues that the nature of iconic brands and being ethical are “*the two [don't] go together*” as a result of these global brands being “*corporate machines*” that generate profit. Similarly, Harriet argues that smaller brands possess the potential to contribute to communities unlike larger, well-known brands. This aligns with existing literature suggesting

that smaller companies are better positioned to embody ethical behaviour due to their interdependent control and close connection to the communities they operate in, facilitating easier community engagement (Spence, 1999). Moreover, Harriet elucidates the broader implications of ethical conduct by companies and ethical consumption. She highlights the complex factors that influence a company's ability to give back to the community, drawing upon Carroll's (1991) corporate social responsibility model, which posits that companies must first prioritise their economic survival. Only then can they ascend to the upper levels of philanthropy, a luxury that is contingent on financial stability. Additionally, Harriet acknowledges that from a consumer standpoint, purchasing from brands that engage in community initiatives often comes at a higher cost, thereby exposing the social inequalities related to social class, wealth, and the ability to support such companies. Consequently, opting to purchase from globalised iconic brands is frequently viewed as a more accessible choice, despite these brands' failure to engage in community-oriented initiatives. Both Harriet and Gemma effectively justify the absence of ethical behaviour from iconic brands by accepting the inherent contradiction between ethics and a business's operations. This stance perpetuates Neoliberal narratives that view iconic brands primarily as profit-driven machines, rather than entities that have the responsibility of seeking to benefit vulnerable minorities through racial representation.

Respondent Philip also perceived iconic brands in a negative light as they are unlikely to give back to the community or race they are exploiting:

“Let's say Ice Cube, the rapper, he is iconic and in a way I guess a brand. When he makes music and people buy it, they [Ice Cube] gain money from it. They can get out of their situation. But in movies and companies where you talk about something like race or the problems of a community, but nobody from that movie that it's based on gains anything from it. So I feel like you make the richer, richer and the poor poorer. You tell their story but they don't gain anything. And as someone buying their music, films or products it's nice to know when my purchase gives back you know”- Philip Group 2

Philip illustrates the contrasting dynamics between an iconic rapper like "Ice Cube" and a brand by highlighting the potential for an individual to use their success to improve their circumstances and support others. According to Philip, when a brand incorporates a race or culture into its narrative, the profits generated should be reinvested in the communities or individuals it represents. Failure to do so, in Philip's perspective, results in a negative perception of the brand, as it signifies a lack of reciprocity and benefit to the exploited community or race despite the portrayal of their story, because *"you tell their story but they don't gain anything from it"*. Philip articulates a longing for a more intimate connection with the company or individual he supports, highlighting a perceived deficiency in iconic brands in this regard. When purchasing music, Philip experiences a sense of closeness and transparency, being aware of where his money is directed and having a heightened sense of accountability due to his knowledge of the artist's identity and values. In contrast, Philip expresses a lack of clarity regarding where his money and support go when engaging with iconic brands. This notion aligns with the idea that consumers are utilising their purchasing decisions as a means of virtue signalling their preferences and values (Berthon et al, 2023), emphasising the increasing significance of consumer behaviour in expressing personal values and supporting entities that align with those values.

This exploitation of racial communities is also apparent in Allen's comment:

"It's really unfair for companies that haven't felt that pain (referring to racism, discrimination and slavery) to capitalise on it and never even give back to that community." - Allen group 2

Allen suggests that it is unjust for these companies to profit from such historical and ongoing injustices while failing to contribute back to the communities affected. This perspective implies a moral expectation for companies to demonstrate responsibility and give back to the communities they draw inspiration from or represent. The respondent's viewpoint aligns with the insights provided by racial formation theory (HoSang et al., 2012). According to this theory, racial inequality is perpetuated through social practices and institutional mechanisms that draw upon historical narratives, such as slavery, and manifest in contemporary marketplaces. Racial minorities' experiences of pain and suffering inflicted by society are capitalised upon and exploited within these systems. Allens' perspective highlights the ways in which racialised

narratives and the commodification of racial pain are intertwined with market dynamics, perpetuating racial inequality and reinforcing systemic oppression.

All respondents across all four focus groups perceive an iconic brand's adoption of racial representation as a form of commodification, where these iconic brands prioritise profits over social justice and equality. This is further demonstrated by their exploitation of these races while failing to give back and compensate these racial minorities and communities.

4.3 Misrepresentation of Race

The following theme is named misrepresentation of race and is a large and significant finding from the data collected on how consumers view race representation used by Iconic brands. There were several ways in which the participants found that iconic brands misrepresented race such as stereotypes and sub themes within stereotypes, such as phenotypes and cultural stereotypes. Participants also found that race was exoticised and that there was a high romanticisation of the West and Eurocentric beauty standards and neglect of cultural understanding in iconic brands' representation. The first subtheme is stereotypes and is presented as the following:

4.3.1 Enforcing stereotypes

Participants Tyrion & Gemma from focus group 1 had discussed the impact or lack of impact that stereotypes had on consumers when an Iconic brand would represent race:

“I think it's definitely important they start to showcase a race or culture in the right way so it's informative as well as entertaining. You don't want to have prejudice or enforce prejudice stuff like they've [iconic brands] done previously.” - Tyrion Group 1

Here, Tyrion stated that they found that representing a culture and race had to be done “*in the right way*”, meaning that using a race or culture had to be informative of that race or culture as well as entertaining to its audience. They followed this by stating that iconic brands “*do not want to enforce prejudice*” on their consumers. Tyrion then ended their statement by saying that iconic brands have enforced prejudice previously. Blumer (1958), explains that there are four types of feelings that present themselves in race prejudice within the dominant race groups such as superiority, that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and alien, a proprietary claim to

certain areas of privilege and advantage, and fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbours on the prerogatives of the dominant race and that that racial prejudice is fundamentally a matter of the relationship between racial groups. Tyrion is of the dominant race and feels that it is important to not further spread prejudice against minority races, with the harboured feelings that Blumer (1958) shows in their study. Tyrion further elaborates that those feelings of racial prejudice have been once done before by iconic brands. Though Blumer (1958)'s study states that racial prejudice is between the relationship of racial groups, racial prejudice can also be shown through powerful brands, and further enforce prejudice towards specific races. This is then followed by Gemma who stated:

“I mean, you can show race, but if you're using stereotypes that are not real, then yeah, it doesn't do anything for or impact their consumers”- Gemma Group 1

Here, Gemma had agreed with Tyrion, however, they added the term *“using stereotypes”* instead of saying *“enforcing prejudice”*. However, unlike Tyrion, Gemma said that it doesn't do anything or impact the consumers when using stereotypes which is not the same as the outcome of prejudice. When they state this, they are referring to how it may not empower a certain race or culture. However, Quillian (2006) states that a number of experiments in social psychology have proven that even subtle influences of stereotypes create judgements and perceptions that manifest in behaviours. Though Gemma is saying that *“using stereotypes doesn't do anything for or impact their consumers”* (as in this does not empower consumers or do anything positive for them), stereotypes have been shown to create judgements towards people. Although stereotypes do not empower consumers, it also creates a judgement towards a racial group which later manifests in how that racial group is treated. This statement by Gemma, though maybe unintentional, seems to minimise the serious implications of using racial stereotypes by brands, although they do state it results in not uplifting their consumers. This aligns with Blumer's (1958) four feelings which present themselves in practical prejudice by the dominant race, specifically the proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage. As Gemma is from a dominant race, they may adhere to privileges and advantages that subsequently desensitise understanding that impact from harmful stereotypes manifest in how racial groups are treated.

The next sub themes within stereotypes are specifically related to the physical attributes that can be stereotyped:

4.3.1.1 Stereotypes related to Phenotypes

In the following quotes, three participants from separate groups, namely focus groups 1, 2 & 3 had stated similar findings that related to the physical features of characters being portrayed by Disney and other movies as the following:

“Yeah I feel that it's not even a kid thing, of course, but it's not even a Disney thing if you look at movies like with real people in it, there's always, the black person was the villain. The black person died first. Also when they show villains in the 90s Disney movies, they exaggerate features that look like black and Arabic features, instead of Caucasian features. Like the villain has a big nose or darker skin or big lips” Philip Group 2

“Yeah, you see some of them early Disney cartoons, probably earlier than the first batch [referring to Disney cartoons from the 60's to 80's]. With Black people just lazing around and eating watermelons, with massive lips and it's pretty full-on when you watch it.”- Cody Group 1

“I feel they would show the good characters or love interests even from different races still have Caucasian features and then the evil characters would lean into more I guess ethnic features, almost like associating evil and ugly with ethnic features. I mean like look at Ursula, she's dark and curvy and Jafar has more [air quotes] ethnic features”.- Joshua Group 3

Philip emphasises that it is not just Disney that has previously portrayed their Black characters negatively, but that movies that are not animated depict villains as having Black features. Philip then goes back to Disney, stating that Disney villains have exaggerated Black, Arabic or ethnic features such as darker skin, larger noses and bigger lips and that the villains did not have Caucasian features. This is a similar finding to what Cody from focus group 1 had stated, referring to earlier Disney cartoons which depicted Black characters as *“lazing around, eating watermelon, with massive lips”*. They followed this statement by saying *“that it felt pretty full-on when you watch it”*. Joshua, from group 3 had shared that they noticed that protagonists of Disney films regardless of race always had *“Caucasian features”*, whereas evil characters *“lean into more I guess ethnic features, almost associating evil and ugly with ethnic features”*. This differed from the other quotes as Joshua compared Caucasian and ethnic features, noting the

contrast in how they are portrayed by Disney cartoons. The negative portrayal of ethnic features is shown by all three statements across different groups.

Maddox & Perry (2018) state that racial phenotypes have generally been associated with immortality and crime and the notion that “Black is bad” is a common heuristic in social judgement. Maddox & Perry (2018) gives examples from archival newspapers, and photographs that accompany black and white celebrities, depicting darker skin tones if the article was critical versus complimentary (Maddox & Perry 2018; Alter, Stern, Granot, & Balcetis, 2016). The association of negativity and blackness even extends into the criminal justice system where police crimes were more likely to falsely identify stereotypical black features in a recognition task and more likely to rate these faces as criminal (Maddox & Perry 2018). This association of black features is seen by the participants in the findings and reflects on their perception of Iconic brands in representing the narrative that stereotypical ethnic features were associated with villains and laziness.

It is relevant to note that Cody is in the Caucasian focus group, whereas Philip and Joshua were a part of focus groups with ethnic minorities and minorities themselves. Philip and Joshua's alignment with Cody's opinion indicates that participants, irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, shared a common perception that iconic brands' portrayal of minority ethnic groups was problematic. This depiction was unsettling for the participants, leaving them with a sense of dissatisfaction and unease.

4.3.1.2 Cultural Stereotypes

The final subtheme within stereotypes that participants found was that cultural stereotypes were depicted by iconic brands when using race representation. This differs from the previous stereotypes as it refers to the culture instead of the phenotype of a particular race.

In all quotes, participants mention cultural stereotypes that are portrayed by iconic brands that adhere to their own culture. The first quotes are within Irish and Arabic cultural stereotypes:

“You kind of get the same thing [with stereotypes] in Ireland, as well.

There was an episode of The Simpsons that was in Ireland and it just makes your blood churn a little bit. It's just horrible”.- Cody Group 1

“because he was a thief [referring to Disney’s Alladin] and they portrayed him as a thief who's Arab, it's so stereotypical. As if we didn't have enough stereotypes.”- Georgia Group 2

These two statements were made by participants from two different focus groups and two different racial and cultural backgrounds. Cody is of Caucasian race and Irish nationality, who gave their experience of the iconic TV show The Simpsons portrayal of Irish characters. Participant Cody ends their statement with *“It just makes your blood churn a little bit. It's just horrible.”* The second quote by participant Georgia in focus group 2 being from an Arabic cultural background stated that they found that Aladdin's portrayal of a thief being Arab, contributed to a negative stereotype, and ended their statement by saying *“as if we didn't have enough stereotypes.”* What's interesting to note about these two participants is that they are from the cultures that they see represented in these iconic TV shows and movies and they have both ended their statements showing their discontent with the way the brands portray the cultures. The participant stated that their *“blood churned”* when they saw Irish culture portrayed in such a stereotypical manner, and participant Georgia even stated *“as if we didn't have enough stereotypes”* in response to the many stereotypes they felt Arabic culture already has, not to mention the stereotypical portrayal of Aladdin as a thief. Lyons & Kashima (2001), show that people prefer reproducing information that aligns with stereotypes rather than information that challenges them, resulting in perpetuating cultural stereotypes. This aligns with Georgia's statement of *“as if we didn't have enough stereotypes”* referring to having experienced their culture being a victim of cultural stereotypes many times before. This also goes for Cody's quote where they emphasised disdain, saying that it made their blood churn seeing their culture portrayed in such a stereotypical manner, expressing that this may not be the first time they have witnessed this. Lyons & Kashima's (2001) literature shows that there is a preference for

stereotype-consistent information because it promotes efficient communication and the maintenance of cultural stereotypes and that this preference arose from the desire for mutual understanding and efficiency of communication. It is important to note, however, that this preference can lead to the stigmatisation and even harassment of people, as shown in Zorro and Jerry's quotes, where they both reflect on Disney's cultural stereotypes as follows:

"I'm just thinking about the closest Disney cartoon that represents me is probably Mulan? Being half Chinese, I don't remember thinking like, oh yeah, this is representing my Eastern side. Maybe in hindsight, I even think it's a bit offensive. There's definitely a difference between the ones on the right [Disney cartoons 2010 and up], they are more representative. It's like the ones in the middle are more Westernised versions of what they imagine those cultures to be like. I think I've seen Brave. I remember that was more of an insight into what that culture was. I think the middle ones create harmful stereotypes, well for me I felt like it did." Zorro Group 3

