



## The Perceived Brand Equity of the 2013 Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association Games

Lysias Tapiwanashe Charumbira  
National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe.

### Abstract

This paper seeks to determine the perceived brand equity of the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (ZUSA) Games and increase knowledge on how producers of sports events can enhance the competitiveness of their brands. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 37 randomly sampled participants during the 2013 edition of the ZUSA Games, in Harare and mixed methods procedures were used to analyze data. The findings show that, dimensionally, the perceived equity of the ZUSA game is an aggregate of brand awareness and brand associations. The study established that brand equity scales cannot be uniformly applied across different sport settings owing to the subjective and experiential nature of customer experiences with sports products and services. It also established that the ZUSA Games have negative perceived brand equity. These Games command very low levels of brand awareness outside the Collegiate sports market and have weak psychological connections with internal customers. This sport brand is not differentiated from competing brands.

**Key Words:** *Perceived Brand Equity, Customer-Based Brand Equity, Firm-Based Brand Equity, Spectator-Based Brand Equity, and Viewer-Based Brand Equity.*

### 1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to determine the perceived brand equity of the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association Games. The Zimbabwe University Sports Association Games is a multi-discipline sport event which is staged every year under the patronage of the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association (ZUSA). Since their inauguration in 1999, with athletes from four universities competing in six sporting disciplines, the ZUSA Games have shown tremendous growth. The 2013 edition of these games included participants from eleven universities competing in thirteen compulsory sports and one optional sport.

The globalization of sports markets has increased the intensity of brand competition on the Zimbabwean sports market. Fans and athletes now have a wide varied of local and foreign sports brands to choose from. As a result, the ZUSA Games are now facing stiff competition from such innovative new entrants as social sports clubs and sports academies, school sport, global sport brands, video and computer games, musical shows, social networks and religion, among other pastimes. This fits well with the observation by Higgins (2006) that, off-field competition among sports organizations has become just as fierce as the competition on the field of play, since consumers have so many different sport and entertainment choices these days. Gladden and Milne (1999) and Bauer et al. (2005) note that in such competitive sports markets, products and services within the same brand category are becoming increasingly similar. Differentiation through performance on the field of play is difficult. The ZUSA Games are also facing challenges in the areas of financial viability, attractiveness to sponsors, provision of customer oriented products, product innovation, brand visibility, brand differentiation and media coverage.

There is increasing consensus among such scholars as Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), Davis (2002), VanAuken (2003), Kapferer (2008), and Keller (2008) that building strong brands delivers numerous financial rewards and differential advantage to organizations. In the sports industry, studies by Gladden et al. (1998), Gladden and Milne (1999), Gladden and Funk (2002), and Bauer et al. (2005), Ross (2006), Kaynak et al. (2008), Bauer et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2008), Kunkel et al. (2012), Arai et al. (2013), Naik and Gupta (2013), and Biscayan et al. (2013) have acknowledged the contribution of brand equity building as an antecedent of sustainable competitive in intensely contested modern sports markets.

However, although scholars and brand managers have begun to realize the value of brand equity in modern organizations, diverging views and approaches still persist on the definition and conceptualisation of brand equity in literature. This is captured by Winters (1991, p70) who argues that “if you ask ten people to define brand equity, you are likely to get ten (maybe 11) different answers as to what it means”. This has influenced scholars like Feldwick (2002) to suggest that the term 'brand equity' be abolished, with individual variants named separately to avoid the current confusion. A review of branding literature recorded serious inconsistencies in the definition of brand equity and these are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Definitions of Brand Equity Identified in Literature.**

