



The influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa



Mini-dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of **Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand
Leadership** at The Independent Institute of Education, Vega School.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research project is the result of my independent work. It is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Commerce degree in Strategic Brand Leadership at The Independent Institute of Education, Vega School. This work has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. Additionally, I confirm that I have secured the requisite authorisation and consent to conduct this research.

Phushaza Sibiya

30 October 2024

Acknowledgements

This research report is dedicated to my late mother, **Joyce Johannah Sibiya**. Ma, while you may have departed, I feel your love every single day. Your prayers continue to carry me. I walk every day, knowing that you're with me. To my dad, Bafunani Thomas Sibiya, bra Tom, you continue to hold us together. Ngiyathokoza.

Modimo wa Thaba Sione. Ke a leboga.

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Abstract

Commercial radio stations in South Africa continued to see a shift due to digital transformation. This study aimed at understanding the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa. The study considered the perceptions of South African listeners and the adaptation of digital radio.

The literature provided a conceptualisation of brand awareness, brand association and brand knowledge. The uses and gratifications theory (UGT) was used to understand better how radio listeners engaged with digital radio to fulfil specific needs. This study was conducted qualitatively, employing semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis for qualitative data analysis. A total number of 12 participants currently residing in South Africa were sampled to share their understanding and experiences of digital radio.

Key themes were identified in the process of analysing data, namely the listeners' knowledge of radio, listener perception changes towards radio stations, listener engagement and digital radio platforms, affordability of data and digital adoption, alignment of radio features and listener preferences, digital radio stations and new music discovery as well as brand equity and leveraging digital radio. Findings from this research indicated that digital radio plays an essential role in shaping the media landscape and the listeners' experiences of digital radio. The study also presented recommendations in managerial implications for radio stations to further enhance their brand equity on radio. Key to the findings was the development of content, which spoke to the different lifestyles of listeners.

Key words: Digital media; brand equity; brand perception; media consumption; audience engagement; internet radio

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1. Background to the study

The advent of digital radio has revolutionised the way audio content is consumed and has transformed the methods through which radio stations engage with their listeners (Ajisafe & Dada, 2023:36-37). However, given the abundance of media competing for audience attention, how are radio stations performing in the digital era? This study examined the use of digital radio in South Africa, focusing on how radio stations use this technology to remain relevant, establish closer connections with listeners, and ensure their position in the constantly changing media industry.

Media plays a significant role in society (Arias, 2019:561-562). One evident function is entertainment (Lule, 2016:18). Certain types of mass communication are more aptly adapted for entertaining purposes. In contrast, others are more logical platforms for disseminating information (Lule, 2016:10). Thus, different media and platforms cater to the diverse needs and preferences of the audience.

The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) examines the rationale behind individuals' use of media to meet their wants (Zhang, Akhter, Al-Abyadh & Cong, 2022:3). According to the theory individual traits affect media incentives and decision-making (Zhang *et al.*, 2022:3).

Commercial radio stations have maintained a strong and influential position in the media industry (Radiocenter, 2023:4; Mostert, 2018:1; Krause & Fletcher, 2023:1). Both claim that radio is recognised for its easy accessibility, entertaining content, and capacity to build connections, which bridges gaps and fosters a sense of community (UNESCO, 2023).

The advent of the digital revolution has presented both challenges and opportunities for radio stations (Ajisafe & Dada, 2023:36-37), resulting in a decrease in the consumption of traditional media (Alzubi, 2023:2). However, radio remains a powerful tool for reaching diverse communities, providing a sense of connection, and sharing experiences (Lumley, 2023).

Vlad (2023:255) and Ajisafe and Dada (2023:38) believe traditional radio has adapted to technology. As the internet has grown in popularity, so has time spent online (Ajisafe & Dada, 2023:38). This has also disrupted the conventional radio industry, compelling commercial music radio stations to change their strategies to reach their audiences (Kuyucu, 2019:266). Digital platforms broaden the content landscape and change radio listeners' expectations and habits (Zhang, 2021:102).

Radio stations generate revenue using advertising (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2023). Such stations compete with other radio stations and various media platforms vying for advertisers' financial resources, such as television, print media, billboards, and the internet (Odun & Ututu, 2016:63-67).

Digital radio has also opened new opportunities for advertisers to reach their target audiences (Ajisafe & Dada, 2023:36). With the ability to track listener data and preferences, advertisers can now tailor their messages and content to specific demographics, increasing the effectiveness of their campaigns (Lumley, 2023). Kuyucu (2019:66) proposes that digital radio enhances the engagement between listeners and advertisers through interactive advertising experiences, including clickable advertising material and direct response alternatives. This proposition further suggests digital radio's ability to establish diverse ways advertisers can reach their targeted audience.

The attractiveness of digital radio lies in its ability to tailor-make preferences that interest listeners, allowing for engaging content (Webster, 2021:2141). This supports the findings by Mostert (2028:3) that creating content that is appealing to the radio audience constitutes a key advantage of digital radio. Given such changes in the media landscape, commercial radio stations have had to adopt the necessary functionalities to remain competitive and meet listener demands (Lumley, 2023).

Despite studies being conducted on the significance of radio as a form of mass media, there is a lack of research on the influence of digital radio on commercial radio stations in South Africa, apart from Mostert (2018), whose study suggests frameworks and strategies for radio station managers to increase listener figures by focusing on conventional radio as well as digital radio. While studies on the impact of digital disruption on the radio industry have been conducted, its effect in the South African context has not been explored in much detail.

This paper aims to understand the influence of digital radio platforms on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa and examine how digital radio has affected the perceptions of listeners towards radio stations. Smith (2018:63) highlights the importance of understanding the influence of digital radio as a crucial factor for building strong brands that contribute to audience loyalty and attract advertisers, thus ensuring the competitiveness of radio stations in the dynamic media landscape. The following section presents the rationale of the study.

1.2. Rationale

While research on radio stations has been widely explored globally, there is limited research focusing, specifically on the South African context. Previous studies have largely addressed the global impact of digital radio on commercial radio stations, particularly in terms of listener behaviour, but have not examined its effect on the brand equity of South African commercial radio stations. Although advertisers' perspectives are referenced, there is a notable gap in research on strategies for influencing brand equity within the South African radio industry.

1.3. Problem statement

Commercial radio stations in South Africa face challenges maintaining relevance and audience engagement because of digital media platforms and streaming services (Lumley, 2023). Such platforms provide audiences with on-demand and a personalised listening experience. The shift in listener preferences toward curated playlists, podcasts, and interactive features offered by digital platforms contributes further to the challenge, as these features reshape audience expectations and reduce the time spent on traditional radio (Ajisafe & Dada, 2023:36-37). To thrive in the digital age, radio stations must develop different approaches to build brand equity and leverage it to attract and retain listeners, generate revenue, and ensure long-term sustainability (Mostert, 2018:32). South African commercial radio stations must leverage digital radio to influencing brand equity and audience engagement for long-term success in a competitive digital media landscape (Ntobaki & Buthelezi, 2023:1). The next section outlines the research objectives.

1.4. Research Aim

Research Objectives

1. To analyse the different digital radio platforms available to the South African audience.
2. To determine how South African radio listeners are engaging with digital content.
3. To determine what influences listeners' choice of platforms and engagement with digital radio content.
4. To compare brand equity metrics of South African commercial music radio stations before and after adopting digital radio strategies.

Hofstee (2018:86) posits that research objectives enable researchers to ensure that methods and analysis are aligned with the intended outcomes. Research objectives are more likely to result in greater specificity compared to research questions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019:32).

The study thus focuses on understanding the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of South African commercial music radio stations by analysing the digital platforms available to radio listeners, examining how listeners engage with digital content, identifying factors influencing their platform choices, and comparing brand equity metrics of these stations before and after implementing digital radio strategies.

The radio landscape continues to evolve due to the rise of digital technology (Ajisafe & Dada, 2023:36-37). While radio has traditionally been a powerful tool for information and entertainment, the abundance of media options continues to challenge its relevance, which signifies the need for South African commercial radio stations to leverage digital radio to remain competitive (Mostert, 2018:32).

Purpose Statement

Drawing on the limited research on brand equity in South African commercial radio (Mostert, 2018:32), this study aims to understand how South African commercial radio stations leverage digital platforms to build brand equity and listener engagement in the face of digital competition (Smith, 2018:63). The next section will delve into a preliminary literature review to explore existing research on digital radio, brand equity, and audience engagement in the context of South Africa and beyond.

1.5. Preliminary Literature Review

This preliminary literature review will examine how South African commercial radio stations can leverage digital radio to strengthen brand equity, explore the emergence and potential of this technology globally and in South Africa, and then investigate the concept of brand equity, highlighting key components such as awareness, association, and loyalty.

Radio broadcasting is considered one of the oldest forms of mass communication and has profoundly influenced society and culture during the 20th and 21st centuries (Bethy, Pawito & Utari, 2023:140). One of the first radio stations to broadcast was KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1920, which was formed by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation (Federal Communications Commission, 2024). This radio station provided continuous updates on the 2 November 1920 elections (Kuyucu, 2019:266). To date, KDKA is considered a catalyst for the growth of radio and media, mass communication, and entertainment because of its immediacy in delivering news and entertainment.

To compete in the digital age, commercial music radio stations in South Africa must find new ways to engage their audiences and generate revenue (Ajisafe & Dada, 2023:40). Brands, therefore, need to build a strong brand value. It measures how well-known and respected a brand is and how much consumers are willing to pay for its products or services (Aaker, 1991). This study will explore the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa. The study on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa will contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of the rapidly changing environment of the media industry. The findings of this study highlight the key relationship between digital radio and brand equity that will guide commercial radio stations in South Africa in formulating critical decisions. Not only will the findings enable commercial radio stations to better connect with their listeners, but it will also enable and enhance the station's revenue-generation models.

The following section will delve into the practical applications of digital radio for enhancing the brand equity of radio stations.

Digital Radio

Digital radio can be regarded as a form of technology that can potentially change the broadcasting industry, providing alternative ways in which the audience can access content (Hirschmeier, 2019:5018). However, not all radio stations have adopted digital radio (Greer & Ferguson, 2008:148-157). Redmond (2019) adds that adopting digital radio has been implemented, given the infrastructure in some countries. Hoeg and Lauterbach (2023:2) note that AM and FM broadcast platforms can be replaced by digital radio. However, technological infrastructure will play a significant role.

Redmond (2019) posits that digital radio continues to emerge as a promising innovation that provides new ways of broadcasting content and enables significant growth. The adoption of digital radio differs between countries, and varying standards are being implemented globally (Redmond, 2019). Hoeg and Lauterbach (2003:2) support this conclusion, describing radio as a platform with the potential to replace the current AM and FM modulations in many countries, forming part of the significant shift from analogue to digital broadcasting.

From a global context, the United States has implemented digital radio, transforming the media industry (Umoren & Akpan, 2023:91). This change has provided better sound quality, more radio channels, and interactive features available to radio stations and listeners (Redmond, 2019). It is undeniable that digital radio offers listeners more variety and the added convenience of downloading content at a convenient time (Menduni, 2017:6). It is important to note that while digital radio is also experiencing growth on the African continent, its adaption is occurring at a slower pace compared to some regions in the world (African Union, 2020:11). This uptake can also be attributed to limited infrastructure and the high costs of technology, hindering the progress of digital radio (African Union, 2020:11). At the same time, it is essential to note the vital role played by the availability of smartphones. The African Union (2020:11) adds that while digital radio on the continent may be challenging, there is an excellent potential for expansion. Given this fact, digital radio can offer diverse programming content. As the African continent continues to develop its digital infrastructure, we will likely see digital radio contributing significantly to shaping the future of broadcasting.

Qocha (2021) suggests that South Africa is making reasonable strides in implementing digital radio. The convenience and accessibility of digital radio have attracted a younger demographic, who are increasingly turning to online platforms for their entertainment needs (Sundet & Lüders, 2023:226). This shift towards digital radio provides

opportunities for local content creators to highlight their work and allows for greater programming diversity, catering to South Africa's diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Ajisafe, 2023:36).

Brand Equity

Aaker (1991:15) describes brand equity as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers". Sadiq (2020:5) posits that brand equity pertains to the additional value that a corporation obtains from a product bearing a well-known brand name compared to a generic alternative. By realigning their strategies, radio stations can appeal more to their listeners and enhance brand equity (Mostert, 2018:84). While challenges remain present in the radio industry because of technological and media advancements, commercial radio stations need to formulate strategies which contribute to brand equity by observing listener habits (Sari, Mone, Irawa & Aras, 2021:171). This can bolster brand awareness and enhance radio advertising (Sari *et al.*, 2021:171).

Radio Advertising

The advent of radio advertising can be attributed to experts in the marketing field's recognition of the advantages offered by newspaper advertising (Phiri & Hossain, 2022:4). Organisations sought to expand their client base and employed a strategy of procuring advertising and sponsorship opportunities on widely consumed radio stations (Phiri & Hossain, 2022:6). There is an increasing trend towards digital advertising (Singh & Jitendra, 2021:73). Total internet advertising revenue amounted to R14.51 billion, exceeding 2021's R12.1 billion (Breitenbach, 2023). This shift towards digital advertising can be seen as a response to consumers' changing media consumption habits (Ndadziyira, 2023:4). With the rise of smartphones and the increasing accessibility of the internet, more people are spending their time online (Tsetsi & Rains, 2017). As a result, advertisers are shifting their focus towards digital platforms to reach their target audience effectively (Sule, Olley & Akpor, 2023:3157). This shift is expected to remain as technology evolves and consumers become even more digitally connected (Nuseir, El Refae, Aljumah, Alshurideh, Urabi & Al Kurdi, 2023:24). To maintain relevance in consumer influence through advertising, brand strategies in radio broadcasting must be in sync with digital media platforms.

Marketing techniques have adapted to the changing digital technology landscape by developing mobile apps for radio stations, online radio streaming platforms, and social media networks (Phiri & Hossain, 2019:6).

1.6 Key concepts

Brand awareness

Brand awareness is a crucial aspect of brand equity and is commonly regarded as a prerequisite for consumers to make purchasing decisions (Moisescu, 2023:103). It serves as a primary determinant for incorporating a brand into the set of options that people examine (Moisescu, 2023:104). In today's digital age, brand awareness can benefit commercial radio stations, allowing them to reach a wider audience through various online platforms (Phiri, 2022:9). With the increasing use of social media and streaming services, commercial radio stations can leverage these channels to promote their brand and attract new listeners (Hirschmeier, Tilly & Beule, 2019:5017-5020).

Brand association

According to Aaker (1991), many different indications may be used to investigate a consumer's associations with a brand. One of the signs is the extent to which a brand name can retrieve associations from the consumer's brain (Lencastre, Machado & Costa, 2023:2). Brand association is a crucial factor that motivates people to make a purchase decision or choose a particular brand over another (Chen, 2021:3216; Roux & Maree, 2022:2). Radio stations continue to operate in a dynamic environment that continues to change at a rapid pace. To enhance brand association, radio stations should consider leveraging non-product associations and creating a brand persona with which the station can be associated (Roux & Maree, 2022:2).

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a metric used to evaluate consumers' level of attachment and commitment towards a particular brand. Consumer brand loyalty can be considered a viable alternative to other brands (Omran, 2021:159). In the case of commercial radio stations in South Africa, brand loyalty plays a crucial role in maintaining a strong listener base (Yeo, Cheah, Wee, Tan & Chee, 2018:754-758).

