



**Brand identity factors that influence Gen Z's purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media:
An Esse and SKOON case study.**

By

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ABSTRACT

The global cosmetic industry has seen growth, particularly in the rapidly expanding sector of green skincare. Despite this trend, there is a crucial focus on understanding the preferences of a significant consumer group, Generation Z (Gen Z), who will soon have one of the largest buying powers globally. Gen Z differs from former generations, presenting brands with a problem as they cannot use the same brand communication strategies they have used for previous generations to reach this new market, which currently forms one of the most significant segments in the cosmetic industry. However, there is a lack of comprehensive literature on Gen Z globally and specifically within the South African context. Additionally, there is limited behavioural research in current green cosmetics literature. Therefore, this study, utilising an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative approach, aimed to fill these gaps by exploring what brand identity factors were more likely to influence female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media.

Convenience sampling was the chosen sampling method for this study, as it enabled the researcher to gain quick and easy access to their population. The sample size for this study included 10 female participants based in Durban, South Africa, between the ages of 18-28. This sample size enabled the researcher to ask and interpret more in-depth questions and reach data saturation. The findings of this study revealed that physique and personality tended to have the most influence out of the brand identity factors, while reflection and self-image appeared to have the least. However, brand identity did not solely influence Gen Z's purchase intentions, as there were other influential internal and external factors, such as attitude towards green skincare, social environment, and barriers to perceived behavioural control. The findings also revealed that Gen Z consumers were more likely to purchase from a green skincare brand that appeared to be more credible, trustworthy, transparent, authentic and aspirational. This study has contributed towards the limited academic literature on green skincare and Gen Z, and industry knowledge, specifically for South African green skincare brands, such as Esse and SKOON.

Key words: *green skincare, brand identity, purchase intention, Gen Z, social media, Theory of Planed Behaviour*

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research report submitted for the BA Honours in 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.

Signatur



Date 13/11/2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Contextualisation

The global cosmetic industry has seen significant growth, with green skincare as one of the fastest-growing sectors (Fraß & Walter, 2021; Ninan, Roy & Cheriyan, 2020; Chin, Jiang, Mufidah, Persada & Noer, 2018). According to Gebashe, Naidoo, Amoo and Masondo (2022) the South African beauty industry and skincare market was valued at \$3.5 billion in 2018 and by 2024, is expected to be worth \$6.16 billion. There has also been an increase in demand for South African green skincare, driven by factors such as access to natural ingredients from indigenous flora (The DTI, 2020). Thus, highlighting the significant potential and profitability of green skincare within South Africa.

However, despite the growing popularity of green skincare, there is a new consumer segment (Gen Z) that skincare brands need to understand. Gen Z forms one of the largest consumer segments within the cosmetic industry and will soon have one of the largest buying powers globally (Morris & Buckle, 2022; Khoros, 2021; Nguyen, 2020; Ninan *et al.*, 2020). Nonetheless, there is a significantly limited amount of research on this generation, specifically various brand factors that influence their consumer behaviour (Tamara, Heriyati, Hanifa & Carmen, 2021; Ninan *et al.*, 2020; Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019), which indicates the importance of brands understanding what factors motivate this new consumer segments' purchase intentions, to drive future purchases.

Gen Z is the first generation to grow up with constant exposure to the Internet and social media, making it a significant influence in their lives and led them to become a highly visual generation (Aspitman, Karacsonyi & Uthman, 2021; Beng, Mun, Kian, Ying & Shiuan, 2019; Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019). This indicates the power of social media and how brands can use various platforms, such as Instagram, to develop and grow their brand identity. However, it is important for green skincare brands to understand what brand identity factors influence female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions to effectively reach this new market segment.

Previous studies have examined various other factors that can influence consumers' purchase intentions of green skincare brands (e.g. brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand image, brand congruence, eco labelling and certification, social media marketing, environmental knowledge, celebrity endorsement, social media content, price sensitivity, country of origin and social norm); however, none have explored the influence of brand identity factors on consumers' purchase intentions of green skincare brands (Kapoor, Fernandes & Punia, 2022; Shanti & Alversia, 2022; Pop, Săplăcan & Alt, 2020; Hsu, Chang & Yansritakul, 2017).

Therefore, this study aims to provide a new perspective on how brand identity factors (physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image) might impact consumers purchase intentions.

Although research on Gen Z exists from various countries, the literature specifically focused on the South African market is limited, this presents local brands with challenges in effectively engaging with Gen Z consumers to drive future purchases (Morris & Buckle, 2022; Khoros, 2021; Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019). Thus, further emphasising the importance of this chosen topic, as it can help South African green skincare brands gain a deeper understanding of female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions within their local context.

This study includes two South African green skincare brands (Esse and SKOON) as a part of the case study. Esse was selected because they not only prioritise sustainability, use active ingredients and biodegradable foaming agents in their formulations, but they also promote their stance on sustainability on social media (Esse, 2023). They are also "certified organic, vegan, cruelty-free and carbon- and plastic-neutral" (Esse, 2023). Esse (2023) also ensures the sustainable harvesting of indigenous plants by local communities. All these factors demonstrate that the brand fits within the criteria of a green skincare brand.

SKOON was selected because their formulations are non-toxic, certified cruelty-free, and include natural, active ingredients harvested sustainably across Africa (SKOON, 2022), similar to Esse's green skincare practices. The brand emphasises holistic, clean, and sustainable skincare, employing eco-friendly packaging and organic ingredients, which they also promote on social media (SKOON, 2022). Similar to Esse, SKOON strives to minimise its environmental impact and adheres to green skincare practices, creating products free from harmful chemicals. Moreover these brands were selected, because they have unique and distinct brand identities from one another (Esse, 2023; SKOON, 2022). This is imperative as this study aims to understand how brand identity influences female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions. The selected brands had to share similar green skincare practices. This criterion is crucial, as any disparity in perceived sustainability between the brands could influence the study's results. Given that this research's primary focus is examining brand identity, maintaining consistency in environmentally friendly practices is essential.

1.2. Rationale

Green skincare has gained significant popularity within the cosmetic industry, as sustainable living and choosing eco-friendly products are now considered trends (Fraß & Walter, 2021; Chin *et al.*, 2018). Social media has also significantly increased the popularity of green skincare brands within the last two decades, specifically among Gen Z consumers (Nguyen, 2020). According to Pauliene and Sedneva (2019), Gen Z differs from previous generations due their technological upbringing, which has resulted in trend-following behaviour and decreased brand loyalty. Furthermore, their values differ from those of previous generations, as they highly value sustainability, making them more eco-conscious and valuing eco-friendly products (Bhavana & Thiruchanuru, 2018). Moreover, Gen Z are more likely to start purchasing and using skincare products before the age of eighteen, which provides them with a greater purchasing power (Nguyen, 2020). These unique factors indicate the importance of focusing on using this generation as the sample for this study as it could assist South African green skincare brands, such as Esse and SKOON, by providing them with insights and an in-depth understanding as to how they might reach this new target audience that's entering the workforce and becoming more financially independent, as well as understand what factors brand identity influence Gen Z's purchase intentions of green skincare.

Although green skincare has grown in popularity, there is a lack of behavioural research regarding consumers purchasing intentions of green products, specifically skincare, as well as limited research on what brand identity factors are more likely to influence the purchasing intentions of green skincare (Tamara *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen, 2020; Chin *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, there is little to no research – to the knowledge of the researcher – on this topic within a South African context, thus forcing South African green skincare brands to rely on research conducted in different countries with various cultures. This is problematic as the findings of each country cannot be applied generally, since each country has its own norms, values, and perceptions concerning skincare and sustainability. Thus, further reinforcing the importance of this study as it can provide South African green skincare brands with findings that they can utilise to help grow their brands.

Given that Gen Z forms one of the largest segments within the global market it is imperative for brands, such as Esse and SKOON, to start cultivating relationships with this new target audience to drive future purchases (Nguyen, 2020). However, brands can only achieve this if they have a greater understanding of Gen Z through new research studies. This study aims to fill the gap in academic research and industry knowledge by exploring what brand identity factors influence Gen Z's purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media.

1.3. Problem Statement

Gen Z is the new target market for green skincare brands, however, as previously stated they differ from former generations. This presents brands with a problem as they cannot use the same brand communication strategies, they have used for previous generations to reach this new market. Therefore, they need to develop a greater understanding of Gen Z; however, there is a gap in the literature on Gen Z globally and even more so within a South African context (Tamara *et al.*, 2021; Ninan *et al.*, 2020; Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019). This is problematic as Gen Z will soon have one of the largest buying powers globally, and brands need to understand how to use their brand identities effectively to increase consumer purchase intention within this new generation (Morris & Buckle, 2022; Khoros, 2021).

There is also a significant lack of behavioural research within current green cosmetics literature (Tamara *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen, 2020; Chin *et al.*, 2018). This is problematic for skincare brands, as they need to understand why their consumers behave a certain way to grow their business. Furthermore, previous literature has not explored brand identity's effect on green skincare purchase intention (Kapoor *et al.*, 2022; Pop *et al.*, 2020; Beng *et al.*, 2019; Hsu *et al.*, 2017). This, therefore, warranted a research response as this specific study has not yet been conducted. There is also a gap in methodology; most previous studies use quantitative or mixed-method approaches (Shanti & Alversia, 2022; McClure & Seock, 2020; Pop *et al.*, 2020; Bhavana & Thiruchanuru, 2018); however, few studies utilised qualitative research exclusively.

Therefore, using a qualitative methodology, this study will provide a more in-depth understanding of what brand identity factors are more likely to influence female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media. This study will also assist in filling the gap in the literature and address the issue that green skincare brands face by providing them with findings that they can use to understand this new target market better.

1.4. Purpose Statement

This study aims to explore and understand what brand identity factors are more likely to influence female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media. Moreover, the researcher intends to use this research to contribute to the academic literature on green skincare and Gen Z and industry knowledge, specifically South African green skincare. This will be achieved by using local skincare brands, Esse and SKOON.

1.5. Research Question/s

What brand identity factors are more likely to influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

Sub-Questions

SQ1: Does physique influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SQ2: Does personality influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SQ3: Does culture influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SQ4: Does relationship influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SQ5: Does reflection influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SQ6: Does self-image influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SQ7: Which green skincare brand, Esse or SKOON, are female Gen Z consumers more likely to purchase from?

1.6. Research Objectives

To explore which brand identity factors of green skincare brands on social media are more likely to influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers.

Sub-Objectives

SO1: To explore whether physique influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SO2: To explore whether personality influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SO3: To explore whether culture influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SO4: To explore whether relationship influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SO5: To explore whether reflection influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

SO6: To explore whether self-image influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

S07: To explore whether female Gen Z consumers more likely to purchase from Esse or SKOON.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: This research report will define key terms/concepts that relate to their study, discuss the researcher's chosen theoretical foundation as well as discuss and analyse previous literature using a thematic structure. Following the literature review the researcher will describe and explain their chosen research methodology from their paradigm, research design, population and sampling to their data-collection and data-analysis methods. Then, they will discuss their findings and interpretations. Finally, the researcher will discuss their study's trustworthiness, discuss their final conclusions, and address ethical considerations and limitations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptualisation

2.1.1. *Brand identity*

Based on Aaker's (1996a) research, this study defines brand identity as the various components that make a brand identifiable and unique, as well as enabling it to differentiate itself from its competition. Furthermore, brand identity is developed to determine how a brand wants consumers to perceive them. According to Kapferer (2008a) brand identity consists of six elements (physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image):

Physique:

This element focuses on the physical characteristics of a brand, which enables consumers recognise specific brands that have developed a unique brand identity (Kapferer, 2008a). Moreover, the physique also includes the physical features of a brand's product (Kapferer, 2008a).

Personality:

This element refers to the brand's character, which consists of various traits that are communicated towards consumers through the brand's unique voice (Kapferer, 2008a). This enables the brand to be more relatable towards its target audience (Kapferer, 2008a).

Culture:

This element focuses on the values and beliefs on which the brand is built, and provides a connection between the brand and the organisation (Kapferer, 2008a). Moreover, the brand's culture can be utilised to help consumers connect with the brand (Kapferer, 2008a).

Relationship:

This element refers to the relationships and connections that brands form with their consumers, which can assist in developing a stronger brand identity (Kapferer, 2008a).

Reflection:

This element focuses on how the brand reflects the characteristics and values of its target audience (Kapferer, 2008b, cited in Cunningham, 2021).

