

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

**SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL TO GROW BRAND PREFERENCE AMONGST
MILLENNIALS IN THE GREATER DURBAN AREA**

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**SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL TO GROW BRAND PREFERENCE AMONGST
MILLENNIALS IN THE GREATER DURBAN AREA**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the
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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to evaluate social media as a tool to grow brands amongst millennials in the greater Durban area. Social marketing has proved to be crucial in creating brand preference and brand exposure, considering its inexpensiveness and capability to reach a greater number of potential customers. Some of the social media websites that have a great influence on millennials are Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, SnapChat and TikTok. Social media marketing marks the current advancement in marketing created by the use of social media websites as a way of empowering customers to interact on the internet concerning brand preference. This study is crucial because social media currently affects economic growth in many aspects, such as boosting brand image, increasing demand, and hence increasing productivity in the country.

Social media is also responsible for the growth, survival and collapse of many businesses. Currently, access to personal computers, smartphones, the internet and e-commerce has increased so much to the extent that many providers are now advertising on social media, linking their websites with social media platforms, which is more effective and efficient. The sustainability and survival of small businesses also depend on how social media presents the brand image of their products and how well they are able to market on social media. This study anticipates adding new knowledge on using social media effectively to grow brand preference. This study contributes new knowledge to the literature on effectively closing the gap between millennials' perceptions of social media and its performance in growing brand preference.

Furthermore, this study provides the social media content creator's perspective on the effectiveness of social media as a tool to grow brand preference. Despite the tremendous progress in social media marketing and the increase in users' numbers, the economic feasibility of these social media websites still needs to be studied and explored. Research on the use of social media to promote growth in brand preference amongst the millennials is very scanty at best; hence, little is understood about the millennials and their purchase behaviour, most specifically in regard to the social media websites used by many brands. Moreover, it is very difficult to monitor what customers post on social media, despite the fact that many brands have been affected both

positively and negatively, which highlights the need for more research on social media as a tool to grow brand preference positively and effectively. The objectives of the study are to assess various ways in which social media develops and enhances positive awareness and brand preference; to examine the influence of social media on the buying decision-making process of millennials in Durban; To identify the perceptions of millennials on social media and social media performance in Durban; and to suggest strategies for managing and monitoring social space activities towards a positive brand preference.

A mixed-methods approach was used for the study to achieve the research objectives. The target population were the millennials in the greater Durban area. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 400 participants for quantitative data and 10 participants for qualitative data collection. The study presents a regression model that highlights the factors significantly affecting social media and customer satisfaction, emphasising the importance of managing and enhancing various aspects of social media interaction to improve overall customer satisfaction levels. The study results indicate that brand awareness and recognition are critical factors for growing brand preference, and maintaining a consistent brand identity and leveraging social media are effective strategies for enhancing these aspects. However, it is important to recognise that the significance of brand recall may vary, and businesses should consider their specific context and continuously assess consumer sentiment to make informed branding decisions. The study concludes that businesses may improve their brand awareness, communicate with customers, and favourably influence purchasing decisions by understanding and properly exploiting social media. Social media has been found to be an effective tool to grow brand preference.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, except where noted, this dissertation represents my own work, and that all references, to the best of my knowledge are well reported. The entire study has been compiled under the supervision of the aforementioned Durban University of Technology supervisor.

.....29/11/2023.....

FAITH RUDAIRO CHIBVURA

DATE

DEDICATION

This Doctorate is dedicated to my family and friends who have been so supportive throughout my project. It would not have happened without their unfailing support and belief in my abilities.

My parents, husband, siblings and daughter.

Thank you for being there for me and praying for my success.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the study's context, research problem, aim, objectives, and justification. The chapter also gives a summary of the study's literature and methods. This chapter provides background information on social media and how it is influencing the marketing industry in the area of branding. It will begin with a general overview of the topic before moving on to a presentation of a problem that will lead to the formulation of the research questions. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the research. This thesis seeks to shed light on social media as a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials in the greater Durban area.

1.2 Background of the study

Social media marketing marks the current advancement in marketing created by the use of social media websites as a way of empowering customers to interact on the internet concerning brand preference (Li, Larimo and Leonidou 2021b: 51). Social media marketing is a form of internet marketing that uses social networking websites as a marketing tool. Social media can be both formal and informal communication or advertising for brands, attract customers, collect reviews about brand performance, and attain customer satisfaction (Ahmed, Erum, Alam, Streimikiene and Parmar 2023: 265). Moreover, social marketing has proved to be crucial in creating brand preference and brand exposure, considering its inexpensiveness and capability to reach a greater number of potential customers. Some of the social media websites that have a great influence on millennials are Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, SnapChat and StreetBees. According to Li, Drew, Liu, Li, Drew and Liu (2021: 51), all internet-based apps are built on the conceptual and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which has enabled the creation and exchange of user-generated content. In 2011, the use of the internet grew rapidly due to the use of Facebook. This study evaluates social media as a tool to grow brand preference. Different social media platforms are assessed in this evaluation.

1.3 Research problem

Despite the tremendous progress in social media marketing and the increase in users' numbers, the economic feasibility of these social media websites still needs to be studied and explored (Nadeem, Tan, Tajvidi and Hajli 2021: 1). In addition, research on the use of social media to promote growth in brand preference amongst the millennials is very scant; hence, little is understood about the millennials and their purchase behaviours, most specifically in regards to the social media websites used by many brands. Moreover, it is very difficult to monitor what customers post on social media, despite many brands being affected both positively and negatively, which rings an alarm on the need for more research on social media as a tool to grow brand preference positively and effectively (Appel, Grewal, Hadi and Stephen 2020: 79). Currently, social media marketing relies on the use of multiple brand endorsers to attract targeted leads. According to Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, Silvestre (2011: 245), the business environment is being transformed daily by the internet. The internet has promoted the coverage of a large audience and the creation of compelling value propositions, which have never been possible before through social media. The internet also brought a great change to how customers and sellers interact, as they now interact through an electronic connection. In addition, the internet has influenced most marketing fundamentals, such as the need for new brand-building strategies (Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014: 155). According to Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014: 340), data from 2011 shows that there are more than 2.4 billion internet users. The internet, through social media, is taking control over the business environment in the 21st century, and it is also affecting businesses both positively and negatively. Effective monitoring of social media in South Africa leads to business excellence, resulting in increased productivity and this research bridges the knowledge gap in understanding the shifting marketing landscape, providing insightful guidance for businesses looking to harness the power of social media for customer engagement and brand loyalty.

The research not only addresses the evolving marketing paradigm but also has implications for academia. In addition, this study seeks to understand social media content creators' perspectives on using social media as a tool to grow brand preference. Social media studies have been conducted globally. Previous studies by

Lacoste (2016), Quesalaga (2016), Agnihotri and Dingus (2017) and Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu and Kush (2016), to name a few, do not provide any research on how social media can influence brand preference amongst millennials from both the customer's and content creator's perspectives. This leaves a gap with regard to the influence of social media on brand preference amongst millennials, and the purpose of this study is to evaluate social media as a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials in the greater Durban area.

1.4 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to evaluate social media as a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials in the greater Durban area.

1.5 Research objectives

- To assess various ways in which social media develops and enhances positive awareness and brand preference.
- To examine the influence of social media on the buying decision-making process of millennials in Durban.
- To identify the perceptions of millennials on social media and social media performance in Durban.
- To suggest strategies for managing and monitoring social media space activities towards a positive brand preference.

1.6 Justification for the research

This study is very important because social media now affects economic growth in many aspects, such as boosting brand image, increasing demand, and hence increasing productivity in the country. Social media is also affecting the growth, survival and collapse of many businesses globally (Milwood, Marhiori and Zach 2013: 167). Currently, access to personal computers, smartphones, the internet and e-commerce has increased so much to the extent that many providers are now advertising on social media, linking their websites with social media platforms, which is more effective and efficient. The sustainability and survival of small businesses also depend on how social media presents the brand image of their products and how well they are able to market

on social media. Through this study, new knowledge will be added on how social media can be used effectively to grow brand preference, and new knowledge will be added to literature on how to close the gap between the perceptions of millennials on social media and social media performance in growing brand preference (Tham, Croy and Mair 2013: 147). Despite the tremendous progress in social media marketing and the increase in the number of social media users, the economic feasibility of these social media websites still needs to be studied and explored. In addition, research on the use of social media to promote growth in brand preference amongst the millennials is very scanty at best; hence, little is understood about the millennials and their purchase behaviour most specifically in regards to the social media websites used by many brands. Moreover, it is very difficult to monitor what customers post on social media, despite the fact that many brands have been affected both positively and negatively, which highlights the need for more research on social media as a tool to grow brand preference positively and effectively. This study provides the social media content creator's perspective on using social media as a tool to grow brand preference through a qualitative method. Additionally, the study offers valuable insights for businesses. These insights can enhance marketing strategies by optimizing content creation, influencer collaboration, and overall social media campaigns. By future-proofing marketing practices, the study's findings can help businesses stay relevant and competitive in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

1.7 An overview of literature review

Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014: 340) state that social media marketing is a form of internet marketing that uses social networking websites as a marketing tool. Social media can be both formal and informal communication and advertising for brands, attract customers, collect reviews about brand performances, and attain customer satisfaction. Moreover, social marketing has proved to be crucial in creating brand preference and brand exposure, considering its inexpensiveness and capability to reach a greater number of potential customers. Some of the social media websites that have a great influence on millennials are Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, SnapChat, StreetBees, Google Plus, YouTube, Wikipedia, and WeChat. According to Kaplan and Haelein (2010: 60), all internet-based applications build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which has allowed

the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Figure 1 below demonstrates the extensive number of social media users and significant traffic on social media platforms in a month. Due to this, social media can be a great tool to reach a large audience for different brands around the world.

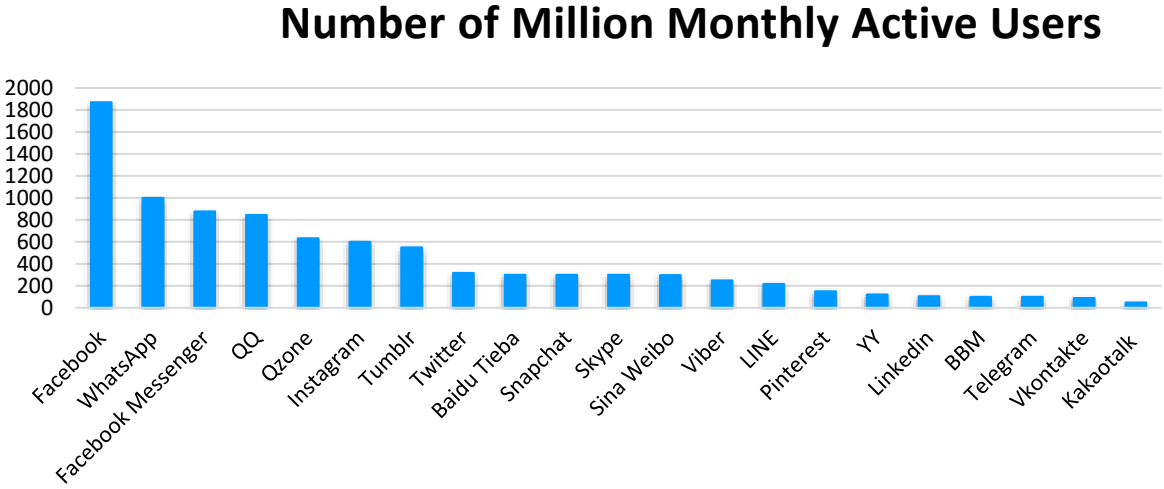


Figure 1: Number of million active users of social media

Source: Newman (2017: 816)

Various online platforms have emerged utilising social data by selling analytics as a service, such as brand and media monitoring, consumer engagement, and security. Social media growth is increasing, and people are spending more time on social media platforms. According to the data generated by Twitter, on average of 000 tweets per second or 350 000 tweets sent per minute, which makes it about 500 million tweets are sent per day.

1.7.1 Brand awareness

Khan (2011:835) states that brand awareness is a process from where the brand is just known to a level when consumers have put the brand at the top of mind. Brand awareness is a way of recalling and recognising the brand within the category in a greater understanding that leads to purchase (Kotler and Keller 2014: 517). Brand awareness is made up of brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recall is of importance outside the shop, and brand recognition is of value inside the shop (King and Janiszewski 2011: 743). Brand awareness is achieved and maintained through

multiple exposures to the brand. Brand awareness is important since most consumers think that a credible brand is of good quality. Kang and Scheutt (2013: 182) support the view that brand awareness results in a lasting competitive advantage because brand awareness gives brands a sense of familiarity, which is enjoyed by many consumers. Buying decisions for low-involvement products, such as domestic detergents, can be driven by familiarity. Hudson and Thal (2013: 129) support the view that brand awareness is an asset that can be sustainable, and it is difficult to move a brand that has reached a dominant awareness.

1.7.2 Millennials perceptions

Smith and Nichols (2015: 38) state that millennials enjoy using technology and are dependent on technology at a younger age as compared to baby boomers and Generation X. Generation X was born from 1965 to 1977; Generation Y was born from 1977 to 1994; and Generation Z was born after 1994. Millennials are people born between the early 1980s and 1990s and those born in the early 2000s (Bako 2016:1). Millennials are made up of Generations Y and Z. Moreover, this generation is regarded for being open-minded, confident, carefree, liberal, upbeat, receptive to new technology, and ways of living. In addition, millennials are very cyberactive, very active on social media, and very responsive when shopping online. According to DeVaney (2015: 11), millennials are creative, socially conscious, and team-oriented. When a marketer factors in the different characteristics and behaviour of the generations, it should be easier to build relationships, gain trust, and close business. As such, an understanding of multigenerational marketing is very important to the marketer.

1.7.3 Managing and monitoring social space

Since the business environment is being transformed daily by the internet and the internet has promoted the reach of many audiences through social media, social media has to be managed and monitored to bring greater value to marketing a brand (Weinberg and Pehlivan 2011: 280). Some brands use social media to respond to consumer grievances. Academic scholars noted the potential of social media in helping many brands increase their online presence and engage prospects and existing customers. The ability of social media to improve the online presence of many brands and engage with prospective and actual customers allows businesses to quickly

identify customer grievances. Social media allows brand marketers to take note of some of the negative postings by customers and provides a chance to respond to those postings as well as to improve the quality of the services offered (Kang and Scheutt 2013: 94).

1.7.4 Social media and buying decision-making

Social media has influenced the buying decisions of many people through platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, where people recognise the fashion trends of different celebrities such as Beyonce, Rihanna, Drake and Chris Brown (Pate and Adams 2013: 124). The use of social media is growing rapidly. Social media provides a new outlet for marketing professionals and can potentially be used to help increase interest in a product or service (Hudson and Thal 2013: 160).

1.7.5 Strengthening the brand

The new perceptions obtainable from social media have the potential to strengthen the innovation aspect of the brand (Hudson and Thal 2013: 160). However, Milwood *et al.* (2013: 167) argue that brands do not only need to engage in online chats, but they also need to adjust their web marketing strategies based on their findings from the chats. Engaging with customers consistently using social media can be used to reinforce durability and strength for a brand, and evidence that confirms a huge return on investing in social media will emerge (Dholakia and Durham 2010, cited in Hudson and Thal 2013: 161).

1.7.6 Theoretical and Meta-theoretical conceptualization

Table 1 below illustrates the theoretical and meta-theoretical conceptualization of the study. Table 1 provides an illustration of the individual fields that approach the research problem, from broad theory to real disciplines and constructions. A grand theory is one that contributes to providing comprehensive explanations for a certain corpus of knowledge. A grand theory can be valuable in creating frameworks that help in the creation of knowledge, but it cannot be simply converted into variables or hypotheses. The brand model relates very well to the study in the sense that it focuses on the consumer benefits rather than the benefits of the company (Çınar 2020: 281).

According to Keller's approach, brand equity is the "added value" that has been given to a brand as a result of prior marketing expenditures for the brand. Additionally, Keller's approach also relies on an associative network model of memory, in which the simplicity with which positive brand associations may be recalled is a key factor in determining brand equity (Tian 2023: 111).

Table 1: Theoretical and Meta-theoretical conceptualization.

Research Question	How does social media marketing contribute towards creating brand awareness, brand knowledge and brand image to enhance brand preference?		
Grand Theory	Keller's theory of brand equity		
Meta theories	Agenda-setting theory, uses and gratification theory, Consumption value theory, theory of reasoned action and planned behaviour.		
Interdisciplinary field	Branding		
Academic discipline	Marketing		
Concepts	Social media	Buying decision-making process	Brand preference
Constructs/ Dimensions	Image, uniqueness, favourability, interaction, associations, perceptions, monitoring posts	problem solving & information search	Awareness (recall and recognition), brand credibility, uniqueness, brand knowledge satisfaction.

The uses and gratification theory was also adopted in this study. The uses and gratification theory is a media effect theory that focuses on understanding the reason behind seeking a particular media to satisfy certain needs and how people actively seek it (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy and Goodman 2016: 261). The uses and gratification theory provides an approach to understanding that people willingly choose a certain

medium that satisfies certain needs (Gruzd, Haythornthwaite, Paulin, Gilbert and Del Valle 2018: 475). A brand's overt goal in social media is to attract an audience by providing value, or gratification, through its content. To build a stronger level of engagement, content must be designed in a way that creates value for individual consumers (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege and Zhang 2013: 270). As a result, uses and gratification theory provides a framework for understanding the motivations of millennials looking for a specific type of content on social media.

In addition, the agenda-setting theory was also adopted in this study. The agenda-setting theory is a social science theory that refers to the ability of the news media to influence the importance placed on the topics of the public agenda and attempt to make predictions (McCombs, Shaw and Weaver 2013). For instance, if a news item is presented frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more vital. The agenda-setting theory was formally developed by Max Mc Combs and Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 American presidential elections (Pant 2001). Through this theory, the degree to which the media determines public opinion was determined. Moreover, over a hundred studies have been done on the agenda-setting function of the mass, and the theory still proves relevant and useful. When it comes to brand preference, the brands that tend to have more news in the media are more likely to receive media exposure.

According to Meraz (2009), the agenda-setting theory was proposed to correct the perception that media effects are immediate reflections of media consumption. Not much attention was paid to the mechanism by which exposure was initially achieved. This theory emphasised that media content needs to be made significant to the user before being processed and accepted. In addition, the agenda-setting theory tends to take into consideration the representation and content of the media coverage as well as the corresponding audience responses about the issues. The agenda-setting theory supports the 'how' part, not the 'what' part, thus addressing the issues in the media. Furthermore, this theory was continuously developed to explain how media attention toward certain topics strengthens audience attitudes concerning those issues.

However, unlike in the 1960s, technology has taken communication to another level. The modern media landscape has changed to include more bloggers, Facebook,

WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and so many other social media platforms (Carroll 2015). This now raises some questions, such as: Does this change the nature of the agenda-setting theory? Does traditional media still maintain the power to set the agenda for the audience? Or has the balance of power shifted to social media? According to McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (2013), social media has come with tremendous force to influence the agenda of the audience. Through social media, common people can determine issues of significance for public conversations. It is noted that traditional media continues to fight for market share, despite the fact that traditional media and blogs now complement each other.

Moreover, in an effort to understand why people prefer one product type over another on social media, one brand over another, and why consumers choose to buy or not buy (or use or not use) a certain product, this study adopts the consumption value theory.

The consumption value theory focuses on the consumption values explaining why consumers choose to buy or not buy (or use or not use) a particular product, why consumers choose one product type over another, and why consumers favour one brand over another, with a focus on consumption values (Kaur, Dhir, Rajala and Dwivedi 2018b: 205). All theories will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

1.8 Overview of the methodology

This section provides an overview of the research strategy and methodology employed to answer the study's research aim and objectives. In Chapter 4, the research approach employed in this study is discussed in greater depth. This research was carried out in order to create findings that meet the research objectives. This section discusses the philosophical approach used in this study as well as a brief explanation of the research methodology and methodologies employed.

1.8.1 Research Philosophy

It is critical to understand the ideas that underpin the methodologies used to collect and process data. Ontological and epistemological principles underpin research

techniques (Neuman 2011: 91). This study used a positivist epistemological standpoint and a deductive approach.

1.8.2 Research Design

A cross-sectional descriptive research design will be adopted within the study. The researcher adopted mixed methods to offer a complete analysis of the research problem (Cresswell 2014: 217). The use of both methods includes data collection, analysis, and integration of quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Zikmund and Babin 2013: 312). A mixed-methods approach was used because it enhanced credibility of the research findings. A mixed-methods approach creates a synergistic effect when the results from one method help to develop the other method to achieve the research objectives. For instance, the collected quantitative data can shape interview questions for the qualitative method of the study. However, qualitative approaches might lack the formal test of hypothesis, but they afford rich narratives that add important insights about the effectiveness and influence of social media on building a brand (Jackson 2015).

1.8.3 Target Population

Zikmund and Babin (2013: 312) define a population as a collection of units a research effort aims at investigating. Malhotra (2010: 468) stresses the importance of drawing samples from the same geographical location. For this study, millennials from the greater Durban area were targeted. This population was chosen because this generation is regarded as open-minded, confident, carefree, liberal, upbeat, receptive to new technology, and ways of living. In addition, millennials are cyberactive, very active on social media and very responsive when shopping online (Smith and Nichols 2015: 38).

1.8.4 Sampling Method and Sample Size

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013: 269), a sample size ranging between 30 and 500 is suggested, depending on the nature of the questions the study is answering. The larger the sample size, the higher the chances of minimising errors and getting accurate and reliable results. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 400

participants for quantitative data and 10 participants for qualitative data within the greater area of Durban. Sampling was based on the researcher's judgement. According to Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016: 02), purposive sampling refers to the process of selecting participants based on their ability to provide the required data. The interview participants were selected from social media influencers and experts in the greater Durban area.

1.8.5 Questionnaire and interview guide

This study used a mixed-methods approach; a questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data and interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data for the study. The research instruments were developed considering the objectives of the study.

1.8.5.1 Questionnaire

An online-administered questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. Malhotra (2010:336) asserts that the design of the questionnaire is critical to ensuring that the correct research question is addressed and that accurate and appropriate data for statistical analysis is collected. Close-ended questions were used in the construction of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of a Likert scale and dichotomous questions. Closed-ended questions were used to collect factual information or to obtain a point of view from respondents, whereas Likert scale questions were used on questions that required the respondent's perceptual judgement. The scale ranged from 1 (the worst situation) to 5 (the ideal situation). The structure of the questionnaire was simple and easy for the respondents to complete without difficulty.

The closed-ended questionnaire was adopted because a set of standardised answers guarantees uniformity of responses; question uniformity throughout the questionnaire can assure a reduction in bias; questionnaires ensure that the participants' anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed; questionnaires allow participants to respond at their convenience; questionnaires are ideal for covering a large and geographically widespread target population; and questionnaires are non-threatening and familiar territory to most people.

1.8.5.2 Interview Guide

An interview guide was used to collect qualitative data. The qualitative data collection instrument was designed in English with semi-structured questions, with the intention to translate the interview questions into Zulu when necessary, as some participants might not understand English. Interviewee consent to participate in the interview was also recorded. Social media influencers or millennials who show keen interest in social media issues in Durban were invited to participate in the qualitative aspect of the study. As regards the interviewees, the researcher involved social media influencers or millennials who show keen interest in social media issues in Durban. Prior to administering questionnaires consent was secured by seeking participant approval and providing explanation of the research's objectives. The participants needed to provide consent first before proceeding to the next stage in the online questionnaire.

1.8.6 Pilot study of the questionnaire and the interview guide

The questionnaire and the interview guide were pre-tested.

1.8.7 Data analysis

Data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively using thematic analysis and SPSS version 28.0, respectively.

1.8.7.1 Quantitative

The primary data collected from each respondent through questionnaires in SPSS version 28.0 was captured and presented in tables and graphs.

1.8.7.2 Qualitative

Data recorded during interviews was transcribed and reviewed into a list of answers to research objectives. Thematic analysis was used to locate patterns within data through data familiarisation, coding, and developing a revised theme (Deworking 2012: 1319). Thematic analysis has greater potential to provide greater depth and uncover more themes. Data coding was done first, as it is a critical element of analysing data. Data coding helps in interpreting the data collected during interviews. All codes developed

were used to represent words and phrases that were used to establish concepts (Moonsamy and Singh 2012: 07).

1.8.8 Validity and Reliability

Validity is defined as the extent to which the research findings accurately represent what is really happening in the situation (Noble and Smith 2015). To ensure the validity of this study, efforts were geared towards ensuring that the themes in the questionnaire were in line with the objectives. The questions in the questionnaire were derived in accordance with the objectives of the study, research literature, and findings conducted by other scholars. The validity of questionnaires was pre-tested with supervisors and a statistician and then pilot-tested to identify and eliminate any potential problems. Factor analysis was used. Rather than only using pre-coded data collection instruments, the research shows that the use of open-ended questions in interviews allows one to access participants' personal interpretations of experiences and activities.

In addition, specific strategies were used to ensure reliability and validity for qualitative studies, such as peer debriefing, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, audit trails, and member checks. Moreover, the researcher was receptive and adaptable to changing circumstances, holistic, had professional immediacy, and had the ability to clarify and summarise (Noble and Smith 2015).

Reliability measures the ability of the data collection instrument and method used for the study to obtain accurate and consistent results (Malhotra and Birks 2007: 359). Reliability was obtained by providing all respondents with the identical set of questions on the 400 questionnaires for surveys. An identical set of questions was also used for each interview. Cronbach's alpha was used to ensure the reliability of the estimates.

1.8.4 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Crow and Wiles (2008:1) opine that the anonymity and confidentiality of participants are central to ethical issues in research. The authors explain the idea as the ability of a researcher to cover the identities of the respondents and to uphold the confidentiality of the data given by participants. As such, it provides the respondent with adequate

freedom to share information liberally with few or no risks. This research ensured anonymity and confidentiality by not requesting the names of the respondents.

1.8.5 Ethical Considerations

Research has ethical dimensions that require the researcher to maintain both moral and professional obligations to be guided by ethics, even when the participants are unaware of the ethics (Greenfield 2016: 46). The researcher was extra careful and sensitive to every word uttered during the course of data collection or fieldwork. The researcher ensured truth, honesty, and respect for the respondents' morals throughout the research process for the purpose of integrity in the research. The researcher further ensured that the participants knew that they could withdraw from the research process at any time. The consent form was explained and signed on the online questionnaire by the respondents, indicating that they clearly understood what was expected of them. The questionnaire only allowed them to continue answering to the questions if they gave consent.

1.9 Delimitations

The study was delimited to millennials in the greater Durban area.

1.10 Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 introduced the study by providing the problem statement, the aim of the study, the objectives, the theoretical framework, the research methodology, the rationale of the study, and the summary of the study.

Chapter 2 will discuss the theories that underpin this study around social media and branding and how they influence this study and covers all important key areas of social media's influence on brand preference.

Chapter 3 will discuss the related literature on brand building (brand preference, brand awareness, and brand equity).

Chapter 4 will present the methodology of the research, the design process, the sampling method, the data collection methods used, the rationale for the selected methods, and ethical, validation, and confidentiality issues.

Chapter 5 will present the data analysis and interpretation and a summary of the findings in tables and graphs. The results chapter outlines the quantitative data analysis and interpretation of the results from participants. The quantitative section focuses on the socio-demographic information of the participants, descriptive statistics on various policies and practices of social media, and inferential statistics.

Chapter 6 will present, analyses and discusses the qualitative data.

Chapter 7 will cover the conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the research. The discussion and recommendation chapter explores the study results and recommendations in comparison to the literature review and theoretical framework so as to provide a clear picture of the relevance of the study in the generation of new knowledge and perspectives on social media practices and their impact on customer satisfaction.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL GROUNDING AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses literature focusing on the theories that underpin this study and social media. The purpose of this discussion is to lay a solid foundation for the study by clarifying, in context, the specific components of social media and how they influence brand preference. The overarching customer-based brand equity theory (also known as Keller's theory of equity) is explained at the outset, which emphasises that a brand's strength comes from the impressions that customers have of it as a result of their interactions with it. The meta-theories that are relevant to social media marketing are then discussed. A social media marketing introduction will follow. This comprises several definitions for social media, social media infrastructure, and social media marketing, as well as the goals, benefits, and drawbacks of engaging in social media marketing. The challenges faced in managing and monitoring social media accounts are also addressed.

2.2 Theoretical foundations

A solid theoretical foundation serves as the cornerstone upon which knowledge is built in the field of academic inquiry and research. A research study's theoretical framework offers the necessary scaffolding, guiding researchers through the dense labyrinth of questions and findings (Varpio, Paradis, Uijtdehaage and Young 2020: 989). The theoretical foundation provides a lens through which occurrences can be examined, interpreted, and comprehended. This research study delves into the heart of social media and its influence on growing brand preferences among millennials. Therefore, the next section provides a review of the theories that were adopted for this study, as highlighted in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Theoretical and Meta-theoretical conceptualization for this study

Research Question	How does social media marketing contribute towards creating brand awareness, brand knowledge and brand image to enhance brand preference?		
Grand Theory	Keller's theory of brand equity		
Meta theories	Agenda-setting theory, uses and gratification theory, Consumption value theory, theory of reasoned action and planned behaviour.		
Interdisciplinary field	Branding		
Academic discipline	Marketing		
Concepts	Social media	Buying decision-making process	Brand preference
Constructs/ Dimensions	Image, uniqueness, favourability, interaction, associations, perceptions, monitoring posts	problem solving & information search	Awareness (recall and recognition), brand credibility, uniqueness, brand knowledge satisfaction.

Table 2 illustrates the theoretical and meta-theoretical conceptualization of the study. Table 2 provides an illustration of the individual fields that approach the research problem, from the broad theory to the real disciplines and constructions. A grand theory is one that contributes to providing comprehensive explanations for a certain corpus of knowledge. A grand theory can be valuable in creating frameworks that help in the creation of knowledge, but it cannot be simply converted into variables or hypotheses (Turner and Boyns 2001: 353). Keller's model of brand equity is proposed as the overarching theory for this study, serving as the foundation for brand awareness, brand image, and brand knowledge (Chandon 2003: 3).

There is then a second set of theories, or meta-theories, including agenda-setting theory, uses and gratification theory, consumption value theory, the theory of reasoned action, and planned behaviour. Each of these is discussed in Chapter 2. Social media marketing utilises these components or constructions in a variety of disciplines and applications. In a subsequent phase, the components or constructions involved in each of these notions will be further illustrated. The sections that follows includes all of these components.

2.3 Grand Theory: Keller's theory of brand equity

Brand equity is a marketing concept that symbolises a brand's perceived worth and strength in the minds of consumers (Haudi, Handayani, Musnaini, Suyoto, Prasetio, Pitaloka, Wijoyo, Yonata, Koho and Cahyon 2022: 961). Xu, Zhu, Metawa and Zhou (2022: 1) opine that brand equity includes a brand's many intangible assets and associations that have developed over time and can influence consumer preferences, perceptions, and behaviours. In addition, Tasci (2021: 166) argues that brand equity is a measure of a company's capacity to attract and keep customers, generate loyalty, and charge premium pricing as a result of its brand. It is frequently regarded as a valuable asset that can help the long-term success and profitability of a brand.

With roots in branding, Keller's brand equity model describes how a brand's equity comes from the impressions that its customers have of it over time (Świtała, Gamrot, Reformat and Bilińska-Reformat 2018b: 96-119). Keller's brand equity model is also known as the CBBE model, which stands for customer-based brand equity. In Keller's brand equity model, the consumer is considered the company's key emphasis as marketing develops (Jia-yi, Yan-qiao, Qi-xing and Li 2022: 589-596). Figure 2 below illustrates Keller's brand equity model.

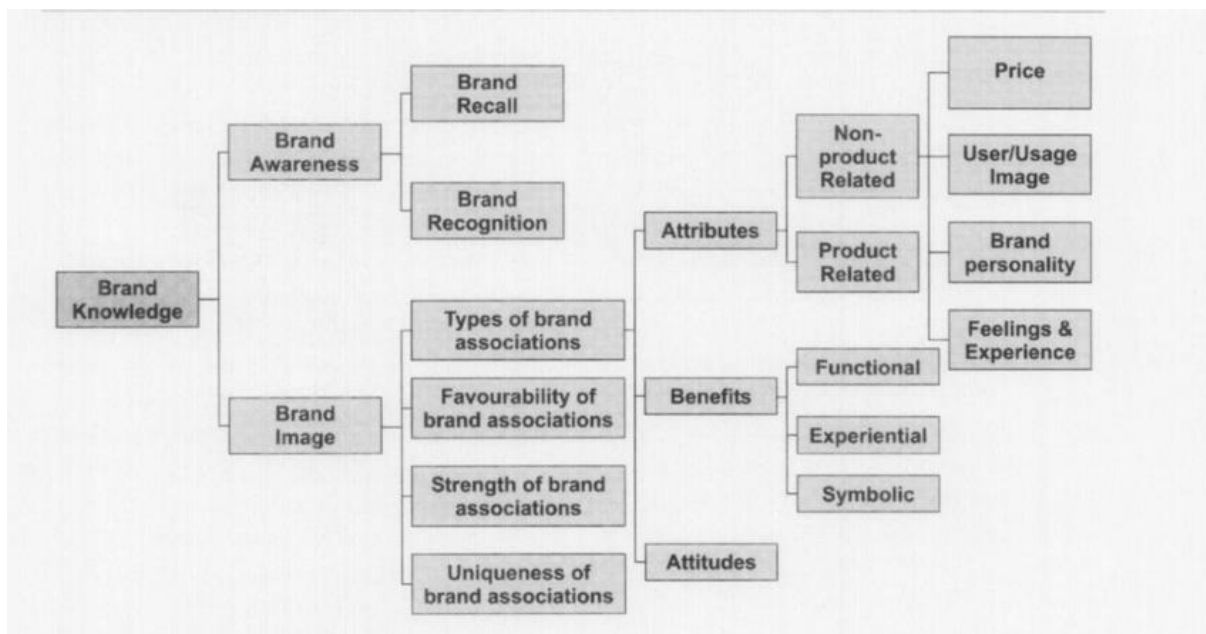


Figure 2: Keller's theory of brand equity theory of brand equity

Source: Adapted from (Keller 1998a: 299)

According to Keller's brand equity model, brand equity is a result of brand knowledge, which is expressed in consumers' perceptions, preferences, and brand image (Yousaf, Amin and Gupta 2017: 119). Brand knowledge is dependent on brand recall and brand recognition (brand awareness), types of brand associations, favourability of brand associations, strengths of brand associations, and uniqueness of band associations (brand image) (Çınar 2020: 281). Brand awareness is the capacity of a brand to be remembered, as evidenced by the consumer's capacity to recognise the brand under various circumstances (Stukalina and Pavlyuk 2021: 272). Brand image is the perception of a brand as expressed by the brand association that a customer has in their mind (Yousaf, Amin and Gupta 2017; Yousaf 2020: 119)

The brand model relates very well to the study in the sense that it focuses on the consumer benefits rather than the benefits of the company (Çınar 2020: 281). According to Keller's approach, brand equity is the "added value" that has been given to a brand as a result of prior marketing expenditures for the brand. Additionally,

Keller's approach also relies on an associative network model of memory, in which the simplicity with which positive brand associations may be recalled is a key factor in determining brand equity (Tian 2023: 111). In social media marketing, brand associations are crucial in terms of selecting social media brand influencers and the social media platform for the brand. Keller's model explains that every brand has a specific amount of brand equity, which is the assets and liabilities connected to it that increase or decrease the value the product offers (Aaker 1996: 251). This is demonstrated by customers' propensity to spend more for a preferred brand over alternatives, suggest it to peers, and take into account other firm products (Otero and Wilson 2018: 7).

2.3.1 Applications of the Brand Equity Model to the study

The study focuses on how businesses can use social media marketing to grow brand preference. The idea behind the Brand Equity Model is that marketers need to influence how customers feel and think about their brands in order to develop a strong brand. Due to the new technology in marketing the study looks into how marketers can utilise social media to ensure that consumers have specific, favourable thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, and perceptions about a brand (Keller 1998b: 299). Marketers must always be on the lookout for better ways of creating the appropriate types of brand experiences (Zha, Foroudi, Jin and Melewar 2022: 130). When a brand has strong brand equity, its customers will buy more of that brand, the brand is recommended to other customers. When the customers are more loyal, and brand preference increases (Yoo 2020: 11).

According to Mason, Narcum and Mason (2021a: 1), social media marketing uses social media to promote brand awareness online, form networks, and share ideas to create brand loyalty and brand preference. Additionally, consumers interact with brands on social media channels, share information, find new information, and act. Keller's theory of brand equity suggests that brand associations contribute in creating brand image; therefore, in order to build a brand on social media, it is very important that a brand select the correct social media network that supports the brand's image (Keller 1998a: 300). Li, Larimo and Leonidou (2021a: 51) opine that the brand association strategy, can be called the seeding strategy whereby brand marketers use

highly connected people and different characteristics of influential relationships to grow brand preference. Social media marketing associations go to the extent of using social media influencers and social media marketers (Hudders, De Jans and De Veirman 2021: 25).

The brand equity model suggests that brand knowledge is dependent on brand recall and brand recognition (brand awareness), and types of brand associations, favourability of brand associations, strengths of brand associations, and uniqueness of brand associations (Taleghani and Almasi 2011: 5) . Olanipekun and Adelekan (2022: 44) state that brand awareness is essential during the decision-making process. According to Azzari and Pelissari (2021: 669), the first step to brand awareness is brand recognition, which is responsible for communicating the product's features until a brand is established. In today's technologically advanced world, this communication social media brand promotions with no well-planned strategy (Tarsakoo and Charoensukmongkol 2020: 441). Sanny, Arina, Maulidya and Pertiwi (2020: 2139) support the idea that businesses seem to be aware that social media has an influence on brand awareness, yet little is understood about the full extent of this influence.

This study considers customers' perceptions about brand associations with social media influencers, which is one of the main considerations of the Keller's model. In its most basic form, branding is the process of giving a product, service, person, or idea a "label" (for recognition) and "meaning" (for comprehension) (Avraham 2020: 711). Brands achieve recognition and establish association in customers' minds through the conception and implementation of their marketing campaign. Brands can be considered to label items and give significance by influencing brand knowledge. Strong brands in particular become very recognisable to consumers and are associated with positive, distinctive, and powerful feelings, which reinforce brand preference (Zabojnik 2018: 160). Certain brands reflect particular beliefs or characteristics because they are associated with a certain social media influencer (Enke and Borchers 2021: 10). Consuming these brands could therefore be a way for consumers to express to others, or even to themselves, the kind of person they are or want to be due to the trust they have in the social media influencer associated with the brand.

In addition, the model considers the constructs mentioned in Table 2, which are brand image, uniqueness, favourability, interaction, brand associations, perceptions, brand knowledge, problem solving and information search, awareness (recall and recognition), brand credibility, uniqueness, brand knowledge, and satisfaction. Keller's model opines that one of the benefits of brand equity is that it aids customers in the evaluation and purchase of products (Świtała, Gamrot, Reformat and Bilińska-Reformat 2018a: 96). Therefore, this increases brand preference for a certain brand over its competitors' brands. It is also suggested that brand knowledge plays a big role in creating brand preference (Purani and Jeesha 2022: 53).

Moreover, Keller's model recognises that brand marketing investments have the capacity to endow added value to a brand, which makes it preferred as compared to competitors' brands (Raut, Pawar, Brito and Sisodia 2019: 295). The study looks into how best a company can invest in social media marketing strategies to grow brand preference. The model suggests that marketing investments should create positive brand associations to create a positive brand image. According to Ebrahim (2020: 287), social media marketing provides platforms to enhance the brand's strength, favourability and uniqueness of its associations.

In addition, it is stated that brand image is created from the types of brand associations a brand has. Social media marketing provides the opportunity for brands to be associated with great, loved, and trusted social media influencers. Keller's model supports the notion that it is more sensible to start with creating brand awareness, as consumers must first be aware of the brand before they can start to prefer one brand over another (Jayasuriya, Azam, Khatibi, Atan, Dharmaratne and Research 2018: 31). Therefore, this study's first objective is to create awareness through the use of social media; hence, Keller's model supports the objectives of the study. Keller's model assumptions state that brand awareness brings learning advantage, consideration advantage, and choice advantage to a brand (Aljumah, Nuseir and Alshurideh 2021: 367).

- Learning advantage refers to the ability of the customers to internalize data and create associations with the brand.

- Consideration advantage refers to creating a room for consideration for a certain brand in the customers' minds in terms of satisfying and fulfilling the customers' needs.
- Choice advantage is when customers opt purchase the brand they are most familiar with.

Brand awareness and brand image are noted as very important factors in creating brand equity, which leads to brand preference in the model. However, Keller's brand equity theory does not consider the factors that affect individual media use and the reasons that motivate them to engage in certain media use behaviour for gratifications that meet their inherent needs, including the identification of the positive and negative consequences of individual media use. The study focuses on millennial population groups and their perceptions of social media in terms of brand preference. In an effort to understand the reasons that motivate millennials to engage in social media use behaviour for gratification, the uses and gratification theory is adopted and explained below.

2.4 Meta theory: The Uses and Gratification theory

Gratification theory is a media effect theory that focuses on understanding the reason behind seeking particular media to satisfy certain needs and how people actively seek it (Dolan *et al.* 2016: 261). Furthermore, uses and gratifications is a psychological communication perspective that focuses on how individuals use mass media and other forms of communication, such as interpersonal communication, to meet their needs and desires (Kania and Agatha 2012: 91). According to the uses and gratification perspective, media use is determined by a number of key elements, such as people's communication needs and motivations, the psychological and social environment, the mass media, functional alternatives to media use, communication behaviour, and the consequences of such behaviour (Korhan and Ersoy 2016: 1799). Therefore, the uses and gratification theory differs from the other media effect theories in the sense that it focuses on "what do people use media to do to people" instead of "what do media do to people". In addition, there are limitations and suggestions for future research.

Kayahara and Wellman (2007: 824) state that previous uses and gratification research divided media gratifications into two categories as follows:

- Process gratification is derived from the performance of an activity, such as unstructured Web browsing or creating content for one's profile.
- Whereas content gratification is derived from the acquisition of information.

In summary, media selection and use are goal-directed purposeful, and motivated actions (Rubin 2009: 147). The uses and gratification theory is illustrated in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3: Uses and gratification theory

Source: (Rubin 2009: 148)

The uses and gratification theory provides an approach to understanding that people willingly choose a certain medium that satisfies certain needs (Gruzd *et al.* 2018: 475). Furthermore, the selected media must allow knowledge enhancement, interaction, and relaxation. The uses and gratification theory assumes that users are active consumers of media; asserting control and influence over media content. Billings, Broussard, Xu and Xu (2018) assume that users are accountable for selecting media to satisfy their desires and needs to attain gratification. The uses and gratification theory implies that media compete against available information sources. Sheldon and Newman (2019:

2) state that the uses and gratification theory focuses on psychological needs, and the following five uses of media are very important:

- Be informed and educated,
- Identify the characters of the situation in the media environment,
- Simple entertainment,
- Enhance social interaction, and
- Escape from the stresses of daily life.

Millennials use social media networks to have selective, efficient, and immediate contact with others for (mediated) interpersonal communication satisfaction and as an ongoing means of seeking approval and support from others when it comes to brand preferences (Froget, Baghestan and Asfaranjan 2013: 134). Social media networks allow the user to choose who sees and who does not see posts and other site information. This also helps social media marketers target different groups of people (Shao 2009). The information on a user's site can be very efficiently customized for a specific network of friends. In some ways, the user becomes a "broadcaster" to an audience that he or she creates and grants access to (Muhammad 2018: 204). Furthermore, responses from other millennials in the form of wall posts, likes, comments, or reviews serve as confirmation and support for mediated relationships that change daily. As a result, many millennials engage in addictive behaviour by constantly checking for responses to their self-presentation and/or concerns expressed on their daily blogs. Therefore, many brands target millennials through social media networks (Basilisco and Cha 2015: 181).

2.4.1 Application of the Uses and Gratification Theory to the study

A brand's overt goal in social media is to attract an audience by providing value, or gratification, through its content. To build a stronger level of engagement, content must be designed in a way that creates value for individual consumers (Malthouse *et al.* 2013: 270). As a result, uses and gratification theory provides a framework for understanding the motivations of millennials looking for a specific type of content on social media. The reasons for using social media encompass a variety of factors that influence individuals' choices and the utilization of specific social media platforms

(Malik, Dhir, Nieminen and Informatics 2016a: 96). The uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al. 1973), which asserts that consumers are actively and selectively involved in media usage to satiate their psychological and social needs, provides theoretical support for the presence of these motivations. In the context of social media, motives can range from hedonic and utilitarian goals (such as rewards and amusement) to relational goals (such as identification and brand affiliation) (Enke and Borchers 2021: 7). According to Kamboj (2019: 51), the primary drivers of consumer-brand social media interactions are empowerment, personal identity, social connection, entertainment, and information.

In order to understand why millennials are always on social media and what they like that can boost the potential of advertising brand preference, the theory of uses and gratification is of importance to this study. When a marketer is knowledgeable about what the target population is interested in on social media, it will help in creating social media strategies to win them over. Uses and gratification theory has become a common theoretical paradigm for understanding the uses and gratifications behind the use of various types of media since the 1980s (Kujur and Singh 2020a: 31). The uses and gratification theory was first used in 1954 as an extension of the needs and motivation principle (Islam, Mäntymäki and Kefi 2020: 83). After a decade, the uses and gratification theory was also used to explain people's plans to watch certain television shows and how people perceived the mass media (Kamboj 2019: 205). Currently, researchers are looking into the uses and gratifications behind the use of social media. People are drawn to social media for a variety of reasons. Malik, Hiekkanen, Dhir and Nieminen (2016b: 364) studied the advantages that Facebook users obtained from social media participation based on the Uses and Gratification Theory. They specifically identified six different forms of satisfaction from sharing images in their online study of Facebook users. They discovered that attachment, attention seeking, habit, knowledge sharing, disclosure, and social influence can all lead to user delight.

Additionally, Kim and Ko (2019: 346) discovered that consumers enter a state of cognitive absorption when they are intensely engaged with information technology.

The uses and gratification theory has been applied to several technology adoption contexts, including the following:

- The internet use (Malik *et al.* 2016a: 129),
- Photo tagging on social networks (Dhir and Tsai 2017: 350),
- Online photo sharing (Malik, Dhir and Nieminen 2016: 129),
- Online social media (Chen and Lin 2019: 32), and
- Understanding why Millennials continue to use social media and the negative influence of social media use (Mäntymäki and Riemer 2016: 1042).

The uses and gratification theory has been used in previous studies (Kamboj and Sarmah 2018: 46). This study adopted the uses and gratification theory because of the theory's applicability in explaining internet users' participation on social media and related platforms. The most common user gratifications are information searching, social enhancement, and entertainment (Kamboj 2019: 205). Understanding how these needs and gratifications influence customer social participation is extremely limited. According to Benamira, Devillers, Lesot, Ray, Saadi and Malliaros (2019: 568), the uses and gratification theory has been used by researchers to better understand why and how people deliberately seek out a particular form of media to meet the needs at hand. For instance, in this study, the researcher is looking into how social media can be used to promote brand preference and which social networks are the best. Sheldon, Antony and Ware (2021: 2) state that the uses and gratification theory is commonly used to discover why users want a particular form of media.

Weiyang (2015: 71) recommends the uses and gratification theory for explaining and understanding the psychological needs that shape millennials' reasons for using the media. The literature is silent on the use of social media to grow brand preference amongst millennials (Fernandes and Inverneiro 2021: 320). Ultimately, in the context of this study, there is a need to understand the reasons that motivate millennials to engage in certain media use behaviour for gratifications that meet their inherent needs, including the identification of the positive and negative consequences of individual media use (Tanta, Mihovilović and Sablić 2014: 85). Millennials use social networking sites to connect with others in a selective, efficient, and immediate manner to satisfy their (mediated) interpersonal communication needs and as an ongoing means of

seeking approval and support from others (Ahad and Anshari 2017: 65). This theory is intended to assist communication researchers and marketers in developing a better understanding of the powerful influence of social networking sites. Businesses should close this knowledge gap on how millennials perceive and behave in social media marketing in terms of growing brand preference.

2.4.2 Weaknesses of the uses and gratification theory

The uses and gratification theory has some weaknesses too. Li, Dittmore, Scott, Lo and Stokowski (2019: 335) argued that requiring early participants to identify gratifications for specific channels could possibly overestimate the number of gratifications. In addition, audiences from different generations are likely to have differences in sources of motivation in media use. Different generations also have different gratifications. Amalin, Pawito and Sutopo (2019: 1) argue that there is a thin line between uses and gratifications, which makes the theory unclear.

However, both Keller's model of brand equity and the uses and gratification theory are of interest in understanding the aspects of brand equity that lead to brand preference, the reasons behind seeking a particular medium to satisfy certain needs, and how people actively seek it. These theories explain how a customer's perception of brands and social media can result in a perception of credibility, satisfaction, and trust in the brand, hence brand preference. In other words, both Keller's model of brand equity and the uses and gratification theory assist in understanding consumer behaviour towards brands within the social media marketing context.

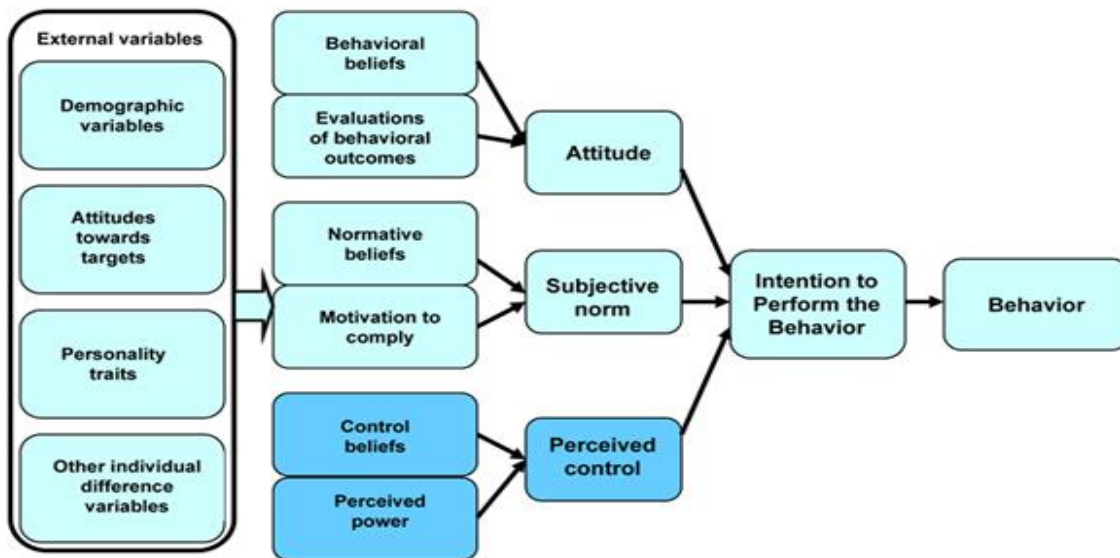
Given some of the above reasons, this study also uses the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behaviour (TRB) approach to offer a useful contribution to the understanding of the social media behaviour of millennials on brand preference. The view held by the researcher is that discussing the existing theories to test the influence of social media procedures and issues widely provides an opportunity to close the knowledge gap, as the literature is silent on how social media can be a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials. The theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behaviour are discussed in the next section.

2.5 Meta theory: Theory of reasoned action and Theory of planned behaviour.

The theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behaviour relate to the study in the sense that they try to raise awareness of the social media behaviours of millennials using social media (Procter, Angus, Blaszczynski and Gainsbury 2019: 99). The theory of reasoned action was initially suggested in 1967 by Fishbein as a way of explaining voluntary behaviour amongst individuals (Yzer 2017: 1). LaCaille (2020) states that after realising that behaviour is often beyond the control of the person, Fishbein and Ajzen updated the principle of reasoned action in 1980 (Theory of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour, 2010).

Tornikoski and Maalaoui (2019: 536) opine that the theory of reasoned action is a model that can be used to predict a person's intention to perform a behaviour based on their attitudes and normative beliefs. The theory of planned behaviour was born out of the extension of the theory of reasoned action to account for changes in the variables (Ajzen 2011: 1). The theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behaviour are written at a higher level of generalization. As a result, they can be used in areas other than medicine. The TRA and TRB have the same attitudinal and social norm-related components (Ajzen and Fishbein 1975: 261).

A new source of the purpose to act was suggested because of this realization, and the idea was dubbed the theory of expected behaviour (Sarosa 2013). Designed behaviour is a theory that raises questions of control and superiority. Peer pressure is becoming more prevalent, and it is valid to a large degree that often-reckless behaviour is carried out to please others (Cooke and French 2008: 745). Attitudes and subjective norms lose their significance in such situations, and regulation takes precedence (Montano and Kasprzyk 2015a: 231). Therefore, it is very important for social media marketers to also consider this as another aspect that should be included in social media strategies. In a nutshell, the two theories are designed to investigate the factors that are thought to be responsible for individual decision-making (Muñoz-Silva, Sánchez-García, Nunes and Martins 2007). Figure 4 below illustrates the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behaviour combined.



Each behavior is defined within: Action, Target, Context, Time

Note: Upper light area shows the Theory of Reasoned Action; entire figure shows the Theory of Planned Behavior

Figure 4: Theory of reasoned action and theory of planned behaviour combined

Source: Adapted from (Montano and Kasprzyk 2015b: 231)

According to Muñoz-Silva *et al.* (2007: 1177), the theory of reasonable action and planned behaviour has been successfully useful in predicting and explaining the range of behaviour and intentions. Communicating product attributes to vulnerable population groups such as millennials and motivating millennials to take preference for a certain brand remains a significant challenge for many businesses (Zhou, Calder, Malthouse and Hessary 2022: 90). This theory provides an understanding of behaviour that can be useful in social media marketing strategies that shape how millennials feel and act in South Africa (Yzer 2017: 2).

The theory of reasoned action opines that attitude and subjective norms are vital for convincing communication (Montano and Kasprzyk 2015a: 231). According to Bloom, Gundlach and Cannon (2000: 92), attitude refers to the person's positive or negative feelings attributed to the behaviour. Montano and Kasprzyk (2015a: 232) opine that attitude is a person's favourable or unfavourable feeling about carrying out a specific behaviour. In addressing the issues of social media marketing, strategies must

therefore target how millennials feel as well as what they believe in concerning social media brand promotion (Ajzen 2011: 1). Figure 2.3 below provides a visual presentation of how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control all drive the intention to act, resulting in behaviour.

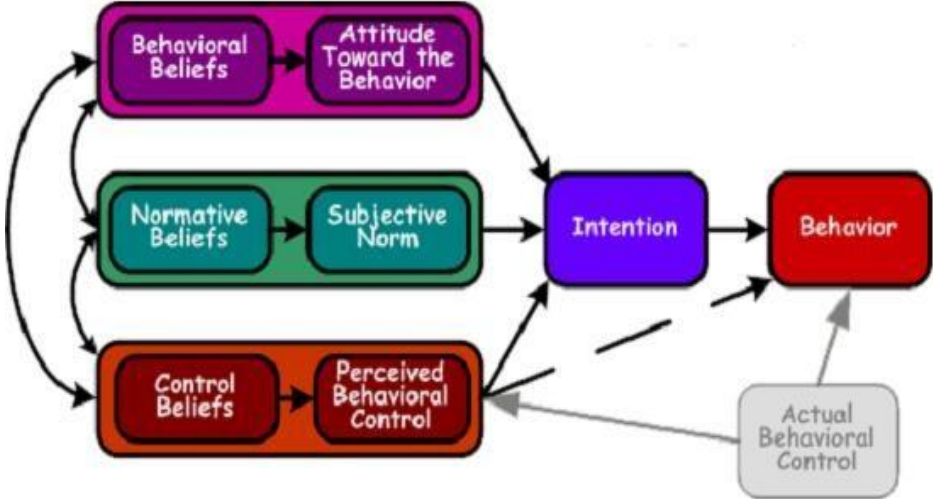


Figure 5: Sources of Intention

Source: (Sarosa 2013: 1)

As a result, the TRA and the TPB share the following components as Figure 5 illustrates:

- **Behavioural Beliefs**

Behavioural beliefs are important for determining the probability that a particular action will encourage or negate a specific outcome and evaluating outcomes achieved or avoided in terms of the desirable and unfavourable consequences (Wang, Long, Li, Wang, Ding and Cai 2021: 7230). Individuals' significant probability and evaluation-associated behavioural beliefs are multiplied to form behavioural attitudes. Such behaviour, on the other hand, can be measured separately. Behavioural intentions are formed by combining the behavioural attitude with the subjective norm and the primary proximal cognitive precursors to act as intentions rather than attitudes (Montano and Kasprzyk 2015a: 231). Attitude towards behaviour is influenced by behavioural beliefs. If the person believes that the behaviour will lead to positive outcomes, their attitude

towards the behaviour becomes more favourable, which, in turn, strengthens their intention to perform it.

- **Normative Beliefs**

Normative beliefs include referent beliefs about what other people expect and the degree to which one wants to meet those expectations (Kachkar and Djafri 2022: 549). According to Kumar and Nayak (2023: 147), subjective norms are defined as the multiplicative sum of the two sets of normative beliefs, like behavioural attitudes, but they can also be evaluated independently. Normative beliefs are a key component of subjective norms. If a person believes that important others expect or approve of their behaviour, their subjective norm is positively influenced, leading to a stronger intention to comply with the expectations.

- **Control Beliefs**

Control beliefs relate to an individual's perception of their ability to perform the behaviour and the presence of facilitating or inhibiting factors. Sources of control beliefs include self-efficacy, external sources, and past experiences (Montano and Kasprzyk 2015a: 231). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to carry out the behaviour is a significant source of control beliefs (Renaldo, Karuppanan, Bhuiyan and Kumarasamy 2021: 15). External factors, including the presence or absence of resources, support, and barriers, can influence control beliefs. Past experiences refer to previous attempts or experiences related to the behaviour can shape beliefs about one's ability to perform it (Hiranrat, Harncharnchai and Duangjan 2021: 40). Control beliefs directly affect perceived behavioural control. If an individual believes they have the necessary control and resources to perform the behaviour, their perceived behavioural control is high, which strengthens their intention.

The theories of reasoned action and planned behaviour suggest that there should be a pull at the customers' belief structures, which are informed by modernization and freedom of action and thinking rather than traditional culture (Yzer 2017: 1). The marketing discipline has adopted the theory of reasoned action and the theory of

planned behaviour for assessing consumer behaviour (Pavlou and Fygenon 2006: 115). According to Southey (2011: 44), the use of these theories to model decision behaviour in small and medium-sized businesses is a route that has gotten little attention in the current literature. The theory of reasoned action and planned behaviour and its application to millennials and social media branding are discussed in the next section.

2.5.1 Theory of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour and its application to millennials and social media branding

This theory is a good fit for this study because it offers a behavioural interpretation that can be applied to social media techniques that affect how millennials feel and behave in South Africa. Fishbein suggested that there are two key sources of the intention to act in a certain way, as part of his theory. The first is one's attitude towards a certain type of behaviour, which involves positive or negative emotions associated with the behaviour (Bloom, Gundlach and Cannon 2000: 93). Therefore, to combat brand awareness and high brand preference, social media campaigns must concentrate on shifting how millennials feel and believe about social media marketing and brand endorsements. When one's mentality changes, one's actions shift as well (Wang, Xu and Liu 2022: 483).

The second source of motivation to act in a certain way is what is known as subjective norms. This is about people's own belief systems; as a result, they prefer to compare what they think and believe to what other powerful people believe (Montano and Kasprzyk 2015a: 231). This source of motivation is very important to note when investing in social media marketing; it is all about the influencers or endorsers marketers use for their social marketing campaigns and the behaviour of Millennials towards that (Jin, Muqaddam, Ryu and Planning 2019: 567). Regarding the fact that millennials are always online, looking forward to new trends, and appreciating different models and endorsers, social media marketers should be sensitive about who to endorse for social media branding (Arora, Bansal, Kandpal, Aswani and Dwivedi 2019: 86).

