



Business & Social Science
IJRBS

Research in Business & Social Science

IJRBS VOL 13 NO 4 (2024) ISSN: 2147-4478

Available online at www.ssbfn.net

Journal homepage: <https://www.ssbfn.net/ojs/index.php/ijrbs>

The role of information quality, ease of use and usefulness on consumers' trust in Facebook and WhatsApp groups as online sales platforms



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 March 2024

Received in rev. form 17 April 2024

Accepted 21 May 2024

Keywords:

Information quality, Ease of use, Usefulness, Trust, WhatsApp, Facebook

JEL Classification:

M30; M31

ABSTRACT

Facebook and WhatsApp, recognised as popular social media and messaging platforms, are increasingly being used as online sales platforms through the emergence of marketplaces, online stores and groups. Businesses and individual sellers create groups on these platforms to attract buyers who share similar interests, but the buyers and sellers often do not know one another, which may cause trust issues. Therefore, sellers should be aware of the factors that influence a buyer's trust so that strategies can be developed to mitigate trust issues that may hinder sales transactions. The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of information quality, perceived ease of use and usefulness on consumers' trust in Facebook and WhatsApp groups as online sales platforms. Following a descriptive research design, the data was gathered from 412 participants by means of an electronic self-administered questionnaire that was distributed to the South African database of an international research company. The statistical methods that were used to analyse the data included reliability measures, HTMT analysis and structural equation modelling. The findings of the study revealed that the information quality and perceived ease of use of WhatsApp and Facebook groups significantly influence the perceived usefulness of these groups, which, in turn, influences consumers' trust in WhatsApp and Facebook groups as online sales platforms. In conclusion, by understanding the relationship between these factors, social media platforms could alter their group features, while businesses and individual sellers can improve their marketing strategies to instil trust among group members and ultimately increase sales.

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Introduction

Social media has been transforming the manner in which businesses transact and grow by providing online platforms to create relationships with society, customers and the general market (Vithayathil, Dadgar, & Osiri, 2020). Facebook is known as the most popular social media network among individuals and businesses (Bhattacharyya & Bose, 2020). According to Conlin (2022), Facebook allows individuals to connect with one another by sharing content such as videos, pictures, articles and opinions. Moreover, Facebook users have the ability to create groups among each other so that they can communicate on topics in which they share common interests. Mayur (2021) highlights that Facebook is not only cost effective for businesses to utilise, but businesses can easily share essential information, enhance customer support, improve brand awareness and emphasise positive word-of-mouth, among many other benefits.

While Facebook is recognised as the most popular social network platform in the world, followed by YouTube, WhatsApp is recognised as the third most popular social network platform. In addition, WhatsApp is the most well-known and used messenger application, with approximately two billion active users worldwide (Statista, 2022). Kottani and KN (2021) state that WhatsApp is widely used for its basic functions of sending and receiving text and audio messages, making telephone and video calls, as well as

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<https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v13i4.3362>

sharing documents, photos, videos and location points, among other functions. Moreover, WhatsApp attracts multiple users as it is free to use and only requires an internet connection for it to be accessed via a smartphone or desktop computer. Oliveira and Pereira (2019) explain that two versions of WhatsApp exist, namely a WhatsApp application for personal use and a WhatsApp Business application for commercial use. Kottani and KN (2021) highlight that WhatsApp Business was introduced in 2018 as a communication platform specifically for business activities. One of the most prominent functions of both WhatsApp and WhatsApp Business is the ability to create groups for social or business purposes (Oliveira & Pereira, 2019).

In recent times, the formation of groups has not only been popular among formal groups, such as political parties, and community and religious organisations, but also among informal groups, such as the friendship and community groups created via social media platforms (Suarniki, Wijayaningtyas, Lukiyanto, Kusuma, & Afandi, 2019). As such, Ersöz (2018) states that WhatsApp groups are formed for both informal purposes among family and friends, and for formal purposes such as for business activities. Hsu, Qing, Wang, and Hsieh (2018) indicate that the traditional manner of online shopping is gradually shifting towards a group buying model, whereby community pages or groups are created on social media and transactions are conducted on a consumer-to-consumer (C2C) basis. Chen, Su, and Widjaja (2016) explain that groups on Facebook that are formed for trading purposes will consist of two users, namely a seller and a consumer and, as such, these groups are frequently termed *buy and sell* groups. Hsu and Lin (2020) emphasise that group participation has become an everyday activity for individuals utilising social media. Therefore, businesses and individuals can benefit from selling their products and services via groups on Facebook and WhatsApp due to the exposure it provides for their products and services. However, Irshad, Ahmad, and Malik (2020) caution that trust is the most important issue that should be addressed when conducting sales via social media.

