



**UNDERSTANDING SOUTH AFRICAN MILLENNIAL CONSUMER  
ATTITUDES TOWARDS BRANDS THAT SUBSCRIBE TO  
ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES**

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*I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the Bcom Honours in Strategic Brand Management degree to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study was undertaken to understand if brands that subscribe to environmentally sustainable practices resonate with Millennial consumers in South Africa. Deloitte (2019) indicated that Millennials prioritize environmental sustainability in their purchase decisions. Whilst this may be true for other countries, limited research was conducted in a South African Context. The study looked at environmental sustainability as a vital component to business operations (Chladek, 2019). Currently the extent of environmental damage requires brands to operate in a manner that preserves resources (The World Economic Forum, 2020). Porter and Kramer (2011) highlights that businesses are regarded as being the cause of environmental problems within society. Thus it is important for brands to pursue environmental sustainability to regain consumer trust. This research study focused on Millennial consumers in South Africa. It is important to align to the demands of the Millennial generation since they currently represent the largest generation with purchasing power in South Africa. 6 semi structured interviews via the Zoom platform were undertaken. Participants were chosen based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. The interviews were voice recorded which was then transcribed. Coding, content analysis and narrative analysis were then undertaken.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Introductory section of this research paper consists of the contextualisation, rationale, problem statement, research goal, research questions, research objectives and conceptualization.

### **1.1. CONTEXTUALISATION**

Friedman (1970) proposed that the only commitment to social responsibility for a business was to ensure that profit maximization was achieved. The result of such business operations created numerous social and environmental problems (Nilsson, GmbH & Robinson, 2017). These problems created by businesses resulted in an externality, whereby a third party who is uninvolved in the business transaction is left to bear the cost resulting from it (Kenton, 2020). Currently an increased demand is placed on businesses to be held responsible and lead the way in solving issues faced in society. The shared value model is the proposed solution that suggests a business whilst undertaking to create value for itself, should simultaneously create value for society by addressing their challenges and needs (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Kenton (2020) indicates that business externalities have largely been environmental in nature, as such there has been an increasing trend towards environmental sustainability. This is due to the urgent need for preserving the environment and its resources, whilst operating to meet the needs of today (Rafi, 2021). This has thus led to the concept of an environmentally sustainable business or green business, which is defined as a business that has incorporated environmentally sustainable practices into its operations allowing them to meet the needs of present consumers without compromising future generations ability to meet their needs (Karagulle, 2012). This has further changed the way the environment is viewed, resulting in it being viewed as a stakeholder to the business (Willard, 2019). Therefore, considering the environment as a stakeholder allows for an application of the shared value model in this context. This application aims for the creation of value for the environment whilst undertaking to

create value for the business. Furthermore, the benefits of incorporating environmental sustainability, has the potential to create value by improving business processes (Cote, 2020). This can be achieved through redefining productivity in the value chain (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Thus environmental sustainability is an imperative undertaking in business operations, which allows for the reduction of costs incurred to the business as well as the protection of the environment. The result is the creation of value for both.

Environmental sustainability has the ability to mitigate potential future loss to the business's reputation; further evidence has shown that environmental sustainability carries the potential to create brand equity as consumers are increasingly becoming aware of environmental issues (Cote, 2020). Since businesses operate in a highly saturated business environment, an emphasis is placed on brand equity as a means to drive success and gain a competitive advantage (Aaker, 2000).

The theory of planned behaviour proposes that an individual's attitudes and beliefs result in the performance of an action (Ajzen, 1991). Grounded in this concept, the attitudes and beliefs that Millennial consumers have towards environmental sustainability and environmentally sustainable business practices, can influence their purchasing decisions. Based on these consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions, a brand's equity can be impacted. Understanding consumer attitudes therefore allows a business to strategically manage the way consumers perceive the business, thereby creating a greater likelihood for consumers to resonate with the business (Keller, 2001). This can be achieved through incorporating the Keller customer based brand equity model in the positioning of business to consumers (Keller, 2001).

This research paper thus focuses on the link between brand equity and environmentally sustainable business practices. The purpose of the study is to understand Millennial consumer attitudes towards businesses that subscribe to environmentally sustainable practices and seek to understand if environmental sustainability is a factor in their purchase decisions.

## Research Outline

Section 1: Introduction: consists of the contextualisation, rationale, problem statement, research goal, research questions, research objectives and conceptualization. This section provides the necessary context to the study. It then presents the relevance for undertaking this research study, the problem that this study will address, the goal this research aims to achieve, the questions that this research aims to answer and the objectives in undertaking this research. The conceptualization provides the reader with the relevant terms pertinent to this study.

Section 2: Literature Review: The theoretical foundation presents the two theories selected for this research. These theories were integral in understanding and correlating the data in a meaningful and relevant way. The theories selected were The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991); and The consumer based brand equity model Keller (2005). The literature review then incorporates environmental sustainability within the corporate context as well as presents the shared value model in relation to environmental sustainability. The final part of this section looks at Millennials and their demand for environmental sustainability.

Section 3: Research Methodology: The research interpretivist research paradigm is discussed followed by the research design and data collection methods.

Section 4: Findings and Interpretation: An analysis of the findings derived from the research is discussed in this paper. Analysis was undertaken by coding, narrative analysis and content analysis. This is followed by addressing and answering the research problem and questions.

Section 5: Conclusion: The final section of this research paper presents the validity, reliability and trustworthiness relating to this research study. The ethical considerations and limitations of the study are presented, followed by the anticipated contribution of



this research. Attached are the annexures which include the concept document, interview questions and consent forms.

## **1.2. RATIONALE**

The environmental crisis experienced on a global scale requires businesses to urgently incorporate environmental sustainability into their business models to ensure long term success (Chladek, 2019). The energy crisis within South Africa has further contributed to the rapid shift needed by businesses to incorporate environmental sustainability into their operations (Atebaa, Prinsloo & Gawlik, 2019). The implementation of legislations such as the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), forces South African businesses to increase their commitment to environmental sustainability and create a circular economy (Creecy, 2020).

The increasing issues prevalent in society have largely been attributed to businesses prospering at their expense, resulting in a further decline in consumer trust (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Through the redefinement of their purpose, brands that incorporate the shared value model carry the theoretical solution of bridging the gap between society and business (Crane, Palazzo, Spence & Matten, 2014). El Zein, Consolacion-Segura and Huertas-Garcia, (2019) highlight that an increase in consumer awareness has resulted in a rising demand for environmentally sustainable products coupled with greater accountability expected from brands.

Anon (2018) reports that Millennials are the current largest consumer group in South Africa, as such this generation are in their prime spending years. Not catering to the demands of Millennials will negatively impact a brand and its ability to gain market share. Deloitte (2019) highlights that Millennial consumers are placing greater emphasis on a business's environmental impact and will either start or stop supporting a business based on its interaction with the environment. Brand equity is ultimately impacted by Millennial consumers' attitude.

The environmental problems and energy crisis within South Africa coupled with an increased awareness relating to environmental sustainability makes this research highly relevant. Whilst studies have been conducted internationally, a study focusing on Millennial consumers' attitude towards brands that subscribe to environmentally sustainable practices in South Africa have been limited. This gap found in available literature further contributes to the relevance and need for this research. The Covid-19 pandemic has further shaped and changed consumer behaviour (Cote, 2020). Whilst there have been previous studies undertaken, the coronavirus outbreak has created a demand for more relevant and updated studies post the pandemic.