Therefore, it is imperative to consider the attitude of millennials towards the language used, the content, and the endorsee used for the success of social media branding targeting millennials. In addition, the theory of reasoned action and planned behaviour sheds light on the two factors (attitude and subjective norms) that influence the final behaviour. In this study, the final behaviour to be achieved is love for the brand, hence the high brand preference. Therefore, social media marketers should make sure what they post on social media is highly supported by millennial influencers and results in a positive attitude towards the brand. Muschalik, Elfeddali, Candel, Crutzen and de Vries (2019: 2) opine that there are two types of attitudes: implicit attitudes and explicit attitudes. Implicit attitudes are introspectively unexplained (or wrongly identified) traces of previous experience that mediate positive or negative emotions, thoughts, or behaviour towards social objects (Greenwald and Banaji 1995: 4). Implicit attitudes are assessments that have an unknown origin and are triggered automatically, according to the source. Consequently, implicit attitudes are believed to be evaluations developed predominantly subconsciously.

However, it is important to note that these claims do not suggest that these evaluations are unconscious, but rather that actions can be mediated by implicit attitudes without the person being aware of this causal effect (Rudman 2004: 147). For example, people with a lack of impact understanding are unaware of the influence their attitudes have on other psychological processes such as perception and decision-making (Greenwald, Brendl, Cai, Cvencek, Dovidio, Friese, Hahn, Hehman, Hofmann and Hughes 2022: 1161). Therefore, it is worth mentioning that it is significant for social media marketers to consider attitudes and how they affect millennials behaviour towards social media branding (Duffett 2020: 5075). As a result, social media marketing campaigns should encourage positive attitudes towards brands, taking into consideration how to create rich content on social media. There should be a pull at their belief structures, which are informed by modernization and freedom of action and thinking rather than traditional culture (Park and Lin 2020: 1).

It is critical to clearly identify the behaviour under investigation in terms of the target at which the social media marketing is aimed the action taken, the context in which it occurs, and the appropriate time when conducting the research (Montano and

Kasprzyk 2015a: 231). In addition, the degree to which people feel they have power over their behaviour can affect their intentions and thus have an indirect influence on behaviour. As a result, a third determinant of intention has been added: perceived behavioural regulation, which is characterise as people's expectations of their ability to perform a given behaviour. Social media marketers should consider adequate research on the target population to clearly identify the behaviour under investigation in terms of the target at which it is aimed.

Keller's theory of brand equity, the uses and gratification theory, and the theory of reasoned action and planned behaviour are of interest in understanding the aspects of brand equity that lead to brand preference, the reason behind seeking a particular media to satisfy certain needs and how people actively seek it, and the attitudes of millennials towards the language used, the content, and the endorsee used for the success of social media branding targeting millennials. These theories explain how social media can be the best tool for a certain target market to grow brand preference. All the aspects of brand preference, the issues of media used, and how customers experience certain attitudes from social media campaigns have been included in these three theories. However, the literature has been silent in terms of why millennials choose to prefer a certain brand over another on social media. Therefore, in an effort to understand why people prefer one product type, over another on social media, one brand over another, and why consumers choose to buy or not buy (or use or not use) a certain product, this study adopts the consumption value theory. Meta theory: The consumption value theory

2.6 Meta Theory: The consumption value theory

The consumption value theory focuses on the consumption values explaining why consumers choose to buy or not buy (or use or not use) a particular product, why consumers choose one product type over another, and why consumers favour one brand over another, with a focus on consumption values (Kaur *et al.* 2018b: 205).The consumption value theory has been applied in a study focusing on resolving user participation and retention challenges in brand choices in social media brand communities by (Kaur, Dhir, Rajala and Dwivedi 2018c: 1).

In addition, the consumption value theory has been adopted in studies that focus on brand loyalty creation by Laroche, Habibi, Richard and Sankaranarayanan (2012: 76); Kang and Hustvedt (2014: 253); Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2014: 152); Lin and Lu (2011: 1152); Wu and Ho (2014: 145). It is imperative to also note that consumption value theory has not been adopted in brand preference studies. In marketing and consumer behaviour, consumption value theory is frequently used. Consumption value theory has been used by researchers to characterize a variety of product and service consumption, including that of food, clothing, cigarettes, education, and tourism (Tanrikulu 2021: 1176). Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991: 159) define five consumption values: functional value (price and quality), social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value, which strongly influence consumer preference. They also stated that consumers' consumption decisions are likely to be influenced by the value they attach to goods and services. The multidimensional aspect of consumption values aids customers in choosing whether to acquire a good or service or stick with a specific brand.

Previous research by Kaur *et al.* (2018c: 1) has found that online social media brand communities have a positive impact on user behaviour. According to Laroche, Habibi and Richard (2013: 1755), online social media brand communities aid in the development of brand loyalty and trust among consumers. The previous studies have not addressed the use of online social media brand communities in the development of brand preference. This necessitates further research into the behaviour of users in online social media brand communities with the objective of growing brand preference. From the available literature, no other study has attempted to understand users' brand preferences on social media networks in the greater Durban area.

The consumption value theory emphasises consumption values. Therefore, ensuring active user participation and retaining existing users is a key concern of the moderators of social media marketing. The consumption value theory explains the importance of the epistemic, emotional, functional, conditional, and social values that influence users' intention to choose one brand over the other (de Oliveira Santini, Ladeira, Pinto, Herter, Sampaio and Babin 2020: 1211).

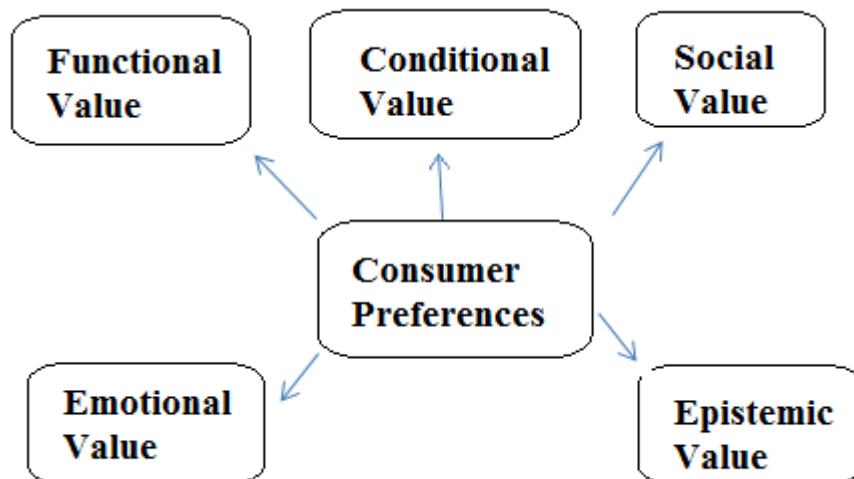


Figure 6: The consumption value theory

Source: (Kaur *et al.* 2018b)

Figure 6 above presents the consumption values that influence users' intentions to prefer one brand over the other. The functional value, conditional value, social value, emotional value, and epistemic value and how these values influence consumer preference on social media are explained in the next section.

2.6.1 Epistemic value

Muhamed, Ab Rahman, Hamzah, Zain and Zailani (2019: 2951) state that epistemic value represents a value that pertains to cognitive accomplishments like genuine beliefs, justified views, knowledge, and understanding. Epistemic values explain the importance of knowledge, justification and comprehension. According to Friston, Rigoli, Ognibene, Mathys, Fitzgerald and Pezzulo (2015: 187), seeking tailored information motivates users to participate in social media brand communities. The presumed utility derived from an alternative's capacity to arouse interest, provide novelty, and fulfil a desire for information is known as epistemic value (Zailani, Iranmanesh, Sean Hyun and Ali 2019: 931).

Therefore, users' intentions to use online social media networks for brand preferences are influenced by information retrieval (Jung 2014: 299). Users' information needs on online social media networks are influenced by social influence and problem solving.

This desire for approval by others (social influence) and relevant information addresses users' desire for information on current trends and problem-solving methods, as well as decision-making assistance (Kaur *et al.* 2018b: 205). Epistemic value is made up of social influence and problem solving.

2.6.1.1 Problem solving & social influence

Customers go through the customer decision-making process when shopping. It is very important to get relevant information that will aid to the decision on which brand to buy (Varshneya, Pandey and Das 2017: 478). In the present study, epistemic value addresses the value generated by gaining information from a social media brand page or post. Hu, Chen and Davison (2019: 297) state that users spend about thirty minutes on online social media looking for information rather than generating content. Additionally, information retention is one means of value generation. Facebook is used for seeking information, generating ideas, and obtaining information on ways to do things (Kaur, Dhir, Rajala and Dwivedi 2018a: 297).

In the current study, it is important to understand the influence of the availability of adequate information that solves consumers' problems on social media brand communications and how this leads to brand preference. This is because users' intents to be active in online social media brand communities are influenced by their satisfaction with their information demands and perceptions of its usefulness. In addition, the process by which an individual's attitudes, beliefs, or conduct are altered by the presence or actions of others is known as social influence (Hu, Chen and Davison 2019: 297). Conformity, compliance and obedience, and minority influence are the four spheres of social influence. Customers tend to believe in brands that their families, friends, workmates, or age-mates believe in (Chandrasekara and Sedera 2018: 3). This marks the significance of social influence in brand preference.

2.6.2 Social value

The development of social value may have a significant impact on users' decisions to choose one brand over another on social media (Tanrikulu 2021: 1176). For instance, the intention of consumers to utilise Facebook is significantly predicted by social connection, communication, and social networking. According to Kaur *et al.* (2018b:

205), social value is made up of both social interaction and social enhancement. In the context of online social media brand communities, social value also significantly influences user behaviour (Zailani *et al.* 2019: 931; Lin and Lu 2011: 1152). According to Nadeem, Khani, Schultz, Adam, Attar and Hajli (2020: 1), social enhancement, along with the creation and maintenance of relationships, is a significant factor in encouraging people to engage in online social media brand communities. Similar to this, individuals' intentions to choose a certain brand are predicted by social interaction and the satisfaction of social needs (Lin and Lu 2011: 1152).

The social value aids in the enhancement of self-esteem and acceptance, both of which influence consumer behaviour (Zailani *et al.* 2019: 931). Social interaction and social enhancement represent users' social needs to contact new acquaintances who share common interests and to improve their reputation because of their participation in online social media networks. The concept of social interaction addresses users' tendency to form relationships with new acquaintances with whom they share common interests. When it comes to brand preference, the common interests shared matter as it gives a sense of belonging and self-esteem.

2.6.3 Emotional value

Emotional value is concerned with the arousal of emotions because of the use of social media networks. According to Ray, Bala and Dwivedi (2020: 23), based on a review of existing research, emotional value contributes the most to the value accrued by social network users. Existing online social media research has discovered that playfulness has a direct influence on users' intention to use online social media as well as their actual usage (Rosário and Raimundo 2021: 3003). The emotional value comes to light through the playfulness of the brand's social media content being posted. The playfulness also affects how millennials will perceive brands on social media. Consumers' emotional state is sparked by emotional value, which has a big influence on their impulse purchase behaviour (Zhang, Leng and Liu 2020: 1). According to Jie, Poulouva, Haider and Sham (2022: 1), the brand connection of a mobile application has emotional significance.

2.3.6.1 Playfulness and social media brand preference

Social media is now a dominant channel of communication between consumers and brands (McShane, Pancer, Poole and Deng 2021: 96). These platforms have been noted as an effective way to strengthen the quality of brand–consumer relationships, with many associated benefits such as increased satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth intentions (Hsieh, Lee and Tseng 2021: 102). However, to date, much of the understanding of the linguistic content of such communications remains both isolated from the digital environment, specifically with regard to social media, and focused on text-based communications.

This includes works highlighting how different types of words (for example, explanatory, refusal, and assertive) (Kronrod and Danziger 2013: 726); (Moore 2012); (Patrick and Hagtvedt 2012: 390), word sounds (vowel sounds) (Lowrey and Shrum 2007: 406), and typographic (written brand name: (Lowrey and Shrum 2007: 407) influence the consumption experience. Emojis are being used more frequently by brands to communicate with their customers, both corporate and human (McShane *et al.* 2021: 96).

The concept of playfulness has received scant attention in the marketing literature and yet has been more widely studied in areas of social psychology and human-computer interaction (Stratton 2021: 373). It has been proposed as a potentially central tenet of human social interactions (Hsieh, Lee and Tseng 2021: 102). It revolves around the central idea of play, which is referred to as a behaviour or activity pursued with the goal of amusement, enjoyment, and fun ((Van Vleet and Feeney 2015: 630)). Playfulness has been characterise as the extent to which the individual is curious regarding an interaction and finds the interaction enjoyable and interesting (Moon and Kim 2001: 217). This approach, in particular, highlights the centrality of interaction to the concept of playfulness. Extending from here, perceptions of playfulness reflect, rather, the perception of whether an interaction encapsulates the key elements of play.

Turning to work on playfulness in the field of human-computer interaction, although less focused on the role of playfulness in relationships, this work addresses the

significant influence of playfulness on consumers' brand preference (McShane *et al.* 2021: 96). This study will provide an understanding of the influence of social media content playfulness on brand preference. The emphasis here has been primarily on understanding the influence of playfulness on individuals' reactions to various social media content from brands (Lin, Wu and Tsai 2005: 683). This work finds positive outcomes associated with perceptions of playfulness, such as a greater likelihood of using a certain social media platforms (Sledgianowski and Kulviwat 2009: 74), of using certain retailer website (Ahn, Han, Kwak, Moon and Jeong 2007: 1), and of achieving high levels of customer satisfaction (Hsu, Chang and Chen 2012: 549)

Perhaps most relevant, Hsieh, Lee and Tseng (2021: 102) find that emoticons in person-to-person text messaging enhance social interactions via perceptions of playfulness. Although not specifically focused on playfulness, related research also shows that the entertainment value of social media brand posts can positively influence engagement (Luarn, Lin and Chiu 2015: 503).

Taken together, this discussion identifies playfulness as an important construct in relationship-building that can yield significant positive brand preference. Applying these ideas to social media brand-consumer communications, it is possible that perceptions of playfulness in brand-consumer social media messaging will lead to greater levels of engagement and brand preference. The missing piece, then, is how emojis can enhance these perceptions of playfulness and, in turn, drive engagement and brand preference. It is empirical to explore how emojis may engender greater perceptions of playfulness in brand-consumer social media communications.

2.6.4 Functional value

According to broad definitions, functional value refers to the perceived advantage or utility that results from an alternative's ability to perform in a functional, utilitarian, or physical manner (Kaur *et al.* 2018b: 367). The definition of functional value was linked to a commodity's functionality and quality (Sweeney and Soutar 2001: 203). Additionally, social media applications offer numerous benefits in branding, including anytime and anywhere access, quick transaction records, and money transfers

between individual accounts. Therefore, it is expected that utilising social media will allow users to form a favourable opinion of the service or product.

Due to the technical advantages that social media provides, functional value drives its utilization. Functional value also considers pricing and quality evaluation of the product (Sweeney and Soutar 2001: 203). According to Berraies, Yahia and Hannachi (2017: 1018), the perception of higher value compared to a substitute increases mobile banking use when the gain that social media branding provides exceeds the cost associated with the service. Additionally, the effectiveness and quality of the brand may lead to the creation of functional value.

2.6.5 Conditional value

Conditional value refers to how decisions are influenced by events or situations. According to consumption value theory, there are a variety of values at play when customers exercise choice, and these values are both independent and situational (Kaur *et al.* 2018b: 205). The inability to predict the conduct of two or more people is one of the key drawbacks of consumption value theory; however, this may not be an issue if the individuals form a group with similar perceptions.

2.6.6 The influence of the value dimensions on “Consumer Preferences”

Consumption value theory acknowledges that consumers get value from products and services in a variety of ways and that this value may be classified into many dimensions. Functional value, emotional value, epistemic value, social value, and conditional value are examples of value aspects that influence consumer brand preferences (Majeed, Ahmed and Rasheed 2022: 1110). It is important for businesses to understand how these variables influence consumer preferences and purchase decisions.

- Functional value is frequently the starting point for a product's ability to meet consumer needs. Consumers expect products to meet their basic functional needs. However, if other factors are present, it may not be the primary predictor of preference.

- Emotional value can have a considerable influence on brand preferences, especially for items and services where emotional connections are important. Consumers may pick brands or goods that evoke strong emotional responses, even if they provide equivalent functional benefits (Rahman, Nanu and Sozen 2023: 1).
- Consumers that prioritise learning and personal development may have preferences based on epistemic value (Chakraborty, Siddiqui and Siddiqui 2022: 2521). Products and services that provide opportunities to expand one's knowledge or skills can be quite tempting.
- Majeed, Ahmed and Rasheed (2022: 1110) state that consumers who prioritise learning and personal development may have preferences based on epistemic value. Products and services that provide opportunities to expand one's knowledge or skills can be quite tempting.
- Consumer preferences can be heavily influenced by social value, particularly in things related to personal image and social standing (Roh, Seok and Kim 2022). Consumers may select products that correspond to their chosen social identity.
- Conditional value can lead to different preferences depending on the situation. Products or services that are well-suited to the consumer's present demands or circumstances may be prioritised.

A mixture of these value dimensions frequently influences consumer brand preferences, and the relative relevance of each component varies among individuals and product categories. Businesses that comprehend and handle these characteristics can more successfully customize their marketing tactics and product offerings to fit consumer brand preferences and expectations (Karjaluoto, Glavee-Geo, Ramdhony, Shaikh and Hurpaul 2021). Businesses and marketers frequently attempt to understand and use these aspects of value in order to develop products, services, and marketing tactics that are appealing to their target customers. Recognising that customers want more than just functionality helps firms establish greater brand loyalty and customer relationships. However, consumption value theory is a limited paradigm that merely suggests the influence of value on decision behaviour and identifies perceived values associated with product purchases (Tanrikulu 2021: 1176). In addition, consumer values vary with the consumer type (millennials) presented.

According to a study by Berraies, Yahia and Hannachi (2017: 1018), various consumer segments may have various reasons for using a technology or innovation. For instance, members of Generation Y are referred to as "digital natives" because they were raised in and were born into the largely digital world of today. The majority of studies concur that, in contrast to earlier generations, social value is crucial for digital savvy.

In trying to understand how the best social media marketers can utilise social media and make their brands dominate the market, the agenda-setting theory is adopted in this study. Agenda-setting theory explains how news or posts can get more attention from viewers. For instance, the agenda-setting theory assumes that if a news item is presented frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more vital. The agenda-setting theory places the media as the primary decision-maker when it comes to choosing which news stories to prioritise and report on.

2.7 Meta theory: Agenda-setting theory

The agenda-setting theory is a social science theory that refers to the ability of the news media to influence the importance placed on the topics of the public agenda and attempt to make predictions (McCombs, Shaw and Weaver 2013: 42). The agenda-setting theory was formally developed by Max Mc Combs and Donald Shaw in a study on the American presidential elections in 1968 (McCombs, Shaw, Weaver and society 2014: 781). Through this theory, the degree to which the media determines public opinion was determined. Moreover, over a hundred studies have been done on the agenda-setting function of the mass, and the theory still proves relevant and useful.

According to the agenda-setting theory, the media is the primary decision-maker when it comes to choosing which news stories to prioritise and report on (Grzywińska and Batorski 2016: 19). It accomplishes this less by telling people what to think and more by provoking thought. This means that the public is more likely to view an issue as essential the more coverage specific occurrences receive in the mainstream media. To explain the disproportionate influence of the media on what is "on the agenda" in public discourse, the agenda-setting theory was initially developed. Currently, the idea is used to investigate how social media networks' algorithms affect the news people

receive and how biased those news networks are (Harder, Sevenans and Van Aelst 2017: 275)

The way news reports and issues are presented has an impact on how the general audience perceives them (Eberl, Meltzer, Heidenreich, Herrero, Theorin, Lind, Berganza, Boomgaarden, Schemer and Strömbäck 2018: 207). The manner in which news reports are produced makes it so that when one news story receives more importance and attention than another, the audience will naturally believe that it is the most significant news and information being provided to them (Gilardi, Gessler, Kubli and Müller 2022: 32). According to how people think and how much influence a piece of news will have on the audience, the media decides which news should be presented first and which should come later. Agenda-setting theory involves a cognitive mental process called "accessibility" (Capella and Jamieson 2023: 181). The media presents information that is most thought-provoking, portrays the most important social concerns, and offers a window into people's thoughts (Harder, Sevenans and Van Aelst 2017: 275). The levels of agenda-setting theory are as follows (Cheng and Chan 2015: 18):

- **Initial Level-** Researchers frequently utilise the first level to examine how media is used, its goals, the influences it has on individuals, and the closest association that people will make between their exposure to information from media sources and their own thoughts.
- **Second stage-** The media emphasises how individuals should think about the nature of the challenges at a second level. As a result, news reports may be sensationalized to grab viewers' attention. In actuality, the media seeks to seize public attention and spread awareness of some pressing concerns. This is why the media makes some causes popular.

In political advertisements, campaigns, business news, and public relations, to name a few agenda-setting theory is applied (McCombs *et al.* 2014: 781). Gatekeeping is the key idea behind the philosophy. The choice of material that is discussed in the media is under the direction and control of gatekeeping. It is presumed that the public is primarily interested in the results of media gatekeeping. The principal gatekeepers of media are editors. According to Naser (2020: 1), the news media chooses "what"

events to transmit and show through the media "gates." Gatekeepers are the strong authorities who make sure the appropriate information is shared widely. In addition, some issues are significant to the media but not to the general public. Additionally, they are quite concerned about not affecting public stability and harmony.

2.7.1 Application of the agenda-setting theory to the study

This study focuses on how social media can be used as an agenda-setting tool for growing brand preference. Because of social media's widespread use, academics are becoming more interested in how social media agendas affect traditional media agendas, or the other way around. According to Soroka (1999: 763), research, Twitter is more effective at influencing agendas for issues that the mainstream media tends to ignore, like news about environmental problems and gender equality, while Twitter tends to follow the mainstream media for other topics. Twitter is one of the social media platforms where customers relate to and engage with brands. In this study, the research is more interested in how social media, as an agenda setter, can be used to grow brand preference. The agenda-setting theory suggests that the media is the primary decision-maker when it comes to choosing which news stories to prioritise and report (Blasco-Duatis, Coenders, Saez, García and Cunha 2019: 4). The customer is more likely to view an issue as essential due to the more coverage, and specific occurrences received in the mainstream media.

When it comes to brand preference, the brands that tend to have more news in the media are more likely to receive media exposure. According to Meraz (2009: 682), the agenda-setting theory was proposed to correct the perception that media effects are immediate reflections of media consumption. Not much attention was paid to the mechanism by which exposure was initially achieved. This theory emphasised that media content needs to be made significant to the user before being processed and accepted. In addition, the agenda-setting theory tends to take into consideration the representation and content of the media, coverage, as well as the corresponding audience responses about the issues (Blasco-Duatis *et al.* 2019: 4). The agenda-setting theory supports the 'how' part, not the 'what' part, thus addressing the issues in the media. Furthermore, this theory was continuously developed into how media

attention towards certain topics strengthens audience attitudes concerning those issues.

However, unlike in the 1960s, technology has taken communication to another level. According to Su and Borah (2019: 236), the introduction of the Internet gave rise to a new area of study, such as the investigation of relationships between news organisations in their online forms, the interaction between offline and online media (Luo, Tu, Xu and Networks 2014: 236), and the intermediation of the influence of blogs on the news media. The modern media landscape has changed to include more bloggers, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and so many other social media platforms (Carroll 2015). This now raises some questions, such as: does this change the nature of the agenda-setting theory? And does traditional media still maintain the power to set the agenda for the audience or has the balance of power shifted to social media? According to McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (2013), social media has come with tremendous force to influence the agenda of the audience.

Through social media, common people can determine issues of significance for public conversations. It is noted that traditional media continues to fight for market share, despite the fact that the traditional media and blogs now complement each other. On the other hand, the agenda-setting theory studies still require more hard work to show a robust and time-tested causal relationship. It is noted that limitations in scope and unclear operationalization are the agenda-setting theory's primary weaknesses, which must be worked on (Russell, Guggenheim, Mo Young and Bae 2014).

In addition, it is important to note that social media wide coverage, traffic, and quick spread of information have supported social media to be the agenda setter currently as compared to the traditional mass media. Marketers should be knowledgeable about what social media infrastructure is and how to use it effectively to create brand preference. Therefore, the meaning of social media is explained in the next section. Social media marketers will be able to make use of social media to communicate product features, attributes, and benefits to customers more frequently and effectively to create a good brand image and useful information online.

2.8 Meaning of social media

Auxier and Anderson (2021: 2) state that social media are essentially accessible communications technologies that turn Internet-based communications (such as, smart phones, tablet computers, and portable media players) into a collaborative dialogue platform. Social media has been used as an umbrella term, and it should be clearly defined as the beginning point towards the determination to attain an understanding of social media influence on millennials brand preference and buying decision-making.

Social media definitions given by many researchers towards this end are discussed, concluding by providing a definition of social media for the purpose of this study. Gilardi *et al.* (2022: 39) characterize social media as encompassing platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, yet social media has not been used before to denote any other form of media. Contrary to the use of Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter in place of the term social media, still a number of researchers utilise the term “social media” (Khan 2017: 236). According to Abdullah (2017: 222), social media involves the act of creating relationships between people online through different social utilities such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Myspace, LinkedIn and Snap Chat.

Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace have been eye-openers to the masses towards social media and led to the explosion of information in the business environment (Evans, Bratton and McKee 2021: 44) This definition can be considered limiting for some reasons. Firstly, it frames social media only within different networks of people and social utilities such as Facebook and neglects the other aspects, which are organisations and communities. It also considers social media as a source of information, abandoning other purposes such as self-expression and entertainment. Moreover, Abdullah’s social media definition only involves social networking sites and neglects other types of social media such as blogs, microblogs, wikis, content community sites, consumer review sites, Internet forums, and location-based social media (Reinhardt 2019: 1).

In addition, social media refers to an online system of communication, conveyance, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, businesses, and communities enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility (Tuten and Solomon 2017: 4) . For this study, Tuten and Solomon's definition is adopted because it clearly includes the collaboration and cultivation of relationships among interconnected and interdependent networks of people in businesses and communities. This study follows the same methodology, treating social media less as a collection of discrete technologies and more as an integrated group of media with a variety of capabilities while simultaneously acknowledging the various ways they are used and the various effects they have based on their relative importance to growing brand preference on social media.

This study is looking at how social media can be used as a tool to create brand preference. It is referred to as a customer's brand preference when they regularly choose one brand over another (Erkmen and Hancer 2019: 1469). In other words, customers have to become familiar with the other brands, perhaps even try a couple, and decide that this is the brand they prefer. Social media can grow brand preference by being a space for creating loyal relationships between businesses and consumers and cultivating and collaborating relationships. It is through these social media platforms that relationships between brands and customers are cultivated and reinforced. According to Jacobson, Gruzd and Hernández-García (2020: 118), social media has a major impact on changing consumer tastes and preferences. Therefore, questions on the influence of social media on brand preference still need to be addressed.

Most importantly, the available literature poses the key point that social media has proved to be crucial in creating brand awareness and brand exposure considering its inexpensiveness and capability to reach a greater coverage of potential customers' (Chatterjee and Kar 2020: 1). Social media can be both formal and informal communication and advertising for brands, attract customers, collect reviews about brand performance, and attain customer satisfaction (Khan 2022: 102). Some of the social media utilities that have a great influence on millennials are Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, SnapChat, StreetBees, Google

Plus, YouTube, Wikipedia, and WeChat. The following figure 7 shows the monthly users for a number of social media platforms.

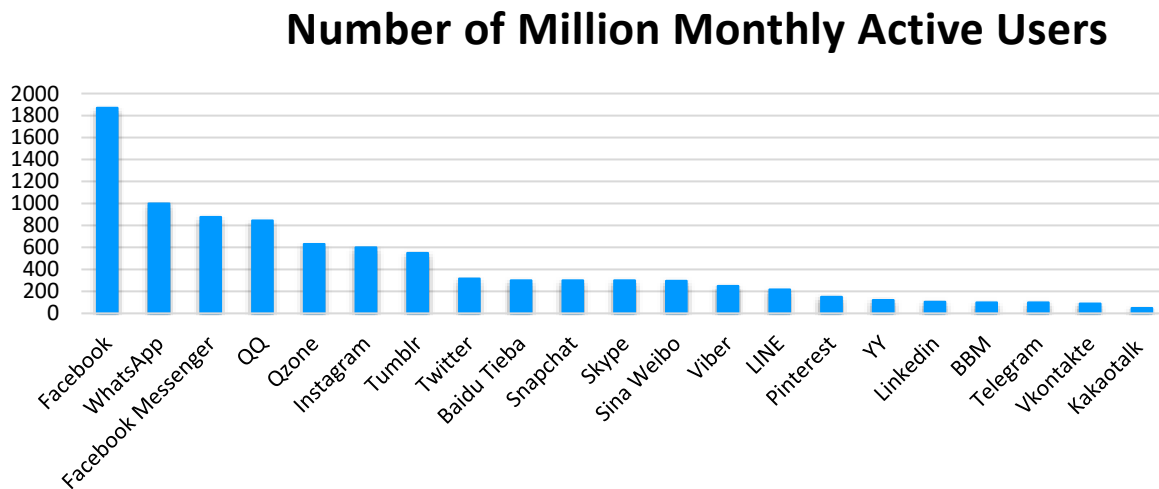


Figure 7: Number of monthly users of social media network platforms.

Source: (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy and Nielsen 2017: 591)

Looking at the traffic of users per month, it can be stated that social media platforms promote high coverage. High coverage is favourable for creating brand awareness.

In addition, through the sale of analytics as a service, such as brand and media monitoring, consumer interaction, and security, numerous online platforms have emerged that use social data. People are using social media more frequently and are spending more time there. Statistics show that there are approximately 500 million tweets sent each day, or 6, 000 tweets sent per second, or 350 000 tweets sent every minute, according to data produced by Twitter (Newman *et al.* 2017: 592).


According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2016: 60), all internet-based applications build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which has allowed the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social media has brought a big change in the business environment. For example, Bajpai, Bredemeyer, Li, Zaitsev, Koenig, Lokshina, Mohan, Ivey, Hsiao and Weinheimer (2019: 263) commented that social media has changed the way fashion is designed. Social media belongs to a

volatile digital environment which is more like a volcano that can erupt at any time. Figure 8 below shows the rankings based on average monthly traffic.

Digital in 2018 in Southern Africa

JAN 2018

SIMILARWEB'S RANKING OF TOP WEBSITES
RANKINGS BASED ON AVERAGE MONTHLY TRAFFIC TO EACH WEBSITE IN Q4 2017



#	WEBSITE	CATEGORY	MONTHLY TRAFFIC	TIME PER VISIT	PAGES PER VISIT
01	GOOGLE.CO.ZA	SEARCH	116,600,000	11M 41S	7.9
02	GOOGLE.COM	SEARCH	88,400,000	14M 29S	13.7
03	YOUTUBE.COM	TV & VIDEO	74,900,000	31M 30S	11.0
04	FACEBOOK.COM	SOCIAL	52,600,000	15M 33S	14.0
05	WIKIPEDIA.ORG	REFERENCE	10,300,000	3M 55S	2.9
06	NEWS24.COM	NEWS & MEDIA	9,900,000	4M 56S	2.5
07	FNB.CO.ZA	FINANCE	9,600,000	7M 48S	5.3
08	TWITTER.COM	SOCIAL	9,100,000	12M 14S	6.2
09	YAHOO.COM	NEWS & MEDIA	8,700,000	9M 23S	6.9
10	TAKEALOT.COM	SHOPPING	7,900,000	8M 54S	9.6

Figure 8: Rankings based on average monthly traffic

Source: (Saputra and Rufai 2018: 345)

Figure 8 illustrates some of the examples of social media platforms that are existing currently, as well as the monthly traffic, time per visit, reason behind the scrolling on the platform, and pages per visit. Social media data has allowed marketers to understand customers' tastes and preferences better. The next section discusses the different types of social media technologies that marketers can use to create brand preference and how these technologies can contribute towards creating brand preference. The following social media technologies are very important to this study because they provide platforms for businesses to market different brands and a pool of information to assist customers in their buying decisions. Knowing how these technologies work will help social media marketers strategise towards creating brand preference. Having knowledge on how social media technologies operate will assist in creating a tailored content to post for every platform.

2.9 Types of social media technologies

Boswell, Byrne and Davies (2018: 1) state that social media includes a variety of technologies that encourage communication. Social media technologies are discussed in terms of their contribution towards creating brand preference.

2.9.1 Blogs

Chawinga (2017: 3) refers to blogs as frequently updated websites or web pages, typically maintained by one person or small group and written in an informal style. According to Kido (2017:54), blogging concept started in the 1990s, when Americans started embracing the web. Tuten and Solomon (2017: 21) also added that blogs can be maintained by journalists, traditional media providers, or organisations. Ntobaki (2018: 30) states that a blog is a web-based log, normally known as a blog, is a social media instrument that is there to convey the thoughts, views, experiences, and beliefs of the author. It is also noted that blogs assist brands in expressing their personalities and communicating brand value. It is also further stated that fruitful commercial blogs are considered by length, viewpoint, remarks, and regularity.

Fotis (2015: 1) emphasised that blogs allow the expression of feelings, the communication of ideas and personal publishing. People blog for various reasons, such as documenting a life, as an outlet for feelings, and as a thinking tool. Furthermore, blogs have proven to be more significant, trusted, and credible as compared to broadcast TV news and traditional media. Blogs are very informative as they give readers the option to comment for feedback (Tuten and Solomon 2017: 20).

It is important to note that there has never been a better time for businesses to incorporate blogging into their marketing plans, given that there are currently close to 4 billion individuals using the internet worldwide (De Rose and Thangalakshmi 2021: 26). Blogging helps brands establish trust with potential clients while also promoting goods and services and increasing website traffic. Increased website traffic increases brand awareness, brand knowledge, and brand preference. Blogging for a business also promotes brand recognition and helps the business be easily seen (Assis, Ferreira

and Andrade 2020: 586). A brand blogger produces material that others can share on social networks each time the blogger writes a new piece.

The study looks at how social media can be used to create brand preference. The current literature does not cover how blogging as a form of social media can aid in the creation of brand preference. For example, in 2009, Chiara Ferragni started a blog called "Blond Salad" simply for fun. She now has 20 million Instagram followers, has worked with numerous international brands, and has created her own shoe line that has now grown to include clothes and accessories (Borsoi, Zappa and Rédei 2018: 21). Literature indicates that it is a good tool towards creating brand awareness, brand recognition, and brand recall (Marques, da Silva, Davcik and Faria 2020: 497). Therefore, it can be noted that blogging can influence brand preference positively because brand preference comes after customers are aware of the available brands.

2.9.2 Microblogging

Vaast, Safadi, Lapointe and Negoita (2017: 1) state that microblogging sites are more like blogs despite that the micro share is limited. A micro share refers to small elements of content for example, images, short sentences and video links (Tuten and Solomon 2017: 17). Twitter application falls under microblogging. In addition, Twitter seem to be the most popular micro sharing vehicle with a maximum of hundred and forty characters. Kido (2017: 53) states that Twitter was created in 2006. According to Effing and Spil (2016: 2), microblogs are different from other social media networks as members may seek to align and connect basing on interests instead of relationships.

Short messages, a limited number of characters, and instant message delivery are the three main characteristics of microblogging sites (Du 2020: 102). Fotis (2015: 12) opines that the majority of the posts posted on Twitter are about a product, an organisation, and opinions on the product or an organisation. It is worth mentioning that microblogging can be a very effective social media technology to create the popularity of a brand, hence brand awareness. Microblogging can be used as a source of customer feedback through reviews, comments and likes.

2.9.3 Social network sites

Social networking sites are very popular and viral worldwide (Barry and Girona 2017: 1); (Baccarella, Wagner, Kietzmann and McCarthy 2018: 431); (Kohli, Suri and Kapoor 2015: 35). Social networking sites refer to the applications that allow people to connect around the world (Barry and Girona 2017: 1). Some authors use the term network instead of networking, which denotes relationships between strangers (Ellison, Gibbs and Weber 2015: 103). Kaplan and Haenlein (2016: 441) define social networking as applications that allow connections between friends and family through creating and sharing profiles and emails.

In addition, Kaplan and Haenlein have restricted social networking to friends and family; the profiles are limited to profile creation and the sharing of messages and emails, neglecting other functions. Businesses and strangers can also connect through social networking. Social networking sites consist of vehicles such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Ntobaki (2018: 40) comments that social networking sites allow easier connections through the creation of private and public profiles. Nunan, Sibai, Schivinski and Christodoulides (2018: 31) add that social networks allow consumers to interact with brands by escalating business Facebook pages, giving them the option to post comments, questions, and updates.

2.9.4 Wikis

Wikipedia is the most well-known wiki. According to Ntobaki (2018: 43), wikis are the most powerful drivers for mass collaboration, despite the fact that they are not popular in the marketing industry. According to Özdemir and Aydın (2015: 2359), wikis refer to online gathered web pages that allow any interested individual to generate, edit, comment on and contribute to. It is a worthy comment that Wikis will be highly recommended for data mining in the future because link creation, both internal and external, plays a big role in search rankings (Ismail, Balkhouche and Harous 2020: 1). A wiki website can be used to link to extremely pertinent material on the company's website. Customers seeking information about a company's goods or services will see a brand even more prominently as a result. Wikis provide constant content access, regardless of the user's location. Wikis may accommodate a wide variety of media,

including URLs, images, videos, and audio. Mirembe, Lubega and Kibukamusoke (2019: 72) assert that social technologies are altering how marketers impart knowledge to their customers. In addition, social media technologies like wikis allow for communication between customers and brand marketers.

2.9.5 Content communities

According to (Riley 2020: 344), content communities are social groups that foster a sense of camaraderie with one another by having similar values, aspirations, and behaviour. The creation of vibrant communities is the responsibility of social media marketers. YouTube seems to be the most popular of all content communities. Kido (2017:15) states that YouTube is the crown jewel of internet video. Du Plessis (2017: 1) added that content communities are web-based applications that allow people to share videos, photos, documents, music and links. Fotis (2015: 1) commented that consumers upload and view content, which gives an implicit vote in favour of and against these subjects depicted. When this data is aggregated, prediction and forecasting are enabled in marketing, politics and economics.

2.9.6 Consumer review websites

According to Filieri (2016: 46), consumer review websites refer to social media applications that enable participants to upload reviews and ratings for all market offerings, wish lists, comparisons of prices, history chats on prices, and customized shopping. Rothenfluh, Germeni and Schulz (2016: 129) state that consumer review websites can either be stand-alone websites with the main function of collecting and presenting consumer feedback or embedded content. The embedded content websites refer to those websites that have the sale of goods as their primary function and incorporate consumer reviews for customers' decision-making (Hollensen, Kotler and Opresnik 2017: 1). For instance, TripAdvisor, Airbnb are very good examples of the most successful consumer review website, Filieri (2016: 46). There are many scholars who support the idea that consumers are interested in both online reviews and the influence the reviews have on buying decisions (Leung, Sun and Bai 2019: 517). Consumer review websites have affected branding and consumer decision-making through both negative and positive consumer reviews (Rothenfluh, Germeni and

Schulz 2016: 129). The online reviews and comments have made it possible to explore consumers' perceptions.

The study's focus is on how social media can work as a tool to grow brand preference; therefore, consumer review websites are one of the social media technologies that the study is reviewing. The consumer review websites are important for this study as they are a source of reviews that consumers use when selecting one brand over another on social media. For example, Airbnb is an example of a consumer review website where accommodation apartments are posted with reviews and ratings. Customers are able to select the best accommodation based on the ratings given by customers, reviews, pictures and videos. Airbnb provides a space for social media marketing to create awareness for those in the accommodation business. Overall, it is worthy to mention that consumer review websites are playing a big role in creating brand awareness and allowing feedback from customers.

This section has grouped the social media platforms into different types of social media technologies based on how they operate and what they allow businesses and customers to do. For instance, LinkedIn is classified under content communities because it is a social group that fosters a sense of camaraderie with one another by having similar values, aspirations, and behaviours (Sundström, Alm, Larsson and Dahlin 2021: 454). LinkedIn is a social group of professionals growing their careers, sharing job opportunities and achievements, career development training, and highlights on the career journey. It is a very powerful social media platform.

The following section will define and discuss the underlying social media infrastructure that empowers social media users to do any activity of their choice, such as marketing, recording, and uploading their own videos.

2.10 Social Media Value Chain

According to Tuten and Solomon (2017: 18), the social media value chain refers to the underlying social media infrastructure that empowers social media users to do any activity of their choice, such as marketing, recording, and uploading their own videos. The social media digital environment comprises all the elements that create a social

web: social channels and vehicles, the software, the devices, and the participants (Bucher and Helmond 2017: 223). The social media value chain shows the key activities of social media participants and the elements that make those activities possible. A social media value chain, at times known as a social media funnel, converts an audience into customers (Corbos, BUNEA, POPESCU and ZAMFIR 2019: 1). The components of the social media value chain (infrastructure, channels, hosts, supporting software, services and devices) are discussed in the next section.

2.10.1 Infrastructure: The web

The internet marks the root of Web 2.0; hence, the web is the foundation of social media (Newman, Chang, Walters and Wills 2016: 591). Moreover, Web 2.0 brought the networks of people and the networks of information together through interactive online technology, cost-effective rich data access, mobile apps, micro market access, and easy, accessible, and interactive user interfaces. The web is the first supporting element identified in the social media value chain. The social web image from Web 2.0 advances the era of communication. The social web enables the network effect, whereby each additional user adds value for all users (Tate 2018: 1).

Web 2.0 gave social media a privilege to harness the collective knowledge of a large group of people to solve problems and complete tasks (Newman *et al.* 2016: 592). This created a great opportunity for organisations to use crowdsourcing to benefit from the collective wisdom of many people. Furthermore, Web 3.0 came into the picture to allow collaboration between machines and people, the users of captured data, and data mining and processing (Güler 2015: 192).

Understanding the web is crucial for this study because the web marks the foundation of social media; without the web infrastructure, social media will not exist. The study focuses on how social media can be utilised to create brand preference; therefore, understanding the infrastructure that allows social media to exist is of importance. Social software is also part and parcel of the social media environment; hence, social software is discussed in the next section.

2.10.2 Supporting software and services

The supporting software and services include all social software applications. The host of social media applications plays the biggest role in what we can do online and all our experiences on social media (Shams, Amlani, Scicluna and Gerlai 2019: 727). Social media applications consist of all programmes that make it possible for users to interact, create, and share data online. In addition, some applications are down-loadable from Google Play, and they are known as widgets (Cook 2017: 5).

Social software facilitates all social media channels. The chat box is a current social software development that works as an artificial intelligence computer software application that stimulates intelligent discussions in the form of written and spoken messages through a chat interface, for instance, Facebook. Moreover, social software shapes the users' experiences on social media (Richter, Kelly and Haugen 2017: 1). Supporting software and services are important to this study because it is through these social software applications that brand information is shared, reaching wide coverage and creating brand awareness and knowledge. When marketers are knowledgeable about the available social software applications, they will be able to utilise them effectively to grow brand preference.

The following section discusses devices as the third element in the social media value chain that contributes to accessing the internet and participating on social media. Devices are used to access the supporting social software applications to share, create, talk, work, learn, buy and sell.

2.10.3 Devices

According to Tuten and Solomon (2017: 17), devices refer to any form of equipment that digital natives use to participate online. We use gadgets such as smart phones, smart watches, laptops, desktops, and televisions to access different social media applications. Mobile devices, such as cell phones, are the most commonly used gadgets to access social media. According to Tuten and Mintu-Wimsatt (2018: 3), 85.5% of the digital natives who participate are using mobile devices. Moreover, social media has transformed our way of life, with mobile phones constantly in our hands, our

eyes fixed on the screen and our online content being validated (Chandrasekara and Sedera 2018: 3). Social media has significantly reduced family time. This only highlights how committed and glued people can be to social media mobile applications and how social media marketers can maximise on this opportunity in terms of growing brand preference.

Devices are very important to this study because they are the ones that connect people and social software applications to share, create, talk, work, learn, buy, and sell on social media. A study done by Mirembe, Lubega and Kibukamusoke (2019: 72) on the types of gadgets students were utilising to access social media was another focus of their study. According to the poll results, the majority of respondents, 95.2%, were using mobile devices, followed by 72% who were using laptops. Additionally, the results of critical information interviews with professors found that the majority of professors who use social media do so on both laptops and mobile devices. It can be concluded that laptops and mobile devices are the most used devices in social media interactions. Due to this, it is crucial to understand the role of devices in this study.

2.10.4 Channels and Hosts

Channels and hosts mark the fourth element of the social media value chain. People are the hosts and content creators on social media. Channels and hosts play the most important role in participating, sharing, and creating content online. People also include bloggers that create and share content professionally and personally online (Hollensen, Kotler and Opresnik 2017: 1). Moreover, brands, government organisations, social groups, and media businesses are also part and parcel of the channels and hosts.

People provide the rich electronic word-of-mouth that is influential. This relates to the social comparison theory, which suggests that people search for other people with whom they can compare themselves and validate themselves (Hill, Aime and Ridge 2017: 1935). In agreement with this theory, many people make comparisons, validations, and judgements of their perceptions, beliefs, and opinions on the social nature of social media. In addition, channels and hosts are very important in this study because social media only works when people engage, create, and share content

(Tuten and Solomon 2017: 11). When social media marketers understand that people are the key players on social media, they will be very sensitive and careful when creating content and sharing information.

The social media value chain encompasses the various duties and procedures essential for developing a successful social media platform. Organizing and maximising a social media marketer's efforts can be achieved by developing a social media value chain (Hollensen, Kotler and Opresnik 2017: 1). Marketers can use all four elements of the social media value chain to find and prioritise areas that need improvement in a brand. It can be mentioned that the social media value chain clarifies the relationships concerning the internet, social media channels, social software, and the internet-enabled devices that people use for access and contribution.

Tuten and Solomon (2017: 11) state that the coverage of the social media value chain is incomplete without a review of social channels and related vehicles in and through which social media participation takes place. These social channels are known as zones of social media. Zones of social media are addressed in the next section.

2.11 Zones of social media

Zones of social media refer to the social communication channels and vehicles where social media participation takes place (Lumsden 2018: 131). Mass media or personal media, can be used to reach a large number of individuals online. According to the source, the sheer number of social media channels and platforms, with new ones constantly appearing online, is a contributing factor in their complexity. Grouping similar channels together simplifies the process of comparing and contrasting this variety of channels and vehicles. Grouping these channels and vehicles creates social media zones. Social communities, social commerce, social entertainment, and social publishing are discussed below.



Figure 9: Zones of social media.

Source: (Tuten and Solomon 2017: 18)

Figure 9 above presents the zones of social media and the responsibilities of each of them. Explaining the zones of social media helps us understand social media better. Each of the zones is discussed below.

2.11.1 Social community

These are social media channels that allow relationships and common activities to take place online. Social media channels allow people with the same interests to socialize and participate in common activities (Khan 2022: 102). These social media channels include social media networks (Facebook) and forums. Social networking sites refer to online hosts that allow members to create and maintain profiles, identities and connections with other members. Tuten and Solomon (2018:13) state that profiles enable the creation of social identity and the maintenance of social presence. The social community zone does the sharing, socializing and conversing of information, as discussed below.

- **Sharing**

Sharing of information through messages, pictures, videos, and voice notes is also done through social community social media channels (Islam, Laato, Talukder and

Sutinen 2020: 120). These social media networks, such as Facebook, are used by many people use these social media networks, such as Facebook, to share information about brands and create brand awareness. Brand awareness is an integral part of business, and in today's day and age, this can be most effectively achieved through social media.

- **Socializing**

The process of socialization involves acquiring the traits necessary to be accepted in society. Social media is the best platform for interacting with various individuals, scrolling through their daily activities, and exploring a new world of potential opportunities in this way (Sutcliffe, Binder and Dunbar 2018: 272). Social contact in the context of social media is highly sophisticated since it depicts information flows that are multidirectional and interrelated rather than just a firm's monologue (Winstone, Mars, Haworth and Kidger 2021: 2). This is due to the fact that, on the one hand, social media has given users the ability to participate equally in interactions with businesses through sharing, gaming, expressing themselves, and networking, and, on the other hand, customer-customer interactions have emerged as a growing market force because users can influence one another's attitudes or behaviours (Sarkar and George 2018: 269). According to Yan, Winterbottom and Liu (2023: 6141), there are two basic kinds of social interactions: opinion- or preference-based interactions (such as WOM) and action- or behaviour-based interactions (such as observational learning), each of which calls for a different set of tactical moves.

- **Conversing**

Conversing is when a social media user takes the action that the content creator wants them to take. In the context of a social media conversion, this refers to a customer that engaged with a brand after finding the brand on social media (Leban, Seo and Voyer 2020: 514). Social media conversing is the ultimate goal of social media marketing. Marketers post content on different social media platforms to create awareness and brand preference, which will lead to conversations.

2.11.2 Social Publishing

Social publishing refers to the art of posting and publishing information while living in a room and responding and commenting to the audience (Ashley and Tuten 2015). Social publishing allows people, organisations, and communities to build relationships from people's responses. With the initiation of social publishing, a proper instant goldmine of information, feedback, and the required elements to build strong client relationships (Margatan, Pinkovezky and Switalski 2019: 1). It is empirical to note that social publishing plays a very important role in creating value creation for online content, as the value also depends on the content that people upload on social media and how it is endorsed.

2.11.3 Social commerce

Zhang and Benyoucef (2016: 95) define social commerce as a practice of Internet-based social media that allows people to be involved in the selling and marketing of merchandise and services on online platforms and marketplaces. Ashley and Tuten (2015: 15) support the idea that social commerce includes online shopping and the buying and selling of market offerings. Social shopping has to do with buying decisions made through the influence of E-Worm (comments, likes, opinions, recommendations, and experiences shared). In computer-mediated social contexts, a social commerce strategy is defined as exchange-related actions that take place in, or are influenced by, an individual's social network and correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focused transaction (Yadav, De Valck, Hennig-Thurau, Hoffman and Spann 2013: 312).

According to Onomake (2021: 1), this method of using social media is not intended to spark conversation or involvement, instead the initial contact and the ultimate intent are to sell. Similar to this, Li, Larimo and Leonidou (2021b: 51) contend that because social media promotional operations do not fully capitalize on the interactive nature of social media, consumers are not actively engaged. Social commerce has allowed marketers to advertise through different social media websites using tools such as Facebook Connect and share applications. It is paramount to mention that businesses are currently thriving through WhatsApp online shopping groups.

- **Customer relationship management service**

Customer relationship management refers to software and procedures that include the collective wisdom of a firm's customers in order to better hone the offer and foster closeness between a company and its customers. According to Tuten and Solomon (2017:26), it is important for brands to embrace social customer relationship management. Businesses that maintain strong brand customer relationships benefit from earned media (likes, shared content, engagements, and referrals). Happy customers turn to sharing recommendations with their networks.

The idea of social customer relationship management aims to incorporate the advantages that come from both social media and customer relationship management perspectives, such as customer engagement and retention (Li, Larimo and Leonidou (2021b: 51). The social customer relationship management strategy emphasises the active involvement of customers who are empowered by social media. Customer relationship management can contribute to numerous forms of value, in contrast to the standard customer relationship management approach, which states that consumers are passive and only contribute to customer life value (Leban, Seo and Voyer 2020: 514). A social customer relationship management strategy is a type of collaborative interaction that aims to engage and empower customers in order to foster mutually beneficial relationships with the company and improve performance (Li, Larimo and Leonidou 2021a: 51). This type of collaborative interaction includes firm-customer, inter-organisational, and inter-customer interactions.

Additionally, social monitoring is a crucial component of customer relationship management (CRM) and must be considered. The importance of social listening and meeting customer requirements is emphasised by social monitoring strategies, according to a source (Mason, Narcum and Mason 2021a: 1). It is crucial to pay close attention to client conversations and comments on social media, determine unique requirements and preferences from them, and then react appropriately and quickly with the best corporate offering. Businesses can use a variety of approaches to examine social media data since social media has evolved into "listening tools" for monitoring and analysing consumer behaviour.

According to Riley (2020: 344), customers' habits are influenced by businesses' active interactions with them. Actively engaging with customers on social media should be a continuous activity that, with the right incentives and monitoring, may help impact customer behaviour. Customer reactions are influenced by different responses, such as volume and speed; voices, such as human and impersonal voices, vital to effectively generating positive customer reactions in social media; and formal or informal styles (Yoo 2020: 34). It is crucial to avoid negative e-word of mouth at all costs, but if it does occur, there are a number of measures that can be used, from corporate acknowledgement and public apologies to recovery actions and compensation.

- **Retailing/sales**

Social media retailing entails the participation and active influence of others on a customer's decision-making process through the sharing of thoughts, recommendations, and experiences (Ansari, Ansari, Ghori and Kazi 2019: 6).

- **Human resources**

CRM systems support the tracking of employee data within a business, including contact details, performance evaluations, and benefits. This makes it possible for the HR division to manage the internal staff more skillfully. Devoted employees are a great advantage for firms since they can build the brand from the ground up (Çakıcı 2022: 216). Each employee becomes the company's success by meeting all clients at the appropriate time and delivering relevant results by carrying out their assigned duty in accordance with the clear and aggressive regulations outlined in the marketing or business strategy.

2.11.4 Social entertainment

This refers to the zone that provides audiences with pleasure and enjoyment through events, performances, and activities (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart and Madden 2015). It can be stated that social entertainment has taken over as many people now spend so much time on social media networks watching videos, playing games, and messaging loved ones (Gedik and Cosar 2020: 6). On the other hand, this has affected businesses negatively, as some workers are less productive due to social networking during working hours.

The zones of social media are adopted in this study because they encompass social communication channels and vehicles where social media participation takes place (Sarkar and George 2018: 269). Creating powerful social media marketing tools involves understanding how to combine different social media zones. Considering all the four zones of social media discussed, it is imperative to state that for social media strategy to work, it needs an inclusion of what every zone of social media offers (Hermida and Mellado 2020: 864). For instance, it takes social community, social publishing, social entertainment, and social commerce for a social media marketing campaign to be effective. The social community zone needs to offer networked relationships for interaction and collaboration online for any social media marketing to occur.

Social publishing contributes to the creation of awareness through the production and issuing of content for distribution via social media (Aichner, Grünfelder, Maurer and Jegeni 2021: 215). Through social publishing, marketers are able to publish content about brands to create brand awareness and brand knowledge. In addition, Anderson (2020: 7) states that social entertainment contributes to why people love social media and why they want to continue using social media. Therefore, social entertainment is crucial to keeping people eager to access social media platforms. Social commerce brings in the professional business transaction side, whereby online shopping, buying, and selling of products and services take place.

Applications for social media are slowly spreading throughout the marketing and retail sectors. Increasing the use of social media is a top priority for marketers currently (Ajina 2019: 1). It is also important to note that the financial benefits of social media marketing are elusive, despite the excitement. A recent Software & Information Industry Association study focused on software marketers, a sector at the forefront of social media and technology use (Regan and Steeves 2019: 1). Social media marketing generated less than 5% of the deals, according to 60% of these highly skilled marketers. It is critical to keep in mind that social media marketing is relatively new and still developing. In this brave new environment, marketers are forging ahead while learning and improving the model. Therefore, it is imperative to discuss the differences

between social media marketing and traditional marketing. The next section discusses social media marketing and traditional marketing. In the context of a study on growing brand preference, comparing traditional marketing versus social media marketing helps academics and businesses discover which technique is more effective in accomplishing this specific aim. It enables a nuanced assessment of the strengths and limitations of each method in developing customer brand preference.

2.12 Social media marketing and Traditional marketing

According to Todor (2016: 51), it is now a fact that it is now the digital era and social media marketing has so much influence on consumer behaviour and business transactions. Social media has turned into a revolutionary component of the average person's daily life (Mavenga 2018: 32). Although traditional media is still considered the most appreciated form of advertising, this barrier may very well be broken by social media (Todor 2016). Social media gave birth to social media marketing, which then led to social media marketing communication (Ashley and Tuten 2015: 15). Social media marketing refers to the establishment of relationships between firms and prospects and tapping into peer-to-peer influence (Yan, Wu, Wang, Wu, Chen and Wei 2016: 2). Social media marketing communication is an extension of the firm's communication mix, as social media complements the traditional communication mix (Mavenga 2018: 33).

Considering the huge influence of social media marketing, it is best for businesses to adapt their new social media marketing strategies. Moreover, Dwivedi, Kapoor and Chen (2015: 289) state that regardless of the new era of communication, traditional marketing should not be abandoned. Traditional marketing is still important because the public remembers traditional marketing techniques better and for a longer period of time (Ashley and Tuten 2015: 15). The same television advertisement, flyers, business cards, or brochures can be used more frequently. Bala and Verma (2018: 321) also support the idea that traditional advertising continues to be quite important. When combined, traditional and digital marketing can reach a wider audience and increase consumer confidence, which will lead to brand affinity and sustainable growth (Dolan *et al.* 2016: 261). Blending traditional marketing with social media marketing is highly recommended for achieving the company's goals. A well-blended marketing mix

(Du Plessis 2017: 2) highly enhances customer relationship, brand awareness, and customer retention.. The next section explains the advantages of social media marketing.

2.12.1 Advantages of social media marketing

In today's digital landscape, social media marketing plays a vital role in generating brand preference for businesses and brands. When it comes to building brand preference among consumers, social media marketing has various advantages. Some of the advantages are discussed in the next section.

2.12.1.1 The cost efficiency

Social media marketing is considered cost-efficient as compared to traditional marketing. Ntobaki (2018: 31) opines that social media marketing is the only medium that provides exposure to more than one thousand people for less than thirty rand. Traditional television advertising is costly; one can be charged thousands of rand for the same advertising message delivery that can be done for less than R30 on social media. According to Weinberg and Mares (2015: 1), a social media campaign on the most valued platforms is totally free. One can create a public profile for free. In addition, social media marketing has boosted the number of entrepreneurs due to its low cost. It is now worth mentioning that anyone can now advertise products and sell them without worrying about the high costs that come with traditional advertising.

2.12.1.2 Engagement

According to Lee, Hosanagar and Nair (2018: 5105), social media marketing allows interaction and two-way communication whereby consumers can actually experience real engagement that can actually provide instant feedback. Social media achieves this through live chats, likes, and reviews. Social media platforms allow brands to engage directly with their audience through comments, likes, shares, and messages (Moran, Muzellec and Johnson 2020: 533). This direct interaction fosters a sense of community and enables brands to build relationships with customers. This engagement provides insights to the company on its competitive advantage and on what needs improvement (Dolan *et al.* 2016: 261). Unlike traditional marketing, social

media marketing allows customers to communicate directly with brand ambassadors and representatives. Social media provides a continuous feedback loop where brands can gather feedback, conduct surveys, and monitor discussions to understand consumer perceptions and preferences. This two-way relationship is largely lucrative for brands. In addition, social media has brought the notion of agility to brands. According to Tuten and Solomon (2017: 17), traditional marketing campaigns are mostly organised around a quarterly schedule, which makes them less responsive to the environment in which they are presented. Engaged and satisfied customers on social media often become brand advocates, actively promoting the brand to their networks. This advocacy can drive brand preference among their peers.

2.12.1.3 Audience Targeting and the Metrics

Social media has the most active and highly responsive target market (Sajid 2016:1). Social media networks provide organisations with the potential to reach a specific market. For instance, Facebook reaches over eight hundred million users per day. Social media marketing enables highly targeted and personalized advertising (Infante and Mardikaningsih 2022: 45). Brands can tailor content and offers based on user demographics, interests, behaviour, and engagement history, making the marketing message more relevant to individual consumers. Furthermore, the metrics mark the greatest advantage of social media marketing (Kumar, Choi and Greene 2017: 268). The metrics show the number of people who have interacted with the posted social media content and their identity. Hanaysha (2022: 1) supports the idea that social media platforms provide robust analytics tools that allow brands to measure the impact of their marketing efforts. The marketers can track engagement, reach, conversion rates, and other key metrics, helping to refine their strategies.

2.12.1.4 Data Insights

According to Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma and Ruangkanjanases (2020: 189), social media platforms collect extensive data on user behaviour and preferences. Brands can use this data to gain insights into consumer trends, preferences, and sentiment, allowing them to refine their strategies and offerings. In addition, content on social media has the potential to go viral, reaching a wide audience rapidly. Viral content can generate significant brand exposure and preference.

2.12.1.5 Community Building

Brands can create online communities or groups where like-minded customers can connect and share their experiences (Nadeem *et al.* 2020). This sense of belonging can strengthen brand preference.