By implementing digital radio, South African commercial radio stations can reach a wider audience and engage with listeners innovatively. The global rise of digital radio has shown the potential for increased brand visibility and customer loyalty (Ntobaki & Buthelezi, 2023:1).

By understanding how digital transformation has influenced brand equity, radio stations can position themselves as leaders in the industry and create long-lasting connections with their audience.

1.7 Research Design and Methodology

In research and philosophy, ontology concerns the nature of existence and reality (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988:509). It explores what exists, how entities are related, and the nature of being (Al-Saadi, 2014:1). Ontology seeks to understand the fundamental categories of being and their relationships (Dahlstrom, 2010:407). It is a crucial aspect of research, as it helps researchers define their assumptions and perspectives on the world they are studying (Akkerman, Bakker & Penuel, 2021:419). Yin (2011:311) posits those conceptual presuppositions regarding social reality, particularly on the existence of multiple realities or one that forms the basis of ontological assumptions. The main questions that arise from these assumptions are related to the nature of truth and the construction of knowledge (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2021:30). For Al-Saadi (2014:1), ontology describes the assumptions that are made about the nature of reality and what exists.

Applying an ontological approach to "The Influence of Digital Radio on the Brand Equity of Commercial Radio Stations in South Africa" entails recognising the existence of multiple realities and perspectives regarding this phenomenon, as various listeners may have different listening experiences. Laor (2022:17) has found that radio provides listeners with myriad options, encouraging listeners to consume the platform according to their needs and preferences. The ontological position of interpretivism highlights how individuals look for meanings and motives behind people's actions, such as behaviour and interactions with others in the society and culture (Whitley, 1984:3). According to Junjie and Yingxin (2022:2), interpretivism distinguishes human beings from natural phenomena based on their ability to generate profound levels of meaning. Within the context of commercial radio in South Africa, this approach can assist in understanding how listeners interpret and derive meaning from the messages and content they hear on the radio.

The epistemological position is based on the philosophical foundations of researchers' opinions about the nature of knowledge and its origins (Yin, 2011:309). It also refers to the researcher's connection with knowledge and understanding and includes several ways knowledge can be obtained through different types of inquiry and alternate

investigation methodologies. Epistemology thus focuses on how knowledge is acquired about the phenomenon rooted in how researchers see the world (Sol & Heng, 2022:82-83). It raises the following questions: What is the correlation between the individual who possesses knowledge, and the information or concepts understood? How do we acquire knowledge? What qualifies as knowledge? (Antwi & Hamza, 2015:3).

Interpretivist epistemology will be used to understand how digital radio affects commercial radio stations' brand equity in South Africa. This choice supports interpretivism's power to gather in-depth information about listeners' experiences. Interpretivism holds that meaning is created by individual experiences (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022:420). By studying listeners' digital radio experiences, we can establish how they see commercial radio stations and brand equity.

The study of values and value judgements can be used to describe axiology. Axiology is an essential component of the phenomenological approach as it helps in comprehending the values and beliefs that influence people's experiences and viewpoints (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:31). Axiology provides insights into the principles and beliefs that are highly regarded within a specific framework or cultural context. It also raises the question of whether it is possible to temporarily set aside personal values to gain a deeper understanding.

This research will apply interpretivism. Interpretivist epistemology emphasises research-subject relationships. It outlines comprehending the individual's meaning, voice, standpoint, experience, thoughts, and feelings (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022:11). This method emphasises subjective meanings of experiences (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:148). It seeks to understand participants' viewpoints and interpretations. Thus, it tries to create new and more comprehensive social context interpretations (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:149) to reveal human experiences' meaning and intricacies. The interpretivist approach examines listeners and radio station management from their perspectives.

1.7.1 Methodological Choice

The population will consist of adults residing in South Africa between 18 and 34. This age range captures a demographic known for high digital media consumption (Statista, 2024). Furthermore, the study will only include participants who actively listen to the radio to ensure the sample is relevant to the South African radio landscape. This screening process ensures the gathered data reflects the experiences and perceptions of a relevant audience segment.

Semi-structured interviews help researchers gather study data. Qualitative researchers benefit from this type of interview as it provides comprehensive data (Ruslin, Mashuri, Rasak, Alhabsyi & Syam, 2022:22). Semi-structured interviews are effective for open-ended data collection, but they have limitations. Not all interviewees are good participants, which is a challenge. Some people are unresponsive or afraid to talk about sensitive topics. The difficulty of interviewing specific people may affect both experienced and novice interviewers (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019:1). To overcome this limitation, researchers can use probing questions based on participants' feedback (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019:5). In studying the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa, an inductive approach will be taken. This aligns with the interpretivism theory as we aim to understand how listeners perceive and value commercial radio stations in the digital age. An inductive approach seeks to understand data from themes and findings (Lim, 2023:12). This alignment between inductive and interpretivism theory will allow for a deep exploration of subjective experiences and perspectives. It aims to make sense of social interactions or experiences and formulate a theory based on this data (Tenny, Brannan & Brannan, 2022). The themes will come directly from the listener's experience with digital radio and how it affects their perception of commercial radio stations. As the data is analysed, recurring patterns will then be identified and grouped, forming the themes of research (Braun & Clarke, 2006:6). By analysing themes emerging from interviews, an exploration will be made of how the digital landscape shapes brand equity. This inductive approach will enable a nuanced understanding of this complex phenomenon rather than imposing predetermined categories.

This study will use purposive or judgmental sampling, which involves selecting sample items based on a list of qualities, as discussed by Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2021:161). To stay within the borders of the research topic and relevant population, the researcher needs to establish what demographic traits are significant for the study and the population and research topic are considered. This study will screen participants by age, location, and radio station preference to ensure a relevant and representative sample by capturing generational differences, regional media consumption patterns, and listener engagement with commercial music radio stations.

Participants will be selected according to their age and digital usage (Obilor, 2023:1). This study will benefit from its ability to recruit participants based on a particular criterion and digital usage. Purposeful sampling will be used to address interview restrictions such as limited participant availability, geographic constraints, and the need for relevant

industry insights from engaged radio listeners.

The significance of qualitative research is its ability to collect rich data and reach some saturation point (Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs & Jinks, 2018:527). Given the common use of small sample sizes in qualitative research, it is crucial to ensure that the sample size is adequate to achieve saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022:4). For this study, a sample of 12 audiences will be used as saturation is expected between 8 and 12 participants (Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024:8). This study will make use of purposive sampling, which is a method of selecting sample items based on predetermined criteria as outlined by Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2021:161). The sample items will be deliberately selected to represent attributes that relate to this study. Participants will thus be chosen based on their age, location, and radio station preference to ensure relevant insights into the impact of digital radio on brand equity. To stay within the borders of the research topic and relevant population, participants will be screened by age, location, and radio station preference. Per the purposive sampling method, participants will be selected according to their age and radio station preference (Obilor, 2023:1). In addressing interview restrictions, individuals who meet the criteria will be invited to participate in the study. The objective of the study determines the time horizon, and then it is taken into consideration whether this study necessitates a singular snapshot or a series of snapshots representative of events over an extended timeframe (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:212). Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies can be applied in a research study (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:212). For this study, a cross-sectional approach was used from 29 July to 2 August 2024. Such studies involve collecting data from a specific sample over a period to answer research questions (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020:112).

1.7.2 Research design

This section outlines the qualitative methods used to assess the study's trustworthiness on "the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa." Lincoln and Guba (1986:73–84) suggest four criteria to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Thus, these criteria are essential in establishing methodological rigour in qualitative studies to ensure the findings are valid and reliable.

The table below provides a summary of the research design as well as elements applicable to the study.

Table 1: Summary of the research design elements (adapted from Yin, 2011)

Component	Description
Topic	The Influence of Digital Radio on the Brand Equity of Commercial Radio Stations in South Africa. Theory underpinning the study: The Uses and Gratification Theory
Problem Statement	Commercial radio stations in South Africa continue to face challenges in maintaining relevance and audience engagement due to digital media platforms and streaming services (Lumley, 2023). To thrive in the digital age, radio stations must develop different approaches to build brand equity and leverage it to attract and retain listeners, generate revenue, and ensure long-term sustainability (Mostert, 2018:32). South African commercial radio stations must leverage digital radio to build brand equity and audience engagement for long-term success in a competitive digital media landscape.
Research Objectives	1. Analyse the different digital radio platforms available to South African South Africa. 2. To determine how radio listeners in South Africa are engaging with digital content. 3. To determine what influences listeners' choice of platforms and engagement with digital radio content. 4. To compare brand equity metrics of South African commercial music radio stations before and after adopting digital radio strategies.
Unit of observation	Listeners of South African radio stations between the ages of 18 and 34.
Method	▪ Qualitative research ▪ Use of interview protocol ▪ In-depth interviews to gain a better understanding of listeners' experiences. ▪ Thematic analysis.

1.8 Anticipated Contributions of the Research

1.8.1 Theoretical Contribution

This research aims to expand the body of knowledge on the relationship between digital radio and brand equity. Within the South African context, this study will contribute to a broader understanding of how digital radio influences the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa. It seeks to fill the gap in the existing academic literature by

providing insights on the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa.

1.8.2 Practical Implications

Beyond its academic value, this research holds practical significance for the commercial radio industry in South Africa. The study offers actionable insights for radio stations to optimise their digital strategies by identifying the key factors influencing brand equity. The findings can inform platform selection, content creation, audience engagement, and revenue generation decisions.

1.8.3 Proposed Chapter Outline

Table 2 shows the arrangement of chapters, and the primary research method used.

Table 1: Arrangement of chapters and research methods

(Table adapted from du Toit, 2022:6)

Chapter	Description	Method
Chapter 1: Introduction	- Background to the study - Rationale - Problem statement - Research objectives	Introduction
Chapter 2: Literature review	- The Uses and Gratifications Theory - The Evolution of Radio Broadcasting - Historical Context of Commercial Radio Stations - Key Concepts	Literature review
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	Methodology	Contextual discussion
Chapter 4: Discussions of results	Data analysis	Thematic analysis
Chapter 5: Findings, recommendations, and conclusion	Key insights and recommendations.	Findings, recommendations, and conclusion

1.9 Summary

This chapter offers an in-depth understanding of the significance of digital radio and how this occurrence continues to change how audio content is consumed. To better understand previous literature on the research problem, critical seminal theories are adapted to the framework of uses and gratifications theory (UGT). Thus, the research follows a qualitative data collection approach through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. The next chapter outlines literature relevant to the aim and objectives of this.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature provides a detailed outline of academic work as it relates to the aim and objectives of the research to provide a golden thread. The literature review is presented from a broad to a narrow perspective, solidifying the groundwork for the following chapters. The first section of the chapter forms the basis for understanding the uses and gratifications theory, which seeks to explore individuals' rationale for satisfying their needs. The study considers brand equity, which is established through characteristics, including awareness, association, and loyalty. This study explores the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial stations in South Africa, specifically examining how awareness, association, and loyalty are impacted by the transition to digital platforms. The historical context of commercial radio stations is given to build on the understanding of how radio continues to evolve, thus providing insights into the influence of digital on radio.

2.2 The Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) investigates the individuals' motivations to satisfy individual needs. It argues that past experiences shape individuals' motivations. This theory is grounded as a functional approach in examining the impact of individuals' varied media preferences (Rubin, 2002:525-548). This will be achieved qualitatively by conducting in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to explore participants' media consumption habits, preferences, and perceptions of digital radio's impact on brand equity. Personal attributes, therefore, play an essential role in influencing one's media consumption habits. Key to the principle of UGT is that individuals engage with media to satisfy a diverse array of wants (Ruggiero, 2000:10). Vinney (2024) corroborates the assertion that UGT is based on the premise that individuals make decisions to use radio stations to obtain a particular benefit as a result of their choices. People may seek information, entertainment, social interaction, or even escape from reality through media consumption (Falgoust, Winterlind, Moon, Parker, Zinzow & Madathil, 2022:1).

UGT can be contrasted with the magic bullet theory (IfeKristi & Adelabu, 2020:88), which explains the influence of media content on the audience, describing the audience as passive receivers of information instead of active participants. Tomaselli and Tomaselli (2022:105) argue that there continues to be a shift towards the "active audience" idea. This perspective suggests that media audiences are not passive recipients of information but actively interpret messages based on their social, class, and individual experiences.

Glo (2023:1) highlights vital assumptions of the uses and gratifications theory as the uses and linking the requirements and media preferences of audience members directly to them in the context of mass communication, which suggests that the requirements of individuals have a considerable influence Glo (2023:1). This approach differs from prior theoretical perspectives by considering audiences as active participants in media consumption rather than passive recipients of information. The uses and gratifications approach focuses on understanding how individuals use and consume media. UGT is relevant to the brand equity of commercial radio stations as it helps explain why and how listeners engage with radio platforms, whether traditional FM or digital, based on their needs. In contrast, classic media effects theories primarily examine the impact of media on individuals and assume that audiences are uniform. Gassner (2007:127) suggests that audiences are more discerning individuals who actively engage with media messages and possess specific information based on their social experiences and cultural resources. These factors influence how they understand communications that have multiple meanings.

Lu and Lin (2022:2) describe one of the core tenets of the uses and gratifications theory as fulfilling various social and psychological needs and increasing a sense of belonging. Egede and Chuks-Nwosu (2013:202) further add that audiences actively choose media platforms that best align with their needs to fulfil particular gratifications.

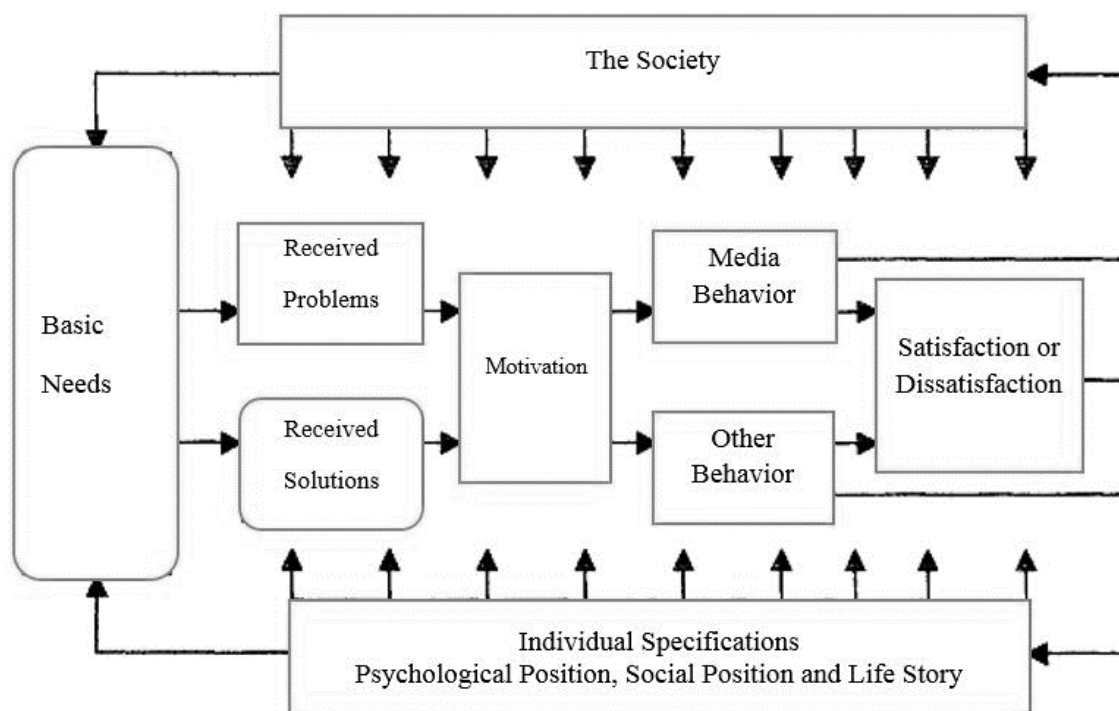


Figure 1: Uses and gratifications paradigm (reproduced from Kuyucu, 2015:294)

The uses and gratifications theory relates to cognitive requirements associated with acquiring knowledge and information and gaining insights into the audience's social surroundings, investigation, and curiosity. The significance here is that listeners select specific media based on their need for knowledge and facts, as these outlets are renowned for their commitment to disseminating accurate information (Kasirye, 2022:1). Listeners may, for example, tune into SAFM or Talk Radio 702 to stay abreast of the latest current affairs. The key difference between traditional radio and digital radio in this context lies in accessibility, interactivity, and content personalisation. Traditional radio is often valued for its credibility, real-time broadcasting, and broad audience reach, making it a trusted source for news, music, and entertainment (Kasirye, 2022:1). In contrast, digital radio offers on-demand content, niche programming, and interactive engagement.

