

Investigating the influence of online reviews on consumer buying behavior in the buying process: a focus on high and low involvement products.

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Declaration:

I declare that "Investigating the influence of online reviews on consumer buying behavior in the buying process: a focus on high and low involvement products" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to the originality checking software (Safe Assign) and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

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Abstract

Consumers use of online consumer reviews is increasing as a method of finding product information before making the buying decision. It has become popular for consumers to write their experiences and opinions about products and services in websites and social media, which are then made available to other consumers.

This study relied on the investigation of the influence of online reviews, on consumer buying behavior in the buying process, examined with a focus on high and low involvement products.

The methodology of the study, involved a self-administered online survey. For the basis of our study, surveys seemed to be the most appropriate method as the aim was to gather data about people's opinions and impressions.

All the information collected was analysed through the use of descriptive statistics.

The main findings of our study are that consumers are motivated to search and process information in online reviews for high involvement products only, mainly in the stages of information search and post-purchase in the consumer buying process and, consumers do not base themselves on online reviews when buying low involvement products, instead they rely on traditional word-of-mouth of family and friends.

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet and information technology provide a new opportunity for consumers to share their product evaluations online. According to Priest, Carter and Statt (2015) “Amazon.com began offering consumers an option to post their comments on products on its website in 1995”. Currently, Amazon.com has about 10 million consumer reviews and ratings on all its product categories, and these reviews and ratings are regarded as one of the most popular and successful features of Amazon (Priest, Carter and Statt, 2015). Consumers freely interact online in order to gather and share information about products and services and because of this, it is very important for companies to understand how these developments shape demand. The consumer may be – a child, a parent, a student, a worker, a lover, a jogger or stamp collector and all they do is buy and use goods and services constantly: to eat, to wear, to read, to watch, to play, to travel in; to keep them healthy, to make them wealthy and, if not wise, at least better educated (Moloi, 2016).

Lindmark (2015) argues that, in today's highly competitive market, companies are constantly searching for creative ways to stay ahead of the competition and knowing the customer's needs will always be the priority, as these needs or demands can change dramatically. Traditionally most companies focus on lowering their costs in order to be able to compete. However, this option is not reliable, and it cannot be the only solution, therefore, it is very important for companies to focus mainly in the consumers behaviour.

Understanding consumer behaviour is crucial, in order to help companies identify which consumers to target and how to target them.

In the buying process, consumer behaviour, according to the Oxford University (2017) can be defined as the “actions, reactions, and consequences that take place as the consumer goes through a decision-making process, reaches a decision, and then puts the product to use”. The decision making process, describes a set of phases, that consumers should follow in order to achieve an optimal decision (Moloi, 2016). In the buying process, the purchase is only the visible part of a more complex decision process created by the consumer for each buying decision.

DECISION MAKING PROCESS IN THE BUYING BEHAVIOUR

There are many ways of describing the consumer buying process. Although recent research present models with various numbers of stages, a common theme includes the following five stages: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase decision (Paren, 2015).

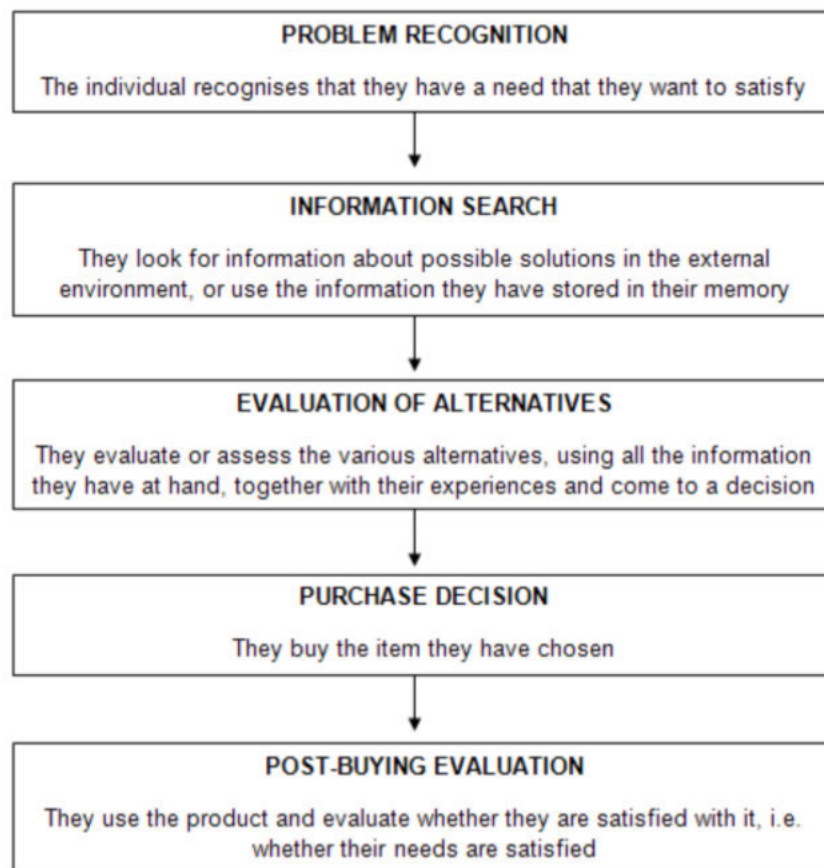


Figure 1 (Priest, 2015)

Problem of recognition

The need recognition is the first and most important step in the buying process. If there is no need, there is no purchase. "This recognition happens when there is a lag between the consumer's actual situation and the ideal and desired one" Oxford University (2017).

Information search

Once the need is identified, it's time for the consumer to seek information about possible solutions to the problem. He will search more or less information depending on the complexity of the choices to be made but also his level of involvement (Paren. 2015). Then the consumer will seek to make his opinion to guide his choice and his decision-making process with internal information and external information.

Alternative evaluation

Once the information collected, the consumer will be able to evaluate the different alternatives that offer to him, evaluate the most suitable to his needs and choose the one he think it's best for him (Paren. 2015).

Purchase decision

Now that the consumer has evaluated the different solutions and products available to respond to his need, he will be able to choose the product or brand that seems most appropriate to his needs (Paren. 2015). Then proceed to the actual purchase itself. His decision will depend on the information and the evaluation made in the previous step.

Post-purchase behaviour

According to the Oxford university (2017) "once the product is purchased and used, the consumer will evaluate the adequacy with his original needs and whether he has made the right choice in buying this product or not. He will feel either a sense of satisfaction for the product or on the contrary, a disappointment if the product has fallen far short of expectations.

It is very important for companies to understand the cycle of buying process, because only through the buying process models' companies can understand their customer needs.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Consumers are the “life blood” of any organisation that wants to survive, and without them, there is no market (Moloi, 2016). It can therefore be inferred that marketers should know their consumers as well as their needs and wants.