It is important to note that the continuous difficulty for the majority of businesses is not to launch social media campaigns but rather to integrate social media into their marketing strategy to engage customers and develop value and lasting connections with them (Lamberton and Stephen 2016: 146). To acquire a thorough grasp of the nature and function of social media marketing strategies, despite the enormous opportunities social media presents to businesses, there is no clear definition or comprehensive framework to guide their integration (Effing and Spil 2016:3). Overall, social media marketing provides brands with a dynamic and diverse platform for connecting with their target audience, creating meaningful interactions, and cultivating brand preference through personalized, engaging, and honest communication.

On the other hand, social media marketing has some disadvantages. The social media market does not provide the ever-needed opportunity to have a touch of the actual product before buying it. On this note, Todor (2016: 51) asserts that trust, credibility, and reliability are highly valued for a brand to prosper on social media. Moreover, it is complex to earn trust and measure the credibility and reliability of the products through social media campaigns. In addition, social media campaigns can be plagiarized by competitors, and company logos can be misused to defraud prospects (Duggan *et al.* 2015: 19). The huge number of frauds regarding social media marketing have eroded consumer trust, and this lack of trust has influenced even honest businesses' image and reputation. Online payment, which goes in line with social media campaigns, is still not trusted by many people, as they are skeptical about the credibility of websites (Lovelock and Patterson 2015: 55).

In addition, social media depends 100% on the internet, which leaves it exposed to network glitches and social connectedness. Social connectedness refers to the number of connections a person has on social networks (Chandra, Verma, Lim, Kumar

and Donthu 2022: 1529), but Cho and Son (2019: 4) define connectivity in terms of other dimensions such as the quantity, quality, and location of connections. According to a social media study, social influence is significantly impacted by connections. Sajid (2016: 1) demonstrates that leveraging highly connected individuals can increase the success of viral marketing initiatives by eight times. Despite all the social media problems, it still holds great advantages and influences the targeted audience. Therefore, it is empirical to discuss social media consumers in this study. It is also important to understand social media consumers in order for social media marketing to work effectively. Social media consumers are discussed in the next section.

2.13 Social media consumers

Understanding consumers' needs, wants, beliefs, expectations, and behaviours is very important (Chen and Shen 2015). Customers' use of social media results in a variety of behavioural forms, from passive (such as observing) to active (such as co-creating) (Gaozhao 2021: 1). Depending on the attitudes and information processing during contacts, these customer social media activities can either be positive (for example, sharing) or negative (for example, creating nasty content) (Dolan et al. 2016:261). Customers who exhibit good behaviours are referred to as pseudo-marketers by Cao, Meadows, Wong and Xia (2021: 835) because they utilise their own resources to support a company's marketing efforts, whereas those who exhibit negative behaviours might convert firm-generated "hashtags" into "bashtags. Qin (2020: 337) divides customers' brand-related actions on social media into three categories based on the uses and gratifications theory: consuming (such as reading a brand's posts), contributing (such as rating products), and creating (for example, publishing brand-related content).

Social media consumers have different needs, preferences, beliefs, behaviours, and expectations; therefore, it is crucial to segment social media customers for a better understanding of social media consumers. This makes market segmentation crucial for social media marketing. It is important to note that the traditional segmentation approach is still relevant, though the characteristics might include new features. Geographical segmentation, demographic, psychographic, benefit sought, and

behavioural segmentation will be discussed to give an understanding of a social media consumer.

2.13.1 Geographical segmentation

Geographical segmentation is considered in social media marketing. According to Mavragani, Nikolaidou and Theodoraki (2019:16), geographic segmentation is a marketing strategy used to target products or services at people who live in, or shop at, a particular location. It works on the principle that people in that location have similar needs, wants, and cultural considerations. By understanding what people in that area require, brands can target more relevant marketing messages and suitable products to customers, who are then aware and more likely to buy. Tuten and Solomon (2017: 17) mentioned that social media is increasingly incorporating global positioning system (GPS) technology that provides real-time location and time information. This satellite innovation allows firms to segment social media consumers (Naraine 2019: 222). Social media marketers implement three geolocation techniques, which are geofencing, geotargeting, and beaconing. These techniques are explained as follows:

❖ Geofencing

Geofencing refers to a virtual line around a defined geographic space (Haston 2019: 155). For instance, as prospects enter the defined area, the geolocation mobile app can target them with offers.

❖ Geotargeting

This technique is more like geofencing, but the geographical parameters are more general, for example, forty miles away from a zip code (Baye, Reiz and Sapi 2018: 15).

❖ Beaconing

Beaconing involves targeting a very small range of locations within a store.

Geographical segmentation allows organisations to stay current by tailoring the marketing strategy, messaging, and product offers to the distinct qualities of each region within their target market (Saxena 2022: 1). Brands can stay relevant and competitive in an ever-changing marketplace by being tuned into local preferences, consumer insights, and market dynamics. Customized marketing initiatives draw

clients and boost sales by appealing to the requirements and wants of a particular region, which leads to purchases (Alzoubi, Alshurideh, Kurdi, Akour and Aziz 2022: 449). Compared to psychographic, demographic, or behavioural segmentation, location data is impartial, simple to measure, and less expensive. Larger businesses can more effectively promote their products in various regions by offering different or more relevant offerings there. Smaller businesses, instead of adopting an ineffective general strategy, can direct marketing at their unique target audiences and areas of interest. Besides segmenting social media customers geographically, demographic segmentation can also be used. Demographic segmentation is also crucial in this study because social media users are made up of different demographic aspects, such as age and gender.

2.13.2 Demographic Segmentation

Demographic segmentation is a precise form of audience identification based on data points like age, gender, marital status, family size, income, education, race, occupation, nationality, and/or religion. Common characteristics such as age, income, gender, and occupation are utilised (Chitty, D'Alessandro and Gray 2019: 1). Men and women, for example, typically have different needs, wants, and mental processes. For example, very few males use makeup, and the majority of women do not wear boxers. Additionally, women are more likely than men to donate to charitable causes and often handle the majority of the grocery shopping for the family. These are all crucial aspects to consider while developing a campaign. An increase in segmentation based on ethnicity, race, country, and religion is a result of the enormous growth in worldwide trade and global advertising (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch 2017: 118). These groupings are made up of numerous distinct cultures, each with its own set of divergent preferences, attitudes, and beliefs. This might affect how they react to marketing campaigns and how they make purchases.

It is imperative to note that businesses can spend their time and resources more effectively by segmenting the market into smaller segments, each with a common variable. Social media marketers can better understand audience members' shared characteristics to identify the messages that will resonate with them. Targeting certain audiences using demographic segmentation. To properly manage a company's

advertising spending, a customized, targeted strategy is required. Deeper client loyalty results from targeted, individualized marketing that connects with customers on a more intimate basis (Haider, Zafar, Khalid, Majid, Abdullah and Sarwar 2019: 1). Customers are more inclined to conduct business with the chosen firm for longer periods of time when they can relate to the brand and feel as though the marketer is an advocate for their needs (Hartanto, Firmansyah and Adhrianti 2022: 589).

2.13.3 Psychographic Segmentation

Psychographic segmentation is used to examine consumers and categorise them based on psychological traits such as personality, lifestyle, social status, activities, interests, opinions, and attitudes (De Corte and Van Kenhove 2017: 441). This form of segmentation allows marketers to have a deeper understanding of consumers. Social media has taken over many business industries; for instance, the greeting card industry has been adversely affected (Hundal 2020: 2). Currently, it is noted that people prefer to send emails, e-cards, or posts on social media networks (Facebook, WhatsApp) (Katsikari, Hatzithomas, Fotiadis and Folinias 2020: 1).

People have changed from using traditional physical greeting cards due to the alternative seekers psychographic segment. This is a group of consumers using alternatives to traditional greeting cards. Surprisingly, many businesses in the greeting card industry are now adopting applications such as cool greeting cards and the Wink App on social media. Schafer, Gopal, Mathews, Thompson, Kaiser, McCullough, Jones, Castillo, Canale and Hutcheson (2019: 1) commented that there are different personalities, such as narcissism and attention-seeking. Narcissism involves the excessive use of social media; consumers with this personality are always online. Attention seekers manipulate their social environments to create an opportunity for self-improvement and search for positive feedback. All they seek is support and validation. In addition, Tuten and Solomon (2017:59) segmented social media consumers according to personalities, considering the degree of social creation and consumption. Based on the degree of consumption and creation, social media users are categorised into attention seekers, devotees, entertainment seekers, and connection seekers. The above-mentioned psychographic segmentation categories are discussed below:

- Attention seekers: people who desire attention have extensive networks, substantial social capital, and the capacity to produce and disseminate social material. These are the social media influencers whose online behaviour has earned them a cult-like following. Influencers on social media are driven by the need to be validated and are prepared to engage in overt, brand-initiated conversation.
- Devotees: these are true brand ambassadors who are true followers since they are willing to engage with brands and express their ideas. They are great content producers, much like attention seekers (Romanovskyi, Pidbutska, Knysh and Vorobieva 2022: 632). Other social media users may view devotees as being more true and genuine since they are active content consumers (Kozinets, Gretzel and Gambetti 2023: 1).
- Entertainment seekers: low levels of creation and consumption are a defining characteristic of entertainment seekers (Menon 2022: 1). These are inactive users with short attention spans who do not commit much time or effort unless something in return is provided as an incentive. They respond well to social media marketing initiatives in the entertainment-focused space of social media, which includes videos, quizzes, polls, and games.
- Connection seekers: the majority of users of social media are connection seekers. They serve as any social media community's building blocks. Despite producing little material themselves, their continuing interaction is vital for the wellbeing of social groups (Makhija, Pradhan and Atri 2022: 1335). Connection seekers are driven by the affinity impulse and desire to interact with others and form relationships (Tirtoprodjo and Sfenrianto 2023: 1962). The social media marketing campaigns for brands targeted at the social community will be most successful with naive connection seekers.

It is imperative to note that businesses can generate more focused and relevant content, advertisements, and interaction methods that resonate with certain audience categories by implementing the above-mentioned segmentation approaches in social media marketing. In the online economy, market segmentation leads to increased brand exposure, engagement, conversion rates, and customer loyalty.

2.13.4 Benefit sought segment

This is a way of segmenting consumers into groups based on the benefits they seek from the market offerings (Tuten and Mintu-Wimsatt 2018: 1). Currently, businesses are using social media to identify the benefits they want. For instance, McDonald's all-day breakfast meal demand was identified from the eight thousand tweets about the need for an all-day breakfast option (Rothenfluh, Germei and Schulz 2016: 129). Generally, consumers seek different benefits from brands, such as functional relationships, and this comes to the issue of social currency (Katsikari *et al.* 2020: 1). Social currency measures the ability of brands to fit into how consumers manage their media-centric lives. When social media currency is high, customers are willing to even pay a premium.

2.13.5 Behavioural Segmentation

The term "behavioural segmentation" refers to a marketing technique where clients are divided into groups based on how they engage with a particular company or website (Borges-Tiago, Tiago and Cosme 2019: 574). When it comes to behavioural segmentation, consumers are being divided into groups based on their actions (An, Kwak, Jung, Salminen and Jansen 2018: 54). For example, in social media marketing, behavioural information such as the time customers spend online, activities they participate in on social networks being used, and devices being used. Customer profiles are created through these segmentation bases (Haider *et al.* 2019: 1). Buyer personas enable the marketer to identify, understand, acquire, engage, and retain the target audience.

Behavioural segmentation is crucial because it identifies the most engaged consumers. Being able to distinguish between current clients and future leads that exhibit the highest levels of engagement is very useful in social media marketing (Pelletier, Krallman, Adams and Hancock 2020: 269). For instance, knowing which customers open the advertisement emails frequently or spend the most time on the product pages helps marketers decide where and how to invest their time, money, and resources most effectively. In consequence, this reduces the amount of money that businesses spend trying to warm up mostly cold leads, making marketing more cost-

effective (Li, Larimo and Leonidou 2021b: 51). Social media marketers may target those who are most likely to make a purchase, thanks to behavioural segmentation.

After realising the consumer segments on social media, customized social media content can be created. In creating social media campaigns, it is imperative to identify objectives to accomplish and decide how to accomplish those objectives with specific strategies and tactics. Therefore, strategic planning of social media marketing is very important for this study to achieve its objectives. The next section discusses social media marketing strategic planning.

2.14 Social media strategic marketing planning

Zabojnik (2018: 159) states that strategic planning refers to the process of determining, recognising and achieving the set objectives, utilising particular approaches to reach the objectives. Strategic planning is a three-tiered procedure, originating at the high management level, stirring to the middle stage, and finally reaching the lower level of the company. Effing and Spil (2016: 1) define social media strategy as a goal-directed planning process for creating user-generated content, driven by a group of internet applications, to create a unique and valuable competitive position.

Hollensen, Kotler and Opresnik (2017: 1) state that social media is a very challenging tool in the marketing industry due to its dynamic nature, as it is ever-changing, yet marketers have to match the pace. It is of great importance to use social media strategically to reap the desired benefits. However, many businesses find it very difficult to successfully implement social media strategically. Figure 10 illustrates social media marketing strategic planning.



Figure 10: Steps to social media marketing strategic planning

Source: (Chatterjee, Narayanan and Malek 2016: 25)

The steps of social media marketing strategic planning shown in Figure 10 are discussed in the next section.

2.14.1 Set Goals

The firm's overall needs must be analysed, as must the means by which social media will be utilised to meet the finalised list of needs. Businesses should develop tailored objectives, integrating only a few in their strategy, such as reminding customers, reducing marketing costs, and growing brand awareness (Daoud 2016: 1). When setting goals, the strategist clarifies the main social media campaign objectives and the resources needed to execute them (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch 2017: 118). When social media campaign objectives are set, the financial and human resources needed to meet the objectives are determined. According to Chatterjee, Narayanan and Malek (2016: 25), an objective refers to a particular statement of an organised social media activity in terms of the intended accomplishment.

The content of the set objectives depends on the current situation, as determined by the SWOT analysis in the first stage. For instance, the social media campaign can be tailored to boost the already existing company tools (Hollensen, Kotler and Opresnik 2017: 1). Moreover, the objective can be to improve brand reputation, increase brand awareness, cut customer costs, and create sales leads. Bjerke and Renger (2017: 125) state that objectives should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timed. Tuten and Solomon (2017: 18) support the idea that a budget should be planned when executing a social media campaign to ensure sufficient resources to accomplish the objectives attained. In addition, Todor (2016: 51) states that it is important to note that only media costs are free, but there are other costs associated with the creation, sharing, and management of the content that need funding. Khan (2017: 236) supported the idea that the same social media strategies involve development expenses such as developing social games, branded applications, widgets, and micro-sites. Currently, it is assumed that the social media budget will increase in the next few years, as the more content generated, the more management and time are needed, hence the higher the cost.

2.14.2 Determine audience

At this stage, the strategic planner has to select the target audience (Chatterjee, Narayanan and Malek 2016: 25). The user characteristics are critical when describing the audience, pursuing the correct market in certain settings, and providing the appropriate message at an appropriate time (Lipsman, Mudd, Rich and Bruich 2012: 40). In this stage, the strategist is required to target the desired audience meaningfully. A social media profile of the targeted audience has to be developed (Chen and Shen 2015: 55). According to Rani (2018: 43), when determining the audience, the following questions should be addressed:

- Who is the key target?
- How can the key segments of that core target be described? The target audience's profile will include the market's social activities, the level of social media participation, and the vehicles they use?
- Whom will the conversation be directed to?
- How do they use social media?
- What is their interaction with other brands?

2.14.3 Choosing a platform

Choosing the right platform to use is very critical, as one should have great coverage and be effective in distributing the correct media appropriate for business (Pagoto, Waring, May, Ding, Kunz, Hayes and Oleski 2016: 24). Determining the audience and knowing the target market characteristics are very helpful in choosing the most appropriate platforms (Billings, Qiao, Conlin and Nie 2017: 2). In addition, Schulze, Schöler and Skiera (2015: 8) state that being aware of and familiar with the functions of social media platforms contributes highly to the formulation of an effective and efficient social media strategy. Ntobaki (2018: 31) adds that it is wiser to be extraordinary on a number of platforms than to have poor presentation on many different platforms. This stage marks the correct time to put in place the best social mix, as the strategic planner will be fully aware of who to reach (Ashley and Tuten 2015: 15). Dwivedi, Kapoor and Chen (2015: 289) state that social media mix refers to a combination of vehicles to be included in the strategy to accomplish the firm's objectives. The social media mix revolves around the four social media zones, such as social communities, social publishing, social entertainment, and social commerce (Hollensen, Kotler and Opresnik 2017: 1). These social media zones provide vehicle choices for the social media mix. Moreover, it is key to plan how the campaign will create earned media and use paid and owned media synergistically.

2.14.4 Creating content

According to Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski (2016), the content that is posted on social media possesses the power to turn a brand into a household name or create a number of fans for a brand. Narangajavana, Fiol, Tena, Artola and García (2017: 60) advise that identifying specific goals, generating valuable posts that are in line with those goals, and distributing content on the right platforms lead to an outstanding post.

Ahmad, Musa and Harun (2016: 331) opine that it is important to do a social media content audit for the brand, analysing the performance of all the posts made on different platforms. A content audit helps to substantiate what is working well with quantitative data that shows how each post is performing (Gürel and Tat 2017: 192).

Du Plessis (2017: 1) states that once the content performs best and the primary goals are identified, it is time to create a social media content calendar. A social media content calendar helps take a big-picture approach to social media content planning. The content calendar acts as the hub for every post. When creating a strategy plan for social media, identifying a creative message strategy is critical.

The creative message strategy should emanate from the firm's positioning statement. According to Sawhney, Grayson, Dupree, Hsu, Metzger, Obuchi, Sundaram and Wilson (2017: 1), a positioning statement refers to one return phrase that sells out the brand image that the brand wishes to hold in the target audience's mind. In addition, the message strategy should be appropriate to attain the objectives of the social media campaign.

2.14.5 Implementation

According to Rugova and Prenaj (2016: 1), time is the main challenge in implementing an effective social media marketing strategy. At this stage, the goals of the company and the available resources are highly considered (Zhang and Benyoucef 2016: 148). The strategic planner has to decide which social networking platforms are the best to invest in to make the most of the available resources and the limited time. At this point, the virtual tactics and marketing strategies are implemented (Effing and Spil 2016: 6). For instance, when social media profiles are created, consumer engagement and content development start. Finally, promotional campaigns with incentives to buy are implemented on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms.

2.14.6 Track and measure progress

Effing and Spil (2016: 1) suggest outlining the key performance indicators of the implemented strategy and that the key performance indicators and anticipations must correspond with tracking metrics for every social network to make measuring easier. Web analytics tools should be arranged properly to lock up all significant information, (French 2017: 67). Lovelock and Patterson (2015: 1) support the idea that Google Analytics, which delivers a comprehensive set of social media analytics, should be used to find which posts drive overall revenue, conversions, and traffic.

2.14.7 Adjust

Effing and Spil (2016: 2) advise that when a marketer understands which content is urging the highest engagement, adaptations and site visits, that information can be utilised to increase attainment. First-hand social media posts and content should correspond to the previously fruitful ones (Chatterjee, Narayanan and Malek 2016: 27). Narangajavana *et al.* (2017: 64) state that a marketer must evaluate marketing strategies, apply ratified recommendations, examine, and track continuously during the course of the arrangement.

Social media marketers should follow the process of determining, recognising and achieving the set objectives, utilising particular approaches to reach the objectives. Tracking and measuring progress is also crucial in determining the effectiveness of the implemented social media brand campaigns as tools to grow brand preference. Adjusting is also very recommendable, as it gives social media marketers' an idea of how to create fruitful content that can result in high engagement and increase attainment. Effing and Spil (2016: 3) define social media strategy as a goal-directed planning process for creating user-generated content, driven by a group of internet applications, to create a unique and valuable competitive position.

Despite the existence of several reviews on the social media phenomenon, no comprehensive evaluation of social media from the standpoint of strategic marketing has been made to date (Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi and Thrassou 2021: 617). This is partially due to the fact that the majority of social media literature draws ideas from a wide range of fields, including marketing, management, consumer psychology, and computer science (Li, Larimo and Leonidou 2021b: 51). Therefore, this study focuses on understanding how social media affects the millennial population, who are heavy users of social media, in order to enable social media marketers to create user-generated content specifically for millennials. Social media has influenced the tastes and preferences of millennials and shaped how they feel about different things in their lives (Jan, Soomro and Ahmad 2017: 44).

2.15 The influence of social media on Millennials.

This section discusses the influence of social media on millennials. The influence of social networking sites on millennials can be both negative and positive (Khurana 2015: 2). Moreover, social media networking sites have influenced the lives of millennials in different aspects, such as their academic lives, their shopping decisions, and the way they socialize (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch 2017: 119).

2.15.1 Social media Influence on millennials' studies

The millennials are overwhelmed by various social networking sites such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and MySpace (Chatzigeorgiou 2017: 25). There is a notion that millennials are being distracted by the popularity of social media networks in their studies and workplaces. However, Khurana (2015: 3) argues that social media networks are helping the millennial generation develop friendly social ties with reality in the world. Moreover, Khurana states that students now utilise social media networks for academic purposes (Lau 2017: 286). Most importantly, millennials require discipline to focus on their studies and not get distracted by social media activities.

Siddiqui and Singh (2016: 71) state that social media has been referred to as various relatively affordable and widely used electronic tools that facilitate access to and publication of information. Khurana (2015: 2) states that millennials spend over two hours on social media, and social media has hampered more than half of youth social gatherings. Most millennials believe that the virtual world is growing (Meier, Smith and Porter 2017: 48). Social media allows millennials to connect and get exposure.

However, it is very difficult now to know who a stranger is or not due to social media. A lot of unlawful activities are being made easy by social media (Fagan 2017: 393). In South Africa, there are cases where young children and youths are being abducted or abused through social media communication (Rani 2018: 43). Social media has become the best routine for every millennial, and it is addictive (Sago 2010: 1).

According to Wankel (2009: 251), most students use social media. Small communication devices, such as cell phones, laptops and iPads, have promoted the

use of social media for educational purposes. Mason, Narcum and Mason (2021a: 1) support the idea that students should be encouraged to use social media for educational classes. It is commented that social media has promoted quality collaboration for learners (Woods, Taylor and Dumas 2019: 4). In addition, students use the WhatsApp social media platform to share information very quickly and with greater coverage as compared to the traditional way of teaching and learning.

Social media enhances students' knowledge as they get opportunities to write blogs for teachers (Ross and Myers 2017: 338). Moreover, a study conducted in Nigeria shows that students need to be well disciplined to make good decisions on where and when to use social media platforms (Amannah and Adeyeye 2018: 108). The negative influence of social media on millennials has been noticed. For example, millennials lose the chance for face-to-face engagement as they are always online and learning online. This can limit the chances of expressing certain topics fully through facial expressions and body language (Hossain, Shan, Musa and Rahman 2020: 194). In addition, multiple bloggers post wrong information online, and students would not be able to know what is correct or wrong.

Furthermore, using social media for education can break the privacy of students due to posting some personal information online (Powell, Wimmer and Rebman 2019: 1). Social media can also distract students from being attentive in class during lectures. More importantly, social media marketing is emerging as a carrier option with high demand and potential (Tuten and Solomon 2017: 10). Therefore, using social media in education prepares millennials to become familiar with how one can be productive using social media.

The aim of this study is to assess how social media can be used as a tool to grow brand preference. Therefore, if millennials use social media in their studies, it will create social media expertise in them in terms of how one can use social media for their everyday shopping. Moreover, social media has shaped how millennials perceive different brands (Fox, Bacile, Nakhata and Weible 2018: 1). For instance, social media has affected the self-esteem of millennials and shaped their self-concept. They also

associate their self-concept with different trending brands. Social media influence on millennials self-esteem, body image, and self-concept are discussed next.

2.15.2 Social media influence on millennials' self-esteem, body image and self-concept

According to Jan, Soomro and Ahmad (2017: 329), social media has affected the self-esteem of millennials. Generally, our self-concept is partly shaped by how people perceive us. Young women have been recorded as the highest users of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Ormerod (2018: 1) added that Instagram and Facebook have been ingrained in millennial lives. Fox *et al.* (2018: 1) state that it is of much significance to assess the effect of social media on self-concept, body image, self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction. Fardouly and Vartanian (2016: 2) support the view that millennials utilise image-based social media platforms to post their best images, admire other people's images, set certain standards of living, and follow new trends in fashion brands.

Reategui and Palmer (2017: 367) support the idea that social media brings insecurities and dissatisfaction to millennials. The insecurity is due to the obsession of millennials with the likes they get when they post an image (Cheng and Mallinckrodt 2009: 365). Moreover, the stress of trying to match social media life with real life has taken the comfort of millennials by storm. Millennials spend more time extensively deciding on the best image to upload, applying filters, and continuously checking for several likes and comments (Lupinetti 2015: 1).

On the other hand, a conclusion on the influence of social media on self-concept, body image, self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction should be made considering that some scholars have found no relationship between viewing posted images and body dissatisfaction (Hendrickse, Arpan, Clayton and Ridgway 2017: 92). Moreover, certain academics propose that merely observing fitness inspiration on social media has the potential to impact millennials' unhealthy eating habits and exercise behaviour. (Holland and Tiggemann 2017: 76). The popularity of social media among

millennials makes it a significant influential force. The following section discusses the influence of social media on society.

Millennials' self-concept, body image, and self-esteem determine the brands that are more acceptable to them in society. Social media marketers should consider all these important aspects for them to be able to create brands that fit well with their self-concept. For instance, clothing brands should be very sensitive to changes in self-concept and self-esteem for them to remain relevant. The following section discusses the influence of social media on society. Having knowledge of how society is being influenced by social media and how society is responding determines the effectiveness of social media on people's tastes and preferences.

2.15.3 Influence of social media on society

Social media has so many benefits and a great influence on society. According to Gerbaudo (2018: 745), social media platforms provide an opportunity to catch up and reconnect with old friends. Social media allows people to make new friends and share great ideas, pictures, and audiovisuals beyond geographical boundaries (Akram and Kumar 2017: 351). For instance, family members are now able to video call and send each other pictures very cheaply through social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and Facebook, to name a few. Live videos on Instagram and Facebook are trending now amongst millennials (Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar 2016: 624). Bloggers and writers are meeting and connecting with clients on social media.

In addition, people are uniting on social media to achieve great, specific goals; hence, this creates a positive change in society (Meikle 2016: 1). Society utilises social media for COVID-19 and gender-based violence awareness campaigns to provide people with updated information. For instance, in South Africa, the WhatsApp number for COVID-19 updates and information has helped researchers and society at large access current and updated information on COVID-19.

On the other hand, it is healthy to mention that social media is not risk-free for society. Most people get addicted to social media, which makes them anti-social in the real

world and causes them to lose focus on important priorities in life (Jha and Singh 2020: 1). Furthermore, there is no screening machine for content on social media since people are free to post anything. Therefore, some people share content that includes violence and negative effects on children (French, Fajardo and Lepre 2015: 67). This affects the way millennials behave. In addition, social media allows invasions of privacy. People can post content that concerns certain individuals without the person's consent (Siddiqui and Singh 2016: 71). Contrary to popular belief, social media weakens family relationships and bonding time since everyone gets busy and glued to social media. Social media users need to exercise caution in deciding what to post and maintain discipline to remain productive.

This study examines millennials perceptions on social media, starting with how they socialize on social media and how society is affected by social media. Social media channels allow relationships and common activities to take place online. Social media channels allow people with the same interests to socialize and participate in common activities (Bayor, Bircanin, Sitbon, Ploderer, Koplick and Brereton 2018: 113). These social media channels include social media networks (Facebook) and forums. Social networking sites refer to online hosts that allow members create and maintain profiles, identities, and connections with other members (Kümpel 2020: 1083). Socialization on social media will allow social media marketers to be able to segment social consumers effectively and customize the content they post online. Currently, social media is also influencing the way business transactions are conducted in the marketing and retail industries. The influence of social media on business is discussed in the next section.

2.15.4 Influence of social media on businesses

According to Siddiqui and Singh (2016: 73), social media marketing is the new marketing tool that creates viral news, makes fans and produces good connections and followers for different brands. In addition, social media is being utilised to enhance business objectives such as growth and increased market share (Lau 2017: 286). Moreover, social media creates a two-way form of communication between customers and businesses. Social media provides a voice for new brands and businesses. Social media marks a great turn in the business and social sectors (Zhang and Benyoucef 2016: 108).

Social media allows businesses to intensify and strengthen African and global business networks (Duggan *et al.* 2015: 19). This places South Africa in the international arena to drive the knowledge economy. According to Meikle (2016: 1), entrepreneurs are also benefiting from social media to set out business promotions and change lives. Social media is being used in various business functions, as follows:

2.15.4.1 Marketing

Marketing marks the most crucial use of social media in business. Nowadays, every brand seeks a certain target audience online. Ahmad, Musa and Harun (2016: 333) state that many researchers have studied the use of social media in marketing, specifically improving customer relationships. Furthermore, researchers' acknowledge that social media tools in business influence customer relationships. Ashley and Tuten (2015: 18) argue that social media benefits aspects of prospecting, leads, and maintaining great relationships with customers. Social media allows businesses to gain a better understanding of their customers' likes and dislikes on posts.

When businesses are aware of what customers like, it will increase their sales and foster good customer relationships (Dwivedi, Kapoor and Chen 2015: 290). Social media plays a big role in prospecting, as it provides useful facilities. Data mining on social media enhances market insight and provides room to stretch beyond competitors through online networking (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch 2017: 119). Moreover, social media acts as a tool to increase brand awareness within an affordable or zero budget.

2.15.4.2 Human Resources Function

Social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook are playing a big role in human resources. Social media helps in identifying and engaging talent directly. For instance, LinkedIn is a social media platform for skilled people to connect, build a profile, update their working status, and find job openings. LinkedIn is being used worldwide as it connects businesses and the labour market. According to Singla and Durga (2015: 90) and Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright (2017: 22), many businesses are using social media for recruitment and screening processes. Social media has become an

integral part of the human resources function, impacting recruitment, employee engagement, communication, and many other aspects of human resources management (Saputra 2022: 47). However, human resources professionals must navigate the complexities and ethical considerations associated with social media use in the workplace to maximise its benefits while mitigating potential risks.

Human resources experts may examine candidates' social media profiles to acquire insight into their personalities and conduct. However, this technique must be carried out in an ethical and legal manner. Many businesses have used internal social networks or collaborative platforms to improve communication, information sharing, and employee engagement. Human resources can advertise vacancies and target certain candidate demographics on social media platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook.

2.15.4.3 Creativity

Social media enhances creativity in the business world. Social media enables the sharing of art, ideas and knowledge that can be utilised to achieve business objectives beyond borders (Rugova and Prenaj 2016). It allows one to share art and copy ideas that can be used to achieve business objectives. Social media provides businesses with a dynamic platform for expressing creativity and connecting with their audience. Adeola, Hinson and Evans (2020: 65) opine that social media is a space where innovation, engagement, and storytelling can lead to significant business growth and success. Creative approaches to social media are increasingly vital in today's competitive business landscape. Pepler and Dahn (2022: 219) support the idea that social media platforms are a treasure trove of ideas and inspiration. Businesses can follow trends, explore competitor strategies, and engage with a global community to spark new creative ideas (Adeola, Hinson and Evans 2020: 61). In addition, social media encourages businesses to produce creative content to capture and retain the attention of their audience. It is imperative to note that, whether it is visually appealing images, engaging videos, or thought-provoking blog posts, businesses must constantly innovate to stand out. Platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest and TikTok heavily rely on visual storytelling (Zhang, Nguyen, Jung and Ren 2023). Businesses can use these platforms to craft compelling narratives through images, videos, and graphics. This

visual content can effectively convey the brand's message and values, capturing the audience's attention and generating brand preference.

Social media offers a wide range of content formats, from written posts and images to live videos and stories. This variety allows businesses to experiment with different creative approaches and engage with diverse audience preferences. Social media allows partnering with influencers who align with the brand's values and target audience, which brings a fresh perspective and creativity to the marketing campaigns (Craig and Cunningham 2019: 1). Influencers often have unique and creative ways of promoting products or services. Moreover, social media enables businesses to provide real-time updates, share news, and address current events creatively. This agility in communication can help build brand preference by showcasing the brand's relevance and responsiveness. Businesses can create and promote creative campaigns and challenges that encourage user participation. These campaigns can go viral and generate brand loyalty and preference among participants. Social media analytics provide valuable insights into audience behaviour and preferences. Businesses can use these insights to refine their creative strategies, ensuring that content resonates with the target audience.

2.15.4.4 Operations and business Development

LinkedIn is also being used to connect businesses with experts who can contribute to their business strategic plans (Kohli, Suri and Kapoor 2015: 37). This helps the operations function of a business. Moreover, there are professional networking sites. On the other hand, it is paramount to note that social media brings certain risks to businesses. The main risk comes from the fact that social media followers have the freedom to post opinions and negative comments on a certain brand or company, which can lead to failure (Sajid 2016: 1). In addition, social media posts go viral, and any wrong online brand strategy can be costly for a big company. To add to that, social media viral posts can affect people negatively when it comes to the human resource recruitment process (Kohli, Suri and Kapoor 2015: 38). Nowadays, it is worth mentioning that a company might not hire a certain applicant due to viral negative social media content concerning the applicant.

Furthermore, creativity ideas on social media lack security; thereby anyone to duplicate posted ideas. Creativity is very important on social media to keep followers captivated all the time a post is made (Schulze, Schöler and Skiera 2015: 8). A company must assign a social media person to manage the company's pages with significant content. This study adopts social media in business because it aims to discuss social media as a tool to grow brand preference. Social media marketers must be knowledgeable about how social media can be used effectively in business functions to put their company's brand on the global market.

2.16 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on social media theories, social media channels, vehicles, strategic planning, the value chain, and the effects of social media. To sum up, the level of adoption and usage behaviour are subject to constant change. Social media marketing has significantly strengthened, and it is vital for marketers and brand managers to determine the best strategies for using social media in order to attain its full potential. The literature on consumer behaviour towards social media branding will also be reviewed. Relationship management, which has a beneficial impact on performance and competitive advantage. It is also important to note that when developing social media marketing campaigns, social messaging strategies such as brand names, functional and emotional appeals, vividness and interactivity, inspirational information and topical themes, and content-user fit are crucial. Infrastructures, systems, and technologies that actively search, access, and integrate data from many sources, as well as ease the sharing and coordination of actions with clients, improve social media marketing. Although the usage of social media is becoming more significant as a business strategy, few studies has been done to systematically consolidate and increase knowledge on social media marketing techniques. This chapter has explained social media and how social media marketing can work as a tool to grow brand preference. However, branding and how it can be promoted through social media are key areas that needs to be discussed. Therefore, Chapter 3 will discuss branding and how it can be linked with social media to promote brand preference.

CHAPTER 3: INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRAND PREFERENCE

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on social media theories, social media channels, vehicles, strategic planning, the value chain, and the influence of social media. Chapter 3 discusses branding and how it can be linked with social media to promote brand preference. This chapter reviews the related literature on the concepts and developments with respect to brand knowledge, brand image, brand awareness, brand associations and the favourability of brand associations, brand credibility, and the steps of building a brand on social media. In addition, this chapter will provide an understanding of how branding started and how social media can promote brand awareness, brand building, brand innovations, brand associations, and brand equity to create brand preference.

3.2 The meaning of branding

Baldacchino and Khamis (2018: 368) state that the word brand originates from the Old Norse “Brandr”, which means to burn. It is mentioned that in the early days, branding was mainly associated with property ownership. Branding is considered one of man’s artefacts to differentiate the creation of one’s work from that of competitors (Schivinski, Langaro, Fernandes and Guzmán 2020: 645). According to Dwivedi (2015: 100), a brand refers to a sign system that formulates the identity of particular market offerings and differentiates them from the competitors’ products. Kent and Pauzé (2018: 102) state that a brand refers to a combination of descriptive verbal attributes and symbols, which include a name, logo, positioning statement, and service. Haudi *et al.* (2022: 961) opine that a brand is more than a name, logo, or positioning statement, but the true meaning of a brand exists deep down, which is what the consumers feel, say, and think about a brand. Moreau (2020: 155) states that a brand is a valuable long-term asset. Brand value is attached to what consumers feel, think, and say about the brand. Therefore, it is empirical to summarise that branding refers to man’s artefacts such as a name, logo, and positioning statement that differentiate the creation of one’s products from those of competitors and add value to consumers.

It is significant to note that the marketing and retail industries are changing due to the evolving technological environment. The emergence of the fourth industrial revolution is causing the global retail landscape to continue to evolve, and branding has developed from convenience goods to services, non-profit firms, and cities (Gómez, Lopez and Molina 2019: 196). Currently, a brand is a valuable long-term asset with its value attached to what consumers, feel, think and say about the brand. Consumers use social media platforms as their venting space and provide feedback on different brands around the world; therefore, it is important for this study to discuss the advantages of branding on social media in assessing its potential as a tool to grow brand preference.

3.3 Social media branding

According to Mwabu and Munyoki (2022: 2), without brands, a company is nameless, and without a name, a company has no equity, and without equity, customer loyalty is impossible to build. Social media has transformed branding by providing new opportunities for engagement, storytelling and customer involvement (Pachucki, Grohs and Scholl-Grissemann 2022: 1). Brands that properly use social media may develop better, more real relationships with their audiences and remain competitive in the digital era. Michael and Fusté-Forné (2022: 827) support the view that social media has had a significant influence on branding, transforming how businesses and individuals create, manage, and market their brands. To define social media branding, Tseng, Shanmugam, Magalingam, Shahbazi and Featherman (2022: 4626) state that social media branding is the act of developing and maintaining a consistent and appealing online presence for your brand or business across numerous social media platforms. Mohd Johan, Syed, Azalanshah and Mohd Adnan (2022: 151) argue that social media branding entails creating a strong and identifiable identity that embodies the brand's beliefs, mission, and personality. Effective social media branding may help businesses establish a loyal following, raise brand awareness, and boost audience engagement. The following section discusses the advantages of branding on social media.

3.4 Advantages of branding on social media

Social media branding offers several advantages for businesses and individuals looking to establish and promote brand identity in the digital age. The following are some of the key advantages of social media branding:

- The greatest benefit is that the brand's social media presence requires little to no money and few resources. As a result, social media has increased the opportunities, particularly for small brands, to grow (Akbar and Özgül 2018: 217).
- Social media allows brands to have direct interactions with people through social networking sites. Personal interactions have the potential to increase and reinforce consumer loyalty to businesses that actively engage in social media discussions (Qin 2020: 337).
- In social media, word-of-mouth is now as common as it is offline, but it differs from offline word-of-mouth as the influence of consumers' opinions is exponentially greater online (Barreto 2014: 631). On the other hand, this implies that unfavourable word-of-mouth on brands will also spread further through social media.
- Social media platforms offer robust targeting options, allowing brands to reach specific demographics, interests, and behaviour which leads to higher conversion rates (Wilson, Ramey, Donaldson, Germain and Perkin 2016: 127).
- One of the social media sites that has greatly enhanced targeting capabilities for advertising is Facebook, and it is essential to the business strategy. On Facebook, the marketer may quickly and precisely target the ads based on demographics such as age, gender, geography, and hobbies (Andreou, Venkatadri, Goga, Gummadi, Loiseau and Mislove 2018: 2).
- Both social media's ability to be measured and the data it produces are very beneficial.

According to Correia, Wood, Bollen and Rocha (2020: 433), information gleaned from social media can be used to improve strategy or gather insightful

information on topics like brand perception. For instance, when utilising information from social media, it is feasible to monitor and assess the brand in real time in many ways.

Due to the significant mass media efforts, it may be claimed that traditional mass media is more effective than social media at raising brand recognition and creating brand knowledge (Deineka 2023: 1). However, the disadvantage of boosting brand recognition through traditional mass media advertising is the lack of precise targeting options and measurability (Taherdoost 2023: 205). A certain, unspecified percentage of the customers that can be reached by the advertisements might not be among the intended population. It is vital to note that brand awareness campaigns are only effective to the extent that the intended audience is reached in each component (Iqbal 2023: 1). Therefore, social media provides the opportunity to reach the target audience effectively and efficiently. It is vital to discuss how social media influences brands for this study to assess its importance in branding. The following section discusses how social media is influencing brands.

3.5 Social media influences on brands.

Understanding how social media is influencing brands is very important for this study because of the increasing pressure to differentiate brands from rivals. Factors such as competitiveness, economic difficulties, and changing consumer tastes and preferences are highly influenced by social media (Hsiao, Wang, Wang and Kao 2020: 40). Businesses are creating expensive and complex branding initiatives to engage their consumers in order to fight competition. But even as they do so, businesses encounter a variety of difficulties, such as resistance to change and issues with creating a convincing brand that captures the diversity of a complex institution (Ardiansyah and Sarwoko 2020: 156). The next section discusses the influences of social media on brand information search, brand ambassadors' creation, and consumer behaviour.

3.5.1 Social media influences on brand information search.

According to Guan, Lau, Yang and Ren (2022: 90), consumers use social media extensively to learn about brands, investigate and exchange information on various

businesses and products. Currently, social networking sites are the primary source of information for consumers who conduct product research across several internet sources (Ibrahim and Aljarah 2021: 3). Active social media users read the online product reviews, and these users also write their own reviews of goods and services (Hudson, Huang, Roth and Madden 2016: 27). In general, social media users favour user-generated reviews and product ratings as their preferred sources of product information.

According to Stojanovic, Andreu and Curras-Perez (2022: 651), currently the main source of information for tourism is social media. Dedeoğlu, Taheri, Okumus and Gannon (2020: 103954) support the idea that nowadays, planning a trip without checking social media platforms is practically impossible. The importance of social media for developing destination brands is acknowledged by tourism academics, who also demand more research (Dedeoğlu, Van Niekerk, Küçükergin, De Martino and Okumuş 2020: 33). According to Alvarado-Karste and Guzmán (2020a: 1), customers' views of brand image, which has two dimensions: cognitive and affective, are influenced by the information they are given. According to Bilgin (2018: 128), a brand's social media content has an impact on how that brand is perceived. Studies on social media marketing and social media advertising have verified this finding in the field of tourism (Seo and Park, 2018).

3.5.2 Social media as an avenue for brand ambassadors.

The other intriguing trend is the desire of consumers to serve as brand ambassadors and supporters on social media. Many social media users are active followers of different brands (Argyris, Wang, Kim and Yin 2020: 106). The majority of customers who post product evaluations online claim they do it to acknowledge a job well done by the business. On the other hand, firms are increasingly enlisting the help of their fans and followers to spread the word about their goods and services. The majority of millennials who use social media acknowledge that they want to make suggestions for product improvements, and another two-thirds want to have their items customized (Weismueller, Harrigan, Wang and Soutar 2020: 160). This indicates that social media users are also interested in working with their favourite brands.

According to Hassan and Ariño (2016: 1), customers are increasingly expressing their brand devotion on social media, and many of them are looking to get paid by businesses to help them market their goods. Some of the people who post their brand experiences on social media do so in order to get discounts. It is important to note that social media users are more likely to believe the advice of their friends and family while investigating products (Kawaf and Istanbuluoglu 2019: 144). The majority of social media users claim to submit product reviews to shield other customers from terrible experiences, and nearly one in four claims to share their bad experiences to punish firms, which is another important role social media plays in protecting brands. Additionally, many consumers interact with firms on social media in order to receive customer support (Lim and Rasul 2022: 325).

However, some industries have been slow to respond to social media's explosive growth as a platform for brands to promote their brand identity and message. For instance, Edumadze and Demuyakor (2022: 16) state that higher education has been slow to respond to social media's explosive growth as a platform for brands to promote brand identity and message while other industries, such as the tourism industry, prosper.

3.5.3 Social media influence on consumer behaviour.

Social media is highly evolving the business environment without a concrete sense of direction it might take (Schivinski *et al.* 2020: 645). This is creating a lot of uncertainty about the essence of branding. Díaz-Meneses (2019: 166) opines that social media has caused paradigm shifts in how consumers engage with brands. Currently, social media represents the most significant network of consumer knowledge. Kohli, Suri and Kapoor (2015: 155) argue that social media can drastically alter consumer behaviour and brand preferences. Moreover, social media affects the way brands are managed. Social media has empowered consumers to engage with different brands online and create their own content. Therefore, brand managers are now more brand hosts as compared to brand managers.

Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014: 1) opine that so much attention has been given to how consumers engage with different brands on social media due to its influence on consumer behaviour. However, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014: 2) argue that

scholars and brand managers have a narrow understanding of the influence the social media community has on consumers' perceptions of brands. According to Pansari and Kumar (2018: 3), it is very critical to understand the drivers of online consumer engagement. Therefore, the marketers should be knowledgeable about the targeted market and its motivations to be able to inspire and elicit the targeted market (Leventhal, Wallace, Buil and de Chernatony 2014). In addition, Dwivedi (2015: 100) emphasises that consumers are no longer passive recipients of marketing cues but increasingly proactive participants in interactive value creation.

Lavoie (2015: 1) concludes that the goal of branding is to emotionally connect the company and its consumers. In addition, the new technology has influenced the way businesses communicate with customers and how branding is done. Social media has taken over branding through Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Therefore, research on creating and sustaining strong brands that are accessible to communicators is significant. Leitão (2023: 1) proposes the customer-based brand equity model pyramid to address how brands can be created and sustained through user knowledge structures.

It is also important to note that when developing social media marketing campaigns, social messaging strategies such as brand names, functional and emotional appeals, vividness and interactivity, inspirational information and topical themes, and content-user fit are crucial (Ksiazek and Springer 2020: 14). Li, Larimo and Leonidou (2021b: 51) opine that infrastructures, systems, and technologies that actively search, access, and integrate data from many sources, as well as ease the sharing and coordination of actions with clients, improve social media marketing. Although the usage of social media is becoming more significant as a strategy for businesses, few studies have been done to systematically consolidate and increase knowledge on social media marketing techniques to promote brand preference. There have been significant changes in the market as a result of social media (Mason, Narcum and Mason 2021b: 187). It is imperative to note that social media makes it feasible for businesses and customers to connect in ways that weren't before conceivable. Social media has changed how businesses and customers communicate and affect one another.

It can be noted that social media has established itself as a platform that both

consumers and brands may utilise to influence or be influenced. In the end, this determines the personality and future modes of engagement for the brand. It can be concluded, from the available literature, that social media is influencing brands in different ways. Customer perceptions and preferences are continuously changing due to new technologies. Therefore, it is important to review the literature on how marketers can build brands on social media. The next section explains the concept of social media brand building. It is important to discuss social media brand building because the way a brand is built on social media influences customer perceptions and preferences.

3.6 Brand building on social media

According to Kohli, Suri and Kapoor (2015: 1), in 2012, the Coca-Cola brand retained the highest brand value. Interestingly, most of the 2012 top brands that appeared in Business Week were created more than three decades ago. Therefore, it can be said that it takes a lot of hard work to build a sustainable brand. In this automated retail environment, social media is overriding traditional branding that involves high upfront investments (Christodoulides, Michaelidou and Li 2009: 395). Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2014: 152) state that social media has influenced marketing practices, including branding. Moreover, this brought an ever-rising need to update the knowledge on social media on how it works. Anderson (2010: 18) states that the main challenge marketers have now is determining how social media activities are impacting significant brand variables. Social media has transformed traditional communication among brands and customers and allowed customers to influence brand equity both positively and negatively (Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaitė 2013: 142). It is significant for businesses to know how to manage communication on social media in order to build brand equity.

Moreau (2020: 155) opines that the first impression of a brand through delivery packaging adds to a positive brand experience. In addition, delivery packages present a great opportunity for brand strengthening, thereby reducing sales returns. Zhou, Guo and Zhou (2018: 198) state that there is a notable change in product sales returns due to a well-branded package. Moreover, marketing academics are looking out for new retail trends, as evidenced in the current publications on the retail environment.

Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013: 21) conclude that brand experience plays a big role in building a brand. Iglesias, Markovic and Rialp (2019: 32) state that the brand experience is made up of three dimensions, such as cognitive, behavioural, and sensory or affective. It is important to discuss these three dimensions of brand experience as they affect how customers prefer a certain brand over another. For marketers to be able to build brand preference, there is a need to understand the dimensions of brand experience. The three dimensions of brand experience are discussed below:

3.6.1 Sensory and affective

Affective and sensory refer to how a brand can generate emotions by appealing to the senses (Iglesias, Markovic and Rialp 2019: 33). This is how the consumer perceives the store design, product design and packaging design (Khan, Hollebeek, Fatma, Islam and Riivits-Arkonsuo 2020: 102219). The affective and sensory aspects allow consumers to see, hear, touch, smell and taste a brand (Han, Jongsik and Hyun 2020: 86). According to Yu, Yuan, Kim and Wang (2020: 1), sensory marketing refers to that aspect of marketing that engages the consumer's perception, judgement, and way of doing things. According to Keller (1993: 2), customers' views of brand image, which has two dimensions: cognitive and affective, are influenced by the information they are given. According to Iglesias, Markovic and Rialp (2019: 343), a brand's social media content has an influence on how that brand is perceived. For instance, a picture shared on social media can inform tourists on what to expect when they arrive at their destination (cognitive) and arouse their enthusiasm or amazement (affective) (Xu, Qiu, Gu and Ge 2020: 8). It is important to note that the majority of marketing academics acknowledge that the online brand experience embraces both cognitive and affective states, despite the fact that only a few consider them important (van der Westhuizen 2018: 1).

3.6.2 Behavioural

The behavioural dimension marks the most critical way of delivering the brand experience. According to Ahn and Back (2019: 1), behavioural dimension refers to the way brands encourage physical engagement. Iglesias, Markovic and Rialp (2019: 32) state that recycling the packaging is a connotative and sustainable way of creating a

positive brand experience. The behavioural dimension is crucial to consider in brand social media marketing because customers are not passive recipients of sensory information; they co-create information based on brand experience. This form of brand building often takes place within brick-and-mortar stores (Ong, Lee and Ramayah 2018: 755). On the other hand, online retailers are encountering a challenge in branding when it comes to encouraging behavioural engagement.

3.6.3 Cognitive

Cognitive marketing is one of the most critical ways of creating brand experiences online, as it involves appealing to customers (Ding and Tseng 2015: 994). Brand information such as brand heritage, brand positioning statements, and reinforcing brand promises is communicated through packaging. This is done as a way of creating a positive brand experience (Moreau 2020: 155). Moreover, cognitive refers to how a brand can stimulate the customer intellectually. This takes into consideration the product's effect on society. Packaging acts as a billboard for the brand and product information to communicate the brand and product attributes (Wilkins, Beckenuyte and Butt 2016: 213).

It can be noted that marketers should take into consideration the three dimensions of brand experience, such as cognitive, behavioural and sensory, and affective, when creating strategies to build a positive brand experience. The affective and sensory aspects allow consumers to see, hear, touch, smell and taste a brand. This has been a challenge when advertising products on social media because customers are not able to experience other affective and sensory effects such as the smell, touch and taste of a brand. More understanding is needed on how to innovate brands on social media to create a full affective and sensory experience for the brand. In addition, the behavioural dimension refers to the way brands encourage physical engagement.

Encouraging physical engagement has been a challenge for social media brand-building strategies. However, some brands are still accessible in brick-and-mortar retail, so customers can still visit the shop and have physical engagement before buying on social media. Moreover, marketers have to consider cognitive effects when creating strategies to build brands. Stimulating the customer intellectually is

crucial for a brand to be preferred. The three dimensions of brand experience aid in the growth of brands; therefore, it is important for them to be integrated into the social media branding strategy.

To add to these, the steps of social media brand building are important to discuss. Having social media accounts and occasionally posting on them marks only the beginning of social media branding. Building a brand on social media is the process of creating a brand's identity and interacting with your audience in a way that is consistent with the overall perception of the brand. It is critical to comprehend how the social media branding process will take place. It might be the initial impression for many new potential buyers as well as a way for your supporters to follow your brand. Therefore, this study adopts the following steps for social media brand building:

3.7 Steps of Social media brand building

This section discusses the steps of social media brand building. In the age of social media, developing a brand is a long-term process. It is believed that it takes years to establish a solid brand reputation, but it can be destroyed in an instant (Enke and Borchers 2021: 1). Recent research from a variety of fields shows that social media is becoming increasingly important to the brand-building processes of businesses operating in both the consumer and business markets. For instance, it is important to note, in light of this research, the study by Bacik, Fedorko, Nastisin and Gavurova (2018: 1108), which investigated the relationship between fan page signals and interaction on a brand's social media platform website in the context of the travel industry. Research findings indicate that social interactive values, visual appeal, and identity attractiveness strongly contribute to site engagement. A study done by Kohli, Suri and Kapoor (2015: 35), who had previously investigated the foundations of branding in connection to social media contends that, if the fundamentals of social media marketing are misunderstood, social media has a significant influence on brand management methods, both favourably and unfavourably. Christou (2015: 607) also presents an intriguing study that points out that brand loyalty is favourably influenced by consumer trust in a social media brand. The purpose of brand building is to give consumers a satisfying experience.

Brand building is an ongoing process that affects consumer satisfaction (Kim and Chao 2019: 1). Additionally, Keller (2009: 1) asserts that the brand and what it stands for are the business's most significant advantages and serve as the foundation for both profit and a competitive edge. As a result, it is critical to take a responsible approach to all the factors involved in creating a social media brand. Building a brand can be strongly impacted by the actual interaction a user has with it on social media (Steenkamp 2020: 13). Lardi and Fuchs (2013a: 1) suggest the following steps for building a brand on social media.

3.7.1 Identifying the target market

This stage marks the beginning of social media marketing. It is important to define the target market and tailor the marketing pitch accordingly. A target audience for social media is a group of people to whom a marketer wants to appeal (Tien, Vu and Tien 2019: 57). This may be determined by factors related to demographics like age, occupation, income level, education, location, or behaviour. The most likely candidates for the product's or brand's target audience on social media are included. Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011: 241) opine that knowing your target market is a more affordable, efficient, and effective way to reach potential customers and create business.

Establishing a social media target group can help to create brand guidelines and is comparable to creating the company's buyer personas (Kim and Kim 2021: 223). This is crucial so that the marketer can communicate with the audience in their own language, increasing the likelihood that the audience will engage with social media posts on social media, creating brand loyalty, and eventually buying the posted brand. After deciding on the target audience, it is important to decide on which social media platform to focus on for the brand (Steenkamp 2020: 13). Finding the audience's preferred online destinations is simple once one has a clear understanding of who they are. As a social media marketer, prioritising the social media platforms one wants to concentrate on will help in identifying where the target audience is (Moreau 2020: 155). Therefore, the next step explains the process of selecting and updating the most appropriate social media accounts for the brand.

3.7.2 Selecting and updating the social media accounts

After deciding on the target audience, the brand marketer needs to decide on which social media accounts to focus on for the brand message to reach the target audience (Zailskaite-Jakste and Kuvykaitė 2013: 142). Recognising where the audience is helps one prioritise which social media platforms are the most appropriate to focus on to deliver the brand message. For instance, if a post works well on one platform but not on another, one can adapt. Or if the target audience is not interested but another group is, one can change the target audience. All the information should be updated and accurate to build traffic effectively and efficiently to the relevant networks (Verduyn, Gugushvili, Massar, Täht and Kross 2020: 32). This will also help to clear up any confusion concerning outdated information that does not contribute positively to the brand image. According to Büyüközkan and Ilıcak (2019: 451), the key to building a brand through social media marketing is to apply the right media at the right time to the target audience.

After selecting and updating the social media platforms, it is very important to identify the areas of capability around social media posting. Marchand, Hennig-Thurau and Flemming (2021: 549) state that social media resources and capabilities influence social media performance and brand perception. Social media performance is considered in determining whether social media can be a tool to grow brand preference or not. Therefore, it is important to discuss the next step of recognising the area of capabilities before starting to post on the selected social media platforms. When one realises the area of capability, it will assist in creating effective and relevant content online.

3.7.3 Recognising the area of capability

The brand marketer should be able to recognise their own area of expertise. The area of specialty could be content marketing or a certain topic (Kohli, Suri and Kapoor 2015: 155). This is the stage where the brand marketer needs to experiment more to get a feel for what the brand marketer is best at. The brand marketer should gain an understanding of what type of content the followers have responded to the most and if this can be done with similar products (Lardi and Fuchs 2013b: 1). The more different, creative, unique, and engaging the posted

and selected content is, the more the audience will start to consider the content creator an influential leader in the chosen field (Feiz and Moradi 2019: 1).

Recognising the area of capability alone is not enough to create a larger following for the posted content; posting should be user-friendly for the content creator and the target audience to engage constructively. The next step discusses how to make posting user-friendly on social media platforms.

3.7.4 User friendly posting on social media Apps

At this stage, it is vital to recognise that content creation and maintaining an online presence can be time-consuming without easier social media apps (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch 2017: 118). For instance, software applications such as Buffer and Sprout can allow a marketer to post across different social networks and schedule posts. This eliminates the need to log into different social media platforms when one needs to post the same content (Chen and Tan 2019: 97). On the other hand, the posted content should engage customers, and it has to be easy for customers to engage with and share with others. When the customers find the posts user-friendly, interesting, and relevant, they may share them on their social media platforms, and they may search for more information about the brand.

Despite just posting content on social media, it is important to be consistent in sharing creative content. This is because at this stage of social media marketing brand building, the more posts one makes, the more interaction one can generate. The next step discusses how a content creator can be consistent in sharing content.

3.7.5 Being consistent in sharing content

Social media marketing requires the brand marketer to consistently create interesting content. It is vital to note that at the beginning of social media marketing, the more brand marketing posts, the more interactions with the audience about the brand (Khalid, Jayasainan and Hassim 2018: 1). Nevertheless, too much posting results in exhaustion and irritation for the audience. The brand marketer should avoid looking desperate by oversharing while observing open lines of communication with the audience (Gillespie 2018: 1). Therefore, it is acceptable not to post on other days. In

addition, it is important to keep track of the data on the posts and identify the pattern that works best. It is also important to look at the hashtag on Twitter and sign up for Google Alerts to get some insights on creating content (Lee and Ma 2012: 331). Creating and reposting engaging content is always necessary to foster loyalty. Therefore, it is important to discuss how one can create and repost engaging content.

3.7.6 Creating and reposting engaging content

According to Kietzmann *et al.* (2011: 241), it is very wise to create and share original content with the audience to build one's own brand and show one's expertise. However, Gillespie (2018: 1) argues that reposting shared content is a smart strategy, though it is not the only action required to build your own brand. One needs to post content that possesses knowledge of the current trends in the industry. The creation of fresh content allows one to take a fresh approach to the updates shared with the audience. According to Giakoumaki and Kreppapa (2020: 457), effective brand engagement with customers is very important for a successful social media marketing campaign. The brand must ensure that it provides a memorable experience for the customer through its advertising messages on social media (DiResta, Williford, Cohen and Genn 2020: 4444).

When the posted messages are memorable and interesting, it will help the customers recall the brand easily, hence creating brand awareness (Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger III 2019: 243). If done correctly, social media marketing can be a great way for a brand to build brand preference. In addition, to increase following and engagement, the content creator has to consider importing already-existing contacts to other social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook (Hodson and O'Meara 2023:1). The next step discusses the importing of contacts as a step in the social media brand-building process.

3.7.7 Importing contacts

When using social media, one could be surprised by how many individuals they already know. To determine how many connections are missing, one can import their phonebook contacts or email contacts from Gmail or Outlook into social networks. The import of a limited number of contacts is free on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram,

LinkedIn, and Instagram. Importing contacts to social media platforms will give one an opportunity to know who among the contacts you already know is available on other social networks (Laverie, Humphrey, Velikova, Dodd and Wilcox 2011: 3). This will also shed light on who you still need to connect with. Content creators should import email contacts from their email accounts, or contacts from their phonebooks, into their social networking platforms to see the missing connections (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 59). In addition, knowing what to do to ensure continuous growth of the brand is very important; hence, how to maintain positivity on social media for brand marketing is discussed in the next step.

3.7.8 Maintaining the positivity

It is good to know the positive things a content creator should be doing on social media to build the best social impression. Morales (2023: 2) suggests that knowing the things to do to keep that positive impression is very important. A brand marketer should consider social media engagements and content creation as part of their own work resume and a reflection of their professional approach and behaviour. It is very important not to mix personal posts and business posts in the same social media account (Jaakonmäki, Müller and Vom Brocke 2017: 1). At this stage, it is also important to keep searching for groups and brand communities that one should join to increase coverage for awareness creation. The next step discusses how one can find and join online groups.

