UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Exploring the influence of instant message marketing communication on the attitudes and behavioural intentions of Generation Z consumers in Zimbabwe

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DECLARATION

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DEDICATIONS

My daughters, Courtney and Christiana. To you, with love and appreciation.

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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS USED

Central route characteristics: these are the primary qualities or features of the contents of a message or source

Peripheral route characteristics: these are the secondary qualities or features of the contents of a message or source

Consumer attitude: the favourable and unfavourable disposition of a consumer towards a product or service

Perceived control: measures the degree to which an individual believes he or she is in control of their decision

Subjective norms: these capture the role of the expectations of the significant others

Behavioural intention: the willingness or desire to act in a particular way with regards a marketing communication stimulus

Marketing communication: the promotional activities undertaken by a business to attract and or inform customers

Mobile marketing communication: the use mobile devices to promote products and services

Generation Z consumers: young consumers who were born between 1995 and 2010, and whose age ranges from 18 to 27 years

Mobile instant message (MIM) Apps: This is the term used to describe mobile communication applications such as WhatsApp Messenger

WhatsApp: a mobile instant messaging platform used for communication exchanges

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

IMMC	-	Instant message marketing communications
MC	-	Marketing communication
MIM apps	-	Mobile instant message applications
Gen Z	-	Generation Z
SMS	-	Short message service
ELM	-	Elaboration Likelihood Model
TPB	-	Theory of Planned Behaviour
IAM	-	Information Adoption Model

ABSTRACT

The mobile technology revolution has transformed society and business across the globe, with mobile instant messaging applications (MIM apps) now challenging social networking sites (SNS) as the most widely adopted means of communication for individuals and groups. With over 3 billion users across the globe exchanging more than 23 billion messages daily, for marketers, MIM apps present a ubiquitous, pervasive, and rich marketing communications (MC) channel that supports interactive and dialogic communications with young consumers, particularly in developing countries like Zimbabwe. Thus, this study aimed to establish, through a quantitative approach, firstly, the central route and peripheral route characteristics of instant message marketing communications (IMMC) and their influence on the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, secondly, the influence of subjective norms, perceived control and consumer attitude towards IMMC on behavioural intentions, and thirdly, the moderating role of impulsiveness on the relationship between the attitude of the Gen Z consumers towards IMMC and their behavioural intentions.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire. Stratified sampling method was used to survey 410 Gen Z consumers at Great Zimbabwe University, situated in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses. Regarding the central route characteristics of IMMC, the study revealed that informativeness and entertainment did not influence consumer attitude, whereas personalisation had a positive influence and irritation generating a negative association. Notably, all the peripheral route characteristics of IMMC, namely; credibility, interactivity and media richness had a significant and positive influence on the attitude of Gen Z consumers. Concerning the planned behaviour constructs, namely; subjective norms and perceived control, a significant and positive association with consumer attitude was observed, but when tested against behavioural intention, only subjective norms and consumer attitude revealed a significant and positive relationship whilst perceived control demonstrated a negative association.

It is recommended that mobile marketing practitioners should consider the peripheral route characteristics of IMMC messages along with personalisation and irritation. It is further suggested that mobile marketing communication planners and designers should consider the influential role of subjective norms and consumer attitude on the behavioural responses of Gen Z consumers.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The rise of mobile internet and smartphone technologies has changed people's social lives and consumer behaviour. Globally, more than 5 billion people use smartphones, and mobile internet traffic accounts for more than ninety percent (90%) of all internet traffic (Dixon, 2024). Accordingly, mobile instant messaging applications (henceforth referred to as MIM apps) like WhatsApp, WeChat, and Telegram have gained widespread adoption, and opened up new marketing possibilities. In an effort to influence consumer attitude and behaviour, firms are increasingly leveraging these novel and unique marketing communication tools as they provide firms with simple, convenient, and quick means to communicate with potential and existing clients, particularly young people (Kremming, 2020).

However, little is known about the efficacy of instant message marketing communication (henceforth referred to as IMMC) efforts in influencing Generation Z consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. In addition, whilst the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981) has been widely used in past studies spanning different marketing communication contexts, there is still a growing need to determine the central and peripheral route factors propagated in emerging marketing communication tools such as mobile instant messaging (henceforth referred to as MIM) applications. Moreover, the role of consumer impulsiveness triggered by the pervasive and intrusive nature of mobile communication require critical inquiry.

In general, young people are divided into two cohorts: Generation Y and Generation Z. While recent studies have focused on Generation Y consumers (commonly known as millennials) (Arora, Kumar, & Agarwal, 2020; Duffett, 2017; Sari, Suziana, & Games, 2020), empirical research on the Generation Z (also known as digital natives) cohort is still in its infancy. Generation Z (henceforth referred to as Gen Z) is the group of people born between 1995 and 2010 (Brown, 2020; Maggs, 2019), who now comprise a third of the population of the world and have $143 billion in purchasing power (Brown, 2020). A typical member of Gen Z has grown up with access to the internet, social media, and mobile communication. Hence, they

spend more time online searching for information, sharing buying experiences with peers, and communicating with brands and businesses (Duffett, 2016; Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Hughes, & Carlson, 2021; Feger, 2024). As a result, firms should design their marketing strategies to target this growing consumer demographic group (Maggs, 2019).

Despite the Gen Z cohort of the population being immersed in mobile and other contemporary communication technologies, the following questions, remain unanswered with respect to this cohort's use of instant message marketing communication:

- What variables influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC?
- What role does the attitude, perceived control and subjective norms of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC play on their behavioural intentions?
- How does consumer impulsiveness moderate the relationship between the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe and their behavioural intentions?

This study aimed to address inter-alia, the above questions by analyzing the behavior of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

1.2 Background of the study

For more than a decade, the use of the internet and mobile communication technology in marketing communication (hereinafter referred to as MC) has piqued the interest of both practitioners and academics. These emerging communication platforms have transformed the conduct of MC activities as they present new channels and methods of communication with consumers (Rehman et al., 2022). Currently, the global expenditure on digital marketing communication is projected to reach over US850bn dollars by 2026 (Dixon, 2024), and more than two-thirds of this figure will be via mobile communication platforms (Dixon, 2024). One of the ways businesses are now actively engaging consumers is through the use of mobile instant messaging (henceforth referred to as MIM) platforms such as WhatsApp Messenger. With over 3 billion users (Dixon, 2024), this MIM app enable businesses to access and engage a big client base on a regular basis.

Mobile instant messaging applications are described as text-oriented communication technologies that enable instantaneous engagement with other users (Vazquez, Dennis, &

Zhang, 2017). They allow text, video, image, and audio messages to be sent via the internet using features such as group chats, broadcast lists, and status updates (Tang & Hew, 2020). From a marketing communication perspective, MIM apps have a high potential for both push and pull MC (Kremming, 2020). Businesses can use IMMC to promote their products and services and communicate directly with customers (Sonnenberg, 2021), through content marketing, product placement, digital display advertising, product news updates, and promotional campaigns (Kremming, 2020). To achieve this, marketers can use the MC capabilities of MIMs namely; personalized messaging, two-way communication, and timely and relevant promotional messaging (Murphy, 2021). Thus, it is evident that this represents some form of transition from impersonal, business and brand promotional messaging to personal, social, and interactive engagement (Kim, 2019).

However, this presents opportunities as well as challenges for MC practitioners. In particular, the emergence of IMMC presents businesses with the major challenge of designing IMMC messages which appeal to the Gen Z consumers, so as to influence their attitude and behavioural intentions. It is believed that understanding the relationship between exposure to MC messages and consumer attitude is critical in determining the behavioural intentions of consumers (Arora et al., 2020; Martins et al., 2019). The MIM apps context, along with the Gen Z cohort group, makes this even more necessary for a developing country market, like Zimbabwe. This generation is internet-savvy (Duffett, 2020); and accustomed to certain message and content characteristics of IMMC. As such, it is reasonable to assume that their response to IMMC differs from other generations. Hence, marketers are faced with the daunting challenge of ascertaining the features that appeal the most to this consumer group. This is further accelerated by the dynamic advances in mobile communication technology affordances (Tang & Hew, 2022), which dramatically alter young consumers' internet behaviour.

Moreover, earlier studies on MIM apps have shown that consumers perceive mobile instant messaging as largely irritating, invasive and intrusive (Tang & Hew, 2022; Safieddine & Nakhoul, 2021). This, in turn, calls into question the effectiveness of MIM apps as a MC channel. Hence, in recognition of the marketers need to identify and understand key design factors of IMMC, it is important to understand the message and content characteristics (central and peripheral routes) of IMMC that influence the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen

Z consumers. Without a comprehensive examination of the principal central route and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC, the understanding of the MC capabilities and potential of MIM apps is limited. More importantly, this will, no doubt, help marketers to ensure that they effectively plan and design impactful IMMC messages which can trigger positive consumer responses and ultimately contribute to the bottom line.

In addition, it is evident that MC practitioners are struggling to harness MIM apps as an effective MC tool for the achievement of marketing goals (Duffett, 2016). This is despite the fact MIM can help consumers with improved closeness and interpersonal relationships (Tang & Hew, 2022). Furthermore, most of the work on MIM apps has largely been done in developed and emerging economies, (Tang & Hew, 2020; Tseng et al., 2019; Tyrer, 2019; Valeriani & Vaccari, 2018; Yang, et al., 2021), and focused on the acceptance, loyalty, and continuance intention to use MIM apps (Gong, et al., 2020; Safieddine & Nakhoul, 2021; Tang & Hew, 2022). In this regard, observations made in studies in rich and growing economies outside Africa, (Marino & Lo Presti, 2018; Mouakket, 2019; Tang & Hew, 2020; Yang, et al., 2021) may not be generalized to the African context. Thus, an in-depth understanding of IMMC, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers is therefore paramount.

