



Title

An investigation of the influence of brand image on fan loyalty of Mamelodi
Sundowns fans.

Student Name: Tshegofatso Papo

Student Number: [REDACTED]

Supervisor: Dr Tish Taylor

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ABSTRACT

Loyalty of sports fans has been researched quite extensively in a European context, but rather less in South Africa. Brand image is held to be an important antecedent of fan loyalty. This study therefore investigates the influence of brand image on fan loyalty, using a sample of 100 fans of Mamelodi Sundowns FC . In addition to the verification of this link, causal modelling reveals a relationship between the major drivers of a club's brand loyalty, namely brand image, attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty.

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1.Introduction

Fans are steadfast in their support for the teams they choose to support. These views are mostly the result of the fans' enthusiasm and fervent partisanship. They are based on observed fan behavior, particularly the continued devotion of fans who support underperforming sports teams (Stewart, 2003). People in marketing circles have always pondered why fans stick with a team even when they aren't performing well (Stewart, 2003).

Customer retention has been a major concern for many sports teams as a result of the commercialization of football. In marketing practice, a growing interest in customer relationships has emerged, making customer retention a top focus for many sports teams (Bauer, 2008). As a result, because fans play such an important role in a football team's profitability and identity, companies must now understand fan loyalty habits (Smith, 2017).

A fan who supports a sports team faces two marketing issues: brand image and brand loyalty. The collective connections that customers have about a brand are referred to as brand image (Bauer, 2008). Team symbols reflect brand values such as honesty, elegance, ability, excitement, and toughness, as reflected in Joachimsthaler's (2009) brand leadership theory.

Brand loyalty necessitates a strong commitment to purchasing the same goods again and over again (Oliver, 1999). According to East (2008), loyalty can be both attitudinal and behavioral: attitude corresponds to rational action (e.g., a brand endorsement), whereas behavior replicates the act itself, which is not always rational (i.e. purchasing the same item). Sport loyalty entails more than that: it also entails an emotional connection (Mahony, 2000).

Recent changes in the sports industry, including the increasing commercialization and professionalization of team-sport clubs and leagues, have increased the value of having a consistent fan base (Bauer, 2008). The PSL has a problem with match attendance (Mathidza, 2014). In brand management, how a brand is viewed has a significant impact on its financial performance (Joachimsthaler, 2000). As a result, any examination into sports loyalty should begin with a look at brand image. Mamelodi Sundowns is the PSL's third-largest and most successful team according to (Wikipedia, 2022). Based on this the problem isn't one of awareness. (Mathidza 2014;Surujlal 2012) have looked into the motivations for attending matches in the past.

Given the foregoing, they may have concentrated on the symptoms and not the root of the problem. Through this document, the reader should be able to understand how the constructs are related which will be explained in great detail in the literature review.

1.2 Background of study

This section covers the major variables of this study.

1.2.1 Mamelodi Sundowns Fc.

Mamelodi Sundowns FC is one of two Tshwane teams currently playing in South Africa's highest level of domestic football—the DSTV Premiership. The club was established in 1970 and has since went on to become the most successful team in the premier soccer league. The team has won 24 titles since it was formed and it currently plays in the Africa champions league which is the most decorated tournament in African football. Perhaps the fact that the club is in its 50th year of existence makes them the perfect team for studying in the league. That's because they've been around long enough to build a strong fan base and yet attendance to matches is still a concern.

1.2.2 Clubs as brands

In contemporary times the professional sports industry has changed dramatically. In 2003, there was no professional team worth one billion USD; yet five years later, 24 of them existed around the world (Riper, 2009). In recent decades, shifts in thinking have resulted in brands being studied in a much wider range of organizational types and sectors; as the importance of branding has increasingly been recognized (Bridgewater, 2010).

One of the recent and fastest developments in this regard is the branding of sports teams (Funk, 2001). Teams are businesses as indicated by the aforementioned scholars; and the most significant asset of a sports team as a business is its brand (Richelieu, 2005). It is important because the purpose, direction and meaning of a team stems from their brand identity (Joachimsthaler, 2009). Joachimsthaler (2009), further argues that brand personality is the basis on which this identity is built and is made up of values and attributes. Increased consumer use, together with encouraging emotions that tend to increase loyalty and confidence, are the result of this brand personality.

Due to the increasing commercial importance of sport, it is up to clubs to concentrate on generating revenue if they have any hopes of meeting their business objectives

(Bridgewater, 2010). Viewing clubs as brands may be one of the best ways to achieve this, in order to acquire a loyal fan base.

Many people dislike the effect of business on football; and therefore, the thought of discussing brands or something relevant to business in the same way as football is likely to outrage the fans (Bridgewater, 2010). Modern football, after all, is in many ways unrecognizable from the game it was 100 years ago—even if it is governed by many of the same rules. A brand does not just focus on business activities. From a marketing point of view, branding is about assessing what is important, and aligning organizational values with the people the brand engages with.

So, instead of looking simplistically at branding in sports from a revenue generating point of view, considering clubs as brands is at least trying to understand what they stand for, what is important to them, and how best they can interact and act. This is so that the services offered to the fans are transparent and consistent (Bridgewater, 2010). The implication by considering clubs as brands is that there are elements drawing the fan toward the brand. Thus, in this paper's more grandiose scheme that revolves around fan loyalty, branding provides the foundation from which one can begin to dissect how and why fans should adopt a team.

Having understood how clubs have become businesses, and the importance of this when it comes to loyalty, it makes sense to see how this brand concept applies to Mamelodi Sundowns FC. By applying it to the paper's case study, the characteristics of a team brand with which sport consumers relate should be better understood and explained.

1.2.3 Mamelodi Sundowns FC as a brand

A club or team as a brand has an identity and image that the consumer relates to. Brand identity has more significance when it comes to sport-team brands because of the high degree to which individuals identify with their favorite teams (Rundle-thiele, 2005). First, the brand identity definition includes everything that makes a brand distinctive and meaningful. It looks the unique set of associations that not only imply a core and extended identity, but also implies a quality guarantee for the customers (Joachimsthaler, 2009).

A professional team's brand identity represents what the entire team has to give to both incumbent and future fans (Urde, 2001). According to Joachimsthaler (2009), The

core identity of a brand is defined by elements such as the logo, the historical heritage and the city / country of origin. On the other hand, an element, such as the players' performance on the field, is part of a brand's extended identity.

If applied to Mamelodi Sundowns FC, this would suggest that a core identity like the team being based in Tshwane (among other things) has the ability to attract sports consumers to the team. The extended identity would likewise imply that on field success would draw customers to matches. Thus, in an ideal scenario, some sort of team success accompanied by team location may be enough to form a bond with the Mamelodi Sundowns football team for the respective fans.

Second, the brand image allows the consumer to associate symbolic meanings with particular product aspects. According to some studies Cretu (2007), the corporate brand image can, positively influence fan judgements. Many researchers and sport marketers believe that sporting organizations shield themselves from the potentially detrimental financial effects of losses with the aid of strong brands (Funk, 2001). It is thought that superior brands differentiate one club's product from another. Some empirical evidence suggests that the image of a brand has a strong impact on the attitude of fans towards a club (Funk, 2001). While other research has also argued that economic performance and the power of a brand are linked positively (Hans H. Bauer, 2008).

Recognition, confidence, and other associations may all be affected by the image that a firm exhibit. This simplifies customer transactions (Bridgewater, 2010). "The company" therefore becomes the primary brand, as opposed to the product itself (Joachimsthaler, 2009). Nha Nguyen (2001) asserts that a strong reputation can help create and retain a loyal customer base and can affect repeat purchases. Consequently, if applied to Mamelodi Sundowns FC, this would indicate that loyalty to the club may be created due to the good reputation that the club might have. In contrast, if the image is not so good, this may be a factor that contributes to the lack of fans attending matches.

1.3.Rationale

Customer base nowadays is one of the most important sources of revenue in all company systems, and it is very important to concentrate on branding strategies to maximize their satisfaction. Satisfied customers continue to patronize the same brand

to reduce the possibility of unhappiness and powerful brands provide a strategic advantage in all industries, including sports.

In the sporting industry loyalty can also be built along with successful events (e.g. successful winning of successive championships), but not limited to that alone. Partners or friends may influence individuals to cultivate a positive attitude towards a team despite bad results. In this case, brand love is a sort of passion which doesn't rely on any objective reward.

Sport marketers seek to gain public attention, expand team fan bases and boost the reputation of brands (Smith, 2017). According to (Richelieu, 2005) club success is highly important for fans' satisfaction; thus, if the club fails to win major tournaments, an effective positioning strategy will minimize financial uncertainty.

Marketers interested in building brand value in sports must consider the relationship between team image and fan loyalty. Fun, emotional attachment to the brand of clubs can help sports managers improve confidence, loyalty and profitability (Holt, 1995). This work will explore the impact of brand image on customer loyalty of Mamelodi Sundowns FC. In order to understand if the way fans evaluate a sports brand can influence their loyalty, and how that can be achieved.

It is a sports marketer's duty to develop good, positive and unique consumer beliefs around the club, in essence their duty is to build a strong brand image. Because of its highly competitive nature, branding can play a significant role by shaping fan tastes and attitudes about a club and separating it from rival clubs and other leisure activities (Bauer et al, 2008). Therefore, it is essential to understand how strong brands are established in sports.

The relationship between supporter's and their favorite clubs has been the subject of considerable research (Stuart, 2017; Tapp, 2004). The general recognition based on a large number of studies is that fans exhibit the kind of long-term loyalty that has now disappeared in most industries (Smith, 2017). Supporter loyalty cannot be regarded as a forgone conclusion and blindly relied upon. However, the concept of fan loyalty has been under-examined in a South African football context in terms of empirical studies on the matter. Rui Biscaia (2013) recommends studies that theoretically and empirically examine the relationship between strong brands and team loyalty

To the researcher's knowledge studies that were conducted in South Africa are primarily focused on the factors that influence match attendance: since the match attendance numbers have been worrisome (Surujlal, 2012). The reason for this is logical; as world-class stadiums were built for the World Cup and after that they were empty for most of the DSTV Premiership games. Focusing on this one aspect has left gaps in the available literature. The impact of brand image on customer loyalty is a study that hasn't been researched widely in the context of South African football; limited empirical research has been done on these concepts. By exploring the effects of brand image on fan loyalty, this study aims to build on the sports marketing literature that already exists. This study also aims to contribute to sports marketing literature broadly by incorporating findings from a South African perspective.

