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The influence of online consumer reviews on purchasing intent

Molise Moloi

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in Strategic Marketing.

Wits Business School

Johannesburg

2016

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of social platforms in the digital and online space has given voice to millions of social media users and carved careers otherwise unheard of a few years ago, in the form of expert technology reviewers who enjoy mass online following and sponsorship from brands seeking to leverage millions of followers who log in daily. Social media has enabled access to information otherwise previously restricted to user guides and product manuals.

Using the theory of planned behaviour, the study examines the effect that online consumer reviews have on product knowledge, social influence, trust, source credibility, brand image and purchase intent among urban South Africans falling in the Generation Y cohort. The methodology involved a self-administered online questionnaire adapted from past studies. A total of 255 questionnaires were collected from the identified sample. The study tested ten hypotheses using Structural Equation Modelling along with SPSS 22 software used for descriptive statistics and IBM Amos 22. Results indicate that all ten hypotheses have significant influence on purchase intent. All hypotheses displayed equally significant relationships per testing as findings revealed that online consumer reviews have a positive effect on product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility and brand image. Findings also revealed a significant relationship between product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility, brand image, and purchase intent. The study contributes to the literature and theoretical knowledge on online consumer reviews in the local South African context, and can be applied to similar developing markets.

The theoretical implications in the study contributes to both limited, and existing research, literature, and knowledge on the effects that online consumer reviews have on the purchase intent of South African consumers. The study broadens knowledge in the ever growing influence of online consumer reviews and the significant theoretical contributions of the study will benefit academia and scholars. Managerial implications highlight that managers cannot afford to ignore the influence of online consumer reviews on intent to purchase, and that even though these reviews are not under the direct influence of organisations, marketers can indirectly influence these by ensuring quality products that meet both the brand and product promises. Recommendations,

limitations of the study, and future research on the subject of online consumer reviews are also discussed.

Keywords: Online consumer reviews, social influence, brand image, product knowledge, purchase intent, source credibility

DECLARATION

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

Molise Moloi

Signed at…….

On the……day of……..20……

DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to my parents who willed me on to further my studies—my father, Mr Sidwell Mokete Moloi, my mother, Mrs Zodwa Ellen Moloi—I am the man that I am because of your teachings, guidance and love. To my sisters, Mabale Moloi, my late sister, Ntaoleng Moloi, thank you for the inspiration, belief and love. To my beloved children who inspired me to further my education, Kabelo Khalipi Moloi and Kamohelo Libabatso Moloi. All that I do, I do for you.

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1 CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of online consumer reviews on purchasing intent of electronic computing devices among Generation Y (Gen Y) shoppers in South Africa. In South Africa, Internet access is almost universal among urban youth, with only 23% not owning a mobile phone (Kreutzer, 2009). There has been insufficient research devoted to the impact on Gen Y's social media use on its members' psychological and physical well-being, social identity, and market-related behaviours on online and offline platforms including purchasing and consumption, word-of-mouth communication, and brand and user community building (Bolton et al., 2013). With firms seeking to understand and capitalise on Gen Y's use of social media, pertinent questions include the following: do Gen Y customers who recommend or denigrate a brand on social media actually buy or reject the brand; and what are the real-time and long-term influences of word-of-mouth generated by Gen Y on their product experiences and other members' purchase behaviour?

1.2 Context of the study

Online shopping has come a long way since its advent in the mid-90s with Pizza Hut leading the charge when they launched their first online pizza shop in 1994. Since those early days of what was termed electronic commerce, the standout consumer benefits of online shopping are listed as the ability to view one's past transaction history and receive personalised and relevant advertisements; and conversely, the benefits to sellers are the ability to obtain accurate data about consumers' shopping behaviour (Zhang, Chen, Cheng, Liang, Jiang, & Zhao, 2012). Since the Internet exploded onto the scene and became a way of life for millions of people, marketing has taken great advantage of it as a business medium and marketers saw the Web from the onset as the enabler of housing various kinds of products and services, this at a time when people were browsing the Internet mainly for information rather than shopping online (Teo, 2002).

One of the early challenges faced by marketers and retailers was the ease with which customers could leave a Website as compared to walking out of a store while being served and waited on by store personnel (Cui, Lui, & Guo, 2012). A review of the challenges prevalent on both the side of consumers and of marketers pointed to trepidation from both sides towards the adoption of online shopping. The benefit to physical shopping is the ability to see, touch and feel products before committing to a purchase, and the benefit for marketers and retailers is the ability to influence sales, as well as to leverage opportunities to cross-sell (Cui, Lui, & Guo, 2012).

As an emerging market, Internet penetration in South Africa lags behind that of established markets — as witnessed by low penetration of household Internet access (10.10%) and fixed broadband penetration (1.48%) (Oyedemi, 2012). Although Internet access is publically available in South Africa, the low penetration levels permeate across sectors with accessibility in universities at only 5% in 2011 (Afrographique, 2011; Muller, 2011; RIA, 2011).

According to Gretzel and Yoo (2008), consumer-generated media has become a critical component of corporate publicity in all industry sectors, whether positive or negative. Gretzel and Yoo (2008) go on to highlight the importance of Trip Advisor™ as enabling travellers to comment on the products and services that they experience, and how these consumer-generated reviews now routinely inform and influence consumers' travel purchase decisions on an individual level. The growth in online consumer reviews (OCRs) is largely motivated by interest from consumers (Schindler & Bickart, 2012). Access to online customer reviews has spread and become easy, leading some observers to suggest that other guarantees of product quality, and brand performance would lose much of their relevance in the interactive marketing environment (Chen, 2001).

More consumers have gained access to social media and online customer review sites since. Ho-Dac, Carson, and Moore (2013) offer the suggestion that customers will overlook marketer-led signals and messaging about brands, instead relying on unfiltered word-of-mouth from other consumers. Information contained in online consumer reviews is generally considered to be highly credible with a lot of influence because it does not originate with the company (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Therefore,

it is not impossible that consumers may use online consumer reviews to find the products that they desire, in spite of the brand name.

Through the rise of consumer-generated OCRs, it is possible to examine the way in which the content and style of word-of-mouth messages contribute to their helpfulness in enabling consumers to make purchasing decisions that they can trust (Schindler & Bickart, 2012). OCRs increasingly supplement expert opinion and views, as well as social networks when it comes to informing consumers about product attributes and quality; however there is limited empirical evidence linking digital word-of-mouth to purchasing decisions (Anderson & Magruder, 2012). The internet facilitates far-reaching social learning, and this is made possible through the reduced cost of gathering and distributing information (Anderson & Magruder, 2012). Anderson and Magruder (2012) go on to highlight the reach of online consumer reviews to large audiences, including global audiences. In experiments carried out to test the importance of consumer reviews for judging the trustworthiness of an online store; and as a seal of assurance; it emerged that consumer reviews were the strongest predictors of trustworthiness judgements (Utz, Kerkhof & van den Bos, 2012). The ability to judge the trustworthiness of a specific online store or environment is important to even consumers who shop online frequently and not just novices or ad hoc shoppers. Former trust models prioritised perceptions of the company, of company websites, and consumer characteristics as predictors of the trust that consumers have in online stores (McKnight et al., 2002).

In South Africa, consumers are often unaware of who the vendor is behind a particular service; making it difficult to point out a party to trust (Joubert & Van Belle, 2013). Morgan and Hunt (1994) define trust "as existing when one party has confidence in the exchange partner's reliability and integrity." Trust is "the expectations held by the consumer that the service provider is dependable and can be relied on to deliver on its promises" (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002, p. 17). Furthermore, it is highlighted that Sub-Saharan Africa is sparsely wired and with the advent of internet penetration in South Africa, local consumers with internet access are seen to be engaging in the e-commerce space and utilising the platforms available to them. Joubert and Van Belle (2013) highlight South Africans' positive attitude to mobile devices and services as evidenced by extremely high penetration of mobile phones.

The study commences with a review of current literature on online consumer reviews to determine the research hypothesis. The research methodology is also presented, and analyses discussed. Thereafter results are stated, followed by the discussion and conclusion to the research question. The study ends with limitations and a proposal of recommendations for future research.

1.3 Problem statement

Not enough research has been conducted on Gen Y's use of social media to understand their market-related behaviour, both online and offline—including purchasing and consumption, word-of-mouth communication, brand, and the building of user communities (Bolton et al., 2013). Close, Kukar-Kinney and Benusa (2012) highlight the growing need to understand the processes around online shopping, as well as the variables that have an impact on consumer decision-making. This need is brought on by an increase in the number of online shoppers, and the increased revenues seen in the online shopping space; as well as the shift from niche to mass marketplace in first world countries. A sufficient number of studies around this topic have been conducted on a global scale, with very few, if any, conducted in the technology industry in a South African context.

As OCRs increase in popularity, trying to understand the believability of them has drawn increased attention from both academics, and marketing practitioners (Cheung, Sia & Kuan, 2012), word-of-mouth communication and OCRs have become a crucial and essential source of product-related information and change the way in which consumers search for information needed to inform their purchase decisions. Sufficient studies show that OCRs can shape the attitudes of consumers, as well as affect their purchase decisions. There is incentive for retailers to provide OCRs to consumers, to help them make better decisions (Cheung, Sia & Kuan, 2012).

OCRs could, in principle, improve the ability of consumers to evaluate products and services (Mayzlin, Dover, & Chevalier, 2012), however, it is the authenticity of online consumer reviews that remain a concern—partly due to the generation of positive reviews by marketers and companies for their products, and negative reviews of competitors' products. Mayzlin at al. (2012) list the following ways in which suppliers

and marketers can generate user reviews, such as through the creation of a fictitious user profile, which only requires an email address; or by paying reviewers to post fake and favourable reviews.

Many academic studies have reviewed the effectiveness of positive online consumer reviews communication by examining the process by which OCRs influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Cheung & Lee, 2012); however there is a feeling that consumers' motives to write online reviews have not been as openly and widely explored. Wang et al. (2004) state that the first encounter with a stimulus such as information gleaned from a website, generally initiates trust without direct experiential evidence of either the credibility or integrity of the trustee. Trust is tested in the tourism and hospitality sector and is deemed to be primarily cue-based (Wang et al., 2004). As far as information processing goes, the heuristic-systematic theory of information processing (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012) provides a useful dimension to understanding persuasion of consumer decisions in the context of eWOM and OCRs for tourism accommodation. This study tests the persuasiveness of OCRs in the consumer electronics sector, products with a higher economic value and extended usefulness to consumers.

Moloney (2015) cites a three year gap between the launch of online giant Amazon in the United States, and the South African launch of Kalahari.net as highlighting a lag in e-commerce initiation and adoption in the South Africa retail industry. Korea ranks number one in terms of OECD's statistics on home internet penetration with a reading of over 80.6% of homes having access to the internet. Two thirds of Koreans with Internet access are online shoppers (Kim, Chung & Lee, 2011). The South African landscape is in stark contrast to Korea's with very low Internet access and online shopping activity. The two contrasted countries have contrasting realities and levels of adoption for online shopping and as a consequence, participation in OCRs.

The intended outcome of this study is to explore and examine the extent of OCRs and their effect on the purchasing intent of South African Gen Y consumers, specifically in the procurement of electronic computing devices. Utz (2009) suggests that the very active consumer reviewers dedicate up to an hour writing OCRs on their product and services experiences, and that consumers regard concrete experiences as more informative than product and service ratings.

1.3.1 Main problem

The Gen Y segment, which for the purposes of this study comprises people born between 1981 and 1991, has caught the attention of researchers due to the size of the segment as well as its considerable spending power (Kruger & Saayman, 2015). Gen Y presents a challenge for marketers in that they are very demanding (Brooks, 2005), and they are largely considered the hardest segment to reach via traditional advertising media (Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008). Gen Y's use of social media is changing the marketplace, society, and the workplace; it will in all likelihood lead to new business models and processes that go far beyond the examples discussed in existing research; however many questions remain about how Gen Y's use of social media will influence individual, firm and societal outcomes in different contexts (Bolton et al., 2013). This study explores how Gen Y's review of OCRs influence their intent to purchase electronic computing devices. Firms need practical guidance on how to best incorporate Gen Y social media insights into their strategies and policies in order to effectively use the insights (Bolton et al., 2013).

1.3.2 Sub-problem 1

The first sub-problem explores whether there are relationships between online consumer reviews and product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility and brand image.

H1. Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on product knowledge
H2. Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on trust
H3. Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on social influence
H4. Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on source credibility
H5. Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on brand image

1.3.3 Sub-problem 2

To evaluate the highlighted variables to assess which of the variables demonstrates the strongest relationship with the purchasing intent of South African consumers of electronic computing devices as informed by online consumer reviews (OCRs).

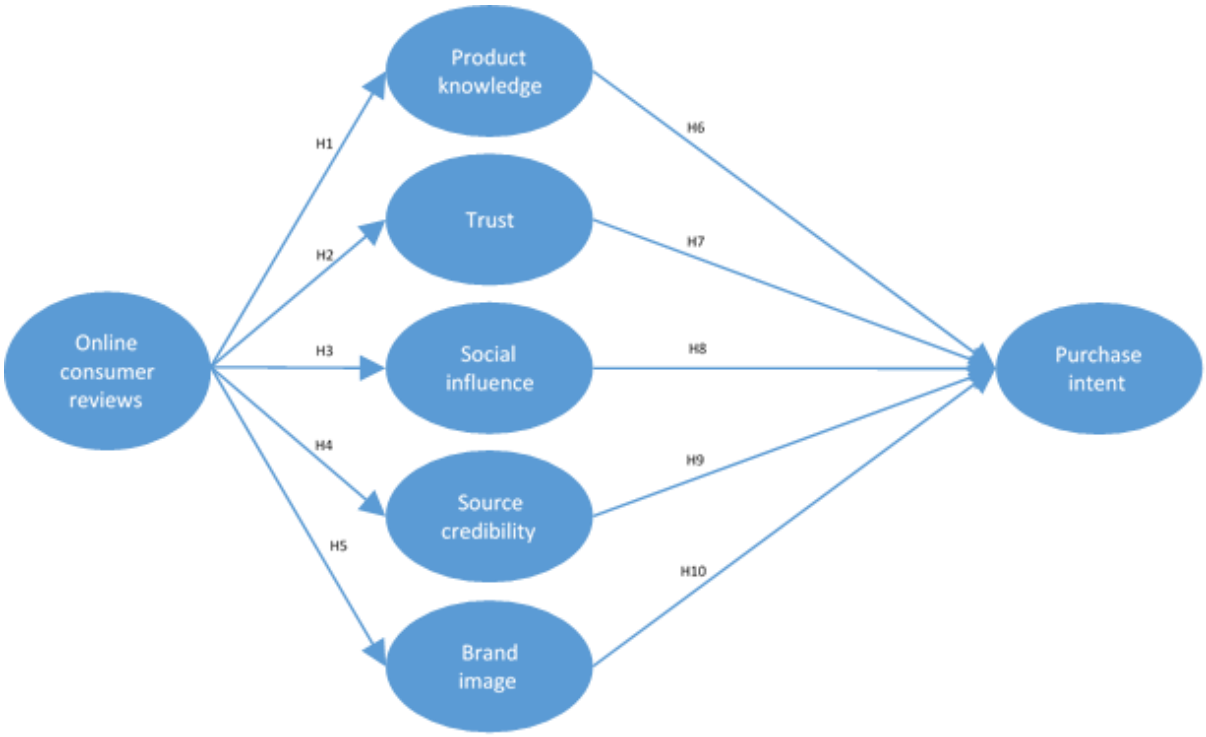


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

1.4 Significance of the study

This study aims to positively contribute to the literature and knowledge pool of consumer purchase behaviour in the electronic computing devices segment by the South African Gen Y cohort. A number of academic studies have looked at the effectiveness of positive electronic consumer reviews communication by examining the process by which it influences how consumers make purchasing decisions (Cheung & Lee, 2012). Furthermore Cheung and Lee (2012) go on to highlight the extent and reach of traditional word-of-mouth communication into electronic media platforms, such as, online discussion forums, news-groups, blogs, review sites, electronic bulletin boards and social networking sites. This penetration has been brought on by the advent of Internet technologies.

When one considers the recent prominence of OCRs in informing online purchasing intent, the researcher believes that it is imperative to understand the associated components and variables linked to purchasing intent, and the relationship that these components and variables hold with South African Gen Y consumers' intent to choose one electronic computing device over another.

This study further provides an academic point of view on the relationship between the highlighted constructs of product knowledge, trust, social influence, consumer reviews, and brand image, and how they relate to purchasing decision making.

The hypothesis is that the findings of the study will add great value to the field of marketing in South Africa by particularly helping marketers understand how user testament posted online in the form of OCRs, influences other shoppers. The study could potentially shed light on modern-day consumer behaviour drivers in the form of OCRs, and how marketers can utilise these to augment their marketing efforts. Sweeney, Soutar and Mazzarol (2012) cite Plummer (2007), McDonnel (2005) and Nielsen (2007) who stated that in a sea of product information, modern consumers have over time become less attentive to the traditional methods of marketing and advertising. Online shopping has gone a long way towards replacing the brick and mortar business mode. Online consumer behaviour is described as a "complicated socio-technical phenomenon which involves too many factors" (Moshrefjavadi, Dolatabadi, Nourbakhsh, Poursaeedi, & Asadollahi, 2012).

The research findings help bridge the gap and limited literature in this field in the South African context. The study also helps to better understand the economically active Gen Y's mentalities around OCRs and related influences.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

The study focuses on the South African electronic computing devices industry, specifically in the Gen Y segment. The electronic computing devices industry includes, but is not limited to the mobile devices industry, online banking, and entertainment. The cohort selected for the study was part of a convenient sampling group across two organisations. However random selection was applied in compiling the cohort.

1.6 Definition of terms

1.6.1 Trust

Trust is generally initiated when a person first encounters a stimulus, for example, information accessed through a website without first-hand experience or evidence of either the integrity, or the credibility of the trustee (Wang et al., 2004).

1.6.2 Product knowledge

As stated by Chandrasegaran, Ramani, Sriram, Horváth, Bernard, Harik, & Gao (2013) the matter of 'what is knowledge' can take on a variety of answers as there are various meanings of the term 'product knowledge,' that are dependent on the context in which it is used. Knowledge is described as the experience, values, and concepts, beliefs that can be shared and communicated with others (Sainter et al., 2000).

1.6.3 Social influence

Social influence is described by Venkatesh et al. (2013) as the degree to which individuals perceive that important others believe they should use a new system. The following three processes affect social influence theory, beliefs, individuals' attitudes and behaviour: identification; compliance; and internalisation (Kelman, 1958).

1.6.4 Online consumer reviews

When compared to product descriptions generated by vendors, OCRs are user-oriented and describe products in terms of different usage scenarios, and assess it from the perspective of the user (Yu, Duan & Cao, 2013).

1.6.5 Brand image

Aghekyan-Simonian et al. (2012) identified brand image as an important antecedent that directly influences price and online purchasing intentions. Brand image is the picture of value, or benefit to the consumer, not only the physical picture, but the benefit or value of the product, because product quality can influence consumers' purchasing decision (Lovelock, 2005). Brand image is one of the most important parts of products and can be viewed as additional value to the product — whether tangible or intangible; image being the way the public actually perceives products (Kotler et al., 2009).

1.7 Assumptions

Various assumptions that are important in establishing a baseline for this study are listed below as follows:

- The findings of the study could be generalised in another sector or category in South Africa
- It is assumed that feedback by Generation Y respondents was representative of the South African online shopper community
- It is assumed that respondents would have engaged in online shopping on at least one occasion
- The respondents would not be biased in their responses as they would be answering questions across service providers and brands that they use.

This study addresses both theoretical and empirical objectives related to OCRs. The comprehensive literature review helps with addressing the theoretical objectives of the study, and a research investigation process helps address the empirical objectives relating to the study.

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review serves as a pragmatic and scholarly review of the key areas of significance to the study. It serves as an empirical review of the listed variables under study: product knowledge, trust, social influence, consumer reviews, and web design. The literature review discusses the theories on which the study is anchored under online purchasing intent, which serves as the outcome variable.

The goal of the literature review is to discuss the relationship between the variables affecting attitudes towards online consumer reviews, and consumers' intent to purchase. The literature review in addition, discusses the correlation between product knowledge, trust, social influence, consumer reviews, and source credibility, brand image, and purchasing intent with a view to highlighting those variables that hold the strongest relationship. The literature review goes on to review and summarise the key learnings acquired in this area in different geographies and sectors, to help hypothesise the effects of these select variables on South African consumers' online shopping behaviour.

In light of the growth and penetration of the Internet and e-commerce, online consumer reviews have become an important source of information as they assist consumers to make informed purchase decisions (Spanos, Vartanian, Herman & Polivy, 2015).

The theory of planned behaviour (TBP) is a model developed by social psychologists and has been widely applied to the understanding of a variety of behaviours (Armitage & Conner, 2001). TPB can essentially be classified as the extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TA) that looks at measures that control belief, and perceived behavioural control (Sentosa & Mat, 2012). TBP outlines the factors which determine an individual's decision to adopt and follow a particular behaviour, it proposes that the proximal determinants of behaviour are intention to engage in a certain behaviour with perceptions of control in said behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

In a review of research examining the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, in which Wicker (1969) concluded that attitudes probably do not predict consumer behaviour, social psychologists have sought to improve the predictive power of consumer attitudes. With progress in this area, the main approach moved to developing integrated models of behaviour, which included additional determinants of behaviour such as social norms and intention (Olson & Zanna, 1993). The Theory of Reasoned Action is arguably the most widely researched of the models of planned behaviour, of which the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which includes measures of control belief and perceived behavioural control (see Fig. 1) is essentially an extension (Ajzen, 1991).

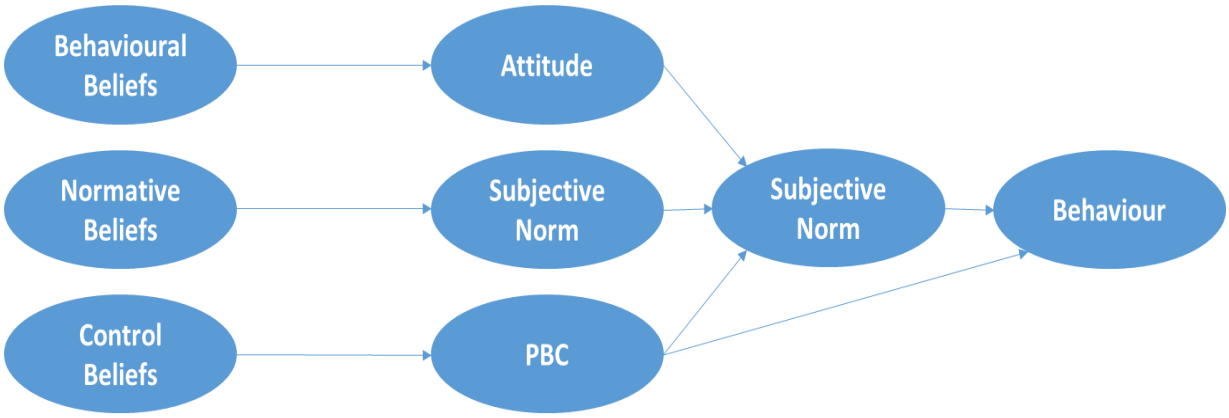


Figure 2.1: The theory of planned behaviour (Christopher &and Mark, 2001)

Sentosa and Mat (2012) use the theory of planned behaviour along with the technology acceptance model (TAM) in a study about internet purchasing using structural equation modelling. TPB has been the theoretical basis for some 610 studies published in the PsycINFO database, and 222 studies published in the Medline database from 1985 to 2004, and has been the basis for researchers' information source around measurement strategies to consider prior to constructing questionnaires to investigate their topics of interest (Francis, Eccles, Johnston, Walker, Grimshaw, Foy & Bonetti, 2004).

