

**Investigating the Role of Branding in Strategic Communication: A Qualitative Study of the
GCIS and Department of Tourism**

by

SEAPEI PASCALINE LEBELE

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SUPERVISOR: DR R.S. NETANDA

&

CO-SUPERVISOR: DR M.R. MOILA

03 March 2026

Declaration

Name: Seapei Pascaline Lebele

Student number: 33888639

Degree: Master of Arts in Communication Science

I declare that the dissertation titled: **Investigating the role of branding in strategic communication: A qualitative study of the GCIS and Department of Tourism** is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references, and that any use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been fully disclosed.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to the appropriate originality detection system, which is endorsed by UNISA, and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

I further declare that where AI tools have been used in the preparation of this dissertation, their use has been limited to ethically permissible support, has been fully disclosed, and does not replace my own original research, my independent critical thinking and analysis, or authorship responsibilities.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Mrs Esther Serialong Phiri, the late Mr John Guja Phiri, and my sisters, Ms Beauty Minnie Chautsane and the late Ms Elizabeth Martha “Dinky” Phiri. “I am, because of you”, and for this, I am truly and forever grateful. *Ke a leboga*.

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To the Department of Tourism and the GCIS, thank you for allowing me to conduct my research at your organisations. It is greatly appreciated. I hope this study will make a meaningful contribution to both departments.

To all the participants, thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. It would not have been possible without you.

My colleague and friend, Baasa, as we affectionately call each other, it was at your graduation that I got inspired to study further, and you promised to support me, and you kept your promise. Thank you. I am forever grateful. On to the next one!

Ngwana Seapei, Ms Ofentse Lebele, thank you for being my biggest cheerleader and always reminding me that I will complete. Thank you for your patience. I love you, ngwana Seapei.

Abstract

This study investigated the role of branding in strategic communication within the South African government, with reference to the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) and the Department of Tourism. Although government branding has attracted scholarly attention, it is often treated in isolation from broader strategic communication processes. This separation creates gaps in understanding how branding functions as an integrated component of government communication. Furthermore, limited research has examined government branding through a systems theory lens.

Grounded in systems theory, the study adopted a qualitative, phenomenological research design to explore communicators' experiences of branding within their institutional contexts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirteen purposively selected communication practitioners from the GCIS and the Department of Tourism. Data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring codes and themes.

The findings indicate that branding plays a strategic role in enhancing brand awareness, thereby contributing to the achievement of institutional objectives. Branding was also found to support differentiation, credibility, trust-building, and legitimacy in government communication, although its effectiveness still depends on consistent implementation and alignment with other organisational objectives. However, the study identified challenges related to brand consistency, highlighting the need for ongoing training and internal alignment among communicators and other staff members.

The study contributes to advancing government communication policy and practice by positioning branding as an integral component of strategic communication rather than a standalone activity. It further enriches the literature on government branding by applying systems theory and recommends a phased approach to reinforcing implementation, improving guidelines, and fostering institutional learning to enhance effectiveness in practice and additional research to deepen theoretical understanding in this area.

Keywords/Concepts: Branding, strategic communication, government communication, communicator

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List of Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System
CI	Corporate Identity
COA	Coat of Arms
HRD	Human Resource Development
GCF	Government Communicators Forum
ICF	Internal Communicators Forum
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
RO	Research Objective

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of branding in strategic communication within the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) and the Department of Tourism.

Public sector branding as an area of research interest has increased over the past few years. Establishing a framework that facilitates brand growth, sustainability, and encapsulating the organisational values, branding enhances communication (Aaker, 2023). Branding is an essential component of organisational communication, as it encapsulates the organisation's essence, goal, and objectives through brand tone and design (Jovanovska, 2020). Furthermore, branding helps sustain mutually beneficial relationships by amplifying the organisation's awareness among its publics (Lestari, Dimyati & Shihab, 2017).

The GCIS is responsible for government communications in South Africa. It ensures that all three spheres of government, public entities, and agencies conform to the policies, principles, and standards developed for a communication system that is efficient and effective (GCIS, 2025a). The GCIS developed, published and manages the National Coat of Arms, Corporate Identity (CI) and Branding guidelines in 2005. This was an effort to ensure coherent, uniform branding across the national government departments (GCIS, 2005).

Furthermore, the core mandate of the Department of Tourism is to increase South Africa's tourist arrivals, improve the industry's economic performance, enhance employment prospects within the sector, and ensure the efficient utilisation of public funds for the benefit of South African citizens. Additionally, the Department enables the country to be recognised as a robust, attractive, and competitive tourism brand on a global scale (Department of Tourism, 2025). Internally, the CI and branding

guidelines developed by the GCIS are implemented and managed by the Chief Directorate: Communications (Department of Tourism, [sa]).

Branding is a phrase that is often used but has not been thoroughly described since everyone believes they know what it means and how it should be used (Avis & Henderson, 2022). Most people assume it relates to visuals, such as an organisation's logo. However, in strategic terms, it encompasses much more; it should be reflected verbally, visually, and in written form, communicating the organisation's mission, vision and values. It reflects how government departments, through communication, live their values and how these are presented and perceived by the organisation's publics (Martinelli, 2021). The conceptual contradiction appears at this point. Branding is traditionally a marketing concept, and strategic communication scholarship has not always incorporated it as a crucial theoretical construct, even though it is essential to how organisations differentiate themselves. Expanding on this perspective, De Villiers, Degenaar, and Fourie (2025) posit that organisational branding and strategic communication concepts often develop simultaneously with limited theoretical overlap, indicating that branding remains underexplored within broader strategic communication frameworks.

In the case of the government, branding needs to be more clearly understood. It is frequently viewed in isolation from other aspects of organisational communication, resulting in a disconnect between how the organisation interacts with its audience and how they perceive it. Furthermore, misusing and mishandling branding will result in inefficient and ineffective organisational communication efforts, as a lack of integration hinders trust, message clarity and communication outcomes in general (Sharma, Mahajan & Kapse, 2024). For example, government event posters will have the national department, provincial, district and local municipality logos, making it seem as if the various spheres are competing when one logo can represent the entire government and communicate a more united public service (Department of Tourism, 2022).

Despite the idea that strategic communication is the purposeful use of all organisational communication tools to achieve its goals, not all purposeful communication is strategic (Zerfass, Verčič, Nothhaf & Werder, 2018). For instance,

the use of a political principal's image for a government campaign, then two weeks later, there is a cabinet reshuffle, and the person no longer occupies that position. Arguably, the decision to brand the campaign with that image was purposeful but not strategic. Therefore, strategic communication affects how communication management is viewed and how organisational communication strategies are developed and implemented (Palmieri & Mazzali-Lurati, 2021).

The GCIS (2014) provides an outline for developing a communication strategy. However, the outline excludes a branding plan but includes a media plan and a stakeholder engagement strategy. Additionally, the role of branding in government communication is not articulated clearly in the approved Government Communication Policy of 2025. From a theoretical perspective, Aaker (2023) posits that Joseph Schumpeter, known as the “father of disruptive innovation”, also did not include branding in his theories. Based on the preceding statements, the importance of branding in strategic communication is often downplayed and results in communication inconsistencies, i.e., uncoordinated organisational communication efforts. These limitations reflect a broader conceptual tendency in both practice and theory to prioritise other communication efforts over branding.

Branding allows the organisations to strategically position and adapt itself to meet the expectations of all stakeholders, thereby enabling integrated communication within the organisations. It allows the organisations to distinguish itself from comparable organisations and be seen as having a distinct business line. Consequently, this demonstrates that branding is suggestive of strategic positioning (Schmeltz & Kjeldsen, 2016; Cornelissen, 2017). Leijerholt, Chapleo and O'Sullivan (2019b), in their study titled “*A brand within a brand: An integrated understanding of internal brand management and brand architecture in the public sector*”, argue that the public sector will benefit significantly from the advantages of branding.

While the government utilises branding to communicate, there seems to be limited exploration of branding within national government departments in South Africa, particularly the Department of Tourism and the GCIS. Even though government branding studies have increased over the last decade (Manoharan, Hohensinn & Wu, 2025), the role of branding in strategic government communication has not received

much attention. However, its role in strategic government communication has not received as much attention. Against this background, to allow for an in-depth analysis of practices, challenges and perceptions encountered by the two departments, the study qualitatively explored how branding functions as a strategic communication tool.

1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The branding process in government needs to be clarified. Each department employs branding at its discretion, resulting in variations. These variations result from the GCIS delegating the branding aspect to the heads of communications (GCIS, 2025a). To reinforce this statement, Reghunathan (2021) asserts that government agencies frequently make the error of hurriedly establishing brands without a cohesive branding plan when introducing new services or campaigns. This practical ambiguity, however, also highlights a theoretical limitation. When branding becomes disconnected from the strategic government communication process that should be followed to align policy meaning, organisational identity, and stakeholder expectations, if it is viewed only as optional or as a visual aesthetic.

In this context, branding should be coordinated with other organisational communication endeavours. Inadequate coordination of communication activities may impede the organisation's ability to achieve its goals. Contrary to Bastos and Levy's (2012) notion that branding conveys a particular message about the organisation, they do not consider the implications or the alignment of the requested amendments with the organisation's mandate. For example, when presenting artwork to clients, it is common to receive feedback requesting the inclusion of additional logos and changes to different colours.

Leijerholt et al. (2019b) suggest that future research should focus on gathering additional empirical evidence on the probable advantages and branding techniques applicable to public organisations. In the absence of this comprehension, public organisations may adopt branding techniques from the private sector without being aware of their suitability for the public sector. Using the prior example, in the private sector, various logos would be utilised in a campaign to denote the sponsorship level

of the campaign. However, applying the identical approach in the public sector might convey a different message.

Within the context of the public sector, the researcher has encountered a notable lack of understanding among employees regarding the concept of "branding" and its intended meaning. It is assumed that it is a logo, pull-up banner, entrance signage, and so on. Therefore, missing communication opportunities, which in turn means that the messages might not have yielded the desired outcomes for the organisation. This served as an impetus to investigate the role of branding in strategic communication in government.

Against this backdrop, the study sought to comprehensively investigate the role of branding in strategic communication within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism. It would contribute to the formulation of organisational communication policies as it is intended to explore and describe the role of branding in strategic communication. Additionally, it aimed to create awareness among government communicators about the role and significance of branding in strategic communication. Furthermore, it strived to contribute to the body of knowledge on government branding as a strategic communication tool.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.3.1 Problem statement

In government, branding is often misconstrued, inconsistently applied and lacks a coherent unified approach. Although the private sector has entrenched systems, government departments such as the GCIS and the Department of Tourism struggle to align branding with strategic communication objectives. Furthermore, the existing literature mainly focuses on private sector and public sector institutions, such as higher education institutions and empirical research on how branding functions in South African government departments is limited (Thokoa, Naidoo & Herbst, 2022). This void hinders the provision of contextually relevant advice to communicators and the field's theoretical advancement. Consequently, departments become vulnerable to adopting inappropriate private sector branding practices due to a lack of understanding of these

practices and a failure to consider their unique mandates and audiences (Leijerholt, Biedenbach & Hulten, 2019a).

In practice, branding in government is often reduced to visual identity components, such as logos, banners, and signage. Therefore, overlooking branding's wider role in fostering the organisation's identity, image, trust, credibility and reputation. This limited conceptualisation leads to fragmented implementation and undermines branding's potential as a strategic communication tool. Furthermore, the lack of integration between other communication activities and branding hinders the coherence and effectiveness of government messaging. To enhance the strategic communication in government, it is crucial to address this problem. Therefore, an in-depth comprehension of the role of branding can inform policy and practice by establishing branding as an essential aspect of strategic communication.

In line with the above, the study sought to qualitatively explore and describe the role of branding in strategic communication within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.

The next section outlines the research questions that guided the study.

1.3.2 Purpose of the study

A research aim is a succinct description of the project's goal. It provides a clear sense of the background and key ideas the researcher will be examining (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). The purpose statement often encompasses the core phenomenon under investigation, the participants, the study's location, and the study's methodology (Leavy, 2015). The study aimed to qualitatively investigate the role of branding in strategic communication, with a focus on the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.

1.3.3 Research objectives

Research objectives serve as the avenues through which the researcher plans to accomplish the study goal (Dawson, 2016). Moreover, Bailey (2016) asserts that

research objectives are more precise than the aim and directly pertain to the study issue. The study had exploratory and descriptive objectives, and they were as follows:

1.3.3.1 Main research objective

- To investigate the role of branding as a strategic communication tool in advancing the organisational objectives of the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.

1.3.3.2 Sub-research objectives

- To investigate and gain insight into the contribution of branding as a tool in strategic communication.
- To establish how the GCIS and the Department of Tourism implement branding.
- To explore the role of branding in strategic communication within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.
- To establish how branding can be made more effective within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.

1.3.4 Research questions

A research question aims to narrow the scope and establish a framework for the study. It is ambiguous yet effectively expresses the subject matter intended to be studied (Kivunja, 2016; Creswell, 2023). Additionally, it provides direction on the methodology for the inquiry. A research question bolsters a concentrated, debatable argument and provides a coherent line of reasoning (Ratan, Anand & Ratan, 2018). The study sought to answer the following main and sub-research questions:

1.3.4.1 Main research question

What is the role of branding as a strategic communication tool in advancing the organisational objectives of the GCIS and the Department of Tourism?

1.3.4.2 Sub-research questions

- What strategic role does branding play in GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
- How is branding implemented within GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
- How does branding as a strategic communication lead to the achievement of organisational goals at GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
- How can branding as a form of strategic communication be made effective?

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is the lens through which the study is viewed. The Systems Theory was considered best suited for the study because, from a strategic communication point of view, all communication activities within an organisation should be integrated (Radwan & Mousa, 2020; Canel & Sanders, 2015), thus creating a fully functional, comprehensive communication system (University of South Africa, 2021). Furthermore, it supports the notion of holism and the belief that the sum of the elements of the system is greater than the whole. The interconnectedness of the system's elements, their adaptation to the environment, and the provision of a feedback loop linking the internal and external environments to maintain a state of equilibrium (Jackson & Moraes, 2023; Lai & Lin, 2017). Knowledge of the system and the roles of its components is crucial, as this contributes to the effective functioning of the system. It clarifies the fluid relations and the interconnectedness evident between the system and its environment (Arnold, Kleve & Pieper, 2024). The systems theory, therefore, provides a framework for addressing the research objectives and questions, and is unpacked in chapter two.

The following section outlines the research methodology and its components.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical and systematic process followed for data collection, analysis and interpretation is referred to as research methodology. Components of research methodology include research paradigm, approach, design, population, sampling,

data collection and analysis methods, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations (Sreekumar, 2026), which were discussed in the next section.

1.5.1 Research paradigm

Saunders et al. (2023) posit that a research paradigm comprises a set of beliefs that shape the contextual framework, theoretical approaches and operational methods of a group. It has an impact on how the researcher views and interprets the subject matter (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). According to Saunders et al. (2023), there are several research paradigms, and these include:

- a) **Pragmatism**, which affirms that concepts may be utilised across a variety of research methodologies and are significant only when they encourage action.
- b) **Positivism**, which is usually associated with quantitative research methods and refers to the natural scientist's philosophical stance, which is concerned with prescriptive generalisations.
- c) **Critical realism**, which emphasises understanding of experienced and observed phenomena in terms of the fundamental constructions of reality that influence perceptible phenomena. This paradigm is associated with various research approaches.
- d) **Postmodernism**, which is usually associated with qualitative research approaches and aims to interrogate and reveal the influences that perpetuate existing realities.
- e) **Interpretivism**, which is also generally linked to qualitative research approaches, investigates a phenomenon extensively and does not assume that findings can be generalised.

The study adopted the interpretive perspective because it enabled the researcher to obtain a new, deeper comprehension and interpretations from participants (Saunders et al., 2023) regarding the role of branding in strategic communication. Consistent with Leavy's (2017) assertion, the participants' subjective interpretation and comprehension of the research issue were of value to the study.

1.5.2 Research approach

Hosseini (2020) asserts that a method that deals with non-numerical data and is naturalistic is referred to as qualitative research. It aims to explore and understand, rather than control factors or explain the phenomenon. The study adopted a qualitative research approach informed by an interpretivist perspective. Qualitative research was deemed suitable for the study because it emphasises the exploration of phenomena that occur in real-life environments (Mills & Birk, 2017). Employing this approach allowed the researcher to conduct a thorough and unbiased exploration and description of branding as a strategic government communication tool (Creswell & Poth, 2025; Renjith, Yesodharan, Noronha, Ladd, & George, 2021).

1.5.3 Research design

Loseke (2017) opines that a research design refers to the comprehensive strategy (including the sample selection, data collection techniques, tools and data analysis techniques) a researcher would employ to obtain answers or develop a profound comprehension of the study problem. Furthermore, Oranga and Matere (2023) assert that there are five types of qualitative research designs, namely:

- a) **Narrative**, which involves a series of events, typically from one or more people, to understand their viewpoints, experiences, or emotions related to the research issue.
- b) **Phenomenology**, which entails a sequence of events, generally involving one or more people, to understand their viewpoints, experiences, or emotions related to the research issue.
- c) **Grounded Theory** aims to generate a theory through methodical data collection and analysis.
- d) **Ethnography** involves the researcher integrating themselves into the participants' environment and is grounded in cultural and social anthropology.
- e) A **Case study** is an in-depth analysis of how a particular occurrence, circumstance, or person evolved in a real-world setting.

The study employed a phenomenological research design, which enabled the researcher to gain a deeper comprehension of the participants' perspectives, insights and experiences regarding the significance of branding within the context of strategic communication. Aligned to the interpretivist perspective, the selected research design further allowed flexibility during data collection and analysis processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). It enabled the study of the research issue as experienced by the participants (Watson, 2024).

1.5.4 Population

Cooper and Schindler (2014) define "population" as a group of people, objects, or occurrences that have common characteristics that are relevant to the study and to which the findings can be applied and generalised. Moreover, identifying the population sets boundaries for the study and provides an environmental context, and helps the researcher focus and avoid a generic approach. Additionally, having defined boundaries enables the researcher to clearly identify the target and accessible populations while ensuring study coherence (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). The study's population comprised 13 communicators ranked differently across the GCIS and the Department of Tourism. The participants' diverse ranks and work experience enabled the researcher to obtain varying perspectives. The latter is congruent with Leedy and Ormord's (2015) assertion that when employing the phenomenological research design, participants should possess direct experience with the investigated phenomenon.

1.5.5 Sampling method

The procedure of selecting a small number of representatives from a population to participate in a study is referred to as sampling (Barragán-Landy, Sousa, Romero, & Leão, 2020). Gill (2020) posits that the frequently used qualitative sampling techniques include:

- a) **Convenience sampling:** Prospective participants offer their time to participate in the study.

- b) **Snowball sampling:** Participants suggest or recommend other prospective participants.
- c) **Purposive sampling:** Participants are specifically selected based on their expertise or experience with the research issue.
- d) **Theoretical sampling:** The researcher selects samples to develop a hypothesis.

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select participants. This method was suitable for the study because of its alignment with the phenomenological research design. Furthermore, to achieve the objectives of the study, there was a need to recruit participants who possessed specific characteristics. These characteristics included that participants be employed within the communications units of the departments specified in the study, have two or more years of work experience in the government communication environment, and possess formal qualifications. To obtain diverse perspectives, the participants' hierarchical levels were considered when determining the sample. Lastly, the size of earmarked units within the departments served as the basis for the sample size.

1.5.6 Data collection method

Creswell and Poth (2025) postulate that data collection is a sequence of connected tasks designed to obtain high-quality information to address the research question. Qualitative data can be collected through observations, document analysis, interviews or digital materials, audiovisual and social media (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Interviews were deemed suitable for the study. Karatsareas (2022) asserts that interviews are a speaking event that resembles discussions between various parties in which a researcher extracts information from the participants. There are three different types of interviews, namely:

- a) **Structured interviews:** the interviewer asks participants predetermined questions in a certain sequence.
- b) **Unstructured interviews:** interviews do not follow a set order and allow participants to answer questions freely and move between topics.

- c) **Semi-structured interviews:** a blend of the two aforementioned techniques, using both prepared and unprepared questions.

After obtaining research ethics clearance from the University of South Africa (UNISA) and permission to conduct the research from the GCIS and the Department of Tourism, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in English with the thirteen selected participants. This technique was suitable for the study as it enabled the researcher to evaluate the communicators' perceptions of branding and its role in strategic communication within the government (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Additionally, this technique allowed for flexibility during the interviews to probe for more information (Baker, Hutt, Bosch, Ocumpaugh, Biswas, Paquette, Andres, Nasiar & Munshi, 2024). For convenience, all participants chose to have the interviews conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. The interviews and proceedings were recorded using the application, an iPad voice memo, and typed notes.

