

**Factors influencing
consumer behaviour in an
online shopping
environment in Sedibeng
district of Gauteng**

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Mini-dissertation accepted in
fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Business Administration
at the North-West University

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ABSTRACT

The spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) worldwide in the year 2019 invaded every society. The pandemic interrupted and changed human activities such as world trade, education, commerce, and many others. In marketing, as is the case in most societal elements, these changes have triggered a shift towards online shopping. It is thus important for marketers to examine the effects that online shopping has on consumer-buying behaviour constantly. The aim of this study is to examine the factors that influence the online shopping behaviour of customers in Sedibeng region. The study explored the factors that bring about changes in consumer-buying behaviour, as well as why consumers prefer shopping online compared to visiting the physical store. An online survey was used to gather quantitative data from 383 respondents using the non-probability convenience sampling method, the majority of whom are females, who are experienced in an online shopping. Mean and standard deviation statistical tools were used on responses to test for significant mean differences between consumer-buying behaviour online and factors. The results confirm that there are significant differences among factors such as COVID-19 lockdown regulations, product delivery time, and social networks that consumers strongly consider as important in an online shopping environment. The implications of the research findings to marketers and businesses indicate the importance of understanding factors that influence consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment so that they can effectively plan in order to remain competitive.

DECLARATION

I, Junior Mthimkhulu, declare that this research report is my own unaided work. Ideas borrowed from other researchers are acknowledged through citations and references. The dissertation is submitted to the North-West University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MBA degree and has not been submitted for any other qualification at any institution.

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Signed at _Vanderbijlpark__ this __30__ day of March 2022

DEDICATION

This mini dissertation is dedicated to my entire family. My sincerest appreciation goes to my fiancée for being a great supporter. Taking care of our children while I was busy with the study is no mean feat. Thank you for believing in me. I doubt I would have been able to accomplish this without your support.

To my brother who has always been guiding me in my social and professional life. I will never forget your encouragement during the times when I was overwhelmed and wanted to quit. I will always be grateful for all the sacrifices you made to support me.

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Contents

ABSTRACT	2
DECLARATION.....	3
DEDICATION	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Purpose of the study	1
1.3 Background to the research problem	1
1.4 Problem statement.....	2
1.5 Research objectives.....	2
1.6 Key context of the study.....	3
1.6.1 Consumer behaviour	3
1.6.2 Online shopping.....	4
1.6.3 External environment.....	5
1.6.4 Consumer-buying decision process.....	6
1.6.5 Online buying process	8
1.6.6 Factors influencing online purchasing.....	8
1.6.7 Decision-making for online purchases	11
1.6.8 Impact of social media	13
1.6.9 Perceived usefulness.....	13
1.6.10 New trends in consumer behaviour	14
1.6.11 Development of the Theoretical Model	15
1.7 Research methodology	15
1.7.1 Research design.....	16
1.7.1 Research approach and methodology	16
1.7.2 Population and sampling.....	17
1.7.3 Pre-test study.....	18
1.7.4 Data analysis	18
1.7.5 Substantiation of need for the study	18
1.7.6 Theoretical contribution.....	18
1.7.7 Managerial implications	19
1.7.8 Rationale why this research is executable	19
1.7.9 The field of study under which this study can be classified.....	19
1.7.10 Research approach and motivation	19

1.7.11 Mini-dissertation format and why	19
1.7.12 Academic value and contribution of the proposed study.....	19
1.7.13 Delimitations of the study.....	20
1.7.14 Assumptions	20
1.8 Definition of key terms.....	20
1.9 Conclusion	21
CHAPTER TWO.....	22
EFFECTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN ONLINE SHOPPING	22
2.1 Introduction	22
2.3 Electronic word-of-mouth	22
2.4 Factors influencing online purchasing	23
2.5 Impact of social media	24
2.6 The impact of COVID-19 on consumer behaviour	25
2.7 Perceived risks in consumer online shopping	25
2.8 Online shopping in South Africa.....	27
2.9 New trends in an online consumer shopping environment.....	27
2.10 Conclusion of literature review	28
This chapter provided elaborations of each factor as a foundation for the study. In the following chapter, the research methodology employed.....	28
CHAPTER THREE	29
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.....	29
3.1 Introduction	29
3.2 Research design	29
3.3 A classification of the study's overall research design	30
3.4 Sampling	31
3.4.1 Population.....	31
3.4.2 Sample.....	32
3.5 Data collection	33
3.5.1 Questionnaire design.....	33
3.5.2 Measurement.....	34
3.6 Pre-test study	35
3.7 Data management	35
3.7.1 Data validation	36
3.7.2 Data editing and coding	36
3.7.3 Data cleaning and entry	37
3.7.4 Other requirements in data analysis	37

3.8 Statistical data analysis.....	37
3.8.1 Reliability assessment of rating scales	37
3.8.2 Descriptive statistics for demographics.....	38
3.9 Evaluating and revealing the rigour and quality of the research design	38
3.9.1 Sources of bias	38
3.9.2 Types of errors.....	38
3.9.3 Reliability	39
3.9.4 Validity	40
3.10 Approval of the ethics committee	40
CHAPTER FOUR	42
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS	42
4.1 Introduction	42
4.2 Descriptive statistics	42
4.2.1 Sample results	42
4.2.2 Demographic profiles of the respondents	42
4.4 Statistical analysis.....	50
4.4.2 Table format for tests for significant mean differences.....	53
4.4.3 Conclusion	57
CHAPTER FIVE	58
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	58
5.1 Introduction	58
5.2 The importance of the study.....	58
5.2.3 Revisit the problem statement	58
5.3 Integration of research objectives, literature, and discussion of results	59
5.4 Summary of the findings	61
5.5 General findings and recommendations.....	62
5.6 Theoretical implications of the study	63
5.7 Managerial implications of the study	63
5.8 Limitations of the study	63
5.9 Recommendations for future research study	64
5.10 Conclusion	64
REFERENCES.....	65
APPENDIX A: Data collection instrument.....	74
APPENDIX B: Approval of the study	82
APPENDIX C: Letter from the editor	83
APPENDIX D: Letter from the statistician.....	84

APPENDIX E: Turnitin report	85
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List of Figures

FIGURE 1.1 CONSUMER-BUYING BEHAVIOUR PROCESS	7
FIGURE 1.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	8
FIGURE 1.3 FFF MODEL	12
FIGURE 1.4 THEORETICAL MODEL	15
FIGURE 2.1: DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WOM AND EWOM	23
FIGURE 4.1 GENDER	43
FIGURE 4.2 AGE GROUP IN YEARS	43
FIGURE 4.3 AGE BY GENDER	44
FIGURE 4.4 MARITAL STATUS OF THE RESPONDENTS	45
FIGURE 4.5 HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION	45
FIGURE 4.6 INFLUENTIAL FACTORS	46
FIGURE 4.7 CONTRIBUTING FACTORS	47
FIGURE 4.8 WORD-OF-MOUTH, BRAND NAME AND PRODUCT DELIVERY TIME GRAPH	47
FIGURE 4.9 FINANCIAL CONDITION, CONVENIENCE & ADVERTISEMENT	48
FIGURE 4.10 ONLINE PURCHASING PROCESS	49
FIGURE 4.11 PERSONAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS	50

List of Tables

TABLE 3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTION NUMBERS	34
TABLE 4.1 RELIABILITY AND CONVERGENT VALIDITY	50
TABLE 4.2 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ANALYSIS	51
TABLE 4.3 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS FOR QUESTION 6	52
TABLE 4.4 SAMPLE GENDER TEST	53
TABLE 4.5 COMPARISONS BETWEEN HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND OVERALL RESPONSES	53
TABLE 4.6 EFFECT SIZE	55
TABLE 5.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS	61

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Technology has transformed human activities from the physical to an online space. Notable changes can be observed in the way people shop, learn, play, and study. The way goods and services are produced, distributed, and consumed has changed dramatically, and the continual growth in technology has obviated its central place in human life. Online shopping is one of the new ways consumers search for information about the products they want, make a decision and buy the product through the use of technology (Pütter, 2017:7). In this chapter, an overview of the study is provided and a cursory view of the key concepts of consumer behaviour; online shopping; factors influencing online buying; and decision-making in an online environment are outlined.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This study aims to understand the factors that influence consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment.

1.3 Background to the research problem

The fast developments in communication and information technology during the past industrial revolutions, such as increasing mobile technology usage, artificial intelligence and the internet have forced industries to introduce E-commerce. The fourth industrial revolution has brought about disruptions such as high-speed mobile technology, a large body of data analytics and automation in digital technologies that affect different industries and every economic sector. These changes in technology ranging from online ordering to home deliveries have caused consumer buying trends to shift and change towards online shopping. Marketers need to examine the effects that online shopping has on consumer buying behaviour (Vijay Victor, 2018:4).

The invasion of the coronavirus disease worldwide in the year 2019 impacted many countries societies and economies. Globally, the pandemic interrupted various activities such as world trade, education, commerce and many other activities. Many businesses in the world, including South Africa, are now trying to adopt online shopping (Neger & Uddin, 2020:92).

The online shopping phenomenon is rapidly growing, and consumers can easily see products, review rating information as well as buying products and services online. Thus, the online shopping environment plays a critical role among consumers and marketers (Nowakowski, 2021:597). The main goal of a business is to meet consumers' needs by providing a product or service that meets those needs more effectively than the competition. Moreover, in South Africa, online buying has been growing rapidly by 66% in 2020 from 2019 and internet penetration extends across the whole country (iKhokha, 2022). Regardless of Africans' observed moderate approach to online buying, the emergence of COVID-19 and the global lockdown regulations imposed in response to it, fast-moving life, globalisation, and dependence on online shopping have been projected to grow exponentially (Muhammad Umar Usma, 2020:2). Therefore, businesses need to understand the prodigy of online shopping, as well as having a good understanding of factors such as social, financial and satisfied customers that influence consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment.

1.4 Problem statement

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered major changes in economics, technology and behaviour among individuals globally, including in South Africa. The most significant change underpinned by lockdown regulations is consumer online shopping. The rising of online shopping obliged businesses to meet and exceed customers' expectations in an online shopping environment.

In the consumer buying process, the information that consumers receive from the internet platform plays an important role during their online purchasing. For businesses to meet the ever-changing needs, they need to understand the factors that play a crucial role in changing online consumer behaviour (Mohammad, 2019).

Thus, the hypothesis of this dissertation that constitutes the research problem under investigation is that a lack of understanding of influential factors in an online consumer shopping environment could make it difficult for online marketers to know where to focus their marketing efforts and capital when matching consumers' needs with a company's products and services.

1.5 Research objectives

The below research objectives guided the study. The primary objective is to understand factors that influence online shopping behaviour of consumers in the Sedibeng Region of Gauteng.

Secondary objectives are as follows:

- a. To determine factors contributing to online purchasing behaviour;
- b. To determine the consumer decision-making process that consumers are faced with when making an online purchase; and
- c. To determine the internal and external factors that motivate consumers to purchase products or services online.

1.6 Key context of the study

The key context of the study focusses on the areas that the study investigated, including consumer behaviour; online shopping; the external environment; the consumer buying decision process; the online buying process; factors influencing online purchasing; and new trends in consumer behaviour.

1.6.1 Consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour is defined as a study of how individuals select, use and dispose of products or services (Mehta *et al.*, 2020:292). Consumer behaviour involves clear decisions, ideas, activities and experiences that satisfy customers needs (Pourfakhimi *et al.* 2020:649). It is related to all activities implicated in acquiring, consuming and disposing of products or services. Sonwaney and Chincholkar (2019) have submitted extensive studies that examine online consumer behaviour. These authors agree commonly that there is a need to study the factors influencing consumer behaviour online.

According to (Mohammad, 2019:19), consumer behaviour research pinpoints a universal model of purchasing behaviour that illustrates the process utilised by consumers in their purchasing decision making. A study conducted by Gaurav and Dheer (2017) confirms that the decision-making process is very similar regardless whether the consumer is online or offline. The major differences between when consumers shop online and offline is the shopping environment and the marketing communication: for example, in terms of the shopping environment of the traditional stores, consumers physically visit the store to see the products. Contrarily, in an online store, consumers check the products online using their technological devices. Schofield (2016) defines consumer behaviour as a study of how consumers make a purchasing decision about the product or service that they need or want. In a recent study by Mohammad (2019:17), he examined how the customers make a purchasing decision on the product or service in an online shopping context. He found that the five

stages that consumers undergo in an offline environment when they want to buy a product, is also utilised in an online shopping environment

The understanding of consumer behaviour is an important marketing function because the outcomes of this understanding lead to satisfying customers' needs, as well contributing to the success of the company (Alessandra Daiana Schinaider, 2016). The changing consumer behaviour over the past decade has obliged businesses to examine the psychology of virtual consumers (Lim *et al.*, 2016:402).

There are several consumer behaviour models: it all depends on the objectives of the research; for example, the objective of this study is to examine the factors that influence consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment. This requires the adoption and investigation of well-known and useful methods of consumer buying decision-making process. The most well-known and useful method is the decision process which outlines the way consumer decisions are made (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019:212).

(Mohammad, 2019:19) indicates that consumer satisfaction is the complete measurement of a customer's experience after buying products or services. Every human being has a different way of thinking compared to other humans. For example, different people prefer different food brands or car brands. The concept of consumer behaviour depends on human nature (Qazzafi, 2019:1205).

1.6.2 Online shopping

Online shopping refers to an activity or action of purchasing a product or service over the internet (Neger & Uddin, 2020:93). Online shopping is growing drastically in this era of globalisation along with the development of e-commerce. E-commerce refers to all aspects of operating a business online which have changed how the business environment and market operates. It has made searching and buying products from all over the world easier by creating a worldwide market. For example, consumers have access to purchase goods and services anywhere any time, thanks to the introduction of digital devices such as smart phones, tablets and computers (Cunningham, 2019).

E-commerce is also known as an electronic transaction, which can be defined as the purchasing and selling of products and services online which involve the transmission of money, information and data related to commercial transactions through the use of

the internet and information and communication technology (ICT) (Neger & Uddin, 2020:92). The fourth industrial revolution has driven many businesses' sales and marketing efforts of their products and services on the World Wide Web. These days consumers discover products and services by visiting company websites, or by searching using search engines, and through those platforms, consumers are able to compare prices and buy online (Rudresha C.E, 2018).

Mohammad (2019:40) confirms that demographic variables such as age, gender and level of income play a crucial role in influencing South African consumers' perceptions of online shopping. Many countries' economies are driving businesses into online marketing as it is an affordable form of advertising and reaches many customers in a short period (Lim *et al.*, 2016:402).

The improved difference and amount of information online have enriched the ability of customers to make better purchasing choices. During the initial stage, the internet supported the consumer decision-making process. Recent trends such as recommended online decision aid, and social media trends are spreading via the internet, influencing all the decision-making stages (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019:210). For example, many studies by (Al-Abdallah *et al.*, 2021) that examine how social media trends are spreading the internet's influence during all the decision-making stages found that there is a positive relationship among social networking platforms and the purchase-decision process.

Online stores are completely different compared to physical stores. All products in an online store are described using text, photos as well as multimedia files. Marketers have upgraded online stores to offer additional links that will assist consumers with more information such as the most purchased items (Mohammad, 2019).

1.6.3 External environment

Consumers are encircled by a widespread choice of influences in their environment that affects them in considering their options and rejecting others to make a final choice on buying a product or service. The external consumer environment refers to all the factors that are external to customers that influence their buying decision. These factors include culture, social class, reference groups, families, globalisation, economic, political and technological factors (Victor *et al.*, 2018:2).

Consumers' external environment constitute the surroundings and all the aspects that are external to the customer and have an influence on their buying decision making.

According to Wei (2016:113), socio-cultural influences play an important role when it comes to consumer-buying behaviour. Consumers most probably buy online due to the influence of family members and friends. A study conducted by Ariffin *et al.* (2018:315) reveals that sociocultural influences have a strong impact on consumer-buying behaviour online.

1.6.4 Consumer-buying decision process

The consumer buying decision process refers to the stages that consumers face when deciding to buy a product or service. The buying decision process for consumers consists of five stages, namely: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour (Mehta *et al.*, 2020:651).

