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KWAZULU-NATALTM**

**INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

**Social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African
Generation-Z during the coronavirus pandemic**

By

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DECLARATION

I, **Sershan Naidoo**, declare that:

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ABSTRACT

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic and consequential lockdowns reshaped consumers' buying behaviour. Social media became crucial, globally influencing Generation-Z's buying patterns. Generation-Z consumers are becoming one of the most significant generations in the world. Tech-savvy Generation-Z has formed strong ties with social media. Despite the increase in the prevalence of Generation-Z consumers and its growing influence in the marketplace, there is limited research on how these consumers perceive social media marketing and its impact on purchasing intentions. The study addressed the gap in the extant literature by exploring how social media marketing impacted South African Generation-Z consumers' purchasing intentions during the Covid-19 pandemic. To achieve this, the study examined the mediating role of trust in social media marketing as a plausible intervening variable in the relationship.

The study was conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Management, Information Technology and Governance, across the Westville and Pietermaritzburg campuses. A quantitative cross-sectional design was used, and a descriptive approach was embraced. The study focused on Generation-Z students (18-26 years) enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. A sample of 323 respondents completed the electronic questionnaires distributed through the University's notice system. This study used a non-probability convenience sampling approach. Questionnaire validity and reliability were assessed through factor analysis and Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, respectively. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyse the study's results.

The results revealed Generation-Z perceptions of social media marketing during covid 19. The perceptions included a number of key dimensions, and these ranked from highest to lowest: trendiness, interaction, convenience, entertainment, customisation and word-of-mouth. These dimensions had a significant impact on purchasing intentions. Trust was identified as a partial mediating variable, emphasising the importance of building trust between social media marketing and purchase intentions. The study provides marketing practitioners with substantial recommendations targeting Generation-Z as a consumer base on social platforms, especially in the rapidly evolving e-commerce landscape beyond the Covid-19 context.

Keywords: Covid-19, Generation-Z, Purchase intentions, Social media marketing, Trust

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

The year 2020 stood out as exceptional, particularly in the realm of consumer behavior and purchasing patterns (West, 2020). The world faced a global pandemic, which resulted in a lockdown. During this time, social media played a pivotal role for many people (Liu, Liu and Yoganathan, 2021). The pandemic created a social media presence globally, which had a significant impact on Generation-Z consumers' buying behaviour. In South Africa, the online retail industry reported that the market grew up to 40% during the pandemic (Wood, 2020). The pandemic changed how consumers make their purchase decisions (Mastercard, 2020). Many consumers have shifted from their traditional means of purchasing to purchasing online, which has increased online sales (Wood, 2020).

According to Kasasa (2019), Generation-Z consumers were born between 1994 and 2015. The youngest Generation-Z is six years old, and the oldest is 26. Moreover, Generation-Z are also referred to as the digital natives (Yang and Kang, 2020). Generation-Z are known for its presence on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube (Artemova, 2018). Social media is “a collection of software based on digital technology presented as apps and websites” (Appel et al., 2020:80). YouTube, for example, is a popular video-sharing platform. In a marketing context, many consumers use YouTube for reviews of products and reactions to gain more information about the product, resulting in brand awareness (Artemova, 2018). Instagram shares images, videos, trends, and shoutouts of a brand. These features assist with consumer retention as they often provide giveaways of products to regular consumers. Thus, it changes the way marketers connect with consumers (Artemova, 2018).

According to Sinha (2018), traditional marketing is not as effective as digital marketing as it lacks the features of interaction with customers. In addition, the promotional tools used in traditional marketing include radio, television and print. Sinha (2018) further explains that digital marketing is highly effective as it allows customers to interact and expands the target

audience locally and globally. Zahoor and Qureshi (2017) define social media marketing as internet marketing, which utilises various social media platforms to build brand awareness and brand association with a product or service.

The research environment for the study was based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal which investigated South African Generation-Z's social media marketing and purchasing intentions during the coronavirus pandemic. Generation-Z consumers have solidified their status as the most sought-after demographic, given their substantial purchasing intentions and considerable buying influence, prompting numerous companies to focus on catering to this cohort (Smalej, 2017). Many of Generation-Z are currently in tertiary institutions (Ramnarain and Govender, 2013). These students are suitable candidates to participate in a study of this nature as the majority fit into this age group category. To date, there exists a paucity of research on Generation-Z consumers and their intention to purchase, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic (West, 2020).

1.2. Background of the study

Factors like culture, environment, personal behaviour, and demographics drive the distinct spending patterns of different generations, including Baby Boomers, X, Y, and Z (Williams and Page, 2011). When it comes to purchasing habits, experiences, values, and expectations every generation is different and has its own particular traits. According to Francis and Hoefel (2018), Baby Boomers were born between 1940 and 1959. Their buying behaviour can be characterised as value hunters, loyal and preferring brick-and-mortar stores. Baby Boomers are responsive to traditional marketing such as television, print media, and radio (Buesnel, 2022). Generation X was born between 1960 and 1979, and their buying behaviour includes researching products and wanting proof of performance and value. Generation X is at the prime of their careers and focused on getting value for money (Buesnel, 2022). Generation Y, also known as millennials, was born in 1980 – 1994, and the buying behaviour, include mobile-dependent loyalty is hard to achieve. Generation Y values social imitation, cases, and authentic experiences (Buesnel, 2022).

Therefore, marketers ought to utilise different marketing tools to influence these diverse generations of consumers (Williams and Page, 2011). Fromm and Read (2018) further highlight that Generation-Z are now becoming one of the most significant generations in the world.

Despite the increase in the prevalence of Generation-Z and its growing influence in the marketplace, there is limited research on their intention to purchase and their buying behaviours. The lack of literature is a significant disadvantage as many scholars attempt to explain the nature of Generation-Z without focusing on social media marketing's influence on their intention to purchase. This study thus provides insights into the influential role of social media marketing on the purchase intention of this specific cohort of consumers.

From a South African perspective, March 2020 was a month that many consumers will remember, as the country was affected by the Covid-19 global pandemic from a single case infected individual, it grew to over 2.06 million cases (JHU CSSE, 2021). The South African government imposed drastic measures such as national lockdowns and major restrictions on non-essential businesses. These events impacted consumers as they changed their traditional means of in-store purchasing and adopted online purchasing (Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020). According to Mastercard (2020), research examining the impact of Covid-19 on consumer behaviour in South Africa indicated a 68% increase in online purchases. Consequently, marketing goods and services using social media marketing could play a significant role in the online purchasing environment.

1.3. Statement of the problem

Generation-Z represents a significant group of consumers in the marketplace in the twenty-first century (Bourke, 2019). Notwithstanding this, there is a lack of insight into Generation-Z consumers' behaviour (Pillay, 2021). Despite their undeniable influence, there remains a dearth of understanding regarding the behavioral nuances of Generation-Z consumers (Pillay, 2021). This study delves into the transformative impact of the global pandemic on Generation-Z South Africans and its consequential reshaping of the marketing dynamics targeting this demographic. Notably, 80% of consumers in this cohort now base their purchase intentions on social media marketing in the wake of the pandemic (Reddy, 2020). Given that Generation-Z individuals have been shaped by the technological era, fostering a profound emotional connection to social media marketing (Wu and Li, 2018), the study underscores the urgency of gaining insights into their purchasing behavior.

In response to the identified research gap, this study concentrates on Generation-Z South Africans perceptions of interaction, customization, word of mouth, trendiness, convenience,

and entertainment as independent variables influencing their purchasing inclinations during the Covid-19 outbreak. Furthermore, the research investigates whether trust in social media marketing acts as a mediating variable, guiding Generation-Z consumers towards forming purchase intentions. This endeavor is essential as it addresses a notable void in the field of social media marketing and Generation-Z purchase intentions, particularly in the context of South Africa's unique socio-economic landscape during the coronavirus pandemic.

Crucially associated with platforms like Instagram and YouTube (Artemova, 2018), Generation-Z's affinity for social media necessitates an exploration of how these platforms sway their purchasing intentions. As Ramnarain (2011) reveals, a substantial 80% of consumers attribute their purchase decisions to social media marketing. The transformative impact of social media on consumer behavior is evident, reshaping the traditional landscape and fostering connections between consumers and brands at a personal level, thereby instilling trust and brand loyalty (Rani, 2014). In this evolving marketing environment, marked by a shift from conventional tools to online strategies on social media platforms (Naidu, 2018), the literature showcases a shortage of studies examining the role of social media in marketing products and services. Recognising the growing influence of Generation-Z consumers and their inclination to leverage social media when contemplating purchases, this study contributes to an evolving body of knowledge addressing the intersection of social media marketing and consumer behavior.

Thus, aim of the study is to examine the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and intentions to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study also seeks to determine whether trust in social media marketing mediates the perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase relationship.

1.4. Contribution of the study

The study provided valuable contributions to marketers and practitioners. The study can be considered by marketers and small-medium-enterprises that want to endeavour in the field of social media marketing in a digital landscape. The research findings can be considered on how to build trust in social media marketing initiatives and foster a bond between Generation-Z South African consumers to influence their purchase intentions. The underpinning conceptual framework for this study is the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian and

Russel, 1974). Based on the S-O-R model, this study has examined the stimulus effect on Generation-Z trust in social media marketing (organism), which subsequently influences the consumer intention to purchase (response). Thus, the study offers valuable contributions in relation to the S-O-R model. This model is further expanded on in chapter two.

Notwithstanding, a lack of scholarly work examining the influence of social media marketing on Generation-Z consumers. The research seeks to address the void in the literature. Due to the dearth of knowledge the study fills the void in this area of social media marketing and Generation-Z purchase intentions.

1.5. Research methodology

The Westville and Pietermaritzburg campuses of the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Management, IT & Governance serves as the study sites. This study has embraced a quantitative research design, cross-sectional and descriptive approach. The target population consisted of Generation-Z students (18-26 years) registered for undergraduate and postgraduate studies. In this study, 364 students make up the sample size as per the sample size table, which is further discussed in chapter three. Primary data was collected by electronic questionnaires that were administered via the University notice system. In order to gain a deeper understanding of South African Generation-Z's purchasing intents and social media marketing during the coronavirus pandemic, descriptive and inferential statistics was employed for data analysis and interpretation.

1.6. Research questions

- 1.6.1. What are the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 1.6.2. What is the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 1.6.3. What is the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?

- 1.6.4. What is the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 1.6.5. What is the impact of trust in social media marketing regarding perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase by Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?

1.7. Research objectives

- 1.7.1. To explore the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.7.2. To understand the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.7.3. To understand the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.7.4. To understand the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.7.5. To determine the impact of trust in social media marketing regarding perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase by Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.8. Limitations of study

The focus of this study was only the UKZN School of Management, IT & Governance students, which may not adequately capture the perceptions of the broader Generation-Z consumers. Due to this, there was a limit to the generalisability of the results. Using only one research approach, the quantitative approach, may not fully capture the in-depth understanding of the areas examined. Since the data collection instrument was distributed online, the researcher was unable to fully explain the questions to the respondents. The respondents might have responded differently if the researcher interacted with respondents. The lack of human interaction plays a disadvantage as the researcher could not observe the respondents' body language. Due to the sample being students, it might have been difficult for them to fill out the questionnaire as many would have busy social and academic schedules. Because completing surveys can be time-consuming, students might not be interested in doing so.

1.9. Summary of chapters

The dissertation is divided into the six chapters that follow.:

Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

An overview and introduction are provided in Chapter One. The research problem, study background, study contributions, research technique overview, research questions, and research objectives. The chapter also describes the research limitations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In Chapter Two, the emphasis is on offering a thorough literature study on social media marketing and the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on Generation-Z South African consumers' purchase intentions. The chapter presents previously explored studies and research related to the study phenomenon to identify the gaps in the body of knowledge in the marketing field.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

The study's preferred research approach is presented in this chapter. Research environment, research paradigm, research design, research strategies, time horizon, and methodological choice. The chapter also covers descriptive and inferential statistics, data collection tools, sampling strategy, target population, sample size, and data quality management. The chapter concludes by outlining the study's ethical considerations.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Results

The results of the research tool, which the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) assessed, are presented in Chapter Four. The presentation of descriptive and inferential statistical data are provided.

Chapter Five: Discussion of Results

The findings are examined in Chapter Five in relation to the study's research objectives. The findings are evaluated in relation to earlier academic publications and research in the same topic.

Chapter Six: Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

An overview of the study's limitations and conclusions is given in the last chapter. The chapter offers suggestions for future research that could result from this study to marketers and practitioners. Additionally, the chapter offers recommendations derived from the data collected during the study.

1.10. Chapter summary

The chapter presented the overview of the background, outlining the problem statement and describing the study's contribution to the field of marketing. Furthermore, it included a brief of the literature review and research methodology of choice. Moreover, limitations of the study were described. An overview of the six interlinked chapters of this research was provided in this chapter. The following chapter provides a literature review that examines and analyses existing scholarly studies within the field of study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

An examination and analysis of past and existing literature has been critically reviewed to identify the gaps that exist in the field of marketing. The literature review examines and evaluates South African Generation-Z social media marketing and purchase intentions during the coronavirus pandemic in relation to research questions to better understand some of the critical aspects this research aims to address. A comprehensive exploration of the concept of Generation-Z, delving into its defining characteristics as consumers. The understanding of Generation-Z is crucial for marketers aiming to connect with this influential demographic. The subsequent section concentrates on the emergence of social media marketing, tracing its roots to the advent of Web 2.0. Exploring the dynamic relationship between social media marketing and Generation-Z forms a pivotal aspect of the literature review. The literature review further delves into the influence of social media marketing on Generation-Z's purchase intentions. This includes an examination of elements such as interactivity, customisation, word-of-mouth, trendiness, convenience, and entertainment, elucidating how these factors shape the consumer landscape in the context of social media marketing. Given the global significance of the Covid-19 pandemic, a specific focus on its impact in a South African context is warranted. The pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and altered consumer behaviors, making it imperative to understand how Generation-Z in South Africa navigates the evolving marketing dynamics amidst the pandemic. Lastly, a conceptual framework, informed by the literature, is designed to provide a structured understanding of the interplay between social media marketing, Generation-Z, and the contextual influence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.2. Defining Generation-Z

The field of consumer behaviour has been evolving. Nevertheless, it has become a crucial aspect of research as it indicates how to satisfy consumer needs (Cruz, 2016; Pillay, 2021). Generation-Z is known for its various names such as Gen-Z, post-millennials, iGeneration, Zoomers (Cruz, 2016), Uber generation (Koulopoulos and Keidesen, 2016; Djafarova and Foots, 2022), the net Generation (Kuijter, 2011; Vojvodic, 2019). According to Kasasa (2019) Generation-Z consumers are born from 1994 to 2015. The youngest Generation-Z is six years

old, and the oldest is 26. However, there is no precise indication for Generation-Z. White (2017) and Giray (2022) explain that Generation-Z consumers were born between 1995 and 2010.

Yang and Kang (2022) claim that Generation-Z was born between 1997 and 2014. To understand the start of Generation-Z, one must look at the previous generation, Generation Y, which occurred from 1976 to 1994 (Younas and Waseem-Bari, 2020). Generation-Z childhood is described as a digital playground, being associated with advanced technologies, smartphones, Wi-Fi, and watching the establishment of the fourth industrial revolution has shaped this advanced Generation (Smalej, 2017; Kumar, Mamgain and Singh, 2023). Scholars refer to Generation-Z as the first-ever digital generation associated with smartphone usage and screen time (Lanier, 2017; Benitez-Marquez, Sanchez-Teba, Bermudez-Gonzalez, and Nunez-Rydman, 2022). Generation-Z is described as confident, embracing one's culture and beliefs, techno-savvy, ambitious, and unique (Seemiller and Grace, 2016; Chillakuri, 2020).

Kotler and Armstrong (2016) describe the characteristics of Generation-Z as realistic, valuing peer acceptance, environmentally conscious, and multitasking. Moreover, Gen Z is innovative, creative, and passionate about freedom of speech and humanitarian causes (Priporas, Stylos, and Fotiadis, 2017). As the Generation is known as the iGeneration, five devices are used to keep the Generation connected to the world: iPad, smart devices, laptops, pc, and T.V. (Abramovich, 2015). Generation-Z can be defined as a lucrative market. Being the first to grow up in a technological era has transformed how marketers engage with consumers.

The reality is that Generation-Z sees the world through social media. Their vision is through the screens of social media platforms which allows them to share their opinions, connect with brands, gain access to information and connect with other consumers across the world (Cruz, 2016). That is the power of social media, connecting others and bringing consumers and marketers together. Generation-Z is one of the leading generations of the era. Therefore, it provides an opportunity to understand the generation's purchase intention as marketers aim to satisfy their needs and wants (Cruz, 2016). The following section analyses Generation-Z as a consumer, thus providing insights into the purchasing intentions of the generation.

2.3. Generation-Z as consumers

The dynamic growth of Generation-Z in the market has proven that the generation is the most popular and most wanted to satisfy, as many companies are targeting them due to their purchasing intentions and buying power (Smalej, 2017). Generation-Z focuses on four consumer components: innovation, convenience, security and escapism. Generation-Z being brought up around technology is constantly searching for innovation in the authenticity of products and brands. Convenience is a vital aspect as Gen Z seeks an easier and simpler means of shopping and security to protect one's personal information from cybercrime. The concept of escapism Gen Z is looking for an 'out of this world' experience from brands (Wood, 2013).

Pillay (2010) explains the power of Generation-Z in the market, "It is estimated that 40% of consumer spending will be attributed to Generation-Z consumers in 2020". Moreover, Pillay (2010) mentions it is of utmost importance that retailers know their consumer needs and wants that make up the market segment. As consumers, Generation-Z uses social networking networks to access information linked to purchases. According to Ozkan and Somaz (2017), Generation Z is changing the consumer dynamics with their consumption habits together with the emergence of online shopping. The key aspects that Generation-Z focuses on are personalisation, authenticity and engagement, which allows them to make a purchase decision (Pillay, 2010).

Generation-Z will be the consumers of the future. Therefore, understanding the generation's needs, beliefs, and environment will enable marketers to build a better market environment (Jiang and Yin, 2021). According to Akoijam and Mazumder (2023) Businesses are conscious of Generation-Z potential advantages; hence, businesses adopt marketing communication tools such as social media, as these marketing strategies attract Generation-Z consumers. Moreover, Generation-Z consumers are closely associated with social media marketing. Rijitha (2021) Social media sites like YouTube and Instagram assist customers in choosing what to buy. Social media platforms utilise images, infographics, videos, audio, and live streams, making the consumer engage and learn about the brand, which in turn triggers a motivation to purchase a good or service (Rijitha, 2021).

The effectiveness of social media marketing for Generation-Z customers is becoming increasingly apparent to marketers. Hossain and Sakib (2016) notes that social media marketing

has a great influence on the decision-making process, as there is a decline in the use of traditional marketing methods as the focus is being placed on social media marketing and online shopping due to it being flexible, easy, convenient and cost-effective for consumers and businesses. Thus, the research has focused on the emergence of social media marketing.

2.4. The emergence of social media marketing

Social media is rapidly growing in momentum with Generation-Z. Social media gives advertisers the opportunity to interact with customers in new and inventive ways. According to Karthika, Kalpanadevi, Mythili, Sugantha, and Banu (2022), social media marketing has provided opportunities to influence consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, social media marketing plays a vital role in marketing communication strategies. Marketing communication channels are transforming from traditional marketing channels to digital ones. The new marketing communication tools include social media and online purchasing, known as eMarketing. According to Rockendorf (2011) and Sharma (2019), social media marketing has become a hot spot where marketers understand consumers' purchase intentions. Walia and Majumder (2019) explain that businesses are aware of the potential benefit of Generations-Z. Hence, marketers are using marketing communication tools such as social media advertisements, emails, online press, and websites to gain the attention of Generation-Z consumers. Shivakumar (2018) explains that social media marketing is gaining a presence and helping brands connect with consumers. Marketers often refer to Generation-Z as the digital natives because the generation has a high level of technological advancement.

The growth of social media marketing offers a unique interactive communication that allows collaboration and information sharing. Generation-Z appears to be a powerful market segment influenced by social media marketing. Hossain and Sakib (2016) demonstrate how brand loyalty is favorably impacted by social media marketing, enabling consumers to purchase via social media platforms. Mohanlal's (2012) study claims that social media marketing expands with time. According to Mohanlal (2012), South Africans use social media to gain insight into products and services. The following section focuses on social media, also known as Web 2.0. In addition, it explores the various network sites and social platforms, namely Instagram and YouTube. This is followed by the nature of these social media platforms and how they influence Generation-Z consumers' purchase intentions.

2.5. Social media web 2.0

Social media, which enables communication between users, is quickly emerging as one of the most significant technological advancements ever (Appel, Grewal, Hadi, and Stephen, 2020). Social media consists of internet-based applications used in Web 2.0 that allow interaction and information exchange over the internet (Montoya, 2011). According to Yadav and Vohra (2016:65), “Web 2.0 can in the simplest words, be defined as the second-generation internet services that focus on collaboration and user sharing and communication”.

Devault (2011) explains that social media is an integral marketing tool as it provides marketers with a platform to influence and connect with consumers through various social media platforms. According to Shivakumar (2018:2), “The term social media can be derived from two words which constitute it. Firstly, media refers to advertising and the communication of ideas through chatting, and social implies the interaction of individuals within a group or community.” Hence, social media can be described as a communication medium that consumers use to share, interact, and gather information through social media platforms. Therefore, social media marketing consists of interaction, socialisation, and sharing ideas on a common platform (Ulfa and Astuti, 2019).

Kotler and Keller (2016) state that social media is a platform where consumers can share images, videos, audio, and text of brands and products with other consumers. Social media marketing allows factors such as integration, consistency, control, and conversation that allow consumers to share information on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and other social networking sites where consumers can express their views and opinions (Kotler and Armstrong, 2011). Social media marketing has revolutionised consumer-brand interaction. Consumers can share their views and opinions through posts, reviews, comments, YouTube videos, Instagram posts or stories, and other social media outlets. Moreover, brands and marketers pay close attention to social media platforms as it changes the way consumers make purchase decisions (Chen, 2018).

Social media marketing has become an integral part of a consumer's life. Instagram, Facebook and Twitter keep increasing daily with new users (Ostrow, 2010; Prasath and Yoganathen, 2018; Sharma, 2020). The increase in users has gained marketers' attention with the understanding of social media marketing potential towards Generation-Z (Goldring and Azab, 2021). Thus, the

inception of social media platforms has provided brands the opportunity to connect with consumers. Sites like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter provided new channels to introduce brands and products and exchange information with consumers online (Shen and Bissell, 2013; Cheung, Pires, and Rosenberger, 2020).

Salpini (2017, 1), “In particular, Gen Z is much more influenced by Instagram (44%), Snapchat (21%) and YouTube (32%) than other generations”. The following section provides insight into social media network sites and their functions and user terminology. Which has allowed the study to gain a deeper understanding of each site.

2.6. Social media network sites

In the early 1980s, consumers used to connect through the internet. However, the use of social media network sites had evolved (Dayanand, 2019). According to Ahn (2011), Social Network Sites (SNSs) are platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook that are popular among Generation-Z. Various characteristics make it easy for consumers to connect and communicate through social network sites (Ellison and Boyd, 2013). A social network site can be described as “focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others” (Shin, 2010:1).

Various social network sites allow consumers to communicate through instant messages, posts, statuses, wall posts, likes, images, videos, and voice notes, allowing consumers to express their interest with others on social media platforms (Taprial and Kanwar, 2012). Social media has various characteristics, such as openness, conversation, and community (Cyr, 2016). Openness is a key characteristic as it enhances the trust between the consumer and the brand. Conversation is the second characteristic that allows two-way communication between consumers and brands. That allows the brand to understand the needs of consumers. As a result, the brand can satisfy the target market (Cyr, 2016). Lastly, an online community promotes information sharing and collaboration and enhances the relationship between consumers and the brand. It brings consumers from different geographical areas to one common platform (Cyr, 2016).