1.5.7 Data analysis method

Mezmir (2020) asserts that qualitative data analysis entails the categorisation and interpretation of spoken and visual information to derive conclusions regarding its implicit and explicit dimensions, as well as to construct the meaning of the data and its representation. The data analysis phase has a critical role in shaping the overall conclusions drawn from the study. The study employed thematic analysis to methodically assess, categorise and interpret the collected data. This technique was deemed suitable for the study because of its flexibility to amend where necessary, its applicability to a variety of texts and its ability to enable the exploration and description of the role of branding in strategic communication within the two departments (Allen, 2017; Neuman, 2014). Following Braun and Clark's (2006) six-step approach, the researcher ensured that they familiarised themselves with the data, generated codes, searched, reviewed and refined themes, and lastly produced a write-up of the themes that emerged during data analysis.

1.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

In accordance with the seminal work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), Wagner et al. (2012) further state that trustworthiness should be assessed through credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability, which helps in upholding the integrity of the study. Given that the researcher is an employee of the Department of Tourism, they sought to mitigate this bias by adhering to research principles during data collection. Furthermore, to ensure that the study is relatable to others, the researcher sought input and advice from the supervisors. To verify that the participants' perspectives were properly recorded, the researcher also allowed them to review the data interpretation.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher ensured that they were acquainted with UNISA's Policy on Research Ethics of 2016. In line with the Policy on Research Ethics (2016), research ethics clearance from UNISA and permission to conduct research from the selected organisations were obtained prior to data collection. Informed consent was sought from the participants before data collection. This process was done through the Human Resource Development units of the selected departments, which also aligned with the guidelines of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), as the participants were able to share their personal details with the researcher. Furthermore, pseudonyms were adopted to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants, and participation in the study was completely voluntary.

1.8. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.8.1 Limitations

Limitations of a study are difficulties or obstacles that may be outside the researcher's control but influence the methodology and or the findings of the research (Akanle, Ademuson & Shittu, 2020). The study aimed to investigate the role of branding in strategic communication within government. There are over 20 national government departments. However, only two were targeted for the study because it was not

practical to target all due to time constraints and the lack of both human and financial resources to conduct a study of this magnitude. Furthermore, given the size of the study, the results cannot be generalised for all national departments. To comply with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), as recommended when the researcher applied for Ethical Clearance, the recruitment of participants proved challenging, as the researcher had to rely on Human Resource Development units within the department to make initial contact with prospective participants.

1.8.2 Delimitations

Deliberate inclusionary and exclusionary choices made by the researcher during the study development stage are referred to as delimitations (Coker, 2022). This study adhered to a meticulous plan that included and excluded certain aspects to achieve the study's objectives. The study focused on the GCIS, as the custodian of government communications, and the Department of Tourism, as the implementer of policies and guidelines set by the GCIS. To explore the role of branding in strategic communication within the departments, the study included only participants employed in the communications units of the selected departments and with two or more years of experience in government communication, aligning with the phenomenological design employed in the study. Thirteen communicators from both departments participated, which does not constitute a representative sample of national government departments. However, these delimitations may facilitate a more extensive investigation encompassing all national government departments.

1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following terms have been defined for the proposed study:

Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is defined as “the purposeful use of communication by an organisation to fulfil its mission” (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007:3). Zerfass et al. (2018) add that it includes all communication required for the organisation's survival and continued success. As a result, the claim

is that it replaces "integrated organisational communication." In the case of the proposed study, strategic communication refers to purposeful, integrated organisational communication.

Branding

Branding is a distinctive symbol that helps distinguish an organisation, product, or service. It also serves to convey a particular message (Bajde, 2019). According to Satøen and Waerass (2015), Balmer (2001) defined corporate branding as a conscious decision by executive management to identify and communicate unique qualities of an organisation's identity through an appropriately articulated branding strategy. The notion supports the organisation's endeavours to effectively communicate, distinguish, and improve the brand in relation to important stakeholders. In the context of the proposed study, the term branding encompasses all actions related to branding within the two departments.

Government communication

Radwan and Ali Mousa (2020:517) define it "as all communication activities of government bodies that are aimed at conveying and sharing news, information to present and explain government policies, plans, decisions and actions".

On the other hand, Luoma-aha and Canel (2020:10) define it as "communication directed and seeking to influence key publics, in pursuit of both political and civic purposes, carried out by executive politicians and officials, usually in a managed way, to establish and maintain beneficial relationships to build reputation, to gain support from and interact with citizens, using tools and strategies of public relations and corporate communications". The study exclusively employs the term "government communication," although the terms "public sector communication" and "government communication" are often used interchangeably.

Departments

The term "departments" specifically refers to the government departments at the national level in South Africa. In the context of the proposed study, the term refers to the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.

Communicator

A communicator is someone who effectively conveys information, opinions, or policies to the general public, demonstrating expertise in the process (Dictionary.com [sa]). In the proposed study, the word "communicator" refers specifically to the officials employed as communication experts in each department that will be studied.

1.10 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study was presented in the following order:

Chapter 1: Overview of the study

This chapter introduced the study, providing the background and rationale for investigating the role of branding in strategic communication within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism. Furthermore, it highlighted the research problem, objectives, methodology employed, and ethical considerations adhered to.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review

This chapter reviewed the existing literature on the research issue under investigation. This involved examining pertinent books, journals, blogs, and articles, among other sources. The systems theory served as the framework for this study, which was also discussed.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

This section outlined the plan for the study. The selected methodological approach, paradigm, research design, population and sampling, data collection and analysis approaches, trustworthiness and ethical considerations for the study were discussed in detail.

Chapter 4: Data presentation, analysis and interpretation

This chapter outlined the data analysis process, including presentation and interpretation of the collected data.

Chapter 5: Summary, findings, and recommendations

This chapter provided a summary of findings, recommendation and conclusions of the study.

1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the study, explaining the background, rationale, and theoretical lens. Furthermore, it presented the research problem, outlined the methodology that will be employed, discussed the delimitations and limitations, defined the key concepts, provided an overview of the ethical considerations, and concluded with the chapter outline for the dissertation. The subsequent chapter presented the theoretical framework adopted and the literature review for the study.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided an overview of the study. The first section of this chapter presented the systems theory as a lens for investigating the role of branding in strategic communication within government. To explore branding as a strategic tool, the subsequent section of this chapter reviewed literature on branding in government. This section examined strategic government communication, followed by a discussion on the concept of government branding and what it entails. The section further examined aspects of government branding, including its role in strategic communication, its importance and challenges, its implementation within government, and ways to improve government branding.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE SYSTEMS THEORY

Systems theory is employed as the main framework for examining the role of branding in strategic government communication, as it views organisations as open systems. Jackson and Moraes (2023) assert that a system is composed of interacting components and that this combination should exhibit an attribute referred to as emergence, which cannot be identified from the examination of a single component. In addition to more general, implicit goals such as survival, growth, and adaptation, systems have specific, well-defined purposes. Furthermore, Lai and Lin (2017) define systems theory as a conceptual framework within organisational theories designed to clarify the dynamic relationships and interdependencies among system parts, as well as the interactions between organisations and their environments. It perceives organisations as dynamic processes composed of interacting variables that constantly interact with the external environment and with each other, rather than as isolated phenomena (Weber, 2024).

The seminal work of Von Bertalanffy (1972) also posits that systems theory is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach founded on the systems concept. It is intended to convey the holistic perspective of various processes as a collection of interacting elements. The systems theory emphasises the notion of holism, a system comprising interconnected elements that adapt to their environment and use information to regulate themselves, linking the internal system to the external environment (Jackson & Moraes, 2023). Moreover, communications serve as a cohesive element, integrating all subsystems to maintain the overall system's internal stability (Sackey, 2021). Musheke (2021) argues that the benefit of viewing effective government communication through a systems lens is that all types of communication influence the system as a whole. Therefore, the outcome of branding has consequences for the departments' ability to achieve their goals.

A thorough knowledge of the system, its surroundings, and all of its components is necessary to properly comprehend how each component functions (Arnold et al., 2024). Poole (2014) further corroborates this notion, arguing that a significant approach to systems thinking emphasises the roles performed by the system components. Branding in government serves multiple functions, including but not limited to the enhancement of legitimacy, trust, visibility, the cultivation of a positive image, and the differentiation of departments, to promote government programmes and initiatives as well as foster public engagement and achieve its mandate (Stevens, Klijn, Warsen, 2021; Hall, 2021).

The interaction and exchange between a system and its environment, which encompasses all factors beyond the system's boundaries, are highlighted by systems theory. In the context of government, the stakeholders are the relevant environments that shape the department, and the department is the relevant environment that shapes the organisation's public environment (Arnold et al., 2024). Furthermore, another crucial aspect of system theory is the feedback mechanism, which assists the system in maintaining a stable state. Negative feedback allows the organisation to adapt to environmental changes or rectify shortcomings, thereby preserving the existing state, whereas positive feedback seeks to transform the system through expansion or enhancement (Musheke, 2021; Lai & Lin, 2017). Moreover, promptly

responding to the environmental changes through the feedback loop can lead the system to reach a new equilibrium (Kantabutra, 2022).

Systems theory, therefore, lays the foundation for addressing the research questions and objectives. The next section discussed strategic government communication, reviewed the literature on branding, and concluded with a summary of similar prior studies.

2.3. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.3.1 Strategic government communication

For the purpose of the study, it is crucial to discuss the concept of strategic government communication. Strategic communications emphasise the essential components necessary for attaining organisational goals and prepare an organisation for an uncertain future (Shabangu, 2024). Hence, it has been considered a fundamental component of official government communications for nearly a century (Martinelli, 2021). Government communication performs a significant role, including informing stakeholders about the government's objectives, policies, programmes, and initiatives, as well as facilitating government administration through intangible assets and co-creation (Radwan & Mousa, 2020; Luoma-aho & Canel, 2020). Advancing this perspective, Urban (2023) argues that government communication is about informing stakeholders about the government's programme of action in a manner that aligns with its citizens' values. Therefore, challenging the narrow association that government communication is concerned with only media relations and running campaigns.

According to the National GCIS (2025c), a significant aspect of service delivery is government communication. The framework further argues that effective government communication is regarded as a tool to foster public engagement, thereby enhancing trust, credibility, and stakeholder awareness of government programmes and initiatives, thereby improving service delivery. In the same breath, Shabangu (2024) contends that in addition to building credibility and trust with stakeholders, it also cultivates the organisation's image and maintains meaningful ties with its audiences. However, these perspectives assume that communication and favourable governance

outcomes are associated progressively. In contrast, Macnamara (2025) posits that government communication is primarily one-way and focuses on informing the public rather than encouraging substantial engagements. Therefore, limiting the awareness, credibility, and trustworthiness of government communication. To mitigate this challenge, Hyland-Wood, Gardner, Leask and Ecker (2021) contend that government communication must be adapted to the interests and values of varied audiences and use diverse methods of information dissemination to effectively cultivate public trust, loyalty and participation.

Strategic government communications make a diverse array of contributions. Aligned with systems thinking, it advocates for the integrated, purposeful, and effective utilisation of organisational communication measures and capabilities to support policies, programmes, and initiatives in achieving organisational goals (Gordeladze & Molodini, 2021). In this context, strategic government communication is deliberately planned, purpose-driven and aligned with governance objectives and not typical information dissemination. Furthermore, it aims to empower communicators to execute the organisation's strategic goal and to swiftly discover, disseminate, receive, and comprehend reliable, rational, and pertinent strategic information (Makrydakis, Spiliotopoulos & Lymperi, 2025). Aligned with this perspective, Lovari, D'Ambrosi and Bowen (2020) argue that government communicators have a crucial role in fostering and promoting effective communication practices within departments and in disseminating information to stakeholders.

Accordingly, strategic government communication requires establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relations with the organisation's publics. Therefore, to enhance service delivery and government image, the involvement of communicators is key during the formulation phase of strategies and policies is key, as it enables the departments to drive a compelling narrative that would also enhance stakeholder participation (Urban, 2023; Martinelli, 2021).

2.3.2 Government Communication and Information System (GCIS)

In South Africa, the GCIS is the leader, custodian, and coordinator of government communication. To ensure an efficient and successful communication system, it provides the framework and procedures that guide communication among public bodies, agencies, and national, provincial and local spheres of government (John, Maama, Ojogiwa & Mubangizi, 2022). The government communication system aims to strengthen communication to ensure coherence in communicating government messages, while facilitating stakeholders' access to information, empowering and encouraging their participation in the government's programmes and initiatives (Government Communicators Handbook, 2014).

The GCIS, as the custodian of government communication, is also responsible for communicating, overseeing, and upholding the government corporate identity (CI) (GCIS, 2025a). Post-apartheid, a need to rebrand emerged, leading to the redesign of the National Coat of Arms (CoA). This was to ensure that the government projects a uniform, consistent, and coherent government identity to the public. The CoA is the government's visual identity that differentiates South Africa from other nations, encapsulates the country's distinctive history, and embraces the future (GCIS, 2005). To enhance government communication and the government brand, the GCIS developed branding guidelines to promote a uniform look across government. The following section explored branding in government.

2.3.3 Branding in government

2.3.3.1 The concept of branding

In recent years, due to its relevance, branding in government has emerged as a significant subject of academic debate. It serves different purposes than in the private sector, primarily building stakeholder trust as a core strategic function rather than profit generation. Moreover, contend that the concept of branding in government aligns with social expectations, as governments need legitimacy, and adherence to these standards bolsters that legitimacy (Waeraas, 2020; Kiwia, Khanagha and Alexiou, 2025). Consequently, branding in government is used to advance the organisation's

policies or services offered. It encompasses engaging the organisation's stakeholders, facilitating opportunities for discourse, dedicating time to establish a transparent process, and considering methods for enabling various stakeholders to influence both the design and execution of the branding process (Stevens et al., 2021).

Branding is crucial for governments, as it is more than just a logo, visual identity, or tagline; it represents a combination of all these elements and more. It is how the organisation lives its values and how they are presented and perceived by its stakeholders (Martinelli, 2021). Organisational branding spans the entire organisation and delineates a comprehensive strategy that connects the strategic vision, organisational culture, and identity (Leijerholt et al., 2019b). In this context, branding is framed as the unifying principle permeating all information, services, and products of the organisation, aligned with organisational values and vision and resonating with all those who engage with the organisation (United Nations, 2021). Fundamentally, branding pertains to identity, which involves identifying the distinct qualities of an organisation and differentiating it from similar organisations (Hall, 2021; Igelesias, Landgraf, Ind, Markovic and Koporcic, 2020). It is a combination of the organisation's values, the value of its services or products, and its inherent commitment to the public. Conceptually, branding integrates tangible and intangible elements that allow an organisation, product, or service to be identified and differentiated from others, thereby reinforcing its strategic poise (Johansen & Gregersen, 2024).

Compared to the private sector, branding in government may differ, particularly when looking inward; as a result, it necessitates a rather different perspective, unlike in the private sector (Leijerholt, 2019). From an internal perspective, branding involves employees' understanding of their association with the organisation and their delivery of high-quality services and products to stakeholders, thereby allowing the organisation to stand out from the rest (Ikram, Fiaz, Mahmood, Ahmad & Ashfaq, 2021). This notion underscores the importance of employees in embodying the brand. Such an understanding frames internal branding as one of the most effective strategies to enhance employees' performance because it allows management the means to get officials on board and align them with the organisational values (Thokoa et al., 2022; Clark, Chapleo & Suomi, 2020). Additionally, it effectively promotes the

organisation's intended perceptions and benefits both employees and citizens (Leijerholt, 2021).

Branding in government encompasses various elements such as brand image, identity, visibility, awareness, legitimacy, and trust. The subsequent section examined these elements in detail.

2.3.3.2 Components of branding

2.3.3.2.1 Image and identity

Brand image and identity are somehow intertwined. Brand image refers to the impressions individuals form when encountering the organisation, whereas brand identity pertains to the desired perception of the organisation by its publics (Aaker, 2025; Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). In government, organisational identities are influenced by mandates, values and organisational functions, thereby conveying their positioning and purpose to stakeholders (Zwakala & Steenkamp, 2023). Identity is, therefore, at the core of branding, as it shapes how organisations represent themselves and plan their communication (Iglesias, Landgraf, Ind, Markovic and Koporcic, 2020). To cultivate a favourable image among internal and external stakeholders, consistency in identity is crucial (Acar, Büyükdağ, Türten, Diker & Çalışır, 2024). However, the link between identity and image is not often clear.

Given institutional complexity, conflicting expectations, and past experiences, stakeholders may perceive the organisation's identity differently (Bertilsson, Rennstam & Sullivan, 2022). Therefore, it is important to differentiate between identity, which is an internally formulated expression of organisational values and image as externally formulated perceptions held by stakeholders. This is because of the inconsistencies between the two can hinder the success of organisational communication (Mahdiraji, Kamardi, Hajiagha & Vrontis, 2024).

Brand image is shaped by the desires and experiences of the organisation's publics. Perceptions tend to improve when experiences meet or exceed expectations, and vice versa (Jain, 2017). However, rather than being intentionally generated, brand image is spontaneously constituted through these interactions and develops emotional

connections with the organisation's publics (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). It touches on the organisation's publics' values, expectations, and lifestyles, therefore shaping how organisations are perceived (Johansen & Gregersen, 2024).

The above highlights the importance of brand image as an element of present-day organisational strategies, which impacts stakeholders' perceptions, enhances brand essence, and positions the organisation (Nagalakshmi, Charan, Farooq, Gaur, Saxena & Soni, 2025). This notion may be limiting the continuous strategic and managerial influence on shaping the brand image. Instead, brand image is presented in the branding literature as a contested concept co-created by a range of role players with varying levels of influence and authority (Sarasvuo, Rindell & Kovalchuk, 2022; Iglesias & Ind, 2020). Furthermore, research shows that stakeholder interpretations do not always match organisational intentions (Koll, von Wallpach & Uzelac, 2023). This contrasts with the assumption that positive experiences result in desirable perceptions.

The increased use of branding within government needs to be understood within the broader management reforms, as the adoption of these practices focuses on identity, image, differentiation, and consistency that may not be consistent with fragmented nature of government (Bertilsson et al., 2022).

2.3.3.2.2 *Visibility and awareness*

Individuals tend to favour familiarity and associate various qualities with items they recognise. Brand awareness of a brand may therefore serve as an indicator of achievement, dedication, and integrity, qualities important to the organisation's publics (López-Rodríguez, Gutiérrez Bernal, & Páramo Renza, 2024). Reinforcing this perspective, Nkuna, Erasmus & Olivier (2023) contend that if an organisation, as a brand, is known or recognised, there must be a justification and, ultimately, awareness that can influence the brand recall during user decision-making. Consequently, a brand that is readily remembered by stakeholders possesses a more profound degree of awareness than one that is recognised upon visual encounter (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). This assumption has increasingly been challenged, as recent studies suggest that awareness alone does not ensure increased stakeholder involvement or brand loyalty, especially in technology-controlled contexts where

freedom of speech is important in determining brand equity (Enes, Demo, Porto & Zulato, 2024).

Aaker (2025) contends that brand awareness and visibility are mostly influenced by distinctiveness, the most critical predictor, which serves as the foundation on which other associations can be connected (Jain, 2017). For the organisation's publics to recognise a brand, they need to see, read, hear or consider it (Parida & Prasanna, 2021). Furthermore, a brand must not only occupy a prominent position in stakeholders' consciousness and possess adequate mindshare but also do so at the appropriate moment and location (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020; Seturi, 2016). To improve brand awareness and visibility, several communication tactics must be employed to embed the name and visual identifiers in the consciousness of the organisation's stakeholders (López-Rodríguez, Gutiérrez Bernal, & Páramo Renza, 2024).

The above perspectives assume that significant brand recognition might lead to greater awareness and visibility. In contrast, recent studies argue that stakeholders may be familiar with a brand but not necessarily consider or recall it when making relevant decisions, as brand recognition alone does not substantially improve visibility or awareness (Menon, 2026). In this light, set apart from salience, which challenges the linear assumption that greater recognition inevitably increases visibility or impact by requiring contextual relevance and accessibility at the time of need (Phua, Bali, Anesbury & Sharp, 2026). Therefore, it implies that increased recognition does not translate to favourable visibility or influence over stakeholder decision-making.