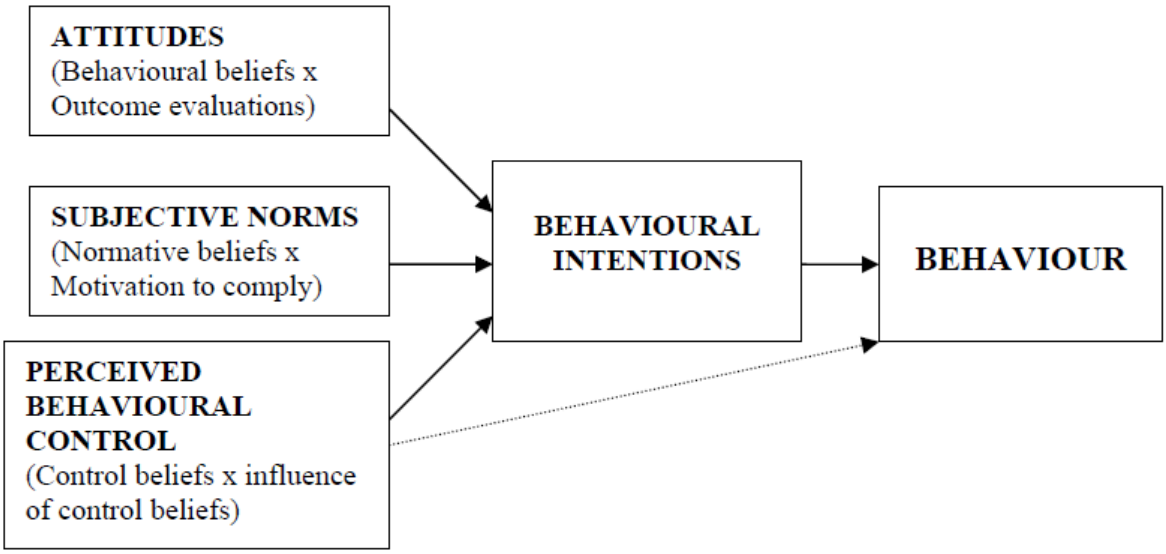


Figure 2.2. The theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)

TPB proposes a model on how human actions are guided and predicts the occurrence of a specific behaviour provided that said behaviour is intentional (Ajzen, 1991). TPB is applied in this study to design strategies that will be helpful to people adopting positive and healthy behaviours (Francis et al., 2004). TPBs highlight the predictive power of attitudes towards online consumer reviews and how they shape and inform purchasing intent based on the consideration of the online consumer behaviour.

2.2 Online consumer reviews and product knowledge

Product knowledge is one of several diverse factors that assist in profiling consumer behaviour, profiles vary from simple routines in personal purchase, to purchases involving complex decision making and requiring information and product knowledge (Lee, 2014). Product knowledge, as described by Mothersbaugh (1994), divides product knowledge into the following two types: objective knowledge relating to knowledge in the long-term memories of consumers; and subjective knowledge relating to the self-perception of consumers on how much they know about a product. Product knowledge has been studied in various types of social science research and is denoted as general knowledge that consumers have information about the functional characteristics of products or brands (Rezvani et al., 2012). Wood and Lynch (2002, p. 416) define consumer product knowledge as “the amount of domain-specific knowledge about a product class that is stored in memory.”

Consumer knowledge can be regarded as a multi-dimensional concept where various types of product-related experiences lead to different dimensions of knowledge which have different effects on how consumers evaluate and choose products (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). The statement suggests that product knowledge aids the choice of products or services, more so in the intangible space of online shopping for services. In a comparison between product knowledge and brand familiarity in online shopping, Nepomuceno, Laroche and Richard (2014) show that product knowledge compensates the effects of privacy and security concerns more than brand familiarity and highlights the importance for practitioners to work on increasing consumers' product knowledge in order to reduce the Public Relations of buying online. Prior research suggests that the level of consumer product knowledge plays a crucial role in the consumer inference process when responding to persuasion (Kirmani & Campbell, 2004). The more knowledgeable consumers are more likely to be direct and efficient in using promotional information to achieve relevant processing goals (i.e. trustworthiness, purchase intentions); while the less knowledgeable consumers are more likely to use such information primarily to build their product knowledge base (Hong & Sternthal, 2010).

Hobday, et al. (2005) talk about product system integrators developing cutting edge products in the networks of specialist firms, and them acting as the knowledge integrator by bringing together relevant partners and choosing where and how they will collaborate. Brusoni and Prencipe (2011) go on to explain how successful knowledge integration is based on a firm's ability to access or own diverse technological and scientific disciplines—and say that these are bodies of understanding or knowledge and practices that underpin a firm's product design and manufacturing. In a study in the financial services sector, the intangibility and opacity of products, and the wide variety thereof, are suggested to make decision making complex and daunting and lead to consumers with varying product knowledge bases to seek trustworthy financial counsel prior to making decisions (DeCarlo, Laczniak & Leigh, 2013). It could then be inferred that consumers in the electronic computing devices sector may also require sources of reliable information to call on when it comes to making purchasing decisions. According to Bearden et al. (1989), consumers with lower product knowledge are less sophisticated in their ability to interpret product and related persuasion information. It is highly likely that less

knowledgeable consumers may focus a lot of their effort on accumulating the missing product knowledge in situations that are less familiar to them (Hong & Sternthal, 2010).

The employment of product strategies does more than just reveal the multifaceted nature of product knowledge as a resource and tool for establishing a competitive advantage, but it benefits proactive and focused business above those that are reactionary in nature (McGuinness & Hutchinson, 2013). It has been proven in social psychology studies examining voting behaviour, that knowledge moderates the attitude-behaviour relationship (Davidson et al., 1985). Other researchers link knowledge to other strength variables i.e. how much a consumer thinks he knows about an alternative, what is called 'subjective knowledge', may be related to how confidently they hold their attitude (Brucks, 1985). As a matter of fact, research studies in decision making indicate that judgements based on more perceived knowledge are made with greater confidence (Peterson & Pitz, 1988). This suggests that the product attributes that are based on subjective knowledge, regardless of valence, should be held with great confidence levels and should be better predictors of behaviour than those attitudes based on less subjective knowledge (Berger, Ratchford & Haines, 1994).

It is hypothesised that:

$\boldsymbol{H_{10}}$ *There is a positive relationship between online consumer reviews and product knowledge*

$\boldsymbol{H_{1A}}$ *There is a negative relationship between online consumer reviews and product knowledge*

2.3 Online consumer reviews and trust

Western scholars began researching trust in the 1950s (Luo & Hu, 2014). Trust has, for a long time, been recognised as a critical success factor in e-commerce, and much research has been conducted on trust (Gefen & Straub, 2004). Mayer at al., (1995, p. 712) define trust as *"the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party."* Researchers, upon agreeing that that trust is multidimensional, cite three dimensions of trust as ability, benevolence, and integrity (Gefen & Straub, 2004); and go on to define ability as the skills or competencies that allow one to be perceived competent in a specific discipline or area, benevolence as the care for, and good deed by the trustee toward the trustor, and finally, integrity, as the expectation that the trustee will act in accordance with socially acceptable norms and principles that are acceptable to the trustor.

Trust has been known to reduce risk and conflict through the creation of goodwill that secures relationships while also strengthening satisfaction and the commitment of partners in exchanges (Nielsen, 2011). General management literature sees trust as a governance mechanism and as a result, scholars locate its impact in the relationship's design, and post-formation phases (Kale & Singh, 2009). Trust has been described as being a place between knowledge about a person, and lack of awareness of a person, which enables an hypothesis to be made about a person's behaviour on an individual basis (Simmel, 1975).

Trust has been analysed as so-called 'generalised trust,' which is a component of social capital in a country or nation (Putman, 2000); or from the perspective of inter-organisational relations (Child & Faulkner, 2008). Behavioural trust is a reflection of actions undertaken in the belief that others will reciprocate those same actions and act in the same manner, this constitutes actions resulting from a state of cognitive and affective trust (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

There is a suggestion that trust primarily involves a calculative process (Faulkner, 2000; Williamson, 1993; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), and the referenced group refers to

a calculation of benefits and costs that are connected with adhering to the relationship, versus the breach of an arrangement. Trust can then be looked at as being built through repeatedly making promises, and more importantly, keeping those promises.

Trust can also be built through a process of embeddedness in a social network (Powell, 1990). Czernek and Czakon (2016) conclude that trust is a crucial factor in starting a collaboration, whereas the vast majority of studies of trust in a collaborative setting, view it as a mechanism for governance which is important in the design and post-formation phases of relationships (Kale & Singh, 2009).

In the context of virtual communities, interpersonal trust between couch surfers and couch hosts is viewed as a dynamic process which covers three stages — these being early; middle; and late, whereby initial trust is formed online and at a high level, and then successfully transferred to the offline environment where trust evolves from probable anticipation, to mundane routine trust and finally to ideological trust (Luo & Hu, 2014). To anchor the study in the e-commerce and online shopping space, the study focuses on interpersonal trust, which can be regarded as a substantive or active, personal trait, belief, social structure or behavioural intention (McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

Several approaches to study interpersonal trust include individual trait theory; situational theory; interpersonal relationship theory; and social structure theory (Xue at al., 2009). First, situational perspective conceptualises trust at the situational level and regards trust as a product of situational conditions and as a way to resolve conflict; second, the individual trait theory conceptualises trust at the individual level where it is regarded as a relatively stable psychological trait focusing on individual difference in trust; third, the interpersonal relationship theory conceptualises it at a relational level and regards trust as a product of social interaction with three dimensions, namely cognitive, affective and behavioural; fourth; the social structure theory conceptualises trust at a societal level and considers trust as a social phenomenon based on cultural values or social institutions (Johnson & Grayson, 2005).

Research carried out on trust in the tourism industry is mainly focused on the trust a local community has in institutions such as government, regional, or municipal offices (Nunkoo, 2015).

In an informal survey on trust in virtual communities in China, it emerged that more than 70% of respondents had bought counterfeit products online, which affected their likelihood to make online C2C purchases in future (Sina 2009). Lu , Zhao and Wang (2010) believe that trust is critical to the success of C2C websites.

In the case of couch surfing whereby couch surfers and couch hosts communicate in the virtual space, their communication is based on their real identities which are long-term mental guarantees that stabilise relationships and trust where mutual assistance between couch surfers and couch hosts related to daily life and respective social roles becomes an important contributor to strengthening interpersonal trust (McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

In light of the above evidence, it is important to understand the impact of online consumer reviews on the trust that readers have in information and the source of information, in informing purchasing intent. This study focuses on trust in the members of a virtual community. Trust in the context of virtual communities can be understood as interpersonal trust, as it exists between an individual and members of the community who are strangers (Ridings et al., 2002), and it varies from trust in online systems or stores (Gefen 2000), trust in the online vendor (Gefen et al., 2003b), or trust in online shopping or e-commerce (Lee & Turban 2001). Following a study about trust in virtual communities in the C2C space, Lu, Zhao, and Wang (2010) suggest that trust is the ability of members to be positively affected by familiarity — which is knowledge based; perceived similarity — which is based on characteristics; structural assurances — which are institution based; and trust propensity — which is personality based. The willingness of members to seek information from fellow community members increases where there is trust.

It is stated that whereas the traditional notion of trust is primarily focused on trust in a trading partner, the notion extends to trust in e-business, its infrastructure and the underlying control mechanism — otherwise referred to as technology trust (McCole,

Ramsey & Williams, 2010). Technology trust deals with transaction integrity, confidentiality, authentication and non-repudiation and depends on three factors: the perceived technical competence of the system; the human operator's understanding of underlying characteristics and processes; and the system's perceived performance level (Lee & Turban, 2001). A plethora of studies stress the importance of trust where the Internet is the concerned medium for e-commerce (Eastlick et al., 2006). Trust refers to a positive notion about the dependability and reliability of a person or object (Everard & Galleta, 2006). The more trust a consumer has in a website, the less the perceived online transaction risk — the greater the intention to purchase via that website (Mansour et al., 2014).

It is therefore hypothesised that

$\boldsymbol{H_{20}}$ *There is a positive relationship between online consumer reviews and trust*

$\boldsymbol{H_{2A}}$ *There is a negative relationship between online consumer reviews and trust*

2.4 Online consumer reviews and social influence

It is observed that individuals' adoption of particular technology is not because of their own personal persuasions but because of the views of other (Cheung & Lee, 2009). Social influence has been known to generally occur when an individual's opinions and behaviours are affected by those of others (Aronson, Timothy & Akert, 2010). The three types of social influence are described as compliance — the act of agreeing with others; identification which is the process of being influenced by others in the same social group; and internalisation — which refers to accepting a belief or behaviour based on it being consistent with one's personal value system (Kelman, 1974).

Social science research by Lewis et al. (2012) and Jin et al. (2012) indicates the strong effects that social influence has on an actor's behaviour i.e. how an actor behaves regarding joining a group or buying a product based on the behaviour of their friends. Barley (1990) explored influence among organisations, and studied their social network's impact on the technologies that the organisations employ. Chaouali, Yahia and Souiden (2016) argue that social influence could have a great impact on the behaviour of consumer, particularly those in emerging countries. In a study on the consumption of soft drinks in emerging markets, social influence has been found to

have a strong impact and influence on customers' overall consumption choices (Dholakia & Talukdar, 2004), green products (Kaman, 2008), and luxury products (Shuklar, 2011). In a study on the acknowledgement of social influences on food intake, social influence was found to be a powerful determinant of food intake, the finding of which suggest that people who are more concerned with the social world are more willing to acknowledge being influenced by social factors, and those who are less willing to acknowledge social influences on their food intake may not, in actual fact, be any less influenced by social cues (Spanos, Vartanian, Herman & Polivy, 2015). This failure to acknowledge social influences on behaviour has also been observed in domains outside of eating, such as energy conservation behaviour (Nolan at al., 2008).

For those who do acknowledge social influence, hold perceptions of the appropriateness of social influences (Spanos, et al., 2015). Social connections enable the transmission of judgements, ideas and opinions; this is the phenomenon known as social influence where knowledge transfer between individuals significantly shapes their decisions about acquiring a product (Samadi, Nikolaev & Nagi, 2016). Some research results suggest the convenience of obtaining relevant knowledge and information in daily life about similar social groups (Henke & Petropoulos, 2013).

Identities have been found to exist between similar groups, and in a study about the social and cultural factors influencing the choice of residential location, Huang (2012) intimates that people will choose to live close to the same social groups as them. It is this propensity to be drawn to those deemed to be of the same social groups that this study investigates the context of basing electronic computing devices selection decisions on online consumer reviews.

When social influence is considered in a social network, the dissemination of the desired opinion of the informed agents (which often lack high social power), is harder to reach (AskariSichani & Jalili, 2015).

Hypothesis:

$\boldsymbol{H_{30}}$ *There is a positive relationship between online consumer reviews and social influence*

$\boldsymbol{H_{3A}}$ *There is a negative relationship between online consumer reviews and social influence*

2.5 Online consumer reviews and credibility reviews

Consumers often search for word-of-mouth (WOM) to reduce perceived risks when making a purchase decision, and previous research has presented extensive evidence of the importance of WOM in purchase decision and choice behaviour (Xie, Zhang & Zhang, 2014). The effect of WOM has been further enhanced in the form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the Internet era where consumers make their opinions and views about products easily accessible to other Internet users via the use of message boards, Twitter, online product review websites, or online communities (Litvin, et al., 2008). The role of consumer reviews is described as uniting large numbers of people with similar interests who perceive commonality as well as identification with other members of the group or social community, and feel a sense of duty to the rest of the group as well as to its individual members (Von Hippel, 2005). Firms are continuously seeing Consumer reviews, specifically on online platforms as suited for interactions with customers (Wang, Hsiao, Yang & Hajli, 2015).

The PowerReviews and E-tailing Group's findings confirm that 22% of respondents "always" read consumer reviews before making a purchase, 43% of respondents check consumer ratings and reviews "most of the time", and approximately 68% read at least four reviews prior to committing to a purchase (Kee, 2008). Lee and Youn (2009) found the impact of eWOM to be particularly salient in the case of experience goods, where the quality of goods, such as hotels, is often unknown before it is experienced.

Consumer-provided OCRs are highly dynamic and voluminous and in most cases, they are available free of charge to any organisation that can assign the relatively small resources required to glean the Web (Schneider & Gupta, 2016). OCRs have, over time, become an indispensable tool for consumers and therefore for online retailers

who are looking to attract and retain consumers (Pan & Zhang, 2011). WOM communication is a crucial facilitator of learning and can impact consumer decisions significantly (Leonard-Barton, 1985). Substantial research has been conducted to document the effects of WOM on the way consumers evaluate and adopt products (Van den Bulte & Wuyts, 2007). Researchers have, with the advent of e-commerce, started to investigate the issues related to the attributes of OCRs and their influence on consumer-perceived helpfulness (Pan & Zhang, 2011), consumer choice (Zhao & Xie, 2011), and product sales (Duan, Gu & Whinston, 2008).

Researchers have demonstrated that OCRs increase sales in a number of contexts (Moe & Trusov, 2011). As a consequence, online retailers are keen to understand those dimensions of OCRs that are the most important and influential in consumer decision making—and how businesses can manage the key dimensions to drive business (Jin, Hu & He, 2014), and recent studies of OCR reviews have mainly focused on two key dimensions of OCRs, these being volume—the total number of reviews; and valence—review ratings. In a study on the purchase of music, Dhar and Chang (2009) concluded that there is a positive correlation between future sales of a musical album and the volume of blog posts about that album. In the context of books, there are further indications that improvements in the volume and valence of a book review both lead to increased sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

Most reviews contain more than just numerical ratings of product opinions but also rich textual content or data; collectively, OCRs represent a vast repository of word-of-mouth information that consumers can rely on in their purchase deliberations (Schneider & Gupta, 2016). Studies reveal the value of consumer reviews as providing a range of benefits, including supporting the management of customer relationships (Rapp et al., 2013). The focus for established companies like Honeywell International, Maersk Line, and MySQL around consumer reviews has been on stimulating innovation diffusion and building brand awareness (Parmentier & Mangematin, 2014). Numerous studies have approached the subject on consumer reviews from the sellers' point of view, thereby providing the opportunity to assess the effect of consumer reviews on purchasing intent.

Many of the characteristics of consumer reviews that make them appealing as a form of market research data are feature challenges and limitation, for instance, inherent

sample selection bias because consumers who post OCRs are only a tiny subset those consumer who buy products because they think that they will like them (Schneider & Gupta, 2016). This may be the case with early buyers which implies that reviews will tend to become more negative over time (Li & Hitt, 2008). Studies have reviewed the relevant factors that consumers evaluate in the electronic computing devices sector, including review valence (Duveger, 2013). Online consumer reviews have come to fulfil a very important role as the source of information in the acquisition of a service or booking in the hospitality sector (Ye at al., 2011), and they are used considerably by consumers to inform them of accommodation quality (Filieri & Mcleay, 2014).

This study aims to explore the impact of OCRs on the purchasing intent of South African consumers shopping for electronic computing devices. When one considers the critical influence of OCRs on the hospitality industry, specifically in the hotel segment, OCRs for hotels become a key component of how the hospitality segment manages its service offering (Leung at al., 2013).

It is the advent of Web 2.0 applications that greatly facilitated the creation of consumer reviews and provide virtual environments for members to share ideas and opinions, and to learn more from the knowledge of their peers and to develop relationships with other users through the various social technologies available (Quinton & Harridge, 2010). In an earlier study, Chan and Lee (2004) reported that collaboration with members of consumer reviews who are innovators and early adopters can be beneficial throughout the product development phase. This study tests the influence of online consumer reviews by innovators and early adopters on the purchasing intent of other members of the online community. Characteristics of consumer reviews, such as the digitisation of user-generated content, can have a direct influence on the social behaviour of members, and affect the way in which they collaborate, interact with one another, and share information with one another (Curty & Zhang, 2011). The study assesses how members' purchasing intent is influenced by the information and knowledge shared.

Hippel and von Krogh (2003) argue that in the case of Open Source Software (OSS) consumer reviews, personal learning and the enjoyment from programming are the

main reasons community members choose to participate. In the context of consumer-to-consumer communication (C2C), information derived from C2C plays a crucial role in consumers' purchase decision making process — where consumers once relied on acquaintances at hand to help with making purchase decisions; recent technological advances in information technology (IT) have brought about profound changes in C2C communication (Zhu, Chang & Luo, 2016).

Consumers can now communicate freely and remotely with acquaintances and like-minded strangers in the same online community and with similar interests (Zhu & Chang, 2014). The biggest impact of the technological advances can be observed with mobile devices whereby consumers communicate with one another at any time. Consumers are increasingly using consumer reviews as vehicles for pre-purchase information gathering (Adjei et al., 2010). The question remains on how this information informs and shapes consumer purchasing intent. The information derived from C2C in consumer reviews plays a vital role in both consumers' purchase decision making and marketing strategies (Parmlee & Perkins, 2012).

When consumers purchase experience goods through the Internet, they formulate a quality evaluation based on a combination of product information, personal taste, and recommendations from close acquaintances — the nature of experience goods drive consumers to read previous consumers' reviews to help inform purchase intent as online reviews by product consumers provide information about an item's perceived value (Hu, Liu & Zhang, 2008).

On online review sites, it is expected that when consumers find online reviews are from credible sources, rather than non-credible one — expectancies can be developed regarding the quality of arguments of the reviews (Zhang et al., 2014). Existing literature also shows that the credibility of the source of information or reviews exerts a significant impact on the way that individuals adopt behaviour (Zhang & Watts, 2008).

It is suggested that consumers who receive recommendations from credible sources will more likely select the corresponding products (Senecal & Nantel, 2004).

We therefore hypothesise that:

$\boldsymbol{H_{40}}$ *There is a positive relationship between online consumer reviews and source credibility*

$\boldsymbol{H_{4A}}$*There is a negative relationship between online consumer reviews and source credibility*

2.6 Online consumer reviews and brand image

Brand image is described as the determinant affecting the subjective perceptions of consumers and their consequent behaviours (Ryu et al., 2008) and is the intrinsic cue when consumers are evaluating products and services prior to purchasing (Ziethaml, 1988). Brand image has also been defined as perceptions about a brand as reflected by brand association as held in the memory of consumers (Bang et al., 2000). Dobni and Zinkan (1990) defined brand image as emotional or reasoned perceptions that consumers attach to brands. Keller (1993) inferred that brand image involves the perception of a particular brand as it is reflected by the brand associations held in the memory of a consumer. Aaker (1991) intimated that the strength of brand association, and the link to a brand will be stronger when that link is based on a consumer's experience or exposure to communication about the bran. With the emergence of branding came the adoption of concepts such as brand identity, brand meaning, brand image and brand reputation as organisations and managers alike sought to develop distinctive identities and enhance the reputation of their brands in highly competitive global environment (Hemsley-Brown, Melewar, Nguyen & Wilson, 2016).

