

**AN ASSESMENT OF BRAND REPUTATION AS AN ATTITUDINAL
CONSTRUCT AT NIKE: A FEMALE CONSUMER PERCEPTION ANALYSIS**

by

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I declare that this study, **THE ASSESMENT OF BRAND REPUTATION AS AN ATTITUDINAL CONSTRUCT AT NIKE: A FEMALE CONSUMER PERCEPTION ANALYSIS**, is my own work and all the sources used in this study have been acknowledged by means of complete referencing.

23/11/2017

Signature

Date

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ABSTRACT

Brand reputation has received the attention of many scholars and practitioners because it is central to the success of organisations of all kinds, and an intangible asset with no substitute. In the academic world, brand reputation has been demarcated by various scholars, depending on the disciplinary mind-set involved. It has been established that diverse stakeholder groups have different needs from a brand and their perceptions of brand reputation are thus varied. Acknowledging the needs of different stakeholders and the importance of the consumer stakeholder group allows for a more nuanced and systematic approach in conceptualising brand reputation. Although numerous studies have attempted to explain brand reputation, there is a paucity of studies that have actually conceptualised brand reputation as an attitudinal construct based on both cognitive (rational) and affective (emotional) components. Even fewer researchers have endeavoured to conceptualise brand reputation as an attitudinal construct in the consumer stakeholder group.

The aim of this study was to explore female consumer perceptions of Nike's brand reputation and conceptualise brand reputation as an attitudinal construct based on both cognitive and affective components. The study used qualitative research methods (focus groups and interviews) to collect data on Nike from a group of female consumers in order to identify perceptions and elements that contribute to conceptualising brand reputation on the basis of the components of attitudes. The key findings of this study highlighted the fact that brand reputation is a multidimensional construct and can be demarcated through various elements that contribute to the following themes: *perception of product qualities and service*, the *perception of brand traits* and the *perception of brand strategy*. These themes contribute to the conceptualisation of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. Since brand reputation as an attitudinal construct has previously been conceptualised based on cognitive and affective components, this study confirmed the two components but a unique finding of this study was the identification of the behavioural component of attitudes. Hence the study findings not only make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge on perceptions of brand reputation in an elusive stakeholder group – female consumers, consumer-based reputation (CBR), and in defining brand reputation but also conceptualise brand reputation as an attitudinal construct based on previously identified cognitive and affective components as well as the newfound behavioural component of attitudes.

KEY WORDS

Brand reputation; brand reputation as an attitudinal construct; cognitive component; affective component; behavioural component; consumer-based

reputation (CBR); perception of product qualities and service; perception of brand traits; perception of brand strategy.

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CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT OF AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

There has been increasing interest in the reputation of brands in both industry and academia. In this study brand reputation was assessed, with a particular focus on the brand reputation of Nike, one of the world's leading brands. Brand reputation was explored as an attitudinal construct with the elements and components of attitudes receiving particular attention.

This chapter provides an introduction to the overall study. The context of, and background to the study are highlighted, and the relevance of the study to the discipline of communication discussed. The goals and objectives of this study are stated and the key aspects of the literature review summarised. Research problems and sub problems are formulated. The research methodology of the study is briefly reviewed along with its research methods and approaches. The ethical considerations of this study are also identified. The chapter gives an overview of Nike, the organisation investigated in the study, and concludes with the layout of the dissertation.

1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of Nike's brand reputation (as an attitudinal construct), among a select group of female consumers. Given the monolithic international image of Nike, this study attempted to identify actual perceptions of reputation of the brand by a small group of female consumers, selected for their diversity of perceptions. An effort was made to determine whether there is an overlap or significant differences in the perceptions of Nike's reputation among selected female consumers. A further aim of the study was to conceptualise brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The next section highlights the background to the study and its relevance to the discipline of communication.

1.2.1 Background to the study

Brand reputation has been a topic of interest among scholars and firms alike (Caruana & Chircop 2000; Barnett & Pollock 2012). The reason for this is that a positive brand reputation is widely seen as an intangible asset that is vital for a brand's sustainability, profitability and growth (Paba 1991; Wartick 2002; Schwaiger 2004). Brand reputation has various definitions, central to which is the fact that reputation ultimately has to be earned (Fombrun 1996:23; Marconi 1996; Dowling & Moran 2012). The perception of reputation is built on experiences and interactions in the minds of stakeholders over a period of time (Roberts & Dowling 2002). A brand's custodians may try to paint a picture in the minds of stakeholders, but whether or not this picture is perceived positively is another matter. Reputation is a kind of social memory that is present in the minds of consumers based on multiple "past experiences" of the performance, interaction, satisfaction of promises and images that resonate through different communications on the company's part (Fombrun & Shanley 1990; Barnett & Pollock 2012).

The success of a brand depends on the people who support it. Thus, brands rely heavily on stakeholders in order to be sustainable and profitable (Markham 1972). Stakeholders' perceptions of a brand's reputation are crucial information, which ensures effective communication between different stakeholders. This enables the brand to better position itself (Marconi 1996; Tischer & Hildebrandt 2014). However, communication is not solely reactive and received exclusively by the stakeholder's order of importance. If communication fails to acknowledge stakeholder priorities, stakeholders are less likely to be won over (Mui, Mohtashemi & Halberstadt 2002; Tischer & Hildebrandt 2014). Brand reputation is therefore deemed a vital strategic resource in the discipline of communication. Since the focus of this study was a specific consumer stakeholder group, it could be classified in the category of consumer-based reputation (CBR). Furthermore, the focus on female consumers and their perceptions of the brand reputation was deemed significant for brand-specific reasons as a key growth strategy of Nike as a brand, as well as for broader

theoretical reasons relating to the importance of the female segment consumer market. According to Silverstein and Sayre (2009) and Singhi, Jain and Sangh (2017) female consumers account for 70% to 80% of the overall spending and thus drive the world economy.

Numerous academic studies have endeavoured to conceptualise and measure reputation (Berens & Van Riel 2004), but various scholars have used different methods to measure the concept (Zhang & Schwaiger 2009; Dowling & Moran 2012; Bălan 2015). The diverse cross-disciplinary mind-sets have influenced the way in which brand reputation is defined and measured. These differences in defining and measuring brand reputation are outlined in Chapter 2. For example, when assessing brand reputation, psychology researchers have placed the emphasis on stakeholders' subjective feelings, whereas researchers in organisational theory have underscored internal stakeholder perceptions. A number of scholars such as Schwaiger (2004), Caruna, Cohen and Krentler (2006) and Omar, William and Lingelbach (2009) view brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. These studies highlight the importance of the cognitive and affective components in assessing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. However, some of these studies have been critiqued for giving preference to the cognitive components of attitudes (Sjovall & Talk 2004; Raithel, Wilczynski, Schloderer & Schwaiger 2010) or for failing to emphasise the consumer stakeholder group enough (Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson & Beatty 2009; Raithel et al 2010). This study attempted to apply both the cognitive and affective components of attitudes.

The brand of interest in this study is Nike, largely due to its popularity and global presence. Few brands are able to sustain their popularity and market lead, but Nike has managed to create and maintain its brand presence globally. The Nike brand will be discussed in more detail in section 1.8. Because of this study's specific interest in brand reputation as an attitudinal construct and the perceived reputation of Nike (a global brand) in the minds of a select group of female consumers, the assessment of brand reputation occurred in two ways. Firstly, the perceptions of reputation by the selected female consumers of the Nike

brand were identified. Secondly, the study attempted to identify components and elements that contribute to the conceptualisation of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct for the Nike brand.

1.2.2 Relevance of the study to the discipline of communication

Brand reputation is and has increasingly been assessed as a significant theoretical construct of corporate communications, one of the fields of the broader discipline of communication (Fan 2005). The discipline of corporate communication is directly related to reputation. Van Riel (1995:26) defines corporate communication as “an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonized as effectively and efficiently as possible, with the objective of creating a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent”. Reputation indicates whether the communication strategies are being perceived in the way that they should by the intended stakeholders (Guru, Sanjeevaraja, Gopala & Parashivamurthy 2013; Tischer & Hildebrandt 2014).

Reputation is a vital facet of corporate communications because it is deemed to be one of the most important strategic objectives. The reason for this is that creating, preserving and protecting reputation are the principal duties of communications practitioners (Cornelissen 2008:3). It is therefore evident that brand reputation is a key element of the function of corporate communication.

The topic of this study was deemed relevant because of its potential contribution to existing research and the body of knowledge on brand reputation and the identification of perceptions of reputation, which are a central area of exploration in the discipline of communication. The study was also considered relevant among a stakeholder segment that is not only regarded as important by brands, but is also increasingly significant for Nike specifically, in that it studied a fairly elusive group, namely female consumers. Furthermore, this study attempted to explore different perceptions of a consumer stakeholder group based on their needs and relationships with the brand. The aim of the study was

to make a contribution to the identification of elements that contribute to the conceptualisation of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.

1.3 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was exploratory in nature. The objective of exploratory research is to identify key issues and variables that have not been clearly defined (Barker & Angelopulo 2005; Research methods 2015). An exploratory study is specifically useful in helping to decide on the best research method to identify the correlations between the variables and the research problem (Barker & Angelopulo 2005). Exploratory research is generally inductive, not deductive which means that it follows a “bottom-up” approach.

The aim of this study was not to test the salience of the reputation intended by Nike, but rather to explore the company’s reputation as constructed and formulated by the individuals comprising the group of participants. The aims were to zero-base Nike’s reputation and generate results from the ground up, with no preconceptions or conditions. The intention was for the findings to serve as hypotheses of the brand’s reputation in later deductive research.

Hence, the goals and objectives of the study are formulated as follows:

- To explore diverse perceptions of Nike’s reputation among a select group of female consumers.
- To identify the constituent elements of Nike’s brand reputation as an attitudinal construct among a select group of female consumers.

1.4 KEY CONCEPTS OF THE STUDY

The focus of this research was on exploring perceptions of brand reputation (as an attitudinal construct) by female consumers of the Nike brand. The literature review presented in this study is divided into two sections.

The first section of the literature review chapter defines a brand and discusses in detail the strategic value of brand reputation. Brand reputation and the concepts relating to it, as well as consumer-based reputation (CBR) are then

discussed. The various concepts, theories and schools of thought in different academic disciplines of reputation are also explored and critiqued.

The second section of the literature review chapter describes brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. Previous studies that view brand reputations as an attitudinal construct the cognitive and affective components and their respective elements are explained. The attitudinal components are then applied as a basis for a framework to define and measure perceptions of brand reputation among the select group of female consumers. The key concepts are highlighted in the subsections below.

1.4.1 Brand reputation

Various authors define brand reputation in different ways. Fombrun (1996), for example, views reputation as a multidimensional construct that is based on the collective perceptions and experiences of stakeholders, whereas Raithe et al (2010) derive reputation from cognitive and affective attitudes. Drawing from these and for reasons listed in Chapter 2, the following definition of brand reputation was formulated and utilised in this study:

Brand reputation is the value outcome of cognitive (rational) and affective (emotional) attitudes derived from a particular stakeholder's social, economic and personal needs of a brand over time.

1.4.2 Concepts relating to brand reputation

The concepts relating to brand reputation include organisational identity, visual identity, brand image and brand equity. These concepts are important to brand reputation because they are closely intertwined with brand reputation, but are also distinguishable. These concepts are briefly outlined below and their derivations explained in Chapter 2:

Organisational identity is the way in which internal members of an organisation view that organisation.

Visual identity is the visual cues that a brand or organisation represents and communicates itself through.

Brand image is the way in which a brand presents itself and its desired image.

Brand equity is the marketable value of a brand.

1.4.3 Consumer based reputation (CBR)

The consumer stakeholder group has been of interest in a number of studies on brand reputation (Laufer & Coombs 2006; Walsh & Beatty 2007; Raithel et al 2010). This study focused on perceptions of brand reputation of the consumer stakeholder group. Hence this study can be regarded as a CBR study. CBR recognises the importance of consumer perceptions in brand reputation.

1.4.4 Brand reputation as an attitudinal construct

Kottasz and Bennett (2005) and Tischer and Hildebrandt (2014) posit that brand reputation is assessed through the perceptions of stakeholders. In addition, according to Schwaiger (2004), Mak (2005), Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) and Raithel et al (2010) these perceptions are based on attitudes. Vaughan and Hogg (2005) explain *attitude* as the way in which stakeholders behave and feel about something, and their beliefs about it. The two components identified in the literature upon which stakeholder attitudes are based are *cognitive components* or rational beliefs and *affective components* or emotional feelings (Schwaiger 2004; Omar et al 2009; Raithel et al 2010). Hence, in this study, brand reputation was demarcated as an attitudinal construct that is based on both cognitive and affective components. However, a unique finding of this study was the identification of the behavioural component, which influenced brand reputation as an attitudinal construct (discussed in greater detail in chapter 6).

1.5 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND SUB-PROBLEMS

The overall objective of this study is to explore brand reputation as an attitudinal construct at Nike. The subsections below focus on the research problem and sub-problems.

1.5.1 The research problem

According to Lewis (2015), a research problem is a concise and clear statement about a concept that is to be explored or investigated in a given study. As stated previously, various studies have attempted to define the concept of brand reputation and outlined the importance of this concept. However, few studies have attempted to conceptualise brand reputation as an attitudinal construct on a well-known brand, such as Nike in the female consumer stakeholder group. Hence the research problem for this study was formulated as follows:

To identify perceptions of Nike's brand reputation and to explore the cognitive and affective components of the brand's reputation as an attitudinal construct among a segment of female consumers.

1.5.2 The sub problems

According to Walliman (2017), research sub problems are constituent parts of the original research problem that is broken down into smaller parts.

The following sub problems were formulated for this study:

- To identify important factors that contribute to brand reputation among the participants
- To explore the dominant perceptions of Nike's reputation among the participants
- To explore Nike's reputation as an attitudinal construct based on the cognitive and affective components among the participants.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

As explained earlier, the research design for this study was exploratory, and *qualitative research methods* were applied. Since the purpose of the study was to identify perceptions, the researcher felt that a qualitative study would help to provide depth and detail by recording the target consumers' attitudes, behaviours and feelings. This type of research would also allow the participants to expand on their responses and explain 'why' they had certain perceptions

about the reputation of the Nike brand. Furthermore, the qualitative research design adopted in this study allowed the researcher to explore the dominant perceptions of the Nike brand and the way in which the female participants demarcated brand reputation, and to investigate the perceptions of both the cognitive and affective components of reputation through narrative discussions of the Nike brand. This qualitative research design also enabled the researcher to discuss and interpret in detail the perceptions and attitudes of the select female consumers' perceptions of Nike's brand reputation. This study is positioned within an *interpretivist paradigm*, with its cognisance of the importance of socially and subjectively constructed reality (Goldkuhl 2012; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston 2013).

This study did not formulate a hypothesis. Since it was inductive and not deductive, the aim was to explore a range of perceptions of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct at Nike that might exist among the broader population. The outcome could then be formulated as a hypothesis in later studies. The study conducted *four semi structured face to face interviews* and *two focus groups* to evaluate the participants' perceptions of Nike's reputation and to determine brand reputation as an attitudinal construct based on both cognitive and affective components. The theoretical underpinnings of brand reputation guided the way in which the focus group guide and interview schedule were compiled.

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data collected in both the focus groups and interviews. Thematic analysis enables one to sort data into themes and categories (Joffe 2011) in the encoding of qualitative information. Thematic analysis involves the following steps: familiarising oneself with the data; coding the different themes; searching for themes (and potential patterns); reviewing themes; and defining, naming and writing up themes (Braun & Clarke 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2008). Because this study was inductive, the themes were coded and developed *inductively*. This means that this process was based on the data collected, namely the participants' perceptions. This study utilised the theoretical framework of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct

provided in the literature (elaborated on in section 3.4) in order to guide the way in which questions were formulated. The use of a theoretical framework guides researchers during the data collection stage. Furthermore, findings and theories generated inductively support and/or contest the theories acknowledged in the literature. Hence there is an amalgamation of the inductive data collected from the study participants and the theories in the literature. This was deemed crucial in this study because of the paucity of research on the perceptions of a specific group, namely the female consumer segment, of Nike's reputation. The intention was to explore the select participants' perceptions of Nike's reputation and systematically gather data on Nike's reputation, from the bottom up, in order to build on the different variables that describe reputation.

Owing to the qualitative nature of this study, the rigid terms typically used in quantitative research were not used. Reference was thus made to "participant selection" and not to "sampling techniques", which include "population" (target and accessible), that are more widely used in quantitative studies. The selected participants in this study were drawn from a *female consumer segment*. All the participants were required to willingly give their consent to take part in the study, and they were required to *speak English*, a dominant language which various people from different backgrounds can relate to.

The participant selection process used for both focus groups and interviews was akin to convenience purposive sampling. Convenience purposive sampling, also known as judgment sampling, is the "deliberate choice of research participants selected for the qualities they possess" and is not intended to statistically represent a population (Tongco 2007:147; Ritchie et al 2013). Convenience purposive sampling is a non-random sampling method that needs no underlying theories (Devers & Frankel 2000). In simple terms the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find participants who can and are willing to provide the information by "virtue of knowledge or experience" (Tongco 2007:147; Ritchie et al 2013). The value of convenience purposive sampling in this study was that it would enhance the understanding of the select

participants and also allow for building on the brand reputation theories and concepts.

In this study, multiple methods were utilised to ensure valid and reliable findings and perspectives of reality. *Triangulation* (methodological and theory triangulation) and *pilot studies* (pretesting) were utilised to ensure *internal validity* (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers 2002; Pandey & Patnaik 2014). In terms of *construct validity*, semi structured focus groups and interviews were devised based on brand reputation literature.

According to Koch and Harrington (1998), Golafshani (2003), Tobin and Begley (2004), Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin (2007), Høye and Severinsson (2007), Smith (2015), *external validity* in qualitative studies refers to *trustworthiness*. In this study, the trustworthiness of the two focus groups and interviews was ensured in the following ways (Johnson 1997; Winter 2000; Pandey & Patnaik 2014):

- descriptive validity (by transcribing verbatim and cross-checking the data)
- interpretive validity (through participation feedback and the use of direct quotations)
- theoretical validity (through the use of brand reputation literature to guide the interview schedule and focus group discussion)

In the current study, the researcher further ensured that the following reliability and validity procedures were followed in the qualitative process: *conformability*, *trustworthiness*, *consistency* and *dependability*. Verification strategies were applied to ensure that conformability, trustworthiness, consistency and dependability were achieved. These verification strategies included the following (explained in detail in section 3.6.3):

- methodological coherence (through the alignment of the research problem and the chosen qualitative research design)

- appropriateness of the selected participants (explained in the participant selection process in sections 1.6.1 and 4.3)
- collecting and analysing data concurrently (through the use of semi structured questions based on the literature and analysis via thematic analysis)
- thinking theoretically (the questions for both the focus group discussion guide and interview schedule were based on theory)
- theory development (using the framework explained in the literature on further theory development)

The quality of this study was therefore ensured through the use of various methods in order to ensure reliable, valid and trustworthy research findings.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are vital in any research study, particularly a qualitative one, because ethics guide the credibility and trustworthiness of the given study (Ritchie et al 2013). To this end, the researcher read and understood the policy on ethics at the University of South Africa (Unisa). The study complied with Unisa's research ethics policy by observing the following protocols:

Confidentiality was guaranteed by ensuring the anonymity of participants.

All the participants in the two focus groups and interviews were required to give their *informed consent* by reading and signing a consent form containing all the information pertaining to the nature of the study. Participation was completely voluntary, and the participants could withdraw at any time (autonomy). They were also asked to consent to the researcher tape recording the focus group or interview (see annexure E).

1.8 OVERVIEW OF THE BRAND NIKE

This section provides some background on Nike, the brand of interest in this study, its brand value and global presence, and lastly, the importance of the female consumer group to the brand.

1.8.1 Background on the Nike brand

Nike is a global footwear, apparel and equipment brand that was founded by Phil Knight and Bill Bowerman in 1964 as a blue-ribbon sports company. The company originally operated as a distributor for a Japanese shoemaker (Lim & Phillips 2008; Ramaswamy 2008; Larson 2011; O'Reilly 2014; Sansui, Lazarev, Jorgensen, Latsanych & Badtiev et al 2014). The American multinational brand is based in Oregon, Portland (Locke 2003). The name Nike (pronounced ny'-kee') comes from the Greek goddess of victory (Nike's heritage [sa]; Sansui et al 2014). The Nike logo is "the swoosh" (the Nike tick) that is apparent on all its products and services (Larson 2011).

Nike has gone beyond traditional advertising of building a sign, to building a philosophy of a global power brand through images that resonate with people worldwide (Goldman & Papson 1998; Sansui et al 2014). According to Goldman and Papson (1998:4), "Nike is a company that competes per excellence in an economy of images and signs". Nike's slogan "just do it" is one of the best-known trademarks (Lim & Phillips 2008; Larson 2011). Since the "swoosh" is the first visual logo that people identify with Nike, therefore the images that resonate in the minds of consumers from the "swoosh" play a key role in confirming its reputation.

The Nike brand operates from numerous countries (190 in total) all over the world, giving Nike a global stature (Soni 2014a). Nike is considered a brand superstar because of its appeal to different people in different places (Kozinets et al, 2002). Nike's mission is to "bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world" (Nike Inc 2014). The company believes that anyone with a body can be considered an athlete, which means that Nike's target is everyone, not only professional athletes (Nike Inc 2014; Sansui et al 2014). Few brands are able to stand out and make their mark globally, and the Nike brand has not only managed to survive, but also classifies itself as a top brand (Larson 2011).

The brand mantra for Nike is "authentic athletic performance", which is prevalent in all its marketing and communications (Lim & Phillips 2008). Nike has been endorsed by the likes of LeBron James, Michael Jordan, Maria

Sharapova, Cristiano Ronaldo, Roger Federer, Derek Jeter, Rafael Nada and Tiger Woods, to name a few (Lim & Phillips 2008; Theodoros 2014). Lane Keller (1999) and Hollister (2008) suggest that Nike is a successful brand, and its brand mantra contributes to its success. Nike has a sense of what it represents, and these brand values are reflected in words or phrases that correspond with its brand mantra. Consumers are expected to relate to Nike with terms such as “innovative technology”, “top athletes”, and so forth (Lane Keller 1999; Ramaswamy 2008). These core brand associations can have both tangible and intangible benefits for a brand (Lane Keller 1999; Ramaswamy 2008), and this includes a positive brand reputation.

1.8.2 Nike brand value

The Nike brand is considered a top global brand and dominates the footwear and sports apparel market (Larson 2011; Miller 2014). According to Locke (2003), Nike evolved from being an importer and distributor of Japanese running shoes, to the world leader in design, distribution, marketing and revenue of not only athletic footwear, but also other sports apparel and equipment (see figure 1.1).

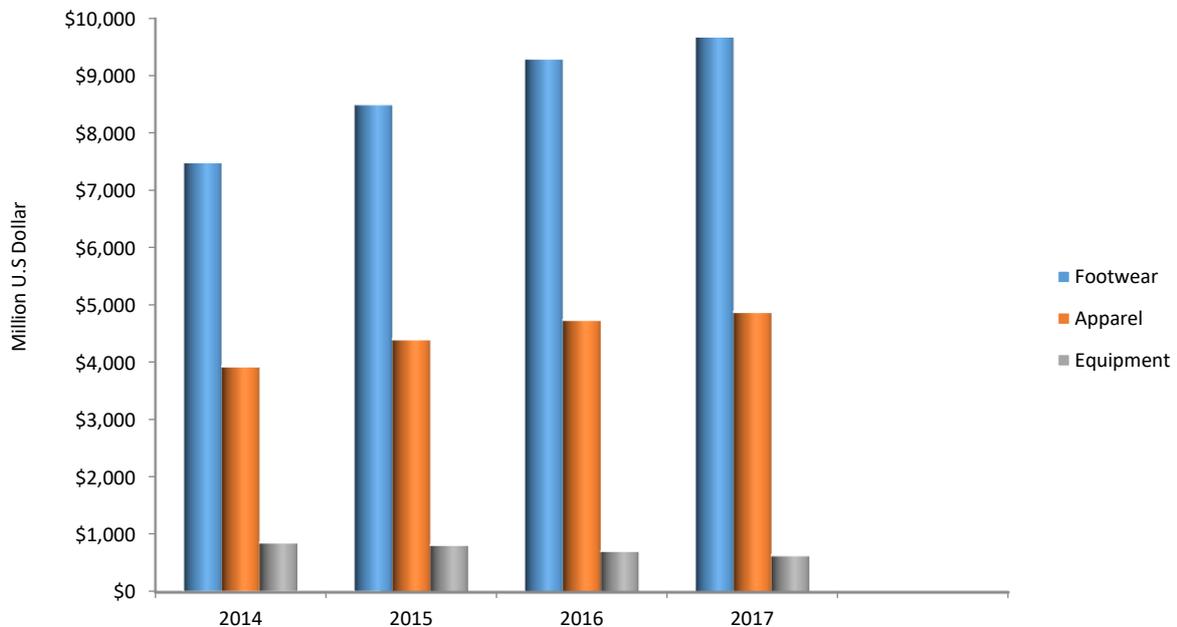


Figure 1.1: Nike sales and revenue breakdown by product category: 2014 - 2017

Source: Nikes North America revenue by segment (www.Statistica.com)

Although footwear is the largest sales point for Nike, the company maintains the position of being the largest seller of sporting and goods apparel in the world, and this is illustrated by the record growth of the company and the recognition of the “swoosh” globally (Helstein 2003; Arvidsson 2006; Soni 2014a). In the same vein, Leach (2015) describes Nike as a brand that dominates the sports apparel and footwear industry.

According to Forbes (2014a) and Soni (2014a), Nike is the most valuable sports brand, with an estimated worth of \$19 billion, beating the likes of Adidas and ESPN and even brands out of the sports apparel bracket such as Disney. Miller (2014) further posits that the Nike brand “has almost 20% of athletic footwear market around the world and its stock price has outperformed the Dow Jones US footwear index by 50% during the past five years”. Furthermore, according to Mahdi, Abbas, Mazar and George (2015) and Kornum, Gyrd-Jones, Al Zagir and Brandis (2017), Nike does not face any real threats from its competitors because of its prestige, reputation and marketing, therefore maintaining a top brand position in its related brand category (see figure 1.2). Brand reputation is thus vital for a top brand to enable it to maintain its brand position and competitive advantage.



Figure 1.2: Market share: sport apparel brands (August 2014-July 2015)

Source: Some surprises in the sportswear market online (www.1010data.com)

1.8.3 Nike as a global brand

Consumers from different cultures have different perceptions of the reputation and image of a brand (Locke 2003; Laufer & Coombs 2006; Sarstedt, Wilczynski & Melewar 2013). According to Aaker (2004), the global or local orientation of a brand has an impact on the way in which it is perceived. Being global has various advantages including prestige and visibility, which mean more recognition (Aaker 2004). A global brand is one that consumers can find under the same name in numerous countries, with similar strategies to build relationships with consumers across cultures (Larson 2011). The environments in which global brands operate today are complex. The way in which brands operate in a competitive environment today is different to a few years ago, largely because of globalisation, and the development of new technologies and social networks (Fan 2005; Sarstedt et al 2013). Not only is there a need to act ethically and in a socially responsible manner, but stakeholders' perception of a company's reputation, defines the brand and its position against its competitors (Dowling & Moran 2012).

Regarding the Nike brand, Nike is built on the globalisation of sports culture. “The aim is to sell a global brand that appeal to local tastes” (Soni 2014b). According to Nike vice chairman, Richard Donahue, “the commitment to be a global company means, one management, one theme, one value, one ethic around the world” (Goldman & Papson 1998:14). We live in a cultural environment of signs, and according to Goldman and Papson (1998:1) and Murphy and Mathew (2001), the “swoosh” is one the most recognised brand icons today and it stands for “athletic excellence, a spirit of determination, hip authenticity and playful self-awareness”. The slogan “just do it” seems to be recognised globally and the “swoosh” is visible everywhere on caps, shirts, pants, shoes, billboards and the media (Mathew [sa]; Collins, Zoch & McDonald 2004; Lim & Phillips 2008).

1.8.4 Nike and the female consumer segment

This study focused on the female consumer segment, a segment that is deemed important by Nike because the company aims to appeal to the female consumer segment and thereby increase revenues by \$36 billion by 2017, which is faster than the company’s overall growth rate (Forbes 2014b; Soni 2014a). According to Kell (2014) and Forbes (2014a), Nike is worth roughly \$16 billion today, but only 20% of that is represented by Nike’s women’s business. However, this figure is expected to grow and outpace men’s business fairly quickly.

Nike sees women as an integral part of its customer base, and this is evident in its strategies, branding and marketing (Soni 2014a; O’Reilly 2015). Nike believes that the focus on women consumers could help achieve its target of \$36 billion by 2017 (Helstein 2003; O’Reilly 2015). The company sees opportunity in this consumer segment and anticipates revenues that would exceed 20% of its overall revenues (Forbes 2014a; O’Reilly 2015). Nike believes that women consumers could actually add more value and profit to the company than their male counterparts (O’Reilly 2015).

According to Soni (2014b), because of the opportunity that Nike has identified in the female consumer segment, its current focus is on this particular segment. Nike believes that women participate in sports as much as men do, be it yoga or running (Soni 2014a). In fact, Nike appointed a female executive to head its women's business in 2013 (Forbes 2014a). Furthermore, the brand has a keen interest in female consumers interested in any sporting activities (Cooper 1995; O'Reilly 2015).

The shift to the female consumer segment is also in the prevalence of spaces dedicated to women's products (Kell 2014). In addition to this the interest in women is also evident in the number of digital drivers that are used as a strategy to invite women in specific to participate. The majority of the users of the digital training apps are women and these apps include different workout regimes (Helstein 2003; Soni 2014a). According to Soni (2014b), women use these apps twice as much as men do, and also spend more than twice the amount of money than their male counterparts. Cole and Hribar (Helstein 2003) provide an insightful account of the success of Nike, which is continually embraced because it does something for people. Helstein (2003) identifies the so-called "representational images" directed towards women and further postulates that Nike knows the desires of women, and plays on those strengths. The success of recent advertising directed towards women showcases an "intelligible" and "physic" dimension (Helstein 2003). The representational images produced through the campaigns that focus on a particular stakeholder group help to form perceptions (Soleimani, Schneper & Newburry 2014). Hence global brands need to have a sound understanding of the needs and expectations of their interest stakeholders in order to be well perceived by this group.

Although there is a body of literature available on global brands and brand reputation, there is still a gap in identifying the perceptions of the interest stakeholder group of a global brand. This study would therefore attempt to identify the perceptions of a select group of female consumers (interest

stakeholder group) of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct of a global sport and apparel brand (Nike).

1.9 LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the context of and rationale for the study. The next part of the study presents the literature review, which is discussed in the subsequent two chapters. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical underpinnings of brand reputation by briefly defining the concept of brands, and then explaining the strategic value of brand reputation. The chapter goes on to define brand reputation, drawing from the work of various authors. Concepts similar to brand reputation are then distinguished. Finally, consumer-based reputation (CBR) is discussed and the cross-disciplinary nature of brand reputation explored.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the theoretical underpinnings of brand reputation and discusses in detail brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. Previous studies that view brand reputation as an attitudinal construct are outlined. The elements of the cognitive and affective elements are then discussed. Chapter 4 systematically discusses the research design and methodology that guided this study, as well as how reliability and validity were ensured and ethical practices adhered to.

Chapter 5 outlines the research findings of this study, while Chapter 6 concludes by providing an overall summary of the findings, drawing conclusions and making recommendations for possible future studies.

1.10 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overall framework for this study. The context of the study was explained, highlighting the main aims and purpose of the study, namely to identify perceptions of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct at Nike, from a select group of female consumers. The background to the study was discussed, underscoring the importance of the concept of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The significance of the topic for the discipline of communication was discussed, and the goals and objectives of the study

formulated. The key concepts in the literature were emphasised, namely defining brand reputation, the concepts relating to brand reputation, consumer-based reputation and brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The research problems and sub-problems were discussed and the research methods applied in the study and the participant selection process outlined. This was followed by a discussion of the ethical considerations and the way in which reliability and validity were ensured in the study. The anticipated findings and contributions of the study were highlighted. Lastly, an overview of Nike, the chosen brand of the study, was provided. The next chapter explores the concept of brand reputation.

CHAPTER 2

BRAND REPUTATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the concept of brand reputation has received a great deal of attention in the past four decades (Helm 2011), there has been limited focus on the nature of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. Mahon (2002) and Brown, Dacin, Pratt and Whetten (2006) identify the need to comprehensively define and understand brand reputation and come to grips with the constructs that build reputation. Owing to this ambiguity in the definition of reputation, it is difficult to assess reputation as an intangible asset and its role in altering stakeholders' behaviour and creating a competitive advantage for the brand's future success.

In order to reduce this ambiguity and clearly outline the position of this research in contextualising brand reputation, the literature review in this chapter defines a brand, highlights the strategic value of brand reputation and then attempts to formulate a comprehensive definition of the concept. Concepts similar to brand reputation are discussed and individually demarcated in order to indicate their relationship to brand reputation. Furthermore, because of the focus of this study on a consumer stakeholder group, consumer-based reputation (CBR) is discussed. Finally, various concepts, theories and schools of thought on reputation from different academic disciplines are explored and critiqued. Therefore the content of this chapter contributes to the research problem by providing a holistic overview of the main concept of this study- brand reputation.

2.2 DEFINING A BRAND

A brand is a symbol, sign, name, design or term or the combination of these that sets them apart and accords them a differential supremacy (Brown 2016). Kotler (2000) adds that a brand is any other feature that can differentiate it from others. A brand defines the organisation and what it stands for (Aaker 2004; Yu Xie & Boggs 2006). Low and Lamb (2000) maintain that a brand name is a vital

differentiation tool because it allows stakeholders to differentiate between similar products and services in a similar product category. Hakala, Svensson and Vincze (2012) suggest that a brand is distinct from a company. According to Einwiller and Will (2002), a company refers to the place where the products and services are manufactured, whereas a brand is the “personality of the company” and the way it establishes itself in the marketplace.

According to Harris and Chernatony (2001) and Einwiller and Will (2002), in consumer markets, organisations promote their brand rather than their company name. Davies, Chun, Da Silva and Roper (2003:77) add that the corporate name is the first thing that defines a brand. The brand investigated in this study is Nike, and throughout it is referred to almost exclusively as the Nike brand. In the case of Nike, both the company and the brand overlap because the brand name “Nike” is also the name of the parent company – Nike Inc (O’Reilly 2014; Brown 2016). Moreover, a brand name provides ownership and is transferrable (Davies et al 2003:79). In the case of the Nike brand, Nike owns a number of subsidiaries, namely Cole Haan, Bauer Hockey, Converse Inc and Hurley International (Sansui, Lazarev, Jorgensen, Latsanych & Badtiev 2014; Statista 2016). For the above reasons, this study refers to the Nike brand and therefore refers to brand reputation instead of corporate reputation. The next section elaborates on the strategic value of brand reputation.

2.3 THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF BRAND REPUTATION

Owing to financial, economic, organisational and intangible benefits, brand reputation has been attracting increased attention from scholars and practitioners alike (Caruana & Chircop 2000). Various scholars have acknowledged the relationship between brand reputation and its impact on financial performance (Markham 1972; Fombrun & Shanley 1990; Griffin & Mahon 1997; Preston & O’Bannon 1997; Roberts & Dowling 2002; Barnett & Pollock 2012; Feldman, Bahamonde & Bellido 2014; Bălan 2015). However, brand reputation has been recognised as providing numerous other valuable outputs for the organisation not limited to its financial value only (Markham

1972; Stanwick & Stanwick 1998; Argenti & Druckenmiller 2004; Schwaiger 2004; Walsh et al 2009; Barnett & Pollock 2012; Gardberg, 2017).

Although reputation is still an elusive concept and a mixture of constructs (Mak 2005; Barnett & Pollock 2012; Gardberg 2017), it is still a crucial concept. The way in which a brand is perceived has an impact on overall performance (Marconi 1996; Mak 2005; Melo & Margado 2012). According to Davies et al (2003), Schwaiger (2004), Soleimani, et al (2014) and Tischer and Hildebrandt (2014), reputation signals to stakeholders the key characteristics of the brand in order to maximise its status. Reputation in its entirety has a strong signalling influence on stakeholders, which can sway perceptions and feelings (Mak 2005; Soleimani et al 2014). A sound reputation signals different valued outcomes that could indicate good quality and superior performance, and influence the buying decision (Barnett & Pollock 2012). Not only does it signal outcomes that are of value to an organisation, but it also significantly decreases “perceived risks” (Melo & Margado 2012). Reputation also facilitates economic transactions where markets could otherwise be unsuccessful by giving feedback and incentives to the brand to act in certain ways (Barnett & Pollock 2012:8). Olegario and McKenna (2013) argue that reputation can strengthen markets by reinforcing its stakeholders’ beliefs about the brand.

Brand reputation is regarded as an intangible asset (Fan 2005; Davies et al 2003; Afzal, Khan, Rehman, Ali & Wajahat 2009; Dowling & Moran 2012). An intangible asset can find entry into new markets, promote consumer holding and help to achieve a competitive advantage (Markham 1972; Hall 1993; Roberts & Dowling 2002; Barnett & Pollock 2012). A brand’s reputation is regarded not only as an intangible asset, but also as a vulnerable one, because one wrong move could cause major damage overnight (Fan 2005). According to Barnett and Pollock (2012:16) and Fombrun and Shanley (1990), reputation is a strategic asset because it is built through socially complex processes, making it difficult to recreate, which provides a competitive advantage.

Competitive advantage is necessary for companies to survive in the era of globalisation (Nakra 2000; Sarstedt et al 2013). Research has linked reputation

to greater performance and better economic results (Markham 1972; Fombrun & Shanley 1990; Griffin & Mahon 1997; Preston & O'Bannon, 1997; Roberts & Dowling 2002; Barnett & Pollock 2012; Feldman et al 2014; Bălan, 2015). Globalisation has made it more difficult for organisations to remain accountable and proactive in their strategies of reputation and image (Feldman et al 2014).

