



The impact of social media communication has on brand attitudes in the
South African fast-food industry.

By

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ABSTRACT

In this study did the research examine to what extent the social media presence of fast-food brands in South Africa influence brand love, trust, and engagement. This study focussed on young South African active Facebook users, their engagement towards fast-food brands on Facebook were measured in order to determine the brand love and trust that comes from the engagement. According to Abel and Roshan (2022), the South African fast-food industry will reach \$4.9 billion in 2026, representing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.9 percent over the next five years. South Africa has the largest food service market in sub-Saharan Africa as well as a highly competitive hospitality industry. The food service industry is expected to grow significantly during the forecast period, despite negative impacts on several economic parameters. This thesis delivers some insights for fast-food chains in South Africa which could assist them in social media marketing. Social commerce could account for approximately R5 billion in South Africa (Stewart, 2022).

This year alone, R7 billion will be generated in sales revenue, which could increase to R21 billion (Stewart, 2022). The next three years will see a 2-billion rand increase (Stewart, 2022). Social commerce refers to brands selling directly to consumers via a platform (Stewart, 2022). As well as influencers, refer to brands engaging their followers to drive sales, and thirdly, individual sellers who sell to their own networks (Stewart, 2022). With e-commerce and the fast-food industry growing in South Africa is it needed for fast-food brands to determine how to cut through the online clutter and to build brand love and trust through brand engagement. With the Covid-19 pandemic which made an impact on many organizations globally, have they made the shift towards social media platforms to attract and retain customers (Davis, 2022).

Organizations are rethinking how they will use social media to enhance customer loyalty in 2023 (Davis, 2022). Brands use social media as a touchpoint to engage their customers these days, creating an omnichannel experience for the consumer (Davis, 2022). It is particularly true for millennials, who currently account for over 90% of global social media usage, and whose collective spending power now exceeds \$1.4 trillion (Davis, 2022). Additionally, 95% of internet users between the ages of 18 and 34 follow at least one brand on social media (Davis, 2022).

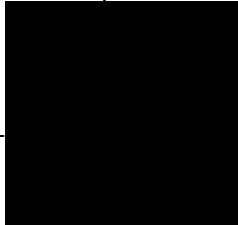
Fast-food chains continue to create effective marketing strategies to entice loyal customers, ultimately leading to remaining competitive in a competitive business world and gaining more market share (Omran, 2021). Brand love, trust, and engagement of consumers are influenced by the social media presence of Facebook brand pages, this study covers to what extent does Facebook pages influence consumers.

Key words: Brand Love, Brand Trust, Brand Engagement, Social Media, & Facebook

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted for the Honours in BA Brand Strategic Communication to The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE) is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a postgraduate qualification.

Signature_____



Date 2022/11/29

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1 INTRODUCTION

Globally, social media penetration has been evolving in recent years (Omran, 2021). People's communication and socialization are fundamentally changing as a result of social networking sites (SNS) (Omran, 2021). Statistics show that social media usage continues to grow with hundreds of millions of users using Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram (Omran, 2021). With platforms that are effective at reaching broad audiences and enabling active involvement between businesses and their customers through online two-way communication, the advent of social media has inspired consumers and changed the dynamics of traditional marketing (Omran, 2021). Social media's participatory aspect enables users to share their own consuming experiences in their profiles across various social networks (Omran, 2021). More advertisers are shifting their marketing and advertising spending from traditional advertising media to these new media as a result of technology advancements (Omran, 2021).

Facebook fan pages (brand pages) are considered the most popular form of social media marketing, with more than a million organizations having pages on this network (Omran, 2021). These brand pages are online communities that bring together brand enthusiasts on a single platform so that customers can communicate with both the brand and one another (Omran, 2021). Consumers can follow brands and join their Facebook communities by clicking the "like" button on the brand page (Omran, 2021). Consumers can access content provided by the page administrators and engage with other users and the brand after joining this online community (brand page) (Omran, 2021). There is a growing interest among marketers to boost consumer engagement in these new online brand communities as a result of the wide use of these communities for marketing purposes (Omran, 2021).

This document is structured in four main sections. Section one provides the introduction to the study that is going to be conducted including the rationale, problem statement, purpose statement, research question, and hypothesis. Then, section two presents the theoretical foundation for this study and the literature review. Next is section three which provides the research methodology, research approach, population and sample, data-collection, and analysis methods. Finally in section four is the presentation and interpretation of the findings in this study followed by the reliability and validity with a conclusion.

1.1 Contextualisation

Consumers' brand attitude is a consistent reaction they have whether it's positive or negative. Brand attitude is a combination of the brand's personal evaluation, emotions, and behaviours (Shin, Kim, Lim, & Kim, 2014). Brand attitude is formed when a person sees a brand on social media and evaluates the brand presence based on their feelings. The social media platform that is proposed to be analysed in this study is Facebook as it is one of the biggest social media platforms with 2,9 billion monthly active users (Statista Research Department, 2022). According to Oberlo (2022) are the top uses of Facebook messaging friends and family, posting and sharing photos or videos, and using Facebook to stay informed. About 71% of Facebook users say they use the platform to chat with family and friends (Oberlo, 2022). 63.1% of them share media on their own profiles or elsewhere (Oberlo, 2022). While 59.2% of Facebook's active users are on the platform to follow news and events (Oberlo, 2022).

The goal of this study is to understand to what extent social media posts of fast-food restaurants change the brand attitude of the consumer towards the brand. This study will go to the extent of focusing on the Fast-food industry in South Africa in uncovering the impact social media has on consumer attitudes. Abel and Roshan (2019) report that South Africa has the largest food service market in sub-Saharan Africa as well as a highly competitive hospitality industry. It is expected that the food service industry in South Africa will grow despite the negative impact of the country's economic parameters (Abel and Roshan, 2019). Abel and Roshan (2019) also concluded that the demand for fast food in South Africa is going through the online channel and with on-trade distribution. Because of the rise in take-away vendors.

Brand love, trust, and engagement are key factors that is formed through brand communication, in this study was these key constructs researched in order to determine the influence social media Facebook brand communication has on their consumers and the public. Facebook allow for industries to grow as it gives brands the opportunities to advertise on the platform directly to their target audiences through organic and content posts. Organic advertisement posts are free marketing where people can like, share, and tag a photo of a brand or person and then do marketing through electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Sanne & Wiese, 2018).

1.2 Rationale

Consumers' perceptions of brands and brands' attitudes are heavily influenced by social media, so brands should recognize the importance of their social media presence. According to Galal (2022), South Africans spend three hours and 37 minutes on social media per day. This shows that social media platforms are big contributors to the decision-making process of consumers. Therefore, social media marketing is important for organizations as it can establish or break a brand (The Economic Times, 2018). Social media platforms like Facebook make it ideal for brands to communicate with consumers and work on their brand image. According to Amin and Kaplan (2021), marketers are paying increasing attention to social media sites. The main objective of Facebook pages and advertisements is to attract consumers' attention and influence their attitudes toward the brand, consequently affecting their purchase intentions (Long, Coleman, 2020).

This study's objectives were to define consumer attitudes toward Facebook advertisements according to their perceptions of brands' Facebook pages. This was done by looking at what influence Facebook has on brand love, trust, and engagement. The aim of this study was to provide a more general and comprehensive look at consumer attitudes toward advertising strategies used in social media mainly focusing on Facebook. The importance of this study was for brands to focus on building long-term relationships with consumers by increasing brand awareness through targeting and building relationships.

1.3 Problem Statement

According to Statista Research Department (2022), there were 2,9 billion monthly active users on Facebook, which is also named the most popular social media platform worldwide. Therefore, it is why Facebook was chosen as the social media platform that was used in this study. Despite an increase in empirical research on the topic of social media, it was difficult to affirm to what extent Facebook posts and advertisements affect brand attitudes when it comes to purchasing products. In a broad sense, the problem was measured by looking at how brand attitudes were influenced by social media platforms. This study focused on the impact social media has on consumers relating to the fast-food industry and how much a Facebook page encourages brand love, trust, and engagement.

