



Qualitative research on customer cigarette brand loyalty during and post-lockdown, due to the ban on tobacco sales.

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I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the **Honours for Strategic Brand Communication** degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

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ABSTRACT

This research study is based on the Covid-19 lockdown tobacco sales ban. The tobacco ban stemmed from the South African government implementing laws to protect and refrain the population from the virus. However, the lockdown and particularly the tobacco ban had drastic economic effects. The aim of this study is to explore and gain a deeper understanding of consumer brand loyalty due to the ban. Brand loyalty can be described as the preference a consumer has for one brand over most others, regardless of price, quality or market factors. A qualitative research study was conducted of seven participants to gain insights and understanding into their experiences during the tobacco sales ban. The findings of this study concluded that customers stayed brand loyal to cigarettes to a large extent. However, the consumer behaviours, perception and accessibility were all relative to the individuals. Previous studies conducted on this topic have all been quantitative and used a much larger sample size. However, this study can benefit as it focuses on personal experiences and attitudes individuals have. The implication of this study is qualitative methodology uses interpretivism and therefore, many realities are all prevalent and valid. Therefore, more qualitative studies can take place in the future to gain deeper insights and understandings into the tobacco sales ban and its effects.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextualisation

This study is being conducted to explore customer brand loyalty following the ban on tobacco sales by focusing on the key brand loyalty indicators. From March 2020 to August 2020, South Africa went into lockdown due to Covid-19, where the sale of non-essential products was banned (McLaggan, 2020). Tobacco was listed as a non-essential product, hence sales of it was banned from the economy (McLaggan, 2020). The study aims to focus on smoker's behavioural patterns and their brand loyalty due to the sales ban. The study will be looking at consumer brand loyalty towards cigarettes during the tobacco sales ban, while also investigating loyalty once the ban was lifted.

1.2 Rationale

The reason behind the tobacco product ban stemmed from the government's idea that smoking caused with pneumonia, lung infections and tuberculosis (Patanavanich & Glantz, 2020). Government believed these diseases would make citizens more susceptible to Covid-19 and therefore increase cases and fatalities (Patanavanich & Glantz, 2020). This claim has since been disputed by numerous health professionals, stating there is little scientific evidence of a correlation (Rossato, Russo, Mazzocut, Di Vincenzo, Fioretto, & Vettor, 2020).

Then formed an illicit tobacco market, the cigarette black market became more lucrative and active due to the government ban, as illegal traders became the most active sellers, while formal retailers were forced to limit and stop their sales (van Walbeek et al., 2021). The illicit market is when there is ban or halt on products within that sector and therefore all sales become illegal (van Walbeek et al., 2021). The research aims to explore consumer brand loyalty due to this reasoning and how the consumers reacted to the sales ban.

The identified research gap is that there is little research on brand loyalty due to the tobacco ban. Also, the research that has already been conducted on the tobacco sales ban and its effects has mostly been quantitative research. Surveys and statistical analysis have been the focus on this area of research, outlining the need for qualitative research. This study will be using a qualitative research methodology that will seek to gain a deeper understanding on the topic. This is a research gap as the attitudes and experiences of the population affected has not been comprehensively studied or evaluated. This research study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the topic through a more interpretivist approach. This is

important because new information can be discovered around the central phenomenon of the sales ban, enabling this research to have a significant contribution to this area of studies.

1.3 Problem statement

Covid-19 had a drastic effect on most business and brands particularly in South Africa (McLaggen, 2020). This was due to the suspension of sales for non-essential goods, and tobacco products were listed as non-essential products (Egbe & Ngobese, 2020). Hence, the tobacco industry suffered heavily due to a government ban on all cigarette products from March 2020 to August 2020 (McLaggen, 2020). The government stated that the reason for the ban was due to the rising cases of Covid-19. The governments logic behind the tobacco sales ban was to limit amount of cigarette shared between individuals that would cause a spread of Covid-19 infections through mouth and hand contact touching (Patanavanich & Glantz, 2020). Another factor was the government believed smoking led to diseases such as pneumonia and tuberculosis which would also make citizens of South Africa more susceptible to Covid-19 (Patanavanich & Glantz, 2020). At the time of the ban there were around 6.7 million adult smokers over 18 years old in South Africa (van Walbeek, Hill, Filby, & van der Zee, 2021). Frequent smokers around South Africa were the population who were most affected by the tobacco sales ban as they were restricted to purchase tobacco products, which they would normally buy frequently.

The research aims to determine if the tobacco ban had any effect on the smoking habits of consumers particularly their loyalty towards their brands considering they had no access to them. The cigarette market became 100% illicit during the lockdown with limited products available (McLaggen, 2020). The investigation will seek to see if the illicit market and sales ban had any consequences. An important aspect is most buyers did not have a choice on what cigarettes products they purchased due to the sales ban and the limited supply (McLaggen, 2020). The illicit market limited the options consumers had regarding tobacco products, hence the research will explore the effect this had on consumer cigarette brand loyalty. The lockdown in South Africa due to Covid-19 affected every citizen, however the tobacco sales ban had a specific impact on tobacco smokers within the country (McLaggen, 2020). Due to South Africa being one of the only countries around that world that banned the sale of tobacco due to Covid-19 this was a significant phenomenon (Egbe & Ngobese, 2020). By understanding the reasoning behind the ban and then further investigating the reaction of consumers towards the tobacco ban, it provides a basis to understand how the

problem was observed. South African tobacco smoker's reaction towards the sales ban will help evaluate the role of the ban towards upholding customer brand loyalty.

1.4 Purpose statement

The purpose of this study is to explore if the cigarette ban effected frequent smokers brand loyalty due to the sales ban on tobacco. The research will focus on gaining a deeper understanding of the attitudes and experiences of the consumers who were affected by the sales ban. Hence the focus is on frequent smokers across South Africa and their reaction towards the sales ban. The research methodology that will be implemented for the study will be qualitative research. This methodology is useful when seeking to gain a deeper understanding of a central phenomenon, which the tobacco sales ban was. As the sales ban was implemented exclusively to South Africa this will be where the study will be focused on by interviewing and conducting research on a population sample (Egbe & Ngobese, 2020). Purposive sampling will be used for the study, and it is when participants are selected specifically (O'Leary, 2014). This is relevant as the study will be looking for a specific subset of people, smokers. Hence, non-smokers will be rejected, and it will be known beforehand the group of individuals relevant to this study. The sample of smokers will be interviewed through Zoom meetings, on and around campus and in the surrounding areas. The use of online platforms is due to the limitations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of the research is to understand if there was an impact on consumer brand loyalty towards cigarette brands either positively or negatively. This will be done by looking at the concepts and theory surrounding brand loyalty.

1.5 Research objectives

- To explore smoker's cigarette brand loyalty.
- To explore consumers perceived value of cigarettes post-lockdown.
- Explore consumer purchasing behaviours of cigarettes during the tobacco ban.

1.6 Research questions

1. How has consumer brand loyalty changed towards cigarettes due to the tobacco sales ban?
2. What were consumers perceived value of cigarettes post-lockdown?
3. How did consumers respond to the tobacco sales ban, in terms of purchasing behaviours?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical foundation

There are two central theories to this research the first being Keller's Brand Equity Model, which is the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model (Keller, 2003). The study will focus on brand loyalty within this model and use the definition of brand loyalty within this framework. Keller's model describes brand loyalty as the reoccurring and continued purchase of products (Keller, 2003). The study focuses mainly on the concept of brand loyalty to understand consumers attitudes towards brands they are familiar with. Along with their experiences with that brand during a time where there was market, economic and social constraints between the consumer and brand. This is relevant to the study as it focuses on cigarette brand loyalty and how the tobacco ban affected the continuous ongoing purchasing of cigarette brands. Keller's model also states brand loyalty is measured through the higher proportion of product purchasing represents the higher the value of brand loyalty (Keller, 2003). Hence the study aims to explore the value of brand loyalty consumers have towards cigarette brands, due to the halt of continuous purchase.

Aaker's Model of Brand Equity (1991) is the second theory being used focusing on brand loyalty. In this model brand loyalty is explained as one of the key contributors to brand equity (Aaker, 1991). Brand loyalty is how committed and loyal consumers are to a brand (Aaker, 1991). This is because it is the currency that can significantly benefit brand equity if there is a large amount of repeat purchasing (Aaker, 1991). The study also focuses on brand equity, mainly brand loyalty, therefore Aaker's model is relevant in outlining the contribution repeat cigarette product purchases are to the brands' equity.

Both models provide aiding definitions for brand loyalty, however, Keller's definition is better suited for this study. Keller states, loyalty is the faithfulness a consumer has towards their brand, despite external factors such as marketing. Therefore, Covid-19 can be viewed as an external factor and the commitment the participants had towards their preferred brand will be considered as brand loyalty .