Good management of reputation can mitigate a crisis (Davies et al 2005; Raithel et al 2010; Feldman et al 2014) or at least allow a company to better deal with it (Bailey & Bonifield 2010). A strong brand reputation can be crucial during a crisis situation to restore stakeholder confidence in the brand or organisation (Coombs & Holladay 2006; Tischer & Hildebrandt 2014). A sound reputation means that the stakeholders will believe and empathise with the brand or organisation and trust the brand despite the negativity surrounding it (Bailey & Bonifield 2010).

According to Griffin (in Guru et al 2013:2), "a damaged reputation can severely hurt the bottom line." However, a positive reputation attracts and retains talented stakeholders and better applicants (Lemmink, Schuijf & Streukens 2003; Brammer & Pavelin 2006; Melo & Morgado 2012). Pérez (2015) adds that not only does a good reputation assist in the recruitment of viable candidates, but also influences employees' productivity and relatability in the organisation's values, and creates strong organisational identification by employees (Raithel et al 2010). Numerous studies have indicated a higher retention and recruitment rate among organisations with a positive reputation (Fombrun & Van Riel 1997; Gray & Balmer 1998; Roberts & Dowling 2002; Chun 2005; Raithel et al 2010). Additional benefits are the fact that a positive reputation garners positive comments from media outlets and more media coverage (Laufer & Coombs 2006) further attracting business partners (Croft & Dalton 2003). According to Schwaiger (2004:48), reputation indicates strategic stances and the current societal standing of the brand.

Numerous researchers and practitioners have also examined the positive association between good reputation, superior brand equity (Cable & Turban 2003; Fan 2005; Mak 2005; Helm 2007), the ability to attract investors

(Schwaiger 2004; Raithel et al 2010), influencing the purchase situation positively (Weigelt & Camerer 1988; Fombrun & Shanley 1990; Walsh & Beatty 2007), and, in turn, higher purchase intention (Fombrun & Shanley 1990; Yoon, Guffey & Kijewski 1993; Brown 1998; Bromley 2003; Roberts & Dowling 2002; Chun 2005; Barnett, Jermier & Lafferty 2006; Helm 2007; Raithel et al 2010; Gatti, Caruana & Snehota 2012).

Reputation is an informative signal about the company's likely output (Roberts & Dowling 2002). With respect to consumers, researchers have found that a buoyant brand reputation increases consumer certainty of the products and services offered, advertising claims, loyalty and the buying decision itself (Weigelt & Camerer 1988; Bromley 2003; Barnett et al 2006; Helm 2007; Walsh & Beatty 2007; Dowling & Moran 2012). Researchers have also suggested that a positive brand reputation over time generally encourages consumer loyalty (Paba 1991; Nakra 2000; Davies et al 2003; Helm 2007; Barnett & Pollock 2012). A positive view of reputation thus increases the stakeholder's confidence and trust in that company's products and services (Brown 1998; Schwaiger 2004; Raithel et al 2010; Tischer & Hildebrandt 2014), therefore reducing postpurchase dissonance (Lafferty & Goldsmith 1999; Raithel et al 2010). This view would therefore reduce uncertainty, build credibility and consequently gain a competitive advantage for the brand (Dowling 2001; Schwaiger 2004; Barnett et al 2006; Raithel et al 2010).

Reputation can be lost within a short time, but it can take a long time to build because reputation is the perception or expectation that is built in the minds of stakeholders through an accumulation of interactions and experiences of the stakeholders and those around them of the particular brand (Fombrun 1996; Tischer & Hildebrandt 2014). Since a brand's reputation is extremely difficult to recreate, it can become a substitute indicator of the quality of the products and services offered (Fombrun 1996; Walsh & Beatty 2007; Raithel et al, 2010). Newell and Goldsmith (2001) further suggest that a positive perception of a brand's reputation leads to brand preference. Having an influence on consumers' buying process results in better consumer retention, corporations

having superior contact with capital markets and a decline in procurement rates and hence higher profitability and stakeholder value (Fombrun & Shanley 1990; Schwaiger 2004; Cretu & Brodie 2007; Raithel et al 2010; Dowling & Moran 2012). According to Davies et al (2003:73), a good reputation is an investment because it can ensure credibility. Research has also indicated that a reputational stance can help to develop a brand through the perceptions of trust and credibility, which can assist with the achievement of organisational goals (Feldman et al 2014:60) and thus become a basis for repeated consumption (Brown & Dacin 1997).

According to Dowling and Moran (2012), previous research, such as Fortune's "Americas Most Admired Companies", Edelman's "Corporate Trust Barometer", the Economist Intelligence Unit's "Refocusing Reputation Management" and the Reputation Institute's "Reputation Quotient", all concludes that reputation management is a necessary strategy for a company to succeed against its competition. Reputations are challenging to duplicate because they stem from distinctive interactions, and the perceptions emanating from these interactions suggest to others what a brand stands for (Fombrun & Van Riel 1997; Smaiziene & Jucevicius 2009).

Ultimately, having stakeholder support allows numerous resources to become available for a company (Barnett & Pollock 2012:104). Through stakeholder support, brands can achieve top-of-mind awareness and better overall financial performance (Davies et al 2003; Feldman et al 2014). With regard to consumers, a positive reputation would mean that they will think positively of the brand as a whole and tell others about it (Chun 2005). Consumers will tell others about the brand, based on the relationship they have with that company and how consistent this relationship has been (Smythe, Dorward & Reback 1992; Raithel et al 2010; Barnett & Pollock 2012).

Hence from a strategic perspective, brand reputation is an asset of great value, allowing brands to better differentiate and position themselves (Davies et al 2003; Feldman et al 2014). Brand reputation fulfils all the qualities required by a

strategic resource because it is a scarce resource among competitors, it is difficult to emulate, it is extremely applicable and valuable, and there is no substitute for it (Feldman et al 2014).

Perceptions, in turn, create brand reputation and stimulate stakeholder loyalty and support, which allow brands to have a better social and economic standing (Paba 1991). Academics and practitioners alike consider the constructing and sustaining of a positive reputation as a valuable intangible asset that is not only scarce, but also difficult for a competitor to imitate (Fombrun 1996; Mahon 2002; Schwaiger 2004; Feldman et al 2014). It is evident from these observations that reputation does not have an equivalent strategic substitute.

Table 2.1: The strategic value of brand reputation

<i>Positive reputation can...</i>	<i>Scholars</i>
<i>be regarded as an intangible asset</i>	Davies et al (2003); Fan (2005); Afzal et al (2009); Dowling and Moran (2012); Gardberg (2017)
<i>be regarded as a strategic and vulnerable asset</i>	Fombrun and Shanley (1990); Fan (2005); Barnett and Pollock (2012)
<i>create a competitive advantage</i>	Markham (1972); Hall (1993); Dowling (2001); Roberts and Dowling (2002); Dowling and Moran (2012); Schwaiger (2004); Barnett et al (2006); Raithel et al (2010); Barnett and Pollock (2012)
<i>have an impact on financial performance and value</i>	Markham (1972); Fombrun and Shanley (1990); Paba (1991); Griffin and Mahon (1997); Preston and O'Bannon (1997); Roberts and Dowling (2002); Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004); Schwaiger (2004); Cretu and Brodie (2007); Walsh et al (2009); Raithel et al (2010); Dowling and Moran (2012); Feldman, Bahamonde and Bellido (2014); Bălan (2015); Gardberg (2017)
<i>impact overall performance</i>	Marconi (1996); Mak (2005); Melo and Margado (2012)
<i>be a signal to stakeholders</i>	Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) ; Davies et al (2003) ; Tischer and Hildebrandt (2014) ; Soleimani et al (2014)
<i>be a tool to enhance status</i>	Davies et al (2003); Schwaiger (2004); Soleimani et al (2014); Tischer and Hildebrandt (2014)
<i>facilitate economic transaction by giving feedback</i>	Barnett and Pollock (2012); Tischer and Hildebrandt(2014)
<i>strengthen markets</i>	Olegario and McKenna (2013)
<i>Entry into new markets</i>	Markham (1972); Hall (1993); Roberts and Dowling (2002); Barnett and Pollock (2012)
<i>assist in consumer holding and</i>	Markham (1972); Hall (1993); Brown and Dacin (1997); Roberts

<i>repeated consumption</i>	and Dowling (2002); Barnett and Pollock (2012); Tischer and Hildebrandt (2014)
<i>assist in mitigating a crisis</i>	Davies et al (2003); Coombs and Holladay (2006); Bailey and Bonifield (2010); Raithel et al (2010); Feldman et al (2014)
<i>retain talent and better applicants</i>	Lemmink et al (2003);Brammer and Pavelin (2006); Melo and Morgado (2012)
<i>increase stakeholder confidence</i>	Schwaiger (2004); Coombs and Holladay, 2006; Raithel et al (2010); Barnett and Pollock (2012); Feldman et al (2014); Tischer and Hildebrandt (2014); Pérez (2015)
<i>garner positive comments from media outlets and attract more media coverage</i>	Laufer and Coombs (2006)
<i>attract more business partners</i>	Croft and Dalton (2003)
<i>mean a superior brand equity</i>	Cable and Turban (2003); Fan (2005); Mak (2005); Helm (2007)
<i>attract investors</i>	Schwaiger (2004); Raithel et al (2010)
<i>influence the purchase situation positively</i>	Weigelt and Camerer (1988); Fombrun and Shanley (1990); Walsh and Beatty (2007);Tischer and Hildebrandt (2014)
<i>result in higher purchase intention</i>	Fombrun and Shanley (1990); Yoon et al (1993); Brown (1998); Bromley (2002); Roberts and Dowling (2002); Barnett et al (2006); Raithel et al (2010); Gatti et al (2012); Chun (2005); Helm (2007)
<i>increase the consumer certainty of the products and services offered</i>	Weigelt and Camerer (1988); Smythe et al (1992); Brown (1998); Fombrun (1996); Bromley (2002); Schwaiger (2004); Barnett et al (2006); Helm (2007); Walsh and Beatty (2007); Raithel et al (2010); Barnett and Pollock (2012); Dowling and Moran (2012)
<i>help retain stakeholder loyalty</i>	Paba (1991); Nakra (2000); Davies et al (2003); Helm(2007); Weigelt and Camerer (1988); Bromley (2002); Barnett et al (2006); Helm (2007); Walsh and Beatty (2007); Barnett and Pollock (2012); Dowling and Moran (2012); Tischer and Hildebrandt (2014)
<i>build trust and credibility</i>	Brown (1998); Dowling (2001); Schwaiger (2004); Barnett et al (2006); Raithel et al (2010); Feldman et al (2014)
<i>reduce postpurchase dissonance</i>	Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999); Raithel et al (2010)
<i>become a substitute indicator of the quality of the products and services offered</i>	Davies et al (2003); Walsh and Betty (2007); Raithel et al (2010)
<i>lead to brand preference</i>	Newell and Goldsmith (2001)
<i>increase confidence in advertising claims</i>	Weigelt and Camerer (1988); Bromley (2002); Barnett et al (2006); Helm (2007); Walsh and Beatty (2007); Dowling and Moran (2012)
<i>give superior contact to capital markets</i>	Fombrun and Shanley (1990); Schwaiger (2004); Cretu and Brodie (2007); Raithel et al (2010); Dowling and Moran (2012)

<i>decrease procurement rates</i>	Fombrun and Shanley (1990); Schwaiger (2004); Cretu and Brodie (2007); Raithel et al (2010); Dowling and Moran (2012);
<i>result in top-of-mind awareness</i>	Smythe et al (1992); Davies et al (2003); Chun (2005); Raithel et al (2010); Barnett and Pollock (2012) ; Feldman et al (2014)

Table 2.1 summarises the above discussion on the strategic value of reputation for a brand. The next section attempts to holistically define the term “brand reputation”.

2.4 DEFINING BRAND REPUTATION

Brand reputation has received extensive attention from practitioners and scholars in academic literature. It has also received a lot more attention recently than ever before (Barnett et al 2006; Barnett & Pollock 2012). Despite the increased attention, there is no unanimity in the definition of reputation. Definitional clarity is vital in the precise measurement of reputation, in order to clarify boundaries and add value by providing insight into various underlying definitions and assumptions (Barnett & Pollock 2012:13).

Reputation has already been established as an intangible asset (Davies et al 2003; Fan 2005; Afzal et al 2009; Dowling & Moran 2012). Davies et al (2003:63) define reputation as the overall outcome of combined views and assessments, which are based on information and experience that people have of a certain brand. Fombrun and Gardberg (2000:243) define reputation as “combined assessments of an organisation’s ability to provide valued outcomes to a representative group of stakeholders”. Similarly, Fombrun (1996:12) describes reputation as “a perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects that describes the firm’s overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals”. Wang, Kandampully, Po Lo & Shi (2006:183) add that reputation is the collective perception of previous transactions over a period of time.

Zulhamri (2009) also suggests that the values that stakeholders attribute to a brand are based on their perception and how they interpret that brand’s reputation over a period of time. This means that stakeholder perceptions of

reputations are built over a period of time and that they are not constant and may change – hence the decision that the current cross-sectional study would only measure the perceived reputation of Nike at a period in time because this perceived reputation might change over time.

Scholars like Fombrun (1996) and Omar et al (2009) see reputation as the “signals” that organisations send to the stakeholders of their key attributes in order to distinguish themselves from their competitors. Wang et al (2006) add that reputation is not only an overall appeal, but the overall cognitive attitude (with respect to consumers) of a brand’s past performances, judged in terms of its image, identity and different marketing communications. Rindovo and Martins (2012) also recognise the relationship between reputation and other concepts like image and identity. However, Bromley (2000), Fombrun (1996) and Mak (2005) add that reputation is not analogous to identity and image, but rather contributes to the development of reputation.

Guru et al (2013:1) similarly describe reputation as “the sum values that stakeholders attribute to a company, based on their perception and interpretation of the image that the company communicates over time”. Gotsi and Wilson (2001) concur that reputation is a compilation of multiple images and experiences of multiple stakeholder groups. According to Giardini, Totso and Conte (2008) reputation is based on global assessments. Bromley (1993), Fombrun (1996) and Barnett et al (2006:34) maintain that reputation is created from the bottom up, based on stakeholders’ social economic, environmental personal and financial variables over time.

Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) identify reputation as the aggregate perceptions of many stakeholders of the prominent characteristics of a brand over a period of time. Reputation is a communal and multidimensional construct that is the collective perception of many individuals (Fombrun 1996:242; Wartick 2002). Dowling and Moran (2012) add that stakeholders appreciate companies that foster a strong reputation by indicating consistent performances.

The concept of reputation in the minds of stakeholders is not only a collective representation of the brand's past actions and outcomes, but also its ability to deliver valued outcomes to numerous stakeholders (Fombrun & Rindova 1996; Gardberg 2017). In forming brand perceptions, individuals draw on various sources over different time periods in order to form perceptions of reputation (Chernatony 1999; Barnett & Pollock 2012).

Schwaiger (2004) and Saeidi, Sofian, Saeidi, Saeidi and Saaedi (2015) maintain that reputation is the outcome of satisfying interactions with the brand's product. Brown and Dacin (1997) add that reputation is a set of "mental associations". Similarly, brands with a good reputation are demarcated to have a successful emotional link with their consumers (Fombrun 1996; Davies et al 2003). According to Fombrun and Van Riel (1997), reputation is subjective in nature. The increase of subjective rankings such as "most admired" or "most innovative" demonstrates the significance of using subjective (cognitive and rational) attitudes to assess brands (Fombrun 1996:6).

Schwaiger (2004) and Raithel et al (2010) believe that reputation is attitudinal, based on the cognitive and affective attitudes of key constituents. The emotional and rational nature of the attitudes surrounding reputation makes it necessary to define and understand reputation through their integration (Schwaiger 2004; Walsh & Beatty 2007; Raithel et al 2010). In their study, Barnett et al (2006) recognised reputation as a state of awareness and assessment. Other authors also regard reputation as a state of awareness (Fombrun 1996; Gray & Balmer 1998; Balmer 2001; Mahon 2002; Roberts & Dowling 2002; Larkin 2002; Wartick 2002; Pharoah 2003; Argenti & Druckenmiller 2004; Barnett et al 2006).

In order to describe reputation, some researchers focus on its attributes. These include the following: trust, reliability and integrity (Fombrun 1996; Dowling 2001; Mui et al 2002; Roberts & Dowling 2002; Rose & Thomsen 2004; Fan 2005; Jøsang, Ismail & Boyd 2007; Raithel et al 2010; Park, Lee & Kim 2014); the quality and performance of products and services offered (Roberts &

Dowling 2002; Rindova, Williamson, Petkova & Sever 2005; Raithel et al 2010); responsibility (Smythe et al 1992; Fombrun & Van Riel 2004; Schnietz & Esptein 2005; Tucker & Melewar 2005; Brammer & Pavelin 2006; Raithel et al, 2010; Saeidi et al 2015); and overall impression (Fombrun 1996; Schwaiger 2004; Kottasz & Bennett 2005; Rindovo, Williamson, Petkova & Sever 2005; Barnett et al 2006; San Martín & Del Bosque 2008; Boyd, Bergh & Ketchen 2010).

Reputation is also delineated through perceptions of brand attractiveness and likeability (Fombrun 1996; Fombrun & Van Riel 1997; Bailey & Bonifield 2010; Nguyena, Melewar & Chen 2013); respect and admiration (Smythe et al 1992; Fombrun & Gardberg 2000; Dowling 2001; Vidaver-Cohen 2007; Dowling & Moran 2012); and loyalty (Walsh & Wieldmann 2004; Balmer & Greyser 2006; Walsh & Beatty 2007; Akbar & Parvez 2009; De Cannière, De Pelsmacker & Geuens 2009; Loureiro & Kastenholtz 2011; Barnett & Pollock 2012).

Fombrun, Gardberg and Sever (2000:243) define reputation as “combined assessments of an organisation’s ability to provide valued outcomes to a representative group of stakeholders”. According to Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) and Giardini et al (2008), reputation is based on global assessments. Bromley (1993), Fombrun (1996) and Barnett et al (2006:34) maintain that reputation is created from the bottom up, based on stakeholders’ social economic, environmental, personal and financial variables over time. Table 2.2 summarises the above discussion and highlights the main assumptions in defining brand reputation.

Table 2.2: Summary of the main assumptions in defining brand reputation

Reputation is ...	Scholars
the "signals" that distinguish the brand	Fombrun (1996); Omar et al (2009)
multidimensional	Fombrun (1996); Wartick (2002)
collective perceptions	Fombrun (1996); Gotsi and Wilson (2001); Wartick (2002); Davies et al (2003); Wang et al (2006);

	Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009); Zulhamri (2009)
valued outcomes	Fombrun and Rindova (1996); Fombrun et al (2000); Guru et al (2013); Gardberg (2017)
constructed on past actions and future prospects	Fombrun (1996); Wang et al (2006)
built on collective information and experiences by stakeholders	Fombrun (1996); Gotsi and Wilson (2001); Wartick (2002); Davies et al (2003); Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009); Zulhamri (2009)
based on stakeholders' social, economic and personal needs from the brand	Bromley (1993); Fombrun (1996); Barnett et al (2006)
created over a period of time	Fombrun and Shanley (1990); Bromley (1993); Barnett et al (2006); Wang et al (2006); Gotsi and Wilson (2006); Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009); Zulhamri (2009)
the brand's overall appeal	Fombrun (1996)
the distinguishing factor relating to competitors	Fombrun (1996); Omar et al (2009); Gardberg (2017)
the outcome of satisfied interactions	Schwaiger (2004); Saeidi et al (2015)
a global assessment	Gioia et al. (2000); Giardini et al (2008)
the combination of stakeholder attitudes	Schwaiger, (2004); Mak (2005); Walsh and Beatty (2007); Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009); Raitheal et al (2010)
the overall cognitive impression	Wang et al (2006)
judged in terms of its image, identity and different marketing communications	Wang et al (2006)
inclusive of image and identity	Rindova (1997); Bromley (1993), Fombrun (1996); Mak (2005)
not synonymous with identity and image	Bromley (1993); Fombrun (1996); Mak (2005)
the emotional link with consumers	Fombrun (1996) ; Davies et al (2003)
centred on emotional attitudes	Fombrun (1996); Fombrun and Van Riel (1997); Schwaiger (2004); Raitheal et al (2010)
based on cognitive and affective attitudes	Schwaiger (2004); Walsh and Beatty (2007); Raitheal et al (2010)
delineated through perceptions of	
awareness	Fombrun, (1996); Gray and Balmer (1998); Balmer, (2001); Fombrun, (2001); Mahon (2002); Roberts and Dowling (2002); Larkin (2002); Wartick (2002);

<i>trust, reliability and integrity</i>	Pharoah (2003); Argenti and Druckenmiller, (2004); Barnett et al (2006)
<i>the quality and performance of products and services offered</i>	Fombrun (1996); Dowling, (2001); Mui et al (2002); Roberts and Dowling (2002); Rose and Thomsen (2004); Fan (2005); Jøsang et al (2007); Raithel et al (2010); Park et al (2014)
<i>responsibility</i>	Roberts and Dowling (2002); Rindova et al (2005); Raithel et al (2010)
<i>overall impression</i>	Smythe et al (1992); Fombrun and Van Riel (2004); Schnietz and Esptein (2005); Tucker and Melewar (2005); Brammer and Paveline (2006); Raithel et al (2010); Saeidi et al (2015)
<i>attractiveness and likeability</i>	Fombrun (1996); Schwaiger (2004); Kottasz and Bennett (2005); Rindovo et al (2005); Barnett et al (2006); San Martin and Del Bosque (2008); Boyd et al (2010)
<i>respect and admiration</i>	Fombrun and Van Riel (1997); Fombrun (1998); Bailey and Bonifield (2010); Nguyena et al (2013)
<i>loyalty</i>	Smythe et al (1992); Fombrun and Gardberg (2000); Dowling (2001); Vidaver-Cohen (2007); Dowling and Moran (2012)
	Walsh and Wiedmann (2004); Balmer and Greyser (2006); Walsh and Beatty (2007); Akbar and Parvez (2009); De Cannière et al (2009); Loureiro and Kastenholz (2011); Barnett and Pollock (2012)

From the above discussion, one can formulate and define brand reputation as follows:

Brand reputation is the value outcome of cognitive (rational) and affective (emotional) attitudes derived from a particular stakeholder's social, economic and personal needs of a brand over time.

The above definition was used in this study to conceptualise brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The next section describes the concepts relating to brand reputation.

2.5 CONCEPTS RELATING TO BRAND REPUTATION

There have been significant advances in defining reputation and portraying reputation as a concept of strategic value. However, differentiating it from related concepts is necessary in order to completely understand reputation as a construct in itself. Brand reputation is a concept that is often confused with identity, image and equity. Although image, identity and equity are used synonymously or work closely with reputation (Wartick 2002; Barnett & Pollock 2012), they are not exact synonyms.

These concepts were separated and described in terms of the different roles they play in reputational development. Although the concepts of brand identity, image and reputation are distinct from each other, they are definitely interconnected (Christensen & Askegaard 2001; Omar et al 2009). Research that empirically differentiates and explores the relationship between reputation and related concepts can be practically and theoretically valuable (Barnett & Pollock 2012).

There is no generally accepted definition of brand identity (Olins 1994; Bhattacharya & Sen 2003; Omar et al 2009). Identity has been subdivided into two sections in the literature, namely visual and organisational identity. Visual identity refers to the various visual cues that a brand holds as part of its corporate communications policy (Olins 1994; Gioia et al 2000; Davies et al 2003). It includes the brand's name, typeface and design of its logo, slogan, colour and anything else related to the brand's graphic design (Davies et al 2003; Van den Bosch, De Jong & Elving 2005). Visual identity further exists in the trademark and design of its buildings and products (Selame & Selame 1988; Davies et al 2003:128). Hence visual identity is described as a multidimensional (visual) mode in which a company communicates its key traits to stakeholders (Fombrun 1996; Balmer & Greyser 2003). Organisational identity, however,

refers to the way in which internal members collectively perceive the values and principles of a brand that contribute to the uniqueness of an organisation (Olins 1994; Van den Bosch et al 2005; Barnett et al 2006).

Brand image is the way in which the company presents itself and wishes to be seen, whether it is planned, unplanned or accidental (Marconi 1996; Fombrun 1996; Selame & Selame 1988; Wartick 2002, Balmer & Greyser 2003). Brand image reflects current, changing perceptions that individual/individuals has/have of an organisation at a specific point in time (Lemmink et al 2003). Brown et al (2006) view identity as the “internal view” or the brand’s “self-perception”, whereas image is the desired view that the brand wishes its stakeholders to see. Reputation is then viewed as the external view, the actual perception of the brand by stakeholders (Barnett & Pollock 2006; Veloutsou & Moutinho 2009).

Reputation is explained as a more concrete external assessment of a brand than image because it does not focus on the latest impression as an interpreter for impending stakeholder results (Marconi 1996; Garbett 1988; Chernatony 1999). The perceptions that stakeholder groups have of a brand are therefore the reality of the brand for that specific stakeholder – not the brand itself (Balmer & Grayser 2003; Brown et al 2006).

Brand reputation, in contrast to a brand’s image, is more stable and represents the perceptions of numerous images over time (Selame & Selame 1988; Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997, 2004; Gray & Balmer 1998), giving the notion a more permanent nature than image. In the evaluations of stakeholder perceptions, reputation provides a far more representative indication of brand performance and success than image or identity (Harris & Chernatony 2001).

A way in which to demarcate the concepts of brand reputation, brand image and brand identity is to view them as different forms of brand associations (Brown & Dacin 1997). In an attempt to distinguish the above concepts, Brown and Dacin (1997:69) categorise them into the following four types of associations: (1) identity is referred to as the “mental associations by internal organisational members”; (2) intended image is what the organisational leaders want

stakeholders to have mental associations of; (3) constructed image, which is referred to as the mental associations that people inside the organisation think the external public holds; and (4) reputation is what the external stakeholders actually think of the organisation. Hence the key distinction between identity, image and reputation seems to be the type of stakeholder who is doing the assessment of the brand.

Postmodern researchers view image as what the brand is trying to portray (Marconi 1996). By contrast, reputation is the perception of these images and experiences that stakeholders have with the brand (including internal identity) over time (Pruzan 2001; Veloutsou & Moutinho 2009). Brand reputation is the way in which a select group of stakeholders actually conceptualise the brand, and is arguably the aggregation of identity and image (Wartick 2002). Reputation captures evaluations from previous experiences and can reflect a company's identity and image (Fombrun & Van Riel 1997; Selame & Selame 1988; Gray & Balmer 1988).

The aggregation of identity and image determines brand equity (Erdem & Swait 1998; Schwaiger, 2004; Van Riel & Balmer 2007; Abratt & Kleyn 2012). Brand equity is closely related to the concept of reputational capital, which was introduced by Fombrun (in Beneke 2011). In simple terms, brand equity is the marketable value that is derived from the consumer's perception of the brand (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble & Donthu 1995). Furthermore, according to Cobb-Walgren et al (1995), consumers are the first stakeholder group to determine brand equity. Brand equity also contributes to increasing competitiveness through the promotion of a good reputation (Wang et al 2006). This means that a positive reputation can directly enhance brand equity, which, in turn, can influence the way in which the organisation wishes to be perceived (brand image) (Barnett & Pollock 2012). From the above discussion, it can be deduced that image is the way in which a brand wants to be perceived; organisational identity is the way in which employees perceive the image; and visual identity includes the perception of the graphics of the company from its logo to its slogan. The combination of the above can influence stakeholders' perception of

reputation, which, in turn, can enhance brand equity. Figure 2.1 below indicates that the different concepts (organisational and visual identity, image, equity and reputation) are intertwined, but also distinct from one another. Since the main distinction in the concepts relating to reputation is the type of stakeholder doing the assessment, the next section focuses on consumer-based reputation (CBR). This was deemed especially relevant to this study because brand reputation was delineated through the perceptions and attitudes of consumers, with this stakeholder group comprising the participant cohort in this study.

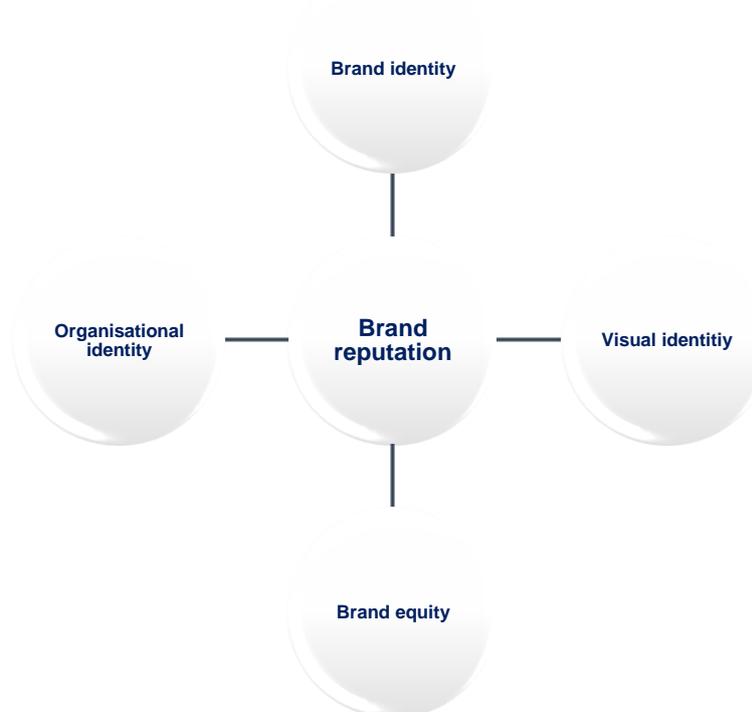


Figure 2.1: Concepts relating to brand reputation

2.6 CONSUMER-BASED REPUTATION (CBR)

There is ambiguity in both defining and conceptualising brand reputation. That said, most definitions seem to explain reputation around a commonality of perceptions of what a brand stands for among particular or collective stakeholder groups (Fombrun & Van Riel 1997, 2004; Rose & Thomsen 2004; Raithel et al 2010). Reputation describes how well a brand interacts with its

stakeholders. Hence the way in which stakeholders (interest groups) perceive the brand is vital (Freeman 1999). Since these stakeholders are individuals or groups in which the company operates, they are the direct or indirect objectives of the company's communications. Stakeholders have a differential supremacy in affecting a company's ability to achieve its objectives (Donaldson 1999; Barnett & Pollock 2012). Raithel et al (2010:397) argue that the "combined dynamics of all stakeholders are much more representative of the multitude effects of events that shape overall corporate reputation than the dynamics of perceptions of a single stakeholder". A superior understanding of specific stakeholder perceptions about the brand helps define a type of reputational platform where reputation can be measured (Feldman et al 2014:57).

The inference in some definitions of brand reputation is that all stakeholder groups have similar views and share a common value system (Markham 1972; Marconi 1996; Walsh & Beatty 2007). However, the assumption that all stakeholder groups will have similar experiences, interactions and relevance is questionable (Fombrun et al 2000; Pruzan 2001). All stakeholder groups need not have the same unilateral perception of the brand (Davies et al 2003). Freeman (1984) and Walsh et al (2009) concur that each stakeholder group will have different perceptions based on their needs and relationship with the brand. Hence all stakeholder groups cannot be measured or defined in the same manner. Different stakeholders have different needs and views of reputation (Raithel et al 2010). For example, a consumer's interest lies in the quality of products and services, whereas an employee's interest lays in the benefits he or she receives from that brand (medical aid, etc).

Larson (2011) further argues that a brand is not only an assortment of perceptions, but also a "set of perceptions" that are common and persistent in the minds of similar stakeholder groups. Bromley (2000) and Mahon (2002) add that the difference of opinion regarding the reputation of different stakeholders is based on the different contexts and interpretation of information that different stakeholders receive. It is vital to note that brand reputation could be subject to changes being effected in the social environment or by strategies implemented

by the company itself (Mahon 2002). Different stakeholders are thus likely to have different perceptions of the brand, based on differing information received by them (an employee may have a positive perception of the organisation's reputation, whereas the consumer may perceive it negatively, or vice versa). Hence a brand can have "multiple reputations" (Smythe et al 1992; Pruzan 2001; Barnett & Pollock 2012).

The focus of prior research has not been on single stakeholder perceptions but on multiple stakeholders (Walsh & Beatty 2007; Helm & Klode 2011). Even though it is beneficial to understand reputation as an aggregate of the perceptions of various stakeholders, the concept in its entirety is difficult to measure and capture (Laufer & Coombs 2006). The much-needed focus on CBR is far less common, with the exception of a few existing reputation measures that are interested in stakeholder groups such as consumers or the general public (Laufer & Coombs 2006; Walsh & Beatty 2007). This is despite the fact that consumers are arguably one of the most important stakeholder groups to assess brand reputation, not only because the communication strategy and advertising focus messages on these stakeholders, but also because they create revenue streams and sustainability for that particular brand (Walsh & Beatty 2007; Barnett & Pollock 2012).

According to Davies et al (2003:43), reputation is a strategic communication tool that allows brands to achieve their objectives. This communication feedback is bottom-up approval, which allows the brand to understand the market and where it stands before implementing strategies in that specific market (Davies et al 2003). Bottom-up approval is centred on consumers upon whom the brand is focusing its communications, strategies and products and services (Cornelissen 2008).

Consumers and target consumers are the stakeholders whose perceptions the brand wants to sway favourably (Mak 2005; Abratt, & Kleyn 2012). Many scholars support the idea that reputation is the reason why consumers buy a specific brand's products or services (Smythe et al 1992; Mak 2005; Veloutsou & Moutinho 2009). Caruana and Chircop (2006) concur that consumers'

perceptions of reputation are most salient to brands. Consumers are the carriers of income and information, by means of word of mouth (WOM) and purchase behaviour (Raithel et al 2010; Barnett & Pollock 2012). The advent of online communications and WOM could influence many other stakeholder groups (Walsh & Wiedmann 2004; Barnett & Pollock 2012). Consumers therefore have the power to influence and can be influenced by other stakeholders or institutional intermediaries of a particular brand (Davies et al 2003; Mak 2005). Consumers are arguably the most important stakeholders for a brand, and sometimes their interest and perceptions are the most crucial for brand strategy (Davies et al 2003; Fan 2005; Barnett & Pollock 2012:18) – hence the need to assess the perceptions of consumers as a stakeholder group.

Consumers can view brand reputation through information received about the brand or through personal experiences and interactions (Walsh & Beatty 2007). Previous research suggests that when a brand is attractive, consumers are drawn to it because it forms part of their social identity (Hong & Yang 2009). According to Fombrun and Van Riel (1997), reputation builds “identification”, which means that the more the stakeholder identifies with the brand, the higher the chances are that the brand can generate a positive reputation.

CBR (or only the perceptions of consumers of the brand’s reputation) is the “overall evaluation of a firm based on his or her reactions to the firm’s goods and service, communication activities, interactions with the firm and/or its representatives or constituencies (such as employees, management, or other consumers) and/or known corporate activities” (Walsh & Beatty 2007:129). Studies suggest that CBR is significant because a positive reputation can act as a risk suppressor (Fombrun & Rindova 1996; Fombrun & Van Riel 2004; Omar et al 2009). CBR is a distinctive concept that was relevant to the current study. It differs from the other theories of brand reputation in which various stakeholders assess the brand.

Walsh et al (2009) contend that consumers are more likely to have a more noteworthy relationship with the brand than other stakeholder groups.

Consumers form relationships with and perceptions of a brand, based on their opinions of the constructs that build reputation (Veloutsou & Moutinho 2009). The above argument highlights the importance of consumers as a stakeholder group in conceptualising brand reputation. The next section explains the cross-disciplinary nature of brand reputation by explaining the way in which different academic researchers theorise and focus on certain elements and stakeholder groups when conceptualising brand reputation.

2.7 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF BRAND REPUTATION

The proliferation and variation in reputation philosophies make it difficult to classify reputation. Definitions of reputation overlap and add diversity to the cross-disciplinary nature of the concept. Despite differences of opinion regarding the definition of brand reputation, there are also various approaches to the conceptualisation and measurement of reputation. Chun (2005) suggests a framework that divides reputation into three schools of thought primarily based on the relationship with stakeholders, namely the evaluative, impressional and relational schools of thought. Barnett and Pollock (2012) also refer to three main theories relating to reputation – that is, game theory, socio constructivist theory and institutional theory. Furthermore, the overriding theories of reputation, namely stakeholder theory and signalling theory, are discussed. Chun's (2005) school of thought is discussed in relation to a few reputation theories. In addition, the cross-disciplinary viewpoints are discussed along with the dominant theories of reputation, in an attempt to holistically understand the concept of reputation.

The following subsection specifically highlights Chun's (2005) schools of thought and various theories in conceptualising brand reputation.

2.7.1 Theoretical conceptualisation of brand reputation

Chun's (2005) framework classifies reputation into three main schools of thought. This includes the *impressional school of thought* (similar to game theory), which considers reputation as the overall impression of the brand, not based on financial figures but on image, identity and personality (Chun 2005;

Bălan 2015). The impressional school of thought is mainly used by scholars in marketing and organisational theory (Bălan, 2015). The *evaluative school of thought* (similar to institutional theory) views reputation as the assessment of the brand's achievements, which are established through social beliefs (Helm & Klode 2011).

Reputation measures such as "Fortune's annual most admired companies survey" and the "Reputation Institute's reputation quotient" (Fombrun & Gardberg 2000; Davies et al 2003; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004) are prominent examples of this school of thought (Helm & Klode 2011). According to Chun (2005), the evaluative and impressional schools of thought are concerned with a single stakeholder group's perception of reputation.

