



**ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON BRAND
EQUITY:
A CASE STUDY OF NAMPOWER AND DISABILITY SPORTS NAMIBIA**

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ABSTRACT

Businesses are no longer viewed as separate from society; instead, they are recognized as integral partners who contribute significantly to society's development, stability, and prosperity through various efforts - including corporate social responsibility (CSR). Owing to this, companies invest millions each year - in cash and in kind - towards corporate social responsibility initiatives in a move to build good corporate citizenship. However, despite these widespread efforts, there is a noticeable absence of academic literature highlighting the benefits of CSR for an organisation, and more specifically, an absence of academic literature on the impact of corporate social responsibility on *brand equity*.

To address this gap, this study was undertaken to explore the impact of CSR on brand equity, employing NamPower Foundation and Disability Sports Namibia (DSN) as a case study. The study adopted an impact assessment approach, using convenience sampling and semi-structured interviews to examine the relationship between CSR and the components of Aaker's (1991) brand equity theoretical model.

This study's findings reveal that CSR, when implemented strategically, transparently, and authentically, has a positive and invaluable impact on the equity of a brand. More specifically, NamPower's CSR activity fosters brand loyalty, enhances brand awareness, cultivates positive perceptions of the product and service quality, and creates positive brand associations in the DSN.

This study contributes empirical evidence to CSR's influence on brand equity. It makes a unique contribution to the academic literature by situating its analysis within the Namibian context and is of specific value to the researched organisation (NamPower), by providing evidence-based feedback on DSN's perceptions of NamPower's brand equity as influenced by the impact of its CSR activity. Finally, this study provides important insights to inform strategic decision-making related to CSR for the benefit of a company and its brand.

DEDICATION

To my husband, Samuel, and my daughter Isabel. The two of you inspire me to become the greatest version of who I am meant to be.

Thank you.

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My sincere appreciation goes to my principal supervisor, Dr Adelina Mbinjama, for her support, patience, and motivation during this period. Similarly, gratitude also goes to my co-supervisor, Dr Blessing Makwambeni, for his guidance.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

- *Corporate reputation*: The overall estimation in which an organisation is held by its internal and external stakeholders based on its past actions and the probability of its future behaviour (Fombrun, 2005)
- *Corporate social responsibility*: A company's financial and non-financial contribution to society aimed at social and environmental upliftment (Triologue, 2009)
- *Customer loyalty*: A desire on the part of the customer to continue to conduct business with a given company over time (Raman et al., 2012)
- *Equity*: The value that a brand holds in the minds of consumers (Shariq, 2018)
- *Brand equity*: The "added value" endowed to a product or service because of past investments in the marketing of the brand (Tuominen, 1999)
- *Stakeholder*: A person who has interests or concerns in a business (Oberseder et al., 2013).
- *Brand loyalty*: How easily, or not, a consumer is likely to switch to another brand in times of crisis or when a similar product is launched in the market (Shariq, 2018, p. 9)
- *Brand awareness*: The ability to recognise and recall a brand's quality with ease (Aaker, 1991)

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To Whom It May Concern

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This letter serves to confirm that a research proposal titled **ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON BRAND EQUITY: A CASE STUDY OF NAMPOWER AND DISABILITY SPORTS NAMIBIA**, was submitted to me for language editing.

The research document was professionally edited, and track changes and suggestions were made in the document. The research content or the author's intentions were not altered during the editing process, and the author has the authority to accept or reject my suggestions.

Yours faithfully



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

A business that makes nothing but money is a poor business.

- Henry Ford

1.1 Introduction

Since its inception, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been a high-interest subject to all the stakeholders of a company, including shareholders, employees, society, and even the government. This is attributed to CSR's dual ability to benefit society and simultaneously bring significant financial and image-related benefits for companies and their broader ecosystem.

This study investigated the effect of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on brand equity by analysing customer perceptions of CSR, assessing the CSR landscape in Namibia, and examining the relationship between CSR and various dependent variables, as detailed in the subsequent sections. A qualitative research approach in the form of interviews was undertaken to gauge the opinions of the targeted population, and the findings indicate that there is a solid and positive relationship between CSR, company performance, and brand equity.

This study advances the existing body of literature in the underexplored academic field regarding the tangible and intangible outcomes associated with investment in CSR, specifically in relation to brand equity. It offers significant value to decision-makers in the fields of CSR, Public Relations, and Marketing by equipping them with insights to make informed and strategic business decisions in the best interests of the company and its stakeholders.

1.2 Background to the study

Companies are no longer driven by the sole aim of making money and maximising profits. They have now taken up the mandate to contribute to the development of societies and the countries in which they operate. In fact, according to Trialogue (2009), businesses are no longer viewed as separate from society, but as an integral part of it: in its development, its well-being, and its continuing stability and prosperity.

This trend has birthed the emergence of corporate social responsibility (CSR), a company's financial and non-financial contribution to society aimed at social and environmental upliftment (Triologue, 2009). Owing to this, companies spend billions in social responsibility initiatives, ...in a move to build a good corporate reputation (Mahmood and Bashir, 2020:184). Mahmood and Bashir (2020) continue to allude that 42% of the image of a company stems from its CSR activities.

Additionally, according to Stobierski (2021), customers' interest in CSR is also increasing, as 55% of American consumers believe that it is essential for companies to take a stand on environmental, social, and political issues. Oberseder, Schlegelmilch, and Murphy (2013) state that, in addition to consumers being interested in CSR, they also take CSR into account when evaluating companies. This is supported by Zulu (2020), who states that customers are no longer interested in corporations that pursue business only to make a profit. Customers now expect firms to act as good corporate citizens, too. Further to the findings above, Oberseder et al. (2013) allude that most customers believe that companies should engage in CSR, and that they should benefit from it too.

Testament to the growing importance of CSR, the topic (of CSR) has been extensively studied across management, marketing, and business ethics literature (Yang & Basile, 2019:2-17). However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the outcomes associated with investment in CSR (Yang & Basile, 2019: 2-17). This is again corroborated by Oberseder et al. (2013), who agree that researchers and companies are indeed paying increased attention to CSR; however, it remains unclear the extent of the influence of CSR on consumers' perceptions, and in addition, managers and academics lack a tool for measuring consumers' perception of CSR.

Furthermore, the following gaps in research were also found:

1. Despite CSR's critical function, a visible thread throughout available literature is the lack of agreement on a singular definition of the term. This is corroborated by Aletter, Von der Burg, and Zanella (2010), who state that there is no single, universally accepted definition of CSR. This may be because this discipline is relatively new and is ever-changing in its areas of responsibility and attributes.
2. In addition to the gap mentioned above, there is a considerable amount of academic literature on the benefits of CSR in view of societies, such as the report on the benefits of CSR for companies and society report by Ksiezak (2016), which clearly outlines a series of advantages of CSR. However, there is limited academic material that highlights the benefits of CSR for the organisation. More especially, there is inadequate research on the impact of corporate social responsibility on **brand equity**.

Brand equity is a concept born in the 1980s (Fayrene & Lee, 2011:33). The concept has, since its inception, gained much popularity as researchers argue that brand equity is one of the most valuable assets that a company can possess (Tuominen, 1999:65-100). Brand equity represents the "added value" endowed to a product or service because of past investments in the marketing of the brand (Tuominen, 1999:65-100). The scholar proceeds to explain that brands are financial assets and should be recognised as such by top management and the financial markets.

Accordingly, considering the substantial amounts of resources invested in CSR and the strategic benefit of brand equity, there is a need to investigate the relationship between CSR and brand equity to ascertain whether there is a clear return on investment for the organisation. Against this background, this study investigates the impact of NamPower's CSR investments on the *equity* of its brand, using the company's relationship with Disability Sport Namibia as a case study. The relationship between the two entities is outlined in the following subsection.

1.3 NamPower and Disability Sport Namibia (DSN)

Namibia Power Corporation (NamPower) is the national electricity utility of Namibia. As a state-owned entity, in addition to its responsibility of ensuring the security of electricity supply for the country, NamPower has been equally committed to good corporate citizenship and has, over the years, established a footprint in the corporate social investment sphere in Namibia. Through the company's CSR arm called the NamPower Foundation, the company makes significant investments in various community projects and organisations aimed at socio-economic development. One such investment is NamPower's continued support of Disability Sport Namibia.

Disability Sport Namibia (DSN) is the national body for developing sports for disabled people in Namibia. NamPower has, since 2011, been the sole sponsor of Disability Sport Namibia, having invested more than N\$10 million to date (2024) towards the development of the Disability Sport Namibia organisation, including the training and support of the disabled athletes. This partnership came about after DSN sought funding from NamPower to meet financial shortages.

According to Kumar and Muthulakshmi (2022), many businesses have CSR programmes, and yet they struggle to quantify their impact. For this reason and considering the large financial CSR investments made in DSN, there is a need for NamPower to investigate the return on investment (ROI), specifically on its brand equity. It is becoming increasingly expected for companies to track their CSR impact, just like any key performance indicator, because CSR spending has evolved from a goodwill activity to a measurable financial strategy (Kumar & Muthulakshmi, 2022).

Correspondingly, D'Cunha (2025) emphasises that it is essential to measure CSR impact as it allows a company to demonstrate the effectiveness of its CSR programmes by evaluating whether they (CSR programmes) are achieving their intended objectives. CSR impact measurement also builds trust among stakeholders and investors through transparent reporting. The importance of CSR impact measurement and the absence of it in NamPower culminated in the research problem.

1.4 Purpose of the study

This study sought to discover the effects of the practice of CSR in modern organisations and measure the impact that it may have on brand equity by exploring the correlation between CSR and brand equity. Specifically, this study analyses the direct effects of CSR on brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations.

1.5 Research problem and question

Despite significant investments in CSR initiatives, there is limited evidence regarding the effects of these investments on how the company is perceived or positioned by its consumers and stakeholders. More specifically, there is a lack of information on the impact of NamPower's CSR activity on the equity of its brand particularly among its CSR beneficiaries (DSN).

While CSR is an extensively studied subject, the correlation between corporate social responsibility and brand equity is a relationship that is underexplored in general, aggravating the research problem. This finding is supported by Zulu (2020), who states that there is a lack of clarity in terms of the outcomes associated with investment in CSR. In agreement, Oberseseder et al. (2013) state that the influence of CSR on consumers' perceptions is unclear, and in addition, there is also a lack of a tool to measure consumers' perceptions of CSR.

