



An exploration of sustainable factors that impact brand loyalty for South African Millennials who consume skincare products.

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I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication 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

Millennials, according to Heo and Muralidharan (2019), are the most environmentally conscious generation, a generation that not only plays a critical role in the push toward a greener future, but also continues to be the most willing to pay a premium for sustainable products. In contrast, Azami et al. (2018) claim that while Millennial consumers demonstrate environmental care, this does not always translate into purchases or brand loyalty. Although studies show that sustainability motivates purchases, there is limited evidence that sustainable practices influence Millennials' purchasing behaviour and brand loyalty in South Africa (Azami et al., 2018).

In addition, due to the contradicting notions surrounding Millennials' sustainable consumption patterns and purchasing behaviour, there is a significant need for additional in-depth research (Azami et al., 2018). With that in mind, the study's purpose was to gain a more detailed picture of the sustainable factors that can affect or influence brand loyalty among South African Millennials who consume skincare products. The approach taken was a qualitative method, whereby data was collected through in-depth interviews. The study found the factors which influence a Millennials brand loyalty towards a sustainable skincare brand to be; price, transparency of ingredients, information and education, and social influence. Furthermore, the study indicated that Millennials could, in fact, become loyal to a sustainable skincare brand.

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Research Title

An exploration of sustainable factors that impact brand loyalty for South African Millennials who consume skincare products.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextualisation

As society has become more aware of social concerns in the last several decades, environmental protection has become a more significant topic. Environmental issues, including air pollution and deforestation, have become major concerns for consumers. As a result, many consumers have begun to adopt more environmentally friendly habits (Nielsen, 2015). One of these consumer groups is Millennials. Millennials are believed to be among those who buy sustainable products and are seen as a generation with mighty spending power (Heo & Muralidharan, 2019). Although studies show that sustainability can be a driver for purchasing when it comes to Millennials, there is still limited evidence that suggests that sustainable practices can impact Millennials' brand loyalty in South Africa (Azami, Bathmanathan & Rajadurai, 2018).

Owing to those mentioned above, there is a great need for further, more in-depth research to be done due to opposing ideas around Millennials' sustainable consumption patterns and purchasing behaviour (Azami et al., 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to make use of an interpretivist paradigm to gain valuable insight into the sustainable factors that can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African Millennial consumers who purchase skincare products. This will be done through qualitative research, whereby a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews will take place (Maree, 2020).

1.2 Rationale

The Millennial generation is described as those born between 1980 and 2000 (Stats SA, 2018) and is a generation that has a favourable attitude towards sustainability (Heo & Muralidharan, 2019). However, when it comes to sustainable consumerism, there is a disconnect between how Millennials think and act. (Azami et al., 2018). This is supported by Nielsen (2015), who claims that Millennials are a key target market for moving towards a more sustainable future. In direct contrast to the aforementioned, Chen and Deng (2016) argue that while many worldwide customers may identify as sustainable brand loyalists

when presented with a moral option, they will nonetheless pick an alternative brand or switch brands based on convenience and price.

Due to contrasting ideologies centred around Millennials' sustainable consumption habits and purchasing behaviour, there is a great need for additional, more in-depth studies. More so, prior research in South Africa has focused solely on measuring consumer awareness, attitudes, habits, and understanding of sustainable products, but how these sustainable factors can influence customers' desire, buying behaviour, and loyalty in a developing country like South Africa has yet to be sufficiently studied (Muntaha & Venter, 2014). In addition, there is a need for the research to focus specifically on sustainable practices and the extent to which they influence Millennials' purchasing behaviour and, ultimately, their loyalty (Azami et al., 2018). While in doing so, assisting South Africa skincare brands and communication agencies in gaining insight into what sustainable factors can impact brand loyalty behaviours in Millennials to improve their commercial positioning.

1.3 Problem statement

Heo and Muralidharan (2019) describe Millennials as the most sustainably-minded generation, a generation that not only plays a vital role in the movement towards a greener future but one that continues to be most willing to pay extra for sustainable offerings. In contrast to the aforementioned, Azami et al. (2018) argue that while consumers express their concern towards the environment, this does not necessarily translate into purchases or brand loyalty. Although studies point to sustainability incentivising a purchase, there is much contradiction in this scrutiny, with little evidence of whether or not sustainable practices influence Millennials' buying behaviour and brand loyalty within South Africa (Azami et al., 2018).

1.4 Purpose statement

The purpose of this study is to make use of an interpretivist paradigm to gain valuable insight into the sustainable factors that can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African millennial consumers.

1.5 Research Goal and Question

The goal of the research is to determine what sustainable factors can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African Millennial skincare consumers.

1.5.1 Sub-questions:

- What are Millennials attitudes towards sustainable skincare products?
- Do Millennials who value sustainability in skincare products remain loyal to a brand, or do they product switch?
- Which factors are considered sustainability influencers in brand loyalty?

1.5.2 Objectives:

- To determine consumer attitudes towards sustainable skincare products.
- To determine the role sustainability plays in brand image.
- To determine what sustainable measures are considered adequate or qualify as sustainable practices in skincare products.
- To investigate the possible effect of sustainability in skincare products on brand loyalty.

2. THE LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

Focusing specifically on both brand loyalty and the consumer mindset, two key theories and frameworks have been identified that specifically relate to these aforementioned elements. These theories are: The Adoption of Innovations Model, which is constituted as one of the first theories in consumer behaviour (Hirschman, 1989) and Keller's Brand Equity Model.

2.1.1 The Adoption of Innovations Model

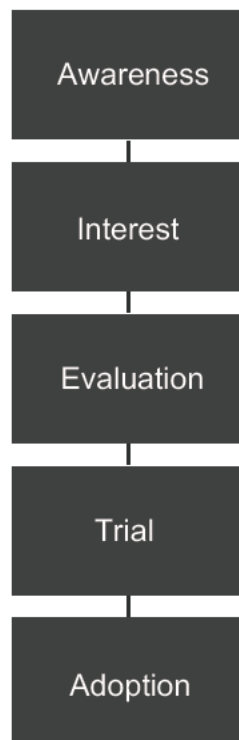


Figure 1: *The Adoption of Innovations Model (Hirschman, 1989).*

The figure above is a graphical representation of the Adoption of Innovations Model spurred on by the seminal work of Rogers (1962). This model address five stages of consumer behaviour, which are as follows:

- **Awareness:** At this stage, the consumer becomes aware; this means that the consumer learns of the existence of the innovation (product or service). Even though the consumer is at the awareness stage, they still lack the necessary and relevant information required in order to make an informed decision regarding the innovation.
- **Interest:** Once the consumer is aware, they develop an interest and seek to find out more information regarding the innovation.
- **Evaluation:** Based on the required information, the consumer then considers the innovation and decides whether or not to try it.

- **Trial:** Based on the evaluation of the innovation, the consumer decides to make use of the innovation to determine whether or not it meets their needs and expectations.
- **Adoption:** From testing out the innovation, the consumer makes an elective decision to continuously make use of the innovation (Hirschman, 1989).

In retrospect to the above model, it becomes clear that the Innovation Adoption Model highlights a process in which the consumer becomes aware of an existing innovation on the market, whether it be a product or service. The consumer then moves through the sequence, by seeking further information regarding the innovation. Once they have received all of the necessary information, they then purchase it, try it and then elect to adopt the innovation on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, the consumer not only continues to invest, but throughout this recurring stage becomes an advocate for that innovation (Hirschman, 1989). In relation to the study, it is crucial to understand the process in which a Millennial consumer becomes aware of a product (in this case – skincare), all the way to the last stage of becoming a loyal Millennial consumer. Understanding the process of Millennial consumer behaviour is conducive to ultimately determining whether or not sustainable factors can influence brand loyalty.