1.5 Problem statement

Recent developments in the sport industry, such as the growing commercialization and professionalization of team-sport clubs and leagues, have resulted in the growing importance of a stable fan base (Bauer *et al*, 2008). Teams in the PSL have a match attendance problem (Mathidza, 2014). In brand management the way a brand is perceived plays a huge role in how it performs economically (Joachimsthaler, 2000). Therefore, brand image should be the starting point of any investigation that involves loyalty in sports. Mamelodi Sundowns is the third largest and the most successful team in the PSL, so their problem is not awareness related. Past researchers have been investigating the motivation behind match attendance Mathidza (2014) and (Surujlal, 2012). Given the above, they might have focused on the symptoms of the issue and not the root.

1.6 Purpose/ aim

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the influence of brand image on consumer loyalty among Mamelodi Sundowns supporters. In order to comprehend how fans build a relationship with a sports brand and how this affects their loyalty.

1.7 Research Question

What is the influence of brand image on consumer loyalty?

1.8 Hypothesis

According to Keller (2012), investing in a brand improves customer loyalty, and in sports, the image of a good team improves loyalty among the fan base (Holt, 1995). Bauer *et al*, (2008) argues that, in football, brand image contributes to loyalty in two areas: attitudinal loyalty (psychological commitment) and loyalty in behavior. Therefore the following is expected:

H1:- Brand image influences Mamelodi Sundowns FC fan's attitude to the team.

Behavioral loyalty can be defined as the predisposition of consumers to support a brand over time (Thiele, 2005). Behavioral loyalty in sports fans can be assessed in terms of future and past behaviour (Bauer *et al*, 2008). Team image and positive attitude in professional football are significant antecedents of fan loyalty (Bauer *et al*, 2008). Brand image can also improve how fans feel about a club and also boost a football club's revenue accordingly (Ferrand, 2006). Therefore we expect that:

H2:- Brand image influences behavioral loyalty of Mamelodi Sundowns FC fans.

A fan's commitment to a club increases the club's brand loyalty (Mahony, 2000). In service industries, such as tourism and entertainment, involvement may be more essential to loyalty than the level of service itself (Lee, 2007)

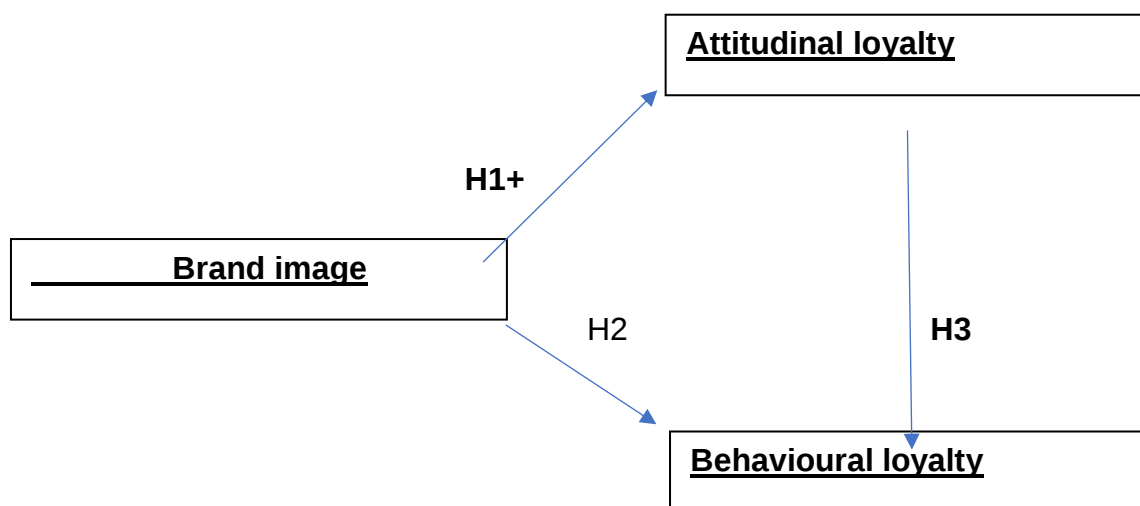


Figure 1: Theoretical model Adapted from (Bauer, 2008)

Behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty may vary from high to low in the sporting world. Greater levels of commitment and knowledge build more loyalty (Bauer, 2008). These statements lead us to assume that:

H3:- Attitudinal loyalty influences behavioural loyalty of Mamelodi Sundowns FC fans.

Bauer et al. (2008) developed the theoretical model used in this study to assess potential relationships between brand image and soccer fans' loyalty to their favorite teams. Brand image can be defined as the cumulative associations that consumers form in their minds about a product (Bauer et al., 2008).

2. Theoretical framework

This section explores the theoretical foundation, describes key variables for the study and offers a reviewed overview of previous literature to promote a broader understanding of the topic. This literature review aims to bring the research into perspective, identify relevant hypotheses and models and identify what is known and unknown about brand image and fan loyalty.

2.1 Theoretical foundation

The theoretical foundation for the research covers brand theory, brand image, and loyalty as relevant frameworks for exploring the influence of brand image on fan loyalty. This foundation serves as the conceptual framework and frames the research (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Due to the study's positivist nature, the chosen frameworks will allow the research problem to be explored in a robust, detailed, and in-depth manner that contributes to a greater understanding of the research topic (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

2.2 Brand Theory

Brands have developed through time from a means of indicating ownership to a means of forging emotional bonds between consumers and businesses (Keller, 2012). Brands, according to Joachimsthaler (2009:34), are "names, phrases, signs, symbols, patterns, or combinations thereof that aim to identify items or services of a seller or group of sellers and distinguish them from those of competitors." In regard to the brand's product performance, brand differentiators might be functional, logical, or quantifiable. However, brands can also be symbolic, emotive, or intangible, referring to what a brand stands for in a more abstract sense (Keller, 2012). Brands are powerful concepts that convey a specific and particular meaning to consumers and serve as

the credibility preceding market entities promoting the development of logical and emotional desirability (Joachimsthaler, 2009).

The importance of brand theory to this study is that it incorporates all that the brand concept entails (Keller, 2012). It's crucial as the study's goal is to use Mamelodi Sundowns FC—a brand—to gain a better understanding of brand image and the resulting effect on brand loyalty. Furthermore, brand theory is significant because it pertains to the exploration of solutions that contribute to the research problem. Mamelodi Sundowns Fc can, in theory, use its brand to strengthen ties and recruit new followers.

2.3 Brand image

In the 1990s, the identity-based approach to brand management emerged, merging two key brand theory principles: brand identity and brand image (Keller, 2012). According to Joachimsthaler (2009), brand identity is an internal construct that emerges unilaterally from a company and reflects what the corporation wants the brand to be experienced. The self-image of a brand is represented by the brand identity concept, which depicts how the brand perceives itself, what it stands for, and the values it wishes to transmit to its customers.

Brand image, on the other hand, is a multidimensional notion that expresses individual and subjective brand connotations in the minds of consumers (Bauer *et al*, 2008). As a result, it perfectly encapsulates how people view brands. As a result, unlike brand identity, brand image is employed for this research because it aids in gathering insights about customer perception and the study of consumer loyalty.

2.4 Consumer loyalty

Consumer brand loyalty research has grown in unison with basic social psychological research throughout the years. In the beginning, studies focused more on customer behaviors, such as behavioral loyalty. This research looked at the likelihood, consistency, and extent to which a consumer would choose one brand over another (Kahn, 1986). Since then, however, some studies have proven that attitudinal elements of devotion to a good or service exist (Bauer, 2008).

This approach makes up for the shortcomings associated with merely measuring behavior-based loyalty. Consumers, for example, may buy a product repeatedly, because of factors such as price and convenience rather than loyalty. Thus two dominant dimensions can be used to describe and measure consumer loyalty: attitude

and behaviour. The psychological commitment to a team is referred to as the attitudinal dimension (Bauer et al., 2008). "Fans demonstrate a high level of psychological commitment if they have a strong inner attachment to their preferred team and if their devotion is long-term, [resisting] criticism" (Bauer et al., 2008 p. 207). The behavioral aspect of loyalty deals with prior actions and intentions (Homburg & Giering, 1999; Bauer et al., 2008, p. 207). Previous purchase habits and good remarks about the team are examples of prior conduct (Bauer et al., 2008). Both levels of brand loyalty work together to generate a loyal repeat buyer. The brand equity of a team is directly influenced by the brand loyalty of its fans.

2.5 Literature review

This section includes an initial understanding of the principal variables of this study. Broadly speaking these are; (i) Brand image and (ii) Fan loyalty, according to Funk (2001) loyalty can be broken into two constructs namely behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty.

Brand image

According to Bauer et al, (2008), Brand image is defined as the collection of associations that consumers have in their minds about a product or what the brand means to the end user Keller (2012). Customers attribute certain characteristics to brands as a result of these associations with the brand, and these characteristics influence purchase decisions and actions (Keller, 2012). According to Joachimsthaler (2009), brand image is how consumers recognise brand identity, so organisations must invest in the development of strong identities which leads to positive brand images in order to create strong brands (Joachimsthaler, 2009).

According to Wallpach (2009), organisations must learn how to strengthen brand equity because attitude and behavior represent how end-users perceive the brand. Powerful brands increase a company's competitive advantage and lead to repeat purchasing or patronizing behavior (Joachimsthaler, 2009).

Brand equity includes two constructs: brand awareness and brand image. When it comes to professional teams in popular sports, such as football, it makes more sense to focus on image rather than awareness because brand recognition is often high (Bauer et al, 2008). To put it another way, it may be argued that brand recognition and recall are already high among those who support the club. Furthermore, because media attention is strongly influenced by the team's successful performance, the

capacity to assess brand awareness is effectively limited (Bauer *et al.*, 2008). Sports teams are significantly more tightly related to their brand identities than most brands are because they are dynamic brands with intangible and volatile core products (Holbrook, 2001).

Brand image in the context of sports

Summers (2005:15) describes the sports industry as "interesting." People who watch or listen to sports are known, as sports consumers.' This is a result of their consumption. "Sport can be absorbed directly—by watching a live game or participating in a sport—or indirectly—by watching a game on TV, listening to it on the radio, or reading updates in a newspaper or magazine" (Summers, 2005:15). Sports clubs strive to employ skilled management techniques in order to increase fan loyalty and brand success (Bauer, 2008).