The *relational school of thought*, unlike the previous two schools of thought, measures reputation through the difference in internal and external views (Bălan 2015) (somewhat like *socio constructivist theory*). The relational school of thought sees reputation as a global phenomenon where all stakeholder perceptions count (Bălan 2015). This school of thought is based on the different perceptions held by internal and external stakeholders (Chun 2005; Helm & Klode 2011), much like stakeholder theory and socio constructivist theory, which recognise the fact that different stakeholders have different needs and thus different perceptions of the brand (Gotsi & Wilson 2001). The relational school of thought is embedded in the disciplines of economics, sociology, strategy and psychology (Gotsi & Wilson 2001). This school of thought further emphasises that reputation creates value by providing a competitive advantage (Helm & Klode 2011).

According to Fombrun (1996), reputation is closely related to *stakeholder theory*. Stakeholder theory has its roots in numerous disciplines, including sociology, marketing, economics and organisational theory (Jensen 2001). The core concept of stakeholder theory is that organisations have an obligation to all stakeholders, and the emphasis is on the nexus of relationships. Freeman (1984:24) defines stakeholders as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisations objective". In other words, an

individual or group who can significantly affect or be affected by the organisation is regarded as a stakeholder (Jones & Wicks 1999). The assumption is that organisations that are known to have sound reputations influence stakeholder attitudes, and vice versa (Rose & Thompson 2004). Stakeholder theory underscores the importance of all stakeholders or those with a stake in the brand (Jensen 2001; Barnett & Pollock 2012).

Signalling theory, unlike stakeholder theory, postulates that information is not symmetrical or received by all stakeholders at the same time (Mak 2005). A good reputation is a signal to stakeholders that reduces risk and attracts stakeholders towards the product in question (O’Riordan & Fairbrass 2008). Signalling theory therefore suggests that reputation signals are sent to stakeholders and that all stakeholders will receive different signals at different times, which means that all stakeholders will not view and process reputation signals the same.

There are many theoretical concepts surrounding reputation. In an effort to showcase the different disciplinary views of reputation, the next subsection highlights the theoretical cross-disciplinary viewpoints of reputation, which include areas of accounting, marketing, strategy, economics, organisational theory, sociology and psychology.

2.7.2 Brand reputation as a cross-disciplinary and multidimensional concept

Since reputation is constantly evolving, it is conceptualised as a dimensional or multidimensional concept (Feldman et al 2014). Researchers such as Robertson (1995), view and measure reputation as one-dimensional. However, more recently, brand reputation has been accepted as a multidimensional concept (Davies et al 2003; Walsh & Weidmann 2004; Rhee & Valdez 2009; Smaiziene & Jucevicius, 2009; Rindovo & Martins 2012).

Furthermore, Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) have emphasised how various disciplines view reputation. Brand reputation is by nature interdisciplinary. This is because its interest is in many different academic disciplines (Chun 2005).

Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) have also underscored how various disciplines theoretically view reputation. The various academic disciplines are highlighted below.

The discipline of sociology regards reputation as a sociocognitive phenomenon (Fombrun & Van Riel 1997), drawing attention to the fact that key role players have different expectations and needs based on their relationship with the brand (Whitmeyer 2000; Gotsi & Wilson 2001; Bălan 2015). Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) add that in sociology, reputation is viewed as sociocognitive processes that indicate legitimacy. The sociological view, alongside stakeholder theory, regards reputation as a means to gain trust in order to gain legitimacy among various stakeholders that can indicate future performance (Ashforth & Gibbs 1990; Bălan 2015).

In the accounting discipline reputation is regarded as an intangible asset that has financial value that contributes to the brand's equity (Hall 1993; Fombrun & Van Riel 1997; Roberts & Dowling 2002; Dolphin 2004). Reputation is not only seen as an intangible asset, but also one that is developed through "sustained social interactions in which past impressions affect future behaviours" (Fombrun & Rindova 1999:706).

To organisational practitioners, reputation takes a different meaning and definitions that have emerged from this discipline place the company's employees in a central role (Gioia et al 2000; Gotsi & Wilson 2001). Human resources define the culture and the identity of an organisation, which ultimately affect the way in which the company interacts and establishes relationships with other groups of stakeholders. Hence employees act as the representatives of reputation and enhance it (Gotsi & Wilson 2001; Whetten & Mackey 2002).

Balmer and Greyser (2006) add that employees, specifically managers, play a key role in making the right decisions for the brand. They further state that these strategic decisions (image) are based on internal identity and culture (Balmer & Greyser 2006). Organisational theorists thus consider brand image and identity in order to build positive relationships with employees in an effort to enhance

reputation. In organisational theory, corporate culture influences employees' perceptions and attitudes, while corporate identity shapes managers' capacity to interpret the information available in the market and influence reactions to stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel 1997; Yang & Grunig 2005). However, insights from previous research have established that this relationship is also two-dimensional (Balmer & Greyser 2006; Balmer 2008).

Those individuals who view reputation through the discipline of marketing primarily focus on a single stakeholder group and further emphasise the importance of loyalty, trust and other emotional attitudes among stakeholders, particularly consumers (Dowling 1993; Bromley 1993; Brown & Dacin 1997; Lane Keller 1999; Balmer & Greyser 2006; Smaiziene & Jucevicius 2009; Bălan, 2015). They also posit that identity and image play a crucial role in the formation of reputation (Balmer & Greyser 2006).

Psychology theorists, like marketing theorists, also focus on the subjective feelings (such as trust, admiration and respect) of stakeholders who shape reputation (Jøsang et al 2007; Zhang 2009; Zhang & Schwaiger 2009). Moreover, in this discipline, reputation is viewed as a combination of various idiosyncratic attitudes towards an organisation by various stakeholders (Croft & Dalton 2003; Bhattacharya & Sen 2003).

In the discipline of strategy, the focus of reputation is to create a competitive advantage, which helps to create an intangible asset (Weigelt & Camerer 1988; Fombrun & Shanley 1990; Mahon 2002; Bălan, 2015). According to Roberts and Dowling (2002:56), reputation can "limit competitors by creating a market entry barrier" and by providing intrinsic values to its stakeholders. Helm (2007) and Davies et al (2003) both underscore the importance of reputation from a strategic perspective, and state that reputation can reduce the perception of risk and thus indicate a competitive advantage.

In the discipline of economics, the main assumption is that past actions "signal" reputation, based on certain attributes of the stakeholders and not only financial figures (Fombrun & Van Riel 1997; Davies et al 2003; Chun 2005). An example

of this attribute is the “perceived quality” of products and services (Chun 2005). Early research on reputation has influenced how economic research used game theory perspectives to study how past behaviours can affect future interactions (Shapiro 1983; Weigelt & Camerer 1988; Barnett & Pollock 2012:19). Scholars who work with this perspective define reputation as signals based on observations of organisations’ actions over a period of time (Clark & Montgomery 1998; Barnett & Pollock 2012). Reputation is thus measured on the basis of the beliefs of an organisation’s strategic actions, such as being able to produce quality or how competitive the organisation can be in its market segment (Landon & Smith 1997; Barnett & Pollock 2012). These actions provide information on attributes that lead to different unobservable values of a particular organisation (Chun 2005; Barnett & Pollock 2012).

The discipline of economics categorises reputation as game theory and signalling theory. Game theory proposes that certain attributes based on past actions “signal” to stakeholders the brand’s reputation and future behaviour (Weigelt & Camerer 1988). Signalling theorists add that the attributes that indicate reputation to stakeholders can also provide information to managers that could be used to manage and enhance their reputation (Fombrun & Van Riel 1997). Both signalling theory and game theory indicate that reputation signals vital attribute-specific information to stakeholders based on past actions (Bălan 2015).

Game theory further categorises a brand as a player in the reputation field (Weigelt & Camerer 1988; Jaramillo & Srikant 2010). The theory assumes that reputation is based on past actions, which signal to stakeholders the type of player they are dealing with. Game theorists use an equilibrium notion in order to identify and signal future behaviour (Weigelt & Camerer 1988). Nash and sequential equilibriums are the most common equilibrium notions used in this theory (Weigelt & Camerer 1988; Jaramillo & Srikant 2010). This type of information allows the organisation to predict the economic exchange between themselves and stakeholders (Weigelt & Camerer 1988; Jaramillo & Srikant 2010; Barnett & Pollock 2012). Reputation in game theory can signal different

results for different stakeholders, based on different attributes (Barnett & Pollock 2012). This implies that different stakeholders are interested in different attributes of reputation and should therefore be grouped separately.

Institutional theory (like the evaluative school of thought) also adds value to measuring reputation in that it captures a concrete and externally validated view of reputation. According to Rao (in Barnett & Pollock 2012:23), “institutional hierarchies created by information intermediaries are social control specialists who institutionalise distrust of agents by inspecting their performance ... and who sustain social order”. Furthermore, reputation is categorised according to the organisation’s position, based on ranks created by known and credible external institutional intermediaries, who could include media, financial analysts and monitoring brands (Barnett & Pollock 2012:22). Since the institutional intermediaries play a key role in generating and presenting information to an organisation’s stakeholders, they are involved in the social construction process of reputation (Barnett & Pollock 2012:22). Since the reputational ranking of these institutions is available and objective, the brand’s’ reputation can be seen as a strategic asset because it reduces stakeholder uncertainty and provides a comparable scale for measuring reputation and economic impact (Barnett & Pollock 2012:24).

Fortune’s “reputation ranking” is an example of an institutional intermediary (Fombrun & Gardberg 2000; Davies et al 2003). These rankings are considered by many different stakeholder groups as a brand’s reputation and the hierarchy of ranking compared to that of competitors and other institutions (Lange, Lee & Dai 2011; Tischer & Hildebrandt, 2014). These rankings could also be from a broad cross-industry list or a particular industry (Barnett & Pollock 2012; Tischer & Hildebrandt 2014). They portray a brand’s reputation, which would be acquired socially, but is then viewed as an objective fact (Lange et al 2011; Barnett & Pollock, 2012:23).

Stakeholders can assess an organisation’s reputation ranking on the basis of a third party (Lange et al 2011). The assessment of reputation from the perspective of institutional theory is beneficial because it allows information that

is comparable, objective and reliable across organisations (Barnett & Pollock 2012). These rankings can also provide qualitative insights that may produce effective communication decisions by the brand (Barnett & Pollock 2012). However, scholars like Iglesias, Singh and Casabayó (2011) and Barnett and Pollock (2012) have shown that reputational ranking can be fairly arbitrary and not the collective perceptions of stakeholders. Also, the criteria for measuring reputation are inconsistent across the different institutional intermediaries and could allow for bias (Smythe et al 1992).

Socioconstructivist theory, unlike game theory, proposes that a brand's reputation is affected not only by its actions, but also by its interactions and exchanges between various stakeholders (Barnett & Pollock 2012:22). This theory views reputation as an amalgamation of the collective and diverse perceptions of different stakeholder groups (Barnett & Pollock 2012:20). The key contribution of this perspective is that it emphasises the diversity of perceptions and the collective socially constructed nature of brands (Barnett & Pollock 2012).

According to Bălan (2015), this perspective further notes the position of a brand in the marketplace from not only economic sources, but also sociological and psychological sources. These perceptions vary from overall impressions to attribute-specific knowledge (Barnett & Pollock 2012). This is a crucial part of this theory that was deemed relevant to the current study of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct, which would take into account impressions and attributes in order to assess reputation, but for a single stakeholder group, namely consumers.

Different attribute-specific knowledge is crucial in the measurement of reputation (Giardini et al 2008). However, this socioconstructivist theory implies that in order to measure reputation, stakeholders need to be interactive and aware of each other to enable them to form perceptions of the reputation of that particular brand or organisation (Giardini et al 2008; Barnett & Pollock 2012). This implication is ideal but impractical to assess because the amount of interaction between stakeholders would first need to be assessed before

measuring reputation in a short period of time. These interactions could be inconsistent and therefore signal inconsistent perceptions of reputations. Also, all stakeholder groups cannot be measured on the same level and in terms of the same attributes because different stakeholders have different needs from that brand (Gotsi & Wilson 2001; Mahon 2002). Understanding the perceptions of particular stakeholder groups is vital in realising a holistic reputation (Barnett & Pollock 2012). A holistic view of reputations across all stakeholders would be especially difficult to measure in a global brand such as Nike, because it would be unmanageable to assess all stakeholders in different parts of the world, let alone in one country.

There is an overlap of concepts of reputation between the Chun (2005) and Helm and Klode (2011) schools of thought, the cross-disciplinary viewpoints of Weigelt and Camerer (1988) Fombrun and Van Riel (1997), Bălan (2015), Fombrun and Shanley (1990), Fombrun (1996), Barnett and Pollock (2012) and the theories surrounding reputation. These theories, schools of thought and disciplines differ considerably in terms of their underlying approaches, the stakeholders they investigate and what they measure. Table 2.3 attempts to relate the theories, schools of thought and cross-disciplinary concepts of reputation in order to help conceptualise the multidimensionality of brand reputation.

Table 2.3: The multidimensional and cross-disciplinary characteristics of brand reputation

Discipline or theory	View of reputation	Underlying theories, concepts and schools of thought considered	Scholar/s	Stakeholder group considered	Attribute focus	Cognitive or affective inclination	Strengths and/or weaknesses
Sociological	Reputation is sociocognitively constructed and indicates legitimacy through exchanges between internal and external stakeholders (relative to norms and expectations that differ in terms of the stakeholder group)	Stakeholder theory, relational school of thought and socio-constructivist theory	Ashforth and Gibbs (1990); Fombrum and Van Riel (1997); Whitmeyer (2000); Bălan (2015)	All stakeholders	Trust; quality; performance; communication satisfaction	Cognitive and affective	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Considers different intermediaries in reputation building – Considers the importance of all stakeholders in the sociocognitive role of building reputation – Sees reputation as an integrative process – Recognises that each stakeholder group has different values and needs that make reputation <p>Weakness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Does not place much emphasis on the sociosubjective role of

							assessing reputation
Economic	Reputation “signals” the estimation of organisational attributes such as the quality of products and services to stakeholders to signal future behaviour	Signalling theory, game theory, relational school of thought, Impressional school of thought, Institutional theory and socio-constructivist theory	Weilgert and Camerer (1988) ; Davies et al (2003) ; Clark and Montgomery (1998) ; Shapiro (1983); Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) ; Landon and Smith (1997) ; Chun (2005)	All stakeholders, focus on consumers	Quality of products and services; performance	Cognitive	<p>Strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Considers the cognitive attributes that are important in assessing an organisation's reputation <p>Weakness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Does not consider subjective and emotional feelings in reputation building
Marketing	Focuses on conveying important information (such as vision and mission) about the brand to stakeholders (considered an end user perspective), sometimes referred to as image	Impressional school of thought, signalling theory, identity, image and institutional theory	Dowling (1993); Bromley (1993); Lane Keller (1999); Balmer and Greyser (2006); Brown and Dacin (1997); Balmer and	Generally focuses on consumers	Loyalty; familiarity; likeability; advertising; attractiveness; celebrity affiliation; overall impression; trust	Cognitive and affective	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Focuses on disseminating important information about the organisation – Considers the importance of image in the formation of reputation – Consumers can objectively and subjectively

			Greyser (2006); Smaiziene and Jucevicius (2009); Bălan (2015)				decode information in order to assess reputation Weakness – Focuses on end user perspective
Strategic	Views reputation as an overall impression that can provide a competitive advantage and considers different planned initiatives and communications to improve reputation	Stakeholder theory, game theory, relational school of thought and impressional school of thought	Dowling and Moran (2012); Fombrun and Shanley (1990); Weigelt and Camerer (1988); Mahon (2002); Helm (2007); Davies et al (2003); Bălan (2015)	All stakeholders	CSR; trust; integrity; reliability/credibility; celebrity endorsements; respect; admiration; employee communication; advertisements; overall impression	Cognitive and affective	Strengths – Focuses on improving reputation through strategy – Considers strategy on all channels of communication? – Considers all stakeholder groups for different strategies – Sees reputation as a sign of a competitive advantage that lowers risk Weaknesses – Only focuses on the outcomes/values that strategic initiatives will bring to reputation – Does not consider the other nonplanned channels

							of reputation
Accounting	Reputation is an intangible asset that considers the financial value of reputation that results in brand equity	Brand equity, evaluative school of thought, institutional theory	Hall (1993); Fombrun and Van Riel (1997); Fombrun and Rindova (1999); Roberts and Dowling (2002); Dolphin (2004)	Investors; shareholders; CEO; managers; institutional intermediaries	Financial performance	Cognitive	<p>Strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Considers the financial value of reputation <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No emphasis on stakeholder groups such as employees and consumers – Does not consider subjective and emotional feelings in reputation building
Organisational	Reputation is based on how internal stakeholders/employees, specifically managers, make strategic decisions for other stakeholders (image) constructed on their sense of identity and culture	Game theory, impressional school of thought, brand identity, corporate culture and brand image	Whetten and Mackey (2002); Gioia et al (2000); Gotsi and Wilson (2001); Yang and Grunig (2005); Balmer and Greyser (2006);	Specific focus on employees, especially managers	Employee values	Cognitive	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Considers the importance of identity and image in the formation of reputation – Considers the employee stakeholder group in assessing reputation <p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Too much emphasis on

			Balmer (2008)				managers – Does not consider subjective and emotional feelings
Psychology	Reputation is based on multiple feelings towards an organisation by stakeholders	Socioconstructivist theory, relational school of thought and impressional school of thought	Croft and Dalton (2003); Jøsang et al (2007); Zhang (2009); Zhang and Schwaiger (2009); Battacharya and Sen (2003)	All stakeholders	Trust; reliability; integrity; likeability; attractiveness; loyalty; respect; admiration	Affective	Strength – Considers the subjective perceptions and feelings of stakeholders towards an organisation Weakness – Does not consider the cognitive components necessary for building reputation

Overall, the schools of thought depicted in table 2.3 suggest that reputation is both cognitive and affective, and includes the following attributes: financial performance; loyalty; reliability, integrity, trust; likeability and attractiveness; quality and performance of products and services; responsibility; overall impression; awareness and visibility; respect and admiration; celebrity endorsements; employee communications and values; communication satisfaction; and advertisements.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The value of brand reputation has been established to be to be beyond financial performance. This scarce and intangible asset has the ability not only to create a competitive advantage and enhance status, but also to foster other strategic values that can make a brand successful. Since brand reputation is a central concept to this study's research problem, this chapter discussed brand reputation and similar concepts related to brand reputation. In defining reputation, the various assumptions and the importance of both affective and cognitive perceptions of stakeholders have been recognised. In this chapter, the concepts relating to brand reputation such as organisational identity, visual identity, brand image and brand equity were delineated individually to indicate their relationship with brand reputation. Furthermore, it was established that every stakeholder group has a different need and perception of reputation. Thus, in this study, a single stakeholder group, namely consumers, was identified to measure reputation. The theory of this study as indicated previously was in two parts. The first facet of the theory was to holistically conceptualise brand reputation. The next chapter focuses on the second facet of literature pertaining to this study, that is brand reputation as an attitudinal construct consisting of both cognitive and affective components.

CHAPTER 3

BRAND REPUTATION AS AN ATTITUDINAL CONSTRUCT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the strategic value, various definitions and concepts relating to brand reputation, and it specifically examined CBR. Different views of brand reputation adopted by various academic subject areas were highlighted (Fombrun & Van Riel 1997; Chun 2005; Smaiziene & Jucevicius 2009; Barnett & Pollock 2012). Although there is not a universally accepted process to assess reputation, there is overall agreement on its significance (Fombrun & Shanley 1990; Fombrun 1996; Schwaiger 2004; Helm 2007; Walsh & Beatty 2007; Raithe et al 2010; Barnett & Pollock 2012; Feldman et al 2014). The detailed discussion of brand reputation in the previous chapter underscored the vital importance of the concept as a strategic asset. The assessment and conceptualisation of reputation is therefore imperative for any brand.

The previous chapter addressed the concept of brand reputation but did not centre brand reputation as an attitudinal construct based on both cognitive and subjective components which is central to this study. This study focused on brand reputation as an attitudinal construct, thus this chapter attempts to highlight the way in which reputation can be viewed as such a construct. In this chapter studies that have characterised reputation as an attitudinal construct are reviewed, as are the elements that influence the cognitive and affective components of reputation. These attitudinal components are then applied as the basis of a framework for this study in order to define and examine perceptions of brand reputation at Nike among a select group of female consumers.

3.2 THE ASSESSMENT OF BRAND REPUTATION AS AN ATTITUDINAL CONSTRUCT

According to Davies et al (2003:72), in spite of how abstract reputation is, the concept can actually be measured. Scholars from different academic streams have applied numerous measures and theories to categorise and measure brand reputation (Fombrun & Van Riel 1997; Chun 2005; Barnett & Pollock 2012; Bălan 2015).

However, Fombrun (1998) and Walker (2010) have noted a few problems with many reputation measures, criticising them for two reasons: (1) no theoretical platform for the measures; and (2) the respondents in many reputation surveys were mostly executives and analysts, which the result that most external stakeholders' perspectives were disregarded.

Helm (in Barnett & Pollock 2012:9) describes a measure for brand reputation as “a single stakeholder’s perception of the estimation in which a certain firm is held by its stakeholders in general”. This definition suggests that assessing brand reputation is perception based. The perceptions surrounding a brand are crucial knowledge because this information can have an impact on the stakeholders gravitating towards a brand (Davies et al 2003; Barnett & Pollock 2012). Reputation is referred to almost exclusively as perceptions (Fombrun & Rindova, 1996; Post & Griffin 1997; Balmer 1998; Miles & Covin 2000; Einwiller & Will 2002; Roberts & Dowling 2002; Kottasz & Bennett 2005). These perceptions are based on stakeholder attitudes (Schwaiger 2004; Mak 2005; Veloutsou & Moutinho 2009; Raithel et al 2010). According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993:1), attitudes can be described as “... a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour”. Vaughan and Hogg (2005:15) similarly describe attitudes as a person’s disposition towards something, based on behaviours, beliefs and feelings. Moreover, brand reputation is recognised as an attitudinal construct stemming from specific stakeholder perceptions (Schwaiger 2004; Walsh & Beatty 2007).

In earlier discussions, it was established that various stakeholder groups have different relationships with a brand, and each group’s evaluation of reputation is based on different values they assign to the brand (Dowling & Moran 2012). For example, investors tend to base their evaluation of reputation on financial performance, whereas employees regard workplace and suchlike as the foundation of reputation. Hence each stakeholder group determines reputation in terms of their own set of values that drive the perception of reputation. One should bear in mind that consumers, like other stakeholder groups, have perceptions that are based on attitudes pertaining to a brand – hence the need to conceptualise reputation as an attitudinal construct, which is based on different elements that portray specific stakeholder perceptions surrounding that brand.

Furthermore, since perceptions are related to attitude, they should be assessed in terms of the elements that form reputation as constructs of attitudes. It is also vital to note that many scholars and practitioners assess reputation according to the school of thought, discipline and theory they perceive reputation to be categorised as (Einwiller & Will 2002; Barnett et al 2006) and thus focus on the elements they deem significant.

Stakeholders can have a variety of perceptions of a brand and there are various elements that contribute to the perception of reputation as good or bad (Berens & Van Riel 2004). While research has demonstrated the importance of reputation in the positive performance of the brand, confirming that it is in fact an intangible asset (Davies et al 2003; Fan 2005; Afzal et al 2009; Dowling & Moran 2012), there has been little theoretical progress towards understanding what elements make up perceptions of reputation that are attitudinal based (Schwaiger 2004; Barnett & Pollock 2012; Bălan 2015).

Numerous studies have identified different elements that are useful in measuring and conceptualising reputation (Resnick, Kuwabara, Zeckhauser & Friedman 2000; Lewis 2001; Whetten & Mackey 2002; Schwaiger 2004; Barnett et al 2006; Jøsang et al 2007; Lii & Lee 2012). However, these elements do not appear to have been considered simultaneously in conceptualising reputation.

Limited empirical research has conceptualised and explained the role of consumers and their attitudes that form their perception of a particular brand's reputation (Walsh et al 2009). Similarly, previous studies do not appear to recognise (with the exception of the research of Schwaiger 2004; Caruana et al 2006; Helm 2007; Omar et al 2009) brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.

This study assessed brand reputation as an attitudinal construct and explored all the elements that contribute to these perceptions and attitudes of the consumer stakeholder group. This ensured that the study would focus on what is important to the stakeholder group under investigation, and also provide a sturdy theoretical platform for the conceptualisation and measurement of brand reputation. As stated previously, consumers were the participants in this study. Hence the perspectives of external stakeholders were taken into account. Consumer stakeholders are arguably

one of the primary stakeholders to assess for a brand (Walsh & Beatty 2007; Raithel et al 2010). Furthermore, this study considered the various constructs that have been identified in previous studies, and classified them into the cognitive and affective components of reputation. These constructs are delineated in the section below.

3.3 STUDIES OF REPUTATION AS AN ATTITUDINAL CONSTRUCT

Most previous studies are criticised for not adequately considering the emotional aspect of conceptualising and measuring reputation (Sjovall & Talk 2004). Raithel et al (2010) have critiqued previous measures of reputation because they only consider the cognitive aspects thereof, such as the quality of products, but fail to consider the emotional elements that are deemed equally important in the formation of reputation. In addition, previous studies have tended to rely mainly on financial components and have ignored the emotional elements that play a vital role in the operationalisation of reputation (Roberts & Dowling 2002; Alsop 2004; Schwaiger 2004). Emotions (affective) are just as important as knowledge (cognitive) in measuring reputation in any stakeholder group. This study extended previous research (Schwaiger 2004; Omar et al 2009; Raithel et al 2010) that viewed reputation as a two-dimensional attitudinal concept.

Martineau (1958) was the first researcher to study reputation as an attitudinal construct and distinguished two components, namely emotional and functional, in order to rationalise reputation (Berens & Van Riel 2004). Schwaiger (2004) theorised reputation as an attitudinal construct whereby attitude denotes subjective, emotional and cognitive mind-sets. Schwaiger (2004) combined both cognitive and affective components by postulating that a brand's reputation consists of not only cognitive knowledge but also the subjective emotions of stakeholders. In his empirical study, Schwaiger (2004) performed two focus groups and conducted a number of in-depth interviews in order to ascertain what elements are important in measuring reputation. The cognitive component of Schwaiger's (2004) study included constructs such as social responsibility, the quality of products and services, the quality of employees, the quality of management, financial performance, market leadership and ethical behaviour. The affective component (extracted from the focus groups comprising

various publics) of Schwaiger's (2004) study identifies fair attitude towards competitors, transparency, openness and credibility.

Schwaiger (2004), however, measured reputation on the basis of the opinions of various stakeholder groups. Hence constructs that he identified in his study, such as the quality of employees, a fair attitude towards competitors, the quality of management, financial performance and market leadership, were not deemed relevant in the present study because of its specific interest in one stakeholder group, namely consumers. Other elements such as credibility were renamed "reliability" in the current study, and the researcher gleaned from the literature (Davies et al 2003) that the two words are indeed synonyms. Openness and transparency were categorised as trust, in terms of Rose and Thompson's (2004) definition that trust is based on and constructed via transparency, and the two concepts are too intertwined to be classified as separate elements. Hence the assessment of reputation does not only consider subjective perceptions (successful brand, good quality product, etc.) but also allows an intrinsic view of these features (i.e. the brand is successful, but I do not really like it, etc.).

Omar et al (2009) also recognised the importance of both affective and cognitive perceptions, and referred to the following elements of measuring reputation, namely the objective components that classify a brand as good or bad, and the emotional components that include the overall impression of the brand's past actions. According to Raithel et al (2010), reputation is a two-dimensional attitudinal construct. They utilised a quantitative seven-point likert scale that focused on the cognitive and affective components in order to measure whether reputation provides value-relevant information. The respondents included all stakeholder groups comprising opinion leaders, the general public, consumers, and suchlike, for different companies. The results showed the stability or change in reputation in various companies over two years. Walsh and Beatty (2007) posit that reputation is based on five information contacts, namely product and service quality, social and environmental responsibility, consumer orientation, reliable and financially strong brand and being a good employer. However, Raithel et al (2001) argue that there are other constructs that are equally significant in the formation of reputation, and these constructs do not operate in isolation.

The study conducted of Raithel et al (2010), like that of Schwaiger (2004), is useful because it underscores the importance of a two-dimensional view of reputation and also the need for an emotional or affective component in the conceptualisation of reputation. However, Raithel et al's (2010) study only uses general cognitive and affective components such as "how well the brand performs" (cognitive) and "how likeable the brand is" (affective), without correlating other elements that have been identified in the literature as having an influence on reputation. Furthermore, Raithel et al's (2010) study does not account for all the different elements that make up both the cognitive and affective components, some of which include awareness, competence and quality. Their (2010) study further probed general inquiries that are not always relevant to all stakeholder groups.

Walsh et al (2009) measured reputation in terms of the perceptions of a single stakeholder group – consumers. They adopted an approach of consumer-based reputation and also identified the fact that different stakeholders have different needs from a brand that could indicate subjective emotional and rational inclinations. Davies et al (2003:95) concur as follows: "Consumers can value brand through rational and emotional attributes." Walsh et al (2009) did not conceptualise reputation as an attitudinal construct, but their focus on consumers is beneficial because it highlights a number of cognitive components and showcases consumers as a primary stakeholder group to consider in the measurement of reputation.

Although evaluating each stakeholder is more representative of overall reputation, each stakeholder has different needs from the brand, which form perceptions, and these should be taken into account when measuring overall reputation (Walsh et al 2009; Christodoulides & Chernatony 2010). It would therefore be incorrect to categorise different stakeholder groups as one, and ask the same questions about reputation (that might not be relevant to that specific stakeholder group) in order to effectively understand the value of reputation for each stakeholder group, and ultimately the overall value of reputation. The current study, like that of Walsh et al (2009), utilised arguably one of the most important stakeholder groups – consumers. Since each stakeholder has a diverse need from and perception of a brand, various cognitive and affective elements are required by each stakeholder group in order to comprehensively understand and correlate the findings between each stakeholder group (Walsh et al 2009). According to Fombrun and Gardberg (2000), some

elements are more relevant to a particular stakeholder than to others. For example, investors are concerned about the brand's financial performance, whereas this would not really be a major concern for consumers. In their conclusion, Raithel et al (2010) refer to the fact that various drivers/constructs of cognitive and affective components are different for each stakeholder group, and that the different perceptions of different stakeholders should be weighted individually, depending on their ability to bring value in managing reputation.

This study expanded on Martineau's (1958), Schwaiger's (2004) and Omar et al's (2009) two-dimensional approach to the conceptualisation of brand reputation and draw from the constructs deemed significant in measuring reputation. The combination of cognitive and affective components allows for a more nuanced approach to measuring perceptions of reputation, especially in respect of consumer-based reputation (Walsh et al 2009; Raithel et al 2010). According to Schwaiger (2004), the value of conceptualising reputation as an attitudinal construct allows for the measurement of a subjective and intrinsic disposition towards a brand or organisation. The combination of cognitive and emotional components indicates reputation as an attitudinal construct, where attitude signifies emotional, subjective and cognitive-based mind-sets. Hence evaluating brand reputation will not only measure the idiosyncratic perceptions of a brand's qualities (such as a brand that is regarded successful or produces top-quality products, etc.), but also allows an inherent disposition towards these qualities (in the sense that the perception of the brand may not be successful, but it is still liked, or vice versa) (Barnett & Pollock 2012). Although the elements of reputation (both cognitive and affective) are interrelated in the sense that they could have a mutual effect on each other, each element needs to be individually demarcated (Raithel et al 2010). As stated in previous research, all the elements are not substitutable (Helm 2007). The next section elaborates on the cognitive and affective components of brand reputation, based on the literature.

3.4 THE COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE COMPONENTS OF BRAND REPUTATION

In the Schmalenbach Business Review, Schwaiger (2004) and Raithel et al (2010) concurred that reputation is an attitudinal construct that is subdivided into two dimensions. The first dimension includes competence, which is the cognitive

assessment of a brand, while the second is likeability, which involves the emotional and subjective attitudes towards that brand. This model holds substantial theoretical appeal as it indicates the assessment of how effective and likeable a brand is (Schwaiger 2004).

The cognitive and affective components were deemed necessary to explore in the current study because each component, contributes to the objective measurement of the perception of reputation. Reputation is the combined perception of a particular stakeholder group, regarding a brand's attributes and success. It is a "collective phenomenon that includes both cognitive and affective dimensions that develop over time" (Feldman et al 2014:3). A positive and consistent reputation indicates not only having a competitive advantage and boasting greater financial performance, but it is also an intangible asset that is rewarded by stakeholders. Reputation can be best conceptualised as "an attribute specific and audience specific measurement of a company" (Barnett & Pollock 2012:54). This definition allows for a more nuanced assessment of reputation in research. Measuring reputation in all the combined assessments across all attributes and audiences could become unmanageable and produce vague findings. The next subsection explains in detail the cognitive component and elements deemed to conceptualise brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.

Owing to the focus of this study, reputation was conceptualised as an attitudinal construct that is divided into cognitive (rational) and affective (emotional) elements. These attitudinal constructs were delineated through elements that were mentioned in the previous chapter such as trust, reliability, social responsibility and so on, and will be discussed in more detail below. Figure 3.1 below captures the cognitive and affective constructs and their respective elements that were used to measure brand reputation for the purpose of this research.

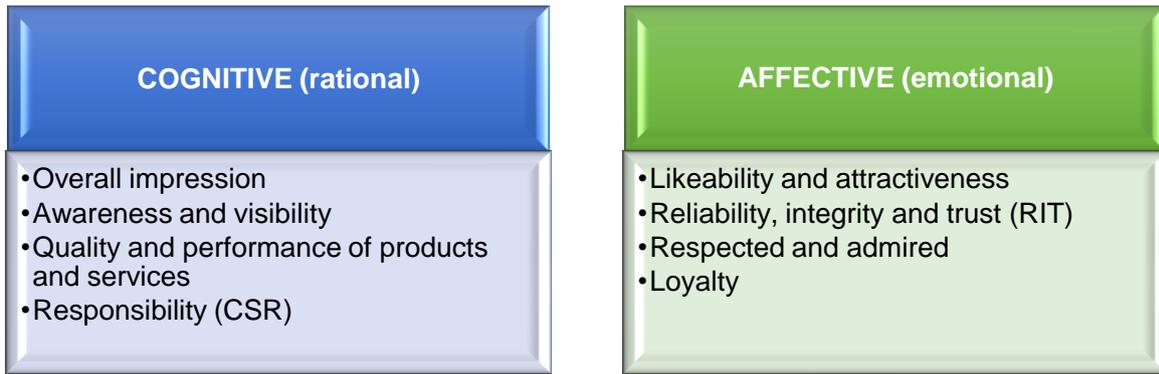


Figure 3.1: Cognitive and affective components in the measurement of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct

3.4.1 Cognitive components of brand reputation

In previous studies, a cognitive component of an attitudinal construct was conceptualised as an individual's beliefs and thoughts about and knowledge of a phenomenon or object (Eagly & Chaiken 1993; Bohner & Schwarz 2001; Schwaiger 2004; Niedenthal, Barsalou, Winkielman, Krauth-Gruber & Ric 2005; Raithe et al 2010). Hence the cognitive component of reputation as an attitudinal construct relates to all rational beliefs about the brand under investigation (Nike). The elements below contribute to the conceptualisation of the cognitive component of reputation as an attitudinal construct.

3.4.1.1 Overall impression

Consumers can have markedly dissimilar overall impressions of a particular brand (Kottasz & Bennett 2005) and the measurement of this element can set the scene for what consumers think of brand as a whole. Kottasz and Bennett (2005) further emphasise the importance of the general overall impression in understanding and deconstructing the constructs of reputation.

Overall impressions are typically characterised as what comes to mind among stakeholders when a logo or brand is mentioned to them (Barnett et al 2006). According to Barnett et al (2006) and Boyd et al (2010), an overall impression includes stakeholders' image of a brand.

The perception of success contributes to the overall impression that stakeholders have of a brand (Schwaiger 2004; Rindovo et al 2010; Barnett & Pollock 2012).

Rindovo et al (2010) and Barnett and Pollock (2012) note that the perception of success is crucial in measuring reputation because it denotes whether or not the brand has value in the minds of stakeholders. An assumption is that if a stakeholder views a brand as successful, then it is likely that he or she has an overall positive impression (Schwaiger 2004).

According to Brown et al (2006) and Einwiller, Carroll and Korn (2010), stakeholders can base their perceptions on media and opinion leaders without ever having direct contact with the brand. There are thus varying outside sources (institutional intermediaries) that affect reputation, which should be taken into account. Fombrun (1996) contends that institutional intermediaries have an impact on the overall impression of reputation. Institutional intermediaries are the bodies that assess information (Fombrun 1996). According to Rindovo et al (2005), because these institutional intermediaries specialise in assessing information, they are by default viewed as having greater contact with and expertise about that brand. Rindovo et al (2005) further state that information is distributed by institutional intermediaries and is more readily available to stakeholders.

There are two types of institutional intermediaries, namely general and expert, that can influence the overall impression of a brand (Rindovo et al 2005; Einwiller et al 2010). General intermediaries are those that provide overall (good and bad) information on a brand (such as the media), while expert intermediary supplies information through a specific capability (e.g. Fortune's rankings) (Rindovo et al 2005).

Fortune's list of most admired companies has become a widely acclaimed measure of reputation (Robert & Dowling 2002) and this could have an impact on the perceptions of the consumers of the Nike brand. The media or general intermediary could signal both positive and negative perceptions by highlighting problems or crises in a brand, or simply talking positively about the brand and what it is doing for the community. Either way, the general intermediary has the power to influence perceptions by taking a stand and focusing attention on what is reported.

Hence, stakeholders are likely to form an impression of the brand on the basis of what is being said about it. However, Davies et al (2003) contend that institutional intermediaries sway the perceptions of stakeholders such as investors, employees

and the like, and they affect the consumer group minimally. They (2003) go on to say that consumers are more swayed by general intermediaries such as the media, and the latter should be considered when analysing brand reputation. By including institutional intermediaries as an attitudinal construct in one's examination of reputation, institutional theory also comes into play (Barnett & Pollock 2012).