"I also don't personally find that any film represented my ethnicity really. I mean, the closest there is, is Jungle Book, but I don't really resonate with that really. I mean, I don't think there's enough really out there of Indian heritage. And when they do represent Indian heritage it's super stereotypical. And I feel because there's not much representation in films or brands that people lean on these few stereotypes. Like in Sweden, I was often called monkey boy because I had an Indian background and Mowgali was the first thing that came to their heads because it's the only thing they could compare me to or that can come to their minds.- Jerry Group 3

The first statement by Zorro shows how they don't feel that Disney has ever made a cartoon that truly represents their Chinese cultural heritage. They wearily say that perhaps Mulan might be the closest to this cultural identity of theirs, however, they didn't feel this growing up, and in hindsight, they do feel it might even be "a bit offensive". They follow this statement by saying that they felt that modern Disney cartoons made from 2010 and up are different to early Disney cartoons because earlier Disney cartoons were a "Westernised version of what they imagined that culture to be". They then compare this to a new Disney movie called Brave, stating that the movie showed more insight into the culture it represented. Participant Jerry, then responded to participant Zorro, by replying that they also personally find that there were no Disney films that

represented their ethnicity and perhaps the movie *Jungle Book* is the closest to this representation. They state that there is not much representation of Indian heritage, to begin with. They end their statement by giving a personal reflection on growing up in Sweden and often being referred to as “*monkey boy*”. Jerry had an Indian background and they felt they were called this because, in Sweden, the *Jungle Book* was what Indian culture was associated with. These two participants similarly, compare what they feel is their lack of representation within Disney cartoons, and when there was a cartoon that technically represented their culture, they felt it did not adhere to their culture appropriately and aided in harmful stereotypes. Participant Zorro felt that *Mulan* did not appropriately reflect their Chinese heritage because the movie did not show an insight into the culture, as it felt like it was Westernised, in comparison to newer movies which were more insightful to the culture they portrayed. Whereas participant Jerry, reflected that they felt that there were few representations for them to begin with and that the representation they did have was stereotypical which aided in them being called derogatory terms like “*monkey boy*” by other cultural/racial groups who associated being Indian with the only representation of Indian culture there was by Icons like Disney, when Jerry was a child.

Doyle & Aboud’s (1995), study on Caucasian children suggests that children's development over time has shown that prejudice and cognitive abilities are interconnected and that children who have mastered perspective-taking have a better ability to understand others' viewpoints and show levels of prejudice. As children age they are able to rate members of different races more similarly and members of the same race more differently.

Jerry’s reflection of Caucasian, Swedish children stigmatising his Indian heritage, aligns with what this study shows. However, racial harassment and stigmatisation are not limited to young children. Badaan & Jost (2020), present that in total racial minorities were victims of 70-80% of hate crimes, while the remaining 20% were committed against White/European American targets during the same period. This further proves that racial stereotypes can lead to prejudiced behaviours towards racial groups, and the dangers of iconic brands portraying racial stereotypes towards children are reflected in both this study's findings as well as studies such as Doyle & Aboud (1995).

4.3.2 Exoticisation and Eurocentric beauty standards

When discussing racial representation within iconic brands, a recurring comment, specifically from groups 1, 2 and 4 was that racial diversity was presented through an exotic and romantic lens. Despite being in different focus groups, participants Cody and Johny from focus group 1 and focus group 4 mentioned similar perspectives of Disney portraying romanticised, attractive characters:

“Like in the middle batch [Disney cartoons from the '90). There's racial diversity, but not really. They're all attractive. You know, it's an attractive mermaid redhead. They're attractive, like an Arabian princess, Native American. But also they are playing in these beautiful ethnic cultures, like mulan leans into what they think is the culture, but it's not it's just using the beauty of it for the sake of it rather than teaching and being real” - Cody Group 1

Cody acknowledges Disney’s use of diversity, but questions the extent to which true diversity is achieved, stating that these characters such as *“Arabian princess”* and *“Native American”*, are not real representations of racial diversity due to its adherence to conventional standards of attractiveness, that is intrinsically linked to postcolonial eurocentric standards of beauty (Hasinoff, 2008). Cody believes this “attractive” depiction of race does not reflect the full range of racial diversity. Moreover, Cody’s comment highlights the potential unethical behaviour of companies when portraying diversity in a romanticised attractive way. By depicting diversity through this narrow beauty standard it implies that only those who fit within society's preconceived notions of attractiveness are considered valuable and worthy of representation and recognition. This selective portrayal diminishes the visibility and validation of ethnic features that do not conform to this idealised version, potentially perpetuating harmful stereotypes and marginalising individuals who do not fit these narrow beauty standards. Cody’s perspective reinforces Thomas, Cross and Harrison's' (2019) illustration that racially marginalised individuals have a limited influence in the construction of their racial identity, and those that fail to fit the phenotypic traits “chosen” are likely to be stigmatised from society. The correlation between Cody's viewpoint and the research of Thomas, Cross, and Harrison (2019) highlights the broader implications of the portrayal of diversity in popular media and marketing. It underscores the

significance of inclusive representation that acknowledges and respects the diverse range of racial identities, rather than reinforcing narrow beauty standards and perpetuating social stigmatisation.

Johny from focus group 4 also acknowledges the Disney's adoption of different races:

“These classical stories were super related to white people and then during the 90s when you see Pocahontas, Aladdin and Mulan start to change a little bit around it, but also is super related to beauty. I mean Pocahontas is an American indigenous but she has amazing beauty and Mulan is Chinese but she's also amazing with beauty as well.” - Johny group 4

Participant Johny's example of diversity changing “during the 90s” with “Pocahontas, Aladdin and Mulan”, is almost devalued in participant Johny's eyes as he correlates it with being “super related beauty”. Here both participants Cody and Johny feel like racial diversity is being misrepresented due to having diversity portrayed in a beautiful romanticised way.

In addition to idealising physical beauty, participant Johny further asserts that numerous iconic brands frequently succumb to perpetuating romanticised exotic stereotypes that conveniently overlook the negative aspects or authentic realities of individuals or cultures:

“Especially because in the latest year in the Colombian representation of the screen from iconic TV shows, such as NARCO or this hot girl [Gloria] in the modern family. So it's like, OK, it's super nice having a Colombian in the show, but this is not the representation that I want to see. Like, OK, it's great that you're talking about Pablo Escobar, but the authentic representation of him is he's not a hero. He was a serial killer. So this discussion is important for me. So I think it's important to truly represent instead of having representation because you want to have a character from Latin America who is going to be very cliché and sometimes that could be a mistake and this is the stereotypical idea of how we are and what we do.” - Johny group 4

According to Johny, while the Colombian representation is recognised and appreciated, there is a lack of identification in the way iconic brands represent his race. Choosing which stereotypes

and characters to reproduce in the marketplace such as the “hot [colombian] girl” or the stereotypical Colombian drug lord “Pablo Escobar” demonstrates companies trying to make certain strange exotic cultures palatable, by reusing stereotypes and fetishising them so the “stranger” feels less alienating (Ahmed’s 2000). However, the idealisation and romanticisation of certain characters such as Pablo Escobar who is depicted as a “hero” despite being a notorious serial killer, exemplifies how corporations and society have the power to redefine racial identity through selective consumption of certain aspects (Ahmed, 2000). This misrepresentation strips racial minorities of agency, further perpetuating harm and reinforcing their status as the “other.”

This exotic, romanticised use of diversity that perpetuates this sense of falsehood as expressed by Johny, was similarly felt by responses from Allen and Georgia within focus group 2:

‘Aladdin where the start of expressing representation was pretty racist still but it was on the way to something positive, and then you see Soul and it is so much deeper in culture. I feel like Aladdin shows the ‘golden’ view of what they think the middle east is - Allen Group 2

Speaking of Aladdin, I agree, I think what you are trying to say, is there's a theory called Orientalism and it's where they portray people from the Orient as you know, like the Arabian culture of belly dancers, camels, all of that. And Aladdin really enforces that theory a lot. He's the whole reason people think of the Middle East as if everyone is riding camels and that is all they do, but it's wrong. And it's annoying when these wrongful stereotypes are pushed onto us because it makes us become the exotic exciting foreign thing, but only when they want us to be like that [laughs], otherwise we're terrorists” - Georgia Group 2

Both Allen and Georgia felt the portrayal of middle eastern diversity as a way of what outsiders view that culture or race to be. By Allen describing Aladdin as the “golden view” of Middle Eastern representation, it helped prompt Georgia to address the correct label of “*Orientalism*”. While both believe that this representation is “*pretty racist*” and “*wrongful stereotypes*”, Allen acknowledges it is “*on the way to something positive*” with then highlighting the film “Soul” as an exemplar from Disney that effectively portrays a culture in a more meaningful and respectful manner. However, Georgia’s description of Disney’s use of orientalism and exoticism is more harmful. Said (1978) defines Orientalism as the portrayal of the East by the West, which is deeply rooted in imperialism and colonialism. It involves representing Eastern cultures in an

exoticised manner that serves to maintain the power dynamics in favour of the West. When iconic brands engage in Orientalist presentations, they contribute to a dangerous act of perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

This perpetuation further reinforces the power imbalance between the East and the West, as highlighted by Said (1978). Furthermore, the ability for these brands to pick and choose “*when they want us to be like that*”, versus when the Middle East is viewed as “*terrorists*” demonstrates the power these brands have in perpetuating harmful stereotypes and controlling the resources of identity construction for ethnic minorities. Additionally, it demonstrates the changing of a minority's identity based on political activities. Allen and Georgia both reveal that Disney portrays an image of a race or culture that is a “*golden view*”, perpetuating a falsehood. However, it is intriguing to observe that despite both respondents identifying as people of colour, their perspectives on racial representation and the progress made in this regard exhibit diversification. This diversity may stem from the distinct ways in which different racial groups are portrayed, each associated with their own set of stereotypes. Allen, being of Somali descent and identifying as a black man, notes greater progress in the marketplace and within Disney concerning these racial identities. On the other hand, Georgia's identification with the Middle East exposes her to a vulnerability to stigmatisation due to the association of the region with the ongoing war against terrorism (West and Lloyd, 2017). It is worth noting that Allen highlights the acknowledgement of progress through the example of “*Soul*,” a Disney film centred around a black male protagonist. In contrast, Georgia's sole cultural representation comes from “*Aladdin*,” and she perceives it as racist and perpetuating stereotypes. This underscores the significant impact that racial representation within the marketplace can have on shaping perceptions and experiences.

Similarly, participant Bella from Focus Group 1 expressed the sentiment that iconic brands like Disney impose specific romanticised stereotypes onto individuals like herself.

“And for us Italians, Luca has a lot of stereotypes. They wake up, and they have pasta every single meal, 500 grams. Then you just go to the beach and there's never any real problems. It would be nice if it was that way but It's not.”- Bella Group 1

In a similar manner to Aladdin, Luca also shows this romantic version of Italy, where there are “*never any real problems*”. Bella recognises the attractiveness of having a culture and race portrayed in a romantic way, however, it misinforms the viewer's perception of the realities as it almost eradicates certain hardships Italians face. By reducing Italian culture to a series of exaggerated and superficial traits, the film fails to capture the richness, diversity, and complexity of Italian identity. It is interesting to observe that misrepresentation and perpetuation of harmful stereotypes extend beyond consumers of colour, but also to individuals such as Bella, a Caucasian female. This demonstrates that even for individuals who have certain levels of privilege such as being part of a dominant identity (White, female), misrepresentation and harmful stereotypes can be felt by individuals across various racial backgrounds.

Within the observations made by Cody, Johny, Allen, and Georgia, there is a shared recognition of misrepresentation through exoticism within Disney's product line in the 1990s, exemplified by films like Pocahontas, Aladdin, and Mulan, with Allen even noting the progress made with Soul. In contrast, Bella acknowledges the continuation of this pattern in contemporary society, citing the film Luca as evidence that the exoticisation of race remains an ongoing issue, indicating that it is not merely a relic of the past.

As a response to the comments made by Allen and Georgia in focus group 2 with the portrayal of only the good “*golden view*” of racial diversity, participant Philip claimed that diversity needs to be less romanticised but rather normalising a wide assortment of identity positions:

“The first thing for me when displaying race is if it's not showing the good and the bad, I don't believe it. Like I'm watching Snowfall right now. And it's about drug dealers and stuff like that, but they always show like they have money and women. They like the good things about the good life, the good life, they romanticise it. But in this Snowfall, the thing I like about it is they show everything. The good the bad, the everything, it's not about showing not only the romanticised parts. We can't just show the good side.” -Philip Group 2

Philip demonstrates scepticism when companies are selective with their representation and how the romanticisation of a certain race makes the portrayal feel inauthentic and thus a misrepresentation. Philip's viewpoint emphasises the importance of representing race in a comprehensive and authentic manner, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. He believes that a truly authentic representation of racial minorities must include a nuanced

portrayal that reflects the full spectrum of their experiences. This challenges the prevailing notion that deviating from the dominant identity's narrative of a particular racial identity will inevitably lead to stigmatisation from society, and in turn, a comprehensive representation of racial identities contributes to a more inclusive and less stigmatising society (Weinberger and Crockett 2018).