1.4 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact social media has on brand love, trust, and engagement. The fast-food industry's growth has been fuelled by social media marketing (Bartleby, 2022). As television advertising has declined, fast-food chains have resorted to social media advertisements in order to reach a larger audience (Bartleby, 2022). Several social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube, are popular marketing platforms used by fast-food restaurants (Bartleby, 2022). Therefore, was this study's focus on the presence of the fast-food industry in South Africa. With the rise of social media culture over the past decade, brands began to realize the importance of snappy, meme-y humour in gaining brand loyalty and popularity among younger generations (Turner, 2020).

The research of this study was done from a consumer's perspective and filled a gap in understanding the impact of social media on brands by looking at how consumers build brand love, trust, and engagement with the social media presence of the fast-food industry brands in South Africa. Literature on social media analysis focuses largely on how social media can help businesses determine consumer patterns, rather than on how social media can influence consumer perception and their brand attitude. This study contributed to the existing knowledge on how consumers view brands when they encounter brands on social media.

1.5 Research Questions

The main research question to this study is;

To what extent do Facebook posts and advertisements of Fast-Food brands affect brand love, trust, and engagement towards the brand?

The sub research questions in this study are;

Q1: Does Facebook user-generated social media communication create brand engagement from the consumers towards the brand?

Q2: To what extent do Fast-Food brands gain brand love from their Facebook pages?

Q3: Do consumers trust a brand more who is active on Facebook?

1.6 Hypothesis (H0 & Ha)

Ha: Fast-Food brands' Facebook pages strengthen brand love, trust, and engagement of consumers towards the brand.

H0: Fast-Food brands' Facebook pages weaken brand love, trust, and engagement of consumers towards the brand.

The data collection, data analysis, and findings have all been correlated with the study's hypothesis that Facebook pages influence brand love, trust, and engagement. To measure brand love, engagement, and trust, the study used a survey to collect data using the data-collection method. The data-analysis method was linked with the hypothesis as each aspect that needed to be measured was divided up into themes to determine the findings for this study. Facebook pages are low valued but essential to brands since they increase brand love and trust. However, the findings showed that brand engagement was not increased by Facebook pages, the findings also showed that Facebook pages weaken brand engagement.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualization

In this study are there main themes the study was built on, these themes are brand love, trust, and engagement. Brand attitude according to Omran (2021) consists of the brand love, engagement, trust, and engagement a customer or the public has towards the brand, which is going to be measured in this study. When measuring the brand attitude, a customer creates when seeing Fast-Food brands on Facebook, will brand love, trust, loyalty, and customer engagement be measured to determine the brand attitude of a customer. The goal of brand love is to convert people who are loyal to a brand into advocates or influencers (Schreane, 2020). As part of the effort to establish such a culture, brands should focus on customer satisfaction, customer value, and relationship marketing (Schreane, 2020). Brand love links to brand attitude as it is an emotion a customer feels towards the brand. Researchers and academics have been drawn to the concept of brand love, which is considered one of the most influential marketing concepts (Omar, 2021).

The interest here is a result of the belief that positive feelings between consumers and brands increase loyalty to them (Omar, 2021). Brand engagement refers to customers who engage with brands by building and maintaining their commitment to them (SendPulse, 2022). This results in customers being highly engaged, they are both retained and loyal to organizations, which improves products and services ultimately (SendPulse, 2022). The level of engagement indicates if the marketing of the brand indicates the brand attitude and if the user-generated content was effective, the relationship of the brand with its customers is usually also represented on social media platforms (Sanne & Wise, 2018). Brand trust is based on how much confidence your customers have in your brand is measured by brand trust (Wix eCommerce, 2020). It measures how consistently the brand delivers on its promises and maintains its values (Wix eCommerce, 2020).

Consumers can develop trust through direct experiences with brands, and brand trust is developed through direct experiences with brands (Omar, 2021). By looking into brand love, trust, and engagement as themes will it allow this study to give answer to

the research question which is “To what extent do Facebook posts and advertisements of Fast-Food brands affect brand love, trust, and engagement towards the brand?”.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

In this study will the Mimetic Theory of Desire from Rene Girard come into consideration. According to Chetty (2020) desire is a thing that makes people human, it is not classified as the biological needs to survive (such as food, shelter, and sex). It is centred around models, for example, parents or work colleagues (Chetty, 2020). Desire comes from culture, things that humans desire are pinpointed as desirable (Chetty, 2020). When looking at what the word mimetic means from a Girardian viewpoint does mimetic derives from the Latin synonym “imitative” (Chetty, 2020). The Mimetic theory from Rene Girard contends that desire trends are imitative which means their mimetism comes in many forms, for example, cultural progression, competition, jealousy, or violence (Chetty, 2020). According to the Mimetic Theory (2020), the mimetic desire keeps social media, education, and capital systems ongoing through mimetic desires as the motivation structure has deep mimetic grooves.

Social media platforms run on mimesis, for example, Twitter which encourages users to measure imitation by giving the number how many times a post has been retweeted, the same with Facebook which encourages shares, likes, and comments (Mimetic Theory, 2020). It has been known that the greater and stronger the mimetic forces on a certain social media platform, the more people want to use it (Mimetic Theory, 2020). When social media companies bring more friction and brakes into the platforms, will engagement and revenue be lost as humans need to accelerate mimetic behaviour (Mimetic Theory, 2020). Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is inherent to social media sites as they can provide insights into mass behaviour and the choices that are being made (Wan & Palaniappan, 2017). The mimetic theory of desire on social media is viewed as one of the key metrics in brand awareness (Wan & Palaniappan, 2017).

Humans need to feel socially connected therefore will the mimetic theory of desire play a role in this study as it has an impact on how humans use social media linking it to how it impacts brand metrics. Objects of desire lie in the fact that the object or target is the desire of others as well which means it is a form of imitation with the desire being

seen as a reflection of them (Wan & Palaniappan, 2017). According to Wan and Palaniappan (2017) has a study been done on online food image sharing where desire is conceptualized, energetic, and innovative. It was found that networks of desire grow in a snowball effect of technologically enhanced desires as the image of food has been shared by one on social media (Wan & Palaniappan, 2017). The mimetic theory in this case of food sharing on social media has increased the passion and desire to consume by interacting with the post (Wan & Palaniappan, 2017).

A person's desire to be on social media is largely determined by the number of followers, likes, shares, and comments (Wan & Palaniappan, 2017). An example that could be used is the Fyre Festival that happened in April 2017 when hundreds of tickets were sold (some up to \$100,000) with the result leaving the festivalgoers stranded on the island with a lack of accommodation and food (Bueno, 2021). Social media led to the rise and fall of this festival. The coordinator McFarland and his business partner the rapper Ja Rule organized this event (Cohn, 2017). With a promotional video including the most prominent models in the world and 400 social media influencers, the tickets sold out almost immediately (Cohn, 2017). This festival is a strong example of the mimetic theory of desire. The desire was built through influencers, models, and location which led to everyone buying these tickets to fulfil the specific desire that has been created by McFarland with the promotional videos and influencers on social media.

2.3 Literature Review

Omran (2020) suggests the term “consumer engagement” has grown in importance over the last few years. This term gained popularity with the rapid penetration of social networking sites, which enabled consumers to engage with brands through online communities. Facebook brand pages are increasingly popular with young consumers thanks to the rapid adoption of social media in marketing. Social media build brand attitudes amongst stakeholders. By focusing on the fast-food industry and its social media presence on Facebook, previous studies have been conducted worldwide. It is difficult to affirm to what extent Facebook advertising or generated communication affects the consumer's brand attitude towards the brand. This study will explore to the extent of focusing on the Fast-Food industry in South Africa in uncovering the impact

Facebook advertising and communication have on consumers' brand attitudes in terms of brand love, trust, and engagement.

The main research problem of this study focuses on the impact social media has on consumers relating to the Fast-Food industry and how much interaction there are the consumers and fast-food brands on Facebook.

2.3.1 Fast-Food Industry in South Africa

Through world-famous fast-food outlets, the whole world gets along with similar consumption patterns without much cultural difference as a result of globalization (Shashikala & Thilina, 2020). As multinational fast-food outlets expanded in developed countries, they gradually spread to developing countries. In the last couple of decades, the term 'fast food' has been discussed and highlighted more frequently than any other term (Shashikala & Thilina, 2020). Today there are many multinational fast-food outlets such as Pizza Hut, Domino's Pizza, KFC, MC Donald's, and Burger King which are known and available in most countries over the world (Shashikala & Thilina, 2020). The fast-food market in South Africa was worth \$2.7 billion in 2018 and is predicted to grow to \$4.9 billion by 2026, with a CAGR of 7.9% from 2019 to 2026 (Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019).