Hossain (2019:18) indicates that the audience frequently seeks to fulfil specific personal and social requirements, including the pursuit of information, social engagement, the expression of freedom, enjoyment, a sense of social presence and belongingness, and the establishment of social identity, which is influenced by the uses and gratifications theory.

It then becomes evident that gaining insights into the motivations behind the audience shift from conventional to digital radio can influence South African commercial radio stations' approach in formulating programming and brand strategies. The theory is used by Egede and Chuks-Nwosu (2013:202) to describe the concerted effort by audiences to choose media to satisfy their respective needs. Therefore, this study will understand digital radio's influence on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa.

2.3 Radio

Throughout history, radio has been used as a powerful source for reaching audiences (Krause & Fletcher, 2023:1). Radio's ability to reach listeners from different geographical and social limitations made it a powerful tool for mass communication and social discourse (Backhause, 2020:4648). Globally, radio continues to be a popular form of media for disseminating information (United Nations, 2022). To illustrate the significance of radio in reaching a broad audience, Deloitte (2018) indicates that over 3 billion people listen to traditional radio weekly. In South Africa, 26.4 million people listen to the radio (The Broadcast Research Council of South Africa, 2023).

Globally, radio continues to be a popular means of distributing information (United Nations, 2022). It connects individuals across geographical, cultural, and political divides

(Watson, 2024). Over the years, radio has also been used to foster help in different communities (The International Federation of Redcross and Red Crescent Societies) (2024). Deloitte (2018) suggests that approximately 3 billion people listen to traditional radio weekly. However, the increasing nature of the digital landscape continues to have an impact on environmental, societal, and organisational levels (Kraus, Jones, Kailer, Weinmann, Chaparro-Banegas & Roig-Tierno, 2021:1). These changes can be seen in how businesses interact with their customers, how communities are formed and engaged online, and how political discussions are shaped and influenced through digital platforms (Appel, Grewal, Hadi & Stephen, 2020:79). The need for digital transformation has changed from being a technological opportunity to a technology that addresses the growing needs of organisations and societies at large (Kraus *et al.*, 2021:2).

In terms of content creation, the influence of the digital landscape has had a tremendous impact on how content is developed, consumed, and distributed (Udoudom & Nwokeocha, 2023:75). Furthermore, this has fostered various content platforms (Wilding, Fray, Molitorisz & McKewon, 2018:12-18). Multiple means of broadcasting have been established over the years, including “Digital Audio Broadcasting” as well as “Digital Video Broadcasting - Terrestrial” (Hirschmeier *et al.*, 2019:5018). While the radio broadcasting industry is going through significant digital change, limited research has been conducted on the impact of “Digital Audio Broadcasting” and “Digital Video Broadcasting” on the effects of listener attitudes and how this can affect the wider industry (Hirschmeier *et al.*, 2019:5018).

2.4 The Evolution of Radio Broadcasting

The advent of radio broadcasting can be dated back to the late 19th century, which saw the emergence of wireless telegraphy. During the late 1800s, innovators and scientists achieved notable advancements, establishing the basis for developing radio transmission (Ajisafe, 2023:38). The analogue era was characterised by the dominance of AM and FM radio, the golden age of radio broadcasting. This form of broadcasting gained widespread popularity as a mass medium during the early twentieth century. The primary transmission technology used was AM (Amplitude Modulation) radio, which involved the modulation of audio signals onto carrier waves. It facilitated the dissemination of vocal, musical, and other auditory content to a substantial audience (Apuke, 2017:28).

The SABC dominates the radio industry, primarily due to its African Language Stations (ALS) and Metro FM. The SABC asserts that it holds a 73.2% portion of the radio market. At the same time, the remaining share is allocated to commercial stations that emerged

in the market after 1994, when the SABC's monopoly ended. Each radio station is individually licenced by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), and each licence specifies a specific amount of time that must be dedicated daily to news and current affairs, among other things (SANEF, 2020:26).

The way individuals consume on-demand content is no longer dependent on schedules, which contributes to how radio broadcasting is evolving (Laor, 2022:25). Part of this transformation is the introduction of managing data mainly in the analysis of digital audiences, which plays an essential role in determining the success of radio stations (Fernández-Sande & Rodríguez-Pallares, 2022:1).

The radio broadcasting industry is influenced to innovate and develop processes to meet the needs of listeners and advertisers while also facing competition in the digital ecosystem (Fernández-Sande & Rodríguez-Pallares, 2022:3). Hirschmeier *et al.* (2019:5017) concur that radio stations need to enhance their service offering to meet the demands of their listeners and advertisers. Radio stations respond to digital transformation by forming partnerships with other media houses to distribute their content utilising simulcast broadcasts (Hirschmeier *et al.*, 2019:5017). Dhiman (2023:2) adds that the radio industry has seen substantial changes with the advent of the digital age.

The industry is currently challenging established ideas and reinventing the methods used to create content (Kong (2024:223-224). A recent partnership between 947, Rise FM and Vuma FM is an example of how radio stations formed a partnership by syndicating a radio programme called Marawa Sports Worldwide, which will be broadcast to Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Kwa-Zulu Natal as well as on digital platforms (Primedia Broadcasting, 2023).

Zhang (2021:102) posits that both new and conventional media have significantly extended communication platforms and improved the influence of communication. New media can use mobile Internet technology and distribute content in tandem, employing various platforms that provide a seamless and interactive approach to reaching audiences (Zhang, 2021:103). O'Sullivan and Fortunati (2021:43) indicate that this form of media alters how information is shared; furthermore, broadcasters are no longer the sole creators of content, highlighting the significance of interactivity. Wang (2021:458) highlights the importance of traditional media's role in allocating resources to ensure competitiveness in the digital age, which can be accomplished using growing talent geared towards new media.

2.5 Historical Context of Commercial Radio Stations

The global history of commercial radio broadcasting is extensive. Following World I, several privately owned radio stations were established, using technologies created during the conflict (Gamede, 2020:32). Radio has changed significantly, evolving from a challenging and experimental medium into a mobile and modern format. This transformation paved the way for new technologies such as television and cellphones. Within four years after the first KDKA broadcast, 600 stations were already in the United States. KDKA is a radio station that has been granted a licence to operate in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The call letters "KDKA" were allocated from a list maintained to assign identification for ships and marine shore stations, which were the sole regular services under official authorisation by the Federal Government at that time. The call letters "KDKA" were chosen since they were the next available option on the roster (CBS, 2012).

The swift increase in popularity of radio had a significant role in shaping its character by offering syndicated news, sports, and music. For many people, radio was a dependable method to acquire information on national and global occurrences (Federal Communications Commission, 2023).

Retailers were among the first to implement radio's economic potential by airing advertisements for their products to their customers, frequently through their radio stations (Phiri, 2022:10). This marked the inaugural occasion when radio demonstrated its capacity for commercial viability (Gamede, 2020:32). While radio stations could advertise their products, they were not designed in a way that modern listeners could recognise. Moreover, there was no mention of price and a solid call to action (Sterling & Kittross, 2002). Sterling and Kittross (2002:124) assert that the influence of radio on society was significant, leading to the rapid acceptance of advertising on radio shows. In collaboration with advertising agencies, radio stations began creating radio shows titled after what they were promoting, as is widely observed today. The Primedia Broadcasting radio station, 947, receives sponsorship from many companies, including CTM (Primedia Plus). Although advertisements were permitted, they were limited to airing only during daylight hours. However, due to the escalating economic strain of the Great Depression in the 1930s, radio stations started seeking alternative sources of income, leading to the integration of advertising as a regular component of the radio soundscape (Sterling & Kittross, 2002).

Commercial radio stations are not state-owned and receive most funding from selling airtime and advertisements (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2016). The operations of commercial radio stations thus lie in the content and programming motivated by profit (Gamede, 2020:32).

The present media environment in South Africa can be classified into three tiers: public media, commercial media, and community media (Wasserman, 2020:453). A small number of sizable conglomerates dominate the commercial media sector in South Africa (Wasserman, 2020:454). One of the leading players is Naspers, which controls Media24 and oversees various newspapers, magazines, and online news platforms (Wasserman, 2020:454-455). Naspers also dominates the paid television market through its digital subscription service, Multichoice. Another key player is Independent Media, which publishes various publications across South Africa. Caxton Publishers is particularly active in the local commercial community newspaper publishing sector. Lastly, Arena Holdings owns significant newspaper titles and broadcast channels (Angelopulo & Potgieter, 2013:304). As with many industries, radio does not function without regulatory bodies. Several regulatory agencies were established during the transition to democracy. The entities involved in regulating media in South Africa are the Independent Communications Authority, responsible for imposing restrictions on local content on commercial and public television and radio stations; the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA), which deals with complaints related to potential breaches of the broadcasting code of conduct; and the Press Council, which performs a similar role for print media (Thloeloe, 2012).

2.6 Digital Transformation's Influence on Radio

The digital revolution presented significant changes in the radio industry (African Union, 2023). This transformation included the shift from analogue to digital transmission, allowing for more evident sound quality and the ability to transmit more data over the same bandwidth (Benike, 2022:170). Technological advancement has shifted from analogue broadcasting, marked by limited frequency range, subpar audio and visual quality, challenges in accessing and editing tapes, and signal disruptions, to digital terrestrial transmission. This newer form of broadcasting provides enhanced transmission quality, cost-effective maintenance, reduced energy consumption, and an improved viewing experience for the audience (Mocheki, 2021:28-29).

Digital radio brought about the rise of internet radio stations and podcasts, providing listeners with even more options for entertainment and information (Denevan, 2014:5). The digital revolution also led to the development of digital audio broadcasting (DAB) and HD radio, further transforming the way people consume radio content. Kuyucu (2021:285) adds that internet broadcasting has made disseminating radio programmes through various online platforms easier.

From an African context, radio continues to be the dominant form of media (Brooke, 2024:1). Recent studies indicate that 68% of Africans get their news from the radio daily. On the other hand, only 53% of Africans get their news from television, and 37% of Africans report getting their news from the internet (Malophane, 2022). Another study revealed that 80% of South Africans engage in weekly radio consumption, making it the primary medium for reaching the greatest African audiences in a country where digital media is highly popular (Bosch, 2022). The digital change throughout the continent is prompting a necessary transformation in how radio operates and delivers content to its listeners (Esipisu & Kariithi, 2007:21).

Technological obstacles

Broadcasters face new technological problems in the digital age. Radio station management must allocate resources to infrastructure, equipment, and digital platforms to ensure smooth delivery and dissemination of content. Staying abreast of the latest trends and industry advancements is essential for broadcasters to keep pace with adopting innovative technologies and platforms.

Furthermore, broadcasters must guarantee that their material is compatible with a wide range of devices, platforms, and streaming services to reach a broad audience (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2021).

Changing consumer expectations

In the digital age, consumers have developed a strong desire for information that specifically caters to their interests and tastes. They desire a customised experience that specifically caters to their interests and provides them with complete control over their content consumption. Moreover, listeners aim to actively engage with the content they consume rather than passively absorb it (Lutkenhaus, Jansz & Bouman, 2019:3).

Sustainability and social responsibility

While social responsibility and sustainability may not be a novel challenge, radio stations are expected to have a sense of global awareness of environmental and social issues. Sustainable practices and demonstrate social responsibility. Implementing energy-efficient broadcasting technology, reducing waste, and minimising the environmental impact of operations are all instances of sustainability initiatives. Environmental concerns can be communicated to radio listeners through programming and public service announcements (May, Cheney & Roper, 2007). Notwithstanding these obstacles, the prospective advantages of new media are unquestionable.

Radio stations may endure and prosper in the 21st century by deliberately adopting and using this digital toolkit. Enhanced audience involvement, a worldwide scope, and inventive sources of income all consolidate radio's position in the developing media landscape. New media provides radio a potent means to engage with a broader audience, establish a devoted community, and ensure its longevity as a pertinent and dynamic source of information and entertainment.

2.7 Key Concepts

2.7.1 Brand Equity

The study of brand equity has been one of the primary focus areas in marketing research (Marketing Science Institute, 2022).

Brand equity represents the financial value that has been allocated towards establishing and developing a brand. It occurs when a consumer has developed a sense of familiarity with the brand, resulting in a favourable association in the mind of the consumer (Keller, 1993:1).

Brand equity has been considered from two main perspectives, namely from an organisational and customer perspective. From an organisational perspective, the brand is regarded as an asset, highlighting the potential financial advantages it brings to the organisation (Nath & Bawa 2011:135). Customer-based brand equity refers to the unique impact of brand awareness on consumer reactions to the brand's marketing efforts (Keller, 1993:1). Positive customer-based brand equity refers to when consumers respond more favourably to a specific aspect of a brand's marketing mix compared to a similar aspect used by a fictional or unidentified version of the product or service (Vukasović, 2022:305).

In essence, an accurate measure of the power lies in consumers' perceptions, emotions, and behaviours towards the brand (Rahmanian, 2020:4-6). When evaluating the application of brand equity to commercial radio stations, this factor holds significant importance. For example, the ability of a radio station to connect with its audience on a deeper level can lead to increased brand loyalty and word-of-mouth promotion. By leveraging the emotional connections formed through engaging content, radio stations can build a strong brand identity that resonates with listeners. This, in turn, can drive revenue growth and solidify the station's position in the market. Ultimately, the digitalization of radio transmission has opened new opportunities for stations to enhance their brand equity and reach a broader audience in today's digital age (Rahmanian, 2020: 4-6).

Aaker (1996) brand equity model

Aaker's (1996) brand equity model, illustrated in Figure 2.2, is widely recognised as the fundamental framework for brand equity research. It points out that brand equity is established through various characteristics: loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, brand, and association. The brand's performance on these dimensions drives customers to build a holistic and intangible assessment of brand equity. Aaker's brand equity model subsequently delivers value to the consumer and the enterprise in the specified manner. Aaker's model pioneered brand equity and paved the way for further research in this area (Smith, Gradojevic & Irwin, 2007:105).