Cho et al. (2015) regard brand image as a consumer's feelings and perceptions toward a brand. Esch et al. (2006) consider this an important concept as consumers' product and brand choices are determined based on how they assess brand image. A number of studies have investigated the impact of brand image on consumer behaviour in the services sector (Aghekyan-Simonian, Forsythe, Kwo & Chattaraman, 2012). The hotel brand name and onsite amenities are important intangible cues in shaping and influencing customers' behaviour in the hotel industry (Lien, Wen, Huang & Wu, 2015). Mediating effects of brand image on purchasing intent through trust and value have not been well examined, however brand image was identified as an important

antecedent which directly influenced price and the intention to purchase online in the hotel industry (Aghekyan-Simonian, Forsythe, Kwo & Chattaraman, 2012).

Researchers in the field of marketing have conceptualised brand image in several different ways, these include the representation of tangible and intangible attributes, as well as the benefits of a brand. These researchers' main focus has been on cognitive dimensions, and lesser so, affective dimensions of brand image (Esch et al. 2006). In a fashion context, Landwehr, et al. (2012) highlight the importance of these two dimensions of brand image to shaping and informing how consumers respond to various products. The more favourable the brand image the more positive the consumer attitudes toward the branded product and its attributes (Aghekyan-Simomian, et al., 2012). Brand image helps consumers in recognising their needs and wants with respect to the brand and also distinguishes the brand from those of rivals (Anwar et al., 2011).

Although brand image has been discussed as an important marketing concept since the late 1950s, marketers and researchers still have not reached consensus regarding how brand image was conceptualised and its measurement (Park & Rabolt, 2009). According to Esch, et al. (2006) recent literature emphasises the incorporation of an emotional dimension with the cognitive dimension of brand image. The Internet provides information in abundance to learn about brand image perception and representation (Stepchenkova, Kirilenko & Morrison, 2009). In order to measure brand image, a destination is required to be managed as a brand and to obtain a unique identity — as brand identity serves as the basis for comparison against identified destinations that serves multiple roles to various stakeholders (Chen, 2010).

In a study on online purchase intentions for apparel products, results showed that brand image had a positive influence on purchasing intentions through the reduction of perceived risk (Aghekyan-Simomian et al., 2012). A good brand image serves to improve a consumer's trust through diminishing the risk of purchase, and brand image representation clearly differs among distinct online information sources (Chen, 2010). Thus one infers that trust has a mediating effects on the relationship between brand image and a willingness to purchase.

This leads to the hypothesis:

$\boldsymbol{H_{50}}$ *There is a positive relationship between online consumer reviews and brand image*

$\boldsymbol{H_{5A}}$ *There is a negative relationship between online consumer reviews and brand image*

2.7 Online consumer reviews and purchase intention

Purchase intention is described as a common measure of effectiveness which is often used to anticipate response behaviour (Li, Daugherty & Biocca, 2002). Purchase intention is described as a consumer's objective intention and aim toward a certain product (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2015). It has also been described as a consumer's conscious intention or plan to make the effort to purchase a product (Spears & Singh, 2004). In the context of in-app purchases and a study on purchasing intent for mobile games, results revealed that loyalty to the product has a significance influence on a consumer's intention to make an in-app purchase, but was observed not to have as much influence on non-paying players/consumers (Hsiao & Chen, 2016).

In a report, Moskowitz, et al. (2008) argue that sensory analysts do not typically use purchase intent questions because they require that participants make decisions that go beyond sensory properties, they nevertheless highlight that purchase intent is of critical importance to organisations and mainly marketers—who should include it in consumer tests. They note how a question on purchase intent will provide little insight not provided in a liking question unless it is accompanied by the knowledge that they may receive at the point of purchase. In the context of online shopping, purchase intention focuses on consumers' willingness and intention to buy a certain product (Pavlou, 2003). Lu et al., (2014) suggest that purchase intention can be viewed as a consumers' willingness to purchase a given product in a specific situation or at a specific time, and that consumers that are willing to believe the content of a sponsored recommendation are more likely to form a purchase intention regarding the proposed product by the blogger.

A survey by Chen and Sethi (2007) of the Chinese middle class highlights the extent to which consumers intend purchasing luxury goods despite a lack of affordability, this as a symbol of a successful life and displaying good taste. They highlight how consumers rarely perceive the acquisition of luxury items as a waste of money or as

being superficial. Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) describe involvement in a fashion context as the degree to which a consumer considers a particular acquisition or purchase decision and perceives it to be essential to him/herself; the justification of purchase intent. Finley et al. (2002) refer to attitude towards conducting a particular behaviour as being viewed as an assessment of the degree or extent to which people like or favour performing the behaviour.

Fitzmaurice (2005), Pavlou and Fygenson (2006), Smith et al. (2008) all posit, in numerous empirical studies, the positive relationship between purchase intent and attitude as having received support across many different services and products. In a study related to fashion, Bellman, et al. (2009) found that women's intentions to purchase fashion accessories are affected by their attitudes towards acquiring or purchasing these accessories. Zhang and Kim (2013) posit in their study, that brand consciousness plays a significant role in predicting the attitudes of Chinese consumers towards purchasing luxury fashion goods, the finding of which is consistent with research results which indicated Chinese consumers' strong brand consciousness towards established and famous international brands.

Zhu, et al. (2016) refer to there being many factors involved in effectively motivating users' peer-influence on purchasing intent via social media, these include different users' interests and preferences, different social networking platforms and different goods' attributes. They highlight identifying those that are key from the complicated ones as the first important problem. Bonchi, et al. (2010) consider the basic goal or social marketing is to motivate followers to buy goods and/or services by means of peer influence behaviour between friends. Narayanam and Nanavati (2012) posit that in the practice of social marketing, the general belief is that the key lies in triggering or encouraging users with high influence and many followers, such as experts, critics and stars.

The following hypotheses are proposed: *The impact of product knowledge, trust, social influence, online consumer reviews and brand image towards an online consumer review that is viewed as credible on consumer purchase intention is significantly positive.*

$\boldsymbol{H_{60}}$ *There is a positive relationship between product knowledge and purchase intent*

$\boldsymbol{H_{6A}}$ *There is a negative relationship between product knowledge and purchase intent*

$\boldsymbol{H_{70}}$ *Trust has a positive effect on purchase intent*

$\boldsymbol{H_{7A}}$ *Trust has a negative effect on purchase intent*

$\boldsymbol{H_{80}}$ *Social influence has a positive effect on purchase intent*

$\boldsymbol{H_{8A}}$ *Social influence has a negative effect on purchase intent*

$\boldsymbol{H_{90}}$ *Source credibility has a positive effect on purchase intent*

$\boldsymbol{H_{9A}}$ *Source credibility has a negative effect on purchase intent*

$\boldsymbol{H_{100}}$ *Brand image has a positive effect on purchase intention*

$\boldsymbol{H_{10A}}$ *Brand image has a negative effect on purchase intention*

2.8 Conceptual model and hypothesis development

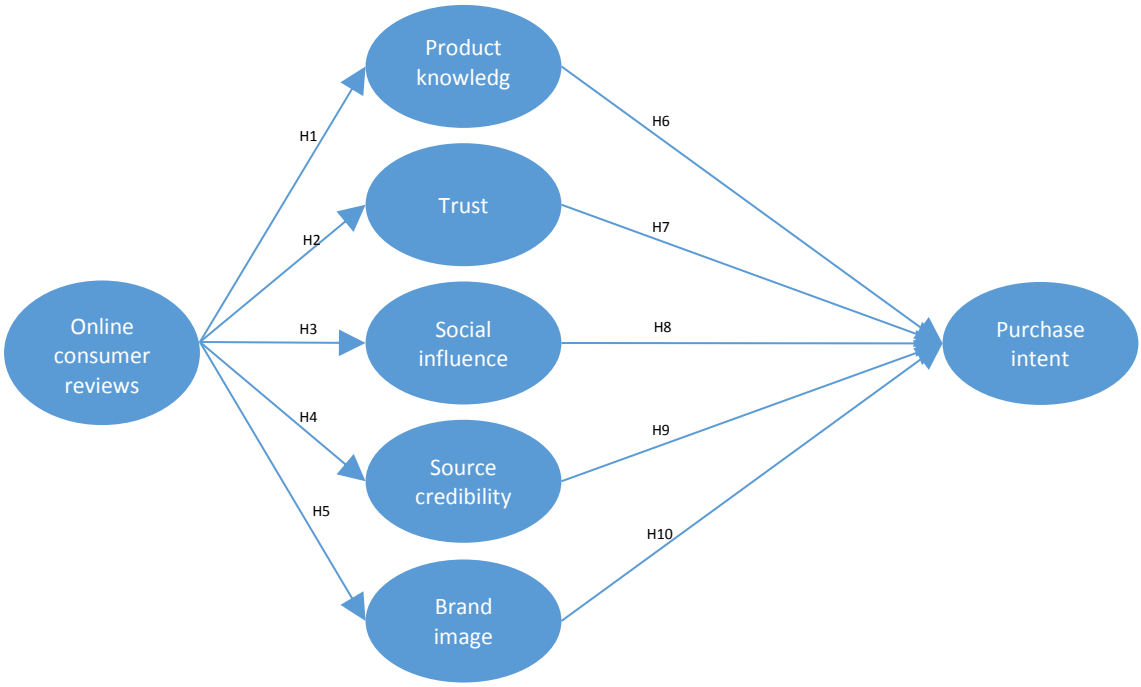


Figure 2.3: A conceptual model of the effects of online consumer reviews, product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility, and brand image on purchase intent

2.9 Conclusion of Literature Review

The above discussion in the literature review points to the conclusion that the collective factors of product knowledge; trust; social influence; source credibility; brand image; and consumer reviews seem to influence shoppers' purchasing intent. The above list is by no means the entire universe of factors affecting purchasing behaviour informed by online consumer reviews. The above factors are highlighted and prioritised due to their relevance and suitability to the South African landscape and context as a developing country with a different e-commerce reality than developed countries.

This study tests the aforesaid statement which aligns to the overall hypotheses. It would furthermore be informative to evaluate the above-mentioned factors and their influence South Africans' online shopping behaviour.

3 CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter covers the following sections: 1) an introduction; 2) the research paradigm; 3) research design; 4) population and the sampling frame; 5) research instrument; 6) procedure for data collection; 7) data analysis; 8) limitations of the study; 9) validity and path modelling and 10) concluding remarks.

3.1 Introduction

With the review of current literature, the author has come to understand online consumer reviews and their impact on purchasing intent, looking at product knowledge, trust, social influence, consumer reviews, source credibility and brand image in the context of online shopping. It is clear that the effect of these constructs on, and their relationship with, online shopping behaviour warrant further research.

Chapter 3 presents the rationale for the approach taken for the research, discussed and justified on the following hypotheses presented in question form.

The research methodology and approach, as addressed in this chapter, is to outline the research procedure used to address the objectives, as well as the hypothesis as outlined. The highlighted research method is used for the sampling design, research tool design and data collection. Quantitative research is the preferred research method for the study. It is supported by empirical evidence tabled for scholarly evaluation. Quantitative research has been chosen as it allows the researcher to reliably test objective theories by testing and examining relationships between the highlighted variables (Creswell, 2009). It is crucial that the highlighted variables are also measurable on instruments in order to ensure the analysis of numbered data through the use of statistical procedures (Creswell, 2009).

3.2 Research paradigm

The purpose of the study is to explore the effects of OCRs on consumers' purchasing intent for electronic computing devices. In order to measure the effect of OCRs the study needs to be based on set scenarios suitable to the related environment of online shopping for electronic appliances. It is hoped that this is the ideal research method for collecting data and measuring the effects of OCRs. The choice of an experimental design is because it consists of carefully devised and executed data collection plans and analysis which permits the inference of causation (Keppel & Wickens, 2004).

This particular research process starts with specific claims which ar refined or abandoned for other claims that strongly warrant it. Creswell (2013) intimates that most quantitative research in fact, starts with the test of a theory. A quantitative approach, otherwise known as positivism, was used for this study as positivism works on the premise that the social world can be viewed objectively and studied effectively with little or no interference, specifically with the objective to obtain results that can be applied to the general population and situations.

In their study on functional regression for output prediction, Nguyen and Peraire (2016) used both optimal and sequential experimental design as they played a collaborative role in their approach where optimal design was used only once to provide an optimal training set, and sequential design performed several times to choose the next training input where their prediction was not accurate enough. Factorial design is another experimental design in which two or more treatments get administered simultaneously such that every level of a variable occurs with the level of other variables (Ellsworth, et al., 1990).

The basic principle of experimental design is to carry out experiments so that the "effects of independent variables can be evaluated" (Ellsworth, et al., 1990). The aim is to manipulate the independent variable(s) in order to be able to measure the dependent variable — and to integrate the two in a situational context. In this study, respondents are tested on familiar brands. In a study on an experimental examination of the time-variant effects of online consumer reviews, Jin, Hu and He (2014) used experimental conditions to test the perceived uniqueness of review content and how

varied they are across the experimental conditions used. The outcome was that participants were able to recall the time of reviews posted at the end of the experiment, which suggests that they focused their attention on the posting dates of reviews.

3.3 Research design

Research design is “the recipe for carrying out the project” (Hair, et al., 2007). With this principle in mind, it becomes imperative that the researcher chooses a design that is most suited to, and provides relevant information on, the research proposition, the underlying objective being to complete the research process in an efficient and accurate manner.

Research design is commonly partitioned into qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research includes approaches such as semiotic analysis of texts, and participant observation (Spiggle, 1994). The quantitative methodology, on the other hand, seeks to effectively identify the measure and prioritise the thousands of elements that impact an action or decision (Gurley, Lin & Ballou, 2005). Effectively, quantitative research addresses research objectives through the use of empirical assessments that involve numerical measurement and analysis approaches, (Zikmund & Babin 2007) and applies a form of statistical analysis (Malhotra, 2007). Hair et al. (2007) list three types of research designs that exist: *exploratory research* which is used in instances where there is little information about the problem or opportunity. Its importance is in revealing patterns, themes, ideas and relationships which can be observed, analysed and studied. *Descriptive research* aims to correlate data which describes the characteristics of the topic of interest in the research. Cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses can be undertaken to describe business elements and events over time respectively. *Causal research* is best suited in instances where you examine the influence of events and variables on others. In order to test the relationship and effect between the highlighted dependent and independent variables in current time in South Africa, a cross-sectional design was adopted.

3.4 Population and sample

3.4.1 Target population

Burns and Grove (1997) define the target population as “the entire aggregation of respondents that meet the designated set of criteria.” Bryman (2012) goes on to describe ‘population’ as the universe of units from which researchers select, or draw samples.

This study pulled its sample from the South African population potentially made up of Generation Y with ages between 25 and 35 years old. The population stemmed from major South African economic hubs, Gauteng, Durban and Cape Town, for ease of administering the questionnaire electronically. Due to the challenges involved in gathering data from an entire population in business related research, it was viable to adopt a random sampling method to help facilitate the data gathering process from a practical group which would be adequate to make accurate business decisions.

3.4.2 Sampling frame and sampling size

According to Bryman (2012), the sampling frame is made up of a list of all units in the population from which the target sample will be drawn. The study sampling frame is made up of employees of two business institutions accessible to the researcher. Total representation and population of the selected institutions is estimated at 5 000. It is also estimated that females constitute a slightly larger share of the total population.

The suitability of the selected organisations is due to the likelihood that the population has Internet access and is *au fait* with online shopping, and represents a sufficient size to attain at least 250 responses. The researcher aimed for a sample size of 250 respondents in this study. A total of 17 respondents were disqualified for not meeting the study criteria that respondents had to have been exposed to online reviews prior to purchasing an electronic computing device, leading to a final sample size of 238 respondents.

3.4.3 Sampling method

Bryman (2012) emphasises the appropriateness of a sampling method in order to ensure that the fair and unbiased requirements for scientific research are met. Appropriateness ensures that data deduced from the sample group can be referred back to the sample population. The study relies on an equal opportunity of being selected from the sample population, to ensure a measured representation based on age. This approach is achieved where initial sampling is based on the simple random probability method, followed thereafter by the adoption of a method of (n + 3).

3.4.4 Sampling size

Key considerations in netting at the sample size of 250 were the attainability of the sample size, and the relative ease of administering and collecting responses in the prescribed research timeline. In order to optimise the probability of reaching the desired sample of 250, 700 questionnaires were distributed to mitigate against likely no-responses and declines.

3.5 The research instrument

The preferred and most popular research instrument in quantitative research is a questionnaire. Gillham (2008) points out that questionnaires are at the “structured end of the continuum.” Meaning that the questions that are asked, and a range of possible answers are determined by the researcher. This however, does not deny the respondent a choice between either ‘yes’ or ‘no’, or ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’.

Careful consideration was given to the questionnaire design as well as its merits and demerits. The questionnaire comprised five sections; namely Sections A, B, C, D, and E. Background information was naturally addressed in section A, with Internet connectivity, risk and product, Web design, user convenience all measured in sections B, C, D, and E respectively.

Researchers utilise a number of methods to facilitate data collection, one of which is the use of a Likert scale which is commonly used to measure attitudes, knowledge,

perceptions, values and behavioural change (Pautsch, et al., 1999). The study lent itself to the use of a seven point Likert scale ranging between: 1 = strongly disagree, to 7 = strongly agree. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS and AMOS related to the weighting of the Likert scale.

3.6 Procedure for data collection

3.6.1 Respondents identification

The sampling process was followed diligently and initial contact made with Human Resources departments two weeks prior to the commencement of data collection. The purpose of this was to ensure that the various Human Resources Managers were primed to authorise the study and provide contact lists for the distribution of the self-administered briefing session. Respondents were from the Generation Y segment, employed, ages above 25 years old, and marital status was immaterial to the outcomes of the study.

3.6.2 Pilot testing

A piloting phase was carried out with a pilot sample of 20 respondents. The purpose of the pilot was to establish any shortcomings in research design and administration. Where actual data from the instrument is concerned, screening was carried out for outliners and missing values. The data that was collected was used to test the validity and reliability of the scales.

3.6.3 Respondents briefing

The success of the research was dependent on the thorough understanding of the study and its intention. Potential respondents were presented with an electronic covering letter covering the research questionnaire—as stipulated in the timeline—in order to brief them on the requirements of the study. Since this was a self-administered questionnaire, it was of paramount importance that respondents knew the directive upon receipt and completion of the questionnaire.

3.6.4 Data collection

The electronic research questionnaire was circulated to the staff databases pulled by respective Human Resource departments, according to the parameters of age, i.e. above 25 years old and employed. 181 respondents were from Investec Bank Limited's Private Banking department, 28 respondents were from Investec Bank Limited's Client Service Centre division, 29 respondents were from Mercedes-Benz South Africa, with the balance of 17 from Coca-Cola South Africa. The survey was carried out digitally via email employing systematic random probability sampling.

3.6.5 Reminders and follow-ups

Three reminders were sent at weekly intervals, on Fridays only. Reminder emails were sent to remind those who had not yet completed the questionnaire to do so. No incentive was provided to respondents.

3.7 Data analysis

Data extraction and coding initiated the data analysis process. Responses were inputted into Excel and coded initially. SPSS and AMOS were applied to gain understanding of the attributes per variable via descriptive statistical analysis to show the mean and standard deviation of each factor. Because multiple variables were analysed simultaneously, a multivariate analysis approach was employed. The study utilised 3.6.1 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM); Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Path Modelling. According to Hardy and Bryman (2004), the appropriateness of SEM is because it enables the incorporation of multi-item scales and also provides precise measurement estimates to measure errors associated with the scales used.

The success of a research study relies on the data analysis process, hence it is a crucial part of the research process. It provides meaning to the research study by facilitating data analysis and interpretation, without which the research would be rendered meaningless. It was important for the researcher to determine the data analysis method early in the research process in order to work out the data analysis

process. Bryman (2004) highlights the importance of appropriately matching the chosen data analysis with the types of variables created during the research.

Step-by-step data analysis procedure

1. Code and clean data collected into Excel
2. Import data into SPSS and AMOS
3. Descriptive statistics analysis
4. Confirmatory factor analysis
5. Path modelling

The results of the above steps are discussed in chapter four.

3.8 Limitations of the study

Limitations pose genuine concern to the validity of the study and have to be considered carefully in order to aid the effectiveness of the study. Lambert (1992) highlights that research on social issues is so mission-oriented and so focused on change rather than promoting immediate practical applications, that it is more often limited to promises, new methodologies within a discipline. Lambert goes on to speak about how, in rare instances, social research generates real power and value that contributes to tangible change.

The sample size of 250 respondents which is considered on the basis of accessibility and viable administration could be relatively small compared to the total South African online shopper population. This calls for careful consideration and due diligence when extrapolating data.

There is the likely threat of the validity and accuracy of feedback being subject to bias due to respondents' wish to be viewed in a particular light, which may influence them to reflect desired characteristics relating to online shopping versus their actual characteristics. The assumption is that the respondents' answers are precise, truthful and accurate to their real life situations. There is pronounced awareness that the analysis and interpretation may be imperilled to predetermined outcomes.

3.9 Validity, reliability and path modelling

Validity in quantitative research refers to issues concerned with the measurement of a concept or concepts and whether they measure what they are supposed to measure (Bryman, 2004). Questionnaires are usually used by researchers to measure attitudes or perceptions of individuals, and to highlight that quantification of attitudinal constructs require the definition of continuous numeric scales. Validity, in this instance, tested whether the instruments indeed measured what they were intended to measure. Convergent and discriminant validities were employed to check the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the measured items.

Bryman goes on to explain external validity as those issues which are concerned with the generalisation of the results of a study "beyond the specific research context." The researcher had to ensure that the findings of this study could be replicated to studies of a similar nature while carefully generalising the results of the study to other geographies and e-commerce industries outside of those tested in the study.

Reliability is demonstrated by the extent to which the techniques used to collect and analyse data are positioned to generate coherent and reliable results; it cannot be accurately calculated, but estimates can be observed from it. Easterby-Smith, Golden-Biddle and Locke (2008) define reliability as "the extent to which data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings". As per Bryman (2012), reliability was tested with the employment of Cronbach's alpha values, as well as the composite reliability values. On internal validity, the researcher ensured that the study was reliable and sound, especially where there was an instrumental relationship between variables. Three key areas were observed, these being the stability of results over time, internal reliability and consistency of scales and indices, and the inter-observer consistency, subjectivity of the study.

Path modelling is described as an approach where the concept of causality is formulated in terms of linear conditional expectation (Serrano-Cinca, et al., 2014). What the partial least squares path modelling (PLS-PM, PLS-SEM) method to structural equation modelling allows is the estimation of complex cause-effect relationship models with latent variables. It is an approach based on component

estimation that differs from the covariance-based structural equation modelling. Researchers have applied partial least squares path modelling in the analysis of complex relationships between latent variables (Henseler, 2010).

3.9.1 Experimental approach and validity

Econometric analysis, laboratory experiments and analyses of scanner panel data are some of the various sources of data used in consumer research studies. Surveys, observation, case studies and panel data are all used as data collection options in quantitative studies. Experimentation is one of the main research design methods used to examine causal relationships (Shadish, et al., 2002). This study aims to understand relationships among variables and experimental design was well suited to the study. One of the criticisms of experimental design is the argument by researchers that laboratory settings limit the generalisation and application of findings (Shadish, et al., 2002).

3.9.2 Path modelling

Path modelling is used to define the relationships between observed, or measured variable and theoretical constructs (Roche, Duffield & White, 2011). It also tests the hypothesised research model's structural paths whereas SEM demonstrates and tests the theoretical foundations of the proposed study, and how significant the relationships between model constructs are. SEM specifies a technique where separate relationships are allowed for each set of dependent variables. It provides an estimation technique for a series of separate multi-regression equations which will be estimated concurrently. Also contained are two mechanisms – the structural model which paths independent and dependent variables and their link, and the measurement model facilitates the study to use several indicators for a single independent variable. The study identified and highlighted several attributes and their effect on repurchase intention. Multi-item scales were developed for each construct. Following the evaluation of a model fit using CFA, AMOS 21.0 software package was used to perform Path Modelling.