Without consumer knowledge, it will be hard to make a success of any organisation. It is not sufficient for organisations to only know what consumers want, but it is also critical for them to know and understand how consumers make their buying decisions. Organisations should therefore be attentive to how consumers think, what influences their decisions and how these elements can be used to get them to purchase a specific brand or to become loyal to a specific store.

The effect of consumer reviews and online ratings in the recent times, has been widely recognized and is of growing importance. Online customer reviews and ratings are types of electronic word of mouth designed to reduce information asymmetry and thereby help to lower the risk of buying unfamiliar goods through the Internet (Velle, 2016).

Consumers motivation of searching for product information online, in online consumer reviews and ratings can be determined according to the type of product and its level of involvement. The present research will investigate how online reviews and online ratings affect consumers buying behaviour, in the decision making process, when purchasing high involvement products or low involvement products and ultimately draw a conclusion that will support companies in understanding and managing the possible outcome of the reviews and ratings that can either promote or oppose the sale of the company product, as managers need to learn how to manage the information flow.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Nowadays, having high involvement in social media platforms is a very important factor, for the survival of many companies. All the information that customers have access to on the internet regarding the products, plays a huge role, if not the most important role in the buying decision making process.

According to Paren (2015) numerous studies have shown that consumer ratings and reviews impact people's purchasing behaviour and intentions, as well as attitudes towards products and retailers. "Positive and negative reviews and ratings can sway the consumers behaviour, but, they can differ in their impact" (Moloi, 2016).

There is a need to investigate and understand the impact of online ratings and reviews, as well as the relevance carried when consumers are making a decision of purchasing a high involvement product or a low involvement product, and how companies should be addressing it to remain relevant to existing consumers, as well as when persuading new consumers into buying their product.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of online consumer ratings and reviews have in influencing consumer buying behaviour, with a focus on high and low involvement products. This will help companies strategize activities such as sales and organizational reputation.

RESEARCH RELEVANCE

Understanding how consumers make buying decisions is of growing importance, especially when purchasing low to high involvement products.

Currently, the biggest challenge for companies is related to understanding how, electronic word of mouth (consumer online reviews and ratings) affects the consumer decision making process and thus, determining the influence that it has on demand.

This study, is relevant, to elucidate companies of the power that electronic word of mouth has on consumers, by promoting or opposing their products based on product opinions shared by other consumers. Companies will also understand the impact of online consumer reviews and ratings on demand and businesses performance, ultimately giving them tools to comprehend their current performance. This will also allow companies to direct their efforts to improve their ratings and reviews, by making their products and services match

consumer needs, thus, achieving customer satisfaction and consequently gaining positive word of mouth recommendations and repeat purchase.

Lastly, this study will open new doors for a further research on how the online reviews and ratings can help to determine consumer behaviour focusing on low and high involvement products.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

MAIN QUESTION

How do online consumer ratings and reviews affect the consumers buying behaviour in the buying process when purchasing high or low involvement products?

SECONDARY QUESTIONS

- How useful do consumers find online ratings and reviews in the buying process?
- Do customers make use online reviews and ratings by other costumer as aid to make their final decision regarding the purchase of a product?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Display the influence of online reviews and ratings in the customers experience in the buying process, focusing on high and low involvement products.
- Establish if customers use online reviews and ratings by other costumer as aid to make their final decision regarding the purchase of a product;
- Discover if customers invest time reading online reviews regarding high involvement product

LITERATURE REVIEW

CONCEPTUALISATION

According to Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2019) conceptualisation refers to “the refinement and specification of abstract concepts to create meaning and purpose of a specific research project”. This can be considered as one of the most fundamental processes of a research.

For the purpose of this study we will define the following term as:

Word of mouth - is the passing of information from person to person using oral communication (Valle, 2016)

Electronic word of mouth - is any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company (Valle, 2106)

Online ratings and reviews - a review of a product or service made by a customer who has purchased and used, or had experience with (Moloi, 2016).

Product involvement - Product involvement is the degree to which a consumer is engaged with a product (Lindmark, 2015).

High involvement product - Products with higher perception of risk than low-involvement products (Lindmark, 2015).

Low involvement product - Frequently purchased non-durable and low-cost products with a low perception of risk (Lindmark, 2015).

It is very important for companies to understand the cycle of buying process, because only through the buying process models' companies can understand their customer needs.

With the volatile environment we live in, consumers have changed their roles, from being passive receivers of advertising messages who used to follow manufacturers and retailers recommendations, to being active participants in the marketplace (Gligorijevic, 2015). Nowadays, by making use of new forms of communication, this is, through social media platforms, consumers rate products or post product reviews, providing valuable information to other consumers and due to this increased use of word of mouth in social media, online consumer ratings and reviews have become increasingly important as a marketing force for organizations. Word of mouth is one of the most important sources of information affecting consumers' attitudes and perceptions, and hence shaping the behaviour of consumers when making purchase decisions (Velle, 2016). This topic has been extensively studied since the early 50's. (Lindmark, 2015). A general consensus about its relevance in the consumer decision journey as one of the most reliable sources of information for customers, has been reached. In recent times, thanks to technological progress, this word of mouth (WOM) has transcended from the physical to the digital world. The internet has enabled consumers to share and consult information about products and services in a more efficient way, allowing them to take advantage of its scalability, anonymity, accessibility, speed of dispersion, variety of formats and others (Lindmark, 2015). Consequently, giving rise to electronic word of mouth (eWOM), that is, online interaction that aim to gather and share information about products and services (Naz, 2015).

The importance of understanding eWOM has been growing for companies and the academic community alike, not the least because, contrary to what happens WOM, eWOM can be easily tracked and measured (Paren, 2015).

ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH

From early ages, humans have constantly communicated with one another, sharing and talking about everything and everywhere any time. It is really easy to share point of views, experiences, disagreements, or constant advices and to build up informal communications (Moloi, 2016). Therefore, people can easily explain their last experience without any trouble and give their experience about the product or even the service.

Word of mouth (WOM) was originally defined as “oral, person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or service” (Velle, 2016). In similar lines, Naz (2015) defines electronic word of mouth as “word of mouth as any positive or negative statement made by customers experiences about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet”.

Marketing is a significant division of the companies strategies. These strategies are more and more inventive and disturbing in people lives (Velle, 2016). Currently, eWOM is also a great aspect in marketing and more above all in e-Marketing (Moloi, 2016). The diverse tools used by marketers in order to pass on information to customers are present everywhere on the internet, from advertisements to opinion on blogs or forums. (Lindmark, 2015).

Whether companies like it or not, people chat online about a variety of products and services. eWOM is seven times as effective as newspapers and magazines, four times as effective as personal selling and twice as effective as radio advertising in influencing consumers to switch brands (Lindmark, 2015).

Following consuming the product, more and more consumers are keen to creating an exchange of information with other consumers and increasing more and more the eWOM fact. Appreciation to the Internet, consumers have the widest likely cause of information to be successful in this way. Many blogs, forums and social networking websites in the Internet present customers the means of getting and sharing this kind of information (Moloi, 2016).