According to San Martín and Del Bosque (2008), having a first or a general impression is a highly cognitive process. This is because stakeholders already unpack the value they may receive from the brand and have a general impression (San Martín & Del Bosque 2008). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the element of overall impression was categorised as a cognitive element.

3.4.1.2 Awareness and visibility

A number of scholars such as Larkin (2002), Pharoah (2003) and Barnett et al (2006) define reputation as a state of awareness. They maintain that the collective representation of perceptions includes awareness as crucial knowledge in understanding attitudes, and show how advertising can help to increase awareness of a brand. Brand awareness can to some extent measure the salience with which the consumer's mind is engaged when prompted by the product or a product category, and this signifies brand equity (Mahon 2002; Hakala et al 2012).

Wartick (2002) and Barnett and Pollock (2012) advocate awareness as an element necessary to build reputation. Awareness relates to being conscious of the existence of a brand by stakeholders (Balmer 2001; Coenen, Von Felten & Schmid 2010). According to Fombrun and Van Riel (2004), the term "awareness" has been used interchangeably with the terms "visibility" and "familiarity". In reputation research, awareness, visibility and familiarity are acquired by past experiences, the degree to which the brand is visible and the knowledge constituents have of a brand, based on other similar brands (Gray & Balmer 1998; Bromley 2000). Sources of familiarity, awareness and visibility with a brand are based on previous interactions (Bromley 2000) as well as "mediated experience by the mass media" (Cobb-Walgren et al 1995:56).

Generally, companies with sound reputations are the ones that most people are aware of (top of mind – TOP) (Fombrun 1996). Companies such as IBM, Nike and

McDonald's are familiar to most, and their logo and brand are everywhere – in food containers, commercials and fashion, and on billboards (Fombrun, 1996:19). Hakala et al (2012:56) posit the following in this regard: "Top-of-mind awareness is considered a key indicator of how consumers develop their own preferences for or against a global brand." TOM refers to what brand comes to mind first when compared to a specific category (Chun 2005).

Studies such as the consumer based perceptual measure of brand equity (Cobb-Walgren et al, 1995), the reputation quotient (Walsh & Weildmann 2004) and fortune reputation study (Chun 2005), measure reputation in relation to TOM awareness of that brand and purchase intention. The findings in the above studies indicate a positive correlation between TOM, reputation and purchase intention.

According to Omar et al (2009), larger global brands are more visible than their local counterparts. The visibility of a brand affects the perception by providing information on the brand and introducing a type of bias when the media report about any happenings around that brand (Steenkamp, Batra & Aden 2003). Hence media exposure towards a brand increases the information and visibility available to stakeholders and also sets the background against which the brand is viewed. Visibility is a key element in measuring reputation because it refers to the prominence of the brand through the prominence of advertising and media (Mak 2005). The more visible a brand is, the more likely a consumer is to remember it when it is time to buy something in that product category (Barnett & Pollock 2012).

In their study, Akram, Merunka and Shakaib Akram (2011) relate positive correlations between perceived brand globalness and positive consumer attitudes towards that brand, specifically to consumers in emerging markets. They advocate that the reason why consumers prefer global brands over local ones is because these brands are available everywhere, and they have a higher perceived quality prestige and status attached to them. However, Steenkamp et al (2003) argue that the presence of global brands does not automatically result in brand preference. Local culture and identity are equally important, especially for ethnocentric consumers (or consumers who relate more to local products because they give them a sense of belonging).

Nevertheless, global brands promote awareness, visibility and prominence of a brand through continual cross-border awareness and value addition (Steenkamp et al 2003; Sarstedt et al 2013). An implication of a global brand is that it is more visible, and consumers are therefore more aware of and familiar with that particular brand (Akram et al 2011). Steenkamp et al (2003) suggest that consumers, compared to local competitors, prefer a global brand, and infer that a global brand has a higher value even if the quality is not necessarily superior to their local brand's product categories. Research has also indicated that many brands use their global status as a tool to enhance their image and as brand superiority (Lane Keller 1999). The aggregate of these choices makes a brand more recognised, thus contributing to the element of awareness of the brand.

Hence the more visible, aware and familiar a brand is to consumers, the more likely that the brand will be considered and preferred over others. Feldman et al (2014) suggest awareness as an element that is rationally constructed, not a feeling that is deduced on the basis of some affective component. For the purpose of this study, awareness, visibility and familiarity were elements that were used interchangeably and cognitively constructed.

3.4.1.3 Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Global brands are more visible and "out there" (Schwaiger 2004; Tucker & Melewar 2005; Sarstedt & Taylor 2010). This increased visibility has attracted consumers, but also means that their every move is under scrutiny (Fombrun 1996:20). According to Smythe et al (1992), this is the era of ethical consumers. These consumers want brands to act ethically and responsibly. Consumers generally want to feel good about the products they buy and be confident that they will not cause them harm, and that their production did not harm the environment or the people manufacturing the products (Tucker & Melewar 2005). The branded clothing and footwear sector currently boasts the widest adoption of ethical sourcing codes of conduct focused on working conditions and labour rights (Lim & Phillips 2008). Hence the need to act ethically is more critical than before.

Responsibility has been identified as a key driver in reputation building (Fombrun 2005; Schnietz & Esptein 2005; Tucker & Melewar 2005; Raithel et al 2010; Schwaiger et al 2010). Numerous studies have been dedicated to studying the

relationship between reputation and responsibility (Fombrun 2005; Morsing & Schultz 2006; Brammer & Pavelin 2006). CSR is demarcated as the character of the brand with respect to key societal issues (Brown & Dacin 1997).

Various studies have emphasised the connection between doing good and responding to social needs and the impact on the perceptions of that brand and its overall wellness (O'Riordan & Fairbrass 2008; Minor & Morgan 2011; Stanaland, Lwin & Murphy 2011; Lii & Lee 2012; Hsu 2012). While consumer interest does not always translate into ethical purchasing decisions, there is no doubt that there is latent interest in CSR (Fombrun 1996; Stanaland et al 2011). The need for CSR has been well documented in the literature to provide meaningful outcomes that range from promoting awareness, helping a cause or society to enhance the brand's reputation and serving as a type of insurance during times of crisis (Tucker & Melewar 2005; Hillenbrand & Money 2007; Greyser 2009; Rettab, Brik & Mellahi 2009; Minor & Morgan 2011; Lii & Lee 2012). Responding to social needs has more than a significant impact on brand reputation (Greyser 2009). Stakeholders want to see how well brands respond to nonprofit initiatives. CSR allows brands to go the extra mile, beyond their legal obligations (Bear, Rahman & Post 2010).

Fan (2005) and Lindgreen and Swaen (2005) explain that forming a reputation with a brand is like any relationship, with responsibility as one of the factors that strengthens the relationship. Batcharaya and Sen (2003) further contend that CSR allows consumers to identify with that brand. Moreover, they adopt the notion of consumer and company identification (C_C). According to this notion, the advantage of doing good fundamentally breeds familiarity, liking and identification in the minds of consumers. Batcharaya and Sen (2003) further state that when a CSR initiative has an attribute that overlaps with the attribute of the consumer's self-concept, then consumers are likely to support it and have positive perceptions of the brand.

Social responsibility is necessary in building a positive reputation. The idea that responsibility and power go hand in hand is a concept that has been around from the start of time (Markham 1972). Good relationships must be maintained with various stakeholders in order to succeed economically (Markham 1972). Melo and Margado (2012) suggest that stakeholders primarily rely on the brand's social responsibility initiatives in order to form an opinion on its products and services. They (2012) argue

that acting ethically and responsibly serves as a sign to the stakeholders of the brand's key characteristics and is a guarantee.

According to Carroll (1991), CSR is measured in relation to giving back to the community, and the type of contributions companies make to give back to society. Carroll (1991) and Battacharya and Sen (2003) contend that being responsible means being ethical, and they are one and the same. Analysing CSR is a rational process affected by experiences, opportunity and information (Lii & Lee 2012). Responsibility is an element that is understood and viewed cognitively, because the antecedent of responsibility is rational, and even though emotional elements can affect the way in which each initiative is viewed, the element in itself is cognitively perceived (Schwaiger 2004).

3.4.1.4 Quality and performance of products and services

According to Rindova et al (2005), stakeholders rely on many signals to create an impression of the brand. The most obvious signal would be the usage of the product or service from that particular brand over time, and obtaining consistent results (Rindova et al 2005; Raithel et al 2010; Dowling & Moran 2012). In their study, Rindova et al (2005) underscored the importance of the quality of products and services and how this impacts on reputation. Their study (2005) integrated previous research and viewed the drivers of reputation to be prominence and perceived quality, each of which has implications for reputation building. Rindova et al (2005) also elaborated on how different stakeholders view the quality of products and services and prominence in a different light when it comes to reputation building. They (2005) noted that consumers are the stakeholder group for which quality and prominence are the primary considerations when it comes to reputation.

Raithel et al (2010) emphasised the importance of perceived quality for reputation – driven by the quality of efforts, materials and productive results. Roberts and Dowling (2002) and Shamsie (2003) both stressed the key role that the performance of a brand's products or services plays in measuring reputation. How well the product performs influences the way in which that brand is perceived. Dowling and Moran (2012) add that stakeholders appreciate companies that foster a strong reputation by showing consistent performances. Consistent performance can signal to

stakeholders that the particular brand is reliable and trustworthy – hence greater the likelihood of repurchasing behaviour (Boyd et al 2010). Hence consumers who perceive a brand's quality and performance to be satisfactory are likely to repurchase and tell others about it (Rindova et al 2005; Raithel et al 2010).

According to game theorists, the perception of the quality and performance of product and services signals either a good or bad reputation (Robert & Dowling 2002). Wang et al (2006) contend that brand reputation is the overall cognitive impression (with respect to consumers) of a brand's past performance and quality. Walsh and Beatty (2007) refer to reputation as a substitute indicator of the quality and performance of the products and services offered. The dimension of quality and performance of a brand's products is cognitively perceived by consumers (Johnson & Grayson 2005). Hence the performance and quality of products and services offered by a brand do not only signify a good reputation, but they are also interchangeable, rationally constructed and may suggest feelings of trust and reliability.

3.4.2 Affective components of brand reputation

An affective component of an attitudinal construct refers to all emotions and feelings about an object or phenomenon (Eagly & Chaiken 1993; Bohner & Schwarz 2001; Schwaiger 2004; Niedenthal et al 2005. Raithel et al 2010). The psychological and emotional nature of perceiving brands therefore plays a role in conceptualising brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The affective component of reputation as an attitudinal construct relates to all emotional and subjective sentiments about the brand under analysis (in this instance, Nike). The next subsection highlights the affective elements of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.

3.4.2.1 Likeability and attractiveness

Previous research suggests a link between likeability and attractiveness – one cannot exist without the presence of the other (Bailey & Bonifield 2010; Nguyena et al 2013). Perceived likeability affects consumer reactions to the product prices, its marketing activities and even consumers' purchase intentions (Nguyena et al 2013). When consumers dislike a brand, they often do not invest time and money in it, and lean towards a brand that they like and find attractive (Nguyena et al 2013).

According to Davies et al (2003:186), having a connection and being able to relate to the brand sum up what reputation stands for. Bailey and Bonifield (2010) and Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) emphasise that the likeability and attractiveness of a brand directly relate to its reputation. According to Fombrun and Van Riel (1997:6), "if stakeholders like what they hear and see they'll support the company". Attractiveness is the emotional appeal that draws consumers to that brand (Sheu 2010), it is the essence of reputation and different attributes of attractiveness appeal to different stakeholder groups (Bailey & Bonifield 2010). Different attributes generally differ among the diverse stakeholder groups when measuring the likeability and attractiveness of a brand (Sheu 2010). Sheu (2010) also underlines the fact that similar stakeholder groups have similar expectations about specific attributes of a brand, and such attributes would need to be assessed. For example, employees may find a brand attractive because it is rated as a top brand to work for, whereas consumers may find the same brand not that attractive because they cannot personally relate to it.

In their study, Nguyena et al (2013) introduced brand likeability from a consumer's perspective and its impact on consumer behaviour. They explain that the element of likeability is drawn from the disciplines of marketing and psychology. They also note that although likeability could be both cognitive and emotionally based, because of its subjective and emotional appeal, it is best classified as an affective component. They further underscore the importance of advertising on the perception of how likeable a brand is. Davies et al (2003) also noted the significance of advertising with particular reference to a global brand. Good advertising indicates that the brand is more likeable and attractive to different constituents, especially consumers (Davies et al 2003).

According to Davies et al (2003), consumers like a brand on the basis of how relatable it is and if it is able to provide an intrinsic value, such as relating to the brand, based on lifestyle. Nguyena et al (2013) highlight the fact that the likeability of a brand could be a precursor to outcomes such as awareness, brand love and creditability (although these are not synonymous). Many associations that are made with brands are less objective and more psychological in nature (Davies et al 2003:80; Nguyena et al 2013).

The above explains why the likeability of a brand is based on its psychic value. This means that a brand fulfils the symbolic need of what it represents. If the brand is seen as a fashion statement, is relatable by the consumer or is a means to impress others, then the likeability of that brand increases (Sheu 2010). Often, liking a brand could be to “fit in” and satisfy egos, and the more a brand satisfies what is important to a stakeholder, the more likeable it is (Sheu 2010; Nguyena et al 2013).

3.4.2.2 Reliability, integrity and trustworthiness (RIT)

Trust and reputation have been used alongside each other in many different studies (Dowling 2001; Mui et al 2002; Roberts & Dowling 2002; Rose & Thomsen 2004; Jøsang et al 2007; Park et al 2014), and rightfully so. No relationship, be it one between consumers and a brand, can be sustained if trust is lost. Trust is the belief that stakeholders have that a specific brand will continue to deliver on its promises and be honest about its claims (Park et al 2014). Trust is the confidence that stakeholders have in a brand, but it goes far beyond the buying intention. The relationship that is based on trust enhances reputation and consistently trusting a brand can breed loyalty (Raithel et al 2010). According to Rose and Thompson (2004), stakeholders’ perception of transparency and openness is an indicator of trust.

Some scholars even believe that trust is the cornerstone for building a reputation (Smythe et al 1992; Markham 1972; Raithel et al 2010; Barnett & Pollock, 2012). Trust is synonymous with reliability and integrity (Markham 1972). According to Smythe et al (1992) and Davies et al (2003), without trust there is no reliability. It is difficult to see them as being anything but synonymous because one cannot exist in isolation from the other, and they are so intertwined (Markham 1972). Raithel et al (2010) stress the importance of reliability and integrity. Reliability is the ability of a brand to perform and maintain performance in different circumstances (Smythe et al 1992; Fombrun 1996; Raithel et al 2010; Barnett & Pollock 2012). Because reliability and credibility are regarded as synonymous, asking questions about reliability would yield answers about credibility, and vice versa (Davies et al, 2003). Hence for the purpose of the current research, credibility was deemed to be equivalent to reliability, and henceforth only referred to as reliability.

Integrity is how consistent values, communications, actions and messages are over time (Fan 2005; Raithel et al 2010). According to Fan (2005), brand reputation is demarcated through the attributes that form consumer perception. Feldman et al (2014) refer to the “economy of reputation” whereby society is linked through networks, and this influences the way in which brands operate. Since information is symmetrical between networks, trustworthy relationships become an essential asset that should be preserved for longevity (Feldman et al 2014). Fan (2005) and Barnett and Pollock (2012) further posit that the basis for measuring reputation should be like any long-term relationship, by gauging values such as trust, reliability (staying true to what was promised), loyalty and responsibility. Mui et al (2002) suggest that trust is always evident where there is a positive reputation. Fan (2005) contends that if trust is lost, then the foundation of a good reputation is also lost. The information that forms these perceptions comes from communications from the brand, from other people and from interactions with the brand and its actual products and services (Fan 2005). Previous research has indicated that trust builds reputation and leads to consumers frequently returning, which increases consumer loyalty (Davies et al 2003:24; Barnett & Pollock 2012).

In their study, Johnson and Grayson (2005) principally focus on the element of trust at a consumer level. They draw from the academic precedents in psychology, which state that trust can be both emotional and rational. Fombrun and Van Riel (1997:10), however, posit that “reputation is a subjective collective assessment of an organisation’s trustworthiness and reliability based on past performance”. Johnson and Grayson (2005) further elaborate that without trust, reputation is lost. This means that every decision a stakeholder takes, whether it is consumers buying products/services, investors buying stock, regulators granting licences to operate and even employees delivering on the strategy, is based on the perceptions that stakeholders have of the brand and trusting that the brand will fulfil its promises (Barnett & Pollock 2012; Park et al 2014).

Fan (2005) contends that brand reputation is demarcated through the attributes that form a consumer’s perception. Trust is seen as an attribute that reduces uncertainty and provides comfort to the stakeholder’s relationship with the brand (Walsh et al 2009). The more positive the relationship of trust is with the brand, the more positively it will affect the stakeholders’ feelings about the likeability of that brand,

hence emphasising the link between each element (Jøsang et al 2007; Walsh et al 2009). According to Schweizer and Wijnberg (1999) and Omar et al (2009), the notions of trust and reputation are clearly intertwined.

Fombrun (1996) and Jøsang et al (2007) stress trust, integrity and reliability as key foundations relating to the measurement of reputation. Markham (1972:32) argues that establishing trust in stakeholder relationships will “negate formal accounting requirements”. According to Jøsang et al (2007), positive trust and reliability are necessary for an exceptional reputation. The concept of trust is rooted in stakeholder theory (Hillenbrand & Money 2007). Stakeholder theory suggests that mutual trust between stakeholders and brands is necessary for sustainability and long-term success (Hillenbrand & Money 2007).

Hence a positive reputation would indicate a satisfied consumer who is loyal to that brand. In addition, consumers who trust the brand and its promises will talk about their feelings about the brand to others in a positive manner, thus acting as brand advocates (Barnett & Pollock 2012). These attributes lead a brand to being trusted, and trust helps build consumer confidence in the brand’s integrity, abilities and any future plans (Harris & Chernatony 2001; Davies et al 2003:47).

3.4.2.3 *Respect and admiration*

Dowling (2001) suggests that reputation is based on the stakeholders’ respect and admiration for a brand. Reputation measures such as Fortune’s annual most admired companies survey and the Reputation Institute’s so-called “reputation quotient” underscore the importance of admiration and respect in analysing reputation (Fombrun & Gardberg 2000). Dowling and Moran (2012:27) further emphasise the following: “Reputation is often measured as the organisation being good, admired, respected, and/or held in high esteem.” Bailey and Bonifield (2010) add that being respected and admired is crucial for sustaining a positive brand reputation.

Vidaver-Cohen (2007) identifies admiration and respect as elements used to measure reputation. Moreover, respect and admiration play on the emotional appeal of stakeholders and therefore cannot be cognitively demarcated (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). Fombrun and Gardberg (2000) also classify admiration as emotional rather

than cognitive. According to Smythe et al (1992), to measure admiration and respect, one would need to identify whether the particular brand is held in high regard and whether or not it provides a sort of status that fosters feelings of respect and admiration. Davies et al (2003) elaborate on the importance of celebrity/brand endorsements that could either enhance respect and admiration or deflate them.

Several studies have indicated the correlation between celebrity involvement and its influence on admiration and respect for the brand (Sheu 2010). Celebrity affiliation with a brand affects the way in which consumers perceive reputation (Barnett & Pollock 2012). This would depend entirely on whether or not the affiliate celebrity is liked (Barnett & Pollock 2012). In the case of Nike, celebrities such as Michael Jordan pushed the brand's popularity to new heights (Bottlick 2010). According to Sheu (2010), such affiliations can be either good or bad for the brand's reputation, depending on the long-term consistency of the affiliation of the celebrity and the reputation of the celebrity himself or herself.

Bottlick (2010) also posits that respect and admiration may influence elements such as trust, likeability and responsibility. Smythe et al (1992) support the contention that respect and admiration are likely to be positive if the brand is seen as likeable, appealing, trustworthy and responsible. However, even though these elements are interrelated and can influence one another, they are not substitutable. Davies et al (2003) underscore this by maintaining that every element that enhances reputation should be carefully grouped on the basis of previous literature and past research. Even though the elements are interrelated because they can influence one another, they are not interchangeable because one can exist without the other.

3.4.2.4 Loyalty

Relationship marketing focuses on the importance of loyalty in reputation (Walsh & Wiedmann 2004; Balmer & Greyser 2006). Numerous studies have found positive correlations between loyalty and reputation (Walsh & Beatty 2007; Akbar & Parvez 2009; De Cannière et al 2009). Loureiro and Kastenholz (2011) and Barnett and Pollock (2012) both emphasised the importance of consumer loyalty for a brand's reputation. Various studies subdivide loyalty into attitudinal loyalty, which is based on trust, integrity and reliability, which then results in behavioural loyalty, and

behavioural loyalty, which is based on actions of repurchase behaviour and positive WOM and trusting the brand (Lau & Lee 1999; Akbar & Parvez, 2009; De Cannière et al 2009). Conversely, Smythe et al (1992) note that although loyalty and trust are linked, their outcomes are not necessarily the same. In other words, having the perception of trustworthiness does not automatically make a stakeholder loyal.

Helm (2007) supports the notion that loyalty and trust are not synonymous, and states that even though a consumer may trust a brand, he or she may not necessarily be loyal towards it and tell others about it. Loyalty is based on some value that the stakeholder is receiving in turn for the loyalty he or she gives a brand (Davies et al 2003). Even though loyalty could be based on values like quality of a product or service, or even some celebrity supporter (Davies et al 2003), it is not always based on trust.

Sabater and Sierra (2005) propose that the concept of loyalty should be divided into direct and recommender loyalty. Direct loyalty basically means purchasing a particular brand over others, while recommender loyalty is generally derived from recommendations to others through WOM (Sabater & Sierra 2005). Direct loyalty is measured by deciding whether consumers buy a particular brand over the brand of competitors (i.e. Adidas) because it is more convenient, or whether consumers will make a conscious effort and go out of their way to purchase that specific brand (Sabater & Sierra 2005).

Recommender loyalty is directly linked to positive WOM (Sabater & Sierra 2005; Walsh et al 2009). According to Silverman (2001), positive WOM by consumers is seen to be more resourceful than the marketing efforts by the brand itself. The assumption is that stakeholders, who perceive the brand to have a positive reputation, will engage in positive WOM. This notion is supported by Hong and Yang (2009) who assume that because a positive WOM indicates loyalty towards the brand, consumers will act as advocates of that brand and hence reduce the threats posed by a crisis situation. Although stakeholders can collect information on a brand on the basis of many different signals, the choices of others and a positive WOM will influence buying decisions (Walsh et al 2009). This may result in the extension of reciprocity between both the stakeholders and the brand (Afzal et al 2009).

In terms of the consumers of a brand, loyalty can be measured in terms of their choice and selection of that particular brand (Marconi 1996). The added value the specific brand offers over that of competitors in the minds of stakeholders, plays a vital role in forming a perception of the reputation of that brand and repurchasing behaviour (Barnett & Pollock 2012:21). According to Zhang (2009), loyalty is a key mechanism through which reputations affect economic relations. The reason for loyalty is sometimes unknown (Barnett & Pollock 2012). A stakeholder may not prefer a specific brand because superior quality or its CSR initiatives, but because it may invoke a positive experience (Lii & Lee 2012). For example, a little girl who goes running with her dad in her Nike sneakers might favour the brand not because she likes the quality of her shoes, but because of the memories the shoes evoke. Hence this is not necessarily 'attribute' specific.

Marconi (1996) and Akbar and Parvez (2009) recognise brand loyalty as a multidimensional elements based on subjectivity. Hence loyalty is grouped under affective components. Since the aim of this study was to only observe reputation as an attitudinal construct, the reason and attitudes for liking or being loyal to the brand (Nike) were not necessarily further probed. The study endeavoured to include each element relating to reputation in the literature, divided into cognitive and affective components, and then assess the brand reputation of Nike. Hence the focus of the study was not on the attitudinal association between trust and loyalty, but rather to demarcate brand loyalty through loyalty actions (such as repurchasing a product and positive WOM). Information that stakeholders receive from others is vital in measuring reputation because in times of uncertainty, consumers tend to use what others say about the brand to make up their mind (Park et al 2014).

3.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, reputation was demarcated as an attitudinal construct that signifies both cognitive and affective components that are necessary in understanding and measuring reputation. Many researchers and practitioners have investigated the strategic impact of cognitive components (e.g. quality and performance of products and services, responsibility, awareness and visibility, and overall impression) on a brand's reputation. However, there is a paucity of studies and practitioners that have considered subjective and affective components such as: likeability and

attractiveness, reliability, integrity and trust, respect and admiration, and loyalty, that change stakeholders' emotional perceptions of a brand's reputation. Even fewer studies have considered reputation as an attitudinal construct that is equally influenced by both cognitive and affective components. This chapter delineates the cognitive and affective components of attitudes, the variables that influence these components, and it outlines previous studies that identify brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The next chapter focuses on the research design and methodology adopted in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the theoretical foundation of this study with the focus on brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The strategic value of brand reputation was also outlined. The way in which various academic disciplines view brand reputation was then delineated. Finally, the general and more specific theories of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct and the underpinning of the elements of both the cognitive and affective constructs of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct were explored.

All research is based on philosophical assumptions that propose an appropriate method for the development of knowledge. Hence in order to conduct research, it is vital to state what the assumptions are. This chapter discusses the way in which the understanding of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct was demarcated through the methodologies selected to conduct this research. To this end the key facets of the envisaged framework for the research design, methods and analysis of the study are explained, together with the participant selection process. Finally, in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the research appropriate criteria for qualitative research are discussed, and several methods that include ethical considerations, verification strategies and triangulation are proposed and subsequently applied. The chapter closes with a tabulated representation of the summary of the major facets of the framework used in this study.

4.2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research process entails analysis based on data collection (Jabareen 2009). Two types of data collection methods are commonly used in research, namely qualitative and quantitative (Berg 2004; Gibbs 2007). Quantitative research is based on statistics, whereas qualitative research evokes descriptive narrations by the participants (Flick 2009). The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research methods thus exists not only in the assumptions and methods of data collection, but also the analysis and presentation of findings.

This study employed *qualitative research methods*. Qualitative research is described as the “way in which people being studied understands and interprets their social reality” (Brymann in Ritchie et al 2013:3). A qualitative study answers the “what is going on here” question and provides rich narratives (Gibbs 2007:4). Furthermore, qualitative findings are not based on the application of quantifiable and statistical measures (Ritchie et al, 2013:3), but rather on the perceptions and behaviours of the participants (sample) in relation to the aims of a study (Brymann 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Proponents of qualitative approaches further emphasise the nature of naturalistic inquiry (Ryan et al 2007). The naturalistic approach to research places value on the subjective reality of the participants (Bernard 2017).

Since the aim of this study was to identify perceptions, the researcher opted for a qualitative approach in order to provide depth and detail of data and to allow her to record the participants’ (female consumers’) feelings and perceptions of the assessment of Nike’s reputation as an attitudinal construct. This study was also exploratory because its purpose was to investigate a span of perceptions of Nike’s brand reputation among the select group of female consumers. This type of research not only allowed the participants to express their perceptions of the reputation of the Nike brand through narratives, but also elaborated on their responses in order to determine why they had certain perceptions about the reputation of the Nike brand. Hence the qualitative research methodology adopted in this study would allow the researcher to discern the similarities and differences between the participants’ perceptions (Smith 2015; Bernard 2017). Through qualitative research, other elements of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct could also be introduced, which might not have been recognised in the theory. The researcher felt that the qualitative research method would contribute to the development of knowledge competencies of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.

A qualitative research method was deemed necessary for answering the research questions formulated for this study. The questions addressed dominant perceptions of Nike’s reputation, the factors that contribute to brand reputation and the attitudinal components (cognitive and affective) of Nike’s brand reputation. Previous studies of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct that were investigated in the literature review either lacked a holistic conceptualisation of brand reputation based on both

cognitive and affective components (Sjovall & Talk 2004), or did not focus on single stakeholder groups (see chapter 3). It was established in the literature review that because various stakeholders have different needs from the brand, they tend to view brand reputation differently (Schwaiger 2004; Raithel et al 2010). Hence this study would endeavour to provide a better understanding of brand reputation and further demarcate the concept as an attitudinal construct comprising both cognitive and affective (emotional) components in a single stakeholder group, namely– consumers.

Bonß and Hartmann (in Flick 2014:14) state the following:

On the condition of the disenchantment of ideals of objectivism, we can no longer unreflectively start from the notion of objectively true sentences. What remains is the possibility of statements which are related to subjects and situations and which a sociologically articulated concept of knowledge would have to establish.

The above delineation of statements was especially relevant for this study because the researcher realised that the statements made by participants would be diverse and subjective, and not based on pure objectivity. From a measurement perspective, the perceptual nature of brand reputation makes it a manageable construct to assess (Davies et al 2003; Schwaiger 2004). Hence by selecting the subjects (female consumers) and then analysing their statements, it would be possible to evaluate brand reputation (Fombrun & Rindova 1996; Dowling & Moran 2012).

In this study, no empirically true reputation was being identified. The empirical truth of brand reputation would emanate from whatever constituted the participants' perceptions of the Nike brand. The measurement issues relating to brand reputation were thus only those pertaining to the method – that is, the suitability of the selected participants, the reliability of the instrument and the acceptability of analysis (Dowling & Moran 2012). Hence qualitative research was deemed to be the most suitable method for this study to enable the participants to formulate such subjective and perceptual statements, as opposed to pure objectivity, which is called for quantitative research.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3) explain qualitative research as follows:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

The above definition further embedded the roots of this study in the interpretive paradigm because qualitative research by its very nature is interpretive. The next subsection explains the interpretive research paradigm used in this study.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013), the researcher's worldview of reality has a huge influence on the way in which reality is realised. Thomas Kuhn derived the term "paradigm", which refers to the theoretical assumptions and observations about the "nature of the world" (ontology) and how this world is understood (epistemology) (Maxwell 2005; Babbie 2013:32). A paradigm can thus be defined as a comprehensive system that illustrates the nature of the research values and assumptions under enquiry (Olsen, Lodwick & Dunlop 1992:16; Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Maxwell (2005), different research designs differ in their assumptions and implications. A research paradigm is commonly defined through ontology, epistemology and methodology. In essence, ontology and epistemology refer to the researcher's so-called "worldview" (Flick 2009; Scotland 2012). The three main worldviews that affect the researcher's beliefs include reality being realised objectively, constructively and interpretively (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Scotland 2012).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), research paradigms are grouped into three main categories, namely interpretivism, postmodernism and positivism. Researchers interested in the positivist paradigm derive knowledge on objectivity that can be

quantified (Neuman 2011). Critical postmodernist researchers are concerned with social reality being constructed on the basis of historical values and beliefs (Jabareen 2009). The interpretive paradigm, as opposed to positivism or critical postmodernism, was deemed most suitable for this study, because this paradigm assumes that perceptions and knowledge are based on the meanings that people assign to them in terms of their subjective experiences (Innes 1995; Angen 2000; Jabareen 2009; Scotland 2012; Punch 2013). According to Scotland (2012:11), “the ontological position of interpretivist is relativism”. Relativism sees reality as being different from one person to the next, based on their subjective reality (Scotland 2012). Hence this study acknowledged the importance of reality being socially and subjectively constructed on the basis of individual subjective perceptions that are socially created as well as the researcher’s perspective (Goldkuhl 2012; Ritchie et al 2013).

The interpretive paradigm notes subjectivity and the fact that every individual has different viewpoints and perceptions based on his or her interactions and experiences (Wisker 2008; Cohen et al 2013). Consequently, in this study, the perception of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct of Nike was implicit through the perspectives of the participants. The next section explains how the participants were selected for this study.

The research design will be explained in detail in later sections of this chapter, but to clarify the structure of the research the following table is included:

4.3 PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The population of a study is the cluster of individuals from whom inferences can be made for the study (Babbie 2013). In quantitative studies, the population of a study is subdivided into the target and accessible population. The target population is “the total group of individuals from which the sample can be drawn” (McLeod 2014). However, the qualitative nature of this study moved away from more rigid sampling techniques that are better suited to quantitative studies.

Marshall (1996:524) states the following: “In practice, qualitative sampling usually requires a flexible, pragmatic approach”. Hence in this study, the participant selection process would apply, as opposed to the traditional sampling techniques

used mainly in quantitative studies. The participant selection process used for both the focus groups and interviews was akin to convenience purposive sampling, which is a nonprobability sampling technique in which individual participants are not intended to statistically represent a population, but are rather selected according to certain characteristics in the sampled population (Ritchie et al 2013). In qualitative research, participants are selected on the basis of their individual viewpoints and experiences of the phenomena under investigation (Ryan et al 2007). Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002) advocate the use of purposive sampling in qualitative research, and in this study, the participants were included on the strength of the following criteria:

- They had to be female (the study explored female consumer perceptions of Nike's reputation).
- They had to consent to taking part in the study and be willing to sign the informed consent forms (the study was completely voluntary).
- They had to speak English (the language of the study, and also the dominant language that people from different backgrounds can widely relate to).

The researcher chose this form of participant selection because this study had a special interest in female consumers' perceptions of brand reputation. Female consumers were the *unit of analysis* for this study and perception of brand reputation was the *unit of observation*.

This study intended to gather a wide range of perceptions of the female participants on Nike's reputation. In addition to gathering diverse perceptions, the inherent nature of this study did not demand a large number of participants. This is because qualitative research methods see value in a small sample size that not only provides richness of data, but is also sufficient to answer the research question, making no claim to generalisability of results (Smith 2015). In this study, the *number of participants* included six and eight participants per focus group respectively. Hence the participants in focus groups 1 and 2 combined amounted to 14 participants. In-depth interviews were also conducted with four participants. This research made no claim to representativeness because the research goal was to explore perceptions of Nike's reputation (as an attitudinal construct) in a diverse group of female consumers.

4.4 DATA COLLECTION

The two data collection methods chosen for this qualitative study were focus groups and face-to-face in-depth interviews. According to Du Plooy (2009), these two techniques are commonly used for exploration in qualitative research. The order to gather data for this study, the researcher conducted two focus groups with six to eight participants in each group. Four willing participants were then interviewed to determine the similarities and differences between perceptions (wide-ranging perceptions) and probe in greater depth their perceptions of the reputation of the Nike brand and the reasons why they held certain perceptions of the Nike brand that may have been latent during the focus group discussion. The two methods of data collection, namely focus groups and interviews, are explained in detail in the next subsections.

4.4.1 Focus groups

Focus groups were the first part of data collection used for this study. Patton (2002:385) defines focus groups as “an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. Groups typically consist of six to eight people who participate in the interview”. Hennik, Hutter and Bailey (2011:136) add that focus groups allow for an “interactive process between 6–8 predetermined participants ... The aim of a focus group is to gain a broad range of views on the research topic ... And to create an environment where participants feel comfortable to express their views.”

Focus groups also allow for social interaction between the participants, who are encouraged to converse, ask questions and comment on each other’s perceptions, feelings and experiences (Du Plooy 2009). In a similar vein, Kitzinger (1995:299) posits that the benefit of focus groups is in the communication and interaction between participants, which is essential in generating rich data. Not only are group discussions conducive to conversation and participation, but they also allow deep insights into the participants’ personal feelings and the opportunity to identify perceptions in a group as they emerge (Ritchie et al 2013:37). Patton (2002) adds that focus groups allow for the identification of shared and disparate views. Balmer (in Flick 2014) concurs with the above view, stating that a small group of people brought together for discussion can be more resourceful than a representative sample. This is because focus groups allow for a broad range of perceptions

(Hennick et al 2011), which was deemed essential for this study in assessing the wide-ranging perceptions of Nike's reputation (as an attitudinal construct).

The similarities and differences between perceptions allow participants to not only explain themselves and provide clarity and depth in data (Gibbs, 2007), but also to elaborate and clarify on something they do not understand (Hennick et al 2011). The participants thus perform a type of quality check on the discussion. In addition, because of the unique collective and interactive nature of focus groups, wide-ranging perceptions and facets of the participants generally emerge, which is not the case in other methods (Ritchie & Lewis 2003).

Focus groups typically include six to twelve participants (Flick 2014). However, according to Ritchie et al (2013:37), participants could include four to a maximum of ten people. Different authors and academics who work with focus groups (Patton, 2002; Ritchie et al, 2013; Flick, 2014) opt for different maximum and minimum numbers of participants. This study kept to a number of participants that was consensually regarded as acceptable, that is, between six and eight participants per focus group.

Owing to the fact that this study involved exploring perceptions of Nike's reputation (as an attitudinal construct), the focus groups allowed the researcher to gather information on the diverse views of a similar reference group (females) and further direct the discussion towards Nike's reputation. Not only did the focus groups allow for rich and subjective viewpoints, but this method also enabled participants to share ideas and draw out elements (of brand reputation) that might otherwise have been latent in the discussion (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis 2013). The next subsection explores the second major data collection method used in this study, namely– face-to-face in-depth interviews.

4.4.2 Face-to-face in-depth interviews

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were the second major data collection tool used in this study. According to Ritchie et al (2013), in-depth interviews allow for a detailed understanding of each individual's perceptions about his or her personal context and provide detailed subject coverage. Moreover, in-depth interviews afford each participant an opportunity to provide a detailed account of the subject, based on his

or her own context and experience. Hence participants are able to refine and elaborate on their individual views on a one-on-one basis (Ritchie et al 2013).