Following the introduction of the paper is the literature review that sheds light on the conceptual background of trust within an online context and the empirical review and hypotheses development concerning the factors that influence consumers' trust. Subsequently, an outline of the research and methodology is provided with reference to the sampling and data collection methods, research instrument, data analysis and the ethical considerations. Thereafter, the findings of the study are outlined, followed by the discussion thereof. Lastly, a conclusion of the paper is provided as well as the limitations of the study, recommendations and future research opportunities.

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to provide insight into the concept of trust and its relation to social media platforms. This section first investigates trust within the online context, followed by a review of empirical studies that are of a similar topic to this study.

Conceptual Background of Trust

Trust is known as a multidimensional concept that can relate to various aspects or objects (Al-Adwan & Kokash, 2018; Irshad et al, 2020; Lin, Wang, & Hajli, 2019; Shareef, Kapoor, Mukerji, Dwivedi, & Dwivedi, 2020). Sharif, Soroya, Ahmad, & Mahmood (2021) highlight that trust is defined differently in relation to various disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and economics, amongst other disciplines. However, for the purpose of this study, trust is defined from a general perspective and is perceived as the reliability and goodwill of the parties involved. More specifically, trust is defined as "the willingness of a party [the trustor] to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other [the trustee] will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Al-Adwan & Kokash, 2019; Lin et al, 2019). Cheng, Gu, and Shen (2019) highlight that buyers will be reluctant to conclude online sales transactions if they do not fully trust the seller. In comparison to traditional shopping contexts, trust is known to be a greater concern for online consumers as it eliminates face-to-face interactions and other aspects, such as the ability to view a product before purchasing it (Al-Adwan & Kokash, 2018; Hung, Cheng, & Lee, 2022). Irshad et al (2020) explain that consumers can gain trust within traditional shopping contexts by examining physical cues such as the sales force. However, physical cues are absent in online shopping and, as such, consumers search for alternative aspects to build trust. With regard to social media groups, Cheng et al (2019) state that if trust is promoted among the members of a group, it will strengthen the overall trust in the social media platform. Hajli (2015) explains that trust can be facilitated through online reviews and customers' experiences posted on social media groups or communities. In other words, if a member of a social media group posts a positive review based on their experiences, then other group members will be more likely to trust the system, group, its members and the seller. Lin et al (2019) concur, indicating that a consumer's trust is not only evaluated from the seller's perspective, but also through the interactions, experiences and information provided by the other buyers or members of the group. Zhang and Li (2019) suggest that buyers will need to determine a seller's trustworthiness by examining their behaviour during their interaction and communication. Moreover, trust will be established progressively based on the experiences gained from the seller, or by other members of the group (Shareef et al, 2020). However, it will be challenging in a social media group, such as a Facebook or WhatsApp group, as members do not necessarily know each other and can be complete strangers to one another (Hung et al, 2022).

Irshad et al (2020) emphasise the need to determine the factors that influence consumers' trust in sellers on social media platforms. While previous research has been conducted on trust in social media platforms (Al-Adwan & Kokash, 2019; Cheng et al, 2019; Irshad et al, 2020; Sharif et al, 2021; Zafar, Shen, Ashfaq, & Shahzad, 2021; Zhang & Li, 2019), minimal research has been conducted

to explain the role of information quality, perceived ease of use and usefulness on consumers' trust in social media platforms, and if this is significant to Facebook and WhatsApp groups as online sales platforms. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the influence of information quality, perceived ease of use and usefulness on consumers' trust in Facebook and WhatsApp groups as online sales platforms. This study fills the gap in the literature regarding trust in social media platforms and the use of WhatsApp and Facebook groups as online sales platforms. Given that the lack of trust between a buyer and seller leads to buyers being reluctant to conclude sales, and ultimately a loss in sales to the seller, this study provides insight into the factors that influence consumers' trust in Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and provides recommendations to businesses and individual sellers on Facebook and WhatsApp groups to instil trust among their group members.

Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

In the technology acceptance model (TAM), developed by Davis, perceived ease of use and usefulness were utilised as measures to predict users' acceptance of technology (Davis, 1989). Many authors have made use of the TAM and extensions of the model have been developed, which include an array of variables, such as trust, risk, attitude, information quality, and purchase intention, among many others (Ha & Nguyen, 2019; Koththagoda & Herath, 2018; Wang & Song, 2017; Zarrad & Debabi, 2012). For the purpose of this study, information quality and perceived ease of use of Facebook and WhatsApp groups were applied as independent variables, whereas the usefulness and trust of Facebook and WhatsApp groups were utilised as the dependent variables.

Within an online context, Wang, Wang, Cheng, and Chen (2009) state that the relationship between buyers and sellers has evolved, as buyers can search for a variety of information relating to the product or service, which includes online reviews made by other members, and as a result, can reduce any uncertainty before concluding a purchase transaction. Cho and Sagynov (2015) and Chen et al (2016) indicate that online consumers require detailed product information as there are limited physical cues within the online environment, such as the ability to touch and feel a product and various other sensory aspects. Ahn and Sura (2020) caution that irresponsible sellers can use social media to easily manipulate information to persuade buyers into a fraudulent transaction. As such, the quality of the information provided by sellers is of utmost importance to the buyer. Fadhillah, Zebua, and Prayoga (2021) explain that information presented for online shopping should only be related to the products and services being offered. Moreover, consumers will evaluate the information to determine whether it is of quality in terms of the information being up-to-date, consistent and easy to understand. To a large extent, information quality relates to the relevance, completeness, accuracy, value, reliability and usefulness of the information on the product or service (Boustani, Sayegh, & Boustany, 2022; Hung & Cant, 2017; Tsai & Bui, 2020). Ahn and Sura (2020) state that consumers will perceive information to be useful if they are satisfied with the quality of information given by the seller. Moreover, if the information quality is of a high standard, it will ultimately be an indication of information reliability, which is useful to consumers when making cognitive decisions (Tsai & Bui, 2020). Therefore, within the context of this study, the quality of the information communicated by the seller, or other members of the Facebook and WhatsApp group, will have an influence on the buyer's perceived usefulness and cognitive decisions, such as the decision to trust the seller or not. Within similar online environments, previous studies have found that information quality has a positive influence on perceived usefulness (Andarwati, Zuhroh, & Amrullah, 2020; Cho & Sagynov, 2015; Machdar, 2016), but limited research has been conducted to determine if this relationship also applies to Facebook and WhatsApp groups. As such, the following hypothesis was developed for this study:

H1: The information quality of Facebook and WhatsApp groups has a significant positive influence on the perceived usefulness of these groups.

The definition of perceived ease of use refers to a situation where an individual assumes that utilising a system or technology would exert minimal or no effort (Andarwati et al, 2020; Davis, 1989). Prakosa and Sumantika (2021) explain that an electronic activity should be easy to use and understand, as complicated processes will discourage a user's willingness to adopt the activity. Lane and Coleman (2012) state that if a social media platform is perceived as being easy to use, then consumers will engage and interact more with the platform. In a study conducted by Hajli, Wang, Tajvidi, and Hajli (2017), it was theorised and empirically supported that an easy-to-use social media platform ultimately increases usefulness. The positive influence of perceived ease of use on perceived usefulness has also been supported by the findings of other studies (Andarwati et al, 2020; Cho & Sagynov, 2015; Machdar, 2016), but not in specific relation to Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it will be determined whether the perceived ease of use of Facebook and WhatsApp groups has a positive influence on the perceived usefulness of these groups, and as such, the following hypothesis was developed for this study:

H2: The perceived ease of use of Facebook and WhatsApp groups has a significant positive influence on the perceived usefulness of these groups.

Perceived usefulness can be defined as the extent to which an individual believes that using a system or technology would improve his/her performance (Davis, 1989; Machdar, 2016). Cho and Sagynov (2015) differentiate between perceived ease of use and usefulness by indicating that usefulness relates to the outcome of using a system or technology, whereas ease of use incorporates the process leading to the outcome of using a system or technology. Andarwati et al (2020) highlight that perceived usefulness implies that a task is completed quicker, more effectively and without difficulty. In relation to online shopping, perceived usefulness would be the consumers' perception that they have managed to enhance their shopping experience through the use of the internet (Cho &

