

The evolution of social sustainability in contemporary brand and brand building.

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the Bachelor of Arts Honours in 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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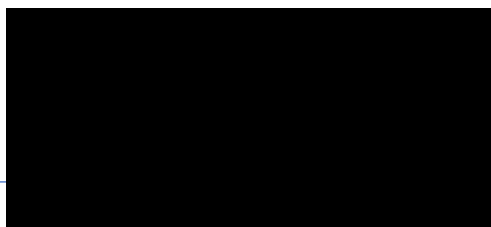
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Declaration.

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Signed: 25th November 2020

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Abstract.

The following research study adopts a qualitative approach in order to explore how social sustainability has evolved throughout the brand-building spectrum and to what extent social sustainability can be considered a relevant contribution to sustainable efforts within society or to what extent contemporary brand-building is utilising sustainability simply as a strategic advantage within brand-building.

The research study will analyse social sustainability within an undisclosed organisation within South Africa known for exemplifying sustainability within their business practice in order to address the outlined objectives of the research study.

The initial information of the research study has been gathered through qualitative means, utilising survey research which has led to specific sustainable themes being identified which has drawn on relevant conclusions.

The following research study has concluded the undisclosed organisation in which primary research has taken place, exemplifies social sustainability as a brand-building advantage and the sustainability orientated nature of the undisclosed organisation is where their unique identity is built from, adopting practices from the reform approach to sustainable development and crafting an innovative environment of sustainable progressivism, recommendations include a proposed business model which seeks to leverage sustainability as a brand-building advantage that extends not only to the benefit of contemporary organisations, but to the benefit of greater society. Brands are purpose-driven and that should translate to uplift the environment in which these brands operate in.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and overview of research.

1.1 Introduction.

The concept of sustainability is met with a variety of theoretical approaches, assumptions and debate which has dictated the evolution of the concept throughout society. The following research study will specifically explore social sustainability as a concept rarely explored within contemporary brand building and how social sustainability is informing these brand-building efforts as well as identifying and exploring the evolution of sustainability to what it is considered today.

1.2 Contextualisation.

Social sustainability is a concept poorly explored, according to Vallance, Perkins and Dixon (2011) the human dimension of sustainability is poorly considered due to sustainability research being centred on the physical environment rather than social environment, however, recent studies have indicated social sustainability has become a relevant strategy in developing positive intangible brand values that contribute to contemporary methods of successful brand building. Zein, Segura and Garcia (2019) explain intangible brand assets contribute to long term, sustainable and successful business models, intangible assets rely on social perception, these assets can simply be defined as brand reputation, which is fundamentally important within contemporary brand building as brand reputation is fragile with consumers ability to destroy a brand reputation in as little as a social media post. while social sustainability incorporates viable strategies to solidify brand reputation, many organisations do not realise the full potential of incorporating sustainable business models due to fear of organisational change and a particularly large scope of transformation needed to adopt sustainable business models. Grubor and Milovanov (2017) suggest this transformation requires stakeholder engagement across all business operation and centring the business model across consumer philosophy. The aim of this research study serves to illustrate the importance of incorporating social sustainability within business models as a means of informing positive and

relevant change through brand activism that develops a better world while sustaining a profitable business.

1.3 Rationale.

The following research study aims to provide a relevant contribution to brand building practices by providing the research necessary that supports the incorporation of sustainability within business models as an effective strategy in not only positively developing brand equity but as a means of providing a positive contribution to social, economic and physical environments. The focus on social sustainability as a previously unexplored concept within brand building will create the foundation that leads to further develop knowledge that informs unparalleled brand strategy and support theoretical evidence dictated by the 4th industrial revolution in order to contribute to relevant and unexplored brand strategy. The following research study will contribute within the sustainable community and those who advocate ecology as a means of political and social reformation, Grubor et al (2017) suggests sustainability cannot be adopted as a one for one approach, instead sustainability needs to incorporate collaboration from the greater community and the contribution to the industry in which sustainability brings a new competitive edge and deeper meaning to brand image. The relevance of exploring social sustainability as a brand strategy is apparent in the growing consumer expectations that are seeing these consumers advocate for organisations that pursue the green agenda, however, the green agenda can be considered unauthentically adopted, consumers are now encouraging brands to support social consciousness.

1.4 Research problem.

1.4.1 Problem statement.

Consumer knowledge has created perceptions that are challenging previous brand reputation and equity, while sustainability is essential it is no longer considered the differentiator. Organisations need to explore unparalleled methods of adopting sustainable business models in order to inform relevant change and create the differentiated competitive edge through unconventional sustainability.

Increasing the focus on sustainability (2018) suggests organisations are aware sustainability can be a means of grasping competitive advantage however, sustainability is not an overnight process and for many organisations, poses significant challenges such as entire organisational structure changes, this research study aims to provide theoretical evidence that will identify the common organisational changes that take place during the adoption of sustainable business models as well as explore a new theory that explores the rising potential of previously unexplored concepts such as social sustainability.

1.5 Research goal.

1.5.1 Purpose statement.

The purpose of the following research study aims to provide a thorough analysis of the current brand-building spectrum in order to access the extent to which organisations are utilising sustainability as a means of developing entire business models, analysing successful brand examples to provide the guideline that will inform assumptions.

1.6 Research question.

To what extent are contemporary brands developing sustainability as a unique identity instead of utilising sustainability and all of all approach to create relevant change?

1.7 Research objectives.

1.7.1 Explore best practice using the undisclosed organisation as examples to create the foundation organisations require to adopt unconventional sustainable approaches.

1.7.2 To critically evaluate the evolution of social sustainability within brand-building and reconnect authentic sustainable efforts within brand-building.

1.7.3 To evaluate sustainable strategy and propose a sustainable business model that engages in long term investment.

End of chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature review.

Theoretical foundation.

The theoretical foundation of the following research study will combine both theoretical foundation and literature that has been reviewed, as the theoretical foundation is directly supported by the literature in order to build argumentation, the primary theories identified are the theories of community practice as discussed in Lave and Wenger (1991) publication *Situated learning* which is supported by Hopwood, Mellor and O'Brien (2005) *Mapping sustainable development* Publication, Clune and Zehnder (2018) three pillars of sustainability framework. The second theory discussed is the theory of natural capital from Zheng et. al (2019) supported by the literature reviewed in Mihalache (2019) publication *Health state of human capital in the economic theory* Which discusses human capital within the natural capital framework and finally the model of circular economy reviewed in Lewandowski (2016) publication detailing circular economy. The use of footnotes under the theoretical foundation will identify the key literature explored and reviewed within the theoretical foundation.

2.1 Communities of practice theory.¹

The community of practice theory was first coined within Lave and Wenger (1991) publication *Situated learning* in which these authors describe the process of learning as a process of social construction in which the recipient learns via a social process that inevitably leads to the recipient becoming a practitioner of the learned knowledge. Concerning the concept of sustainability, Communities of practice theory can be acknowledged within the model of sustainable development approaches explored by Hopwood, Mellor and O'Brien (2005) in which these approaches to sustainable development are characterised by social movements. These social movements and reformations need to be closely explored as the issue within

¹ Lave and Wenger (1991) *Situated learning*.

contemporary brand-building suggest brands need to communicate themselves as the link between society and the external environment in which they operate in. Communities of practice theory will be examined as key literature due to the challenged assumption of social sustainability within organisations is built upon the adoption of societal values towards the external environment. (Weller, 2017:458).

2.1.2 Communities of practice theory as sustainable development approaches.²

The research study will explore Hopwood, Mellor and O'Brien (2005) as a seminal source that will create the framework in which contemporary social sustainability will be challenged and explored. Hopwood et al (2005) focus on O'Riordan (1989) mapping methodology which aligns with the community of practice theory due to the mapped approach exploring socio-economic effects on the environment. These approaches will become the primary framework that will evaluate where contemporary sustainability within brand building fits within O'Riordan (1989) framework. Shi, Han, Yang and Gao (2019:5) suggests global society is within the developing period which is characterised from 1987 to the present day. It is suggested that sustainable development has been adopted as a global strategy that allows contradictions between economic growth and environmental protection to be eliminated and instead strategizing economic development in alignment with resource preservation (Shi et al,2019:5). These assumptions allow sustainability within a contemporary context to be positioned within the reform approach of the sustainable development framework. Reformation essentially remains a socially orientated approach to sustainable development in which the greater public recognise the increased need for sustainable development as well as questioning economic policies that are currently in place. Hopwood et al (2005) suggest reformationists are willing to accept large shifts in lifestyle to accommodate sustainable development. This is evident within today's society in which there is a notable change in lifestyle, characterised by the choices consumers are making in terms of the brands they identify with.

² Hopwood, Mellor and O'Brien (2005) *Sustainable development: mapping different approaches*.

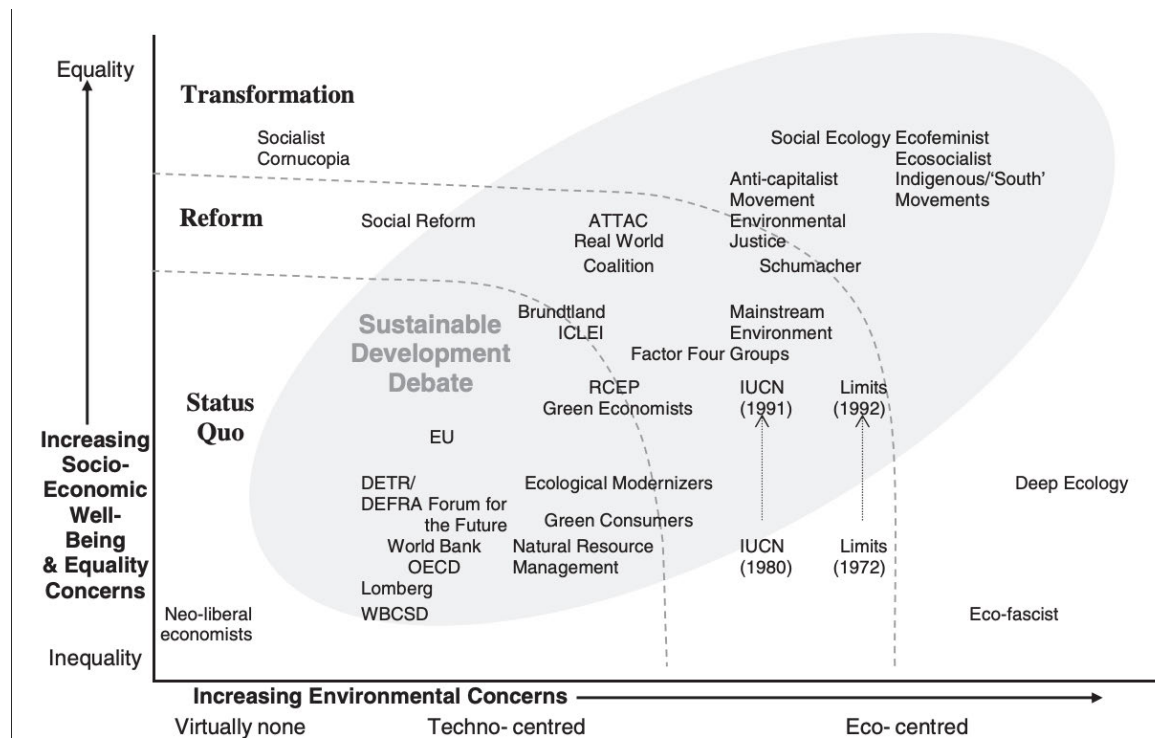


Figure 1: Mapped approaches of sustainable development – Retrieved from Hopwood, Mellor and O'Brien, 2005. *Sustainable development: mapping different approaches*, Wiley InterScience, Newcastle, UK