4.3.3 Romantising the West and White Superiority

The respondents in the study also identified a discernible pattern in the utilisation of racial diversity by iconic brands, indicating an underlying theme of white superiority:

“Personally. I don't think that the first two are not that different from each other. And I think the change only happened in the last one because if I look at the first one [60s Disney collage], OK, They're all white. But even the second one, ok, the characters are not all white, but the movies were made for white people. Whether it is Tarzan, Aladdin, or Pocahontas as she was helped, and she also helped two white men discover America, I forgot his name, but they were all for white people. They also all look like the white version of beauty, and since they are 'princesses' it's like saying these white features and stories are what is right and beautiful” - Georgia Group 2

This observation suggests that even when brands incorporate racial diversity, they may still uphold and reinforce notions of white dominance and Eurocentric ideals as Georgia explains they are the “*white version of beauty*” and through these representations, it suggests to society “*what is right and beautiful*”, which is consequently tied to the western ideals of beauty. Within the same focus group and conversation, Philip was prompted by Georgia's remark stating:

“Exactly. But it's the same thing with Africans. And I feel it because it's something if you look like, if you look at like Tarzan, yeah, he was white. But when he was hanging in the jungle, he became like a monkey and it wasn't until the white man came to make him more civil” -Philip Group 2

The participant highlights the transformation of the protagonist from a “*monkey*” in the jungle to a more civilised version under the influence of white intervention. This observation underscores the portrayal of white superiority and the notion that non-Western cultures are perceived as inferior or in need of civilising. Both comments by Georgia and Philip suggest that merely

including diversity at the level of phenotypes, such as skin colour, is insufficient. Instead, it is crucial to critically examine the core of the stories being told, the physical appearances of characters, and the narratives they perpetuate. The promulgation of the dominant group's narrative is recognised through “Whiteness theory” by Burton (2009), whereby he explores how these narratives surrounding white and coloured individuals are perpetuated to sustain and legitimise the dominant group's power, thus reinforcing their control over society.

Respondent Johnny also found this narrative of the white saviour complex, similar to the example given by Philip:

“I really love Pocahontas but It's like a white saviour complex here. The girl falls in love with the white guy, he's like a trophy. I also felt like Pocahontas had a responsibility to teach the white guy how to be responsible for nature over the community, and the cultural heritage. But the way they portray the whites as civilised versus the indigenous as “savages”. And then the white guy is a hero at the end.”- Johnny Group 4

Here Johnny describes how the white characters are often placed higher on the hierarchy of the social pecking order with the “white guy” being a “trophy”, while the other indigenous characters are portrayed as “savages”. Respondent Zorro from focus group 3, contributes similar thoughts but translates them in a business context:

“There is a certain level of responsibility for these companies because of their high status to make sure they are diverse. Because if they only include white people in their company and advertisements then it's pushing the historic narrative of white superiority, like that only white people can purchase these cool brands and work there too and be of high status”- Zorro Group 3

The participant's statement highlights the consequences of companies predominantly featuring “white people in their company and advertisements.” Such a representation communicates to society that individuals of white ethnicity hold a position of “high status” and implies that the product or service offered by the company is intended specifically for them. This practice further perpetuates the historical narrative of white superiority, reinforcing societal norms and power

dynamics that have long been entrenched. However this presentation of white superiority is equally viewed as a glorified image, according to Zorro:

“ I mean In a lot of these movies, they represent say the ones with just white people they still represent sort of like a glorified version of the Western culture. So it depends on how they're going to represent it they're going to show the cool parts in a positive way and almost kind of glorified way” Zorro Group 3

Similarly, while these stories and brands perpetuate this white superiority and Eurocentric beauty standards, it still does not negate the existence of diverse narratives and perspectives within Western cultures, but instead only depicts a selective portrayal of the “glorified version of the Western culture”. Therefore in regards to Zorro’s comment, the “white saviour” image is not only misrepresenting consumers of colour but also to white consumers.

Interestingly, across all four focus groups, the respondents that noticed this white superiority narrative and pattern were participants who were of colour in focus group 2, 3 and 4. This observation suggests that participants who were people of colour in focus groups 2, 3, and 4 were more attuned to and aware of the white superiority narrative and pattern compared to the participants in focus group 1, which consisted of Caucasians. This finding aligns with Burton's (2009) Whiteness Theory, which posits that individuals from marginalised racial backgrounds are often more aware of the issues related to race and power dynamics. It also highlights the influence of the white lens, as participants from focus group 1 are part of Western society’s dominant racial group, and therefore sometimes fail to recognise their own privilege and biases that are inherent in the narratives and patterns they encounter. As a result, this can influence their understanding and interpretation of racial dynamics within society and the marketplace, which can lead to overlooking the normalisation of white superiority. Furthermore, the participants from focus groups 2,3 and 4 demonstrate a heightened awareness of certain narratives, which could be a result of their lived experiences and historical subordination as a result of social hierarchies and power dynamics. Overall the comments from Philip, Georgia, Zorro and Johny imply a need for comprehensive representation that goes beyond surface-level diversity and actively challenges and subverts dominant narratives that uphold white and Eurocentric superiority.

4.3.4 Neglecting cultural understanding in their representation

Many respondents felt that iconic brands, specifically Disney came across as demonstrating a lack of cultural understanding in their representation, which manifested in the form of misrepresentation. Specifically, one theme that was mentioned during focus group 1 was the lack of proximity to the culture:

“I feel like when they do a movie, for example, Luca, in a specific location, they need to have someone from that specific location. But we have to transfer the message, but the proper cultural message, like someone Italian explains to them, we don't do that. Like we eat pasta, yes, but it's not every single meal. So that they can do what they're trying to do in the best way possible.” - Bella Group 1

“If they want to make fun of something you have to be very close to the limit. Or have a very good understanding to be able to be very funny about a certain culture because when you know a culture well its easier to joke about it, ” -Tyrion Group 1

Here participants Bella and Tyrion recognise the importance of cultural and racial proximity when representing an object as a result of not being able to fully transpire the experience and meaning of that culture. Here contamination of the self (Belk 1988) is visible, as Bella expresses a sense of disdain and personal attack on her as her culture being represented wrong as if having the wrong representation almost contaminates her own identity. In alignment with Joy et al's (2003) experiential view of consumption, Bella suggests that symbolic meaning is transferred by the brand through the “message” of that particular culture. However, she argues that the experience provided by Disney is one that perpetuates the wrong meaning. Similarly, Tyrion demonstrates that the correct symbolic meaning can only be attainable through proximity to the culture, otherwise, consumers' experience is equally hindered. Both comments by Bella and Tyrion suggest that in order for correct representation to elicit a positive consumer experience, the brand needs to employ someone from that particular culture or have a deep understanding.

Respondents, Harriet and Meredith found that a lack of cultural understanding is visibility noticeable when a company represents a race:

“And she [Mixed-race friend] said what she personally felt was that what they're doing is just taking certain stories and just changing the characters to try to be more inclusive and putting in an ethnic person instead of actually creating stories at all about people and their background. So it's kind of in a way a little bit lazy, just like, oh look, we're inclusive, but we're not going to give you the time to give you something that's actually true, something that's more for just making money. They don't do the research on those cultures or people and you can tell” - Meredith Group 2

“It feels like we'll just put on, a dress or whatever and describe a tradition or race in the wrong way. They didn't take the time to put in the research and it came across as very insensitive”. - Harriet Group 4

Both Meredith and Harriet felt a sense of insincerity at the representations provided by iconic brands, where the companies' attempts at racial representation created unsolicited feelings of them being “lazy” and “not taking the time to put in the research”. This response demonstrates how consumers. This response highlights that consumers like Meredith and Harriet are not passive receivers of racial representation but actively engage with and evaluate these portrayals. Their comments emphasise Joy et al's (2003) experiential theory, when brands, utilise established narratives (like Disney), they need to recognise consumers bring their own experiences into the consumption process, which affects their acceptance of these identities. Therefore, failure to create this “true” feeling comes from a lack of effort to research the culture.

Allen and Sean from focus group 2 both agreed that if time was taken to research the culture and race, that representation would be construed in a much more positive light:

“So when brands use a culture if they take the time to research it and show it in its truest form, it puts respect on the culture”- Allen Group 2

“I agree, it's more satisfying when it's a real representation because it feels like if you try to just include people for the sake of it rather than trying to empower them,“ - Sean Group 2

In a similar way to how visible it is when a company fails to research the culture, Allen claims it is just as visible to see when they do “*take the time to research*” as you witness the race and culture in its “*truest form*”. Sean implies that authentic and well-researched portrayals capture the essence and nuances of a particular race or culture, allowing viewers to experience a more genuine and accurate representation that enhances the authenticity of the portrayal and contributes to a more meaningful and “*satisfying*” viewing experience.

The respondents recognised significant changes in the representation of race and culture between older Disney movies and newer ones. While the negative impacts of a lack of research were acknowledged, there was an acknowledgement of progress and improvements in more recent films:

“Like here [referring to 90s] there they were telling real stories but in I think in the end Disney learned their lesson and they stopped because some of the stories they were telling were wrong and harmful to the real cultures and stories. But here [referring to 2010] they have educated themselves more on the cultures behind the stories, and I think it comes across as more enjoyable to watch, to be honest”- Georgia Group 2

“I think that they're really just trying to really include, like the example of Mulan which is set in China I believe if I remember correctly. But it never really taught you anything about the culture. Same thing with Aladdin. But if I can recall correctly, I believe Brave and Coco teach a lot about their traditions and their culture. Same thing with Moana and I mean, soul is a bit of an odd one out, but it doesn't have to be a culture from like a country or place. I think soul has to do with a lot of soul music and that kind of culture from New York or the Bronx. So it's really, it's teaching more about how people have their way of life than just showing the parts you wouldn't normally just see. I like it, I think it allows us to connect to them on a deeper level.”- Joshua Group 3

Both Georgia and Joshua recognise Disney’s history of misrepresenting a race through perpetuating harm “*to the real cultures and stories*” by never teaching consumers “*anything about the culture*”. However, both respondents acknowledge that Disney as a company has made improvements by taking the “*time to educate themselves more on the cultures behind the story*” which in turn is “*teaching [consumers] more about how people [from these cultures] live their*

life". Joshua makes a similar comment to both Allen and Sean, that this kind of representation enables the consumers to "*connect to them on a deeper level*", thus portraying a more authentic depiction.

Delilah equally agrees that Disney has recently taken the time to understand the culture and race they are representing:

"I also think these days they're forced to put in a lot of effort to really do their research and they try to get most of the facts about the culture. It's even more insulting that you try to do the bare minimum. Previously, they kind of just threw stuff around. They didn't quite do the research. But these days, they really try to talk about the culture and give us more of an understanding of what the entire culture is instead of just wearing one thing like a bindi, just for the sake of it. So it's nice to see that these days they've put in more effort there." -Delilah Group 4

However, she equates this change due to society placing pressure on brands as "*they're forced to put a lot of effort to really do their research*". While she acknowledges brands have previously presented race in an "*insulting*" way due to the lack of research and attention, in recent years she has witnessed a change in companies' behaviours such as putting more effort in. This relates to Georgia's remark where she feels big brands such as Disney have "*learned their lessons*".

One noteworthy observation pertaining to brands dedicating time to cultural research and striving for accurate representation is the perspective offered by Jerry in focus group three:

“We moved around a lot when we were younger and we were never really in Sweden or in Singapore for long periods of time, and our parents didn't really teach us a lot about it growing up. Plus I am mixed race, and I think everyone else in this group is too, so I feel like maybe we didn't really have too much of a place or culture that we could really be like, oh I love this movie or this brand because this is what I feel like I am in terms of race. But I could definitely see if like someone that was Scottish or Mexican would love something like Brave or Coco because they represent their culture, and go into it in depth. I didn't feel like a movie here really made me feel empowered or made me feel like I belonged somewhere, like just having a brown person doesn't automatically make me feel like I can relate” -Jerry Group 3

The composition of focus group 3, consisting of mixed-race individuals, had a noticeable influence on their perceptions of racial and cultural representation. Jerry's experiences of not having a singular "*place or culture*" to identify with in terms of race led them to accept the unsolicited fact of being underrepresented by brands and media. Jerry's comment reaffirms that race should not be reduced to a binary distinction between white and non-white (Stoshine and Brandi, 2011). Instead, each racial group, including those belonging to multiple races like group three, possesses unique experiences and narratives. Merely featuring a physical representation of a particular phenotype is insufficient in capturing the complex narrative and diversity within racial identities. Unlike the other three groups, focus group 3 made minimal comments regarding the misrepresentation of race resulting from the brand and a lack of research. This can be attributed to these individuals' lack of exclusive affiliation with a specific culture and race, which potentially shapes their perspectives on representation.

4.4 Inconsistency between external brand image and company actions

The inconsistency between brand image and company actions is a strong theme found in the focus groups. The participants expressed that they felt a misalignment between what iconic brands represent in their branding compared to their history as a company, their internal organisation diversity and that their branding efforts did not reflect society.