### **1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Millennial consumers internationally are increasingly becoming aware of the environmental crisis on hand, as such they are placing greater emphasis on environmental sustainability in their purchase decisions (Deloitte, 2019). There has further been identified trends towards placing greater demand on businesses to operate in a manner that does not impact future generations ability to meet their needs, whilst meeting the necessities of today (Rafi, 2021). The research problem thus seeks to understand if Millennial consumer attitudes are influenced by businesses that subscribe to environmentally sustainable practices in South Africa. Millennial consumers currently make up the largest portion of South African Consumers (Anon, 2018). Gaining an understanding of Millennial consumer's attitudes will allow South African businesses to adequately position themselves to this dominant generation, this will therefore impact a businesses equity and competitive advantage.

### **1.4. PURPOSE STATEMENT**

The purpose of this research is to understand if brands that subscribe to environmentally sustainable practices can create brand equity amongst Millennial Consumers. Since Millennials currently represent the largest portion of consumers in South Africa, it is important for brands to align to their demands and expectations.

Environmental sustainability not only carries the potential of creating brand equity but further allows a business to reduce costs derived from operations.

## **1.5. RESEARCH GOAL**

Do businesses that subscribe to environmentally sustainable practices influence Millennial consumer attitudes?

## **1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **1.6.1. Primary Questions**

- What are Millennial consumers understanding of an environmentally sustainable brand?
- Does environmentally sustainable business practices influence Millennial consumers' willingness to purchase from that business?

### **1.6.2. Secondary Questions**

- What are Millennial consumers' perceptions of the benefits to the environment derived from purchasing an environmentally sustainable brand?
- Are Millennial consumers influenced by individuals around them or on social media who have purchased environmentally sustainable brands?
- Do Millennial consumers perceive that environmentally sustainable brands are available and easily accessible to them?

## **1.7. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- To understand South African Millennial consumer definition of environmentally sustainability relating to brands.

- To understand if environmentally sustainable practices influence South African Millennial consumers purchase behaviours.
- To understand if South African Millennial consumers perceive value as a result of purchasing environmentally sustainable brands.
- To understand if South African Millennial consumers are influenced by people around them to act in an environmentally sustainable manner.
- To understand if South African Millennial consumers feel that environmentally sustainable brands are available and accessible.

## 1.8. CONCEPTUALISATION

The table below consists of the definitions of key concepts which are relevant to the study:

Table 1: Key concepts

<p><b>The theory of planned behaviour</b></p> <p>The theory centers around the intentions of an individual to perform a behaviour, highlighting that strong intentions to engage in a behaviour correlates to a greater likelihood to perform that action (Ajzen, 1991). Based on the theory of planned behaviour, a correlation between intentions regarding environmental sustainability and its influence on the purchase decisions of Millennial consumers can be predicted (Bosnjak <i>et al.</i>, 2020; Ferguson <i>et al.</i>, 2017).</p>
<p><b>Shared value</b></p> <p>A business undertaking in the creation of economic value whilst co-creating value for society, and simultaneously addressing consumer needs and challenges (Porter &amp; Kramer, 2011). Redefining productivity in the value chain is a means of achieving shared value whilst further reducing operating costs (Porter &amp; Kramer, 2011).</p>
<p><b>Environmentally sustainable business</b></p> <p>An environmentally sustainable business or green business is defined as a business that has incorporated environmentally sustainable practices into its operations allowing them to meet the needs of present consumers without compromising future generations ability to meet their needs (Karagulle, 2012).</p>
<p><b>Sustainability</b></p> <p>Relates to environmental sustainability and requires the preservation of the environment in a manner that does not impact future generations ability to meet their needs, whilst meeting the necessities of today (Rafi, 2021). It is no longer an option to pursue but rather an imperative for business success (Chladek, 2019).</p>

**The environment**

The environment is considered as a stakeholder to a business and therefore has the ability to impact a business, furthermore as a stakeholder, businesses should aim to create value for it (Willard, 2019)

**The Keller CBBE pyramid**

The Keller CBBE pyramid positions brand equity from the perspective of the customer; the model requires that resonance is achieved in each level of the pyramid, the higher on the pyramid a consumer is positioned, the greater the level of resonance (Keller, 2013).

**Brand image**

Relates to the perceptions of stakeholders external to the brand (Kapferer, 2008). A business through the strategic application of the Keller CBBE model can create equity by positioning itself as an environmentally sustainable business in the minds of Millennial consumers (Keller, 2013).

**Millennial**

For the purpose of this study, millennials are defined as individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019).

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section presents the theories integral to this research study followed by the literature review.

### **2.1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

The theory of planned behavior by (Ajzen, 1991) and the consumer based brand equity model by (Keller, 2013) form the theoretical foundation of this research.

#### **2.1.1. THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR**

The theory of planned behaviour conceptualized by (Ajzen, 1991) focuses on the intentions of an individual to perform a particular behaviour. Ajzen (1991) proposes that a strong link between intentions correlates to a greater likelihood in performance of that action; based on this notion an individual's intention to purchase an environmentally sustainable brand would likely result in an environmentally sustainable purchase. Bosnjak, Ajzen and Schmidt (2020) thus indicate that people are expected to carry out their given intention should an opportunity arise with a sufficient degree of control over the behaviour.

The theory of planned behaviour highlights that there are three kinds of considerations that guide human behaviour: behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs (Bosnjak *et al.*, 2020).

##### **Behaviour beliefs**

These are beliefs relating to the likely consequences resulting from the performance of a behaviour, this therefore produces a favourable or unfavourable attitude to such performance based on the perceived outcome should the action be performed as well as the resultant value that the outcome offers (Bosnjak *et al.*, 2020; Ferguson, Hair, Silver & Mollah, 2017). An individual may have certain perceptions of the results of

purchasing an environmentally sustainable brand and hold an estimation of value the environment may derive from such a purchase.

### **Normative beliefs**

These are beliefs that arise based on the normative expectations of others and are based on perceived social pressures or subjective norms, thus an individual will act in a particular way due to their exposure to perceived subjective norms (Bosnjak *et al.*, 2020; Ferguson *et al.*, 2017), The intention of an individual to purchase an environmentally sustainable brand may be influenced by their association or the beliefs that are held by the society around them. This is further amplified by the engagement of individuals on social media platforms. Social media is largely impacting the dissemination of virtual information and contributes towards influencing awareness around environmental sustainability amongst individuals (De Leo, Gravili & Miglietta, 2018).

### **Control beliefs**

These are beliefs relating to the impediment or facilitation of the performance of a behaviour and give rise to a perceived self-control and efficiency. Thus, an individual will act on their intention, should the necessary resources be available (Bosnjak *et al.*, 2020; Ferguson *et al.*, 2017), An individual will purchase from an environmentally sustainable brand should they perceive availability and accessibility for their purchase.