The clubs brand image can be attributed as a product of managements attempt to create a shared understanding of the nature of teams within a social or cultural community (Bauer *et al.*, 2008). When a team succeeds in high-level competitions, its image tends to be more favorable than when they lose. Abosag (2012), asserts that supporters embrace their club as a brand, they even support the idea of brand extensions, because there is a strong connection between this recognition of branding behavior and the emotional participation of supporters within the club. Bauer *et al.*, (2008), Confirmed that the club's image enhances the likelihood of a fan buying intention of their sports goods, which means that marketing strategies can be used to inspire the fan base to endorse the success of the team in the following ways: buying and/or using the original items and images of the club; patronizing club services (e.g. fitness, beauty parlors, diet); cheering the team during the game etc.

Sports management issues must extend beyond the squad: it is critical to consider the club's brand in addition to squad results (Bauer *et al.*, 2008). Clubs must also investigate their fans' emotional attachments in order to increase trust and loyalty (Holt, 1995). Sports clubs must strengthen their brand because strong brands increase fans' attachment to the club (Arigil, 2012). A club's value is also increased by a strong brand equity.

Behavioural loyalty

Customer loyalty to a brand was defined by Oliver (1999:34), as a 'deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the

future despite situational influences and marketing efforts. There has been a struggle to separate repeated purchases by consumers from the concept of brand loyalty (Bandyopadhyay, 2007). A difference conceptualised by Oliver (1999) was that brand loyalty was a process of many psychological layers, whereas behavioral loyalty happens when a person buys and uses the same brand (Keller, 2012). A measure of behavioral loyalty is the use and purchase of the brand repeatedly when compared with the purchase and use of competing brands by the consumer (Keller, 2012).

Oliver (1999), proposed a four phase loyalty model: action, cognitive, conative and affective loyalty. Cognitive loyalty focuses on consumer judgements about the information a brand sends out, pricing, features and so forth, affective focuses on the likeability of the brand and conative on the consumer's desire to rebuy the brand (Oliver, 1999:36). Action loyalty is similar to behavioural loyalty, it is the 'commitment to the action of repurchasing' the brand that occurs as a result of the previous three phases.

When applied to a sporting context, past behavior includes live match attendance, club-related media consumption, merchandise purchase, etc. (Funk, 2001; Mahony, 2000). Furthermore, the fan's positive and persistent future behavior is the intentional component of behavioural loyalty. Behavioral intentions correspond to the consumer's past behaviour, when it comes to watching matches, merchandise purchases, etc. They are, for example, intending to purchase club merchandise, intending to watch a club game on TV, and planning to visit the stadium for a live match etc. So fans' allegiance to a club can be expressed in various ways. Having defined ways of demonstrating loyalty, the loyalty or lack of loyalty of football fans can subsequently be measured using indicators related to these behavioral dimensions.

Behavioral loyalty is crucial to firms due to its impact on long-term sales and market share. Loyalty can bring benefits such as lower marketing costs, repeat purchases and increased profitability (Holbrook, 2001). It should also be remembered, however, that a customer may be loyal to a brand simply because of ingrained behaviour, or because there is no alternative brand offering (Oliver, 1999). Even satisfaction is not enough to maintain behavioural loyalty (Oliver, 1999).

Attitudinal loyalty

Keller (2012) coined the term 'attitudinal attachment' for the second factor of his brand resonance theory. He defined this as the consumer viewing the brand as something

'special'. Attitudes are developed by both cognitive tests and affective emotions, while attachments involve the value of an object to the user (Lavine, 1998; Park, 2010). Attachment is an emotionally charged, specific bond between a person and a object (Ainsworth, 1992). Attachments are strong relationships that are typically formed with parents during childhood and that can grow with other targets later in life (Thomson, 2006; Ainsworth, 1992). An individual engaged in such a relationship would normally perceive the partner as irreplaceable and special (Thomson, 2006). This is how fans view their sports teams

Attachment is an independent term but is related to trust, satisfaction, and commitment (Thomson, 2006). Keller (2012) suggests that brand love is like an intense form of attachment. Park (2010), stated that love is an emotion that characterizes the bond of attachment, not the bond itself. Ahuvia (2006), defines the concept of brand love as 'the degree of a satisfied consumer's passionate emotional attachment to a specific trade love' and involves affection, attachment, and declarations of love for the brand, and positive assessments and emotions in response to the brand. This definition has been used widely by researchers (Thomson, 2006; Funk, 2001). Consumer love is different from interpersonal love (Ahuvia, 2006). Ainsworth (1992) found that in comparison to interpersonal relationships customers process interactions with their brands in a separate region of the brain.

When applied to the sports sector, a fan's psychological commitment to a team is the attitude aspect of loyalty (Beatty, 1988). In general, the emotional or psychological attachment to a brand is defined as commitment. The commitment of fans was historically measured in three ways: persistence, resistance, and attachment (Mahony, 2000; Funk, 2001). Therefore, if a fan is deeply attached to a team, and this commitment is consistent and not affected by any criticism, a high level of psychological commitment is considered. This commitment is fueled by a fans love for the team (Keller, 2012). A fans love is evident because even when the team loses the fan still supports the team.

The attachment will not weaken if a team loses its ability to gratify and enrich fans. In sports the team you support is more than a team Stewart (2003), it is part of your identity. People who are deeply attached to a brand are most likely to devote themselves to it, invest in it and make sacrifices for it (Thomson, 2006). This attachment translates into loyalty to a brand, a willingness to make a financial loss,

and other sacrifices, such as paying a higher price, running the risk of losing reputation for supporting the brand, or going to great lengths to maintain the relationship with the brand (Park, 2010).

Consumer loyalty in sports marketing

Sports marketing can be defined as an exchange mechanism involving a series of activities designed specifically to please sports consumers (Summers, 2005). According to Surujlal (2012) Compared to service encounters in other sectors, the satisfaction of customers with sporting activities is primarily measured by the nature of their experiences,' and these experiences are influenced by other customers, the physical environment, and the mood or feelings of consumers. In addition to some recent changes, loyalty in sports still needs to be defined in South African soccer. South African soccer fans don't attend matches which means they don't contribute much to the balance sheet of their respective teams (Surujlal, 2012).

Sports loyalty may be defined as allegiance or commitment to a team based on the spectator's connection to that team over time (Harada, 2004). "Sport supporters have an emotional dedication to sporting event customers" (Mahony, 2000:15), this happens because the brand turns individual supporters into a community of supporters. Sports fans are unique consumers because they have a self-sustaining interest in a brand. Therefore loyalty in sports differs from loyalty in other sectors because sports fans don't rely on tangible rewards (Pimentel, 2004). "They actively engage in beneficial activities for the relationship they have with the brand, such as promoting positive word-of-mouth, preserving the brand and ensuring the continued life and legacy of the brand" (Chung, 2008:43). But to explore the brand loyalty of sports fans, rational factors alone are not adequate to explain their attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty. The phenomenon needs to be examined from a "emotional attachment" perspective of fans. Factors that influence fan loyalty have a cognitive dimension, such as habit and long history, social and emotional identification, brand symbolism and self-image (Funk, 2001).

When it comes to fans of the Mamelodi Sundowns FC, the club's brand image can affect brand loyalty. For example, if the image of the club is good in the fans' minds, then the fans will stay loyal irrespective of how well they do during any given season. So if the image isn't so strong, and the fans don't really relate to or feel part of the team at a deeper level, then the loyalty rates may fall during bad times. As stated earlier,

the aim is to build a positive team image for Mamelodi Sundowns FC and to encourage loyalty from the fans.

Conclusion

It was established in this chapter that fans are attracted to a sports team, like Mamelodi Sundowns FC, because of its strong brand image. A positive brand image is the reason why people watch games on Tv and attend matches; it is the reason why fans buy merchandise and why they remain loyal to the team they support. Among other things, this applies to why individuals watch and attend games; why they buy merchandise; and why they stay loyal to the team they support

Attitudinal loyalty, on the other hand, is a significant antecedent of behavioral loyalty thus, sports marketers should explore team image to draw prospects and then turn them into match attendants to boost financial support for the club. A good image alone is not enough in South African soccer e.g., Mamelodi Sundowns FC is the most successful team in the PSL and yet they are the third largest team in terms of supporters, and they have match attendance problems like all PSL teams.

Finally, there was an emphasis on the notion of fan loyalty as being something dynamic rather than static. It has been suggested that the brand of the club plays an important part in ensuring this loyalty.

2.6 Operationalization

An operationalization can be seen as a link connecting the conceptual framework with data gathering. Due to their involvement, the participants in this scenario will know less than the researchers. To make these concepts easier to understand, it may be essential to reduce them to item-levels. Most of these "questions" have been rephrased to make them easier to grasp and more approachable rather than difficult. The operationalization's goal is to create easily understood statements so that participants may complete the survey more quickly and easily. In Table 1, the operationalization is shown.

Theory	Concept	Subconcept	Item	Reference	Statements
Brand image	Brand associations	Product related attributes	Team	(Bauer et. al, 2008)	Mamelodi sundowns has a great team
			Coach		Mamelodi Sundowns is well managed
			Results		Im happy with Mamelodi Sundowns results
			Star Players		Mamelodi Sundowns plays with stars
			Success		Mamelodi Sundowns is succesful
		Non product related attributes	History		The history of my team is important to me
			Fans		I value other Mamelodi sundowns fans
			Stadium		Mamelodi Sundowns has good training facilities
			Logo		I like the teams logo
			Colours		I like my teams colours
		Benefits	Identification		Being identified as a Sundowns fan makes me happy
			Nostalgia		Thinking of my team brings good memories
			Emotions		I am emotionally involved with my team
			Escape		Watching the team play is a escape from reality
			Entertainment		The team plays entertaining football
			Socialization		Talking about Mamelodi sundowns helps me socialize
			Companionship		Mamelodi Sundowns has created a positive environment for meeting people

Loyalty	Consumer loyalty	Attitudinal commitment	Supporter	(Bauer et. al, 2008)	I am a real fan of my favorite club.
			Commitment		I am very committed to Mamelodi Sundowns
			Cognitive dissonance		I will never change teams based on results
			Defend		I would defend my favorite team in public even if this caused problems
			Affiliation		I will not change my affiliation from my favorite club to another club just because my friends try to convince me to.
			Pro football		It is really important to me that my favorite club continues playing in the major league.
			Success		The long-term success of my favorite team is important to me.
			Satisfaction		There is nothing that could change my commitment to my favorite club
		Behavioural loyalty	Attendance		I have often attended games of my favorite team live in the stadium. / I will often attend games of my favorite team live in the stadium
			Tv		I have watched games of my favorite team on TV. / I will watch games of my favorite team on TV.
			Media consumption		I have often followed reports about my favorite team's players, coaches, managers etc. in the media. / I will often follow reports about my
			Merchandise		I have purchased a lot of club-related merchandise. / I will purchase a lot of club- related merchandise.
			Representation		I often wore the colors and/or the logo of my favorite team. / I will often wear the colors and/or the logo of my favorite team.
			Engage		I have often participated in discussions about my favorite team. / I will often participate in discussions about my favorite team

Table 1 Operationalization

3.Methodology

The research methods and design that was used in this study are discussed in this chapter. The research design is categorized in the first section using the proper descriptors, and the sampling strategy employed in this study is covered in section two. This includes concentrating on the study's target population, sampling technique, and sample size. The third section, which focuses on data collection, includes a brief description of the pre-testing procedure, the survey method that will be used, and the questionnaire design. The approach to data analysis is briefly described in section four, and the final section of this chapter draws a conclusion.

