

**EXPLORING BRANDING AS A STRATEGIC MARKETING
MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED
ENTERPRISES SUSTAINABILITY IN MBABANE ESWATINI**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT

OF

THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR

**THE MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION MANAGEMENT
STRATEGY DEGREE**

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

BY

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201800438

MAY 2022

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Abstract

This study explored branding as a strategic marketing management tool for small and medium sized enterprises' sustainability in Mbabane Eswatini. The interpretivist research philosophy was used. On methodology the study also used a qualitative approach and case study design. Interviews were used to collect data from purposively sampled SME owners and employees in Mbabane Eswatini. Three SME owners and twelve employees were selected to take part in the study. Literature was reviewed to understand what other researchers have written on similar and related topics. In the literature Aaker's brand equity model that guided the study was discussed. The findings of the study showed that though SME owners and employees were aware of branding and that it could be used as a marketing management tool, they don't use it often due to time constraints and lack of resources. Findings also showed that SMEs in Mbabane use limited marketing and customer relations marketing management strategies. The study recommends that SMEs should budget for branding and ensure that they often use branding as a marketing management tool to promote their products and markets and ensure business sustainability. The study also recommends that SMEs should broaden their customer relations marketing management strategies and embrace strategies such as drafting easy customer product return policy, making use of digital platforms to enhance regular interaction with customers, developing a customer data base to make it easy to track and interact and give information to customers. Another recommendation was that, SME owners and employees should be trained in branding and marketing so that they understand these concepts and are able to apply them properly and effectively for the growth and sustainability of SMEs.

Keywords: Branding, marketing management tool, small and medium sized enterprise, sustainability

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, praises and thanksgiving to you Lord, the Almighty, for Your showers of blessings throughout my research work, enabling me to complete the research successfully.

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr. Elisha Woyo for giving me the opportunity to do research and providing invaluable guidance throughout this research. His dynamism, vision, sincerity and motivation has deeply inspired me. He guided me well in carrying out the research and presenting the research work as clearly as possible. It was a great privilege and honour to work and study under his guidance. I am extremely grateful for what he has offered me. I am extending my heartfelt thanks to his family for their acceptance and patience during the research work and thesis preparation.

I am extremely grateful to my family for their love, prayers, caring and sacrifices in educating and preparing me for my future. I am very much thankful to my husband and my daughters for their love, understanding, prayers and continuing support in completing this research work. I also express special thanks to my sisters for their support and invaluable prayers. Special thanks to my friend Nomzamo Mulengwa for the keen interest shown in seeing me complete this thesis successfully.

Finally, thanks to all the people who supported me in completing the research work directly or indirectly.

Dedications

I dedicate this project to God Almighty my creator, my strong pillar, my source of inspiration, wisdom, knowledge and understanding. He has been the source of my strength throughout this program and on His wings only have I soared. I also dedicate this work to my husband, Masotjeni Jason Dlamini, who has encouraged me all the way and whose encouragement has made sure that I give it all it takes to finish that which I have started. I also dedicate this to my children Sakhelwe and Biyelwe Dlamini, who have been affected in every way possible by this quest. Thank you, your contributions can never be quantified. God bless you!

I am very fortunate and grateful to Mr Madlela for providing readership and ideas paramount for the completion of this thesis. Thank you for your support and helpful suggestions, I will forever be thankful to you. To my Boss Mrs. Linda Nxumalo, I don't know where I would be now if it wasn't for your huge help in allowing me to take some time off work, to work on my thesis. Unfortunately, I cannot thank everyone by name, because it would take a lifetime, but I just want you all to know that you count so much. Had it not been for all your prayers and benedictions; were it not for your sincere love and help, I would never have completed this thesis. So, thank you all!

Statement of declaration of own work

I, Chunky Mdluli declares that the thesis entitled *exploring branding as a strategic marketing management tool for small and medium-sized enterprises sustainability in Mbabane, Eswatini* is my own work and is a true reflection of my research, and that this work, or any part thereof has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the background of the study, problem statement and objectives. Covered as well in the chapter are significance that justifies the importance of the study to relevant stakeholders and to the body of knowledge. The chapter also covers limitations and delimitations of the study.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The study explored branding as a strategic marketing management tool for small and medium-sized enterprises' sustainability in Mbabane, Eswatini. Most SMEs in Mbabane do not often use branding as a marketing management tool due to lack of resources and time constraints. The study contributed by generating branding and customer relations management strategies that SMEs can use to promote their brands and operate in a profitable and sustainable way. Some owners of SMEs struggle financially because of their weak brand recognition (Hong & Diep, 2016; Renton, Daellenbach, Davenport, & James, 2016). Marketing literature has long recognised the strategic importance of brand management for large corporations (Sheth and Sinha 2015). However, this has not been the case with SMEs (Odoom, Narteh & Boateng, 2017). Literature on branding has focused mostly on large brands (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017) suggesting that the application of strategic marketing in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is yet to be fully explored in developing countries.

Centeno, Hart and Dinnie (2013) and Mitchell, Hutchinson, Quinn and Gilmore (2015) argue that brands can in fact be established and maintained on relatively modest budgets. SME growth can only be achieved if appropriate strategies are developed and successfully implemented (Yieh, Yeh, Tseng, Wang, & Wu, 2018). The Kingdom of Eswatini has experienced a huge shift in market demand in the past two decades (AfDB, OECD and UNDP, 2017; Government of Eswatini, 2018). This has led to a significant growth in the number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) across many sectors in Eswatini (Ebitu, 2016; Finoti, Didonet, Toaldo, & Martins, 2017; Ardjouman, & Asma, 2015). To sustain this growth, SMEs in Eswatini need to adopt strategic marketing management practices such as branding which should make them more competitive (Guenther & Guenther, 2019).

Small business owners are now adapting to modern marketing practices which are strategically driven to maximise employment of their resources while remaining competitive. Previous studies have demonstrated that strategic marketing management is important to large corporates (Seyedghorban, Matanda & LaPlaca, 2016). Notwithstanding, there is a dearth of literature investigating the importance of SME branding in developing countries, including Eswatini. Based on this gap, the purpose of this study was to highlight the role branding can play in enhancing SME competitiveness in the city of Mbabane in Eswatini.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Research on brands and branding has been well established by large corporations in consumer markets (Sheth & Sinha, 2015). It is however,

comparatively under-developed for SMEs (Odoom, Narteh, & Boateng, 2017). Some owners of SMEs struggle financially because of their weak brand recognition (Hong & Diep, 2016; Renton, Daellenbach, Davenport, & James, 2016). Most SME owners have insufficient knowledge of branding strategies (Gundala & Khawaja, 2014). The problem for some SME owners in the city of Mbabane is that they do not effectively use branding, and this negatively impacts the profitability and sustainability of their businesses. In Eswatini, SME owners in the city of Mbabane lack branding strategies to differentiate their products and services so as to improve their financial performance and sustainability. Between 2019 and 2020, there was a 37.50% operator exit rate (Research Department: Eswatini Tourism Authority, 2020).

To be successful with branding, SMEs have to first establish their own unique brands. Once the brand is created, the SMEs have to market the brand to create market awareness of the brand. To the extent the perceived brand quality is consistently delivered, the market will have a heightened awareness of perceived brand quality, leading to brand loyalty in the medium to long term. Continued satisfaction with the brand, ultimately leads to brand association which creates service differentiation. This study aims to provide strategies that should guide SME owners and employees on how to better understand branding and its potential to improve the financial performance of their businesses.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to explore branding as a marketing management tool for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

sustainability in Mbabane, Eswatini. To achieve this, the following secondary objectives were pursued:

- i) To examine customer relations marketing management strategies used by SME owners in Mbabane, Eswatini to create awareness of their brands
- ii) To analyse branding strategies used by SME owners in Mbabane, Eswatini
- iii) To investigate the prevalence of branding as a Strategic Management tool used by SME owners in Mbabane, Eswatini

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study provides strategies that should guide SME owners and employees to better understand branding and how it can be used to improve the financial performance and sustainability of their businesses. The use of branding as a strategic marketing management tool would assist SME owners reduce the risk of operation, by innovating marketing and business processes in time and taking early action. Additionally, the findings of this study should significantly contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of branding as a strategic marketing management tool as well as inform SME strategic and policy formulation in Eswatini. The findings should also broaden the researcher's knowledge on how branding could be used as a marketing management tool to enhance viability and sustainability of SME businesses.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since the study is qualitative, findings could not be generalised, because the sample of SMEs and participants was small and was derived only from

Mbabane Eswatini. This means that the study's findings could not be generalised to other cities in Eswatini or to other countries. Data was collected from SMEs operating in the Tourism and Hospitality sector. Study findings might not be generalisable to non-Tourism and Hospitality sector SMEs. Sharma (2017) however argues that the finding of a qualitative study can be transferred to other similar places as long as the researcher gives details of methods that were used to collect data, so that the reader from a similar condition can judge and see whether findings are relevant to their conditions. In the study the methods that were used to collect data are given in detail in order to help the reader in a different place to make an informed decision on whether to use the findings of the study.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in three SMEs in Mbabane. Participants were SME owners and employees who worked in the marketing and sales departments. Employees who worked in other departments like transport, accounts were not given a chance to take part in the study. Data collection was only limited to face-to-face interviews with fifteen participants.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter gave the background of the study and its problem statement. This chapter reviews the literature on what other researchers have written about branding as a strategic marketing management tool to extensively explore the knowledge that already exists on the topic. This enabled the researcher to analyse this knowledge and find the existing gaps in relation to the investigated topic. The analysis of literature proved that most researchers dealt with the importance of branding in business in general, without specifying how it could be used by SMEs as a marketing strategy to enhance their sustainability. Most studies were conducted outside Swaziland. In Swaziland studies did not focus on how branding can be used as a marketing management strategy to sustain themselves. The study covered this gap by focusing on SMEs in Mbabane Eswatini, and generated strategies for SME on how they could use branding as a marketing management strategy to make their businesses sustainable. The literature review also formed the basis for data analysis and presentation in chapter four of the study.

The main focus areas in the chapter are the concept of branding, small and medium-sized enterprises, sustainability and the theoretical framework (Aaker's 1991 brand equity model). Furthermore, it covers the importance of branding, branding as a strategic marketing management tool, customer relationship marketing management strategies, digital marketing strategies as well as branding strategies. The chapter ends with a summary of the literature review.

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF BRANDING

Kotler and Keller (2015) assert that branding is endowing services and products with the power of a brand. They proceed to argue that branding is the process of creating the company and its products' strong perception in the customer's mind by combining elements such as mission statement, design, logo, and a consistent theme throughout marketing communications. Effective branding enables organisations to differentiate themselves from competitors and build a customer base that is loyal to them. In line with this assertion, Marion (2020) argues that branding is the process of giving a meaning to specific products and services by creating and shaping a brand in the minds of customers. It is a strategy that organisations adopt to assist customers to quickly identify and experience their brand and give them a reason to choose their products ahead of the competitors'. This is done by clarifying what the particular brand is or is not.