Moreover, while past related studies have examined MC in the context of social media, (Duffett & Wakeham, 2016; Alalwan, 2018; Hamouda, 2018), and SMS advertising, (Drossos, et al., 2014), there are substantial disparities between MIM apps, SMS technologies and social networking sites, making it impossible to generalise research findings across platforms. In fact, research studies differ based on research context and unit of analysis (Duffett, 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Y consumers (which have dominated current mobile MC literature) are not similar to those of Gen Z consumers. Some scholars argue that the Gen Z cohort group is deemed to possess greater computer and digital skills than any other previous generation (Hossain, 2018). It therefore remains challenging that the efficacy of IMMC efforts in influencing Gen Z consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions is yet to be explored.

The attitude and behavioural intentions of the Gen Z consumers towards IMMC has been touted as potential area of further investigation (Duffett, 2017; Alalwan, 2018; Arora et al., 2020; Sreejesh et al., 2020). Duffett (2017) assert that the attitude of Gen Z towards technology-based MC has yet to be adequately measured. Notably, there is a paucity of studies which explore the behaviour of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC. In this regard, the growing population of Gen Z consumers in developing countries maybe a cause for concern for IMMC practitioners. Due to the circumstantial socio-cultural backgrounds, Gen Z consumers in developing countries may display unique online behaviours with regards IMMC. Moreover, some researchers have observed that research on MIM apps is still in its early stages, with contradictory results and findings (Duffett, 2016). Accordingly, there is a lack of strategic theoretical foundations underpinning IMMC (Hamouda, 2018). This, in turn, implies that measuring and understanding the effectiveness of IMMC efforts is difficult. This is further exacerbated by the ever-changing nature of MIMs as a result of technological advances which makes generalization of results and findings difficult.

Against this background, the study aimed to critically analyse the effect of instant message marketing communication (IMMC) on the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. Drawing on a theoretical framework founded on the cognitive response approaches to marketing communication, the study presented and empirically tested a conceptual framework, taking into consideration the characteristics of the Gen Z cohort in Zimbabwe. Specifically, the study integrated the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), information adoption model (IAM) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), to explore the determinants of Gen Z consumers' attitude toward IMMC, and the influence of perceived control, subjective norms and attitude toward IMMC on the behavioural intention of Gen Z consumers. Further, the study evaluated the moderating effect of consumer impulsiveness on the relationship between consumer attitude and behavioural intentions of the Gen Z cohort in Zimbabwe.

1.3 Problem statement

Mobile instant messaging applications have captured the interest of marketing practitioners (Dufett, 2016). Incorporating them into core marketing activities alters MC processes and outcomes (Safieddine & Nakhoul, 2021). Goldman (2021) suggest that MIM apps could be a

highly effective MC tool for reaching out to young consumers. In Zimbabwe, wherein more than 50% of the population use WhatsApp Messenger, (Dube, 2023), and 90% of internet usage is via mobile internet, (Sengere, 2023), MIM apps have gained prominence as modern, cost-effective, and simple-to-use MC tool. It is apparent that businesses are turning to MIM apps to promote their products and services via banner ads, short video clips, and text messages at a lower cost. However, empirical studies on IMMC are limited. As a result, little is known about IMMC, and more specifically, with respect to Gen Z consumers' attitude, and behavioural intentions.

Researchers argue that consumer attitude toward MC in a specific marketing tool is a key measure of MC effectiveness (Dufett, 2016; Martins et al., 2019). In this regard, understanding the attitudes and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers, who are heavy users of MIM apps (Feger, 2024; Duffett, 2020; Brown, 2020), is important for MC practitioners. The proliferation these new MC tools and resultant decline and shift away from traditional MC tools, creates new opportunities and challenges in the design, implementation, and evaluation of MC efforts (Keller, 2001). While a typical MIM platform allows for real-time text transmission over the internet (Dixon, 2024), the impact of IMMC message, source and content characteristics has yet to be investigated. In particular, through the lenses of an integrated theoretical framework.

Several researchers advocate for critical inquiry into IMMC (Marino & Presti, 2018), particularly in different socioeconomic contexts such as developing countries (Arora et al., 2020; Duffett, 2020), with a focus on new media technologies such as MIM apps (Mouakket, 2019). Thus, empirical studies linking IMMC message characteristics, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions are expected to help IMMC designers to effectively plan, strategize, and target their IMMC programs and activities in order to shape consumer behaviour patterns, thereby contributing to business success. This study, is therefore an attempt to fill in this research gap.

1.4 Aim and Objectives of the study

The study aimed to critically analyse the effect of instant message marketing communication (IMMC) on the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

1.4.1 Research objectives

The aim of the study was addressed by considering the following objectives, namely;

- To analyse the relationships between central route and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC and the attitude of Gen Z consumers.
- To assess the influence of perceived control, subjective norms and the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC on their behavioural intentions.
- To evaluate the moderating effect of impulsiveness on the relationship between the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers.

1.5 Overview of related literature

In a broader sense, marketing communication encompasses all the key elements of the marketing mix that enable the creation and exchange of meaning with customers, not just promotion (Andrews & Shimp, 2018). It is a mix of advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotion, and direct-marketing tactics used to persuadably explain a firm's market offerings and establish client relationships (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). However, in recent years, new conceptualisations of MC have emerged, driven by the emergence and subsequent explosion of new media technologies. Some scholars now use such terms as; digital marketing communication, (Bashirzadeh et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019); social media marketing communication, (Duffett & Wakeham, 2016), mobile marketing communication, (Grant & O'Donohoe, 2007; Guido et al., 2016; Ryu & Murdock, 2013) among others. In light of these developments, IMMC can be described as the collective process of leveraging MIM platforms to transmit promotional messages in various multimedia formats in order to achieve MC objectives (Gibbons, 2018). Central to this definition is the notion that, in the new communication environment, MC can be both planned or unplanned, (Andrews & Shimp, 2018), a unique feature of MIM apps. Planned MC is tantamount to paid advertising whilst unplanned MC can be viewed as product or brand catalogue or cues.

Consumer attitude and behavioural intentions are important concepts in research on application of emerging technologies in MC. The attitude of a consumer is a psychological approach that portrays consumers' positive and negative responses to the MC messages (Ajzen, 1991). Behavioural intention denotes a person's subjective probability which determines whether or not they will perform some specific behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). It is a measure of an individual's purpose to behave in a specific way, with the higher the intention, the more probable the behaviour will be carried out (Ajzen, 1991). Accordingly, given the peculiarity of MIM applications, this study examines the attitude and behavioural intentions of the Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. These concepts are further discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

1.5.1 Theoretical framework

Several theories and models have been developed to provide a solid theoretical foundation for predicting consumers' attitude and behavioural responses toward a company's MC efforts (Sharma et al., 2021). According to Kitchen et al., (2014), there has been a call to extend the application of these theories and models to emerging MC tools, such as MIM apps, and new demographic consumer groups, such as the Gen Z cohort. With this in mind, this study integrated the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo, (1981) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (1991).

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is generally used to explain how communication results in persuasion through the formation or modification of one's attitude. It is based on the idea that; the central route or peripheral route are two possible ways for customers to react to persuasive messages. The central route views the customer as an engaged party in the communication process who actively listens to the message content. Under the peripheral route, the consumer uses heuristics and other external indicators, such as source credibility, with little cognitive effort on their part. Hence, in this study, the central route comprises such IMMC message characteristics such as informativeness (IF), entertainment (EN), personalisation (PS) and irritation (IR), whilst, credibility (CR), interactivity (IN) and media richness (MR) are the peripheral route characteristics of IMMC. The ELM was chosen for this study due to its widespread usage in related studies on social media, mobile technologies, websites, and online reviews (Shabab et al., 2021). Scholars are becoming more interested in using the ELM to

investigate how consumers interpret information from marketing companies that they get online (Teng, et al., 2014; Leong, et al., 2019). For example, earlier technology-based research by Cyr et al., (2018), Pillai et al., (2022), and Bao & Wang, (2021) have all investigated online persuasion through online MC, website design, consumers' purchase intention and consumer engagement using the ELM.

The information adoption model (IAM) which was developed by Sussman and Siegal (2003) was employed in the study to reinforce the predictive power of the ELM. Based on the claim that message effectiveness is primarily influenced by central factors (argument strength) and peripheral factors (credibility of source), the IAM specifically clarifies how information provided on digital platforms affects a person's information adoption behaviours (Cheung, Lee & Rabjohn, 2008; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Hence, the IAM is employed in this study to explain the characteristics of IMMC messages. This is consistent with current streams of research on emerging MC tools such as Youtube (Arora & Lata, 2020), and SMS (see Sharma et al., 2021 Goh et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2019; Kim, 2019). These studies concur that consumers' attitude and behavioural intentions in the digital MC environment are influenced by the central and peripheral route characteristics of MC messages.

