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Corporate storytelling for branding: Underpropping or thwarting internal stakeholders’ optimistic corporate brand perceptions?

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Abstract: There are many instances when pervasive and/or retrogressive corporate stories for branding are experienced and not reported truthfully in the organisations. If corporate stories for branding are negative, it can therefore be questioned to what extent they underprop or thwart internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. Due to this, there are theoretical and literature gaps existing related to corporate storytelling for branding and its influence on internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. As a result, purposively sampled fifty-four in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2019 and 2020 (within six selected Zimbabwean listed companies, from six different industrial sectors), to inquire for responses basing on the research study questions modelled from the research problem. Qualitative methodological was applied to execute the research, with evidence from interview transcripts, corporate documents and physical observations

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Corporate storytelling for branding is the integration and sharing of experiences through corporate brand narratives and anecdotes, communicate complex ideas, concepts, and causal connections and build connections and associations. It assists in the attaining of corporate communicative goals. It remains unknown whether corporate stories for branding affect internal stakeholders’ emotional attachment and corporate brand perceptions, as some of them go untold and unreported. To investigate this problem qualitatively, Impression Management (IM) theory, which entails the process that individuals or organisations use when they seek to influence perceptions of them, has been used to support the research process. Findings from the research process depicted that internal stakeholders’ perception of the corporate brand and emotional is influenced by shared corporate stories for branding. The research contributes to theory, practice and future research.
being analysed systematically, using conventional, summative and directed content analyses, respectively. Results showed that there are extensive differences in the responses related to how internal stakeholders perceive the corporate brand, as a result of shared corporate stories for branding. Originally, the study depicted that Impression Management (IM) theory is utilitarian in exploring the influence of corporate stories for branding on internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. The research study contributes to corporate storytelling for branding and Impression Management (IM) theory, practice and future research directions.

**Subjects:** Organizational Communication; Public Relations; Communication Research Methods; Communication Theory

**Keywords:** corporate stories for branding; corporate brand perceptions; content analysis; internal stakeholders; impression management; listed companies; qualitative research methodology; Zimbabwe

Storytelling organizations exist to tell their collective stories, to live out their collective stories, to be in constant struggle over getting the stories of insiders and outsiders straight. (Boje, 1995, p. 1000)

1. **Introduction & background analysis**

Corporate storytelling for branding is an art and a valuable form of human expression (Weick & Browning, 1986; Wilkins, 1984) which define a corporate brand (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). Alternatively, it is the integration and sharing of experiences through corporate brand narratives and anecdotes (Mendonca, 2015), communication of complex ideas (Boje, 1993), concepts, and causal connections and building of connections and associations (Cater et al., 2020; Keskin et al., 2016). Corporate associations (Romaniuk & Gaillard, 2007), corporate values (Urde, 2003), corporate personalities (Aaker, 1997) and corporate activities (Sen & Bhattacharaya, 2001) are the major antecedents which construct corporate stories for branding of an organisation (Mendonca, 2015), for the current research study. Corporate storytelling for branding is an important as it helps in giving an organisation (Kadembo, 2016) to have a unique corporate identity (Suvatjis et al., 2012), differentiating itself from others in the same business industry. Corporate storytelling for branding in this current research study, has been expressed with four earlier mentioned constructs that are directly linked to the Impression Management (IM) theory thematic behavioural elements. Corporate stories for branding are told by organisation to target audience such as internal stakeholders.

Internal stakeholders are key advocates and recipients of corporate stories for branding (Abratt & Keyn, 2012; Li, et al., 2019). Corporate stories for branding improves internal stakeholders’ perception on organisation as more genuine, different, truthful, transforming memorable and lovable (Zhong et al., 2017), leading to positive corporate reputation (Dowling, 2006). The current situation in the selected six Zimbabwean listed companies for this study, showed that employee’s attitude towards the corporate brands has an effect on corporate performance, trust (Fang, 2015) and corporate brand identity. The function and role of the internal stakeholders in organisations, especially the employees, has gradually changed (similar to the observations in research by Scholz & Smith, 2019), as they are now being taken as the corporate brand ambassadors of the organisation (Cheng, 2018; He et al., 2016; Hewett et al., 2016). Managers within these corporates are making efforts to communicate and build corporate stories for branding (Benoit, 2018), since they involve a two-way communication mode. Feedback is provided, however, sentiments from the internal stakeholders indicate that there are limitations and problems in the conveyance of the corporate storytelling for branding communiques (Cater et al., 2020; Goode, 2018; Nyagadza, 2019a).

The paper starts by discussing the theoretical framework used in this study. Impression Management theory is evaluated, and this informed the building of relevant literature. Review of
literature is based on corporate storytelling for branding thematic antecedents. Following that, methodological s and qualitative research findings are discussed. The paper proceeds to discuss theoretical and managerial implications of the research study, together with limitations and future research directions. The problem statement is expressed in the following section, in connection to the study background.

2. Problem statement
There are many instances when pervasive and retrogressive corporate stories for branding through corporate activities, corporate associations, corporate personalities and corporate values are experienced and are not reported truthfully in the organisations (Hitchin, 2015). If the corporate stories for branding are positive or negative, questions are made to investigate their effects on the internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions (Hauser et al., 2017). Other scholars propose that corporate storytelling for branding assists an organisation to boost reputation, motivation and trust with stakeholders (for example, Copeland & Moor, 2017; DeVries, 2018; Li et al., 2019; Spiller, 2018), however there is empirical research paucity on whether corporate storytelling for branding supports or negatively affect internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions (Nyagadza et al., 2019). There are gaps that exist in the previous research studies depicting that employees’ emotional attachment to the corporate (Nyagadza et al., 2020a) is important for internal corporate wellness and growth.