Dlamini (2018) explains that social networking sites provide numerous benefits, such as user-friendliness, interaction, consumer engagement, awareness, and information sharing. Social

media network sites are broken down into two aspects: personal sharing sites and business-oriented sites (Vroman and Stulz, 2016). Personal sharing sites are Instagram and Facebook. Whereas, YouTube, and Twitter, blogs are both business-oriented sites. Many of the above sites co-exist today and are used for personal and business-oriented purposes (Vroman and Stulz, 2016). According to Statista (2020), the top five social media platforms used most frequently in South Africa are Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, represented in Figure 1.

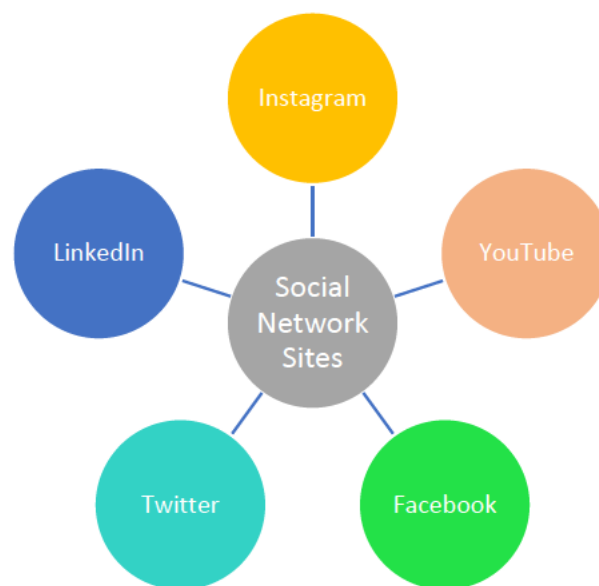


Figure 1: Social Network Sites Used in South Africa

Source: Statista (2020)

2.6.1. Instagram

Instagram was established in the year 2010, although relatively young in its establishment compared to other social media networks. Instagram is gaining momentum rapidly (Bergstrom and Beckaman, 2013). Instagram is a trendy social networking platform that allows users to share images and videos from any device. Users must create an account that includes a profile picture and a bio to help the social community understand the user (Moreau, 2018). When an image or video is uploaded, other users who are known as followers can see this upload on their feed, allowing the followers to comment, tag, like, and share the post (Moreau, 2018).

Berg and Sterner (2015) explain that Instagram was established to share images with friends. Today the platform has been revolutionised with additional features, tools, and filters. Global statistics have recorded that the largest demographic using this platform is aged 25 and younger (Statista, 2015). From a marketing perspective, many brands have their own Instagram account in which they upload content such as new trends, sales, promo discounts, competitions, and the latest ranges of products. The advantage of companies using Instagram is that it is a quick, free, effective market communication tool that can reach a large global target audience (Appel *et al.*, 2019). Instagram allows viral marketing, which triggers consumers to follow the brand of their choice (Appel *et al.*, 2019). There are various terms associated with Instagram and its features. The following section explains the different terminology that Generation-Z often uses (Goodman, 2021).

Bio: A bio is referred to as a biography. That allows your followers to know more about you or your brand. Users may use emojis and hashtags that can describe them (Goodman, 2021).

Caption: A caption is a description placed under the picture that can include a quote or explain the story of the picture or video. It can include hashtags, emojis, and mentions (Ichau and Frissen, 2019).

Community: When referring to followers, the term used is community. Many brands and individuals will have different communities based on the profile's content, and this community is between the brand and the individual towards its followers (Goodman, 2021).

Explore: Explore is the search icon that is based on the toolbar. This feature allows you to view what is trending on Instagram (I.G.), including images, videos, and Instagram Television (IGTV). In addition, it can find various topics such as sports, health, travel, food, and fashion, which users can view (Goodman, 2021).

Hashtags: A collection of words, phrases, or letters followed by a symbol (#) is referred to as a hashtag (Goodman, 2021). Hashtag (#) is a symbol mostly used on Instagram. A word or phrase associated with a hashtag relates to a topic. A hashtag in front of a word/phrase creates a link to a collection of all images and videos that use that hashtag (Watson, 2020). A hashtag is a form of electronic word of mouth in viral marketing (Tsur and Rappaport, 2012). Users can now follow hashtags to boost followers and brand engagement (Goodman, 2021).

Highlights: Instagram helps users select the best stories and allows these images or stories to be stored in your archive. Users can create a topic or events, and followers can watch these highlights (Goodman, 2021).

I.G. Live: Many brands and celebrities go live, or Instagram live that is a live stream. This allows the account holder to interact with followers, reply to comments, and even join their live stream (Goodman, 2021). Many brands go live to announce new products or competitions from a marketing perspective. The feature puts consumers first with the brand and allows them to experience consumers and brands (Pacis, 2018).

IG: Instagram is known as IG (Goodman, 2021).

IGTV: One of the latest features of Instagram is IGTV, which allows anything more than a minute long. That is used for long videos such as reviews, Q&A, and special product releases (Goodman, 2021).

Influencer: Hatago (2018: 2), “An influencer is defined as someone who produces highly engaging, organic content for a large audience, and often has expertise in a particular domain (food, fashion)”.

Insights: Insight is a tool that allows the account holder to access statistics relating to the account, such as the age, gender of followers. In addition, it provides a time which is most suitable to post, which will gain more likes and visibility (Goodman, 2021).

Direct Message (DM): D.M. refers to a direct message which allows users to share images, videos, calls, and audio (Goodman, 2021).

Mention: Herman (2020) explains that a mention occurs when the (@) symbol is placed in front of someone's I.G. username. This will notify that they have been mentioned in a post or story.

Stories: Instagram stories are one of the most popular features. They are images or videos that are limited to 15 seconds and can only last up to 24 hours. Users can insert music, emojis, text, stickers, hashtags, and tags (Goodman, 2021).

Tag: Herman (2020:5), “Tagging someone on Instagram is done in/on the image of your original post, and you can tag several other accounts in that image”. The feature is used only on posts, reels, or videos (Goodman, 2021).

The above is an overview of the terminology and features used by brands and Generation-Z. According to Jamwa (2018:36), “Instagram enables organisations to make strong connections with target audiences’ developing heightened relationships with them beyond an online basis”. Statista (2021) provides a demographic of usages of Instagram in Figure 2.

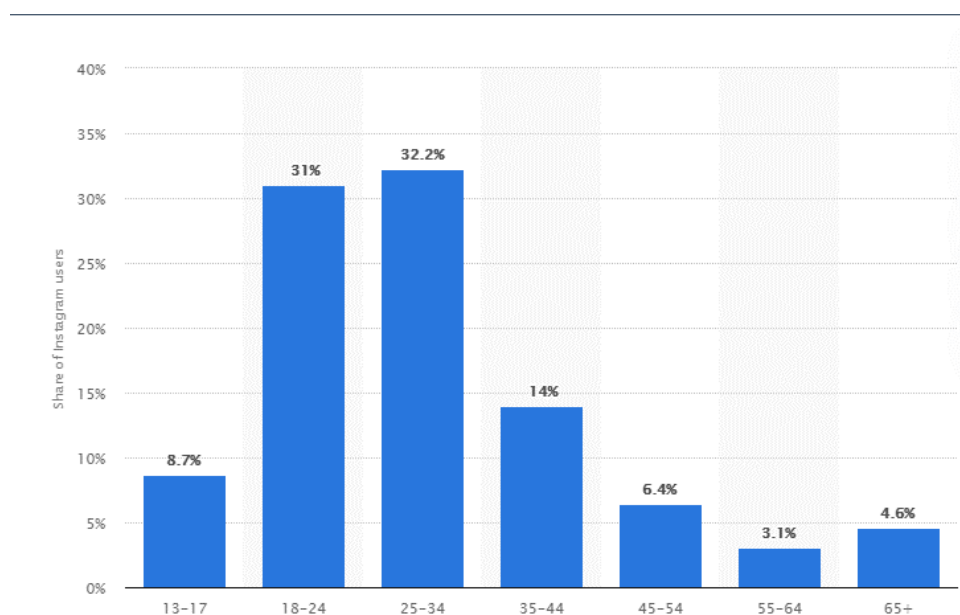


Figure 2: Demographics of usage of Instagram

Source: Statista (2021)

For many Generation-Z consumers clicking Instagram has become a daily norm as picking up a newspaper for Baby Boomers (Bishop, 2020). Furthermore, has been found that 18 to 24 year olds are the majority of users of Instagram. According to Statista (2021) 53,8% of Instagram users are females whereas, 46,2% are male users. Instagram can reach up to 4 million users with adverts (Lama, 2020). Hence, Instagram creates brand awareness and recognition which can have a major advantage in reaching out to Generation-Z. Therefore, Instagram is the

selected social media marketing platform discussed in this research. It is highly associated with Generation-Z consumers in a South African context.

The following social media platform discussed is YouTube, where the focus is based on the establishment, the features, and the association with Generation-Z consumers.

2.6.2. YouTube

On a global scale, YouTube is the second most visited site for users to view products, videos, and entertainment (Silaban, Chen, Nababan, Eunike, and Silalahi, 2022). According to Tafesse (2020), many businesses invest in YouTube to create brand awareness and influence consumer purchasing behaviour through video marketing. Duffett's (2020) study based on YouTube and Generation-Z consumers provides valuable insight into the potential marketing communication tool. YouTube is a vast growing platform with more than 2 billion users growing daily and has become a marketing communication targeted at Generation-Z. The study explains that 65% of retailers have invested in YouTube to attract Generation-Z consumers (Duffett, 2020).

YouTube was established as an entertainment platform. However, YouTube has transformed into a marketing communication tool that provides promotions, reviews, product testimonials, advertisements and reaction videos on products and services that influence consumers' purchase behaviour. Influencers use YouTube to endorse brands and products through reaction videos or reviews that influence consumers and viewers, as there is a trust factor between the influencer and the consumers (Duffett, 2020). According to Tafesse (2020) YouTube has a vast and diverse userbase that makes the platform ideal for engagement. YouTube is a cost-effective social media platform as there is no cost associated with uploading content or videos, and it has a high geographical range that can reach users worldwide, allowing for viral marketing (Duffett, 2020). YouTube, as a marketing communication tool, aids in building brand awareness and image and has the influence to impact the purchase intentions of consumers (Febriyantoro, 2020).

According to YouTube (2020), the social media platform provides data to the account holder or brands, including demographics, geographics, user information, and other information like the number of views, likes, and dislikes. Livingstone, Stoilova, Yu, Byrne and Kardefelt-Winther (2018) affirm that existing literature based on YouTube and Generation-Z is limited as

there is a lack of information on the influence of YouTube on Generation-Z consumers' purchase orientation. Moreover, Duffett (2020) mentions that Generation-Z South Africans comprise 41% of the population. The Generation would have completed high school and entered university or the job market. Thus, this study has focused on YouTube as the second social media platform and influential factors influencing Generation-Z consumers' buying behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.6.3. Facebook

Facebook was developed in the year 2004 and expanded globally in 2006 (Ramnarain, 2011). “The goal of the company is to help people to share more to make the world more open and to help promote understanding between people diversity” (Fuchs, 2011:159). Rampersad (2011) defines Facebook as a social utility that enables individuals to share and interact with family and friends. Treadaway and Smith (2010) explain that there are various features that users can use, such as Facebook, which allows users to create and personalise their accounts which the user has the option to pick a series of categories from food, music, movies, actors, and sports which will provide information and media on those selected categories. In addition, users can upload videos, pictures, and messages, share, react, like, comment, and connect with users across the world (Treadaway and Smith, 2010). Facebook consists of a wall that contains news feeds. A wall is where the user can post images and statuses; it also allows friends to post and tag the user on images, videos, or media (Muhongya and Maharaj, 2015).

From a marketing perspective, Facebook is a cost-effective feature that allows marketers to reach out to target markets, large audiences, and time effectively (Ramnarain, 2011). According to Gevers (2016) Facebook is divided into communication, gaming, and personal expressions. Duffett (2015) explains that Facebook has allowed consumers to interact with marketers and brands. Upon further research, Duffett (2015) reveals that most Facebook users are from the Generation Y cohort (Figure 3).

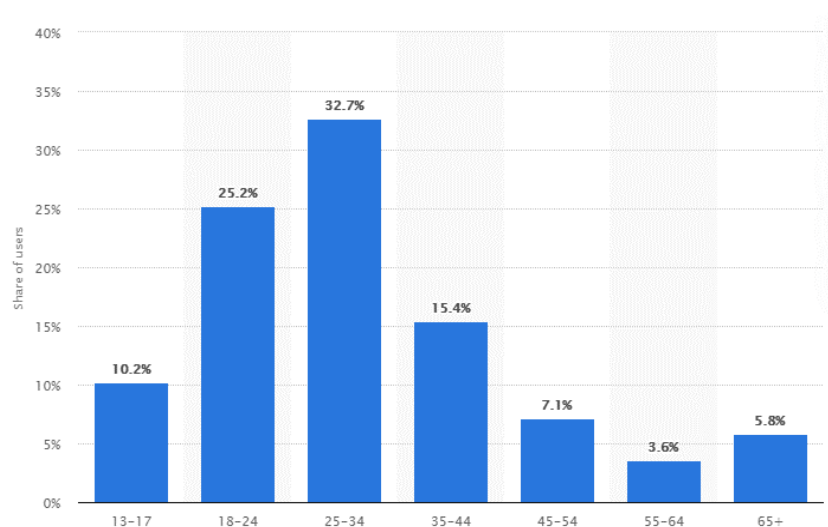


Figure 3: Demographics of usage of Facebook

Source: Statista (2021)

Generation Y, known as the born frees as this Generation were born after the 1994 election post-apartheid. The Generation was introduced to Bluetooth, GPS, PlayStation, and flip phones (Duffett, 2015). According to Stern and Taylor (2007), Facebook aims to connect with friends and make new friends. Duffett (2017) conducted research based on the influence of Facebook communication on Generation-Z attitudes in South Africa. The findings are intriguing as “Generation-Z attitudes are less favourable as they move towards purchase” (Duffett, 2017:11). That indicates there is a low impact of influence on the purchase intentions of Generation-Z. Therefore, Facebook is mostly associated with Generation Y. Due to the nature of this study being based on Generation-Z, this platform is not be suitable for this study.

2.6.4. Twitter

According to Naidu (2018) Twitter was established in March 2006. Kariapper (2020) Twitter has become a marketing communication tool for many businesses. Conger (2023) Mr. Elon Musk rebranded Twitter to the new name is called “X”. According to Conger (2023:1), “The X app is the trusted digital town square for everyone. The app has a new slogan, too: “Blaze your glory!” (Twitter’s previous tag lines included “Let’s talk” and “It’s what’s happening.”)”. However, Twitter provides viral marketing by providing trends and the latest updates, but some limitations exist on the pervious once known as Twitter. Tweets were restricted to 140 characters, limiting marketers to providing additional information that consumers need to

engage more with the brand (Kariapper, 2020). Twitter is described as online microblogging, which means users can rapidly share messages, ideas, pictures, and videos.

Based on Kariapper (2020) study, the user demographics is Generation Y, which projected an 84.4% usage of Twitter. Thus, Generation-Z consumers are not influenced by the social media platform as the user percentage of Generation-Z is 13.6%. In addition, Timothy (2019) indicated low user usage of Twitter from Generation-Z, as 14.7% considered it a preferred social media platform. Ramnarain (2011) explains that Twitter is commonly used to connect with family, friends, industries, and celebrities. Twitter usage demographics are Generation Y based on the studies provided. Thus, it is not be suitable for this study.

2.6.5. LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social media platform used by individuals seeking employment, academics, and researchers who share posts and topics in various fields (Muriithi, Horner, and Pemberton, 2016). LinkedIn is a professional networking site that allows individuals to connect with other professional's worldwide (Muriithi *et al.*, 2016). Professionals widely use LinkedIn to connect with businesses to discuss trends, job searches, and networking. LinkedIn introduced features that allow a long-form post that allows the brand to expand on its description. Marin and Nila (2021) and Marchewka-Bartkowiak, Nowak, and Litwiniski (2022) explained LinkedIn allows users and companies to maintain and promote their profession identity. This allows the brand to share its interests and expertise, leading the reader to learn more and connect with the brand profile (Muriithi *et al.*, 2016). The target audience on LinkedIn is professionals seeking employment and research; therefore, the study's nature is based on the purchase intention of Generation-Z during the Covid-19 pandemic, so LinkedIn is not be suitable for this study. The association between social media marketing and Generation-Z is emphasised in the next section.

2.7. Relationship between social media marketing and Generation-Z

The growth of social media marketing has offered unique interactive, creative communication and allows collaboration. It is a hub of information sharing, which provides transparency between consumers and brands. Generation-Z appears to be a powerful market segment influenced by social media. Hossain and Sakib's (2016) findings provide a positive influence

in terms of social media marketing in terms of brand loyalty. There are many perceptions of social media marketing with Generation-Z. Therefore, the next section focuses on the various viewpoints to understand the common associations that link social media marketing and Generation-Z.

Upon review, Naidu (2018) mentions that Generation-Z is a new generation growing rapidly. Naidu (2018) conducted a study based on the factors influencing consumer behaviour in the context of retail in relation to social media marketing on Generation-Z. The findings of the study indicated that YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook are the most influential social media platforms that Generation-Z would use. However, Naidu (2018) did not indicate which social media platforms were the predominate platform that influenced Generation-Z to make a purchase decision. One of the gaps is that the study was focused on females, limiting the full overview of which platform is most suited to trigger the purchase intention. Generation-Z are in favor of dynamic, interactive, and authentic brands that are online (Trang, McKenna, Cai, and Morrison, 2023). Ninan, Roy, and Cheriyan (2020) indicated that social media marketing is more effective than the traditional marketing and has impact on Generation-Z that led to greater brand awareness, loyalty and purchase behaviour.

Duffet (2017) research focused on the influence of social media marketing communication on younger consumers, although the sample would fall under Generation-Z, from 13 to 18 years old. The limitation is that the age category is influenced by parental supervision. There were limitations in terms of the social media platforms. However, the strong key aspects of social media positively influenced their decisions. An interesting point in this study is the focus in terms of the age of Generation-Z consumers as they are at a point in life where they can make a purchase decision as they are working-class individuals, students, and mature consumers. Perumal (2018) sheds light on how social media marketing affects the tendency of consumers to make purchases. Social media allows marketers to interact with consumers in creative and innovative ways. Perumal (2018: 2) highlights that “social media marketing has provided the opportunity to influence consumers' buying behaviour”. Moreover, Perumal (2018:4) suggests limited knowledge, “there is a lack of literature regarding the relationship between social media marketing and consumer buying behaviour”. Although the finding indicates that there is an opportunity to influence buying behaviour, the limitation is that the study focused on large demographics and did not indicate whether the majority of the sample were Generation-Z consumers.

Cao, Meadows, Wang, and Xia's (2021) study was based on consumer social media engagement focusing on two social media platforms: YouTube and Facebook. Results indicated that social media greatly impacts consumption, contribution, and creation behaviours as there is a level of trust between the consumer and brand (Cao *et al.*, 2021). The perceptions of online shopping through social media are that it is convenient, and provides competitive prices, is time-effective, and easy access to information (Pillay, 2010). Pillay (2010) stated that online shopping is an emerging trend gaining momentum, and that finding indicated that social media platforms influence consumers.

According to Mohanlal (2012), customers utilise social media to interact with companies and learn more about their offerings. Shivakumar (2018) explains that consumers adapt to the ever-changing world of technology and social media. Brands are expected to move at the same pace as social media and technology. Ramnarain and Govender's (2013) findings indicate that consumers use social media to gain information that influences their purchase intentions. In addition, reviews done on social media influence consumers' purchase intentions.

According to Li (2019), Generation-Z spends most of their time on social media. Moreover, the generation has multiple social media accounts that allow access to information, trends, and communication on various platforms. Dayanand's (2019) study based on students in tertiary institutions noted that 60% of students spend three hours on social media. An important aspect is that most of Generation-Z would enter or finish their tertiary education.

According to Budree, Fietkiwicz, and Lin (2019), social media sites such as YouTube and Instagram are becoming more popular in South Africa. According to Ossendryer (2015), there is an increase in users, which amounted to 65% and 53% growth in Instagram and YouTube user rates. Moreover, Burdree *et al.* (2019) state that social media marketing provides marketers the opportunity to connect with consumers. As a result, consumers bond with the brand and gain more trust in the brand, thus, creating a strong relationship between the consumer and brand. Kunz, Hackworth, Osborne, and High (2011) provide insights from a company perspective, stating that brands will employ social media marketing. Consumers are expected to respond to the social media marketing strategies used to influence consumers' purchase intentions. Now, the emphasis is placed on determining the social media marketing variables that influence consumers' intentions to purchase.

2.8. Influential factors of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention

The factors discussed in this section revolve around the influential factors of social media marketing on consumer purchase intentions. The key factors explored include convenience, word-of-mouth, customisation, entertainment, interaction, trendiness, trust, and perceptions of social media marketing. The comprehensive exploration of influential factors provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of how social media marketing shapes consumer behavior and influences their intentions to make purchases.

2.8.1. Convenience

Consumers are looking for the most convenient way of shopping that saves time and effort. Kayumovich and Annamuradovna (2020) explain that online marketing provides ample opportunities in terms of convenience. Social media marketing provides individuation content that allows consumers to interact with brands and gain more information via social media platforms. According to Duarte, e-Silva, and Ferreira (2018), consumers focus on online convenience due to the efficiency and effectiveness of services provided by brands. Aspects such as 24-hour services, seven days a week, delivery services, and discounts lead to online convenience (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010). Duarte *et al.* (2018) indicate that various dimensions of online convenience influence a consumer's behaviour, such as access, search, attentiveness, and transaction convenience, which results in purchase intention. According to Vadwa, Stiehler, and Mashaba (2015), social network platforms have become a primary source of information as they are convenient to the consumer and allow information sharing via social network sites.

2.8.2. Word of Mouth

Word of mouth is when individuals transmit product information to other individuals via a conversation, online web, text, and social media platforms (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, and Hogg, 2013). Word-of-mouth communication is a powerful tool as it can be beneficial and detrimental to a brand. Solomon *et al.* (2013) claim that word of mouth can decline or incline an individual trust and faith in the brand. Asiam (2011) explains that word-of-mouth communication provides an honest, realistic view of a product or service. It is part of communication when individuals share their options and experience with products. Word-of-mouth communication can influence an individual's perception, especially if the individual is

new to the brand and has little information (Solomon *et al.*, 2013). One may ask if Generation-Z uses reviews such as ‘hello peter’ and other social media sites that review products, and do these factors influence buying behaviour? Choudhary, Jhamb and Sharma (2019) mention that customer feedback forms on social platforms are very effective as they provide reliability and trust to ensure customer satisfaction. Cruz (2016) claims that Generation-Z is influenced by word of mouth and peer interaction as the Generation tends to seek more information from family and friends on purchase decisions. That is based on the consumers' societal background. Virtual communication occurs through word of mouth and peer interaction (Cruz, 2016). Cruz, Silva and Machado (2017) claim that Generation-Z is influenced by word of mouth and peer interaction as this Generation tends to seek more information from family and friends when intending to purchase.

