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Article

Structurally validated scale of measuring the link between corporate storytelling for branding & internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions

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MARKETING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Structurally validated scale of measuring the link between corporate storytelling for branding & internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions

Brighton Nyagadza^{1,2*}, Ernest M. Kadembo³ and Africa Makasi⁴

Abstract: The research purpose was to assess the link between corporate storytelling for branding and internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions. Nomothetic quantitative explanatory research design anchored on positivist paradigm was applied. Data were collected via physical self-administered survey, resulting in 335 responses from 6 selected companies listed on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange (ZSE), in 6 industrial sectors. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS version 6 software, was used to test the propositions. Results depicted that there is a positive link between corporate stories for branding elements such as corporate activities ($r(335) = .15, p = .01$), corporate values ($r(335) = .84, p < .001$), corporate associations ($r(335) = .60, p < .001$), corporate personality ($r(335) = .90, p < .001$) and emotional attachment with internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions ($r(335) = .74, p < .001$). It was recommended that the management of



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Brighton Nyagadza is a Doctor of Philosophy (Marketing Management) finalist (Midlands State University, Zimbabwe) and Digital Marketing Lecturer (Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, Zimbabwe). He holds an Executive Certificate in Export Marketing & International Trade (University of Zimbabwe), Post Graduate Diploma In Education (Zimbabwe Open University), Professional Diploma in Marketing (Driving Innovation) (The Chartered Institute of Marketing, United Kingdom), Bachelor of Commerce (Marketing) (Zimbabwe Open University) and Master of Commerce (Marketing Strategy) (Midlands State University, Zimbabwe). His key interests revolve on corporate storytelling, marketing metrics and digital marketing.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The research examined quantitatively the relationship between corporate storytelling for branding and internal stakeholders' corporate brand perception within selected Zimbabwean listed companies. Major elements of corporate storytelling for branding are corporate associations, corporate personality, corporate activities and corporate values. Propositions were developed based on the literature reviewed in line with corporate storytelling for branding, emotional attachment and corporate brand perceptions. Results depicted that there is a direct positive influence of corporate storytelling for branding on internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions. The researchers argue that internal stakeholders are important audience of the corporate stories for branding since they are the foundational custodians of the corporate brand. The research contributes to theory, practice and future research.

the selected listed companies need to consider internal stakeholders in creating convincing corporate stories for branding which yield positive perceptions. The research contributes to theory, practice and future research directions.

Subjects: Research Methods in Management; Strategic Management; Marketing; Organizational Studies

Keyword: corporate brand perceptions; corporate storytelling for branding; impression management (IM); structural equation modelling (SEM); Zimbabwe Stock Exchange (ZSE). JEL: M3; M31

“Discursive metaphors ‘read’ story plurivocality - the potential for multiple interpretation -back into the constructions that organizations collectively “write” as their histories” (D. Boje, 1995, p. 998).

1. Introduction & background analysis

Corporate storytelling for branding is a concept which helps an organisation in parading the essence of the corporate brand to internal stakeholders (Cater et al., 2020; Keskin et al., 2016), by competitively positioning it against its competitors and emotional bond creation with employees (Kadembo, 2016; Nyagadza et al., 2020a; Roper & Fill, 2012; Spear & Roper, 2013). Corporate storytelling for branding is of great importance to many diverse organisations (Smith & Keyton, 2001) in the efficient attainment of communicative goals (Brown, 2005; Mendonca, 2015; Nyagadza et al., 2019). With trends taking place in the corporate sector, internal stakeholders such as employees and stockholders have become the major ambassadors of corporate brands (Abratt & Keyn, 2012; Denning, 2006; Dowling, 2006). Internal stakeholders have an impact on how an organisation can strategically survive in a competitive environment, due to their integral influence (Nyagadza et al., 2020b). Corporate reputation and corporate culture of an organisation are reflected in behaviours and feelings expressed by internal stakeholders (Nyagadza, 2020; Virgin, 2020). The paper analysed the link between corporate storytelling for branding and internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions, within selected Zimbabwean listed companies. Hypotheses were posited based on the findings in the extant literature reviewed. There are research paucity and lack of theory construction in the area of corporate storytelling for branding. Therefore, this current research contributes to the body of knowledge by closing the gaps identified in the research related to the former. Effective strategy crafting efforts of corporate storytelling for branding are a necessity in shaping the internal stakeholders’ perceptual influences (Nyagadza & Makasi, 2019f).

What is highly known about pure corporate storytelling research traditionally has been a focus on the general organisations (Boje, 1991; D. Boje, 1995; Boje, 2008, 2011, 2014), which are both for-profit and not-for-profit. This also complements corporate branding research studies which had exhaustively investigated matters of concern in multinational corporations, which are mainly for not-for-profit (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012). A newly emerging concept of corporate storytelling for branding is a result of the integration of storytelling and corporate branding. Few researches have been conducted in this area. And to support this discovery, Spear and Roper (2013) have investigated the impact of corporate storytelling for branding in the United Kingdom (UK). Denning (2007) conducted research in the USA, based on storytelling as a leadership narrative, as well as Sheri and Traoudas (2017) in Sweden (video brand storytelling: the rise of content marketing). These studies are a typical representation of global researches in line with corporate storytelling for branding. However, what is not known about corporate storytelling for branding is its application in African listed corporates and other continents. Furthermore, earlier research studies were not clear on expressing the major predictors of corporate storytelling for branding, emotional attachment (Oliver, 1999; Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011) and corporate brand perceptions (Aaker, 1997; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Warrington & Shim, 2000). Due to this, the researchers were motivated to undertake an investigation of the latter in Zimbabwe. The current study aimed to unearth this by establishing a

validated corporate storytelling for branding measurement scale for future research utilisation. The main cause for this was to understand the influence level of corporate storytelling for branding on internal stakeholder's corporate brand perceptions (Nyagadza, 2020). Therefore, carrying the research study was important in order to find out what could have caused a reduction in motivation and corporate brand emotional attachment in the employees, as a result of shared pervasive corporate stories for branding (Adamson et al., 2006; Booker, 2004; Padgett & Allen, 1997). CEOs, directors, managers and administrators of listed corporations are the major beneficiaries to the results of the current study, as this would assist them in designing their strategies. The Impression Management behavioural elements in corporate stories for branding cause some to be likeable than others (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Nyagadza et al., 2020a, 2020c). This may influence internal stakeholders to be passionate and intimate, develop marks of love, commitment to their corporate brands (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The following section is a discussion on Impression Management (IM) theory, which informed literature review and hypothesis development relevant for the study.

