

# An application of impression management theory on corporate storytelling for branding in examining internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions

**B Nyagadza**

*Midlands State University Marondera  
University of Agricultural Science &  
Technology  
Zimbabwe*

bnyagadza@muast.ac.zw



<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7226-0635>

\*Corresponding author

**Prof E M Kadembo**

*Richmond The International American  
University in London*



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5457-358X>

**Dr A Makasi**

*Harold Pupkewitz Graduate School of  
Business (HP-GSB, Namibia)*

## ABSTRACT

**Research purpose:** The paper evaluates perspectives of Impression Management theory applied to examine the relationship between brand storytelling and internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions. This is as result of paucity of research and complex dynamics which remain unexplored in brand storytelling, as used in Zimbabwe listed companies.

**Motivation for the study:** The aim was to develop a theoretical framework which leads to adoption Impression Management theory as an anchor for the testing the relationship between brand storytelling and internal stakeholder's corporate brand perceptions in Zimbabwe listed companies.

**Research design, approach and method:** Brand Storytelling concepts and Impression Management theory were critically analysed and evaluated to determine their strength and weaknesses in link to the current research focus area, using systematic literature survey method and deductive research approach.

**Main findings:** Nexus between themes and elements of brand stories and Impression Management strategies indicates that these elements influence internal stakeholders' perceptions of the corporate brand.

**Practical/managerial implications:** The themes are potential starting points of brand stories, and are presented by the elements of brand stories. However, there is a gap between theory and practice on the real relationship between internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions and brand stories of the organisations.

**Contribution/value-add:** Organizations can use impression management strategies to build the positive brand stories and enhancing the internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions.

**Keywords:** Marketing theory; Internal Marketing; Marketing Philosophy; Corporate Communications

The notion of storytelling is argued as ubiquitous, as it touches on every facet of life (Kadembo, 2016: pg. 7). It has a dark side as well (Stevens, 2002; pg. xvi and Boje, 2014). In organisations it is also gossip, rumours, lies, purposive distortions, exaggerations, cons and witch hunts (Stevens, 2002; pg. xvi and Boje, 2014). Boje (2014; pg. xx) points out that 'storytelling is technically a subdomain of conversation, discourse, dramaturgy, and communication, and happens in many mediums: oral, print, gesture, digital, and material practices'. Again in the view of Boje (2014; pg.

xx), 'storytelling occurs in storytelling organizations, which are part of every organization or company'. Contrary to this Denning (2000), expounds on storytelling as 'something told, even recounted, more closely and often in the form of a causally-linked set of events; account; tale,; the telling of a happening or connected series of happenings, whether true or fictitious'. Derrida (2001), accepts this by suggesting that in storytelling everything is in the margins or traces. This concedes to Boje's (2001) view of stories as exemplars of messy process of human sense making. The logic being that corporate stories for branding, do not simply persuade us, they become us, through living them (Denning, 2006: p. 44; Kadembo, 2016: p. 41).

## **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The paper evaluates perspectives of Impression Management (IM) theory applied to examine the relationship between corporate storytelling for branding and internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions. This is as result of paucity of research relating to the latter. There are complex dynamics which remain unexplored in corporate storytelling for branding. Corporate storytelling for branding is the keyword in today's marketing and communication world, as many other concepts of branding also covers different approaches and fields of interest (Chen and Seng, 2016). Brand stories are told by leaders and managers. Storytelling instrumentation applied in this research is from the perspective of an organisation. This is in line with Boje's (2016) views, where he contends that; 'Storytelling occurs in storytelling organizations, which are part of every organization or company'. By itself that is not saying anything new. To this we add that storytelling in organizations is a combination of living stories, narratives, and ante narrative connections. A little better, but saying that one thing has three parts does not help much. The contribution of storytelling organization is in the understanding of the sense making that takes place in pragmatic ways between storytellers and their audiences' impressions! The next subsection gives a synthesis to research background in line with Southern African brand story telling dynamics.

## **RESEARCH CONTEXT**

On continental scale, major dominating brand storytelling listed corporates like MTN are found in South Africa. However, in Zimbabwe, the currently 63 listed corporates, more is unknown about the effect of brand storytelling (Spear and Roper, 2013) on the corporate brand perceptions of internal stakeholders. Recently, the annual ranking of the most admired corporate storytelling for branding and most valuable brands in Sub Saharan Africa, Brand Africa 100 was announced at a Gala launch of the 4th annual Brand Africa 100 in South Africa (venturesafrica.com, 2018). In the category of most admired African brands for 2015, MTN, GLO and Dangote came top. It is also worthy to note that Nigeria dominated the list of African brands by 11 percent followed by South Africa and Kenya accounting for 4 percent each respectively (venturesafrica.com, 2018). Using at the numerical change in ranking MTN which came top on the list for 2015 rose by only one point from its position last year while Dangote Nigeria rose by nine points, Mukwano brand in Uganda rose 42 places and Star Lager beer in Nigeria rose by 40 points. It is also not surprising that half of the brands of top 10 most admired brands are food and beverage companies with Telecommunications Company taking first and second place.