SCHOLAR	DEFINITION OF BRAND EQUITY
Leuthesser (1988)	The set of associations and behaviour on the part of a brand's customers, channel members and parent corporation that permits the brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it could without the brand name.
Farquhar(1990)	The value added to a product by the virtue of its name.
Aaker (1991)	A set of assets (or liabilities) linked to the brand's name and symbols that add value to (or subtract from) a product or service.
Srivastava and Shocker(1991)	The aggregation of all accumulated attitudes and behaviour patterns in the extended minds of consumers, distribution channels and influence agents, which will enhance future profits and long term cash flow.
Winters (1991)	The value added to a product by consumers' associations and perceptions of a particular brand name.
Keller (1993)	The differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of a brand, with that effect occurring when a brand is known and when the customer possesses favourable, strong and unique brand associations.
Ritchie &Ritchie(1998)	The total accumulated value or worth of a brand: The intangible and tangible assets that the brand contributes to its corporate parent both financially and in terms of selling leverage.
Nicolino(2000)	The totality of the various values different persons ascribe to a brand, hence, the sum embraces feelings or thoughts that consumers, dealers, distributors or competing businesses attach to a brand.
Wood(2000)	A situation when companies establish a long-term relationship with customers.
Knapp(2000)	The totality of the brand's perception, including the relative quality of products and services, financial performance, customer loyalty, satisfaction, and overall esteem toward the brand.
VanAuken (2002)	The commercial value of all associations and expectations (negative and positive) that people have of an organization and its products and services due to all experiences of, communication with, and perceptions of the brand over time.
Keller (2009)	The added value endowed to a product in the thoughts, words, and actions of consumers.

However, Keller(2009) notes that although there is no universally accepted definition of brand equity, all the definitions share the notion that brand equity denoted added value endowed by the brand to the product, and it can be positive or negative.

A survey of brand management literature identified Customer-Based Brand Equity and Financial-Based Brand Equity as the two dominant dimensions of brand equity. To buttress this observation, Kapferer (2008) argues that two brand equity paradigms do exist. The first is customer-oriented, which is based on the relationships consumers have with the brands they buy, from indifference to attachment, and focuses on the consequent relative strength of the brand. The second brand equity paradigm is concerned with the brand's financial value, as a separable asset. To these two approaches, Feldwick (1996) adds a third interpretation of brand equity as description of the associations and beliefs the consumer has about the brand. While Motameni and Shahrokhi (1998) and Baldauf et al. (2003) include a dimension which incorporates both Customer-Based Brand Equity and Financial-Based Brand Equity. Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2010) note that the financial value of brand equity is only is the outcome of customer response to a brand name and they consider Customer-Based Brand Equity to be the driving force of increased market share and profitability of the brand. This has influenced us to premise this study on customer-oriented dimension of brand equity.

Keller (1993) defines Customer-Based Brand Equity as a situation when a customer is familiar with a brand and holds some favourable, strong and unique brand associations in memory. A brand is said to have positive Customer-Based Brand Equity when consumers react more favourably to a product and the way it is marketed when the brand is identified than when it is not (Keller, 2006).

Aaker (1991), Keller (1993) and Berry (2000) proposed the most notable theories of brand equity from a customer-based perspective. Aaker's (1991) Brand Equity Model is grounded in Cognitive Psychology. It conceptualises brand equity as an aggregate of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, brand loyalty and other proprietary brand assets. According to this model, brand equity creates value for both the customer and firm.

Keller (1993) on the other hand, developed a multidimensional Customer-Based Brand Equity model from a Consumer Psychology perspective. The basic premise of the Customer-Based Brand Equity model is that the power of a brand lies in what resides in the minds of customers and that it is a function of Brand knowledge. Keller(2008) argues that Brand Knowledge is the key to creating Customer-Based Brand Equity, because it creates the differential effect that drives brand equity. Brand Knowledge is conceptualized as consisting of a brand node in memory with a variety of associations linked to it (Keller, 2008). Keller (1993) divided brand knowledge into two components; brand awareness and brand image.

Berry (2000) outlines a Service Brand Equity model determining customer value. The model is premised on the view that a service brand is blend of the *Presented Brand* (what the company says the brand is); *External Brand Communications* (the information customers absorb about the company from other sources that are not controlled by the company); and *Customer Experience with the Brand*.

