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Understanding the effect that Facebook's targeted advertising has on its brand image  
among Millennials.

By

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the research report submitted for the strategic brand communication degree to The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE) is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a postgraduate qualification.

**Signature: Anja Roodt    Date: 05/12/2022**

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## **Abstract**

Targeted advertisements have become ever prevalent on social media platforms. These platforms often make use of personal and browsing data collected to ensure these advertisements are accurate. There are mixed feelings towards this practice with people finding it convenient and others finding it unethical. This research made use of a qualitative study on South African millennial Facebook users to determine the impact that targeted advertising has on Facebooks brand image. Interviews were conducted with the target population and coding was completed on their responses; this data was analysed to determine the impact that the targeted advertisements on Facebook had on the individuals. Qualitative research was used as this is an opinion and deep human understanding was needed to not only analyse the impact on the brands image, but also why the individuals felt the way they did. This research found that the majority of people dislike the use of targeted advertising and that they feel it is an invasion of their privacy.

## **Introduction**

### **Contextualisation**

“What is the difference between targeted advertising & intrusive advertising?” (Chivers, 2022). Targeted advertising has grown more common on social media platforms, which has affected many customers' user experience (Smith, Summers and Reczek, 2016). Targeted advertisements can have a negative impact on the user experience if done incorrectly however they can also be beneficial to the user if done well (Baglione, Amin, McCullough, Tucci, 2018). This research will investigate the impact that targeted advertisements have on Facebook's Millennial South African users' perceived brand image of Facebook. To analyse the impact, this research will look into the possible trust and privacy implications that the users might experience based on the targeted advertisements. After reviewing the literature there is existing research that is similar, however that research is in a global context, and this will be specific to a South African millennial context which will provide new findings on the topic. The purpose of this research will be to determine if Facebook's targeted advertisements have negatively or positively impacted its brand image amongst South African millennials; the outcome will assist Facebook in improving its brand image among millennials. This paper first broadly introduces the research topic, followed by a literature review of previous literature that is relevant to the topic, what methodology will be used to complete the research and lastly the ethical considerations and limitations that affect this research.

### **Rationale**

From the research, it can be seen that privacy concerns that users have, can have an impact on their trust in a brand. Brand trust is a crucial part of a brand's image as individuals are more likely to appreciate a brand that they can trust, are more likely to continue to support trusted brands and are more likely to be an ambassador for the brand (Keller, 1993).

This research will be done to investigate what effect Facebook's use of personal data for targeted advertising has on millennial South Africans. Research conducted on this matter

in the South African millennial context has not been completed before and this research will address that gap. This research is relevant as targeted advertising has become a popular marketing medium with more data on the consumer being available (Smith, et al, 2016).

The findings of this paper will assist Facebook's understanding of its audience and allow them to improve its brand image amongst millennial South Africans.

### **Problem statement**

This research will look into the impact that brand trust and privacy concerns have on a brand's image (Huang, Wang, Chen, Deng and Huang, 2020). This will be conducted by investigating if Facebook's use and aggregation of browser data for targeted advertising have an effect on the brand image amongst Millennials in South Africa.

### **Research aim**

The purpose of this research will be to determine if Facebook's targeted advertisements have negatively or positively impacted its brand image amongst millennials in South Africa; the outcome will assist Facebook in improving its brand image amongst South African millennials.

### **Research Questions**

How does targeted advertising impact Facebook's brand image perceived by Millennials?

- What drives millennials' perceived brand image of Facebook?
- How does target advertising influence Millennials' consumer experience?
- Do millennials have privacy concerns related to Facebook's targeted advertising?

### **Research Objectives**

The research objective will be to Determine the impact targeting advertisements have on millennial South Africans; this will allow Facebook to make more informed decisions regarding their advertising techniques to help their brand image grow.

## **Literature review**

### **Conceptualisation**

The following key concepts have been identified for this research, trust, brand image, targeted advertising, and privacy. Definitions and discussion on each concept will follow so that throughout the paper each concept is understood.

#### **Trust**

Trust is when a party has the confidence and willingness to rely on another, or else the trust is viewed as limited (Moorman, Deshpande and Zaltman, 1993). As stated by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) trust is defined as the openness of a person to be exposed to the behaviour of another party, and the expectation that the other party will perform an action that is of high importance to the original party. For this research, a combination of both the above definitions will be used. This research will define trust as the willingness to be vulnerable and open to another party. For this research, trust will be measured by investigating if users of the platform are open to Facebook's collection and aggregation of their data.

#### **Privacy**

Modern privacy is defined as the ability to protect one's data across contexts, the facility to have control over exchanges of information that are occurring through the internet and in person, and the capability to control what the personal data companies are collecting about oneself is used for. (Labrecque, Markos and Darmody, 2021). Social media privacy is the concern one has about the ability to infringe on the personal data that has been shared on platforms. People feel that their privacy is protected when they have control over what information can be seen and who can see it (Cistulli and Snyder, 2022). Both definitions speak to the ability to have control over what your data is being used for, and who can access it, for this research paper the definition used will be that privacy is the ability to control who has access to an individual's data and what they can do with it. This research will discuss how Facebook collects and aggregates personal information to

target the consumer with specific advertisements, through the research it will be explored whether people believe this is an invasion of privacy or not.

### **Targeted advertising**

Summers, Smith and Reczek (2016) state that behaviourally targeted advertising is an advertising strategy that presents users with advertisements based on the actions they have performed online, their search history, purchase history and what web pages they visit frequently. Boerman, Kruikemeier and Zuiderveen Borgesius (2017) define targeted advertising as the use of monitoring and collecting people's online actions and using this to target individuals with advertising that is relevant to them. Both these definitions are aligned and for the purpose of the research, the definition is that targeted advertising is the practice of using one's online behaviour to send individually selected advertisements based on what their believed wants are. This concept ties into the research to understand the impact that targeted advertising has on users which is the purpose of the research, targeted advertisement first needs to be understood.