2.1.3 Three pillars of sustainability.³

While this model incorporates the framework of sustainability at every facet, the following research study will primarily focus on social equity within the pillars of sustainability framework, also known as the triple bottom line framework, Clune and Zehnder (2018) describe this framework as a strategic framework that identifies viable sustainable solutions that are driven by all three pillars consecutively. While this research study focuses primarily on social equity, the additional pillars must be taken into consideration as a cause-and-effect relationship that directly affects social equity. The research problem suggests brands are in need to adopt sustainability within their business models to remain relevant due to the socially conscious nature of contemporary consumers, the triple bottom line framework serves as strategic

³ Clune and Zehnder (2018) *The three pillars of sustainability framework: Approaches for law and governance*.
Cuthill (2010) *Strengthening the "social" in sustainable development*.

criteria that will allow the following research study to explore relevant strategic directions that are carefully considered, brands can utilise to successfully integrate their business models within sustainable development strategies. Exploring the pillar associated with social sustainability, Murphy (2014) describes the social pillar within the triple bottom line framework as poorly understood and vaguely defined, while remaining an essential facet in the framework. Cuthill (2010) explains while the concepts of sustainability have seen much attention both academically and politically, the social pillar has been viewed as an “inferior” compared to the economic and environmental pillars, making social sustainability the least developed pillar in terms of conceptually. This research study will aim to conceptualise the concept of social sustainability and investigate the relevance this concept plays within contemporary brand building, Cuthill (2010) utilises a more focused framework of the triple bottom line which suggests four key components that contribute to the development of social equity within sustainable development, these components are social capital, social infrastructure, engaged governance and social justice and equity. Primary research will analyse these components within a undisclosed organisation to determine to what extent the organisation, an example that exemplifies sustainable development within modern organisational operations engages in these four components. Murphy (2014) states social sustainability is not entirely associated with policy adherence but rather an exercise of power from influential groups such social movements, Vareed (2007) draws correlations between the social pillar and both the environmental and economic pillars, referring to the environmental and economic pillars as "environmental economy" while all decisions made within environmental economy fall to people. This directly suggests brands, as social institutions with ideals society align with, have become within the modern economy and society, key drivers of social reformation.

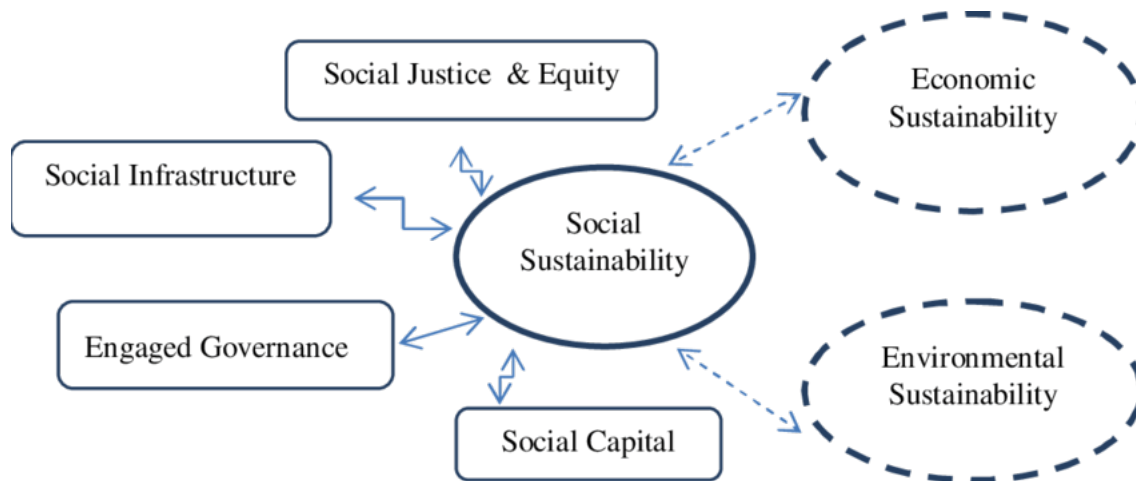


Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the three pillars of sustainability with particular emphasis on the four components of the social pillar – Retrieved from Cuthill, 2010. *Strengthening the ‘Social’ in Sustainable Development*, Wiley online library, Queensland, Australia.

2.2 Natural Capital. ⁴

The model of natural capital will provide a theoretical foundation for the exploratory nature of this research study. The purpose of utilising natural capital as a framework is supported by Zheng et al (2019) statement that Natural capital has predominately supported human development and well-being, however, this human development is also the very reason for the depletion of natural capital that has been provided by our ecosystem. The United Kingdom’s department of environment, food and rural affairs (2020) defines natural capital as the primary focus on the elements within the natural world that allow governance and greater society achieve specific outcomes. The relevance in this particular framework suggests the desirable strategy and approach to sustainable development are the models incorporated into nature itself. While natural capital is commonly associated with a holistic view that allows considered policy-decision making and governance that supports sustainable development (Natural capital coalition, 2018). Natural capital within the research study will explore the concept of human/social capital and the relevance and influence within sustainable evolution.

⁴ Zheng et al (2019) *Realising the values of natural capital for inclusive, sustainable development: Informing China’s new ecological development strategy*.

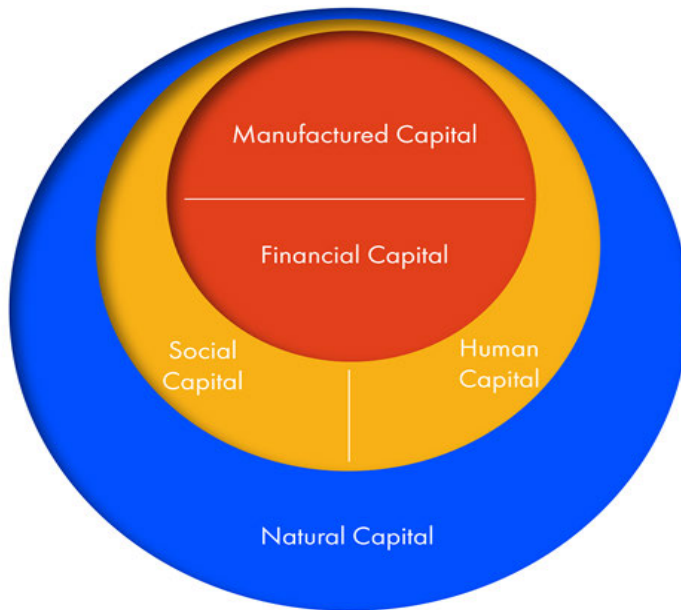


Figure 3: The model of Natural capital – Retrieved from Forum for the future.org, n.d. *The five capitals – a framework for sustainability* [image].

2.2.1 Human capital.⁵

Human capital is the fourth pillar of the natural capital framework and is regarded as essential in producing manufactured capital due to human knowledge, skills and motivation being the driving force behind productivity (Forum for the future.com, n.d). this statement is further supported through Mihalache (2019) works *Health state of human capital in the economic theory* which states, human capital can be directly translated as the labour force and the physical and emotional wellbeing of the labour force systematically affects the economic environment. The research problem indicates brands link the external environment within the greater society. The exploration of human capital within the research study will aim to identify human capital within sustainable development approaches as not simply the labour force for the organisation but how the consumer landscape and their perceptions and brand advocacy assist in the organisation's brand-building efforts, essentially including every stakeholder with the organisation as human capital and how this assists brands in building social sustainability. However, while it is apparent the extent to

⁵ Mihalache (2019) *Health state of human capital in the economic theory*.
Ciuhu (2016) *Human Capital and Sustainability: Current Challenges*.

which human capital supports economic growth, how exactly is human capital growing social sustainability? Ciuhu (2016) suggests the concepts of human capital and social sustainability are interlinked, this is evident through the indication that developing countries are plagued by economic and social unsustainability through factors concerned with human capital such as lack of education. Organisations need to recognise the cause-and-effect relationship between human capital and developing their sustainable development models.

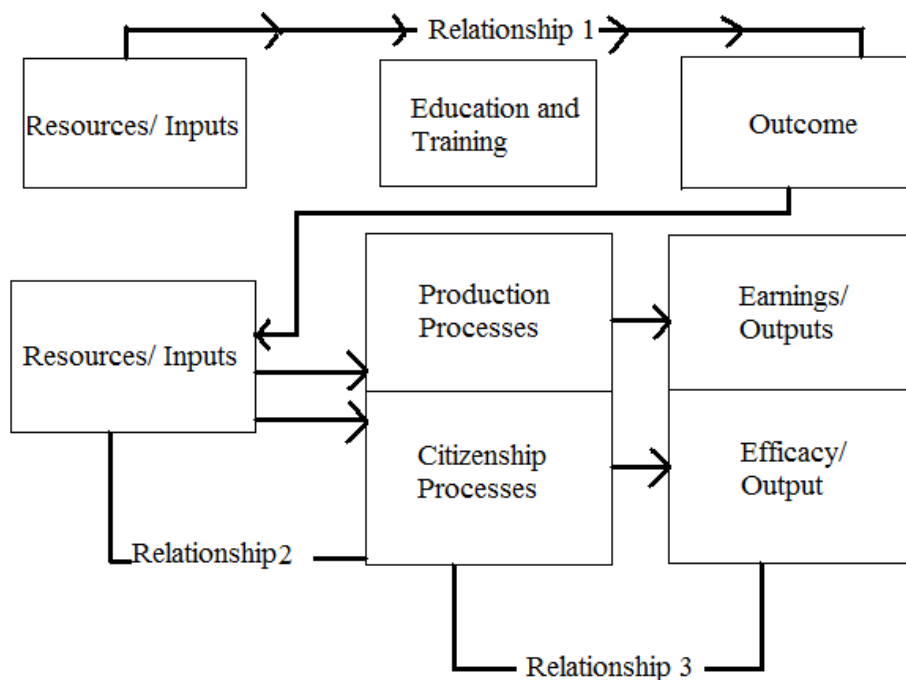


Figure 4: Human capital theory and the main relationships that drive social and economic output – Retrieved from Swanson and Holton, 2001. *Foundations of human resource development*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc, San Francisco, California.