Marion (2020) gives an example that if the product sold is water, in order to convince customers to buy particular water, organisations develop different water brands, like Evian, Perrier and Fiji. All these brands give different meanings to the product, water. Evian makes you feel young, Perrier is bubbling and refreshing, while Fiji is natural, pure and healthy. This shows that branding makes the product appeal to customers by creating a positive perception about the product, in the customers' minds, that makes the customer prefer the product than the competitors.

2.3 SMALL AND MEDIUM – SIZED ENTERPRISES

Gibson and van der Vaart (2008) assert that small and medium – sized enterprises (SMEs) are businesses that raise revenue to a certain threshold, but this threshold differs from country to country. Al-Awlaqi, Aamer, and Habtoor (2018) on the other hand say that SMEs are businesses whose number of personnel falls within a certain limit, but this limit varies from industry to industry. They continue to say that SMEs play an important role in modern economies by initiating attractive innovative business systems. Al-Awlaqi *et al.* (2018) note that the CEOs of most SMEs are their founders. This is also the case in Eswatini where most SME CEOs are founders of those businesses.

SMEs are job creators for employees and create competition in the market which leads to better satisfaction of customer needs Gherghina, Botezatu, Hosszu, and Simionescu (2021) and Al-Awlaqi *et al.* (2018). They proceed to accentuate that SMEs carry out certain activities to help big organisations produce goods and services efficiently. Another important feature that they note from SMEs is that SMEs focus on innovative processes in technology and in management. This makes them help in forming the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and increasing the national export, and as a result play a role in maintaining the country's socio-political stability.

Gherghina *et al.* (2021) assert that SMEs play an imperative role towards market evolution, locally and abroad, influencing sustainable growth in the trading, production and service areas. They proceed to argue that though in most developing countries SMEs are essential for economic development,

playing a noteworthy role in job creation, poverty alleviation and economic growth, they encounter many funding barriers.

Eswatini as a developing country has limitations in funding SMEs due to limited resources on the side of the government. Based on the issue of funding barriers and limitations, it can be argued that SMEs should develop innovative ways such as effective branding to promote their visibility and dissemination of their marketing messages.

2.4 BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

Bose and Mahajan (2018) and Gupta (2017) assert that a sustainable business is the one where profitability, environmental concern and social commitment are in harmony. For example, running a sustainable business involves using own resources economically and reducing any negative impact on the environment. Bose and Mahajan (2018) go on to say that in the broadest possible sense, sustainability refers to the ability of a business to maintain or sustain itself profitably over time. From these assertions, it can be said that sustainability is the process of running business, taking into consideration the following three aspects: economic, social and environmental. In the study sustainability means the process whereby organisations, for example, SMEs manage to continue operating at a profit over a long period of time, taking into account, environmental concerns and commitments.

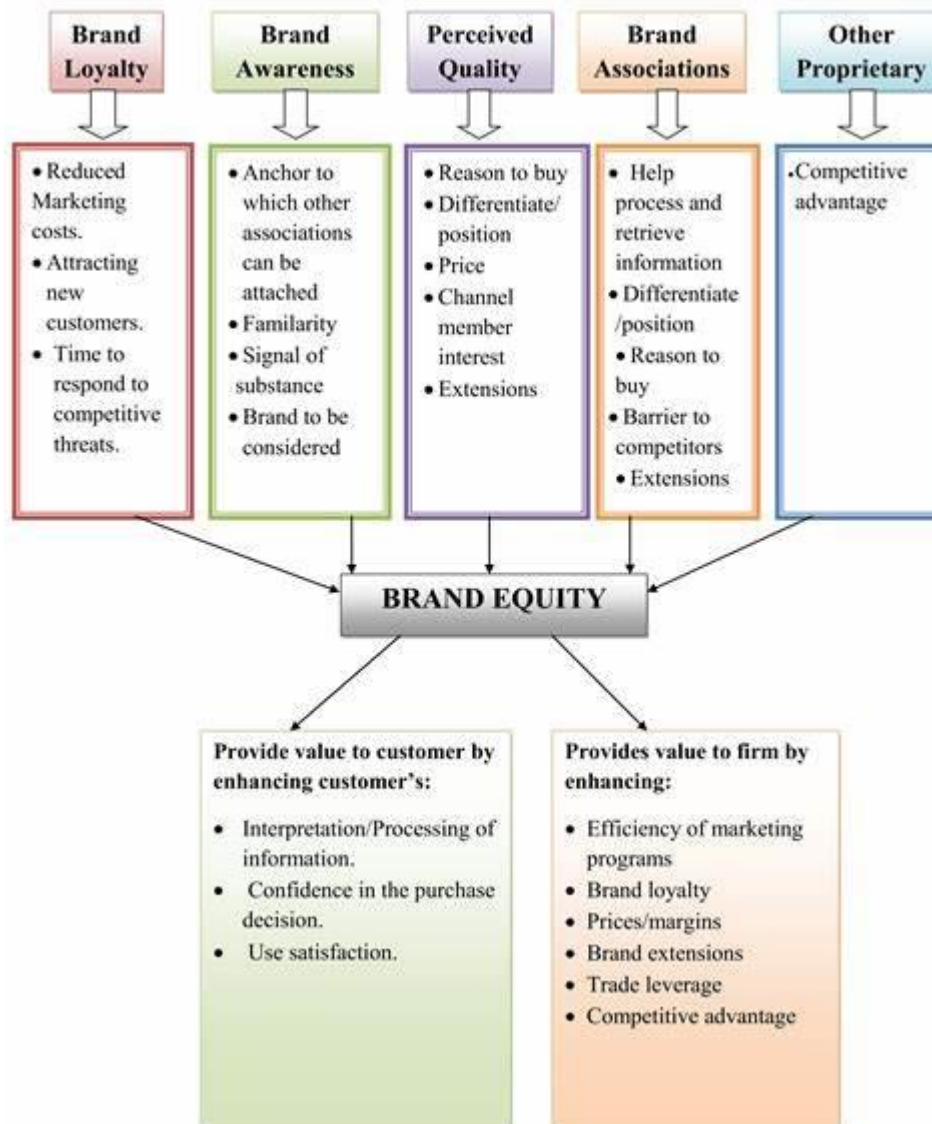
2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (AAKER'S BRAND EQUITY MODEL)

The study used Aaker's brand equity model as its theoretical framework. Steenkamp (2020) argues that Ambler (1995) defines brand equity as the sum of brand relationships with those in the market, weighted by their importance to enhance future profits and cash flow. Steenkamp (2020) argues that brand equity is a derived marketing asset with financial value in terms of future profit and cash flow. Brand equity is consumer-driven, but agents like journalists and professional advisors outside the distribution channels may influence brand equity. On the other hand, Moisescu (2015) asserts that David Aaker considers brand equity as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to the brand, its symbols and name. These add or subtract value that the product or service provides to the organisation or the organisation's customers.

Perceived equity provides the reason for the customer to buy the product. Although assets and liabilities that brand equity is based on differ from one context to the other, they can be grouped into the following five categories: brand name awareness, brand loyalty, brand associations, perceived brand loyalty and other proprietary brand assets (Moisescu, 2015; Steenkamp, 2020).

Aaker's brand equity model was developed to show how value is created or lost through advertising that enhances or damages brand equity. Below is an illustration of Aaker's brand equity model and its explanation thereafter (Moisescu, 2015; Steenkamp, 2020).

Figure 2.1 Aaker's Brand Equity Model



Adapted from

https://th.bing.com/th/id/OIP.a67oZefbC9_pOss_PixLwHal5?pid=ImgDet&rs=1

2.5.1 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty, as expressed in Aaker's brand equity model generates value by reducing marketing costs and leveraging trade. The organisation's loyal customers expect the brand to be always available. They also entice others to use the brand (Smith Gradojevic and Irwin 2017, Steenkamp 2020 and Moisescu 2015). Retaining existing customers is less costly than attracting new ones. It is not easy for competitors to communicate with satisfied brand users because they have less motivation to learn about alternative brands in the market (Moisescu, 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that if SMEs brand their products properly, they would enhance customer loyalty. Such loyalty would help them to fight competition in the market, where SMEs do not only compete with each other, but also compete with big organisations.

2.5.2 Brand awareness

Steenkamp (2020) posits that brand awareness is the customer perception and it is at times called brand familiarity. Customers usually buy brands that they are familiar with and translate that familiarity into quality and reality, based on previous use experiences. Steenkamp (2020) says that brand awareness entails a link between the brand and the category, and refers to the awareness pyramid, which is a hierarchy that ranges from unaware of the brand, brand recognition, and brand recall to top of the mind awareness.

Aaker (1991) argues that brand awareness is achieved, maintained and improved by being different and memorable, which means that it is necessary to be effective among other competing brands. In line with this assertion, Moisescu (2015) argues that awareness at the customer's recall level, affects

choice by influencing what brands get considered and selected by customers. The brand must first enter the consideration set before being put on the customer's purchase list. Hutt and Speh (2013) note that most businesses, especially small ones, fail to be competitive either because customers are not aware of their existence or are not aware of products and services that they offer.

In Eswatini most SMEs are located in crowded or obstructed places where they are not easily noticeable. It can be argued that without branding, most customers might not be aware of what they are offering. It is only through the power of branding one can make customers aware of what SMEs are offering in Eswatini, both in small and big towns.

2.5.3 Perceived equity

Perceived quality is the consumer's perception of the product's quality, related to its intended purpose and alternatives (Moisescu, 2015 & Steenkamp 2020). Steenkamp (2020) goes on to say that perceived quality directly influences brand loyalty, particularly in low involvement purchases. Perceived quality is achieved by organisations through commitment to quality, a culture of quality, consumer input, measurement standards, which allow for personnel initiatives to meet customer expectations.

Aaker (1991) argues that brand equity is usually based on brand associations that give meaning to customers and is represented in brand loyalty. In line with these assertions Moisescu (2015) believes that quality associated with a brand can also be a strong factor of differentiation and positioning. Building a strong brand implies an above average quality positioning. Perceived

quality, can also attract the interests of a channel member, allow extensions and support a higher price that provides resources to reinvest in the brand. Perceived quality provides the customer a reason to buy the product (Steenkamp, 2020).

2.5.4 Brand associations

According to Moiescu (2015) brand associations may refer to persons and the use context, the life style or a personality that can change the use experience and assists to one process and retrieve information in a specific manner. Moiescu (2015) posits that two products that are similar may create a different effect because their brand's associations differ. Associations are an important factor in product differentiation and positioning, creating a reason to purchase for potential customers who are looking for specific associated emotional or physical features. If a brand is well positioned based on a key product attribute, the attempt of a frontal assault by claiming superiority via that dimension will be a credibility failure, making the association, a barrier to competitors. A strong association may also be the basis of the brand extension (Moiescu, 2015).