2.1.2 Keller's Brand Equity Model

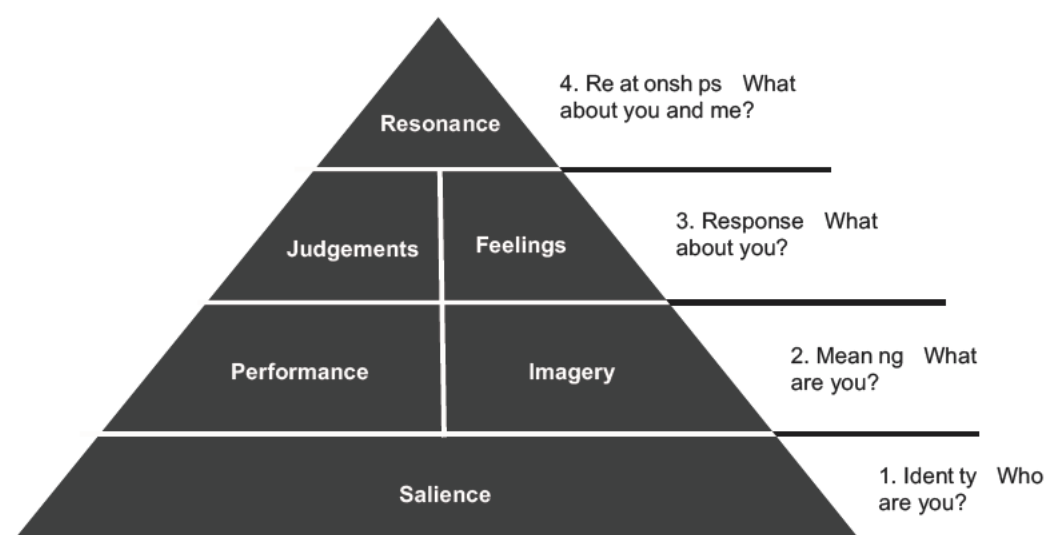


Figure 2: Keller's Brand Equity Model (Hawker, 2019).

The figure above pays reference to Keller's Brand Equity Model, also known as the Customer-Based Brand Equity Model (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). This model is essentially a

pyramid highlighting six key elements pivotal in creating a solid and successful brand (Hawker, 2019). Hawker (2019) states that to create a strong brand, a brand needs to provide value, leading to brand equity. Farjam and Hongyi (2015) support this by saying that a brand needs to elicit positive thoughts, feelings, and perceptions to establish brand equity.

Keller's model highlights six key elements that play a vital role in the creation of brand equity, namely: brand salience, brand performance, brand imagery, brand feelings, brand judgments, and brand resonance (Hawker, 2019). These six elements fall within four stages of the pyramid (starting from the base to top); these stages are identity, meaning, response and relationships.

The first stage of the pyramid is brand awareness, which pertains to how the brand may be perceived by potential consumers and their ability to recall or recognise a brand. This stage, therefore, relates to brand identity and the need to create a successful association of a brand's unique characteristics in the minds of the consumer. In order to achieve this, brand salience must exist (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015).

The second stage, as discussed by Farjam and Hongyi (2015), is brand meaning, which is characterised by either brand performance (functional) or brand image related (abstract) associations. Brand performance refers to whether or not the product or service offered satisfies the needs of the consumer. In contrast, brand imagery signifies a brand social currency —and the overall appearance of a brand. Adding to the aforementioned, brand imagery is also determined by the value of messaging in the consumer's eyes (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015).

The third stage of Keller's model is response, which refers to the overall opinions and evaluations of a brand based on consumer judgements and feelings. Judgements are based on assumptions made through observation; these include; the overall quality, credibility, superiority and consideration of a brand (Hawker, 2019). Whereas feelings include the consumer's emotional responses and reactions to a brand. Feelings are categorised into six types: warmth, excitement, fun, security, self-respect and social approval (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015).

The final stage in the pyramid is brand relationships, which is where a brand's response is converted into a strong, long-lasting relationship between the consumer and the brand. This is a pinnacle stage of the pyramid, and more often than not, the most challenging stage for a brand to reach (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). However, despite this stage being challenging, it is vital to the success of a brand. At this stage, the consumer can resonate so well with a brand that they continue to purchase and, in turn, become a brand loyal advocate (Hawker, 2019). Thus, at this stage, brands can connect deeply with consumers and instil loyalty while essentially creating a high level of brand equity (Van De Voorde, 2016).

Keller's pyramid highlights an obvious sequence, where it is evident that unless brand identity is created, responses cannot occur. Without meaning, a relationship between the brand and consumer cannot be developed. While furthermore, a relationship cannot transpire without eliciting appropriate and positive responses (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). The above theory is relevant to the research as the higher a brand's equity, the more likely they are to attract potential consumers, and convert them into brand loyal advocates (Ali & Muqadas, 2015).

Both frameworks, The Adoption of Innovations Model and Keller's Brand Equity Model, serve as the theoretical grounding of the study. More so, they serve as a blueprint for the entire study. Furthermore, these theoretical frameworks will drive the qualitative research methodology, with a focus on the a posteriori construction of a theory throughout the data analysis phase (Maree, 2020). Framing the research will limit the scope of data, this will ensure that when the researcher analyses the data and remains grounded to both theories. Adding to this, the theories will act as a viewpoint that the researcher will take when interpreting and understanding concepts from the data (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

The researcher will utilise these theories as follows:

- As a guide to build and support the study
- To determine whether the theories hold true in a specific context
- To make use of the theories as a basis for how the researcher will perceive and interpret the data (Maree, 2020).

2.2 Literature Review:

The purpose of this study is to make use of an interpretivist paradigm to gain valuable insight into the sustainable factors that can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African Millennial skincare consumers. In order to gain a broader field of view into the research topic and situate the research study, key authors from relevant sources have been reviewed and key concepts have been identified. Within the literature review, the following concepts will be addressed:

- Sustainability (Nielsen, 2015)
- Millennials (Heo & Muralidharan, 2019)
- Brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991)
- Brand equity (Ali & Muqadas, 2015)
- Skincare (Amberg & Fogarassy, 2019).

2.2.1 Sustainability

In a world full of limitless options, a consumer is faced with many choices, especially in the cosmetic and skincare industry. These choices come with a variety of elements that influence a consumer's decision to choose one thing over another (Amberg & Fogarassy, 2019). Therefore, Understanding the link between attitude and purchase decisions has never been more vital (Nielsen, 2015).

As concern about the environment and business sustainability continues to gain momentum around the world. Consumers are now more than ever seeking out products that meet their needs, without the depletion of natural resources and without compromising the ability of future generations (Hernández, Jaraba, Blanes & Carrasco, 2020). When it comes to sustainable purchases, there is a clear generation gap. This is evident in a study done by Nielsen in 2018, that shows that Millennials are altering their buying habits with the environment in mind (Mullen, 2018).

In support of the aforementioned, Nielsen (2015) states that despite Millennials growing up in one of the most challenging economic environments in history, they remain most willing to pay when it comes to sustainable offerings. Mullen (2018) affirms this notion, by saying that Millennials have a greater tendency to pay more for products deemed as sustainable, environmentally friendly, or organic. Chen and Deng (2016) argue the aforementioned, by stating that even though consumers (such as Millennials) are more concerned about the environment and, in turn, are more inclined to purchase sustainable products, they are still at the end of the day motivated by price.

Heo and Muralidharan (2019) share similar sentiments to Chen and Deng (2016) by stating that even though Millennials are likely to promote sustainable products and make a promise of pro-environmental attitudes, Millennials fail to convert these attitudes into actual behaviour. In retrospect to the aforementioned, it is evident that the research is contradictory in nature, as various authors argue whether or not sustainability incentivises a purchase or not, and whether or not this purchase will ultimately result in brand loyalty.

Thus, from a brand communication viewpoint, understanding the extent to which sustainability factors can have an impact on brand loyalty is essential to improve a skincare brand's commercial positioning and to strengthen its overall messaging (Heo & Muralidharan, 2019). To date, only a handful of academic research has paid attention to Millennials and sustainable behaviour, with little to no evidence of these works focusing on brand loyalty. Therefore to bridge the gap in the literature, this study aims to research the impact of sustainability factors on brand loyalty in South Africa. More so, the research is not only relevant to the body of research and skincare brands within South Africa, but also for practice, as creating a brand that is sustainable has become increasingly important in today's day and age (Hernández *et al.*, 2020).

2.2.2 Millennials

Marketing and communication agencies require specific communication strategies when catering to various consumer groups (Heo & Muralidharan, 2019). The group of interest for the study is the Millennial generation, also known as Generation Y (Stats SA, 2018).