A broad literature review by Al-Abdallah *et al.* (2021:560), has presented a new case of the consumer buying decision process. They concluded that consumers can follow all the stages of buying decision-making process while some consumers might skip some stages, depending on the consumers' mindsets. Mohammad (2019:17) concludes that there is a strong link between what consumers check online and their final buying decisions.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the consumer decision-making process

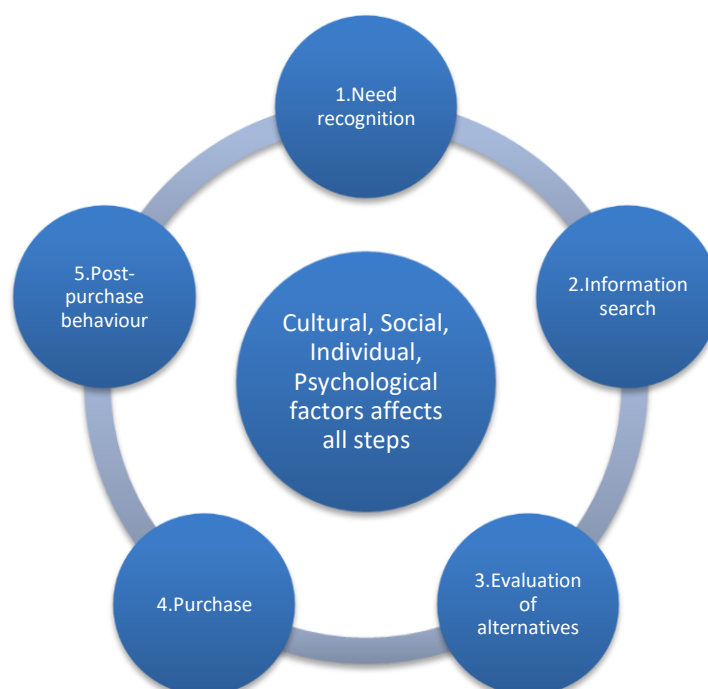


Figure 1.1 Consumer buying behaviour process

Source: (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019:213).

The consumer-buying process comprises need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decisions and post-purchase decisions (Wei, 2016:113). Each is described briefly below.

- i The buying process begins with the need recognition as a first stage and its realisation of the problem that needs to be solved by a product or service. Consumers identify a problem that is created by internal or external factors such as thirst and hunger that might be created by heat (Mohammad, 2019:18). Research by Al-Abdallah *et al.* (2021:562) shows that the need recognition stage of consumers is influenced by consumers daily activities and experiences on social networks.
- ii The second stage of the consumer buying process is information search. During this stage, a consumer searches for information regarding the product or service that can address the need. Research by Neger and Uddin (2020:93) reveal that consumers utilise the internet to access product or service information during the information search stage.
- iii Stage three of the process is an evaluation of alternatives, where consumers evaluate different products and services available using past experiences which are related to beliefs and attitudes. Pourfakhimi *et al.* (2020:651) concludes that when consumers are busy with the evaluation of alternatives online, they might utilise electronic word-of-mouth ratings and customers' reviews in order to evaluate alternatives themselves.
- iv The purchase decision is the fourth stage where consumers make a purchase decision to buy the selected product or service.
- v The post-purchase decision stage refers to consumers' reflection on the purchase decision that they made. Wang *et al.* (2019:839) indicate that during the post-purchase stage, consumers measures whether the product or service meets the identified need.

1.6.5 Online buying process

The online buying process refers to the process of stages that illustrates how customers make decisions online (Wei, 2016:113). Online sources such as websites and social media platforms provide detailed information in the consumer-buying decisions. Customers use online sources in the comfort of their home, office, or during vacations to gather information regarding different products, services and brands before making their final buying decision. Online customers utilise the same buying process stages as offline consumers, as they identify the problem, search for information, evaluate alternatives, reach purchase decisions and post-purchase behaviour (Mohammad, 2019:17).

1.6.6 Factors influencing online purchasing

Socio-economic factors play a crucial role in influencing consumers in an online shopping environment as shown in the Figure 1.2. Research by Ali (2020:270) reveals that socio-economic, psychological and consumer habits have increasingly influenced consumer online shopping as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic regulations.

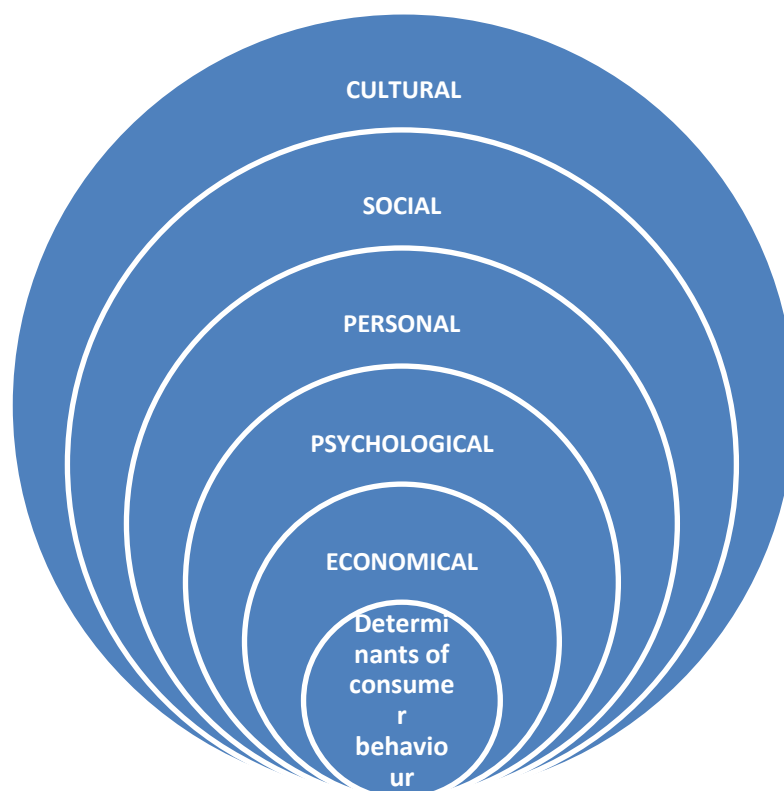


Figure 1.2 Factors influencing consumer behaviour

Source: (Rabby et al., 2021:18).

Marketers focus on the psychological elements of their consumers to have access to a successful consumer-oriented market (Rabby et al., 2021:18). The factors affecting consumer satisfaction and buying behaviour should be at the centre.

During the past two decades, print and television advertising have been the essential elements of marketing strategies. But nowadays, social media have shaped the advertising industry and changed the way businesses interact with their customers (Sonwaney & Chincholkar, 2019a:445).

The space of the consumer's environment has improved dramatically due to the introduction of virtual social networks, media and telecommunication systems that simplify the communication of information among a vast number of consumers (Palalic *et al.*, 2020).

The lifestyle of consumers plays a vital role in the process of online shopping. Well-known brands with comprehensive descriptions attract more online consumers. Furthermore, known brands guarantee product quality and price is one of the crucial factors in the consumer's decision-making process. (Wei, 2016:112).

According to Ramya and Ali (2016:77), buying behaviour is influenced by several factors and these include personal, economic, psychological, social and cultural factors.

1. Internal or psychological factors

- a. The most important internal factor is motivation and perception.

Motivation can be defined as an internal drive or a craving that a consumer needs to satisfy (Minchekar & Mangore, 2022) a particular need.

- b. Perception refers to the consumer's opinion regarding a product or a business (Neumann *et al.*, 2020:576).

2. Social factors

Social factors refer to factors that influence how consumers behave in a society and these factors includes religion, family and social networks (Al-Abdallah, 2021:560). The human being is a social animal and factors such as family, reference groups roles and status, affect individuals as follows:

- a. Family members can strongly influence consumers' buying decisions especially if the consumer is rooted in the family-buying behaviour. Ramya and Ali (2016:78) propose that individuals' priorities and buying habits usually change due to the influence of spouses and families who purchase goods online.
- b. A reference group is a group of individuals with which an individual is associated. Reference groups become the individual edge of reference and foundation of ordering experiences, ideas and perceptions. Khan (2019:15) confirms that a reference group has an influence on online purchasing behaviour.

3. Cultural factors

Cultural factors refer to the social behaviour, beliefs and norms of a certain society (Dahiya & Gayatri, 2018:85). Children grow up and acquire a set of values, behaviours and perceptions from their families and other major institutions. Mehta *et al.* (2020:299) support the trend that culture plays a key role as it is the most fundamental determinant of an individual's behaviour. Social class also plays a role in consumer behaviour since individuals in society are divided into different social classes such as the lower class, middle class and upper class.

4. Economic factors

Economic factors refer to factors that influence consumers' financial position (Nowakowski, 2021:598). Economic factors largely influence consumer behaviour: factors such as personal income, family income and consumer credit.

Qazzafi (2020:1207) submits that personal income is a determinant of buying behaviour and a decrease in disposable income leads to a decrease in the expenditure of different food items. Family income comprises the total income of all the family members. Family income consequently influences family expenditure (Dörtyol *et al.*, 2018:115).

5. **Personal factors** Personal factors include personal characteristics that affect consumers' purchasing decisions (Husnain *et al.*, 2019). These are factors such as age, income, occupation and lifestyle that influence consumer-buying behaviour online.

- a. The age of an individual influences buying behaviour as consumers purchase different products at different ages. The preferences and tastes of consumers change as they age.
- b. Qazzafi (2020:1207) advances that income largely influences the buying behaviour of consumers in an online shopping environment.
- c. The occupation or employment of a person plays a vital role in influencing the buying behaviour of consumers. For example, a CEO's purchasing habits can be differentiated from that of a teacher, so marketers need to develop strategies that suit the buying drives of people from various occupations (Alalwan, 2018:74).
- d. Lifestyle refers to an individual's way of living as articulated in the hobbies, opinions and interests that represent a person's interaction with the environment (Pentz *et al.*, 2020:235).

Decision-making pertaining to online purchases will be discussed in the next section.

1.6.7 Decision-making for online purchases

Research conducted by Hinterstein (2020:9) refers to the FFF model (the factors and filtering elements and filtering buying motives model) that takes into consideration the internal and external factors affecting consumers' buying behaviour and then proceed to different filtering elements that are applied by consumers when making a final online-buying decision.

Figure 1.3 illustrates the internal and external factors as the first building block that motivates consumers to purchase goods or services online.

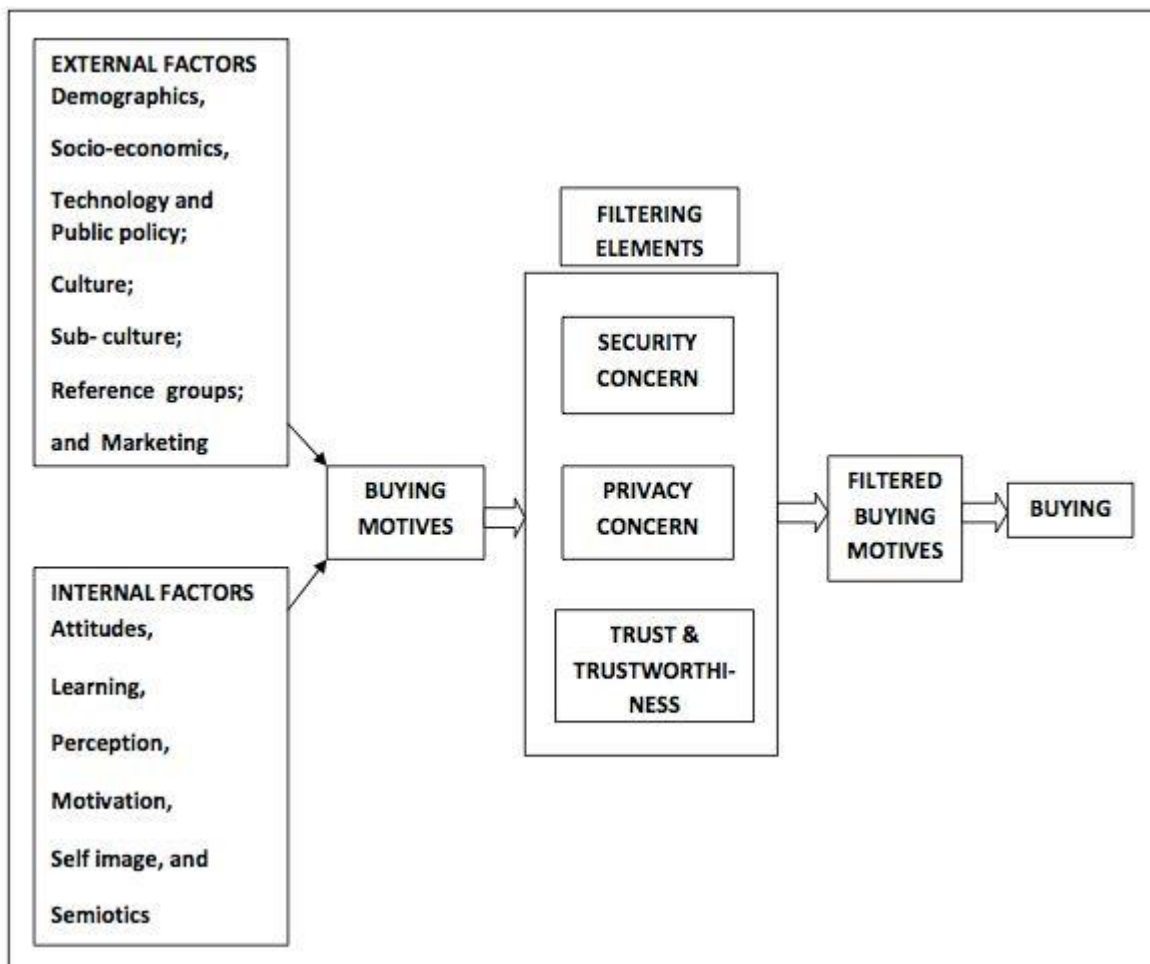


Figure 1.3 The FFF model

Source: (Mohammad, 2019:22)

The first elements that motivate consumers to buy a product or service online are both internal and external factors. The external factors are uncontrollable and are beyond customers' control such as demographics, socio-economics, technology, culture, sub-culture, reference groups and marketing. Internal factors include personality traits or behaviour, attitude, perception, learning, semiotics and self-image. Forsström (2019:17) further propounds that the online-buying process presents consumers with convenience as well as risks associated with trust, security and privacy.

Various studies (Mohammad, 2019:22) have examined the determinants of trust such as privacy and security. These studies confirm that the elements of security, trust and security are affirmed by online customers who utilise them to filter alternatives before making a final purchase online (Forsström, 2019:18). The decision-making process affects the duration and number of alternatives considered by consumers (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019:214). Neger and Uddin (2020:93) point out that in consumers' buying

decisions, consumers come across positive or negative information by word-of-mouth in addition to their own experience. Their final buying decisions are made using a combination of the above factors. Rabby *et al.* (2021:17) hold that the abovementioned factors such as a socio-economics, culture, marketing, technology, motivation and learning influence online consumer-buying behaviour.

1.6.8 Impact of social media

Social media can be defined as online platforms that people utilise to form social relations or networks with other individuals who share similar interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections (Akram and Kumar 2017:347). Social media can also include websites that can connect people with similar interests, hobbies and views across the world. There are many definitions for social media, as well as the various types of social media platforms and it is important to outline the classification of social media. Social media examples include: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube (Mkhwanazi, 2018).

Recent developments in interactive digital platforms have resulted in increased information sharing among individuals. Different digital platforms have allowed individuals to interact actively with others to meet their personal or mutual goals (Islam *et al.*, 2017:510).

The increase in social media usage has opened many doors for organisations to reach their prospects and customers using different social media platforms. Organisations have noticed the importance of utilising social media platforms to connect with consumers and generate revenue (Simplilearn, 2020). The theory of word-of-mouth was introduced as early as the 1950s, and it has been refreshed by the internet through the trend called 'electronic word-of-mouth'. These days, word-of-mouth is a primary source of information for customers to make a purchasing decision. Through wider interconnection of consumers, word-of-mouth has gained a new status (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019:211). The internet development and the increase in mobile technology use have hugely influenced the growth of social media.

1.6.9 Perceived usefulness

Perceived usefulness refers to the level to which customers sense the organisation online website could add efficiency and value to customers when purchasing online.

Past studies on the relationship between consumer behaviour and perceived usefulness were conducted and revealed that perceived usefulness has a substantial effect on the subject of online-buying behaviour in countries such as Spain (Lim *et al.*, 2016:403).

The comprehensive literature review by Lim *et al.*, (2016:402) suggests that more consumers are facing challenges when logging into online shopping due to other businesses websites not being user-friendly. Therefore, online businesses are obliged to design user-friendly sites and effectively manage social media channels.

1.6.10 New trends in consumer behaviour

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused consumers to change their buying habits and priorities. The pandemic initially started in Wuhan in China and spread to many regions of the world. The lockdown regulations forced stationary shopping retailers to close temporarily and forced companies to look for different ways to increase their sales volumes during these tough times. E-commerce was one of the ways that was utilised by companies to increase their sales. A study conducted by Nowakowski (2021:957) confirms that consumers may now choose from a wider range of products and compare them to see which ones would meet their needs.

The pandemic regulation which required individuals to limit social contact obliged consumers to look for alternative ways to communicate and thus increased internet usage. Consumers now have an option of buying their products online and this has encouraged businesses to devise innovative forms of sales with additional services such as free delivery services (Nowakowski, 2021:606). Nwankwo *et al.* (2019:3) confirm that delivery service is influencing consumer-buying behaviour online.