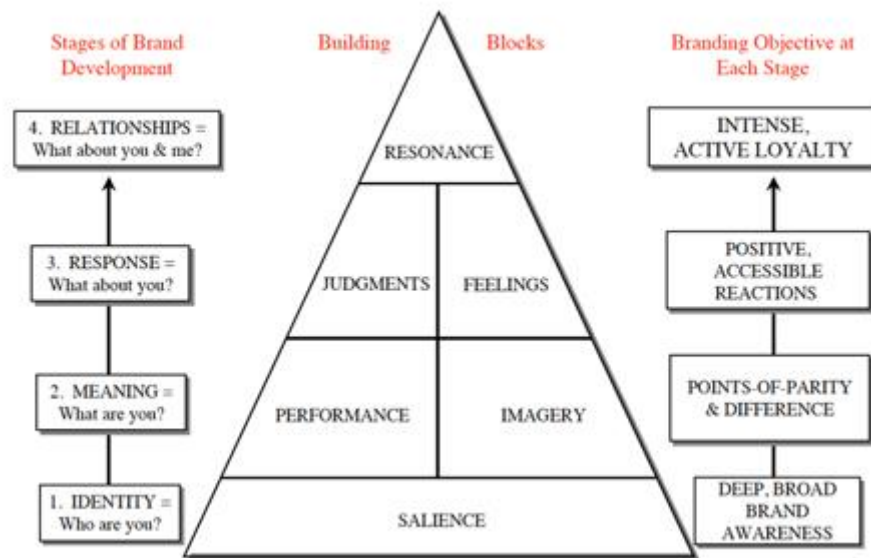


Figure 1. Keller, K. 2003. *Brand Equity Model*. 7.69 x 11.92cm. Marketing Science Institute. (Keller, 2003: 108)

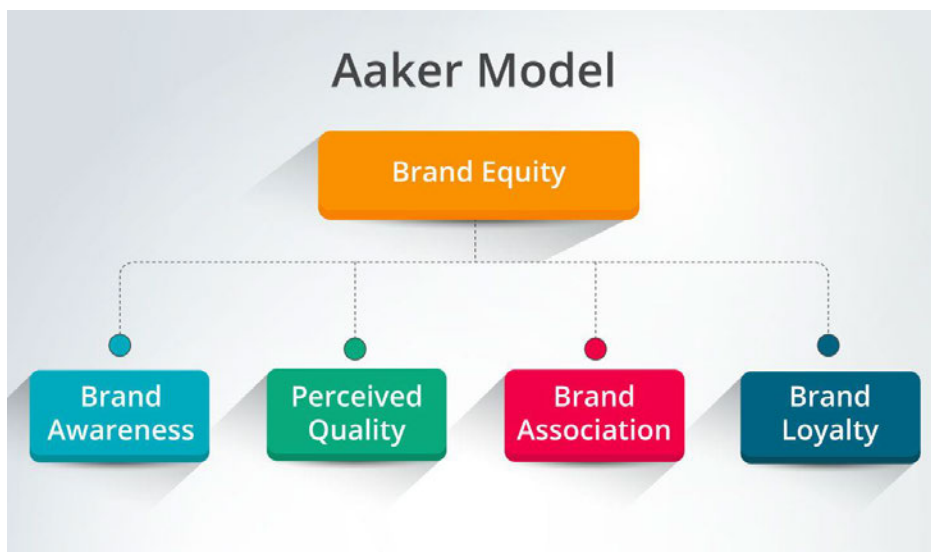


Figure 2. Aaker, D. A. 1991. *Aaker Model*. 8.0 x 12cm New York, The Free Press. 2(1). (Aaker, 1991).

2.2 Conceptualisation

The main concept being used for the research is brand loyalty. For the purpose of this study Keller's definition of brand loyalty will be the main focus. Brand loyalty is the extent to which a consumer is faithful to a specific brand, expressed by continuous purchasing, word of mouth, or advocacy regardless of the marketing or economic pressures (Keller, 2003).

Perceived value will be the focus within brand loyalty. This can be described as the customers' desirability of the product, particularly in comparisons to the product's direct competitors (Yi & Jeon, 2003). A key indicator of desirability is the price customers are open to paying in order to purchase this good product (Yi & Jeon, 2003). Due to the lockdown ban, tobacco product prices were rising by up to 4% per day (Van Walbeek, Hill, Filby, & van der Zee, 2021). The relevance is perceived value is able to explore brand loyalty by understanding if consumers kept on purchasing, as they were open to these exorbitant prices (Yi & Jeon, 2003).

Conceptualising brand preference is when a consumer chooses a certain service or product, while having the knowledge that they are equally affordable and similar products and services elsewhere (Knox & Walker, 2001). Hence, brand preference can be described as when a brand is preferred over others despite them being equal in price and availability (Knox & Walker, 2001). This is not a key concept, however it can be used as an indicator to explore and gain a deeper understanding of consumer brand loyalty.

2.3 Introduction - literature review

The literature review is an important part of this research study as it provides context to the research problem. The literature provides a background description and provides context for the researcher in order for them to be able to gain insights and a deeper understanding. The literature on the tobacco sales ban and the illicit market has allowed for the research study to have an academic basis and understanding for the research to be meaningful and insightful. By understanding past research, a gap is able to be viewed, which in this case is the necessity of a qualitative study. Previous research studies on the tobacco ban have mostly been conducted through quantitative research, due to the limitations of Covid-19. However, a qualitative methodology is able to allow the research to focus on gaining a deeper understanding of the attitudes and experiences of consumers who were affected by the tobacco sales ban. This is through conducting primary research and examining expressions, feelings and multiple realities of the population who are being studied.

2.3.1 Reason for tobacco ban

From March 2020 to August 2021 the government implemented a lockdown where all 'non-essential' goods were taken off the market (McLaggan, 2020). The lockdown had a drastic impact on most brands and businesses along with the South African economy (Egbe & Ngobese, 2020). Egbe and Ngobese(2020), state there was reasoning behind this ban and that it was valid. This is because South Africa has one of the highest usages of tobacco in Africa, as about 22% of the population over 15 years of age use tobacco products. The nation also has one of the highest numbers of tuberculosis cases on the continent. Therefore, the government implemented the lockdown ban to protect its citizens from these health issues, by restricting movement and smoking (Egbe & Ngobese, 2020). As this study focuses on the cigarette ban and how smokers responded and reacted to the lockdown, it is crucial to understand the reasoning behind the governments-imposed ban. Hence, this literature is relevant as it elaborates on the issues pertaining to the government's logic of the ban.

The difference between this study and the article is that the article focuses more on the reasoning behind the tobacco lockdown ban. However, the research study is aimed at finding out how smokers reacted due to the ban and their response. This is through focusing on cigarette brand loyalty instead of smoker's health issues and the government's decisions. The main relevance between this study and the article is tobacco usage within South Africa and showcasing how many South Africans were truly affected due to the cigarette ban. However, another article that is similar to Egbe and Ngobese (2020) is Patanavanich and Glantz (2020). This article is similar in terms of its reasoning behind the value of the lockdown ban on tobacco. Patanavanich and Glantz (2020) state that there is a connection between smoking and Covid-19 symptoms and cases.

Government believed smoking led to infections such as pneumonia, lung infections and tuberculosis and these diseases would make citizens more susceptible to Covid-19, therefore increasing cases and fatalities (Patanavanich & Glantz, 2020). The results of Covid-19 progression being associated with smokers were provided through a quantitative study, where hospital patients who were previous or current smokers were studied. The focus and method were a systematic study using an application called PubMed where they analysed the link between Covid-19 progression and smokers. There was a total of 11590 Covid-19 patients who were studied and 2133, about 18.4% reported they experienced progression. 6.3% of patients who experienced Covid progression are found to have a history of smoking. The significance of this study is that 218 patients, 29.8%, who had a

history of smoking were found to have the disease progression, in contrast to only 17.6% of patients who were non-smokers (Patanavanich & Glantz, 2020). The article's findings conclude that smoking can be considered a risk factor towards the progression of Covid-19. This is because the results stated that smokers are 1.91 times more likely to experience a Covid-19 progression compared to people who have never smoked before (Patanavanich & Glantz, 2020).

The significance of this study is it provides a basis for the government's logic to ban tobacco products, as they feared it would lead to more fatalities of Covid-19. However, the limitation of this study is that it is not representative as it was conducted with a specific population and demographic. The study focused on a specific hospital, hence leaving out numerous other factors, for example different regions and smoking habits. The difference between the article and this study is that the research will be using a qualitative methodology, focusing on smokers' experiences and not on Covid-19 progression. Covid-19 is not the focus, but rather the tobacco sales ban due to Covid-19, with a focus on brand loyalty and brand preference. However, to understand the tobacco ban, it is important to understand the reasoning behind the ban, which this article provides.