To check model fit:

Using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), the following statistical indicators listed below were utilised for model fit:

- Chi-square value – should be less than 3
- Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) – should be greater than 0.9
- Augmented Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) – should be greater than 0.9
- Composite Fit Index (CFI) – should be greater than 0.9
- Incremental Fit Index (IFI) – should be greater than 0.9
- Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) – should be greater than 0.9
- Random Measurement of Standard Error Approximation (RMSEA) – should be less than 0.08

3.9.3 Reliability

Because measures are supposed to be consistent in order to be dependable, reliability tests this consistency by ensuring that different efforts to measure variables converge at the same result (Zikmund & Babin, 2006). Cronbach and composite reliability (CR) are utilised as accepted measures of consistency (Hair, et al., 2007).

Ethical considerations can be defined as a method, perspective, or procedure for deciding how to act, and for analysing complex problems and issues, and different disciplines, institutions, and professionals adhere to behavioural standards that suit their particular aim and goals — these standards help members of the said discipline to coordinate their activities and actions and to establish the public's trust of that discipline (Resnik, 2011). Ethics in research are important because the norms promote the aims of the research, such as knowledge, truth, and the avoidance of error, and they promote the values that are critical to collaborative work.

3.10 Summary

Chapter 3 served to describe the research design and the methodology which was used to deliver on the research objective. Research ethics have been considered too.

4 Chapter 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results obtained from the 238 respondents who completed the online survey. The analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS 23. The chapter proceeds with descriptive statistics on the demographic profile of the respondents, followed by an illustration of the measurement scales pertaining to the variables discussed in this study. In addition, reliability and validity measurements are discussed. Furthermore, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Path Modelling (PM) are presented. Thereafter, the hypotheses test results are discussed. Lastly, a conclusion of the chapter is undertaken.

The next section proceeds with a descriptive statistics pertaining to the demographic profile of the respondents.

4.2 Descriptive statistics: demographic profile

4.2.1 Gender

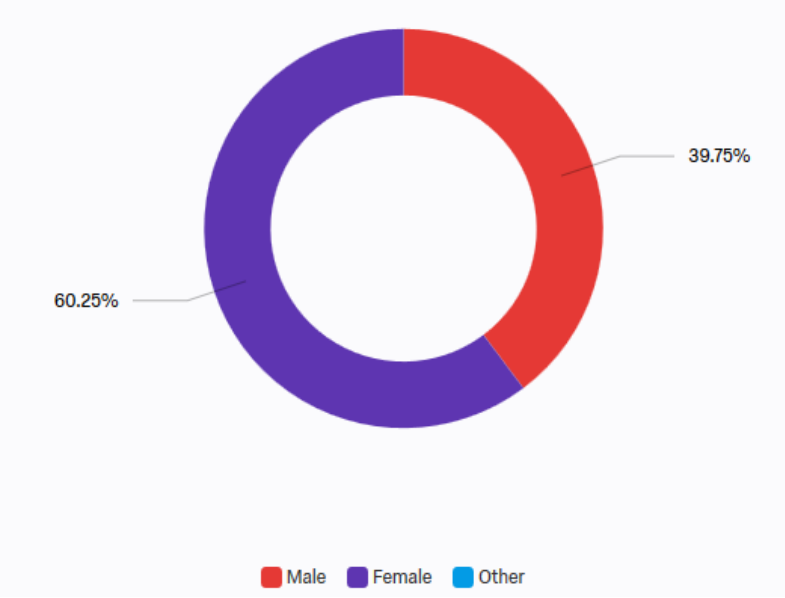


Figure 4.1: Gender

As presented in figure 4.1, a large majority of the respondents were female, which accounted for 60.25% of the total respondents. The male respondents accounted for 39.75% of the total respondents. This indicated that females were more likely to be active users of online shopping.

4.2.2 Ethnic group

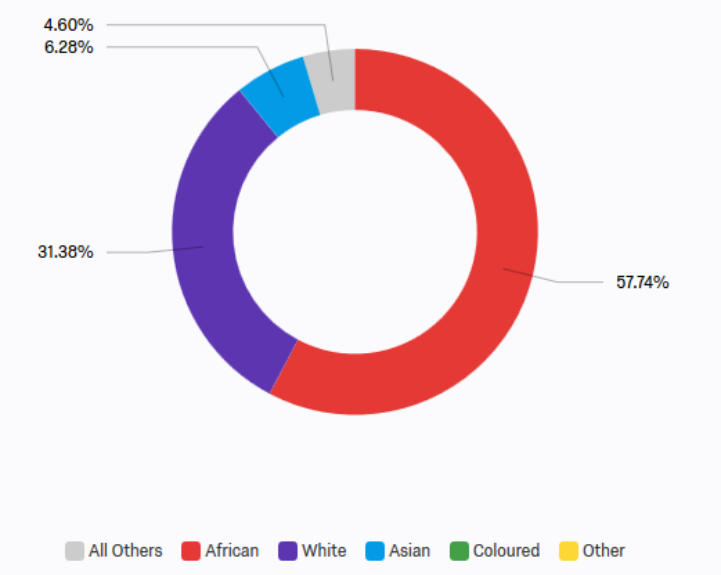


Figure 4.2. Ethnic group

African ethnic group accounted for 57.74% of the respondents, as seen in figure 4.2. It was followed by White, which accounted for 31.38% of the respondents. Asian and all others were 6.28% and 4.60% respectively.

4.2.3 Age group

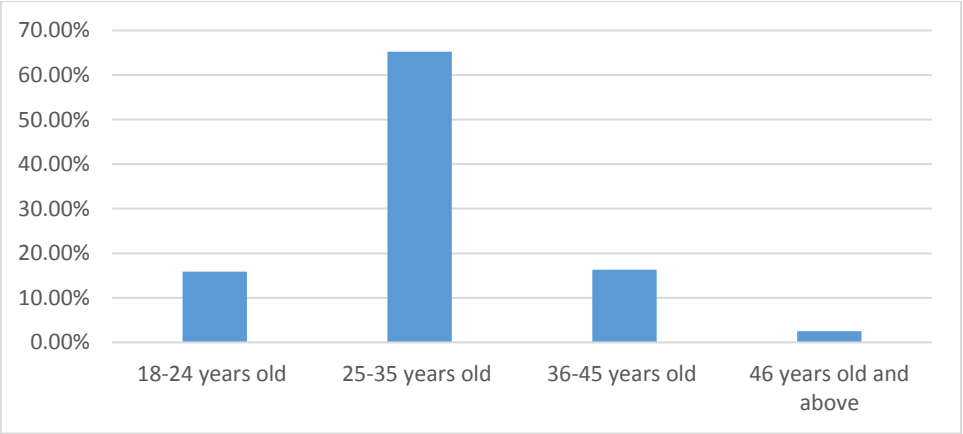


Figure 4.3. Age group

As seen in figure 4.3, 65.27% of the respondents were from the 25-35 years old age group. 16.32% of the respondents were from the 36-45 years old age group. 15.90% of the respondents were from the 18-24 years old age group. 2.51% of the respondents were from the 46 years old and above.

4.2.4 Overall employment term

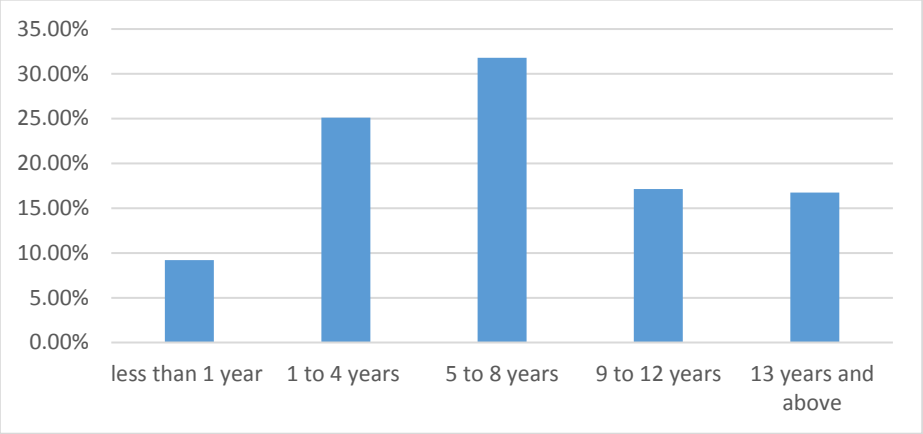


Figure 4.4. Overall employment term

As presented in figure 4.4, a large majority of the respondents had overall employment term of 5 to 8 years, which accounted for 31.80% of the total respondents. 25.10% of the respondents had between 1 to 4 years overall employment term, 17.15% had 9 to 12 years, 16.74% had 13 years and above and 9.21% had less than 1 year overall employment respectively.

4.2.5 Do you read online consumer reviews?

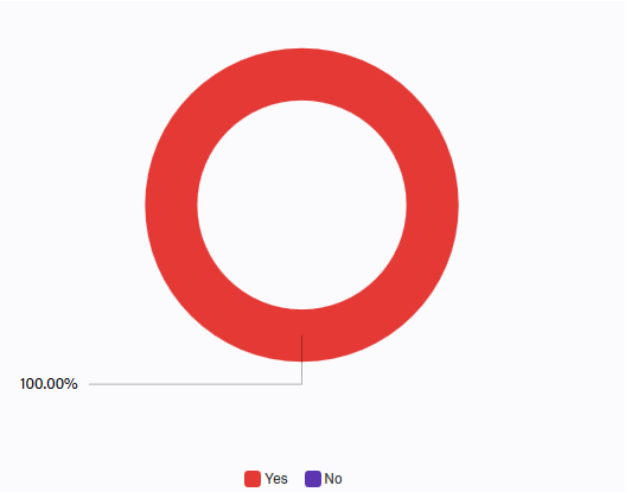


Figure 4.5. Do you read online consumer reviews?

As seen in figure 4.5, all the respondents met the criteria of the study, which entailed respondents that read online consumer reviews. All the respondents selected yes, which accounted for 100% of the total respondents.

4.2.6 Where you have read online consumer reviews prior to purchasing a computing electronic device.

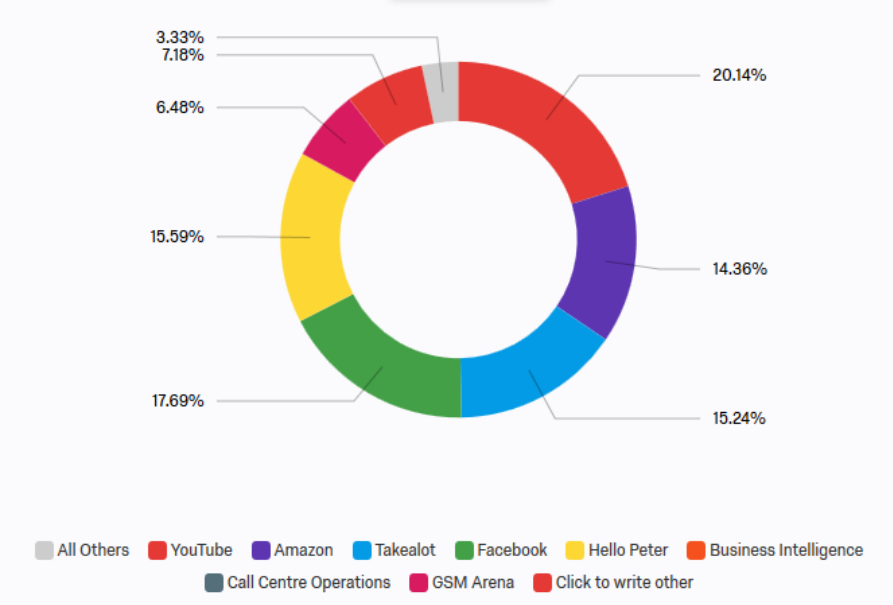


Figure 4.6. Where you have read online consumer reviews

For this measurement, it was to identify where respondents read online consumer reviews prior to purchases. Respondents were allowed to select more than one option. As such, most respondents used YouTube to view and read consumer reviews, which accounted for 20.14% of the respondents as presented in figure 4.6. This was followed by 17.69% of the respondents who used Facebook to read online consumer reviews. The least number of respondents were all others at 3.33% respectively.

4.2.7 Last electronic mobile computing device you purchased after reviewing online consumer reviews

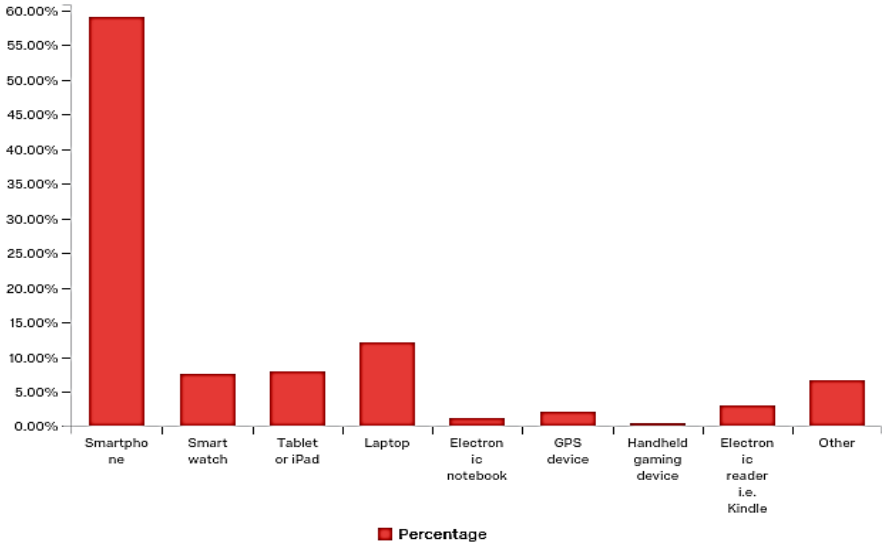


Figure 4.7. Last electronic mobile computing device you purchased after reviewing online consumer reviews

As seen in figure 4.7, a large majority of the respondents purchased a smartphone after reviewing online consumer reviews, which accounted for 59% of the respondents. Laptop purchases were the second highest at 12.13% of the total respondents. The least number of respondents purchased other electronic computing devices, which accounted for 6.69% respectively.

4.2.8 What brand of electronic computing device did you purchase after reviewing online consumer reviews?

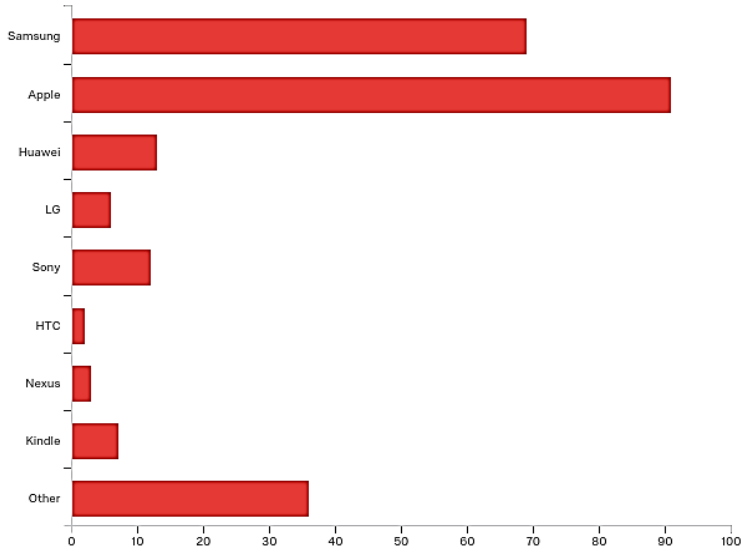


Figure 4.8. Brand of electronic computing device

As presented in figure 4.8, a large majority of the respondents purchased an Apple electronic computing device after reviewing online consumer reviews, which accounted for 38.08% of the total respondents. 28.87% of the respondents purchased a Samsung brand, 15.06% purchased other brands not listed in the questionnaire. The least number of respondents purchased a Sony brand of electronic computing device.

4.3 Descriptive statistic: Measurement scale

This section illustrates the results from the seven point Likert scales collected from the respondents across the variable. The results are presented according to the literature review and hypotheses statements.

4.3.1 Online consumer reviews

4.3.1.1 Online reviews measurement scales

Table 4.1: Online reviews measurement scales

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Online reviews made it easier for me to make a purchase decision i.e. to purchase or not to purchase	2.52%	0.42%	1.26%	8.82%	21.01%	45.50%	21.17%
Online reviews have enhanced my effectiveness in making purchase decisions	2.10%	1.26%	1.68%	6.30%	21.01%	51.26%	16.39%
Online reviews have motivated me to make a purchase decision i.e. purchase or not purchase	2.10%	4.20%	3.78%	8.82%	23.11%	40.76%	17.23%
The last time I read online reviews I adopted consumers' recommendations	1.68%	2.94%	5.46%	12.18%	38.24%	32.35%	7.14%
Information from reviews contributed to my knowledge of discussed product i.e. electronic computing devices	2.52%	1.68%	1.29%	4.20%	18.91%	48.32%	23.11%

As presented in Table 4.1, 45.80% of the respondents indicated that they agree that online reviews made it easier for them to make a purchase decision, to purchase or not to purchase. 0.42% of the respondents disagree with the statement. This confirms

that online reviews make it easier for consumers to make purchase decisions. 51.26% of the respondents agree that online reviews have enhanced their effectiveness in making purchase decisions, as seen in Table 4.1. 1.26% of the respondents disagree with the statement. This confirms that online reviews enhanced their purchase decision making. A large majority of the respondents agree that online reviews have motivated them to make a purchase decision i.e. purchase or not purchase, which accounted for 40.76% of the responses. 2.10% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. This confirms that online reviews motivated their purchase decision making. 38.24% of the respondents indicated that they somewhat agree that the last time they read online reviews they adopted consumers' recommendations. 1.68% strongly disagree with the statement. This confirms that respondents adopted consumers' recommendations after reading online reviews. 48.32% of the respondents agree that information from reviews contributed to their knowledge of the discussed product i.e. electronic computing devices, as seen in Table 4.1. 1.29% of the respondents somewhat disagree with the statement. This confirms that information provided in online reviews contributed to their knowledge of the product discussed.

4.3.2 Online consumer reviews and product knowledge

4.3.2.1 Product knowledge measurement scales

Table 4.2: Product knowledge measurement scales

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I frequently use an electronic computing device	2.10%	0.42%	0.84%	1.26%	2.52%	28.99%	63.87%
I have used a wide variety of electronic computing devices	2.52%	2.10%	2.10%	5.46%	10.92%	30.25%	46.64%
I know many technical details about the electronic computing devices I have used	1.26%	6.72%	7.14%	12.61%	21.43%	30.67%	20.17%

63.87% of the respondents strongly agree that they frequently use an electronic computing device, as seen in Table 2. 0.42% of the respondents disagree with the statement. This confirms that respondents frequently use an electronic computing device. As seen in Table 2, a large majority of the respondents strongly agree they have used a wide variety of electronic computing devices, which accounted for 46.64% of the responses. 2.10% of the respondents equally disagree and somewhat disagree with the statement. This confirms that respondents used a wide variety of electronic computing devices. 30.67% of the respondents indicated that they agree that they knew many technical details about the electronic computing devices they have used. 1.26% strongly disagree with the statement. This confirms that respondents knew the technical details about the electronic computing devices they used.

4.3.3 Online consumer reviews and trust

4.3.3.1 Trust measurement scales

I think that electronic computing devices with a majority of favourable online consumer reviews have high integrity

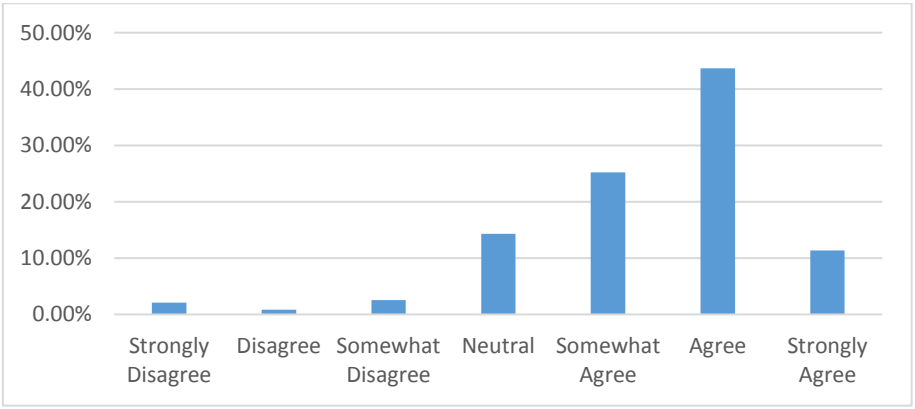


Figure 4.9. Trust measurement scale 1

As presented in figure 4.9, 43.70% of the respondents indicated they think that electronic computing devices with a majority of favourable online consumer reviews have high integrity. 0.84% disagree with the statement. This confirms that favourable online consumer reviews on electronic computing devices have integrity.

Electronic computing devices with favourable online consumer reviews appear to be more trustworthy than those with unfavourable online consumer reviews.

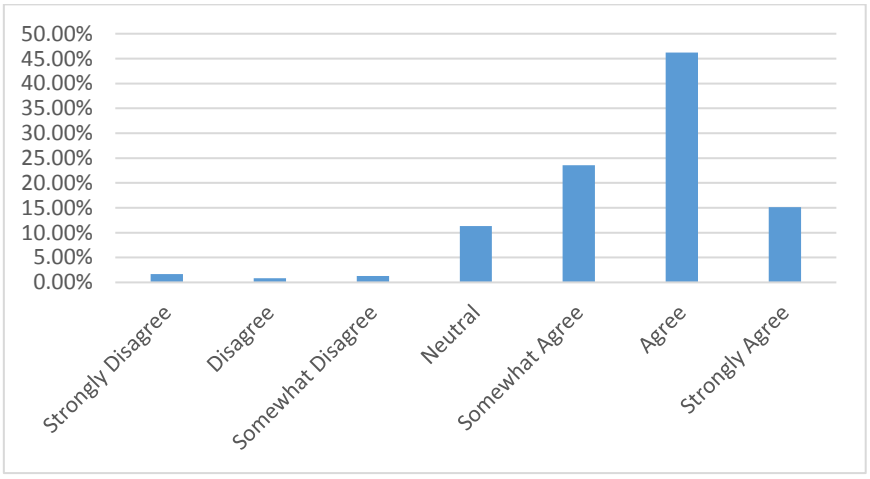


Figure 4.10. Trust measurement scale 2

46.22% of the respondents agree that electronic computing devices with favourable online consumer reviews appear to be more trustworthy than those with unfavourable online consumer reviews, as seen in figure 4.10. 0.84% of the respondents disagree with the statement. This affirms that favourable online consumer reviews are more trustworthy.

Electronic computing devices with favourable online consumer reviews seem to deliver on their product promise.