It is hard to make a choice to purchase a computer or even a simple shampoo. So, when faced with a decision of what to purchase, the probability of purchase is higher when the consumer has been exposed to favourable word of mouth and it decreases as if exposed to unfavourable comments about the product.

ONLINE RATINGS AND REVIEWS

An online consumer review or rating can be defined as a consumers opinion and or experience of a product, service or business (Liu and Park, 2016).

As consumer-created information, online consumer ratings and reviews are likely to be more relevant to consumers than seller-created information. Seller-created information is more likely to be product-oriented, since it often describes product attributes in terms of technical specifications and measures product performance by technical standards (Velle, 2016). On the other hand, consumer-created product information is, by definition, user-oriented. It often describes product attributes in terms of usage situations and measures product performance from a user's perspective (Liu and Park, 2016).

In the beginning allowing consumers to post their reviews and ratings, appeared to be a bad strategic decision, as experts and consumers alike were now able to rant about the products on offer (Lindamark, 2015). However, as time passed, Amazon became one of the first successful online retailers to prosper on the back of customer reviews (Valle, 2016). These became a crucial tool in the value proposition of the company, giving relevant and convenient information to consumers in their decision making process. Over time, the importance of consumers reviews increased and they have evolved in the website accordingly (Lindmark, 2015). According to Valle (2016) "In 2005, Amazon implemented customer discussion areas for specific products and in 2009 it allowed consumers to share and rate specific product attributes". Nowadays, many other online businesses use consumer reviews as an informational value proposition, namely: TripAdvisor for travelling purposes, Yelp and Foursquare for entertainment businesses, Yahoo Movies and Netflix for movies, among others (Lindmark, 2015). Currently, one of the biggest challenges for companies and marketing researchers with a stake on e-commerce is understanding how electronic word of mouth affects the consumer decision making process and thus, determining the influence that it has on demand.

For this reason, specific metrics have been developed to assess the consumers reviews and ratings, an important part of which are related with the analysis of the volume, valence and dispersion of online consumer ratings and reviews. Volume refers to the absolute number of online consumer ratings and reviews. Valence refers to whether online consumer ratings and reviews reflect more or less positive offer assessments and dispersion relates to the spread of online consumer ratings and reviews across different consumer segments (Valle, 2016).

The quantity of online consumer reviews and ratings, is quite important when it comes to low-involvement consumers who simply do not have the motivation or ability to put effort and time into searching for a large amount of product information. For these consumers, recommendations from other consumers are enough to base their buying decision on (Lindmark, 2015). High involvement customers on the other hand perceive review quality as the most important factor. This is because they are looking for reviews which provide them with useful, logic information and product facts with convincing arguments (Lindmark, 2015).

PRODUCT INVOLVEMENT

Involvement can be described as the level of interest that customers have of learning about a product and looking for additional information (Lindmark, 2015). The amount of time customers spend on searching for product information depends on the product involvement, which can be high or low. The main factors that determine a consumers involvement with a product, are usually the perceived risk of purchasing the product and the consumers knowledge of the products characteristics (Santandreu and Shurden, 2017).

HIGH AND LOW INVOLVEMENT PRODUCTS

Li (2019) describes that “the buying process tends to be longer in high involvement purchases and in this case the customer is not willing to choose substitute brands because of the high risk in the purchase of expensive products. The length of the buying process is reduced in low involvement purchases and in such instances, customers are very flexible and willing to change to substitute brands if the purchase is a disappointment (Lindmark, 2019) . Because of the low cost there is a low risk of making the wrong decision.

LOW INVOLVEMENT PRODUCTS

These are products that consumers buy often and do not require much research. A clear example of this, is when a consumer runs out of milk, and there is no need to conduct too much research to come up with a decision of which milk to buy. Important characteristics of low involvement products: relatively inexpensive and carry minimum or no risks (Li, 2019)

HIGH INVOLVEMENT PRODUCTS

These products are bought after careful consideration and lots of thought. Important characteristics of high involvement products: expensive, complex and risky. An example of this is a car (Li, 2019).

THE ELABORATION LIKEHOOD MODEL

Online consumer reviews and ratings have the ability to recommend or persuade a consumer, because these can either contain positive or negative information about a product. This information takes us to the elaboration likelihood model (ELM).

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) according to Obediat (2017) “describes how customers attitude towards products and buying behaviour can change when they are exposed to messages such as online consumer reviews or ratings”. This model seeks to explain how humans process stimuli differently and the outcomes of these processes on changing attitudes and consequently behaviour (Obediat, 2017)

According to Obediat (2017) the ELM was developed “in mid-1970 by the cofounder of the field of social neuroscience, John Cacioppo and Richard Petty, a distinguished psychology professor at Chicago University”.

The ELM posits that when a persuader presents information to an audience, a level of “elaboration” results (Lindmark, 2015). According to Lindmark (2015) “elaboration refers to the amount of effort an audience member has to use in order to process and evaluate a message, remember it, and then accept or reject it”. Specifically, the ELM has determined that when facing a message, people react by using either of two channels, reflecting the level of effort they need. As such, they either experience high or low elaboration, and whichever of these will determine whether they use central or peripheral route processing (Obediat, 2017).

Central route processing involves a high level of elaboration (Lindmark, 2015). “The consumer scrutinizes the message contents because of a high motivation level. Consumers know what’s important to them and consequently, they will invest in examining a credible designed message (Obediat, 2107). So, if consumers are persuaded via central route processing, they will have focused on the message strengths and this is because they’ll be reckoning so much on what the message is telling them (Obediat, 2017).

Obediat (2017) also argues that consumers are persuaded in the stage of search for information of the consumer behaviour, to search and put effort into processing logically written product information in online review messages, when they are highly involved with the product. Information search is considered the second of five stages that comprise the consumer decision process. A consumer who recognizes a specific problem or need will then likely be persuaded to search more and more.

Lindmark (2015) argues that the peripheral route processing involves a low level of elaboration”. The consumer isn’t scrutinizing the message for its effectiveness. As such, other factors can influence him, including distractions. (Lindmark, 2015). These include consumers who know that they want, but do not know much about the detail of that item.

If the message succeeds in persuading them, these consumers will follow through with a call to action. Their behaviour will be more enduring and less likely to be changed (Obediat, 2017). However, they may change again if they process another convincing argument.

The ELM model can be used to explain the difference in customers perception of online consumer reviews, depending if they are going to buy high or low involvement products (Lindmark, 2015). The qualities of online consumer reviews are most important for highly involved customers because they are looking for reviews with logic content and useful product facts (Lindmark, 2015). Low involvement customers are satisfied if there is a large amount of reviews because this signals product popularity. This means that the quantity is more important than the quality of reviews (Lindmark, 2015).