2. Theory

Impression Management (IM) theory has been applied in this current research study to inform the direction of approach for the storytelling methodological approaches, in sync with prior research conducted (Cüre et al., 2020). Impression Management can be defined as the process by which individuals or organisations present themselves to other entities in order to act in a certain desirable manner. The presentation in Impression Management (IM) can either be positive or negative depending on situations and what is supposed to be addressed. Evidence from the research showed that corporate storytelling for branding literature has been lacking theoretical frameworks (for example, in Melewar, 2003; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Cornelissen et al., 2012; Spear & Roper, 2013; Mucundorfeanu, 2018). A lot of Impression Management (IM) approaches have been applied in testing and constructing socialisation of human, which are also meant for functional utilization in organisations (Nyagadza, 2019b; Spear & Roper, 2013). Corporate stories for branding elements and Impression Management (IM) have a bold connection in accounting for the ways in which internal stakeholders see the corporate brand (Cüre et al., 2020; Nyagadza, 2020). Respective Impression Management (IM) theoretical links have been explored with an aim to depict their influence on corporate storytelling for branding. The scale of Impression Management (IM) behavioural elements included self-promotion, exemplification, demonstration, acclamation or defense and ingratiation.

Organisations apply the corporate activity element to show strategy creation (an Impression Management behaviour) as it shows actions by corporates (Nyagadza et al., 2019c). This leads to emotional attachment to corporate achievements by internal stakeholders, as they are directly in line with corporate credibility and performance efficiency in terms of corporate associations. In line with this, there can be a positive relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate association's perception and emotional attachment. Corporate values are seen as ingratiation Impression Management (IM) behaviour. They express the corporate beliefs and principles, which shows what an institution stands for at any given situation (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). Corporate brands tell a story about an organisation's values, which in turn creates a distinct and favourable image to internal stakeholders. Corporate personality is linked to Impression Management (IM) theory's acclamatory or defensive strategy. It involves the organisation's reaction to a given problem that might have occurred. This influences internal stakeholders' bond and corporate brand perceptions (Nyagadza, 2019d; Spear & Roper, 2013). The following section addresses the literature reviewed and hypothesis development.

3. Literature review & hypotheses development

The literature reviewed in the following sub-sections was informed by Impression Management (IM) theoretical perspectives, which are directly connected to corporate storytelling for branding. Corporate associations, values, activities and personality define what corporate storytelling for

branding is all about. Hypotheses have been developed based on literature findings, exposing gaps to be closed by the research inquiry.

3.1. Corporate storytelling for branding antecedents

3.1.1. Corporate associations and emotional attachment

Corporate associations equally affect internal stakeholders' corporate brand attachment (Nyagadza et al., 2020c; So et al., 2013; Souiden et al., 2006). Not all internal stakeholders' realise that the stories for branding can meet their expectations through corporate brand promise. This is so because the latter initially assess how credible and trustworthy the company is before being attached to their corporate brands (Hawabhay et al., 2009). Internal stakeholders become more associated with corporate brands (Kılıç & Okan, 2020) if they are in good knowledge of what they mean to them and alignment to their expected goals (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). Good corporate stories for branding tend to fascinate the targeted audience, which in turn results in more attention to the corporate product and service brands (Lundqvist et al., 2012). Employees as primary advocates of corporate brands have an impact on how it may survive in competition against other corporate brands (Dowling, 2006; Pawle & Cooper, 2006; Woodside, 2010). Indicators in preliminary research had depicted the change in behavioural and attitudinal patterns within the internal stakeholders, such as employees, as a consequence of the shared corporate stories for branding. Therefore, this leads to the hypothesis:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between corporate associations and emotional attachment.

3.1.2. Corporate activities and emotional attachment

Corporate activities depict the important action cardinality of what the corporate is highly involved in (Nyagadza et al., 2020b; Nyagadza & Nyauswa, 2019e; Spear & Roper, 2013). Main corporate activities are known to be of great qualities which build the perception of the internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions (Larsen, 2000; Roper & Fill, 2012). Corporate activities are those "things" initiated or done by a company to be in connection with its internal and external stakeholders. These corporate activities are reflected in corporate stories for branding (Nyagadza, 2019a; Spear & Roper, 2013). Majority of internal stakeholders have a strong interest in corporate activities. They make comparisons versus what the corporate brand affirms to deliver in conjunction with their desired corporate brand oaths. Corporate activities should be in tandem with the corporate values of an organisation. Both of these lead to a total commitment to the corporate brand. With this, the following proposition is produced:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between corporate activities and emotional attachment.

3.1.3. Corporate values and emotional attachment

Corporate values are vital elements of corporate stories for branding (Dowling, 2006; Schembri & Latimer, 2016), and they mean the reason why the organisation exists (Roper & Fill, 2012; Urde, 2003). Corporate stories for branding are meant to control the corporate's strategy, core competencies and cultural systems (Marzec, 2007; Nyagadza et al., 2020c). Corporate branding and corporate values have a great influence on the internal stakeholders such as employees, directors and managers (Scholz & Smith, 2019). If internal stakeholders develop an affiliation, it adds value to their belief system. Strategically, corporate values are an important construct of corporate stories for branding (Driscoll & McKee, 2007). This is so because the corporate vision and corporate mission are meant to shape the corporate brand and corporate culture. It is a very difficult task to the management to deal with issues pertaining to the alignment of corporate strategy and corporate story for branding told by the company (Nyagadza & Nyauswa, 2019e), as a way to yield positive emotional attachment to the organisation. Thus:

H₃: There is a positive relationship between corporate values and emotional attachment.

3.1.4. Corporate personalities and emotional attachment

Internal stakeholders when in their organisations act and behave the same way equivalent to the behaviours of their corporate brands (Aaker et al., 2001; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Escalas & Stern, 2003; Herbst & Merz, 2011; Sheri & Traoudas, 2017). Employees as major internal stakeholders of an organisation take pride in their corporate brand (Nyagadza, 2019a). However, not all corporate stories for branding can easily be recalled as suggested by Megehee and Woodside (2010), and Sheri and Traoudas (2017). As a result, employees behave the same way they respond to corporate personality effects. There is a literature gap pertaining behaviours of employees and the power of corporate personalities (He et al., 2016; Nyagadza et al., 2020a; Zou & Yang, 2019). However, there is probability that corporate stories for branding may create resentment in employees if they are not shared to them truthfully and accurately. Trust is a key element in building the confidence of internal stakeholders in the corporate brand. Emotions are strongly related to the corporate stories for branding expressions. In line with the above literature, the following proposition is produced:

H₄: There is a positive relationship between corporate personalities and emotional attachment.