Ramsunder (2011) suggests that many consumers seek peer advice over social networks, resulting in consumer-to-consumer (C2C) communication. With social media evolving, word-of-mouth marketing is now called electronic-word-of-mouth marketing that allows consumers to share experiences, views, and preferences on social media and access information with others (Tingley, 2015). Chu and Kim (2011) accurately describe how E-WOM through social media platforms stimulates a feeling of trust associated with sharing online, leading to high trust levels with social media platforms such as Instagram or YouTube. Furthermore, the psychological link between friends and contacts is more likely to increase e-word of mouth (Chu and Kim, 2011). According to Qazzafi (2020), word-of-mouth and e-word-of-mouth are used in groups to influence purchase intentions as the individual would trust the recommendations and suggestions of family and friends and base their purchase decision on these factors as there is a level of trust.

2.8.3. Customisation

One of the critical aspects of social media marketing is that consumers are interested in viewing a wide range of services and products via social media platforms. In addition, consumers can customise their orders to their preferences. Many social media marketing strategies allow consumers to purchase various items to receive promotional deals. Van der Lans, Bruggen, Eliasherg, and Wierenga, (2010) provide valuable insight into the concept of viral marketing campaigns associated with a large audience over a short space of time. These marketing campaigns are cost-effective, time-effective, and consumers are responsible for making the

product viral through sharing, tagging, and e-word-of-mouth. That generates a high-level trust; thus, consumers feel motivated to purchase as it is a market trend and the majority is purchasing (Van der Lans *et al.*, 2010).

2.8.4. Entertainment

Social media provides a social purpose in entertainment, keeping in touch with friends and brands. Brand awareness is defined as recognising a product or service and acquiring consumers through brand elements (Macdonald and Sharp, 2003). Vadwa *et al.* (2015) state that social networks allow individuals to browse social accounts and engage and interact with the content provided, allowing these individuals to develop online relationships with brands. Social media marketing has gained momentum in increasing entertainment, allowing the consumer to recall the brand, and influencing whether to purchase the good or service. The concept of awareness is associated with the 'purchasing funnel' or 'marketing funnel' which explains how a consumer is influenced to make a purchasing decision. The funnel begins with awareness, making the consumer aware of the product or service through social media platforms in this context, leading to an interest in the product (Shivakumar, 2018). The consumer may seek information about this product or service and visit social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or the company website to see how good the brand image is. Shivakumar (2018) mentions that social media marketing influences consumers through brand awareness, brand building, and customer acquisitions by introducing new products and services, leading to customer retention. This leads a consumer to develop a desire for a product to purchase the good or service.

2.8.5. Interaction

Social media marketing provides consumers with the accessibility to information right at their fingertips, which leads to the interaction of content and information Tajudeen, Jaafar, and Suliaman (2016). Gammie (2011) explains that once a consumer has a need and requires to satisfy that need. The consumer would require more information that will allow them to see which brand will be able to satisfy their needs. Consumers search for brands and look at the range of services, prices, and history to gain more insight and understanding, thus enabling them to make a purchase decision (Gammie, 2011). Social media marketing provides access to information via different social media platforms that allow e-commerce (Pillay and Singh,

2010). With the aid of social media platforms, consumers can purchase a product or service anywhere in any geographical area, just with a tap of a button. Thus, accessibility plays a key role in motivating a consumer's purchase intention (Pillay and Singh, 2010). According to Vadwa *et al.* (2015), social media provides a sense of ease of use, meaning that consumers are provided with the flexibility to engage with brands.

2.8.6. Trendiness

Social media marketing is constantly improving and changing, resulting in a trend that would build a relationship with the changing Generations (Yan, Wu, Alhalabi, Kao and Wu, 2016). Muntinga, Moorman and Smit (2011:27) state that “trendy information on social media covers four sub-motivations: surveillance, knowledge, pre-purchase information, and inspiration”. From a retail standpoint, a lot of companies interact with their social network community by using various social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. (Kunz *et al.*, 2011; Sulaiman, Yusufu and Sadiq, 2021; Abdulrahman and Hussein, 2019). Creating market trends is an art form as retailers will use social media analytics to determine when to post and increase their usage during peak seasons, driving traffic to social media accounts, also described as viral marketing (Kunz *et al.* 2011). Moreover, Vadwa *et al.* (2015) argue that social media marketing enables consumers to be informed about the brand, displaying the latest trends, news, and styles that keep the consumers intention that could influence their purchase intentions.

2.8.7. Trust

Trust is crucial in consumer purchase orientation, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has shifted consumers from traditional purchasing, that is, physically going to a store, to online purchases (Thakur, Diwekar, Reddy and Gajjala, 2020). Online trust is extremely important when making a purchase decision (Bauman and Bachmann, 2017). According to Le and Hoang (2020), trust is an important factor as consumers need to fully trust the brand and services provided to make a purchase decision.

Furthermore, Le and Hoang (2020:2) state,

“The customers will spend time on the website, feel comfortable, get accustomed to the information, and eventually trust the e-retailer. Similarly, the information on the website will provide the same effects as those from website design and navigation. Information provided will convince the consumers to believe in the products and decide to buy the products on the website.”

Thus, social media platforms mediate the trust between the consumer and the brand as a consumer can then make a purchase decision. The finding based on Le and Hoang (2020) indicates that marketers must understand the importance of trust and that social media platforms aid in developing a relationship that can be referred to as online trust between the consumer and brand.

2.8.8. Perceptions of social media marketing

Perceptions of social media marketing were based on convenience, word-of-mouth, customization, entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and trust. In addition to those identified, customers could have perceptions of credibility, perceived value, and content (Sah, 2023). Credibility is perceived as a source of authenticity and trustworthiness that can influence consumer interests and purchase intentions (Kumar, Mamgain, and Singh, 2023). Perceived value refers to when consumers tend to regard social media marketing as beneficial when the is more value-added. This could be in the form of exclusive offers, promotion, educational, or entertainment value (Kumar *et al.*, 2023). Content if social media marketing is appealing, engaging, and interactive, consumers are likely to be influenced and engage with the content that is associated with their interests and preferences. According to Salhab, Al-Amarneh, Aljabaly, Zoubi, and Othman (2023) states that dimensions such as brand image, if perceived positive, it will have a positive effect on the purchase intention. Legon, Hew, Ooi, Lee, and Hew (2019) explained that consumers perception of brand image online impacts their purchase intention. Thus, social media marketing plays a significant role in building the brand image of a product or service. Thus, there are additional dimensions identified that customers could have perceptions of, and the literature has alluded to these dimensions.

The following section focuses on understanding the Covid-19 pandemic from a global and South African perspective and the impact on consumers' intention to purchase.

2.9. The Covid-19 pandemic

The Coronavirus 2019, referred to as the Covid-19 pandemic, has drastically changed the lives of many consumers (Eger, Komarkova, Egerova, and Micik, 2021). According to Liu, Kuo, and Shih (2020), the first case to be reported was in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, and then it resulted in a worldwide spread that led to a global pandemic. The effect of this virus is detrimental as it is highly contagious and rapidly spreads among the human population. The World Health Organisation (2021) reports an estimated 177 million infected worldwide.

Zwanka and Buff (2021) explain that each country had experienced hardships and major loss of citizens in various geographical areas due to the outbreak. In addition, countries faced different variants which impacted different demographics. Governments regulated a lockdown in their nations, including curfews, restrictions on religious gatherings and mass gatherings, closure of retail outlets, the entertainment industry, and non-essentials. The restrictions had a major impact on the economy and consumers (Zwanka and Buff, 2021). Moreover, Zwanka and Buff (2021) mention that the Covid-19 pandemic awareness on a global scale was noted in March 2020, resulting in consumer purchase intentions traits change. Understanding whether this pandemic has resulted in a long-term shift in consumer purchase intentions from traditional means to online purchases.

According to Singh and Rakshit (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic increased online consumer retention. On a global scale, marketers found that consumers started purchasing online for groceries, clothes, and food (Al-Ghraibah, 2020). However, consumers were reluctant to purchase online in previous years due to privacy, fraud, and spam as a lack of trust. Thus, the Covid-19 pandemic shifted the consumers to online purchasing (Reddy, 2020). Brands use social media platforms to ensure online consumer retention, influencing purchase orientation (Al-Ghraibah, 2020). Eger *et al.* (2021) conducted a study based on the Czech Republic, and the findings indicated that consumers' buying behaviour changed due to the various waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, consumers' purchase intentions are based on various factors.

The following section focuses on the coronavirus, also known as the Covid-19 pandemic, from a South African perspective.

2.9.1. The Covid-19 pandemic in a South African context

In South Africa, the first coronavirus case occurred in March 2020, which led the South African government to enforce a national lockdown. That included social interactions, curfews, and closures of various entertainment, retail, and non-essential industries (Schroder, Bossert, Kersting, Aefferer, Coetzee, Timme, and Schluter, 2021). In addition, Schroder *et al.* (2021) indicated a decrease of 70% in shopping due to the Covid-19 pandemic in South Africa. Stiegler and Bouchard (2020) indicated that consumers were reluctant to do physical purchasing of goods and services and, therefore turned to online purchasing. The lockdown restrictions impacted many industries and businesses, including restricting consumers from purchasing goods and services (Payne, 2021). Therefore, the study focused on the perceptions of social media marketing and its influence on Generation-Z South African consumers' intention to purchase during the Covid-19 pandemic. The reality was unique with Covid-19 and its various lockdown stages implemented by the South African government.

2.10. Theoretical Framework

The Stimulus-Organism-Response model also referred to as S-O-R, was formulated by Mehrabian and Russel (1974). This model provides the theoretical framework for this study and is illustrated in Figures 4 and 5. According to Kawaf and Tagg (2012), the S-O-R model in an online environment provided much insight into consumer behaviour relevant to the study. Factors that influence a consumer's intention to purchase can be referred to as stimuli that impact a consumer's behavioural change. The S-O-R model emphasises the link between the environment and the behaviour of individuals (Al-Adwan, Al-Debei and Dwivedi, 2022). This model has been employed in the marketing field to understand consumer behaviour. In the existing literature, the S-O-R model was used to understand consumer buying behaviour in relation to mobile apps (Pop, Hledik, and Dabija, 2023). As there is a shift towards online marketing, many businesses use online platforms and social media marketing to influence consumers' purchasing intentions. The online environment is often called the e-atmosphere (Tabuena, Necio, Macaspac, Bernardo, Domingo, and De Leon, 2022). In this study, the stimuli is the online environment which represents social media marketing perceptions.

Wu and Li (2018) explain that an organism is an individual cognitive and affective reaction that influences consumer behaviour. In addition, the organism acts as a mediator between the stimuli and response. Thus, the organism in this study is a psychological factor based on

consumer trust in the service provider (social media marketing), which would impact the response. In addition, Goi, Kalidas and Zeeshan (2014:462) “S-O-R model consists of stimulus as an independent variable, organism as a mediator, and response as the dependent variable”. Kawaf and Tagg (2012:13) state, “According to the S-O-R, following the exposure to stimuli and the development of consumer inner organism, a responsive behaviour emerges”. A study conducted by Zhou, Li, Yang, and Chen (2022) used the S-O-R model to assess what drives consumers purchase intention of online paid knowledge. Thus, the S-O-R model was a relevant model to use in this study. Therefore, based on the S-O-R model, this study has examined SMMP (stimulus) effect on Generation-Z trust in social media marketing (organism), which subsequently influences the consumer intention to purchase (response).

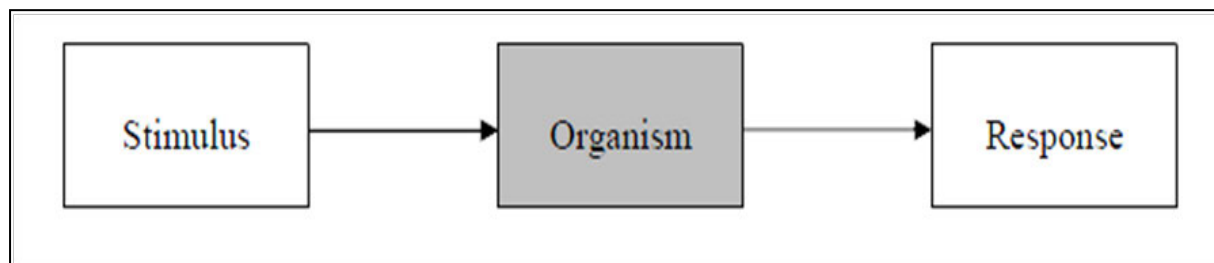


Figure 4: The Stimulus-Organism-Response Model

Source: Dudovskiy (2013).

Drawing from Figure 4 and the literature included in this chapter, a diagram was created to clearly illustrate the variables related to this study. The diagram in Figure 5 explains the relationships among six factors of social media marketing: trust in social media marketing, consumer intention to purchase a good or service, perceptions of social media marketing are influenced by a variety of elements, including interaction, customisation, word-of-mouth, trendiness, convenience, and entertainment, according to existing studies (Ainin, Parveen, Moghavvemi, Jaafar, and Modh-Shuib, 2015; Ibrahim, Aljarah and Ababneh, 2020; Zulqurnaim, Shabbir, Ruaf and Hassian, 2016; Shuyi, Mamun and Naznen, 2022). These factors are examined Generation-Z South African consumers’ perceptions of SMM throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Using the theoretical underpinning of the S-O-R model, it is proposed that perceptions of social media marketing (stimuli) would have a significant influence on trust in social media marketing (organism), which would subsequently influence the consumer intention to purchase (response). Figure 5 represents the conceptual framework of the study

and it shows the intervening mechanism by which perceptions of social media marketing could influence the intention to purchase.

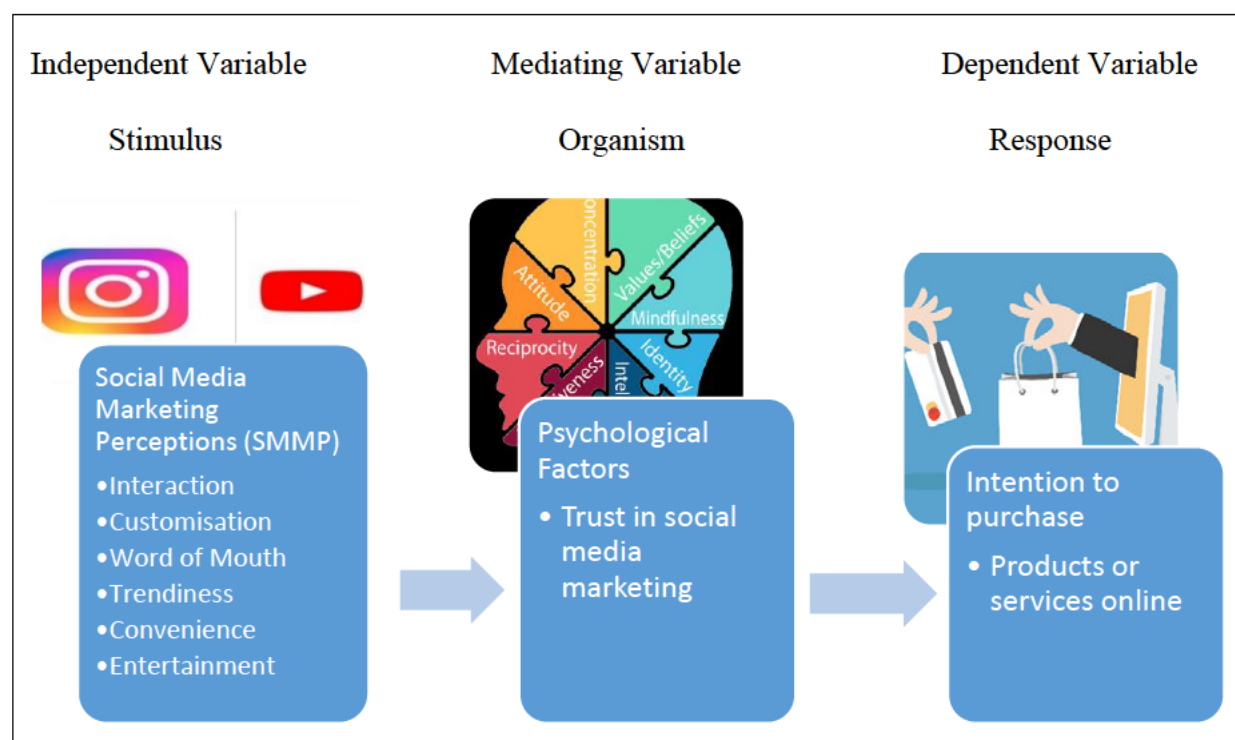


Figure 5: Conceptual Framework

Source: (Author construction)

2.11. Chapter Summary

An overview of recent research relevant to the study's emphasis on South African Generation-Z's social media marketing and purchasing intents during the coronavirus pandemic was provided in this chapter. The chapter was structured into three main parts, each of which addresses a distinct aspect of the study. Perceptions of Social Media Marketing Amongst Generation-Z that focused on the existing literature regarding how Generation-Z perceives and engages with social media marketing. By examining prior research, the study was able to assess how Generation-Z's attitudes towards social media marketing might have evolved or adapted during the Covid-19 pandemic. The second section focused on the factors that motivate purchase decisions among Generation-Z consumers. These factors included convenience, interaction, trendiness, entertainment, customisation, word-of-mouth, and trust. These factors are crucial in determining how social media marketing efforts can effectively target and engage Generation-Z consumers intentions to purchase. The literature review then explored the specific impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Generation-Z consumers' buying behavior in

the context of social media marketing from a global and South African context. From the above, the underpinning theoretical model for this study was the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. Based on the S-O-R model, this study has examined the SMMP (stimulus) effect on Generation-Z trust in social media marketing (organism), which subsequently influences the consumer intention to purchase (response). The research approach employed in this study would be explained in the upcoming chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the preferred research approach that was utilised to achieve the research objectives. The research problem, research questions, research objectives, and research philosophy are all outlined in this chapter. The chapter also covers sample size, sampling technique, and the target population. A review of the study's data analysis, data quality control, and data collection techniques concludes the chapter.

The following section outlines the study's research questions and research objectives.

3.2. Research questions

- 3.2.1. What are the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 3.2.2. What is the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 3.2.3. What is the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 3.2.4. What is the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- 3.2.5. What is the impact of trust in social media marketing regarding perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase by Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?

3.3. Research objectives

- 3.3.1. To explore the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.3.2. To understand the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 3.3.3. To understand the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.3.4. To understand the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.3.5. To determine the impact of trust in social media marketing regarding perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase by Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.4. Research paradigm

A research paradigm, also known as ‘research philosophy’, according to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019:130), “a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge”. Saunders *et al.* (2019) positivism, interpretivism, critical realism, pragmatism, and postmodernism are the five main research philosophies. The researcher embraced positivism as opposed to interpretivism, critical realism, pragmatism, and postmodernism because it relies on empirical data that describes the findings in an objective manner. These philosophies are associated with their own epistemology, ontology, and axiology (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Adhering to the positivism school of thought would require the researcher to detach himself or herself from the study during data collection. According to Abbadia (2022:1) states that “epistemology is the study of knowledge that focuses on the validity, extent and ways of gaining knowledge”. Thus, in a positivist paradigm, knowledge can be obtained systematically and scientifically. Accordingly, this study has adopted a quantitative approach to obtain the data, thus ensuring that biases and subjectivity are reduced in the research process.

Dudovskiy (2022) explains that ontology focuses on the nature of reality. Moreover, ontology relates to whether social entities are perceived as objective or subjective. Ontology, to put it simply, is the interpretation of the nature of existence or reality. In association with a positivist paradigm, the stance will be that there is an objective reality that exists independently of the researcher’s perception. This is supported by Park, Konge, and Artino (2022), that positivists assert that knowledge can and must be created objectively, without the researcher's influence. Thus, positivists maintain that researchers and participants can be separated to reduce influence or biases. In this study, the researcher used online self-administered questionnaires, reducing

the researcher's influence over the data. Axiology is concerned with the function of values in the research process. Axiology, in particular, focuses on how researchers manage their own values as well as respondents' values. (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). By giving the respondents an online, self-administered questionnaire to complete, the researcher in this study attempted to maintain objectivity while gathering data. This approach prevented researcher interference as the respondents were able to complete the questionnaire in their own time and detach from the researcher. In so doing, 'a value-free' data collection process was attained.

Thus, allowing the researcher to become neutral would ensure that the research is not influenced by the researcher's feelings or beliefs (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, positivism was the selected research paradigm for this study, as this philosophy is associated with natural science. According to Saunders *et al.* (2019:144), "Positivism relates to the natural science and entails working with an observable social reality to produce law-like generalisation".

Thus, the researcher adopted this research paradigm based on the research questions which sought to investigate relationships among different variables which require a quantitative approach with statistical analysis of data in order to obtain a more accurate picture. Moreover, positivism was best suited for this study as it allowed the data not to be influenced by human interpretation and biases (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). According to Pereira (2017), positivism is closely associated with a quantitative research method. Saunders *et al.* (2019) state that positivism provides unambiguous and accurate knowledge. Additionally, the researcher was objective and disengaged from the research and data by using positivism as a research paradigm in this study, which prevented the researcher from influencing the findings (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

3.5. Research design

According to Saunders *et al.* (2019), a research design is a general plan on how the researcher would answer the research questions that are aligned with the research objectives; the design specifies how data would be collected and analysed. Moreover, a research design is a crucial element that directs a research problem (Bairagi and Munot, 2019). In research there are three common designs that are used, namely, exploratory, descriptive and casual. The researcher embraced a descriptive approach instead of an explanatory, exploratory, or evaluative one. According to McCombes (2019), descriptive research can be described as an accurate and

systematic study in which the target population of interest is represented. The researcher can identify specific trends and characteristics that occur during the research. A descriptive approach is associated with a quantitative study (McCombes, 2020).

3.5.1. Hypotheses of the study

Hypothesis 1 (alternate) - There is a significant relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hypothesis 1 (null) - There is no significant relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hypothesis 2 (alternate) - There is a significant relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hypothesis 2 (null) - There is no significant relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hypothesis 3 (alternate) - There is a significant relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hypothesis 3 (null) - There is no significant relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hypothesis 4 (alternate) - Trust in social media marketing mediates the relationship between the perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase by Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hypothesis 4 (null) -Trust in social media marketing does not mediate the relationship between the perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase by Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.6. Research approaches

A researcher had to choose between three methodological options: mixed, quantitative, and qualitative. To differentiate the methodological choice of quantitative and qualitative is to differentiate between numerical data and non-numerical data (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Quantitative research involves numeric data that can use either a mono-method or multi-method quantitative approach. The mono-method is the use of a single data collection technique. Whereas multi-method is the use of more than one data collection method (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Quantitative research is associated with positivism philosophy. In addition, this approach is associated with a deductive approach that refers to when data is collected, and then analysed and tested against a theory. Research strategies that are associated with a quantitative study are survey and experimental strategies. Methods of data collection in quantitative research are rigorous and structured (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Creswell (2013) provides some key strengths of the methodology, including reliability, allowing the researcher to explore and understand the relationships between variables. Saunders *et al.* (2019) explained that the researcher is independent and does not influence the findings, reducing the bias factor. Singh (2021:47) states, “This approach is useful for a large scale of assessment, and it is described as a method that gathers data in a numerical form which can then be transformed into diagrams and statistics”.

Qualitative research involves non-numerical data, including images, words, videos, and similar data (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Paradigms that is associated with qualitative research is interpretivism (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Interpretivism as opposed to positivism is subjective by its nature. There are several types of qualitative research designs and these include action research, focus groups, interviews, and case studies. Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research provides an opportunity for descriptive and exploratory research that allows a deeper understanding of a study. One drawback of this approach were that analysing the data is time-consuming and challenging.

Mixed methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative methods (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Creswell (2014) notes that mixed methods are used in a study that uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative. According to Molina-Azorin, Bergh, Corley, and Ketchen (2017), pragmatism and critical realism are the philosophy associated with this approach. Saunders *et al.* (2019) contend that research that adopts mixed-methods has a pluralistic outlook.