With a vast and highly competitive industry, South Africa has the largest food service market in Sub-Saharan Africa (Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019). The food service industry is predicted to rise significantly throughout the forecast period (Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019). Likewise, the country boasts a big number of domestic and international restaurant chains, which is fuelling the fast-food segment's expansion (Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019). This is due to a rise in demand from target clients for various sorts of fast-food products (Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019). According to the Southern Africa Food Lab, the availability of takeaway vendors has resulted in an increase in convenience food consumption over the last five years (Thomas & Deshmukh, 2019). With Facebook enabled consumers to share their experiences, therefore has there been a shift in marketing control and consumers' trust (Shamhuyenhanzva, van Tonder, Roberts Lombard & Hemsworth, 2016).

Brands needed to make the shift to use social media in influencing customers to stay relevant and start eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) (Shamhuyenhantzva, van Tonder, Roberts-Lombard & Hemsworth, 2016). Studies have been done on eWOM looking at when the characteristics of the sender resemble the characteristics of the receiver (Shamhuyenhantzva, van Tonder, Roberts-Lombard & Hemsworth, 2016). According to Shamhuyenhantzva, van Tonder, Roberts-Lombard, and Hemsworth (2016), social media must first be trusted for it to work as an effective decision-making tool. Fast-food chains' goal is to become the preferred choice among consumers by embracing the emerging social media trends, and their communication strategies (Shamhuyenhantzva, van Tonder, Roberts Lombard & Hemsworth, 2016).

Social media bring big opportunities for FastFood chains to create a favorable brand image of their brand for customers. Facebook brand pages strengthen relationships between the brand and social-media communities, for doing it is the driver of engagement explored in brand communities (Omran, 2021). Fast-food companies are in an environment of hyper-competitiveness, with them being active on Facebook could they engage in two-way communication and brand love, trust, and loyalty can be built by changing the brand attitude customers have about a brand.

According to Sanne & Wiese (2018), limited understanding of the influences on Facebook users' reaction to advertising and engagement with the brand on Facebook, studies in South Africa are also limited with the intent of filling the gap. A study done by De Meyer (2014) about the product involvement and eWOM of the fast-food industry of South Africa has it been shown that the most popular fast-food restaurant in the minds of South Africans is Nando's, KFC, and McDonald's. Brand loyalty has also been recorded with customers being loyal for standing 3 years, these customers visit the fast-food restaurants at least once a month accessing them through the internet on their cell phones and laptops (De Meyer, 2014).

2.3.3 Brand Attitude

Brand attitude is the base of a consumer's actions, and it is a consistent positive or negative reaction they have towards a brand, brand attitude includes a personal evaluation of the brand, emotional feelings, and behaviour tendencies of an individual (Shin, Kim, Lim, & Kim, 2014). It is the overall evaluation of consumers on a product that is related to a brand. With the development and expansion of social media

communication between individuals who could be viewed as strangers is accelerated (Schivinski, 2014). The strength of brand attitude predicts the behaviors of interest to the organization itself such as brand consideration, purchase intention, purchase behavior, and brand choice (Schivinski, 2014).

According to Schivinski (2014) has previous studies shown that a better brand attitude within the consumers, is the brand behaviour towards the brand better. Therefore, can a positive brand attitude on Facebook through advertisements and brands post means the public will engage more with the brand on Facebook (Sanne & Wiese, 2018). With brand attitude is social groups developed on social media, this links to the mimetic theory as humans having the desire to have to be more aligned with the brand (Sanne & Wiese, 2018).

2.3.4 Social Media: Facebook

Facebook Customer engagement has been applied to social media brand communities that also give indications of how consumers behave towards the brand or a certain topic (Omar, 2021). Brands have made use of Facebook to engage with consumers. These pages are where consumers join to engage with the brand, brand stories, and experiences (Omar, 2021). This enabled customers to become cocreators of the brand message and attitude which is the beginning point for electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and user-generated communication (UGC) (Omar, 2021). Online brand communities are formed around a brand on social media platforms especially Facebook, with customer engagement comes brand trust, brand love, and brand loyalty (Omar, 2021).

In 2021 Omar focussed on Facebook brand pages and how social media marketing created a brand-customer relationship based on the fast-food industry. The study by Omar (2021) investigated the effect of consumer engagement with brand loyalty to fast food brands and relationships brands build with consumers. Facebook and other social media platforms form brand reputation, brands use planned communication to make impressions amongst the public (Azionya, 2015), such as advertising on Facebook. Azionya (2015) stated that brands have control over what they send out on social media platforms but have no control over how stakeholders and other users perceive it. Brand reputation according to the same author is brand reputation and

attitude formed from dialogue and experience rather than planned communication (Azionya, 2015). Social media allow brand communication to become a dialogue and allow for the brand to share valuable content created for their target audience (Azionya, 2015).

2.3.5 Brand Love

Brand love happens when that brand is loved by consumers and the brand has an emotional connection with its audiences (Casarotto, 2021). Brand love occurs when the brand moves beyond the traditional relationship between them and their customers, because brand love has strong ties to the values and beliefs that are shared by its customers (Casarotto, 2021). Brand love is composed of the following components: self-desire, emotional connection, heartbreak expectations, a sense of natural fit, willingness to invest, frequency of usage, intrinsic rewards, and a long-term relationship with the brand, according to Omran (2021). The increasing competition and the number of brands that emerge every day give marketers a great opportunity to market their products (Omran, 2021). Consequently, marketing communications have become increasingly focused on establishing a strong bond between consumers and brands (Omran, 2021). Research and academics have been studying brand love for a number of years and consider it to be one of the most significant marketing concepts (Omran, 2021).

Brand love, according to Wallace, Torres, Augusto, & Stefuryn (2021), is continuously evolving and should be studied for its antecedents and outcomes. Social media has given brand managers greater access to their customers, but it remains challenging to create loved brands and harness social media to motivate consumer behavior toward brands (Wallace, Torres, Augusto, & Stefuryn, 2021). Although brand love is critical and social media has become increasingly popular in digital settings, few studies have examined its antecedents and effects (Wallace, Torres, Augusto, & Stefuryn, 2021). Due to the fact that future consumer marketing will take place in digital environments and social media is a critical aspect of 21st-century business, however, marketers have struggled to foster relationships with consumers through social media (Wallace, Torres, Augusto, & Stefuryn, 2021).

From a consumer's perspective, liking on social media is seen as a fairly superficial type of feedback (Wallace, Torres, Augusto, & Stefurn, 2021). Studies have shown that when consumers "like" a post it is usually for self-expression without any emotional connections (Wallace, Torres, Augusto, & Stefurn, 2021).

Although "liking" a brand on social media may increase brand love (Wallace, Torres, Augusto, & Stefurn, 2021). In general, brand love is expressed through a consumer-centric approach, where consumers are interested in what the brand can do for them and not what the brand can do for them (Omran, 2021). With social media being a big role player in the current era, consumers express their interest and emotional connection to particular brands by following them on several social media platforms (Omran, 2021).

2.3.6 Brand Trust

Brand trust contributes to the tendency of customers to behave towards attitudes towards a brand by building consumer trust in social media related to the products or services offered by the company (Puspaningrum, 2020). Brand trust has been shown in numerous studies to mediate the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty (Puspaningrum, 2020). According to Mosavi and Kenarehfar's (2013a, 2013b), and Khoa's (2020), study, social media marketing is all about building brand trust (Puspaningrum, 2020). To ensure customer loyalty, brands need to be trusted because of their reliability (Puspaningrum, 2020). Customer confidence in a brand (brand trust) derives from consumer belief that the product can deliver the value promised (brand intention), which is based on consumer confidence that the brand can put the interests of the customer first (brand reliability) (Puspaningrum, 2020).