If this research gap/problem is not addressed, future decision makers will lack research-based and empirical evidence to determine the strategic alignment between business goals and CSR. In today's world, where businesses are expected to positively contribute towards environmental, social, and governance (ESG) dimensions, this study contributes towards the academic body of literature around the effects of social investments on corporates.

The research question guiding the study is: How does DSN perceive the equity of NamPower's brand based on NamPower's CSR activities? What influence does CSR have on the components of Aaker's brand equity model

1.6 Significance of the study

This study will contribute to increasing the literature in the underexplored academic field regarding the tangible and intangible outcomes associated with investment in CSR, specifically in relation to brand equity.

This study is of great benefit to the larger academic field as its outcomes can help decision makers in strategic management and practitioners in the fields of CSR, Public Relations, Sustainability, Marketing, and related fields, make intelligent and profitable business decisions for the benefit of the company, its brand, and its bottom line.

Finally, the study serves as critical feedback to NamPower, providing the company with data on the impact of its CSR initiatives on the company's brand equity.

1.7 Research objectives

To this end, the primary research objectives of this study are the following:

- To analyse DSN's perceptions of NamPower's brand equity as influenced by the impact of NamPower's CSR activity.
- To examine the effects of CSR on brand equity based on Aaker's brand equity model.

1.7.1 Research questions

- How does DSN perceive the equity of NamPower's brand based on NamPower's CSR activities?
- What influence does CSR have on the components of Aaker's brand equity model?

1.8 Limitations of the study

It is inherent in human nature that beneficiaries of CSR initiatives may feel obligated to speak positively of their sponsors due to the support received. For this study, the employees and athletes of Disability Sport Namibia may feel obliged to rate NamPower positively in the data collection interviews because of the significant investment NamPower has made to them. To counter this possible bias, the researcher reassured

the sample group that their identities and responses to questions would be kept confidential, allowing them the freedom to respond honestly. With this reassurance, the researcher expected that participants would be truthful and forthcoming.

1.9 Conclusion

Since the inception of CSR in the 1950s (Carroll, 2008), the concept has gained international popularity, resulting in the continuous growth of the number of companies practicing CSR all over the world. The uptake of CSR has seen companies invest significant amounts of finances and resources into the discipline. However, despite extensive research on CSR, there remains a notable gap in understanding how these initiatives impact organisational outcomes, particularly brand equity. This issue has created an urgent demand for measuring CSR performance and assessing its impact, ultimately leading to the necessity for this research.

1.10 Outline of chapters

The study consists of five main chapters. Chapter One outlines the background of the topic, the reasons for selecting the particular problem, the significance of the study, and highlights the research question and research objectives. Chapter One also introduces Disability Sport Namibia and NamPower, the subjects of this study. The chapter following, Chapter Two, presents the literature review in detail - providing a critical summary of literature on various subjects related to the research question and research topic. Chapter Three discusses the research design and methodology adopted to investigate the research problem, while the presentation of findings and discussion of the data collected and analysed in the study are illustrated in Chapter Four. Finally, the implications, limitations, and recommendations made for further research and the summarised conclusion of the study are discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The literature review commences by discussing the evolving definitions of CSR. With no universally accepted definition, the term has gone through various changes over the years, which are discussed in the first subsection. The literature review further explores the institutionalisation of CSR, highlighting its role within the Namibian context and shedding light on the relationship between CSR and brand equity - an asset recognised for its strategic value since the 1980s.

Through the analysis of a brand equity model, existing related theories, and empirical findings, this literature review points out the gaps in the literature and in CSR practice and highlights the different subtopics related to CSR and brand equity.

2.2 Defining Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR is defined as a company's financial and non-financial contribution to society aimed at social and environmental upliftment (Triologue, 2009). When properly aligned to meet the social and environmental needs of society, CSR can generate positive associations for the firm (Yang & Basile, 2019: 2-17).

There is a general perception that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a recent or emerging concept. However, literature back-dates the discipline of CSR as far back as the twentieth century, more specifically from the early 1950s, to date (Carroll, 2008). Despite its perceived recent growth, there is evidence of the business community's concern for society for centuries (Carroll, 2008). In the decades that followed, societal expectations towards corporates transformed, and so did the concept and definition of CSR. Carroll (2008) further alludes that CSR has since then grown and evolved in meaning

and in practice, to become more far-reaching and inclusive, eventually becoming global in scope.

Presently, CSR has become fully integrated with strategic management, with every corporation having a policy concerning CSR and producing a report annually detailing its activity (Crowther & Aras, 2008). The last two decades have experienced a tremendous increase in corporate attention to activities around CSR (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015: 229-253).

Despite the growth and evolution of CSR, there remains no consensus on a clear definition of the discipline and on what it fully encompasses. Some authors argue that CSR is merely a marketing tool, some say that it is a platform to enhance the company's brand, and others protest that it is simply corporate responsibility (Wan-Jan, 2006: 176-184). Many CSR definitions were developed by scholars in the past based on the social, economic, political, and environmental context of that period since the 1950s (Rahman, 2011: 166-176).

Rahman (2011) quotes the following definitions of the term CSR, each defined and accepted in relation to their respective decade:

- 1950s - Heald (1957): CSR is recognition on the part of management of an obligation to the society it serves, not only for maximum economic performance but for humane and constructive social policies as well.
- 1970s - Carroll (1979): The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organisations at a given point in time.
- 1980s - Epstein (1987): Corporate social responsibility relates primarily to achieving outcomes from organisational decisions concerning specific issues or problems which (by some normative standard) have beneficial rather than adverse effects on pertinent corporate stakeholders.
- 21st Century - World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2008): the continuing commitment by a business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families, as well as of the local community and society at large.

These definitions clearly illustrate the evolution of the concept of CSR throughout history, each of them representing or highlighting a particular dimension of the topic. A deeper analysis of these definitions also illustrate that in earlier years, CSR was viewed more as an obligation to society which focused only on labour conditions, philanthropy and charity. Later, the definition of CSR expanded to include environmental impact, including the sub-aspects of stakeholder involvement and voluntariness. When globalization came into the picture (21st century), the importance of ethical conduct was added to the definition. The history and evolution of CSR based on the definitions above illustrates that the 1950s were a period in which *defining* CSR took precedence. This propelled the growing interest of other scholars to similarly study and define the subject and its meaning. The following decade defined and highlighted *what* CSR responsibilities were in the context of a business, followed by the 1980s, when the discussion centred around the ways and benefits of implementing CSR.

To sum it up, in layman's terms, the above definitions can be summarised as: the ethical and moral issues surrounding corporate decision-making and behaviour (Branco & Rodrigues, 2007). Complementing this, and according to Crowther and Aras (2012), the broadest definition of CSR is concerned with the relationship between global corporations, governments, and individual citizens. There is consensus that organisations should be aware of the environment in which they operate and should thus take note that they are responsible for the needs of all their stakeholders and not only those of their shareholders.

It is thus understood that the concept of CSR involves ethical behaviour by a company towards the society in which it operates, taking care of the needs of its employees and those of its stakeholders, and taking good care of the environment in which it operates.

As noted earlier in this subsection, the growing interest in CSR over the years has led to its full integration with strategic management, as companies continue to incorporate CSR into their business practices, on a global scale. The following section highlights the corporate institutionalisation of CSR around the world.

2.2.1 The institutionalisation of CSR

While early traces of CSR can be found in the mid-1800s (Mosca & Civera, 2017:2), CSR was only formally recognised as a business principle in the 1950s. Since then, several factors have emerged over the years that have brought CSR into business focus, resulting in the growth of the number of companies practicing CSR. Dapi and Phiri (2015) state that increased stakeholder activism has resulted in consumers becoming more interested in the activities of businesses and actively taking a stance against companies that do not contribute to society. As such, there is now a demand from stakeholders and consumers alike for transparency in CSR reporting. The significance of CSR reporting is examined in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

Another factor that has influenced the corporate uptake of CSR is the realisation of market-based incentives associated with engaging in CSR initiatives, such as improved top-of-mind associations, credibility, and stronger brand equity (Dapi & Phiri, 2015). Researchers have recognised CSR as a key element in building brands in modern business environments, while corporate leaders now view CSR as a legal, legitimate, and critical endeavour for business (Zulu, 2020). Presently, the concept of CSR has gained international popularity, and many organisations understand the importance, opportunities, and benefits of the subject.

However, while CSR is a voluntary act by corporations, some countries pursue the legal institutionalisation of the activity. This information is the outcome of research conducted by the Institute of Communication (2004), which, through an international survey on CSR carried out in 21 countries, found that some countries advocate for having a legal framework pertaining to CSR institutionalization, while others advocate for a non-statutory framework in respect of the implementation of CSR activities (Leonidas et al., 2012:3). At present, CSR remains a voluntary practice rather than a legal requirement, including in Namibia, the setting of this research's case study.

2.2.2 CSR in Africa and the perceptions of CSR among Namibians

There is no definite period that has been collectively agreed upon by scholars regarding the date that CSR migrated from the West to Africa. However, Ntoutoume (2023) highlights that CSR practice in the African context rose exponentially after the Copenhagen World Summit in 1995 during which the United Nations declared 1996 – 2006 as the decade for poverty eradication. This call for action saw businesses, even in Africa, begin to take on the responsibility to support and sustain the development of countries, communities and people. Since then, CSR was viewed as more than just philanthropy, but rather as a targeted approach to the socio-economic development of communities. Major areas of CSR investment in Africa, according to Ntoutoume (2023), are education, community development, Small-medium-enterprise support and skills development and training.

While CSR in Africa is found to be conducted by a lesser number of businesses in comparison to the West, the practise is prominent among mining, oil and gas companies and larger corporations on the continent (Rampersad et. al., 2014).

Perceptions of CSR within the Namibian context

In Namibia, many organisations have adopted CSR as an avenue to support national development and address the socio-economic challenges of the country (Network Media Magazines, 2025). A local study conducted by Erastus et al. (2023) on employees' perceptions of CSR practices in Namibia found that the Namibian workforce and consumers alike are intentional about where they work or spend their money, and how that company gives back to the community. The study highlighted that the Namibian workforce aims to identify and affiliate themselves with socially responsible organisations, as it improves the levels of their feelings of job satisfaction (Erastus et al., 2023). Furthermore, it was found that being responsible for the needs of the society and conducting sound ethical business practices is the standard expectation that Namibians have for local companies (Erastus et al., 2023:18).