Sagynov, 2015). Similarly, perceived usefulness can be applied to social media shopping, whereby consumers perceive that their shopping experience was enriched through the use of a social media platform. Hajli et al (2017) postulate that if a consumer perceives a social media platform to be useful, it will assist them in making a purchase decision and also build trust. Ha and Nguyen (2019) highlight that trust is the underlying foundation for online transactions to take place. In other words, consumers will not conclude an online transaction if they do not trust the seller. However, Chinomona (2013) states that consumers will only be able to develop trust if they perceive the technology to be useful. Therefore, consumers will cease to continue their usage of a particular social media platform if they do not perceive it to be useful for their needs, consequently prohibiting them from building trust and concluding their purchase. Previous research relating to online shopping activities has supported that perceived usefulness has a positive influence on trust (Primanda, Setyaning, Hidayat, & Ekasasi, 2020; Ventre & Kolbe, 2020; Hajli et al, 2017). However, no research has been conducted to determine whether the perceived usefulness of Facebook and WhatsApp groups has a positive influence on consumers' trust in these groups. As a result, the following hypothesis was developed for this study:

H3: The perceived usefulness of Facebook and WhatsApp groups has a significant positive influence on consumers' trust in these groups.

Figure 1 below is a visual presentation of the proposed model for this study. In line with the hypotheses formulated, this study proposes that the information quality and perceived ease of use of Facebook and WhatsApp groups have a positive influence on the perceived usefulness of these groups, whereas the perceived usefulness of these groups will have a positive influence on the consumers' trust in Facebook and WhatsApp groups.

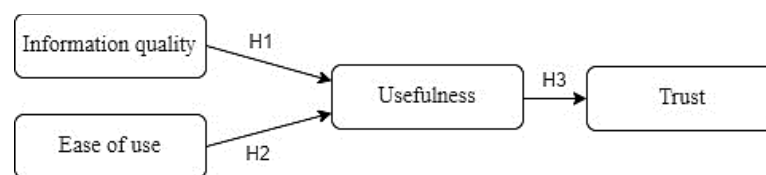


Figure 1: Proposed Model of the Study; *Source:* Authors

Research and Methodology

This study followed a descriptive research design, using a single cross-sectional sample approach.

Sampling Method and Data Collection

An international research company was recruited for the data collection of this study. The research company allowed for specific sample criteria to be selected, of which the researchers indicated that the sample should include South African male and female consumers between the ages of 18 and 55 years. Given that the population of interest for this study included South African consumers who have previously purchased from a Facebook or WhatsApp group, a screening question was included in the questionnaire to ascertain that the participant had previously purchased from a Facebook or WhatsApp group. The questionnaire was distributed to 500 participants that formed part of the general population on the research company's South African database, who were classified as male and female and between the ages of 18 and 55 years. Participants who did not meet the criteria were not selected to participate and the researchers excluded the questionnaires of the participants who had not previously purchased from a Facebook or WhatsApp group. A sample size of 500 was deemed suitable as it is in line with other studies of similar nature such as the study conducted by Hung et al (2022) (sample size of 498) and Ventre and Kolbe (2020) (sample size of 380).

Research Instrument

The data was collected by means of an electronic self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire included a cover letter to explain the purpose of the study, a section that requested the participants' demographic information (Section A), and another section that included questions that related to the topic of the study (Section B). One screening question was included to ascertain that the participants included in the study had purchased a product or service from a Facebook or WhatsApp group before. Section B comprised 16 items that were adapted from previously published studies. Information quality was measured using five items (Alalwan, 2018; Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008), perceived ease of use was measured using three items (Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa, 2004; San Martín & Herrero, 2012), perceived usefulness was measured using four items (Cha, 2009; Oeawpanich, 2018), and trust was measured using four items (Elkheshin, 2020; Jarvenpaa, 2000). The participants' responses to the questions in Section B were measured on a six-point Likert-type scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using IBM's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS), versions 27. The data analysis employed for this study included frequencies, descriptive statistics, reliability analysis and correlation analysis. In addition, confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis were performed by means of structural equation modelling.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical standards of academic research. The questionnaire included an informed consent statement and did not request any personal information such as the participant's name, surname, identification number, or contact number, which ensured the anonymity of the participants. The participants completed the questionnaire on a voluntary basis and were free to withdraw from the study at any time, should they wish not to participate in the study anymore.