3.1 Paradigm

The study will use a positivism approach, which can be defined broadly as the “approach of natural sciences” (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The positivist theory is composed of two main concepts. Firstly, it is important to isolate, examine and understand the causes of human behaviour. In essence, it is assumed that if what triggered behaviour is known, then human actions can be clarified and to some degree predicted (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The second principle is objectivity. According to positivism the only way to determine objective fact and truth is through a scientific method (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Positivist methodology is heavily dependent on experimentation. Hypotheses about the causal relationship between phenomena is presented in the form of propositions or questions. The mass of empirical evidence is then analyzed and formulated in the form of a theory that explains the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. A deductive approach to data analysis is used; first, a hypothesis is proposed, and then it is statistically analysed which will result in either rejecting the null hypothesis or failure to reject the null hypothesis. This study will focus on determining any relationships between constructs with the aim of uncovering how these relationships exist. This paradigm is applicable because the research is focused on objectively investigating human behavior theory and will use quantitative data to do the investigation. This paradigm will be viewed from a metatheoretical position of positivism, which aims to develop generalisations to the broader population. According to my knowledge, previous researchers (Bauer *et al*, 2008; Surujlal, 2012) also used this approach.

3.2 Research Design

This study could be classified as an explanatory one because it aims to explain how brand image influences loyalty. Explanatory studies test specific hypotheses and look at relationships. The deductive methodology used in this work involves testing the compatibility of theory and investigation. The scholar has developed hypotheses based on the literature to be investigated because the theory serves as the foundation for the study. This method is suitable when a theory needs further context, if there is more to learn about a different circumstance, situation, or historical period.

The study used a quantitative research method to test the presented hypotheses after using the deductive methodology. Data collection, testing, and discussion are all steps in the quantitative research process. It has been emphasized as a very unique research strategy, a constructive approach with a tendency toward natural science and where social reality is regarded as objectivist. Because the author wishes to see how brand image impacts customer loyalty, this study adopts a quantitative methodology and will test 5 different hypotheses.

Survey research was the method of inquiry used in this study. This was thought to be suitable given that the study by Bauer et al. (2008), which was repeated in this study, used survey research as its principal method of inquiry. Previous studies that investigated brand image and its relationship to consumer loyalty also used survey research

Answers to questions like "who," "what," "where," "how much," and "how many" can be found in surveys (in numeric terms). Such inquiries are frequently made in descriptive and exploratory research (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:138). When compared to other methods of data gathering, survey research gives the researcher more control over the study process at a cheaper cost (Saunders et al., 2007:138). However, one should be aware that a representative sample is required to guarantee the validity of the study's findings and to ensure that the method of gathering survey data is not overly time-consuming and there is a cap on the number of questions that can be asked (Saunders et al., 2007:130). A survey gives a researcher quantitative or numerical information that may be statistically analyzed (Saunders et al., 2007:138).

The broad research design of the study is best described by the following descriptors:

- Basic research - The purpose of basic research, according to Saunders et al. (2007:7), is not to directly influence administrative decision-making, but rather to build an understanding of a certain process, especially in the academic community. The sole goal of the research for this study is to better understand how fan loyalty is impacted by brand image.
- Empirical research - A study can be deemed empirical whenever the researcher seeks to gather primary data for analysis, according to Kotzé (2009:6). The purpose of this study was to collect primary information in order to describe

numerous factors that influence fan loyalty. The research done for this study can therefore be categorized as empirical.

- Descriptive research - When one wants to talk about the traits of certain people or specific occurrences, descriptive research is done, according to Saunders et al. (2007:134). The study's goal is to explain how brand image affects consumer loyalty. The study is primarily interested in how the identified factor and customer loyalty are correlated.
- Explanatory - When attempting to explain the relationship between two or more variables, explanatory research is used (Cooper & Schindler, 2006:143; Saunders et al., 2007:134). This study's goal is to explain the connection and causality between the constructs of brand image and fan loyalty, hence explanatory research is appropriate.
- Cross-sectional studies concentrate on a specific incident that occurred at a specific period (Saunders et al., 2007:148). Because respondents would only be requested to complete surveys once, at a given period, this study satisfies the criteria for cross-sectional research. Unlike longitudinal research, the aim of this study was not to track alterations in respondents' opinions or behaviors over time.

3.3 Population

The Mamelodi Sundowns supporters who attend games and are a part of a supporters branch group on WhatsApp make up the study's target population. Since the study's main focus is on the effect of brand image on consumer loyalty, specifically among Mamelodi Sundowns supporters, they were chosen as the target demographic. In addition, Mamelodi Sundowns supporters in South Africa who are a part of the supporters group on WhatsApp serve as the study's units of analysis and the sources from which the data will be gathered. These fans were chosen at random based on the sampling strategy described below for study participation and questionnaire completion.

3.4 Sampling method

Probability sampling technique should be used (Saunders et al., 2007:226). Non-Probability sampling is not an option because we trying to generalise. Furthermore, quota sampling will be complicated because the PSL is on break and no games are being played, so we won't be able to visit stadiums. After the aforementioned discussion, it was obvious that a probability sampling strategy should be employed to locate and contact respondents for the purpose of completing the questionnaires. The study's particular area of interest will be random sampling.

probability sampling is a sampling technique where the probability of a case being selected for the study is known (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:207). There are many different techniques that can be used with non-probability sampling to choose a sample for a study. In this study, random sampling was the method used. Random sampling entails randomly choosing participants for one's study who are the simplest to contact (Saunders et al., 2007:234). In this case reaching fans in the supporters group on whatsapp is much easier.

3.5 The sample

The following formula can be used to determine how many participants are required for the regression analysis: $N > 50 + 8 \cdot m$. While the 'm' in the formula indicates the number of independent variables employed, the 'N' specifies the bare minimum number of respondents required to run regression. Behavioural loyalty is a independent variable in this study and brand image and attitudinal loyalty are dependent variables. With this in mind, one can calculate the required number of participants as $N > 50 + 8 \cdot 3$, which indicates that the sample size (N) must include at least 74 persons. Having 120 or more participants also qualifies as a big sample size (Christensen et al, 2016).

Sample size = n=100

3.6 Data collection

The questionnaire items were derived from Bauer (2008), study on fan loyalty. The first 17 items measure brand image, 9 items that follow measure attitudinal loyalty and the rest of the items measure behavioural loyalty. Data for the study was distributed via google forms by means of a questionnaire. Please refer to Annexure A for questionnaire. A self-administered questionnaire is a method for gathering data in which the respondent reads and responds to the questionnaire's questions on their own, with the assistance of an interviewer who is only there to help the subject when requested or when necessary (Saunders et al., 2007:611).

Self-administered questionnaires have the advantage that respondents are frequently honest and do not craft their responses to be socially acceptable. However, while gathering information for the study, consideration will be given to the drawbacks of self-administered questionnaires. Self-administered surveys have a lower response rate than interviewer-administered ones, and there is a chance that the respondents will misinterpret the questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:185).

Since open questions could be more challenging to respond to, questionnaires often have more closed than open questions. The questionnaire must be easy to follow for participants to avoid skipping or missing items. The questionnaire can be shortened by the researchers to ensure that individuals fill it out and prevent participant fatigue.

A benefit of questionnaires is that they may be quickly given to a larger number of people; nevertheless, the researchers must wait for the results before using them. The inability of an interviewer to tamper with the results is another advantage of questionnaires. Participants are not given the opportunity to create prejudices towards the authors based on factors like their ethnicity. This type of data collecting is advantageous for both those conducting it and the participants, who can do the survey at their own pace.

A likert scale was used in the questionnaire design to collect data for the study. Since closed questions (likert scale statements) can be written before the survey is distributed, doing so makes it much simpler to analyze the data. Each of these items will be measured by its strength and uniqueness on a 7-point likert scale with the end points 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

The data was collected first 2weeks of September in a Whatsapp Sundowns supporters group where a link to the questionnaire was shared.

3.7 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics

Mamelodi sundowns has a great team

101 responses

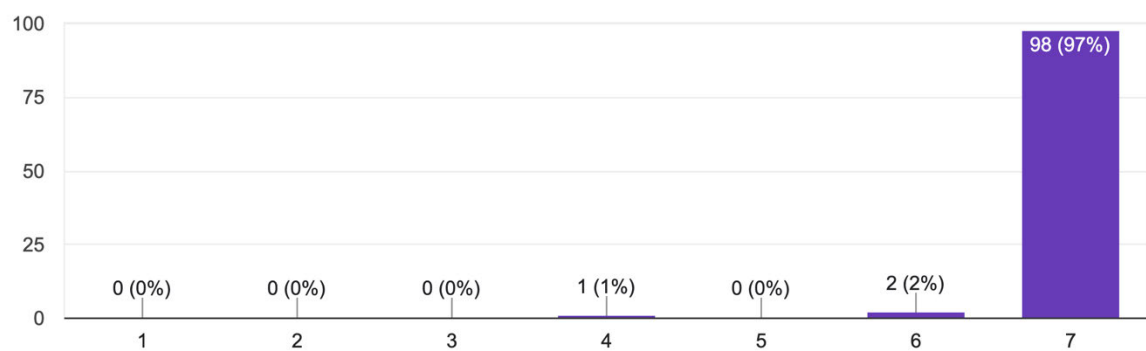


Figure 1: V1 team image

Figure 1 demonstrates to us that respondents agree that the team has a great team as the responses varied between neutral and strongly agree with 97% selecting the latter.