The perceptions of employees regarding CSR (internal perceptions) is an area that has received limited academic attention, as existing literature focuses predominantly on the

external perceptions of CSR (Ditlev-Simonsen, 2015:3). This predicament is unfortunate as employees are the most important stakeholders of any organisation, thus their insights should be considered as the most important (De Busy & Suprawan, 2012). Cognisant of this gap in the literature, Ditlev-Simonsen (2015) conducted a study on the relationship between employees' perception of CSR and commitment and found that employees develop positive emotions towards employers who care about the world outside of their company. In the context of CSR, the emotion of pride is especially relevant because organisations that engage in CSR are likely to be seen as competent, responsible, considerate, caring, and moral. Pride, once developed, gives employees many psychological rewards such as meaningfulness, esteem, and excitement (Ng et al., 2019:107-137).

As the universal interest in CSR continues to grow, societal views and perceptions of CSR continue to grow too. As such, corporates, including those in Namibia, are paying increasing attention to CSR and the reactions and perceptions that they ignite in their employees and in their consumers. This area of study is detailed more intently in the next section.

2.2.3 Views and societal perceptions of CSR

Besides the shareholders of a company, various stakeholder groups have interests in a business. These stakeholder groups include investors, the public, employees, and consumers. Research indicates that consumers' interest in CSR is increasing, and they believe that companies should engage in social initiatives (Oberseder et al., 2013:5).

An empirical study carried out by Narwal and Sharma (2008: 61-79), on the Perceptions of CSR in India, found that society's perceptions of CSR activities were first *skeptical*, but it is now changing to being *objective*. Through CSR, businesses are no longer perceived as merely profit-driven, but society takes a positive view of companies' efforts and expects positive behaviour. Additionally, an empirical study of the perceptions of CSR in Kazakhstan found that the majority perceived CSR as a tool to (1) improve public image and reputation, (2) a tool to lower criticism from the public, and (3) a method to increase consumer loyalty (Smirnova, 2012: 404-417). According to Yung (2019), there are three central opinions as to why CSR may have differing impacts on stakeholders' perceptions

of a company. Firstly, the credibility of the CSR activities, the visibility of the activities, and the “fit” of the CSR activity to corporate strategy. The argument on credibility states that if stakeholders believe that the company is not acting out of its own self-interest, stakeholders are likely to trust the company. The visibility argument states that a company’s internal CSR initiatives are not as visible as its external initiatives, and as such, might not be visible to all stakeholder groups. The argument about “fit” refers to the fact that stakeholder needs are different, thus CSR activities may fit one group, and not the other.

Additionally, society’s perception on CSR has also been viewed and condemned as being merely a public relations stunt for corporates, rather than being genuine (Daphi & Phiri, 2015:7). The authors further allude that corporations have been criticised for attempting to evade their legal, ethical, philanthropic, and economic obligations by engaging in activities that merely create the illusion of corporate social responsibility (Daphi & Phiri, 2015).

Despite the literature on the perceptions of CSR, thus far, no scales aimed to measure consumers’ perceptions on CSR have been developed (Oberseder et al., 2013:5). Oberseder et al. (2013) further explain that a wide-ranging scale is needed for various reasons, chief among them being that there is difficulty gauging customers’ CSR perceptions on CSR (Phole & Hittner, 2008). These findings indicate that substantial improvements are necessary in measuring both general CSR perceptions and CSR impacts. Specifically, in the present study, there is a need to better measure CSR as it relates to brand equity. The following section defines and explores this concept.

2.3 Brand equity

2.3.1 The definition of a brand

A consumer’s perception of a company is formed by two broad categories, namely, brand performance and brand equity (Zulu, 2020). Brand equity is a concept born in the 1980s (Aaker & Alexander, 1993), and any discussion on defining the term brand equity must begin by first understanding what a brand is. A brand is defined as a mark of distinction that differentiates one thing from another (Shariq, 2018). Shariq (2018:312) puts it into

clearer perspective by illustrating the concept as follows: “A product is an item that offers a functional benefit. A brand is the name, symbol, or design that increases the value of that same product, beyond its functional purpose”. Tuominen (1999:65-100) qualifies this statement by explaining that brands are financial assets and should be recognised as such by top management and the financial markets. Shariq (2018:312) also alludes that brands are one of the strategic assets available to a company and they can provide long-lasting competitive advantage. Branding is critical in differentiating products/services from competitors in an increasingly competitive market (Permana, 2023).

The definitions above provide important context on the difference between a product and a branded product. With this understanding now in place, the concept of brand equity is presented in the next paragraph.

2.3.2 Introducing brand equity

The concept of brand equity has, since its inception, gained much popularity with researchers asserting that it is one of the most valuable assets that a company can possess. Aaker and Alexander (1993) define brand equity as a set of assets, including brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and associations, that are attached to a brand name or symbol. It is the value generated by a brand, by virtue of its name (Shariq, 2018:318). Tuominen (1999:65-100), alludes that brand equity represents the “added value” endowed to a product or service because of past investments in the marketing of the brand. Brand equity exists in the hearts and minds of consumers (Shariq, 2018). It is demonstrated in the way consumers think, act, and feel about your brand, and how much they respect and value it (or not). Therefore, a high brand equity adds immeasurable value to a company in its ability to attract and retain consumers, thereby increasing consumer confidence and loyalty, and subsequently resulting in financial gain.

Building strong brands with a high brand equity has become a marketing priority for many organisations as a strong brand yields an invaluable marketing advantage for organisations (Hoeffler, 2003). The benefits of a strong brand can be grouped in two ways: according to the marketer/company and according to the consumer. For a

company, a strong brand with significant brand equity provides a myriad of benefits. These include greater customer loyalty and less vulnerability to competitive marketing actions and marketing crises, larger profit margins and more favourable customer responses to price increases and decreases, and brand-extension opportunities (Keller, 2001). To a consumer, a strong brand decreases buying time as it becomes easy to recognise and select a specific product from among competing products, which is best suited to them.

Different approaches have been adopted by researchers with the aim of quantifying or measuring brand equity. One of these approaches includes Brand Equity Ten by Aaker (1996), which illustrates ten sets of measures grouped in five categories, and the Measure of Park (1992), which adopts a direct and indirect measurement of brand equity. Additionally, some have used perceptual or psychological measures, while others use consumer and market behaviour to measure brand equity (Gill & Darwa, 2010:190). The present dissertation explores the impact of CSR on brand equity, based on Aaker's (1991) brand equity model.

2.3.3 Measuring brand equity - Aaker's brand equity model

Brand value can be evaluated and measured from several complementary perspectives, most commonly financial, customer and employee-based (perspectives). From a financial perspective (finance-based brand equity), cash flows, stock prices and other financial metrics are used to measure a brand's equity. From an employee's perspective (employee-based brand equity), brand value derives from the influence of brand knowledge on employee's behaviours within their work environments. From the customers perspective (customer-based brand equity) – which is also the perspective most preferred by academics (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015) - brand value is determined by consumers attitudes, perceptions and responses. Aaker's (1991) brand equity framework falls under this customer-based category, and it is the theoretical foundation of this dissertation.

Aaker (1991) identifies five components that make up brand equity, and they are as follows:

(1) Brand loyalty – This is known to be the core of brand equity. Brand loyalty measures the attachment that one has to a brand (Shariq, 2018:9). It determines how easily, or not, a consumer is likely to switch to another brand in times of crisis or when a similar product is launched in the market. Brand loyalty is displayed in the emotions, consciousness, and buying practices of consumers (Wu & Su, 2020). Brand loyalty provides an invaluable upper hand against industry competitors and increases profits.

(2) Brand awareness - Brand awareness relates to the strength of the brand in the memory of the consumer as reflected in the consumer's ability to identify the brand under different conditions (Shariq, 2018:10). This allows the consumers to be able to recognise and recall its quality with ease (Aaker, 1991). Brand awareness plays a critical role in a consumer's decision-making as it increases the chance that a brand will be considered when making a purchase decision. Research has implied that a company's CSR efforts can impact brand awareness positively (Wu & Su, 2020).

(3) Perceived quality – This refers to a consumer's perception of the *complete* quality or superiority of a product, in comparison to its competitors. It is also described as “the overall feeling of a brand” (Aaker, 1991). Wu and Su (2020) crucially emphasise that perceived quality refers not to the actual quality of products or services, but rather to consumers' subjective assessment of their condition. A highly perceived quality of a good or service influences purchase decisions and allows premium pricing without price sensitivity on the part of the consumer.

(4) Brand associations - Brand associations refer to anything “linked” in memory to a brand (Aaker, 1991). Product attributes include tangible and intangible characteristics of a product, consumer benefits, etc.

(5) Other proprietary assets - These are patents, intellectual property rights, and other rights that a brand may have accumulated, giving it a greater competitive advantage.

Gill and Darwa (2010) indicate that what makes Aaker different from other researchers is that Aaker (1991) combines both market behaviour-related measures and perceptual

measures to create a framework to measure brand equity. His approach is rooted in focusing on consumer experiences, emotions, and perceptions – which are the essential driving factors of brand equity. Aaker's (1991) brand equity model also corresponds with the widely accepted view that brand equity is most accurately assessed from the consumer's viewpoint rather than through financial or company-centred measures.

2.4 The effects of CSR

With corporate social responsibility (CSR) as the independent variable, the following subsection reviews literature examining the impact of CSR on various dependent factors related to this study.

2.4.1 The relationship between CSR and brand equity

CSR as a concept has been extensively studied, and there is abundant literature on its history, its definition, its components, and its evolution. Within this body of research, scholars have also determined a relationship between CSR and brand equity. Various authors, including Wang et al. (2015) and Hossain et al. (2019), have conducted studies on the influence of CSR on brand equity and found a positive affiliation between the two (Hossain et al., 2019).

Additionally, in an empirical study conducted in Bangladesh, Hossain et al. (2019:1-7) concluded that through the concept of CSR, businesses can accelerate their market competitiveness and strengthen their brand equity. This finding is corroborated by Mahmood et al. (2020), who found that the CSR activities of a company have a positive impact on consumers who are sensitive to social concerns. Mahmood et al. (2020) further note that CSR activities imply that a company possesses the ability to produce superior quality products. Furthermore, literature suggests that the equity of a brand is no longer constant, as it can be affected by a myriad of both internal and external forces. Given the established positive relationship between CSR and brand equity, it is therefore important for companies to prioritise CSR as a method to uphold brand equity.