The researcher adopted a quantitative approach instead of qualitative or mixed methods. Saunders *et al.* (2016: 116) highlighted that “quantitative research examines the relationship between variables which are measured numerically and analysed using a range of statistical and graphical techniques”. Saunders *et al.* (2019), The positivist school of thought is linked with quantitative research. The research paradigm selected is positivism which is associated with quantitative studies. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) state that quantitative research enables the researchers to project findings using statistical analyses and numbers. Moreover, quantitative research has enhanced the study by allowing the researcher to examine social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African Generation-Z consumers during the coronavirus pandemic. Moreover, it allows the researcher to analyse independent, mediating, and dependent variables involved in the study.

3.7. Research methodologies

There are several methodologies associated with qualitative and quantitative research. For example, in qualitative research, there are case studies, action research, grounded theory, and ethnography research.

Case studies are described as an exploration of complex issues usually associated with qualitative approaches (Kapur, 2018). There are limitations associated with case studies, which include data gathering, which can be exhaustive and time-consuming. Case studies have also been described as lacking in scientific reliability, rigour, and generalisation. The research paradigm embraced in this study was positivism which relates to a law-like generalisations of the data (Pereira, 2017). Action research ‘is focused on action for change’. This methodology involves identifying a problem that exists and gathering data to provide a tentative solution (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). According to Bryman, Burgess, Burgess, Hirschman and Burgess (2011:1),

“Action research can be defined as an approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in diagnosing the problem and developing a solution based on the diagnosis”. A disadvantage of this strategy is that there is a lack of repeatability and rigour. Grounded theory can be described as a systemic set of procedures used in research (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Saunders *et al.* (2016) explain that grounded theory tends to be inductive. According to Hassan (2022), grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology which aims to formulate theories based on data grounded in empirical reality in a research context. There are limitations related to the use of grounded theory which include, time-consuming, subjectivity, lack of structure, and data overload (Hassan, 2022). Ethnography consists of examining a particular culture of a social group in a study (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). It is associated with qualitative research in the area of anthropology (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Sekaran and Bougie (2016) have noted that the long duration required for observing the behaviour of a social group is one of the major limitations of this methodology.

In quantitative research, there are experiments and surveys.

Experiments are highly scientific and may entail a researcher manipulating a study's independent variable to measure its effect on the dependent variable (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Saunders *et al.* (2019), experiments tend to focus on the impact of changes to the independent variable/s on the dependent variable in a study and fall under the rubric of casual designs. Experimental designs are time-consuming and have strict protocols and high ethical standards. Consequently, this could lead to an increase in a study's time horizon and the data collection process's lead time (Pereira, 2017). Surveys are used in quantitative research and may involve the use of questionnaires that are distributed to a large sample of respondents. There are several benefits associated with surveys. For example, surveys allow for the use of questionnaires to be distributed to a diverse sample and over a wide geographical area. Furthermore, surveys are also an economical way of collecting quantitative data and this allows for statistical tests to be computed (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). This methodology was useful in descriptive research where relationships between different variables are examined. In keeping with the positivist ideology and the quantitative technique, a survey was chosen to answer the research questions in this study.

3.8. Time horizon

There are two types of time horizons longitudinal studies and cross-sectional studies. Longitudinal studies are utilised where the researcher collects data from the same sample repeatedly over an extended period of time (Bell, Bryman, Harley, and Hirschsohn, 2021). Whereas, cross-sectional studies refer to data gathering, which occurs once the duration of days, weeks, or months to answer the research question and the research objective of the study (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). A cross-sectional study, also known as a one-shot study, is described as a time horizon that occurs at a particular time, as most studies have time constraints (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). The time horizon adopted for this study was cross-sectional.

3.9. Research environment

Research environment, the term often used is the location of the study. The Edgewood campus, the Pietermaritzburg campus, Howard College, the Westville campus, and the School of Medicine are the five primary sites that make up the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The location for this study was aimed at two campuses, Westville and Pietermaritzburg. The rationale for selecting Westville and Pietermaritzburg Campuses was due to the campuses having a student population that belongs to the field of commerce with a focus on marketing. Consequently, as marketing is taught in undergraduate and postgraduate curricula, students have a fundamental grasp of the subject. UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee also provided the researcher with a gatekeeper's letter and ethical clearance, (Approval number: HSSREC/00003507/2021) to conduct research on these study sites.

3.10. Target population and sampling

3.10.1. Target population

Hair, Wolfinbarger, Ortinau, and Bush (2014) explain that a target group is made up of people whom a researcher wants to include in a certain study. In contrast, a sample is a subset of the intended audience from which a researcher may draw conclusions about the population as a whole. (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). For this study, the target population were all Generation-Z students (18 -26 years) registered for degrees (undergraduate and postgraduate) in commerce in the School of Management, IT and Governance, University of KwaZulu-Natal, both Westville and Pietermaritzburg Campuses.

The rationale for the target population was that the cohort was exposed to marketing concepts and theories in their curriculum. The Data Management Information (DMI) online system at the University of KwaZulu-Natal provided a list of enrolled students. According to the latest DMI, the total population consists of 6560, which includes undergraduate and postgraduate students.

3.10.2. Sampling size and sampling method

A sample is characterised as a portion of the population that is intended to be observed for a research. (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). In addition, a sample, according to Ruesink (2010), is chosen as a subset of the entire population. The subset of individuals the researcher chooses from the population is, thus, the sample size. The Data Management Information (DMI) indicates that 6560 students, including undergraduate and graduate students, made up the study's total population. The sample size for the study was 364 after being determined using the sample size table. The sample size for this study totaled 323 participants. This sample was deemed adequate for a study of this nature. In estimating the sample size, a 95% confidence level was used as the benchmark and a 5 % margin of error. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), a recommended sample size for a target population of 6560 is approximately 364 participants. The actual sample size of 323 participants represented no material difference to Sekaran and Bougie's (2016) recommendation. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) depict the suitable sample size based on the total population size (Table 1 below).

Table 1: Sekaran and Bougie’s population-to-sample size table

<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	100000	384

Source: Sekaran and Bougie, (2016: 237)

Two sampling approaches exist, according to Saunders *et al.* (2019): non-probability sampling and probability or representative sampling. Probability sampling involves a random selection of the population. Probability sampling consists of various sampling methods such as simple random, systematic, stratified, and multi-stage cluster sampling (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

Simple random sampling refers to a known and equal chance of respondents being selected. However, simple random sampling limitations can become cumbersome and costly, and the population must be contentiously updated (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Systematic sampling is defined as “drawing every *n*th element in a population” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016:243). Stratified random sampling involves the population's grouping in the study's context. Multi-stage clustering sampling is used when the researcher has difficulty formulating the target population (Mlambo, 2018). Thus, the probability sampling technique was not used as the main sampling method in this study. This is contradictory as probability sampling is the most suitable for positivist studies.

Non-probability sampling consists of snowball, purposive, convenience, and quota sampling. Snowballing sampling is used when the researcher finds it difficult to identify participants from the population. This involves a tendency of bias as the researcher would tend to find

participants who are likely to share the same traits and characteristics (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). This method of sampling was not suitable for this study.

Purposive sampling involves participants being selected based on expertise. The sample should meet a requirement to be chosen (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Quota sampling can be associated with the proportion of stratified sampling, which is the fixture of certain groups (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). The researcher has not utilised these methodologies of sample selection.

The study employed convenience sampling methods, chosen for their suitability in the context of this research. This sampling approach facilitated easy access to participants within the population, ensuring a swift, cost-effective, and convenient involvement. The method took into consideration factors such as proximity and accessibility, aligning with the study's specific requirements (Mlambo, 2018). In comparison to alternative sampling methods such as snowballing, purposive, and quota sampling, convenience sampling emerged as the preferred choice for its expeditious data collection, cost-effectiveness, and convenience when dealing with large sample sizes (Gaille, 2020). The advantages of this method extend to its affordability, making it particularly advantageous for researchers working within budget constraints (Singh, 2021). Notably, convenience sampling proves instrumental in efficiently gathering data from substantial sample sizes within a limited timeframe (Gaille, 2020).

3.11. Data collection

3.11.1. Data collection instrument

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and challenges, the researcher used a self-administered questionnaire via Google Forms. According to Sivakumar (2019), Google Forms is a web-based application utilised to develop forms for data collection purposes. Moreover, Google Forms has the potential to collect any amount of data, is easy to control, and user friendly to respondents or participants (Sivakumar, 2019). In addition, Mahmood (2019) provides a detailed description of the online application. Google Forms are helpful for collecting data on various topics, and the online application is fully featured with tools to assist the creator in developing customised forms and themes. Lastly, the responses that have been received from participants can be exported in the form of an Excel spreadsheet or Google spreadsheet (Mahmood, 2019). Therefore, with a Google Form from the Excel spreadsheet and Google

sheet, the researcher can apply formulas and conditional formatting to analyse the data, enabling better interpretation of the data collected (Mahmood, 2019). Additionally, employing a questionnaire has advantages in terms of cost and time efficiency, allowing anonymity of respondents, high return rate, and easy of scientific and statistical analysis (Singh, 2021).

3.11.2. Construction of questionnaire

A quantitative research methodology was used in the research. Online questionnaires were administered electronically. The online questionnaire (Appendix C) included an introductory section, a welcome screen, and a cover letter explaining the study's purpose and offering instructions to complete the questionnaire (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). The cover letter outlined all ethical protocols of the study and included the title of the study, researcher and supervisor details, ethical approval number, and details of the study's participation, such as benefits and risks associated with the study. This was followed by an informed consent form to which participants were required to provide consent before engaging with the study. That then led the participants to a screening question where the participant must answer if they are within the age category (18-26 years of age) if answered yes it would allow participants to proceed. If not the Google form would submitted, as the respondent did not meet the desired target population. The online questionnaire was formulated into four sections:

- Section one represented the demographics of participants which is vital to understand the representation of the target population.
- Section two focused on the perceptions of social media marketing of Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Section three paid careful attention to the intentions to purchase online during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Section four examined trust in the social media marketing environment during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The self-administered online questionnaire adopted the use of closed-ended questions as it provides various strengths such as ease of coding of participants' responses, is user-friendly, and enables participants to respond faster, lowering the amount of time needed to finish the survey (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014). Moreover, questions consisted of closed-ended questions that were positively and negatively worded to provide a balanced view. In Section One, the

participants' personal information, including age, gender, race, education level, and campus, was recorded using a nominal scale. Saunders *et al.* (2019) explain that nominal scales are utilised in quantitative studies and provide reliability to the study. Sections two, three, and four adopted a Likert scale of 5 (Five) points (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree). With 1 (One) representing Strongly Disagree and 5 (Five) representing Strongly Agree. According to Saunders *et al.* (2019), a Likert scale allows participants to indicate how strongly they disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree with a statement or series of statements. The questionnaire ended with a closing that indicates the submission has been successfully submitted.

Questionnaires are distributed in various ways such as face-to-face, emails, internet, and postal. With the Covid-19 pandemic, government regulations, and social distancing, using the University of KwaZulu-Natal notice system, surveys were distributed online. The UKZN Inner Web notice system is “a web-based system and can be used to read existing notices or place a notice of your own” (UKZN Inner Web, 2021:1). The uploaded questionnaire included the research title, researcher and supervisor details, ethical clearance number, and the registrar's letter of approval for the gatekeeper were all included in the submitted questionnaire. In addition, with the web questionnaire, participants can access the questionnaire via a web browser using a hyperlink on their smartphones, iPads, computers, or laptops (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). This method of distribution provides numerous advantages such as quick responses, instant analysis of data, larger target audiences can be reached, less cost, and efficiency in collecting data due to the nature of the pandemic. Table 2 shows the constructs, variables and the primary sources from which scales were adopted for this study.

Table 2: Measuring instruments

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Questions</i>	<i>Primary sources from which scales were adapted</i>
<i>Interaction</i>	Do you use social media to gain information on brands?	Adapted from Naidu (2018).
	Social media marketing allows brands to interact with its followers and fans?	Adapted from Yadav and Rahman (2017).

Customisation

Social media allows conversation and exchange of information to others? Adapted from Bilgin (2018).

Social media marketing offers accurate information on products and services? Adapted from Yadav and Rahman (2017).

Social media platforms allows you to compare prices online? Adapted from Ramnarain (2011).

can easily access information that I need due to social media accounts of the brand? Adapted from Bligin (2018).

Word of Mouth

I would share my online purchase experience with friend and acquaintances on social media? Adapted from Yadav and Rahman (2017).

I Would Encourage My Friends And Acquaintances To Use Social Media For Purchase Decisions? Author's Construction.

Reviews become the reason for my intentions to purchase? Adapted from Gupta and Singharia (2019).

Trendiness

I follow brands on social media to engage and learn more about the products and services? Author's Construction.

Social media marketing shows the newest information on brands and trends? Adapted from Kim and Ko (2012).

Does social media allow you to become more aware of new brands in the market? Adapted from Soe and Park (2018).

Convenience

Would you say social media marketing is more effective than traditional marketing? Adapted from Ramnarain (2011).

<i>Entertainment</i>	Does social media marketing help you save time when making a purchase decision?	Adapted from Mlambo (2018).
	Is social media marketing convenient for your lifestyle?	Adapted from Ramnarain (2011).
	Browsing on social media platforms is convenient as you can browse whenever and wherever you like?	Adapted from Naidu (2018).
	Social media allows me to recall a brand?	Adapted from Soe and Park (2018).
	I am always aware of what is new in the market via social media?	Adapted from Soe and Park (2018).
<i>Purchase intentions of Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.</i>	The content shared on social media is enjoyable?	Adapted from Soe and Park (2018).
	When purchasing online, do you browse on social media platforms?	Adapted from Gammie (2011).
	Does social media marketing reviews influence your purchase intention?	Adapted from Khan (2019).
	Social media marketing had a positive effect on my online purchase intention?	Adapted from Purtri and Tiarawati (2021).
	Information about brands that are shared by friends and family on social media influence my purchase intention?	Adapted from Tabassum, Khwaja and Zaman (2020).
	During the Covid-19 pandemic, I intended to purchase online?	Adapted from Koch, Frommeyer and Schwew (2020).
	Do you prefer to purchase online?	Author's Construction.

Trust

During Covid-19 it became a trend to purchase online?	Author's Construction.
My online purchase intentions were based on convenience during the Covid-19 pandemic?	Author's Construction.
My online purchase intentions were based on interaction during the Covid-19 pandemic?	Author's Construction.
My online purchase intentions were based on word-of-mouth during the Covid-19 pandemic?	Author's Construction.
My online purchase intentions were based on the customisation during the Covid-19 pandemic?	Author's Construction.
My online purchase intentions were based on trends during the Covid-19 pandemic?	Author's Construction.
My online purchase intentions were based on entertainment during the Covid-19 pandemic?	Author's Construction.
I found my online purchase intentions increased during the Covid-19 pandemic?	Author's Construction.
I feel it is important for me to trust the brand while making an online purchase decision?	Adapted from Gupta and Singharia (2019).
Having online trust makes your feel more confident in your intention to purchase?	Author's Construction.
Does having a prior online purchase experience build trust between you and the brand?	Author's Construction.

Does a trustworthy social media platform motivate your intention to purchase?	Author's Construction.
Does seeking advice from friends and family on a brand help gain trust?	Author's Construction.
Would you say that the Covid-19 pandemic led you to develop online trust when purchasing online?	Author's Construction.
Having online trust is essential when purchasing online?	Author's Construction.
Social media marketing facilitates the building of trust between consumer and brand?	Adapted from Choudhary, Jhamb and Sharma (2019).
Social media marketing strengthens and enhances the relationship of brands with consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?	Adapted from Choudhary, Jhamb and Sharma (2019).
Social media marketing strategies like promo codes and free delivery are effective way to win consumers hearts during the Covid-19 pandemic?	Adapted from Choudhary, Jhamb and Sharma (2019).

The paradigm items were scored using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree) were the respective values.

Source: Researcher's operationalisation of the constructs of the study.

3.11.3. Pilot testing

A pilot study was a mini version of the full study. The research instrument should constantly be tested or piloted to a few respondents who are likely to complete it (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). This allows the researcher to adjust and amend the research instrument to ensure that it can provide successful results. The purpose of the pilot study was to ascertain the following: time taken to complete questions, the sensitivity of questions, comprehension of questions, and whether questions are ambiguous (Lenz, Schmid, and Wilrich, 2012; Pereira, 2017). In addition, conducting a pilot test was a preliminary study that aids the researcher in identifying any errors that may exist in the research instrument.

Moreover, it aims to identify if the questions on the questionnaire are ambiguous or biased. The questionnaire was created on Google Forms prior to pilot testing. The researcher conducted a few submissions of how the questionnaire would perform. Twenty Generation-Z students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal participated in the pilot study of the questionnaire. This ensured that the research instrument was clear, easy to comprehend, user-friendly, and understandable. Lastly, the researcher was able to ascertain that the questionnaire was completed by the participants without the need for help. After the pilot testing was completed, no modifications were needed.

3.12. Data quality control

3.12.1. Validity

Validity in reference to questionnaires refers to the ability of the researcher's questionnaire to measure what it intends to measure, such as variables (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). When it comes to a questionnaire, researchers distinguish between three basic categories of validity: construct validity, criterion-related validity, and content validity (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). According to Singh (2021:55), "Content validity assesses whether a test is representative of all aspects of the construct". Saunders *et al.* (2019) explain that content validity in relation to a questionnaire provides sufficient and adequate coverage of the investigated questions. According to Hlope (2021), consensus among experts is necessary to select instrument items that are pertinent to a construct in order to attain content validity. In addition, Rutherford-Hemming (2015) states that previous research can be used to achieve content validity. Whereas criterion-related validity,

also referred to as predictive validity is the ability to measure “the questions” to ensure accurate predictions (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:517).

Moreover, if a researcher is using criterion-related validity, it means that the researcher had to compare the data collected with that specified in a criterion from another (Singh, 2021). The degree to which the research instrument and the questionnaire measure the intended construct is known as construct validity. (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Sekaran and Bougie (2016:222) explains “Construct validity testifies to how well the results obtained from the use of the measure fit the theories around which the test is designed”. Validity for the study was ensured in the questionnaire as the questionnaire provided was uniform to ensure all forms of validity were established. The construct validity of the measuring instruments was assessed by conducting a factor analysis on SPSS Version 26. Essentially, factor analysis was on SPSS Version 26 using the Principal Components Method of factor extraction and a Varimax rotation of the factors. This has been covered in more detail in chapter 4 of this study.

3.12.2. Reliability

According to Saunders *et al.* (2019), reliability refers to consistency. It is important that even though the questionnaire is valid, it also needs to be reliable. This is to ensure that respondents interpret the question in the research instrument (questionnaire) in one way to produce consistent findings in different times or situations (Hard and Ford, 2014). The researcher assessed for reliability using the internal consistency test. More specifically, a Cronbach Coefficient Alpha was computed for the items that comprise the measuring instruments for perceptions of social media marketing, intention to purchase, and trust in social media marketing. The Cronbach Coefficient Alpha values range from 0 to 1.

The values of 0.7 or above indicate an acceptable level of reliability for a measuring instrument (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). In order to verify the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher also employed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling and Bartlett’s test of sphericity. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach’s Alpha. According to Analysis INN (2020:nd), “KMO is a test conducted to examine the strength of the partial correlation (how the factors explain each other) between the variables”. Bartlett’s test of sphericity is used to determine if the variance in research data sets is equal when data is determined to be normally distributed (Feldman, 2023). Oliver (2022:58) states, “Cronbach’s

alpha and reliability values were utilised to measure the internal consistency of the scale items”. In addition, Yad and Pathak (2016:125) explain that the “alpha level measures the extent to which an item responses correlate with each other”. These numbers vary from 0 to 1, with more internal consistency occurring when the value is closer to 1 (Abakah-Anaman, 2018). These results are presented in Chapter 4 of this study.

3.13. Data analysis

SPSS was used for the data analysis. Version 26. This statistical programme is licensed and made available by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It has various tools that allow the data to be represented in graphs, pie charts, and frequency distribution tables, which also allows for a better representation of data, enabling the researcher to understand and interpret the data gathered.

3.13.1. Descriptive statistics

Saunders *et al.* (2019) note that descriptive statistics allows the researcher to describe and compare variables numerically. Descriptive statistics focus on frequency and percentages, central tendency, and dispersion.

3.13.2. Frequencies and percentages

The number of times a variable happens in a certain event is known as its frequency, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2017). Masiya (2020:54) contends, “this value can be represented as a percentage of variables or sub-categories”. Moreover, percentages can be calculated from frequencies (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). In addition, Saunders *et al.* (2019) mention that the simplistic way to summarise data is through frequency distribution. Pie charts and bar graphs are useful for displaying percentages as well as frequencies. In order to illustrate biographical information such as age, gender, race, college, and educational attainment, the researcher calculated frequencies and percentages in this way.

3.13.3. Measures of central tendency

Central tendency is defined as a “generic term for statistics that can be used to provide an impression of those values for a variable that is common, middling or average” (Saunders *et*

al., 2019:789). There are three ways in which central tendency can be measured in research: mode, median, and mean, which is discussed in the following section.

Mode: is used to describe the value or number that appears most frequently (Masiya, 2020). Saunders *et al.* (2019) explain that mode is the value which is most frequently. “in descriptive data, the mode is the only measure of central tendency that can be interpreted sensibly” (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:599).

Median: is referred to as the middle value or the mid-point after values have been arranged from lowest to highest (Singh, 2021). In a quantitative study, it is possible to calculate the middle or median value by ensuring the data is arranged in ascending order, allowing the mid-point to be discovered (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). An advantage of the median is that it is not affected by large values in the distribution (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

Mean: the most frequently used measure of central tendency is the mean. The average or mean is calculated by dividing the total number of values in the data by the number of values. (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

3.13.4. Measures of dispersion

The way that data is distributed around the central tendency is described by dispersion measures (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Sekaran and Bougie (2017) explain that elements such as range, standard deviation, and variance are measures of dispersion. Saunders *et al.* (2019) mention calculating the difference between the lowest and highest variables once they have been arranged in a category or in ascending order; this is referred to as range. Whereas, if a researcher wants to describe and compare which variables differ from the mean, then the standard deviation is used. The distribution of numerical data around the mean is described by the standard deviation. Saunders *et al.* (2019:601) “If your data values are all close to the mean, then the mean is more typical than if they vary widely”. Thus, the standard deviation can detect the skewness of data and how close the values are to the mean. Variance can be defined as the square root of the standard deviation (Sekaran and Bougie, 2017). The smaller the variance, the closer individual data is to the mean (Saunders *et al.*, 2019).

3.13.5. Inferential statistics

Inferential statistics enable the researcher to form relationships or conclusions among variables, allowing certain judgments to be made when drawing a conclusion in a study (Sekaran and Bougie, 2017). The study assessed the strengths between dependent and independent variables to which Pearson correlation, regression analysis and hierarchical regression analysis would be utilised.

3.13.6. Pearson correlation coefficient (r)

Pearson correlation coefficient (r) shows the relationship between two variables and ascertains whether one variable is dependent on the other (Singh, 2021). According to Sekaran and Bougie (2017), any variable that was assessed at the ratio or interval level may be seen in terms of its bivariate association, strength, and direction in the Pearson correlation matrix. A coefficient can have a value between -1.0 and +1.0 and is denoted by the letter “r”. A positive correlation is denoted by a value of +1, whereas a negative correlation is represented by a number of -1 (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). A correlation analysis was computed on the study's different variables (perceptions of social media marketing, intention to purchase, and trust in social media marketing) using Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient.

3.13.7. Regression analysis

Regression analysis is used to analyse data and investigate the relations between variables in a study (Hlophe, 2021). Moreover, Chatterjee and Hadi (2015:1) state that

“To have accurate and reliable data for analysis of the relationships in the conceptual model, and due to the correlational nature of the study, regression analysis was used to analyse data. Regression analysis is a method for investigating functional relations between variables”.