Customer confidence in a brand (brand trust) derives from consumer belief that the product can deliver the value promised (brand intention), which is based on consumer confidence that the brand can put the interests of the customer first (brand reliability) (Puspaningrum, 2020). In terms of the decision to continue using a brand, social media plays a significant role in establishing customer trust (Hafez, 2021). Activities of social media management provide valuable opportunities to promote and build brand trust in the marketplace (Hafez, 2021). Social media activities are directly linked to brand trust (Hafez, 2021). Authentic brand-related messaging from the brand's side via social

media will build strong brand trust among consumers (Hafez, 2021). Customer trust in a brand will result in repeat purchases (Omran, 2021).

This will guide the customer's commitment to the brand, and a relationship between the brand and the customer can be established (Omran, 2021). The marketing literature provides several outcomes for brand trust (Omran, 2021). For instance, it was discovered that brand trust is important in uncertain and uneven information situations (Omran, 2021).

2.3.7 Brand Engagement

According to Murray (2021), customer engagement can be defined as the way a customer perceives an experience across platforms such as social media and engages with it. Brand engagement refers to the ongoing development of a relationship between a business and its customers that reaches beyond the transaction (Murray, 2021). The idea of brand engagement has changed recently as more organizations look for creative ways to attract and retain consumers (Murray, 2021). In the past, offering a high-quality good or service was sufficient. But the latest information and analytical techniques indicate that consumer interaction plays a major role in determining their buying behavior (Murray, 2021). Brand engagement is currently being discussed everywhere (Murray, 2021). Additionally, brands with higher consumer engagement are more successful according to Murray (2021).

When an organization intentionally and consistently adds value to every consumer interaction on social media, it fosters customer loyalty (Murray, 2021). Consumer engagement's idea is viewed as influencing consumer behaviour, including self-brand connection, purchase intention, and brand loyalty (Cheung, Rosenberger III, & Pires, 2019). It refers to "consumers' precise level of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement in brand interactions" (Cheung, Rosenberger III, & Pires, 2019).

Social media is a powerful tool for fostering dialogue between customers and brands, which will increase consumer engagement (Cheung, Rosenberger III, & Pires, 2019). In order for social media content to strengthen brand engagement, it needs to encourage consumers to engage with posts in the brand's social network community (Cheung, Rosenberger III, & Pires, 2019). Customers are more inclined to interact with brand posts that convey sentiments that aren't overly promotional (Cheung,

Rosenberger III, & Pires, 2019). According to Cheung, Rosenberger III, and Pires (2019), interactive and multisensory brand posts boost brand engagement and boost popularity. Brand engagement is significantly impacted by the social sharing value of brand consumers (Cheung, Rosenberger III, & Pires, 2019).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Paradigm

For this study, the Positivism paradigm was applicable. It is a paradigm that analyses certain phenomena, including social phenomena (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:24). Positivists believe that research makes the world a better place and can be used to avoid some scenarios and improve the environment (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:24). This paradigm applies to this study as a social phenomenon is going to be tested focusing on consumer behaviours and actions that take place due to social influences. Such as how big the impact Facebook advertising has on the consumer's brand love, trust, and engagement.

The epistemological position of positivism is believed to test standing assumptions against the world (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:25). The approach is to find evidence to support or reject the hypotheses that are stated in this study (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:25). The hypothesis in this study is that consumer attitudes toward brands are heavily influenced by brand posts and advertisements on Facebook. The ontological position of positivism believes to have a single objective believing that reality can be measured to predict outcomes of human behaviour (Du Plooy Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:25).

This position argues that the given cause has the same effect on all people such as a brand's presence on Facebook, or social media, therefore the ontological position of positivism will be applicable to this study. The axiological position of positivism does it indicates that research is not tainted by personal bias and values personal integrity (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:27). This applies to this study as the outcomes will be trusted, and the research that is going to be done aims to predict the outcome of future events and people.

3.2 Research Approach

This study took on correlational research, as the aim of this study was to find a correlation between two variables (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:76). The correlation of this study was to find a relationship between the brand presence on Facebook and consumer attitude towards the brand in terms of brand love, trust, and engagement. This study was approached by using quantitative empirical methods. The quantitative approach describes the methods of collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of results. This approach were used to verify or reject the hypotheses that have been set which is “Fast-Food brands’ Facebook pages strengthen brand love, trust, and engagement of consumers towards the brand.”

Quantitative research is designed to gain a deeper understanding of social phenomena and the methods of quantitative research are used to observe how people react to different events (Williams, 2021). The results of quantitative research can be communicated clearly through tables and statistics (Williams, 2021). This research approach was beneficial for this study to find patterns, make predictions, test relationships between variables, and generalize results (Williams, 2021). For example, whether the social media presence of brands has an influence on consumer brand love, trust, and engagement towards the brand. The quantitative research approach aligned with the positivist paradigm that has been identified to be used in this study as the focus is to study social phenomena to make predictions of future events and to improve the social media environment for brands.

This study made use of a deductive reasoning approach. Deductive reasoning was used to reason from cause to effect (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:128), which link to the hypothesis as the cause is Facebook advertising of brands with the effect of having an impact on the brand attitude of consumers towards brands. This study took a cross-sectional survey design as the data is going to be collected once from the population at one point in time (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:149). The survey assisted the study in enabling the study to inspect the effect of Facebook brand advertising on the brand attitude on consumers carefully.

3.3 Population

In South Africa, there are currently 30.17 million registered Facebook users (Statista, 2022). Therefore, it is the most popular social media platform in South Africa (Statista, 2022). As 86.55% of the population in South Africa use Facebook (Statista, 2022), it makes Facebook the ideal platform to focus on in this study and sample. The target population for this study was South African citizens who are active on Facebook and use social media weekly. The nature of this population is people who encounter fast-food brands on Facebook through sponsored posts and fan pages. The size of the population was based on people currently living in Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa with their unique characteristics being people who are active on the social media platform Facebook. The accessible population for this study was South Africans who were active on Facebook, ate in fast-food restaurants, and were aware of brands in the industry. The key characteristic of the population was that they are aware of fast-food brands on social media or are a fan of one of their Facebook brand pages.

3.4 Sampling

This sample was selected non-probably due to the high number of people who are active on Facebook between the ages of 19 and 42 in the study. In this study a convenience sampling method was used to select the target respondents, the sample was biased towards the social and professional context of the research (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:142). The recruitment method for this sample was based on online communities and the researcher's social and professional context. The sample for this study was people living in South Africa who is active on Facebook and made use of Fast-Food brands in Pretoria. The sampling method that was used was the convenience sampling method due to the easy access to the population and already having the characteristics that are needed for the study. The sample of this study focussed on the ages 19 to 42 years, which includes mostly millennials.

The sample was big enough to gather the information that was needed for this study, the sample size of respondents that was collected consist out of 98 respondents on the online survey. Because this was a quantitative study, a sample was chosen. This is because all people who are active on Facebook are more likely to have easy access to the internet for the sample to complete the survey. The reason for focussing on the certain age gap was that 20- to 39-year-olds are the age gap who eat Fast-food the most according to Barbeque Lab (2022). The reason for focussing on Pretoria (Tshwane) was that the city is one of the biggest cities in South Africa (Statista, 2021), this eased the collecting of data within the sample.

3.5 Data Collection Method

The data in this study was collected through cross-sectional survey research. Survey research is a quantitative data collection tool that consists of a series of closed-ended questions designed to gather information about a larger group of people (Du PlooyCilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:148). Survey research consists of a series of questions designed in a manner to gather information from the decided population/sample of this study (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:149). Survey research also enables the study to collect demographic information and the attitudes, impressions, and opinions of the sample (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:149).

It was beneficial to the study to use this method of data collection in order to gather the exact information needed to test a phenomenon, which relates back to the Positivist paradigm that has been incorporated throughout the study. As cross-sectional survey designs were designed to only gather information once from the sample (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:149). Using the survey as a way of collecting data was important because it allowed the researcher to collect data in an ethical and convenient manner (Omar, 2021). The survey is a quantitative data collection method and enables the study to collect information from a large number of people (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:148). A survey questionnaire was used for this study with closed-ended questions, checklists, and rating scales.

The survey questionnaire was built on Google Forms and sent and filled out electronically, the surveys enabled the study to gather data about the chosen population's opinions and impressions. Survey questionnaires enabled the respondents' feedback to be quantified, more people were willing to participate in the survey study as it was easy, quick, and fast (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:152). This data collection method enabled the study to gain insight into how brands influence the perception of consumers on brands through the social media platform, Facebook. The benefits of a survey questionnaire were that it is a faster way of collecting data due to the research being collected automatically and having a quicker response rate (Smart survey, 2022). It is cheaper and more accurate, as the responses are directly recorded into the system can there be no error in the results (Smart survey, 2022).