In support of the above, a recent study conducted by Zhao et al. (2021) found that CSR significantly impacts corporate reputation and brand equity. The scholars highlight that organisations have the potential to build moral capital in intangible forms (such as brand equity, trust, and improved reputation) by investing more in CSR activities. These intangible forms of capital are also referred to as brand assets.

Further evidence is provided by Hur et al. (2013), who set out to investigate the relationships between CSR, brand credibility, brand equity, and corporate reputation. From a sample of over 800 consumers in South Korea, the study found that CSR has a direct positive effect on corporate reputation and credibility. The findings further indicate that the relationship between CSR and brand equity is “sequentially and fully mediated” by corporate reputation and brand credibility.

2.4.2 CSR's impact on company performance

Findings by Wang et al. (2015) suggest that CSR and brand equity positively affect company performance. Most of the analysis on CSR's benefits is linked to the correlation between CSR and employee loyalty, as well as CSR and brand equity. This is supported by Melo and Galan (2009:423-437), who allude that CSR leads to enhanced performance as it creates intangible assets in terms of image and reputation. Melo and Galan (2009) highlight that these intangible assets create a competitive advantage that subsequently leads to enhanced financial performance. This theory is corroborated by Gardiner et al. (2003:67-77), who state that if CSR has not been incorporated into business principles and practices, its effects on the “bottom line” will be below its potential.

CSR, although not a profit-making cost centre for an organisation, indirectly contributes to the bottom line of a company through the intangible assets that it creates and evokes in its stakeholders – these being loyalty, commitment, and trust. There is substantial evidence in the literature indicating that customers' beliefs on CSR directly impact customer outcomes such as brand preference and positive advocacy on the brand (Torres et al., 2012:13-24). Similarly, Du et al. (2007) found that visible CSR is a prerequisite to stronger brand identification and loyalty. With these positive impacts in mind, Wang et al.

(2015) conclude that companies are driven to engage in and fulfil their CSR commitments to improve company image, strengthen marketing initiatives, and positively affect company performance. As highlighted above, the positive effect of CSR on company performance derives from its influences on critical business factors such as brand image and customer loyalty.

Customer loyalty is the most significant driver of brand equity, and corporate social responsibility plays a key role in significantly enhancing that loyalty (Salifu, 2020). As customers grow more aware of the effects of their purchases, they are now more deliberate about where they allocate their spending, favouring companies that align with their values and demonstrate a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility. Through shared values, establishing deep sentimental connections between a business and its customers becomes a powerful driver of customer loyalty and trust.

2.5 Conceptual framework

This study is informed by two theories, the Stakeholder Theory and Carroll's Pyramid of CSR Theory. These two theories not only complement each other but also speak to the study's objectives. Carroll's Pyramid of CSR Theory illustrates the structured framework regarding the different levels of CSR responsibility of businesses towards society, while the Stakeholder Theory highlights the importance of considering and satisfying those same responsibilities, for the greater benefit of the company and its success. The two theories are explained in greater detail as follows.

2.5.1 The Stakeholder Theory

The Stakeholder Theory is considered a foundational factor in the operations of CSR (Branco, 2007). CSR and the Stakeholder Theory are distinctly different concepts, but are interconnected, with their greatest similarity being the importance of considering societal interests (of stakeholders) into business operations.

Freeman's (1984) famous definition of a stakeholder is a group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievements of the organization's objectives. Stakeholders

are identified as having three vital attributes, namely, power, urgency, and legitimacy (Wang, 2011:107). These attributes influence the involvement of stakeholders in a corporation's CSR programme and their perceptions of a corporation's CSR performance.

Wang (2011) further states that through the stakeholder theory, the main aim of a corporation is to satisfy the economic and non-economic demands of its stakeholders. Other researchers, namely Brin and Nehme (2019), add that the stakeholder theory suggests that the objectives of a company can only be achieved by protecting and balancing the interests of different stakeholder groups.

Ultimately, the theory provides a framework that identifies the connection between stakeholder management and the achievement of corporate goals. The theory suggests that the management of a company has a duty to act in accordance with the interests and values of an organisation's stakeholders (Yang & Basile, 2019:2-17). The theory ensures that both corporate goals and stakeholder goals are considered, and if this objective is achieved, the company will gain the loyalty and trust of its stakeholders (Pavlo, 2019).

The Stakeholder Theory asks the following foundational and critical questions: Who are the stakeholder groups? How many of these groups must be served? Which of their interests must be served? Which of their interests are most important? How can their interests be balanced? How much corporate money should be allotted to serve these interests? (Wang, 2011).

The Stakeholder theory is one of the most widely used frameworks for conceptualizing and understanding issues related to CSR. This is evident in a study by Zahari et. al. (2019) on the effects of CSR practices on brand equity, which examined Malaysia's top 100 brands that also adopted the Stakeholder Theory to study the effects of CSR on brand equity. The study highlighted that CSR is greatly related to the concept of corporate citizenship, which acts as validation of the Stakeholder theory. Stakeholders are considered pertinent and remain impactful in relation to a company's CSR practices (Zahari et al., 2019:3).

In addition to the Stakeholder Theory, the triple bottom line concept is also one of the foundations of CSR. The triple bottom line concept is a sustainable business strategy,

which states that companies should commit to measuring their social and environmental impact, as opposed to only focusing on the bottom line. The triple bottom line concept was introduced for the first time by John Elkington in 1994 (Zak, 2015). Elkington argues that companies should produce three different bottom lines. The financial bottom line (profit), the people account (societal), and the environmental account (planet). This concept is now popularly also known as the triple Ps: People, Profit, Planet, for sustainable business. CSR is sometimes identified with the concept of sustainable development, and sustainable development is the basis for responsibility in modern business (Zak, 2015). The concept encourages companies to positively impact society and the environment, while also ensuring that they benefit their shareholders.

The dependent variable in this study is brand equity, while the independent variables are the influences of CSR geared to a specific stakeholder group. The Stakeholder Theory is relevant to this research as it is built on the same premise and principle as the relationship between CSR and brand equity. This is illustrated as follows: A company invests in its stakeholders through its CSR initiatives. These investments, in turn, influence the sentiments and perceptions of its stakeholders towards the company. Consequently, it influences brand equity.

2.5.2 Carroll's Pyramid of CSR Theory

The supplementary theory applicable to this study is Carroll's Pyramid of CSR. Carroll (1991:116-132) states that four kinds of social responsibilities make up CSR, and these are: economic, philanthropic, legal, and ethical.

More formally put, there are "four obligations that create a foundation for a business's responsibility towards society" (Brin & Nehme, 2019), namely:

- (1) Economic responsibilities: Businesses have an economic responsibility to society. It is an organisation's responsibility and requirement to make money, as every and any establishment needs funds to sustain itself and/or provide a good or a service. According to Carroll (1991), to implement CSR, one must be involved in business

operations and make a profit, as profits are necessary to reward investors and to be reinvested back to maintain business growth.

- (2) Legal responsibilities: Carroll (1991) highlights the importance of the organisations' adherence to and respect of laws and regulations. This is because an unethical organisation is unlikely to value CSR principles.
- (3) Ethical responsibilities: The ethical responsibility of a business means that businesses are supposed to refrain from activities that are considered as being immoral or unethical in society (Carroll, 1991). According to the same author, organisations must be responsible and contributing corporate citizens, aimed at bettering the circumstances of the communities in which they operate, and the country at large.
- (4) Philanthropic responsibilities: Philanthropy on a corporate level refers to all possible forms of business giving. "It is a voluntary activity guided by the business's desire to participate in social activities" (Brin and Nehme, 2019). "They are actions that are in response to society's expectation that businesses be good corporate citizens" (Carroll, 1991).

The obligations mentioned above are illustrated pictorially in the figure below.

Figure 1: The Pyramid of CSR



Source: Carroll, 2016

The premise of Carroll's pyramid is the importance of implementing CSR according to the order stated above. To be socially responsible, a company must first achieve economic objectives by being profitable. Only after this can it move to the next stage, namely adhering to legislation, and further to ethical responsibilities. Finally, it will achieve the last level of CSR obligations by fulfilling its philanthropic responsibilities.

In relation to this study, the four identified key areas of Carroll's pyramid were used as a framework to assess the company in question's CSR implementation. It served as a blueprint to determine whether NamPower is involved in initiatives pertaining to the four groups and if the interests of the different stakeholders that fall under each of the four respective groups are met, and ultimately, if they have an influence on the equity of the brand.

2.5 Overview of literature

In summary, traditionally, a company's value was primarily assessed based on financial performance; however, this has shifted. Today, a firm's value is largely determined by its brand equity, which is directly influenced by CSR. The literature review highlights a clear consensus among researchers: consumers expect companies to contribute meaningfully to society through corporate social responsibility (CSR), and they are willing to support those companies that do so. This perspective has generated significant benefits for companies engaging in CSR.

Consequently, the following chapter (Chapter Three: Methodology) discusses the research design and methodology adopted to investigate the impact of these generated benefits – that is, the influence of CSR on brand equity.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology employed to investigate the impact of CSR on NamPower's brand equity. It details the research strategy and methodological approach and outlines the data analysis techniques used in the study. The chapter further discusses ethical considerations undertaken by the researcher to uphold data integrity and participant confidentiality, thereby reinforcing public trust in the study's findings.

3.2 Research strategy

Zulu (2020) defines a research strategy as a step-by-step plan of action that guides researchers in conducting research "systematically and on schedule" to produce quality results and comprehensive reporting. Given the variety of research strategy methods available, researchers must choose the approach that best aligns with the study's objectives.

For this study, a primary research strategy was adopted. Primary research strategies are research methods that collect data directly from the original sources, allowing for more in-depth insights into the research questions (Williams, 2024). Through a qualitative approach, this research strategy enabled the researcher to investigate the relationship between CSR and brand equity, achieving the study objectives and providing answers to the research questions.

3.3 Research methodology: Qualitative

This study employed a qualitative case study research approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. A qualitative research approach was deemed most appropriate for this study as compared to quantitative methods because it provides a greater understanding of participants' thoughts and allows for an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of participants by learning about their

experiences and perspectives (Moriarty, 2011). Furthermore, according to Moriarty (2011), qualitative methods reach the parts that other methods cannot reach, as this method gathers words and emotions, resulting in detailed, extensive, and information-rich data. Consequently, this approach was selected because it allowed the researcher to thoroughly explore participants' personal and unique perspectives.