### **Brand image**

Brand image is a perceived concept of a business, product, or service. The brand image will affect consumer purchasing habits as customer loyalty and perception are influenced (Harun, Kassim, Mohidin, Nizam, Wong Li Ting, 2021). According to Keller (1993), brand image is the observations around a brand due to the brand association, experiences, and sentiment towards a brand that the customer has for the brand in their memory. Both of these definitions align but the Keller definition will be the one that is leaned on mostly for this research as this ties back to the theoretical foundation that will be used, as it focuses on the emotions and feelings that a customer has towards a brand based on interactions and experiences they have had with the brand. In this research, brand image will be defined as the observations that consumers have from a brand based on their association with the brand, experiences with the brand and sentiment towards the brand. This concept is strongly linked to the research as the purpose of the research is to find the effect that targeted advertising has on the brand image of Facebook in the eyes of Millennial South African Facebook users and this brand image must be defined.

## **Theoretical foundation**

This research will leverage the following two theories, Brand Image, and the Commitment Trust Theory.

For the brand image, this paper will rely on Keller's Brand Equity theory (Keller, 1993). This theory states that there are four levels of Brand Equity and that by understanding and using each level, a brand is able to build a strong brand image.

Firstly, Brand identity is the foundation of the brand's equity and relies on the initial marketing of the brand to new customers, this is the image the company is trying to show the public, this section answers the question: who is the brand?

Brand meaning describes that the user needs to understand who the brand is, are they high performing, and what it offers. It is broken into a performance section and an imagery section. Where imagery talks about the consumer being able to know that the brand's products will look and feel a certain way, with performance speaking to if the brand has a good track record of delivering what is promised. This answers the question: what is the brand?

Second to last Brand response is the feeling that the customer has for the brand, after using or buying from them. Has it lived up to the expectations that the consumer had, if so then admiration for the brand, however, if the customer is not happy this will cause them to build a negative sentiment towards the brand. This answers the question: What about the consumer?

Brand resonance is the final level of brand equity and describes that the brand has resonated with the customer. The customer has now formed a strong relationship with the brand and shares an instant connection with other customers of the brand. This answers the question: what about the brand and me?

This model has been chosen as it not only discusses the recognisability of a brand but speaks to the brand performing as the customers expect, it states that a brand also needs to win the trust and admiration of the customer in order to have a strong brand image. In the case of this research, although everyone can recognise Facebook, the research will examine the relationship between the users and the brand and understand the feelings and sentiments of the user toward the brand.

Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Commitment trust theory will also be used as this theory states that for a marketing relationship to be successful both commitment and trust are required. This theory states that for a marketing relationship between customers and brands to be effective two key attributes need to be met, the customer must trust the brand, this trust can be built by the brand doing what is promised, having shared value with the customer as well as clear and honest communication amongst other methods. The brand needs to commit to maintaining the partnership they have formed with the customer. Once both these attributes are in place, the customer will not only trust the brand and continue to buy products or use their services, but they will also feel valued by the brand which results in the brand having a loyal and long-term customer, if either of these is not present, the relationship can sour, and the brand will lose trust.

This model has been chosen by way of foundational theory for this paper as the research is looking to see if trust is lost by the use of targeted advertisements, if this is the case it can be reasoned that the brands' relationship with the customer could be negatively impacted, however, if the use of targeted advertisements does not lose trust in the user, then the brand's image is not impacted, and trust is maintained.

## **Review of literature**

After reviewing the literature, the following themes have been identified and are key to the problem statement:

### **Importance of Privacy**

Privacy in terms of social media has become a much more widely spoken about topic in recent years, with many important discussions revolving around what information is needed by organisations, and what they are doing with the information. This is due to the prevalence of social media and how much data can be captured about users. This section will review the literature relating to online privacy, the importance of privacy to the end-user and the effects of breaching privacy.

Rosenthal, Wasenden, Gronnevet and Ling (2020) state that there is a link between being literate in terms of privacy and the distrust for an organisation, as the user knows more about the importance of privacy they trust an organisation to protect them and their data less, this theme relates directly to other literature that was reviewed and was reproved, as according to Labrecque et al. (2020), that conducted a study in which they taught 96 end-users about privacy, a correlation was drawn that showed users understood more about privacy and a loss in trust was also noted in companies. Taking this one step further Martin (2020) using a quantitative study of 856 Americans discusses that privacy violations that occur in firms and businesses result in a massive distrust and unwillingness to be involved with the business going forward. They describe that the customer-facing businesses that share user data with other third party and use secondary data to be a violation of the trust that the user has given the company, this study also shows that users are less likely to work with advertising companies that make use of an ad network compared to those who do not use any third-party information or data on users.

The above literature ties in with the research problem at hand, as targeted advertisements are the use of user data to create advertisements that are specifically relevant to the individual. Although terms and conditions are accepted that allow for Facebook to do this, it is still important to note the importance of privacy and the possible impacts it can have

on users based on their beliefs and understandings. All three of the above papers are quantitative studies that use large data sets to conclude. This leaves a gap for a qualitative approach for the research to be done, as this will provide more human-centric data as each individual will be interviewed and understood, this is a very relevant gap as humans are individuals and the use of targeted interviews will add more depth to the study of this matter. Another gap that is present in the above is that the Rosenthal et al. (2020) research was cross-sectional and due to this no causal claims can be drawn. Lastly, after reviewing the research, it has been noted that none of the research has been completed in South Africa which validates the need for this research to be completed.

### **The link between trust and brand image**

In modern society, trust has become a vital aspect of marketing your company successfully and building a strong brand image. This statement can be seen as true when reviewing the literature that will be used in the research. Huang, Wang, Chen, Deng and Huang (2020) performed a study on 283 individuals who were sent a questionnaire, this questionnaire allowed for the researchers to perform aggregation and draw a correlation between the following, brand image, brand trust, repurchase intention and advocacy intention, from the research a correspondence between brand image and brand trust was found, this shows that if users trust a brand more, the brands' image will improve. This outcome is further shown by Rosenthal et al. (2020) who concluded that for companies to be successful and well-branded, they need to win the trust of their user base, this research highlighted that this is specifically important in companies that use consumer data as the main part of their business, such as Facebook.