Im happy with Mamelodi Sundowns results
101 responses

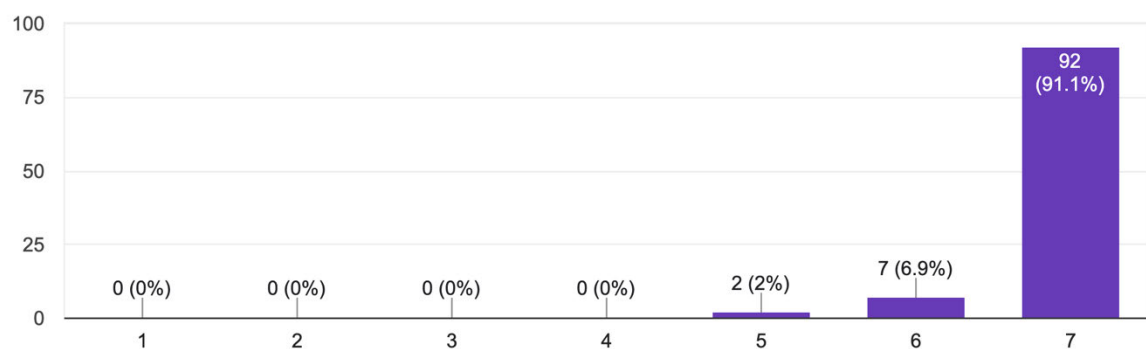


Figure 2: Satisfaction

91% of respondents are happy with the team's results. The responses varied between somewhat agree and strongly agree which shows us that the respondents are satisfied.

Mamelodi Sundowns is succesful

101 responses

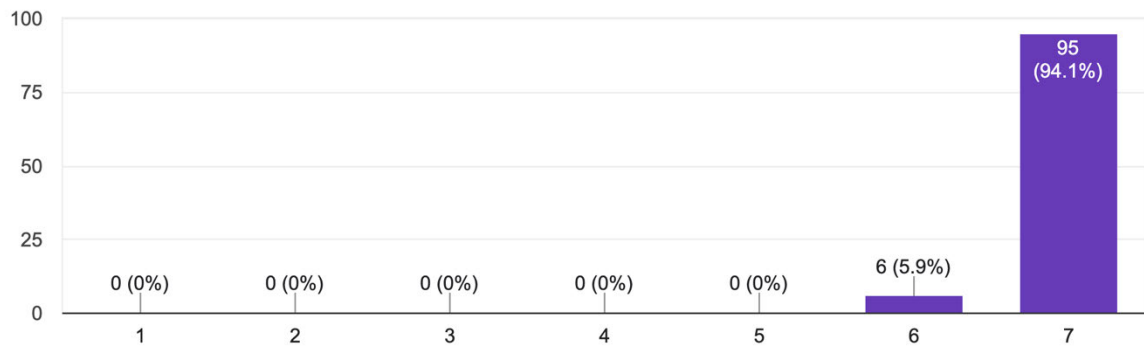


Figure 3: Success

Figure 3 had positive responses as they varied between Agree and strongly agree. 94% of respondents strongly agreed that the team is successful and 6% agreed. The responses show us that the fans are happy with the team.

I value other Mamelodi sundowns fans

101 responses

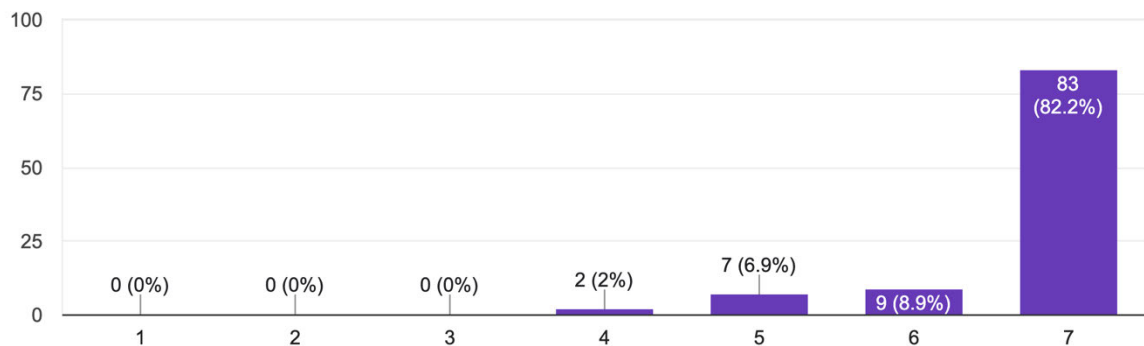


Figure 4: Family

Figure 4 had positive responses, they varied between neutral and strongly agree. This reveals to us that the team brings people together. 82% strongly agreed that they value other fans this shows us that majority of fans have a bond because of the team.

Being identified as a Sundowns fan makes me happy

101 responses

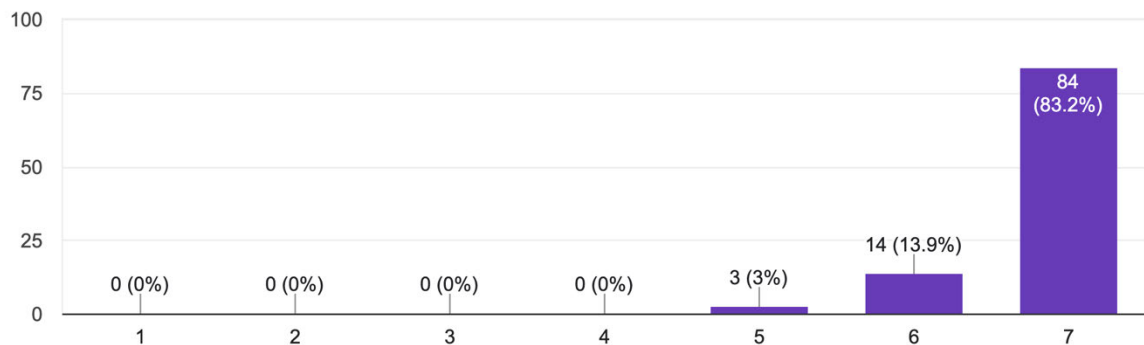


Figure 5: Positive feelings

83,2 respondents strongly agreed that being a Sundowns fan made them happy. Other respondents still had positive responses to this question. This shows us that the team has a good image hence fans want to be associated with it.

Thinking of my team brings good memories

101 responses

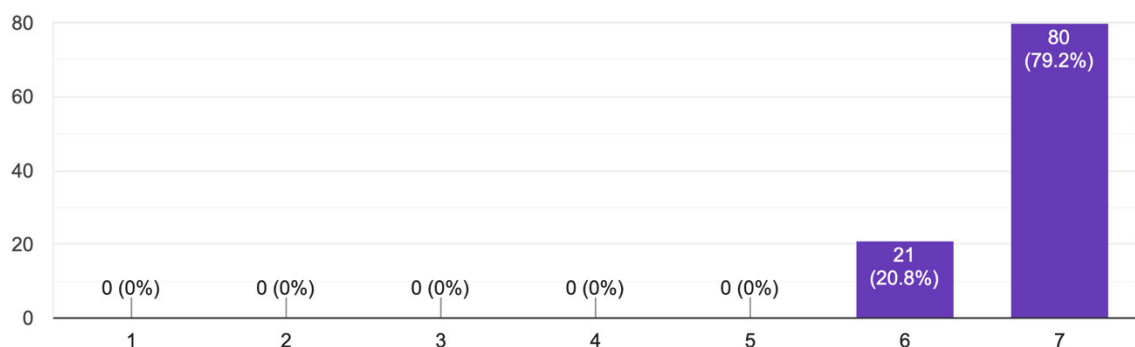


Figure 6: Nostalgia

79% of respondents strongly agreed that thinking of the team brings nostalgic memories with 21% saying they agree. The data reveals to us that the overall responses are positive.

I am emotionally involved with my team
101 responses

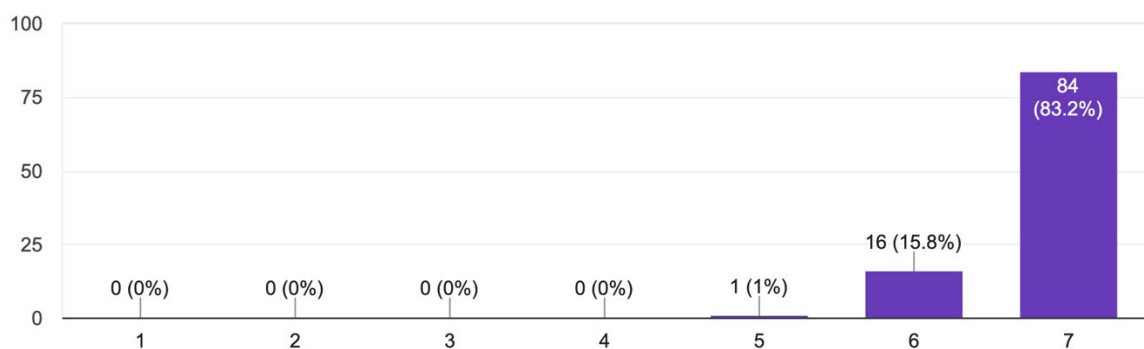


Figure 7: 83% of respondents strongly agreed that they were emotionally involved with the team. The responses are overall positive showing us that the team success affects the fans.

I am a real fan of my favorite club.
101 responses

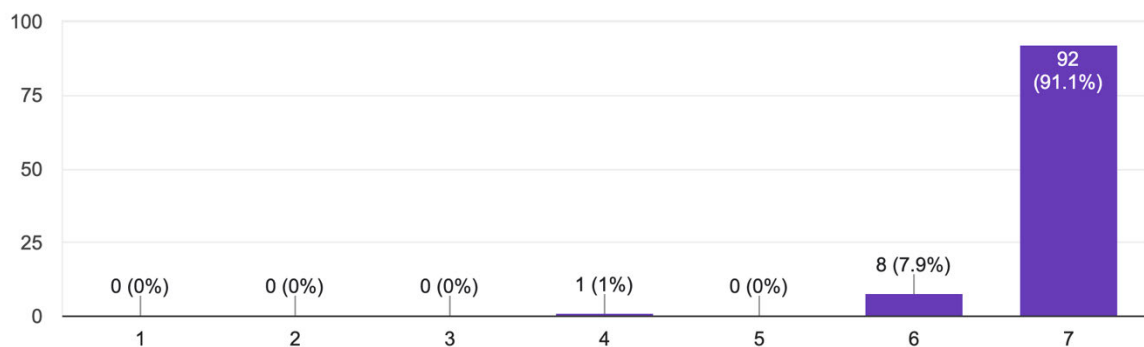


Figure 8: fanaticism

100% of responses were positive so respondents view themselves as real fans which shows us that they have a strong bond with the team.