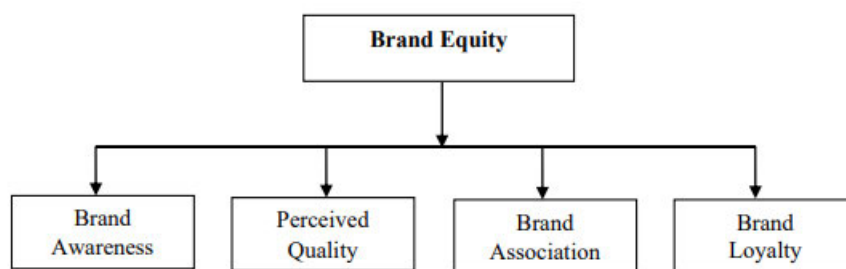


Figure 2: Aaker's Brand Equity Model (Gupta & Adil, 2014:109)

2.7.2 Brand Awareness

As a dimension of brand equity, brand awareness refers to the extent to which consumers can accurately recognise or recall a brand with enough detail to make a purchase (Aulia & Briliana, 2017:17). Enhancing brand recognition enhances the probability that the brand will be included in the consideration set, which consists of a small number of brands that are seriously considered for purchase. It impacts the creation and robustness of the connections that constitute the brand's image, encompassing brand recognition and

brand recall performance (Keller, 2008:72). With the increasing use of digital media, commercial radio stations can take advantage of online platforms to further promote their brand and increase their listenership (Hirschmeier *et al.*, 2019:5017-5020).

2.7.3 Brand Association

Aaker (1991) proposes that brand equity combines brand loyalty, brand associations, brand awareness and perceived quality. Brand associations refer to elements people can remember and connect to a brand, ultimately shaping the company's image. It is an information-gathering tool for brand differentiation and extension (Van Osselaer, Stijn & Janiszewski, 2001:202-223). Brand association is a crucial factor that motivates people to purchase a brand's products and fosters brand loyalty by serving as a foundation for their buying decisions (Chen & Qin, 2021:3216). Brand associations are divided into three groups: brand characteristics, advantages, and feelings (Keller, 1993). Brand attributes refer to specific product or service characteristics that a buyer sees as valuable and are associated with their intention to purchase (Keller, 1993). Given the dynamic nature of the broadcasting industry, radio stations need to take advantage of non-product associations and formulate a brand persona with which stations can be associated (Roux & Maree, 2022:2).

The critical focus of Keller's brand equity model is to build strong, favourable, and unique associations in the minds of consumers (Keller, 1993:2). By creating memorable experiences and content that align with their target audience's values and preferences, radio stations can differentiate themselves from competitors and establish a loyal following. This emotional connection can drive listener engagement, increase listener retention, and boost the overall success of radio stations in the market (Denevan, 2014:15). As technology continues to evolve, radio stations must adapt and innovate to stay relevant and maintain their brand equity in a rapidly changing media landscape (Ajisafe, 2023:42).

2.7.4 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty continues to be widely studied, indicating its significance in the marketing literature (Alizadeh & Kashan, 2022:597). While various definitions exist for brand loyalty, Oliver (1980:460-469) presented one of the best definitions of brand loyalty as the enduring attitude of consumers and customers to continue purchasing a product or service in the future. Regarding commercial radio stations, brand loyalty is fostered by a consistent and positive listening experience that builds trust, emotional connection, and a preference for the station over competitors (Yeo *et al.*, 2018:754-758).

2.7.5 Radio Advertising

Commercial radio stations in South Africa are progressively using digital platforms such as digital audio broadcasting (DAB+) and online streaming, leading to a digital transformation of the radio environment (Qocha, 2021). Although traditional FM radio advertising continues to be a significant source of revenue, it is vital to recognise the impact of digital radio on advertising strategy in this changing media landscape (Mostert, 2018:4). Over time, radio stations have had to modify their approaches to contend with advancing technology, such as television, which commenced its initial transmission in 1926 (Davis, 2017).

2.8 Summary

This chapter presented a conceptual framework to better understand individuals' motivations to satisfy their needs. Employing the uses and gratifications theory, the literature review outlined how this framework is linked to media consumption. The uses and gratifications theory paradigm (as reproduced from Kuyuku, 2015:294) was included to provide the central tenets of this theory. Given the significance of this study, the concept of radio was discussed, providing digital transformation's influence on the platform. Key concepts were also discussed to get a better perspective of the influence of digital radio on commercial radio stations' brand equity. The next chapter outlines the research methodology as applicable to this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter systematically provides critical considerations related to the study's philosophical foundation. By using Saunders *et al.* (2019:102) research onion, this section offers the fundamental research paradigm for the study. This section will detail the research design to further highlight the significance of the study as well as the objectives of the research. To conclude the research design, the methodological choice of the research and time horizons are discussed. A summary of the methodologies will be presented to establish the trustworthiness of qualitative data.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Varying aspects of science require clarifying fundamental concepts essential to the study (Ylönen & Aven, 2023:581). As a branch of metaphysics, ontology seeks to form an understanding of the nature of reality and how things exist in the world (Lawson, 2004:1–3). Key to this study is developing an understanding of how digital radio influences the perception of brand equity towards commercial radio stations in South Africa, which is at the centre of what ontology investigates. From a philosophical perspective, ontology is viewed as the study of existence and being (Kant, 2014:69). Yin (2011:311) opines that the existence of multiple realities is a central theme in ontology, as it explores the numerous ways in which individuals perceive and interpret the world around them. Such perceptions shape how individuals interact and make sense of their environment, including their attitudes towards brands and products. The ontological approach transcends the specifics of individual disciplines and asks: What truly constitutes reality, and how do the various entities within it relate to each other? Scholars such as Poli and Seibt (2010:395-415) placed ontology at the heart of philosophical inquiry, viewing it as the foundation upon which all other knowledge is built. Ylönen and Aven (2023:581) posit that ontology is concerned with fundamental categories in the world and how they relate to each other, thus focusing on the essence of reality and the essential nature of being. In the context of this research study, ontology will guide the exploration of how digital radio has impacted the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa.

The epistemological stance refers to the researcher's beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how it can be obtained (Yin, 2011:309). Couper (2020:275), on the other hand, views epistemology as the study of knowledge, asking questions such as “what is knowledge?” and “how do we know something?” Epistemology is a philosophy that focuses on the nature and theory of knowledge (Sol & Heng, 2022:80). It looks at how knowledge is obtained, verified, and shared. Epistemology thus explores the fundamental

questions regarding the nature of knowledge and how we can have certainty of what we know (Kivunja, 2017:25). Yin (2016:335) adds that epistemology plays an essential role in guiding the research process. Epistemology influences the research process by influencing the process of data collection and interpretation. To ensure that the findings are valid and reliable, epistemology takes on a more critical analysis of the sources and methodologies. Epistemology encourages researchers to develop an open mindset and question their assumptions when undertaking a study. Following this research approach may also lead to a better in-depth understanding of the world around them.

To understand how digital radio influences the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa, this study applies an interpretivist approach. Interpretivism, within the context of research, can be used to better understand how digital radio shapes listeners' perceptions towards digital radio. Given this study, epistemology will focus on the complex relationship between different facets of digital radio and brand equity to better understand the South African media landscape. Pervin and Mokhtar (2022:420) add that interpretivism as an approach considers reality as subjective, with personal experiences playing a significant role. Many scholars, including Lim (2013:12), believe that consumer behaviour is somewhat nuanced and recognise the subjective nature of how listeners listen to radio. By taking the interpretivist approach, researchers can formulate a better understanding of the listening habits of audiences. This study will take an approach that shows commitment to the sentiments of the audience and their listening patterns.

For this reason, an interpretivist approach is applied to establish different ways in which listeners perceive different radio stations and the content that the different radio stations curate. The study thus aims to establish how audience attitudes and preferences influence key facets of brand equity (awareness, association, and loyalty). This understanding contributes to the overall brand value of commercial stations.

3.3 Research Design

While various definitions exist, Gemma (2018:8) suggests that interpretivism is a type of research method in which a phenomenon is analysed by looking at the values and perceptions of the world around them. Personal feelings influence the concept of interpretivism. Omodan (2022:77) adds that interpretivism considers the environment and one's worldview and considerably influences reality. This position suggests that people's lived experiences indicate the universality of truth (Putnam & Banghart, 2017:7), suggesting that such lived experiences contribute to their differing truths. It considers the diverse ways in which individuals view the world. For researchers, interpretivism fosters

a methodological approach to better understand the behaviour of individuals and the environments in which they live. It challenges scholars to examine the different methods of interpreting their surroundings. Having this knowledge equips researchers with a better understanding of human experience. This research approach thus encourages the ideology that truth exists in different facets and is formed using subjective experiences. Chowdhury (2014:432-433) argues that approaching research from an interpretive approach can lead to a deeper knowledge of the influences that impact how we view the world. Using the ontological approach to this study will provide more information and analysis on the audiences' perspectives on radio listening and content that is appealing to them. We will also be able to understand what motivates radio listeners to listen to a particular radio station. This approach considers the changing nature of the media landscape and how this impacts the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa.

Du Plooy *et al.* (2021:31) and Biedenbach and Jacobson (2016:140) describe axiology as pivotal in understanding how values we hold influence our decision-making. Hoian (2019:66), on the other hand, highlights the importance of ethical considerations in forming judgements. The axiological position outlines firsthand experiences, which enables researchers to understand what motivates individuals to make certain decisions (Lim, 2023:13). Beliefs and values give the researcher a different understanding of individual decision-making. From the content of commercial stations, having this knowledge is instrumental in making programming decisions aligned with the listeners.

3.4 Research Methodology

3.4.1 Population and Sampling

Purposive sampling intentionally selects participants based on characteristics appropriate to the study (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:161). Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan and Hoagwood (2015:1-3) define purposive sampling as a widely used method in qualitative studies. One of the critical benefits of purposive sampling is its effectiveness when researchers have limited resources. It provides richer data on the research topic. Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, Shearer, Walkem, Young, Bywaters, and Walker (2020:654) collectively describe purposive sampling as the deliberate sampling of participants to fulfil the study's objectives.

Purposive sampling facilitates a more directed approach in the selection of participants. This kind of sampling adds more relevance and meaning to the data collected. When developing a research topic, factors such as age, geographical location and the station

participants listen to will be used to ensure that the sample is representative of the larger population. This form of sampling enables researchers to select participants who can provide valuable information on the study (Obilor, 2023:1). One of the critical objectives of this form of sampling is to collect rich data that is representative of the targeted audience. Participants with different experiences will add more value to the study. Any potential biases during data collection will be addressed.

Adults between the ages of 18 and 34 were selected to take part in the study. Such participants will be chosen using purposive sampling. This is to ensure that different perspectives are included in the study. Participants aged 18 to 34 will be selected as they have been exposed to digital and traditional radio. The proposed participants are regarded as more interested in digital media (Statista, 2024). This age group also bridges the gap between individuals who have grown up listening to digital radio and are attuned to social media platforms. Using social media, participants will be identified and recruited by adopting organic engagement strategies. By posting on professional networks such as LinkedIn, the researcher was able to gain access to a vast network of participants. Jones, Wilson-Keates and Melrose (2023:5) posit that social media is considered a more cost-effective form of recruitment for researchers. It is widely used and can allow researchers to reach participants from broader geographical areas (Darko, Kleib & Olson, 2022:1). To ensure that research findings are representative of the wider population, diverse perspectives on radio consumption will be incorporated. Adding diversity to the research design is vital in accomplishing sound research output (Medical Research Council 2022:3). Diversity can add credibility to the study. Swartz, Palermo, Masur and Aberg (2019:S32) indicate that diversity can enhance the credibility of research findings by increasing the depth of participants' lived experiences. Participants will also be drawn from various provinces in South Africa for this study. Selecting participants from different South African provinces can ensure the study covers South African radio listeners' in-depth experience. This selection was accomplished by screening participants to ensure representation of different South African provinces.

To ensure the relevancy of the research to the South African radio industry, listeners who actively listen to South Africa radio stations will be selected. This is to ensure that a complete picture of radio patterns is captured.

The engagement of participants with digital radio will be evaluated through a series of preliminary screening questions. An assessment will be made on existing dimensions of engagement, which aims to establish the listeners' radio consumption frequency,

preferred digital platforms and how participants interact with digital radio content. Preliminary questions were formulated to evaluate participants' engagement with digital radio. These questions gathered participants' interactions with digital content, listening habits and platform preferences. This assessment collected data on how frequently participants consume digital content and preferred platforms. The engagement with digital platforms provided by digital radio stations were also investigated.

3.5 Research instrument

Data collection instruments play a significant role in the collection of data participants (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:11). Such instruments include surveys, interviews, observations, or physiological measurements (Khan, Raman, Sambamoorthy & Prashanth, 2023:2). For this study, in-depth interviews will be conducted with a sample of 12 participants (between the ages of 18 and 34) who listen to South African radio stations. Such interviews will focus on the participants' listening habits and preferences. The interview data will provide valuable insights into listeners' perceptions of the brand equity of commercial radio stations in the context of digital radio. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to gain deep insights from participants.

Semi-structured interviews provide more in-depth information that can add value to the research study. Despite this advantage, semi-structured interviews do come with some limitations. Semi-structured interviews can be a time-consuming and resource-intensive exercise (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2018:4). Semi-structured interviews will be used as they are more appropriate for this study. The choice of semi-structured interviews will yield a richer understanding of the research topic. Applying this form of research instrument can assist in better understanding how digital radio affects the brand equity of radio stations. Its use is also beneficial as it will better understand how listeners experience digital radio. By allowing participants to articulate their thoughts in their own words, we can gain valuable insights into how digital radio impacts the brand equity of commercial radio stations and listeners' overall perceptions of radio stations.

The tables below provide a summary of the screening and main research questions. Research questions are formulated to understand how digital radio influences the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa.

Table 3: Screening and main research questions

Background		
1.	Please state your name and surname.	
2.	What is your age?	
3.	In which country do you currently live in?	
4.	How do you primarily listen to radio?	FM/AM channels, digital radio, or both?

What are the different types of digital radio services available to South African listeners?

1.	Have you heard of the term "digital radio"?	Yes/No
2.	If so, can you tell me in your own words what you understand digital radio to be?	
3.	Do you currently use any apps or platforms for listening to the radio beyond traditional radio broadcasts?	Yes/No
4.	If yes, can you name some of the platforms you've used?	
5.	How did you first hear about these platforms?	
6.	Compared to traditional radio, do you see any advantages to using digital radio platforms?	
7.	Compared to traditional radio, do you see any disadvantages to using digital radio platforms?	
8.	If you haven't used digital radio platforms, what are some reasons why you haven't tried them?	

How are South African radio listeners engaging with digital content?

9.	Beyond just listening to live radio broadcasts on digital platforms, do you engage with any additional content offered by your favourite stations?	Yes/No
10.	If you do, what types of digital content do you find most appealing?	
11.	Why do you choose to engage with this type of content?	
12.	How often do you typically access a radio station's digital content outside of listening to the live broadcast?	
13.	Do you access this content directly through the radio station's app, website, or social media platforms?	
14.	How does your digital content engagement (podcasts, social media) connect with your traditional radio listening habits?	

What factors influence their choice of platforms and engagement with digital radio content?