Renee and Chao (2019) agree with this statement, the research has positioned the hypothesis that brand trust has a positive impact on brand attachment and that brand attachment has a positive effect on the purchase/use intention of the consumers; Renee and Chao (2019) research also make use of two of the same seminal authors that this research paper will include, speaking on Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Commitment Trust theory and Keller's Brand Equity model (1993). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994) as a user trusts a brand more, and as the brand commits to the user more a strong

relationship will form and the brand will grow due to this relationship, this speaks directly to the research problem that this paper will cover and is the framework for further discussions. All the above research was performed using quantitative methods, this shows a further gap for qualitative research in the field that will be addressed by this paper. It is also noted that both Huang et al., as well as Renee and Chao, discuss brands that are retail-related stores and between them, only 5 brands are investigated, this leaves a gap for research to be done on social networks as well as research in a South African context to a targeted audience.

### **The link between advertising and brand image**

Advertising plays an extremely important part in the development of the image of a brand, as mentioned by Meenaghan (1995) advertising represents the most effective source of building the identity of a brand. It has two primary functions both of which play a critical role in developing a brand, these functions are to ensure that the performance specification of a brand is presented, and to make sure that the brand seems more relatable and human-like. This sentiment is reinforced by Keller (1993) a seminal author for this paper who states that advertising is the foundation of brand identity and creating a meaningful brand. This is reinforced by Işoraité (2018) who states that through having a strong brand image which is built by relatable advertising a company gets to a point where the brand's name alone is what drives the value of the company.

According to Seyyedamiri, Karimi, Sadat Khosravi, and Ghamkhar (2021) who studied the effect that advertising has on the brand image of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs, performed this study by sending out 386 questionnaires to customers of SMEs which asked the user to related to how the customers' perceived brands based on their advertising, it was concluded in the study that smart and creative advertisements had a significant impact on the perceived brand image of the SME. The above studies were a mix of qualitative and quantitative, with the in-depth quantitative analysis used by Seyyedamiri et al., and Işoraité, a qualitative study being conducted by Meenaghan and Keller. These papers all highlight that to build a strong brand effect advertising needs to be done, this ties into the research as the paper will investigate how the advertising that

is placed on Facebook is perceived and the impact this not only has on Facebook but on the brands that are advertising on the platform. After reviewing the literature, it is found that there is a lack of modern literature on the link between advertising and brand image. This research paper will address the mentioned gap by looking into the relationship in the modern context of social media and targeted advertisements.

### **The effect of targeted advertisements**

With more personal data being captured about customers as they use websites and social media platforms, the ability to target advertisements to appeal to an individual has grown and has become a much more common practice. With this comes new ways in which individuals react to their personal information being used for advertisements. According to Summers et al. (2016), who performed a research study into how users perceive targeted advertisements, it was found that in general users react more positively to targeted advertisements that they know have been based on their online history. This was done by using advertisements that had a watermark dictating the advert was generated using targeted advertising practices, this can speak to the idea that people are not generally opposed to targeted advertisements seeing they are aware of the advertising happening.

It was also concluded that for targeted adverts to be effective they needed to be accurate and relevant, this puts a much stronger emphasis on the accuracy of the model that companies use to generate the ads. This stance is backed up by Zarouali, Poels, Ponnet and Walrave (2018) who studied adolescents between the ages of 14-16 and the impact that having advanced control over how their data is being used has on the effectiveness of targeted advertisements, this paper found that the ability to control privacy settings results in targeted advertisements being better received as the user is aware of what is going on and will be more likely to be persuaded by the advert. However on the contrary Baglione, Amin, McCullough, and Tucci (2018), in a study of 207 people, questionnaires were sent out to determine the user perceptions of the advertisements, this study found that none of the sample groups found that Facebook's targeted advertising was effective, helpful or useful and that the adverts would not lead them to make any purchases, they

also concluded that respondents have a poor view of Facebook's targeted advertising practices. Continuing this stance Torbet (2021) argues that the use of targeted advertising is immoral and can have a lasting negative impact on companies that make use of them.

The above research is very critical to this research paper as it speaks to the core on whether targeted advertisements are effective and how they are received by consumers. There are two conflicting viewpoints on targeted advertising can be effective if the consumer is aware that it is happening and the implications of it, and the other is that targeted advertisements are ineffective but also immoral and can damage a brand. Gaps in the research done are that the target audience was not narrowed down to a specific age group, resulting in broad questions that only go surface level, on top of this none of these research papers were in a South African context, this paper will address this. All the research above was quantitative this is a research topic that will benefit from qualitative research as it will then be possible to get deeper human-centric input and understanding of the issue, as this issue will differ between individuals.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **Research paradigm**

For this research, an interpretivism paradigm will be used. According du-Plooy Cilliers (2014) interpretivism is the belief that humans cannot be studied the same way that objects can in scientific research, humans are ever-changing based on environments and experiences they have individually faced, and these factors need to be considered when conducting research as the outcome will be a better understanding of human behaviour.

This paradigm will be used as the paper aligns with the view that human beings are not simple objects, humans are complex and ever-changing. It believes that to research humans, an understanding of the individuals' views, experiences and environments is needed as everyone is different. Every user reacts differently to targeted advertisements based on their preferences and experiences, the understanding of what those reactions are and why they are had is what will be investigated. This will be done to gain a better understanding of human behaviour and not to draw a direct conclusion.

From an epistemological view, this research will take the stance that something is seen as knowledge when it is relevant to those being interviewed and that the common sense of people is a critical part of knowledge (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). As an interpretivist, epistemology is subjective therefore this view has been chosen for the research at hand as the individuals that are being interviewed are a key source of information and their views will drive the findings.

The ontological position in this paper is that research is subjective, that reality is impacted by the environment and experiences of an individual and the axiological position is that individuals are unique and that their uniqueness is valued (du Plooy-Cilliers 2014). These views have been chosen as each individual's interpretation of how targeted advertisements are perceived will differ based on their values and experiences.