Elaborating on Patanavanich and Glantz (2020), a study showcased infected patients who have a history of smoking are 14 times more likely to develop progressions of similar symptoms to pneumonia (Singh, & Chaturvedi, 2020). The World Health Organisation also states that Covid-19 spreads through touching the mouth and nose, but also through coughing and exhaling. Tobacco products are used by touching the mouth repeatedly, while they also increase coughing and exhaling (Singh, & Chaturvedi, 2020). Hence, smoking tobacco can be viewed as a spreader of Covid-19 and provides a basis for the cigarette ban in South Africa.

However, in contrast to the article by Patanavanich and Glantz (2020), the notion of Covid progression being associated with smoking behaviour is challenged. Rossato, Russo, Mazzocut, Di Vincenzo, Fioretto, and Vettor (2020) state there is no direct link that ties smoking tobacco products with Covid-19 progression and fatalities. This is evident as the article states that a variety of doctors and medics have not found any sustainable evidence of the association (Rossato et al., 2020). Hence the ban on tobacco can be seen as unjust and inappropriate. Despite Patanavanich and Glantz (2020) claims that there is an association between smoking and Covid-19, it is imperative for this study there is no bias or limitations, therefore it will be looking at the tobacco and Covid-19 link objectively. Hence, understanding that there are challenging articles enables debate and research to be deeper

explored. Covid-19 was a major reason for the ban on tobacco as the government feared smokers would become more susceptible to Covid-19. Although, this claim has since been disputed by numerous health professionals, stating there is little scientific evidence of a correlation (Rossato et al., 2020).

2.3.2 Defining consumer brand loyalty

Yi and Jeon (2003), describe brand loyalty as when the consumer has a preference for a brand over another brand. This is normally regardless of the prices and location of the brand in which the consumers prefer. The consumer has a good relationship and a positive association with the specific brand and is therefore faithful to the brands' services or products. This can be described as the consumer being viewed as a loyal customer to the brand they want (Yi & Jeon, 2003).

An indicator of brand loyalty is perceived value. Yi and Jeon (2003) describe perceived value as the desirability the consumer has towards a product. Desirability of a product is stated as the price consumers are willing to pay for the product they want (Yi & Jeon, 2003). This is relevant to the study as it will be exploring the buying patterns of consumers and if the high prices of tobacco products affected their perceived value.

Brand loyalty can be associated with being a key measure of effective brand marketing and also, to an extent of brand equity (Knox & Walker, 2001). Aaker (1991), states brand loyalty is a key component of brand equity as it is a contributor towards equity. This is because loyalty is the retention and allegiance customers have with a specific brand, service, or product (Knox & Walker, 2001). Within Aaker's (1991) brand equity model, brand loyalty is described as a currency that then supplies equity through the process of repeat purchasing. As consumers contribute to buy products, despite the rise in prices or change in purchase location, a brand has successfully gained loyal customers (Yi & Jeon, 2003).

Brand loyalty can be described as the association and the trust that consumers have towards a brand (Knox & Walker, 2001). It is the emotional connection consumers have developed with a brand, hence they choose their services or products over the brand's competitors (Yi & Jeon, 2003). Brand loyalty can occur due to a result of brands successfully showcasing their products or services as reliable, trustworthy and of high quality in comparison to their direct competitors (Knox & Walker, 2001).

Strong brand loyalty is prevalent in the case of consumers finding the brand dependable and therefore, continue to purchase the products despite the marketing and exposure to

competitors (Knox & Walker, 2001). Competitors use marketing and advertising to lure away competitors from their preferred brand, hence brand loyalty is when consumers do not engage with the competitors as they have a strong association and trust with the brand (Knox & Walker, 2001). As Aaker (2021) stated brand loyalty is the result of repeat purchasing, it is relevant to this study as focusing on consumer repeat purchasing despite there being a tobacco ban. As consumers might not have direct access to their reliable and trustworthy tobacco products, the study is exploring brand loyalty towards these brands. The study is focusing on the consumer brand loyalty once the ban was lifted and if the ban had any impact on their brand loyalty. However, understanding the products that consumers bought during the ban is important in order to gain a deeper understanding on the ban of tobacco sales and consumer experiences. As prices were rising dramatically and overpriced products were only available on the illicit market, understanding if consumers continued to loyal to the brand is the focus (van Walbeek et al., 2021). This can be achieved through using perceived value as a brand indicator, where desirability overrules high pricing (Yi & Jeon, 2003). In this study, understanding consumer's perceived value of cigarette brands provides a strong basis for understating consumer cigarette brand loyalty.

2.3.3 Illicit tobacco market

This article outlines how the cigarette market became completely illicit and states that the government combatted the Covid-19 crisis in a negative way (McLaggan, 2020). This is because the government's ban enabled criminality to increase and public health to become threatened. The cigarette black market became more lucrative and active due to the government ban, as illegal traders became the most active sellers, while formal retailers were forced to limit and stop their sales. Illegal trade can be described as any activity that does not comply with tax and government regulations (McLaggan, 2020). Cigarette products sold during the ban managed to avoid tax payments and were produced disregarding legislations, which can be described as illegal (McLaggan, 2020). The importance of understanding illegal trade is that it defines the illicit market, which is relevant to the study focusing on consumer behaviour patterns. By exploring behaviour patterns during the ban, it is necessary to understand consumers who partake in the illicit market, to understand their actions and behaviours.

Cigarette prices were rising astronomically during the ban, enabling illegal traders gaining increased profit (Van Walbeek et al., 2021). While traders were able to gain a lot of monetary benefits during the ban, the government lost an enormous amount of income due to the loss

of excise taxes (McLaggan, 2020). This correlates with the theory of perceived value, where it is stated that purchasing products at a higher price is an indicator of brand loyalty (Yi & Jeon, 2003). Van Walbeek et al. (2021), stated that prices were rising by a rate of more than 4% per day, outlining the dramatic rise in cigarette prices. This was due to the black market becoming the most predominant place for consumers to purchase their cigarettes (McLaggan, 2020). Retail purchases changed drastically as the tobacco ban, stopped all sales from formal outlets (Van Walbeek et al., 2021). The sales from retail distribution outlets such as petrol stations, tobacco stores and wholesalers, decreased from 70% before the ban, all the way down to 3%. While informal outlets, such as spaza shops managed to increase sales from 34% to 44% and house shops increased from 4% to 18% (Van Walbeek et al., 2021). The relevance of this information is it provides the study with a basis of consumer buying patterns and behaviours as the location of the purchases is valuable information. Knowing where consumers purchased cigarettes provides a framework for their habits such as black-market purchases. Although the article focuses on a quantitative study of purchase behaviours, this research study will determine consumer brand loyalty. It Aims to understand despite the difference in buying and purchase behaviours if consumers still show brand loyalty. Using a qualitative methodology allows for a more interpretive approach as experiences will be the focus to gain more data and develop a deeper understanding of attitudes and patterns.

2.3.4 Smokers' behaviour during ban

The cigarette market become purely illicit during the tobacco ban, due to 100% of all tobacco products being banned (Van Walbeek, Hill, Filby & van der Zee, 2021). The National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) aimed to provide a nationally representative study that would outline the response of smokers towards to tobacco ban, across South Africa (van Walbeek et al., 2021). NIDS-CRAM conducted qualitative research by using surveys to understand smoker's consumer behaviour during the national tobacco ban. This research is important because it correlates with this study by outlining the various responses and behaviours smokers had towards the ban (van Walbeek et al., 2021). This study will be a qualitative study focusing more on the experiences and brand loyalty, while NIDS-CRAM's weighted study is focused on statistics of purchase behaviours and smoking patterns.

7.9% of the 6.7 million smokers before lockdown stated they quit during the sales ban, this is around 536,000 smokers (van Walbeek et al., 2021). About 84.7%, 5.7 million smokers,

stated that they continued to smoke during the lockdown ban. This corresponds with this study focusing on brand loyalty, hence understanding the purchase patterns and buying behaviours enables this study to gain deeper and more meaningful insights into smoker's brand loyalty. The importance of this article is that it is a weighted quantitative study, hence it was conducted to represent a large population instead of a small in order to generalize. The research study will be using qualitative as it is a method used to better understand attitudes and behaviour better (O'Leary, 2014). This is because qualitative research focuses on behaviours and experiences and is not statistics based, hence there are more ways to interpret the data (O'Leary, 2014). This allows for the researcher to dwell deeper into the reasons and perspectives of the individuals being studied, which are smokers (O'Leary, 2014).

Van Walbeek, Filby, and van der Zee (2020), conducted a quantitative research study on the smoking and quitting behaviour patterns of cigarette users in South Africa. The study was conducted through the Research Unit on the Economics of Excisable Products (REEP) and the approach was similar to the NDIS-CRAM surveys which were conducted. The difference between the two studies is REEP used an online survey on Twitter, hence limiting a demographic of users, smokers from poorer areas with no access to the internet (Van Walbeek et al., 2020). Hence, REEP's study cannot be nationally representative of South Africans but rather a generalization of the sample used. 23,631 respondents answered the survey, these results were helpful in providing a clearer indication of consumer behaviour patterns due to the tobacco lockdown.