I will never change teams based on results

101 responses

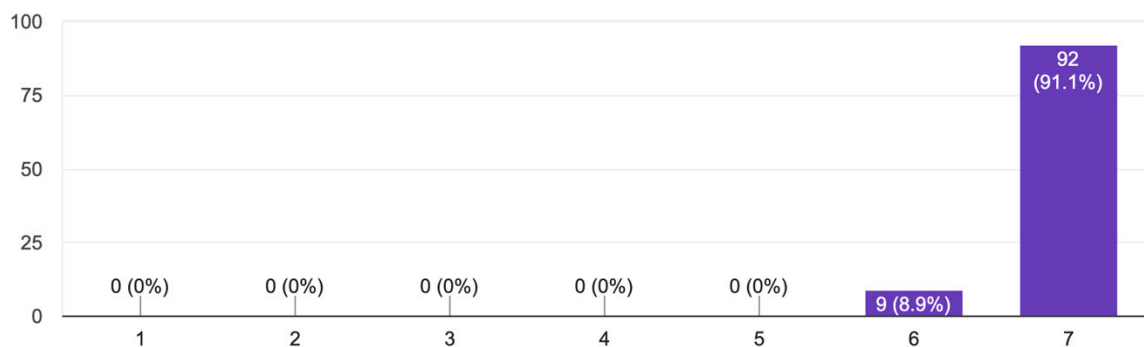


Figure 9: loyalty

Respondents all agreed that they would never change alliances based on results this reveals that there's a strong cognitive dissonance.

Data was produced using a Likert-type scale at the interval level of measurement. The current study employed a questionnaire with Likert-type scale questions. The mean and standard deviation of the supplied data are the minimal univariate descriptive statistics that need to be reported for an interval level of measurements. Previous studies have also revealed the mean and standard deviation of the study's determined factors of fan loyalty.

Additionally, this study included the number of respondents for each question, as studies using interval levels of measurement should do when analyzing data.

Composite (total) scale scores were constructed to create a new single variable for each of the scale sub-dimensions in order to prepare the study's data for data analysis. Three composite (total) scores—one for each of the three study variables—were produced.

We used the "brand image" dimension to explain the steps taken to generate the 17 composite (total) scores. First, a mean score for each respondent's replies to the three items measuring "brand image" was calculated. The mean values (M) of the 17 items are put together and divided by the total number of items ($114,28/17=6,72$) to determine the composite score for the brand image construct.

To determine the composite total for attitudinal loyalty 8 items were used to get the mean total ($52,91/8= 6,61$). To determine the composite total for behavioural loyalty 11 items were used to get the mean total of the variable ($70,1/11=6,37$).

See Table 2 for the means and standard deviations of the composite (total) scores, as calculated in the current study.

Questions	MEAN	STD DEV
Mamelodi sundowns has a great team	6,98	0,141
Mamelodi Sundowns is well managed	6,93	0,326
Im happy with Mamelodi	6,91	0,321

Sundowns results		
Mamelodi Sundowns plays with star players	6,91	0,321
Mamelodi Sundowns is succesful	6,94	0,239
The history of my team is important to me	6,75	0,702
I value other Mamelodi sundowns fans	6,73	0,664
Mamelodi Sundowns has good training facilities	5,14	2,156
I like the teams logo	6,61	0,723
I like my teams colours	6,64	0,644
Being identified as a Sundowns fan	6,82	0,435

makes me happy		
Thinking of my team brings good memories	6,80	0,402
I am emotionally involved with my team	6,84	0,368
Watching the team play is a escape from reality	6,80	0,471
The team plays entertaining football	6,91	0,321
Talking about Mamelodi sundowns helps me socialize	6,75	0,626
Mamelodi Sundowns has created a positive environment for meeting people	6,82	0,520

I am a real fan of my favorite club.	6,92	0,273
I am very committed to Mamelodi Sundowns	6,86	0,378
I will never change teams based on results	6,91	0,288
I would defend my favorite team in public even if this caused problems	4,61	2,554
I will not change my affiliation from my favorite club to another club just because my friends try	6,86	0,349

to convince me to.		
It is really important to me that my favorite club continues playing in the major league.	6,92	0,307
The long-term success of my favorite team is important to me.	6,92	0,273
There is nothing that could change my commitment to my favorite club	6,91	0,288
I have often attended games of my favorite team	5,29	2,001

live at the stadium.		
I have watched games of my favorite team on TV.	6,83	0,570
I have often followed reports about my favorite team's players, coaches, managers etc. in the media.	6,82	0,539
I have purchased a lot of club-related merchandise..	6,13	1,397
I often wore the colors and/or the logo of my favorite team.	6,04	1,456

I have often participated in discussions about my favorite team.	6,77	0,510

Table 2: Items

Notes: Scales values range from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree); the higher the mean score, the higher the level of agreement associated with the particular aspect.

M = mean, *SD* = standard deviation.

The lowest mean is 4.61 and the highest is this is due to the variation in that answers. The highest mean is 6.98. The questions with standard deviations above 1 generally had variations in the answers.

Variables	Mean	SD
Brand image	6.7224	.23247
Attitudinal loyalty	6.6125	.36519

Behavioural loyalty	6.3133	.69843

Table 3: Composite total for mean and standard deviation

The lowest total score ($M = 6,31$ $SD = 0,69843$) is related to player interest, while the greatest total score ($M = 6,72$ $SD = 0,23247$) is related to team image. The mean scores are all higher than 4, and all three of the total scores are above the midpoints of the scale. This suggests that respondents' perceptions of all the variables and of fan loyalty were, in general positive.

The focus of the next section is on the correlations between the item scale scores in the study.

Correlation

Correlation was used to measure the relationship between the latent variables and the items. The correlation coefficient can be viewed as a number that either indicates positive or negative direction and strength. Its value, which runs from -1 to 1, is absolute and has no dimensions. It is not thought of in terms of units. If the correlation coefficient value is zero, there is no correlation between the variables being looked at. Instead, a number nearer to ± 1 in any form suggests that the variables under study have a strong correlation and move in lockstep in a linear fashion (Taylor, 1990).

A statistical test known as the Spearman's correlation coefficient was carried out to assess the strength of the linear relationship or correlation between two interval-scaled variables (Saunders et al., 2007:606).

Spearman's correlation, which runs from -1 to +1, is calculated from sample data, according to Cooper and Schindler (2006:714). The prefix (+, -) denotes the relationship's direction, which can be either positive or negative. The relationship between the two variables is quantified by the number that comes after the prefix. A number of 0 implies that there is no association, whereas a value that is closer to 1 indicates a greater relationship (Cooper & Schindler, 2006:714).

Annexure 1 shows Spearman's correlation coefficients as the top values (Pallant, 2005:142). The correlations between the study's determinants and fan loyalty can be categorized into three groups, according to Pallant (2005:126). These associations, according to Pallant (2005:126), might be strong (with values between 0.5 and 1.0), medium (with values between 0.29 and 0.5), or weak (with values smaller than 0.29).

Please refer to Annexure B for correlation

Fan loyalty and each of its variables are correlated, as seen by the correlation coefficients (in bold, in annexure A). Club merchandise and representation had the highest correlation ($r = 0.723$) which means that the teams regalia is seen as a success symbol and fans feel proud to wear the kit, followed by fan commitment and team performance ($r = 0.680$) which shows us that fans are loyal no matter results, and emotional involvement and memories ($r = 0.600$). The correlations had a 1% level of significance (i.e., $p < 0.01$), all of these positive and statistically significant correlations are significant.

Based on these relationships, one may anticipate that a regression study using "fan loyalty" as the dependent variable and each of the determinants as independent variables would reveal positive regression coefficients.

The items were then bundled into their respective variables in order to get the mean sum score of each variable.

Inferential statistics

The hypotheses in Section 1 were tested using regression analysis. In addition to presenting the findings of the linear regression analysis carried out for this study, this part gives background information on regression analysis.

An introduction to regression analysis

Regression analysis is the statistical technique utilized in this study to investigate the relationships between fan loyalty, which is the dependent variable, and brand image, which is the independent variable. Regression analysis is a statistical technique used to look at the relationship between several independent variables and one dependent variable (Hair et al., 2005:176).

Regression analysis is carried out to use the independent variables to predict the single dependent value, according to Hair et al. (2005:176). Regression analysis must be performed with one dependent variable and two or more independent variables (Pallant, 2005:145).

Since the goal of the study was to examine the relationships between a dependent and independent variable, regression analysis is appropriate for this study (Cooper & Schindler, 2006:575). Fan loyalty was one of the dependent variables in the regression model that was examined in this study, and brand image was one of the independent variables that predicted fan loyalty.

According to Pallant (2005:140), regression analysis can handle a variety of problems.

Finding the best predictor of an outcome from a group of factors; the capacity of a set of variables to predict a specific outcome.

The capacity to assess whether a certain predictor variable will continue to be able to predict a result if the other factors are controlled.

A basic formula for the regression equation is (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007:129):

$$Y = A + B_1X_1 + B_2X_2 + \dots B_kX_k$$

Where:

Y= the predicted value of the dependent variable

A = the intercept

X = the independent variables

k = the number of independent variables

B = the coefficient assigned to each of the individual variables

Regression analysis weights the independent variable, according to Hair et al. (2005:176). Regression coefficients are the weights that are produced. These regression coefficients show how much each particular independent variable influenced the ability to predict the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2005:176).

Regression analysis is dependent on a number of assumptions about the data, according to Pallant (2005:142), and it can only be used effectively if these assumptions are met. The following section will go over these presumptions.