These 3 beliefs thus influence the intention and behaviour of an individual, this is graphically depicted below:



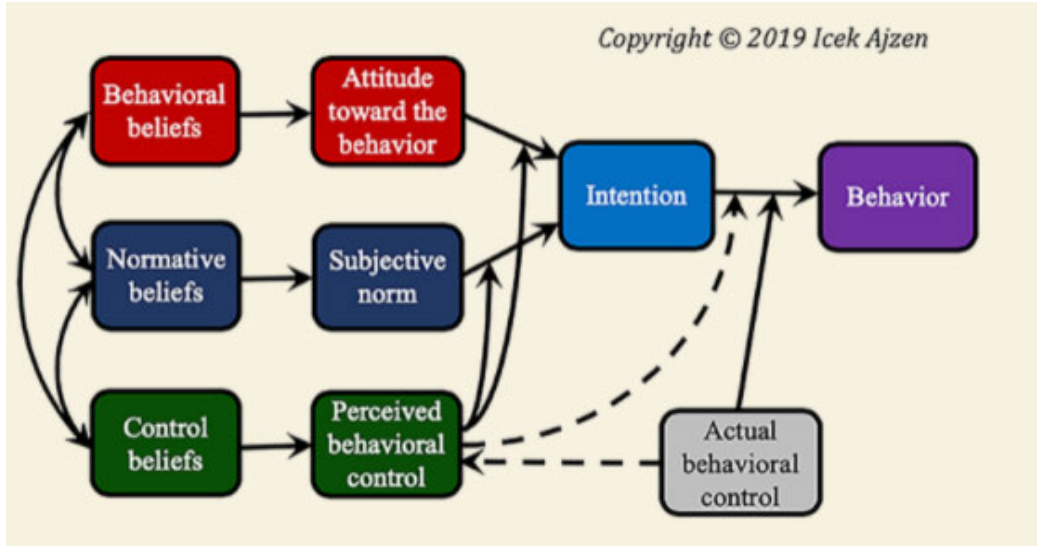


Figure 1. The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2019)

Millennial consumer purchasing behaviour will thus be impacted by their perceptions and intentions towards environmentally sustainable brands, the resultant environmental implications they perceive to arise due to their purchase and their subjective norms resulting from lived experiences (Bosnjak *et al.*, 2020; Ferguson *et al.*, 2017).

The theory is relevant to this study as it allows for the correlation between intentions to purchase and likelihood to purchase. Understanding of Millennial consumer intentions to purchase environmentally sustainable brands, allows a brand to effectively position itself in order to remain relevant to consumers as well as gain competitive advantage (Bosnjak *et al.*, 2020; Ferguson *et al.*, 2017).

### 2.1.2. CONSUMER BASED BRAND EQUITY

Brand equity can be analyzed from a financial, employee or customer perspective (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). Customer perspective is a widely preferred means of understanding brand equity as a brand will be meaningless to other external stakeholders if it fails to gain value and meaning from its customers (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). For the purpose of this research, brand equity relating to Millennial consumers'

attitudes towards brands that subscribe to environmentally sustainable practices is undertaken.

Brand image relates to the perceptions of stakeholders external to the brand (Kapferer, 2008). Keller (2005) indicates that brand image is a vital element in the creation of brand equity as it relates to the perceptions held by consumers regarding a brand's associations; based on this concept, a brand's image as an environmentally sustainable brand can influence Millennial consumer purchase decisions, which could thus either increase or decrease the brands equity. Brand equity, when strategically managed as an asset can result in long-term competitive advantage for a business (Aaker, 2000).

The 4 levels of the model and its relation to a brands development and branding objectives is graphically depicted below:



Figure 2: Brand resonance pyramid (Keller, 2013).

The Keller brand resonance pyramid positions brand equity from a customer perspective; the model requires that success is achieved in each level of the pyramid, the higher on the pyramid a consumer is positioned, the greater the level of resonance (Keller, 2013). The model is used in the development of strong brands, and attempts to

create positive experiences and associations with the brand (Raut & Brito, 2014). The Keller CBBE model, with specific focus on brand image relates to the study, as it allows the researcher to explore attitudes relating to a brand's image as a environmentally sustainable brand. Based on these attitudes, a brand will be able to align its brand image thereby influencing Millennial consumer purchase decisions, resulting in an impact on a brand's equity.

## **2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.2.1. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY - A CORPORATE CONTEXT**

Environmental sustainability identifies the links between society and the environment and examines its correlation to a brands' responsibility towards them (El Zein *et al.*, 2019) environmental sustainability no longer is an option, but rather a vital component fundamentally required for the long term success of a brand (Chladek, 2019). The World Economic Forum (2020) highlights the extent of environmental damage has prompted the release of a manifesto which encapsulates the purpose of a brand within the fourth industrial revolution. Within the manifesto, a focus on environmental sustainability is emphasized highlighting that brands should operate whilst taking care of the environment, in a manner that preserves it for future generations (The World Economic Forum, 2020). This further aligns to the concept presented by (Rafi, 2021) which states that environmental sustainability involves preserving the environment in a manner that does not impact future generations ability to meet their needs, whilst meeting the necessities of today.

Whelan and Fink (2016) state that a clear positive impact to brands has been identified through the incorporation of environmentally sustainable practices; similarly (El Zein *et al.*, 2019) highlight that environmental sustainability impacts the competitiveness of a brand and if not pursued, can result in negative outcomes. Rafi (2016) highlights that environmental sustainability is built on creating long term value for a brand by considering the ecological, social and economic environment within its operations.

Arponen, Granskog, Pantsar-Kallio, Stuchtey, Törmänen and Vanthournout (2015) highlight the benefits for the company, economy and environment by following a circular economy model. In a circular model, brands attempt to reuse resources in contrast to the old linear economy, where inputs go in and waste is generated out (Arponen *et al.*, 2015). Circular economies further carry cost benefits for scarce and declining resources as well as meeting legislative and governance pressures (Arponen *et al.*, 2015). Environmentally sustainable practices within a brand further allows for the mitigation of risk relating to its reputation and allows for a brand to gain competitive advantage as it can be seen as a purpose driven brand (Chladek, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted environmental issues prevalent in society, pointing out that overcoming these issues will need the combined collective actions of individuals globally (Cote, 2020).

### **2.2.2. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND SHARED VALUE**

Society and businesses have largely been seen as competitors to each other, with the notion that businesses providing benefits to society requires diluting their economic success due to increased costs and decreased profits (Porter & Kramer, 2011). This however is not true as a business can undertake to create economic value whilst co-creating value for society; thereby simultaneously addressing consumer needs and challenges (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Thus shared value is not a social responsibility model, but rather a profitability model with increased sensitivity towards societal problems and the resolution to profitably address them. Businesses need to fundamentally operate as a business, but with a redefined purpose of creating shared value and not just profitability (Porter & Kramer, 2011). The same sentiments are presented by (Chladek, 2019) who indicates that environmentally sustainable business practices does not require a business to forgo profits in aid of the environment but rather the success of a business and environmental sustainability are closely related to each other; as a business is unable to implement better environmental sustainable activities if it is not performing well. Thus the implementation of environmentally

sustainable practices is undertaken to increase the profitability of a business whilst creating environmental value also. Bonini and Swartz (2014) highlights that an increasing number of leading economists believe that environmentally sustainable practices actually assist a company's financial performance, this relates to (Rafi, 2021) indication that businesses are also able to gain value by reducing expenses due to the implementation of environmentally sustainable practices.