Although research on sport brand equity has received increased attention from scholars in the last fifteen years, very few studies in branding literature have approached brand equity from a sport perspective (Ross, 2006). The few significant studies that have approached brand equity from a sport perspective include the works of ;Gladden ,Milne, and Sutton(1998), who used Aaker'(1991) Brand Equity Model as a conceptual framework for analyzing brand equity in Division 1 college athletics; Gladden and Milne(1999), who compare the importance of athlete success and brand equity on merchandise sales in the National Hockey League, National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball; Gladden and Funk (2002) ,who developed a framework for identifying the various dimensions of brand associations that are predictive of brand loyalty in professional team sports; Bauer et al.(2005), who developed a scale to measure brand equity in team sports which highlights the importance of brand awareness and demonstrated that brand equity had a significant effect on economic success of the organization; Ross (2006), who developed a framework for the development of Spectator-Based Brand Equity ; Ross et al. (2006), who developed a scale to measure brand associations in professional team sport; Kaynak et al.(2008) who developed an integrative conceptual framework for identifying various dimension of brand associations that are predictive of brand loyalty in professional sports; Kerr and Gladden(2008), who modified and extended the frameworks by Gladden et al.(1998) and Gladden and Milne (1998) to the global market place by focusing on the impact of professional sports teams in foreign markets; Ross et al.(2008), who made an empirical assessment of the Spectator-Based Brand Equity Model and found it to be a reliable framework for measuring brand equity in professional sports teams; Bauer et al.(2008), who modified Gladden and Funk's (2002) Team Associations Model and developed a parsimonious 4-factor and 20-indicator model which highlights the importance of brand image for fan loyalty in professional team sport;Kunkel et al.(2012) who developed a conceptual understanding of Consumer-based League Brand Associations ;Arai et al.(2013) who developed a conceptual Model of Athlete Brand ;Biscaia et al.(2013) who examined and adapted the Spectator-based Brand Equity Model in order to measure brand equity in the European football context ;and Naik and Gupta(2013) who developed the Viewer-Based Brand Equity Model , a conceptual framework for measuring brand-equity of sport teams in context of television viewers.

Most of these frameworks do not take into account the subjective, intangible and experiential nature of sport since they were developed from a manufactured goods perspective (Ross, 2006). The dimensionality of brand equity has not been unanimous (Biscaia et al. (2013). Some of frameworks on sport brand equity focus on a single dimension of brand equity (brand associations), while conceptualise brand equity as an aggregate of brand associations and brand awareness .It was also noted that most of the frameworks focused on brand equity in sports teams. Very few studies in sport branding literature have attempted to measure brand equity in sports events, as a result the nature and significance of sports event brand equity remains opaque. It is against this background that this study sought to fill these knowledge gaps by determining the dimensions and strength of the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association Games' perceived brand equity and increase knowledge on how producers of sports events can enhance the competitiveness of their brands for survival in globalised sports markets. The study also examined the appropriateness of applying brand equity scales developed from a team or league sport perspective to the examination once-off annual Collegiate sports events like the ZUSA Games.

## 2.0 Methodology

This study is based on a phenomenological research philosophy. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from 37 randomly sampled athletes, spectators, and officials at the various competition venues during the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association Games, in Harare, in May 2013.

Before going into field, the research instrument and the methodology was pre-tested. The pre-testing was done in Bulawayo during the 2012 Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association games. No major modifications were done on the interview guide. However, focus group discussions were dropped in the main study as they were found to be unsuitable for collecting data from respondents whose attention is focused on the games.Participation in the study was voluntary and the sample included participants from nine universities.

The NVivo 10 qualitative software package was used to analyze data collected through semi-structured interviews. The analysis of demographic data was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.0 data analysis software.

## 3.0 Results And Discussion

### 3.1 Demographic Data

Effort was made to include both male and female participants in the study.61.76 % of the respondents were male, while 38.24 % were female. This conforms to the sport participation trends in the Country's Colleges and Universities, where women sport participation is limited owing to the gender stereotypes associated with sports participation in society.

The majority of the respondents (41.18 %) had participated in the games for more than 5 years.29.41 % of the respondents were participating in the games for the first time, while another 29.41 % had participated for a periods ranging from 2 to 5 years. The majority of the respondents (55.88 %) were athletes.17.65 % were coaches and the remainder served in a variety of roles such as members of the organizing committee, ZUSA Executive Committee members and institutional sports managers.