2.2.2 Circular economy. ⁶

The circular economy is most notably explored as a natural model that the natural environment has used since the beginning of the earth's existence. It is the oldest yet most effective recognised model. The model incorporates a circular lifecycle in which natural phenomenon occurs as a result of reproduction, dies as a result of the lifecycle, degrades and provides for the next generation of the lifecycle. The most common example utilised is the death of an animal as it degrades and provides nutrients to the soil which seedlings absorb to grow, and the process is repeated. While the circular economy provides the most basic model of sustainability, the model has been adapted to build economic and social capital (Ellen Macarthur foundation.com, 2017). The primary question being how can we utilise the circular economy to build sustainable, long-lasting business models? Lewandowski (2016) describes the current model of sustainability is positioned as a linear approach which applies to the majority of existing business models which is described as take-make-dispose, circular economy within business models consider the in-between and eliminate the environmental and social issues between the production and distribution chain. While designing circular business models have served as a particular challenge for contemporary brand building, Osterwalder, Pigneur and Tucci (2005) have adapted the most commonly used circular business model which will analyse the extent brands adopt circular economy practices within their business models.

⁶ Lewandowski (2016) *Designing the Business Models for Circular Economy—Towards the Conceptual Framework*.

Partners - Cooperative networks - Types of collaboration	Activities - Optimising performance - Product Design - Lobbying - Remanufacturing, recycling - Technology exchange Key Resources - Better-performing materials - Regeneration and restoring of natural capital - Virtualization of materials - Retrieved Resources (products, components, materials)	Value Proposition - PSS - Circular Product - Virtual service - Incentives for customers in Take-Back System	Customer Relations - Produce on order - Customer vote (design) - Social-marketing strategies and relationships with community partners in Recycling 2.0 Channels - Virtualization Take-Back System - Take-back management - Channels - Customer relations	Customer Segments Customer types
Cost Structure - Evaluation criteria - Value of incentives for customers - Guidelines to account the costs of material flow			Revenue Streams - Input-based - Availability-based - Usage-based - Performance-based - Value of retrieved resources	
Adoption Factors - Organizational capabilities - PEST factors				

Figure 5: Framework depicting circular business model – Retrieved from Osterwalder, Pigneur and Tucci, 2005. *Clarifying Business Models: Origins, Present, and Future of the Concept*. Communications of the association for the information system, Lausanne, Switzerland.

2.3 Conceptualisation

2.3.1 Brand identity

Brand identity will become a common concept mentioned throughout the following research study due to the nature of sustainability as a brand-building concept, the current research problem suggests sustainability within the contemporary brand building is focused on creating a unique brand identity rather than developed as a ground-up business model that incites societal, economic and environmental change. Marito, Deden, Radi and Rahmat (2019) describes brand identity concerning Kapferer's framework of brand identity as how the brand is perceived by an audience, brand identity is built on a variety of factors, however, Marito et. Al (2019) focuses on building brand identity through differentiation and value. The relevance of brand identity within the following research study suggests brand

identity is a core element within brand building, the ideals of sustainability are ingrained within brand identity in contemporary brand building, organisations communicate sustainability within their organisational efforts as their value-added approach, while differentiation is a factor Accenture.com (2012) suggests while sustainability is becoming an essential method in doing business, it can no longer be considered the differentiator. To what extent is this identity surface level or truly engrained within the organisation?

2.3.2 Green myopia/Fatigue

Green myopia, also referred to as Green fatigue remains relevant within the following research study as it is one of the commonly identified barriers to authentic and meaningful sustainable development. Flanigan and Cleaver (2014) describe green fatigue as the excessive use of "green" labels and messaging within brand communication objectives without authentic sustainable development, while this can be considered greenwashing, many organisations are affected by green fatigue despite having engrained and authentic sustainable development. Flanigan et.al (2014) mentions sustainability within brand building does not always have positive connotations, consumers often view sustainable products as less performing while costing more. Brands can be affected by green fatigue in situations where their product category might not incite consumers to consider sustainability. Ottoman, Stafford and Hartman (2006) suggest that organisations can avoid green myopia by maintaining focus on two core principles, improve the environmental quality and satisfy consumers, green myopia is the result of the overemphasis or underestimation of these primary objectives commonly leads to green myopia. Hartman et.al (2006) also describes green myopia as the result of a disconnect between organisational goals and sustainable development goals, green products need to support and develop the natural economy and increase the productivity of natural resources rather than a sole focus on brand equity development.

2.4 The consumer revolution.

The various consumer revolutions throughout society will provide a relevant basis in formulating arguments and building assumptions within the following research study due to the research topic focus on sustainability as a social effort. Social sustainability dictates the ideals that contemporary sustainability has been built on values shared within societies concerns for the plight of the natural environment. The most notable social movements within the following research study are the Buen Vivir movement and green consumption.

2.4.1 Buen Vivir movement.

Buen Vivir refers to the social philosophy originating from the 1990s which loosely translates to “good living”, Buen Vivir dictates community-centric, ecologically-balanced and culturally sensitive methods (Balch, 2013) the social philosophy suggests human capital has never owned the earth and its resources and rather humans simply benefit and borrow these resources. In terms of the economy, Buen Vivir promotes the idea of collaborative consumption which essentially conserves resources. Chen (2020) uses the example of on-demand taxi services such as uber as an example of collaborative consumption as multiple consumers pay for the service and the service is shared amongst them, rather than traditional consumption when a single consumer purchases their private vehicle to use. Buen Vivir is reforming entire economies, Gudynas (2011) states in *the journal of the society for international development* that the ideals of Buen Vivir have been adopted within the new constitution of Ecuador as a response to Latin America's adoption of Neo-Liberal and progressive governance where Beun Vivir promoted unity and equality within the economic context. Buen Vivir directly supports the ideals of human capital within the theory of natural capital as the Buen Vivir philosophy supports principles of human wellbeing such as equality, solidarity and social justice as being essential to the performance of the economy.

2.4.2 Green consumption.

Green consumption can be described as the specific consumer revolution that has increased the need for brands to adopt sustainability within brand-building efforts which form relevance within the research study as the requirement for brands to adopt sustainability is increasing due to the shift in consumer behaviour as a result of consumer movements. Yue, Sheng, She and Xu (2020) describes Green consumption as consumer consumption behaviour that decreases the negative impact on the environment as a result of the purchasing and post-purchase results, common examples of green consumption include purchasing environmentally friendly products such as biodegradable packaging, consumers are aware of the environmental challenges and are willing to support environmental conservation. However, there is an expectation in which brands are held as accountable to support environmental conservation. Consumers want to make a relevant change in as little as their purchasing decisions, Townsend (2018) suggests brand have become social engagers for consumers and with this has seen increased brand confidence adopting ideals that potentially change the world. Green consumption is considered a pattern of consumer behaviour adopted by specific socially conscious consumers, Yue et.al (2020) suggests green consumption behaviour cannot be identified traditionally through consumer segmentation variables such as demographics as the behaviour lies within the theory of perceived green value, this suggests green consumption has seen a shift in the nature of consumer psychology as lifestyle factors influence purchasing behaviour. Green consumption has created a new consumer segment in which organisations know little about, consumer psychology has provided the basic indication of how sustainability has evolved into a concept that has become the forefront of business model construction.

2.5 Shortcomings of the literature.

Commonly within the case of researching specific social phenomena in which the following research study is positioned (the theories and concepts associated with social sustainability), social phenomena are constantly changing through a variety of contemporary social movements and new information availability, theoretical foundations within the literature reviewed to allow for deductive reasoning and assumptions that simply suggest the reasonings behind the phenomena existence, however, the dynamic nature of social phenomena may render the theoretical foundation discussed in the reviewed literature to become obsolete within the course of a few years.

The literature reviewed explores social sustainability from a variety of conceptual and theoretical approaches, Atieno (2009) mentions the shortcomings within the literature that explores qualitative research topics include the ambiguities associated with language and discourse of qualitative phenomena such as social sustainability, an example of conflicting findings within the literature reviewed is the suggestion that the Beun Viver movement, while considered a social philosophy is reforming neo-liberal economies and governments, the confliction between a social phenomenon and an economic framework creates shortcomings within the focus of the literature reviewed. Another limitation within the literature is the theoretical foundations of social sustainability explored is difficulty informing the literature utilising primary research as South African sustainable development within brand building is still considered premature in relation with the global environment, while South Africa is considered an emerging economy in sustainable development, Struwig and Van Rensburg (2016) suggest the premature nature of South African sustainable development is attributed to a poor economy which does little to aid sustainable development initiatives.

2.6 Contribution to the literature.

The following research study aims to contribute to the literature reviewed by suggesting how the social phenomena of social sustainability can be utilised to inform relevant and unconventional approaches to contemporary brand building and assist in allowing organisations to strategize new approaches, the particular gap identified in the literature suggests the lack of social sustainability not only as a concept within brand building but within the conceptual development of sustainable development, as the substantial focus has always remained with physical environmental sustainability, rather than exploring the approaches of social sustainability and how human capital has changed the sustainable development spectrum, in summary, the following research study aims to create the foundation in which social sustainability will become a more broadly explored concept.

2.7 Conclusion

The theoretical foundation discussed within the following research study Indicates sustainability is rooted within a social context as much as physical environmental preservation. The model of natural capital and the social philosophy of the Buen Vivir movement suggest social sustainability is extending beyond simply a sustainable development approach within brand building but social sustainability is reforming the entire political environment and constitutions. Key literature within the theoretical foundation suggest sustainability cannot be considered solely as an economic and political concept but contemporary sustainability has been developed through social reforms, Lave and Wenger (1991) theory of community practice has informed a theoretical suggestion that the contributed ideals of sustainability came from community collaboration, sharing opinions and common knowledge amongst a community creates a dominant discourse of knowledge that dictates the development of the concept of sustainability. While exploring social sustainability as a conceptual framework, literature has maintained a particular focus on social sustainability as brand-building efforts, in accordance to the research problem suggesting sustainability within brand building can be considered unauthentic due to the adoption of sustainability being used to develop unique brand identities, the

concept of brand identity has been explored to determine how brand identity can be positioned in a manner that encourages the social development of sustainability. The exploration of brand identity as communicating sustainability identified one of the most relevant barriers to sustainability as green myopia, the concept explored the negative connotations associated with sustainability within consumerism which is essentially the realm in which brands operate.