While the nature and properties of IMCC messages are explained by the ELM and IAM, the TPB explains how attitudes, the existence of subjective norms, and perceived control affect human behaviour. In sum, the TPB suggests that a causal relationship exists between consumer attitudes and their real behaviour as mediated by behavioural intentions. As a result, the TPB offered a solid theoretical foundation for comprehending the study's outcome variables, consumer attitude and behavioural intention. This provided enough justification to therefore employ the TPB in the study. This decision was substantiated by Sharma et al., (2021) who discovered that consumer attitude towards SMS-based commercials influence their behavioural intentions. A detailed discussion of the theories underpinning this study is provided in chapter 3.

1.5.2 Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework can be viewed as a schematic presentation of the proposed relationship between the variables under investigation. It as a set of ideas that guide and support research and includes presumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories, (Maxwell, 2006). Figure 1.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework which guided the study. It is drawn up based on the theoretical propositions of the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), information adoption model (IAM) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB).

The ELM and IAM depict the central route characteristics (i.e., informativeness, entertainment, irritation and personalisation) and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC (i.e., credibility, interactivity and perceived media richness). The TPB accounts for the such constructs as consumer attitude (CA) towards IMMC and behavioural intention (BI). Also, the moderating effects of consumer impulsiveness (CI) on the consumer attitude-behavioural intentions relationships regarding IMMC and behavioural intentions are indicated in the conceptual framework. The research hypotheses were postulated to show the relationship between the variables under investigation. Further details are presented and discussed in chapter 3.

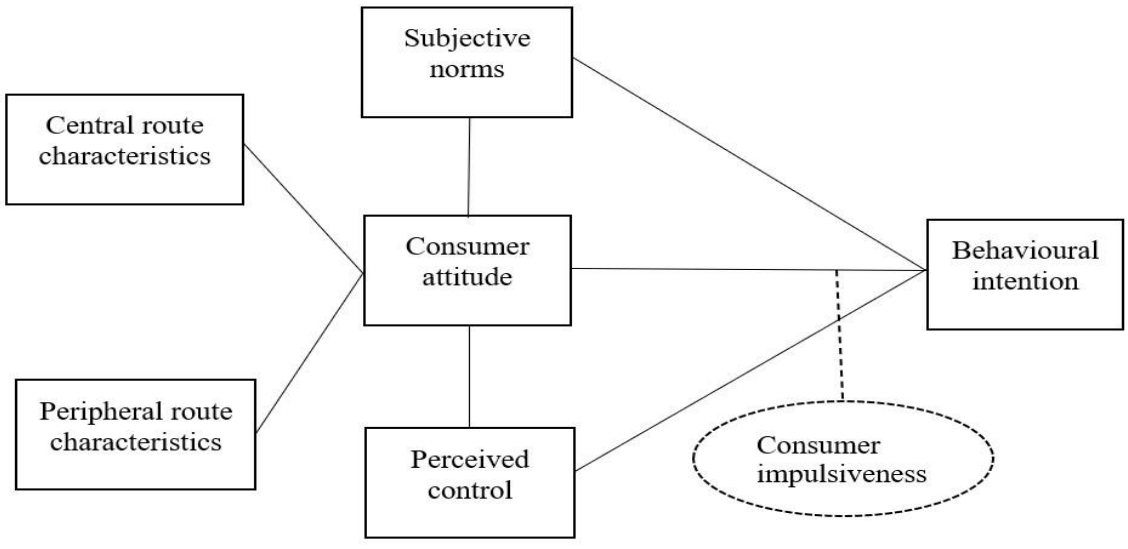

Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework **Source:** Developed by the Researcher

1.6 Overview of the research methodology

The nature and context of the study necessitated the use of quantitative research approach as it is a highly structured methodology. In essence, the quantitative research approach is congruent with the aim of the study. This approach allows for explaining fundamental relationships that exists between identified research constructs through hypotheses testing to facilitate replication (Saunders et al., 2019). Thus, the quantitative research approach helped to address the research problem through statistical means for the purpose of attaining conclusive and generalisable results. In view of the fact that not every member of the Gen Z cohort group in Zimbabwe could be studied, aa representative sample was drawn up from the Gen Z cohort group in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. A sample of 410 Gen Z consumers was used to collected data. The Slovin's sample size formular was used to determine the sample size at 4% confidence interval. The actual respondents were selected via the stratified sampling technique.

A customer intercept survey method was used to administer the questionnaire to the respondents with the help of research assistants. The 5-point Likert scale structured questionnaire (Appendix 1) which consisted 55-measurement items was developed after consultation of the relevant literature from past empirical studies. Each measurement scale item used in this study was obtained from related literature and grounded in the theoretical framework. To ensure compatibility with the research context, the measurement items were further modified. The self-administered structured questionnaire was divided into three major sections, namely; the central route characteristics, peripheral route characteristics and respondents' socio-demographic profiles.

The analysis of data was done in several phases. First, the researcher used SPSS software v26 to analyse the demographic characteristics of the generation Z consumers. Secondly, Smart PLS 4 software was used to test the hypotheses of the study. To do this, the researcher first conducted a confirmatory factors analysis to assess the fitness of the model. Thereafter, a structural model was developed to evaluate the influence of instant message marketing communications on consumers attitudes and behavioral intention among generation Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

The final section of the research methodology chapter discussed the ethical considerations observed in this study. These related to such issues as; debriefing respondents about what the research is all about, obtaining informed consent and maintaining the confidentiality of the respondents. In this regard, the researcher first received permission from the relevant authorities (see gatekeepers' letter in Appendix 3) to carry out the study before beginning to gather data. In addition, prior to data collection, ethical clearance approval was obtained from the UKZN Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC/00005841/2023) (See Appendix 2).

1.7 Research context

Zimbabwe has a total of ten provinces and an estimated population of over 15 million people, of which many are young people below the age of thirty-five. The median age in Zimbabwe is 18.4 and over 50% of Zimbabwe's population is below the age of 24 (Kemp, 2023). More importantly, the mobile instant messaging platform, WhatsApp, has a penetration rate of over 46%, indicating that half of the country's population of 15 million people actively uses the platform (Dube, 2023). To this end, university students are studied because they make up a larger percentage of the older, and informed Gen Z consumers (Feger, 2024). This is according to the Education report by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT), which revealed that undergraduate enrolment at institutions of higher learning is dominated by the 19-24 age group, thus the typical Gen Z cohort.

In addition, although the majority of Zimbabwe's population stay in rural areas, the study focused on university students in an urban setting because the rural counterparts struggle to access smartphones, the internet and most importantly MIM apps due to poor network coverage and technology infrastructure. More importantly, the study was initiated during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures, hence Masvingo province was conveniently selected for this study. Presently, Great Zimbabwe University is the largest university in Masvingo province with an estimated undergraduate student population of over 12 000. Hence, in this study, Great Zimbabwe University was used as a sampling unit.

1.8 Significance and Contribution of the study

1.8.1 Managerial contribution

In a world with mobile instant messaging, the study may offer new perspectives on current MC methods and strategies. Cognizant of the managerial need to understand the effectiveness of MC efforts, this study helps to widen and deepen the understanding of mobile MC appeals and the broad impact of MIM technologies on the field of MC. Furthermore, the information gained from the study may help marketers and business managers to have a clear understanding of what the Gen consumers value most when it comes to IMMC. More precisely, the study has added new details regarding the vital role central and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC play regarding the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers. This, in turn, will culminate not only in the design and implementation but also in the evaluation of the effectiveness of novel MC strategies and tactics which are appealing to young consumers, especially within the developing country markets.

1.8.2 Theoretical contribution

The insights generated from this study will provide direction to and complement the theoretical discussion on MC in the context of mobile media. In particular, the study adds value to the emerging stream of scholarly works on the application of new media technologies such as MIM apps in MC. More specifically, the study makes significant contributions to this body of knowledge through a detailed analysis of the central route and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC. In this regard, the study provides important directions on the relationship between IMMC and the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe and other developing economies.

Regardless of the growth of empirical studies on mobile MC, IMMC is a relatively new area, which is under explored. Hence, this study presents new contributions to the application of MIM apps in the MC domain. It is among the pioneering works on IMMC, consumer attitude and behavioural attitude. In particular, the study adds new variables, namely; interactivity and media richness to the peripheral route factors of a MC message. This unique contribution adds value to the theoretical strengths of the ELM by providing empirical evidence which adds

weight to the growing literature on consumer behavioural responses to emerging mobile MC tools in general and MIM apps in particular.

The study may also provide a unique contribution to the advancement of new knowledge and academic literature which relate to the application of elaboration likelihood within contemporary MC tools. By integrating the Elaboration Likelihood Model, Information Adoption Model (IAM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the study may offer an overall MC framework that could become the basis for understanding the evolving contextual forces and how they interactively influence the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers. Due to the proliferation and continued fragmentation of MC tools, this approach lays the foundation for the application of these established MC theories in an international setting by examining the influential role of each variable in a developing country like Zimbabwe. Thus, this integrative approach may provide insights into the effectiveness of this novel mobile MC tool as compared to traditional avenues.

1.8.3 Pedagogical contribution

This study extends the elaboration likelihood and planned behaviour constructs to mobile MC, in particular, IMMC. The study fills a gap in the marketing communication literature on mobile MC, consumer attitude and behavioural intention of the Gen Z consumers. Considering that limited research has been conducted on elaboration likelihood, planned behaviour and mobile MC in the context of Gen Z consumers (as opposed to the Gen Y), exploring how central and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC influences the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers will be highly critical for MC educators in today's digital world. Thus, the research findings may have important pedagogical implications for educators.