2.5.5 Other proprietary brand assets

Proprietary brand assets include trademarks, patents, and channel relationships which can provide a strong competitive advantage. A trademark protects brand equity from competitors who might want to confuse customers by using a similar symbol, name or package. A patent prevents direct competition. A distribution channel can be indirectly controlled by a brand as

customers expect the brand to be available (Smith, Gradojevic & Irwin 2017 & Moisescu, 2015).

According to Moisescu (2015) Aaker's brand equity model contends that brand assets create value for the customer. Brand equity helps the customer to interpret, process, store, and retrieve large quantities of information about brands and products. It can also affect the customer's confidence in the buying decision. The customer usually becomes more comfortable with the previously used brand, is familiar or considered to have high quality. Perceived quality and brand associations provide value to customers by enhancing their satisfaction (Moisescu 2015).

Aaker's brand equity model has six further ways in which brand assets create value for the organisation (Steenkamp, 2020; Moisescu, 2015; Smith, Gradojevic & Irwin, 2017). They argue that brand equity can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing programmes. A sales promotion, for example is likely to be effective if the brand is familiar. Moisescu (2015) argues that perceived quality and brand associations can all strengthen brand loyalty by increasing customer satisfaction and providing reasons for customers to buy the product.

Brand equity usually provides higher margins for products, allowing premium pricing and reducing reliance on promotions. Brand equity also provides a platform for growth by brand extensions and provides leverage in the distribution channel. Channel members have less uncertainty when dealing with a proven brand name that has already achieved recognition and

has established strong associations. A strong brand represents a barrier that prevents customers from switching to competitors (Steenkamp 2020) and Moisescu 2015).

Taking these assertions into account, it can be argued that Aaker's brand equity model shows that if SMEs in Eswatini invest in branding, their brands are likely to be visible and familiar to customers. This might lead to customer loyalty and repeat business instead of switching to competitors. Aaker's brand equity model is appropriate for the study, because it clearly portrays a brand as an asset to organisations that can be used as a marketing tool to create product awareness and win customer loyalty and repeat business. This can lead to business sustainability of SMEs in Eswatini.

2.6 IMPORTANCE OF BRANDING

Branding increases business value. It generates new customers, improves employee pride and satisfaction. Branding also creates trust within the marketplace, branding creates customer retention (Giles 2020, Durmaz 2016, Ukaj 2016 & Marion 2020).

2.6.1 Branding increases business value

Marion (2020) argues that branding is important when the company wants to generate future business. A strong brand can give the company leverage in the industry by increasing its business value and making it a more appealing investment opportunity due to its strongly established place in the marketplace. Marion (2020) says that a strong brand incorporates reputation and value. A strong reputation means a strong brand which in turn translates

into value. The value means to influence, mind share and premium price. Giles (2020) views the brand as a business asset that like other business assets holds its own monetary value, and must therefore have its own place in the business' balance sheet, because it increases the company's overall worth. Since branding holds so much value in the organisation managers should give financial weight to the organisation's brands, because they increase value to the business. In line with these assertions, Ukaj (2016) believes that the brand image is the company's important and powerful asset. Ukaj (2016) goes on to say that the strong brand image may influence the choice of customers in the market.

2.6.2 Branding generates new customers

Branding means that customers have a positive impression of the company, and they are likely to do business with it, because of familiarity and assumed dependability of using the brand name that they trust. Giles (2020) and Marion (2020) argue that when the brand is well established the word of mouth will be the company's best and effective technique of advertising. Once the perception of a certain brand is established in the market, the word of mouth starts to pass the perception to other customers and further reinforce the reputation of that particular brand. If the reputation is positive, potential new customers may come into contact with the brand having an already positive association in their minds that make them more likely to buy the brand and also refer it to other customers ahead of the competitor's (Giles, 2020).

2.6.3 Branding improves employee pride and satisfaction

The stakeholders of the brand are not only clients, but employees are also important stakeholders of the brand. When employees work for a company with strong brands, they tend to truly stand behind those brands and become more satisfied with their jobs, resulting in a higher degree of pride in the work that they do (Ukaj, 2016; Marion 2020). This demonstrates that, working for a company with a reputable brand that is held in high regard by members of the public makes working for that company more fulfilling and enjoyable for workers. Ukaj (2016) argues that human interaction is the basis of commerce, and organisational employees are the brand ambassadors since they are the first line of communication for the brand.

This shows that if small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) invest in branding in Eswatini, their employees will have good associations and perceptions with those brands and then perpetuate those perceptions further down the line to the business partners and clients they interact with. Such a scenario will translate into improved leadership and better involvement by all employees, resulting in improved service delivery to customers.

2.6.4 Branding creates trust within the market

Durmaz (2016) asserts that a strong brand creates trust within the market place and amongst the organisation's customers, as it determines how customers perceive the organisation's goods and services, and the likelihood of them buying from the organisation. Durmaz (2016) continues to argue that by implementing the brand strategy throughout the company's marketing

activities the level of brand credibility amongst the company's customers is enhanced. This results in the company's competitive edge and recognition in the market. As customers begin to trust the company's brand offerings, the ease to buy from the company becomes more likely.

Durmaz (2016) believes that the combination of an effective brand and excellent marketing content makes the general public to be trust the company and its product offering, as they tend to perceive the company's products and services as of high quality. In Eswatini, the SMEs would benefit if they use branding to generate a bigger share of voice within the market. This would be the case because Durmaz (2016) argues that utilising branding throughout the company's marketing strategy is the best way for the company to grow its voice share in the market. This is the case, because engaging customers with branding and good marketing messages that can be spoken about and shared by customers is an effective way to increase brand awareness. This positions the company as an expert and credible provider of goods and services within the industry.

2.6.5 Branding creates customer retention

Once the company has grown its brand to a relatively recognisable point in the market, its marketing practices become more beneficial in generating sales leads Giles 2020 and Durmaz, 2016. Giles 2020) argues that it is important to note that branding helps retain existing customers since it keeps them engaged with its brand and marketing materials. This customer experience results in customer retention. A strong brand brings customers back to buy from the company after the initial interaction with it.

Organisations should develop their brands with customer retention in mind in order to create customer loyalty Giles (2020) and Durmaz (2016). They argue that loyal customers enable the business to operate in a sustainable way. They also become the advocates as they share their experiences with the company's brand with their wider circles in their societies. Durmaz (2016) argues that according to Customer referral expert Grace Miller 92% of potential leads trust personal recommendations than any other methods of marketing. Taking this into consideration it can be said that it is important for the brand to live up to its value propositions. This is the case, because the better the experience a customer has with the company's brand, the more inclined they are to recommend the company's products and services to other potential customers. This will also make the company's referral campaign to be incredibly effective (Durmaz, 2016). If SMEs in Eswatini use branding in combination with other marketing activities, they will be able to create brand awareness for their businesses, build trust and credibility, and also strengthen customer loyalty and relationships to ensure repeat business. Customer loyalty and repeat business will ensure that SMEs operate in a profitable and sustainable manner in Eswatini.

2.7 BRANDING AS A STRATEGIC MARKETING MANAGEMENT TOOL

According to Ajike (2015) most markets are overpopulated with large and small companies and overexposed to marketing messages. This makes it difficult for organisations to have their marketing messages noticed. With the high costs of getting new products and services ready for the market, organisations have become more necessary to cut through this clutter. Ajike

(2015) argues that one sure way of doing this is by branding organisational offered products and services. Powerful branding can equip most new products or services with instant credibility and value that simply cannot be reproduced with any sort of product-focused marketing campaigns. Taking this assertion into consideration it can be argued that, it is necessary for any organisation especially SMEs in Eswatini that want their products to be successful to create and protect strong brands for their products.

Parkin's (2010) study concluded that branding has a potential to align the organisation's resources towards the attainment of its strategic competitive advantage. Ajike (2015) argues that a strong brand is more powerful than any sales and marketing tool or technique available. Due to this notion branding should be a strategic marketing main priority for any company whether small or a big corporation in any industry. Parkin (2010) believes that branding is the best marketing tool that creates product awareness and strength in the market now and in the future.

Ajike (2015) in one of his study's recommendations posits that since the study's findings proved that branding gives companies a competitive edge over competitors, therefore a company that wants to remain a market leader should employ branding as a strategy to achieve the aim. SMEs in Eswatini can employ branding as a marketing tool since it is effective and economic to use brands to market products than disseminating volumes of information through expensive channels with less customer reception.

2.8 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MARKETING MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Labus and Stone (2010) assert that Customer Relationship Management (CRM) roots stem from the relationship management theory. They proceed to posit that relationship marketing is the process of identifying, developing, maintaining, and terminating relational exchanges to exchange performance. Chittaie (2012) argues that CRM oriented movement evolved in the 1980s from total quality management. Chittaie (2012) says that theorists Parvatiyar, Sheth, and Miller state that CRM has the following four aspects, customer identification, customer attraction, customer retention, and customer development.

2.8.1 Customer identification

CRM begins from identifying customers by targeting individuals who will become the company's profitable customers (Mohamad, Othman, Jabar, and Majid 2014, Chittaie 2012 and Chittaie 2012). Chittaie (2012) argues that this stage of CRM also involves an analysis of customers lost to competitors and then finding ways of winning them back. Identification of customers by companies makes them be considered strategically important, and occupy a role in the company's success. Mohamad, Othman, Jabar, and Majid (2014) assert that since customers have their needs, addressing those needs promotes the organisation's products. Chittaie (2012) says that customer identification involves customer analysis and segmentation. Customer analysis requires investigation of functional aspects through analysing attributes of customers, while, customer segmentation classifies customer base into smaller groups

that are relatively similar. Branding helps in this endeavour as customers can be segmented according to their brand preferences.

2.8.2 Customer attraction

Labus and Stone (2010) posit that customer attraction is the phase that follows customer identification. After identifying potential customer segments companies can then work towards attracting target segments of customers through for example using direct marketing. Labus and Stone (2010) argue that direct marketing is the process of advertising to entice the customer through using different channels and platforms, distributing coupons and direct posting so that the customer could be convinced to buy the company's products. This can be effectively done if the company uses the dimensions of Aaker's brand equity model, because branding according to this model makes customers to be familiar with the brands and tend to be attracted to them. Moisescu (2015) Aaker's model creates value for the customer. This means that when the company's products are branded, the company can use the brand to attract customers and build good and profitable relationship with them.