Findings

From the 500 questionnaires that were distributed to the participants, 412 questionnaires were deemed usable as these participants met the sample's requirement to have purchased a product or service from a Facebook or WhatsApp group before. The majority of these participants fell within the age category of 18 to 34 years (73%), while the majority reside in the Gauteng Province (42.2%), followed by those in the Western Cape (16.5%) and those in KwaZulu-Natal (15.5%). There is a relatively equal split between the male (48%) and female participants (52%). In terms of occupation, the majority of the participants were salaried employees (49%), followed by those who indicated being self-employed (19.9%). In addition, three participants indicated the 'other' category and 12 participants selected multiple options, which implies that at the time of the data collection, the participant took on two roles simultaneously, such as salaried employee and student. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample description

	Frequency	Percent (%)		Frequency	Percent (%)
Age			Gender		
18-34	299	73	Male	198	48
35-55	113	27	Female	214	52
Province			Occupation		
Eastern Cape	26	6.3	Student	55	13.3
Free State	14	3.4	Salaried employee	202	49
Gauteng	174	42.2	Retired	3	0.7
KwaZulu-Natal	64	15.5	Self-employed	82	19.9
Limpopo	16	3.9	Unemployed	55	13.3
Mpumalanga	22	5.3	Other	3	0.7
Northern Cape	10	2.4	Multiple options	12	2.9
North West	18	4.4			
Western Cape	68	16.5			

Source: Authors

To ascertain internal consistency reliability, Cronbach alpha values were calculated for each of the factors. The descriptive statistics, including the means and standard deviations, were also calculated for each factor. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to determine whether relationships exist between the factors. The Cronbach alpha values, descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics, reliability measures, and correlation coefficients

Latent factors	Cronbach alpha	Means	Standard deviations	F1	F2	F3
Information quality (F1)	0.855	4.141	0.914			
Ease of use (F2)	0.813	4.717	0.827	0.414*		
Usefulness (F3)	0.849	4.683	0.871	0.497*	0.634*	
Trust (F4)	0.907	3.957	1.107	0.563*	0.376*	0.545*

* Statistically significant at $p \leq 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Source: Authors

As presented in Table 2, the Cronbach alpha values for all the latent factors surpassed the recommended level of 0.70 (Malhotra, 2020), which suggests internal-consistency reliability. The means of the latent factors exceeded 3.5. Given that a six-point Likert-type scale was used, this suggests that the participants perceive the information on Facebook and WhatsApp groups to be of high quality and that Facebook and WhatsApp groups are easy to use and useful. While trust returned the lowest mean, it still suggests that the participants have trust in Facebook and WhatsApp groups as online sales platforms.

Concerning the correlation coefficients, there were statistically significant positive relationships ($p \leq 0.01$) between each of the latent factors. This implies the nomological validity of the measurement theory. Among the latent factors, perceived ease of use and usefulness have the strongest relationship ($r = 0.634$), which fell below 0.90 and thereby revealed no obvious multicollinearity issues (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). In addition, the collinearity diagnostics were examined and revealed tolerance values ranging from 0.488 to 0.799, which are above the 0.10 threshold, and an average variance inflation factor (VIF) of 1.60, which fell

below the cut-off of 10 (Pallant, 2020) and as such, no multicollinearity issues were identified. Because of the nomological validity of the measurement theory, and the absence of multicollinearity issues, a measurement model was proposed.

A four-factor measurement model was specified for confirmatory factor analysis that included information quality (five indicators), perceived ease of use (three indicators), perceived usefulness (four indicators) and trust (four indicators). For model identification purposes, the first loading on each of the four latent factors was fixed at 1.0, which resulted in 152 distinct sample moments and 54 distinct parameters to be estimated, equalling 98 degrees of freedom (df) based on an over-identified model, as well as a chi-square value of 263.734 with a probability level equal to 0.000.

The measurement model was examined for problematic estimates, such as standardised factor loadings above 1.0 or below -1.0, and negative error variances (Hair et al, 2014). In addition, the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated and the HTMT analysis was performed to assess the composite reliability and construct validity. The results of these analyses are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Measurement model estimates

Latent factors	Standardised loading estimates	Error variance estimates	CR	AVE	HTMT analysis		
					F1	F2	F3
Information quality (F1)	0.680	0.462	0.860	0.553			
	0.804	0.647					
	0.803	0.644					
	0.788	0.621					
	0.625	0.391					
Ease of use (F2)	0.761	0.579	0.815	0.596	0.488		
	0.805	0.649					
	0.748	0.559					
Usefulness (F3)	0.715	0.511	0.852	0.591	0.587	0.786	
	0.784	0.615					
	0.787	0.620					
	0.786	0.617					
Trust (F4)	0.852	0.727	0.909	0.715	0.640	0.424	0.623
	0.915	0.837					
	0.741	0.549					
	0.864	0.747					
Correlations	F1↔F2: 0.477		F1↔F3: 0.569		F1↔F4: 0.630		
	F2↔F3: 0.774		F2↔F4: 0.400		F3↔F4: 0.590		

