

FANS' PERCEPTION SURROUNDING THE SHARKS BRAND | A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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RESEARCH REPORT

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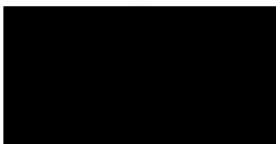
for

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I, Ryan Matthew Schutte, hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the IIE Bachelor of Arts Strategic Brand Communication degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University of Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.



14 December 2020

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Date

ABSTRACT

Over the past five years, the South African rugby franchises has experienced a significant reduction in fans attending matches at their respective stadiums, despite rugby still meaning so much to our nation. This phenomenon served as the purpose behind the study which was aimed at gaining a better understanding as to how fans perceived the Sharks brand and what it could potentially do within the capacity of their brand, to attract more people to their stadium. This study sought to investigate how members of the Sharks' fan base perceived their rugby team as a brand. The data collection methods used included in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight purposively selected participants, which enabled the study to produce thick narratives allowing for an in-depth analysis to occur. Findings indicated the participants still value the experiences created by the Sharks brand, however, they feel that the interpersonal brand connection has been lost over time. These findings indicated that there is a need for Sharks brand to improve their interpersonal relationships with fans, therefore, to increase fan loyalty and total brand equity. It is recommended that the Sharks brand prioritises the reestablishment of interpersonal relationships with their fans.

Key words: Brand, experience, Sharks, rugby, brand equity, brand image, brand identity.

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1. Introduction

The study will qualitatively explore the factors that influence the matchday attendance of fans relative to the Sharks brand.

2. Contextualisation

Rugby has an important place in South Africa's heritage and has been partly responsible for bringing a once broken country together. The Sharks have played a significant part in South African rugby and have achieved much success over many years and have forged a special place in the lives of many Durbanites (The Sharks, 2020). Over the past few years, the Sharks along with other local rugby teams have experienced a decline in fan attendance (Lampley, 2018). There could be many factors that have influenced the decline in attendance over many years. One of those factors could be linked to the brand offering of the Sharks and other local franchises, as consumer (fans) needs, and demands have shifted these teams have not successfully adapted over time.

This paper sets out to review perceptions of the Sharks brand held by fans living in Durban, in the effort to better understand how the Sharks could perhaps improve their brand offering as well as identifying what it is that Sharks fans currently value about the brand.

3. Rationale

This study aims to highlight the importance of branding relative to the Sharks as an organisation. The Sharks go beyond playing rugby on the field, and the brand owns a strong responsibility to create enterprising experiences for their fans in the effort to keep them coming back. By better understanding how the fans of the Sharks currently perceive the brand, the perceptions can then be related to branding theory and lastly be interpreted into practices to better the brand offering of the Sharks.

The results of better understanding how fans perceive the Sharks brand will serve as a beneficial metric that could be adopted by other South African rugby franchises in the effort of creating a deep level of insight surrounding the people who support them. With the intention to rekindle the matchday heritage that South African rugby

and more specifically the Sharks, once owned.

4. Problem Statement

With rugby being readily available on television, it is up to the brand of the Sharks to provide a one of a kind matchday experience for their fans that makes it worth coming to watch the game live rather than watching matches on television. While on-field performances aren't always predictable, the brand of the Sharks should always be consistent and on the ball.

Branding should serve as a controlled asset of the brand and bring joy to many fans. By improving the brand offering of the Sharks organisation, the brand should be able to attract and retain more fans than it is currently doing. Brand image has the ability to attract fans to buy into the brand and brand equity has the ability to improve fan loyalty and see them returning game after game.

5. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study serves to identify valuable fans perception held by Sharks fans towards the brand. In the effort of better understanding, the perceptions will serve the aim to improve the organisation's brand offering in an attempt to attract and retain more fans than it is currently doing.

6. Research Questions

6.1. Primary Research Question:

- What are the current relationship standings between the fan community and the Sharks brand?

6.2. Secondary Research Questions:

- What is it about the Sharks brand that fans currently value?
- What areas of the Sharks brand could be improved?

7. Objectives

- To examine how the fans feel towards the Sharks brand.

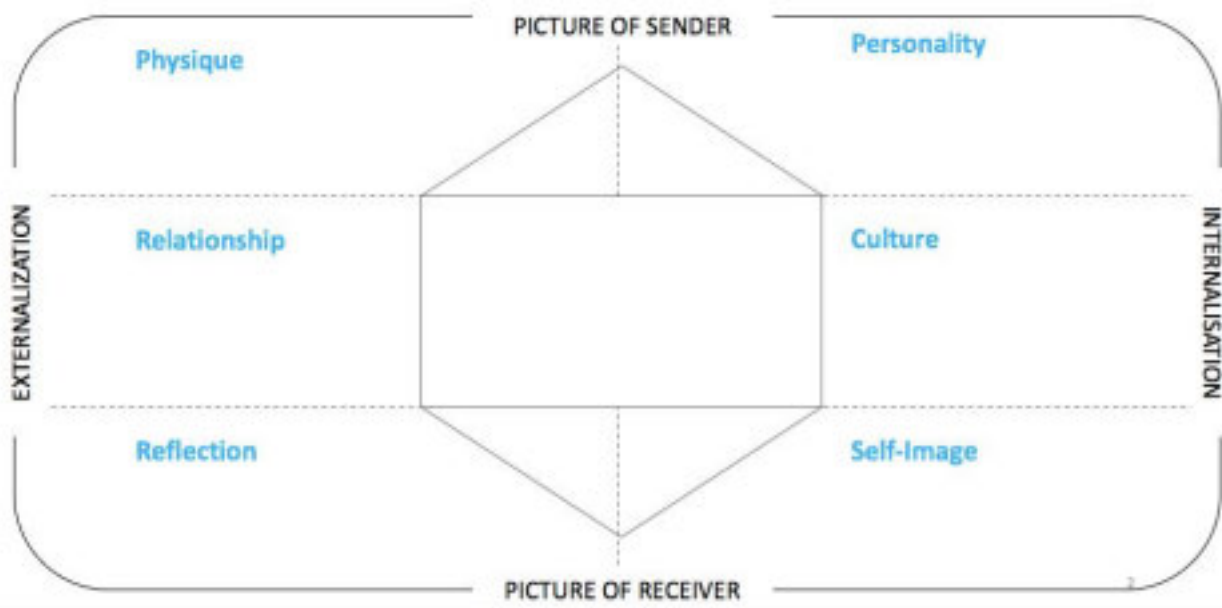
- To examine how the Sharks brand can improve in the effort of attracting more people to the stadium.

8. Theoretical foundation

The purpose of this section is aimed at examining and discussing theoretical works related to brands. The nature of this research is inductive as it considers emerging theoretical frameworks considering fanbase relationships with a brand (Gabriel, 2013).

The theory in focus will offer direction and purpose to the study as both Keller (2013), and Kapferer (2008) are highly regarded branding theorists and their work has been used in many branding related studies.

The first theory selected is **Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (2008)**.



The above model serves as a means for businesses to analyse and reflect on their brand (Kapferer, 2008). In relevance to this study, Kapferer's brand identity prism will provide a foundation of analysing the Sharks brand, after understanding the perceptions held by their fanbase. For the purpose of deriving brand suggestions for the Sharks by the end of this study, in the effort of improving their brand.