The assumptions made in regression analysis

Field (2009:220) outlines some assumptions about the data. For the results of the regression analysis to be applicable to a larger population, these presumptions must be true. The presumptions that need to be fulfilled include (Field, 2009:220; Pallant, 2005:142)

- **Variable types** This presumption states that there should be no restrictions on the outcome's variability and that the outcome variables should be quantified at an interval level (i.e., should be quantitative). Additionally, it's critical that the predictor variables be either categorical or quantitative (Field, 2009:220). The use of a scale that assesses the outcome variables at an interval level allowed for the fulfillment of this premise.
- **Unexpected variation** The predictors should ideally have some degree of fluctuation in their values and should not have a variance of zero (Field, 2009:220)

- No perfect multicollinearity Multicollinearity refers to the relationships between the predictors. It is therefore important that there should not be a perfect linear relationship between the predictors (Field, 2009:220). Multicollinearity occurs when the predictors are highly (but not necessarily perfectly) correlated.
- Predictors and "external variables" are not correlated. Any external factors that are not taken into account in the regression analysis but may have an impact on the result variable are referred to in this assumption as "external variables." Since the outcome could have been caused by these so-called "external factors," it is best to avoid using the variables themselves as the findings of the model are untrustworthy (Field, 2009:220)
- The homoscedasticity When all of the residuals for the predictors have the same variance, homoscedasticity is present (Field, 2009:220). Contrarily, if the variances are unequal, heteroscedasticity will result, which will go against the assumption.
- Normally distributed errors □ It is important that the residuals (or errors) in the outcome be distributed normally, and have a mean of zero (Field, 2009:221).
- Independent errors □ This assumption highlights the fact that the residuals in the outcome should not show any sign of a relationship with one another (Field, 2009:221).
- Commonly occurring errors It is crucial that the residuals (or mistakes) in the result have a normal distribution and a mean of zero (Field, 2009:221).
- Independence The values of the result variables should be independent from one another and derive from different sources (Field, 2009:221). Thus, the term "separate entities" suggests that the values ought to be independent.
- Linearity In order to increase the generalisability of the outcome, it is important that the relationship depicted be linear, which implies that all the predictors will lie along a straight line (Field, 2009:221).

When any of the aforementioned assumptions is violated, the regression model created from the data cannot be applied to any other samples save the present one (Field, 2009:251). The regression analysis findings should be shown in order to assess the data in light of these presumptions. As part of the study's regression analysis, the

hypotheses were put to the test. Therefore, the next part discusses the pertinent results.

The regression analysis results for this study

The assumptions and outcomes of the data's linear regression analysis are the main topics of this section. There are numerous multiple regression analyses in it. The initial study was carried out to gather diagnostic data for evaluating the aforementioned presumptions and to pinpoint any significant observations. Once these problems have been resolved and the significant cases have been eliminated, a second regression analysis was carried out to represent the study's final conclusions.

A regression analysis was carried out to gather the necessary diagnostic data in order to evaluate the hypotheses provided in the preceding Section. "Fan loyalty" was the dependent variable in the analysis, and the independent factors were the determinants. TABLE 4 displays the findings of this analysis.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.299 ^a	.089	.35026	1.988

a. Predictors: (Constant), BI

b. Dependent Variable: AL

Table 4 : BI=Brand image AL= Attitudinal loyalty

Model Summary^b

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.183 ^a	.023	.69019	1.565

a. Predictors: (Constant), BI

b. Dependent Variable: BL

Table 5: Brand image and Behavioural loyalty

Model Summary^b

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.315 ^a	.090	.66625	1.550

a. Predictors: (Constant), AL

b. Dependent Variable: BL

Table 6: Attitudinal loyalty and Behavioural loyalty

According to Field (2009:211), *R* - the correlation coefficient is the correlation between the observed values of the dependent variable, *Y*, and the values of *Y* predicted by the regression model. *R*² the coefficient of multiple determination indicates the proportion of variation in the dependent variable, *Y*, that is explained by the predictors in the model as a set taken together (Field, 2009:237).

According to the *R* value in the table above, which was detected as 0.299, 0.315, and 0.189, the -correlation coefficient between the predictors and the dependent variable

in the various models should be 29,9%, 31%, and 18,9%, respectively. R², or the squared multiple-correlations coefficient, also demonstrates the proportion of the dependent variable's variation that may be accounted for by the independent variables. Based on the fact that the R² indicates the variance in the values of each predictor and not the amount of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables as a set, the non-zero variance assumptions can be met in this situation (Field, 2009:237).

The R² score for this study is .089, .033, and .099, and it is obvious that there is variation because this change is significant because the value for significant change (as shown in the column marked Sig. F Change) is less than 0.05. (Field, 2009:237). The presumption of non-zero variance is therefore satisfied. The adjusted R² value is also used to provide researchers a sense of how effectively the models can be generalized. The ultimate objective is to bring the adjusted R² value as near to the R² value as possible (Field, 2009:235).

Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson value should be near to 2 and between 1 and 3 in order to support the premise that the regression errors are independent (Field, 2009:237). As a result, the current study's premise of independent mistakes is satisfied. The Durbin-Watson statistic's value is 1.988, 1.565, and 1.550, which is close to 2 and between 1 and 3.

In addition, the ANOVA table below demonstrates the significant fit of a regression model to the overall data (Field, 2009:237). According to Field (2009:237), the p-value should be smaller than 0.05 in order to be regarded as statistically significant.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum Squares	of df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.181	1	1.181	9.624	.003 ^b

Residual	12.023	98	.123		
Total	13.203	99			

a. Dependent Variable: AL

b. Predictors: (Constant), BI

Table 7

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum Squares	of df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.610	1	1.610	3.380	.069 ^b
	Residual	46.683	98	.476		
	Total	48.293	99			

a. Dependent Variable: BL

b. Predictors: (Constant), BI

Table 8 Behavioural loyalty and brand image

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum Squares	of df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
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1	Regressi on	4.792	1	4.792	10.795	.001 ^b
	Residual	43.501	98	.444		
	Total	48.293	99			

a. Dependent Variable: BL

b. Predictors: (Constant), AL

Table 9 Behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty

SPSS only display the first three values after the decimal point for the p-value. Therefore, we can see that table 7 and 9 models are statistically significant because they less than 0.05. Whereas table 8 is insignificant because its over 0.005 This value thus demonstrates that the 2 model are a significant fit for the overall data and table 8 is not. This also reveals to us that brand image does not affect the behaviour of fans.

Additionally, Field (2009:238) recommends that it is vital to look into the regression model's coefficients. Analysis of the unstandardized regression coefficients, often known as b-values, is required for this model. The b-values show the individual contributions of each predictor to the model. The b-value provides information about how each variable and fan loyalty are related. The b-values thus show the amount by which the dependent variable will rise if a particular independent variable is increased by one scale point while the other independent variables are maintained at their current levels. Positive values denote relationships between the predictor and the outcome that are positive, whereas negative values denote relationships that are negative (Field, 2009:238).

Examining the outcomes of the t-tests connected to the b-values is also crucial. The t-test illustrates the b-values' statistical significance. The p-value needs to be lower than 0.05 for the link to be statistically significant (Field, 2009:238). Therefore, for the predictor to be regarded as a statistically significant contributor to the model, the p-value should be lower than 0.05.

The b and beta values for each predictor in the regression model are provided in Tables 10, 11, and 12 below. The b-values look at how each of the listed criteria affects fan loyalty. Values can be either positive or negative, with a positive value indicating

a favorable association between the predictor and the outcome (which represents a negative relationship). The b-value, according to Field (2009:238), also shows how much each predictor affects the result when the effects of all other predictors are held constant. In contrast, Beta (the standardized version of the b-value) tells us how many standard deviations will change the outcome as a result of a change of one standard deviation in a certain determinant.

The Beta should be used when one is examining the relative importance of a predictor in the regression model (Field, 2009:239).

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.455	1.019		3.392	.001	1.433	5.476					
	BI	.470	.151	.299	3.102	.003	.169	.770	.299	.299	.299	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: AL

Table 10: Brand image and attitudinal loyalty

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.626	2.007		1.308	.194	-1.357	6.609					
	BI	.549	.298	.183	1.838	.069	-.044	1.141	.183	.183	.183	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: BL

Table 11: Brand image and behavioural loyalty

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.330	1.214		1.919	.058	-.080	4.739					
	AL	.602	.183	.315	3.286	.001	.239	.966	.315	.315	.315	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: BL

Table 12: Attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty

The beta reveals to us that there's a positive relationship between the constructs, however the second table shows us that brand image is not a predictor of behavioural loyalty due to the significance level.

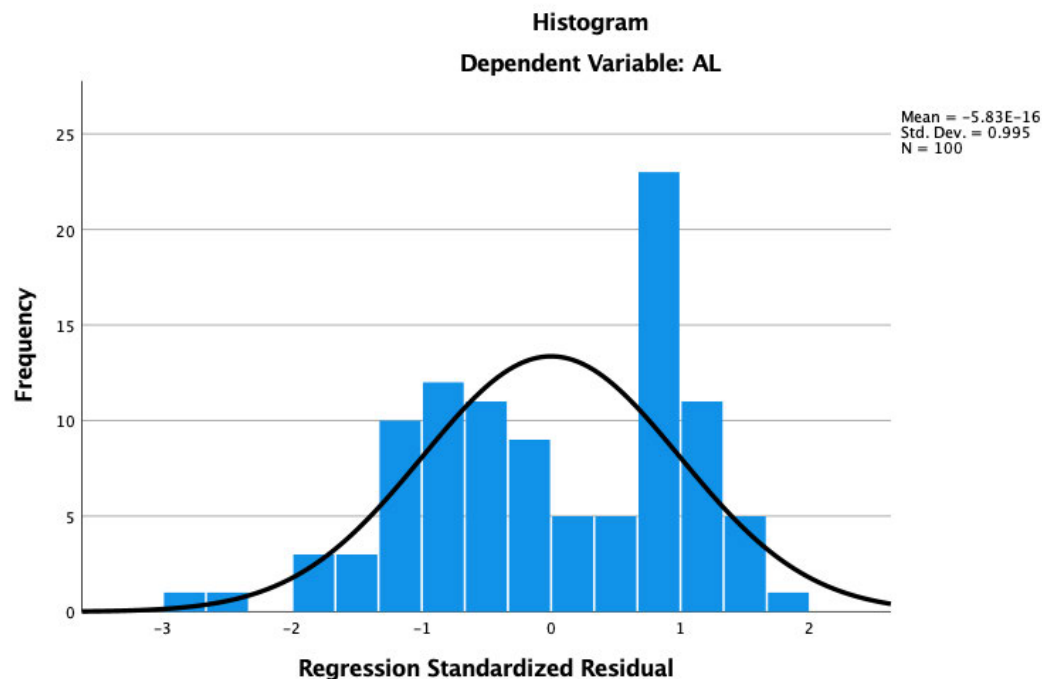


Figure 1

The discrepancy between the dependent variable's actual and expected values is known as a residual (or error). This gauges how well a single observation fits a prediction (Hair et al., 2005:5). A histogram of the standardized residuals is shown in Figure 1. The residuals must be normally distributed in order for normalcy to exist, which can be shown by a bell-shaped curve (Field, 2009:248). The distribution of the standardized residuals is approximately bell-shaped, as shown by Figures 1. This demonstrates that the residuals do not follow a normal distribution and that the data does not conform to the assumption that residuals are normally distributed.