In view of the above, the study explores the following main research questions; does corporate storytelling for branding underprops or thwarts internal stakeholders’ optimistic corporate brand perceptions? To what extent are the corporate stories for branding representing the truth within Zimbabwean-listed companies and how this relates to internal stakeholders’ perception of the corporate brand? It remains unknown whether corporate stories for branding affect internal stakeholders’ emotional attachment and corporate brand perceptions, as some of them go untold and unreported (Hitchin, 2015). Addressing these research questions responds to the calls for recent literature to better integrate and place corporate storytelling theory into practice (Youssef et al., 2019), by assessing how theoretical concepts fit in or not. Conducting this research had a goal of helping the Zimbabwean-listed corporates on how to manage internal stakeholders’ emotions and corporate brand perceptions, such as employees, as well as building positive organisational behaviour.

3. Theory
Theoretical framework for this study, which best explained the nexus between corporate storytelling for branding and internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions is Impression Management (IM) theory. Impression Management (IM) entails the process that individuals or organisations use when they seek to influence perceptions of them (Cüre et al., 2020; Nyagadza et al., 2020a). It is pervasive in social interaction (Leary, 1995; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and at times may involve misrepresentation and presenting fronts that are deviant from a corporate’s “true-self” (Becker & Stamp, 2005; Bromley, 1993; Nyagadza, 2020). A range of tactics have been used in corporates (Talbot & Boiral, 2015), to build self-presentation to influence internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions (Chen & Fang, 2008). Much of literature on corporate storytelling for branding lacked theoretical frameworks, such as Cornelissen. et al. (2012), Melewar (2003), Spear. et al. (2013). Many Impression Management (IM) strategies and tactics have been utilised for human interactions which is also meant for functional use in corporates (Kleinmann & Klehe, 2010; Nyagadza, Kadembo et al., 2019; Spear. et al., 2013). Corporate stories for branding elements and Impression Management have a strong relationship in explaining how internal stakeholders perceive the corporate brand (Cooper & Slack, 2015). The relationships are based on the theoretical literature made by authorities who confirm that the connection exists between Impression Management (IM) and corporate storytelling for branding. These include Goffman (1959), Tetlock and Manstead (1985) and others. The respective links were explored further with a view to demonstrate their impact on corporate stories for branding (Siano et al., 2016). The scale of Impression Management (IM) behavioural elements include self-promotion, exemplification,
acclamation, intimidation, and gratification. Purposive and goal-oriented behaviours of internal stakeholders are influenced by Impression Management (IM) concerns (Cüre et al., 2020). As a result of dyadic nature of Impression Management (IM), prior storytelling researches (for example Becker & Stamp, 2005; Brosy et al., 2020; Nyagadza, 2020; Roulin et al., 2014; Spear et al., 2013) have focused on the use of Impression Management (IM) in the context of interviews, as applied too in the current research study. The next section presents a discussion on literature review that is relevant to the corporate storytelling for branding antecedents.

4. Literature review
The following subsections give a critical review of corporate storytelling for branding literature themes derived from research questions, primarily informed by the theoretical framework.

5. Corporate associations
Corporate associations influence internal stakeholders’ corporate brand emotional attachment (Nyagadza et al., 2020a; Souiden et al., 2006). Not all internal stakeholders’ reliance on the corporate brand satisfies their prospects through the corporate brand oath (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). This is so, because the internal stakeholders like employees, first check on the reliability of the organisation, its corporate reputation (Pappas, 2017) and how trustworthy (De Langhe et al., 2016) it is with its corporate brands, before being attached to them. Internal stakeholders desire to be connected to a corporate brand with great and positive corporate story for branding. When internal stakeholders see the firm as a truthful mate, they desire to improve the state of their minds to focus on the corporate brand (So. et al., 2013). They learn to understand and perceive the corporate brand through the relevant associated corporate stories for branding (Escalas, 2004). Due to this, it is highly expected to yield more loyalty of internal stakeholders towards their corporate brands. Lundqvist et al. (2012) suggest that corporate storytelling for branding will fascinate internal stakeholders and, as such, are often more recalled in their minds. Internal stakeholders who are in knowledge of the corporate stories for branding usually describe the corporate brand with greater affection (Kılıç & Okan., 2020), and they desire to have attention and associations for the corporate products.

6. Corporate activities
Corporate activities depict actions of what an organisation is involved in (Spear et al., 2013; Nyagadza, Dzenga et al., 2019). If an organisation loses its corporate image and corporate identity (Suvatjis et al., 2012) as result of the bad corporate activities, it may lead to lower level of internal stakeholders’ loyalty to corporate brand. Main corporate activities are known to be great qualities of corporate stories for branding, which build internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. Corporate activities such as corporate social responsibility are strong corporate story for branding element (Ryder & Vogeley, 2018) which drive a desired brand imaging in the stakeholders mind. Corporate activities show the things started by the organisation to keep in touch with internal stakeholders via corporate stories for branding (Spear et al., 2013). Internal stakeholders are able to understand and interpret corporate activities without the need for conscious reasoning. They make evaluations against what the corporate brand promises and the desired results. Internal stakeholders cannot continue to remain loyal when corporate activities are not in line with their expectations.

7. Corporate values
In sync with the above, corporate stories for branding are intended to effect an organisation’s plan of action (Marzec, 2007). Corporate values are important elements of corporate stories for branding (Goode, 2018) and they denote the core purpose of a firm which are guided by its mission and vision (Urde, 2003a). However, this could be an obsolete statement as changes have since taken place in the way corporate values and behaviours evolve (Scholz & Smith, 2019). Corporate branding and corporate values have much more impact on primary internal stakeholders than external stakeholders. Corporate values are an essential element of corporate stories for branding (Nyagadza, 2019a; Schembri & Latimer, 2016). They carry the corporate vision and corporate
mission elements which are expressed towards shaping the purpose of corporate brand (Spear et al., 2013). If the corporate stories for branding are not linked to the corporate strategy, it may result in paralleled corporate vision and achievement of goals in an organisation (Nyagadza, Kadembo et al., 2019; Nyagadza et al., 2020a). It is a very bigger task to the manager(s) to deal with s pertaining to alignment of corporate strategy and corporate stories for branding, in a bid to bring positive corporate emotional attachment. This is so because corporate stories for branding influence how internal stakeholders interact (Kılıç & Okan., 2020).