The guiding research philosophy that serves as the foundation of this research is interpretive epistemology based on qualitative techniques. Kivunya and Kuyini (2017) define epistemology as how one generates knowledge of the social world. Sol and Heng (2022:80) define it in simpler terms as “how we know what we know”. This philosophy complements the central aim of the interpretivist paradigm, which is to understand the subjective nature of human experience. This approach acknowledges that people are unique, and their observations and actions are based on how we interpret the social world. The approach also prioritises the importance of understanding social phenomena through the individual's perspective.

Therefore, considering the personal nature of this research topic, this approach allowed the researcher to see things from “others' point of view” based on the participants' unique interpretation of the world, placing emphasis on understanding the individual and the world around them (Kivunya & Kuyini, 2017:33).

Equally important, the study also employed a case study research design. Defined as an analysis of a specific individual, group, or situation to gain a comprehensive understanding (Njie and Asimiran, 2014), this was appropriate to the study's objectives to understand the perceptions and experiences of a specific group of people, namely Disability Sport Namibia.

To visually depict the philosophical and methodological foundations of this study, Figure 2 as depicted below, summarises the above:

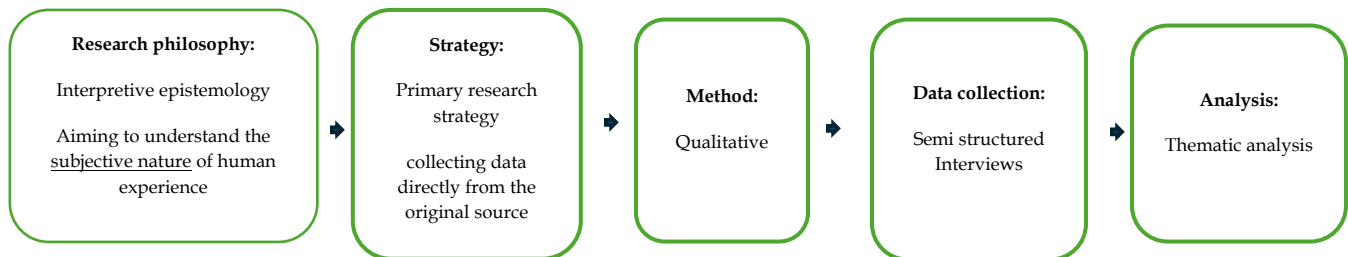


Figure 2: Study research method map (Source: Self-created)

3.4 Data collection design

Data collection is the initial phase of research and data analysis.

The data utilised in the study were derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with the sample population, intended to obtain detailed qualitative knowledge about how the subject views CSR's influence on NamPower's brand equity. This data collection method worked well in this study, considering the interpretivist nature of the research topic that is being explored. The semi-structured interviews allowed participants a degree of freedom to share and explain their thoughts and thought processes regarding the research questions.

Semi-structured interviews often entail having an interview guide with pre-determined questions aimed at addressing the research objectives. Therefore, in preparation for the interview, the researcher prepared an interview guide that contained open-ended questions (see Appendix 1) using Aaker's brand equity components as the basis of the interview questions. The pre-determined questions were not meant to create rigidity, but rather to provide structure for the interview session. Participants were free to elaborate on their thoughts, and the researcher also freely probed or asked follow-up questions in particular areas of interest that the participants may have displayed.

3.5 Population

Banjerjee and Chaudhury (2020) describe a population as the entire group about which information is required to be ascertained. The authors further emphasise that the population must be clearly defined, to specify exactly who is included or excluded.

For the present study, the target population was the group of people who are employed by or volunteer for the Disability Sport Namibia organisation. This includes the Directors, office administrators, and coaches, totalling a population size of 9. The athletes of Disability Sport Namibia were excluded from the study for the following reason: Disability Sport Namibia is the umbrella body for Special Olympics, Deaf Olympics, and Paralympics organisations in Namibia. The athletes that fall under each organisation have different degrees of intellectual disability. For this study, the researcher made the decision to only gather data from participants who work or volunteer for Disability Sport Namibia, as they do not have intellectual disabilities. This decision and criteria were not meant to stigmatise individuals with intellectual disabilities, but rather to ensure the integrity of the research results.

3.6 Sample size and sampling technique

A sample refers to a small portion of the fully defined population (Banjerjee et al., 2020). To ensure accurate inferences, the sample must be representative of the total population. A representative sample, as defined by Banjerjee et al. (2020), is one in which every individual within the population has an equal chance of being selected.

Due to Disability Sport Namibia's operational structure, where Directors are part-time and coaches frequently travel with athletes, many of the research population were inaccessible. Therefore, the sample was selected through convenience sampling, meaning that the researcher interviewed the participants who were most accessible at the time. Out of a population of 9, a sample of 5 was interviewed.

3.7 Data analysis method and process

Data analysis begins with efficient data collection. In the case of this study, it began with the researcher facilitating the interviews with intent and skill and probing in areas where there seemed to be deeper themes. Naturally, interviews by nature generate large amounts of data, and it is vital to reduce the amount of data and remain only with what is relevant after the discussions have taken place. Considering the above, this study adopted the thematic analysis method – a data analysis approach that involves exploring a set of data, recognising patterns, systematically coding, extracting themes, and ultimately constructing a coherent narrative. Among the various approaches to thematic analysis, this study specifically adopted the 6-stage thematic analysis framework according to Braun and Clarke (2014), which was employed in the following steps:

1. Familiarising the data

The first step of the data analysis process entailed the researcher manually transcribing the recorded interviews into a written document. Transcribing the interviews allowed the researcher the opportunity to better familiarise herself with the transcribed data through reading the transcripts or listening to the initial interview recordings repeatedly, until the researcher had a sense of familiarity with the data. This process further allowed the researcher to identify the major themes and patterns that presented themselves from the different interviews.

2. Generating initial codes

Data coding is the process of categorising and organising qualitative data into meaningful segments (Dye, 2023). Once the data is transcribed, the researcher segments the data into smaller parts for more detailed analysis (Hallberger & Malmberg, 2014). This is done through coding. It helps researchers manage and make sense of large amounts of qualitative data. Therefore, from the transcribed interviews, the researcher broke down the content into smaller pieces by highlighting statements and giving codes to portions of the transcribed data which were relevant to the research question. This process allowed the researcher to identify repeating trends in the data.

3. Generating themes

The researcher then grouped the codes and categories to form overarching themes with deeper meanings by identifying similar patterns.

4. Reviewing themes

This step involved the formulation of a final map of themes and categories. The researcher spent time looking at the content collected within each theme and then examined it to see if all themes made sense holistically, which they did.

5. Determining the significance of themes

After reviewing the themes, the researcher finalised and clearly labelled each one.

6. Reporting on findings

Finally, the researcher drafted a thematic analysis on each of the themes based on the findings and in relation to the research questions. They are presented in the data analysis chapter, which follows.

3.8 Verification of results

The credibility of this study and the verification of its results were guided by the principles of reliability, validity, and objectivity, which, according to Ali et al. (2011), is the prominent way to judge qualitative studies.

3.8.1 Validity

Validity in research is concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of research findings (Brink, 2003). It relates to the trustworthiness and credibility of the research. With that in mind, the researcher remained aware of the potential for researcher bias—particularly in this instance as the researcher is employed by NamPower—which could affect the credibility of the data. To minimize bias and to enhance validity throughout the study, the researcher adopted an objective perspective on the research topic during data collection. Additionally, the researcher sought to strengthen validity by clearly communicating to participants the purpose of the research and how/where the findings would be used.

3.8.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which results are consistent over time and are an accurate representation of the total population under study (Golafshani, 2003). More specifically, a study is referred to as *reliable*, and its research instrument is considered *reliable* if the results of the study can be reproduced under a similar methodology. Thus, the attribute of the research instrument is profound.

Accordingly, in this study, the researcher took steps to ensure reliability by selecting participants based on their knowledge and experience with the research topic. Every interview was conducted using a semi-structured approach with a consistent set of guiding questions to allow comparability, while still allowing participants the freedom to share and explain their thoughts. The research questions were clear, and the researcher made sure to emphasise the confidentiality of participants' answers.

3.8.3 Objectivity

Objectivity is the elimination of all subjectivity (Khatwani & Panhwar, 2019). Yet, achieving complete objectivity is a challenging goal in social sciences since, according to previous researchers, some level of subjectivity is inherent in qualitative research. However, to promote objectivity, the researcher intentionally examined her own personal biases and preconceptions and implemented the following strategies during data collection: The researcher allowed themes to emerge naturally during interviews rather than steering them towards predetermined or biased outcomes. During data analysis, the researcher thoroughly familiarised herself with the data to ensure accurate coding and avoid selective reporting.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Research ethics addresses and ensures honesty, objectivity, integrity, carefulness, openness, respect for intellectual property, and confidentiality (Salifu, 2020). In line with these principles, the researcher obtained official permission from NamPower to conduct this study (See Appendix 2) and disclosed her employment with the company to all participants.

The researcher understands the values of informed consent, voluntary participation, and the right to anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore, participation was entirely voluntary, with participants being free to use their real names or pseudonyms. The researcher further assured the participants that no identifying information would appear in any reports or publications. All participants received clear information about the purpose and objectives of the study and were required to give verbal consent before the interview commenced.

This research was conducted with academic integrity and will be used solely for academic purposes.

3.9.1 Protecting and securing data

The interviews were recorded using the researcher's cell phone, and the recordings were securely transferred to a password-protected laptop, which, along with transcriptions, is stored in a locked office.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology undertaken for this study. The study utilised a primary research strategy approach that informed the use of a qualitative information gathering method namely, semi-structured interviews. The latter part of the chapter outlined the population, the sampling approach, and the data analysis procedures. The next chapter presents the research findings, structured around the research questions introduced in Chapter One.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This study was motivated by the distinct purpose of examining the impact of NamPower's CSR initiatives on its brand equity, using the company's partnership with Disability Sport Namibia as a case study. Chapter four presents the findings and discussion of the data collected from interviews conducted with the representative sample of Disability Sport Namibia. The researcher has organised the findings into thematic categories that reflect and highlight prominent patterns observed throughout the interviews. Five categories were identified that are deemed important to understand the relationship between CSR and the different dimensions of brand equity.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 THEME ONE: CSR and shaping perceptions, creating loyalty

A clear theme that emerged from the data, as expressed by most of the interviewees, is that a company's commitment to CSR significantly influences a person's perception of the organisation. Respondents mentioned that a company's CSR involvement is a clear indicator of a company's ethics; thus, the presence or absence of CSR greatly shapes the emotional sentiment that they have towards that company. For example, Interviewee 1 narrated: *"CSR tells me that if a company is willing to invest in the communities around it, it is committed to the socio-economic development of the country at large. It tells me that it is a caring company and not just one that is focused on money and profits."*

Interviewee 5 shared similar sentiments: *"Yes, CSR initiatives portray a company as trustworthy and community focused."*

When making purchasing decisions, customers do not only consider the tangible attributes of a brand (such as pricing), but they also consider its intangible qualities, such as its perception or reputation. Therefore, the data confirms that CSR is not just corporate

philanthropy, but it is a strategic tool that can be utilised to influence the image of a company. These findings are consistent with Martínez and Del Bosque (2014), who state that by linking a brand with ethical and social issues, the bond of the brand is reinforced in the minds of its consumers – thereby fostering loyalty. Thus, it can be confidently concluded that consumer loyalty is directly enhanced through CSR or societal contributions.