## **Research Design**

For this research, a qualitative descriptive approach will be used, open-ended semi-structured interviews will be completed with the target population, and it will follow a cross-sectional design. The reasoning will be conducted in an inductive approach.

The reason that a qualitative approach will be used in this research is that each individual's opinions, interactions, and feelings towards targeted advertisements are different and those need to be valued and analysed in the context of the individuals, and conducting qualitative research allows for the individuals to drive the findings of the research. This aligns with the epistemological stance that is taken in this research.

This research will follow a descriptive approach as this research aims to describe the feelings of the participants of the study towards the use of targeted advertisements by Facebook, as well as draw human insights from this research.

Open-ended semi-structured interviews will allow the researcher to dig deeper into the topics that are important to the individual being interviewed rather than being forced to always follow the script, this will allow for deeper human insights to be drawn.

The use of a cross-sectional research design allows for the findings to be at this point in time, this is because not only is this research limited by time, but also with how technology is changing at such a fast pace, it is hard to ensure that the way targeted advertisements are handled on Facebook will remain constant therefore research is to be conducted with how it is at this moment.

Lastly, an inductive approach will be used as this research values human insights, and with each small insight gained during the interviews, which is specific to each participant, a broader more general conclusion will be drawn to meet the research objective of determining how targeted advertisements of Facebook impacts the brand image of Facebook.

## **Population**

The target population and unit of analysis was Millennial South African Facebook users that reside in Johannesburg, this was also the accessible population. Factors such as gender, race or standard of living are not important factors to this research as Facebook is widely used therefore all races, genders and standards of living were allowed to participate in the research.

Due to experience with the internet and social media, the Millennial age range was chosen (Oliveira, Ramiro, Martins & Branco, 2017), as life experience affects individuals' views, the population has been limited to Millennials in South Africa to ensure participants that share similar living locations and experiences were considered together so that deep human insights could be gained about the population. If the population was not narrowed, it would be difficult to draw the same level of insights as the common ground between each participant's life experiences would be greatly different.

## **Sampling**

A sampling of the accessible population was conducted using a non-probability combination of purposive and convenience sampling methods where participants who were accessible to the researcher through WhatsApp, and that met the criteria of being daily Facebook users without an ad blocker were included in this research. The interviews were thorough and time-consuming therefore a sample size of 4 individuals was used.

The purposive sampling method was the most appropriate method for this research as the sample is a selection of participants who are very frequent Facebook users and do not use an ad-blocker, this is because if the individuals either do not use Facebook enough or use an ad-blocker, insights gained from them would not have been useful to the study as they are not experiencing the topic this study is based on enough.

Convenience sampling was used in order to counter a limitation of time, given this research has a finite time that it needs to be completed, using convenience sampling

allowed for the interviews and data collection to be fast-tracked to ensure that the research deadline is met.

Recruitment was completed by reaching out to individuals that fit the sampling criteria through WhatsApp and asking if the individual would be available to participate in this research.

### **Data-collection Method**

The data collection method used was open semi-structured in-person interviews. This collection method of interviews was chosen as it aligned with not only the qualitative approach but also the interpretivism paradigm that this research follows. Interviews allowed for an in-depth personal understanding of the participant's feelings towards the targeted advertisements that are present on Facebook allowing for human-centric insights to be collected, understood, and analysed.

The key theories for this research are Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Commitment Trust Theory, as well as Keller's Brand Equity model (1993). Due to this, the questions asked in the interview related directly to aspects of the theories, focusing on the trust in Facebook after their use of targeted advertisements, as well as having at least one question that related to each level of the brand equity model (See Annexure A). By doing so key themes such as brand image, and trust are covered in the interviews.

The semi-structured interviews allowed for each interview to go in-depth to understand the individual's feelings as each participant had different reasoning as to why they feel the way they do about targeted advertisements. These interviews were pre-tested and reviewed, and after recommended changes were completed the interview process started.

To schedule the interviews, the 4 participants in the sample were contacted through WhatsApp to first confirm that the participants indeed met the population restrictions of

age, living location, and Facebook usage and that they do not use an ad-blocker, and then to schedule dates for the interviews.

The interviews helped the researcher gain deep human-centric insight from the participants as to how the targeted advertisements present on Facebook affect them, and how it impacts their perceived brand image of Facebook.

Each interview was scheduled for a 30-minute time slot to allow for enough time to gain the necessary understanding from the individual and get through each question that is needed. Three of the interviews were completed in person and over a zoom video call for one of the interviews. Being able to read body language and facial cues was important to the research as these are insights into the emotions that the participant held to the topic being discussed, and for that reason, all interviews were at least completed through a video call, however, in-person interviews would be better.

The interview that was completed over Zoom differed from the others as the individual was unable to meet in person due to travel concerns. Since they still met the population criteria and were open to participating a Zoom interview was conducted to ensure that their feedback was not lost, as this was a video call, body language and facial cues could still be monitored.

Each interview was recorded using the Voice Memos app to record in-person interviews and Zoom's inbuilt recording functionality was used for the fourth interview. This allowed for the interviews to be reviewed and transcribed.

After the individual signed the consent document, the interviews started with a brief introduction to the topic, ensuring that the participant was aware of what targeted advertisements are and where they are present on Facebook. Introductory questions were asked, followed by in-depth questions that are specific to the research and the answers to these questions will be what drives the insight that is found.

These interviews all followed the same script, introductions, and questions for all participants. Since all individuals were accustomed to Facebook, targeted

advertisements, and technology, none of the questions in the interview had to be explained, and all the research participants understood the questions.

Two of the interviews conducted were in the participant's home, and the other two were in a neutral venue, this could have impacted the results as being interviewed at home allows the participant to feel safe and provide more insight, however, no distinct difference in the quality of data was noted by the researcher.