2.8.3 Customer retention

CRM customer retention is very important. Customer satisfaction is considered as prerequisite for retaining customers (Mohamad, Othman, Jabar, & Majid 2014, Labus & Stone 2010; and Chittaie 2012). Labus and Stone (2010) argue that CRM is a business philosophy used to attract and keep customers through raising customer value, loyalty and implementing

customer centred techniques. CRM is aimed at fully examining and strengthening customer relationships. Chittaie (2012) posits that proper CRM can assist organisations to attract new customers and retain existing ones. are of the view that Customer retention includes simultaneous marketing, programmes for creating customer loyalty. Simultaneous marketing which deals with marketing competitions, analyses, explores, and anticipates changes in customers' behaviour Mohamad, Othman, Jabar, and Majid 2014, Labus and Stone 2010).

Chittaie (2012) posits that an analysis and the introduction of an existing system directly relates to marketing. Programmes for creating customer loyalty include efforts and activities that have supporting roles and are targeted at maintaining long-standing relationships with customers. Continuous analysis of service quality and reliability or satisfaction constitutes a part of customer loyalty programmes. Creating customer loyalty is very important for organisations. Aaker's brand equity model demonstrates that organisations can also earn customer loyalty and retention through brand equity. Steenkamp (2020) argues that proper branding makes customers to be familiar with the product and eventually become loyal to that particular branded product. This shows that both small and big businesses in order for them to earn customer loyalty they should invest in branding as well in addition to other techniques. Branding would help make their marketing messages attractive to customers when such messages are supported by a strong brand that customers would like to associate with. Customer loyalty and retention ensure business sustainability and survival.

2.8.4 Customer development

Chittaie (2012) asserts that customer development requires the organisation to increase the amount of interaction, the value of interaction, and personal profitability of the customer. Chittaie (2012) proceeds to argue that customer development components are customer life time value analysis, average sales growth, and analysis of product basket the customer uses in the company. Customer lifetime value analysis has been defined as a prediction of total net income that company can expect from the customer. Average sales growth pertains to advertising the activities targeted at raising the number of related services customers use in the company. Market basket analysis relates to the maximum number of customers' trades, their value, and exploring purchase behaviour of customers. Doing so helps the organisation to know its customers and their needs better. This results in long term relationships that are profitable to both the customer and the organisation. CRM is therefore important to both big and small businesses. Since small businesses are still growing up, CRM can enhance their growth if they apply its techniques properly. It is essential to state that branding and brand equity as expressed by Aaker's brand equity model is a strong tool that can be used by organisations to manage their relations with customers. Customers want to be associated with strong brands, as a result they become loyal to strong brands and tend to have lasting relationships with organisations that offer reliable brands that give them satisfaction.

2.9 DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

The 21st Century has seen an acceleration in digital platforms to market products in organisations. This was further accelerated by COVID-19 global health crisis that made the government of Eswatini to impose lockdown restrictions. Lock down restrictions meant that both big businesses and SMEs were deprived of their rights to market their products to customers using a face to face approach like road shows and exhibitions in the trade fairs and agricultural shows. COVID-19 forced businesses in Eswatini to market their products digitally using available virtual platforms such as social media.

Digital marketing is a projection of conventional marketing, its tools and strategies on the internet Machado and Davim 2017 and Sheth and Sisodia 2015). The digital world and its appropriation for marketing have fostered the development of channels, formats and languages that have led to tools and strategies that are unthinkable offline. Machado and Davim (2017) argue that nowadays rather than a subtype of conventional marketing, digital marketing has become a new phenomenon that brings together customisation and mass distribution to accomplish marketing goals. Technological convergence and the multiplication of devices have led to an opening up of more interactive, more measurable and user-centred digital marketing ways. The development digital marketing strategies offer much potential for brands and organisations.

Sheth and Sisodia (2015) argues that the digital space affords organisations an opportunity to build their brand image on the Web. Possibilities to disseminate information web through links offer consumers a chance to approach the organisation in a wider and customised way. Sheth and Sisodia

(2015) proceed to argue that the web offers user friendly platforms for customers in order to improve user experience and allow for their activities. In the context in which organisations try to forge long-term relationships with their current and potential customers, the internet offers a possibility of having conversations and generating a positive experience with the brand.

Digital marketing offers marketers different image and video-based tools. This is an attractive way of reaching customers, leading to greater engagement. They go on to say that easy segmentation and customisation of advertising in Internet maximise the output, and it allows for more attractive advertising. Internet is a unique opportunity to connect organisations with their customers and users among themselves (Machado, & Davim, 2017). This connectivity can improve their experience and enhance the relationship with the product, brand or organisation. Taking these assertions into consideration it can be argued that digital marketing is one of the techniques that organisations can use to promote their brands. It can also be used by organisations to align their CRM strategies.

Sheth and Sisodia (2015) assert that in order to use digital marketing effectively organisations must ensure that their Internet presence and their presence on different channels follows a strategy with concrete goals, in line with their brand or organisational image. Being on the Web without proper planning cannot only mean a lost opportunity in terms of resources and potential, but also it can have a negative impact on the organisation, as the audience, their needs and perceptions regarding the organisation would be unknown. It is also essential to state that organisations can use branding as an

effective tool to support digital marketing. Using visuals of branded product in the different internet platforms can attract the attention of customers. One of the internet platforms that is gaining momentum at a faster rate are social media platforms.

2.10 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media provides a great opportunity to organisations to establish significant relationships and create ways of interaction with their customers through different platforms that are available Machado and Davim (2017) and Sheth & Sisodia (2015). Social media platforms that organisation can use to advertise their products include audio-visual platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo and Sound Cloud; image platforms such as Flickr, Picasa, Pinterest or Instagram; general social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ or specialised ones such as LinkedIn, news or bookmark aggregators such as Digg or Delicious, blogs and Wikis Machado & Davim (2017).

Machado and Davim (2017) continues to argue that social networks have developed through platforms that show different types of functions, but common features. The aim of these features is to create a community by connecting users, who can interact, discuss, offer insights and knowledge. Technology in the case of these platforms also needs to be flexible and conducive to an exchange of information. In this sense, brands and organisations should be part of the social conversation and use the interactive channels to listen to their users, who share their perspectives, insights and knowledge. Based on these assertions, it can be argued that branding as a marketing tool should be fully utilised on social media advertising. If products

are branded and markets on the social media platforms, they stand a chance of being noticed by customers. Since most customers use social media products advertised in these platforms are likely to be seen by many customers including prospective ones. Steenkamp (2020) and Moisescu (2015) argue that branding improves the value of the product and makes customers to be familiar with the product resulting in customer loyalty. Machado and Davim (2017) asserts that organisation should promote their brands on social media. This shows that branding is a strong marketing tool that businesses should use to market their products in order to attract more customers especially those who use social media platforms.

2.10.1 Social media plan

Machado and Davim (2017) advise organisation to come up with social media plans. They argue that a social media plan is a master document that guides an organisation's presence on social media. This plan covers all aspects to be considered when setting up, maintaining and integrating social networks in the organisation's digital marketing strategies. Any Social Media Plan must be aligned with the marketing plan.

A Social Media Plan is a living document that needs close control due to the liveliness of the virtual world in which it is implemented (Machado and Davim 2017) and Almeida 2014). This document usually follows a relatively stable structure including goal setting, types of targeted audiences, platforms, strategies and tools as well as output measurement. Due to the COVID-19 global healthy crisis, organisations should invest more on social media advertising since face-to-face advertising is restricted by lock downs and

other COVID-19 restriction gazetted by the government that banned road shows and exhibitions.

Social media platforms can be used by organisations to beat COVID-19 restrictions as they allow organisations to interact with customers and promote their brands virtually. In Eswatini the widely used social media platforms are WhatsApp and Face Book. Effective branding can help organisations to effectively market their products on social media platforms. Giles (2020) posit that, once customers become familiar with the brand, they tend to be loyal to it, to the extent of refusing to accept substitutes from competitors.

2.11 BRANDING STRATEGIES

Vinerean (2016) asserts that branding is evolving and marketers should pace up with the technological and media development as with changes in customers' behaviour. Vinerean (2016) goes on to argue that due to technological changes it can be wise for marketers to consider how to best marry traditional brand messaging with the informational, educational, entertaining charms of content marketing, online and off line. Faganel and Janes (2020) argue that though traditional branding strategies are still used by some organisations, but it is necessary for organisations to modernise and embrace branding Strategies on Social Media.

2.11.1 Branding Strategies on Social Media

Ashley and Tuten (2014) argues that social media can serve multiple branding purposes as an interpersonal and interactive marketing tool. They move on to

assert that branded social media activities can be used to increase brand awareness and brand liking, promote customer engagement and loyalty, inspire consumer word of mouth communication about the brand, and potentially drive traffic to brand locations on and offline. Branded social tactics and strategies are dependent on social networks and may involve initiatives such as ongoing organisation and customer conversations, content that is created and shared on social media, consumer engagement experiences, and a brand persona that invites consumers to co-create the brand in online settings, invites interaction, participation, and collaboration with consumers (Ashley, and Tuten, 2014).

2.11.2 Creative Strategies for Brand Messaging on Social Media

Vinerean (2016) says that the plans of action for brands in social media frameworks are important because they effect advertising results. Vinerean (2016) also says that branding messages on social media can be aimed to consumers' inspirations. In this case, a brand projects a certain image that the targeted customer aims to achieve. On social media, brands can also apply creative strategies with messages that provide insights into specific experiences. For example, GoPro is a brand mostly known for its action cameras and their social media presence is focused on moving customers into an adventure with each video that is filmed with a GoPro camera.

Ashley and Tuten (2014)'s study focused on consumer engagement for brands in social media and their findings highlight those functional messages have the most appeal on social media. Due to the experiential, participatory nature

of social media, it is somewhat surprising that functional and resonance appeals were used by more brands than experiential appeal. One possible explanation the authors offer is that brand marketers do not want alienate consumers, especially consumers who feel they are in relationships with a particular brand. Additionally, several creative strategies were associated with customer engagement, specifically experiential, image, and exclusivity messages (Vinerean, 2016).

2.11.3 Consumer Engagement for Brands in Social Media Marketing

According to Tsimonis and Dimitriades (2014) customer engagement has a big potential to affect customer behaviour and several researchers consider it a successful acquisition and retention strategy for establishing and sustaining the competitive benefits for brand in digital marketing. Tsimonis and Dimitriades (2014) argue that since customer engagement is a key benefit for a brand's social media presence, organisations should encourage active commentators and likers in their pages. Doing so would lead to more commenting and liking and also encourage purchase behaviour.

Regarding customer engagement in social media activities, brands encourage customers to develop branded content on social networks. Jahn and Kunz (2012) carried out a study based on the use and gratification theory proposed by Katz in 1959. Jahn and Kunz's (2012) study investigated consumer participation on Facebook brand pages and discovered that functional and hedonic contents were drivers of participation.

Katz's (1959) theory of use and gratification explains customers' need for communication which is oriented on content, relationship and self. Similarly, Medury's (2011) research revealed that customers have a higher emotional attachment for brands once they receive more knowledge and information about the brand through social media. These assertions show that branding is a powerful marketing tool.