Source: Authors

Based on the results presented in Table 3, there were no problematic estimates in the measurement model. Furthermore, all the CR values of the latent factors exceeded the recommended value of 0.70, which suggests composite reliability (Malhotra, 2020). Given that the standardised loading estimates and the AVE values for all the latent factors surpassed 0.50, it provides evidence of convergent validity (Hair et al, 2014). Additionally, the HTMT values of all the factors fell below the 0.85 threshold, which suggests discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). As such, the convergent and discriminant validity combined with the nomological validity established in Table 2, suggest construct validity (Malhotra, 2020).

To assess the model fit of the measurement model, statistical measures, including the incremental fit index (IFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the standardised root mean residual (SRMR), the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), and the chi-square statistic were examined. The model fit is considered acceptable if the model returns a non-significant chi-square value, the IFI, CFI and TLI values exceed 0.9, the RMSEA value is 0.08 or smaller (Malhotra, 2020) and the SRMR value is smaller than 0.1 (Hair et al, 2014). The model returned a significant chi-square value of 263.734 with 98 degrees of freedom (df). Because the chi-square value is known to be vulnerable to large sample sizes (Byrne, 2016), other fit indices were examined and indicated acceptable model fit such as SRMR=0.0532, RMSEA=0.064, IFI=0.957, CFI=0.956 and TLI=0.946.

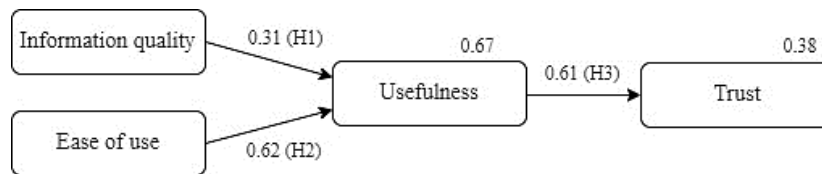
To achieve the aim of the study, a structural model based on the specified measurement model was tested. In the structural model, it is hypothesised that the information quality (F1) and perceived ease of use (F2) of Facebook/WhatsApp groups have a direct positive influence on the perceived usefulness (F3) of Facebook/WhatsApp groups, which, in turn, has a direct positive influence on consumers' trust (F4) in Facebook/WhatsApp groups. Table 4 presents the standardised and unstandardised regression coefficients, standard errors, p-values and results of the model.

Table 4: Structural model

Paths	β	Unstandardised β	SE	p-value	Result
Information quality $\rightarrow$ Usefulness	0.31	0.27	0.044	0.001	Sig.
Ease of use $\rightarrow$ Usefulness	0.62	0.67	0.068	0.001	Sig.
Usefulness $\rightarrow$ Trust	0.61	0.86	0.076	0.001	Sig.

β : beta coefficient; SE: standard error; p: two-tailed statistical significance **Source:** Authors

Based on the results presented in Table 4, all paths tested in the model were positively and statistically significant ($p \leq 0.001$). The information quality of Facebook/WhatsApp groups ($\beta=0.31$, $p \leq 0.001$) and the perceived ease of use of Facebook/WhatsApp groups ($\beta=0.62$, $p \leq 0.001$) have a statistically significant positive influence on the perceived usefulness of Facebook/WhatsApp groups. Therefore, H1 and H2 were accepted. Furthermore, the perceived usefulness of Facebook/WhatsApp groups is found to be a statistically significant predictor of consumers' trust in Facebook/WhatsApp groups ($\beta=0.61$, $p \leq 0.001$). As such, H3 was accepted. With regard to the squared multiple correlation (SMC) coefficients, the model explains 67 percent of the variance in the perceived usefulness of Facebook and WhatsApp groups as online sales platforms and 38 percent of the variance in consumers' trust in Facebook and WhatsApp groups as online sales platforms. Figure 2 presents the structural model along with the standardised regression estimates and SMC coefficients.