### **Data Analysis Method**

Each question in the interview tied back to one of the key themes within the research, these being: brand image, the importance of privacy, the link between trust and brand image, the link between advertising and brand image, and the effect of targeted advertisements. Ensuring that the questions related to one of the themes, the coding was then done against those core categories allowing the answers to the questions to be coded under those categories, which allowed for key findings and insights to be grouped into the themes they related to.

After the interviews were completed and transcribed, initial reading of the transcripts was done to understand each interview. Following the initial reading, the transcripts were manually colour-coded according to similar concepts to help group feelings and thoughts together (See Annexure C). The data was analysed using an open coding system where the content of the interview was analysed and broken up into common codes present and tied back to the core categories, this allowed for completely new findings and understanding to be drawn without limiting the themes present in the interviews. After that, those codes then went through Axial coding which allowed for connections to be drawn between the codes found during the open coding step, this was done to allow for general conclusions to be drawn around the feelings of the participants as a whole and to identify common threads between codes. This research was done in an inductive approach as given the specific details of each interview general themes and threads will be drawn to provide insight on the research topic.

## **Findings**

### **Presentation of findings**

When respondents were asked about Facebook's brand image most respondents replied stating that although Facebook is a place for connections to be made and kept, it was generally felt that recently the service is better suited for an older generation, and the service focus has been placed on news and information rather than relationships.

When asked about how trust impacts their support of a brand, all respondents stated that they would not support a brand that they did not trust.

When respondents were asked about the practice of targeted advertising, most respondents did not find it helpful, stating that they felt it was an invasion of privacy and they would not give any of the adverts much attention. One respondent however did say that they did not mind as long as the advertisement was for an interest of theirs. The majority of respondents also raised legal and ethical concerns about the practice.

When asked about how targeted advertisements have affected their view of Facebook's brand image respondents stated that in general the practice has put them off from supporting the brand and that they feel that Facebook is being greedy in their use of the practice.

### **Interpretation of findings**

After analysing the data four key themes were found which would be further interpreted and understood in order to help answer the research question proposed by this research and meet the objectives, these themes were: Facebook's Brand Image, privacy, trust and targeted advertising.

#### **Facebooks Brand Image**

The first theme that was discussed by the participant was that of Facebook's brand image, the questions in the research helped to determine what the individuals felt about the brand

and how the practice of targeted advertisements affects their opinion. Most of the participants shared a general indifference toward Facebook as a brand, none of the participants were feeling excited when discussing the brand and none truly hated the brand. One participant stated that *"News that may or may not be questionable, updates on friends and memes"* this shows that to them Facebook is nothing more than a news platform that they do not trust and not much more, when saying this the participant also had a tone that showed they were not interested in the brand. This sentiment was carried through all the responses, with the only positive thing that people mentioned about Facebook's brand being that it helps them stay connected.

Participants also generally were not impressed with the performance of Facebook, with two of the participants stating that the brand is no longer for the youth that it was originally used by, with one participant saying that Facebook is, *"A platform for older people"*. Another participant mentioned that they *"think Facebook has underperformed as of late, I think they started off with quite a lot of noise and positive energy, but I think they've lost the younger market and that's affecting their performance"*. These two speak to the larger generally feeling amongst the participants that Facebook is not a high-performing brand anymore.

Lastly, when individuals were asked what they pictured when thinking about Facebook, one participant mentioned that they picture adverts, stating, *"... and then also a lot of adverts basically."* this shows how the advertising practices of Facebook have influenced the brand so much that people often can't even picture Facebook without thinking of advertisements.

When using Kellers' Brand Equity Prism (1993) on the above findings it could conclude that due to Facebook having negative sentiment across the brand's meaning, imagery, and performance due to their use of targeted advertisements, their brand's equity would also be negatively impacted. The findings in the research support that all participants showed negative sentiments towards Facebook as a brand due to their targeted advertising.

## **Privacy**

The second theme that was identified is privacy, participants viewed their privacy as important but felt that their data was not used ethically, the questions relating to this section brought about the most emotional responses from the participants, with one participant strongly stating how creepy their interactions with Facebook are when they get targeted advertising for things they discussed but never search, stating that it felt as if *“big brother is watching you”*. Another participant also mentioned that this invasion of privacy is a fear of theirs, *“I always fear that they are always checking my activity on the internet, and I don’t feel secure”*, this shows just how much privacy meant to the participants as they all were extremely vocal about how important privacy is to them.

A sub-theme that was found in this section is the legality of data privacy, with two of the participants mentioning how there has been a massive push in the world for the protection of personal information, and both mentioned they felt as if Facebook was not helping this drive, referencing the recent legal cases that occurred in the United States of America.

In this research, privacy is defined as the ability to control who has access to an individual's data and what they can do with it. Research done by Martin (2020) states that when a company violates the privacy of their consumers, this causes mass distrust in its consumer base, and consumers would be less likely to be involved with the company going forwards, these sentiments were echoed by the research participants as all participants firstly valued their privacy, and personal data and none of the participants felt that what Facebook was doing with their data was ethical. On top of this, they all stated that Facebook's use of their personal data in targeted advertisements has impacted their relationship with the brand negatively.

## **Trust**

The second to last theme that was identified was the importance of trust and how that impacts the brand image in the eyes of the participants. The responses to this were unanimous with every participant stating that their trust in a brand directly impacts their idea of the brand. This question also resulted in two very emotional answers, which

showed that trust was exceptionally important to at least two of the participants with one mentioning, *“I think in this day and age I need to know that my values are supported by the brand”* showing that they want to see their values in a brand so that they can relate and support the brand, and the other participant stating that, *“if a brand burnt my trust through the leaking of email addresses or not adhering to a return policy I generally won’t support said brand again”*.

One of the key theoretical foundations that are being used to evaluate this research is the commitment trust theory, by Morgan and Hunt (1994). This theory states that for a relationship between a brand and a customer to be successful both trust and commitment need to be present. From the research performed participants all agreed with this statement saying that they would not support a brand that they cannot trust and some stated that it is even more important when it comes to Facebook due to the amount of data the company has on their customers. Huang, Wang, Chen, Deng and Huang's (2020) study also draws the same conclusion finding that there is a direct correlation between the trust that a brand has and the image that the brand holds.