According to Pogodina *et al.* (2020:97), the growing informatisation and globalisation have changed consumer lifestyles almost everywhere in the world. The new evolving stage of socio-economic systems is distinguished by several trends such as the migration of peoples, educational gaps, income inequality and demographic change. This is displayed differently in different countries of the world. Such trends are: spreading of ethical consumption principles and more complex social relations (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021:5).

In the following section, the theoretical model for this study is explored in more depth. The framework measures the interactions among the investigated factors such as

personal, social, psychological, marketing and consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment in the Sedibeng region of Gauteng.

1.6.11 Development of the Theoretical Model

Qazzafi (2020:1205) proposed a model that outlines four factors, namely: external environment, consumer buying-decision process, personal and online purchasing decision-making factors. Sonwaney and Chincholkar (2019b:447) suggest that marketing stimuli should be added to the personal, psychological, and socio-economic factors. Based on the theoretical framework designed by Qazzafi (2020:1205) and Sonwaney and Chincholkar (2019a:447), a Theoretical Model has been proposed to measure the objectives of this study as shown in Figure 1.4 below:

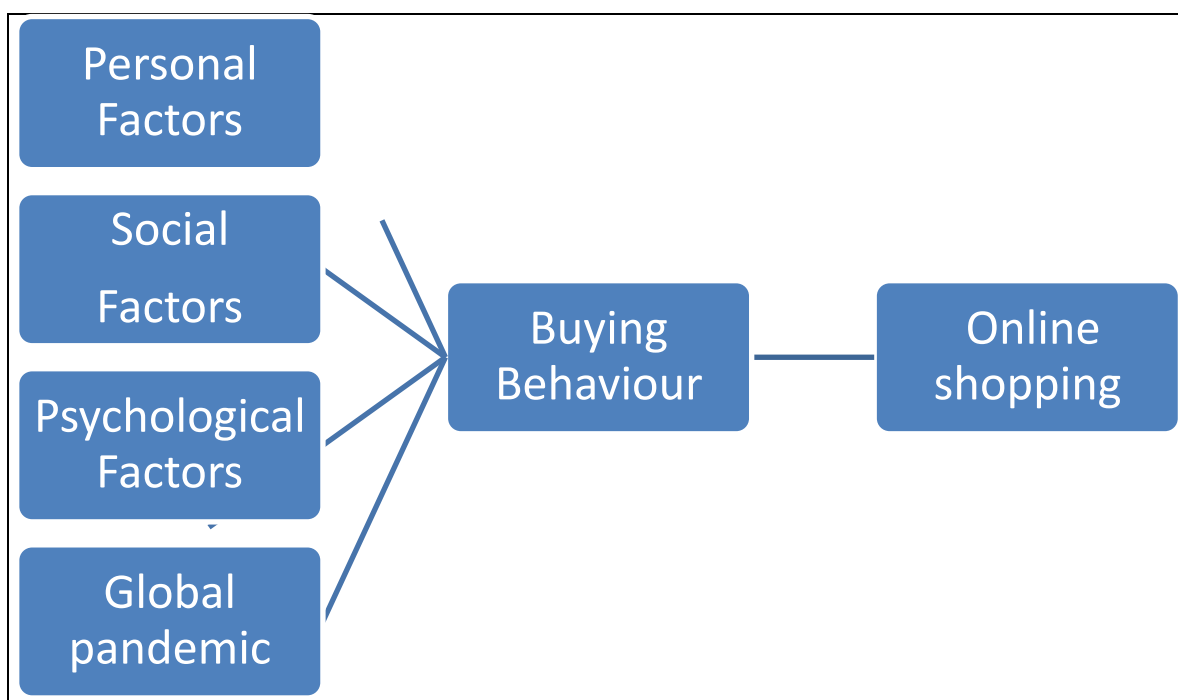


Figure 1.4 Theoretical Model

Source: (Sonwaney & Chincholkar, 2019a:447)

The Theoretical Model in Figure 1.4 provides a broad theoretical framework for this study by outlining the connections among the factors, consumer behaviour and the online shopping environment.

in the next section, the research methodology of this study will be outlined.

1.7 Research methodology

Research methodology refers to the path in which the research project will be followed by the researcher to solve the research problem (Cr, 2020:8). In this study,

the research methodology followed is quantitative research. This is based on the quantitative research focus of collecting and analysing of data.

1.7.1 Research design

The main aim of this study is to understand the factors influencing consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions in an online environment. Thus, quantitative research is appropriate for this study. The target population was drawn from individuals who reside in the Sedibeng region of the Gauteng province and who have previous experience in shopping online Akhtar (2016:68) advances that research design can be deemed a form of research as it is the link that holds all the elements together in a research project. Research design is the plan of the research project.

Siedlecki (2020:8) classifies the following categories of research designs in a quantitative study:

1. Descriptive study, which involves the description of the broad of the relationship among variables (Cr, 2020:2); and
2. Experimental study involving the conditions controlled and manipulated by the experimenter (Akhtar, 2016:78).

This study follows a descriptive research design. A quantitative research approach was executed to gain a thorough understanding of the topic under investigation. This was based on the study's primary aim: to understand the factors that influence consumer buying behaviour online. Quantitative research aims to establish broad laws of behaviour and experiences in context (McLeod, 2019).

1.7.1 Research approach and methodology

Research approach is defined as an approach comprising detailed methods that are used by the researcher to collect data, analyse and interpret (Cr, 2020:5). In academic inquiry, the research question usually leads the researcher or writer to select a specific method, either a qualitative or quantitative method. Quantitative research refers to the quantity of measurement, while qualitative research refers to the measurement of the quality or reasons for the phenomena (Mohammad, 2019:10). Most studies regarding factors that influence consumer behaviour utilise quantitative data (Chrysochou, 2017:412). Based on the above argument, the quantitative method was used in this study because quantitative research can assist in understanding the factors that are influencing consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment.

1.7.2 Population and sampling

1.7.2.1 Study population

Study population refers to the unit of analysis and it can refer to individuals, groups, organisations, spatial, institutional, cultural and societal units (Kumar, 2018:71). In this study, the unit of study are individuals who have previous experience in shopping online and who reside in and around the Vaal Triangle area of Gauteng.

1.7.2.2 Sampling

Sampling can be defined as a process of selecting suitable representatives of a population for the purpose of the research study (Cr, 2020:14). There are two main techniques of sampling in research: probability sampling and non-probability sampling methods (Neger & Uddin, 2020:97). In this study, a non-probability convenience sampling was used to ensure that participants with an online shopping experience were included in the study. Social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp were used to recruit respondents in the Vaal, Sedibeng district.

1.7.2.3 Sample size

The survey was conducted in the Sedibeng district located in the south of the Gauteng province. According to data gathered in 2019 the Sedibeng district has a total estimated population of 774 000 people. Davis (2019) expatiates that the number of e-commerce users in South Africa is around 18.43 million, which is 33% of the overall population. Therefore, 33% of Sedibeng's population is around 255 420 and it can be estimated that the number of online shoppers in and around the Sedibeng district is around 255 420. Based on this estimate, there are around 255 420 online shoppers in the Sedibeng district. The sample size selected for this study is 384. This sample size is based on a 0.05% margin of error with a 95% confidence correlating with the indicated population.

1.7.2.4 Data collection

Data collection refers to the method a researcher uses when collecting data (Cr, 2020:95). In this study, the chosen method that was used to collect data was online. An electronic questionnaire was created using Google Forms and a link was disseminated to respondents to complete the questionnaire.

The respondents were recruited using social media platforms through placing paid advertisements on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram. The questionnaire

includes screening questions where respondents indicated their age and whether they have experience in online shopping.

1.7.3 Pre-test study

The term 'pre-test' refers to the stage of testing research questions and questionnaires (Willis, 2016:359). The pre-test study was conducted before the actual data collection to evaluate the effectiveness of the questionnaire. A small sample of 10 respondents was randomly selected from different age categories such as 18-20;21-25;26-30;31-35;36-40;41-45;46-50;51-55;56-60;61 and older, and from all race groups in South Africa. The pre-test results highlighted no major errors and biases.

1.7.4 Data analysis

Data analysis involves a process of cleaning, processing and changing data in order to identify valuable information (Ott & Longnecker, 2015:61). According to Alchemer (2019), one of the methods highlighted in the statistics that allow a researcher to examine the relationship between two or more variables of interest, is regression analysis. Regression analysis pertains to the confirmation of a relationship cause and effect among two or more variables (Montgomery *et al.*, 2021). It also provides comprehensive insights that can be applied to improve business services or products.

In this study, the following data analysis techniques and methods were applied: standard deviations and means were calculated using SPSS version 21 for data the analysis of factors such as family, social networks and how COVID-19 regulations are influencing consumer behaviour and their purchasing decisions in an online environment. A test on factors' significant mean differences, as well as percentage comparisons, was also applied in this study.

1.7.5 Substantiation of need for the study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the effects of online shopping on the buying behaviour of customers. Factors and reasons why consumers prefer to shop online are explored. Below are the potential contributions of the study.

1.7.6 Theoretical contribution

The results of this study provide insight into how consumers behave when they make an online purchase. This insight can contribute to future research. The results can also indicate the influence of social media platforms on consumers' online-buying behaviour.

1.7.7 Managerial implications

Consumers' buying behaviour have drastically changed ever since the emergence of technology. The internet and search engines are now used in consumers' purchasing-decision process. Managers and marketers need to identify and respond to these changes. Knowing the factors that cause consumer behaviour to change can assist managers: for example, marketers can effectively plan and tailor-make their products and services such as adding home delivery services in their campaigns to meet the changing consumer behaviour.

1.7.8 Rationale why this research is executable

A similar study was conducted in the United Kingdom. South Africans are now experiencing increasing online shopping experiences. Therefore, this research topic is relevant and executable.

1.7.9 The field of study under which this study can be classified

This study evaluates the effects that online shopping has on the buying behaviour of customers in the retail sector. The field of study under which this study can be classified is marketing.

1.7.10 Research approach and motivation

The research study aims to examine the effects that online shopping has on the buying behaviour of potential customers. The study examines the factors that bring about changes in consumer-buying behaviour.

It utilises descriptive research, and a quantitative research approach was employed to assist in gaining a thorough understanding of the topic under investigation.

1.7.11 Mini-dissertation format and why

The research study findings are reported in the form of a mini dissertation. A mini dissertation is required to fulfil the requirements of the Master of Business Administration degree. The dissertation comprises five chapters namely the introduction, literature review, methodology, results and conclusions.

1.7.12 Academic value and contribution of the proposed study

The study's contributions to the marketing discipline are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study provides insights regarding the factors that are influential in consumer behaviour when shopping online. Thus, the study extends the existing knowledge on consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment.

It also provides some valuable marketing guidelines to brand managers, marketers, practitioners and entrepreneurs. An understanding of factors that are influential when it comes to consumer online shopping can increase sales and brand awareness. These insights can then assist practitioners to perform their functions more effectively.

1.7.13 Delimitations of the study

This section explains the limits of this study in terms of the targeted population: the research method used; factors measured; data collection method; geographic demarcation; and summary of the findings. The following are the boundaries that constitute the scope of the study:

- a. The participants of the study were online shoppers or had previously shopped online.
- b. The study was limited to South Africans residing in the Gauteng Sedibeng district.
- c. The participants are between the ages of 18 to 61 years.
- d. The study used Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and email to direct individuals to the online survey.
- e. The study focused on limited factors.
- f. The study used only a quantitative research method.

1.7.14 Assumptions

The following assumptions informed the study:

- a. Respondents had previous online purchasing experience and therefore would be able to respond to the questions regarding factors influencing consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment.
- b. Respondents had an adequate literacy level to understand the study questions and be able to respond.
- c. There was also the assumption that the data required could be collected efficiently through an online survey using a structured questionnaire.

1.8 Definition of key terms

This study involves a number of technical concepts that require some clarification in order to situate both the study and the reader in a right perspective. These include consumer behaviour, online purchasing, the consumer decision-making process, social media and perceived risk.

Consumer behaviour is defined as the study of behaviour patterns of consumers and the processes that consumers use in order to choose, consume and dispose of goods and services (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019:212).

Online purchasing is defined as the buying of goods and services by consumers over the internet (Sonwaney & Chincholkar, 2019a:445).

The consumer decision-making process is defined as a process that consumers experience when selecting a product and service that will meet their needs (Qazzafi, 2019:1205).

Social media are electronic systems of communication through which users form online communities in order to share ideas, information, content and messages (Al-Abdallah *et al.*, 2021:561).

Perceived risk is defined as the consumer's level of uncertainty about the result of a buying decision (Ariffin *et al.*, 2018:312).

1.9 Conclusion

Chapter one focused on the purpose of the study, i.e., an understanding of the factors that influence consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment. The research problem emanated from a marketer's lack of understanding influential factors in consumer online-buying behaviour. The chapter outlined the objectives to understand the factors that contribute to the online shopping behaviour of consumers in the Sedibeng Region of Gauteng) as well as a brief review of key concepts. The chapter concluded with an academic valuation of the study, which presents the contribution to the existing knowledge of consumer online-buying behaviour, as well as the definitions of key terms.

CHAPTER TWO

EFFECTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN ONLINE SHOPPING

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the following factors influencing online buying: psychological, electronic, word-of-mouth, the impact of social media and the impact of COVID-19 in an online environment. This discussion grounds the key question that the study interrogates, i.e., the effects that online shopping has on the buying behaviour of customers.

2.2 Psychological factors

Psychological factors involve the psychology of a consumer or individual that leads him or her to find satisfaction when purchasing an item or service (Frankham *et al.*, 2020). Research by Yuen *et al.* (2020:2) outlines that behavioural changes may occur amongst consumers, following major events such as disease outbreaks and natural disasters that disrupt their social lives. The psychology of consumers directs their behaviour to find a need for a satisfying product or service. These psychological factors includes beliefs, motivation, perception and learning (Dhaliwal *et al.*, 2020:5). Psychological factors further affect consumers' intentions to purchase in an online environment.

2.3 Electronic word-of-mouth

Electronic word-of-mouth is defined as a type of communication where consumers share positive or negative statements about a company's product or services online. Through online word-of-mouth, consumers provide feedback, ratings and reviews about a company's product or service online (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019:211).

According to Qazzafi (2020:1207), the strongest factor that influences buying behaviour for consumers is word-of-mouth. Consumers are easily influenced by recommendations and personal words from a trusted person such as a family member, associates, friends and other satisfied customers. The model of word-of mouth (WOM) is used as a fundamental source of information by consumers when they are making a buying decision. In today's world, WOM has obtained new eminence due to humans connecting on social media plartforms (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019:211).

Scholars have distinguished the traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in different typologies. Figure 2.1 depicts this difference as illustrated by Huete-Alcocer (2017:3) in terms of credibility, privacy, diffusion speed and accessibility.

	WOM	eWOM
Credibility	The information receiver knows the communicator. This creates a positive influence on credibility.	Anonymity between the receiver and the communicator. That creates a negative influence on credibility.
Privacy	The conversation is interpersonal, private and conducted in real time.	The information shared is not private and can be viewed by anyone, anywhere and anytime.
Diffusion speed	The spreading of messages is slow. During the information sharing, the user must be present.	Messages spread very quickly among users using the internet and social media platforms.
Accessibility	Less accessible	Easily accessible

Figure 2.1: Difference between WOM and Ewom

Source: (Huete-Alcocer, 2017:3)

For Huete-Alcocer (2017:3), eWom is used by consumers to minimise risk during the decision-making process. When comparing WOM and e-WOM, the message in traditional WOM is private while there is no privacy in e-WOM. Furthermore, in e-WOM, reviews are written and can be checked anytime, while in WOM, the message can disappear once it has reached the receiver.

2.4 Factors influencing online purchasing

The factors that influence consumer-buying behaviour have been categorised as cultural, social, personal, psychological and economic. It is important to understand the factors influencing consumers' behaviour when making a purchasing decision.

The price factor

Price is defined as an exchange value of money for a product or services received by the customer. During the year 2020, at the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic, products and services prices have undergone changes (Valaskova *et al.*, 2021:2). Online shopping has granted customers with opportunities to compare products' prices online. The price element contributes in influencing consumers during the online purchasing decision-making process and businesses might offer special discounts and competitive prices in order to attract customers (Neger & Uddin, 2020:94).

The convenience factor

Consumers' desire for convenience has increased as more consumers are looking for alternative ways to save time and efforts when buying. These consumer resources of effort and time are classified as non-monetary costs that influence consumer-buying behaviour (Duarte *et al.*, 2018:162).

The payment factor

According to Makhitha and Ngoben (2021:4), online customers' concerns are fundamental to the safety and ease of online payment systems. A company's positive feedback regarding safety of payment systems may have a positive influence for online shoppers and negative feedback or reviews may also have a negative influence.

The product delivery factor

According to Makhitha and Ngoben (2021:3), online shoppers usually have concerns regarding the delivery of a product. Delivery concerns include potential product-delivery delay, delivery of damaged goods and non-delivery.