3.2. Mediating variable

3.2.1. Emotional attachment

Emotional attachment to a corporate brand can be viewed as the love or passion, self-connection, expressed by internal stakeholders towards a product or service. Practically, this is related to a metaphor that internal stakeholders as human beings tend to form robust relationships and connections with corporate brands, as expressed in corporate stories, the same way they form social context relationships (Ball & Tasaki, 1992; Hazan & Zeifman, 1999). A variety of studies have indicated that emotional attachment is formed between human beings and corporate brands. Objects found in organisations tend to tell corporate stories for branding (Gabriel, 2000). With this, emotional attachment to a certain corporate brand is made up of affection, attitude strength and self-related cognitions (Nyagadza et al., 2020a; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). Emotions trigger different psychological evaluations (Nyagadza & Makasi, 2019f). However, if there are no concerted efforts in terms of rationality and influence on internal stakeholders (Dickinson-Delaporte et al., 2010), retrogressive evaluations may increase towards the corporate brand.

3.3. Response variable

3.3.1. Corporate brand perceptions

Perception goes beyond just seeing something and making related evaluations. It involves serious mental process when one assesses an entity in a bid to come with an informed conclusion (Nyagadza et al., 2018; Smith & Wheeler, 2002). Corporate brand perception entails the approach to which internal stakeholders see and/or evaluate a corporate brand against their pre-set imaginations and expectations (Bowlby, 1979; Nyagadza et al., 2020a; Slater, 2001). Due to this, the more the link to the corporate stories for branding, the more propensity of internal stakeholders getting bonded to the corporate brand (Coker et al., 2017). The study inquiry was focused on closing this void by assessing the relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions and corporate storytelling for branding (Nyagadza et al., 2020c; Spiller, 2018). There is a bold connection between the two. If internal stakeholders have a "love mark" to a corporate story for branding, this results in optimism towards the corporate brand. Therefore:

H₅: There is a positive relationship between emotional attachment and corporate brand perception.

4. Research conceptualisation model

The model had (see Figure 1) four predictor variables, one mediator variable and one response variable. The existence of emotional attachment as the mediator variable was supported by the views made by So et al. (2013). The link between the predictor variables and the response variable has been empirically tested. The conceptual model was as follows:

In sync with the conceptualized research model, the regression model below was derived to determine linear relationships between variables:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + u_t$$

where *Y* = internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions,

*X*₁ = corporate associations,

*X*₂ = corporate activities,

*X*₃ = corporate values,

*X*₄ = corporate personalities,

*X*₅ = emotional attachment,

*X*₆ = unobserved error term.

**Y* was the response variable.

**X*₅ was the mediator variable.

*from *X*₁ to *X*₄ represent the predictor/explanatory variables.

With the preceding research model underpinning the study, the next section accounts for the methodological issues applied in the research study.

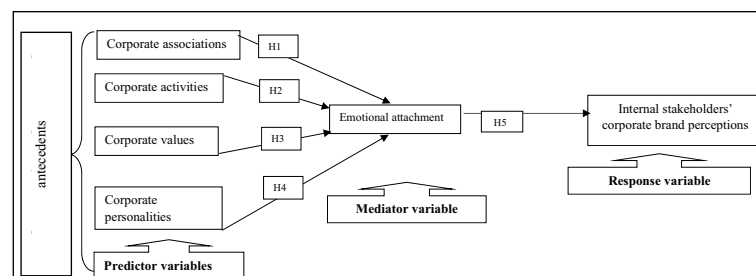
5. Materials and methods

5.1. Data collection

The researchers had to put into practice “nomothetic” quantitative research methodology, as a result of the set objective’s nature. A total of 335 self-administered questionnaires were distributed in the period 2019 to 2020, and these constituted the mainstay of the data analysis for the

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

Source: Researchers’ conception (derived from theoretical and literature review) (2020).



study. This was carried in six selected listed Zimbabwean companies, from six different industrial sectors. A deductive logic embedded in a positivist research paradigm and anchored to an objectivist ontology was used as research philosophies. Random sampling was applied to collect survey reports.

5.2. Measuring instrument

The instrument (in [Table 1](#)) for measuring the data collected was developed from prior literature reviewed in line with the latent constructs. The coding process was intelligently done with an aim to give clarity and direction in the statistical analysis process. Labels were given for each of the constructs in the study, by assigning numeric values to each of the responses from the respondents. Items have been assessed based on a seven (7) point Likert Scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

5.3. Data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics have been utilised for analysing quantitative data from the questionnaire. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to test the posited hypotheses. Descriptive statistical analysis was achieved through the functional application of charts, tables, graphs and diagrams, and this fed into inferential statistics. These included frequencies, mean, and standard deviation. Software packages used were Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Analysis of Moments of Structure (AMOS) version 6. Exploratory Factor Analysis was applied to compute the data collected into its underlying themes (Malhotra, 2010; Vingirayi et al., 2020) as applied by Spear and Roper (2013), in assessing corporate storytelling as a corporate reputation cue. To assess the adequacy of the measurement model, the researchers applied Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The researchers also utilised Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to consider the total variance in the data and establishing minimum amount of variables that will account for the maximum variance (Malhotra, 2010; Spear & Roper, 2013). In addition, Bartlett’s test of sphericity was applied to assess the proposition that the variables were not correlated. It was used to see whether there were some relationships between variables, which is necessary for factor analysis to be appropriate.

5.4. Quantitative research reliability and validity

Each factor’s reliability was tested using Cronbach’s alpha. Further to this, each value was required to be at least .5, as this is suggested to be a sufficient reliability score by (Churchill, 1979; Makasi, 2015; Nunnally, 1967). Internal consistency was meant to measure the degree of the interrelatedness of measurement items that were constructed to assess the uniformity. To assess validity, content, discriminant and predictive validities were tested. The researchers used content validity to look into the fitness and link of the research subjects to the theoretical underpinnings (Malhotra, 2010). Furthermore, researchers employed pre-testing and pilot approaches to enhance research instrument’s content validity. The concept of construct validity used was made to check on the connections between items that were assessed and the concept under study (Nyagadza et al., 2018). To measure construct validity, the average inter-item correlations were calculated using CFA. To ascertain the discriminant validity of the moderation model, the researchers employed Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) measure of Average Variance (AVE). All the factor loadings that were above .5 were considered (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

5.5. Non-response bias test

Armstrong and Overton’s technique (Armstrong & Overton, 1977) was used to check for non-response bias test. The process involved the function of *t*-tests to assess the similarities and differences of each of the items of the succeeding results against the remaining responses. There were no larger differences in the process. This indicated that non-response bias has not been a threat to the research study.