Self-image:

This element focuses on how “consumers perceive themselves when they are using the brand” (Kapferer, 2008, cited in Cunningham, 2021: 19). This can provide insight into how consumers actually perceive the brand (Kapferer, 2008b, cited in Cunningham, 2021: 18

2.1.2. Green skincare

This study will utilise the literature of Hsu *et al.* (2017) and Chin *et al.* (2018) to define the concept of green skincare, which is classified as skincare cosmetics that are formulated with natural ingredients, that are sourced sustainably and are free from harmful chemicals, as well as having a minimal impact on the environment.

2.1.3. Brand communication: Social Media

Based on Keller’s (2009) previous literature, brand communication is defined as all marketing communication activities used to deliver consistent brand messages to advertise and publicise a brand’s products or services, while maintaining the brand’s identity and reputation.

This study will utilise Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan’s (2017) definition of social media, which is classified as a brand communication tool as it consists of various Internet-based platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, that can be used for marketing and content creation, which is used to further develop brand identity and ensure consistent brand communication across all communication channels.

2.1.4. Consumer behaviour: Purchase intention

Based on previous literature conducted by Kotler *et al.* (2017) and Solomon *et al.* (2013), this study defines consumer behaviour as the study of understanding consumers behaviour and what influences their decisions and motivations throughout the purchasing process. One of the consumer behaviours this study will be focusing on is purchase intention, which is defined, based on Ajzen’s (1991) research, as the decision-making process of the consumer that involves multiple factors that may influence the consumers preference for a particular product and their intention to purchase it.

2.2. Theoretical Foundation

The theory chosen for this study is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which originated from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) (Ajzen, 2020). The TRA assumed that human behaviour is within volitional control, but it overlooked factors that might hinder individuals from fully exercising control over their intended behaviour

(Ajzen, 2002). Recognising this limitation, Ajzen (2020: 316) introduced a new construct in the TPB called perceived behavioural control, which refers to “people's perceptions of their ability to perform a given behaviour”. This addition allows researchers using the TPB to consider situations or factors that may impede individuals from carrying out their intended behaviour (Ajzen, 2020; Ajzen, 2002).

The TPB has become one of the most popular, influential, and frequently cited models for predicting and understanding human social behaviour (Lavuri, 2021; Ajzen, 2011). This reinforces the theory's validity as it has been applied across various studies. The TPB consists of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control; these three factors are utilised to understand how they might influence behavioural intention (Lavuri, 2021; Ajzen, 2020).

The first factor, attitude, refers to people's attitudes towards the behaviour, also known as behavioural beliefs, which can be favourable or unfavourable depending on an individual's attitude (Ajzen, 2020). As applied to this theory, this study suggests that the attitudes of female Gen Z consumers towards the brand identities of the green skincare brands Esse and SKOON could influence their intention to purchase from these brands.

The second factor, subjective norm, refers to normative beliefs, which may result in the perceived social pressure to participate in a specific behaviour (Ajzen, 2020). This, however, is subjective to an individual's social environment. As applied to this theory, this study suggests that a female Gen Z consumer's normative beliefs regarding green skincare brands' identities on social media may influence their purchasing intentions.

Lastly, perceived behavioural control, based on control beliefs, refers to an individual's perception as to the ease or difficulty in enacting the behaviour (Ajzen, 2020). As applied to this theory, this study suggests that female Gen Z consumers perceived behavioural control over purchasing green skincare products may encourage them to act on their intentions.

According to Lavuri (2021) the TPB is the best model for predicting behavioural intentions. Thus, demonstrating that this theory can be utilised to understand consumer behaviour. The aim of this study is to understand what brand identity factors may influence female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions of green skincare on social media, reinforcing the relevance of this theory in being applied to this research. According to Ajzen (2011) the TPB illustrates a more complex depiction and understanding of human social behaviour. This correlates with the chosen paradigm of the study, as interpretivism is focused on understanding individuals' behaviour, which is influenced by their subjective experiences, perceptions, and beliefs.

2.3. Green Skincare

People are more concerned than ever about environmental issues, as consumer awareness has increased significantly within the last few decades (Fraß & Walter, 2021; Ottman, 2011; Prothero & McDonagh 1992). This has had a significant impact on consumer behaviour and led to an increase in the purchasing of green products, including green skincare (Fraß & Walter, 2021; Nguyen 2020; Prothero & McDonagh 1992). According to Dangelico and Pontrandolfo (2010) the concept of the word “green” has caused confusion, as it is a broad term that’s utilised across various marketing segments. Therefore, there is no concrete definition of what makes a product green. Ottman, Stafford and Hartman (2006) state that all consumer products have an effect on the environment, as it is unlikely that a product has zero environmental impact. This indicates that for a product to be considered green it needs to meet certain requirements and have a minimal impact on the environment. Ottman *et al.* (2006) define green products as merchandise that is designed to protect and preserve the environment by diminishing waste, preventing pollution, eliminating use of toxic chemicals and conserving energy and natural resources. Ottman *et al.* (2006) provide a universal definition that can be utilised by most green brands.

Hsu *et al.* (2017) and Chin *et al.* (2018) define green skincare as products that are formulated with natural ingredients, are free from harmful or toxic chemicals, packaged using recycled materials, as well as having a minimal impact on the environment. This definition fits within the parameters of Ottman’s *et al.* (2006) definition, yet it provides a more specified definition that green skincare brands can apply to their business. Dangelico and Pontrandolfo (2010) developed the Green Option Matrix (GOM), a framework designed to help define green products and practices through the analysis of the various characteristics of green products and practices. These characteristics include the reduction of water use and waste generation; the use of natural and renewable materials; use of recycled or partially recycled materials; formulation through natural ingredients and plant extracts from certified organic crops and biodegradable products and packaging (Dangelico & Pontrandolfo, 2010).

This matrix provides a more detailed definition of green skincare. Moreover, it reinforces Ottman’s *et al.* (2006) statement that most green products have an impact on the environment; however, that effect is minimised by the number of increased green product and practices characteristics.

In recent decades, sustainable and green consumption has become a global trend, which has led to an increased demand for green products (Shanti & Alversia, 2022; Fraß & Walter, 2021; Pop *et al.*, 2020; Chin *et al.*, 2018). This can be attributed to consumers' increased

environmental awareness and concern for their impact on the environment; however, social media also played a vital role in contributing towards this global trend (Shanti & Alversia, 2022; Fraß & Walter, 2021; Pop *et al.*, 2020). Hsu *et al.* (2017) argue that sustainability does not guarantee loyalty and profitability, therefore it is imperative for green skincare brands to acquire greater insights as to what factors influence consumers' purchase intentions towards their products, such as brand identity factors.

2.4. Brand Identity

According to Aaker (1996a), brand identity is composed of various elements or constructs that are unique to a brand. Moreover, a brand's identity is designed to provide a certain structure for the brand; this is achieved through consistency (Aaker, 1996a). This, therefore, indicates the importance of brand identity, as it can help brands differentiate themselves from their competition, and communicate how they want to be perceived by consumers. Kapferer (2008a) argues that it is brand communication paired with six brand elements that bring a brand's identity to life. Furthermore, Kapferer (2008a) and Kotler *et al.* (2017) argue that while brand identity consists of a unique set of core values that are unchanging and provide a guide and structure for the brand; the external brand elements should remain dynamic and open to adaptation towards the changing market. This highlights that Aaker views brand identity as fixed and unchanging, whereas Kapferer and Kotler view brand identity as a more flexible structure. Aaker (1996a) developed a Brand Identity Planning Model (see Figure 1), which can be used by businesses to help build or update their brand identity.

Figure 1: Aaker's Brand Identity Planning Model.

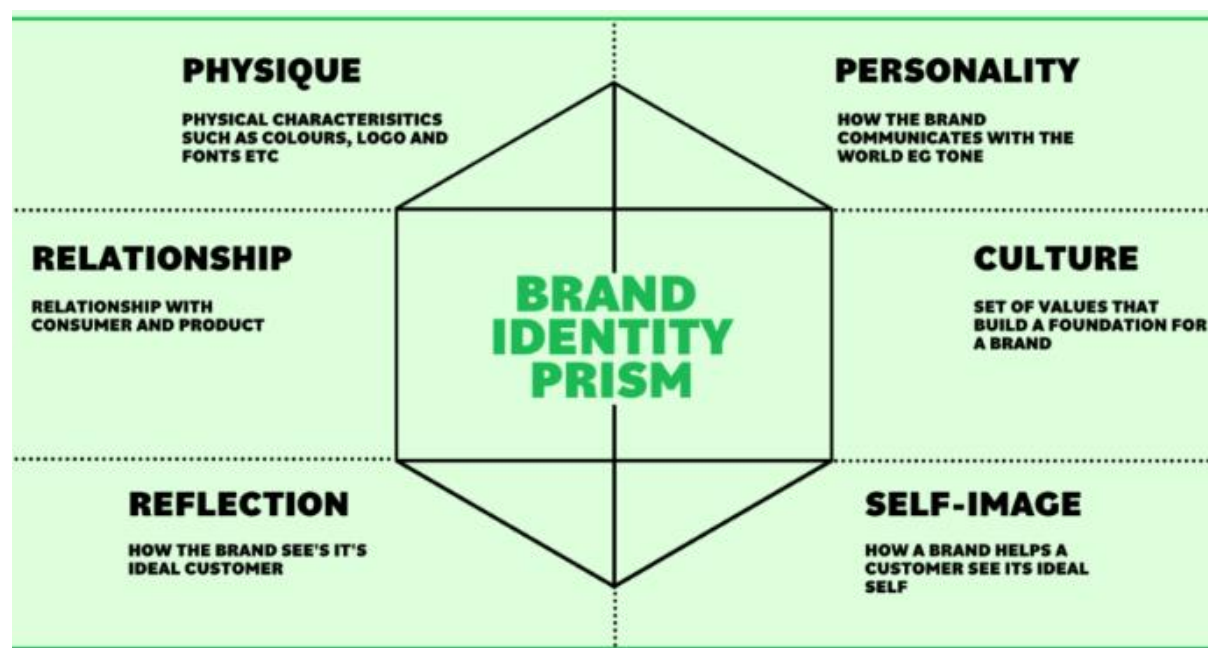


Source: van Haaften (2023).

Aaker's model can also be utilised by researchers to gain a greater understanding of brands and how they have developed their identity. This model features a core identity and extended identity, where the latter is composed of brand identity elements that have been organised into four groups: brand as product, brand as organisation, brand as person, and brand as symbol (Aaker, 1996b, cited in Mohan & Sequeira, 2009). The core identity forms the brand essence and is unlikely to change, whereas the extended identity is more adaptable; however, the brand elements are still required to remain connected to the core identity (Aaker, 1996b, cited in Mohan & Sequeira, 2009).

Conversely, Kapferer (2008a) developed the Brand Identity Prism (see Figure 2), which can assist brands in not only developing and communicating a strong brand identity, but also help assess the strengths and weaknesses of a brand.

Figure 2: Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism.



Source: Bailie (2023).

The Brand Identity Prism consists of elements similar to Aaker's Brand Identity Planning Model, such as the brand essence which represents the central value/s of a brand (Aaker, 1996b, cited in Mohan & Sequeira, 2009; Kapferer, 2008a). There are certain theoretical differences between the elements as seen in Figures 1 and 2, for instance Kapferer's (2008a) prism consists of six elements: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image (see section 2.1. Conceptualisation for more in-depth definitions). Moreover, these six elements provide brands with two perspectives on how their brand identity is communicated internally and externally. Therefore, it provides a more holistic perspective that includes the

internal and external perspective of the consumer (Kapferer, 2008a), whereas Aaker's model focuses solely on the brand.

In this study, the researcher uses Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism to understand how the attitude, social norms and perceived behavioural control of female Gen Z consumers towards brand identity factors (physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image) of Esse and SKOON influence their purchase intentions of green skincare. This model was selected as it provides a more holistic outlook on brand identity that takes the consumer's perspective into account (relationship, reflection and self-image); which aligns with the chosen methodology, as qualitative research focuses on the entire context in order to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2020).

2.5. Brand Communication

According to Keller (2009) and Keller and Lehmann (2006), branding has become integral to marketing communication due to companies recognising its value as a key resource. This reinforces the importance of establishing a strong brand identity as it provides marketers with a guide on developing strong marketing communication that aligns with the brand (Cunningham, 2021). However, for branding to impact consumer behaviour, it needs to be integrated with marketing communication to deliver a consistent brand message, i.e. integrated brand marketing communication (Percy, 2018; Keller, 2009; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). All communication contact points contribute towards brand awareness and the brand's identity, equity, and image (Percy, 2018; Kotler *et al.*, 2017; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). This indicates that all the aspects of branding are a form of communication. These elements are then integrated across various marketing channels to convey consistent brand messages (Percy, 2018; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). However, brands need to adapt and incorporate new media, such as social media, to stay relevant in the evolving marketing landscape (Keller, 2009).