1.8.4 Marketing communication practitioners

This study examines the applicability of the Elaboration Likelihood Model in an emerging MC context, that is IMMC, and fascinating consumer group, that is, Generation Z consumers in Zimbabwe. With this in mind, the study is deemed to provide valuable insights that help to understand the application of the ELM in the IMMC context within a developing country market. Thus, the research may yield useful theoretical notions that could help MC practitioners

better understand consumer perceptions and behaviour in MIM-mediated MC. More importantly, the empirical findings may provide alternate perspectives on IMMC message features, consumer attitudes, and behavioural responses to IMMC attempts. This would help IMMC practitioners to have a clear picture of consumers' expectations with regards to IMMC. Finally, the valuable information and literature generated in this study on the usage of MIM platforms such as WhatsApp Messenger, will aid in developing effective IMMC campaigns, as well as highlighting the projected benefits and hazards.

1.9 Assumptions of the study

The researcher assumed that:

- There would be no significant changes to the mobile instant messaging technologies during the period under study;
- The sample is a true representation of the Gen Z cohort group and is free from bias; and
- All the study participants would provide honest and informed answers which make it easy to generalize the research findings.

1.10 Delimitations of the study

This study was confined to such key research constructs as elaboration likelihood and planned behaviour. In particular, the study focused on instant message marketing communications, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions. In this regard, a single generation cohort group (Gen Z) was used and other generations were excluded. The researcher decided to use the Gen Z cohort group in this study primarily because this generation now account for a third of the global population and have considerably high purchasing power (Brown, 2020). More importantly, this generation is deemed to possess greater computer and digital skills than any other previous generation, (Hossain, 2018), and has never lived without mobile devices and the internet (Duffett, 2020). Moreover, there is scant empirical research on the Generation Z (also known as digital natives) cohort, as most previous studies by Arora et al., (2020), Duffett, (2017) and Sari, et al., (2020), have largely focused on Generation Y.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study was restricted to three theoretical models, namely; the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Information Adoption Model (IAM). Specifically, the ELM and IAM are used to expound the central route and peripheral route characteristics of a MC message and the TPB is employed to explain consumers attitude and behavioural intentions.

In terms of the geographical scope, the study was confined to Masvingo city, which is situated in the southern part of Zimbabwe. The decision to consider Gen Z consumers in the city of Masvingo was motivated by the fact that the study was initiated when Zimbabwe was still under the COVID-19 lockdown.

1.11 Limitations of the study

Even though the researcher was meticulous and followed all the guidelines and procedures of conducting research, it is worth noting some factors exist that may have affected the results of the study. These limitations include the following:

Firstly, the respondents were selected from a single sampling unit. Due to the prevailing global health pandemic, the study was limited to one area and unit of study. The inclusion of Gen Z consumers in other cities in Zimbabwe could have yielded different findings due to differences in perceptions, opinions, attitude and behaviours.

Secondly, the research model was formulated based on the research constructs culled from the integrated theoretical framework of the ELM and TPB. Several variables from other MC theories such as the Hierarchy of Effects Model could be explored to provide more insightful outcomes and depth in understanding the antecedent factors influencing consumer attitude and behavioural intentions in the context of IMMC.

Thirdly, although WhatsApp is the most popular and widely used MIM app in most developing countries, future studies could explore MC in the context of other MIM apps in either emerging or developed economies. It is believed that this would enhance the knowledge of how these

mobile social media tools are influencing the attitudes and behavioural intentions of young consumers who form the majority of today's world population.

Furthermore, the focus on one particular cohort group (Gen Z) may negatively affect the generalizability of the research results as this suffers from a lack of representation. It would be fascinating to see how a comparative study of different consumer groups such as Gen X, Gen Y along Gen Z would yield important insights that would guide MC strategies in a world of MIM apps. Perhaps more importantly, other researchers may consider extending to the other cohort groups by extending to other Gen Z consumers in rural areas as this would deepen the insights gained from the study.

Finally, given that a quantitative research approach was adopted in this study, it is suggested that future studies consider a mixed-methods approach or qualitative research approach to broaden the understanding of consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions regarding IMMC.

1.12 Organisation of the study

Chapter one serves to give an overview of the study. It defined the research problem and stated the aim and objectives. Also, the chapter specified the research questions and hypotheses, which established the research design. The research context and significance of the study are also pointed out together with the anticipated contributions.

Chapter two presents a review of related literature concerning MIM apps which inevitably forms the bedrock of this study. In particular, the chapter outlines the nature of the MIM including the definitions of MIM apps, and the global trends in MIM. The chapter also offers a thorough analysis of the type of communication exchanges as well as the peculiarities of MIM apps. In addition, the chapter highlights the MC context, the conceptualisation of instant message marketing communication (IMMC) and the application of MIM apps as a MC tool. The final section discusses the MIM apps in the Zimbabwean context.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical foundations upon which the study is built. It specifically outlines the theoretical framework, conceptual framework and research model and statements of hypotheses. In particular, the chapter reviews the literature relating to the three theories underpinning the study.

Chapter Four explains the methodology used to collect and analyse data. Specifically, the guiding philosophy, approach and the overall research design are outlined in this chapter. Also, the research population and sampling, ethical considerations and data analysis plan were also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Five includes a discussion of the study results and how the results address the previously defined research problem. The chapter provides insights into the findings on IMMC and the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

Chapter Six presents a detailed discussion of the results, trends, and observations which emerge from the results presented in chapter five.

Chapter Seven provides a summary of the key research findings, conclusions, implications, contributions and limitations of the study as well as areas of further research.

1.13 Chapter summary

This chapter gave an overview of the study. The general introduction, background to the study, statement of the problem, the research aims and objectives, hypotheses, significance and contributions of the study were outlined in this chapter. The following chapter discusses a literature review of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a review of related literature concerning MIM apps which inevitably forms the bedrock of this study. In particular, the chapter outlines the nature of the MIM including the definitions of MIM apps, and the global trends in MIM. The chapter also provides a thorough analysis of the nature of and the peculiar qualities of MIM apps. In addition, the chapter highlights the MC context, the conceptualisation of instant message marketing communication (IMMC) and the application of MIM apps as a MC tool. The final section discusses the MIM apps in the Zimbabwean context.

2.2 The Mobile Instant Message Context

The mobile technology revolution and its subsequent technologies such as mobile messaging applications have significantly transformed people's lives including the conduct of business transactions and marketing activities across the globe. Both individual consumers and businesses now take advantage of the growing popularity and use of these mobile instant messaging apps to engage and interact (Koyen, 2022). Moreover, the increasing rate of mobile phone penetration, internet access and overall connectivity witnessed worldwide spur the widespread adoption and use of MIM applications. These include such platforms as WhatsApp, Messenger, WeChat, Line, Kingschat and Telegram among others, which are widely considered as emerging marketing communication tools, (Kremming, 2020). Notwithstanding, the inherent features of MIM apps, namely; affordability, user friendliness and ease of use (Tang & Hew, 2020; LoPresti et al., 2022) among others, enable even the technologically marginalised and illiterate individuals to use them without much difficulty. Hence, the widespread use and continued uptake of MIM apps particularly in developing countries, (Dixon, 2024).

From a societal perspective, similar to social networking sites, MIM apps have created intricate social interactions which allow users to send or receive messages, share stories and build credible and solid social relationships with each other. Conversely, from the business

viewpoint, MIM apps have transformed marketing communications by creating a ubiquitous, pervasive, and rich channel which support interactive and dialogic communications with consumers. To this end, MIM apps are expected to eclipse other digital communication tools like email and website on both value and volume of MC (Giacomini, 2021). In agreement with this notion, Koyen (2022) asserts that, unlike email which requires complex support services and websites which are largely generic and impersonal, MIM apps allow personalized and customized communication. This enables users and MC practitioners to create meaningful, direct relationships between marketers and consumers. In the same vein, unlike SMS which is costly, MIM apps are valued as cost-free, real-time mobile messaging transmission mechanisms which rely on internet services. Therefore, they allow rapid dissemination of information and relay of the corresponding feedback (Sonnenberg, 2021; Murphy, 2021). However, there is need to define MIM apps particularly within the context of this study.

2.2.1 Definition of Mobile Instant Message Apps

It is worth noting that there is no agreed definition of mobile instant message applications probably due to the fact that this area is still in its infancy stage. In general, MIM apps can be described as, 'a type of electronic communication that allow two or more participants to hold real-time conversations online (via computers) and or through mobile devices', (Duffett, 2016). In other words, mobile instant messaging apps refer to a type of online social messaging app which offers real-time text transmission via the internet (Dixon, 2024). This view of MIM apps attest to the distinctive features that separate MIM apps from operator-based text messaging services such as SMS. Some scholars view MIM apps as mobile applications that are freely downloadable and run on several operating systems (Padmavathy et al., 2018). Other writers describe MIM apps as text-oriented communication technologies that enable instantaneous engagement with other users (Oghuma et al., 2016). Thus, in essence, MIM apps are cost-free mobile messaging applications which facilitate both asynchronous and synchronous conversations and exchanges through smartphones and other handheld devices (Rambe & Bere, 2013). Therefore, this study classifies MIM apps as social messaging platforms accessible via smartphones and other mobile devices. This conceptualisation captures all facets of MIM apps and excludes text messaging systems such as SMS.