These were some of the results of REEP's findings, around 27% of respondents stated they tried to stop smoking due to the tobacco ban (Van Walbeek et al., 2020). 9% were able to completely quit smoking, however the majority of them smoked less than non-quitters' pre-lockdown. Quitters smoked around 8 cigarettes per day, compared to 16 cigarettes for other respondents, indicating they were the least addicted group of participants. Information that correlates with brand loyalty and especially perceived value is the reason for the respondents attempt to quit smoking. 56% of smokers who attempted to quit stated that the main reason was due to the high prices of cigarettes (Van Walbeek et al., 2020). As Van Walbeek et al. (2021) stated prices were rising drastically at around 4% per day, hence buyers who continued purchasing could be deemed to have higher perceived value than those who attempted to stop (Yi & Jeon, 2003). Prices were soaring up as the average price during the ban was around 250% higher than the average pre-lockdown ban (Van Walbeek et al., 2020). Prices were averaging around R5.69 per cigarette and R114 per box of 20

cigarettes (Van Walbeek et al., 2020). This was a direct result of illegal trade and the illicit market which formed that McLaggan (2020) defined.

Regarding respondents who continued smoking, the results are also crucial in the study as it outlines the consumer behaviour patterns of my target population, frequent smokers. Van Walbeek et al. (2020), reported 15% of respondents stated they smoked more during the ban than before lockdown while 35% stated they smoked less. While half of the respondents answered that they smoked the same amount as before lockdown. There were 93% of smokers who continued to purchase cigarettes during the ban, showcasing the majority of this sample purchased on the illicit market.

Friends and family were the main sources for smokers to gain access to cigarettes as 27% of respondents stated (Van Walbeek et al., 2020). Spaza shops and informal retailers were at 25%. This is evident and correlates with Van Walbeek et al. (2021) stating that the majority of purchases were in rural areas compared to urban places. Retail outlets were around 0.3% showcasing the drastic decline of formal cigarette sales (Van Walbeek et al., 2020). This aligns with Van Walbeek et al. (2021) stating that informal shops were the main consumer access point, instead of retail outlets.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, India implemented a strict lockdown where they shutdown most economic activity from 23 March 2020 (Veeraiah, Sudhakar, Tripathy, Sankar, Usharani, Ramakrishnan, Selvam, Nagarajan, Subramani, & Swaminathan, 2021). Tobacco is seen as a lifestyle product, hence it was restricted to keep citizens at home and safe during the lockdown. The article aims to explore tobacco usage during the lockdown and analyse behaviours such as quitting, due to the restriction of tobacco products (Veeraiah et al., 2021). The article used a qualitative method of understanding smoker's behaviour through open-ended questionnaires via telephone. The results were as follows, of the 251 participants who were contacted and consented, 101, 40%, were smokers. 56% of those smokers stated they had easy access to tobacco products and 67% reported they purchased cigarettes from daily shops. 65% of users stated they reduced their tobacco usage during the lockdown, while only 4% were able to quit (Veeraiah et al., 2021). However, in contrast to South Africa where there was a complete ban on tobacco products, India only restricted products to an extent by limiting shop sales.

Despite this, it is relevant in the South African context as the two countries experienced similar situations due to Covid-19, hence this article is relevant to the study. The gap is by understanding the consumer behaviour patterns of smokers in India and then applying a

similar framework but in the South African context. The article provides literature on a topic which is limited around the world, hence it provides important and relevant information towards the research study. It is also a qualitative study, which is the same as the research topic, hence it is very relevant and useful literature to analyse and explore. However, the limitations are telephone surveys, which deny the interviewer to gauge the facial expressions and body language of the participants. This research study will look to do face-to-face interviews in order to understand and examine the participants better.

2.4 Conclusion - literature review

There are four key components to the literature review, understanding brand loyalty, reasoning for the ban, the illicit tobacco market and smoker's behaviour during the ban. All these aspects are important in the aim and focus that is exploring and understanding consumer cigarette brand loyalty. Understanding brand loyalty provides a foundation for determining the indicators that define loyalty towards cigarette brands, such as perceived value. The reasoning for the ban is relevant in knowing the logic behind the tobacco ban and would make understanding how consumers acted and responded to the ban. The illicit market defined by McLaggan (2020) states they are products which avoided tax regulations, explaining the tobacco black market. Smokers' behaviour has been widely researched but mostly using quantitative research, this study will focus on qualitative to gain a deeper understanding of behaviours and attitudes better (O'Leary, 2014). All these aspects are relevant in the study and important in discovering findings and conducting this study.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

A qualitative methodology will be used as in is line with the paradigm being used, also because the research will be exploring a phenomenon, with various avenues for answers (O'Leary, 2014). The research will be looking at behaviours and changes which means they are open ended and cannot be definitive. Hence, phenomenology is the approach being used as it focuses on experiences from specific points of views (O'Leary, 2014). The benefits of qualitative research are it allows for the research to gain an understanding of the phenomenon through the in-depth textual responses that will be given to open ended questions regarding lived experiences. (O'Leary, 2014). The questions are open-ended meaning there are definitive answers, allowing the research to be deeper explored (O'Leary, 2014). There is no right or wrong, only emotional data as the human experience is the main focus (O'Leary, 2014).

3.2 Paradigm

The paradigm selected for this study is interpretivism. This is associated with the belief of idealism which means that the mind shapes and forms the world around us (Ponterotto, 2005). Idealism focuses on experiences from the mind, rather than physical objects. The relevance to the study is that it is centralised around experiences and human consciousnesses (Ponterotto, 2005).

Interpretivism implies that there are numerous realities and ways to look at life (Ponterotto, 2005). This is completely relevant to the study as it will be focusing on different perspectives and various insights from people's lived experiences. This means that a single phenomenon, which is the lockdown ban on tobacco sales, can be perceived in many different ways by the consumers, therefore different explanations and results can occur (Ponterotto, 2005). People understand their social environments differently according to interpretivism and the study aims to explore these differences within the context of cigarette brand loyalty due to the lockdown ban on tobacco (Ponterotto, 2005).

3.3 Population

South Africa has one of the highest number of users of tobacco within Africa. Around 22% of South African citizens who are over the age of 15, use tobacco products (Egbe & Ngobese, 2020). There are over 6.7 million users of tobacco who are over the age of 18 that

were affected by the tobacco sales ban directly (van Walbeek, Hill, Filby & van der Zee, 2021). As a result of the large quantity of individuals who were affected by the cigarette ban, there was a specific population within that that was used for the research study. The targeted population that will be used is limited to seven citizens that experienced the lockdown and tobacco sales ban within South Africa. The characteristic of this population is that they should be considered frequent smokers. These are people who smoke at least one cigarette every one to two days. The population parameters of the population are that the age should be individuals over the age of 18 years old. This parameter is set because that is the legal purchasing age of cigarettes in South Africa. The accessible sample should also have been within South Africa during the national lockdown and have experienced the ban on tobacco sales directly. The parameters are important because frequent smokers above 18 years old were the population most affected by the cigarette ban due to Covid-19. The target population is any individual who falls in between this category of characteristics and parameters. The accessible population is the people who were available for these interviews and able to provide feedback on their experiences. These are individuals who were able to access interviews, 'Zoom' meetings, and answer open-ended questions.

During the data collection process, the population mostly fit the description necessary for the research study. The research study aimed at examining frequent smokers as a population. The first question of the interview was about the smoking habits of the participants, mainly their frequency of smoking. All participants fell into the targeted population as they were all frequent smokers, by definition and therefore, fit the criteria for the study. The population was also accessible as they all stayed in South Africa during the tobacco sales ban. However, the accessible sample would be individuals from Gauteng, particularly Johannesburg and Pretoria. This meant that they experienced the tobacco sales ban during lockdown and had experiences that were relevant to the study. These participants were able to share their experiences and attitudes of the tobacco sales ban due to them being the target population, hence contributing significantly to the study.

3.4 Sampling

The non-probability sampling method that was used for this research study was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling can be described as when participants are selected for the specific needs of the study (O'Leary, 2014). This is relevant to this study as it focuses on a specific subset of people, frequent smokers. They were chosen for this sampling because 6.7 million smokers were affected and denied access to tobacco products during the tobacco

sales ban (van Walbeek et al., 2021). This is the population that is being studied for this research, hence they are imperative to the study. The unit of analysis that this research used are frequent smokers, as a group of people. The intended sampling size is around seven participants. There was no age range for this study, as smokers can be anybody from 18 years of age and above. The sample size was chosen in order to gain broad and different experiences which is evident in a qualitative study. The sampling method is also used in order to not generalize and be a representation of a specific population. Through purposive sampling, non-smokers were rejected for the study. Due to Covid-19 and its effects some of the samples were accessed through zoom meetings, on and around campus and in surrounding areas.