2.5.1. Social Media

Social media has had a significant impact on consumer-brand interactions; however, there has been a significant lack of research on the role of social media in the process of consumer behaviour (Pop *et al.*, 2020; Kotler *et al.*, 2017). Over half the world's population is active on social media platforms (Fraß & Walter, 2021). This further emphasises the importance of examining social media's role in influencing female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions of green skincare brands.

Social media can be defined as Internet-based communication channels and platforms that enable content sharing, brand communication, and marketing (Arhanchiague, 2021; Pop *et al.*, 2020; Alalwan, 2018; Kotler *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, social media platforms can be used as brand communication tools through marketing and content creation, which in turn can increase brand awareness, brand loyalty, purchase behaviour and engagement (Arhanchiague, 2021; Ninan *et al.*, 2020; Alalwan, 2018). Therefore, illustrating that social media is a vital tool in the development and maintenance of a brand's identity. Compared to traditional media, customers find content marketing on social media more interesting, trustworthy, and engaging (Kotler *et al.*, 2017).

According to Shanti and Alversia, (2022), Tamara *et al.* (2021), Zhongqin (2020) and Alalwan (2018) social media plays a key role in the consumers' decision-making process, as well as having a significant influence over consumers attitudes and purchasing intentions. This demonstrates the importance of a brand's understanding of what brand identity factors might influence these intentions, as well as the vital role that social media plays within brand communication today.

Instagram is a social media and visual-based platform, where most skincare brands promote their products due to the highly visual nature of the platform (Fraß & Walter, 2021). Instagram also has over one billion active users, and one of its most important age categories, 18–24-year-olds, represents 29.3% of the total number of users worldwide (Arhanchiague, 2021).

2.6. Generation Z

According to Tamara *et al.* (2021), Ninan *et al.* (2020), and Pauliene and Sedneva (2019) previous literature rarely uses Gen Z as a research sample. This can be attributed to it being a new consumer segment for brands to market towards (Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019). There is a large debate regarding when Gen Z begins and ends some argue that it began in 1997 others argue 1995, and some authors argue Gen Z ended in 2010, whereas others argue it ended in 2015 (Aspitman, Karacsonyi & Uthman, 2021; Nguyen, 2020; Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019). However, for the purpose of this study Gen Z is defined as people born from 1995-2010.

Gen Z is the first digitally native generation, as they are the first generation to be exposed to and highly influenced by advanced technology and the Internet since birth, specifically social media (Aspitman *et al.*, 2021; Ninan *et al.*, 2020; Beng *et al.*, 2019; Kotler *et al.*, 2017). This suggests they are a highly tech-savvy and adaptable generation, easily influenced by social media. This is supported by previous literature which found that social media plays a key role

in Gen Z's daily life, and that they utilise these various online platforms to seek and share knowledge on brands and products, mainly YouTube and Instagram (Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019; Nguyen, 2020; McGorry, 2017). This indicates that Gen Z is a highly visual audience, thus, highlighting the importance of brands understanding how to effectively utilise their brand identity to influence the purchase intentions of this new consumer market.

Gen Z's preferences, values, and behaviours differ from previous generations due to the technological advancements during their upbringing (Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019); thus, leading them to prefer multimedia over text, follow trends, value experiences, and exhibit lost brand-loyalty (Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019). According to Nguyen (2020), Ottman (2011), and Bhavana and Thiruchanuru (2018), sustainability is a core value for Gen Z; driven by the impact of climate change on their lives and a global awareness of environmental issues. However, Gen Z consumers are aware of and can recognise greenwashing, which has a negative impact on Gen Z's purchase intentions, as they value transparency and authenticity (Nguyen, 2020; Beng *et al.*, 2019). Although global statistics state that the environment is Gen Z's number one concern, within a South African context, Gen Z consumers' top three issues of greatest concern are unemployment, economic growth, and education (Deloitte, 2021).

2.7. Consumer Behaviour: Purchase Intentions

According to Larchanka (2022: 22), consumer behaviour is a "new field of study, with no historical body of research of its own." Solomon, Russell-Bennett and Previte (2013) define consumer behaviour as the study of the consumers' purchasing process and understanding the motivations for their decisions. Consumer behaviour is a process that is comprised of three phases: pre-consumption, consumption, and post-consumption (Solomon *et al.*, 2013). This process is also known as the customer path, which follows the customer along their journey (Kotler *et al.*, 2017). This path differs from Solomon's *et al.* (2013) process as it is comprised of five phases: aware, appeal, ask, act and advocate (Kotler *et al.*, 2017). However, both authors agree that the process is not linear; the process does not end after the consumer has made their purchase, as the aim for brands is to ensure repurchase (Kotler *et al.*, 2017; Solomon *et al.*, 2013).

Solomon *et al.* (2013) argue that it is of paramount importance that brands understand consumer behaviour, as it provides them with a guide on how to fulfil their customer's needs best. One of the most critical aspects of consumer behaviour is purchase intention, which focuses on the consumers' decision-making process, and can be used to predict consumer behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Tamara *et al.*, 2021; Zhongqin, 2020; Hsu *et al.*, 2017). However, for brands to predict and understand consumer behaviour they need to have a clear

understanding of the factors that may affect their intentions to purchase a particular product or service.

Beng *et al.* (2019) used their study to compare Gen Y and Gen Z, and their findings revealed significant differences in consumer behaviour between the two generations. The results revealed that brand image has a greater effect on Gen Z consumer behaviour than Gen Y (Beng *et al.*, 2019). This indicates that they place a higher value on the image of a brand; thus, demonstrating that for brands to reach Gen Z, they need to develop and maintain strong brand identities, which in turn will influence how consumers perceive them. According to Bhavana and Thiruchanuru (2018) and Nguyen (2020), the eco-friendly elements of green skincare have a positive effect on Gen Z's purchase behaviour, and their findings revealed that unlike Gen Y, Gen Z are more willing to pay for higher priced green skincare. Other studies discovered that traditional marketing is not as effective as social media marketing on the purchase intentions of Gen Z, and that Gen Z is more likely to follow brands on social media (Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019; Ninan *et al.*, 2020).

In the last few decades, there has been a notable shift in consumer behaviour; as people have become more environmentally aware, they are opting for more environmentally friendly products and services (Nguyen, 2020). This has led to the rise of green marketing and the development of green (sustainable) brands; however, there is a significant lack of behavioural research regarding consumers purchasing intentions of green products, specifically skincare (Nguyen, 2020; Chin *et al.*, 2018). It is imperative for brands to understand what factors motivate consumers' purchase intentions, since they can use this information to create a stronger brand and increase profits.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Paradigm

Interpretivism is the chosen paradigm for this study. This paradigm was developed to study human beings, specifically to gain an in-depth understanding of their behaviour (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020). Unlike the idea of objective knowledge, interpretivism emphasises that people's interpretations and realities are shaped by their context and experiences (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020). Thus, illustrating that this paradigm provides a subjective perspective on human behaviour, recognising the influence of the environment and personal perceptions on behaviour. This indicates that human behaviour is subject to change; interpretivism allows researchers to understand the factors that may influence human behaviour and why such changes occur.

The epistemological position of interpretivism “challenges the idea of objective truth” and argues that facts are dependent on the context and people’s interpretations of information (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020: 29). As applied in this study, the researcher will attempt to gain an understanding of the participants’ perceptions of green skincare brands’ identities within the context of social media.

The ontological position of interpretivism argues that “reality is a social construction” as it depends on how people perceive and experience the social world (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020: 29). This study will be conducted in Durban, South Africa; therefore, the participants’ experiences and social environments are likely to influence their perceptions of green skincare brands on social media.

The axiological position of interpretivism includes the researcher’s and participants’ interpretations and values, as well as discussions on the values that influence their research (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020: 31). As applied in this study, the researcher will attempt to understand how the participants values may influence not only their perceptions of green skincare brand’s identities but also their purchase intentions of green skincare.

The aim of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding on what brand identity factors are more likely to affect the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z, which are subject to change as the participants’ perceptions of green skincare brands are influenced by their environment, specifically social media platforms. This reinforces the relevance of interpretivism as the chosen paradigm for this study.

3.2. Research Design

The objective of this study was to understand the brand identity factors that influence the purchase intentions of female Gen Z consumers when it comes to green skincare brands on social media. Therefore, the study utilized a qualitative approach since it aligns with the chosen paradigm (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020). Qualitative research aims to understand how individuals perceive and experience a phenomenon subjectively (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020). This approach is suitable for understanding human behaviour and identifying patterns or trends in people's actions (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020). After data collection, the researcher used an inductive approach to identify patterns and themes.

This study used an exploratory case study approach, which is a form of qualitative research. Exploratory research is the study of an unknown area (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020), and this study explored the effect of brand identity on Gen Z consumer's purchase intentions of green skincare, which had not been conducted in previous literature (Kapoor *et al.*, 2022; Pop *et al.*, 2020). The case study aimed to provide an integrated and in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences within a specific context, which aligned with the goal of qualitative research (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020; Maree, 2019). The chosen case study brands were Esse and SKOON, and the study will help South African green skincare brands understand the purchasing behaviour of female Gen Z consumers to assist in driving future purchases.

In-depth interviews were the chosen data collection method for this study. This method is frequently utilised in case studies, with the aim to obtain in-depth information about the participants' perceptions, values and opinions based on asking them open-ended questions (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020; Maree, 2019). This correlated with the qualitative approach and interpretivist paradigm, as this data collection method enabled participants to share their subjective experiences.

The chosen data analysis method for this study was qualitative content analysis (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020). "Qualitative content analysis is used to explore and identify overt and covert themes and patterns in a particular text" (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020: 234). Thus, demonstrating that it was the ideal data analysis method for this exploratory case study, as the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews into written text to identify themes and patterns. Furthermore, this study utilised a cross-sectional design, to provide a holistic overview of a specific case study at one point in time (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020).

3.3. Population

The target population for this study comprised of all female Gen Z consumers in South Africa who use social media, specifically Instagram. However, the accessible population was female Gen Z consumers between the ages of 18 - 28 who live in Durban, South Africa and use social media, specifically Instagram. This is because the researcher resides in Durban, and planned to conduct in-depth interviews in person, thus preventing them from being able to include participants from other regions of South Africa.

The units of analysis are the female Gen Z consumers who participated in the in-depth interviews. The researcher decided to focus on female consumers for their research because they form one of the largest segments within the cosmetic industry, specifically Gen Z who will soon have one of the largest buying powers globally (Morris & Buckle, 2022; Khoros, 2021; Nguyen, 2020; Ninan *et al.*, 2020). The population parameters for this study were females based in Durban, South Africa; between the ages of 18 - 28; they must have access to and use social media, specifically Instagram.

3.4. Sampling

The researcher utilised non-probability sampling in their study. This form of sampling is utilised when challenges may prevent the researcher from gaining access to the entire population (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020). The researcher could not access the entire female Gen Z population in Durban, South Africa, as this was not feasible. Moreover, the aim of non-probability sampling is to examine how many participants are needed to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem that is being explored i.e. until the data saturation point is reached (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020). Data saturation plays a significant role in qualitative research, with the aim to collect as much data as possible to develop a greater understanding of the female Gen Z population (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020).

Convenience sampling was the chosen sampling method for this study, as it enabled the researcher to gain quick and easy access to their population (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020). The researcher used WhatsApp to contact the participants, whereby they sent out a generalised message asking the participants if they would be willing to take part in their research. They also provided a brief explanation as to what the research topic was, and that their personal information would remain confidential. Once the participants agreed to be interviewed, the researcher organised dates and times to meet with the participants. This form of sampling assisted in accelerating the research process as the data collection and analysis were the most time-consuming; due to the study's qualitative nature, the researcher only had a limited amount of time to complete this research study.

According to du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2020) and Maree (2019), the sample sizes for qualitative research should remain small as it is difficult to analyse data that includes in-depth answers from a large sample. Therefore, the sample size for this study included 10 participants. This sample size enabled the researcher to ask and interpret more in-depth questions and reach data saturation. Furthermore, the aim of inductive reasoning is not to generalise the results to a broader population (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020); therefore, a smaller sample size was more appropriate for this study.