2.5 Impact of social media

Social media are online platforms that people use to create social networks with other users who share similar interests, activities or backgrounds or real-life connections (Akram & Kumar, 2017:347). The increase in the usage of the internet as well as mobile technology has significantly influenced the growth of social media platforms. Social networking platforms are increasingly becoming an important part of customers' daily activities, with fundamental transformations in buying behaviour. Social media platforms play a crucial role in communication among users online. They can be utilised by companies to increase their engagements with customers as well as to

increase their brand awareness and influence consumers' buying decisions (Al-Abdallah *et al.*, 2021:559).

Valaskova *et al.* (2021:3) purport that the impact of social media during a pandemic may cause consumers to make panicky but also smart decisions. This shows that social media can shape and create consumer panic.

2.6 The impact of COVID-19 on consumer behaviour

The Coronavirus, known as COVID-19, is a virus disease that was detected in 2019 initially in China, Wuhan and later spread globally. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the disease as a pandemic (Neger & Uddin, 2020:91).

COVID-19 occasioned several consequences and challenges which still affect business organisations globally. The COVID-19 lockdown regulations affected economies due to related risks and uncertainties. The global economy has been affected negatively by COVID-19: it caused many organisations to close their offices, the cancellation of social events, as well as face-to-face business interactions cancellations (Ali, 2020:270).

For organisations to survive the changes presented by the pandemic, businesses have had to change the way they have been doing business. Many businesses are now adopting online transactions, known as e-commerce. There are a number of activities and initiatives to support the growing of e-commerce, such as easy online payment methods and cash on delivery, which accelerate the e-commerce growth (Neger & Uddin, 2020:92).

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused a shift in consumer behaviour and has significantly spurred organisations on to reach their customers in the digital world. Organisations have been forced to develop strategies and solutions to adapt to the new normal presented by the pandemic. Businesses have been obliged to find ways to reach homebound customers who have embrace new digital lifestyles and online shopping (Ali, 2020:268).

2.7 Perceived risks in consumer online shopping

Perceived risk is defined as the doubt resulting from a bad decision that the consumer may make when making a buying decision. It can also pertain to the uncertainty a consumer might experience when buying a product or service (Wai *et al.*, 2019:246).

Lăzăroiu *et al.* (2020) demonstrate that consumers' intention to make an online purchase is affected by their confidence in the website.

A comprehensive literature review by Lim *et al.* (2016:402), reveals that more consumers are facing challenges when logging in on online shopping, due to other businesses' websites not being user-friendly. Additionally, online businesses must design user-friendly sites and effectively manage social media channels.

In Lăzăroiu *et al.* (2020)'s view, online-buying risk must be addressed as it creates a crucial situation to business success in the consumer online-shopping environment. Even though online shopping provides tremendous advantages and benefits, consumers are still doubtful about online shopping due to the lack of trust and the risk.

Wai *et al.* (2019:246) propose that there are several factors associated with perceived risk that are associated with online buying. These include the following:

- a. Product risk, which includes risk regarding the performance of the product or quality of the product and services that consumers select during online buying.
- b. Financial risk, which relates to consumers' uncertainty around security and online safety when using their bank cards or credit cards as well as the disclosure of personal information.
- c. Convenience risk is linked to the perception of consumers that they will face challenges in ordering goods and services online, or will not be able to cancel the placed order, or there might be delays with the delivery of goods and services. According to Bhatti *et al.* (2018:2), online buying normally fails due to consumers being unable to complete online transactions. Additionally, a lack of technological literacy plays a huge role.
- d. Non-delivery risk: a study by (Aminu *et al.*, 2019:77) found that there is a strong relationship between online shopping and perceived delivery risk. Non-delivery risks have a negative influence on consumers' attitudes when shopping online (Makhitha & Ngobeni, 2021).
- e. Product return policy risk: Product return policy is the exchange of return policies that assure consumers that they can return the purchased product if they are not satisfied.

Perceived risk plays a key role in consumers' online shopping experiences. During online shopping, consumers have no idea of who the seller is and perceived risk thus poses a threat that creates doubts in the minds of consumers (Bhatti *et al.*, 2018:3).

2.8 Online shopping in South Africa

Online shopping is also known as mobile e-commerce. It is swiftly transforming the retail industry in South Africa. Online retailers such as Zando, Superbalist and Take-a-lot have displayed significant growth in their online sales encouraged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional brick and mortar retailers such as Game, Makro, the Foschini Group, Mr Price and Checkers, have relatively recently also joined the trend of investing in online shopping platforms and home delivery options (Makhitha & Ngobeni, 2021:2).

In South Africa, online sales have shown an increase of 66% from 2019 to 2020. The most sought-after products are data and airtime, followed by groceries underpinned by the COVID-19 regulations and restrictions. The growth in food delivery was evident on South African delivery platforms such as UberEATS and Mr Delivery (Administration, 2021).

2.9 New trends in an online consumer shopping environment

The broad increase of e-commerce has caused consumers to make a shift from in-store shopping to online buying, as well as online education. The COVID-19 restrictions have underpinned these consumer behaviour changes (Müller *et al.*, 2022:1)

International online sale days which include Black Friday, are very well known in South Africa and have created opportunities for marketers and online retailers to reach more consumers. Black Friday online sales increased in the year 2020 by 100% compared to 2019 and 66% of the sales were made online using mobile devices (Asmal & Rooney, 2021:18).

In the digital marketing space, social media platforms are increasingly becoming more established as marketing instruments globally, including in South Africa (Administration, 2021).

Compared to first-world countries, South Africa has created significantly fewer sustainable behaviour frameworks. In South Africa's formal cosmetics sector there are

around 250 players, with growth primarily coming from SMMEs (Shimul *et al.*, 2022:38).

Social media platforms may signal a connection between social media and online buying. Furthermore, consumers are now avoiding crowded shopping malls and retail shops and that leads to an increase in online buying (Müller *et al.*, 2022:4).

2.10 Conclusion of literature review

This chapter provided elaborations of each factor as a foundation for the study. In the following chapter, the research methodology employed.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter encapsulates the research design and methodology relevant to this study. The research objectives of this study underpin the research design selected. The chapter comprises six sections. The first section concentrates on the descriptors utilised to categorise the research design of the study. Thereafter, the population and sampling method implemented for this study is described. This is followed by data collection where the survey method, questionnaire design and the research objectives are outlined. Data management and statistical data analysis are covered in the fourth and fifth sections of the chapter. Section six supplies an outline of the issues related to the ethics of the study.

3.2 Research design

The research design is defined as a structured plan that summarises the research and outlines how the research project will address the research problem (Asenahabi, 2019:77).

This section explains the research design of this study. According to Dannels,(2018:402), research design offers the glue that holds the research project together. The research design establishes how the participants are selected; what variables are integrated and how they are controlled; how data is collected and analysed; and how unimportant variability is controlled to address the overall research problem.

McCombes (2019) Identifies the following types of research designs:

- a. Descriptive study, which involves the description of the broad of the relationship among variables;
- b. Experimental study in which conditions are controlled and manipulated by the experimenter. It is used to study causal relationships;
- c. Cross-sectional design, which focuses on expressing the characteristics of a precise target population within a particular time period;
- d. Case study design, which is a detailed study of a specific subject;
- e. Ethnography, which involves immersing oneself in a certain community or organisation to observe behaviour; and

- f. Longitudinal design, which pertains to examining the same individuals repeatedly to reveal any changes that might transpire over a while.

Since the main aim of this study is to investigate the factors influencing consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions in an online environment, quantitative research was deemed appropriate for this study.

3.3 A classification of the study's overall research design

Below are the conventional descriptors that best reflect the fundamental characteristics of the present study:

- a. Empirical study: the research study was empirical since the researcher collected the primary data from a sample drawn from the target population. The online survey was used to collect data by using a structured questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The online survey was used because it is faster, less costly and more accurate. An additional reason for using an online survey was due to the COVID-19 regulations around social distancing.
 - b. Descriptive study: this concept refers to a study that focuses on systematically describing and observing the behaviour of a subject (Chambers IV, 2018). Analysing non-quantified topics and issues through a descriptive study is effective, and includes decision-making using research findings (Nassaji, 2015:129). Since the study aimed to investigate factors that influence consumer behaviour in an online shipping environment, a descriptive study will be appropriate because of its advantages of effectively analysing a quantifiable topic.
 - c. Non-experimental study: this study was non-experimental since it did not involve a planned process that was designed to manipulate independent variables systematically, while utilising stable other variables and observing and evaluating the outcomes of the theory (Banerjee & Chiplunkar, 2020:8).
 - d. Primary data: Davis and Pimenta (2021:430) define primary data as the data that the researcher collects specifically for the research purpose. In this study, data was collected specifically for the study to analyse the factors that influence consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment.
- Quantitative data: quantitative data refers to information that can be measured or counted (Bergin, 2018). In this study, data that was collected was

quantitative, because of the main objective of study which was to understand the factors that influence consumer behaviour.

3.4 Sampling

Sampling is defined as a process of choosing a sub-group from the study population (Berndt, 2020:224).

This section explains the sampling approach utilised for this study. The section further concentrates on the target population, the sampling method and the size of the sample for this study.

3.4.1 Population

Target population refers to the total group of people from whom the sample might be drawn (Otzen & Manterola, 2017).

The target population for this study comprised online consumers who reside in the Gauteng Province. The study targeted the following characteristics:

- a. Age: The respondents were over the age of 18 years including the following categories: 18 to 20; 21 to 25; 26 to 30; 31 to 35; 36 to 40; 41 to 45; 46 to 50; 51 to 55; 56 to 60; 61 and older.
- b. National status: The research advertisement was placed using geographical targeting of respondents residing, working or studying in the Vaal area (Sedibeng region). The Sedibeng region community social media pages were used to recruit respondents from the Sedibeng region.
- c. Online shopping experience: The respondents had to have online shopping experience.

According to Kumar (2018), the unit of analysis are; individuals, groups, organisations, spatial, institutional, cultural and societal units. The targeted population in the Sedibeng region of Gauteng consists of a population of around 774 000 people (data, 2019). Furthermore, Markets (2021) claims that e-commerce users in South Africa totalled around 18 million in the year 2020. This constitutes 33% of the overall population in South Africa. The Sedibeng district of Vaal's 33% equates to 255 420, therefore a sample of 384 respondents was used for the purpose of this study.

3.4.2 Sample

A sample is defined as a portion of the population selected to be studied (Berndt, 2020).

3.4.2.1 Sampling method

There are two main techniques of sampling in research: probability sampling and non-probability sampling methods (Neger & Uddin, 2020:97). In non-probability sampling, the researcher selects samples based on subjective judgement rather than random selection. Probability sampling involves randomly selecting respondents to take part in a survey (Langer, 2018).

In this study, non-probability sampling was used, due to its affordability and convenience. Every research study uses its own unique sampling method and is guided by the objectives of the study.

According to Sarstedt *et al.* (2018:653), there are three main types of non-probability samples:

- a. Purposive sampling
- b. Convenience sampling
- c. Quota sampling

Purposive samplings relate to selecting informants based on their ability to illuminate a particular concept, phenomenon or theme. Convenience sampling refers to selecting respondents who are convenient for the research, while quota sampling involves selecting individuals who represent a larger population (Etikan *et al.*, 2016).

In this study, a convenience sampling method was used. The method of convenience sampling was used because it allows a sample to be selected because it is convenient for the researcher. With convenience sampling, the respondents are readily available, affordable and data is easily collected (Mapande & Appiah, 2018).

3.4.2.2 Sample size

The survey was conducted in the Sedibeng district located in the Southern quadrant of Gauteng Province. The targeted population in the Sedibeng region of Gauteng consists of a population of around 774 000 people (Data, 2019). Furthermore, Markets (2021) purports that the number of e-commerce users in South Africa was around 18 million in the year 2020. This constitutes 33% of the overall population in South Africa.

The Sedibeng district of Vaal's 33% is 255 420, therefore a sample of 384 respondents was used for the purpose of this study. A sample of 384 respondents was used for this study. This sample size is based on a 0.05% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, correlating with the indicated population.

3.5 Data collection

The chosen topic for this study involves consumer behaviour in an online environment. This behaviour can be influenced culturally, socially, psychological and socially. In this study, the method that was used to collect data is a survey method where a questionnaire was developed. An electronic questionnaire was created using Google Forms and a link was disseminated to respondents to complete the questionnaire.

The respondents were recruited using social media platforms by placing a paid and non-paid survey invitation on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. Only the Sedibeng region social media community pages were used to place survey invitation to ensure that the respondents were residing in the Sedibeng region. The advertisements clearly state that only individuals residing in the Sedibeng region may complete the survey.

3.5.1 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire utilised in this study to collect data is attached in Appendix A. The questions used in the questionnaire permitted the researcher to accomplish the study objectives. The questions used in the questionnaire were piloted and amended appropriately to fit the research objectives of this study.

Table 3.1 pairs each objective of the study with the relevant questionnaire questions.

Table 3.1 Research objectives and question numbers

Research objective	Question number
To understand factors that influence consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment.	Question 6 & question 11
To determine factors that influence the consumer's willingness to purchase online.	Question 6 & question 7
To determine the process that consumers undergo when making an online product purchase.	Question 10
To determine factors about the online environment that influence consumers' product choice.	Question 8
To understand customer experience and how it influences their buying behaviour.	Question 10

3.5.2 Measurement

The complete questionnaire was separated into eight sections arranged as follows:

Section 1 - Introduction

Section 2 - Informed consent

Section 3 - Personal profile

Section 4 - Factors

Section 5 - Factors

Section 6 - Factors

Section 7 - Factors

Section 8 - Factors

The Likert scale refers to psychometric scale that provides respondents with a series of statements from which they can select to rate their response to evaluate questions or statements (Joshi *et al.*, 2015:397). The constructs were all measured using the five (5) point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree.

3.6 Pre-test study

Pre-test refers to a trial or preliminary test of a questionnaire to evaluate its reliability and validity before the final dissemination (Hallberg *et al.*, 2018). The absence of pre-testing the questionnaire of a study usually leads to several challenges which include misunderstood questions, survey logic error and response bias. Pre-testing determines the weaknesses and strengths of the survey questionnaire's wording and format (Marcial & Launer, 2021:4370).

Pre-testing was performed in this study to establish the following concerns:

- a. Was there any difficulty understanding question, or wording in the questionnaire?
- b. Was there a logical order of questions?
- c. Were essential questions understood in the questionnaire by participants?
- d. Were there any questions that were repeated or duplicated?

The pre-test study was conducted before the actual data collection to evaluate the effectiveness of the questionnaire, i.e., if it measures the necessary data. A small sample of 10 respondents was randomly selected containing different age groups to identify challenges such as unclear wording, duplicates, logical questioning and understanding of key questions.

During the pre-testing phase, the researcher was looking for similar responses such as selecting the "neutral" option in a rating scale. This was because a researcher is required to explore why most respondents select the "neutral option" during pre-testing. According to Chyung *et al.* (2018:10), different respondents can attribute different meanings to the "neutral option" on a Likert scale. Some respondents might mean "I don't know", while others might mean "I don't understand the question well", or "I have not thought about the issue". The researcher evaluated the pre-test results and no major errors and biases were noted

3.7 Data management

Data management refers to the processes of gathering, organising, protecting and archiving data in order to analyse it for business decisions (Qi, 2020). During a research project, data needs to be prepared before it can be analysed. According to Hameed and Naumann (2020:18), data preparation refers to a process of checking the collected data if it is of good quality and thereafter capturing responses in an electronic format to be readable and controlled by computer software SPSS.

All the questionnaires were labelled with numbers. No names of the respondents were indicated to ensure anonymity. In the questionnaire, questions were pre-coded using numbers assigned to each question to simplify data capturing after collection.

3.7.1 Data validation

Data validation was performed to establish whether there was bias when respondents were completing the questionnaire. Sartori *et al.* (2019:79) define data validations as assessments included in a survey that permits a researcher to control what data is submitted.

This study utilised mandatory questions for fields that are required by the researcher for analysis as a form of data validation. Mandatory questions are beneficial because they ensure that every respondent submits the most important data (Sartori *et al.*, 2019:81).

There are two types of data validation that were utilised in this study, namely data verification and data screening.

- a. Data verification: the respondents' responses were scrutinised on a case-by-case basis. The researcher applied personal judgement regarding the completed questionnaires which presented problems, whether to accept or reject them as valid.
- b. Data screening: all the responses that were questionable and incorrect were screened by the researcher. The researcher checked if the respondents selected a single rating on all the Likert scales (DeSimone & Harms, 2018:560).

3.7.2 Data editing and coding

Data editing eliminates errors caused by participants and the interviewer before data is captured to a computer (Liu *et al.*, 2019:27).

Data was checked for omissions, legibility and consistency after the questionnaires were completed. The below errors were checked by the researcher:

- a. Completeness of the questionnaire; and
- b. The consistency of the answers, that is, whether the respondents provided illogical and contradictory answers.

This resulted in high data quality for statistical analysis. The quality of the data directly impacted the reporting of research results and recommendations, especially

for research which was intended to advise an organisation. A pre-coded questionnaire permits the researcher to capture data easily, and to be understood by statistical analysis software - Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.