The Millennial generation comprises of individuals who were born between 1980 and 2000, which means that they would currently be between 21 to 41-years-old (Stats SA, 2018).

Millennials are thought to be more technologically savvy than previous generations, and they rely on the Internet for information and decision-making. Millennials account for around 27% of the South African population, and therefore hold quite a significant purchasing power (Dilotsothe, 2020). Furthermore, Millennials are socially aware of their environmental influence and seek out brands that have sustainable policies in place. In fact, brands are more willing to stand the test of time if they are committed to leaving a long-lasting and positive impact on the environment and society (Bizcommunity, 2020).

This is further supported by Nielsen (2015) who states that there is a shift among the drivers of Millennial consumer loyalty, and brands that have not embraced sustainability risk being left behind. Therefore, understanding the link between emotion, purchase decisions and loyalty has never been more crucial, especially seeing as concern about the environment and sustainability continue to build momentum around the world.

Despite Millennials being an upcoming generation of spenders, that hold a considerable amount of consumer power in South Africa, only a few studies have investigated their views, attitudes and behaviours (Dilotsothe, 2020). In relation to South Africa, prior studies mainly focused on assessing the awareness and knowledge around sustainable products, instead of investigating the sustainable factors that can determine a Millennials willingness to purchase and become brand loyal (Heo & Muralidharan, 2019 & Hernández *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand the sustainability factors that may influence a Millennials brand loyalty when it comes to South African sustainable skincare brands.

2.2.3 Brand Loyalty and Brand Equity:

Aaker (1991) defines brand loyalty as the measurement of attachment between a consumer and a brand. While stating that brand loyalty is a relationship that forms between the consumer and brand (Aaker, 1991). This relationship is where a consumer places preference over purchasing a particular brand within its category. Therefore, brand loyalty can be defined as a consumer's preference and attachment to a particular brand (Ali & Muqadas, 2015). At the same time, brand equity refers to the power and sway of a brand's name in the minds of a consumer, as well as the benefit of having a well-known and well-recognised brand. Furthermore, brand equity is built by providing great experiences that encourage consumers to choose them over competitors that offer similar products (Ali &

Muqadas, 2015). Different scholars have looked at brand equity from various viewpoints (Pather, 2017). That being said, Keller's framework was identified as a key component of brand equity and will be used in order to support and ground the research study.

Although brand loyalty and brand equity can be seen as separate entities by various authors (Ali & Muqadas, 2015), Aaker (1991) argues that brand loyalty lies at the heart of brand equity. More so, that loyalty is pivotal to brand equity, as a consumer's continued purchase, even in the face of greater items from competitors, indicates that the brand has an assumed added value (Ali & Muqadas, 2015).

Brand loyalty can be conceptualised as a pyramid consisting of five tiers. The bottom of the pyramid symbolises non-loyal consumers who are unconcerned about the brand. These consumers believe that any brand would suffice. Consumers who are satisfied with the product offering make up the second level. The third level is consumers who are classified as habitual buyers. Whereas the fourth level consumers form a relationship and resonate with the brand, and they are also exceptionally loyal. The fifth, and final level compromises of loyal that not only resonate with the brand, but advocate for it as well (Aaker, 1991). Yang, Pusaksrikit and Buavaraporn (2020) highlight the importance of this final level, as having a consumer who is brand loyal, is much cheaper and more beneficial to a brand in the long run.

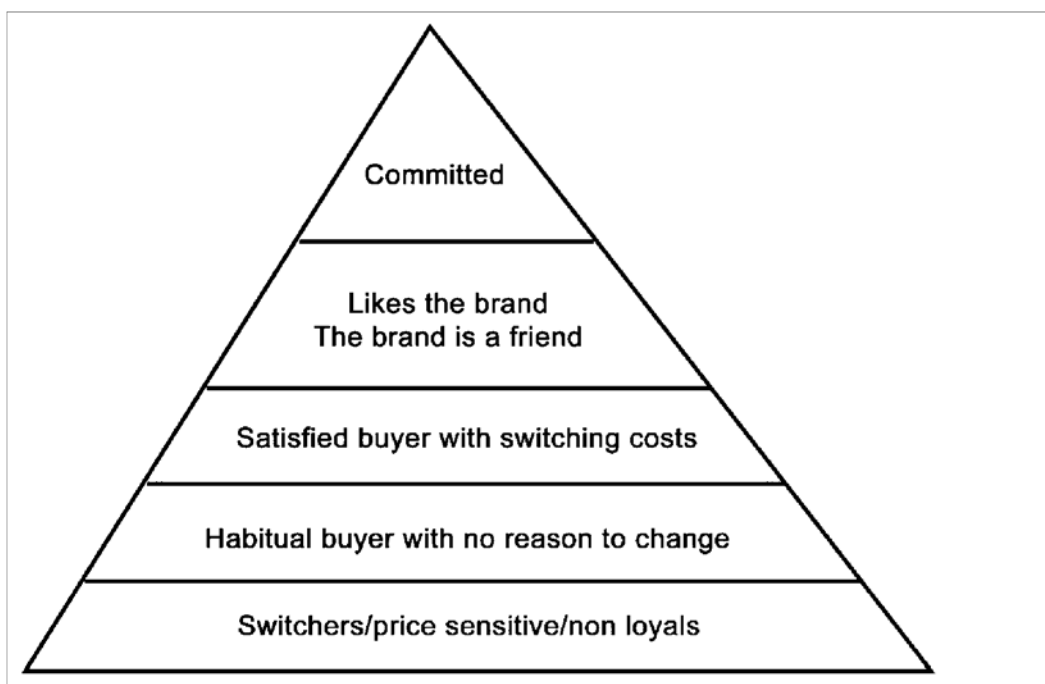


Figure 3: *Brand Loyalty Pyramid (Aaker, 1991).*

Taking into account the aforementioned, brand loyalty is therefore at the heart of a brand's success (Aaker, 1991). Considering brand loyalty is pivotal to the success of a brand, it is important to identify and understand the main sustainability drivers and factors that determine a Millennial consumer's loyalty to a skincare brand or product (Yang *et al.*, 2020). The relevancy of researching brand loyalty is that understanding how to increase loyalty can have a direct impact on business profitability which is essential for long-term growth. Research on brand loyalty also has practical relevance as local brands seeking to increase their Millennial consumers' loyalty will be able to further understand the sustainability factors that can impact brand loyalty (Yang *et al.*, 2020).

2.2.4 Skincare

In recent years, consumer behaviour in the cosmetics industry has changed dramatically, with environmental and health awareness playing an increasingly important role. Consumers are now more than ever becoming aware and open to the usage of natural and sustainable cosmetics (Amberg & Fogarassy, 2019). In relation to the cosmetics industry, there has been a significant demand in natural skincare products. Boon, Chee and Fern (2020) support this by saying that in the year 2011, skincare products dominated the global market.

At present, there is a strong willingness to purchase sustainable cosmetics. With Millennials being at the forefront. This is due to their perception that their choices have an impact on society and the world at large. They, therefore, understand that the environment and the future of generations to come is their responsibility (Boon *et al.*, 2020). Although it is evident that previous research on sustainable consumption highlights a relationship between sustainability and purchase intentions, there is little evidence highlighting factors that can influence these consumer groups willingness to become brand loyal (Amberg & Fogarassy, 2019). However, Chun (2014) contradicts the aforementioned by saying that in the case of personal care cosmetic goods, perceived economic sustainability has a considerably greater impact on consumer loyalty than in the other industries studied.

Nowadays, cosmetics can be seen as consumables and consumers are often changing skincare products when there are numerous alternatives available on the market (Boon *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, a brand should react in time to cultivate and retain consumers with high loyalty, and understand low loyalty consumers early to transform them into a loyal

customer (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the objective of the research is to uncover the influencing sustainable factors that can impact a Millennial consumer's brand loyalty, so that they are not just incentivised to purchase once-off, but instead encouraged to purchase continually and advocate for the brand.

2.3 Conceptualisation

The definitions below provide insight into the study's key concepts. These essential concepts emerged from the literature review findings and are crucial to consider during the data collection process.