3.5. Data-Collection Method

In-depth interviews were the chosen data collection method for this study. This method is frequently utilised in case studies and the aim is to obtain in-depth information about the participant's perceptions, values and opinions based on asking them open-ended questions (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020; Maree, 2019). This correlated with the qualitative approach and interpretivist paradigm, as this data collection method enabled participants to share their subjective experiences. Furthermore, this data collection method also enabled the researcher to capture more in-depth data on Gen Z's consumer behaviour, which in turn would address the problem many green skincare brands face – understanding how to use their brand identities effectively to increase consumer purchase intention within this new generation, who have different values and perspectives on green skincare, compared to previous generations.

All of the interviews took place face-to-face. Before each interview, the researcher provided a more in depth description of their research and provided the participants with the consent and audio consent forms to read and sign. After the participants signed all the consent forms, the researcher got them to fill out a screening questionnaire to ensure they fit within the population parameters. Once the questionnaire was approved by the researcher, they started the interview. The researcher used a voice recording app on their phone to record each interview. The researcher also wrote notes after each interview on key words or phrases that participants stated for an additional data source.

The interviews were semi-structured, in which the researcher asked the participants open-ended, semi-structured questions that could be followed by further clarification or probing. This enabled flexibility and allowed the interviews to “progress and flow in a natural, conversational matter” (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020: 189; Maree, 2019), as the aim of the interviews was to gain as much detail from the participants as possible, namely reach data saturation.

The interview questions guideline was divided into two parts (see Annexure A to view the research instrument). Part one comprised of general questions; these helped the participants ease into the interview and gave the researcher a general understanding of how Instagram, the participant's social environment and attitudes may influence their perceptions and purchase intentions of green skincare. These questions were based on previous literature conducted by seminal authors, specifically Ajzen's (2020) research.

Part two focused on brand identity factors within the context of social media. The researcher presented the participants with printed out screenshots of Esse and SKOON's Instagram accounts, which included images of their profile pages, organic posts, product posts, influencer posts and sustainability posts. The participants were then asked specific brand identity-related questions based on these images; this provided the researcher with a comparison between the two green skincare brands. These questions were based on Kapferer's (2008) Brand Identity Prism as well as previous literature. Part two aimed to ascertain what brand identity factors (physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image) were more likely to affect female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media.

The interviews took place just over two weeks. After half of the interviews had been conducted, the researcher began transcribing the recordings through a code developed by AI. The transcripts were almost one hundred percent accurate; however, there were some grammatical errors, due to the participants individual speech patterns and accents. However, the researcher edited each transcript, by relistening to the recordings to ensure that the interviews were transcribed verbatim. This also enabled the researcher to become more familiar with the data. After the second batch of interviews, the researcher repeated the transcription and editing process. The researcher removed the participants' names from the transcripts and identified them by a letter, such as Participant A (PA), to assist the researcher in remaining objective and ensuring the confidentiality of the participants' identities.

3.6. Data-Analysis Method

The researcher used qualitative content analysis as their data analysis method for this study. It involves the identification of various patterns, themes, and codes within a text as well as their meanings (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020; Maree, 2019). This aligned with the researcher's inductive approach as they chose not to develop categories or themes before data collection, but rather categorise key codes within the collected data (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020). Qualitative research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of a certain phenomenon (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020; Maree, 2019), and in this study, the researcher's goal was to gain

a greater and more thorough understanding of Gen Z consumers, which indicated that qualitative content analysis was the ideal analysis method for this study. Furthermore, the interview recordings were transcribed into written text, thus making it the appropriate method to examine the collected data.

The researcher printed out each transcript, identified keywords and phrases by highlighting them, and then assigned them a code; this was achieved through the use of open coding. The codes were grouped together to develop categories, which were then developed into key themes. Open coding involves the organisation, careful examination, conceptualisation, categorising and re-categorising of data (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020; Maree, 2019). The researcher's open coding process was iterative, meaning they would consistently re-examine the data and edit codes and categories until the key themes emerged and data saturation was achieved.

The researcher then compiled all the codes (see Table 1 below) and the key words and phrases into a spreadsheet in order to organise all the codes and make them more accessible. This enabled them to begin interpreting the findings and meanings within the data. Moreover, they made use of memoing during data collection and analysis. These reflective notes assisted in providing greater insights as well as increased the study's trustworthiness, as they offered detailed evidentiary support on the research process (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020).

4. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Table 1: Presentation of findings.

Themes	Categories	Codes
Brand Preference	Brand Identity factors	Image Communication Shared values Connection Reflection Self-image
	Trustworthiness	Information Credibility Authenticity Familiarity Transparency Research
Gen Z Consumer Behaviour	Attitude towards green skincare (GS)	Positive towards GS vs negative towards GS Self vs Nature Beauty vs Health Environmental knowledge SA brand knowledge & perceptions Aspiration Holistic perspective
	Social environmental influences	Family influence Friends influence Instagram influence
	Barriers to perceived behavioural control (PBC)	Price Efficacy Availability Brand loyalty

Source: Gallus (2023).

After in-depth analysis and consistent re-examination of the data, two themes emerged: Brand preference and Gen Z consumer behaviour.

4.1. Brand Preference

This theme was formed through two categories: Brand identity factors and Trustworthiness. These categories were created through their related codes as seen in Table 1. The brand identity factors relate to the six elements of a brand's identity, based on Kapferer's (2008) Brand Identity Prism.

4.1.1. Brand Identity Factors

The findings revealed that the image (i.e. the physique) of the brand tends to play the most influential role when choosing a green skincare brand. This was indicated by the participants responses, as they would often go into greater detail when describing how the physique influenced their choice, and in some cases, it was the sole reason why they chose their specific brand. Here are some examples of the participants responses:

"Esse just because I'm liking the imagery" (PB),

"I would choose SKOON again purely for the fact that it attracts my attention" (PC),

"I think that this one just spoke to me in terms of brand design" (PH).

One of the main aspects of physique (image) that participants frequently mentioned was "colours". This suggests that Gen Z is a highly visual audience; therefore brands need to have strong visual elements to capture Gen Z consumers' attention fully. Furthermore, these findings align with Aspitman *et al.* (2021), Pauliene and Sedneva (2019), and Beng *et al.* (2019) research on Gen Z, where they all found and agreed that brand image has a greater effect on Gen Z consumer behaviour than previous generations, which was most likely due to the Gen Z's constant exposure to the Internet and social media. However, the physique does not solely guarantee purchase intention, as one of the participants stated that, *"although the brand attracts me it doesn't mean that it is necessarily what I would buy on the shelf" (PC)*. This indicates that there are a number of factors that are interconnected in how they influence the purchase intentions of Gen Z consumers.

However, communication, which refers to a brand's personality, also played a significant role in brand preference, which was highlighted by these participants responses: *"What impacted my choice was the copy" (PF)*, and *"It was definitely the caption of the post" (PG)*. In some cases, it was more influential than the physique. For example, one participant said, *"content is winning over colour"*. This is most likely because the personality reveals more about the

brand and its character, and provides the participants with more information, so that they can make an informed decision on whether or not they would want to purchase from the brand. Furthermore, the participants' responses to the captions in the organic and sustainability posts (see Annexure A) revealed how the language that the brands used to convey their personalities influenced the participants' choices. The participants preferred the brand they perceived to be simplistic, honest and sincere, which provides insights into the type of language that connects with Gen Z.

The shared values code (see Table 1) refers to the culture of a brand, which appeared to have some influence over participants' choices, however it wasn't as influential as physique (image) and personality (communication). This was indicated by one of the participants who said, *"The culture in and of itself is a bonus but it's not something that would have made me want it more."* If the participants shared certain values with a brand, it would have some influence over their decision. For example: *"I think where it as a value alignment that's where I would like buy the product"* (PB). Nearly all of the participants shared both brands' values of sustainability, as the majority of them felt that it was important to help the environment. This aligns with previous literature conducted by Ottman (2011), Bhavana and Thiruchanuru (2018) and Nguyen (2020), who found that sustainability is a core value for Gen Z and the eco-friendly elements of green skincare have a positive effect on Gen Z's purchase behaviour.

Similarly the participants' connection with their chosen brand i.e. relationship, was not as influential as the visual aspect of brand identity; however, it did still influence the participants' choices, specifically for the influencer posts (see Annexure A) where many of the participants felt as if they could *"relate"* to the influencers. This was most likely due to the age of the influencers, as many of the older participants preferred the Esse influencer post and many of the younger participants preferred the SKOON influencer post. Therefore, highlighting the importance of Gen Z seeing their generation being represented by green skincare brands to drive a stronger relationship between the brand and the consumer. Furthermore, the participants had a stronger connection with the green skincare brands that they felt spoke to them on a personal level and communicated that they *"care"* about everyone's *"unique skin types"* and needs. This indicated that Gen Z consumers tend to value more personalised communication; therefore, green skincare brands can use more personalised language to strengthen relationships between them and this new generation, which in turn could lead to increased purchase intention among Gen Z consumers.

The participants did not elaborate as much on reflection and self-image as much as the other factors, as they would often provide one-word answers or repetitive phrases such as, *"proud"*,

“happy” or “feel good about myself”. This indicates that these two factors do not appear to play a significantly influential role in the participants brand preferences and purchase intentions.

4.1.2. Trustworthiness

The second factor that influenced brand preference was trustworthiness, which is comprised of various aspects: information, credibility, authenticity, familiarity, transparency and research (see Table 1). Many of the participants seemed to favour posts that reflected *“honesty”* and *“transparency”*. See the examples below:

“I don't know too much about Esse, so I think I would stick with SKOON based on these images” (PJ).

“I would be inclined to trust what they're saying to me because it feels like they're being upfront” (PE).

“There's like an honesty about it that's simple” (PB).

This illustrates that Gen Z values authenticity quite highly, and prefers green skincare brands that are simple and minimal when it comes to communicating their brand identity. This is supported by Beng *et al.* (2019) and Nguyen (2020) who found that Gen Z consumers value transparency and authenticity more than previous generations; and that these values were likely to influence their purchase intentions. Other key components that influenced the participants' brand preferences was having access to lots of information on the brand as well as being able to research a brand. One of the participants stated that Instagram wouldn't lead them *“straight to buying without doing other research or asking someone before.”* Green skincare brands therefore need to ensure that they provide easily accessible information that is proven to be trustworthy, such as reviews from consumers and dermatologists or news articles. However, one of the most important aspects of trustworthiness is credibility, as the participants were more likely to choose a brand that has *“done their research”*, is *“clinically proven”* and is science-based. This need for credibility is most likely due to their awareness of and exposure to greenwashing, which, according to Nguyen (2020) and Beng *et al.* (2019), negatively impacts Gen Z's purchase intentions.

Brand identity factors and trustworthiness led most of the participants to choose Esse over SKOON, thus revealing Esse as the preferred green skincare brand. SKOON tended to be more popular with the younger participants, whereas Esse tended to be more popular among the older participants. For example, one of the older participants said, *“It just feels very like they (SKOON) are aiming towards my younger sister. Whereas Esse makes me feel luxurious, it makes me feel like they understand me.”* However there were a few exceptions on both sides. Although there were other factors above brand identity that influenced the participants

choices, such as their familiarity with either one or both brands. One participant said, *"I can't ignore the brand perception that I have, so I would still choose Esse"* (PF), when referring to SKOON.

Many of the participants used similar words to describe both brands: *"simple"*, *"clean"*, *"bright"*, *"clear"*, *"natural"* and *"minimalistic"*. However, Esse's physique and personality were perceived as a more *"premium"*, *"sophisticated"*, *"organic"*, *"modern"*, *"professional"*, *"scientific"*, *"intelligent"*, *"thoughtful"*, *"intentional"*, *"responsible"* and *"caring"* by most of the participants. However, some participants viewed Esse as a *"cold"*, *"clinical"* and *"older"* brand. Conversely, SKOON's physique and personality were perceived as more *"aesthetically pleasing"*, *"playful"*, *"dynamic"*, *"lifestyle based"*, *"fun"*, *"funky"*, *"young"*, *"warm"* and *"personal"* by most of the participants. However, some participants viewed SKOON as *"dull"*, *"bland"*, *"vain"*, *"too young"* as well as *"more like a startup company rather than being like established."*

However, despite these various factors, Esse was viewed as more honest, transparent, credible, authentic, and more aspirational. Furthermore, they provide more information, are more reflective of Gen Z, and feature stronger values that Gen Z share. Esse also had a stronger connection with the participants, this was most likely due to their personalised communication and that they were viewed as more trustworthy. Thus making Esse the preferred green skincare brand.