It is important to note that the model considers both the internal and external

workings of the brand and although the externalised dimension of the brand is experienced by the fans. The internal dimension of the brand needs to be appropriately geared to meet the expectations of the fans so there is still good reason to adopt this model (Kapferer, 2008).

At the cornerstone of all brands, are their **physical identity**. The physical identity serves as the backbone of the brand and becomes tangible to the value it creates (Kapferer, 2008). In the Sharks case, they own a unique logo with distinct black and white colours running through all facets of their physical identity (The Sharks, 2020). Further physical additions to their brand identity are the Johnson Kings Park stadium as well as the iconic mascot Sharkie (The Sharks, 2020).

The **relationship** spectrum considers the brand's ability to function with an element of charm by achieving a strong bond with its customers (Kapferer, 2008). Understanding the fans relationships with the Sharks brand may be one of the most important facets of this spectrum as it may have the most insight into understanding why there has been a decline in stadium attendances over the past few years, as pointed out by Lambley (2018). It will be important to understand how the Sharks brand can earn its way into becoming a "friend" with their fanbase (Kapferer, 2008).

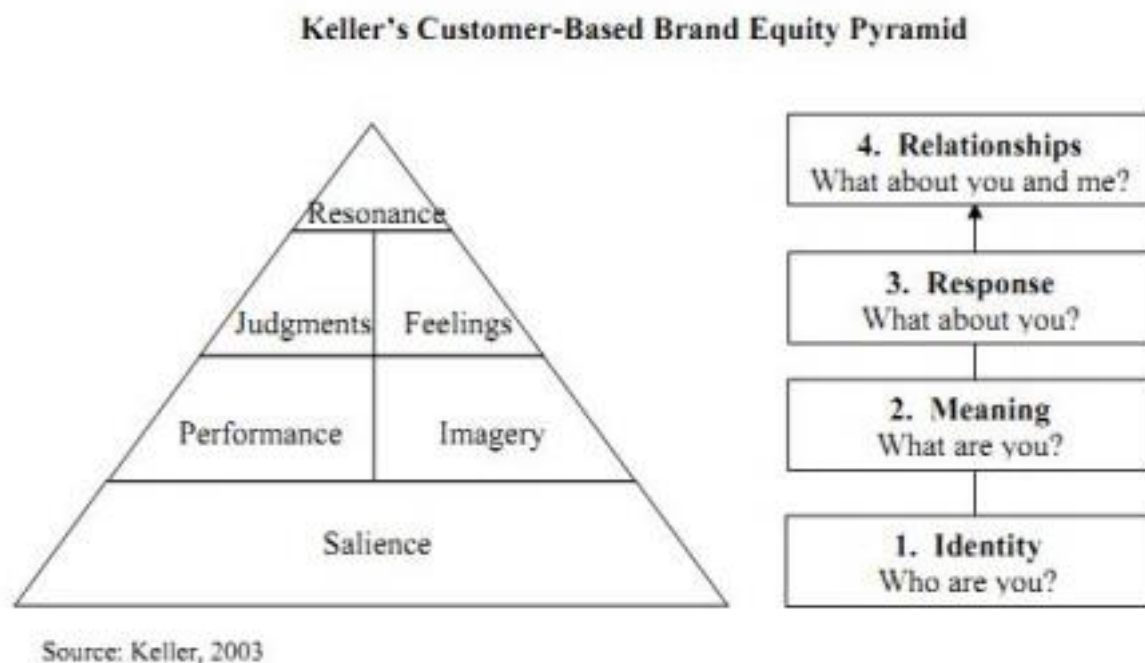
The brand as a **reflection** considers how the brand portrays the typical consumer of their brand. The brand owns a responsibility to control how their customers are perceived (Kapferer, 2008). Understanding what people are saying about people who go, and watch Sharks games is important for the brand to be conscious of. The brutal murder of a fan by a group of other fans still lingers in the heads of many and may suggest that Sharks fans are aggressive in nature.

A brand develops **character** through its communications by the way it speaks of its products and services. It is important that fans easily interpret the values of the Sharks brand personality. Kapferer (2008) also mentions that the brand's spokespeople are used effectively in communicating the personality of the brand. In the case of the Sharks, they own a whole inventory of past legends as well as current players to build the brand's personality.

Kapferer (2008), advocates the **cultural** spectrum of a brand. The brand culture should be at the centrefold of all products and services (Kapferer, 2008). Consequently, the Sharks brand needs to internalise a brand culture that can be externalised to meet the desires of their fan base through all of its product offerings.

Within the spectrum of **self-image**, Kapferer (2008) considers how consumers see themselves in the mirror when subscribing to a brand. Essentially it is worth understanding just how Sharks fans see themselves in the figurative mirror. Furthermore, should there be a trend of negative feelings, what can the Sharks brand do to change this?

Additionally, **Keller's Brand Equity Model (2013)** is another conceptual framework used to understand how fans perceive the Sharks brand and is what this study sets out to achieve, making use of this model is imperative and includes four tiers namely, identity, meaning, response, and relationships.



At the base of the model, **identity**, we find salience that refers to how aware customers are of the brand (Keller, 2013) Identity is not just about creating awareness, it is also

trying to ensure that the brand's perceptions are correct, in this case, the Sharks fans. The second tier, **meaning**, will be used to determine the Shark's brand's meaning by evaluating their performance and imagery. Meaning forms a base for the delivery of the Sharks brand experience whereby the identity and service experienced by the Sharks fans will set the tone for how the rest of the brand is perceived. In the third tier, **response**, of the pyramid, Keller (2013) refers to how customers respond to a brand by owning feelings and judgments towards the brand. Fans will respond towards the Sharks brand according to how it makes them feel when interacting with them. The final tier, **relationships**, of the pyramid is where Keller (2013) informs us about resonance whereby brand loyalty is formed by forming an attachment between the brand and the consumer. Loyalty is the final destination for the Sharks brand, whereby fans will see themselves frequently returning to home games as well as advocating the experience to their family and friends in the hope of including them in future matchday experiences.

9. Literature Review

9.1. Customer / Fan Experience:

Customer/fan experience is important to understand relative to stadiums and, as it closely ties into facets of the Sharks brand identity as well as their efforts to obtain an optimal sense of brand equity perceived by their fans. Wakefield and Sloan (1995) are considered seminal authors in the concept of *stadium experience*, and how the fans experiences are influenced by factors in and around the stadium. It is worth noting that although this study was based in America and focused specifically on Southern Conference football stadia, the factors that influenced the study are parallel in similarity to that of Sharks supporters. *i.e.: stadium cleanliness and stadium parking facilities.*

The Sharks as a team cannot always control on-field results even when they are considered to have a "better" team than their opponents. A recurring finding in customer/fan experience studies, explain the idea of team performances versus fan experience. On-field performances fluctuate over time and are never certain. On-field expenditure can often also take most of the brand's revenue to procure the services of the best players. While ensuring optimal stadium experiences can always be controlled and still ensure customer loyalty even when on-field

performances are poor (Miller & Johnson, 2008; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995). This finding will provide an insight to explore the degree to which on-field experiences contribute to Shark's fans loyalty relative to their stadium experiences. Brand experiences should always maintain consistency unlike on-field performances unpredictable nature.

It is worth acknowledging that Wakefield and Sloan's (1995) study made use of empirical data to obtain their findings related to customer/fan experiences. Wakefield and Sloan (1995) set out an appropriate road map and context, however, this paper will examine the customer experience differently. For the purpose of studying the fans' perceptions of the Sharks brand, this study will make use of qualitative data.