Table 1. Constructs, item codes, items and sources of items

Latent constructs	Codes	Items	Sources of items
Corporate association	CAS1	Corporate associations shared in corporate stories are not difficult to understand	MacInnis and Nakamoto (1991), K. L. Keller (1993), K. Keller (2006), Anisimova (2007), Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2008), So et al. (2013), De Langhe et al. (2016), Pappas (2017), Nyagadza et al. (2019), Nyagadza, Kadembo & Makasi (2020), Kılıç and Okan (2020)
	CAS2	Corporate stories for branding communicated to internal stakeholders result in corporate associations.	
	CAS3	Face-to-face corporate stories for branding communications improve internal stakeholders' corporate association.	
	CAS4	Print corporate stories for branding communications are key in enhancing corporate associations.	
	CAS5	Digitally generated corporate stories for branding are important in shaping corporate associations.	
	CAS6	Corporate associations are associated with historical knowledge about corporate stories for branding.	
	CAS7	Corporate associations serve as information cues to internal stakeholders when evaluating corporate stories for branding relating to credibility and perceived product quality.	
	CAS8	Corporate associations encourage internal stakeholders to trust the corporate stories for branding in fulfilling corporate brand promises.	
	CAS9	Outstanding corporate products and services communicated through corporate stories for branding increase internal stakeholder's corporate association.	
	CAS10	The level of corporate success in terms of profitability and market share enhances internal stakeholders' corporate association.	
	CAS11	Corporate responsibilities to the society shared in corporate stories for branding improve internal stakeholders' corporate associations.	
	CAS12	Corporate associations are key in affecting internal stakeholders' bond to the corporate brand.	
Corporate activities	CAC1	Corporate activities expressed in corporate stories for branding are easily understood by internal stakeholders.	Anisimova (2007), Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2008), So et al. (2013), Nyagadza et al. (2019), Nyagadza et al. (2020a).
	CAC2	Corporate stories for branding communicated to internal stakeholders include corporate accomplishments.	
	CAC3	Corporate stories for branding communicated to internal stakeholders include corporate core competencies.	
	CAC4	Corporate stories for branding communicated to internal stakeholders include corporate core abilities.	
	CAC5	Face-to-face corporate stories for branding communications improves internal stakeholders' corporate activities.	
	CAC6	Print corporate stories for branding communications are key in enhancing corporate activities.	
	CAC7	Online corporate stories for branding communications are crucial in shaping corporate activities.	
	CAC8	Advertisements as corporate activities improve internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions.	
	CAC9	Corporate core competencies improve internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions.	
	CAC10	Corporate accomplishments are vital in shaping internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions.	
	CAC11	Corporate core abilities affect internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions.	
	CAC12	Corporate activities such as social responsibility shared in corporate stories for branding are key in enhancing internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions.	
	CAC13	Internal stakeholders' participation in corporate sports and wellness activities influence corporate brand perceptions.	
	CAC14	Corporate activities influence internal stakeholders' emotional attachments to the corporate brand.	

(Continued)

Latent constructs	Codes	Items	Sources of items
Corporate values	CVA1	Corporate values expressed in corporate stories for branding are easily understood by internal stakeholders.	Gabriel (2000), Denning (2006), Dowling (2006), Driscoll & McKee (2007), Urde (2003) Roper and Fill (2012), Suvatjis et al. (2012), So et al. (2013), Ryder and Vogeley (2018), Schembri and Latimer (2016), Goode (2018), Scholz and Smith (2019) Nyagadza et al. (2019), Nyagadza et al. (2020a).
	CVA2	Face-to-face corporate stories for branding communications improves internal stakeholders' corporate values.	
	CVA3	Print corporate stories for branding communications are key in enhancing corporate values.	
	CVA4	Online corporate stories for branding communications are vital in shaping corporate values.	
	CVA5	Corporate stories for branding shared inside the organisation contain the elements of the corporate strategy, mission and values.	
	CVA6	Corporate stories for branding influence corporate financial stability.	
	CVA7	Corporate stories for branding influence internal stakeholders' or employee fulfilment.	
	CVA8	Corporate stories for branding influence corporate long-term perspective.	
	CVA9	Corporate stories for branding influence corporate efficiency.	
	CVA10	Corporate stories for branding influence corporate fairness.	
	CVA11	Corporate stories for branding influence corporate trust.	
	CVA12	Corporate stories for branding influence internal stakeholders' or employee personal growth.	
	CVA13	Corporate stories for branding influence internal stakeholders' positive attitude.	
	CVA14	Corporate stories for branding influence professional growth.	
Corporate personality	CPE1	Corporate personality expressed in corporate stories for branding is easily understood by internal stakeholders.	Digman (1990), Aaker et al. (2001), Azoulay and Kapferer (2003), Okazaki (2006), Herbst and Merz (2011), Chu and Sung (2011), He et al. (2016), Yongjae et al. (2018), Nyagadza et al. (2019), Zou and Yang (2019), Nyagadza et al. (2020a).
	CPE2	Face-to-face corporate stories for branding communications improve internal stakeholders' corporate personality.	
	CPE3	Print corporate stories for branding communications are key in enhancing corporate personality.	
	CPE4	Online corporate stories for branding communications are crucial in shaping corporate personality.	
	CPE5	Internal stakeholders such as employees, have behaviours which resemble the corporate personality.	
	CPE6	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation are sincere, that is honest, down-to-earth, wholesome and cheerful.	
	CPE7	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation are exciting, that is spirited, imaginative, up-to-date and daring.	
	CPE8	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation are competent, that is reliable, intelligent and successful.	
	CPE9	Corporate stories for branding shared within the institution are sophisticated, that is upper class and charming.	
	CPE10	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation are rugged, that is outdoorsy and tough.	