5 of the participants were known to the researcher. These participants just so happened to be students at IIE Vega School, and this was not the target population. These participants were contacted via WhatsApp messaging. When setting up the interviews a WhatsApp message was sent out to the participants requesting their email addresses. This is because most of the participants were known to the researcher at the time. Hence, their phone numbers were already available for access. A message was sent out asking the availability and willingness for these participants to engage with the research study and be willing to be interviewed. An email was sent requesting their participation for an interview and to set up a Zoom call at set times. There was a schedule that was determined in order to interview 7 participants between two weeks. Each interview took place on separate days to provide adequate time to transcribe and re-evaluate each interview. There was on average a two-day period between interviews in order to properly engage with the past interview and to review and transcribe it onto a Microsoft Word document on the researcher's computer. This process was done in order to avoid mass transcription at the end of all the interviews and to keep a log for all participants on Microsoft Word. The data collection process was done in a way that made the data analysis a more convenient process.

3.5 Data collection method

The research conducted no face-to-face interviews with all of them done online due to Covid-19 and the limitation on in-person contact. Interviews were done in order to allow the participants to provide a descriptive and accurate analysis of their personal experiences. It is important for the collection of data to understand the reasoning behind the participants decisions and how they reacted to the questions. Hence, participants answers are not the only aspect being evaluated and explored but also their reactions, and facial expressions.

This is because these aspects provide a deeper understanding and insight into the attitudes of the participants and provide more meaning to their answers.

The data collection tool was in-depth structured interviews, in order to gain answers that relate to the same questions. This was important for the analysis as answers were compared and contrasted easier due to the question and approach being the same. Structured interviews required a predetermined set of questions that were used for all participants in order to be able to find common themes and understandings along with contrasting views. Through in-depth interviews participants were able to provide more descriptive and expressive answers instead of being guided by the researcher. This benefitted the research because when trying to gain a deeper understanding of views and experiences it is better to allow participants to perceive the question themselves and answer as they deem fit (O'Leary, 2014). This made it more beneficial for the researcher, as participants were able to interpret the answers instead of explaining them, hence the reason for interpretivism being used (O'Leary, 2014).

Before any interview would take place, participants were made aware of the ethical principles of the research study. They signed consent forms for anonymity and audio and visual recordings. This ensured they understood that the study was confidential and contained anonymity. This informed participants of what to expect from the interview as well as increase the likelihood of honesty. Zoom meetings were used due to Covid-19 and being on lockdown hence, there were no face-to-face interviews conducted. This limited the researcher to evaluate body language and close facial expressions, which would have contributed more substantially to the participant's answers. However, most interviews took place for the participants from the comfort of their own home. This resulted in a more productive interviews as participants were less distracted and were more comfortable due to their surroundings.

3.6 Application of data-collection method

The questions that were formulated for the interview were derived from secondary research and the research objectives. Previous research was mostly quantitative hence a research gap was identified, the need for a qualitative study. Quantitative questions are very close ended and did not allow for explanation and description, which is crucial to this research study (O'Leary, 2014). However, these previous studies still aid the research objectives, to explore smoker's cigarette brand loyalty, explore the populations perception of the brands equity and to explore how smokers changed their perceived value of cigarette brands. The

questions were improved from former quantitative studies to become more open ended by using words such as “how”, “describe” and “what”. The interviews conducted was a structured interview where predetermined questions were asked with little to no variation as well as no follow up questions. The more simple and easier answers were asked first in order to make the participants more comfortable and build their confidence for the interviews. These were questions such as “How often do you smoke cigarettes?”. Then there was a progression to more elaborate and difficult questions such as what your perception of a particular cigarette brand is. This led to a larger quantity of data and generated rich data.

In order to get general areas of information the same approach was used for each interviewee. Despite this there was still freedom and adaptability in order for participants to express themselves freely and without influence. After conducting the first mock interview in order to see if the data collection method was effective, there were no questions which were improved or changed. The description and replies were adequate enough and provided enough information which could then later be analysed. The questions were all asked in a similar manner, with no further interpretations from the researcher but only the responses interpreted from the participants. The questions asked were to yield as much information as possible about the study of the phenomenon, the tobacco sales ban. However, also to be able to compare and contrast the information as the answers could be standardised due to the reliable similarities of the questions.

The data was collected over a three-week period from the 8th of July up until the 29th of July 2021. Every interview was scheduled and confirmed the day before the interview was due to take place. An email was sent out to the relevant participant confirming the time and sending them the link in order to access Zoom. The email also contained consent forms which were to be electronically signed and then sent back to the researcher. This provided written and informed consent which is imperative for the interview to be able to take place. On the day of the interview, the researcher logged in 10 minutes before each interview in order to ensure the link was working and there was a functioning connection. Each interview took approximately 15 minutes on average as the participants were all asked the same questions. However, many answers varied in length and time from by the participants due to their own views and expression towards the questions. After the interview participants were thanked for their time and contribution and also reinforced about the purpose of the study.

The Zoom meeting was recorded so that it could later be revisited and then transcribed. The recording was to take place of detailed notes to remove any bias and ensure that there was

an accurate account of the interview. However, “field notes” were taken for any ideas or observations made to contribute to the data analysis process. The recording was then analysed to determine what the participant said and not what was thought to be said. When accessing the previously recorded interviews, Microsoft word was open in order to transcribe the words of the interviewer and interviewee. The researcher typed the words out as the recording played but paused in between answers to transcribe accurately and effectively. A table was created for every respondent numbered from number 1, in relevance to the order in which they were interviewed in. All their dialogue was transcribed and typed out into their respective tables. True verbatim was used, which is when everything is transcribed from the recording (Simon, 2011). This includes words and fillers such as uhm, uh and non-verbal communication such as laughter. There is no editing from the audio, and everything is typed exactly as is from the recording. True verbatim was used as a replacement for the limitation of observing body language and it benefitted the study as it provided the answers with more substance and provided a deeper understanding of the participants answers (Simon, 2011).

The data collection process was similar to the methodology that was set up before it took place. There were very little deviances from the process, such as structured in-depth interviews. However, a big limitation which affected the data collection process was Covid-19. Many participants were not able to be interviewed and the sampling population changed to more accessible participants. The interviews were also not face-to-face but rather on an online video conference platform, Zoom. This limited the observation of body language and detailed facial expressions, which affected the study. However, the effect was not substantial as all questions were fully answered and reliable and rich data was obtained during the data collection process.

3.7 Data analysis method

Qualitative data provides broad and unstructured data which is text based such as interview transcripts, observation notes and entries (O’Leary, 2014). In order to analyse this data, there was a need to be more intuitive and creative. Hence this research used a thematic analysis approach, as it is relevant and widely used within the interpretivism paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005). Thematic analysis is focused on the participants’ experiences, perceptions and attitudes (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke & Braun, 2017). These aspects are the core objects of the study that need to be researched and analysed. This allowed for participants to express their own opinions and provide a description of their own reality, without being influenced or swayed.

Thematic analysis is taking data and interpreting it in order to find and establish common themes and finding within it (Terry et al., 2017). It is comparing and contrasting different perspectives and descriptions to outline if there is a common theme or multiple findings within the data (Terry et al., 2017). The textual data is converted into more concise and summarized information, in order to be able to find and establish clear links between the data and the research objectives (Terry et al., 2017). Hence, a framework can be developed through this thematic approach, which would explain and group the experiences which are prevalent in the raw data. Thematic analysis can provide a systematic set of procedures that will make analysing the data collected easier, which can produce more valid findings (Terry et al., 2017). The coding of this data is done by organising the data into specific themes that they are related to (Terry et al., 2017). Hence through establishing themes throughout the topic, it is then easier to gauge and understand the data, leading to a better analysis.

In thematic analysis, data that is collected from the interviews, meetings and general observations are put into writing and transcripts (Terry et al., 2017). This becomes textual data that will then be processed in order to find common themes within it. The questions that are asked are divided into subsections and then they are split into different themes. These themes were used in order to gain understanding and knowledge of the participants attitudes (Terry et al., 2017). There was constant contrasting and comparing the different themes in order to establish important links or common findings within the data (Simon, 2011).

3.8 Application of data analysis method

The data analysis method used for this study, is common throughout most qualitative research (Simon, 2011). After each interview that was conducted there was a two-day period in which the data was transcribed and collected. There was also some analysis which took place, through observations which were made during the collection process, that was then applied to the data as part of the findings. These observations also fell under their own category of themes, and they contributed to the understanding of how and why the participants stated and reacted the way they did (Simon, 2011).

However, before all the data was analysed and sorted with a software programming application, Atlas.ti, all of the data, raw and structured was read through. This was in order to gauge the information and determine if there was a general consensus along with getting more insight into the data collected. This is thematic analysis, as the main findings and themes were being derived and emerging from the data that was collected (Simon, 2011). The analysis of qualitative data was dependant on the interview responses. The responses

were analysed in their relevance to the research study and the questions derived from the objective. The three main questions of the research study were, how has consumer brand loyalty changed towards cigarettes due to the tobacco sales ban? What were consumers perceived value of cigarettes post-lockdown? How did consumers respond to the tobacco sales ban, in terms of purchasing behaviours?