15.	What factors influence your decision to engage with a radio station's digital content?	
16.	Have you ever discovered new music or artists through a radio station's digital content?	Yes/No
17.	If yes, how did this digital content influence your music exploration?	
18.	When choosing how to listen to the radio, what factors influence your decision to use a specific platform (traditional radio vs. digital radio app)?	
19.	Have you ever switched between traditional radio and digital radio platforms for listening to the same station? Why or why not?	
20.	What features or functionalities offered by a particular digital platform make it appealing to you?	
21.	Once you've chosen a platform, how do you typically decide what digital radio content to engage with?	
22.	Do you primarily listen to live radio broadcasts on the platform, or do you explore additional content like podcasts or archived shows?	
23.	What factors influence your decision to listen to a specific podcast or other digital radio content?	
24.	How actively do you engage with the digital radio platform itself?	
25.	Do you find yourself spending more time listening to the radio overall since using digital platforms? Why or why not?	
26.	In your opinion, what are some of the biggest advantages and disadvantages of consuming radio content through digital platforms?	

How has the adoption of digital radio strategies by South African commercial music radio stations impacted their brand equity metrics?

27.	Thinking back to a few years ago, can you reflect on how your perception of some of your favourite South African commercial music radio stations has changed, if at all?	
28.	Have any specific radio stations stood out to you in terms of their digital presence? If so, why?	
29.	When choosing a radio station to listen to, what factors typically influence your decision?	
30.	Do you find that any stations offer a more engaging experience through their digital platforms compared to others? If yes, why?	
31.	Do you ever engage with the social media platforms or other digital content offered by your favourite radio stations?	

32.	If so, has this digital content (podcasts, social media interactions, etc.) influenced your perception of the station in any way?	
33.	How has the shift to digital radio affected you personally?	

At the core of semi-structured interviews for this study is establishing how digital radio connects and adds value to brand equity. Provision will also be made to understand what drives the audience to listen to a particular radio station over another using open-ended questions. This will be guided by the motivations and preferences of the individual listener (Dursun, 2023:100-112). Lu and Hong (2022:5) suggest that this research approach can enable researchers to better understand radio listeners' thoughts and perceptions. Qualitative research will aid in establishing new perspectives and underlying data. Applying this form of research will enhance the findings of this research.

3.6 Data collection

Interviews are considered one of the valuable ways of gathering rich data from participants (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020:2). As a form of data collection, interviews allow for more in-depth data from participants (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2018:3). Ruslin, Mashuri, Rasak, Alhabsyi and Syam (2022:24) regard interviews as flexible and providing a more detailed analysis into the perspectives of participants. Its adaptability allows the researcher to change the questions based on participant feedback (Saunders *et al.*, 2019: 144). Magaldi and Berler (2020:4825-4830) highlight the significance of flexibility as advantageous for researchers as it can result in more meaningful data.

Using interviews allows researchers to ask additional questions from participants (Dunwoodie, Macaulay & Newman, 2022:865). Ruslin *et al.* (2022:24) add that this data collection can produce rich participant data. The overall purpose of interviews is to aid in unpacking the nuances which may not be evident at the beginning. One of the other benefits of this form of data collection is that it helps to understand better and clarify information provided in the study. Data gathered from this study will be important in the identification and analysis of themes. Due to the exploratory nature of semi-structured interviews, new themes will likely emerge that can be investigated further. It is also worth noting that semi-structured interviews can be structured so that researchers can establish a rapport with participants (McGrath, Palmgren & Liljedahl, 2018:1004). This will create a conducive environment for data collection and allow participants to provide more perspective on the research topic (McGrath *et al.*, 2018:1004). The interview was conducted using a semi-structured format. This form of interview enabled a flexible approach, which allowed the researcher to guide the conversation while also adapting to the participants' responses.

A pre-test was conducted with a similar sample to assess the effectiveness and clarity of the research questions. This test was conducted purposively to assess the recruitment of participants, the use of survey questions and data collection processes (Fraser, Fahlman, Arscott & Guillot, 2018:1-3). The research methods on the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa will thus be formulated to evaluate the efficacy of the research methodology (Simkus, 2023). This pre-test will involve two participants who are representative of the target population to identify any form of ambiguity (Hashim, Mohamad, Lim, Che & Nur, 2022:500). This test will assist in making the necessary changes to the research instrument.

The estimated duration of the interview was 45 minutes, which allowed the participants to provide insights into their experiences and perspectives on digital radio. This duration facilitated in-depth discussions, which ensured that participants provide detailed insights without feeling rushed. The researcher guided the conversation to cover key topics while allowing flexibility for participants to express their thoughts fully.

3.7 Data analysis

Saunders *et al.* (2019:527) describe the saturation point as signifying sufficiency in the collection process. Naeem, Ozuem, Howell & Ranfagn (2024:2) add that saturation is reached at a point where no new data can be collected, which indicates the full exploration of data. Thus, no new themes can emerge from the data set. It is important to note that the point of saturation will not yield the establishment of new information which relates to the research questions (Naeem *et al.*, 2024:1). Saunders (2019:1893) posits that meaningful conclusions can be made at a point of saturation. On the other hand, Fusch and Ness (2015:1408) caution that the researcher's inability to reach this point can negatively affect the reliability and validity of the study.

For this study, 12 participants were included to ensure a more holistic understanding of the research topic. Saturation is, therefore, expected between 8 and 12 participants. Such participants were selected by employing purposive sampling. A thematic analysis was manually applied to analyse the data.

Dawadi (2020:62) describes thematic analysis as a qualitative method for understanding key themes with data sets, which may be nuanced. Naeem *et al.* (2024:2) define this method of analysis as the identification of patterns in qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a method used to establish themes. It follows a methodical yet descriptive form of a

particular data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006:6). Nowell *et al.* (2017:2) consider thematic analysis adaptable to qualitative data analysis. Thematic analysis can be altered to meet the requirements of the study. The application of a thematic analysis can assist researchers in examining and interpreting patterns from the data. Insights that may be as apparent can also be investigated through thematic analysis (Dawadi, 2020:70). Jowsey, Deng and Weller (2021:1) add that thematic analysis can also help explain nuances in the data from the participants. The thematic analysis considers the different perspectives and the lived experience of the participants (Dawadi, 2020:62).

This research followed a six-step thematic analysis cited by Braun and Clarke (2006:16-23), which is a useful approach to conducting this analysis:

1. Become familiar with the data: Interviews for this study were conducted virtually between the researcher and participants. After each interview, the researcher will transcribe all data from participants. The interviewer became familiar with the data by conducting online interviews with participants. This was followed by the transcription of the recorded conversations. This process allowed the interviewer to review and analyse the participants' responses in detail.

2. Generating initial codes: The manually applied a thematic analysis to analyse the data. This approach involved carefully reviewing the interview transcripts and identifying patterns or themes that emerged from the responses. The manual process ensured a thorough analysis of the data, allowing the researcher to derive insights directly from the participants' experiences...

3. Searching for theme: This step involved the analysis of data by identifying patterns in the data and developing themes from the data collected.

4. Reviewing themes: During this phase, the researcher justified all themes to ensure an accurate representation of the data collected from interviews.

5. Defining and naming themes: Specific themes were defined and presented for the analysis.

6. Producing the report: This section involves the final analysis. The analysis needs to provide a logical account of the data, which may include a write-up such as data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006:26).

Naeem *et al.* (2024:3) developed a PRICE model to assist researchers in reaching the saturation point in thematic analysis.

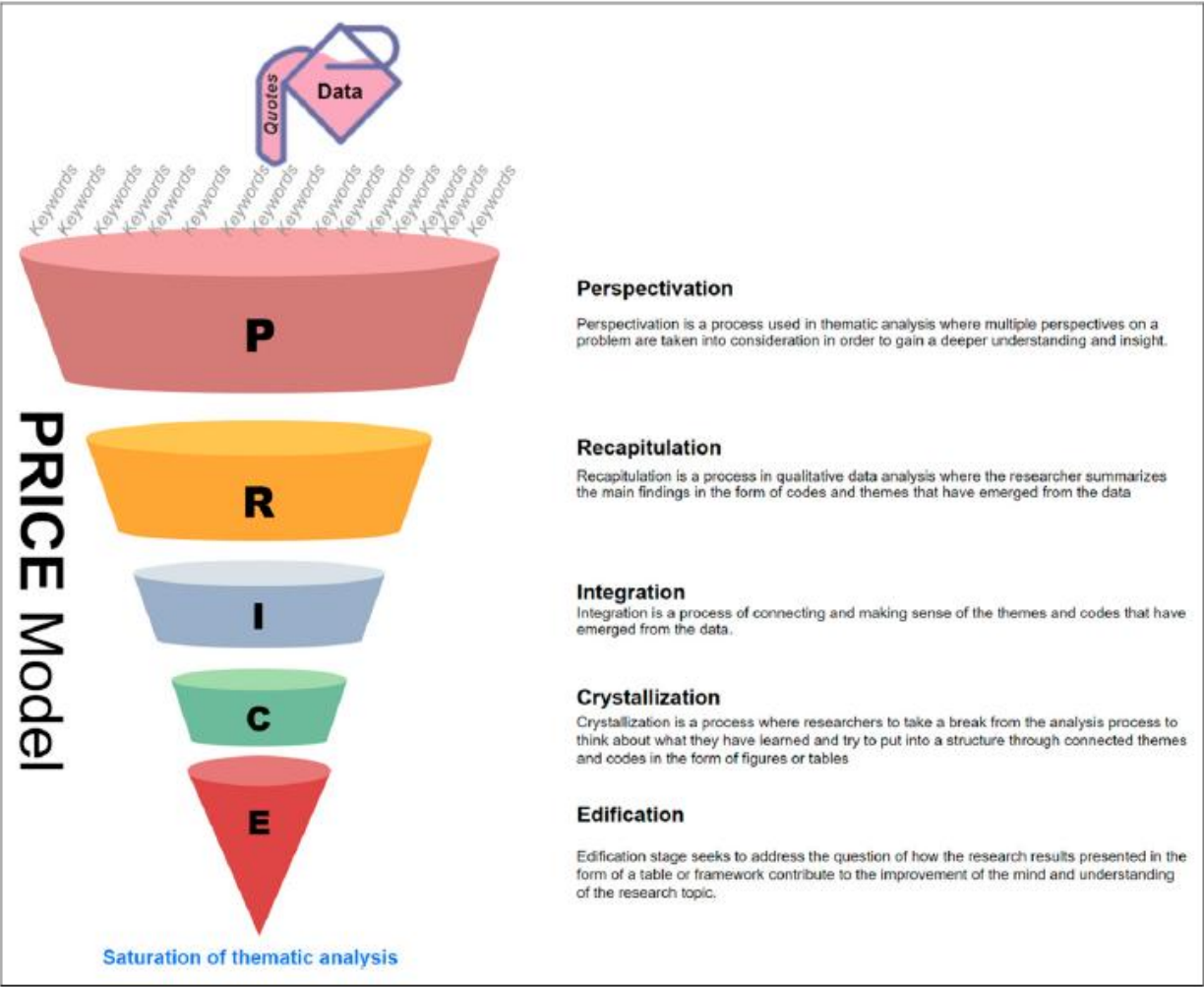


Figure 3: PRICE model to reach saturation (reproduced from Naeem *et al.*, 2024:4).

The PRICE model was applied to ensure saturation in thematic analysis. As the data was analysed, progress was tracked by identifying emerging themes, such as engagement, content preferences, or brand perception. When themes appeared repeatedly across multiple interviews, it indicated repetition, which suggested that a point of saturation about to be reached. This approach helps ensure that all relevant aspects of listeners' views have been captured, giving you a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between digital radio and brand equity.

This study aims to uncover new insights and develop theories from the data. Through understanding digital radio's influence on commercial radio stations' brand equity, thematic analysis will present the findings aligned with participants' perspectives. Rana, Poudel and Chimoriya (2023:11) suggest that the approach to analysis can be a feasible

way to unpack the participants' experience with listening to South African radio. Morgan (2022:2080) compares the inductive and deductive thematic analysis, citing that an inductive approach allows for data to drive the analysis, which may be as apparent in a deductive method.

Braun and Clarke (2006:12) posit that deductive analysis takes a more structured approach to investigating data. While themes in the inductive approach stem from collected data, predetermined patterns in existing literature are used in the deductive approach. A researcher's interest in the subject matter is crucial in the deductive analysis. Naeem *et al.* (2024:2) add that a deductive approach can present less detailed data than inductive analysis. The latter provides a method that offers more open-ended analysis. This is because they emerge from the data without constraints from already-decided themes. Thematic analysis is beneficial when it comes to complex subject matters. An inductive thematic analysis will be applied to allow the findings to be grounded in the data. The researcher began by conducting open-ended interviews with participants, asking them about their experiences with digital radio and how it influenced their perception of the station's brand. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher reviewed the data by reading the responses thoroughly. An inductive approach was applied by identifying initial themes that emerged directly from the participants' answer. To investigate the themes on the listeners' perception of commercial radio in South Africa, thematic analysis will be used.

An inductive approach will be used to better understand digital radio's influence on brand equity in a South African context. Sovacool, Iskandarova and Hall (2023:3) describe an inductive approach as primarily data based. The primary objective of an inductive approach is to present hypotheses from collected data. Its basis is for the collected data to guide the research process (Thomas, 2003:2). Researchers can explore the data with no preconceived notions. Maguire and Delahunt (2017:335) suggest that an inductive analysis is useful in establishing unexpected new information. Due to the practical implications of the study, thematic analysis provided practical insights by enabling the identification of key themes. The relevance of thematic analysis for this study lies in its ability to facilitate the exploration of complex and context-specific issues, which allows the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the influence of digital radio on brand equity. Its adaptability and depth with the study's objectives made it a highly relevant choice.

Casula, Rangarajan and Shields (2020:1704) suggest that this approach also allows for adaptability as new information is discovered. This can lead to a more dynamic study. The themes will emerge from listeners' experiences with the consumption of digital radio platforms and how they have shaped their listening behaviours (Braun & Clarke, 2006:6). Herzog, Handke and Hitters (2019:2-8) add that this analysis will enable researchers to identify underlying themes and draw meaningful conclusions.

3.8 Time Horizon

Time horizon refers to the length of time a study is conducted. Saunders *et al.* (2019:176) posit that the time horizon highlights key questions in planning a research study. It asks questions such as 'Do I want my research to be a "snapshot" taken at a particular time, or do I want it to be more akin to a "diary" and represent events over a given period?' (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:176). Generally, the answer would depend on the aims of the research and the subject matter. A snapshot approach would be more appropriate in examining the influence of radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa. On the contrary, a diary-like approach would be ideal if the objective of the research is to monitor listener habits over a more extended period. In choosing a time horizon, researchers need to align objectives to get relevant insights on radio consumption in South Africa.

Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies can be used in research studies. The purpose of a cross-sectional study is to collect data that is reliable at any given time (Wang & Cheng, 2020:565). This allows for drawing conclusions and developing new issues to be examined (Zangirolami-Raimundo, Echeimberg & Leone, 2018:356).