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Latent constructs	Codes	Items	Sources of items
Emotional attachment	EAT1	Face-to-face corporate stories for branding communications improve internal stakeholders' emotional attachment to the corporate brand.	Bowly (1979), Ball and Tasaki (1992), Hazan and Zeifman (1999), Gabriel (2000) Slater (2001), Thomson, MacInnis & Whan (2005), Van Riel and Fombrun (2007), Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011), So et al. (2013), Nyagadza et al. (2019), Nyagadza et al. (2020a).
	EAT2	Print corporate stories for branding communications underprops internal stakeholders' emotional attachment to the corporate brand.	
	EAT3	Online corporate stories for branding communications are crucial in internal stakeholders' emotional attachment to the corporate brand.	
	EAT4	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel cared for.	
	EAT5	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel friendly.	
	EAT6	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel loved.	
	EAT7	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel not at conflict or war.	
	EAT8	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel pleased.	
	EAT9	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel attracted.	
	EAT10	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel linked.	
	EAT11	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel connected.	
	EAT12	Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel joined.	
Corporate brand perceptions	CBP1	The corporate brand is committed to chronological issue, power and capitalisation.	Schroeder and Borgerson (2005), S. Smith and Wheeler (2002), Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), So et al. (2013), Coker et al. (2017), Spiller (2018), Nyagadza et al. (2019), Rahe et al. (2020), Nyagadza et al. (2020a).
	CBP2	The corporate brand is protective.	
	CBP3	The corporate brand is vivid in terms of its presence.	
	CBP4	The corporate brand is responsive in terms of market alternations, limitations and opportunities.	
	CBP5	The corporate brand is vivid in terms of positioning, values and offering.	
	CBP6	The corporate brand is genuine in terms of internal competence with defined heritage and well-grounded value.	
	CBP7	The corporate brand matches in terms of internal stakeholders' requirements, aspirations and decision method, across all their different backgrounds.	
	CBP8	The corporate brand is understandable in terms of its different attributes.	
	CBP9	The corporate brand is visible in both traditional and social media.	
	CBP10	The corporate brand is not the same from those of rivals.	

Source: Developed by researchers from literature and theoretical review (2020).

5.6. Ethical considerations

Corporate stories for branding or narratives that are focused on actions related to the scrutiny of ethics are a key issue in the research process (Gunelius, 2013; Kadembo, 2014). Due to this, the researchers were obliged to observe the practices that take note of the values and integrity of research by not making manipulations to ethical issues. They made sure that they upheld ethical considerations by maintaining integrity and professionalism about the morals of academic research. Researchers obtained informed consent from research participants so that there is no coercion, in a way to bring a free decision on whether to participate or not. To satisfy this standard of data protection from case study organisations, the researchers made sure that collected personal data from the survey had to be obtained for specified purposes, accurate, relevant and not excessive in relation to its function (Marketing Research Society (MRS), 2020; Nyagadza, 2019a; Spear & Roper, 2013; Vingirayi et al., 2020).

6. Respondents' demographic profiles

Responses from the survey carried out by the researchers depicted that qualifications held by each of the respondent (in all three authority levels) ranged from undergraduate to postgraduate. The randomly sampled female participants constituted 56% while male participants constituted 44%. Majority of the respondents were aged between 25–34 years and 18–24 years as indicated by high percentage values of 43% and 36%, respectively. Very few respondents were aged 35–44 years (7%), 45–54 years (8%) and 55 years and above (6%) exist in the industry. The research output depicted that the industry has economically active and young age groups. The most energetic and active age group was that of 18–34 years. The age group information is of great value as it provided necessary detail for decision-making purposes. Furthermore, majority of the respondents (52%) hold middle management level while 35% and 13% are into top management and operational levels, respectively. A balanced review could have been obtained if all top management, middle management and operational level equally responded. [Table 2](#) summarises the departments of the respondents.

[Table 2](#) depicts that majority of the respondents, 19%, 18%, 17%, 16% and 14% are in the Operations, Government business, Human Resources, Financial services and Finance departments, respectively. 7%, 4% and 4% of the respondents are in the ICT, Marketing and Special objects departments. It was clear that 49% and 4% of the respondents had been in the industry for 6–10 years and 0–5 years, respectively. Furthermore, about 11% had been in the industry for more than 10 years. This generally means the sampled respondents are experienced.

7. Results and analysis

positivist research paradigm was applied, as it was necessary for theory examination rather than theory generation. This assisted in proposition development, testing, assessment of their links (Faroudi, 2018). The following is the results analysis from the research study survey.

7.1. Sample adequacy

Both the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) evaluator of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were applied and the findings from the tests are displayed in [Table 3](#).

[Table 3](#) depicts that the probability value for the KMO test (.985), was above the threshold value of .5 (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; De Vaus, 2002). This means that the link between the items was

Table 2. Departments

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	ICT	24	7.2	7.2	7.2
	Finance	48	14.3	14.3	21.5
	Government business	60	17.9	17.9	39.4
	Financial services	53	15.8	15.8	55.2
	Human resources	57	17.0	17.0	72.2
	Operations	64	19.1	19.1	91.3
	Marketing	16	4.8	4.8	96.1
	Special objects	13	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	335	100.0	100.0	

Source: Primary data (2020).

proper enough for EFA to produce a minimal number of assumptions for a set of factors (Caruana, 2002; Foroudi, 2018; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The Bartlett’s test of sphericity $p < .05$, implied that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix. The results indicated that the matrix was not an identity matrix and this allowed the factor analysis to be conducted as the relationship between variables existed (Churchill, 1979; Hair et al., 2006).

7.1.1. Normality tests

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K-S) and Shapiro-Wilk (S-W) normality assessments were made to examine if all variables are normally distributed prior to conducting the parametric tests (Field et al., 2012; Shapiro & Wilk, 1965). The test was done under the null hypothesis which suggested that data from the sampled variables were normally distributed. These tests were conducted in order to inform the decision on whether to use parametric or non-parametric statistics.

The results in Table 4 suggested the acceptance of the null hypothesis which stated that the data from all the variables were from a normal distribution (corporate activities (K-S(335) = .22, $p = .19$, S-W(335) = .91, $p = .73$), corporate association (K-S(335) = .262, $p = .24$, S-W(335) = .824, $p = .53$), emotional attachment (K-S(335) = .24, $p = .20$, S-W(335) = .85, $p = .62$), corporate values (K-S(335) = .20, $p = .17$, S-W(335) = .89, $p = .71$), corporate personality (K-S(335) = .25, $p = .21$, S-W(335) = .86, $p = .64$) and corporate brand perceptions (K-S(335) = .29, $p = .26$, S-W(335) = .82, $p = .53$)) (Field et al., 2012; Shapiro & Wilk, 1965).