2.3.1 Sustainability

Sustainability entails meeting specific needs without jeopardising future generations' ability to meet their own. In the context of a brand or business, this refers to brands being environmentally and socially responsible, through either donating a portion of their revenues to non-profits and groups that promote sustainability or, most notably, by acquiring resources in a more environmentally friendly manner (Nielsen, 2015).

2.3.2 Millennials

Millennials were born between 1980 and 1999 and are, therefore, currently between (or turning) the ages of 22-41. Furthermore, Millennials have been characterised as a tech-savvy, goal orientated, and value-driven generation (Heo & Muralidharan, 2019).

2.3.3 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is a consumer's favourable sentiments towards a brand, as well as their commitment to making a consistent repeat purchase over time. Adding to this, brand loyalty can be seen as the consumer's positive associations towards the brand, as well as their devotion, despite the efforts of competitors (Aaker, 1991)

2.3.4 Brand equity

Brand equity can be described as a combination of brand assets and liabilities related to a brand, its name and symbol, that contributes to the value offered by a product or service to a company and/or its consumers (Aaker, 1991). In essence, it, therefore can be seen as the

commercial value that is derived from a consumer's perception of the brand, as opposed to the product or service itself (Ali & Muqadas, 2015).

2.3.5 Skincare

Skincare can be defined as the use of cosmetics in order to care for the skin. In relation to sustainability, skincare that is deemed as sustainable, generally makes use of a variety of environmentally friendly and natural resources and materials (Amberg & Fogarassy, 2019).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm was utilised for this study as the researcher aimed to understand and interpret the meanings behind human behaviour, and to understand the participant's experiences (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Furthermore, the interpretivist approach allowed for the researcher to gather further insight through the eyes of the participant in order to understand their subjective experiences (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This approach aided the study, as understanding the concept of brand loyalty requires a deep understanding of the human mindset.

Adding to the above, four key positions were applied to the interpretivist approach:

- Ontology refers to the nature of reality and the understanding that reality can be constructed through human interactions, experiences, interpretations, and knowledge. Furthermore, assumptions pertaining to the nature of reality can assist the researcher in understanding the gathered data. These assumptions can orientate the researcher's thinking regarding the research problem and contribute to its solution. Pertaining to the interpretivism approach that exists outside of the senses. While furthermore, rejecting to accept any fixed criteria by which universal truth can be understood (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).
- Epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining human knowledge or what constitutes acceptable knowledge, where the researcher will aim to understand the participant's subjective constructions in an objective way (Saunders, Lewis,

Thornhill & Bristow, 2019). Furthermore, epistemology focuses on the knowledge that the researcher can acquire and how it can deepen the understanding in a specified field of research. For this study, epistemology assisted the researcher in focusing on what is currently known to position the research context to discover something new relative to what is known. More specifically, the researcher aimed to comprehend participants' perceptions of the social phenomena they engage with, rather than to uncover universal, context, and value-free knowledge and truth (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

- Axiology refers to the level of influence of the researcher's values on the research process. For the study, the researcher needs to remain neutral and value-free (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, axiology considers ethical behaviour in relation to the research. For this study, in particular, the research was conducted in a manner that was socially just while avoiding harm, whether physical or psychological (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).
- Methodology refers to the methods used to answer the research question or solve the research problem. A qualitative approach was used for the study, in order to gain a deeper understanding of human interests, attitudes, and experiences (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). While ultimately, the researcher aimed to 'see' social phenomena through the eyes of the participant rather than through the eyes of the researcher (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

3.2 Research approach

The adopted approach for the study was qualitative. This approach aided in the development of a theory and uncovering a pattern of meaning, which enabled the researcher to gain deeper insight into the research topic (Maree, 2020). Furthermore, the choice of methodology aided the researcher in unearthing rich insights into thoughts and feelings that affect the way in which Millennials behave (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Adding to the aforementioned, the researcher relied upon linguistic data (qualitative) instead of numerical data (quantitative). The method for this approach was in-depth interviews that focused on open-ended, exploratory questions. These in-depth interviews involved a smaller

number of participants (5); this is due to the study not requiring pre-determined responses or statistical analysis. Instead, the study attempted to understand the participants' subjective attitudes, opinions, and/or experiences (Maree, 2020).

3.3 Population

The targeted population was Millennial consumers living in South Africa. According to Stats S.A. (2018), Millennials were born between 1980 and 1999 and are, therefore, currently between (or turning) the ages of 22 - 41. Millennials have been raised in a digital age, meaning that this generation overall is quite tech-savvy. Owing to this, Millennials came about at the same time as online and social media platforms (Deloitte, 2021). Smith and Nichols (2015) describe Millennials as being confident, goal orientated, as well as value and family-focused. Adding to this, a 2021 report from Deloitte, shows that Millennials top concerns are healthcare, disease prevention, unemployment, climate change, and environmental protection (Deloitte, 2021).

3.4 Sampling

The sampling method used consisted of both probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling was first used to determine the accessible population from which the data was collected (Maree, 2020). Furthermore, simple random sampling was used for probability sampling to ensure that every member of the population had an equal chance of being chosen and included in the sample. This sampling method was achieved through an online QuestionPro survey. The link to this survey was shared on both Facebook and Instagram. The intention behind the survey was to ensure that the selected participants for the in-depth interviews were from a diverse group of people with various backgrounds and experiences who may have different perspectives and/or experiences (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2015).

The intended reach of the survey was 100 respondents, however, due to the limitation of time, only 75 respondents have completed the online survey.

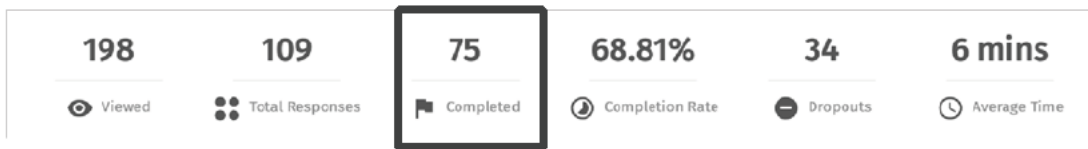


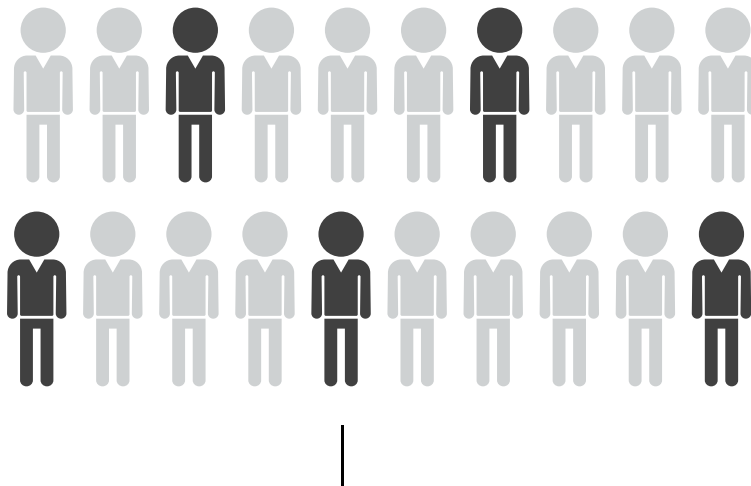
Figure 4: *Analytics from QuestionPro survey.*

The online survey was used to find the accessible population; the group of participants from which the data was collected. Once the accessible population had been determined, non-probability sampling was used to allow for purposive sampling whereby five participants for the in-depth interviews were identified (Maree, 2020). The selection of participants for the in-depth interviews was based on their responses from the survey, these responses had to meet a set of criteria, namely:

- If they were from the targeted population (Millennials)
- Whether or not they purchase sustainable skincare products
- If they were from the geographical area of South Africa
- If they agreed (gave consent) to an interview.

The combination of both sampling methods (probability and non-probability) ensured that a sufficient amount of data was collected without being skewed or impacted by bias. While further warranting that the data collected was both fair and accurate while reflecting the views and experiences of the population that was studied (Millennials) (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

PROBABILTY SAMPLING TO DETERMINE THE ACCESSIBLE POPULATION



NON-PROBABILTY TO ENSURE PURPOSIVE SAMPLING



Figure 5: *Sampling method.*

3.5 Data Collection

The researcher followed the qualitative approach as the study relies upon linguistic data (qualitative) instead of numerical data (quantitative). Therefore, the selected method for this approach was in-depth interviews. Due to the limitations of Covid-19, as well as time, in-depth interviews were the appropriate and preferred choice for this study. The in-depth interviews involved a smaller number of participants; this is due to the study not requiring pre-determined responses or statistical analysis. Instead, the study attempts to understand the participants' (Millennials) subjective attitudes, opinions, and/or experiences (Maree, 2020).