A longitudinal study gathers information data from the same participants over extended periods. Caruana, Roman, Hernández-Sánchez and Solli (2015:E538) adds that this study can be observational. This allows researchers to observe changes that may occur over time. This type of study design also allows for exploring causal relationships and identifying potential risk factors for specific outcomes. A longitudinal study is thus not relevant to as study this does not aim to track changes in listener behaviour over an extended period. Instead, it focuses on capturing the current influence of digital radio on brand equity at a particular point in time.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the study

This section provides a summary of the qualitative methodologies that were implemented to assess the study's trustworthiness.

Table 4: Assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative data.

(Adapted from Stahl & King, 2020:26-28)

Criteria	Purpose (Stahl & King, 2020:26-28)	Techniques	Application
Credibility	To ensure the findings accurately represent the perspectives of the participants.	Triangulation	Outcome from the interviews will be compared with existing research to validate the accuracy of the data.
Dependability	Establish the consistency and reliability of the findings over time and with different researchers.	Pre-testing through a small-scale study with a similar sample to ensure the research methods are appropriate (Simkus, 2023).	The researcher will also keep detailed records of the research process to allow for transparency and reproducibility. This will help to establish the dependability of the findings.
Transferability	Provide enough details for readers to determine if the findings can be applied to their own context.	Thick description will be applied to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study's results and implications (Younas, Fabregues, Durante, Escalante, Inayat & Ali, 2023:1).	Thematic analysis will be conducted to identify recurring patterns and themes within the data, enhancing the

			transferability of the findings to other settings.
Confirmability	Ensuring that the findings are grounded in data and not influenced by researcher bias.	Research journaling, bracketing to enable the researcher to reflect on their own biases and assumptions throughout the study (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021:783)	The researcher will conduct reflective journaling as data is collected. Transcripts and audio recordings will be stored securely to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

Table 5: Overview of the research design and components
(adapted from Yin, 2011)

Component	Description
Topic	The Influence of Digital Radio on the Brand Equity of Commercial Radio Stations in South Africa. Theory underpinning the study: The Uses and Gratification Theory
Problem Statement	Commercial radio stations in South Africa are facing challenges in maintaining their relevance and audience engagement due to the rise of digital media platforms and streaming services (Lumley, 2023). To thrive in the digital age, these stations need to find new ways to build brand equity and leverage it to attract and retain listeners, generate revenue, and ensure long-term sustainability (Mostert, 2018:32). South African commercial radio stations must leverage digital radio to build brand equity and audience engagement for long-term success in a competitive digital media landscape.

Research Objectives	1. To analyse the different types of digital radio services available in South Africa. 2. To determine how South African radio listeners are engaging with digital content. 3. To compare brand equity metrics of South African commercial music radio stations before and after the adoption of digital radio strategies. 4. To determine what influences listeners' choice of platforms and engagement with digital radio content.
Unit of observation	Listeners of South African radio stations between the ages of 18 and 34.
Method	• Qualitative research • Use of interview aid and protocol • In-depth interviews to gain a better understanding of listeners' experiences. • Thematic analysis.

3.10 Limitations

The limited sample size of only 12 participants may not yield adequate data to draw strong conclusions regarding the impact of digital radio on brand equity for commercial radio stations in South Africa. Furthermore, despite the study's limited scope to a single country and the potential lack of generalisability to other locations, the results can provide valuable insights for developing strategies tailored to the South African market.

While the study aims to delve deep into the listeners' perspective, it acknowledges the potential limitations in transferring the findings to the decision-makers experience. This suggests that the insights gained from listeners may not fully capture the complexities and nuances of the issue from a managerial standpoint. Nevertheless, the data collected can still offer valuable information on listener preferences within the South African market.

3.11 Delimitations

The study is delimited to South Africa and aims to understand the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in the country. Focusing on commercial radio will provide an understanding of the challenges and opportunities the media landscape presents, particularly from a digital perspective. This research also excludes a broader study of other radio formats.

Furthermore, the study is confined to the age group of 18–34. While the 18 to 34 demographic represents a significant part of the radio listening audience, it does not include the perspectives of other age groups who may have distinct preferences and behaviours regarding digital radio consumption. In focusing on this specific age group, the research is concerned with a detailed understanding of their media habits, but it acknowledges the limitation of not including the views of other age groups.

Individuals outside of the 18 to 34 age range will not be included in this study. This age range includes a significant number of listeners, which is essential in understanding their digital radio consumption and preferences. Participants with little to no exposure to digital radio will also be excluded as this study focuses on participants who consume digital radio and are thus able to provide in-depth insights on their listening. People with limited exposure to digital radio may not be able to provide relevant insights, which can impact the study's quality.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

The researcher will strive to attain the utmost levels of excellence and integrity in research endeavour, which aligns with the Code of Academic and Research Ethics of IIE Vega School. Ethical considerations are the fundamental criteria that researchers must adhere to safeguard their participants' rights, safety, and well-being (Resnik, 2020).

Ethical standards will include the voluntary participation of participants, the acknowledgement of their right to withdraw from the research at any point, and the assurance of confidentiality (British Educational Research Association, 2018:6-25). The researcher will be guided by scholarly moral guidelines throughout the research process (Ajemba & Chinwe, 2022:46-50).

Participant data will be anonymised. Data will be collected and stored on the researcher's laptop and password-protected for two years, after which the information will be destroyed. The data collected in this study were collected with written consent and will only be used for this study. Participants signed voluntary consent forms indicating their voluntary participation in this study.

Participants will be protected accordingly by South African law and the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA). None of the participants will be subjected to harmful or criminal activities throughout the research. Ensuring that participants fully understand the objective of the study may pose potential challenges. This challenge will be

addressed by providing a detailed informed consent form, which outlines the purpose of the study. Protecting the participants' personal information can also pose potential challenges. This will, however, be offset by anonymizing the responses and securely storing the data.

3.13 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the sampling techniques used in the sampling process. A criterion was also taken into consideration to illustrate appropriateness. A summary of how the data analysis was completed was outlined. The data was compiled into different themes based on the interviews with participants. The chapters 4 and 5 will thus outline the research findings, recommendations, and conclusions.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis of the Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the data collected. The researcher took the six steps of the thematic analysis, as cited by Braun and Clarke (2006:6) while conducting the study. Interviews were used as a method for data collection. Transcripts from the interviews were used to highlight recurring themes. The researcher performed this process manually as participants answered questions individually. This manual approach to analysing the data allowed the researcher to form a deeper understanding of the responses from the participants and formulate a flow of information key to concluding the research (Tenny *et al.*, 2022).

The analysis addresses key themes formulated to understand the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa. Participants' responses are used to support each theme derived from the data. By evaluating the themes from the data, this study provides a better understanding of the impact of digital radio, which continues to shape the media landscape. The findings from the research can also be used to inform the decision-making process for radio station management, enable key stakeholders to better understand the digital landscape, and influence decision-making.

The data collected for this study were analysed according to a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006:6). The thematic analysis for this study was conducted systematically to identify, analyse, and interpret themes within the collected data. The data were thoroughly reviewed and familiarised by reading and re-reading to gain an in-depth understanding. Initial codes were then generated by systematically categorising relevant and recurring features of the data. These codes were organised and collated into potential themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and automatically transcribed. All participants in this study were allocated numbers to maintain anonymity and protect their confidentiality.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. To analyse the different digital radio services available in South Africa.
2. To determine how South African radio listeners are engaging with digital content.
3. To investigate what influences listeners' choice of platforms and engagement with digital radio content.

4. To compare brand equity metrics of South African commercial music radio stations before and after adopting digital radio strategies.

A summary of the participants in the research is presented in the table below. All participants currently reside in the Republic of South Africa.

Table 6: Demographic Profile

Participant	Gender	Age
P1	Female	34
P2	Male	33
P3	Male	28
P4	Female	34
P5	Male	25 – 30*
P6	Female	23
P7	Male	27
P8	Female	30
P9	Female	33
P10	Female	34
P11	Male	33
P12	Male	31

*Participant 5 only provided an age range instead of their exact age.

Key Themes from the Data

The themes in the table below (see Table 6) appeared frequently during the interview process with the participants. The identification and selection of the themes were inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006:6) on the thematic analysis for a qualitative study. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to assist participants in providing clear answers.

Table 7: Themes from the data

	Themes
1.	Knowledge of digital radio.
2.	Listener perception changes towards radio stations.
3.	Listener engagement and digital radio platforms.
4.	Affordability of data and digital adoption.
5.	Alignment of radio features and listener preferences.
6.	Digital radio stations and new music discovery.
7.	Brand equity and leveraging digital radio.

4.2 Analysis of Findings

This section outlines an in-depth analysis of the data collected from participants.

4.2.1 Knowledge of digital radio

Most of the participants are aware of digital radio. Participant 1 (P1) highlighted their understanding of digital radio as a shift from analogue to digital radio transmission. Participant 1's knowledge of digital radio shows offers insights beyond the basic understanding of the basic concept of digital radio. The terms "analogue" and "transmission" can be regarded as a listener's vested interest in both traditional and digital radio.

[...] *"I understand digital radio to be the fact that we have moved from analogue to FM. So, whenever you move something from analogue, it becomes digital."* (P1)

Participant 10 demonstrates a solid understanding of what digital radio is:

[...] *"Whereas before it would be on the traditional FM/AM, but nowadays I'm able to tune in live through a website through an app."* (P10)

As with many participants who participated in the study, Participant 10 highlights the convenience of listening to their favourite radio stations through a website or an app. This highlights the flexibility that digital radio provides to listeners. Accessibility also plays a crucial role, allowing listeners to tune into their favourite radio stations virtually anywhere with an internet connection. Participant 10's response demonstrates how the transformation of digital radio has changed the way listeners consume audio content made available digitally (Hirschmeier *et al.*, 2019:5017-5020). This also highlights the significance of digital radio in offering listening options tailored to their needs (Laor, 2022:17).

Many of the participants in the study continued to demonstrate different listening habits, which reflect the diverse ways in which people engage with radio in this day and age. While some individuals still prefer listening to the radio through AM/FM channels, some have embraced the ease and convenience of listening to their favourite content on digital platforms. This suggests a growing trend in the flexibility of available content as consumers of digital radio can access their stations of choice on different platforms and devices.

4.2.2 Listener engagement and digital radio platforms

A radio station's digital presence plays an essential role in informing the listener's decision to engage with the content offered by radio stations on its digital platforms.

Participant 4 says:

[...] "radio has always been a theatre of the mind. You had to imagine what your favourite presenter looked like. Being able to see [them] presenting their shows live has removed this mystery, which is absolutely stunning."

Participant 4's view of listening engagement underscores how visual elements enhance the listening experience. The participant's observation of "theatre of the mind" also provides radio's differentiated power of storytelling. Storytelling has always been compelling in capturing one's attention. Allowing listeners to imagine the world as narrated by a presenter will enable them to be active participants in this narrative, allowing the listener to process the information in a way that makes sense to them. Coupled with a visual element to radio broadcasting, radio stations can enhance their experience.

Participant 10 adds that their engagement with radio extends beyond live content:

[...] "if it's content that I would normally engage with when it is on air, I'm still able to continue that engagement further on."

Participants further highlighted the evolving nature of radio consumption. The need for on-demand content becomes pivotal as listeners still like to engage with the radio. Given many people's busy lifestyles, such content would be beneficial for the listener and radio stations as there would be continued engagement beyond live radio. In the past, listeners had to wait for a specific time to catch their programmes on the radio. However, with the shift in radio broadcasting, listeners can exercise more control over when and how they access digital radio content (Laor, 2022:4). The observation from participant 10 also highlights a great opportunity for radio stations to create other revenue streams.

Participants also indicated that making content available online can cultivate loyalty between the radio station and the listeners. This approach to digital content can enable listeners to consume content at their convenience, fostering loyalty and a more engaged listener base.

Most participants engage with digital radio beyond just listening to live radio content. Participant 12 highlights the idea of intentionality when engaging with such content.

[...] “I would only engage with digital radio for specific things.”

Participant 12's answer signifies a trend, which can be observed among some participants who share similar sentiments about how content is consumed. Due to being available digitally, some listeners become more intentional about the content they consume. As an observation, radio stations also need to be mindful of the content that speaks to the interest of their listeners. Most participants highlighted the need for radio stations to develop compelling content that resonates with them.

4.2.3 Alignment of radio features and listener preferences

Most participants indicate that they're more likely to engage with features involving real-life situations. There's a growing interest in digital radio content, which speaks to other people's lived experiences.

[...] “I listen to content that relates to what I am currently going through in my life. I currently listen to is called ask a man on Metro FM. [...] which is a very popular segment amongst South Africans. I deal with a lot of relationship issues and would like to know what the rest of the nation is going through. And take some advice from the rest of the people.” (Participant 3)

Consumers of digital content seek content that resonates with the challenges they find themselves in. This becomes evident in features such as 'Ask a Man,' which airs on the SABC's Metro FM. The nature of radio content is designed to appeal to an individual instead of the masses. Key to this is the relatability of the content presented on air. This study's participants highlight camaraderie and empathy when consuming content. It signifies a more profound need for radio stations to become more of a companion.

Many participants highlighted the importance of aligning live radio/on-air with digital content. According to participant 10:

[...] “features that I would definitely take part in would be something like the Blind Spot which is on Kaya 959. The station poses a question on social media and ask the same question on air and there would be a whole wide engagement around that.”

There's a growing trend on aligning live radio content with digital platforms, which can enhance a radio station's ability to reach a wider audience. Participants of this study see this innovative approach of integrating live on-air moments with digital content. Listeners may be on social media and come across content posted by their favourite radio stations, leading them to listen to a feature while it happens.

4.2.4 Listener perception changes towards radio stations

A significant number of participants indicate that their perception of some of their favourite South African commercial music radio stations has changed. Quality content remains the core of what listeners are after. Participants indicate that a radio station's ability to provide consistent, quality content would be the primary driver for them to tune into a radio station. It is worth noting that a radio station's relevance also rests on its ability to meet the evolving needs of its listeners, according to participants.

"My perception of the radio stations that I listen to has changed, which in this case would be Metro FM. I listened to it back then and I still listen to it now. [...] you know the kind of content that you're going to get, and you know that whatever it is that you listen to will almost definitely be quality." (Participant 4)

While consistency of content plays a critical role in the success of radio stations, authenticity also needs to be considered, as highlighted by Participant 1:

"Radio now has become a numbers game. Even for the end user. You can almost see the lack of authenticity in their social media posts. [...] you can see when something is trendy for the sake of it." (Participant 1)

This observation highlights the significance of radio stations being more authentic. Given that consistency is essential for radio stations to retain more listeners, content that resonates with the listener needs to be more genuine. Listeners are becoming more and more discerning. If radio stations don't balance key metrics and become authentic, the listener may lose a connection.

"I got introduced to radio through my family. [...] I didn't really understand the purpose of radio or what it was there for. But as I as I grew older, that understanding became clearer. That in turn changed my perception of radio and what it is here for." (Participant 3).

Family plays a crucial role in influencing the initial perception of radio. Some participants were introduced to radio at a young age and were thus unable to understand its purpose. When individuals start maturing, their understanding and function of radio become more pronounced. It's also important to note how different perspectives differ from generation to generation. Unique cultural and social contexts largely shape each generation's experience of radio. Many technological advances have emerged over the years (Ajisafe, 2023:36), indicating how different people consume radio. Factors such as one's immediate influence on how they perceive their world become evident in radio's role in people's lives.