### 3.2 The Perceived Brand Equity of the ZUSA Games.

Although the study identified some brand equity dimensions which are consistent with those in existing team and league brand equity literature, a remarkable number of brand equity dimensions identified in literature

were not mentioned by the respondents in this study, as summarized in Table 2 below. The findings show that brand equity scales cannot be uniformly applied across different sports settings owing to the subjective and experiential nature of customer experiences with sports products and services. These results strongly mirror the findings from a study by Biscaia et al. (2013) which recognizes customer experience and cultural differences across sport settings in the assessment of sport brand equity.

**Table 2: Perceived Brand Equity Dimensions of the ZUSA Games.**

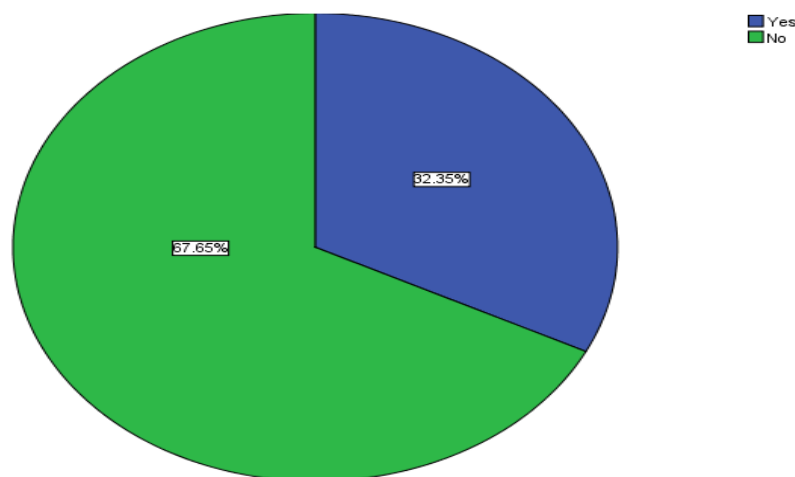
<b>BRAND EQUITY DIMENSIONS IDENTIFIED IN SPORTS TEAM BRAND EQUITY LITERATURE</b>	<b>AUTHORS</b>	<b>MATCHING WORDS OR DESCRIPTIONS MENTIONED BY THE RESPONDENTS IN THIS STUDY</b>
Brand Mark	Gladden and Milne (1999), Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et al. (2005), Ross et al.(2006), Bauer et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
Rivalry	Ross et al. (2006), Bauer et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Rivalry.
Concessions	Ross et al. (2006), Bauer et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
Social Interaction	Ross et al. (2006), Bauer et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Socialisation, Mixing with friends from other Universities, Making friends, Student interaction, Mixing with giants.
History	Bauer et al.(2008), Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
Success	Gladden et al. (1998), Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et al. (2005), Ross et al. (2006), Bauer et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Winning, Disappointment, Medals, Certificates, Substandard medals, institutional glory.
Media Coverage	Gladden et al. (1998).	Limited media coverage, Lack of media interest.
Tradition	Gladden et al. (1998), Gladden and Funk (2002), Ross et al.(2006), Bauer et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2008).	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
Organisational Commitment	Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
Organisational Attributes/	Gladden and Funk (2002),and Bauer et al. (2005), Ross et al. (2006), Bauer et al.(2008), Ross et al. (2008),Naik and Gupta (2013).	Congested fixtures, Games scheduled during examination periods, Well-organized sports competitions, Well managed competition, Flawed national team selection procedures, Monotony, Lack of innovation.
Team Play Characteristics	Ross et al.(2006), Ross et al. (2008).	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
Non-player Personnel	Gladden et al. (1998), Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et al. (2005), Ross et al. (2006), Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	High concentration of sports professionals failing to deliver, Directionless administrators.
Star Player	Gladden et al. (1998), Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et al. (2005), Bauer et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
Event's Image	Naik and Gupta (2013).	Poorly marketed games, Multiple discipline competitions, Games run by an invisible Federation, Once-off annual event, Exhausting games.
Sponsors/owner	Bauer et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Lack of corporate sponsorship, Heavy dependence on institutional funding.
Escape	Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et al. (2005), Bauer et al. (2008).	Way to easy academic pressure.
Peer group acceptance	Bauer et al. (2008).	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
Nostalgia	Gladden and Funk (2002), Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et al. (2005), Bauer et al. (2008)	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
Pride in place	Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et al. (2008).	Institutional pride.
Entertainment	Gladden et al. (1998).	Fun, Singing athletes, Song and dance.
Emotions	Naik and Gupta (2013).	Excitement, Cheering.
Fans	Gladden et al. (1998).	Vulgarism by supporters.