8. Corporate personalities
When internal stakeholders hold reliance in a corporate brand, it means they have self-assurance in the corporate brand to prospectively satisfy them; thus they desire to have positive corporate brand perception (Nyagadza et al., 2020a; So. et al., 2013). Internal stakeholders express themselves through corporate brands (Escalas, 2004; Sheri. & Traoudas., 2017). This translates to the notion that there is a strong psychological connection between the corporate storytellers for branding and the benefits embedded in the corporate story for branding (Pera & Viglia, 2016). The reason internal stakeholders express themselves through corporate brands is because they have an inner connection with the corporate story for branding. However, not all corporate stories for branding can easily be remembered (Megehee & Woodside, 2010; Sheri. & Traoudas., 2017) by internal stakeholders, due to differences in what affects them positively or negatively. Corporate stories for branding are believed to carry a personality trait. They modify the way the employees as primary internal stakeholders behave. There is a gap between the behaviour of internal stakeholders and the influence of corporate brand personalities (He et al., 2016; Zou J-L. & Yang., 2019). However, if there is overwhelming evidence that corporate stories for branding are untruthful and improperly expressed, it may create a sense of insecurity to the targeted audience, such as employees (Fang, 2015).

9. Emotional attachment & the corporate brand perceptions
As internal stakeholders become more connected and engaged (Spiller, 2018) to a corporate story for branding, they are in close ranks with the corporate brand due to the presence of the attracting element yielding joy, freedom from apprehension and contentment. Thus, it is believed that internal stakeholders who are attracted to the corporate brand (Schembri & Latimer, 2016) may stay connected to it for a prolonged period of time. Corporate brand perception is the way stakeholders evaluate or see an organisation in its entirety and gives a position against other brands (Nyagadza, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005; S. Smith & Wheeler, 2002). Internal stakeholders perceive positively a corporate brand, if the related corporate brand stories such as corporate associations, corporate values, corporate personalities, and corporate culture are expressed truthfully and factually. Corporate brand perception is a resultant effect of affective or cognitive changes about an organisation (DeVries, 2018). Furthermore, corporate brand relationship and brand meaning ideally shape the level of influence towards stakeholders (both internal and external). Emotions evoke perceptions, modify attitudes, intentions and behaviours (Baldwin & Ching, 2016), as they are strongly related to mental processes (Cater et al., 2020). However, if there is inconsistency corporate stories for branding are shared (Rahe et al., 2020) it influences the internal stakeholder, leading to negative perceptions (Doyle, 2015; Singh & Oliver, 2015) and attitudes mounting against the corporate brand (Coker et al., 2017). The following section addresses methodological s applied in the research process.

10. Methodology
The research was executed in six selected listed companies, within six different industrial sectors (telecommunications, construction, manufacturing, banking, fast-moving consumer goods and financial services), all headquartered in Harare city, Zimbabwe. Case study protocol was followed in carrying out the research study. Due to the nature of the research, the study was nomothetic qualitative in nature. An interpretivist research paradigm, anchored on subjectivism have been applied as research philosophy pillars (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). Purposive sampling was used to select respondents from three authority levels (operational, tactical and strategic). Fifty four in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2019 and
2020. It took almost ten months to completely conduct the interviews. The reason for such an extended period was due to some limitations posed by the novel virus “Covid 19’ pandemic effects, which led to partial shutdown of some of the selected listed companies. Interview data were analysed through thematic analysis and axial coding, based on coded interviewees responses (R1 to R54). Codes for interviews were derived from data and those meant for document analysis stemmed from the Impression Management (IM) theory and keywords from review of literature (Folger et al., 1984; Hsieh & Shannon., 2005). Evidence from interview transcripts, corporate documents (56 corporate official annual reports from six selected listed companies) and physical observations were analysed systematically, using conventional (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), summative content analysis (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999) and directed content analysis (Mayring, 2000), respectively. Qualitative analysis was employed to collect and analyse the literature. The words such as corporate storytelling for branding and internal stakeholders” corporate brand perceptions were used to guide the literature search process (Nyagadza, 2020).

11. Qualitative research trustworthiness
The researchers made sure that there is meticulous evidence regarding the interviewing process in form of recorded transcripts of the interviews, the interviewer’s notes for retest reliability and themes corroboration (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). The interview guide and document analysis were scrutinized by experts in corporate storytelling for branding so as to enhance content analysis validity and reliability. Consistency of responses was evaluated by the researchers so as to maintain the much-required credibility using specific forms of questioning (Long & Johnson, 2000). In a bid to increase the validity and/or credibility of the study, seven respondents were requested to evaluate the interview transcripts as a way of testing the truthfulness of the views reflected (Hsieh & Shannon., 2005). Researchers’ reflexivity was employed so as to enhance trustworthiness of the inquiry, by disclosing all personal beliefs and values that underpinned the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To safeguard the skipping of important information, the data was analysed following an iterative format, in addition to member validation. The process of debriefing was done and an analyst triangulation was utilised, where an audit trail to check for adequacy of the research process was also involved.

12. Ethical considerations
Working on any information connected to surviving individuals made personal data processing essentially restricted and was subject to the provision of Data Protection 1998 (Nyagadza et al., 2020a; Spear. et al., 2013). Possibilities for gaining the room for security, anonymity and confidentiality were considered. No third parties were allowed to gain access to the data collected (Marketing Research Society (MRS), 2020).

13. Interviewees’ profile
The sex-disaggregated composition of respondents’ statistics comprised 40% females and 60% males. Mean age range for the operations level of authority (see Table 1) was dominating at 25 ≤ 34 years, followed by 35 ≤ 44 years for the tactical level and strategic level being at 45 ≤ 54 years. The sector to which each of the listed Zimbabwean companies belong to played a major role in the results presented, as appointments and work contracts (either permanent, fixed or backup) tend to differed across the board.