The data was organized and put into Microsoft word documents, in various tables. Underneath these tables, there were field notes and observations which were included to give more substance to the data. By using Atlas.ti which is an analysis software programme, it was more convenient to separate the data into categories and find themes within it. Using this application, the tools available were able to locate, code and annotate the data available in order to make important discoveries and links between the data. Atlas.ti kept information of the notes, codes and annotations which were made in order to make the analysis process more beneficial. Using this application there were themes and links that were able to be found, between smoker's who had similar behaviour patterns and also smokers who used a particular brand. An example of this was that frequent smokers who smoke Marlboro were much more likely to say loyal to their brand, in terms of smoking it during the sales ban after under the ban was lifted.

Data was divided into different themes, such as 'loyalty', 'disloyalty' and 'uncertain' when it came to categorizing different cigarette brands and their users. This was also the same usage, which was divided into very frequent, frequent and occasional. These categories were for post tobacco sales events mainly. Common events, words, phrases were separated into different themes. However, during the process of analysis many of these pieces of data were removed and changed to different categories. There were about six to seven different cycles of coding that was used. This was when the all the data was re-examined and revalued in order to try and find new links, fix categories and shift data. This was beneficial to the study as it made the findings more substantial as they were more in-depth and accurately analysed. Data such as behaviour patterns, were easier to examine through coding their behaviour and categorizing them. This led to greater discoveries and relevance to the research study, such as how they behaved, and the relation of their loyalty based on these patterns. Smokers who were smoking a lot during the lockdown were more susceptible to purchasing expensive cigarettes before the lockdown began. By noting their spending patterns before the lockdown using Atlas.ti, it was easier to discover that purchasing habits during and after the lockdown were mostly similar, depending on their habits.

4 FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction to findings

The findings of this research were formulated using an inductive approach. This involved no premeditated framework, theory or structure but using the data itself to establish conclusions (Simon, 2011). This is used when there is little known information on a central phenomenon but is comprehensive and derives its own structure from the raw data (Simon, 2011). Thematic analysis was the chosen method of analysis. This method is focused on the participants' experiences, perceptions and attitudes (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke & Braun, 2017).

Thematic analysis is taking data and interpreting it in order to find and establish common themes and finding within it (Terry et al., 2017). It is comparing and contrasting different perspectives and descriptions to outline if there is a common theme or multiple findings within the data (Terry et al., 2017). In thematic analysis, data that is collected from the interviews, meetings and general observations are put into writing and transcripts (Terry et al., 2017). This becomes textual data that will then be processed in order to find common themes within it. The questions that are asked are divided into subsections, analysed, and then they are split into different themes. These themes were used in order to gain understanding and knowledge of the participants attitudes (Terry et al., 2017). There was constant contrasting and comparing the different themes in order to establish important links or common findings within the data (Simon, 2011). During the coding process, there was constant reviewing and re-evaluating until the point of data saturation (Simon, 2011). This is when there is no more new information being found when the data is being relooked at (Simon, 2011).

4.2 Presentation of findings

There were seven participants used for this study and they were all asked the same set of questions. The demographic composition of the participants was that all of them stayed in Gauteng at the time of the interviews. Five of the participants were between the ages of 22 to 26, the other two were over the age of 35. The participants under 35 were all doing their tertiary education, while the two over 35 were working in the finance sector. Most of the participants were similar in terms of their demographics, as well as all of them being frequent

smokers. Five of the participants were male and two were female. By analysing the interview transcripts using a coding application, Atlas.ti, there were three main themes established. Price, availability, and perceived quality are all interlinked as they have an effect on the brand loyalty of these participants.

THEMES	PRICE	AVAILABILITY	PERCEIVED VALUE
Definition	Determined by asking the question of how much each participant spends on cigarettes per week and how much they would be willing to spend. This was to gauge the importance of cigarettes to the participants, in terms of monetary value. Also, in order to explore if this would have an effect on the participants spending habits during the tobacco ban and after the ban was lifted.	Availability refers to if participants were able to obtain their preferred cigarette brand during the tobacco sales ban, if they continued to purchase them, or if they opted for alternative options.	The theme of perception is centred on the perceived value participants had of cigarettes, specifically their preferred brand, before the tobacco sales ban and after the ban was lifted.
Participant Habits	Four out of the seven participants stated that they would spend a minimum of R100 per week on cigarettes. Two of the participants who spend R100 a week on cigarettes have the same preferred cigarette brand, Marlboro. They also have the same product, Marlboro reds, which shows a strong attachment to that particular brand. Stuyvesant was the other brand with two participants who preferred it. However, no pair of participants who had the same preferred brand had similar smoking or spending habits, as one was contrasting to the other.	All seven participants stated that they have a preferred brand they were constantly smoking before lockdown. Two participants stated that they did not have access to their preferred cigarette brand, and one of them completely stopped smoking, but not as a direct result of lack of access. Four participants stated they purchased cigarettes on the illicit market, through Spaza shops and informal shops. One participant responded they ordered cigarettes through a WhatsApp group with friends, where a seller would deliver the product.	Before the tobacco ban, two participants stated that cigarettes are not of great value to them, one stating "they are overrated to me" and another, "the feeling is quite exaggerated." Their preferred brand is also not valuable as they stated they could switch brands easily, their preferred brands were Stuyvesant and Chesterfield. The two Marlboro participants responded ensuring that cigarettes are meaningful to them and are of high value. However, only one participant stated that they would not switch brands. The other three participants stated they did not perceive cigarettes in a significant manner but rather it is something that they just do, with one stating smoking as a "hobby" and another as an "activity."
Significance	In regard to price, all participants stated that they would spend R50 or more on cigarettes per week. The significance of this is that it averages out to more than one pack of cigarettes per week. Hence, by definition all of these participants can be considered a frequent smoker as they smoke one or two cigarettes per day (Wang, 2021). Interestingly, the Marlboro smokers each had a different approach to the cigarette brand, with one switching and the other staying. Despite both spending similar amounts of money on cigarettes before the sales ban.	Four out of the seven participants who continued smoking cigarettes during the tobacco sales ban were able to have access to their preferred cigarette brands. The other three participants stated that they switched cigarette brands due to the lack of access of cigarettes and also astronomical rise in product prices.	Significantly, two smokers who stated they have a high value of their preferred cigarette brand stated the reason for this was that the particular brand was their first one when they started smoking. Despite this one responded they would still be open to switch.

4.3 Interpretation of findings

Using the research objectives and secondary questions were important in interpreting the findings. This is because it provided more context to information and was easier to develop themes. Achieving the research objectives was obtained through the secondary research questions. The first objective was to explore smoker's cigarette brand loyalty through the question of, how has consumer brand loyalty changed towards cigarettes due to the tobacco sales ban? The themes important to answering this question were price, perceived value and availability. The second research objective was to explore the populations perception of cigarette brands, asked through the research question, what were consumers perceived value of cigarettes post-lockdown? This objective focuses on the theme of perceived quality. Exploring consumer behaviours during the lockdown was the third objective, asked through the secondary question, how did consumers respond to the tobacco sales ban, in terms of purchasing behaviours? The findings within price, availability and perceived value contribute to this objective.

4.3.1 Price

In terms of behaviour around price, there was a direct correlation between how much a participant was willing to spend and how much they smoked on average, before the tobacco sales ban. Participants 1,3,6 and 7 stated they spent around R100 a week on cigarettes and were smoking a minimum of 50 cigarettes a week. Participant 7 who smokes 70 in a week, stated that they would willingly spend up to R200 a week, although they spend R100 on average. This showcases how the more a participant smokes the more that they are willing to spend. To further emphasize this finding, Participant 4 smokes the least as they smoke two 20-packs in a week and states they would spend maximum R50 a week.

The amount of spending is also linked to availability in most cases. This is because the amount willing to spend in a week relates to if participants based their lack of access to their preferred brand on price. Due to the lockdown ban, tobacco product prices were rising by up to 4% per day (Van Walbeek, Hill, Filby, & van der Zee, 2021). Participant 7 stated that they were able to gain access to their preferred brand by purchasing through a contact on WhatsApp. Despite the absorbent prices, they stated they still bought their preferred brand

no matter the price. However, this is in contrast to the other three participants that were willing to spend R100 on cigarettes. Participant 3's preferred brand is Stuyvesant and they stated they had access to them but were only purchasing them because they were "luckily one of the cheapest brands available." Participant 1 and 6 although having the option of purchasing their preferred brand, opted for alternatives due to price. Participant 1 normally purchases Stuyvesant but instead bought Palmore which is one of the cheapest cigarette brands. While Participant 6 prefers Marlboro, the same as Participant 7, purchased Dunhill's because they "tasted similar and were slightly cheaper." This is significant because it shows that price is not always associated with availability, as only one participant would pay the premium amount for their preferred cigarettes. Although, Participants' 1, 3 and 6 thought hard about their responses, they took their time to answer and used words such as "um", "uh", and "like" throughout their response to the question surrounding price. Participant 7 was blunt as they answered quickly and confidently, further illustrating their commitment to their preferred brand.