As previously mentioned, the research data was collected through in-depth interviews. These interviews were conducted online through Microsoft Teams; this was done not only to ensure the safety of participants (due to Covid-19), but also to allow for ease of recording and transcribing of the data. Furthermore, the in-depth interviews were semi-structured,

which involved a number of open-ended, exploratory questions; this was done to ensure the questions prompted expressed the views and opinions of the participants (Millennials) (Maree, 2020). Even though there were predetermined questions, the in-depth interview still followed a conversational approach as the questions themselves were not be fixed. This approach allowed for the flow and sharing of opinions to be more natural (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

In addition, the open-ended nature of the semi-structured questions allowed the researcher to prompt the participant to elaborate or answer the question in detail, especially if the participant's response to the question was brief. Although the nature of the questioning style is advantageous, it is important to note that this method is rather time consuming due to the amount of data that needs to be analysed and compared (Mathers, Fox & Hunn, 2002).

The choice of methodology (qualitative) aligned with the objectives of the research, which was to determine what sustainable factors can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African Millennial skincare consumers. By following this approach the researcher gained rich insights into thoughts and feelings that affect the way in which Millennials behave (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Adding to the above, the analysis of the qualitative data aided the researcher in the development of theories and uncovering a pattern of meaning, which enabled the researcher to gain deeper insight into the research topic (Maree, 2020).

3.5.1 Application of the data collection method

The data collection method consisted of a qualitative approach where in-depth interviews were conducted in order to obtain data for the study (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015). A total of five in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviewees were selected from the QuestionPro survey, whereby, those that were interested in participating could leave their email address. This also served as an additional means of obtaining consent from the participants, as they were not coerced to participate in the interview.

Would you be open to conducting a one on one interview for this study? If so, kindly provide your email address below.

Email Address

Figure 6: *Sample question from QuestionPro survey.*

Due to Covid-19, the in-depth interviews were conducted online, via Microsoft Teams. This platform made it easy to not only record, but also transcribe. Furthermore, it is not a requirement for the participant to have Microsoft Teams themselves, as the browser version of Teams is entirely free. This platform is also accessible to each participant as they do not have to download an app or create any accounts to join the interview. Prior to the interview, each participant was sent a Teams link (University of Bath, 2020).

Furthermore, because the participants were not face-to-face with the interviewer, they were more likely to feel anonymous and therefore, could feel more inclined to speak freely and honestly about the subject at hand. The online interviews, also removed any form of bias, as often face-to-face interviews can allow for responses to be misconstrued through body language as well as facial expressions (Maree, 2020).

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured, including a number of open-ended, exploratory questions. The main purpose of these questions being open-ended, was to ensure that the questions suggested reflected the participants' (Millennials) ideas and opinions. Even though the questions were prepared, the in-depth interview was conducted in such a way, that it was more conversational and the questions were not fixed (Maree, 2020). This allowed for the researcher to seek clarification if necessary, allowing for greater flexibility in the interview process (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

Prior to the in-depth interviews, the participants were sent the explanatory information sheet to explain the purpose of the study further, and why they were chosen. Adding to this, they were also sent a consent form for audio and/or video recording to ensure that full consent was given to be recorded. Adding to this, before the interview commenced, participants were further explained the purpose of the study, and they were informed that the interview was

wholly voluntary and were ensured that if at any point they felt uncomfortable, they could withdraw (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

The interviews were guided by 12 semi-structured, open-ended questions (see Annexure D). These questions were formulated with the research objectives in mind, as well as the research goal of being able to understand perspectives and experiences around the sustainable factors that can impact the brand loyalty of Millennials who consume skincare products. This qualitative method also provided a dynamic approach to research, allowing the researcher to follow up on responses given by participants in real-time, generating valuable conversation around the topic of sustainability – something that a structured survey would not allow (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

3.6 Data analysis

The method used in the study was thematic analysis. This method was used to identify, analyse and report upon themes or patterns within the data. This method consists of six phases that were carried out by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These phases are as follows:

- Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data
- Phase 2: Generating initial codes
- Phase 3: Searching for themes
- Phase 4: Reviewing themes
- Phase 5: Defining/naming themes
- Phase 6: Creating the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a theme as something that represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set and captures something important about the data in relation to the research question. In relation to the study, in order for the research to identify these themes, the researcher needed to revisit the initial goal of the study to ensure that the identified themes linked directly to the understanding of Millennial consumers behaviour when it comes to sustainability, as well as the purchasing and brand loyalty habits of this consumer group when it comes to skincare in particular.

It is also important to note that the process of thematic analysis (although phases) acts solely as a guideline and that the researcher needed to apply flexibility to ensure that the emerging themes within the data addressed the overall research problem, in this case, contrasting ideologies, and little evidence of whether or not sustainable practices influence Millennials' buying behaviour and brand loyalty within South Africa (Azami *et al.*, 2018).

3.6.1 Application of the data analysis method

As previously mentioned, the study made use of qualitative data, which, once transcribed, was analysed to define sets of initial codes. Once themes were identified, the initial codes from the data source were reviewed holistically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to create these themes, the researcher combined codes from one or more transcripts in order to portray qualitative research findings in a logical and comprehensible manner (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

The method that the researcher followed is outlined below:

- Phase 1: Before the commencement of the analysis, the raw data from the in-depth interviews were transcribed into written text. Although time-consuming, this benefited the researcher as transcription requires full immersion. While the researcher was fully immersed in the data (which involved repeated listening), they were able to actively search for meanings and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Phase 2: Once the data had been transcribed, the researcher then generated a set of initial codes from the data. In order to achieve this, the researcher systematically worked through all of the data, while looking for interesting elements that could form the basis of recurring patterns across the data set. These codes were then organised into meaningful groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Phase 3: After the data had been collated and sorted into meaningful groups, the researcher started to analyse these codes against a broader level of themes. The researcher then evaluated and combined the various codes to form overarching themes. After this point, the researcher began to consider the relationships

between codes and themes, and started to categorise them into collections of candidate themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- Phase 4: Once candidate themes were identified, the researcher then began the process of refining these themes. During this, the researcher had to relook these themes to see if any of them needed to be combined into one another, divided into subcategories or completely discarded. More so, the researcher also consider had to consider the validity of these themes concerning the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Phase 5: Once themes had been refined, the researcher defined, named, and formulated a description for each of the themes. The themes were then considered in light of the research objectives and themes relevant to each were grouped (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Phase 6: After phase five, the research began formulating the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Findings and Interpretation

In order to analyse the information collected from the in-depth interviews, thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report upon themes or patterns within the data. These interviews were done in order to obtain the information needed to accomplish the research goal and objectives. The interviews consisted of 12 open-ended exploratory questions. These questions were designed to elicit detailed responses that reflected the participants' (Millennials) ideas and opinions (Du PlooyCilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2015).

The overall goal of this study was to determine what sustainable factors can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African Millennial skincare consumers. All participants interviewed were from the targeted population, Millennials (ages 22 - 41) and from the geographic area of South Africa (Stats S.A., 2018).

The table below highlights the five final themes obtained from the in-depth interviews. These themes are also matched to the research objectives or goals that the themes address, as well as the five key concepts identified in the literature, (1) Sustainability, (2) Millennials, (3) Brand loyalty, (4) Brand equity, and (5) Skincare.

The objectives are as follows:

1. To determine consumer attitudes towards sustainable skincare products.
2. To determine the role sustainability plays in brand image.
3. To determine what sustainable measures are considered adequate or qualify as sustainable practices in skincare products.
4. To investigate the possible effect of sustainability in skincare products on brand loyalty.

Table 1: Five identified themes.