The following literature review has deviated the progression of the research study as a deeper synthesis of theoretical foundation and key concepts have led previously discussed concepts and theories to be proved redundant within the context of the research study. Theoretical conclusions have eliminated the concept of pragmatic sustainability as a secondary focus of the research study due to pragmatic sustainability focuses on environmental ethics within the political context. The literature in review has suggested circular economy as a relevant model to be adapted within brand building, as the theory has suggested sustainability is not only a conservation concept but a concept of longevity, sustainability within business models allows brands to create and sustain business objectives.

End of chapter.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology.

3.1 Paradigm.

The research paradigm in which the following research study is positioned is the paradigm of interpretivism. Du Plooy-Cilliers (2015:27) describes interpretivism as being an appropriate paradigm in which to position research, that aims to explore humanistic concepts and the study of societal associations. The following research study is positioned strongly in terms of exploring sustainability within the social context, by exploring how human behaviour has shaped the concepts associated with sustainability and how these social movements have influenced sustainability and how organisations adopt these concepts in a contemporary context.

The interpretive paradigm will allow for the exploration of social sustainability in contemporary brand building in the intellectual tradition of phenomenology in which social sustainability is understood from the concepts of sustainability arising from human action and behaviour throughout society which has influenced the evolution of these concepts and how they have been applied to modern-day brand building. Phenomenology will be applied particularly as a tradition to explore and determine how the Beun viver movement and how this social philosophy has influenced the evolution of sustainability as it is known in our contemporary context (Gudynas, 2011). More particularly, the following research study will be positioned within the ontological position of interpretivism, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009:127) describe ontology as the subjective assumptions made regarding the reality, this particular position is useful within exploring sustainability as a social concept as this topic is driven from my assumption and beliefs surrounding sustainability, thus the goal of the research study serves to challenge these assumptions and determine the extent to which these assumptions are supported by empirical evidence. Due to the evolutionary nature of sustainability, the research study can also be positioned within a historical context, Wesner (1994) explains the purpose of historical studies generally gather factual data and interpret these facts to build onto existing assumptions and verify these facts using a variety of additional sources, this

research study will explore this through the use of seminal sources that support the first uses of the term sustainability.

3.2 Research methodology.

The following research study adopts qualitative approaches due to the humanistic nature of social sustainability which will be explored through how humanistic perceptions of social sustainability have been adopted as a relevant brand strategy within the undisclosed organisations business model.

3.2.1 Qualitative research.

A qualitative approach has been identified as the most suitable approach to the following research study as the aim of the following study is to challenge assumptions and determine using a theoretical foundation, the extent social sustainability can be considered a relevant brand communication strategy and create the foundation for sustainable business models. These assumptions will be challenged utilising qualitative ability to interpret gathered data into meaningful insights and findings (Bezuidenhout and Cronje, 2014). Within the research paradigm, it has been identified sustainability will be explored through a variety of social movements that have influenced the ideals of social sustainability, as a result, the qualitative method of iterative analysis will be used to re-analysing the existing secondary research against data that will be gathered and explored to find contextual symmetry between what has been explored regarding social sustainability within secondary research, and what has been found within primary data.

3.2.2 Secondary data collection.

The following research study emphasises secondary research due to the historical and hermeneutic nature of the research study which explores how historical social events and industrial revolutions have influenced the contemporary definitions and understandings of social sustainability within a brand-building context. Utilising a

theoretical foundation developed through the research study's literature review which comprises a variety of academic journals and publications that explore the social movements such as the Beun Vivir movement that contribute to contemporary understandings, seminal sources such as the 1972 publication *Limits to growth* allow findings to correlate to the initial literature that saw social sustainability become polarised and how these fundamentals have either remained the same or changed completely.

3.2.3 Primary research collection.

The following research study will gather primary research utilising an undisclosed organisation as the brand of focus in which primary data will be gathered. Since the research topic focuses on sustainability within a brand-building context, primary data must be gathered from a South African organisation that exemplifies meaningful and purposeful sustainability. While more observational research is considered ideal, primary research will be gathered as questionnaires for staff at the undisclosed organisation, particularly within the marketing, human resource and environmental health department. While focus groups provide relevant conversational data, the use of focus groups during the following research study will be absent due to the complications caused by dominant voices obstructing conversational analysis and the logistical organising process is difficult within an online context.

3.3 Population.

A population within a research study is defined by Pascoe (2014) as a group of people or social artefacts in which data is required to inform the research study. Within the context of the following research study, the population parameters are defined as employees from an undisclosed organisation that exemplifies social sustainability, ranging from the ages 23-50. The determined population parameters of the following population determine the population share similar motivations and attitudes due to sharing the corporate culture of the organisation that embodies social sustainability, the undisclosed organisation employing within their vast departments, however, employees from selected departments will be chosen within

the sample, the research in doing so has gathered data from these participants that illustrate to what extent the organisation is engaging in social sustainability explored in secondary research and determined the theories and concepts explored within the reviewed literature are relevant within a physical example.

3.4 Sampling.

While the target population and parameters have been identified within the following research study, Pascoe (2014) suggests the process of sampling allows the accessible population to be identified, due to the limitations imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, the sample size will consist of 20 participants, distributed evenly amongst departments associated with environmental health and safety and marketing. While structured in-depth interviews were to be conducted within the research study, the Coronavirus pandemic has limited the organisation's ability to participate in these interviews, the undisclosed organisation refused to participate via phone call and the use of other methods of contact such as Skype or Zoom was rejected by the organisation. Sampling for the following research study will take place as probability sampling since every employee within the department categories have the opportunity to be included within the sample as these employees share similar perceptions of sustainability within their departments. Various sampling methods will take place such as systematic sampling due to the large scale of employees within each department category, and the decreased population-scale requires for systematic allocation of twenty questionnaires between three departments, stratified sampling will take place after the conducted research to segment respondents based on data that may suggest positive connotations and negative connotations which allows for concise data analysis.

The final sample has been identified as.

1. 20 participants across Marketing, environmental health and human resources departments to determine overall organisational perceptions and to identify common sustainability indicators.

3.5 Data collection method.

Due to imposed limitations from the undisclosed organisation, the methods of data collection have been reduced to survey research, findings from the survey research will be analysed against secondary literature available to the public from the undisclosed organisation to evaluate the extent the undisclosed organisation incorporates social sustainability as a brand-building opportunity.

3.5.1 Survey.

While surveys are predominately a quantitative data collection method, the limitations of the Coronavirus pandemic has seen the need to adapt survey research towards qualitative data collection in nature, within the following research study, this has been achieved through applying principles of empathy within the survey question formulation, while questions are designed to incite factual responses, the questions are designed to allow the participants to answer the question in a manner that facilitates storytelling. This was an important consideration within the following research study as exploring social sustainability from a brand-building perspective essentially needs to be leveraged from employee perceptions. The survey research will essentially identify examples within the undisclosed organisation that exemplifies the best practice of social sustainability to be discussed in relation to the objective of identifying factors that encourage organisations to adopt unique approaches of sustainability to complement brand-building initiatives, the survey will ask participants to disclose initiatives they believe exemplify social sustainability as best practice, to satisfy the objective of discovering thorough evaluation of the undisclosed organisation's initiatives, if the undisclosed organisation and their future initiatives can reconnect authentic sustainability, the overall analysis of the undisclosed organisation will conclude the following research study with a proposed business model utilising the data collected to determine the importance of sustainable strategy as a means of developing unique business models that sustain organisations well into the future.

3.5.2 Application of survey research.

The survey was designed utilising Google forms which consisted of 10 questions that encourage personal opinion and storytelling, subsequently, a link was generated for the online survey and through communication and discussion of the population and sample with a representative of the undisclosed organisation, the generated link was distributed via an organisational representative to 20 participants within the organisation across the departments of environmental health and safety, marketing and human resources. Due to the anonymous nature of the surveys and all participants first point of contact have been made with an organisational representative and not the researcher, there is no way the identities of participants can be known in any way other than that of the organisation itself, as a result, no forms of consent required signing for participation in the survey. All point of contact was made within the undisclosed organisation to minimise the researcher's knowledge of who exactly is participating in the research study which further reassures the undisclosed organisation the confidentiality measures that have been taken. Consistent communication between the organisation's representative allowed the organisational representative to track how many participants completed the survey and allowed a review and update to be communicated amongst higher management in the organisation and allowed the participation within the survey participants to be tracked, should participation be poor, the organisational representative would send out additional emails to incentivise participation.

3.6 Data analysis methods.

In order to align with the qualitative function of the survey research, the responses will be analysed to conclude the inductive and deductive reasoning and meanings behind the responses, responses will be further analysed alongside the literature discussed in the reviewed literature to develop a business model that exemplifies socially sustainable business practice as a means of a long term brand building strategy.

3.6.1 Content analysis.

The primary data analysis method employed for the following research study is content analysis, Du Plooy-Cilliers and Cronje (2014) describe content analysis as the representation of the gathered data in terms of how words and sentences are translated into symbolic phenomena, in order to address the purpose of the research study, content analysis will be structured to reveal exactly how social sustainability efforts are being applied to the undisclosed organisation to determine if these initiatives and even personal opinions of what social sustainability is can be translated to effective brand-building strategy, analysis against additional secondary research and the theories discussed in the reviewed literature will deductively conclude the underlying assumptions. While content analysis commonly requires no additional assumptions to be made, the qualitative function of the survey research allows this factor to be overlooked, methodologies have been adjusted due to the immense limitations imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, in-depth content analysis will allow examples of how the undisclosed organisation has exemplified social sustainability within their business practices, due to the unpredictable limitations, content analysis has been chosen as the primary method of content analysis due to the particular advantage that doesn't require data to be analysed in structured methods (Du Plooy-Cilliers and Cronje, 2014).

3.6.2 Application of content analysis.

The demographic information of the participants will remain the first data set to be analysed, the demographic data will simply be tabulated and illustrated utilising a visual chart to provide a visually aided illustration of the sample in terms of participants age and gender, after this process has been completed, the additional content analysis will follow the specified steps as directed by Du-Plooy-Cilliers and Cronje (2014) responses will be read through several times in order to uncover any trends amongst the responses that require secondary analysis against public data from the undisclosed organisation, these notes will be made available in the data findings process, once all relevant considerations have been made the notes will allow common themes amongst responses to be uncovered which will support the secondary research conducted in the reviewed literature to evaluate the extent in

which these themes correlate with secondary findings, additional themes may be uncovered which will require additional secondary research, at this stage the research may possibly deviate. After reoccurring themes have been identified, these themes will be categorised in order to provide operational definitions, essentially making sense of the participant's responses and essentially how these responses support the following research study. As a result, the definitions will be placed into predetermined categories determined by the nature of the secondary research, the process of coding takes place within this step, coding will take place as word cloud analysis, Better evaluation.org (2020) describes word cloud evaluation as a visual representation of the most occurring key phrases or words that appear within gathered data, it is a means of exploratory analysis that allows the most important themes to be identified within participants responses. After each theme has been categorised, the interpreted data will be analysed in terms of how relevant these categories are in addressing the research study's purpose and objectives and conclusions will be drawn from this analysis. In alignment with the qualitative nature of the research study, responses will be carefully analysed in terms of the connotative meanings of identified phrases, employees embody the principles of social sustainability within the undisclosed organisation, as result perspectives of sustainability need to be analysed from the employee perspective, Du-Plooy-Cilliers and Cronje (2014) describe connotative analysis as the feelings and attitudes respondents associate with specific words and phrases, creating a deeper more resonating meaning behind the surface level interpretations of social sustainability.