South Africa and Kenya presented top four brands each while Nigeria dominated with 11 brands (venturesafrica.com, 2018). Many of the top 10 brands from 2015 have retained their positions in 2016 except for Woolworths which has moved to fifth place, and Absa which has moved to seventh. The top 10 brand storytelling corporates are: MTN, Vodacom, Sasol, Standard Bank, Woolworths, FNB, Absa, Nedbank, Investec and Mediclinic. Brands seeing a significant increase in value include Investec (27%) and WesBank (27%) (Biz Community, 2018). Two new brands have entered the Top 50. Country Road, now owned by Woolworths, enters at 31st place with a value of R4.64 billion and Growthpoint enters at 50 with a value of R1.47 billion. SABMiller holds the most valuable portfolio amounting to R29.67 billion with four of its brands standing amongst the country's top 50: Castle, Carling Black Label, Hansa Pilsner and SABMiller. According to Biz Community (2018), SABMiller is followed by Firstrand with three brands (FNB, WesBank and RMB) valued at R23.12bn. The total value of the Top 50 brand storytelling corporates increased

3% from R373 billion to R384 billion. Excluding MTN's drop in brand value of R17 bn, the remaining Top 49 brands have a total of R347 billion in 2016, growing 9% from the total value in 2015 (R319 bn), according to Biz Community (2018).

In Zimbabwe currently, there are some market dynamics leading to erosion of corporate brands, as a result of both internal and external brand stories. This is so because corporate storytelling for branding is no longer simply a way of averting failure (Haig, 2003: p.13). The Colcom Pork pies in Zimbabwe have suffered a heavy backlash from customers after massive outcry relating to compromised quality of their product. The internet through the social media networks like Facebook and Twitter were awash with the viral campaigns of storylines such as; "...#bring back our original pork pie...#nyama yakaendepi?" This was in a bid to be heard by the producer. A report by the Bulawayo24 Online Newspaper 20 May 2019, alleges that "Alpha Media Holdings CEO, Trevor Ncube is not a happy man after buying a Colcom pork pie which has little pork inside of it". "The AMH Boss took to twitter handle to register his frustration". "...Dear Colcom, Just to let you know that I am sulking. There was very little pork in my Pork Pie. I love my pie with lots of pork and bit of pastry. Cheers!" This a typical example of brand stories narrated by external stakeholders which had great potential to kill the brand of the company. Presumably the sales of Colcom had to decline heavily as a result of these negative stories towards the brand. In support of this, Bulawayo24 Online Newspaper 20 May 2019, went on to say; "Trevor Ncube joins a huge list of Zimbabweans who have been complaining in the past years over the product that is being manufactured by Colcom". What could have driven these negative brand story? Are Zimbabwean pork pie brand loyalists to switch to other pork pie brands? How does this affect Colcom's corporate brand image and what will be the stakeholders' perceptions and impressions? One could therefore argue that stakeholders would learn about brands and behave as a result of the effects of stories, as proposed by Marzec (2007: p. 27) and Kadembo (2015: p. 98).

Furthermore, companies like "Chibuku" opaque beer brand under National Breweries, has failed to fully penetrate the Mozambican market because of negative external stories. Customers are alleged to have complained that the product lacks the expected concentration of alcoholic content befitting their expected standards, they are used to spirits and dry gins than opaque beer. This led to the brand erosion in Mozambique, although in Zimbabwe the brand is still strong. In the opinion of *Zambian Daily Mail* of 14 January 2017, Chibuku which has its roots in Zimbabwe and Zambia has become a new sensation in the African countries where it has been marketed through such typical brand stories. It is known as has been around since 1960s, when Max Heinrech, a white settler in Zimbabwe was struck with an innovative idea of coming up with an African tradition beer of an African tradition. Ross (2013), expounds that the 'slogans might be different in other parts of southern or eastern Africa, but the Chibuku beverage itself and the loyalty of its consumers are broadly similar wherever the modern, standardized version of traditional African beer is available'. 'No social occasion or religious ritual was complete without it; no wedding or funeral, no prayer for rain, no tribute to the gods' as Ross (2013) insinuates. Currently through compelling brand stories the company has grown to reach not on Zimbabwe and Zambia but to Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, Tanzania, but under National Breweries plc brand. By 2020, the Chibuku under National Breweries is set to increase its capacity from one million hectolitres to 1.5 million hectolitres, with an option to expand it to 2.5 hectolitres (*Zambian Daily Mail* online, 14 January 2017). Thus, it follows that the corporate storytelling for branding is a tool that can impact situations if used to good effect; they require thinking and doing something (Parry and Hansen, 2007; Kadembo (2015: p. 100).