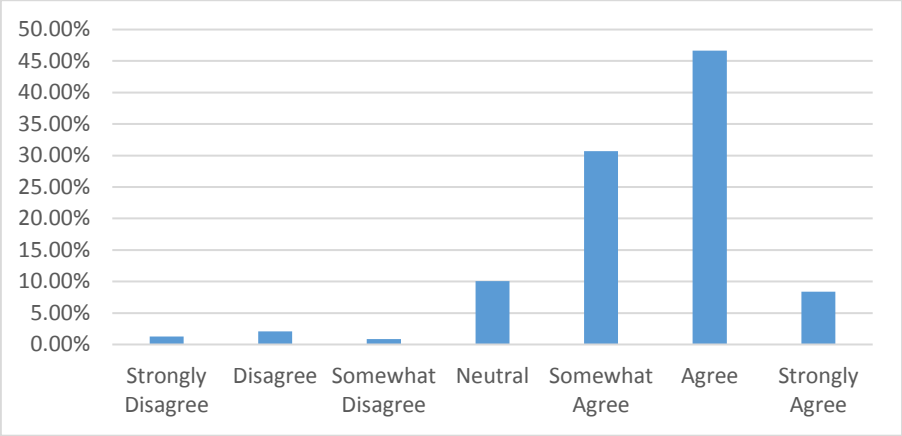


Figure 4.11. Trust measurement scale 3

46.64% of the respondents strongly agree that electronic computing devices with favourable online consumer reviews seem to deliver on their product promise, as seen in figure 4.11. 0.48% of the respondents somewhat disagree with the statement. This affirms that respondents believe that products that have favourable online reviews deliver on their promise.

My impression of the believability of online consumer reviews about electronic computing devices is very high.

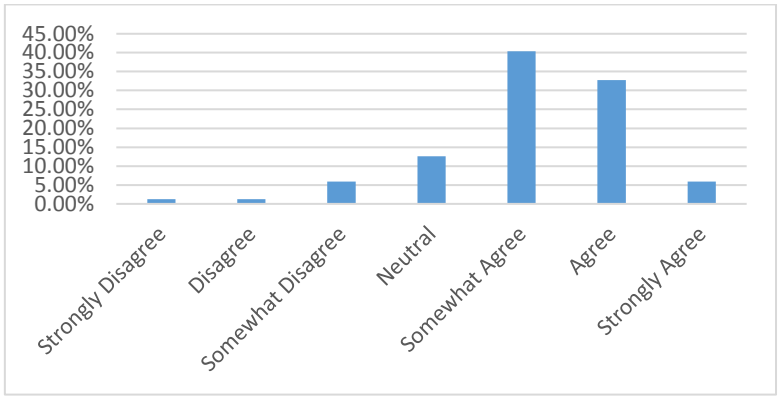


Figure 4.12. Trust measurement scale 4

As seen in figure 4.12, a large majority of the respondents somewhat agree that their impression of the believability of the online consumer reviews about electronic computing devices is very high, which accounted for 40.34% of the responses. 1.26% of the respondents equally strongly disagree and disagree with the statement. This confirms that respondents have very high impressions on the believability of the online consumer reviews about electronic computing devices.

My confidence in the online consumer reviews about electronic computing devices is very high.

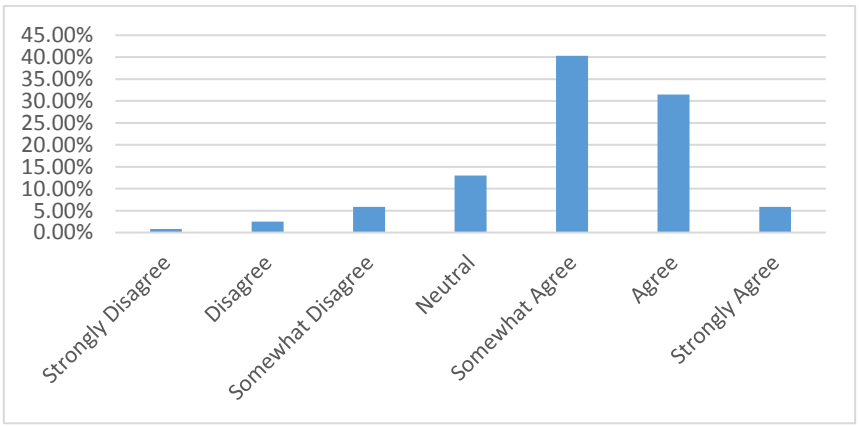


Figure 4.13. Trust measurement scale 5

As presented on figure 4.13, 40.34% of the respondents indicated that they somewhat agree that their confidence in the online consumer reviews about electronic computing

devices is very high. 0.84% strongly disagree with the statement. This confirms that respondents have confidence in online consumer reviews.

4.3.4 Online consumer reviews and social influence

4.3.4.1 Social measurement scales

Table 4.3: Social influence measurement scales

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
People who are important to me think that I should use online consumer reviews	4.20%	9.24%	10.08%	39.08%	15.55%	18.07%	3.78%
People who influence my behaviour think that I should refer to online consumer reviews	4.20%	11.76%	6.72%	35.71%	16.39%	20.59%	4.62%
People whose opinions I value prefer that I refer to online consumer reviews	3.78%	13.03%	5.04%	34.03%	16.81%	21.85%	5.46%

As presented in Table 4.3, 39.08% of the respondents indicated that they were neutral that people who are important to them think that they should use online consumer reviews. 3.78% strongly agree with the statement. This confirms that respondents are not influenced by others with regard to online consumer reviews. A large majority of the respondents indicated they were neutral to the statement that people who influence their behaviour think that they should refer to online consumer reviews, which accounted for 35.71% of the responses. 4.20% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. This confirms that respondents neither agree nor disagree that people influence their behaviour in referring to online consumer reviews. 34.03% of the respondents answered neutral to the statement that people whose opinions they value prefer that they refer to online consumer reviews, as seen in figure 26. 3.78% of the respondents strongly agree with the statement. This affirms that respondents may or may not be influenced by other people's opinion about online consumer reviews.

4.3.5 Online consumer reviews and social credibility

4.3.5.1 Social credibility measurement scales

People who complete online consumer reviews are convincing

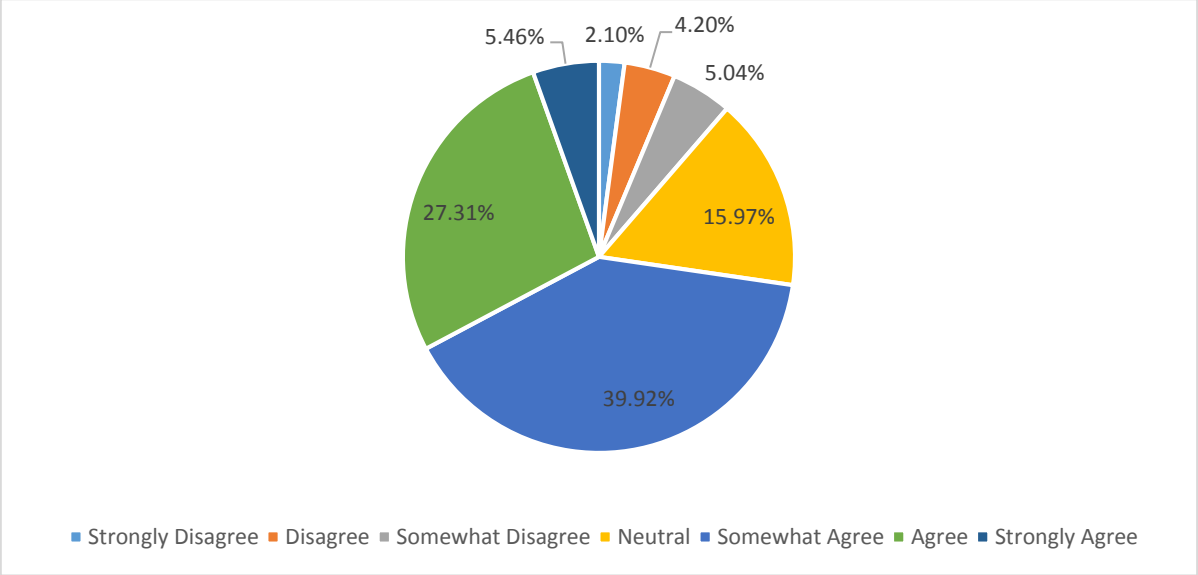


Figure 4.14. Source credibility measurement scale 1

As presented in figure 4.14, 39.92% of the respondents indicated that they somewhat agree that people who complete online consumer reviews are convincing. 2.10% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. This confirms that respondents find people are convincing when completing online consumer reviews.

The arguments of these online consumer reviews were persuasive.

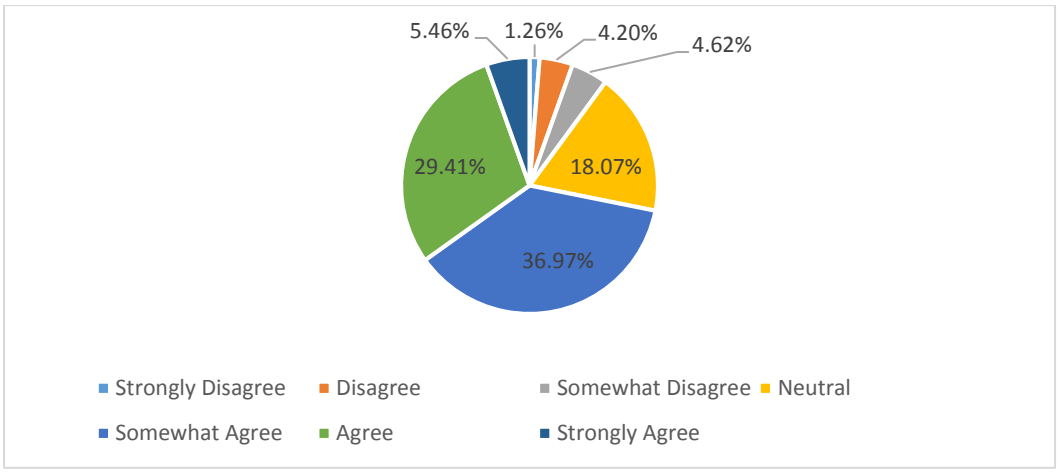


Figure 4.15. Source credibility measurement scale 2

As seen in figure 4.14, a large majority of the respondents indicated they somewhat agree with the statement that the arguments of these online consumer reviews are persuasive, which accounted for 36.97% of the responses. 1.26% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. This confirms that respondents find the arguments of online consumer reviews to be persuasive.

The arguments of these online consumer reviews were strong.

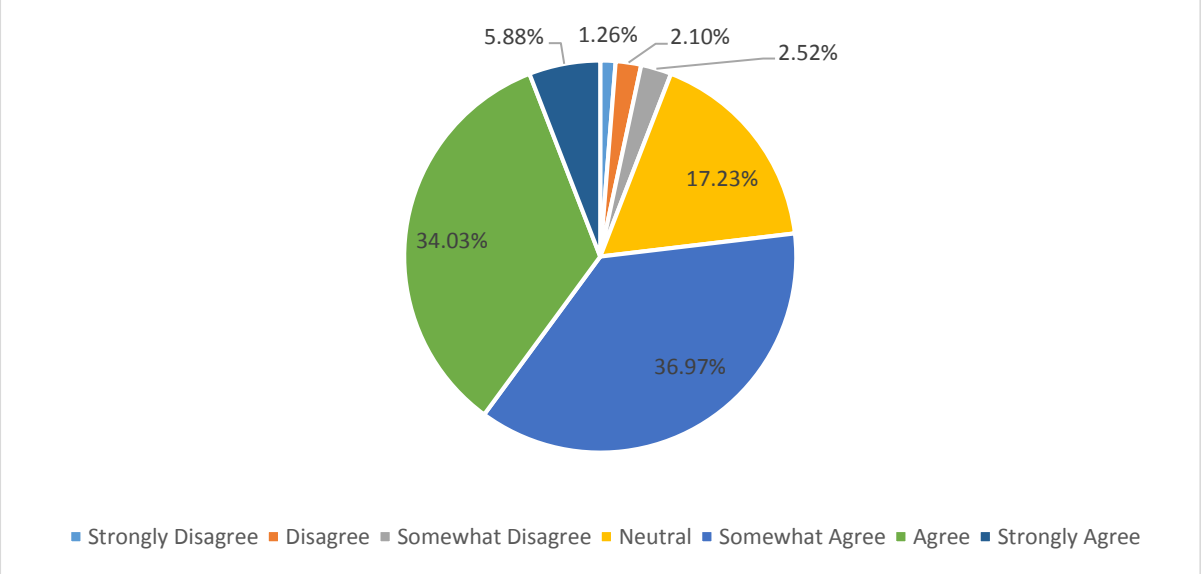


Figure 4.16. Source credibility measurement scale 3

36.97% of the respondents answered somewhat agree to the statement that the arguments of these online consumer reviews were strong as seen in Figure 4.16. 1.26% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. This affirms that respondents find the arguments of online consumer reviews to be strong.

The arguments of these online consumer reviews were good.

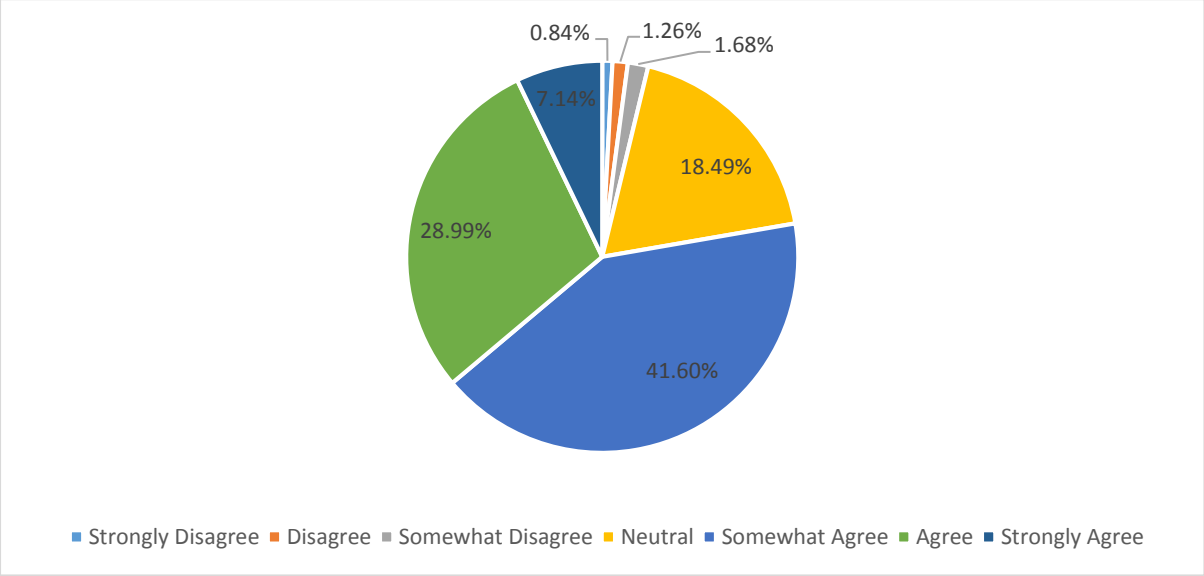


Figure 4.17. Source credibility measurement scale 4

As presented in Figure 4.17, 41.60% of the respondents indicated that they somewhat agree that the arguments of these online consumer reviews were good. 0.84% strongly disagree with the statement. This affirms that respondents find the arguments of online consumers' reviews to be strong.

4.3.6 Online consumer reviews and brand image

4.3.6.1 Brand image measurement scales

The electronic computing device product brand name of my liking is reliable

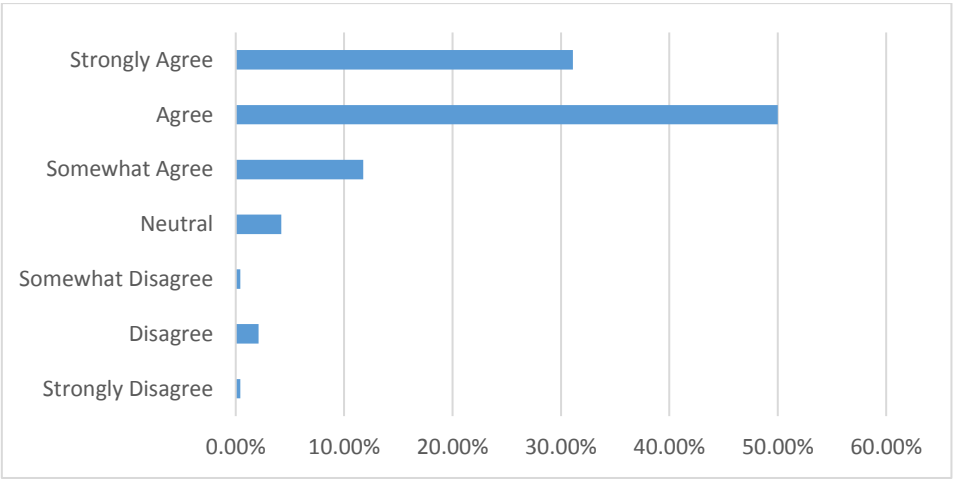


Figure 4.18. Brand image measurement scale 1

As presented in Figure 4.18, 50% of the respondents indicated they agree that the electronic computing device product brand name of their liking is reliable. 0.42% of the respondents both strongly and somewhat disagree with the statement. This confirms that the brand image of the electronic computing device of the respondents liking is reliable.

The electronic computing device product brand name of my liking is attractive.

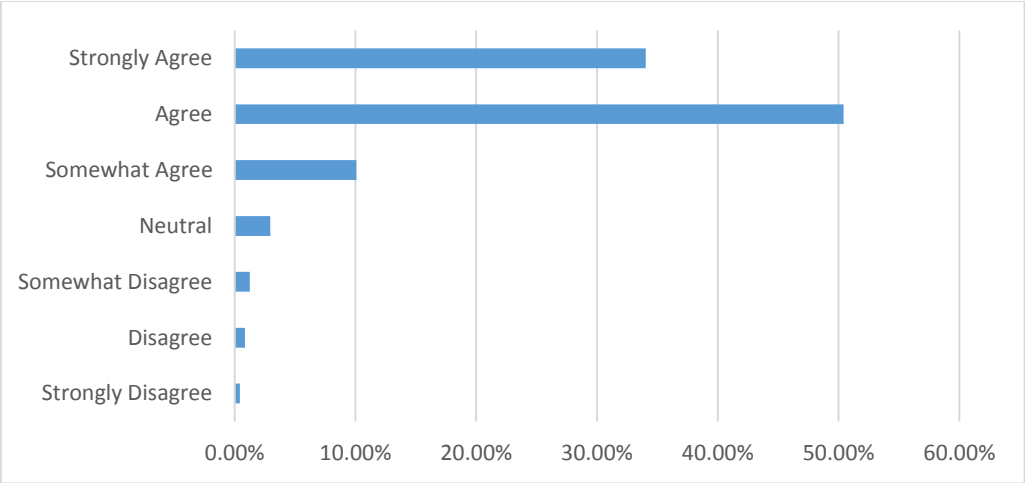


Figure 4.19. Brand image measurement scale 2

50.42% of the respondents agree that the electronic computing device product brand name of their liking is attractive, as seen in Figure 4.19. 0.42% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. This affirms that the brand image of the electronic computing device of the respondents liking is reliable.

The electronic computing device product brand name of my liking is pleasing.

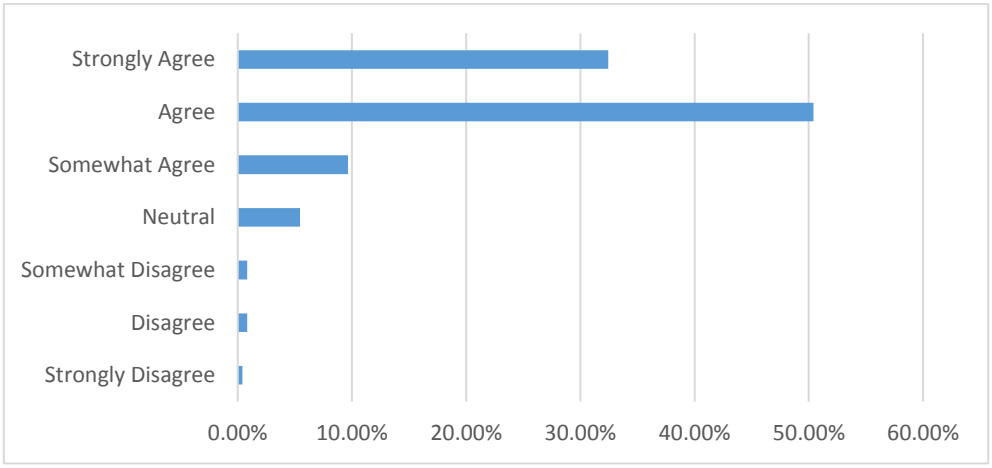


Figure 4.20. Brand image measurement scale 3

As seen in Figure 4.20, a large majority of the respondents agree that the electronic computing device product brand name of their liking is pleasing, which accounted for 50.42% of the responses. 0.42% of the respondents strongly disagree with the statement. This confirms that the brand image of the electronic computing device of the respondents liking is pleasing.

The electronic computing device product brand name of my liking is a social status symbol.

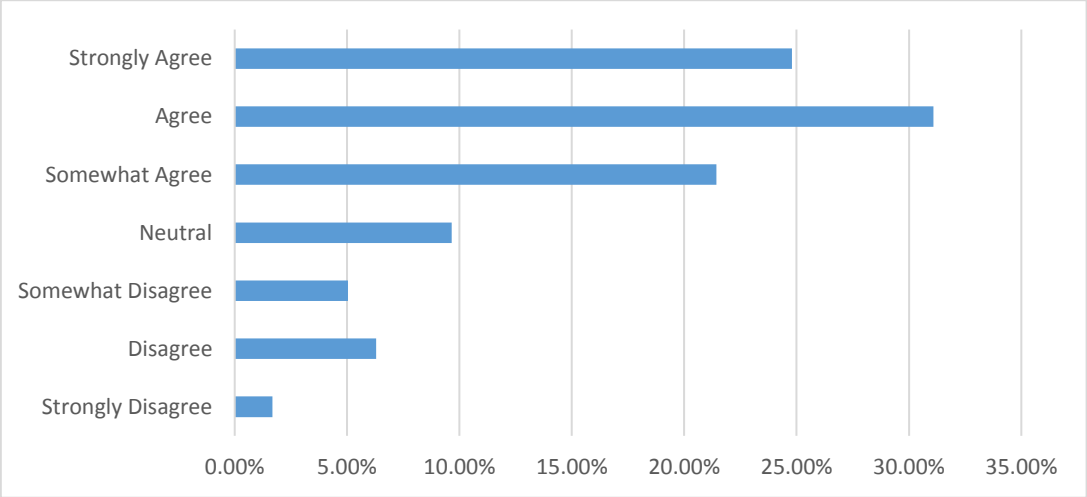


Figure 4.21. Brand image measurement scale 4

As presented in Figure 4.21, 31.09% of the respondents indicated that they agree the electronic computing device product brand name of their liking is a social status symbol 0.84% strongly disagrees with the statement. This confirms that the brand image of the electronic computing device of the respondents' liking is a social status symbol.

The electronic computing device product brand name of my liking has a good reputation.