Nowadays due to COVID-19 global health crisis as organisation's move from off line marketing to digital marketing branding plays an instrumental role in marketing organisations' products through different digital platforms. In light of this it can be argued that both small and big businesses should invest on branding in order to facilitate a smooth marketing transition from traditional modes into a digital space.

2.12 CREATING BRAND ADVOCACY THROUGH CONTENT CREATION AND BRAND CO-CREATION WITH CONSUMERS

Vinerean (2016) argues that social media facilitates interactions and collaborations among current or potential customers and brands. Technological developments make it possible to develop of new interactive platforms for customers to share, create and generate new content related to brands in the online environments. Vinerean (2016) argues that customers get opportunities to share their experiences on social media platforms, and develop new meanings for brands.

This connection that customers develop with brands leads them to influence with favourable or unfavorable information other potential customers, and these potential consumers will receive brand-related content from reliable

sources, which will further lead to more personal brand experiences in online and offline settings. It can then be argued that the use of social media platforms is changing the online branding process due to faster information sharing.

Participation and involvement in social media, is a key component of brand advocacy and co-created branding with customers (Faganel and Janes 2020 and Ashley and Tuten 2014). Due to changes in consumer behaviour branding is no longer an organisation-based activity, that used to provide products to customers with minimum levels of feedback, but a value co-creation activity which involves the participation of an organisation and its respective customers and other relevant stakeholders. Faganel and Janes (2020) argue that co-creation is a process of engaging customers in the creation of value, as customers are transformed from playing a passive role to playing an active role. Faganel and Janes (2020) posit that in a brand co-created experience, online customers provide details of their shopping experiences and information on their favourite brands, and encourage others to purchase.

Ashley and Tuten (2014) posit that in social media branding, co-creation reflects participation from current and potential customers who seek an opportunity to be involved in the development of brands, products, services with insights, user-generated content, sharing of organisation-created content, and active interactions related to the brand in the online environments. Based on this assertion it can be said that encouragement of customers to share their positive experiences with the product via social media can lead to improved

brand reputation and increase of sales by enticing indecisive customers to buy the organisation's products.

Ashley and Tuten (2014) argues that sharing the same message on multiple social media platforms can improve its credibility and confidence in the advertised product. On the other hand, De Swan Aarons, van den Driest, and Weed (2014) argue that organisation should migrate from traditional ways of marketing and adopt modern ones, because extremely rapid changes have occurred in marketing in this digital age. They see traditional ways of marketing as obsolete since digital methods that include the use of social media have taken the centre stage in marketing.

In the digital marketing space, branding is vital in the creation of product value. Branding therefore is a powerful marketing tool that organisations, especially SMEs should use if they want to create value for their customers and earn their loyalty and retention. Aaker's brand equity model recognises branding as a strong tool for marketing the organisation's products and earning customer loyalty and retention. In brief in order for marketing to be effective both offline and in the digital space it needs to be supported by branding, because branding is the one that attracts customers, makes them to be familiar and loyal to the product. Customer loyalty result in repeat sales, customer retention and business sustainability.

2.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed literature intensively and extensively on what other researchers have written on branding as a marketing tool. The main focus

areas were the concept of branding, small and medium-sized enterprises, sustainability, theoretical framework (Aaker's brand equity model), importance of branding, branding as a strategic marketing management tool, customer relationship marketing management strategies, digital marketing strategies as well as branding strategies. It emerged in the chapter that branding strategies are now responsive to the requirements of the digital age. The next chapter discusses the methods that will be used to collect and analyse data for the study.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The study explored branding as a strategic marketing management tool for small and medium-sized enterprises' sustainability in Mbabane, Eswatini. The previous chapter reviewed literature in detail and the current chapter discusses methods that were used to collect data from participants. The chapter starts by giving an explanation of the research philosophy that was used by the study. It then goes on to explain the study's research approach and design. The chapter also covers data collection methods and instruments, population, sampling, data analysis and presentation, trustworthiness as well as ethical issues.

3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Research philosophy is a world view on how research should be done. It is a model that contains a design for data collection and analysis (Tichapondwa, 2013; De Vos, 2015). Interpretivism and positivism are the main research philosophies (Tichapondwa 2013). The interpretivist research philosophy was used in this study.

An interpretivist research philosophy comprehends connotations that participants assign to social experiences. It gives participants a platform to voice out their concerns and views. It also allows them to interpret and give meaning to their daily experiences in their environment (Neuman, 2011,

Tichapondwa, 2013). This way, the world can be understood from experiences of individual participants.

According to Weaver and Olson (2011) the interpretivist research philosophy allows the researcher to use a qualitative research approach which enables the researcher to visit participant in either their work or residential places and get a deeper understanding of the topic being studied. The qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to go to the SMEs in Mbabane and collect information directly from participants. It further allows the researcher to understand individual cases. Considering the above assertions, the interpretivist research paradigm was deemed appropriate for the study, because it allowed the researcher to get the views of participants regarding branding as a strategic marketing management tool for Small and Medium-Enterprises (SMEs) in Mbabane, Eswatini straight from the field. This enabled the researcher to construct knowledge about the phenomenon being investigated from the participants' point of view in their natural settings.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted a qualitative methodology that follows a case study design. A case study design is suitable for qualitative research and it constitutes a boundary which channels the researcher to work within that boundary so that they understand the topic in-depth. A case can be an organisation, person or event (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The case study design was suitable for the study, because it made it possible to capture individual SME owners and employees' perceptions of branding as an important component of their marketing strategies. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) assert that a case

study enables the researcher to study the topic in depth. In the study, branding as a strategic marketing management tool was studied in depth, using face to face interviews to generate detailed information on how branding could be used by SMEs in Mbabane to effectively market themselves and their offerings.

3.4 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The target population was SME owners and employees who worked in the marketing and sales department in Mbabane City Eswatini. Participants from these departments were seen as having deep information regarding branding and how it could be used as a strategic marketing tool in their organisations. According to the Ministry of Commerce and Trade (2021) there are ninety-five registered SMEs in Mbabane. The population of the study comprised of owners of these SMEs and employees who worked in the marketing and sales department. This was the case because branding is a component of marketing.

3.5 SAMPLING

This study adopted the purposive sampling technique since data was collected from SME owners and employees. Not all participants in the selected three SME organisations took part in the study. Only fifteen purposively selected participants took part in the study. Three SME organisations were conveniently selected based on their easy accessibility by the researcher. From those three SMEs an owner from each was selected. From each SME four employees from the Marketing and sales department were purposively selected and this gave a total number of fifteen participants. Purposive

sampling, is choosing participants who have rich and detailed information for the study (McLeon, 2014 & Denscombe, 2008).

A qualitative study does not need huge numbers like a quantitative study, but it needs a few knowledgeable participants who have been purposively selected based on their knowledge about the topic being investigated (McLeon, 2014 & Denscombe, 2008). SME owners and employees from the marketing and sales departments possessed detailed information about the use of branding as a strategic marketing tool to enhance sustainability of SMEs. Since SME owners and participants were the ones who were involved in the marketing of their organisations, they managed to contribute information and some of the ways SMEs could use branding as a strategic marketing tool that could benefit them in a sustainable manner in Mbabane Eswatini.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND INSTRUMENT

In qualitative research, methods that are used to collect data are interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis (Sharma, 2017 and Cohen, and Manion, 2010). Primary data was collected using a structured interview guide during face-to-face interviews with participants in January 2022. The interview guide was developed using the objectives of the study and information from literature review.

3.8.1 Interviews

This study used a structured interview guide with non-structured questions to collect data from fifteen participants sampled from three selected SMEs in Mbabane. Creswell (2018) asserts interviews enable the interviewer and the interviewee to engage and share information in a formal conversation. The

interviewer makes use of the interview guide that has a list of non-structured questions to be covered during the interview process. The interviews were effective for data collection, because they enabled the researcher to clarify questions in areas where participants needed clarity (Creswell, 2018 and Doyle, 2015). This made it possible for the researcher to collect and record detailed information from the participants. What further added to the effectiveness of interviews was that the researcher used the interview guide to interview participants in the comfort of their offices and conference rooms at their work places. Holding interviews in the venues that participants were familiar with enabled them to feel relaxed and motivated to give the researcher detailed information during interview sessions.

The Interviews were appropriate for the study as they enabled the researcher to generate rich information through in-depth interaction with participants. Unlike using questionnaires that are completed in the absence of the researcher, denying participants an opportunity to ask for clarity from the researcher, interviews allowed participants to seek for clarity of certain questions they felt they needed clarity on. Clarification of questions enabled participants to contribute detailed information which was relevant for the study. Each interview lasted thirty minutes. COVID-19 guidelines of sanitising hands, wearing of face masks and social distancing were followed by the researcher and participants during interview sessions.

3.9 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Before collecting data, the researcher asked for permission to do so from management of the three chosen SME organisations in Mbabane. After getting permission, the researcher visited these organisations to familiarise herself with the marketing and sales departments and started sampling participants who took part in the study. The researcher asked management to assist in identifying employees who had detailed information on branding and marketing.

Appointments for interviews were made with selected participants. The researcher proposed and agreed with participants on interview dates, times and venues as well as interview durations. During interview days, the researcher went via management offices to inform them that interviews were going to take place. Interviews took place in participants' offices and conference rooms. The researcher conducted the interviews using an interview guide. Participants' responses were recorded. COVID-19 guidelines of social distancing, sanitising of hands and wearing of face masks were followed during interviews.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

The researcher followed the steps of thematic analysis of qualitative data. She familiarised with the data, assigned codes to describe content, searched for patterns, reviewed themes, defined and named themes then produced the report (Kiger, & Varpino, 2020). In qualitative research, data is analysed under themes using words (McMillan and Schumacher 2014). The themes

that developed from data analysis and presentation were used as headings of chapter four.

Data collected from interviews was analysed, presented and discussed at the same time. This is supported by Creswell (2014) and Maree (2015) who argue that some studies analyse, present and discuss data concurrently. In most cases, participants' contributions were written as they were. Literature from chapter two, was used to support and to point out gaps in participants' contributions.

3.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness is important in qualitative research, the same way reliability and validity are important in quantitative research (Sharma, 2017, McLeon, 2014 Creswell, 2016). According to Maree (2015), Sharma (2017) and McLeon (2014) credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability are the elements that the researcher uses to make sure that their studies are trustworthy. The study used these elements to guarantee trustworthiness of the findings.

3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Consent of participation was sought from participants by asking them to sign consent forms. Anonymity of participants was observed. The true identity of participants was protected through using code names. Participants were given the right to withdraw their participation at any convenient time during the research process and protection from harm was assured to participants. Recordings of interviews and notes are kept safe in a lockable cabinet.