Looking further into customer/fan experiences this study values the work of Miller and Johnson (2008) where their study was similar in nature to that of Wakefield and Sloan's (1995) however Miller and Johnson lent their focus to the service staff working in stadiums. Miller and Johnson's (2008) motivation behind their study was that they acknowledged that patronage is essential to all modern-day sports teams and they wanted to understand how staff performance influenced fan experience in Major League Baseball teams. While the study was aimed at defining whether service employees performed better if they had a close interest in the team opposed to service workers who had little interest in the team (Miller & Johnson, 2008). The results found that the service workers who were closely invested in the team performed better than those who weren't. What the result ultimately alludes to without explicitly defining it is that service employees ultimately influence the perceived customer experience in a stadium (Miller & Johnson, 2008). For the purposes of understanding the brand perceptions of the Shark's brand, it is in the interest of this study to identify how fans perceive in-stadium service quality and how it ultimately affects their brand experience and differs from Miller and Johnson (2008) as they gathered their data from stadium workers and not fans exclusively. Despite the difference in sample groups the goals to identity stadium experience relative to service quality are the same.

9.2. Brand Equity:

Brand equity in sports teams is constructed through a complex multi-level production

system (Bauer, Sauer & Schmitt, 2005). Although the study done by Bauer, Sauer and Schmitt (2005), was based on German Football clubs they made an interesting point relating to Keller's base of the identity model. The base of Keller's model considers salience, identity and awareness (Keller, 2013). Bauer, Sauer and Schmitt (2005) suggest that brand awareness cannot be used to measure brand equity when studying fans of a team. For the purpose of this study identifying Sharks fans' perceptions, the study cannot use the brand awareness of the Sharks as a metric to gauge the overall brand equity of the Sharks brand. It is a given that the fans are aware of the brand as they would not have been included in the study in the first place.

(Bauer, Sauer & Schmitt, 2005), go on further to contextualise the metrics used to determine brand equity in sports teams. They consider brand identity, the stadium of the home team, the atmosphere and tradition to be valuable facets to measure brand equity within a sports team. When studying the Sharks, the study will focus on factors that involve the stadium as well as relevant factors that surround the stadium. Considering atmosphere would be important in adding to the experience but the atmosphere cannot be limited solely to the Sharks. Stadium atmosphere can be influenced by the Sharks supporters themselves, rival fans and even the nature of the game. A Super Rugby final will not experience the same atmosphere as an ordinary league game. For this reason, the study will acknowledge atmosphere as a contributor to experience but not as a dedicated metric of evaluating the overall brand equity.

Adding to Bauer, Sauer and Schmitt (2005), metrics for determining brand equity in sports teams, Gladden and Funk (2001) offer a differing and relevant perspective towards building brand equity in sports teams. Their work supports the concept of better understanding the existing perceptions of the brand, held by fans Gladden and Funk (2001). Once sports teams, like the Sharks, better understand the perceptions held towards them as a brand, they can start to improve their relationships with their fans. Relationships are an important spectrum for a brand's identity (Kapferer, 2008) and are of the highest tier on the brand equity model

(Keller, 2013). Although relationships find itself on the top of the brand equity model. Positive relationships are achieved from the bottom up and it is for this reason that Gladden and Funk (2001) consider fostering customer relationships to be so important. Once the Sharks understand their current brand perceptions, they are able to draw their focus to soliciting, listening and responding to the desires of their fans, in the effort of achieving optimal brand equity (Gladden & Funk, 2001). An important consideration that (Gladden & Funk, 2001) make is that brand equity will not be achieved by simply ticking a few boxes, it comes with establishing long relationships with fans over time. (Gladden & Funk, 2001) recommend the use of Integrated Brand Communications to improve the brand associations over time by building fan relationships through effective communications that address the 10 newly discovered brand perceptions. What the study can take from the work of (Gladden & Funk, 2001), is that the perceptions of the Shark's fans form the starting point for building sustainable brand equity.

In addition to the work of (Gladden & Funk, 2001; Bauer, Sauer & Schmitt, 2005), the study of the Sharks brand also borrows from the literature of Giroux, Pons and Maltese (2017) where they also cover the work of brand equity in French football teams relative to fan perceptions. What stood out in their study was their focus on the motivations of fans relative to brand equity. With it been well mentioned that the Sharks are experiencing a decline in-stadium attendance (Lambley, 2018) it makes the work of (Giroux, Pons & Maltese, 2017) valuable to understand what it is about motivation that one lends itself to brand equity and ultimately being motivated to watch Sharks game live at the stadium. (Giroux, Pons & Maltese, 2017) state that motivation refers to the event of a sports team's capacity to meet the specific needs of a fan. The needs can differ and range from a fan's desire to be a part of something great or perhaps their needs are fulfilled through relationships formed with the team. Under critical evaluation (Gladden & Funk, 2001) show the importance of understanding perception held by fans in the effort to build brand equity. (Giroux, Pons & Maltese, 2017) shows how brands are able to build on those perceptions by addressing the motivations held by fans of a particular team, for the purpose of this study, the Sharks.

9.3. Brand Identity and Image:

Kapferer (2008) sees the act of researching brand identity as serving a double purpose. The first purpose is to examine the brand for its primary production, in the case of this study it will be live Shark games taking place at Johnson Kings Park. The second purpose of examining brand identity is the perception of the brand sent back by the market. It is for this reason that this study relies on how fans perceive the Sharks brand. After doing so this study will be able to examine the Sharks home rugby games (as a product) against how the brand identity is perceived by their fans, which will indicate telling factors towards how the Sharks could conduct their brand offering in the future.

In a sporting context, the notion of the importance of brand identity is backed up by Richelieu and Pons (2011). They advocate that the brand image represents the true perception of brand attributes by the consumer. This is where the study of the Sharks brand will contextualise the interlinked roles of brand identity and brand image. Although they are two ends of the same ecosystem (Kapferer, 2008) explains that brand image deals with the perception of customers and brand identity is governed by the brand, in this case, the Sharks. In this study, there will be a frequent reference to both as they are very closely linked and will regularly be weighed up against one another. Richelieu and Pons (2011) lend their advocacy of brand identity to the earlier theme of experiences and they found that the cumulative number of experiences (positive or negative) ultimately influence the brand image. For the purpose of this study, it is imperative to understand the degree to which the cumulation of match day experiences ultimately lead to the possible erosion of the Sharks brand image and whether or not that correlated to the decrease in-stadium attendance due to a weak brand identity (This phenomenon may prove to be a strong example of exactly how brand image and identity are at constant interplay). As Richelieu and Pons (2011) go further on to say the burden then falls on the brand to reestablish positive perception and meet customers where they expect the brand to be. In doing so it improves the brand identity and restores its equity (Keller, 2013; Richelieu & Pons, 2011).

The Sharks brand owns a proud history in South African rugby with many titles and legends of the game gracing the team jersey (The Sharks, 2020). The history of the

Sharks could be used to enhance their brand identity. Richelieu and Pons (2011) advocate “storytelling” as a way to strengthen the emotional bond between the brand image and consumers. For this study, the use of legends and history could serve as a tool that relates to the building of the brand identity relative to the brand identity prism (Kapferer, 2008). Past icons and accolades can be used as a means of intrinsic growth of the Shark’s brand culture and then can become externalised as fans grow their relationship with the brand.