Stadium	Gladden and Milne (1999), Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et al. (2005), Ross et al. (2006) Ross et al.(2006), Bauer et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2008).	Scattered competition venues, Below standard venues.
Identification	Gladden and Funk (2002), Bauer et al. (2005), Bauer et al. (2008), Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
Internalisation	Ross et al. (2008), Naik and Gupta (2013).	Not mentioned by the Interviewees.
<b>ADDITIONAL DIMENSIONS</b>		
Ethical	Identified in this study & not in existing literature.	Cheating, Biased officiating, Unaudited funds.
Tourism	Identified in this study & not in existing literature	Travelling to new places, Foreign trips.
Corporate social responsibility	Identified in this study & not in existing literature	Street clean-ups before competitions.
Competition	Kunkel et al. (2012).	Excellent competitive atmosphere, Unbalanced zones.
Education	Kunkel et al. (2012).	Workshops, Learning through sport participation.
Personal benefits	Identified in this study & not in existing literature.	Travel and subsistence allowances inspired activities, Allowances.
Power Relations	Identified in this study & not in existing literature.	Institutional administrators interfering in sport, Games organized by a Federations dominated by one arrogant institution, Games where Institutional Politics overshadows professionalism, Bickering.

**a) Brand Awareness**

Ross et al. (2008) note that team identification and internalization act as antecedents to sport team awareness. As a result, the respondents’ failure to associate any words relating to identification and internalization with the ZUSA Games may suggest that they have weak psychological connections with these Games. 100 % of the respondents also indicated that the visibility of the ZUSA Games brand outside the collegiate sports sector was poor .This was echoed by responses to a follow-up question where the participants were asked if they knew anything about the ZUSA games before their first involvement the competition. 67.65 % indicated that they did not know anything about the ZUSA Games before their first involvement in the competition, as shown in figure 1 below.

**Did you know anything about ZUSA before your first involvement in their activities?**



**Figure.1:Brand Knowledge Before First Involvement.**

These findings provide important managerial implications to the organizers of the ZUSA games. They highlight the need to cultivate media interest and adopt other marketing communication based branding strategies in order to increase the levels of brand awareness among prospective consumers outside the collegiate sports sector, for competitive advantage. Internally, brand awareness building strategy should be centred on strengthening psychological connections with the users of the brand and institutional administrators.

**b) Brand Associations**

The brand associations of the ZUSA Games were profiled by means of free-thought listing tasks. The subjects of the study were asked to list what comes to mind when they think about the ZUSA Games. The study

identified a total of 64 themes and these were coded by clustering related themes into the brand association dimensions summarized in table 1. The study identified 16 brand associations dimensions which were consistent with existing team and league brand equity literature. These include rivalry, social interaction, success, media coverage, organizational attributes, non-player personnel, owner/sponsor, event image, and pride in place escape, entertainment, emotions, fans, stadium competition and education. The absence of such associations as brand mark, concessions, history, tradition, organizational commitment, team play characteristics, star player, peer group acceptance and nostalgia may suggest that they were weak, since the users of the ZUSA Games brand did not experience them well enough to evoke memorable associations during the 2013 edition of the Competition. The study identified a further 5 brand association dimensions which have not been explicitly captured in existing league and team brand equity literature. These include; ethical, tourism, Corporate Social Responsibility, personal benefits and power relations. The dominance of words belonging to the competition, event image, and ethical and organizational attributes dimensions can be attributed to the fact that the majority of the respondents were athletes, coaches and competition organizers.