4.4.1 An act of redemption or an attempt to cover up a dark history?

The following participants entered a discussion of their experiences growing up watching Iconic brands like Disney. Both participants are in focus group 2, consisting of a mix of different races. Participant Georgia started by expressing their personal story as the following:

“I grew up watching Disney cartoons from the 80s and 90s. I also played with Barbies. They were all White, blonde, and straight hair, and that to me was what beauty was. I could never imagine a Barbie having a different skin colour or hair. Or a Disney princess for the matter. After Brave came out when I was 13, it was so nice to see a princess with curly hair like mine. She was still a White princess, but it was something. After this, I realised something was really wrong with the way these brands portrayed beauty when I was a kid. So I am glad to see they're making a change with these ones” (referring to 2010 and up Disney cartoons) -Georgia Group 2

Participant Georgia, who is of Arabic descent, received a response from Participant Sean, who is of Caucasian, American descent. While Sean sympathised with Georgia, he admitted that he couldn't personally relate to the feeling expressed:

“I grew up watching Disney cartoons from the 80s and 90s. I also played with Barbies. They were all White, blonde, and straight hair, and that to me was what beauty was. I could never imagine a Barbie having a different skin colour or hair. Or a Disney princess for the matter. After Brave came out when I was 13, it was so nice to see a princess with curly hair like mine. She was still a White princess, but it was something. After this, I realised something was really wrong with the way these brands portrayed beauty when I was a kid. So I am glad to see they're making a change with these ones” (referring to 2010 and up Disney cartoons) -Georgia Group 2

Both participants pointed out the change of Disney cartoon narratives as a positive impact and change that the company has made. Though participant Sean could not relate to feeling excluded by Disney or other Iconic brands, they felt that based on the newer Disney cartoons, Disney is learning from their past mistakes of not including other forms of representation. Participant Georgia, only felt when they reached adulthood that *“something was really wrong with the way these brands portrayed beauty when I was a kid”* referring to iconic brands. However, they expressed feeling glad to see that changes are being made within the representation. Leonardo's (2004) study presents that White people as a racial group secure supremacy in almost all areas of

social life. This includes being represented by brands, and being the ideal beauty standard portrayed by children's toys like the iconic toy Barbie. Sean acknowledges his privilege in seeing that they cannot experience not being represented in society, as Georgia has. However, Sean does state that they believe that the company is actively trying to incorporate more representation in its branding. This is similar to other Caucasian participants such as Tyrion giving an example of their experience in Sweden of the Swedish tradition of watching Kalle Änka (a Swedish Christmas tradition of a mixture of Disney cartoons, played on Christmas morning for children):

“I think how Disney started a long, long time ago, it feels like they were very racist and sexist. So going from that to how they're perceived today, they obviously, must have changed a lot within the company and the company culture and what they stand for.”

I mean like as a Swedish person, every Christmas we have this Disney thing (Kalle änkä). It's like this snippet of Disney movies that you grow up with and they always add one movie or they change one small thing every Christmas. So it's a little bit changed. But I used to love that stuff when I was a kid, I was so excited for that on Christmas to watch the Disney stuff. But just under my lifetime, they've taken away so much because it's perceived as racist or sexist. It's not like you think about it when you're a kid, but you see it and you learn from it in some way. You see it every Christmas so when they took that away, you realise oh that's not okay, you know.” Tyrion Group 1

This was followed by participant Bella who is Caucasian but not Swedish:

“I'm not Swedish so I've never heard of that (Källe Anka), but I still agree that they must have changed the company, must have changed with the fact they are taking racist clips away. But they still have a lot to prove. They've started being more inclusive, but they have to be consistent also for the next few years, because, you know, it's not enough to do it for like five or ten years. You have to develop over time.” - Bella Group 1

The conversation ended with participant Cody:

“To be honest, I'd say the more iconic a brand is, I feel like the more skeletons they're hiding in their closet. It might be a change of company culture, or learning from their mistakes, but it could be that they don't want to be boycotted” Cody Group 1

This conversation displayed participant Tyrion starting by explaining how Disney started long ago and that they were racist as well as sexist and they perceive Disney to “*must have changed a lot within the company and the company culture and what they stand for*”. This observation is followed by an example from Tyrion’s childhood in Sweden of watching Kalle Änka, which they realised over time had completely taken away certain snippets of Disney cartoons which Tyrion describes as “*perceived as racist or sexist*”. They express that as a child, they did not perceive anything wrong with those cartoons. However, the removal of those clips by Disney made them realise that there was indeed an issue with them, and they learned from this experience.

However, Tyrion's lack of awareness as a child regarding the negative depiction of racial minorities in the cartoons, which only became evident after their removal, can be attributed to the fact that Tyrion is Caucasian and did not personally experience the impact of such racial portrayals in Disney cartoons. Additionally, the phrase "perceived as racist or sexist," although possibly unintentional, suggests that the cartoons were seen as racist or sexist but may not have been inherently racist or sexist. This observation is consistent with Leonardo's (2004) study, which highlights the various privileges encountered by white individuals.

Bella responded by mentioning that they are not Swedish and therefore never had the experience of watching "Kalle Änka." However, they agreed that the company must have undergone changes. Nonetheless, Bella still felt that Disney has a lot to demonstrate and that they must have transformed their company values. Merely being consistent for a few years was not sufficient, as they believed Disney needed to evolve over time. This ends with participant Cody then stating that if they were being honest to the group, they felt that “*the more iconic a brand is, I feel like the more skeletons they’re hiding in their closet.*” This statement was followed by Cody saying that though Disney may have made changes within the company culture, as Tyrion had stated, or learned from their mistakes, similar to what participant Sean from focus group 2 had said, that in fact “*it could be that they don’t want to be boycotted*”. This participant's take on iconic brands, differed from the rest of the stated quotes because they felt that though there has been a change from a racist, non-inclusive history, like the other participants perceived, they questioned Disney’s motive for change based on that history. Breaux (2010) conducted a study on Disney's particular portrayal of a black princess (Princess and the Frog) and states that it was an attempt to address criticism by including elements like a two-parent household, a present mother, an interracial romance, and an African American princess. However, Disney has never openly

acknowledged its racist past or made a political statement, instead presenting itself as a racially neutral and colourblind corporation, and in turn actively capitalising on its racist history. This aligns with Cody's perception of Disney as an Iconic brand in questioning if it might be a change in company culture or the fact they do not want to be blacklisted as a brand.

This sceptical questioning of Iconic brands and their motives as a company followed in other statements from focus groups 3 & 2:

"I would also say that a lot of these iconic companies, they are now trying to 'represent' [air quotes] a certain ethnicity or race, but like, they touch the surface of representation, and also it is kind of ironic or hypocritical because a lot of these brands have a history of being racist or doing other unethical things so it just feels a bit fake I guess, they're just trying to tick a representation quota without actually changing or addressing their past problematic behaviour. So in a way can they ever truly represent a race and the culture surrounding it, when in the past they have caused harm?- Kliff Group 3

"Also I find it super weird when these companies like Disney where they have had scandals with race and have previously been racist in their cartoons, to now wanting to be this race-loving representative company, like it just doesn't match and it always makes me view it with a sceptical eye" -Meredith Group 2

"it's almost like now they're deleting the history so they can like act like it never happened. They say Disney represents black consumers and everything is good now. But now their whole racist history is like deleted as if it never happened" -Allen Group 2

Participant Kliff from the mixed race group of focus group 3 stated that iconic companies were *"trying to represent (air quotes) a certain ethnicity or race"*, however, that they only touch the surface of representation followed by stating that they felt that it was rather *"ironic or hypocritical"* that brands with a history of racism or generally being unethical are trying to portray different races and ethnicities. Participant Kliff expressed that they felt this was *"a bit fake"* as it felt as if iconic brands were trying to tick a representation quota box of sorts, without addressed their history of problematic behaviour. Participant Kliff then ends with a rhetorical question *"So in a way can they ever truly represent a race and the culture surrounding it, when*

in the past they have caused harm?”. This seemed to be a thought-provoking question for the rest of the group, that was left unanswered, of a strong opinion and a negative take on iconic brands like Disney. Similarly, Meredith from group 2 stated they felt it was “*super weird*” that a brand like Disney which has had scandals with race and a history of racism is “*now wanting to be this race-loving representative company*”. Meredith, claims that Disney’s past does not match their current initiatives with representation and therefore participant Meredith views the company with a “*sceptical eye*”. Participant Allen, from the same focus group 2, at a different point of the discussion brings up that they felt that Disney is “*deleting their history, so they can act like it never happened*”. This is a similar take as Kliff, from focus group 3 who stated that they felt that Disney is “*just trying to tick a representation quota without actually changing or addressing their past problematic behaviour*”. Both participants felt that there was a lack of addressing the past by the iconic brands and as participant Allen states “*deleting their history*”. Unlike the previous quotes from focus group 1, which were made solely by Caucasian participants, these quotes came from a mixture of Black, Mixed-race and Caucasian participants that felt negatively about Disney’s current representation. These statements directly correspond to Breaux’s (2010) sentiments on Disney as a colourblind company, that never truly confronted its racist past, but instead deems it appropriate to capitalise off of racial minorities they once subjected to derogatory racial stereotypes. The phrase “*they’re deleting their history, so they can act like it never happened*” & *iconic brands were trying to tick a representation quota box of sorts, without addressed their history of problematic behaviour*” truly resonates with Breaux’s (2010) literature on Disney.

The last statement outright shows participant Johny from group 4’s discontent with Iconic brands as the following:

“They (iconic brands) are not ethical because they are powerful from a history of being the leaders in their industry and they can manage the market how they want. I mean they can say a lot of things they want to do for the good of society but they can also regulate the market how they want. Even they can set the standards just because they are Disney.”- Johny Group 4

This statement, like the previous, gives a negative take on iconic brands, however, it differs by stating how iconic brands are powerful from years of being leaders in their industry “*and they can manage the market how they want*”. Johny states that due to the status of iconic brands that

though they can make claims of wanting to change society for the better, at the end of the day, they are who regulate the market to “set the standards”. Breaux (2010) also provides that Disney as an iconic brand, is a powerful multimedia conglomerate, effectively promoting their movies through its social media and generating significant prerelease advertising for its films. This resonates with Johnny’s feelings about how iconic brands have so much power that they can potentially do as they please, including capitalising off of racial minorities without so much as an apology for their past indiscretions. The next subtheme corresponds to how participants felt that iconic brands were misaligned in their internal and external representation of race.

4.4.2 Misalignment of internal and external racial representation

Within the theme of Inconsistency between external brand image and company actions is the misalignment of internal and external company racial representation. This theme emerged in three different focus group discussions and participants conveyed a disdain for a lack of internal representation from iconic brands, especially when there are external representations. Focus group 1 conversed the following with each other:

“I think Procter and Gamble own Dove, and them as a company is like the exact opposite of Dove- while Dove’s campaigns are all for the people, Proctor and Gamble are all about selling at the end of the day, based on their scandals. And it just clashes, so I think it’s hard to get invested with any of these identity characteristics shown by them.” Cody Group 1

“I feel like it also depends on the company, obviously, because there are certain companies like Procter and Gamble, but there are probably some that do a good job. But it also comes down to the staff. People working for the company. Like if you have multicultural representation in your movie or advertisements, you need to have multicultural people working for you. Because if I see all those races from the outside and when I go into your office and it’s just white people, then you’re not going to be consistent. It’s not going to be genuine. That proves that you’re doing that just for the market, to satisfy the market, and what they expect from you. But then internally you’re doing like the exact opposite. So it makes no sense. For me you understand when watching Luca it was not done by an Italian, but it was done by an American who probably came to Italy for like one week and said: ‘Oh my God, I love Italy. I want to go back and make a movie about it.’ So I can imagine that representing another race is even more important to have someone from that race or culture represent a character.” Bella Group 1

“I think they put a lot of money into looking as ethical and representative as possible, rather than being actually representative.” Tryion Group 1

“I mean, I guess they're selling an idea at the end of the day as much as they're selling the products, and I think that's where things fall apart a little bit for me when it comes to it. So that you have to be able to see through the smoke a little bit of what you're being told.” Cody Group

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Here participants Tyrion, Bella and Cody have a conversation with each other starting with Cody mentioning the iconic brand Dove which is owned by Proctor and Gamble. They compare Dove’s marketing, which Cody describes as *“all for the people”*, given their diverse representation of women's bodies and race in their campaigns, to the firm Proctor & Gamble which has had ethical scandals. Cody continues by stating that because of this contrast between their marketing campaigns and the company’s scandals, *“it just clashes”* and therefore Cody finds it *“hard to get invested with any of the identity characteristics shown”* by the brand. Though Cody refers to environmental scandals, they feel as if this correlates to other ethical aspects such as representation. They view the company’s main goal as to sell products which makes it difficult to invest in believing the company cares about actually representing consumers. This is followed by participant Bella who states that *“it also depends on the company”*, stating that though there are companies such as Proctor and Gamble who have scandals, there may be some who do not. They then mention that *“it also comes down to the staff”*. Bella expresses that if a company has multicultural external representation in movies or advertisements this should be reflected in their company employment. Bella justifies that, if the external and internal representation does not align, this will keep the company from being consistent and that this proves that the company is only externally representing different cultures and races to *“satisfy the market.”* Bella then gives an example that they could relate to, being from Italian descent, of the Disney cartoon Luca. They felt that the movie was obviously written by an American who vacationed in Italy, and decided they loved Italy so much, they would write a Disney cartoon about it. Participant Bella ends by stating *“So I can imagine that representing another race is even more important to have someone from that race or culture represent a character.”* In this case, participant Bella shares that they believe it is even more important that another race be represented by the same race internally, as Luca was created by a non-Italian, just as every race should be presented by someone who understands its culture and identity.

This is then followed by participant Tyrion that plainly says *“I think they put a lot of money into looking as ethical and representative as possible, rather than being actually representative.”* As Iconic brands put a lot of money into their branding and external representation efforts compared to immersing representation within the company’s beliefs and values. This conversation is then ended by participant Cody who share that they believe that Iconic brands are *“selling an idea as much as they are selling a product”* which is why they feel like they have to *“see through the smoke a little bit of what you're being told.”* In other words, iconic brands cannot be trusted and believed in everything they say because they are selling an image as well as their products, and as a result, they must maintain appearances, which may not reflect the company as a whole.