4.2. Gen Z Consumer Behaviour

Although these various brand identity factors play varying influential roles regarding Gen Z consumers purchase intentions towards green skincare, there are other internal and external factors that also influence their purchase intentions. Therefore, the Gen Z Consumer Behaviour theme emerged from three categories: Attitude towards green skincare (GS), Social environmental influences, and Barriers to perceived behavioural control. These categories were based on Ajzen's (2020) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

4.2.1 Attitude Towards Green Skincare (GS)

The first category focused on the participants' perceptions (attitudes) towards green skincare brands as well as green skincare in general. Gen Z consumers' attitude towards purchasing green skincare formed an internal influencing factor. For the most part, the participants had a positive perception towards green skincare as many believed it was *"important"* to help the environment. However, one participant said, *"I'm not an eco-friendly enthusiast... I don't feel that skin care adds a huge amount to the carbon footprint"* (PD), and another said, *"I've never really thought about it enough to be important to me"* (PI), which revealed a somewhat

negative perception towards green skincare. Another important aspect to the participants attitudes towards green skincare was Self vs Nature (see Table 1), where they want a product that works well and cares for their skin, but at the same time is “*environmentally friendly*”. Furthermore, many of participants appeared to care less so for beauty and more so for “*health*” and having “*healthy skin*”. This was supported by one of the participants who said, “*they like care about what’s really going on; like the life inside your skin and not just how it looks on the outside*” (PF), when explaining why they chose Esse. This revealed that they take their skin’s health as well as their impact on the environment into consideration when evaluating green skincare brands, which is something that these brands could focus on when communicating their brand identity to this new market to drive purchase intention.

Gen Z tend to have more advanced environmental knowledge than previous generations, this has been driven by the impact of climate change on their lives and the increased global awareness of environmental issues (Nguyen, 2020; Ottman, 2011; Bhavana & Thiruchanuru, 2018). This was reflected in the findings of this study, as all of the participants displayed environmental knowledge around green skincare; some had more in-depth knowledge due them having conducted further research, yet even the participants who claimed they did not know anything about green skincare, did present basic environmental knowledge. For example, when PE was asked to describe what green brand features came to their mind when thinking about skin care, they said: “*Biodegradable packaging, toxin-free, paraben- and sulphate-free, like no testing on animals*”. One participant said, “*it’s not really even something I consider cause almost everything should be like real beauty without cruelty like not tested on animals and that sort of thing*” (PF). This indicated that green skincare brands that are ethical, sustainable and cruelty-free need to go beyond what is considered green if they want Gen Z consumers to choose their brand; since these green brand features are no longer considered unique and are now the norm and form the basic expectations of Gen Z consumers.

However, this is another area where Esse outperforms SKOON, specifically in the sustainability post (see Annexure A), as they are not solely focused on sustainability, but also supporting fair trade and creating new jobs through their green skincare products. This led the participants to favour Esse over SKOON. See the example below:

“They’re giving jobs to women and children; that’s attractive to me for a young person living in South Africa knowing that the unemployment rate is so high... Those are things that I think that as a Gen Zer now in this climate are so important” (PH).

Furthermore, these findings align with the Deloitte (2021) report, which revealed that although global statistics state that the environment is Gen Z's number one concern, within a South African context Gen Z consumers' top three issues of greatest concern were unemployment, economic growth, and education. This demonstrates the need for South African green skincare brands to understand the concerns and issues that South African Gen Z consumers face.

Although despite the participants' environmental knowledge, nearly all the participants had very limited knowledge on South African green skincare brands, and they often said that they *"don't know"* that many. Their limited knowledge resulted in them lacking in-depth perceptions of South African green skincare brands. This might highlight a larger issue, such as limited brand awareness that local brands face and something that they might need to address. However, many of participants said they *"like supporting local"*, but their main concern around these South African brands was the *"effectiveness"* of the actual skincare products. This was highlighted as one of the most important factors when purchasing green skincare products, which is further discussed in the Barriers to Perceived Behavioural Control (PCB) section.

Another intriguing observation with regards to Gen Z consumers' attitudes towards green skincare, was that many of the participants aspired to live a more sustainable lifestyle, such as being able to purchase green skincare. See the examples below:

"I think it reflects something that we aspire to" (PB).

"I would love to be more sustainable so it definitely reflects what direction I'm going in, not so much where I am" (PE).

"Like the kind of lifestyle positioning that I would aspire to" (PF).

This is supported by Fraß and Walter's (2021) and Chin *et al.*'s (2018) findings, which argue that green skincare has gained significant popularity within the cosmetic industry, as sustainable living and choosing eco-friendly products are now considered trends. This was further supported by a participant who said, *"As a Gen Zer we're very very into our skin care routine"* (PI).

Many of the participants also tended to have a holistic perspective concerning green skincare, meaning that they not only cared about the product being green, but also looked at the whole manufacturing process and cared about whether a brand was implementing green practices throughout. For example: *"How the plants are sustainably harvested and whatnot but also their values and beliefs in making sure that the people involved in the process are fairly compensated and looked after"* (PG). This refers back to the importance of trustworthiness,

as the responses from the participants indicated that Gen Z want access to more than surface level information, as they believe it is important to know not only what basic ingredients are in their skincare products (chemically toxic or natural) and how those ingredients might affect their skin, but also how their products are manufactured and what impact that might have on the environment.

4.2.2. Social Environmental Influences

The second category focuses on the social environmental influences that might have played a factor in participants' behaviour, when choosing green skincare brands. Based on the participants answers friends and family tend to play a more influential role in the participants decisions and purchase intentions. In some cases the family played a more influential role, one of the participants had an aunt who started a green skincare brand, and another participant's sister has sensitive health issues so her whole family switched to using green cosmetic products. This is most likely due to the fact that the participants *"trust friends and family more"* as they can *"vouch for those recommendations"*. However, for most of the participants, their peers tended to have a bit more sway. For example: *"They'd kind of make you feel bad if you're not, you know, contributing to helping the environment, so it would definitely impact the intention"* (PA). Thus, further highlighting that trustworthiness is an important value for Gen Z consumers, reinforcing the external influence of these consumers social environments on their purchase intentions.

Conversely, the findings of this study revealed that, for most participants, Instagram has a fairly limited influence on their purchase intentions, as they are less trusting of information that they find on Instagram. This is supported by one of the participants who said, *"I'm not sure if it is truly green or if what they're saying is true"* (PH). This contradicts the findings of Shanti and Alversia (2022), Tamara *et al.* (2021), Alalwan (2018) and Kotler *et al.* (2017), who argued that consumers find content marketing on social media more interesting, trustworthy, and engaging than traditional media; and that social media plays a key role in the consumer's decision-making process, as well as having a significant influence over consumers attitudes and purchasing intentions.

Although, there were a few participants who found Instagram more influential in their purchasing decisions. For example: *"Because of how often I use it (Instagram) I think that maybe my intention to purchase it (green skincare) would be a bit like higher"* (PH). However, for some participants Instagram has helped them become more *"aware"* of green skincare brands and piqued the participants *"interest"* in said brands, as well as provided them with easily accessible *"information"*. Instagram, therefore, plays a more supporting role to the other influencing factors – it provides an *"extra nudge"* towards choosing a green skincare brand.

However, this study's findings indicate that most Gen Z consumers do not perceive Instagram as trustworthy or a reliable source of information, possibly due to their heightened awareness of greenwashing. This is supported by the findings of Nguyen (2020) and Beng *et al.* (2019) who argued that Gen Z consumers are more likely to recognise a brand making false claims about having a sustainable product or implementing sustainable practices i.e. greenwashing.

4.2.3. Barriers to Perceived Behavioural Control (PCB)

The third category for Gen Z consumer behaviour focuses on barriers to PBC, whereby certain factors were identified that the participants believed would prevent them from purchasing green skincare products. Although most of the participants said they desired to live more sustainable lifestyles and aspired to purchase green skincare, the “*price*” of these products appeared to be the main barrier, as the participants find green skincare to be too “*expensive*”. Since most of the participants financial situations prevent them from being able to purchase more expensive skincare products. These findings contradict Bhavana and Thiruchanuru's (2018) results, as they argued that Gen Z were more willing to pay for higher priced green skincare than Gen Y. There was one participant who did not mention “*price*”; however, they are in a more stable financial situation as they live with their family who is of the upper-middle class, therefore the expense of green skincare would not prevent them purchasing from green skincare brands.

However, another important factor that would make the participants hesitant to choose green skincare brands is efficacy. They were more concerned about whether the green products “*work*”, rather than how sustainable they were. An example of this is one of the participants stating, “*I like products that work at the end of the day... I think there is an understanding that more natural skincare products sometimes are slightly less effective because they use much gentler ingredients*” (PB). This factor could be connected to the high cost, because if participants purchase green skincare products, they might perceive them as investments that need to deliver on their promises to be worth repurchasing. This is further supported by Hsu's *et al.* (2017) argument that sustainability does not guarantee loyalty and profitability. Therefore, in order to influence the purchase intentions of Gen Z consumers, green skincare brands need to prove that their products are just as effective, if not more so than traditional cosmetics. Another barrier that a few participants mentioned was the availability of green skincare brands, as they felt there were “*fewer options in South Africa*”. This is most likely due to their limited knowledge of local, South African green skincare brands, as previously stated.

Brand loyalty also presented as another barrier, as some of the participants were more willing to “*stick*” to products and brands that they were familiar with, especially ones that they had used for “*years*”. However, this could have been influenced by their perceptions of green

skincare, and concerns about whether or not more eco-friendly products will be as effective. Another interesting finding regarding brand loyalty is that if participants were familiar with one of the two green skincare brands (Esse or SKOON) or they had chosen the same brand multiple times in a row during the interview, they would present a stronger loyalty towards that brand. For example: *"I want to choose SKOON more because now I've identified with the brand multiple times"* (PA). These findings contradicted Bhavana and Thiruchanuru's (2018) argument around Gen Z's decreased brand loyalty compared to previous generations.

However, the findings did support Bhavana and Thiruchanuru's (2018) argument that Gen Z's technological upbringing has resulted in trend-following behaviour. This was illustrated by some of the participants responses towards the product post (see Annexure A), where they preferred the brand that had a more *"trendy"* product. For example one of the participants said, *"I love doing face masks, that's really popular right now, so I think that yeah as a Gen Zer that really is attractive"* (PH). Thus, reinforcing the findings of previous literature, that Gen Z consumers are more likely to follow trends, such as skincare trends.

This study aimed to gain a more in-depth understanding of what brand identity factors are more likely to influence female Gen Z consumers purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media. The findings within themes of brand preference and Gen Z consumer behaviour, revealed that both play an influential role on Gen Z's purchase intentions. The brand preference findings revealed how brand identity and trustworthiness influences purchase intentions,. In contrast, the Gen Z consumer behaviour findings revealed the internal (attitude) and external factors (social environmental influences and barriers to PBC) that influence Gen Z consumers decisions or ability to purchase green skincare. This indicated that while brand identity plays a significant role in Gen Z consumers decision-making process, there are other external and internal factors that are individual to each Gen Z consumer and influence those consumers' behaviours.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Trustworthiness

As previously stated, the researcher maintained transparency with regards to their research process from data collection to analysis, by providing written memos on their decisions and interpretations of the data. This enhanced the trustworthiness, dependability, confirmability, and integrity of the researcher's study, as the research methods were readily accessible for examination (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020; Maree, 2019). Furthermore, the findings of this study could be applied to a similar research study, as the researcher provided full descriptions on the context, participants, and research design; thus, increasing the transferability and credibility of the study (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020; Maree, 2019).

The credibility of this study was also increased through the compatibility of the research methodology with the research question (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020; Maree, 2019). The aim of the study was to develop an in-depth understanding of female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions of green skincare brands and how brand identity factors influence those intentions, this aligned with the researcher's qualitative approach. The research questions were mainly based on previous literature conducted by seminal authors, such as Ajzen (2020) and Kapferer (2008), to enhance the credibility of the study. The researcher did fit within the population parameters of this study, which could have allowed bias to influence the interpretation of the results. However, researcher was aware of their own predispositions and used written records of their research process to support their data interpretations, which would increase the confirmability of the study (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2020; Maree, 2019).