Table 1 indicates the Index of Respondents’ profile and coding. On average, the strategic level employees had at least a master’s degree and for the tactical ones, majority had undergraduate qualifications ranging from college diplomas, professional diplomas and university degrees, which was almost the same with the operational customer service level. The following section shades more light on results analysis.
Table 1. Index of respondents’ profile and coding

| Organisation Number | Level of Authority               | Respondent Code |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| **C1 (Banking Sector)** | Level 1—Operational Employees    | R1              |
|                     |                                  | R2              |
|                     | Level 2—Tactical Employees       | R3              |
|                     | Level 3—Strategic Employees      | R4              |
|                     |                                  | R5              |
|                     |                                  | R6              |
|                     |                                  | R7              |
|                     |                                  | R8              |
|                     |                                  | R9              |
| **C2 (Manufacturing)** | Level 1—Operational Employees    | R10             |
|                     |                                  | R11             |
|                     | Level 2—Tactical Employees       | R12             |
|                     | Level 3—Strategic Employees      | R13             |
|                     |                                  | R14             |
|                     |                                  | R15             |
| **C3 (Retail Sector)** | Level 1—Operational Employees    | R16             |
|                     |                                  | R17             |
|                     | Level 2—Tactical Employees       | R18             |
|                     | Level 3—Strategic Employees      | R19             |
|                     |                                  | R20             |
|                     |                                  | R21             |
| **C4 (Banking)**    | Level 1—Operational Employees    | R22             |
|                     |                                  | R23             |
|                     | Level 2—Tactical Employees       | R24             |
|                     | Level 3—Strategic Employees      | R25             |
|                     |                                  | R26             |
|                     |                                  | R27             |

(Continued)
14. Results
Corporate values, corporate activities, corporate personalities and corporate associations, as corporate storytelling for branding constructs, have an impact on how internal stakeholders perceive the corporate brand and the level of emotional attachment. However, upon making a deep scrutiny on the interviews’ results the researchers noted that negative responses were more on the part of less experienced internal stakeholders in terms of corporate tenure and history. Document evidence and observations depicted representation of all these corporate storytelling for branding constructs.

14.1. Interviews
The interview excerpts presented different answers given by respondents, in response to the interview questions derived from literature review themes. Codes for interviewees were derived from data collected from the field. Evidence from interview transcripts with the stated codes was analysed thematically using conventional content analysis (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). Prolonged engagement in the conduct of the interviews, averaging between 30 and 45 minutes was done so as to produce thick data that revealed study phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Kirk & Miller, 1986). The typical interviews’ transcriptions resulted in about 65 text pages. In line with the main research questions highlighted before; does corporate storytelling for branding underprops or thwarts internal stakeholders’ optimistic corporate brand perceptions, to what extent are the corporate stories for branding representing the truth within Zimbabwean-listed companies and how this relates to internal stakeholders’ perception of the corporate brand, the following were the responses obtained:

14.2. Corporate personality
Corporate personality as an element of corporate stories for branding, matches corporate brand attitude and behaviours which are manifested in the way the internal stakeholders tend to behave

| Organisation Number | Level of Authority                          | Respondent Code |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| **C5** (Telecoms Sector) | Level 1—Operational Employees | R37             |
|                     |                                            | R38             |
|                     |                                            | R39             |
|                     | Level 2—Tactical Employees                 | R40             |
|                     |                                            | R41             |
|                     |                                            | R42             |
|                     | Level 3—Strategic Employees                | R43             |
|                     |                                            | R44             |
|                     |                                            | R45             |
| **C6** (Construction) | Level 1—Operational Employees             | R46             |
|                     |                                            | R47             |
|                     |                                            | R48             |
|                     | Level 2—Tactical Employees                 | R49             |
|                     |                                            | R50             |
|                     |                                            | R51             |
|                     | Level 3—Strategic Employees                | R52             |
|                     |                                            | R53             |
|                     |                                            | R54             |

Source: Field Data (2020)
across the board. Behaviours of internal stakeholders represent corporate personality, an element of corporate storytelling for branding. Respondent R10 charged that:

They are not caring. They only do things that really do benefit them. If you look outside they claim quality guaranteed but you know what? They tell you take it or leave it [sic].

The researchers noted that corporate personality has an influence on the behaviour of internal stakeholders, as evidenced in the resentment feeling expressed in the above response by respondent R10. However, differences were in the forms of affective and cognitive domains found in other responses.

14.3. Corporate associations

Internal stakeholders who are in knowledge of the corporate stories for branding usually describe the corporate brand with greater affection (Kılıç & Okan., 2020), and are even desiring to have attention and associations for the corporate products (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). Usually in many organisations, employees respond in a way that they feel aligned to the corporate associations, or simply the impression that they have after sense-making through experiences related corporate associations. In this case an example is the response that was given by respondent R33, who said:

I think corporate associations are very key to success an organisation. They help it to be more competitive, gives a good reputation and its corporate brand. I have a positive perception about this.

This response is a clear sign that the respondent had a positive impression about the corporate associations. Therefore, corporate associations positively influence the internal stakeholders’ corporate brand emotional attachment (Nyagadza, 2020; So. et al., 2013; Souiden et al., 2006). To support this, the researchers synthesised this perception through the views that were aired by respondent R45, who echoed;

If I am not involved in the communication and sharing of the organisation’s information relating to the corporate storytelling for branding, then there is no way I will be positively emotionally attached to the corporate associations?

In the above response, the respondent links the corporate associations to the success relating to how information shared within the organisation can have impact on the latter. However, the respondent R45 could not be in any position to be positively emotionally attached to corporate associations as a result of negative perceptions towards the corporate stories for branding.

Respondent R45, had almost the same sentiments with another respondent with the excerpt below;

We do not benefit much to the corporate associations. I am not attached to them.

The impressions that the internal stakeholders have on their counterparts bear direct results on how they see, collectively assess, and take them, as well as personal views for themselves, in a way which determine others’ impressions outcome.

14.4. Corporate values

Corporate values as important construct of corporate stories for branding (Goode, 2018), they denote the core purpose of a firm which are guided by its corporate mission and corporate vision (Urde, 2003a). Corporate values carry the latter corporate storytelling for branding constructs which are expressed towards shaping the purpose of corporate brand (Spear. et al., 2013). Changing the corporate values leads to the corporate strategy overhaul, since the two have implications on each other. Respondent (R41) had to say;
I know nothing about the corporate values. It’s not even … hahahah … What should I say? Honestly, I have the worst perceptions towards these values [sic].