Wagner, Lutz & Weitz’s (2009) literature develops a term called corporate hypocrisy, a similar ordeal to what Cody describes in his opinions of Procter & Gamble as a company compared to their brand Dove. Corporate hypocrisy is defined by Wagner et al. (2009) as the belief that a firm claims to be something that it is not. When inconsistent information about their own statements and observed behaviours emerge, firms may be viewed as hypocritical since they are similar (but not identical) to individuals.

As an example, organisations communicate more socially responsible initiatives but have been reported on numerous instances of irresponsible behaviour. Wanger et al. (2009) like Cody gives an example of an iconic brand (Starbucks) and how they have presented themselves as an avid adopter of fair-trade practices, however, the company has been criticised for trying to inhibit Ethiopian farmers from securing trademark protection for their coffee to be able to obtain a better price for themselves (Wagner et al. 2009; Adamy and Thurow 2007). This is a similar context to the one Cody had used about the brand Dove, and how they claim to care about representation of all women (be it race or body image), whilst the company has been known to have irresponsible behaviours in terms of sustainability.

Kele & Cassell's (2022) literature presents that within the last decade, companies have utilised representation externally, but not internally, both for regulatory compliance and business image enhancement, similar to Bella’s presumptions about the lack of representative alignment. Firms have redesigned their corporate communication to persuade the public that they are dedicated to diversity and inclusion by updating their diversity rhetorics, modifying mission statements and even incorporating photos of their diverse employees in their annual reports, websites and internal and external communications (Kele & Cassell’s 2022; Burgess, Wilkie and Dolan,

2021; Pasztor, 2019). Alike Bella's statements and Tyrions add on that firms put a lot of money into looking representative instead of actually being representative, Kele & Cassell's (2022) literature shows that such actions of modifying external communications to persuade consumers that firms are indeed diverse have been criticised as a strategically manufactured symbol of corporate citizenship. This is due to pressure from social and political issues, but may not be an accurate and authentic depiction of workforce diversity in the firms (Kele & Cassell 2022; Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2015; Windscheid et al.2018). As Bella had stated, if a firm does not have representation internally, but shows they do through external forces, it shows that they are only doing so to satisfy the market, directly aligning with what Kele & Cassell (2022) state in their study.

Similarly, focus group 2's participants Meredith and Philip discuss the lack of alignment between the company's internal representation compared to their external branding as the following:

"If they wanted to make big changes (iconic brands), I mean you probably have to look at who's running these companies and that's where you have to make the changes, not the actual stories they're producing. Often you see the company's diversity and the image they put out, it doesn't match. So for true representation also would require that the people that are involved in these types of projects actually, either need to be from that background or do really proper research so the involvement will also empower people working on it, not just the people viewing it."

Meredith Group 2

"Ya, actually even with the movie, if you look at the Django movie (referring to the movie Django Unchained), Django was made from Quentin Tarantino, a white dude who I think has even been racist in the past. Him making these films and being a 'representation' [air quotes] is so contradictory to him as a person. Also, what does he even know? Although he can do his research, but like for me, it doesn't feel real" - Philip Group 2

Meredith suggests that in order for iconic brands to change for the benefit of society, they should start by looking at who runs the company and making charges there, rather than on the stories they're producing. Meredith then states that *"often you see the company diversity and the image they put out, it doesn't match."* Followed by saying that *"for true representation"* would mean that the movies and projects with external representation would need internal representatives of those races, or people who do thorough research on the groups they are representing because this

would not only empower the consumers but the employees working on the projects. A former slave and his quest for freedom is depicted in the movie *Django Unchained* by Quentin Tarantino (a film that Philip refers to) and Philip says that Quentin Tarantino is Caucasian and that making such a film contradicts the director's history of racism. Philip ends by stating: *“Also, what does he even know? Although he can do his research, like for me, it doesn't feel real.”* Philip refers to participant Meredith's comment about the importance of employees either being from the race they represent or conducting thorough research. Philip suggests that even these measures may not be sufficient when it comes to sensitive subjects like depicting slavery because they may lack genuineness. It is worth noting that Philip, who is of the Black race, may have a strong personal connection to the portrayal of a Black character. Philip expresses a sentiment about the lack of connection between a white director and their depiction of slavery, highlighting an imbalance of power where the dominant race portrays a storyline that they cannot personally experience or connect with. This perspective aligns with Arya's (2021) literature on cultural appropriation, which describes it as an imbalance between dominant and marginalised cultures, with the dominant culture appropriating from the marginalised culture.

Although Quentin Tarantino, as an individual of the Caucasian race, does not represent a culture, his role as an iconic director from a dominant race portraying a marginalised race and historical depiction of slavery contributes to perpetuating inequality, marginalisation, and appropriation (Arya, 2021). This stands in contrast to cultural assimilation, which involves incorporating a marginalised culture into a host society. This may give an understanding as to why Philip feels uncomfortable with a powerful and iconic white director's depiction of slavery, considering his own West African descent, which may create a personal conflict and elicit an emotional response in his statement.

The next conversation is from focus group 4, between participants Penny, Harriet and Johny. This conversation also is connected to a misalignment, however, differs from the rest due to the mention of CSR:

“I definitely believe that the more diverse they are in a brand internally, the more diverse productions they also have. Because now with diversity, everybody is thinking differently. They will start considering different stuff that they never really thought of. For instance, if you're hiring an African person and telling the African person you need to make a production, or you need to make a movie, that African person will probably have or mostly have more knowledge about the African culture than a non-African person. So I definitely believe that the internal CSR reflects external CSR as well.” Penny Group 4

“Ya but they might have some people of different races that are in the company or in leading higher roles, but overall the board members and the CEOs, a lot of them are most likely white men. That is a fact that we can't escape. So I don't think it's necessary that the internal CSR is reflecting the external. They're showing off that they are. It's a branding thing. It's good for them, but I don't think they're doing the work within the company.” Harriet Group 4

“I agree with something that Penny said about when a company has a lot of diversity, but however, I think it's important asking where is the diversity part? You know, because sometimes the companies, they are saying, “Oh, we are so diverse, we have a lot of people with different genders, different sexual manifestations, different races,” but probably they are not in a power position as Harriet said, so they cannot talk about some specific topics.” Johnny Group 4

Penny mentions, as other participants in previous groups have stated, that the internal representation manifests in the external, giving the example of an employee from Africa as most likely to produce something from Africa. Penny then ends by stating *“I definitely think the internal CSR reflects the external.”* This is the only group to mention CSR, and participant Penny seems to link internal and external representation with CSR. After this has been mentioned participant Harriet responds by agreeing to what Penny says, however, adds that big company decision makers such as *“board members and the CEOs' ' are most likely to be Caucasian men.* Harriet goes on to say that internal and external CSR may not be the case, but it could be the company branding itself to look this way because it causes a positive effect amongst stakeholders, and Harriet does not believe they are *“doing the work”* within the company to be representative where it may matter. This resonates with participant Tryion’s statement from focus group 1, who says that iconic brands *“put a lot of money into looking as ethical and representative as possible, rather than being actually representative.”*

This is then followed by Johnny that starts by stating that they agree with what participant Penny says about internal representation reflecting externally, however, goes on to say that many companies also claim to adhere to diverse, races, sexualities and genders, but that *“they are not in a power position as Harriet said, so they cannot talk about specific topics”*. This statement shows agreement with what participant Harriet shares about power positions within iconic brands not having representation of races that can *“talk about specific topics”*. Similarly, Harris (2014), presents that historically in non-profit organisations board members have composed of largely white upper- and middle-class citizens and that less diverse boards had greater difficulty in responding to the varied needs of the population they served, implying the importance and need for diversity in director recruitment. This aligns with Harriets' statements on how board members are more likely to be Caucasian men, with similar statements from Johnny who agreed with Harriet in saying that representative employees were not in positions of power. Furthermore, Harriet sharing that they perceived iconic brands branding their company as representative, but not *“doing the work”* in being representative, corresponds once again to Cassell's (2022) findings on brands redesigning their diversity image to persuade consumers of their representation initiatives. Additionally, Cassell (2022) aligns with Harriet and Johnny's statements, as it shows that organisations often apply vague strategies to communicate diversity, creating a disconnect between their statements and actual practices (Cassell, 2022; Long, Doerer, and Stewart, 2015). Furthermore, diversity branding strategies though aiming to showcase fair and inclusive company culture, often lack accountability in promoting social justice, putting marginalised racial groups at a disadvantage (Cassell, 2022; Burgess, Wilkie, and Dolan, 2021; Byrd, 2018). This directly correlates to Harriets' assumptions that many iconic brands *“show off”* their representative without actually being so, as well as Johnny's incentives about the lack of marginalised groups in decision-making positions, where they can actually make a difference.

4.4.4 A flawed reflection of society

The last sub theme within inconsistency between external brand image and company actions, is a flawed reflection of society. This sub theme differs slightly from the other subthemes, as it is not about the misalignment between the company's brand image and its history or internal representation, but about the company's external marketing being a flawed representation of society itself, which still adheres to a misalignment from the company's behalf. Three different

focus groups mention the lack of reflection of society within iconic brands' marketing and start as a conversation within focus group 1:

“I find in Irish advertisements now you always see a mixed race couple with a mixed race child and it's not really that representative of the country itself. You have people from different places, but you don't have it like in the US or like in Australia where you have a longer history of people coming together and mixing. So it sometimes can border on not too much, but it's a diverse racial representation when it's not really necessary. If that makes any sense.” Cody Group 1

“I think the context depends on where the branding is taking place and should be reflected in the advertisement. So for example, again, Australia is very multicultural, No one looks like Margot Robbie. So that should be reflected in the advertisements. That should just be the bare minimum for an iconic brand when they market globally, also it's the minimum to represent all genders, that's the bare minimum too.” Gemma Group 1

“I feel like right now we're in a time where if an iconic company is making an ad they do the super representative type. So it's like one person from every race. Just to be able to say we have every representation, you know, So it's almost like they're doing it unnaturally.” Tyrion Group 1

“Kind of cynical, yeah. That's what it feels often like. It's forced. It kind of comes from a place of a marketing focus group where they're like: maybe we'll have this and we'll have this. it's like you're kind of checking off boxes rather than any kind of just real representation of anything within a society.” Cody Group 1

Here, the conversation begins with Cody explaining their experience of Irish advertisements, being from Ireland themselves and noticing that *“now you always see a mixed race couple with a mixed race child and it's not really representative of the country itself”*. Though this does not particularly pertain to Iconic brands but a general advertisement in Ireland, this statement of Irish advertisements not reflecting Irish society and having *“diverse racial representation when it's not really necessary”*, was followed up by Gemma who gives their take from an Australian perspective stating that *“the context depends on where the branding is taking place and should be reflected in the advertisement.”* and that a reflection of advertisements should *“be the bare minimum for an iconic brand when they market globally”*. Here, Gemma pulls the conversation back to iconic brands, stating that they should also reflect society. This was replied to by Tryion

who says that they feel that “we’re in a time where if an iconic company is making an ad they do the super representative type.” Tyrion then states that iconic brands do this “just to be able to say we have every representation, you know, So it’s almost like they’re doing it unnaturally.” This is a relevant take on iconic brands, as though the same participants have previously in other statements expressed that iconic brands should be inclusive and that they should still reflect society at the same time, depending on the context of advertising. Cody then ends the conversation by saying these advertisements can at times feel forced as if they are “checking off boxes rather than any kind of just real representation of anything within a society.” indicating that Cody feels as if iconic brands are going through certain criteria they need to have as physical characteristics in advertisements, however, not using people based on how society looks like. There seems to be a lack of examples of iconic brands doing so within this conversation, however, participants Molly, and Johny (from focus group 4) gave examples at different periods within the focus group discussion of having the same opinion as participants Tyrion, Gemma and Cody. Molly, though not giving a direct example gives a contradictory take on iconic brand representation compared to the previous conversation:

“They’re probably just proving that they can focus on something different (referring to the representation of races in Disney). But they should put more backgrounds together with different cultures. For example, if they were to make a movie about us, everyone’s from a different culture and background, so it makes sense to have a movie to reflect that, where every character has a different background.- Molly Group 1

“Right now it might be a luxury (representation in iconic brands), but it should be a necessity. We should be represented. But it needs to be as a result of society being diverse. So It shouldn’t be a luxury anymore.”- Georgia Group 2

“The newer cartoons like Encanto that is set in Colombia, show a more diversified version that doesn’t have the Westernised standard of beauty. The diversity of characters reflects the society of Latin American countries diversity” Johny Group 4

The first paragraph by Molly comes from the focus group 1 at a different point of discussion than the previous conversation. Molly refers to Disney cartoons and how they all have “older” stories

of different races and cultures and states that this may be because they're "*just proving that they can focus on something different.*" However Molly then goes on to say that it would be valuable for Disney consumers if Disney made a movie with people of different backgrounds, giving an example of how all the participants in focus group 1 are from different cultural backgrounds and it would make sense that Disney movies reflect society. From a separate discussion in focus group 2, Georgia starts off by saying that representation is currently a luxury to find by iconic brands, but it should be a necessity. This is contradictory to the statements made by focus group 1, who feel that iconic brands overdo representation, to the point where it does not reflect society. Georgia goes on to say "*We should be represented. But it needs to be as a result of society being diverse.*" Claiming that if society is diverse, representation by iconic brands' should not be a luxury, but a necessity. Focus group 1 consists of Caucasian participants, who believed iconic brands overrepresented themselves to the point that their advertising didn't reflect the society they advertised towards, however, Georgia is of Arabic descent. Georgia felt it was a luxury to be represented as an ethnic minority, and the Caucasian participants did not feel represented by their own society because they felt that iconic brands have an unnatural amount of representative race that did not match. The last statement by Johnny from focus group 4, however, gave an example of Disney's recent cartoon Encanto which Johnny felt did not have a Westernised standard of beauty and reflected "*the society of Latin American countries' diversity*". Though this is just one example where a participant felt an iconic brand reflects a society realistically, it is a contrast to the previous statements which felt that iconic brands did not reflect society, either because they were using representation unnaturally or because there was a lack of representation. Vredenburg et al. (2020) present that having inauthentic brand activism where a brand's marketing message is not aligned with its purpose, values and corporate practice, may adhere to "woke washing". Vredenburg et al. (2020) define "woke-washing" as brands that have unclear or indeterminate records of social cause practices (Vredenburg et al. 2018) but yet are attempting to market themselves as being concerned with issues of inequality and social injustice (Vredenburg et al. 2020; Sobande 2019, p. 18). All participants, regardless of race expressed that iconic brands' external marketing efforts did not accurately reflect society (either because there was too much representation, where it became unnatural or lack of representation), but at the same time, they all uniformly believed that these iconic brands wanted to portray themselves as companies that care about representation, even if their intentions may

not be genuine. This perception of iconic brands among consumers suggests the presence of inauthentic brand activism, as participants felt that the brands' marketing messages did not align with both society's values and their internal practices. This disconnect indicates a perception that iconic brands may engage in “woke-washing”, as defined by Vredenburg et al. (2020), where they lack a genuine commitment to social causes but attempt to market themselves as socially concerned and invested in representing society and addressing social injustice.