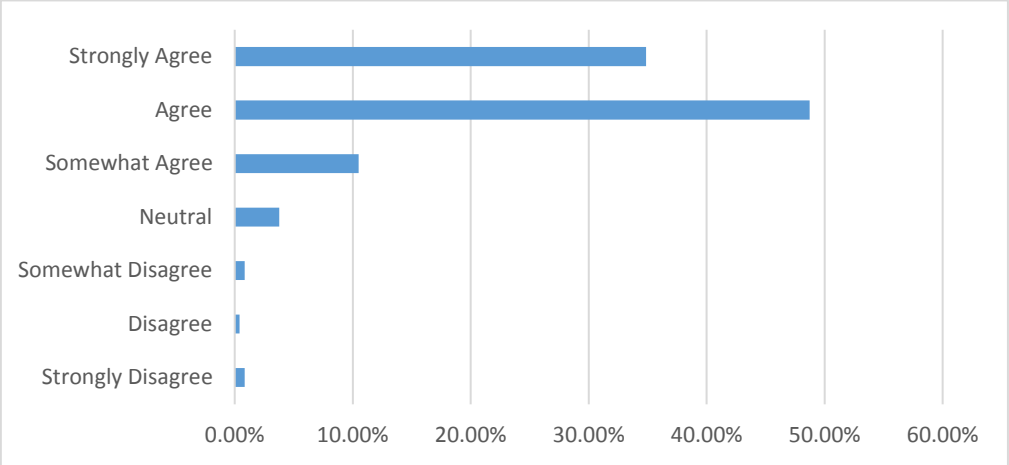


Figure 4.22. Brand image measurement scale 5

48.74% of the respondents agree that the electronic computing device product brand name of their liking has a good reputation, as seen in Figure 4.22. 0.42% of the respondents disagree with the statement. This affirms that the brand image of the electronic computing device of the respondents liking has a good reputation.

4.3.7 Online consumer reviews and purchasing intent

4.3.7.1 Purchasing intent measurement scales

After reviewing online consumer reviews, the likelihood of purchasing an electronic computing device is high

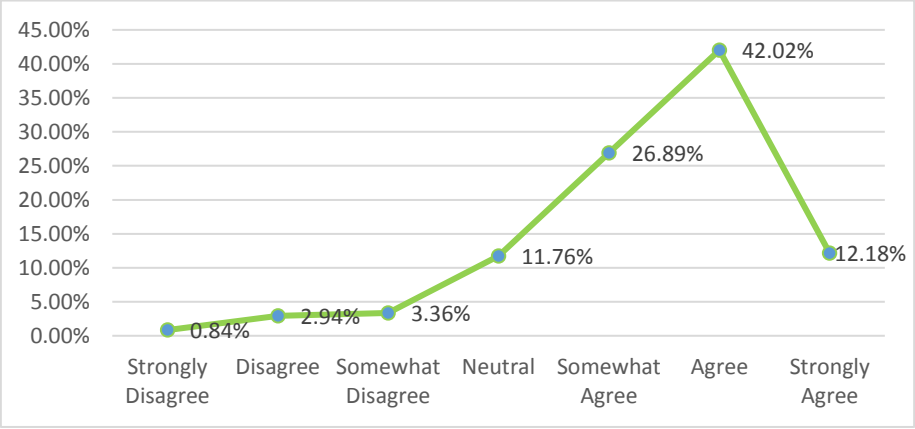


Figure 4.23. Purchasing intent measurement scale 1

42.02% of the respondents agree that after reviewing online consumer reviews, the likelihood of purchasing an electronic computing device is high, as seen in Figure 4.23.

0.42% of the respondents disagree with the statement. This affirms that the respondents are highly likely to purchase an electronic computing device after reviewing online consumer reviews.

If I am going to purchase an electronic computing device of my liking, I would consider purchasing a product with favourable online consumer reviews.

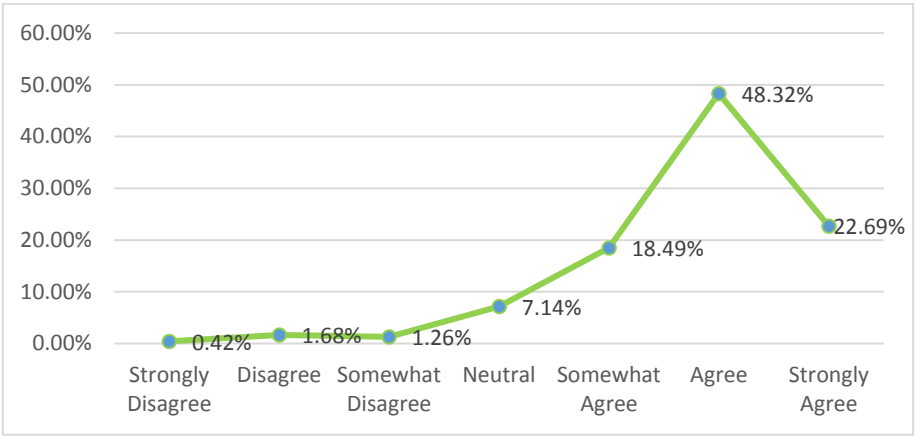


Figure 4.24. Purchasing intent measurement scale 2

As presented in Figure 4.24, 48.32% of the respondents indicated that they agree that if they are going to purchase an electronic computing device of their liking, they would consider purchasing a product with favourable online consumer reviews. 0.42% strongly disagree with the statement. This confirms that respondents are likely to make a purchase if the product has favourable online consumer reviews.

The probability that I would purchase the electronic computing device of my liking is high.

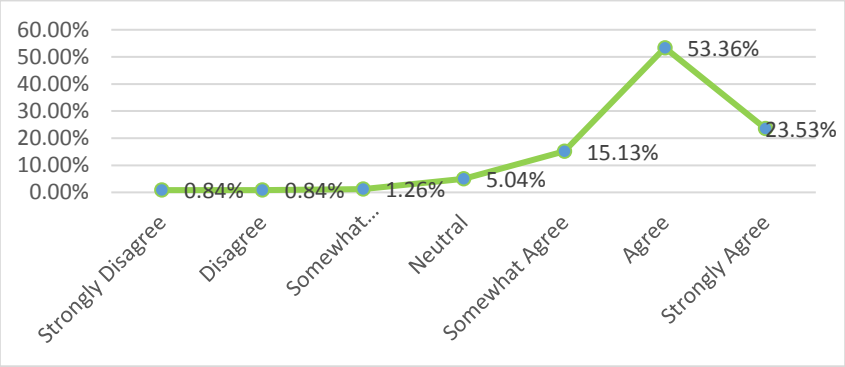


Figure 4.25. Purchasing intent measurement scale 3

As seen in Figure 4.25, a large majority of the respondents agree that the probability that they would purchase the electronic computing device of their liking is high, which accounted for 53.36% of the responses. 0.84% of the respondents strongly disagree and disagree with the statement. This confirms that the respondents have a high probability of purchasing the electronic computing device of their liking.

My willingness to purchase the electronic computing device of my liking is high.

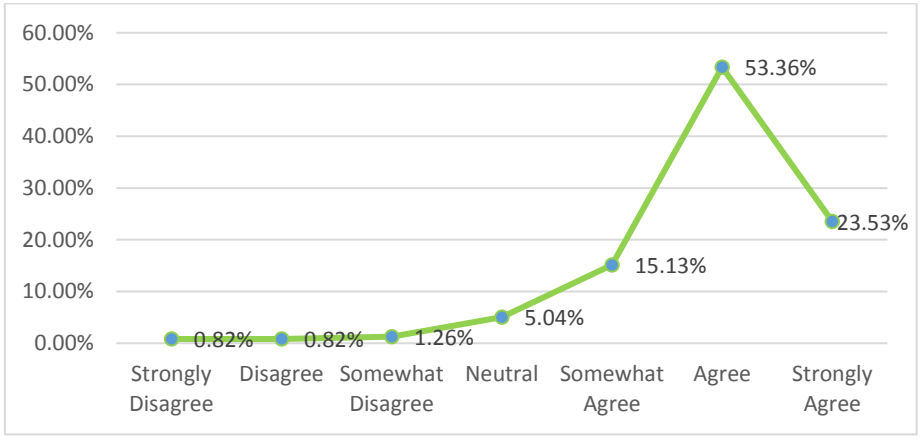


Figure 4.26. Purchasing intent measurement scale 4

As presented in Figure 4.26, 53.36% of the respondents indicated they agree that their willingness to purchase the electronic computing device of their liking is high. 0.82% of the respondents both strongly disagree and disagree with the statement. This confirms that the respondents have a high willingness to purchase products of their liking.

4.4 Reliability and validity measurement

The following section presents the results pertaining to the testing of the measurement scales for reliability and validity.

4.4.1 Reliability measurement

4.4.1.1 Cronbach Alpha Coefficient

Cronbach alpha is one of the most extensively used assessments of reliability in the social sciences (Bonett & Wright, 2014). Cronbach alpha is mentioned as a measure of internal consistency (Bonett & Wright, 2014). In this study, the Cronbach alpha ranged between 0.72 and 0.92, as seen in Table 3, thus representing a good internal consistency reliability. This exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.70 by Garaus and Wagner (2016).

Table 4.4: Cronbach's alpha

Variable	**Cronbach Alpha**
Online consumer reviews (OCR)	0.849
Product knowledge (PK)	0.723
Trust (T)	0.863
Social influence (SI)	0.928
Source credibility (SC)	0.883
Brand image (BI)	0.817
Purchase intent (PI)	0.777

4.4.2 Composite reliability

The composite reliability is measured to assess the internal consistency of the measurement model (Jayasingh & Eze, 2015). According to Lee, Moon, Kim and Yi (2015), a strong reliability measure should be above 0.80. It is calculated by using the formula: $CR\eta = (\Sigma\gamma yi)2 / [(\Sigma\gamma yi)2 + \Sigma\varepsilon i]$,

This formula is stated in the following method: Composite Reliability (CR) = (square of the summation of the factor loadings)/ {(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (summation of error variances)}.

In this study, the composite reliability for each of the variables was greater than 0.80, they varied between 0.854 and 0.926, thus indicating strong reliability. The following measurement items were excluded from the calculation; A9_3, A9_5, A11_3, A14_1, A14_5 and A15_1 as they had low standardised estimates.

Table 4.5: Composite reliability

				B = sumA*sumA	C = 1-(A*A)	D =sumC	E = B/(B+D)
			A	B	C	D	E
Constructs			**Estimate**	**(∑λYi)²**	**ɛ̀i**	**∑ɛ̀i**	**(∑λyi)² /[(∑λyi)² +(∑ɛ̀i)]**
A9_1	<---	OCR	0.866	5.89518	0.250044	1.002744	0.85463113
A9_2	<---	OCR	0.898		0.193596		
A9_5	<---	OCR	0.664		0.559104		
A10_1	<---	PK	0.748	21.75290	0.440496	2.295366	0.904551689
A10_2	<---	PK	0.836		0.301104		
A10_3	<---	PK	0.537		0.711631		
A11_1	<---	T	0.705	14.89188	0.502975	2.002277	0.881481101
A11_2	<---	T	0.688		0.526656		
A11_4	<---	T	0.836		0.301104		
A11_5	<---	T	0.813		0.339031		
A12_1	<---	SI	0.874	7.30621	0.236124	0.561991	0.928574388
A12_2	<---	SI	0.942		0.112636		
A12_3	<---	SI	0.887		0.213231		
A13_1	<---	SC	0.832	10.91642	0.307776	1.26529	0.896131954
A13_2	<---	SC	0.811		0.342279		
A13_3	<---	SC	0.779		0.393159		
A13_4	<---	SC	0.882		0.222076		
A14_1	<---	BI	0.790	6.62033	0.3759	0.784371	0.894071198
A14_2	<---	BI	0.860		0.2604		
A14_3	<---	BI	0.923		0.148071		
A15_2	<---	PI	0.845	6.27002	0.285975	0.909722	0.873293148
A15_3	<---	PI	0.822		0.324316		
A15_4	<---	PI	0.837		0.299431		

OCR : Online consumer reviews

PK : Product knowledge

T : Trust

SI : Social influence

SC : Source credibility

BI : Brand image

PI : Purchase intent

4.4.3 Validity measurement

4.4.3.1 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity accepts that items must associate higher among them than they associate with other items from other constructs that are theoretically not too related (Zait & Bertea, 2011). Discriminant validity is assessed using average variance extracted and an inter-construct correlation matrix.

4.4.3.1.1 Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

To estimate the AVE, the factor loading values (standardised estimates) in the confirmatory factory analysis results are used (Jayasingh & Eze, 2015). The following formula is used to calculate the Average Variance Extracted (AVE): $V\eta=\Sigma\lambda yi2/(\Sigma\lambda yi2+\Sigma\varepsilon i)$

This formula is stated in the following method: AVE = {(summation of the squared of factor loadings)/{(summation of the squared of factor loadings) + (summation of error variances)}. AVE, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), must exclude items with standardised coefficient ≤0.50. As such, the following measurement items were excluded for their low scores; A9_3, A9_5, A11_3, A14_1, A14_5 and A15_1. The AVE estimates from this study ranged from 0.422 and 0.707, which exceeds the threshold of 0.40 recommended by Kuo and Hsu (2001).

Table 4.6: Average Variance Extracted

				B = A*A	C = sumB	D = 1-B	E = sumD	F = C/(C+E)
			A	B	C	D	E	F
Constructs			**Estimate**	**λyi²**	**∑λyi²**	**ε̇i**	**∑ε̇i**	**∑λyi² / (∑λyi² + ∑ε̇i)**
A9_1	<---	OCR	0.866	0.749956	1.997256	0.437566	1.5928893	0.556316202
A9_2	<---	OCR	0.898	0.806404		0.349713		
A9_5	<---	OCR	0.664	0.440896		0.805611		
A10_1	<---	PK	0.748	0.559504	1.546769	0.686955	2.11534298	0.422370755
A10_2	<---	PK	0.836	0.698896		0.511544		
A10_3	<---	PK	0.537	0.288369		0.916843		
A11_1	<---	T	0.705	0.497025	2.330234	0.752966	2.60357597	0.472299098
A11_2	<---	T	0.688	0.473344		0.775945		
A11_4	<---	T	0.836	0.698896		0.511544		
A11_5	<---	T	0.813	0.660969		0.56312		
A12_1	<---	SI	0.874	0.763876	2.438009	0.416493	1.01007313	0.707062335
A12_2	<---	SI	0.942	0.887364		0.212585		
A12_3	<---	SI	0.887	0.786769		0.380995		
A13_1	<---	SC	0.832	0.692224	2.73471	0.520826	2.11480727	0.563913859
A13_2	<---	SC	0.811	0.657721		0.567403		
A13_3	<---	SC	0.779	0.606841		0.631744		
A13_4	<---	SC	0.882	0.777924		0.394834		
A14_1	<---	BI	0.790	0.6241	2.215629	0.610499	1.33770801	0.623534721
A14_2	<---	BI	0.860	0.7396		0.452992		
A14_3	<---	BI	0.923	0.851929		0.274217		
A15_2	<---	PI	0.845	0.714025	2.090278	0.490168	1.54282251	0.57534274
A15_3	<---	PI	0.822	0.675684		0.543451		
A15_4	<---	PI	0.837	0.700569		0.509203		

OCR : Online consumer reviews

PK : Product knowledge

T : Trust

SI : Social influence

SC : Source credibility

BI : Brand image

PI : Purchase intent

4.4.3.1.2 Inter-construct correlation matrix

A correlation matrix displays, in brief, the inter connections between a series of variables. To achieve high inter-construct correlation matrix, values that deviate from 1 are desired (O'Rourke & Hatcher, 2013). The results of the inter-item correlation matrix are presented in Table 7. The results ranged between 0.184 and 0.591.

Table 4.7: Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	OCR	PK	T	SI	SC	BI	PI
Online consumer reviews (OCR)	1.000						
Product knowledge (PK)	.455	1.000					
Trust (T)	.530	.402	1.000				
Social influence (SI)	.341	.185	.383	1.000			
Source credibility (SC)	.463	.184	.591	.398	1.000		
Brand image (BI)	.265	.379	.452	.201	.410	1.000	
Purchase intent (PI)	.445	.326	.546	.309	.470	.516	1.000

4.4.4 Construct validity

Construct validity is concerned with the selection of the measurement instrument and its capability to capture the latent variable (Zait & Bertea, 2011). Construct validity is measured using factor loadings for each measurement scale. As seen in column A in both Tables 2 and 3, the factor loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.05 as mentioned by Fornell and Larcker (1981). For this study, the factor loading ranged between 0.537 and 0.942.

4.5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

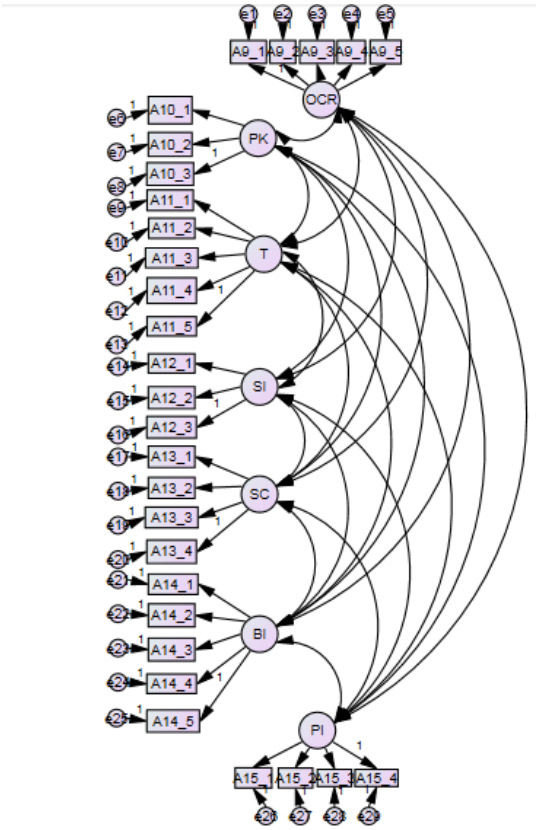


Figure 4.27. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA tested the seven-factor model. As a result of low standardised estimates, A9_3, A9_5, A11_3, A14_1, A14_5 and A15_1 were removed. Subsequently, model fit was improved. The model produced a highly acceptable fit, most loadings were significant and substantial (> .50). The following indices were examined and results provided below:

Using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), the following statistical indicators fared as follows with standards:

Table 4.8: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

CFA for model fit: Standards	CFA for model fit: Results
Chi-square value < 3	Chi-square value = 2.65
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) > 0.9	Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.965
Augmented Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) > 0.9	Augmented Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.965
Composite Fit Index (CFI) > 0.9	Composite Fit Index (CFI) = 0.995
Incremental Fit Index (IFI) > 0.9	Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.997
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) > 0.9	Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.975
Normed Fit Index (NFI) > 0.9	Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.944
Random Measurements of Standard Error Approximation (RMSEA) < 0.08	Random Measurements of Standard Error Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.08

4.6 Path modelling and hypotheses testing

The following section presents the results of the path modelling and the correlating path coefficients.

4.6.1 Path modelling

According to Keith (2015), path modelling provides a stronger understanding of the relationships between variables. The path below is in line with the conceptual model presented in chapter 2. The results are presented in the next section.

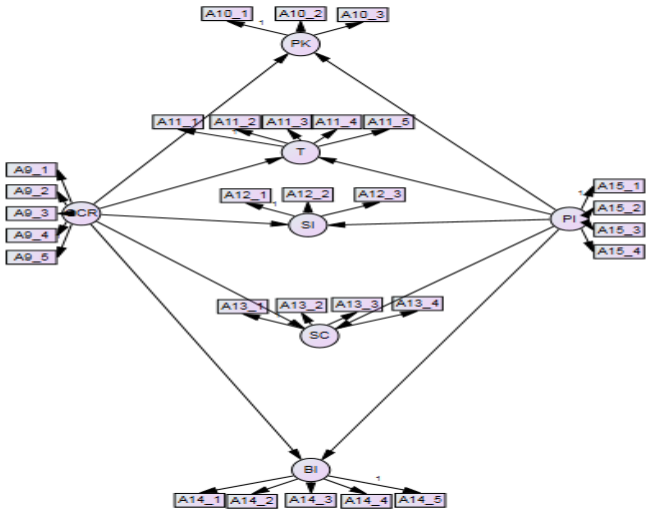


Figure 4.28. Path Modelling

4.6.2 Hypotheses testing

The study intended to test the following hypothesis as mentioned in chapter 2.

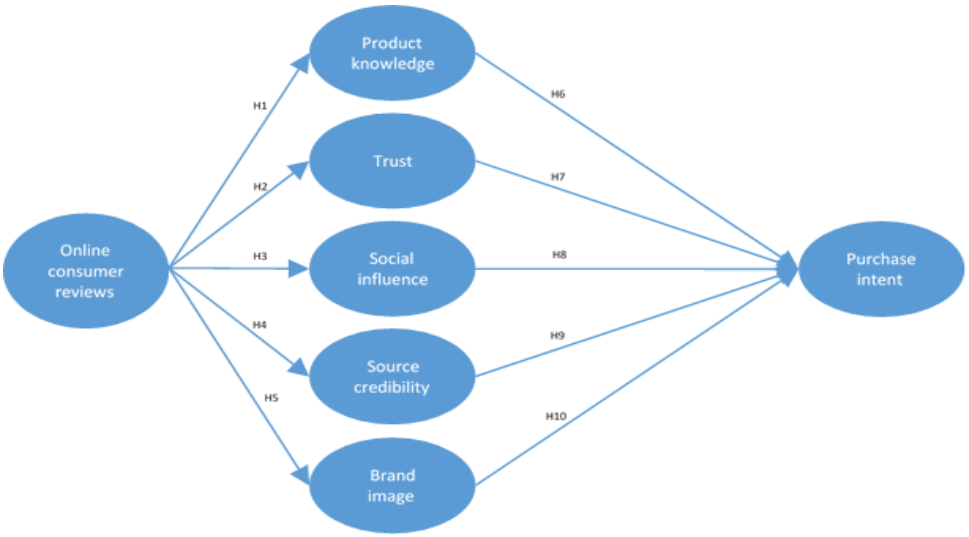


Figure 4.29. Conceptual model

The results are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Hypotheses testing results

Path Coefficient	Hypothesis	Estimate	P-Value	Result
Online Consumer Reviews → Product Knowledge	H1	0.587	***	Significant and supported
Online Consumer Reviews → Trust	H2	0.522	***	Significant and supported
Online Consumer Reviews → Social Influence	H3	0.344	***	Significant and supported
Online Consumer Reviews → Source Credibility	H4	0.465	***	Significant and supported
Online consumer reviews → Brand Image	H5	0.287	***	Significant and supported
Product Knowledge →Purchase Intent	H6	0.399	***	Significant and supported
Trust→ Purchase Intent	H7	0.497	***	Significant and supported
Social Influence→ Purchase Intent	H8	0.170	***	Significant and supported
Source Credibility → Purchase intent	H9	0.382	***	Significant and supported
Brand Image→ Purchase intent	H10	0.568	***	Significant and supported

4.6.2.1 H1: Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on product knowledge

The path coefficient estimate of H1 was 0.587, and this advocates a significant relationship between OCR and PK. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then confirms the hypothesis is significant and supported. This hypothesis was the strongest relationship.

4.6.2.2 H2: Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on trust

The path coefficient estimate of H2 was 0.522, and this supports a significant relationship between OCR and T. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then approves the hypothesis is significant and supported.

4.6.2.3 H3: Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on social influence

The path coefficient estimate of H3 was 0.344, and this endorses a significant relationship between OCR and SI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then accepts the hypothesis is significant and supported.

4.6.2.4 H4: Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on source credibility

The path coefficient estimate of H4 was 0.465, and this advocates a significant relationship between OCR and SC. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then confirms the hypothesis is significant and supported.

4.6.2.5 H5: Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on brand image

The path coefficient estimate of H5 was 0.287, and this supports a significant relationship between OCR and BI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then approves the hypothesis is significant and supported.