A key characteristic feature of MIM apps is that they enable users (businesses or individuals) to send messages in different formats such as video, image, audio to each other and converse in real time (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020). They practically work on every smartphone, and have amassed millions of users across the globe (Tang & Hew, 2020). To be able to use an MIM app, a user simply installs the MIM application on their smartphone and use it to communicate with a mobile contact given that the latter has the application installed in their device as well an internet connection (Marino & LoPresti, 2018). Thereafter, a user can initiate real-time chats immediately with other users. Safieddine and Nakhoul (2021) observed that MIM apps rely on the integral features of mobile devices to facilitate instantaneous real-time communication between users. For instance, a typical MIM app such as WhatsApp enable users to share information in the form of texts, pictures, documents and videos either individually or collectively in groups. Thus, the flexibility of MIM apps could be attributed as one of major reasons driving people to use them frequently for social purposes in general, (Tang & Hew, 2020) and marketing communication in particular.

2.2.2 Mobile instant message trends: A global perspective

Smartphone applications such as MIM apps are challenging social networking sites (SNS) as the most widely adopted digital means of communication for individuals and groups (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2018). This is due to the digital revolution and its subsequent smartphone technologies which have transformed society and business across the globe. The aforementioned is supported by Dixon (2024) who mentions that the emergence and explosive growth of mobile apps has given rise to widespread adoption and use of less costly social messaging apps. The latest statistics in Figure 2a indicate that there is a combined total of over 3 billion MIM apps users across the globe (Ceci, 2022; Enberg, 2021). It is predicted that the figure will rise to more than 3.5 billion by 2025. Furthermore, Giacomini (2021) alludes that more than 23 billion messages are sent worldwide daily implying 270 000 messages sent every second. Thus, Koyen (2022) asserts that for businesses, mobile messaging is set to become the marketing and communications channel of choice.

It is worth noting that the upwelling of mobile messaging app usage statistics in the past two years can be attributed to a couple of factors. First, the COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns

which drove people to opt for digital communication tools to interact with family, friends and peers. Secondly, the rise of mobile internet traffic which accounts for more than ninety percent (90%) of all internet traffic (Ceci, 2022). Others factors include the fact that MIM apps are cost-free as they require internet services only to be operational. Another factor to consider may be the rising young population particularly the Gen Z cohort group which accounts for more than a third of the world's population, (Brown, 2020). These young consumers have unlimited access to the internet and smartphones which they use to interact, communicate and share opinions.

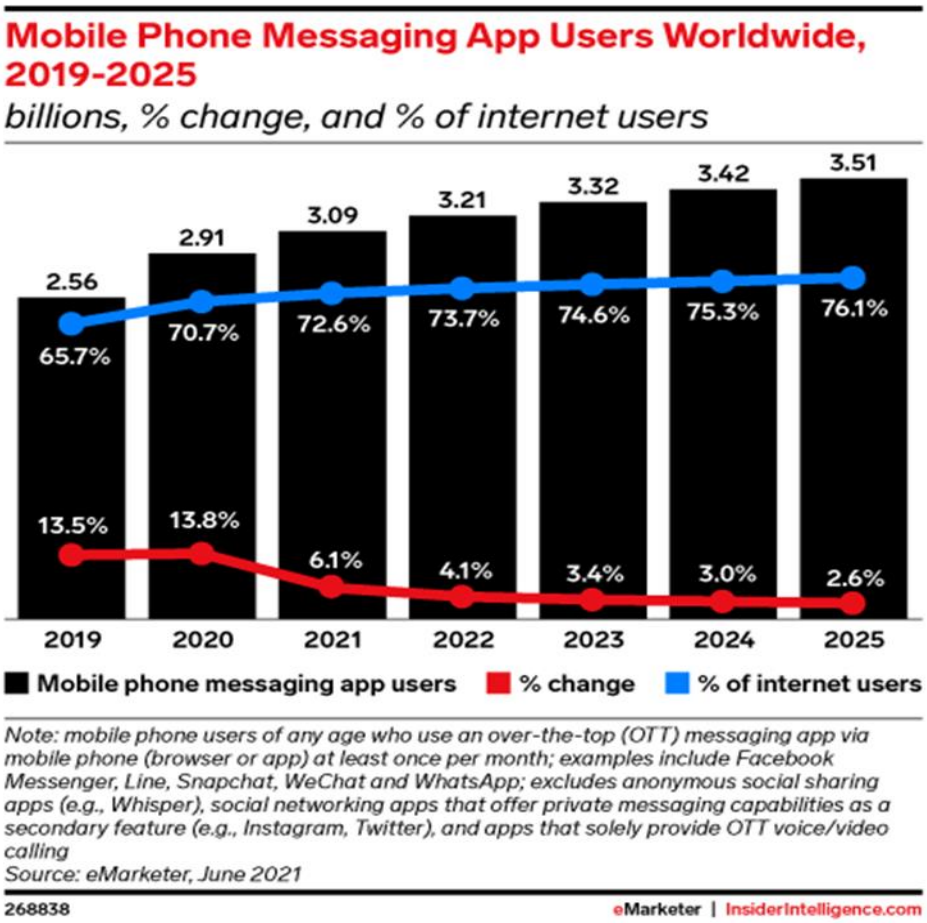

Figure 2.1: MIM Usage Statistics

Interestingly, according to Enberg (2021), the use of mobile messaging apps is relatively low in the developed economies compared to emerging economies and developing countries including China, India and most African countries. In fact, recent MIM app usage and reach figures, suggest that penetration is high in markets outside of the developed world (Dixon, 2024; Ceci, 2022). For example, Africa has 69.1 percent of mobile internet traffic, followed by

Asia at 65.2 percent, while the global average is 56.9. In addition, Ceci (2022) submits that the most popular MIM apps in the developed world are WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, while WeChat, LINE, and KakaoTalk are the dominant players in China, Japan, and South Korea, respectively. WhatsApp reached an estimated count of 2.26bn users by June 2022, whilst Facebook Messenger had over a billion users, (Ceci, 2022). During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Telegram, an MIM app developed by the Russians, reached one billion downloads in August 2021 (Ceci, 2022).

Although, the two Meta-owned apps (WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) dominate the global MIM market, the Asian market is largely dominated by WeChat, LINE and KakaoTalk, (Dixon, 2024). By December 2021, there were more than 1.2 active monthly users on WeChat, followed by LINE which accounted for 178 million and KaKao Talk with a little above 50 million monthly active users (Ceci, 2022). Notwithstanding, in India, WhatsApp is the most popular and widely used MIM app followed by Snapchat, Myspace, and WeChat (Padmavathy et al., 2018). The trend follows a similar pattern even Africa, hence, in accord with this assertion, the global MIM market is dominated by WhatsApp. In agreement to the aforementioned, WhatsApp is the most adopted and widely used MIM app with more active users compared to Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and Pinterest combined (Dixon, 2024).

Accordingly, the study is based on WhatsApp Messenger as the focal MIM app. Just like in many developing countries, WhatsApp Messenger is the dominant MIM app in Zimbabwe (Mangeya & Ngoshi, 2021). WhatsApp messenger is a cost-free mobile messaging application which facilitate one-to-one and group interactions in multimedia formats (Kaufmann & Peil, 2020). Now part of the Meta group, WhatsApp was founded in 2009. Presently, it is the most widely used mobile messaging application with more than 2 billion users in more than180 countries (Dixon, 2024). This mobile messaging app is downloadable on mobile devices running either Android or IOS operating systems and is also available on desktop. WhatsApp allows for both social and professional interactions amongst its users (Rafique et al., 2023).

2.3 Nature of communication in MIM apps

In theory, short-message-service (SMS) technologies had a role in the development of MIM apps' fundamental technological functionalities. However, their underlying features and communication capabilities are vastly different. In fact, there are substantial disparities between MIM apps and SMS technologies. First, whereas SMS technologies allow text messages to be sent over a telecommunications operator's network, MIM apps allow text messages to be sent over the internet. Second, unlike SMS, which charges users for sending text messages, MIM apps users get access to free online chatting services. Third, although SMS technology can be used on both simple feature phones and smartphones, MIM apps can be used on desktops, laptops, and smartphones (PCs). In sum, Rafique et al., (2023) claims that MIMs have all-in-one online video, audio, image, and text discussions with multiple persons on any smart device. They have an array of capabilities which users can capitalise on, namely, group-chats and status updates, among others.

2.3.1 Group chats feature

In general, MIM apps give users the chance to connect individually through one-to-one messaging, and the possibility to collaborate as a group through group conversations. In essence, MIM platforms like WhatsApp allow users the opportunity to create a group comprising several participants. Once an MIM app user creates a group, they can add others instantly or invite them to join the group via a group link. Rafique et al., (2023) submit that group members can instantly post messages in the group which every member of the group can view, read, reply or even share with other users outside the group. It is also worth noting that MIM apps allow one user to establish and administer several groups. In most cases, a user can start with one group and expand it to several other groups once the original group reaches its maximum number of participants (Ceci, 2022). Hence, in accord with the aforementioned, a typical WhatsApp group is an online community made up of people with similar interests or who are part of a specific social or professional group. For instance, there are several WhatsApp groups for small-scale farmers, event planners, commercial dealers, and others in many developing countries.