The other respondent (R13) also suggested that;

The corporate values are only important to the organisation not to the staff.

Perceptions shown by the respondents in the interviews were varied depending on the corporate values associated with interview questions. For instance, the respondent R32 charged positively to say;

The corporate values are better communicated to us the staff within our organisation.

I would say I’m emotionally attached to them … they have an impact on our success as an organisation. Because if they are changed they tend to affect many things [laughs].

This kind of response was almost common amongst many respondents who aired that they have little knowledge about the corporate values (R15, R17, R20, R29, R32, R34, R42 and R48). The cause of this could be resentment, lack of management support, poor corporate orientation, and lack of communication effectiveness and training of employees. If the corporate stories for branding are not linked to the corporate strategy, it may result in paralleled corporate vision and achievement of corporate objectives in the organisation (Nyagadza et al. 2019; Nyagadza et al., 2020a). This is so because corporate values influence how internal stakeholders interact and behave (Kılıç & Okan., 2020), which impacts corporate strategy effectiveness.

14.5. Corporate activities

Internal stakeholders can continue to remain loyal, especially when corporate activities are in line with their perceptual preponderances. Responses that came related to the corporate activities were both positive (R21, R33, R37 and R47) and negative (R23, R22, R28, R42, R34, R20, R45 and R35) in terms of impressions as well as emotional attachment. The respondents for example, R21 proposed that;

I think the corporate activities done are good. But at times I feel they just do it maybe for their benefit, not necessarily … if you go up to the higher ends of the economy because there is their buddy … and they just do for the sake of their friends [sic].

14.6. Emotional attachment

Emotional attachment tends to differ and vary in depth or strength (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). Emotions evoke perceptions, modify attitudes, intentions and behaviours (Baldwin & Ching, 2016), as they are strongly related to mental processes (Cater et al., 2020; Nyagadza et al., 2020a). Deeper emotional attachments to the corporate brand like the response of R39, depicted bold feeling of heart and soul connection, affection, love and compassion to the corporate brand.

Respondent R15;

The corporate brand of our organisation was built by our predecessors. It has a strong position in the market and it is very difficult to destroy it as it is [laughs]. I think it will continue to survive in the market … although sometimes it is affected by some bad reputation … In terms of emotional attachment, I can simply say I am emotionally attached to it.

The response of R15 depicts total loyalty and positive emotional attachment to the corporate brand. This depicts that the more the internal stakeholders are connected emotionally to the corporate brand the higher their loyalty to the corporate brand (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). The exploration of the Impression Management strategies can indicate the potential for corporate stories for branding to shape the audience form of the corporate brand.
14.7. Corporate brand perceptions

Corporate brand perception is the way how stakeholders evaluate an organisation in its entirety and gives a position against other brands (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005; Smith & Wheeler, 2002; Nyagadza, 2019c). Respondent R3 depicted an element of negative perception towards the corporate brand. The causes of this drive could have been as a result of negative corporate brand emotional attachment that was also found in R1, R8, R16, R21 R36, and R51 responses. In some sources this can be viewed as cognitive dissonance. In reference to Impression Management (IM) theory, the researchers saw this kind of corporate brand emotional attachment as signifying a conflicting tendency, concretely intended and symmetrically conscious in form (Nyagadza et al., 2020a).

Respondent R39;
We have a strong corporate brand which stands out among other corporates, which makes it competitive. I am emotionally attached to it to the extent of defending it if there are negative things being said about it.

Respondent R27;
The corporate brand is good and has been well accepted but the challenge is, it has been left unsupported. It is lacking promotion financially and the products levels are not maintained.

Pride as impression expression, can be seen as self-promotion behaviour, whereas fear is portrayed as part of supplication behaviour (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). The tone of respondents R27 and R39, showed some signs of pride in the corporate brand. Internal stakeholders perceive positively a corporate brand, if the related corporate stories for branding constructs such as corporate associations, corporate values, corporate personalities, and corporate culture are expressed and/or shared truthfully and factually (Nyagadza et al., 2020a; Spear et al., 2013).

14.8. Document analysis

The following document analysis was executed using publicly available documents and secondary sources. These mainly included corporate annual reports, magazines, heralded documents, newspapers and website content data sources. The document analysis was done for all the six selected Zimbabwean listed companies with codes C1 to C6. Themes developed from research questions and literature review were used to guide the content analysis in the documents that were analysed by the researchers. Evidence from corporate documents was analysed systematically, summative content analysis (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999) and directed content analysis (Mayring, 2000), respectively. Verification was indicated by a Y symbol, to indicate presence of an element in the corporate stories for branding and an N symbol to depict absence of the latter.

The analytical schematic schedule (see Table 2) was adapted from thematic constructs in the literature reviewed. Corporate associations (MacInnis & Nakamoto, 1991; Keller 1993; Keller, 2006; Anisimova, 2007; Souiden et al., 2006; Chevalier & Mazzalova, 2008; Lundqvist et al., 2012; De Langhe et al., 2016; Pappas, 2017; Nyagadza, Kadembo et al. 2019; Kiç & Okan., 2020; Nyagadza et al., 2020a), corporate activities (Larsen 2000; Anisimova, 2007; Chevalier & Mazzalova, 2008; Janssen et al. 2012; So et al., 2013; Nyagadza, Kadembo et al. 2019; Nyagadza et al., 2020a), corporate values (Gabriel, 2000; Denning, 2006; Dowling, 2006; Ryder & Vogeley, 2018; Driscoll & McKee, 2007; Urde, 2003b; Roper & Fill, 2012; Suvatjis et al., 2012; So. et al., 2013; Schembri & Latimer, 2016; Goode, 2018; Scholz & Smith, 2019), corporate personality (Digman, 1990; Aaker et al., 2001; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Okazaki, 2006; Herbst & Merz, 2011; Chu & Sung, 2011; Fang, 2015; Yongjae et al., 2018; Nyagadza, Kadembo et al. 2019; He et al., 2016; Zou J-L. & Yang., 2019; Nyagadza et al., 2020a), and corporate brand (deChernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005; Smith & Wheeler, 2002; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; So. et al., 2013; Coker et al., 2017;
### Table 2. Selected listed companies’ corporate stories for branding document content analytical integrated checklist