**Figure 2:** Structural model; *Source:* Authors

Concerning the model fit of the structural model, the model returned a significant chi-square statistic [326.451 (df=100, $p < 0.000$)]; however, it produced acceptable model fit indices of SRMR=0.0825, RMSEA=0.074, IFI=0.941, CFI=0.940 and TLI=0.928.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of information quality, perceived ease of use and usefulness of Facebook and WhatsApp groups as online sales platforms on consumers' trust in these groups. By performing confirmatory factor analysis, it was established that the proposed model of the study is a four-factor structure that comprises the information quality of Facebook and WhatsApp groups, perceived ease of use of Facebook and WhatsApp groups, perceived usefulness of Facebook and WhatsApp groups and consumers' trust in Facebook and WhatsApp groups. The measurement model showed acceptable model fit and displayed internal-consistency reliability, composite reliability and construct validity, which made it suitable to perform path analysis. The results of the path analysis were in line with the literature in that the information quality and the perceived ease of use of Facebook and WhatsApp groups have a significant positive influence on the perceived usefulness of these groups, which, in turn, has a significant positive influence on consumers' trust in these groups.

With online shopping, consumers are exposed to more means of searching for information on the sellers' products and services. This influences the quality of the information that sellers need to provide as buyers will evaluate the information to determine whether it is reliable, complete, accurate and useful. Consequently, if buyers are not satisfied with the information quality, it will negatively influence the buyer's perceived usefulness of the group and they will refrain from conducting a sale. This poses a disadvantage to the seller as the buyer will revert to supporting competitors. In relation H1, the results of this study indicated that the information quality of Facebook and WhatsApp groups has a significant positive influence on the perceived usefulness of these groups, which is supported by the findings of the studies conducted on internet shopping (Cho & Sagynov, 2015), accounting information systems and software in Indonesia (Andarwati et al, 2020; Machdar, 2016). Therefore, sellers need to ensure that the information they provide is complete, reliable, easy to understand and concise, as this influences the buyer's perceived usefulness of the Facebook and WhatsApp groups. The information provided does not necessarily need to be restricted to written information. For example, sellers should be creative with complicated products and complex services and perhaps create a short video as a demonstration for potential buyers. However, sellers need to make sure that the quality of the advertisement is enhanced with whichever format is chosen as a poor-quality video advertisement or an unformatted written message with spelling errors will negatively affect the buyers' perceived information quality. More than often, online buyers will utilise this information provided by sellers as a replacement for the 'physical cues' that they would have experienced with traditional shopping. These 'physical cues' help the buyer determine whether the seller is trustworthy and, as such, high-quality information will improve the likelihood of the buyer trusting the seller.

The perceived ease of use of Facebook and WhatsApp groups relates to buyers' perception that the system is easy to use and they can complete a sale on the group with minimal or no effort at all. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, should ensure that the features that they are providing sellers to use on these groups are of value to the buyers. In relation to H2, the results of this study indicated that the perceived ease of use of Facebook and WhatsApp groups has a significant positive influence on the

perceived usefulness of these groups. These findings are in line with previous studies conducted on online environments (Andarwati et al, 2020; Cho & Sagynov, 2015; Machdar, 2016). From the seller's perspective, they need to ensure that the buyers are comfortable and skilful at using the features of their groups so that the buyers perceive their groups to be useful. The sellers can provide short tutorial videos on how to navigate and use the features of their groups and provide clear instructions for the rules and procedures of the group. Moreover, sellers can provide their contact details to offer additional training to prospective buyers who struggle to use their group features. This is especially valid if it is the buyer's first time interacting with a Facebook or WhatsApp group, as these buyers would be unfamiliar with the processes of such groups and could become discouraged if they perceive the group features to be overcomplicated.