10. Conceptualisation

According to Vega (2016), a **brand** is a particular and unique construct that creates, communicates and sustains value for all its stakeholders through its products and/ or services. Whereby this study pays close attention to that of the Sharks brand, rather than their on-field performances.

Definition by Keller (2013) described **brand equity** to be the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumers response to the marketing of the brand. The brand equity of Sharks will be influenced by the manner of which they are perceived by their fans / consumers.

Aaker (2014) describes **brand identity** as a unique set of brand associations that the brand aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members. The Sharks are responsible for creating an enterprising brand identity that will own a host of positive association for all fans.

Verhoef et al (2009) describe **customer experience** as holistic in nature that involves the customers cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical perceptions towards a firm. This experience is created not only by those elements which the firm can control. The experience can also be influenced by elements that are outside of the firm's control.

11. Research Paradigm

Research paradigms are used as a lens for one to gain understanding as to how the researcher viewed the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). This study endorses the use of the

interpretivism paradigm. An interpretive paradigm will allow the study to empathise and understand human behaviour in order to assign meaning to particular social experiences (Jansen, 2020).

For the purposes of this study, interpretivism will be used to better understand how Sharks fans perceive the Sharks brand, by gaining an in-depth interpretation of their experiences and perceptions of the brand.

The ontological belief of interpretivism considers reality to be socially constructed (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). Consequently, ontological understanding relates to understanding constructed beliefs and feelings held by fans of the Sharks towards the Sharks brand.

The epistemological stance towards this considers that we as humans are guided and by social constructs and common sense throughout our daily experiences (Bezuidenhout, Davis & du Plooy-Cilliers, 2017). For that purpose, this study will identify themes and experiences that will be considered as common knowledge specific to Sharks fans within KwaZulu Natal.

The axiology of this study considers the subjectivity of which this study is conducted. Related to the subjectivity of the theory as well as the data valued by the researcher (Nieuwenhuis, 2020) in this case, fans perceptions regarding the Sharks brand. For this study, the value will be derived from the experiences and perceptions held by fans towards the Sharks fans and then subjectively interpreted by theoretical works.

12. Research Design and Conceptual Approach

The study will use qualitative research as it aims to tell the stories, beliefs and values by members within the Sharks fanbase (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). The data set to be collected relies on linguistics rather than statistical data sets (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). Nieuwenhuis (2020) goes on further to suggest that qualitative data is best focused on natural settings and interactions. This gives the study strong grounds to pursue a qualitative approach as the researchers aim to better understand fan interactions with the Sharks brand within the stadium.

While Wheeler (2019) conducted a study similar in nature to this study, the overall aim of this study differs from that of Wheeler's. Exploratory qualitative research will

be conducted to gain a better understanding of an existing setting (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). Further, exploratory research will assist the researcher to identify key issues, key variables related to the Sharks brand. To further solidify the notion of exploratory research, the study will value fans' perceptions as descriptive data which will ultimately assist the study to better understand the Sharks brand (Nieuwenhuis, 2020).

Inductive reasoning grants the researcher the ability to move from specific observations to broader and more generalised theories. Furthermore, by establishing patterns and consistency the researcher will be able to explore tentative hypotheses further (Bradford, 2017). The researcher will then use data to draw conclusions or infer an explanation. The study will draw on Keller's Brand Equity Model (Keller, 2013) and Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2008) in making sense of the findings. In addition, the study will be cross-sectional as it will be conducted at one single point in time and the researcher will be able to evaluate all variables at the same time (Nieuwenhuis, 2020); specifically related to the brand factors that relate to how fans perceive the Sharks brand.

13. Population

The population characteristics of this study included Sharks rugby fans' who reside in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal who have watched the Sharks live at Johnsons Kings Park within the last five years between 2015 and 2020. The period of five years was stipulated as the attendance figures started to reflect a significant decline from the 2015 season onwards. This study will attempt to understand Sharks rugby fans perceptions towards rugby. When it came to identifying participants, age was not used as a deciding factor, for the reason that a fan of any age can own a valuable perception towards the Sharks as a brand. The study did not consider the participation for any members of the sample population who were under the age of eighteen to keep within the IIE's ethical research guidelines.

14. Sampling

The sample included the participation of eight Sharks rugby fans' that were drawn from the above-mentioned population. By ensuring a relatively small sample size, the researcher was able to gather data-rich and in-depth

narratives from all participants. The narratives allowed the researcher to gain insight and explore the specific perceptions of each participant related to their experiences with the Sharks brand. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that all the necessary data was gathered to reach saturation for the study and the small-scale sample size was appropriate to achieve the aims of this study.

The study made use of a non-probability sampling method, to be more specific, purposive sampling was used. The use of a non-probability sampling method allowed for a descriptive exploratory research to take place, this served as a crucial element when considering the various factors that influence how fans perceive the Sharks brand. The use of non-probability sampling required the researcher to apply subjective judgments, by drawing from existing literature and the developing phenomenon of the research process. By opting for purposive sampling, the researcher was able to purposely select the population (Bezuidenhout, Davis & du Plooy-Cilliers, 2017) to ensure that the participants fitted the profile of the population necessary for this study. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to purposively select the population (Bezuidenhout, Davis & du Plooy-Cilliers, 2017) which was important as there were certain characteristics and parameters of the specific population that needed to consider in order for them to consider a part of the sample. The researcher only selected Sharks fans that were above the age of eighteen and have attended at least one Sharks game within the past five years. The above-mentioned population characteristics the need to use purposive sampling was important, ensuring only participants were considered that fitted the specified population.

The unit of analysis for this study included the perceptions and experiences held by Sharks fans' relative to the brand offering of the Sharks. This study seeks to gain insight into the lowering attendance figures experienced by the leading rugby team of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Rugby has a special place in the hearts of many South African's particularly in Kwa-Zulu Natal, therefore it is imperative that the Sharks brand are able to optimise their offering in order

to ensure the best possible relationship with their fans’.

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15. Data collection methods

The interview will take place over Skype, with the intention to be in-depth and follow a semi-structured guideline. The researcher will offer questions to the participants with the researcher's intention to interpret the views, beliefs and opinions surrounding a particular phenomenon (Bezuidenhout, Davis & du Plooy-Cilliers, 2017), in this case, the Sharks brand. The researcher will facilitate discussion by posing certain open-ended questions, in which there will be a degree of freedom given to the participants. This is where the researcher will be attentive to the responses. In this instance, the researcher will further inquire and define particular points offered by participants. The use of open-ended questions is important to the nature of this study as they have the ability to produce rich narratives, subsequently providing a platform for in-depth analysis.

The intended time frames for Skype interviews will be between forty-five minutes to one hour. Which will serve as sufficient time to conduct the interview process, any shorter and the research would risk missing out on data and any longer and the participant may lose interest and provide substandard data offerings.

The Covid-19 pandemic has influenced the interviews to be conducted online, in the effort to ensure the safety of both the researcher and all participants. All interviews will adhere to government guidelines related to Covid-19. Appendix E has been attached towards the end of this document, which contains the interview schedule detailing more specific information related to how the interviews will be conducted. All interviews will be recorded, with consent from the participants, in the interest of the researcher transcribing the interview at a later stage.