To better understand the positivity of brand associations, respondents were asked follow up questions as to what they like best and dislike about the ZUSA Games. The findings show that the ZUSA games have been able to generate positive associations along the competition, emotions, social interaction, educational, escape, personal benefit, entertainment, corporate social responsibility, and tourism dimensions. Negative associations, on the other hand, dominated on the organizational attributes, event image, media coverage, sponsor/owner, ethical, fans, non-player personnel, stadium and power relations dimensions where the majority of the respondent highlighted their unhappiness with such organizational aspects as rushed and congested fixtures, lack of technical expertise among the event organizers, inadequate prizes, poor officiating, lack of product innovation, scheduling of games during examination times, scattered competition venues and poorly organized official and closing ceremonies among other things.

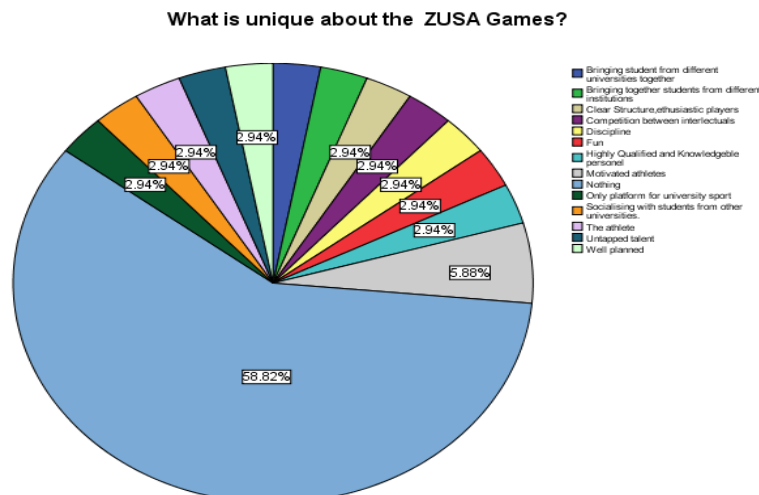
The findings have a number of practical implications for the organizers of the ZUSA games. This highlights importance of strengthening the equity of the ZUSA Games brand by developing positive associations through strategies grounded on improving the event management and organizational capacity of its makers. The marketers of the ZUSA games can also build brand equity by capitalizing on the positive brand associations they have with the users of their products along the competition, emotions, social interaction, educational, and tourism dimensions. This can help to improve the market competitiveness of the event and enhance its commercial potential. The dimensions of brand associations identified in this study are different from those identified in mainstream consumer goods by such scholars as Aaker (1991) and Keller (2001). This highlights that the need for an adapted framework for the analysis of sports events.

**c) Brand Personality**

The brand personality of the ZUSA Games was determined by soliciting responses from participants on the question: *“If the ZUSA Games were a car, which one would they be, and why?”* The majority of the respondents likened the games to an economy class bus or haulage truck; which transport passengers or goods to their final destinations in large volumes, with very little comfort. This choice was influenced by the multi-disciplinary nature of the games. Other popular choices include “old fashioned” cars like Peugeot 404, Nissan Sunny Box, and Dustan 120 Y. This stems from the lack of product innovation on the part of the markers of the ZUSA Games. The respondents noted that the games have been running in more or less the same manner since their inception in 1999. These findings show that the brand personality of the ZUSA Games is mainly driven by the organizational attributes and event image dimensions of the brand, and is negative the minds of the brand users.

**d) Brand Differentiation**

The extent to which the ZUSA Games are differentiated from other sports competitions was determined by soliciting responses to the question: *What is unique about the ZUSA Games?*



**Figure 2: Perceived Brand Differentiation.**

58.82 % of the respondents indicated that there was nothing unique about the ZUSA Games. This is contrary to the views of Keller (2008) who posits that for branding strategies to create brand equity, consumers must be convinced that there are meaningful differences between brands. According to Keller (2008), the key to branding is that consumers must not think that all brands in the category are the same. This shows that the marketers of the ZUSA Games are using an ineffective marketing strategy since they are failing to differentiate the brand from competition for competitive advantage. However, these findings are consistent with those from studies by Gladden and Milne (1999) and Bauer et al. (2005) that show in today's competitive sports markets, products and services within the same brand category are becoming increasingly similar. Differentiation through performance on the field of play is difficult. As a result, it is imperative for the marketers of the ZUSA Games to devise innovative brand differentiation strategies, if they are to capture the attention of consumers and generate adequate revenue for survival in highly competitive operating environments.