3.7 Thematic analysis.

While themes are addressed in content analyse, the data representation for identified themes will differ, Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as the foundation of qualitative data analysis and the process is described as the identifying of uncovered themes within the data set and analysing these determined themes against secondary research conducted, the application of thematic analysis within the following research study is to once again mitigate the unpredictable limitation of the Coronavirus pandemic as Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) explain thematic analysis provides a flexible approach that can change according to

the deviation of the research study. Thematic analysis will address the research study purpose and identify the themes that link socially sustainable business practice amongst contemporary brand-building strategy and inform the relevant data that either proves or disproves the assumptions made within the following research study. The exploration of good social sustainable business practice within the undisclosed organisation will identify themes that suggest the foundation in which sustainable business practice can be considered unconventional and unique which addresses the first objective of the following research study. The relevance of utilising thematic analysis within the following research study is to provide relevant findings within a less complex manner, Nowell et al (2017) explain thematic analysis is well suited to first-time research studies as thematic analysis offers a relatively simple and accessible method of data analysis, positioning thematic analysis favourably within early research careers. Thematic analysis will assist in uncovering the common factors associated with unconventional business models that exemplify contemporary brand-building strategy thus driving the conclusion of a suggested business model formulated from the interpreted findings which satisfy the research objective of uncovering if socially sustainable business practice can be implemented as a means of developing a unique identity or as a means of developing long term engagement.

3.7.1 Application of thematic analysis.

The application of thematic analysis will be visually interpreted utilising a free thematic analysis software which allows the data to be input and the software categorically analyses and places the data into predetermined graphs and themes within the software application, the themes determined within the content analysis will categorise the data gathered from the survey research. The process of thematic analysis will be conducted under the steps stated by Mortensen (2020) which requires the data firstly be familiarised from this codes can be determined to be used for data presentation, the developed codes which is described by Mortensen (2020) as a simple explanation of what is being stated and referred to within the responses, determining codes assists in the next step which identifies the specific themes both relevant and irrelevant to the research study which will then be narrowed down to the

most relevant data that informs the conclusion of the research study, themes require further definition in order to determine what story the theme tells and how this is relevant in meeting the objectives of the research study, the story from the determined themes are summarised as a coherent finding that addresses the research objectives, the final data will be presented as an employee scenario within the undisclosed organisation as an easy to understand means of understanding what the data is concluding (Marx and Plaat, 2019).

3.8 Trustworthiness.

Since the following research study is qualitative in nature trustworthiness criteria needs to be in place as qualitative research cannot be measured in terms of validity and reliability in the same manner as positive studies (Shenton, 2004). The process of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research studies is the evaluation of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Shenton, 2004).

3.8.1 Credibility.

Credibility is measured according to Koonin (2014) as the accuracy in which a researcher has interpreted the findings directly from the participants, however, Shenton (2004) also defines credibility as to how coherent the findings are among the reality and the researcher's ability to record and document the phenomena. In order to maintain credibility within the following research study, specific tactics that will encourage honesty from the participants will be employed ethically, this will be conducted through the ethical consideration which allows participants the right to refuse to participate in the research study, this will ensure participants who willingly engage in data collection, offer information that is honest and transparent.

3.8.2 Transferability.

Transferability is regarded as one of the simplest methods of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research, Koonin (2014) describes transferability as the extent the findings of a research study can be applied in similar circumstances and deliver mirroring results. This is important within the following research study as the primary aim of the study is to provide a strategic direction for organisations to follow beyond simply being used within a similar research study, the following research study will ensure transferability through detail that states the restrictions for the type of participants who provided the data and an explanation of these restrictions, the period in which the data was collected, the length of each data collection process and detailed background of the organisation in which the data was collected from, providing the relevant information will allow the reader to accurately judge how accurate the transfer of findings in a different context will be (Trochim, 2020).

3.8.3 Dependability.

Due to the ever-changing phenomena that is social sustainability, the following research study takes into account the introduction of new findings may render assumptions and generated information within the research study redundant. Dependability relies on the consistency between the research findings and primary data (statistic solutions.com, 2020). To ensure dependability within the following research study consistency throughout the research study will be maintained to ensure the research process does not deviate, an external audit will be performed before the final dissertation to assess to what extent trustworthiness within the research study has been met.

3.8.4 Conformability.

Shenton (2004) states in order to maintain conformability within qualitative research, the findings must be consistent with the ideas and experiences of the participants rather than the researcher's preferences, bias needs to be eliminated in every process of data collection, conformability within the following research study will be

achieved through transparent and honest confession of predispositions where bias will be stated early within the research report. Assumptions will be formulated before data collection in order to ensure findings are not influenced through predispositions.

End of chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings and interpretations.

4.1 Introduction.

The following research study has adapted questionnaires and survey research towards a qualitative approach to data analysis due to the limitations imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, the purpose of these questionnaires distributed to the sample discussed in chapter 3 was to identify common social sustainability indicators within the undisclosed organisation and determine these against the objectives of exploring the best practice of social sustainability within the undisclosed organisation, critically evaluate the evolution of social sustainability within the undisclosed organisation as best practice and determine whether authentic social sustainability has been reconnected and finally, propose a sustainable business model which will formulate a conclusion for the following research study.

Due to ethical reasons, the respondents will only be profiled according to age and gender factors, while questionnaires were distributed to environmental health, human resources and marketing departments, each response cannot be tracked to the correlating department of the undisclosed organisation.

4.2 Presentation and discussion of findings.

The use of tabularized responses will be utilised to display the findings within the questionnaire, utilising thematic analysis software found online to accurately discuss and categorise themes within the responses will also be utilised, tables and additional figures will provide a quantitative overview of the findings, however, these will also be used to assist in identifying themes, to provide a visual presentation of findings, word cloud figures will be utilised to provide an overview of uncovered themes.

4.3 Profile of respondents.

The participants of the questionnaire consisted of employees within the undisclosed organisation ranging from the ages of 23 – 60+, the majority of respondents were between the ages of 46 – 50 which consisted of 33.3% of 15 participants while a total of 40% of 15 respondents were between the ages of 36 – 40 (20%) and 51 – 55 (20%). Only 13.3% of 15 respondents were between the ages of 23 – 30, 6.7% of respondents were between the ages of 56 – 60+ and 6.7% between the ages of 31 – 35. The majority of respondents were male (80%) while 20% of respondents were female.

Please state your age.

15 responses

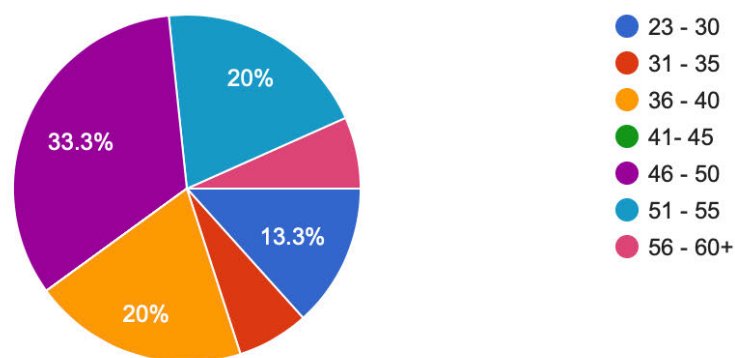


Figure 6: Pie chart of respondent's age (Researcher, 2020)

Please state your gender.

15 responses

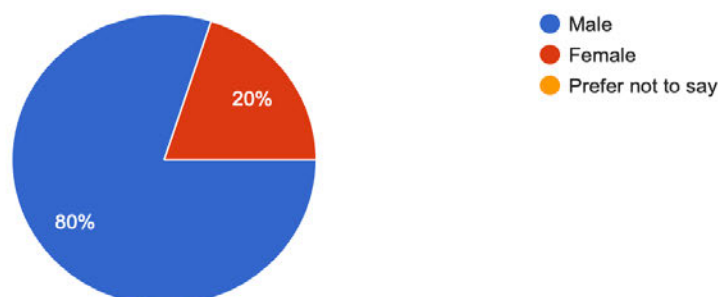


Figure 7: Pie chart of respondent's gender (Researcher, 2020)

4.4 Interpretation of findings.

4.4.1 Objective 1 – Explore best practice using the undisclosed organisation as examples to create the foundation organisations require to adopt unconventional sustainable approaches.

4.4.1.1 Discussion of findings.

The questionnaires aim to explore best practice within the organisation to determine whether the organisation has a relevant unconventional sustainable approach, in line with the reviewed literature, the findings will identify and categorise at which approach to sustainable development the undisclosed organisation currently falls under in accordance with Hopwood, Mellor and O' Brien (2005) approaches to sustainable development.

Question 4 - Can you please describe one of your favourite sustainable initiatives your organisation has done in the past or currently?

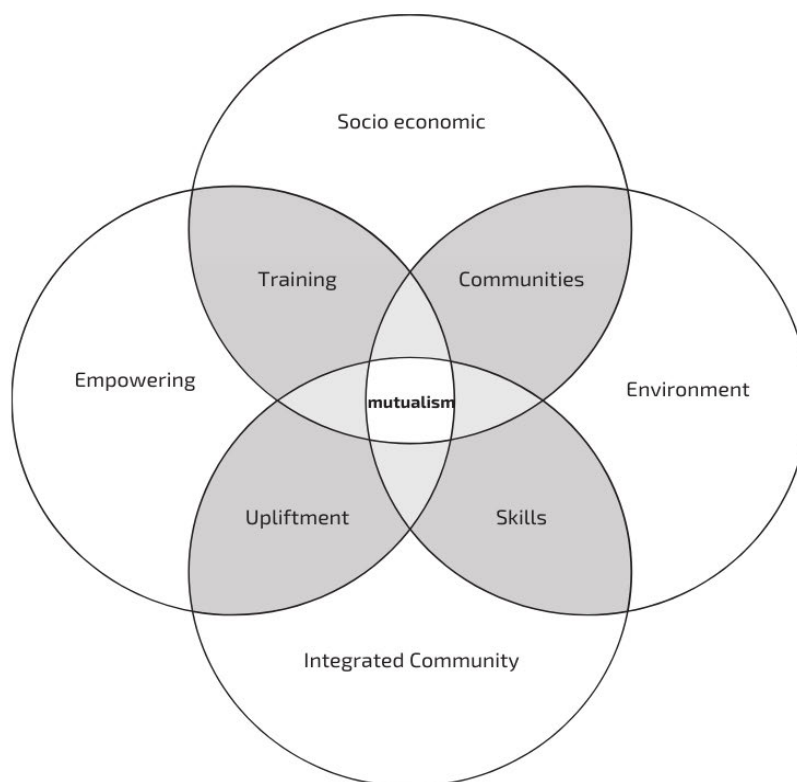


Figure 8: Word cloud analysis of question 4 (Researcher, 2020)

Themes identified within the responses indicate the undisclosed organisation positions their social sustainability efforts primarily within Mutualism and integrated community, these themes correlate directly with the position of the undisclosed organisation's sustainability indicators within the 2019 report which emphasises the fact there are various factors within our environment that don't require integration to thrive, however, this said integration can lead to the betterment of society and the physical environment.