In other words, the above model suggests that, online consumer reviews and ratings are important as an information source for consumers. It also supports that, online consumer reviews do helps consumers evaluating product alternatives and make a buying decision, because it provides them with earlier customers product experiences.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

According to Mohammed (2019) the methodology is a strategy or a plan of action that guides the writer to conduct a specific research or the philosophical framework within which the research is conducted or the foundation upon which the research is based.

RESEARCH PARADIGM

This chapter describes the research paradigm, the research methods, approaches and designs in detail.

In general, a paradigm is best described as a whole system of thinking. In this sense, a paradigm can be referred as established research traditions in a particular discipline or a philosophical framework (Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2019).

A positivism approach will be used for this study as it works on the premise that the social world can be viewed objectively and studied effectively with little or no interference, specifically with the objective to obtain results that can be applied to the general population and situations (Moloi, 2016). The positivist paradigm of exploring social reality is grounded on the idea that human behaviour is best understood through observation and reason (Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout, 2019). Ideally this paradigm was chosen with the aim to really observe social reality and produce generalisations similar to those produced by the natural scientists.

The relevance of this paradigm to the study, is also justified by the fact that positivism is concerned first and foremost with the creation of laws applicable to all people at all times (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2019). In other words, the purpose of positivism is to seek generalisations, which represents the focus of the study.

The study will also, adopt a axiological position of positivism, as it maintains that it is possible to adopt a distant, detached, neutral and non-interactive position (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2019). A position such as this, enables us to assume the role of an objective analyst, making detached interpretations about the data that has been collected in an

apparently value-free manner. (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2019). Assuming this position, we aim to make a representation of honest facts. The results of this study will be presented with no distortion, in a very precise and logic manner.

RESEARCH APPROACH

In the writing of an academic paper, the writer has two possible methods to use, the qualitative and quantitative research are, however the research area and the research question will lead the writer to select a specific research.

For the purpose of this study, a quantitative research approach will be followed due to the main purpose of this method being to predict, control and generalize.

A quantitative approach is a process that is systematic and objective in its way of using numerical data from only a selected subgroup of a population to generalise findings to the universe/population being studied.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design stage is one of the most important stages in the academic research process, and on this stage, the writer will draw a map of the research, which has a great influence on how the data should be collected and how it should be analysed (Mohammed, 2019).

For a quantitative study, there are two research design methods, the experimental design and the non-experimental design. As it has been discussed in the previous section the main goal of this study is to investigate and analyse the impact of online ratings and consumer reviews on the consumer buying behaviour in the buying process, as well as generalize the findings of the study, which takes this research to adopt a non-experimental design. The units in this study will be selected to take part in the research and are measured on all relevant variables at a specific time. No manipulation takes place. The most widely used non-experimental research design is the survey method. Surveys are done in order to obtain

quantitative data that can be used to explore or describe certain research aspects or topics. With the surveys, we will be able to collect a large amount of data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way (Creswell, Ebersohn, Ferreira, Ivankova, Nieuwehuis, Pietersen, Clark, 2019).

POPULATION

Population according to Mohamed (2019) can be defined as an aggregate of all the objects, subjects or members that conform to a set of specifications.

In this study the population was South African men and women of all races, above 18 years, employed and able to make decisions on their own, with any educational status, who have purchasing power and ultimately the end user consumers of the retail industry, being the reason for that, that this is from whom the information is actually necessary to help companies strategize activities such as sales and organizational reputation.

The eligibility criteria

These criteria specify the characteristics that people in the population must possess in order to be included in the study (Lee, 2015).

The eligibility criteria in this study is that that the participants have to:

- to be South African citizens
- gender: female and male
- decision makers
- employed
- they should also be over the age of 18
- any educational status
- any socio-economic status
- have to have purchasing power
- need to be consider end users consumers in the retail industry

SAMPLING

The process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population is known as sampling (Mohammed (2019). It is acknowledged the necessity in sampling in this study as it has a significant impact on the quality of the results/findings.

To ensure the quality we aim to achieve, we will work with a sample, which will then be the representative for the study.

A sample, according to Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout (2019) is a “subset of a population that is considered to be the representative of the population”.

For the purpose of this study surveys will be conducted in a certain group of 10 people, and this certain group of people has been selected based on the nature of the research question which focuses on the impact of the online ratings and reviews in the buying process. The selected sample focused on certain category of people within specific age of 18 and above. A study Mohammed (2019) argued that people 18 and above are mostly using the internet and social media to find information about any products. The study concluded that 80% of people in this age group who is internet users are engaging in a discussion about different online products.

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

“The unit of analysis is the person or object from which the researcher collects data from” (Kumar, 2018).

The unity of analysis answers the question of “who” and “what” is being studied in the research. It is the whole unit being researched and it includes individuals, groups of individuals, organizations of individuals, countries, technologies and objects that are the aim of the investigation (Kumar, 2018).

For the sake of this study, the unit of analysis is people employed at Simply Black. This choice was based on the convenience of access to the employees at Simply Black and their fit in the population as well as sample of the study.

SAMPLING METHOD

A probability sampling method will be applied on this research, ensuring that there is no bias from the sampling process, thus, using methods that are random and systematic (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2019).

According to Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout (2019) "Probability sampling refers to whether or not each unit in the population has an equal opportunity to be part of the sample".

We will apply on this study the Stratified sampling method. The stratified sampling defined as a type of sampling method in which the total population is divided into smaller groups or strata to complete the sampling process. The strata is formed based on some common characteristics in the population data (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2019). This is the ideal method for the study, as we need to ensure that the final sample is representative of the population of this study.

DATA COLLECTION

The data collection of a research is considered to be a very important aspect of the whole study, and this is so, because, data is collected incorrectly leads to invalid findings and results.

There are various ways in which data can be collected in a quantitative research and we have chosen to collect data through surveys (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2019).

Surveys is a data collection tool that consists of questions designed to gather information about a group of people

Surveys seem to be the most appropriate method as we aim to gather data about people's opinions, impressions etc. The survey will follow a cross-sectional design, due to the fact that we aim to create a general picture of a specific phenomenon at one point in time. With this design, data is collected only once and there are absolutely no repeats (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout , 2019).

Due to the current pandemic the world is facing, we opted for mail surveys created under a Google Form, avoiding direct contact with the individuals of our sample. The survey was sent out to all the individuals that are part of the sample which they filled in and returned via email by the appointed date.

In order to obtain more accurate results and findings, the questionnaires contained direct questions as well as close ended questions.

DATA ANALYSIS

Right upon the collection of data, an analysis will be conducted through the use of descriptive statistics.

Descriptive statistics summarizes and organizes the characteristics of a data set (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout , 2019).