The researcher identified potential participants and contacted them via email and asked them if they were willing to participate in the study. The email read as follows, *“Hi (participant’s name), I hope you are well. I am currently conducting a research study concerning the way that fans perceive the Sharks brand. I am aware that you are a Sharks supporter and would like to know if you would be able to participate in my study. If so, I will send through more information shortly.”*

The researcher managed to successfully identify eight potential participants who all agreed to take part in the study who were all over the age of 18 to keep within the IIE research guidelines. The researcher then responded by sending through the information sheet as well as the two consent forms and requested that the participants take the time to read the forms and email them back to the researcher. The response time varied, as some participants responded within a couple of hours and other participants took up to a week to respond. As the responses came in the researcher responded with an arranged time and date for the interview to take place and asked the participants if it suited them. Before conducting the interview, the researcher ensured that all participants met the sample population criteria to guarantee the collection of valid data.

A reminder email was sent out to the participants twenty-four hours before the interview, just in case any of them had forgotten. On the day the researcher called the participant and introduced himself and once again explained the nature of the study prior to beginning the interview. After the brief introduction the researcher began the recording so the researcher could come back to the interview when transcribing the data. The researcher then started posing semi-structured questions to the participants and allowed them to share their personal account of their experiences and perceptions surrounding the Sharks brand. At certain points of the interview the researcher probed the responses of the participant in the effort to draw out an elaborated response from them. By doing so, it allowed the participant to provide more clarity about their ideas and feelings surrounding the research topic. The interviews served as a good

way to provide insight surrounding many factors that contribute to brand equity and brand identity ultimately relating to how the Sharks brand is perceived by their fans. In summary, the data collection process ran relatively smoothly despite dealing with load shedding and the Covid-19 pandemic.

16. Data analysis methods

Thematic analysis will be used in which the researcher will identify common themes which may include a variety of topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly in the interview with and between the participants. Because of the use of an inductive approach, the data will determine the various themes.

The post-interview phase of the study will consider Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step approach towards thematic analysis, as the researcher is required to intensively discern the data by first transcribing the audio from the interview. Additionally, the researcher will develop initial codes, using line-by-line coding, which the researcher will make use of to provide context to the conversations discussed with the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lastly, the researcher is required to organize relevant data extracts in accordance with overarching themes and start the interpretive analysis of codes.

Further, the researcher will take on a deeper review of the identified themes. This will be done to establish that the data found within particular themes blend together with meaning and distinction between each theme. A two-phased approach will include the analysis of themes relative to coded extracts and then for the comprehensive data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The next step involves 'refining and defining' appropriate themes, and potential subthemes, within the data sets. Each theme will be provided with appropriate labels and definitions by the researcher. The researcher will conclude the analysis by interpreting themes, offering examples and facilitating the themes to address the initial research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006) relative to the brand perceptions held by Sharks fans.

The researcher made use of qualitative thematic analysis whereby the researcher practiced meaning-based research, identification of common trends, which included a variety of topics, ideas and feelings that appeared repeatedly in the interview process.

All of which related to how Sharks fans' perceived the brand along with their matchday experiences. The study makes use of inductive research, so data collected by the researcher was used to determine the themes linked to the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach were considered when making use of qualitative thematic analysis which required the researcher to actively transcribe the data from the audio recording taken during the interview whilst becoming familiar with the data and gaining an extensive understanding of the context. After the transcription process, the researcher generated initial codes with the use of line-by-line coding. The coding was considered relevant and meaningful as it provided an indication of the context of the conversation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher coded the data which aided the understanding and provided insight towards the perceptions held by Sharks fans'. The next step involved arranging the relevant data derivatives according to the overarching themes which became the start of interpretive analysis of the various codes. The researcher then subjected the identified themes to a deeper review where it was ensured that the data found within the themes worked together meaningfully with distinct differences visible between each theme. A two-phase approach was included in this step, which accounted for the themes being analysed in relation to the coded extracts and then the overall data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The fifth step involved 'refining and defining' the themes and subthemes present within the data while the researcher provided numerous names and clear working definitions in a concise manner for the appropriate theme. The last step found the researcher transforming the analysis by interpreting the themes, offering examples, and allowing the themes to address the research questions relating to the study. The researcher made the transition from specific observations to broader generalisations and theories, through the establishment of patterns and regularities which enabled the researcher to explore and reach conclusions from the data. The researcher ensured they went beyond a mere description of each theme, by providing a supported analysis with evidence that addresses the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Qualitative data analysis is an interactive layered development whereby each step and layer of the analysis is documented. The researcher ensured the preparation and organization of the data systematically in the effort of establishing a comprehensive thematic analysis could take place. By doing so, it proved to be useful for the

researcher to streamline the research and not waste any time during the lengthy qualitative data analysis process. All the data gathered from the interview process was subjected to in-depth inspection, understanding and scrutiny.

The researcher made use of Braun and Clarke's (2006), step-by-step guideline for the thematic data analysis process. This is where the researcher started transcribing the data that had been recorded during the interview process. The audio from the interviews was transcribed verbatim by the researcher, this included non-verbal cues offered by the participants, which contributed to the meaning attached to the spoken word. All participants were provided with a pseudonym in the effort to best protect their anonymity and confidentiality. During the transcription process the researcher started to become familiar with the different aspects of the data, gaining important insights and understanding towards the content by intensively reading the transcripts several times.

The researcher's next step involved coding the data whereby the transcribed data was thoroughly studied line by line in the effort to provide initial codes. Those fundamental codes allowed the researcher to structure the information into relevant units to draw meaning from them. The researcher found the coding process easier by printing out the transcripts and which enabled the researcher to focus on specific data sets with the use of identifiers, word sets and symbols. The codes served as collection points that consisted of significant data related to assorted factors that influence how fan's perceived the Sharks brand which were represented by various themes. Various themes were identified by the researcher that were previously established as well as the addition of new themes that were identified from the data. A list of themes were kept by the researcher as they are central to the study and are appropriately considered specifically to the research objectives. Once the researcher could no longer identify new codes/themes the researcher considered the data to be saturated. Additionally, the researcher focused on founding the connection between the various themes ensuring all the themes and subthemes pertaining to the study are related to each other and contribute to the research purpose, questions, and objectives. Finally, the researcher has begun transforming the analysis into an interpretable piece of writing, by using extracted examples that relate to each theme, question and literature. The themes are directly related to and answer the research questions relative to this

study.

17. Trustworthiness

Guba (1981 as cited in Maree, 2020) suggests four important criteria in the effort of maintaining trustworthiness in any qualitative research study:

For the research to be deemed **credible**, the researcher is responsible for making use of well-established research methods, an appropriate research design that correlates with the research questions. Additionally, a firm theoretical foundation should be aligned with the research questions and methods.

In order to address **transferability**, viewers of the study should be able to draw conclusions between facets of the study relative to their own experience of the study, as opposed to generalised assumptions or claims.

In order to address **dependability**, a journal will be kept by the researcher throughout the process of the study, whereby the researcher will document thoughts, decisions and concepts, related to the data collection process. In doing so, a journal will allow others to have the ability to follow the reasoning of the researcher throughout the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2020).

In order to address **confirmability**, the participants are at the centre of the study rather than the interests or bias of the researcher. The researcher will make all readers aware of any apparent limitations or acknowledgements necessary to ensure a credible study (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). Finally, to ensure complete credibility, the researcher can ask all participants to verify all data sets collected along with the evaluations made to ensure accuracy and no room for misinterpretation.