As a result, the undisclosed organisation has responded to this approach through social sustainability, specifically, initiatives that serve to integrate the greater community within the efforts of the organisation and the surrounding environment, these initiatives included community training initiatives to uplift and further empower communities, the organisation has recognised the correlation between environmental preservation and society, as a result, the organisation's position within sustainable development approaches can be regarded as an organisation that incites social reform, according to Hopwood et al (2005) organisations and/or individuals who adopt reform approaches generally accept changes in lifestyle for ecological purposes, these skills development initiatives serve to encourage participation required to incite the social change that leads to environmental upliftment.

Concerning the research problem, the findings challenge whether the undisclosed organisation's sustainability approaches can be considered differentiators and to what extent these approaches can be considered unparalleled, the theme of mutualism extends further the surface-level approach to sustainability, indicating while additional factors may not be necessary, their integration can pave the way for a new way of sustainable development, as a result, the undisclosed organisation can be considered an organisation that remains a differentiator.

Question 3 - How important is sustainability to your organisation?

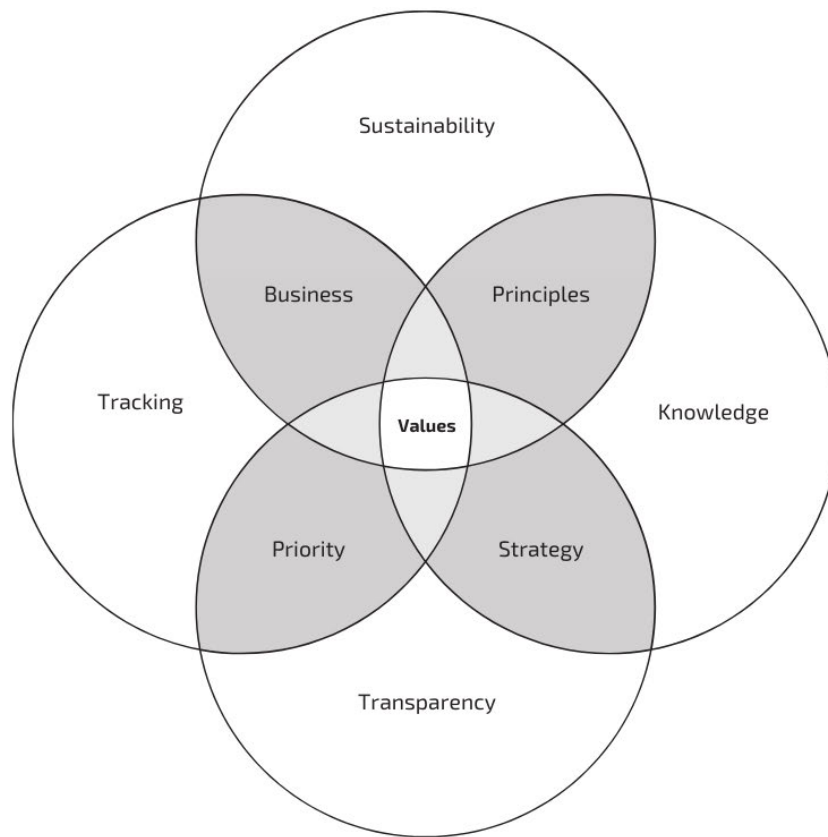


Figure 9: Word cloud analysis of question 3 (Researcher, 2020)

As organisations establish themselves as exemplifiers of best practice, there needs to be consideration of how important sustainability is to the organisation and to what extent sustainability encompasses strategy, the respondents within the proposed organisation all stated sustainability is critical to their organisation, however a particular response that stood out is how sustainability is required in their reporting requirements which indicates without sustainability, the organisation cannot function under their current business model, an important consideration of best practice is the human capital element of the organisation and how they align with the overall brand-building strategy and business model, the fundamentals of the undisclosed organisations operations are dictated by employees, as a result exemplifying sustainability amongst the employees can be considered a brand-building exercise, the undisclosed organisation has successfully recognised the link between human capital and sustainable development as discussed by Ciuahu (2016) in the reviewed

literature and essentially developed their foundation of sustainable development from a human capital perspective.

Question 7 - Are you aware of the concept of social sustainability?

Are you aware of the concept of social sustainability?

15 responses

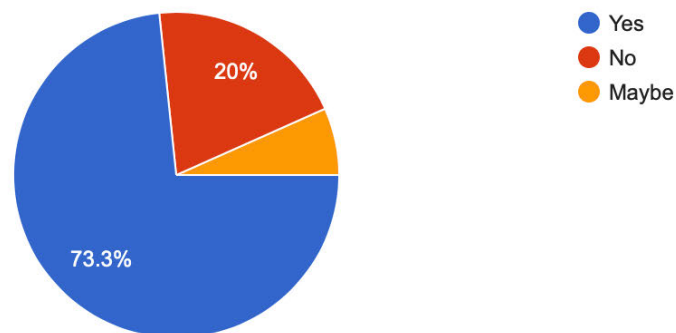


Figure 10: Pie chart representing awareness of social sustainability (Researcher, 2020).

The purpose of the following finding was to identify whether respondents were able to make a distinct differentiation between sustainability as an inclusive term, and the different elements within social sustainability, the finding from the following data provides an indication to which the research study remains focused on the concept of social sustainability.

4.4.2 Objective 2 – Critically evaluate the evolution of social sustainability within brand building and reconnect authentic sustainable efforts within brand-building.

4.4.2.1 Discussion of findings.

In direct correlation with the research objective, these questions will uncover the evolution of social sustainability within the undisclosed organisation to determine

how this concept evolves following Clune and Zehnder (2018) concept of the triple bottom line.

Question 8 - Please explain in your opinion what you believe social sustainability is?

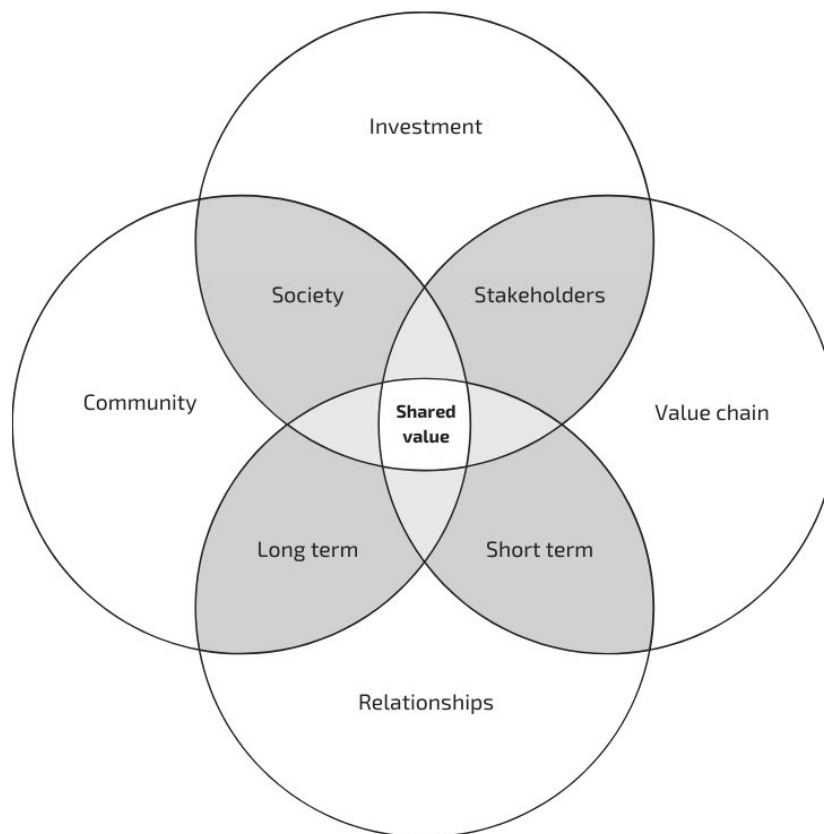


Figure 11: Word cloud analysis of question 8 (Researcher, 2020)

Asking the employees opinions will essentially uncover how social sustainability is perceived within the organisation and will correlate the approach of the organisation to sustainable approaches, one respondent associated social sustainability with shared value, these principles are outlined within the triple bottom line, which dictates the integration of people, planet and profit creates shared value, this indicates the organisation is aware of the function social sustainability plays in achieving shared value. Respondents were also aware social sustainability has both long-term and short-term effects and efforts can be tailored to producing these long- or short-term deliverables, outlined in Cuthill (2010) statements, social sustainability itself can be considered an overall evolution of sustainability due to social

development being a segment of sustainability poorly explored and the previously unexplored link between social, environmental and economic sustainability.

Question 9 - Do you feel social sustainability should be considered important within a business, why?