Themes	Research Objectives	Key Concepts
Theme 1: Price sensitivity	1	Sustainability and Millennials (Concepts 1 and 2).
Theme 2: Transparency of ingredients	2 and 3	Skincare (Concept 5).
Theme 3: Information and education	2, 3 and 4	Sustainability (Concept 1).
Theme 4: Social influence	2 and 4	Millennials (Concept 2).
Theme 5: Brand loyalty	4	Brand loyalty and Brand equity (Concepts 3 and 4).

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

The below table takes a closer look at each theme, and links it to direct responses taken from the in-depth interviews.

Table 2: Participant responses from in-depth interviews.

Themes	Participant responses
Theme 1: Price Sensitivity	<i>"Holy cow, some stuff is expensive."</i> <i>"Like the pricing of it, I think is what kills me and I think that's often what turns others off too."</i> <i>"Sustainable but also not going to cost you an absolute fortune."</i> <i>"Ridiculously priced."</i> <i>"If fits comfortably within what I'm able and willing to spend on a product."</i>
Theme 2: Transparency of Ingredients	<i>"What's inside the products is important, I want to know that I can read the ingredients."</i> <i>"If I can't read it and it's some wacko scientific name, then I know it's not really coming from anything sustainable."</i> <i>"You choose products that contributes to sustainability, so it's like ethical shopping."</i>

	<i>"I refuse to use anything that has chemicals or by product or anything that is not natural."</i> <i>"All natural."</i>
Theme 3: Information and Education	<i>"Education through social media."</i> <i>"Why not educate and enforce it to your consumer?"</i> <i>"I also know that I'm getting the information from the skincare brand on the platform."</i> <i>"I think also just comes down to them being vocal about their sustainability."</i> <i>"Building your knowledge based on the ingredients that your products contain."</i> <i>"I think we have more access to knowledge and we're more aware of what is happening."</i> <i>"Information on their social media, the websites, all their various platforms about their practices and processes."</i>

Theme 4: Social Influence	<i>"I think word of mouth or reviews."</i> <i>"I normally check reviews on products how other people experiencing it."</i> <i>"Reviews, or friends or family".</i>
Theme 5: Brand Loyalty	<i>"A bit too obsessed with anything that comes from Lush."</i> <i>"I've used their products so many years."</i> <i>"It's a long term commitment for me.",</i> <i>"You try to advocate for it."</i> <i>"I advocate for Skin Creamery, an unofficial advocate."</i> <i>"I won't use products that cross those boundaries and that's how I kind of become brand loyal."</i>

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

4.1.1 Theme 1: Price Sensitivity

Findings

According to Nielsen (2015), despite growing up in one of the most challenging economic environments in history, Millennials are most willing to pay for sustainable products and services. Another notable author, Mullen (2018) supported this claim by stating that Millennials are likely to spend more on sustainable, eco-friendly, or organic products. However, adding much scrutiny to the above mentioned, when participants were asked if there was anything that would make them less likely to purchase a sustainable skincare

product, one of the prominent themes that came up was the price. This theme contradicts the literature, where notable authors suggested that Millennials are not sensitive to price when it comes to sustainable products. Adding to this, three out of the five participants all suggested that price does, in fact, play an essential role in the decision making of whether or not to purchase (and repeat purchase) a sustainable skincare product. When discussing why they might not support a sustainable skincare brand, a key phrase was: *“I think price also is a factor, so affordability and if I can afford the product.”*

In support of the above, Chen and Deng (2016) argue that even though Millennials are concerned about the environment, they are still, however, motivated by price. This is evident in other responses, whereby participants mentioned that sustainable products still need to be within their purchasing power, and that a massive price tag can prevent first-time or repeat purchases. This is further supported by a participant that mentioned, *“If it fits comfortably within what I'm able and willing to spend on a product on a monthly basis or an annual basis. Then I will return to that product every time”*.

This was a surprising outcome as no questions regarding price were asked during the interview; instead, all of the participants emphasised pricing, with the general consensus being that affordability is a crucial element in purchase decisions. *“The pricing of it, I think is what kills me and I think that's often what turns others off too”*.

Interpretation

One of the two highlighted key concepts of ‘Sustainability’ and ‘Millennials’ identified within the literature review, indicated that Millennials are willing to pay more for sustainable products and services than other generational groups (Nielsen, 2015). However, findings have indicated that Millennials are in fact price sensitive and even though they are inclined and prefer to support sustainable skincare brands, it comes with the condition of affordability (and within their spending power means). This, therefore, means that ‘price’ is a crucial factor for sustainable skincare brands to consider. Adding to this, if brands are wanting Millennials to progress from the awareness to the adoption stage where they become brand loyal – they will need to consider price and how it influences not only the purchasing behaviour of Millennials, but also their brand loyalty.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Transparency of Ingredients

Findings

From the literature, it is evident that consumer behaviour in the cosmetics industry has changed dramatically in recent years (Boon *et al.*, 2020). These concerns about the environment and long-term sustainability are growing around the world, and consumers are now more than ever looking for items that suit their requirements without depleting natural resources (Amberg & Fogarassy, 2019).

Adding to the above, Amberg and Fogarassy (2019) suggest that in recent years natural skincare products have seen a surge in popularity. The aforementioned statement was supported by Boon *et al.* (2020) that stated that Millennial consumers are demanding the usage of natural and unharmed ingredients from brands. This is evident and further supported by the findings from the in-depth interviews, where all five participants felt strongly about the ingredients used within their skincare products; *“For me, it's about the natural product. I refuse to use anything that has chemicals or by-products or anything that is not natural.”*. The findings also indicated that the ingredients within a skincare brand forms part of the decision making process when it comes to purchasing a skincare product.

Furthermore, participants want to be able to read the ingredients, to see that the brand is, in fact, sustainable, cruelty-free, natural, and not adding harm to the environment or society at large. Adding to this, participants also mentioned the transparency around product ingredients. It, therefore, is not only about the ingredients being used, but also the transparency around that information. This is supported by a key phrase by one of the participants; *“I want to know that I can read the ingredients and know what's in that product. If I can't read it and it's some wacko scientific name, then I know it's not really coming from anything sustainable.”*.

Another participant echoed similar sentiments, stating that the lack of transparency around product information and about a skincare brand's sustainable practices could be a deterrent to purchasing that product; the reason being is that purchasing the product without the information would give the consumer no indication of the impact the brand is having on the environment or society at large. This is further supported in another participant's response; *“As long as the business manufacturer is being transparent and truthful that should carry*

them a long way with developing a relationship with the consumer and making the consumer feel at ease to continue following their product and repeat purchase.”.

In retrospect to the aforementioned, all participants expressed similar opinions around product attributes, where, if the ingredients are not natural, and the brand is not sustainable and does not partake actively in sustainable practices, they would not support that brand or purchase from them.

Interpretation

Based on the findings, it is evident that the product attributes (what it consists of), as well as the transparency around them, are major influencing factors for Millennials when it comes to purchasing decisions, as well as brand loyalty. All participants felt that if the brand does not adhere to sustainable practices, they would not (and could not) support that brand.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Information and Education

Findings

The main aim of the research was to determine what sustainable factors can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African Millennial skincare consumers. One of the most common and surprising factors was centred around the brand's responsibility to inform and educate consumers around their sustainable practices. This is highlighted in a participant's response; *“If they are not really using their platform to advocate for sustainability, then I also feel like I'm less inclined to utilise the brand.”*

All five participants felt that a skincare brand should cater their social media messaging (and messaging in general) around their sustainable measures, not only to create awareness, but also to serve as information about the brand – this is especially important and links to the previous theme of transparency of ingredients, as participants want to know what sustainable measures the brand has in place. Another participant added that it is the role of the brand to inform, and that they prefer to obtain information on sustainable practices directly from the brand, whether on the product, online, or through other marketing initiatives.

This theme not only arose with questions regarding the important factors around sustainability, but also when it came down to who is responsible for implementing sustainability. Some participants felt it was the brand's responsibility to use their platform as a voice. This is mirrored in two various participants responses; *"Why not educate which goes to what I was saying earlier? Why not educate and enforce it to your consumer?", "I think educating, like education through social media like obviously the packaging is important and it can look pretty, but if you're not informing me or educating me about sustainability through your brand, then I think it's like a waste of a platform."*

In addition to the foregoing, several participants directly related information and education to brand loyalty. This, therefore, coincides with the literature, whereby Chun (2014) states that brand loyalty is inextricably tied to sustainability, particularly in the personal care and cosmetics industry. Furthermore, participants added that if a brand uses its platform in an educational manner, they (the participants) are more likely to become brand loyal to that specific brand. Further supporting this notion, another participant paid reference to their favourite brand, marvelling at how this brand openly lists their ingredients on their website, while showcasing their sustainable processes and how their products are made on their social media platforms.