18. Presentation of findings

The findings were collected using semi-structured interviews conducted online via Skype. Eight Sharks fans were interviewed and contributed to this study. All participants had attended a Sharks home game within the last two years and had been following the Sharks since the early ages of their lives.

18.1. Theme 1: Matchday Experience

Throughout all the interviews matchday experience, proved to be the most influential theme discussed by the participants relative to how they perceived the Sharks as a brand. The participants shared a general conscientious that the Sharks put on a high level of matchday experience quality. Three of the participants went as far as saying that the Sharks matchday experience is better than anything that they have experienced anywhere else in the country. Participant 3 went as far as directly comparing the Sharks experience directly to that of the Stormers, "I watched a game at Newlands in the beginning of last year and I felt so isolated throughout the experience, even the stadium itself is isolated, unlike the Sharks. Johnson Kingspark is very accessible and so are all of the facilities within the stadium, I really like that."

The new stadium's additions were also highly regarded by most participants with participant 1 stating that "The stadium really caters for everyone whether you're a family or just a group of friends getting together to watch some rugby and have some fun. The new James Small kids' zone is a brilliant concept as well as introducing a club within the stadium. The Sharks are the only stadium to have a pool in it, that definitely contributes to the experience for all in attendance." Participant 4 had similar feelings about catering for all, "the new stadium features now appeal to more than just the traditional rugby fan and the Sharks are clearly trying very hard to deliver an experience to everyone".

While all participants were pleased or at least content with the matchday experience, some offered their opinions as to how it could be improved. Participant 1 felt that the stadium atmosphere could be enhanced in an interesting way, "As much as I enjoy the matchday experience, it would be nice to see vacant seats filled with school children from rural areas who would not have the opportunity to watch a live Sharks game. This would fill seats, contribute to the atmosphere and grow the game of rugby which is something that the Sharks and SA Rugby really pride themselves on." Another suggestion included making all the tickets one price to ensure that those who are in attendance are less segregated in the attempt to get everyone closer together which was followed up with a suggestion similar in nature by another participant.

18.2. Theme 2: Brand Equity

Throughout the interview process, the participants offered much insight concerning their relationship standing with the Sharks. The general consensus offered by all participants suggested that they are all still very connected to the Sharks however their relationships with the Sharks has sadly declined over the past few years. Participant 2's response summed up the general consensus of all participants appropriately, *"I still consider myself to be very close to the Sharks and my interest in them is still very high. It's just the case that I am less motivated to be physically involved with them (attend matches). I will only now attend when it is convenient or on a specific occasion. That occasion could be a high-profile match, a day out with my friends/family or perhaps I feel like going out that night so I will go to the rugby beforehand. It is a little weird because I am still a big fan but I'm less motivated to attend. So, to answer your question, yes my relationship has declined with the Sharks over the past few years to some degree."*

18.3. Theme 3: Brand Identity and Image

The findings discovered throughout the interview all offered positive feelings towards the brand image of the Sharks. Although all participants had positive sentiments about the Sharks brand and what the identity of the Sharks stood for, their perceptions of the identity were not all in common. What was common throughout all of the interviews, was the sense of pride and humility instilled within the brand. Participants referred to the brand serving as a reflection of the greater provincial rugby playing community, *"They (The Sharks) stand for the people of Natal, they are the premier rugby team in the province that boasts a proud history. I feel as if they represent all of the rugby players within the Natal's rugby playing public."* Where participant 5 also felt that the Sharks were a brand filled with richness and tradition, they felt that the brand represented transformation and a new era of rugby, *"I really enjoy how they embrace diversity and their 'I See Colour' campaign was a true testament to that. Diversity and transformation are something that the Sharks are transparent about and it's something that I value, being a person of colour. It really ties into their visual identity of black and white as well, if you have to think about it."*

In summary, the participants all valued the traditional nature of the Sharks identity along with the welcomed presence of public representation and ever-growing diversity,

which painted a positive brand image for the brand in the eyes of the participants.

19. Interpretation of findings

The findings of the research study will be discussed in detail by presenting the factors that had a significant degree of influence on how the Sharks brand is perceived by their fans.

Throughout the interview process, it became clear that all participants had a long relationship with the Sharks and still value the brand to this day. The matchday experience offered by the Sharks appears to exceed the current stadium experiences offered by the other leading rugby franchises in South Africa. It is not only what the Sharks have offered in the past that stood out to them but also the most recent additions to the stadium which include Kingston Beach Club (a tropical-themed club) located behind the dead-ball line at the bottom of the South Stand, as well as the Small Zone (A children's play area that includes a slip n' slide, named in memory of the former Sharks and Springbok James Small) located on the North Stand. The participants felt that the Sharks have really made a strong effort to cater to all, whether it be for families, a social group of friends, rugby fanatics and fans of colour who may not have previously felt welcome in the doors of the stadium. While the Sharks continue to make inroads to diversify their offering, the fans also value the tradition and heritage that has instilled in the Sharks brand throughout their history. This is experienced in their brand identity, their values and the stadium which still brings back many nostalgic memories to most fans.

Despite the stadium attendance numbers showing a significant decline, what stood out throughout the interviews is that those who support the Sharks clearly still value and understand all that the Sharks brand are about. This would suggest that the stadium attendance figures may have less of an impact on Sharks fans attending matches, as initially thought.

The correlation between the Sharks brand and stadium attendance has a stronger connection when the theme of relationships (Brand Equity) was discussed with the interview participants. The previous sentence may appear to be contradictory because many would assume that if the fans are strongly attached to the identity and experience then they ought to have a good relationship with the brand.

According to the interviews, the relationship decay comes from the fans feeling somewhat isolated within the stands. With fewer people attending the stadium, those that do attend can often feel more isolated during the game, even if they are in the company of their friends and family. This feeling appears to make fans feel less motivated to return frequently because they feel as if they will once again feel as if they are isolated within the stands. This then lowers their expectations of future fixtures and hinders their motivation to attend frequently as they would rather save their visits to sporadic occasions. As participant 4 puts it, *“I feel that if I choose to go, I will be part of only a handful of fans that also decided to attend, while the others are sitting at home watching. I could also just do as they are doing.”*

The findings of the study will be discussed by referring to the supporting theoretical literature related to brand identity (Kapferer, 2008) and brand equity (Keller, 2013).

For brands to achieve the end goal of total brand equity they ought to fulfil all four tiers of Keller's (2013) Brand Equity model. According to the study participants, the Sharks as a brand have done very well in fulfilling the bottom two tiers of the brand equity model which concern the brand identity and the brand's meaning. This is where fans valued the efforts of the Sharks matchday experience, their tradition, diversity and overall appearance. As for the third and fourth tiers, the brand of Sharks fails to fulfil their potential.

The third tier of the brand equity model considers the 'brand response' (Keller, 2013). This is where the Sharks start to lose their brand equity as the brand response refers to the credibility and judgement held by their fans. Despite all of the participants having a lot of praise regarding the matchday experiences and the value attached to the Sharks brand identity, the credibility of the brand is challenged by the fact that not many people attend their games. This creates negative judgements held towards the brand and makes it appear as if there are many things wrong with the brand. While according to the interview results, there isn't all that much wrong with the brand and in fact, the Sharks are doing many things right. The shortcomings of the Sharks brand is directly correlated to the illusion of the brand being unattractive in nature and at a loss within itself even though this is far from the case as the study findings have contradicted this.