Survey questionnaires are quick to analyse and easy for participants as they can access the survey at any place and any time of day and ease the process of analysis (Smart survey, 2022). Online survey research is easy to use for the study as it saves time during the data collection stage of the research, the survey is easy to set up (Smart survey, 2022). Respondents are more honest in survey questionnaires than in telephone interviews, with survey questionnaires enabling the study to be more selective with the sampling (Smart survey, 2022). The survey questionnaire is built on Google Forms which is an online platform that allows the researcher to set up the survey online without cost. This platform collects the information immediately and directly from the respondents which eases the data collection process. The research instrument and questions for the survey questionnaire are amended in Annexure A. The survey questionnaire is linked to an URL and send on WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook for respondents to fill out the form freely.

3.6 Data Analysis Method

For this study was quantitative data analysis method used by analysing descriptive statistics to describe the data that is going to be collected through the survey. Google Forms was used to collect the data. The respondents completed the form, which made it easier to analyse the data with descriptive analysis, the responses were recorded numerically. Descriptive data analysis method benefited the study by enabling the researcher to understand the details of the sample that has filled out the survey (Jansen and Warren, 2020). This allowed the study to determine the relationship social media has with consumer perceptions people have of brands. The goal of quantitative data analysis is to examine data that can be converted into numbers without losing any information - generally data that is numbers-based (Jansen and Warren, 2020).

With the data collection method being a survey questionnaire was the data of the respondents for the study collected automatically through Google Forms (Jansen and Warren, 2020). The method was used to test hypotheses in a scientifically rigorous manner. Quantitative analysis relies on statistical analysis methods (Jansen and Warren, 2020). The quantitative data analysis method consists of two statistical analysis methods such as descriptive and inferential, the data of this study was analysed with the descriptive data analysis method (Jansen and Warren, 2020). Descriptive data analysis method was suited for this study as it showed hidden patterns that enabled the study to show how fast-food brands' Facebook pages influence the attitudes of the sample, in terms of brand love, trust, and engagement. In this study was the descriptive statistics measured by mean, media, mode, standard deviation, and skewness (Jansen and Warren, 2020).

The process of analysing the data were as follow:

1. The data was collected and recorded through an online survey using Google Forms.
2. The results were exported on Microsoft Excel into graphs.
3. The data was then cleaned and surveys with missing responses were removed.
4. The data were grouped and sorted according to the constructs.
5. Formulas were used to calculate the mean, media, mode, standard deviation, and skewness accurately.
6. The findings were interpreted.

The reason for using descriptive statistics first was to analyse the sample of the study (Jansen and Warren, 2020). Descriptive statistics showed deeper characteristics of the sample that was discovered after the data collection stage such as most people in the sample spend less than one hour a day on Facebook. The descriptive data analysis method assisted the study by enabling the researcher to understand the big picture and finer details of the research that has been conducted. By determining the median, mode, mean, and standard deviation from the feedback of the sample have it indicated to what side is the sample leaning and what extent they agree.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

The interpretation of the results from the survey questionnaire allowed the researcher of the study that has been conducted to get more in-depth relations between variables. The aim of this study was for 50+ respondents to complete the survey questionnaire, when an error occurs have the results been generalized to ensure that similar results will come to the next researcher for when the study is conducted again in the future. The type of reliability of this study has been inter-rater/inter-coder, which was a measure of agreement in which various participants were asked to fill out the survey, but the same methodology, tools, and instruments were used (Du PlooyCilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:152). The validity aspect of this study was to determine if the research measured what it was supposed to measure, the validity of this study has been determined when the findings reflect the reality of the constructs that were researched.

The questions that were used in the survey questionnaire were pre-determined questions from Omran (2021) in his study 'Customer Engagement in Social Media Brand Community A Study of Fast-Food Facebook Brand Pages in Syria'. Therefore, the result of this study is reliable and valid as the findings reflect the reality of the constructs that were measured. This study aimed to be identified as internal validity as the research questionnaire's findings answer the research question.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Presentation of Findings

An overview of the main quantitative study is presented in this section. It consists of two main parts. In the first part of this section, descriptive statistics about the sample's demographic characteristics are presented. The second part is the discussion of the results of the hypotheses test.

4.1.1 Demographic of Sample

A total of 92 members that are active on Facebook were surveyed online for a quantitative study. Of these 92 participants, (36) were males which form (39.1%) of the total sample, and (56) females, which form (60.8%) of the total sample. Of the 92 customers surveyed, 47 (51%) were between 19 and 42 years old and this was the largest group of customers. Respondents' occupations are diverse from student, employee, worker-student, self-employed, and unemployed.

The largest portion included 43 employees, which represent about (46.7 %) of the total sample. Also, 21 students were surveyed, which represents (22.8%) of the total sample. There were 19 self-employed respondents surveyed which represent (20.6%) of the total sample, then the worker-students were 9 that represents (9.7 %).

Demographic Variable	Criteria	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	19-24	47	51%
	25-31	9	9,78%
	32-42	7	7,61%
	42+	29	31,52%
Gender	Male	36	39,13%
	Female	56	60,87%
Occupation	Student	25	27,17%
	Worker-Student	10	10,87%
	Employee	48	52,17%
	Self-employed	20	21,74%
	Unemployed		
	Graduate	0	0,00%

Table 1: Frequency Distributions of Sample

4.1.2 Descriptive Analysis

Brand Love, Trust, and Engagement

The survey was divided into three main constructs, construct one focussed on brand trust, construct two focussed on brand engagement, and construct three focussed on brand love. The scale questions parameters, mean, mode, and standard deviation underlying the survey questions related to brand trust, love, and engagement are presented in Figure 2. The data is displayed with each theme and its questions. The answering scale of the questions were scales from 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree.

Questions	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Construct 1: Trust	3	4	1
Q1: I feel quite confident that my fast-food brand will always try to treat me fairly	4	4	
Q2: My fast-food brand has been frank in dealing with me	3	4	
Q3: My fast-food brand would never try to gain an advantage by deceiving its clients	3	4	
Q4: My fast-food brand is trustworthy	4	3	
Construct 2: Love	4	4	0,98
Q5: This fast-food brand is totally awesome	4	4	
Q6: This fast-food brand makes me very happy	4	4	
Q7: This fast-food brand is pure delight.	4	4	
Q8: I am passionate about this fast-food brand.	3	3	
Construct 3: Engagement	3	3	1,21
Q9: I am passionate about this brand page	3	3	
Q10: I like to learn more about this brand page	3	3	
Q11: I concentrate a lot on this brand page.	2	1	
Q12: I like to learn more about a brand through their social media / Facebook page	2	1	
Q13: This is the only brand of fast food that I will buy.	3	4	
Q14: I intend to keep staying with this brand.	2	1	
Q15: I am committed to this brand.	3	3	
Q16: I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.	3	3	

Table 2: Population means, modes, and standard deviation

Construct 1 (Brand Trust):

Based on the findings above, the values in construct one does it appears that customers have a high level of trust in fast-food brands regardless of whether they trust the brand. They also consider whether the brand is safe enough to rely upon. With the standard deviation overall for construct one (brand trust), 1 is does it indicate that most of the respondents' feeling towards fast-food brand trust as the responses are not scattered. From the feedback from theme two, consumers expressed a sense of integration and emotional connection with the fast-food brand.

Construct 2 (Brand Love):

Based on the values of the second construct (brand love), the researcher found that neither agreement nor disagreement exists where respondents are passionate about a certain fast-food brand. At theme three, brand engagement, the data indicates that customers are not having cognitive and behavioural interaction with fast-food brands through their Facebook pages, however, they have a sense of loyalty towards one of their preferred fast-food brands.

Construct 3 (Brand Engagement):

Based on construct three (brand engagement) have the values showed with question nine "I am passionate about this brand page" and question 10 "I like to lean more about this brand page" that the respondents is neutral towards the two questions. With question 11 "I concentrate a lot on this brand page", question 12 "I like to learn more about through their social media/ Facebook page" and question 14 "I intend to keep staying with this brand" is the mean for the questions 2. This shows that the respondents disagree and do not want to learn more about the brand itself through their Facebook page.