4.2.5 Affordability of data and digital adoption

A significant number of study participants raised concerns about data affordability as a limiting factor to digital adoption. Participant 4 says:

[...] "digital radio relies solely on Internet stability and Internet access, and we do live in a country where not everybody has access to Internet or has access to data. I do think that that's the limiting factor when it comes to digital radio."

Participant 4's comment illustrates an essential factor regarding the affordability of data in South Africa. The lack of universality of access to the internet (Higgins, Ferri & Donnellan, 2023:2094) can constrain individuals from accessing digital audio content. While digital radio offers compelling content, it may not reach some of its intended audience in parts of the country with limited connectivity. As highlighted by participant 4, this digital divide also demonstrates the digital divide in South Africa (Faloye & Ajayi, 2021:1-4).

Key to the digital adoption of content offered by radio stations is the infrastructure, which certain parts of the country may not have access to. Participant 11 says:

[...] "I'm not sure how the infrastructure in South Africa currently looks like, but for more of the rural areas and some parts of the country... I cannot imagine it being easy to connect to the Internet, to listen to the radio. Data is also expensive in the country. [...] Which can be the biggest disadvantage."

The observation by participant 11 highlights one of the key challenges that radio stations with a digital offering can face. The lack of infrastructure can hinder radio stations' ability to reach more of their audience.

Participant 11 also highlights the lack of reliable internet connectivity, more so in rural parts of South Africa, as having an adverse effect on radio stations' ability to offer digital content on their platforms and limits the success of digital adoption by listeners. Without stable internet connectivity, listeners may be unable to access digital radio services, which restricts their exposure to programming content that is more diverse than traditional radio. As referenced by Participant 11, the lack of infrastructure can leave other parts of the population with limited access to digital radio. Beyond the purpose of having access to digital radio, the lack of robust technology infrastructure can also limit the innovation and creativity of radio stations in coming up with compelling content. Some features require stable connectivity, which can be challenging when implementing features and programming content.

[...] "with digital radio, there's still a level of exclusion. We are a country where the majority of citizens do not have access to either Wi-Fi or they don't have enough data to access digital radio." (Participant 1)

As with most of the participants in the study, participant 1 makes a compelling observation on digital exclusion. From participant 1's comment, it stands to reason that digital exclusion increases the existing inequalities in South Africa (Faloye & Ajayi, 2021:3). The lack of affordable internet access limits certain groups of people from actively participating in the digital landscape, which can also restrict access to skills and opportunity.

4.2.6 Digital radio stations and new music discovery

Digital radio stations continue to impact how listeners discover new music significantly. Many participants indicated that digital radio content largely influences their music exploration. Digital radio can assist in introducing new music to listeners. By using applications such as Shazam (Shazam, 2024), listeners can quickly discover new artists or genres of music.

[...] "I would listen virtually, right. And obviously during some of the breaks the presenter would play a song. And I'm like, oh, that sounds like a really cool song. So I'll actually go ahead and find out what song it is." (Participant 8)

Artist interviews on digital radio stations also enhance the radio experience listeners have of digital radio. There's also a growing trend for radio stations to post snippets of

interviews on their social media platforms, providing listeners with exclusive content beyond a radio station's playlist.

[...] "when the presenters do artist interviews, and they put them online. [...] yeah, all the time." (Participant 9)

"I listen to radio and that's when I would discover a new artist and then it would sort of expand my palate in terms of the type of music I listen to." (Participant 3)

Radio can expand a listener's music horizon by introducing them to a wide range of artists, including genres that may not be as popular then. The expansion of listeners' choice of music is more evident, given the number of streaming platforms. According to participants, radio stations leverage this as some platforms only suggest artists which are more familiar to the listeners by means of an algorithm.

While digital radio plays a pivotal role in the discovery of new music, Participant 4 sees radio stations as a secondary player in the discovery of new music:

"I think radio stations have become secondary players. Artists have taken control, and they are now actively sharing their content and their music and introducing themselves to the world via social media and then to radio stations." (Participant 4)

The reflection from participant 4 highlights a shift that is also taking place with radio stations and artists. Historically, radio stations were one of the primary players in distributing music. However, given the advent of digital platforms and social media, music artists have taken greater control over their work and distribution of their music. Given this shift in music, radio stations' role cannot be underestimated. Digital radio stations are also evolving to curate content listeners greatly resonate with. This shift in dynamics allows radio stations to start operating differently while understanding the changing landscape of media.

4.2.7 Factors influencing radio station selection.

Participant 4 highlights the need for radio stations to produce compelling content. This observation emphasises what listeners look for when it comes to radio programming. The content needs to be curated in such a thought-provoking way. The participant further emphasises the need for learning and critical thinking:

[...] “content is king for me. It’s what you are talking about, so I don’t listen to radio for frivol. There always has to be something that grabs my attention. I need to walk away from a radio show having learnt something new or being able to think about a certain thing differently. I always say to people, one of the most influential people that I found on radio (and may his soul rest in peace) was Eusebius McKaiser. You would never listen to Eusebius and not walk away without learning something new or thinking differently about a certain topic, right?”

The importance of personal interest and relevance largely influences a listener’s choice of a radio station. Radio listeners are likelier to engage with content that broadly resonates with them. Such content needs to align with their interests.

Participant 9 says:

“You need to pique my interest. If it’s something I’m interested in, or if it is a personality that I like, or a radio station that I like, but it has to pique my interest in terms of, relevance.”

Radio listeners are continuously engaging with content that adds value to their lifestyle. Increasingly, listeners are looking for content that aligns with where they are in their lives. Participant 12’s sentiments suggest that having content that keeps them knowledgeable about different facets of life needs to be curated by radio stations:

“[...] content needs to be relevant to my lifestyle. It needs to keep me on trend. You know that will just give you some street cred.”

According to participant 2, reputation and credibility influence their decision to listen to a particular radio station. There needs to be trust in a presenter as well as a listener. Radio stations need to be able to deliver reliable information on their platform. As with traditional radio, listeners also value authenticity from a presenter:

[...] "having trust in a presenter to deliver credible news or information. I can tell when a presenter is there because he/she has a good voice or just an influencer. What informs my decision to listen to a radio station relies heavily on its reputation. And the standard of the content, including a guest they may have at any given time."

Captivating a topic is a crucial driver in influencing a listener's decision to tune into a radio station. According to Participant 5, radio stations must be robust in content creation. The digital content also needs to be more diversified:

[...] "If it's not interesting topic, then it's an interesting interview. Or certain interesting or individual that's being interviewed. If it's not that, then It's a certain song that I would like to hear."

4.3 Trustworthiness, credibility, and reliability

4.3.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness constitutes a fundamental aspect of qualitative research. It is regarded as the validity and reliability of the research undertaken (Sirwan, 2024:1). Qualitative studies rely on the subjective narrative and interpretation of data; thus, trustworthiness ensures that the research conducted is accurate and of quality (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:295).

4.3.2 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative studies ensures that the research findings are trustworthy and reliable. Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2021:295) describe credibility as the accurate interpretation of the researcher's interpretation of the participants' responses as a true reflection of the data presented.

For this study, prolonged engagement was implemented to establish a rapport with participants before and after the data collection process. Before data collection, the researcher introduced the study objectives and ensuring participants fully understood the purpose and significance of their involvement. Informal conversations were used to create a comfortable environment, which encouraged participants to share their insights freely. The application of the prolonged engagement also enabled the researcher to develop a better understanding of their lived experiences as they relate to the study. To better understand how digital radio affects listeners' experience on the topic, the researcher spent extended periods to gain better insights.

4.3.3 Dependability

Within qualitative studies, dependability is considered as the consistency of the process followed in the research (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2021:26). It thus refers to the interconnectedness of the data collection method and qualitative data analysis. The researcher considered the data collection method and qualitative data analysis presented in Chapter 3 of this paper. To ensure dependability, descriptions of the research design were provided. The in-depth descriptions were provided to ensure transparency in the qualitative study.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented findings by outlining the research objectives. The findings suggest that digital radio impacts the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa. While several digital services are available, the data cost is considered a factor constraining listeners' ability to access digital radio. Given that some participants may have internet access, some are intentional about how they consume digital radio. Factors such as lifestyles and where listeners live play a crucial role. The user-friendliness of websites and applications determines whether listeners engage with the content offered by the radio station. Listeners prefer content that is of good quality. As listeners become more discerning, it is easy to establish whether presenters are authentic.

To further enhance the brand equity of radio stations, partnerships between radio management and mobile operators may form partnerships to offer data-free content. The investment in on-air presenters can be overestimated. Radio stations must provide the necessary mentoring programmes to ensure that their on-air presenters appeal to relevant markets. The key to a radio station's success is monitoring its reputation. Therefore, radio stations must conduct this exercise regularly to establish the listeners' perceptions.

Chapter 5: Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The emergence of digital technology continues to change the way industries operate, and radio is a classic example of how technological advancements impact different sectors. Commercial radio stations in South Africa are faced with myriad challenges in sustaining their position within the media landscape (Ajisafe, 2023:37). Digital media and streaming platforms are now considered competitors to traditional radio broadcasting (Laor (2022:18). Radio listeners can now opt to consume different forms of digital platforms. Different approaches need to be applied for radio stations to maintain their relevance in the highly competitive industry. This research problem has strongly influenced the purpose of this study to gain a better sense of how digital radio influences the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa.

This study aimed to develop a better understanding of digital radio platforms available to the South African audience and establish the factors that contribute to a listener's choice of platforms (such as TuneIn radio) and engagement with digital radio. The objectives were developed to support the study in achieving the research aim.

This chapter will, therefore, outline the findings, recommendations, and conclusions. The first section of the chapter will present key findings that relate to the research, providing insights that have emerged during the study. Recommendations will offer guidelines for translating the research findings to address the identified issues. Implications of the study will be summarised in the conclusion, offering areas for future research.

5.2 Findings

The study's key findings from collected data and qualitative data analysis will be presented in this section. The literature review in Chapter 2 will support these findings. To support the research aim, the findings will be presented next to the study objectives.

Objective 1

To analyse the different types of digital radio services available in South Africa.

In the research, it became evident that several digital radio services are available to South African radio listeners. Most of the participants in the study indicated that they use applications and websites to listen to the radio beyond traditional radio broadcasts. For participants in this study, digital radio moves from analogue to digital broadcasting. The convenience of having access to digital radio was observed as a critical feature for many of the participants. The Primedia+, 5FM, and Kaya 959 apps were listed as one of the participants' most-used applications for listening to their favourite radio stations. Some of the other applications used by participants include Radio ZA and Iono.fm. Traditional radio platforms are where listeners first hear about a station's digital platforms. Listeners are prompted to download the app when a presenter references it on air. An interesting finding on the Iono.fm platform allows many radio stations to be accessed, including stations that broadcast on amplitude modulation (AM). Many participants indicated that digital radio services presented more advantages than traditional radio stations.

One of the key advantages of digital radio is its ability to provide access to stations which would not otherwise be available on terrestrial radio. Most participants observed that digital platforms have allowed community and regional radio stations to broadcast nationally. Beyond this, digital radio stations also offer means of accessibility to other countries (Laor, 2022:4). However, digital radio is not without its limitations. Participants highlighted the expensive cost of internet access, which may create somewhat of a digital exclusion. Within the South African context, learning and access to information can be hindered by the lack of access to the internet (Faloye & Ajayi, 2021:5)

Objective 2

To determine how South African radio listeners are engaging with digital content.

There are different ways listeners engage with the digital content provided by their favourite radio stations. Beyond listening to live radio broadcasts, many participants interact with radio stations on their digital platforms. Podcasts and audio on demand are how radio stations access a radio station's content online. Social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram also enjoy significant engagement from listeners. The type of content that listeners are likely to engage with is content that resonates with their lifestyles. There's substantial intentionality regarding the type of content listeners engage

with. While a one-size-fits-all may not be possible, radio stations can take advantage of the varying needs of their audience by curating content that speaks to them. The type of content listeners will likely engage with must be timeous and relevant. Some participants have indicated that such digital content needs to be information. It needs to leave them better informed about geo-political issues. Interviews with interesting guests also drive listeners to tune into a radio station. Participants indicated the need for their favourite radio stations to curate compelling content.

Much of the content is accessed mainly through the radio station's website and social media platforms. Digital content engagement on podcasts and social media platforms connects with the listeners' traditional listening habits. An on-air moment can also be a critical driver for listeners visiting a station's website. However, there needs to be a reason for listeners to visit a station's website. Competitions, music charts, or video content can be one of the main factors influencing listeners to visit a station's website. Participants also feel like digital radio content enhances their radio listening experience. With the rise of digital content, listeners have more variety of content at their disposal. While radio remains a theatre of the mind, participants have indicated that they prefer watching an interview with their favourite presenters instead of just listening to them on the radio. This shift from traditional radio has revolutionised radio broadcasting. It enables listeners to be part of the part of the experience.

Objective 3

To investigate what influences listeners' choice of platforms and engagement with digital radio content.

Several factors influence a listener's choice of platforms. Participants need to provide user-friendly websites for them to engage with the content. In addition, some participants feel that likeable presenters are a drawcard for them. Some listeners have indicated the need for more authentic presenters. There is a powerful sentiment that ingenuity can drive listeners away from engaging with some content on the digital platform. Topics presented by a radio station need to be robust. Few of the participants have switched between traditional radio and digital radio platforms. Given the cost of data, some listeners may not be able to switch to the same radio station when they lose the station's signal. Participants indicated they are most likely to tune into radio stations' on-demand content rather than switch to a streaming service.

A significant number of participants in the study have highlighted features such as “Ask a man” on Metro FM and “The Blind Spot on Kaya 959” as more appealing to the listeners. Content needs to resonate deeply with the listener. Some participants have indicated they’re likelier to engage with content that “speaks to them.” Podcasts have come up as one of the content listeners would engage with. Participants need some form of control over when to consume certain content. These factors are primarily influenced by where listeners are in their lives. For listeners to access certain content is also informed by the need to learn more about different issues. Shows need to leave listeners better than they found them. While some participants changed their radio listening habits when introduced to digital radio, some listeners continued to consume traditional radio in the same way they were used to previously.

Objective 4

To compare brand equity metrics of South African commercial music radio stations before and after the adoption of digital radio strategies.

Participants have observed radio stations such as Metro FM, Kaya 959 and 947 as keeping up with the times. Participants feel that radio stations have been largely influenced by popular culture. Some of the radio stations have also maintained their relevance by playing music that is regarded as trendy. Some participants feel that numbers significantly drive the nature of radio. The listeners’ perception of radio stations has changed over the years. Radio used to be all about storytelling, but the key factor in stations being a source of companionship still contributes significantly to listeners’ perceptions. Some of the participants regard themselves as the most prominent critics of radio.

Presenters need to have a strong presence that meets the station's sound. Some participants feel that old-school radio had a significant impact on their lives. How radio was done in the day resembled art. Participants think that there’s an emotional connection with radio the more they grow up. Radio stations also need to invest heavily in their up-and-coming talent. One participant highlighted radio as regurgitating content. Whereas radio stations put a lot of effort into their shows, some radio stations “copy and paste” what their counterparts are doing. From the participants’ point of view, the perception of radio needs to drive innovation. Most participants also feel that the shift from terrestrial to digital radio has affected them personally. Now more than ever, listeners have more options, and they do not have to worry about having a stereo to tune into their favourite radio stations.