5.2. Future Research

Future studies could include various demographics rather than focusing on a single generation or gender, to make the findings more generalisable. They could also focus on using a larger sample size, as this could yield greater and more reliable insights on Gen Z's consumers purchasing intentions of green skincare. Hsu *et al.* (2017) suggest future studies could examine whether purchase intention changes over time, and the factors that may influence these changes. This study implemented a cross-sectional design; therefore, future studies could use a longitudinal design to examine these changes. Another aspect that they could focus on is including more green skincare brands within future studies, rather than just two. This would likely lead to more in-depth insights, a more holistic perspective and understanding of the green skincare market in South Africa, reducing the likelihood of overgeneralisation.

5.3. Final conclusions

The main question that this study aimed to answer was what brand identity factors are more likely to influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? The sub-questions focused on the six brand identity factors of Kapferer's (2008) Brand Identity Prism (physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image), and whether they influence the purchase intentions of female Gen Z consumers. The findings of this study revealed that physique and personality tend to have the most influence out of the brand identity factors. Culture and relationship have some influence; and reflection and self-image appear to have the least amount of influence, due to the participants limited answers. However, the findings reveal that brand identity does not solely influence Gen Z's purchase intentions, as there are other external and internal factors that play influential roles, such as attitude towards green skincare, social environmental influences and barriers to perceived behavioural control.

The final sub-question was to answer, which green skincare brand (Esse or SKOON) are female Gen Z consumers more likely to purchase from? The findings illustrated that Gen Z consumers are more likely to purchase from Esse, as it was viewed as more credible, trustworthy, transparent, authentic and aspirational than SKOON. All of these findings address the problem that South African green skincare brands face in understanding how to reach this new target market and increase consumer purchase intention, as this study has provided in-depth insights on Gen Z consumers within a South African context. Furthermore, the findings of this study have addressed the gap in the literature on Gen Z globally and within South Africa. Moreover, it has added to the limited behavioural research within current green cosmetics literature, which will assist green skincare brands in understanding why their consumers behave a certain way to grow their business.

The objective of this study was to explore which brand identity factors of green skincare brands on social media are more likely to influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers. Thus, the findings of this study addressed another gap with previous literature which had not explored the effect of brand identity on the purchase intention of green skincare. Moreover, this study addressed the gap in methodology of previous studies by exclusively utilising qualitative research. This enabled the researcher to gain a more in-depth understanding on what brand identity factors were more likely to influence female Gen Z consumers purchase intentions towards green skincare on social media.

5.4. Ethical Considerations

A few ethical considerations that need to be addressed, one of which was that the researcher fit within the population parameters. This may have prevented them from remaining completely objective and could have allowed bias to influence the interpretation of the results. However, this issue was alleviated through their transparency and written records (memo) of their research process. Another ethical consideration was that the participants needed to be informed on what research study they were taking part in and assured that their personal information would remain confidential. This was addressed in Annexure C, which includes the participant consent form.

When collecting data from the participants, the researcher needed to ensure that they prioritised the participants' physical and psychological comfort, by considering the physical and social context in which the data was gathered. Therefore, the researcher conducted the interviews within a private space to further ensure the privacy and comfort of the participants. The interviews were recorded, and although the researcher's supervisor would have access to the recordings, the participants identities would remain confidential, as the researcher removed the participants names from the transcripts and identified them by a letter, such as Participant A (PA). Another ethical consideration was ensuring data confidentiality, integrity, and privacy when data is stored online (Maree, 2019). The recordings and transcripts for this study were stored on the cloud which could pose security risks, such as theft or the system failure of the laptop (Maree, 2019). However, the researcher made regular backups and kept the recordings and transcripts password protected to ensure data security.

5.5. Limitations

There were several limitations within this study, such as the researcher having limited access to the target population, as they could not conduct in-depth interviews with the majority of female Gen Z consumers in South Africa, due to a time and resource limitations. The researcher only had 18 months to complete their research proposal, and they lacked the funds to conduct the study on a larger scale.

However, if given more time and extra resources, the researcher would have conducted more in-depth interviews across various provinces within South Africa, to provide a greater understanding of female Gen Z consumers behaviour within a regional context. This would have provided Esse and SKOON with data that they could use to reach the whole of the South African Gen Z market, and not remain restricted to findings within Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The study only used two green skincare brands, which in turn placed a limitation on gaining a

more in-depth understanding and a more holistic perspective of the green skincare market in South Africa.

The researcher also implemented a cross-sectional design; however, it would be useful to use a longitudinal design to determine what trends on social media might influence female Gen Z consumers purchasing intentions over time. Another limitation is the insubstantial number of studies on this specific topic, specifically within a South African context; therefore, the researcher is forced to rely significantly on primary research.

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[79hJWzxqfgQn_XFYrchQ8s&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Solomon%2C%20M.R.%202011.%20Consumer%20Behaviour%3A%20Buying%2C%20Having%2C%20and%20Being&f=false](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354791799/figure/fig/1/figure-fig1/1629844444444/79hJWzxqfgQn_XFYrchQ8s&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Solomon%2C%20M.R.%202011.%20Consumer%20Behaviour%3A%20Buying%2C%20Having%2C%20and%20Being&f=false) [Accessed 24 March 2023].

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ANNEXURE A

Research Instrument

Screening Questionnaire

This interview will focus on brand identity factors influence female Gen Z consumers purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media.

All participants personal information will remain confidential.

Please answer these screening questions:

SQ1: Do you identify as a female?

If you selected “No”, you do not qualify to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your time.

☐ Yes

☐ No

SQ2: Please select the age category do you fit into.

If you do not fit within any of these age categories, you do not qualify to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your time.

☐
18-20

☐
21-23

☐
24-28

SQ3: Do you have access to, and use Instagram?

If you selected “No”, you do not qualify to complete the questionnaire. Thank you for your time.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Interview Questions Guideline

Part 1: General Questions

1. How would you describe green (sustainable) skincare in your own words?
2. What are green (sustainable) versus non-sustainable (traditional) cosmetics to you?
3. Which green (sustainable) brand features come to your mind when thinking about skincare?
4. Is green skincare important to you? Why?
5. How do your friends and family influence your perceptions of green skincare brands?
6. How do your friends and family influence your intention to purchase green skincare?
7. How do you feel about green skincare when promoted on Instagram, compared to friends, family or co-workers promoting green skincare products they use?
8. How does Instagram influence your intention to purchase green skincare?
9. What factors may prevent you from purchasing green skincare and why?
10. What is your perception of South African green skincare brands? Why?

Part 2: Social Media

Instagram profile

The researcher will instruct the participants to look at the below images (Figures 3 to 6) and then answer the following questions:

1. Based on these images of the Instagram profiles of Esse and SKOON, which green skincare brand are you more likely to choose?
2. Does the physique, such as the colours, logo, and design elements, play a factor in your choice?
 - 2.1. If so, what is it about the physique that led you to choose that brand?
3. Does the culture, such as the values and beliefs, of the brand play a factor in your choice?
 - 3.1. If so, what is it about the values that led you to choose that brand?
4. Based on your chosen brand, does that brand reflect you as a female Gen Z consumer and your values?
5. If you were to purchase and use products from your chosen brand, how would you perceive yourself?

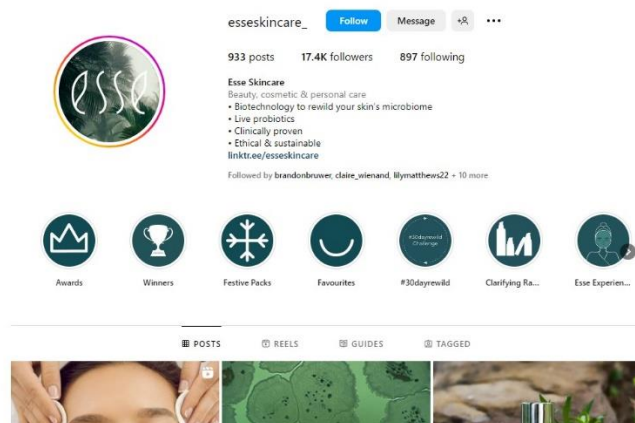


Figure 3: 2023. Esse Instagram profile. (Esseskincare, 2023).

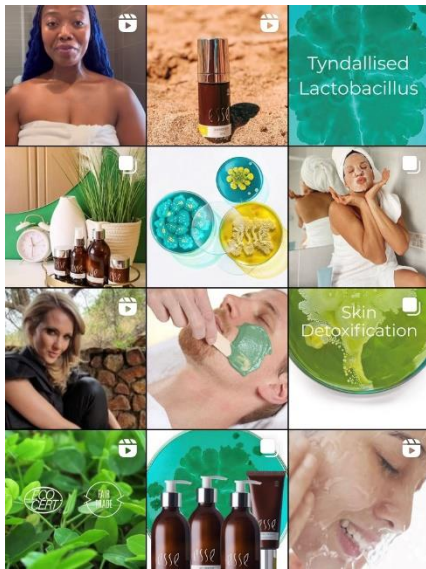


Figure 4: 2023. Esse Instagram profile. (Esseskincare, 2023).

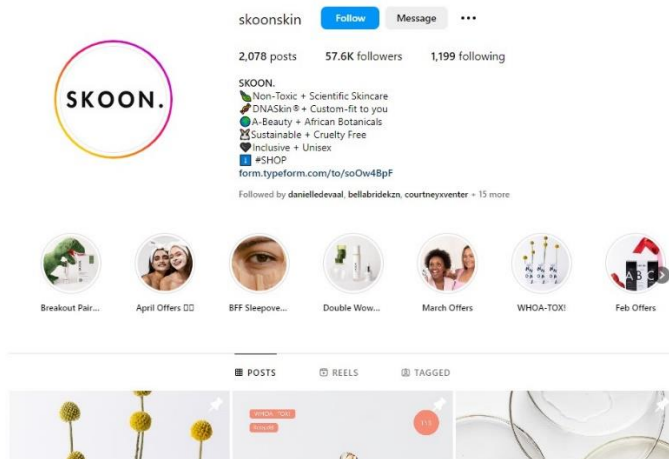


Figure 5: 2023. SKOON Instagram profile. (Skoonskin, 2023).

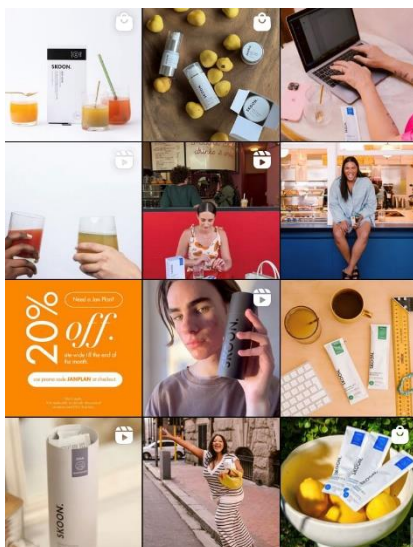


Figure 6: 2023. SKOON Instagram profile. (Skoonskin, 2023).

Organic post

The researcher will instruct the participants to read the below posts (Figures 7 & 8) and then answer the following questions:

1. Based on these images of organic Instagram posts from Esse and SKOON, which green skincare brand are you more likely to choose?
2. Does the physique, such as the colours, logo, and design elements, play a factor in your choice?
 - 2.1. If so, what is it about the physique that led you to choose that brand?
3. Does the personality, such as the voice and brand's character, play a factor in your choice?
 - 3.1. If so, how would you describe the brands personality and how did it influence your choice?
4. Does the culture, such as the values and beliefs, of the brand play a factor in your choice?
 - 4.1. If so, what is it about the values that led you to choose that brand?
5. What connection do you feel with the brand?
6. Based on your chosen brand, does that brand reflect you as a female Gen Z consumer and your values?
7. If you were to purchase and use products from your chosen brand, how would you perceive yourself?



Figure 7: 2023. Esse organic post. (Esseskinicare, 2023).