| Corporate Associations                                                                 | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Corporate associations expressed in corporate stories for branding contain evidence    | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| that they are easily understood by internal stakeholders.                              |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding communicated to internal stakeholders result in          | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| corporate associations.                                                                |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Print corporate stories for branding communications contain corporate associations.     | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Online corporate stories for branding contain corporate associations.                   | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| There is evidence that Internal stakeholders’ past memories about the corporate      | N  | N  | N  | N  | N  | N  |
| stories for branding & interactions determine corporate association levels.             |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate associations serve as information cues to internal stakeholders when         | Y  | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| evaluating corporate stories for branding relating to credibility and perceived product|    |    |    |    |    |    |
| quality.                                                                               |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate associations encourage internal stakeholders to trust the corporate stories  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| for branding in fulfilling corporate brand promises.                                   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Outstanding corporate products and services communicated through corporate stories for  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| branding increase internal stakeholder’s corporate association.                         |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| The level of corporate success in terms of profitability and market share enhances     | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| internal stakeholders’ corporate association.                                          |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Good corporate citizenship in corporate stories for branding experienced by internal   | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  | Y  | N  |
| stakeholders improve their corporate association.                                       |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate associations are key in influencing internal stakeholders’ emotional        | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| attachments to the corporate brand.                                                    |    |    |    |    |    |    |

| Corporate Activities                                                                 | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Corporate activities expressed in corporate stories for branding are easily understood | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| by internal stakeholders.                                                              |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding communicated to internal stakeholders include            | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| corporate accomplishments.                                                             |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding communicated to internal stakeholders include            | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| corporate core competencies.                                                           |    |    |    |    |    |    |

(Continued)
Table 2. (Continued)

| Corporate Associations | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 |
|------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Corporate stories for branding communicated to internal stakeholders include corporate core abilities. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Print corporate stories for branding communications are key in enhancing corporate activities. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Online corporate stories for branding communications are crucial in shaping corporate activities. | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | N |
| Advertisements as corporate activities improve internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | N |
| Corporate core competencies improve internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N |
| Corporate accomplishments are vital in shaping internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Corporate core abilities affect internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Corporate activities such as social responsibility shared in corporate stories for branding are key in enhancing internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | N |
| Internal stakeholders’ participation in corporate sports and wellness activities influence corporate brand perceptions. | Y | N | Y | Y | Y | N |
| Corporate activities are influence internal stakeholders’ emotional attachments to the corporate brand. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Corporate activities expressed in corporate stories for branding are easily understood by internal stakeholders. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Corporate stories for branding communicated to internal stakeholders include corporate accomplishments. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |

**Corporate Values**

| Corporate values expressed in corporate stories for branding are easily understood by internal stakeholders. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Print corporate stories for branding communications are key in enhancing corporate values. | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
Table 2. (Continued)

| Corporate Associations                                                                 | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Online corporate stories for branding communications are crucial in shaping corporate  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| values.                                                                                |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding shared inside the organisation contain the elements of  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| the corporate strategy, mission and values.                                             |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding influence corporate financial stability.                 | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Corporate stories for branding influence internal stakeholders’ or employee fulfilment.| Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| Corporate stories for branding influence corporate long term perspective.              | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Corporate stories for branding influence corporate efficiency.                         | Y  | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| Corporate stories for branding influence corporate fairness.                           | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Corporate stories for branding influence corporate trust.                               | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Corporate stories for branding influence internal stakeholders’ or employee personal  | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| growth.                                                                                |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding influence internal stakeholders’ positive attitude.     | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Corporate stories for branding influence professional growth.                          | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Corporate values expressed in corporate stories for branding are easily understood by  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| internal stakeholders.                                                                 |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Print corporate stories for branding communications are key in enhancing corporate     | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| values.                                                                                |    |    |    |    |    |    |

| Corporate Personality                                                                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Corporate personality expressed in corporate stories for branding is easily understood  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| by internal stakeholders.                                                               |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Print corporate stories for branding communications are key in enhancing corporate     | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| personality.                                                                           |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Online corporate stories for branding communications are crucial in shaping corporate   | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| personality.                                                                           |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Internal stakeholders’ such as employees, have behaviours which resemble the           | Y  | N  | N  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| corporate personality.                                                                 |    |    |    |    |    |    |
### Table 2. (Continued)

| Corporate Associations                                                                 | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation are sincere, that is      | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| honest, down-to-earth, wholesome and cheerful.                                          |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation are exciting, that is     | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| spirited, imaginative, up-to-date and daring.                                          |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation are competent, that is    | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| reliable, intelligent and successful.                                                  |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation are sophisticated, that   | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| is upper class and charming.                                                           |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation are rugged, that is      | Y  | N  | N  | Y  | N  | Y  |
| outdoorsy and tough.                                                                   |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate personality expressed in corporate stories for branding is easily understood | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| by internal stakeholders.                                                               |    |    |    |    |    |    |

### Emotional Attachment

| Print corporate stories for branding communications improve internal stakeholders’     | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| emotional attachment to the corporate brand.                                           |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Online corporate stories for branding communications are crucial in internal           | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| stakeholders’ emotional attachment to the corporate brand.                             |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal            | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| stakeholders feel affectionate.                                                        |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal            | Y  | N  | N  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| stakeholders feel friendly.                                                            |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal            | Y  | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| stakeholders feel loved.                                                               |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal            | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| stakeholders feel peaceful.                                                            |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal            | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| stakeholders feel delighted.                                                           |    |    |    |    |    |    |