4.6.2.6 H6: Product knowledge has a positive effect on purchase intent

The path coefficient estimate of H6 was 0.399, and this endorses a significant relationship between PK and PI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then accepts the hypothesis is significant and supported.

4.6.2.7 H7: Trust has a positive effect on purchase intent

The path coefficient estimate of H7 was 0.465, and this advocates a significant relationship between T and PI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then confirms the hypothesis is significant and supported.

4.6.2.8 H8: Social influence has a positive effect on purchase intent

The path coefficient estimate of H8 was 0.170, and this supports a significant relationship between SI and PI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then approves the hypothesis is significant and supported. This hypothesis was the weakest relationship.

4.6.2.9 H9: Source credibility has a positive effect on purchase intent

The path coefficient estimate of H9 was 0.382, and this validates a significant relationship between SC and PI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then accepts the hypothesis is significant and supported.

4.6.2.10 H10: Brand image has a positive effect on purchase intent

The path coefficient estimate of H10 was 0.568, and this advocates a significant relationship between BI and PI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then confirms the hypothesis is significant and supported.

4.7 Conclusion of the presentation of results

In conclusion, this chapter delivered the statistical analysis of SPSS and AMOS 23 and results found from the data collected from 238 respondents on how online consumer review influences purchase intention. As discussed, the study meets the reliability and validity requirements pertaining to the measurement instrument. The study had an acceptable model fit. A path modelling with the results from the hypotheses testing was presented. The test found that all ten hypotheses were significant and supported, with H1 having the strongest relationship and H8 the weakest relationship. The next chapter discusses these results further.

5 Chapter 5: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The results and findings of the research on the effects of online consumer reviews on purchasing intent are discussed in this chapter—along with the ten hypotheses tested, namely: Online consumer reviews and the relationship between product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility and brand image; as well as product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility and brand image and the relationship on purchase intent.

The results and findings were compiled by evaluating and analysing information gathered from the online survey. The results of the research are discussed as per the research questions, with descriptive statistical analysis used to identify percentages to answer all questions or statements in the survey. Those respondents who indicated that they do not read online consumer reviews (n=17) were excluded from the data analysis; as such; results are reported with input from those respondents who met the survey criteria (n=238). The discussion takes into account supporting literature from prior studies.

5.2 Demographic results discussion

The research respondents are predominantly female; with a percentage split of 60.25%. This ties in with Statistics South Africa's 2014 report asserting that South Africa has a young population; with up to 40% of the population falling between the ages of 15-35 and with more females than males. This indicates that there are more female users of online consumer reviews. Africans constitute 57.74% of respondents. With the growth in the middle class, there is scope for marketers to leverage the African segment which sees continued increase in disposable income. White respondents constitute 31.38% of the sample size; with Asian constituting 6.28%.

A large number of respondents (65.27%) fall in the 25-35 Gen Y age bracket, one of the most economically active segments. All respondents are employed; with 31.80%

employed between 5 to 8 years; and 25.10% employed between 1 and 4 years. This is an economically active segment which presents opportunities for marketers and business.

Only those respondents who read online consumer reviews were considered for the study (n=238) in order for the input and feedback to positively serve the needs of the study, which was to test the effects of online consumer reviews on purchase intent. YouTube enjoyed marginally large exposure with 20.14% of respondents opting to review via the online video platform. This could suggest that respondents prefer visually stimulating reviews and actual product demonstrations to inform their decision making. A large majority of respondents purchased a smartphone after reviewing online consumer reviews, which accounted for 59% of total respondents. Laptop purchases were the second highest purchase item at 12.315% of total respondents. Thus, the findings demonstrate that respondents purchased an electronic computing device of one kind or other after reviewing online consumer reviews.

5.3 Hypotheses discussion

Table 5.1 is a summary of the hypotheses tests and the following section discusses each hypothesis in support of existing empirical findings.

Table 5.1: Summary of hypotheses testing

Path Coefficient	Hypothesis	Estimate	P-Value	Result
Online Consumer Reviews → Product Knowledge	H1	0.587	***	Significant and supported
Online Consumer Reviews → Trust	H2	0.522	***	Significant and supported
Online Consumer Reviews → Social Influence	H3	0.344	***	Significant and supported
Online Consumer Reviews → Source Credibility	H4	0.465	***	Significant and supported
Online consumer reviews → Brand Image	H5	0.287	***	Significant and supported
Product Knowledge →Purchase Intent	H6	0.399	***	Significant and supported
Trust→ Purchase Intent	H7	0.497	***	Significant and supported
Social Influence→ Purchase Intent	H8	0.170	***	Significant and supported
Source Credibility → Purchase intent	H9	0.382	***	Significant and supported
Brand Image→ Purchase intent	H10	0.568	***	Significant and supported

Source: Calculated from questionnaire results (2016)

5.3.1 Online consumer reviews and product knowledge

The path coefficient estimate of H1 was 0.587, and this advocates a significant relationship between OCR and PK. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then confirms the hypothesis is significant and supported. This hypothesis was the strongest relationship. Korfiatis, et al. (2012) state the fact that consumer or visitors to an online information resource tend to read reviews and/or appraisals of products first, and that higher ranked reviews, i.e. those with five stars, also increase attention from a usability point of view. The readability scores and length of a review confirm that justification of the review provides an indication of why a review is considered helpful by a consumer (Korfiatis, et al., 2012). A study related to the

helpfulness of reviews by Mudambi and Schuff (2010) confirms that Amazon UK reviews presented similar behaviour in terms of the helpfulness of product reviews.

Kostrya, et al. (2016) found in an online retailing context that customers base purchase decisions on information from online consumer reviews because of first-hand product experience perceptions of other customers, which they perceive as trustworthy. Minnema, et al. (2016) argue that review valence reflects product quality, and that products that have a higher average and long-term ratings have a purchase and a lower return probability—findings that are in line with the expectation disconfirmation mechanism as experienced customers have a lower reliance on online consumer reviews than those with less experience, or novices.

Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2013) found that in the context of mobile phones being perceived as a hybrid product, respondents who received respective information proved to be significantly more knowledgeable than those who received no information at all. In their study on predicting the helpfulness of online consumer reviews, Lee and Cohen (2014) analysed 19 variables encompassing product data, and found the variables to be important in how they affect the level of helpfulness. Singh et al. (2016) found that in terms of variable ranking for analysed products, there was a clear indication that ease of readability index and other indices, including entropy, proved to be significant parameters in determining the helpfulness of online reviews. Yan, et al. (2015) found feature-based product analysis of consumer reviews to be very important and essential to enabling consumers to have a better understanding of products prior to making a purchase decision.

5.3.2 Online consumer reviews and trust

The path coefficient estimate of H2 was 0.522, and this supports a significant relationship between OCR and T. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then proves the hypothesis is significant and supported. This is consistent with a study by Sparks, et al. (2016), who found that the provision of a response from the reviewed business, in this case a hotel, yielded significantly more favourable trust and client inferences. These results are further consistent with the findings of Lee and Song (2010) and van Noort and Willemsen (2012), whose studies confirmed that

individuals who saw responses to online complaints evaluated the concerned company more positively than those receiving no response.

Shan (2016) concludes that 'top reviewer' status serves as a reputation cue and helps to form the perceptions of the reviewer's competence and trustworthiness; and that reviews that contained strong arguments had a greater trustworthiness than those that contained weak arguments; and this is regardless of the varying levels of similarity and source prestige. Huang and Chen (2006) demonstrated that reviewers with similar demographics, attitudes and values to the consumer are perceived as more trustworthy due to perceived similarities serving as a cue for similar taste, preference or interest in the products and/or services.

Sparks, et al. (2016)'s study in the hotel and hospitality context found that responses from the concerned hotel yielded significantly more positive and favourable trust and customer concern inferences. They went on to find that both customer concern and trust inferences were more favourable with just a single day's lag between the customer review being posted; and the hotel responding as opposed to 30 day old responses. Trust inference scores were found to be more favourable when a high level of human voice characterised the hotel's response—and is consistent with the findings obtained in the public relations and communication fields research by van Noort and Willemsen (2012). Filieri (2016) found that consumers discount untrustworthy reviews from their information set, and that they will not consider these reviews when making a purchase decision—this is a crucial finding as it was found that the more a review is perceived to be trustworthy, the higher its influence on consumer decision making. Park and Nicolau (2015) found extreme ratings, be they positive or negative, to be more useful than moderate ratings. While scrutinising content, consumer use cues that are related to the valence and extremity of a review in order to assess trustworthiness (Filieri, 2016).

5.3.3 Online consumer reviews and social influence

The path coefficient estimate of H3 was 0.344, and this endorses a significant relationship between OCR and SI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then accepts the hypothesis is significant and supported. In exploring the

factors in restaurant reviews that affect a reader's perceived usefulness, Cheng and Ho (2015) found the peripheral route factor or source credibility to be more useful to consumers than the central route factor, or quality of argument. Cheng and Ho (2015) go on to state that with Internet reviews, readers can only judge the usefulness of the review from clues found in the content—and where consumers do not know the identity of the reviewer—the level of trust in the review is low.

Zhou and Guo (2016) refute the assumption that reviews of a given product are independent of each other, thus overlooking the fact that reviews are often subject to social influence by past reviews and reviewers when writing own reviews. Ma et al. (2013) found that expert and connected reviewers contribute more independent reviews. To this end, Zhou and Guo (2016)'s findings further highlight that reviews from connected or expert reviewers are seen as more helpful, irrespective of the order of the reviews.

Seufert, et al. (2016) found that while users are fine to show their trust in people who do not like admitting to being influenced by friends, influence and trust of users differs and there are users with more influence. Filieri (2015)'s findings show that the informational influence of online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth is stronger than the normative influence, and highlights information quality as representing a crucial antecedent of information diagnosticity in electronic word-of-mouth. This finding therefore implies that reviews with the highest level of information quality, mixed with crowd opinion, are viewed as most helpful and influential by consumers.

5.3.4 Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on source credibility

The path coefficient estimate of H4 was 0.465, and this advocates a significant relationship between OCR and SC. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then confirms the hypothesis is significant and supported. Sussman and Siegal (2003) found trustworthiness and expertise to be two major factors in determining source credibility. They link the usefulness of a reviewer's comments on the number of followers that reviewer has i.e. the more followers a review has, the more useful the reviews are viewed as being. Zhang and Watts (2008) found that although the

influence of argument quality on consumers' attitudes to be slightly higher than that of source credibility, studies supporting the contention remains small.

Mudambi and Schuff (2010) found that among several information quality dimensions identified in other studies i.e. information depth and breadth, factuality, relevance, and credibility—information depth is an important dimension of information quality—and is also a predictor of information helpfulness and subsequently, credibility. Additionally, Filieri (2015) demonstrated that information quality affects credibility judgements in reference to the source of the information. This finding advances related electronic word-of-mouth literature. It is noted that electronic word-of-mouth credibility is not a characteristic intrinsic to the source as such, but rather an evaluation made by the receiver based on information quality as provided by the reviewer (Filieri, 2015).

A study by Shan (2016) shows that top reviewers are recognised by a peer-rating system to have better trustworthiness and expertise than lay people. In the same study, consumers rated that top reviewers were more trustworthy than lay people. In his study, Pornpitakpan (2004) examined the influence of argument strength in advertising, on consumer attitudes toward the brand, and purchase intention and found that higher argument strength leads to improved attitudes and increased purchase intention irrespective of the expertise of the endorser. This suggests that if the review is deemed as credible, the effect on the consumer is likely to be favourable. In findings from a study on at-risk communities, Spence, et al. (2013) discovered that when messaging is directed to at-risk communities, messages embedded with authority cues could surprise and drive elaboration and perceptions of source credibility. Yang, Sarathy and Lee (2016) highlight the important role that online reviews play, especially negatively distributed consumer reviews, in determining consumers' intention to purchase.

5.3.5 Online consumer reviews on brand image

The path coefficient estimate of H5 was 0.287, and this supports a significant relationship between OCR and BI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then approves the hypothesis is significant and supported. This is supported by Kostyra, et al. (2016) whose results suggest that no-name brands can compensate for lack of brand equity by making investments in other areas, such as product quality, which may lead to high online consumer reviews. Kostyra, et al (2016) go on to highlight the importance of appropriate segmentation and consideration of segment-specific needs, because a one-size-fits-all product or brand policy gives niche suppliers the leverage to become competitive because of positive online consumer reviews.

Ho-Dac, et al. (2013) found that strong brands were shielded and protected against the impact of online consumer reviews, and strong brands were always backed with positive online consumer reviews in their study. Kostyra, et al. (2016) observe that the new digital world offers brands many opportunities to strengthen the relationship between brands and their target audience i.e. through social media and other online platforms; and that branding in a digital world therefor entails balancing product quality investments and subsequently, leading to higher online consumer reviews.

When looking at the opinions of individuals about brands in social communities, Hajli, et al. (2016) show that customers search for information about specific brands or products and they feel satisfied and happy with the information that is provided. In their findings, they record that participants in the study mentioned that their social interactions with their brand communities create committed, long-term relationships with their brands that lead to brand loyalty. This is found to be consistent with literature by Huang and Chiu (2006) stating that over and above trust, satisfaction, and commitment influencing customer loyalty, the customer is willing to extend beyond just loyalty to discuss brand meanings and deep relationships with their peers in online communities.

5.3.6 Product knowledge purchase intent

The path coefficient estimate of H6 was 0.399, and this endorses a significant relationship between PK and PI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then accepts the hypothesis is significant and supported. This is supported by a study by Jiménez et al. (2012) on remanufactured laptop computers in which they argued that the more knowledgeable individuals were about remanufactured products, especially looking at their similarities to new products, the more willing they were likely to be to purchase the remanufactured product.

Wang and Hazen (2015) suggest in their study that of the three knowledge considerations in use, quality knowledge wields the strongest effect on customer perceptions of product value and risk, and that the emergence of quality knowledge as a crucial predictor underscores the fact that it is quality that is at the forefront of consumers' minds. Wang and Hazen (2015) note, in the remanufactured products context, that government and manufacturers need to work together in order to enhance public knowledge of the three features of remanufactured products which were considered in their study, these being quality, cost and the green factor.

They found in their study that only a few customers demonstrated a thorough understanding of remanufactured products, many of whom were sceptical about the remanufactured products. Yang, Sarathy and Lee (2016) found that product reviews with a low volume significantly reduced consumers' intention to purchase the concerned product compared to high-ended reviews. This also proves the impact of product knowledge gleaned from consumer reviews, on the intention to purchase and thereby corroborates the hypothesis that product knowledge has a positive effect on purchasing intent.

Karimi, et al. (2015) compared statisficers with high knowledge and maximisers with low product knowledge and observed how they employed varying intensive decision making processes. They observed that within both statisficers and maximisers groups, the decision making process was more intensive for those with low levels of product knowledge—thus confirming the impact of consumers' decision-making style

and product knowledge on their behaviour when measured during a purchasing decision-making process.

5.3.7 Trust purchase intent

The path coefficient estimate of H7 was 0.465, and this advocates a significant relationship between T and PI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then confirms the hypothesis is significant and supported. Trust is formed slowly over time while consumers gain experience through repeated transactions (Cheskin-Research, 1999). People frequently shop at highly reputable stores that they trust, even though prices may be higher than those of competing products and suppliers (Hong & Cha, 2013).

After noting that prior research has shown that negative online reviews may affect consumers' purchase behaviour in a complex manner (Zhang, et al., 2014), and motivated by the need to investigate whether online retailers may benefit from a mix of positive and negative reviews, an experimental study showed that three dimensions of cognitive trust have a positive effect on emotional trust, which further influences consumers' purchase decision.

Moreover, emotional trust develops from consumers' cognitive trust in the online environment and this increases consumers' likelihood of transacting online (Zhang, et al., 2014). Zhang, et al. (2014)'s further results go on to show that inconsistent online reviews significantly strengthen the link between emotional trust, and purchasing intent, and suggest that, at the same level of emotional trust, consumers under the influence of inconsistent online reviews are more likely to purchase, be it online of offline.

Berger, et al. (2010) found that even negative reviews can produce favourable opportunities for marketers and businesses.

5.3.8 Social influence has a positive effect on purchase intent

The path coefficient estimate of H8 was 0.170, and this supports a significant relationship between SI and PI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then proves the hypothesis is significant and supported. This hypothesis was the weakest relationship. Zhu, et al. (2016) conclude in their study that is verified by experiment results, that there exists users' influence by peers in so far as purchasing intent is concerned, and this influence exists among online friends. In a study on the influence of family structures on purchasing intent, Anitha and Mohan (2016) conclude that although purchasing outcome could vary significantly due to the interaction and communication between involved parties, the family environment and the communication therein play an irreplaceable role in shaping a particular purchase outcome.

In their study, Hutter, et al. (2013) observe that consumers' engagement with Facebook fan pages has positive effects on consumers' brand awareness; word-of-mouth activities; and purchase intention. This supports prior findings by Zhu and Zhang (2010) that social media content influences the economic outcome of brands. Intention toward behaviour is predicted by attitude; therefore Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) observe that social function attitudes towards luxury brands are expected to predict or inform the purchase intention for luxury brands.

Mäntymäki and Salo (2013) highlight the importance of social influence, measured with perceived network size as well as intrinsic and extrinsic types of motivation in predicting purchase intention. They identify a different role for social influence to that obtained by Guo and Barnes (2011), who reported an insignificant relationship between the subjective norm and purchase intention among Second Life users—the difference can be explained by contextual differences and by the fact that the subjective norm captures the normative influence, whereas perceived network size reflects informational dimensions of social influence (Dechow & Tan, 2016). Influencers have come to play an important role in consumers' decision making process.

5.3.9 Source credibility on purchase intent

The path coefficient estimate of H9 was 0.382, and this validates a significant relationship between SC and PI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then accepts the hypothesis is significant and supported. The credibility of a source of information is believed to mediate influence by affecting own-thought activation, as a highly credible source is expected to inhibit own-thought activation (Harmon & Coney, 1982). Harmon and Coney's 1982 study findings are that the effects of source credibility on attitude and behavioural intention, are indeed situationally dependent. As justified by a study by Lu, et al. (2014), propensity to trust could improve consumer attitudes toward the sponsored recommendation post as they are more likely to trust the blogger and the content posted. The study goes on to show that the effect of the type of blog sponsorship on attitude toward the sponsored or recommended post is not significant.

The study by Ayeh, et al. (2013) theorised that source credibility factors; and technology acceptance factors are predictors of the attitudes of online travellers and their intention to use specific services for travel planning. The study found that perceived usefulness has a direct influence and indirect effect on usage intention—through attitude towards usage; or purchase intent in the context of physical products. This is mirrored in other studies in other contexts which have also established a direct relationship between the perceived usefulness and usage or purchase intention (Venkatesh, et al., 2012). Also, the findings of the study by Ayeh, et al. (2013) highlight that source credibility factors are antecedents of product or service usefulness, both perceived trustworthiness and expertise wield significant influence on usefulness perception.

Manfredo and Bright (1991) regard credibility as a crucial cue in an individual's decision-making process, and that it impacts more than just individuals' attitudes, but also their behavioural intention. Research findings argue that highly credible sources stimulate and aid in the realisation of favourable behavioural intentions towards a message, product or service, while the opposite constrains any such influences (Kersetter & Cho, 2016). Despite associated risks with online transactions, the results of a study by Flanagin, et al. (2014) indicate that people tend to believe the commercial

information they find online, and they privilege that information above alternative and traditional information sources. Consumers are armed with information to make informed decisions. Non-credible information is spotted early and may have a detrimental effect on the perception a consumer holds of a product, thereby affecting the decision to purchase.

5.3.10 Brand image has a positive effect on purchase intent

The path coefficient estimate of H10 was 0.568, and this advocates a significant relationship between BI and PI. The P value indicates a 0,01 level of confidence which then confirms the hypothesis is significant and supported. This is consistent with a study by Aghekyan-Simonian, et al. (2012) who found that brand image has a positive influence on consumers' online purchase intentions in the context of fashion apparel products, both directly and indirectly, as they reduce various risk perceptions, and these findings reinforce previous findings that preference over a product brand image has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention, both online and in physical stores. Lee and Tan (2003) illustrate that product brand image is a critical prompt in informing the intention to purchase, suggesting that brand name serves as a surrogate for various product attributes such as colour, texture, and fit in the apparel context.

Previous research shows that the store image, which is linked to the brand image, has a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention in both physical and online stores (Chen, et al., 2010). Ranjbarian, et al. (2012) found there to be a moderate significant relationship between brand image and purchase intent, with the reason for the moderate relationship being the promotion factor.

According to Shah, et al. (2012), attitudes towards brand advertisements and brand cognition directly impact on customers' attitude towards the brand. Freling, Cronso and Henard (2011) intimate that brands that build favourable brand personalities can enhance brand attitudes, consumer-brand relationships, and importantly, purchase intentions. In summary, brand image is intricately linked with products and is important to consumers and customers. As such, marketers need to prioritise brand health to ensure that product quality and the promise of superior product experience translate

to brand preference and brand love by consumers, as consumers are more likely to purchase brands that appeal to them.

5.4 Summary

Chapter 5 is a presentation of the demographic profiling of the research respondents. It contrasted the research respondents with the contents of the literature. Furthermore, a discussion of the hypotheses highlighted that all 10 hypotheses were supported with a significant P value indicating 0.01 level of confidence. The results show that all 10 hypotheses have significant relationships. The positive effect of online consumer reviews on product knowledge is similar to studies conducted by Korfiatis, et al. (2012); Mudambi and Schuff (2010); and Kostrya, et al. (2016). The positive effect of online consumer reviews on trust is similar to studies conducted by Lee and Song (2010); van Noort and Willemsen (2012); and Shan (2016). The positive effect of online consumer reviews on social influence is similar to studies by Cheng and Ho (2015); Zhou and Guo (2016); and Ma, et al. (2013). The positive effect of online consumer reviews on source credibility is similar to studies by Sussman and Siegal (2003); Filieri (2015); and Shan (2016). The positive effect of online consumer reviews on brand image is similar to studies by Kostrya, et al. (2016); Ho-Dac, et al. (2013); and Hajli, et al. (2016). The positive effect of product knowledge on purchase intent is similar to studies by Jiménez, et al. (2012); Wang and Hazen (2015); and Yang, Sarathy and Lee (2016). In addition, the positive effect of trust on purchase intent is similar to studies by Hong and Cha (2013); Zhang, et al. (204); and Dechow and Tan (2016). The positive effect of social influence on purchase intent is similar to studies by Zhu, et al. (2016); Anitha and Mohan (2016); and Hutter, et al. (2013). The positive effect that source credibility has on purchase intent is similar to studies by Lu, et al. (2014); Ayeh, et al. (2013); and Venkatesh, et al. (2012). The positive effect that brand image has on purchase intent is similar to studies by Aghekyan-Simonian, et al. (2012); Lee and Tan (2003); and Chen, et al. (2010).

The following chapter concludes the study and discusses implications, puts forward recommendations, highlights limitations and possibilities around future research.

6 CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the conclusion pertaining to the study is discussed, as well as the recommendations in light of the results of hypotheses testing discussed in chapters 4 and 5. Additionally, theoretical and marketing managerial implications, limitations and future research pertaining to the study are hereby presented.

6.2 Conclusion of the study

Chapter 1 highlighted the purpose of the study as to investigate the effects of online consumer reviews on purchasing intent of mobile electronic computing devices among Gen Y shoppers in South Africa. These were covered by the following areas: online consumer reviews, product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility, brand image and purchasing intent.