Therefore, given that group chats are typically based on some form of informality, they encourage mutuality by bringing people together at any time and across different time zones (Goodwin, 2023). Additionally, the relaxed tone of MIM group chats fosters a warm environment that provides users a strong sense of belonging, allowing them to openly and voluntarily cooperate, post, and exchange information (Rafique et al., 2023). In accordance with this, group chats offer a distinctive online community (Gronseth & Hebert, 2019) that can be addressed with customized MC messages, making them an attractive tool for MC. Furthermore, MC practitioners can benefit from the advantages of the immediacy nature of group chat conversations to speed up the decision-making process for customers by providing timely and pertinent product information (Goodwin, 2023). For instance, service providers in a specific residential area can set up a business networking WhatsApp group where they can advertise and promote their companies. This allows customers to inquire about the availability of specific products, look up product details, and solicit and share feedback on their interactions with particular brands or products (Marino & LoPresti, 2018). In sum, group conversations make it simple and quick for MC practitioners to spread their messages, while also making it simple for users to interact with or react to MC stimuli (Hollington, 2023).

2.3.2 Status update feature

Another important feature of MIM apps is the status update feature which is also referred to as ‘stories’, ‘moments’, in other social media. Snapchat is recorded as the first platform to introduce the ‘stories’ feature with some others mimicking the feature and renaming it to ‘status update’ (O’Connell, 2020). For instance, in 2017, WhatsApp Messenger introduced the WhatsApp Status feature which is visible only for twenty-four hours after which it disappears (Menon, 2022). Unless the user adjusts the status viewership settings, in general, any user can view the posted status update as long as they have saved the contact number of the one who has posted (Goodwin, 2023). Thus, the status update function provides a platform for individual users to express their emotions and daily life experiences. Hence, Menon (2022) capitulates that the status update feature allows for MIM users to share their current ‘state of mind’ with their peers in different multimedia formats.

Interestingly, this feature is popular among young consumers including both millennial and the Gen Z cohort age groups. Perhaps most importantly, this function support MC efforts such as word of mouth communication, especially customer to customer MC wherein customers share their opinions, judgments and experiences with products or services. In light of this, Safieddine and Nakhoul (2021) opine that, the status update feature enhances both online and offline word of mouth marketing and helps to predict the outcomes of a firm's MC efforts. On the one hand, customer can spread the message by posting MC messages on their WhatsApp status, while on the other hand, businesses can update their status profile with a MC stimulus (Hollington, 2023). Once a business posts a status update, they can get feedback in two major ways. One way is to gather statistics on how many people have viewed the status. Another way is for the viewers to reply to the post through requesting for further information or simply reacting by commenting on the post itself.

Moreover, although a WhatsApp status update post has a life span of 24 hours, users can view them multiple times during the 24-hour cycle. They can also download other users' status posts and/or repost them themselves (Mangeya & Ngoshi, 2021) either on their own status, or in groups or other social media thereby pushing them to go viral. Most importantly, the status update feature is a deliberate and intentional way of transmitting messages with the expectation that others will view the post and thus process the message (Malekhosseini & Hosseinzadeh, 2019). Consequently, this helps MC practitioners to propagate MC messages within a short period of time and generate conversations both online and offline. In essence, for small businesses, the status update feature supports several MC activities. These include communication exchanges between businesses, consumers and peers, which in-turn influences consumer buying behaviours.

2.3.3 Other unique features of MIM apps

A summative body of recent research (Tang & Hew, 2022; Safieddine & Nakhoul, 2021; Tang & Hew, 2020) highlights several inherent features implicit in MIMs in comparison with other mobile communication systems. Due to the technological developments and advances of mobile communication systems, the unique features have equally transitioned resulting in different classifications. Early writings on MIMs, Quan-Haase et al., (2005) distinguished the communication capabilities of MIMs from related electronic communication systems on a

continuum of inherent characteristics key among them is the immediacy of message delivery. They further argue that a typical MIM app operates three key mechanisms. One such mechanism is the 'pop-up' system which notify users whenever a message is transmitted to their account. Another one is the system for signalling when other MIM users are either online or offline. The third mechanism is for allowing MIM users to access a visible list of other MIM users. This is supported by Church & De Oliveira, (2013) who observed that among the common features of MIM apps were the ability to notify the users when their message is sent, delivered, and read by the recipients.

In addition, apart from voice messaging, the conventional features of MIMs now enable users 'to send and receive text, images, videos, geographic location, and real-time messaging', (Safieddine & Nakhoul (2021). The aforementioned is supported by Tang and Hew (2020) who stated that the general functional capabilities of MIM offer features such as "private or group chats, and the exchange of graphics, audio, and video messages". In their recent work, Tang and Hew (2022) further cements the notion that a typical MIM app offers various functions. Therefore, it can be observed that in recent years, MIM apps have distinguished themselves from SMS-based texting. From a marketing perspective, Andujar (2016) alludes that MIM apps facilitate synchronous and asynchronous interaction virtually at any time and place. This implies that MIM apps allow for users (i.e. businesses and their customers) to interact and engage either in real-time or even at a later stage, whichever way is convenient to either party. In addition, Marino and LoPresti (2018) suggest that for businesses, MIM apps possess several qualities. For instance, they are easy to setup, facilitate personalization of the content, and the possibility of obtaining customer information anytime, anywhere. To this end, Marino and LoPresti (2018) argue that MIM apps tend to be more communal, spontaneous and colloquial in nature and thus promote engagement among users.

Furthermore, in a comparative study of the use of MIM apps and SMS, Church and De Oliveira (2013) suggest three factors driving the effective use of MIMs, namely, affordability, rapidity and social connectedness. They further submit that the widespread adoption and use of MIM is driven by the fact they are relatively inexpensive to use. In support, other scholars submit that MIM apps are affordable, portable, available and accessible to both MC practitioners and recipients of MC messages (Safieddine & Nakhoul, 2021). Consequently, businesses and

consumers resorted to voice and video calls for corporate communication (Ceci, 2022). Moreover, given that both businesses and consumers are always connected on MIM apps, the level of availability presents enormous opportunities for effective MC (Giacomini, 2021). Thus, Koyen (2022) argues that the nature of communication in MIM apps provides a holistic mobile MC approach. It is further suggested that MIM apps 'provide a single point of contact that eliminates the need to switch to other digital MC channels like chats, emails and phone calls. Thus, in essence, MIM apps unify the MC efforts of a business into one digital and mobile marketing communication channel.

2.4 The Marketing Communication (MC) Context

Historically, the term "marketing communication" resulted from a combination of two disciplines, namely; marketing and communication. In general, marketing is associated with the traditional marketing mix elements (i.e., the 4Ps - product, place, price, and promotion). Notably, Guolla et al. (2017) suggest that the role of the marketing function is to blend all four elements into a marketing program aimed at facilitating marketplace exchanges. In the same way communication entails sending and receiving information via some form of media in order to establish common thoughts and share meaning between individuals or organizations (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Nordquist, 2019). As a result, MC encompasses all the marketing mix elements that enable the creation and exchange of meaning with customers, not just promotion (Andrews & Shimp, 2018). It refers to the techniques used by businesses to inform, persuade, and remind customers about their market offerings, either directly or indirectly (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Thus, put simply, MC is a combination of advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotion, and direct-marketing tools used to persuasively communicate a firm's market offerings and build customer relationships (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

In recent years, the meaning and function of MC has dramatically changed due to advances in technology and fragmentation of traditional MC tools (Goldman, 2021). In the 1980s, the focus of MC shifted towards integrated marketing communication (IMC), wherein IMC proponents argued for cohesive and mutually reinforcing MC efforts, (Andrews & Shimp, 2018). However, since the turn of the millennium, new conceptualisations of MC have emerged, driven by the emergence and subsequent explosion of new media technologies. To this end, scholars now use

such terms as; digital marketing communication, (Bashirzadeh et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019); social media marketing communication, (Duffett & Wakeham, 2016), mobile marketing communication, (Grant & O'Donohoe, 2007; Guido et al., 2016; Ryu & Murdock, 2013), and more recently, Youtube marketing communication (Duffett, 2020; Febriyantoro, 2020; Park & McMahan, 2020). This reflects the adopted technology or communication channel. Consequently, contemporary scholars summarily view MC as, the collective use of communication channels such as print, broadcast, internet, and social media, among others, to pursue marketing objectives, (Bhasin, 2021).

2.4.1 Conceptualisation of Instant Message Marketing Communication (IMMC)

Given that mobile marketing is the foundation of instant message marketing communications, it is critical to first define it. In 2009, the Mobile Marketing Association defined mobile marketing as the use of mobile devices and networks by organisations to communicate and engage with audiences in an interactive and relevant manner. Earlier, some scholars broadly defined mobile marketing the conduct of marketing activities via a ubiquitous network accessible to consumers via personal mobile devices (Varnali & Toker, 2010). In other words, the term 'mobile marketing' has been used to describe the use of mobile technologies to conduct marketing and promotional activities. In particular, due to widespread adoption of mobile devices, researchers viewed mobile marketing as marketing communication conducted via mobile media; mobile advertising; text message marketing; and wireless advertising (Broadbridge, 2018).