A shift to creating shared value further carries the potential to enhance a company's competitiveness and create financial success through policies and operating practices that also benefit and advance societies economic and social conditions (Kramer & Pfitzer, 2016). Porter and Kramer (2011) indicate that whilst new promising models are emerging, most businesses are stuck within the sphere of social responsibility, the result of which however does not allow for societal problems to become the primary focus but rather a side-lined undertaking. Kramer and Pfitzer (2016) indicate that world problems prevalent in societies are expansive and large, as such would require implementable solutions from the private sectors in order to overcome them. Kramer and Pfitzer (2016) further indicate that businesses have largely been seen as the major cause of environmental issues; as such greater accountability is being placed on them to rectify the prevalent problems, whilst operating in a manner that does not cause further environmental damage.

Creating shared value through environmentally sustainable practices can be justified by understanding the impact of environmental damage created from business operations on society. The undertaking of environmentally sustainable practices in pursuance of its profitability allows for societies to benefit as well. Negative externalities resulting in a cost created by the producer but not incurred by that producer have also largely impacted individuals (Kenton, 2020). This is seen by the environmental problems such as pollution which arise from business operations negatively impacting societies and individuals who were uninvolved in the business transaction (Kenton, 2020). Mendy (2019) indicates that businesses who subscribe to the creation of shared value can limit the negative externalities which arise from their operations. In a society centric model,

when businesses undertake to create shared value through environmentally sustainable operations, the outcome of such undertaking allows for mutual benefit for the business and society (Mendy, 2019). However further applications to the model can be achieved when we shift our focus to consider the environment as a stakeholder to a business (Willard, 2019). When we consider the environment as a stakeholder, an application of the shared value model can be pursued to create value for the environment itself through the pursuit of value for a business, this would ultimately create societal value also.

A business can therefore redefine productivity in the value chain resulting in a reduction of costs incurred to the business and the environment, thus creating value for both parties (Porter & Kramer, 2011). In the past value creation for shareholders was the primary focus of business, however a more current and futuristic focus requires that value is created for all stakeholders of the business (Whelan & Fink, 2016). Environmental sustainability requires companies to move away from social responsibility and focus its efforts on doing no harm to people and the planet whilst creating value for all its stakeholders (Whelan & Fink, 2016).

### **2.2.3. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY - A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

An increase in the environmental crisis within the country has now forced individuals to recognize the need for long term sustainable solutions to be implemented (Montmasson-Clair, 2018). Whilst the focus is set on environmental sustainability and transformation, the existing operations are still very much set in its old ways, therefore drastic policies were imperative in achieving any progress towards environmental sustainability at all (Montmasson-Clair, 2018). Pombo-van Zyl (2021) highlights an opportunity created for businesses to incorporate social and environmental models, in light of the recovery needed to the global economy due to the impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic. An incentive to move to sustainable energy creation, is the fact that it is now the cheapest form of energy generation within the country, in addition to a narrowing time frame to solve the impacts of climate change (Pombo-van Zyl, 2021). Incremental

progress towards environmental sustainability is no longer sufficient in the 21st century, the topic is now the prime focus and objective for a business in mitigating risks and capitalizing opportunities (Pombo-van Zyl, 2021). Furthermore, South Africa is a country that is on the brink of an energy crisis; this is of great concern to businesses as it can drastically impact their ability to generate an income (Atebaa *et al.*, 2019). As such it is now more imperative than ever to incorporate environmentally sustainable practices so as to assist the energy crisis within the country

South Africa is amongst the few developing countries that requires sustainability reporting for companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), this is due to the progression of environmental and social issues within the country and the impact that poor disclosure can have on investments into the country (Struwig & Janse Van Rensburg, 2016). There is an emerging theme of integrated reporting aligning to global standards, these reports are increasingly requiring businesses to report on their ability to create value in the context of environmental sustainability with a greater transparency in reporting (Corvino, Doni and Martini, 2020). The adoption of King III reporting in 2009 requires that sustainability reporting be integrated with a business's financial reporting; this is thus an imperative step in achieving sustainable advances within the South African context (Institute of Directors Southern Africa, 2009).

#### **2.2.4. CREATING BRAND EQUITY THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Consumers create certain links to a brand through their perceived associations of that brand to a particular attribute (Keller, 2005). Consumers can impact a brand through their purchasing decisions (Cote, 2020). Consumers are aware of the prevalent environmental crises and as such are increasingly demanding more environmentally sustainable products. Brands that do not cater for such demand, will do so at their own peril, whilst further impacting their ability to gain a competitive advantage (El Zein *et al.*, 2019).

Millennials are individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019). According to survey data, the perceptions of businesses interaction with the environment have prompted Millennial consumers to either start or stop supporting their brands, a further 40% indicated that they will stop should a business or its brand offering negatively impacts the environment (Deloitte, 2019). Millennial consumers have been identified to place greater emphasis on a brands environmental impact, believing that brands should mitigate the damage already done as well as protect and improve the future environment (Deloitte, 2019).

### **2.2.5. LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUSION**

Increased awareness of the environmental crises experienced on a global scale is being highlighted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This has placed a spotlight on the extent of urgency regarding the situation. Whilst the pandemic has broken the structures of the global economy, it presents an opportunity to regrow it with greater sensitivity, care and focus on environmental and social sustainability. Environmental sustainability is no longer an issue that can be ignored or slowly incorporated into a business, rather sustainability has to now become the focus of business processes (Pombo-van Zyl, 2021).

Millennials make up the current largest generation and are more likely to change their habits in the bid to reduce the impact on the environment. The trend of demand for environmentally sustainable brands is increasing; by becoming an environmentally sustainable brand a brand is likely to capitalize and gain value by appealing to the Millennial generation (Rafi, 2021). Thus the researcher has identified that Millennial consumers care greatly about the environment and brands need to account for this. In a global context, it has been identified that a large emphasis is placed on environmentally sustainable brands by Millennials (Deloitte, 2019). This is the current dominant generation with purchasing power (Anon, 2018). Therefore brands that do not align to this demand carry the potential of becoming obsolete. Whilst these trends have been identified in developed countries, very little research has been conducted within the



context of South Africa which is still a developing country. This research thus aims to fill this gap by understanding if the identified global trends hold true within a South African context.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This section consists of the selected paradigm, the research approach and design, the population, sample, data collection methods and data analysis methods.

#### **3.1. PARADIGM**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher has selected the interpretivism paradigm. Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014) highlights that the interpretivist paradigm allows for the study of individuals based on the notion that individuals change with the influence of time and the environment. The researcher's view of people having different individualistic perceptions further relates to the theory of planned behaviour which indicates that beliefs influence an individual to act in a certain way (Ajzen, 1991). Since these beliefs are formed due to multiple and different external circumstances, every individual will perceive and thus act differently based on them (Bosnjak *et al.*, 2020; Ferguson *et al.*, 2017).

The researcher does not intend to generalize the findings of this study, therefore the results of this research are pertinent to the individuals involved in this study at the time of conducting the research. Everyone has their own perceptions which are based on their lived experiences, therefore every individual will have a different definition of reality, how each individual thus perceives environmental sustainability will differ based on their own formed reality (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). This further justifies the use of the interpretivist paradigm as it allows for a deeper understanding of the mindset of each individual. People have individualistic ideologies; therefore, a single phenomenon can have multiple interpretations, thus the truth is relevant and subjective to every individual differently (Intgrty, 2016), therefore environmental sustainability will be interpreted and relevant to every individual differently.