As the Sharks brand experiences challenges within the third tier of the brand equity model, the ability to fulfil the fourth and final tier becomes near impossible. The fourth and final tier of the model considers the relationships formed between the brand and its customers, in this case, between the Sharks and their fans.

The final tier of the pyramid is where Keller (2013) informs us about resonance whereby brand loyalty is formed by achieving an attachment between the brand and the consumer. By fulfilling the brand, the final tier of the equity model, it would mean that the Sharks would be able to clearly establish and communicate value to all of their fanbase. The fans of the Sharks need to be able to see the value of the brand offering through the establishment of loyalty between the brand. This will see the fans frequently returning to games to be a part of the greater Sharks offering.

For the Sharks to achieve brand resonance, it would be advisable for them to reconnect with supporters who are currently subjected to the illusion of the Sharks being a “failing”

brand. This could be achieved by potentially opening up the doors to fans to enter the stadium free of charge to watch preseason warmup fixtures or perhaps conducting training sessions with open doors in the effort to increase the foot traffic within the walls of the stadium in the attempt to wipe away the current illusion that challenges the brand.

In summary, the Sharks have created a unique and valuable matchday product which exceeds local standards. Despite doing so they have had little luck in attracting more fans to the stadium. This suggests that it is only the fans who attend games who are aware of the value created by the brand. Going forward, the Sharks would need to communicate their diversified value offering that they have created, and this can be done by potentially incentivizing the “trial” of their product through warm-up games or open training sessions in the attempt to change the existing illusion of the Sharks being a failing brand of interest to few.

20. Research Question addressed

20.1. Primary Research Question:

- ***What are the current relationships between the fan community and the Sharks Brand?***

The study found that the Sharks brand still owns a strong relationship with their fans. Although, fans have confessed that although they still regard the Sharks brand highly, many fans confessed that their relationship has been subject to decline over the past few years.

20.2. Secondary Research Questions:

- ***How do fans feel towards the Sharks brand's ability to create valuable experiences?***

Participants felt that the Sharks brand is able to create unique and valuable experiences, especially when compared to other South African rugby franchises. The participants frequently highlighted the efforts made by the Sharks to cater for more than just the traditional rugby fans and this ultimately contributes to the overall matchday experience.

- ***Do fans feel a sense of community between fellow fans and the team?***

The Sharks fans do feel as if they are part of a greater community but feel that their community is in a state of decline relating to the reduced number of people that attend home games.

21. Ethical Considerations, Limitations and Heuristic Value

21.1. Ethical Considerations

The study will account for many ethical considerations in order to ensure that there is no potential harm to any participants, group of people or any organisation. The following ethical considerations will be considered, the researcher will contact participants via email to ensure formality. The researcher will obtain voluntary informed consent from the participants prior to participation in the study. The researcher will fulfil the responsibility of ensuring that all participants are aware of the nature of the study and will receive a full explanation of their involvement in the study. The researcher will honour the principle of respect informing all participants that the interview on Skype will be recorded (see appendix E & F).

Participants will remain anonymous as the researcher will ensure that the identities of all participants remain undisclosed. All data collected without obtaining any personal or identifiable information. With the interviews being conducted via Skype, the

researcher will have knowledge of whom they are speaking to, however, this will not compromise the discretion of the data or identities involved in the study. Pseudonyms will be used by the researcher when reports are written in the effort of protecting the identity of students. Confidentiality means that all the participants in the study can be identified but their identities will not be announced outside the study.

All data collected from the interview will find itself stored on a password encrypted external hard drive, the effort of ensuring that the information can be accessed by nobody other than the researcher.

21.2. Limitations

This study acknowledges that there are research limitations present. However, none of these limitations will directly affect the integrity of the study nor its validity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed Super Rugby on hold, and this may impact the study as it is not clear when the Sharks are due to play again (Pitjeng, 2020). The perceptions of the Sharks fans will not account for current experiences with no rugby being played. The study would rather account for any Sharks brand experiences ranging over the past five years as this was when the notable decline in stadium attendances started.

Going beyond the halt in rugby, the pandemic has also influenced how the research will be conducted. The initial plan for this study was to conduct face to face interviews. In the effort of ensuring the safety of the researcher as well as the participants, the interviews will be conducted via Skype. Other than potential internet issues and minor technical difficulties the research should have no apparent limitations. Provided the interview is well planned and the time taken is not excessive. One other potential limitation regarding Skype interviews is that members of the sample population who do not have access to the internet will not be able to partake in the study. Such a limitation is not that severe as there are many members of the sample population who do have access to the internet, and it will not exclude the majority of potential participants.

The study is unique in nature and as a result, it has little literature to go by in guiding

the study. However, the study does acknowledge minor similarities between the work of Wheeler (2019) and this study, although the intended outcomes differ.

The Sharks have a large fanbase and this study will only consider the perceptions held by eight Sharks fans. With more time and resources, the researcher could potentially consider including more fans in the study. Despite this the researcher believes that the themes offered by the eight fans will be sufficient for achieving the research objectives of this particular study.

21.3. Heuristic Value

The study provided insight into the current way the Sharks brand interacts with their fans, and the impact this had on the decline of attendance of Sharks fans. Through this insight, a further can be explore ways into how the brand can effectively reestablish itself in the hearts of their fanbase. In doing so it will hopefully improve stadium attendances and provide a win-win for the team and its fans. Ultimately, this study will contribute to the field of South African sports branding by adding the above-mentioned data relating to this specific niche area of rugby.

22. Conclusion

The study provided insight, understanding, and generated knowledge surrounding the experiences of Sharks fans towards the Sharks brand.