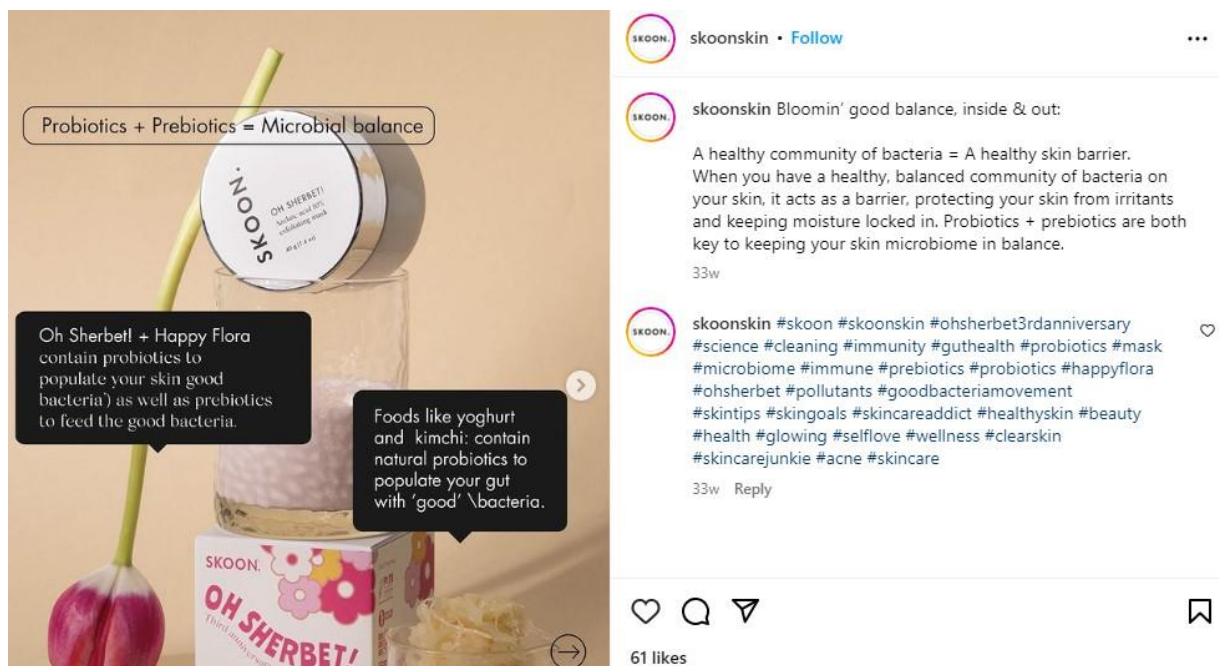


Figure 8: 2023. SKOON organic post. (Skoonskin, 2023).

Product post

The researcher will instruct the participants to look at the below images (Figures 9 to 10) and then answer the following questions:

1. Based on these images of the product images of Esse and SKOON, which green skincare brand are you more likely to choose?
2. Does the physique, such as the colours, logo, and design elements, play a factor in your choice?
 - 2.1. If so, what is it about the physique that led you to choose that brand?
3. Based on your chosen brand, does that brand reflect you as a female Gen Z consumer and your values?
4. If you were to purchase and use products from your chosen brand, how would you perceive yourself?



Figure 9: 2023. Esse product post. (Esseskinicare, 2023).



Figure 10: 2023. SKOON product post. (Skoonskin, 2023).

Influencer post

The researcher will instruct the participants to look at the below images (Figures 11 to 12) and then answer the following questions:

1. Based on these images of Instagram influencers for Esse and SKOON, which green skincare brand are you more likely to choose?
2. Does the physique, such as the image, play a factor in your choice?
 - 2.1. If so, what is it about the physique that led you to choose that brand?

3. What connection do you feel with the brand?
4. Based on your chosen brand, does that brand reflect you as a female Gen Z consumer and your values?
5. If you were to purchase and use products from your chosen brand, how would you perceive yourself?



Figure 11: 2023. Esse influencer post. (Esseskinicare, 2023).



Figure 12: 2023. SKOON influencer post. (Skoonskin, 2023).

Sustainability post

The researcher will instruct the participants to read the below posts (Figures 13 & 14) and then answer the following questions:

1. Based on these images of sustainability posts for Esse and SKOON, which green skincare brand are you more likely to choose?
2. Does the physique, such as the colours, logo, and design elements, play a factor in your choice?
 - 2.1. If so, what is it about the physique that led you to choose that brand?
3. Does the personality, such as the voice and brand's character, play a factor in your choice?
 - 3.1. If so, how would you describe the brands personality and how did it influence your choice?
4. Does the culture, such as the values and beliefs, of the brand play a factor in your choice?
 - 4.1. If so, what is it about the values that led you to choose that brand?
5. What connection do you feel with the brand?
6. Based on your chosen brand, does that brand reflect you as a female Gen Z consumer and your values?
7. If you were to purchase and use products from your chosen brand, how would you perceive yourself?



Figure 13: 2023. Esse sustainability post. (Esseskincare, 2023).

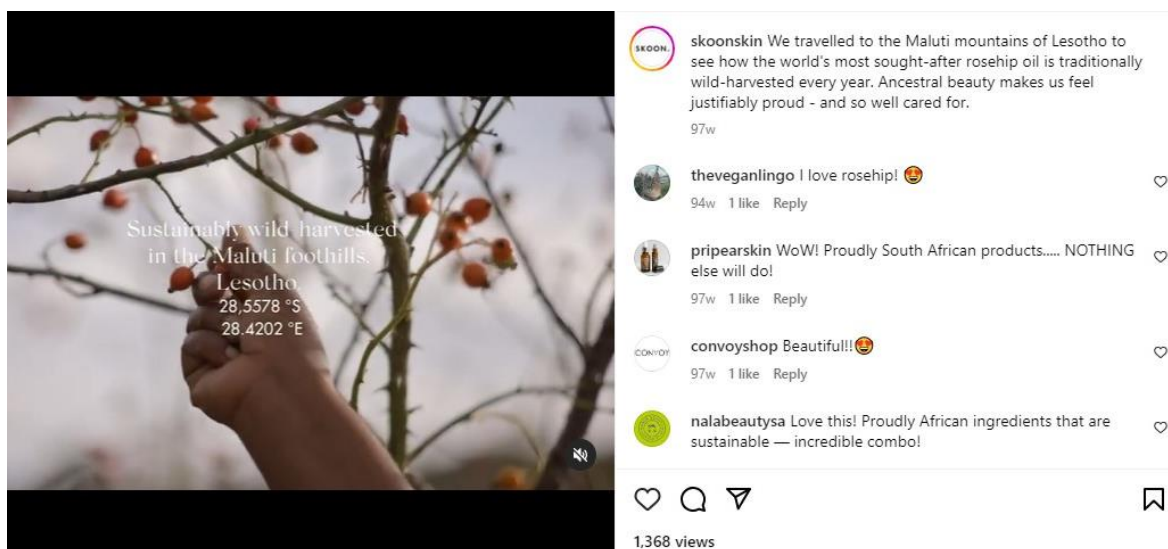


Figure 14: 2023. SKOON sustainability post. (Skoonskin, 2023).

ANNEXURE B

Vega Ethics checklist: RESE8419/p/w

Student Details												
Title	Prof	☐	Dr	☐	Ms	☒	Mrs	☐	Mr	☐	Mx	☐
First name(s)	Emilie											
Last name(s)	Gallus											
Title of study	Brand identity factors that influence Gen Z's purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media: An Esse and SKOON case study.											
Qualification	BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication											

Supervisor Details												
Title	Prof	☐	Dr	☐	Ms	☒	Mrs	☐	Mr	☐	Mx	☐
First and last names	Amalia van Schalkwyk											
Co-supervisor Details (if applicable)												
Title	Prof	☐	Dr	☐	Ms	☐	Mrs	☐	Mr	☐	Mx	☐
First and last names	Click or tap here to enter text.											

Explaining your research process						
Philosophical paradigm	Positivism	☐	Interpretivism	☒	Constructivism	☐
	Realism	☐	Objectivism	☐	Pragmatism	☐
	Functionalist	☐	Subjectivism	☐	Humanist	☐
Research design:	Other:					
	Interview	☒	Questionnaire (self administered)	☐	Focus group	☐
	Ethnography/ Observation	☐	Artefact analysis/website/ social media analysis	☐	Action Research	☐
	Case Study	☐	Design Research (Practice based)	☐		☐
Brief explanation of the population and number of participants/items	Other (if so, state)	☐	Click or tap here to enter text.			
	The population parameters for this study are females based in South Africa; between the ages of 18-28; they must have access to and use social media, specifically Instagram. The sample size will include 10 participants.					
Target group sampling methods/artefact (No under 18's or vulnerable groups allowed)	Purposive	☐	Random	☐	Snowball	☐
	Convenient	☒	Stratified	☐	Census	...
	Explain selection process		The sample will include participants (who fit within the population parameters) that are known to the researcher, who will use WhatsApp to contact the potential participants.			

Ethics		
Documentation submitted with proposal	Gatekeeper's letter (institutional consent)	☐
	Completed Annexure E if you conduct research on IIE sites/students/staff	☐
	Instrument(s) (interview schedule or questionnaire)	☒
	Participant or respondent consent form	☒
	Audio-visual consent form (if applicable)	☒

Campus ethics committee recommendation	
Proposal has been reviewed by the supervisor and necessary ethics considerations have been included.	
☐	Accepted as is and provide letter
☐	Accepted with provisions: Nature of provision: e.g. Instrument is not sufficient / included and need to be signed off by the supervisor

☐ Major issues: Student should not continue with fieldwork. Actions to be taken: Click or tap here to enter text.

Supervisor signature

2023/09/29

Co-supervisor/Campus ethics panel member signature

Click or tap to enter a date.

ANNEXURE C

PARTICIPANT OR RESPONDENT CONSENT FORM

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Emilie Gallus, and I am a student at The IIE's Vega School Online. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Amalia van Schalkwyk about what brand identity factors are more likely to affect the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the purchase intentions of Gen Z consumers, and what brand identity factors may influence their purchasing intentions of green skincare brands within the context of social media. I hope that this research will assist green skincare brands in developing a greater understanding of a new market segment (Gen Z), and in turn use these findings to help increase revenue. 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 my focus is on female Gen Z consumers. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to conduct in-depth interviews in person in order to gain a greater understanding on how brand identity may influence your intentions to purchase green skincare. 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 understanding of green skincare brands that use social media. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating. My supervisor will have access to the interview recordings; however your personal information will remain confidential. When conducting the interviews, I will ensure that I prioritise your physical and psychological comfort, by considering the physical and social context in which the data is gathered and by conducting the interviews within a private space to further ensure your privacy. The recordings and transcripts will be stored on the cloud which poses a security risk; however, I will make regular backups and keep them password protected to ensure the security of the data.
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 The IIE Vega School, 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 BA 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:

Emilie Gallus

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Amalia van Schalkwyk

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Participant or respondent consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Emilie Gallus about what brand identity factors are more likely to affect the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media.

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

ANNEXURE D

AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING CONSENT FORM

Consent form for participants	
I, _____, agree to allow Emilie Gallus to audio record my interviews as part of the research about what brand identity factors are more likely to affect the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name, personal details or any other identifiable information will be kept confidential; • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer; and • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor(s) and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	Date

ANNEXURE E

Data Classification - Business General



05 June 2023

Student name: Emilie Gallus
Student number: [REDACTED]
Brand and campus: Vega Online



Approval of BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication Proposal and Ethics Clearance



Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus ethics committee, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Ethics Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and we hereby provide you with ethics clearance to proceed with your data collection.



There may be some aspects that you still need to address in your proposal. If this is the case, feedback will be provided to you in writing. You will need to address these aspects in consultation with your supervisor.

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

We wish you all the best with your research!

Yours sincerely,



Amalia van Schalkwyk
Supervisor



Dr Tish Taylor
Chair of the Campus Ethics Committee

ADvTECH House: Inanda Greens, 54 Wierda Rd West, Wierda Valley 2196
P.O. Box 2369, Randburg 2125

Directors: RJ Douglas (UK), JDR Oesch, MD Aitken, SCD Lurie
Group Company Secretary: CB Crouse



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ANNEXURE F

Concept Document

Project details	
Your Name: Emilie Gallus	Student Number: [REDACTED]
Supervisor: Amalia van Schalkwyk	Date: 18/11/2023 Version: 5

Proposed Title	
Title	Brand identity factors that influence Gen Z's purchase intentions of green skincare on social media: A case study on Esse and SKOON.