The results of the study gave insight into the importance of having a Facebook page for a brand. With a brand having an active Facebook page it increases brand trust with brand love growing. The results indicate that Facebook pages do contribute to brand engagement. The sample, however, did not demonstrate engagement, but rather saw the ads as sponsored ads on Facebook. Having established the extent to which a Facebook page can influence brand attitude (brand love, hate, and engagement), the findings may be applied to understanding how they influence the decision-making process.

4.1.3 Respondent's view of Facebook Marketing

The survey focussed on determining what the respondents' attitude are about Facebook marketing. This questions were part of the introductory questions that were asked in the beginning of the survey, this survey was built by Omran (2021) in this format to prepare the respondents for answering the questions that was followed. Time spent on Facebook, type of preferred Facebook advertisements, and activities performed on Facebook of respondents were measured.

Demographic Variable	Criteria	Frequency	Percentage
Activities on Facebook	Checking news and updates	78	44,32%
	Commenting and sharing post from friends	22	12,50%
	Visiting pages of companies and brands	39	22,16%
	Work	11	6,25%
	Sharing personal content	10	5,68%
	Education	6	3,41%
	Chatting with friends	10	5,68%
Type of preferred Facebook advertisements	Advertising on the side of my profile page.	22	22,68%
	Sponsored advertising on my home page.	47	48,45%
	Fan pages on Facebook	28	28,87%
Time Spend on Facebook daily	Less than 1 hour	49	53,26%
	1-2 hours	27	29,35%
	2-3 hours	14	15,22%
	more than 4 hours	2	2,17%

Table 3: Introductory Questions

The results showed that 44.32% of respondents logged onto Facebook mainly to check on updates, as it was one of the most preferred activities. Furthermore, did 22.16% of the respondents visit the Facebook pages of brands and companies, and 12.5% of the respondents comment on and share photos with their friends on Facebook. Additionally, only 3.41% of the respondents use Facebook for education. Among the respondents, the most popular type of Facebook advertisement was sponsored advertising they saw in their own home feed, with 48.45% selecting the option. Only 28.87% of the respondents preferred fast-food Facebook fan pages for advertising.

The majority of respondents (53.26%) spend less than an hour a day on Facebook, and 29.35% spend one to two hours a day on Facebook. 15,22% spend two to three hours a day on Facebook with only 2,17% spending more than four hours on Facebook.

4.2 Interpretation of Findings

4.2.1 Direct Interpretation of Results

This study's aim was to investigate to what extent Facebook posts and advertisements of a fast-food brand in South Africa have an effect on brand attitude when it comes to purchasing products. This study focused on how strong fast-food brands' Facebook pages influence brand love, brand trust, and brand engagement amongst consumers. This study measured how much engagement fast-food brands attract on Facebook for having an active Facebook page. The findings that have been founded during data collection have been based on collecting data from respondents with questions based on brand trust (Construct One), brand love (Construct Two), and brand engagement (Construct Three). The results indicated that respondents felt that fast-food brands would try to treat them fairly. Respondents agreed that they felt they could trust their preferred fast-food brand. According to the findings in Construct Two (brand love), the respondents agree that fast-food brands are awesome and bring them happiness and delight.

Respondents to Construct Three (brand engagement) showed little interest in fast-food Facebook pages, and they were not enthusiastic or receptive to learning more about fast-food Facebook pages. One statement "I intend to keep staying in touch with this brand", respondents disagree on; this could indicate that Facebook pages do not create a strong enough loyalty tie with consumers. The results showed that Facebook pages of fast-food brands do contribute somewhat to brand trust, based on in-store experiences and the respondents' experiences on fast-food brands' Facebook pages.

Brand love can also be curated through Facebook pages as the results indicated that Facebook pages played a role in bringing customers happiness, entertainment, and delight. The results indicated that Facebook pages do not enhance brand engagement, as the overall means for the theme was between two (disagree) and

three (neutral). Customers are not open to learning more about a fast-food brand on social media Facebook pages. The results also showed that they do not concentrate on what content fast-food brands post. This shows that fast-food brands should find a more innovative way to connect with their target audiences on Facebook.

The most preferred Facebook marketing type amongst the sample was sponsored advertising they received on their home feeds. The results show that consumers are receptive to fast-food brands bringing their Facebook posts and advertising directly to them instead of them visiting the brand's Facebook page to see what it has to offer. Facebook users mostly use the site to check news and updates. This shows that if fast-food brands create content that draws consumers in to start a conversation about and include their friends, then the brand engagement score grows. Most respondents spend less than one hour on Facebook, suggesting that sponsored advertising should appear on their home feed within the first hour they are active on Facebook.

4.2.2 Previous Studies

Facebook brand pages were chosen because they are widely popular among consumers and are rapidly gaining popularity in social media marketing. Facebook brand pages are widely used in marketing by the fast-food industry in South Africa. The result of this study aligns with previous studies that have been done in Syria (Omran, 2021), one main difference found was the brand engagement results. South African brand engagement on Facebook fast-food brand pages is much lower than engagement in Syria (Omran, 2021).

This could be due to the unstable economic conditions after the Syrian Conflict that Syria experienced (Omran, 2021). Fast-food chains relied on social media / Facebook pages to make a more effective and efficient impact on consumers (Omran, 2021). The study by Abdelkader & Fathy Mohammed (2018) also found that Facebook influences consumers' trust in a food brand and that one rumour can cause consumers to lose trust in the product. The findings of this study align with those of the study conducted in Egypt (Abdelkader & Fathy Mohammed, 2018).

A study found that Facebook pages of a brand have a positive impact on brand awareness, purchase intention, as well as the purchase decision-making process (Abdelkader & Fathy Mohammed, 2018).

4.2.3 Research Problem

Despite an increase in empirical research on the topic of social media, it was at the beginning of this study difficult to affirm to what extent Facebook posts and advertisements affect brand attitudes when it comes to purchasing products. In a broad sense, this research problem was researched by looking at how brand attitudes are influenced by fast-food brand pages in South Africa. The findings of this study showed that brand love and trust are strongly influenced by fast-food Facebook brand pages but brand engagement on the platform was not stronger. The reason for brand engagement results being low could be due to consumers mostly being active on Facebook for less than one hour per day. They prefer sponsored advertising over exploring and learning about a brand on their Facebook page.

4.3 Mimetic Theory of Desire

This study considered the Mimetic Theory of Desire from Rene Girard as it is the key element that keeps social media platforms running (Mimetic Theory, 2020). Mimetic desire provides a motivation structure with mimetic grooves within people, for example, Facebook which encourages likes, shares, and comments (Mimetic Theory, 2020). Mimetic Theory (2020) has determined that the stronger the mimetic forces on a brand page or social media platform, the greater the desire to use and engage with it.

The results of this study align with the theory since the results showed a low level of brand engagement among consumers on fast-food Facebook pages. This could be due to the mimetic friction being too low and fast-food brands not creating enough desire points for consumers to create the need to engage with the brand on Facebook. The results show fast-food Facebook pages contribute to brand love and trust, so Facebook can be used to create friction to engage consumers with fast-food brands more. When the mimetic forces are stronger on Facebook, the popularity of the

Facebook page will increase, more consumers will be reached, and the two-way communication stream will be broadened.

4.4 Contribution

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that was developed. The findings increased knowledge of the identified variables, which was whether a brand's presence on Facebook impacts the attitude consumers have towards it. The findings of this study brought meaning to fast-food retailers as the insights could be applied to their Facebook/Social Media marketing strategies. This study served as a guide for Fast-Food retailers as they enhance customer engagement on Facebook to influence the brand attitudes of customers, especially the Millennial target market. Additionally, to provide insight into consumer research, the study contributed to the existing knowledge of fast-food retailers in South Africa. The findings of this study can be beneficial to Fast-Food retailers and other retailers in the industry, resulting in better brand selection and greater profits.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Research Question Answers

Research Question	Findings/ Insights
To what extent do Facebook posts and advertisements of Fast-Food brands affect brand love, trust, and engagement towards the brand?	Fast-food Facebook Brand pages have an influence on brand love and trust according to the findings of this study, although it does not increase brand engagement.
Sub Research Questions	
1. Does Facebook user-generated social media communication create brand engagement from the consumers towards the brand?	Facebook communication in the form of sponsored advertisements generates some form of brand engagement, but not in a way that would affect the brand engagement score overall.
2. To what extent do Fast-Food brands gain brand love from their Facebook pages?	Consumers build some kind of brand love towards fast-food brands when they have a Facebook page according to the findings.
3. Do consumers trust a brand more who is active on Facebook?	It is confirmed by the findings that consumers have a higher trust level with fast-food brands who are active on Facebook.