### **Targeted advertising**

The final theme that was uncovered was the theme of targeted advertising, within this theme there were quite a few sub-themes that were discussed, one of the sub-themes was that targeted advertisements left the majority of the participants feeling uneasy or that they were being watched with one participant stating that targeted advertising was, *“creepily accurate and that actually puts me off it”*, this is a general emotion that is carried through the majority of the respondent's answers regarding this theme, with them feeling violated by the practice and that it has put them off the brand, this could also be seen in the demeanor of the participants when asked about targeted advertisements, the majority clearly showed that they were annoyed and agitated by the concept. Only one participant in the questionnaire felt that they did not mind the practice as long as the advertisements that were placed on their timeline were useful and something that they would actually use, this was the only outlier, and the participant did not feel strongly about this stance.

The next sub-theme that was discovered was that half of the participants mentioned that they felt their timelines were filled with advertisements and did not contain the actual information that they wanted, stating that, *"I can't scroll for more than two pages without getting an ad"*, in a disapproving tone. When these participants discussed this, they were clearly annoyed and shocked at how prevalent advertisements have become on their timelines. The other participants did not have conflicting views they just did not bring up the point.

Participants also mentioned how although the advertisements were present, they felt that they would never be effective, with one participant stating, *"No, I think that thing appearing on my timeline that no one is really vouching for doesn't really impact my buying decisions"* and another saying they never go to Facebook to find adverts. This shows that the practice is not effective and can do more damage to the brand than good in the eyes of the participants. Only one participant felt that targeted advertising could be effective, and this would only be the case if the advert is for a brand they were already interested in.

The finding showed that most participants did not find targeted advertisements to be effective and negatively impacted their interactions with Facebook is the same outcome as that was found by Baglione, Amin, McCullough, and Tucci (2018), who found that not only were targeted advertisements not effective at persuading their sample group but also that the use of targeted advertisements resulting in a poor view of the brand using them. This is backed up by the research performed by Torbet (2021) which states that the use of targeted advertisements is immoral and can have a lasting negative impact on companies. However, these findings do contradict the findings of Summers, Smith and Reczek (2016), which found that as long as the advertisements were relevant the majority of customers found them useful and reacted positively to them.

## **Research Questions and Objectives Addressed**

The purpose of this research was to understand the impact that Facebook's use of targeted advertisements has on the perceived brand image of Facebook in the eyes of millennial South Africans.

## **Research Questions**

### **Primary Question**

How does targeted advertising impact Facebook's brand image perceived by Millennials?

This study found that amongst all the participants there was a general negative sentiment toward Facebook's use of targeted advertisements. The study found that due to the presence of targeted advertisements, consumers of the brand felt that their data was not protected and felt that their privacy was invaded, resulting in a poorly perceived brand image.

It was also found that only one of the participants didn't mind receiving targeted advertisements as long as they were relevant to their wants and needs and that they were not invasive however, even this participant would prefer targeted advertisements not being present at all.

### **Secondary Questions**

What drives millennials' perceived brand image of Facebook?

How does target advertising influence Millennials' consumer experience?

Do millennials have privacy concerns related to Facebook's targeted advertising?

This research found that the main driving factor of Millennials' perceived brand image of Facebook was their trust in the brand, with all participants stating they would not support a brand they could not trust and that did not represent their values. It was also found that second to this the next factor influencing the brand image of Facebook was the content

that was present on participants' timelines, it was felt that the presence of advertisements has become overwhelming on the platform and that they are used too often, resulting in a poor experience and negative sentiment.

It was further found that consumers of Facebook found that their experience on the platform has been negatively influenced by the presence of targeted advertisements, many participants were creeped out by the accuracy of the advertisements and others were annoyed at how frequently advertisements were present on their timelines.

Lastly, all participants had a very strong reaction to the idea of their privacy being compromised by Facebook through the use of targeted advertisements, all individuals felt that the practice was not ethical, and all participants valued their privacy.

## **Conclusion**

### **Rigour and Trustworthiness**

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), to ensure trustworthiness and rigour in qualitative research four key aspects need to be achieved, these are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This research will ensure each of these is achieved by completing the following.

Credibility will be achieved as the researcher will spend prolonged time with the participants as the research will be conducted using in-person interviews, this will allow for any un-trustworthy sources to be handled appropriately. On Top of this, after coding is completed on each of the transcripts, the researcher will go back to the participant to ensure that any conclusions that have been drawn align with their true feelings.

Transferability will be achieved by ensuring that descriptions of the themes and outcomes of the interviews are in-depth and contains all the information that was available during the interviews, this allows for other researchers to decide accurately if the findings of this paper are truly transferable as they have all the details required.

To ensure dependability the researcher will code the transcripts, have a break, and then recode them again at a later stage to ensure that external factors did not impact how the coding was performed.

Confirmability will be achieved by keeping an audit trail of how data was captured, analysed, and interpreted for this research, this allows for readers of the research to gain insight into how the findings were drawn. On top of this, a section in the paper will include a detailed description of how the researched bias may have impacted the study.

By completing the above, this research can be seen as trustworthy as the necessary steps have been put in place to ensure that the study is conducted with rigour.

### **Implications of the findings for Facebook**

Given that the research showed all participants perceived brand image of Facebook was negatively impacted by their use of targeted advertisements, and that participants were creeped out, overwhelmed, and annoyed by their presence Facebook will be able to make a more informed and impactful decision regarding their targeted advertising practices.

It was found that if the presence of the targeted advertisements was less and if they were more accurate and if the products and pages being advertised were more useful to the consumers' needs and wants that the negative sentiment being generated might not be as bad for the brand as the consumer would not only find value from advertisements and they would not be reminded of the privacy invasion as often.

It was also found that if the platform had the option to opt out of receiving targeted advertisements that the majority of the participants would do so, and they would respect the brand for giving them this option.

The above findings can provide Facebook with a better way of handling targeted advertisements to not lose the trust of their consumers and negatively impact their brand image.