Though it does not independently ensure behavioural impact, complementary views recognise that brand recognition is still an important requirement for awareness. Considering the fact it generates the basic level of brand awareness necessary for a brand to be noticed and taken into consideration, thereby increasing its visibility (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). This perspective supports systems thinking, which holds that all elements of a system have specific roles and are interconnected.

2.3.3.2.3 Legitimacy and trust

Nkuna et al. (2023) define legitimacy as the widespread belief that an organisation is appealing in a socially established environment. The idea that a certain organisation plays a significant role in accomplishing someone's objectives or convictions on efficacy, efficiency, or usefulness is known as legitimacy. On the other hand, trust is widely characterised as the individual's inherent evaluation and emotional outlook towards the organisation and parties that manage the government system. Although technically distinct, legitimacy and trust are often treated as interrelated concepts in governance studies. Some scholars posit that organisational survival relies heavily on legitimacy and trust. In the context of government, these two factors are closely related to the value of the services provided by the departments. As a result, to foster a dependable government, communicators must be accountable, transparent, and honest. This is crucial for preserving stakeholders' trust in the organisation, which, in turn, fosters loyalty to government initiatives and programmes (Vincent & Evans, 2022). Congruent with the broader importance of trust, Devine, Valgarðsson, Jennings, Stoker and Bunting (2025) contend that a trusted organisation will yield desirable results, such as cooperation and compliance, even when unmonitored.

Given the link between legitimacy and trust, government is seen as a strategic tool for fostering and strengthening both concepts. Karens, Eshuis, Klijn and Voets (2016) assert that trust and legitimacy are essential for government, and from a governance perspective, branding augments trust and legitimises government initiatives and programmes. Additionally, branding in government allows departments to persuade stakeholders of their value, strengthening their identity and image (Zavattaro et al., 2021). In this regard, brand legitimacy and trust represent intangible organisational assets derived from assessments by resource-holding stakeholders regarding the desirability, propriety, or appropriateness of an organisation's actions (Leijerholt et al., 2019a). Taken as a whole, these viewpoints suggest that branding functions as a channel for co-creating and sustaining legitimacy and trust in a governance context, as opposed to communicating organisational value. Importantly, consistency in corporate branding comes with brand familiarity, which helps build trust and loyalty among the organisation's publics. Departments may gain trust and legitimacy,

increase public participation, and enhance their reputations among stakeholders and the public by improving branding consistency (Peddisetty, 2024).

Although the significance of legitimacy and trust is generally recognised, these concepts cannot be treated as conclusive indicators of sound governance. Unwarranted and blind trust can conceal accountability shortcomings and hinder transparent monitoring. Notably, people's perceptions can be influenced by government branding, leading to positive assessments that do not necessarily depict the true performance reflection of an organisation (Alon-Barkat, 2020; Maggetti, Papadopoulos & Guaschino, 2023). In practice, branding can sometimes compensate for governance flaws and inspire underserved trust and legitimacy. These viewpoints suggest that the connection between trust, legitimacy and governance is far more intricate and context-specific than it would initially seem (Besley & Dray, 2024; Curry, 2024). Thus, improving legitimacy and trust through branding and communication alone is insufficient and requires balanced strategies and policies that incorporate performance, accountability, and informed public assessment.

2.3.3.3 The importance of branding

Branding is fundamental to an organisation's business communication. Effective branding strengthens an organisation's messaging and actions, but inadequate branding can compromise or obscure its reputation (United Nations, 2021). In this regard, organisations with elevated branding and suitability qualities generally exhibit better brand recall, thereby enhancing recognition and commitment towards the organisation (Balmer & Podnar, 2021). These interrelated advantages are particularly important in government, as studies confirm that branding is beneficial to government departments as it enables them to fortify and cultivate a positive image, improve efficiency, enhance public awareness, and, in certain instances, generate revenue (Leijerholt et al., 2019b). Thereby, strengthening stakeholder and public participation and maintaining mutually beneficial relations (Lestari et al., 2017).

Expanding on the above, branding influences citizens' perceptions, which may be seen as positive, as it reduces public mistrust of the departments and enhances their

perceived efficacy (Alon-Barkat, 2020). It has the ability to establish an emotional bond between the organisation and its publics and enhance communication by encapsulating the organisation's values and providing a cognitive framework that enables the brand to grow and remain durable (Nyagadza, Kadembo & Makasi, 2020; Alvarado-Karste & Guzmán, 2020). On the contrary, these affirmations are challenged by Jaffar, Yusoff and Suffian (2026), who argue that the ability of government branding to influence citizens' perceptions is extremely volatile and largely dependent on fluctuating time frames as opposed to long-term administrative value.

Branding within government is a political, inclusive and collaborative process that allows stakeholders and citizens to shape the government's identity, while fostering the integration of diverse social groups to advance the government's social and economic standing (Manoharan et al., 2025). It is used to uphold a positive image and to oversee organisational reputations, which may subsequently affect several outcomes, including organisational legitimacy, autonomy, and inter-organisational collaboration (Zavattaro et al., 2021; Lestari et al., 2017). However, Mugobo (2021) demonstrated in their study that government branding is neither inclusive nor collaborative. They posit that the government's lack of consultation during a rebranding process led to adverse public perceptions, thereby challenging governance practices and stakeholder relations.

In addition to its external role, branding also functions internally within an organisation, improving employees' awareness of and opinions about the brand (Clark et al., 2020). Within government departments, internal branding is crucial as it underscores that delivering a distinctive service by officials to the public is a primary precursor to an organisation in attaining its objectives (Eid, Al Zaabi, Alzahmi & Elsantil, 2019). In this regard, directing branding efforts inwardly facilitates the development of internal culture, processes, and an organisational framework that enable employees to optimise their capabilities (Ikram et al., 2021). Challenging these views, Leijerholt, Biedenbach and Hultén (2022) found that employees' association with the brand depends on support for organisational norms and processes and on value congruence. Thus, implying that effective brand communication is not adequate to ensure continuous internal enactment.

2.3.3.4 Challenges associated with branding in government

2.3.3.4.1 Governance and leadership challenges

Balancing interests: Government communicators face branding challenges when they must balance between serving the public interest and responding to elected officials in a rule-abiding and efficient manner. Therefore, complicating the creation of a unique and consistent brand identity for the departments (Vincent & Evans, 2022).

Conflicting values: The existence of various identities and conflicting values within government stems from the need to uphold both the personal and public interests while maintaining a balance between accessibility and authority (Leijerholt, 2021).

Political influence: Political leadership, even when it is independent of the department's day-to-day operations, still significantly shapes the organisation and its strategic decisions (Leijerholt, 2021). Furthermore, negative perceptions of the political leadership among the organisation's public harm the organisation's image, therefore leading to loss of trust and loyalty (Vincent & Evans, 2022).

2.3.3.4.2 Organisational and cultural challenges

Employee motivation: Unlike the private sector, where organisational success and profit are key, government branding may not universally resonate with all employees, as their commitment is primarily motivated by the fulfilment of values and advancement of societal benefits intrinsic to government (Fernandes, Santinha, & Forte, 2022). Therefore, making the organisation's publics less likely to support the department's objectives, contradicting their perception of the organisation's purpose (Syaifuddin, 2025).

Lack of differentiation: Government departments often struggle to establish uniqueness, with some publics unable to distinguish between them (Zavattaro et al., 2021).

Fragmentation: The fragmented and complex nature makes it difficult for departments to establish consistency and a single identity, thereby adversely affecting the organisational branding (Leijerholt, 2021).

2.3.3.4.3 Communication and consistency challenges

Coherence and credibility: A lack of coherent communication is common in organisations with multiple teams, varied channels, diverse platforms, and a focus on rapid content production, which complicates maintaining consistent branding. Therefore, reducing the level of credibility, trust and participation in the organisation's programmes and initiatives among stakeholders and the public (Peddisetty, 2024).

Social media: New technologies have boosted brand recognition but also pose risks, including those associated with social media platforms. Although social media has an extensive reach, it also poses significant threats to organisations, particularly because it can disseminate disinformation that can damage reputations (Kogo, 2025).

Digital divide: Limited resources, resistance to change, and low levels of digital literacy among stakeholders, including employees and the public, are among the challenges often encountered when implementing digital branding in government. Therefore, creating uneven access to government information and services (Syaifyddin, 2025; Mofokeng, Ramolobe, & Bogopa, 2025).

2.3.3.4.4 Strategic and resource challenges

Bureaucracy and communication gaps: Ineffective communication strategies and intense bureaucracy weaken branding efforts (Eresia-Eke, 2021).

Financial and human resource constraints: Limited budgets, understaffing, insufficiently skilled personnel, and unclear roles adversely affect brand image and visibility, and thus hindering the achievement of organisational goals (Vincent & Evans, 2022; Eresia-Eke, 2021).

Weak strategies: Departments often rush into campaigns without a coherent branding strategy, undermining long-term effectiveness (Reghunathan, 2021).

2.3.3.5 Branding implementation

Vincent and Evans (2022) posit that adopting a comprehensive, well-structured brand can reduce misconceptions among its publics, enabling organisations to effectively communicate their objectives and promote a positive image. Conversely, Marland, Lewis and Flanagan (2017) argue that government branding may simplify complicated policy realities to structured and consistent narratives, thus creating a disjuncture between the actual operational circumstances and the communicated image. In government, communicators utilise corporate branding to address external pressures and conflicting interests by implementing targeted campaigns aimed at improving stakeholder awareness and participation in government programmes and initiatives (Barasa & Omariba, 2024). Nonetheless, contradicting interpretations and contextual limitations tend to define government branding practices, suggesting that the efficacy of these strategies should not be equally presumed across organisations (Leijerholt et al., 2019a). Proper branding management often results in the organisation's public forming favourable impressions, attitudes, and associations (Buil, Catalán, & Martínez, 2016), however, these effects are dependent on the extent to which the brand narrative is embodied in organisational practices.

In government, departments normally employ a master brand strategy that encompasses a range of services and descriptive sub-brands (Leijerholt et al., 2019b). In contrast, studies show that a single master brand is complex to implement across a diverse number of government departments and might find it difficult to fit different mandates and multiple identities (Mau, 2019). In South Africa, the CoA is managed by the GCIS and functions as a unique identity and key emblem that encompasses national government departments and the CoA's interface with the public and stakeholders. Furthermore, it acts as the parent brand representing the country, while the sub-brands represent the national departments (GCIS, 2005). Visual elements such as colour, typefaces, style, and other usability elements can improve user experience and enhance brand awareness (Manoharan & Wu, 2022). However,

favourable branding outcomes cannot be achieved through design aspects only as they require active stakeholder participation during the brand co-creation process (Tøttenborg, Ooi & Hardy, 2023).

Branding standards must express the organisation's mission, values, purpose, and brand personality, as well as its visual components, to provide a contextual understanding that guides all communication decisions. They outline the communication standards, principles, and tone and encapsulate the department's mandate, as well as the transparency and accountability obligations intrinsic to government institutions (Leijerholt et al., 2019a). Reliance on branding, however, may emphasise the development of prescribed communication at the expense of conveying intricate policy information, thereby concealing discrepancies between the intended brand narratives and actual operational practices (Marland et al., 2017). The GCIS (2025a) further stipulates that the National Corporate Identity Branding Guidelines govern the use of the CoA and government branding, safeguarding the CoA and limiting unauthorised use, thereby demonstrating how government identity management utilises centralised branding standards as mechanisms for managing communication.

2.3.3.6 Branding as a strategic tool

Alves and Rodrigues (2025) contend that branding shifts significantly from a reactive, operational function to a strategic, visionary one when it is viewed as a valuable organisational resource. For branding to be considered strategic, it must follow a deliberate, planned process within the department (Islami, Rahyuni & Rukayyah, 2024), as it represents a holistic approach that emphasises the interdependence between organisational image, culture, and strategic vision (Leijerholt et al., 2019a). It purposefully communicates organisational identity, programmes, and initiatives to achieve organisational goals (Zavattaro et al., 2021). The fragmented nature of government, however, has called the alignment assumption into question because it is often difficult to achieve consistency across brand, organisational practices and stakeholder experiences in a complex governmental context (Alon-Barkat, 2020).

Strategic branding is associated with present and future organisational plans, providing a framework for departmental programmes and initiatives (Kumar, Kotler & Rajan, 2026). Aligned with this notion, strategic communication emphasises the importance of stakeholders' understanding in the formulation of policies and services, thereby facilitating superior decision-making and implementation (Barasa & Omariba, 2024), positioning branding within the broader organisational processes. Marland, Lewis, and Flanagan (2017) similarly posit that the strategic appeal of government branding lies in its ability to substitute conflicting messages with impactful, reinforcing communication. This focus on coherence is important; however, it can inflate the influence of branding, as consistent messaging does not necessarily guarantee seamless implementation of policies within a complex government system (Reghunathan, 2021).

Karens et al. (2016) state that branding serves as a strategy that facilitates the communication and image-building among the organisation and its publics. It is an approach that integrates employee activities and communication channels around a shared objective and helps reduce the likelihood of disinformation and drives forward the organisation's mandate (Marland et al., 2017). While Zavattaro et al. (2021) argue that government branding provides authentic and reliable information to the organisation's publics and articulates public policy frameworks, branding is often employed after decisions have been made in the policy process. Therefore, limiting the capacity of branding as a strategic tool to authentically shape policy development (Macnamara, 2025).

Leijerholt et al. (2019b) posit that strong departmental branding enhances the organisation's overall performance and facilitates goal achievement. Therefore, a comprehensive branding strategy for every government effort must convey its positive impact and significance in people's lives and enable the organisation's public to easily understand and identify with it (Reghunathan, 2021). These perspectives assume that organisations have adequate oversight to always integrate the broader organisational objectives with branding strategies. Although in practice, government priorities are frequently shaped by external factors, such as political, social and administrative factors that can hinder the effectiveness of strategic branding (Common, 2025).

2.3.3.7 Recommendations and successes of branding in government

Government departments should acknowledge their current traits as a distinctive amalgamation of characteristics that can be leveraged in the branding process, rather than seeking an overarching brand communication strategy. They need to capitalise on the variety of their identities to reflect the diversity of their constituents (Vincent & Evans, 2022). Furthermore, to ensure sector and organisational values are interwoven, departments should incorporate sector-specific values and ethos into their brand values to bolster trust among stakeholders and the public (Leijerholt et al., 2019b). The departments also need to harmonise stakeholders' interests with the organisation's mandate, vision and fundamental principles, while operating with a holistic perspective, emphasising the organisation's publics' overall wellbeing above creating efficiency (Vincent & Evans, 2022). Given this, branding benefits the government by improving efficiency, enhancing public awareness, cultivating a favourable reputation and in some cases generating income (Leijerholt et al., 2019a).

In implementing these strategies, the practice of using public figures as brand ambassadors for government programmes and initiatives is advantageous for the government because ambassadors are regarded as trusted sources of information (Reghunathan, 2021). Similarly, conducting public awareness campaigns plays a vital role in informing stakeholders and the public about the government programmes, initiatives, and achievements and in shaping the organisation's public perceptions of the government brand image (Barasa & Omariba, 2024). Collectively, these techniques shape public perceptions and raise awareness as part of a broader strategic communication endeavour. These strategies, however, assume that the organisation will earn credibility and message acceptability from campaigns and ambassadors. This might not necessarily be the case with government institutions, where stakeholders interpret and comprehend communication differently (Macnamara, 2025; Ademolu, 2022).

Employees are also considered brand ambassadors, and their common understanding of corporate branding and incorporating it into their day-to-day functions ensures branding consistency. Consequently, internal training and branding support, such as workshops and information sessions, are beneficial for maintaining branding

consistency (Pedisetty, 2024). Emphasising branding consistency enables organisations to attain credibility, improve public and stakeholder participation and enhance their perception of the organisation (Jovanosvka, 2020). Nonetheless, achieving such consistency requires organisational commitment and employee understanding, which may differ across departments (Leijerholt et al., 2019b).

A departmental brand is viewed favourably when branding initiatives conform to CI guidelines and are consistent with organisational principles. In this regard, management has a duty to provide a strong example for employees by embodying the organisational brand and demonstrating dedication towards departmental branding initiative (Leijerholt et al., 2019b). Embracing internal diversity in corporate branding would help address government-sector brand communication challenges within departments and establish consistency in the sector, without losing sight of the overall essence of branding (Vincent & Evans, 2022).

Organisations that innovate and adapt their branding strategies remain ahead of the curve as digital environments continue to change organisational and communication landscapes (Ramu & Thirumurugan, 2024). New technologies have enabled messages to be communicated not just by communicators but also by the organisation's publics. Through effective branding strategies, the government can influence how it communicates. Given the evolving nature of technology and communication, the government must invest in and build its capacity in this field (Neely & Stewart, 2021). However, elevated public participation in the development of messages may adversely affect organisational control over branding narratives and impact consistency (Palmieri & Mazzali-Lurati, 2021).

2.4 SUMMARY OF SIMILAR STUDIES

Most research conducted focuses on the impact of branding on an organisation's reputation and relationships with stakeholders, which contributes to legitimacy and social value. However, the research does not extensively explore the role of branding as a strategic communication tool for achieving these outcomes and as an integral part of the organisation's communication system.

Siano and Palazzo (2015) conducted a case study of Tetra Pak Italy to explore the role of ingredient branding in shaping strategic communication during crisis management. Their study utilised the case study approach because it allowed for in-depth exploration of the research issue and the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Primary data was collected through interviews, while post-recovery effects results were used as secondary quantitative data. The mixed approach enabled the study to consider several perspectives on other subjects. Furthermore, the findings of the study confirm that the intensity of the ingredient brand's connection to the host determines the function it plays in marketing and communication (Siano & Palazzo, 2015). Their study is partially relevant to this present study as it was conducted at a private company and not a government organisation.

In contrast, Stevens et al. (2021) investigated the role of branding as a public governance strategy using a Q-sort approach. The study focused on 33 organisations in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The study asserts that branding has swiftly become a significant governance technique in the public sector. It emphasises the need to engage stakeholders and to conduct the branding process openly and transparently. Moreover, the research primarily focused on place branding; hence, it is only partially congruent with the present study.

Leijerholt et al. (2019b:277) conducted a study to “explore brand management practices and brand architecture, from an employee perspective”. The theoretical framework presented in the study is integrative and flexible, merging brand management, internal branding and brand architecture. The study focused on a single case study of a public healthcare organisation in Sweden to comprehensively comprehend the issues and relationships, rather than aiming for quantifiable generalisability. The data collection process included selecting four departments, conducting semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, and observing seven employees. Thematic analysis was utilised to generate codes and themes. The findings of the study suggest that branding is crucial for both organisations and individual units.

Drawing on the theory of branding, Barasa and Omariba (2024) conducted a quantitative study to emphasise the importance of effective communication techniques in enhancing the Kenyan government's brand image to improve service delivery. The study discovered that enhancing the brand image increases trust and satisfaction, thereby improving service delivery. To assess, establish, maintain, market and evaluate the brand through feedback, the study presented a framework for communication techniques. The study employed an exploratory design using surveys, interviews and field observations for triangulation. The paper is suggestive of systems thinking, although it does not make mention of it.

To determine whether internal branding predicts employee performance, how well internal branding practices are implemented within the department, and how the concept can be communicated to managers in simple, non-technical language, Thokoa et al. (2022) conducted a study at the National Treasury, a national government department in South Africa. The conceptual foundation was based on employee performance and internal branding strategies. The study employed a cross-sectional quantitative approach utilising two survey questionnaires, and computer software was used to analyse data. The paper is consistent with systems theory as it conceptualises the National Treasury's internal branding, human resource procedures, employee performance and organisational culture as an interconnected subsystem inside an open, feedback-driven organisational system, rather than as separate, solitary components. Nevertheless, the research does not examine the problem via the prism of systems theory.