Furthermore, considering the findings above and in response to the question, “Does NamPower’s CSR influence your loyalty or commitment towards its brand?”, the respondents predominantly answered in the affirmative. This signifies that NamPower’s CSR contributions have created a positive emotional connection with a majority of the interviewees, as reflected by Interviewee 5, who affirmed their loyalty to the brand, NamPower, because *“the company aligns with the same values as me.”* This is considered a sustainable competitive advantage, as Martínez and Del Bosque (2014) emphasise that brands that are based on emotional values are more durable and less likely to suffer from competition. In response to the same question, Interviewee 5 said, *“Yes, it (NamPower’s CSR contribution) increases my loyalty because it shows that the company cares about investing in improving Namibians’ lives.”* Many studies have explored the relationship between CSR and customer loyalty – for example, Raman et al. (2012) investigated the impact of CSR on customer loyalty in Malaysia. Their study found that the higher the practice of CSR, the stronger customer loyalty is towards the brand.

However, Interviewees 3 and 4 held a different view. They narrated that their loyalty is not influenced solely by NamPower’s CSR activities. Interviewee 4 said, *“My loyalty is not influenced by CSR activity alone. Positive CSR may enhance my perception of a company, but other factors such as service, quality, and reliability play a more significant role.”* Similarly, when the same interviewee was asked if CSR initiatives influence the way in which they perceive a company, the response was *“not necessarily”*. These findings demonstrate that while CSR influences some aspects of brand perception and loyalty, it does not influence all the dimensions of it. Yet still, when asked if NamPower’s CSR contributions increase their willingness to recommend the brand to others, all five interviewees responded with “yes”. This response indicates that although the minority

admitted that their loyalty was not solely driven by CSR initiatives, their clear willingness to recommend NamPower nonetheless reflects an overall and strong satisfaction /positive sentiment with the brand among all interviewees, formed by the company's CSR contribution.

4.2.2 THEME TWO: CSR and influencing brand awareness

Brand awareness refers to how well consumers know and recognise your brand. It is the most important component of brand equity because every purchase decision begins with recognising and recalling a brand.

Since the interviewees (Disability Sport Namibia) are beneficiaries of the NamPower Foundation, they are naturally familiar with NamPower's brand imagery. However, the researcher still chose to include questions pertaining to brand awareness in the interview. This is because, beyond simply being able to recognise the brand, the researcher sought to explore the deeper, emotional impact of CSR on the interviewee's awareness of the brand because, according to Ismael (2022), consumers build emotional relationships with brands owed to all of the emotional and sociological linkages that are tied to that brand.

Therefore, to explore this, the researcher asked, *"Do NamPower's CSR activities make the brand more memorable to you, and how?"*. All interviewees responded in the affirmative, and their responses are as follows:

Interviewee 1: *Yes, you will always **remember** everything about someone who once helped you. You will remember their colours, their logo, and **honour their contribution.**"*

Interviewee 2: *"Yes, CSR narrates **concrete stories and visible impacts** that make a brand standout "*

Interviewee 3: *"CSR is a very **important part of a company**, but equally, a brand should first be able to carry out its mandate to be memorable"*

Interviewee 4: *"Yes, NamPower's CSR activities are **visible and relevant to society**. This often leads to media coverage and word of mouth mentions and this makes the brand more memorable to everyone."*

Interviewee 5: *“Yes, it does, any company that shows that it **cares** for its people by uplifting them and making **positive impacts** and **cares for the environment** will always be memorable.”*

In some broader definitions of brand awareness, brand awareness is expanded to include not only brand recognition, but also: “what a customer remembers about a brand”. The responses above indicate that owing to NamPower’s CSR contributions, the interviewees possess a strong brand awareness of NamPower, which has clearly influenced stakeholder satisfaction and customer loyalty, as evidenced by the interviewees’ responses.

The results are powerful reminders to the fact that companies can strategically leverage CSR to intentionally craft compelling brand stories narrating authenticity, relevance, and corporate responsibility, which can leave lasting impressions in the minds of their consumers, thereby strengthening brand equity.

4.2.3 THEME THREE: CSR and the perceived quality of NamPower’s products and services

Perceived quality refers to a customer’s general assessment of how superior or inferior a product or service is (Lacap et al., 2021). Past literature has reported that several factors influence perceived quality, such as product price, marketing campaigns, and, in recent years, even CSR – and this is evident in the findings.

The research findings reveal that NamPower’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives positively influence consumer perceptions of the quality of the company’s products and services. This is supported by Interviewee 4, who explained that NamPower’s CSR initiatives directly shape their perception of the company’s goods and services, as they believe that a company committed to responsibility and long-term value (through CSR) would also reflect the same principles in its products. Similarly, Interviewee 2 linked active CSR with reliability and brand superiority, which influences perceptions of product quality. Furthermore, Interviewee 1 remarked, *“Yes... if NamPower is moral and gives back to society...then they (NamPower) would be moral in their business practices too.”* Collectively, these insights demonstrate that NamPower’s CSR activities foster

greater trust among customers, consumers, and beneficiaries, thereby elevating the perceived quality of its products and services. This is consistent with Pham (2025), who asserts that transparent CSR messaging strengthens perceived quality and brand credibility, both of which are essential components in building strong brand equity and customer loyalty.

However, Interviewee 3 held a different perspective, asserting that a brand's CSR initiatives do not necessarily impact their perception of the company's products or services, as some organisations use CSR to obscure questionable practices. Similarly, Interviewee 5 noted more generally that a company may have commendable CSR efforts while still offering substandard products. Although these responses were made in a more general sense and not specifically towards NamPower, they underscore the importance of authenticity and transparency when it comes to CSR. It is essential for fostering an ethical corporate image.

4.2.4 THEME FOUR: Creating positive brand associations

A brand association refers to the answer to the question “*What comes to mind when you think about xxx?*”. Brand association is a mental connection or mental association that a customer makes between your brand and an image, an emotion, an experience, a person, or other elements. These associations are formed by past experiences with the brand and can either be negative or positive.

The research findings indicate that NamPower's CSR activities have generated direct, strong, and positive brand associations in the minds of the interviewees. When prompted to describe their immediate feelings or words associated with NamPower, the interviewees responded as depicted in the illustration below:



Figure 3. Brand associations, as mentioned by interviewees (Source: Self-created)

The size of each word in the illustration corresponds with the frequency with which it was mentioned – therefore, the larger the word, the more it was mentioned. Notably, “caring” emerged as the most frequently cited association. Other prominent descriptors include “development partner,” “community-driven,” and “community-support” - reflecting NamPower’s commitment to societal development and advocacy for vulnerable groups. Additional terms used by respondents include generous, advocate, inclusive, supportive, and empowerment. It is important to mention that all interviewees expressed positive associations with NamPower. This underscores the significant impact of NamPower’s CSR activities in shaping its consumers’ perceptions, thereby fostering a strong, positive, emotional connection with the brand.

4.2.5 THEME FIVE: Consumers view CSR as important

In addition to examining brand equity, the researcher also aimed to assess the perspectives of the interviewees to find out whether they genuinely value a company’s investment in CSR, and to understand the general perceptions towards CSR. With that in mind, the researcher posed the question, “Do you care whether a company invests in CSR or not?”. The responses received are a clear indication that consumers not only consider CSR as important, but they also expect companies to actively engage in it in a strategic and focused manner that aligns with sustainable development initiatives.

Interviewee 1: Yes, I care (whether a company invests in CSR), I want to spend my money on a company that also gives back to the community. I care because it shows that a company considers its impact on society and that it is a partner in achieving universal SDGs.

Interviewees 2 and 4 also mentioned the importance of targeted CSR alignment.

Interviewee 2: Yes, I care (whether a company invests in CSR), especially if the CSR efforts are aligned with community values.

Interviewee 4: *Yes (I care whether a company invests in CSR). A company's efforts matter to me, especially if those efforts address the relevant and present needs of society.*

These responses indicate that consumers prioritise CSR activities that address specific community needs, which are also aligned with the company's core mission. For example, a food-producing company might focus on food sustainability programs within the community. Such targeted CSR efforts are perceived as more meaningful and impactful compared to arbitrary sponsorships.

Furthermore, Interviewee 3 stated the importance of companies contributing to the communities in their operational areas, especially if they extract natural resources from the area or heavily source human capital from the area. Interviewee 5 expressed that they believe it is mandatory for every company to take care of society. This study corroborates the existing literature regarding the increasing consumer interest in corporate social responsibility, as outlined in the introduction of this research.

4.3 Discussions

This study evaluated the *impact* of NamPower's CSR initiatives on its brand equity, focusing on the company's partnership with Disability Sport Namibia as a case study. Aaker's (1991) brand equity framework served as the theoretical foundation of this research, guiding the evaluation of impact around the components of brand equity, namely brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality.

The study's findings provide compelling evidence confirming that NamPower's CSR activity positively affects all the dimensions of brand equity within the research population – Disability Sport Namibia.

Additionally, the research findings are consistent with existing literature that highlights a strong relationship between CSR and brand equity. As stated by Hossain et al. (2019), companies that adopt strategic CSR practices cultivate an enriched brand equity, which fosters deep emotional connections like trust and loyalty. Furthermore, the research findings also corroborate the Stakeholder Theory, discussed previously in this research, which states that when a company acts in the best interests and values of its

stakeholders, it subsequently earns their loyalty and trust, consequently enriching its brand equity.

4.3.1 Fostering deep emotional connections

From the research findings, the researcher also learnt that NamPower's CSR initiatives have significantly contributed to strengthening emotional connections with the NamPower brand among the study participants, particularly by fostering a sense of trust.