7.2. Reliability and validity analysis

Questionnaires’ reliability was proved through Cronbach’s alpha assessments (Saunders, et al., 2009). This helped to pre-emptively indicate any unclear elements in the questionnaire that would have deformed the answers by respondents, thereby changing the real truthful results. Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics and the Cronbach’s alpha values for the items, the standardized

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett’s test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy		.985
Bartlett’s test of sphericity	Approx. chi-square	109,228.883
	df	2,556
	Sig.	.000

Source: Primary data (2020).

Table 4. Normality tests

	Kolmogorov–Smirnov ^a			Shapiro–Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Corporate associations	.262	335	.244	.824	335	.530
Emotional attachment	.240	335	.198	.854	335	.624
Corporate values	.198	335	.172	.892	335	.711
Corporate personality	.246	335	.208	.861	335	.637
Corporate activities	.217	335	.187	.905	335	.725
Corporate brand perceptions	.285	335	.262	.824	335	.530

a. Lilliefors significance correction

Source: primary data (2020).

factor loadings for all items, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) that measure construct validity (Churchill, 1979).

In order to assess the inter-links between huge figures of the elements, EFA was used (Hair et al., 2010; Foroudi, 2018). Hair et al. (2010) recommended that all the factor loadings and the construct reliability for convergent validity should be equal to or greater than .7 for good convergent validity. In this case, all the factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) that measure construct validity were above this threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Kuo et al., 2009; Segars, 1997). This showed that the convergent validity conditions were all met (as depicted in Table 5). Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha coefficient value was .999, implied that the quantitative data collection instrument was well structured (Hair et al., 2010). The results implied that the elements matched well within the theoretical element structures (Churchill, 1979).

7.3. Multiple regression analysis

In line with the multiple regression results, the R-square value of .911 was noticed indicating that 91.1% total variability in the response variable was being explained by the predictor variables. Furthermore, the R-square (.911) was significant, implying this was a valid regression model that can be used for prediction purposes. All the regression coefficients in the model were statistically significant at 5% since all the $p < .05$. It can be noted that an increase in corporate associations and corporate values by 1 unit will result in corporate brand perception increasing by .2 and .74, respectively. An increase in corporate personality and activities by 1 unit will result in corporate brand perceptions increasing by .46 and .05, respectively. However, an increase by 1 unit in emotional attachment will result in corporate brand perceptions declining by .31.

X_1

7.4. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried (indicated in Table 6) out to see if the explanatory variables have the same impact on the corporate brand perceptions by denoting the coefficient of corporate activities by X_1 , corporate associations by X_1 , the coefficient of emotional attachment by X_1 the coefficient of corporate values by X_1 and the coefficient of corporate personality by X_1 the ANOVA was conducted under the following hypothesis:

$$H_0: \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = \beta_5 = 0$$

Versus

$$H_1: \beta_i \neq 0 \text{ for at least one } i(i = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)$$

7.5. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) has been used by the researcher to assess the relationships between the variables in the model. Multiple regression analysis of variables versus a single measured response variable and predictors have been applied (McQuitty & Wolf, 2013), to show the links between constructs and causal dependencies between exogenous and endogenous variables (Hair et al., 2010). The links between the independent variables; corporate associations (12 indicators), corporate personality (14 indicators), corporate values (14 indicators), corporate activities (14 indicators), moderator variable corporate brand perceptions (10 indicators), and one mediator emotional attachment (12 indicators). Observable and latent variables in the model were used to execute full Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

Table 5. Accuracy analysis statistics

Research construct	Descriptive statistics		Cronbach's test		CR	AVE	AVES/ root	Factor loadings
	M	SD	Item total	α Value				
Corporate association	CAS1	1.92	.987	0.997	0.998	0.974	0.987	0.989
	CAS2		.982					0.985
	CAS3		.989					0.991
	CAS4		.986					0.989
	CAS5		.984					0.987
	CAS6		.971					0.975
	CAS7		.986					0.988
	CAS8		.987					0.989
	CAS9		.985					0.987
	CAS10		.980					0.983
	CAS11		.986					0.988
	CAS12		.987					0.989
Corporate activities	CAC1	1.93	.986	0.999	0.998	0.982	0.991	0.988
	CAC2		.990					0.992
	CAC3		.984					0.986
	CAC4		.992					0.993
	CAC5		.993					0.994
	CAC6		.993					0.994
	CAC7		.990					0.991
	CAC8		.989					0.991
	CAC9		.983					0.985
	CAC10		.993					0.994
	CAC11		.989					0.991
	CAC12		.990					0.991
CAC13	.987	0.989						
CAC14	.993	0.994						

(Continued)

Table 5. (Continued)

Research construct	Descriptive statistics		Cronbach's test		CR	AVE	AVES/ root	Factor loadings				
	M	SD	Item total	α Value								
Corporate values	CVA1	1.94	.985	0.999	0.999	0.982	0.991	.987				
	CVA2		.993					.994	.994	.990	.994	.994
	CVA3		.989					.993	.992	.993	.993	.991
	CVA4		.994					.989	.991	.992	.992	.992
	CVA5		.986					.988	.982	.989	.988	.988
	CVA6		.984					.982	.984	.991	.990	.985
	CVA7		.991					.984	.991	.992	.990	.986
	CVA8		.986					.988	.982	.993	.993	.991
	CVA9		.988					.982	.984	.991	.992	.992
	CVA10		.982					.984	.991	.992	.992	.988
	CVA11		.984					.982	.984	.993	.993	.990
	CVA12		.982					.984	.991	.991	.991	.985
	CVA13		.984					.982	.984	.992	.992	.986
	CVA14		.982					.984	.991	.993	.993	.985
Corporate personality	CPE1	1.93	.991	0.998	0.997	0.967	0.983	.985				
	CPE2		.989					.983				
	CPE3		.990					.984				
	CPE4		.994					.989				
	CPE5		.991					.985				
	CPE6		.989					.983				
	CPE7		.990					.984				
	CPE8		.985					.976				
	CPE9		.988					.981				
	CPE10		.991					.985				

(Continued)

Table 5. (Continued)

Research construct	Descriptive statistics		Cronbach's test		CR	AVE	AVES/ root	Factor loadings
	M	SD	Item total	α Value				
Emotional attachment	EAT1	2.0	.994	0.998	0.999	0.984	0.992	.995
	EAT2		.994					.995
	EAT3		.989					.991
	EAT4		.993					.994
	EAT5		.989					.991
	EAT6		.992					.993
	EAT7		.987					.989
	EAT8		.994					.995
	EAT9		.992					.993
	EAT10		.991					.993
	EAT11		.989					.991
	EAT12		.985					.987
Corporate brand perceptions	CBP1	1.97	.993	0.998	0.998	0.984	0.992	.994
	CBP2		.991					.993
	CBP3		.992					.994
	CBP4		.989					.991
	CBP5		.994					.995
	CBP6		.983					.987
	CBP7		.991					.992
	CBP8		.986					.989
	CBP9		.993					.994
	CBP10		.989					.991

Source: primary data (2020).