The use of face-to-face in-depth interviews as a means of data collection has numerous advantages such as, the following:

- There is less chance of no responses or incomplete ones from participants (Boyce & Neale 2006; Doody & Noonan 2013).
- This type of interview supports the exploration of attitudes, beliefs, values and perceptions (Patton 2002; Shenton 2004).
- It is possible to gather rich and insightful information based on each participant's personal context (Doody & Noonan 2013).
- This type of interview allows the researcher to take note of nonverbal cues that either support or do not support the participants' responses (Doody & Noonan 2013).
- They allow the researcher to compare responses, especially because participants are likely to answer questions until the end (Shenton 2004).
- Participants are able to provide detailed responses of what is important to them (Boyce & Neale 2006; Doody & Noonan 2013).
- This type of interview ensures that the participants' responses are their own and not influenced by others' opinions or perspectives (Shenton 2004).
- There is flexibility, which gives the researcher a chance to explore untapped areas (Berg 2009).
- The researcher can prompt and probe to gain valuable information or clarification needed for the study (Patton 2002).
- Open-ended questions provide depth and rich data, therefore increasing the validity of the data (Creswell 2003; Doody & Noonan 2013).
- The participants can ask the researcher for further clarification (Doody & Noonan 2013)

The benefits of face-to-face in-depth interviews were especially relevant to this study, because of the fact that it was rooted in the interpretive paradigm, and such subjective and rich viewpoints would allow the researcher to gain better insight and

clarification on a one-on-one basis on Nike's reputation. The next subsection discusses the methods of reasoning used for the focus group discussion and interview schedule.

4.4.3 Approaches to the development of a focus group discussion guide and interview schedule

This subsection elaborates on the inductive approach used in this qualitative study and the use of theory from the literature to guide this approach. The structure of the questions, techniques and tests used in the focus group discussion guide and interview schedule are also explained.

In qualitative research, data is collected inductively, deductively or both (Ryan et al 2007). The deductive approach to analysis refers to the testing of a preconceived hypothesis (Silverman 2000). The inductive approach to analysis refers to interpretations made by the researcher based on raw data collected from the study participants (Thomas 2006). Ritchie et al (2013:267) encourage the use of inductive research in qualitative research by stating the following: "The value of qualitative research is in its ability to explore in depth and issues in depth and from the perspectives of different participants, with concepts, meanings and explanations developed inductively from the data."

Hennick et al (2011) further support the fact that in qualitative research, the identification of issues or phenomena is from the perspective of the specific study participants. In essence, inductive research produces theory that appears from the research data (Smith 2015). An inductive approach was best suited to this study because of its main objective of this study to explore perceptions of Nike's reputation in the select group of female consumers, and then view brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. In this study, individual viewpoints were elicited from the participants. Furthermore, information in this study was used as evidence to draw a conclusion rather than using a proposition or hypothesis as a starting point (Ritchie et al 2013). Data in this study was further generated from the participants and thus inductive in nature (Cohen et al 2013).

Although this study was inductive, it used the theoretical framework of brand reputation in the literature to guide the way in which questions were formulated. The

use of a theoretical framework allowed for the identification of any patterns or new ideas to guide the researcher during the analysis of the phenomenon of Nike's reputation as an attitudinal construct. In addition, findings and theories generated inductively can either support or contest the theoretical assumptions identified in the literature. There is thus a comprehensive integration of theoretical knowledge in the literature and the inductive use of data collected from the study participants.

Ritchie et al (in Gibbs 2007) further encourage the use of previous literature or a framework to guide the measuring instruments. According to Smith (2015), existing literature is a basis for research and the framework through which findings can be interpreted. Flick (2014:66) adds that in qualitative research insights, information from existing literature is also known as "context knowledge", and the participants' statements can be customised and grouped together to achieve the research objectives. In the current study, although the theory from existing literature was used to guide the researcher in the interview schedule and focus group discussion guide, the findings were still presented on the basis of the study participants' statements with no predetermined hypothesis.

For pragmatic reasons, the questions in the focus group discussion guide and interview schedule were semistructured to ensure that the conversations with the participants remained focused on the research problems and sub-problems. Semistructured interviews and focus groups use some predetermined questions and promote a sense of order in relation to the research aim (Louise Barriball & While 1994). Semistructured interviews and focus groups also allow for flexibility in formulating the questions (Whiting 2008) and the participants may initiate discussions, allowing for the potential identification of new concepts and providing depth in the participants' perceptions (Harrell & Bradley 2009).

The semistructured questions used in this study enabled the researcher to steer the discussion in the direction of the study aim, and also gave the participants flexibility in voicing their personal perceptions of Nike's reputation and in uncovering elements that contribute to perceiving reputation, which may not have been identified in the literature (Flick 2014).

Semistructured questions are open, thus allowing the researcher to probe or seek clarification on data when deemed fit (Irvine, Drew & Sainsbury 2013). Probing in

semistructured interview schedules and focus group discussions is a valuable tool to ensure the collection of reliable and valid data, because probing and prompting promote the following:

- Establishing a sense of rapport with participants (Louise Barriball & While 1994; Whiting 2008)
- Allowing clarification of inconsistencies and information that is incomplete to enable the researcher to gain better understanding (Irvine et al 2013)
- Allowing the participants to divulge information that may be important to them, while the researcher can still stay track with the purpose of the study (Louise Barriball & While 1994)
- Enabling the researcher to prompt the participants to recall information they might not remember (Harrell & Bradley 2009)
- Highlighting the fact that each participant will have his or her own point of view based on personal experience, thereby reducing the number of socially desirable answers (Irvine et al 2013)

In the current study, probing by means of semistructured questions fostered a conversational, relaxed but at the same time prepared discussion that had the necessary direction to collect rich information on the perceptions of Nike's reputation. The semistructured questions were based on brand reputation (see the discussion in chapter 2, regarding the cognitive and affective components of brand reputation) as a framework to guide the interviews and focus groups in order to assess perceptions of Nike's brand reputation among the select group of female consumers. The semistructured focus group discussion guide and interview schedule allowed the researcher flexibility in the research, and also facilitated openness and the collection of in-depth, rich information from the participants. This flexibility is an advantage because it allows for identification of elements and concepts that may not have been previously realised in the literature. According to Whiting (2008), semistructured interviews and focus groups can also act as a complementary means of triangulation. Hence the use of these tools in this study allowed for an additional source of credibility.

The funnel technique was also used. In terms of this method, questions in the focus group discussion guide and interview schedule may range from more general to

more specific (Hennick et al 2011). According to Flick (2014), asking general questions to more specific questions is an advantage in qualitative studies because it allows for the emergence of different themes and for the probing of information on specific sensitising concepts.

To ensure that the questions were in line with the aim of the study, the researcher compiled both the interview guide and focus group schedule. She also conducted a small-scale pilot study before tackling the actual focus groups and interviews. According to Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001:1), a pilot study “is a mini version of a full-scale study or trial run done in preparation of a full-scale study ... The latter is also called a feasibility study. It can be a specific pretesting of research instruments including questionnaires and interview schedules.”

The pilot study was beneficial for this study for the following reasons:

- A pilot study can serve as a test run or pretest that allows the researcher to understand and get a feel of what it's like to assess' actual participants (Kim, 2011; Arain, Campbell, Cooper & Lancaster 2010).
- It can pre-empt challenges specifically in the areas of measurement and technicalities, such as timing limits, instructions, transcription of data (e.g. whether the tape and video recorder are working properly and can be heard, and whether the instructions are clear enough) (Van Teijlingen & Hundley 2002; Arain et al 2010).
- The researcher can obtain feedback from the “test” participants on problems they encountered (specifically noticing nonverbal behaviour that suggests discomfort because of the wording or content of the questions) and highlight the parts of the study that are satisfactory (Berg 2004).
- The researcher can assess beforehand if there is any ambiguity in the questions and that the types of responses are aligned with what the study aims to achieve and what the researcher has planned. If the content is inadequate in certain areas, then it can be adapted (i.e. the content and format of questioning, discussion and probing) (Berg 2009).

Hence the pilot study for this study served as both a feasibility study and a pretesting of the technical instruments used in the focus group discussion guide and interview

schedule. The researcher thus felt that the pilot study would also enhance the reliability and validity of the study by testing its feasibility and highlighting and fixing problem areas before the actual study was conducted. The pilot study included four willing members who satisfied the inclusion criteria for participant selection in the actual study for the testing of the focus group discussion guide; and two willing members who met the inclusion criteria for participant selection for the testing of the interview schedule. The pilot study allowed the researcher to identify any problems in the focus group discussion guide and interview schedule itself and problems with the technical instruments. In this study, the purpose of the pilot study was to resolve any problems/ambiguity in the questions, probing questions, the compilation of instructions and with the technical instruments (used for transcribing, etc.) of the focus group discussion and interview guide.

The results of the pilot study helped the researcher to gain experience in conducting qualitative research and identify potential problems encountered, which enhanced her knowledge of the application of these methodologies. Any problems with maintaining a friendly rapport with the participants were noted, and a different approach adopted in the actual research. Furthermore, any ambiguities in the questions, probing of questions and instructions were dealt with. Minimal changes were made to the focus group discussion guide and interview schedule in order to make the questions as clear as possible so that the participants would have no problem understanding them. No problems were noted in the technical instruments (e.g. whether the sound of the tape recorder was too loud, etc.). The questions in the discussion guide and interview schedule were deemed to be conversational, clear, open without the use of jargon and neither one-dimensional nor impersonal.

4.4.4 Recording

The interviews and focus groups were all conducted in English. This was because English was the language of the study and also the dominant language that most people from different backgrounds can relate to and converse in. The focus groups and interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, which ensured that the entire interview and focus group were transcribed verbatim and orthographically, with the permission of the individuals participating in the interviews. The next subsection deals with the systematic process of the focus group discussion guide.

4.4.5 Focus group discussion guide

Two separate focus groups were used as a form of data collection for this study. The participants of the focus groups were purposefully selected because they were female consumers and willing to participate in the study (see section 4.3 on the participant selection process). The setting for both focus groups was a quiet venue convenient for all the participants. The two interviews lasted one hour and ten minutes and one hour and twenty-five minutes, respectively.

The researcher acted as a mediator between different participants to ensure that certain participants or partial groups did not dominate the discussion in the focus groups. This was done by encouraging the reserved participants or reserved group of participants to express their views. This enabled the researcher to assess the perceptions of the entire group as opposed to hearing the views of the dominant participants or partial groups in the focus group. Holding two focus groups was especially beneficial because it allowed for the identification of dominant and latent perceptions and the similarities and differences of perceptions held by the individuals in both groups on Nike's reputation. This enabled the researcher to adequately answer the research questions used in this study.

The questions and probing questions compiled in the focus group schedule ranged from more general questions pertaining to the Nike brand to more specific questions relating to the assessment of the reputation of the Nike brand as an attitudinal construct. This was in line with the method recommended for asking questions in a focus group using the funnel technique. In this focus group, the participants were welcomed and the researcher introduced herself and outlined the context to the study by providing a brief overview and explaining the purpose and objectives of the study. The researcher also explained the process of informed consent and anonymity in the research to all the participants. She then asked the participants if they had any questions about the study, and she only proceeded to the second set of questions once the participants had signed the informed consent forms and she had satisfactorily responded to their questions about the study.

The focus group discussion guide then posed broad opening questions relating to brands in general (questions 1 to 5). This allowed the participants to express their perceptions of brands broadly. It not only explained the context of the research for

the participants, but also enabled them to build a sense of rapport with the researcher and feel comfortable in a group setting. Questions 1 to 5 also gave the researcher some perspective on pursuing certain lines of questioning. Questions 1 to 3 in the focus group schedule asked the participants about their level of fitness, proficiency in sports and their use of sportswear apparel. These general questions allowed the researcher to understand the participants' interest in sports and fitness and sportswear apparel wear, which was directly related to the Nike brand category. Questions 4 and 5 asked the participants about the appeal of sportswear apparel as females, what sportswear brands were prominent to the participants, what made the brands that were mentioned stand out, their favourite sports apparel brand and the reasons why these particular brands were their favourite over other brands in the sportswear apparel category. These questions helped the researcher to understand the appeal of sportswear apparel from a female perspective, and to further glean which brand was prominent in the minds of participants and the reason(s) for this. This provided an indication of which brands were regarded as prominent among these participants, without specifically mentioning the brand under investigation, namely Nike. The favourite brands in the sportswear apparel category and the reason for the participants favouring these brands over others also allowed the researcher to further understand why some participants preferred certain brands over others.

Thereafter, specific questions pertaining to the Nike brand were discussed. Subsequent questions were specific to the cognitive and affective elements of brand reputation identified in the literature on Nike's reputation. The tenets from both the cognitive and affective elements of brand reputation were used (the guide for the focus group discussion) as sensitising themes, which allowed data to be induced, based on the participants' perceptions. The rich information gleaned from the literature consulted in the study gave the analysis direction, based on the cognitive and affective elements, in order to assess Nike's reputation as an attitudinal construct. Hence the dominant perceptions of Nike's reputation and both logical (cognitive) and emotional (affective) subjective viewpoints of Nike's brand reputation were analysed on the basis of the participants' perceptions. This order of questioning allowed the researcher to build rapport with the participants and gather data that was in line with

the purpose of the study and the discussions by Hennick et al (2011) on the structuring of discussion guides (see annexure A).

Since most of the questions were based on some element of the cognitive and affective constructs of reputation, the motivation for the inclusion of each question emanated from the discussion in the literature review. However, the questions were not asked in the same order as each element discussed in the literature review. The main reason was that the researcher felt that this method would allow the conversation to flow easily and enable the participants to converse without following a rigid structure. In addition, some of the cognitive and affective elements were derived from one another, which meant that the questions were not separated from each of the cognitive and affective elements provided in literature.

From a procedural perspective, in order to follow a well-structured discussion guide relating to the research questions, the questions for the two focus groups for this study were compiled on the basis of the concepts identified in literature. The researcher introduced herself and adopted a funnel technique to ask broader to more specific questions in order to assess Nike's reputation among the study participants. These focus group transcripts were further pilot tested in order to ensure that the participants understood the meaning of the questions and that there were no problems with the measuring instruments. The focus group discussion guide is provided in annexure A. After conducting the focus group discussion on the basis of the guide and the information collected, this research engaged in four face-to-face in depth interviews.

Although it was not part of the purpose of the study to include demographic characteristic such as age, these characteristics seemed to yield slightly different results, as noted by the researcher. The first focus group consisted of a sample of females between the ages of 18 and 25, while the second group comprised a sample of females between the ages of 25 and 35. The similarities and differences between the two groups were identified, and these are included in discussion of the findings of this study in chapter 6. The interview schedules for the four face-to-face in-depth interviews are discussed in detail in the next subsection.

4.4.6 Interview schedule

The interview schedule was more specific than the focus group discussion guide because the questions were only compiled after conducting and analysing the two focus groups. The aims of the interviews were to:

- Gain insight into and gather in-depth information on diverse perceptions of Nike's reputation
- Identify if there were in fact any differences in the perceptions of the two age groups, namely 18 to 25 and 25 to 35, regarding Nike's reputation, as identified in the focus groups
- Identify other elements and concepts that might have contributed to perceptions of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct

As mentioned in relation to the focus group discussion guide, age was not a demographic characteristic that was intended as part of the participant selection process, but the researcher realised that all the participants in focus group 1 appeared to be between the ages of 18 and 25, while the participants in focus group 2 were between the ages of 25 and 35. Hence the four interviews conducted purposively selected two participants between the ages of 18 and 25, and two between the ages of 25 and 35. This enabled the researcher to verify whether there were any differences in perception in the focus group findings.

The questions in the interview schedule were semistructured – that is, open probing questions were posed, allowing the researcher to direct the participants' responses in order to answer the research problem and sub-problems in this study. However, the participants were also able to give open-ended responses, which allowed for the identification of other theoretical assumptions of brand reputation that might not have been established in the literature review or the findings from the focus groups. As in the focus group discussion guide, the order of questioning in the interview schedule ranged from broader to more specific questions (using the funnel technique) focused on Nike's reputation. The questions in the interview schedule were based on important concepts identified in the focus group findings (see annexure B). The four interviews were between 45 and 60 minutes each. The interviews were held at a quiet location that was convenient for the participants. The researcher realised that a

private and quiet venue would enable her to effectively ask questions without any distractions. The next section deals with the process of data analysis and interpretation used in this study.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Essentially, qualitative research can be described as a science and an art (Hennick et al 2011). It is a science because it has rigour and structure (Charmaz, 2006), and an art because it gives the researcher flexibility, and is often termed “creative” (Corbin & Strauss 2008). Hence this aspect of qualitative research denotes the interpretative nature of inquiry, whereby the researcher explains, understands, interprets and contrasts the various participants’ perceptions or behaviour, and this is achieved in a structured process using accepted methods for data analysis.

The purpose of data analysis in a qualitative study is to find meanings in and extract themes from the information provided by the participants’ perceptions and experiences (Levy 2006; Alhojailan 2012). These themes are then categorised into concepts that are directly related to the phenomenon under investigation through the stories told by the participants (Levy 2006; Braun, Clarke & Terry 2014). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), qualitative data analysis works with information and dissects it in order to construct codes that are manageable and theoretical in the given study and to look for meaningful patterns. Hence the aim of qualitative data analysis is to find patterns, themes, ideas and meanings in the perspectives or views of the study participants.

According to Gibbs (2007:38), coding is “a way of indexing or categorising the text in order to establish a framework for thematic ideas”. Codes allow the researcher to think about the text, and describe and interpret it in a structured manner. Gibbs (2007) adds that coding can be done in several ways, depending on the nature of the study, namely inductive, deductive or both. Inductive coding involves reading the data and observing themes based on the participants themselves (Hennick et al 2011). Deductive coding, however, is based purely on theories or concepts identified in the literature. The findings of this study were based on the participants’ perceptions; these findings were then related to literature, making this study *inductive* in nature.

According to Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2011:50), the following important concepts need clarity in a definition:

- *Data*: the textual representation of a conversation, observation or interaction
- *theme*: a unit of meaning that the reader of the text observes in the data
- *Code*: a textual description of the semantic boundaries of a theme or a component of a theme
- *Codebook*: a structured compendium of codes that includes a description of how the codes are interrelated
- *Coding*: the process by which a qualitative analyst links specific codes to specific data segments

Furthermore, it is necessary to point out that, codes, themes and subthemes are also separate entities that support one another (Braun et al 2014). A theme captures common recurring patterns in the data set, “around a central concept” (Attride-Stirling 2001:6), whereas a code is more specific. Codes capture “single ideas associated with a segment of data” in relation to the research question (Attride-Stirling 2001:6). A subtheme, however, exists under the canopy of a theme, sharing the same “central idea” (Attride-Stirling 2001:6). In this study, the codes contributed to the development of subthemes, which, in turn, contributed to the emergence of themes in the qualitative data analysis.

There are typically two types of coding systems that are commonly used: semantic coding, which is recognised at an explicit level; and latent coding, which is interpretative (Boyatzis 1998; Braun et al 2014). This study made use of the explicit words (semantic codes) uttered by the study participants across the data set to identify and indicate meaning and similar patterns that were later grouped into subthemes. Similar subthemes were then grouped together and interpreted in order to contribute to a main theme (latent coding). Although the interpretations in this study were later theorised to contribute to brand reputation as an attitudinal construct, this study was not based on the constructivist approach, but rather the interpretive approach, as stated in the previous section.

In the process of identifying patterns, the researcher looks at the entire transcription of data and then analyses and deconstructs codes to find meaningful patterns and

themes. This type of analysis allowed for the categorisation of subthemes and stories contained in the viewpoints of the female consumers, and for the identification of new themes that might not have been discerned in the literature, which indicated various perceptions of Nike's reputation. This systematic sorting of data further enabled the researcher to find relationships and make comparisons between the various concepts and subthemes that contributed to a core theme in the perception of Nike's reputation.

Data analysis therefore begins with the organisation of codes in finding meaningful themes and concepts. This kind of organisation of data is known as "open coding", whereby theoretical categories are tentatively grouped (Gibbs 2007). This type of coding provides a preliminary outline for analysis. In the current study, the researcher also acknowledged that data analysis is not a linear process, but a recursive process based on the aim of the study. Hence data collection and analysis were used iteratively because the results of the focus group analysis would guide the interview data collection. Hennick et al (2011) support the use of a data collection method in qualitative studies that is iteratively analyst driven. The collection of data and its analysis inform and guide each other – hence the fact that in this study there was a holistic synthesis of data between the focus groups and interviews, which provided rich information and perspectives.

The information was analysed according to the sensitising concepts dealt with in the literature, as explained above. The various concepts in literature or "context knowledge" allowed for a holistic exploration of the phenomenon under investigation, namely the perceptions of Nike's reputation as an attitudinal construct. New themes emerged from the study, which linked up with the literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3. These themes are explained in more detail in chapter 5. The researcher realised that that some of the subthemes that evolved might be interdependent of other subthemes and the emergent themes. The process of data gathering and data analysis became interwoven into the study, thus adhering to the emergent design.

Each focus group and interview was transcribed and recorded (on a voice recorder). The information on the perceptions of reputation was grouped and compared on the basis of the transcriptions, and the researcher then combined the information received from both methods. The two focus groups and interview responses were

recorded individually as interviews 1, 2, 3, 4 and so on, and focus groups 1 and 2. This allowed the researcher to organise the data per group or individual. Within a theme, subthemes were created from the codes of data collected. The researcher constantly compared the focus group and interview transcriptions with the voice recordings to check for accuracy in the data gathered.

In qualitative data analysis, there are various nuanced approaches to analysis and interpretation. Some of the major theoretical approaches in qualitative data include grounded theory, content analysis, phenomenology and thematic analysis (Patton 2002; Thomas 2006; Berg 2009; Flick 2009; Bernard 2017). *Thematic analysis* was used to analyse and organise data for this study. This type of analysis involves categorising themes of data that are deemed important for the subject matter (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2008). Thematic analysis is also described as a qualitative research method that allows for the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns in a given data set (Braun & Clarke 2006). Furthermore, thematic analysis is delineated as the identification and description of “implicit and explicit concepts within the data” (Guest et al 2011:17).

Thematic analysis has numerous advantages, the most important being flexibility in the approaches to coding and the potential to provide a rich, detailed and complex account of the data (Braun & Clarke 2006; Holloway & Todres, 2003). It should be noted that the theoretical positions of this study influenced the way in which the data was analysed and interpreted. However, because of flexibility, a clear demarcation of the method of analysis is needed to outline and comprehend the philosophical assumptions of a given study. This study systematically utilised Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases as a basic precept, in order to categorise and analyse the data to render this study theoretically and methodically sound. These phases are highlighted below.

4.5.1 Phase 1: familiarising oneself with the data

In this phase, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest the immersion of the researcher in the data such that he or she becomes familiar with the content. In the current study, the researcher started the analytical process by listening to the audio recording before transcribing verbatim the two focus groups. To ensure a transcript that was orthographic, accurate and rigorous, the researcher listened to the recordings three

times for each focus group to ensure that all participants' words and perceptions were recorded verbatim. This included all verbal and some unintended nonverbal cues such as laughing or coughing by participants. According to Riessman (1993), the process of transcription is an excellent way to immerse oneself in the data. Lapadat and Lindsay (in Bird 2005:227) further argue that the transcription process is a vital stage in data analysis and meaning making within the interpretative qualitative methodology.

Once the two focus groups had been transcribed, the researcher read and reread the transcriptions. She read the transcriptions for the third time before attempting to code the data. This repetitive process allowed the researcher to familiarise herself with the data and gain a better understanding of what the participants were saying. It was in this initial reading process that the researcher started realising and observing initial ideas in the coding process. Hence the analytical process started with the researcher thoroughly acquainting herself with the study data set and ensuring accuracy.

4.5.2 Phase 2: generating initial codes

In this phase, all the codes should be collated systematically throughout the entire data set. In the current study, only after the fourth reading of the focus groups transcripts did the researcher move to second phase of Braun and Clarkes (2006) thematic analysis. At this point, the data had been systematically gathered so that the process of coding could begin. Earlier in this section, "open coding" was defined as a means of organising data into meaningful themes and concepts. These codes were captured at both a semantic and conceptual level. This was achieved by classifying possible codes that emerged from data through repetition in the transcripts. These initial codes were highlighted and notes were made on each code. These initial codes were identified at a semantic level, whereby the researcher identified codes at an explicit level, based purely on what the participants had said, which is also in line with inductive coding (described in the section above). The initial codes for each focus group were arranged in tables alongside one another, which allowed the researcher to identify comparable and diverse initial codes in the two focus groups.

4.5.3 Phase 3: searching for themes

Once all the initial codes had been semantically and inductively collated, all the similar codes were collated to form a common subtheme in the form of mind maps, based on similarities or some form of relationship between the codes in order to generate possible subthemes. The researcher then collated all the coded data relevant to each subtheme. Collation of coding is vital during this phase, and data is arranged in terms of relevance for each potential subtheme. The researcher needs to ensure that these common codes actually contribute to a common subtheme and tell a story about the data. Even though Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to “searching for themes” in phase 3 of thematic data analysis, this study used similar codes that contributed to common subthemes that would guide the emergence of the main theme.

4.5.4 Phase 4: reviewing themes

These possible themes were then revised in the entire data set, and a thorough comparison made of the potential themes and codes under each theme. This involved a review of the subthemes identified in the previous phase to ensure that these sub themes were sufficiently valid to stem from coded extracts (the direct quotations by the participants) in the entire data set of the interviews and focus groups. At this point, the subthemes were collated to contribute to a potential central idea or potential theme in an iterative process of theme development.

4.5.5 Phase 5: defining and naming themes

Only after thorough analysis, did the researcher label and define each individual theme. During this stage, each subtheme was analysed, refined and collated to contribute to a common main theme in order to tell a story of the entire data set. Each subtheme and theme was then clearly defined and labelled. The essence of each theme was also checked iteratively in relation to the research problem.

Hence themes were not labelled and defined on the basis of how often they occurred in the data set, but rather on whether they contributed to the perception of brand reputation. During this phase, the data extracts were reread to check whether they backed the preliminary themes provided in the theoretical model of reputation as an attitudinal construct.

4.5.6 Phase 6: producing and writing up the report

Finally, the previous phases (identification of codes, subthemes and themes) were written up to demonstrate the analytical process of this study's use of thematic analysis. The researcher attempted to present the identified codes, subthemes and themes in such a way that they outlined an analytical story through the codes, subthemes and themes identified and examined in the previous phases of thematic analysis. During this stage, the researcher attempted to tell a coherent and persuasive story about the entire data set in relation to existing theory provided in the literature and against the model designed by the researcher in the literature review chapters (chapters 2 and 3), as well as the research questions that guided the study. This last phase is delineated in chapters 5 and 6 of the study.

Based on the above assumptions, the researcher chose an approach that allowed her to collect and interpret the data through the selected female participants' narratives in order to gain insight into perceptions of Nike's reputation (as an attitudinal construct). The data were organised into themes by means of a systematic inductive and iterative process, whereby the themes were realised purely through the participants' perceptions, but also in line with the study aims (see annexure C). The study findings were embedded in the data, increasing the reliability of the study. The next section deals with the ethical considerations in this study.

4.6 ISSUES OF RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability and validity ensure that any study is sustainable and well grounded (Ritchie et al 2013), thus ensuring the credibility of the data for the study. Credibility is defined as "confidence in the truth of the findings, including an accurate understanding of the context" (Ulin, Robinson & Tolley 2005:25). Reliability refers to the way in which the study and its methods can be replicated (Ritchie et al 2013), whereas validity relates to the "correctness of the research findings" (Ritchie et al 2013:273). When referring to validity, the dimensions include internal, construct and external validity (Pandey & Patnaik 2014). Internal validity refers to whether the study is examining what it set out to examine, whereas construct validity relates to whether the variables in the study represent the variables in the theory (Pandey & Patnaik 2014). This study utilised multiple methods in order to generate valid and reliable findings and perspectives of reality.

The literature reviewed helped to establish valid measuring instruments, namely the questions used in the face-to-face semistructured interviews and focus groups. In addition, the following measures were taken to ensure the *internal validity* of both the interviews and focus groups: triangulation and pretesting, which were both identified as methods that support the internal validity of a qualitative study (Morse et al 2002; Creswell 2003; Golfshani 2003; Pandey & Patnaik 2014). Triangulation of data enables the researcher to produce valid and diverse viewpoints as they occur. Hence, in this study through triangulation, validity and reliability were achieved by reducing bias on the researcher's part and ensuring trustworthiness (Golafshani 2003) (see section 3.6.5). This ensures reflexivity, which a researcher applies to reduce possible bias when exploring the perceptions of participants and limiting selected recording of information (Johnson 1997; Creswell 2003; Flick 2014). Researcher bias requires constant self-evaluation by researcher reflexivity so that the select views or select recording of information do not affect the way in which the research is conducted and interpreted (Golfshani 2003). Through constant self-evaluation, neutrality was achieved in the way in which research was not only conducted, but also interpreted. Furthermore, the questions posed in the interviews and focus group schedule were pretested in the pilot study as mentioned previously. In this regard, *construct validity* was also maintained because the semistructured interviews and focus group questions were guided by the variables identified in the literature review.

External validity is the relationships between constructs that can be generalised to different times, studies, people and settings (Pandey & Patnaik 2014) – more accurately referred to as “transferability” in qualitative studies (discussed below). It is important to note that the notion of validity and reliability is embedded in the quantitative school of thought (positivist) because this type of research concerns itself with the generalisability and reproducibility of findings (Pilkington 2002; Creswell 2003). However, in qualitative research, there is much debate about the applicability of the validity and reliability measures that are present in quantitative studies (Koch & Harrington 1998; Golafshani 2003; Tobin & Begley 2004; Høye & Severinsson 2007; Smith 2015).

Ryan et al (2007: 18) also note that the following: “When qualitative researchers refer to validity, they are usually referring to qualitative research that is plausible,

credible, trustworthy and therefore defensible” – in other words, how accurate and true the overall research is deemed to be. According to Maxwell (2005), validity relates to the research goal and the circumstances surrounding the research. Hence validity refers to the rigour or trustworthiness of the conclusions that can be drawn by following a particular method in a specific context for a specific purpose (Maxwell 2005). Furthermore, external validity in qualitative research differs from the way in which it is understood in traditional quantitative research (Maxwell 2005). According to Becker (in Maxwell 2005), qualitative findings usually yield different results in different settings and times, and for different members. External validity was not considered important for this study, but instead, the emphasis was on *descriptive, interpretive and theoretical validity*.

Descriptive validity refers to how accurately the study has been reported (Johnson 1997; Winter 2000; Pandey & Patnaik 2014). In the current study, the following measures were taken to ensure descriptive validity:

- The researcher transcribed and recorded (with the permission of the participants) the interviews and focus groups.
- The researcher cross-checked the notes of transcriptions and the recordings during the interpretation and findings stage of the study.

Interpretive validity is the accuracy with which the researcher interprets the meaning that the participants disclose (Johnson 1997; Winter 2000; Pandey & Patnaik 2014). The current study ensured interpretive validity by engaging in participant feedback, and the researcher kept verifying whether the participants meant what they were saying during their interviews and focus groups. Interpretive validity was also ensured by recording the participants in direct quotations when writing up the research report, therefore using the actual words of the participants when justifying interpretations.

Theoretical validity is the degree to which the theory correlates with the research study and data (Johnson 1997; Winter 2000; Pandey & Patnaik 2014). The theoretical framework for the model of reputation as an attitudinal construct was established in the literature through a thorough review of the concept of reputation

(specifically attitudinal), which was then used as a framework to guide the interview guide and focus group schedule.

Shenton (2004), Høye and Severinsson (2007), Ritchie et al (2013) and Pandey and Patnaik (2014) concur that in qualitative research, a number of concepts are required to ensure reliability, validity and the trustworthiness of the research findings. These include credibility (e.g. internal validity), conformability (e.g. construct validity), transferability (e.g. external validity) and dependability (e.g. reliability) (Pandey & Patnaik 2014).

Various authors have different names for these concepts in ensuring reliability and validity in qualitative research. Ritchie et al (2013), for instance regard the following as vital elements that also need to be considered: conformability, trustworthiness, consistency and dependability. Dependability relates to “whether the research process is consistent and carried out with careful attention to the rules and conventions of qualitative methodology” (Ulin et al 2005: 26), while Morse et al (2002) mention the concepts of credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability. The above concepts have different names, but essentially address the following questions:

- Is the study achieving its goal (credibility)?
- Are the findings consistent and could they be applied to other situations (dependability and consistency)?
- Has bias been eliminated to ensure objectivity as much as possible (conformability and trustworthiness)?
- Could the techniques and findings used in this study be repeated in other studies (transferability)?

The next section further elaborates on verification strategies that allowed the above concepts of credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability to render this study and its findings reliable and valid.

4.6.1 Verification strategies to ensure reliability and validity

Verification strategies are necessary in qualitative research to ensure reliability and validity (Morse et al 2002). Morse et al (2002:10–13) further suggest the following verification strategies to ensure reliability and validity in qualitative research:

- Methodological coherence
- Appropriateness of the selected participants
- Collecting and analysing data concurrently
- Thinking theoretically
- Theory development.

In this study, *methodological coherence* was obtained by ensuring that the research problem, namely exploring the perceptions of female consumers of Nike's reputation as an attitudinal construct, corresponded to the research method. Since this research concerned perceptions, qualitative data was best suited to collect in-depth information. The research question and method therefore had methodological congruence.

The second criterion was also met by including and selecting participants who satisfied the inclusion criteria for the study (see section 4.3 on the participant selection process). The third criterion was met by collecting data that worked jointly with data analysis as the questions were semistructured on the basis of the literature review, and data was categorised under themes that contributed to viewing Nike's reputation and brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The literature that was reviewed helped the researcher to apply valid measuring instruments, namely the types of questions used in the face-to-face semistructured interviews and focus group discussions. This also ensured adherence to the fourth criterion of *thinking theoretically* as the questions were compiled on the basis of the theory provided in the literature review, and emergent ideas were tested against the same literature. The selected qualitative research design thus allowed for flexibility and contemporaneous data collection through transcriptions, tape recordings and analysis throughout the fieldwork period.

In addition, the model (figure 3.1) provided in the literature review supported *theory development* in viewing reputation as an attitudinal construct with a holistic combination of both cognitive and affective elements necessary in viewing reputation as an attitudinal construct, and also allowing emergent findings that were not accounted for in the literature review. This study applied all five of the verification strategies recommended by Morse et al (2002:10-13) in order to ensure reliability and validity in this research.

4.6.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is a method used to enhance the validity and reliability of a study (Morse et al 2002; Golfshani 2003; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). It is defined as “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller 2000:126). Simply put, triangulation is a “means of combining several qualitative methods” (Flick 2009:27) to produce valid and reliable findings (Pandey & Patnaik 2014:5). Triangulation uses various sources of information to improve the credibility and validity of the research findings (Ritchie et al, 2013). Triangulation can be done in numerous ways, and Denzen (in Flick 2014) notes the following four types of triangulation techniques:

- 1 Data triangulation
- 2 Investigator triangulation
- 3 Theory triangulation
- 4 Methodological triangulation.

This study utilised both *methodological* and *theory* triangulation in order to validate the findings. Methodological triangulation is defined as between-method triangulation (Flick 2014). In terms of methodological triangulation, in this study, two different data collection methods were used – two focus groups and interviews. The two focus groups were categorised as “within-method triangulation” in the sense that the researcher used the same semistructured focus group schedule for both focus groups. Since different female consumers were part of the two focus groups, the findings allowed for diversity of responses in both these groups.

The interview schedule was also semi-structured and based on the findings emanating from the focus groups. The interviews consisted of female participants, two between the ages of 18 and 25 and another two between the ages of 25 and 35. This was done to elicit in-depth and diverse views on Nike's brand reputation and so that other elements that contribute to the perception of brand reputation (specifically as an attitudinal construct) could be identified that were latent in the focus group discussion. The few differences in perceptions based on age noted in the focus groups were confirmed or challenged. Hence, in this study, several qualitative methods were used in an effort to triangulate the methodological findings.

In terms of *theory triangulation*, this study included comprehensive theory set out in the literature review in chapter 2. This encompassed a theoretical model to assess reputation as an attitudinal construct. This model contained sensitising concepts that were used to interpret the data. The theory was also used as a basis to compile semi-structured questions for both the focus groups and interviews. This study thus efficaciously used triangulation as a means to enhance its reliability and validity.

4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are imperative in qualitative research. This is because the moral integrity of the researcher ensures the trustworthiness of the research findings (Ritchie et al 2013). In the current study, the researcher adhered to Unisa's policy on confidentiality and informed consent, which she read and understood. The informed consent form apprised the participants of the nature of the study and what would be required of them, and their consent was obtained prior to participation. The participants were guaranteed anonymity and they were also not coerced into taking part in this study – their participation was completely voluntary. In addition, the researcher took the necessary precautions to protect both individual (female participants) and organisational (Nike) information, the participant's identities were not revealed and their information was not released to any third parties. An ethical clearance form required by Unisa, with ethical considerations, was also provided (see annexure D).

According to Gibbs (2007), anonymity ensures confidentiality. In this study, the participants' identities were never revealed at any stage during the research. The true identities of the selected participants were only known to the researcher, and

these details were not transcribed. Furthermore, no questions pertaining to the personal information of participants were asked during this research – hence there was no record of this in the recordings and transcriptions. During data analysis, pseudonyms were given to each participant (i.e. participant A, B, etc.).

According to Ritchie et al (2013), informed consent fulfils basic human rights principles and protects both the researcher and the study participants. Participation in this study was completely *voluntary* even though the participants were purposively selected. Participants could choose to take part in this study and also had the option to withdraw from the study at any stage. This is known as *autonomy* (Beauchamp & Childress 2001). Each participant (from both the interviews and focus groups) was provided with an informed consent form before participating in the research (see annexure E) and information on the *nature of the study* and *potential risks* was underlined. In addition, the researcher asked for the participants’ permission to tape record the interviews and focus groups.

The informed consent form included the following information: the fact that participating in the study was consensual; the purpose of the study, the way in which data would be utilised; what participation in the study required participants to do (time), and the option for participants to withdraw from the study at any stage if they so wished; and the fact that the participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous (see annexure E).

Table 4.1 summarises the philosophical assumptions used in this study.