## **BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW**

'The positive perception of internal stakeholders' on the corporate brand leads to driving sustainable corporate brand loyalty has been well documented within the marketing literature' (So, Yin and Parson, 2013; Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). However, the 'impact of corporate brand storytelling strategy on internal stakeholders' emotional attachment and (subsequent) loyalty has yet to be examined and empirically substantiated in the corporate sector' (So, Yin and Parson, 2013; Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). Urde (2003) and Sheikh (2014) 'defined corporate branding as maintaining alignment between core values of the corporate brand, added values (values appreciated by external stakeholders), and organizational values' (values 'lived-by' internally, through employees' attitudes and

behaviour, and products/services) (Sheikh, 2014). This implies that values need to be constantly rejuvenated; as external values change, internal values should equally adapt (Sheikh, 2014). Corporate brand, to date, has been defined in several ways. To better understand the extant definitions, it is helpful to distinguish corporate branding (as a verb) from the corporate brand (as a noun) (Stern, 2006; Sheikh, 2014).

Perception of the corporate brand is determined by each contact with the brand, regardless of whether contact is direct or indirect. This defines how internal stakeholders view the corporate brand itself versus its promises (Aaker, 1997; Immonen, 2016). The characteristic features are created by transferring personality features of the typical brand consumer to the brand itself.

Clarkson (1995) defines internal stakeholders as the persons or group of people that have interest in the organisations activities, and they have rights, claims past, present and the future. One of the major authorities in the area of stakeholder concepts is Freeman and Stoner, who have contributed immensely in the related literature. The concept has now been recognised so much in the profession and many academics as suggested by Alkhafaji (1989).

The researchers support the view that emotional corporate brand attachment is directly linked to the corporate associations and stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions. Once the employees are captivated by the corporate stories for branding in an organisation, it becomes easy for them to be emotionally attached to the corporate brand itself. The target audience of a brand story are associated with how they evaluate the level of sense making to them. Not all brand stories acknowledge the element of conflict as alluded by some authorities in the literature above. The way internal stakeholders position a certain corporate brand in their minds, shows clearly the degree to which an organisation is competent. This ultimately results in increased corporate brand equity and brand recognition.

In addition, the authors expound that not all internal stakeholders' trust that the corporate brand will meet their expectations through the brand promises. This is so because the latter first check on the reliability of the organisation and how trustworthy they are with their brands before being attached to them with positive impressions. Any customer or stakeholder, desires to be associated with a corporate brand with great positive corporate story for branding. In concluding this section, corporate associations equally influence corporate brand attachment to the stakeholder. But a question that can be posed is, to what extent can corporate associations be fully accepted as information cues for an organisation? Are corporate stories for branding fully expressed in corporate associations?

Furthermore, corporate activities show all initiatives made by the organisation to vividly work in line to internal stakeholders with the brands. Again, these corporate initiatives, such as the use of metaphorical advertisements and corporate social responsibility behaviour, are aimed at improving the internal stakeholders' perceived brand image and reputation (Sen and Bhattacharaya, 2001; Heath et al, 2006; So, Yap and Parsons, 2013, pg.8). All stakeholders, be it internal and external, they have an intuitive approach towards activities. They make evaluation against what the corporate brand promises and the desired results. But a question is posed on whether the internal stakeholders can continue to remain loyal, especially when activities are not in line with their perceptive preponderances? What if the organisation loses its corporate image as result of the bad activities, what will be the effect to their level of loyalty and will they continue to be positively attached emotionally to the corporate brand? Again, all corporate stories for branding end up becoming strategic if they relate the corporate values to the mission and vision statements of an organisation. If the brand story is not linked to the corporate strategy, what can be the result? Does it lead to paralleled vision and achievement of goals in the organisation?