According to Freeman (2016) there are 3 main types of descriptive statistics:

- The frequency distribution
- The central tendency
- The validity or dispersion

For the sake of this study, a simple frequency distribution method was used, as the data set was made up of a distribution of values in tables and graphs, and then summarized by the frequency of every possible value in percentages.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents the results obtained from the 10 respondents who completed the online survey. The chapter proceeds with descriptive statistics of the respondents who use or not social, followed by an illustration of the measurement scales. All the other findings of the relevant questions in the questionnaire, will presented in the same way. In addition, there will be an Interpretation, a discussion and insights of the findings in terms of the broader context of the research problem. Lastly, reliability and validity measurements are discussed.

Finding 1

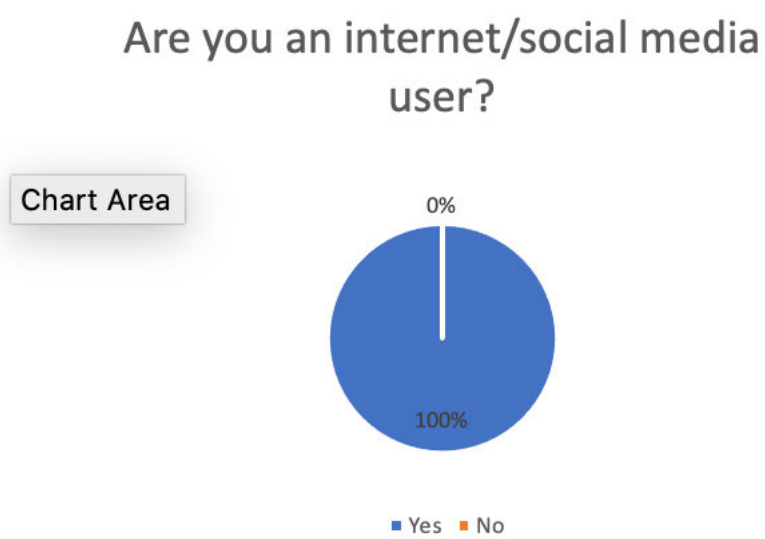


Figure 2

Respondents were asked to indicate they are internet/ social media users. As presented in figure 2, all of the respondents are internet users, which accounted for 100% responding Yes.

Finding 2

Do you write online reviews about products?

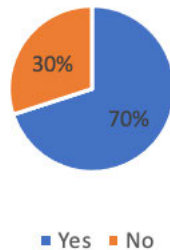


Figure 3

Respondents were asked if they write online reviews. As presented in figure 3, 70% of the respondents said Yes and 30% of the respondents said No. It is important to establish if consumers do actually take the time to review products (according to the data captured they do), as these confirm the statement that these became a crucial tool in the value proposition of the company, giving relevant and convenient information to other consumers in their decision making process.

Finding 3

Do you consider online reviews before purchasing a product?

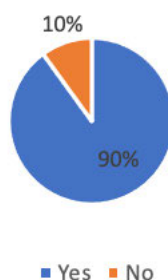


Figure 4

Respondents were asked if they consider online reviews before purchasing a product. As presented in figure 4, a large majority of the respondents said Yes, which accounted for 90% of the total respondents. The respondents who said No accounted for 10% of the total respondents. These reviews, impact the decision consumers make in their buying decision making, They have the power to sway consumers to buy or not buy a specific product.

Finding 4

Do you consider online reviews before purchasing an high involvement product (Example: Cars, Furniture) ?

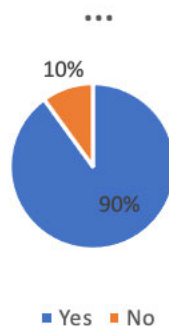


Figure 5

Respondents were asked if they consider online reviews before purchasing a high involvement product. As presented in figure 5, 90% of the respondents said Yes, and 10% of the respondents said No. This establishes a strong relationship between consumer online reviews and high involvement products buying decision, as it shows that consumer need to read reviews to make the purchase.

Finding 5

How often do you use online reviews about a high involvement product?

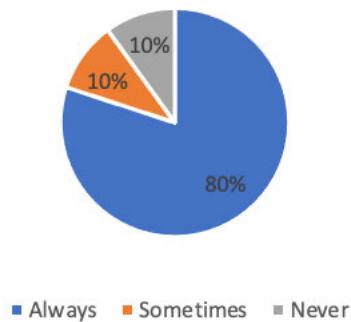


Figure 6

Respondents were asked how often they use consumer reviews about a high involvement products. As presented in figure 6, 80% of the respondents said Always, 10% of the respondents said Sometimes and the other 10% said Never. This creates an argument to state that high involvement products are usually only bought after using online consumer reviews.

Finding 6

At what stage of your buying process do you consider using online reviews for high involvement products?

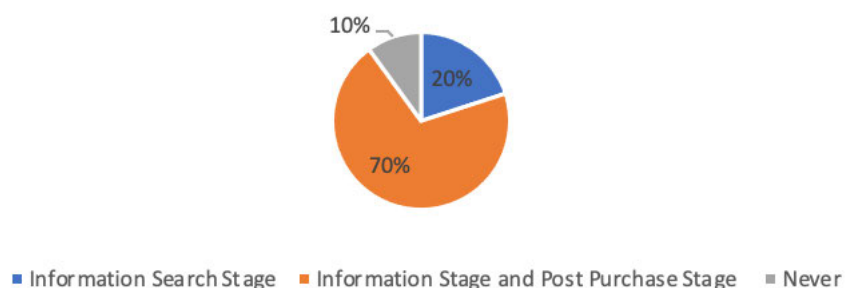


Figure 7

Respondents were asked in which stage of the buying process they use online reviews for high involvement products. As presented in figure 7, a large majority of the respondents said in the Information and Post Purchase Stages, which accounted for 70% of the total respondents. The respondents who said The Information stage accounted for 10% of the total respondents and lastly the respondents who said Never accounted for 10% of the total respondents. This establishes that that consumers really search for information before purchasing a high involvement product and that they always leave a review after the purchase.

Finding 7

Do you consider online reviews before purchasing an low involvement product (Example: Coffee, Cleaning products) ?...

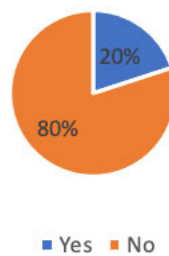


Figure 8

Respondents were asked if they consider online reviews before purchasing a low involvement product. As presented in figure 8, 80% of the respondents said No, and 20% of the respondents said No. This information comes to point that majority of the respondent do not consider for online reviews when deciding to buy a low involvement product.

Finding 8

How often do you use online reviews about a low involvement product?

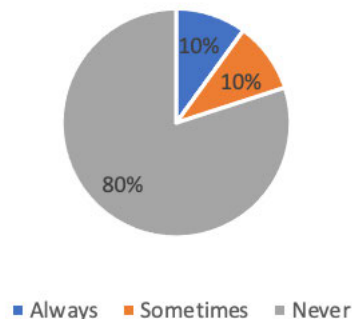


Figure 9

Respondents were asked how often they use consumer reviews about a low involvement products. As presented in figure 9, 80% of the respondents said Never, 10% of the respondents said Sometimes and the other 10% said Always. This creates an argument to state that consumers never really use consumer reviews in order to buy low involvement products.