The researcher believes that the world is perceived in different ways which alters the experiences of individuals differently, the sense of reality thus is an internal construct (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The paradigm is embedded within the aim of the research which

is to gain an in-depth understanding of a Millennial consumer, their beliefs in regards to environmental sustainability, the influences towards environmentally sustainable purchases and facilities to purchase environmentally sustainable brands based on their intention (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

### **3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN**

Since the interpretivist worldview was utilized for this research, a qualitative approach in the research methodology is best aligned to this paradigm (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The researcher aims to gain an understanding relating to experiences, meaning and perspectives from a Millennial consumers opinion, thereby the result of the information obtained does not allow for counting and measuring, this further justifies the use of a qualitative approach (Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lace, 2016) Nieuwenhuis (2016) further highlights that in order to give meaning to this study, a qualitative approach is suitable since the data obtained could be analyzed through narrative analysis and did not rely on statistical and numerical methods. Instead the use of observations and in-depth interviews are employed to gain context and a deeper understanding relative to the experiences and perspective of the participants (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). This aligns to the paradigm of the research and allows for the researcher to gain a depth in the understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of individuals towards environmental sustainability and environmentally sustainable brands based on their unique lived experiences (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

### **3.3. POPULATION**

The unit of analysis used for this study were Millennial consumers. The unique characteristic about the study was that it was limited to Millennial consumers based in South Africa, as the study aimed to gain a South African perspective. There are 8 Millennial participants which make up the sample unit of study. The age limits of the study were 25 to 40 years aligning to the Millennial generation relevant to this study. This study included participants of both male and female gender as well as multiple

racial segments due to the multi racial population that make up the demographic of South Africa. The study however does not require an equal representation of genders or each racial segment as these factors are irrelevant to this study. The target population for the study is thus South African Millennial consumers comprising both of male and female participants of all race groups.

### **3.4. SAMPLING**

Aaker, Kumar, Leone and Day (2013) highlight that sampling is useful when the population size is large and when costs and time are limited, since the population of Millennial consumers are too large, and there are time and cost limitations, sampling is essential for this study. Sampling further allows the researcher to increase the time spent on interviews thereby increasing the response quality (Aaker *et.al.*, 2012). Due to time and financial constraints, randomized selection from the entire South African population of Millennial citizens was not possible nor was a census viable. Instead convenience sampling was utilized to obtain the most relevant participant samples. Convenience was based on participant accessibility and availability. The target population is thus Millennial South African consumers. The sample size is 6 South African participants, this is adequate for a qualitative research study. Bryman and Bell (2011) indicate that a representative sample is needed in order to generalize the findings to the entire population, since the researcher does not intend to generalize the findings, the sample does not need to represent the entire population of South African Millennials consumers. Due to cost and time limitations, convenience sampling is relevant to the study however it does not provide definitive findings to be generated (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This research thus provides the preliminary foundation for further quantitative research to be conducted.

### **3.5. DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

In depth interviews were undertaken to collect the relevant data needed for this study. This aligns to the paradigm of an interpretivist worldview indicating that each individual

will have their own conceived perceptions in relation to environmental sustainability and environmentally sustainable brands. In depth interviews allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding relating to these perceptions through the use of open ended questions relating to environmental sustainability and environmentally sustainable brands (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). This further aligns to the theory of planned behaviour which forms part of the theoretical framework of the study. Therefore in depth interviews allow for the researcher to gain an inside perspective of consumers allowing the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the beliefs and views of Millennial consumers relating to environmental sustainability and environmentally sustainable brands (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). In depth interviews allow for a more conversational approach thereby creating a natural and conducive environment for participants to express their views (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). It further allows the researcher the ability to identify non verbal communications such as body language, which allows for greater insight to be gained (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The following benefits relative to the study as highlighted by (Aaker *et al.*, 2012) further justified the use of in-depth interviews:

- **More quality**

This allows the researcher to directly ask a respondent a question or probe for greater clarity, Unlike a focus group, it further allows for individuals to not be influenced by other people. This therefore allows for a better quality of information to be attained.

- **More quantity**

A single person can provide a greater amount of information as opposed to the limited time they are able to speak in a group.

- **More depth**

Rich in-depth information can be attained, as the respondents can provide details and be probed for greater clarity. Transcribing the information further allows for identification of themes in the responses.

- **More efficiency**

Respondents can be interviewed at length and do not require incentives to participate.

- **More value**

One on one interviews can allow respondents to speak at length thereby allowing for a greater amount of information to be attained.

The following steps were thus undertaken:

- The researcher identified the 6 Millennial participants through convenience sampling.
- The researcher then enquired if they are willing to participate in the study.
- Upon receiving their agreement and willingness to participate, the researcher then set up a time, a date and a venue to conduct the research. Given the current Covid-19 situation, online interviews via the Zoom platform were undertaken to ensure the safety of all participants.
- The researcher then sent out the relevant consent forms to be filled to obtain permission for participation and recording, as well as provide the participants with information related to the purpose of the study and the use of the obtained information.
- Before the interview began, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the research and the use of the obtained information.
- The interview was then conducted following receiving the final verbal consent to proceed from the participant. The interview was recorded and later transcribed.

Open-ended questions allowed the researcher to maintain a level of consistency throughout the interviews as well as allowed for the systematic identification of emerging themes. Open-ended questions further offered flexibility to respondents to freely respond, as well as gave the researcher the ability to probe for greater clarity. This ensured that in-depth information could be obtained pertinent to the research questions (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). The research questions were submitted for

ethical clearance and upon obtaining the relevant ethical clearance, the researcher was able to undertake the data collection. Preceding the commencement of data collection with the participants of the research, a pilot test was conducted to mitigate any potential problems and to gauge the level of understanding of questions (Aaker et al., 2013). The respondent from the pilot test did not form part of the 6 respondents selected for the study. The data obtained from the respondent in the pilot interview was not used in the data findings and analysis for this study. The pilot interview allowed the researcher to identify potential problem questions as well as rearrange questions to ensure better flow. The researcher was further able to identify and remove questions that were repetitive in nature. The researcher then identified the participants between the age of 25 and 40 on the basis of accessibility and availability. Thus 6 Millennials were selected to participate in this study. The researcher then inquired if the selected participants were willing to participate in the study. Upon receiving their agreement a time and date was set up for the commencement of the interviews. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, online interviews via Zoom had to be undertaken to ensure the safety of all parties involved. The researcher then sent out the relevant consent forms to obtain permission for their participation and recording, as well as provide the participants with information related to the purpose of the study and the use of the obtained information.