3.7.9 Finding and joining brand communities on social media

Many social media platforms offer many opportunities to join specific groups for specific industries and topics (Chu 2011: 30). Joining different groups or brand communities will increase coverage among the audience. Finding groups linked to specific areas of expertise allows one to share insights and build authority within their own brand. However, Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman and Kannan (2016: 7) argue that industry groups may be congested with competitors; therefore, smaller, topic-based groups can be more fruitful. According to Sharma, Sadh, Billore and Motiani (2022: 16), joining groups or communities on social media can help with pushing and inspiring yourself, motivate you to reach your goals, gain assurance, boost your skill set, and test your understanding to build a brand successfully.

The above-mentioned steps of brand building on social media, highlight the importance of maintaining a consistent profile and brand image across social media platforms and direct connections with followers in the brand voice and tone. Usually, a strong brand presence on social media is associated with an engaged audience and loyal brand followers. It is also vital for the posts to speak with one voice on all social media platforms. A strong social media presence aids in the growth of a brand on social media. However, there is no one proper way to implement a branding building plan, just like there is no one right marketing strategy. According to Kamboj (2020: 205), every brand is distinct and demands extraordinary actions, and this must be considered. Additionally, effective internal and external communication is necessary for brand management in an online context.

It is paramount for marketers to understand the technological environment and to remain innovative to gain a competitive advantage. For instance, it is very important to discuss brand innovation in this study because technology is taking over control in today's market, where consumers prefer the highest tech market offerings. A brand cannot be built without considering promoting new ideas and creativity around the brand. Social media brand innovation is discussed in the following section.

3.8 Social media brand innovation

According to Nguyen, Yu, Melewar and Chen (2015: 11), brand innovation promotes new ideas, creativity, and nature's growth. Technology is taking over control in today's market, whereby consumers prefer the most high-tech market offerings (Odoom and Mensah 2018: 1). In addition, this provides the consumer with a great feeling of being at the forefront of innovation. This makes brand innovation a pivotal influence on consumer buying behaviour (Roberts and Piller 2016: 41). Many scholars have found out that consumers value the innovation process highly, as their tastes and preferences are influenced by new innovations. Innovation is well received and appreciated if it originates from the customers' needs and preferences (Wikhamn 2019: 102). Therefore, continuous brand innovation is important for a firm to satisfy customers' brand expectations. Gehani (2016: 11) states that brand innovation strategy works well when it is tailored to the brand identity and the company's corporate image. It is vital to discuss brand innovation in this study because it leads to brand

preference. Consumers' tastes and preferences for brands also change as new technology becomes available. According to Brexendorf, Bayus and Keller (2015: 548), there are five stages to a successful brand innovation strategy. These five stages of brand innovation are discussed below.

3.8.1 Intent Identifying

Intent identification means understanding the purpose of the brand, and it marks the starting point of brand innovation (Herrera 2016: 1725). For a company's team to define its brand innovation intent, it is vital to inspect and observe short-term and long-term market opportunities. The intent stage should be aligned with the entire company strategy (Hamel and Prahalad 2010: 1). If it is done well, a path towards sustainable growth and profitability is created. After intent identification, it is important to gain an exact and deep understanding of the target audience. The next step discusses the insight stage.

3.8.2 Insight

The insight stage refers to a process of gaining an exact, deep understanding of the target audience (Verloop and Wissema 2004: 1). A deep customer data analysis can be very informative towards creating brand content, specific and appropriate solutions, effective communication, and great customer experiences (Grant 2011: 20). Considering the dynamic current business environment, successful innovation is based on creating, obtaining, and utilising current existing knowledge (Xu and Duan 2019: 148). Therefore, knowledge acquisition from social media marks the current way of data mining in the current business environment. Social media has become the information pool, providing insights for decision-making and strategising. When a deeper understanding of the target audience is done, the marketing team has to brainstorm the most appropriate way to articulate the brand's concept innovatively. Ideation is discussed in the next stage.

3.8.3 Ideation

According to Ruspil, Vellera and Munzel (2019: 59), it is very important for the company team to brainstorm on the most appropriate way to articulate the brand's concept

creatively. The creation of a brand concept allows a generative effect, connecting existing market tangible offerings and services to exemplify a complete brand experience. Visualisation and evaluation of ideas are enabled through the process of ideation (Bressa, Wannamaker, Korsgaard, Willett and Vermeulen 2019: 173). Innovation, explained in the next section, involves implementing ideas to create value.

3.8.4 Innovation

At this stage, the brand's concept should explain the strategic framework that formulates product resolutions, experiences, and the brand portfolio (Nguyen *et al.* 2015: 11). The innovation strategy should be reinforced through the strategic allocation of resources, rationalised operations, and re-allied corporate culture (O'Cass and Ngo 2007: 1). Zolkepli and Kamarulzaman (2015: 189) state that the main aim of brand innovation is to achieve the highest market share and to transform existing markets. Innovation is necessary, as it ensures that the brand stays ahead of its competitors. It can be said that a brand needs to be innovative in its product, design, packaging and marketing communication methods. In addition, the brand has to consider the changes in the environment, for instance, the technological environment, and adapt the marketing strategies in a creative way without losing the brand's core values. The world is constantly changing and evolving, and social media brand innovation is one of the new technologies that have emerged. According to Mount and Martinez (2014: 124), social media brand innovation refers to a new idea that is nurtured through social media branding, causing vital changes to daily practices and markets. Social media enhances communication of brand innovations to consumers easily and effectively. When the innovation strategy is reinforced in the company's strategic plan, it is the best time to start the implementation process. The implementation state is discussed below.

3.8.5 Implementation

Implementation of the devised innovation strategy is done after the branding team has agreed on a timeline (Chen 2020: 155). Over time, the brand is expected to change and enlarge its market share, thereby gaining a competitive advantage. According to Jiang, Chiu and Chan (2023: 48), implementation is the final stage of brand innovation. The implementation stage involves taking the validated and refined innovation and bringing it to market or integrating it into the organisation. Implementation requires

careful planning, resource allocation, and execution to ensure a successful launch or integration.

It is empirical to note that the success of implementation determines whether the innovation accomplishes its intended aims and adds value to both the brand and its customers. Wu, Nambisan, Xiao and Xie (2022: 429) support the opinion that it is also critical to stay fluid and responsive during the implementation phase, since it may disclose unexpected obstacles or possibilities that necessitate changes to the innovation or its distribution plan.

A discussion on brand innovation is necessary for this study, as it ensures that the brand stays ahead of its competitors. The world is constantly changing and evolving, and social media brand innovation is one of the new technologies that have emerged. A proactive market focus is necessary for social media brand innovation. According to Tajurahim, Abu Bakar, Md Jusoh, Ahmad and Muhammad Arif (2020: 511), some studies have found a good correlation between customer centricity and innovation. The most successful brands and businesses are created from the ground up using the principles of insight, identity, and innovation. To ensure brand preference, the brand has to meet or exceed customer expectations as compared to its competitors; therefore, brand innovation is very important.

3.9 Brand Equity

According to Ebrahim (2020: 287), brand equity is a market-based intangible asset that can be leveraged to improve the performance of the organisation. Brand equity refers to the worth of a brand. According to Haudi *et al.* (2022: 961), brand value is determined by the brand's perceived worth and the customers' experiences. Keller and Brexendorf (2019b: 1409) support the idea that a brand has strong brand equity if consumers think favourably of it. The results from a study by Tingchi Liu, Anthony Wong, Rongwei and Tseng (2014: 961) confirm that significantly higher preferences and buy intentions are produced by the brand with the highest equity. According to the customer brand equity model adopted in this study, brand equity is created based on customers' experiences over time and their perceptions of the firm's marketing activity.

Suki and Sasmita (2015: 276) opine that young consumers access information on

brands on social media. Millennials are able to recognise a certain brand and compare it to other competing brands on different social media platforms. Gómez, Lopez and Molina (2019: 196) opine that the number of social media users is expected to increase to more than three billion per month by the year 2023. Pansari and Kumar (2018: 3) support the idea that marketing has shifted its focus from customer transactions to a relationship-based approach. Due to the tremendous growth of social media in brand marketing, it is worth mentioning that many brand managers are working hard to build their brands on social media.

Clark (2007: 12) states that brand equity is one of the main marketing research objectives in the marketing industry. According to Chow, Ling, Yen and Hwang (2017: 70), brand equity is one of the major elements of marketing management. Many scholars understand brand equity from a financial and customer perspective. Customer perspectives refer to the brand's image in the customers' minds and the customers' reactions to the brand (Dwivedi, Johnson, Wilkie and De Araujo-Gil 2019: 1). The financial perspective refers to the market value of the company's brand goodwill (Keller and Brexendorf 2019a: 1409). This study focuses more on the customers' perspective on brands. Muniz, Guzmán, Paswan and Crawford (2019: 2) and Álvarez-García, del Carmen Cortés-Domínguez, del Río and Simonetti (2019: 1) concluded that customers' perspectives on brand equity are further categorised into consumer behaviour and consumer perception. Feiz and Moradi (2019: 1) argue that consumer attitude towards a certain brand is significantly influenced by brand equity. Meanwhile, Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger III (2019) opine that brand image and brand awareness create brand knowledge.

According to Calder (2019: 24), a brand represents the most valuable asset of any company. In addition, a brand is the most important reason for a consumer's choice as they are able to differentiate products from competing products. Branding enriches consumers' trust and confidence in a decision on what to buy (Chan 2019: 12). Brand equity is very important as it promotes brand competitiveness, successful extensions, and protection against competitors' promotional pressures. Building significant brand equity creates a host of benefits and merits for the company. It is very important for brand managers to understand the sources and results of brand equity, as it informs them about how and where to add value (Iglesias, Landgraf, Ind, Markovic and

Koporcic 2020a: 343).

Brand equity can be measured using either consumer perceptions or sales (Datta, Ailawadi and Van Heerde 2017: 2). The concept of brand equity came into existence in the 1980s. According to Tanveer and Lodhi (2016: 43), brand equity refers to a non-tangible asset that forms an association between a brand and its consumers. Guan *et al.* (2022: 90) argue that the power of a brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen, and heard about the brand as a result of their consumers' experiences over time. Kantar and Bardakci (2017: 124) support the idea that brand equity is made up of brand loyalty, brand association, brand awareness, and perceived quality. The next section will examine the contributing factors to creating brand equity.

3.10 Factors influencing brand equity

Brand equity, as outlined by Keller (2016:3). is influenced by factors such as brand association, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand image. Figure 11 below elaborates on the brand equity pyramid illustrating how different factors affect brand equity. Brand equity is important to this study because it promotes brand preference.



Figure 11: Brand equity and contributing factors.

Source: (Keller 2016: 3)

All the contributing factors shown in Figure 11 are discussed below.

3.10.1 Brand association

Suki and Sasmita (2015: 1) opine that brand association refers to the brand's image in, either positive or negative, the consumer's mind. Keller (2003: 595) adds that brand associations are created based on what the consumers' learned, felt, seen, and heard about the brand due to their experiences over a period of time. Rachmadhian and Chaerudin (2020: 1) argue that brand associations do not refer to any benefits but images and symbols attached to the brand or brand benefit. In addition, the three desirable characteristics of brand associations are favourability, strength, and uniqueness (Keller 1993: 5). In addition, Chen (2017: 155) states that brand associations refer to the degree to which a certain brand is recognised within its product class. According to Prasanna and Parida (2021: 3), the most widely acknowledged part of brand equity is probably brand associations or brand image. Product characteristics, customer benefits, uses, user demographics, lifestyles, product categories, rival brands, and nations are all included in brand association. Associations can be the basis for differences and extensions, provide motivation to buy, foster good emotions, and assist customers in processing or retrieving information. Consumers analyse, organise, and retrieve information in their minds using brand associations, which aid them in making purchases (Aaker 2009: 1). Brand associations refers to anything that is connected in memory to a brand, including all brand-related ideas, sentiments, perceptions, pictures, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes (Kotler and Keller 2003: 15).

Prasanna and Parida (2021: 4) opine that the brand association is not only real, but it also has some degree of power. A bond to a brand will be stronger if it is built on numerous exposures to communications or events rather than a small number of them. Additionally, it will be more durable if it is supported by a network of additional links (Aaker and Equity 1991: 35). In other words, the relationship between the customer and the brand is strengthened by the association. When a consumer uses the product

and services more frequently, the brand connection becomes stronger. A favourable emotion and contentment with the goods or services are produced by the brand association. Brand equity rises in proportion to the strength of the link between the customer and the brand. Social media brand associations are formed based on the advertisements on social media, e-word of mouth, celebrity endorsements, quality of the product, competing products, gallery displays, consumer engagement, and product class. (Andéhn, Kazeminia, Lucarelli and Sevin 2014: 132-144). The next section discusses advertisements on social media.

3.10.1.1 Advertisements on social media platforms

Social media advertising is a kind of digital marketing that uses paid ad campaigns to target audiences on social media sites (Alalwan 2018: 65). Through the popular social media channels that people use, marketers and advertisers can raise brand awareness and encourage purchases. On the other hand, social media gives marketers the opportunity to engage with the perfect customers based on their location, demographics, psychographics, and behavioural attributes (Voorveld, Van Noort, Muntinga and Bronner 2018: 38). The social media advertisements create a platform for electronic word-of-mouth where the audiences like, comment on, and share opinions on different brands. E-word publicity is discussed in the next section.

3.10.1.2 E-word of mouth publicity

Electronic word-of-mouth is defined by King, Racherla and Bush (2014: 167) as a forum for existing users and potential buyers to exchange positive or negative reviews. As word-of-mouth is the process of passing opinions and perspectives from one person to the next, Duan, Gu and Whinston (2008: 1007) feel that it is one of the most effective ways for individuals to exchange knowledge. Word-of-mouth became electronic/online word-of-mouth with the introduction of Web 2.0 technologies. User-generated content is created and shared online by connecting online users due to the expansion of social media and social media usage.

Electronic word-of-mouth distributes user-generated content in an organic way. Word-of-mouth plays a significant role in the purchasing decisions of consumers because it offers a forum for customers to express their opinions about brands, products, or

services. Sulthana and Vasantha (2019: 1) support the assertion that the spread of knowledge through electronic word-of-mouth on social media positively affects brand preference and purchase intention. It is important to note that the significance of electronic word-of-mouth cannot be understated given customers' growing reliance on online purchasing, information searching, and social media when choosing a brand amongst competing brands.

3.10.1.3 Celebrity endorsements and social media influencers

Celebrity branding is a marketing tactic that makes use of a celebrity's notoriety to advertise a good or service or spread awareness of a problem (Cocker, Mardon and Daunt 2021: 1). Celebrity endorsers have long been used in commercial campaigns. Social media influencers have grown in importance over the past decade as a result of the increased attention paid to social media, and they are becoming increasingly significant in advertising efforts (Saini, Sharma, Gupta and Verma 2021). Social media influencers are people who have developed a reputation for their knowledge and experience on a certain subject (Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget 2020: 258). Social media influencers frequently post about that subject on their preferred social media platforms, where they amass sizable fan bases of enthused, active individuals who pay close attention to their opinions. Since social media influencers have the capacity to start trends and persuade their followers to purchase the things they advocate for, different brands are willing to work with them.

Pöyry, Pelkonen, Naumanen and Laaksonen (2021: 103) confirm that purchase intentions and brand preference are increased more by images of social media influencers than by images of more well-known celebrities in general. The celebrity's likeness appearing in the photo has the greatest favourable impact on photo perceptions and buying intentions. Saini *et al.* (2021: 161) argue that celebrity endorsements not only increase the visibility of a company's marketing and advertising efforts, but also make the brand seem more fun. Businesses may also utilise celebrities as brand ambassadors to spread the celebrity's favourable perception of the product or brand, which may influence consumers' attitudes towards the brand and their intentions to make a purchase (Pöyry *et al.* 2021: 103). A product like wrinkle lift cream, for instance, would always be associated with a celebrity who is somewhat older,

whereas a beauty brand would always be associated with a female actress who is younger. It is vital to note that a celebrity's endorsement of a product or service produces a lasting impression on consumers. In addition, it is critical for brands to look for genuine synergies between their message and the endorsement celebrity and to ensure that the material matches the celebrity's typical aesthetic.

3.10.1.4 Quality of the product

At this point, brand attributes are factors that contribute to positive brand associations. A brand attribute is a distinctive quality that characterizes a good or service (Gallart-Camahort, Fiol and García 2023: 33). Pricing, quality, look, and packaging are examples of tangible or external product qualities. To set a brand apart from rivals, a company may extensively market the brand quality or the tangible attributes of the product. According to Poturak and Softic (2019: 20), branding through qualities can strengthen a name in a customer's mind, establishing the business in the sector and linked market niche.

3.10.1.5 Competing products offered

Competitive items are identical to or comparable to those sold by rival brands, necessitating a specific marketing strategy from businesses (Tien 2019: 2). Establishing the distinct value proposition of a product in comparison to that provided by rivals enables the company to more successfully contact its target audience (Abid 2022: 1). Wu, Zhang and Zhou (2022: 5348) support the idea that planning effective strategies to outperform rivals is ensured by learning how to do a competitive product analysis. By conducting a thorough competitive product analysis and implementing effective social media strategies, one can position a brand and product more effectively in the market, connect with the target audience, and gain a competitive edge. It is vital to remember that social media strategies should be flexible and evolve over time to meet changing market dynamics and customer preferences. The next section discusses the gallery displays of advertised products.

3.10.1.6 Gallery displays of the advertised products

The marketing sector is evolving due to digital advertising. A thorough understanding

of digital marketing in all of its forms is necessary to stay competitive in this changing market. The use of display advertising is among the simplest ways to promote goods and services. Display advertising promotes goods and services by using text, images, or videos on websites owned by other people (Choi, Mela, Balseiro and Leary 2020b: 556). Display advertising comes in a variety of forms. Display advertising includes, for example, banner advertisements and leaderboard advertisements on desktop and mobile devices (Yakovleva, Popov and Filchenkov 2019: 373). The majority of advertisements have a rectangle or square shape, and their content is usually created to complement the host website's and the target audience's preferences. However, Choi *et al.* (2020b: 556) argue that the nomological network for virality will get more conceptually rich and the prediction validity of upcoming studies will increase by including subtle content-creator interactions.

3.10.1.7 Consumers' engagement with the firm and its employees

Customer engagement is the process of enhancing the customer experience through productive client interactions and business initiatives (Islam, Shahid, Rasool, Rahman, Khan and Rather 2020: 1279). Customers can be contacted in a variety of ways, such as through the company website and social media business pages. Islam, Hollebeek, Rahman, Khan and Rasool (2019: 277) argue that customers are more likely to be satisfied when personnel are happy. Employees who are happy with their jobs are more inclined to help customers and provide better customer service. This improves consumer satisfaction, fosters customer loyalty, and ultimately spurs greater profitability. When a brand is associated with great customer service, it enhances brand loyalty.

3.10.1.8 Product class

Many clients can link a brand based on the value or benefit the brand attributes to the product or service (Beig and Nika 2019: 410). This customer-to-brand connection may functionally be related to a certain good or service. Susilowati and Sari (2020: 39) argue that an association with advantages that emphasises the user's experience is more experiential. Benefits may also be symbolic, connecting to a customer's underlying need or desire, such as joining a social movement.

It is the main objective of every brand manager to create and grow positive brand associations. According to Li, Guo, Zhang and Sun (2020: 1214), positive brand associations are successfully created when the products depicted by the brand are durable, marketable, and desirable. Favourable brand associations create good will, which is an asset to the company. The more favourable brand associations are, the more they will be easily remembered by customers; hence, brand loyalty is created. Brand association facilitates the collection of information for brand extension and brand differentiation (Andéhn and Decosta 2016: 1). According to Severi and Ling (2013: 125), many scholars concluded that a strong and favourable brand association leads to higher brand loyalty.

Achieving brand equity through brand association is important for this study because brand associations promote the positive effects of social media communication on brand perception (Keller 2013: 73). In the consumer's memory, a strong brand image is expressed by positive, distinctive associations that influence the consumer's attitudinal behaviour (Keller and Lehmann 2003: 26). It is important to discuss brand association as a contributing factor to brand equity because, when brand equity is achieved, brand preference is created. Fundamentally, strong brand associations can boost sales and provide an advantage over rivals. Brand association helps clients remember the brand and its attributes, which greatly facilitates brand preference and the purchasing process (Vo Minh, Nguyen Huong and Dang Nguyen Ha 2022: 2).

It is vital to understand the concept of brand association, as it gives consumers a reason to purchase a company's goods and serves as the foundation for both brand loyalty and purchasing decisions. Being aware of brand associations can assist a company efficiently in establishing brand equity because brand associations may draw people away from the brand. When a product or brand delivers on its promise and stands out from the competition in the eyes of the consumer, positive brand associations are created (Rego, Brady, Leone, Roberts, Srivastava and Srivastava 2022: 583). When a business's efforts fall short of what customers expect, negative brand connotations begin to form.

3.10.2 Brand Identity

Brand identity refers to how a company presents itself to consumers (Alvarado-Karste

and Guzmán 2020b: 1). It is the collection of all branding efforts that a business makes to position itself in the eyes of its target market. A brand distinguishes itself through its brand identity. It consists of the sum of the brand's name, tagline, voice, positioning, connotations, and personality (Iglesias, Landgraf, Ind, Markovic and Koporcic 2020b: 32). Even though brand identity and brand image are sometimes mistaken for the same thing, they are extremely different. Brand identity refers to how a company wants its consumers to view it (Alvarado-Karste and Guzmán 2020a: 1). On the other side, brand image is the consumers' perception of the brand as a result of their interactions with it. As the brand has little to no control over the brand image, it frequently derives from the brand identity but may not be identical to or comparable to its source (Iglesias *et al.* 2020a: 32).

According to Essamri, McKechnie and Winklhofer (2019: 366), brand identity aids in the development of the company's distinctive position and allows it to stand out from competitors. This differentiation aids in creating a positioning strategy and establishing a devoted customer base. Taecharungroj (2019: 1) argues that the most crucial component of branding is consistency, and brand identity is what makes consistency possible. Mao, Lai, Luo, Liu, Du, Zhou, Ma, Bonaiuto and Bonaiuto (2020: 3391) support the view that for a brand to be viewed as a brand in the way that it wants to be, it is crucial to develop a consistent external representation. In addition, a brand's identity aids in separating it from competitors. It has recognisable brand components that are utilised to advertise the company. Brand identity comprises all of the visual and non-visual components that contribute to the brand experience (Tai, Sekarini, Kardana and Sujaya 2022: 428). Brand identity encompasses all the elements that make up a brand's image and perception in the eyes of consumers. Some of these components are listed below:

3.10.2.1 Visual Components of brand identity

According to Adamus-Matuszyńska, Dzik, Michnik and Polok (2021: 731), visual components consist of brand name, brand logo, brand typography style, colour scheme and imagery.

- Brand name: The brand strategist chooses a name for the offering in order to identify it and set it apart from competitors.

- Brand logo and tagline: A logo is a textual and/or visual symbol used to represent an organisation or a product. A tagline is a brief, memorable statement that sums up the brand's message.
- Brand typography style: Typography is the art and technique of arranging letters and words in a way that is specific to a brand. The choice of fonts and typography style contributes to the brand's personality and readability (Singla and Sharma 2022: 272).
- Colour scheme: A brand's colour scheme refers to the collection of colours utilised in its advertising. Brands often have specific colors associated with them. These colours evoke emotions and associations and are used consistently across branding materials (Fillova and Panasenko 2023: 65).
- Imagery is the collection of distinctive pictures and visuals that a brand uses to convey its brand message. Visual elements such as images, graphics, and icons used in branding materials play a significant role in conveying the brand's message (Srivastava, Ramakanth, Akhila and Gaikwad 2022: 58).

The above-mentioned visual components work together with the following non-visual components to create a cohesive and memorable brand identity.

3.10.2.2 Non-visual components of brand identity

Gelli, Uricchio, He, Bimbo and Chua (2020: 2) state that the non-visual components consist of the following:

- Brand personality: A brand's personality is a collection of features and characteristics that apply to people in general. This personality is derived from the visual components of the brand identity and through consumer engagement.
- Brand associations are things that the client identifies with the brand but that are not the actual brand. These include well-known individuals and alliance partners.
- The overall brand experience customers have when interacting with the brand, including customer service, product quality and user experience, is important.
- Brand voice is the consistency in word choice, attitude, and values of the brand

while speaking to the target market or other people.

It is worth mentioning that a strong brand identity gives a company a competitive edge. The company's narrative must be told in a way that is consistent with the brand identity in order to build brand loyalty, recognition, and enthusiasm. The company's mission and operating principles are clearly communicated through a powerful brand identity. A strong brand identity helps consumers recognise, relate to, and trust a brand. It also sets the brand apart from competitors and allows it to communicate its unique value proposition effectively. Furthermore, it is important to note that a brand's identity can evolve over time in response to changing market trends, consumer preferences, and the brand's growth. Managing and maintaining a consistent brand identity is essential for long-term brand success and customer loyalty.

In addition, brand awareness is one of the identified contributing factors towards creating brand equity. The next section discusses brand awareness and its contribution towards creating brand equity.

3.10.3 Brand awareness

Khan (2012: 170) states that brand awareness is a process from where the brand is just known to a level when consumers have put the brand at the top of mind. Brand awareness is a way of recalling and recognising the brand within the category in a greater understanding that leads to purchase (Kotler, Keller, Ancarani and Costabile 2014: 21). According to Rossiter (2014: 533), brand awareness refers to the association of a particular brand with a certain product that the customer aims to own. Guest (1942: 800) opines that brand awareness refers to the probability that customers are familiar with its existence. According to Kapferer (2012: 18), brand awareness marks the first step in brand building and the first goal of a new brand launch. From the above definitions, brand awareness refers to the degree to which people are aware of a brand. It also refers to the degree to which a brand name is recognised by consumers when they see or use its goods, services, or brand signals. According to Bergkvist and Taylor (2022: 294), the following are the types of brand awareness to pursue:

- Great brand positioning so that the brand stays at the top of the mind of the consumer. This level of brand recognition signifies the highest level of brand

awareness (Suhanto, Wisesa and Mussry 2023: 68). When a brand achieves top-of-mind awareness, it means that it is the first brand that comes to mind when customers think about a specific product or category (Bajwa and Khan 2022: 153). Brands with top-of-mind recognition are frequently regarded as industry leaders. This positioning is the outcome of successful marketing and branding initiatives that have established the brand as synonymous with the product or category.

- Spontaneous brand awareness is the ability of customers to recall a brand from memory without prompts or cues (Chandon, Laurent and Lambert-Pandraud 2022: 468). It demonstrates a high level of brand identification. When consumers can recall a brand on the spur of the moment, it indicates that the brand has made an indelible mark on their brains through advertising, product quality, or other brand interactions (Suthianto 2023: 95).
- Aided or prompted awareness means that the brand should be the brand to know best, if only by name; the brand should belong to the competitive class (Bergkvist and Taylor 2022: 294). Aided or prompted brand awareness involves consumers recognising or recalling a brand when provided with a prompt or cue. This prompt could be a list of brand names or other contextual information (Alagarsamy, Mehrolia and Paul 2022: 2). It is important for brands to achieve aided awareness because it ensures that consumers can identify the brand when they see it or hear about it, even if it may not be the first brand that comes to mind spontaneously.

These different types of brand awareness reflect varying levels of brand recognition and recall. The goal for brands is to achieve a balance between top-of-mind awareness, spontaneous recall, and aided awareness while also being firmly linked to their competitive class. Effective marketing and branding strategies, consistent messaging, and delivering on brand promises are key to building and maintaining these different levels of brand awareness.

Brand awareness is made up of brand recognition and brand recall. For instance, brand recall is of importance outside the name, and brand recognition is of value inside the shop (Panchal, Khan and Ramesh 2012: 81). Van Grinsven and Das (2016: 256) state that brand recognition refers to the customer's ability to know

about the brand before being exposed to the brand when the brand is presented only as a cue. Brand recall is when the customer is able to remember the brand from memory when exposed to the product category or product needs as a cue (Kim 2018: 22). Therefore, brand recall is critical for both services and online brands.

Every company wants devoted clients, but building such a community requires a lot of dedication and resources. It is essential to incorporate brand identity ideas into social media strategy. Managers should put increasing brand awareness at the top of their priority list. Social media is a great instrument for this, as demonstrated by the fact that, on average, more than 1.40 billion individuals logged on to Facebook every day in December 2017 (Mosquera, Odunowo, McNamara, Guo and Petrie 2020: 575). It would be foolish to ignore such a large group, given how many they are. Additionally, social networking programs can really pick users based on a range of demographic species, behaviours, and interests.

Brand awareness is created by increasing brand familiarity through repeated exposure (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt and Füller 2013: 1). Repeated exposure works better for brand recognition. According to Bernarto, Berlianto, Meilani, Masman and Suryawan (2020: 412), the more the customer sees, hears and thinks about the brand, the more the brand is strongly registered in the consumer's memory. Many researchers have shown that consumers only buy familiar and well-established brands. Therefore, creating a high level of brand awareness provides a favourable chance of being preferred by the consideration set (Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger III 2019: 243). Saydan and Dölek (2019: 470) commend the current effectiveness of social media brand awareness, attributing it to the increased reach achieved through viral posts. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that social media brand awareness is tough and more challenging to maintain, as it requires persistence, creativity, and determination. The next section discusses the influence of brand image on brand equity.

3.10.4 Brand image

According to Tran, Nguyen, Do and Nguyen (2020: 2053), brand image refers to mental images, a symbolic process created from the stored experiences in associative memory concerning products and events. Bilgin (2018: 128) opines that brand image

creates a mental representation of meaning. According to Mabkhot, Shaari and Salleh (2017: 1), brand image is born from a combination of the influence of brand associations and consumer perceptions of both tangible and intangible associations. Shabbir, Khan and Khan (2017: 416) describe brand image as a way of thinking by the consumer based on the brand and the feelings evoked when the consumer thinks, sees and recalls the brand. Ramesh, Saha, Goswami and Dahiya (2019: 377) comment that brand image is created by decoding, extracting and interpreting the associations read.

Collard (2012: 1) concluded that brand image plays a critical role in the development process of a brand. This is because the brand image involves the reputation and trustworthiness of the brand, serving as guidelines for the customer audience when utilising the market offering. Mabkhot, Shaari and Salleh (2017: 1) agree that understanding brand image is critical to effectively and efficiently managing the brand. Moreover, it is also important to be aware of how customers shape and reshape the brand image and the type of relationship created with the brand. Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger III (2019: 243) support the idea that a company should consider how social media may affect the perception of its brand when setting up a social media account. Social media can more strongly influence the opinions of a brand than previous forms of marketing, for both positive and negative reasons. Budiman (2021: 1339) concludes that brand image is significantly and favourably influenced by social media advertising as the audience leaves positive brand reviews on social media.

Wijaya, Surachman and Mugiono (2020: 45) state that brand image has various functions in nurturing the life of a brand. The functions include penetrating the market, adding value to market offerings, storing for the organisation, channeling power, and promoting brand extension. Related to the function of market entry, brand image plays a critical role in brand extension and brand association (Hanafi and Irwansyah 2017: 1). Brand image encourages a firm to create a brand of products from one market to another through brand extension (Kupfer, Pähler vor der Holte, Kübler and Hennig-Thurau 2018: 21). Another popular strategy to enhance the brand image is through brand alliances. A brand alliance refers to a short- or long-term association or a grouping of tangible and intangible attributes associated with brand partners (Newmeyer, Venkatesh, Ruth and Chatterjee 2018). Many marketers recognise that

brand image does not just encapsulate the consumer experience towards the product but also can change it (Ma, Cheng, Bu and Jiang 2018: 22).

It is evident that high-equity brands have a positive brand image. Moreover, it is acceptable to charge premium prices for brands that have high brand equity and high image ratings (Kupfer *et al.* 2018: 22). To understand brand image better, it is vital to look at five dimensions of brand image, as illustrated in Figure 12 below:

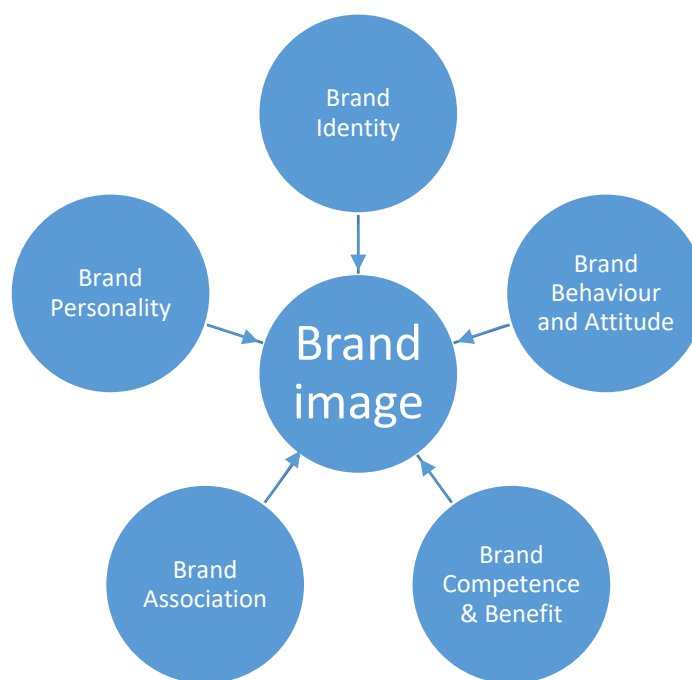


Figure 12: Five dimensions of Brand image

Source: (Wijaya, Surachman and Mugiono 2020: 46)

Figure 12 presents the five dimensions of brand image. The next section discusses each of the above-mentioned dimensions and how they contribute to brand image.

3.10.4.1 Brand identity as a dimension of brand image

A company creates a differentiated brand with unique attributes, thus giving birth to brand identity (Black and Veloutsou 2017: 416). De Paula and Chaves (2017: 1246)

argue that brand identity and brand image are related, but distinct concepts, and both are essential ingredients of brand equity. A firm will often utilise branding strategy as a means of communicating its identity and value to customers and other stakeholders (Mao *et al.* 2020: 3391). Kapferer (2012: 16) opines that a firm seeks to convey its uniqueness and individuality to the target market through brand identity. Realising the need will motivate consumers to buy the brand. Sisouvong (2018: 1) argues that involving the three types of consumer needs—functional, symbolic and experiential—is designed to meet the externally created needs. The three types of consumer needs are explained below:

- **Functional need**

From the three primary categories of client demands, functional needs are the most real and evident (Giakoumaki and Krepapa 2020: 457). Customers often assess alternative solutions based on whether they would enable them to carry out a specific task or function. They are likely to buy or hire the good or service that best meets their functional needs.

- **Symbolic need**

When people buy goods or services to satisfy symbolic requirements like conformity, individuality, affinity, and social distinction, this is known as symbolic consumption. Consequently, self-image and social identification are linked to symbolic demands (Wang and Qiao 2020: 83). Symbolic needs vary greatly from consumer to customer and are frequently harder for a corporation to pinpoint. Finding trends among brand users can be done by analysing distinct social requirements. It is important to consider how trends can influence product development, sales, and marketing processes if enough customers share a specific demand.

- **Experiential need**

To avoid giving customers more labor, the process of using the good or service must be simple and unambiguous (Gilovich and Gallo 2020: 23). The customer's experience with the brand should be favourable. In the context of customer satisfaction, experiential demands refer to the need for a positive and uncomplicated experience when utilising a product or service (Gunawan 2022: 30). Customers want enjoyable,

convenient, and trouble-free encounters with brands.

To address experiential needs, brands should strive to make the process of using their goods or services as simple as possible (Liu-Thompkins, Okazaki and Li 2022: 1198). This entails removing unnecessary procedures and making it as simple as possible for customers to obtain and use the product or service.

3.10.4.2 Brand Personality

According to Keller (2016: 2), brand personality refers to the human traits and attributes that consumers can associate with and attribute to the brand. Brand voice, the aggregate of tone, intention, and language that is uttered wherever the brand name is heard, even online, is based on brand personality (Mao *et al.* 2020: 3391). Consumers often use brands as symbolic devices to express themselves (Unurlu and Uca 2017: 672). Social media can give a brand a personality. A brand that audiences can identify with and empathise with attracts more customers. Peco-Torres, Polo-Pena and Frias-Jamilena (2021: 164) support the idea that social media is the perfect platform for bringing a brand to life.

Empirical studies have shown that brand personality differs across cultures (Mishra, Singh, Fang and Yin 2017: 1). For example, Ahmad and Thyagaraj (2014: 9) state that a study by Aaker tested brand personality dimensions in the context of Japan and Spain and concluded that brands reflect the beliefs, values, and behavioural patterns of each and every culture they are exposed to. In addition, many studies propose that the set of human traits associated with a brand serves a self-expressive function and can signify and institutionalise the values and beliefs of a certain culture (Aaker, Benet-Martinez and Garolera 2001: 492). Multiple experiential researchers have recommended that the greater the congruity between human traits and those that represent a brand, the greater the preference for the brand (Vellnagel: 21; 2020).

Previous studies suggest that brand personality influences significant consumer behaviour variables such as consumer brand relationship, consumer satisfaction, and brand loyalty (Fernandes and Moreira 2019: 1). Garanti and Kissi (2019: 1480) also

show that brand equity mediates the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty. Lu, Chen and Bae (2020: 379) support the idea that brand personality plays an important role in marketing efforts and allows marketers to convey messages to customers efficiently and effectively. It can be stated that brand personality is about character and charisma, and it is the basis of brand voice (Coelho, Bairrada and de Matos Coelho 2020: 41).

Table 3, lists the five dimensions and traits of brand personality (Garanti and Kissi 2019: 1481) .

Table 3: Brand-personality dimensions and traits

Competence	Sincerity	Excitement	Sophistication	Ruggedness
Reliable	Down-to-earth	Daring	Upper-class	Outdoorsy
Hard-working	Family oriented	Trendy	Glamorous	Masculine
Secure	Small-town	Exciting	Good-looking	Western
Intelligent	Honest	Spirited	Charming	Rugged
Technical	Sincere	Cool	Feminine	Tough
Corporate	Real	Young	Smooth	
Successful	Wholesome	Imaginative		
Leader	Original	Unique		
Confident	Cheerful	Up-to-date		

	Sentimental	Independent		
	Friendly	Contemporary		

Source: (Aaker 1997: 347)

Company design and brand message decisions are influenced by brand personality. For instance, from Table 3, the sophistication personality dimension has traits that include glamorous, upper-class, and charming, while the competence dimension does not have the same traits. It is the personality dimension of a brand that consumers relate to and identify with. Consumers easily recognise and relate to the best brand personalities. The chosen brand dimension for a brand should align with the human characteristics linked to the brand. A carefully selected brand personality appeals to the target market's positive emotions. A brand's personality plays a significant role in giving it a human identity that makes it relevant and real. A brand's personality determines whether the brand is likeable, unlikeable, inspiring, dull, magnetic, or off-putting. It is important to note brand competence and benefit as dimensions of brand image discussed below.

3.10.4.3 Brand competence and benefit

According to Leung, Lenoir, Puntoni and van Osselaer (2023: 546), a competent brand refers to the brand's ability to solve a customer's problem and meet their needs. According to Kolbl, Diamantopoulos, Arslanagic-Kalajdzic and Zabkar (2020: 346), consumers who believe that a brand has the capability and know-how to fulfil their needs place a premium on a brand's competitiveness, intellect, and abilities; this is known as brand competency. Every brand puts effort into establishing competence in key areas and has control over the brand within brand competence (Wang and Liu 2020: 400). A brand is considered to be more beneficial when it has benefits such as great quality, uniqueness, credibility, superiority, predictability, and consideration (Kervyn, Fiske and Malone 2022: 51). Consumers' opinions on the competency or friendliness of a brand may have a direct impact on brand trust, purchase intent, and

capacity to meet corporate sustainability goals. According to Lin, Zhou and Leckie (2021: 1148), perceived competence and warmth have a strong beneficial impact on purchase intention, with brand trust acting as a mediating factor.

3.10.4.4 Brand Associations and brand image

Brand associations also determine the brand image that customers perceive (Kim and Oh 2020: 1703). Mitra and Jenamani (2020: 213) opine that brand image is the collective perception that customers construct of a brand based on all of its components, which include brand associations. Customers establish various associations with the brand, forming perceptions of the based on these associations. Their subjective views of the association bundle contribute to the creation of an image of the company.

3.10.4.5 Brand behaviour and attitude

Attitude is the most significant factor that influences purchase behaviour for any brand (Chu and Chen 2019: 453). Consequently, marketers pay close attention to consumer attitudes. According to Wassler, Wang and Hung (2019: 437), an effective marketer must understand the crucial facets of the consumer mentality. Understanding how attitude is structured is crucial for a marketer. Ramesh *et al.* (2019: 377) define brand attitude as a person's personal assessment of the brand, emotional state, and behavioural tendencies, whether they are positive or negative. According to Davtyan, Cunningham and Tashchian (2021: 420), brand attitude refers to a consumer's overall assessment of a brand that carries a particular brand. A brand must determine the unmet customer expectations in the target market and develop strategies to satisfy those needs through the branded product in order to develop a favourable brand attitude.

When creating a brand image, it is important to consider all five dimensions of brand image, such as brand identity, brand association, brand personality, brand behaviour and attitude, and brand competence and benefit. This is because brand image refers to mental images, a symbolic process created from the stored experiences in associative memory concerning the brand. For customers to prefer the brand over the competitor, the brand image has to be positive in all dimensions. Therefore, it is very

important to carefully communicate a positive brand image to consumers effectively by excelling in delivering the five brand image dimensions. The next section discusses brand loyalty as one of the contributing factors to brand equity.

3.10.5 Brand Loyalty

According to Coelho, Rita and Santos (2018: 110), brand loyalty refers to the positive relationship consumers attribute to a specific product or brand. Consumers that show brand loyalty are dedicated to a product or service, which is confirmed through repeat consumption despite competitors' determinations to lure them away (Huang 2017: 1). Han, Nguyen, Song, Chua, Lee and Kim (2018: 86) conclude that brand loyalty is positively related to both purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. Precisely, brand-loyal customers can be willing to pay more for a brand for the reason that a unique value in the brand is perceived that no substitute can deliver (Hegner-Kakar, Richter and Ringle 2018: 53).

Rather and Sharma (2016: 16) opine that brand loyalty creates some marketing advantages that include bargain marketing expenses, additional new consumers, and superior trade influence. According to Leal and Ferreira (2019: 1), reward card programmes are considered a great strategy for nurturing brand loyalty. For instance, many firms lure customers by offering points to be redeemed for price discounts on their next purchase. In the light of this research, it is appropriate to mention that the purpose of the brand is to build loyalty, not to achieve a great consumer experience (Atulkar 2020: 559). This is an important aspect in the present dynamic world, and the better image communicated inspires customers to be loyal and support the company. Customers refer others to the brand, which is a form of advertising and has one of the greatest levels of persuasiveness (Myers, Sen, Syrdal and Woodroof 2022: 1). However, it can be argued that brand loyalty can be a result of a great customer experience. Therefore, it is imperative to note that a brand should create both brand loyalty and a great customer experience. This is because brand image is also influenced by customer experiences (Ma, Mather, Ott, Fang, Bremer and Miroso 2022: 206).

3.10.6 Customer perception

The term customer perception describes how a customer feels about a brand; this encompasses the customer's feelings, thoughts, and views (Slack, Singh, Ali, Lata, Mudaliar and Swamy 2021: 1324). Customer perceptions might be favourable or unfavourable. Customers' interactions with the brand, goods, or services affect how they perceive the brand. Tzavlopoulos, Gotzamani, Andronikidis and Vassiliadis (2019: 1) argue that, understanding that consumer perceptions of brands are influenced by their beliefs, expectations, and attitudes towards them, it is crucial to match these expectations to succeed in the long run. Thus, each time a consumer or customer interacts with a brand, their experience must live up to their expectations. By doing this, one can make sure that the brand is viewed favourably by the public. Positive customer impressions can affect whether consumers trust your brand to meet their needs and whether they think the company's values relate to their own (Cha and Borchgrevink 2019: 143). This may affect whether customers prefer the brand as compared to the competitor.

Customers' prior expectations and beliefs have an impact on these perceived experiences, which in turn affect future interactions (Clauss, Kesting and Naskrent 2019: 180). A positive personal experience can override opposing viewpoints and start to alter public perception. If a customer had a positive experience, they may promote the brand through recommendations and reviews, which will improve public awareness as well (Iglesias, Markovic, Singh and Sierra 2019: 441). Above all, the customer experience must align with the perception of the brand. Problems may occur if there is a gap between how people perceive your brand and how they really experience it. Online reviews on social media may be the first point of contact a brand has with people looking for goods and services, and what they discover there may influence their purchasing decisions (Uzir, Al Halbusi, Thurasamy, Hock, Aljaberi, Hasan and Hamid 2021: 102721).

Discussing the above-mentioned contributing factors to brand equity provides an understanding of the most important factors that influence consumers' preferences for brands. It can be mentioned that positive brand equity is built when brand associations, personality, awareness, brand identity, brand image, and brand loyalty are positive.

The power of a brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen, and heard about the brand as a result of their consumers' experiences over time, thus brand equity (Suwarno 2022: 605). When brand equity is high for a certain brand, consumers prefer the brand more as compared to its competitors. Social media has been providing different platforms to communicate the brand message based on brand equity, which contributes to achieving brand preference. Moreover, this study seeks more discussion on brand credibility, considering one of the objectives of brand credibility as a contributing factor to brand preference. In addition, if a brand lacks credibility, it is difficult to obtain brand equity, hence brand preference (Perera, Nayak and Nguyen 2022: 1). However, it is not clear on the importance of brand preference. In the next section, we will discuss brand credibility.

3.11 Brand credibility

According to Wang and Scheinbaum (2018: 416), brand credibility refers to the believability of the brand information on the product attributes. The consumers should have positive perceptions of the brand's ability and trustworthiness to constantly deliver as promised. Junior Ladeira, de Oliveira Santini and Carvalho Jardim (2020: 1) argue that brands with a consistent marketing mix over a period of time and high brand investments carry high brand credibility. Erdem and Swait (2004: 191) examined the role of brand credibility (trustworthiness and expertise) on brand preference and confirmed that brand credibility enhances the likelihood that a brand would be preferred over another. It is important that the firms know more about the product as compared to the consumers (Chin, Isa and Alodin 2020: 896). Therefore, it is the firm's responsibility to entrust trustworthiness and expertise to the customers.

In addition, brands can serve as signals of product positioning. Brand credibility influences the formation of consideration sets; hence, brand preference. According to Hussain, Melewar, Priporas and Foroudi (2020: 1), brand credibility consists of three elements, which include trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness or likeability. Trustworthiness represents the receiver's trust in a sender (Nayeem, Murshed and Dwivedi 2019: 1). Expertise means the source's observed skills. Attractiveness or likeability is linked to the source's image (Rajavi, Kushwaha and Steenkamp 2019: 651).

Moreover, it is important to note that brand credibility plays a significant role in influencing consumer preferences and purchase decisions (Supiyandi, Hastjarjo and Slamet 2022: 9). Establishing and maintaining a credible brand is crucial for building trust, loyalty, and a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Haq, Khaliq Alvi, Somroo, Akhtar and Ahmed 2022: 1). The following are the advantages of a credible brand:

- **Trust building:** Credibility is closely linked to trust in trust building. When a brand is perceived as credible, consumers are more likely to trust its claims, promises, and the quality of its products or services (Limna and Kraiwanit 2022: 1). Trust is the foundation of strong customer relationships. Nikbin, Aramo, Iranmanesh and Ghobakhloo (2022: 494) support the idea that consumers are more inclined to prefer and choose brands they trust.
- **Reducing risk:** Consumers often perceive purchasing decisions as risks, especially when trying a new product or service. A credible brand reduces the perceived risk associated with a purchase (Cabeza-Ramírez, Sánchez-Cañizares, Santos-Roldán and Fuentes-García 2022: 1). Brand credibility assures consumers that the product or service will meet their expectations and provide value for their money, making them more likely to prefer it.
- **Positive referrals:** Customers who are satisfied are more inclined to tell others about their excellent experiences, resulting in positive word-of-mouth marketing (Song and Kim 2022: 1033). Ahmad, Mirza and Ahmad-ur-Rehman (2023: 136) argue that customers who trust a brand are more inclined to not only share their positive experiences but also suggest the brand to others, influencing brand preference.
- **Repeat customers:** A trustworthy brand is more likely to keep its current clients. According to Ismail (2022: 167), customers are more likely to make repeat purchases when they have had a pleasant encounter with a brand. Customers actively choose to return to a brand they trust; therefore, repeat business is a significant signal of brand choice.
- **Competitive advantage:** Brand reputation can be a major distinction in competitive markets (Zhou, Leng, Liu, Cui and Yu 2022: 101144). A brand acquires a competitive advantage when people believe it to be more credible

than its competitors. Hwang, Kim, Joo and Kim (2022: 256), brand preference is frequently motivated by the perception that one brand is more trustworthy and reliable than others in the same category.

It is critical to recognise that brand credibility is a significant driver of brand preference on social media. Consumers are more inclined to trust, prefer, and become loyal customers when they perceive a company to be trustworthy (Khan and Fatma 2023: 3409). Brand management and marketing strategies should prioritise the development and maintenance of brand credibility. After creating brand credibility, it is crucial to strengthen and manage the brand's social media accounts to promote sustainable brand credibility. This is vital to attaining the objectives of the study. The next section examines brand strengthening and management on social media.

3.12 Strengthening and managing the brand on social media

The new perceptions obtainable from social media have the potential to strengthen the innovation aspect of the brand (Kim, Moon and Iacobucci 2019: 22). John, Larke and Kilgour (2018) state that a consumer's first engagement or interaction with the firm usually happens on social media. However, Kohli and Buller (2013: 155) argue that brands do not only need to engage in online chats, but they also need to adjust their web marketing strategies based on their findings from the chats. Engaging with customers consistently using social media can be used to reinforce durability (Wang, Gellynck and Verbeke 2017: 400). Alampi (2019: 203) argues that engaging as many of the audience as one can and maximising the return on investment are two objectives for managing a company's social media accounts. Therefore, social media accounts need to be managed and monitored in order to maximise the return on investment. Bottles and Sherlock (2011: 68) provide the following advice for managing social media accounts in order to ensure that one is utilising social media as successfully as possible:

- Using planning tools: Scheduling tools aid in the organisation and planning of your content. These tools allow the marketer to schedule precise posting times, save time managing material, and maintain consistency across all of the accounts.

- **Maintain consistency:** Every social media account needs to share the same content and operate according to the same values and guidelines. Consistency fosters consumer trust and aids in brand maintenance.
- **Observe trends:** Be aware of the trends on social media and follow them. This might entail producing challenge videos, using hashtags, and developing memes.
- **Reuse the material:** Reusing posts is OK as long as the information is still current. By doing this, one may relieve some of the pressure on those who create social media content and give it a second chance to influence the audience or reach new viewers.
- **Make posts every day:** It is crucial to try to routinely interact with the fans on social media. Users of social media are kept amused and interested by a consistent stream of content.
- **Share tales:** The creation of relatable content that interests the target audience can be aided by sharing company success stories.
- **Respond to a rift:** Participating in discussions and expressing support for causes helps promote a brand and creates a vital emotional connection with the audience since people admire socially conscious businesses.

Moreover, to assess how effective your social media use has been, it is crucial to analyse social media metrics (Poecze, Ebster and Strauss 2022: 901). According to Shin and Ognyanova (2022: 579), the following are some of the metrics to consider:

- **Engagement:** The quantity of interactions that social media users had with your material.
- **Impressions:** How many times a member of a social media platform might see your material on their timeline, feed, or page.
- **Conversions:** The number of times someone bought anything after clicking on your content.

- Response rate: The amount of time it took the social media team to respond to user messages.

In order to promote corporate values like customer satisfaction and supplier loyalty, raise sales and revenues, assist marketing objectives, build brand awareness and reputation, and enforce loyalty performance, a growing number of businesses are turning to social technology. Therefore, it is very important for brands to be able to monitor, manage, and strengthen social media accounts while maintaining a positive brand image.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter discussed relevant literature on branding and how social media is influencing branding. This review of related literature highlighted a gap in investigating the effectiveness and efficiency of social media in growing brand preference amongst millennials in the marketing industry. The steps of growing brand preference on social media were also discussed, shedding light on the fact that the effectiveness of social media as a promotional tool also depends on the type of market offering. Brand equity was also one of the main concepts discussed. It can be concluded that social media is the current affordable, effective, and efficient way of creating brand awareness and brand preference.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters established the theoretical foundation underpinning this study and defined the variables integral to its investigation. This chapter delineates the research strategy that facilitated the collection and analysis of the necessary data enabling the researcher to derive solutions to answer the study's objectives. The research procedures, statistical methods, and analytic methods used to gather the qualitative and quantitative data are presented and the reliability and validity concerns are addressed. The evolution of the research tools, including sampling and data analysis techniques, is described. A marketing research process was used as a guide for the study's methodology because it ensures that a research project is designed and planned in a systematic manner, promoting consistency of research aspects and accurate alignment of research methodology with the identified purpose and objectives.

4.2 Marketing Research Process

Hair et al. (2017: 31) created a business research process for researchers to use as a guide for their methodologies. Figure 13 depicts a four-phase marketing research process that can be broken down into eleven specific steps. The research process ensures a research study is designed and planned in a systematic manner, promoting consistency of research aspects and accurate alignment of research methodology with the identified purpose and objectives. van der Willik, Meuleman, Prantl, van Rijn, Bos, van Ittersum, Bart, Hemmelder and Dekker (2019: 2) recognise that the four-phase information research process is based on the scientific method, which promotes prudent research principles based on logic, objectivity, reliability, and validity.

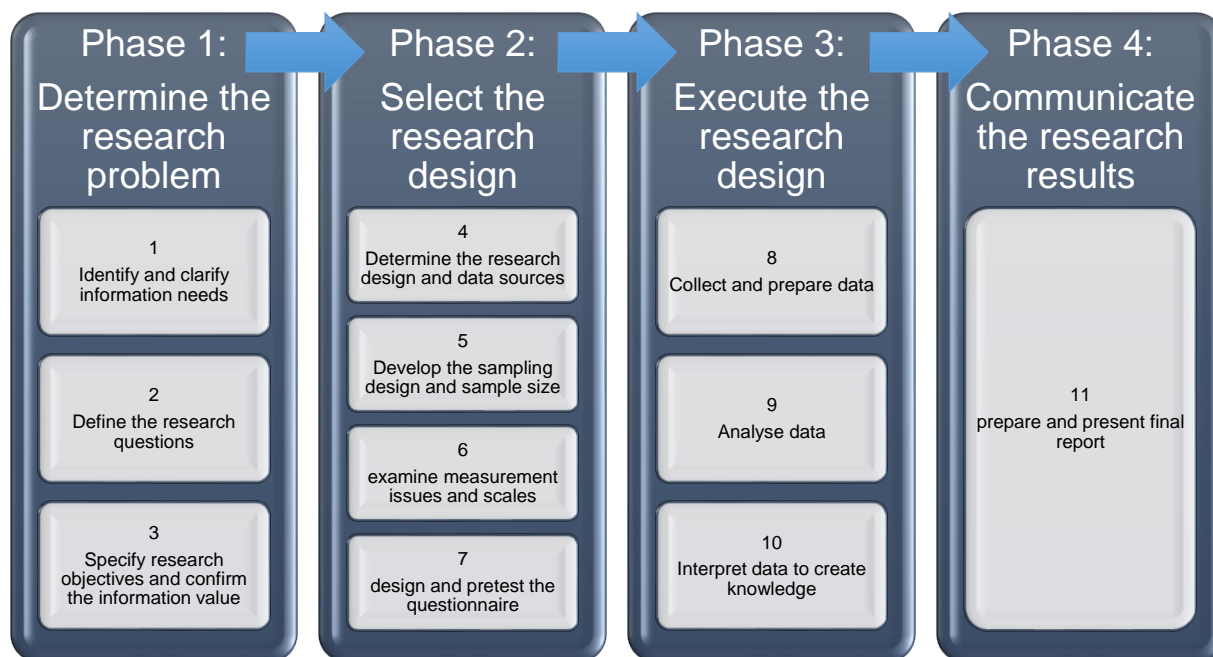


Figure 13: The marketing research process

Source: (Hair, Celsi, Ortinau and Bush, 2017:31)

This study's methodology follows the eleven steps of the marketing research process in the order listed below to ensure that a research study is designed and planned in a systematic manner, promoting consistency of research aspects and accurate alignment of research methodology to the identified purpose and objectives. The following section explains Phase 1 of the marketing research process. Phase 1 includes three steps which are identifying and clarifying information needs, defining the research questions, and specifying the objectives, and confirming the information value. All three steps are crucial in preparing an effective and efficient research design.

4.3 Phase 1: Identify the research problem

Before defining the problem, it is necessary to identify the study's unit of analysis. The unit of analysis denotes who or what should provide the data and at what level of aggregation it should be provided (Katoch 2019: 1). For this study, the unit of analysis is any millennial in the greater Durban area. Phase 1 covers Steps 1, 2 and 3 for the marketing research process strategy.

4.3.1 Step 1: Identifying and clarifying information needs

When problems are identified, marketing research becomes necessary (Baghestani Tajali, Sanatjoo, Behzadi and Jamali Mahmuei 2021: 1). Careful, systematic and timely attention is necessary to achieve or overcome the situation. The goal of the research project must be attainable. The research purpose validates the need to investigate the problem statement and provides project intent (Tu 2018: 1).

In this regard, the study's goal is stated as follows:

The aim of the study is to evaluate social media as a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials in the greater Durban area.

In the form of a carefully crafted problem statement, the researcher must identify the root of the problem. This enables the researcher to create a clear and concise research design that guides the research. This is important when creating a research design for the study. When research objectives are clear, they guide the research design to achieve solutions and recommendations for the research problems.

4.3.2 The problem statement is as follows:

In addition, research on the use of social media to promote growth in brand preference amongst the millennials is very scant; hence, little is understood about the millennials and their purchase behaviour, most specifically regarding the social media websites used by many brands. Moreover, it is very difficult to monitor what customers post on social media, despite many brands being affected both positively and negatively, which rings an alarm on the need for more research on social media as a tool to grow brand preference positively and effectively (Aljumah, Nuseir and Alshurideh 2021: 367). In the current trend of social media marketing, multiple brand endorsers are being used to attract targeted leads. According to Novak and Hoffman (2019: 216), the business environment is being transformed daily by the internet. The internet has promoted the coverage of many audiences and the creation of compelling value propositions, which have never been possible before through social media. The internet also brought a great change to how customers and sellers interact, as they now interact through an electronic connection. In addition, the internet has influenced most marketing

fundamentals, such as the need for new brand-building strategies (Islam, Rahman and Hollebeek 2019: 1). According to Tsimonis, Dimitriadis and Omar (2020: 217), data from 2011 shows that there are more than 2.4 billion internet users. The internet, through social media, is taking control over the business environment in the 21st century, and it is also affecting businesses both positively and negatively.

It is worth noting that studies have been conducted in the area of social media across the world. Nevertheless, previous studies by Appio and Lacoste (2019: 53), Arrigo (2018: 1), Li, Larimo and Leonidou (2021a: 51) and Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Hughes, Carlson, Filieri, Jacobson, Jain, Karjaluoto, Kefi and Krishen (2021: 102168), to name a few, do not provide any research on how social media can influence brand preference amongst millennials. This leaves a gap regarding the influence of social media on brand preference amongst millennials, and the purpose of this study is to evaluate social media as a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials in the greater Durban area.

Knowing and understanding the information needed helps in creating a well-customized research design for this study. The following step 2 explains the research questions of the study. Understanding the research questions is crucial in creating the constructs of the research instruments and making sure that the research instruments are collecting relevant and valid information to answer the research questions.

4.4 Step 2: Determine the specific research questions

Specific research questions assist the researcher in determining which issues the study should address. According to Hair *et al.* (2017: 34), these questions can be obtained from a literature review. A detailed literature study identifies concerns, which are then translated into specific and measurable research questions that must be answered for the research study to be effective.

The following issues must be addressed in this study:

4.4.1 Research questions

- What is the influence of social media on growing brand preference?
- What is the influence of social media on millennials' buying decisions?

- What is the influence of social media on enhancing brand awareness and brand preference?
- What is the influence of social media on brand positioning and credibility?
- What recommendations can be given for managing and monitoring social media brands' accounts?