Table 4.1: The ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical foundations of the study

Features	Characteristics
<i>Ontology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are multiple realities and perspectives on Nike’s reputation. • Perceptions are diverse and based on each participant’s subjective reality. • Reality is different from one person to the next (relativism). • Perceptions and knowledge are based on the meanings people assign to them based on their own

	experiences.
<i>Epistemology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions are understood through the researcher's mental processes of interpretation (interpretive paradigm). • The researcher and participants are interlocked in an interactive and iterative process.
<i>Participant selection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small number of female participants who are able and willing to participate in the study
<i>Methodology</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collection of data by means of two focus groups and four interviews • Exploration is a product of the researcher's values (interpretive).
<i>Structure of questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured and probing methods • Funnel technique
<i>Data analysis and interpretation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inductive in nature with the use of context knowledge • Thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases • Coding, subthemes and themes based on the study participants' viewpoints and narratives
<i>Ethical considerations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot study • Confidentiality • Informed consent • Reliability and validity • Triangulation • Verification strategies • Reliability and validity

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter dealt with the methods, philosophical assumptions and analytical process through which data was collected and analysed. The fact that the qualitative research design was applied by means of an interpretive paradigm and analysed by means of thematic analysis, was highlighted. Convenience purposive sampling was established as the participant selection process that guided this research. Furthermore, the use of an inductive data collection approach and technique was identified and elaborated on. The data collection methods included two focus groups

and four face-to-face interviews. The way in which questions were formulated in both the focus group discussion guide and the interview schedule was explained and justified. Ethical considerations were also highlighted. Lastly, the issues of reliability and validity were discussed and the key verification strategies outlined to ensure that the research was valid and reliable. The next chapter deals with the research findings of this study.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the methodology and systematic data analysis procedures used in this study. This chapter discusses the research findings. Data was analysed to explore perceptions of Nike's brand reputation as an attitudinal construct among a segment of female consumers. The first section of this chapter provides a detailed discussion of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the two focus groups regarding Nike's brand reputation. Then, the themes and subthemes that emanated from the four interviews on Nike's brand reputation are discussed in detail and in relation to the findings from the two focus groups.

5.2 FINDINGS

The systematic methodological process of Braun and Clarke (2002) to thematically analyse both focus groups and interviews was discussed in the previous chapter. In generating themes and subthemes, the initial phase was the development of codes. After reading and rereading the transcriptions, the codes that appeared important in the basic data set were highlighted. These similar codes from the basic transcribed text were then grouped together to form a central idea or the subthemes (see annexure A).

An example of the themes and subthemes that emerged in the study is provided below. This example is only used to illustrate the generation from a code in the data set (words) to a subtheme (words that form a central idea) to a core theme (ideas that contribute to the perception of brand reputation). Codes that appeared in the focus groups and interviews, such as *price*, *cheap*, *value for money* and *expensive*, were grouped together to form a collective subtheme *price*. Another example was the identification of codes such as *comfort*, *long lasting* and *quality*, which were grouped together to signify the subtheme *product quality*. The subthemes, *product quality* and *product price* were then grouped together and the common factor between them was that they contributed to the perception of the technical qualities of Nike products – hence the emergence of the theme *perception of technical product qualities*. In this section, the findings from both the focus groups and interviews are

presented in terms of each theme, and the conception of the theme is exemplified through codes and subthemes. Direct quotations are used to indicate raw textual data used to generate subthemes and themes. The quotations from the transcriptions of both focus groups and interviews are italicised and indented where multiple quotations are included, or italicised with inverted commas where single quotations are included.

In this section, the findings are described in detail and categorised according to the data collection method. As stated previously, the data collection methods used for the study were focus groups and face-to-face semistructured interviews. The findings for both the focus groups and interviews are discussed in the subsections below.

5.2.1 Focus groups

In this study, two focus groups on female consumers were conducted, and the findings used to generate subthemes and themes. The next subsection discusses in detail the three main themes and their respective subthemes to describe the female participants' perceptions of Nike's brand reputation in both focus groups.

5.2.1.1 Theme 1: perception of technical product qualities

In this theme, the *perception of technical product qualities*, related to how the female participants essentially felt about Nike products as a whole, which contributed to their perception of brand reputation. This core theme was realised through codes that occurred in the data that contributed to subthemes associated with Nike's products and reputation. The subthemes comprising the *perception of technical product qualities* included *product quality*, *fit of the product*, *product look*, *product price* and *product range*. These subthemes and the female participants' perceptions of them regarding Nike are discussed below.

The first subtheme, of *product quality* emerged when the female participants in the focus groups mentioned quality and the items that signify quality such as good quality, long lasting, padding that enhances the quality of Nike products and comfort, in influencing their perception of the Nike brand. The participants in both focus groups seemed to regard quality as a vital aspect of their buying decision. Many participants in both focus groups had similar views on the quality of Nike as "good",

“comfortable” and “long lasting”. The following narratives indicate the participants’ views on the quality of Nike products, in both focus groups:

“I think Nike is still worth the value, I have a few pair of Nike shoes, and I bought them like 4 5 years ago and it still looks like new, like the quality it lasts for like forever. If you would have to buy, a different type of brand, like a cheaper brand, even like Reebok and that only lasted me like few months and it looked disgusting at the end it looked worn out so their quality is definitely good.”

“I haven’t heard anyone say anything bad about Nike like I bought a shoe and its terrible you know or I bought something from Nike and something came off or the material in the middle of the foot that it gets really uncomfortable or anyone ever say that they felt uncomfortable in Nike.”

“I don’t have anything bad to say about their quality, like you get what you pay for. When you think of quality and Nike you think of it as an investment because you know it’s not going to wear out quickly. Ok from my experience, it’s not going to wear out and you know you got it for a good few years. Especially when you buy something for R200 but then next year you need to buy it again, so buying Nike is for quality so it’s an investment.”

One participant, however, commented on the difference in quality in the different pairs of Nike shoes she owned, and described the quality as inconsistent by stating the following: “I have a lot of different pairs of Nike shoes right so there’s Roshe, Airs all feel different, all of them. So their padding is not the same, their look is not the same; their comfort is not the same. So they are not consistent in that way but you do pay for the quality. But they are not the same depending on what type of Nike shoes you buy.”

Fit of the product was another subtheme that emerged under the core theme *perception of technical product qualities*. This subtheme was also recurrent in what the participants had to say about Nike products. Participants used words such as “fits well”, “large”, “nice”, “loose”, “contoured”, “tight”, “covers”, “small”, “terrible” and “horrible” to describe how Nike products fitted them, even though the researcher did not initially inquire about the fit of Nike products in the research questions. The

participants in focus groups 1 and 2 had different individual views on how well Nike products fitted them.

The following statements by female participants in focus group 1 described their views that Nike does not fit large-sized women: “I would wear large so for me I went to the Nike store once and the large it wouldn’t fit around my bust. Another participant agreed and commented as follows: “I understand that they are trying to make everyone fit right but in order to get fit you need to start somewhere so if you starting out as a large and it doesn’t fit you then you are not part of their like market.” By contrast, other participants in focus group 1 mentioned that Nike shoes fit well, but the clothes do not: “So Nike clothes’ fit is horrible for me their shoes are great actually very nice.”

In focus group 2, the participants appeared to have diverse views on the fit of Nike products, with one of them stating that Nike products fit her: “... So I know Nike fits right, so I will sacrifice and buy two Nike pants and alternate them but then buy the cheaper t shirts. So ultimately, the fit and quality always takes preference in terms of how comfortable you are when you are training. If you are using it for training.” Another participant agreed by stating that Nike products fit well and cater for all sizes: “And style they got every style, they got something that suits everyone so it got things that suit short people, tall people, bigger, chubbier people, thin people, every style and their quality.”

The participants frequently expressed how a “product looks” on them as an indicator for purchasing and liking the brand. This subtheme again emerged inductively, based on what the participants had to say. Adjectives such as “good”, “nice”, “catchy”, “cute”, “pretty” and “great” were used to describe the participants’ perception of how the Nike products looked. The following participant described the looks of Nike products favourably by stating the following: “The Nike stuff I like because it looks pretty, I like this because it lasts longer I buy for the feel, and based on how they look”. The participants in both focus groups appeared to describe their perception of the look of Nike products positively.

The subtheme *product price* emerged through repetition in the data set. The participants mentioned price by using words such as “discounts”, “expensive”, “cheap”, “pay”, “value for money”, “sale”, “affordability” and “income level”. Many

participants expressed how important the price of a product is to them for ultimately liking the brand, purchasing it and even preferring it to other brands in the same product category. Interestingly, participants in focus group 2 placed far more emphasis on *product price* compared to their counterparts in focus group 1. The participants in both focus groups remarked that paying the price for Nike products put them in a certain social class. This view is encapsulated in the following narrative: “Because of the price of Nike, it is ultimately associated with wearing a certain type of clothing. Therefore, people can say you wearing Nike shoes and you paid a certain amount of money so it automatically puts you in a social class.”

When asked if they thought Nike is worth the value they pay for the products and services, the participants in both focus groups unanimously agreed and stated that would be prepared to pay this money because of “comfort”, “style”, “prestige” and because Nike “looks after them”. One participant in focus group 1 had the following to say about why she thought Nike is value for money: “And it’s not just style it’s also the fact that they put some thought into what they sell like what they did with participant C*. They see how you run and they give you the correct shoe fit. So, I think they put some thought into actually your comfort and what suits you and what’s healthy and if it’s something else affordable to you then at the end of the day your legs are sore then it’s not the same as Nike so they look after your wellness. So I think it’s worth it, if I could afford it I would buy.”

Although the participants in focus group 2 concurred that Nike’s products and services provide value for money, some of them repeatedly stated that even though they thought the quality of Nike products is good, they would not be prepared to that price for Nike products, but would rather pay for a cheaper brand. This view is summarised in the following narrative: “I feel like even though I know it is very good quality, its luxurious, I just go to Mr Price or directly to the lower price sections. Because I feel like when you walk into the Nike shop you just see all these lovely things and then I can’t walk out of them buying something. So, I don’t even bother even though I am conscious that they might be a better brand and they might be better quality and all of that I just won’t.”

By contrast, most participants stated that if they were looking for something specific they would prefer quality and a product that lasts longer, to buying a cheaper

product. One participant in focus group 1 had the following to say in this regard: “You know it’s expensive but you are buying a quality product. And that’s the same thing for clothing, I’ll buy a tights and it will last me forever.” The participants argued that the quality of a cheaper brand is not as good as one that is more expensive, and that they are therefore prepared to pay for quality when it comes to Nike products. This view was evident in the following words of one of the participants: “And because everybody wants money, so even if you buy a cheaper shoe the quality is like terrible for the price you are paying. I mean you are still paying a lot but even though you are paying R400 less than you are paying for Nike but you are still paying lots ...”.

A participant in focus group 2 mentioned that price is relative and supported the above participant’s view by commenting as follows: “That’s the thing, the fabric is that expensive and you have to be at a competitive advantage so all of them are going to be on that level because they are competing with each other, one is at R500 and another R100 more or R50 more but the quality is the same so I feel they the same race. You can’t compare a MacD’s to a Mythos restaurant because its different quality so in the same way can you ask Nike to make things more affordable.”

In addition to the above observation, another participant from focus group 2 compared the prices of the different categories of “takkies” (sneakers) that Nike offers, which are based on the level of comfort, and stated the following: “But I can tell you now the ones I’m wearing right now are the most comfortable from the lot but also most expensive. Like the Roshes are not as comfortable as these ones but not as expensive but I think I expect what I pay for.”

Nevertheless, participants from both focus groups remarked that they were more likely to buy Nike products when they were on sale or offered at a discount. One participant in focus group 1 mentioned the following when buying Nike products on sale: “I think when there is a sale then I would definitely want to buy at Nike.” A participant in focus group 2 expressed a similar view: “I think its sportswear in general I go to Mr Price unless it’s something specific or on sale then Nike for the quality or if I want something in specific.”

The subtheme *product range* emerged when the participants mentioned that in order to prefer or buy products from a specific brand, there should be many to choose from, which would automatically make them think of that brand above other brands in

that product category. When the participants were asked why the brands the participants had mentioned previously (Nike and Adidas) were prominent in their minds, one participant in focus group 2 stated the following: “They have a nice range, like they have a lot of choice and a big range both brands and they keep up with the trends.”

In the same vein, many participants in focus group 2 stated that Nike has a “nice range”, and a “big range” with a lot of “variety”. In addition, the participants explained that because of this variety they would suggest Nike products because they are likely to “find what they are looking for”. This view is evident in the following narrative in the data set: “You hear generally that they have a nice range from like your family and friends and even just random people. If someone were looking for a running shoe then I would probably advise you to go to Nike because they have different range especially their shoes they have a range for all different things. So, they have like a golf range, a soccer range, a running range a walking range a lifestyle range so, the range is very big. If someone is looking for a specific shoe or active wear someone would advise you to go to Nike because you are probably going to find what you are looking for. They will tell you there’s a full range but probably advise you that it is expensive so you need to be willing to pay and I haven’t seen a Nike shoe for under a R1000 I think most of them are priced within that range, so you know more or less that’s what you are going to pay basically.”

Conversely, some participants in focus group 1 felt that Nike does not have a range for large-sized women. One participant in this group stated the following in this regard: “I think for Nike clothes if you are small fit then it’s perfect but as soon as you get out of that small tiny range and get into large, like my sisters because they are so tall they can’t buy from Nike because it doesn’t really cater for them.” Another participant in the same group agreed with the words, “I don’t think they have a plus size range for ladies.”

One participant in focus group 2 disagreed with the above view by describing the Nike range as being equal for both men and women: “But I think they have equal man and women range and there’s a lot of comfort and style. Like a lot of people will specifically go to Nike to buy tracksuits when they travel because when you think where do you buy a tracksuit from you are limited. You are limited to Nike, Adidas,

Cotton On. You are limited to those places and Nike probably has the biggest range when you think of like where should you go.”

In summary, the female participants in both focus groups expressed similar and disparate views on Nike products through the subthemes, *product price*, *product range*, *product quality*, the *fit of the product* and *product looks*. These subthemes were related to the *perception of technical product qualities*. The salient perceptions of female participants regarding the technical qualities of Nike products were mostly (but not all) positive (table 5.1 provides a synopsis of these perceptions).

Table 5.1: Summary of theme 1 (focus groups): *perception of technical product qualities*

SUBTHEMES	FOCUS GROUP 1	FOCUS GROUP 2
Product quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long lasting ▪ Good quality ▪ Comfortable ▪ Good padding ▪ Difference in quality in different Nike shoes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investment ▪ Long lasting ▪ Good quality ▪ Comfortable ▪ Good padding
Fit of the product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clothes do not fit large-sized women ▪ Clothes fit slim women well ▪ Shoes fit well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nike fits well ▪ Nike sizes cater for all types of people
Product price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The price of Nike products puts you in a certain social class ▪ Value for money ▪ Cheaper product price means cheaper quality product ▪ More likely to buy Nike on sale and discount 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The price of Nike products puts you in a certain social class ▪ More emphasis placed by participants on the price of the product – they would rather buy a cheaper product in the product category ▪ Value for money ▪ Cannot compare an expensive and good-quality brand like Nike to cheaper brands ▪ More likely to buy Nike on sale and discount
Product looks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nike products looks good, pretty, nice, catchy, cute, pretty and great 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nike products looks good, pretty, nice, catchy, cute, pretty and great
Product range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lots of choice and variety ▪ Big range 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lots of choice and variety ▪ Big range

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No range for plus-sized and large women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equal range for men and women
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5.2.1.2 Theme 2: perception of brand traits

The theme, *perception of brand traits*, was associated with how the female participants perceived the actual brand persona. This theme was realised through the codes from both focus groups that suggested the representation of the participants' perception of the traits of the Nike brand, which contributed to their perception of brand reputation. These subthemes included *brand awareness*, *brand attractiveness*, *brand in relation to competition*, *brand loyalty* and *brand inclination*.

The researcher observed how aware the participants were of the Nike brand, and this tied in with the theme, *perception of brand traits*. The participants in both focus groups were aware of the Nike brand and commented that they saw Nike and the Nike logo (the swoosh/tick) everywhere. One participant mentioned that because Nike is so visible, she tends to remember Nike and go to the shops to buy Nike: "Now that I think about it ja, because I never thought about it before but generally ja I think it's the first place you go to isn't it when you need a takkie. I think also because you just always remember Nike, because of its visibility." Another participant stated that her son, who was under two years at the time, identified with the Nike brand and only wore Nike shoes: "My son when he was under two years would never wear any shoe that does not have a tick on it."

Some participants described Nike as a "global brand". Many also stated that people from different parts of the world can be seen wearing the Nike brand. Participants also explained that Nike is a brand that is easily accessible, both in South Africa and internationally. The following narratives highlight this view: "Because, I feel like we watch the adverts on TV and I feel like social media right now connects us and not just in South Africa, but all over the world. We see people um like stars and celebrities wearing these Nike brands and we automatically you know it's not just us. Its people in LA, people in America, its people in Europe, that are wearing these brands so you know for a fact that it's not just us its everywhere." Another participant added: "When you think of globalisation you think of Nike, Coke, McDonald's." However, some participants in focus group 2 felt that Nike was more readily

available internationally than in South Africa. This perception can be summarised in the following account of a participant: “Well the Nike overseas has different floors and you can personalise your own shoe, which is the coolest thing which I don’t think you can do here. Actually, my friend did tell me that I can do it if I wanted to but they don’t advertise it so well in SA or that often so I don’t know. I didn’t know you could do it here.” These narratives underscore the importance of brand awareness in purchase behaviour and the overall perception of the brand’s reputation.

A number of terms emerged during the group discussions in both focus groups that participants implicitly used to describe their perception of how attractive the Nike brand is. The participants’ perceptions of how attractive the Nike brand is, seemed to influence their view of its brand reputation. The participants used such as “popular”, “prestigious”, “versatile”, “luxury”, “elite”, “good”, “appealing”, “fashion statement”, “big brand” and “without a need for an introduction” to describe Nike’s “brand attractiveness”. They also mentioned words like “admiration” for the brand, “loving”, “liking”, “enjoying” and “wanting” the brand to suggest *perceptions of brand attractiveness*. The participants appeared to have optimistic views on how attractive they thought Nike was as a brand. The following narratives of participants in both focus groups suggested positive perceptions of Nike’s brand attractiveness:

“So, you don’t even have to tell anyone about the brand, the brand speaks for itself because it is so popular.”

“Simple yes um like its saying get the job done like you just identify with Nike when you see it you know it resembles a big brand.”

“It’s also the prestige attached to that brand you know when you wear a brand everyone knows you just feel all good.”

“And also, people wear brands and they feel dressed up and I feel like with Nike whatever you wear attracts attention and then you feel good, ja it makes you feel good.”

“Wearing Nike is like being in an elite group.”

“Nike kind of doesn’t need an introduction because of social media word of mouth”.

In addition, the participants in both focus groups mentioned that being popular and a top brand gives Nike a competitive advantage. This view was evident in the following statements:

“It’s kind of like the more fame a celebrity has the more people want to know about them and wear things. It is the same for brands, the more popular the more we are drawn to it. So, I would definitely say that is a major competitive advantage for Nike.”

“I know in my mind if I want to buy a Nike then I know it’s a good brand so for me ja because I know other people wear it its popular it must be good so ja it gives a competitive advantage.”

“It really does them a competitive advantage, the more a brand is associated as a top brand the more people want it and want to be associated with it.”

Brand loyalty was another concept identified in the study that is associated with the *perception of brand traits*. In both focus groups, the participants appeared to have mixed perceptions about loyalty towards the Nike brand. Some participants emphasised supporting the Nike brand and being oriented towards it by emphasising their support for it and mentioning positive WOM and repeat purchase behaviour towards the brand. The following narratives reflect the above observation:

“... I do hear about Nike from people I hang around with like colleagues and family and stuff but not often only if the conversation of gym or running or something comes up or if something new is out and that kind of thing.”

“I would definitely buy it based in someone unless recommendation.”

“Some of my friends at the gym, when they were uncomfortable training then I would tell them where to go and what to buy but I think every girl needs to know.”

“Like I said it’s a lot about brand loyalty it’s about if you consistently buying Nike and you know what you are getting or you buying Adidas you know what you are getting and you more like compelled to buy it. Because you know like ok you think I need a takkie you immediately going to think I’m gonna go to

Nike you know. So, I think it's also about that, that you so used to doing it and preferring it."

However, a few participants in both focus groups did not seem to have the same notion of supporting and being loyal to the Nike brand, but commented that they would buy a brand based on price and they were not really brand inclined. Hence *brand inclination* was another concept that appeared important in relation to the *perception of brand traits*.

Brand inclination emerged in the participants' views on caring or not caring about a brand name, liking or wearing and wanting specific brands. It appeared that the participants' perception as expressed in both focus groups was that they were not inclined towards a particular brand, but if the brand catered for their needs then they would buy it. The following account captures the essence of this: "For me it's not because of the name brand but because I have to be on my feet all the time it's nice for me to put a pair of shoes that I can wear that is comfortable and doesn't hurt." Nevertheless, many participants in focus group 2 appeared to be more expressive about not being inclined towards buying brand names: "It doesn't feel like you have to wear brands all the time, like I have never felt that way." Another participant concurred by stating the following: "And those people will probably know what's nice and what's not and actually pay attention to the adverts. Like an average trainer like me, ok fine I'm not an average trainer. I'm trying but we go for style but we don't go for a brand specifically like Nike or puma or this style of Nike is what suits my foot. I don't know that, so when I went or buy a takkie, I wanted running shoes and they told me according to the manner in which you walk and the manner in which you run, I don't know what brand I've got it's just what suited to my foot."

An important subtheme that emerged in relation to *perception of brand traits* was *relation of the brand to its competition*. The participants described the brand under investigation as "Nike along with other brands in the same product category". It was obvious that the participants in both focus groups viewed Nike as prominent and liked, with some participants preferring brands in the same product category such as Adidas, New Balance and Asics, while the majority preferred Nike to its competition. The participants in focus group 1 expressed their preference for Adidas clothes over Nike clothes and Nike shoes over Adidas shoes. The reason they gave was the *fit of*

the product (identified in theme 1). The following narratives underscore this perception:

“I own more Adidas clothes, I actually don’t really own Nike clothes but I own Nike shoes.”

“Adidas clothes are very airy, like if you sweating and stuff like that that’s what you need you need air to circulate and not feel sticky.”

Participants in focus group 2 also stated that they preferred brands such as Nike and Adidas because of “comfort”, “difference in performance”, “loyalty”, “top of mind awareness”, “sponsoring of sports – specifically soccer”, “the fit of the product”, being identified with a certain “social class” and “peer pressure”. Some of these concepts were evident in the following statements:

“So, in the movie they kept showing the guy ‘9999’ and then subconsciously he ended up betting on the number 9 horse. It’s same things with Nike everybody is wearing it regardless of your family or friends are wearing it every friend, young person, every one actually there’s no age on it I have seen 2 years wear it and I’ve seen a 60-year-old wear it. There is not even age category. You constantly seeing it everywhere so obviously there’s a curiosity of it, let me try it on for myself and then you try it on and you will be impressed and then say oh well these shoes are actually good so.”

“I think I was under peer pressure when I bought these Nike shoes (pointing at shoes).”

“People will know Roshe costs this amount of money you automatically put people into a certain income class that a lot of people would want to appeal to.”

“I think ja Adidas is more prominent in soccer.”

The participants in focus group 2 also mentioned Nike and Adidas as prominent brands, citing as the reason why they thought these brands are prominent their “advertising”, “big range”, influence by “family members and friends”, “quality” and “price”. The influence of family members and TOM awareness in terms of prominence were evident in the following narrative: “I also used to do sports a while

but then my husband he likes Adidas so I think I'm kind of also in that mind-set so when I think of a sneaker Nike doesn't come to mind first."

Interestingly, some participants in focus group 2 mentioned Nike and Adidas as being their favourite brands, but also mentioned Puma, Max Pro-Action, Cotton on Body as their favourite brand. Puma was termed "fashionable" and Max Pro-Action and Cotton on Body were deemed favourite brands because they were more "affordable" than Nike and Adidas. This assessment was evident in the following statements:

"Puma is now becoming fashionable; they have become more fashion conscious. They are not only sporty they are now fashionable like tekkies and all of that."

"It helps because they have a range that's lot more affordable."

To summarise, the theme, *perception of brand traits*, was delineated through the following subthemes identified in the data set: *brand awareness*, *brand attractiveness*, *brand loyalty*, *brand inclination* and *brand in relation to competition*. Overall, the female participants expressed favourable perceptions on Nike's brand traits. Table 5.2 summarises each subtheme, which were building blocks in understanding the female participants' *perception of Nike brand traits*.

Table 5.2: Summary of theme 2 (focus groups): *perception of Nike brand traits*

SUBTHEMES	FOCUS GROUP 1	FOCUS GROUP 2
Brand awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ See Nike tick/swoosh everywhere ▪ See everyone wearing Nike ▪ Identify the brand ▪ Global brand ▪ Easily accessible in SA and internationally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ See Nike tick/swoosh everywhere ▪ See everyone wearing Nike ▪ Identify the brand ▪ Global brand ▪ Accessible in SA and internationally ▪ More readily available internationally
Brand attractiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fashion statement ▪ Popularity gives brand a competitive advantage ▪ Prestigious ▪ Versatile ▪ Luxury 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fashion statement ▪ Popularity gives brand a competitive advantage ▪ Prestigious ▪ Versatile ▪ Luxury ▪ Elite

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Elite ▪ Big brand ▪ No need for an introduction ▪ Good brand ▪ Appealing ▪ Love the brand ▪ Like the brand ▪ Want the brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Big brand ▪ No need for an introduction ▪ Good brand ▪ Appealing ▪ Love the brand ▪ Like the brand ▪ Want the brand
Brand loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supporting brand ▪ Positive WOM ▪ Repeat purchase behaviour ▪ Loyalty based on what brand one is inclined towards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supporting brand ▪ Positive WOM ▪ Repeat purchase behaviour ▪ Loyalty based on what brand one is inclined towards
Brand inclination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not inclined towards brand names ▪ Would be inclined towards Nike brand because it signifies comfort and quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not inclined towards brand names ▪ Would be inclined towards a brand based on price and comfort
Brand in relation to competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nike – most prominent and liked brand ▪ Prefer Adidas clothes because of fit ▪ Prefer Nike shoes because of fit ▪ Some preferred Adidas, Asics, New Balance ▪ Favourite brands included Nike and Adidas because of comfort, difference in performance, brand loyalty, TOM awareness, sponsoring of sports – specifically soccer, fit, being identified with a certain social class and peer pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nike and Adidas – prominent brands because of: advertising, big range, influence by family members, quality and price ▪ Favourite brands include Adidas, Nike, Puma, Max Pro-Action, Cotton on Body

5.2.1.3 Theme 3: perception of brand strategy

In this theme, *perception of brand strategy* refers to all the female participants' perceptions on the approaches that Nike adopts in order to achieve specific goals. The following subthemes were identified in the data set relating to the perception of Nike's brand strategy: *focus on women, use of media, celebrity affiliation, consistency of messages, keeping up with the times and a moral and ethical brand.*

Since the focus of this study was on females' perceptions of Nike's reputation, the subtheme *focus on women* was a concept contributing to the *perception of brand strategy*, and particularly pertinent to this study. The participants were asked about different aspects of the Nike brand that were relatable to them, and they appeared to recognise the fact that Nike does *focus on women*, and expressed their "liking" towards this brand strategy. Participants in focus group 1 alluded to the fact that Nike caters for women, but they reiterated that Nike does not cater for large-sized women (as mentioned in theme 1: *perception of technical product qualities* – how well the product fits). Many participants in focus group 1 commented that Nike is a popular brand for both men and women, but others thought that Nike was a more popular brand for men. A few participants also compared the prices of men's and women's shoes and emphasised that the former were cheaper than the latter: "Ok no for example this (*pointing at takkie*) was R1700 but my boyfriend bought the same pair and it was R1400. That is sexist. That's not cool." Participants in focus group 2 also mentioned that Nike had previously targeted men more, but this was no longer the case. The following statement summarises the above view: "I feel like previously before, Nike was like more aimed at men and more like them and I find that as time went on it started like getting more diverse and kind of shifting more like to make things more comfortable for women, so found that that progression was really nice."

Many participants in focus group 1 further stated that Nike is more invested in women now than it was previously. The following words summarise this opinion: "Well just, like I said lately they have been a lot more concentrated on women and so like if you take the last five years then it would obviously be men but in the last year they really come out and concentrate on more women." The participants mentioned that the Nike brand now caters more for females as opposed to the previous situation of focusing more on males. This was evident in the variety Nike now offers women by including more showrooms for them, more advertisements directed at women, empowering women through its initiatives and making products more feminine. This observation was evident in the following narratives:

"Like previously before like ages ago you know maybe ten years ago you couldn't walk into Nike and find a large selection for women as you can now."

“You would normally just buy tracksuit pants if you were a woman or something like that, now they are making it more feminine.”

“I don’t actually know I have never asked her but you know every day at this time they have classes, they have a running club and everything is Nike and sometimes by the looks of it they even get sponsored Nike things so its women and they love it so they empower women for sure.”

In addition to having similar views to the participants in focus group 1 regarding the Nike brand’s *focus on women*, the participants in focus group 2 added that Nike caters for different religions through their launch of the active wear *hijab* (headscarf) for Muslim women. The participants added that this launch was satisfying a unique need of women in that the Nike brand had identified it and had done something about it. The following participants’ comments reflected this view:

“Isn’t it Nike that’s come out with the first hijab I mean they are the first sports brand that is accommodating other religions that scarf that hijab that Muslim females wear, so ja I think Nike caters for females, the think diverse.”

“You see the women at gym and those that wear hijab, the scarf they wear caps even indoors they are wearing caps because they want to cover their hair and they want to train like everyone else so this is absolutely fantastic that somebody thought of that.”

In the data set, *use of media* was another subtheme that emerged and appeared to influence the *perception of brand strategy*. The participants in both focus groups mentioned Nike advertising and the use of media outlets to describe the Nike brand’s use of media. In terms of this subtheme, the participants in both focus groups considered the Nike brand to be prominent on social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, but they had not noticed it in magazines, or on television or radio. This view was expressed in the following two statements:

“Social media definitely, your Instagram, your Facebook. They are very active there but I don’t physically see on TV or the billboards anymore.”

“Well I’ve heard something recently now about Nike coming out with the first active wear hijab I know it not because I have seen it in person but because

its advertised everywhere, social media is a big form of advertising so you see it on Facebook, you see it on the pop up of Google so ...”.

However, participants in focus group 1 also pointed out that they constantly used their cell phones and would probably not have noticed any advertisements on the traditional media channels, such as radio, television and magazines. The following comments reflected the above perspective:

“Honestly, I think we all just stare at our phones, we don’t see much else expect what is on our Facebook page or Instagram, coz Instagram nowadays there’s that sponsor thing.”

“Honestly if there was a Nike advert on the radio it would just go through it and not notice it you know.”

With regard to advertising, the participants in both focus groups described Nike advertising positively by using words such as “simple”, “catchy”, “inspiring”, “personal”, “cleverly thought” and “well timed”. Participants in focus group 1 further described the advertisements that had made an impression on them, namely the *hijab* (headscarf) advertisement and the one depicting a swimmer with a prosthetic leg. They positively associated these advertisements with Nike, and further described them as “relevant”, “sweet” and “strategic”. Some participants in focus group 2 added that Nike appeared to advertise more internationally than in South Africa. The following comment aptly describes the above view: “I think overseas you see a lot more advertisements, if you go overseas, Nike is a big thing it’s everywhere. Like there’s Nike town and it’s a big deal everyone goes there and passes it and buys it.”

Some participants in focus group 2 added the Nike running app (application) as a form of media that Nike uses to advertise. They described the Nike app favourably and stated the following: “It just helps you run, so it tells you how many kilometres. It tells you where you went and I think I hear because I’m not really a runner that there is a weight loss running one in the app. So that’s very motivating and then there’s those Nike running clubs you see promoted.” A number of participants in both focus groups also highlighted a few negative comments they had heard about the Nike brand in the media, including child labour issues and anti-Islamic insinuations about

Nike shoes. Some participants in focus group 1 concluded that depending on the type of media one is exposed to, they would hear either positive or negative things about the brand. Interestingly, a few participants in focus group 2 asserted that all top brands experience some form of negative publicity and did not confirm the negative things they had heard about the Nike brand. They referred to the negative publicity as rumours that could “tarnish an image”.

The participants in both focus groups discussed *celebrity affiliation*, which emerged as another subtheme identified that affected the participants’ *perception of brand traits*. Participants in both focus groups identified the following sports that Nike sponsors: football, karate, surfing and golf. Participants then identified celebrities and athletes who were either seen wearing Nike or were currently affiliated to Nike. These included Selena Gomez, Alex Morgan, Serena Williams, Roger Federer, Maria Sharapova and a female Muslim Olympic athlete. The participants in both the focus groups appeared to perceive these celebrities and athletes linked to the Nike brand positively. Furthermore, participants in both focus groups recommended celebrities for the Nike brand. Many of these recommendations were justified in relation to perceiving the Nike brand positively. The following comments reflected this view:

“Natalie Du Toit ... so I suggest somebody like that also someone who has overcome a disability and someone who has done well for themselves and someone who has defeated a stereotype against them.”

“But you know Ronaldo would be a good advert for Nike because have you seen his whole life story on Facebook, somebody showed it to me the other day. He started off as the guy who used to sweep the floors around the stadium ... And he saw the ball and he started kicking it and his father was apparently an alcoholic and I don’t know what happened and eventually somebody noticed, he got skill and from a sweeper with an alcoholic father. I think it was him, I could be wrong but something like that would give you motivation to like the brand more.”

However, some participants in focus group 1 recommended celebrities and athletes such as plus-sized models and mothers in order to fill a gap they felt Nike currently does not fill. These gaps included not catering for plus-sized women and being

inconsistent in terms of sponsorships. The gaps identified by the participants led to the identification of the next subtheme, *consistency of messages*. When discussing this sub-theme, all the participants' perceptions of the Nike brand were considered. Most of the participants in both focus groups regarded Nike as a consistent brand with consistent and unified messages. The following comments underscored this view:

“Yes, it's very consistent, I don't hear anything about it that's not consistent, like I said if you are on Facebook and you see and advert and you go on Instagram you see the unification it's not different they say the same things and have the same message.”

“Like they all on social media, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, all of those things they have. They very unified, as in they say the same things and portray the same things. There is a lot of unification in that so therefore the unification of how people speak of is generally like that. Like they like if you go more into in it, and you look more into it and realise that you know not everything is as positive as we'd like to think.”

Conversely, one participant in focus group 1 did not think that Nike was consistent in the messages it disseminated. The following narrative emphasises this view: “Well actually with the Sharapova case, I think she was doing some drugs. I don't know something like that, but they still kept her on and the sponsorship afterwards, which I thought was a bit suspect I mean for example Lance Armstrong all his contracts were cancelled after he was caught for doping and Sharapova they still kept her on so I don't know about that, that wasn't consistent, ja.” In contrast to the above perspective, a few participants in focus group 2 mentioned that Nike had sponsored Tiger Woods, but had cancelled his contract following the scandal he had been involved in. Another participant further described Nike as having moral standards by doing this, and commented as follows: “So it says a lot about their moral standards.”

In this study, involvement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) was identified in the literature review as being vital to the perception of brand reputation. However, the participants implicitly added to this view by asserting that being an ethical and moral brand is even more important – hence the emergence of the subtheme, *ethical and moral brand*. Many participants in focus group 1 initially did not view Nike as a

brand that gives back to society because they stated that they had not heard about any initiatives that Nike had been involved in. After probing, participants in focus group 1 mentioned a few initiatives that they were aware of that the Nike brand might have been involved in. These included sponsoring events and facilities and being environmentally friendly. These initiatives were highlighted in the following comments:

“I think I heard there is some facility in Soweto that they sponsor but I’m not sure.”

“Oh yes and they give bursary sponsorships to like train and stuff.”

“I think they do surf contests in Ballito where they get like random kids and they teach them how to surf I think it’s also sponsored by Nike as well.”

“I remember a couple of years ago I did the Run Jozi run there were people who came out first and Nike sponsored them with like tekkies and shoes and blah blah if you came within a certain range.”

“With regard to CSR they are very environmentally friendly, like with regard to their factories and stuff they don’t do the whole ocean dumping and stuff like that, with that they are good but I’m not sure about any charities and stuff.”

However, many participants in focus group 1 did not believe Nike was an open and transparent brand. When probed for the reason for their opinion, many of them stated that they assumed that Nike (because it is a big brand) would likely not allow the public to see the negative aspects of the brand and cover up its mistakes because the company has a good public relations system in place. The following narrative summarised this view: “I can’t say specifics but yes I also assume because they are a big brand and because they have the power to hide the negative and generally big brands PR is so good they can manipulate a bad situation to look good, so that’s why. No specifics.”

The participants in focus group 2 stated that they were not aware of any charity initiatives that Nike was involved in, but many of them also commented that Nike would probably be involved in some charity work. One participant explained this as follows: “Every big organisation will do something for charity for their brand. So we

may not be aware of it but they must be something.” The participants in focus group 2 also stated that they did not know whether Nike was an open and transparent brand. One of them, however, had mixed feelings about this and justified her view by commenting that all “big organisations” have to hide some of the negative publicity, but also have to be open – hence the belief that Nike is open and transparent, yet sometimes not open and transparent.

Interestingly, many of the participants in focus group 1 repeatedly mentioned the fact that the Nike brand is involved in charity initiatives involving education. This view was evident in the following narrative: “I’m sure like bursaries and education is something very important and I don’t think that’s something Nike touches on a lot of people are uneducated and if you can empower in that way it would send a really big positive message.” Another participant supported this statement with the following comment: “I’m sure like bursaries and education is something very important and I don’t think that’s something Nike touches on a lot of people are uneducated and if you can empower in that way it would send a really big positive message.” However, the participants in focus group 2 recommended the Nike brand to help disadvantaged people. She explained this as follows: “And if they can do an initiative where they can provide shoes to children that don’t have shoes ... that would be fantastic.”