Since corporate stories for branding are believed to carry a personality trait according to the researchers, they tend to modify the way the employees as primary stakeholders behave too. But does it mean all employees behave as a result of all brand story personality effects? Are all brand stories through personality element expressed in visible and measurable behaviours within stakeholders? The authors contends that there is a gap between the behaviour of employees and the influence of brand personalities. However, there is overwhelming evidence that corporate stories for branding may create that sense of insecurity if improperly expressed to the targeted audience. Trust is key element in building confinements and confidence in the corporate brand. Emotions are strongly related to the corporate storytelling for branding expressions.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theoretical framework presented in this study outlines the Impression Management theory, Stakeholder theory, Narrative theory, Drama theory, Consumer storytelling theory and Signalling theory. These concepts and theories were critically analysed and evaluated to determine their strength and weaknesses in link to the current research focus area; corporate storytelling for branding. Much of the literature on brand storytelling lacked theoretical frameworks, such as Mucundorfeanu (2018), Cornelissen et al. (2012), de Chernatony (2005, p.818), Money et al. (2012, p. 197)

**TABLE 1:  
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS USED IN PRIOR RESEARCH**

Theory	Area	Author	Methodology
Impression management theory	Corporate communication	Brennan, Guillamon-Saorin, and Pierce (2009)	Empirical and quantitative.
Impression management theory	Corporate reputation	Spear and Roper (2013)	Empirical and content analysis.
Impression management theory	Corporate communication	Connolly-Aher and Broadway (2007)	Empirical and content analysis.
Impression management theory	Consulting	McFall. K. K (2017).	Empirical and quantitative.
Impression management theory	Brand Storytelling	Thompson-Whiteside. H. Turnbull. S and Howe-Walsh. L (2017).	Conceptual.
Impression management theory	Marketing Communications	Young J. A. and Gardener. W. (1994).	Empirical and content analysis.
Impression management theory	Marketing Communications	Wu. Y and Shang. S.S.C. (2012).	Empirical and content analysis.
Narrative theory	Corporate Stories	Woodside (2008)	Conceptual
Narrative theory	Metaphor in conversations	Doyle,J.R.,& Sims,D.(2002)	Empirical and content analysis.
Narrative theory	Narrative processing	Escalas, J. E. (2004).	Empirical and content analysis.
Narrative theory	Storytelling	Kadembo (2012)	Conceptual.
Narrative theory	Storytelling	Daugaard. M. P. and Eriksen (2018).	Empirical and content analysis.
Stakeholder theory	Corporate identity	Spear and Roper (2013)	Empirical and content analysis.
Stakeholder theory	Corporate identity	Balmer Fukukawa, and Gray (2007, p.10)	Conceptual
Stakeholder theory	Corporate reputation	Spear and Roper (2013)	Empirical and content analysis.
Stakeholder theory	Corporate reputation	Dickinson Delaporte, Beverland, and Lindgreen (2010, p. 1871)	Empirical and quantitative.
Stakeholder theory	Corporate reputation	Mahon (2002, p. 423)	Empirical and quantitative.
Consumer storytelling theory	Storytelling	Woodside (2008)	Conceptual
Consumer storytelling theory	Storytelling and Sense making in organizations	Weick, K. E. (1995).	Empirical and quantitative.
Consumer storytelling theory	Storytelling	Wertime, K.(2002)	Conceptual
Drama theory	Cognitive and affective responses	Wells, W. D. (1988).	Empirical and quantitative.
Signalling theory	A communication review	Connolly, et al. (2011)	Theoretical review.

**Source:** Researchers' own conception (2019)

and Melewar and Akel (2005, p. 41) according to Spear and Roper (2013). Therefore this section considers previous theoretical frameworks used so as to identify, the best one for this study, in sync with its trajectory. Below is the summary of previous theoretical frameworks used to evaluate corporate storytelling for branding, together with the methodologies used.

The above table instead focuses on the Impression Management theory, Stakeholder theory, Narrative theory, Drama theory, Consumer storytelling theory and Signalling. The core of each theory include the following; Stakeholder theory asserts that companies have a responsibility that requires them to consider the interests of all parties affected by their actions (Daugaard and Eriksen, 2014). On the other hand Narrative theory informs the development of propositions of storytelling behaviour by providing understanding and description of brand story enactments and content (Woodside, 2010). Furthermore, Consumer storytelling. Woodside (2008), Holt and Thompson (2004) and Wertime (2002) supports the idea that the central proposition is consumers use products and service props identities to enact story productions that reflect archetypal myths. The origins of Impression Management theory is attributed to Goffman (1959), cited in Spear and Roper (2013), who suggested a dramaturgical view of social interactions, which see people as actors engaging in performances before the audiences. To conclude, the signalling theory, is concerned with reducing information asymmetry between two parties. However, the authors of this paper sees the linkages towards the development of a corporate story for branding and advance arguments to demonstrate justification through the use of various theories developed and tested in diverse study fields.