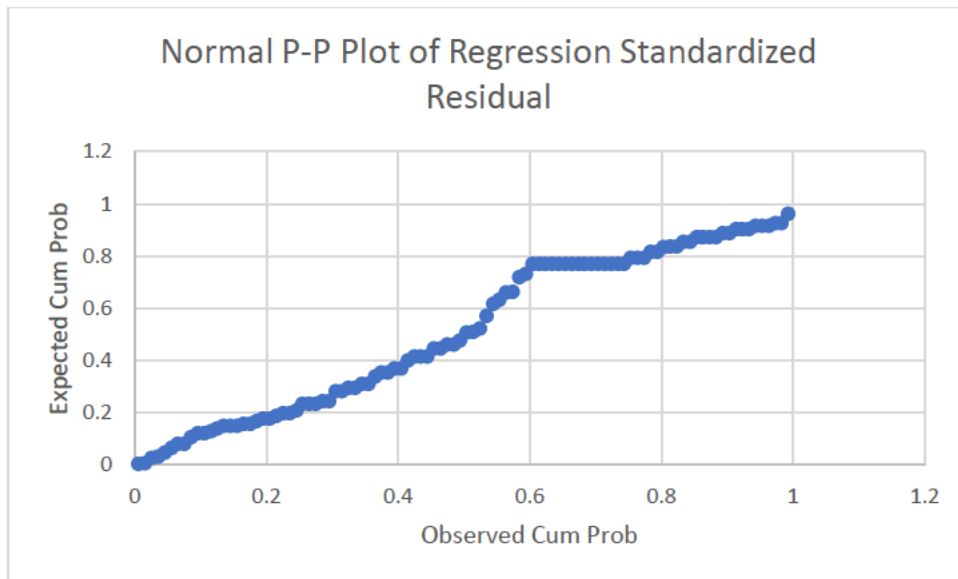


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows a normal probability plot of the standardized residuals. This plot indicates that the residuals do not have a perfectly normal distribution because the circles do not all fall exactly on the solid, diagonal line.

But Figure 2 makes it very evident that the residuals observed are not far from the solid, diagonal line, indicating that the data do not stray greatly from normality (Field, 2009:249). As a result, the premise of normally distributed errors was satisfied

3.8 Reliability and validity

Due to the sampling method chosen the stability was not able to be measured within the sample group. As the respondents were anonymous and chose to participate individually by clicking the link to the survey themselves that was shared in the group. Therefore the participants are unavailable to a second test as the researcher has no way of contacting them. Furthermore internal reliability refers to the degree to which the respondents' answers correlate to their other answers. Internal reliability is often measured through using cronbach's alpha, and it measures the internal consistency between items on a scale. Cronbach's alpha is a coefficient that ranges between 1 (best possible outcome) and 0 (worst possible outcome) (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The

general accepted level of acceptance can be found at 0.8 but a relatively close number such as 0.7 can also be seen as acceptable.

The questions that are used in the questionnaire were adapted from (Bauer et al, 2008). These are seminal authors and their studies have been replicated. Participant error will be avoided by giving respondents time to answer the questionnaire. The questionnaire will be shared via a link so that the respondent can answer it when they are comfortable at their own time. The trustworthiness of the research instrument was determined by its validity and reliability. The instrument was deemed accurate as a result of the pilot study conducted. No incentive will be given to ensure that respondents are truthful.

The reliability of the measuring instrument was also considered in previous studies using a Cronbach's alpha analysis. Cronbach's alpha's purpose is to calculate the reliability of internal accuracy of a multiple item rating scale (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Bauer et al, (2008) had a Cronbach alpha of 0.85 for behavioural loyalty items and 0.85 for attitudinal loyalty items. For brand image items, had a Cronbach alpha of 0.82. This confirms the internal consistency reliability of the scale

4.1 Findings

The findings supported hypothesis 1 (H1) by showing that brand image is a significant antecedent of attitudinal loyalty, but its ability to directly affect behavioral loyalty (H2) is only moderately strong. Table 8 shows that behavioral loyalty is positively influenced by brand image, albeit the significance of this association is only marginally significant ($P=0.069$) which means it is rejected. Additionally, the findings demonstrated that behavioral loyalty is highly and directly influenced by attitude loyalty (H3). In other words, the findings supported H3 in that attitudinal devoted fans are substantially more likely to attend games, purchase branded goods, wear team apparel, etc.

These findings support Bauer (2008), except the behavioural loyalty and brand image relationship. This could be due to the the study being in a South African context. This shows that for future studies reverse relationships need to be tested because we found in this paper that brand image does not influence behavioural loyalty, which basically shows us that the relationship between a fan and a team is deeper than image.

4.2 Discussion

This study examined the influence of a team's reputation on fans' behavioral and attitude-based loyalty. The findings imply that while customer perceptions of their favorite soccer teams have a significant role in determining attitudinal loyalty, behavioral loyalty can only be indirectly improved by these perceptions. Contrarily, attitudinal loyalty is a crucial precursor to behavioral loyalty, therefore sports management may consider team image to win over supporters and then turn them into devoted fans to increase financial support for the team's endeavors.

it was found that brand image affects fan loyalty through attitudinal loyalty but not behavioural loyalty.

The results show that attitude loyalty is substantially influenced by the team's reputation, but a good reputation does not guarantee any conduct that involves spending money. For instance, it is not uncommon to come across South African soccer fans who never go to a game but fervently declare their devotion to a "club of the heart." Soccer fans are routinely polled by sports magazines to estimate the size

of the fan bases for various clubs, and the managers of the top teams use these results as a barometer of their performance.

These results are in line with earlier research, which shown that brand benefits had the highest perceived influence on fan loyalty (Bauer et al, 2005; Maderer et al, 2016). Additionally, the conclusion that attributes unrelated to products had a stronger impact on fan loyalty than attributes connected to products is in line with earlier studies (Bauer et al, 2005; Bauer et al, 2008; Gladden & Funk, 2001).

5.1 Anticipated contribution

This study aims to contribute to the limited knowledge base of South Africa's soccer fan loyalty construct. It will also add knowledge to the field of sports marketing when it

comes to investigating the relationship between brand image and fan loyalty. It will do so by building on previous studies that apply the scales. The studies that exist don't cover the aspect of branding of a South African soccer club, so this study aims to fill that gap.

5.2 Ethical considerations

The researcher guarantees informed consent, voluntary participation, collection of ethical data, protection of sensitive information and confidentiality. The researcher will behave ethically avoid prejudice, never falsify or manipulate information, avoid the use of improper methods and never misrepresent results. Lastly the researcher will follow the IIE ethical guidelines while conducting the research.

5.3 Limitations

Sample size is a limitation as the sample size that is chosen is not representative of the entire population. Time is another limitation the researcher only has 7 months to conduct this study. Limited resources are also a factor, the researcher ideally wanted to use a mixed method approach but due to the expensive nature of qualitative research the researcher chose to use a quantitative approach.

this research was conducted post covid influencing the world through devastation and restrictions so behaviour hasn't changed in terms of match attendance. This has of course limited the author of this paper in various ways but some distinct limitations should be acknowledged. First and foremost the restrictions have prevented any interactions with fans in person. There have not been any opportunities to achieve a closer connection to the population which narrows the author's perception of it.

It is possible to make some recommendations for future research in order to advance the fan loyalty field. To get a sample that is more representative of the population, the first recommendation would be to test the research model again using a more stratified sampling technique.

A second proposal would be to compare the effects of brand image on fan loyalty among other groups, such as age groups or differences in gender (male/female/other). By doing this, it will be possible to better understand fan loyalty and determine whether or not outcomes vary depending on the group.

Finally, further investigation into the various elements that both directly and indirectly affect fan loyalty could be done in the future. Consider the brand benefits that most significantly influenced fan loyalty, despite the fact that one product was discovered to be inconsistent with the idea. Studying this will help us comprehend the underlying issues that affect the football team's brand image better.

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Annexure A

Brand image

Mamelodi sundowns has a great team

Mamelodi Sundowns is well managed

Im happy with Mamelodi Sundowns results

Mamelodi Sundowns plays with stars

Mamelodi Sundowns is successful

The history of my team is important to me

I value other Mamelodi sundowns fans

Mamelodi Sundowns has good training facilities

I like the teams logo

I like my teams colours

Being identified as a Sundowns fan makes me happy

Thinking of my team brings good memories

I am emotionally involved with my team

Watching the team play is a escape from reality

The team plays entertaining football

Talking about Mamelodi sundowns helps me socialize

Mamelodi Sundowns has created a positive environment for meeting people

(Note. All items are measured on 7-point scales with the end points ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items in parentheses were eliminated.)

Attitudinal commitment

I am a real fan of my favorite club.

I am very committed to Mamelodi Sundowns

I will never change teams based on results

I would defend my favorite team in public even if this caused problems

I will not change my affiliation from my favorite club to another club just because my friends try to convince me to.

It is really important to me that my favorite club continues playing in the major league.

The long-term success of my favorite team is important to me.

There is nothing that could change my commitment to my favorite club

(Note. All items are measured on 7-point scales with the end points ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items in parentheses were eliminated.)

Behavioural loyalty

I have often attended games of my favorite team live in the stadium. / I will often attend games of my favorite team live in the stadium.
I have watched games of my favorite team on TV. / I will watch games of my favorite team on TV.
I have often followed reports about my favorite team's players, coaches, managers etc. in the media. / I will often follow reports about my favorite team's players, coaches, managers etc. in the media.
I have purchased a lot of club-related merchandise. / I will purchase a lot of club-related merchandise.
I often wore the colors and/or the logo of my favorite team. / I will often wear the colors and/or the logo of my favorite team.
I have often participated in discussions about my favorite team. / I will often participate in discussions about my favorite team.

(Note. All items are measured on 7-point scales with the end points ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items in parentheses were eliminated.)