Table 4: Research Questions Table

5.2 Limitations and Recommendations

It is beyond the scope of this study to address the question of to what extent Facebook posts and advertisements of Fast-Food brands affect brand love, trust, and engagement with the brand.

This study was designed to contribute to the literature on social media communication focusing on Facebook, but some limitations were brought to light. Social media communication differs across social media channels (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014). Further research should focus on other types of social media like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube as well. In this study, Facebook was only used as the social media platform.

As part of this research design, only the brand attitudes of consumers were measured on social media networks. Social network sites may contain a wide range of potential factors that could influence brand attitude (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014). In addition, future studies should explore a broader range of industries as this study only focuses on the fast-food industry in South Africa. Another limitation of this study could be the sample, as the sample only consisted of a certain age group of people based in Pretoria (Tshwane) South Africa. Future studies could focus on other areas. Over time, other brands may increase their engagement with customers on Facebook which could also influence the study's findings in the future.

5.3 Ethical Considerations

With the gathering of information in this study will the process be ethical, the respondents will be respected and protected, the survey will be transparent, and the survey will be done professionally. The code of ethics that will be adhered to in this study is formulated by the Human Sciences Research Council (HCRC) (2022). The research of this study is going to be undertaken with the identified sample and will not disrespect the respondent's personal, social, and cultural values. The gathering of information for this study will a survey questionnaire be used through Google Forms with a set of questions and an introduction; the introduction will give the background of the study and inform the participants that they will be taking part in the study when they give their consent. The first part of the survey will be seen as a consent form and will entail that they are going to complete the survey questionnaire anonymously. The results of the research will not be falsified and distorted and will be numerical and be interpreted as it is.

The welfare of all respondents will be protected, and before the respondents complete the survey can they give informed consent. The research of this study will be done on people older than 18, the survey will also inform the respondents that they can withdraw anytime during the survey. The respondents will complete the survey anonymously and will all receive the same set of questions to complete. For the survey to be transparent will the respondents be briefed on the aims of the research for the respondents to reassure their willingness to participate in the study.

The findings of the study will be researcher subscribes to the principles of honesty, transparency, and scrutiny (HCRC, 2022). In this study will the participants give their consent through a consent form. The consent form is attached in Appendix B which gives information about the study to the participant and supplies the participant with the contact details of the researcher. The form declares that the information of the participant will be kept anonymously and will be held confident though out the research process. The consent form aims to make the participant feel comfortable with participating in this study. The findings of the study will the research not be distorted or used for other scenarios except for this study. Annexure B is the consent form that is going to be given to the respondents.

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Annexures

Annexure A: Questionnaire

Part 1: Introductory questions

Question 1: How many hours do you spend on Facebook daily?

Less than 1 hour.

- ☐ 1-2 hours.
- ☐ 2-3 hours.
- ☐ 3-4 hours.
- ☐ More than 4 hours.

Question 2: What are the activities that you regularly perform on Facebook?

- ☐ Checking news and updates.
- ☐ Chatting with friends.
- ☐ Sharing personal content.
- ☐ Work.
- ☐ Visiting fan pages of companies and brands.
- ☐ Commenting and sharing posts from friends.
- ☐ Education.

Question 3: What is the most type of Facebook advertising that attracts your attention?

- ☐ Sponsored advertising on my home page.
- ☐ Advertising on the side of my profile page.
- ☐ Fan pages on Facebook.

Question 4: Are you a fan of one of the fast-food fan pages on Facebook?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, please mention the name of the fast-food brand page that you are following or a member in.

- ☐ McDonald's
- ☐ Nando's
- ☐ Steers
- ☐ Wimpy
- ☐ Debonairs Pizza
- ☐ Burger King
- ☐ KFC
- ☐ Roman's Pizza
- ☐ Pizza Hut

Question 5: Duration of membership in the fast-food fan page on Facebook:

- ☐ Less than 1 year.
- ☐ 1-2 years.
- ☐ 2-3 years.
- ☐ More than 3 years.

Part 2: Antecedents of consumer engagements on Fast-Food Facebook brand pages.

Question 6: The following statements aim to assess your level of Trust with the fast-food brand that you follow on Facebook. Please indicate your level of agreement with it (1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree).

- I feel quite confident that my fast-food brand will always try to treat me fairly
- My fast-food brand has been franked in dealing with me
- My fast-food brand would never try to gain an advantage by deceiving its clients
- My fast-food brand is trustworthy

Question 7: The following statements aim to assess your level of Love with the fast-food brand that you follow on Facebook. Please indicate your level of agreement with it (1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree).

- This fast-food brand is totally awesome
- This fast-food brand makes me very happy.
- This fast-food brand is pure delight.
- I am passionate about this fast-food brand.

Question 8: The following statements aims to assess your level of Engagement with the fast-food brand that you follow in Facebook. Please indicate your level of agreement with it (1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree).

- I am passionate about this brand page
- I like to learn more about this brand page.
- I concentrate a lot on this brand page.
- I like learning more about this brand page.
- In general, I like to get involved in this brand page discussions.
- In general, I enjoy exchanging ideas with other people in this brand page.
- I concentrate a lot on this brand page.

Question 9: The following statements aims to assess your level of Loyalty with the fast-food brand that you follow in Facebook. Please indicate your level of agreement with it (1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree).

- This is the only brand of fast food that I will buy.
- I intend to keep staying with this brand.
- I am committed to this brand.
- I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over other brands.

Part 4: Demographic Data

Question 10: Please indicate your gender

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Question 11: Please indicate your age

- ☐ 19-24
- ☐ 25-31
- ☐ 32-42
- ☐ Other

Question 12: Professional Situation

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Worker-student
- ☐ Employee
- ☐ Self employed
- ☐ Unemployed Graduate

Annexure B: Respondent Consent Form

To whom it may concern,

I, Janel Gryzenhout am a student at IIE-Vega (a brand of the Independent Institute of Education). I am currently conducting research for my thesis in BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication in which I am investigating how social media (Facebook) impact the brand attitude of consumers towards the brand.

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.

Your participation will be anonymous.

The study has been approved by my supervisor and the IIE-campus ethics committee.

I can be contacted at: [REDACTED]

if you have any questions or concerns.

I hereby acknowledge and give my full consent to the participation to this study as stipulated above.

(Single choice).

☒ YES

Annexure C – Concept Document Template

Project details		
Your Name: Janel	Student Number: [REDACTED]	
Supervisor: Anthony	Date: 29/11/2022	Version: 5

Proposed Title
Title: The impact of social media communication has on brand attitudes in the South African fast-food industry.

Research details	
Problem statement	According to Statista Research Department (2022), there were 2,9 billion monthly active users on Facebook, which is also named the most popular social media platform worldwide. Despite an increase in empirical research on the topic of social media, it was difficult to affirm to what extent Facebook posts and advertisements affect brand attitudes when it comes to purchasing products. The problem was measured by looking at how brand attitudes were influenced by social media platforms. This study focused on the impact social media has on consumers relating to the fast-food industry and how much a Facebook page encourages brand love, trust, and engagement. The study gave insight into the importance of having a Facebook page for a brand.
Purpose statement	The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact social media has on brand love, trust, and engagement. The fast-food industry's growth has been fuelled by social media marketing (Bartleby, 2022). As television advertising has declined, fast-food chains have resorted to social media advertisements in order to reach a larger audience (Bartleby, 2022). Several social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube, are popular marketing platforms used by fast-food restaurants (Bartleby, 2022). Therefore, was this study's focus on the presence of the fast-food industry in South Africa. With the rise of social media culture over the past decade, brands began to realize the importance of snappy, meme-y humour in gaining brand loyalty and popularity among younger generations (Turner, 2020).
Research question/s	The main research question to this study is; To what extent do Facebook posts and advertisements of Fast-Food brands affect brand love, trust, and engagement towards the brand? The sub research questions in this study are; Q1: Does Facebook user-generated social media communication create brand engagement from the consumers towards the brand? Q2: To what extent do Fast-Food brands gain brand love from their Facebook pages? Q3: Do consumers trust a brand more who is active on Facebook?