This is supported by Uyanik and Güler (2013:234), who mention that “regression analysis is conducted to determine the relationship between variables and to make sold predication of the topic at hand”. Moreover, regression analysis provides insight into which variable has an impact (Gallo, 2014). Regression analysis was used to determine how the following variables

related to one another: perceptions of social media marketing and intention to purchase, perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing, and trust in social media marketing and intention to purchase.

3.13.8. Hierarchical regression

Flom (2023:1) states, “Hierarchical regression is a statistical method of exploring the relationships among, and testing hypotheses about, a dependent variable and several independent variables”. Through this approach, researchers can ascertain which variables in the model have the most predictive power for the dependent variable as well as any possible interactions between them. To find out how trust in social media marketing impacted the relationship between social media marketing and Generation-Z customers' intention to buy, a hierarchical regression analysis was performed.

3.14. Ethical considerations

This study was guided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal code of ethics. The University of KwaZulu-Natal registrar’s office provided the researcher with a gatekeeper letter before the data gathering procedure (Appendix A). Ethical clearance was provided via the Research Information Gateway (RIG) system (Appendix B). The research office provided the researcher with an ethical clearance certificate outlining the study and an ethical clearance number. This allowed the researcher to upload the research instrument to the university notice system together with the ethical clearance document. Approval number: HSSREC/00003507/2021; UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

The questionnaire contained the ethical clearance number, researcher details, supervisor details, an informed consent form that respondents are required to sign, and the gatekeeper’s letter to be attached to the notice system. Moreover, Nayak and Narayana (2019:34) state, “The privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of respondents are the key issues that need to be considered when conducting an online survey research”. Therefore, a letter of informed consent was given to the respondents, which stated that no personal information would be shared or utilised in the study and that the researcher and the School of Management, IT, and Governance would keep the respondents anonymous. Furthermore, there were no hazards or uncomfortable aspects to the research. Through the informed consent form, respondents were also made aware

that their involvement in the study was completely optional and that by doing so, they gave the researcher permission to utilise their answers (Appendix D).

3.15. Chapter Summary

The chapter focused on vital aspects that guide the research aspects, such as research philosophy, research design, selection samples, collection of data, and analysing of data, thus providing guidance to ensure that the research is able to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives. From the above, the study embraced the quantitative research approach underpinned by the positivistic research paradigm. The following chapter presents the results.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

The study results collected using the data collection tool are presented in this chapter. Furthermore, the chapter includes an examination of descriptive and inferential statistics, which have yielded the necessary data for addressing the research questions and accomplishing the research objectives. Additionally, this chapter delves into the demographic characteristics of the respondents and outlines the various analytical methods applied in this quantitative study.

To analyse the data gathered, the researcher used Version 26 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Results are presented in the form of graphs, pie charts, and frequency distribution tables, enhancing the comprehension and interpretation of the gathered information. The data presented provides greater insight and achieve the research objectives based on the study's research questions.

4.2. Descriptive statistical results

This section presents the descriptive statistical results generated from data collected via the research instrument (electronic survey) distributed online among UKZN Westville and Pietermaritzburg college students via the UKZN University Notice System.

4.2.1. Demographic profile of respondents

The study's target group comprised of Generation-Z students (18 -26 years) registered for degrees (undergraduate and postgraduate) in commerce in the School of Management, IT and Governance, University of KwaZulu-Natal, both Westville and Pietermaritzburg Campuses. The total population for the study was 6560, including undergraduate and postgraduate students, according to the Data Management Information (DMI). After being calculated by the sample size table, the sample size for the study was 364 Generation-Z students. Based on the response rate, the study received 335 respondents.

However, out of the 335 questionnaires, only 323 were usable for data analysis, representing an 89% response rate achieved. The researcher outlined the respondent demographics using frequencies and percentages. The demographic table represents 323 respondents, including age, gender, race, education level, and campus. The demographic profile is shown in Table 3, followed by a discussion.

Table 3: Frequency distribution of demographic variables

Demographic Profile of Respondents		n	%
Age	18 – 20	136	42.1%
	21 – 23	156	48.3%
	24 – 26	31	9.6%
	Total	323	100.0%
Gender	Male	99	30.7%
	Female	224	69.3%
	Total	323	100.0%
Race	Black African	183	56.7%
	Coloured	13	4.0%
	White	4	1.2%
	Indian/Asian	123	38.1%
	Total	323	100.0%
Education level	Undergraduate	262	81.1%
	Postgraduate	61	18.9%
	Total	323	100.0%
Campus	Westville Campus	290	89.8%
	Pietermaritzburg Campus	33	10.2%
	Total	323	100.0%

The age distribution of the 323 respondents to the study is displayed in Figure 6.

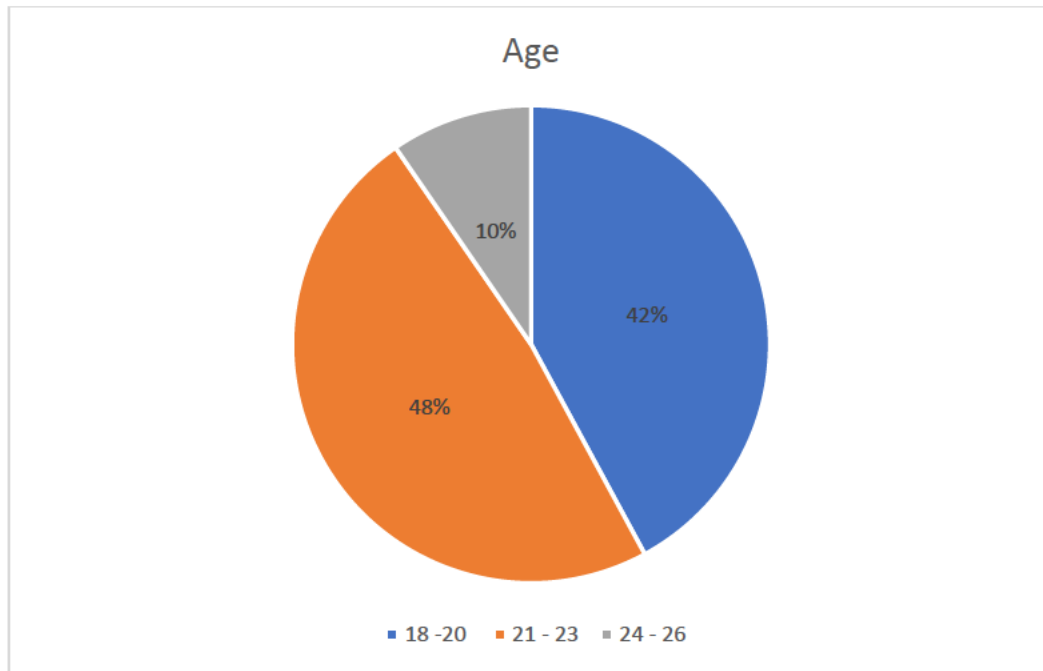


Figure 6: Age distribution of respondents

The highest percentage (48.3%) of the respondents were between 21 to 23 years of age. This was followed by (42.1%) of respondents representing 18 to 20 age group and (9.6%) of respondents representing 24 to 26 age group. Thus, the above illustration (Figure 6) indicates the age distribution of Generation-Z with the predominate age group of 21 to 23, followed by 18 to 20 and lastly, 24 to 26 age groups.

Figure 7. illustrates the gender of the 323 respondents of the study.

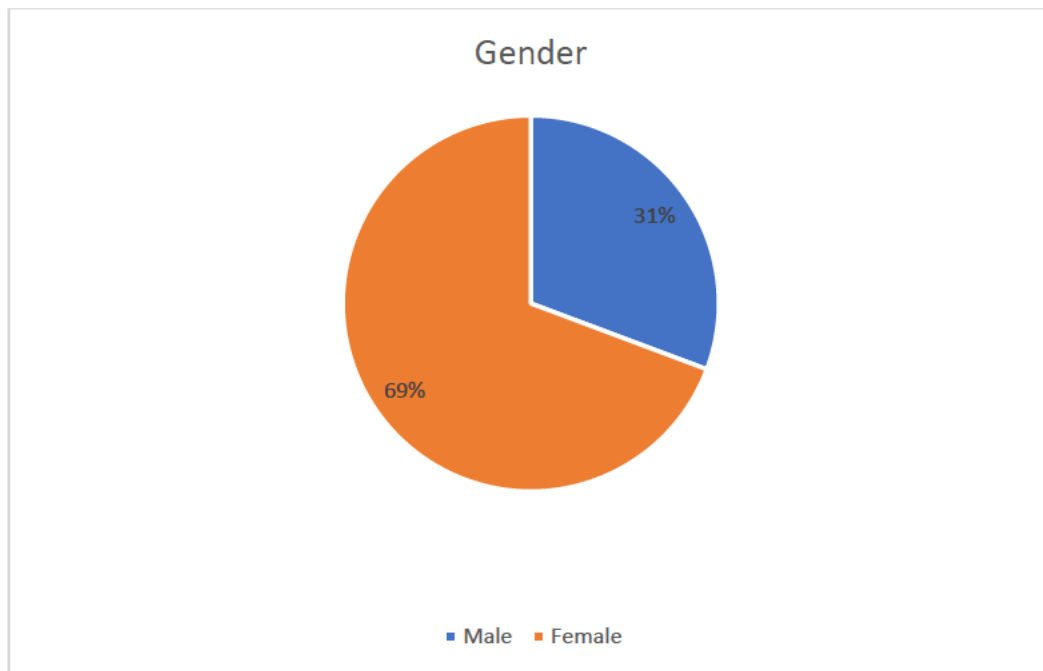


Figure 7: Gender distribution of respondents

Figure 7 shows the respondents' gender distribution. Most of the participants (69.3%) were female Generation-Z, whereas, (30.7%) represented the male Generation-Z population in the study. Figure 8. illustrates the race of the 323 respondents of the study.

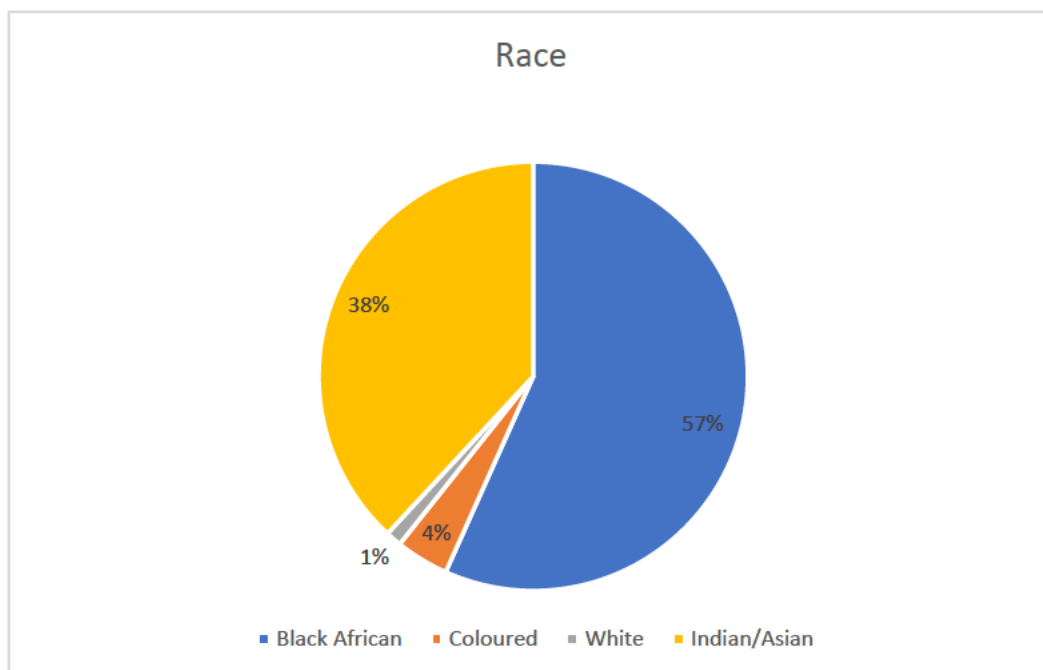


Figure 8: The race distribution of respondents

Majority of the respondents (56.7%) were Black African, followed by Indian/Asian (38.1%), Coloured (4.0%), and White (1.2%)

Figure 9. illustrates the education level of the 323 respondents of the study.

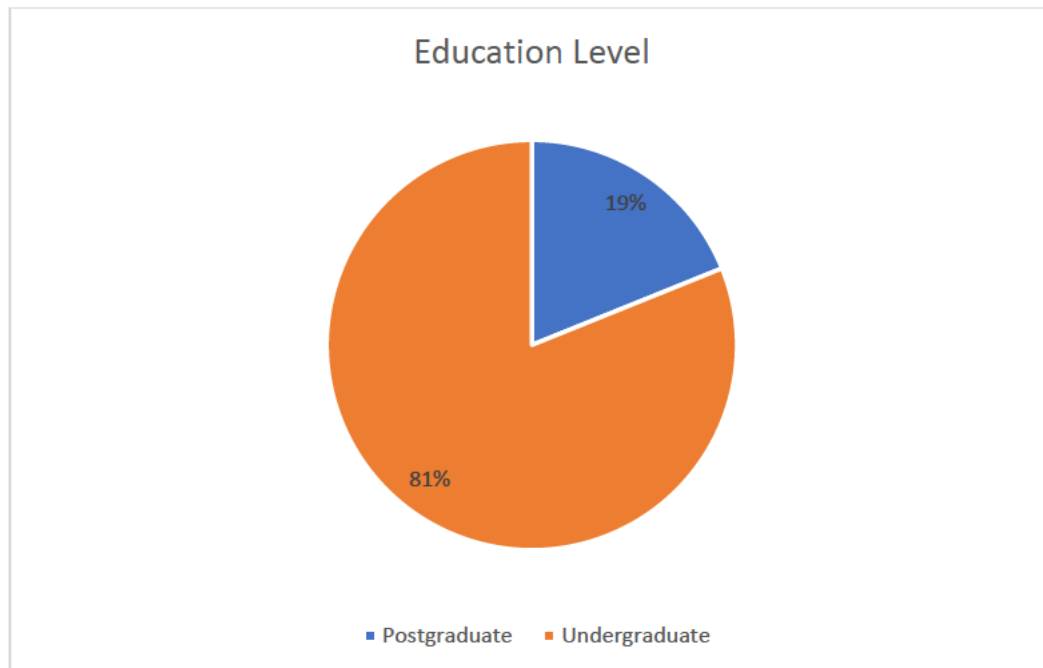


Figure 9: Education level distribution of respondents

The majority of the respondents (81.1%) included undergraduate Generation-Z, followed by postgraduate Generation-Z (18.9%).

Figure 10. illustrates the percentage and campus from which the participants were drawn.

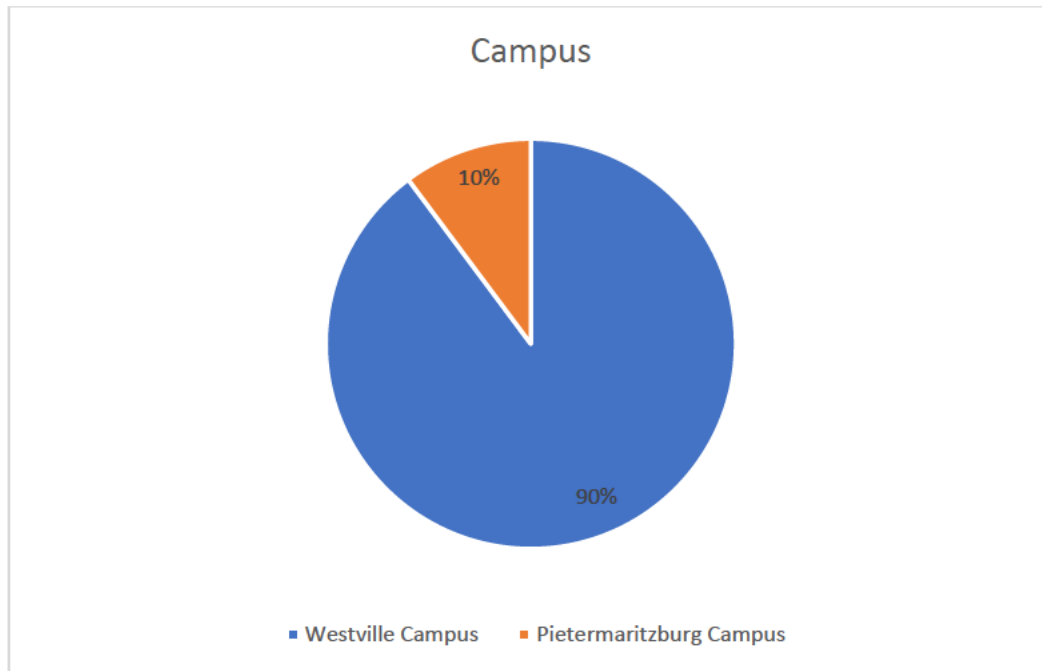


Figure 10: Campus representation of the study

Figure 10. shows that the majority of respondents (89.9%) belonged to the Westville Campus, followed by (10.2%) from Pietermaritzburg.

4.3. Reliability and validity of the questionnaire

According to Analysis INN (2020:nd) “KMO is a test conducted to examine the strength of the partial correlation (how the factors explain each other) between the variables”. The Bartlett’s test of sphericity is used to determine if the variance in research data sets are equal when data is determined to be normally distributed (Feldman, 2023) Table 4. below explains the interpretation of the KMO measure.

Table 4: KMO Measure Interpretation

KMO Measure	Interpretation
$KMO \geq 0.90$	Marvellous
$0.80 \leq KMO < 0.90$	Meritorious
$0.70 \leq KMO < 0.80$	Average
$0.60 \leq KMO < 0.70$	Mediocre
$0.50 \leq KMO < 0.60$	Terrible
$KMO < 0.50$	Unacceptable

Source: Analysis INN (2020: online). (<https://www.analysisinn.com/post/kmo-and-bartlett-s-test-of-sphericity/>)

Table 5: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for the study

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.912
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6613.985
	df	595
	Sig.	0.000

Table 5. highlights that the KMO statistic of 0.912 was higher than 0.5, and the corresponding Bartlett's test was significant with a p-value < 0.05. This is sufficient evidence to conclude that the sample size in the study was adequate for conducting the factor analysis. In Table 6, the factor analysis findings are displayed.

Table 6: Factor Analysis Showing the Factor Loadings

	Intentions to purchase online during Covid-19 pandemic	Trust in social media marketing	Interaction	Customisation	Convenience	Word of Mouth	Entertainment	Trendiness
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Social media enables information sharing with others			0.625					
Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through social media.			0.779					
It is easy to express my opinion through social media.			0.523					
Social media interacts regularly with its followers and fans.			0.514					
Social media facilitates personalised information search.				0.674				
Social media makes purchase				0.503				

recommendations as per my requirements								
I feel my needs are met by using social media.				0.595				
I would recommend my friends to visit social media platforms.						0.907		
I would encourage my friends and acquaintances to use social media platforms.						0.863		
I would like to share my online purchase experiences with friends and acquaintances on social media.								
The content on social media is up-to-date.								
Using social media is very trendy.								0.687
Anything trendy is available on social media platforms.								0.655
Social media allows me to shop anytime I want.					0.717			
Social media is always accessible.					0.567			
I can order products or services wherever I am using social media.					0.883			
Social media allows me to complete a transaction quickly.					0.746			
Using social media is fun.							0.658	
Contents shown on social media seem interesting.							0.754	
The content shared by the social media platform are enjoyable.							0.835	
I intend to purchase products or services online	0.730							

that are marketed on social media.								
Products and services that are advertised on social media will have a positive influence on my online purchase intentions.	0.636							
I am more likely to purchase some products or services online that are promoted on social media.	0.733							
I would buy some of the products or services online that are marketed on social media platforms if I had the money.	0.764							
I plan to purchase the products or services online that are advertised on social media platforms.	0.787							
Given the opportunity, I would like to purchase products or services online that are promoted on social media platforms.	0.812							
My willingness to purchase products or services online are high.	0.745							
Promises made on social media platforms are likely to be reliable.		0.535						
I do not doubt the honesty of marketing communications on social media platforms.		0.647						
I expect that the marketers on social media platforms will keep to their promises.		0.547						
I believe that the online purchasing		0.710						

transactions on social media platforms are fair.								
I believe that the marketers on social media platforms keep my interests in mind during most transactions		0.762						
I believe that the marketers on social media platforms are receptive to my needs.		0.859						
I believe that the marketers on social media platforms make good-faith efforts to address my concerns.		0.788						
I believe that I can trust the marketers on social media platforms when making my online purchases.		0.684						

Table 7: Summary Validity

Constructs	Items	KMO and Bartlett's Test	Eigenvalue	Explained Variation
Interaction	4	0,686	2,223	55,57%
Customisation	3	0,635	1,826	60,87%
Word-of-Mouth	3	0,616	2,256	75,21%
Trendiness	2	0,500	1,598	79,88%
Convenience	4	0,799	2,662	66,54%
Entertainment	3	0,725	2,494	83,14%
Intentions to purchase online during Covid-19 pandemic	7	0,896	4,429	63,27%
Trust in social media marketing	8	0,889	4,465	55,81%

Eight factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 emerged from the factor analysis. Based on the factor loadings, the factors can be identified and named as follows:

Factor 1 – Intentions to purchase online during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Factor 2 – Trust in social media marketing

Factor 3 – Interaction

Factor 4 – Customisation

Factor 5 – Convenience

Factor 6 – Word of mouth

Factor 7 – Entertainment

Factor 8 – Trendiness

These factors correspond appropriately with the theoretical constructs of the study. The reliability of each construct is illustrated in the next section.

Using Cronbach's Alpha, the questionnaire's reliability was assessed. Table 8 presents the findings.

Table 8: Reliability of the Questionnaire

Constructs	Items	Initial Cronbach Alpha	Item Removed	Revised Cronbach Alpha
Interaction	4	0.724		
Customisation	3	0.676		
Word-of-Mouth	3	0.822		
Trendiness	3	0.664	Trendiness (1)	0.748
Convenience	4	0.831		
Entertainment	3	0.897		
Intentions to purchase online during Covid-19 pandemic	7	0.902		
Trust in social media marketing	8	0.885		

Table 8. clearly shows that all the constructs demonstrate acceptable levels of reliability, as the Cronbach Alpha coefficient is consistently above 0.7 (Jaiswal and Kant, 2018). The construct of trendiness measured three items. The item removed was “the content on social media is up-to-date.” Removing item one in trendiness led to an improvement in the Cronbach Alpha from

0.664 to 0.748. As a result, item one, if not removed, would have impacted the overall reliability of the trendiness construct. Furthermore, the initial Cronbach Alpha for the trendiness construct was 0.664, which may have been considered below the acceptable threshold for reliability. According to Jaiswal and Kant (2018), acceptable levels of reliability as the Cronbach Alpha coefficient are consistently above 0.7. Hence, removing item one from the trendiness construct lowered the correlation with the other items in the construct. After removing Trendiness 1, the Cronbach Alpha increased to 0.748. This improvement suggests that the internal consistency or reliability of the Trendiness construct was enhanced by excluding this particular item. Thus indicating a level of consistency and reliability.

4.3.1. Key Dimensions of Study

The descriptive statistics that have been shown to be valid and reliable for each of the study's dimensions are highlighted in Table 9.