Finding 9

At what stage of your buying process do you consider using online reviews for low involvement products?

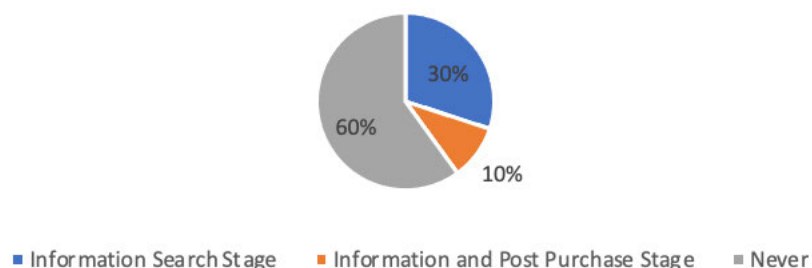


Figure 10

Respondents were asked in which stage of the buying process they use online reviews for low involvement products. As presented in figure 10, a large majority of the respondents said Never, which accounted for 60% of the total respondents. The respondents who said The Information stage accounted for 30% of the total respondents and lastly the respondents who said Information and Post Purchase Stage accounted for 10% of the total respondents. This establishes that consumers almost never need online reviews when purchasing low involvement products, but when they do search it's on the Information Stage only.

Finding 10

Do you often rely on family's and friend's opinion when purchasing products?

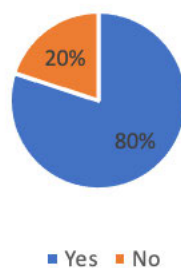


Figure 11

Respondents were asked if they on family and friends when purchasing a product. As presented in figure 11, a large majority of the respondents said Yes, which accounted for 80% of the total respondents. The respondents who said No accounted for 20% of the total respondents, indicating that consumers still value family and friends opinions in their decision making process.

Finding 11

For low involvement products: where do you rely for ultimately purchasing the product?

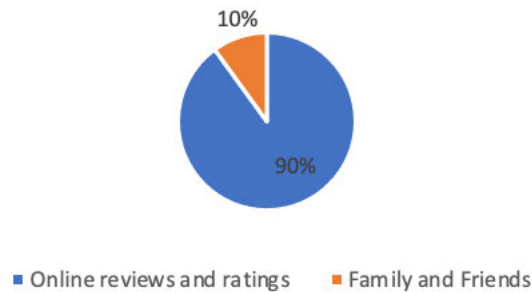


Figure 12

Respondents were asked where do they rely ultimately when purchasing a low involvement product. As presented in figure 12, a large majority of the respondents said Family and Friends, which accounted for 90% of the total respondents. The respondents who said Online reviews and ratings accounted for 10% of the total respondents. These results indicate that consumers value family and friends opinions more than they do value consumers reviews and ratings when purchasing low involvement products.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

Q1: How do online consumer ratings and reviews affect the consumers buying behaviour in the buying process when purchasing high or low involvement products?

Data support previous research from Velle (2016) that consumers feel the need to search for further information in online consumer reviews when buying high involvement products. As it is described in the basic elaboration likelihood model, “the respondents were more motivated to search and put effort into processing logically written product information in review messages, when they were highly involved with the product” (Obediat, 2017). For high involvement products, the data suggests that online consumer reviews are important as an information source for highly involved customers. This supports prior findings by Lindmark (2015) that “online consumer reviews helps customers to evaluate product

alternatives and make a buying decision” and this is because it provides them with earlier customers product experiences. Customers are motivated to search for additional product information because of the increased risk and increased costs of buying high involvement products. Customers perceive online consumer reviews as a more credible information source than family and friends.

For low involvement products, online consumer reviews are not used as an information source and instead, the source of product information is consumers social contacts that have product experience. According to the elaboration likelihood model, low involvement consumers “are not motivated to process a lot of information. Therefore they process information via the peripheral route without any effort” (Obediat, 2017).

Product information from friends and family is considered to be more important and credible than online consumer reviews, this supports prior findings by Lindmark (2015) that “low involvement customers are not motivated to spend time and effort in searching for product information in other sources than traditional word of mouth” and this is because low involvement products are in-expensive and bought out of habit to a low risk in costs.

Q2: How useful do consumers find online ratings and reviews in the buying process?

Overall, consumers find ratings and reviews to be an essential tool in the buying process. Consumers base purchase decisions on information from online consumer reviews and ratings because of first-hand product experience perceptions of other consumers which they perceive as trustworthy (Lindmark, 2015).

Q3: Do customers make use online reviews and ratings by other costumer as aid to make their final decision regarding the purchase of a product?

Based on the findings, consumers tend to use online reviews and ratings by other customers as a source of product information mostly to help in their purchase decision, in the consumer buying process. This supports prior finding by Lindmark (2015) that the reason that consumers search for product information online is to find the opinions of others and thereby reduce the risk when making purchase decisions. The online search is a good source of information prior to purchase and it is an opportunity to compare product prices and quality.

The data also suggests consumer reviews and ratings are used on the information stage and post-purchase stage.

Additionally, the overall data agrees to previous studies by Velle (2016) and Lindmark (2015) that consumers put more effort and time in searching for product information for high involvement products and that consumers perceive online consumer reviews to be useful when searching for product information. It also agrees that consumers are not motivated to spend any time or effort in searching for product information in online consumer reviews for low involvement products and that would rather rely on family and friends.

The study objectives were achieved as per below:

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

According to Mohammed (2019) when conducting research there are two main issues should always be considered which are reliability and validity.

When it comes to quantitative research, reliability is all about the credibility of the study and the consistency in it. According to Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout (2019) “reliability refers to the fact the fact that different research participants being tested by the same instrument at a different times should respond identically to the instrument”. The reliability of the measures how reliable the findings of the research are, and it always can argue that the reliability of the research will be high if the same finding can be reached from independent research within the same subject and using the same method. The reliability of this study will be ensured by applying homogeneity, stability and equivalence. Homogeneity (the level to which all the items in the scale measure one construct) , stability (relates to the consistency of results, by making use of an instrument with repeated testing) and equivalence (the level

of consistency among responses of multiple users of an instrument) (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

According to Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout (2019) “validity is about determining whether the research method measured what it was supposed to measure”. Validity is all about the appropriateness of the data collection method & tools, research processes, and finally the appropriateness of the question for the targeted outcome.

To ensure validity in the study, we will ensure homogeneity (the instrument will measure one construct) and theory evidence (this is evident when behaviour is similar to theoretical propositions of the construct measured in the instrument).

It is important to determine how rigorously the issues of reliability and validity have been addressed in a study, as an essential component in the critique of the research as well as influencing the decision about whether to implement the study findings.

