

Effects of Digital Activism on Brand Awareness and Image.

DISSERTATION

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DECLARATION

I, Nachanza Malambo, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in Strategic Marketing at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the impact that digital activism has on brands in South Africa. Digital activism, commonly known by social media users as cancel culture, has gained momentum with social media audiences; using the network effects of popular platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram to discipline users, brands and celebrities that may have erred or offended users.

As brands observe the increase of hours spent on social media, they are likely to increase their presence on the platforms of choice either for digital advertising and marketing communication purposes or to connect with potential audiences. They may be caught up in incidents of digital activism as has been seen with brands such as H&M, Dove, Treseemme and Clicks in recent years in South Africa.

This paper begins by unearthing the roots of digital activism in political sciences disciplines and explores how the brand management theories of brand image and brand awareness are affected by this activity. The research problem explores the fact that traditional marketers have concentrated on the positive brand building elements of brand equity, with attention given to the awareness and image that brands are able to conjure in the minds of consumers; without much focus on the negative elements of brand avoidance, hate, and aversion, which can be outcome of digital activism.

The research objectives were firstly to investigate the impact that social media activity has on brands as it has been shown that an increase of social media usage among individuals would increase the interaction that brands have with their intended target audience and members of the community. Secondly, the study sought to investigate the impact that digital activism has on brand awareness as one of the gaps to be studied is on the negative impact that digital activism or cancel culture may have on brand awareness. Thirdly, the researchers examined the impact of digital activism on brand avoidance, as a deliberate effort to avoid the brand either online or physically. Lastly, the study seeks to investigate the impact that digital activism has on a brands image, on whether this is reduced or increased in the light of increased mentions, trends, or appearances on popular social media platforms.

The research method most suited to this study was the positivism philosophy as the researcher was observing a social reality of digital activism. The positivism philosophy also seeks to investigate the causal relationship or explanatory relationship between independent (digital activism) and dependant variables (brand awareness and image). Using the deductive method on a sample size of 330 South Africans from the ages of 18 and above, the researchers used a quantitative online survey to determine the effect of digital activism on the above-mentioned brands and whether their awareness and image was affected by this activity. The data was analysed using Excel, IBM software SPSS 28, and AMOS 28 and involved the use of inferential statistics, being structural equation modelling via confirmatory factor analysis and path modelling.

Findings revealed that although social media activity by a brand would not result in digital activism and a decrease in digital activism would result in a positive effect in brand awareness. The researchers also concluded that digital activism does positively affect brand avoidance resulting in a deliberate effort by participants to avoid a brand by not supporting any of its activities. And lastly, that respondents did not find that digital activism affected the brand image. Their perceptions of the brands mentioned in the study didn't not change after the boycotts they faced.

The business implications of these findings is that traditional and digital marketers will have to be cognisant of the impact that social media has on their brand equity in a negative manner. They need to avoid relying heavily on the positive metrics of brand awareness and image must empower themselves on how to protect their brands from potential digital activism. They have to plan in advance of the potential impact of a backlash and how they can recover from potential boycotts. Prolonged activism may have an adverse effect on a brand profitability as a result of brand aversion and avoidance.

Keywords Brand awareness, brand image, digital activism, cancel culture, social media.

1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of digital activism on brand awareness and brand image. Digital activism is described as “digitally mediated social activism”, whereby individuals organise themselves with a common cause on a digital platform and participate in activism on issues of concern (Berendt, Uhrich, & Thompson, 2018). Digital activism is described by Sivitanides and Shah (2011) as any type of campaigning, both social and political that uses technological infrastructure. Like-minded individuals that wish to effect change on social justice issues, controversial and contentious matters against brands may increasingly connect on social media platforms and seek to address the matter.

Digital activism may lead to a withdrawal of support, patronage, or association of a brand after an event that causes offense (Clark, 2020a). This is a deliberate action by consumers toward organisations that may have behaved in an unacceptable manner, resulting in brand hate, brand avoidance, and brand aversion (Roy, Sharma, Bose, & Singh, 2022) These negative outcomes are a contrast to the positive consumer-brand relationship of building brand awareness and brand image (Roy et al., 2022). Brand awareness and brand image are parts of brand knowledge, whereby brands seek to create mental memory associations with their consumers' minds, which can be verbal, non-verbal, abstract, or contextual (Keller, 2014).

As communication between brands and consumers has become more transparent, consumers are likely to comment on negative brand behaviours online using social media (Christodoulides, Gerrath, & Siamagka, 2021). Brands must understand the impact that negative activities like digital activism may have on consumer-based brand equity, directly impacting their brand awareness and brand image (Husnain, Syed, Akhtar, & Usman, 2020).

1.2 Context of the study

Modern marketers use a combination of content and electronic word of mouth to achieve their marketing goals on social media platforms (Bala & Verma, 2018). The 2025 digital marketing spend was projected to reach over a total of \$820 billion globally (Mpinganjira & Maduku, 2019). Digital marketers can track their prospective consumers, send personalised and relevant marketing messages, targeting them at the appropriate time with specific content, and in turn build closer and stronger relationships with them (Mpinganjira & Maduku, 2019).

Brands have used social media platforms to engage with online communities, advertising their goods and services, and communicating with them using the platform's two-way capabilities (Geng, Yang, Gao, Tan, & Yang, 2021). These adverts or organic posts have often been noted by audiences or followers, allowing for thousands of likes, user comments and shares that allow brands to gauge user interest (Geng et al., 2020). The positive use of digital media is likely to result in increased brand performance in the form of brand awareness, which in turn increases sales both online and offline (Payne, Peltier & Barger, 2017). When audiences find advertising relevant to their needs on a platform they trust for personal reasons, they are likely to have positive attitudes and opinions of the brand; increasing their word-of-mouth capabilities and increasing their knowledge of the brand's products (Geng et al., 2020).

The area of interest is to examine what the effect on the brand would be if the brand made an error and was facing some boycott or backlash. While there has been increased research around digital activism, there has been limited research on the link between digital activism and a brand's performance in the form of awareness and brand image (George & Leidner, 2019). The effects of digital activism are evolving constantly, requiring regular academic studies (Saint-Louis, 2021).

There have been incidences of brands that have got their marketing activities wrong and have been called out for offending social media audiences. The viral messages that cause the brand to trend may have negative connotations in terms of reduced

brand awareness, reputational damage, and a negative image. Here are some examples of how retail brands have offended audiences and been victims of digital activism:

In 2017, personal and beauty care brand Dove, launched a Facebook campaign showing a black woman taking off a T-shirt and revealing a white woman underneath to depict how the brand assists women to achieve their beauty goals (News24, 2017). The brand was forced to apologise and take down the advert as it angered South Africans with calls on Twitter to boycott the brand (News24, 2017). In 2018, clothing store, H&M, closed its stores for a week in South Africa after posting a digital advert depicting a black child wearing a t-shirt with the slogan “coolest monkey in the jungle” (Thomas, 2018) In 2020, the shampoo brand, Tresemmé, faced backlash following a racial advert on their online channel, demonstrating different hair types of black and white people. This affected their sales as major retailer, Clicks, pulled their products off the shelves following picketing and call for boycotts (BBC, 2020).

1.3 Research Problem

The study seeks to unearth the impact of digital activism on a brand’s image and awareness. A major concern with traditional marketing is that it focuses on the positive impact that marketing stimuli has on brand awareness and brand image (Bryson, Atwal, & Hulten, 2013). Traditionally, marketers expect their marketing activities to result in increased brand awareness and positive brand awareness (Homssi, Ali, & Hashoush, 2023). However, it is been noted that increased consumer scepticism and questioning on true intention particularly when brands participate in cause-related marketing (Homssi et al., 2023). In recent times, additional research on the digital activism has been carried out with the proliferation of brands being attacked for not aligning to consumer expectations (Gambetti & Biraghi, 2023) There is a mismatch between the commercialization of brands, whereby their intentions are seen as hidden and mistrust build from consumers perceptions on how brands should behave (Gambetti & Biraghi, 2023) This results in extreme negative emotions towards a brand causing backlash, and protest that harm the brand. The discourse becomes amplified using social media channels which offer a platform for anti-brand movement to form

polarizing, extreme and contested views about the erring brand (Gambetti & Biraghi, 2023).

The theories of digital activism are rooted in the studies of political and social movements (George & Leidner, 2019). Digital activism has been instrumental in affecting social and political justice issues, by connecting individuals with common causes by means of digital media and in particular social media (Suwana, 2020). The motivation behind the use of social media for activism purposes is primarily its scalability in terms of reach, ease of use, accessibility, and its two-way communication capabilities (Brodock, Joyce, & Zaeck, 2019).

The term, cancel culture, became popular to describe digital activism on social media with regards to withdrawing support, attention and possibly patronage from an individual or a brand (Clark, 2020). The withdrawal of brand support is based on brand management concepts under brand aversion, brand hate, and brand avoidance. These negative phenomena affect the brand, impacting its brand equity in terms of brand knowledge made up of awareness and image. The gap is that marketers have concentrated on the positive impact of integrated marketing communications in building brand awareness and the brands image that the negative and converse of brand hate have not been fully explored. Another gap is that the political and social science theories of digital activism have not been fully extended to include studies on their impact on brands.

This is necessary as advertising spending on social media was projected to reach US\$ 227M in 2023 in South Africa, with a yearly growth of 7.55 percent (Statista Search Department, 2023). As brands use social media more to connect with their audiences as part of the omnichannel strategy, they may get called out at any point and find themselves going viral for offensive comments as shown in the above examples (Payne et al., 2017). Some of these viral tactics may not extend beyond the platform, and some may lead to physical protests such as in the case of H&M in Johannesburg (Thomas, 2018).

The research will further seek to understand if the possibility of campaigns being cancelled on social media affects the brands' ability to plan future digital media activities (Pang, Limsico, Phong, Lareza & Low, 2018). There are limited studies and

research on the impact of social media and digital activism on brands (Chon & Park, 2020). The negative impact of digital activism, which may lead to brand avoidance in the form of brand hate, is a relatively new study with limited research as well (Roy et al., 2022).

1.4 Research Objectives.

1. To investigate the impact of social media activity on brands.
2. To investigate the impact of digital activism on brand awareness.
3. To examine the impact of digital activism on brand avoidance.
4. To investigate the impact that digital activism has on brand image.

1.5 Significance of the study

The study seeks to give marketing and brand managers insights into digital activism's effect on consumers' perception of the brand's image and awareness. Digital activism is a relatively new subject rooted in social movement and political science studies (George et al., 2019). Its effect on brands is evolving constantly with regular academic studies being pursued (Saint-Louis, 2021) This paper's contribution will aid marketing and brand managers in South Africa to understand the impact that digital activism resulting in brand hate, brand avoidance, and aversion has on their brand's awareness and image (Lee & Conroy, 2009).

As the focus in recent years has been on the positive brand building mechanisms, there are fewer insights on how brands can react to negative consumer reactions and how to recover from them. This study will be beneficial in advising these managers on planning their digital media activities, giving guidelines on how to recover from a backlash and find favour with potential consumers. A study of this nature will contribute to consumer well-being, prevent brand losses, improve profitability, build consumer-brand relationships and aid marketers to give better service (Zhang & Laroche, 2021).

Researchers that have studied the effects of digital activism expanded their studies to cover all industries, thus likely diluting the findings. This paper will focus on the FMCG sector to have comprehensive report.

1.6 Delimitations

The research will focus on South African brands in the FMCG sector as they have large social media followers. FMCGs are not the only sector that faces the digital activism - banks in South Africa often get called out on user-generated platforms for their seemingly restrictive and discriminatory policies (Hans, 2022). Therefore, this study's findings focusing on FMCGs may be narrow yet comprehensive. The study will also only focus on South Africa, although global viral activities may have an impact on local brands.

The research will gather consumers' viewpoints on digital activism. Research on brand awareness is usually carried out from the consumer perspective using methods such as surveys, or questionnaires (Park & Srinivasan, 1994). The research will be conducted among digitally savvy individuals who have access to social media platforms. It will be focused on both genders. The limitation is that brand awareness and brand image are not easy to quantify, and the researcher believes that a better measurement of the effect of digital activism on the brand should be on its sales volumes and values. However, this information is not readily available and would need the cooperation of the brands manager who may deal with sensitive information.

Lastly, the research will only focus on brands that have a presence on digital media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube as these have the highest engagement rates from an audience perspective and are widely used. These platforms also promote user-generated content, whereby brands can adopt personas and communicate in an organic manner.

1.7 Definition of terms

Digital activism is a relatively new term used to describe social activism using digital technologies. In the context of this paper, the term can be interchanged with another new term “cancel culture”. Digital activism occurs online, using social media tools, to gather like-minded individuals and group them together to champion a cause. This activity may be done to force a brand to be accountable, change its operations, or apologise for its actions (Clark, 2020). Digital activism may result in the brand being cancelled – which in brand management terms is synonymous with brand avoidance, brand aversion, or even brand hate (Pinto & Brandao, 2020). This is when consumers deliberately avoid the brand, even when they have the means to patronise it.

Cancel Culture is a common phrase that started out in the United States of America to describe the action of calling out an individual or organisation that may have erred and would need to be made accountable for their actions (Clark, 2020a). This activity may start out on online platforms and may extend to physical activity including boycotts, and marches (Clark, 2020a). This is to be used interchangeably with the term digital activism

Brand awareness is “the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category” (Aaker, 1991). In this paper, the term will be used as an outcome of marketing and brand communications for consumers. This term is usually used as a positive outcome of marketing activities.

Brand image, according to Aaker (1991), is a “set of associations” that a potential consumer organises in a meaningful way. Associations are described as any link that a consumer ties to the brand. These are based on the consumers’ perception and may not be an accurate reflection of the brand and may be independent of the product (Keller, 2014).

The paper will be focused on fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), also known as consumer-packaged goods. These are sold in large volumes and the organisations spend huge sums of budget on their brands and marketing efforts.

Social media is any digital platform that is used by individuals to share content and participate in social networking. Social media marketing is the “deployment and

development” of marketing strategies to communicate brand information (Cheung, Pires, & Philip J. Rosenberger, 2019). The most popular social media in South Africa are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. This paper will limit the term social media to these four platforms.

1.8 Assumptions

This research will collect data among digitally savvy individuals who have access to and are active on social media. The assumption is that these individuals spend more than one hour a day on a social media platform and may have engaged with brands advertising messages or organic posts on the social media sites. It is also assumed that these individuals are commercially independent, have financial access and make purchase decisions at some point. The questionnaire and survey provided will be easy to understand and will take less than 15 mins to complete. The research instrument will be online-based, and the assumption is that users will have access to data or Wi-Fi to complete. Another assumption is that respondents will be able to give accurate and honest answers on their views on digital activism, if they have participated in any kind of activism and if they have hated a brand thereafter.

2 Literature Review

This literature review sets out to explain digital activism in theory before drawing the links to marketing and the brand management theories of brand image and awareness. The researcher will begin by reviewing the literature on digital activism, which is a relatively new term to describe social activism occurring on digital platforms. Digital activism has its roots in political and social sciences, and the researcher seeks to review how in the social media age it's become easier for individuals with a common purpose to connect and share opinions on brands. This activity results in potential consumers avoiding the brand and deliberately calling on others to follow suit on social media. The negative attention the brand ultimately receives may increase brand awareness and have an impact on its brand image.

2.1 Digital activism and cancel culture.

The paper by George and Leidner (2019) explains the origins of social activism as a prelude to digital activism. By conducting an exploratory study, the authors were able to unpack how digital activism evolved from political science disciplines to social activities that involved individuals, businesses, and governments. Digital activism has its roots founded in social activism, whereby individuals with a common purpose would form social movement organisations that cause revolutions or effect change in society. Digital activism has been seen to be more effective than traditional activism, which relied on marches, demonstrations, and drastic measures like sit-ins. It attracts younger people, who are technologically savvy, and can connect to the internet (Clark, 2020). Marginalised groups of people have been able to have their voices heard and have used the power of social media and its connecting features like hashtags (#) to gain momentum and create viral content (Schradie, 2018). The terms, cancel culture and digital activism, will be used interchangeably for this paper (Clark, 2020).

George and Leidner (2019) used Lester Mibrath Hierarchy of Political Participation to demonstrate the different layers of digital activism. The bottom of the political hierarchy is comprised of the individuals who partake in spectator activities such as initiating discussions, reading political content, and attempting to convert or convince others.

In the digital activism arena, this layer is synonymous with the digital spectator layer comprised of Clicktivism and Metavoicing (George & Leidner, 2019).

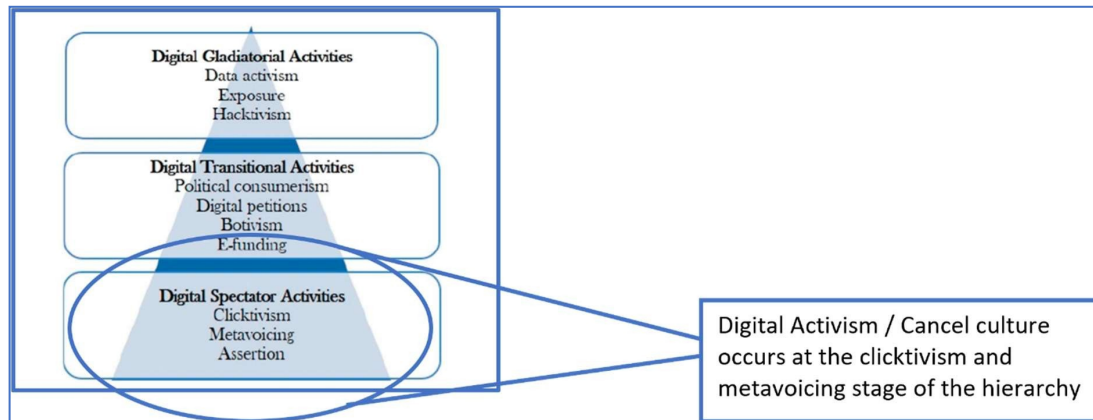


Figure 2-1: Hierarchy of digital activism and cancel culture by George and Leidner (2019)

Cancel culture is rooted in both clicktivism and metavoicing, whereby audiences like, follow, and show signs of endorsing a social media post. In this way, a call for cancellation would gain momentum with the number of clicks or support it receives, causing it to go viral. It's easy for audiences to participate in this form of activity whether they are fully committed or not. These individuals can add voice to a cause making it legitimate, validating the concerns of the movement and giving authority to the cause (George & Leidner, 2019). Clicktivism is defined as activism that uses the internet and social media intended to gain political or social aims. Metavoicing is a form digital activism whereby audiences would share, retweet, repost, comment on social media, at times merely echoing another person's sentiments (Falk, 2011).

Cancel culture uses clicktivism and metavoicing to shame, boycott, bully or withdraw support from a brand (George & Leidner, 2019). Cancel culture is social interaction on social media in response to a brand's negative social event, mishap, or scandal (Laidlaw, 2017). It has been described as raw mob justice that erases the positives of brands and concentrates on an isolated event, with an aim to cause reputational damage to an institution (Teixeira da Silva, 2021). The article, "The digital activism gap: how class and costs shape online collective action", explores how political digital activism gained momentum primarily based on two issues – low cost of organising and

lack of barriers of entry from a global perspective (Schradie, 2018). This makes digital activism appealing to a younger demographic.

A recent paper by Ertekin and Dilek (2022) explored the motivation for individuals participating in digital activism. The study's aim was to examine the effects of "digital activism campaigns implemented on brands" (Ertekin & Dilek, 2022). The researchers conducted a qualitative research study in Turkey with 17 participants using semi-structured in-depth studies. It was found that participants joined in activist movement primarily so they can feel like they took some action against a social ill. The use of hashtags, signing petitions, liking, and reposting made it easy to join the action. An activist movement is only seen as successful by the number of people who participate, with mass reach being the goal of using social media. Rallying up and educating others who may not be aware of the digital protest is seen as success too. The researchers found that participants in the study had a feel-good moment at creating awareness of social issues on social media even if they didn't create an real social impact. This feel-good feeling is described as slacktivism.

Digital activism has been used in the past to sanction individuals who may have offended followers, causing topics to trend and go viral. In South Africa, brands like Dove, Tresemme, and H&M have all faced boycotts offline after rolling out unsuccessful digital campaigns. This type of digital activism involves boycotting, calling out, and shaming brands into self-correcting or making an apology (Schradie, 2018). It has forced many organisations to re-examine their media strategies and their ways of governing (Ertekin & Dilek, 2022). It involves withdrawing support from anyone whose values have been found to be offensive (Clark, 2020). Although digital activism, social online movements, and cancel culture are currently being researched, there is limited research on the effect this has on brands (Saint-Louis, 2021).

2.2 Brand hate, brand aversion, and brand avoidance.

A recent paper by Roy et al (2022) sheds light on brand hate and how it results in brand aversion or brand avoidance. According to the authors, brand hate is a psychological condition in which a consumer harbors a strong negative feeling and

hatred for a particular brand, which manifests as anti-branding activity.. Hate is an emotional state with theories in psychology and consumer behaviour. Marketers have concentrated on the positive outcomes of marketing efforts such as brand equity, which includes brand knowledge, loyalty, and brand resonance (Clark, 2020). Few articles have been dedicated to the study of brand hate and its negative impact on brands (Keller, 2013). Zhang and Laroche (2020) mention that brand hate can involve strong emotions such as anger, sadness, or fear towards a brand.

Consumers may also develop feelings of betrayal when they compare their expectations to the brand realities (Zhang & Laroche, 2021). Understanding how brand love works, in an emotional state and how consumers react to a brand they love and resonate with, would be a first step in gauging consumers reactions to brands they hate (Jabeen, Kaur, Talwar, Malodia, & Dhir, 2022).

Brand hate is a strong emotion that may cause consumers to punish the brand with the following consequences – avoidance behaviour, approach behaviour, or attack behaviour (Michael Shyue Wai Lee, Conroy, & Motion, 2009). Avoidance behaviour is whereby consumers punish the brand by not considering them in purchase decisions (Zarantonello, Romani, & Bagozzi, 2016), while approach behaviour is when consumers complain about the brand. Attack behaviour is seen as consumers partaking in anti-brand activities, and generating negative online brand communities aimed at attacking the brands reputation (Kucuk, 2021). At the attack level, these consumers would encourage others to join them in retaliation, which is a form of digital activism (Kucuk, 2021).

An outcome of brand hate is brand avoidance (Jabeen et al., 2022). Brand avoidance is the consumer's deliberate effort to "reject a brand". This can be seen as retaliation for betrayal as a coping response and can be seen as a means of attacking or punishing the brand (Roy et al., 2022). This is done by individuals, potential consumers, or previous consumers, who would normally consume the product and are not facing other difficulties in purchasing the brand such as affordability or accessibility (Jabeen et al., 2022). There is limited research to advise on how long the avoidance can last as it may be stemming from deep-seated resentment and not forgiving the brand for its errors.

Consumers who have negative experiences with the brand may develop strong emotions and feelings such as hate. Consumers may feel betrayed if the brand experience does not match their expectations, especially if they have a past and existing relationship with the brand. Consumer brand disidentification (CBD) is one of the consequences of excessive negative word of mouth activity. CBD occurs when consumers view a brand as misrepresenting their self-motives and thus misaligned with their values (Wolter, Brach, Cronin, & Bonn, 2016).

Brand hate often manifests itself in the form of complaining, negative word of mouth, protests, and brand avoidance – either in the digital world or the physical world (Roy et al., 2022). Negative consumer experiences posted on social media platforms were found to be more honest, believable, and relatable in comparison to positive comments (Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011). Negative electronic word-of-mouth comments have a strong impact on purchase decisions, and they affect brand reputation. Reputational damage would directly affect a brand's image. Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold (2011) proved that negative word of mouth on social media influenced consumer perceptions.

The temporal dominance of a topic using a hashtag (#), making a topic trend, leads to large numbers of social media posts. Social media has the advantage of speed and mass reach with brands being attacked within hours (Pfeffer & Carley, 2014). Twitter has been involved in most brand attack that have occurred because of its nature - it's a microblogging site allowing for short and quick messages reaching individuals and their followers. Twitter creates a network effect that makes it possible for clusters of individuals to be connected. A good example of this is – if user A is connected to B, and B is connected to C, there is a high chance that A will be connected to C – thus creating a network cluster (Pfeffer & Carley, 2014). These clusters assume that these individuals will be talking about the same topic, thus the spreading of opinions and beliefs begins (Pfeffer & Carley, 2014). Strong ties are created on social media with people having hundreds if not thousands of followers that are able to echo and amplify one's opinions (Pfeffer & Carley, 2014). These are called echo chambers, creating the impression that everyone is talking about the same issue. Echo chambers ensure persuasion and affirmation to users, creating the

impression that most people have the same opinion about the topic (Pfeffer & Carley, 2014).

Unhappy consumers could use their voice on social media and spread negative word-of-mouth posts to let followers know of their displeasure. Negative consumer-brand relationships develop negative speech, actions and emotions towards a brand online (Brandao & Popoli, 2020) Bad impressions and stereotypes are quicker to form, spread quicker and are easier to confirm according to Baumeister et al (2001). The theory developed by Ebbesen, Kjos and Konecni (1975) on propinquity stated that people who lived closer to each other would most likely dislike each other than be friends. The increase of propinquity (the state of being in close proximity) highlights more bad events than good ones, thus causing enemies among individuals, leading to the thought that people connect to bad events more than positive ones (Ebbesen, Kjos, & Konecni, 1975). In a social media setting, the conclusion may be that echo chambers use the propinquity to spread negative information that spreads quicker, and is processed easier, enabling people to form opinions and connect about a brand's error.

A study by Nezlek and Gable (2001) had participants record daily events in a period of 3 weeks and the result was that bad events had a stronger impact in their day rather than good events. Bad events also had a lasting effect than good days and participants who experienced a bad day mentioned having the same feeling the following day. A study on the recall level of positive versus negative events found that respondents were able to report on negative and bad emotions better than good memories (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998). This could mean that bad experiences would remain on social media for longer periods of time before being replaced by newer topics.

Pratto and John (1991) tested whether there was a difference between the attention paid to negative news compared to positive ones. They used a modified Stroop paradigm where respondents were asked to name the colour the word was written in rather than the word. The words were either positive ones or negative human traits. The negative words received more attention as respondents took longer to name the ink colour rather than the word, paying more attention to the word. Bad traits had a

greater power of attracting attention than good traits in a social media setting such as on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. This literature echoes what the current is seeking to understand, which is: the reason why negative brand reviews are more popular than good ones, negative news spreading faster and being more memorable than good news, and why people would jump onto negative trending bad news as opposed to good brand news.

Furthermore, the article by Baumeister et al, 2001 mentioned how bad events form lasting impressions and carry more weight than good impressions. According to the study by Peeters and Czapinski (1990) on positive-negative asymmetry, the research showed that people formed lasting impressions on bad information received about a subject. The positive-negative asymmetry is the tendency of people to give more weighting to negative information when making decisions and creating perceptions than positive information (Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). The study found that negative information is seen to have greater informational value and is viewed as more trustworthy than positive stimuli. Hamilton and Huffman (1971) found that negative behaviour weighted more in impression building as it demonstrated that there was more to be revealed by the subject of interest while good behaviour is common and expected. The study used 80 undergraduate students to examine whether trait words reflecting negative human behaviour would have a greater weighting in forming first impressions than common human behaviour. It was found that this was true primarily because of the usefulness of information. People were more curious to find out more about an individual with bad traits. This shapes the current research on whether people's impressions about a brand is affected by negative brand attacks.

The researcher thus hypothesises that intense emotions towards a brand caused by negative news has an impact on the brand's image. Brand hate affects the recollections the consumers have in the brand, impacts their decision making and most importantly their first impressions on the brand are distorted by brand hate.

The research by Lee and Conroy (2009) created a theoretical framework to show the four types of brand avoidance including experiential avoidance, identity avoidance, moral avoidance, and deficit-value avoidance. This paper is important to this current

research as it is clearly demonstrating how brand hate and brand avoidance affect specific brands instead of industry categories. This research also sheds light on the causes of brand avoidance. The brand avoidance discussed by Lee and Conroy's paper stems from unfulfilled brand promises, which cause consumers and potential consumers to avoid the brand.

Experiential avoidance describes an unfulfilled brand promise (Roy et al., 2022). This occurs when the customers' expectations do not match the brand's promises. Identity avoidance occurs when consumers find the brand inauthentic, or their mental association does not match theirs. This is based on their own perceptions and their own self-concept.

Moral avoidance is when consumers avoid a brand based on ethical considerations (Lee & Conroy, 2009). These can be based on the country of origin or the size of the organisation. Consumers may avoid products because they are American, Russian, or Chinese. They may withdraw support from an organisation because they feel they may be supporting a monopoly.

The fourth type of brand avoidance is deficit value avoidance, whereby there is cost-benefit evaluation (Lee & Conroy, 2009). This can be in cases when low-priced goods are perceived as low quality or when the highly priced products don't match the perceived benefits.

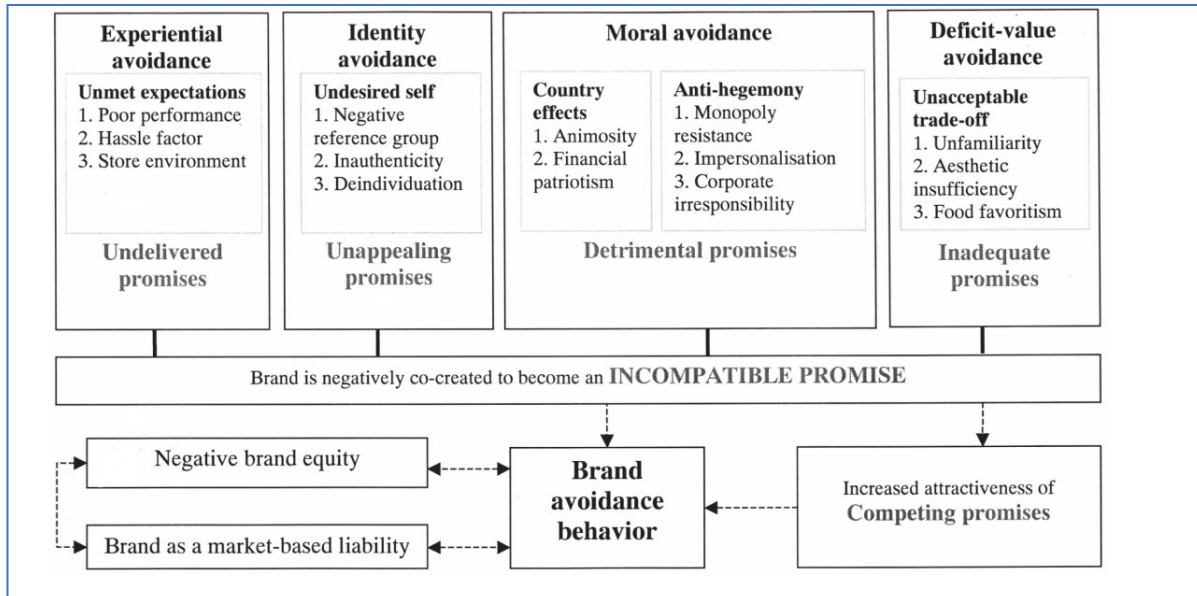


Figure 2-2 The brand avoidance framework developed by Lee (2009)

The fifth type of brand avoidance is advertising avoidance (Knittel, Bearer & Berndt, 2016). Advertising is defined as a paid promotion or presentation of goods, services or ideas by a sponsor (Lee & Conroy, 2009). Potential and existing consumers can avoid a brand because of the advertising content produced, a celebrity endorsement, the music, or the response to the advertisement (Keller, 2014). In this case, marketing communications would cause irritation or annoyance among target audiences.

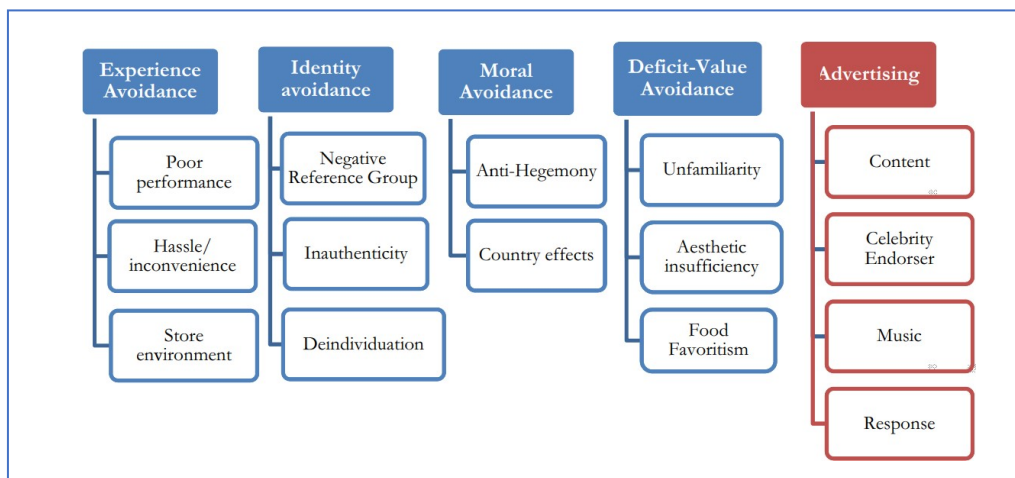


Figure 2-3 Brand Avoidance and Advertising by Knittel, Bearer and Berndt (2016)

2.3 Social media and digital marketing

Social media is a digital platform that uses its networking effects to bring communities of shared interested together. People use social media to communicate with their friends and family, share information, read up on current affairs and stay up to date on current trends. The most social media platforms South Africans use are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. They spend hours on the platform of choice, with 18–34-year-olds are most likely to spend more than 3 hours a day on the social media platforms of choice – interacting with friends, and family and like-minded communities (Pillay, 2022).

Brands use social media platforms to communicate with audiences and form relationships and gain new customers (Duman & Ozgen, 2018; Ertekin & Dişli, 2022). Most brands thus create social media profiles on the platforms so they can form relationships with followers. Online communities engage with advertisements and organic posts from brands they find relevant and use trust theory to change their perceptions about brands (Geng, Yang, Gao, Tan, & Yang, 2020).

Brands have included social media advertising as part of their integrated digital marketing mix often using the platforms of choice for promoting advertising campaigns. Social media has been attributed with promoting sustainable purchase intent among potential consumers as consumers develop trust with the platform of choice and the trust extends to the brand marketing communication activities (Geng et al., 2020). Consumers are motivated to learn more about the brands and often visit their websites to learn more, or to perform a desired action such as a sale or fill in a lead form, thus demonstrating purchase intent (Zafar, Shen, Ashfaq, & Shahzad, 2021). Web 2.0 has made it possible for technology to track conversions back to the channel used and attribute a conversion accordingly (Zafar et al., 2021).

The role of social media in digital activism is more of a facilitator (Ertekin & Dişli, 2022). Its role in bringing communities with common interest has been instrumental

in the increased rate of announcing and spreading information quickly. Hashtags and trending topics have made it easy for audiences to participate in latest news or events (Ertekin & Dilek, 2022). Social media platforms like Twitter have made it possible for users to search for most popular topics based on their geographic location, thus getting granular with the targeting parameters, and connecting users in close-proximity. Therefore, users are able to share both positive and negative opinions on any topics from a local scale to a global scale.

Consumers have become empowered on social media. Consumers can communicate directly with brand representatives, with the possibility of that communication reaching more than their own followers. Consumers are able to give product reviews, thoughts and opinions, rate the service given, share brand experiences, and influence their peers buying decisions (Ertekin & Dilek, 2022).

The literature reviewed in this section helped the current researcher understand the role social media has in digital activism. The rise of negative comments and feedback from the consumers voices have caused a significant threat to marketers and brands driving the era of digital activism. Consumers may take part in social media activism when they feel there is a gap between the brands values and the societal benefits. Communities may feel that the brand does little to contribute to societal issues and may thus begin anti-brand campaigns.

2.4 Brand awareness and Brand Image

Brand awareness is the ability of the potential consumer to recognise or recall a particular brand within a product category field “as reflected by their brand recognition or recall performance” (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Potential consumers would create mind associations or mental nodes which can evoke facts and feelings about the brand, and can recall and recognise under different circumstances (Li & Kannan, 2014). Familiarity or likeability and ease of recall are positive outcomes of brand awareness (Keller, 2014).

Brand image is based on the consumers perception of the product based on their own memories (Keller, 1993). It is created when consumers create mental associations on the brands attributes and benefits. A strong brand image is built on strong brand associations, favourability of the associations, and the uniqueness of the association (Keller, 2014).

Brand awareness and brand image are measured from the consumer's perspective as an outcome of an organisation's marketing efforts as part of the consumer-based brand performance (CBBP) (Keller, 2014). CBBP models measure consumers' perceptions related to their "attitudes and opinions" (Molinillo, Ekinci, & Japutra, 2019). These consumer-based brand performance measurements result in brand loyalty, brand switching, and increased brand share which are positive outcomes of brand awareness and image (Molinillo et al., 2019).

A major contributor to brand awareness and brand image is advertising, which has also been identified as a major source of brand avoidance (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995; Knittel et al., 2016; Molinillo et al., 2019) Consumers have increasingly reacted negatively to advertising, social media posts and from the internet (Knittel et al., 2016).

The literature review on brand awareness and brand image assisted the researcher of this study to understand why it is important to measure a brand success in terms of awareness and image with a seen from a customer perspective.

2.5 Brand performance in terms of Brand Awareness and Image

Brand performance measurements are critical for measuring business success as managers use these to gauge the brand values and thus, have benchmarks for comparison with other business units (Knittel et al., 2016). Ways of measuring a brand's success from a marketing perceptive can be consumer-based (Molinillo et al., 2019). The paper by Molinillo, Enkinci and Japutra (2019) explored the consumer side of measuring brand success which included metrics namely brand awareness which is part of customer-based brand equity (CBBE).

There is a direct link between a carefully executed, effective marketing communication plan and CBBE with awareness and image as the main outcome (Datta, Ailawadi, & van Heerde, 2017). The desired measurement of brand success for this research is consumer-based (Luxton, Reid, & Mavondo, 2014).

2.6 Empirical Review

Roy et al (2022) conducted research into brand hate and the relationship between consumers and their negative perceptives of a brand. The researchers conducted online surveys among 300 participants of both genders. The survey was centred around 25 brands in multiple verticals in the services industry like retail, airline, fast foods, and technology in the United States of America. The study was not industry-specific and focused on the consequences of brand hate rather than the causes. The article carefully states the types of brand hate and draws a clear connection between brand hate and brand avoidance.

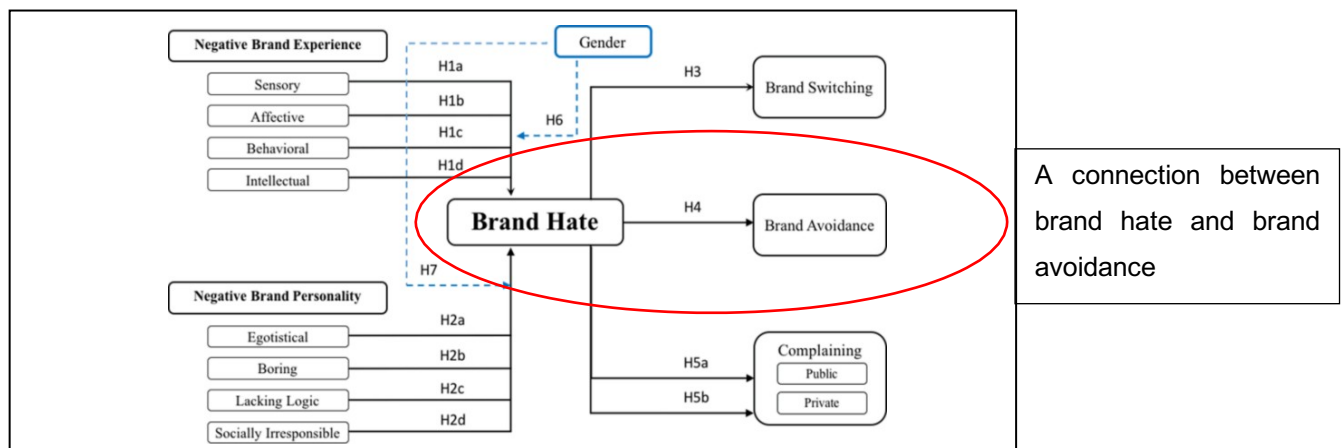


Figure 2-4 Brand Avoidance and Brand Hate Roy et al (2022).

The research paper also emphasised on the service industry, whereas this research paper will centre on the FMCG industry. This research paper will also seek to pinpoint the origins of the brand hate as streaming from social media brand activity, culminating in hatred and avoidance of the brand. The research will seek to uncover if there are any positive outcomes associated with brand avoidance and brand hate in terms of brand awareness. As brand trends on social media and their share of voice and

mentions increase during that time, this awareness can be exploited by the brand into a positive element.

As there is limited global research on brand hate and brand avoidance, South Africa is no exception. Consumption habits of Sub-Saharan and South African consumers have limited empirical representation in brand management theory, therefore an understanding of concepts such as brand hate and avoidance would need further research (Yu et al., 2018). According to the brand avoidance scale developed by Odoom et al (2018), advertising-related and moral avoidance were the highest causes of brand avoidance among consumers in Ghana and Nigeria, prompting researchers to advise marketing managers and brand owners to be mindful of their messages as these were likely triggers for avoidance. This research will focus on advertising and brand messaging carried out only on social media platforms to advise managers on how to minimise the chances of being cancelled through negative word of mouth activity and viral activity (Odoom et al., 2018).

In a study by Wolter et al (2016), the authors demonstrate that a strong brand image that attracts consumers, resulting in exclusive loyalty, can simultaneously repulse other consumers to the point of brand opposition. The authors introduce the model of Consumer-brand identification (CBI) and consumer-brand disidentification (CBD) (Wolter et al., 2016), which are based on consumers' perspectives on the brand and their personal motives such as self-enhancement. The stronger the self-motives are satisfied, the stronger the CBI. This results in brand acceptance, purchase and eventually loyalty. When consumers reject the brand's image, they disidentify themselves from the brand and wilfully exclude the brand from their self-identity. The brand is viewed as "misrepresenting" their self-motives and thus is rejected (Wolter et al., 2016).

2.7 Theoretical Framework – the effect of Digital activism on brand awareness and image.

This theoretical framework highlights the effect that digital activism has on brand awareness and brand image. The research will centre on brand marketing activities on social media platforms as the source.

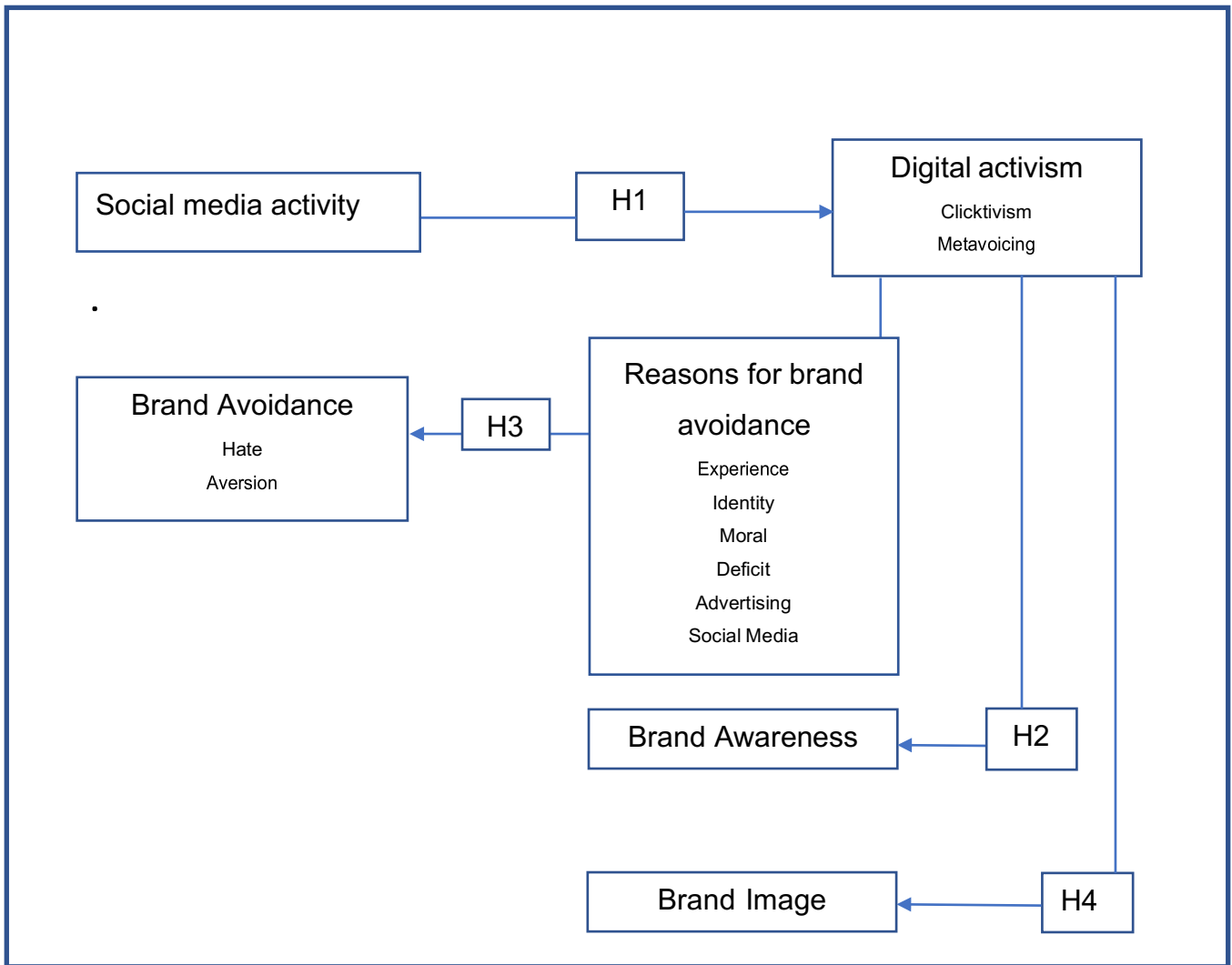


Figure 2-5 Theoretical framework for the effect of Digital Activism on Brand Awareness and Image showing the hypotheses to be tested and developed in section 2.7

2.7 Hypotheses Development

Based on the theoretical framework, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

2.7.1 Social media activity and digital activism

Social media is useful for communicating with communities of people with shared interests using user-generated content (Gaskill & Winzar, 2013). Brands can advertise to their followers and encourage real-time information sharing to influence purchase

decisions. As previously mentioned, South African brands were projected by Statista Search Department (2023) to increase their social media advertising budget to US\$227M in 2023 as organisations have seen the benefits of cultivating two-way communication with their audiences (Liu, Lee, Liu, & Chen, 2018; Mpinganjiraa & Maduku, 2019; Statista, 2021).

It is reported that 74 per cent of online customers are social media users, that use social media to research on brands (Cheung, Pires, & Philip J. Rosenberger, 2019). Furthermore, 90 percent of global businesses use social media marketing to relay advertising messages (Cheung et al., 2019).

Social media has played a key role in the increase of activism campaigns that have used its networking effect to connect people of similar interests. Twitter, in particular, has seen movements like “Black lives matter” which began in the United States of America growing into a global movement (Housley et al., 2018). The fast-paced nature of Twitter and its wide reach enables the platform to galvanise and support a movement. Some of the digital activism on the platform does not extend further than the platform, with audiences merely taking part in movements on a clicktivism level (Housley et al., 2018). The paper explores how the microblogging site Twitter uses hashtags (#) to correlate topics and make them easier to be found. Another popular movement that used Twitters hashtags includes the #ArabSpringUprising, which gained momentum and ultimately a change in North African governments (Mushtaq & Afzal, 2017). The #YesAllWomen hashtag in India was used to shed light on the plight of women in New Delhi and became a global movement (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer, 2016). The #MeToo movement that was created by feminist activist to conscientise the world on how rampant sexual abuse is at workplaces was also started on Twitter (Manikonda, Beigi, Kambhampati, & Liu, 2018).

The researchers hypothesise that social media activity will increase digital activism towards brands. In other words, the more time spent by consumers on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, the more exposed they are to some form of activism. They will be encouraged by their peers or communities to partake in some form of clicktivism, metavoicing or slacktivism. The barriers to entry for these digital protests are minimal; users only need access to the internet and the

device. (Ertekin & Dilek, 2022). The costs of joining a digital boycott are also ~~minimum~~ with the rise of digital activism being noted among under privileged societies. It's also noted that there is a low involvement as user may simply like, repost, share, on a cause dear to them without having to manually or physically do so (Ertekin & ~~Dik~~ 2022). This often results in a feel-good moment, with members of a digital boycott feeling like they have achieved a great deal. Users associated digital activism with feelings of gratitude and hope (Ertekin & Dilek, 2022)

H1: Social media activity will increase digital activism towards brands

2.7.2 Digital activism and Brand awareness

Brands are increasingly under pressure to be transparent and are held accountable by potential and existing customers for their online and offline activities (Cheung et al., 2019). Digital activism or cancel culture has increased in recent years because of the ease of recruiting like-minded people on social media platforms. These individuals would use the concepts of clicktivism and metavoicing to add their voice in calling out brands that have erred (Nickerson, Lowe, Pattabhiramaiah, & Sorescu, 2021).

Negative events have a greater impact on individuals than positive ones, with consumers having a higher likelihood to tell others about negative events (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Destructive behaviours have been found to be "better understood than positive ones" with the likelihood of sharing a brand bad experience being higher than a good one (Baumeister et al., 2001). Unhappy consumers would often complain publicly using online blogging, posting on social media and on websites, freely voicing out their displeasure of the brand spreading the word about their complaints to other consumers; thus increasing brand awareness (Zarantonello, Romani, & Bagozzi, 2016).

Another research on the anti-branding using the internet hypothesised that anti-brand online communities did have a negative effect on the brand image (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). The activism performed against the brand would have an effect on its online identity and negatively affect any brand associations that marketing would have created in the minds of consumers (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009).

This activity can stay on the platform, with audiences posting, reposting, liking, and sharing, thus encouraging others to do the same. The brand's name would trend, at times losing followers, whilst increasing traffic to their website. News searches would increase and visitors to their page would also increase, resulting in increased awareness for that period. This activity would cause a spike in the share of voice for the brand increasing their brand awareness.

H2: Digital activism has a negative effect on brand awareness

2.7.3 Digital activism and Brand Avoidance

Brand avoidance is the deliberate action of keeping away or rejecting the brand (Wolter, Brach, Cronin, et al., 2016). It's the conscious decision that consumers make to abstain from purchasing a brand (Lee & Conroy, 2009). Kittel et al., (2016) describes five sources of brand avoidance which include moral avoidance, identity avoidance, experience avoidance, deficit-value avoidance, and advertising-related avoidance. The most common cause of brand avoidance is the advertising-related avoidance. The research done by Mashegede et al., (2018) included findings on brand avoidance caused by brand presence on social media

Brand avoidance can be linked to anti-consumption behaviours whereby consumers resist the purchase of certain goods and services (Mashegede, Bilal, & Radwan, 2018). The behaviour is a deliberate action not linked to product unavailability, inaccessibility and affordability (J. Lee, Park, Baek, & Lee, 2008). Brand avoidance contributes to the notion of negative brand equity with brand awareness as a focus (Michael Shyue Wai Lee et al., 2009). The association with a brand that is actively being avoided by consumers reduces its worth in a brand awareness perspective (Michael Shyue Wai Lee et al., 2009).

Marketing efforts of building brand awareness are for the brand to enhance its profitability and sustain a cash flow for its stakeholders, thus having a positive brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) When consumers view the brand elements in positive light, the brand achieves profitability and resonates with its consumers; thus

being a valuable organisational asset (Michael Shyue Wai Lee et al., 2009). Brand avoidance and anti-consumption behaviours would result in negative brand association, diluting the consumers-based brand equity. This research paper takes brand equity elements of knowledge comprised of brand awareness from a consumers perspective (Keller, 1993). Keller (1993) discusses the value the consumers derive from the brand in a consumer-based brand equity, in particular awareness, how they differentiate the brand from competitors and the effect that brand knowledge has on the brands major attributes.

Negative online word of mouth has a detrimental impact on brand awareness. Negative word of mouth reviews receive more engagements as they are seen to be more credible (Baumeister et al., 2001; Michael Shyue Wai Lee et al., 2009). Consumers with a purchase intent for a certain product would have a change of mind when reading online reviews of others who had negative experiences or are avoiding the brand based on reasons mentioned , primarily based on social media and advertising related causes. (Michael Shyue Wai Lee et al., 2009). Brands that do not monitor the amount and types of negative online word of mouth received would eventually have high numbers of consumers avoiding their brands.

Mashegede, Balil and Radwan (2018) expanded on the reasons for brand avoidance from the model developed by Lee et al (2009) and Knittel et al (2013) to include social media. The research findings found that social media factors did induce consumers to avoid certain brands as per model below (Mashegede et al., 2018). The study was done on Facebook as the social media platform, but the findings can be extended to other platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. The findings from this paper have been included in the theoretical framework on the effects of digital activism on brand awareness and brand image. With brands increasing their advertising spend and organic time on social media platforms, the hypothesis is formed that social media advertising will increase digital activism. The study found that consumers avoid brands on Facebook for the following reasons as shown in Figure 6.

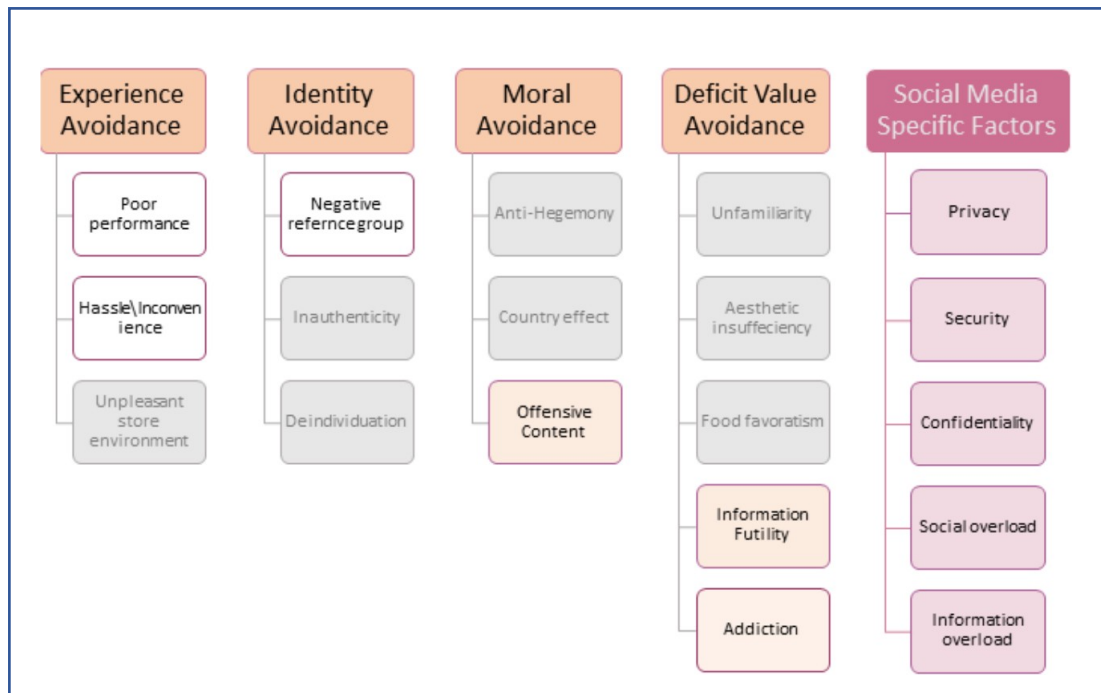


Figure 2-6 Social media as a source of avoidance by Mashegede, Balil and Radwan (2018)

Social Media Factors

1. Privacy

Consumers citing privacy reasons may avoid social media networks like Facebook. They may feel their information such as demographics, photos, locations may be used by the platform and third parties for unwarranted activities. The dissatisfaction with the platform may transfer to the brand – that use information gathered from the social media network for targeting and advertising purposes (Mashegede et al., 2018).

2. Security

Consumers in the study mentioned they avoided the Facebook as they felt their security was breached. Cyber-attacks and online victimisation were cited as the main reasons for avoiding the platform which extended to a brands avoidance (Mashegede et al., 2018).

3. Confidentiality

Users on the Facebook platform felt that security breaches opened to confidentiality

woes, with a lot of their personal and sensitive information being breached (Mashegede et al., 2018). To avoid that, they resorted to quitting the platform and would inevitably miss out on a brands marketing communications on the platform.

4. Social Overload

When consumers feel overloaded by the number of requests and contacts they receive from contacts and brands alike, they would avoid the platform; which may transfer to avoiding the brand (Mashegede et al., 2018).

5. Information Overload

Information overload negatively affects the consumer-brand relationships on Facebook (Mashegede et al., 2018). It affects the quality of their interactions and reduces trust, brand association and brand likeability.

H3: Digital activism increases brand avoidance

2.7.4 Digital Activism and brand image

As previously stated, brand image is based on the consumers perception of the product based on their own memories (Keller, 1993). It is created when consumers create mental associations on the brands attributes and benefits. A strong brand image is built on strong brand associations, favourability of the associations and the uniqueness of the association (Keller, 2014).

Digital activism has become one of the most common topics on the internet with brands an individual's being targeted. Digital activism is commonly known as cancel culture which is the practice of individuals withdrawing support, or patronage from a brand or individual who may have erred. This is done to show disapproval of the brands actions. The on-going study by Mohsen (2022) sheds light on the effects of digital activism or cancel culture on a brand image. This literature was used extensively in this current study as there were few prior writings on the direct relationship between digital activism or social media activism and brand awareness. This paper was particularly written as incidences for boycotts were common and brands were being affected as the cancellation rate was increasing.

Highly emotional communities united with a common purpose towards a brand's mishap would use the connecting power of social media to voice out their opinions, dissatisfaction, and disconnect from a brand. The common social media platforms studied in the paper by Mohsen (2022) were Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. A quantitative study was then undertaken using a self-administered online survey.

The study done by Kristal et al (2018) showed that there was a dilution of the brand equity elements of image after a call for a boycott occurred as there was a distortion of brand value perceptions. Brand attacks impact a brand reputations (Romani & Grappi, 2015). The brand attacks lead to a "reinterpretation of the brands meaning", spreading information misaligned with the brands image thus affecting its reputation (Popp, Germelmann, & Jung, 2016)

Findings by Brandao and Popoli (2022) showed that consumers who participated in brand boycotts and joined anti-brand communities did so with an aim of destroying the brand image and reputation. This information was derived from interviews done with online anti-brand community administrators (Brandao & Popoli, 2020).

The effects of a brands boycott would have an impact on the company's reputation and destroy their brand image as consumers spread negative electronic word of mouth, bad comments, posts, and tweets. The outrage from a boycott and resulting bad publicity from one sector of society would spread using the use of viral content, trending topics and hashtags to encourage other social users to join in the activism. The trust and loyalty users had in the brand becomes diminished, thus affecting the favourable associations they had and may begin a ripple effect of brand avoidance. Digital activism may have its positive elements, as it has been used in the past to correct brands, to get them to apologise or to make a firm stand on a social and political issue (Bakhtiari, 2022). Movements such as #BlackLivesMatter gained global momentum from digital activism and brought social change to many communities (Mohsen, 2022). However, this paper is focused on the negative impact that digital activism has on brand image.

H4: Digital activism has a negative impact on brand image

2.8 Summary of the Literature review

The literature review provides a background on the origins of digital activism and its roots in political sciences. Digital activism occurs when social activists have used digital and online media to rally support for a cause among social media followers. Social media is the most used platform for these activities as it connects individuals with a similar purpose, is accessible to minority groups including marginalised individuals, and young people. It is easier to mobilise individuals to follow a common purpose with the usage of hashtags which make it easier for topics to trend and brand attack can easily gain momentum.

Brands have been using social media as part of their social media omnichannel strategies. They do this to engage with potential online brand communities and encourage two-way communication to receive and pass on information - in a bid to build brand awareness. The goal of a marketer engaging in marketing activities is to improve brand performance. Brand performance can be used in measurable metrics like consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) which measures the success of campaigns from the consumer's perspective.

The literature review assisted the researcher in building the theoretical framework using the various research carried out by Lee (2008), Knittel (2016) and Mashegede et al. (2018) on the various origins on brand avoidance and how these link to brand hate and brand avoidance. Based on the framework, the researcher was able to hypothesise on how social media brand activity can have an increase in digital attacks leading to brand hate, aversion and avoidance leading to an impact on the brands awareness and image.

3 Research techniques and procedures.

3.1 Introduction

The third chapter of this research document outlines the Research Methodology. The researcher followed the structure provided by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009). The layout of this research starts of by describing the research philosophy and research approach followed by the strategy. The researcher will describe the research method choice which of comprised quantitative research. The researcher will then describe the analytical aspect of the research findings and how they will be interpreted.

3.2 Research Philosophy.

Research philosophy refers to the developing of knowledge and the nature of the knowledge (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Research philosophies are broken into two formats namely Ontological and Epistemological. Ontological assumptions are based on the nature of existence and the structure of the reality, and what is known in the world based on social structures, cultural norms; or social actors (Hathcoat, Meixner, & Nicholas, 2019). Epistemological assumptions pertain to the nature, limitations, and justifications of human knowledge (Hathcoat et al., 2019). These are further broken down into four research philosophies namely positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism (Al-Saadi, 2014).

Positivism and realism are the research philosophies based on observable phenomena (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). For positivism, the result is a “law-like generation” that can be replicated. When conducting a research based on realism, the researcher expects a scientific outcome. This philosophy is based on the premise that the reality is independent on humans. This has an impact on the data collection method used (Almqvist, Forsberg, & Holmström, 2016). On the other hand, interpretivism and pragmatism are concerned with subjective assumptions. Interpretivism research is conducted among social actors rather than objects. It involves qualitative research, and the researcher seeks to understand the respondent’s point of view, thus adopting an empathetic manner. The pragmatic

position argues that the research question is the determinant factor in deciding the research philosophy and integrates different perspectives of collecting (Almqvist et al., 2016).

This research paper used the positivism philosophy as the researcher was observing a social reality. The researcher used theories on brand awareness, brand image and digital activism to draw up a hypothesis central to the study. These hypothesis' were tested and confirmed, leading to further research and the findings could be replicated (Saunders et al., 2009). The positivism philosophy holds the position that the truth already exists, and the researcher will uncover it or discover it (Al-Saadi, 2014). Another goal for positivism research is the generation of a causal relationship or explanatory association between the independent and dependent variables (Park, Konge, & Artino, 2019). By conducting a quantitative study, the researcher primarily seeks to find a causal relationship between digital activism (Independent variable) activity and brand awareness and image (dependent variables).

3.3 Research Approach

This study used a deductive approach to gather data (Almqvist et al., 2016). The deductive approach is highly structured and requires a hypothesis based on theory as a starting point. If the results confirm the hypothesis, it can be confirmed to be true and valid (Schindler, 2019); if its false, its rejected. The deductive approach follows a top-down a structure from theory to hypothesis to accept, or reject or add on to theory (Soiferman, 2010).

The inductive approach, on the other hand, begins with a drawn conclusion. This approach is usually used with qualitative methods. It is less structured and more subjective (Saunders et al., 2009). Using a bottom-up methodology, the researcher worked with respondents to develop bigger themes and generate a theory." (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007)

The study being undertaken was reliant on the development of a hypothesis, the relationship between the various variables, and the testing of these hypothesis. The

researcher then drew conclusions on the findings and either accepted or rejected the hypothesis (Saunders et al., 2009). The deductive approach also seeks to explain the relationship between the independent variable of digital activism and the dependent variables of brand awareness and image. This makes it an explanatory study. This approach will guide the sample size to be used as it relies on a large and sufficient size to make generalised conclusions (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.4 Research Strategies

There are up to seven different research strategies, and these include experiments, surveys, case studies, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, and archival research. The one most associated with the deductive approach and would be the best fit for this study is the survey strategy (Saunders et al., 2009). This strategy is best suited for explanatory studies and for collecting large data from sizeable samples. Surveys are suitable for understanding the view of the population (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). The survey can be self-administered, via a personal interview, online or via the telephone (Schindler, 2019). This approach allows for many participants to be included if online surveys are used (Saunders et al., 2009). Surveys are typically used to get respondents to give their views and opinions on certain topics in a numerical and measurable manner (Saunders et al., 2009). The study used online self-administered surveys that are easy to understand, requiring up to 15mins to answer to avoid exasperating the respondents.

3.5 Research Methodology

The quantitative method is used when the research requires statistical or numerical data (Saunders et al., 2009). It is best suited for collecting measurable data from observations, surveys, and experimental tests (Schindler, 2019). It is widely used when collecting data from a large sample size. It is the preferred research method for researchers that need to prove causal relationship between variables. Importantly, quantitative research allows for generalisation due to the large number of the sample (Saunders et al., 2009). This study utilised the mono method, using a single data collection method in the survey being the questionnaire.

This research utilised quantitative methods of data collection primarily because of the nature of the data needed. Large sample sizes of respondents are required to explore if there is a direct relationship between digital activism and brand awareness and image. Brand awareness and brand image are customer-based measurements and require the consumers perspective. The digital activism is also an action carried out by like-minded individuals on social media toward brands they dislike, avoid, or hate. The quantitative research would assist in proving the causal relationship using numerical and statistical measurements. This would allow the researchers to generalise on the research findings that can be used on further studies as there are limited studies on the impact of digital activism on brand awareness and brand image.

3.6 Research Time Horizon

The quantitative method aligns with the cross-sectional study as this type of study is one done on a phenomenon (digital activism) at a particular time (when a social media message goes viral) (Saunders et al., 2009). Cross-sectional studies are also used in survey format that are fast and inexpensive to administer. Researchers use this cross-sectional study to record data and not manipulate the variables (Creswell & Noth, 2018). Longitudinal studies, on the other hand, are time consuming, involve participants being studied over a long period of time, or in a variety of activities which will not be applicable in this research (Schindler, 2019).

3.7 Research techniques and procedures.

The data collection methods used in this study are based on recommendations from Creswell and Poth (2018) and Sanders (2019). The researcher begun by identifying the population to be used, then the participants for the study. A detailed description of the sample size, how it was determined, and the strategy used will be advised. Required permissions from institutions and ethical reviews will be discussed below. The researcher then reviewed the types of data to be collected in the survey and provided examples of the instrument to be used. Lastly, the researcher will outline the validity and reliability of the instrument as well as anticipated ethical issues.

3.8 Data collection

3.9 Population

The population of interest are South Africans of age 18 and above who are active on social media platforms, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, where viral digital activism is most experienced. 18-35 year olds are the widest social media users in South Africa making up 60% of the total users (Statista.com, 2022). These 18-34 year olds are most likely to spend more than 3 hours a day on the social media platforms of choice – interacting with friends, and family and like-minded communities (Pillay, 2022).

There is an almost equal gender split among males and female social media users with 50.2% of social media users being female and 49.8% males in the 18-35 age group (Statista.com, 2022). It is important for the researcher to get views among these respondents in the population as they are more likely to get involved in brand attacks. Roy et al (2022) mentions that one of the factors that influenced brand avoidance was gender and they hypothesised that negative brand experiences and brand hate are stronger in males than females.

3.9.1 Sample

Sampling is important as it is impossible to survey the entire population (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). However, the researcher must select a sample from population that best represents the population allowing for generalisation. Data collection will be quicker, simpler, and more accurate. The researcher used probability sampling methods, where the chances of being picked are equal for all in the population. This enabled the researcher to gather data from a small number of the population and be able to make inferences on the entire population. A sampling frame is a list of elements that make up the sample (Schindler, 2019).

The simple random sampling method was used in which any individual in the population has the likelihood of being selected. The researcher required email addresses from a database like Wits university, and sent the survey on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and LinkedIn. A similar study, “Consumer- brand relationship: a brand hate perspective”, conducted an online survey through Amazons Mechanical Turk (MTurk) used 297 participants (Roy, Sharma, Bose, & Singh, 2022). The paper by Pinto and Brandao (2020) on the consequences of brand hate distributed an online survey using the University of Porto, Portugal’s email and achieved 636 responses. A similar study on the drivers of consumer brand disidentification used online cross-sectional surveys using participants recruited by student administrators from university, who distributed the website address housing the survey (Wolter et al., 2016). Each student recruited received a credit for recruiting 2 more students and eventually the researchers obtained 1314 respondents. The Raosoft sample size calculator recommends a sample size of 277 with a margin of error of 5% (Raosoft, 2015).

3.9.2 Data collection

This study made use of primary data collection methods in the form of an online self-administered survey. Questionnaires are widely used in surveys as respondents are asked the same set of questions and are an efficient way to gather responses in quantitative studies (Saunders et al., 2009) The researcher selected questionnaires as the most suitable data collection method as they are effective and enable the researcher to analyse causal relationships between variables. The questions will revolve around the respondents’ opinions on digital activism and their behaviours towards brands that faced this action. Software programs like Qualtrics use artificial intelligence to help researchers design and gather data from self-administered online surveys.

3.9.3 Data collection instrument

As this is research used the deductive research approach, the researchers focused on the theory already outlined earlier on digital activism, brand awareness and brand

image to develop a data collection instrument (Tay & Jebb, 2016). The purpose of the scale is to determine whether the sample respondents are affected by social media digital activism on their brand awareness and image perceptiveness. To determine the validity of the instrument, the researcher followed the Cronbach and Meehl method content validity. Content validity is in line with the deductive nature of the research, whereby one will establish if the test items are a representative of the sample of the universe which the researcher is interested in (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). This assisted in determining if the scale properties are stable and generalisable (Tay & Jebb, 2016).

The questionnaire will be subdivided into 5 sections. There will be 21 questions and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Section 1: Qualifying question. This was to eliminate individuals that don't match the population. Respondents will be asked if they have a social media account and if not, the questionnaire will be terminated.

Section 2: General questions. This section asks for demographic information from the respondent such as age, gender, and province of residence.

Section 3: Social media usage. This section asked respondents to give information on how long they use social media in terms of hours per day and number of days in a week. This section also asked respondents if they have taken part in any digital activism in the past year by liking, sharing, or retweeting any calls for the cancellation of a brand.

Section 4. Brand awareness. This section asked specific questions on brands in South Africa that experienced digital activism and whether respondents heard of the action. The questionnaire asked if the respondents were influenced by others online to take part in the online activity to avoid the brand.

Section 5. Brand Image: The respondents were asked if their perception of the brand was diminished by digital activism.

One of the limitations of using a self-administered online questionnaire is that the researchers do not have a real way of knowing who is answering the survey, hence a degree of error is included (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). As it is a self-

administered survey, respondents may not be able to get clarity on any questions they misunderstand.

3.10 Validity of the Questionnaire

Threats to the validity may be concerned with the causal relationship between the two variables of digital activism and brand awareness and image. The researcher developed a theoretical framework that formed the foundation for the literature review, data collection, and data analysis. Although the literature showed that there is a causal relationship between positive brand marketing message and brand awareness and image, there could be ambiguity about the causal relationship between digital activism and brand awareness and brand image (Furrer & Sudharshan, 2001).

Internal validity of the research instrument is vital as it ensures that the questionnaire measures what the researcher intends it to (Saunders et al., 2009). The content validity ensures that the questions asked are adequately covering the issues hypothesised (Saunders et al., 2009). The researcher carefully reviewed the literature to ensure that internal validity was maximized. The researcher pre-tested the questionnaire among a representative sample to detect irregularities and inconsistencies, with a list of content to be covered in the survey and a comparison between the list and the questions.

3.11 External Validity

External validity measures the extent to which the research findings can be generalized (Saunders et al., 2009). The researcher increased external validity by ensuring that the sample closely resembles the population. The research used the simple random sampling to eliminate chances of selection bias.

3.12 Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis reduces the collected data into “meaningful segments and assigning names for those segments” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data can be analysed using computer software, IBM SPSS software.

3.12.1 Data Analysis Procedure

According to Babbie (2016), developing generalisations, detecting trends and themes that test the hypothesis, and tying data to theories are the main goals of data analysis. This allowed the researcher to employ reasoning to completely understand and analyse the acquired data. Data analysis essentially comprises of the deliberate application of statistical procedures with the goal of condensing, presenting, and assessing data (Neuman, 2014). It is important to emphasise that different methods are used to analyse qualitative and quantitative data. As a result, the data analysis strategy used depends on whether a quantitative or qualitative approach will be used in the study. Through empirical support and the use of the statistical programs AMOS 28 and SPSS 28, what this study aimed to understand and provide to marketing professionals, academics, and business will be amplified.

To complete the study objectives outlined in Chapter 1 and to ensure that the empirical suppositions of the hypotheses are supported, three statistical tools will be used in this work to analyse the data: Excel, SPSS 28, and AMOS 28. The objectives of the study and the hypothesised relationships guided the selection of the data analysis techniques. Data was checked once it was collected to make sure it was accurate, clean, usable, legitimate, and dependable before being prepared for analysis. Then, an Excel spreadsheet was used for the initial coding procedure. The replies were recorded in Excel, which is also utilised for the descriptive analysis. The data that has been coded in Excel will be converted to SPSS 28 to make the performance of descriptive statistics easier. The following phases involved using inferential statistics are structural equation modelling via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Path Modelling, utilising the AMOS Graphic Version 28 statistical software.

3.12.2 Descriptive Statistics

After data was gathered and analysed, it was crucial for the researcher to make sure that information is condensed, tabulated, and presented in a way that allows for the drawing of meaningful conclusions. Descriptive statistics is a method that enables the researcher to tabulate and summarise the demographic profile and traits of the study participants (Hahs-Vaughn & Lomax, 2020).

Descriptive statistics was used in the current study to describe the demographic characteristics of the research data. The total number of responses will be provided, and the distribution of gender, age, and social media use will be examined. Chapter 4 presents the comprehensive descriptive data in full.

3.12.3 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

This study used structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse the data as a technique for expressing, estimating, and testing a relationship between measured variables and latent variables. The purpose of SEM, which uses a variety of models to represent correlations between observable variables, is to provide a quantitative evaluation of a conceptual model that the researcher has hypothesised. This claim was previously emphasised by Grace (2006), who also noted that the SEM is well-known for a number of significant characteristics, one of which is its robustness in evaluating the hypothesised models of directional and non-directional connection between a number of observed (measured) and unobserved (latent) variables. What distinguishes SEM, according to Svensson (2015), is that it enables the researcher to build abstract notions and evaluate the proposed causal linkages across two or more structural equations.

Regression analysis, factor analysis, and simultaneous equation modelling are just a few of the components that SEM integrates (Carvalho & Chima, 2014). One advantage of SEM is that it departs from conventional regression models by including many dependent and independent variables as well as potential latent constructs that could represent collections of observed variables. SEM is regarded as a highly respected statistical technique by Nusair and Hua (2010). They attribute this recognition, among other things, to its ability to handle a variety of modelling complexities, the endogeneity among variables, and combined underlying data

configurations that exist in many phenomena, so it is preferred by researchers from a variety of fields.

3.12.4 Rationale for Selecting Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

Even though Creswell (2014) makes it abundantly clear that the research question under consideration and the data at hand must inform the choice of the statistical technique employed in the study, the researcher looked at several statistical methods before settling on an appropriate model. The ANCOVA is one of the more well-known statistical methods that the researcher investigated. It is an analysis of covariance that includes the addition of a continuous variable in addition to the variables of interest (i.e., the dependent and independent variables) as a means for control (Woodrow, 2014). Both the MANOVA, which is an ANOVA with multiple dependent variables, and the ANOVA, are used to analyse the differences between group means in samples (Woodrow, 2014).

It was intriguing to realise that while traditional statistical methods and SEM have many differences, they also have several things in common. Some of the differences cited by Suhr (2014) have to do with the formal specification of a model needed for SEM, whereas conventional techniques call for a default model. Another difference is that SEM explicitly lists inaccuracy while traditional techniques simply presume measurement to be error-free.

The most effective method and one that is very tenacious when assessing the causal relationship between numerous variables is SEM. The researcher was convinced that SEM could perform this analysis because the current study aimed to evaluate the relationships between the multiple constructs, specifically social media marketing, awareness, image, digital activism, reference groups, family influence, attitudes, and intention. This is because SEM may evaluate several interactions simultaneously, in contrast to some common statistical methods like multiple regression, which can only evaluate a single relationship. Additionally, SEM provides accurate approximations of these parameters, whereas standard multivariate approaches are incapable of quantifying or correcting for measurement error (Stein, Morris & Nock, 2012).

3.12.5 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) Process

The evaluation of the measurement model's fitness makes up the first step in the SEM process. The construct dependability and item reliability are assessed during this stage (Nusair & Hua, 2010). Data coding, descriptive statistics production using SPSS software, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS for SEM, and path modelling using Amos for SEM comprised the four parts of the data analysis approach. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) establishes the reliability, validity, and model fit, whereas Path Modelling assesses the significance of the relationship and the likelihood that the result is positive or negative. The model's fit is thereafter examined.

3.12.5.1 Validity and Reliability of the Measurement Scales

Validity

When discussing an instrument's validity, it is important to consider how well it will capture the goals of the study (Punch, 2013). In quantitative research, content validity focuses on whether the conceptual definition is reflected in the measure, criterion validity focuses on how well a measure conforms to theoretical expectations, and construct validity focuses on how well a measure matches theoretic expectations (Punch, 2013). Since utilising a measurement tool that is ineffective at measuring the underlying concept or the inappropriate measurement tool could compromise the research's integrity, validity is particularly crucial (Creswell, 2013). Measures of validity included convergent and discriminant validity.

Convergent Validity

A subtype of construct validity called convergent validity describes how closely two construct assessments that theoretically should be related are. When two related notions coincide, convergent validity is attained, and this suggests that all of the items in a measurement model are statistically significant (Malhotra, Birks, & Willis, 2013). Convergent validity can be confirmed by computing the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). The factor loading for each construct must be higher than the required cut-off of 0.5 for convergent validity

to apply. Malhotra et al, (2013) and other researchers disagree, saying that a base of 0.5 is acceptable and a base of 0.7 is excellent. The degree to which markers of a particular construct have a significant amount of variance in common is known as convergent validity (Hair, 2010). By analysing item correlation estimations and factor loadings in the current study, convergent validity will be explored. Items are said to demonstrate satisfactory convergent validity, according to Nusair and Hua (2010), when they substantially load on their shared construct. Additionally, a loading greater than 0.5 is necessary to establish convergent validity, while low factor loading components in a model could cause a construct to fail.

Discriminant Validity

The distinctiveness of each construct in relation to others is examined via discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010). This suggests that convergent validity is applicable to two easily distinguishable constructs that are dissimilar. By examining the correlation between the constructs and contrasting the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to Shared Variance, discriminant validity will be evaluated (SV).

Reliability

Reliability deals with the degree to which a scale yields coherent outcomes if repeated measurements can be made on that attribute (Malhotra, 2010; Bryman, 2012) In simpler terms, it assesses whether a study would yield consistent outcomes if repeated. Additionally, it signifies that the inference drawn about a fundamental concept remains unchanged when employing a comparable measurement repeatedly over time (Babbie, 2016) For the current study, to ensure the credibility and integrity of the study, the Cronbach's Alpha value (Cronbach α), Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) will be performed to appraise the reliability of measurement models of each construct.

Cronbach Alpha

AMOS Graphics and SPSS Statistics 28 are used to create the Composite Reliability Index and Cronbach Alpha, respectively. While CR and AVE corroborate and authenticate the presence of discriminant reliability, Cronbach's Alpha aids in confirming the existence of dependability. Bryman (2012) asserts that Cronbach Alpha determines the mean of all potential split-half reliability coefficients. The range of a

determined Cronbach's coefficient is from 1 to 0. A Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 1 denotes absolute internal reliability, while a value of 0 denotes no internal reliability. As a general rule of thumb, an acceptable level of internal reliability is defined as 0.70. (Bryman, 2012).

Composite Reliability

Composite reliability is a method used to verify and prove the existence of discriminant reliability, according to Clow and James (2013). The composite reliability test was executed to evaluate internal reliability. Bryman (2012) suggests that the formula illustrated underneath should be applied when examining composite reliability:

$$CR\eta = (\sum \lambda_i)^2 / [(\sum \lambda_i)^2 + (\sum \epsilon_i)]$$

Composite reliability = (square of the summation of the factor loadings) / (Homssi et al.).

When assessing the composite dependability of all the constructs in the current investigation, the formula mentioned above will be used. Bagozzi and Yi (2012) state that CR values must be above 0.70 and AVE values must be above 0.50. If an indicator's loading score is 0.50 or higher, it is considered dependable.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

The average proportion of variation for a latent construct that can be explained by the measuring items is shown by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). It measures the degree of variance and inconsistency in the construct as a whole in relation to the amount of variance caused by measurement error (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). This suggests that the Average Variance Extracted represents the total degree of variance present in the indicators. On the AVE threshold that is considered acceptable, there appears to be disagreement among academics. Although Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, and Hair (2014) claim that the appropriate AVE threshold is 0.50, indicating that the variable is dependable, other researchers, such as Malhotra (2010), believe that 0.4 is acceptable if AVE is less than 0.50 but composite reliability is greater than 0.6, the construct's convergent validity is still sufficient. In Chapter 4, it is explained how the current study's validity metrics, Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Value Extracted (AVE) are performed.

Model Fit Assessment

Concurring with Pawaskar, Raut and Gardas (2018) assertion, applying a model that does not fit the data well cannot provide good answers to the underlying research questions under investigation. Hence Model fit assessment is conducted for the purpose of determining how well the conceptual model is signified by the sampled data (Osarumwense & Duru, 2019).

1. Chi-square (χ^2/DF)

According to Pawaskar, Raut, and Gardas (2018), using a model that does not accurately reflect the data cannot produce insightful solutions to the core research issues being examined. Hence to evaluate how effectively the conceptual model is represented by the sampled data, model fit assessment is done (Osarumwense & Duru, 2019).

2. Normed Fit Index (NFI)

Byrne (2016) describes NFI is an incremental measure of goodness of fit for a statistical model, which is not affected by the number of variables in the model. Goodness of fit is measured through a comparison of the model of interest to a model of completely uncorrelated variables. A recommended threshold for NFI of greater than 0.9 is deemed to be acceptable fit (Byrne, 2016). The Normed Fit index value of the current study at 0.925 is above the recommended threshold, 0.9, hence there is acceptable fit.

3. Relative Fit Index (RFI)

A chi-square from the model being tested is compared to one from a baseline model, often known as the null model, using the relative fit index (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2021). A RFI value greater than 0.9 indicates a satisfactory match. The current study's RFI value is 0.903, which suggests that the fit is reasonable.

4. Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)

The Non-normed Fit Index (NNFI) is another name for the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) (Hair et al., 2021). Although it is somewhat sensitive to a small sample size, Hair et al. (2021) define this index as an attempt to account for the model's complexity. Byrne

(2016) claims that TLI values more than 0.9 suggest a strong fit and are therefore appropriate, as is the case with the TLI of 0.957 for the current study.

5. Incremental Fit Index (IFI)

Comparative fit indices, also known as incremental fit indices (IFI), show how well the research model has fit compared to the statistical baseline (Kline, 2011). An acceptable fit is indicated by an IFI value of 0.9 or greater. The study's value of 0.967 indicates a satisfactory match because it exceeds the cut-off.

6. Comparative Fit Index (CFI)

The goodness-of-fit index, or CFI, measures how well the study model fits the data in comparison to this independent representation by examining any inconsistencies between the data and the hypothesised model. According to Byrne (2016), a CFI value that meets or exceeds 0.9 denotes a satisfactory match. CFI values vary from 0.0 to 1.0. The CFI value for the study is 0.967, indicating a strong fit.

7. Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)

According to Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen (2008), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) measures how closely the model fits the covariance matrix of the population. A decent model fit is indicated by an RMSEA value that is between 0.05 and 0.08, according to Sharpe (2015). The present study's RMSEA value is 0.033. This demonstrates that the fit is appropriate. In Chapter 6, under the results presentation, all fit measures that were utilised to assess the models' goodness of fit are discussed.

8. Structural Model: Path Model Assessment

Path analysis was the following stage of data analysis using SEM after the researcher assessed the model fit using CFA (Stein et al., 2012; Byrne, 2016). Path analysis is a SEM method that focuses on the relationships between variables that are observed (measured) (Shamim & Butt, 2013). Malhotra (2010) referred to this step as a structural model and added that it demonstrates the interrelationships between the constructs, frequently with numerous dependent linkages. The relationship between variables that are observed or measured, and theoretical conceptions is defined by path modelling (Roche, Duffield & White, 2011). It enables the investigation of causal

mechanisms underlying observed connections and the estimation of the significance of potential impact channels. The path estimate empirically illustrates the structural relationship between the variables (Hair et al., 2010). Chapter 4 shows a path diagram for this subject.

3.13 Ethical consideration

The researcher will consider the ethical considerations at each level of the study regarding the sharing of information, in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act of South Africa (POPI act, 2022). The Act states that respondents should be made clearly aware of the purpose of the data collected and its usage, and that the data should not be used for any other purpose that which consent was given. Respondents will be made aware that the data will be collected only for empirical research and will not be sold to any third parties.

The authors of this paper will ensure that respondents are guaranteed of their anonymity during the data collection period and thereafter during the analysing stages. The researchers have a responsibility to the respondents to protect their information based on these four pillars of no harm or injury to study participants, no informed consent, invasion of privacy and lastly deceiving participants (Bryman, 2012). Respondents' rights will be protected and respected at all times.

The researchers will advise participants on the voluntary nature of the study, the self-administered questionnaire can be terminated at any stage with no penalties. The respondents are not coerced to participant, nor is there any reward for completing the questionnaire. No personal identification of the participants will be collected to ensure confidentiality. The letter notifying the participants is included in Appendix A as well as the questionnaire in Appendix B.

The research will be carried out in line with the ethical policy of the University of the Witwatersrand and data will be collected only after ethical clearance has been approved.

4 Presentation of the results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results gathered from the research study, the data was collected, cleaned, and analysed using SPSS software, applying the methodologies discussed in Chapter 3. Following the descriptive profile of the respondents by age, gender and location, the research will show the numbers of hours spend on social media per day as well as the number of times during the week. The researchers will then confirm reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach Alpha, Composite reliability and the Average Variance Extracted methods.

The research will the confirm the validity of the instrument using the Convergent validity and discriminant validity to find the extent to which the research findings can be generalised. The model fit assessment will be discussed to ascertain the Structural equation modelling to test the relationship between variables. The Confirmatory factor analysis was the best method used as it is used to confirm past theories.

The researcher will then show using the Path modelling diagram whether the conceptual framework used for this paper is reliable and does indeed depict a relationship between variables. Finally, the researcher will test the four hypotheses.

4.2 Descriptive Profile of respondents.

The research used the quantitative research methodology, using a self-administered fully structured online survey. The researcher used the simple random sampling method to gather participants in South Africa. The research questions were sent via a link on Qualtrics to respondents from Wits university, as well as to those among the researcher's social media networks of Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Respondents were notified that their participation in the study was voluntary, and their responses were confidential and anonymous. As the research was based on social

media activism, a qualifier question was used to determine whether respondents use social media. If not, the survey would terminate.

The survey method was considered the best method for collecting data for the explanatory research philosophy, which was followed by the researcher, as the study sought to find an association or causal relationship between digital activism and brand awareness and image.

A total of 335 respondents drawn from the nine provinces in South Africa responded to the questionnaire. During data cleaning, it was observed that due to incomplete responses, some set of variables received 332 responses while the least set of responses were 330 responses. The response rate was higher than the recommended one of 277 by the Raosoft sample size calculator. A similar study named “Consumer-brand relationship: a brand hate perspective” conducted an online survey through Amazons Mechanical Turk used 297 participants (Roy, Sharma, Bose, & Singh, 2022).

The age of the respondents was important for this study as the majority of social media users in South Africa are between the ages of 18-35 spending more than 3 hours on social media making up 60% of users (Statista.com, 2022). Although there is an almost gender split between males and females on social media, the study was interested in finding out the gender breakdown of the participants as it would likely have a real bearing on the results and be a determining factor on whether individuals participate in digital activism based on gender. In Roy et al (2022), it was found that participation in brand avoidance following negative brand experiences was more in males than in females. The study was interested in the respondents’ geographical location as the study is solely focused on South Africa and respondents were asked for their province of residence.

4.3 Demographic Breakdown

4.3.1 Age

Figure 7 shows the age breakdown of the respondents. The age group with the largest number of respondents was the 24–34-year-old with 42% of the respondents. The second largest group was the 35–44-year-olds with 25% of the responses. Thirdly, the 18-24 age group made up 21% of respondents and lastly the smallest group was the above 45 year olds making up 12.03%. A total of 330 people answered this question.

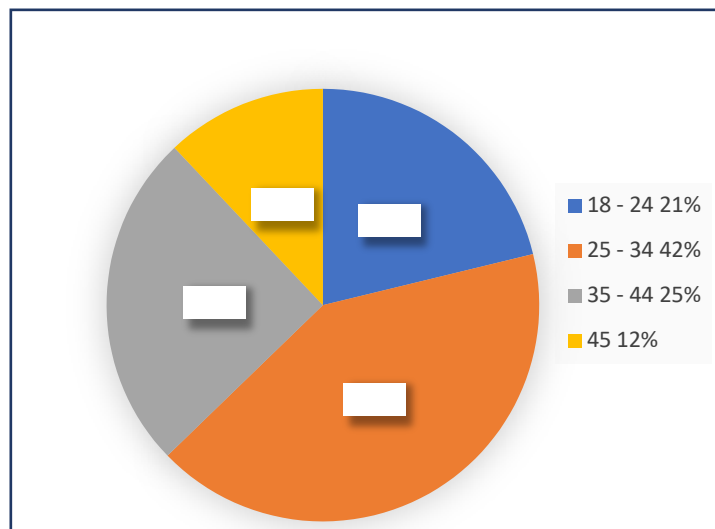


Figure 4-1 Age Breakdown

4.3.2 Respondents gender

From a total of 330 individuals who answered the question on gender, there were more females than males as can be seen in Figure 8. A total of 209 females making up 63.19% of the respondents participated against a total of 117 males (35.36%). A small number of people preferred not to answer the question (one person) while four people identified as non-binary or having a third gender.

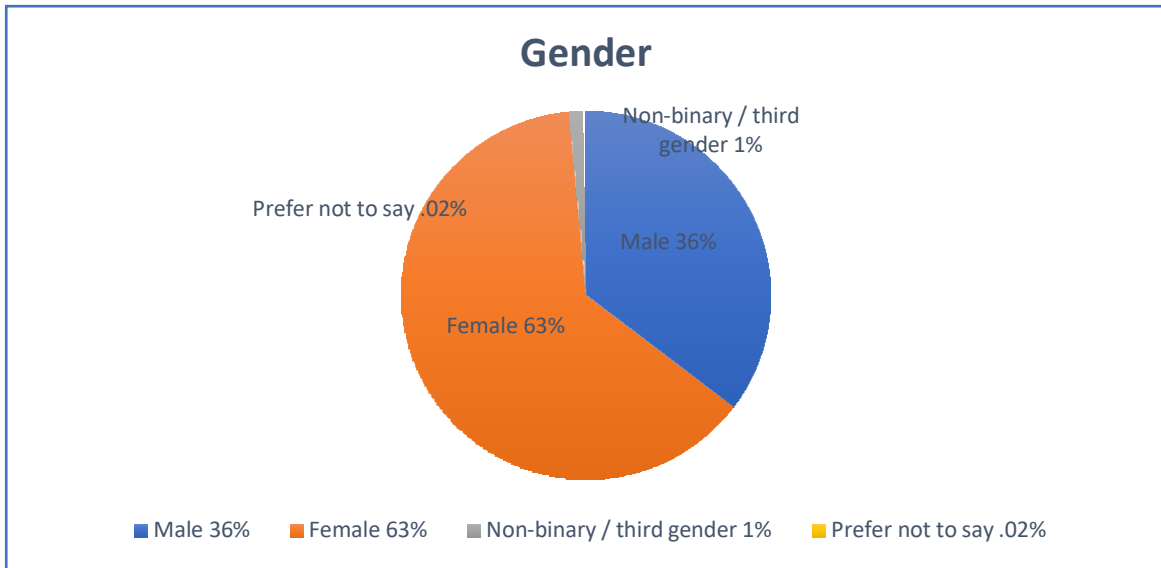


Figure 4-2 Gender breakdown

Table 1 below shows the cross tabulation of age and gender usually used to analyse nominal data sets. Cross tabulation tables are used to gauge data from entire groups of respondents to examine possible relationships that may not be obvious from at first glance.

4.3.3 Respondents' location

Figure 9 shows that a total of 330 people answered the question on which province in South Africa they were based. The majority were found in Gauteng at 84%. There were few people in the other 8 provinces with Limpopo having 5%, KwaZulu- Natal 3% and Mpumalanga with only 8 people responding. Western Cape, Free state, North West, and Northern Cape had 5, 4, 3, and 1 individuals responding respectively.

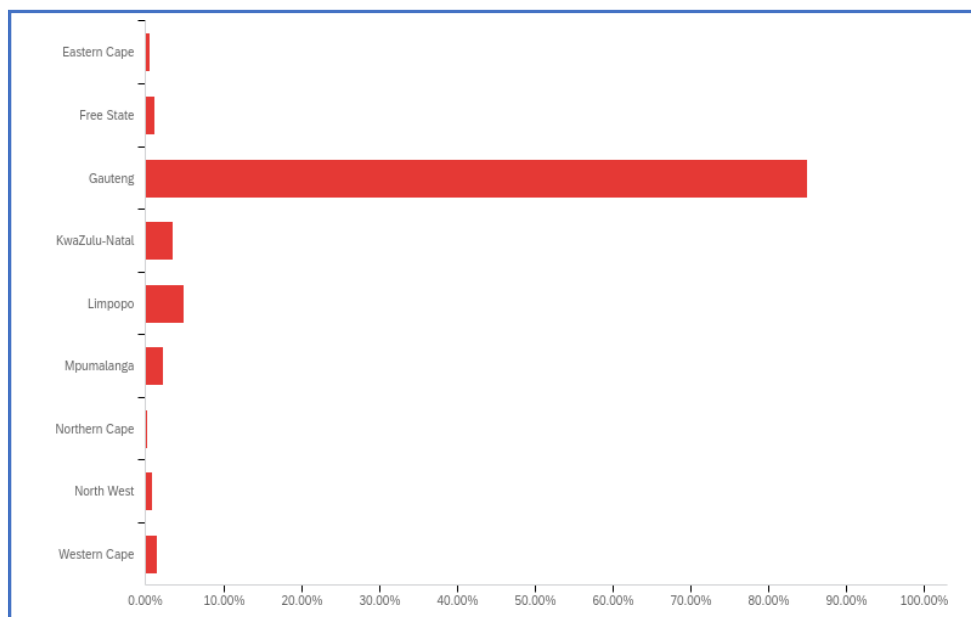


Figure 4-3 Province breakdown Province Breakdown

4.3.4 Respondents' social media usage.

Respondents had multiple social media accounts as shown in the pie-chart in Figure 10. Instagram has slightly more respondents at 27% while You Tube had 25%. Facebook and Twitter both had 24% each.



Figure 4-4 Social media usage

4.3.5 Social media usage per week

The table below demonstrates respondents answer to the question on how often they use their social media account in a week. The majority (24.9%) of respondents said they used social media for more than 2 hours a day. When looking at the actual age breakdown, the researcher found out that the 18-24year olds spent more than 5 hours a day on social media.

	Demographics: 2. Age				
	Total	18 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	+45
less than 1 hour	17,5%	6,8%	12,4%	22,7%	42,9%
> 2 hours	24,9%	18,9%	24,8%	30,7%	23,8%
> 3 hours	19,2%	23,0%	24,1%	13,6%	7,1%
> 4hours	15,8%	18,9%	14,5%	18,2%	9,5%
+ 5 hours	20,1%	28,4%	23,4%	14,8%	4,8%

Table 4-1 Age and hours spent on social media

4.3.6 Social Media usage per day.

Respondents were asked how many hours they spend on social media in a day and 74 % of them said they opened their social media accounts at least 5 times a day on their platform of choice as seen in Table 2.

Usage per day	Age				
	Average	18 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	+45
1-2 times	8,0%	1,4%	9,0%	5,7%	21,4%
2-3 times	6,9%	8,1%	6,2%	6,8%	7,1%
3-4 times	7,7%	2,7%	11,0%	6,8%	7,1%
+5 times	74,8%	83,8%	73,1%	80,7%	52,4%

Table 4-2 Social media usage per day

4.4 Testing reliability and the validity of the scales

The online questionnaire consisted of questions relating to users social media activity (independent variable) and their perceptions of digital activism (dependant variable) in relation to brand awareness (dependant variable), brand avoidance (dependant variable) and brand image (dependant variable). These were developed based on a literature review. An examination of the measurement scales was done, and the researchers tested the instrument for validity and reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach a), Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were used to test the reliability of the measures using IBM SPSS version 28. While Cronbach Alpha confirmed the presence of reliability, CR and AVE validated the presence of discriminant reliability. The abbreviations used in the graphs and tables below are as follows:

- SMA – Social media activity
- DA – Digital activism
- BAV – Brand avoidance
- BI – Brand Image

4.4.1 Cronbach Alpha

Cronbach Alpha provides researchers with an efficient way of measuring whether a scale is reliable or not. It is a measure of internal consistency (Shrestha, 2021). The Cronbach Alpha qualifies a scales internal consistency by quantifying values ranging between 0 and 1 with a favourable scale being between 0.7 and 0.9. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In Mpinganjira and Moduku (2019), the acceptable threshold was 0.7 to confirm the reliability of the scale items. In this study, all the indices were above 0.7 demonstrating reliability as shown in the table below. The Cronbach Alpha values exceed the values of 0.7 that is SMA = 0.846, DA = 0.861, BAV = 0.736, BA = 0.944, BI = 0.908 as shown in Table 4.

Research Construct		Descriptive Statistics				Cronbach's Test		C.R. Value	AVE Value	Factor Loading
		Mean Value		Standard Deviation		Item - total	α value			
SMA	SMA1	4,536	4,534	0,854	0,859	0,780	0,846	0,861	0,786	0,913
	SMA2	4,579		0,833		0,764				0,862
	SMA3	4,488		0,890		0,607				0,673
DA	DA2	3,776	4,026	1,278	1,122	0,719	0,861	0,875	0,835	0,819
	DA3	4,039		1,122		0,834				0,899
	DA4	4,264		0,965		0,693				0,788
BAV	BAV1	3,336	3,659	1,425	1,307	0,592	0,736	0,875	0,867	0,847
	BAV2	3,982		1,190		0,592				0,915
BA	BA1	4,127	4,151	1,157	1,168	0,826	0,944	0,910	0,844	0,942
	BA2	4,085		1,172		0,892				0,894
	BA3	4,194		1,205		0,898				0,770
	BA4	4,197		1,138		0,852				0,769
BI	BI1	4,555	4,513	0,809	0,844	0,840	0,908	0,910	0,863	0,905
	BI2	4,506		0,844		0,807				0,865
	BI3	4,479		0,879		0,806				0,864

Table 4-3 Reliability test using Cronbach Alpha

4.4.2 Composite reliability (CR)

The Composite Reliability test were performed to assess internal reliability using the formula given in the SPSS data analytics tool. Composite Reliability was used to test the constructs in this research. Although there is no universally accepted standard the CR threshold, the common threshold for reliability using the Composite reliability method is 0.7 and above (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). A higher reliability score of at least more than 0.7 ensures that the measurement tool does measure the same construct. The paper will use the threshold of 0.7. The scores shown in the below table demonstrate a good reliability score of above 0.7 with the follow results SMA = 0.861, DA = 0.875, BAV = 0.875, BA = 0.910, BI = 0.910 as depicted in Table 4.

4.4.3 Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) measures the amount of variance a construct that is captured, in relation to the amount of variance due to the measurement error, thus measuring convergent validity (Shrestha, 2021). The value of the scale ranges

from 0 – 1 with the acceptable threshold for the AVE is 0.5. The higher value denotes a higher reliability level (Shrestha, 2021). From Table 4 above, the measurement shows values above 0.5 demonstrating that the instrument is reliable with the following readings SMA = 0.786 DA = 0.835, BAV = 0.867, BA = 0.844, BI = 0.863.

4.5 Validity Measurements

External validity measured the extent to which the research findings can be generalised (Saunders et al., 2009). The researcher conducted a Convergent and Discriminant validity test, which will be discussed in the below section.

4.5.1 Convergent validity

Convergent validity refers to how closely the new scale is related to other variables and other measures of the same construct. It is measured by examining the factor loadings of each construct, together with the composite reliability and average validity extracted; which are calculated to determine the convergent validity (Joseph F Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). To assess convergent validity of the scales, it was required that the value of standardised factor loadings should be greater than 0.5. The standardised factor loadings presented in the Reliability measure ranges between 0,673 and 0,942, exceeded the criterion of 0.5, thus indicating that the minimum requirement for convergent validity is met.

4.5.2 Discriminant Validity

The discriminant validity refers to the relationship between the variables. It measures the strength between two variables. The researcher used the Fornell-Larker criterion, whereby the square root of the AVE values are measured against the latent variable correlations (Joseph F Hair et al., 2017) . Hair et al, (2021) states that the idea behind this method of calculation is that a construct shares more variance with its “associated indicators than with any other construct”. In other words, the inter-construct correlation matrix was used to determine how distinct and/or less similar the constructs were from one another. The range of the scale must be between -1 and 1. The results indicate

that 0.770 is the highest correlation as shown in Table 5. Since these inter-factor correlation values for all paired latent variables were below the recommended maximum threshold of 1.0, there was satisfactory discriminant validity in the measurement scales.

Constructs	SMA	DA	BAV	BA	BI
SMA	1				
DA	.294**	1			
BAV	0,103	.770**	1		
BA	.628**	0,057	-0,013	1	
BI	.593**	.168**	0,033	.622**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4-4 Inter-correlation Matrix

A negative result in the findings demonstrates a negative relationship between the variables. In this case there was a negative reading of -0.013 for Brand avoidance and Brand awareness, whereas the strongest relationship was between the Digital activism and Brand avoidance with a reading of 0.77.

4.5.3 Model Fit assessment

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) combines the aspects of factor analysis to enable a researcher to examine the relationship between the measured variables and the latent variables (the measurement theory) and the latent variables being the structural theory (Hair et al.,2021)

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is used when testing the hypothesis of existing theories and concepts. The researcher used the CFO while running the regression analysis using the dependant and independent variables based on the theories and concepts of Social media activity and Digital activism, Brand avoidance, Brand awareness and Brand image. The CFA generally measures the overall questions in the instrument to determine the factor loading. This literally means testing how well the data fits into the proposed theory. The abbreviations used in Table 8 are

as follows: X^2 / DF)= Chi-square/degrees of freedom; GFI = This is a goodness-of-fit; NFI = Normed Fix Index; RFI = Relative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; IFI = Incremental Fit Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Model Index	Acceptable Threshold	Results	Outcome
Chi- square (X^2 / DF)	<3	2.831	Acceptable
GFI	>0,900	0.9	Acceptable
NFI	>0,900	0.934	Acceptable
RFI	>0,900	0.914	Acceptable
IFI	>0,900	0.955	Acceptable
TLI	>0,900	0.969	Acceptable
CFI	>0,900	0.954	Acceptable
RMSEA	<0,08	0.055	Acceptable

Table 4-5 Model fit - Confirmatory Factor Analysis

- a. Chi-square/degrees of freedom: It is an attempt at reducing the sensitivity of the chi-square to the sample size with a threshold of >3. The result was lower than 3 at 2.831 providing an acceptable outcome.
- b. Goodness-of-fit measurement measures the discrepancy between observe values and expected values. The threshold is >0.9 and the result obtained was at par demonstrating the model is a good fit.
- c. Normed Fix Index seeks to find the discrepancy between the chi-square value of the hypothesised value and the chi-squared value of the null model (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). The null hypothesis is the worst-case scenario showing uncorrelation of the values. The ranges of the NFI scale are between 0-1 with the lowest being 0 and the highest being 1. An indication of good fit is >0.900 and the result was above that 0.934 rendering the model as acceptable.
- d. Relative fit index includes factors that deviate from the null hypothesis. The acceptable result should be above 9, and the module produced an acceptable result at 0.914.

- e. Tucker-Lewis Index measures the “relative reduction misfit per degree of freedom” (Tucker & Lewis, 1973). The index is designed to indicate poor fits. The recommended cut-off has been placed at 0.90. The model being measured exceed this, resulting with a reading of 0.969 rendering it acceptable.
- f. Incremental Fit Index: compare the chi-square value to the bassline model (Hooper et al., 2008). The threshold for this index greater than 0.9 and the model achieved 0.955 making it acceptable.
- g. Comparative Fit Index compares the sample covariance matrix with the null model. The ranges for this matrix are between 0 and 1 with values closer to 1 being a good fit. The acceptable threshold is placed at 0.9 and the study achieved 0.95 rendering it acceptable (Hooper et al., 2008).
- h. Root Mean Square Error of Approximation demonstrates how well the model would fit the population's covariance matrix with estimates of its unknown but optimally chosen parameters. (Hooper et al., 2008). A good score would be below the 0.8 mark. A well-fitting model would be closer to 0, while the upper limit should not exceed 0.8. The study produced an acceptable result at 0.555 which is acceptable.

4.5.4 Confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis is used when researchers seek to confirm theories or identify patterns and relationships between variables (Joseph F Hair et al., 2017). It is also used to confirm the validity of extracted items (Haque, Sarwar, & Ahmad, 2015). CFA enables the researcher to test the hypothesis that there exists a connection between the variables that are observed and their latent constructs. (Suhr, 2006). CFA relies on number of structural equation modelling statistical measurements to determine the adequacy or acceptability of the desired model (Suhr, 2006). These include the Chi-square test, the CFI, the RMSEA indices which were already tested above and found acceptable. In the diagram below, Figure 11, the graphic illustration of the confirmatory factor analysis is shown. The latent variables are identifiable in the oval or circular shapes, while observed ones are rectangular. Next to the observed variables are the measurement errors also circular shaped. The bi-directional arrows show a relationship between the latent variables.

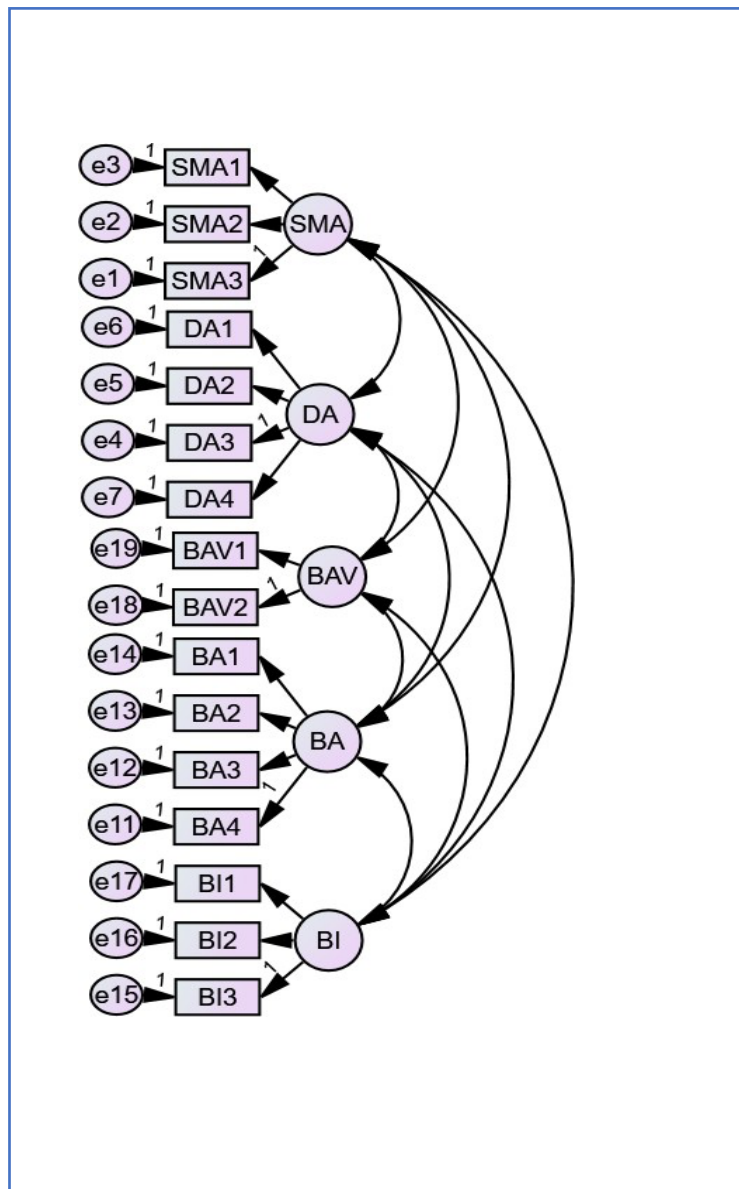


Figure 4-5 Confirmatory Factor analysis

4.6 Path Modelling

The figure 12 below shows the hypothesised conceptual framework of the study showing the how social media activity (SMA) impacts digital activism (DA) and in turn how digital activism impacts brand avoidance (BAV), brand awareness (BA) and brand

image (BI). Path modelling seeks to evaluate the causal relationship among the latent variables. A positive reading demonstrates a positive relationship and the path coefficient shows that the relationship is supported. This is a structural equation modelling technique calculated using SPSS software package and is a measure of good fit.

The path coefficient is a multiple regression technique used to measure the causal relationship between two variables. The path coefficient indicates the direct effect of the variables assumed to be the cause of the other assumed to be an effect. The arrows in the diagram below signify the direction of the causal relationship between the variables. The independent variables (X) are also called exogenous variables and in this case, there is only one independent variable namely social media activity (SMA). The dependable variables (Y) are called endogenous and have an error term next to them (e4-22).

The path diagram below assumes that all paths are linear and show a causal assumption and that there is a one-way flow from the independent variable to the dependable ones and between the dependable ones. The threshold for a good path is a value above 0.90- this is considered a good fit and is acceptable.

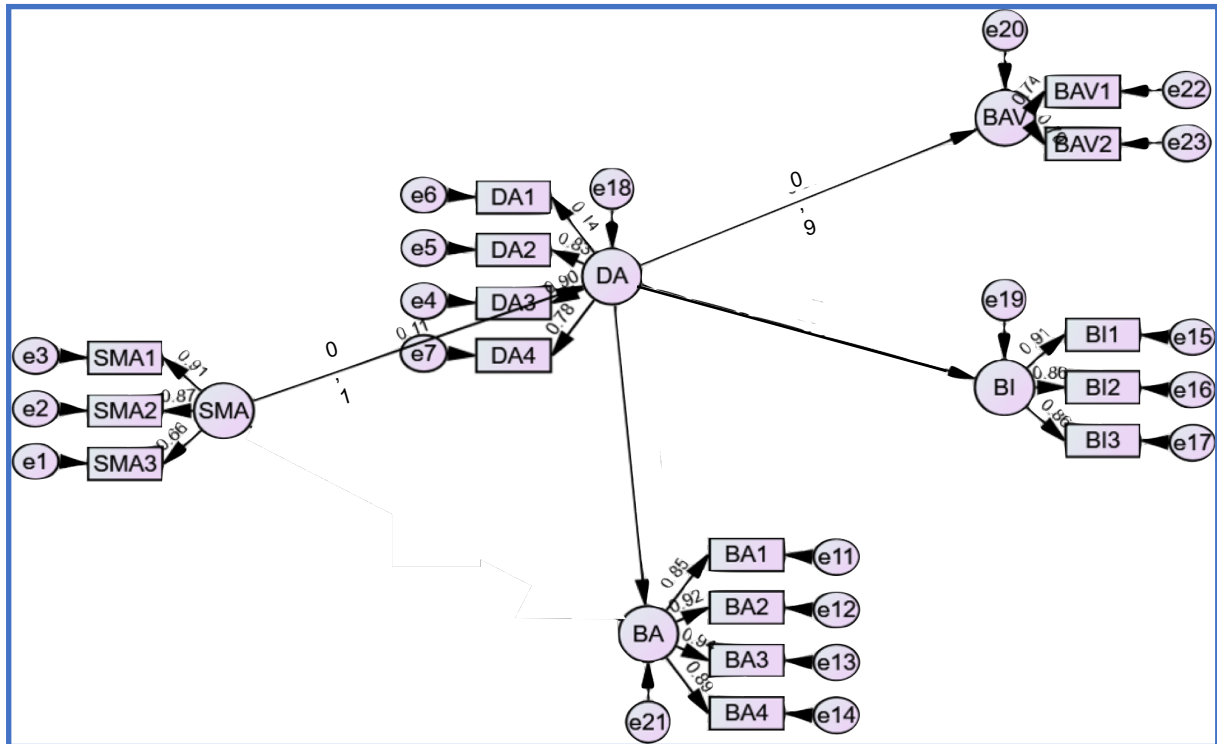


Figure 4-6 Path Modelling

4.7 Testing of the hypothesis

The next section presents the analysis to test the different hypothesis to achieve the research objectives. The research tested four different hypotheses using both correlation and regression, as well as descriptive statistical research analysis. After confirming the model fit, the researcher proceeded to testing the hypotheses. The structural paths, as per the hypothesised relationships, were examined after assessing the model fit. The 1%, 5%, and 10% ($p < 0.01, 0.05, \text{ and } 0.1$) significance levels have been used.

H1: Social media activities (SMA) will increase digital activism (DA).

The coefficient for H1 was 0.114, implying that there is a relationship between social media activity and digital activism. The P-value of 0.062 implies that the hypothesis is not significant.

Hypothesis	Hypothesised relationship	Estimate/Path Coefficients	P-value	Assessment (***) p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.1)
H1	DA <--- SMA	0.114	0.062	Not significant at 5% level p<0,05

Table 4-6 Hypothesis HO1 SMA>DA

H2: Digital activism (DA) has a negative effect on brand awareness (BA).

The coefficient of H2 is -0,192, showing that there is a strong relationship between Digital activism and brand awareness. The P-value was a 0.01 confidence level which shows a significance that the hypothesis is supported and significant.

Hypothesis	Hypothesised relationship	Estimate/Path Coefficients	P-value	Assessment (***) p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.1)
H2	BA <--DA	-0,192	***	Supported and significant at 1% level p<0,01

Table 4-7 Hypothesis HO2 DA > BA

HO3: Digital Activism (DA) positive effect brand avoidance (BAV)

The co-efficient for H3 is 0.95 showing strong relationship between Digital activism and Brand avoidance. There is also a 0.01 confidence level which shows that the hypothesis is supported and significant.

Hypothesis	Hypothesised relationship	Estimate/Path Coefficients	P-value	Assessment (***) p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.1)
H3	BAV <--- DA	0.95	***	Supported and significant at 1% level p<0,01

Table 4-8 Hypothesis H03 DA> BAV

H4: Digital activism (DA) has a negative impact on brand image (BI).

The co-efficient of H4 is 0.009, showing that the relationship between digital activism and brand image is not strong and is not significant.

Hypothesis	Hypothesised relationship	Estimate/Path Coefficients	P-value	Assessment (***) p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.1)
H4	BI <--- DA	0.009	0.883	Not significant at 5% level p<0,05

Table 4-9 Hypothesis HO4 DA>BI

4.8 Summary.

This chapter was the analysis of the data collected using an online questionnaire and analysed using the Statistical package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) tool. In addition to descriptive statistics, the researcher also discussed the reliability and validity of the research instrument using Cronbach Alpha, Composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted methods. The validity of the instrument was also measured using Convergent and Discriminant validity. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the Model fit with Path modelling being carried out to test the model fit and test the four hypotheses of the study.

5 Discussion of the results

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 of this research paper is a discussion of the research results that were analysed in chapter 4. The chapter begins with the demographic breakdown of the 330 respondents and explains in detail why the demographics were important for the research of this nature. The chapter then goes on to discuss each of the four hypothesis and why they were either accepted or rejected.

5.2 Respondents' profiles

The researchers found it important to study the demographic breakdown of the respondents in terms of the age and gender as well as social media usage, as these had a direct impact on the results of the study.

5.2.1 Demographic Profiles

The study had in interest in individuals in South Africa who have access to social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and Instagram. The researcher used a self-administered online questionnaire developed on Qualtrics to reach individuals on among their social circles on Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Twitter. The questionnaire was also distributed among the University of Witwatersrand students. Table 20 below sets out the demographic profile of the respondents of the study.

Gender	Frequenc y	Percentag e
Male	117	35%
Female	209	63%
Non-binary / Third Gender	3	1%
Prefer not to say	1	0%
Total	330	100%
Age Category	Frequenc y	Percentag e
18-24	68	21%
25-34	141	43%
35-44	86	26%
Above 45	35	11%
Total	330	100%
Province	Frequenc y	Percentag e
Gauteng	277	84%
Limpopo	17	5%
Mpumalanga	8	2%
KwaZulu Natal	10	3%
North West	3	1%
Eastern Cape	5	2%
Western Cape	5	2%
Free State	4	1%
Northern Cape	1	0,3%
Total	330	100%

Table 5-1 Respondents demographic profiles

There were more female respondents (63%) than other genders, namely males (35%), non-binary (1%) and only 1 person declined to declare their gender among those who

participated with the study. This is not in line with the population on South Africa, which has an equal number of women and males as of 2022 (O'Neill, 2022). It was important for the researchers to find out about respondents' gender in relation to the digital activism as earlier studies by Roy et al (2022) conducted research on brand hate among 300 individuals of both genders. The findings were that more males participated in incidents of negative brand experiences and brand hate than females. As the findings in this study show that more females completed the study than males, non-binary individuals and those who preferred not to disclose, the findings will be skewed and will not be a fair representation of the facts.

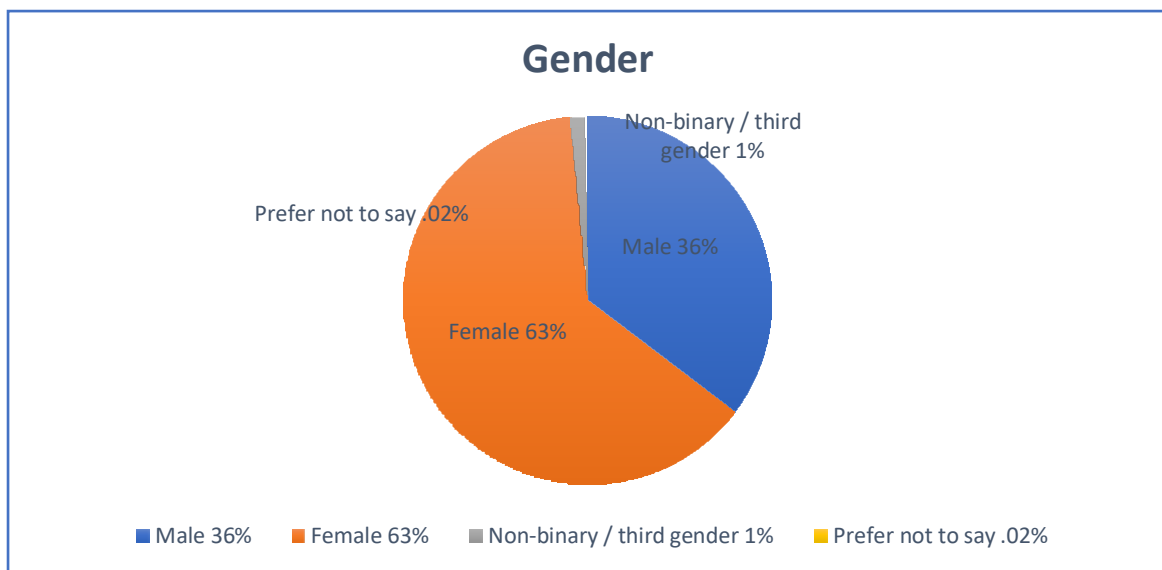


Figure 5-1 Respondent gender

The report published by Statista Research Department (2022) showed that 25-34 were the most social media users (33%) with 16.3% female and 17.1% males, while 18–24-year-olds accounted for 25% of social media users. This was in line with the data received, where the majority of the respondents were between the ages 24 – 35 accounting for 42.7% of all respondents. The next group with the majority of the respondents based on age was the 35–44-year-olds, who accounted for 26% of the respondents.

5.2.2 Social media usage

The study was mainly interested in the social media activity of people between the ages of 18-35 as these would spend more than 3 hours on social media per day (Galal, 2022). The table below shows that the majority (24.9%) of respondents said they used social media for more than 2 hours a day. When looking at the actual age breakdown, the researcher found out that the 18-24-year olds spent more than 5 hours a day on social media followed by the 25–34-year-olds (23.4%) who spent more than 5 hours as well. The literature review purported that the longer individuals spent on social media, the likelihood they would encounter digital activism activity and may be encouraged to partake in this activity.

Per day	Demographics: 2. Age			
	18 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	+45
less than 1 hour	6,8%	12,4%	22,7%	42,9%
> 2 hours	18,9%	24,8%	30,7%	23,8%
> 3 hours	23,0%	24,1%	13,6%	7,1%
> 4hours	18,9%	14,5%	18,2%	9,5%
+ 5 hours	28,4%	23,4%	14,8%	4,8%

Table 5:2 Hours spent a day on social media

The respondents were asked a qualifying social media question. This was done to ascertain if one had a social media account. This was essential as the study was on whether social media activity had a bearing on digital activism. From the literature review, the researchers found that the research carried out by Lee (2008), Knittel (2016) and Mashegede et al., (2018) on the various origins on brand avoidance, brand hate and brand avoidance mentioned social media as a base. Based on the framework, the researcher was able to hypothesise on how social media brand activity can have an increase in digital attacks leading to brand hate, aversion and avoidance leading to an impact on the brands awareness and image. The research was thus interested in respondents that had social media accounts. The findings were that most people had multiple accounts. Out of 330 respondents, 27% had Instagram accounts, 25% had YouTube, and Facebook and Twitter both had 24%.