Research details	
Problem statement	The influence of brand identity factors on female Gen Z consumers purchase intentions of green skincare on social media. The researcher's aim is to gain an in-depth understanding as to what brand identity factors are more likely to influence consumers purchase intentions, specifically Gen Z. However, there is a lack of research on Gen Z globally and even more so within a South African context (Tamara <i>et al.</i>, 2021; Ninan <i>et al.</i>, 2020; Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019). This is problematic as Gen Z will soon have one of the largest buying powers globally, and brands need to understand how to use their brand identities effectively to increase consumer purchase intention within this new generation (Morris & Buckle, 2022; Khoros, 2021). This is even more problematic for South African skincare brands as they have nearly no research that they can rely on to help them grow their business, therefore, they are forced to use research conducted in other countries. However, this is an issue because Gen Z consumers in other countries have different purchasing behaviours and values to South African Gen Z consumers; therefore, the influence on these behaviours are most likely to differ. Thus, South African green skincare brands cannot completely rely on research conducted in different countries. There is also a significant lack of behavioural research within current green cosmetics literature (Tamara <i>et al.</i>, 2021; Nguyen, 2020; Chin <i>et al.</i>, 2018). This is problematic for skincare brands, as they need to understand why their consumers behave a certain way, as they can use this research to grow their business. Furthermore, previous literature has not explored the effect of brand identity on the purchase intention of green skincare (Kapoor <i>et al.</i>, 2022; Pop <i>et al.</i>, 2020; Beng <i>et al.</i>, 2019; Hsu <i>et al.</i>, 2017). This, therefore, warrants a research response as this specific study has not been conducted. There is also a gap in methodology; most previous studies use quantitative or mixed-method approaches (Shanti & Alversia, 2022; McClure & Seock, 2020; Pop <i>et al.</i>, 2020; Beng <i>et al.</i>, 2019; Bhavana & Thiruchanuru, 2018; Alalwan, 2018); however, few studies utilised qualitative research exclusively. This study will help provide a more in-depth understanding on what brand identity factors influence female Gen Z consumers purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media using a qualitative methodology.
Purpose statement	The purpose of this study is to explore and understand what brand identity factors are more likely to effect female Gen Z consumers' purchase intentions of green skincare on social media. Moreover, the researcher intends to use this research to contribute to academic literature on green skincare and Gen Z, as well as industry knowledge, specifically South African green skincare. This will be achieved through the use of local skincare brands, Esse and SKOON.
Research question/s	What brand identity factors are more likely to influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? Sub-Questions SQ1: Does physique influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SQ2: Does personality influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SQ3: Does culture influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media?

	SQ4: Does relationship influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SQ5: Does reflection influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SQ6: Does self-image influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SQ7: Which green skincare brand, Esse or SKOON, are female Gen Z consumers more likely to purchase from?
Objective/s	To explore which brand identity factors of green skincare brands on social media are more likely to influence the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers. Sub-Objectives SO1: To explore whether physique influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SO2: To explore whether personality influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SO3: To explore whether culture influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SO4: To explore whether relationship influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SO5: To explore whether reflection influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SO6: To explore whether self-image influences the purchasing intentions of female Gen Z consumers regarding green skincare brands on social media? SO7: To explore whether female Gen Z consumers more likely to purchase from Esse or SKOON.
Research rationale	Green skincare has gained significant popularity within the cosmetic industry, as sustainable living and choosing eco-friendly products are now considered trends. Social media has also played a significant role in increasing the popularity of green skincare brands within the last two decades, specifically among Gen Z. According to Pauliene and Sedneva (2019), Gen Z differs from previous generations due their technological upbringing, which has resulted in trend-following behaviour and decreased brand loyalty. Furthermore, their values differ to previous generations, as they highly value sustainability, this is likely due to climate change's impact on their upbringing, making them more eco-conscious and valuing eco-friendly products (Bhavana & Thiruchanuru, 2018). Moreover, Gen Z are more likely to start purchasing and using skincare products before the age of eighteen, which provides them with a greater purchasing power (Nguyen, 2020). These unique factors indicate the importance of focusing on using this generation as the sample for this study as it could assist South African green skincare brands, such as Esse and SKOON, by providing them with insights and an in-depth understanding as to how they might reach this new target audience as well as understand their consumer behaviour. One of the consumer behaviours that these brands need to understand to grow their businesses, is what factors influence Gen Z's purchase intentions of green skincare. Although green skincare has grown in popularity, there is a lack of behavioural research regarding consumers purchasing intentions of green products, specifically skincare, as well as limited research on what brand identity factors are more likely influence the purchasing intentions of green skincare (Tamara <i>et al.</i>, 2021; Nguyen, 2020; Chin <i>et al.</i>, 2018). Therefore, the researcher is focusing on the influential role of brand identity on the purchase intentions of female Gen Z consumers for their chosen study, to provide greater insights for South African green skincare brands. Moreover, there is little to no research on this topic within a South African context, thus, forcing South African green skincare brands to rely on research conducted in different countries with various cultures. This is problematic as the findings of each country cannot be applied generally, because each country has its own norms, values, and perceptions with regards to skincare and sustainability. This is further supported by a report conducted by Deloitte (2021), which did a survey on Gen Z's greatest concerns: on a global scale climate change was considered their biggest concern, however in the South African context Gen Z respondents biggest concern was unemployment. Thus, further reinforcing the importance of this study as it will provide the South African green skincare brands with findings that they can utilise to help grow their brands, as the sample will be comprised of South African Gen Z consumers. Gen Z forms one of the largest segments within the global market; therefore, it is imperative for brands, such as Esse and SKOON, to start cultivating relationships with this new target audience today, to drive future purchases (Nguyen, 2020). However, brands can only achieve

	this if they have a greater understanding of Gen Z through new research studies. Thus, this study will help contribute towards the limited academic research and industry knowledge with regards to what brand identity factors influence Gen Z's purchase intentions of green skincare brands on social media.
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Literature overview

Key theories	Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)				
Seminal authors/sources	(Ajzen, 1991; 2002; 2011; 2020)., (Aaker, 1996a)., (Kapferer, 2008a)., (Ottoman, 2011)., (Ottman, Stafford & Hartman, 2006)., (Prothero & McDonagh, 1992)., (Keller, 2009)., (Keller & Lehmann, 2006)., (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017)., (Solomon, Russell-Bennett & Previte, 2013)., (Aaker, 1996b, cited in Mohan & Sequeira, 2009)., (Kapferer, 2008b, cited in Cunningham, 2021).				
Literature review themes	<u>Theme 1</u> Green skincare	<u>Theme 2</u> Brand identity	<u>Theme 3</u> Brand communication: social media	<u>Theme 4</u> Generation Z	<u>Theme 5</u> Consumer behaviour: Purchasing intentions of consumers.
Sources	(Aspitman, Karacsonyi & Uthman, 2021)., (Nguyen, 2020)., (Tamara, Heriyati, Hanifa & Carmen, 2021)., (Pauliene & Sedneva, 2019)., (Shanti & Alversia, 2022)., (Kapoor, Fernandes & Punia, 2022)., (Ninan, Roy & Cheriyan, 2020)., (Zhongqin, 2020)., (Larchanka, 2020)., (Fraß & Walter, 2021)., (Beng, Mun, Kian, Ying & Shiuan, 2019)., (Pop, Săplăcan & Alt, 2020)., (Chin, Jiang, Mufidah, Persada & Noer, 2018)., (Morris & Buckle, 2022)., (Khoros, 2021)., (Deloitte, 2021)., (Hsu, Chang & Yansritakul, 2017)., (McClure & Seock, 2020)., (Arhanchiague, 2021)., (Gebashe, Naidoo, Amoo & Masondo, 2022)., (Bhavana & Thiruchanuru, 2018)., (Alalwan, 2018)., (Lavuri, 2021)., (McGorry, 2017)., (Dangelico & Pontrandolfo, 2010)., (Percy, 2018)., (The DTI, 2020)., (Maree, 2019).				
Key concepts	Brand identity, green skincare, social media – brand communication, and consumer behaviour.				

Provisional Research Approach

Paradigm	<u>Paradigm</u> The chosen paradigm for this study is interpretivism. The aim of interpretivists is to gain an in-depth understanding of human behaviour (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2020). In this study the researcher aims to gain an in-depth understanding of female Gen Z consumers' behaviour, therefore, indicating the relevance of interpretivism as the chosen paradigm.	<u>Epistemology</u> The epistemological position of interpretivism "challenges the idea of objective truth" and argues that facts are dependent on the context and people's interpretations of information (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 29). In this study, the researcher will attempt to gain an understanding of the participants' perceptions of green skincare brands' identities on social media.	<u>Ontology</u> The ontological position of interpretivism argues that "reality is a social construction" as it depends on the way in which people perceive and experience the social world (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 29). This study will be conducted in Durban, South Africa; therefore, the participants' experiences will influence their perceptions of green skincare brands on social media.	<u>Axiology</u> The axiological position of interpretivism includes researcher's and participants' interpretations and values, and includes discussions on the values that influence their research (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 31). The researcher's and participants' values will shape their perceptions of green skincare brands' identities.
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Approach/ design	This study will utilise a qualitative approach, as the researcher aims to gain an in-depth understanding of female Gen Z consumers' behaviours. This demonstrates that qualitative methods are more suitable towards this study as the objective of this approach is to explore or understand people's behaviour and identifying possible patterns or trends between people's actions (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020).
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Provisional Research Plan

Population	Units of analysis: The female Gen Z consumers that participate in the in-depth interviews. The target population for this study comprises of all female Gen Z consumers in South Africa who use social media, specifically Instagram. However, the accessible population is female Gen Z consumers between the ages of 18 and 28 who live in Durban, South Africa and use social media, specifically Instagram. This is due to the fact that the researcher resides in Durban, and is going to conduct in-depth interviews in person, thus preventing them from being able to include participants from other regions of South Africa. The population parameters for this study are females based in South Africa; between the ages of 18-28; they must have access to and use social media, specifically Instagram.
Sampling	The researcher will utilise non-probability sampling for their chosen study. This form of sampling is utilised when there are challenges that may prevent the researcher from gaining access to the entire population (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020). In this specific study the researcher is unable to gain access to the entire female Gen Z population in South Africa, as it is not feasible and there is a time limitation. Moreover, the aim of non-probability sampling is to examine how many participants are needed to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem that is being explored i.e. until the data saturation point is reached (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020). Convenience sampling is the chosen sampling method for this study, as it will enable the researcher to gain quick and easy access to their population (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020). Furthermore, this will assist in accelerating the research process as the data collection and analysis will be the most time consuming and the researcher only has a limited amount of time to complete this research study. According to du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> (2020) and Maree (2019), the sample sizes for qualitative research should remain fairly small as it is difficult to analyse data that includes in-depth answers from a large sample. Therefore, the sample size for this study will include 10 participants. This sample size will enable the researcher to ask and interpret more in-depth questions and reach data saturation.
Data collection method(s)	The researcher will use in-depth interviews as their qualitative data collection method. The interviews will be semi-structured in which the researcher will ask the participant open-ended, pre-planned questions which can be followed by further clarification or probing. This enables flexibility and allows the interviews to "progress and flow in a natural, conversational matter" (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020: 189; Maree, 2019) as the aim of the interviews is to reach data saturation. The research instruments for this study include a screening questionnaire, and an interview questions guideline divided in to two parts: general questions and then questions based on Esse and SKOON Instagram posts.
Data analysis method(s)	The researcher will use qualitative content analysis their data analysis method for this study, which involves the identification of various patterns, themes, and codes within a text as well as their meanings (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Maree, 2019). This aligns with the researcher's inductive approach as they have chosen not to develop categories or themes before data collection, but rather categorise key codes within the collected data (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020). The interview recordings will be transcribed into written text, thus enabling the researcher to examine the text using qualitative content analysis. Key words will be identified and then grouped together to develop categories; this will be achieved using open coding (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020). The process of open coding involves the organisation, careful examination, conceptualisation, categorising and re-categorising of data (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Maree, 2019). The researcher will then begin to interpret the data and meanings within the text.

Ethical considerations and limitations

Ethics	The researcher fits within the population parameters, which may prevent them from remaining completely objective; this could allow bias to influence the interpretation of the results.
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	The participants need to be informed on what research study they are taking part in and assured that their personal information will remain confidential (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i>, 2020). When the researcher is collecting data from the participants, they need to ensure that they prioritise that participants' physical and psychological comfort, by considering the physical and social context in which the data is gathered (du Plooy-Cilliers <i>et al.</i>, 2020). The interviews will be recorded, and the researcher's supervisor will have access to the recordings, however the participants identities will remain confidential. Another ethical consideration is ensuring data confidentiality, integrity, and privacy when data is stored online (Maree, 2019). The recordings and transcripts for this study will be stored on the cloud which could pose security risks, such as theft or the system failure of the laptop (Maree, 2019).
Limitations	The researcher has limited access to their population. There is also a time limitation within the researcher's study as they only have 18 months to complete their research proposal, as well as a resource limitation due to the researcher lacking enough funds to conduct the study on a larger scale. Another limitation is the insubstantial number of studies on this specific topic, specifically within a South African context; therefore, the researcher is forced to rely significantly on primary research.