CONCLUSIONS

The main objectives of this study were to display the influence of online reviews and ratings in the consumers' experience in the buying process, focusing on high and low involvement products, to establish if consumers use online reviews and ratings by other customers as aid to make their final decision regarding the purchase of a product and discover if customers invest time reading online reviews regarding high involvement product. This was done and achieved through an investigation that resulted in the following: Online reviews do affect the consumers' behaviour when purchasing high involvement products, by either opposing or being in favour of the product in cause. On the other hand, these reviews have little to no influence to consumers when purchasing low involvement products. High involvement consumers look for online reviews and ratings mainly in the information and post purchase stages. Low involvement consumers, look for family and friend opinions to base their decisions on, thus allowing companies to strategize accordingly.

SUGGESTIONS FOR COMPANIES

Companies with high involvement product lines should provide consumers with the opportunity of exchanging product opinions in organizational websites. Giving consumers the opportunity to share high involvement product information in online brand communities have been found to result in several positive outcomes for companies, such as increased sales and positive brand images (Velle, 2016). Product and service information alone are not perceived by consumers to have enough credibility to base a buying decision on, especially when it comes to high involvement products.

In the case of high involvement products, online consumer reviews and ratings are considered to be more credible than the general product information and traditional media sources. If companies provide consumers with an opportunity to post online consumer reviews in organizational websites, it is possible for companies to manage the information flow in reviews, learn about their customers buying behaviour, know their current market performance and adjust accordingly (Lindmark, 2015).

In the case of companies with low involvement product lines, investing in online consumer reviews and ratings at the moment, shouldn't be a top priority as consumers spend very little to no time reading online consumer reviews when it's time to deciding which low involvement product to buy. These companies should instead, invest more in traditional WOM, as customers rely more on family and friends to hear feedback and thoughts regarding low involvement products.

FURTHER RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study contributes to the current knowledge base of online consumer reviews and ratings in the existing research, literature, and knowledge on the effects that online consumer reviews have on the purchase behaviour of consumers . The study also broadens knowledge in the ever growing influence of online consumer reviews and the significant theoretical contributions of the study will benefit academia and scholars. Company implications highlight that they cannot afford to ignore the influence of online consumer reviews on influence of consumer behaviour in the buying decision making process, and that even though these reviews are not under the direct influence of organisations, managers can indirectly influence these by ensuring quality products that meet both the brand and product promises.

But, for further research, the suggestions are to perform a similar study of how online consumer reviews and ratings influence consumers in the buying behaviour in the buying process, but with a different method approach. This could for example be done with a qualitative study to see if the results are able to generate deeper understanding of the theme.

Also, generally speaking, there is still no unanimity about the true effect of online consumer reviews and ratings on organizational sales, although its importance is acknowledged, leaving then room for further research.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical Considerations can be considered as one of the most important parts of the research. Moyo (2016) indicates that “ethics in research denotes the type of research procedures that are morally acceptable or put differently ethics simply refers to ‘what is or is not legitimate to do’”. Mojo (2016) says that ethics begin and end with the researcher himself or herself. The conduct before the research, during the research and after conducting the research is of critical importance to the credibility of the study.

Research involves human participants, thus, it is fundamentally important that human research ethics approval has been obtained. It is also very important that this approval is obtained gained before the commencement of data gathering.

Informed Consent

Participants had to be fully informed of what was asked of them, as well have the information of how the data will be used and what consequences there could be. The participants provided a very explicit signed consent to taking part in the research, including understanding their rights to have all the access to their information and the right to withdraw at any point. The informed consent process will be considered as the contract between researcher and the participants (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018).

We’ve attached an example of the consent forms handed to participants.

Risk of Harm, Anonymity and Confidentiality

It was crucial that the identity of participants was kept confidential or anonymous and the assurances extend beyond protecting their names to also include the avoidance of using self-identifying statements and information.

Anonymity and confidentiality is essential in protecting the participants from potential harm. Participant anonymity and participant confidentiality are two terms commonly used synonymously when in fact they are different (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018).

Deception

It is important that participants are aware from the get-go what the research is really about and we ensured them by describing the full process of the study. (Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2019).

Other ethical points:

- “If interviews or focus groups are recorded, a separate form is required where participants must give permission to be recorded” (IIE, 2020)
- “Photographs of humans may only be taken if relevant to the research and informed consent was obtained. Even with informed consent, the photographs

LIMITATIONS

One of the main limitations of this study was presented with the study focused on a sample of end consumers being employed at Simply Black and largely being based in the Gauteng region. The use of this defined set of respondents could pose limitations in that the results cannot be generalised to the greater South African population. The final sample size of 10 respondents was incredibly small considering the number of employed South Africans. The

other huge limitation was ensure that the surveys were being answered in time for all the data to be analysed accordingly, as the COVID19 pandemic, prevented that these were handed in real time and returned immediately.

Time constraint was also a limitation, due to a short period of time available to complete the research project there. The amount of information to be collected was little, but we overcame this limitation by spending more time researching and gathering as much information possible.

Additional, this research did not allow the option to review answers with the respondents. All the answers provided had to stand by themselves, even if the information seemed confusing or it is invalid. The quantitative option had very few opportunities to allow participants to ask for clarity. We overcome this is by having very clear and direct questions in order to avoid the need for even more clarity.

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ANEXURE A: CONSENT FORM



CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Neide Mucavele and I am a student at Varsity College Pretotrial I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Katlego Oliphant to examine and gain a deeper understanding of how online consumer ratings and consumer reviews influence consumer buying behaviour in the consumer buying process, to help companies understand and manage how these can influence company activities, such as sales and organizational reputation. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding by exposing how companies can no longer rely only on keeping a low-cost production and aiming for a high volume of sales to stay relevant in business, but, the main focus should be to achieve customer satisfaction. It will also help companies understanding the role of online ratings and reviews on the customer behaviour. Lastly, it will open new doors for a further research on how the online reviews and ratings can help to determine the consumer behaviour. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because it would allow me to better understand the behaviour of consumers in the buying process. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to request that you answer a questionnaire, that should take about 5 minutes to complete. The data collected from the questionnaires will be analysed and used to draw a conclusion to the study.

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your consumer behaviour. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?
I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at Simply Black will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.
What will happen to the information that participants provide?
Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Management. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.
What happens if I have more questions about the study?
Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate. You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed. My contact details are as follows: Neide Mucavele

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Katlego Oliphant

ANEXURE B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

My name is Neide Mucavele, a Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Management student at the Varsity College Pretoria, a brand of the Independent Institute of Education (IIE). The research I wish to conduct for my Honours Project titled "The influence of online ratings and reviews on consumer buying behaviour in the buying process: with a focus on high and low involvement purchases".

I would like to invite you to participate in my study by taking a look and answering the questions below. It should take you 5 minutes to complete it just by putting an X on your desired option.

If you have any additional questions please do not hesitate to ask me for more information.