Chapter 5: Discussions

5.1 Introduction

According to the research findings, iconic brands using race representation are perceived by consumers as commodifying ethnicity and neglecting racial communities, a misrepresentation of race where they perpetuate phenotypic and cultural stereotypes, exotification, a lack of cultural understanding, and romanticising the West and white superiority. Lastly, consumers view iconic brands using race representation as an inconsistency between the brands' external image and their company actions, through their historical context, the misalignment of internal and external race representation, and a flawed reflection of society.

This chapter of the study focuses on discussing the findings and interpreting the results. It evaluates the significance of these findings, explores unexpected results, considers the implications of these findings, and examines how they align as well as challenge previous literature. Additionally, it explores how these findings contribute to the existing body of literature. This will start with expanding on contribution to each literature stream within the finding's themes, and then each individual relevant article within that stream.

5.2 Contributions to previous literature & implications

Here, a discussion of the findings from the previous chapter will be analysed as to how it connects to previous literature and evaluate the significance of this. This will be organised within the themes from the main headings of the findings:

5.2.1 Commodification of ethnicity

Consumers perceive the use of race representation by iconic brands as a form of commodification of ethnicities, lacking genuine support for racial communities. This significant finding suggests that consumers believe iconic brands incorporate race representation not with the sincere intention of representing minority races, but rather as an opportunistic strategy to target diverse consumers for their own financial gain. This aligns with the study's results, which also highlight the harmful role of commodification in iconic brands. Within the realm of cultural branding, these findings contribute to our understanding of ideology, iconic brands, and their role as brand activists.

Holt (2006) argues that iconic brands act as ideological parasites, capitalising on emerging ideologies to remain relevant and influence consumer behaviour. As consumers perceive iconic brands using race representation as a commodity, it supports Holt's (2006) argument that iconic brands rely on ideologies to maintain their status. Race representation may be the current ideology that iconic brands are fixated on. This study adds to the literature by providing further evidence that iconic brands not only exploit the gunfighter myth as analysed by Holt (2006) but also use race representation for the same purpose.

Furthermore, Moorman (2020) and Holt (2004) propose that iconic brands are activists and leaders in culture. Moorman (2020) argues that not all brands have the authority to engage in brand activism, as it is a defining characteristic of truly iconic brands. Moorman (2020) identifies seven lenses through which iconic brands can approach brand activism, with the fourth lens emphasising a calculative view where brand activism is pursued to gain a competitive edge in the market. This study reveals that consumers perceive iconic brands to solely adopt this calculative lens, focusing on profitability and market success. This challenges the notion that iconic brands adhere to the other six lenses of brand activism. The finding raises questions about the genuine ability of iconic brands to be brand activists and cultural leaders, particularly when consumers perceive their engagement with ethical dilemmas like race representation as driven solely by monetisation rather than a genuine commitment to societal improvement. This adds to Moorman's (2020) literature by showing that consumers view iconic brands as adhering only to the calculative lens of brand activism.

Moreover, Vredenburg et al. (2020) propose four different ways in which brands can engage in brand activism: absence of brand activism, silent brand activism, authentic brand activism, and inauthentic brand activism. Vredenburg et al. (2020) state that smaller brands can also partake in brand activism, contradicting Moorman and Holt (2004; 2020) on the exclusivity of iconic brands in using brand activism. This study finds that consumers believe iconic brands engage in brand activism to commodify race, which corresponds to inauthentic brand activism. Inauthentic brand activism implies that iconic brands embrace activist marketing messaging without a clear brand purpose and values, and it is perceived as insincere, deceptive, and even unethical. Vredenburg et al. (2020) provide the example of Pepsi's scandalous advertisement featuring reality star Kendall Jenner and the Black Lives Matter movement, which received severe backlash from consumers and was seen as "woke-washing." Therefore, this study further contributes to Vredenburg et al.'s (2020) findings by demonstrating that consumers believe inauthentic brand activism is associated with iconic brands attempting to align with socio political causes without genuine commitment.

This study contributes to the literature on consumer culture by shedding light on the commodification of race. According to Rogers (2006), the interaction between society and the marketplace involves the dynamics of race and culture, highlighting the prevalence of commodification. Commodification refers to the treatment of cultural objects as commodities, disregarding their cultural significance. Hasinoff (2008) further underscores that the commodification of race perpetuates harmful stereotypes. The findings of this study, where consumers perceive iconic brands using race representation as a commodity, align with the perspectives of both Rogers and Hasinoff (2006; 2008). It provides further evidence that the commodification of race and culture persists in the marketplace, with iconic brands playing a role in this process. While Rogers (2006) delves into the relationship between the marketplace and race, this study reveals that iconic brands contribute to the marketplace by capitalising on racial identities for their own financial gain.

This study contributes to the literature on ethics, within sustainability by examining societal expectations of iconic brands in terms of their ethical responsibilities. Windsor (2006)

emphasises that companies are expected to go beyond legal obligations and engage in moral reflection. However, unethical managers who prioritise corporate strategy over genuine philanthropy are perceived as untrustworthy by consumers. The findings of this study align with Windsor (2006) by demonstrating that consumers believe iconic brands prioritise profit by commodifying race rather than giving back to the racial communities they use in their branding, leading to a perception of untrustworthiness. While Windsor (2006) highlights the tendency of unethical management to prioritise strategy which leads to the perception of disingenuous philanthropy, this study's findings reveal that consumers believe iconic brands completely neglect their philanthropic efforts towards racial communities when using them. This adds to Carroll's (1991) literature by showing that the prioritisation of winning in the marketplace over philanthropic endeavours is not limited to unethical managers but also extends to iconic brands.

Furthermore, Carroll's (1991) CSR pyramid suggests that companies should aim to achieve philanthropic efforts if they want to fulfil their corporate social responsibility. However, this study's findings indicate that consumers believe many iconic brands, as industry leaders, do not give back to the communities they use in their branding to generate profit. While Carroll's (1991) pyramid suggests that companies can contribute to their ethical and philanthropic responsibilities once they meet their obligatory legal and economic obligations, this study challenges this notion for iconic brands as consumers perceive them as solely motivated by profit, without giving back to the racial communities they exploit.

5.2.2 Misrepresentation of race

The findings found consumers viewed racial representation by iconic brands as a form of misrepresentation, through enforcing stereotypes, exoticising racial minorities, romanticising race through a white lens and neglecting a cultural understanding in their representation. These findings contribute towards consumer culture theory, through widening the knowledge of (non)dominant identity projects and portrayals within the marketplace and the surrounding discourses that influence consumer behaviour. These findings specifically address the dialogue between iconic brands and racial non-dominant identities along with the structural discourses that uphold white consumers.

The findings found consumers viewed racial representation built on two different stereotypes: one based on phenotypes and the other on cultural narratives. Bone et al. (2014), found that racial identity is portrayed in a variety of archetypes as a result of the marketplace still being a victim of socio-historic discrimination. This study reinforced Bone et al's (2014) findings as consumers felt that iconic brands created stereotypical archetypes that perpetuate harmful stereotypes that reinforced systematic racism (i.e. ethnic features on evil characters, perpetuated criminal archetypes and people of colour). Harris et al. (2005) found that racial discrimination within the marketplace was often on a scale. Within this study respondents' opinions on iconic brands' racial profiling stereotypes equally ranged with the belief that Disney's portrayal of a race was an overt degradation and boarding criminal treatment through using ethnic phenotypes as a signalling method of an evil character, while other respondents viewed Disney's portrayal of race in more of a subtle degradation, depending on the impact on the consumers. Some respondents expressed the belief that if racial stereotypes were completely misrepresented, their impact on those races would be minimal.

Rogers (2006) found that social interactions between the marketplace and cultures, often lead to a range of different types of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation from brands in the form of commodification and exploitation often encourages harmful stereotypes through exoticising and fetishisation of racial identities as a result of the uneven power dynamic between the East and West. The findings of this study align with Rogers' (2006), however, this study expands upon this, with findings further demonstrating that these exotic stereotypes are interchangeable and mould depending on the socio-political activities of the time. This coincides with Schau et al. (2009) findings on identities can change within the marketplace from "triggers". This can be witnessed with one respondent's example of the 2001 terrorist 'trigger', altering the Middle Eastern stereotype.

The study also added to the existing literature on racial representation by exploring how it operates within an environment of white superiority. Bhopal (2018) found that the current Neoliberal political landscape upholds white privilege. Similarly, Davis (2018) found through "selling whiteness" that dominant groups are upheld by marketplace stigmatisation. The respondents from the study reaffirm this finding, by demonstrating racial representation often

romanticises whiteness, while also reinforcing white superiority through narratives. Through the organisation of the four focus groups based on racial phenotypes, this whiteness was revealed by the Caucasian group failing to mention the influence of white privilege in racial representation. This finding reiterates Burton's (2009) theory of whiteness, whereby he states the marketplace is often viewed through a white lens, thereby making it particularly hard for Caucasian identities to recognise their privilege.

The study's findings revealed that misrepresentation occurred when iconic brands lacked an understanding of a particular culture or race due to a lack of proximity. These findings align with the ideas presented by Joy et al. (2003), who argued that consumption in the marketplace contributes to the construction of identity through experiences. The study's results support the notion that consumers are not simply information processors but seek representation that provides a meaningful experience. The lack of experience is felt when iconic brands fail to conduct effective research or involve individuals who have knowledge of the culture being represented. The findings also reinforce the concept of tokenism, as discussed by Kanteer (1977, cited in Gustafson, 2008), where racial representation is superficially included for the sake of diversity. The theory of possessions and the extended self-proposed by Belk (1988), specifically the concept of contamination, is also applicable to this study. Respondents felt that the misrepresentation contaminated their own identity due to the lack of proximity and understanding. While Joy et al. (2003) focused on experientialism in the context of the food industry, and Belk (1988) had a broader perspective on contamination and the extended self, this study contributes by examining the interplay of experientialism and contamination specifically in relation to race. Furthermore, it expands on Kanteer's concept of tokenism by exploring a range of ethnic identities, including mixed-race consumers within Group 3.

5.2.3 Inconsistency between external brand image and company actions

The findings of an inconsistency between the external brand image and company actions, in terms of iconic brands' history, the misalignment between their internal and external race representation as well as their flawed reflection of society contributes within the stream of literature within cultural branding.

Tortelli et al.'s (2010) literature suggests that brand iconicity is measured by consumers based on the brand's cultural relevance, values, and beliefs, and posits that iconic brands enhance their iconicity by strengthening associations with important values. However, this study's findings indicate that consumers feel the use of different ethnicities and cultures in iconic brands is disingenuous, driven more by the desire to gain market advantage and profit rather than a genuine intention to represent diverse cultures and ethnicities. Moreover, consumers find that iconic brands sometimes push representation where it is not needed, leading to a perception that it does not accurately reflect society. This challenges Tortelli et al.'s (2010) assertion that iconic brands effectively connect with diverse cultural knowledge, as consumers feel that the use of race representation at times appears disconnected from society.

However, Testa et al. (2017) find that factors such as changes in consumer preferences and cultural trends, negative events or scandals damaging a brand's reputation, loss of innovation and trendsetting, and loss of economic value can contribute to de-iconisation. Despite the history of racism associated with some iconic brands as perceived by consumers, this study finds that iconic brands such as Disney, have not yet experienced de-iconisation, as consumers still engage with them. This challenges Testa et al.'s (2017) proposition regarding whether an ethical scandal is sufficient to lead to the downfall of iconic brands.

Moreover, the findings contribute to the literature on ethics within sustainability regarding iconic brands' lack of alignment of representation, both internally and externally, and the degree to which they implement diversity.

Aydon Simmons (2009) suggests that a holistic approach that integrates both internal and external responsibility fosters strong relationships with customers and contributes to the overall success of the company. While CSR is often considered from a management perspective, Aydon Simmons (2009) argues that internal ethical responsibility, manifested through perceived congruence in ethical dealings with customers and society, establishes a symbolic relationship that leads to satisfied stakeholders who become brand advocates.