Recordings and interview notes will be kept for a period of five years. After five years this data will be permanently destroyed by shredding of the hard copies and formatting of the discs.

3.12.1 Informed consent

The study abided with ethical guidelines. Braun and Clarke (2013) argue that researchers must ensure that participants sign consent forms before taking part in the study. Before each and every interview session, the researcher gave participants consent forms with ethical guidelines. The researcher explained the consent forms to participants. After that all participants signed consent forms to show that their participation in the study was voluntary. The researcher also told participants that since taking part in the study was voluntary, they were free to stop from participating anytime they wanted to without any victimisation.

3.12.2 Protection of participants from harm

Participants were not exposed to any physical or psychological harm. The researcher focused on the questions in the interview guide that dealt with branding and marketing. Questions focusing on those were not likely to harm participants since they already dealt with branding and marketing in their daily work. Interviews were held in participants' offices and conference rooms. Participants were already used to those venues and were comfortable to be interviewed in them. During interviews, the researcher followed COVID-19 guidelines. The researcher and participants socially distanced,

sanitised hands, wore face masks and avoided exchanging papers and pens. Tables and chairs were sanitised, and interviews lasted for thirty minutes in order to ensure that the researcher and participants did not stay in one place for more than two hours.

3.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter discussed the study's data collection methodology. It started by discussing the research philosophy that was used in the study. It then went on to focus on the research approach, research design and research methods that were used in the study. It further discussed the population, sampling methods and data analysis and presentation techniques. The chapter ended by discussing trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4:

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The study used interviews to collect data from purposively sampled owners and employees of SMEs in Mbabane Eswatini. In this chapter, data is analysed, presented and discussed concurrently. Categorisation and coding were used to develop the themes, and data was analysed and presented under those themes. To uphold ethical guidelines, the names of all those who participated and their organisations were not disclosed. They were protected through using code names. SMEs were coded as SME A, SME B and SME C. Employees were coded as participant 1 from SME B, participant 4 from SME A, participant 3 from SME C and the like. SME owners were coded as SME A owner, SME B owner and SME C owner. Table 4.1 below gives details on how participants and their organisations were coded.

The objectives of the study were to:

- To analyse branding strategies used by SME owners in Mbabane, Eswatini
- To examine customer relations marketing management strategies used by SME owners in Mbabane, Eswatini to create awareness of their brands
- To investigate the prevalence of branding as a Strategic Management tool used by SME owners in Mbabane, Eswatini

During data analysis, similar data was grouped together, coded and then themes developed. The themes and subthemes that were developed are given in the table below. The chapter analyses, presents and discusses data under those themes.

4.2 THEMES

The table below shows the themes and sub-themes that developed from data analysis and presentation.

Table 4.1: Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Subtheme
Branding	
Branding strategies used by SME owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal branding - Product branding - Core-branding
Customer Relations Marketing Management	
Customer Relations Marketing Management strategies used by SME owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective and quality service delivery - After sales service
Prevalence of branding as a strategic marketing management tool by SME owners	
Strategies that SME owners can use to enhance the effectiveness of branding as a marketing management tool	

To avoid using real names, participants were coded as follows:

SME owners

SME A owner

SME B owner

SME C owner

Employees

Participant 1, 2, 3, 4 from SME A

Participant 1, 2, 3, 4 from SME B

Participant 1, 2, 3, 4 from SME C

4.3 BRANDING

At the beginning of interviews, participants who included the employees and owners of SMEs were asked the question: What is branding? When responding to these questions, participants demonstrated that they know what branding is, though they expressed their understanding in different terms. In response to the question, what is branding? Participant 1 from SME C said:

Personally, I would say branding is creating something that is unique and will stand out for a service or any business that you have. It involves creating visibility for your company and products in a way that will increase the sales of products that the company is offering.

Participant 4 from SME A explained branding as follows:

In my own understanding it is putting your name out there into the market either by creating a name, symbol, logo or motto so that customers can identify your products and come and buy from your company. You don't have to tell customers what you deliver, the brand has to talk for you because you can't reach out to everyone, just post the brand, and the brand will show customers what is different about your products.

This participant continued to say that:

As a business person you should remember that you are not supposed to brand for the sake of branding, but the brand should promote and support the products and services. It should be a standing out so that the business retains its customers. It should be unique and different from the business' competitors, for example my business brand is 'you dream it, I created'. This means that whatever you are dreaming of as a customer, I am here to create it for you. This kind of branding attracts customers to come to my business to buy our products in order to satisfy their dreams. In brief I can say that branding is a unique identity that you give to your business and products that communicates with customers who you are, your values as well as the quality of your offering in order to create strong perceptions about your offering in the minds of clients and customers.

These explanations of branding by participants showed that they understood what branding is. Their assertions are supported by Kotler and Keller (2015) and Marion (2020) who argue that branding is giving the product a unique name different from those used by competitors in order to build the customer base that is loyal to the product. Taking these assertions into account it can be said that from their contributions participants demonstrated that they understood that branding entails using creative names, symbols and logos to differentiate products from competitors in order to shape and create positive perceptions in the minds of customers about the products. Marion (2020) sees that brand as the one that enables the customers to have pleasant perceptions about the brand.

4.4 BRANDING STRATEGIES USED BY SME OWNERS

During interviews when responding to the question, which branding strategies do you use in your company/organisation? Participants said that they use personal branding, product branding and core-branding.

4.4.1 Personal branding

Participants said that it is common that when the business starts it begins by using personal branding where by the owner becomes the brand of the organisation. SME B owner said:

I used personal branding to brand the business and products. I gave the business my middle name (Precious). As an individual I have a lot of followers on social media. If I market using my name on face book and Instagram, I get a lot of responses from customers who are my followers. The strategy of using personal branding was to tap into the market of customers who were already my followers on social media.

Assertions by this participant were also echoed by SME C owner who said that he used personal branding which motivated customers to prefer his products than competitors who used corporate brands. He had the following to say:

My strategy is to use personal brand. I use my name as a brand (Mbongeni Spares) then customers prefer these car spares because they associate them with a local person as opposed to spare parts sold by foreign owned organisations like Auto Spares for example.

Participants' responses during interviews showed that most SMEs used their names to brand their businesses and products. This strategy of branding is supported by Giles (2020) and Ajike (2015) who argue that when small businesses start operating, their owners tend to use their names to brand them and their products. They go on to assert that as time goes on these personal brands grow and become corporate brands that businesses become identified with as they continue to expand to other markets.

During interviews participant continued to assert that they used personal branding, because they believed that it was good to fight competition against big corporations that sell similar products. SME A owner said:

In small business you can't really specify brands. You tend to put yourself under your own personal brand. You start by branding yourself and then use your personal brand to compete than trying to use a different name for your business which is not known by people. In the closing industry where I am, you can't compete with already established companies like Lewis, Edgars if you use your unknown business brand. But you can use your personal brand to compete, because as an individual you are already known by many people who can be willing to support you in your business.

This participant went on to say that:

Like myself my business is supported by many customers because I branded it and the products using my personal brand. My brand is (Perfect Perfection with Fafy). Fafy is my nick name that most people know. Using my nick name as part of my brand has made my business

and products like T shirts that have this brand written on them more popular and marketable.

It can be said that by using personal branding as a strategy, SMEs in Mbabane in Eswatini are on the right track. Durmaz (2016) asserts that personal branding is a good strategy for business start-ups. Durmaz (2016) further advises young business owners and entrepreneurs to be their own brands and make sure that they develop reputable images that can sell the business well off and online. Moisescu (2015) argues that if well-developed, the personal brand can be strengthened by a combination of the owner's skills, personality and experiences. This enables the brand to be more marketable and get a huge following, especially when posted on social media platforms. Taking this assertion into account, it can be said that by using personal branding, SMEs in Mbabane are using the right strategy that is supported by authorities like Durmaz (2016) and Moisescu (2015). Participants asserted that they believed that with time, their personal brands will grow bigger and enable them to open business branches in other parts of the country outside Mbabane. Their assertions are confirmed by Moisescu (2015) who posits that some personal brands are powerful and good for engineering business growth and expansion.

4.4.2 Product banding

Participants said that in addition to personal branding in their organisations, they also used product branding strategies. Most of them used their personal brands to brand their products while others gave products different names. An SME owner during interviews said that she put the logo of her personal brand on her products. She said:

When using the product branding strategy, I use my personal brand 'Perfection with Fafy' to brand my products. Customers get attracted to this logo when it is inscribed on the products and when it is visually posted online or displayed on the premises of the business. I positioned my brand through good customer service delivery and offering my customers quality products. Doing so convinced customers that Perfection with Fatty product and services are good and reliable.

The product branding strategy that SMEs in Mbabane, Eswatini apply is supported by Kotler and Steenkamp (2020) and Keller (2015) who argue that most business organisations brand their products in order to make them distinct from competitors' so that they become marketable in a competitive market place. Kotler and Keller (2015) assert that strong product brands can be further used to initiate and implement brand extension strategy. During interviews, participants said that in their organisations, they used brand extension strategy. Participant 1 in SME A during the interview said:

In our company we extend our product brands. For example, we use the same brand name for cushions, hoods and hats.

These assertions by the participant are validated by authoritative sources such as Kotler and Keller (2015) and Steenkamp (2020) who argue that product branding strategy enables companies to extend the brand name to other product lines.

4.4.3 Core branding

Participants during interviews said that they were aware of core branding as a strategy, but they don't use it in their companies. SME A owner and SME

C owner said that as small businesses, core branding was not appropriate for them since they were still growing up. They said that it is only good for big and established corporations that have stable brands and sustainable businesses. SME C owner said:

It is risky for SMEs to core brand because they are not yet established and most of them use personal brands that are strongly attached to their characters and personalities. If you core brand for example with another SME that uses a personal brand and the following day that person is on the media for wrong reasons, then the brand will be affected and your business will suffer even if you did not do anything wrong.

Most participants, including both SME owners and employees argued that core branding is risky for SMEs in Mbabane because they are still not yet fully established. They argued that some of them failed to survive during the COVID-19 crisis, and in case of core branding that was a big risk, they also said that most of SMEs who core branded, ended up fighting for money. Though participants gave their reasons on why they did not use the core branding strategy, Kotler and Keller (2015) see core branding as an effective strategy that improves the visibility of the product offering and makes it marketable in the market place. Participants' criticism of core branding showed that they had limited knowledge about how this kind of branding could be strategically implemented and utilised to boost the performance and sustainability of SMEs. Most SME owners have insufficient knowledge of branding strategies (Gundala & Khawaja, 2014).

4.5 CUSTOMER RELATIONS MARKETING MANAGEMENT

Participants expressed their views on what Customer Relations Marketing Management (CRMM) is. Though their views had variations but they all showed that participants had an appreciation of what (CRMM) is. Most of them believed that CRMM is building good relationships with customer in order to win their loyalty. During interviews in response to the question, what is customer relations marketing management? Participant 2 from SME B said:

I think customer relations marketing management has to do with connection between the company and the customer.