This insight has highlighted an emerging concept or new theory shift within the fields of CSR and marketing known as emotional marketing. This concept states that any initiative that successfully evokes positive emotions in consumers and subsequently establishes a deeper emotional connection between consumers and a brand is considered emotional marketing, which, as argued by Pohorelov (2024), is an extension of CSR. Emotional marketing has a direct and positive impact on purchasing decisions, brand advocacy, and brand loyalty, which the present study has revealed to be clear in the research sample. Considering that trust and loyalty are critical drivers of brand equity, NamPower's ability to cultivate these sentiments among its stakeholders creates a significant and strategic advantage for the company and its brand in a myriad of ways - as mentioned earlier in the literature review chapter of this dissertation.

4.3.2 The importance of transparency and authenticity

Transparency and authenticity in CSR were identified as critical factors by the research participants. Transparency in the context of CSR refers to a company providing information in a manner that enables all stakeholders involved to gain proper insight into the issues that are pertinent to them (Dubbink et al., 2008). Insights from the interviewees indicate that these principles (transparency and authenticity) are key to meaningful CSR as they produce long-term credibility, trust, and brand endorsement. The interviewees emphasised that corporates must prioritise transparent communication and actively incorporate stakeholder input within their CSR decision-making processes. Engaging stakeholders, which include communities and potential donor recipients, will enable a more targeted and need-aligned approach to CSR, a perspective emphasised by the interviewees. The interviewees referred to the importance of strategically aligning CSR

initiatives to business objectives. They believe that it will ensure that all CSR efforts are more impactful and sustainable, compared to arbitrary sponsorships.

Several interviewees also referenced the significance of authenticity in CSR. These references indicate that this value is regarded as important by many. Authenticity reemphasises that a company's CSR initiatives are a genuine reflection of its ethos and values, and not merely a marketing tactic. This topic has been trending in the corporate sector following increased awareness of "greenwashing" – a deceptive CSR marketing practice. The frequent mention of authenticity by the interviewees indicates that consumers critically assess the intentions behind a corporation's CSR actions and are interested in supporting businesses committed to authentic social development and sustainability. Thus, the opposite is also true: consumers will quickly disassociate themselves from disingenuous CSR. This is a significant insight derived from the research findings.

The findings provide clear evidence that supports a previously stated fact in this research: Consumers' interest in CSR is ever-increasing (Stobierski, 2021), and they also expect companies to actively participate in CSR and take a stand on environmental, social, and political issues, as initially mentioned in the research problem section of this thesis.

Additionally, the need for transparency and authenticity underscores the critical importance of effective CSR reporting. CSR reports, also known as impact or sustainability reports, are becoming increasingly prevalent as stakeholders and governments now require companies to disclose comprehensive information regarding their sustainability efforts and their environment, social, and governance strategies to create corporate accountability (Khamisu et. al., 2024). This trend is gradually gaining traction in Namibia; however, many companies, including NamPower, do not publish CSR reports. This information gap partly justified the necessity of conducting this research.

4.3.3 CSR influences the perceived quality of NamPower's services and products

Perceived quality is a key component of brand equity. The research findings indicate that NamPower's CSR activity has significantly contributed to creating trust and confidence in the company's services among the DSN. It is important to clarify that perceived quality is

not the actual quality of the product or service, but it is a consumer's subjective evaluation of the quality Wu and Su (2020). As such, interviewees perceive NamPower's services and products as "dependable" and "reliable", based solely on the company's commitment to social responsibility. These results demonstrate that the company's corporate social responsibility activity has led its stakeholders to believe that if a company is responsible, then its products and services will be reliable too. The interviewees used profound phrases such as "ethically aligned goods and services", "long-term value," and "reliability and excellence" to describe NamPower's services. This means that companies can leverage their CSR commitment to enhance the reputation of their products and services, which makes for an invaluable competitive advantage.

This further emphasises the fact that CSR is not merely philanthropy. It holds strategic business importance and has become a fundamental and proactive element of corporate competitiveness and success. When undertaken purposefully and authentically, CSR enhances all dimensions of brand equity, significantly influencing a company's reputation, perception, and overall brand equity.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate the impact of NamPower's CSR initiatives on its brand equity, with Disability Sport Namibia serving as the case study. Fundamentally, this research is an impact assessment study. The preceding chapter discussed the findings of the data collected. This final chapter presents the conclusion generated from the research findings and subsequently offers recommendations based on these conclusions.

5.2 Study objectives and key findings

This study was motivated by the growing uptake of CSR in business practice, which has resulted in companies investing substantial amounts of resources into CSR initiatives all over the world. Subsequently, and parallel to this growing uptake, consumers' expectations regarding CSR also evolved, with them demanding that companies be responsible and contribute to corporate citizenship and give back to communities and take a stand on environmental, social, and political issues. However, despite this global movement, there was a noticeable absence of academic material highlighting the benefits of CSR for an organisation – and more especially, an absence of academic literature on the impact of corporate social responsibility on *brand equity*, particularly within the Namibian context.

Further motivation for this study was derived from the absence of a tool to measure consumers' perception of CSR (Oberseseder et al., 2013), despite NamPower's significant financial investments in this area without clear insight into their return on investment. Consequently, the research question was ultimately: *How does DSN perceive the equity of NamPower's brand based on NamPower's CSR activities?*

This study was, therefore, aimed at answering this question by examining the direct effects of CSR on the key components of brand equity, namely brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations.

The study adopted a qualitative, case study research approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with a sample of five participants from Disability Sport Namibia, enabling the researcher to obtain in-depth qualitative insights into the participants' views of CSR and its impacts. The study findings indicate that NamPower's CSR activity exerts a direct and positive impact on brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality among the DSN, which in turn enhances brand identity, strengthens brand loyalty, and contributes to the overall enrichment of brand equity.

This newfound understanding of the critical importance and power of CSR reinforces that this discipline should not be viewed as mere philanthropy, but instead as a key and strategic income-generating asset that must be incorporated into core business operations. This is corroborated by Ramachandran et al. (2004), who state that CSR offers companies the strategic opportunity to pursue both social goals and sustainable profitability. The authors further allude that CSR will gain even more strategic significance as companies and consumers become increasingly mindful of social issues. This is owed to the fact that there is a growing movement of socially conscious consumers - consumers who choose to engage and support socially responsible companies. This movement is called ethical consumerism, and their purchasing behaviour is called ethical consumption. These findings are corroborated by Yang (2014), whose research also revealed that consumers often take into consideration a company's CSR background when making purchasing decisions. In addition, Yang (2014) further highlights that customers are willing to pay premium prices for products with socially responsible characteristics and ethical qualities.

In the present day, ethics plays an increasingly important role in how companies conduct business and in consumer behaviour. The pursuit of corporate progress is now expected to match with social equity as there is a growing global demand for sustainable and socially responsible practices - and consumers in Namibia share similar sentiments.

Research by Erastus et al. (2023) found that the standard expectation that Namibians have for local companies is to address societal needs and conduct sound ethical business practices.

Based on these findings, companies must prioritise investing in social responsibility initiatives and communicate these efforts to their stakeholders through various communication channels and report them formally via CSR reports. All these actions play an important role in shaping the company's image and enhancing its brand equity.

5.3 Implications

5.3.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the underexplored academic discourse on the tangible and intangible outcomes of corporate investment in CSR, with a specific focus on its impact on brand equity. This study offers support and validation for established theoretical frameworks, such as the Stakeholder Theory, by illustrating that outcomes such as trust and loyalty are indeed a result of authentic CSR initiatives. Additionally, the findings also validate Carol's Pyramid of CSR Theory, which identifies four key CSR dimensions of social responsibility that are expected of businesses. As revealed in the study, participants expressed clear expectations for companies to engage in CSR in different areas in an authentic and transparent manner, further validating the theory's relevance in modern business practice. This study has empirically tested these theoretical frameworks, including Aaker's brand equity model. Ultimately, the study's findings are consistent with existing publications that highlight the link between CSR and brand equity.

5.3.2 Implications for business strategy

Consumers are aware of corporate social responsibility, and they give more preference to companies that are socially responsible. The findings of this study reinforce the strategic significance of CSR in achieving sustainable competitive advantages within a market of internal and external stakeholders who have become increasingly ethically conscious. Companies must recognise CSR as a strategic and critical business function capable of directly enhancing the corporate image, strengthening customer loyalty, and enhancing brand value - all of which contribute positively to the bottom line. This study,

therefore, adds to the growing body of empirical research that recognises the strategic relevance of CSR in driving business success.

This study also emphasises the importance of ESG reporting for corporates. The adoption demonstrates a company's commitment to upholding sustainable and ethical business practices in a transparent manner.

Looking at the bigger picture, the integration of CSR and ESG principles in businesses supports the creation of a better world for all because it contributes to the advancement of the socio-economic conditions of communities and protects the environment. Therefore, corporates should not consider CSR as merely a cost center or a burden on the organisation but rather consider it as a strategic avenue for value creation in the company and in society.

5.3.3 Practical implications

This study highlights the importance for practitioners in CSR, Sponsorship, Marketing, and related fields to formulate clear CSR strategies by aligning their CSR efforts with corporate brand values and corporate strategy. Strategically aligned CSR efforts are found to be more effective and appreciated as they are sustainable in nature and thus more impactful. The study also emphasises the important role of stakeholder engagement in decision-making processes and reinforces the importance of authenticity and transparency in CSR efforts by ensuring that companies are genuine in their conduct and by adopting CSR or sustainability reporting to reinforce credibility. Furthermore, this study educates practitioners aiming to enhance brand equity or develop effective brand strategies to consider CSR as a strategic tool to build and increase brand strength.

5.4 Limitations of the study

This study had a few limitations, which present opportunities for future research. This study's limitations are:

1. This study examining the impact of CSR on brand equity was restricted to Disability Sport Namibia (DSN). However, DSN is but one of many beneficiaries of the NamPower Foundation, and the findings cannot be generalised to all the

beneficiaries of the NamPower Foundation. Therefore, future studies could investigate the phenomena on more than one beneficiary to determine whether these perceptions are observed across the population.