The above discussion depicts that government branding encompasses diverse contexts but does not employ systems theory. The language used in some of the papers indicated an inclination toward thinking, but they utilise other theories to investigate the research issues. This presents a gap that this study filled by examining the role of branding in strategic communication within government through a systems-theory lens.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a literature review for the study. The first section of the chapter dealt with systems theory as the theoretical framework that underpins the study. Systems thinking advocates the interconnectedness of a system's elements, the relationship between the organisation and its environments, and the feedback mechanisms that allow the organisation to maintain the status quo or adapt to environmental changes if necessary. Strategic government communication, which promotes the integrated, purposeful and effective utilisation of organisational communication to strengthen government policies, programmes and initiatives to achieve organisational goals, was addressed in the second section of the chapter. This section concluded with a brief discussion on government communication in the South African context. The subsequent section introduced the concept of branding in government. It further provided a detailed discussion of the elements of branding, including brand image and identity, visibility and awareness, and legitimacy and trust. The importance and challenges of branding in government were also discussed. The chapter further examined the implementation of branding, branding as a strategic tool, recommendations and successes of branding in government. A summary of previous studies concluded the chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the literature review, theoretical and conceptual foundation for the execution of the study and branding as a strategic communication tool. Sreekumar and Sreekumar (2023) state that research methodology is a methodical process implemented to address a research issue and also assists the researcher in organising and analysing the collected data to ensure that the results of the study are credible and trustworthy. It is against this background that this chapter outlines and provides an in-depth discussion on the research strategy for the study, including the methodologies that were used to address the research.

The study employed a qualitative research approach, and this section began with a discussion on qualitative research methods, the interpretivist paradigm, and the phenomenological research design. Furthermore, the chapter guided the type of data collection technique, population and sampling methods, data analysis techniques, trustworthiness, and lastly, ethical considerations.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is defined as "the abstract beliefs and principles that influence a researcher's worldview and their interpretation and actions within that context" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:26). Paradigms serve as a conceptual framework for evaluating methodological decisions, influencing every phase of research, that is, from question formulation to data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Kivunja & Kuvini, 2017). Therefore, scholars' perceptions of reality influence their method of investigation (Kriukow, 2023). In this study, the researcher held their own views and beliefs that reality is subjective. As a result, the researcher investigated the role of branding in strategic communication to gain an in-depth understanding of the issue from the participants' point of view.

Aligned with the qualitative methodology, the study adopted an interpretive perspective, as participants had individual interpretations of the role of branding in strategic communication within their departments (Sol & Heng, 2025). Interpretive scholars employ qualitative research techniques, characterised by an inductive approach, to comprehend and articulate the essence of human nature. The interpretivist paradigm encompasses phenomenological, interactionist, constructivist, and hermeneutic approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Adherents of this paradigm hold the belief that social phenomena are produced or co-produced by humans and may be recognised by collecting and analysing conversations and texts (Leavy, 2017; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

As stated by Creswell and Creswell (2023), the research approach pertains to a systematic technique for initiating a research endeavour to increase the likelihood of collecting data that provides substantiated responses to the provided research inquiries. The scholars identify three main research approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

Quantitative research seeks to elucidate, predict, substantiate, validate, and scrutinise a theory (Lichtman, 2017). It utilises objective data collection and analysis techniques to delineate certain characteristics rather than differences to draw conclusions. Additionally, quantitative researchers utilise instruments such as questionnaires to collect data and statistical analysis to link variables, identify patterns, and contrast groups, thereby generalising findings from a sample to a larger population (Ghanad, 2023). Whereas qualitative research aims to delineate, explain, investigate, interpret, and generate a theory (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The latter involves subjective and contextual methods for understanding the environment.

Qualitative research establishes a setting that is favourable for examining objects within their natural setting, enabling individuals to scrutinise phenomena from their own perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2025). It aims to enhance a comprehensive

understanding and contribute to theory building. However, it seldom subjects the theory to empirical testing (Schindler, 2022). The qualitative research approach, according to Schindler (2022), has its origins in a diverse array of fields, such as communication. The qualitative research approach enables the researcher to ascertain the meaning the participants attribute to the issue, rather than the meaning that the researcher or the authors of the literature express. The approach allows the researcher the ability to adjust certain components of the study due to its emergent nature (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). It is intended to provide the researcher with an explanation of the nature and causes of events. Qualitative researchers gather, analyse, and interpret data independently, as opposed to quantitative researchers, who depend on tools developed by others (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Mixed-method research methodology combines quantitative and qualitative techniques within a single study. Accordingly, Taherdoost (2022) views this process as one that simply utilises these approaches as directed by the nature, purpose, and objectives of the study, aiming to provide a better understanding of the subject. Combining these two differing methods, for example, using both interviews and questionnaires, could help better answer different types of questions, enriching findings from both numerical and textual data (Åkerblad, Seppänen-Järvelä & Haapakoski, 2021).

The study employed a qualitative research approach informed by an interpretive perspective. Qualitative research is deemed suitable for the study because it emphasises investigating phenomena that occur in a real-life environment (Mills & Birk, 2017). The approach allowed for the collection and analysis of data that delved into the intricate aspects of branding and strategic communication within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Loseke (2017) opines that a research design is the comprehensive strategy a researcher employs to obtain answers or develop a deep understanding of the study problem. Informed by the interpretive perspective, the study adopted a

phenomenological research design.

Phenomenological design is a method of studying a phenomenon as experienced by participants (Watson, 2024), thereby enabling the comprehension and analysis of individuals' perspectives on a situation or issue (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015; Creswell, 2023). The approach aims to uncover the essence of these experiences by examining the perceptions and interpretations of the participants while setting aside preconceptions and biases (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Prime, 2024). Prime (2024) further reiterates that phenomenological design enables researchers to gather data that is rich and detailed on the lived experiences of the participants, thereby providing an in-depth understanding of the research topic.

The study adopted a phenomenological design because it allowed the researcher to gain a deeper comprehension of the participants' perspectives and insights (Creswell & Cresswell, 2023) on the significance of branding within the context of strategic communication in government. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) assert that the phenomenological design enables flexibility in the data collection process while still adhering to the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research. The technique emphasises the significance of interpretation in comprehending lived experiences and the notion that the researchers and participants collaboratively construct meaning, and this is shaped by their historical and cultural experiences or context (Watson, 2024). In congruence with Watson (2024), the researcher and the participants of the study provided their subjective views on the role of branding in strategic communication within government, thus also aligning with the interpretive paradigm.

3.5 STUDY SETTING

The setting of a research study encapsulates the experimental, social, or physical environment in which the investigation takes place. This encompasses the period, time, location, population, and environmental factors (Fonseca, 2023). Also, providing a description of the research setting and location that is precise and thorough is crucial in assessing the relevance and generalisability of the study (Menon, Varadharajan,

Praharaj & Ameen, 2023).

In light of the above, the study was conducted in 2025 at the GCIS and the Department of Tourism. Both departments are national departments situated in Pretoria, Gauteng, and their communication efforts are aimed at the general South African population. The GCIS was selected purposively as the study's focus, as it is responsible for government communications and ensures that government departments adhere to the policies, principles, and standards developed for an effective and efficient communication system. Conversely, the Department of Tourism was selected as an implementer of the communication policies, principles, and standards set by the GCIS.

To explore the role of branding as a strategic communication tool, participants were selected based on their expertise and knowledge in government communications. The researcher ensured that the study was conducted within the participants' natural surroundings (either at the workplace or at home) using virtual methods in accordance with the qualitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2025).

3.6 POPULATION AND SAMPLING APPROACH

In research methodology, the population is the whole group of objects, individuals or events that share common features of interest to the study within a defined geographic or institutional context, and represents the group to which the study findings are intended to be applied or generalised (Martínez-Mesa, González-Chica, Duquia, Bonamigo & Bastos, 2016). Moreover, the process of selecting prospective participants who can offer valuable information to answer the research question from the population is referred to as sampling (Douglas, 2022).

3.6.1 Population

3.6.1.1 Target population

The target population is a defined subset of the broader population that possesses specific, measurable characteristics and attributes directly relevant to the research inquiry and represents the actual population of interest to the study (Alvi, 2016). This

subset is developed based on alignments that link with the objectives of the study, enabling researchers to centre their inquiry on parts of the population that are particularly significant or relevant (Willie, 2022). Furthermore, when using the phenomenological method, participants must have firsthand experience with the investigated phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Given the size of the units targeted within both the GCIS and the Department of Tourism, the target population for the study consisted of 26 communicators.

3.6.1.2 Accessible population

The accessible population describe a part of the target population that is realistically reachable to the researcher for recruitment, considering practical constraints and participants' willingness to take part, and from which a sample can be selected and the study implemented (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayi, 2017; Lee, 2025). In this study, the population was accessible and consisted of 13 differently ranked communicators from the two departments. The size of the accessible population was determined based on two reasons. Firstly, the phenomenological research design necessitates prolonged interviews comprising a small, cautiously chosen sample (Pilarska, 2021). A standard sample for this design ranges between 5 and 25 participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Secondly, the number of personnel in the business units the study focused on was relatively small, with fewer than 20 communicators.

3.6.1.3 Population parameters

The participants shared the following characteristics:

- They were employees working for the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.
- They executed government communication plans and programmes.
- They had formal qualifications in communication.
- They were all located in Pretoria.
- They varied in the following ways: gender, race, age, salary level, and number of years of service.

3.6.1.4 Unit(s) of analysis

The objects, persons, or events under examination are considered the units of analysis (Babbie, 2016). Furthermore, units of analysis are classified into several categories, influencing sample selection, data collection, and study conclusions (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). The unit of analysis for the study was thirteen participants from both departments, categorised as follows: four senior managers, five middle managers and four officers. The participants' varying ranks were considered to acquire different perspectives on the research issue, and also because the Department of Tourism's communication structure has only one Chief Director and two Directors (Department of Tourism, 2024).

3.6.1.5 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria refer to the characteristics participants must have to be eligible to participate in the study. In contrast, the exclusion criteria indicate the characteristics that disqualify them from the study (Robinson, 2014). The study employed the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Table 3.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

No:	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1.	Employed in business units responsible for communication.	Employed in other business units not related to communication.
2.	Formal qualification in communication.	Not in possession of a formal qualification in communication.
3.	Work experience (2 years and above).	Individuals on internship or learnership programmes, or who have less than two years of work experience.
4.	Employed by the departments specified in the study.	Not employed by the departments specified in the study.
5.	Persons aged 18 to 65 years	Persons below 18 and above 65 years.

3.6.2 Sampling method

Sampling is the systematic procedure of selecting a smaller number of elements or individuals from a broader population that accurately reflects the characteristics and attributes of the studied population (Salkind, 2017). Probability sampling is characterised by the random selection of a sample, where each unit has an equal opportunity to be chosen. On the other hand, non-probability sampling is characterised by the absence of equal chances for units to be selected (Wiśniowski et al., 2020; Sarun, 2026).

The study employed a purposive sampling technique, a non-probability method. In line with the phenomenological research approach, purposive sampling was utilised in the study because the participants were purposefully selected as they all had experience with the research issue (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). As previously outlined in the 'Target and Accessible Population' section, the target population for the study consisted of 26 individuals, while the accessible population size comprised 13 participants from both departments. The hierarchical level of participants was considered in the sampling process to ensure the study obtained diverse perspectives. In addition, purposive sampling assisted in expanding theoretical comprehension of the role of branding in strategic communication and would pave the way for future research (Neuman, 2014).

3.7 DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND PROCEDURES

The data collection process is often considered the most crucial phase of research, as the absence of appropriate data hinders the ability to address the research question (Flick, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2023) posit that qualitative data can be collected through the following four methods:

- a) **Observations** – the researcher notes participants' behaviour and activities in their natural environment.
- b) **Interviews** – the researcher gathers information from participants in person or by telephone, and focus groups with six to eight participants. With the advent

of new technologies, Saunders et al. (2023) also indicate that virtual interviews are a data collection technique.

- c) **Document analysis** – of both public and private documents.
- d) **Audio-visual, social media, and digital materials** – data can be gathered from images, videos, art objects, digital messages, audio and film.

Individual semi-structured interviews were utilised to collect data for the study. This technique was selected because it allowed participants to express themselves freely and facilitated the collection of rich, detailed data (Petrescu, Lazar & Doroftei, 2017). The flexible nature of the technique afforded the researcher control over the questioning process, enabling them to address the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Aligned with the phenomenological research design, the interviews were of sufficient duration to allow for in-depth probing. However, they were limited to 45–60 minutes to ensure participants remained engaged (Leedy and Ormrod, 2015). The participants' hierarchical levels were considered to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. Having participants at various levels enabled the gathering of diverse perspectives on the research issue, which is consistent with the interpretivist perspective. Furthermore, the virtual interviews option provided convenience by allowing interviews to be conducted outside work hours and reducing travel costs (Saunders et al., 2023).

A detailed account of the data collection process is outlined in chapter four.

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2012) espouse that qualitative researchers commonly employ the concepts credibility and trustworthiness in place of validity and reliability. The trustworthiness of research is a collective, subjective phenomenon, in which others may reach consensus on efficient techniques (Stahl & King, 2020). In accordance with the seminal work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), Wagner et al. (2012) further state that trustworthiness should be assessed through the following:

- **Credibility**

In qualitative research, credibility refers to the consistency and reliability of the findings (Coleman, 2022). Various methodologies are available to augment the credibility of a study, such as member-checking, triangulation, and the extended involvement of the researcher with the project (Awan, Yahya & Arif, 2023). Differently ranked participants were interviewed to gain varying perspectives on the research issue, and thus ensuring triangulation. Aside from the supervisors, the researcher sought input from other colleagues to evaluate the study, ensuring that it would be relatable to anyone other than the researcher. Additionally, participants were allowed to review chapter four to ensure accurate interpretation of their viewpoints.

- **Transferability**

Transferability denotes how the findings can be generalised to various contexts. The concept is complex because qualitative research is not necessarily centred around replicability. Researchers ensure transferability by providing comprehensive descriptions of the context and participants or by employing purposive sampling for the study (Stahl & King, 2020). In accordance with the latter statement, the study employed a purposive sampling technique, allowing the likelihood of findings to apply to comparable situations and settings. In addition, adequate information regarding the sample characteristics and context of the study was provided.

- **Confirmability**

The confirmability of qualitative data is based on the consistency of the findings and whether they could be replicated (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016). This concept parallels objectivity in quantitative research. Detailed records of the decisions and analyses throughout the study were kept to ensure confirmability. Subsequently, these records can be subject to discussion or review by others (Connelly, 2016).

- **Dependability**

Dependability is similar to reliability in that it assures others that the findings would be consistent if the study were replicated with identical or comparable participants in the same context. The researcher kept an audit trail of all records of the study from conception to conclusion, as appropriate record-keeping ensures dependability (Ahmed, 2024).

Creswell and Creswell (2023) outline eight key methods for confirming the accuracy and validity of the gathered data. To verify the data collected, the researcher acknowledged and addressed personal biases that may have influenced the research, presented any contradictory or conflicting evidence that went against the established patterns, and sought input and feedback from other experts in the field.

Olmos Vega, Stalmeijer, Varpio, and Kahlke (2023) posit that rigorous, transparent, and reflective methodological techniques are necessary to establish the credibility of qualitative research. To verify the data collected, the researcher acknowledged and addressed personal biases that may have influenced the study, presented any contradictory, conflicting or unrelated evidence that went against the established patterns, and sought input and feedback from other experts in the field. Participants were allowed to review chapter four to ensure accurate interpretation of their viewpoints. In addition to these measures, the researcher considered how their positionality as a government communicator could have influenced the study process.

As previously stated, the researcher's affiliation with the participants introduced bias into the research. This affiliation improved rapport, access, and, more relevantly, richer discussions, but might also have influenced participant engagement, with them potentially limiting or softening their responses because of the professional association with the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges that their past experience and perspectives may have influenced the formulation of the research problem; the way the interview questions were posed; and the way particular themes were interpreted and prioritised during analysis.

To uphold the integrity of the study, the researcher diligently and ethically collected data by meticulously documenting all procedures in written form, using an audio recording device, and carefully interrogating the data. During the interviews, the researcher also reiterated the participants' answers to verify the accuracy of the recording. Supporting this process, the researcher also ensured continuous reflection. This included constantly assessing how familiarity with the participants, power dynamics between the researcher and participants and the researcher's prior knowledge affected both data generation and interpretation.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

According to Flick (2018), the analysis phase is a crucial component of the qualitative research process, regardless of the nature of the data gathered. This phase has a critical role in shaping the overall conclusions drawn from the study. Furthermore, the primary objective of data analysis is to explore significant meanings, patterns, and themes in what the researcher has heard or observed (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Mezmir, 2020; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

The study employed thematic analysis, a technique for systematically examining, coding, and interpreting the information contained in spoken or written forms of communication (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). The methodology was appropriate for the study because it made it possible to explore and describe the role of branding in strategic communication within government. Furthermore, thematic analysis is advantageous because it is adaptable and applies to a wide range of texts, and any potential mistakes that may arise during the analysis may be rectified with relative ease (Allen, 2017; Neuman, 2014).

The data were presented in a narrative format, and the themes and codes were analysed in relation to the research questions, objectives, and overall comprehension of the research topic. This analysis enabled the assessment of the data and facilitated the formulation of a conclusive statement. In this case, commonalities were examined and compared among all participants. These included both agreeing with and disagreeing with the questions stated. The data were analysed using human techniques to derive findings on the role of branding in strategic communication within the departments.

The study used the following six-step data analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

a) Familiarisation with the data

The researcher examined and familiarised themselves with the data obtained for the study. This assisted the researcher in comprehending the data gathered.

b) Generating initial codes

For the analysis, the researcher developed a coding system by identifying recurring patterns and terms. Coding is the process of categorising pieces of content and putting identifiable themes with each category in the margins (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

c) Searching for themes

The themes were based on the research questions, the research aims, and a broad understanding of the research topic. The data were organised and categorised into preliminary themes employed in the study.

d) Reviewing themes

One of the benefits of content analysis is its adaptability. The coding frame should always be linked to the material so that the researcher may make changes as needed to guarantee that themes can acquire significance (Schreier 2014). Therefore, the researcher reviewed and added themes to meet the minimum requirement of five themes as stated by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

e) Refining and naming themes

This stage entailed compiling extracts of data for all the identified topics of the study. This was done to acquire a better grasp of the significance of each topic and its context (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

f) Production of the report

This is the final phase of the process, and it involves a write-up of the themes that were presented as part of the overall findings and discussions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher read and acquainted herself with UNISA's Policy on Research Ethics of 2016. To protect the rights and dignity of participants and the institutions that were involved in the study, the researcher ensured that the study was consistent with the guidelines for research involving human participants (Policy on Research Ethics, 2016). As indicated in the Policy on Research Ethics (2016), the researcher obtained ethical clearance prior to collecting data to ensure that the study upheld intellectual integrity and ethical conduct. In addition, the researcher obtained permission from the

GCIS and the Department of Tourism to conduct the research before data collection (see Annexures B & C).

The Policy on Research Ethics (2016) makes provision for informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, and non-coerced consent to participate in a study. It is against this background that the researcher ensured that written consent to participate in the study was obtained from the participants (see Annexure D), and their information and responses have been kept confidential and anonymous. The participants were also informed of the parties who had access to their information, and that this access was limited to administrative purposes during the study. Consent was sought before data collection to guarantee voluntary and informed participation in the study.

The study did not include any vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, persons under the age of 18 or persons with cognitive disabilities. The study was classified as low risk, as it was unlikely to pose any physical, psychological, or social harm, given that it did not require participants to engage in any physical activity or undergo any form of examination. Participants engaged only in conversations with the researcher about the study topic, which was done in the comfort of their own spaces.

In compliance with the POPIA, the Human Resource Development units of the GCIS and the Department of Tourism were requested to circulate an email to prospective participants. The researcher provided the Human Resource Development units with the participant information sheet and consent forms for distribution to the participants. Additionally, the researcher briefed the units on the inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that participants with relevant knowledge and expertise were recruited. Once the interested parties responded to the researcher, their details were recorded to schedule interviews.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This section of the research gave an outline of the study's research approach, explaining how the researcher intended to answer the research questions. It was determined that, because the study adopted an interpretative ontological and

epistemological position, the research design would be qualitative. The research questions were outlined, alongside the methods employed to collect the data. The study also discussed the data collection methods, target and accessible populations, population characteristics, units of analysis, and sampling procedures. The subsequent chapter focused on the interpretation and presentation of the data.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the study's research design and outlined the data collection and analysis methods used to address the research questions. The study focused on corporate communication as a sub-field of organisational communication, with an emphasis on branding and strategic communication. This qualitative study sought to explore and describe the role of branding in strategic communication within government, focusing on the GCIS as the custodians of government communication and the Department of Tourism as an implementer of the policies, principles and standards established by the GCIS. The presentation and analysis processes were shaped by the following main and sub-research objectives, as well as main and sub-research questions.

The following was the main research objective:

- To investigate the role of branding as a strategic communication tool in advancing the organisational objectives of the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.