However, this study's findings show that there is a misalignment between the internal and external ethical responsibility of iconic brands, specifically in relation to race representation. This lack of alignment leaves consumers feeling a disconnect and a lack of symbolic relationship

with the brand, as race representation may be used externally by iconic brands but not represented internally, resulting in inconsistencies in how specific ethnicities are portrayed. Additionally, consumers perceive a lack of representation of these ethnicities in higher leadership roles such as CEOs and board members, further exacerbating the perceived misalignment between the company's outputs and the distribution of power within the organisation. However, it is important to note that though consumers view a lack of alignment in iconic brands' internal and external representation, the consumers cannot truly know if iconic brand companies adhere to representation internally if they have not researched or have personal experience in said company. Based on the findings, consumers believe there is a lack of alignment due to inconsistencies in how race has been represented (through stereotypes, lack of cultural accuracy, exoticism and glorification of the West). Overall this contributes to Aydon Simmons (2009) as this study's findings reveal that there is a lack of alignment of ethical responsibility by iconic brands.

Furthermore, Burkas et al.'s (2022) typology categorises brands' approaches to diversity into four degrees: transformative, adaptive, passive, and performative. While iconic brands are often associated with brand activism and cultural leadership (Holt, 2004; Moorman, 2020), the findings of this study indicate that consumers believe iconic brands lean more toward a passive approach to diversity integration. This challenges Holt & Mormon's (2004;2020) notion that iconic brands lead in culture through brand activism but supports Burkas et al's (2022) typology because the findings suggest that iconic brands should embrace a more transformative approach according to the typology. Consumers perceive that iconic brands invest significant resources in the appearance of representation rather than genuinely integrating diversity into their company culture, likely due to past incidents of racism, and inconsistencies in how race has been portrayed in their branding.

5.3 Summary

To summarise what this study's findings have contributed to within all three streams of literature, three tables that represent each stream have been created to clearly show what has been contributed or challenged in separate literature through each finding in the study:

Literature within Cultural branding stream:	Contributions through findings within commodification of race:	Contributions through findings within Misrepresentation of race	Contributions through findings within inconsistency between external brand image and company actions
Holt (2004)	Challenges this study's claims to iconic brands being brand activist leading in culture as consumers think race representation is used superficially for profit and not the better of society		challenges the notion that iconic brands truly lead in culture through brand activism as they do not adhere to a transformative diversity implementation approach
Holt (2006)	Supports the study through evidence that iconic brands exploit ideology using race representation to gain market place relevance and profit		
Mormon (2020)	Challenges that all seven lenses adhere to iconic brands, as consumers only feel that iconic brands use activism within race representation for profit, which solely aligns with the calculative view		and challenges the notion that iconic brands truly lead in culture through brand activism as they do not adhere to a transformative diversity implementation approach
Vredenburg et al. (2020)	Contributes by demonstrating that consumers believe inauthentic brand activism is associated with iconic brands attempting to align with sociopolitical causes without genuine commitment		-
Tortelli et al.'s (2010)	-		Challenge the study's implications that iconic brands effectively connect with diverse

			cultural knowledge, as consumers feel that the use of race representation at times appears disconnected from society.
Testa et al. (2017)	-		Challenges whether an ethical scandal is sufficient to lead to the downfall of iconic brands

Table 5: Summary of contributions towards literature in cultural branding (source: the authors)

Literature within consumer culture stream:	Contributions through findings within the commodification of race:	Contributions through findings within Misrepresentation of race	Contributions through findings within inconsistency between external brand image and company actions
Davis (2009)	-	Provides further evidence to this theory by demonstrating that dominant consumers (white) were upheld through racial representation while discriminating racial minority identities.	-
Rogers (2006)	Provides further evidence that the commodification of race and culture persists in the marketplace, as a form of cultural appropriation with iconic brands playing a role in this process	Providing further evidence of cultural appropriations and the effects of eroticisation and fetishisation. This contributes further to this theory by demonstrating the interchangeable exoticised labels.	-
Burton (2009)	-	Provides further evidence of a “white lens” as participants from focus group 1	-

		(Caucasian) failed to recognise their own privilege and the white superiority narrative that was mentioned by other groups.	
Hasinoff (2008)	Provides further evidence that the commodification of race and culture persists in the marketplace, with iconic brands playing a role in this process	-	-
Kanter	-	Provides further evidence of tokenism, with consumers feeling like racial representation was insincere due to a lack of cultural understanding. Contributes to this theory by providing a deeper insight into the opinions of different ethnic identities.	-
Bhopal (2018)	-	Provides further evidence to this theory as respondents reveal current neoliberal political landscape affects the portrayal of non-dominant identities.	-
Harris et al (2015)	-	Provides further evidence that discrimination operates on a scale. However, findings contradict this by demonstrating that some respondents believed there was no scale at all.	-
Bone et al (2014)	-	Provide further examples of how racial	-

Table 6: Summary of contributions towards literature in consumer culture (source: the authors)

Literature within ethics, sustainability stream:	Contributions through findings within the commodification of race:	Contributions through findings within Misrepresentation of race:	Contributions through findings within inconsistency between external brand image and company actions
Windsor (2006)	findings reveal that consumers believe iconic brands completely neglect their philanthropic efforts towards racial communities when using them	-	-
Caroll (1991)	challenges this notion for iconic brands as consumers perceive them as solely motivated by profit, without giving back to the racial communities they exploit	-	-
Aydon Simmons (2009)	-	-	Consumers believe there is lack of alignment due to inconsistencies of how race has been represented
Burkas et al (2022)	-	-	suggests that iconic brands should embrace a more transformative approach according to the typology.

Table 7: Summary of contributions towards literature in ethics within sustainability (source: the authors)

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a summary of the findings of the research. An overview of the findings will be presented, along with recommendations for marketing managers. This chapter also reveals the limitations of the research and concludes with some suggestions for future research.

6.2 Conclusions

In conclusion, the qualitative approach of focus group discussions provided valuable insights into this study's research question of how consumers perceive race representation by iconic brands. The results reveal that consumers view it as a commodification of ethnicity, a misrepresentation of race, and an inconsistency between brand image and company actions.

The results suggest that consumers do not consider iconic brands to be genuinely ethical when it comes to respecting racial diversity. Instead, they perceive these brands as using race representation as a marketing tool to target and profit from diverse consumer demographics, without truly empowering the communities they represent. This highlights the need for brands to showcase culture and foster a genuine understanding of race, rather than superficially addressing diversity.

Furthermore, the study highlights that iconic brands can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, leading to stigmatisation. Consumers recognise the importance of addressing a brand's history and its commitment to improvement, however, feel that iconic brands have failed to address their past shortcomings, which can leave long-term negative impressions on consumers and erode trust.

In addition, consumers notice a discrepancy between the diverse brand image projected by iconic brands and the reality of their company actions. They observe that higher positions within these brands still favour dominant identities, such as Caucasian men. This misalignment undermines the legitimacy of brand representation and raises questions about the brands' commitment to true diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, branding comes across as forced and disingenuous, not truly reflecting consumer society.

Overall, the findings shed light on the need for iconic brands to move beyond superficial representation and embrace a genuine commitment to racial diversity. By addressing the commodification of ethnicity, misrepresentation of race, and inconsistency between brand image and company actions, brands can strive towards more meaningful and inclusive engagement with consumers and society as a whole.

6.2 Contributions

In integrating cultural branding with ethics from a consumer perspective, this study makes a significant and unique contribution to all three streams of literature. While Holt and Moorman (2004; 2020) have explored the concept of iconic brands as brand activists, this study goes further by examining how consumers perceive iconic brands' adherence to racial diversity in their branding efforts, with the aim of contributing to the betterment of society. It recognises that race representation is not only a matter of brand activism but also an ethical responsibility, as a result of affecting consumers' identity construction, and thus emphasising that leaders in the industry should uphold this.

Setting it apart from other research that predominantly approaches the topic of iconic brands and ethics from a management perspective (Bonera, Corvi, Codni, and Ma, 2017; Burgess, Wilkie, and Dolan, 2022; Aydon Simmons, 2009; Windsor, 2006; Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005; Ayozie, Ndubueze & Uche's, 2011; Borgerson and Schroeder, 2002; Holt, 2004; 2006; Moorman, 2020; Tortelli, Keh, & Chie, 2010; Pineda, Sanz-Marcos & Gordillo-Rodríguez, 2022; Cova and D'Antone, 2016; Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry & Kemper, 2020; Testa, Cova & Cantone, 2017), this study focuses on the consumer perspective and examines what aspects of race representation are important to the individuals who purchase from brands. By employing a qualitative approach through focus group discussions, it values the perspectives of consumers from heterogeneous ethnic backgrounds, acknowledging the unique experiences each ethnicity may have in perceiving representation. The discussion format encourages participants to share their experiences and consider new information within the focus groups, thereby enhancing the researchers' understanding of race representation in iconic brands

Conducted in Sweden, this study holds particular significance due to the country's recent influx of migration (Ulver and Laurell 2020). It offers valuable insights into the experiences of Swedish migrants with global brands, shedding light on considerations that brand managers should take into account at both local and global scales. This context-specific approach adds to the study's uniqueness and relevance in understanding the dynamics of race representation.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is crucial for managers to consider specific measures when implementing race representation in both large and small brands. First and foremost, firms should ensure that ethnicities are not misrepresented, aiming for an accurate reflection of society both externally and internally within the company. This entails having employees who represent the society they operate in and fostering diversity within upper management and positions of power. By incorporating diverse perspectives within the company, brands can effectively carry out their external representation in a way that resonates with consumers.

To avoid being perceived as commodifying race, brands should engage in philanthropic initiatives that empower the communities they feature in their external branding. This commitment to giving back demonstrates a genuine effort to value and uplift different ethnicities, rather than viewing them solely as a means to gain market relevance. These recommendations hold relevance for both global brands and those operating within Swedish society, as consumers appreciate the quality of representation, which is closely tied to the internal diversity of the company.

This study highlights the importance of considering certain measures to ensure responsible race representation. By avoiding misrepresentation, fostering internal and external diversity, and actively giving back to racial communities, brands can be perceived as more genuine and valuable in their portrayal of different ethnicities.

6.4 Limitations

This study has encountered several limitations, which can be summarised as follows:

Firstly, the cross-sectional nature of the study means that it captures consumers' perspectives during a specific time frame, without considering the longitudinal changes in attitudes towards race in branding. As societal ideologies evolve over time (Holt, 2004), it is important to acknowledge that consumer values and perceptions also change.

Secondly, the topic of race is highly subjective, and there is no definitive right or wrong within this complex subject area. It can be challenging to provide concrete solutions to the sensitive and ever-changing concept of race identity. Moreover, race is not an isolated identity but intersects with other important aspects such as gender and social class. These intersecting identities can significantly influence consumer experiences, and participants may have different perspectives even if they belong to the same racial group due to their other identity traits and life experiences.

Thirdly, while this study explores the consumer perspective of iconic brands in relation to race identity, it is important to note that the initial design of the focus group questions predominantly revolves around prompts related to Disney. Although Disney is undoubtedly an iconic brand, the researchers recognise its distinct history, which could potentially influence participants' opinions regarding iconic brands as a whole. To address this, a second set of questions was included that are more general in nature. However, since Disney is mentioned first in the focus group questions, it could potentially influence participants' associations with other iconic brands.

Lastly, this study focused solely on consumers residing in Sweden and their opinions on global iconic brands. The findings may vary significantly among participants from different geographical locations, which could impact the generalisability of the research findings.

6.5 Further Research

This study suggests several areas for further research. Firstly, adopting a longitudinal approach would be valuable in gaining an evolving understanding of consumer perceptions of race as portrayed by iconic brands. This would allow for the examination of how attitudes and values change over time, considering the dynamic nature of ideologies surrounding race (Holt, 2004).

Additionally, exploring the perceptions of a specific ethnicity in depth could provide a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of how that particular race views representation by iconic brands. It would also be beneficial to consider the influence of gender and social class as factors that shape consumer experiences and perceptions.

Last, conducting research in other geographical locations and societies is essential to capture diverse viewpoints. This would provide insights into how different cultural contexts and societal norms impact consumer perspectives on race representation by iconic brands.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Holt (2004) Axioms of Iconic Brands

1. Iconic brands address acute contradictions in society

Holt (2006) illustrates how Jack Daniels addresses societal contradictions through the gunfighter myth, which expresses following ideological demands wherever the action is. This process involves an analytical cultural selection that allows brands to discover untapped myth markets during specific periods (Holt, 2006). For instance, the ad agency of Jack Daniel's identified emerging symbolism and convinced management to launch a print campaign that capitalised on unresolved contradictions, solidifying the brand's position as the champion of gunfighter values (Holt, 2006). This example highlights how brands can identify and address societal contradictions, leading to iconic status. However, this approach is not limited to Jack Daniels. Uncles (2010) describes how brands, such as Apple, use storytelling and myths to address contradictions in society. For example, Apple's products, such as the iPad, resolved unique designs and user-friendly technology, responding to a deeper symbolism of a desire to stay connected in an increasingly impersonal and alienating society (Uncles, 2010). These different desires and anxieties linked to identity can be widely shared across a large population of people, leading to the development of iconic brands that address these contradictions (Holt, 2004).

2. Iconic brands perform myths that address these desires and anxieties

According to Holt (2006), iconic brands utilize modern myths to naturalise the status quo and contain otherwise destabilizing changes in society. Mythmaking has become an extension of cultural expression that creates a foundation for cultural architecture or even a mythical society (Holt, 2006). Iconic brands gain cultural power by expressing identity myths that provide collective salves for major contradictions in society, such as Jack Daniel's identity myth of ideal masculinity expressed through the gunfighter myth during a particular time (Holt, 2006).

When brands create myths that address consumer desires and anxieties, consumers associate those myths with the brand's product (Holt, 2003). By purchasing products that resolve their desires and anxieties, they establish a relationship with the brand (Holt, 2003). For example, Nike's myth of individual achievement through perseverance with the Air Jordan product in the late 1990s is an example of this phenomenon (Holt, 2003).