Keeping up with the times was then noted as an important subtheme in the *perception of brand strategy*. The participants in both focus groups appeared to perceive Nike as a brand that keeps up with the times by doing things at the right time, creating trends, always altering its products and coming up with new ways to keeping their consumers happy. These included creating new and relevant advertisements and products with new technology that has not yet entered the market. The following statements substantiate the above view:

“I think with certain brands some of them come and then they disappear, and then I think Nike has stuck throughout and I think it’s because they have changed their products a lot. Some brands keep to the same products so sometimes they come and everywhere for a certain amount of time and they disappear and then Nike has just stuck through it all.”

“For like my mother she has orthopaedic problems because she is diabetic so Nike kind of health wise they accommodate for people and their issues because their whole padding at the bottom is like really good and especially people who have problems go on about how good Nikes cushioning is and its orthopaedic and suitable.”

“... And they keep up with the trends.”

The following was a discussion between participants in focus group 1:

“Participant A1: To add to that lately it would be the hijab one with how they fighting back against Trump and like being cheeky.

Participant B1: They were very strategic in the time they released it.

Participant B1: So much is going on at the moment with Trump and immigration who are mainly Muslims ...

Participant D1: They hit what was relevant at the time.”

To summarise, the theme, *perception of brand strategy*, was demarcated through the perception of the following subthemes: *focus on women, use of media, celebrity affiliation, consistency of messages, ethical and moral brand and keeping up with the times*. The inductive conception of these subthemes contributed to the participants’ perception of the Nike brand strategy in either an optimistic or pessimistic light. Table 5.3 below summarises the predominantly favourable views of the participants about the Nike brand strategy, which was a crucial theme that contributed to the perception of Nike’s reputation.

Table 5.3: Summary of theme 3 (Focus Groups): *perception of brand strategy*

SUBTHEMES	FOCUS GROUP 1	FOCUS GROUP 2
Focus on women (relevant to this study only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Caters for most women ▪ Does not cater for large-sized women ▪ Mixed perceptions: popular among men and women, others more popular among men ▪ Women’s shoes more expensive than men’s shoes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Caters for women and different religions ▪ Mixed perceptions: popular among men and women, others more popular among men ▪ more invested in women than before because of more:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More invested in women than before because of more: ✓ showrooms for women ✓ variety for women ✓ adverts directed at women ✓ empowerment of women ✓ feminine products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ showrooms for women ✓ variety for women ✓ adverts directed at women ✓ empowerment of women ✓ feminine products
Use of media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prominent in social media: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and pop-up adverts ▪ Likely not to notice adverts from traditional media channels such as television, radio, magazines and newspapers ▪ Adverts described as simple, personal, inspiring, well timed, clever, strategic, sweet and relevant ▪ Adverts made an impression: <i>hijab</i>(headscarf) and advert with swimmer with prosthetic leg ▪ Negative publicity (child labour, anti-Islamic connotations regarding Nike shoes) – depends on the type of media one is exposed to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prominent in social media: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and pop-up adverts ▪ Adverts described as simple, personal, inspiring, well timed, clever, strategic, sweet and relevant ▪ Negative publicity (child labour, anti-Islamic insinuations regarding Nike shoes) – deemed as rumours
Celebrity affiliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sponsors sports: football, karate, tennis and surfing ▪ Celebrities affiliated with Nike perceived positively ▪ Recommends celebrities for Nike with reasons that justify perceiving Nike positively ▪ Recommends celebrities who fill a gap at Nike: catering for plus-size women and inconsistencies with sponsorships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sponsors sports: football, golf and tennis ▪ Celebrities affiliated with Nike perceived positively ▪ Recommends celebrities for Nike with reasons that justify perceiving Nike positively
Consistency of messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consistent brands and mixed perceptions of consistent messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consistent brands and consistent messages
Ethical and moral brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initially did not view Nike as a brand that gives back ▪ After probing, several initiatives of sponsorships and being environmentally friendly mentioned ▪ Not open and transparent brand because brand covers up as it has good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not aware of any initiatives that Nike is involved in ▪ Do not know if Nike is a transparent and open brand ▪ Nike is open and hides some things because it is such a large organisation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> public relations ▪ Recommends charity initiatives involving education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recommends charity initiatives to help disadvantaged people
Keeping up with the times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brand keeps up with the times, and does things at the right time ▪ Creates trends ▪ Creates new and relevant adverts ▪ Creates new products with new technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brand keeps up with the times, and does things at the right time ▪ Creates trends ▪ Creates new and relevant adverts ▪ Creates new products with new technology

The participants in both focus groups appeared for the most part to have similar views about Nike’s brand reputation, although there were some notable differences in perception. As stated in section 4.3 in chapter 4, age was not initially intended to be a demographic factor in the study. However, the differences in perceptions were highlighted between the two age groups in the findings for the focus groups. These perceptions were expressed through codes that the participants explicitly mentioned. These codes were then grouped into subthemes that contributed to three emergent core themes, namely *perception of technical product qualities*, *perception of brand traits* and *perception of brand strategy* that were identified in the data set.

5.2.2 Interviews

Once the focus groups had been conducted, four interviews were held. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the participants’ perceptions of Nike’s reputation in more depth and to elaborate on the findings for and views of the two focus groups. Section 4.5 in chapter 4 discussed in detail the analytical process applied to analyse the four interviews. The findings for the interview participants were then discussed. These findings were explained in relation to each theme identified in the focus groups. The findings were also compared to the views of the two age groups (females between the ages of 18 and 25 and between 25 and 35) in order to identify any differences between the perceptions of the two age groups. The additional subthemes identified in the interviews are discussed in the subsections below.

5.2.2.1 Theme 1: perception of technical product qualities and service

The theme, *perception of technical product qualities* was initially demarcated through the female participants describing each subtheme identified in the focus groups such as *product quality*, *product price*, *fit of the product*, *product looks* and *product range*. With reference to the quality of Nike products, most interview participants like those in the focus groups, described Nike's product quality as "good", "comfortable" and "long lasting", and they stated that they were happy with the quality of the Nike products they owned. The following comments demonstrate this optimistic view about the quality of Nike products:

"You are not just buying a normal shoe you are buying a running shoe that will last you a good few years you know you don't just want it tearing and things so the quality of the shoes are good."

"I think I most definitely do Nike is a class brand and they not only cater for everyone they never compromise on quality."

"... I'm a school teacher so I'm on my feet a lot so I wear takkies most of the week and its super super comfortable so when I come home, my feet aren't sore, my legs aren't sore, my back isn't sore ...".

In addition, many participants described Nike's *product quality* as one of the reasons why they perceived Nike to have a good reputation and the reason why they would buy the Nike products. Participants from both age groups in the interviews further compared Nike's *product price* with *product quality* and stated that they would not compromise on quality for a cheaper product. The following narrative aptly summarises this view: "If you need something and you know its good quality and it will last long, then you will be willing to pay the price. I think no matter what it is, you can buy for example a cheap shoe and in a week, it will hurt your ankle. You don't want to do that you need something with the right support and the price just comes with it. I'm a sale junkie though, like I look for sales. I price check something at a store and see if I can get it somewhere else cheaper but I won't necessarily compromise on the quality for the price." This view of the participants contradicted the views highlighted by a few participants in focus group 2, some of whom were more disposed towards purchasing a cheaper product over perceived quality.

In terms of *product price*, many participants indicated that they would purchase Nike products and that they were value for money. In agreement with the participants in focus group 1, the participants in the interviews stated that they would prefer buying Nike products on sale. The following view expressed by one participant supported the above observation: "...I usually look at the sale things, because I don't use the sporting wear so often so I don't mind getting it at a bargain as opposed to full price that's why I would also go to factory outlets...". Another participant commented that the first thing she would check when looking for sportswear apparel would be comfort and then see if the product was reasonably priced. This view was substantiated by the following statement: "I look for comfort mostly. If something feels comfortable and looks good then I will look at the price, if it's not too pricey then I'll buy it. I like getting things on a bargain so if I find something at a good price and I know I'll use it a lot then I'll buy it."

The interview participants did not appear to place much emphasis on the looks of the Nike products. Nevertheless, some participants stated that they would only buy a product if "it looks and feels good, and Nike for me does that". Another participant asserted that the look of the product is dependent on each individual's taste because some people like bright colours, while others do not. The interview participants also described Nike products as fitting them well. This view was similar to the perceptions held by participants in the focus groups. Some of interview participants shared opposing views to those of participants in the focus groups by stating that they thought that Adidas shoes fit better, but that the Nike clothing has a better fit. This view was reflected in the following participant's account: "I prefer the Adidas shoes but I really like the Nike Run Wear it's very nice." Conversely, another participant preferred Puma products and asserted the following: "Just like the Puma stuff better on my body shape". Another participant argued that Nike tights, sports bras and shoes fitted very well, but that she did not always find "Longer tops" and that she preferred "Much longer looser tops". Nevertheless, all participants in the interviews consistently agreed that Nike products predominantly fitted them well and that Nike offered a "big", "different", "wide range" and "big choice". Interestingly, one participant highlighted the advantage of having a big range and articulated that this variety allowed one to compare different prices and quality in the Nike brand.

Two highly significant subthemes emerged in the interviews, namely *service* and *product fulfilling its purpose*.

In the interviews, the participants reiterated the importance of the *product fulfilling its purpose* in their buying decisions and their perception of the products. Hence a new subtheme emerged, which contributed to the *perception of technical product qualities*. Although a few participants in the focus groups appeared to underscore the importance of the *product fulfilling its purpose*, it was not until recurring codes were observed in the interview data set that emphasised the significance of the *product fulfilling its purpose* for the participants' *perception of technical product qualities*. In this subtheme, the participants highlighted the importance of the *product fulfilling its purpose* and supporting the expected need of consumers. Regarding Nike, many participants in the interviews stated that when looking for sports apparel products they would specifically consider the purpose they were purchasing the product for. This included the type of sports they would be using the product for or whether the product was intended for leisurewear. They further mentioned that sports apparel products should contain new technologies, which improve performance and support their overall health (back, neck and knee support). All the participants seemed to have a similar view that Nike products do in fact fulfil their purpose and, as a sports apparel brand, Nike satisfies sporting needs. Furthermore, participants asserted that because Nike products meet their needs and fulfil its purpose, they would purchase Nike products and hold the Nike reputation in high regard. One participant further mentioned that Nike tests its products prior to launching them, which supports the purpose of the product. The following comments by participants summarised the subtheme of Nike products fulfilling their purpose:

“So, I look for the specific purpose that I am buying ... the purpose it has to meet the specification of the sport. I have tennis shoes that you can't wear on a golf course; I have tennis shoes that you can't wear on a soccer field. You know what I mean, ja so purpose and then comfort.”

“The reason I buy Nike is because of sports that's the only reason why. So, like running shoes, good sports bra a nice material technology top where I won't sweat so much and keeps me warm in the winter when I go running so thermal, you know running vests. So, I do believe those kinds of things are

important and I consider those things when I buy clothing and shoes for sports, because I feel like it's important to my health and I can't put my health at risk. So, I know Nike has this technology in their shoes that assists with back support, knee support, umm like I said the same goes for thermal vests for when you are running and sports bra support for when you are running. So those kinds of things are important when buying sportswear ... Nike their main focus is sport so they put their research and money and time into that and making it good for the person and healthy so ja I would use Nike products over others.”

Another significant subtheme that emerged during the interviews was *service*. A few participants from both age groups commented that they were happy with Nike's service, which was an important factor in their perception of the brand, and it allowed them to determine whether they liked the brand and purchased the brand's products. A few participants stated that Nike's service allowed consumers to test out the product before actually purchasing it and this helped them to finding the right size and the appropriate product, depending on their sporting needs – hence their favourable perceptions about Nike. The following narratives highlight the view that the participants were satisfied with the service Nike rendered:

“I'm happy with the products and the service when I go to the store, I usually get a store attendant and they do some tests with the shoes for running and things so you get to use the shoe outside before you buy it so the service I'm quite happy with ...”.

“...Even their service is good when you go to a Nike store the people there are so helpful with your size and what is used for what even if you are clueless about sports I think there's always someone to help and they always sell something to you, I just think I like Nike.”

One participant explicitly stated that the service she received from the Nike brand largely affected her *perception of brand reputation*: “... My experience with the brand and products in terms of the service when I go into the shops ultimately umm makes or breaks the reputation that I have of Nike.”

In the theme, *perception of technical product qualities*, identified in the focus groups, it appeared that participants in all four interviews had similar views (to those of focus group 1) and favourable perceptions of the *product quality*, *product price*, *product looks*, *fit of the product* and *product range* which conceptualised the participants' views on the technical qualities of Nike products. Two new subthemes emerged in contributing to the *perception of technical product qualities*. Regarding the subtheme *service*, the researcher was unsure about whether to leave *service* as a subtheme or classify it as a theme on its own. The former option was chosen. The justification for doing so was that *service* plays a vital role in brand development. *Service* was integrated as a subtheme because product and service go hand in hand, which was an exact reflection of the participants' perceptions. The participants did not seem to differentiate *product* and *service* separately and in the literature (section 3.4.1.4 in chapter 3), the two subthemes were grouped together. Therefore, since there was an added component to the theme identified in the focus groups, the theme, *perception of technical product qualities* was amended to *perception of technical product qualities and service*.

Regarding the two new subthemes identified in the interviews, the female participants expressed favourable views by indicating that the Nike “product fulfils its purpose” and offers a good “service”. Since no notable differences in perception were observed in the age groups, all four interview participants perceptions are highlighted in table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Summary of theme 1 (interviews): *perception of technical product qualities and service*

SUBTHEMES	INTERVIEWS
Product quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long lasting ▪ Good quality, therefore good reputation ▪ Comfortable ▪ Happy with quality, reason why they would buy Nike products ▪ Nike does not compromise on quality ▪ Will not compromise on quality for a cheaper product
Fit of the product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clothes fit well ▪ Shoes do not fit as well as Adidas products ▪ Clothes fit better than Adidas products
Product price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Value for money

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cheaper product price means cheaper quality product ▪ More likely to buy Nike on sale and discount
Product looks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nike products look and feel good
Product range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lots of choice and variety ▪ Big range ▪ Different range ▪ Cannot always find longer and looser tops ▪ Big variety allows comparison of prices and quality in Nike
Product fulfils its purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When purchasing sports apparel, would consider product purpose such as buying for a specific sport or leisure wear ▪ Nike satisfies sporting needs, therefore good reputation ▪ Nike includes new technologies which improve performance and overall health ▪ Nike tests product prior to launching to fulfil its purpose
Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Happy with Nike service ▪ Allows testing of product prior to purchase

5.2.2.2 Theme 2: perception of brand traits

The second theme identified in the focus groups, namely *perception of brand traits*, was demarcated through the subthemes, *brand awareness*, *brand attractiveness*, *brand loyalty*, *brand inclination* and *brand in relation to competition*. In terms of *brand awareness*, all the interview participants commented that they were very aware of the Nike brand, that the Nike tick is visible and that they see many people wearing Nike products. Some participants stated that this visibility made them think of the brand first (TOM awareness) when buying something in particular relating to sports apparel. One participant added that Nike has a “mall presence” and an “online presence” and that the company spends money on its marketing, which makes the Nike brand stand out and be noticed. Participants also asserted that Nike was easily accessible in South Africa and internationally, in both developed and developing countries. This contradicted the opinion of a few participants in focus group 2. The following statements aptly summarise this view:

“They everywhere, their tick just do it is everywhere you see people wearing Nike shoes, Nike caps, tops all the time. So ja, I think Nike is a good brand.”

“Yes, I think Nike is easily available I mean you get them online, you get their stuff in stores, you get them in China mall and Fordsburg also. You can get Nike from anywhere so yes I would say they are easily accessible everywhere

even overseas I think you get Nike just as easily in first world countries like America and Europe and also third world countries like India, China and Brazil.”

“There are the showrooms, there’s the mall presence there’s the online presence there’s the wholesale presence, they are everywhere. You see that Nike tick all the time and everyone wearing it you literally can’t go a day without seeing someone wearing Nike”.

“You see it extremely often around you ... I’m very aware of the Nike brand they make themselves known”.

Many of the interview participants had similar views to the participants in focus group 2, describing Nike as an attractive brand. They used words like “luxury”, “popularity”, “quality” and “comfort”, and stated that it is a “good top brand” that is well “liked” and “appeals to everyone”. The following narratives underscore these confident perspectives of Nike’s brand attractiveness:

“... I think Nike always delivers and has catchy phrases like just do it, it’s like simple yet it gets a message across I would have to say Nike is the most attractive brand and when you think of Nike you think of comfort, luxury, quality even their service is good.”

“.... My nephew he is like two and a half, he loves his shoes with the tick, and that should say something when a small child like that wants to wear shoes with a tick and knows the brand then you know then brand is very popular.”

“Hmm, Nike I think of a popular brand when I think of Nike, like I would associate Nike with top brands like McDonald’s, Apple.”

When comparing the Nike brand with other brands in the same product category (competition), most of the interview participants stated that Adidas was Nike’s main competition, and a few of them felt that Puma, Reebok and New Balance were also competition for Nike. These views were similar to those of the participants in the two focus groups. It appeared that while half of the participants were disposed and loyal to the Nike brand regardless of their age, the other half were disposed and loyal to brands such as Adidas or Puma. These participants asserted that they related more

to these brands than the Nike brand because of the competition brands being either more feminine or endorsing sports they liked.

Nonetheless, the participants explained that they still liked the Nike brand, owned Nike merchandise, and would probably buy the Nike brand in the future. A few participants, regardless of their age further stated that they would prefer Nike to other brands, and that they were simply inclined towards the Nike brand. Others explained that they were not conscious of wearing brand names but bought the Nike brand because it fulfilled their sporting needs. It would appear that participants in both age groups expressed not being brand conscious but appeared to be inclined towards purchasing Nike because it was fulfilling some need or because they were simply loyal to the Nike brand. The following statements indicate the participants' support for the subthemes, *brand loyalty* and *brand inclination*:

“I’m not very brand orientated but I do believe that umm the reason I buy Nike is because of sports that’s the only reason why.”

“But I have a lot of Nike things and I suppose it’s just because I’m somehow subconsciously loyal to Nike so whenever I want tekkies and stuff the first place I think of is Nike. I just prefer their stuff and I honestly don’t know if that’s because their quality is better or if their prices are better, but I just am inclined to Nike it’s like the first brand I think of and then I buy that even over shoes and stuff that are not really branded.”

“I don’t really care generally what brand I wear. Like I have shoes that are not branded and tracksuits that aren’t branded, but I find Nike lasts me a much longer time. They have all this technology to make you feel hot when it’s cold or cold when it’s hot and help you not sweat. So, they always come up with new things and I don’t really care about brands but I buy Nike because it lasts and I don’t find it that much pricier, it’s worth it I think especially because of how long it lasts.”

Brand experience was a new subtheme that emerged in the interviews that contributed to the *perception of brand traits*, not originally identified in the focus groups. A few participants expressed numerous times that their individual experience with the brand had shaped their perception of the brand. Most participants stated

that the experience they had had with the Nike brand thus far had been positive. Many participants commented that their perception of the brand was based on all encounters they had had with it and this had contributed to their perception of overall reputation. The following narrative aptly summarises the above view: "... I think your view of the brand is how you experience it and the products. So, my experience with the brand and products in terms of the service when I go into the shops ultimately umm makes or breaks the reputation that I have of Nike."

Hence in terms of the above perceptions, the interview participants, compared to the participants in the focus groups, appeared to have favourable perceptions about Nike brand traits. These perceptions comprised the perceptions of the subthemes identified earlier in the focus groups such as *brand awareness*, *brand attractiveness*, *brand inclination*, *brand loyalty*, *brand in relation to competition*, as well as a new subtheme that emerged during the interviews, namely *brand experience*. Table 5.5 summarises the interview participants' *perception of Nike brand traits*.

Table 5.5: Summary of theme 2 (interviews): perception of Nike brand traits

SUBTHEMES	INTERVIEWS
Brand awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ See Nike tick/swoosh everywhere ▪ See everyone wearing Nike ▪ Identify the brand ▪ Nike spends on marketing, and online and mall presence ▪ Think of Nike first (TOM) ▪ Global brand ▪ Easily accessible in SA and internationally
Brand attractiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fashion statement ▪ Popular ▪ Quality ▪ Comfort ▪ Big brand ▪ Good top brand ▪ Appeals to everyone ▪ Like the brand
Brand loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supporting brand ▪ Repeat purchase behaviour ▪ Loyalty based on what brand one is inclined towards
Brand inclination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not inclined towards brand names ▪ Would be inclined towards Nike brand because it fulfils sporting needs
Brand in relation to competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nike – most prominent brand ▪ Some preferred Adidas, Reebok, Puma and New balance for being feminine or supporting a sport that is liked ▪ Some prefer Nike, buy Nike and would probably buy it in the future
Brand experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Related positive experiences

5.2.2.3 Theme 3: perception of brand strategy

The participants in the interviews mostly had positive things to say about their *perception of Nike brand strategy* by referring to the Nike brand's *focus on women*, *use of media, celebrity affiliation, consistency of messages, keeping up with the times* and being an *ethical and moral bran*.

In the previous section, *focus on women* was explained as a subtheme specific to this study, which contributed to the *perception of brand strategy*. The views of many of the interview participants were comparable with those of the participants in the

focus groups. The interview participants stated that they related to the Nike brand and that this brand catered for and offered women variety. A few participants also specified that as women, Nike fulfilled their needs through their innovation and technology merchandise and sports bras. They also commented that women have everything available to them from the Nike brand as men do. Hence the participants concluded that Nike is popular for males and females and fulfils the needs of both genders.

Conversely, a few of the participants in the interviews mentioned that the Nike brand empowered men slightly more because of its “endorsements towards men” and “advertising for men” and because the company “launches men’s products before they launch women’s products”. However, these participants and a few others added that the Nike brand seems to have advanced a lot because nowadays it is more interested in women’s needs the brand is moving towards women’s wellness through “women’s running clubs”, “more showrooms”, increased “advertising” and the “large variety” of products offered for women. Furthermore, a few participants remarked that because specific items are customised exclusively for women, such as tights and sports bras, Nike focuses on women more than on men. The next narrative of a participant encapsulates the view that Nike focuses on both men and women. However, slightly more emphasis was placed on women than on men: “I think Nike is suited to me as an individual I don’t think gender association matters for a brand like Nike, because I think they are including men and women in their products and their advertising. I don’t think they are favouring one over the other. I know before anything sporty was mostly male, but now as women are becoming more fit and going to the gym, I think these companies recognise that and they are treating men and women as equals. Maybe Nike is favouring women slightly I’m only saying this because I remember two or three adverts that specifically target women and also they have a Nike women’s running club. So they seem to be interested in women’s wellness and women’s needs much more now.”

A repetitive idea that emerged in the interviews was that of the female *hijab* Nike advertisement. Participants in both focus groups had identified this advertisement earlier, and it appeared that regardless of their age group, most of the interview participants were aware of this advertisement. It had impressed them and this had led to them believing that Nike caters for women’s needs and that the company had

identified a gap in the market. A few of the participants felt that this advert was “strategic”. The statement summarises this view: “Ok so take for example the Nike hijab advert, it’s like they including a part of society that was not recognised before or maybe not society but audience. I think they focus on women’s wellbeing a lot and they know women can shop and it’s quite strategic actually. They have things for men and women. It’s not like you’ll get Roshes for men and not women. I think women actually have more variety and colours to choose from than men”.

The above concept also related to the subtheme *use of media* previously identified in the focus groups. The interview participants stated that they had heard positive things about the Nike brand in the media, and that Nike endorses the right people. When the participants were asked if they could remember any Nike advertisements that had made an impact on them, half of them could not mention any, while the remainder of participants highlighted “Running”, “Planet Fitness”, “Hijab” and “Let’s dance” as examples of advertisements they could remember or that had made an impact on them. One participant further positively described some of these advertisements as giving “... women and people in general, a sense of community to get fit ...”. The participants added that they had predominantly noticed Nike advertisements on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. They also stated that they could not remember seeing these advertisements on traditional media platforms like television, radio, newspapers and magazines and went on to mention noticing Nike advertisements when “downloading applications on play store”. This view was comparable with the views of participants in the focus groups. The following comment by one participant reflects this view: “I don’t actually remember seeing a lot of adverts in TV commercials and stuff but I remember lots of Nike on social media, this article on Nike this Run Club so they seem to mostly advertise on social media.”

Regarding the subtheme *celebrity affiliation*, one of the interview participants expressed the view that “Nike endorses the right people”, while others commented that they could not remember the name of a particular celebrity, model or athlete associated with the Nike brand. However, in addition to the above, one participant stated the following: “I’ve heard of instances if a person is endorsed by Nike is say for example convicted of something then they immediately drop them so I think that it’s extremely good they uphold their standards and they keep the right people to

endorse them even though I can't remember who." Other participants associated Cristiano Ronaldo, Bella Hadid and Tiger Woods with the Nike brand and posited that this was a positive celebrity association with regard to perceiving the Nike brand. These views seemed to correspond to those of the participants in the focus groups.

All the interview participants appeared to describe Nike as a brand that was "innovative" and "makes trends" with "new technology apparel" that keeps the needs of the consumers in mind and in doing so keeps up with the times. In this subtheme, *keeping up with the times*, the interview participants explained in far more detail than the participants in the focus groups why they perceive Nike as a brand that keeps up with times. A few participants repeatedly mentioned how Nike technology in its apparel wear allows them to keep warm in winter and cool in summer, which is especially useful when they work out. A few other participants also mentioned that the padding in the Nike shoes and products in general were more "streamlined" which made them believe that Nike keeps up with the times. Moreover, nearly all the participants explicitly mentioned "innovation" and the brand "keeping up with the times" to describe Nike's reputation.

Regarding the subtheme, *consistency of messages*, the interview participants described the Nike brand as being consistent in its messages in terms of media, advertising, quality, what they heard about the brand and their experiences with it. One participant used the word "consistent" in to depict Nike's reputation. This view was similar to that of some participants in the focus groups, thus contributing to the subtheme, *consistency of messages*. The following narrative of one of the participants underscores the view that Nike's brand messages were considered unified and consistent: "I think Nike is now consistently trying to like give women the upper hand and offering things for women that they never used to and I think they are quite consistent in the messages they are giving out that they care they always doing new and cool things and always come up with cool product."

In terms of the subtheme, *ethical and moral brand*, the interview participants appeared to have a similar view to those in the focus groups and asserted that they were not aware of any corporate social responsibility initiatives and that it was "not well marketed". However, a few participants articulated that they were aware that Nike does give back to society by sponsoring the Soweto Centre that "trains

underprivileged kids” and “wanting to make people healthier through their Nike run and Nike fitness adverts”. A few participants further went on to say that they were not aware of how environmentally conscious the Nike brand was and how the brand “... disposes off its waste”. Nevertheless, all the interview participants commented that they believed Nike was an honest, ethical and moral brand that “deliver on what they promise”. This view contradicted the view of some of the participants in the focus groups who remarked they did not think Nike was an honest, ethical and moral brand.

The participants described Nike’s ethics as good in relation to their experience of the brand. A few participants described Nike as a brand that does not “prefer a specific race preference in their adverts or in their models”, therefore implying that that the brand was ethical by not having racial preferences. Another participant overtly described Nikes ethics favourably and described the Nike brand as follows: “You never think of them in a bad light they have never been publicly humiliated or I think from a brand perspective from an employee perspective. Whenever you hear of retrenchments you never hear of their share price falling, you never hear of risky advertising, you never hear of them supporting anything negative so I think that’s excellent their ethics are in the right place.”

Hence the above views of Nike’s *perceptions of brand strategy* suggest that the interview participants perceived Nike as a brand that has *consistency in its messages, keeps up with the times* and is regarded as an *ethical and moral brand*. They further described Nike as a brand that *focuses on women* a lot more than previously, and that the company’s *use of media and celebrity affiliations* indicates that the Nike brand was perceived positively by the interview participants in terms of its brand strategy. A synopsis of the interview participants’ *perceptions of brand strategy* is provided in table 5.6.

Table 5.6: Summary of theme 3 (interviews): *perception of brand strategy*

SUBTHEMES	INTERVIEWS
Focus on women (relevant to this study only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Caters for women ▪ Relatable to women ▪ Fulfils women's sporting needs through innovation and technology: sport bras and tights

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offers variety for women ▪ Popular and fulfils the needs of men and women ▪ Empowers men slightly more because of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ adverts for men ○ endorsements ○ launching men’s products first ▪ More invested in women than before because of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ more showrooms for women ○ more variety for women ○ more adverts directed at women ○ specific items customised for women only: sports bras and tights
Use of media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prominent on social media: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Play Store ▪ Have not noticed adverts in traditional media channels: TV, radio, magazines and newspapers ▪ Adverts that made an impression: “Hijab/headscarf”, “Running”, “Planet Fitness” and “Let’s dance” ▪ “Hijab/headscarf” advert described as catering for women’s needs, impressive, identified a gap in the market and fulfilled it, strategic ▪ No negative publicity
Celebrity affiliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Endorses right people and keeps to ethical standards ▪ Celebrities affiliated with Nike perceived positively
Consistency of messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consistent and unified messages of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ media ○ quality ○ heard about Nike from others ○ own experiences ▪ Used the word “consistent” to describe Nike’s reputation
Ethical and moral brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not aware of CSR initiatives – not well marketed ▪ Nike gives back to society by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ training underprivileged kids in Soweto ○ making people healthier through fitness initiatives ▪ Not aware if Nike is environmentally friendly ▪ Honest, ethical and moral brand because <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ it delivers on its promises ○ it is based on past experiences ▪ no race preference given ▪ Do not see brand in a bad light – not from <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ employee perspective ○ retrenchments ○ share prices falling ○ supporting negative things ○ risky advertising

Keeping up with the times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brand keeps up with the times, and does things at the right time ▪ Creates trends ▪ Innovative brand ▪ Creates new products with new technology keeping consumers' needs in mind ▪ Streamlined ▪ Brand keeping up with the times used to describe Nike's reputation
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5.2.2.4 Explicit views on Nike's brand reputation

The interview participants were informed that on the basis of the findings of the previous focus groups conducted, brand reputation appeared to comprise what people actually think of the product, the way in which people perceive the brand's traits and the perception of how strategic the brand is. The interview participants were asked if they could add to anything about how they conceptualise the reputation of any brand. Most participants stated that they would not add anything else and went on to say that for them it is important if the "product delivers in terms of need, experience and service", and the product provides "quality and comfort". They also added that if they were to hear good things about the brand, hear good endorsements and perceive the "gender equality" of the brand, then they would define the reputation of the brand positively. Some participants further mentioned that they were not so conscious of a brand being ethical as long as they did not hear "negative publicity", they would still believe the brand to be reputable. A few of them also indicated that the way in which they perceived the brand was completely individualistic, and based solely on their own experiences and beliefs.

With regard to Nike's reputation, when the participants were asked to describe it they used the following words or phrases: "classy", "funky", "big brand", which is in a "league of its own". They also used the following descriptions: "innovation", "comfort", "quality", "strong brand", "traditional brand", "consistent", "popular", "everywhere" and "smart advertising". They are also "happy with the brand experience". All the interview participants emphasised that they thought Nike had a good reputation.

In the four interviews, the participants largely had similar views to those highlighted in the focus group findings, although some diversity was noted. The findings for the interviews were presented in relation to the findings for the focus groups. Three

additional subthemes emerged in the interviews, namely *service*, *product fulfilling its purpose* and *brand experience*. These new subthemes added to the insights into two themes identified in the focus groups, namely theme 1: *perception of technical product qualities* amended to *perception of technical product qualities and service*; and theme 2: *perception of brand strategy*. The summary of the overall findings for both the focus groups and interviews are discussed in detail in chapter 6.

5.3 CONCLUSION

The findings for both the focus groups and interviews suggested favourable perceptions about Nike's brand reputation. The three core themes that contributed to the participants' *perception of brand reputation* included *perception of technical product qualities and service*, *perception of brand traits* and *perception of brand strategy*. The various subthemes that contributed to the conceptualisation of each theme were discussed in detail, underscoring the participants' perceptions of the Nike brand in both the focus groups and interviews. Although the overall views of the participants in focus groups 1 and 2 were predominantly similar, a few diverse views were noted regarding their respective age groups (18 to 25 and 25 to 35). Conversely, the interview findings suggested that the overall views on Nike's brand reputation did not confirm any differences in perceptions between the two age groups, and on the whole, the participants unambiguously held salient perceptions about Nike's brand reputation. The next chapter, which concludes the study, provides a summary of the overall findings, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY OF OVERALL FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the study, addressing the research problem and sub-problems and providing the overall findings of the focus groups and interviews. Brand reputation is specifically assessed as an attitudinal construct and more generally, the findings are scrutinised in relation to the literature of Chapters 2 and 3. The limitations and strengths of the study are highlighted. The relevance of the study is considered and recommendations made for possible future research. Finally, concluding remarks are made about new knowledge generated from the study.

6.2 SUMMARY OF OVERALL FINDINGS

The overall findings of the focus groups and interviews revealed participants' salient perceptions of Nike's brand reputation. In the subsections below the overall findings, the three sub-problems and the research question are addressed.

6.2.1 Sub-problem 1: To identify important factors that contribute to brand reputation among the participants

The female participants' perceptions were categorised into codes, core themes and their subthemes, and explained in detail in the previous chapter. These core themes and their respective subthemes identified in the study through the focus groups and interviews conceptualised brand reputation. The three main themes were *perception of technical product qualities and service*, *perception of brand traits* and *perception of brand strategy*. These themes and their respective subthemes are outlined in the figure 6.1 below.



Figure 6.1: Themes and subthemes in conceptualising brand reputation

This study identified various elements through the themes and subthemes that contributed to the conceptualisation of brand reputation. Hence the research question relating to the first sub-problem was answered.

6.2.2 Sub-problem 2: To explore the dominant perceptions of Nike’s reputation among the participants

In terms of the Nike brand, it appeared that the themes and subthemes depicted in figure 6.1 were used by the participants in both the focus groups and interviews to describe their perceptions of Nike’s reputation. The participants in the focus groups and interviews primarily had positive attitudes towards Nike’s reputation regarding all three themes identified, namely *perception of technical product qualities and service*, *perception of brand traits* and *perception of brand strategy*.

In addition, although it was not the researcher’s intention at the start of the study to differentiate between age groups, focus group 1 and focus group 2 consisted of participants from different age groups. Focus group 1 comprised female participants between the ages of 18 and 25, while focus group 2 included participants between the ages of 25 and 35. A number of differences were observed between the perceptions of the two age groups. These apparent differences are summarised in the table 6.1 below:

Table 6.1: Differences in perceptions of the Nike brand

FOCUS GROUP 1 (FEMALE PARTICIPANTS AGED 18–25)	FOCUS GROUP 2 (FEMALE PARTICIPANTS AGED 25–35)
Nike does not fit large-sized women	Nike caters for all types of people
Nike is reasonable	Find Nike expensive Would rather buy a cheaper brand in the same category (Cotton on Body or Max Pro–Action)
No range for plus-sized women	Range for all women
Nike accessible in SA and internationally	Nike more easily available internationally
Inclination towards a brand because of quality	Inclination towards a brand because of price
Aware of many Nike adverts Aware of negative Nike publicity, which appeared important	Not aware of many Nike adverts Aware of negative publicity and this did not appear important
Recommend celebrities to endorse the Nike brand that fills a gap: catering for larger women	Recommend celebrities that fit the Nike brand image
Mixed perceptions on consistency of Nike messages	Consistent Nike messages
Initially thought Nike does not give back to society; after probing, listed a few initiatives in which Nike is involved	Not aware of Nike initiatives
Recommend charity initiatives involving education	Recommend charity initiatives involving disadvantaged people
Nike not an open brand	Do not know if Nike is an open brand

The few differences in the perceptions of the two age groups noted in the focus groups above were not confirmed by views of the interview participants. The reason for this was that although the female participants in the interviews were selected on the basis of their age groups (two between ages of 18 and 25 and two between the ages of 25 and 35), it appeared that the participants from both age groups had similar perceptions regardless of their age.

According to the interview participants, they would not compromise on quality because of price, but preferred purchasing Nike products on sale. The interview participants, unlike those in focus group 1, also had diverse perceptions of how well the product fitted and did not indicate that they believed Nike did not cater for large-sized women. Their views were based on their personal preferences of brands in the sports apparel category. The interview participants indicated that Nike products fulfilled their purpose (sportswear apparel and leisurewear), supported their overall health and improved performance. Hence, *product fulfilling its purpose* emerged as a new subtheme in the interviews, which contributed to the *perception of technical product qualities*. Regarding Nike's *focus on women*, the interview participants appeared to have similar views to the participants in focus group 2, namely that Nike caters for women and offers variety for them. The participants in the focus groups also indicated that Nike is consistent in its messages through its advertising, quality, experience and what they hear about the brand. However, the only difference noted was that the participants in the focus groups stated that they did not know whether Nike was an open and transparent brand. All the interview participants contradicted this view and indicated that Nike is indeed an open and transparent brand. Hence the inference in this study was that participants of similar ages do not necessarily have similar perceptions, but their perceptions are based on their individual reality and experiences.

The female participants in this study had largely similar and some diverse perceptions of Nike's reputation. Positive dominant perceptions of Nike's reputation appeared to be evident among all the participants. Hence the research question pertaining to the second sub-problem was answered.

6.2.3 Sub-problem 3: To explore Nike's reputation as an attitudinal construct based on cognitive and affective components among the participants

In responding the third sub-problem in this study, the cognitive and affective components of reputation identified in the literature needed to be clearly defined so that brand reputation could be appropriately viewed as an attitudinal construct. A definition of both cognitive and affective components was provided in chapter 3 (section 3.4). In this study, in simple terms, cognitive component referred to all the rational beliefs of participants about the Nike brand, whereas the affective

component related to all the emotional beliefs of the participants about the Nike brand.