(Continued)
### Table 2. (Continued)

| Corporate Associations                                                                 | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel connected. | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel bonded. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel attached. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |
| Corporate stories for branding shared within the organisation make internal stakeholders feel captivated. | Y  | N  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Print corporate stories for branding communications improve internal stakeholders’ emotional attachment to the corporate brand. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Online corporate stories for branding communications are crucial in internal stakeholders’ emotional attachment to the corporate brand. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | N  |

| Corporate Brand                                                                 | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| The corporate brand is committed to time, influence and investment.               | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is protective.                                               | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is clear in terms of its positioning, values and proposition. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is responsive in terms of market changes, challenges and opportunities. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is clear in terms of positioning, values and proposition.     | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is authentic in terms of internal capability with defined heritage and well-grounded value. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is relevant in terms of internal stakeholders’ needs, desires and decision criteria, across all their demographics and geographies. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is understandable in terms of its distinctive qualities and characteristics. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is present in both traditional and social media.             | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is different from those of competitors.                     | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is committed to time, influence and investment.              | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| Corporate Associations                                                                 | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 | C5 | C6 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| The corporate brand is protective.                                                      | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is clear in terms of its positioning, values and proposition.       | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is responsive in terms of market changes, challenges and opportunities. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is clear in terms of positioning, values and proposition.           | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |
| The corporate brand is authentic in terms of internal capability with defined heritage and well-grounded value. | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  | Y  |

*Source: Thematic elements adapted from literature reviewed, for example, Aaker (1997), Dowling (2006), Anisimova (2007), Yongjao et al. (2018), and Nyagadza, Kadembo et al. (2020a).*
Spiller, 2018; Nyagadza, Kadembo et al. 2019; Nyagadza et al., 2020a; Rahe et al., 2020). Validation was from the literature reviewed, which informed the coding scheme by the researchers (Nyagadza., 2019c). A total of fifty six corporate official documents (official annual reports) from six selected listed companies were analysed. The three researchers established the coding process. To achieve inter-coder reliability, two independent experts in the field were consulted to establish their conclusions, to check whether there was similarities of the analytical findings. Marginal differences in findings indicated reliability of the coding process.

In reference to the above Table 2, evidence showed that, if internal stakeholders are captivated by the corporate stories for branding in an organisation, it becomes easy for them to be emotionally attached to the corporate brand itself. The target audience of corporate stories for branding are influenced by how they evaluate the level of sense making in the latter. The way internal stakeholders position a certain corporate brand in their minds (Aaker, 1997; Nyagadza, Dzenga. et al., 2019), showed clearly the degree to which an organisation is competent. Corporate activities, corporate personalities and corporate values are very instrumental elements of the organisation as they represent the corporate stories for branding, with almost 90% in all six selected companies. Furthermore, corporate activities such as corporate social responsibility (with 85% representation) are a strong corporate story for branding construct, which drives a desired corporate brand imaging within the stakeholders’ mind.

Schematic checklist Table 3 depicts a summary of the impression management strategies and behaviours link to corporate storytelling for branding of the six selected listed companies (with codes C1 to C6). Partial deductive content analysis made for document evidence had its own loopholes such as missing syntactical and semantic information embedded in the text (Weber, 1990). Inductive reasoning was applied to come up with the themes and categories in the matrixed Table 3, though it was not immune to deductive reasoning (Patton, 2002). Coding for document analysis in Table 3 stemmed from the Impression Management (IM) theory and keywords from review of literature (Folger et al., 1984; Hsieh & Shannon., 2005). Self-promotion behaviour relates to communicating the corporate’s ability and accomplishments, thus to appear competent (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Spear. et al., 2013). Exemplification behaviour means that the corporate is showcasing what it has done better than is necessary, going the general call of duty, to appear dedicated or superior (Bolino et al., 2008). Ingratiation behaviour relates to how the corporate seeks to be viewed as likeable by flattering other organisations or doing favours for them (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Spear. et al., 2013). Defensive behaviour is when the organisation reactively manages impressions about themselves in order to protect their established corporate image (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985).

Contents of Table 3 were adapted from thematic elements in the Impression Management (IM) theory literature reviewed by the researchers; self-promotion behaviour (Becker & Stamp, 2005; Spear. et al., 2013; Talbot & Boiral, 2015; Nyagadza et al. 2019), exemplification behaviour (Bolino et al., 2008; Nyagadza et al., 2020a), ingratiation behaviour (Bolino et al., 2008; Goffman, 1959; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992), and defensive behaviour (Cure et al., 2020; Spear. et al., 2013; Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). As alluded earlier on in reference to Table 2, a total of fifty six corporate official documents (official annual reports) from six selected listed companies were analysed. The three researchers for this study established the coding process. To achieve inter-coder reliability, two independent experts in the field were consulted to establish their conclusions, to check whether there were similarities in the analytical findings. Marginal differences in findings indicated reliability of the coding process. In the six selected listed companies, 86% of the corporate associations expressed, contained self-promotion behaviour as expressed in the schematic checklist (see Table 3). Only 14% of the listed companies do not include the self-promotion behaviour of Impression Management (IM) theory. The selected listed companies include all (99.7%) the elements of the impression management behaviours and or strategies, which are self-promotion, exemplification, ingratiation and defensive strategies in their corporate activities as part of their corporate stories for branding. 86% of the corporate values included Impression Behaviours (IM) self-promotion.
Table 3. Linking selected listed companies’ corporate stories for branding and Impression Management (IM) theory strategies and behaviours document content.

| Corporate Associations | Corporate Activities | Corporate Values | Corporate Personalities |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Cl                     | Cl                   | Cl              | Cl                      |
| y                      | y                    | y               | y                       |
| N                      | N                    | N               | N                       |
| Y                      | Y                    | Y               | Y                       |
| y                      | y                    | y               | y                       |
| N                      | N                    | N               | N                       |
| y                      | y                    | y               | y                       |
| N                      | N                    | N               | N                       |
| y                      | y                    | y               | y                       |
| N                      | N                    | N               | N                       |
| y                      | y                    | y               | y                       |
| N                      | N                    | N               | N                       |
| y                      | y                    | y               | y                       |
| N                      | N                    | N               | N                       |
| y                      | y                    | y               | y                       |
| N                      | N                    | N               | N                       |
| y                      | y                    | y               | y                       |
| N                      | N                    | N               | N                       |