Iconic brands not only embody any myth but also strive to resolve tensions people feel in their lives (Holt, 2003). However, a truly iconic brand is not afraid to deviate from its original myth, such as in the case of Mountain Dew (Holt, 2003). As historical changes occur, so do the ideologies and myths of the time, and brands must adapt to remain relevant. Unfortunately, Mountain Dew failed to adapt to the prevailing black activist, hippie, and feminist movements that emerged due to massive urban riots, making Hillbilly's challenge myth irrelevant (Holt, 2003).

3. Identity myths reside in brands which consumers experience and share via ritual action

Stratton & Northcote (2016) argue that shared rituals among consumers strongly influence brands as they serve as the lens through which consumers interact with the brand's value systems. There are four reasons why consumers who identify themselves with a brand engage in ritualistic consumption behaviour according to Stratton & Northcote (2016). Firstly, they believe that the product has better performance and value for money than consumers with no ritual associations with the product. Secondly, rituals involve goal-directed actions, and thus, the delay between a ritual and the opportunity to consume the product enhances the pleasure of consumption. Thirdly, active participation in rituals increases enjoyment in the consumption

experience rather than being a passive audience. Fourthly, rituals require greater involvement, and thus, enhance enjoyment.

The significance of rituals for brands is evident in the formation of brand communities, which are self-organized groups of brand followers with no particular geographical limitations. As Muniz & O'guinn (2001) note, brand communities are specialized because they revolve around a branded good or service and are characterized by a shared consciousness, rituals, traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility towards the brand. These brand communities play an integral role in the brand's larger social construction and contribute to the brand's ultimate legacy. Therefore, engaging in ritual actions towards the brand is vital for becoming iconic (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001).

4. Identity myths are set in populist worlds

Gustafsson (2017) describes populist worlds as places where people create identity myths that reflect cultural contradictions. These worlds provide subculture outlets for individuals to express their identity projects in varying degrees of extremity. For example, Gustafsson (2017) describes a small group of runners who use a Facebook group to post their statistics and pictures and organise meet-ups. This group could serve as the basis for an identity myth that explains the cultural contradiction they are addressing.

According to Warren, Batra, Loureiro & Bagozzi (2019), brands can become cool by first tapping into small subcultures, even if they are not well-known to the broader population. Over time, these niche brands can gain a wider audience and become perceived as iconic, although they may need to be more autonomous. This phenomenon occurs because consumers tend to feel that brands are cooler when they are not yet popular. Brands that are familiar to the general population are also considered cool. Thus, subcultures that contain identity myths can gain consumer popularity and eventually attain iconic status.

5. Iconic brands perform as activists, leading culture

This axiom of iconic brands is the most relevant component of an iconic brand according to this study. Though There is no particular ethical component to making an iconic brand, Holt (2004) does state that iconic brands perform as activists. Moorman (2020) identified seven brand activism lenses that guide companies in deciding to what extent they want their brands to be

involved in political issues. These lenses influence the types of information companies focus on when making such decisions. The first lens is the brand authenticity view, where brand activism requires companies to act in a way that is consistent with their brand identity and authentically connects with their target audience. The second is the corporate citizen's view, which sees brand political activism as fulfilling a company's responsibility to contribute to the world in which they operate. The cultural authority view, which is the third lens, justifies brand political activism by acknowledging that brands are powerful cultural actors and have cultural authority, which establishes an expectation of involvement in social issues. The fourth lens, the calculative view, suggests that brand activism should only be pursued when it helps the company "win" in the marketplace. The fifth lens is the brand as educators view, which sees brand activism as a way to teach customers new ideas and behaviours to bring about social change. The sixth lens is the political mission view, which suggests that social change is the company's reason for being, and its products and services are tools for facilitating change in the world. Finally, the employee engagement view argues that brands can help companies attract and retain employees and increase productivity.

All of the lenses Moorman (2020) has identified are relevant to this study's research question. This study recognises that different iconic brands may adhere to one or more of these lenses and because this study is not focusing on a particular iconic brand, but iconic brands as a whole, it considers all lenses as equally important, particularly because Moorman (2020) states that not all brands have such authority, and only truly iconic brands can use activism as a means to further distinguish themselves from competitors.

Koch (2020) uses the brand Oatly as an example of using a typically unremarkable product as a socially significant food consumption object. This approach has enabled consumers to express and engage with their political values, ranging from veganism to environmentalism (Koch, 2020 cited in McCrown-Young, 2017; Ulver, 2019). By becoming a prominent player in the emerging myth market related to food system change, Oatly has established itself as an iconic brand, at the forefront of cultural debates over countervailing ideals and ideological appeals (Koch, 2020; Holt, 2002, 2004). This brand has achieved this status by leveraging an uncontested market space to position itself as a leader in plant-based food production (Koch, 2020).

6. Rely on breakthrough performances, rather than consistent communication

Brand consistency, as defined by Beverland, Wilner, and Micheli (2015), involves the standardisation of a brand image and associated meanings over time and place through names, symbols, and positioning themes. While it is important to reinforce brand identity, relying solely on consistency can be problematic because brands also need to adapt to changing circumstances (Beverland et al., 2015; Bengtsson et al., 2010). This is similar to Holt's (2004) Myth Market model, which shows that identity myths may change as society changes. Brands that rely on consistency tend to make incremental adaptations to maintain brand preference among existing customers, but this may lead to erosion of brand equity because it does not address shifting socio-cultural expectations or challenges faced by consumers, resulting in perceptions of irrelevance (Beverland et al., 2015; Holt, 2004).

On the other hand, brand relevance provides consumers with a perceived need or desire, which increases the brand's value and strength (Beverland et al., 2015). Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) argue that a brand's ability to create impactful change cannot come solely from its existing capabilities, but rather from the exploration of new opportunities. Beverland et al. (2015) demonstrate a relationship between consistency and incremental innovation, and relevance and radical innovation. Brand consistency focuses on existing competencies, which relate to incremental innovation characterised by relatively simple improvements, adaptations, and extensions that imitate competitive offerings. Brand relevance, on the other hand, focuses on the development of new knowledge by the brand, which relates to radical innovation characterised by discontinuity with the past and clear advances with high novelty from the customer's point of view.

According to Holt (2004, p. 10), to be an iconic brand, a brand must use breakthrough performances rather than relying solely on consistency. Breakthrough performances correlate to radical innovation and brand relevance, which show clear advances compared to the rest of the market (Beverland et al., 2015).

7. Enjoy a cultural halo effect

According to Kwon and Lennon (2009), the halo effect occurs when the evaluation of individual attributes of an object is influenced by the overall impression of the object. This phenomenon causes individual attribute ratings to show greater covariance than they would if evaluated independently. Leuthesser, Kohli, and Harich (1995) also note that the halo effect can result from

consumers' global attitudes towards a brand. Despite some limitations, halo measures are widely accepted as valid indicators of brand equity, according to Leuthesser et al. (1995). However, the halo effect can also be viewed as a general impression bias, as consumers may give an overall evaluation or impression of brand performance (Moliner, Fandos, Monferrer Tirado & Estrada, 2019).

Holt (2004, p. 10) states that Iconic brands enjoy a halo effect because it delivers such a powerful myth that consumers find it useful in cementing their identities and in turn solidifying their quality reputation. Smith, Read & López-Rodríguez (2010) gives an example of this using CSR and how it influences consumer behaviour, suggesting that consumers who are sensitive to CSR, trade off a product's ethical attributes with its effectiveness. This shows that if a brand has a myth that aligns with consumers' identity, they may overlook product efficiency and instead prioritise the brand's adherence to its identity myth.

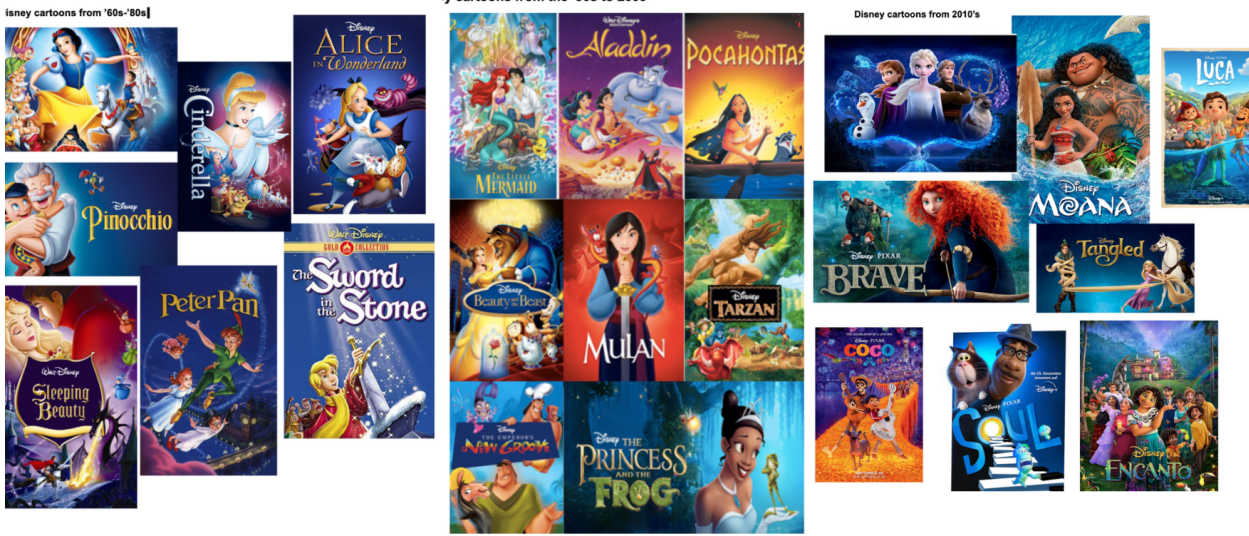
Holt (2004) proposed that these axioms which make up iconic brands are successful because these brands have an ability to meet specific needs in particular contexts, allowing them to leverage cultural changes in society as sociological soil and to remain iconic need to adhere to identity myths which change over the course of history (Pineda, Sanz-Marcos & Gordillo-Rodríguez, 2022; Holt, 2004).

Appendix B: Wojnar & Swanson (2007) Seven phenomenological approaches

Phemenology	Definition
Transcendental Phenomenological	Focuses on analysing the essential structures of consciousness and experience. It seeks to uncover the underlying, universal human experience.
Naturalistic phenomenology	is Concerned with how consciousness constitutes things in the world of nature, assuming that consciousness is part of nature.
Existential phenomenology	Focuses on concrete human existence, including issues of free choice or actions in life situations. It is concerned with how humans have created meaning and make

	choices in the world
Generative Historicist phenomenology	focuses on how meaning in human experience is generated within historical contexts of collective human experience over a period of time.
Genetic phenomenology	is Concerned with the genesis of the meaning of things within the individual experience.
Hermeneutic phenomenology	Focuses on the interpretation of lived experiences, emphasising the role of language and interpretation in shaping meaning.
Realist phenomenology	Believes consciousness and intentionality do not exist within consciousness, but are external to it.

Appendix C: Focus group questions & prompts



Questions about Disney prompts:

1. Do you notice any changes between the different timelines?
2. What are the differences and similarities you see between the decades?
3. Why do you think the company made these changes?
4. How do you think this affected Disney consumers?
5. How do you think this affected the company?
6. How does it resonate with your personal identity and experiences?
7. If you had the later examples growing up, would you have felt differently compared to earlier examples?
8. Do you think that children growing up in these different decades, having these examples of cartoons, would change the way they see themselves?
9. Do you think they have achieved representation?

General questions:

1. Consumer culture:

- What does it mean to you to have your race represented by an iconic brand?
- What do you think about brands using your ethnicity in their branding?
- What identity characteristics are most important to be represented by iconic brands?

2. Ethics within Sustainability:

- When you purchase from a company, is an external racial representation the norm?
- Do you believe it is a company's responsibility to represent its consumers in its marketing?
- If your favourite iconic brand had an ethical scandal would it affect your purchasing from them?
- What is an ethical brand to you in terms of racial representation?

3. Cultural Branding:

- Do you think there is an iconic brand that represents everybody?
- How do you think iconic brands affect other brands, in terms of representation?

Appendix D: Consent form layout

Consent form

We are pleased to invite you to participate in our Master thesis Focus group session. Your participation involves a casual group discussion with four other individuals for approximately 90 minutes, where one of the researchers will be monitoring and guiding the discussion as well as giving prompts for discussions.

Topic and Purpose: We, Sithara Novak and Josephine Palmeholt-Letchumanan are both postgraduate students from Lund University, studying International Marketing & Brand Management are conducting a research study to examine your views within the subject of consumer research and consumer culture, specifically your outlook on representation within iconic brands. We would greatly benefit from a consumer perspective and achieve an increased understanding of your opinions.

Potential risk: Minimal risks such as loss of time and fatigue

Data handling and confidentiality: All data will be anonymous and only the results of the study will be used with no involvement of names.

Voluntary participation: You are not required to participate and may choose not to participate. Your participation in the focus group is strictly voluntary and you may end at any time without penalty.

Debriefing to come: At the conclusion of your participation, the focus group will be debriefed on the purpose of the study and if you wish to be given information about how to access the final results, this may be done.

If at any point of participating, you have any questions, you may contact us at:

Sithara.novak@gmail.com or josephineletchumanan98@gmail.com

I, _____ consent to participate in the research study outlined above. I have been informed of the procedure and how I may obtain the results of the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point without negative consequences to myself.

Signed _____ Date _____