This step is important for this study because, when the researcher is aware of the research questions, it assists the researcher in determining which issues the study should address. Step 3 is addressed in the next section. The research objectives are clearly stated. Knowing and understanding the objectives allows the researcher to maintain a manageable focus for the study.

4.4.2 Step 3: Specifying research objectives and confirm the information value

The research objectives are the goals that are attained by conducting the research (Pandey and Pandey 2021: 21). They must be quantifiable, clear, and succinct. The research objectives govern the research design as well as the measurement instrument to be used for the project (Kumar 2018: 20). The study's objectives are as follows:

- To assess various ways in which social media develops and enhances positive awareness and brand preference.
- To examine the influence of social media on the buying decision-making process of millennials in Durban.
- To identify the perceptions of millennials on social media and social media performance in Durban.
- To suggest strategies for managing and monitoring social space activities towards a positive brand preference.

For this study, only four objectives have been identified. According to Dawson (2019: 15), fewer objectives allow the researcher to maintain a manageable focus for the study. This makes it easier to complete each objective by the end of the project. Step 3 concludes Phase 1 in the research process. Clearly defining the research purpose, problem statement and objectives in Phase 1 is very important, as it creates a streamlined research design, ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the study. The following sections discuss how the researcher selects the research design for the study.

4.5 Phase 2: Selecting the research design

This second phase seeks to identify the best research design for achieving the objectives of this study. A proper research design ensures the success of the study. A research design is a strategy that serves as a guide to reaching the study objective in a proper manner and is completed by the researcher before data collection starts (Asenahabi, Busula and Ronoh 2019: 348). In order to give pertinent answers to research questions at the lowest possible cost, an appropriate research design directs the researcher to convert a research topic into data for analysis. The research design's purpose is to plan and structure the marketing research project to improve the overall validity of the research results and findings. A research design, in other words, is the plan for how the research investigation is to be carried out (McDaniel Jr and Gates 2018: 14). From the above definitions, it can be stated that research design refers to the entire strategy for bridging conceptual research issues with empirical research. Phase 2 comprises Steps 4, 5 and 6 of the marketing research process. Step 4 is explained next.

4.5.1 Step 4: Determine the research design and data sources

The research objectives serve as the foundation for determining the research design (Malhotra, Nunan and Birks 2017: 19). As a result, the research design can be viewed as a blueprint or master plan for achieving specific objectives within the scope of the study. It is also a series of rational decision-making choices that govern the data

collection and analysis strategy (Knight 2010: 98). Three types of research designs are commonly used in business research: exploratory, descriptive, and causal.

- **Design of exploratory research:** Exploratory research is unstructured and informal, and it produces a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding an identified problem (Babin and Zikmund 2015: 13). Literature reviews and qualitative data collection methods such as case studies, focus groups, experience surveys, and observations are used to inform exploratory research projects. Exploratory research is also used to define terms, clarify ambiguous situations and hypotheses, and prioritise research (Wilson 2018: 5).
- **Descriptive research design:** Descriptive research describes the properties of variables of interest such as objects, people, groups, organisations, and environments (Zikmund and Babin 2015: 16). Descriptive research is conducted after the researcher has gained a thorough understanding of the situation under investigation. Accuracy is critical in descriptive studies; therefore, good primary and secondary data must be collected to increase the value of the completed project. Prasad and Jha (2014: 335) state that to validate descriptive studies, reliable quantitative data must be collected. In descriptive studies, hypotheses are frequently present, albeit speculative and tentative (Ćwiklicki and Pilch 2021: 51).
- **Causal research design:** Causal research investigates the cause-and-effect relationships between variables. It is appropriate to use causal studies when the researcher needs to determine which independent variables cause the dependent variables to move (Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree 2014: 28). Typically, statements analysing causality between variables are phrased as follows: if x is an independent variable, then y is a dependent variable. Causal studies rule out the possibility of other external variables causing the given variables to behave and react in the ways that they do.

4.5.2 Research design selected for this study

This study is both **exploratory and descriptive** in nature, as it uses a mixed-methods approach. According to Seixas, Smith and Mitton (2018: 778), descriptive studies can aid in describing the effects of social media on brand preference. This is relevant to

this study because it seeks to comprehend social media and how the city of Durban can successfully grow brand preference in the marketing industry through social media. In addition, exploratory research is unstructured and informal, and it produces a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding social media and growing brand preference (Swedberg 2020: 18).

Determining data sources

Primary and secondary data is gathered for the study. Secondary data is literature that was collected for previous studies and already exists (Johnston 2017: 619). Secondary data is collected in chapters two and three as part of a thorough literature review.

Secondary data is found in several formats, including company reports, academic and professional journals and dissertations, newspapers, books, statistical reports, social media, and blogs. According to Putro and Prasetyowati (2019: 1), primary data can be quantitative data or qualitative data, which are explained in the following section. This study uses both quantitative and qualitative data.

4.5.3 Quantitative data

Quantitative data collection entails posing structured questions with pre-determined response options to a pre-determined group of respondents. Quantitative research uses statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques to establish relationships between variables in a population (Bloomfield and Fisher 2019: 27). Variables are classified into two types: dependent and independent variables. Independent variables stand alone and are unaffected by other variables being measured, such as age and gender. Other factors (independent variables) influence dependent variables, such as test results, which are influenced by study time, which is an independent variable.

Quantitative data necessitates formalized data collection procedures (Goertzen 2017: 13). Quantitative data places a premium on specificity and precision. The data formatting and sources are clearly labelled. Data collection and reporting can be numerically represented and analysed. Most quantitative data is used to inform causal and descriptive studies (Brannen 2017: 37). The researcher must be capable of statistical analysis and numerical interpretation. In this study, quantitative data was collected, analysed and presented.

4.5.4 Qualitative data

Qualitative research refers to unstructured data collected and analysed through observation of what people say and do, which informs qualitative research (Silverman 2020: 9). To collect unstandardised, free-style responses from respondents, open-ended questions and observations are used. Although qualitative data is difficult to quantify, it can be classified. Exploratory studies are frequently informed by qualitative data. To analyse qualitative data, thematic analysis was used. Generalizing data may be restricted (Flick 2018: 23). Qualitative data was collected for this study.

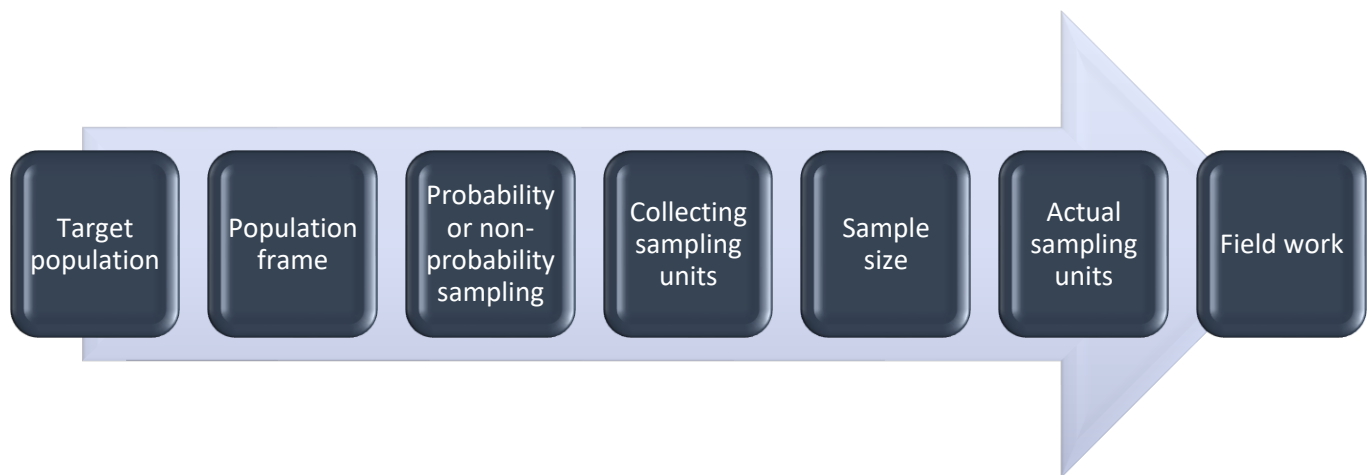
4.5.5 Mixed method

The use of more than one method of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting is referred to as a mixed method. It is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches (Timans, Wouters and Heilbron 2019: 193). This study adopted the mixed methods approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods. For this study, quantitative and qualitative primary data were gathered. To obtain specific information from the respondents, a structured questionnaire and an interview guide were designed and used. The mixed method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to examine various viewpoints and discover connections between the complex layers of multiple research issues, drawing on the capabilities of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Expanding and strengthening a study's results and, as a result, adding to the body of published literature is the overarching purpose of mixed-method research. The following step five explains the sampling methods and the sampling method chosen for this study.

4.6 Step 5: Create a sampling design and a sample size

Zikmund et al. (2009:391) have delineated seven steps for analysing sampling concepts. This study employed these procedures, which are depicted in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Seven steps in analysing sampling concepts



Source: Zikmund *et al.* (2009: 391).

4.61 Identifying the target demographic and population frame

A sample represents a subset of a larger population of elements (Majid 2018: 1). The population is a large group of elements that share some characteristics. To obtain reliable data from a small portion of a population that is representative of the entire population, sampling is required (Lakens 2022: 332). Obtaining data from a sample is advantageous, especially when it is impractical to obtain data from the population due to its size or due to time, cost, or other constraints. Alternatively, for the research study, a researcher may collect data from every member of the population, which is known as a census (Heen, Lieberman and Meithe 2020: 3).

For this study, millennials from the greater Durban area represent the study's target population. For this study, millennials aged 26 to 41 from the greater Durban area represent the sampling frame. This population was chosen because this generation is regarded as open-minded, confident, carefree, liberal, upbeat, receptive to new technology, and receptive to new ways of living. In addition, millennials are cyber active, very active on social media, and very responsive when shopping online (Leon 2018: 6).

4.6.2 Determine whether to use probability or non-probability sampling

It is critical to comprehend why there is a need to sample the general population. A decent sample should be a representative subset of the population the researcher is

interested in studying. This section will state the available sampling methods and the chosen sampling method for this study. The reasons for choosing the sampling method are outlined.

➤ **Probability sampling**

Probability sampling is a sampling technique in which researchers select samples from a larger population by employing a method based on probability theory (Bhardwaj 2019: 157). This sampling method considers every member of the population and creates samples using a predetermined process.

➤ **Nonprobability sampling**

Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique in which the researcher chooses samples based on his or her subjective judgement rather than random selection. It is a more lenient method (Pace 2021: 5). This sampling method is heavily reliant on the researchers' expertise. It is carried out through observation, and it is widely used in qualitative research. Non-probability sampling, as opposed to probability sampling, is a sampling method in which not all members of the population have an equal chance of participating in the study (Bacher, Lemcke, Schmich and Quatember 2019: 1). This method is used by researchers in studies where it is impossible to draw random probability samples due to time or cost constraints (Roy 2019: 181).

Granted the knowledge around probability and non-probability sampling techniques, this study utilises non-probability purposeful or judgemental sampling. This is a non-probability sampling technique in which units in the sample are chosen based on characteristics pre-specified by the researcher in order for the sample to have the same distribution characteristics assumed to exist in the population (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim 2016: 2). Age is one of the pre-specified characteristics of millennials. This sampling technique is the most appropriate because the researcher possesses enough knowledge and credibility to choose the sample, and the research belongs to the millennial generation (target population). Non-probability sampling is faster and less expensive than probability sampling. Respondents respond faster than people chosen at random because they are highly motivated to participate (Berndt 2020: 224).

4.6.3 Plan procedure for selecting sampling units

The single elements or groups of elements that are likely to be selected in the sample are referred to as sampling units. This study utilises purposeful or judgemental nonprobability sampling because the researcher possesses enough knowledge and credibility to choose the sample, and the researcher belongs to the millennial generation (target population). Purposive nonprobability sampling is faster and less expensive.

4.6.4 Determine the sample size and the actual sampling units

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 15), sample size ranging between 30 and 500 is suggested, depending on the nature of the questions the study is supposed to answer. The larger the sample size, the higher the chances of minimising errors and getting accurate and reliable results. Nonprobability purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 400 participants for quantitative data and 10 participants for qualitative data within the greater area of Durban.

4.6.5 Carrying out fieldwork

This is the process by which the researcher collects data from the chosen respondents, referred to as fieldwork. Step 8 of the research methodology process goes into greater detail. Step 6 is explained in the following section in which measurement issues and scales are examined.

4.7 Step 6: Examining measurement issues and scales

Scale measurement entails assigning descriptors to represent the range of possible answers to a question about an item or construct (Dalati 2018: 79). A Likert scale was used for this study. The scale descriptors include phrases such as "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree". There can also be numbers in any range beginning with 1 that are assigned according to a set of rules. According to Hair et al. (2017: 163), scale measurement is used to assign degrees of intensity, known as scale points, to responses. Scales are classified into four types: nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio (Sekaran and Bougie 2016: 18).

4.7.1 Scales used in this study

The questionnaire for this study employs nominal, interval, and Likert scales. These are used in conjunction with the various attitude rating scales described in the following section. In business research, attitude rating scales are very common.

4.7.1.1 Nominal scale

The nominal scale is the most fundamental scale (Suparji, Nugroho and Martiningsih 2021: 133). Responses cannot be ranked because there is no intensity level on this scale. According to Burns et al. (2017: 206), nominal scales employ designators such as race, gender, religion and occupation in this study.

4.7.1.2 Interval scales

The distance between each level can be calculated using interval scales. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 19), interval scales are used to rate subjective properties in which a single strength or distance between two consecutive items can be mapped on a continuum and considered as one scale unit. The interval scales measure subjective properties; therefore, the researcher must exercise caution when employing this type of scale. The Likert scale is balanced with an array of agree and disagree descriptors that allow respondents to indicate how much they agree or disagree with the statements about a topic (Mirahmadizadeh, Delam, Seif and Bahrami 2022: 63). The Likert scale is made up of a 5-point scale to measure respondents' judgements.

4.7.1.3 Category scales

These are nominal scales with more response options than dichotomous scales and are thus more sensitive (Sanchez Fausto 2021: 1). Respondents are given options to choose the most appropriate response on a scale. To collect nominal data, category-scale questions are used to group respondents into specific common groups. This scale is also used when asking respondents to select the statements that best apply to them from a given set of statements, as well as when answering multiple-choice questions.

4.8 Scales of measurement evaluation

The measurement scales must be validated and tested for reliability.

4.8.1 Putting measures to the test

Testing the goodness of measures allows the researcher to ensure that the correct scale is used to measure a specific variable and that it is measuring the concept that it is supposed to measure (Sekaran and Bougie 2016: 18). It enables the researcher to sort through items and variables to ensure that only the most accurate and relevant ones are included in the study. It aids in reducing the possibility of errors, particularly in the measurement of attitudinal variables. Item analysis and assessing the scales' reliability and validity are used to assess the goodness of the scales in this study. Each item is evaluated in order to determine its ability to distinguish between high-scoring and low-scoring subjects. The means of the high-scoring and low-scoring subjects are then compared using t-values to identify significant differences for this study. Following that, the items with the highest t-values are incorporated into the instrument.

Step 7, discussed in the next section, elaborates on questionnaire development. This step is important in ensuring that the correct research question is addressed and that accurate and appropriate data for statistical analysis is collected.

4.9 Step 7: Creating a questionnaire

According to Zickar (2020: 213), measurement is the act of determining something's capabilities, magnitudes, quantity, or level. Krosnick (2018: 439) supports that the design of the questionnaire is critical to ensuring that the correct research question is addressed and that accurate and appropriate data for statistical analysis is collected. Valid, dependable, clear, short, and fascinating are all qualities of an excellent questionnaire.

4.9.1 Introduction to the questionnaire

The introduction is the initial part of the questionnaire, according to Oosterveld, Vorst and Smits (2019: 2501), where the potential respondent reads about the study before answering the questionnaire. Issues such as who is conducting the survey, what the

survey is about, how the respondent is chosen, motivation for the respondent's participation, and determining the respondent's ability to fully participate in the survey are all covered in the introduction of this study's research instruments. The respondents are also assured that their identity and comments are kept confidential or anonymous in the introduction.

4.9.2 Instructions to the respondent

The participant is instructed to read all of the questions attentively and respond in the areas provided at the commencement of the survey. After each question, there are explicit directions on how to react to the question. Each question is followed by a bracketed statement in italics that explains how to answer it. Instructions are also given on which questions to react to or not respond to base on the answers given to previous questions.

4.9.3 Wording principles

The questions are logically phrased in plain English. The usage of trade terminology is kept to a bare minimum. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 19), inquiries should not be loaded, double-barrelled, leading, confusing, or socially undesirable.

4.9.4 Formatting of survey questions

In quantitative research questionnaires, closed-ended questions are used sparingly (Gehlbach and Artino 2018: 360). Closed-ended inquiries are well-structured and appropriate for gathering quantitative information. Closed-ended questions require respondents to choose the most appropriate response from a list of options. Even if the question is irrelevant or irrelevant to the respondent, a response is requested. Responses can be simplistic, constrained, or forced at times. Closed-ended questions were used in the construction of the questionnaire for this study. The questionnaire was designed in a way to collect information, such as demographic information and other factual information, from the respondents based on the aim of the study and the problem statement (Brace 2018: 12).

The structure of the questionnaire was simple for the respondents to complete without difficulty. The closed-ended questionnaire was adopted because a set of standardised

answers guarantees uniformity of responses, and question uniformity throughout the questionnaire can assure a reduction in bias (Oosterveld, Vorst and Smits 2019: 2501). The questionnaire's introduction page informed participants that their anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed, and allowed participants to respond at their convenience. In addition, questionnaires are ideal for reaching a broad and geographically diverse target population. The questionnaires perceived as non-threatening and familiar to most people.

4.9.5 Question flow

Question flow refers to the order in which questions or blocks of questions are asked (Burns, Bush and Sinha 2014: 1). The questions in this study were organised in a way that demonstrated logic and common sense. Each question was clearly labelled with a number. The questions were divided into ten sections, each of which corresponded to one of the research objectives and the conceptual framework hypotheses.

4.9.6 Computer aided questionnaire design

Computer-aided software allows users to create and administer surveys using computer technology (Chen, Yang, Chang, Cheng, Lu, Wang, Juan, Hsu, Huang and Tu 2020: 318). The software also enables the researcher to retrieve and analyse responses in order to produce spreadsheets and graphs that may be used to generate useful data. Microsoft Forms® was used to create an online version of the study's questionnaire. Participants received an email with a link to the questionnaire. Upon completion of the survey, participants click the "submit" button, and the finalised questionnaire is stored within the researcher's Microsoft Forms® account.

4.9.7 Closing the questionnaire

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 18), the questionnaire should end on a kind note. This study's questionnaire concluded with a thank-you note to the participant. The next section explains Phase 3 of the research methodology development process.

4.10 Phase 3: Execute the research design

The field study is the initial step in carrying out the research design. Utilising a mixed method to generate useful information, the data collected during the field study must be both qualitative and statistically analysed.

4.10.1 Step 8: Gathering and compiling data

For this study, the researcher used a questionnaire and an interview guide as the research instruments. The actual administration of the questionnaire was part of the data collection procedure. Data preparation entails preparing the data for statistical analysis. Prior to administering questionnaires to the participants of the study, a letter of consent was provided to seek participant consent and explain the purpose of the research. In-depth interviews were used to collect qualitative data. Interviewee consent to participate in the interview was also recorded. As regards the interviewees, the researcher included social media experts (bloggers) and social media influencers. The qualitative data collection instrument, the interview guide, was designed in English with relatively unstructured questions. No questions were consciously formulated during these informal conversation-type interviews; however, an interview guide was used to guide the participant back to the research subject when necessary. The interview session lasted at least 30 minutes (Wiid and Diggins, 2022: 103). In-depth interviews were used to gain a detailed analysis of attitudes, behaviours and perceptions on social media and branding. According to Rogers, Shearer, Hryniuk, Ray and Rempel (2021: 1), the following guidelines followed:

- The duration of the interview depends on the level of interview fatigue.
- Respondents are carefully screened to ensure that they are relevant and appropriate respondents for the researched topic.
- Good communication skills are very important; therefore, the researcher conducts the interviewer.
- Where possible, the interviews are recorded for transcription and analysis later.
- The interviews should take place in a pleasant place where the interviewee is very comfortable, which encourages a fruitful discussion.

To complete the data collection process, the researcher enlisted the help of one research assistant. The research assistant is a post-graduate student in the Faculty of Management Sciences at Durban University of Technology (Marketing). Initial training was provided to the assistant in order to strengthen her understanding of the study, the participants, and the research assistant's role in successfully administering the questionnaire.

The initial contact is made either telephonically, via email, or face-to-face meetings with the participants. According to Tan (2019: 69), introductory communication facilitates the participant's familiarity, rapport and cooperation between the researcher and the participants. This helps in identifying the most suitable methods for administering the questionnaire and conducting the interviews, as well as deciding on the date and time to interview and administer the questionnaire, and setting a deadline for receiving the completed questionnaire from the participant.

4.10.2 Surveys that are structured vs. Unstructured

The contrasts between structured and unstructured surveys are noted by Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 19). In structured surveys, the participant is approached by the researcher with a set of questions to which he or she must respond. An identical questionnaire template is used for all of the participants in the sample. In unstructured surveys, on the other hand, the researcher approaches the participant with ambiguous or no pre-set questions and sets up future questions depending on the prior questions' responses. For exploratory investigations, unstructured surveys are commonly used. This study's survey was structured and based on a pre-determined questionnaire, which is detailed in Step 7 of this chapter. In addition, this study is also using an unstructured interview guide for the qualitative data collection.

On the other hand, some of the participants are directly administered the questionnaire by the researcher and the research assistant (Ji and Jan 2020: 716). When the survey is limited to a small area, this is the best option. It saves time and allows for the easy and quick clarification of doubts. Good rapport and respondent confidence in the study are facilitated by physical interaction between the researcher and the participant. While the research assistant waits, the participants complete the questionnaire. Alternatively,

the researcher and the research assistant were to return at a mutually agreed-upon time to collect the completed questionnaire.

The research assistant calls the participant at a pre-arranged time and reads the questions to him or her while the respondent verbally affirms his or her response. On the questionnaire, the assistant records the responses in the appropriate manner. Even if they are out of town, respondents may be reached at any time. If the participant does not properly comprehend the question and/or the responses supplied, the research assistant is urged to speak slowly and clearly when speaking with respondents over the phone.

Participants are sent emails with a link to the online questionnaire. To submit the questionnaire, the participant clicks on a save and send button after completing the survey. This method is inexpensive and ensures that the questionnaire is delivered to and from the participant as soon as possible (Sekaran and Bougie 2016: 20). To successfully complete the online survey, the participant must have a reliable internet connection and sufficient computer-based intelligence. Participants (millennials) have access to a good internet connection because millennials are generally technologically savvy and have access to high-quality internet services.

4.10.3 The management of errors made by participants and administrators

Errors in data collection can be caused by participants and survey administrators. Errors caused by the researcher may include bad questions, such as ambiguous and leading questions, as well as misunderstandings. Non-response, omissions, and inconsistent answers are examples of mistakes that participants can make (Tan 2019: 70). Participants' errors are reduced by using simple-worded and short questionnaires, providing clear instructions, and emphasising participant's anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided. To ensure that survey administrator errors are minimised, the research assistant receives extensive initial training as well as close monitoring and management of the survey administrator's activities. After gathering the data, it must be prepared for analysis (Trevena, Zikmund-Fisher, Edwards, Gaissmaier, Galesic, Han, King, Lawson, Linder and Lipkus 2013: 4).

Data validation ensures that the survey is being carried out correctly and without bias or fraud (Hair *et al.* 2017:131). The researcher ensures that the participants' responses are valid and consistent with one another. It entails ensuring that the data is free of errors that a participant or the survey administrator could make (Burns, Bush and Sinha 2014: 5). The researcher ensures that the appropriate questions are asked, that responses are entered correctly and completely, and that the responses are properly screened.

4.10.4 Data coding

The researcher reduces survey responses to mutually exclusive categories that could be assigned numerical codes through coding. Data coding is an important step in research and analysis, particularly in qualitative research, because it categorises and organises raw data for simpler analysis. According to Wiid and Diggins (2015:35), data coding consists of the following three steps:

- The specification of categories

In this step, researchers decide which categories or themes they want to find in the data. These categories are frequently linked to study questions or aims. For instance, if the study is about social media and brand preference for a product, categories could include determinants of preferred social media platforms and preferred social media content.

- Allocation of code numbers to each category

After defining the categories, the researcher needs to assign each one a unique code number or label. These codes are used to indicate the various data categories. This stage aids in the simplification and organisation of the analysis process (Parameswaran, Ozawa-Kirk and Latendresse 2020: 630). For example, if “determinants of preferential social media platforms” is coded “D1” and “preferred social media content” is coded “C1”, every incidence of these categories in the data will be tagged with their corresponding codes.

- Compilation of a code book or manual.

To document the categories and their matching code numbers, a code book or manual is prepared. This resource will be useful for scholars who will be involved in the coding

process. The code book explains each category in detail and includes examples of what kind of data should be coded with each category (Xu and Zammit 2020: 1).

4.10.5 Data categorization

At this stage, the data is grouped so that questions about the same concept can be grouped and analysed together. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 21), all data must point in the same direction. For this study, data from negatively worded questions was reversed so that it pointed in the same direction as data from positively worded questions. Categories should be of a suitable size. Data categories should be mutually exclusive and incompatible, thus making sure each answer falls into only one category. To sum up, categories must be exhaustive and comprehensive, which means they should include all possible answers. The survey questionnaire was created using Microsoft Forms; enabling the automatic capture of data. As a result, there was no need for manual input of information into the computer. Regarding the qualitative data, the interviews are recorded to facilitate transcription.

4.11 Step 9: Analysing the data

The collected raw data was prepared for analysis to produce useful information. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to produce a data set. A data set, according to Burns, Bush and Sinha (2014: 11), is a matrix of integers arranged in rows and columns. Each column emphasises a related question from the questionnaire, while the rows populate each respondent's responses. Descriptive analysis, inferential analysis, association analysis, and predictive analysis can all be utilised with the data set (Deeks, Higgins, Altman and Group 2019: 241). Descriptive and inferential analyses were used in this study.

According to George and Mallery (2018: 126), descriptive analysis is the statistical definition, combination and presentation of ideas of interest or relationships among these concepts. Inferential statistics, on the other hand, are arithmetical measures that are used to draw conclusions about the relationships between variables. They differ from descriptive statistics in that they are specifically designed to test hypotheses. Many statistical measures supported by modern statistical software, such as SPSS

version 28.0 and Statistical Analysis System (SAS), fall into this category. SPSS version 28.0 was used for quantitative data.

4.11.1 Descriptive analysis

Descriptive analysis is a statistical method of summarising data in order to assess the information contained within (Kaliyadan and Kulkarni 2019: 82). Cooksey (2020: 61) states that descriptive statistics refers to a shared name for several statistical methods that are used to organise and summarise data in a meaningful way. Therefore, descriptive statistics enhance the understanding of the properties of data. Exploratory analysis is done using descriptive statistics to understand the data. In this regard, the statistical analysis of the data is done with the help of a statistician. According to Mishra, Pandey, Singh, Gupta, Sahu and Keshri (2019: 67), descriptive analysis uses statistical transformation of data to determine basic properties such as central tendency and variability. It is stated that choosing the most appropriate descriptive measure and making sense of the data is crucial.

➤ **Choosing the most appropriate descriptive measure**

Burns, Bush and Sinha (2014: 21) point out that to analyse the data provided for each question, the appropriate statistical measure must be utilised. The more thorough the information offered by a statistical measure, the better it is for scales with larger amounts of data.

➤ **A sense of the data**

This is accomplished by looking at the central tendency and variability. This allows the researcher to evaluate how the respondents felt about each question, as well as the quality of the items and measures. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 19), a narrow range or little diversity in responses provided may indicate that the questionnaire is not correctly designed and respondents do not fully comprehend the question's criteria.

4.11.2 Inferential analysis

Admittedly, researchers prefer to go beyond just summarising and describing the collected data; therefore, a need to go beyond descriptive statistics arises (Zhang,

Wang, Zhao and Cai 2018: 103). Likewise, a field of statistics that relies heavily on probability theory is implemented. Inferential statistics are created from probability statements because it is impossible to report anything about the whole population with certainty if it is based on only a representative sample.

Researchers use inferential statistics to learn about the links between two variables, the differences in a variable between different subgroups, or how numerous independent variables might explain the variance in a dependent variable (McDaniel Jr and Gates 2018: 24). The significance of each of these inferential statistics is described in turn.

4.11.3 Correlations

This analysis enables the researcher to comprehend the properties of bivariate relationships, or those involving two variables (Makowski, Ben-Shachar, Patil and Lüdecke 2020: 2306). Correlation is determined by observing how one variable reacts to changes in another variable. Correlation can range from a totally positive correlation of +1 value to a perfectly negative correlation of -1 value, as depicted on a scatter diagram. Correlational analysis can also be used to accept or reject ideas about variable relationships. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016: 21), bivariate correlations can be used to describe the strength of associations evaluated on interval and ratio scales.

4.11.4 Chi-square test

The chi-square (χ^2) test compares two nominal variables are compared. The chi-square (χ^2) test is a non-parametric test that is used to detect if two nominally scaled variables are related or independent (Pandey and Pandey 2021: 21). When normality of distributions cannot be assumed in the supplied data, χ^2 tests, like other non-parametric tests, are utilised. In the provided data, it compares the observed frequency to the expected frequency.

4.11.5 A t-test

A t-test determines whether there are significant mean differences between two groups. The t-test enables the researcher to see if there are any differences between

two groups on a specific interval or ratio-scaled variable (Wilson 2018: 31). It compares the two groups' means and standard deviations to see if the numerical differences in means are statistically different from zero, as the null hypothesis assumes.

4.11.6 ANOVA

ANOVA tests the differences in mean between various groups. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) examines significant mean differences between three or more groups on a dependent variable that is interval or ratio scaled (Kumar 2018: 28). The F-statistic is used in ANOVA to determine whether the means of the groups are substantially different from one another. This F-statistic depicts the differences or similarities in variances between two samples.

4.11.7 Factor analysis

Factor analysis is used to find underlying components in data and to narrow down the number of variables to a more manageable quantity (Bandalos and Finney 2018: 98). It converts the original variables into factors, which are linear combinations of non-correlated variables. The primary purpose of factor analysis is to reduce the amount of data. When a researcher wants to represent a large number of questions with a small number of hypothetical components, factor analysis is commonly used in survey research (Shrestha 2021: 4). Participants may answer three independent questions about stakeholder involvement, cooperative competition, and a centralized, coordinated management system level as part of an industry-wide poll on the need to build brand preference for a consolidated product for Durban's global business marketing plan.

Each question would be insufficient as a measure of attitudes towards such a marketing plan on its own, but taken together, they may provide a more accurate picture of attitudes. The three metrics can be compared using factor analysis to see if they are measuring the same thing. If this is the case, they can be merged to form a new variable, a factor score variable, which includes a score for each respondent on the factor. Factor approaches can be used in a wide range of scenarios. For this study, factor analysis was done by way of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and principal component analysis (PCA).

❖ **Factor analysis exploratory (EFA).**

Exploratory factor analysis aids in the more efficient representation of a large number of links among regularly distributed or scale variables (Terrell 2012: 254). For both EFA and PCA, a basic criterion is that relationships between the variables be established.

• **Data suitability for EFA-**

The sample size and the strength of the correlations between variables are assessed to determine whether the data is suitable for EFA. According to Shrestha (2021: 4), the sample size must be at least five times larger than the number of variables in the study. The KMO and Bartlett's tests are useful for identifying the strength of correlations between variables, and, consequently, the data's appropriateness for factor analysis.

• **The KMO and Bartlett's**

There are two different types of tests. The sampling adequacy measure, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), indicates the proportion of variance in variables that can be explained by underlying factors. Closer to 1.0 indicates that factor analysis may be beneficial with the dataset, while less than 0.5 indicates that factor analysis results are neither practical nor useful (Rojas-Valverde, Pino-Ortega, Gómez-Carmona and Rico-González 2020: 8712). The notion that a correlation matrix is an identity matrix is investigated using Bartlett's sphericity test (International Business Machines 2012a). This would show a link between the variables and their structure-detection suitability. Bartlett's sphericity tests identify redundancy between elements that may be summed up with a few components (Hair et al. 2017:31). A factor analysis might be effective with the dataset if the significance level is less than 0.05.

• **Extraction of factors**

Factor extraction entails determining the smallest number of factors that can be utilised to describe correlations between variables with the maximum accuracy. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's criterion is the most widely used method for determining an appropriate number of components (Rojas-Valverde *et al.* 2020: 8712). For subsequent analysis, only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 are extracted.

4.11.8 Qualitative Data analysis

Thematic analysis examines patterns of meaning in a data set, such as a series of interviews or focus group transcripts. Thematic analysis is used to locate patterns within data through data familiarisation, coding, and developing a revised theme (Lowe, Norris, Farris and Babbage 2018: 191). Thematic analysis has greater potential to provide greater depth and uncover more themes. Thematic analysis was used for this study because it provides themes that help the researcher make sense of the content and derive meaning from it.

4.12 Step 10: Analyse data to generate knowledge

Unless data is interpreted into valuable knowledge, it is useless for business solutions. A collection of facts, signals, or symbols is called data. It might be unpolished, inconsistent, or disorganised in this state. It is therefore useless. A collection of facts that has been consistently organised and arranged is referred to as information. Due to the ease of storage and retrieval, data in the form of information becomes more helpful. A body of information with its corresponding context is referred to as knowledge. Relationships between information sets gathered throughout time serve as context. In Chapter 7, the knowledge gained was used to draw essential conclusions and offer recommendations.

4.13 Validity

The concept of validity in research refers to how logical, honest, solid, sound, practical, useful, and valuable a study is. A study's validity is ensured when it contributes to knowledge (Sekaran and Bougie 2016: 19). The evidence gathered for the study's purposes must be reliable (Dawson 2019: 1). Similarly, Majid (2018: 2) defines validity as the degree to which the research instrument is able to determine how sound a certain notion is (Flake, Davidson, Wong and Pek 2022: 576). To ensure validity, the questions for this study were developed in accordance with the study's aims, as well as the literature and findings of other academics on social media marketing and its influence on brand preference, whose conclusions are conceptually sound, empirically validated, and founded in the literature.

4.14 Reliability

Laumann (2020: 106) defines reliability as estimations of the degree to which evaluations are not unplanned or have uneven inaccuracy. Temporary and situational dynamics are not inquisitive; thus, reliable tools can be used with confidence. Pandey and Pandey (2021: 14) define reliability as the degree to which a measurement produces consistent results when repeated assessments are done. Cronbach's alpha, Kuder-Richardson, and split-half are three different ways of measuring reliability. Cronbach's alpha is the explicit degree of internal consistency and reliability of a set of items (Park 2021: 3). Schrum, Johnson, Ghuy and Gombolay (2020: 42) remark that Cronbach alpha is created to be used when test material has more than two options, such as a Likert scale with five options. This study used Cronbach's alpha test to test reliability since the questionnaire included a Likert scale with five options. The questionnaire was pretested to check reliability through a pilot study.

4.15 Considerations on Ethics

Ethics is the honest distinction between good and wrong; therefore, unethical behaviour is not necessarily criminal. According to Williams and Anderson (2018: 386), general ethical standards may fluctuate depending on society, as different societies believe in different norms and values. The ethical problems that necessitate expectations are numerous, and the study methodologies mirror them. These considerations apply to any approach and at any stage of the research process (Sekaran and Bougie 2016: 23). The researcher followed ethical guidelines in this study by ensuring that only millennials were included among the study's participants. Participants were not forced to participate in any way, and they were informed in writing of their freedom to withdraw from the study.

4.16 Limitations and delimitations

A limitation is a feature of a study that the researcher cannot control and has a negative impact on the study's outcomes (Theofanidis and Fountouki 2018: 155). The representativeness of the data acquired was also condensed due to the limited time

and financial resources available to conduct research in Durban within a specific timeframe. The research was only confined to the Durban area.

4.17 Conclusion

This chapter gave a general outline of the study's research methods. The study's research design, sample procedures, and population size were all described. The design of measuring instruments, data collection methods, data processing methodologies, and validity and reliability were also discussed in this chapter. The research approach was detailed using an eleven-step strategy created by Hair *et al.* (2017: 31). The research problem was established, and the precise questions that needed to be answered were written down. The importance of the study objectives was stressed in the research approach. The research used an online survey technique that included a self-administered questionnaire with predetermined response options. In addition, an interview guide was also used to collect the qualitative data. The findings and results analysis will be described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter's primary goals are to present quantitative data analysis and to provide a thorough explanation of the findings drawn from the analysis of the responses gained from the quantitative data collected. The main aim of the study was to assess the use of social media as a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials in the greater Durban area. A mixed technique was used as the study's chosen research strategy. As a result, this chapter discusses the quantitative findings of the study. The following chapter will review the qualitative findings. The main instrument for gathering quantitative data was the questionnaire, which was given to 400 millennials in the greater Durban area. There was a 100% response rate. SPSS version 28.0 was used to analyse the data gathered from the responses. The results will present the descriptive statistics in the form of graphs, and cross-tabulations and other figures for the quantitative data that was collected. Inferential techniques include the use of correlations and chi square test values, which are interpreted using the p-values. The traditional approach to reporting a result requires a statement of statistical significance. A p-value is generated from a test statistic. A significant result is indicated with " $p < 0.05$ ". This chapter begins with an outline of the demographic data analysis. After the demographic data is analysed, the collected data is then analysed according to each objective. The cross-tabulations and correlations are then discussed. Finally, the general linear model regression analysis is discussed, with social media and customer satisfaction as the dependent variables and all of the other dimensions as independent variables. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

5.2 Reliability statistics

The two most important aspects of precision are reliability and validity. Reliability is computed by taking several measurements on the same subjects. A reliability coefficient of 0.60 or higher is considered "acceptable" for a newly developed construct (Baistaman, Awang, Afthanorhan and Rahim 2020: 413). Table 4 below reflects the Cronbach's alpha score for all the items that constituted the questionnaire.

Table 4: Cronbach’s alpha score for all the items that constituted the questionnaire

Section		Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
B	PERCEPTIONS OF MILLENNIALS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	7	0.739
C3.3	IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION	7	0.792
D	AWARENESS (RECALLING AND RECOGNISING THE BRAND)	9	0.804
E5.2	SOCIAL MEDIA AND DECISION-MAKING	12	0.845
F	BRAND CREDIBILITY	8	0.816
G	SOCIAL MEDIA AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	8	0.838
H	MANAGING AND MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA	7	0.772
I	SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT EXPECTATIONS	7	0.781
J	ONLINE SOCIAL ENHANCEMENT& SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON BRAND PREFERENCE	10	0.899
All items included		75	0.932

The reliability scores for all sections exceed the recommended Cronbach’s alpha value. This indicates a degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for these sections of the research. Amirrudin, Nasution and Supahar (2021: 223) agree that when the items are strongly correlated with each other, their internal consistency is high and their alpha coefficient will be close to one.

5.3 Factor analysis

Factor analysis is a statistical technique whose main goal is data reduction. A typical use of factor analysis is in survey research, where a researcher wishes to represent a number of questions with a small number of hypothetical factors. For example, as part of this survey to assess the perceptions of millennials on social media, respondents

were asked to answer seven separate questions regarding their perceptions of social media as a tool to grow brand preference.

Each question, by itself, would be an inadequate measure of attitude towards environmental policy, but together they may provide a better measure of millennials perceptions. Factor analysis can be used to establish whether the three measures do, in fact, measure the same thing. If so, they can then be combined to create a new variable, a factor score variable that contains a score for each participant on the factor. Factor techniques are applicable to a variety of situations. One need not believe that factors actually exist in order to perform a factor analysis, but in practice, the factors are usually interpreted, given names, and spoken of as real things (Schreiber 2021).

5.3.1 The KMO and Bartlett's Test

A summarised table reflecting the results of KMO and Bartlett's tests precedes the matrix table. The KMO and Bartlett's tests in Table 5 below show two tests that indicate the suitability of data for structure detection. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy is a statistic that indicates the proportion of variance in the variables that might be caused by underlying factors. High values (close to 1.0) generally indicate that a factor analysis may be useful with the data. If the value is less than 0.50, the results of the factor analysis are probably not very useful.

Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which would indicate that the variables are unrelated and therefore unsuitable for structure detection. Small values (less than 0.05) of the significance level indicate that a factor analysis may be useful with the data (Sechrist, Laplace and Smith 2022: 951). Factor analysis is done only for the Likert scale items. Certain components are divided into finer components. This is explained below in the rotated component matrix.

Table 5: KMO and Bartlett's Test

		Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Sphericity	Test df	of Sig.
B	PERCEPTIONS OF MILLENNIALS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	0.783	618.330	21	< 0.001
C3.3	IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION	0.790	799.277	21	< 0.001
D	AWARENESS (RECALLING AND RECOGNISING THE BRAND)	0.847	866.103	36	< 0.001
E5.2	SOCIAL MEDIA AND DECISION-MAKING	0.877	1380.625	66	< 0.001
F	BRAND CREDIBILITY	0.847	835.981	28	< 0.001
G	SOCIAL MEDIA AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	0.867	1028.290	28	< 0.001
H	MANAGING AND MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA	0.823	717.327	21	< 0.001
I	SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT EXPECTATIONS	0.811	682.768	21	< 0.001
J	ONLINE SOCIAL ENHANCEMENT & SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON BRAND PREFERENCE	0.883	2378.204	45	< 0.001

All of the conditions for factor analysis are satisfied. This is an indication that the sampling and, therefore, clustering values under each theme measure the same thing, thus making it statistically significant (Zungu 2020: 136). That is, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value should be greater than 0.500, and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity sig. value should be less than 0.05.

- Therefore, in this study, the perceptions of millennials on social media have a KMO value of 0.783 (Table 5). This means millennial social media perceptions have a positive influence on growing brand preference. The approximate Chi-Square values for millennials perceptions of social media as a tool to grow brand

preference are 618.330. This means that brand preference is positively influenced by millennials' perceptions of social media.

- The importance of social media interaction section has 0.790 KMO measures of sampling adequacy (Table 5). This indicates that all the items in the importance of social media interaction section measure the same dimension. The approximate Chi-square value is 799.277. This means brand preference is positively influenced by the social media interactions of millennials.
- The awareness section has 0.847 KMO measures of sampling adequacy (Table 5), which is greater than 0.500, and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity sig. value is 0.001 (Table 5). To determine whether the correlation matrix is enough, one might apply Bartlett's test of sphericity (Tuan 2020: 781). At p 0.001, the Bartlett's test of sphericity is very significant, indicating that at least some of the variables in the correlation matrix have substantial relationships.
- The social media and decision-making sections have 0.877 KMO measures of sampling adequacy (Table 5). The Bartlett's test of sphericity sig. value is 0.001 (Table 5). Therefore, it could be concluded that the factor analysis is suitable and useful for this section.
- Brand credibility has 0.847 KMO measures of sampling adequacy, which is the same as the one for the awareness section (Table 5). The Bartlett's test of sphericity sig. value is 0.001 (Table 5). This indicates that by clustering variables under each theme, the same thing is measured, thus making it statistically significant.
- Social media and customer satisfaction, managing and monitoring social media, social media content expectations, online social enhancement, and social media influence on brand preference have 0, 867, 0.823, 0.811, and 0.883 KMO measures of sampling adequacy, respectively. This is an indication that the sampling and, therefore, clustering values under each theme measure the same thing, thus making it statistically significant (Zungu 2020: 136).

Therefore, the statements constituting each section were perfectly loaded into a single component. This corroborates the statements that made up these sections and shows that what was set out to be measured, was perfectly measured.

5.3.2 Rotated Component Matrix

Factor analysis is done only for the Likert scale items. Certain components were divided into finer components. This is explained below in the rotated component matrix.

Table 6: Rotated Component Matrix

B- Perception of millennials on social media	Component
	1
Social media enhances my brand preference	0.683
I became aware of certain brands through social media	0.758
Social media is cheap to access	0.344
Social media allows information to reach many people in a short period of time	0.751
I am always receiving social media notifications on new social media posts, likes and new comments	0.618
A brand with more followers, likes and reviews on social media receives high brand preference	0.697
I cannot spend a day well without accessing my social media platforms	0.591
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 component extracted.	

C3.3. How important is social media interaction				Component	
				1	2
Using social media platforms allows me to develop relationships with others				0.108	0.835
Using social media networks allows me to know new friends				0.145	0.858
Social media keeps me updated on my friends' brand preferences				0.317	0.685
Using social media allows me to show off my new fashions without embarrassment				0.419	0.380
Social media influencers play a big role in starting social interactions on social media platforms				0.696	0.282
Using social media influencer of whom I am a top fan really captures my attention on the brand				0.826	0.144
Social media brand employees' behaviour instils confidence in me on the brand				0.838	0.097
Extraction	Method:	Principal	Component	Analysis.	
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.					

D. Awareness (Recalling and Recognising the brand)				Component	
				1	2
A brand that has been previously seen is more preferred to a brand that is new				0.079	0.834
On brand preference, a familiar brand has an edge or is safer than a new brand				0.207	0.776
I take brand recognition as a signal that the brand is good				0.412	0.585
Awareness creation is very important in creating brand preference				0.662	0.276
Brand recall is a very important factor for a brand to be considered or preferred by the customer				0.748	0.078
Strong social media presence builds brand loyalty				0.642	0.251

The tone and style of brands should be specific and intentional for easy recognition	0.739	0.128
Low brand recall in customers is an indication of poor brand performance	0.327	0.334
Social media coverage enhances brand recognition	0.599	0.296
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.		

E5.2. Problem solving in buying decision-making process	Component	
	1	2
There is adequate information on social media platforms about posted products to purchase the product	0.035	0.685
Social media allows a comparison of alternatives before buying the product	0.066	0.770
I use information on social media platforms (e.g. customer reviews) to make decisions on what to buy	0.533	0.316
Social media has empowered me to complain online	0.311	0.573
I use reviews on social media brand posts to assess brand quality	0.603	0.356
Social media provides a platform for feedback or post purchase reviews after buying the product	0.425	0.426
My friends' comments and likes on a brand post help me to decide on which brand to buy	0.678	0.006
Being able to ask questions and get feedback on social media also affect my choice of brand	0.768	0.050
I use social media platforms to get solutions that satisfy my needs through selecting various available brands	0.728	0.258
I use social media testimonials to make decisions on the best brand to choose	0.763	0.110

I use social media platforms to discover interesting information and content, to act	0.652	0.140
Social media posts are aided by word-of-mouth or referrals from friends and family when it comes to decision-making	0.546	0.257
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.		

F. Brand Credibility	Component	
	1	
Brand preference is high when I believe that a brand has the ability and willingness to continuously deliver what has been promised	0.523	
Brands need to be unique and personable through meaningful content	0.738	
Brands should see themselves as a single person with a unique set of values, attitudes and behaviour E.g. Nandos	0.650	
Brand touch points (social media platforms) should provide great brand experiences to consumers	0.709	
A brand's choice of social media network plays an important role in the brand's image and credibility	0.662	
Positive customer reviews and comments on a product's attributes lead me into believing in the product and buying it	0.597	
Consistent and recognisable brand personality enhances brand credibility	0.719	
Brand association, in terms of social media influencers, endorsers/ affects a brand's credibility	0.687	
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
a. 1 component extracted.		

G. Social media and customer satisfaction.	Component
	1
The quality of products you buy on social media	0.553
The brand information provided on Social media	0.662
Consumer insights on social media, that provide a great base for building brands that satisfy consumer needs	0.724
Customer communication on social media	0.685
Social media product delivery process and time	0.723
Social media ordering process	0.791
Navigating social media platforms	0.717
Comparing, accessing and buying various brands on social media	0.660
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 component extracted.	

H. Managing and monitoring social media	Component
	1
It is difficult to manage and monitor the content posted on social media	0.395
All the good, the bad and the ugly can go viral on social media in a short period of time	0.670
Content posted on social media can affect the growth and survival of a brand	0.749
Many customers now turn to social media to vent their frustrations and seek retribution after being slighted by the company	0.694
Social media needs to be handled with care when it comes to growing brand preference	0.811
Competing Businesses can also create false content to tarnish the rival company's reputation	0.643

Compared to other marketing strategies, social media has excellent coverage when it comes to reaching customers and creating awareness	0.666
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 component extracted.	

i. Social media content expectations	Component
	1
I like social media posts that include humour	0.665
I like interactive content on social media	0.766
I like social media posts that include quotes	0.609
I like posts that include colourful images and videos	0.687
I always like posts asking for my opinion on a certain brand	0.577
I like posts of appreciation to customers	0.669
I like to post with a clear and short message	0.683
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	
a. 1 component extracted.	

J. Online social media enhancement and social influence on brand preference.	Component	
	1	2
Choosing good brands on social media networks can help me improve my image amongst friends	0.754	0.218
Using social media networks enhances my reputation amongst friends	0.833	0.189

Using social media networks to make decisions on brands can help me impress others	0.841	0.220
Using social media networks helps me to feel important and stay on top of the things	0.837	0.239
Wearing the most popular brand on social media makes me feel like I am part of the celebrity family	0.802	0.277
Posting pictures on social media using expensive and quality brands gives me a high social status among friends	0.774	0.300
Interacting with others with the same interests positively influences my brand preference	0.500	0.546
Being able to access social media keeps me up to date with top brands	0.232	0.823
I use social media platforms to keep up with the new fashions on different brands	0.110	0.874
Social media takes away individuality and encourages mob mentality	0.210	0.431
Extraction	Method:	Principal
Rotation Method:	Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.	Component
Analysis.		
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.		

The statements that constituted sections B, F, G, H, and I loaded perfectly along a single component. This implies that the statements that constituted these sections perfectly measured what they set out to measure.

It is noted that the variables that constitute Section C3.3, D, E5.2 and J are distributed across two components (sub-themes). This means that respondents identified different trends within the section. The color-coded splits within the section further highlight this differentiation.

5.4 Section A: Descriptive statistics for biographical data.

Descriptive statistics are an important stage of analysis since they help determine how the variables included in the research are distributed (Mishra *et al.* 2019: 67). According to Choi, Tagore, Siddiq, Park and Ewing (2020a: 107), frequencies can be

used in descriptive statistics if the variable of interest is an ordinal or nominal variable. This section summarises the biographical characteristics of the respondents.

5.4.1 Gender distribution by age

The demographic variables analysed include year of birth and gender. Table 7 below describes the overall gender distribution by age.

Table 7: The overall gender distribution by age.

Year of birth		Gender			Total
		Male	Female	Other	
1981-1985	Count	37	39	1	77
	% within Year of birth	48.1%	50.6%	1.3%	100.0%
	% within Gender	19.3%	20.4%	8.3%	19.5%
	% of Total	9.4%	9.9%	0.3%	19.5%
1986-1990	Count	53	54	2	109
	% within Year of birth	48.6%	49.5%	1.8%	100.0%
	% within Gender	27.6%	28.3%	16.7%	27.6%
	% of Total	13.4%	13.7%	0.5%	27.6%
1991-1996	Count	102	98	9	209
	% within Year of birth	48.8%	46.9%	4.3%	100.0%
	% within Gender	53.1%	51.3%	75.0%	52.9%
	% of Total	25.8%	24.8%	2.3%	52.9%
Total	Count	192	191	12	395
	% within Year of birth	48.6%	48.4%	3.0%	100.0%
	% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

	% of Total	48.6%	48.4%	3.0%	100.0%
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In addition, the following paragraphs consist of comprehensive statistics and analyses of the three age categories of the study respondents.

❖ **Comprehensive analysis of age category of those born from the year 1981 to 1985.**

Within the age category of those born from the year 1981 to 1985, 48.1% were males, and within the males' category (only), 19.3% were born from 1981 to 1985, comprising 9.4% of the sample. The results also show that for those born from 1981 to 1985, 50.6% were females, and within the female category only, 20.4% were born from 1981 to 1985. This category of females formed 9.9% of the sample. In addition, the results in Table 7 also show that within the age category of those born between 1981 and 1985, 1.3% belong to the "other" category, where (only) 8.3% were born from 1981 to 1985, comprising 0.3% of the sample. This age category contributed 19.5% of the respondents. The analysis of the age group born between 1981 and 1985 gives useful information about gender distribution and the significance of this age group within the sample. It is important to recognise the gender distribution and diversity within the sample. Understanding the sample distribution promotes correct analysis of data (Leyk, Gaughan, Adamo, de Sherbinin, Balk, Freire, Rose, Stevens, Blankespoor and Frye 2019: 474).

❖ **Comprehensive analysis of age category of the respondents born from the year 1986 to 1990.**

Within the age category of those born from the year 1986 to 1990, 48.6% were males, and within the males' category (only), 27.6% were born from 1986 to 1990, comprising 13.4% of the sample. The results also show that for those born from 1986 to 1990, 49.5% were females, and within the female category, only 28.3% were born from 1986 to 1990. This category of females formed 13.7% of the sample. In addition, the results in Table 7 also show that within the age category of those born between 1986 and 1990, 1.8% belong to the "other" category, and within the "other" category only 16.7% were born from 1985 to 1990, comprising 0.5% of the total sample. The "other" category, as mentioned earlier, may include individuals who do not strictly identify as

male or female. This aligns with the growing recognition of diverse gender identities beyond the binary concept. Studies in sociology and gender studies have explored the experiences of individuals identifying as non-binary, genderqueer, or other gender identities (Nagoshi, Raven Cloud, Lindley, Nagoshi and Lothamer 2019: 137). Inclusivity and respect for these identities are important considerations for research and social engagement.

❖ **Comprehensive analysis of age category of the respondents born from the year 1991 to 1996.**

In the age category of those born from the year 1991 to 1996, 48.8% were males, while the males (only) category reflects 53.1% for those born from the year 1991 to 1996. Males born within this age category constitute 25.8% of the total sample. However, 46.9% of the respondents within the age category of those born from 1991 to 1996 were females. In the females (only) category, 51.3% were born from 991 to 1996, with this category contributing 24.8% of the sample. The age category of those born from 1991 to 1996 contributed 52.9%.

Overall, the ratio of males to females is approximately 1:1 (48.6% to 48.4%), with a significantly smaller proportion of Other (3.0%) ($p < 0.001$). Within the age category of 1991–1996, there were similar numbers of males and females (average = 52.2%), but the Other category had significantly more respondents (75.0%) ($p < 0.001$). In addition, half of the respondents in the total sample belong to the age category of those born from 1991 to 1996. The fact that the researcher and the research assistant belong to this age category makes them more connected to the respondents from this age category in the greater Durban area. Therefore, this age group was more accessible to the researcher when collecting data. Studies have shown that generational cohorts may exhibit distinct consumption patterns and attitudes (Schopp, Sabury, Chaney, Zhang, Wakidi, Kim, Sankar, Luong, Therdkatanyuphong and Brus 2023: 3301). Thus, understanding this age group's preferences and behaviours is crucial for targeted marketing strategies and product development.

5.4.2 Level of Education.

As indicated in Figure 14, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of education. The level of education results from matriculation to postgraduate degree are presented in the graph below.

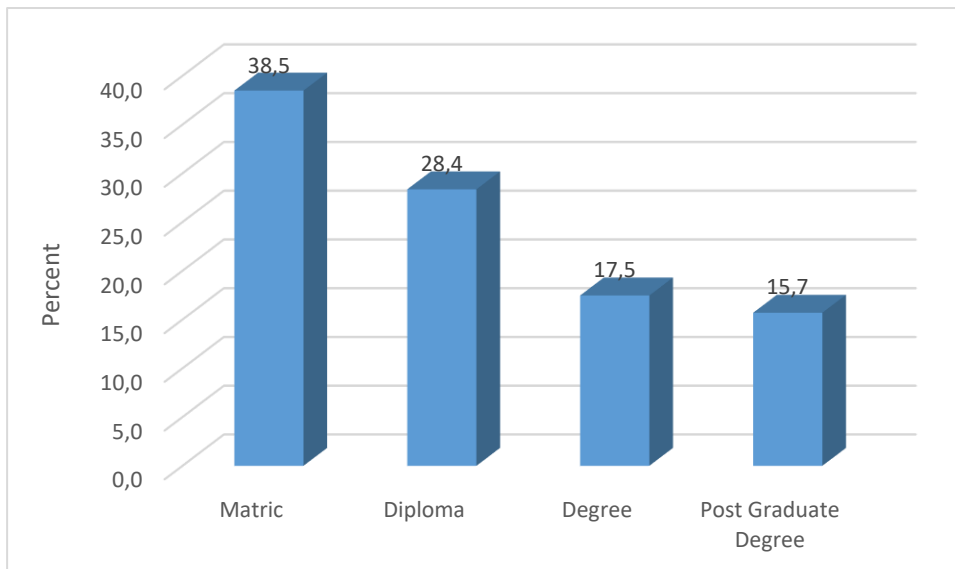


Figure 14: The education levels of the respondents.

Some of the respondents (38.5%) revealed that a matriculation certificate was their highest level of qualification. The majority of respondents (61.5%) had a post-school qualification. Approximately 16% of the respondents had a postgraduate degree ($p < 0.001$). This is a useful statistic, as it indicates that a fair proportion of the respondents have a higher qualification. This would suggest that the responses were obtained from a knowledgeable (learned) source. In addition, the minority has a postgraduate degree. Therefore, it can be concluded that only a few South Africans are eager to study further after acquiring an undergraduate degree. This was confirmed by Akala (2021: 1), who revealed that South Africa is still battling to grow the number of Masters and PhD graduates.

5.4.3 Employment status

Figure 15 below indicates the employment status of the respondents.

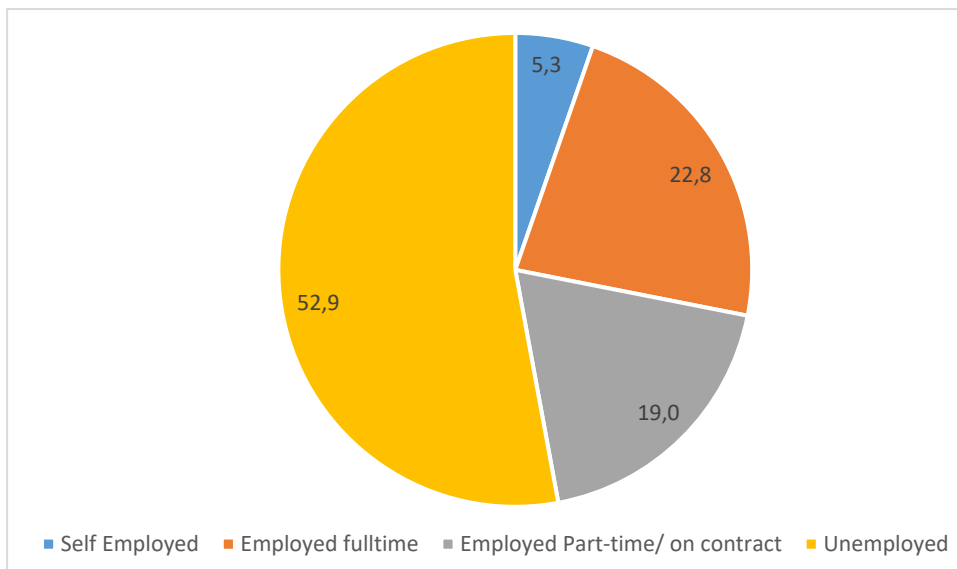


Figure 15: Employment Status

Approximately half of the respondents were unemployed (52.9%), with the smallest proportion being self-employed (5.3%) ($p < 0.001$). The majority of the employed respondents were employed both full-time and part-time; only a few were self-employed.

It can therefore be concluded that half of the millennials in the greater Durban area are unemployed. This was confirmed by a study done by Cinini and Mkhize (2021: 27), which found that the rate of unemployment in Durban is high, hence serious xenophobic attacks against foreigners for employment opportunities.

5.5 Section B: to assess how social media develops and enhances a positive brand awareness and brand preference.

This section deals with the first objective, which is to assess how social media develops and enhances positive awareness and brand preference.

5.5.1 Awareness (recalling and recognising the brand) on social media

Table 8 below summarises the scoring patterns on the statements stated in the Likert scale for measuring awareness.