The preliminary details of the interviews are summarized in the table as follows:

Table 2: preliminary interview details

<b>Participant:</b>	<b>Date of Interview:</b>	<b>Duration:</b>	<b>Platform used:</b>
1	18/08/2021	15 Minutes	Zoom
2	18/08/2021	11 Minutes	Zoom
3	20/08/2021	14 Minutes	Zoom
4	21/08/2021	11 Minutes	Zoom
5	21/08/2021	14 Minutes	Zoom
6	22/08/2021	13 Minutes	Zoom

These interviews were recorded using a voice recording application. It was required that the respondents have their camera turned on, as this allowed the researcher to pick up on non communicated cues. For this reason, recordings were not undertaken via the Zoom platform itself due to only permission being received for voice recordings. This further assured respondents of their anonymity. These recordings were later manually transcribed. An application for transcription was not used as the researcher conducted content analysis whilst listening and transcribing the interviews.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS**

Zhang & Wildemuth [s.a.] indicate that qualitative data analysis aims at interpreting meaningful and symbolic content by analyzing how participants find meaning relating to a specific phenomena; this is obtained through the analysis of their perceptions, attitudes and experiences related to that phenomena. In this study the participants' perceptions and attitudes based on their experiences related to environmental sustainability and environmentally sustainable brands will be analyzed.

The 3 types of analysis was then undertaken by the researcher as highlighted by (Aaker *et al.*, 2012):

- **Coding**

The identification of themes, ideas and patterns that were prominent in the data

- **Narrative analysis**

Which incorporates conversational analysis. It therefore focuses on the speech and content of the conversations.

- **Content analysis**

Analysis of the interview after it has been transcribed to identify themes and meanings.



Following the interviews the data was analyzed using the 8 steps of content analysis as highlighted by (Zhang & Wildemuth, [s.a.]):

- **Step 1: Data preparation**

Before commencing on the analysis, the raw data obtained from the interviews was transcribed from the recordings.

- **Step 2: Defining the coding unit to be analyzed**

The coding unit such as a single word, a phrase or sentences was decided upon by the researcher.

- **Step 3: Developing categories and a coding scheme/conceptual framework**

By grouping together similar or related coding units, the researcher was able to form categories of codes.

- **Step 4: Testing the coding scheme on a sample**

To resolve doubts and issues related to the coding categories, the sample data is tested for consistency and clarity of the category definitions.

- **Step 5: Coding all the text**

The data collected was coded.

- **Step 6: Assessing the coding consistency**

After completing the coding, the consistency related to the coding was again checked by the researcher.

- **Step 7: Drawing conclusions from the coded data**

Interpretation from the identified themes was conducted.

- **Step 8: Reporting the methods and findings**

A complete report which is inclusive of the coding, analysis and interpretation is completed.

As indicated above, narrative analysis incorporating conversational analysis was undertaken to further analyze the data obtained. Du Plooy-Cilliers, (2017) highlights that the focus of patterns in language during an interview such as the analysis of tones, expressions, pitches, intonation, pausing and phrasing can be considered as conversation analysis. This is important for this study as participants may feel pressured

to respond in a particular manner due to the fear of being judged. Thus hesitations or pauses can be analyzed. Since the interviews were recorded, the researcher was able to playback the recording which allowed for deeper conversational analysis to be conducted. The researcher was able to gauge from the responses, the overall emotion or hesitation in the voice of the respondent when probed on questions relating to environmental sustainability. This study thus analyzed the data collected through content analysis, narrative analysis and coding.

#### **4. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

This section presents the findings of the research as well as the interpretation of the data collected. The research problem is then addressed as well as the research questions.

##### **4.1. FINDINGS**

The following findings were obtained regarding respondents personal perceptions relating to environmental sustainability:

- A responsibility of individuals to protect natural resources for present and future generations.
- Awareness of the impact that current generations are having on the environment.
- Resultant problems faced due to the negative impact on the environment.
- Responsible use of resources such as renewable energy.

When asked about environmentally sustainable business practices the following was identified:

- Recyclable materials.
- Renewable energy.
- Reduced plastic use.

When asked about being influenced in their purchasing decisions by environmentally sustainable brands, the following findings were derived:

- Not always due to costs.
- Sometimes but not always.

When asked for an example regarding an actual purchase of a brand that they believe was an environmentally sustainable one, the following findings were derived:

- Locally sourced brands.
- Less once off use products (Coffee Cups).

When asked if their influence to be more environmentally sustainable by people around them or people on social media who follow environmentally sustainable practices or make purchases from environmentally sustainable businesses, the following findings were derived:

- Highly influenced by people around them and people on social media that follow environmentally sustainable practices or purchase brands that are environmentally sustainable.

When asked if they felt that environmentally sustainable brands are easily accessible available, the following findings were derived:

- The internet has allowed for consumers to gain all information regarding brands.
- There is an increase in environmentally sustainable brands available and accessible.

When asked if they feel that they as consumers can make a significant difference towards encouraging brands to be more environmentally sustainable, the following findings were derived:

- Millennials were aware of their power in influencing brands towards sustainability.

When asked if the current undertaking of brands towards environment sustainability was adequate, the following findings were derived:

- Millennials felt that brands are not doing enough and can do more.

When asked what they would gain by purchasing brands that were environmentally sustainable, the following findings were derived:

- Feel good purchase.
- Did not add to the prevalent environmental problems.

## **4.2. INTERPRETATION**

Participants largely focused on the balance between using resources and protecting them for future generations also. Participants were aware of the negative impact on the environment and suggested a shift towards renewable energy uses.

When respondents were asked about environmental sustainable business practices a wide variety of themes emerged. The following are amongst the most prominent themes:

- Using less plastics and using more recycled materials.
- Plant based alternatives/vegan alternatives.

- Business using less natural resources such as water and electricity.
- Reducing the carbon footprint through products and processes.

It was interesting to note that the majority of people approached environmental sustainability from a business output perception. This means that they regarded environmental sustainability as companies that used less plastic, decreased single use plastics or generally sold environmental sustainable products. Few people considered environmentally sustainable business practices such as reducing natural inputs or generating sustainable energy for business operations.

When asked if they are influenced by brands that have known environmentally sustainable practices, the majority of respondents indicated that they are, however when probed further most of them struggled to provide a relative justification. A participant further indicated that he is cautious as some brands market themselves as 'green' but do not really have real environmentally sustainable practices. Another participants indicated that price is also a factor, as they believe that environmentally sustainable products are often more expensive.

All participants struggled to give an example of a environmentally sustainable purchase that they have made, a notable hesitation was identified followed by vague answers such as energy efficient appliances. When probed for clarity, respondents took a moment to think of an example. The following are themes emerged:

- Using reusable/eco friendly straws instead of plastic straws.
- Energy efficient appliances.
- Reusable coffee cups from coffee shops

All participants indicated that they are influenced by individuals who have environmentally sustainable practices or purchase environmentally sustainable brands. Social media further was a huge influence to encourage individuals. It could be identified that people have aspirational goals to be more environmentally sustainable

due to the influence of people around them or on social media. Influences and famous people who advocate their sustainable practices or purchases are highly influential in Millennial consumers' lives.

Respondents were aware of their power as consumers and their ability to influence a brand to be more environmentally sustainable. Participants indicated that they are able to influence businesses through their own choices by avoiding to support a brand should they believe they have unsustainable practices. They are also likely to influence others around them to not support such brands also. Two participants however felt that not enough can be done as a consumer to influence brands and that if a business has a lower price then they have a greater advantage.

When asked how easily accessible information relating to environmental sustainable business practices is, the majority of the respondents felt that information is fairly easily available. However a noticeable hesitation could be identified, when probed further it could be identified that some respondents felt that brands participate in green marketing so some practices could be exaggerated whilst others felt it depended on the consumer and their willingness to obtain such information. Two respondents however indicated that information regarding sustainability is more easily accessible with certain products whilst other products pose a greater challenge.