### ***Key contributors to theories and corporate storytelling for branding literature***

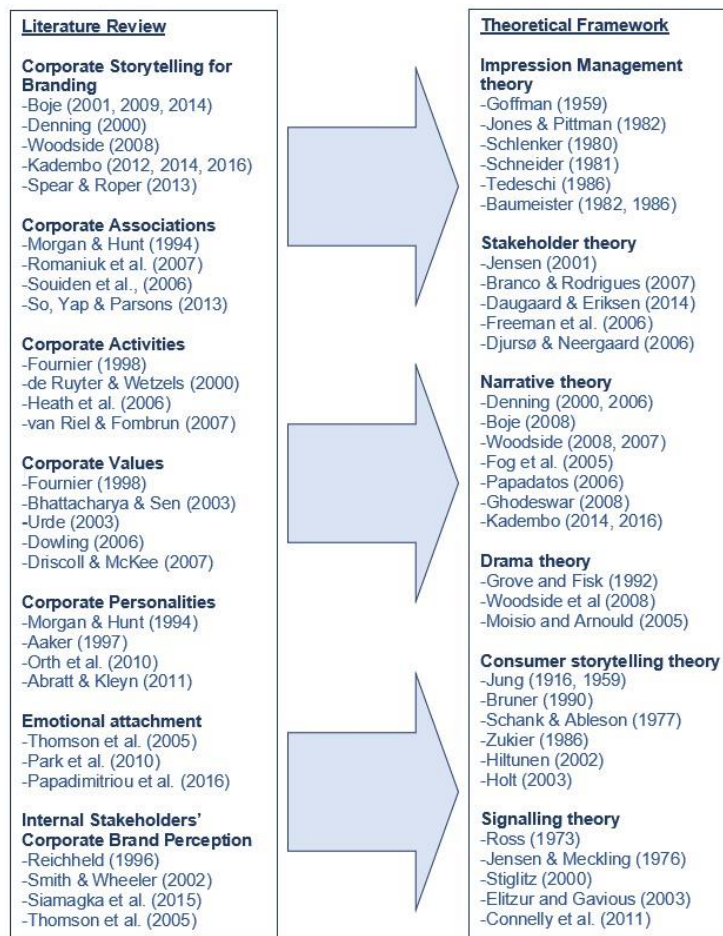
The key contributors to the research topic (corporate storytelling for branding) include the perspectives from Boje (1991a, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2014), Denning (2000), Woodside et al. (2000, 2008), Kadembo (2010, 2012, 2014, 2016), Spear and Roper (2013), Stevens (2002), Clegg (1989), Cooper & Burrell (1988), Laclau, (1983, 1988), Dowling (2006), Driscoll and McKee (2007), Larsen (2000), Marzec (2007), McKee (2003), Barnes (2003) and other related authorities of the field. The theoretical framework was also built by theories which included Impression Management theory, Stakeholder theory, Narrative theory, Drama theory, Consumer storytelling theory and Signalling theory. The schematic diagram that follows conceptualizes the key contributors to corporate storytelling for branding and theoretical framework literature in detail.

The next section delves deep into the perspectives made by Goffman as a major authority in the area of Impression Management.

### ***Goffman's Views as a major contributor to Impression Management Theory***

'Erving Goffman (1922–1982) developed a dramaturgical theory of the self and society inspired by Mead's basic conception of social interaction (Piconne, 2015 pg. 40). Furthermore, Piconne (2015), suggests that Impression Management analysis as seen by Goffman aimed to uncover the various strategies by which people change audiences' perceptions when they show themselves in the public. 'Goffman suggests that how people present themselves (like the same as corporates) to others is aimed toward Impression Management (IM), which is a conscious decision on the part of the individual to reveal certain aspects of the self and to conceal others, as actors do when performing on stage' (Rui and Stafanone, 2013; Paliszkiwicz and Madra-Sawicka, 2013 pg. 40). The same expositions used to explain the above Impression Management can also be applied to corporate storytelling for branding. The authors see that corporate story for branding forms like images, videos, controlling information and all those mediums used in social media are methods that can be applied to evaluate the impressions by the stakeholders. This is so because people and organisations try to present themselves positively in the eyes of the audience. Just like story telling for branding, companies uses it to establish a favourable image, positioning and reputation against other competitors. One way or the other, the authors agree with the notion that the corporate story for branding carry a taxonomy that is direct and assertive, defensive, indirect and assertive and indirect and defensive, even passive in nature. The connection between Impression Management and corporate storytelling for branding is that there actors and audience in both of concepts. Self-presentation as noted earlier is an important aspect again that is found in corporate storytelling for branding and impression management.