2. Although the interviews with the sample of five out of nine participants produced in-depth qualitative data, the limited number of participants may have constrained the extent to which the findings represent the entire organisation at large. Future research should engage a larger and more diverse sample of participants, even including the athletes.
3. Brand equity is a broad concept, and numerous brand equity frameworks and models exist to measure the value of a brand. This study adopted Aaker's brand equity model (1991), which represents only one of several available frameworks, and thus this is a limitation. Future studies could explore alternative brand equity models in their research and then compare their findings with this study for a more thorough understanding of the subject.
4. Considering the researcher's association with NamPower, there is potential for subconscious or unintentional researcher bias when interpreting data. However, to avoid this and to ensure credibility, the researcher made sure to cite participants' direct quotes and to avoid her (the researchers') own interpretations.

5.5 Recommendations for the study

CSR and brand equity are dynamic fields with scopes that continuously evolve. The nature of these growing fields makes way for further research to a greater understanding of the correlation between CSR and brand equity. Based on this, the following areas are recommended for further research:

1. Investigating sports sponsorship as a CSR tool: Sports sponsorship is a popular category of sponsorship that enjoys massive investments from corporates largely due to its (sports) ability to engage large and diverse audiences. However, despite the substantial investments from corporates, there is a lack of academic literature

on sports sponsorship as a CSR focus area. In fact, the topic of sports sponsorship has received limited attention in CSR literature. This is corroborated by Plewa et al. (2016), who state that there is a lack of literature linking sports sponsorship and building CSR image. As a result, the researcher recommends future studies to investigate the impacts of sports sponsorship and to assess how it contributes to the development of a company's CSR image and brand.

2. Studying other brand equity models: As mentioned in the limitations section, this study employed Aaker's brand equity model (1991), which represents only one approach and, therefore, constitutes a limitation. Aaker (1991) identifies five components that make up brand equity, which were the focus of this study. However, more than one brand equity model exists, and they each identify different components and evaluation criteria to measure brand equity. Therefore, to gain a greater understanding of the influence of CSR on brand equity, the researcher proposes that other brand equity models be adopted to allow for more variables to be probed and empirically tested to uncover a broader range of variables that may influence brand equity. In addition, the researcher also recommends carrying out the study on more than one beneficiary to allow for bigger and more diverse sample sizes, to assess if comparable or similar perceptions are observed across the population.
3. CSR and sustainability reporting: The study's results indicate that participants place high importance on transparency when undertaking CSR initiatives. In addition, the standards of good governance now require companies to provide comprehensive information regarding their sustainability and CSR efforts. However, despite this, many corporations fail to comply, perhaps due to a lack of understanding of its importance. Therefore, further research is needed to highlight the importance of CSR reporting, which is also known as sustainability reporting or impact reporting.

4. Lastly, future research could delve into quantifying the linkage between brand equity and organizational/financial performance. This study proves that CSR positively influences brand equity, but there remains a need to know exactly how (and by how much its terms of value) an enriched brand equity, in turn, influences the bottom line. The researcher proposes future studies that track CSR performance through indicators such as increased sales, new customer attainment, and increased market share. Quantifying the impact of CSR influence and its related attributes, such as brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations, would provide a clear and direct picture of the (business/monetary) value of CSR. Quantifying these indicators will enhance what Mbinjama (2022: 53) conceptualised, 'corporate dignity'. The term refers to the treatment of organizations; frameworked from the terms "corporate image" and "corporate identity". In addition, the researcher also proposes that future research focus on developing a measurement instrument to measure consumer's perceptions of CSR. Different scholars have presented different methods, scales and approaches, yet, none offer a comprehensive tool that focuses on CSR solely.

5.6 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to analyse Disability Sport Namibia's perceptions of NamPower's brand equity as influenced by the impact of NamPower's CSR activity. The study adopted an impact assessment approach, using NamPower Foundation and Disability Sport Namibia as a case study. The dependent variable of this study was brand equity, while the independent variables were the components of brand equity according to Aaker (1991). These components were measured to determine their influence on brand equity.

The results of the study found that NamPower's CSR activity directly influences how the beneficiaries of DSN perceive the company. The study results have proven that a company that is perceived to be generous and supportive evokes positive emotional responses among consumers, and a company that is not seen to be investing in CSR is generally viewed more negatively. This finding is significant because it is evidence that CSR activity can provoke strong emotional reactions from the public – emotional reactions

that can be measured and analysed to assess their impact on brand equity. The findings also act as evidence supporting the theory of emotional marketing, which states that initiatives that evoke positive emotions in consumers establishes deep emotional connections between the consumer and the brand.

Secondly, the findings of this study indicate that CSR, when implemented strategically and in a transparent and authentic manner, has a positive and invaluable impact on the equity of a brand. The results demonstrate that CSR initiatives foster brand loyalty, enhance brand awareness, initiate positive perceptions of products and services quality, and create positive brand associations – thus, CSR is a major source of brand/company success. This study's findings are consistent with the results of research conducted by Cankul and Yucescoy (2019), which found that CSR has a statistically significant effect on brand image strength, brand desirability, and economic gains. Thirdly, the findings also confirm that the CSR activities of a company greatly influence consumer perception, behaviour, and decision-making.

However, while the study generated valuable data on the relationship between CSR and brand equity through the case study of Disability Sport Namibia (DSN), the restriction to a single beneficiary creates a limitation with respect to generalisability. Furthermore, the adoption of Aaker's (1991) brand equity model, which represents only one of several available brand equity frameworks, presents another limitation. However, Aaker's (1991) model remains a credible choice for this research as it focuses on consumer experiences, emotions, and perceptions, which are crucial driving factors of brand equity.

To add to the body of knowledge, the study recommends that future researchers consider exploring other brand equity models to allow for more variables to be probed and empirically tested to uncover a broader range of variables that may influence brand equity. Additionally, this study also recommends that more than one beneficiary be studied to determine whether the same perceptions are observed across the population.

This study offers validation for established theoretical frameworks by empirically testing these frameworks and finding them consistent with existing publications that highlight the link between CSR and brand equity. As such, this study contributes to the larger academic

discourse, offering insights that can support strategic decision-making related to CSR for the benefit of the company, its proprietary assets, and its bottom line. This study further benefits scholars interested in understanding the tangible and intangible outcomes associated with CSR investment, specifically in relation to brand equity, and particularly in the Namibian context. Finally, the study benefits the researched organisation (NamPower), by providing it with evidence-based feedback on how its CSR initiatives influence its brand equity.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Date:

Name:

Introduction:

- *Greetings*
- *My name is Rosa Nikanor, I am pursuing a Master of Public Relations and Communication Management from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.*
- *In fulfilment of the requirements of this degree, I am conducting research on **THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (SPONSORSHIP) ON BRAND EQUITY – a case study on NamPower Foundation and Disability Sport Namibia.***
- *State:*
 - ✓ *I must also inform you that I work at NamPower, as a Corporate Communication Officer.*
 - ✓ *I have obtained official permission from NamPower to conduct this study. The results of this study will be used for academic purposes only.*
 - ✓ *You are assured that identities and responses to questions will be kept confidential.*
 - ✓ *No identifying information would appear in any reports or publications.*

1. Brand Loyalty

- Does NamPower's corporate social responsibility (CSR) influence your loyalty or commitment toward its brand? Why or why not?
- Does NamPower's CSR contribution increase your willingness to recommend the brand to others? Why or why not?
- Have you ever continued to support a brand just because of its ongoing CSR efforts, even if alternatives were available? Please elaborate.
- Do a company's CSR initiatives influence the way in which you perceive a company? (Yes/No, and how?)

2. Brand Awareness

- Considering NamPower's CSR investments, how would you affectionately describe the brand "NamPower" to someone you know?
- Do you believe that a brand's CSR activities make it more recognizable or memorable to you? How?

3. Perceived Quality

- Does a brand's involvement in CSR initiatives affect how you perceive the quality of its products or services?
- How does NamPower's involvement in CSR initiatives influence your perception of the quality of NamPower's goods and services?
- How do CSR activities affect your trust in a brand's products or services?

4. Brand Associations

- Considering the relationship between NamPower and DSN, what feelings/words come to mind when you think about NamPower? And why?
- How do CSR initiatives influence your feelings or thoughts about a brand's personality or values?
- What kinds of associations or images come to mind when you hear about a company's CSR activities?

5. Other Considerations

- Do you care about whether a company invests in CSR or not?
- How important is it for you that a brand aligns with your values in terms of social responsibility?
- Have you ever switched brands to move to one that invests more in CSR?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX 2: Permission Letter - NamPower

Namibia Power Corporation (Pty) Ltd
PO Box 2864, Windhoek, Namibia, NamPower Centre, 15 Luther Street
Tel: +264 61 205 4111
Fax: +264 61 232 805
Email address: register@nampower.com.na
Website address: www.nampower.com.na



Ms. RNM Nikanor
Cape Peninsula University Of Technology
Student No. 231058543

Enquiries : M. M. Situmbeko
Telephone : 061 – 205 2595
Date : 09 April 2024

Dear Ms. Rosa

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH STUDY AT NAMPOWER

We acknowledge receipt of your application dated 09 April 2024, to conduct your intended research study titled "Analysing the influence of corporate social responsibility on Nampower's brand equity."


NamPower hereby grants permission for you to carry out research and data collection. Kindly take note that you are allowed to contact NamPower employees to participate in your study.

Further take note that information from any NamPower document. Should only be used for the study mentioned above and will under no circumstances be used for other purposes without prior written consent from NamPower.

Should the researcher be published, the source of data i.e., NamPower should be acknowledged in the research report. Upon completion of the research, NamPower requires that a copy of the study should be submitted to the Records Management Section for future research and record keeping.

For further enquiries, kindly feel free to contact Human Capital Division.

Recommended by



P/P **Mercy M. Situmbeko**
Manager: Education Training & Development

09/04/2024

Date

Approved / Not Approved



Kahenge S Haulofu
Managing Director

09/04/2024

Date

Appendix 3: FID Ethics Approval Certificate

Office of the Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Informatics and Design
Room 2.09
80 Roeland Street
Cape Town
Tel: 021-469 1012
Email: ndedem@cput.ac.za
Secretary: Mziyanda Ndede

15 April 2024

Mrs Rosa Nikanor
c/o Department of Media
CPUT

Reference no: 231058543/2024/4

Project title: Analysing the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on NamPower's brand equity.

Approval period: 15 April 2024 – 31 December 2025

This is to certify that the Faculty of Informatics and Design Research Ethics Committee of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology approved the methodology and ethics of Mrs Rosa Nikanor (231058543) for Public Relations & Communication Management.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for approval.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.



Prof L.J. Theo
Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Informatics and Design
Cape Peninsula University of Technology