The following were the sub-research objectives:

- To investigate and gain insight into the contribution of branding as a tool in strategic communication.
- To establish how the GCIS and the Department of Tourism implement branding.
- To explore the role of branding in strategic communication within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.
- To establish how branding can be made more effective within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.

The following was the main research question:

- What is the role of branding as a strategic communication tool in advancing the organisational objectives of the GCIS and the Department of Tourism?

The following were the sub-research questions:

- What strategic role does branding play in GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
- How is branding implemented within GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
- How does branding as a strategic communication lead to the achievement of organisational goals at GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
- How can branding as a form of strategic communication be made effective?

This chapter focused on the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data. The subsequent section detailed the data collection process undertaken for this study.

4.2 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

A total of 13 participants from the GCIS and the Department of Tourism participated in this study. The participants were selected purposively in line with the phenomenological research design, based on their expertise and knowledge in government communication. Differently ranked participants were selected to enable the researcher to gain diverse perspectives on the role of branding in strategic communication in government. Additionally, all participants were government communicators employed by the GCIS and the Department of Tourism, respectively.

To recruit participants, the researcher shared the exclusion and inclusion criteria, participant information sheet and consent form with the Human Resource Department (HRD) units from both departments after obtaining the research ethics approval from UNISA for the study. The two HRD units distributed the information to 10 prospective participants, respectively. A total of 15 participants responded to the request; however, two participants subsequently withdrew from the study without providing reasons. An exception was made for one participant, who did not possess a formal qualification in communication but had 41 years of experience in government

communication. The final sample comprised four senior managers, five middle managers, and four officers from both departments.

Participants were given a choice between face-to-face and virtual interviews. All participants chose the virtual interview format, and written consent to participate in the study was obtained before the interviews. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted in English using Microsoft Teams and took 45 minutes to an hour, as originally anticipated. The proceedings were recorded verbatim using the application, an iPad voice memo and typed notes. Codes P1 to P13 were used to identify participants.

4.3 PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

4.3.1 Participants' biographical information

To ensure the anonymity of participants in line with the research ethics, the researcher used 13 code names for the participants' data. Participants from the GCIS and the Department of Tourism were assigned code names ranging from P1 to P13 to ensure anonymity. Table 4.1 presents the biographical data of the participants.

Table 4.1: Participants' biographical data

Participants	Code Name	Gender	Rank	Experience in the field (years)	Qualification
Participant 1	P1	Male	Senior Manager	15	BTech Degree
Participant 2	P2	Female	Officer	9	Bachelor's Degree
Participant 3	P3	Female	Middle Manager	41	Matric
Participant 4	P4	Male	Senior Manager	22	Master's Degree
Participant 5	P5	Female	Middle Manager	15	Bachelor's Degree
Participant 6	P6	Female	Officer	12	Honours Degree
Participant 7	P7	Female	Middle Manager	16	BTech Degree
Participant 8	P8	Female	Senior Manager	28	Honours Degree
Participant 9	P9	Male	Officer	6	Bachelor's Degree
Participant 10	P10	Female	Middle Manager	17	Bachelor's Degree
Participant 11	P11	Female	Senior Manager	31	Honours Degree

Participants	Code Name	Gender	Rank	Experience in the field (years)	Qualification
Participant 12	P12	Male	Middle Manager	19	Master's Degree
Participant 13	P13	Male	Officer	8	Honours Degree

4.3.2 Participants' ranks

Table 4.2 depicts the ranks of the participants at the GCIS and the Department of Tourism. The data demonstrated that the participants were of varying ranks, with 30.8% of participants below the management level, 30.8% at the management level, and those in middle management being the largest group at 38.4%. The differently ranked participants allowed the researcher to gain a diverse perspective of the role of branding in strategic communication within government.

Table 4.2: Participants' ranks

Rank	Number of Participants	Percentage
Officers	4	30.8%
Middle Managers	5	38.4%
Senior Managers	4	30.8%

4.3.3 Participants' gender

Table 4.3 illustrates the gender distribution of the research participants. The majority of communicators in both departments were female, leading to a composition of 61.5% female participants and 38.5% male participants.

Table 4.3: Participants' gender

Gender	Number of Participants	Percentage
Female	8	61.5%
Male	5	38.5%

4.3.4 Participants' qualification

92% of the participants have formal qualifications in communications, and it is presumed that they are qualified in their respective fields. Table 4.4 illustrates the breakdown of the participants' qualifications. Most of the participants possess a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent, with four participants holding an honours degree and two participants holding master's degrees. There was, however, one participant with no tertiary education who possessed 41 years of experience in the field. It was presumed that this participant's contribution would benefit the study.

Table 4.4: Participants' qualifications

Qualification	Number of Participants	Percentage
Master's Degree	2	15.4%
Honours Degree	4	30.8%
BTech / Bachelor's Degree	6	46.1%
Matric	1	7.7%

4.3.5 Participants' experience in government communication

Table 4.5 illustrates the information on the participants' experience in government communication. 46.1% of the participants have experience ranging between 11 – 20 years, 23% ranging between 2 -10 years, 15.4% ranging between 21-30 years, 7.7% ranging between 31- 45 years and 7.7% with 41 years of experience in government communication. The data suggests that the participants are seasoned and experienced in their respective fields, yielding rich and detailed data for the study.

Table 4.5: Participants' experience in government communication

Number of years in government communication	Number of Participants	Percentage
2 – 10 years	3	23.1%
11 – 20 years	6	46.1%
21 – 30 years	2	15.4%
31 – 45 years	2	15.4%

4.4 ANALYSIS PROCESS

As noted in Chapter 3, section 3.9, the study employed thematic analysis to analyse the data collected through semi-structured interviews. The six-step data analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed. The analysis process began with a thorough review of the interview transcripts to enable the researcher to become familiar with the collected data. This involved reading the transcripts multiple times and making notes during each reading to develop a comprehensive understanding of the data. Subsequently, the researcher identified texts with recurring patterns, specifically, similarities and differences in the responses of each participant. This enabled the researcher to categorise specific words or phrases that encapsulated the participants' responses, facilitating the generation of codes and themes. The preliminary themes were reviewed and weighted against the research questions and objectives to ensure that the emerging themes corresponded with the data, and their features were adequately described. Table 4.6 presents the identified codes and themes.

Table 4.6: Codes and emerging themes

Code	Category	Theme
• Uniqueness • Identity • Positioning • Differentiation	• Unique identity and positioning	Theme 1: The function of branding in organisational communication.
• CI guidelines • Standard look and feel • Aligning • Branding materials • Approvals	• Management of branding	Theme 2: Branding processes and procedures in the Departments
• Visibility • Identification • Recognition	• Builds brand recognition, trust, loyalty, and enhances credibility	Theme 3: Branding as a value driver for organisational objectives.

Code	Category	Theme
- Fostering loyalty and trust - Advocacy		
- Approvals - Guiding documents - Flexibility - Awareness - Platforms - Consistency - Training	- Training and empowerment - Review frameworks and processes	Theme 4: Enhancing branding as a strategic communication tool

4.5 THEMES THAT EMERGED DURING DATA ANALYSIS

4.5.1 Theme 1: The function of branding in organisational communication

To establish the participants' views regarding the contribution of branding as a strategic tool, two questions were posed. Firstly, the participants were asked: "What is your understanding of corporate branding?" Some of the participants' responses were as follows:

P4: Corporate branding is about the identity of an organisation and also how it is perceived by the audiences, or let me say, clients. It also helps people know that the organisation exists, and they know the values of the organisation. It also helps to build recognition, enhances loyalty, builds trust, and helps extend the reach of communication, as the more frequently citizens encounter a government brand, the more familiar and recognisable it becomes.

P7: It is what the department stands for and how it positions itself or differentiates itself from other departments. It is a distinct identity linked to the department that sets it apart from other government departments. For example, the Department of Tourism has a marketing brand, We Do Tourism, which we have carried through, and it sets us apart from other departments.

P8: Corporate branding is the identity of an entity or organisation. Basically, it represents them, and when you see that, you know what they stand for and who they are. It is the unspoken words about the entity, essentially representing what the entity is and what it wants people to know about it. Overall, it is about identity.

P9: My understanding is that it is unique. It is a way of creating a unique identity for the company or organisation, which might be for a service, product or the company itself. Branding also establishes a recognisable name for that company. It is also a distinctive way for your target audience to distinguish your organisation, products, or services from other related companies within the same field. It also creates a memorable experience with your target audience. Once they have seen it, it stays with their minds, and they do not forget it.

The researcher discovered that the majority of the participants understood what corporate branding is. They mentioned that it encompasses the identity of an organisation, and this identity assists in positioning the organisation and differentiates it from other similar organisations. In support of the participant's perspectives, Hall (2021) opines that corporate branding fundamentally involves identifying the attributes that constitute an organisation's uniqueness and set it apart from others in its sector.

P9 expressed their view that corporate branding not only establishes a recognisable name for an organisation but also creates a memorable experience for the target audience, ensuring that once they have seen it, it remains engraved in their memory. In addition to P9's views, P8 asserted that corporate branding is the identity of an organisation that is recognisable to the public and signifies the importance of the organisation. These perspectives correspond with the notion presented by Iglesias et al. (2020) that identity is a crucial aspect of corporate branding because it makes an organisation unique and enhances its significance in relation to similar organisations.

In contrast to the majority, P6 responded as follows: "For me, corporate branding is when a company or institution is promoting their services or what they are dealing with." (P6)

They attributed corporate branding to be when an organisation promotes its offerings. Despite the researcher probing for more information on the matter, the participant appeared to genuinely understand corporate branding only as a promotional activity. Even though P6 provided a different perspective, their view is corroborated by Stevens et al. (2021), who argue that branding in government is frequently used to advance the organisation's policies or services offered. The researcher concluded that their response had merit.

Secondly, the participants were asked: “Do you consider branding a strategic tool? Why is that”? Their responses included the following:

P1: I do consider branding as a strategic tool. I think with any organisation, you want to stand out for various reasons. I think the most important thing is to be identifiable from other brands so that your services and products are also able to be aligned with what you seek to be in the eyes of the people, so that when people engage with the brand, they can distinguish in terms of who you are and what it is that you are offering.

P5: I do consider branding a strategic tool because of the following reasons. Communications can always be done without a certain level of branding, but certain things rely heavily on identity, and this is where branding comes in. For example, nowadays, if people see a government logo on information, they then regard that information as legitimate. Therefore, branding legitimises whatever the communication or information is and also builds a brand association in people’s minds. When there is a look, people will be able to identify where the information is coming from.

P7: I would say, overall, government branding is strategic, but department by department, I would not necessarily say it is a strategic tool because most people just classify government as one entity. They assume we all do more or less the same thing, whereas each department has a different mandate. I feel that, because we all use the same Coat of Arms, we are likely able to see the difference, but the ordinary South African sees the national government and cannot distinguish between the departments. I believe that the fact that citizens associate with the Coat of Arms indicates that branding is strategic on a national scale (country level). I find it strategic as it positions our country.

P10: Yes, I do think, as I mentioned in response to the first question, branding is strategic because it helps you to be identifiable to both the internal and external public. It is the identity of an institution. If you go out there without a brand, no one will remember who you are. Also, for employees, it is something that helps build a sense of identity because they are able to associate with the brand. It is just as important as having a flag to identify us as a country and take pride in it, because we take ownership of the actual brand.

The majority of the participants concurred that branding is a strategic tool. They believe that branding is a strategic tool because it constitutes the identity of an organisation, enabling it to be distinctly recognisable from other comparable organisations. It helps build a sense of identity for both internal and external stakeholders, enabling them to associate with the organisation. This notion is supported by Balmer and Podnar (2021), who posit that corporate branding allows an

organisation to differentiate and distinguish itself from similar organisations, and also enhances the recognition and commitment in which the organisation is held by both external and internal stakeholders. In addition, Lejerholt et al. (2019a) also state that branding fortifies ties between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders. Furthermore, Temporal (2015) postulates that branding is essential as it accentuates the development of robust intangible ideas, emotions, and impressions among consumers. This aligns with the participants' view that, in the absence of an identifiable brand, messaging and communications may become ineffective; hence, branding is essential for positioning the organisation.

P5 stated that, while communication can be done without a certain degree of branding, there are certain aspects of communication that are significantly dependent on branding. They further argued that branding legitimises information, in that when people see a government logo on information, they view that piece of information as legitimate. P5 perspectives are consistent with the view by Nkuna et al. (2023), who opine that consumers utilise their cognitive memory of the brand to process information provided and draw conclusions. As a result of this association, there is limited scrutiny of the information provided.

P4 alluded that branding fosters loyalty, cultivates trust and broadens communication reach. Reghunathan (2021) supported these claims, arguing that branding promotes trust in governmental services, and thus potentially increasing citizens' involvement. In line with Reghunathan (2021), Karens et al. (2016), and Stevens et al. (2021) opine that applying branding in government can shape or reshape the citizens' perceptions and has the potential to increase trust in government and its services.

The researcher noted that P7 held a view at variance with the majority. They stated that they do not think branding is strategic for the national department because all departments use the Coat of Arms in their logos, and the public classifies the departments as one entity, believing they do the same thing; a view corroborated by some studies. In their study, Leijerholt et al. (2019b) found that differentiation and uniqueness are insignificant goals for government departments, and that certain groups cannot tell government departments apart. However, P7 thinks that, at the country level, branding is strategic because it positions the country. Cornelissen

(2017) supports P7's latter statement and the views of other participants, suggesting that branding is a crucial component of government communication, especially in achieving strategic goals such as fostering legitimacy and improving public participation. Based on the above discussion, it can be deduced that branding is a strategic tool for government communications.

4.5.2 Theme 2: Branding processes and procedures in the departments

This theme allowed the researcher to gain insight into how branding is implemented in both the GCIS and the Department of Tourism. To achieve this, the researcher asked the participants three questions. The first question posed was, "Are you familiar with CI guidelines, and are they easy to understand?"

The majority of the participants shared the same sentiments about the CI guidelines. The participants acknowledged their familiarity with the CI guidelines; however, the majority contended that the CI guidelines are not easy to understand. They concurred that the guidelines are a technical document, understood clearly by graphic designers compared to other communicators. P3 and P13 had contrasting views from the majority, asserting that the CI guidelines are easy to understand. However, P13's observation that there is a lack of awareness around the guidelines aligns with the majority perspective that there is not enough training on CI guidelines when there are new entrants in government. The participants expressed the following views:

Yes, I am familiar with the CI guidelines. I would say for designers who use design software every day, the guidelines may be simple to understand. However, for most communicators, I think the CI guidelines are a bit complicated because when you look at the CI manual, it contains technical information that is not easily understood by communicators. (P4)

Yes, I am familiar with the CI guidelines. I would say they are easy to understand because they are crafted in everyday language, and they detail what is expected from government departments. However, I believe there is a lack of awareness around the guidelines. (P13)

Aligned with the perspective of the majority of participants, the researcher discovered that the government CI guidelines are ambiguous, leading to confusion and branding inconsistencies. In support of the latter statement, King (2023) states that CI guidelines

with precise rules for visual design and messaging can facilitate a smoother, more streamlined creative process. The CI guidelines enable organisations to establish a solid, recognisable brand while maintaining brand consistency across all platforms. Additionally, the GCIS (2025a:61) states that “the CI must be clear and consistent to be easily recognised and identifiable by the public.” Based on this statement, achieving consistent branding may be challenging when implementers report that the guidelines are not easily understood, which contradicts the principles of systems thinking. Arnold et al. (2024) posit that within a systems environment, communicators shape the organisation, and the organisation simultaneously shapes the communicators. Consequently, ambiguity in the CI guidelines influences communicators’ perceptions of what they believe the guidelines to be, instead of their intended meaning. The second question posed to participants under this theme concerned the implementation of branding in both departments. The researcher found that the majority of participants shared a common understanding of how branding is implemented within the GCIS. Some of the participants responded as follows:

A standard look and feel is developed, presented to the Management Committee (MANCO) for input and approval. Once approved, toolkits are shared with all units, and the look and feel are then applied to stationery, promotional items, and presentations, amongst others, ensuring consistency throughout. For example, when there is an event in the Eastern Cape, they should use the same banners as those used by the head office to be more identifiable as an organisation. (P2)

The GCIS decided to develop a look and feel that can be applied to various products, such as brochures and banners. This is to ensure that citizens can recognise communication from the GCIS and differentiate it from generic communication from other government departments, as the GCIS communicates messages on behalf of other departments. (P3)

We brand various items, such as buildings, documents, digital platforms, event branding material, promotional materials and corporate clothing. All these items have the GCIS logo. Also, in radio news bulletins produced by the GCIS, there is always a mention of the department’s name. Having branded items also assists the department in promoting its brand to both internal and external stakeholders. (P4)

However, P6 expressed uncertainty about the use of branding within the organisation but noted that the organisation's products are branded and distinguishable from others. P6 stated:

I am honestly not really sure about this, but I normally see that when there are events, be it organised by other government departments or the GCIS, branded material used by the GCIS always looks similar. (P6)

The participants expressed that within the GCIS, a standard look and feel or branding was developed and applied to various products or platforms, allowing the public to differentiate GCIS's communication from that of other government departments. This is supported by the views from Zwakala and Steenkamp (2023), who posit that having products and services that can be differentiated from similar offerings fosters brand preference, association and loyalty.

Drawing on the majority viewpoint, having a standard look and feel or branding provides an identity for the organisation, as the public will be able to recognise that the products or the information originates from the GCIS. This notion contradicts the argument put forward by Sataøen and Waeraas (2015) that the government frequently lacks a distinct, identifiable brand. Moreover, in support of the participants' viewpoint, Buil et al. (2016) espouse that standardised branding increases efficiency and strengthens consumer awareness and trust through consistent branding, improving customer recognition. Additionally, consistent branding, both internally and externally, enhances stakeholder confidence and improves organisational performance.

The majority of participants from the Department of Tourism shared the same sentiments regarding the implementation of branding in their department. Some of the participants said:

Branding is primarily a visual representation of a brand, and sometimes the way people speak and the terms they use reflect the field they belong to. However, in the Department of Tourism, branding is mainly visual and is reflected through buildings and corporate clothing. Additionally, advertisements and content posted on digital platforms, such as the website, intranet, and social media, are also branded. (P7)

It is utilised quite a lot. It is visible from the time you arrive at the building, the logo is at the entrance, and inside, the interior echoes the corporate colours. We see it in the documents we work with, folders, and official templates that feature the departmental brand, as well as an electronic database accessible to all. It is also visible when hosting events, you see it when driving to the venue, until you get inside the venue. Social media platforms,

media statements, and electronic resources are all branded. Everything that is sent out is branded so that it is identifiable. (P10)

We have branding materials for events, signage for the building, as well as branded documents that we use both internally and externally and corporate wear to ensure visibility of the organisation. (P13)

The participants' view is that there is brand visibility within the organisation. Similar to the GCIS, various items are branded with the departmental logo, including the building, stationery, digital platforms, branding materials, and corporate clothing. These ensure that products and services from the Department of Tourism are visible and identifiable to stakeholders. The participants' views are supported by views from Lejerholt (2019), who asserts that elevated visibility improves public awareness about government programmes and services, resulting in improved public participation and compliance.

A contrasting view that the researcher observed was that of P8, P12 and P11. P12 mentioned that the application of branding in the department is limited by a lack of comprehension regarding its significance, which is often misinterpreted as merely a banner or poster, rather than a representation of the organisation's identity, objectives and goals.

I feel that the application of branding in the Department of Tourism is limited, because officials still have a misconception that branding is a banner or poster. There is a lack of understanding that it is part of telling the department's story. I feel we can do a little more to have more branding within the building itself. For example, outside the building, there are two different logos and inside the building, the corporate brand is not that visible. When you are inside the building, you could say you are in any other office building. However, the products produced (publications, posters, banners) are all branded, making them identifiable. (P12)

In support of the participant's perspective, Jovanovska (2020) suggests that branding is more than a symbol or description thereof. It includes the perception of the whole organisation, its products and services. Additionally, branding incorporates how people perceive and experience an organisation and its offerings. Furthermore, P8 concurred with P12 in that branding is not applied correctly across the board. P8 indicated that officials are aware of the brand but do not always apply it correctly, or rather, do not try to apply it correctly. The observed lack of employee commitment to the organisation's branding efforts corresponds with the government branding

challenge identified by Leijerholt et al. (2019a). The authors argue that, unlike the private sector, where organisational success and profit are key, government branding may not always resonate with all employees, as their commitment is primarily motivated by the fulfilment of values and advancement of societal benefits intrinsic in government (Leijerholt et al., 2019a). Consequently, this disconnect can lead to resistance in actions that contradict their perceptions of the Department's purpose.