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ANNEXURES

Appendix A: Final Research Report Summary Document

Title: Fans' Perceptions Surrounding The Sharks Brand | A Qualitative Study

Research Purpose	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors	Lit Review Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data collection Method (S)	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
The study aims to identify brand perceptions held by fans, towards the Sharks. After investigating brand perceptions from members of the Durban community related to the Sharks, I aim to relate relevant branding theories towards the issues at hand.	What are the current relationship standings between the fan community and the Sharks brand?	By better understanding how the fans of the Sharks currently perceive the brand, the perceptions can then be related to branding theory and lastly be interpreted into practices to better the brand offering of the Sharks.	- Wakefield and Sloan (1995) - Gladden, Irwin and Sutton (2001)	Theme 1: Customer / Fan Experience Theme 2: Brand Equity Theme 3: Brand Identity and Image	Interpretivism will be used to better understand how Sharks fans perceive the Sharks brand, by gaining an in-depth interpretation of their experiences and perceptions of the brand. Epistemology: The study will identify themes and experiences that will be considered as common knowledge specific to Sharks fans within KwaZulu Natal. Ontology:	The study will use qualitative research as it aims to tell the stories, beliefs and values held by members within the Sharks fanbase (Nieuwenhuis, 2020).	- Online Skype interviews - Semi-structured	- Anonymity (Maree, 2020) - Informed Consent (Maree, 2020) - Data protection	Brand relationship decay overtime Sharks fans still value matchday experiences Fans see the Sharks offering as unique and one of a kind.	The Sharks brand prioritises the reestablishment of interpersonal relationships with their fans.
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/ Hypotheses/ Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories		The ontological belief of interpretivism considers reality to be socially constructed (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). Axiology: Related to the subjectivity of the theory as well as what is data is valued by the researcher (Nieuwenhuis, 2020).					
In 2018, Garrin Lambley wrote an article on News24 where he suggested that Super Rugby was dead and local fans were simply losing interest in attending matches (Lambey, 2018). Rugby is a sport that has helped define South Africa's national identity and it is out of this importance that the Sharks should effectively reengage with their local fans and rebuild their sense of community (Perry and Alex, 2008).	- What is it about the Sharks brand that fans currently value? - What areas of the Sharks brand could be improved?	Brand: According to Vega (2016), a brand is a particular and unique construct that creates, communicates and sustains value for all its stakeholders through its products and/ or services. Brand Equity: Definition by Keller (2013) described brand equity to be the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumers response to the marketing of the brand. Brand Identity: Aaker (2014) describes brand identity as a unique set of brand associations that the brand aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members.	- Brand Equity Model (Keller, 2013) - Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2008)			Population Sharks Fans	Data Analysis (S)	Limitations	Key Contribution	
						Sampling non-probability sampling (Bezuidenhout, Davis & du Plooy-Cilliers, 2017)	- Ethnographic data analysis - The study is aimed to interpret beliefs, values and behaviours of members of Sharks fanbase (Creswell, 2007).	- COVID-19 Pandemic has placed Super Rugby on hold and this may impact the study as it is not clear when the Sharks are due to play again (Pitjeng, 2020). - Online interviews will exclude members of the sample population who do not have access to the internet. - The study is unique in nature and as a result, it has little literature to go by in guiding the study. However, the study does acknowledge minor similarities between the work of Wheeler (2019) and this study, although the intended outcomes differ. The study will only consider the perceptions of five fans within a large sample population.	To provide a deeper understanding of the current way the Sharks brand interacts with their fans. This will provide insight into how the brand can effectively reestablish itself in the hearts of their fanbase. In doing so it will hopefully improve stadium attendances and provide a win-win for the team and its fans. Ultimately, this study will contribute to the field of South African sports branding by adding the above-mentioned data relating to this specific niche area of rugby.	

Annexure B: Ethics Checklist



HONOURS RESE, RESM and RMET ETHICS CHECKLIST

Dear student

Please complete this checklist and include this in your proposals as an appendix:

Student name: Ryan Schutte

Title of the research: Fans' Perceptions Surrounding The Sharks Brand | A Qualitative Study

	Yes	No	Comment:
Are you using human subjects in your research?	x		
I intend to use human subjects - I understand that I will not conduct research with human subjects under the age of 18 and other vulnerable groups. - I understand I can only proceed once I receive an ethical clearance letter.			
Interviews/ Focus groups An example of the <i>written consent form</i> I intend to use is attached.	x		
I will record the interview/focus groups and the sample of the letter where I ask for permission to do so is attached.	x		
I plan to use an interview schedule : The example of my research instrument is attached.	x		
I plan to use a questionnaire : The example of my research instrument is attached.		x	Will not use a questionnaire
I plan to use a gate-keepers letter : The example of my letter is attached.	x		
I plan to do research on an IIE site /with IIE students/staff/artefacts and I filled in the application for permission to do so. The application is attached. I understand I can only proceed once I receive IIE Approval for this.		x	

Student Signed:



Annexure C: Ethics Clearance Letter



7 August 2020

Student name: Ryan

Schutte **Student number:**

██████████ **Campus:** Vega

School, Umhlanga

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 Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

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

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

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

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

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample. Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other

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

Supervisor: Gareth Gray



Supervisor signature: 13/08/08

Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC): Carolanda du Toit



Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) signature: 13/08/2020

Annexure D: Information Sheet and Consent Form

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants To whom it may concern, My name is Ryan Schutte and I am a student at Vega Durban. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Gareth Gray about better understanding the perceptions held by Sharks fans towards the Sharks brand. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the Sharks brand facets that are either appreciated or criticised by Sharks fans. 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 am aware that you are a Sharks fan and your understanding of the Sharks brand will be highly valued in this study. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to be able to take part in an online interview via Skype. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study? Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your perceptions of the Sharks brand. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study? • Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected? I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber, Gareth Gray will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Vega Durban, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.
What will happen to the information that participants provide? Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Honours Degree in Strategic Brand Communications. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

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

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

My contact details are as follows:

Ryan Schutte



The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Gareth Gray

**Consent form for participants**

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Ryan Schutte about better understanding the perceptions held by Sharks fans relative to the Sharks brand.

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

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

Signature

Date

Annexure E: Consent Form for Audio Recording

Consent form for participants	
I, _____, agree to allow Ryan Schutte to audio record my interviews as part of the research about better understanding perceptions held by Sharks fans' relative to the Sharks brand. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	Date

Annexure F: Interview Schedule

1. How long have you been a Sharks fan?
2. When was the last time you visited a Sharks game at Jonsson Kings Park? 3. Beyond the on-field performance, how did you find the match day experience provided by the Sharks?
 - What stood out to you that may have added or taken away from your experience?
3. From the time you found parking, or were dropped off outside the stadium, until you sat down in your seat before the game. Did you come across any favorable or unpleasant experiences with the Sharks brand? *(i.e: lack of accessible parking, a well-functioning ticket scanning process, litter in or surrounding the stadium or a steward escorting you to your seat.*
4. If you could bring about one change to the Sharks matchday experience, what would it be?
5. At any point of your match day experience did you find yourself drawn to the Sharks merchandise shop?
 - If so, did you go there for a specific purpose or just to browse?
6. How would you consider your current relationship standing with the Sharks?
 - Based on your answer, would you say that your relationship with the Sharks brand has improved or declined over time?
7. What motivates you to watch a Sharks game live?
8. When you're watching a Sharks game live at Jonsson Kings Park, does the Sharks brand make you feel like you're a part of something bigger than just an individual fan?
9. Do you feel any relived sense of history when walking through the Sharks stadium?
 - If so, are there any particular memories that stand out to you?
10. Which players make up your top three past Sharks players of all time, and why?
 - Could you see any feasible way for the Sharks to include them into the matchday experience so that it adds motivation for you and other fans to attend games?
11. Do you feel that the Sharks clearly communicate what they stand for?

12. In your own interpretation of the Sharks, what do the Sharks stand for?
13. Do you feel that the Sharks brand currently lives outside the walls of the stadium and finds itself in your daily life?
14. Could you offer any suggestions to the Sharks brand that could improve their current offering? Based on something that we have not already covered.

Annexure G: Originality Report

Blackboard



SafeAssign Originality Report

RESE8419_VGDB1 • Step 2: Submit Assignment 2 • Submitted on Mon, 14 Dec 2020, 23:06

[View Originality Report - Old Design](#)

Ryan Schutte

[View Report Summary](#)

① FANS' PERCEPTION SURROUNDING THE SHARKS BRAND | A QUALITATIVE STUDY

② by Ryan Matthew Schutte

RESEARCH REPORT 10 168 words

IIE Bachelor of Arts Strategic Brand Communication degree at

③ IIE Vega School of Brand Leadership for

Research - RESE8419

Supervisor: Gareth Gray December 2020

④ I, Ryan Matthew Schutte, hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the IIE

Bachelor of Arts Strategic Brand Communication degree to The Independent Institute of

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Attachment UUID:



Attachment 1

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