**FIGURE 1:  
LITERATURE CONCEPTUALIZATION**



Source: Researchers' own conception (2019)

### ***Using Impression Management as the main theoretical perspective***

All the preceding theories (Narrative, Consumer Psychology, and Drama Theory) outlined before still feed in and are in congruent to the perspectives of the IM theory. The only limitation is that some these theories are weaker in their applicability and relevancy due to the assumption behind their conception. The authors suggest that Impression Management (IM) as a theory is directly linked to corporate storytelling for branding since stakeholders tend to evaluate and bring out conclusion on them. Usually in organisations, employees behave in a way that they feel aligned to the brand stories that they receive, or simply the impression that they have after sense making through mental processes. The authors' conceptualization of self-presentation in corporate storytelling for branding agrees with the ones propounded by Impression Management Theory are in the eyes of the organisation's stakeholders (Arkin & Baumgardner, 1986; Baumeister, 1982b; Baumeister & Tice, 1986; Goffman, 1959; E. E. Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1980; D. J. Schneider, 1981; Tedeschi, 1986; Spear and Roper 2013; Tashmin, 2016). The concepts are more than just semantic in nature, but go beyond generalisation of concepts. Below is an explanation of the linkage between

### ***Nexus between corporate storytelling for branding & Impression Management***

The link between themes and elements of brand stories and IM strategies/behaviours indicates that these elements relate to audiences' perceptions of the corporate brand. The link are projected based on the theoretical literature made by authorities who confirm the link that exist between IM and Corporate storytelling for branding. According to the authors, these include; Goffman (1959), Johns and Pittman (1982), Tetlock and Manstead, (1985) Gardner and Martinko, (1988), Schlenker and Weigold (1992), Turnley (2003), Ogden and Clarke (2005) Carter (2006); Bolino et al

(2008), Spear and Roper (2013), Parhankangas and Ehrlich (2014), Thompson-Whiteside, et al. (2017), and McFall (2017). There are several Impression Management IM behaviours available to individuals and organisations (Carter, 2006; Spear and Roper, 2013 pg. 495). The Impression Management behaviours such as demonstrative, assertive, are directly linked to the corporate storytelling for branding concepts as identified by Bolino et al (2008) cited in Spear

**TABLE 2:  
LINK BETWEEN THEMES AND ELEMENTS OF CORPORATE STORYTELLING FOR BRANDING  
AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES & BEHAVIOURS**

Impression management strategy	Impression management behaviour	Definition
<b>Assertive</b> The organisation proactively manages impressions about themselves to create a desired image (Tetlock and Manstead, 1985)	Ingratiation	-looking likeable by doing favours or flattering them
	Self-promotion	-expressing the organisation's abilities and accomplishments, to look competent
	Exemplification	-exhibiting the organisation as being successful and going beyond expectations.
	Supplication Intimidation	-threatening others.
<b>Defensive</b> The institution reacts and manage impressions to improve and protect the company image (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985).	Apologies	-accepting that an act the organisation is associated with something wrong and regretful actions.
	Excuses	-trying to reduce corporate responsibility for any bad wrong doing.
<b>Demonstrative</b> Giving facts about specific activities undertaken by the organisation (Bolino et al, 2008).	Justifications	-alteration of audiences' perceptions of an organisational act, minimising harm and transforming it from bad to good.
<b>Illustrative</b> Making broad generalisations about the organisation (Bolino et al, 2008).	N/A	N/A

**Source:** Spear and Roper (2013 pg. 495), Bolino et al. (2008); Bolino and Turnley (2003); Schlenker and Weigold (1992).

and Roper (2013). Furthermore, Bolino and Turnley (2003) developed a scale of IM behaviours from a taxonomy of IM strategies as expressed by Jones and Pitman (1982), which included ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication, intimidation, indirectness, acclamation, display of group loyalty and other non-verbal ones. The table that follows expresses these behaviours alongside the behaviours identified by Spear and Roper (2013), Bolino et al, (2008), Schlenker and Weigold (1992).

Spear and Roper (2013), suggest that Impression Management behaviours are a very important indicator of corporate storytelling for branding influence to the corporate brand image towards the audience. Schlenker and Weigold (1992) and Bolino et, (2008) have identified these behaviours as shown in the table 1 above. The comparison between the of the corporate storytelling behaviours is necessary element of Impression Management.

In consideration of the views by Ogden and Clarke (2005), cited in Spear and Roper (2013), the behaviours can be used as components of ingratiation behaviour. With this it might have influence of internal stakeholder perceptions of the corporate brand as ingratiation focuses to make the organisation appear more attractive and likeable, with its communication to the former (Spear and Roper, 2013, Connolly-Ahern and Broadway, 2007; Young et al, 1994).