Table 6. Summary of the results of the ANOVA test

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	506.199	5	101.240	676.527	.000 ^b
	Residual	49.234	329	.150		
	Total	555.433	334			

Source: Primary data (2020)

^aDependent variable: corporate brand perceptions.

^bPredictors: (constant), corporate activities, corporate association, emotional attachment, corporate values and corporate personality.

7.5.1. Structural and measurement models

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) established a model to fit to the data (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Analysis of moment structure (AMOS) version 6 software was used to examine and quantify the degree to which the four predictor variables influence the mediator and response variables. The model was then evaluated using the *Goodness-of-Fit (GoF)* test and hypothesis testing (Kuo et al., 2009). A graphical presentation of the model is displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Codes' Key: CA—Corporate Associations; EATT—Emotional Attachment; CVA—Corporate Values; CPER—Corporate Personalities; CACT—Corporate Activities; CBP—Corporate Brand Perceptions.

From Figure 2, if Corporate Associations (CA) are increased by 1, Emotional Attachment (EATT) will increase by .15. If Corporate Values (CVA) are increased by 1, EATT will increase by .55, whereas EATT will increase by .29 when Corporate Personalities (CPER) are created by 1. More so, if Corporate Activities (CACT) are increased by 1, EATT will increase by 0.02. Finally, Corporate Brand Perceptions (CBP) will increase by .95 when EATT is increased by 1.

7.5.2. The model fit analysis

The *Comparative Fit Index (CFI)* and *Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)* give sufficient special information to assess the model (Hair et al., 2010; Foroudi, 2018). The model fit analysis summary results for various fitted models are displayed in Table 7.

In line with the results in Table 7, the modified model 4 is the best model ($\chi^2(2043,335) = 2844$, $p < .001$). This means model 4 was a better model and fits well to the data as compared to the other fitted models. Some of the goodness of fit statistics for the best model (Model 4) are presented in Table 8.4 together with the recommended value (Hair et al., 2010).

7.5.3. Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) statistics for final model

The *CMIN/DF* was not more than the lower limit value of 3, implying that it was a good fit. The *Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)* value of .767 is slightly less than .9 indicating a better fit, while both the *Tusker Lewis Index (TLI)* (.945) and *Comparative Fit Index (CFI)* (.953) values were all above the threshold value of .9 indicating a very good fit and are considered to be the upgraded version of *NFI* index (Hair et al., 2006). *GFI* index assesses the fitness of a model versus another model (Hair et al., 2006). *CFI* is an incremental index that measures the fit of a model with the null baseline model (Hair et al., 2006; Foruodi, 2018). *TLI* alternatively known as the *Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI)* compares the χ^2 value of the model to that of the independence model and uses degrees of freedom for the model into consideration (Byrne, 2001; Hair et al., 2006; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Foruodi, 2018). The *Normed Fit Index (NFI)* value met the minimum recommended value of .9, implying it was a good fit, although it does not control for degrees of freedom and under-approximates fit in small samples (Hair et al.,

Figure 2. Initial model 3 with standardized estimates.

Source: Primary data (2020)

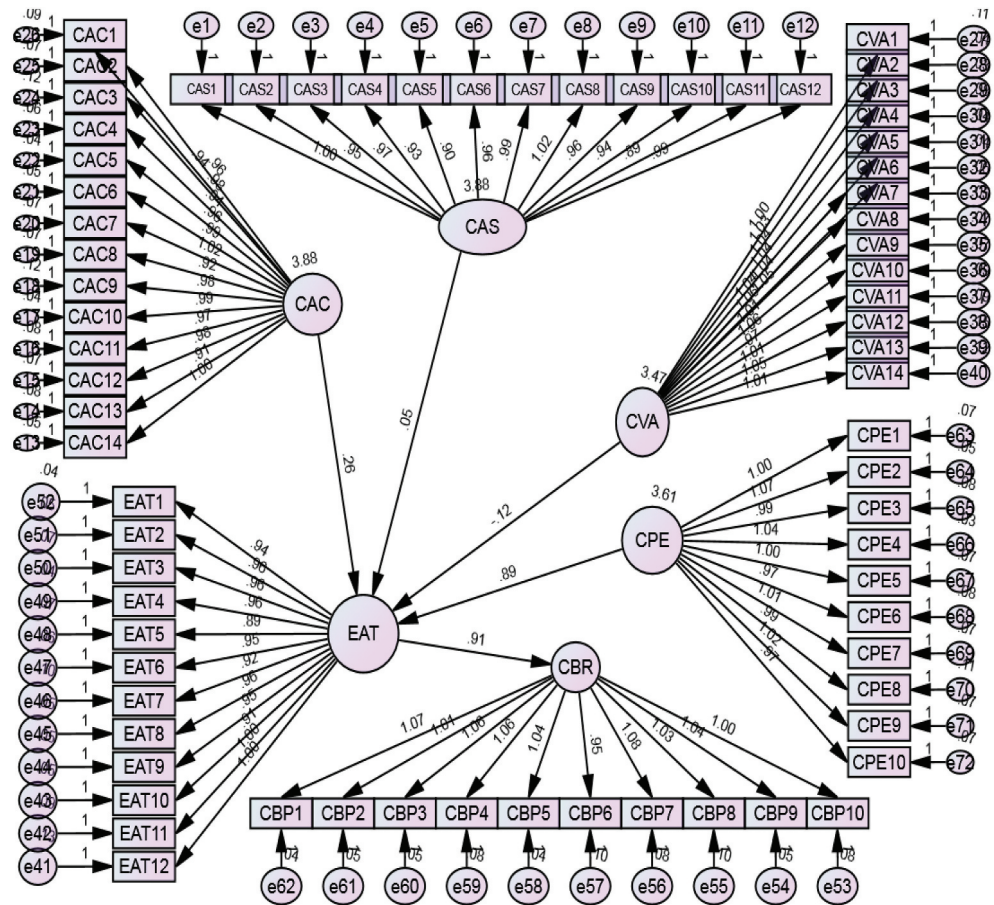


Table 7. The model fit analysis summary results

Model	χ^2	DF	PCMIN/DF	GFI	TLI	CFI	NFI	RMR	RMSEA
1	10,531	2,476	4.33	.53	.82	.87	.77	.10	.92
2	4,926	2,325	2.22	.74	.93	.94	.89	.07	.06
3	3,961	2,128	1.88	.80	.95	.96	.90	.07	.05
4	2,844	2,043	1.67	.90	.95	.96	.90	.05	.05

Source: primary data (2020).