3.7.3 Data cleaning and entry

To clean up the data, it is important for a researcher to check for potential mistakes that may have occurred while capturing data. In this study, all collected data was captured into a statistical analysis software (SPSS).

The total number of respondents was compared and matched with the number of questionnaires, in order to ensure that the data cleaning process was implemented by the researcher.

3.7.4 Other requirements in data analysis

In this study, a professional statistician was utilised and the arrangements were made together with the researcher's study supervisor. This process assisted with data validation of this study.

3.8 Statistical data analysis

A descriptive analysis was conducted to create demographic profiles of the participants and to check the reliability of the rating scales. A statistical analysis for all the rating scales was conducted and a test on factors' significant mean differences. A detailed discussion of the statistical analysis techniques used in this study is presented in the next chapter.

3.8.1 Reliability assessment of rating scales

Reliability refers to the how much to which the measurement of a specific behaviour is consistent and this is accomplished over elevated level of temperance of both the research arrangement and participants (Li *et al.*, 2019:1458). Reliability tests of this study were conducted on the constructs. Cronbach's alpha was used and indicates the degree of internal consistency in a group of items (Amirrudin *et al.*, 2021). The internal consistency reliability of the multi-item scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha as a statistical measurement tool.

3.8.2 Descriptive statistics for demographics

The term descriptive statistics refer to an evaluated, summarised data set.(George & Mallery, 2018). The demographic profile of the respondents was determined by cross-tabulation. The cross-tabulation was performed among gender, age and education.

3.9 Evaluating and revealing the rigour and quality of the research design

Quantitative research measures the building blocks of the theory of a study numerically. Thus, a research design is constructed that is accurate and of high quality and produces reliable and effective results (McLeod, 2019).

3.9.1 Sources of bias

Research bias refers to a situation where a researcher influences the results of the study to promote a certain outcome (Walsh *et al.*, 2021).

Research bias occurs when the researcher manipulates, skews the research process which indicates that results are misrepresented. The results' integrity is compromised by bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020:783). Bias behaviour may arise either from response bias or research bias.

3.9.1.1 Response bias

Response bias denotes a multiple range of tendencies that leads participants to respond inaccurately in the research questionnaire (Lloyd & Hugenberg, 2021:205). To address response bias, the researcher explained the main purpose of this research study in detail and assured respondents that any information supplied would be kept strictly confidential.

3.8.1.2 Interviewer bias

As defined by Jager *et al.* (2020:440) , interviewer bias is the systematic error caused by the interviewer's subconscious selection of data, or his or her influence on the subject's responses. In order to mitigate the interviewer's bias in this study, the researcher permitted respondents to fill out questionnaires on their own and at their own comfortable pace, online.

3.9.2 Types of errors

There were two types of errors that were identified in this study: administrative and respondent errors.

3.9.2.1 Respondent error

Respondent error occurs when a respondent does not take interest or refuse to participate. This may happen when respondents are hesitant to communicate optimistic or pessimistic sentiments. The respondent's error might also take place when respondents are bored, impatient or tired (Biegler, 2020:14).

In order to mitigate the respondent error in this study, the researcher allowed respondents to complete the online survey in their own free time and in the comfort of their homes or offices.

3.9.2.2 Administrative errors

Administrative errors are the results of carelessness, incorrect data entry and omission. The researcher causes such errors and these inevitably influence the study (Syed, 2019).

Administrative errors were minimised in this study by verifying the data captured before disposing or deleting the respondents' questionnaires. Any errors which involved the selection of the sample were managed by obeying the predetermined attributes that meet the requirements of the respondents.

The validity and reliability of a measuring instrument manipulate the range of data analysis and of drawing significant conclusions. The validity and reliability of measurement are outlined in the following section.

3.9.3 Reliability

According to Sürücü and Ahmet (2020:2695), reliability is a gauge of the strength of the measured values attained in repetitive measurements under the same instances utilising the same measurement instrument. In this study, the pre-testing of the questionnaire was conducted to ensure that the results are consistent. Sürücü and Ahmet (2020:2707) postulate that there are three standpoints on reliability: stability, internal consistency and equivalence.

- a. Stability or consistency describes whether the measure gives the same answer when applied at a specific period of time.
- b. Internal consistency tests the homogeneity among items using one test. It involves the capability of a measuring instrument to measure the same essential construct being gauged reliably.

- c. Equivalence considers how many mistakes can be presented by different samples of items being examined on the scales.

3.9.4 Validity

Validity pertains to the accuracy of the measuring instrument in what it is intended to measure (Syed, 2019). Validity also measures how well the measuring instrument performs its function (Syed, 2019).

In this study, content validity was ensured with the assistance of subject-matter experts and face validity was established with the assistance of a study sample.

The ethical considerations have implications either a quantitative or qualitative research study. In the next section, ethical considerations of this study are discussed.

3.10 Approval of the ethics committee

Ethics constitutes a system of moral principles. It is also defined as a set of rules of conduct that apply to a particular class of human action or a particular group of people (Wilson *et al.*, 2020:618).

In all research, ethics applies, regardless of whether the subject is human, an organisation or animals. South Africa is a country with different cultures and has become a democratic country with a high premium placed on human rights. Human dignity, respect and protection are cherished by the state.

The main important ethical issues of concern regarding this study was informed consent, which refers to the process of informing participants about volunteerism and clarity about what the research study entails (Manti & Licari, 2018). Since the study involved human beings, it is vital that respondents received an informed consent form. The respondents received an informed consent form during the online survey. The respondents' feedback in the questionnaire was handled with confidentiality and privacy. No names of the respondents were indicated on the respondents' feedback forms to ensure anonymity.

The researcher employed objectivity and integrity in examining and reporting data in order to deliver precise and clear conclusions and recommendations of the study. The researcher analysed and reported data on all received questionnaires excluding the ones that were not completed or contained missing data.

This study received formal approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences at North-West University on the 3rd of December 2021.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the empirical findings of the study and the following critical sections are outlined:

- a. Gender of the respondents
- b. Age by the gender of the respondents
- c. Marital status of the respondents
- d. Respondents' highest level of education
- e. Influential factors analysis
- f. Statistical analysis SPSS version 21

4.2 Descriptive statistics

4.2.1 *Sample results*

The questionnaire was distributed to individuals in the Sedibeng region of Gauteng, as well as social network users. A total of 384 online survey questionnaires were recorded. Out of the 384 responses, only one respondent did not complete the questionnaire and that response was deleted from the data, resulting in 383 respondents.

4.2.2 *Demographic profiles of the respondents*

Figure 4.1 provides a graphical representation of the respondent's gender.

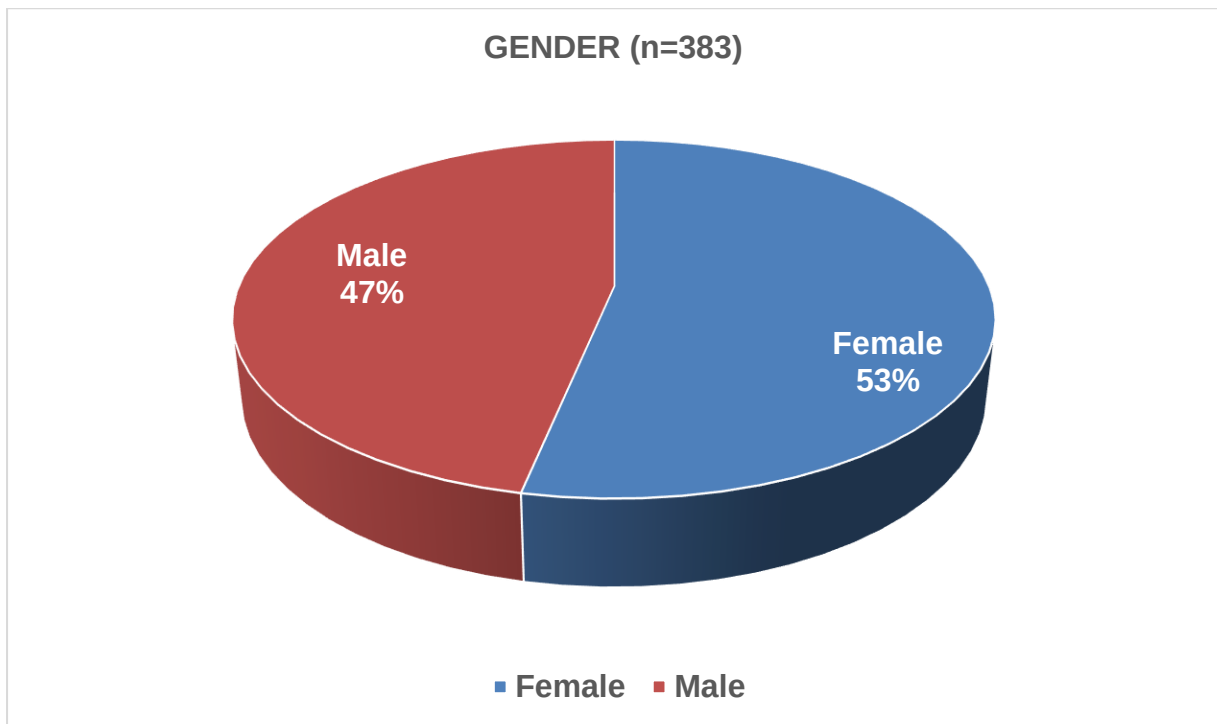


Figure 4.1 Gender

Figure 4.1 represents the frequency distribution of gender in the sample. The above figure indicates that out of the 383 respondents, 53.3% were females and 46.7% were males.

Figure 4.2 provides a graphical representation of the respondents' age.

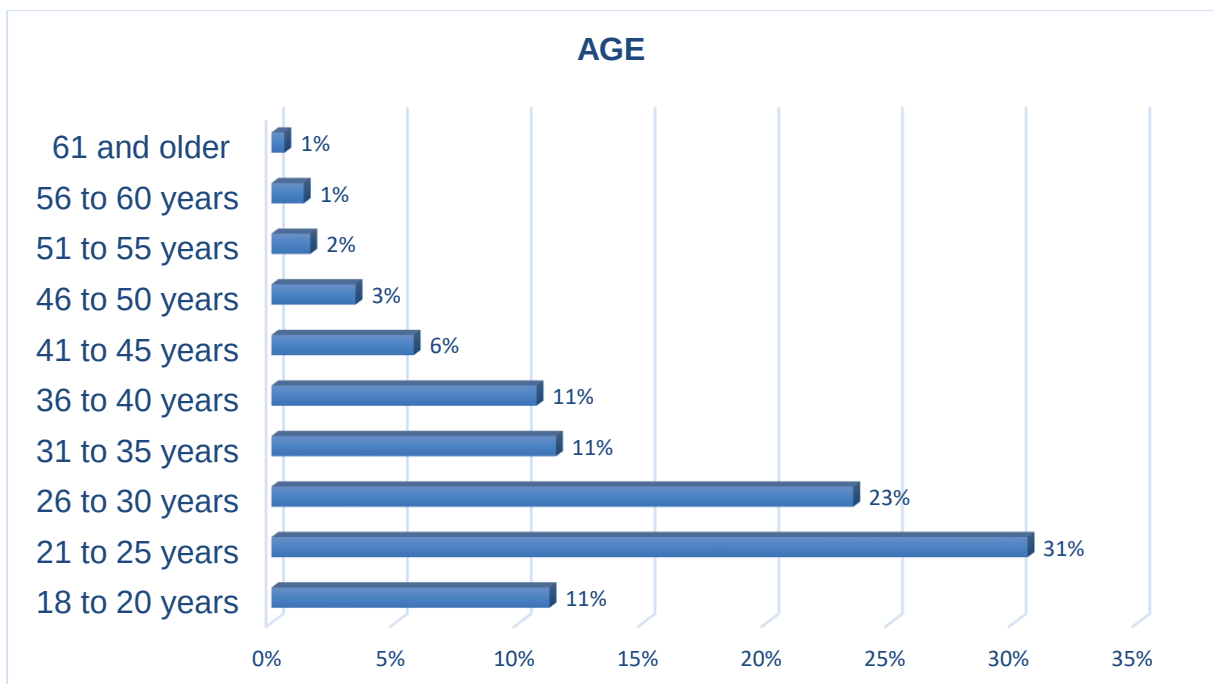


Figure 4.2 Age group in years

Figure 4.2 illustrates the age of the respondents. The majority, about 31% of the respondents, were between the ages of 21 and 25 years while 23% of the respondents were between the ages of 26 and 30. Age was further categorised in terms of gender. Figure 4.3 depicts the graphical comparison of responses using age and gender.

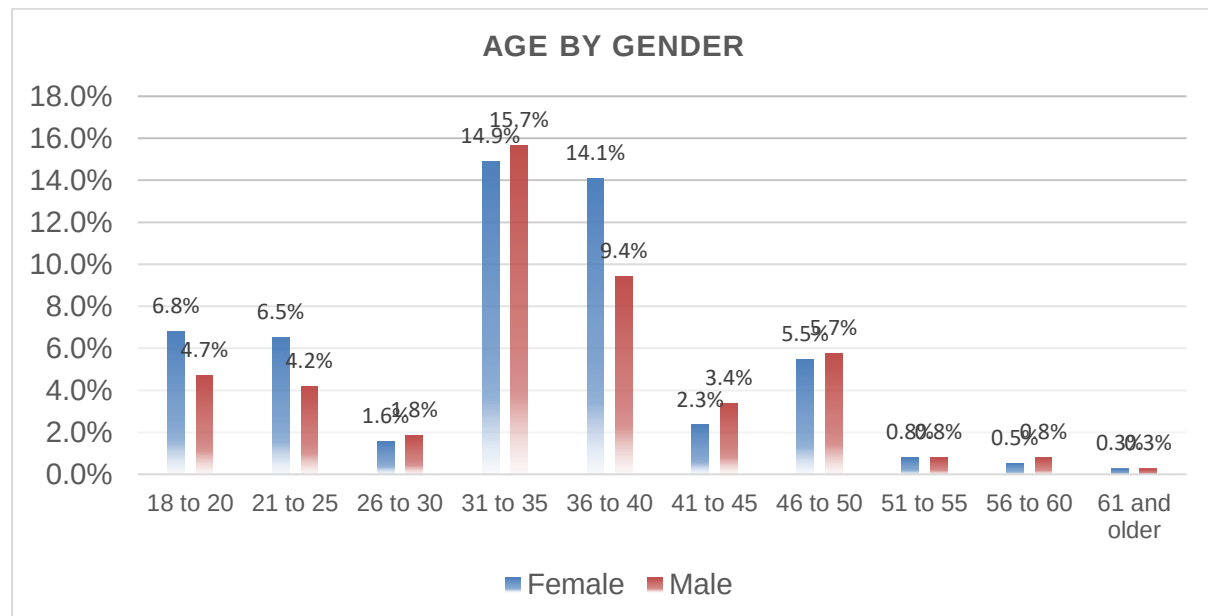


Figure 4.3 Age by gender

Figure 4.3 demonstrates that 15,7% of males and 14,9% of female respondents fell in the age group of 31 to 35 years. In the age group of 36 to 40 years, the research indicates that there were 14,1% females and 9,4% males.

Another biographical category was marital status. Figure 4.4 is a graphical illustration of the respondents' marital status.

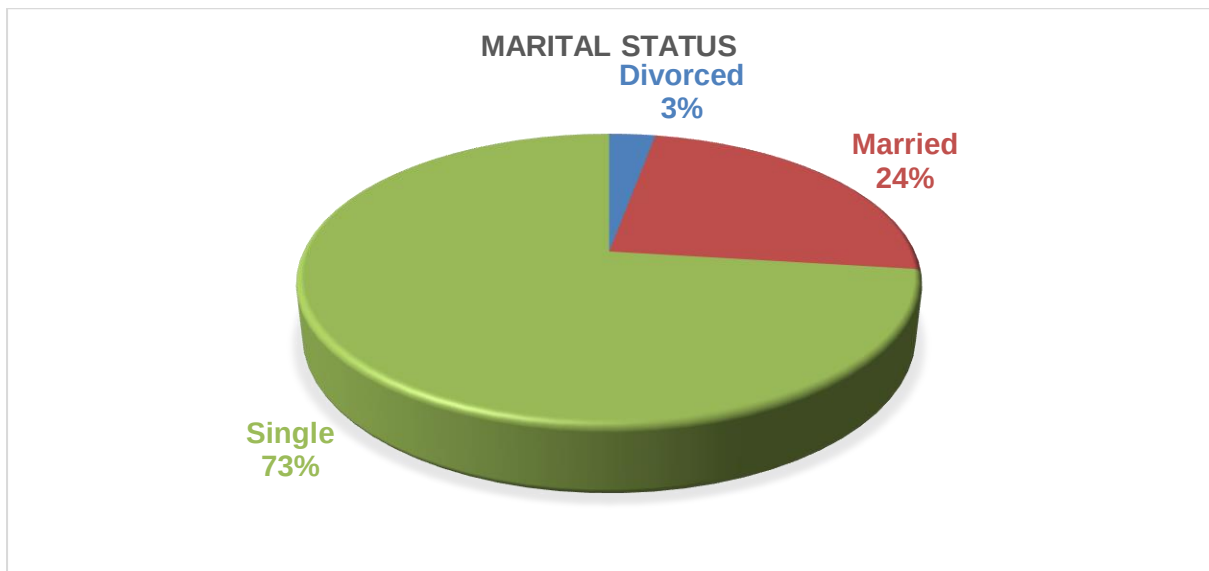


Figure 4.4 Marital status of the respondents

Figure 4.4 indicates that the majority (73%) of the respondents were single, followed by 24% of married respondents and lastly, 3% of the respondents was divorced.