In the past, the term mobile advertising –a form of internet-based advertising which involves the use of mobile phones to transmit promotional messages and information through text, graphics, videos, and sound clips, (Hashim et al., 2018; Goh et al., 2020; Smith, 2017), dominated the literature on studies of mobile marketing. However, in view of the recent technological developments, the conceptualisation of mobile marketing can now include smartphone advertising, (Martins et al., 2019; Arora & Agarwal, 2020); SMS marketing/advertising (Varnali, 2014; Sharma et al., 2021; Sreejesh et al., 2020; Tseng & Teng, 2016; Humbani et al., 2015), in-app mobile advertisements, (Sung, 2021; Sirgudsson et al., 2018; Broadbridge, 2018) and more recently, instant message marketing (Tang & Hew, 2020;

Sonnenberg, 2021; Murphy, 2021; Kremming, 2020; Mouakket, 2019). The aforementioned illustrate that instant message marketing communication falls within the broad category of various forms of mobile marketing communication. Notwithstanding, it has its roots in instant message marketing.

According to Kim (2019), instant message marketing is the use of MIM applications as a conversational tool to reach people at scale with targeted messages. Gibbons (2018), view it as the act of using MIMs to facilitate conversations and commerce with prospects and customers. Simply put, instant message marketing is a marketer's effort to communicate with past, current, and prospective customers via MIM apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, and others. It falls within the category of mobile marketing communication which broadly captures several mobile marketing concepts such as mobile advertising, SMS advertising, smartphone advertising or text advertising. As a result, IMMC is defined in this study as the collective process of leveraging MIM platforms to transmit promotional messages in various multimedia formats in order to achieve MC objectives (Gibbons, 2018; Kim, 2019). Central to this definition is the notion that, in the new communication environment, MC can be both intentional (e.g., as with advertising) and unintentional (e.g., a product feature or package cue), (Andrews & Shimp, 2018), which is a unique feature of MIM apps.

2.4.2 Application of MIM apps as a MC tool

Although developed primarily as a messaging service, MIM apps have the potential to transform marketing communication activities. Compared with impersonal and costly traditional advertising media such as radio, newspaper and television, MIM apps facilitate cost-effective, personal, real-time, two-way dialogic communication with customers (Dixon, 2024; Goodwin, 2023). In addition, the media richness of MIM apps emanating from multimedia features like graphics, audio, emoticons/emoji/stickers, and videos (Tang & Hew, 2020) enriches the message appeal of MIM-mediated marketing campaigns. Most importantly, given that MIM apps practically work on every smartphone, and have amassed millions of users across the globe (Tang & Hew, 2020), they have a wider and extensive reach. Moreover, the mobile and ubiquitous nature of MIM apps extends their marketing capabilities to include viral

marketing, display or banner advertising, one-to-one or mass marketing, personalized customer service support and customer relationship management, (Martins et al., 2019).

Additionally, marketing practitioners can use MIM to perform several marketing functions. In view of the fact that MIM apps are available on almost all smartphones and linked to personal accounts, they have thus become a credible means for customers to share opinions, experiences, assessments, feedback, brand information and performance. Resultantly, Marino and LoPresti, (2018) argue that MIM apps allow for creation of value-laden customer/brand relationships, manifestation of new customer engagement behaviours and optimization of personalised interactions. In addition, Safieddine and Nakhoul (2021) observed that MIM apps offer vast marketing opportunities namely, easy and cost-effective one-on-one experiences with customers; personalised customer support services; increased brand or product visibility and lead generation capabilities. Rafique et al., (2023) suggest that MIM apps offer hassle-free real-time communication with audiences; the ability to create and maintain strong relationships with past, present and future customers, and cross-platform reach, and cost-free advertising and publicity. Thus, Maduku, Mpinganjira and Duh (2016) posited that these mobile marketing technologies allows for businesses to attract customers through the promotion of sales via specials, contests and polling.

According to Kremming (2020), MIMs have a high potential for both push and pull MC, and because of their inherent characteristics, they provide several advantages to MC practices. Businesses can use IMMC tools to promote their products and services and engage directly with customers (Sonnenberg, 2021). Their technological features enable MC practitioners to display banner ads, product catalogues, share jingles, advertorials, and soundbites. They are also are appropriate for content marketing, product placement, digital display advertising, product news updates, and promotional campaigns (Kremming, 2020). Murphy (2021), submits that the MC capabilities of MIMs include personalized messaging, two-way communication, and timely and relevant promotional messaging. Thus, MC has inevitably evolved from impersonal, business and brand promotional messaging to personal, social, and interactive engagement (Kim, 2019).

As a result, MIMs are predicted to be the dominant marketing communication tool by 2025, (Gibbons, 2018), as MC practitioners may use the immediacy, timeliness, and personalisation characteristics of MIM apps to improve product and brand communications, as well as influence consumer attitudes, (Kaur et al., 2018; Lal et al., 2020; Maria de Cosmo et al., 2021). In fact, past studies show that MIM apps may be used to engage customers, improve consumer-brand relationships, and support the customer journey (Kritzinger & Petzer, 2021; Lei et al., 2020; Marino & Presti, 2018). Hence, this unique marketing communication tool provides firms with simple, convenient, and quick means to communicate with potential and existing clients (Kremming, 2020).

2.5 Mobile Instant Message Apps in the Zimbabwean market

In Zimbabwe, just like in many developing countries, WhatsApp Messenger is the dominant MIM app (Mangeya & Ngoshi, 2021). WhatsApp messenger is downloadable on mobile devices running either Android or IOS operating systems and is also available on desktop and allows for both social and professional interactions amongst its users (Ceci, 2022; Dixon, 2024). Globally, the number of daily active users on WhatsApp exceeds 3bn and they are found in more than 180 countries, (Dixon, 2024). In Zimbabwe, WhatsApp accounts for nearly half of the country's internet traffic (Dube, 2023; Mangeya & Ngoshi, 2021) and more than thirty-five (35%) percent of all mobile internet traffic (Mudzingwa, 2018).

Essentially, users can create WhatsApp groups which are online communities wherein users with common interests converge and exchange information in various multimedia formats including texts, images, documents and videos. Some of the peculiar functions of WhatsApp include the ability to make both voice and video calls, multimedia messaging, sharing of user location and posting status updates. In addition, unlike SMS, WhatsApp mechanisms allow a user to check if a counterpart is online, when they were last seen online, and whether they have received and viewed a message or not. Furthermore, some scholars have described WhatsApp as a free-of-charge, advertising-free, yet commercial mobile messaging service which allows for one-to-one and group communication (Church & de Oliveira, 2013).

Small businesses which account for more than two-thirds of Zimbabwe's economic activity, now use MIM apps to showcase their products and services and engage prospects and customers. The application affords users access to simple, fun and affordable communication services as users are able to share a variety of media, such as text, pictures, videos, documents and location with an individual or a group (Tang & Hew, 2020). According to Menon (2022), the transient nature of the status update function of MIM apps is a major push factors for its popularity particularly amongst young consumers who like to share and broadcast their latest 'stories and experiences'.

In essence, WhatsApp gives small enterprises in Zimbabwe the technical means to mass-market to a vast number of contacts. Additionally, they may interact with their clients for free and in real-time using the WhatsApp Business application. Through this application, businesses can advertise their goods, share information about their prices, and trading details including business hours, physical address, and links to other business platforms using the in-app store function. Apart from creating a business profile and product catalogue, the application allows for setting up rapid replies, and broadcast messages to multiple users at a time. These features facilitate and speed up interactions with prospective customers. Perhaps most importantly, although a one-on-one encounter is also offered by other MC tools like email and websites, they somewhat lack the intimacy and social connectedness of a WhatsApp conversation.

With predictions for the future of MIM pointing towards the upward direction, businesses and organisations in Zimbabwe can effectively use IM platforms to build up better communication and interactive channels with their stakeholders. In particular, small businesses can use WhatsApp platform for advertising purposes because it allows users to share a variety of media. Thus, with the rapid penetration of smartphones coupled with increased access to mobile broadband, WhatsApp is increasingly becoming the foremost communication alternative to the traditional SMS in Zimbabwe. Therefore, businesses can use WhatsApp to advance their MC agenda and in turn achieve MC objectives.

2.6. Summary

It is apparent from the above literature reviewed that mobile communication technologies in general and MIM apps in particular are increasingly changing the MC landscape especially in

developing countries. In most countries, it can surmise that MIM apps have become the foremost mode of communication for both social and business purposes. To this end, businesses are migrating to this novel MC tool inorder to influence consumer behaviour. In essence, it has been established that the nature of business to customer and customer to customer interactions in MIM apps provide a fertile ground for building and enhancing consumer-brand relationships, supporting the customer journey and guiding purchase behaviours. Thus, despite the rising popularity of MIM apps and subsequent use for MC purposes, a few questions remain unanswered with respect to instant message marketing communication and this demands a critical examination. For instance, questions regarding the variables which influence the attitudes of consumers towards IMMC, the role consumer attitude, usage characteristics and demographic variables play on consumers' behavioural intentions as well as the moderating effects of consumer impulsiveness. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical and conceptual framework which guides the search of answers for the questions highlighted above.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter specifies the theoretical foundations upon which the study is built. It specifically outlines the theoretical framework, conceptual framework and research model and statements of hypotheses. In particular, the chapter reviews the literature relating to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and the Information Adoption Model (IAM). In addition, the chapter describes the conceptual framework focusing on central route factors (i.e., informativeness, entertainment, personalisation and irritation), peripheral route factors (i.e., credibility, interactivity and media richness), subjective norms, consumer attitude, perceived control and behavioural intentions. The chapter also explains the moderating role of consumer impulsiveness as depicted in the research model.