The first sub-problem sought to determine the relationship between online consumer reviews and product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility, brand image, and purchasing intent. The second sub-problem sought to evaluate all highlighted variables in order to assess which of those demonstrated the strongest relationship with intent to purchase among South African consumers of mobile electronic computing devices.

Against this backdrop, the study demonstrates that the ten (10) hypotheses tested are supported, and that there is a positive influence between them. The results of the study show that online consumer reviews have an effect on the South African Gen-Y consumers' intent to purchase mobile electronic computing devices. As such, the study shows that there is value in marketers investing in product quality to ensure that consumers' expectations are met, which will in turn lead to positive online reviews by consumers.

6.2.1 Online consumer reviews and product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility, and brand image

This study shows that online consumer reviews have a significant influence on product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility, and brand image. This result was expected due to supporting results from previous studies and results. The study thus adds to current knowledge of the relationship between online consumer reviews and purchase intent. Empirical support is thus provided to marketers and managers to see how they can first influence positive online consumer reviews and best leverage those to attain sales targets. The findings will prove valuable due to the buying power of Gen-Y consumers, and the proliferation of mobile electronic computing devices as sources of primary communication and media consumption.

6.2.2 Product knowledge and purchase intent

The results presented in Chapter 4 prove that there is a significant influence of product knowledge on consumers' intent to purchase. This is consistent with previous literature which yielded similar findings. The related hypothesis is well supported and proven to be accurate. The findings give marketers and managers a factual basis on which to leverage knowledge around products in order to arm consumers with the tools required to realise the intention to purchase. This is contextually relevant in fields extending beyond that which is tested in this research, but carries greater meaning when considering the technical nature of mobile electronic computing devices.

6.2.3 Trust and purchase intent

The results clarify the importance of trust across several areas i.e. trust in the information source, brand, product and medium through which the review is evaluated. This indicates that the related hypothesis is true and in line with previous literature on the relationship between trust and purchase intent. Marketers and managers should pay close attention to building trust in their products, which translates to favourable online consumer reviews and by trusted and credible sources.

6.2.4 Social influence and purchase intent

From the results, it is evident that consumers draw influence from multiple sources be it from immediate family, brand ambassadors, social influencers, etc. It is also evident that when drawing influence from a relevant source, consumers can be swayed to making the intent to purchase a reality. Previous literature supports the finding that social influence plays a significant role in convincing consumers to realise the intent to purchase. It is up to marketers to exploit the influencer space to support the product and brand promises that they make, and to close sales with consumers.

6.2.5 Source credibility and purchase intent

Chapter 4 results highlight the significant influence that source credibility has on consumers' purchasing intent. When reviewing previous literature, the above is supported through similar findings. Previous literature also revealed findings that non-credible sources have a detrimental effect and influence on consumers' purchasing intent. With the hypotheses proven to be significantly supported, it is up to marketers and managers to leverage the influence of credible sources of online consumer reviews in order to ensure sales and turnover. The study makes a significant contribution to marketers' drive to be proactive and leverage the all-round efficiencies of online platforms.

6.2.6 Brand image and purchase intent

The study proves that brand image has a significant influence on purchase intent. This is expected as numerous literature studies have shown similar results over time. The most successful brands pride themselves on their brand image and assign huge resources to continuously drive brand love. Brands with a strong heritage, such as Coca-Cola and Mercedes-Benz, do not rest on their laurels and forego the crucial and on-going task of building brands with new and old generations of consumers and customers. Consumers are likely to purchase a product with a positive brand image. Therefore, marketers and managers' tasks is clear, continuously build brand love in order to influence online consumer reviews and subsequently purchase intent. Strong

brands that deliver on their promise are likely to enjoy favourable consumer reviews online.

6.3 Implications

Section 6.3 present the implications pertaining to theoretical and managerial implications

6.3.1 Theoretical implications

The theoretical findings in this study contribute to both limited and existing research, literature, and knowledge on the impact of online consumer reviews on purchase intent in a South African context, as well as contributing to the theory of planned behaviour. When investigating the hypotheses closely, the study contributes to the relationship between online consumer reviews, product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility, brand image and purchase intent. The study broadens knowledge in the growing influence of online consumer reviews and how these influence purchase behaviour. The significant theoretical contributions of this study will benefit academia and scholars, who can use the findings in support of their studies. Based on overall empirical findings, online consumer reviews have a strong and significant influence on consumers' purchasing intent and overall purchase behaviour. The study confirms that online consumer reviews, product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility, and brand image have a mediating influence on purchase intent of South African Gen Y consumers of mobile electronic computing devices. This shows that those brands that deliver on their brand and product promise in order to influence favourable reviews, will drive purchase behaviour indirectly through positive online consumer reviews.

6.3.2 Managerial implications

The findings of the study offer some implications for marketers and managers alike in companies that maintain a direct and indirect online presence through online consumer reviews. Although the study pertains to mobile electronic computing devices, the findings can be applied across industries. The implication to marketers in and outside of the electronic computing devices space is that product quality; and brand health must be maintained at all times in order to enjoy favourable and credible online consumer reviews which will serve to influence consumers' purchase intent. It is imperative that marketers and managers drive a culture of constant brand building and product excellence in order to afford their brands the best chance at securing customers' favour and ultimately, influence sales.

The challenge to marketers is clear in that they are relying on the views of consumers. Marketers no longer own the positioning and promotion of products entirely as some conversations sit with consumers. The finding that customers are sceptical about company generated and sponsored reviews places pressure on marketers to strive for product excellence and brand resonance in order to inspire truly representative online consumer reviews by end-users. By implication, marketing must work closely to coordinate the efforts of the marketing communications, brand management, and digital and social teams to rally behind ensuring that the brand and products are projected in a favourable and representative light.

Customers rely on online reviews to inform and shape their opinion about certain products, especially in the high-investment technology space. Electronic computing devices are considered purchases, as such, brand reputation is key in positioning products in a favourable light.

To conclude, marketers and managers in South Africa and other developing countries can find value in this study and the insights it unearths. The appropriateness of the insights transcends industries and sectors.

6.4 Recommendations

The recommendations discussed herein are based on the hypotheses testing results attained in this study.

6.4.1 Online consumer reviews and product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility, and brand image

The study contributes to the current knowledge base of online consumer reviews and how these influence not only purchase intent, but also product knowledge, trust, social influence, source credibility and brand image. Few studies have explored these variables in a single study. The findings highlight that marketers cannot ignore the impact of unsolicited and independent online consumer reviews. Although marketers' influence on online consumer reviews is limited to non-existent, the task for marketers is to educate as much as possible to cultivate knowledge in their products, establish trust in the products, and ensure positive product experiences that will lead to positive social influence on customers. This influence needs to be credible as well in order for it to contribute meaningfully to brand image.

The electronics industry enjoys substantial online presence as reviewers have carved out careers out of reviewing technology products on platforms such as YouTube, GSM Arena and other related technology websites. Marketers in the technology space will do well to leverage the influence of these career tech-reviewers by enabling extended product trials and use in exchange for reviews. Computing devices lend themselves well to experiential and demonstrated reviews, which are richer in demonstrated form than in written form.

Marketing messages can play a role in shaping points of view among consumers. Marketers need to ensure that educating customers on product features is free of jargon and self-explanatory. Not all consumers have the same grasp of technical specifications, which is why marketers opt to communicate user experience over technical specifications. It is only when consumers are knowledgeable that trust in a product is fostered, that the social influence on opinion is positive, and that it is from credible sources, thereby having a positive effect on brand image.

6.4.2 Product knowledge and purchase intent

Technology is daunting to many end users. Marketers that strike a balance between highlighting technical specifications and highlighting the user experience will enjoy more relevance and resonance with the masses of consumers who are not technologically inclined. The results show a strong and significant relationship between product knowledge and purchase intent. Knowledgeable consumers are empowered to make purchasing decisions. It is in the interest of business and marketers to drive awareness around their products to build consumers' knowledge base.

Observation teaches that jargon is esoteric and appeals to a select few who are passionate about a subject matter. It is crucial that marketers communicate in a manner that connects with audiences, and not in a manner that confuses them. The study shows that all respondents review online reviews prior to purchasing mobile electronic computing devices. YouTube features many reviews of technological products. These provide visual stimulation and demonstration of product features. Some reviews are comparative and serve to assist customers to make informed decisions between competing products. Written reviews have also taken a demonstrative form with comparative tables outlining the strengths and weaknesses of competing products. It is important that marketers effectively unpack their product features in order to influence purchase intent.

6.4.3 Trust and purchase intent

Consumers act decisively when they have established trust and are comfortable with their choices. The study shows that trust has a significant influence on purchase intent. Trust applies to information received via online reviews, trust in the source of the information, trust in the brand, and trust in the product. Organisations have direct control in the trust cultivated in their products and brand. The significance of trust on purchase intent prioritises trust in the product and brand as focus areas for marketers. Trust in product performance is attainable through quality offerings that are relevant, reliable and durable. Organisations that are true to the above will gain a competitive edge over their competitors.

Those elements of trust that organisations have limited to no influence over are trust in online consumer reviews, and trust in the source of information. Marketers can achieve success in these indirect elements by delivering on those elements over which they have direct influence and control.

6.4.4 Social influence and purchase intent

Results showed social influence to have a significant effect on purchase intent. Social influence applies in varying layers, these including immediate family, the circle of friends, celebrities and brand ambassadors, social media influencers with mass following, online subject matter experts and tech reviewers. The significant relationship between social influence and purchase intent warrants that marketers pay special attention to this area, even though their influence here is both direct (via brand ambassadors) and indirect (via unsolicited online reviews and points of view).

When influencers buy into a brand and/or product, they become advocates of that brand or product. Consumers are aware of sponsored and solicited commentary on products and are slightly more sceptical of messages that emanate from such arrangements. It is up to marketers to be sincere and not contrived in their approach to brand ambassadors. Marketers need to carefully consider and appoint brand ambassadors who share similar values and traits to their brand and products. A mutually beneficial relationship between brand/product and brand ambassador is crucial to the success of brand ambassadorships.

By delivering quality products that are attuned to the needs of consumers, organisations are likely to win over unsolicited favourable commentary by social media influencers and online subject matter experts.

6.4.5 Source credibility and purchase intent

The study shows a significant relationship between source credibility and purchase intent, thereby supporting the hypotheses that source credibility has a positive effect on purchase intent. This is another area over which organisations do not have direct influence and control. That is not to say that marketers should not concern themselves with ensuring that the messaging around their products is credible, thereby building credibility for the source and vice versa. There are various sources of information in the online space, ranging from amateurs to professional product reviewers. Organisations and marketers need to concern themselves with established reviewers who have built up credibility over time. Organisations' products need to live up to the points of view seeded by reviewers.

6.4.6 Brand image and purchase intent

The study confirms the expectation that brand image would have a significant effect on whether or not consumers purchase a product. Brand image is built up over time through consistency in quality, relevance and reliability. Many brands have substantial brand equity in reserves and they rely on that brand equity to ride out public relations nightmares. The value to marketers and organisations, of maintaining and building brand image cannot be overestimated. Each and every single marketing initiative should be geared towards building and maintaining brand image.

Product quality plays a crucial role in aiding organisational efforts to build and maintain brand image. Consumers develop emotional relationships with brands based on brand relevance, alignment to personality, and appeal to their needs. Marketers should concern themselves with two sets of target market, existing clients with whom marketers need to sustain brand preference and brand love; and potential clients with whom marketers need to build brand love and brand preference. Brands with a positive image are viewed more favourably by consumers who are likely to commit to purchasing the product in question.

6.5 Limitations and future research

The limitations section presents those limitations that pertain to the study, as well as addresses future research that scholars can pursue.

6.5.1 Limitations of the study

The study focused on a sample of employed Gen Y South Africans largely based in the greater Gauteng region. The use of this defined set of respondents could pose limitations in that the results cannot be generalised to the greater South African Gen-Y population. The final sample size of 238 respondents was relatively small considering the number of employed Gen Y South Africans. This was as a result of limited Internet penetration and Internet access in South Africa, as well as a limited time frame for data collection, lasting four weeks in the month of September 2016.

The study was also concerned with urban Gen Y respondents. This excluded the larger sample of unemployed and rural Gen Y population. Furthermore, there was no way to verify that respondents were in fact exposed to online consumer reviews. A total of 255 respondents completed the survey, with 17 ruled out for not having been exposed to online consumer reviews prior to purchasing a mobile electronic computing device. Many respondents completed the electronic survey during work hours and may have answered in haste in order to complete the survey and get back to work commitments.

The study used the theory of planned behaviour as its theoretical grounding and other scholars are encouraged to use the theory of social identity for their studies. Since the study was limited to the greater Gauteng area, furtherstudies can investigate other relevant areas in South Africa, with the major centres with assumed levels of Internet penetration being Western Cape (Cape Town), Kwa-Zulu Natal (Durban and Pietermaritzburg) and the Eastern Cape (Port Elisabeth and East London).

The study took on a quantitative research method and a mixture of qualitative and quantitative may be investigated for future studies. The study was based on the simple random probability method using a self-administered electronic questionnaire. From

a methodological standpoint, the study utilised cross-sectional design with most researchers employing longitudinal research design (Kang, et al., 2015). As such, the findings may be influenced by respondents' level of involvement in, and reliance on online consumer reviews at the time of taking the survey.

6.5.2 Future research

This study focused on online consumer reviews where mobile electronic computing devices are concerned. These included mobile phones, tablets, GPS devices, smart-watches, electronic notebooks and Kindle e-readers. Future studies should focus on one product category in and outside of the technological gadgets sector. Future studies could also focus efforts on those technological products with a higher monetary value—those products that require more consideration prior to purchasing.

Due to the limited-to-low Internet penetration in South Africa, and the few studies conducted in the technological space in other developing countries, researchers will do well to explore the effectiveness of online consumer reviews as an influencer of purchasing intent. It is important to the addition of relevant literature that studies are carried out in the context of developing countries.

Future research could explore the differences and/or similarities between visual reviews in the form of YouTube videos, and read reviews via online media and the effect that these have on purchase intent. Researchers can explore the extent to which these varied mediums affect purchase intent, and other avenues such as brand image, and brand loyalty.

Future research could explore the effect that negative online reviews have on purchase intent. Where repeat purchases are concerned, especially in the mobile phone space where the average repurchase period is two years, researchers can use non-random stratified or cluster sampling to monitor and observe effects over a period of time. Consumers' purchase intent may be thoroughly monitored against online reviews spread out over a period of time.

Researchers should consider older age groups i.e. Generations X and Z to see what respective effect online consumer reviews have on a more mature, and younger consumers' purchasing intent. Research should consider other regions of South Africa and other developing countries.

6.6 Conclusion of the chapter

Chapter 6 presented the conclusion of the study through confirmation that the ten hypotheses are supported, thus providing insights to sub-problem one, that sought to examine the relationship between product knowledge; trust; social influence; consumer reviews; source credibility and brand image on the purchasing intent of South African consumers of electronic computing devices. The second sub-problem sought to examine the highlighted variables to assess which of those demonstrates the strongest relationship with the purchasing intent of South African consumers of electronic computing devices as informed by online consumer reviews. This chapter provided recommendations that are based on the empirical findings within, and outlined implications pertaining to the theoretical and managerial implications. Lastly, the limitations of the study are presented along with suggestions for future research.

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APPENDIX A: Measurement Tool



Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant

I am a Masters student at Wits Business School. As part of the completion of my studies I am required to complete a research study. I invite you to participate in this study in the form of a survey pertaining to the influence of online consumer reviews on purchasing intent concerning electronic computing devices such as mobile phones; tablets; smartwatches, GPS devices, Laptops, handheld gaming devices, and e-notebooks. If you are aged U35 and are a user of such devices and would like to share your purchase insights please complete the survey.

Confidentiality

All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the researcher will have access to them. No information can be traced backed to you.

Participation

Participation in this research study is completely anonymous with no personal identification details requested. You have the right to withdraw at any time during the survey. If you wish to withdraw, please close your internet browser. Should you wish to participate in this survey, please answer as honestly as possible? This survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact me, Molise Moloi at 1242121@students.wits.ac.za or my research supervisor Dr Yvonne Saini at yvonne.saini@wits.ac.za

Thank you for your participation in my research study!

I have read and understood the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

SECTION A

GENERAL INFORMATION

The section is asking your background information. Please indicate your answer by ticking (✓) on the appropriate box.

A1 Please indicate your gender

Male	1
Female	2
Other	3

A2 Please indicate your ethnic group

African	1
White	2
Asian	3
Coloured	4
Other	5

A3 Please indicate your age group

18 – 24 years old	1
25 - 35 years old	2

A4 Please indicate your employment term

Less than 1 year	1
1 to 4 years	2
5 to 8 years	3
9 to12 years	4
13 years and above	5

A5 Do you read online consumer reviews? (Where an online consumer review is the test of a customer's opinion and or experience of a product, service or business—reviewed online)

Yes	1
No	2

A6 Please indicate where you have read online consumer reviews prior to purchasing a computing electronic product? You may tick more than one (1) choice.

YouTube	1
Amazon	2
Takealot	3
Facebook	4
Hello Peter	5
Business Intelligence	6
Call Centre Operations	7
GSM Arena	8
Other	9

A7 What is the last electronic computing device you purchased after reviewing online consumer reviews?

Smartphone	1
Smart watch	2
Tablet/iPad	3
Laptop	4
Electronic notebook	5
GPS device	6
Handheld gaming device	7
Electronic reader i.e. Kindle	8
Other	9

SECTION B

You can indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement by ticking the corresponding number in the 5 point scale below:

1= Strongly Disagree **2=** Disagree **3=** Somewhat Disagree **4=** Neutral **5=** Somewhat Agree **6=** Agree **7=** Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please tick only one number for each statement

Online reviews made it easier for me to make the purchase decision i.e. to purchase or not to purchase	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
Online reviews have enhanced my effectiveness in making purchase decisions	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
Online reviews have motivated me to make a purchase decision i.e. purchase or not purchase	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
The last time I read online reviews I adopted consumers' recommendations	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
Information from reviews contributed to my knowledge of discussed product i.e. electronic computing devices	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree

SECTION C

You can indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement by ticking the corresponding number in the 5 point scale below:

1= Strongly Disagree **2=** Disagree **3=** Somewhat Disagree **4=** Neutral **5=** Somewhat Agree **6=** Agree **7=** Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please tick only one number for each statement

I frequently use an electronic computing device	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
I have used a wide variety of electronic computing devices	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
I know many technical details about the electronic computing devices I have used	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree

SECTION D

You may agree or disagree with each statement by ticking the appropriate number provided below where:

1= Strongly Disagree **2=** Disagree **3=** Somewhat Disagree **4=** Neutral **5=** Somewhat Agree **6=** Agree **7=** Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please tick only one number for each statement

I think that electronic computing devices with a majority of favourable online consumer reviews have high integrity	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
Electronic computing devices with favourable online consumer reviews appear to be more trustworthy than those with unfavourable online consumer reviews	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
Electronic computing devices with favourable online consumer reviews seem to deliver on their promise	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
My impression of the believability of the online consumer reviews about electronic computing devices is very high	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
My confidence in the online consumer reviews about electronic computing devices is very high	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree

SECTION E

You are required to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements below by ticking the appropriate number where:

1= Strongly Disagree **2=** Disagree **3=** Somewhat Disagree **4=** Neutral **5=** Somewhat Agree **6=** Agree **7=** Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please tick only one number for each statement.

People who are important to me think that I should use online consumer reviews	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
People who influence my behaviour think that I should refer to online consumer reviews	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
People whose opinions I value prefer that I refer to online consumer reviews	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree

SECTION F

You may agree or disagree with each statement by ticking the appropriate number provided where:

1= Strongly Disagree **2=** Disagree **3=** Somewhat Disagree **4=** Neutral **5=** Somewhat Agree **6=** Agree **7=** Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please tick only one number for each statement

People who complete online consumer reviews were convincing	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
The arguments of online consumer reviews were persuasive	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
The arguments of online consumer reviews were strong	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
The arguments of online consumer reviews were good	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree

SECTION G

You may agree or disagree with each statement by ticking the appropriate number provided where:

1= Strongly Disagree **2=** Disagree **3=** Somewhat Disagree **4=** Neutral **5=** Somewhat Agree **6=** Agree **7=** Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please tick only one number for each statement

The electronic computing device brand name of my liking is reliable	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
The electronic computing device brand name of my liking is attractive	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
The electronic computing device brand name of my liking is pleasing	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
The electronic computing device brand name of my liking is a social status symbol	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
The electronic computing device brand name of my liking has a good reputation	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree

SECTION H

You may agree or disagree with each statement by ticking the appropriate number provided where:

1= Strongly Disagree **2=** Disagree **3=** Somewhat Disagree **4=** Neutral **5=** Somewhat Agree **6=** Agree **7=** Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please tick only one number for each statement

After reviewing online consumer reviews, the likelihood of purchasing a computing electronic device is high	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree

If I am going to purchase an electronic computing device of my liking, I would consider purchasing a product with favourable online consumer reviews	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
The probability that I would purchase the electronic computing device of my liking is high	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
My willingness to purchase the electronic computing device of my liking is high	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree

THE END

APPENDIX B: Matrix of consistency

Sub-problem	Literature Review	Hypotheses	Source of data	Type of data	Analysis
Determine the relationship between product knowledge; trust; social influence; Consumer reviews; and brand image on the purchasing intent of South African consumers of electronic computing devices.	Davidson et al. (1985) Brucks (1985) Peterson and Pitz (1988) Ratchford and Haines (1994) Eastlick and Lotz (1999) McCole, Ramsey and Williams (2010) Lee and Turban (2001) Eastlick et al. (2006) Everard and Galleta (2006) Mansour et al. (2014) Huang (2012) AskariSiachini and Jalili (2015) Shoorman (1995, p.712) Jarvenpaa and Tractinsky (1999) Zhang at al. (2014) Zhang and Wattts (2008) Senecal and Netanel (2004) Gardner, B. S. (2011) Chen (2010) Aghekyan-Simomian et al. (2012) Pavlou (2003) Lu et al. (2014)	$H_1 \Rightarrow$ Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on product knowledge. $H_2 \Rightarrow$ Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on trust $H_3 \Rightarrow$ Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on social influence $H_4 \Rightarrow$ Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on source credibility $H_5 \Rightarrow$ Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on brand image $H_6 \Rightarrow$ Product knowledge has a positive effect on purchase intent H7⇒ Trust has a positive effect on purchase intent H8⇒ Social influence has a positive effect on purchase intent H9⇒ Source credibility has a positive effect on purchase intent H10⇒ Brand image has a positive effect on purchase intent	Section B to section G of Questionnaire : (Please refer to questionnaire for full detail)	Ordinal	Structural model equation (SEM) Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Path modelling

To determine the components which hold the strongest relationship with online consumer reviews and intent; and how they do this.		$H_1 \Rightarrow$ Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on product knowledge. $H_2 \Rightarrow$ Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on trust $H_3 \Rightarrow$ Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on social influence $H_4 \Rightarrow$ Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on source credibility $H_5 \Rightarrow$ Online consumer reviews have a positive effect on brand image $H_6 \Rightarrow$ Product knowledge has a positive effect on purchase intent H7⇒ Trust has a positive effect on purchase intent H8⇒ Social influence has a positive effect on purchase intent H9⇒ Source credibility has a positive effect on purchase intent H10⇒ Brand image has a positive effect on purchase intent	Field data collected from questionnaires	Ordinal	The strength of the path coefficient