### **Final conclusion**

This researched aimed to generate a deeper human insight on how the use of targeted advertisements impacts a brands image in the eyes of millennial South African Facebooks users.

After completing this research, it has been shown based on the results of the findings that most individuals do not support the practice of targeted advertising and that it has a negative impact on their image of Facebook.

This is due to how individuals value their privacy and have found that the use of their personal and browsing data to be an invasion of their privacy, and that the practice comes across as creepy and was unsettling for many of the users. It was also found that the targeted population within this research based their brand image of brands on if they can trust the brand, and if the brand shares the same values that they do.

Based on these findings Facebook can see that this practice is not a good choice for their brand, and that most people in this research were not more likely to click on an advert that was targeted to them.

For this reason, it can be concluded that for Facebook to grow a stronger brand image within millennial South Africans, the brand should step away from this practice, by allowing it to be optional as this will earn the users trust and show that the brand values their privacy and values.

## **Contribution, Ethical Consideration and Limitation**

### **Anticipated Contribution**

Currently, research that is related to the topic being discussed is mostly quantitative, a qualitative approach will provide greater human insights as to how targeted advertisements impact users' perceived brand image of Facebook. These insights will be valuable to other platforms that also make use of targeted advertisements. Allowing brands like Facebook to tune their use of the practice to ensure the best outcome for the brand and the customer. This research is also looking at this topic in a South African context, this could allow for geographical insights to be compared if further studies are conducted researching this topic, allowing for companies to use different approaches depending on what country you are accessing their platform from.

This research will also add to the pool of knowledge regarding the brand image of companies and how actions and decisions impact them. Allowing for more substantiated decisions to be made by companies allowing them to take into consideration the outcome of this research when making decisions that involve targeted advertising.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The following ethical considerations will be discussed below and followed throughout the completion of this research.

#### **i) Informed consent**

The participants will be informed of the purpose, nature, data collection methods and extent of the research prior to the interview. Consent will be obtained in writing on the document that can be found below in Annexure D.

#### **ii) Honesty and trust**

To ensure that the research will be completed in a way that can be trusted the researcher will follow ethical guidelines and the outcomes of the interviews will not be altered or influenced in any way by the researcher.

#### **iii) Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity**

The confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be kept through the removal of any identifying characteristics. The participants' names will not be used for any other purposes, nor will information be shared that reveals their identity in any way. Due to this research being conducted using in-person interviews, the researcher will meet the individuals taking part in the study, for this reason, it is important to ensure their identities are kept anonymous.

#### **iv) Voluntary participation**

Participants will be informed that the research is for academic purposes and their participation in it will be voluntary. No one will be forced to participate in the research study.

#### **Research Limitations**

The limitation of time is affecting this research as only a limited number of interviews will be able to be carried out before the research is due, this impacts the thoroughness and completeness of the research as with more participants deep links could have been made and greater more accurate human-insights could have been drawn.

Due to the limited amount of interviews, the sample size of the research is impacted, this has been considered by narrowing the scope of the research to only Millennials living in South Africa, although compensations for this limitation will be put in place, being able to interview wider populations and compare outcomes and insights gained would have provided for more human understandings.

Due to there currently not being much qualitative research that has been conducted on the relationship between targeted advertisements on Facebook and how it has impacted the user's perceived brand image of the brand, it will not be possible to correlate the findings of this research directly with that of another research as most of the previous research done on this topic was quantitative.

Without being able to ensure that all conditions are the same for each participant being interviewed, it is possible that their responses to the questions asked can be influenced by external factors and environments that are not related to their true feelings about the topic.

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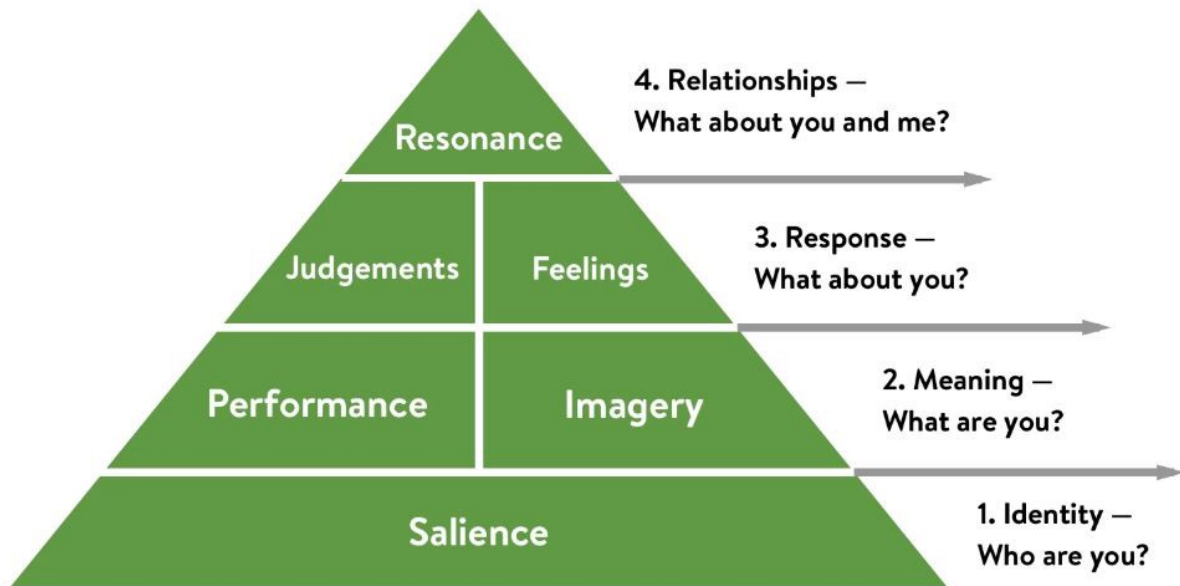
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## Annexures

### Annexure A: Brand equity model



## **Annexure B: Interview Questions**

Thank you for taking part in this interview, in the interview I will be asking questions that relate to the impact that brand trust and privacy concerns have on a brand's image. In particular, we will discuss Facebook's use and aggregation of browser and personal data for targeted advertising, and how that impacts your view of the brand.