While using social media platforms, perceived usefulness would imply that consumers perceive their experience to have been improved through the use of the platform. In other words, buyers will have an increased feeling of perceived usefulness if they perceive their outcome with Facebook and WhatsApp groups to be positive and have improved their shopping experience. In relation to H3, the results of the study found that the perceived usefulness of Facebook and WhatsApp groups has a significant positive influence on consumers' trust in these groups. Within similar environments, previous studies have found that perceived usefulness positively influences trust. Some of these studies include the study conducted by Primanda et al (2020) that investigated students' trust in e-commerce in Indonesia, Ventre and Kolbe's (2020) study on Mexican online shoppers' trust in online shopping, the study conducted by Hajli et al (2017) on British university students' trust in social commerce sites, Sharif et al's (2021) study in Pakistan on Facebook users trust in Facebook and the study conducted by Bhat and Darzi (2020) in Jammu and Kashmir on online consumers' trust in online shopping. As such, sellers on Facebook and WhatsApp groups should aim to improve the usefulness of the groups by providing constant support to enrich the buyer's shopping experience, such as advice on purchase decisions, payment options available, efficient exchange and refund procedures, review systems and so forth. The seller's goal should be to build a relationship with the potential buyer so that the buyer sees the value of the shopping experience and the usefulness of the group. If the seller can improve the potential buyer's usefulness, then it will increase the likeliness that the potential buyer will trust the seller. However, the seller needs to realise that trust will not be gained immediately and, as such, should continue offering support and interaction until the potential buyer becomes a customer. Moreover, the seller can also ask members of the group who have had positive experiences to post a review based on their experiences. Potential buyers will use other members' experiences to increase their levels of trust, not only in the seller, but also in the system, group and the members of the group. Sellers should create channels for members to post their experiences and motivate buyers to post positive reviews based on their experiences.

Conclusion

The world of conducting business is ever changing. Businesses and individuals alike can make use of social media to provide online platforms to sell their products and services. Moreover, the commercial usage of social media has provided endless opportunities for businesses to interact and strengthen relationships with their consumers. Worldwide, Facebook and WhatsApp are two of the most popular and widely used social media networks. Both Facebook and WhatsApp allow for groups to be created, which businesses can use to attract buyers in a virtual environment who share similar interests. These virtual groups, which consist of buyers and sellers, are frequently referred to as *buy and sell* groups. The greatest advantage of these *buy and sell* groups is the exposure it creates for a business or individual's products and services. However, as with any form of online shopping, consumers may be reluctant to conduct sales in these virtual groups as they might not know the seller and, as such, have trust issues. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of information quality, perceived ease of use and usefulness of Facebook and WhatsApp groups as online sales platforms on South African consumers' trust in these groups. The results of the model utilised in this study showed that information quality and perceived ease of use of Facebook and WhatsApp groups have a positive influence on the perceived usefulness of these groups. Moreover, the findings also suggest that the perceived usefulness of Facebook and WhatsApp groups has a positive influence on the consumer's trust in these groups. The findings of this study may assist sellers on Facebook and WhatsApp groups to understand the trust factors that might hinder buyers from purchasing from their groups. The strategies recommended can be incorporated by sellers to enhance buyers' trust in them, and the transactions conducted on their groups. Ultimately, this would lead to increased sales, success and profitability for the sellers on Facebook and WhatsApp groups.

There are limitations to this study that could possibly revert to future research possibilities. This study was conducted in South Africa and only included South African buyers on Facebook and WhatsApp groups. As Facebook and WhatsApp are popularly used in international markets, the study can be conducted in other countries or on participants of different cultural backgrounds. Another limitation was that this study only used Facebook and WhatsApp as social media platforms. However, multiple other social media platforms have recently become popular for commerce activities, such as Instagram and LinkedIn, which present research opportunities for the study to be replicated by using alternative social media platforms. The researchers acknowledge that there could be other factors that could influence the buyer's usefulness and trust in Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Future studies can help to discover these additional factors such as user interface design elements, privacy concerns, social influence amongst others and provide extensions to the model tested in this study. Given that the study was quantitative in nature, qualitative research could provide valuable insight into consumers' trust-related experiences and perceptions, and in-depth information on consumers' trust-building processes and why certain factors play a role. Owing to the nature of consumer behaviour and the facts that it constantly changes; a longitudinal study would be beneficial to sellers on Facebook and WhatsApp groups as this would provide an understanding as to how consumers' trust in these groups evolves over time and how new features and functionalities on these platforms influences their

trust. Furthermore, a comparative study can be conducted based on the participants' age and tech-savviness to determine if differences in the perceived trust in Facebook and WhatsApp groups exist, and consequently, could aid in devising more effective strategies that are better suited for the different categories of customers.

Acknowledgement

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, R.K. and H.T.L.; methodology, R.K. and H.T.L.; validation, R.K. and H.T.L.; formal analysis, R.K. and H.T.L.; investigation, R.K. and H.T.L.; resources, R.K. and H.T.L.; writing—original draft preparation, R.K. and H.T.L.; writing—review and editing, R.K. and H.T.L.

Funding: This research received funding from the WorkWell Research Entity of the North-West University.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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