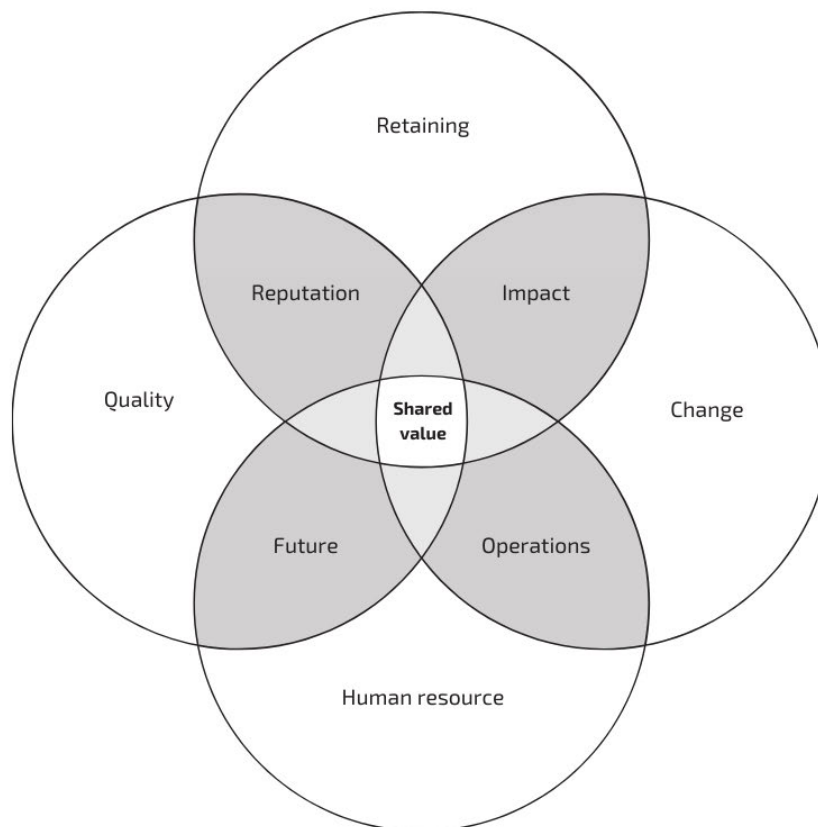


Figure 12: Word cloud analysis of question 9 (Researcher, 2020)

One factor of consideration regarding the evolution of social sustainability is to what extent the concept has been integrated into business operations. One respondent referred to the relation of human capital and the importance of social sustainability within a business, describing human resources as “one of the most important assets” in business. Correlating directly from Mihalache (2019) statements in regards to how human capital is providing the link between the organisation and the environment, essentially the research problem suggests brands link the external environment within the greater society, respondents have suggested they are aware of this link by mentioning how human resources/capital have become vital to overall operations of

the organisation, respondents have suggested “people make it happen” therefore social sustainability shouldn’t be a consideration but rather the forefront of business operations.

Question 6 - Do you feel sustainability is at the core of what you do here at your organisation?

The responses under this question were substantially positive, every respondent answered yes to sustainability is a core driver of organisational efforts, these responses serve to support question 8 by determining to what extent the undisclosed organisation encapsulates social sustainability within their business model, one respondent stating the undisclosed environment is committed to restoring the environment and in turn enhancing business efforts through sustainable orientation. The research problem suggests organisations need to adopt sustainable efforts as a means of developing a competitive edge, this response directly indicates the undisclosed organisation engages in sustainable development as a means of organisational differentiation.

4.4.3 Objective 3 – Evaluate sustainable strategy and propose a sustainable business model that engages in long term investment.

4.4.3.1 Discussion of findings.

The findings addressed within the third objective analyse the opinions of the respondents in terms of to what extent respondents believe social sustainability can be regarded as a suitable brand building strategy, these opinions will be evaluated against Lewandowski (2016) literature which details sustainable business model design to propose a suitable business model in the conclusion of the following research study.

Question 10 - Do you believe sustainability to be a positive brand-building advantage, why?

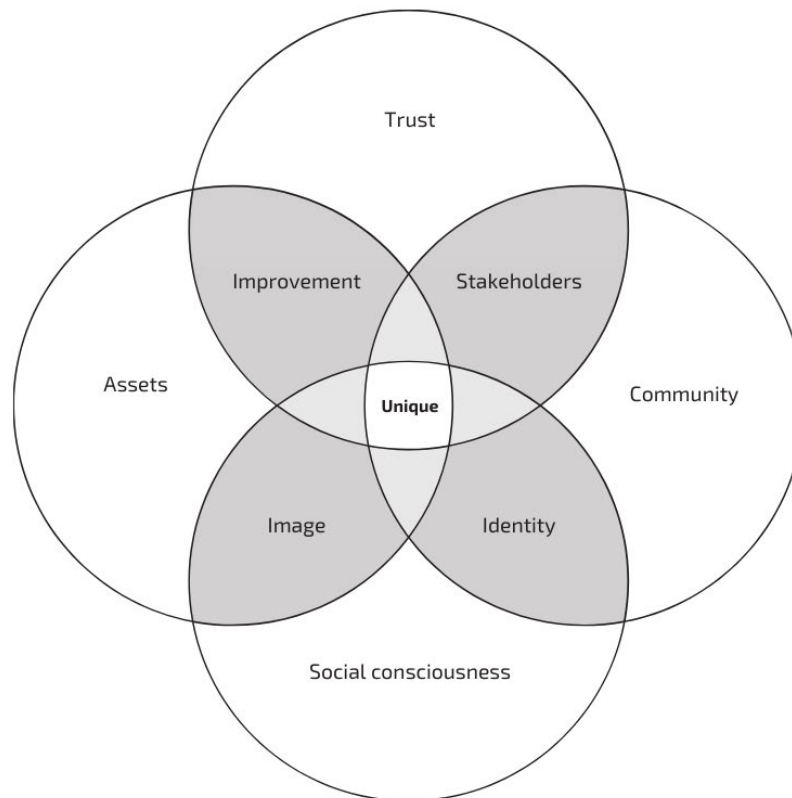


Figure 13: Word cloud analysis of question 10 (Researcher, 2020)

Respondents were asked to reveal their opinions of sustainability as a contemporary brand-building advantage, in alignment with the research problem, one respondent recognising and stating social sustainability directly creates a unique organisation in terms of brand identity and image, within the reviewed literature, the concept of brand identity was discussed, determining how organisations position themselves through differentiation, sustainability can be regarded as a form of a differentiator as mentioned by Accenture.com (2012). Osterwalder, Pigneur and Tucci (2005) adapted business model for circular economy aligns with the responses that suggest customer relation and value proposition segments of the business model which incorporate socially conscious efforts such as community upliftment are directly communicating to consumers the organisation's consideration for environmental pillars and thus developing positive brand equity, this sustainable business model does not only extend to consumers but to suppliers in return, one respondent mentioned sustainable consideration grows the organisation internally, suggesting

the sustainable consideration ensures the undisclosed organisation remains a supplier of choice. Concluding a sustainable strategy can be applied to organisational development both internally and externally.

End of chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations.

5.1 Objective 1 – Explore best practice using the undisclosed organisation as examples to create the foundation organisations require to adopt unconventional sustainable approaches.

5.1.1 Findings from primary research.

The analysed questions of 4, 3 and 7 contributed to the findings and outcomes that addressed this particular research objective.

Key findings indicated that the organisation in question, positioning their sustainable orientation within the theme of mutualism indicates the organisation is utilising social sustainability as a means of encouraging the well-being and development of society, adopting a reformation approach within the undisclosed organisation which details the organisations willingness to shift their business model to accommodate the dynamic nature of sustainable development. This willingness to adapt with an ever-changing environment is characteristic of good sustainable practice and should remain an example all brands should follow.

In regard to the problem statement, primary research has suggested sustainability is not an overnight process as was indicated in the problem statement. The undisclosed organisation has indicated the process of building their sustainable orientation did not come from a simple, adopted approach, but rather from an approach that has been built from the ground up, primary research has satisfied the research goal by indicating sustainability should always be ingrained from the roots of the organisation and encompass over-arching values.

5.1.2 Recommendations.

As discussed amongst the primary findings, the undisclosed organisation exemplifies constantly being at the fore-front of innovative sustainability, as a result it is

recommended to account for all additional factors within sustainable strategy which may not be considered necessary, however the integration of every facet allows room for growth as well as uncovering unparallel sustainable solutions, which have the ability to substantially contribute to brand-building efforts while providing substantial benefits to the greater society.

5.2 Objective 2 – Critically evaluate the evolution of social sustainability within brand building and reconnect authentic sustainable efforts within brand-building.

5.2.1 Findings from Literature.

The analysed questions of 8, 9 and 6 contributed to the findings and outcomes that addressed this particular research objective.

In terms of sustainability within brand-building, the reviewed literature focused on Clune and Zehnder (2018) framework of the triple bottom line, or the three pillars of sustainability and determine the extent the triple bottom line has been utilised within the undisclosed organisation, in order to evaluate the evolution of social sustainability, Cuthill (2010) analysis on social sustainability was investigated which revealed social sustainability is a poorly regarded factor within the triple bottom line and as a result has not seen as much evolution as the other pillars.

The undisclosed organisation revealed while there is an inferior approach taken in regards to social sustainability, the factor should remain a relevant focus as truly the triple bottom line cannot function unless each factor is successfully integrated and understood, as a result, social sustainability should be explored as in-depth as other factors of sustainability and integrated within a coherent strategy.

5.2.2 Findings from primary research.

When gathering primary findings, one particular respondent made reference to shared value when questioned in regard to an opinion to how social sustainability is perceived within the organisation. This indicated the undisclosed organisation follows the triple bottom line as a particular framework. In order to reconnect with

sustainable efforts, respondents differentiated between the long term and short-term goals of sustainability and each goal essentially compliments the next, when analysing the extent to which social sustainability and human capital are interlinked, many respondents expressed the importance of human capital as being essential within the business operations of the undisclosed organisation. While mentioning social sustainability plays a vital role in ensuring human capital is being utilised in the most effective manners possible. In terms of sustainability as a competitive edge, respondents indicated competitive advantage should rather be considered as a reward rather than a goal, positioning the primary goal of sustainable orientation towards alleviation rather than competitive edge as successful social sustainability will result in competitive edge, even if such was never the primary goal.

5.2.3 Recommendations.

Based on the findings within the literature and primary research, it can be recommended to organisations who seek to exemplify social sustainability to do so without the initial goal of competitive edge and to achieve a brand-building advantage, but to rather focus on exemplifying social sustainability for the goal of uplifting the social environment and brand-building advantages will come as a reward, rather than a goal. As a result, it is recommended organisations follow the healthy brand criteria with particular emphasis on the 7th goal which states profit shouldn't be the core driver and should come as a result of exemplifying good sustainable practice (Averntaplin, 2015).

5.3 Objective 3 – Evaluate sustainable strategy and propose a sustainable business model that engages in long term investment.

5.3.1 Findings from Literature.

The analysed question 10 contributed to the findings and outcomes addressed within this objective.

This objective was particularly addressed within the reviewed literature through the analysis of Osterwalder, Pigneur and Tucci (2005) adaption of circular economy within a practical business model to be utilised by organisations. It has been suggested the most relevant business models are crafted through the framework of circular economy as outlined by Lewandowski (2016). After determining the ideal business model to encourage sustainable development, primary research would be positioned to analyse to what extent the undisclosed organisation is shifting towards a business model that exemplifies circular economy.