The respondents' level of education was also analysed. Figure 4.5 is a graphical presentation of the results of the respondents' level of education.

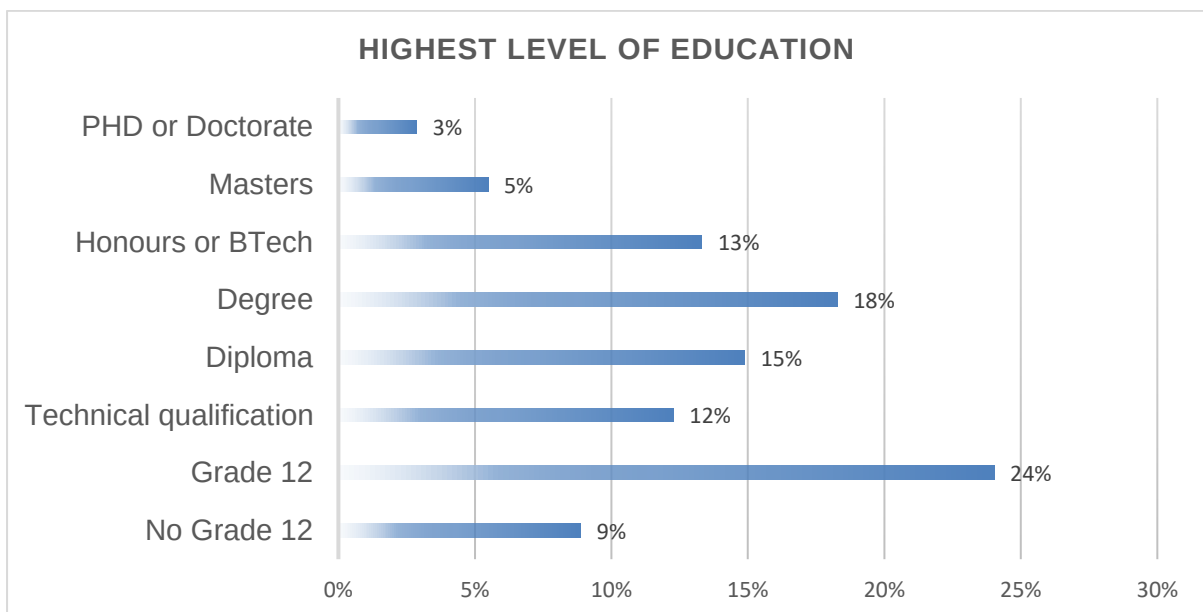


Figure 4.5 Highest level of education

Figure 4.5 depicts the respondents' highest level of education. About 24% of the respondents have a grade 12, while 18% have a degree; 15% of the respondents have

a Diploma, 13% have Honours or BTech, 12% have a technical qualification, 9% have no matric, 5% have a Master's degree and 3% have a PhD or Doctorate.

Respondents were asked about the factors influencing online shopping behaviour. Figure 4.6 graphically illustrates the respondents' feedback.

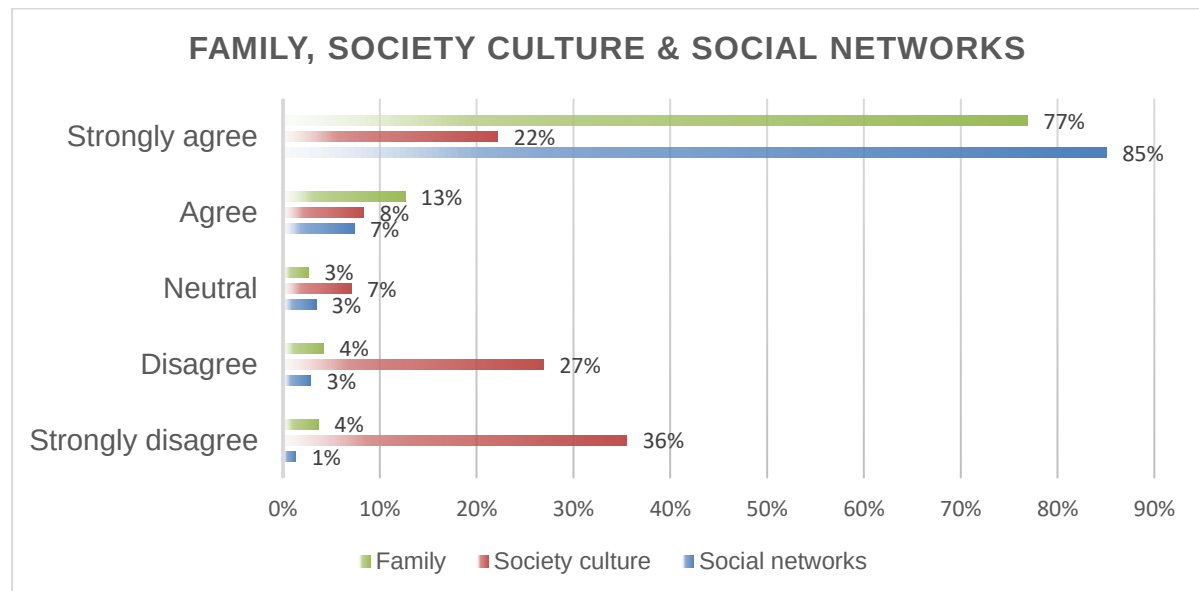


Figure 4.6 Influential factors

Figure 4.6 reflects that 85% of the respondents strongly agree that social media influences the online shopping. About 36% of the respondents strongly disagree that the culture of the society influences the online shopping environment. The majority of the respondents, above seventy- seven percent (77%) strongly agree that family plays an influential role in an online shopping environment. Just above a quarter (27%) of the respondents disagree that societal culture influences online shopping.

Figure 4.7 encapsulates the factors that are influencing consumers in an online buying environment.

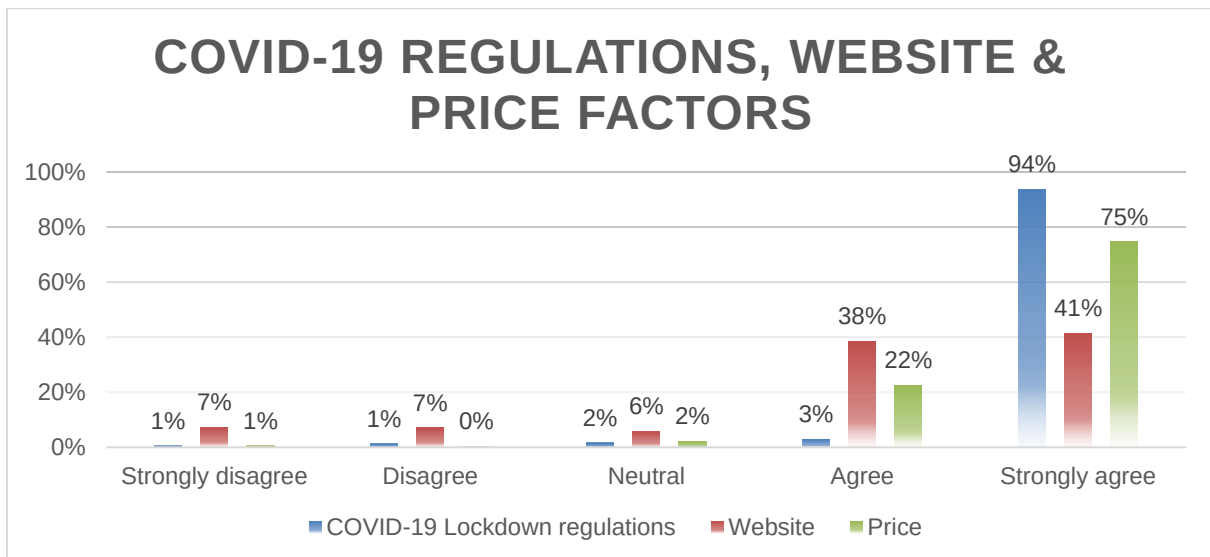


Figure 4.7 Contributing factors

Figure 4.7 indicates that 94% of the respondents strongly agree that COVID-19 lockdown regulations significantly influenced consumers in an online shopping environment. About 75% of the respondents strongly agree that price influences consumers in an online shopping environment. Almost half (41%) strongly agree while 38% agree that a website influences online shopping. Only few respondents (1%, 7% and 1%) strongly disagree that COVID-19 regulations, websites and price are influential in an online shopping environment respectively.

Figure 4.8 below illustrates the most influential factors in an online shopping environment.

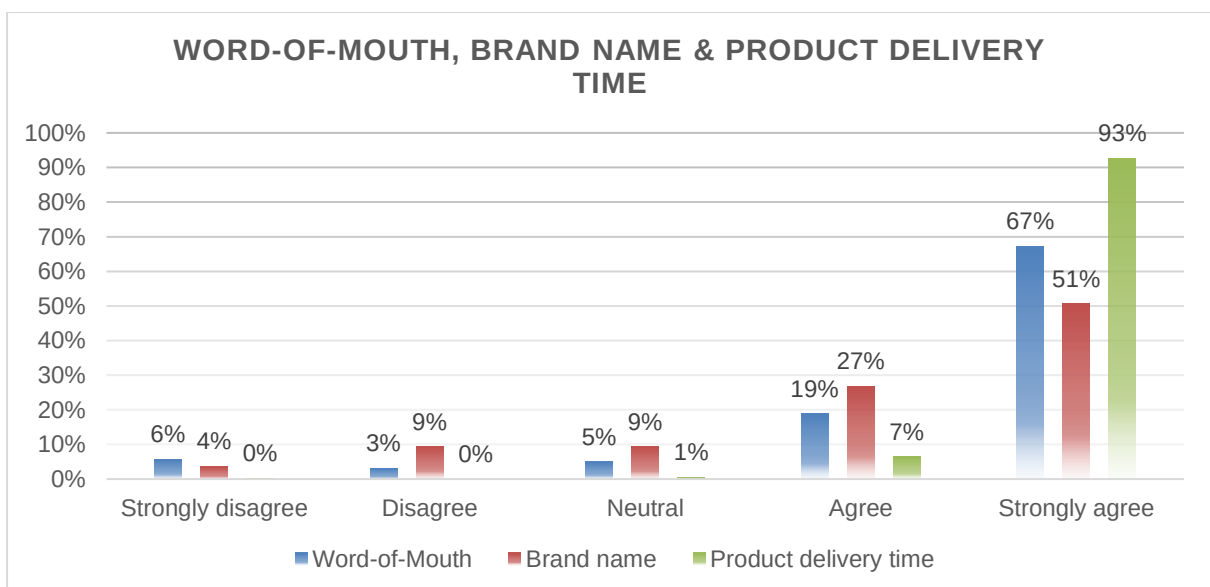


Figure 4.8 Word-of-mouth, brand name and product delivery time graph

Figure 4.8 indicates that most of the respondents (93%) strongly agree that product delivery time is very influential in an online shopping environment. Only 7% agree that product delivery time is influential in an online shopping environment. Eighty-six percent (67% + 19%) of the respondents strongly agree and agree that word-of-mouth is important in an online shopping environment.

Figure 4.9 below captures the results on financial condition, convenience and advertisement factors.

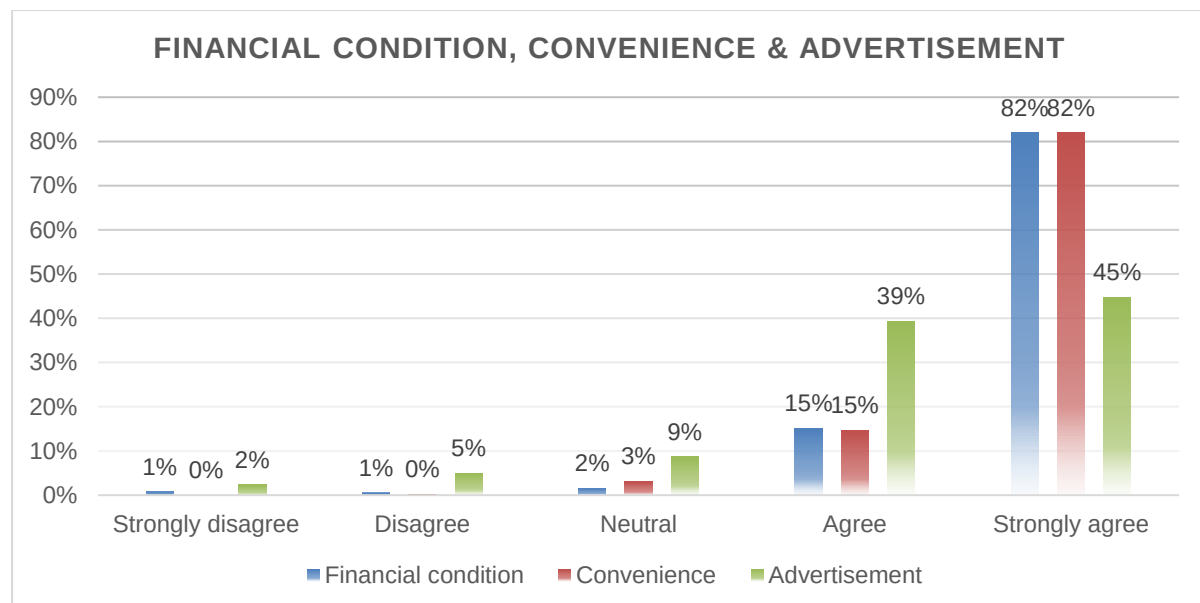


Figure 4.9 Financial condition, convenience & advertisement

In Figure 4.9, it is notable that most of the respondents (82%) strongly support the statements that “Financial condition and convenience contribute importantly to online shopping decisions”. Only 45% of the respondents strongly agree that advertisements influence their online shopping.

Figure 4.10 indicates respondents’ responses to the online buying decision-making process.

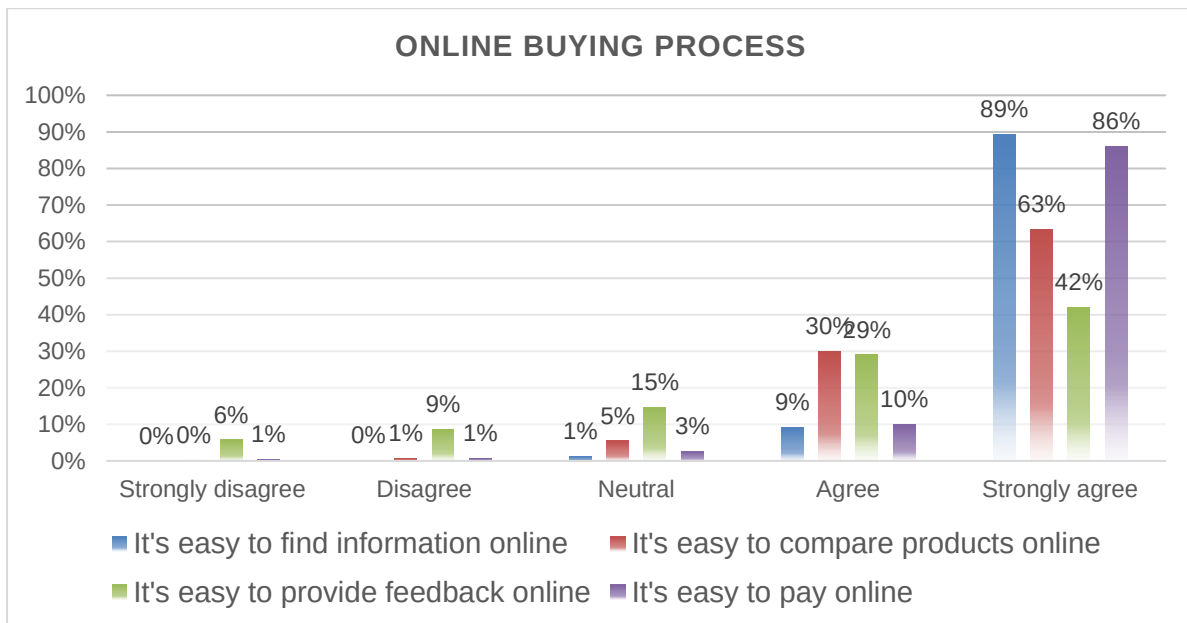


Figure 4.10 Online purchasing process

In Figure 4.9, 89% of the respondents strongly agree that it is easy to find information online. Eighty-six percent (86%) of the respondents also strongly agree that it is easy to make payment online. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the respondents strongly agree that it is easy to compare products online. Only forty-two (42%) of the respondents strongly agree that it is easy to provide feedback online. None of the respondents strongly disagrees with the statement that “It is easy to find and compare information online”.