When asked if they feel that brands are currently doing enough, all respondents indicated no. They felt that brands could do much more than they already are doing. It was interesting to identify that respondents did not struggle with this question, they immediately indicated that brands could do more.

All participants were able to identify the importance of environmental sustainability and answer questions with ease relating to perceptions of environmental sustainability. The majority of respondents attributed environmental sustainability to the brand's products. These were products with attributes such as less plastic used for packaging and using reusable and recycled inputs. Fewer respondents were able to correlate an

environmentally sustainable brand with operational processes that were environmentally sustainable in nature, such as less water or electricity usage or the creation of renewable energy for business operations. Whilst all respondents were favourable to environmental sustainability, the majority of respondents struggled or hesitated when probed for clarity or asked to provide examples. Therefore the researcher believes that whilst their beliefs relating to environmental sustainability may be strong, they may be aspirational in nature.

#### **4.3. ANALYSIS CONCLUSION**

Deloitte (2019) highlighted that Millennial consumers are highly aware of the environmental crisis at hand and as such are seeking greater focus from brands towards environmental sustainability. Whilst this was researched internationally, limited studies were conducted within a South African Context. It was found that South African participants were highly aware of the environmental problems. As such they require brands to become more environmentally sustainable. There were however participants that prioritized other factors such as price. Whilst participants took some time to think of recent sustainable purchases, there was a large consensus of demand for brands to operate more sustainably. This could be due to their perceptions of brands largely being regarded as the cause of problems that are imminent in society (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Porter & Kramer (2011) suggests that brands should pursue the shared value model to regain consumer trust. This was identified within the data obtained whereby participants indicated that although brands may pursue environmental sustainability, they are not doing enough and more should be done. Respondents are looking towards brands to lead the way in rectifying the problems in society (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

It was identified that the participants are influenced by environmentally sustainable brands. Millennial consumers identified more tangible features such as less plastic in packaging or recycled materials used easier than other environmentally sustainable processes. Participants were largely skeptical regarding brands and green marketing. Thus brands need to strive to create greater transparency.

Participants largely correlated environmental sustainability to less plastic use or recycled inputs however some participants indicated less energy and less water. Participants further considered carbon emission and sustainable energy creation as environmentally sustainable factors.

Participants were more willing to support brands with known environmentally sustainable practices. This further made them feel good about their purchases. Therefore, it is imperative for businesses to improve their sustainable practices because the majority of participants indicated that brands can and should do more.

Participants feel that by purchasing brands that are environmentally sustainable they are able to not be a part of the environmental problems that society currently faces. The behavioural belief of the theory of planned behaviour suggests that an individual may have certain perceptions of the results of purchasing an environmentally sustainable brand and hold an estimation of value the environment may derive from such a purchase. Therefore participants regarded purchase of environmentally sustainable brands highly valuable, based on this belief participants are likely to purchase environmentally sustainable brands.

The normative belief of the theory of planned behaviour suggests that the intention of an individual to purchase an environmentally sustainable brand may be influenced by their association or the beliefs that are held by the society around them. It was found that all participants were highly influenced by people around them or on social media that either acted environmentally sustainably or purchased environmentally sustainable brands. Based on this normative belief it is highly likely that participants would purchase from environmentally sustainable brands due to the influence of people around them or on social media,

Based on the control belief of the theory of planned behaviour, an individual will purchase from an environmentally sustainable brand should they perceive availability



and accessibility for their purchase. Participants indicated that the internet provided accessibility to information regarding brands. Thus they were easily able to check if a brand was environmentally sustainable. They also indicated that environmentally sustainable brands were easily accessible to them. Based on this control belief it is highly likely that participants would purchase from environmentally sustainable brands due to the availability and accessibility. ,

Participants were highly aware of their ability to influence a brand to be more environmentally sustainable. They understood the power of purchase choices. Businesses have to be cautious of their green marketing campaigns as consumers also indicated that they believe that some marketing initiatives are overly exaggerated or not entirely accurate. It was identified that Millennial consumers are highly likely to make purchases of brands that are environmentally sustainable. Thus brands need to position their brand image as an environmentally sustainable brand to millennial consumers. It was identified that Millennials represent the largest consumer segment of South Africa, therefore brands need to align to their demands in order to gain market share.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This section consists of discussions regarding the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the research, the ethical considerations, limitations and anticipated contribution of this research study.

### **5.1. VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Validity and reliability are more applicable to quantitative research making the criteria involved in testing for validity and reliability not suited for the purpose of qualitative research (Stumpfegger, 2017). Lincoln & Guba (1985) thus proposes trustworthiness and authenticity as the criteria for assessing qualitative research. Trustworthiness and authenticity in qualitative research involves the criteria of: credibility,

transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bryman & Bell, 2014). This is highlighted below:

- **Credibility**

Since the interpretivist paradigm utilized for the study views people as having individualistic perceptions based on their own formed reality, no one reality can be viewed as the truth, therefore, credibility thus refers to the researcher account which will make the findings credible and acceptable (Bryman & Bell, 2014). This is achieved by carrying out the research in good practice and submitting the research findings to the research supervisor to confirm the understanding of the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2014).

- **Transferability**

This research study involves intensive in-depth interviews, thus findings generated are unique to the context of the study, however these findings could be used to make other possible findings in other contexts of study (Bryman & Bell, 2014).

- **Dependability**

Similar to reliability, dependability is applicable in qualitative research, this is achieved by safely keeping all records of the research, thus allowing for the research to be audited during or after completion (Bryman & Bell, 2014). All records pertinent to this study will be safely kept and accessible for a 5 year period.

- **Confirmability**

Confirmability is achieved by the researchers ability to show that they have not knowingly allowed for the research to be influenced by their personal values or theoretical inclinations (Bryman & Bell, 2014). This will be achieved by regularly discussing the research and its findings with the research supervisor.

## 5.2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues involving both the researcher and respondents were considered in order to ensure that the research study was of professional standards adhering to all ethical principles which are essential for the practice of research. Ethical principles in research are important to ensure that no harm is done to respondents, there is no lack of informed consent, no invasion of privacy and there is no deception regarding the research and the use of its findings (Bryman and Bell, 2014).

Ethical considerations relating to the respondents aligning to the IIE postgraduate handbook (IIE, 2018), will be adhered to. Prior to conducting the interview, the researcher will ensure that participants are issued with a consent form, to obtain informed permission for use of their responses in this research study. The following will be supplied in writing and explained in detail by the researcher:

- An explanation regarding the purpose of the research and the use of the data obtained.
- Participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants will not be coerced nor incentivised for their participation.
- The confidentiality and anonymity of participants would be maintained throughout the duration of the study, they would therefore be referred to in the study by their participant number.
- Participants would be able to withdraw at any point of the study or refuse to answer any questions posed to them in the interview.
- Permission to be recorded was obtained so that the responses could be transcribed at a later stage. Transcripts only carry the participant number and not the individual's name. Recordings in part or whole was only used for the purpose of the study. Recordings will not be published or posted and will be viewed only by the researcher and the research supervisor.
- Information about respondents will not be shared with any other third party.