2006). RMR value of about .05 or less indicates a close fit of the model, and in this case, the RMR value was .058 which was reasonable considering that real data were used. There was a reasonable error of estimation as shown by the *Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)* value (.049) which was below (Table 8) the recommended value of .08 (Caruana, 2002; Hair et al., 2010; Hooper et al., 2008; Makasi, 2015; McQuitty & Wolf, 2013).

The measurement model was nomologically valid (Steenkamp & Van Trijp, 1991) and acceptable. Standardized regression estimates allowed the examination of the direct link between the constructs of the research study. Table 9 presents the results.

Table 8. Goodness-of-fit (GoF) statistics for the final modified model summary

Index	Recommended value	Sources	Final model
χ^2	≤ 3	J. F. Hair et al. (2010)	3,937.03
DF	≤ 3	J. F. Hair et al. (2010)	2,197
PCMIN/DF	≤ 3	J. F. Hair et al. (2010)	1.792
GFI	$\geq .9$	J. F. Hair et al. (2010)	.767
TLI	$\geq .9$	Hooper et al. (2008)	.945
CFI	$\geq .9$	J. F. Hair et al. (2010)	.953
NFI	$\geq .9$	J. F. Hair et al. (2010)	.9
RMR	$< .05$	J. F. Hair et al. (2010)	.058
RMSEA	$\leq .08$	J. F. Hair et al. (2010)	.049

Source: primary data (2020).

8. Discussion of hypothesized relationships and outcomes

The **first (H₁)** hypothesis sought to establish the nature of the relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate association's perception and emotional attachment. The result suggested the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis which states that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate association's perception and emotional attachment ($r(335) = .60, p < .001$).

The **second (H₂)** hypothesis sought to establish the nature of the relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate activity perception and emotional attachment. The result suggested the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis; hence, the conclusion was that a statistically significant positive relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate activity perception and emotional attachment ($r(335) = .15, p = .01$) existed.

The **third (H₃)** hypothesis sought to establish the nature of the relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate value perception and emotional attachment. A positive and statistically significant relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate value perception and emotional attachment existed. There is acceptance of the alternative hypothesis which stated that a statistically significant positive relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate value perception and emotional attachment ($r(335) = .84, p < .001$).

The **fourth (H₄)** hypothesis sought to establish the nature of the relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate personality's perception and emotional attachment. Results showed that a positive and significant relationship exists. These results suggested the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis which states that a positive statistically significant relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate personality and emotional attachment exists ($r(335) = .90, p < .001$).

Table 9. Standardized regression estimates of the final modified model

Construct	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p	Label
EATT <—CPER	.11	.04	2.88	.00	par_67
EATT <—CA	.32	.09	3.54	***	par_75
EATT <—CVAL	.99	.10	9.49	***	par_76
EATT <—CACT	.01	.01	2	.04	par_160
CBR <—EATT	.98	.06	16	***	par_68

Source: primary data (2020).

The **fifth (H₅)** hypothesis sought to establish the nature of the relationship between emotional attachment and internal stakeholders' corporate brand perception. Results indicated the rejection on the null hypothesis; hence, it was concluded that a positive and statistically significant relationship between emotional attachment and corporate brand perceptions exists ($r(335) = .74, p < .001$).

9. Managerial implications and conclusion

The paper analysed the link between corporate storytelling for branding and internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions, within selected Zimbabwean listed companies. Implications of the research results may assist managers in increasing the motivation and corporate brand emotional attachment within the employees. This would come into play if the shared corporate stories for branding are favourable to the former. The major theoretical contribution of the current study is of adding to the body of knowledge in the area of Impression Management (IM) and corporate storytelling for branding literature. Further to this, the research study depicted that an increase (decrease) in corporate associations results in an increase (decrease) in emotional attachment. This means internal stakeholders become more associated with corporate brands (Allen et al., 2018) if they are in good knowledge of what they mean to them and alignment to their expected goals (Lin & Chen, 2014). Employees as primary advocates of corporate brands have an impact on how it may survive in competition against other corporate brands (Pawle & Cooper, 2006). Results also showed that an increase (decrease) in internal stakeholders' corporate value perception leads to an increase (decrease) in emotional attachment. Corporate branding and corporate values have a great influence on the internal stakeholders such as employees, directors and managers (Scholz & Smith, 2019). If internal stakeholders develop an affiliation, it adds value to their belief system. Corporate values are vital elements of corporate stories for branding, and they mean the reason why the organisation exists. Increase (decrease) in internal stakeholders' corporate personality leads to an increase (decrease) in emotional attachment. As a result, employees behave the same way they respond to corporate personality effects. When internal stakeholders hold reliance on a corporate brand, it means they have self-assurance in the corporate brand to prospectively satisfy them. This means they desire to have positive corporate brand perception (So et al., 2013). Internal stakeholders express themselves through corporate brands (Sheri & Traoudas, 2017). Employees as major internal stakeholders of an organisation take pride in their corporate brand (Nyagadza, 2019a). Finally, an increase (decrease) in emotional attachment results in an increase (decrease) in corporate brand perceptions. Corporate brand perception entails the approach to which internal stakeholders see and/or evaluate a corporate brand against their pre-set imaginations and expectations (Bowlby, 1979). Due to this, the more the link to the corporate stories for branding, the more propensity of internal stakeholders getting bonded to the corporate brand (Coker et al., 2017). Perception goes beyond just seeing something and making related evaluations. It involves serious mental processes when one assesses an entity in a bid to come with an informed conclusion (Smith & Wheeler, 2002).

10. Limitations and future research direction

The current study was limited to corporate storytelling for branding, which has proved to be not sufficiently able to explain its linkages with all Impression Management (IM) theoretical elements. Due to this, there is still research paucity and lack of theory construction in the area of corporate storytelling for branding. Future research directions can focus on corporate reputation relationship with corporate culture of organisations as reflected in individual behaviours and feelings expressed by internal stakeholders (Nyagadza, 2020; Virgin, 2020). The study can be applied in other areas of the storytelling and branding to determine its applicability universally.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The researchers declare that they do not have any financial interest or benefit that has arisen from the direct applications of this research study.

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