Figure 4.11 graphically shows respondents’ feedback on personal factors, psychological factors, cultural factors, and social factors.

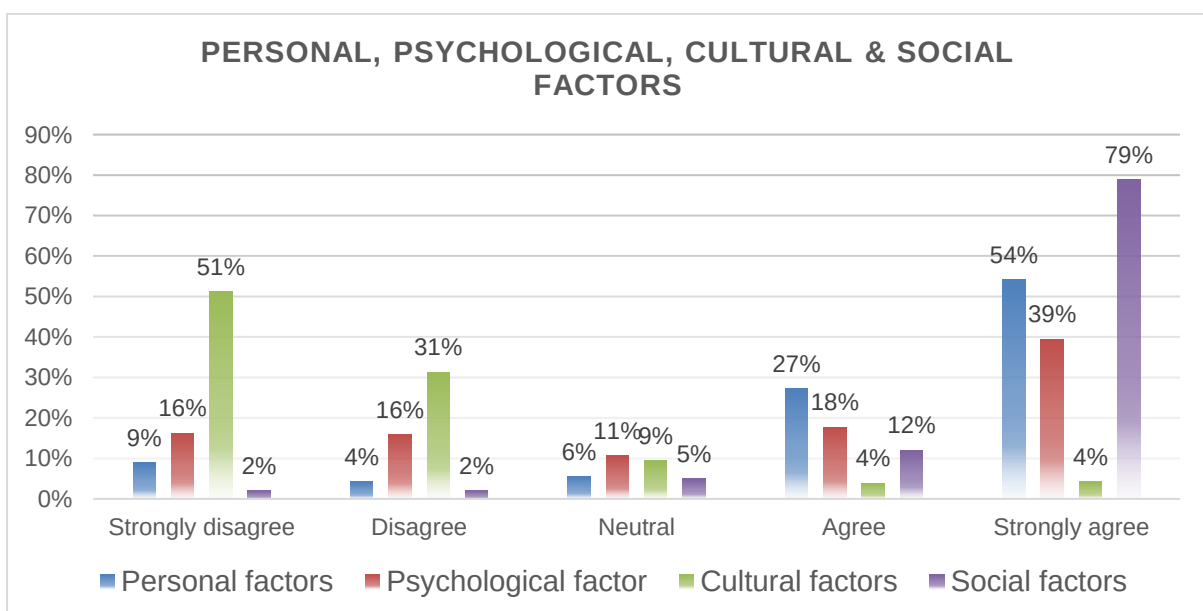


Figure 4.11 Personal, psychological, cultural and social factors

Figure 4.11 shows that seventy-nine (79%) of the respondents strongly agree that social factors influence online buying and that fifty-four (54%) of the respondents strongly agree that personal factors have an influence in an online shopping environment. Fifty-one percent (51%) of the respondents strongly disagree that cultural factors have an influence in the online shopping environment.

In the following section, the statistical analysis of the above results is presented.

4.4 Statistical analysis

This section of a statistical analysis results is based on responses to the Likert scale questions 6 to 11 on the study questionnaire. The SPSS version 21 was used on the entire sample (n=383) of respondents.

4.4.1 Reliability

This study used Cronbach Alpha to evaluate the Validity and Reliability of a latent construct.

The following reliability procedures were evaluated in this study to satisfy the validity procedure:

- Cronbach alpha

Table 4.1 Reliability and convergent validity

Questions	Construct Name	Cronbach Alpha	Mean	SD
Question 6.1	Family	0,689	4,73	0,54
Question 6.2	Society	0,748	4,47	0,45
Question 6.3	Social Networks	0,529	4,36	0,53
Question 6.4	Age	0,706	4,46	0,67
Question 6.5	Financial Condition	0,636	4,74	0,42
Question 6.6	COVID-19	0,697	3,50	0,58

Table 4.1 represents the reliability and all the reported Cronbach Alpha values are above the guideline value of 0,7 or at least 0,5 as advocated by Taber (2018:1287). This signifies that the resulting constructs are reliable. It should be noted that questions 6.2 and 6.4 (society culture and age) influenced the respective Cronbach

Alpha values in a negative manner and were omitted from the constructs. Society culture shows a mean of 4,47 and standard deviation of 0,45. Age shows a mean of 4,46 and standard deviation of 0,67.

Table 4.2 below illustrates the highest mean for question Q9. Product delivery time (mean = 4.91, SD = 0.348) indicates that the respondents on average strongly agree with the statement and this reflects that product delivery time is the most influential factor in an online shopping environment. The lowest reported mean in the above table 4.2 is for question Q11. The respondents strongly disagree that culture influences online shopping.

Table 4.2 Descriptive statistics analysis

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q6_Family	381	1	5	4,55	0,998
Q6_Society	383	1	5	2,55	1,569
Q6_SocialNetworks	381	1	5	4,72	0,776
Q6_Age	383	1	5	3,32	1,695
Q6_FinancialCondition	383	1	5	4,77	0,578
Q6_LockDown	381	1	5	4,88	0,529
Q7_Website	382	1	5	3,99	1,191
Q7_Price	383	1	5	4,70	0,574
Q7_Convenience	383	2	5	4,78	0,499
Q7_OtherHappyCustomers	382	1	5	4,70	0,683
Q7_Advertisement	382	1	5	4,19	0,954
Q7_Other	27	1	5	3,19	1,302
Q8_Advertisements	380	1	5	4,13	0,997
Q8_FamilyAndFriends	382	1	5	4,65	0,801
Q8_WordOfMouth	382	1	5	4,39	1,104
Q8_OtherHappyCustomers	381	1	5	4,72	0,611
Q8_WebsiteQuality	380	1	5	3,54	1,332
Q8_SocialMedia	383	1	5	4,74	0,776
Q9_BrandName	383	1	5	4,11	1,138
Q9_Quality	382	1	5	4,44	0,937
Q9_Price	382	1	5	4,67	0,646
Q9_Family	379	1	5	4,63	0,873
Q9_DeliveryTime	383	1	5	4,91	0,348

Q9_Other	18	1	5	2,56	1,381
Q9_OtherExplain	0				
Q10_Information	382	2	5	4,87	0,390
Q10_Compare	383	1	5	4,56	0,660
Q10_Feedback	383	1	5	3,93	1,195
Q10_Pay	382	1	5	4,80	0,567
Q11_Personal	379	1	5	4,13	1,249
Q11_Psychological	383	1	5	3,48	1,528
Q11_Cultural	383	1	5	1,79	1,047
Q11_Social	383	1	5	4,63	0,842
Q11_Other	18	1	5	2,78	1,263

Tables 4.2 above and 4.3 below indicate the lowest mean for question 6.2 stating that “My society culture influences my buying behaviour online” (mean = 2.55, Standard Deviation -SD = 1.57). This indicates that respondents on average felt neutral, leaning towards disagree with this statement.

Table 4.3 Descriptive analysis for question 6

No	Statement	% Strongly disagree	% Disagree	% Neutral	% Agree	% Strongly agree	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q6.1	My family is most influential and affect my buying behaviour online	3,7	4,2	2,6	12,6	76,9	4,55	1,00
Q6.2	My society culture influences my buying behaviour online	35,5	26,9	7,0	8,4	22,2	2,55	1,57
Q6.3	My social network sites influence my online buying behaviour	1,3	2,9	3,4	7,3	85,0	4,72	0,78
Q6.4	My age influences my online buying	25,59	13,32	6,53	12,27	42,30	3,32	1,70
Q6.5	My financial condition influences my online buying behaviour	0,78	0,52	1,57	15,14	81,98	4,77	0,58
Q6.6	COVID-19 lockdown regulations influenced my online shopping	0,52	1,31	1,57	2,89	93,70	4,88	0,53

The highest reported mean in the above tables 4.2 and 4.3 was question 6.6 “COVID-19 lockdown regulations influenced my online shopping” (mean = 4.88, Standard Deviation-SD = 0.53). This indicates that respondents on average strongly agree with the statement.

4.4.2 Table format for tests for significant mean differences

Table 4.4 specifies the gender group statistics test results for significant mean difference and effect size.

Table 4.4 Sample gender test

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Effect size
Q6_mean	Male	179	4,7179	0,59696	0,04462	0,03
	Female	204	4,7357	0,48163	0,03372	
Q7_mean	Male	179	4,4886	0,46144	0,03449	0,10
	Female	204	4,4443	0,43863	0,03071	
Q8_mean	Male	179	4,3715	0,56555	0,04227	0,03
	Female	204	4,3523	0,50266	0,03519	
Q9_mean	Male	179	4,5107	0,66830	0,04995	0,13
	Female	204	4,4244	0,66418	0,04650	
Q10_mean	Male	179	4,7523	0,44984	0,03362	0,04
	Female	204	4,7353	0,40207	0,02815	
Q11_mean	Male	179	3,5127	0,61876	0,04625	0,03
	Female	204	3,4914	0,54240	0,03798	

Table 4.4 captures the effect size smaller than 0.2 which is considered to be no practically visible difference between the mean and the effect size. Based on the reported effect size in table 4.4 there are only practically insignificant differences between the means of men compared to women.

Table 4.5 summarises the results of comparisons between highest level of education and overall responses.

Table 4.5 comparisons between highest level of education and overall responses

Descriptives						
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean

						Lower Bound
Q6_mean	No Grade 12 or Matric	34	4.9118	0.14927	0.02560	4.8597
	Grade 12 / Matric	92	4.8179	0.41122	0.04287	4.7328
	Technical qualification	47	4.8830	0.27012	0.03940	4.8037
	Diploma	57	4.8202	0.42486	0.05627	4.7074
	Degree	70	4.6214	0.73443	0.08778	4.4463
	Honour's degree	51	4.4314	0.70548	0.09879	4.2330
	Master, PhD or Doctorate	32	4.5807	0.55012	0.09725	4.3824
	Total	383	4.7274	0.53797	0.02749	4.6733
Q7_mean	No Grade 12 or Matric	34	4.5363	0.33012	0.05662	4.4211
	Grade 12 / Matric	92	4.4978	0.41128	0.04288	4.4127
	Technical qualification	47	4.4851	0.43288	0.06314	4.3580
	Diploma	57	4.4602	0.49591	0.06569	4.3287
	Degree	70	4.4843	0.41621	0.04975	4.3850
	Honour's degree	51	4.2686	0.53352	0.07471	4.1186
	Master, PhD or Doctorate	32	4.5448	0.47824	0.08454	4.3724
	Total	383	4.4650	0.44939	0.02296	4.4199
Q8_mean	No Grade 12 or Matric	34	4.5196	0.36414	0.06245	4.3926
	Grade 12 / Matric	92	4.4203	0.40561	0.04229	4.3363
	Technical qualification	47	4.4362	0.46697	0.06811	4.2991
	Diploma	57	4.3807	0.54805	0.07259	4.2353
	Degree	70	4.3905	0.54054	0.06461	4.2616
	Honour's degree	51	4.0588	0.64276	0.09000	3.8780
	Master, PhD or Doctorate	32	4.2969	0.69398	0.12268	4.0467
	Total	383	4.3613	0.53236	0.02720	4.3078
Q9_mean	No Grade 12 or Matric	34	4.4926	0.47068	0.08072	4.3284
	Grade 12 / Matric	92	4.4828	0.56025	0.05841	4.3668
	Technical qualification	47	4.5000	0.66553	0.09708	4.3046
	Diploma	57	4.5146	0.75167	0.09956	4.3152
	Degree	70	4.4857	0.69663	0.08326	4.3196
	Honour's degree	51	4.2288	0.71099	0.09956	4.0288
	Master, PhD or Doctorate	32	4.5729	0.79530	0.14059	4.2862
	Total	383	4.4648	0.66663	0.03406	4.3978
Q10_mean	No Grade 12 or Matric	34	4.7157	0.29738	0.05100	4.6119

	Grade 12 / Matric	92	4.7609	0.40245	0.04196	4.6775
	Technical qualification	47	4.8227	0.29366	0.04283	4.7365
	Diploma	57	4.7895	0.36532	0.04839	4.6925
	Degree	70	4.7762	0.46356	0.05541	4.6657
	Honour's degree	51	4.5882	0.53161	0.07444	4.4387
	Master, PhD or Doctorate	32	4.6979	0.53788	0.09508	4.5040
	Total	383	4.7433	0.42459	0.02170	4.7006
Q11_mean	No Grade 12 or Matric	34	3.8088	0.67437	0.11565	3.5735
	Grade 12 / Matric	92	3.5332	0.43458	0.04531	3.4432
	Technical qualification	47	3.4521	0.63980	0.09332	3.2643
	Diploma	57	3.5354	0.56819	0.07526	3.3846
	Degree	70	3.3829	0.50347	0.06018	3.2628
	Honour's degree	51	3.3118	0.66004	0.09242	3.1261
	Master, PhD or Doctorate	32	3.6563	0.63421	0.11211	3.4276
	Total	383	3.5013	0.57867	0.02957	3.4432

Table 4.6 Effect size

EFFECT SIZE					
No Grade 12 or Matric with...	Grade 12 / Matric with...	Technical qualification with...	Diploma with...	Degree with...	Honour's degree with...
0,23					
0,11	0,16				
0,22	0,01	0,15			
0,40	0,27	0,36	0,27		
0,68	0,55	0,64	0,55	0,26	
0,60	0,43	0,55	0,44	0,06	0,21
0,09					
0,12	0,03				
0,15	0,08	0,05			
0,12	0,03	0,00	0,05		
0,50	0,43	0,41	0,36	0,40	
0,02	0,10	0,12	0,17	0,13	0,52

0,24					
0,18	0,03				
0,25	0,07	0,10			
0,24	0,06	0,08	0,02		
0,72	0,56	0,59	0,50	0,52	
0,32	0,18	0,20	0,12	0,13	0,34
0,02					
0,01	0,03				
0,03	0,04	0,02			
0,01	0,00	0,02	0,04		
0,37	0,36	0,38	0,38	0,36	
0,10	0,11	0,09	0,07	0,11	0,43
0,11					
0,36	0,15				
0,20	0,07	0,09			
0,13	0,03	0,10	0,03		
0,24	0,32	0,44	0,38	0,35	
0,03	0,12	0,23	0,17	0,15	0,20
0,41					
0,53	0,13				
0,41	0,00	0,13			
0,63	0,30	0,11	0,27		
0,74	0,34	0,21	0,34	0,11	
0,23	0,19	0,32	0,19	0,43	0,52

Table 4.6 reports effect sizes which indicate a difference between the means of question 6 “Factors influencing online behaviour” of respondents with an Honours degree compared to respondents with no grade 12 or Matric ($d=0.64$) and Diploma ($d=0.55$). The respondents with Honours degrees (mean=4.43, SD=0.71) on average agreed with the statements in question 6, the no grade 12 or grade 12, and diploma respondents strongly agreed (mean = 4.82 to 4.91, SD =0.15 TO 0.42).

4.4.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented the demographic profiles of the respondents who participated in this study. Some demographic variables were cross-tabulated amongst one another.

The respondents' responses were analysed and the results confirm that COVID-19 lockdown regulations, product delivery time and social networks are the factors customers consider important in an online shopping environment. The results also indicate that societal culture is the least influential factor in an online shopping environment.

Reliability tests were conducted which indicate that only two factors (societal culture and age) influenced the respective Cronbach Alpha values in a negative manner. The other resulting constructs are reliable.

Tests for significant mean differences were conducted and the results confirm that there is a difference between the means of question 6 (factors influencing online behaviour): respondents with Honours degrees compared to respondents with No matric, Matric or a Diploma.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The main aim of the research study was to determine which factors contribute to consumer online shopping behaviour. The study examined the factors that bring about changes in consumer-buying behaviour, as well as the consumer decision-making process that consumers undergo when making an online shopping decision. This chapter draws conclusions based on the results presented in the preceding chapters. Notable implications and limitations of the findings are highlighted and some recommendations for future research are suggested.

5.2 The importance of the study

This study is important empirically, conceptually and practically. The empirical contribution regarding the factors that are influential in an online shopping environment are invaluable for marketing and retail competitiveness in a changing business environment. This study provides marketers and brand managers with a constructive guideline in order to cultivate applicable marketing strategies. The results of this study will further assist marketers to develop a unique, competitive advantage for their organisation. COVID-19, social networks, product delivery time and family have a significantly positive influence on consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment. The discussion on influential factors in a South African context contribute to the limited body of local academic knowledge on this topic. This study has made a theoretical contribution to the field of consumer behaviour and marketing regarding online shopping.

5.2.3 Revisit the problem statement

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered major changes in economics, technology and behaviour among individuals globally, including in South Africa. The most significant change underpinned by lockdown regulations is consumer online shopping. The increase in online shopping obliged businesses to meet and exceed customers' expectations in such an environment. For businesses to meet the ever-changing needs, it is vital to understand the factors that play a crucial role in changing consumer behaviour.