Hypotheses / Objectives	Ha: Fast-Food brands' Facebook pages strengthen brand love, trust, and engagement of consumers towards the brand. H0: Fast-Food brands' Facebook pages weaken brand love, trust, and engagement of consumers towards the brand.
Research rationale	Consumers' perceptions of brands and brands' attitudes are heavily influenced by social media, so brands should recognize the importance of their social media presence. Social media marketing is important for organizations as it can establish or break a brand (The Economic Times, 2018). The main objective of Facebook pages and advertisements is to attract consumers' attention and influence their attitudes toward the brand, consequently affecting their purchase intentions (Long, Coleman, 2020). The aim of this study was to provide a more general and comprehensive look at consumer attitudes toward advertising strategies used in social media mainly focusing on Facebook. The importance of this study was for brands to focus on building long-term relationships with consumers by increasing brand awareness through targeting and building relationships.

Literature overview						
Key theories	The theory identified for this study is the Mimetic Theory from Rene Girard. The mimetic theory was proposed by the French anthropologist René Girard, who saw that human desire is not individual, but collective, or social (Mimetictheory, 2020). In this study is the mimetic system of desire applicable as it fits into the framework of social media and how people perceive brands (Mimetictheory, 2020). According to Mimetictheory (2020) is U.S. education and venture capital systems and many other social media platforms are examples of mimetic systems with mimetic grooves. Mimesis is at the heart of social media platforms. This theory will support on how consumer's perceptions are influenced on social media and to what extend mimetic theory influence it.					
Seminal authors/sources	1. Omran W. 2021. Customer engagement in social media brand community. A study of fastfood Facebook brands in Syria. 1(1):15 [Online] Available at: https://comum.rcaap.pt/handle/10400.26/38572 2. Mimetic Theory. 2020. Mimetic System Mimetic Process. 2020. [Online] Available at: https://mimetictheory.com/articles/mimetic-system/ [Accessed 6 Apr. 2022]. 3. Azionya C.M. 2015. University of Johannesburg Millennials' Communication of Brand Perception on Facebook: Implications for Reputation Management. 1(1): 15-16. [Online]. Available at: https://www.proquest.com/openview/4d752eb2e28c4c530fa66db32d64db20/1?pqorigsite=gscholar&cbl=2026366&diss=y					
Literature review themes	Theme 1: Brand Attitude	Theme 2: Brand Love	Theme 3: Brand Trust	Theme 4: Brand Engagement	Theme 5: Social Media	Theme 6: Facebook
Sources						
Key concepts	Brand Love, Brand Trust, Brand Engagement, Social Media, & Facebook					

Provisional Research Approach				
	<u>Paradigm</u>	<u>Epistemology</u>	<u>Ontology</u>	<u>Axiology</u>
Paradigm	For this study, the Positivism paradigm will be applicable. It is a paradigm that analyses certain phenomena, including social phenomena (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:24). Positivists believe that research makes the world a better place and can be used to avoid some scenarios and improve the environment (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:24). This paradigm applies to this study as a social phenomenon is going to be tested focusing on consumer behaviors and actions that take place due to social influences.	The epistemological position of positivism is believed to test standing assumptions against the world (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:25). The approach is to find evidence to support or reject the hypotheses that are stated in this study (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:25). The hypothesis in this study is that consumer attitudes toward brands are heavily influenced by brand posts and advertisements on Facebook.	The ontological position of positivism believes to have a single objective believing that reality can be measured to predict outcomes of human behavior (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:25). This position argues that the given cause has the same effect on all people such as a brand's presence on Facebook, or social media, therefore the ontological position of positivism will be applicable to this study.	The axiological position of positivism does it indicates that research is not tainted by personal bias and values personal integrity (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:27). This applies to this study as the outcomes will be trusted, and the research that is going to be done aims to predict the outcome of future events and people.
Approach/ design	It was the aim of this study to determine a correlation between two variables (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:76). The correlation of this study was to find a relationship between the brand presence on Facebook and consumer attitude towards the brand in terms of brand love, trust, and engagement. This study was approached by using quantitative empirical methods. This study made use of a deductive reasoning approach. Deductive reasoning was used to reason from cause to effect (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:128). This study took a cross-sectional survey design as the data is going to be collected once from the population at one point in time (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:149).			

Provisional Research Plan	
Population	In South Africa, there are currently 30.17 million registered Facebook users (Statista, 2022). The target population for this study was South African citizens who are active on Facebook and use social media weekly. The nature of this population is people who encounter fast-food brands on

	Facebook through sponsored posts and fan pages. The size of the population was based on people currently living in Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa. Their unique characteristics are people who are present on the social media platform Facebook. The accessible population for this study was South Africans who were active on Facebook, ate in fast-food restaurants, and were aware of brands in the industry.
Sampling	This sample was selected non-probably due to the high number of people who are active on Facebook between the ages of 19 and 42 in the study. In this study a convenience sampling method was used to select the target respondents, the sample was biased toward the social and professional context of the research (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:142). The sample for this study was people living in South Africa who is active on Facebook and made use of Fast-Food brands in Pretoria. The sampling method that was used was the convenience sampling method due to the easy access to the population and already having the characteristics that are needed for the study. The sample of this study focussed on the ages 19 to 42 years, which includes mostly millennials.
Data collection method(s)	The data in this study will be collected through cross-sectional survey research. Cross-sectional survey designs are designed to only gather information once from the sample (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:149). A survey questionnaire will be used for this study with closed-ended questions, checklists, and rating scales. The survey questionnaire will be built on Google Forms and will be sent out and filled out electronically, surveys will enable the study to gather data about the chosen population's opinions and impressions.
Data analysis method(s)	For this study will quantitative data analysis method be used by analysing descriptive statistics to describe the data that is going to be collected through the survey. With the data collection method being a survey questionnaire will the data of the respondents for the study collected automatically through Google Forms (Jansen and Warren, 2020). The method is used to assess relationships between variables and test hypotheses in a scientifically rigorous manner. Quantitative analysis relies on statistical analysis methods (Jansen and Warren, 2020). The data of this study will be analysed with the descriptive data analysis method (Jansen and Warren, 2020). Descriptive statistics are going to be used to describe the sample in this study (Jansen and Warren, 2020).

Ethical considerations and limitations	
Ethics	With the gathering of information in this study will the process be ethical, the respondents will be respected and protected, the survey will be transparent, and the survey will be done professionally. The code of ethics that will be adhered to in this study is formulated by the Human Sciences Research Council (HCRC) (2022). The research of this study is going to be undertaken with the identified sample and will not disrespect the respondent's personal, social, and cultural values. The gathering of information for this study will a survey questionnaire be used through Google Forms with a set of questions and an introduction; the introduction will give the background of the study and inform the participants that they will be taking part in the study when they give their consent. The results of the research will not be falsified and distorted and will be numerical and be interpreted as it is. In this study will the participants give their consent through a consent form. The form declares that the information of the participant will be kept anonymously and will be held confident though out

	the research process. The consent form aims to make the participant feel comfortable with participating in this study.
Limitations	This study is designed to contribute to the literature on social media communication focusing on Facebook, but it does have some limitations. Social media communication differs across social media channels (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014). Further research should focus on other types of social media like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube as well. This is due to this study only focusing on Facebook as the social media platform. In this research design, only the brand attitude of consumers will be measured on social media networks. Social network sites may contain a wide range of potential factors that could influence brand attitude (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014). In addition, future studies should explore a broader range of industries as this study only focuses on the fast-food industry in South Africa.

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Annexure D: Ethical Clearance Letter



Date: 13 June 2022

Student name: Janel Gryzenhout

Student number: [REDACTED]

Campus: Pretoria

Re: Approval of RESE8419/RMET8429 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS/PGDip ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

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

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

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

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

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

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

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.

4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor name: ***Anthony Wingfield***

Signature



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) name: ***Courtney Jade de Villiers***

Signature:

