Brand Avoidance
A Qualitative Study on Why Consumers Make Conscious Decisions to Avoid Social Media Platforms Like Facebook
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Abstract

Background: Interest in brand avoidance, which is a form of anti-consumption behaviour is growing among scholars, marketers and consumers. The extant literature has focused on the positive attitude consumers have towards brands, failing to account for reasons underlying brand avoidance. Consumers purchase brands and construct their identities through brands that represent positive benefits (Lee et al., 2009a) and avoid brands that add undesired meaning to their lives.

Purpose: Social media platforms facilitate the exchange of information among users, and companies use social media platforms as part of their marketing strategy to communicate their brand personality, engage consumers and build long term relationships with them (Ramadan, 2017), yet consumers are deliberately avoiding social media platforms. Five reasons for brand avoidance have so far been identified, but brand avoidance literature has not yet explored a specific social media platform. Leading social media platforms like Facebook are frequently used by consumers to generate content and to engage in social interaction. Consumers’ intention to use Facebook is demonstrated by regular visits to the platform and the time spent on the platform. However, some consumers express dissatisfaction with Facebook and deliberately choose to avoid Facebook. Hence, the purpose of this research is to look into the role of Facebook as an online service provider and explore the reasons behind the decisions to abandon Facebook.

Method: The interpretivist paradigm is adopted since brand avoidance in this case concerns the negative relationship between consumers and brands within a social context. Due to the limited literature in brand avoidance this thesis employs an exploratory research design together with a qualitative and abductive approach. In the data collection method, the snowballing sampling technique is used, and this resulted in a sample that includes respondents from diverse geographical backgrounds. The abductive approach is used in coding, analysing and developing the extended brand avoidance model from the 15 semi-structured interviews that were conducted.

Conclusion: The findings of this study show that several social media factors can lead to brand avoidance within the social media context. This resulted in an extended brand avoidance model that excludes advertising since Facebook does not advertise. In place of advertising, a new category named social media specific factors is developed. The five components identified were privacy, security, confidentiality, information overload and social overload. The revised framework not only provides insights in the management of brand avoidance, but also adds knowledge into the growing field of brands avoidance for academics and marketing managers by providing new information of an underexplored domain of brand avoidance within the field of social media service.
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1. Introduction

The introductory chapter begins by presenting the background of brand avoidance. The problem brand avoidance poses in markets and failure by researchers to provide comprehensive literature on brand avoidance will then be discussed. The purpose of the study is then stated and the academic justification for this study is put forward, followed by a section outlining the delimitations.

1.1 Background

“There are times when Facebook makes us feel good about using the service. As a society we feel like we are at war with computer algorithm, and the only winning move is not to play”.

-(Bilton, 2018a).

The topic of brand avoidance is gaining momentum among scholars, marketers and consumers (Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009a). Consumers purchase brands and construct their identities through brands that represent positive benefits (Lee et al., 2009a) and avoid brands that add undesired meaning to their lives (Hogg & Bannister, 2004). The quotation above is evidence of this and it is dedicated to the area of social media service avoidance (Sterling, 2018).

Consumers develop relationships with brands the same way relationships are formed in a social context. Brand relationships reflect personality and shape identity, distinguishing between what a consumer would want or would not want to be (Neudecker, Hupp, Stein & Schuster, 2013). The quality of relationship that develops between a consumer and a brand is determined by past experiences with these brands. Ideally, loyal consumers are profitable to companies as they recommend their favourite brands to other consumers. Nevertheless, relationships with brands can either be maintained for a lifetime or may result in conflicts and end unexpectedly (Neudecker et al., 2013).

Over the years, researchers have been keen on the role building a brand serves in an organisation, yet marketing academics have failed to agree on a single definition of a brand (de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). According to Lee et al. (2009a), a brand serves as the identity and face of an organisation. de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, (1998) defined a brand as a name or symbol that differentiates a corporation from its competitors and provides legal protection from imitation by competitors.
Additionally, it serves as a unifying force for the corporation to allow for better strategic positioning. From the consumer’s perspective, a brand must communicate meaning that distinguishes it from other products or services, and it should be able to add unique value that satisfies a consumer’s needs and wants (de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998).

A brand is considered positive equity when it influences consumers favourably. A brand can have positive or negative customer based equity and the positive customer based equity of a brand is the relative advantage it has over the competitors which enhances the cash flow for the company, while negative brand equity are the disadvantages linked to the brand (Berry, 200). Brand avoidance can lead to negative brand equity, which means a decline in market share as some businesses may discontinue utilising brands that experience continuous avoidance (Lee et al., 2009b). Given the reasons of brand avoidance, marketers have several options to sustain powerful brands and to exploit the avoidance of other brands so that their brands represents an attractive alternative (Lee et al., 2009b). Thus, studying brand avoidance is as important as studying brand loyalty because it gives a deeper insight into consumers’ needs and helps to enhance the business reputation and profitability (Knittel et al., 2016). Brand avoidance is a form of anti-consumption behaviour and it describes the situation where “…consumers deliberately choose to reject a brand” (Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009b), despite it being affordable, accessible and available (Knittel, Beurer & Berndt, 2016).

Research on the positive aspects of consumption is well established as previous studies have predominantly focused on the positive consumption of brands (Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi & Bagozzi, 2016; Knittel et al., 2016; Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009b). In other words, practitioners have been more interested in positive forms of knowledge, for example, knowing who the loyal consumers are, why they love certain products and services, and the positive emotions they feel towards the brands (Zarantonello et al., 2017). It is evident from previous research that consumers who utilise specific products and services are critical targets for firms as they are inclined to share positive word of mouth about the brand (Zarantonello et al., 2017). Thus, brand theories are also aligned with positive brand aspects like loyalty, trust, commitment and brand attachment as these aspects are crucial for understanding brand equity (Fournier & Alvarez, 2013).
However, recent developments in consumption literature have pointed out the relevance of exploring the concept of brand avoidance (Anderson, Hamilton & Tonner, 2014). Interest in brand avoidance is growing and researchers are stressing the importance of exploring the products and services brands consumers avoid (Knittel et al., 2016). Lee et al. (2009a), posited that brands add either desired or undesired meaning to life. Thus, it is valuable to understand both the positive and negative consumer-brand relationships to improve the welfare of consumers (Lee et al., 2009b) and avoid episodes of service failure as this leads to negative relationships with consumers, resulting in negative word of mouth and brand avoidance (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016; Zarantonello et al., 2016).

Learning only about what causes consumers to make a purchasing decision without learning about what causes them to avoid a specific brand limits the ability to understand consumers’ needs and build a powerful brand. Thus, it is important to understand both the positive and negative aspects of the brand-consumer relationship as “business scholars who only study successful companies may never understand the reasons behind unsuccessful companies” (Lee, Fernandez & Hyman, 2009a).

1.2 Problem Formulation
A recent phenomenon of interest is that of users who have stopped using social media platforms like Facebook. Brand avoidance literature at a social media level is scarce (Ramadan, 2017) as most social media avoidance literature has focused on general product or service categories rather than specific products or services (Kim & Hancock, 2015), and the research is predominantly discussed through a positive lens (Ramadan, 2017). A few noteworthy exceptions have looked at the negative aspects associated with social media usage such as psychological distress, conflicts among romantic partners, decreased self-esteem and the risk of becoming victims of cyberbullying (Kim & Hancock, 2015; Saridakis, Benson, Ezingeard & Tennakoon, 2016).

Proudfoot et al. (2017), posit the view that the adoption and use of SNSs has yielded a rich field for researchers to explore the reverse notion where some consumers avoid social networking platforms (SNSs). SNSs are rich and diverse platforms that allow users to share information and interact with others on the website (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). SNSs have been created for the general masses and they attract millions of users by offering highly interactive social
communications (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Undeniably, there is a list of positive things SNSs have done. These include connecting people and communities around the world, offering news updates, professional networking and enabling interaction between businesses and consumers, yet consumers still choose to avoid these positive benefits (Bilton, 2018).

The available evidence suggests that some SNSs aspects facilitate the avoidance of SNSs, but research is yet to investigate avoidance of specific social networking sites (Anderson, Hamilton & Tonner, 2014). The extant literature has focused on exploring the positive outcomes of SNSs while literature on the negative aspects and their implications to users and the social media industry is relatively lean (Saridakis, Benson, Ezingeard & Tennakoon, 2016).

The context for this study is Facebook which is the strongest social media brand it terms of global dominance (Pew Research Centre, 2017). Brand strength is advantageous to companies as it positively impacts the corporate brand image. Much as strong brands have a higher degree of penetration and more loyal consumers who consume repeatedly, there are multiple disadvantages associated with brand strength (Kucuk, 2007). Strong brands are affected by various forms of anti-consumption and they attract the attention of anti-brand activists more than weak brands. These activists seek recognition by targeting certain brands and exposing scandalous events on anti-brand sites with the aim of eroding the brand (Kucuk, 2007). Thus, corporations may experience both positive and negative effects in opposite directions, and these effects are now visible on social media platforms (Kucuk, 2007), as is the case with Facebook. Social media sites should be cautious of the existence of anti-brand consumers as they do not bring value or benefit to the company (Kucuk, 2007) but create a negative brand-consumer relationship that leads to brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009a).

Even though millions of consumers use Facebook, there is lack of academic attention in Facebook avoidance. Facebook presents positive stories about the use of their brand while information about user problems, the misuse of the platform by cybercriminals, privacy breaches and security leaks is controlled (Vishwanath, 2014).
1.3 Purpose and Research question (RQ)

Social media platforms facilitate the exchange of information among users, and companies use social media platforms as part of their marketing strategy to communicate their brand personality, engage consumers and build long term relationships with them (Ramadan, 2017), yet consumers are deliberately avoiding social media platforms. Five reasons for brand avoidance have so far been identified, but brand avoidance literature has not yet explored a specific social media platform. Leading social media platforms like Facebook are frequently used by consumers to generate content and to engage in social interaction. Consumers’ intention to use Facebook is demonstrated by regular visits to the platform and the time spent on the platform. However, some consumers express dissatisfaction with Facebook and deliberately choose to avoid Facebook.

Hence, the purpose of this research is to explore the role of Facebook as an online service provider and the reasons behind consumers’ decisions to abandon Facebook.

The following research question has been formulated to clarify the purpose:

RQ: Why do consumers engage in Facebook avoidance?

1.4 Delimitations

This research is an exploration of brand avoidance with a focus on Facebook. As a result, we delimit the research to Facebook since it is the most dominated social media platform (Pew Research Centre, 2017). Various attributes inherent to Facebook include flexible interaction using devices such as computers, tablets and phones, the site’s perceived ease of use and the swiftness at which content such as videos, images and texts can be uploaded (Proudfoot, Wilson, Valacich & Byrd, 2017) and yet some consumers choose to abandon Facebook. In light of these affordances, Facebook is relevant as a focal point of our study.

Since Facebook is the most dominated social media platform, we are looking for a hard to find group, hence the study will consider all consumer demographic categories. To remain within the scope of the research, this study will not consider technophobes. This is a group of people who do not believe in technology and therefore choose to avoid technology. This group of people will not contribute to knowledge advancement in the
area of social media avoidance as they may give biased views based on hearsay. Thus, the focus will be on people who know about Facebook and have used and abandoned Facebook or those who have abandoned Facebook for another platform.

1.5 Definitions

- **Brand**: “a multi-dimensional marketing tool that communicates a constellation of values” (Lee et al., 2009b, Pg. 196).
- **Brand avoidance**: “a phenomenon whereby consumers deliberately choose to keep away from or reject a brand” (Lee et al., 2009c, Pg. 422).
- **Anti-consumption**: “a resistance to, distaste of, or even resentment of consumption” (Zavestoski, 2002, Pg. 121).
- **Social media**: a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, Pg. 61).
- **Social Networking Sites (SNSs)**: “online communities that support social interaction by allowing individual users to maintain a network of connections and actively communicate and correspond with them” (Krishnan & Aktin, 2014, Pg. 111).
2. Frame of References

Anti-consumption can be seen as an umbrella term encompassing theoretical concepts such as brand rejection, brand hate, service boycott and brand avoidance. Despite the growing interest in product and service brand avoidance, there is lack of anti-consumption literature and its related topics. This chapter provides a review of the extant literature on anti-consumption. Motivations for social media consumption are discussed and then an overview of the five main types of brand avoidance is provided.

2.1 Anti-consumption

Anti-consumption focuses on the reasons against consumption (Lee et al., 2009a; Knittel et al., 2016). Zavestoski. (2002), defined anti-consumption as “a resistance to, distaste of, or resentment of consumption”. Anti-consumption usually exists in mass consumption markets. The definition of anti-consumption that is specific to business discourse focuses on processes by which consumers are against the acquisition, use and dispossession of certain products or services (Lee, Roux, Cherrier & Cova, 2011). Lee et al. (2011), identified three non-exclusive categories of anti-consumption namely: reject, restrict and reclaim. In rejection consumers exclude certain products or services from their consumption cycle. This rejection can be motivated by functional, symbolic, or ethical reasons. Restriction deals with limiting consumption rate when full anti-consumption is impossible, while reclaiming is the processes of acquiring, using and disposing of a product or service. Brand avoidance falls into the rejection category.

A key concept of brand avoidance is the “anti-constellation” formulated by Hogg and Bannister (2001). Anti-constellation is made up of two types of anti-consumption behaviour, “non-choice and anti-choice”. The three factors that make up non-choice are affordability, availability and accessibility. A non-choice scenario is when a consumer does not purchase a brand due to unavailability, inaccessibility and expensiveness,
hence brand avoidance in view of such reasons is intuitive (Lee et al., 2009a). In other words, the services or products could be beyond the means of consumers due to lack of finance or non-availability in the marketplace. Contrastingly, “anti-choice” comprises of services and products that are within the means of consumers but are not chosen because they are incompatible with the consumer’s preferences. The three components of anti-choice are aversion, abandonment and avoidance (Hogg & Bannister, 2001). These anti-choice factors highlight brand avoidance behaviour in which old consumption habits are abandoned, aversion comes as a result of strong emotional dislike for a brand and consumption is avoided (Hogg, 1988).

In this thesis, the three components of anti-choice will be grouped into one concept of avoidance since the components overlap (Hogg, 1998) and brand rejection and anti-choice of brands will be studied.

2.2 Brand Hate

“Hacking, viruses or network intrusion are not the biggest digital risk problems keeping some senior executives awake at night, but corporate hate sites against major global brands”.

-mi2g Intelligence Unit

The quotation above proves that there is a strong connection between brand hate and anti-consumption. Brand hate is the perhaps the most negative and hostile emotion that consumers feel towards a brand (Zarantonello, 2016). Zarantonello et al. (2016), provided a comprehensive evaluation of the consumers’ emotions when they hate a brand. They put forward the view that brand hate consists of primary and secondary feelings and the two components compounding brand hate are active brand hate and passive brand hate. The emotions triggering these two components are anger, disgust, disappointment and dehumanisation. Passive responses to brand hate are expressed by switching to competitors or by completely avoiding the brand, while active responses to brand hate are expressed by complaining to third parties such as anti-brand sites (Zarantonello et al., 2016).

On the other hand, Hegner, Fetscherin and van Delzen, (2017) support the claim that consumers are more likely to share negative brand experiences than positive ones. Their study explored external factors causing brand hate and found that it is triggered by three factors which are: extreme dissatisfaction with a product or service performance
because of negative past experiences, incompatibility between self-image and brand image and the third factor is when consumers regard organisational behaviour to be ideologically unacceptable (Hegner, Fetscherin & van Delzen, 2017). This results in three behavioural outcomes that are negative word-of-mouth, brand retaliation and brand avoidance (Hegner, et al., 2017).

Brands that negatively impact consumers are hated and avoided. Negative brand perception is damaging to both consumers and businesses and it can result in financial losses for companies. Consumers find more value in negative information about brands, thus, to avoid brand hate there is need to manage negative brand relationships effectively (Fournier & Alvarez, 2013).

2.3 Brand rejection
Brand avoidance focuses on the deliberate rejection of brands (Lee et al., 2009a). Brand rejection is entwined with the undesired self and the undesired end state (Hogg & Banister, 2001). Hogg and Banister, 2001 researched on the concept of the undesired self which is in contrast to the ideal self. They found that consumers try to enhance their self-image when they consume brands. Therefore, they will reject products or services that add undesired meaning to their lives (Lee et al., 2009a). Similarly, symbolic consumption interprets the positive and negative meanings related to consumption decisions. Symbolic consumption and rejection of brands is influenced by whether the brands evoke positive or negative user self-image (Hogg & Banister, 2001). Undesired end state is an incentive for rejection of brands (Hogg & Banister, 2001).

Consumers prefer brands that create a unique self-identity. As more people consume the brand, the brand’s ability to create a unique self-identity decreases. It is possible for consumers to end up developing negative perceptions towards a brand and this will move the consumer towards the undesired self, leading to brand rejection.

2.4 Service Boycott
Consumer boycott and brand avoidance behaviour occur simultaneously (Lee et al., 2009a). Friedman (1985) defined boycott as the decision by consumers to refrain from purchasing certain brands due to ideological dissatisfaction with a service or a product in the marketplace. Unethical business practices lead to service boycott (Friedman,
The issues of human rights, corporate failure and business strategy decisions are the leading causes of service brand boycotts (Makarem & Jae, 2015).

The anti-consumption strategies used against corporations that engage in unethical practices are boycott movements. Service boycott movements demand action against consumption of services or products for reasons related to ethics and values (Makarem & Jae, 2015). Service boycott has been fuelled by consumer public attention to corporate social responsibilities. Consumers are now more aware of their roles in society through utilisation of social media and political engagement. Thus, the vulnerability of brands and corporate reputations has increased (Makarem & Jae, 2015).

The increase in social media usage is enabling boycott organisers to effectively reach millions of consumers at unprecedented speed (Makarem & Jae, 2015). Social media has become a source of consumer power that makes it possible for individual consumers to effectively share boycott intentions with family members, friends and followers via online service platforms. With standalone platforms like Twitter, WhatsApp, Snapchat and LinkedIn and Facebook, consumers can utilise other platforms as alternative communication tools to conduct a backlash on service providers they intend to boycott.

Facebook is one of the social network service providers that has been targeted by anti-brand movements that encourage consumers to boycott SNSs. It is important for both consumers and businesses not to ignore anti-brand sites as they cover a wide range of issues such as service brand failure and service brand boycott (Kucuk, 2007). Much as these sites are a major threat to companies, they also offer valuable information for businesses in the event of service recovery.

2.5 Brand Avoidance

Brand Avoidance is the deliberate rejection of a brand much as it is available, accessible and affordable (Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009). Consumers may choose to avoid using a certain product or service brand even though it falls within their financial limits. From the perspective of the consumer, brand avoidance is the deliberate avoidance of certain products or services (Lee, 2009a). This may be attributed to the brand not meeting the requirements or expectations of the consumer.
2.5.1 Brand Avoidance Framework

Lee et al. (2009a), identified four reasons for brand avoidance behaviour namely: experiential avoidance, identity avoidance, moral avoidance and deficit value avoidance.

2.5.1.1 Experiential Avoidance

Experiential avoidance of both products and services occurs as a result of unmet consumer expectations. Negative consumption experiences lead to unmet expectation (Lee et al., 2009a). A brand should be able to deliver its promises to the consumer, and the consumer’s expectations are based on the brand promise. If the brand fails to deliver that promise, dissatisfaction occurs (Lee et al., 2009c, Halstead 1989), resulting in brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009c; Lee and Conroy 2005). Thus, unmet expectations (Lee et al., 2009b) which result from undelivered brand promise (Lee et al., 2009c) are the main drivers for experiential avoidance of a brand.

Poor performance, unpleasant store environment and hassle factors are main drivers for experiential avoidance (Lee et al., 2009b; Lee et al., 2009c). Poor performance leads to extreme dissatisfaction with the brand (Lee et al., 2009b; Lee et al., 2009c). Some brands not only fail to meet consumers’ expectations related to performance, but also add unnecessary complications to their lives and cause inconvenience and hassle associated with complaints and product failure (Lee et al., 2009b). Additionally, non-interpersonal factors of the shopping experience lead to experiential avoidance because of unpleasant store environment (Lee et al., 2009b).

Figure i The Four Types of Brand Avoidance (Lee, Conroy & Motion 2009c, Pg. 423).
2.5.1.2 Identity Avoidance

Consumers purchase brands and construct their identities through the brands they use (Lee et al., 2009a; Knittel et al., 2016). Brands that fail to fulfil consumers’ symbolic identity requirement are likely to suffer from identity avoidance (Lee et al., 2009b; Lee et al., 2009c). Consumers who perceive brand promises as unappealing are likely to avoid such brands because they bring them close to the undesired self (Lee et al., 2009c). Thus, consumers purchase products that represents their identities and avoid brands that are related to negative reference groups (Lee et al., 2009b; Lee et al., 2009c). Brands connected to a negative reference group are avoided because they are incompatible with a consumer’s own self-concept (Lee et al., 2009c). Furthermore, consumers avoid brands that lack authenticity. Being a mainstream motivates identity avoidance because it represents deindividuation. When everyone uses the same brand, some individuals avoid these brands to maintain uniqueness and to prevent a loss of individuality and self-identity (Lee et al., 2009c).

2.5.1.3 Moral Avoidance

This type of avoidance is based on the ideological level of the brand’s perception and its negative impact on the society. Moral avoiders believe that it is their own duty to avoid certain brands (Lee et al., 2009b). There are two categories of moral avoidance: anti-hegemony and country effects (Lee et al., 2009c). Anti-hegemony means that consumers avoid large corporations to prevent monopoly or they reject some brands for engaging in corporate irresponsibility (Lee et al., 2009b; Lee et al., 2009c). Some consumers engage in moral avoidance because they believe that large corporations are impersonal, and they dehumanise their agents.

Country effects are linked to moral avoidance and they depend on the perception consumers have on the brand’s country of origin. When consumers have a negative attitude towards a specific country, they are likely to avoid iconic brands from that country. For example, individuals who disagree with American politics might avoid purchasing from iconic American brands such as Coca Cola and McDonalds. On the other hand, some consumers prefer purchasing from local brands and avoid foreign brands because they believe that these brands can enhance the well-being of their society.
2.5.1.4 Deficit-Value Avoidance

Deficit Value avoidance occurs when a brand delivers unacceptable cost to benefit trade-off. Consumers avoid brands that deliver a functionally inadequate promise, and inadequate price-quality relationship (Lee et al., 2009c). Thus, deficit value avoidance does not require personal experience of the brand, it only examines the relationship between value and cost (Knittel et al., 2016).

*Unfamiliarity* plays an important role in deficit value avoidance. Consumers are likely to purchase familiar brands and avoid unfamiliar ones because they perceive unfamiliar brands as lower in quality and involving more risk (Lee et al., 2009c; Richardson, Jain, & Dick 1996). Furthermore, consumers are more likely to relate quality to *aesthetic* side of the brand such as packaging. When the appearance of a brand is unappealing, consumers’ utilitarian requirements are not satisfied, and thus deficit value avoidance occurs (Lee et al., 2009c).

Another type of deficit value avoidance is a phenomenon called *food favouritism*, where individuals avoid purchasing food from some brands that are associated with deficit value, even though they purchase other products from the same brands. This phenomenon shows that people are more likely to be cautious and avoid unfamiliar, contaminated, cheap or harmful food (Lee et al., 2009c).

2.5.2 Advertising as a Reason for Brand Avoidance

Knittel, Beurer and Berndt, (2016) proposed an expanded framework of brand avoidance. They suggested advertising as an additional form of brand avoidance with content, celebrity endorser, music and response as factors contributing to brand avoidance. All these aspects show negative reactions to a brand’s advertisement. The content of the advertised brand influences avoidance of the advertised brand if for example, the advertisement is perceived as being provocative (Knittel et al., 2016). Provocative content may be the use of nudity which is intolerable to some consumers, hence negative perceptions of the brand will develop (Knittel et al., 2016).

Furthermore, consumers choose to avoid products endorsed by celebrities they dislike and purchase those endorsed by celebrities that identify with them. On the other hand, music can negatively influence the consumer’s perception towards a brand, leading to
purchase behaviour or avoidance behaviour (Knittel et al., 2016). Music that triggers negative feelings may result in brand avoidance than music that triggers positive feelings. The final factor which is response represents the last element of the communication process. Different receivers interpret advertisement differently. Negative emotions where the consumers describe the brand advertisements as boring and annoying may lead to brand avoidance (Knittel et al., 2016).

Figure ii The expanded framework - five types of brand avoidance.

2.6 Social Media
Social media is a communication tool for peers, business to business and business to consumer (Bright et al., 2015). Social media is defined as an internet-based technology built on the technological foundations of web 2.0 that enables users to create and exchange content (Bright, Kleiser & Grau, 2015). The main purpose of social media is information sharing and it has become a facet of everyday life for consumers (Anderson, Hamilton & Tonner, 2014) with daily social media consumption amounting to 135 minutes per day (Statista, 2018). SNSs, blogs, virtual game worlds, content communities like YouTube and collaborative projects like Wikipedia are examples of
social media (Bright et al., 2015). Millions of people benefit from the use of social media since it narrows the economic and geographical borders, and the platforms can be used to achieve goals such as education, entertainment and job searching (Rathore, Sharma, Loia, Jeong & Park, 2017).

The state of advertising, marketing and promotions have been revolutionised by the emergence of social media, enabling individuals not only to create and share information, but also to dictate the nature and context of marketing exchanges (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011). Companies view social media sites as platforms of information and influence that are significant for marketing strategies. To reach out to target audiences, firms do so in places they communicate and nowadays consumers are utilising social media platforms (McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). Thus, firms are utilising social media as a primary marketing tool to share and discuss services and products with users (Proudfoot et al., 2016).

However, the advancement in mobile technology, the escalation of social media platforms and the emergence of numerous consumer review websites has empowered consumers to battle against large and powerful corporations (Hoffmann & Lee, 2016). Large and powerful firms are in constant battle with connected and empowered consumers. These are two contradictory developments and the issue at core is the well-being of consumers (Hoffmann & Lee, 2016). Consumers now have power over corporations and the survival of firms depends on the cooperation of consumers. Hence, ignoring the concerns of consumers can have a tremendous impact on the achievement of company objectives (Lee, Roux, Cherrier & Cova, 2011). Therefore, researchers need to look at the reasons for brand avoidance from the perspective of the consumer (Hoffmann & Lee, 2016).

2.7 Facebook Consumption
Consumption of Facebook includes acquiring a user profile, using the site and deactivating user profile (Anderson, Hamilton & Tonner, 2014). Facebook has been built around user identity and requires users to set up profiles and share personal information. The site has also been designed for content sharing. Photo sharing is prominent on Facebook and it is a way of maintaining relationships and seeking positive feedback. Unlimited number of photos can be uploaded and details like a caption and
location can be added. With tagging, friends in a photo can be identified and content can be automatically shared with them (Facebook Newsroom, 2018). Thus, one re-lives important memories and explores the world through the eyes of friends. Social media platforms have enriched innovators and Facebook is the most successful social network with an annual revenue of 27.6 billion United States dollars (Statista, 2018).

However, according to Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn and Hughes (2009), the browsing activity and content shared on Facebook is collected and stored for an indeterminate period of time. The data may be distributed to business partners and government agencies for marketing purposes in order to maximise profits for the business venture (Malik, Hiekkanen, Dhir & Nieminen, 2016). There are risks associated with personal information disclosure on Facebook and consumers often underestimate the risks. Accepting Facebook terms and conditions gives away privacy rights and leads to tremendous information disclosure which may be accessed by other social media users. As a result, the susceptibility of consumers’ personal information to unintended users and issues regarding account hacking, cyberbullying, and the safety of children are fuelling concerns among consumers (Chang & Heo, 2014).

Much as Facebook’s privacy is controlled by privacy settings, users often fail to set proper levels of privacy and have a tendency of disclosing sensitive information (Malik et al., 2016). Content shared can reveal consumers’ confidential information that is viewed by unintended audiences. Studies have revealed that a lot of content is shared on Facebook while the default settings is public. This means personal information is exposed to the public and this leads to privacy related risks (Malik et al., 2016).

2.8 Virtual Identity Suicide

The advent of social media as a significant marketing tool has on the contrary empowered consumer activist groups who share messages against product and service brand consumption on anti-brand websites (Kucuk, 2007). Both corporations and consumers have access to these platforms and consumers are actively co-creating market value through internet technology since it allows speech equality (Kucuk, 2007). However, valuable brands are attracting anti-brand sites more than less valuable brands on social media, and anti-consumption movements are utilising anti-brand sites since they are a powerful communication tools for message dissemination against products
and services (Kucuk, 2007). Like-minded consumers are using social media as a weapon to battle against powerful brands and to express extreme dissatisfaction with some SNSs.

Discomfort with SNSs has been on the rise for different reasons. For instance, social networking sites are not only linked to jealousy and suspicion in relationships, but they are also known for influencing evaluation of job candidates and for facilitating stalking and harassment of users (Stieger, 2013). These negative aspects are some of the reasons people want to leave online social life, but they feel trapped. The formation of counter movements or anti-brand sites has helped users who want to quit online social life by committing “virtual identity suicide.” Also known as Web 2.0 Suicide Machine, the services help users to permanently delete virtual identities. For the “virtual death” to be memorialised, users give the suicide machine login details. The suicide service will then systematically go through the user’s account deleting posts, friends and pictures, and the account becomes inaccessible through password change (Stieger, 2013).

A counter movement that specifically targeted Facebook was “Quit Facebook Day” which advocated for ceremonial suicides for users who intended to quit Facebook to do so using various suicide platforms. Many users used new internet applications like the Suicide Machine and Seppukoo to quit Facebook. More than 34 000 Facebook users are said to have deleted their accounts on the first day although the motivation behind the virtual identity suicide was unclear (Stieger, 2013). While typical suicides are connected to psychological distress, virtual suicide could be associated with extreme dissatisfaction with some SNSs facets (Stieger, 2013).
3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology of the thesis. Due to the limited literature in brand avoidance this thesis employs an exploratory research design together with a qualitative and abductive approach. In the data collection method, the snowballing sampling technique is used. The abductive approach is used in coding, analysing and developing the extended brand avoidance theory from the 15 semi-structured interviews conducted. The chapter also discusses how research quality issues of ensuring credibility are ensured.

3.1 Scientific philosophy

Diverse philosophical approaches of seeking consumer knowledge exist, and researchers choose processes through which they gain knowledge (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Research philosophy is based on different views of reality and it not only contributes to the development of a wider perspective of research, but also develops the research purpose to new knowledge (Carson, 2001; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Ontology and epistemology are two major ways of thinking in research philosophy.

Ontology is a philosophical position that is concerned with the nature of reality (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Carson, 2001). Two major aspects of ontology are objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivists view the culture of an organisation as something the organisation “has” while subjectivists regard culture as something an organisation “is” (Saunders et al., 2012). Epistemology addresses the questions of what people know, what constitutes knowledge in an area of study and how knowledge of the world around us is gained (Saunders et al., 2012). Carson (2001) defines epistemology as the relationship between reality and the researcher.

3.2 Interpretivism

For conducting research, the two paradigms used are interpretivism and positivism. Interpretivism and positivism are two predominant ontological and epistemological ideologies that add knowledge in the social sciences (Carson, 2001). It is important for the researcher to understand social dynamics and the world from the research subjects’
point of view (Saunders et al., 2012) and thus interpretivism is adopted in this thesis. The interpretivist focuses on exploring social phenomenon and believes in the existence of multiple realities.

Interpretivism is important in studying a social phenomenon and it is important for an interpretivist to understand subjective experiences (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The interpretivist holds that social reality is subject to perceptions of an individual, of which if one tries to fragment it, the reality changes (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Individual perceptions continually change depending on the context, making research an emergent process. Thus, to guide the research and view the entities holistically, the researcher and the respondents should create a mutual inquiry by interacting with each other, and then the descriptive analysis of the respondent’s observation will be used (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). There is need for researchers to open up to new information because the priori knowledge the researcher enters the research environment with is insufficient in choosing a research design due to changing patterns of perceived realities (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

Positivism is the opposite of interpretivism. The positivist believes that the world is external and that a single objective reality that is independent from observers exists (Carson, 2001). Positivist researchers are detached from the object of research. Objective facts are used to explain social phenomena and the researcher creates knowledge through quantifiable observations that lead to statistical analysis (Saunders et al., 2012). Positivism theory is based on the knowledge of natural phenomenon, including systematic methods of observations and experiments. Thus, the method of collecting data in this theory is quantitative which includes larger samples (Carson, 2001)

Since the interpretivist holds that reality is subjective, interpretivism helps to gain insight into the consumers experiences. The researchers’ participation in the research process will help to discover new theories based on brand avoidance and provide interpretation of the subject’s experience. Furthermore, interpretivism will help to construct the new theory based on reality.
3.3 Scientific approach

3.3.1 Abductive approach
Different research approaches are used when exploring the research question. The structure of the research is designed and the logic in the thesis is created on the basis of different research approaches (Yin, 2011). The three main approaches used are deduction, induction and abduction. These approaches are means of connecting and generating ideas and together with observation, they create the basis for qualitative and quantitative researches.

In this study, an abductive research approach will be used in explaining some trends and data that will be observed in the field. The abductive approach is a combination of the deductive and abductive approaches and it is slowly being accepted as an important component of interpretative research (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). This approach is efficient if the researcher’s objective is to discover new things, generate new concepts and develop theoretical models rather than confirming existing theories (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). It is an emergent method that can easily go back and forth, which means the researcher can easily switch to the theories. This approach begins by observing the information at hand that comes from existing theories which is often incomplete, and proceeds to the likeliest possible explanation (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The original framework is modified owing to unanticipated empirical findings and theoretical insights obtained during the process.

On the other hand, the deductive approach is concerned with developing existing theories and testing them in the real world. Deductive approach is mostly based on quantitative data that is applied to confirm the data and also on the concept or theory which decides if the data is relevant to the data collection method (Yin, 2011). This approach starts with the concept or a theory and moves towards collection of data and ends at a guaranteed conclusion (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). The approach stresses continuous interchange between theory and empirical evidence. In inductive approach, theory is systematically generated from existing data. This approach begins with gathering evidence which is often specific and limited in scope and moves towards collection of data and ends up with the generation of theory in light of accumulated evidence (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).
Since the main objective of this thesis is to explore why consumers avoid brands and to develop an already existing theory of brand avoidance, the abductive approach is considered an appropriate research approach in this thesis. The abductive approach will help to answer the ‘How’ and ‘Why’ questions regarding the trends that will be observed in the field. For instance, if a consumer stresses that he uses social media platforms to share personal information, the abductive approach will be applied in explaining how the person uses the platforms to disclose private or confidential information.

![Diagram of Deductive, Inductive, and Abductive Approaches](image)

*Figure iii Deductive, inductive and abductive approaches to theory testing and building (Lee, 2007, p. 27).*

3.4 Research method and design

3.4.1 Exploratory

Exploratory research is used in new research topics and when there is limited literature in a research area. This research method is a valuable means of seeking new insights about problems that have not been researched well before, and therefore require further clarification (Saunders et al., 2012). Exploratory research helps to determine the research design, data collection method and the selection of subjects. In addition, it relies on the use of secondary data such as the extant literature and qualitative approaches such as interviews (Saunders et al., 2012).

The exploratory research design is suited for this study due to limited research in brand avoidance and also since the purpose of this study is to explore issues that lead to
Facebook avoidance. To achieve this, semi-structured are used in relation to exploratory studies.

### 3.4.2 Qualitative

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are two common ways of conducting a research. Qualitative research is subjective and allows understanding and interpretation of social interactions, in order to discover the “why” and “how” of consumer decision making (Saunders et al., 2012). The primary purpose of doing qualitative research is to understand the behaviour of consumers, experiences and feelings in relation to the social phenomena, which is difficult to obtain through quantitative research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The richness of qualitative data makes it possible to develop stories that will lead to new theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The collection of results in qualitative research is non-standardised and the data is classified into categories and then analysed through the use of conceptualisation (Saunders et al., 2012). The key methods for qualitative research are interviews, focus groups, observations and analysis of documents. Research methods of gathering information are identified first and they are often adjusted in the collection process if new information is gathered.

Quantitative research is objective and focuses on quantifying data. Researchers explore the relationship between variables, often beginning with a hypothesis which is then analysed using statistical data (Silverman, 2011). Quantitative research surveys or questionnaires are often designed to determine how people see themselves or others.

Qualitative research method is used in this study since it allows researchers to gain in depth understanding of human behaviour. The main source of data is semi-structured interviews which will be elaborated on below. Qualitative research is often intertwined with interpretive philosophy and abductive approach since researchers need to be analytical and make sense of the phenomenon being studied to develop a conceptual framework (Saunders et al., 2012). These approaches have also motivated the need to understand this study in a natural setting.
3.5 Data collection process
To overcome limitations associated with using one source of data, both primary and secondary data is employed in this study. Primary data is data that is generated from the original source. For example, surveys, experiments or interviews (Carson, 2001).
Primary data helps to examine the purpose and provide insight into the research. The primary research data is in the form of semi-structured interviews. Interviews are a major source of first-hand information for qualitative researcher (Carson, 2001) since there is direct interaction with the participants.

3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews
Semi-structured interviewing is a powerful research method for interpretive research that allows the researcher to gather rich data by observing the respondent’s feelings and interpretations that cannot be discovered by using other methods alone. The data collection is enhanced by the researcher’s prior experiential knowledge, comments and contributions (Carson, 2001).

Also known as qualitative research interviews, semi-structured interviews are used in exploratory studies (Carson, 2001). The use of semi-structured interviews is important where the interpretivist epistemology is adopted, in which case the researcher is concerned with understanding the different meanings respondents attribute to various phenomena (Saunders et al., 202). The researcher uses a list of themes and questions to be covered and the order of the questions varies depending on the flow of the interview (Saunders et al., 2012). Some conversations lead into areas that have not been previously considered but that will add significance and depth to research objectives. Thus, additional questions may be required given the nature of the conversation, and the data can be recorded by audio or by note taking (Saunders et al., 2012).

Internet mediated interviews have benefits of convenience because of the accessibility, speed of data collection and low costs that allow interviewers to conduct interviews that would have been impossible due to geographical barriers and prohibitive costs involved because of long distance (Saunders et al., 2012). Skype has been used as an alternative data collection tool instead of face to face interaction (Iacono, Symonds & Brown, 2016). Owing to the need for researchers to reach out to international respondents,
internet technologies such as skype help to increase the variety of samples (Iacono et al., 2016).

Much as Skype provides the ability for researchers to interview respondents using voice and video across the globe, it may present some challenges like dropped calls, inability to read non-verbal cues and body language, and loss of intimacy compared to face to face interviews (Seitz, 2015). Additionally, it may be difficult to obtain sensitive information such as cyber bullying experiences from the respondents because of the Skype video element (Seitz, 2015). To establish trust and rapport where respondents share feelings and experiences, Seitz (2015) suggests establishing a good skype research partnership by emailing several times and creating and discussing an interview checklist that includes confirming a stable internet connection and clarifying the discussion with the respondent before the interview.

In this study, semi-structured interviews are important for exploring topics that are new to the researcher and that are under-researched (Carson, 2001) like the brand avoidance topic. Some general questions will be prepared in advance which can be further expanded in case the information provided by the interviewee is not sufficient. The qualitative data is gathered through 15 face-to-face and skype interviews that are audio-recorded. Face-to-face interviews create a personal connection that allows the researcher to read important non-verbal cues (Seitz, 2015).

**3.5.2 Sampling interviews**

For sampling semi-structured interviews, the snowballing sampling technique is employed in this research. The snowball method was developed by Sirken in the 1970s based on the multiplicity sampling of kinship networks within households (Rothbart, Fine & Sudman, 1982). Multiplicity indicates the generation of information from several sources to improve rare events. Thus, in Sirken’s (1970) method, the respondent was required to indicate specific information available not only to the participant’s household, but also from other households related to the participant (Rothbart et al., 1982). The final question on the questionnaire the respondents were required to answer was if they could nominate a relative outside the household who met the screening criteria (Rothbart, Fine & Sudman, 1982). However, instead of limiting the network to relatives, it was suggested that friends, co-workers and neighbours could be included.
Thus, in 1982, Rothbart, Fine and Sudman extended the multiplicity approach to snowball sampling to bring in more eligible respondents, and to be able to improve the degree of accuracy when estimating the size of the respondent’s network.

Snowballing sampling is a non-probability sampling technique used by researchers to gain access to participants who are hard to find through participants’ social networks (Balta & Brunet, 2012). In theory, the term snowballing means that once the ball starts rolling, it picks up more snow and gets larger. Snowballing is a valuable marketing research tool in reaching out to highly informed individuals in a specific field, service or product (Balta & Brunet, 2012). This sampling technique works like a chain referral process and is essentially dependent upon participants to identify and find other participants (Balta & Brunet, 2012). Initially, one or two participants may be found. After observing the initial participant, the researchers ask for assistance from the participant to help identify people with a similar trait of interest. The researcher observes the nominated participant and continues in the same way until sufficient numbers of participants are obtained (Balta & Brunet, 2012). Social networking sites (SNSs) are an effective way of identifying links to participants as they facilitate in identifying participants with barriers to access and help to increase the sample size by expanding the geographical scope (Balta & Brunet, 2012).

Facebook is a social networking site that has maintained global dominance. With millions of users using Facebook, reaching out to populations that are not using Facebook using other sampling methods is difficult. Thus, snowball sampling is the most efficient in this thesis. The process is not only cheap, simple and cost-efficient, but also needs little planning compared to other sampling methods. Furthermore, the chain referral enables researchers to gain new insights and information globally to enhance the credibility of the results.

### 3.5.3 Interview Participants

The following table shows the participants who took part in the interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>14:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>26:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>13:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>9:42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Pakistan</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Auditor</td>
<td>15:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>18:38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Development officer</td>
<td>20:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Student</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
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<td>Phd student</td>
<td>14:58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
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<td>P13</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>House wife</td>
<td>20:42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P14</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Seller</td>
<td>13:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>18:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: developed by the authors

3.5.4 Execution of Interviews

In order to conduct the semi-structured interviews, guideline questions were prepared in advance. As the respondents belonged to different countries, Skype and Facetime were used as the means of communication along with the face to face interviews. Before the interviews, an email was sent to all respondents together with the guideline questions to ensure deeper understanding of the research topic. The interviewer started by asking for permission to audio record and further proceeded on the respondent’s approval. Furthermore, the respondents were informed that they had the right not to share information that they did not feel comfortable sharing. Also, they had the right not to reveal their names, so they used fictitious names to protect their identity. The interviewer started by giving some general information about social media before asking direct question on Facebook avoidance. The respondents were then asked if they knew about brand avoidance and why they avoid service brands like Facebook. The authors applied the snowballing technique to conclude the interview by asking the respondents if they knew anyone else who has abandoned Facebook.
3.6 Secondary data

The secondary data is based on findings retrieved from existing literature related to the research problem. The literature scope is determined by qualitative data which is employed to illustrate anti-consumption literature. Due to lack of literature directly related to brand avoidance and most specifically in this instance, related fields like sociology literature was also used. Search engines such as JU Primo and Google Scholar were used to ensure collection of data from credible sources. Names of key researchers in brand avoidance like Lee, Motion and Conroy; Knittel, Beurer and Berndt were searched first, and the bibliography of their articles led to other articles. The scope of the literature search was narrowed by using selected keywords related to the topic. The following keywords were used in the literature search: anti-consumption; brand avoidance; SNSs privacy and security; Facebook avoidance; social media. Secondary information was also retrieved from Facebook website and other websites.

Much as brand avoidance is not limited to any particular website or social media platform, Facebook comes heavily in the picture since it is the most dominated social media platform (Pew Research Centre, 2017). In addition, this study is delimited to Facebook, thus, a brief history of Facebook is included in the secondary data.

3.6.1 Facebook History

Facebook was founded in 2004 as a niche private by Harvard students Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The platform was originally designed to connect students and to share photos, but within a short period of time, the site had become popular with Harvard students. Barely a month after the site was launched, the founders expanded it to include Stanford, Columbia and Yale universities and by 2005, 800 college networks were using the site, and Facebook had 5 million active users. Facebook then expanded to include more than just students and to date Facebook has an average of 1.4 billion daily active users and 2.13 monthly active users (Facebook Newsroom, 2018).

As Facebook has grown into global dominance, Zuckerberg is now out of touch with the consumers who use his service. A few years ago, almost everyone had a Facebook app on their smartphone but now a troublesome trend is occurring. Consumers are now deleting apps from their smartphones and Facebook is almost always the first to be
abandoned (Bilton, 2018). Some consumers feel Facebook is sneaky and knows them more than they know themselves and the platform “listens” to their private conversations, while other consumers are tired of news articles that are full of false facts (Bilton, 2018).

Facebook has always been famous for its mantra “move fast and break things” and according to Zuckerberg the mantra means “unless you break stuff, you are not moving fast enough” and ironically Facebook has done that to itself, and putting the things they have broken is going to be difficult for Facebook (Bilton, 2018a). Over the years, Facebook has demolished all the competitors who stood in their way or found a way around regulatory concerns without consequences. The company sucked the lifeblood out of its competitors by copying key features, taking ideas and poaching senior executives, and Zuckerberg has always been quick to bypass regulations before governments realised the dangers of Facebook to citizens’ privacy and democracy (Bilton, 2018a). But now the actions of Facebook is haunting the whole social media industry including Facebook itself (Bilton, 2018a).

Facebook is worth 500 billion dollars and Mark Zuckerberg is worth 76 billion dollars but the fallout from that success became obvious after the American 2016 elections. Some former Facebook executives are now recounting the perils of social media on children and on society (Bilton, 2018a) as Facebook is running into regulatory hazards both home and abroad. In 2010 twitter founders cheered as their platform was used to help overthrow corrupt regimes in North Africa, not anticipating that Facebook would be utilised as the most powerful propaganda platform to disrupt the 2016 presidential elections in America (Bilton, 2018b).

3.7 Data analysis

3.7.1 Coding

Coding is a process used in analysing qualitative data. Codes capture the primary content in the data that the researcher hopes to convey to others and are used in categorising data that is similar in meaning so that the researcher can put the data under relevant themes (Saldaña, 2015). To facilitate this process three steps are used. The initial step is to create a storyline from the data. The research question and purpose of the study should guide the storyline. Remembering the research question is essential
while coding as this will help keep the qualitative analysis focused on relevant codes and also helps in developing the themes and concepts that link to the story line and give focus to the research (Saldaña, 2015).

The second step is to categorise the data into codes. Coding is done using a priori, which is knowledge that proceeds from theoretical deduction or emergent codes or a combination of both. Priori data is based on theoretical concepts from other researchers. During the process of coding the researcher constantly compares all the data to identify the commonalities. In order to find the relationship between the codes and interpret them, the researcher constantly moves back and forth between data to theory and theory to data. (Saunders et al., 2012). As mentioned above, the researcher can switch from deductive to inductive thinking, constructing the theory from the relationships between the codes. The theory will then be tested with other data and the process is known as abduction (Saunders et al., 2012). The final step is to use memos for interpretation. Memos help to clarify the interpretations of the codes and to ensure that there is consistence in the analysis (Saldaña, 2015).

The authors want to communicate the findings in an organised manner. Abductive reasoning enables the use of emergent information and also allows researchers to focus on a realistic line of experimentation. Thus, an abductive approach will be used as it is built upon observed phenomena and previous studies (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.7.2 Data Quality Issues
Reliability, bias, validity and generalisability are data quality issues that may distorts the outcome of semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2012). These issues will be considered before conducting interviews. Concerns about the reliability of semi-structured interviews arise from their lack of standardisation which may result in other researchers revealing different information (Sunders et al., 2012). Basically, this criterion means that research findings of any study must also be confirmed by another person.

Reliability concerns are related to either interviewer bias or interviewee bias. The interviewer may make judgments about respondents and may be prejudiced in the interpretation of responses or they may try to impose their own beliefs on respondents through comments and non-verbal behaviour (Saunders et al., 2012). Conversely, the
interviewee may evade some questions of the topic being explored if there is sensitive information that they do not wish to divulge. This results in skewed responses, raising uncertainty about the reliability of the information given (Saunders et al., 2012). Thus, the findings from the study should not reflect a fabrication from the researcher’s bias but rather the interviewees’ responses.

Validity is the extent to which the researcher’s findings from a study reflects the phenomena under study. The research should guarantee that the main issue of the research was identified and described properly (Saunders et al., 2012). Validity is often used in quantitative research and in interpretive research the term ‘validity’ is usually replaced with “trustworthiness” (Lee, 2007). The last issue is generalisability or transferability and it refers to the extent to which research findings can be applied or extended to other settings or groups of people. This criterion evaluates trustworthiness and assesses how useful the research findings are to others in analogous conditions. Generalisability is a major issue with semi-structured interviews because they are often based on small sized samples and researchers often generalise their findings beyond the sampling frame, which is a major weakness in qualitative analysis (Saunders et al., 2012).

To avoid data quality issues, the preparation for the interviews was done in line with Saunders et al. (2012) suggestions. The authors suggest developing the themes before the interview and giving the respondents the opportunity to prepare themselves. Also, familiarity with the situational context in which the interview will take place is recommended. For instance, interviewing respondents from other countries requires knowledge about their cultural norms to avoid misinterpretations of information given (Saunders et al., 2012). Since the authors are from diverse backgrounds, information about different cultural backgrounds was exchanged before the interviews. For instance, religious issues are sensitive in some cultures, hence caution was needed in cases where the reasons for brand avoidance are linked to religious issues.

In addition, Saunders et al. (2012), recommend running a pilot test with family or friends before doing the interviews to refine the questionnaire and to ensure that there will be no problems in recording. This helps to avoid problems for respondents during the interview because even family or friends are able to determine this. Pilot tests were
run with family members in our respective countries of origin prior to the interviews. Additionally, bigger sample sizes help to avoid generalisability of findings. Research based on several informants can reinforce the transferability or generalisability of the results (Saunders et al., 2012). The study aimed at conducting interviews until no new information could be obtained and the authors were certain that information was saturated after conducting the 15th interview.

4. Empirical Findings

In this chapter the empirical findings from the semi-structured interviews in the case of Facebook avoidance are presented. Quotations from the respondents will be included to support the findings. Fictional names are used for the respondents.

“Everyone wants to leave social networks. It has become absolutely clear that our relationships to others are mere points in the aggregation of marketing data. Political campaigns, the sale of commodities, the promotion of entertainment – this is the outcome of our expression of likes and affinities.”

-Sean Dockray
The extract above sums up some factors explained below that lead to Facebook avoidance. The more clicks, more connections, more time spent on the platform means accumulation of marketing data for the service providers (Bilton, 2018a) and consumers no longer tolerate advertisements for things they are not interested in (Sterling, 2018). Likewise, governments worldwide are exploring ways of stopping social media sites from spreading harm in societies (Bilton, 2018a).

Studying consumer behaviour across social media platforms specifically Facebook which is the most dominated social media platform enabled the authors identify factors that trigger avoidance behaviour on Facebook. Although many consumers still endorse Facebook as the best social media platform, some have expressed anger over the negative impact Facebook has had on their lives. Several respondents considered switching to alternative brands after abandoning Facebook. Competitors possessing knowledge on why Facebook users are abandoning the platform could capitalise upon this knowledge and market themselves as better alternatives. Hence, empirical findings on switching behaviours are first explained. Factors related to the old model will then be explained before introducing new findings related to social media. Privacy, security, social overload, information overload and confidentiality are the most commonly stated concerns that influence consumers to abandon Facebook. In this thesis, these issues will be referred to social media specific factors.

4.1 Switching Behaviours
Facebook users are abandoning the platform in favour of competitors. Most of the participants use one or more social media platforms, but they avoid Facebook for different reasons. The reason for switching to other social media platforms, for instance, Snapchat and Instagram is that these platforms provide them with more protection than Facebook. For example, P6 switched to Snapchat because this site guarantees his privacy more than Facebook:

“If you use a picture on snapchat and you put it on your wall then it stays there for 24 hours and then it is removed ...... If you are communicating with people you do not know, you send them a massage or a picture, it stays there as long as they can see it, and, for instance, if they take a screenshot of your message or picture you get
notified….So, for me privacy is very important, and I think snapchat is more secure than Facebook”.  

(P6, age 27)

Similarly, participant (P15) switched to WhatsApp because it provides him more privacy and less social overload:

“In WhatsApp, only people who know my phone number can contact me. so, I can make sure that my privacy is safe, and no stranger can disturb me.”  

(P15, age 26)

P10 also switched to Whatsapp because it is more private than Facebook:

“On WhatsApp you can give your number to the person you want to give the number, while on Facebook any person just adds you. Mostly, Facebook needs information and details, but WhatsApp does not need that”.  

(P10, age 19)

Another participant (P3) explained that she switched to Instagram because it has a policy towards offensive content, where offensive content is the main reason for her to quit Facebook:

“On Instagram, if a celebrity posts something and someone posts negative things…. Instagram goes in and actually removes that post and blocks them. Legal procedures are embedded which proves that there are regulations and they are keeping an eye on the platform”  

(P3, age 21)

Switching behaviours between social media platforms might occur frequently because these platforms are free and there are no financial switching costs. Hence, when users of certain platforms perceive that the platform is failing to deliver the expected promises, they are most likely to switch to other platforms which deliver their expectations.
4.2 Experiential Avoidance

Some participants (P6, P7, P10, P14, P15) stated that they avoid using Facebook because they experienced negative issues when they used the platform. These issues are mostly related to Facebook features like Messenger app settings, and notifications settings. For example, P6 and P14 were very disturbed by the notifications they received regarding online games:

“Happy farm” is one of the main reasons I stopped using Facebook. Every minute I used to get at least one notification from friends asking something for their happy farm, and there was no way to stop it except leaving Facebook. It was so irritating, and Facebook has no settings to stop unwanted notifications”

(P14, age 22)

The main issue for P14 was that there was no option to stop unwanted notifications or notifications regarding unwanted content.

Another participant (P15) stated that the inability to hide Facebook online status is a major drawback in using Facebook:

“I used Facebook from my phone only, and in Messenger app, there is no way to hide your online status or your last active time. I did not like that, because whenever I opened the application many people started chatting with me and I had to reply because if I didn’t, they would think that I disrespected them.”

(P15, age 26)

For P15, the option of hiding her online status or her last active time was an important feature, and the absence of this feature caused her to quit Facebook because she got disturbed by other people who wanted to communicate with her whenever she was online.

Hassle issues are mentioned by participant (P7), who thinks that settings on Facebook require a lot of effort and it failed to deliver the expected performance:

“It is not really simple. I have to make it private, you have to go to individual settings and change the privacy options like who you want to see your status, who can message
you and who can see your friends.. etc. So sometimes you might miss something, and it would still mark on your account”

(P7, age 25)

4.3 Identity Avoidance
Identity avoidance was mentioned by participant (P15). The participant avoids Facebook because she believes that Facebook is meant for older people and she considers them as a negative reference group:

“I think Facebook is used mostly by old people. Younger people are using Snapchat and Instagram instead of using Facebook. So that’s why I prefer using Snapchat and Instagram, using Facebook makes me feel older.”

(P15, age 26)

The participant also believes that elderly people do not use Snapchat or Instagram, but most of them use Facebook, like her parents:

“My mom, my dad and all old people I know use Facebook, but none of them use Instagram or Snapchat.”

(P15, age 26)

4.4 Moral Avoidance
Anti-hegemony and country effect were not explained by any participant, but a new theme was added to this type of brand avoidance.

4.4.1 Offensive Content
Offensive content is considered morally unacceptable and against users’ values and beliefs. It leads to the avoidance of Facebook because the platform fails to prevent offensive content through specific regulations. For instance, P6’s major reason for avoiding Facebook is that it fails to control offensive content:

“The main reason I quit Facebook is the bombastic content I used to see on Facebook and Facebook fails to stop that practice in the name of freedom of expression which I didn't like at all.”
P6 got offended by the offensive contents about his religion:

“….. People were using cartoon pictures of our Prophet and getting fame from them. Me, along with my friends and all community, reported a lot of times to get them removed from Facebook but Facebook on the other hand did not remove them saying that it is freedom of expression. So, that was the main thing, and because of that I quit Facebook.”

As a religious person, the participant believes that it is his own moral duty to boycott Facebook because of its failure to control and remove content that is offensive to his religion. P3 has a similar reason for quitting Facebook:

“Facebook is a very good place for bringing up scandals. However, it is damages self-esteem. I think people post really, say, gruesome things and, in our generation, the younger generation, having a constant side of such negativity, such horrible content, I think, is not good for the brain.”

For her, Facebook is spreading negativity which can destroy the current generation’s psychological well-being, and thus, causing serious problems in the society.

4.5 Deficit Value Avoidance

Unfamiliarity issues are not recognized by this research because Facebook is the most famous social networking sites and the vast majority of Internet users are familiar with it. Furthermore, aesthetic insufficiency was not mentioned by any participant, and food favouritism is not applicable to online platforms. However, thinking about the definition of deficit value avoidance as avoiding a specific brand because it represents unacceptable cost to benefit trade-off, new themes can be added under this type of brand avoidance.
4.5.1 Information Futility

Information futility is another reason for Facebook avoidance according to four participants (P9, P13, P14 and P15). Facebook avoidance in this case happens when the information on Facebook is considered worthless by the users or the information adds no value to them:

“I realised that Facebook is full of useless posts, useless photos and useless videos. I realised that I spent hours looking at nothing important. So, I said to myself, what am I gaining from using Facebook? I’m even not getting entertained. So, I decided to quit.”

(P14, age 22)

The other participant (P15) has a similar attitude towards the information on Facebook:

“Say I spend one hour on Facebook, I spend this hour looking at what my friend ate today, what my far relative did last night combined with endless compliments.”

(P15, age 26)

Likewise, P13’s opinion about the information on Facebook is that Facebook is becoming a platform where people get obsessed about themselves instead of sharing useful content:

“Everyone is concerned about the popularity of their pictures rather than using it for useful purpose.”

(P13, age 40)

Users are fed up with repetitive content. Repeated information adds no value to the users and they, in turn, consider it futile:

“I felt fed up with the repetitive stories I see. Like, when a new story is published somewhere, then it becomes a trend and I see it almost everywhere on Facebook.”

(P15, age 26)
The participant further touches upon another issue which is lack of credibility. When the information has no credible source, the information adds no value to the user and thus it can be considered futile:

“I look for information that has trustworthy references. I used to like one page called “I believe in science”, and I think it is really amazing because it shares up-to-date information with a credible reference for each post. And to be honest this is the only page I enjoyed on Facebook. Other pages which pretend to be scientific share information with no references, so I don’t trust them.”

(P15, age 26)

P9 complained that the information she receives might not be trustworthy:

“There is too much information posted on Facebook and there is no way of verifying it, it is more based on people’s opinions and people’s experiences and how someone perceives that particular experience

(P9, age 36)

Information futility belongs to deficit-value avoidance, because useless, repetitive and untrustworthy information adds no value to the users, while costing them valuable time and effort. Thus, the costs exceed the benefits, and a decision to leave Facebook is taken.

4.5.2 Addiction Tendencies

Some participants (P7, P8, P9) decided to leave Facebook because of issues not related to the platform itself but related to some negative issues reflected upon their personal lives by using Facebook, like addiction tendencies. Participants who were addicted to Facebook deactivated their accounts as a way to control their addictive tendencies. They felt frustrated about the time consumed using Facebook, while losing time that can be consumed in higher-priority activities like studies. Thus, they considered Facebook a source of distraction and perceived it as becoming deficit in value because the costs exceeded the benefits. For instance, P7 stopped using Facebook because she was spending too much time on it, which distracted her from studies:
“when I was at school even if I had exams, I just used to get distracted. I used to be constantly online... like the first thing I used to check in the morning is Facebook, the last thing I used to check before sleeping was Facebook, and it is all like an addiction to a certain point that always distracted my work.”

(P7, age 25)

P11 left Facebook because of her addiction tendencies towards it, in addition to the fact that there was nothing she considered important on it:

“You wake up you are on Facebook, lunchtime you are on Facebook, and, end up losing precious time using Facebook, and literally, you will be doing nothing other than just quarrelling, reading stories and looking at other people’s photos.”

(P9, age 36)

4.7 Social Media Specific Factors avoidance

4.7.1 Privacy

Privacy issues involve the consumer’s right to determine who they allow to have access to their private information (van Schaik, Jansen, Onibokun, Camp & Kusev, 2018). Facebook features that require user participation are the avenues through which private information is accessed. There are loopholes in Facebook’s third party platform applications that allow easy theft of private information (Ingram, 2018). Privacy is the most dominant factor that caused Facebook users to abandon the platform. Participants (P1, P2, P5, P6, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15) mentioned privacy issues as their main reason for quitting Facebook. Two participants (P1, P2) had incidents where lack of privacy protection in Facebook caused them serious harm and they decided to abandon the platform. Participants who mentioned privacy believe that privacy issues cannot be compromised at any costs, as P11 said in her statement:

“The main thing is privacy, because no one can compromise on privacy, so that is the main thing.”

(P11, age 30)
Registering with a platform may enable that site to keep track of a user. Although Facebook has privacy settings, participants think that these settings are insufficient to protect their privacy. Another participant elaborated on this point by stating that:

“If you post something you can adjust privacy settings, but once one thing is on Facebook, it becomes the property of Facebook....When you share a story, maybe you end up having it shared somewhere else where you did not intend that story to reach.”

(P9, age 36)

Given that social media platforms have lower levels of privacy protection, the issue of information protection is important for social media platform users, and consumers are now more concerned about knowing the private information available online about them (Kelly et al., 2017), like P1 and P3. These participants regret the decision they made in trusting Facebook with their personal information. One of them (P1) confessed that trusting Facebook to the extent of sharing her photos and private information was not a wise decision:

“Now I feel like it was one of my biggest mistakes that I have ever done in my life”

(P1, age 24)

Trust concerns can also arise because of privacy issues. As one participant stated that the recent scandal of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has made her lose trust in Facebook:

“...he has admitted to this ..plus, he says that he is also tracking the purchase history of a person if they have a Facebook account..... I thought that Facebook is not trustworthy anymore for us.”

(P11, age 30)

Privacy issues on Facebook cause serious problems to its users because private information is often stolen and misused, as P1 stated:

“I think Privacy is the main disadvantage of using Facebook. I mean anyone can steal your information, save your pictures and misuse them.”
On the other hand, P13 spoke about the two privacy policies on Facebook. According to (P13), the first one is known to the users, which she called “on the table policy”, while the other one that is not revealed to the users is called “under the table policy” and Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has admitted that they run the ads, and these ads require users’ private data. This information is supported by her statement:

“There are billions of people who are using Facebook, but how does Facebook know what people like, what are their choices, what are their interests?..... I was so surprised to see how they (Facebook) knows what brand I like or which website I visited.”

(P13, age 40)

The participant believes that Facebook is actually collecting its users’ data by “under the table policy” and running ads on the basis of their choices and interest. This issue brought a lot of rhetoric question in her mind and that was her reason for quitting Facebook. She was concerned about her privacy and thought that Facebook might be collecting her private data and leaking it to third parties.

Lack of privacy is also evident as some employees are using SNSs as a tool to evaluate prospective job candidates or to evaluate their employees. An applicant’s qualifications are strong factors in deciding whether to offer them employment, yet employment opportunities in some cases now depend on how a candidate is evaluated on SNSs (Bohnert & Ross, 2010).

“I know someone who put information that was regarded by their employer as inappropriate and they lost their job, and I decided that I don’t want to take this risk and decided not to be part of Facebook”

(P9, age 36)

Information disclosure is now a major issue on SNSs as employers are now using SNSs to screen job candidates. Participant 9 felt like she was not herself on Facebook as she expressed concerns about the possibility of employers viewing her profile, and how this
may negatively affect her employment opportunities. Sensitive information disclosure is a potential threat to user privacy, and Facebook privacy settings are not flexible enough to protect user data, and this can create big problems for job seekers. Attackers may use updated information against users and they may lose job chances due to negative information (Rathore et al., 2017).

4.7.2 Security
The research also found that internet users avoid Facebook because it fails to protect their accounts from hackers. Social media overuse influences users’ susceptibility to phishing attacks and victimization (Vishwanath, 2014). Personal data is stolen from SNSs and used to carry out attacks such as malware, spamming, account hijacking, identity theft, stalking and blackmailing (Rathore, Sharma, Loia, Jeong & Park, 2017).

When people decide to join Facebook, they expect their accounts to be secured from hacking and scams and when this expectation is not met, Facebook avoidance occurs. Three participants (P9, P10, P11, ) put hacking as a major issue in using Facebook. For example, P10 said one of the reasons he left Facebook is the fear of hacking:

“if someone hacked your account and you lose everything and I mean this is a terrible thing.”

(P11, age 30)

In phishing attacks, social engineering is used to acquire a user’s financial information that has been shared on social media platforms. Social media platforms are becoming a means for hackers to make illegal money on the web (Vishwanath, 2014).

P10 said that the major incident that lead to quit using Facebook is that his account has been hacked and was being misused by the hacker:

“My password changed, someone used to update my status, like the hacker was using my account and using bad things, using bobo language, saying harsh things and all that”.

(P10, age 19)
The use of third party applications in social media platforms pose security threats as some applications, for example games, require a user’s credit card, telephone number, email ID and personal information to complete the registration process. By analysing personal data, hackers also obtain important data such as bank account details that they use to commit bank fraud (Rathore et al., 2017).

On the other hand, teenage suicide are becoming popular on Facebook. Children are targeted the most by online paedophiles who stalk them and emotionally destroy them.

“I heard about cases of teenage suicides because of security issues”

(P10, age 19)

Hacking is perceived dangerous because the information stolen can be misused. Thus, users might quit Facebook because they fear their account being hacked and used for improper activities. Users who are hacked feel insecure using the platform, and thus they engage in brand avoidance.

4.7.3 Confidentiality

Facebook users have personal secrets they wish to keep confidential. Confidential data may include social security numbers, health information, family secrets, credit card numbers, financial account numbers. Confidentiality breaches is another issue mentioned by participants 8, 10 and 11

“Some people can acquire your private information, your photos, your secrets either by hacking or by other methods and then they blackmail you to do what they want.

(P10, age 19)

“I liked FB as a social media platform, but I was afraid to share secrets or air my opinions because there are people reading in between lines whatever you post.....It’s not everyone that I wanted to read what I posted. So, I can’t say I was myself on Facebook.”

(P8, age-)
Participant 11 expressed shock at Mark Zuckerberg’s admission that he collects information from non-users. The Facebook CEO cannot be trusted with protecting user privacy and confidential information if he himself is breaching non-users’ privacy and confidentiality.

“I mean it is hard to believe that he is the CEO and he is doing such kind of things like... he says he is tracking the information of a person even if that person is not on Facebook...it is really hard to believe ...for me that’s a dangerous thing”

(P11, age 30)

In terms of services, confidentiality means a service provider is trusted with sensitive information and is expected to protect that information from unauthorised disclosure (Kuyumdzhiiev, 2014). This means that any exchange of confidential information between two parties should be visible to only the two parties. The unauthorised disclosure of confidential data to third parties may have adverse effects on both consumers and service providers (Kuyumdzhiiev, 2014).

4.7.4 Social Overload
Social overload is experienced when the users perceive too much social demands from their increasing number of contacts. Handling these demands requires a lot of time and effort, which results in stress and social networking fatigue. When users cannot handle social overload, they abandon Facebook to avoid stress.

Three participants complained about social overload while using Facebook because they believe that Facebook is overpopulated (P3) and that they are forced to communicate with people they do not have strong social ties with:

“There were people that were a part of my life, but they were still in my life, people that I rarely spoke to, but I still know everything about them and they know everything about me.”

(P7, age 25)

Another participant has a similar opinion towards social relationships on Facebook:
“Even if you don’t want to connect with people, they know you, they send friend requests……and it is so rude not to add them and if you add them they will gossip about you.”

(P4, age -)

For P4, too many social demands on Facebook made her waste her time, and she could not refuse to respond to these demands. She decided to leave Facebook because it adds unnecessary social complications to her life. P3 said:

“The whole purpose of social media is to keep contact with the loved ones and friends, but I think it is just too congested and overpopulated.”

(P3, age 21)

Zhang et al. (2016), put forward the claim that social overload is directly related to dissatisfaction towards SNSs. The concept of SNSs fatigue describes the subjective feelings of boredom, tiredness and burnout resulting from SNSs activities (Zhang et al., 2016).

4.7.5 Information overload

As brands fight for attention from consumers on SNSs, individual consumers are also being used as marketing medium for brands. To extend the brand’s reach, brands are posting content to consumers’ friends’ list on behalf of their followers (Ramadan, 2017).

Participants (P3 and P9) complained about information overload. For them the content they were receiving was too much too handle. Some consumers choose to avoid Facebook when they feel that too much of their time is being wasted on information that does not contribute any meaning to their lives.

P3 highlighted the fact that Facebook has allowed people to upload pictures, videos and advertisements and at the same time the more you upload content, the more content you get in return. Thus, instead of building meaningful relationships with your relatives and friends, you get overwhelmed with content.
“You are allowed to upload any type of content that you want, in the form of pictures videos and text. Now there are too many advertisements and videos on Facebook yet the whole purpose of Facebook is to keep contact with the loved ones and friends. ”

(P3, age 21)

Consumers are becoming concerned about how much content is being posted and the information posted is based on the assumption that consumers have a positive relationship with the brand, yet this may not always be true, and the posted content may be irrelevant to the consumer (Ramadan, 2017).

P9 complained that the information she receives might not even be trustworthy, hence, it is irrelevant to her.

“I will be very honest if you choose to say that Facebook has got very authentic source of information I beg to differ because there is too much information posted on Facebook and there is no way of verifying it, it is more based on people’s opinions and people’s experiences and how someone perceives that particular experience.”

(P9, Age 36)

Information overload is inevitable since social media tools are designed to reach many users so that the more users they reach, the more profits that can be extracted from the data. Thus, consumers feel like social media is not serving its purpose in an informative way, and as a result, Facebook users choose to avoid the platform.
5. Analysis

In this chapter the results will be analysed and linked to the brand avoidance framework in Chapter 2. The social media specific factors will be analysed to show how they contribute new knowledge within the field of brand avoidance. The analysis will be divided in sections based on the Lee et al. (2009a), framework of brand avoidance and then the social media specific factors will follow (Figure 4).

According to Knittel et al. (2016), there might be other reasons why people avoid brands apart from the five reasons that have already been identified. Hence, since Facebook does not advertise, we propose an expanded model that includes Social Media Specific Factors avoidance as reasons for brand avoidance in place of advertising avoidance. Some components under the Social Media Specific Factors avoidance influenced brand avoidance behaviour more than others. Privacy, security, confidentiality, social overload and information overload reflect our research findings, and these factors will be analysed in this thesis.

In addition, brand avoidance behaviour linked to some categories in the framework such as experiential avoidance, moral avoidance, identity avoidance and deficit value avoidance were mentioned by some participants. Although these findings are not part of the Social Media Specific Factors avoidance, they are valuable in this study as they contribute to academic knowledge. Thus, they will be explained in the analysis.

5.1 Experiential Avoidance

The study was able to elaborate on how experiential avoidance can be related to Facebook avoidance. Poor performance is evident in this study because some users feel disappointed due to some features on Facebook or they become dissatisfied because a feature they need does not exist. As a result, they perceive the platform as performing poorly. Thus, social media platforms should pay more attention to users’ dynamic needs because users’ needs can develop and change often. Understanding users’ needs is vital in keeping the platform an attractive place for them. The perception that Facebook is a hassle because some activities on Facebook require a lot of time and effort was emphasised. Thus, hassle factors also contribute to Facebook avoidance.
5.2 Identity Avoidance

The ability of this study to explain identity avoidance was limited as it was mentioned only by one participant (P15) who avoided Facebook because it belongs to a negative reference group. This finding might be due to the fact that social media platforms are used by almost everyone who has access to internet, and most of the users do not avoid all platforms.

5.3 Moral Avoidance

The research finding regarding moral avoidance is the issue of offensive content. Offensive content includes hate speech against a specific person, a group or a culture, foul language or porn content. Promoting offensive content on social media is found to cause moral consequences in the society, and has negative implications on social media (Alakali, Faga & Mbursa, 2017). Some participants avoid using Facebook because of its failure to regulate or prevent offensive content. Some participants left Facebook because they believe that their moral values are offended by the content they see on the site, and the site does not take any step to prevent this issue. Facebook refuses to regulate offensive content because the platform is trying to pursue other important values like the freedom of expression. Hence, Facebook should consider making a balance between victims’ and other users’ rights (Guiora & Park, 2017). Users need to express their opinions freely, but they also need to respect other users’ values, beliefs and cultures. As a result, social media platforms should consider limiting the freedom of expression in terms of racist content, religious content and similar sensitive issues, because protecting victims of offensive content outweighs the privilege of freedom of expression (Guiora & Park, 2017).

5.4 Deficit-Value Avoidance

Social networking sites are emerging as important sources for information sharing (Kim, Sin & Tsai, 2014). However, they lack quality assurance mechanism that provide unfiltered information with different levels of quality (Kim & Sin, 2011). Information futility describes the situation where users perceive the information they get from Facebook as useless, repetitive or lacking credible references. Information futility can lead to Facebook avoidance because users perceive the platform as adding no value to them while costing them their time. Thus, information futility is relevant to deficit value avoidance because the costs exceeds the benefits. Information futility is a problematic
issue for social media platforms because it cannot be solved easily. For other media channels like newspaper, the brand itself is the one that chooses the information it publishes, so it is easy to control. However, in social media platforms, the users are the ones who publish the information and they are the ones who are responsible for the quality of the information, which makes it difficult to control.

Some participants decided to leave Facebook because they could not control their addiction tendencies. Addiction belongs to deficit value avoidance because the costs of using Facebook become higher than the benefits when users experience addiction tendencies. The costs can be time, stress and failure to successfully perform other activities. For example, when people use Facebook so often during the day, they consume their valuable time that can be used on more important activities, like studies and work. Users who are addicted to a social media platform face more difficulty in focusing on their jobs or other activities (Sriwilai & Charoensukmongkol, 2015). When addiction tendencies towards Facebook occur, it would be considered a source of distraction, and users might avoid the platform to focus on higher-priority activities. Likewise, the participants who got addicted to Facebook felt they were self-destructing after spending too much time on the platform, and the only way to get rid of the addiction tendencies was by deactivating their accounts. Furthermore, addiction leads to stress, feelings of guilt and social networking fatigue (Ravindran, 2014).
5.5 Social media specific factors influencing brand avoidance

Figure iv The Expanded Brand Avoidance Framework developed by the authors with social media factors as the fifth reason for brand avoidance (based on existing theory by Lee et al., 2009a; Authors, 2018)
5.5.1 Privacy

When consumers sign up for the first time on social networking platforms they are required to provide information like birthdays, email address, age, sex, hometown, religious and political views. This information enables users to expand their circle of friends and to find new friends. Sharing information might seem safe for users and their circle of friends, but for advertisers and hackers it means opening up private data to the public (Rathore et al., 2017).

Privacy includes the right of an individual not only to decide what information is collected about them and how it is used, but also, the right not to have their browsing activities tracked (Kelly & McKenzie, 2002). When sending or receiving e-mail messages or other data such as credit card numbers, users have the right not to have this information intercepted by unintended recipients and they should be allowed access to information held about them so that they know if it is safe and correct (Kelly & McKenzie, 2002). However, agreeing to the terms and conditions and consenting to the use of cookies in accordance with a website’s privacy policies means consumers have no control on what is revealed about them to third parties (Kelly et al., 2017).

Maintaining user privacy should be the main objective of SNSs. However, social media platforms create privacy and security risks for users especially when multimedia content such as videos, photos and audios are uploaded. This content carries information that can be transmitted virally within social media platforms and beyond (Rathore et al., 2017). The majority of respondents were motivated to quit Facebook due to be privacy concerns. Privacy is a vital need for internet users, and when SNSs fail to meet this need, brand avoidance might occur. Lack of privacy causes fear among users as personal information can be stolen and used in improper activities. For example, stolen information might be used for blackmailing like in the case of P1, whose fiancé was blackmailed until he cancelled their wedding. These issues are caused by Facebook failure to protect its users’ privacy from third parties. Some Facebook users fear that their private information is misused by Facebook itself, and thus, they avoid the brand because they cannot trust Facebook. This issue is raised by P9 after the recent scandal by Facebook of leaking users’ data to another company and that influenced the outcome of American elections in 2016 (Bilton, 2018b).
Lack of privacy also leads users to restrict the information they publish on their personal pages, like photos and even their names as a way to protect their privacy. This restriction leads to dissatisfaction with the platform. As a result, users may decide to leave the platform as a reaction. For example, P2 restricted the information on her personal page to hide herself from a certain individual, but the person still found her, and she decided to leave Facebook because she discovered that there was no way to protect her privacy on the platform.

Likewise, P9 does not want to reduce employment opportunities because of the content she posts. P9’s colleague was fired because of the content that was deemed inappropriate by the employer. SNSs are becoming costly in terms of employment opportunities and salary offers (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). For instance, when job seekers update personal information on social media platforms, employers may evaluate current and potential employees based on content posted on SNSs. These privacy concerns trigger feelings of intrusiveness especially when companies gain access to information a user does not wish to the employer to see, making a user feel vulnerable (Kelly et al., 2017).

A third of employers have refused to offer at least one suitable job candidate employment due to inappropriate material posted on SNSs (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). Employers may make causal attributions from photos posted online. For instance, candidates posting photographs of themselves on SNSs in a drunken state may be evaluated unfavourably whereas a candidate who posts family or professional oriented photographs will receive favourable ratings (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). Nevertheless, there is a possibility that misleading information may be posted by a candidate’s ex-spouse, enemies or rivals (Bohnert & Ross, 2010) and because of that SNSs users feel that it is unethical for employers to violate a job candidate’s privacy. Thus, job candidates are now being advised not to post information that they do not wish their employers to see (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). This user content sharing restriction caused by lack of privacy on Facebook is causing extreme dissatisfaction with the platform, leading to Facebook avoidance.
5.5.2 Security

The growth in social media services reflects global development, but on the other hand this growth has opened an avenue for anti-social behaviour and criminal activities such as hacking (Barrett-Maitland, Barclay & Osei-Bryson, 2016). Security issues occur when hackers gain access to a protected site with a user’s account details and a user’s shared information (van Schaik, Jansen, Onibokun, Camp & Kusev, 2018). Hackers may steal a user’s identity by exploiting that user’s social security number and all the personal details without the user’s consent and use these details for conducting scams or theft (Rathore et al., 2017).

Rathore et al., (2017), identified security threats that they classified into three namely; multimedia content threats in which content shared by users on social media platforms is used to expose the user, traditional threats in which attack techniques such as phishing is used to obtain users’ personal information and social threats in which hackers establish social relationships with SNSs users to bait and lure potential victims. Security issues are exacerbated by cookies since they track websites browsed, companies subscribed to, downloaded apps and games played, and SNSs service providers contribute to this by selling user information and browsing activities to third parties (Saridakis et al., 2016).

The rise in cyber-attacks involving SNS highlight the vulnerability of social media users (Rathore et al., 2017). Activities such as status updates and tagging relatives and friends in the posts often give hackers the information they need to steal a user’s identity like what happened to p8. A friend’s hacked account was used to scam her. Users often succumb to phishing attacks and according to Google phishing scams have a 45% success rate and an estimated 100 million Facebook profile pages are fake accounts being used for phishing attacks (Buckley, 2014). Scammers can also obtain personal information by using social information like email addresses. By clicking “forgot password” information can be recovered through email. Once the hackers gain access to the user’s email account, it is easy to collect all the information they require on SNSs. Facebook’s CEO has not been spared either by hackers. His LinkedIn password “dadada” was used to hack his Pinterest and Twitter accounts (Rathore et al.,
The question that remains unanswered for consumers is how safe they are on Facebook if Zuckerberg can be hacked.

It is evident that social media lacks mechanisms to control SNS security threats, hence, they have become security holes that facilitate criminal activities (Silic & Back, 2016). P8 said she was born in Zimbabwe and moved to Australia in 2000 and hackers had all this information with them and she blames Facebook for exposing her personal information that she trusted them with, to hackers. Hackers managed to check her personal details and found information on her page that she is an immigrant and used a web page for immigrants to lure her into a scam.

Furthermore, social media use is linked to online victimisation which is significantly high on dominant social media platforms like Facebook (Saridakis et al., 2016). Online victimisation leads to negative social and emotional outcomes like suicidal attempts, substance abuse and depression (Kim & Hancock, 2015). Youths are mostly vulnerable to cyber-attacks that include online sexual extortion. P12 complained about paedophiles taking advantage of the vulnerability of children on SNS. These paedophiles get satisfaction by stalking and abusing minors and as a mother she feels her children should avoid Facebook because of such issues. One noteworthy story of Facebook stalking that gained international attention is that of Amanda Todd a Canadian citizen who committed suicide at the age of fifteen after being stalked and sexually extorted on Facebook by a thirty-five-year-old Dutch citizen since she was eleven. The online predator used different platforms including Facebook to solicit nude videos and images of minors and he used Facebook to bully and expose Amanda whenever she moved to a new school, thus she became his victim and a victim in the school yard (Surbramaniam & Whalen, 2014). The story of teenage suicides due to stalking was also confirmed by P10 who said teenagers are committing suicide when they can’t handle SNS bullies. To avoid security issues like these, users are choosing to abandon Facebook.

5.5.3 Confidentiality
Privacy and confidentiality are used as synonyms in some cases but there are obvious differences in the classification of these terms, even within organisations (Kuyumdzhiev, 2014). Confidentiality focuses on not spreading information and keeping user information secure and secret from others (Wu & Wu, 2018). Confidential
data should be protected from external access otherwise it may cause adverse effects on a company’s reputation, services or consumers (Kuyumdzhiev, 2014). Some information recorded on Facebook may be classified as confidential and according to Kuyumdzhiev (2014), SNSs are one of the most inappropriate places to store or exchange confidential information, but users often do so. Confidentiality problems are often intertwined with social networking sites, but the potential harm is higher depending on how much a user engages on online activities and how much information is shared (Kuyumdzhiev, 2014).

Security breaches open doors to confidential information belonging to users as highlighted by P11 that Zuckerberg has admitted to leaking user information. P8 also blames Facebook for exposing her to scammers. She expected Facebook to protect her secret information, but it ended up in the hands of scammers. The latest scandal of leaking users’ private and confidential data has thrust Facebook into its worst crisis. It has been revealed that millions of Facebook users’ information has been improperly accessed and used by political consultancy to the Trump campaign to build voter profiles (Ingram, 2018). Facebook has also been accused of collecting information about non-users which Zuckerberg claims is for “security reasons.” It is not clear what Facebook is doing with non-users’ information and lawmakers and privacy advocates have since protested this practice. Facebook said they have no plans of building tools that reveal how much information they know about non-users (Ingram, 2018). In another breach of user confidentiality, Facebook has recently been accused of planning to collect personal data from patients as part of a research project. The allegations made against Facebook are that they wanted to collect medical information about its users’ illnesses and prescription information and share with professionals so that they develop specific treatment plans using that data (Cuthbertson, 2018). More than half of Facebook users have had their confidential data exposed to malicious actors and privacy advocates have said the latest revelation highlights the importance of user confidentiality and having a say in how personal data is used (Cuthbertson, 2018). Facebook scandals prove that the platform cannot be trusted with confidential information, hence users are choosing to quit instead.
5.5.4 Social Overload

Social overload happens when the users of a SNS perceive the platform as overcrowded and when they receive too much social demands. For example, messages, calls, comments and friend requests that they have to handle. Handling such social demands requires investing too much time, effort and attention to maintain relationships with the growing number of contacts in the SNSs (Zhang, Zhao, Lu & Yang, 2016). Thus, social overload occurs when social demands exceeds user’s communication capacities, that is why it is also referred to as “communication overload” (Lee, Son & Kim, 2016).

Social media users get overwhelmed by the demands they receive from their increasing number of contacts. When their accounts get overcrowded, the costs of handling social demands exceed their ability to handle, and as a result, they engage in brand avoidance. P3 stated that Facebook is becoming irritatingly overcrowded while the purpose of using it is to communicate with people close to you. Social overload has a negative impact on SNSs’ users because when technology use exceeds the optimum level, it might incur negative outcomes (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010). When users perceive too much social demands while performing other daily tasks (like work or studies), they get disturbed, especially when these demands occur frequently, and they find it hard to perform their daily tasks. Furthermore, users can get fatigued from SNSs usage because when they have to deal with too much communication from SNSs while performing primary tasks, users can get overwhelmed because they cannot effectively deal with the situation (lee et.al, 2016).

5.5.5 Information overload

Consumers using SNSs have no control over what they want to see and what satisfies them. The volumes of content published on social media platforms is more than any consumer can handle. Limitless amounts of information is constantly being uploaded and social media is overloaded with user generated content because of the rapid expansion in SNSs. Information overload in the context of social media is when the information generated exceeds the user’s ability to handle (Bright, Kleiser & Grau, 2015). With so many consumers adopting social media presence, enormous content with varying levels of quality is created online. SNSs users may feel frustrated especially if the information is irrelevant to their interests as highlighted by participants 3 and 9, and according to P9, in most cases the content cannot be trusted. P10 complained that
different versions of the same content keep popping up as marketers compete for attention, and the versions can be conflicting sometimes.

It has also been noted that information overload is negatively affecting consumer-brand relationship and their experience on Facebook. Information overload affects the quality of interaction, information quality and the system quality of social media platforms. Worse still, it reduces brand trust, brand association and brand likability (Ramadan, 2017). Users tend to avoid SNS when they are overwhelmed with information (Bright et al, 2015). Social media information overload increases stress and contributes to SNSs fatigue. Users who are overloaded with information will negatively evaluate the usefulness of the platform and this leads to dissatisfaction towards the site (Zhang, Zhao, Lu & Yang, 2016).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The final chapter discusses the conclusion, the main contribution of the thesis and the implications of the research findings. The limitations of the research findings are addressed, and the thesis concludes by providing recommendations for future studies.

6.1 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to increase knowledge in the area of brand avoidance. The introductory chapter begins by identifying academic gaps in the brand avoidance extant literature. To date, there is no study of brand avoidance within the context of individual social media platforms. Hence, the study was delimited to Facebook. To fulfil the objective of the study the research questions sought to find out why consumers engage
in Facebook avoidance. Qualitative data was the most efficient in this research and it not only helped in answering the research questions in this study, but also helped in theory development so that original contributions to the area of brand avoidance could be made. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents who were familiar with Facebook consumption and therefore were able to provide first-hand information from which the new brand avoidance themes in the context of social media emerged.

The findings of this study show that several social media factors can lead to brand avoidance within the social media context. This resulted in an extended brand avoidance model that excludes advertising since Facebook does not advertise. In place of advertising, a new category named social media specific factors is developed. The five components identified were privacy, security, confidentiality, information overload and social overload. The revised framework provides insights in the management of brand avoidance. Furthermore, it adds knowledge into the growing field of brands avoidance for academics and marketing managers by providing new information of an underexplored domain of brand avoidance within the field of social media service.

Overall, this study addresses the research questions and provides valuable answers as to why people avoid social media services.

6.2 Contribution
The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding on why Internet users engage in Facebook avoidance. The study was built upon Lee et al. (2009c), framework of brand avoidance and new findings were added to the original model. The factors added to the original model are named social media specific factors and they are included as the fifth type of brand avoidance in place of advertising. Consumers utilise social media to find out which brands they identify with (Bright et al., 2015). In this thesis we noted that conflicting objectives between users and online social media providers exist. For example, while users trust the service providers to deliver quality services, the service providers have other objectives intended for businesses to achieve (Proudfoot et al., 2017). These conflicting objectives negatively impact service providers as users may choose to abandon the service provider.
6.3 Academic Implications

The area of brand avoidance remains underexplored with limited extant literature (Lee et al., 2009a). It is evident from this research that brand avoidance does exist, and the knowledge gathered about why consumers avoid brands is relevant in understanding consumer behaviour. The study of brand avoidance shows that brands possess positive brand equity for some consumers and negative brand equity for other consumers. This study has identified new reasons for brand avoidance of which social media specific factors are the reasons for social media avoidance. Other reasons related to the framework were also identified. Thus, the empirical findings resulted in new theory development that contributes to academic knowledge.

6.4 User Implications

Privacy is the most dominant factor among other factors that leads to Facebook avoidance. Consumers use social media platforms to build trust in a brand, but consumers can easily lose trust in a brand due to privacy issues (Kelly, Kerr & Drennan, 2017). Users appear to trust the service providers with the information they upload but they do not want their information distributed to third parties. On the other hand, service providers have the authority to use consumer information as they wish, as they benefit from sharing the information for advertising purposes (Gao, Hu, Huang, Wang & Chen, 2011). This power imbalance indicates that user privacy is not always guaranteed.

Security is also a major factor in social media services. Frequent use of social media and too much information disclosure increases the user’s risk of exposure to cybercriminals. Once users post personal information online, it becomes public and may end up in the hands of hackers. This information is then used to identify potential victims (Saridakis et al., 2016). Users’ personal information and online activities are considered public information as information can be available to the public by default (Kelly, Kerr & Drennan, 2017).

Users are the most vulnerable on social media platforms and there is no guarantee that records of their activities will remain private (Barrett-Maitland, Barclay & Osei-Bryson, 2016). The more users share, the more vulnerable they are. Thus, privacy responses on social media require more than technical solutions. There is need for users to consider avoiding over-sharing of information.
6.5 Managerial Implications

The breaches of personal information security have been frequently reported in the media. Safeguarding personal information has been considered the sole responsibility of the user, yet many users lack awareness about social media threats (Saridakis et al., 2016). To protect user information security, the social media industry should take an active role in educating the users and provide adequate control systems to protect user information instead of making it entirely the responsibility of the user (Saridakis et al., 2016).

Taking into account the amount of data stored by Facebook, there is a risk that confidential organisation data may be disclosed through user’s accounts. Confidential company information may include passwords, procedures used in processing client confidential information, company business operating procedures, departmental memos, salaries, business plans, marketing and promotional information (Kuyumdzhiev, 2014).

Unauthorised access to a company’s confidential can negatively impact the company’s operational effectiveness, benefit the competitor while causing financial losses to the company affected and reduce consumer confidence (Kuyumdzhiev, 2014).

The authors also noted that consumers relate less to SNSs due to information overload. Consumers are getting overwhelmed with high volumes of user generated content, leading to extreme dissatisfaction with some platforms. The same SNSs that represent success also represent considerable risk to companies and their brands. The risk information overload presents on brand-consumer relationships is worse than the financial implications for both companies and SNSs (Ramadan, 2017). If consumers were to start leaving SNSs in large numbers, this would mean massive financial loss for both SNSs and companies (Ramadan, 2017). Therefore, companies should avoid excessive broadcasting of brand messages and over targeting consumers. As consumers are overloaded with information from different brands on SNSs, companies may consider consumer-brand relationship building by utilising other touchpoints instead of focusing on social media platforms like Facebook. Facebook also needs to manage information overload as this may threaten the usability and the perceived value of the platform (Ramadan, 2017).
6.6 Limitations

Brand avoidance is a new research area that has not been investigated enough, especially within online service industry. So, the authors had to rely on limited literature to conduct the research. Furthermore, as the study aimed to investigate why internet users engage in brand avoidance in regard to the most dominated social media platform, the main challenge was to find people who do not use Facebook. The respondents were from diverse geographical regions, and due to financial and time constraints, online interviews through Skype were conducted.

Online interviews are less effective than face-to-face interviews. Online interviews permit less interaction and relationship building, which might result in the participant not sharing enough information to the interviewer. The effectiveness of online interviews also depends on the internet connection. In some interviews, the internet connection was poor, and thus, the interviewer was not able to understand what the participant was trying to communicate. For example, the Australian interview was conducted during the period when the commonwealth games were being held in Australia and the internet connection was congested, resulting in poor sound connection.

Furthermore, due to time constraints, the research findings have been developed from a few interviews. The findings represent a small group of informants. Some continents like Australia and Africa were represented by one responded. The demographic limitations of the sample restrict the transferability of the thesis findings. Thus, the implications that have emerged are interpreted within the context of this study. Due to this limited number of respondents, the findings offer a theoretical contribution towards the understanding of brand avoidance in social media services and not a generalisable market analysis of consumer behaviour outside of this study. There may be other valid reasons that explain why consumers engage in social media avoidance that are of concern to managers.

Another communication challenge was the language barriers. Although all interviews were conducted in English, the participants had different dialects and different levels of English fluency. In some cases, it was difficult to understand what the respondent meant because of the different dialects.
6.7 Suggestions for future research

This is the first study to explore brand avoidance in social media platforms where consumers avoid social media platforms due to social media specific factors. Based on these findings, there is need for more research in this area. Future studies could test the relevance of these factors or whether they are applicable to other service industries. This research was done from an interpretivist perspective. We suggest a research paradigm from the positivist perspective. The positivist avenue will give an empirical validation of the theory developed. In this case, quantitative data in the form of surveys or questionnaires is used and this may help in extending the research findings beyond the demographic limitations of this research and establish if the social media specific factors are applicable to a wider population.

7. Reference list


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8. Appendix
8.1 Interviews Guide

1. Firstly, can you introduce yourself (name, age, nationality and occupation)?
2. What is your opinion about social media?
3. Do you use any social media platforms? Which ones?
4. What about Facebook? What do you think about it?
5. Have you ever had a Facebook account?
6. What was the good thing about Facebook?
7. What happened to quit using Facebook? Can you tell a story?
8. Is there any other reason you would like to share, that you think you have not shared so far?
9. Can you rank the negatives of Facebook that made you quit it from the major to the less important?
10. Do you, by any chance, have plans to join Facebook again in the future?
11. Do you know others who do not use Facebook?