1. Are you over 18 years old?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. What is your gender?

☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary

3. What is your economic status?

☐ Student ☐ Unemployed ☐ Employed ☐ Seeking employment

4. Are you an internet/social media user?

☐ Yes ☐ No

5. What amount of time do you spend using the internet per day?

☐ Less than 30 minutes per day ☐ More than 30 minutes per day

6. Do you consider yourself a very active internet/social user?

☐ Yes ☐ No

7. Do you write online reviews about products?

☐ Yes ☐ No

8. Do you consider online reviews before purchasing a product?

☐ Yes ☐ No

9. Do you consider online reviews before purchasing an high involvement product (Example: Cars, Furniture) ?

☐ Yes ☐ No

10. How often do you use online reviews about a high involvement product?

☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never

11. Do you consider online reviews before purchasing an low involvement product (Example: Coffee, Cleaning products) ?

☐ Yes ☐ No

12. How often do you use online reviews about a low involvement product?

☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never

13. At what stage of your buying process do you consider using online reviews for high involvement products?

☐ Information Search Stage ☐ Information Stage and Post Purchase (commenting) ☐ Never

14. At what stage of your buying process do you consider using online reviews for low involvement products?

☐ Information Stage ☐ Information Stage and Post Purchase (commenting) ☐ Never

15. Do you consider quality or quantity of the online reviews?

☐ Quality ☐ Quantity

16. Do you check for ratings of products online?

☐ Yes ☐ No

17. Do you rate products online?

☐ Yes ☐ No

18. How often do you consider ratings about a product online in the buying process?

☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never

19. Do you rate high involvement products online?

☐ Yes ☐ No

20. Do you rate low involvement products online?

☐ Yes ☐ No

21. At what stage of your buying process do you rate your products?

☐ Information Search Stage ☐ Information Stage and Post Purchase
(commenting) ☐ Never

22. Do you often rely on family's and friend's opinion when purchasing products?

☐ Yes ☐ No

23. For high involvement products: where do mostly you rely for ultimately purchasing the product?

☐ Online reviews and ratings ☐ Family and friends

24. For low involvement products: where do you rely for ultimately purchasing the product?

☐ Online reviews and ratings ☐ Family and friends



ANEXURE C: CONSENT FORM (PARTICIPANTS)



Consent form for participants	
I, [REDACTED] agree to participate in the research conducted by Neide Mucavele about the influence of online consumer ratings report and online customer reviews on consumer buying behaviour in the buying process: with a focus on high and low involvement purchases. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • I agree to be interviewed for this research. • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research. • I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview. • I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.	
Signature	Date

ANEXURE D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



14 JULY 2020

Student name: NEIDE MUCAVELE

Student number: 14015039

Campus: IIE Varsity College Pretoria

Re: Approval of BACHELOR OF COMMERCE HONOURS: MANAGEMENT Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS/PGDIP ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor:

Katlego Olinbant



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC):

Janus Snyders



ANEXURE E: HIGH PERCENTAGE MOTIVATION LETTER



Motivation for high similarity

DATE and TIME: 26/10/2020 13:15

STUDENT NAME AND SURNAME: ~~Neide Mucavele~~

STUDENT NUMBER: 14015039

PROGRAMME and MODULE: BCOM

ASSIGNMENT NUMBER: PEO

ASSIGNMENT DUE DATE: 28/10/2020

I, ~~Neide Mucavele~~ hereby declare a high percentage on the similarity report on SafeAssign/Turnitin with a valid reason.

Application for high similarity percentage:

Plagiarism is the use of words, ideas or images of another person, as one's own without adequately or appropriately acknowledging the source. The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE) view plagiarism as an act of academic dishonesty and will handle it accordingly.

1. I am aware of the approach of The IIE to plagiarism and intellectual integrity.
2. I am aware that the Intellectual Integrity policy and the Student Code of Conduct prescribe the consequences of plagiarizing.
3. I am aware that the quick referencing guide is available on the Student Portal as well as in the Library and Student Support and following them is a requirement for the successful completion of my assignment.
4. I am aware that should I require support or assistance in using the correct referencing techniques and/or guide to avoid plagiarism, I should approach the lecturers, Librarian or the Student Support team for assistance.

I declare that I have read and understood the 4 points as stated above. I declare that the assignment was written in my own words and there is a valid reason for the high similarity percentage as stated below. (Please motivate the reason in the section provided below.) I also understand that if the reason is not valid and plagiarism is detected that the Intellectual Integrity Policy IIE023 will come into effect.

Motivation for high similarity

Provide a motivation for the high similarity percentage:

All the information submitted in this report, has been submitted by me previously,
reason why, I have a high similarity report.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT: _____



DATE: 26/10/2020

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources
The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of online consumer ratings and reviews have on influencing consumer buying behaviour, with a focus on high and low involvement products. These help companies strategize activities such as sales and organizational reputation.	How do online consumer ratings and reviews affect the consumers buying behaviour in the buying process when purchasing high or low involvement products?	Understanding how consumers make buying decisions is of growing importance, especially when purchasing low to high involvement products. Currently, the biggest challenge for companies is related to understanding how, electronic word of mouth (consumer online reviews and ratings) affects the consumer decision making process and thus, determining the influence that it has on demand. This study, is relevant, to educate companies of the power that electronic word of mouth has on consumers, by promoting or opposing their products based on product opinions shared by other consumers. Companies will also understand the impact of online consumer reviews and ratings on demand and businesses performance, ultimately giving them tools to comprehend their current performance. This will also allow companies to direct their efforts to improve their ratings and reviews, by making their products and services match consumer needs, thus, achieving customer satisfaction and consequently gaining positive word of mouth recommendations and repeat purchase. Lastly, this study will open new doors for a further research on how the online reviews and ratings can help to determine consumer behaviour focusing on low and high involvement products.	Textbooks, articles
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/	Key Concepts	Key Theories

	Hypotheses/ Objectives		
Nowadays, having high involvement in social media platforms is a very important factor, for the survival of many companies. As the information that customers have access to on the internet regarding the products, plays a huge role, if not the most important role in the buying decision making process. According to Patten (2015) numerous studies have shown that consumer ratings and reviews impact people's purchasing behaviour and intentions, as well as attitudes towards products and	- How useful do consumers find online ratings and reviews in the buying process? - Do customers make use of online reviews and ratings by other customers as a aid to make the final decision regarding the purchase of a product?	Consumer buying processes Consumer behaviour Online consumer reviews Product Involvement: High involvement purchases and low involvement purchases	Elaborate on the hood mode

retailers. "Positive and negative reviews and ratings can sway the consumers' behavior, but, they can differ in their impact" (Moore, 2016). There is a need to investigate and understand the impact of online ratings and reviews, as well as the relevance carried when consumers are making a decision of purchasing a high involvement product or a low involvement product, and how companies should be addressing it to remain relevant to existing consumers, as well as when persuading new			
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consumers into buying the r product.			
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