In conclusion, radio listeners are aware of the existence of digital radio. This is understood to be an alternative to traditional radio. Apps are not as widely used as websites and podcasts to access a radio station's content. Apps such as Kaya 959, TuneIn radio and ion.fm are popular applications for participants to access their favourite radio stations. Participants have highlighted digital radio as having more advantages. While the cost of accessing digital content may be a challenge, some listeners are downloading a lot of the on-air moment as this gives them more control. Listeners continue to engage with the content. However, some listeners are cautious about their content; the content must resonate and benefit their lifestyles. The likability of radio presenters remains a critical factor in retaining listeners. The radio station's branding strategies need to be formulated in a way that appeals to its audience. Radio still appeals to a significant number of listeners, but more can be done to maintain the competitive advantage of listeners.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Managerial Implications

Commercial radio stations can look at various managerial implications to further enhance their brand equity in digital radio:

- **Formulate exclusive digital content**

Radio stations should be aware of how much their content impacts listeners. As such, commercial radio stations should consider formulating content exclusively available on their websites and apps. On-air moments should also be translated into digital content shortly after a live broadcast. Some content can be curated for a radio station's online platforms. For example, radio stations such as Kaya 959 and Metro FM can create exclusive content that provides a glimpse of the behind-the-scenes of their favourite radio stations. This content can connect the audience and the radio station, boosting their coverage beyond a radio station's live broadcast.

Making content available immediately after it has happened would extend the radio's ability to reach more listeners. The availability of content of digital content also has implications for radio stations. This means that radio stations need to create on-air content that is not only suitable for on-air broadcasting but for download purposes.

- **Providing data-free applications**

Given the cost of data in South Africa, commercial radio stations may be unable to reach the desired number of listeners who may not be able to access their content because of affordability. Radio stations can consider partnering with mobile networks to provide data-free applications. While this may not be an inexpensive alternative, radio stations can establish a relation with different networks and provide them with discounted air. Some of the digital content may also be branded with the respective mobile network's name. The partnership between a radio station and a mobile network to offer a data-free network could differentiate brands from their competitors. Providing data-free content can benefit commercial radio stations and mobile networks, as this can increase the number of subscribers.

- **Investing in on-air personalities**

It is recommended that radio stations invest in their on-air personalities as they form a significant part of their content offering. This investment in radio presenters can significantly influence the success of radio stations. While radio in the traditional sense continues to evolve, the need for old-school mentoring can be something which radio stations need to consider. In so doing, radio stations can differentiate themselves and build a solid audience. Investing in on-air personalities needs to be a continuous exercise and not necessarily when some form of intervention needs to be implemented. The Y-Academy, for example, serves as a programme to train up-and-coming radio presenters. However, more mentorship programmes must be introduced once presenters start presenting shows.

- **Monitoring brand reputation**

A brand's reputation is essential in running a successful radio station. Radio stations need to keep track of how listeners perceive their station; this can include the radio station's on-air presenters and the quality of content that is broadcast. This can be achieved by providing high-quality content, actively engaging with radio listeners on social media platforms, and being responsive to feedback/criticism from listeners about the radio stations. Radio stations can also outsource the services of public relations and organisations specialising in monitoring brand health. As with any exercise, this needs to be conducted on an ongoing basis as it can prove beneficial to the organisation.

- **Data privacy of radio listeners**

An interesting finding that also came up in the study was the data privacy of radio listeners. Concerns were raised on how digital radio protects the privacy of its listeners. Digital platforms typically request information such as an individual's contact information such as an email address and contact number. While this information could aid the radio station's decision-making process, such information can be considered sensitive. To counter this, radio stations should be more transparent about how they use the information users provide on their platforms.

- **Bridging Generation Gaps in Radio Content**

Some participants in the study have also indicated the significance of being introduced to radio by their parents at formative ages. Commercial radio stations may need to consider creating content bridging the gaps that transcend generations.

5.4 Future studies

This study seeks to understand the long-term impact on the brand equity of digital radio compared to traditional radio. Through a comparative analysis, future studies can investigate how the two forms of radio can build and maintain their respective brand equity. Future studies could also consider the influence that digital radio has on brand perception among different age groups, such as different generations that may have different views on radio. With the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), studies could also be undertaken to examine AI's ability to provide personalised content and advertising.

While avoiding rigidity, radio stations can curate content that interests individuals who tune into their radio stations. Creating content suitable for the individual listener can be equated to speaking a language that makes sense to the listeners. It is easy for radio stations to be everything to all listeners, which can negatively impact listeners. Future studies could investigate the role of audience segmentation and data analytics in tailoring content to specific listener groups.

Globally, radio stations such as BBC Radio have introduced features to introduce new artists. A classic example is Radio 1's New Music Show with Jack Saunders (BBC Sounds, 2024). In South Africa, YFM 99.2 took a different approach by introducing a feature called Hot 99 Breaking 'n Entering with Motso (YFM YouTube Channel, 2009).

5FM, a radio station owned by the South African Broadcasting Corporation, also introduced a similar feature on its Sunday programming hosted by Bongi Mbelu, presenting new music. Having features that focus on new music is a testament to radio's powerful approach to being a platform for existing and emerging artists.

5.5 Conclusion

This study is structured to systematically investigate the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa. Chapter 1 establishes the foundation by providing context to the study, articulating the research problem, and outlining the specific objectives that guide the investigation. Chapter 2 highlights the historical trajectory of commercial radio stations, providing a theoretical framework through the lens of uses and gratifications theory. Subsequent chapters focus on the methodological approach and data analysis. Chapter 3 outlines the study's research design, data collection methods, and analytical methods. Chapter 4 presents the findings derived from the thematic analysis of the collected data. Chapter 5 concludes with the findings, recommendations, and conclusions.

This chapter has presented findings by outlining the research objectives. The findings suggest that digital radio impacts the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa. While many digital services are available, the cost of data is considered a factor constraining listeners' ability to access digital radio. While some listeners may have access to the internet, some radio listeners are intentional about how they consume digital radio. Factors such as lifestyles and where listeners live play a crucial role. The user-friendliness of websites and applications determines whether listeners engage with the content offered by the radio station. Listeners prefer content that is of good quality. As listeners become more discerning, it is easy to establish whether presenters are authentic.

To further enhance the brand equity of radio stations, partnerships between radio management and mobile operators may form partnerships to offer data-free content. The investment in on-air presenters cannot be over-estimated. Radio stations must provide the necessary mentoring programmes to ensure that their on-air presenters appeal to relevant markets. The key to a radio station's success is monitoring its reputation. Therefore, radio stations must conduct this exercise regularly to establish the listeners' perceptions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER OF CONSENT



Annexure H – PARTICIPANT OR PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Phushaza Sibiya and I am a student at the IIE Vega School. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr Andria du Toit about the influence of digital radio on the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of how digital radio shapes brand equity and inform the strategies of commercial radio stations. 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 your insights are valuable in understanding how digital radio is influencing the brand equity of commercial radio stations in South Africa. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to establish your listening habits, experience with digital radio, and how these factors influence your perception of your favourite radio stations, which will be conducted by means of an in-depth interview. 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 radio consumption habits and how they are evolving with the rise of digital radio. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating. There are no risks envisaged in participating in this research.

The researcher will strive to attain the utmost levels of excellence and integrity in research endeavour, which is in line with the Code of Academic and Research Ethics of IIE Vega School.

The confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be ensured throughout the study to safeguard against any harm to their personal identity.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at **IIE Vega School** will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my **Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership**. 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:

Phushaza Sibiyi

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Dr Andria du Toit

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Participant or participant Informed Consent – Audio and Visual Recordings.

I agree to participate in the research conducted by **Phushaza Sibiya** about *The Influence of Digital Radio on the Brand Equity of Commercial Radio Stations in South Africa*.

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

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

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL



Mr. PJ Sibiya

Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership

Qualitative Interview Protocol

Supervisor: Dr. A du Toit

Introduction

Good day. Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. My name is Phushaza Sibiya, and I am an MCom candidate at the IIE Vega School. I am conducting research for my Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership.

This interview will focus on your perceptions of digital radio and will take approximately 45 minutes. I would like to record our conversation to ensure accuracy in capturing your responses. Please know that your participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to stop the recording, take breaks, or withdraw from the interview at any time without consequence. Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Context of the study

The advent of digital radio has revolutionised the way audio content is consumed and has transformed the methods through which radio stations engage with their listeners (Ajisafe & Dada, 2023:36-37). However, given the abundance of media competing for audience attention, how are radio stations performing in the digital era? This study will examine the use of digital radio in South Africa, focusing on how radio stations utilise this technology to remain relevant, establish closer connections with listeners, and ensure their position in the constantly changing media industry.

Clarification of “brand equity” and “brand equity metrics”

In the context of radio, brand equity refers to the added value that a particular radio station's name brings to its programming. Radio listeners may prefer tuning in to a well-known station like Metro FM, 702 or Jacaranda FM - over fewer familiar ones, even if the content is similar. This preference is as the radio station may have built a strong reputation and positive associations with its brand, such as trustworthiness, quality of content, or a specific music style. Brand equity in radio is about how much more listeners are willing to value and engage with a station due to its established name and reputation.

Brand equity metrics are tools used to measure the value and strength of a brand in the marketplace. In the context of radio, these metrics help assess how a radio station's brand influences listeners and its overall market presence.

Research objectives:

1. To analyse the different types of digital radio services available in South Africa.
2. To determine how South African radio listeners are engaging with digital content.
3. To investigate what influences listeners' choice of platforms and engagement with digital radio content.

4. To compare brand equity metrics of South African commercial music radio stations before and after the adoption of digital radio strategies.

Interview Questions

Background		
1.	Please state your name and surname.	
2.	What is your age	
3.	In which country do you currently live in?	
4.	How do you primarily listen to radio?	FM/AM channels, digital radio, or both?

What are the different types of digital radio services available to South African listeners?		
1.	Have you heard of the term "digital radio"?	Yes/No
2.	If so, can you tell me in your own words what you understand digital radio to be?	
3.	Do you currently use any apps or platforms for listening to the radio beyond traditional radio broadcasts?	Yes/No

4.	If yes, can you name some of the platforms you've used?	
5.	How did you first hear about these platforms?	
6.	Compared to traditional radio, do you see any advantages to using digital radio platforms?	
7.	Compared to traditional radio, do you see any disadvantages to using digital radio platforms?	
8.	If you haven't used digital radio platforms, what are some reasons why you haven't tried them?	
How are South African radio listeners engaging with digital content?		
9.	Beyond just listening to live radio broadcasts on digital platforms, do you engage with any additional content offered by your favourite stations?	Yes/No
10.	If you do, what types of digital content do you find most appealing?	
11.	Why do you choose to engage with this type of content?	
12.	How often do you typically access a radio station's digital content outside of listening to the live broadcast?	
13.	Do you access this content directly through the radio station's app, website, or social media platforms?	

14.	How does your digital content engagement (podcasts, social media) connect with your traditional radio listening habits?	
What factors influence their choice of platforms and engagement with digital radio content?		
15.	What factors influence your decision to engage with a radio station's digital content?	
16.	Have you ever discovered new music or artists through a radio station's digital content?	Yes/No
17.	If yes, how did this digital content influence your music exploration?	
18.	When choosing how to listen to the radio, what factors influence your decision to use a specific platform (traditional radio vs. digital radio app)?	
19.	Have you ever switched between traditional radio and digital radio platforms for listening to the same station? Why or why not?	
20.	What features or functionalities offered by a particular digital platform make it appealing to you?	
21.	Once you've chosen a platform, how do you typically decide what digital radio content to engage with?	
22.	Do you primarily listen to live radio broadcasts on the platform, or do you explore additional content like podcasts or archived shows?	

23.	What factors influence your decision to listen to a specific podcast or other digital radio content?	
24.	How actively do you engage with the digital radio platform itself?	
25.	Do you find yourself spending more time listening to the radio overall since using digital platforms? Why or why not?	
26.	In your opinion, what are some of the biggest advantages and disadvantages of consuming radio content through digital platforms?	
How has the adoption of digital radio strategies by South African commercial music radio stations impacted their brand equity metrics?		
27.	Thinking back to a few years ago, can you reflect on how your perception of some of your favourite South African commercial music radio stations has changed, if at all?	
28.	Have any specific radio stations stood out to you in terms of their digital presence? If so, why?	
29.	When choosing a radio station to listen to, what factors typically influence your decision?	
30.	Do you find that any stations offer a more engaging experience through their digital platforms compared to others? If yes, why?	
31.	Do you ever engage with the social media platforms or other digital content offered by your favourite radio stations?	

32.	If so, has this digital content (podcasts, social media interactions, etc.) influenced your perception of the station in any way?	
33.	How has the shift to digital radio affected you personally?	

Conclusion

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this study. Your responses are greatly appreciated. I will carefully analyse your input and may follow up with additional questions. If you have any changes or additions to your answers, please don't hesitate to contact me.

APPENDIX C: PROJECT PLAN

			April 2024				May 2024					June 2024				July 2024					August 2024				September 2024				October 2024			
		Week No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	28	29	30	31
		No. of pages																														
	Research Proposal Submission																															
	Proposal Defence																															
Chapter 1	Introduction																															
Chapter 2	Literature Review																															
Chapter 3	Research Methodology																															
	Ethical Clearance																															
	Interviews and Transcription																															
Chapter 4	Data Analysis																															
Chapter 5	Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions																															
	Final Submission																															

APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



Our Ref: M. 450924
Enquiries: research@iie.ac.za

06 September 2024



Outcome of Ethics Clearance Application for Master of Commerce in Strategic Brand Leadership.



Student name: Phushaza Jacob Sibiya
Student number: [REDACTED]
Brand and campus: IIEVega



Dear Phushaza Jacob,

Thank you for submitting the ethics clearance application for the study: *The Influence of Digital Radio on the Brand Equity of Commercial Radio Stations in South Africa*.



We are pleased to inform you that your ethical clearance application has been approved with minor revision. This means that you may proceed with data collection once you have addressed the issues raised by the HDC to the satisfaction of your supervisor and the Programme Coordinator. If you are collecting data from a specific organisation, ensure that you have a gatekeeper's letter that confirms their approval of the data collection being done.

You are reminded to inform the IIE's Higher Degrees Committee of any changes made to the research methodology or title of the research prior to examination. Kindly ensure that all ethical considerations are duly applied whilst collecting, analysing and interpreting the data for the completion of your research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your programme team or supervisor directly.

All the best with your research.

[REDACTED]
Dr Reza Hosseini
Deputy Dean: Research and Postgraduate Studies
The Independent Institute of Education



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CONFIRMATION OF EDITING

29 October 2024

Client: P Sibiya

Via Email: ST10261711@vgconnect.edu.za

Masters submission

Title: The Influence of Digital Radio on the Brand Equity of Commercial Radio
Stations in South Africa

Dear Mr P Sibiya

Thank you for the privilege of editing your submission in fulfilment of your Masters qualification entitled *The Influence of Digital Radio on the Brand Equity of Commercial Radio Stations in South Africa*

This letter confirms that this document has been edited :

- All grammar has been corrected.
- All punctuation and sentence construction has been corrected.
- Spelling has been corrected and standardised.
- Queries and recommendations are raised in the comments.

References:

- All references have been standardised and corrected.

All the best!

Many thanks

Dr. Ara

Dr Ara Ramnund-Mansingh Ph.D (UKZN)
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