#### e) *Perceived Quality*

To determine the perceived quality of the ZUSA games the respondents were asked to compare the ZUSA games with other popular sports events.

**Table 3: The Perceived Quality of the ZUSA Games.**

EVENT	SUPERIOR%	SAME%	INFERIOR%
Competitions organised by mining companies.	0	0	100
Competitions organised by rivalry Collegiate Sports Federations.	47.1	50	2.9
National Social Tournaments organized by Banks and Insurance Companies.	0	0	100
High School Competitions.	50	11.76	38.24
The National Games for Provincial Youth Teams.	17.6	11.8	70.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>114.7</b>	<b>73.56</b>	<b>311.74</b>
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>22.94</b>	<b>14.71</b>	<b>62.35</b>

The fact that the ZUSA Games failed to stand out against the five sports events they were being compared with (which do not rank among the leading sports brands in the country) shows that the Games are perceived as a low quality brand by their users.

#### f) *Brand Loyalty*

The levels of customer loyalty to the games were determined by soliciting responses to the question: "What would you miss if the ZUSA Games cease to exist?" The majority of the respondents indicated that they would miss the social interaction, emotional and tourism aspects of the games. This shows that this sports event is in a weak competitive position. It is exposed to the threat of substitution since customer loyalty to the brand is grounded on brand associations that can also be satisfied by other pastimes.

### 4.0 Limitations of the Study

The literature sources which provided a theoretical framework to the study were not written from a Zimbabwean perspective. Secondly, as all phenomenological work, the results of this study are based on a small sample size. This raises questions about the representativeness of the data and how far it is justifiable to generalize from the findings (Denscombe, 1998). Other limitations stem from phenomenology's emphasis on subjectivity, description and interpretation as opposed to objectivity analysis and measurement. Finally, the study did not solicit the view of such critical stakeholders in collegiate sport as, Deans of Students and Corporate Sponsors.

### 5.0 Conclusions

The study shows that, dimensionally, the perceived brand equity of the ZUSA Games is an aggregate of brand awareness and brand associations. The study identified 16 brand association dimensions which were consistent with existing team and league brand equity literature. 11 brand association dimensions identified in team brand equity literature were not mentioned in the interviews. A further 5 brand association dimensions, that have not captured in team and league brand equity literature, were identified. These findings show that brand equity scales cannot be uniformly applied across different sport settings owing to the subjective and experiential nature of customer experiences with sports products and services.

The study shows that the Zimbabwe Universities Sports Association Games have negative perceived brand equity since the users of the brand displayed negative brand associations along most of the dimensions of brand equity relating to the delivery of the core product and services. Positive brand associations were mainly recorded along those brand equity dimensions that can be replicated by other pastimes, and this exposes the Games to serious competitive threats. It is imperative for sports marketers to devise core product-centred branding strategies if they are to capture the attention of consumers and generate adequate revenue for survival in such highly competitive environments.

The ZUSA Games command very low levels of brand awareness outside the Zimbabwean Collegiate Sports Market. The consumers also displayed low levels of psychological connections with the sport event. The makers of this sport brand have also not been able to differentiate it from competing brands and present it in a way the guarantees sustainable customer loyalty. It was also noted that the brand commands very low levels of customer resonance with such critical internal and external stakeholders as Institutional administrators and Corporate Sponsors. Lack of product innovation on the part of the markers of the ZUSA Games was also noted. This stems from the fact that that games have been running in more or less the same manner since their inception in 1999.

The study highlights the need for the Zimbabwe University Sports Association to develop and implement a market plan to drive brand strategy by; generating brand visibility, differentiating the brand from competition and enhancing its perceived quality and levels of customer loyalty.

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