On another note, SME B owner during the interview process when responding to the question stated above said:

In my understanding customer relations marketing management means how to acquire, maintain and retain customers in your business.

The above assertion by SME B owner is supported by Chittaie (2012) who asserts that customer relation marketing management involves the following four aspects, customer identification, customer attraction, customer retention and customer development. Though participants in their explanation of CRMM did not mention customer development, but apart from that part their explanations are in line with Chittaie (2012)'s explanation of CRMM. This shows that participants knew what CRMM is all about in business.

4.6 CUSTOMER RELATIONS MARKETING MANAGEMENT

STRATEGIES USED BY SME OWNERS

Participants said that in their companies they used the following CRMM, effective and quality service delivery, after sales service.

4.6.1 Effective and quality service delivery

Participants said that companies should nurture positive relationship with the customer in order to keep them coming. Participant 2 from SME C said:

Customer relations can be managed through offering good and customer service and quality products that will earn the company customer trust and will to do repeat business with the company. The mistake that small businesses make is that they spend more time advertising in the media instead of concentrating on quality service delivery. It is excellent service delivery that builds relations and brings customers more than advertising on the media.

During interviews almost all participants said that good service delivery can be used to build strong relations with customers that result in customer loyalty. Participants believed that through offering the service that satisfies customers good relations are built with them. These views by participants are supported by Mohamad, Othman, Jabar, & Majid (2014) who argue that the best strategy for customer retention and building of relations is through offering them good services that will make them to respect and trust the company.

4.6.2 After sales service

In response to the question, which customer relations marketing strategies are used in your company/organisation to create awareness of your brand? Most participants said that they offered after sales service to their customers to demonstrate to them that they are not only interested in their money but in their satisfaction with the services and products that they are offered.

Participant 3 from SME A said:

In my organisation we offer the after sales service whereby we phone the customer and ask how the product is treating them.

Most participants during interviews expressed that they contact customers after they had rendered a service or sold a product to and ask whether they were satisfied with the service or the product that they bought. They said that doing so cultivated good relations with their customers. Authorities such as Kotler and Keller (2015) support the use of after sales service as a strategy of building good relationships with customers.

Taking participants' contributions during interviews about customer Relations Marketing Management strategies used by SMEs in Mbabane, it can be said that these SMEs use a limited number of strategies. There are other effective CRMM strategies that SMEs in Mbabane are not using. These strategies are highlighted by Mohamad, Othman, Jabar, & Majid (2014), Machado and Davim (2017) as developing and keeping an updated customer data base to make it possible to engage customers digitally and keep them informed about available offerings and promotions in the organisation. They also see the customer data base as a source of information that makes it possible for the organisation to communicate with its customers as necessary and come to know their needs through getting feedback from them.

Machado, & Davim, (2017) sees engagement with customers in the digital space as another good CRMM strategy. They argue that creating digital platforms where the company engages with customers makes it possible for the company to educate and develop its customers. Machado and Davim

(2017) believe that customer education and development improves the company's relations with its customers and make most marketing initiatives a success. A flexible product retention policy is seen by Kotler and Keller (2015) as another effective CRMM strategy that makes customers trust the organisation and be prepared to do repeat business with it. During interviews participants did not mention all the above CRMM strategies. They only mentioned two strategies namely effective and quality service delivery, after sales service. This shows that SMEs in Mbabane are not utilising other effective CRMM strategies that have been mentioned above. They are only utilising a limited number of CRMM yet there are other available strategies that they can use.

4.7 PREVALENCE OF BRANDING AS A STRATEGIC MARKETING MANAGEMENT TOOL BY SME OWNERS

In response to the question how often do you use branding as a strategic marketing tool in your company/organisation? Some participants said that they used branding as a strategic marketing strategy regularly, while some participants said that at times, they do not use it. SME B owner said:

Since I use personal branding, this means that I use the brand always, every time. I represent it every day, always. I live the brand, because most people associate me with the brand. Where ever I go people know which brand I represent. It is very hard to switch off the brand if it is yours, even if you are an employee because employees also represent the brand.

The same notion was held by participant 3 from SME C. when responding to the same question during interviews said:

Emm! I use branding as a strategic marketing management tool on a daily basis. I have spoken with some SMEs and told them that everyone in their organisations should make sure that they always do marketing to promote the organisations' brands.

This participant continued to say that:

Once the marketing brings the customer the company, others should take over and continue promoting the brand. For example, at the reception the way how customers are treated is part of brand promotion. The finance section should do the same.

In line with this assertion SME A owner during interviews said that:

I think since we are in Mbabane which has a centre of influence and has many people, we use branding as marketing tool on a daily basis, because if we don't, we will lose business to those who promote their brands in the media especially digital media on a daily basis. Remember out of site out of mind. As small businesses if customers do not see your brand today, they will get other brands that they see that particular day. Customers need to see the brand every day.

These assertions by participants are supported by Machado and Davim (2017) and Sheth and Sisodia (2015) who assert that nowadays the internet has

provided digital space for business to market and keep their brands visible to customers.

Some participants however said that they don't regularly use branding as a marketing tool. During interviews participant 4 from SME B said:

Though it is important to use branding as a marketing tool always, but it is hard to do it frequently due to time constraints. Resources are another constraint that affect frequent branding and marketing. Budget limits. Creating content for posting in the media for example digital media needs to be attractive and comprehensive, so it needs resources and time to put together. Personal life commitments also affect branding and posting.

These assertions by participant 4 from SME B, of personal commitments affecting branding and posting were also raised by SME C owner who said:

As SMEs sometimes we tend to ignore regular use of branding to market our businesses, because we also need to attend too other personal commitments. Due to these commitments, we end up having no time to continuously use our brands to promote our businesses. Most SMEs that I know do not invest in branding. They are not even aware that branding is the one that pushes and promotes the business if it is well used by the marketing department.

From participants' contributions it can be said that some SMEs in Mbabane use branding as a marketing management tool often while other SMEs do not

use it often due to time and resource constraints as well as lack of knowledge on how important it is to use branding as a marketing management tool. Despite the issues of time constraints and non-availability of resources Davim (2017) and Sheth and Sisodia (2015) note that it is important for business to capitalise on the availability of digital media platforms to post their brands and messages on a regular basis so that their brands remain visible to customers. Steenkamp (2020) and Moisescu (2015) assert that according to Aaker's brand equity model loyal customers expect the brand be always visible and available.

4.8 STRATEGIES THAT SME OWNERS CAN USE TO ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BRANDING AS A MARKETING MANAGEMENT TOOL

During interviews participants suggested some strategies that SMEs can use to enhance the effectiveness of branding as a marketing management tool. They stated strategies such as producing quality and attractive brands, addressing customer needs through research, exercising consistency to maintain the brand.

4.8.1 Producing quality and attractive brands

Participant 1 from SME C said: *in order to enhance the effectiveness of branding as a marketing management tool SMEs need to produce quality and attractive brands which talk to people. This can be achieved through engaging and working with people who are experts in branding and*

marketing. They have to invest in equipment like cameras and smart phones that will take good picture quality of brands for posting on the media.

In response to the same question during interviews participant 3 from SME B said that:

Brand associations can be used to enhance the effectiveness of branding as a marketing management tool in SMEs. As a small business if you collaborate with big organisations that have strong brands or associate your brand with them then your brand would become strong and an effective tool to market your business.

These assertions by participants are supported by Faganel and Janes (2020) who posit that well established brands help to effectively market the business and retain its customers. The point of participant 3 from SME C that quality and attractive brands should be produced by SMEs as a strategy of enhancing effectiveness of branding as a marketing management to is supported by Aaker's brand equity model. According to this model building a strong brand implies average quality positioning. Perceived brand quality can also attract the interest of a channel member, allow extensions and support a higher price that provides resources to reinvest in the brand. Perceived quality provides the customer a reason to buy the product (Steenkamp, 2020). This shows that the creation of quality and attractive brands would promote to market the business and its products to customers, stakeholders and also help product positioning and brand extension.

4.8.2 Addressing customer needs through research

Participants said that SMEs need to research and gather information in order to know the needs of customers. They believed that after knowing the needs of the market SMEs can then innovate and come up with novel brands that address the needs of customers in the market. SME B owner said that:

In order for branding to be effectively used as a marketing management tool, it has to be the right brand in the first place. So, SMEs should research and be versatile so that they always come up with new and novel brands that continue to excite the market, because it addresses their needs and expectations.

According to Aaker's brand equity model if the brand becomes familiar and supported by customers it can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing programmes. A sales promotion, for example is likely to be effective if the brand is familiar and addresses the needs of the customers in a certain market as participants asserted. Moisescu (2015) argues that perceived quality of the brand by customers can strengthen brand loyalty and increase customer satisfaction and provide reasons for customers to buy the organisations' product.

4.8.3 Exercising consistency to maintain the brand

Participants also emphasized that the brand should have consistency if it is to be an effective marketing tool. Participant 4 from SME S said that:

If SMEs are to use branding as an effective marketing management tool, then they should ensure that such brands are consistent. They

should understand the seasons of their brands well and maintain consistency of those brands throughout. Some brands start well, but they end up going down. If the brand performance changes customers lose interest.

This notion was in line with participant 2 from SME C who said:

Sometimes as a small business you need to focus and be consistent with regards to your brand. Don't keep on changing unnecessarily. Make sure that you are consistent with your brand and grow it. align everything in the company with the brand. The staff uniform, building etc should be aligned to the brand, for example you can't find MTN in a red building. Everything that they do is aligned to their brand thus why most customers are loyal to their brand.

This participant continued to say that:

What helps big businesses is that they have effective marketing and branding strategies that they develop. These strategies guide their operations. The problem with SMEs is that the majority of them especially those that I know do not have marketing and branding strategies that guide them. In other words, they are not guided thus why they do trial and error moving from one brand to the never without really achieving any sustainable impact on business.

Most participants raised that lack of marketing and branding strategies in SMEs is a set back because SMEs do not have anything that guides them. Participants believed that if SMEs could develop marketing and branding strategies for guidance and consistently grew their brands, chances were there

that such brands could end up enjoying brand equity in the market in the case is with big organisations like MTN. Smith Gradojevic and Irwin 2017) argue that brand equity can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing programmes while at the same time reducing marketing costs.

Based on the contributions of participants on strategies that branding can be effectively used as a marketing management tool it can be said that participants gave only a limited number of strategies. They only gave producing quality and attractive brands, addressing customer needs through research, exercising consistency to maintain the brand. This shows that SMEs in Mbabane lack comprehensive knowledge of diverse strategies that can be used to make branding an effective marketing management tool. Chittaie (2012) says that customers should be educated about the brand so that the brand becomes familiar to customers. Once the brand is familiar to customers, they tend to embrace its messages from the marketing team.