4.3.1 Availability

Availability became a theme as most of the participants stated that they were smoking less due to the tobacco sales ban as lack of accessibility was a factor. Five participants stated they were smoking less during the ban, three of them were for personal reasons while two of them were mainly because of prices. Participant 2 stopped smoking during lockdown because they were surrounded by family members who did not approve. They answered this in a hesitant and emotional way, stuttering and taking long pauses, exemplifying they were saddened by their reasoning. Participant 4 wanted to give up smoking excessively, so they were limiting themselves to 20 cigarettes a week, previously smoking two packs a week (40 cigarettes). Participant 5 smoked less because they lived far away from informal shops and had no connections, so they would only purchase erratically. Participant 1 was smoking less due high prices, despite still purchasing cheaper alternatives, the prices were still too high. Participant 6 also stated "I would buy them when I had enough money, or I would try negotiate."

Hence participants 3 and 7 ended up smoking more than they did before the lockdown. This is significant because both participants smoked the most amount before the ban, with 60 and

70 in a week respectively. This showcases the effect smoking behaviours had before the tobacco sales ban, based on activities after the ban was lifted. Despite the participants who cited personal reasons, price was a contributor to accessibility. The findings were not as straightforward that the participants who paid the most for cigarettes per week were the highest spenders during the tobacco sales ban. However, participants who would normally spend less were less motivated to try and smoke as often.

4.3.1 Perceived value

The relevance of perceived value is it can be described as the customers' desirability of the product, an indicator of brand loyalty (Yi & Jeon, 2003). Perceived value also sees if abhorrent prices are a factor in consumers buying behaviours (Yi & Jeon, 2003). This was determined by the questions of how much they were smoking after the ban, was it the same brand as before and if their perception changed after the sales ban.

Most participants continued smoking their preferred cigarette brand after the ban was lifted, with three participants stating it was because of the lack of access they appreciated it more. Participants 1 and 6 had little access to their preferred brands, hence they were more inclined to purchase them afterwards as they missed their brand. Participant 6 used the words "my Marlboro's" providing personification to the product. This determined the strong perceived value that they had for their preferred brand, the tone of this answer was excitement said with a large grin, further emphasizing this point. Participant 2 continued to not smoke for a duration of three months as they enjoyed the feeling. However, they are now back to smoking their usual amount before the ban of Stuyvesant. When asked about their perceived value they stated, "I couldn't really quit, they are just too good." They previously responded that Stuyvesant was the first cigarette brand they tried, hence their loyalty for them is very strong as the brand holds exceptional sentimental value. Participant 6 who opted for an alternative to Marlboro, contrary to Participant 7, decided they enjoyed Dunhill and that is now their preferred brand. This was despite Participant 6 stating that Marlboro was meaningful to them, as it was the first brand they smoked. This is an outlier as most participants were brand loyal, Participant 6 switched due to lack of accessibility and likeness, despite previously having a high perceived value of Marlboro.

4.4 Discussion

By understanding past research, a gap is able to be viewed, which in this case is the necessity of a qualitative study. Previous studies have mostly been conducted through quantitative research. However, a qualitative methodology is able to allow the research to focus on gaining a deeper understanding of the attitudes and experiences of consumers who were affected by the tobacco sales ban. This is through conducting primary research and examining expressions, feelings and multiple realities of the population who are being studied.

4.4.1 Theoretical models

In terms of previous literature there are some correlations and some differences between this research and previous studies. Firstly, the focus on brand loyalty was based on Keller and Aaker. These pressures include other brands availability, prices and market share (Keller, 2003). Hence, understanding brand loyalty during the tobacco ban is possible by understanding Keller's (2003) definition of brand loyalty. There was also able to provide clarity on whether participants could be considered brand loyal. Majority of consumers were brand loyal, as five out of the seven participants remained loyal to their brand despite the marketing or economic pressures. Aaker's Model of Brand Equity (1991) is the second theory being used focusing on brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is how committed and loyal consumers are to a brand (Aaker, 1991). Using indicators of brand loyalty such as perceived value there was a possibility of understanding and gaining insights. These insights included participant's emotional connection towards cigarette brands and the value that they have for these products.

4.4.2 Pricing

A similarity of this study and past literature is the pricing. Cigarette prices were rising astronomically during the ban, enabling illegal traders gaining increased profit (Van Walbeek et al., 2021). This correlates with the theory of perceived value, where it is stated that purchasing products at a higher price is an indicator of brand loyalty (Yi & Jeon, 2003). Many participants either switched their preferred brand due to the high prices or they were loyal and continued to purchase no matter it, such as Participant 7.

4.4.3 Accessibility

Accessibility also relates to previous studies as sales from retail distribution outlets such as petrol stations, tobacco stores and wholesalers, decreased from 70% before the ban, all the way down to 3%. While informal outlets, such as spaza shops managed to increase sales from 34% to 44% and house shops increased from 4% to 18% (Van Walbeek et al., 2021). Three participants stated that they purchased from Spaza shops as one said, “they were always selling.” This correlates directly with the previous literature and provides context on accessibility, as one participant was unable to purchase because they lived far from these areas.

4.4.4 Consumer behaviours

Consumer behaviours were previously studied in a quantitative approach, by using surveys to understand smoker’s consumer behaviour during the national tobacco ban (van Walbeek et al., 2021). However, the results differed as the Research Unit on the Economics of Excisable Products (REEP) findings were, 27% of respondents stated they tried to stop smoking due to the tobacco ban (Van Walbeek, Filby, & van der Zee, 2020). This is significantly higher than this study as only one participant out of seven attempted to stop, as another one was forced to. Another contrasting finding was that friends and family were the main sources for smokers to gain access to cigarettes as 27% of respondents stated, while Spaza shops and informal retailers were at 25%. However, majority of the participants stated that Spaza shops were the main points of accessibility and one participant mentioned friends, on a WhatsApp group.

4.5 Validity

In contrast to quantitative studies which is measurable and ensures reliability, qualitative studies need to be viewed as trustworthy (Shenton, 2004). Hence, this research study will be conducted in a manner that ensures trustworthiness and dependability. In order to showcase there is truth in the research findings, triangulation of numerous sources will be used to compare the research findings. This will make the data findings appear more credible and accurate (Shenton, 2004). There also needs to be a lack of cognitive bias in the study, in order for more accurate study findings (Shenton, 2004). The research needs to be based

on the participant's experiences and responses to the questions, instead of personal biases from the researcher (Shenton, 2004). This will be done by asking open ended questions and allowing for the participant to interpret and answer the question as they please. This will accurately portray the participants responses instead of allowing them to be influenced by the research questions or the researcher. The study also needs to be trustworthy by ensuring that if it were conducted again there would be similar findings (Shenton, 2004). This should be evident in another researcher taking the same framework and yielding similar results if they use the same process (Shenton, 2004). These are the steps that will be taken in order to ensure a trustworthy research study.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Objectives in correlation to findings

The research objectives of this study were answered through the secondary questions. The first secondary question was, how has consumer brand loyalty changed towards cigarettes due to the tobacco sales ban. This was to answer the objective of exploring smoker's cigarette brand loyalty. This was answered through perceived value and examining how many participants stayed loyal to their brand after the tobacco sales ban was lifted. Five of the seven participants remained loyal to their cigarette brand, with two switching to the brand that was most accessible and used during the sales ban.

What were consumers perceived value of cigarettes post-ban? Was not conclusively answered as majority of participants kept their same perceived value from before the tobacco sales ban. Only one participant had a drastic change as they switched from a brand, they considered sentimental and meaningful. Therefore, the objective of how smokers changed their perceived value of cigarette brands was not sufficiently met.

The last objective was to understand consumer purchasing behaviours of cigarettes during the tobacco ban. The secondary question was what the changes of consumer were purchasing behaviours due to the tobacco sales ban. This was comprehensively answered, as numerous factors contributed to consumer purchasing behaviours of cigarette brands. Price, availability and perception were all contributing factors and exploring the behaviours before and after was very insightful.

5.2 Implications of findings

The main implication of this study is that tobacco brands have a strong connection with their consumers, as many frequent smokers are not only faithful but also committed to their brands. Participants may spend more money to acquire their products, due to their high perceived quality of it. However, there is no direct correlation with consumer behaviours and specific brands. For example, the two participants who preferred Marlboro before the ban, acted in contrast to each other in terms of price spending, finding access to the product and

perception of the brands. Hence in future studies, maybe specific cigarette brands should be used in individual studies to showcase if there is a link between consumers behaviours and brand loyalty.

The significance of this study is that most of the past research that had been conducted on the tobacco sales ban was qualitative. These studies were done through online and electronic surveys, due to contact restrictions due to Covid-19. However, this study can now be used in the future to conduct qualitative surveys and gain deeper meaning and insights into the phenomenon of the tobacco sales ban.