I believe branding is implemented in the Department of Tourism; however, I feel it can be done better. There are officials in the Communications unit who care about the branding, but many staff members in the Department of Tourism do not pay much attention to it. Staff do not apply it correctly; as long as a document has a logo, it is fine. Even when there are events, staff want the branding to be present, but they do not consider whether the type of branding material they request is relevant for the event. (P8)

Inconsistent with P8 and P12, P11 alluded to a higher level of brand awareness and appreciation in the department and noted that more officials are correctly applying the brand to various items.

I think it is very well implemented in the Department of Tourism. There is a higher consciousness of the brand, the brand value and the application of the brand as compared to other departments. So, I think more people are aware of it, more people wear it on their corporate clothing, and more people use it correctly in this department than in others, comparatively. (P11)

In support of P8 and P12's perspective that inconsistent application confuses, Zavattaro et al. (2021), espouse that having a clear and consistent branding is important for improving service delivery and retaining public confidence in government. In agreement, Buil et al. (2016) state that managing a brand properly often results in a favourable impression, positive attitudes, and associations from different stakeholders.

Based on the participants' responses, it is evident that both the GCIS and the Department of Tourism have developed distinct visual identities, allowing their respective services to be recognisable, distinguishable, and differentiated from other government departments. This is supported by the views of Wu & Cheong (2021), who assert that branding is successful when consumers recall an organisation solely by its

brand identity or by recognising its name. Furthermore, an organisation's visual identity helps consumers comprehend what the organisation is about and what it seeks to achieve. Wu and Cheong (2021) also corroborate P12's view that branding is part of telling the department's story. The finding further affirms the systems theory, suggesting the interconnectedness of the components of the system. The department's unique identity enables its publics to recognise, recall and differentiate it from similar entities, thereby connecting the internal and external environments (Jackson & Moraes, 2023).

The third question under this theme sought to help the researcher gain insights into how the departments ensure consistent branding across different platforms. The researcher found that the GCIS and the Department of Tourism use similar approaches to ensure consistent branding across different platforms. The majority of participants reported that having templates or toolkits with a standard look and feel ensures the organisation has consistent branding across different platforms. They further alluded that a uniform look on products ensures brand essence and positions the department. Zwakala and Steenkamp (2023) concur with the participants' views, arguing that consistency in the tone, look and feel assists an organisation in building a lasting identity in the eyes of the public, resulting in improved differentiation and positioning.

The toolkit, a package of products (banners, sizes, t-shirts, letterhead, promotional items, among others) and their technical specifications, is communicated with clear instructions through the internal communications unit within the GCIS. This is how we ensure that all materials produced look the same. (P2)

If you have a look and feel, the only thing that is there to do is to ensure that the look and feel are adaptable enough to live on different products and platforms while maintaining the brand essence. The look and feel of the products do not have to be identical, but they have to look like a family of products for consistency. (P5)

To maintain branding consistency in the department, we have CI guidelines that we use when developing products for various platforms. When you see our adverts on our website, they must look similar to an advert that you would see on our social media platforms. This branding consistency ensures brand positioning for the department. (P7)

The products that I use for digital platforms are actually produced by the design unit, which sits under the main unit that looks after the department's brand. So, when we brief in communication products, they are automatically branded, and all of those products are uniform; what you see on the website is what you will see on the social media platforms. (P10)

Essamri et al. (2018) opine that approvals play an important role in the branding process, as they ensure uniformity, validity, and calibrate the way that the brand is presented across different platforms. Approvals also provide a filter that safeguards the integrity of the brand's identity, messaging, and visual expression before distribution to the public, ensuring alignment with the organisational principles and objectives. Aligned with the argument made by Essamri et al. (2018), the participants from the GCIS indicated that their approval process involves the graphic designers, CI manager and a branch head, whereas the participants from the Department of Tourism indicated that approvals are handled by the Branding unit. P1, P3, P4, P11 and P13 concurred that approvals on products produced allow both departments to ensure consistent branding across different platforms. Moreover, this perspective aligns with systems thinking, which underscores that components cannot function without the support of the other; therefore, suggesting that branding processes cannot proceed without approvals (Lai & Lin, 2017).

For the GCIS, we are not only the custodians, but from time to time, we do apply the branding itself or the CI to our products. The look and feel are developed by the graphic design unit, which is responsible for the design and layout of government materials that go through the GCIS and the CI manager. Second to that is what I can call the second filter: the branch head, who is responsible for the products produced and whose approval the product must pass. This is the two-pillar system we use in the GCIS to ensure that the application of the CI is well executed. (P1)

All the branded products are sent to the CI manager for approval before they are used, which assists in ensuring consistency. In addition, the graphic designers, who are also trained on the CI application, are able to identify and rectify non-compliance issues. So, in a way, branding is consistent. There are templates that are used for letters and reports, for example. These are locked, and you cannot change the branding on these products, ensuring consistency within the organisation, especially when communicating externally. However, there are exceptional cases where templates are not locked, and someone can fiddle with the logo, leading to distortion. (P4)

To ensure consistent branding across all platforms, we have an awareness drive, where we publish articles in our internal monthly newsletter, providing

guidelines on how to use branding on various items. We also provide CI application guidance to other units. For example, when someone wants to procure t-shirts, the branding unit then develops or approves a specification for them in line with the departmental CI guidelines. For campaigns or projects, toolkits are developed and shared with all team members. This ensures consistency, as the poster placed on notice boards would look similar to or the same as the one posted on social media and the one placed in a newspaper. (P13)

P3, P7, P12 and P13 shared the same view that the CI guidelines enable their organisations to maintain consistency across different platforms. Furthermore, P8, P12 and P13 expressed that the Department of Tourism publishes an article in the monthly newsletter focusing on how to use corporate branding on various items to ensure consistency. Aligned to the participants' perspective, the CI guidelines ensure that all communication products have a uniform message and visual identity. They enable the organisation to operate effectively and efficiently by providing detailed instructions on the application of the brand across different platforms to maintain branding consistency and professionalism (The importance of brand guidelines..., 2018). Moreover, the GCIS (2025a) stipulates that the CI guidelines restrict the usage of the government brand to safeguard it against misappropriation and manipulation.

However, P8 and P12 contend that from the Department of Tourism, these endeavours are in vain, as they cite that employees fail to implement branding effectively and do not regard it as important, resulting in documents and products with inconsistent branding. P4 made a similar claim, stating that at the GCIS, there are instances where employees sometimes manipulate the branding on unlocked templates, leading to branding distortion.

There are templates, and officials responsible for branding are always on standby to assist. There is always an article in the internal newsletter on how to use corporate branding and CI. I believe there is an effort from the Branding unit to educate employees, but the uptake to consult is just not there. I feel that other employees do not see branding as important. On my side, I send products or documents to the Branding unit for review and feedback to ensure consistency throughout. (P8)

This is a tough one, especially for the government. There is branding consistency on the products produced by the communication unit, such as banners, posters, and publications, among others. However, some officials still use the incorrect logo in their email signatures. Even after being

corrected, they will not correct the logo; it is as if they do not respect the brand. I would say the department needs to address the organisational culture and encourage people to be prouder of the brand. To ensure branding consistency, we have included a page in the monthly newsletter explaining how branding should be applied, but I think it is the page that most people bypass. I say this because of the inconsistencies in branding I have observed on documents generated by other officials. (P12)

The participants' views on the lack of branding consistency across organisations reinforce the assertion made by Peddisetty (2024) that having CI guidelines developed and distributed to employees is not adequate. They need to be trained on how to use these, and there should also be a feedback mechanism in place, as this will allow for branding consistency. The latter affirms the systems thinking, which advocates for feedback to enable the organisation to adapt to its environment and rectify its shortcomings (Musheke, 2021).

4.5.3 Theme 3: Branding as a value driver for organisational objectives

To comprehend the role branding plays in strategic communication within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism, the researcher posed two questions to the participants. When asked to describe how they developed a branding plan and what informed their decisions, the researcher found that the responses from the participants varied. Seven participants understood the branding plan to be event-based and explained how they would place banners at an event. P8 and P11 indicated that they had never developed a branding plan. When the researcher probed further, they both referred to a plan to put up branded banners at an event, with P8 citing that they would refer to the CI guidelines and seek further guidance from the GCIS.

The seven participants concurred that having a branding plan for an event organised by their organisations increases visibility and positions the organisation. This is because their departmental branding always takes precedence over other partners, as they are government departments. In congruence with the participants' perspective, Stevens et al. (2021) espouse that branding is frequently used to promote government, its policies, initiatives and programmes.

We had an event for the Justice Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) Cluster, which comprises various stakeholders, that is, departments and entities. So, in terms of branding material, we placed the wall banner, which carried the campaign theme and the Coat of Arms, on the stage. Next to the side walls of the venue, we placed a set number of pull-up banners from each stakeholder. Outside the venue, there was also branding from various stakeholders. The decision to brand venues is determined by two aspects: the availability of space for banners, and also to ensure visibility of the various entities participating in the event, while communicating their mandates. (P1)

When I draft a branding plan, I make sure that there is a representation of all partners, but our branding will mainly dominate as we are a national department. For example, if we have an Imbizo, I have the campaign wall banner at the centre of the stage and on the sides, pull-up banners. I then allocate a number for partners' branding material depending on the available space at the venue and the type of branding material required, whether outdoor, indoor, or both. All this is done to make the partnership visible, and also for positioning the department, because when co-branding, the department's brand is always placed on the left, as it needs to take priority over the other partners as a national department. (P7)

The remaining six participants described a branding plan as a document that guides the development of a brand or identity. They described a long-term plan which sets out to communicate the campaign or organisation's mandate, objectives, and values to the stakeholders. In line with the description provided by the participants, it is argued that a branding plan is a blueprint by which the organisation expresses its mandate, values, culture and offering to the public and other stakeholders (Wheeler & Meyerson, 2024).

When developing a branding plan for the Coat of Arms, we started with an audit to obtain the people's perception of the old brand and what would work better. Following that, create a look and feel that will speak to the target audience, and ensure that the government is seen as one. We then looked at the platforms, products and services that people would need to access the branded communication, as our communication caters for both our department and the entire government. (P3)

To develop a corporate brand, we started by identifying the values that the organisation wanted to associate with the brand. Subsequently, a logo was developed, which was then tested with focus groups and approved. Developing the branding plan, we first needed to create messages linked to the brand, apply the branding to different products produced and last, arrange a media launch to unveil the brand. Having a plan creates opportunities to expand the brand and makes it more visible and recognisable. (P4)

“When we developed the branding plan for the GCIS look, my team and I had to consider the following aspects: We had to look at our organisational mandate and objectives, as these would have to be depicted visually; where the look and feel would be applied, whether the look and feel would be amenable, and what colour would be consistent with the selected organisational colour palette; the lifespan of the look and feel (how long we would want to keep it). From an audience perspective, the look had to ensure that the organisation is visible, different, easily recognisable and remembered by the citizens. (P5)

The government brand should be visible to the public so that they are aware of it and its services. The organisation’s visibility leads to awareness, which in turn results in the public recognising and recalling it (Gündüzyeli et al., 2021; Seturi, 2017). Aligned with this notion and the preceding discussion, it is evident that participants have a different understanding of what a branding plan entails. However, the one thing the participants mentioned in common is that having a branding plan ensures enhanced visibility, awareness, recognition and recall of the organisation. The finding corroborates the systems thinking perspective that all types of communication influence the system as a whole, thereby supporting effective organisational communication (Musheke, 2021). Moreover, branding functions as a conduit, linking internal processes with external expectations (Jackson & Moraes, 2023).

Secondly, the researcher sought the participants’ views on the contribution of branding to the achievement of organisational goals to establish the role of branding in strategic communication within departments. The participants concurred that branding enhances the organisation's visibility, which in turn, attracts, recognises, associates with, differentiates, and builds trust and loyalty with the stakeholders, including the public, leading to the achievement of organisational goals. In support of the participants’ view, Zerfass et al. (2018) espouse that strategic communication includes all communication required for the organisation’s survival and continued success. Furthermore, Zavattaro et al. (2021) opine that when using branding in government, the decision is a strategic and purposeful management of aspects that communicate about the organisation, its programmes and initiatives to achieve the organisational goals.

When members of the public recognise the GCIS brand, they know it's a provider of information, and by knowing that, they can go to GCIS offices or platforms to get more information. In that way, there is both trust and loyalty. GCIS becomes the trusted source of government information, which is why it helps to achieve our organisational objectives. Additionally, recognising the brand helps the public to understand what kind of services the GCIS offers, and this makes them use our services more frequently, and that again, ensures that we achieve our organisational goals and objectives. (P4)

Branding is important because it not only attracts the audience but can also increase private sector partnerships in government. Also, the more people resonate with the brand, the more participation the department will receive. Their participation will then lead to trust and loyalty in the services the department offers. So, branding is important in that it can increase the uptake of the department's services and also instil loyalty and trust among the public. (P9)

One of the organisational goals we have at the Department of Tourism is for people to be able to identify and participate in departmental initiatives and programmes. When we have an event or exhibition, we would make sure that we have a stand that is easily identifiable amongst other exhibitors, and the collateral that is handed out to attendees has departmental branding with key information to enable them to interact with the department beyond the event. Also, branding in public spaces helps the department because people know who we are and can spot us among other departments. So, from the perspective of reaching people and ensuring that they participate in departmental programmes and initiatives, yes, we are meeting this objective. (P10)

Xi, Yang, Jiao, Wang and Lu (2022) argue that to foster brand recognition, appreciation, and association, brand identity communicates the organisation's distinctiveness and character to the public. Additionally, Buil et al. (2016) state that brand identity involves an organisation's unique mix of attributes and the concept of significance associated with it. In line with the literature, P1 and P8 agreed that branding visually summarises what the organisation is about and what it offers to the stakeholders.

For me, every organisation has a vision, and one way of understanding a vision is if you were to close your eyes and just imagine what your organisation would look like. I think the visualisation is always useful because it becomes the ultimate way of expressing yourself, as everything is in the eyes. You can include or exclude the text in it, then a brand or the visualisation thereof becomes that vision encapsulated into one artwork or look and feel. So, it becomes very important in that regard and in a nutshell, when people look at the brand, they should be able to see what your

organisation stand for, and what you are offering in terms of your products and services. (P1)

Branding communicates the organisation's values and mission. So, it does contribute to strategic communication because it basically tells people what the organisation is about without using words; it is a visual communication of what the organisation is about. (P8)

The majority of the participants highlighted the importance of brand visibility in meeting the organisation's objectives. They agreed that when people recognise the brand, they understand the services the departments offer and would engage with the departments on the platforms available to obtain more information. Consequently, increasing their participation in the departments' programmes and initiatives. P5 further stated that when the public directly approaches the departments or goes through their platforms to obtain reliable information, the interaction helps build trust and loyalty towards the department. The participants' views are corroborated by Reghunathan (2021), who posits that government branding enhances visibility, legitimacy, and trust by fostering favourable public engagement and enabling departments to communicate their messages. Furthermore, the participants' views affirm the presence of systems thinking as they express the interconnectedness of branding elements.

It contributes a lot because if a brand is not known, people will not be interested in it. So, if a brand is known out there, people know what the organisation entails, and when you are looking for something, you know exactly where to go. Therefore, branding is very important to ensure brand visibility and awareness. (P2)

It is argued that organisations with strong brand image or identity stand out from similar organisations, enabling differentiation and cultivating positive perceptions among the public and stakeholders (Nagalakshmi et al., 2025; Lejeholt et al, 2019b). Aligned to this notion, P5 alluded that since *"people are visually minded"*, this contributes to their recognition and recall of the brand. The public can then differentiate the organisation's product from others based on its visual appeal. When the public is attracted to the product, they then consume the information. In addition, P9 indicated that organisations with *"strong branding are taken seriously and that people can resonate with and remember them, compared to organisations with weaker branding."* Aligned to P5 and P9, P7 said:

In our department, a plaque is normally erected when we launch a community development project. This, in turn, assists in positioning the department as an organisation that cares about the community and has ploughed back into it. Even if administrators change over the years, the departmental brand will be there forever, and whoever walks in there, even for the first time, will start to associate with the departmental brand. So, branding contributes immensely to departmental goals. (P7)

Saxena (2015) also supports these views, contending that people frequently remember imagery more than text. The author also emphasises that organisations characterised by elevated imagery and suitability qualities generally display considerably better brand recall and recognition.

Based on the discussion, it is evident that branding contributes significantly to achieving organisational goals. This corroborates systems thinking, which advocates for the interaction and exchange between the organisation and its environment. From a branding perspective, it shapes the organisation's publics' perceptions, and, in return, favourable perceptions will assist the organisation in achieving its goals (Arnold et al., 2017; Nagalakshmi et al., 2025).

4.5.4 Theme 4: Enhancing branding as a strategic communication tool

Zavattaro et al. (2021) opine that branding is the purposeful effort from all major stakeholders working together to bring a brand to life. Against this context, to gain insight into how branding as a tool for strategic communication can be made more effective, three questions were posed to the participants. Firstly, the researcher enquired about the measures put in place to ensure that branding is implemented effectively. The participants concurred that both departments have measures in place to ensure that branding is implemented effectively. The participants' responses included the following:

To ensure that branding is implemented effectively, we have the two-pillar system I mentioned earlier. In addition to the two-pillar system, we have the Branding and Marketing unit, the Government Communicators Handbook, the Government Communication Policy, and the CI guidelines. We also, on

request, provide training to other government departments on the application of CI guidelines. (P1)

We use the CI guidelines and the Government Communicators Handbook. We also have the Government Communicators Forum (GCF) and the Internal Communicators Forum (ICF), where the CI Manager sometimes makes a presentation outlining the CI application and other aspects related to the brand identity. They also offer training on CI and branding, as well as individual presentations to the departments. The CI Manager also monitors branding across government. Where a department has incorrect branding, the GCIS would write a letter to the department to rectify.” (P4)

In the Department of Tourism, we have a monthly newsletter that carries the branding guidelines and is shared with all staff members. We have departmental branding guidelines, and we also refer to the national CI and branding guidelines developed by the GCIS. We have templates stored on the Electronic Document Management System, which is accessible to the majority of employees. When other units procure branded items, they seek approval from the Branding unit. (P7)

From an external communication perspective, we have templates for external documents that we distribute, because we have to ensure that all the information communicated outside is done on an official template as part of our Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs). (P10)

Currently, I know of only three measures in place, one being the monthly newsletter, where the guidelines are communicated, the actual departmental CI and branding guidelines, and also the Branding unit that provides CI and branding advice to other employees. (P12)

The majority of participants agreed that the CI and branding guidelines are used to ensure effective branding implementation. The participants from the Department of Tourism indicated that, in addition to the government CI and branding guidelines, they also use their departmental CI guidelines to ensure branding is implemented effectively. This viewpoint corroborates the finding by Leijerholt et al. (2019b) that a departmental brand is seen favourably when branding initiatives conform to CI guidelines and are consistent with organisational principles. Moreover, P1 and P4 indicated that at GCIS, in addition to the government CI and branding guidelines, they utilise the Communicators Handbook, and P4 further mentioned that they also use the GCIS (2025a). The researcher found that the Government Communicators Handbook (2014-2017) and the Government Communication Policy refer people to the CI guidelines, with the GCIS (2025a) stating that the role of branding has been delegated

to the Heads of Communication in each department. Therefore, it is unclear how these two documents serve as measures to ensure branding is implemented effectively.

The majority of participants from the GCIS agreed that, in their department, they also use various forums, such as the GCF and the ICF, where the CI manager typically delivers presentations on CI, branding, and related matters. P2 mentioned another measure: the GCIS is in the process of establishing the Marketing Forum, which will comprise the provincial directors responsible for communicating branding and marketing-related matters to the provinces. P3 and P4 also indicated that training is conducted with other government departments, and P2 supports P3's statement that they also conduct roadshows to educate officials on CI and branding.

We are currently in the process of establishing a Marketing Forum, which will comprise GCIS provincial directors. It will be responsible for ensuring that branding and marketing decisions are communicated and implemented in all provinces, to ensure branding consistency. Currently, on the national government level, we conduct roadshows to ensure that government branding is applied correctly. (P2)

The Coat of Arms is protected by the Heraldry Act, and we also conduct roadshows when a new department is established to provide training on CI application. (P3)

The majority of participants in the Department of Tourism shared the sentiment that the measures put in place to ensure branding are implemented effectively, and include the monthly newsletter circulated to staff members, branding advice, and sign-off on all products by the branding unit. P7 and P10 also indicated that templates are accessible to staff to ensure branding consistency at the Department of Tourism. Furthermore, P1 mentioned that the GCIS has a two-pillar system: the CI Manager and graphic designers are the first tier of approval, followed by the branch as the second tier.

The preceding explanation indicates that both departments have implemented actions. Implementing these measures facilitates branding consistency in the departments. In support of the above statements, Cullan (2025) contends that branding guidelines and procedural approvals, including templates, facilitate branding consistency. Moreover, Rojas de Amon (2025) asserts that an organisation must provide continual training

and education to ensure that employees and stakeholders appreciate the brand value. Congruent with systems thinking, continual training would provide a feedback loop that would assist the organisation in maintaining a stable position or adapting its strategies to do so (Musheke, 2021; Lai & Lin, 2017).

The second question posed to the participants aimed to explore how the digital era affected branding in the departments and how they adapted to this change. Consistent with systems thinking, Ramu and Thirumurugan (2024) posit that organisations that innovate and adapt their branding strategies will stay ahead of the curve as digital environments continue to change, fostering customer loyalty and influencing the story of their sector. With reference to this notion, the majority of participants agreed that the departments have somewhat adapted to the new technological environment.

P3 and P5 mentioned that GCIS had to adapt the CI guidelines and make certain changes to accommodate social media platforms while maintaining branding consistency. Furthermore, P5 stated that, given the fast-paced nature of digital media, they had to be flexible and start producing and disseminating content relevant to digital platforms. This is supported by the opinions of Ramu and Thirumurugan (2024), who argue that organisations can establish a unique brand that appeals to consumers by combining customised marketing, high-quality content, and strategic online reputation management. In the end, this enhances visibility, trust and credibility, which influences participation in the organisation's programmes and initiatives.

When it comes to the CI guidelines, the digital platforms are a challenge because the manual was developed a while ago. So, to deal with this change, we are adapting the guidelines as we go. For example, for branding purposes, digital platforms do not have a lot of space, so we had to make some adjustments to address this. (P3)

With the advent of technology, we have had to adapt quite a bit. For example, the Coat of Arms cannot be used without a descriptor, but the size of a profile picture on social media does not have enough space, so we had to be flexible and use the Coat of Arms without a descriptor, also because the platforms allow you to have a descriptor for your department. Digital media is fast-paced, so we had to adapt and develop suitable products for these platforms while maintaining the essence of the message. (P5)

Given the change in environment, P9 felt that the Department of Tourism is not adapting at the desired speed. They mentioned that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is readily available and can enhance the department's work, but the department has not yet adopted it.

When I look at the Department of Tourism, I think we are slow in catching up with technology. Yes, we have social media platforms, recently started a TikTok account, and we have now moved to producing videos. That is why I am saying we are slow in catching up, because we only got into the TikTok space recently. Also, I do not see us utilising AI, even though it is a resource that is easily accessible and can enhance the work of the department. However, we are slowly adapting to this environment. (P9)

To support P9, P11 cited that the department still has a long way to go. Even though meetings are now held virtually, the department has not found a solution to brand the virtual meeting platform. P11 further stated that the department should consider developing QR codes for its information brochures rather than printing them. However, P8 is of the view that the department is adapting to current technological changes, as they have seen digital branding at departmental events, and the departmental publications are electronic. In support of the participants, Manoharan and Wu (2022) opine that organisational online platforms provide the department with additional options to digitally enhance the brand and establish its identity to the stakeholders. Technology has boosted brand recognition, but it also has disadvantages, such as the potential risks associated with social media. Although social media has an extensive reach, it also poses significant threats to organisations, particularly because of its ability to disseminate disinformation and damage their reputations (Kogo, 2025). In support of Kogo's (2025) assertion, P1 and P10 indicated that every technology comes with challenges. Participants cited that the availability of tools that enable people to manipulate content poses a threat to the government. P10 made an example of people going online, taking a screenshot of the departmental logo and placing it in a document, and thus leaving an impression that the content in that document is endorsed by the department. While P1 stated that at GCIS, they have institutionalised a "Fake Stamp" to mitigate this risk.

We have realised that with the heightening of digital technology and communication, a lot has moved to a point where most of our content is being manipulated. Now, when it comes to branding, you also need ways

to ensure that people can distinguish it from manipulation. We have institutionalised what we call a “fake stamp” whenever manipulated communication surfaces. So, that is how we are trying to manoeuvre into this digital space. I said in my first response that a brand should be distinguishable, and our brand should also be distinguished from the fake ones. (P1)

The change I have noticed is that there is increased accessibility to online tools that can manipulate pictures, graphics and documents, even if the department has measures to try and lock documents to protect the brand. People go online, search the department, our logo appears, and they screenshot it, then paste it on their documents as if they are endorsed by the department. I do not know if there is something we can generally do to stop this, but these changes in technology impact our brand’s integrity. (P10)

The researcher noted that both departments are adapting to new technologies. However, it was unclear whether the departments had considered the digital divide and whether they would address it, and, if so, how. Technology-driven government branding is riddled with difficulties despite its many advantages. Populations unable to interact through digital channels may become alienated as a result of the technological divide, which creates uneven access to government information and services (Mofokeng et al., 2025).

Lastly, participants were requested to share their views to gather recommendations on how branding, as a strategic communication, can be more effective. The researcher discovered that the participants had varied perspectives on how branding as a strategic tool could be made more effective. P1 expressed that branding consistency, and uniformity would make it easier for the public to recognise government products and eliminate misinformation from imitators and thus authenticating government communication. Supporting P1’s view, P12 also recommended that communication disseminated on the organisational platforms should be consistent with the brand and uniform. Aligned with the participants, Jeffrey et al. (2024) opine that brand elements include a range of attributes associated with the brand, that is, its name, colours, shapes, logos, images, slogans, and fonts. Consistently applying the brand across products and platforms helps the public and stakeholders strengthen their cognitive representation, facilitating brand recognition.

Consistency and uniformity in terms of design, messaging, and tone are key. Whoever is going to put out any material that speaks to the government must ensure that the branding is consistent and uniform with the one they issued before. If you plan to change your concept or look and feel, you should inform the public that a change has been made. This would make it difficult for the chance takers to manipulate your work, as the public would be able to differentiate right from wrong when they are used to seeing consistency and uniformity from you. (P1)

Externally, we can make sure that on our social media platforms, we place artworks with consistent branding and avoid changing colours every day, for example. We could also assign a colour per branch from our corporate colours. (P12)

P2 and P9 shared the same sentiments that digital branding would be beneficial to both departments. P2 argued that having digital branding at the GCIS building will increase visibility and recognition of the brand. These claims are supported by Akashkumar, Dhanya, Sreevashini, Thirunavukkarasu and Sivagnanabharathi (2025), who argue that digital branding considerably improves brand visibility through the establishment of trust, recognition and public perceptions. It is evident that since the suggested branding will be on the building itself, it will lead to brand recognition and awareness. Saxena (2015) also contends that brand awareness influences the audience's ability to recognise and interact with the brand. The participants concurred that there would be financial implications, with P9 further stating that in the long term, it would be cost-effective, as it would reduce the costs of printing and the fact that digital branding can be updated instantly to suit the purpose. Corroborating this viewpoint, Mansurali and Shanmugapriyaa (2020) posit that investing in branding yields benefits over time, therefore enabling the organisation to achieve its goals effectively.

Things that I think need to be done, unfortunately, have financial implications, and the government currently has financial constraints. For example, our building is situated in a high-traffic area, and we have large glass windows that could be converted into digital screens to display government messages. Based on the location, this would attract people, while also providing information on government programmes and initiatives in all official languages, whilst amplifying the brand. (P2)

Vincent and Evans (2022) posit that government communicators face branding challenges when they must strike a balance between serving the public interest and responding to elected government officials in a rule-abiding and efficient manner. This

makes it difficult to create a unique and consistent brand identity within departments. This notion aligns with the perspectives presented by P3 and P6, which centre on leaders making unfavourable branding decisions.

I think the GCIS should do more training on branding. There is a need for skills in branding content across various platforms. Decision makers should also be willing to learn from the workforce, as sometimes their decisions or instructions result in branding inconsistencies. (P6)

P3 recommended seeking buy-in from political leaders to avoid the usage of their political party colours and images, as this poses reputational risk for the department and the government. Ni (2024) contends that in corporate branding, colour is an important factor with a profound emotional impact, capable of swiftly provoking emotional responses from the audience. Moreover, selected corporate colours not only capture the audience's eye but also enhance the brand's distinctiveness and recognisability. Consequently, deviating from corporate colours will result in branding inconsistencies.

Nowadays, people are free to design and use different colours on communication products. The challenge is that they use the colours of political parties for government products. Also, it has now become a norm to use images of political heads on communication products, and when that person leaves the position, the material produced becomes unusable. There is a need to obtain buy-in from the political heads to avoid using the parties' colours and their images for government work. Usage of people's images also creates a reputation risk for the government and branding inconsistencies. (P3)

Furthermore, the GCIS (2025d) do not support this recommendation, as they only make provision for the display of official photographs in buildings and do not address their placement on other platforms. Therefore, there is a need for the GCIS to develop guidelines or a policy on the usage of corporate images in communication to ensure brand coherence and consistency. On the other hand, P6 expressed that leaders should be open to new ideas to maintain branding consistency in the organisation. Peddisetty (2024) contends that internal training is crucial for maintaining branding consistency, emphasising that consistent branding enables the organisation to enhance its credibility, improve public and stakeholder participation, and strengthen stakeholders' perceptions of the organisation.

P4 recommended revising the CI guidelines to be more flexible to accommodate new technologies. King (2023) contends that branding guidelines must be adaptable and permit revisions while maintaining essential attributes and visual identity. Regarding the revision of the guidelines, the researcher learnt that the CI and Branding Guidelines were developed and approved in 2005 by the late former Minister Essop Pahad, who served as Minister in the Presidency. This, therefore, necessitates a revision of the guidelines to adapt to environmental changes that have developed over the past 21 years (GCIS, 2005; South African History Online, 2022). The participant further emphasised that to restore institutional memory and branding consistency, the GCIS should have a corporate brand archival system. In support of the participant's view, Elvira and Susanto (2024) contend that archiving is crucial, as it supports the government in decision-making, policy formulation, knowledge preservation, and reporting. Additionally, it enhances information clarity and encourages a well-structured system.

I think the branding guidelines need to be revised. The current guidelines are too rigid, and the revised version should have more flexibility. The government brand should form part of legislation, so that it can be regulated, especially because it is on legal documents, such as the Identity Document, among others. It should be protected, and there should be a harsh punishment (including jail time) for those who use it illegally. Another area where we are not doing well is the archiving of branded materials. The brand should be protected through the archives, as this will also preserve institutional memory. (P4)

I think the government should consider some form of enforcing legislation on the misuse and unauthorised use of the Coat of Arms, maybe propose a ban on those responsible. There should also be restrictions on where and how the brand can be used. For example, the departmental brand should not be used on bikinis to maintain its integrity and because the department represents serious matters, such as policy. (P10)

Another view presented by P4 and P10 was that the government brand should be incorporated into legislation to mitigate its misuse, which often results in misinformation and misrepresentation of the government. They further cited that the unauthorised use or misuse of the government brand should result in severe penalties, such as jail time. Supporting these statements, the GCIS (2005) states that the national Coat of Arms is protected by the Heraldry Act 18 of 1962. Section 22A of the

Act states that “any person who commits any act which displays contempt for the National Coat of Arms of the Republic or which is likely to hold it up to ridicule, shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding R10 000 or, in default of payment, to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years or both” (GCIS, 2005:6). Section 20(1) of the Act also says, “protect the National Coat of Arms as heraldic representation from being ridiculed or compromised as part of artistic expression in the public arena” (GCIS, 2005:6). Additionally, the Coat of Arms is protected by the Copyright Act 98 of 1978 which states that “the State is entitled to sue anyone who copies the South African National Coat of Arms for copyright infringement, claiming an interdict and damages. In addition, if anyone knowingly trades in goods featuring an unauthorised copy of the South African National Coat of Arms, this will be a criminal offence” (GCIS, 2005:7).

With reference to the preceding discussion, there is an indication that communicators need training in government branding and the legislation that governs it. P5-P7 and P12 concurred that training is of importance to enhance branding as a form of strategic communication.

“To mitigate this challenge, I think we can have internal roadshows, conduct workshops, and give a presentation during induction to educate new and current employees on how to carry and use the brand. Additionally, I think simpler language should be used for the articles in the monthly newsletter, so that they are easily understood by everyone. This will increase the number of people adhering to branding protocols and standards. (P7)

The participants suggested that employees not using branding correctly might be because the communication on branding guidelines is not as articulate as it should be, or because the employees do not share a common understanding of the importance of branding. Furthermore, P7 and P8 recommended an awareness drive (information sessions, workshops, roadshows, and brand activations) to enhance corporate branding in the Department of Tourism.

The branding team has really tried to educate employees. They include articles in the monthly newsletter, but unfortunately, many employees do not read them. Again, we have templates on EDMS accessible to the majority of employees, but people still create their own. (P7)

In addition, P5 and P6 alluded that there should also be training focused on how branding can be used to communicate on different platforms while still maintaining the brand essence. P5 made an example and said that messages do not always have to be in text. The participants' perspectives are supported by Jovanosvka (2020) and Pedisetty (2024), who contend that, to ensure branding consistency, the organisation must ensure that employees, as brand ambassadors, have a common understanding. To ensure the latter, employee training would be beneficial, and the organisation can consider hosting workshops, information sessions, and study groups to educate employees on how to use the brand across different platforms and documents.

The researcher observed contrasting views between P7 and P9. P7 mentioned that there are templates available on the Department of Tourism's EDMS platform. However, employees disregard these. Whilst P11 stated the department should make templates available to staff, P7 demonstrated that templates are, in fact, accessible on the specified platform. It became evident to the researcher that an awareness drive, as recommended by P7 and P12, is indeed required in the department, as one participant contends that templates are available, while the other is unaware of this.

Another recommendation came from P8 regarding the Department of Tourism's building branding.

I would not mind more branding in the building. If there were enough branding in the building, maybe people would realise how important the departmental brand is. If there is branding everywhere, they would start living the brand, and it would begin to reflect in their work. (P8).

The participant mentioned that there is insufficient branding in the building, and they believe that making branding more visible will assist employees in realising the importance of the corporate building. Furthermore, when there is brand visibility, it can encourage employees to align more with the brand, resulting in their patriotism reflecting in their work and how they carry themselves. This perspective is supported by Clark et al. (2020), who contend that branding extends beyond visual elements. They further assert that branding is essential for improving employees' awareness and their opinions regarding the brand.

The researcher observed an interesting contrast in views on corporate colours from P8 and P13. P13 feels that there is a need to rebrand and use more vibrant colours to attract the youth. They also stated that tourism is a vibrant sector and should have a corporate colour that represents “fun.”

It would be beneficial for us to rebrand and use more vibrant and fun colours to attract the youth, one of our target audiences. The Department of Tourism should be projected in vibrant colours because it is in the leisure sector. I think the GCIS should allow departments like ours to have branding that is more aligned with what we do. Currently, the orange does not work.
(P13)

However, P8 felt that the Department of Tourism branding is “*nice and funky*” and should be used more to ensure brand association by employees and the department’s external stakeholders. Furthermore, contrary to P13, P10 cited that the department deals with significant issues, such as policy formulation and implementation, and this should be reflected in the brand. Nguyen (2020) argues that corporate colours convey a certain message about the organisation and evoke emotions in the organisation’s publics. When choosing a corporate colour, organisations should consider who they are and how they should be perceived and choose a colour that best embodies the organisation.

The above discussion further affirms three aspects of systems theory: expressing the interconnectedness of branding elements (improving CI guidelines would lead to branding consistency), the importance of the feedback loop (training will improve the state of branding in the organisations) and the link to the environment (branding shapes the perceptions of the audience about the organisation).

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter covered a brief discussion on the data collection process for the study. The data analysis procedure was also detailed. A thematic analysis was utilised to examine the data collected from the semi-structured interviews conducted. The participant shared their views on the role of branding, its implementation in their

departments, and branding as a strategic communication tool. Lastly, they made recommendations on how branding can be made more effective.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data. The study investigated the role of branding in strategic communication, focusing on the GCIS and the Department of Tourism. Therefore, this chapter presents the summary of findings in relation to the research objectives and questions of the study. This chapter concluded by presenting recommendations for future studies. The study addressed the following objectives, main and sub-research questions.

The following was the main research objective:

- To investigate the role of branding as a strategic communication tool in advancing the organisational objectives of the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.

The following were the sub-research objectives:

- To investigate and gain insight into the contribution of branding as a tool in strategic communication.
- To establish how the GCIS and the Department of Tourism implement branding.
- To explore the role of branding in strategic communication within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.
- To establish how branding can be made more effective within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.

The following was the main research question:

What is the role of branding as a strategic communication tool in advancing the organisational objectives of the GCIS and the Department of Tourism?

The following were the sub-research questions:

- What strategic role does branding play in GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
- How is branding implemented within GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
- How does branding as a strategic communication lead to the achievement of organisational goals at GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
- How can branding as a form of strategic communication be made effective?

5.2 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

5.2.1 Chapter 1: Overview of the study

This chapter introduced the study and explained the background and significance of investigating the role of branding in strategic communication within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism. It outlined the aim and objectives, research questions, and methodological approach, and provided an explanation for the selected research techniques. Furthermore, the limitations and delimitations were explained, and the chapter concluded with definitions of essential terminology used in the study.

5.2.2 Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review

Chapter 2 began with a detailed discussion of the systems theory as the theoretical framework selected for the study. The second section of the chapter reviewed literature on branding in government. From a government perspective, it outlined the concept of branding, its elements, importance, challenges and success, implementation, its role as a strategic communication, and methods for enhancing its efficiency.

5.2.3 Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

The third chapter focused on the most effective research approach for collecting and analysing data. An interpretive qualitative methodology adopting the phenomenological research design was deemed suitable for the study. The chapter also delineated the population and sampling approach, and purposive sampling was

adopted as a preferred sampling technique. The individual semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool, along with the procedures followed to ensure trustworthiness for the study, were also detailed. The chapter concluded with a discussion on the ethical considerations for the study.

5.2.4 Chapter 4: Data presentation, analysis and interpretation

Chapter 4 focused on the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data collected. The thematic analysis technique was adopted for the study and utilised to develop codes and themes to address the research questions and objectives. Four themes emerged from the data analysis, namely: contribution of branding as a strategic tool, implementation of branding in the Department, the role of branding in strategic communication within the Department and enhancing branding as a form of strategic communication. A detailed discussion on these four themes concluded the chapter.

5.2.5 Chapter 5: Summary, findings, and recommendations

This chapter, aligned to the four themes which emerged in Chapter 4, provided a summary of findings and recommendations for the study. In addition, it provided the overall conclusion for the study.

5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section outlines the contribution of branding as a strategic tool, its implementation across both departments, its role in strategic communication, and how it can be made more effective. However, Leijerholt et al. (2019b) posit that organisational branding encompasses the entire organisation and delineates a comprehensive strategy that emphasises the interconnections between strategic vision, organisational culture, and identity. Moreover, branding in government can shape or reshape the stakeholders' perceptions and has the potential to increase trust and loyalty in government programmes and initiatives (Reghunathan, 2021; Martinelli, 2021; Leijerholt et al., 2019b). Consistent with this broader perspective on branding, systems theory

contends that a system consists of interconnected elements that link its internal and external environments (Lai & Lin, 2017). Nonetheless, the use of branding in government cannot be regarded solely from a management or normative perspective. It must also be comprehended in relation to institutional, political, and bureaucratic realities, which include the impact of political office-bearers on communication practices, procedural delays, conflicting priorities, resource limitations and unequal organisational capabilities. Therefore, the recommendations below distinguish what is practical given the current state of government and what is ideal in theory. The next section provides a summary of findings and recommendations for the study.

5.3.1 Finding 1: The function of branding in organisational communication

The finding links with research objective (RO)1, which investigates the contribution of branding as a tool in strategic communication. Participants expressed that branding is an important tool for strategic communication within government. They indicated that branding provides an identity for the organisation and signifies its importance; that is, it communicates who the organisation is and what people should know about it. Branding enables the organisation to be identifiable, distinguishable, and recognisable among similar organisations. It enhances public association with the organisation's services, thereby fostering trust and loyalty, legitimising the information provided, and, as a result, positioning the organisation.

Even though the majority agreed that branding plays an important role as a strategic tool, one participant expressed that, at the national level, branding has no significance because the public perceives that all departments have the same mandate. This discerning voice cannot be ignored, as it suggests a lack of understanding among communicators on the contribution of branding as a strategic communication tool. Furthermore, on a broader scale, an institutional limitation in differentiating departmental brands within the government system is that the public often perceives it as a single entity. While information sharing and dialogue may promote shared understanding of the role of branding in government, this recommendation should be viewed as reasonably feasible as opposed to a comprehensive solution, because the

challenge also reflects wider structural issues of government communication that cannot be resolved by awareness alone.

Based on the above, it is recommended that both departments strengthen internal communication on the strategic role of branding through existing forums, management workshops and onboarding sessions in the short-term. In the medium-term, the departments should make more deliberate efforts to clarify how the corporate identity should be interpreted within a single national government brand architecture. Lastly, in the long run, the GCIS should review whether the current government brand architecture adequately allows for departmental differentiation while maintaining coherence at the national level.

5.3.2 Finding 2: Branding processes and procedures in the Departments

The finding aligns with RO2, which describes the branding implementation in each department. The majority of participants agreed that the CI and branding guidelines are used to guide the branding process within the departments. However, they expressed that the guidelines are not easily understood by communicators, citing that they are too technical (that is, only easily understood by graphic designers). The lack of understanding of the guidelines by those who implement branding, or rather the custodians of branding in the departments, will lead to branding inconsistencies that might adversely impact the departments' image. Given that the National Coat of Arms CI and Branding guidelines were developed in 2005, it is recommended that the GCIS revise these to ensure that they are easily understood and relevant to the current environment. However, the revision should be regarded as a complex organisational process, given that policy and guidelines modifications are often accompanied by interdepartmental consultations, lengthy approval processes, and administrative delays.

The two departments implement branding similarly by ensuring that products and services are consistently branded to enhance brand visibility. Despite expressing that the CI guidelines are not easy to understand, the majority of participants confirmed that the departments have established distinct visual identities that make their

respective services visible, recognisable, distinguishable, and differentiable from those of other government departments. Firstly, they expressed that both departments have a standard look and feel to ensure consistent branding across different platforms. Secondly, both departments have approval processes they follow before distributing products or messages to safeguard the organisation's image. It is thus evident that both departments have processes in place to implement branding, which enable the organisations to stand out. Nonetheless, the presence of processes and procedures should not be confused with consistent implementation because uneven employee uptake, bureaucratic compliance discrepancies and varying levels of dedication among different units may undermine these protocols in general.

Although the majority agreed that the Department of Tourism has established processes when implementing branding, the dissenting voice (three participants) raised a crucial issue that needs attention from the Department of Tourism. The participants explained that branding within the department is not consistently implemented, thus leading to branding inconsistencies that might adversely affect the department's image. It is, therefore, recommended that the Department of Tourism review the information-sharing or training method currently in place, as it does not seem to achieve its objectives. The department should explore more engaging, interactive strategies to better capture the employees' attention and alter their perceptions of branding. This recommendation should be approached with reservations, as inconsistent implementation may not necessarily be the result of poor communication or inadequate training, but rather from various factors such as inconsistent managerial oversight, workload pressures, limited branding ownership outside of the communication units, and a larger bureaucratic culture where branding may be seen as secondary to other operational priorities.

In summary, it is recommended that, to enhance branding compliance, the Department of Tourism should, in the short-term prioritise improving accessibility to current templates, approval processes, branding support mechanisms; enforce adherence to branding guidelines and implement interactive strategies such as an incentivised campaign to enhance compliance. In the medium-term to long-term, the GCIS should consider simplifying the language used in the guidelines and strengthening practical support for those who are not accustomed to the technical terminology to improve

usability. Furthermore, in the long-term, a comprehensive review of the National Branding and Corporate Identity guidelines, should be undertaken, including clarification of enforcement responsibilities and interdepartmental coordination, to address continuous implementation gaps.

5.3.3 Finding 3: Branding as a value driver for organisational objectives

The finding is linked to RO3, which explored the contribution of branding as strategic communication to the achievement of organisational goals. It was discovered that branding has strategic poise, as it communicates the organisation's identity, distinctiveness, and values. Furthermore, branding is crucial to achieving organisational goals because it enhances brand visibility, awareness, recognition, and recall among the organisation's publics. It differentiates the organisation from similar organisations and helps position it. Branding also fosters trust and legitimacy among the organisation's publics, leading to increased participation in departmental programmes and initiatives or consumption of the information disseminated. As participants simply articulated, when the public sees the department's branding, they recognise it and remember it and then come back for more information or participate in the department's programmes and initiatives because they trust the services offered and the institution, therefore achieving organisational goals. Additionally, it fosters a positive brand image for the organisation. Even though this finding confirms the strategic value of branding, it is crucial to differentiate between the potential impact of branding and its expected outcome. The achievement of organisational goals through branding is still dependent on factors such as the organisation's quality of services, legitimacy, public trust and the overall communication environment. In this instance, branding alone cannot compensate for institutional flaws or negative public perceptions, but it may assist in achieving organisational goals.

Based on the above, both departments should, in the near future, ensure that branding is consistently aligned to public communication deliverables and service information so that visibility translates into accessibility and understanding. For the medium-term, branding strategies should be strictly aligned with communication objectives and programme goals as opposed to being primarily seen as visual or event-based

initiatives. Lastly, in the long run, the department should strive to institutionalise monitoring mechanisms that can evaluate or measure the degree to which branding enhances recognition, trust, participation and engagement, while acknowledging that these outcomes are also influenced by government performance and public sentiment.

5.3.4 Finding 4: Enhancing branding as a strategic communication tool

The finding aligns with RO4, which indicated participants' perspectives on how branding, as a form of strategic communication, can be enhanced. The participants expressed that both departments have measures in place to ensure branding is implemented effectively, which includes approval processes, guidelines and policies that guide the implementation. However, participants reported branding inconsistencies, especially for the Department of Tourism. Therefore, strengthening these processes would be beneficial, as it would facilitate uniformity and consistency, allowing the organisation to be recognised and distinguished from similar institutions. Additionally, consistent branding throughout the building will invoke positive emotions among employees and encourage them to embody the brand. Nonetheless, these interventions should be considered as supportive rather than sufficient to drive change on their own, as internal brand embodiment is influenced by the leadership behaviour, organisational culture, conflicting work demands, and the degree to which employees perceive branding as aligned with the department's mandate.

Digital presence has the ability to enhance brand visibility, leading to greater brand recognition, recall, trust and legitimacy of the departments. Therefore, with the advent of new technologies, the departments need to increase their efforts to adapt to these environmental changes and put measures in place to safeguard the brand, thereby reinforcing the organisation's brand identity and maintaining a favourable brand image. However, digital growth must be evaluated considering realistic limitations, including budget constraints, varying levels of digital readiness, the risk of disinformation and content manipulation and the digital divide that may restrict access for some members of the public.

Training was identified as a crucial aspect that would enhance branding as a form of strategic communication. Participants from the GCIS indicated that forums, roadshows

and one-on-one sessions are utilised to conduct training on branding. However, participants from the Department of Tourism contradicted this viewpoint. They cited a lack of awareness and training on the use of the government CI guidelines. Furthermore, the participants noted branding inconsistencies in the Department of Tourism. Although the following recommendations are significant, their feasibility of execution may vary. Frequent awareness campaigns and the reinforcement of existing training methods should be implemented, as these may require minimal additional resources. The development of a dedicated branding policy that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of all players. However, this can be hindered by conflicting institutional interests, bureaucratic processes and the inherent nature of political oversight within government communication. Therefore, rather than assuming that political involvement can be completely eliminated, it may be more realistic to advocate for well-defined operational measures and governance boundaries to manage political influence.

It is recommended that, in the short-term the priority focus be on reinforcing implementation by improving access to branding support systems and tools, integrating branding with service communication, and establishing monitoring mechanisms to improve consistency. Furthermore, in the medium term, the focus shifts to adapting branding strategies for digital communication contexts to enhance visibility, recognition, and public engagement. The long-term priorities focus on ensuring that digital growth is supported by reliable tools for assessing branding, while protecting the brand against potential threats such as content manipulation, disinformation and inconsistent application. These initiatives must be reconciled with practical constraints, including varying levels of digital readiness, digital divide and resource limitations.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

It is recommended that further studies be conducted on the preservation of the government brand and measures to ensure business continuity. As new entrants enter the system, the brand's essence should be preserved to ensure consistency while upholding the legitimacy of government communication. Furthermore, future research

can delve deeper into the effectiveness of training for communicators and the leadership to ensure branding consistency across the government.

The researcher noted that both departments are adapting to new technologies. However, it was unclear whether the departments had considered the digital divide and whether they would address it, and, if so, how. In light of this, future studies should explore the impact of new technologies on service delivery and the accessibility of information in a fully digital government.

The government has measures in place to manage branding. However, branding inconsistencies were noted. It is against this background that, to foster a positive image of the government, a recommendation is made for future studies to focus on enhancing current government branding strategies and proposing new strategies.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The study sought to explore and describe the role of branding in strategic communication, focusing on the GCIS and the Department of Tourism. Based on the discovery, an overall conclusion can be made that branding plays a critical role in strategic communication within government. Furthermore, it demonstrates strategic poise by differentiating the organisation from similar entities, thereby positioning it. It enhances the department's visibility, leading to greater awareness, recognition, and recall and fosters trust and legitimacy towards the organisation and its programmes and initiatives. The study presented literature on branding in government, linking it to strategic communication and its role in ensuring that departments achieve their objectives and deliver on their mandate. Following an interpretive perspective, the study adopted a qualitative approach employing a phenomenological research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data, and thematic analysis was utilised to generate codes and themes. Themed findings were utilised to address the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study. The study contributes to the literature on government branding, enhances current communication policies and educates or informs communicators of the role and significance of branding in strategic communication within government.

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ANNEXURE A: UNISA ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



College of Human Sciences_CREC

Date: 03/06/2025

Dear: Ms Seapei Lebele

Decision: Ethics Approval from 03 June 2025 to 02 June 2026

NHREC Registration # : (Rec-240816-052)
Ref # : 6216
Name: Ms Seapei Lebele
Student # : 3388639

Researcher: Ms Seapei Lebele

Tourism House, 17 Trevenna Street, Sunnyside, Pretoria
0002

3388639@mylife.unisa.ac.za 0823266050

Supervisor: Dr RENDANI SIPHO NETANDA netanrs@unisa.ac.za

Co-Supervisor: Dr Madidimalo Richard Moila moilamr@unisa.ac.za

Investigating the role of branding in Strategic Communication: A qualitative study of the GCIS and Department of Tourism.

Qualification: MA: Communication Science

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Human Sciences_CREC for the above-mentioned research study. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The **low-risk application** was **reviewed** by the College of Human Sciences_CREC on **03 June 2025** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College of Human Sciences_CREC.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (**02 June 2026**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal, for Ethics Research Committee approval.

Additional Conditions

1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from Unisa.
2. De-identified data must be safely stored on password protected PCs.
3. Care should be taken by the researcher when publishing the results to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the university.
4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be ensured: "Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible." Unisa will not be liable for any failure to comply with this principle.
5. Kindly note that the College of Human Sciences_CREC requires the submission of regular progress reports to be submitted {**annually**}. In line with section 7.2 of the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics (2024).

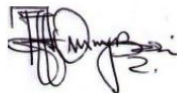
Note

The reference number 6216 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,



Prof K J Malesa
Chair of College of Human Sciences_CREC
E-mail: maleskj@unisa.ac.za



Professor Omwoyo Bosire Onyancha
Executive Dean / By delegation from the Executive Dean of College of Human Sciences_CREC
E-mail: onyanob@unisa.ac.za

ANNEXURE B: GCIS PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

10/29/24, 11:38 AM

Print



government
communications

Department:
Government Communication and Information System
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X745, Pretoria 0001. Tshedimosetso House, cnr Frances Baard (Schoeman) and Festival streets, Hatfield, Pretoria 0083. Tel: (+27 12) 473-0000 Fax: (+27 12) 473 0593 Website: www.gcis.gov.za

Enquiry: Mr K Dimpe Tel: 012 473 0121 E-mail: kabelo@gcis.gov.za

Ms Seapei Pascaline Lebele
Unit 487 Silverwood Estate
Monavoni Ext 6
Centurion
0157

Dear Ms Lebele

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH AT GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEM.

Your request dated 17 October 2024 has reference.

The Department has considered your application and approval is granted to your request with the following conditions:

- You shall conduct the research using questionnaires and individual interviews.
- You shall treat all information obtained from the Department in strictest confidence.
- You shall complete the research within three months.
- All information must be dealt with in compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013.
- Please note that upon completion of your research and submission to UNISA, you are required to provide a copy of the final research document to the Department.
- **Please note that interviewees may only participate on a voluntary basis.**
- Attached hereto is the confidentiality form that you must sign and return to the Directorate: Human Resource Development, for attention **Ms Nomsa Malebye** by **01 November 2024**.

The Department takes this opportunity to wish you well in your research.

Regards

Mr S Vandayar
Acting Deputy Director General: CS
Date: 29/10/24

ANNEXURE C: DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

T014



tourism

Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X424, Pretoria, 0001, Tourism House, 17 Trevenna Street, Sunnyside, Pretoria, 0002
Tel: +27 (0)12 444 6000, Fax: +27 (0)12 444 7000, Call Centre: 0860 121 929, www.tourism.gov.za

Enquiries: N Songelwa
Telephone: 012 444 6149
E-mail: nsongelwa@tourism.gov.za

Ms S Lebele
slebele@tourism.gov.za

Dear Ms Lebele

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

It is a pleasure to inform you that the Department of Tourism hereby grants permission for you to conduct research for your coursework titled: Investigating the role of branding in Strategic Communication: A qualitative cross-sectional study of the Government Information and Information System (GCIS) and Department of Tourism.

It is expected that the final outcome of the study is made available to the department.

Compliance with POPIA is furthermore required, prior to publication.

Sincerely

Director-General

Signed by: Ms R Thobejane

Capacity Director: Human Resource Utilisation and Employee Health and Wellness

Date: 14/11/2024



Departement van Toerisme • uMnyango Wezokuvakasha • ISebe lezoKhenketho • umNyango wezokuVakatjha
Litiko Letekuvakasha • Kgoro ya tša Boeti • Lefapha la Bojanala • Lefapha la Bohahlaudi • Ndzawulo ya
VuphumbaMuhasho wa Vhuendelamashango

ANNEXURE D: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT



Template 1: Human participant information sheet and consent template

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number: 6216

Research permission reference number (if applicable):

<date>

Title: Investigating the Role of Branding in Strategic Communication: A qualitative cross-sectional study of the GCIS and Department of Tourism

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Seapei Lebele, and I am doing research with Dr RS Netanda, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Communication Science towards a Master of Arts in Communication degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Investigating the Role of Branding in Strategic Communication: A qualitative cross-sectional study of the GCIS and Department of Tourism".

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to find out the role of branding in strategic communication within government. The study intends to improve the current communication policies and inform government communicators regarding the role and significance of branding in strategic communication. It also seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge about corporate branding as a strategic communication tool for the public sector.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You were purposefully selected to participate in the study because your experience and role as a government communicator are closely linked to the study topic. A request for permission to conduct a study in your organisation was made, and the Human Resource Development unit



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

was requested to circulate the information to relevant employees to assist with recruiting participants for the study. Six communicators will be interviewed for data collection purposes.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Individual semi-structured interviews will be conducted for the study. It is expected that each interview will take approximately one hour. The researcher has allocated three weeks to complete the data collection process. The interview questions will include, amongst others, how corporate branding and strategic communication are implemented within the organisation, and your understanding of whether branding contributes to achieving the organisation's goals.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time before interviews are conducted and without providing a reason. It is important to note that once the interviews have been conducted, withdrawing from the study will not be possible.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The benefit of participating in this is not only that you will gain more insight in branding and strategic communication, but your contribution can also enhance the work you do daily and enable you to facilitate greater access to information for citizens. Your involvement in the study will also contribute towards improving current government communication policies and the body of knowledge on public sector branding as a strategic communication tool.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

The study has a low-risk rating since it is unlikely to cause physical, social, or psychological harm to participants. However, the nature of the study does not pose much risk should the participant be identified, because it is not foreseeable that the information or responses you



will provide will put you in a compromising situation. It is important to note that your information and responses obtained for the study will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Often, the unavailability of participants for the scheduled interview times poses a risk to the study, as this might cause delays. To mitigate this risk and ensure your convenience as a prospective participant, the interviews can be done in the comfort of your own space, either in person or virtually, and can also be scheduled after hours.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this study. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for ensuring that the study is appropriately implemented, including the Research Ethics Review Committee members. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

It should also be noted that your responses might be used for other purposes, for example, journal articles, conferences, workshops, etc. Your personal information will, however, be kept confidential, and your responses will be used anonymously.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

The researcher will store hard copies of your answers for a minimum period of five years in a locked filing cabinet at their home in Pretoria for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on an external hard drive, which will be locked in a filing cabinet at their home. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. If necessary, after five years, the hard copies will be shredded while files saved on the external hard drive will be permanently deleted and the drive re-formatted.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no compensation for participation in the study. It is envisaged that you will incur data costs if you prefer a virtual interview. If you cannot cover the data cost, the researcher will



assist in ensuring that you receive data. If the interview is in person, you will not incur transport costs as the researcher will travel to your location.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Human Sciences, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Seapei Lebele on 082 326 6050 or 33888639@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible until December 2030.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Seapei Lebele on 082 326 6050 or 33888639@mylife.unisa.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr RS Netanda on 012 429 3993 or netanrs@unisa.ac.za. Contact the research ethics chairperson of the Prof MA Antwi on antwima@unisa.ac.za if you have any ethical concerns.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.



Seapei Lebele



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interviews.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname.....(please print)

Researcher's signature.....Date.....



ANNEXURE E: INTERVIEW GUIDE

PARTICIPANT'S DETAILS:
Name:
Institution:
Position/role:
Highest Qualification:
Gender:
Number of years in service:
GUIDING QUESTIONS
RQ: What strategic role does branding play in GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
RO: To investigate and gain insight into the contribution of branding as a tool in strategic communication.
INTERVIEW QUESTION: What is your understanding of corporate branding, i.e. what does it entail?
INTERVIEW QUESTION: Do you consider branding a strategic tool? Why is that?
RQ: How is branding implemented within GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
RO: To establish how the GCIS and the Department of Tourism implement branding.
INTERVIEW QUESTION: Are you familiar with government corporate identity guidelines? Are they easy to understand? Please elaborate.
INTERVIEW QUESTION: How is branding implemented in your organisation?
INTERVIEW QUESTION: How do you ensure consistent branding across different platforms?
RQ: How does branding as a strategic communication lead to the achievement of organisational goals at GCIS and the Department of Tourism?
RO: To explore the role of branding in strategic communication within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.
INTERVIEW QUESTION: Please describe a time when you developed a branding plan. How did you go about it, and why did you make the decision you made?
INTERVIEW QUESTION: In your own opinion, how does branding contribute to the achievement of organisational goals?
RQ: How can branding as a form of strategic communication be made effective?
RO: To establish how branding can be made more effective within the GCIS and the Department of Tourism.
INTERVIEW QUESTION: What measures do you put in place to ensure that branding is implemented effectively?
INTERVIEW QUESTION: How has the current environmental (the digital era) affected branding in your organisation, and how have you adapted to this change in environment?
INTERVIEW QUESTION: What do you think needs to be done to make branding more effective?

ANNEXURE F: CERTIFICATE OF EDITING



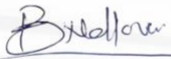
EDITORIAL
Certificate

Proudly Presented to

Seapei P Lebele

"INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF BRANDING IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE GCIS AND DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM"

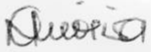
It is certified that the above-mentioned dissertation is edited by professional editors at Saight Scholarly Hub for accuracy in language, grammar, style, tone, tense, and punctuation use, including the technical formatting. The certificate attests the fact that the editor did not alter the idea and aim of the researcher. It is further certified that the above-mentioned dissertation, unless further adjusted, or a revised or outdated version is submitted, is of a satisfactory editorial standard.



Sizwe Ndlovu
Founding Director



03.03.2026



Nomsa Chirisa
Senior Editor
PEG membership no.: CHI005

 +27 78 394 4078

 www.saightsh.org

 editor@saightsh.org

 23A 10th Avenue
Rivonia, Sandton