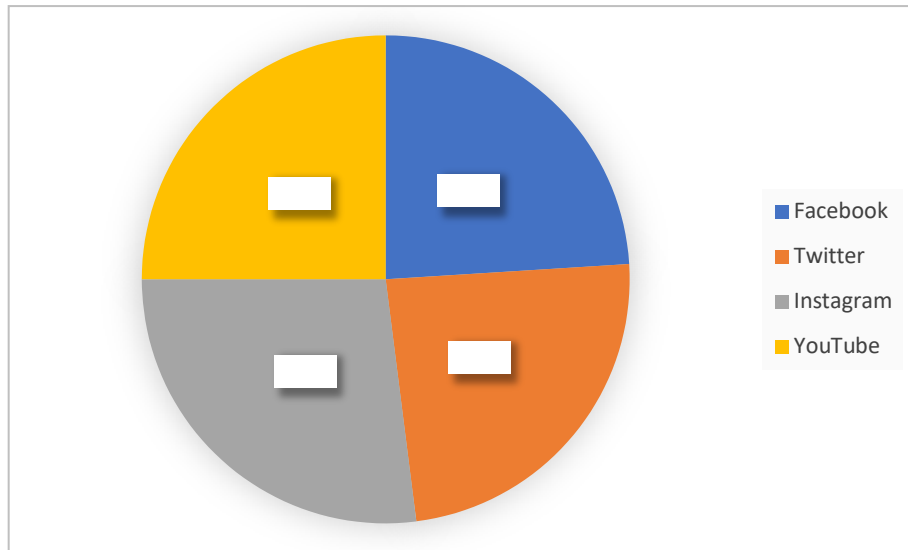


Figure 5-2 Social Media usage

5.2.3 Respondents' location

The respondents were asked which province they were from. This question was asked to ascertain their location as the study was only interested in respondents based in South Africa. The incidents of social media digital activism in the questionnaire were based on events that occurred or had an impact on South Africans. In 2017, personal and beauty care brand Dove, launched a Facebook campaign showing a black woman taking off a T-shirt and revealing a white woman underneath to depict how the brand assists women to achieve their beauty goals (News24, 2017). The brand was forced to apologise and take down the advert as it angered South Africans, with calls on Twitter to boycott the brand. In 2018, clothing store H& M closed its stores for a week in South Africa after posting a digital advert depicting a black child wearing a t-shirt with the slogan “coolest monkey in the jungle” (Thomas, 2018). In 2020, the shampoo brand, Tresemme, faced backlash following a racial advert on their online channel, demonstrating different hair types of black and white people. This affected their sales as major retailer, Clicks pulled their products off the shelves following picketing and call for boycotts (BBC, 2020).

Out of the 330 people that responded, 84% of them were in Gauteng, while Limpopo has 8%, KwaZulu Natal 3% and the rest had Mpumalanga 8 people, Western Cape 5, Free State 4, North West 3 and Northern Cape 1.

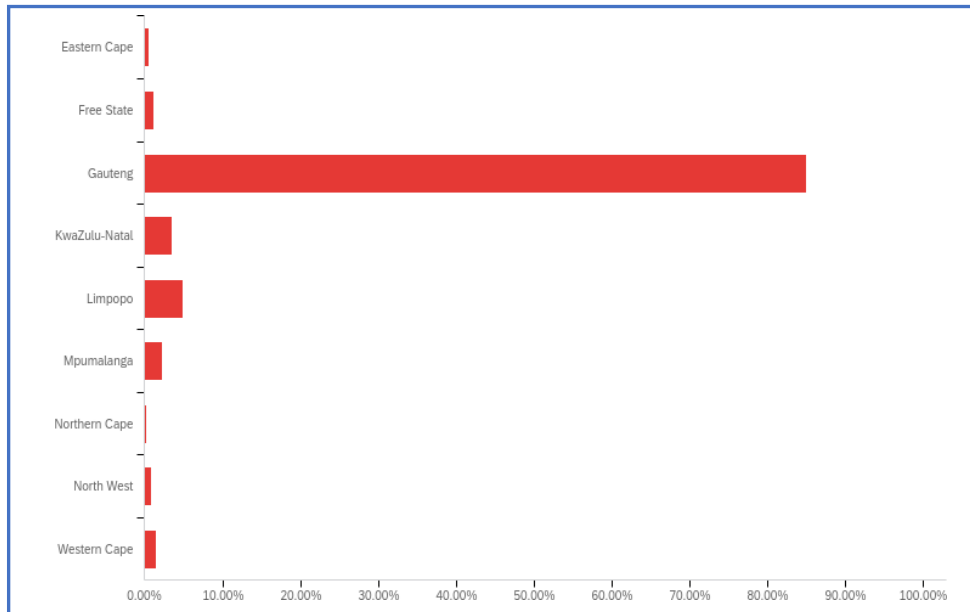


Figure 5-3 Respondents location

5.2 Hypothesis Discussion

5.2.4 Hypothesis 1

H1: Social media activities (SMA) will increase digital activism (DA).

Hypothesis 1 was interested in the causal relationship between social media activity and digital activism. The hypothesis stated that social media activity will increase digital activism towards brands. The path co-efficient analysis is a multiple regression technique which was used to measure the causal relationship between the two variables. The path coefficient indicates the direct effect of the variable assumed to be the cause of the other assumed to be an effect. A good measure of a path coefficient would be above 0.9. The coefficient for H1 was 0.114 implying that there is a relationship between social media activity and digital activism towards a brand albeit not a strong one. The hypothesis P-Value was 0.062, showing that the hypothesis is supported but not significant. The arguments for this hypothesis are found not true and

the researchers thus reject this null hypothesis. Social media activity will not result in digital activism towards a brand.

Social media has been a popular tool used for communication among friends and family. This then extended to connecting people with common interests using user generated content (Gaskill & Winzar, 2013). At least 57% of the respondents in the study said they spend more than 3 hours a day on social media as shown in the figure below. 20% of the respondents spent up to 3 hours, while 16% of the respondents spent up to 4 hours. At least 21% of the respondents spent up to 5 hours a day on social media engaging in various activities.

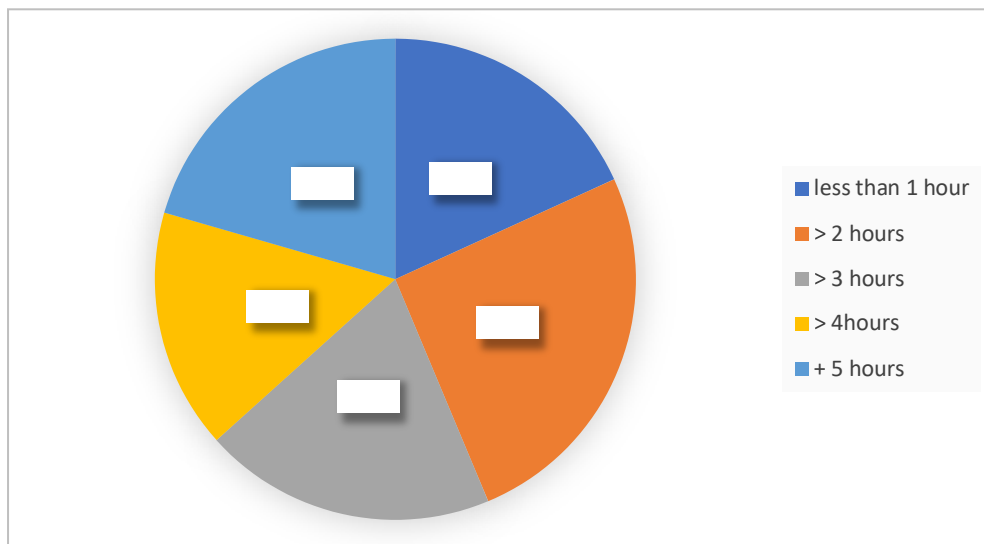


Figure 5-4 Hours spent on social media

Brands began to advertise to communities on social media, using the platforms capabilities to encourage real-time communication with their customers. The projections made by Statista Research Department (2023) stated that by 2025, South African brands would spend more that U\$D227 million on social media advertising. The actual social media budgets spend on social media are unclear, but there is a clear indication that digital marketing advertising has increased year on year. In 2021, South African brands spend more than USD\$411 million on digital advertising, accounting for 12% increase from 2020 (Guttman, 2022). The growing cell phone penetration has had an impact on the increased digital marketing spends according to research published by MarketingResearch.com (2022). Due to the increased amount

of time spend on social media by individuals, brands would likewise increase their presence on the various social media platforms.

Previous literature also showed that social media has, in the past, been used as a tool of bringing communities of similar interests together, using the unifying role to shed light on social justice issues. In the recent past, movements like the Black lives matter, #MeToo and the Arab spring uprising gained momentum and global attention from social media (Housley et al., 2018). Communities have used social media to call out brands that would err or misstep to be cancelled. In South Africa, brands such as Tresemme, Clicks, H&M and Dove have faced digital activism action and been called out to be cancelled. The respondents in this study were asked if they had encountered any digital activism – highlighting these 4 brands for ease of reference.

The findings showed that although there was a relationship between social media activity and digital activism, the hypothesis was not significant.

Further research in this field is required as very few studies have explored digital activism and social media in detail particularly in South Africa. The researchers would have test on other sources of digital activism as highlighted in the literature review by Mashegede, Balil and Radwan (2018) from the model developed by Knittel, Bearer and Berndt (2016), on the sources of brand avoidance and by extension digital activism or cancellation. There are other sources of brand avoidance that cause consumers to deliberately stop engaging with brands they previously patronised such as experience avoidance based on the brands poor performance, the inconvenience and the physical store environment (Knittel, Beurer, & Berndt, 2016). It is recommended that future studies broaden the scope to include other businesses to consumer sectors such as finance and insurance, energy and resources and education among others. Respondents may be asked to comment on significant incidents regarding these brands being called out or facing digital activism.

5.2.5 Hypothesis 2

H2: Digital activism (DA) has a negative effect on brand awareness (BA).

Hypothesis 2 was testing the relationship between digital activism (DA) and Brand awareness (BA). The hypothesis stated that Digital activism (DA) has a negative effect on brand awareness (BA). The coefficient for H2 was -0,192 showing that there was a relationship between digital activism and brand awareness. The negative reading of the path coefficient means that an increase in one activity of measure would lead to a direct proportional decrease in the activity of measure it projects to. In other words, a decrease in digital activism would result in a positive effect in brand awareness. The P-value was 0.01 showing that the hypothesis is supported and significant. Thus, the hypothesis was accepted.

The literature review explained that brand awareness is the ability of potential consumers to recognise or recall a brand within a product category (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Audiences would create mental nodes and mind associations that evoke facts and feelings about the brand that they recall and recognise under difference circumstances (Li & Kannan, 2014). Brand awareness is measured in a favourable light with marketers looking for positive associations between the brand and the consumers (Keller, 1993). Brand awareness is measured from a customer perspective as an outcome of the brands marketing efforts with advertising being a major contributor of brand awareness (Keller, 2014; Molinillo, Ekinci, & Japutra, 2019). It is heavily reliant on a consumers attitudes and opinions (Molinillo et al., 2019).

The literature review showed that as brands are increasing their presence on social media both organic and from a paid perspective, there has been intense pressure for them to be more transparent and are held accountable by potential consumers and social media audiences (Cheung et al., 2019). Brands have found themselves being cancelled by audiences and faced digital activism when they have erred as negative events have a greater impact on individuals than positive ones (Baumeister et al., 2001). People resonate more with bad behaviour, seemingly sharing bad experiences more than good ones. This means that unhappy customers would more likely share their negative experience with a brand than a positive one using online channels such as blogging, social media, websites.

Social media platforms have been instrumental in increasing digital activism, with individuals participating in clicktivism and metavoicing (George & Leidner, 2019).

Some of this digital activism stays on the platform, with users merely posting, reposting, liking, and sharing a brand's negative event. This would cause the brand to trend, increase, or decrease followers for a time being, have increased searches on search engines and traffic to their website. This type of attention, although unwarranted and negative would increase the brand awareness from the consumers perspective (Zarantonello, Romani, S, & Bagozzi, 2016).

The research found that there is strong relationship between digital activism and negative brand awareness. The hypothesis allows the researcher to generalise from the sample size to the population (Corotto, 2022). According to Frick (1995), the hypothesis is accepted on the basis that its firstly possible, secondly the results are consistent with the hypothesis or thirdly that the experiment was a good effort to find an effect. If the hypothesis is accepted, we are thus able to formulate a precise prediction (Corotto, 2022). The observed results from the data collected demonstrate that digital activism will have a negative impact on brand awareness (Fewster, 2015).

Digital activism can lead to a negative brand equity, of which brand awareness is a part of and may become a brand liability (Aaker, 1996). A brand can become a market-based liability in cases of prolonged digital activism. A negative brand equity would result in a lower return on investment for the organisation, affecting its profitability (Michael S.W. Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009). This could eventually lead to the brand being rebranded or being discontinued as it is de-valuing the organisations investment.

Marketers thus need to have a balanced view of brand equity and not rely on the positive brand building metrics and have better knowledge on how to counter brand attacks before they result in the brand avoidance. Marketers need to be cognisant of their brand messages for both local and global campaigns, being sensitive to the language and culture nuances among the target audience so as not to offend and receive negative backlash. A further recommendation for brands to clearly explain their stance on social issues that they don't support and be weary of paying lip service to social issues without proper execution. Lastly, if a brand has a social movement that they believe in, and would like to support, they must do so boldly and be able to defend their position without succumbing to societal or political pressures

5.2.6 Hypothesis 3

HO3: Digital Activism (DA) positively effects brand avoidance (BAV)

The third hypothesis sought to find the relationship between digital activism DA and brand avoidance BAV. The hypothesis stated that digital activism positively affects brand avoidance (BAV). The results showed that there was a co-efficient of 0.95, showing a strong relationship between DA and BAV. The p-value was read at 0.01 confidence level showing that the hypothesis is supported and significant. We thus accept the hypothesis that digital activism does positively affect brand avoidance.

The paper by Roy et al (2022) defines brand hatred as the psychological condition in which a consumer develops a strong negative feeling and hatred for a brand; a hatred that manifests as anti-branding behaviour. Marketers have traditionally concentrated on the positive outcomes of marketing efforts by building brand equity which includes brand awareness and image (Clark, 2020). The converse reactions towards a brand such as brand hate, and avoidance have not been fully explored.

Brand avoidance is an outcome of brand hate (Jabeen et al., 2022). Brand avoidance is defined as the consumers deliberate effort to “reject a brand” and can be seen as retaliation against a brands actions, or a coping mechanism to punish the brand (Roy et al., 2022). Often this kind of activity is done by potential and existing customers who would normally consume a product and are not facing availability or affordability issues (Jabeen et al., 2022). It is linked to anti-consumption behaviour, whereby consumers resist the urge to buy goods and services (Mashegede et al., 2018).

Study done by Mashegede, Balil and Radwan (2018) found that social media activity was one of the reasons why consumers would avoid a brand. Some of the reasons for brand avoidance from social media stemmed from privacy and security concerns, loss of confidentiality, social media overload, and Information overload. When brands increased their social media activity, they were more likely to be avoided or hated thus, increasing their chances of being involved in digital activism activity from online communities.

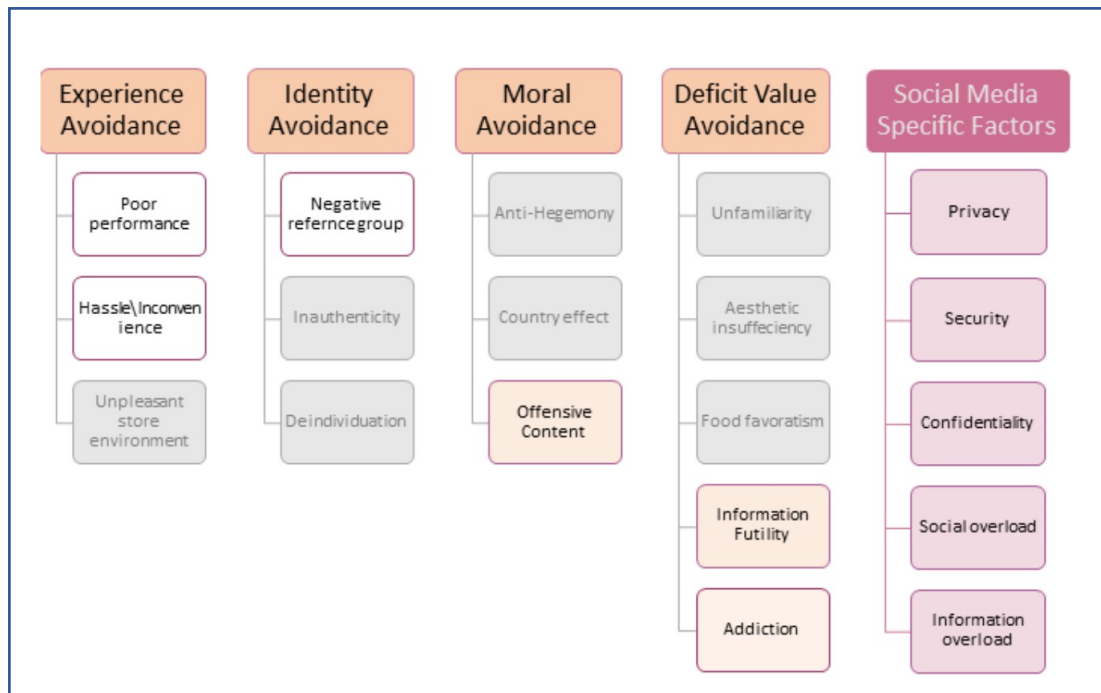


Figure 5-5 Sources of brand avoidance by Mashegede, Balil and Radwan (2018)

Further literature showed another source of brand avoidance to be advertising (Knittel et al., 2016). Potential consumers could develop a negative perception towards the brand because of the advertising content produced by the marketing department. The advertising content may include celebrity endorsements or music that does not resonate with audiences and cause irritation and annoyance among target audiences (Michael Shyue Wai Lee et al., 2009).

The research findings found that digital activism (DA) does increase brand avoidance (BAV). The P-value for this hypothesis showed a significant level of 0.01, showing that the null hypothesis can be accepted. The p-value quantified how strongly the relationship between digital activism and brand avoidance is. There is a higher chance of target audiences avoiding a brand when the brand has faced some digital activism. The researcher used the South African examples of brands that faced some digital activism – Tresemme, Clicks, H&M and Dove to draw attention to the subject. Respondents were asked questions on whether they had participated in offline or online digital activism, whether they had called for a brand to be cancelled and whether they had participated in clicktivism or metavoicing previously.

A similar study carried out by Wang et al (2022) produced similar results. The research concentrated on the effect of digital marketing with its precision targeting methods on consumers. The researchers conducted a quantitative online survey with 436 respondents and analysed the data using structural equation method in AMOS statistical software. The questionnaire asked respondents if they had been exposed to or avoided a brands advertising messages in effect brand avoidance. The results showed that online advertising positively influenced advertising avoidance and resulted in negative emotions towards the brand (Wang et al., 2022). The conclusion was that negative emotions developed from digital advertising led to brand avoidance.

Boycotting a brand or calling for its cancellation is sometimes linked to brand avoidance, however, there is a major difference. Boycotting is built from a commitment from the potential consumers to avoid the brand until certain conditions are met. In some cases it could be a call for an apology from the offending brand or a change in policy, whereas brand avoidance carries no guarantee that the relationship might be mended (Michael S.W. Lee et al., 2009). In certain cases, previous research has shown that there are barriers to avoiding the brand such as switching cost or availability of alternative products. In the case of this research, respondents may have continued purchasing the referred products for either of the following reasons:

1. Influence from family and friends to continue consuming products from boycotted brands (Michael S.W. Lee et al., 2009). This could be part of the tradition in the family, or among friends which would make it hard for a boycotter to uphold their commitment to boycotting the brand.
2. Switching costs would make it hard for the boycotter to commit to their cause as alternative brand maybe unaffordable, or unavailable.
3. The perceived lack of alternatives. Marketers would need to position their brands as the only suitable product.
4. And lastly, the level of involvement that a consumer has with a brand may either suppress or influence the intention to boycott. Some purchases are low involvement ones and consumers may find the search for the alternative product may be time consuming.

The job for marketers will be to prevent or alleviate brand avoidance by ensuring that these barriers to avoidance are in place.