5.3.2 Findings from primary research.

Respondents positively responded to the question, indicating they do believe social sustainability to be a brand-building advantage by stating social sustainability within the undisclosed organisation promotes positive brand identity which suggests sustainability is regarded as a differentiating factor that can essentially influence brand identity and image, whether social sustainability is used primarily as a differentiation strategy depends on the organisation implementing such development. Respondents made particular reference in terms of how social sustainability uplifts the undisclosed organisation internally as well as externally, this concludes social sustainability is essentially regarded as a brand-building strategy, however this should not be achieved as a primary goal and rather as a result of achieving more meaningful goals, this also suggests Osterwalder, Pigneur and Tucci (2005) adaption of a sustainable business model as the primary framework that encourages purpose-driven sustainable development (figure 5). As the framework focuses on value proposition developed through socially sustainable approaches.

5.3.3 Recommendations.

The final recommendation suggests organisations who seek to incorporate social sustainability should make use of the framework developed from Osterwalder, Pigneur and Tucci (2005) (figure 5) which adapts the original business model framework to incorporate elements that promote the development of social sustainability within business frameworks, a key learning taken from the primary

findings is the concept of mutualism embedded within social sustainability. In terms of nature, Mutualism is described by Dande (2018) as the symbiotic relationship amongst inhibitors of ecosystems that coexist together in order to create an ideal environment, much like how circular economy has taken inspiration from the circular process of nature, the idea of mutualism can be applied within sustainable development. As an organisation, it is essential business efforts are viewed as having a substantial impact on the surrounding environment, as a result, organisations should intrinsically work with the surrounding environment, including the social factor as a means of truly uplifting social sustainable efforts within brand-building.

5.4 Ethical considerations.

The research study required ethical clearance provided by the Independent Institute of Education upon meeting ethical criteria as outlined in the Postgraduate Handbook.

Ethical considerations are essential within the research process as they ensure the safety of participants within the data collection process, ensure research communities can utilise the research study as a valuable source and ensure a professional reputation is maintained (Louw, 2014).

As the research study collected data from an established organisation, it is essential to ensure data collection methods take into account the intellectual property of the organisation, the sustainable strategies the organisation makes use of encompass a strategic business model used to gain competitive advantage, as a result, the research study may be used by competitors in order to gain relevant competitive advantage by deciphering the unique business model. Most organisations offer a form that legally prohibits employees and researchers from divulging intellectual property such as business strategies and trade secrets, it is essential this form is signed and provided, the participating organisation was assured all data will be stored on a password-locked personal computer, within a password-locked folder, only the researcher and research supervisor have access to the raw data. Employee

information remains confidential at all times and the questionnaire requires a consent form to be signed that outlines the rights of the participants within the research study.

5.5 Limitations.

The limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have been substantial, the most notable limitation being the virus has severely impacted the opportunity to employ a variety of data collection methods that would have been more suitable for the qualitative nature of the research study, the coronavirus pandemic has severely impacted the ability to perform field research, as a result, data collection methods have been subsequently limited to 20 questionnaires used in survey research.

Limitations include employee unavailability at the time data collection took place, in order to mitigate this limitation, the organisation was contacted at the earliest opportunity to schedule a period in which data collection took, schedules were adhered to ensure substantial time was given for the researcher and the participants.

5.6 Contribution.

The following research study has provided the contextual and theoretical foundation as a guideline to be used within brand-building initiatives that promote social sustainability and generalised sustainability incorporated within organisational business models, the research study allows other researchers to challenge the assumptions and findings, in order to develop additional theoretical foundations excluded from the research study, primarily the research study has assisted in developing the strategic foundation for organisations to develop sustainable business models and encourage the integration of sustainability within organisational business models as a means of innovative brand building and forward-thinking innovative business operations.

5.7 Concluding remarks.

Respondents overall within every question exhibited a thorough understanding of the concept of social sustainability and surrounding theories and concepts, this directly indicates the undisclosed organisation exemplifies social sustainability as an organisational operating function and as a unique differentiator within brand-building efforts. About the first objective, the undisclosed organisation displayed elements of best practice particularly through adopting the reform approach to sustainable development in which the organisation emphasises while elements may not be necessary, additional consideration of these elements may result in a better society, as a concluding statement, the social reform approach to socio sustainable approaches can be considered the primary choice of practice organisations should adopt to develop a ground-up approach to sustainable development.

Within objective 2, the evolution of social sustainability was explored to determine efforts to reconnect authentic efforts, the undisclosed organisation and their employees displayed consideration of the evolutionary shift of social sustainability in which respondents mentioned the long term and short term goals of sustainable development, addressing objective 2, organisations should address lacking socially sustainable approaches to drive the further evolution of the concept, essentially considering the external environment the organisation operates within.

Within objective 3, participants were asked to what extent they consider sustainable development as a unique means of brand-building strategy, respondents revealed the unique components to sustainability as a brand-building strategy suggesting customer relation and value proposition segments be adjusted to suit socially sustainable approaches, addressing objective 3, organisations to include sustainability within their business model should consider adjusting the value proposition component to incorporate circular products or service and customer incentives that encourage perceptual change.

End of chapter.

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Appendix A – Ethical clearance letter.



03 September 2020

Student name: Cameron Dean Galway

Student number: 16093250

Campus: Vega Durban

Re: Approval of Bachelor of Arts Honours in Strategic Brand Communication Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS/PGDIP 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 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.*

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: Clive Greenstone
03 September 2020



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC): Carolanda du Toit
03 September 2020

Appendix B – Concept table.

The evolution of social sustainability in contemporary brand and brand-building.

Research Purpose/Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
order to access the extent to which organisations are utilising sustainability as a means of developing entire business models.	To what extent are contemporary brands developing sustainability as a unique identity instead of utilising sustainability and all of approach to create Change?	The following research study aims to provide a relevant contribution to brand building practices by providing the research necessary that supports the incorporation of sustainability within business models	O’Riordan (1989) Limits to growth Brundtland report Bill Hopwood, Mary Mellor and Geoff O’Brien	Theme 1 Communities of practice theory. Theme 2 Three pillars of sustainability. Theme 3 Natural capital.	The research paradigm in which the following research study is positioned is the paradigm of interpretivism. The interpretive paradigm will allow for the exploration of social sustainability in contemporary brand building in the intellectual tradition of phenomenology in which social sustainability is understood from the concepts of sustainability arising from human action and behaviour throughout society.	Qualitative. Population Employees from an undisclosed organisation that exemplifies social sustainability, ranging from the ages 23-50	Survey.	intellectual property of the organisation. all data will be stored on a password-locked personal computer.	social sustainability to be a brand-building advantage by stating social sustainability within the undisclosed organisation.	recommended to account for all additional factors within sustainable strategy which may not be considered necessary. focus on exemplifying social sustainability for the goal of uplifting the social environment and brand-building advantages will come as a reward, rather than a goal.
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/Hypotheses/Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories	Theme 4 Human capital	Theme 5 Circular economy	Sampling	Data Analysis Method(s)	Limitations	Key Contribution	
Consumer knowledge has created perceptions that are challenging previous brand reputation and equity	Explore best practice using the undisclosed organisation as examples to create the foundation organisations require to adopt unconventional sustainable approaches.	Brand identity Green myopia The consumer revolution. Buen Vivir movement. Green consumption.	Communities of practice theory. Natural capital. Circular economy			20 participants across Marketing, environmental health and human resources departments to determine overall organisational perceptions indicators.	Content analysis. Thematic analysis.	COVID-19 pandemic. Employee unavailability at the time data collection.	Contextual and theoretical foundation as a guideline to be used within brand-building initiatives that promote social sustainability.	

Appendix C – Consent form.



To whom it may concern,

My name is Cameron Dean Galway and I am a student at Vega School of brand leadership. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr Clive Greenstone about the integration of social sustainability within contemporary brand building to explore the extent social sustainability is used as a means of developing a unique identity, I hope that this research will create the strategic foundation and allow organisations to effectively strategize sustainable development initiatives.

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 I consider your organisation currently leading sustainable innovation and solutions within South Africa. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to email you my questionnaire on Google forms. If you could please fill that questionnaire out and then email it back to me. 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 questions on the questionnaire.

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. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the questions, 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 Vega School of brand leadership, will have access to your questionnaire. 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 questionnaires, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Bachelor of Arts 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:
Cameron Galway.

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:
DR Clive Greenstone.

[REDACTED]

By completing the questionnaire, I agree to participate in the research conducted by Cameron Dean Galway about the evolution of social sustainability in contemporary brand and brand building.

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

- My anonymity 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 in the questionnaire
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Appendix D – Questionnaire.

Sustainability at your organisation

Please help me in understanding how important sustainability is to your company and to you as an employee.

Please state your age. *

- ☐ 23 - 30
- ☐ 31 - 35
- ☐ 36 - 40
- ☐ 41 - 45
- ☐ 46 - 50
- ☐ 51 - 55
- ☐ 56 - 60+
- ☐ Other...

Please state your gender. *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say

How important is sustainability to your organisation? *

Long-answer text

Can you please describe one of your favourite sustainable initiatives your organisation has done in the past or currently?

Long-answer text

How important is sustainability to you as an employee? *

Long-answer text

Do you feel sustainability is at the core of what you do here at your organisation? *

Long-answer text

Are you aware of the concept of social sustainability? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

Please explain in your opinion what you believe social sustainability is?

Long-answer text

...

Do you feel social sustainability should be considered important within business, why?

Long-answer text

...

Do you believe sustainability to be a positive brand-building advantage, why ? *

Long-answer text

Appendix E – Gatekeepers letter.



Gatekeepers letter/Request to conduct research

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to ask permission to conduct research at your organisation.

My name is Cameron Galway a bachelor of arts honours in strategic brand communication student at Vega, a brand of the Independent Institute of Education (IIE). The research I wish to conduct for my honours thesis titled the evolution of social sustainability in contemporary brand and brand-building.

This study aims to investigate to what extent brands are adopting social sustainable initiatives as a unique identity or as a means of contributing to relevant societal change. The nature of your firm's participation is to provide survey research, intellectual property of your firm has been taken into account, I, Cameron Galway agree to sign any confidentiality agreements should your firm feel fit.

Yours sincerely

Student: Cameron Galway.

Supervisor: Clive Greenstone.

Appendix F – Gatekeepers approval.



Gatekeepers Approval

Consent form to conduct research at my company	
I, [REDACTED]	
Representative of [REDACTED]	
My capacity: <i>Learning Manager Cameron Galway</i>	
Give my permission that may conduct research at my company. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time. I also understand that research reports are available in the library and IIE repository unless I indicate below that I would not	
Select below:	
☒ I request that my company's identity be kept confidential.	
☒ My company can be identified in the study	
☒ The study may never be available on the repository.	
☒ The study may be made available on the repository. <i>to be discussed once study is complete</i>	
☒ The study may be made available on the repository after months.	
Signature [REDACTED]	Date <i>17/11/18</i> <i>2018</i>