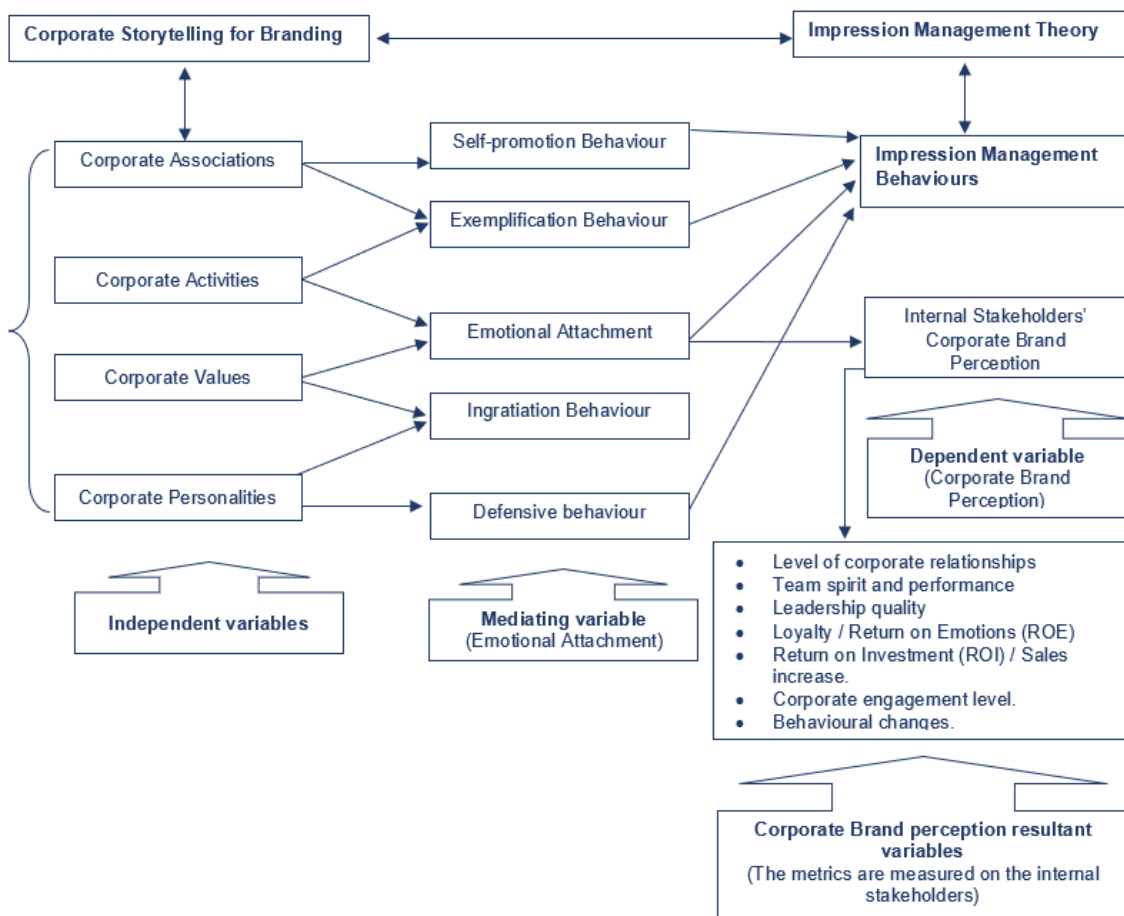
Furthermore, the values element could be used as ingratiation part behaviour, as values are suggested to express the corporate beliefs and principles and shows what an institution stands for at any given situation (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Hall, 1989; Quigley, 1994; Verma, 2009, 2010; Spear and Roper, 2013). The authors in tandem to this, agree with the views of Edvarsson et al (2006), who suggests that brands communicate an organisation's values to create a distinct and favourable image.

In addition, the self-promotion behaviour is likened to accomplishments elements, as this involves the organisations achievements as proposed by Spear and Roper (2013). An impact on the audiences' impressions of corporate storytelling for branding can only be seen if this element is applied, as it links to corporate credibility, and performance efficiency (Spear and Roper, 2013, Connolly-Ahern and Broadway, 2007). This would increase self-promotion according to the authors, as it also shapes corporate reputation as found by Srivoravilai et al, (2011).



In line with the above, Perks et al. (2013) in his study, as cited by Spear and Roper (2013) found out that the exemplification behaviour could be applied as accomplishment element, by referring to the organisation's achievement behaviour in corporate social responsibility. External benefits can be used as showing the public of the organisation. Application of this benefit behaviour in corporate storytelling for branding can shape the internal stakeholders corporate behaviour and improve it in its morally looking image (Spear and Roper, 2013, Connolly-Ahern and Broadway, 2007; Ogden and Clarke, 2005; Young et al, 1994). The conflict element can be used as part of supplication behaviour, as this element identifies the problems the company has faced, but also how these have been overcome (Spear and Roper, 2013, Dowling, 2006; McKee, 2003; Woodside et al, 2008). The framework that follows depicts the link between Corporate Storytelling for Branding & Impression Management theoretical behaviours.