Table 9: Key Dimensions of Study

Key Dimensions of study	Mean	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Standard deviation	Min	Max
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Interaction	4.198	4.123	4.272	0.688	1	5
Customisation	3.658	3.574	3.742	0.764	1	5
Word-of-Mouth	3.634	3.531	3.737	0.938	1	5
Trendiness	4.224	4.133	4.315	0.834	1	5
Convenience	3.998	3.907	4.089	0.835	1	5
Entertainment	3.976	3.878	4.074	0.896	1	5
Intentions to purchase online during Covid-19 pandemic	3.608	3.517	3.698	0.825	1	5
Trust in social media marketing	2.961	2.882	3.040	0.719	1	5

A description of the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic is presented below.

RQ1: What are the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The mean scores are listed below in decreasing order of influence. The important dimension is viewed as stronger the higher the mean score.

- Trendiness (Mean = 4.224)
- Interaction (Mean = 4.198)
- Convenience (Mean = 3.998)
- Entertainment (Mean = 3.976)
- Customisation (Mean = 3.658)
- Word-of-Mouth (Mean = 3.634)

The research examined six key dimensions that focus on the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers, ranging from Trendiness to WOM. However, when compared to a maximum score of 5, the findings indicate that there was scope for improvement. In order to get a more profound comprehension of how South African Generation-Z saw social media marketing throughout the Covid-19 outbreak, descriptive statistics were examined. Therefore, the following section provides a detailed description of each of the key dimensions addressed in the study. Table 10. illustrates the results of six key dimensions that focus on the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers.

Table 10: Summary of key dimensions scale results

Key Dimensions	Statements/items	Frequency								
		SD	D	N	A	SA	No.	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation
Interaction	Social media enables information sharing with others.	15	1	7	63	237	323	4,57	5	0,931
Interaction	Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through social media.	9	2	12	86	214	323	4,53	5	0,835
Interaction	It is easy to express my opinion through social media.	11	26	86	113	87	323	3,74	4	1,049
Interaction	Social media interacts regularly with its followers and fans.	3	16	70	136	98	323	3,96	4	0,896
Customisation	Social media facilitates personalised information search.	6	11	78	138	90	323	3,91	4	0,905
Customisation	Social media makes purchase recommendations as per my requirements	9	24	72	136	82	323	3,80	4	0,994
Customisation	I feel my needs are met by using social media.	19	46	129	89	40	323	3,26	3	1,041
Word-of-Mouth	I would recommend my friends to visit social media platforms.	12	24	67	131	88	323	3,80	4	1,049
Word-of-Mouth	I would encourage my friends and acquaintances to use social media platforms.	14	29	74	128	78	323	3,70	4	1,065

The following are indicated: SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), N (Neutral), A (Agree), and SA (Strongly Agree)

Source: Researcher's construction from survey data (2023)

Word-of-Mouth	I would like to share my online purchase experiences with friends and acquaintances on social media.	23	50	82	109	59	323	3,41	4	1,161
Trendiness	The content on social media is up-to-date.	18	37	68	119	81	323	3,64	4	1,139
Trendiness	Using social media is very trendy.	7	9	48	116	143	323	4,17	5	0,933
Trendiness	Anything trendy is available on social media platforms.	8	9	33	109	164	323	4,28	5	0,933
Convenience	Social media allows me to shop anytime I want.	7	21	52	105	138	323	4,07	5	1,021
Convenience	Social media is always accessible.	7	23	54	111	128	323	4,02	5	1,023
Convenience	I can order products or services wherever I am using social media.	9	17	54	117	126	323	4,03	5	1,010
Convenience	Social media allows me to complete a transaction quickly.	8	27	72	109	107	323	3,87	4	1,047
Entertainment	Using social media is fun.	14	11	53	130	115	323	3,99	4	1,025
Entertainment	Contents shown on social media seem interesting.	10	10	59	137	107	323	3,99	4	0,959
Entertainment	The content shared by the social media platform are enjoyable.	10	11	68	133	101	323	3,94	4	0,968

The following are indicated: *SD* (Strongly Disagree), *D* (Disagree), *N* (Neutral), *A* (Agree), and *SA* (Strongly Agree)

Source: Researcher's construction from survey data (2023)

4.3.1.1. Interaction

While investigating the social media perceptions among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding their interactions with social media marketing, the findings reveal that 92.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement that “social media enables information sharing with others”, with a corresponding mean of 4.57,

mode of 5 and a standard deviation of 0.931. This is followed by 92.9% of respondents who agreed with the statement “Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through social media”, with a corresponding mean of 4,53 and a mode of 5 and a standard deviation of 0.835.

In addition, 72.4% of respondents agreed with the statement “Social media interacts regularly with its followers and fans”, with a corresponding mean of 3.96 and a mode of 4 and a standard deviation of 0.896. The statement that received the lowest result pertains to the statement of “It is easy to express my opinion through social media”, revealing a percentage of 61.9%, with a mean of 3.74 and a mode of 4 and a standard deviation of 1.049.

4.3.1.2. Customisation

While investigating social media perceptions among Generation-Z South African consumers regarding social media customisation during the Covid-19 pandemic, the findings revealed that 70,6% of the respondents agreed with the statement that “Social media facilitates personalised information search”, with a corresponding mean of 3.91, mode of 4, and standard deviation of 0.905. Moreover, 67.7% of the respondents agreed with the statement that “Social media makes purchase recommendations as per my requirements”, with a corresponding mean of 3.80, mode of 4, and standard deviation of 0.994. The lowest result produced a percentage of 39.9%, a mean of 3.26, a mode of 3, and a standard deviation of 1.041, with the statement “I feel my needs are met by using social media”.

4.3.1.3. Word-of-mouth

While exploring the social media perceptions among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding word-of-mouth, the findings revealed that 67.8% of the respondents concurred with the statement, “I would recommend my friends to visit social media platforms”. The corresponding mean score for this statement was 3.80, with a mode of 4 and a standard deviation of 1.049. 63.8% of the respondents agreed with the statement, “I would encourage my friends and acquaintances to use social media platforms”, with a corresponding mean score for this statement was 3.70, with a mode of 4 and a standard deviation of 1.065. On the other hand, the lowest result was observed in response to the statement, “I would like to share my online purchase experiences with friends and

acquaintances on social media,” with a percentage agreement of 52.0%. The mean for this statement was 3.41, with a mode of 4 and a slightly higher standard deviation of 1.161.

4.3.1.4. Trendiness

While exploring the social media perceptions among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding the trendiness of social media, the findings indicated that 84.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement “Anything trendy is available on social media platforms”, with a mean of 4.28, mode of 5 and standard deviation of 0.933. 80.2% of the respondents agreed with the statement “Using social media is very trendy”, with a mean of 4.17, mode of 5 and standard deviation of 0.933. The lowest result was found with the statement “The content on social media is up-to-date”, with a percentage of 61.9%, mean of 3.64, mode of 4, and standard deviation of 1.139.

4.3.1.5. Convenience

While investigating the social media perceptions among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding the convenience of social media, the findings indicated that 75.2% of the respondents agreed with the statement “Social media allows me to shop anytime I want”, with a mean of 4.07, mode of 5 and standard deviation of 1.021. The findings further indicate that 75.2 % of the respondents agreed with the statement “I can order products or services wherever I am using social media”, with a mean of 4.03, mode of 5 and standard deviation of 1.010. In addition, 74.0% of the respondents agreed with the statement “Social media is always accessible”, with a mean of 4.02, mode of 5 and standard deviation of 1.023. Whilst the lowest result was found with respect to the following statement “Social media allows me to complete a transaction quickly,” with a percentage of 66.9%, mean of 3.87, mode of 4, and standard deviation of 1.047.

4.3.1.6. Entertainment

While exploring the social media perceptions among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding social media entertainment, the findings indicated that 75.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement “Using social media is fun”, with a mean of 3.99, mode of 4 and standard deviation of 1.025. 75.5% of the respondents agreed with

the statement “Contents shown on social media seem interesting”, with a mean of 3.99, mode of 4 and standard deviation of 0.959. Whilst the lowest result was found with respect to the following statement “The content shared by the social media platform are enjoyable,” with a percentage of 72.4%, mean of 3.94, mode of 4 and standard deviation of 0.968.

The selected variables that were used in the study and their respective perceptions were determined. Results revealed that South African Generation-Z consumers perceive social media marketing in terms of six key dimensions:

- Trendiness
- Interaction
- Convenience
- Entertainment
- Customisation
- Word-of-mouth

These dimensions contribute to the multi-dimensional nature of perceived social media marketing.

4.4. Inferential statistical results

The links between the main aspects of social media marketing perceptions, social media marketing trust, and online purchase intentions during the Covid-19 pandemic are shown in this section. The discussion are centred on the statistical outcomes obtained from the correlation analysis between the key dimensions of trust in social media marketing and intention to purchase. It further explores how these findings contribute to addressing the research questions.

Table 11: Correlation: Key Dimensions of the Study

Correlation: Key Dimensions of the Study								
	Interaction	Customisation	Word-of-mouth	Trendiness	Convenience	Entertainment	Intention to purchase	Trust in social media
Interaction	1							
Customisation	.583**	1						
Word- of-mouth	.431**	.512**	1					
Trendiness	.469**	.403**	.491**	1				
Convenience	.423**	.485**	.412**	.496**	1			
Entertainment	.481**	.474**	.633**	.516**	.498**	1		
Intentions to purchase online during Covid-19 pandemic	.318**	.451**	.537**	.336**	.338**	.506**	1	
Trust in social media marketing	.260**	.370**	.491**	.222**	.311**	.376**	.539**	1

** - significant at $p < 0.01$

RQ2: What is the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The purpose of the following section is to determine how Generation-Z South African consumers' opinions of social media marketing relate to their propensity for purchasing during the Covid-19. Table 12 presents the findings.

Table 12: Summary of intentions to purchase online during Covid-19 pandemic scale results

Key Dimension	Statements/items	SD	D	N	A	SA	No.	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation
Intention	I intend to purchase products or services online that are marketed on social media.	15	34	106	121	47	323	3,47	4	1,016
Intention	Products and services that are advertised on social media will have a positive influence on my online purchase intentions.	12	34	117	114	46	323	3,46	3	0,985
Intention	I am more likely to purchase some products or services online that are promoted on social media.	14	40	84	118	67	323	3,57	4	1,082
Intention	I would buy some of the products or services online that are marketed on social media platforms if I had the money.	11	20	51	135	106	323	3,94	4	1,020
Intention	I plan to purchase the products or services online that are advertised on social media platforms.	11	42	89	127	54	323	3,53	4	1,025
Intention	Given the opportunity, I would like to purchase products or services online that are promoted on social media platforms.	11	25	68	143	76	323	3,77	4	1,006
Intention	My willingness to purchase products or services online are high.	19	44	78	114	68	323	3,52	4	1,140

The following are indicated: SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), N (Neutral), A (Agree), and SA (Strongly Agree)

Source: Researcher's construction from survey data (2023)

While investigating the social media perceptions among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding the intentional use of social media, the findings indicated that 74.6% of the respondents concurred with the statement “I would buy some of the products or services online that are marketed on social media platforms if I had the money”, with a mean of 3.94, mode of 4 and standard deviation of 1.020. The findings further indicate that 67.8% of the respondents concurred with the statement “Given the opportunity, I

would like to purchase products or services online that are promoted on social media platforms”, with a mean of 3.77, mode of 4 and standard deviation of 1.006. In addition, 57.3% of the respondents concurred with the statement “I am more likely to purchase some products or services online that are promoted on social media”, with a mean of 3.57, mode of 4 and standard deviation of 1.082.

Moreover, 56.3% of the respondents concurred with the statement “My willingness to purchase products or services online are high”, with a mean of 3.52, mode of 4 and standard deviation of 1.140. The findings indicated that 56.0% of the respondents concurred with the statement “I plan to purchase the products or services online that are advertised on social media platforms”, with a mean of 3.53, mode of 4 and standard deviation of 1.025. 52.0% of the respondents concurred with the statement “I intend to purchase products or services online that are marketed on social media”, with a mean of 3.47, mode of 4, and standard deviation of 1.016.

The lowest result was found with respect to the following statement “Products and services that are advertised on social media will have a positive influence on my online purchase intentions,” with a percentage of 49.5%, mean of 3.46, mode of 3, and standard deviation of 0.985.

This section describes the following regression analysis: R square and Adjusted R Square. R square is also referred to as the coefficient of determination that explains the variations in the dependent variable accounted for by the independent variable. Adjusted R square, as the name implies, adjusts the number of independent variables in the model and only improves when the new variable added improves the model; it decreases when the new variable does not affect the model. In addition, F statistic and p values are along with each other to determine if the results are significant (Glen, 2023).

Table 13: Model Summary Regression Analysis

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.602 ^a	0.362	0.350	0.66548	1.947
a. Independent: (Constant), AVE_Entertainment, AVE_Customisation, AVE_Trendiness, AVE_Convenience, AVE_Interaction, AVE_WOM					

b. Dependent Variable: AVE_intention to purchase

Table 13. presents the model summary from the regression analysis, revealing that all the independent variables included in the model were found to be explanatory, as they explained 36.2% of the variability in Intention to purchase with an R-squared of 0.362.

Table 14: ANOVA

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	79.437	6	13.240	29.896	.000 ^b
	Residual	139.944	316	0.443		
	Total	219.381	322			
a. Dependent Variable: AVE_Intention to purchase						
b. Independent: (Constant), AVE_Entertainment, AVE_Customisation, AVE_Trendiness, AVE_Convenience, AVE_Interaction, AVE_WOM						

Table 14. shows that from all the independent variables, at least one will have a significant relationship with intention to purchase because there is a significant model fit with a F-statistic of 29.896 with a corresponding p-value < 0.001, which is less than the established significance level of 0.001.

Table 15: Coefficients

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.163	0.256		4.546	0.000
	AVE_Interaction	-0.065	0.071	-0.054	-0.909	0.364
	AVE_Customisation	0.227	0.066	0.210	3.439	0.001
	AVE_WOM	0.260	0.055	0.296	4.748	0.000
	AVE_Trendiness	0.001	0.057	0.001	0.009	0.993
	AVE_Convenience	0.020	0.056	0.021	0.362	0.718
	AVE_Entertainment	0.216	0.059	0.234	3.652	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: AVE_Intention to purchase						

Table 15. reveals that the independent variables of Customisation, WOM, and Entertainment, have significant β coefficients of 0.210, 0.296, and 0.234, respectively, and all with p-values

of < 0.001 . The findings of the regression analysis indicates that customisation, word-of-mouth, and entertainment have significant relationships with intention to purchase. The correlation analysis also reveals that customisation, word-of-mouth, and entertainment are significantly and positively correlated with intention to purchase. Interaction, trendiness, and convenience were significantly and positively correlated with intention to purchase. However, the regression analysis revealed that interaction, trendiness, and convenience did not show any significant relationships with intentions to purchase. Therefore, based on the aforementioned findings, hypothesis one (alternate) is partially accepted and hypothesis one (null) is partially rejected.

RQ3: What is the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The purpose of the following section is to investigate the link between Generation-Z South African consumers' views of social media marketing and their level of trust during the Covid-19. An summary of the results and the level of trust in the social media marketing environment during the Covid-19 can be found in Table 16 below.

Table 16: Summary of trust in social media marketing environment during the Covid-19 pandemic scale results

Key Dimensions	Statements/items	SD	D	N	A	SA	No.	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation
Trust In Social Media Marketing	Promises made on social media platforms are likely to be reliable.	48	105	122	39	9	323	2,55	3	0,978
Trust In Social Media Marketing	I do not doubt the honesty of marketing communications on social media platforms.	39	110	126	41	7	323	2,59	3	0,933
Trust In Social Media Marketing	I expect that the marketers on social media platforms will keep to their promises.	21	69	111	91	31	323	3,13	3	1,061
Trust In Social Media Marketing	I believe that the online purchasing transactions on social media platforms are fair.	17	54	147	89	16	323	3,10	3	0,918
Trust In Social Media Marketing	I believe that the marketers on social media platforms keep my interests in mind during most transactions	19	56	133	94	21	323	3,13	3	0,973
Trust In Social Media Marketing	I believe that the marketers on social media platforms are receptive to my needs.	14	48	132	113	16	323	3,21	3	0,909
Trust In Social Media Marketing	I believe that the marketers on social media platforms make good-faith efforts to address my concerns.	18	57	134	95	19	323	3,12	3	0,957
Trust In Social Media Marketing	I believe that I can trust the marketers on social media platforms when making my online purchases.	38	60	149	64	12	323	2,85	3	0,992

The following are indicated: SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), N (Neutral), A (Agree), and SA (Strongly Agree)

Source: Researcher's construction from survey data (2023)

While exploring the social media perceptions among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding trust with social media, the findings indicated that 39.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I believe that the marketers on social media platforms are receptive to my needs", with a mean of 3.21, mode of 3 and standard deviation of 0.909.

Findings indicate that 37.8 % of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I expect that the marketers on social media platforms will keep to their promises", with a mean of 3.13, mode of 3 and standard deviation of 1.061. The findings reflects that 35,6% of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I believe that the marketers on social media platforms keep my interests in mind during most transactions", with a mean of 3.13, mode of 3 and standard deviation of 0.973.

Moreover, 35.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I believe that the marketers on social media platforms make good-faith efforts to address my concerns", with a mean of 3.12, mode of 3 and standard deviation of 0.957. In addition, 32.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I believe that the online purchasing transactions on social media platforms are fair", with a mean of 3.10, mode of 3 and standard deviation of 0.918.

Findings show that 23,5% of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I believe that I can trust the marketers on social media platforms when making my online purchases", with a mean of 2.85, mode of 3 and standard deviation of 0.992. The findings indicate that 14.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I do not doubt the honesty of marketing communications on social media platforms", with a mean of 2.59, mode of 3 and standard deviation of 0.933.

Whereas the lowest result was found with respect to the following statement "Promises made on social media platforms are likely to be reliable," with a percentage of 14.9%, mean of 2.55, mode of 3, and standard deviation of 0.978.

The following section provides a summary of regression analysis, which shows if there is a relationship between two or more variables.

Table 17: Model Summary Regression Analysis

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.524 ^a	0.275	0.261	0.61847	2.002
a. Independent: (Constant), AVE_Entertainment, AVE_Customisation, AVE_Trendiness, AVE_Convenience, AVE_Interaction, AVE_WOM					
b. Dependent Variable: AVE_Trust in social media marketing					

Table 17. presents the model summary from the regression analysis, revealing that all the independent variables included in the model were found to be explanatory, as they explained 27.5% of the variability in trust in social media marketing with an R-squared of 0.275.

Table 18: ANOVA

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	45.857	6	7.643	19.981	.000 ^b
	Residual	120.873	316	0.383		
	Total	166.729	322			
a. Dependent Variable: AVE_Trust in social media marketing						
b. Independent: (Constant), AVE_Entertainment, AVE_Customisation, AVE_Trendiness, AVE_Convenience, AVE_Interaction, AVE_WOM						

Table 18. shows that from all the independent variables, at least one will have a significant relationship with trust in social media marketing because there is a significant model fit with an F-statistic of 19.981 with a corresponding p-value < 0.001, which is less than the established significance level of 0.001.

Table 19: Coefficients

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.269	0.238		5.336	0.000

AVE_Interaction	-0.020	0.066	-0.020	-0.309	0.758
AVE_Customisation	0.129	0.061	0.137	2.109	0.036
AVE_WOM	0.299	0.051	0.390	5.870	0.000
AVE_Trendiness	-0.093	0.053	-0.108	-1.744	0.082
AVE_Convenience	0.093	0.052	0.108	1.776	0.077
AVE_Entertainment	0.061	0.055	0.075	1.103	0.271
a. Dependent Variable: AVE_Trust in social media					

Table 19. reveals that the independent variables of customisation and word-of-mouth have significant β coefficients of 0.137 and 0.390, respectively, and all have corresponding p-values of < 0.05 . The results of the regression analysis show that customisation and word of mouth are significantly related to trust in social media marketing. The findings of the correlation analysis also reveal that these dimensions are significantly and positively correlated with trust in social media marketing.

Interaction, trendiness, convenience, and entertainment are also significantly and positively correlated with trust in social media marketing. However, the regression analysis showed that these dimensions are not significantly related to trust in social media marketing. In light of the aforementioned findings, hypothesis two (alternate) is partially accepted and hypothesis two (null) is partially rejected.

RQ4: What is the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The following section is to ascertain the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results are depicted below.

Table 20: Model Summary Regression Analysis

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.539 ^a	0.290	0.288	0.69655	1.919
a. Independent: (Constant), AVE_Trust in social media marketing					
b. Dependent Variable: AVE_Intention to purchase					

Table 20. presents the model summary from the regression analysis, revealing that the independent variable of trust in social media marketing was found to be explanatory, as it explained 29% of the variability in intention to purchase with an R-squared of 0.290.

Table 21: ANOVA

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	63.640	1	63.640	131.169	.000 ^b
	Residual	155.741	321	0.485		
	Total	219.381	322			
a. Dependent Variable: AVE_Intention to purchase						
b. Independent: (Constant), AVE_Trust in social media marketing						

Table 21. shows that the independent variable, trust in social media marketing, has a significant model fit with a F-statistics of 131.169 with a corresponding p-value < 0.001, which is less than the established significance level of 0.001.

Table 22: Coefficients

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.778	0.164		10.817	0.000
	AVE_Trust in social media marketing	0.618	0.054	0.539	11.453	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: AVE_Intention to purchase						

Table 22. reveals that the independent variable, trust in social media marketing, has a significant β coefficient of 0.539 and p-value of < 0.001. Additionally, Table 22 shows that there is a partially favourable association between this variable and intention to purchase. The regression analysis results show that trust in social media marketing is significantly related to intentions to purchase. The correlation analysis also demonstrated that these variables are significantly and positively correlated. Accordingly, hypothesis three (alternate) is accepted and hypothesis three (null) is rejected.

RQ5: What is the impact of trust in social media marketing regarding perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase by Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic?

The following section is to ascertain the impact of trust in social media marketing regarding perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase by Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 23: Model Summary

Model Summary										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.602 ^a	0.362	0.350	0.66548	0.362	29.896	6	316	0.000	
2	.662 ^b	0.438	0.426	0.62544	0.076	42.750	1	315	0.000	1.945
a. Independent: (Constant), AVE_Entertainment, AVE_Customisation, AVE_Trendiness, AVE_Convenience, AVE_Interaction, AVE WOM										
b. Independent: (Constant), AVE_Entertainment, AVE_Customisation, AVE_Trendiness, AVE_Convenience, AVE_Interaction, AVE WOM, AVE Trust in social media										
c. Dependent Variable: AVE_Intention to purchase										

Table 23. presents the model 1 summary, which does not include trust in social media marketing, and the model 2 summary, which does include trust in social media marketing from the hierarchical regression analysis. The results from model 1 reveal that the independent variables without trust in social media marketing were found to be explanatory, as they all explained 36.2% of the variability in intention to purchase with an R-squared of 0.362. However, when trust in social media marketing is introduced into the regression as part of model 2, the explanatory power increases to 43.8% with an improved R-squared of 0.438.

Table 24: ANOVA

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	79.437	6	13.240	29.896	.000 ^b
	Residual	139.944	316	0.443		
	Total	219.381	322			
2	Regression	96.160	7	13.737	35.117	.000 ^c

Residual	123.221	315	0.391		
Total	219.381	322			
a. Dependent Variable: AVE_Intention to purchase					
b. Independent: (Constant), AVE_Entertainment, AVE_Customisation, AVE_Trendiness, AVE_Convenience, AVE_Interaction, AVE_WOM					
c. Independent: (Constant), AVE_Entertainment, AVE_Customisation, AVE_Trendiness, AVE_Convenience, AVE_Interaction, AVE_WOM, AVE_Trust in social media					

Table 24. shows that the independent variables in model 1 without trust in social media marketing, did have a significant model fit with a F-statistics of 29.896 with a corresponding p-value < 0.001, which was less than the established significance level of 0.001. When trust in social media marketing was introduced as part of model 2, the model fit improves with a F-statistics of 35.117 with a corresponding p-value < 0.001, which was less than the established significance level of 0.001.