Interpretation

Based on the above findings, it can be said that the Millennial consumer expects brands to actively inform and educate consumers on their various platforms. This includes sharing their sustainable processes and practices. More so, they should make use of these platforms as a voice, and to further create awareness around sustainability. A key phrase used to support the above notion; *"Any company that has a big following has a responsibility to try and be sustainable, to try and encourage sustainability because they have a lot of pulling power. They have a platform and they have a voice that people are likely to listen to."*

4.1.4 Theme 4: Social Influence

Findings

Participants had similar sentiments on the relevance of reviews from friends or family members, indicating that social influence is a significant factor that plays a role in the purchasing decisions of Millennials when it comes to sustainable skincare products. This is

highlighted in a response from a participant; *“I think word of mouth or reviews, especially with skincare like I always ask around.”* Adding to this, participants also mentioned that they look at reviews before purchasing a skincare product, while often looking to their social groups to seek out opinions and validation.

Interpretation:

As previously mentioned, social influence can directly influence purchase decisions. The findings have shown that Millennial consumers often look to their social groups (peers or family members) for suggestions before purchasing a skincare product. This, therefore, can play a pivotal role in the brand loyalty of Millennials, as in order to move the consumer closer to brand loyalty, they first need to trial the product (Hirschman, 1989). It can therefore be said that in order for brands to reach Millennial consumers, they need to work on getting those reviews and referrals.

4.1.5 Theme 5: Brand Loyalty

Findings

Heo and Muralitharan (2019) argue that while Millennials are more likely to support sustainable products and profess pro-environmental attitudes, they fail to translate these attitudes into actual behaviour. In contrast to the foregoing, findings from the in-depth interviews revealed that Millennials are, in fact, loyal to brands, especially those that are deemed as sustainable. Furthermore, all participants claimed to be brand loyalists to particular sustainable skincare products; this was not only evident in their long term use of the brand, but also in the way in which they described their favourite brand. This is further supported by a participant whose response to a question asking them about their favourite skincare brand was; *“I’m obsessed with like probably mildly obsessed, going on terms of a bit too obsessed with anything that comes from lush, absolutely anything. But. It’s also because I’ve used their products so many years of use.”*

Adding to the above mentioned, participants also find themselves advocating for their favourite brands. This is evident in a noteworthy response from one of the participants who mentioned that; *“As an advocate for Skin Creamery, an unofficial advocate, I mean, I don’t work for the brand. I’m not an influencer for them in any way, but I believe in the brand, they work so well for me and their ethical practices aligned so much with my beliefs that I feel very confident promoting the product within my own circles”*.

Participants were also not only advocating for their favourite brands, but they even mentioned that sustainability does, in fact, play a role in their loyalty towards a brand. This is evident in a response by one of the participants; *“A brand has sustainable practices will allow me to be more loyal because it allows me to feel as if I am not affecting anything negatively.”*. This coincides with the literature, where Nielsen (2015) states that consumers are becoming increasingly aware of social and environmental issues, and that it has almost become mandatory for brands to embrace sustainability. Nielsen (2015) goes on to add that there is a shift amongst the drivers of the Millennial consumer's loyalty, and brands that have not embraced sustainability risk being left behind.

In retrospect to the concept of brand loyalty, Aaker (1991) suggests that brand loyalty can be seen as a pyramid of five stages, whereby the final stage of the pyramid is where the consumer not only resonates with the brand, but also advocates for it. Owing to this, it can then be said, that based upon this concept, as well as the findings, Millennials are in fact brand loyalists.

Interpretation

Based on the findings, there is a clear link between sustainability and brand loyalty. Owing to Keller's Brand Equity Pyramid, which is one of the fundamental theoretical frameworks. Non-loyal consumers, who are unconcerned about the brand are shown at the bottom of the pyramid. While, consumers who resonate well with the brand and continue to re-purchase, and as a result, become brand loyal advocates are represented at the top (Hawker, 2019). Using this model, it can then be said, that sustainability can add to brand loyalty and, in turn, create brand equity (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015).

4.2 Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative study, four quality criteria will be applied. These are, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

4.2.1 Credibility

The term credibility refers to the level of trust that may be placed in the accuracy of a study's conclusions. More so, credibility is determined by whether or not the information derived from the participants' original data is an accurate interpretation of the participants' original

views (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015). The strategy the researcher made use of in order to ensure credibility, is prolonged engagement. Credibility was ensured through the method of long-lasting, in-depth interviews, which allowed the researcher to invest sufficient time with the participants (Maree, 2020).

4.2.2 Transferability

Transferability is whether or not the findings can be applied to a comparable circumstance, while still producing similar results. Therefore, in order to ensure transferability, the participants' behaviour and experiences were recorded, as well as their background, so that readers can determine whether or not the findings are transferable to their own circumstances (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

4.2.3 Dependability

Dependability is all about consistency and refers to whether or not the data collection method and data analysis process is deemed acceptable (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015). The researcher ensured dependability throughout the research process by thoroughly and transparently detailing the research design. Adding to this, the researcher has kept a record of the process throughout the study (Maree, 2020).

4.2.4 Confirmability

The aspect of neutrality is addressed through confirmability. In order to guarantee confirmability, the researcher has ensured that the data is inter-subjective. Furthermore, the researcher has refrained from any biasness, while ensuring that the interpretation is not based upon any personal views and opinions, but rather rooted in the data itself (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Response to the Research Questions

Below pays references to the research findings in response to the research objectives:

1. To determine consumer attitudes towards sustainable skincare products: According to the research, Millennials prefer sustainable skincare products; nevertheless, these products must be within their financial means, which brings up the factor of affordability – which is a critical component in Millennials' purchasing (and repeat purchase) decisions.
2. To determine the role sustainability plays in brand image: According to findings from the study, Millennials demand complete transparency not only around the ingredients in skincare products, but also about the methods used to make them, as well as information about the product's social and environmental impact; all of these factors play a key role in a skincare brand's positive brand image.
3. To determine what sustainable measures are considered adequate or qualify as sustainable practices in skincare products: Transparency of ingredients (together with the fact that the ingredients are natural and do not cause harm to either the environment or society at large), as well as information and education about sustainability, are all regarded as sufficient sustainable practices.
4. To investigate the possible effect of sustainability in skincare products on brand loyalty: If a brand is regarded to be sustainable and within Millennials' purchasing capacity, they will become brand loyalists and advocates. Furthermore, social influence also plays a role in not only the initial purchase, but also the long-term dedication to sustainable skincare brands.

When looking at the main research question: what sustainable factors can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African Millennial skincare consumers; five core themes emerged upon analysing the data. These are (1) price sensitivity, which is an essential factor in the decision making and loyalty of the Millennial consumer. The price needs to be within the means of their spending power – if it is not, the consumer will look elsewhere and turn to a different brand. Another theme is (2) transparency of ingredients; not only are the ingredients an important factor, but the openness of the brand and their

willingness to share these ingredients in a transparent and forthcoming manner are equally as important.

In addition, (3) Information and education is a crucial factor. Millennials want to be informed about the brand's sustainable practices and processes; more so, they feel the brand has a responsibility to use their 'voice' to make a difference and create awareness around sustainability. This, in turn, leads them to be brand loyal, as they feel their moral compass is aligned with that of the brand. Then, (4) Social influence also emerged as an important factor; Millennials often look to their social groups for guidance and validation. A brand needs to tap into reviews and recommendations to target the Millennial consumer.

Lastly, Millennials are (5) brand loyal to their preferred skincare brands, based on the factors mentioned above. If a brand is sustainable and causes no harm to the environment or society at large, and meets the needs of the Millennial consumer, then they will become brand loyal and, in turn, advocate for the brand.