Source: Adapted from Impression Management theory literature, for example, Goffman (1959), Tetlock and Manstead (1985), Bolino and Turnley (2003), Schlenker and Weigold (2012), Spector et al. (2013), Nyagadza, Kadembo et al. (2019), Nyagadza et al. (2020a).
behaviour and strategy. Their corporate vision and corporate mission statements included exemplification, ingratiation and defensive Impression Management (IM) theory and strategies at varying percentages. For example the ingratiation Impression Management (IM) theory behaviours content in the mentioned corporate values elements was at 83.3%. On the other hand, 100% of defensive impression management behaviours or strategies were found in all listed companies’ corporate values. The research through a concise documentary analysis saw that self-promotion and ingratiation Impression Behaviours (IM) behaviour was 100% in corporate personalities. This was followed by 83.3% in both exemplification and defensive behaviours. Some of the statements (16.7%) found in the document analysis of the selected listed companies do not include exemplification and defensive behaviours as impression management strategies.

15. Observations
As part of the qualitative research study, the researchers made an effort to do observations at during the stations which were visited during the interview sessions (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). Evidence from physical observations was analysed systematically using directed content analysis (Mayring, 2000). Buildings, clothing (officially approved apparel), posters, frames, digital-static billboards and artefacts inside the buildings were observed to check the presence of the elements related to corporate storytelling for branding. Posters discovered in the five sampled listed corporates available to the public receptions and offices included the heralding of the corporate values in terms of mission statements, corporate goals, corporate visions, snapshots of corporate strategies and the entire corporate brand (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). On the branded apparel, the corporate brand was more visible corporate storytelling element than any other form of corporate brand communications. Posters and displays inside the companies building were associated with the corporate brand as well as the main corporate colours. Internal stakeholders resultanty see corporate stories for branding as capable of possessing personality traits (So. et al., 2013). The way the internal stakeholders interacted within the selected listed companies, highly resembled their corporate cultures which are embedded in the corporate values. In sync to this notion, corporate stories for branding are intended to effect the corporate’s plans of action, through the corporate purpose, corporate core actions and corporate belief systems (Marzec, 2007). In summation, the observation research results showed that majority of the selected listed companies showcased their corporate stories for branding in various forms.

16. Discussion
Corporate storytelling for branding can arguably be seen as the corporate narratives, which are totally timeously linked sequence of events. Corporate stories for branding form a great and important part of the demonstrative strategy that organisations can use to differentiate itself from competitors. They are important in passing messages to other corporates their official corporate activities (Marzec, 2007; Musingarimi et al., 2020). Evidence from the interviews indicated that internal stakeholders, desire to be connected or associated to a corporate brand with great and positive corporate story for branding. When internal stakeholders see the firm as a truthful mate, they desire to improve the state of their minds to focus on the corporate brand (Nyagadza, 2019b; So. et al., 2013). Corporate stories for branding can be used to motivate internal stakeholders so as to create strong emotional bond and close ranks with the corporate brand itself. However, if there is inconsistency in the way corporate stories for branding are shared (Rahe et al., 2020), it influence the internal stakeholders negatively, leading to bad perceptions (Doyle, 2015; Singh & Oliver, 2015) and regressive attitudes mounting against the corporate brand (Coker et al., 2017). Corporate stories for branding form self-promotion behaviour which in turn creates positive corporate reputation. They are vital for corporate survival. The likeability of the communicated corporate activities in corporate stories for branding by internal stakeholders can be made through an ingratiation Impression Management (IM) theoretical behaviour. Internal stakeholders express themselves through corporate brands. This is so because they have an inner connection with the corporate stories for branding. However, not all corporate stories for branding can easily be remembered (Megehee & Woodside, 2010; Sheri. & Traoudas., 2017) by internal stakeholders, due to differences in what affects them positively or negatively, as depicted in the interviews and document evidence. Corporate values can be used as a gateway to how the
corporates share their corporate culture (beliefs and principles) and express what the corporate brand mean to the business world. Managers can use the corporate stories for branding to engage with their subordinates, as internal stakeholders, so that they can appreciate their valuable contribution to the organisation. Corporate stories for branding are arguably seen as official narratives which are chronologically and causally connected expressions of an organisation (Shankar et al., 2001; Spear. et al., 2013).

17. Conclusion, implications and future research directions
Many issues have been unearthed in this study, which are linked to corporate storytelling for branding constructs such as corporate associations, corporate activities, corporate personality, corporate values, emotional attachment and corporate brand perceptions. Despite the essence of understanding the level to which corporate storytelling for branding influences internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions, this area of study has remained unexplored (So. et al., 2013; Spear. et al., 2013). While this study supported the views by many scholars (for example, Mendoza, 2015; Kadembo, 2016), who argued that corporate storytelling for branding is key in shaping the corporate brand; based on the result discovered, corporates are not to regard corporate storytelling as a simple thing. Major corporate storytelling for branding constructs, applied in this study, are key in influencing internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. Existing knowledge gaps exposed during literature review, have been closed by the research study results. In connection to this, the research contributes to knowledge building on corporate storytelling for branding as it serves as crucial corporate information cue for internal stakeholders (Nyagadza et al., 2020a). In addition, the research study advances theoretical knowledge on corporate storytelling for branding through evidence which depicted that there is a clear relationship between corporate storytelling for branding constructs and Impressions Management (IM) theory behavioural elements. The presented results further assist as practical professional guides to executive management in managing their corporate storytelling for branding strategies meant to shape internal stakeholders’ corporate brand perceptions. In addition corporate storytelling for branding can be used to communicate complex ideas, concepts, and causal connections as well as building connections for internal stakeholders. The study can be applied in some sections of the businesses globally, regionally or locally to determine its universal applicability. Due to limited time, since the research was cross-sectional, future researchers can look into investigating whether corporate stories for branding expressed in corporate activities and Impression Management (IM) behavioural elements can be visibly measurable in internal stakeholders. Furthermore, investigations can be done to evaluate the connection between employees’ behaviours and the influence of corporate symbolic benefits.

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