The researcher conducted this study with integrity and in accordance with the principles and regulations prescribed in the IIE postgraduate handbook (IIE, 2018). All data collected from the respondents was used only for the purpose of this study and is safely stored for a period of five years from the date of submission. With the assistance of the supervisor, the researcher viewed the research objectively. The research further did not influence nor probe for a desired response, nor analyzed the data with any form of bias.

### **5.3. LIMITATIONS**

The researcher undertook to conduct qualitative research, therefore respondents were able to elaborate their responses. This allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding and further justified the interpretivist paradigm used for the study. Quantitative analysis is thus not undertaken and the results of the study are not quantitatively proved. This does not allow for the results to be generalized to all South African Millennial consumers. Enslin (2014) indicates that in reference to research, factors such as time, finance and access that are beyond the control of the researcher are considered limitations and constraints within the research study. Time, financial resources and accessibility were thus the three major limitations of this study.

Time was regarded as a limitation to the study as time constraints do not allow the researcher to conduct more interviews with a greater number of Millennial consumers, this therefore limited the insights and findings of the study. Time and financial constraints further impacted the sample used for the study; convenience does not allow for an accurate representation of the total number of South African Millennial consumers. The researcher conducted interviews with the relevant participants, this further limits the study as the views of the 6 participants are not necessarily the views of all Millennial consumers in South Africa. Furthermore, the sample size was limited to individuals known to the researcher, who were willing to voluntarily participate in the study.

Bias in relation to participant responses are possible due to participants wanting to not appear in a negative light regarding trending topics such as environmental sustainability. Thus there may be social pressures that the participants feel to answer in a particular way. This was overcome by analyzing non verbal communication through content analysis. The lack of financial resources did not allow for external field researchers to be involved in the study, therefore researcher bias is possible, however to overcome this periodic communications with the research supervisor is conducted to ensure researcher bias was limited.

Enslin (2014) indicates that delimitations in research refer to the choices made by the researcher in deciding on the scope of the specific research study. The major limitation of the study is that the researcher does not include geographic, ethnic, gender or socio economic factors into the study.

Further studies are recommended with increased sample size to include greater representations of individuals. Future research on the topics could include geographic, ethnic, gender or socio economic factors to be researched in relation to Millennial consumer attitude to sustainable businesses. A quantitative research study could be undertaken in order to quantify the results and provide a definitive answer in understanding if Millennial consumer attitudes towards sustainable brands impact their purchase decisions.

#### **5.4. ANTICIPATED CONTRIBUTION**

This research study contributes to the current body of academic knowledge associated with the topic of brand equity gained through environmentally sustainable practices, it further contributes towards this knowledge within a South African context. The researcher has identified a gap in research relating to the influence of environmentally sustainable practices of brands on Millennial consumer purchase behaviour conducted in South Africa. Whilst this topic was investigated internationally, limited studies were conducted within South Africa. The Covid-19 pandemic has further altered the way the

world operates, changing business environments and norms. This research study therefore contributes to knowledge in a post-covid outbreak world. Whilst environmental sustainability has become a trending topic, it is especially pertinent to a country on the brink of an energy crisis. By conducting research which recognizes this gap within a South African context, a meaningful contribution can be made by this study towards encouraging greater environmentally sustainable practices in South African brands. This study thus is seen to make a worthy contribution towards the understanding and achievement of environmental sustainability in South Africa. It further contributes to corporations in the development of brand strategies that factor environmentally sustainable practices into their operations so as to create brand equity and gain competitive advantage.

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## Appendix 1: Originality Report

SafeAssign Originality Report

# Report Summary

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 High risk

There is a very high probability that text in these papers was copied from other sources. These papers include quoted or paraphrased text in excess and need to be reviewed for plagiarism.

### Overall Text Similarity

Average Match

80 %

Highest Match

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## Appendix 2: Concept Document Template

**PROVISIONAL TITLE:** *Understanding South African Millennial consumer attitudes towards brands that subscribe to environmentally sustainable practices.*

Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Anticipated Findings	References
The purpose of the study is to understand Millennial consumer attitudes towards businesses that subscribe to environmentally sustainable practices.	What are Millennial consumers understanding of an environmentally sustainable business and does it influence their willingness to purchase from sustainable businesses?	environmental crisis prevalent on a global scale. South Africa is a country on the brink of an energy crisis. More awareness in consumers therefore increased demand for sustainable businesses. Gap in the research from a South African perspective.	Ajzen, 1991 - The theory of planned behaviour  Keller, 2001 Customer based brand equity  Porter & Kramer, 2011 - Shared Value	<b>Theme 1:</b> Environmental Sustainability in business  <b>Theme 2:</b> Shared Value & Sustainability  <b>Theme 3:</b> Sustainability in a south African context  <b>Theme 4:</b> Sustainability and its influence on brand equity	<b>Paradigm</b> Interpretivism,  <b>Epistemology</b> sustainability depends on the perceptions of each individual.  <b>Ontology</b> internal construct that is formed due to experiences and social interactions. therefore it is fluid.  <b>Axiology</b> Unique identity and perspective of each individual.	Qualitative	Qualitative In-depth interviews	respondents: Anonymity, consent, voluntary participation, open to withdraw, information not shared, permission to record. Researcher: integrity Non bias keeping records safe	Environmental sustainability in business influences Millennial consumers' purchase decisions and therefore brands need to align their image to gain further equity.	Porter, M., E. and Kramer, M., R. 2011. Creating shared value. Harvard Business Review, January-February 2011. [Online]. Available at <a href="https://sharedvalue.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Harvard-Business-Review-Creating-Shared-Value.pdf">https://sharedvalue.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Harvard-Business-Review-Creating-Shared-Value.pdf</a>
						<b>Population</b>				
<b>Research Problem</b>	<b>Secondary Questions/ Hypotheses/ Objectives</b>	<b>Key Concepts</b>	<b>Key Theories</b>			<b>Sampling</b>	<b>Data Analysis Method(s)</b>	<b>Limitations</b>	<b>Anticipated Contribution</b>	Ajzen, I. 1991. The Theory of Planned Behavior. Organizational behavior and human decision processes, 50(2): 179-211. [Online]. DOI:10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T  Keller, K., L. 2013. Strategic brand management. 4th ed. Boston: Pearson Education  Kenton, W. 2020.
The research problem seeks to understand if millennial consumer attitudes are influenced by brands that subscribe to sustainable practices in South Africa.	To understand Millennials Consumers: definition of environmentally sustainability relating to brands.. -if sustainable practices influence purchase behaviours. -perceive value as a result of purchasing sustainable brands. -are influenced by people around them to act in an environmentally sustainable manner. -feel that sustainable purchases are available and accessible.	-Sustainable business. -environment as a stakeholder -Brand image as a sustainable brand	Ajzen, 1991 - The theory of planned behaviour  Keller, 2001 Customer based brand equity			<b>non-probability</b>  <b>Sampling method</b> Convenience sampling  <b>Size</b> 6 Participants: 6 Millennials	<b>Unit of Analysis</b> people: Millennial South Africans  <b>Data Analysis Method(s)</b> Qualitative: Coding Narrative Content	Limited Time  Accessibility  no generalisation due to non representative sample.  lack of finances.  Bias in research	Adds to the body of academic knowledge in regards to sustainable business influence on Millennial consumer purchase decisions and its effect on brand image and equity.	