Table 25: Coefficients

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.163	0.256		4.546	0.000
	AVE_Interaction	-0.065	0.071	-0.054	-0.909	0.364
	AVE_Customisation	0.227	0.066	0.210	3.439	0.001
	AVE_WOM	0.260	0.055	0.296	4.748	0.000
	AVE_Trendiness	0.001	0.057	0.001	0.009	0.993
	AVE_Convenience	0.020	0.056	0.021	0.362	0.718
	AVE_Entertainment	0.216	0.059	0.234	3.652	0.000
2	(Constant)	0.691	0.251		2.753	0.006
	AVE_Interaction	-0.057	0.067	-0.048	-0.853	0.394
	AVE_Customisation	0.179	0.062	0.166	2.864	0.004
	AVE_WOM	0.149	0.054	0.169	2.747	0.006
	AVE_Trendiness	0.035	0.054	0.036	0.648	0.517
	AVE_Convenience	-0.014	0.053	-0.014	-0.267	0.790
	AVE_Entertainment	0.193	0.056	0.210	3.474	0.001
	AVE_Trust in social media	0.372	0.057	0.324	6.538	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: AVE_Intention to purchase						

Table 25. reveals that the independent variables of Customisation, WOM, and Entertainment have significant β coefficients of 0.210, 0.296, and 0.234, respectively, and all with p-values

of < 0.001 . Table 25. also highlights that these significant independent variables had moderate positive relationships with intention to purchase.

With the introduction of Trust in model 2 of the hierarchical regression, the independent variables of Customisation, WOM, and Entertainment experience a decline in their β coefficients values of 0.166, 0.169, and 0.210, respectively, and all with p-values of < 0.001 . The relationships between these variables and intention to purchase are thus weakened. Furthermore, trust in social media marketing has a significant β coefficient of 0.324, demonstrating a partial mediating effect. Consequently, based on these findings, hypothesis four (alternate) is partially accepted and hypothesis four (null) is rejected.

4.5. Chapter Summary

The findings of this research are presented in this chapter. Furthermore, descriptive and inferential statistical results were presented. The following analysis was conducted, and findings were illustrated; these include the Re-test, internal consistency test, Cronbach Coefficient Alpha, and construct validity. A factor analysis was conducted on SPSS Version 26 using the Principal Components Method of factor extraction and a Varimax rotation of the factors. Descriptive statistical tests included the frequency distribution that computed the responses to the questionnaire's demographic questions and the response to the study variables. Secondly, the demographic data and questions had their mean, median, mode, variance, and standard deviation calculated. The following inferential statistical tests were conducted using SPSS Version 26. Firstly, a correlation analysis was computed to study the different variables (perceptions of social media marketing, intention to purchase, and trust in social media marketing) using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. Significant correlations between these variables were assessed in terms of the strength of the correlation coefficient r that was presented in the above chapter. Secondly, regression analysis was undertaken to establish the relationship among the following variables: perceptions of social media marketing and intention to purchase, perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing, and trust in social media marketing and intention to purchase. Thirdly, a hierarchical regression analysis was computed to determine the impact of trust in SMM in the relationship between social media marketing and intention to purchase of Generation-Z consumers.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1. Introduction

The discussion is based on the findings from the data analysis given in Chapter four, which will cover the objectives of the study and the body of current literature. This research explored social media marketing and Generation-Z South African consumers' intention to purchase during the Covid-19 pandemic. To understand Generation-Z consumers' purchase intentions, it is essential to analyse the perceptions of social media marketing from a Generation-Z perspective during the pandemic. This provided the key findings that shed light on the relationship between social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers' during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this chapter discusses the results to determine whether the research questions have been answered and research objectives have been achieved. Furthermore, the results have also been contrasted and evaluated with similar research findings that have been reported in the existing literature.

5.2. Findings related to objectives

5.2.1. Research objective one: To explore the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers' during the Covid-19 pandemic

The first objective was to explore the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on the extant literature, perceptions of social media marketing comprise several influential factors, including interaction, customisation, word-of-mouth, trendiness, convenience, and entertainment (Ainin *et al.*, 2015; Seo and Park, 2018; Liu, Shin and Burns, 2021). Jamil, Dunnan, Gul, Shezad, Gillani and Awan (2021) mention some perceptions of social media marketing among consumers; these include social media marketing activities such as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customisation and word-of-mouth. The following sub-sections elaborates on the research findings.

5.2.1.1. Interaction

The majority of the respondents, 92.9%, confirmed that social media enables information sharing with others. Furthermore, 92.9% of respondents agreed with the statement, “Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through social media”. In addition, 72.4% of the respondents agreed with the statement “Social media interacts regularly with its followers and fans.” 61.9% revealed that “It is easy to express my opinion through social media”. These findings are supported by Oh and Syn (2015), who affirm the results of their study, which is focused on the motivation for sharing information and social support on social media platforms. One thousand and fifty-six social media users shared their motivation to distribute information from various social media platforms, thus affirming that social media enables information sharing with others. Jamil *et al.* (2021) consumers use social media to interact and share information, and social media platforms are becoming popular online to interact and engage. According to Chen and Lin (2019), interaction is not limited by geographical location on social media platforms, thus promoting conversations and the exchange of opinions between consumers and brands via social media platforms. In addition, Bal and Bicen (2017) investigated students with an average age of 22 years old. The study showed that the respondents used social media to interact, start conversations and acquire new information, enabling interaction via social media platforms.

Moreover, Surujpal (2023) affirms that social media assist in obtaining information about activities and events, which leads consumers to interact with content by sharing events, saving event dates and setting reminders of events. Studies have indicated that social media enable people to share, exchange and engage with information and content, thus promoting conversations on social media, which leads to interaction (Istvanic, Crnjac-Milic, and Krpic, 2017). Onofrei, Filieri, and Kennedy’s (2022) findings indicate that social media interactions significantly influence consumer purchase intentions. Furthermore, it is argued that social media allow individuals to engage, connect, and interact with others with similar needs (Onofrei *et al.*, 2022). A study conducted by Cheung *et al.* (2020) investigated the effects of social media marketing elements on consumer brand engagement and brand knowledge. It revealed that interaction is a key driver that strengthens consumer brand engagement, which increases the cognitive processing that influences consumer purchase intention. Similarly, Cheung *et al.*’s (2020) findings indicated that respondents found it easy to convey their

opinions, interact and converse with other users, as well as share information through social media.

5.2.1.2. Customisation

The findings revealed that 70.6% of respondents agreed that “Social media facilitates personalised information search”. Moreover, 67.7% of respondents agreed that “Social media makes purchase recommendations as per my requirements”. The 39.9% agreed with the statement “I feel my needs are met by using social media”. According to Kumar, Konar and Balasubramanian (2020), social media marketers can ensure high levels of customisation by monitoring and observing the target audience’s online behaviour in terms of content being posted on social media. In addition, the study’s results are congruent with the findings of Seo and Park (2018), which demonstrated that consumers’ prefer social media marketing that is personalised for their tastes and wants.

Serrano-Malebrán and Arenas-Gaitán (2021) affirm that personalisation indicates that social networks offer customisation of products and services that meet the customer's needs; the greater the customisation, the greater the intention to purchase. This is supported by previous literature that focuses on the perceived usefulness of personalisation and customisation towards influencing the purchase intention of consumers’ (Hansen, Saridakis and Benson, 2018). It has been further highlighted that customisation and personalised content on social media platforms and brand pages influence consumers’ purchase intentions and allow them to share their purchase experiences (Merrilees, 2016; Simion and Tossan, 2018). However, Cheung, Pires, Rosenberger, and De Oliverira’s (2021) study found that customisation does not significantly impact consumer behaviour. This contradiction could be attributed to the nature of the sample used, which was extended to much older participants.

5.2.1.3. Word-of-mouth

While exploring the social media perceptions among Generation-Z South African consumers’ during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding word-of-mouth, the findings revealed that 67.8% of the respondents concurred with the statement, “I would recommend my friends to visit social media platforms”, 63.8% of the respondents concurred with the statement, “I would encourage my friends and acquaintances to use social media platforms”. On the other hand, the lowest

result was observed in response to the statement, “I would like to share my online purchase experiences with friends and acquaintances on social media”, with a percentage agreement of 52.0%.

The above findings haven’t been corroborated by a number of researchers. For example, Dedeoglu’s (2019) findings indicate that the credibility of social media content positively impacted shared content. Moreover, the information quality positively impacts consumer’s shared content. Wang and Chen’s (2021) study shows that information that is posted or shared on brands social media accounts is more likely to impact the perception of a brand towards the consumer. It has been demonstrated that social media posts, shares, and reshares that are interactive have an impact on consumers’ opinions of the brand and their intent to make purchases when it comes to customers participating on the platform to share their experiences with purchases (Kim and Ko, 2010; Kim and Ko, 2012; Chen and Wang, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2019). According to Qazzafi’s (2020) study, word-of-mouth and e-word-of-mouth are used in groups to influence purchase intentions as the individual will trust the recommendations and suggestions of family and friends and base their purchase decision on these factors as there is a level of trust.

5.2.1.4. Trendiness

The findings of the research showed that that 84.5% of the respondents concurred with the statement, “Anything trendy is available on social media platforms”. 80.2% of the respondents agreed with the statement, “Using social media is very trendy”. A number of respondents (61.9%) agreed with the statement “The content on social media is up-to-date”. The findings of the study concur with Hasan, Qayyum, and Zai (2023) study that affirms that trendiness refers to content being updated to the current trends. Kim and Ko (2012) state that trendiness refers to content shown in social media is the newest information. Trendiness refers to latest, updated and trendy content about a product, service or brand (Cheung *et al.*, 2020). A study undertaken by Bilgin (2018) indicated that trendiness enhances the perceptions of a brand on social media. Findings also supports Cheung *et al.* (2021) that trendiness encourages consumers’ to create content, thus ensuring content is always updated. The findings are further supported by previous studies which highlighted that consumers’ are increasingly searching for trends and product information via social media platforms as it is more useful and up-to-date (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Mangold and Fauld, 2009).

5.2.1.5. Convenience

While investigating the social media perceptions among Generation-Z South African consumers' during the Covid-19 pandemic regarding the convenience of social media, the findings indicated that 75.2% of the respondents agreed with the statement "Social media allows me to shop anytime I want". The findings further indicated that 75.2 % of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I can order products or services wherever I am using social media". In addition, 74.0% of the respondents agreed with the statement "Social media is always accessible". Whilst 66.9% of respondents agreed with the following statement "Social media allows me to complete a transaction quickly," Salam, Imtiaz, and Burhan's (2021) research supports the research findings as their study indicates that during the Covid-19 pandemic respondents found that social media marketing was useful and convenient.

In Surujpal (2023), 80.8% of the target population stated that obtaining information through digital marketing is convenient. Moreover, the finding of Mason, Narcum, and Mason (2021) indicates consumers use social media in shopping to gain information and make a comparison that promotes online purchases, which is more convenient, easy, and effective. Additionally, the research finding is supported by Mason *et al.* (2021) as the study reveals that during Covid-19, consumers increased the use of social media for purchases as it was much more convenient and efficient. Social media allow consumers to remotely access stores and identify product needs at the convenience of the consumer (Mason *et al.*, 2021).

5.2.1.6. Entertainment

The findings indicated that 75.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement, "Using social media is fun". Moreover, 75.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement, "Contents shown on social media seem interesting". While 72.4% of respondents agreed with the following statement, "The content shared by the social media platform is enjoyable". These findings receive support from Cheung *et al.* (2021), who opined that entertaining content on social media platforms allows consumers to view, read, and reshare content with other users. Moreover, Soe and Park (2018) affirmed that entertainment will enable users to create fun and playful experiences on social media. In addition, Cheung *et al.* (2020) noted that when marketers use entertainment, consumers find it fun and easy to share content on social media platforms.

Furthermore, when marketers use entertainment features to enhance the online customer journey, it increases trust between the brand and the consumer (Cheung *et al.*, 2020). However, Abaido's (2020) study provides a different perspective; notwithstanding factors such as fun content and information sharing, social media can also be a platform for cyberbullying. Thus, even though there are positive connections to entertainment, there are also negative ones, which can impact the purchase intentions of Generation-Z consumers. Nguyen, Nguyen-Viet, Hoang-Nguyen, and Hoang-Le (2022) have stated that entertainment is found to have a positive influence on purchase intentions.

The following sub-section focuses on the second research objective.

5.2.2. Research objective two: To understand the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers' during the Covid-19 pandemic

When understanding the relationship between the perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model that served as the underpinning theoretical framework for this study can assist in understanding the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable. The perceptions of social media marketing (stimuli) included interaction, customisation, word-of-mouth, trendiness, convenience, and entertainment. The regression analysis findings revealed that the independent variables (S) dimensions, such as customisation, word-of-mouth, and entertainment, have significant (R) relationships with the intention to purchase. In addition, the correlation analysis also showed that (S) customisation, word-of-mouth, and entertainment are significant and positively correlated with the intention to purchase. These findings are supported by Pillai, Sivathanu, and Dwivedi's (2020) study that focused on shopping intention at artificial intelligence retail stores. The results of this study indicated that customisation significantly influences consumers' intention to purchase. Cheung *et al.* (2021) also supported the research findings, who reported that entertainment drives purchase intentions and consumption. Moreover, the study results are also aligned with Wijaya, Sulishtyani, Pudjowati, Kartikawati, Kurniasih, and Purwanto (2021), who conducted an empirical study on social media marketing and purchase intention, and results indicated that customisation affected purchase intentions.

Moreover, the study results are also aligned with those of Sihombing and Pramonon (2021), who concluded that customisation significantly impacted purchase intentions. Customisation and personalised content on social media platforms and brand pages influence consumers' purchase intentions and allow them to share their purchase experiences (Merrilees, 2016; Simion and Tossan, 2018).

The research findings are supported by Yang (2022) who affirms that e-word-of-mouth has become a vital factor in consumers' purchase decisions. As social media platforms consists of friends, family, and acquaintances, when consumers share their online purchase experiences, it has an impact on persuading Generation-Z, either positively or negatively, based on the purchase experience shared on social media platforms. This is consistent with the finding of Wang, Wang, Xue, Wang and Li's (2018) who reported that consumers value word-of-mouth from friends and peers. Moreover, Yang (2022) affirms that conflicting e-word-of-mouth impacts purchase intentions as it decreases the need or want to purchase online. Moslehpour, Ismail, Purba, and Wong's (2021) findings lend credence to this study, as it was averred that positive word-of-mouth leads to a higher purchase intention. The significant impact of entertainment on intention to purchase, as demonstrated in this study is validated by previous research. For example, showed that entertainment had a significant influence on consumer purchase intentions and consumptions.

Similarly, Pöyry, Parvinen, and Malmivaara (2013) concluded that entertainment is a driver that strengthens consumer intentions. Djafarova and Bowes (2021), affirmed that Generation-Z is stimulated by entertainment, thus making more informed purchase decisions. The regression analysis also revealed that interaction, trendiness, and convenience did not show significant relationships with intentions to purchase. In contrast, interaction, trendiness, and convenience were significantly and positively correlated with intention to purchase as shown in the correlation analysis. Moreover, the ambivalence of these findings could be attributed to Generation-Z. Related to this, Liu, Perry, and Gadzinski's (2019) findings indicated that trendiness does not impact purchase intentions on social media platforms. This could be related to a number of Generation-Z consumers being highly conscious about blindly following all trends.

Genoveva (2022) shed further light by contending that all Generation-Z consumers are not similarly impacted by influencers on social media platforms and reported no significant

relationship between trendiness and intention to purchase. In exploring Generation-Z and key factors of e-commerce, Vieira, Frade, Ascenso, Prates, and Martinho (2020) found that convenience does not easily influence Generation-Z.

The following sub-section focuses on the third research objective.

5.2.3. Research objective three: To understand the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing of Generation-Z South African consumers' during the Covid-19 pandemic

The study examined the link between (S) perceptions of social media marketing and (O) trust in social media marketing, based on the S-O-R model. The regression analysis findings indicated that independent variable (S) dimensions of customisation and word-of-mouth have a significant relationship with (O) trust in social media marketing. Findings of the correlation analysis also reveal that these (S) dimensions are significantly and positively correlated with (O) trust in social media marketing. This indicated that the stimulus led to an evaluation by Generation Z, which consequently led to a response. These findings accord with Kim and Ko (2021), Ebrahim (2019) and Moslehpour, Shalehah, Wong, Ismail, Altantsetseg and Tsevegjav (2022), who found significant relationships between customisation and trust. The significant impact found on the independent variable dimension of word-of-mouth on trust in social media marketing has received validation in the literature. For example, Hanaysha (2022) reported that sharing positive word-of-mouth improves consumer perceptions and trust.

According to Van Rooyen and Amoah (2021:19), “website reputation, website quality, and e-word-of-mouth communication are crucial elements of trust in online shopping”. In addition, negative word-of-mouth can have an adverse impact on the level of trust a consumer has in the brand. The concept of word-of-mouth relates to individuals transmitting product information to other individuals via a conversation, online websites, text, and social media platforms (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, and Hogg, 2013). Moreover, Hamid, Ukkas, Goso, Abror, Anwar, and Munir (2023) show that social media marketing does have a direct and indirect positive and significant impact on trust.

Hanayasha (2022) further contends that sharing information strongly influences brand trust and purchase intentions. The research finding is further supported by Mason, Narcum, Mason, and Awan (2021), who stated that sharing positive comments, and video testimonials reviews builds consumer trust online. Kristina and Sugiato's (2020) research found that e-word-of-mouth positively and significantly affected trust. In further support of the findings of this study, the study by Choudhary and Jhamb (2019) showed that customer feedback forms on social platforms are very effective as they provide a sense of reliability and trust to ensure customer satisfaction. Chu and Kim (2011) accurately describe how e-word-of-mouth through social media platforms stimulates a feeling of trust associated with sharing online thus, leading to high trust levels with social media platforms. Similarly, Qazzafi (2020) noted that word-of-mouth and e-word-of-mouth are used in groups to influence purchase intentions as the individual will trust the recommendations and suggestions of family and friends and base their purchase decision on these factors as there is a level of trust.

The regression analysis showed that the independent variable dimensions of interaction, trendiness, convenience, and entertainment are not significantly related to trust in social media marketing. However, the correlation analysis revealed positive associations between these variables. There is literature support for these insignificant regression analysis findings. In this regard, Nguyen, Nguyen-Viet, Nguyen, and Le (2022) found no impact of entertainment on trust. Similarly, Moslehpour *et al.* (2021) found no significant effects of entertainment and trendiness on trust. Yuan, Liu, Yao and Liu (2016) reported no significant relationship between convenience and trust in social media. Zhao and Bacao (2020) argued that if consumers' find social media platforms inconvenient, it leads to low interest and low intention to purchase.

The following sub-section focuses on the fourth research objective.

5.2.4. Research objective four: To understand the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers' during the Covid-19 pandemic

The use of the S-O-R model as the theoretical framework allows the study to look at the relationship between the organism and the response. Thus, the findings in this section focuses on the relationship between (O) trust in social media marketing and (R) the intention to

purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers' during the Covid-19 pandemic. The regression analysis results show that (O) trust in social media marketing is significantly related to (R) the intention to purchase. This association is further exemplified in the correlation analysis where these two variables are significantly and positively correlated. Thus, trust as the organism leads Generation-Z consumers to a cognitive state that drives a response, which influences purchase intentions.

In support of these research findings, the study by Manzoor, Baig, Hashim, and Sami (2020) showed that trust and social media marketing significantly impact consumer purchase intention. Alharthey (2020) stated that trust influences consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions in an online environment. Manzoor *et al.* (2020) argued that trust plays a vital role in the digital landscape by influencing consumers' purchase intentions.

There are several other studies that establish a link between trust in social media and intention to purchase (Moslehpour *et al.*, 2022; Kim and Ko, 2010; Moslehpour, Dadvari, Nugroho, and Do, 2020; Yimeng and Huifan, 2016; Jung and Kim, 2016). In a recent study, Karunasingha and Abeysekera (2022) showed that consumer trust significantly impacts online purchase intentions. Lavuri's (2023) research findings concluded that intrinsic factors impact online purchase intentions, mediating factors being trust and online shopping attitudes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, highlighting the importance of trust in online shoppers' purchase intentions.

The following sub-section focuses on the fifth research objective.

5.2.5. Research objective five: To determine the impact of trust in social media marketing regarding perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase by Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The S-O-R model proposed by Mehrabian and Russel (1974) this model has been used to understand the environment (S), which causes an (O) that leads to a behavioural response. This model has been used in the marketing online environment in fields such as e-commerce, social commerce and online consumer behaviour by various scholars (Le, Wu, Liao and Phung, 2022; Herzallah, Leiva and Liebana-Cabanillas, 2021; Zhou *et al.*, 2022). The research findings from

the data of the regression analysis revealed that (S) customisation, word-of-mouth, and entertainment have significant relationships with (R) the intention to purchase.

Furthermore, the findings show that independent variable (S) dimensions of customisation and word-of-mouth have a significant relationship with (O) trust in social media marketing. When the researcher included (S) customisation, word-of-mouth, entertainment and (O) trust in social media marketing in the hierarchical regression analysis, there was a (R) decline in the strength of the relationship between these variables and intention to purchase. This means that (S) customisation, word-of-mouth, and entertainment when (O) trust in social media marketing comes to mind to Generation-Z consumers, there is a (R) decline in the intention to purchase.

This indicated that trust in social media marketing partially mediates the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and intentions to purchase. Previous research in the area has highlighted the importance that trust plays in mediating relationships between perceptions of social media marketing and online purchase intentions (Karunasingha and Abeysekera, 2022; Irshad, Ahmad, and Malik, 2020; Vohra and Bhardwaj, 2019). It has been argued that trust is a vital factor that needs to be considered in online purchase behaviours (Irshad *et al.*, 2020; Wang, Law, Guillet, Hung, and Fong, 2015; Manzoor *et al.*, 2020).

According to Van Rooyen and Amoah's (2021) study which investigated trust in social media and online shopping in South Africa, the respondents appeared to be neutral and, in some instances, disagreed with statements measuring trust. This response could be attributed to some South African consumers lacking confidence in social media marketing and online service providers. Several scholars have highlighted the risk associated with online shopping and suggested that marketers provide integrity and display competence in order to increase the trust of consumers and in turn influence their intentions to purchase online (Bashir, Khwaja, Mahmood, Turi, and Latif (2021); Cha and You (2018); and Tham, Dastane, Johari, and Ismail (2019)). Whereas other consumers' trust would have declined, resulting in a decline in online purchase intention could be due to negative e-word-of-mouth, negative entertainment, or bad online shopping experiences (Khare, Dixit, and Sarkar, 2020)

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, many companies had to shift towards online shops, online delivery and use the e-marketplace (Wandoko and Panggati, 2022). The research finding of Wandoko and Paggati (2022) shows that when looking at word-of-mouth and information

sharing the impact on customer repurchase intention during the pandemic with trust being a mediating factor, shows that word-of-mouth and information sharing can serve as predictors in building purchase intentions. With regard to entertainment, the consumer will then seek information about this product or service and visit social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or the company website to see how good the brand image is. Khare, Dixit, and Sarkar's (2020) research findings show that the quality of information determines online trust that impacts the purchase decision. What consumers view on social media platforms as a form of entertainment, be it news, posts, blogs, influencers, or reviews of products and services, will consequently impact their trust and purchase intentions (Liu, Lee, Liu, and Chen, 2018). Thus, the impact of trust can either reinforce, augment, or bind to the original perceptions of social media marketing, which are more impactful or less impactful due to the Covid-19 pandemic consequences towards Generation-Z South African consumers.