- 1) What year were you born?
- 2) How often do you use Facebook?
  - Do you use Facebook without an ad-blocker?
- 3) What does Facebook mean to you?
  - a) Does trust in a brand influence your idea of the brand?
- 4) What do you think of Facebook's performance?
- 5) When you think of Facebook what do you picture?
- 6) When a targeted advertisement appears on your timeline, what are your initial feelings?
  - Do you find the advertising to be effective?
- 7) Do you ever receive targeted advertisements for something that you have recently googled or searched on the web?
  - If so, what are your thoughts on that?
- 8) Does receiving targeted advertisements change your feelings toward Facebook?
  - If so, in what way?
- 9) Are you aware that Facebook uses your browsing and personal data to target advertisements toward you?
  - Do you feel that your data is being used ethically by Facebook?
  - If you had an option to opt-out, would you and why?

How has Facebook's use of targeted advertising affected your relationship with the

## Annexure C: Coding Sheet

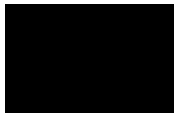
| Themes           | Subthemes                                                                                        | Definitions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Examples from transcripts                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Facebook's image | <p>Older generation</p> <p>Connecting with people</p> <p>News and information</p> <p>Privacy</p> | <p>It is believed that Facebooks brand image no longer appeals with the millennial generation.</p> <p>Facebooks core brand image is still one that allows for people to connect.</p> <p>Facebook brand recently has been tied to being a news and information hub</p> | <p>"Facebook means to me it's one of the original forms of communication so it's good to keep track of family members and friends. it's obviously also good to just keep track of brands you follow and see what products they are releasing and everything."</p> <p>"A platform to stalk some people"</p> <p>"A platform for older people but also a place to see what is happening in people's lives"</p> <p>"News that may or may not be questionable"</p> <p>"I think they've lost the younger market and that's effecting their performance"</p> <p>"Facebook means connecting with friends, family and getting more information on what's happening areas of interest like sport or some schools"</p> |
| Privacy          | <p>Legality of use of data</p> <p>Fear of personal data compromised</p>                          | <p>In the eyes of the law privacy has gained more and more importance</p> <p>Individuals have a fear of their personal data being compromised is very common</p>                                                                                                      | <p>"... given all the laws that have been put in place there's clearly a big push for data privacy... I don't feel that they are ethically using my data. "</p> <p>"personal information for me as an individual may have been compromised here and there by selling data to retailers. So, no I don't trust them very much."</p> <p>"I don't want to see it I immediately delete it and go to my privacy settings"</p> <p>"Its one of those things that I always fear that they are always checking my activity"</p>                                                                                                                                                                                       |

|                         |                                                               |                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                         |                                                               |                                                                                                                                  | <p>on the internet, and I don't feel secure and it's important to me to have that privacy."</p> <p>"I don't feel that its guaranteed that my information is very secure"</p> <p>"I don't like it I think that there have been a lot of cases that have come out, the biggest was I think in the US, with the US elections information was being sold to Facebook"</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Trust                   | Trust directly impacts image of the brand                     | If a brand loses the trust of their customers their brand image will become a negative image                                     | <p>"Researcher: Does trust in a brand influence your idea of the brand?"</p> <p>Interviewee: Yes, definitely "</p> <p>"if a brand burnt my trust through leaking of email addresses or not adhering to a return policy I generally won't support said brand again"</p> <p>"Does trust in a brand influence your idea of the brand?"</p> <p>Participant B: Yes, especially with Facebook"</p> <p>"It definitely does [trust], I think in this day and age I need to know that my values are supported by the brand and if I'm satisfied with the product offering it solves my problems essentially"</p> |
| Targeted advertisements | <p>Uneasy feeling and impact on trust</p> <p>Overwhelming</p> | <p>Targeted advertising has a way of leaving individuals feeling violated or creeped out</p> <p>With too many advertisements</p> | <p>"if it's once in a while I'm perfectly happy but if it's constantly to the point where `I can't see posts from friends or family and all I am seeing are adverts, it gets annoying "</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

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|  | <p>Targeted advertisements are not effective</p> <p>Targeted advertisements are not ethical</p> <p>Effective with brands that customer already enjoys</p> <p>Money focused</p> | <p>customers tend to feel overwhelmed and annoyed</p> <p>Individuals feel that targeted advertisements have not matured yet and are ineffective at selling products, both self-research and suggestions from friends are better methods of advertising.</p> <p>Individuals feel that the use of their browsing data for targeted advertisements is not an ethical practice</p> <p>It is felt that if the individual already is interested in the brand that the advertising would then be effective</p> | <p>“Researcher: Do you find advertisements you're getting to be effective?<br/>Interviewee A: Yes they are effective with brands I enjoy because then I am interested in clicking the link and seeing what the brand is about and what the product is about.”</p> <p>“I never go on Facebook for the targeted ads, it should be something I search for.”</p> <p>“It feels like a violation of my information”</p> <p>“Researcher: Does receiving targeted advertisements change your feelings towards Facebook?<br/>it changed my trust in them”</p> <p>“Researcher: Do you feel that your data is being used ethically by Facebook?<br/>Participant B: No “</p> <p>“: No, I think that thing appearing on my timeline that no one is really vouching for doesn't really impact my buying decisions”</p> <p>“very much so that I have a love and hate relationship with it “</p> <p>“creepily accurate and that actually puts me off it“</p> <p>“In general, I'm more put off because of the suggestions, I feel like they know too much”</p> |
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|  |  |  | <p>“more and more frequently I am being put off because now I can’t scroll for more than two pages without getting an ad”</p> <p>“No in the realistic sense because obviously targeted adverts but honestly if they not advertising extreme or bad content then it's not a bad thing. “</p> <p>“more money hungry, more focused on helping out brands more than its everyday consumer. “</p> |
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## Annexure D: Consent forms



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