Table 8: Awareness (recalling and recognising the brand)

		Count	Mean	Standard	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
A brand that has been previously seen is more preferred to a brand that is new	D1	395	4.64	1.26	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
On brand preference, a familiar brand has an edge or is safer than a new brand	D2	395	4.75	1.07	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I take brand recognition as a signal that the brand is good	D3	395	4.92	0.97	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Awareness creation is very important in creating brand preference	D4	395	5.06	0.90	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Brand recall is a very important factor for a brand to be considered or preferred by the customer	D5	395	4.83	0.94	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

		Count	Mean	Standard	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
Strong social media presence builds brand loyalty	D6	395	4.89	1.10	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
The tone and style of brands should be specific and intentional for easy recognition	D7	395	4.92	1.06	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Low brand recall in customers is an indication of poor brand performance	D8	395	4.45	1.21	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media coverage enhances brand recognition	D9	395	5.08	0.97	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

All of the statements show significantly higher levels of agreement, while other levels of agreement are lower (but still greater than levels of disagreement). The significance of the differences is tested and shown in Table 8. Factor analysis shows that all of the statements form two sub-themes (Table 6, page 175).

Four statements (D1, D2, D3 and D8) that form the first subtheme show similar and high levels of agreement, with D8 having the lowest of the agreement levels (relating to low brand recall in customers as an indication of poor brand performance) and D3 having the highest, with more respondents agreeing to taking brand recognition as a signal that the brand is good.

❖ **D1: A brand that has been previously seen is more preferred to a brand that is new.**

D1 has a higher level of agreement, with a mean score of 4.64. More than half of the respondents agreed that a brand that has been previously seen is more preferred to a brand that is new. Shaalan, Hegazy, Tourky, Elshaer and Ashour (2022: 38) assert

that consumers often show a preference for businesses and products with which they are familiar and have had positive prior experiences. When consumers buy from a brand that they are familiar with, they feel more at ease and more confident in their choice to make the purchase. However, it is crucial to remember that a new brand can still develop traction and succeed if it uses smart marketing, has a distinctive value proposition, and keeps its commitments. Also, some consumers may find it enticing when a new brand is perceived as creative and novel. In the end, a consumer's preference for an established brand or a new brand may be influenced by things like their own preferences, past brand experiences, and perceptions of the brands.

❖ **D2: On brand preference, a familiar brand has an edge or is safer than a new brand.**

D2 has a higher level of agreement, with many respondents agreeing that, based on brand preference, a familiar brand has an edge or is safer than a new brand. As illustrated in Table 5.4, the D2 mean score is 4.75. The mean score is higher than that of D1. Sanny *et al.* (2020: 2139) support the fact that familiarity generates confidence, and customers frequently equate well-known brands with reliable goods and services. Consumer perceptions of a brand's reputation, quality, dependability, and value for money frequently determine brand selection (Poturak and Softic 2019: 17). Therefore, when given the option to pick between a well-known brand and a new one, consumers are more likely to go with the well-known brand because of their favourable past experiences with it or because of the brand's goodwill.

In addition, established brands frequently have greater marketing budgets and may spend more on advertising and promotions, which increases their visibility to customers and helps them remember them (Qader, Hamza, Othman, Anwer, Hamad, Gardi and Ibrahim 2022: 8). The greater visibility may also help customers link well-known brands with reliability and safety.

However, it is crucial to remember, though, that a new brand can still be successful provided it provides something distinctive or novel that distinguishes it from other well-known ones (Erlangga and Erlangga 2021: 2854). When a new brand offers a better value proposition or is more in line with the consumer's values and tastes, people are more likely to give it a try.

❖ **D3: I take brand recognition as a signal that the brand is good.**

The majority of the respondents agreed with the statement that brand recognition is taken as a signal that the brand is good (D3). As reflected in Table 8, the mean score is 4.92. Swaminathan, Sorescu, Steenkamp, O'Guinn and Schmitt (2020: 24) agree that brand recognition is frequently regarded as an indicator of a brand's overall quality or worth. This is so because customers are more likely to utilise or discuss a brand when it has a high level of brand awareness. Strong product or service offerings, successful marketing campaigns, or a combination of the two may have contributed to this. Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft and Singh (2010: 283) indicated that brand awareness can result in favourable sentiments and buy intentions among consumers, even if they had little or no experience with the brand.

On the other hand, it is vital to remember that brand familiarity does not always equate to superiority or value (Graciola, De Toni, Milan and Eberle 2020: 1). Instead of having superior goods or services, a brand may be recognisable to consumers just because it is well-known or has a catchy slogan or emblem. The reputation and calibre of a brand will ultimately be determined by a variety of elements, such as its marketing initiatives, product offers, customer service, and overall brand image (Chunzh, Minghui, Kai, Wei and Salman 2023: 2647).

D8: Low brand recall among customers is an indication of poor brand performance.

D8 has the lowest level of agreement with many respondents as compared to the other statements agreeing that low brand recall among customers is an indication of poor brand performance. However, the level of agreement with D8 is still above the level of disagreement. The mean score is 4.45. Aaker (2012: 16) supports the idea that successful brands have a high level of consumer brand recall and awareness. Low brand recall, in his opinion, is a red flag that a product or service is not connecting with its intended market and may be losing out to rivals.

Although it is not always the case, low brand recall among consumers might be a sign of poor brand performance. Foroudi (2019: 271) argues that brand recall is a crucial metric for determining brand awareness since it measures how quickly consumers can

recall a brand when given a cue. The levels of agreement might be low because low brand recall could mean that customers do not associate it strongly enough with the company in their minds as a result of the brand's marketing efforts. The competitive environment, market saturation, or shifting consumer preferences are a few additional potential contributing variables (Tien, Anh, Ngoc, Trang and Minh 2021: 3297). When making judgements about a brand's overall performance based just on brand recall, it is crucial to take into account other indicators of brand performance, such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. Even though a brand's recall is low, it can still do well because of a devoted and content client base that spreads good word-of-mouth and recommendations.

The other sub-theme is made up of the other five statements (D4, D5, D6, D7 and D9) showing similar and high levels of agreement, with D5 having the lowest levels of agreement as compared to the other four (brand recall is a very important factor for a brand to be considered or preferred by the customer) and D9 having the highest levels of agreement, with more respondents agreeing to the statement that social media coverage enhances brand recognition.

❖ **D4: Awareness creation is very important in creating brand preference.**

D4 has a higher level of agreement, with a mean score of 5.06. The respondents agreed that awareness creation is very important in creating brand preference. Bernarto *et al.* (2020: 412) support the idea that the possibility that a consumer will take a brand into consideration when making a purchase rises when consumers are aware of the brand. The more exposure to a brand a consumer receives through several mediums, such as advertising, social media, and word-of-mouth, the more probable it is that consumers will remember the brand and have it top-of-mind when they are ready to make a purchase. Brand recognition is essential for building credibility and trust with customers. Sürücü, Öztürk, Okumus and Bilgihan (2019: 114) state that customers are more inclined to think highly of and trust a brand if they are familiar with it.

Additionally, in highly competitive marketplaces where consumers have many options, developing brand awareness is particularly crucial. Even when the product or service is similar, consumers are more likely to choose a brand that stands out and is top of

mind (Rather, Tehseen, Itoo and Parrey 2019: 196). It is crucial to note that raising a brand's profile is crucial for establishing brand preference and can ultimately result in higher sales, a more devoted following, and brand advocacy.

❖ **D5: Brand recall is a very important factor for a brand to be considered or preferred by the customer.**

D5 has a higher level of agreement, with many respondents agreeing with the statement that brand recall is a very important factor for a brand to be considered or preferred by a customer. As reflected in Table 8, the D5 mean score is 4.83.

Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi (2020: 4) support the fact that, for a brand to be taken into consideration or favoured by the consumer, brand memory is a critical component. When asked to recall a specific brand, customers' capacity to do so is referred to as brand recall. Brand recall measures how well a brand name or emblem is recalled by consumers when they are considering a specific good or service. Customers can quickly recall a brand when they think of a specific good or service if it has a high brand recall rating. There are numerous ways in which this could help the brand. Ali (2019: 623) agrees that customers are more inclined to select a brand that they are familiar with over one that they are unfamiliar with.

However, Sivaram, Hudaya and Ali (2019: 325) argue that many elements, including the brand's marketing and advertising efforts, the calibre of the good or service, the brand's standing, and word-of-mouth referrals from pleased clients, can affect brand recall. Therefore, a brand can boost brand recall and improve its chances of success in the marketplace by concentrating on these elements and building a strong brand image.

❖ **D6: Strong social media presence builds brand loyalty.**

D6 has a higher level of agreement with respondents agreeing that strong social media presence builds brand loyalty, with a mean score of 4.89 (Table 8). Chierici, Del Bosco, Mazzucchelli and Chiacchierini (2019: 216) support the idea that maintaining a strong social media presence can keep the audience engaged with the brand even when they

aren't actively buying and stay top-of-mind with them. Confente and Kucharska (2021: 8) agree that businesses can engage with their clients and develop relationships with them on a strong social media platform. It is possible to build a sense of community and trust around the brand by consistently publishing amusing and pertinent material, reacting to customer questions and feedback, and demonstrating your brand's distinctive personality and values on social media.

Ebrahim (2020: 287) supports that one can establish a more intimate relationship with the customers by showcasing the real people behind the business and providing behind-the-scenes looks at the corporate culture and beliefs on social media. It is crucial to keep in mind that creating a solid social media presence requires time and effort. It is not sufficient to merely have a social media account; one also needs to update content frequently, interact with their followers, and modify their strategy in response to analytics and feedback. But, if used effectively, a strong social media presence can be a powerful instrument for fostering customer loyalty and expanding the brand.

❖ **D7: The tone and style of brands should be specific and intentional for easy recognition.**

The majority of the respondents agreed with the statement that the tone and style of brands should be specific and intentional for easy recognition (D7). As reflected in Table 8, the mean score is 4.92. The level of agreement from respondents is higher than that of D6, D5 and D4. Canziani, Welsh, Dana and Ramadani (2020: 68) support the view that consumers find it simpler to recognise and identify a brand when the tone and style are consistent throughout all of its marketing and communication channels. This acknowledgement can boost brand loyalty and make the product stand out in a crowded market.

To establish a consistent and recognised brand image, the tone and style of the brand should be deliberate and specific (Pina and Dias 2021: 99). A consistent tone and aesthetic can help create brand identification and set the company apart from rivals. For instance, the tone of Apple is forward-thinking, affluent, and aspirational. Apple emphasises the idea of cutting-edge technology and design while using slick,

minimalist graphics. Apple has a sleek, contemporary aesthetic that emphasises understated, beautiful design and a small number of colour options.

❖ **D9: Social media coverage enhances brand recognition.**

As reflected in Table 8, D9 scored the highest overall level of agreement, with respondents agreeing to the statement that social media coverage enhances brand recognition. The D9 mean score is 5.08. Due to the billions of active users on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and others, these platforms are excellent for helping businesses market their brands and connect with a large audience (Robinson 2020: 1). A brand's exposure and visibility are raised through social media mentions, sharing, and discussions, which results in a rise in brand recognition. Additionally, social media gives businesses the chance to interact with their clients, develop a community, and establish a more intimate connection with their customers (Susanto, Fang Yie, Mohiddin, Rahman Setiawan, Haghi and Setiana 2021: 6). These factors can boost customer loyalty and encourage referrals from other people.

In addition, Adiyono, Rahmat and Anindita (2021: 31) opine that social media gives businesses the chance to produce and distribute material that exemplifies their brand's personality, values, and identity, which makes it simpler for consumers to recognise and relate to the brand. Additionally, social media gives businesses the chance to keep track of where the brand was mentioned and respond to customer comments and grievances, both of which can enhance the reputation of the brand and the satisfaction of its customers. However, it is important to note that social media coverage by itself is insufficient to improve brand recognition. A company's brand identity, narrative, and value proposition must also be strong and appealing to its target market. Also, businesses must create a social media plan that complements the overarching marketing goals and objectives to guarantee that their social media presence effectively raises brand recognition.

The highlighted items are significant if the values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance) overall, which implies that the distributions were not similar. That is, the differences between the ways respondents scored were significant.

5.6 Section C: to investigate how social media influences buying decision-making process.

This section focuses on the second objective which is to investigate how social media influences buying decision-making process.

5.6.1 Problem solving in buying decision-making process.

Table 9: Scoring patterns of problem solving in buying decision-making process.

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
There is adequate information on social media platforms about posted products to purchase the product	E5.2.1	395	4.51	1.06	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media allows a comparison of alternatives before buying the product	E5.2.2	395	4.78	1.05	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I use information on social media platforms (e.g. customer reviews) to make decisions on what to buy	E5.2.3	395	4.66	1.22	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media has empowered me to complain online	E5.2.4	395	4.54	1.27	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I use reviews on social media brand posts to assess brand quality	E5.2.5	395	4.78	1.20	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

Social media provides a platform for feedback or post purchase reviews after buying the product	E5.2.6	395	4.76	1.19	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
My friends' comments and likes on a brand post help me to decide on which brand to buy	E5.2.7	395	4.24	1.47	5.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Being able to ask questions and get feedback on social media also affect my choice of brand	E5.2.8	395	4.65	1.18	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I use social media platforms to get solutions that satisfy my needs through selecting various available brands	E5.2.9	395	4.50	1.24	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I use social media testimonials to make decisions on the best brand to choose	E5.2.10	395	4.41	1.26	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I use social media platforms to discover interesting information and content, to act	E5.2.11	395	4.73	1.07	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media posts are aided by word-of-mouth or referrals from friends and family when it comes to decision-making	E5.2.12	395	4.71	1.11	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

Firstly, the results are displayed using the mean values for the variables included in each section (Table 9). The results are then further examined in light of the assertions' significance. A binomial test (with a cut-off of 3.5) was conducted to see if the scoring patterns for each statement and each alternative were substantially different. Factor analysis shows that all of the statements form two sub-themes (Table 6, page 177). This means that respondents identified different trends within the section. The first sub-theme is made up of E5.2.1, E5.2.2, E5.2.4 and E5.2.6, with E5.2.1 (social media has empowered me to complain online) having the lowest level of agreement with the respondents as compared to the other statements in the sub-theme, yet still above the levels of disagreement, with a mean score of 4.51. E5.2.2 has the highest level of agreement, with respondents agreeing to the statement that social media allows a comparison of alternatives before buying the product, with a mean score of 4.78.

❖ **E5.2.1: There is adequate information on social media platforms about posted products to purchase the product.**

The investigation on how social media influences the buying decision-making process respondents show high levels of agreement with the statement that there is adequate information on social media platforms about posted products to purchase. E5.2.1 has a mean score of 4.51, which shows lower levels of agreement from the respondents as compared to the other statements in this sub-theme. However, the levels of agreement with the statement are still higher than the levels of disagreement.

Voramontri and Klieb (2019: 209) agree that social media sites may give consumers a wealth of knowledge about posted products that customers can use to make wise decisions about their purchases. To make sure the product satisfies one's requirements and expectations, it is crucial to take the time to read product descriptions, examine photographs, and consider reviews. Nash (2019: 82) argues that users of social media who are interested in making purchases should exercise prudence and do their own research before making a decision.

However, social media can be a useful resource for product information; Pop, Săplăcan, Dabija and Alt (2022: 823) emphasise that it is crucial to remember that not all of the information posted on social media is accurate or trustworthy. The information

provided may be skewed in certain posts because they are sponsored or promoted by the company that makes or sells the product. It is a good idea to conduct further research before making a purchase of a product by reading reviews, comparing costs, and confirming the product's features and specifications. For more details, one may possibly go the extra mile and contact the product's maker or seller.

❖ **E5.2.2: Social media allows a comparison of alternatives before buying the product.**

E5.2.2 has the highest levels of agreement, with the respondents agreeing to the statement that social media allows a comparison of alternatives before buying the product, with a mean score of 4.78. Mason, Narcum and Mason (2021b: 1) support the idea that consumers can use social media as a useful tool to weigh the available options before making a purchase. Social media sites offer a variety of data, such as product reviews, user reviews, and brand reputation, that can assist customers in weighing their options and coming to an educated decision. Aji, Nadhila and Sanny (2020: 91) agree that social media may be used by customers to learn more about products, read reviews, and compare pricing from other businesses. In addition, customers can look to their friends, relatives, and online forums for recommendations. Social media gives customers a forum to interact with brands directly and inquire about their offerings. As a result, customers may be better able to comprehend the product and make a wiser choice (Goldring and Azab 2021: 884). In general, it can be recognised that social media has developed into a crucial tool for customers in the choice-making process for purchases, enabling them to compare alternatives and make informed judgements.

❖ **E5.2.4: Social media has empowered me to complain online.**

The respondents have shown high levels of agreement with the statement that social media has empowered customers to complain online. The respondents have agreed that social media provides a platform for feedback and queries. The mean score for E5.2.4 is 4.54. This shows high levels of agreement among the respondents. According to Simanjuntak (2020: 236), customers are now far more able to voice their complaints online due to social media. In the past, a consumer who had an issue with

a product might have had to go through a drawn-out and annoying process to have it resolved. Customers may have had to contact a customer care number, go through an automated phone menu, wait for a long time on hold, and speak to a number of agents who might not have been able to assist them.

Tajurahim *et al.* (2020: 511) support the fact that now that social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become more popular, customers have an easier way to voice their problems and have them heard by more people. Currently, customers may easily publish the complaints on social media with just a few clicks, tagging the company or brand in question, and frequently receive a response much more quickly than they would have through conventional customer support channels.

It is crucial to note that customers can now communicate with one another and share their experiences with a particular business or product more easily, thanks to social media. This means that if any consumer has similar difficulties, a single complaint might easily turn into a much bigger problem. Due to the potential for unwanted exposure and reputational harm, businesses are frequently more driven to respond to complaints made on social media and attempt to resolve them as soon as possible. Overall, it can be said that the capacity for customers to make complaints online has increased their power and influence over businesses and compelled them to pay more attention to the quality of their products in order to preserve their goodwill with the general public.

❖ **E5.2.6: Social media provides a platform for feedback or post purchase reviews after buying the product.**

The respondents have shown high levels of agreement with the statement that social media provides a platform for feedback or post-purchase reviews after buying the product, with a mean score of 4.76. Palalic, Ramadani, Mariam Gilani, Gërguri-Rashiti and Dana (2021: 1249) agree that customers have a platform on social media to discuss their opinions or submit product reviews after making a purchase. Both customers and businesses find this to be a useful tool.

Liao, Widowati and Hsieh (2021: 1) support the idea that consumers can use social media to share their interactions with products, both good and bad. Moreover,

customers have the opportunity to inquire about a product and get opinions from other buyers. Social media is helpful for businesses as it offers insightful data on consumer happiness and product performance. Businesses can spot areas where they might need to make changes or address client complaints by tracking social media comments and reviews. It can be said that social media offers a potent platform for users to voice their opinions and for businesses to hear and attend to their demands.

The second sub-theme, as shown in Table 6, comprises E5.2.3, E5.2.5, E5.2.7, E5.2.8, E5.2.9, E5.2.10, E5.2.11, and E5.2.12. In this sub-theme, E5.2.7 (My friends' comments and likes on a brand post help me to decide on which brand to buy) has the lowest level of agreement with a mean score of 4.24, yet still above the levels of disagreement. E5.2.5 has the highest level of agreement with the respondents agreeing to the statement that I use reviews on social media brand posts to assess brand quality, with a mean score of 4.78 (Table 9).

❖ **E5.2.3: I use information on social media platforms (for example customer reviews) to make decisions on what to buy.**

Researching how social media influences the buying decision-making process, respondents show high levels of agreement with the statement that customers use information from social media platforms to make decisions on brand choice, with a mean score of 4.66 (Table 9). Cooley and Parks-Yancy (2019: 249) support the opinion that customers frequently utilise the information found on social networking sites to guide their purchasing decisions. Many individuals rely on the information available on social media platforms to help them make informed purchasing decisions regarding goods, services, and experiences. In addition, making use of social media for decision-making is advantageous because it gives businesses access to a variety of consumer experiences and perspectives (Kauffmann, Peral, Gil, Ferrández, Sellers and Mora 2020: 523).

However, it is crucial to note that not all of the information on social media is correct or trustworthy. It might be difficult to distinguish between real comments and promotional content because some reviews or posts might be biased or fraudulent. Cross-checking data from many sources is always a good idea, and whenever feasible, look for impartial and reliable reviews.

❖ **E5.2.5: I use reviews on social media brand posts to assess brand quality.**

The respondents have shown high levels of agreement with the statement that I use social media brand posts to assess brand quality. E5.2.5 has a mean score of 4.78, which is the highest level of agreement within the sub-theme. Desai and Vidyapeeth (2019: 196) support the idea that customers are increasingly relying on the evaluations and feedback posted by other users on social media platforms as part of a brand's marketing strategy in the modern world. Consumers can provide feedback on a brand's products by posting reviews, ratings, and comments that other potential buyers can use to make educated choices.

It is important to note that brand managers should be very aware of their social media presence and make sure that they are actively interacting with the audience and responding to the customers' criticism. In addition, it is crucial to encourage their consumers to post testimonials and other comments on their social media profiles to help brands establish credibility and trust with new customers.

❖ **E5.2.7: My friends' comments and likes on a brand post help me decide on which brand to buy.**

Statement E5.2.7 has a mean score of 4.24, which shows a lower level of agreement from the respondents as compared to the other statements in this sub-theme. However, the level of agreement with the statement is still higher than the level of disagreement. This means more than half of the respondents agree that their friends' comments on social media posts assist in making a decision on which brand to buy. Delbaere, Michael and Phillips (2021: 101) argue that it is crucial to note that while friends' opinions and likes on a brand's post may be beneficial when making a decision to buy, they may not always be the most trustworthy or impartial sources of information. It can also be noted that variables other than the actual quality of the goods, such as a person's relationship with the poster, the brand's popularity, or social pressure to follow specific trends, may have an influence on how individuals use social media. In other words, rather than doing so because they actually think the product is wonderful, users could put likes or comments on a brand post simply because it is popular or because they feel compelled to support their friends.

❖ **E5.2.8: Being able to ask questions and get feedback on social media also affect my choice of brand.**

The respondents have shown high levels of agreement with the statement that being able to ask questions and get feedback on social media also affects the choice of brand. Statement E5.2.8 mean score is 4.65 (Table 9). This means that the majority is in agreement with statement E5.2.8. Mason, Narcum and Mason (2021b: 1) agree that by giving you the chance to post queries and solicit comments from other users, social media can most surely influence the brand you choose. In addition, using social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, one can get in touch with the business or other customers who have experience with the product. Customers can learn more about the company's products, as well as their overall brand values and customer service philosophy, by interacting with the company on social media (Shanahan, Tran and Taylor 2019: 57). Overall, it can be noted that social media has offered customers a solid tool for brand research and evaluation before making a purchase. It has also given businesses the chance to interact directly with their clients and forge deeper bonds with them.

❖ **E5.2.9: I use social media platforms to get solutions that satisfy my needs by selecting various available brands.**

In trying to assess how social media influences the buying decision-making process, respondents showed high levels of agreement with the statement that (I use social media platforms to get solutions that satisfy my needs through selecting various available brands). Statement E5.2.9 mean score is 4.50 (Table 9). The mean score is above the binomial test cut-off p-value of 3.5. Buzeta, De Pelsmacker and Dens (2020: 79) support the fact that, as social media offers a variety of information about various brands and items, as well as the opinions and experiences of those customers who have used them, this is a frequent strategy for many people. It is crucial to note that not all of the material on social media sites is trustworthy or objective when conducting brand research on social media platforms. In order to make a more informed choice, one should spend some time attentively reading both positive and negative reviews and comments (Al-azzam and Al-Mizeed 2021: 455). Overall, using social media to

investigate brands and goods can be useful in helping customers find solutions that are appropriate for their needs.

❖ **E5.2.10: I use social media testimonials to make decisions on the best brand to choose.**

The respondents have shown high levels of agreement with the statement that ‘I use social media testimonials to make decisions on the best brand to choose’. Statement E5.2.10 mean score is 4.41, which is above the binomial test cut-off p-value of 3.5. Reich and Maglio (2020: 52) support the idea that testimonials on social media can be a useful resource when deciding which brand to purchase. Dinulescu and Prybutok (2022: 2887) argue that it is crucial to consider where the testimonials are coming from. It is important to check if the testimonials come from actual customers or if they are phony, or purchased. It is vital to be aware of excessively favourable reviews that seem too good to be true because some businesses may hire people to create phony positive reviews or pay influencers to advocate for their items. It is crucial to view social media testimonials with objectivity. While considering testimonials, it is also imperative to consider other aspects when deciding which brand to choose, such as the company's reputation, cost, and product or service attributes. Also, testimonials posted on social media might not be typical of the general public. Individuals that take the time to write reviews or testimonials may have had more extreme experiences, whether positive or negative, and may not be typical of what customers experience on a daily basis.

❖ **E5.2.11: I use social media platforms to discover interesting information and content to take action.**

Statement E5.2.11 has the highest levels of agreement with the respondents agreeing to the statement “I use social media platforms to discover interesting information and content and to take action, with a mean score of 4.73 (Table 9). Voorveld (2019: 14) supports the idea that the use of social media platforms to find fascinating content and information is highly recommended. Social media may provide customers with a wide range of possibilities when looking for information. According to Prestridge (2019: 143), social media enables effective research on a range of subjects. A pool of information can be found by searching for hashtags, phrases, or accounts relevant to a topic.

❖ **E5.2.12: Social media posts are aided by word-of-mouth or referrals from friends and family when it comes to decision-making.**

The respondents have shown high levels of agreement with the notion that social media posts are aided by word-of-mouth or referrals from friends and family when it comes to decision-making, with a mean score of 4.71 (Table 9). Zaraket (2020: 143) supports the idea that customers frequently search their social networks for recommendations and opinions when trying to make a decision regarding a good or service. In addition, customers can easily share their thoughts, stories, and advice with their friends and followers using social media sites. This can be especially effective when making purchasing decisions because customers frequently place more weight on the advice of their friends and family members than they do on advertisements or other forms of marketing.

5.6.2 Brand credibility

In trying to assess how social media influences the buying decision-making process, brand credibility was considered one of the main contributing factors. Therefore, this credibility construct still deals with the objective one. When customers are deciding what to buy, brand credibility is a key factor (Lou and Yuan 2019: 58). Customers are more inclined to trust a company and consider using its products or services when they believe them to be legitimate. Customers' decisions to buy from a brand can be directly influenced by that brand's social media credibility. Table 10 shows a summary of the scoring patterns on brand credibility.

Table 10: Social media posts are aided by word-of-mouth or referrals from friends and family when it comes to decision-making

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
Brand preference is high when I believe that a brand has the ability and willingness to continuously deliver what has been promised	F1	395	4.93	0.93	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Brands need to be unique and personable through meaningful content	F2	395	5.11	0.91	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Brands should see themselves as a single person with a unique set of values, attitudes and behaviour E.g. Nandos	F3	395	5.06	0.99	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Brand touch points (social media platforms) should provide great brand experiences to consumers	F4	395	5.04	0.99	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
A brand's choice of social media network plays an important role in the brand's image and credibility	F5	395	5.00	0.96	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Positive customer reviews and comments on a product's attributes lead me into believing in the product and buying it	F6	395	4.88	0.99	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Consistent and recognisable brand personality enhances brand credibility	F7	395	4.90	0.98	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

Brand association, in terms of social media influencers, endorsers/ affects a brand's credibility	F8	395	4.89	1.03	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
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All of the statements reflected in Table 10 show significantly higher levels of agreement. For example, factor analysis shows that all of the statements form a single theme (Table 6, page 178). Eight statements in Table 10 show similar and high levels of agreement, with statement F6 having the lowest of the agreement levels (relating to positive customer reviews and comments on a product's attributes leading to brand preference) and statement F2 having the highest, with more respondents agreeing that brands need to be unique and personable through meaningful content. The highlighted sig. values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance), which implies that the distributions were not similar. That is, the differences between the ways respondents scored were significant.

❖ **F1: Brand preference is high when I believe that a brand has the ability and willingness to continuously deliver what has been promised.**

The respondents showed high levels of agreement with the notion that brand preference is high when one believes that a brand continuously deliver what has been promised, with a mean score of 4.93 (Table 10). Wallach and Popovich (2023: 187) support the idea that a brand's reputation and track record in the market are frequently linked to its capacity to deliver on promises. Consumers are more likely to select a brand that is well-known and has a track record of providing high-quality goods or services (Muller and de Klerk 2020: 107). In addition, it is important to note that customers also seek out firms that show a drive to develop and improve consistently (Dabija, Csorba, Isac and Rusu 2022: 1). Brands that are viewed as cutting-edge and always testing the limits are frequently recognised as being more dependable and trustworthy.

Overall, a variety of elements, such as reputation, track record, innovation, and general consumer experience, contribute to brand preference. Customers are more likely to be loyal to and choose brands that can reliably deliver on these criteria.

❖ **F2: Brands need to be unique and personable through meaningful content.**

Statement F2 has the highest levels of agreement, with the respondents agreeing to the statement that brands need to be unique and personable through meaningful content, with a mean score of 5.11 (Table 10). Poturak and Softic (2019: 17) support the idea that it is critical for brands to differentiate themselves and establish a relationship with their target audience in today's competitive industry. Making content that resonates with the target audience and is distinctive and personable is crucial. Demmers, Weltevreden and van Dolen (2020: 53) agree that brands gain customers' confidence and credibility by producing meaningful content. In addition, brands develop relationships with their customers and promote brand loyalty by producing content that is catered to their audience's interests, requirements, and preferences. Over time, this could result in rising sales and income. However, it can be said that while being accessible and interesting is crucial, brands must also retain a certain level of professionalism in order to be considered seriously by their target demographic.

❖ **F3: Brands should see themselves as a single person with a unique set of values, attitudes and behaviour, for example, Nandos**

In trying to assess how social media influences the buying decision-making process, respondents showed high levels of agreement with the statement that brands should see themselves as a single person with a unique set of values, attitudes, and behaviour, for example, Nandos. The statement F3 mean score is 5.06 (Table 10). Kohli and Yen (2019: 116) support the idea that brand personality is an important factor in how people make buying decisions. Customers are more likely to adopt a brand if they believe it reflects their own beliefs and values. For instance, a customer may favour Nandos over a more traditional and serious brand if they value fun and humorous posts. Moreover, a brand's personality can build an emotional bond with customers and encourage repeat business and enhanced loyalty. A consumer is more likely to stick with a brand in the future if they have a strong attachment to it.

❖ **F4: Brand touch points (social media platforms) should provide great brand experiences to consumers.**

The respondents have shown high levels of agreement with the notion that brand touch points (social media platforms) should provide great brand experiences to consumers, with a mean score of 5.04 (Table 10). Lin, Li and Ji (2020: 45) agree that social media platforms are just one of many brand touchpoints that give businesses a chance to wow their customers. Our daily lives are now completely reliant on social media, which gives businesses a way to meaningfully engage and connect with their target audiences. Brands can improve their reputation, foster loyalty, and ultimately increase sales by offering fantastic brand experiences on social media (Hu, Olivieri and Rialti 2023: 1).

❖ **F5: A brand's choice of social media network plays an important role in the brand's image and credibility.**

Statement F5 has higher levels of agreement with the respondents agreeing to the statement that a brand's choice of social media network plays an important role in the brand's image and credibility, with a mean score of 5.00. This means the majority of the respondents agreed that the choice of social media network to use is very important in terms of brand image and credibility. Al-azzam and Al-Mizeed (2021: 455) opine that the choice of social media platform by a brand can undeniably influence the brand's reputation, credibility, and, in the end, consumers' decisions to make a purchase. Poturak and Softic (2019: 17) support the view that when choosing a social media platform for a brand, it is crucial to consider platform suitability, perception of brand identity, influence partnerships, and social proof. As an example, a brand that actively engages on TikTok may be seen as more youthful and innovative, while a brand predominantly present on Facebook might be perceived as more mature and traditional. This may have an influence on consumers' decisions to interact with the brand or purchase its goods.

❖ **F6: Positive customer reviews and comments on a product's attributes lead me into believing in the product and buying it.**

The respondents showed high levels of agreement with the notion that positive customer reviews and comments on a product's attributes lead me to believe in the product and buy it, with a mean score of 4.88 (Table 10). This includes things like when brands get favourable ratings and how active and devoted their followers are. Also, customers pay attention to the content that brands provide on social media (Rocklage and Fazio 2020: 332). Reading about other people's experiences with a product can give customers an idea of its strengths and weaknesses and can help one decide whether it would be a good fit for one's needs (Dwidienawati, Tjahjana, Abdinagoro and Gandasari 2020: 1). However, it is important to keep in mind that not all reviews are genuine or unbiased. Some businesses may post fake positive reviews to boost their ratings, while some competitors may post fake negative reviews to bring down the ratings of their rivals. Therefore, it is important to read reviews critically and look for patterns or consistency in the feedback. In addition to reviews, it is also important to consider other factors when making a purchasing decision, such as the product's price, features, warranty and reputation of the manufacturer or seller.

F7: Consistent and recognisable brand personality enhances brand credibility.

The respondents have shown high levels of agreement with the notion that consistent and recognisable brand personality enhances brand credibility, with a mean score of 4.90 (Table 8). Li, Yen and Liu (2020: 550) support the fact that a clear and consistent brand personality can create a sense of trust and familiarity with the brand, which can help to build a strong emotional connection with consumers.

A brand's ability to differentiate itself from rivals and stand out in crowded markets can both benefit from developing a distinct and consistent personality (Sander, Föhl, Walter and Demmer 2021: 421). In addition, a recognisable brand personality can contribute to authenticity, which is becoming more and more significant to contemporary consumers who seek out brands that share their values and convictions.

❖ **F8: Brand association, in terms of social media influencers influence on a brand's credibility.**

Statement F8 has higher levels of agreement with the respondents agreeing to the statement that brand association, in terms of social media influencers, endorsers/ affects a brand's credibility, with a mean score of 5.11 (Table 10). Burke (2017: 10) agrees that customer impressions of a brand's quality, dependability, and overall value can be influenced by these influencers' endorsements because consumers frequently rely on their thoughts and suggestions when making purchases. Xu and Pratt (2018: 958) argue that the effectiveness of brand association can vary depending on a number of variables, including the influencer's reputation, the veracity of their endorsement, and the alignment of their image with the ideals of the brand. An influencer's affiliation with a brand could be detrimental to its reputation if they have a history of endorsing poor goods or have been associated with scandals. In addition, it is important to note that customers are becoming more adept at spotting fraudulent or untrue endorsements, so it is critical for firms to collaborate with influencers who truly care about their goods or services. In general, brand affiliation with social media endorsers and influencers can be a potent tool for establishing credibility, but it must be done so in a thoughtful and genuine manner to be successful.

On the other hand, a brand's lack of social media credibility may discourage customers from making a purchase. Every step of the consumer's decision-making process can be affected by brand credibility. For instance, a company with a solid reputation for dependability and quality may be more likely to be considered during the stages of information gathering and assessment. Also, a brand with a good reputation may contribute to consumer trust and increase their likelihood of choosing that brand over rivals.

5.7 Section D: The perceptions of millennials on social media and social media performance in Durban

This section focuses on the third objective, which is to identify the perceptions of millennials on social media and their social media performance in Durban. In this study, constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The scoring patterns of the respondents per variable per section were analysed. The results were first presented using mean scores for the variables that constitute each section. The results were then further analysed according to the importance of the statements. To determine whether the scoring patterns per statement were significantly different per option, a binomial test was done (with a cut-off of 3.5). The null hypothesis claims that similar numbers of respondents agreed (mean >3.5) as there were who disagreed (mean <3.5). The alternate states that there is a significant difference between the levels of agreement and disagreement.

5.7.1 Perceptions of millennials on social media.

The results on the perceptions of millennials on social media are presented and analysed below.

Table 11: The scoring patterns fo Peceptions of millennials on social media

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
Social media enhances my brand preference	B1	395	4.66	1.27	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I became aware of certain brands through social media	B2	395	5.01	1.26	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media is cheap to access	B3	395	3.99	1.60	4.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media allows information to reach many people in a short period of time	B4	395	5.35	1.04	6.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I am always receiving social media notifications on new social media posts, likes and new comments	B5	395	4.89	1.27	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

A brand with more followers, likes and reviews on social media receives high brand preference	B6	395	5.05	1.18	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I cannot spend a day well without accessing my social media platforms	B7	395	4.77	1.47	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

As reflected in Table 11, all of the statements show significantly higher levels of agreement. Five statements show similar and high levels of agreement (average = 4.88), with statement B3 having the lowest of the agreement levels (relating to the cost of accessing social media services) and statement B4 having the highest, with more respondents agreeing that social media can reach more people in a short time span. The highlighted sig. values (p-values) are less than 0.05 (the level of significance), which implies that the distributions were not similar. That is, the differences between the ways respondents scored are significant.

- ❖ The mean score and standard deviation for statement B1 *social media enhances my brand preference*, are 4.66 and 1.27, respectively. The median is 5.00, and the 25th and 75th percentiles are, respectively, 4.00 and 5.00. The lowest score is 1.00, while the highest is 6.00. The p-value for the binomial test is less than 0.001, which suggests that a considerably higher percentage of respondents more than 50% agree with this assertion. This means that a sizeable sample of respondents (statistically significant) believe that social media influences their brand preferences. Overall, these findings imply that social media positively affects respondents' brand preferences. Barreda, Nusair, Wang, Okumus and Bilgihan (2020: 109) support the idea that social media can be a useful tool for increasing brand preference, but it calls for a planned approach that prioritises forming connections with and engaging your audience. Appel *et al.* (2020: 79) support the fact that social media platforms make it possible for customers to converse with the audience in both directions. In addition, it increases trust and solidifies the relationship with customers by swiftly replying to questions, comments, and criticism (Guana, Olimma, Ederue and Onwuemene 2023: 68).
- ❖ The mean score for statement B2, *I learned about specific brands through social media*, is 5.01, and the standard deviation is 1.26. The 25th and 75th percentiles are 5.00 and 6.00, respectively, while the median is 5.00. The lowest possible score is one, and the highest possible is six. The binomial test results show that the p-value is less than 0.001, indicating that a considerably higher percentage of respondents than 50% agree with this statement. These findings show that

the majority of respondents agreed with the statement to a significant degree, and some even strongly agreed. These findings collectively imply that social media is a formidable tool for businesses to build brand awareness and connect with new potential clients. Businesses can utilise social media platforms to advertise their goods and services, broaden their consumer reach, and enhance exposure. Social media has developed into a powerful tool for businesses to market their brands and find new customers (Ebrahim 2020: 287). Businesses can communicate with customers, express their brand values, and promote their goods and services using social media (Liao, Widowati and Hsieh 2021: 1).

- ❖ The mean score for statement B3, *social media is cheap to access*, is 3.99, while the standard deviation is 1.60. The median is 4.00, while the 25th and 75th percentiles are 3.00 and 5.00, respectively. The lowest possible score is 1.00, and the highest possible score is 6.00. The binomial test results show that the p-value is less than 0.001, indicating that the percentage of respondents who agree with this statement is significantly greater than 50% (Table 11). Overall, these findings imply that even though some respondents might not entirely concur that social media is affordable to access, the majority of respondents do think it is a cheap way to stay in touch with others. The ability for people from all walks of life to interact and express their ideas and opinions online due to social media's cheap access has helped to democratise access to communication and social networking tools (Puschmann 2019: 1582).

However, Fiesler, Beard and Keegan (2020: 186) argue that the expense of utilising social media can pile up over time, despite the fact that the services themselves may be free to access. For instance, some users may pay for data plans or Wi-Fi access to keep their mobile devices linked to social media. Furthermore, some social media sites provide paid advertising or premium capabilities, which can be expensive for organisations or people who wish to use these services to advertise their content or expand their audience (Saha, Torous, Caine and De Choudhury 2020: 1).

- ❖ The mean score for statement B4, *social media allows information to reach many people in a short period of time*, is 5.35, and the standard deviation is

1.04. The majority of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, as evidenced by the 25th percentile score of 5.00 and the 75th percentile score of 6.00. The lowest possible score is one, and the highest possible is six. The binomial test results show that the p-value is less than 0.001, indicating that a considerably higher percentage of respondents than 50% agree with this statement (Table 11). These findings collectively imply that social media is an effective instrument for rapidly and effectively spreading information. Singh and Bajaj (2022: 61) agree that social media can be an effective method for rapidly disseminating information to a large audience. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn are used by billions of people, making it simpler than ever to communicate news, ideas, and opinions with a large audience around the world in real time. In addition, González-Bailón and Lelkes (2023: 155) state that social media algorithms frequently give preference to information that is trending or popular, which can aid in amplifying essential messages and reaching a wider audience.

- ❖ The mean score and standard deviation for statement B5, *I am always receiving social media notifications on new social media posts, likes, and new comments*, are 4.89 and 1.27, respectively. The 25th and 75th percentiles are 4.00 and 6.00, respectively, while the median is 5.00. The lowest possible score is one, and the highest possible is six. The binomial test results show that the p-value is less than 0.001, indicating that a considerably higher percentage of respondents than 50% agree with this statement (Table 11). Overall, these findings imply that respondents frequently receive information on new social media postings, likes, and comments and that they frequently receive social media notifications. Conversely, it may also suggest that frequent social media notifications can potentially lead to a degree of overload or distraction, underscoring the importance of managing one's social media usage. Anderson and Wood (2021: 83) suggest that it is crucial to keep in mind that social media alerts are intended to keep customers active and involved on the site.
- ❖ The mean score and standard deviation for statement B6, *a brand with more followers, likes and reviews on social media receives high brand preference*,

are 5.05 and 1.18, respectively. The 25th and 75th percentiles are both at 5.00, while the median is at 5.00 and 6.00, respectively. The lowest score is 1.00, while the highest is 6.00. The results of the binomial test show that the p-value is less than 0.001. Overall, the findings point to the importance of social media metrics like followers, likes, and reviews in determining customer brand preferences. Mogaji, Badejo, Charles and Millisits (2022: 379) support the assertion that brands have the opportunity to draw in more customers and enhance their reputation by putting more of an emphasis on developing a robust social media presence and growing their followers, likes, and reviews.

5.7.2 Importance of social media interaction

The importance of social media interaction was assessed to also achieve the third objective, which is to identify the perceptions of millennials on social media, social media performance, and social media interaction. Understanding millennial perspectives on social media, social media performance, and social media contact requires evaluating the significance of social media interaction. Gaining knowledge in these areas can help people and businesses interact with this audience more effectively and create social media plans that work. Millennials now spend a large portion of their time on social media; therefore, it is important for people and organisations to communicate with them effectively by comprehending their perceptions and experiences.

Table 12: The importance of social media interaction.

		Count	Mean	Standard	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
Using social media platforms allows me to develop relationships with others	C3.3.1	39 5	4.86	1.28	6.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Using social media networks allows me to know new friends	C3.3.2	39 5	4.85	1.24	4.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media keeps me updated on my friends' brand preferences	C3.3.3	39 5	4.54	1.35	4.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Using social media allows me to show off my new fashions without embarrassment	C3.3.4	39 5	3.92	1.56	4.00	3.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media influencers play a big role in starting social interactions on social media platforms	C3.3.5	39 5	4.56	1.38	4.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Using social media influencer of whom I am a top fan really captures my attention on the brand	C3.3.6	39 5	4.29	1.53	4.00	3.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

Social media brand employees' behaviour instils confidence in me on the brand	C3.3.7	39 5	4.03	1.39	4.00	3.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
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As reflected in Table 12, all of the statements show significantly higher levels of agreement with the statements. The respondents appeared to agree with the statements in general based on the mean scores for all items, which ranged from 3.92 to 4.86. The moderate-to-high standard deviations, which range from 1.24 to 1.56, show some variation in the responses. According to the percentile 25 and percentile 75 results, at least 50% of respondents gave each item a score of four or above. In Table 6, page 178, factor analysis shows that the following three statements form a sub-theme:

- ❖ Using social media platforms allows me to develop relationships with others;
- ❖ Using social media networks allows me to make new friends; and
- ❖ Social media keeps me updated on my friends' brand preferences.

There are higher levels of agreement in relation to this sub-theme, which can be called “information on acquaintances”. There are similar and high levels of agreement that social media allows one to know what friends are doing and what their preferences are. Overall, according to the descriptive statistics, respondents typically saw social media as a useful tool for fostering relationships and staying abreast of friends' brand preferences. Kurdi, Alshurideh, Akour, Tariq, AlHamad and Alzoubi (2022: 1135) suggest that brand representatives and social media influencers are involved in influencing consumer preferences.

The other four statements form a different sub-theme, which can be called “influences of social media” (Table 6, page 178). There are higher levels of agreement in relation to this sub-theme.

- ❖ Using social media allows me to show off my new fashions without embarrassment;

- ❖ Social media influencers play a big role in starting social interactions on social media platforms; and
- ❖ Using social media influencers, of whom I am a top fan, really captures my (Yufada and Simanjuntak 2023), social media brand employees' behaviour and instils confidence in me in the brand.

Social media also gives users the chance to network and communicate with others, which is advantageous for both their personal and professional development (Davis, Wolff, Forret and Sullivan 2020: 1). In addition, McCarthy and Bogers (2023: 153) support this sub-theme, stating that influencers on social media have assimilated into the digital landscape, and their contribution to fostering social connections cannot be understated. For instance, if a social media influencer endorses a brand, it may catch the fans' eye and ignite their interest in the company's products. This is because fans trust the influencer's advice and have a personal relationship with social media. Customers are more likely to be satisfied with a brand when its staff members are cordial, accommodating, and responsive (Raza, Adeel, Nazam, Akash, Hashim, Ahmad and Khan 2019: 489). Increased brand advocacy and loyalty may result from social media influencers, which is good for the brand's image. Therefore, social media interaction is very important for creating brand preference. It can be stated that understanding the perceptions of millennials on social media, social media performance, and social media engagement depends on how important social media involvement is to the goal. Finding out more about these topics can help brands interact with this group more effectively and create social media strategies that work.

5.7.3 Social media and customer satisfaction

Social media and customer satisfaction are assessed to also achieve the third objective, which is to identify the perceptions of millennials on social media, social media performance, and social media interaction. A summary of the scoring patterns for social media and customer satisfaction is presented in Table 13 below.

Table 13: A summary of the scoring patterns for social media and customer satisfaction

		Count	Mean	Standard	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
The quality of products you buy on social media	G1	395	4.24	1.31	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
The brand information provided on Social media	G2	395	4.62	1.11	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Consumer insights on social media, that provide a great base for building brands that satisfy consumer needs	G3	395	4.59	0.97	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Customer communication on social media	G4	395	4.65	1.08	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media product delivery process and time	G5	395	4.53	1.19	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media ordering process	G6	395	4.58	1.10	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Navigating social media platforms	G7	395	4.70	0.99	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Comparing, accessing and buying various brands on social media	G8	395	4.80	0.98	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

According to the factor analysis, this section does not split (Table 6, page 180), which means that the statements constituting each section were perfectly loaded along a

single component. Therefore, the statements measured perfectly what they were set out to measure. It is one theme, as per the questionnaire. The results of a binomial test, which is used to see if the percentage of respondents who gave a rating of 5 or higher differs significantly from a chance level of 3.5, are also displayed in Table 13. The proportion of respondents who gave a rating of 5 or above is considerably greater than the chance level of 3.5, according to the data, which shows that the p-value for all variables is less than 0.001. The high average ratings across the criteria (ranging from 4.24 to 4.80) show that consumers usually view social media as a trustworthy tool for accessing and purchasing brands. The variables pertaining to customer interaction and using social media platforms have the greatest mean ratings (4.65 and 4.70, respectively), whereas the variable pertaining to product delivery has the lowest mean score (4.53). The standard deviations, which range from 0.97 to 1.31, show that the sample's responses vary moderately (Table 13).

This means the majority of the respondents are satisfied with social media in terms of communication with different brands and the ordering and delivery process. This shows that social media can satisfy customers' needs when purchasing brands. Ceyhan (2019: 88) supports the idea that many businesses have integrated their e-commerce platforms with social media in order to streamline the ordering and delivery procedures. This enables customers to place orders straight through their social media profiles. In addition, some systems have links that can help clients with questions about ordering and delivery.

5.7.4 Online social media enhancement and social influence on brand preference

This section deals with objective three, which is to identify the perceptions of millennials on social media, social media performance, and social media interaction. The study looked into how online “social influence” and online “social media enhancement” can influence brand preference. In this context, millennials represent a crucial generation. Since millennials are the first generation to have grown up using social media, they are likely to see brands' social media performance and involvement differently than older generations do. According to Nasr and Selim's (2022: 1934) research, millennials' brand preferences can be significantly influenced by social influence and online social media augmentation.

Table 14: A summary of the scoring patterns for online social media enhancement and online social influence on brand preference.

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
Choosing good brands on social media networks can help me improve my image amongst friends	J1	395	4.34	1.37	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Using social media networks enhances my reputation amongst friends	J2	395	4.16	1.45	4.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Using social media networks to make decisions on brands can help me impress others	J3	395	3.99	1.47	4.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Using social media networks helps me to feel important and stay on top of the things	J4	395	3.94	1.56	4.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
Wearing the most popular brand on social media makes me feel like I am part of the celebrity family	J5	395	3.78	1.65	4.00	2.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Posting pictures on social media using expensive and quality brands gives me a high social status among friends	J6	395	3.97	1.66	4.00	2.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Interacting with others with the same interests positively influences my brand preference	J7	395	4.38	1.26	5.00	4.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Being able to access social media keeps me up to date with top brands	J8	395	4.82	1.08	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
I use social media platforms to keep up with the new fashions on different brands	J9	395	4.56	1.32	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Social media takes away individuality and encourages mob mentality	J10	395	4.55	1.35	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

Ten statements (J1 to J10) and the accompanying statistics for a sample of 395 respondents are included in Table 14, which presents the findings of a survey on social media networks and brand preference. The number of valid answers for each statement is shown in the "Count" column. According to a Likert scale from 1 to 6, where 1 is "strongly disagree" and 6 is "strongly agree", the "Mean" column displays the average score for each statement. The "Standard Deviation" column displays how far the replies varied from the mean. The "Median" column displays the responses' average value; the "Percentile 25" and "Percentile 75" columns provide the first and third quartiles of the responses, respectively. The "Minimum" and "Maximum" columns display the results for each statement with the lowest and greatest scores, respectively (Table 14).

The results are statistically significant at a very high degree of confidence, as shown by the fact that the p-value for each assertion is less than 0.001 in the "Binomial Test - cut-off p-value is 3.5" column. The majority of participants agreed that using social media can help them improve their reputation and status by exhibiting well-known and high-quality products, which suggests that social media networks are significant in influencing brand preference and image among friends. Sengar (2021: 27) supports the idea that social media sites present a special chance to interact with a broad audience and build a credible online presence. Individuals and brands can develop credibility and trust with their followers by continuously offering valuable and pertinent material on social media (Lou 2022: 4). This results in a rise in brand preference and a favourable perception of the company among customers and supporters.

Additionally, social media platforms offer a number of tools and services to support users and marketers in reaching a larger audience and focusing on particular demographics (Vinerean and Opreana 2021: 2633). For instance, by focusing on particular hobbies, habits, and demographics, social media advertising can assist firms in reaching the desired audience. Hence, this creates interaction online and increases brand preference. Thus, it is crucial for people and businesses to make use of social media's capacity to build strong online identities, enhance their status and reputation, and eventually spur corporate growth.

On the other hand, other participants voiced worries about the possibility of mob mentality and the damaging effects of social media on uniqueness (J10, Table 12). Sachdeva, Rathee and Tiwari (2021: 52) agree that the emergence of social media has had a tremendous impact on society, and there are valid worries about how it may affect individualism and group behaviour. The potential for mob mentality, which can occur when members of a group become so enmeshed in the feelings and opinions of others that they lose their capacity for critical and independent thought, is one of the most important problems (Mukhudwana 2021: 153). Waters, Russell and Hensley (2020: 195) added that mob mentality can contribute to issues like cyberbullying, online harassment, and the dissemination of false or misleading information in the context of social media. Also, there could be significant pressure to adhere to the mainstream viewpoints of the group, which can make it difficult for individuals to voice their own viewpoints and beliefs.

Furthermore, it is important to note that by rewarding content that receives the greatest engagement or becomes viral, social media sites frequently encourage homogeneity. Users may develop a "herd mentality" as a result, choosing to conform to the norm rather than being authentic.

Despite these difficulties, there are ways for people to retain their individuality and avoid falling victim to the mob mentality on social media. One strategy is to be aware of the stuff that one engages with and consumes, looking for various viewpoints and information sources before drawing conclusions on certain issues.

The next section deals with the fourth objective of the study. The objective is to suggest strategies for managing and monitoring activities on social media platforms towards a positive brand preference. This is crucial, as the aim of the study is to assess social media as a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials in the greater Durban area.

5.8 Section E: Strategies of managing and monitoring activities on social media platforms towards a positive brand preference.

Measuring social media outcomes frequently to determine what is and is not working is crucial. In addition, it is vital to keep tabs on the audience, engagement, and sales using the analytics tools. Monitoring what the audience is saying about the brand on social media on a regular basis is paramount for the company to be able to respond to critical feedback or remarks and work to remedy any problems that may occur. The results of a summary of the scoring patterns for managing and monitoring activities on social media are presented in Table 15 below.

5.8.1 Managing and monitoring activities on social media

Managing and monitoring social media activities is critical for individuals, businesses, and organisations to maintain their online presence, communicate with their audience, and safeguard their reputation. Therefore, Table 5:13 presents results on managing and monitoring activities on social media.

Table 15: A summary of the scoring patterns managing and monitoring activities on social media.

		Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
It is difficult to manage and monitor the content posted on social media	H1	395	4.09	1.41	4.00	3.00	5.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
All the good, the bad and the ugly can go viral on social media in a short period of time	H2	395	5.20	0.98	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Content posted on social media can affect the growth and survival of a brand	H3	395	5.17	1.00	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
Many customers now turn to social media to vent their frustrations and seek	H4	395	4.96	1.03	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

retribution after being slighted by the company											
Social media needs to be handled with care when it comes to growing brand preference	H5	395	5.11	1.00	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001	
Competing Businesses can also create false content to tarnish the rival company's reputation	H6	395	4.76	1.16	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001	
Compared to other marketing strategies, social media has excellent coverage when it comes to reaching customers and creating awareness	H7	395	4.97	1.09	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001	

Factor analysis has shown that this caption does not split. It is one theme as per the questionnaire (Table 6, page 182), which means the statements measured what they were intended to measure. Table 15 summarises the statistical data from 395 respondents' comments on social media and how it affects brand management. Responses are presented using seven statements labelled H1 through H7. Responses are presented using seven statements labelled H1 through H7. The number of participants who answered each statement is displayed in the "Count" column. On a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 denoting strongly disagree and 6 denoting strongly agree, the "Mean" column displays the average response. The "Standard Deviation" column displays the standard deviation of the replies from the mean. The "Percentile 25" and "Percentile 75" columns show the values that divide the responses into four equal portions, while the "Median" column shows the value in the middle of the range of responses. The "Minimum" and "Maximum" columns, respectively, show the lowest and highest responses. Moreover, the "Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5" column displays the outcome of a binomial test, which evaluates the null hypothesis that the true proportion of replies that agree with the statement is less than or equal to 0.5. The null hypothesis can be disregarded at a significance level of 0.001 if the p-value is less than 0.001 (Hochberg and Benjamini 1990: 811).

❖ **H1: It is difficult to manage and monitor the content posted on social media.**

According to the statistical data in Table 15, this statement's mean score is 4.09, which is just slightly higher than the scale's midpoint. The standard deviation is 1.41, which shows that there is some but not excessive variability in the responses. The bulk of the responses fall within this range, as the median score for this statement is 4.00 and the interquartile range ranges from 3.00 to 5.00. The score ranges from 1.00, which indicates that some respondents strongly disagree with the statement, to 6.00, which indicates that some respondents strongly agree with the statement (Table 15). The majority of respondents concur that it is challenging to manage and control the content posted on social media. Hartmann and Lussier (2020: 101) agree that for brand management, social media can be a challenging and unreliable channel. Reich and Pittman (2020: 660) argue that given the abundance of user-generated content and the diversity of viewpoints and opinions shared on social media platforms, it can be

difficult for brands to uphold a positive online presence and reputation because they have to carefully watch and manage the content that is associated with their brand.

❖ **H2: All the good, the bad and the ugly can go viral on social media in a short period of time.**

According to the statistical data as reflected in Table 15, the mean score is 5.20, which is higher than the scale's midpoint. The standard deviation is 0.98, which shows that the responses have a fair amount of consistency. The majority of responses fall within this range, as the median score is 5.00 and the interquartile range is between 5.00 and 6.00. The score ranges from 1.00, which indicates that some respondents strongly disagree with the statement, to 6.00, which indicates that some respondents strongly agree with the statement (Table 15). The majority of respondents concur that any type of social media content has the potential to go viral quickly. Al-Rawi (2019: 63) emphasises the influence and power of social media, demonstrating how a single post or comment can spread widely and quickly, potentially reaching millions of people in a matter of hours or days.

The results of the binomial test and statistical data support the notion that social media has a great potential for viral content, whether the material is favourable or unfavourable. This emphasises how crucial it is for businesses to carefully oversee and manage the social media information that is linked to their brand because any content has the potential to go viral and harm the company's reputation.

❖ **H3: Content posted on social media can affect the growth and survival of a brand.**

The mean response for Statement H3 is 5.17, suggesting that most respondents felt that social media material can influence a brand's development and survival (Table 15). The standard deviation of 1.00 indicates that the respondents' ratings were generally consistent. According to the median score of 5.00, half of the respondents provided a rating of 5 or higher, and the other half gave a score of 4 or below. The 25th and 75th percentile values of 5.00 indicate that most respondents gave Statement H3 a rating of 5 or higher. There are a variety of responses to this remark, as seen by the rating range of 1.00 to 6.00 (Table 15). According to Statement H3, social media

content can have an influence on a brand's development and survival. This means that a brand's success can be significantly influenced by how its audience perceives it on social media. Businesses now rely heavily on social media to communicate with their clients and spread brand awareness (Kujur and Singh 2020b: 30). When used properly, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn enable brands to interact with their audiences in real-time and can significantly affect a brand's reputation and success. Sengar (2021: 27) argues that the growth and longevity of a brand can be impacted by social media in both favourable and unfavourable ways, according to research. Increasing brand recognition, consumer involvement, and loyalty, as well as website traffic and revenue, are all positive outcomes. On the other hand, unfavourable outcomes could result in a tarnished reputation, a decline in client confidence, and a drop-in revenue.

❖ **H4: Many customers now turn to social media to vent their frustrations and seek retribution after being slighted by the company.**

Statement H4 has a mean score of 4.96 and a standard deviation of 1.03. The median score is 5.00, with a 4.00 for the 25th percentile and a 6.00 for the 75th percentile. The lowest possible score is one, and the highest possible is six (Table 15). The assertion makes the case that consumers are now using social media to voice their unhappiness and demand justice after a business has treated them unfairly. The majority of respondents think that this is a worry (as shown by the high median and 75th percentile ratings). This is a common problem, as seen by the average score, which is likewise on the agree side of the scale.

According to Statement H4, many customers increasingly use social media to express their annoyance and seek retaliation after feeling mistreated by the business. While bad customer experiences can spread quickly and harm a brand's reputation, this shows that social media can have a substantial effect on a company's reputation. Alt and Reinhold (2019: 24) emphasise how crucial it is for businesses to manage their social media presence pro-actively and respond to client complaints and issues promptly and effectively. Failing to respond to client complaints could lead to a decline in customer loyalty and trust, which would ultimately undermine the brand's ability to develop and survive (Loureiro and Lopes 2019: 419).

❖ **H5: Social media needs to be handled with care when it comes to growing brand preference.**

As reflected in Table 15, Statement H5, social media management must be carefully considered to create brand preference. The following are the descriptive statistics for this claim. The average response rate of 5.11 indicates that respondents generally agree that social media management must be carefully considered when it comes to building brand preference. The responses are moderately dispersed around the mean, as indicated by the standard deviation of 1.00. The percentile values and median value of 5.00 indicate that most respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with this statement. The results of the binomial test show that the proportion of respondents who agreed with the statement was considerably higher than 50%, with a p-value of less than 0.001. Social media management is becoming more crucial for businesses trying to develop their brand and engage with customers as it continues to gain popularity (Kong, Witmaier and Ko 2021: 640). Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi (2020: 4) support the view that, with brand preference on the rise, it is more crucial than ever to thoroughly analyse the social media strategy and make sure it complements the company's entire brand objectives.