**FIGURE 2:  
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK DEPICTING THE LINK BETWEEN CORPORATE STORYTELLING FOR  
BRANDING & IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT THEORETICAL BEHAVIOURS**



Source: Researcher's own conception (derived from literature and theoretical review) (2019)

Notwithstanding the former, conflict element is part of defensive strategy, and authors suggest that this strategy includes the company reacting to a given problem that might have occurred, as Spear and Roper (2013) contend. This can influence internal stakeholders' perceptions by assisting the corporate brand in gaining legitimacy and reducing negative characteristics attributed to it (Spear and Roper, 2013, Ogden and Clarke, 2005). Authors believe companies can use the activities element to demonstrate strategy development as it depicts the activities taken by the organisation, in line with Bolino et al (2008) and Spear & Roper (2013).

Authors argue in line with the views of Spear and Roper (2013) that demonstrative and illustrative strategies can influence audiences' perceptions about them by informing about the main aspects of corporate storytelling for branding, in terms of activities, although these strategies have not been explored so much in assertive and defensive strategies literature. Pride can also be seen as self-promotion behaviour, whereas fear could be portrayed as part of supplication behaviour. Corporate brand storytelling has an emotion element in them since emotion is a key

element, such as pride expressed before (Spear and Roper, 2013; Gabriel, 2000). The exploration of the Impression Management strategies can indicate the potential for corporate stories for branding to shape the audience form of the corporate brand.

With the above analysis and evaluation, the authors suggest that impression management clearly shows a great relationship to corporate storytelling for branding as some elements are directly linked and work hand in glove to each other. The next section discusses the application of impression management in various areas which include media and communication studies, internet studies and others. This is meant to support the fact that impression management is a very important aspect in brand storytelling issues. In sync to this, the succeeding section accounts for managerial implications of the research theoretical study.

## **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

In line with the media, social and communication studies, one can conclude that theoretical and empirical studies have been applying Impression Management specifically in digital and social media as suggested by Piconne (2015). The authors believe that the work of Goffman, has been highlighted as very useful in the context of mass communication like radio and television broadcasting. Meyrowitz (1990), added further that Goffmanian vocabulary of symbols and self, have made ways for use in communication and media studies. Managers in organisations can use the Impression Management behaviours to shape how they communicate their corporate storytelling branding of their respective organisations. From a virtual perspective, managers can use Impression Management (IM) to monitor and analyse the webs, blogging, and social networking sites traffic (Papacharissi, 2002; Piconne, 2015). In addition to this, this increases the room to guard information shared. The next section is conclusion for this paper, wrapping the major highlights addressed.

## **CONCLUSION**

The theoretical framework presented in this paper outlined the Impression Management theory, Stakeholder theory, Narrative theory, Drama theory, Consumer storytelling theory and Signalling theory. 'The link between themes and elements of corporate stories for branding and IM strategies/behaviours (as the main theoretical framework for the study), shows that these elements will shape the audiences' perceptions of the corporate brand (Spear and Roper, 2013). 'Core of each theory included the following; Stakeholder theory asserts that companies have a responsibility that requires them to consider the interests of all parties affected by their actions (Daugaard and Eriksen, 2014). On the other hand Narrative theory informed the development of propositions of storytelling behaviour by providing understanding and description of brand story enactments and content (Woodside, 2010). The origins of Impression Management theory is attributed to Goffman (1959), cited in Spear and Roper (2013), who found a dramaturgical social interaction view, which sees people as actors engaging in performances before audience (Gardner and Martinko, 1988).

In conclusion, the Signalling theory is mainly focused putting down the probability of information imbalance (Spence, 2002; Connelly et al, 2011). The theoretical framework presented in this study outlines the Impression Management theory in evaluating its link to corporate storytelling for branding. The link between themes and elements of corporate storytelling for branding and Impression Management strategies or behaviours shows that they influence internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions. The themes are potential starting points for corporate storytelling for branding and could be presented by elements of each behaviour as expressed in the literature. However, the studies which identify these elements are predominantly conceptual (these are Barnes, 2003; Dowling, 2006; Driscoll and McKee, 2007; McKee, 2003; Marzec, 2007; Woodside et al, 2008; Spear and Roper, 2013), and it is therefore necessary to explore the validity of the themes and elements with empirical research. Adopting the Impression management as the theoretical framework for this study, leads to the scientific testing of the theory in ascertain the relationship between corporate storytelling for branding and internal stakeholders' corporate brand perceptions. To wrap up, organizations can use impression management in brand stories to build the positive image. Furthermore the theoretical review addresses controversial issues surrounding Impression Management as a framework for future research regarding the latter and corporate storytelling for branding.

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