5.2 Implications

The research contributes to the academic body of knowledge. More specifically, the research adds to the corpus of knowledge on Millennial consumer behaviour in relation to loyalty and sustainability in academia. Furthermore, the research intends to identify perceptual sustainability factors which could significantly impact the brand loyalty of a Millennial consumer. In doing so, the research could add much needed clarity around the behaviour of Millennials, especially in the context of South Africa (Azami *et al.*, 2018).

The study will also contribute to marketing and communication agencies as it enables marketers to have a richer understanding of sustainability and how to leverage marketing and communication efforts in order to attain brand loyal consumers amongst the Millennial generation group. More so, previous research indicates that companies that adopt and implement sustainability policies are more likely to improve their ability to maintain long-term relationships with their Millennial customers. Moreover, research has also suggested that many Millennial consumers expect companies to adopt these principles, and that it plays an important role in the decision-making process (Moisescu, 2018). This study therefore could provide these agencies with valuable insight that could help improve their communication strategies, which in turn will help build meaningful and long-lasting relationships with their Millennial consumers.

5.3 Heuristic Value of the Study

The study's primary purpose was to determine what sustainable factors can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African Millennial skincare consumers. Although the findings from the research addressed both the research questions and objectives and led to the findings of five key factors that affect the brand loyalty of Millennial consumers, the sample size for the qualitative study was relatively small. Therefore the findings can't be fully related to a larger population. This, therefore, allows for further research, where a larger sample size is used.

Furthermore, future studies could approach the same research problem in a completely different geographical area to see whether there are any changes in behaviour among the Millennial generation based on where they live.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

5.4.1 Participants

Upon commencement of the study, participants had to give their informed consent. The phrase informed consent is made up of two key words, 'informed' and 'consent'. Where 'informed' is concerned, participants were made fully aware of what the research is about, what is requested of them, how the data will be used, and the potential repercussions, if any (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). While with 'consent', participants had to give their active and written agreement to participate in the study. Adding to this, the process of informed consent serves as a contract between the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, participants were ensured that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and at no point were they coerced to participate (Maree, 2020).

Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' identity and responses were also upheld throughout the study. Pertaining to anonymity the researcher ensured that all names and self-identifying information had been omitted from the study. To provide and further ensure confidentiality, all online interviews were conducted using headphones. In relation to confidentiality, the researcher ensured that they, themselves are only privy to the identity of the participants' and nobody else (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015). Adding to the above, the researcher also ensured that no harm (unintended or otherwise) came to the participants during the research process (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018).

5.4.2 Researcher

During the study, the researcher upheld the ethical obligation to refrain from falsifying any information, while ensuring that no data had been deliberately fabricated or altered. More so, the researcher refrained from fabricating any information in support of the desired outcome. Adding to this, the research displays truthful and unbiased answers that correlate with that of the findings (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

5.5 Limitations

5.5.1 Time

The study is not longitudinal; therefore, the researcher had limited time to conduct the study. Due to the researcher having a limited and set timeframe in which to complete the study, they had less time to gather more comprehensive information (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

5.5.2 Sample size

Due to the study being time-bound, the sample size is relatively small and, therefore, might not be seen as a full representation of the population or geographical landscape of Cape Town. More so, to determine the correct sample size in qualitative research is based upon experience in research, which could also be seen as a limitation, considering that the researcher has not yet built up a repour of research (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

5.5.3 Resources

Limited access to resources as well as budget, meant that the researcher did not have access to data collection tools such as premium software to accurately assist with transcribing of the in-depth interviews (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2015).

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ANNEXURE A: CONCEPT DOCUMENT

An exploration of sustainable factors that impact brand loyalty for South African Millennials who consume skincare products.

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method(s)	Ethics	Anticipated Findings	References
To gain insight into the sustainable factors that can impact brand loyalty.	What sustainable factors can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African Millennial skincare consumers.	There are contrasting ideologies centred around Millennials' sustainable consumption. There is a need to gain insight to benefit brands and agencies.	(Heo & Muralidharan, 2019) (Nielsen, 2015) (Aaker, 1991) (Ali & Muqadas, 2015)	Theme 1: Sustainability Theme 2: Millennials Theme 3: Brand loyalty Theme 4: Brand equity Theme 5: Skincare	Interpretivist paradigm will be used as the research aims to understand and interpret the meanings behind human behaviour. Epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining human knowledge. Ontology refers to the nature of reality and understanding that reality. Axiology refers to the level of influence of the researcher's values on the research process (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill & Bristow, 2019).	Qualitative – to gain insight into behaviour and experiences. Population South African millennials (age 22 – 41) – consume sustainable products.	In-depth interviews that will be conducted online through Microsoft Teams. The interviews will be semi-structured with open ended questions.	Participants must give their informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' identity and responses will also be upheld throughout the study. The researcher must remain unbiased.	The researcher will provide an understanding of Millennial attitudes and behaviour around sustainability factors and how these factors can influence brand identity.	Osborne, M. 2017. Brands Need To Step Up Their Game To Win Over Millennials, 26 September 2017. [Online]. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/09/26/brands-need-to-step-up-their-game-to-win-over-millennials/?h=2feef9311b32 [Accessed 20 April 2021].
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/ Hypotheses/ Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories	Theoretical frameworks:		Sampling	Data Analysis Method(s)	Limitations	Anticipated Contribution	
Azami, Bathmanathan and Rajadurai (2018) argue that while consumers express their concern towards the environment, this does not necessarily translate into purchases and brand loyalty.	Attitudes towards sustainability. Is sustainability valued and will Millennials remain brand loyal and what sustainable factors influence brand loyalty.	Brand loyalty Brand image Brand equity Millennials Sustainability	The Adoption of Innovations Model and Keller's Brand Equity Model.	The Adoption of Innovations Model Keller's Brand Equity Pyramid		Probability and non-probability. Probability – accessible population (survey) Non-probability -purposive sampling (Interviews) Size: 5 Participants.	The method used in this study will be thematic analysis. This method will be used to identify, analyse and report upon themes or patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	The study is not longitudinal. Due to limited time the sample size is quite small and therefore, not a full representation of the population.	The study will contribute to the academic body of knowledge and will aid brands and communication agencies with a richer understanding of sustainability and brand loyalty.	

ANNEXURE B: ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER



6 August 2021

Student name: Nicole Faria

Student number: [REDACTED]

Campus: Cape Town

Re: Approval of RESE8419 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.

2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor name: D Bernhardt

Signature:



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) name: Carol Affleck



Signature:

ANNEXURE C: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Nicole Faria and I am a student at Vega. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Donna Bernhardt about sustainable factors that can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African millennial skincare consumers. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of Millennial consumer behavior in relation to loyalty and sustainability in academia. Furthermore, I also hope that it will contribute to marketing and communication agencies by enabling marketers with a richer understanding of sustainability and how to leverage marketing and communication efforts in order to attain brand loyal consumers amongst the Millennial generation group. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you fall within the Millennial age bracket, you are interested in sustainability and skincare. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to gain valuable insight into sustainable factors that can impact brand loyalty for South African Millennials who consume skincare products. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your views, opinions and experiences. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?
I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will

have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Vega will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.
What will happen to the information that participants provide?
Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Bachelor of Arts Honours in Strategic Brand Communication. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.
What happens if I have more questions about the study?
Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate. You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed. My contact details are as follows: Nicole Faria [REDACTED] [REDACTED] The contact details of my supervisor are as follows: Donna Bernhardi [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Participant or respondent consent	
I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Nicole Faria about sustainable factors that can impact or influence brand loyalty amongst South African millennial skincare consumers. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	

Signature	Date
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ANNEXURE D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does the word sustainability mean to you?
2. What do you do on a personal level to live more sustainably?
3. What would you say are the main drivers to you wanting to live more sustainably?
4. Who do you feel is mainly responsible for the implementation of sustainability?
5. What influences you to purchase sustainable skincare products?
6. What are your reasons for supporting brands that are sustainable and environmentally friendly? / What questions do you ask the brand to know if a brand is sustainable or not? or what things do you look out for
7. How do brands that are considered sustainable make you feel?
8. When purchasing a product, what sustainable measures or practices should a skincare brand adhere to?
9. What would be something to make you not (if any) support sustainable skincare products?
10. Describe your favourite skincare brand?
11. What factors can influence you to become brand loyal?
12. Describe how sustainability plays a part in your loyalty to a brand.