❖ **H6: Competing Businesses can also create false content to tarnish the rival company's reputation.**

On a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 represents a severe disagreement and 6 represents a strong agreement, the respondents gave an average score of 4.76. The standard deviation, or amount by which the replies depart from the mean, is 1.16. The standard deviation in this instance is comparatively significant, demonstrating that the respondents' opinions on this assertion ranged widely. The highest rating provided to this statement by any respondent was a maximum of 6.00. The cut-off p-value for the binomial test is 3.5. This implies that the responses of the respondents to this assertion are statistically significant.

This strategy, also referred to as "negative campaigning" or "dirty campaigning", involves businesses using dishonest or unethical means to disparage their rivals

(Callaghan 2020: 1). Creating deceiving reviews or testimonials, disseminating untrue information about the firm, and manipulating search engine results to show unfavourable information about the company are a few ways that competing businesses frequently utilise misleading material to harm the reputation of their rivals (Di Domenico, Sit, Ishizaka and Nunan 2021: 329). Therefore, it is worth noting that it is critical for businesses to actively monitor their internet reputation and take prompt corrective action in the event that any incorrect or negative content emerges.

❖ **H7: Compared to other marketing strategies, social media has excellent coverage when it comes to reaching customers and creating awareness.**

According to this claim, social media is a powerful marketing tool for reaching consumers and raising awareness. The respondents appear to agree with this statement in general, as evidenced by the mean score of 4.97 out of 6. The 1.09 standard deviation indicates that the respondents' opinions are mostly consistent. The median score of 5.00 indicates that half of the respondents gave this statement a score of 5 or higher, while the other half gave it a score of 4 or below. According to the percentile 25 and 75 values of 5.00 and 6.00, respectively, most respondents gave this statement a score of 5 or 6 (Table 15). The majority of respondents agreed with this statement, according to the binomial test's p-value of less than 0.001 with a cut-off of 3.5. Lupu, Bustamante and Zechmeister (2020: 160) support the idea that there are millions, if not billions, of active users on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. This indicates that businesses have the opportunity to communicate their marketing messages to a sizable audience. Ultimately, social media provides businesses with a strong way to engage with their target audience, raise their brand awareness, and increase their sales (Perugini and Solano 2021: 1070). The key is to approach social media marketing intelligently and with a firm grasp of your objectives and target market. Overall, any business that wishes to keep up a strong online presence and effectively communicate with its audience must manage and monitor its actions on social media.

5.8.2 Social media content expectations.

This section still deals with the fourth objective, which is to suggest strategies for managing and monitoring activities on social media platforms towards a positive brand preference. Social media may be a great marketing tool for businesses, but it needs to be handled carefully and with attention to detail. Businesses can create a powerful online presence and forge deep connections with clients by comprehending the content requirements of the audience and successfully monitoring and managing the social media platforms.

Table 16: Social media content expectations

		Count	Mean	Standard	Median	Percentile 25	Percentile 75	Minimum	Maximum	Binomial Test - Cut off p-value = 3.5
I like social media posts that include humour	I 1	395	5.04	1.11	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I like interactive content on social media	I 2	395	5.00	0.98	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I like social media posts that include quotes	I 3	395	4.83	1.08	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I like posts that include colourful images and videos	I 4	395	5.06	1.03	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I always like posts asking for my opinion on a certain brand	I 5	395	4.57	1.35	5.00	4.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I like posts of appreciation to customers	I 6	395	5.10	1.02	5.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001
I like to post with a clear and short message	I 7	395	5.33	0.90	6.00	5.00	6.00	1.00	6.00	< 0.001

Table 44 displays data from a poll of 395 people about their preferences for various kinds of social media posts. The number of respondents who responded to the survey question is shown in the "Count" column. Respondents were asked to rate statement on a scale of 1 to 6, and the results are displayed in the "Mean" column. The degree of variation in the responses for each statement is shown in the "Standard Deviation" column. The middle response for each sentence is shown in the "Median" column. The

25th and 75th percentiles are displayed in the "Percentile 25" and "Percentile 75" columns, respectively. The "Minimum" and "Maximum" columns show the respondents' lowest and greatest ratings for each statement. Each statement is analysed below:

❖ **I 1: I like social media posts that include humour.**

As reflected in Table 5:14, it appears that respondents in this sample have a generally favourable opinion of humorous social media posts. The average rating of 5.04, which is higher than the scale's middle point, shows that most respondents find this kind of content to be appealing. Given that the median is also 5.00, it seems likely that many respondents offered this evaluation. There is some variation in how much respondents enjoy this kind of information, as evidenced by the wide range of scores (1 to 6) and the somewhat high standard deviation (1.11). The p-value is less than 0.001, however, which suggests that this variability is not the result of chance and that the majority of respondents in this sample do enjoy social media posts that include humour. Nabi, Huskey, Nicholls, Keblusek and Reed (2019: 260) support the idea that posts on social media that are humorous can be a fantastic way to interact with your audience and establish a more enduring brand. However, it is important to note that comedy is a personal experience, and it is vital to keep in mind that not everyone finds the same things to be humorous.

❖ **I 2: I like interactive content on social media.**

The data show that this variable's mean score is 5.00, with a standard deviation of 0.98. Moreover, the median score is 5.00, which shows that the distribution of answers is largely symmetrical. The interquartile range (IQR) for this variable is 1, which indicates that most participants had a favourable attitude towards interactive content on social media (25th percentile: 5.00; 75th percentile: 6.00). The diversity of preferences among participants may be shown by the fact that the minimum and maximum scores are 1.00 and 6.00, respectively. The binomial test, with a cut-off p-value of 3.5, suggests that there is a substantial preference for interactive content on social media among the respondents, with a probability of getting the observed results by chance alone being less than 0.001 (Table 44). The majority of participants, according to these findings, appear to like interactive social media material, which may have repercussions for content marketing and social media tactics. Chopra, Avhad,

Jaju and Sonali (2021: 77) support the fact that a wonderful method to boost engagement, raise brand exposure, and forge deeper connections with the audience is through interactive content on social media. Due to the interactive content's ability to boost engagement, expand reach, and forge deeper bonds between businesses and viewers, brand popularity rises (Rahardja, Handayani, Lutfiani and Oganda 2020: 57).

❖ **I 3: I like social media posts that include quotes.**

The majority of the respondents assigned a rating of 5 or higher based on the data reflected in Table 44, which shows that a substantial number of the respondents found quotes in social media posts to be amusing. Although there is some variation in the responses, the standard deviation of 1.08 shows that some respondents preferred posts with quotes more than others.

According to the 25th percentile rating of 4.00, one-fourth of the respondents gave this remark a relatively low rating, indicating that some respondents may not have been as interested in social media posts that incorporate quotes. On the other hand, the 75th percentile rating of 6.00 reveals that 25% of respondents gave this statement a relatively high rating, revealing that a sizeable fraction of respondents genuinely enjoy social media posts that incorporate quotes. The fact that a significant portion of respondents preferred social media posts with quotes is further supported by the binomial test's p-value of less than 0.001, which indicates that the proportion of respondents who liked social media posts with quotes is significantly different from what we would anticipate if respondents had no preference. Macarthy (2021: 1) supports that sharing motivational quotes as content with the brand page followers helps them get the week off to a good start. Cook (2020: 2) supports that it is recommendable to choose a quote that is pertinent and powerful, which includes searching for quotations that are relevant to the company and the preferences of the audience. Stavros, Meng, Westberg and Farrelly (2014: 455) argue that it is important to make sure the quotation speaks to your audience and conveys a message consistent with the brand's core principles.

❖ **I 4: I like posts that include colourful images and videos.**

This shows that social media posts with vibrant graphics and videos were generally well-liked by respondents (mean = 5.06). The majority of the responses (median = 5, percentile 25 = 5, percentile 75 = 5) fell between 5 and 6, indicating that most respondents either liked or strongly enjoyed such posts. The standard deviation of 1.03 suggests that the replies varied somewhat. The outcome of the binomial test indicates that the proportion of respondents who like postings with vibrant images and videos is significantly greater than the cut-off value of 3.5 (p-value 0.001) (Table 44). Barberá-Tomás, Castelló, De Bakker and Zietsma (2019: 1789) agree that the message or theme of a post can be enhanced by using colourful images and videos because colour can elicit feelings and convey meaning. For instance, warm colours like red, orange, and yellow, might evoke feelings of enthusiasm or energy, while cooler colours like blue and green can provide a restful or soothing environment. It is crucial to take the quality and significance of the visuals into account when producing or choosing photographs and videos for a post (Lemke 1998: 1).

❖ **I 5: I always like posts asking for my opinion on a certain brand.**

The results reflected in Table 44 imply that among the 395 people who made up the sample, the average rating for liking posts requesting people's opinions on a particular brand is 4.57, with a reasonably high standard deviation of 1.35, showing a wide variety of tastes within the group. The percentiles show that 25% of respondents had a score of 4.00 or lower and 75% had a score of 6.00 or higher, while the median value of 5.00 indicates that 50% of respondents had a score of 5 or higher. At least some respondents appear to have strongly disagreed with this remark, with the minimum value of 1.00, while some respondents appear to have strongly agreed, with the maximum value of 6.00. While seeking opinions, one should be precise and concise about the information being searched for (Noguti and Waller 2020: 1527). For instance, if one is requesting information on a certain product, it is important to include the product's name in the post. Bennett, Rachunok, Flage and Nateghi (2021: 1) support the opinion that it also helps to give some background information about the company or the brand one is seeking views on. This will make it easier for the audience to comprehend why the business is seeking input. It is important to keep in mind that

other individuals may not have the same perceptions of the brand or product as the social media marketer has (Voramontri and Klieb 2019: 209). In general, polling brand audiences on social media can be a terrific way to get feedback and interact with them. Hence, it is important to remember to be concise, provide context, and be receptive to other viewpoints.

❖ **I6: I like posts of appreciation to customers**

As reflected in Table 44, the average rating for like customer appreciation posts among the sample of 395 people is 5.10, with a comparatively low standard deviation of 1.02, showing a reasonably uniform preference among the group. The majority of respondents appear to have given this item positive ratings, according to the median and percentile of 25. The percentiles show that 25% of respondents had a score of 5.00 or lower and 75% had a score of 6.00 or higher, while the median value of 5.00 indicates that 50% of respondents had a score of 5. At least some respondents appear to have strongly disagreed with this remark, according to the minimum value of 1.00, while some respondents appear to have strongly agreed, according to the maximum value of 6.00.

The results of the binomial test indicate that, with a p-value of less than 0.001, the percentage of respondents who enjoyed posts of customer gratitude is substantially higher than 3.5. This demonstrates once more how the respondents appreciated such posts in general. Rangarajan, Sharma, Lyngdoh and Paesbrugghe (2021: 647) support the idea that customer appreciation posts can demonstrate to clients how much the business values their business. Businesses can express gratitude to consumers in a variety of ways, including through social media posts, email newsletters, and personalised messaging (Buzeta, De Pelsmacker and Dens 2020: 79). On the other hand, it is crucial to make sure that posts of gratitude are sincere and honest, rather than merely an effort to advertise a company. Consumers can usually sense when a company is being dishonest, which can be detrimental to the two parties' relationship (Lysenko-Ryba and Zimon 2021: 448).

Nevertheless, as long as businesses are honest and true in their posted content, appreciation posts may be a potent tool for fostering close relationships with clients.

5.9 Crosstabulations

A Kruskal-Wallis independent test was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between the biographical variables and the various themes. The Kruskal-Wallis test is a non-parametric test used to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between two or more independent groups on a continuous or ordinal dependent variable (Tilak and Arivazhahan 2022: 889). The null hypothesis states that there is no difference between the categories for a specified theme. The alternate hypothesis indicates that there are differences; the tables are attached in Appendix F.

- **Perceptions of millennials on social media and Gender**

The p-value between “Perceptions of millennials on social media” and “Gender” is 0.014. This means that there is a significant difference between males, females and other. That is, the gender of the respondent did play a significant role in terms of how respondents viewed the perceptions of millennials on social media. This means that males and females perceive social media differently. This insight could be valuable for businesses and marketers targeting these demographic groups. It might lead to more tailored marketing strategies. Soliman and Al Balushi (2023: 1) support the idea that marketers can use social media to collect consumer demographic data in order to create tailored promotional campaigns.

- **Social media content expectations across Genders**

The p-value between social media content expectations and gender is 0.014. This means that there is a significant difference between males, females and other. That is, the gender of the respondent did play a significant role in terms of how the respondents viewed social media content expectations. Lin and Wang (2020: 45) encourage that understanding gender differences in social media content expectations is critical for organisations and people looking to develop interesting and relevant material for their target audience. According to Rahman, Fung and Chen (2020: 1), particular colours, styles, or themes may be more appealing to one gender than the other.

- **Perceptions of Millennials on social media across Race**

The p-value between perceptions of millennials on social media and race is 0.038. This implies that there is a significant relationship between the variables. That is, the race of the respondents did play a significant role in terms of how respondents viewed perceptions of millennials on social media. Understanding how different racial and ethnic groups perceive millennials on social media is critical for businesses, marketers, researchers, and anybody aiming to generate content or campaigns that appeal to varied audiences. Van Der Linden (2022: 460) supports the idea that it is crucial to recognise the cultural differences and sensitivities associated with various racial and ethnic groupings. To avoid potential misunderstandings or transgressions, content should be culturally aware and polite. Orji, Chukwudu, Ogbunkwu and Emma-Echiegu (2023: 1) argue that social media content should be inclusive and free of stereotypes or biases that can mistakenly exclude or offend particular racial or ethnic groups.

- **Social media and Decision-making across highest qualification**

The p-value between social media and decision-making with the highest qualification is 0.017. This implies that there is a significant relationship between the variables. That is, the highest qualification of the respondent did play a significant role in terms of how respondents viewed decision-making. Higher-qualified individuals often have greater access to information and enhanced critical thinking and analytical skills. This can result in more informed and data-driven decision-making. Highly educated people are frequently associated with increased digital literacy. Cho, Cannon, Lopez and Li (2022: 1) agree that individuals with advanced qualifications may be better at navigating social media sites, comprehending privacy settings, and recognising online threats, which may influence their social media usage decisions.

- **Social media and customer satisfaction across the Highest Qualification**

The p-value between customer satisfaction and the highest qualification is 0.037. This implies that there is a significant relationship between the variables. That is, the highest qualification of the respondent did play a significant role in terms of how respondents viewed customer satisfaction. Ahani, Nilashi, Yadegaridehkordi, Sanzogni, Tarik, Knox, Samad and Ibrahim (2019: 331) opine that analysing social media usage and customer satisfaction at various levels of highest qualification is a strategic technique that allows organisations to customize their social media activities to the distinct

features and needs of each segment. This tailored strategy has the potential to boost consumer satisfaction, engagement, and overall success in the digital marketing landscape.

In addition, race did not play a significant role in terms of how the respondents viewed “importance of social media interaction”, “awareness”, “decision-making”, “brand credibility”, “customer satisfaction”, “managing and monitoring” and “social media content expectations”. Moreover, employment status and year of birth did not affect any of the dimensions. All p-values are greater than 0.05, which means that the null hypothesis is accepted.

5.10 Correlations

Bivariate correlation was also performed on the data. The results are presented in Table 15 below. The results indicate the following patterns: Positive values indicate a directly proportional relationship between the variables, and a negative value indicates an inverse relationship. All significant relationships are indicated by a * or **.

Table 15 below displays a correlation matrix of the variables related to millennials and their perceptions of social media. The Pearson correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables, ranging from -1 to +1, with values closer to -1 or +1 indicating a stronger relationship. The first row and column represent the variables being analysed. The diagonal cells show the correlation of each variable with itself, which is always 1. The cells below the diagonal show the correlation between each pair of variables.

Overall, the results suggest that millennials perceive social media as important for interaction, awareness, decision-making, brand credibility, customer satisfaction, and management and monitoring. Moreover, their expectations for social media content and online social enhancement also positively correlate with these aspects of social media.

Table 17: Correlations

		PERCEPTIONS OF MILLENNIALS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION	AWARENESS (RECALLING AND RECOGNISING THE BRAND)	SOCIAL MEDIA AND DECISION-MAKING	BRAND CREDIBILITY	SOCIAL MEDIA AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	MANAGING AND MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA
PERCEPTIONS OF MILLENNIALS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	Pearson Correlation	--						
	N	395						
IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION	Pearson Correlation	.340**	--					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000						
	N	395	395					
AWARENESS (RECALLING AND RECOGNISING THE BRAND)	Pearson Correlation	.428**	.278**	--				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000					
	N	395	395	395				
SOCIAL MEDIA AND DECISION-MAKING	Pearson Correlation	.268**	.398**	.359**	--			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	0,000	0,000				
	N	395	395	395	395			

BRAND CREDIBILITY	Pearson Correlation	.142**	.279**	.419**	.476**	--		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0, 005	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000			
	N	395	395	395	395	395		
SOCIAL MEDIA AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	Pearson Correlation	.213**	.366**	.192**	.459**	.365**	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000		
	N	395	395	395	395	395	395	
MANAGING AND MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA	Pearson Correlation	.213**	.199**	.363**	.245**	.461**	.233**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	
	N	395	395	395	395	395	395	395
SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT EXPECTATIONS	Pearson Correlation	.200**	.277**	.226**	.297**	.396**	.340**	.384**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000
	N	395	395	395	395	395	395	395
ONLINE SOCIAL ENHANCEMENT& SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON BRAND PREFERENCE	Pearson Correlation	.309**	.418**	.177**	.364**	.133**	.283**	.136**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 000	0, 008	0, 000	0, 007
	N	395	395	395	395	395	395	395

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- ❖ The importance of social media interaction positively correlates with all other variables, except for brand credibility. For example, the correlation value between “Importance of social media interaction” and “online social enhancement and social influence on brand preference” is 0.418 (Table 5:29). This is a directly related proportionality. Respondents indicate that the greater the social media interaction, the greater the influence on brand preference, and vice versa. This indicates that millennials who place a high value on social media interaction are likely to also be more aware of brands, use social media in their decision-making process, and be more satisfied with their customer experience on social media. Biru (2021: 76) supports that when brands actively communicate with their followers via likes, comments, shares, and direct messages, it builds a sense of connection and loyalty, hence brand preference. This interaction can have a big influence on brand preference since customers appreciate brands that notice and respond to them.
- ❖ Awareness (recalling and recognising the brand) has a strong positive correlation with social media interaction, decision-making, brand credibility, and customer satisfaction, with correlation values of 0.278, 0.359, 0.419 and 0.192, respectively (Table 17). This suggests that social media can be an effective tool for increasing brand awareness and influencing consumer behaviour.
- ❖ Social media and decision-making positively correlate with social media interaction, awareness, and brand credibility, with correlation values of 0.398, 0.359 and 0.476, respectively (Table 17), indicating that social media is an important factor in millennials' decision-making process.
- ❖ Brand credibility has a positive correlation with awareness, social media and decision-making, and customer satisfaction, with correlation values of (0.419, 0.476 and 0.365, respectively) indicating that social media can influence consumers' perceptions of a brand's credibility.
- ❖ Social media and customer-satisfaction have a positive correlation with social media interaction, awareness, decision-making, and brand credibility, with correlation values of 0.366, 0.192, 0.459 and 0.365, respectively (Table 17)

indicating that social media can be an important factor in promoting customer satisfaction.

- ❖ Managing and monitoring social media positively correlates with social media interaction, brand credibility, customer satisfaction, and online social enhancement, with correlation values of 0.199, 0.461, 0.233 and 0.136, respectively (Table 17), suggesting that effective management and monitoring of social media can positively impact these variables.

Overall, the results suggest that social media plays a significant role in millennials' perceptions of brands, their decision-making process, and their satisfaction with their customer experience. Effective management and monitoring of social media can also positively influence millennials' perceptions of brands, their decision-making process, and satisfaction with the customer experience.

5.11 Regression model

A general linear model regression analysis was performed with social media and customer satisfaction as the dependent variables and all of the other dimensions as independent variables. An unadjusted model (excluding the biographical factors) showed that the following four dimensions were significant:

- ❖ Importance of social media interaction
- ❖ Social media and decision-making
- ❖ Brand credibility
- ❖ Social media content expectations

After adjusting for the biographical factors (gender, highest qualification, employment status, race and year of birth), five dimensions become significant (p-values in bold). The overall model is also significant (ANOVA p-value < 0.001), implying that the independent variables are a good predictor of the dependent variable.

Table 18: Parameter Estimates

Dependent Variable: Social Media and Customer Satisfaction

Parameter	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Intercept	2.872	2.271	1.264	0.207	-1.601	7.344
PERCEPTIONS OF MILLENNIALS ON SOCIAL MEDIA	0.052	0.056	0.928	0.354	-0.058	0.161
IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION	0.125	0.051	2.446	0.015	0.024	0.226
AWARENESS (RECALLING AND RECOGNISING THE BRAND)	-0.160	0.070	-2.276	0.024	-0.299	-0.022
SOCIAL MEDIA AND DECISION-MAKING	0.335	0.070	4.750	0.000	0.196	0.474
BRAND CREDIBILITY	0.149	0.082	1.818	0.070	-0.012	0.311
MANAGING AND MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA	0.166	0.069	2.411	0.017	0.030	0.302
SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT EXPECTATIONS	0.180	0.065	2.781	0.006	0.053	0.308
ONLINE SOCIAL ENHANCEMENT& SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON BRAND PREFERENCE	0.059	0.046	1.274	0.204	-0.032	0.149

The p-value is a result of the null hypothesis, which tests whether the coefficients are equal to zero. The ones that are highlighted (in bold) imply that the coefficients (B) are significantly different from zero and hence contribute to the model. Of the 5 significant coefficients (for the independent variables), 4 are positive, implying a directly proportional relationship. That is, an increase in the independent variable results in an increase in the dependent variable (social media and customer satisfaction), and vice versa. An example of the interpretation is done using the importance of social media interaction. An increase of one unit in the importance of social media interaction results in an increase of 0.125 units in social media and customer satisfaction. The coefficient of awareness is negative. This implies an inverse relationship. That is, an increase in one unit of AWARENESS, results in a decrease of 0.160 units of social media and customer satisfaction.

The general form of the mathematical model is:

Social media and customer satisfaction = 2.872 + (0.125 × importance of social media interaction) – (0.160 × awareness) + (0.335 × social media and decision-making) + (0.166 × managing and monitoring social media) + (0.180 × social media content expectations).

5.12 Conclusion

This chapter describes the results of the analysis of the quantitative data using SPSS version 27.0. Data were presented using tables, graphs and charts. The presentation was divided into sections, with the first section focusing on a descriptive analysis of the study. The results showed that there was a 99% response rate. The reliability scores for all sections exceed the recommended Cronbach's alpha value. This indicates a degree of acceptable, consistent scoring for these sections of the research. For factor analysis, the statements constituting each section were perfectly loaded into a single component. This corroborates the statements that made up this section and shows that what was set out to be measured was perfectly measured.

Cross-tabulations were done with the demographics to see if this affected the results in any way. Overall, year of birth and employment status did not play any role in the way the respondents viewed all the stated dimensions. The correlation results suggest that social media plays a significant role in millennials' perceptions of brands, their decision-making process, and their satisfaction with their customer experience. Overall, the results showed that millennials perceive social media as important for interaction, awareness, decision-making, brand credibility, customer satisfaction, management and monitoring. In addition, the results showed that any business that wishes to keep up a strong online presence and effectively communicate with its audience must manage and monitor its actions on social media. Credibility was regarded as a very important factor that affects customer decision-making on social media.

The next chapter presents the summary, conclusion, and recommendations of this study. A general linear model regression analysis was performed with social media

and customer satisfaction as the dependent variables and all of the other dimensions as independent variables; hence, a mathematical model was performed.

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous chapter that discussed and analysed the quantitative data to present the qualitative phase of the study. The aim of this phase is to gain a better understanding of how social media is used as a tool to grow brand preference from the lived experiences of social media marketers and influencers. Data for this chapter was collected through in-depth interviews conducted with eight social media influencers and marketers in the greater Durban area. In-depth interviews were conducted to establish the opinions and attitudes on using social media to create brand awareness and monitor and manage social media posts in a transactional type of industry such as theirs.

6.2 Research objectives

It is important to reiterate the research objectives related to this sector of the study in order to identify which pieces of information or opinions are relevant to each objective. Objectives 1 and 4, as outlined in Chapter 1, are relevant to the qualitative research section.

- ❖ To assess various ways in which social media develops and enhances positive awareness and brand preference.
- ❖ To suggest strategies for managing and monitoring social media space activities towards a positive brand preference.

6.3 In-depth interviews

Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with social media influencers and marketers with a view to gaining more knowledge about social media marketing. The selected participants are involved with well-known brands.

6.3.1 Sampling and Recruitment of Participants for Interviews

Purposive sampling was used to select potential participants who were believed to have the required knowledge of social media brand marketing. The selected

participants social media influencers and marketers were recruited by means of email, WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram messages. Initially, thirteen social media influencers and marketers were approached; however, eight agreed to be interviewed. Each influencer and marketer received a copy of the interview guide one week prior to the scheduled interview. The participants were informed that the interview would last approximately one hour.

6.3.2 Interview process

Participants were interviewed either online or face-to-face at their convenience. The participants have very busy schedules, and it was quite challenging to get the interview appointments confirmed. The sample was made up of five females and three males. Table 19 below presents participants demographics and the work they do on social media. The descriptions of the participants are included to provide an understanding of the given responses.

Table 19: Sample Description

	Gender	Age	Description
Participant A	Male	18-25	A Marketing student pursuing social media influencing on fashion brands.
Participant AF	Male	25-30	A social media influencer promoting the food industry brand.
Participant P	Female	30-35	a passionate Zimbabwean academic and community builder based in Durban, who has a deep appreciation for her cultural roots, particularly when it comes to cuisine, Facebook presented an opportunity to marry her passions

Participant J	Female	25-30	A fashion and lifestyle influencer who uses Instagram as her platform of choice.
Participant L	Female	18-25	She recites poems on social media, she is her own brand.
Participant SM	Male	30-35	A founder of a digital marketing company, he manages different brands social media accounts.
Participant R	Female	18-25	She is employed as a social media marketer; she manages and monitor social media accounts of many brands.
Participant CY	Female	35-40	A social media influencer who promotes many brands.

The interviewer reached saturation at the eighth participant. Table 20 shows the themes and sub themes derived from the in-depth interviews.

Table 20: Themes developed from the in-depth interviews conducted.

Themes	Sub Themes
Determinants of preferred social media platforms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Understanding the target market and user demographics. ➤ Content format ➤ Personal preferences, user fit and creative vision. ➤ Community building ➤ Sense of Family and Loyal followers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ability for Growth and Reputation
Importance of monitoring social media posts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Manual moderation and audience engagement. ➤ Crisis management.
Challenges with Social media monitoring and brand reputation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Data baggage ➤ Different platforms new challenges. ➤ Language barrier
The role of social media on creating brand preference.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Influencer marketing ➤ User generated material. ➤ Brand visibility and identity.
Credibility of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Authenticity and trustworthiness of adverts ➤ User engagement and comments.

6.4 Results: Qualitative research

Qualitative data was collected to provide perspectives from social media influencers, social media marketers, or social media content creators on using social media as a tool to create brand preference. The qualitative section focuses on the development of themes and useful interpretations to complement the quantitative data with the content creator's perspective. The results of the qualitative exploratory research are detailed in the following sections:

6.4.1 Determinants of preferred social media platforms

Influencers play a significant role in shaping brand perception on social media platforms through captivating and engaging large followings (Koay, Cheung, Soh and Teoh 2022: 224). Through their firsthand experiences, influencers shed light on the

considerations, strategies, and outcomes associated with platform alignment, highlighting the dynamic relationship between influencers, target markets, and social media platforms. The choice of these platforms was influenced by various factors, including the content format, target audience, engagement levels, and personal preferences of the influencers. The participants considered these factors and strategically aligned themselves with the platforms that best suited their content style, desired audience demographic, and overall objectives.

In addition to providing a wealth of knowledge that can inform effective strategies for brand marketers, social media personalities' perspectives provide a valuable lens through which to explore the complex dynamics between social media platforms and the development of positive brand perceptions. There are, however, varied social media platforms to work from. Therefore, the researcher sought to find out from the social media influencers what specific social media platforms they preferred.

6.4.1.1 Understanding the target market and user demographics

The social media platforms that are used by the interviewed participants include WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok. Comparatively, TikTok and Facebook were the most preferred among the participants, with the former being the most popular. Results reveal that understanding the target market is crucial for influencers as they seek to build brand awareness and preferences. Each social media platform has its own unique user demographics, preferences, and features that cater to specific audience segments. As a result, the participants revealed that they carefully choose the platforms that align with their target market profiles and offer the right features and functionalities, as shown in Table 21 below.

Table 21: Preferred Platform

Participant	Verbatim Quotes	Preferred Platform	Features and functionalities
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Participant A	<i>"Instagram platforms allows me to reach my target population of people who enjoys aesthetics and fashion."</i>	Instagram	It
Participant L	<i>" I enjoy how TikTok allows me to express my creativity in fun and comfortable ways. TikTok's short video format challenges my creativity. I must come up with engaging content within a very short timeframe, which is exciting."</i>	TikTok	Provides short video format, allows creativity
Participant R	<i>"TikTok's short video format is ideal for quick, catchy, and easily consumable content. It is good for capturing attention in a fast-paced online environment."</i>	TikTok	Quick, catchy and easily consumable content.
Participant CY	<i>"I see myself as a storyteller, and I want to choose a platform that allows me to tell my brand's story in the most effective way. By carefully considering the features and functionalities of each platform, I found Facebook to be the one that aligns with my brand's values and resonates with my target audience."</i>	Facebook	Allows storytelling in an effective and creative way.
Participant P	<i>"I believe that I have a warm and engaging personality on and offline. I'm a firm believer in fostering personal connections and creating a welcoming space where people feel comfortable interacting. It is not just about selling products for me, but also</i>	Facebook	Allows building communities and relationships at large.

	<i>about building relationships. Facebook does well for me.”</i>		
Participant J	<i>“When it comes to fashion and lifestyle content, Instagram is the perfect platform for me. Because of its visual format, I can show off my sense of style and give glimpses into my daily life. The platform's target demographic is the type of people who like aesthetics and carefully chosen material, so it is a good fit for me.”</i>	Instagram	It has a visual format that allows one to showcase a sense of style.
Participant AF	<i>“My brand represents Young, fun, energetic, engaging, and open to positive criticism, continuous improvement. TikTok and Instagram works for me. TikTok is fun and engaging, Instagram has unique short video sharing features.”</i>	TikTok and Instagram	TikTok is fun and engaging, Instagram has unique short video sharing features
Participant SM	<i>“For me it is all about user fit, creative vision, target audience and content format offered as different brands have different preferences and target audience.”</i>	TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube.	These platforms provide variety to difference brands. Different brands prefer different platform.

6.4.1.2 Content format

In an engagement with participant L, an undergraduate student in the marketing and retail department at a university in Durban, she expressed that her preference for social media platforms is largely based on the format of the content that can be shared. Her interest in poetry her famous on social media. She showcases her poems on social media; she is her own brand. Participant L, shared the following about TikTok:

“I enjoy how TikTok allows me to express my creativity in fun and comfortable ways. TikTok’s short video format challenges my creativity. I must come up with engaging content within a very short timeframe, which is exciting. I think the excitement that I have when creating content is what my followers and audience also receive from the other end.”

Similarly, Participant R said that she uses TikTok because of its short video format.

“TikTok’s short video format is ideal for quick, catchy, and easily consumable content. It is good for capturing attention in a fast-paced online environment. I love the video format because it allows me to tell stories visually and engage my audience on a more dynamic level. I believe short video content and user-generated content work well.”

It has been established that TikTok content creators and influencers leverage creativity and high entertainment value to effectively engage audiences (Barta, Belanche, Fernández and Flavián 2023: 1). Xiao, Wang and Wang (2019: 415) also observed that content on TikTok is rich, adaptable to fast-paced life, and can be consumed on the phone. The millennial generation has been profiled for its proclivity towards fleeting moments (Eijsker 2021: 1), which is also a characteristic of TikTok as a marketing platform (Barta *et al.* 2023: 2).

6.4.1.3 Personal preferences, user fit and creative vision

It is important to note from the foregoing discussion that the participants' choices of social media platforms were not solely based on popularity or user statistics. Salient in their responses is the influence of their personal preferences as creatives or brands. Personal preferences of brands can greatly affect their choice of social media platforms for a variety of reasons (Kuncoro and Kusumawati 2021: 265). Ye, Hudders, De Jans and De Veirman (2021: 160) support the view that when determining which social media platforms to employ, brands frequently evaluate aspects such as their values, target demographic, content style, and overall marketing strategy. They carefully consider the platform and user fit, ensuring that they can fully express their creativity and produce the best content possible. As Participant L explains:

“I believe that as an influencer, it is crucial to choose a platform that aligns with my creative vision. Each platform has its own unique features and audience, and I want to make sure that I can fully explore and utilise those features to showcase my creativity. This alignment between the platform and my personal brand allows me to produce the best content and engage with my audience authentically.”

The alignment between the influencers' creativity, brand identity, and the features of the chosen platform creates a synergy that allows effective deployment of creativity and engagement. In support of the above, Conti, Gathani and Tricomi (2022: 86) state that influencers bring their own brand of innovation and content creation to the table. They may create compelling and honest content that resonates with their target audience. The social media content creators' imagination enables them to tell interesting stories, present products or services in novel ways, and develop a distinct and memorable online image (Sette and Brito 2020: 90). Participant CY emphasised the importance of selecting a platform that complements her brand identity.

“I see myself as a storyteller, and I want to choose a platform that allows me to tell my brand's story in the most effective way. By carefully considering the features and functionalities of each platform, I found Facebook to be the one that aligns with my brand's values and resonates with my target audience. I think my character and background ensures that I can produce content that truly represents my brand and connects with my audience meaningfully.”

For Participant P, a passionate Zimbabwean academic and community builder based in Durban who has a deep appreciation for her cultural roots, particularly when it comes to cuisine, Facebook presented an opportunity to marry her passions. She explained her choice as follows:

“I believe that I have a warm and engaging personality, on and offline. I'm a firm believer in fostering personal connections and creating a welcoming space where people feel comfortable interacting. It is not just about selling products for me; but also about building relationships. Especially because we are immigrants, living far from home.”

From the information above, it is imperative to note that social media influencers play an important role in connecting with their followers, brands, and the larger social media community. Kim and Kim (2021: 223) opine that building and maintaining these relationships is critical for influencer success and the effectiveness of influencer marketing. To add to that, while factors like popularity and audience reach play a role in platform selection, the personal preferences and creative considerations of the influencers are vital in determining the platform that enables them to produce their best work. Participant J, a fashion and lifestyle influencer who uses Instagram as the platform of choice, said the following:

“When it comes to fashion and lifestyle content, Instagram is the perfect platform for me. Because of its visual format, I can show off my sense of style and give glimpses into my daily life. The platform's target demographic is the type of people who like aesthetics and carefully chosen material, so it is a good fit for me. I can engage with my followers through stunning visuals, fashion inspiration, and behind-the-scenes glimpses into my life.”

Participant J maximises her impact, attracting an audience that resonates with her fashion-forward approach through aligning her content with Instagram's user base and features. Park and Namkung (2022: 1657) also observe that Instagram's strong user engagement and visual-centered nature make it appealing to advertisers. Martinus and Chaniago (2017: 203) also suggest that Instagram's visually driven nature and its interactive capabilities facilitate brand awareness and preference. It therefore makes sense for a fashionista to want to use Instagram, which is also about living in the moment.

Contrary to the fleeting moments on TikTok and Instagram, participant CY said she preferred Facebook more, though all platforms allow posting content using the video format. For her, Facebook enabled detailed and storied delivery of content. Participant CY makes content that targets mostly rural communities, which are often laid back. The idea that Facebook allows for the creation of a community and the development of personal brands that morph into reputable online sole traders is also shared by Participant P, a Zimbabwean female academic based in Durban who is in her early thirties and sells Zimbabwean food groceries on Facebook. Facebook has a number

of features that promote community creation and interaction. Deligöz (2022: 1) states that individuals can organise like-minded people around common interests, causes, or hobbies via pages, groups, and events, and communities on the platform can thrive and grow via active involvement and content exchange. Moreover, Participant P essentially owns an online shop, identifiable with Zimbabwean products and a trade name, albeit not registered. In her own words, she said:

“Facebook videos tend to have a longer format, allowing for more in-depth storytelling and detailed content. My brand incorporates charity work, developmental activities, advertising, identification of talent, promoting village tourism. I also enjoy the sense of community on Facebook. While there are millions of people online, Facebook allows me one to create a family or loyal fan. For example, you know of the Cat and Zvingaka Families who follow Mai Tt’s and Ketina’s Facebook profiles, respectively. People should not underestimate those loyal fans. They support business associated with their page.”

Participant P's story demonstrates the good impact of social media platforms, particularly Facebook, in developing personal brands that can evolve into credible online sole traders. Facebook users can post a variety of stuff, such as text, photographs, videos, and live broadcasts. Personal brands can use these diversified content-sharing capabilities to promote their expertise, products, or services, engaging their audience and establishing a devoted following (Liao and Yang 2021: 2). The highlights of her experience are as follows:

Community Building: Facebook's features and format, particularly longer video formats, make detailed narrative and content creation possible. Participant P has successfully used these techniques to create a community around her brand. She has established a dedicated fan following by engaging her audience with information pertaining to charitable work, developmental activities, talent spotting, and encouraging rural tourism. Sweet, LeBlanc, Stough and Sweany (2020: 1) support the fact that Facebook has helped to develop communities by offering a platform for individuals and organisations to connect, share interests, and engage in meaningful interactions.

Sense of Family and Loyal Followers: Facebook's platform enables the establishment of intimate communities resembling a family or a group of loyal followers (Garner 2022: 826). Similarly, Masip, Suau, Ruiz-Caballero, Capilla and Zilles (2021: 1062) report that Facebook's platform may create close groups that resemble a family or a group of devoted followers. This sense of belonging and connection motivates people to support the brand and its connected business activities. Participant P can provide more detailed and engaging content by utilising Facebook videos with longer formats. Video content is a great tool for sharing stories, displaying items, and building a stronger relationship with your audience. Participant P's integration of charitable work and developmental activities into her brand identity indicates her devotion to social causes. This can boost her brand's reputation and attractiveness, attracting socially concerned customers. Ting, Abbasi and Ahmed (2021: 1139) state that loyal fans play an important part in supporting businesses affiliated with a Facebook page. Their assistance can result in improved sales, word-of-mouth referrals, and organic brand growth.

Ability for Growth and Reputation: Participant P has the ability to expand her online shop into a respectable and known brand in her niche through constant engagement and great content. While social media sites such as Facebook provide chances for personal branding and online businesses, there are also obstacles such as competitiveness, sustaining audience engagement, and controlling any bad feedback (Zhang, Zang, Zhu, Uddin and Amin 2022: 1). Furthermore, it is critical for online enterprises to follow local legislation, such as registering trade names and conforming to tax requirements (Hurwitz 2020: 1). The example of Participant P demonstrates the importance of social media platforms in allowing individuals to construct their personal brands, engage with communities, and build successful online businesses. As social media evolves, entrepreneurs like Participant P may capitalize on it.

6.4.2 The importance of monitoring and managing social media posts.

Social media offers opportunities for building brands and growing businesses. However, it is also fraught with challenges associated with managing brand reputation. The cancellation culture on social media has the potential to mobilise millions of people to rally against a brand (Anderson-Lopez, Lambert and Budaj 2021: 64). Monitoring

business reputation and brand perceptions online may represent a way to avoid stakeholders' boycott and cancellation culture (Edelman 2010: 62). It is critical for social media influencers to monitor and regulate social media posts in order to safeguard the brand reputation, engage with the audience, adhere to guidelines, efficiently handle crises, and develop effective content plans (Lee 2019: 231). However, the dynamic, ubiquitous, and often real-time interaction enabled by social media significantly changes the landscape for brand management (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins and Wiertz 2013: 242). Influencers who spend their time on social media are best placed to share insights on how to monitor and manage social media posts.

6.4.2.1 Manual moderation and audience engagement.

Social media has provided opportunities for people who are not necessarily marketing professionals to play a key role in promoting brands. Access to digital technologies and the ubiquity of social media platforms have created a shift in where communicative power lies. The average person can now speak back to power and brands almost instantaneously. At times, mistakes from brand influencers or trolling from an ordinary social media user can drag a brand into oblivion. Demsar, Brace-Govan, Jack and Sands (2021: 1568) posit that trolling refers to deliberate, deceptive, and mischievous attempts that are engineered to elicit a reaction from the target(s), are performed for the benefit of the troll(s) and their followers, and may have negative consequences for people and firms involved". Participants who took part in this study were aware of this dynamic and had experiences 'living online' to deal with related challenges.

Participant CY shared that she examines her Facebook platform frequently, checking for comments that have potential damage to the brand or derail the messages from posts. She said the following:

"I actively interact with my followers. My page is not extremely big, and I don't think I have created a loyal following that can defend my personal brand and those of my clients whose products I will be posting. Therefore, when I make a post that is generating unusually high traffic, I live online. There are ghost accounts that can just drag you or steal your thunder. Those ones I delete immediately!"

Participant CY's strategy of inspecting and deleting vile comments might seem effective, but it exposes the lack of and need for professionals to train social media influencers. Retaliatory behaviours from consumers are not always motivated by hate. At times, these behaviours are a result of moral violations by the firm resulting from product or service failure (Grégoire, Laufer and Tripp 2010: 738). Therefore, when social media influencers delete negative comments, they might be ignoring important determinants of success (Kim, Lim and Brymer 2015: 165). It is important, however, to note that manual moderation by either deleting comments or using other available devices on social media is indeed considered an effective way to deal with harassment on social media (Kalsnes 2016: 1).

The study participants shared that manual moderation presents a unique opportunity for social media, at least in comparison with traditional media. Through manual moderation, they can interact with audiences in real time and in often entertaining and educational ways that bring audiences closer to the brands. Influencers build engaged and loyal followers online by examining audience reactions, comments, and interactions on posts as intimated by participants. Going through the comments allows them to assess what their audience and, by extension, customers want, and they react accordingly. Yuan and Lou (2020: 133) also observed that influencers foster relationships with followers that provide important insights. While CY does manual monitoring of social media posts and subsequent comments stemming from them, (SM), who runs a social media marketing company, plans on using automated moderation and filters as his business profile grows. He was of the opinion that:

“Influencers can set up moderation rules and modify filters in order to maintain a courteous and engaged online community.”

While none of the participants are using automated filters, they present an opportunity to create a good and safe environment on social media platforms by detecting and filtering spam, abusive remarks, and unsuitable information automatically (Duarte, Llanso and Loup 2017: 1). Influencers can establish a better and more effective personal brand by actively managing their internet presence.

In addition, participant SM relates very well to manual moderation as it provides a greater room for audience engagement. Participant SM owns a digital marketing company that monitors and manages many brands' social media accounts.

An effective strategy frequently combines automated filters with manual moderation. Automated filters can quickly handle blatant spam and abusive content, relieving human moderators of the strain (Munn 2022: 2). Meanwhile, human moderators can focus on more difficult activities like answering user questions, engaging with the community, and dealing with content that requires contextual understanding. Adopting a hybrid strategy may be the most realistic alternative for Participant SM, who has a digital marketing company that administers numerous brands' social media accounts. They can use automated filters to handle regular chores while maintaining a personalized and active presence, ensuring a great brand image and audience experience. Finally, for social media platforms and brands to provide a safe and secure environment, a complete content moderation strategy is required.

6.4.3 Crisis management

The way a brand handles a crisis on social media can have long-term consequences for customer perception, loyalty, and overall brand reputation. Suffice it to say, crisis management is important in managing a brand's reputation on social media. However, it is complicated when dealing with social media influencers, primarily because of the speed and virality of social media posts. Considering this, all participants suggested that having crisis management plans is critical for organisations to maintain brand identity and successfully address unpleasant circumstances on social media. In line with the same view, Guo, Liu, Wu and Zhang (2021: 1) posit that it is important to identify and address negative feelings as well as manage crises in a timely and effective manner, as inefficiency might aggravate the problem and further harm the brand. Yang, Tang, Zhang and Yang (2021: 2) also opine that brand preference is heavily influenced by social media brand crisis management.

As clients feel heard and respected, this level of responsiveness and attentiveness can boost brand preference. Participant CY shared that it is not a choice for brands not to have social media crisis management plans. She explains how she actively engages her audience after posting anything to avoid damage from social media trolls.

“Social media gives customers a place to express themselves, and negative feedback can spread quickly, possibly harming a brand's reputation. Actively listening to client input, concerns, and complaints on social media is essential for effective crisis management. During a crisis, I actively engage with my audience, respond to enquiries, and give personalized support, [and] display a customer-centric approach. Brands no longer have the option of whether or not to include social media into crisis management; the only option is how to do so.”

The question of how to prepare for and implement crisis management is certainly crucial, just as it is difficult. However, participants had a shared view that clear communication of expectations between the social media influencer and the brand is a pre-requisite for effective crisis management. The general agreement was that it is important to establish clear communication routes and expectations with influencers prior to any crisis. The communication should include the brand's principles, guidelines, and expectations for their social media conduct. This includes how social media influencers should handle unpleasant circumstances, conflicts, or crises involving the brand.

Participant AF emphasised being provided with a detailed crisis response plan that includes standards designed specifically for him as an influencer. This plan explains the measures influencers should take in the event of a crisis and outlines their roles and duties in crisis management.

“It is very important for brands to ascertain that influencers are aware of the crisis response plan and their expected participation in it. The plan should explain the roles and duties of me as a brand influencer in cases of social media brand crisis management.”

Ulvi, Lippincott, Khan, Mehal, Bass, Lambert, Lentz and Haque (2019: 3) encourage that brands must ensure that their responses and actions are consistent with their fundamental values and brand positioning during a crisis. Consistency in how a brand manages a crisis on social media while remaining true to its ideals aids in the establishment of credibility and supports the company's identity. Due to this, customers

are more likely to resonate with a company that stays loyal to its beliefs even in difficult circumstances; therefore, consistency can have a positive impact on brand preference.

From all participants, only one emphasised a crisis response plan when dealing with brands, especially big brands, while the others emphasised being proactive through high engagement with the audience on their posts. It is worthy of note that maintaining open lines of communication with social media influencers provides clear instructions on how to respond to inquiries or negative comments related to the crisis and establishes positive crisis management.

Participant SM, the owner of MSM Group, is dealing with managing social media accounts for different brands and is of the notion that it is important to always monitor the brand influencers' social media activity to stay updated on the interactions. He said the following:

“With the experience of monitoring different social media brand accounts over the years, I can safely say it is critical to keep an eye on your brand social media influencers' social media activity to stay up to date on their material and interactions.”

Lee (2019: 231) supports that proactive monitoring of social media influencers' social media activities assists in identifying any disputes early, which allows brands to take appropriate action instantly. In support of this, Deng, Gao, Wang and Zhang (2020: 2) state that in a crisis, prompt and transparent communication is crucial. The participants' responses acknowledge responding to the crisis in a timely and honest manner, recognising the problem, and assuring the audience that it is being taken seriously. It is critical to avoid deleting bad comments or disregarding the situation, as this can exacerbate the crisis. Maintaining confidence requires transparency, regular communication and providing solutions or remedies to individuals who have been impacted by the situation. Based on the nature of the issue, this may include refunds, replacements, or other necessary responses. Taking concrete measures to address the problem shows accountability and a dedication to client satisfaction.

Following the resolution of the crisis, perform a detailed examination of the issue and your actions. Determine your crisis management strategy's lessons learned and areas

for development. Use these findings to update your crisis response plan and put preventive measures in place to reduce the likelihood of future crises.

It is crucial to remember that each crisis is unique, and how you handle it will differ based on the nature and severity of the circumstances. Customize your crisis response approach to individual circumstances while remaining true to your brand's core values and commitment to transparency and customer happiness.

6.4.4 Challenges with Social media Monitoring and Brand reputation

Monitoring social media is critical for maintaining a brand's reputation. It does, however, present its own set of challenges, as the interviewees indicated. Social media influencers and marketers encounter several challenges when it comes to social media monitoring and brand reputation. The study participants unanimously agreed that some of the most common issues that arise when monitoring social media and managing brand reputation involve data volume and velocity, real-time monitoring, multiple platforms and channels, negative feedback and crisis management, and localization and language.

6.4.4.1 Data baggage

Participant AF elaborated on how social media networks generate massive amounts of data. He mentioned that users add updates, comments, photographs, videos, and other stuff on a regular basis, and this abundance of data makes it difficult for influencers and marketers to keep track of meaningful brand dialogues. Participant SM also supported the idea that social media networks generate large amounts of data, which makes them difficult to monitor. Participant SM, as the owner of the company managing the brands' social media accounts, mentioned the following:

"In real-time, social media networks generate massive amounts of data. Monitoring this data can be difficult, especially for major firms with a strong internet presence. To guarantee meaningful information is captured successfully, managing the volume and velocity of data requires comprehensive monitoring tools and procedures."

Identifying specific monitoring goals was considered to be important in eliminating the challenge of managing the massive amounts of data generated by most of the participants. Identifying monitoring goals is done to concentrate the emphasis, reduce data volume, and clearly identify the objectives and criteria of social media monitoring (Hollender, Van Bavel, Dulio, Farmen, Furtmann, Koschorreck, Kunkel, Krauss, Munthe and Schlabach 2019: 11). In addition, it is important to determine and routinely monitor the important metrics and indications that fit with your brand's goals (Primasiwi, Irawan and Ambarwati 2021: 154). Ye, Zhang, Mu, Gao and Liu (2021: 1340) support the opinion that the use of social media monitoring tools and investment in social media monitoring tools and platforms that provide data aggregation, filtering and analytics. These solutions can help streamline the process of dealing with enormous amounts of data while also enabling real-time monitoring and involvement.

Participants considered the possibility of using artificial intelligence to manage and monitor massive amounts of data on social media. Participant MS mentioned that the use of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) technology to efficiently handle and analyse enormous amounts of social media data is very efficient and allows for more accurate results. This serves to feed the perception that artificial intelligence-powered sentiment analysis, natural language processing, and machine learning algorithms can help uncover patterns, trends, and sentiments in real-time, allowing for faster and more accurate results. When participants use AI technology to manage massive amounts of data, more accurate results are achieved (Hartanto, Firmansyah and Adhrianti 2022: 589).

In addition, the participants mentioned that identifying relevant talks is one of the challenges they incur when managing and monitoring social media accounts. Participant R mentioned the following:

“Not all social media talks about a brand's reputation are relevant. It is difficult to distinguish between noise and genuine discourse.”

Since social media is available 24 hours a day, brand-related conversations can occur at any moment. It is critical to monitor social media in real time to spot developing issues or trends (Burnett and Lisk 2021: 117). However, keeping a continual eye on numerous channels and responding quickly can be difficult, particularly for firms with

limited resources or a worldwide presence (Dwivedi, Hughes, Baabdullah, Ribeiro-Navarrete, Giannakis, Al-Debei, Dennehy, Metri, Buhalis and Cheung 2022: 1). From the information provided by the participants, to effectively discover important discussions that influence brand reputation, complex filtering techniques, sentiment analysis, and natural language processing must be used. The use of powerful filtering options in monitoring programmes to focus on key conversations and data items is imperative. Kliestikova, Durana and Kovacova (2019: 1) support the fact that reducing the data to the most relevant keywords, hashtags, or places for your brand allows one to limit the volume of data and focus on the information that is important.

6.4.4.2 Different platform, new challenges

Participants also identified monitoring many platforms and channels at the same time as a challenge. Participant AF explained further how difficult it can be to monitor many social media platforms.

“Social media monitoring goes beyond the most popular platforms that we used to, such as Facebook and Twitter. Brands must monitor conversations on numerous platforms, such as Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Reddit, and others. Because each platform has its own set of dynamics and user behaviour, it can be difficult to track and manage brand reputation consistently across different channels.”

From the above information, the participant conveyed the perception that monitoring many social media platforms at once is possible through the use of social media monitoring tools that work across various platforms. These tools enable monitoring brand mentions, hashtags, and relevant conversations across many social media channels at the same time. The above-mentioned tools offer a centralized dashboard or interface for monitoring and analysing data from multiple platforms in one location.

Conversely, some participants stated that careful platform selection is very important for every brand when creating brand preference. Determining which platforms are most pertinent to the brand and target demographic is considered very important by the participants. Shahbaznezhad, Dolan and Rashidirad (2021: 47) support the view that considering user demographics, engagement levels, and the platform's connection

with the aim of your company is important when selecting social media platforms. Social media influencers should prioritise monitoring efforts on the selected platforms to ensure resource efficiency. To add to this, participant MS stated that it is crucial to understand every selected platform's distinct traits and user behaviour.

“Understanding each platform's distinct traits and user behaviour is vital when adjusting your monitoring strategy accordingly. Instagram, for example, is known for its image-centric content, whereas Twitter is known for its real-time interactions. I customize my monitoring tactics and keywords to properly collect platform-specific comments.”

This serves to feed the perception that monitoring brand reputation across many platforms successfully necessitates a combination of platform-specific expertise, efficient technologies, and consistent engagement techniques. Kurdi *et al.* (2022: 1135) encourages that influencers and marketers can effectively manage their brand's reputation and engagement across several social media channels by taking a complete approach.

6.4.4.3 Language barrier

In addition, the participants mentioned that global brands have difficulty monitoring social media conversations in several languages and cultural situations. The language barrier issues present a challenge to social media influencers. Participant R, the social media marketer for a digital marketing company, stated the following:

“Localization and language play critical roles in the reputation management of global brands, particularly when it comes to monitoring social media conversations across multiple languages and cultural contexts.”

Some participants shared the opinion that effective reputation management tactics require accurate translation and comprehension of material. In addition, most participants opine that it is a required skill to obtain insights from customers' opinions, identify possible concerns, and respond to enquiries or complaints. The ability to understand and analyse content in multiple languages is required to ensure correct comprehension. Hardini and Sitohang (2019: 238) support the idea that different

languages and cultural contexts can have a big impact on how people receive communications. Loureiro and Alló (2020: 1) state that conversations on social media vary according to language and cultural context. To properly monitor and participate in these dialogues, brands must understand the intricacies, local idioms, and cultural references. Failure to comprehend cultural context may lead to misinterpretation or insensitive responses, both of which can undermine brand preference.

In addition, it can be noted that brands that can communicate effectively in a user's native language and understand their cultural background are more likely to provide personalized experiences. This can boost brand preference by instilling a sense of connection and relatability in the target audience. By promoting cultural awareness, individualized communication, customer support, localized content, and sentiment analysis, effectively handling localization and language problems can significantly influence brand choice.

6.4.5 The role of social media on creating brand preference

The study participants were all of the same view and unanimously agreed that social media plays a significant role in creating brand preference among consumers. The participants' responses support the idea that social media has revolutionized the way brands interact with their target audience, allowing for direct and immediate communication. Mou (2020: 1) supports the idea that brands must have a thorough social media strategy that fits with their overarching marketing goals and objectives. Effectively utilising social media's power can help brands cultivate brand preference and boost client loyalty and advocacy (Aydin, Uray and Silahtaroglu 2021: 768). Participant AF mentioned the following:

“Social media allows advertising that evokes positive feelings, offering the customers a feeling of being part of the brand”.

Participant R responses agree with Participant AF. Participant R mentioned that:

“Social media gives consumers access to advertisements on social media sites that arouse particular emotions and predispose people to particular businesses.”

Participants provided information that revealed social media provides many opportunities for creating brand preference. Social media was found to have increased brand visibility, built brand personality and identity, allowed influencer marketing, user-generated material, targeted advertising, and brought brand advocacy.

6.4.5.1 Influencer Marketing

Social media has given rise to influencer marketing, where brands collaborate with influential individuals to promote their products or services. Influencers often have a loyal following and can significantly impact the brand preferences of their audience. By leveraging influencers' reach and credibility, brands can increase their exposure and generate positive brand associations. Participant AF stated the following in support of the above:

“Having a large following is really helping me to influence a lot of brands because my posts reach a greater number of audiences, giving a great exposure to the brands I work with.”

Influencer marketing exposes a brand to a larger audience, which greatly raises brand recognition. When influencers publish content linked to a brand, their followers learn about it even if they were not previously familiar with the brand. As consumers get more accustomed to the brand and its products, increased brand awareness creates the groundwork for developing brand preference (Ki, Cuevas, Chong and Lim 2020: 1). This signifies that influencer marketing plays a significant role in creating brand preference among consumers. Chopra *et al.* (2021: 77) opine that social media influencer marketing leverages the popularity, credibility and influence of individuals known as influencers to promote products or services. In addition, influencers have built a loyal following based on their expertise, authenticity, and engaging content. Their followers trust their opinions and recommendations, considering them credible sources of information. Participant J mentioned the following:

“My followers are loyal; they have built a level of trust in my posts. I see their comments, likes and reviews, they believe in what I recommend.”

According to the above information, when an influencer endorses a brand, the followers are more likely to trust and develop a positive perception of that brand, leading to increased brand preference. Dam (2020: 920) agrees that influencers have developed a loyal following due to their subject matter expertise, honesty, and engaging content, which increases confidence and credibility in the endorsed brands. In addition, influencer marketing allows brands to strategically partner with influencers whose followers match their target market. Participant SM supported the above by mentioning the following:

“When managing brands social media accounts, it is important to choose an influencer that has the same following as the brand’s targeted customers; this helps the message to reach the targeted audience effectively.”

Therefore, it can be concluded that this targeted approach ensures that the brand message reaches the right audience, increasing the likelihood of creating brand preference among those who are most likely to be interested in the brand's offerings. Belanche, Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez (2021: 186) argue that the brand can boost the relevance and impact of the influencer's marketing by choosing an influencer who shares the same demography, interests, and values as its target market. The likelihood that this customized approach will resonate with the proper audience, foster brand preference, and ultimately lead to the desired actions and conversions is increased. Apart from encouraging influencer marketing, social media encourages users to produce and distribute materials about their interactions with certain brands. This is discussed in the following section:

6.4.5.2 User-Generated material

Participants provided information indicating that user-generated material is crucial for enhancing trust and credibility to create brand preference. According to Kaur and Bedi (2022: 6), user-generated content can significantly affect brand preference, including reviews, testimonials, and photographs. Positive content produced by their peers increases customers' trust and confidence in a brand, making them more likely to choose it. According to Ko, Kim and Kim (2022: 1), social media marketers encourage user-generated content by employing techniques like hosting contests, generating specific hashtags, and presenting user-generated content on their official channels.

Brands may actively support and amplify user-generated content by engaging with users' content through comments and shares. To support the above, Participant A stated the following:

“I create specific hashtags for the fashion brand I promote to generate so many reviews, and if the reviews are positive, they help in creating customers’ trust in the brand”.

To support the above, Rasool and Pathania (2021: 401) agree that by utilising the power of user-generated content, brands can increase brand preference, develop a sense of community, and access the real voices of their consumers. It can be noted that social media encourages user-generated material, which helps in creating brand preference. Social media platforms' ability to propagate good word-of-mouth can have a big influence on consumer choice for brands. Vidani, Meghrajani and Das (2023: 99) argue that consumers are more likely to create a positive perception of and preference for a brand when they witness friends, family, or reliable influencers promoting it. In addition, social media has increased brand visibility and created brand identity, which will be discussed below.

6.4.5.3 Brand visibility and brand identity

The participants shared the perception that social media platforms give brands a global audience and the ability to showcase their goods and services. Brands may raise their visibility and draw in new customers by consistently posting interesting and pertinent content. According to Sengar (2021: 27), social media platforms have a large worldwide user base, giving marketers the chance to connect with a global audience. Kumar and Mittal (2020: 523) argue that with the help of the billions of users that regularly use social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, businesses can contact consumers all over the world. Moreover, some participants mentioned that social media creates a distinctive brand identity. Participant AF mentioned the following:

“I use the same messaging style, visuals and tone of voice in my posts to create a unique image for a brand because it is best for the customers to relate with the brand on a personal level.”

Brand identity assists in setting the brand apart from rivals and making a lasting impact on customers. Brand preference is created when a brand gains a competitive advantage. Considering the above information, participants conveyed the perception that brands can successfully generate brand preference by utilising user-generated content, building a strong brand identity, and utilising the extensive coverage and engagement options provided by social media. Building uniqueness, authenticity, and favourable brand connotations within their target market is what gives rise to brand preference.