The digital space affords organisations an opportunity to build their brand image on the Web so that customers can have experiences with the brand through user friendly digital platforms (Sheth and Sisodia 2015). Organisations to set aside budgets to support branding in the form of training their staff on digital and social media brand promotion. They go on to say that well trained staff members are capable of developing brand reputation. Once the brand becomes reputable to customers it tends to enjoy brand equity which enables it to earn customer loyalty (Tsimonis and Dimitriades 2014). According to Aaker's brand equity model, perceived equity provides the

reason for the customer to buy the product (Steenkamp 2020). On the other hand, Kotler and Keller (2015) advise businesses especially those businesses that are growing up to develop an effective branding and marketing strategies that will guide them in promoting business and its products. During interviews however participants did not mention these strategies that are stated above. They only highlighted a few strategies on how branding could be used as an effective marketing management tool, yet there are many strategies as shown by the discussion above. In addition, though they are aware that they need to brand and market their businesses and products, but they did not have branding and marketing strategies to guide these processes. They embark on them haphazardly without any guiding instrument like a strategy. SME growth can only be achieved if appropriate strategies are developed and successfully implemented (Yieh, Yeh, Tseng, Wang, & Wu, 2018).

4.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter analysed, presented and discussed the findings of the study. Literature was used to support the contributions of participants and in some cases to show gaps in those contributions. Data was presented under themes that developed from data analysis. Those themes and subthemes are shown in the table in the second page of this chapter. In some areas, participants were quoted as they are. The chapter analysed, presented and discussed data concurrently. The next chapter provides the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 5:

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study. The summary will be briefly given per chapter beginning with chapter one and progressing to chapter 4. After that conclusions will be drawn from the findings of the study. The chapter will end by giving recommendations as guided by the findings of the study and literature.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Data analysis and presentation showed that participants understood what branding is. They also demonstrated understanding of using branding as a marketing management tool. Participants also understood Customer Relations Marketing Management and its importance in the SME businesses. Though there was such understanding the findings of the study showed that most SMEs in Mbabane do not often use branding as a marketing management strategy due to time and resource challenges. Findings also showed that SMEs in Mbabane used a limited number of customer relations marketing strategies. They also used a limited number of branding strategies. These were caused by limited knowledge of these strategies, as well as challenges caused by shortage of time and resources needed to invest in customer relations marketing and effective branding strategies and initiatives.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

From data analysis and presentations, it was concluded that SMEs in Mbabane Eswatini use a limited number of customer relations marketing management strategies. They only use effective and quality service delivery, after sales service. Literature review shows that there are other effective CRMM strategies that SMEs in Mbabane can use. These strategies include flexible product retention policy, creating digital platforms to engage with customers, creating customer data base etc. Without a comprehensive customer data base, SMEs in Mbabane would have challenges to track and interact directly with their customers to promote their brands.

Another conclusion was that SMEs in Mbabane use a limited number of branding strategies. They mostly concentrate on personal branding, yet literature revealed that there are a number of effective branding strategies that businesses can use to ensure visibility of their products so that they can operate in a viable and sustainable way. SMEs in Mbabane also do not have branding and marketing strategies to guide their branding and marketing activities. Kotler and Keller (2015) argue that businesses should be guided by well-developed and effective branding and marketing strategies.

It was also concluded that SMEs in Mbabane not often use branding as a marketing management tool due to limited time, expertise and unavailability of resources. They also lack branding and marketing strategies that can guide them on the administering of branding and marketing activities.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

After reviewing literature broadly and analysing and presenting data, recommendations were made to SMEs. The recommendations are meant help SMEs to improve their branding and marketing processes, and effectively use branding as a marketing management tool to promote their business products and operate in a sustainable way. The recommendations are as follows.

- Customer relations marketing management makes it easy for business to directly interact with its customers. There are many CRMM strategies that organisations can use. SMEs in Mbabane however use a few of these strategies like the use of effective and quality service delivery and after sales service. It is recommended that SMEs in Mbabane should expand their CRMM strategies and add other strategies such as developing an easy product return policy, creating digital platforms where they can interact with their customers regularly as well as creating a customer data base for easy tracking and interaction with customers.
- Most SMEs in Mbabane use personal branding to brand their businesses and products that the business sales. Though this is a good strategy, especially for small businesses that are start-ups and only rely on the image of the owner, it is recommended that SMEs should expand branding of certain products beyond personal branding and give them their own unique and marketable brand names. Doing so would allow certain products to grow in the market and end up enjoying brand equity. Aaker's 1991 brand equity model contends

that brand equity reduces marketing costs as it brings adequate finances that makes the business to grow and enjoy sustainability.

- Some SMEs in Mbabane do not often use branding as a marketing management tool that can make their products competitive and ensure the viability and sustainability of business. Failure to often use branding as a marketing tool was caused by time constraints and lack of necessary resources. It is therefore recommended that SMEs should develop action plans that would allow them to use time efficiently, to run business processes such as branding and marketing. During budgeting they should allocate funds for branding and marketing activities and needs including procurement of equipment that can enable the use of digital technologies to promote brands.
- Training and development are an essential element in the running of businesses. Since findings revealed that some SME owners and employees lack needed knowledge and skills in branding and marketing. It is recommended that that SMEs should hire or commission people with necessary branding and marketing knowledge and skills. Also, SME owners and employees should be trained in branding and marketing so that they would be able to understand these concepts and use them properly to improve the financial performance and sustainability of SME businesses.

5.5 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Most SMEs, including those who manage to earn profits, always struggle when it comes to managing their finances. As a result, they end up having

less resources for branding and marketing. Research could be conducted exploring how SMEs manage their financial resources and reinvestment. Fully fledged studies could also be conducted on areas such as branding strategies as well as Customer Relationship Management strategies.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Title: Exploring branding as a strategic marketing management tool for small and medium-sized enterprises sustainability in Mbabane, Eswatini.

Target Audience

Employees working in marketing and sales departments in the SME organisations in Mbabane, Eswatini.

Timing

Each interview will be 30 minutes long.

Interview venues

Conference rooms and offices of participants

Introductions

The moderator will introduce the research team to interviewees and also ask them to introduce themselves to the team. After introductions the researcher will explain the research topic and the purpose of the study to participants. The researcher will also explain and present the consent form with ethical guidelines to participants to sign. After participants have signed the consent form the moderator will start interviews guided by the interview guide.

Questions

Objectives of the study	Interview questions
To analyse branding strategies used by SME owners in Mbabane, Eswatini	1. What is branding? 2. What kind of brands do you have in your organisation? 3. Which branding strategies do you use in your organisation?
To examine customer relations marketing management strategies used by SME owners in Mbabane, Eswatini to create awareness of their brands	4. What is customer relations marketing management? 5. Which customer relations marketing management strategies are used in your organisation to create awareness of your brands.
To investigate the prevalence of branding as a Strategic Management Tool by SMEs owners in Mbabane, Eswatini	6. How often do you use branding as a strategic marketing tool in your organisation? 7. How do you think branding can be effectively used in your organisation as a marketing management tool?

Thank you for taking part in this interview.

- Is there anything left out that you would like to raise?

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research

Topic: Exploring branding as a strategic marketing management tool for small and medium-sized enterprises sustainability in Mbabane, Eswatini.

Researcher: Chunky Mdluli

Contacts: +268 78064033

Supervisor: Dr Elisha Woyo (Manchester Metropolitan University Business School)

Dear Participant

I am Chunky Mdluli registered student at the University of Namibia. My supervisor is Dr Elisha Woyo, I kindly request you to participate in my study which is required for the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration (Management strategy). You have been purposively selected to take part in the study because you are seen as having detailed and needed information for the study.

Participating in this study is voluntary and you can stop from participating at any time if you want to without any victimisation. Taking part in this study is voluntary, you are not going to be paid for it. Your name and the identity of your organisation will not be disclosed and you will not be exposed to any harm as you participate in the study.

I have read and understood this consent form and I voluntarily consent to participate in this study without being forced to:

Participant's Name and surname _____

Participant 's signature _____

Date _____

I have explained this study to the above participant and have sought his/her informed consent. After this form has been signed, I will give the participant a copy.

Interviewer's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX C: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE



The Rev. Dr. Greenfield Mwakipesile

ThD, MBA, HBS | mwkipg@outlook.com

CONTACT

PO Box 99539,
UNAM,
Namibia

LANGUAGE & COPY-EDITING CERTIFICATE

25th March 2022

RE: LANGUAGE, COPYEDITING AND PROOFREADING OF CHUNKY MDLULI'S THESIS FOR THE MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION DEGREE OF THE NAMIBIA BUSINESS SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

This certificate serves to confirm that I copyedited and proofread **CHUNKY MDLULI's** Thesis for the **MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION DEGREE** entitled: **EXPLORING BRANDING AS A STRATEGIC MARKETING MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES SUSTAINABILITY IN MBABANE ESWATINI**

I declare that I professionally copyedited and proofread the thesis and removed mistakes and errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. In some cases, I improved sentence construction without changing the content provided by the student. I also removed some typographical errors from the thesis and formatted the thesis so that it complies with the University of Namibia's guidelines.

I am a trained language and copy editor and have edited many Postgraduate Diploma, Masters' Thesis, Dissertations and Doctoral Dissertations for students studying with universities in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Eswatini, South Africa and abroad. I have also copy-edited company documents for companies in the region and abroad.

Please feel free to contact me should the need arise.

Yours Sincerely,

The Rev. Dr. Greenfield Mwakipesile



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APPENDIX D: SIMILARITY CHECK REPORT-SUMMARY



Document Information

Analyzed document	THESIS-CHUNKY MDLULI 201800438.docx (D131373853)
Submitted	2022-03-24T10:54:00.0000000
Submitted by	
Submitter email	chunkeymdlul7@gmail.com
Similarity	6%
Analysis address	mwakipg.unam@analysis.urkund.com

Sources included in the report

SA	University of Namibia / FPGSC Submission NBS - October 2021 - Leonard Bennett - 201800446 - Thesis.docx Document FPGSC Submission NBS - October 2021 - Leonard Bennett - 201800446 - Thesis.docx (D116908784) Submitted by: lbennett18@hotmail.com Receiver: mwakipg.unam@analysis.urkund.com		23
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SA	The influence of collaborative customer relationship on customer retention.docx Document The influence of collaborative customer relationship on customer retention.docx (D28991625)		2
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SA	University of Namibia / Gilbert_Jemwa_Marketing_Design_and_Operations.docx Document Gilbert_Jemwa_Marketing_Design_and_Operations.docx (D26464379) Submitted by: jemwagi@yahoo.com Receiver: jkangira.unam@analysis.urkund.com		1