Marketers who understand the initial causes of brand avoidance and how it is linked to brand activism would be in a better position to counter attacks. One way is by establishing strong networks and good relationships within the industry and among the communities. Having product partnerships with brands ensures that the brand remains relevant. For instance – the retail store Clicks carries many product specials throughout the month which allow consumers to save money. They also have the most popular loyalty card, which rewards shoppers with the most monetary benefits in South Africa. This ensures that their customer base would have found it difficult to avoid them in the long run (Thukwana, 2021).

5.2.7 Hypothesis 4

H4: Digital activism (DA) has a negative impact on brand image (BI).

The fourth hypothesis is focused on the relationship between Digital activism (DA) and Brand image (BI). The Hypothesis states that digital activism will negatively impact brand image. The co-efficient reading was 0.009 while the P-value was 0.883. This reading did not meet the required threshold of 0.05 to accept the hypothesis. The researcher thus rejects the hypothesis.

The literature review did show that brand image would be affected negatively by digital activism. The reason behind this was the manner the research paper by Mohsen entitled “Consumers-brands Battle: investigating the impact of cancel culture in switching behaviour and brand cancellation: the moderating role of negative eWOM” drew attention to how digital activism can be used for positive brand reinforcement and at certain times may be negative. In the case of social movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo movement, and the #ArabSpringUprising, digital activism has been instrumental at creating positive images for these movements and has helped them gain momentum globally. These movements brought social changes and used digital activism and social medias capabilities for creating trending topics and creating viral content, bringing people of similar interests to rally up behind a cause.

Ertekin and Dilek (2022) mentioned that individuals generally had a good feeling when partaking in digital activism, with feelings of hope and gratification being mentioned. According to Mohsen (2022), communities that partook in digital activism often did so against a brand or company in order to change their behaviour, to force them to take a stand or be accountable for their actions, which would result in better world conditions (Mohsen, 2022). Digital activism is viewed by supporters as a means of achieving a voice for the voiceless and empowering consumers against huge corporations. Users are able to share their stories on a global scale and realise social justice and ethical malpractice (Mohsen, 2022). Digital activism is thus viewed as a positive activity.

Critics see digital activism as a means of reducing democracy, mob rule and a prevention of creating open dialogue and debate, which is crucial for democracy. Findings by Brandao and Popoli (2022) showed that consumers who participated in brand boycotts and joined anti-brand communities did so with an aim of destroying the brand image and reputation. This information was derived from interviews done with online anti-brand community administrators. Another research on the anti-branding using the internet hypothesised that anti brand online communities did have a negative effect on the brand image (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). The activism performed against the brand would have an effect on its online identity and negatively affect any brand associations that marketing would have created in the minds of consumers. The study done by Kristal et al (2018) showed that there was a dilution of the brand equity elements of image after a call for a boycott occurred as there is a distortion of brand value perceptions. Brand attacks impact a brand reputations (Romani & Grappi, 2015). Brand attacks result in a reinterpretation of the brands meaning, which spreads information at odds with the brand's image and harms the reputation of the brand. (Popp et al., 2016).

However, the findings on this hypothesis 4, which stated that digital activism will have a negative impact on the brand image, led the researchers to reject the hypothesis. The path model sought to find the causal relationship between the two variables. A positive figure will be a demonstration of good fit. The path coefficient for Digital activism and brand image was positive at 0.009, showing there was a relationship

between the two variables. However, the P value of this hypothesis was measured at 0.883, which is above the acceptable range of 0.01 to 0.05 to accept a hypothesis.

The interpretation for this data is that respondents did not find that digital activism affected the brand image. This is not contrary to the literature review, which stated differing viewpoints on digital activism and the impact it has on a brand's image. Respondents were asked to identify the four different brands that were involved in some kind of activism. Many of the users identified the offending pictures of Dove, Tresemmé, Clicks and H&M. They were then asked if their perceptions of these brands changed after they faced a call for their boycott, and if they thought of these brands favourably. Respondents were also asked if they had engaged with these brands after they had been affected by cancel culture. At least 53% of the respondents neither disliked nor liked the brands affected in the boycott after the events.

5.3 Summary

This study considered whether digital activism affects brand in terms of brand awareness and brand image. The research study used four hypotheses to test whether there was a causal relationship between digital activism and brand awareness and brand image.

This chapter presented the results after the self-administered questionnaire was sent to respondents on social media platforms, on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and from the University of Witwatersrand student database. After analysis the demographic breakdown of the respondents, the author went on to expand on the analysis and findings mentioned in chapter 4.

The first hypothesis tested the causal relationship between digital activism and social media activity, whereby it stated that social media activity would increase the digital activity. Thus, hypothesis was rejected, and the converse was accepted. The P-value for the relationship between the two variables was not significant. From the data collected, this may hold true as the majority of respondent spent more than 3 hours on

social media daily, but that didn't not translate to their partaking in some form of digital activism. Recommendations are provided in the following chapter.

The second and third hypothesis' where accepted. Hypothesis 2 stated that digital activism has an impact on brand avoidance. The author reiterated what brand avoidance was and how communities would choose with brands to avoid when they don't agree with the organisation's stance on certain matter or when they have strong negative feelings towards a brand. The findings are consistent with the literature review when a brand faces prolonged digital activism or calls for boycott.

The third hypothesis dealt with the relationship between digital activism and brand awareness. The hypothesis stated that digital activism would increase brand awareness. The literature review and the study are in line and the results showed a strong relationship between the two variables.

The final hypothesis was on the relationship between digital activism and brand awareness. The hypothesis was rejected. Some scholars did state the positive elements of digital activism, whereby communities were left with feel good emotions and hope after partaking in a call for a boycott. Further studies are required to further test this relationship. This will be explored in the next chapter.

6 Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the study and give recommendations to marketers and brand managers and suggestions for future studies on Digital activism and its effect in brand awareness and brand image.

6.2 Conclusion of the study

There has been much interest in the study of digital activism and how brands are affected by this social media phenomenon. Digital activism has been described as the digitally mediated social activism where by individuals organise themselves with a common purpose on a digital platform and participate in activism on issues of concern (Berendt et al., 2018). Other scholars described digital activism as any type of campaigning both social and political that uses technological infrastructure (Sivitanides & Shah, 2011). Digital activism calls for the boycott, or cancellation of an individual or a brand that may have erred. It may result in the withdrawal of support, patronage, or association with the individual or the brand. In brand management terms, the withdrawal of support from a brand is also called brand avoidance (Roy et al., 2022)

Social media has been viewed as a facilitator of digital activism primarily because of the networking effects. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter have been used to share content and for participating in social networking. As consumers became more empowered primarily because of the power of social media, they have found their voice. They have been able to join communities of like-minded people and used social media to fight for causes that are dear to them.

Brands have been using social media as part of their digital marketing strategies to communicate with their potential and existing consumers, investing more than 45% of

their advertising budgets on social media (Geng et al., 2020; Mpinganjira & Maduku, 2019).

The study was significant to give marketers and brand managers insights on digital activism and its effects and how to avoid being cancelled and how to mitigate the effects of cancellation. The recommendations provided later in this chapter will provide managers with advice on how to plan for social media activities, how to recover from a backlash and how to find favour with potential consumers. This will contribute the consumers well-being, prevents brand losses, improve profitability and build consumer-brand relationships (Zhang & Laroche, 2021).

The first research objective was to investigate the impact of social media activity on brands. It was found that social media activity does not increase the chances of digital activism against brands. Although brands are spending more time and money on social media platforms to reach their existing and potential customers with carefully structured marketing plans and communication skills, they may not necessarily get involved in a call for their boycott. The same holds true of people who may spend more than 3 hours on social media platforms per day, they may not engage in a call for cancellation and choose not to be involved.

The researchers further sought to analyse the relationship between digital activism and brand awareness and found that there was a strong relationship between the two variables. The results found that digital activism does have negative impact on brand awareness. Marketers have historically concentrated on the positive elements of brand awareness and have invested in building strong associations with their customers that they may have neglected the factors that may cause communities to rally against them. Prolonged digital activism against a brand may lead to the brands reduced profitability thus becoming a liability.

The study found that there was a relationship between digital activism and brand avoidance. When brands face a call for a boycott, consumers will tend to avoid the brand. The route to brand avoidance often goes through brand hate particularly if brands continually err.

The study also found that, although digital activism does affect brand image, the impact is minimal in reference to the fourth research objective on whether digital activism has an impact on brand image. The interpretation is that respondents did not find that digital activism affected the brand image. This is not contrary to the literature review which stated differing viewpoints on digital activism and the impact it has on a brand's image. Respondents were asked to identify the four different brands that were involved in some kind of activism. Many of the users identified the offending pictures of Dove, Tresemme, Clarks and H&M. They were then asked if their perceptions of these brands changed after they faced a call for their boycott, and if they thought of these brands favourably. Respondents were also asked if they had engaged with these brands after they had been affected by cancel culture.

6.3 Recommendations

Marketers thus need to have a balanced view of brand equity and not rely on the positive brand building metrics and have better knowledge on how to counter brand attacks before they result in the brand avoidance (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Marketers need to be cognisant of their brand messages for both local and global campaigns, being sensitive to the language and culture nuances among the target audience so as not to offend and receive negative backlash (Ertekin & Dilek, 2022). Marketers need to understand the motivation for consumers to partake in digital activism as consumers are not passive audiences and want to get involved in social issues (Ertekin & Dilek, 2022). A further recommendation for brands to clearly explain their stance on social issues that they don't support and be wary of paying lip service to social issues without proper execution (Ertekin & Dilek, 2022). Lastly, if a brand has a social movement that they believe in and would like to support, they must do so boldly and be able to defend their position without succumbing to societal or political pressures.

6.4 Future research.

Further research is required as very few studies have explored digital activism and social media in detail particularly in South Africa. The researchers would have to test other sources of digital activism as highlighted in the literature review by Mashegedo,

Balil and Radwan (2018) from the model developed by Knittel, Bearer and Berndt (2016) on the sources of brand avoidance and by extension digital activism or cancellation. There are other sources of brand avoidance that cause consumers to deliberately stop engaging with brands they previously patronised such as experience avoidance based on the brands poor performance, the inconvenience and the physical store environment (Knittel et al., 2016).

It is noted that the researchers used digital activism events that were seemingly widespread in South Africa of the four highlighted brands in the fast-moving consumer goods sector or retail vertical. It is recommended that future studies broaden the scope to include other businesses to consumer sectors such as finance and insurance, energy and resources and education among others. Respondents may be asked to comment on significant incidents regarding these brands being called out or facing digital activism.

Future studies would concentrate on the impact from a brand perceptive on brand avoidance. The research could be a qualitative study focused on interviewing brand managers and marketers who have strong brands and have avoided digital activism and those who have faced digital activism and suffered the consequences of brand avoidance. The impact of a negative brand equity caused by prolonged digital activism resulting in brand avoidance should be further studied.

Future studies can also explore if there was an increased brand avoidance due to digital brand advertising during and post COVID-19 (Wang et al., 2022). During the global pandemic, the main source of advertising was digital due to global lockdowns and a restriction of movements. The study can explore if there were heightened negative emotions resulting in brand avoidance from advertising.

It is also recommended that future researchers consider including Structural equation modelling (SEM) and regression analysis to further support the results and conclusions.

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8 Appendix 1: Digital Activism on Brand Awareness and image introduction

Dear

Participant

My name is Nachanza Malambo, a Master of Management in Strategic Marketing student at the Wits Business School registered under the Faculty of Commerce under the supervision of Dr Thomas Anning-Dorson. To fulfil the requirements of the master's program, I am undertaking a research project to examine **"The effect that digital activism has on brand awareness and brand image"**. Digital activism is commonly known as cancel culture and this survey will refer to it as such.

As part of the project, I have prepared a questionnaire to gain insights on this from a consumer's perspective. The questionnaire has questions on digital activism, brand awareness and brand image.

The survey is completely confidential and anonymous. It will take you approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Kindly complete all questions in the survey there are no wrong or right answers.

If you request any additional information about the study, contact me on the details provided below. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408 or email hreconmedical@wits.ac.za.

Looking forward to your participation.

Nachanza
083 381 430

Malambo

Appendix 2 : Digital Activism on Brand Awareness and image questionnaire

Qualifying Question

Q1. Do you have a social media account

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If 1. Do you have a social media account = No

Demographics

Q2. Age

18 - 24 (1)

25 - 34 (2)

35 - 44 (3)

+45 (4)

Q3. Gender

Male (1)

Female (2)

Non-binary / third gender (3)

Prefer not to say (4)

Q4. Province

Eastern Cape (1)

Free State (2)

Gauteng (3)

KwaZulu-Natal (4)

Limpopo (5)

Mpumalanga (6)

Northern Cape (7)

North West (8)

Western Cape (9)

Social Media Usage: This sections seeks to study the respondents social media usage and whether an exposure to social media usage would have an impact on a brand activity.

Objective 1 To investigate the impact of social media activity on brands.

H1: Social media activity will increase digital activism towards brands

Q5. Which social media accounts do you have?

Facebook (1)

Twitter (2)

Instagram (3)

YouTube (4)

Q6. How often do you use your social media account per week?

	1-2 times (1)	2-3 times (2)	3-4 times (3)	+5 times (4)
I use my social media account_ times a week (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7. How many hours do you spend on social media in a day?

	less than 1 hour (1)	> 2 hours (2)	> 3 hours (3)	> 4hours (4)	+ 5 hours (5)
I spend up to _ hours a day on social media (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		

Brand Awareness : This section seeks to determine the respondents awareness of different South African brands that recently faced some form of digital activism

Objective 2: To investigate the impact of digital activism on brand awareness.

H2: Social media digital activism has a negative effect on brand awareness

Q 12. Which of these brands do you recall when you think of brands being cancelled recently?

Tresemme (1)

Clicks (2)

H&M (3)

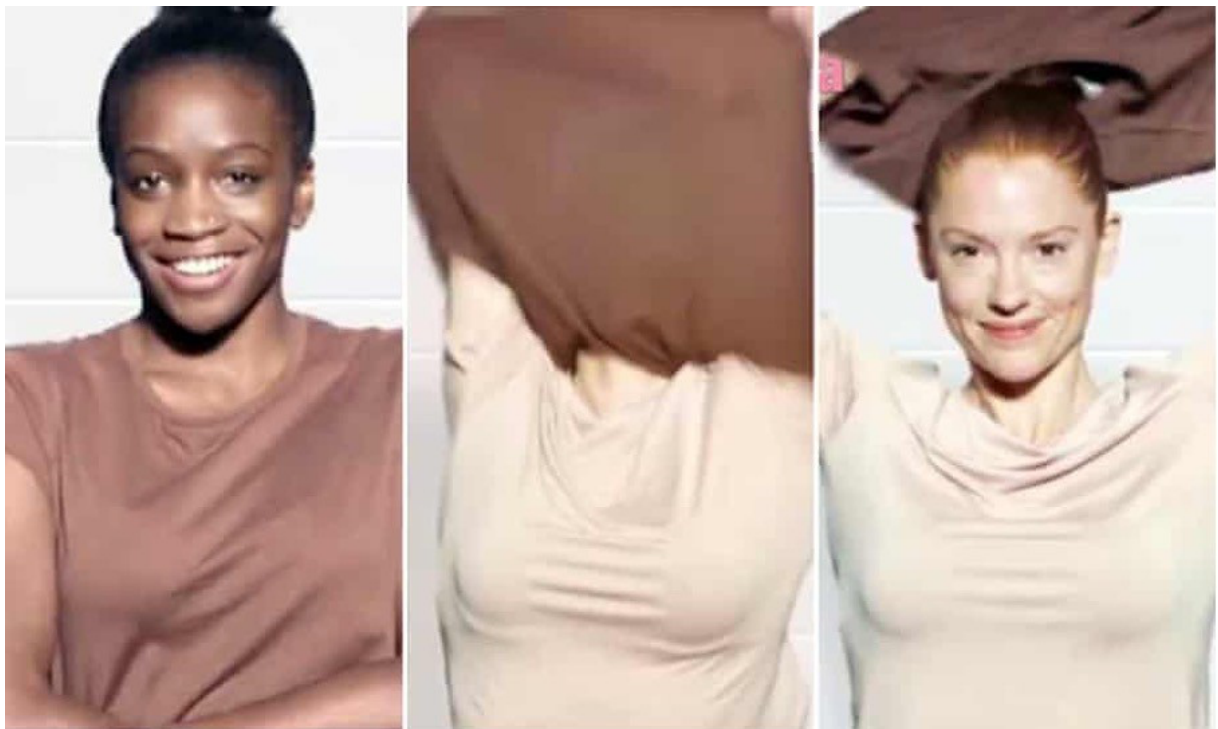
Dove (4)

None (5)

Q 13. Were you aware of these brands before they were involved in a boycott?

- Not well at all (1)
- Slightly well (2)
- Moderately well (3)
- Very well (4)
- Extremely well (5)

Q14. Which brand do you associate with this image.

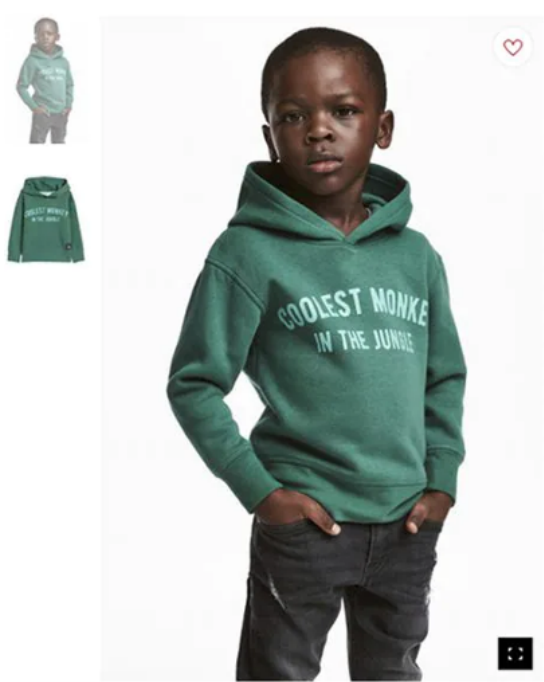


- Tresemme (1)
- Clicks (2)
- H&M (3)

Dove (4)

None (5)

Q15. Which brand do you associate with this image?



Tresemme (1)

Clicks (2)

H&M (3)

Dove (4)

None (5)

Q16. Which brand do you associate with this image?



Tresemme (1)

Clicks (2)

H&M (3)

Dove (4)

None (5)

Q17. Have you ever purchased any of these brands or bought from these stores **before** they were cancelled?

Definitely not (1)

Probably not (2)

Might or might not (3)

Probably yes (4)

Definitely yes (5)

Q18. Have you ever purchased any of these brands or bought from these stores **after** they were cancelled?

Definitely not (1)

Probably not (2)

Might or might not (3)

Probably yes (4)

Definitely yes (5)

Cancel Culture - Brand avoidance is a marketing term for when people “cancel” a brand. This sections seeks to understand how respondent’s react when brands are being cancelled.

Objective 3 To examine the impact of digital activism in brand avoidance.

H3: Digital activism increases brand avoidance

Q8. Have you ever called for any brand to be cancelled on social media?

- Definitely not (1)
- Probably not (2)
- Might or might not (3)
- Probably yes (4)
- Definitely yes (5)

Q9. Have you liked, commented, or shared in any brands cancellation on social media?

- Definitely not (1)
- Probably not (2)
- Might or might not (3)
- Probably yes (4)
- Definitely yes (5)

Q10. Have you encouraged other followers to take part in cancel culture?

Definitely not (1)

Probably not (2)

Might or might not (3)

Probably yes (4)

Definitely yes (5)

Q11. Have you ever taken part in an **offline** protest of any brand?

No

Yes

Brand Image: This section seeks to determine the respondents perception on the brands that were being “cancelled”.

Objective 4 To investigate the impact that digital activism has on brand image.

H4: Digital activism has a negative impact on brand image

Q19. How favourably do you think of these brands after they faced a boycott?
Tresemme | Dove | Clicks | H&M

- Dislike a great deal (1)
- Dislike somewhat (2)
- Neither like nor dislike (3)
- Like somewhat (4)
- Like a great deal (5)

Q20. Did your perception of these brand change after they were cancelled?
Tresemme | Dove | Clicks | H&M

- Definitely not (1)
- Probably not (2)
- Might or might not (3)
- Probably yes (4)
- Definitely yes (5)

Q21. Do you engage on social media with any of these brands after they were cancelled?

Tresemme | Dove | Clicks | H&M

Definitely not (1)

Probably not (2)

Might or might not (3)

Probably yes (4)

Definitely yes (5)