5.3 Final conclusions

Overall, the findings of this study resulted in most of the research secondary answers being met, therefore the main research objective has also been achieved. The aim was to understand customer brand loyalty in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the tobacco sales ban from March 2020 to August 2020, there were external pressures consumers had which affected their cigarette brands and products. Factors such as price, availability and perception all played crucial roles in determining the brand loyalty of the participants and consumers. If the market pressure does not affect consumers commitment to a brand, they can be considered brand loyal, hence five out of seven participants all showed brand loyalty.

As the country continues to combat Covid-19, in the future there may be no virus which can halt or affect the research process. Hence, more insightful and in-depth studies may take place through face-to-face interviews and visiting relevant areas. A larger sample may also be used in order to try and generalize the South African population as this study was unable to.

5.4 Ethical considerations

The importance of ethics is to protect participants and human subjects from harmful research (Connelly, 2014). This is done through placing guidelines and disclosing all information to the participants, in order for their safety (Connelly, 2014). Regarding ethics in this study participants will be advised that the interviews are voluntary, and they can choose to

participate. All participants to be interviewed must be over 18 years old. They will consent to their participation by signing various consent forms. These consent forms include the knowledge and willingness to be recorded while interviewed along with being filmed, on Zoom calls potentially. Participants will be told all data collected for this study will remain anonymous and will only be used for research purposes. There may be some questions regarding smoking habits that participants might not want to answer, and it will be acknowledged that they can decline to answer any question. Personal questions such as purchasing on the black market might be uncomfortable, therefore they can decline to answer or stop the interview at any time.

5.6 Limitations

Most of the participants that were used for this study were either known to the researcher or they were acquaintances. Hence, the interviews that were conducted although structured and formal, the tone of them was friendly and calming. This meant that participants answered more casually and provided information through their own perception without being as nervous. This also meant the way the research questions were asked were less authoritative and there was a sociable approach from the researcher. This is a limitation of the study as the language used was relative to the participants. An unconscious bias was that all questions were straightforward to answer and needed minimal explanations or follow-up questions. There was non-neutral body language or facial expressions while interviewing as participants were known, which may have influenced or imposed on their answers. Knowing some participants past behaviour and personality might have led to bias in the analysis and interpreting their data. This might have affected the explanation process as expressing behaviour might not have been in depth to provide context already known to the researcher. This study consisted of seven participants making it a very small sample in context, however this allowed for more in-depth individual information. This is a limitation because the study cannot generalize the south African population as a limited sample size was used for this research study.

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APPENDIX 1 - CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Ryan Kabwato and I am a student at IIE Vega School. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Mbali Rametse about Consumer brand loyalty of cigarette brands due to the tobacco sales ban. I will be looking at consumer behaviours and their brand loyalty to cigarette brands. The lockdown ban on tobacco affected many smokers, hence this will be exploring and understanding smokers' experiences. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of Cigarette brand loyalty and the brand preference that consumers had due to the lockdown ban on tobacco sales. . I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you smoke cigarette brands. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to interview you and ask some questions related to the tobacco sales ban and smoking specific cigarette brands. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your smoking habits. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?
I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at IIE Vega School, will have access

to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my **BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication**. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Ryan Kabwato

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Mbali Rametse

[REDACTED]

Participant or respondent consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by **Ryan Kabwato** about **Cigarette brand loyalty due to the ban on tobacco sales**.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature	Date

APPENDIX 2 - Consent form for audio or video recording

Consent form for participants	
I, _____, agree to allow Ryan Kabwato to audio record my interviews as part of the research about Consumer brand loyalty of cigarette brands due to the tobacco sales ban. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private; • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer; and • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	Date

APPENDIX 3 - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to partake in this interview. Please note this interview is voluntary. All consent forms signed provides permission for you to be recorded, also filmed if necessary. All data collected for this study will remain anonymous and be used only for research purposes. You do not have to answer any question and if you feel uncomfortable, you can stop this interview at any time. This interview will take approximately 12 minutes of your time.

Demographics

Age?

How many cigarettes do you smoke per day, and in a week?

Data collection Questions:

1. How long have you been smoking for?
2. What would you state as your favourite cigarette brand?
3. What brand were you smoking before the tobacco sales ban?
4. How would you describe your perception of these cigarettes? And the value of them to you?
5. How much are you willing to spend on cigarettes and how much do you ordinarily spend? - What would your budget limitations be on the purchasing of cigarettes? Would this be limited to your favourite brand only?
6. How did your smoking behaviours change during the tobacco sales ban?
7. How much were you smoking during the sales ban of tobacco products during the lockdown in 2020??
8. How did you have access to your favourite cigarette brand during the tobacco sales ban?

9. How would you describe your reaction to the sales ban?

10. What cigarettes were you smoking after the ban was lifted? ... were they similar to the ones smoked during the lockdown sales ban?

11. How much would you say you smoked after the sales ban was lifted?

Thank you very much for your time, this data is much appreciated and will contribute greatly to my research study. Have a good day 😊

APPENDIX 4 - ETHICAL CLEARENCE



Date: 8 July 2021

Student name: Ryan Kabwato

Student number: [REDACTED]

Campus: Vega Johannesburg Bordeaux

Re: Approval of RESE8419 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

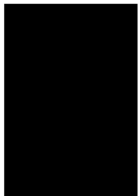
Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor name: Mbali RametseSignature:



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) name: Dr Tish TaylorSignature:



APPENDIX 5 - ORIGINALITY REPORT

SafeAssign Originality Report

RESE8419_VGBX1 • Research Report

[View Originality Report - Old Design](#)

Ryan Steve Takudzwa Kabwato

Submission UUID cbe365e-d7e4-17ba-2904-32be5c90149a

Total Score:  High risk 100 %

Total Number of Reports	Highest Match	Average Match	Submitted on	Average Word Count
1	100 %	100 %	29/11/21	13,037
RESE - Submission for Originality report....			22 48 GMT+2	Highest RESE - Submission for Originality report.docx

 Attachment 1 100 % Word Count 13,037
RESE - Submission for Originality report.docx

Institutional database (7)			100 %
2 My paper	1 My paper	4 My paper	
3 My paper	11 My paper	8 My paper	
10 My paper	11 Student paper	8 My paper	
10 Student paper			

Global database (2) 0 %

6 Student paper

8 Student paper

Internet (2)

0 %

7 researchleap

9 jafeb

Top sources (3)

2 My paper

1 My paper

4 My paper

Excluded sources (0)

Research Purpose/Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Population	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Key Findings
Explore the implications of the ban with a focus on brand loyalty and consumer behaviour during and post ban.	Explore customer cigarette brand loyalty changed post-lockdown, due to the ban on tobacco	March 2020 to August 2020, 6.7 million smokers were denied access to tobacco products. This could have had a substantial effect on their brand loyalty and cigarette brand equity.?	Kevin Keller (2003) & David Aaker (1991)	Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model. The study will focus on brand loyalty within this model and use the definition of brand loyalty within this framework. Aaker's Model of Brand Equity (1991) is the second theory being used focusing on brand loyalty. In this model brand loyalty is explained as one of the key contributors to brand equity	Target population s 7 citizens that experienced the lockdown and tobacco sales ban within South Africa. The characteristic of this population is that they should be considered frequent smokers. These are people who smoke at least one cigarette every one to two days. The population parameters of the population are that the age should be individuals over the age of 18 years old.	Qualitative approach. Phenomenology, as the experiences are all subjective, but relevant. Paradigm Interpretivism. Reality is many different experiences and thoughts.	Online and Face to face interviews. Structured interview with pre-set but open-ended questions.	Participants will remain anonymous and must sign a consent form to participate and be recorded audio and visually.	Price, availability, perceived value were central themes in understanding brand loyalty. Most participants were brand loyal to their respective product, but participants with same product acted differently.
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/	Key Concepts	Key Theories			Sampling	Data Analysis Method(s)	Limitations	Key contribution
Provide a qualitative study on the central phenomenon which was the tobacco sales ban.	How has consumer brand loyalty changed towards cigarettes due to the tobacco sales ban? What were consumers perceived value of cigarettes post-lockdown?	Brand Loyalty Perceived Value	Brand loyalty within both Keller's and Aaker's model of brand equity.	T1: Reason for tobacco ban T2: Defining consumer brand loyalty T3: Illicit tobacco market T4: Smokers' behaviour during ban		Non-probability method of purposive sampling. The unit of analysis that this research used are frequent smokers.	Thematic data analysis. Comparing and contrasting different perspectives and descriptions. By reading and analysing interview transcripts and surveys. Using Atlas.ti to code and evaluate the raw data collected.	Using Zoom calls might limit body language and facial expression observations. Limited sample scope, not representative of every South African.	First qualitative research study/ A potential framework for future studies, to follow questions and methodology.

APPENDIX 6 – FINAL RESEARCH REPORT DOCUMENT SUMMARY TABLE