Thus, the problem under investigation is premised on the thesis that a lack of understanding of the influential factors in an online consumer shopping environment can pose challenges to small-medium enterprises to know where to focus their marketing efforts and capital when matching consumers' needs with the company's products and services.

5.3 Integration of research objectives, literature, and discussion of results

In this section, the research objectives, literature, and the results of the study are integrated and discussed.

Research objective 1: To understand the factors that influence consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment.

The first research objective pursued was to determine the influential factors in consumer behaviour in an online buying environment. The literature consulted revealed that family and friends contribute to influencing consumers when buying online. Consumers are easily influenced by recommendations and personal words from a trusted person such as a family member, friends and or. associates (Qazzafi, 2020:1207).

The study found that four factors (Question 6 & 11) influence consumer behaviour when shopping online. The four factors that were found to be notable are as follows:

- a. COVID-19 lockdown regulations
- b. Social networks
- c. Product delivery time
- d. Family and friends

The statistical description confirmed with the highest reported mean (COVID-19 regulations: $m=4.88$, social networks: $m=4.72$, product delivery time: $m=4.91$, family and friends: $m=4.65$). This research objective was achieved, based on the factors contributing to consumer behaviour when executing online shopping.

Research objective 2: To determine factors contributing to online purchasing behaviour.

The second research objective pursued was to determine the factors that contribute to consumer online purchasing. The results suggest that the financial position of the respondents and convenience (Question 6 & 7) are influential factors.

The literature suggests that financial and convenience risks play a crucial role during consumer online shopping. Very often buyers do not have an idea who the seller is and the perceived risks might create doubt in the mind of the consumer (Bhatti *et al.*, 2018:3).

In this respect, results indicate that the financial situations of the respondents as well as convenience influence consumers to buy online. Figure 4.9 illustrates that respondents strongly agree (82%) that financial position and convenience influence their willingness to buy online. Table 4.2 of the statistical description analysis supports the above statement regarding financial situations (mean = 4.78) and convenience (mean = 4.77). This indicates that the respondents on average strongly agree with the statement. This objective of the study was thus achieved as the results are presented.

Research objective 3: To determine the process that consumers undergo when making an online purchase.

The third research objective sought to determine the consumer decision-making process that consumers undergo when doing online shopping. The results confirm that during the information search stage of the purchasing decision, consumers indicate that “It is easy to find information online”. It indicates that the respondents strongly agree (89%) with the statement “It is easy to find information online”. “It is easy to compare products online”. The results also reveal that respondents strongly agree (86%) with the statement “It is easy to compare products online”. The statistical analysis supports this statement with the highest means (4,87 and 4,56). Although a specific question regarding this entire process has not been put to the respondents, the results confirm that objective 3 has been met at a satisfactory level.

Research objective 4: To determine the internal and external factors that motivate consumers to purchase products or services online.

The fourth objective of this study intended to determine the internal and external factors that motivate consumers buy products or service online. The results (Question 8) indicate that respondents strongly agree with the statements that social factors such

as “other happy customers” and “social media networks” spur on online shopping, with statistic means of 4.72 and 4.74 respectively.

The statement finds resonance in literature which hold that social networking platforms have a significantly positive influence on the online buying decision process (Al-Abdallah *et al.*, 2021:560). Consumers are easily influenced by recommendations and personal words from other happy customers (Qazzafi, 2020:1207).

Consumers are surrounded by a wide range of influences such as social media networks, natural disasters (COVID-19) and family and friends in their environment that affect them when deciding to buy products online.

5.4 Summary of the findings

Table 5.1 summary of the findings

Objectives of the study	Summary of results
To understand factors that influence consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment	COVID-19, social networks, product delivery time, family and friends are the most influential factors online with high mean scores (4.88, 4,72, 4,91 and 4,65).
To determine factors contributing to online purchasing behaviour	Financial position and convenience factors play a crucial role during consumer willingness to shop online.
To determine the process that consumers undergo when making an online purchase	The respondents have a positive online experience in finding information, comparing products, paying, and giving feedback.
To determine the internal and external factors that motivate consumers to purchase products or services online	Other happy customers and social media networks contribute positively to an online shopping environment.

Furthermore, the results of the study reveal that 24% of the respondents have Grade 12, while 18% have a degree. The majority of the respondents were females at 53%.

In conclusion, all study objectives were met for this study and the research problem was addressed.

5.5 General findings and recommendations

The study examined the factors that contribute to consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment in the Sedibeng region of Gauteng, South Africa. The reviewed literature indicates that the natural (COVID-19 lockdown regulations) and social environment impacted a lot of factors, thereby accelerating the expansion of e-commerce. Social media have also become part of consumers' lifestyle and it is used as a point of reference before committing to purchase. These platforms permit marketers and companies to interact and engage with consumers at a reasonable price. It is therefore crucial for marketers to understand the factors contributing to an online shopping environment.

Below are the recommendations based on the results of the study:

- a. Financial investment in digital marketing is recommended in order to interact and engage with consumers more easily. This can be achieved by offering customers online value such as offering one-on-one virtual customer consultation. This can also be achieved through building social media community platforms known as online social-sharing communities, where a company can initiate a conversation, inform them of trends and allow consumers to share their opinions.
- b. Improve product delivery processes, channels and time: these must be communicated through company communication channels, advertisements and social media platforms.
- c. It is also recommended that marketers must create a platform where customers can review or rate the company product and services. It was notable in the study that "other happy customers" contribute to online shopping behaviour.
- d. Investment in research and development to identify the latest consumer trends and the natural disasters that might possibly affect company profitability: Companies had to transform their operations swiftly during the pandemic to be in businesses, for example, KFC introduced a home delivery service. This transformation can be affected through research and development.

5.6 Theoretical implications of the study

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding online consumer behaviour in a South African context. The theory elaborates on the current debate about the knowledge about consumer behaviour because of COVID-19 lockdown regulations and their influence on consumer behaviour online. The debate is waged not only in South Africa, but also globally.

The theoretical contribution of the study alters the mentality of researchers and relevant stakeholders in the discipline of research and marketing. For example, digital communication channels have inspired researchers to recruit respondents, allow questionnaires to be completed online or through a mobile app. This study provides a better insight into consumers' behaviour of online purchasing in this digital era.

5.7 Managerial implications of the study

Consumer behaviour has been changing ever since the emergence of technology. Internet and search engines are used in consumers' purchasing decision processes and managers and marketers need to identify and respond to these changes by tailor-making company strategies to fit the changing needs of their customers. One of the strategies that was noted during the pandemic was a diversification strategy where operations were taken online. Managers also need to focus on adapting the company's business model and expand on channels used and this should include social media channels. Being aware of the factors that lead consumers to change, can help managers and marketers to plan effectively and tailor-make their products and services to meet the changing behaviour of consumers. The add-on services such as home delivery mentioned in the campaign might influence consumer online buying behaviour for the better.

5.8 Limitations of the study

The following are the limitations that constitute the scope of the study:

- The participants of the study were online shoppers or had previously shopped online.
- The study was limited to South Africans residing in the Gauteng Sedibeng district.
- The participants are between the ages of 18 to 61 years.
- The study used Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and emails directly to individuals to the online survey.

- The study focused on limited factors.
- The study used only the quantitative research method.

Therefore, the findings should not be generalised to reflect the views of the whole population of South African consumers.

5.9 Recommendations for future research study

This research identified two potential areas for further study: It focused on factors contributing to consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment. To enhance the body of knowledge in online consumer behaviour and research, it will be beneficial to investigate the influence of each factor applicable in each of the stages of the consumer online decision-making process such as social media networks during the information search stage of the decision-making process. It will be valuable to investigate what factors influence consumer behaviour from the first stage up to the last stage in an online shopping environment. Further academic research on social media platforms utilised by different age groups in a South Africa context could also enhance an understanding of which social network can be used to target a specific age group.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter revisited the problem statement relating to the lack of understanding of contributing factors in an online consumer shopping environment. It integrated the objectives such as to understand the factors contributing to online shopping behaviour.

The literature regarding contributing factors such as social, natural disasters, economic and psychological factors was reviewed. The main results confirm that social media networks, COVID-19 regulations, other happy customers and financial situations were discussed. The general findings indicate that natural (COVID-19), social and economic factors contribute to online shopping behaviour. Recommendations were outlined as well as implications stating that retailers must financially invest in digital marketing, thus amending business operating models to fit customer needs are recommended. The limitations of the study stated that the study focused only on the Sedibeng region; participants were between the ages of 18 to 61 and older; an online survey was used; advertisements of the study were placed only on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. and recommendations for future research were proposed to investigate the influence of each factor in the various stages of the consumer online decision-making process.

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APPENDIX A: Data collection instrument

Ethics informed consent form

Dear Participant

This **Informed Consent Statement** serves to confirm the following information as it relates to the officially approved research project at the North-West University on *“Factors influencing consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment in the Sedibeng District of Gauteng”*.

1. The sole purpose of this study is to obtain information from customers like yourself to determine the nature of your everyday online buying behaviour experience related to the research topic.
2. Participation is completely voluntary and you may opt-out at any time. You may also decide not to answer specific questions.
3. The procedure to be followed is quantitative research design, which entails a questionnaire. Basic background information will be asked e.g. your age, highest qualification etc. related to your experience of the topic.
4. Confidentiality of the data is guaranteed and only the combined results will be used for research and publication purposes.
5. The data gathered from the questionnaires will only be used for research purposes.
6. Please note that there are four classifying variables in Section 5 (age, employment, highest qualification and gender) which will be used to profile the respondents who partook in this study. It will be used in comparative analysis to distinguish green customer behaviour among different customer profiles. Note that only the combined results will be used and at no stage can any specific respondent or his/her data entry be isolated and analysed. (You may also select the option not to answer the specific question should you feel uncomfortable in answering it.)
7. Also note that this study does not have a correct or incorrect answer to any of the questions. This means that in comparing the profiles of respondents, there

is not a correct or incorrect behavioural profile. The study merely analyses green consumer behaviour as is.

Please indicate your consent

I hereby give my consent after having read the above information, that my data may be used as stated above.	YES	NO
I hereby give my consent that my demographic data may be used to develop a profile for green consumer behaviour.	YES	NO

Thank you for your time.

Mr Junior Mthimkhulu

Student contact details: 082 759 4079

Student email: junior.mthimkhulu@nwu.ac.za

Supervisor: **Prof. JJ Prinsloo**

Supervisor contact: 082 904 0977

Supervisor email: Hein.Prinsloo@nwu.ac.za



Student name: Junior Mthimkhulu

Student number: 28262883

Student contact details: 082 759 4079

Student email: junior.mthimkhulu@nwu.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof. JJ Prinsloo

Supervisor contact: 082 904 0977

Supervisor email: Hein.Prinsloo@nwu.ac.za

Dear respondents,

My name is Junior Mthimkhulu student number 28262883 and I am an MBA final year student. Kindly note that part of the MBA programme requires a student to complete a research project. I am conducting an empirical study on factors influencing consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment in the Sedibeng district of Gauteng. It is anticipated that the study results of this magnitude would significantly contribute to consumers, small and medium business owners, and the community at large as this study will impact economic growth and development.

Kindly note that the questionnaire answering might take almost between 10 to 20 minutes and note that there is no compensation for participating in this survey. Please do not insert your name on the questionnaire

If you agree to participate in this study, you are invited to answer all questions honestly and return the completed questionnaire swiftly. Please note that participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time.

Please note that respondents' feedback in the questionnaire will be handled with confidentiality and privacy. It is only the researcher who will have access to respondents' feedback on the questionnaires.

Thank you for your participation.

J.M Mthimkhulu (MBA researcher)

Questionnaire:

“Factors influencing consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment in the Sedibeng District of Gauteng”

SECTION A: Demographic information

Kindly indicate your response by ticking the box corresponding with your correct choice.

1. Gender

Male	☐	1
Female	☐	2

2. Age group

18 -20	☐	1
21 – 25	☐	2
26 – 30	☐	3
31 – 35	☐	4
36 – 40	☐	5
41 – 45	☐	6
46 – 50	☐	7
51 – 55	☐	8
56 – 60	☐	9
61 and older	☐	10

3. Marital status

Single	☐	1
Married	☐	2
Divorced	☐	3
Widow/er	☐	4

4. Level of education

No Grade 12 or Matric	☐	1
Grade 12 / Matric	☐	2
Technical qualification	☐	3
Diploma	☐	4
Degree	☐	5
Honour's degree	☐	6
Master's degree	☐	7
PHD or Doctorate	☐	8

SECTION B: factors influencing consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment

Question 5. Have you ever shopped online?

Yes		1	No		2
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Question 6. Please rate the following statements according to your choice regarding factors influencing your buying behaviour online, where 1 is Strongly disagree, 2 is Disagree, 3 is Neutral, 4 is Agree and 5 is Strongly agree.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1	My family is mostly influential and affect my buying behaviour online.					
2	My societal culture influences my buying behaviour online.					
3	My social networks sites influence my online buying behaviour.					
4	My age influences my online buying.					
5	My financial condition influences my online buying behaviour.					
6	COVID-19 lockdown regulations influenced my online shopping.					

Question 7. Which factors do you think are the most important when shopping online?

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1	Website					
2	Price					
3	Convenience					
4	Other happy customers					
5	Advertisements					
6	Other					

If other, explain.

Question 8. What influenced you to buy online?

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1	Advertisements					
2	Family and friends					
3	Word-of-mouth					
4	Other happy customers					
5	Website quality					
6	Social media					
7	Other					

If other, explain.

Question 9. Online shopping influences

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1	Influence of brand name on purchasing decision online					
2	Influence of quality on purchase decision online					
3	Influence of price on purchase decision					
4	Influence of family members on purchase decision					
5	Influence of product delivery time on purchase decision					

Question 10. Online shopping reasons

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1	I think it's easy to find information about a product of my choice online.					
2	I think it's easy to compare products online.					
3	I think it's easy to provide feedback about the					

	purchasing experience online.					
4	I think it's easy to pay for the product online.					

Question 11. Which factors are more important to you when shopping online?

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1	Personal factors such as age, income, occupation and lifestyle.					
2	Psychological factors such as motivation and perception.					
3	Cultural factors such as values and beliefs.					
4	Social factors such as family and reference groups.					
5	Other					

If other, explain.

Thank you so much for agreeing to take part in this study.

APPENDIX B: Approval of the study



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Economic and Management Sciences Research
Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)

2 December 2021

Prof JJ Prinsloo
Per e-mail
Dear Prof Prinsloo

EMS-REC FEEDBACK: 23092021 (Round Robin)
Student: Mthimkhulu, JM (28262883)(NWU-00968-21-A4)
Study leader: Prof JJ Prinsloo - MBA

Your ethics application on, *Factors influencing consumer behaviour in an online shopping environment in Sedibeng district of Gauteng*, which served Round Robin, refers.

Outcome:

Approved as a minimal risk study. A number NWU-00968-21-A4 is given for one year of ethics clearance.

Please note that the ethics approval of this application is subject to the Covid-19 protocols.

Kind regards,

Prof Mark Rathbone
Chairperson: Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee
(EMS-REC)

APPENDIX C: Letter from the editor

MUSARA LUBOMBO

LANGUAGE EDITOR

CONTACT

Hon Lecturer
University of KwaZulu-Natal

+27 83 490 1604

Lubombom1@ukzn.ac.za

March 29, 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**Re: FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR
IN AN ONLINE SHOPPING ENVIRONMENT IN
SEDIBENG DISTRICT OF GAUTENG**

I write to confirm that editing was performed on the above dissertation.

Technical changes on spellings, grammatical expression and scientific writing were made. References were checked for accuracy, completeness, and consistency.

The editor shall not be responsible for errors imported in later versions of the edited document.

Sincerely,



Musara Lubombo, PhD

APPENDIX D: Letter from the statistician



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Statistical Consultation Services
Tel: +27 18 299 2651
Fax: +27 0 87 231 5294
Email: erika.fourie@nwu.ac.za

30 March 2022

Re: Thesis, Mr J.M Mthinkhulu, student number: 28262883

We hereby confirm that the Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University analysed the data of the above-mentioned student and assisted with the interpretation of the results. However, any opinion, findings or recommendations contained in this document are those of the author, and the Statistical Consultation Services of the NWU (Potchefstroom Campus) do not accept responsibility for the statistical correctness of the data reported.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'E Fourie', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Dr E Fourie

Senior Consultant: Statistical Consultation Services

APPENDIX E: Turnitin report

Junior body only as on 30 March 2022

ORIGINALITY REPORT

18%	11%	3%	10%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to Eiffel Corporation Student Paper	3%
2	Submitted to Northcentral Student Paper	2%
3	repository.nwu.ac.za Internet Source	1%
4	Submitted to Swinburne University of Technology Student Paper	<1%
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9	www.inderscience.com	