According to Wawrowski and Otola (2020: 242), social media platforms provide an excellent opportunity for brands to reach a vast audience and build awareness. According to the participants brands can effectively showcase their products, services, and values to a wide range of users creating and maintaining an active presence on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, thus achieving brand awareness. The participants unknowingly agreed that social media allows brands to share content, engage with users, and generate discussions around their offerings. Participant J mentioned the following in support of the above:

“I make my brand being known by consistent[ly] posting content about the brand and interacting with my followers; this will help me to increase the brand’s visibility and establish recognition among the targeted audience.”

Furthermore, Troise and Camilleri (2021: 161) support the idea that social media platforms provide a variety of advertising and targeting options, allowing firms to reach out to specific demographics with their promotional messaging. Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi (2020: 4) argue that paid social media advertising may raise brand visibility, recall, and recognition even further by reaching a larger user base and targeting individuals based on demographics, interests, and online behaviour.

“To assess the efficiency of their brand awareness activities, brands must regularly monitor and analyse social media indicators such as engagement, reach, and sentiment.”

The participants shared the view that brand awareness is created through being able to remember the brand and being able to know the brand when they see it, thus brand

recall and brand recognition. Guha, Mandal and Kujur (2021: 339) support the idea that brand recall refers to a consumer's capacity to recall a brand when presented with a certain product category or demand. By exposing users to brand content on a regular basis, social media helps to enhance brand recall. Ebrahim (2020: 287) added that the degree to which customers can identify and associate a brand with its specific features or offers is referred to as brand recognition. The interviewees shared that developing consistent brand aspects and visual identities across platforms through social media plays an important role in building brand recognition. Participant AF and Participant R stated the following, respectively:

“I make my followers recall and recognise the brand by creating funny, engaging and memorable content, such as eye-catching visuals, videos, and creative campaigns that resonate with the brand’s target audience.”

“For me, I use profile pictures, cover photos, and consistent colour schemes to create visual cues that users can easily associate with the brand. I also like to use hashtags, unique slogans, and consistent brand messaging to reinforce brand recognition and help consumers recognise and differentiate the brand from its competitors.”

The above information signifies that brands may improve brand recall and recognition by analysing audience preferences and optimizing their social media tactics. While interviewing the participants, the interviewer went on to find out the significance of brand awareness in creating brand preference. The responses given indicated that brand awareness plays a critical role in developing consumer preference for a brand. The participants shared the same view that consumers are more inclined to consider and pick a brand over competitors when they are aware of it and familiar with its products or services. Creating brand awareness successfully is essential to establish familiarity.

Barijan, Ariningsih and Rahmawati (2021: 73) support the idea that consumers gain familiarity and trust as a result of brand awareness. When consumers are repeatedly exposed to a brand through numerous social media channels, they develop trust and confidence in that brand. It can be noted that this familiarity and trust increase the

likelihood that consumers will prefer and choose that brand when making purchasing decisions.

In addition, it was also mentioned that social media helps in creating top-of-mind awareness. Yunpeng and Khan (2021: 1) support the fact that brand awareness ensures that a brand is at the top of consumers' minds when making a buying decision. The participants shared the view that when consumers have a specific need or want for a product or service, they are more likely to recall and consider businesses they are familiar with and about which they have heard good things. Being top-of-mind boosts brand preference because consumers are more likely to choose a brand that they can quickly recall and recognise. Oyenuga, Ahungwa and Onoja (2021: 48) argue that being top-of-mind is not always what drives purchase intentions, since a brand can be top-of-mind because it is actively despised. It can be noted that the nature of the social media content that creates top-of-the mind awareness plays a major role in creating brand preference. The content should be positive to encourage the best brand image in the customers' minds.

Moreover, Fadila, Wahab, Isnurhadi and Widiyanti (2021: 182) opine that strong brand awareness affects consumers' opinions of the quality and value of a brand. The participants shared the perception that when customers are familiar with a brand and it is recommended or admired by others, they form the impression that the brand provides superior products or services. Some of the participants encouraged good social media content that yielded many good customer reviews. This sense of quality and value favours the brand over competitors who may not have the same level of brand awareness; hence, brand preference is created. According to Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh (2021: 16), consumers can form emotional relationships and attachments to brands. Brands that express their values, purpose, and brand personality successfully through social media and other marketing platforms can form an emotional link with their target audience. When customers have a strong emotional connection to a brand, they are more inclined to choose that brand since it speaks to them. From the above information, the participants conveyed the perception that brand awareness plays a big role in creating brand preference on social media.

6.4.5 Credibility of Information on social media

Assessing credibility on social media entails considering a number of variables in order to establish the dependability and trustworthiness of the information or content being delivered. The participants mentioned that due to the open and decentralized nature of these platforms, the reliability of content on social media is a key concern.

6.4.5.1 Authenticity and trustworthiness of advertisements

Brands that continuously provide high-quality content and valuable information and authentically engage with their audience are seen as more trustworthy. Social media allows anybody to post content; information can be spread quickly and without sufficient verification. As a result, the trustworthiness of information on social media can vary greatly, and users must exercise caution while consuming and sharing content. Participant AF mentioned the following:

“For me, it takes quality of adverts, user engagement and feedback, comment section to create credibility around my posts. My posts create a lot of feedback, that is very good; these comments attract more followers.”

In support of the above, Dabbous and Barakat (2020: 1) state that it is crucial to assess the quality and legitimacy of advertisements. Aji, Nadhila and Sanny (2020: 91) added that some misleading or deceptive content may be disguised as advertisements. Therefore, it is crucial to identify sponsored content and understand the intentions behind it. Credible content is open about its sources and includes proper attribution for figures, quotes, and facts. The absence of correct credit may indicate untrustworthy content (Record and Miller 2022: 41). In addition, transparency was also mentioned by the majority of the participants. The participants gave the perception that brands that are transparent about their products, services and business methods are more likely to be trusted. Transparency increases audience trust and a positive view of the brand. Moreover, Mühlhoff (2021: 675) opines that reputable content should explicitly attribute its sources and give correct credit for statistics, quotes, and facts. Properly cited information demonstrates a dedication to accuracy and transparency, which increases the content's credibility.

6.4.5.2 User Engagement and comments

In addition, participants mentioned that genuine customer reviews and user comments are critical in establishing the legitimacy of a brand or content. Positive reviews and testimonials illustrate that others have had positive experiences, thus affecting future customers' attitudes. Participant R mentioned the following:

“Authentic customer reviews play a crucial role in making me feel safe when selecting a particular brand on social media. Therefore, I feel so happy when my posts get positive reviews that will create credibility for my posts.”

Participant AF responses agree with Participant R. Participant AF mentioned that:

“When I get more positive comments on my posts from my followers, it is a milestone for me. This means my followers are believing in the brand’s legitimacy and thus credibility.”

Participant A responses agree with Participant R and Participant AF. Participant A mentioned that:

“Positive reviews increase means a lot when it comes to brand credibility. Many customers tend to prefer the product that has many positive reviews. Positive reviews bring trust.”

The above extract shows that online reviews play a significant role in creating credibility for the posted brand. Positive user feedback and testimonials can boost a company's legitimacy (Roy, Datta, Mukherjee, Eckert and Dixit 2023: 4). This gives the perspective that those brands that encourage genuine consumer feedback and the sharing of positive experiences build credibility.

6.4.5.3. Verification of the social media account

In addition, the participants mentioned the importance of having a social media account with a verified emblem. The verified emblem indicates that the site has validated the brand's identification (Bragg, Pageot, Amico, Miller, Gasbarre, Rummo and Elbel 2020). Accounts that have been verified are more likely to be trustworthy. Participant AF mentioned the following in support of the above:

“Verified social media profiles offer an extra element of trust from my followers. Verified accounts show that the platform has validated the brand's identity, lowering the danger of being duped by imposters. Some people may still try to open fake accounts in your name, but the verification badge plays a very big role in protecting us and our followers from being lied to.”

From the above, the participants shared the view that brands that retain consistency in their messaging, defend their principles, and execute on commitments over time tend, well verified, to have a greater reputation for credibility. Social media influencers should exercise caution when sharing or engaging with content that contains inaccurate or misleading information. In an age of rampant misinformation, fact-checking and validating information from reputable sources are critical skills (Matalon, Magdaci, Almozlino and Yamin 2021: 1).

Overall, from the participants' responses, it can be noted that the legitimacy of social media information is a joint duty of content authors, users and the platforms themselves. It is imperative to note that users must practice critical thinking and scepticism while consuming content, while brands and content creators must aim to deliver accurate and authentic information. Social media platforms must continue to strengthen their efforts to prevent disinformation and offer users trustworthy information sources. Individuals can utilise social media more responsibly and contribute to a safer and more trustworthy online environment by considering these elements and being discriminating customers.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents an analysis of the information obtained in the interviews. The themes and sub-themes obtained were presented in Table 20. An understanding of how social media influencers and content creators use social media to develop and enhance positive awareness and brand preference is presented through analysing the results. Strategies for managing and monitoring activities on social media platforms towards a positive brand preference are also presented through the analysed data. These findings confirm a number of ideas and opinions about how social media content creators' use social media to create brand awareness and preference as well as

monitor their social media accounts. The strong message that comes through from the interviewed social media content creators is that social media is a viable tool to create brand preference. The challenges of monitoring and managing social media are also presented. The next chapter will present the conclusions, recommendations, limitations, and potential future research of the study.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive synthesis of the study and is organised into nine sections for clarity and coherence. Section 7.1 provides the chapter outline to guide the reader through the subsequent discussions. Section 7.2 provides a review of the study, outlining the summary of the theoretical study. Section 7.3 outlines a summary of the empirical study. In Section 7.4, the achievement of the objectives outlining a concise yet thorough overview of its theoretical underpinnings is discussed. Subsequently, Section 7.5 covers the implications of the study. Section 7.6 elucidates the study's contribution for future studies. Section 7.7 discusses the recommendations emanating from the study's findings. The limitations of the study are acknowledged in Section 7.8 and finally, the chapter provides the overall conclusion to the study in Section 7.9. Therefore, this chapter focuses on providing a comprehensive understanding of the empirical study in relation to the theoretical study, with a focus on illuminating the implications of the study in order to suggest recommendations that may assist in pursuing further studies. A summary of the theoretical study is discussed in the next section.

7.2 Review of the study

The first chapter presented an overview of the research. The aim of the study was to evaluate social media as a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials in the greater Durban area. It provides a comprehensive background on social media's role in marketing and brand exposure, emphasising the significance of social media marketing in today's digital landscape. The study addressed the research problem, highlighting the need for a more in-depth examination of the economic feasibility and influence of social media marketing on brand preference among millennials. It also discussed the changing dynamics in the business environment due to the internet and the increasing role of social media. The research objectives were to: assess various ways in which social media develops and enhances a positive awareness and brand preference; examine the influence of social media on the buying decision-making

process of millennials in Durban; evaluate how social media influences brand positioning and credibility; and suggest strategies for managing and monitoring social space activities towards a positive brand preference. The study was justified by its potential to contribute to understanding the evolving marketing landscape and its implications for businesses and academia. It also provided an overview of the literature review and the theoretical and meta-theoretical frameworks used in the research. The methodology, including data collection, analysis, and sampling methods, is explained, emphasising the use of mixed methods. Chapter 1 also highlighted considerations related to validity, reliability, anonymity, confidentiality, and ethics. The research was limited to millennials in the greater Durban area.

Chapter 2 addressed the theoretical underpinnings for the study and review of literature on social media. In this chapter, the focus was on establishing a strong theoretical foundation for the study, specifically in the context of social media and its influence on brand preference, with a primary emphasis on Keller's customer-based brand equity theory. This theory underscores the significance of customer impressions and interactions in shaping a brand's strength. The discussion also delved into meta-theories relevant to social media marketing, which are agenda-setting theory, uses and gratification theory, consumption value theory, the theory of reasoned action, and planned behaviour. The chapter also introduced key concepts such as social media definitions, infrastructure, marketing goals, benefits, and drawbacks. Furthermore, the chapter addressed the challenges associated with managing and monitoring social media accounts, recognising the essential role of a theoretical framework as a guiding lens for exploring and understanding the complexities of this research, which aimed to uncover the dynamics of brand preference among millennials in the realm of social media.

Chapter 3 provided a review of the literature on branding, shifting the focus to the influence of social media on brand preference. Building on the literature review in Chapter 2, this section explored the connection between branding and social media for the purpose of enhancing brand preference. The chapter delved into a range of pertinent topics, including brand knowledge, brand image, brand awareness, brand associations, favourability of brand associations, brand credibility, and the steps

involved in building a brand on social media. It also provided insights into the historical origins of branding and how social media serves as a powerful tool for promoting brand awareness, innovation, association development, and overall brand equity, all of which collectively contribute to the creation of brand preference.

Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology employed to gather and analyse data for this study. It emphasised the importance of aligning the research methodology with the study's objectives. The chosen approach draws from a marketing research process that comprises four phases and eleven specific steps. This process ensured systematic planning and design, maintaining consistency and alignment with the study's purpose and objectives. A cross-sectional descriptive research design was adopted in the study. The researcher adopted mixed methods to offer a complete analysis of the research problem. The use of both methods includes data collection, analysis, and integration of quantitative and qualitative data in a single study. The study targeted millennials from the greater Durban area. Purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 400 participants for quantitative data and 10 participants for qualitative data within the greater area of Durban. Sampling was based on a researcher's judgement. A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. An interview guide was used to collect qualitative data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. SPSS version 28.0 was used to analyse the data gathered from the responses.

The primary goals in Chapter 6 were to present quantitative data analysis and to give a thorough discussion of the findings drawn from the analysis of the responses gained from the quantitative data collected. The research instrument for gathering quantitative data was the questionnaire, which was given to 400 millennials in the greater Durban area. There was a 100% response rate. SPSS version 28.0 was used to analyse the data gathered from the responses. The findings showed that social media is a powerful tool for creating brand preference.

In Chapter 6, the focus transitioned from the quantitative analysis in the previous chapter to the qualitative phase of the study. The goal of this phase was to gain a deeper understanding of how social media serves as a tool to cultivate brand preference, as perceived through the real-life experiences of social media marketers and influencers. Data for this chapter was gathered through in-depth interviews with

eight individuals working as social media influencers and marketers in the greater Durban area. These interviews were conducted to explore the social media content creators' perspectives, opinions, and attitudes concerning the utilization of social media in creating brand awareness and managing social media content in industries characterise by transactional dynamics. The findings showed that social media is a great tool for growing brand preference, and it needs to be well monitored and managed for successful results. The next section provides a summary of the empirical study.

7.3 Summary of the empirical study

The study reveals that millennials' perceptions of social media have a positive influence on growing brand preference, as indicated by a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy value exceeding the threshold of 0.500 (0.783). Additionally, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, reflected in an approximate Chi-Square value of 618.330, further confirms the significant positive influence of millennials' perceptions of social media on brand preference, with the associated p-value being less than 0.05. This underscores the crucial role of millennials' perceptions in shaping and enhancing brand preference through social media channels.

The study's quantitative findings underscore the importance of brand awareness and recognition in consumer decision-making, with recognised brands seen as safer and of higher quality. Social media is identified as a powerful tool for building brand recognition and loyalty, facilitating direct and immediate communication, and fostering a sense of connection with consumers, which promotes brand preference. Additionally, millennials heavily depend on social media for communication and information when choosing a brand. The findings showed that millennials trust social media for various aspects of product and brand information but express dissatisfaction with product delivery times. Effective social media management and alignment with broader marketing goals are seen as crucial for enhancing brand preference. The qualitative findings highlight the influence of influencer following and trust in promoting brand preference, as well as the effectiveness of diverse content types in engaging audiences. Selecting the right social media platform and maintaining authenticity and customer feedback are also crucial for establishing credibility and brand preference.

The findings showed that social media is an effective tool for enhancing brand recognition, building brand loyalty, and growing brand preference.

It is shown that social media enables direct and immediate communication, allowing brands to engage with customers in real-time. This direct interaction fosters a sense of closeness and connection, making customers feel like they are part of the brand. It is also evident that social media platforms offer brands the opportunity to increase their visibility to a wide and diverse audience. The findings showed that social media's dynamic and interactive nature provides fertile ground for brands to cultivate and nurture brand preference. A significant number of millennials also admitted that they cannot spend a day well without accessing their social media platforms. This highlights the extent of dependency on social media for communication, information, and entertainment. The results indicated that monitoring and managing social media activities are essential for maintaining a positive brand preference. The findings indicate that effective brand reputation management on social media can lead to increased brand preference and customer loyalty.

In addition, the multiple regression analysis model conducted in this study has yielded valuable insights into the factors influencing customer satisfaction on social media. The results indicate that independent variables collectively have a strong predictive influence on customer satisfaction. Notably, factors such as the importance of social media interaction, its role in decision-making, effective management and monitoring, and meeting content expectations positively contribute to increased customer satisfaction. The study provides a regression analysis model that serves as a predictive tool for estimating customer satisfaction on social media based on these variables, offering practical implications for businesses. Results from the multiple regression analysis model reveal significant insights into the factors influencing social media and customer satisfaction:

- Significant predictors: the study's overall model is statistically significant, indicating that the collective influence of independent variables strongly predicts customer satisfaction with social media. These variables collectively influence customer satisfaction with social media.
- Positive relationships: four significant coefficients, including the importance of social media interaction, social media and decision-making, managing and

monitoring social media, and social media content expectations, exhibit positive relationships with customer satisfaction. This suggests that the higher importance of social media interaction, social media's role in decision-making, effective management and monitoring, and meeting content expectations lead to increased customer satisfaction.

- Negative relationship: the awareness variable displays a negative relationship with customer satisfaction, indicating that greater brand awareness is associated with decreased satisfaction with social media. Further exploration is needed to understand the reasons behind this negative correlation.
- Intercept: the intercept represents baseline satisfaction when all other variables are zero, and it is measured at 2.872. This means that there is a fundamental level of satisfaction with social media, even in the absence of other influencing factors.
- Model interpretation: the model provides a predictive tool for estimating social media and customer satisfaction based on the independent variables. Each coefficient reflects the change in satisfaction associated with a one-unit change in the respective independent variable, while other variables are held constant.
- Managerial implications: these findings offer practical insights for businesses and organisations utilising social media for customer engagement. Focusing on improving the importance of social media interaction, facilitating its role in decision-making, effective management and monitoring, and meeting customer content expectations can enhance customer satisfaction. However, further investigation is required to understand and address the negative relationship with awareness.

Overall, the model highlights the factors significantly affecting social media and customer satisfaction, emphasising the importance of managing and enhancing various aspects of social media interaction to improve overall customer satisfaction levels.

In addition, the qualitative findings provided the content creator's perspective on the use of social media as a tool to grow brand preference. The study highlights the critical factors in influencer marketing on social media. It underscores the significant role of a substantial following, as influencers with larger followings can effectively amplify brand

exposure and engagement. Trust and loyalty among an influencer's followers emerge as pivotal elements in brand promotion, as credible endorsements from trusted influencers can significantly influence consumer choices. Furthermore, the alignment between an influencer's following and a brand's target audience is crucial to ensuring the resonance of the brand's message with the intended demographic. In essence, the study emphasises that the size of an influencer's following, coupled with trust and loyalty, holds substantial sway in influencer marketing, making it imperative for brands to carefully match influencer demographics and engagement levels with their target audience for effective partnerships and long-term credibility.

The conclusions on social media content preferences reveal that humorous content is generally well-received, interactive posts are highly favoured, and appreciation posts are appreciated for fostering closer customer relationships. Quotes, colourful images, and videos also garner positive responses, emphasising the effectiveness of diverse content types in engaging audiences. Brands should incorporate a mix of these elements into their social media strategies, tailored to their target audience's preferences. Additionally, the determinants of preferred social media platforms underscore the importance of aligning the platform choice with one's creative vision, brand identity, and target audience, allowing for authentic and effective content production and engagement. The personal fit between influencers' creativity and platform features is vital for success.

Participants' considerations underscore the importance of discerning high-quality and transparent advertising, as authentic, honest advertisements are more likely to build credibility. User engagement, feedback, and the quality of comments play a pivotal role in establishing credibility, as constructive interactions and positive reviews enhance legitimacy. The presence of a verification symbol on social media accounts also contributes to credibility, signifying authenticity and trustworthiness. In essence, establishing and maintaining credibility on social media entails a comprehensive approach that encompasses transparency in advertising, fostering authentic engagement, effective comment section management, and pursuing verification status when available, ultimately building trust among online audiences and ensuring the success of brands and content creators. Overall, social media content creators confirm that social media is a great tool for growing brand preference. The next section

discusses the achievement of objectives.

7.4 The achievement of objectives

Four objectives were developed to address the research topic. The following is a summary of the findings with regard to the study's objectives.

7.4.1 Objective 1: To assess various ways in which social media develops and enhances positive awareness and brand preference.

Objective 1 was realised using both quantitative and qualitative analysis in chapters five (Section B) and six (Section 6.4.1), respectively, to give both the audience's perspective and the content creator's perspective on social media. Constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale for quantitative analysis, and interview transcripts were transcribed and analysed. The quantitative results were presented using mean scores. A binomial test with a cut-off of 3.5 was done to determine whether the scoring patterns per statement were significantly different. All statements showed high levels of agreement. A factor analysis was performed.

The quantitative findings showed that brand recognition is a signal that the brand is good, and low brand recall does not indicate poor brand performance. It was agreed that a brand that has been previously seen is more preferred than a new, unfamiliar brand. A familiar brand was associated with safety and credibility as compared to a new brand. The findings also showed that a strong social media presence builds brand awareness and brand loyalty. A specific and intentional tone and style of brands were found to be very important for easy brand recognition.

The study found that brand awareness and recognition are paramount in shaping brand preference, with consumers valuing recognised brands as safer and of higher quality. Social media plays a pivotal role in enhancing brand awareness and preference by allowing direct, real-time engagement with customers, fostering a sense of connection, and enabling the creation of emotionally resonant content. Maintaining consistent branding and tone across social media platforms is crucial for brand recognition. Additionally, social media influencer marketing, user-generated content, precise audience targeting, and the role of satisfied customers as brand advocates all contribute to building brand preference. To capitalize on these insights, businesses

should adopt effective social media strategies aligned with broader marketing objectives for successful brand preference development.

The qualitative findings highlight the intricate relationship between social media influencers, their target markets, and platform alignment, showcasing its influence on creating brand awareness and preference. Influencers make strategic choices about platforms based on content format, audience targeting, engagement potential, and personal preferences, which have a significant bearing on content creation and brand building. Platforms like TikTok, celebrated for their creativity and entertainment value, resonate with the millennial generation's penchant for fleeting moments, reinforcing the importance of platform alignment in fostering brand awareness. Furthermore, the study reveals that brand vision significantly influences platform selection, considering values, demographics, content style, and overall marketing strategy. Social media influencers play a pivotal role in forging connections with followers, brands, and the larger online community, ultimately enhancing brand trust and awareness. Maintaining these relationships is paramount for influencer success, and while factors like popularity and audience reach remain vital in platform selection, the personal preferences and creative considerations of influencers are instrumental in determining the platform that best facilitates their brand awareness strategies. The research underscores the transformative potential of platforms like Facebook, enabling in-depth storytelling, content creation, and personal brand development, ultimately empowering influencers, such as Participant P, to transition into credible online entrepreneurs, thereby amplifying brand awareness and preference. The achievement of Objective 2 is discussed in the next section.

7.4.2. Objective 2: To examine the influence of social media on the buying decision-making process of millennials in Durban.

The study's second objective focused on understanding the influence of social media on the buying decision-making process. The objective was realised in Chapter 5, Section C, quantitatively. Constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The study presented results using mean values for variables within each section, followed by a detailed examination of the statements' significance. A binomial test was conducted to assess scoring patterns for each statement and alternative, indicating

substantial differences. Factor analysis revealed two distinct sub-themes, reflecting varying trends within the section. The first sub-theme, comprised of statements E5.2.1, E5.2.2, E5.2.4, and E5.2.6, saw E5.2.1 ("Social media has empowered me to complain online") with the lowest level of agreement among respondents but still above disagreement levels, with a mean score of 4.51. E5.2.2 garnered the highest agreement, with respondents affirming that social media allows for comparing alternatives before making a purchase, earning a mean score of 4.78.

The findings reveal that social media serves as a vital information source, with consumers using it to gather product information, compare alternatives, and assess brand quality. Businesses are encouraged to actively engage in social media marketing to provide accurate and helpful product details to potential customers. Social media also empowers consumers to provide feedback and voice their opinions directly to brands, making it imperative for businesses to monitor and respond to customer feedback promptly in order to maintain a positive reputation.

While friends' comments and likes on social media posts hold influence in decision-making, they may not always be the most reliable sources of information. Peer recommendations remain significant, but consumers are advised to critically assess information and consider factors like product quality, reputation, and cost. Social media testimonials and reviews also play a crucial role in shaping brand decisions, but consumers should exercise caution and verify the authenticity of such reviews. Brands should encourage genuine customer feedback while actively monitoring and addressing false or biased reviews.

In essence, social media has become a pivotal component of the purchasing decision process, offering both opportunities and challenges for businesses. By understanding and effectively leveraging social media, businesses can enhance brand awareness, interact with customers, and positively influence purchase decisions. However, maintaining transparency, authenticity, and a customer-centric approach in all social media interactions was found to be paramount to success.

7.4.3. Objective 3: To identify the perceptions of millennials on social media and social media performance in Durban.

The study's third objective focused on understanding millennials' perceptions regarding social media, social media performance, and social media interaction. The objective was realised in Chapter 5, Section D, quantitatively. The study utilised a five-point Likert scale to measure constructs, with the scoring patterns analysed per variable within each section. The mean scores for the section variables were presented initially. Further analysis was conducted to assess the statements' significance and differences in scoring patterns per statement option. A binomial test was employed, using a cut-off of 3.5, to determine whether respondents' agreement (mean > 3.5) significantly differed from disagreement (mean < 3.5). A sizeable sample of respondents (statistically significant) believe that social media influences their brand preferences. The findings showed that millennials are of the perception that businesses can utilise social media platforms to advertise goods and services, broadening consumer reach and enhancing exposure. The findings also indicated that millennials have the perception that social media is a cheap way to stay in touch with others.

The findings suggest that millennials perceive social media as a tool that significantly influences brand preference among millennials, emphasising the need for engaging and positive content to shape their perceptions of brands. Moreover, social media is deemed an effective tool for brand awareness, as millennials become aware of specific brands through these platforms, highlighting the importance of a strong online presence. It is also seen as a rapid information dissemination tool and holds considerable value for metrics like followers, likes, and reviews when forming brand preferences.

Additionally, millennials depend heavily on social media for communication, information, and entertainment, underscoring its significance in their daily lives. Regarding social media interaction, millennials largely agree that it plays a crucial role in sustaining relationships and staying informed about their friends' preferences. The findings also suggest that social media influences millennials' behaviour and brand perceptions, although individual preferences and experiences may vary.

In terms of social media performance, millennials express generally positive satisfaction levels, particularly in aspects related to trustworthiness and customer interaction. They place high levels of trust in social media for various functions, such as product quality, brand information, and customer communication. However, there is room for improvement in the efficiency and reliability of product delivery through social media platforms. Recognising the importance of social media interaction among millennials was found vital for individuals and businesses aiming to effectively connect with this demographic and optimize their social media campaigns.

7.4.4. Objective 4: To suggest strategies of managing and monitoring social media space activities towards a positive brand preference.

The study's fourth objective focused on proposing strategies for managing and monitoring social space activities towards a positive brand preference. The objective was realised using both quantitative and qualitative analysis in Chapter 5, Section E and Chapter 6, Sections 6.4.2 to 6.4.6, respectively, to give both the audience and content creator's perspective on managing and monitoring social media space activities. Factor Analysis has shown that this caption does not split. It is one theme as per the questionnaire (Table 6 page 182), this means the statements measured what they were set to measure. Constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale for quantitative analysis, and interview transcripts were transcribed and analysed. The quantitative results were presented using mean scores. A binomial test with a cut-off of 3.5 was done to determine whether the scoring patterns per statement were significantly different.

The quantitative findings underscore the complexity of content management on social media, where both positive and negative content can rapidly go viral. Respondents widely agree on the profound influence of social media on brand development and reputation, recognising that customers often turn to social media to express their experiences, both positive and negative.

Respondents emphasise the need for caution in social media management, especially concerning brand preference. There's a concern about the potential for competitors to create false content to tarnish a rival's reputation, highlighting the necessity for vigilant reputation monitoring. The consensus among respondents is that social media offers

excellent coverage for reaching customers and creating awareness, underscoring its significance as a marketing channel.

The qualitative findings from the content creators' perspective indicate that effective social media management often combines the use of automated filters and manual moderation, as automated filters can efficiently handle spam and abusive content, freeing human moderators for more complex tasks such as engaging with users, addressing questions, and managing context-specific content. A hybrid approach can be particularly suitable for individuals or entities, like Participant SM, with a digital marketing company overseeing multiple brands' social media accounts, aiming to balance efficiency and maintaining an active, personalized brand image. Crisis management on social media was found crucial, as it can significantly influence customer perception, loyalty and overall brand reputation. The findings stressed the need for well-defined crisis management plans to navigate the rapid and viral nature of social media crises, emphasising the importance of using robust filtering options to focus on key conversations and reduce data volume to the most relevant keywords, hashtags, or locations, thus ensuring effective brand monitoring and management on social media platforms.

Overall, the study concludes that effective management and monitoring of social media activities are crucial for cultivating and maintaining a positive brand preference. Social media's influence on brand reputation is substantial, necessitating proactive crisis management and continuous engagement with the audience. Social media influencers and marketers play a pivotal role in brand protection, effective crisis handling, and content planning. Manual moderation and crisis management planning are essential aspects of upholding a positive brand image on social media platforms. The implications of the study are discussed in the next section.

7.5 The implications of the study

The study underscores the importance of brand awareness and recognition in influencing consumer preferences. Businesses should invest in building and maintaining a strong brand identity and recognition to attract and retain customers on social media. The research highlights the critical role of social media in building brand preference. To leverage this, companies should focus on effective social media

management, including regular monitoring and engagement, to create a positive and trustworthy online presence.

The study suggests that influencer marketing can be a powerful tool for promoting brand preference. Brands should carefully select influencers whose followers align with their target audience and ensure that they have a strong following and the trust of their followers. The findings emphasise the effectiveness of diverse content types, including humour, interactivity, quotes, visual content, and customer appreciation posts. Businesses should tailor their content strategies to suit their brand identity and connect with their audience effectively. Different social media platforms offer unique features and formats. Companies should consider these attributes and select platforms that best align with their creative vision and content goals, ensuring they reach the right audience.

The study underscores the significance of authenticity and genuine customer feedback on social media. Brands should maintain credibility by ensuring that their content and interactions are authentic, and they should encourage positive customer reviews and feedback to boost their legitimacy. While social media is a powerful tool, the study highlights certain areas of dissatisfaction, such as product delivery times. Brands should address these issues promptly to maintain a positive online reputation. Given the strong reliance on social media among millennials, businesses should pay special attention to engaging and connecting with this demographic effectively. Understanding consumers' preferences and needs can lead to higher customer satisfaction. The study emphasises the need for aligning social media strategies with broader marketing objectives. Companies should ensure that their social media efforts complement their overall marketing strategy to be more effective. The study's contribution to future studies is discussed in the next section.

7.6 Contribution for future studies

Several promising areas for future research in the realm of social media's influence on brand preference and consumer satisfaction have been identified. Longitudinal studies can provide insights into how these dynamics change over time, revealing patterns and long-term influences. Cross-cultural analyses will shed light on how cultural influences affect social media's role in shaping brand perception and preference, aiding

businesses in international market adaptation. The influence of immersive technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality on brand preference and customer satisfaction through social media interactions requires exploration. Emerging social media platforms, such as TikTok and Clubhouse, present intriguing opportunities for research into their unique features and effects. Investigating how social media contributes to crisis management and brand reputation during crises is essential.

Additionally, a deeper understanding of influencer marketing dynamics, including the influence of micro-influencers, authenticity, and measurement, is warranted. Ethical brand practices' influence on social media in an era of socially conscious consumers is another vital research area. Finally, the application of machine learning and artificial intelligence for sentiment analysis, chatbots, and personalized content delivery holds promise for future studies, offering insights into how these technologies affect customer satisfaction on social media. These research directions collectively contribute to an evolving understanding of the complex relationship between social media, brand preference, and customer satisfaction, offering practical insights for businesses and marketers. The limitations of the study are acknowledged in the next section.

7.7 Limitations of the study

While the study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of social media's influence on brand preference and customer satisfaction, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The study's sample size might not fully represent the diverse nature of social media users and influencers. The demographics of the participants were millennials in the greater Durban area, and this could potentially limit the generalizability of the findings. The findings are context-specific and may not apply universally. Cultural, regional and industry variations can significantly influence how social media affects brand perception and customer satisfaction. Despite the various limitations that were identified in the study, it is possible to make a number of recommendations for future studies. The recommendations of the study are discussed in the next section.

7.8 Recommendations of the study

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are made to help businesses effectively leverage social media to enhance brand preference and customer satisfaction. Businesses should recognise the importance of brand awareness and invest in building and maintaining a strong brand identity. Allocate resources to build and maintain a strong brand identity, as it significantly influences consumer preferences on social media.

Prioritising social media management is recommended. Effective social media management is key to regularly monitoring and engaging with the audience and ensuring that the online presence is authentic, trustworthy and responsive to customer inquiries and feedback. The study recommends businesses harness influencer marketing. Consider collaborating with influencers who have a substantial following and the trust of their followers. Carefully select influencers whose audience aligns with your target demographic to effectively promote brand preference.

It is also recommended for businesses to experiment with a variety of content types on social media, including humour, interactivity, quotes, visuals, and customer appreciation posts. Customizing content to align with the brand identity and connect with the audience is highly recommended. Selecting the right social media platforms is recommended, as each platform offers unique features and formats. Choosing the platforms that best complement the brand's creative vision and content goals and ensuring the reach of the desired audience effectively is recommended. Businesses should consider maintaining authenticity and encouraging feedback. Authenticity is crucial for maintaining credibility on social media. Encouraging and responding to customer feedback and reviews is recommended. Positive feedback can significantly contribute to a positive brand perception.

Addressing areas of customer dissatisfaction promptly is also recommended. Paying special attention to factors like product delivery times, which may negatively influence customer satisfaction, is crucial. Ensuring that social media strategies align with the overall marketing objectives is essential for maximising social media efforts.

Businesses should adapt to emerging platforms, as new social media platforms will continue to emerge. It is crucial to stay flexible and adapt new strategies to harness the unique features and engage with the user base effectively. Through implementing these recommendations, businesses can enhance brand preference and customer satisfaction on social media, ultimately strengthening their online presence and customer relationships.

7.9 Conclusion

The study emphasised the influence of social media as a tool to grow brand preference. The study also offered valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between social media, brand preference and customer satisfaction. The findings indicate that social media plays a central role in shaping brand preferences, enhancing brand awareness, and providing a platform for engaging with consumers. It is a potent tool for disseminating information and promoting brand loyalty, while also serving as a space for customer feedback, both positive and negative. The study underscores the significance of managing and monitoring social media activities effectively, given the rapidity with which content can go viral and the potential influence on brand reputation. Businesses should exercise caution, maintain transparency, and respond to customer feedback promptly to foster positive customer relationships. Moreover, the study sheds light on millennials' perceptions and their high dependence on social media for communication, information, and entertainment, making it a critical channel for businesses to connect with this demographic. Overall, the study's comprehensive analysis and findings provide businesses and organisations with practical recommendations for optimizing their social media strategies, enhancing brand preference, and cultivating positive customer satisfaction. The implications and future research directions identified in the study further enrich the understanding of social media's multifaceted role in modern marketing and its influence on brand success.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of information



Title of the Research Study: Social Media as a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials in the greater Durban area.

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Faith Rudairo Chibvura Masters in Management Sciences (Marketing)

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Prof D. Penceliah (PhD Marketing)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

Greeting How are you?

Introduce yourself to the participant I am a doctorate student at DUT doing research for my PhD degree in Management Sciences (Marketing).

Invitation to the potential participant I would like to invite you to participate in the research

What is Research? Research is a systematic search or enquiry for generalised new knowledge

You can ask as many questions as you wish because it is important that you fully understand the study. You are entitled to discuss the study with your family and friends,

and you are under no obligation to commit at this stage. For this purpose, a copy of the Letter of Information document is given to you to take home.

Outline of the Procedures: You will be responsible for answering the questionnaire. You will be given 5 to 8 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The survey will be conducted online through google forms. The questionnaire consists of the closed ended questions and a five-point Likert scale. Non probability sampling will be used to select the sample. The attention of the researcher will be directed towards Millennials within the greater Durban area. Qualitative data collection will be aimed at 10 social media marketers/influencers.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: There are no risks involved.

Explain to the participant the reasons he/she may be withdraw from the Study: You will be free to withdraw at any time during the study and there will be no adverse consequences for you should you choose to withdraw.

Benefits: The research will contribute to academic research and there is a potential that it will assist, online consumers, social media marketers and social media influencers.

Remuneration: You will not receive any remuneration.

Costs of the Study: You will not be expected to cover any costs towards the study.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be maintained by having your personal details remain anonymous.

Results: Final thesis will be found in DUT library both online and hardcopy.

Research-related Injury: There will not be any research related injury in the study.

Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings Collected data will be stored for five years at DUT.

Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries: Please contact my Supervisor at pencilid@dut.ac.za. Please contact the researcher (0745023945), my supervisor (0824472246 or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373

2375. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Postgraduate Support
Dr L Linganiso on 031 373 2577 or researchdirector@dut.ac.za.

Appendix B: Consent form



Full Title of the Study: Social Media as a tool to grow brand preference amongst millennials in the greater Durban area.

Names of Researcher/s: Faith Rudairo Chibvura

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Faith Rudairo Chibvura (name of researcher), about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study

- I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Participant	Date	Time	Signature /
	Right		

I Faith Rudairo Chibvura herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Faith Rudairo Chibvura	14/10/2023	
Full Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Witness (If applicable)	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)	Date	Signature

Appendix C: Questionnaire

For all questions, select the ONE option that best applies to you

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS

1.1. Gender

Male	Female	Other

1.2. Highest qualification

Matric	
Diploma	
Degree	
Post Graduate	

1.3. Employment status

Unemployed	
Employed Part-time/ on contract	
Employed fulltime	
Self-employed	

1.4. Race

Black	Indian	White	Coloured

1.5. Year of birth

Before 1981	1981-1985	1986-1990	1991-1996	After 1996

2. PERCEPTIONS OF MILLENNIALS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
2.1. Social media enhances my brand preference.						
2.2. I became aware of certain brands through social media.						
2.3. Social media is cheap to access.						
2.4. Social media allows information to reach many people in a short period of time.						
2.5. I am always receiving social media notifications on new social media posts, likes and new comments.						
2.6. A brand with more followers, likes and reviews on social media receives high brand preference.						
2.7. I cannot spend a day well without accessing my social media platforms.						

3. IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION

3.1. How many social media platforms are you active on?

Up to 2	3-4	5-6	7+

3.2. Which of the following social media platforms are you regularly active on? (Select all that apply)

Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	WhatsApp	Instagram	LinkedIn

Snapchat	Pinterest	WeChat	Telegram	TikTok	

3.3. How important is social media interaction?

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
3.3.1. Using social media platforms allows me to develop relationships with others.						
3.3.2. Using social media networks allows me to know new friends.						
3.3.3. Social media keeps me updated on my friends brand preferences.						
3.3.4. Using social media allows me to show off my new fashions without embarrassment.						
3.3.5. Social media influencers play a big role in starting social interactions on social media platforms.						
3.3.6. Using a social media influencer, of whom I am a top fan, really captures my attention on the brand						
3.3.7. Social media brand employees' behaviour instils confidence in me on the brand						

4. AWARENESS (RECALLING AND RECOGNISING THE BRAND)

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
4.1. A brand that has been previously seen is more preferred to a brand that is new.						
4.2. On brand preference, a familiar brand has an edge or is safer than a new brand.						
4.3. I take brand recognition as a signal that the brand is good.						
4.4. Awareness creation is very important in creating brand preference.						
4.5. Brand recall is a very important factor for a brand to be considered or preferred by the customer.						
4.6. Strong social media presence builds brand loyalty.						
4.7. The tone and style of brands should be specific and intentional for easy recognition.						

4.8. Low brand recall is an indication of poor brand performance.						
4.9. Social media coverage enhances brand recognition.						

5. SOCIAL MEDIA AND DECISION-MAKING

5.1. Which of the following factors influence you to buy a product on social media platforms?

5.1.1 Posted Pictures	
5.1.2 Reviews from many people	
5.1.3 Online Adverts	
5.1.4 Likes on posts	
5.1.5 The brand ambassadors used	
5.1.6 Number of subscribers to the page	
5.1.7. None of the above	

5.2. PROBLEM SOLVING in buying decision-making process

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
5.2.1. There is adequate information on social media platforms about posted products to purchase the product.						
5.2.2. Social media allows a comparison of alternatives before buying the product.						
5.2.3. I use information on social media platforms (e.g. customer reviews) to make decisions on what to buy.						
5.2.4. Social media has empowered me to complain online						
5.2.5. I use reviews on social media brand posts to assess the brand quality.						
5.2.6. Social media provides a platform for feedback or post purchase reviews after buying the product.						
5.2.7. My friends' comments and likes on brand posts help me to decide on which brand to buy.						
5.2.8. Being able to ask questions and get feedback on social media also affect my choice of brand.						
5.2.9. I use social media platform to get solutions that satisfy my needs through selecting various available brands.						
5.2.10. I use social media testimonials to make decisions on the best brand to choose.						

5.2.11. I use social media platforms to discover interesting information and content, to take action.						
5.2.12. Social media posts are aided by word-of-mouth or referrals from friends and family when it comes to decision-making.						

6. BRAND CREDIBILITY

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
6.1. Brand preference is high when I believe that a brand has the ability and willingness to continuously deliver what has been promised.						
6.2. Brands need to be unique and personable through meaningful content.						
6.3. Brands should see themselves as a single person with a unique set of values, attitudes and behaviour. E.g. Nandos						
6.4. Brand touch-points (social media platforms) should provide great brand experiences to the consumers.						
6.5. A brand's choice of social media network plays an important role in the brand's image and credibility.						
6.6. Positive customer reviews and comments on a product's attributes lead me to believing in the product and buying it.						
6.7. Consistent and recognisable brand personality enhances brand credibility.						
6.8. Brand associations, in terms of social media influencers, endorses/ affects a brand's credibility.						

7. SOCIAL MEDIA AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Indicate your level of satisfaction with the following statements

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Slightly dissatisfied	Slightly satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
7.1. The quality of products you buy on social media.						
7.2. The brand information provided on Social media.						
7.3. Consumer insights on social media that provide a great base for building brands that satisfy consumer needs.						
7.4. Customer communication on social media.						

7.5. Social media product delivery process and time						
7.6. Social media ordering process						
7.7. Navigating social media platforms						
7.8. Comparing, accessing and buying various brands on social media						

8. MANAGING AND MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
8.1. It is difficult to manage and monitor the content posted on social media.						
8.2. All the good, the bad and the ugly can go viral on social media in a short period of time.						
8.3. Content posted on social media can affect the growth and survival of a brand.						
8.4. Many customers now turn to social media to vent their frustrations and seek retribution after being slighted or ignored by a company						
8.5. Social media needs to be handled with care when it comes to growing brand preference.						
8.6. Competing companies can also create false content to tarnish the rival company's reputation.						
8.7. Compared to other marketing strategies, social media has excellent coverage when when it comes to reaching customers and creating awareness.						

9. SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT EXPECTATIONS

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
9.1. I like social media posts that include humour.						
9.2. I like interactive content on social media.						

9.3. I like social media posts that include quotes.						
9.4. I like posts that include colourful images and videos.						
9.5. I always like posts asking for my opinions on a certain brand						
9.6. I like posts of appreciation to customers.						
9.7. I like posts with a clear and short message.						

10. ONLINE SOCIAL ENHANCEMENT& SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON BRAND PREFERENCE

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
10.1. Choosing good brands on social media networks can help me improve my image among friends.						
10.2. Using social media networks enhances my reputation among friends.						
10.3. Using social media networks to make decisions on brands can help me impress others.						
10.4. Using social media networks helps me to feel important and stay on top of things.						
10.5. Wearing the most popular brand on social media makes me feel like I am part of the celebrity family.						
10.6. Posting pictures on social media using expensive and quality brands gives me a high social status among friends.						
10.7. Interacting with others with the same interests positively influences my brand preference.						
10.8. Being able to access social media keeps me up to date with top brands						
10.9. I use social media platforms to keep up with the new fashions on different brands.						
10.10 Social media takes away individuality and encourages mob mentality.						

THANK YOU!

Appendix D: Interview guide for qualitative in-depth interviews

1. Which social media platform do you enjoy most?
2. How do you describe your personal brand?
3. If there is one thing you could change about social media, what would it be?
4. According to you what content works well on social media?
5. Which social media are you often on? Why are you often active on that social media platform?
6. Do you think social media plays a role in creating brand preference?
7. Have you influenced any brand before? If your answer is yes, what were the challenges and results of the process?
8. What does it mean to be a social media influencer? What are the challenges and benefits?
9. What do you do about nasty or negative content?
10. How do you monitor and manage your social media posts?
11. Can you comment on the credibility of information posted on social media?
12. What do you use to monitor your social media posts?
13. How do you rate social media platforms such as Facebook, twitter and WhatsApp?
14. Is there any brand you only know about or remember through social media?
15. Do you think social media plays a role in brand building?
16. What makes you feel safe to select a certain brand on social media?
17. What makes you recall a brand on social media?
18. What factors do you consider on social media when you are assessing brand credibility?

Appendix E: Ethics Certificate



TRREE

Zertifikat Certificat

Certificado Certificate

Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale
Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants

Certificat de formation - Training Certificate

Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that



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Faith Rudairo Chibvura

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[REV : 20220217]

Appendix F: Crosstabulations

Crosstabs

		Notes	
Output Created			26-JAN-2023 09:56:36
Comments			
Input	Data	C:\Users\singh\OneDrive\Stats Analysis\2023\Faith Rudairo Chibvura\Faith - Data - 3 - Millennials Only - Recoded as scale.sav	
	Active Dataset	DataSet2	
	Filter	<none>	
	Weight	<none>	
	Split File	<none>	
	N of Rows in Working Data File		395
Missing Value Handling	Definition of Missing	User-defined missing values are treated as missing.	
	Cases Used	Statistics for each table are based on all the cases with valid data in the specified range(s) for all variables in each table.	
Syntax		CROSSTABS /TABLES=A2 A3 A4 A5 BY A1 /FORMAT=AVALUE TABLES /STATISTICS=CHISQ /CELLS=COUNT ROW COLUMN TOTAL /COUNT ROUND CELL /METHOD=MC CIN(99.9) SAMPLES(10000).	
Resources	Processor Time		00:00:00.14
	Elapsed Time		00:00:00.25
	Dimensions Requested		2
	Cells Available		524245
	Time for Exact Statistics		0:00:00.14

Highest Qualification * Gender

Crosstab

			Male
Highest Qualification	Matric	Count	74
		% within Highest Qualification	48,7%
		% within Gender	38,5%
		% of Total	18,7%
	Diploma	Count	60
		% within Highest Qualification	53,6%
		% within Gender	31,3%
		% of Total	15,2%
	Degree	Count	29
		% within Highest Qualification	42,0%
		% within Gender	15,1%
		% of Total	7,3%
	Post Graduate Degree	Count	29
		% within Highest Qualification	46,8%
		% within Gender	15,1%
		% of Total	7,3%
Total	Count	192	
	% within Highest Qualification	48,6%	
	% within Gender	100,0%	
	% of Total	48,6%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.914 ^a	6	0,091
Likelihood Ratio	11,485	6	0,074
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	10,759		
Linear-by-Linear Association	.652 ^c	1	0,419
N of Valid Cases	395		

a. 4 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.88.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000.

c. The standardized statistic is .807.

Employment Status * Gender

Crosstab

			Male
Employment Status	Self Employed	Count	9
		% within Employment Status	42,9%
		% within Gender	4,7%
		% of Total	2,3%
	Employed fulltime	Count	41
		% within Employment Status	45,6%
		% within Gender	21,4%
		% of Total	10,4%
	Count		36

	Employed Part-time/ on contract	% within Employment Status	48,0%
		% within Gender	18,8%
		% of Total	9,1%
	Unemployed	Count	106
		% within Employment Status	50,7%
		% within Gender	55,2%
Total	% of Total	26,8%	
	Count	192	
	% within Employment Status	48,6%	
	% within Gender	100,0%	
		% of Total	48,6%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.525 ^a	6	0,104
Likelihood Ratio	9,574	6	0,144
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	9,959		
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.139 ^c	1	0,076
N of Valid Cases	395		

a. 3 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .64.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000.

c. The standardized statistic is -1.772.

Race * Gender

Crosstab

			Male
Race	African	Count	156
		% within Race	48,8%
		% within Gender	81,3%
		% of Total	39,5%
	Coloured	Count	9
		% within Race	45,0%
		% within Gender	4,7%
		% of Total	2,3%
	Indian	Count	11
		% within Race	42,3%
		% within Gender	5,7%
		% of Total	2,8%
	White	Count	16
% within Race		55,2%	
% within Gender		8,3%	
% of Total		4,1%	
Total	Count	192	
	% within Race	48,6%	
	% within Gender	100,0%	
	% of Total	48,6%	

Chi-Square Tests

Value	df
-------	----

			Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6,848 ^a	6	0,335
Likelihood Ratio	5,385	6	0,496
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	7,431		
Linear-by-Linear Association	.120 ^c	1	0,729
N of Valid Cases	395		

a. 3 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .61.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000.

c. The standardized statistic is .347.

Year of birth * Gender

Crosstab

			Male
Year of birth	1981-1985	Count	37
		% within Year of birth	48,1%
		% within Gender	19,3%
		% of Total	9,4%
	1986-1990	Count	53
		% within Year of birth	48,6%
		% within Gender	27,6%
		% of Total	13,4%
	1991-1996	Count	102
		% within Year of birth	48,8%

Total	% within Gender	53,1%
	% of Total	25,8%
	Count	192
	% within Year of birth	48,6%
	% within Gender	100,0%
	% of Total	48,6%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.607 ^a	4	0,625
Likelihood Ratio	2,777	4	0,596
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	2,067		
Linear-by-Linear Association	.133 ^c	1	0,716
N of Valid Cases	395		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.34.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 2000000.

c. The standardized statistic is .364.

Crosstabs

Notes

Output Created	26-JAN-2023 09:56:52
Comments	
Input	Data
	C:\Users\singh\OneDrive\Stats Analysis\2023\Faith Rudairo Chibvura\Faith - Data - 3 - Millennials Only - Recoded as scale.sav

	Active Dataset	DataSet2	
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Missing Value Handling	Definition of Missing	User-defined missing values are treated as missing.	
	Cases Used	Statistics for each table are based on all the cases with valid data in the specified range(s) for all variables in each table.	
Syntax		CROSSTABS /TABLES=A3 A4 A5 BY A2 /FORMAT=AVALUE TABLES /STATISTICS=CHISQ /CELLS=COUNT ROW COLUMN TOTAL /COUNT ROUND CELL /METHOD=MC CIN(99.9) SAMPLES(10000).	
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	Time for Exact Statistics		0:00:00.15

Employment Status * Highest Qualification

Crosstab

			Matric
Employment Status	Self Employed	Count	6
		% within Employment Status	28,6%
		% within Highest Qualification	3,9%

	Employed fulltime	% of Total	1,5%
		Count	2
		% within Employment Status	2,2%
		% within Highest Qualification	1,3%
	Employed Part-time/ on contract	% of Total	0,5%
		Count	10
		% within Employment Status	13,3%
		% within Highest Qualification	6,6%
	Unemployed	% of Total	2,5%
		Count	134
		% within Employment Status	64,1%
		% within Highest Qualification	88,2%
Total	% of Total	33,9%	
	Count	152	
	% within Employment Status	38,5%	
	% within Highest Qualification	100,0%	
		% of Total	38,5%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	267.138 ^a	9	0,000
Likelihood Ratio	280,703	9	0,000
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	274,623		
Linear-by-Linear Association	166.696 ^c	1	0,000
N of Valid Cases	395		

- a. 2 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.30.
- b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 1993510611.
- c. The standardized statistic is -12.911.

Race * Highest Qualification

Crosstab

			Matric
Race	African	Count	151
		% within Race	47,2%
		% within Highest Qualification	99,3%
		% of Total	38,2%
	Coloured	Count	0
		% within Race	0,0%
		% within Highest Qualification	0,0%
		% of Total	0,0%
	Indian	Count	1
		% within Race	3,8%
		% within Highest Qualification	0,7%
		% of Total	0,3%
	White	Count	0
		% within Race	0,0%
		% within Highest Qualification	0,0%
		% of Total	0,0%
Total	Count	152	
	% within Race	38,5%	

	% within Highest Qualification	100,0%
	% of Total	38,5%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	79.026 ^a	9	0,000
Likelihood Ratio	92,654	9	0,000
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	86,111		
Linear-by-Linear Association	48.488 ^c	1	0,000
N of Valid Cases	395		

a. 5 cells (31.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.14.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 1993510611.

c. The standardized statistic is 6.963.

Year of birth * Highest Qualification

Crosstab

			Matric
Year of birth	1981-1985	Count	22
		% within Year of birth	28,6%
		% within Highest Qualification	14,5%
		% of Total	5,6%
	1986-1990	Count	37

		% within Year of birth	33,9%
		% within Highest Qualification	24,3%
		% of Total	9,4%
	1991-1996	Count	93
		% within Year of birth	44,5%
		% within Highest Qualification	61,2%
	Total	% of Total	23,5%
		Count	152
		% within Year of birth	38,5%
% within Highest Qualification		100,0%	
		% of Total	38,5%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.988 ^a	6	0,001
Likelihood Ratio	22,869	6	0,001
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	22,894		
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.038 ^c	1	0,000
N of Valid Cases	395		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 12.09.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 1993510611.

c. The standardized statistic is -4.363.

Crosstabs

Notes

26-JAN-2023 09:57:03

Output Created			
Comments			
Input	Data	C:\Users\singh\OneDrive\Stats Analysis\2023\Faith Rudairo Chibvura\Faith - Data - 3 - Millennials Only - Recoded as scale.sav	
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Missing Value Handling	Definition of Missing	User-defined missing values are treated as missing.	
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Syntax	CROSSTABS /TABLES=A4 A5 BY A3 /FORMAT=AVALUE TABLES /STATISTICS=CHISQ /CELLS=COUNT ROW COLUMN TOTAL /COUNT ROUND CELL /METHOD=MC CIN(99.9) SAMPLES(10000).		
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Race * Employment Status

Crosstab

			Self Employed
Race	African	Count	15
		% within Race	4,7%
		% within Employment Status	71,4%
		% of Total	3,8%
	Coloured	Count	2
		% within Race	10,0%
		% within Employment Status	9,5%
		% of Total	0,5%
	Indian	Count	1
		% within Race	3,8%
		% within Employment Status	4,8%
		% of Total	0,3%
White	Count	3	
	% within Race	10,3%	
	% within Employment Status	14,3%	
	% of Total	0,8%	
Total	Count	21	
	% within Race	5,3%	
	% within Employment Status	100,0%	
	% of Total	5,3%	

Chi-Square Tests

Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
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Pearson Chi-Square	100.951 ^a	9	0,000
Likelihood Ratio	121,522	9	0,000
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	116,144		
Linear-by-Linear Association	65.371 ^c	1	0,000
N of Valid Cases	395		

a. 6 cells (37.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.06.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 726961337.

c. The standardized statistic is -8.085.

Year of birth * Employment Status

Crosstab

			Self Employed
Year of birth	1981-1985	Count	6
		% within Year of birth	7,8%
		% within Employment Status	28,6%
		% of Total	1,5%
	1986-1990	Count	6
		% within Year of birth	5,5%
		% within Employment Status	28,6%
		% of Total	1,5%
	1991-1996	Count	9
		% within Year of birth	4,3%
		% within Employment Status	42,9%
		% of Total	2,3%
Total	Count	21	

	% within Year of birth	5,3%
	% within Employment Status	100,0%
	% of Total	5,3%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.019 ^a	6	0,003
Likelihood Ratio	19,613	6	0,003
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	19,689		
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.521 ^c	1	0,000
N of Valid Cases	395		

- a. 1 cells (8.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.09.
- b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 726961337.
- c. The standardized statistic is 3.677.

Crosstabs

Notes

Output Created	26-JAN-2023 09:57:17	
Comments		
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Missing Value Handling	Definition of Missing	User-defined missing values are treated as missing.	
	Cases Used	Statistics for each table are based on all the cases with valid data in the specified range(s) for all variables in each table.	
Syntax		CROSSTABS /TABLES=A5 BY A4 /FORMAT=AVALUE TABLES /STATISTICS=CHISQ /CELLS=COUNT ROW COLUMN TOTAL /COUNT ROUND CELL /METHOD=MC CIN(99.9) SAMPLES(10000).	
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Year of birth * Race Crosstabulation

			African
Year of birth	1981-1985	Count	60
		% within Year of birth	77,9%
		% within Race	18,8%
		% of Total	15,2%
	1986-1990	Count	79
		% within Year of birth	72,5%
		% within Race	24,7%
		% of Total	20,0%
	1991-1996	Count	181

Total	% within Year of birth	86,6%
	% within Race	56,6%
	% of Total	45,8%
	Count	320
	% within Year of birth	81,0%
	% within Race	100,0%
	% of Total	81,0%

		Chi-Square Tests		
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	
Pearson Chi-Square	14.772 ^a	6	0,022	
Likelihood Ratio	14,286	6	0,027	
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	14,586			
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.307 ^c	1	0,038	
N of Valid Cases	395			

a. 1 cells (8.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.90.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 1487459085.

c. The standardized statistic is -2.075.

Biographical vs C3.1

Crosstabs

Notes

Output Created		26-JAN-2023 10:29:03
Comments		
Input	Data	C:\Users\singh\OneDrive\Stats Analysis\2023\Faith Rudairo Chibvura\Faith - Data - 3 - Millennials Only - Recoded as scale.sav
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	N of Rows in Working Data File	395
Missing Value Handling	Definition of Missing	User-defined missing values are treated as missing.
	Cases Used	Statistics for each table are based on all the cases with valid data in the specified range(s) for all variables in each table.
Syntax	CROSSTABS /TABLES=C3.1 BY A1 A2 A3 A4 A5 /FORMAT=AVALUE TABLES /STATISTICS=CHISQ /CELLS=COUNT ROW COLUMN TOTAL /COUNT ROUND CELL /METHOD=MC CIN(99.9) SAMPLES(10000).	
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How many social media platforms are you active on? * Gender

Crosstab

Male

How many social media platforms are you active on?	Up to 2	Count	33
		% within How many social media platforms are you active on?	48,5%
		% within Gender	17,2%
		% of Total	8,4%
	3-4	Count	112
		% within How many social media platforms are you active on?	53,6%
		% within Gender	58,3%
		% of Total	28,4%
	5-6	Count	34
		% within How many social media platforms are you active on?	38,2%
		% within Gender	17,7%
		% of Total	8,6%
7+	Count	13	
	% within How many social media platforms are you active on?	44,8%	
	% within Gender	6,8%	
	% of Total	3,3%	
Total	Count	192	
	% within How many social media platforms are you active on?	48,6%	
	% within Gender	100,0%	
	% of Total	48,6%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.182 ^a	6	0,003
Likelihood Ratio	17,104	6	0,009

Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	15,654		
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.534 ^c	1	0,033
N of Valid Cases	395		

a. 3 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .88.

b. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 1507486128.

Appendix G: Turnitin Report

Similarity Report

PAPER NAME	AUTHOR
Faith Thesis 2023 Monday 16 10 23 For Turnitin.pdf	-

WORD COUNT	CHARACTER COUNT
124464 Words	702270 Characters
PAGE COUNT	FILE SIZE
428 Pages	3.9MB
SUBMISSION DATE	REPORT DATE
Oct 25, 2023 12:46 PM GMT+2	Oct 25, 2023 12:52 PM GMT+2

- **9% Overall Similarity**
The combined total of all matches, including overlapping sources, for each database.
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 - Crossref Posted Content database
 - 6% Submitted Works database
- **Excluded from Similarity Report**
 - Bibliographic material
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