Another component that emerged in this study (which was not evident in the literature), which contributed to the conceptualisation of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct, was *behaviour*. According to Bohner and Schwarz (2001), behaviour refers to a person's reaction to an object or phenomenon. It appeared that many of the participants revealed behaviours that predominantly favoured Nike's brand reputation. Several theoretical studies have provided support for these three components, and the combination of the affective, behavioural and cognitive components as an attitudinal construct is known as the so-called "ABC components" in psychology (Bohner & Schwarz 2001; Niedenthal et al 2005) However, previous studies do not account for the behavioural component in specifically viewing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.

Consistently positive perceptions of the three components of an attitudinal construct regarding Nike's reputation were noted. All three components, namely affective, behavioural and cognitive, are to some degree interrelated. However, despite this interrelationship, each component is distinguishable in perceiving brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.

The themes and subthemes discussed in the findings section (figure 6.1) systematically summarised all rational knowledge, emotional beliefs and behaviour that suggested the participants' positive perceptions of Nike's brand reputation. It appeared that most subthemes in this study that contributed to the perception of Nike's reputation were based on rational knowledge and beliefs about the Nike brand, indicating the cognitive component of attitudes. The behavioural component was evident in subthemes, such as *product price*, *product fulfilling its purpose*, *brand loyalty* and *brand inclination*, suggested by participants through their purchase behaviour and buying one brand instead of another in the same product category. Many of the participants conveyed emotions and feelings to express their perceptions of Nike's brand attractiveness and their experiences with the brand, therefore indicating the affective component of attitudes. Figure 6.2 conceptualises brand reputation as an attitudinal construct on the basis of the thematic findings of this study (through the main themes) as well as the combination of the affective,

behavioural and cognitive components that lent support to realising brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. Hence the research question in this study, namely to assess brand reputation as an attitudinal construct at Nike: a female consumer perception analysis, was answered. Figure 6.2 is a depiction of the suggested ABC model of conceptualising brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.



Figure 6.2: ABC model of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct

The study findings highlighted factors that contribute to brand reputation through the identification of themes and subthemes. These themes were grouped into the relevant cognitive and affective components of reputation as an attitudinal construct (as proposed in the literature), and an additional component, namely behaviour, was identified. In terms of the Nike brand, all the themes and subthemes appeared to indicate that the female participants in the study had positive salient perceptions of the Nike brand. Furthermore, this study noted female consumers as an important single stakeholder group to assess. Hence, this study could be classified as one focusing on consumer-based reputation (CBR) (explained in section 2.5). The study findings appear to concur with the views in literature that similar stakeholders have similar views on a brand's reputation. The study findings acknowledged that fact that an individual's perception of brand reputation is based on what is important to him or her and his or her experiences.

6.3 THEORETICAL APPLICATION OF THE DERIVED ABC MODEL

The findings from the both the focus groups and interviews indicated common salient perceptions of and attitude towards the Nike brand. Concerning the proposed brand reputation model as an attitudinal construct derived from the literature (figure 3.1), the new themes and subthemes that emerged in the conceptualisation of reputation as an attitudinal construct in the focus groups and interviews (figure 6.1) mostly

complemented, but also added to, the brand reputation model of the literature. The reason is that each cognitive and affective component used to measure reputation as an attitudinal construct in the literature (figure 3.1) was comparable with a theme or subtheme in the study findings (figure 6.1). In addition and most importantly, new themes, subthemes and a behavioural component were also identified in the findings. Similarities and new insights in the two models are highlighted in table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2: Similarities and new insights of the brand reputation model generated from the literature and the themes and subthemes that emerged in the study on the conceptualisation of brand reputation

ATTITUDINAL COMPONENTS	MODEL IN LITERATURE <i>(figure 3.4)</i>	MODEL IN FINDINGS <i>(figure 6.1)</i>
<i>Cognitive component</i>	Overall impression	Brand attractiveness
	Awareness and visibility	Brand awareness Brand attractiveness Use of media Brand in relation to competition Brand inclination
	Quality and performance of products and service	Perception of technical product qualities and service
	Responsibility	Ethical and moral brand
<i>Affective component</i>	Likeability and attractiveness	Brand attractiveness
	Reliability, integrity and trust (RIT)	Ethical and moral brand
	Respected and admired	Brand attractiveness
	Loyalty	Brand loyalty

The findings of this study broaden the scope of the model generated from the literature. The study's findings highlighted the behavioural component of reputation

as an attitudinal construct, identifying brand reputation as an attitudinal construct that is based not only on cognitive and affective components, but also on a behavioural component. This leads to the proposition of the ABC model of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. In addition, new themes and subthemes emerged in the study, namely *perception of technical product qualities and service*, *perception of brand traits* and *Perception of brand strategy*. Theme 1 identified in findings, namely *perception of technical product qualities and Service*, was also identified in the literature review as the *quality and performance of products and services*. However, the theme identified in the study findings, namely *perception of technical product qualities and service*, added greater nuance to the theme identified in the theory through the addition of specific technical aspects of the product identified in its specific subthemes).

Theme 2, *perception of brand traits*, which emerged in the findings, included all the elements of the affective components of the cognitive and affective construct model in measuring brand reputation, provided in the literature review (figure 3.1). New subthemes were realised in the study findings that contributed to the conceptualisation of brand reputation, which were not evident in the literature. These subthemes were *brand experience*, *brand awareness* and *brand in relation to competition*, and they appeared to lend support to the cognitive component of reputation as an attitudinal construct. Subthemes such as *brand attractiveness* and *brand loyalty*, although comparable, added a more in-depth perspective of the elements provided in the affective component of the “Cognitive and affective construct model in measuring reputation”, as provided in the literature review (section 3.4).

In theme 3, *perception of brand strategy*, only the element of *responsibility* in the model, “Cognitive and affective constructs in measuring reputation” as provided in the literature review, was similar to the subtheme, *ethical and moral brand*, in the model provided in the findings (figure 6.1). The additional subthemes in theme 3 of the findings, namely *perception of brand strategy*, included *unification of messages*, *brand keeping up with the times* and *focus on women*. One should bear in mind that the subtheme, *focus on women*, was specific to this study and might not be regarded as a significant element in viewing reputation as an attitudinal construct, in another study. Other subthemes in theme 3, *perception of brand strategy*, included *use of*

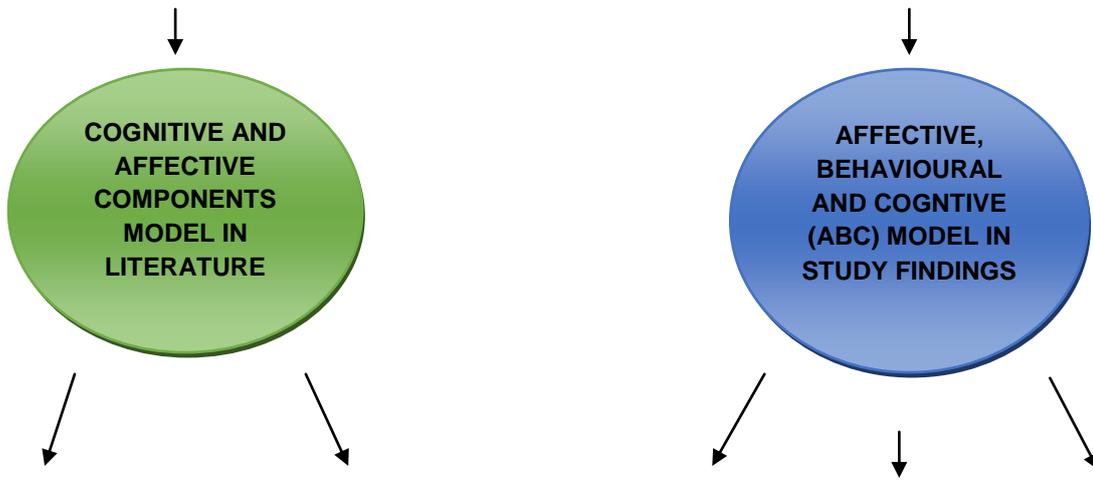
media and *celebrity affiliation*. However, these subthemes were not demarcated as separate elements in the model provided in the literature review (figure 3.1), but added to elements such as *loyalty, awareness and visibility, overall impression* and *respect and admiration*. Again, the model in the findings (figure 6.1) provided not only additional elements to consider in conceptualising brand reputation, but also demarcated certain elements separately in the contribution of perceiving a brand's strategy.

The definition of brand reputation that was initially formulated and utilised in the study was subsequently amended. This was done after it became evident that there was an additional behavioural component of attitude, in the contribution to conceptualising brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The amended definition of brand reputation for this study was formulated as follows:

Brand reputation is the valued outcome of the cognitive (rational), affective (emotional) and behavioural attitudes of a particular stakeholder's social, economic and personal needs from the brand over time.

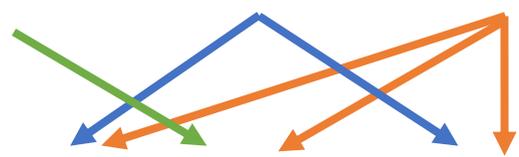
From the above discussion it is apparent that the proposed model of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct in the findings of this study added more nuances to the proposed brand reputational model as an attitudinal construct in the literature review. The proposed model included all the elements of the cognitive and affective components in measuring reputation in the literature, as well as a behavioural component and other elements (emanating from the themes and subthemes that emerged in the findings). The behavioural component and some elements were not previously integrated in the literature review, but they were deemed necessary to holistically conceptualise brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. Figure 6.3 summarises the above discussion.

BRAND REPUTATION AS AN ATTITUDINAL CONSTRUCT



<p>COGNITIVE COMPONENT (Competence)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Overall impression – Awareness and visibility – Quality and performance of products and service – Responsibility (CSR) 	<p>AFFECTIVE COMPONENT (Likeability)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Likeability and attractiveness – Reliability, integrity and trust (RIT) – Respected and admired – Loyalty
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<p>AFFECTIVE COMPONENT (Emotional)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Perception of brand traits 	<p>BEHAVIOURAL COMPONENT (Behavioural)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Perception of technical product qualities and service – Perception of brand strategy 	<p>COGNITIVE COMPONENT (Rational)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Perception of technical product qualities and service – Perception of brand traits – Perception of brand strategy
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<p style="text-align: center;">PERCEPTION OF TECHNICAL PRODUCT QUALITIES AND SERVICE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product quality • Fit of the product • Product price • Product looks • Product range • Product fulfilling its purpose • Service 	<p style="text-align: center;">PERCEPTION OF BRAND TRAITS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand awareness • Brand attractiveness • Brand loyalty • Brand inclination • Brand in relation to competition • Brand experience 	<p style="text-align: center;">PERCEPTION OF BRAND STRATEGY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Focus on women</i> • Use of media • Celebrity affiliation • Unification of messages • Brand keeping up with the times • Ethical and moral brand
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Figure 6.3: Brand reputation as an attitudinal construct in the literature and study findings

6.4 LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

Since qualitative studies focus on the process of meaning-making rather than statistical outcomes (Atieno 2009) it is imperative to acknowledge their limitations and strengths. The next subsections outline in detail the limitations and strengths of this study.

6.4.1 Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of this study was that it categorised its subthemes to align with three core themes. Some of these subthemes could also have influenced each other. Since the association between the identified subthemes and themes was not the focus of this study, their relationship was not investigated or highlighted.

Another limitation was that age was not classified as a criterion in the participant selection process. Nevertheless, the study happened (coincidentally) to include two focus groups whose participants belonged to different age groups (i.e. between 18 and 25, in focus group 1 and between 25 and 35 in focus group 2). The few differences in perceptions yielded different outcomes in the interviews. Hence these differences in perceptions in the different age groups were not explained in detail, but only briefly touched on.

This study focused on female consumers as an important single stakeholder group in considering brand reputation. Hence this methodological limitation meant that it would not be possible to generalise the findings to the larger population and to include male consumers' perceptions of brand reputation. The primary focus of the study was on the Nike brand in conceptualising brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The Nike brand belongs to the sportswear apparel industry. Each brand and each industry emphasise certain elements that are probably more or less important than others. Hence the elements recognised in the thematic findings of this study might be over-emphasised or underemphasised in other similar studies.

The findings of the study further acknowledged that all perceptions were unique to the participants involved. This means that it will not be possible to generalise these

to other brands, the larger consumer population or even other stakeholder groups of the same brand. The findings of this study therefore applied only generally to a group of select female consumers of the Nike brand. Nevertheless, using the context of Nike, a single brand in assessing its reputation and conceptualising reputation as an attitudinal construct allowed a wide-ranging and methodical enquiry into the phenomenon.

6.4.2 Strengths of the study

Several strengths were identified in this study. A major strength was its key findings, that is, the identification of themes and subthemes that contribute to the perception of brand reputation. These themes and subthemes add to those identified in the literature, giving a more nuanced view of brand reputation. The study also identified elements not previously specified in the literature.

Moreover, the specific focus of the study was a single stakeholder group (consumers), more specifically female consumers, thus theorising CBR as an attitudinal construct. In addition, this study highlighted certain features of the female consumer segment. Another strength of the study was the measurement of reputation, specifically of the Nike brand, and the identification of dominant favourable perceptions among the participants.

A central strength of the study related to theoretically conceptualising brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. The study managed to not only design a comprehensive brand reputation model relevant to consumer stakeholder groups, but it also demarcated elements that assist in viewing and measuring brand reputation as an attitudinal construct, based not only on affective and cognitive constructs but also on a newly identified behavioural construct. The study provided an all-inclusive definition in order to conceptualise brand reputation as an attitudinal construct, thus identifying brand reputation as a multidimensional concept based on the affective, behavioural and cognitive components of attitudes (the proposed ABC model).

An added strength of this study was in the clearly outlined methodological steps used to gather and analyse data. Every phase of the methods used in this study was systematically explained and justified. The participant selection process and the

sampling methods were outlined, and the unit of analysis, data collection methods and the thematic analysis steps explained in detail in chapter 4. Credibility and reliability measures were taken to ensure the quality of the study. Furthermore, comprehensive fieldwork was conducted whereby the questions for the focus groups were based on the literature and all the questions were pilot tested. The data was transcribed verbatim and verified during several hearings. The interview schedule was compiled on the basis of the findings of the focus groups. The researcher also kept the database and evidence of the data collected. The validity of the research findings was ensured by using multiple methods of data collection and clearly outlining the data analysis and coding process. This ensured the quality of the study throughout.

6.5 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the contributions of this study was that it viewed brand reputation as a multidimensional attitudinal construct as opposed to a two-dimensional construct that was evident in previous studies on brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. It was acknowledged in the literature review that there is a paucity of studies focusing on the emotional aspect of conceptualising brand reputation, as opposed to giving preference to both the cognitive and affective elements. This study focused equal attention on both of these components. Furthermore, the behavioural component had previously not been identified in specifically viewing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.

Few studies have viewed brand reputation as an attitudinal construct, and these have not simultaneously included all comprehensive themes and subthemes identified in this study. Other researchers might find these research findings useful because brand reputation can in fact be viewed as a multidimensional attitudinal construct as depicted in figures 6.1 and 6.2, and demarcated in the themes and subthemes that emerged in the findings of this study. These themes included *perception of technical product qualities and service*, *perception of brand traits* and *perception of brand strategy* and the subthemes of each.

The results of this study could provide insights into Nike's brand reputation among the select group of female consumers. The brand Nike has indicated its interest in the female consumer segment and proposed spending more money on this segment

(section 1.9.5). This would contribute to the market research needed in the female consumer segment. This study also provided insight into perceptions of Nike’s brand image, visual and organisational identity and brand equity. However, it is important to note that these concepts are distinguishable and entirely dependent on individual experiences and the type of stakeholder being analysed.

One of the strengths of this study was that it did not categorise different stakeholder groups as one identical group, and did not ask similar questions that might not be important to different stakeholders. It was established in the literature review that different stakeholder groups have different needs from the brand. Brand reputation measures as attitudinal constructs previously focused on other stakeholder groups such as analysts and executives. A sample of female consumers as a group was considered in this study, and questions pertaining to this specific group were asked in relation to the theory recognised in the literature review. Hence this study was classified as CBR (section 2.5). The results of the study concurred with the view in the literature that similar stakeholders seem to have similar views of a brand’s reputation. In addition, the results of the study indicated that each individual’s perception of reputation is based on what he or she deems important and his or her experiences. This study could help future researchers to differentiate between and categorise the needs of different stakeholder groups in relation to assessing brand reputation. Furthermore, the study formulated an all-inclusive definition of brand reputation and acknowledged the fact that brand reputation is multifaceted. The results of this study could be applied in further empirical research on assessing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.

Table 6.3: Summary of the contributions of this study in viewing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct

Brand reputation is related to but distinguishable from concepts such as brand image, brand identity (visual and organisational) and brand equity
Not all stakeholders have the same needs from a brand, and they cannot therefore be assessed in the same manner
Brand reputation is demarcated through <i>perceptions of technical product qualities and service, perceptions of brand traits and perceptions of brand strategy</i>
Various elements contribute to the <i>perception of technical product qualities and service,</i>

<i>perception of brand traits and perception of brand strategy</i>
Brand reputation as an attitudinal construct is not based only on cognitive and affective components (two-dimensional)
Brand reputation as an attitudinal construct is based on three components: affective, behavioural and cognitive (the ABC model)
Brand reputation is a multidimensional attitudinal construct
<i>Brand reputation is the value outcome of cognitive (rational), affective (emotional) and behavioural attitudes derived from a particular stakeholder's social, economic and personal needs from the brand over time.</i>

Although it is not necessary for a master's study to make a contribution to the discipline with new theory, it became evident that the results of this study would add substance in two key areas:

- i. The realisation of new themes and subthemes, and their integration as elements in conceptualising brand reputation (see figure 6.1)
- ii. The identification of the ABC components (affective, behavioural and cognitive) in conceptualising brand reputation as an attitudinal construct (see figure 6.2).

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study focused on a single stakeholder group – female consumers. Future brand reputation studies could assess other stakeholder groups (e.g. employees) and possibly include male perspectives, which was outside the ambit of this study because of its aim to assess the perceptions of females only.

Future studies might find it useful to combine both quantitative and qualitative research methods to viewing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. Quantitative research methods make it possible to assess larger sample sizes, thus enabling researchers to generalise the findings. Qualitative research could provide insights into the quantitative findings. Hence the combination of the two methods could provide mutual validation of findings and add a more inclusive outlook on brand reputation as an attitudinal construct.

This study identified and noted the relationship of brand image, identity (organisational and visual) and brand equity to brand reputation, but delineated these concepts separately, based largely on the type of stakeholder assessing the above concepts. Future researchers might find the demarcation of these concepts as outlined in this study useful in their studies. Researchers might also find that combining the assessment of each of these concepts (brand image, visual and organisational identity and brand equity) useful in holistically contributing to brand reputation.

This study underscored the importance of the affective, cognitive and behavioural components in viewing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. Future studies could explore the relationship between these three components and possibly identify other potential attitudinal components and themes that influence these attitudinal constructs that might not have been identified in this study.

Since a limitation of this study was the ambiguity in the relationship between some of the elements identified in the thematic findings of this study, future empirical studies could explore the relationship between the elements identified in this study and identify additional elements. Since each core theme and the subthemes that emerged in this study might not be as significant in other studies, these could be revised to tie in with the purpose of other studies.

6.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research study assessed brand reputation as an attitudinal construct at Nike through a female consumer perception analysis. The conclusions drawn appear to be fairly far reaching and provided new insights into the elements and components of viewing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct among female consumers, and viewing Nike's brand reputation as an attitudinal construct among female consumers.

A comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to brand reputation was conducted (chapters 2 and 3). Elements were identified and proposed on the basis of the theory, which lent support to assessing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct (chapter 3). These elements guided the way in which the questions were formulated for the focus groups. Through thematic analysis of the focus groups, new subthemes that contributed to three new main themes were noted in assessing

Nike's brand reputation (chapter 5). The thematic findings from the focus groups were then used to formulate questions for interviews, which allowed for a more nuanced and in-depth approach to assessing the brand reputation of Nike. Furthermore, supplementary elements (themes or subthemes) were identified that appeared important to the study participants in conceptualising brand reputation.

Using the knowledge gleaned from the literature to guide the questions formulated for the measuring instruments, allowed for rich theoretical descriptions of Nike's brand reputation. Brand reputation was viewed as an attitudinal construct that is based on numerous elements that were not initially identified in the literature review (see figure 6.3). This chapter summarised the perceptions of female participants in the focus groups and interviews regarding Nike's brand reputation through the realisation of themes and subthemes. The study revealed attitudes of brand reputation based on affective, cognitive and behavioural components.

The proposed ABC model and the themes and their respective subthemes recognised in this study contributed to assessing Nike's brand reputation and viewing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct. Some of the elements identified (themes and subthemes – see table 6.2) and the attitudinal component of *behaviour* previously not recognised in the literature, should contribute to the existing body of knowledge on viewing brand reputation as an attitudinal construct (figure 6.3). Future empirical research studies could assess whether the elements suggested in the findings in this study conceptualise brand reputation, and how the proposed ABC model could be used in the context of reputation as an attitudinal construct.

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ANNEXURE A: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Before the session

- The researcher will facilitate and lead the sessions, and ensure that the tape recorder is working.
- The tape recorder will be tested to make sure that it is working properly and the sound is at an acceptable acoustic level.
- The participants' consent forms will be printed and ready to be signed by each participant (and working pens will be available).

Introduction to the session

The participants will be welcomed and briefed about the purpose of the focus group.

Hi everyone, and welcome. I'm very grateful to you all for sacrificing your valuable time to take part in this study. This is a master's study, dealing with the way in which people perceive brands. I would like to concentrate on more general questions to more specific questions (about a specific brand) pertaining to this study. There are absolutely no right or wrong opinions or answers.

Please feel comfortable to say what you really think and how you really feel. We will be recording this session, but it is purely for academic research purposes. We will need this to write down the text for this study, but rest assured that you will remain anonymous and only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

The opinions, feelings and perceptions expressed in this focus group will be treated in confidence and each of you will remain anonymous.

This group interview should last approximately an hour to an hour and a half, and you can leave at any point. But I do hope you will stay.

For ethical reasons, we ask you to please sign the informed consent form. This form contains the following information:

- *You have been given an explanation of the nature and purpose of the study.*
- *You understand what is needed to take part and your questions have been answered satisfactorily.*
- *You understand that you may withdraw at any time, without any consequences.*
- *You are satisfied with the arrangements to ensure that your identity will remain anonymous.*

Please could you sign the informed consent forms before we proceed with the questions?

Would anyone like to ask any questions relating to this focus group before we start?

Thank you.

Note: Gather all the signed informed consent forms.

General questions

1 Who here does sport or some form of workout (i.e. running, gym etc.)?

2 Who here considers herself an athlete?

In other words, are you proficient in sport or other forms of physical exercise?

3 Do you use sportswear apparel (clothing or footwear) even if you are not really working out or engaging in sports?

4 As females, does sportswear apparel appeal to you?

5 What is the most prominent brand that comes to mind in terms of sportswear apparel?

What makes this/these brand/s so prominent to you as a female?

6 Which brands are your favourite in the sports apparel industry?

(Adidas, Reebok, Nike, Converse, Hurley, New balance, etc.)

What is your reason for preferring this brand over others? Please explain

Narrowing focus to Nike: This study deals with perceptions about the Nike brand specifically.

7 What do you think of when you see this (hold up a Nike swoosh/tick poster)?

Is this perception because of past experiences or based on what you hear about the brand?

My questions from now on will specifically focus on the Nike brand.

8 I want you to think about the appeal of this brand. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Nike?

And is this appealing or negative? Why does this appeal/not appeal to you as a female consumer?

9 What has your experience been with this brand? (Prompt in detail)

10 Does buying Nike make you feel good about yourself?

In other words, does it make you feel elite, good, bad, popular, fit in, different, etc.?

Could you please explain why?

11 Can you as a female, relate to the Nike brand? Could you please explain further?

12 Do you think Nike is a successful brand?

Could you please elaborate on this?

13 In your opinion, is Nike a popular brand for males/females?

What makes it popular/not popular to these different genders?

14 Have you noticed any Nike's advertisements around you relating to women?

For example, posters/billboards/social media/messages/news?

15 What do you think about these Nike advertisements?

Probe: Can you remember any advertisements by Nike that made an impression on you? [Probing question]

16 What (else) have you heard about Nike in the media?

Is this information you receive from the media about Nike always the same?

17 is the information you receive from the Nike brand itself consistent?

For example, advertising, activities and other forms of communication by Nike?

18 What are some of the things you hear about Nike? From whom?

19 Do you think Nike is easily available here in South Africa and other countries?

20 Are you more aware of the Nike brand because it is more visible?

Does this give Nike a competitive advantage?

21 Do you think Nike caters for the needs of females?

22 Do you think Nike empowers women?

23 Are you aware of any celebrities (male or female) that Nike is affiliated with? Could you please provide some examples?

24 Are these celebrities you have just mentioned good for the Nike brand?

So would you recommend a specific celebrity for this brand? Why?

26 Do you think Nike gives back to the community and makes a difference to society?

How?

27 What are some of the community initiatives/corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives you know about that Nike is involved in?

Do you relate to any of the initiatives you have just mentioned/are any of these initiatives close to you as females?/ If “no”, which initiative do you think Nike should be involved in?

28 Would you describe Nike as a transparent/open brand?

Probe: Yes/no. Do you think this is a good thing? Why?

29 Do you think Nike is worth the money you pay for its products and services?

Probe: Yes – why would you pay this money; what makes it unique? No – would you pay for another brand in sportswear apparel? How is it better?

30 How would you describe the quality of Nike’s products?

31 Can Nike’s sportswear apparel assist you in your performance as a female in the gym or elsewhere?

Could you elaborate on this? If not, what do you look for when you use sports apparel? Comfort? Price? Quality?

32 Is Nike consistent with its products, and do you get what you expect from the brand?

33 Does Nike keep to its brand promise – “To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world”?

34 Do you have any doubts about buying Nike products?

What makes you so sure or unsure about Nike products?

35 Would you refer Nike to your friends and family? Could you further explain why?

36 Do you think you would buy Nike products over other sports apparel brands?

Is this because of price? Quality? Service? Convenience? Because you support the brand, etc.?

37 Would you consider buying Nike again and again (repeat purchase)?

What makes you repurchase this brand or never buy it again?

Concluding the session

Thank you so much for your time and responses about sports apparel brands and the Nike brand in particular. This information is really valuable to me and my study. Thank you once again.

- The tape recorder will be stopped and switched off.
- The informed consent forms will be gathered and placed in a safe file.
- The tape recorder will be packed away safely.
- The researcher will exit the venue.

ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Before the session

- The researcher will facilitate and lead the sessions, and ensure that the tape recorder is working.
- The tape recorder will be tested to make sure that it is working properly and the sound is at an acceptable acoustic level.
- The participant consent forms will be printed and be ready to be signed by the participants (and working pens will be available).

Introduction to the session

The participant will be welcomed and briefed about the purpose of the focus group.

Hi, and welcome. I'm very grateful to you for sacrificing your valuable time to take part in this study. This is a master's study, dealing with the way in which people perceive brands. I would like to concentrate on more general questions to more specific questions (of a specific brand) pertaining to this study. There are absolutely no right or wrong opinions or answers.

Please feel comfortable to say what you really think and how you really feel. We will be recording this session, but it is purely for academic research purposes. We will need this to write down the text for this study, but rest assured that you will remain anonymous and only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

The opinions, feelings and perceptions expressed in this interview will be treated in confidence and you will remain anonymous.

This interview should last between 45 minutes to an hour long. You can leave at any point, but I do hope you will stay.

For ethical reasons, we ask you to please sign the informed consent form, which contains the following information:

- *You have been given an explanation of the nature and purpose of the study.*
- *You understand what is needed to take part and your questions have been answered satisfactorily.*
- *You understand that you may withdraw at any time, without any consequences.*
- *You are satisfied with the arrangements to ensure that your identity will remain anonymous.*

Please could you sign the informed consent forms before we proceed with the questions?

Would you like to ask any questions relating to this focus group before we start?

Thank you.

Note: Gather all the signed informed consent forms

1 I would like to talk to you about the Nike brand, what do you think about Nike and other brands in the sports apparel industry?

Probe

- awareness of Nike brand
- visibility of the brand (TOM)
- Nike easily accessible
- get what you expect from Nike
- experience with brands mentioned
- relationship of Nike to its competition
- which brand is more attractive
- how brand conscious you are
- loyalty towards a brand
- brand keeping up with the times

2 What is that you actually look for when you buy products for sportswear apparel?

- looks
- size
- financial value
- quality
- choice

3 Could you please elaborate on your relationship as women with the brand Nike?

Probe

- relate to the brand
- popular
- fits better (or not) than other sports apparel
- helps with performance in gym or elsewhere
- needs as a female
- offers a selection for women
- caters for female needs
- does more for women now than previously

4 Do you think Nike is particularly suited to you as a woman, or doesn't gender association matter at all?

Probe

- empowers males or females
- popular among males or females
- adverts for men and women
- what is it about Nike that focuses on women?

5 We see brands everywhere. With this in mind, I want to discuss what you hear about the Nike brand in the media and which celebrities you associate with this brand?

Probe

- adverts in males or females
- adverts that made an impact
- adverts they like
- media
- social media (FB, Insta, Snap, etc.)
- pop-up ads

– consistency in messages

6 Let's discuss how ethical and moral you think Nike is as a brand?

Probe:

– CSR

– honesty

– conscious of the environment

– humanitarian

– community initiatives

– makes a difference

7 What I'm actually looking at is the reputation of Nike among females. If I ask you about the reputation of Nike, what are the main things that come to mind?

8 In the focus groups that I previously conducted, it seemed to me that reputation is classified as what people actually think of the product, what how people perceive the qualities or traits of the brand to be and the perception of how strategic the brand is. Would you agree with this or do you think there is anything else that could be added to how reputable you see the product as being?

Concluding the session

Thank you so much for your time and responses about sports apparel brands and the Nike brand, in particular. This information is extremely valuable to me and my study. Thank you once again.

- The tape recorder will be stopped and switched off.
- The informed consent forms will be gathered and placed in a safe file.
- The tape recorder will be packed away safely.
- The researcher will exit the venue.

ANNEXURE C: ROUGH DRAFT OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

PERCEPTION OF PRODUCT QUALITIES AND SERVICE	PERCEPTION OF BRAND TRAITS/DISPOSITION	PERCEPTION OF BRAND STRATEGY
<p><u>Quality</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lasts (use brand a lot) - Padding - Reliable - Better - Cheap - Comfortable - Good - Durable 	<p><u>Attractiveness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appreciate - Fame - Fashion statement - Relate - Trendy - Popular - Want - Different - Respect/admired - Luxury - versatile/multipurpose - Enjoy using brand - Likeability (like/dislike) - Big/top brand - Feels good - Love - Status - Association to celebrity, etc. - Appealing 	<p><u>Focus on women</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targets women - Femininity - Hire women - Products for women - Empowers - Advertises for women - Caters for women
<p><u>How well the product fits</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tight - Thin - Footwear - Clothing - Covers - Large - Small - Loose - Bust - Contoured - How well it fits 	<p><u>Relation to the competition</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness of other brands in same category - Nike better - competition better - comparing adverts Preference over other brands (vice versa) Brands include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adidas - Asics - New Balance - Reebok - Puma - Cotton on Body - Quicksilver - Soviet - Billabong - Levis - Max Pro-Action 	<p><u>Celebrity affiliation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Models - Won't wear if celeb wears (vice versa) - Good - Uses specific celebs - Endorses brand - Sponsorship - Athletes - Nonathletes
<p><u>Looks</u></p>	<p><u>Accessibility</u></p>	<p><u>Keeping up with the</u></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health - Good - Worn - Nice - Cute/adorable - Nice - Catchy - Great - Kids? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easily available - Malls - Shops - Convenience - Online 	<u>times (KUWT) (merge?)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doing things at the right time - Creates trends - New things - New tech - Adverts
<u>Financial value</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Income level - Affordability - Discounts - Sale - Value for money - Price - Expensive - Economy - Cheap - Relative 	<u>Loyalty</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supports brand - Always bought particular brand - Orientated towards brand - Peer pressure - Family/friends buy - Positive/negative WOM - Repurchasing (consistently buying Nike) 	<u>Use of media</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PR - Social media (FB, Insta, Snap) -TV -Radio -Advertising
<u>Choice</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nice range - Big range - Variety - Lots to choose from 	<u>Visibility</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tick - Universal - Everywhere - No introduction needed - Worldwide - International - Everyone wearing it - Globalisation - See it <p>Awareness (separate?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TOM - First thing that comes to mind - Sports (Nike category) 	<u>Humanitarian + environmentally conscious</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good to environment - Humanity - Sponsor - Giving back - Community - CSR - Environment - Training - Kids - Education - Transparency
	<u>Consciousness/brand orientated</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't care about brands - Like wearing brands - Care about buying brands - Want specific brand - Buy fakes - Don't buy fakes - Buying behaviour based on brand 	<u>Unification of messages (UOM)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic - Media - Consistency - Social media - Advertising - Branding
	<u>Transparency</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - honest - deceitful 	

	- open - dishonest	
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* Each theme was highlighted in a different colour in the original data set. Hence the colours above (orange, green and blue) indicate the way in which subthemes were grouped under each theme.

ANNEXURE D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



College of Human Sciences

Department of Communication Sciences

8 March 2017

Reference number: 2017_CHS_Staff_CommSt_007

Proposed title: An assessment of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct, at Nike: a female consumer perception analysis

Principal investigator: Ms Zaina Rehman, Department of Communication Science

Approval status recommended by reviewers: Approved

The Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Communication Sciences at the University of South Africa has reviewed the research proposal and considers the methodological, technical and ethical aspects of the study to be appropriate.

Ms Zaina Rehman is requested to maintain the confidentiality of all data collected from or about research participants, and maintain security procedures for the protection of privacy. The Committee needs to be informed should any part of the research methodology, as outlined in the ethics application (Ref. No. 2017_CHS_Staff_CommSt_006), change in any way.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the Unisa Research Ethics Policy, which can be found at the following website:

http://staffcmsys.unisa.ac.za/cmsys/staff/contents/departments/res_policies/docs/Policy%20on%20Research%20Ethics%20-%20rev%20appr%20-%20Council%20-%2015.09.2016.pdf

This certificate is valid for two years.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Khan", written in a cursive style.

Prof K Khan
Chair: Departmental Research Committee
Department of Communication Science

ANNEXURE E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number: 2017_CHS_Staff_CommSt_007

29/11/2016

Title: An assessment of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct of a popular brand: a female consumer perception analysis

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Zaina Rehman and I am conducting research under the guidance of my supervisor, George Angelopulo, a professor in the Department Communication Science towards an MA at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled “An assessment of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct of a popular brand: a female consumer perception analysis”.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The focus group/face-to-face interview in which you are being asked to participate, is a part of a research study aimed at exploring perceptions of reputation amongst a select group of women for a popular brand. The researcher is also interested in the cognitive and affective elements that contribute to positive or negative perceptions of reputation. This study is expected to collect vital information that could help assess perceptions of reputation as an attitudinal construct, which is based on both cognitive and affective elements.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited to participate because you fit the following inclusion criteria relevant to this study:

- ✓ The participants must be female.
- ✓ The participants must be between the ages of 18 and 25.

- ✓ The participants must speak English (the language of the study and the dominant language to which people from different backgrounds can widely relate).

Approximately 13 to 25 participants will take part in this study.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves audio, video taping, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Your participation in this study will involve an interview/focus group lasting an estimated half an hour to one and a half hours. You will be asked a series of questions about your thoughts and experiences about a popular brand. Our discussion will be audio taped and video recorded to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words for accurate transcription. The tapes will only be heard by me (the researcher) for the purpose of this study.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is **voluntary** and you are **under no obligation** to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are **free to withdraw** at any time, without giving a reason. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

This study poses little to no risk to the participants. Insights gathered by you and other participants will be used in my master's dissertation, which will be read by my professor and presented to external examiners. The research report may also be published. Although direct quotes may be used in the paper, your name and other identifying information will be **strictly confidential and anonymous**.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Please note that all your personal information and identity are treated as **highly confidential**. The tape recorder and video recorder will only be used as a means to gain insight, information and accurate transcription for the purpose of this study. Your name will not be recorded anywhere and mentioned to anyone. Your name will only be known to me, the researcher, and identified members of the research team (my assistant). This means that your **true identity will be confidential** and will **NOT** be revealed to anyone else or made public when the data is written up. Each participant will be given a pseudonym (e.g. participant 1, 2, etc.), and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings or journal articles. The only place your name will be recorded is on this informed sheet/informed consent form. These sheets are kept in a locked cabinet to which only I, the researcher, have access.

Please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity since focus groups are used as a data collection method for this study. While I will make every effort to ensure that you will not be connected to the information you share during the focus group, I cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat the information confidentially. I shall, however, encourage all participants to do so. For this reason I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Transcriptions of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet and/or a password protected computer to which only the researcher has access. Future use of the stored data may be subject to further research ethics review and approval, if applicable.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No incentives will be paid for participation and you will receive no direct benefits. However, your participation will help us with information and experiences that allow us to understand brand reputation in the specific group of women selected for a popular brand. It may further allow for the understanding of the cognitive and affective elements of brand reputation as an attitudinal construct, which could assist theory development.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee at Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you would like to see it..

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using. Should you require any further information or wish to speak to me about any aspect of this study, you are welcome to contact me:
Zaina Rehman: **took out contact details.*

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact the research supervisor, Professor George Angelopulo: **took out contact details.*

I appreciate you taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zaina Rehman', enclosed within a faint, light-colored rectangular border.

Zaina Rehman

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant's name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understand the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study might be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the <focus group>
<face-to-face interview>

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant's name & surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's name & surname.....(please print)

Researcher Signature.....Date.....