5.3. Chapter Summary

The study's findings were thoroughly analysed in this chapter in light of the objectives of the research, focusing on perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic. It examined various factors, including trendiness, interaction, convenience, entertainment, customisation, and word-of-mouth, while also grounding its discussions in a theoretical framework.

The research outcomes indicate that when evaluating the link between these perceptions and the intention to purchase among Generation-Z South African consumers during the pandemic, customisation, word-of-mouth, and entertainment significantly impacted purchase intentions. However, interaction, trendiness, and convenience did not exhibit any significant correlations with purchase intentions.

Additionally, the study explored the connection between these perceptions and trust in social media marketing. It discovered that customisation and word-of-mouth had a substantial impact on trust. While interaction, trendiness, convenience, and entertainment were positively correlated with trust, these relationships did not reach statistical significance. This suggests that dimensions such as trendiness, convenience, and entertainment may not significantly contribute to trust in social media marketing.

The chapter also delved into the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase among Generation-Z South African consumers during the pandemic. It confirmed the existence of a significant connection between trust and social media, aligning with previous research findings. This underlines the pivotal role that trust plays in shaping purchase intentions.

Furthermore, the chapter explored the impact of trust in social media marketing on perceptions and purchase intentions. It concluded that trust could serve as a motivator or a demotivator for the purchase intentions of Generation-Z South African consumers. The level of this impact can vary due to contextual factors, such as the unique circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. Trust was identified as a partial mediating variable, emphasising the need to establish trust between social media marketing and purchase intentions.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents recommendations, study limitations, and suggestions for additional studies are discussed in this final chapter. The chapter begins with a summary of the various chapters of this dissertation. It then proceeds to provide a summary of the study findings which have been arranged according to the research objectives. Thereafter, the limitations of the study are presented. The chapter then provides recommendations for marketing practitioners and organisations. Following this, suggestions for future research have been provided. The chapter ends with a conclusion to this research.

6.2. Summary of the chapters

In Chapter One, the focus was placed on providing an introduction and background to the study, which highlighted the lack of literature was a significant disadvantage as many scholars attempt to explain the nature of Generation-Z South African consumers without focusing on social media marketing's influence on their intention to purchase. The chapter then presented the research problem with research questions and research objectives associated with social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African Generation-Z during the coronavirus pandemic. The chapter then provided a preliminary literature review to identify the gap presented in existing and current research. Furthermore, the chapter provided a brief overview of the study's research methodology while providing an outline of the significance of the study, the ethical considerations that need to be upheld, and the study's limitations. Finally, the chapter included a dissertation overview.

An analysis and examination of previous and ongoing research related to the topic was presented in Chapter Two. The chapter evaluated South African Generation-Z social media marketing and purchase intentions during the coronavirus pandemic in relation to the research questions. The chapter provided a detailed description of Generation-Z as a consumer and the emergence of social media marketing that led to the social media web and social media network sites. The chapter presented a conceptual framework as well.

Chapter Three presented an in-depth description of the research methodology. The chapter noted that the study embraced a quantitative research approach. The target population as well as the sample size of the study were described alongside the sampling procedure. Data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations, and data quality control measures were all described in this chapter.

In order to help the researcher answer research questions and accomplish research objectives, Chapter Four focuses on descriptive and inferential statistics. The data examined with the Statistical Package for the Social Science, version 26, is presented in chapter four. The researcher had to comprehend and evaluate the data with the depiction of graphs, pie charts, and frequency distribution tables. Based on the research questions posed in the study, the data supplied aims to accomplish the research objectives and offer more information. The chapter included the different tests that guaranteed the study's validity and dependability. To verify the validity of the study's questionnaire, Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling were used. The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha.

In Chapter Five, the discussion was based on the results obtained from the data analysis conducted in Chapter Four. The primary focus was on addressing the research objectives and drawing connections to the existing literature within the scope of this research. The study delved into social media marketing and its impact on the purchase intentions of Generation-Z South African consumers, particularly during the challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, this chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the results, assessing whether the research questions were successfully addressed, and the research objectives were attained. Furthermore, the findings were also compared with prior research on the influence of social media marketing on Generation-Z South African consumers' purchase intentions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The final chapter presents the study's conclusions, drawing upon the results obtained from the preceding analysis and discussion chapter. The chapter also describes the study's findings, limitations, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.

The following section provides a summary of the findings of the study.

6.3. Summary of findings

The findings of the research have been outlined in the section that follows.

6.3.1. Research objective one: To explore the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic

The findings revealed that Generation-Z South African consumers perceived social media marketing in terms of six key dimensions, which are deemed fundamental to the experience of this concept during the Covid-19 pandemic. These dimensions were pre-determined and tested among the respondents. Of the six dimensions, trendiness (mean = 4.224) was the strongest, followed by interaction (mean = 4.198), convenience (mean = 3.998), entertainment (mean = 3.976), customisation (mean = 3.658), and word-of-mouth (mean = 3.634) respectively. These dimensions collectively contributed to the multi-faceted nature of how social media marketing was perceived by Generation-Z South African consumers, especially, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

6.3.2. Research objective two: To understand the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic

The findings demonstrate that the social media marketing dimensions of customisation, word-of-mouth and entertainment are significantly and positively associated with intentions to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The significant links of these dimensions to the intention to purchase have been corroborated by the regression and correlation analysis. Although the remaining three dimensions of interaction, trendiness and convenience were significantly correlated with the intentions to purchase, the regression analysis did not substantiate these relationships. Notwithstanding this, it can be concluded that the findings provide support for the second research objective.

6.3.3. Research objective three: To understand the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing of Generation-Z South African consumers' during the Covid-19 pandemic

The findings show that the social media marketing dimensions of customisation and word-of-mouth are significantly related to trust in social media marketing, with the regression and correlation analysis validating these relationships. The social media marketing dimensions of interaction, trendiness, convenience and entertainment have revealed significant positive correlations with trust in social media marketing. However, these dimensions did not demonstrate significant links in the regression analysis. Overall, it can be concluded that the findings provide support for the realisation of objective three.

6.3.4. Research objective four: To understand the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers' during the Covid-19 pandemic

The findings reveal that trust in social media marketing is significantly and positively related to the intentions to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers. This relationship was exemplified in the regression analysis. Moreover, the Pearson's Correlation analysis also showed significant and positive associations between these variables. Thus, the findings demonstrate unequivocal support for this fourth research objective.

6.3.5. Research objective five: To determine the impact of trust in social media marketing regarding perceptions of social media marketing and the intention to purchase by Generation-Z consumers' during the Covid-19 pandemic

Guided by Baron and Kenny's (1986) 4-steps for mediation analysis and using hierarchical linear regression, the findings show that trust in social media marketing partially mediated the relationship between social media marketing and the intentions to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers. More specifically, it was found that the dimensions of customisation, word-of-mouth and entertainment displayed a decline in the strength of their relationships with the intention to purchase when trust in social media marketing was included the hierarchical linear regression test. The role of trust in social media marketing as plausible intervening mechanism that could shed light on how perceived social media marketing influences the

intentions to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers is also underpinned by the S-O-R Model. More specifically, the stimulus component of the model refers to the independent variable of perceived social media marketing, the organism part of the model, the mediating variable, relates to trust in social media marketing and the response element of the model the dependent variable, pertains to the intentions to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers.

6.4. Limitations of study

Initially, the emphasis on students from UKZN's School of Management, IT, and Governance may not have sufficiently reflected the opinions of the larger Generation-Z customer base. The generalisability of the study's conclusions may thus have a limit.

Secondly, using non-probability convenience sampling instead of more statistically precise probability sampling methods such as simple random or systematic sampling may have negatively impacted the generalisability of the study findings.

Thirdly, the use of a cross-sectional design instead of a longitudinal one to examine the relationships among the study variables may not have obtained a complete picture of the strength of these relationships. As longitudinal studies involve collecting data over an extended period, allowing researchers to observe changes over time and better understand the variables. Longitudinal studies are better suited for examining the dynamics of relationships among variables over time, providing a more complete picture of the studied phenomena.

Fourthly, the use of a single method of data collection, namely, online self-administered questionnaires, may not have adequately captured the depth of the participants' responses compared to semi-structured-interviews or focus groups. Furthermore, the use of a single data collection method, may have limited the validity of the findings.

Lastly, the study specifically focused on a limited number of variables and the relationships among them. Consequently, there are more factors that could have the potential to impact on the intention to purchase online. For example, variables such as satisfaction with social media marketing and the perceived risk of social media marketing.

6.5. Recommendations

The study's findings might significantly benefit marketers and businesses with social media platforms, with the target audience being Generation-Z consumers and consumers in general. The study might also considerably guide those marketers and businesses who want to have a social media presence for their businesses to sell their goods and services via social media marketing. Even though this study is based on the Covid-19 pandemic, it is relevant as there has been accelerated development in e-commerce in the long run.

Drawing from the findings presented in the preceding chapters, marketers and businesses need to foster digital transformation in marketing initiatives. This study's findings and suggested recommendations may guide marketers and businesses to participate in e-commerce via social media marketing and influence the purchase intentions of Generation-Z consumers.

Marketers and businesses can explore the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Regarding the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z consumers, the top six dimensions in descending level of impact are trendiness, interaction, convenience, entertainment, customisation, and word-of-mouth. This is important for marketers when developing marketing initiatives and strategies using social media marketing to target Generation-Z. Marketers need to improve on entertainment, customisation, and word-of-mouth, as this can improve perceptions of social media marketing. Marketers and businesses need to ensure that content should be fun and easy to share. Companies should include entertainment to enhance the customer's online journey. With social media challenges and competitions on social media platforms, it engages consumers and builds trust between the brand and the consumer. Social media platforms should be fun; marketers can include product contests, TikTok challenges, and online games, leading to product promotion.

When it comes to customisation, marketers need to ensure that there are personalised information searches and social media platforms should make purchase recommendations. Therefore, marketers need to monitor and evaluate consumer online behaviour. Marketers should look at the metrics that will indicate how long a consumer is on a site, what is the most clicked, the most viewed, or the most popular item. Consumers prefer social media marketing that is personalised to their wants and needs. Marketers can look at exclusive products, limited

editions, and collaborations with micro-influencers with limited items and personalisation. Therefore, the study findings provide marketers and companies with important insights into the perceptions of Generation-Z consumers, which can be improved when using social media marketing activities and strategies.

The following recommendations are to improve the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and the intentions to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers. The study's finding indicated that customisation, word-of-mouth, and entertainment lead to some form of intention to purchase as the relationship was significant. However, interaction, trendiness and convenience did not have a substantial relationship with intention to purchase. This is vital to marketers as these factors influence the intention to purchase a good or service online through social media marketing initiatives. Recommendations to improve and strengthen the relationship for interaction, trendiness and convenience would include push notifications or customer touchpoints, which will cue the customer to inquire more about the product or service. These cues will strengthen the intention to purchase.

Marketers should provide clear navigations, such as clear touchpoints to message the company or brand, contact the company via email or telecommunications, and click to purchase, which is user-friendly and easy to use. Accordingly, this makes it convenient for the consumer to navigate the company's social media platform. In addition, displays of products and services on social media platforms provide clear images which show the true image of the product or service. This will increase the levels of trust as the brand is providing a true representation of their brand and thus improving the intentions to purchase. Regarding trendiness, marketers can conduct live stream shopping, which allows the company and brand to provide precise information about the product and get micro-influencers that resonate with the organisations' desired target market.

Consequently, marketers need to pay close attention to customisation word-of-mouth, and entertainment as the relationship is significant and leads to intention to purchase. If there are negative attributes to customisation, word-of-mouth or entertainment, it would result in a decline on the intention to purchase. Marketers need to ensure that product and service reviews are made available to potential customers via their online channels to affirm their intention to purchase. Reviews can include testimonials, emails, direct messages, or videos of clients. Content can include products which were customised for the consumer. This will influence

other customers' intention to purchase. With Generation-Zs' prevalence in the marketplace, their online behaviour needs to be considered for marketing strategies and initiatives to gain their attention. Word-of-mouth plays an important role in influencing the intention to purchase. Thus, marketers need to ensure a positive brand image and digital presence and ensure that any negative attributes are handled with care and empathy as this is important to capture the attention of Generation-Z consumers.

Marketers also need to understand the relationship between perceptions of social media marketing and trust in social media marketing of Generation-Z South African consumers. The findings indicate that customisation and word-of-mouth have a significant relationship with fostering trust in social media marketing. Whereas interaction, trendiness, convenience, and entertainment do not have a substantial relationship with trust in social media marketing. Therefore, marketers must understand how to build the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase of Generation-Z South African consumers. Generation-Z tends to pay attention to reviews, blogs, micro-influencers, influencers, friends and family when making a purchase decision. Moreover, Generation-Z consumers are known to undertake research before making a decision, which may impact on trustworthiness and in turn influence intentions to purchase. Therefore, marketers need to foster customer trust online via their social media networks. This will allow Generation-Z to feel safe, secure and confident when making transactions online, influencing their purchase intention. In addition, marketers and businesses can foster trust in social media marketing campaigns by making consumers aware of delivery processes and payment methods as this will reduce the fear of spams and online theft. It is important for organisations to be active on their social media platforms. This means engaging with customers through comments, likes, reactions, stories or posts as this will foster a bond between the customer and the brand.

6.6. Suggestions for future research

The study could be expanded by widening the research study sites to different UKZN campuses and schools such as Edgewood, Howard College, and Medical School. In addition, this study could be broadened to include other Generation-Z consumers who are studying at other higher education institutions in South Africa. In doing so, the generalisability of the findings would be strengthened, and external validity would be enhanced.

Future research may use probability sampling methods such as simple random or systematic sampling. The use of probability sampling would enhance the statistical precision of the findings leading to greater confidence being placed on the results.

Future research can also adopt a longitudinal design when assessing the strength of the relationships between the variables. A longitudinal design provides a more accurate picture of the impact of the independent variable and the mediating variable on the dependent variables. Moreover, longitudinal designs could mitigate the effects of common method bias.

Future research may consider examining the effects of other potential mediating variables other than trust in social media marketing. For example, the use of the concept of social identity could provide another possible explanatory mechanism that will shed light on how social media marketing will influence the intention to purchase among Generation-Z South African consumers.

Future research could embrace a qualitative approach using in-depth-interviews or focus groups. These approaches will provide a deeper insight into the phenomena being investigated. For example, using in-depth-interviews to explore how Generation-Z consumers perceive social media marketing could unearth rich data and/or novel dimensions that will further enrich our understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of the social media marketing constructs.

6.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research delved into a comprehensive discussion of the study's results and their alignment with the research objectives. It particularly examines the perceptions of social media marketing among Generation-Z South African consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic, analysing factors such as trendiness, interaction, convenience, entertainment, customisation, and word-of-mouth. The study revealed that when it comes to the relationship between these perceptions and the intention to purchase among Generation-Z South African consumers during the pandemic, customisation, word-of-mouth, and entertainment significantly influenced purchase intentions. However, interaction, trendiness, and convenience did not demonstrate any significant correlations with purchase intentions.

In addition, the research investigated the relationship between these perceptions and trust in social media marketing. It found that customisation and word-of-mouth had a significant impact on trust. At the same time, interaction, trendiness, convenience, and entertainment were also positively correlated with trust but did not reach significance. This implies that dimensions like trendiness, convenience, and entertainment do not significantly contribute to trust in social media marketing. The study then examined the relationship between trust in social media marketing and the intention to purchase among Generation-Z South African consumers during the pandemic. It established that there is a significant connection between trust and social media, which is consistent with prior research findings. This suggests that purchasing intentions are significantly influenced by trust. Moreover, the impact of trust in social media marketing on perceptions and purchase intentions was explored.

It was found that trust can either motivate or demotivate Generation-Z South African consumers' purchase intentions, but the level of impact may vary due to the specific context, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Trust was identified as a partial mediating variable, emphasizing the importance of building trust between social media marketing and purchase intentions. The study highlighted that trust-related responses had a mean value below 4.0, indicating room for improvement. It suggested that online retailers, digital marketers, social media managers, and marketers could use these findings to enhance their digital marketing campaigns and strategies, focusing on customisation, word-of-mouth, and entertainment, as introducing trust led to a decline in purchase intentions.

The chapter provides a comprehensive recommendation that digital marketers, marketers, practitioner, and social media marketers can use to improve their online social media marketing activities aimed at South African Generation-Z consumers. Recommendations were based on the perceptions of social media marketing that include trendiness, interaction, convenience, entertainment, customisation, and word-of-mouth among Generation-Z South African consumers. The study is founded on its research findings gleaned from the perspectives and behaviors of Generation-Z consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic, allowing the study to bridge the gap in previous and existing literature and contribute to the body of knowledge. In conclusion, the research underscores the significance of trust in social media marketing, its impact on purchase intentions, and the need for tailored strategies to foster trust among Generation-Z South African consumers, particularly during the unique circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Appendix A – Gatekeeper’s Letter



15 March 2022

Sershan Naidoo (SN 216024704)
School of Management, IT and Governance
College of Law and Management Studies
Pietermaritzburg Campus UKZN
Email: 216024704@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Sershan

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper’s permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

“Social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African Generation-Z during the coronavirus pandemic.”

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample as follows:

- With a request for responses on the website. The questionnaire must be placed on the notice system <http://notices.ukzn.ac.za>. A copy of this letter (Gatekeeper’s approval) must be simultaneously sent to (govenderlog@ukzn.ac.za) or (ramkissoob@ukzn.ac.za).

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the ‘Microsoft Outlook’ address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the PAIA and POPI Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

Dr KE Cleland
Registrar

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix B – Ethical Clearance Certificate



18 March 2022

Sershan Naidoo (216024704)
School Of Man Info Tech & Gov
Westville Campus

Dear S Naidoo,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003507/2021

Project title: Social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African Generation-Z during the coronavirus pandemic.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 08 October 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

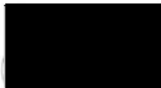
This approval is valid until 18 March 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix C – Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire

Screening Question

Please select the appropriate answer to the question below:

1. Are you between the ages of 18 to 26? Yes No

If you have selected **No** to the question, then please do not continue with the survey.

Section One: Demographic details

Please select the appropriate answer where applicable.

1. Age Group

- ☐ 18-20
- ☐ 21-23
- ☐ 24-26

2. Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

3. Race

- ☐ Black African
- ☐ White
- ☐ Colored
- ☐ Indian/Asian

4. Level of education

- ☐ Undergraduate
- ☐ Postgraduate

5. Which campus do you belong to?

- ☐ Westville Campus
- ☐ Pietermaritzburg Campus

Section Two: Perceptions of social media marketing by Generation-Z consumers during Covid-19 pandemic.

The following statements relate to your perceptions of social media marketing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Please specify how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement below by ticking the appropriate column.

1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Interaction					
1. Social media enables information sharing with others.					
2. Conversation or opinion exchange with others is possible through social media.					
3. It is easy to express my opinion through social media.					
4. Social media interacts regularly with its followers and fans.					
Customisation					
5. Social media facilitates personalised information search.					
6. Social media makes purchase recommendations as per my requirements.					
7. I feel my needs are met by using social media.					
Word-of-Mouth					
8. I would recommend my friends to visit social media platforms.					

9. I would encourage my friends and acquaintances to use social media platforms.					
10. I would like to share my online purchase experiences with friends and acquaintances on social media.					
Trendiness					
11. The content on social media is up-to-date.					
12. Using social media is very trendy.					
13. Anything trendy is available on social media platforms.					
Convenience					
14. Social media allows me to shop anytime I want.					
15. Social media is always accessible.					
16. I can order products or services wherever I am using social media.					
17. Social media allows me to complete a transaction quickly.					
Entertainment					
18. Using social media is fun.					
19. Contents shown on social media seem interesting.					
20. The content shared by the social media platform are enjoyable.					

Section Three: Intentions to purchase online during Covid-19 pandemic.

The following statements relate to your intentions to purchase online during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Please specify how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement below by ticking the appropriate column.

1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I intend to purchase products or services online that are marketed on social media.					
2. Products and services that are advertised on social media will have a positive influence on my online purchase intentions.					
3. I am more likely to purchase some products or services online that are promoted on social media.					
4. I would buy some of the products or services online that are marketed on social media platforms if I had the money.					
5. I plan to purchase the products or services online that are advertised on social media platforms.					
6. Given the opportunity, I would like to purchase products or services online that are promoted on social media platforms.					
7. My willingness to purchase products or services online are high.					

Section Four: Trust in social media marketing environment during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following statements relate to your levels of trust in social media marketing environment during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Please specify how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement below by ticking the appropriate column.

1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Promises made on social media platforms are likely to be reliable.					
2. I do not doubt honesty of the marketing communications on social media platforms.					
3. I expect that the marketers on social media platforms will keep to their promises.					
4. I believe that the online purchasing actions on social media platforms are fair.					
5. I believe that the marketers on social media platforms keep my interests in mind during most transactions.					
6. I believe that the marketers on social media platforms are receptive to my needs.					
7. I believe that the marketers on social media platforms makes good-faith efforts to address my concerns.					
8. I believe that I can trust the marketers on social media platforms when making my online purchases.					

THANK YOU !

Appendix D – Informed Consent Form

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date:

Greetings,

My name is Sershan Naidoo, (Tel: 0662510654; Email: 216024704@stu.ukzn.ac.za) and I am a Masters Student (MCom Marketing) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the School of Management, Information Technology and Governance. My supervisor is Dr K. Perumal (Tel: 031 2607853; Email: perumalkr@ukzn.ac.za).

You are being invited to consider participating in a study entitled, *Social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African Generation-Z during the coronavirus pandemic*. The study involves exploring the social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African Generation-Z during the coronavirus pandemic. The aim and purpose of this research is to provide insight into the relationship associated with the perceptions of social media marketing and consumer purchase intentions throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. The study is expected to include 364 students between the ages of 18-26 years of age at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Management, IT & Governance, Westville and Pietermaritzburg campuses. The duration of your participation if you choose to participate and remain in the study is expected to be 20 minutes.

This study will not involve any risks and/or discomforts. I hope that through your participation, the study will create a clear understanding of social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African Generation-Z during the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, the results of this study will contribute to filling the gap in existing literature on social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African Generation-Z during the coronavirus pandemic.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Approval number: HSSREC/00003507/2021).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (Tel: 0662510654; Email: 216024704@stu.ukzn.ac.za) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001

Durban 4000 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Your participation in the study is voluntary and by participating, you are granting the researcher permission to use your responses. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequence. There will be no monetary gain from participating in the study. Your anonymity will be maintained by the researcher and the School of Management, IT & Governance and your responses will not be used for any purposes outside of this study.

All data, both electronic and hard copy, will be securely stored during the study and archived for 5 years. After this time, all data will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in the study, please contact me or my research supervisor at the numbers listed above.

Sincerely

Mr. Sershan Naidoo

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I ()
have been informed about the study entitled *Social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African Generation-Z during the coronavirus pandemic* by Mr. Sershan Naidoo (Tel: 0662510654; Email: 216024704@stu.ukzn.ac.za) MCom Marketing.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at (Tel: 0662510654; Email: 216024704@stu.ukzn.ac.za).

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness
(Where applicable)

Date

Signature of Translator
(Where applicable)

Date

Appendix E– Editor’s Certificate

4 November 2023

Re: LANGUAGE EDITING STATEMENT

I, THE UNDERSIGNED, hereby confirm that I have edited a THESIS titled *Social media marketing and purchase intentions of South African Generation-Z during the coronavirus pandemic*, by Sershan Naidoo.



Hatikanganwi Mapudzi

Associate Member

Membership number: MAP002

Membership year: March 2023 to February 2024

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