3.2 Theoretical framework

The existing literature shows that several theories have been propounded to explain consumers' attitude and behavioural responses toward marketing communication efforts. These include; the information processing model (IPM); the informational adoption model (IAM), the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) and the advertising value model (AVM), to mention but a few. Each of the above theoretical models has been tested in different marketing communication contexts, and they have generally provided a solid theoretical basis for predicting consumer attitude and behavioural responses towards marketing communication.

However, there is still a growing need to extend the models to emerging marketing communication tools such as MIM apps, in order to predict the attitude and behavioural responses of new demographic groups such as the Gen Z cohort. In particular, it is important to integrate the theoretical models and test their applicability in a developing-country market, such as Zimbabwe. This, in turn, will help to improve on the validity and relevance of the models in different socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, the study integrates the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty &

Cacioppo, 1981), to explore the determinants of the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers toward IMMC.

3.2.1 Elaboration likelihood model (ELM)

Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (1981) conceptualised and formulated the ELM. The principal purpose of the ELM is to justify, the process by which communication leads to persuasion via formation or change of one's attitude (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Kitchen et al., 2014). Grounded in the social psychology theory of human information processing, Petty and Cacioppo (1981) conceptualized a dual process model that predicts the formation of an individual's attitude, persuasion, and overall behaviour change. The model is premised on the notion that the way consumers respond to persuasive messages is a function of one of two ways: the central route or the peripheral route (Andrews & Shimp (2018). Under the central route, the consumer is viewed as an active participant in the communication process, who pays attention to message content. Therefore, attitude or behaviour change is determined by how the consumer evaluates the arguments presented in the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983; Guolla, et al., 2017). In the peripheral route, the consumer requires little cognitive effort, and instead, relies on external cues such as source credibility and heuristics (Kitchen et al., 2014).

In the extant literature, elaboration is described as the extent to which an individual perceives the details and or arguments being presented or offered in a message (Liao & Huang, 2021). It is determined by the motivation and ability of a consumer to process the information (Yang et al., 2022). Segev and Fernandes (2023) posit that elaboration likelihood is high when a consumer has prior experience on involvement with a given message and more cognitive efforts are required to process the information. Conversely, elaboration likelihood is low when a consumer lacks the required experience or prior knowledge about the information contained in a message such that they rely on cue-based heuristics for behaviour or attitude change (Chang et al., 2020). Thus, consumer behavioural change via the central route is based on rational decision making wherein a consumer willingly responds to a MC message via content-related factors (Chiu, 2022). At the same time, incidental environmental cues are the basis upon which the peripheral route determines a consumer's behaviour (Lu et al., 2019).

It is worth noting that evidence from extant literature suggest that several previous researches in the field of MC, including broadcast advertising, and online word-of-mouth communication have applied the ELM (Gregory, et al., 2013). Furthermore, Shahab et al., (2020) observed that the ELM has been widely used in emerging computer-related communications tools, like websites, online reviews, social media and mobile technologies. A study by Chiu (2022) explored the effectiveness of Facebook advertisements via the theoretical lenses of the ELM. In addition, other researches by Leon et al., (2019) and Ismagilova et al., (2021) have shown that the ELM provides valuable insights into understanding how a consumer's information processing mechanisms regarding online reviews and word of mouth MC can lead to purchase decision outcomes. In light of this, it can be argued that the ELM provides a theoretical lens to understand the influence process involved in a consumer's decision-making process on either to process or disregard a MC message. Hence, the model is applied in this study to extend its theoretical explanations to the effects of IMMC on consumers' attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

Past researches view the ELM as one of the most influential theoretical contributions to the explanation of the impact of MC on consumer attitude and behavioural response (Belch & Belch, 2018). In fact, there is substantial evidence from existing literature which indicates that there is a growing interest among scholars to employ the ELM to examine how consumers process internet-based MC messages (Leong et al., 2019). For instance, prior technology-based studies have used the ELM to explore online persuasion through website design, (Cyr et al., 2018), online MC and consumers' purchase intention, (Pillai et al., 2022), as well as consumer participation on brand microblogs (Bao & Wang, 2021). In a recent study, Segev and Fernandes (2022) used the ELM to study characteristics of viral ads in order to identify the specific creative features that drive consumer ad sharing behaviour online. Another study by Chang et al., (2020) examined consumer responses to MC stimuli in Facebook marketplaces. Hence, in light of the aforementioned, the ELM underpins this study on the basis that it provides a solid and sound theoretical foundation upon which the effects of IMMC on the attitude of Gen Z consumers can be investigated.

The premise of the ELM is that attitudinal and behavioural responses to MC messages are the distinct outcomes of the effect of the persuasion process. Therefore, under the central route, MC practitioners rely on rational and objective cues such as content characteristics (i.e.,

informational quality, argument quality) to influence consumer attitudes (Andrews & Shimp, 2018). In the same way, the peripheral route involves qualities of a MC message that are indirectly related to the principal selling propositions in the message (Guolla et al., 2017). For example, source credibility and expertise (Metzger et al., 2005). Therefore, it can be argued that, given the paucity of studies that link ELM and IMMC, is it not yet clear how the central route and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC influence the attitudes and behavioural responses of the Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. More importantly, in light of the flexibility of the ELM (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019), the study includes other predictor variables such as perceived media richness, personalisation, and interactivity to broaden the ELM factors which are critical in determining consumer attitude and behavioural responses in the context of IMMC. This unique contribution adds value to the ELM, thereby making it, even more robust.

Unlike other MC theories, the ELM does not suggest definite independent variables which researchers can apply in a study (Shabab et al., 2020). Rather, the model gives room for the inclusion of new and different variables, depending on the nature of the research (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In this regard, the use of the ELM is based on its flexibility which allows for researcher to adjust the model to fit a multiplicity of research contexts such as MIM-mediated MC. In addition, the ELM gives a contemporary rather than a traditional perspective to understanding the effects of technology-mediated MC efforts. In particular, the model provides a cognitive-response rather than a hierarchical-response approach to MC (Belch & Belch, 2018; Guolla, et al., 2017). Whilst, the former involves understanding the mental effort invested in scrutinising internet-based MC messages, the latter broadly applies to traditional MC strategies such as personal selling (Shimp & Andrews, 2018).

However, in spite of the arguments presented above, critics of the ELM have pointed several weaknesses of the model. Although these shortcomings are valid, they do not essentially render the model unfit for use in the context of this study. Bitner and Obermiller (1985) identified under-specification as one of the limitations of the ELM. They further argue that, although the ELM describes and categorizes attitude formation and change, the model lacks sufficient detail of how the actual process takes place. Other researchers (see Kitchen et al., 2014) criticise the ELM citing the fact that the model does not explicitly provide details of when to use which route. Rather, the model suggest that this depends solely on the elaboration likelihood of the

message. Furthermore, the ELM suffers from the assumption that only the central route processing of information will lead to stronger and lasting attitude. However, this may not always be the case. For instance, when the two routes to persuasion are combined in a single message, it is difficult to clearly identify which among the two particular route influence attitude formation and change (Kitchen et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, the ELM remains a solid theoretical framework to underpin this study. This is primarily because the model provides a solid ground to investigate how MC practitioners can influence or persuade consumers. In essence, the model allows for the researcher to specify the message and content characteristics of IMMC which influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers. Moreover, the model has been widely used in prior studies due to its ability to examine the central and peripheral routes to persuasion in the MC context (Shao et al., 2023). In fact, recent studies have proved that the ELM can be applied in other technology-mediated MC contexts in general, and mobile MC, in particular (Lu et al., 2019).

In addition, the ELM allows researchers to include new variables to the model. In the context of this study, the ELM allows for inclusion of other several variables such as personalisation, interactivity, and media richness which are classified under the central and peripheral route factors respectively. In particular, these new independent variables (media richness, personalisation and interactivity) are added to the ELM within the context of MIM, to critically analyse their effect on consumer attitude and behavioural intention of Gen Z cohort consumers. To further buttress the applicability of the ELM in this study, the research draws from other consumer behaviour and technology related theories. In particular, the study employs the IAM to provide theoretical support to independent variables such as informativeness, entertainment and irritation.

3.2.2 Information adoption model (IAM)

In order to reinforce the validity of the assumptions of the ELM, the information adoption model (IAM) was employed in the study. The IAM is a result of the scholarly works of Sussman and Siegal (2003) who sought to clarify how information provided on digital platforms affects a person's information adoption behaviours (Wang, 2016; Erkan & Evans, 2016). The model is

based on the assertion that message effectiveness is primarily influenced by central factors (argument strength) and peripheral factors (credibility of source) (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Supported by evidence from existing literature (Arora & Lata), which show the increasing relevance of IAM in online information exchange researches, the IAM is applied to MC within the MIM context. It is anticipated that the way consumers process IMMC messages is influenced by their assessment of the value of the information. This perceived value is based on the strength of the supporting evidence and the reliability of the source (Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

In essence, the IAM is employed in this study to explain the characteristics of IMMC messages. This is in line with previous related studies on technology-mediated MC which have linked individuals' information adoption to message characteristics. For example, Arora and Lata (2020) used the IAM to classify Youtube MC messages in terms of relevance, timeliness, comprehensiveness and source expertise. Other researchers have used the IAM to characterise digital MC messages in terms of information quality and information source credibility (Wang & Sun, 2021; Daowd et al., 2021). In addition, several researchers (see Sharma et al., 2021 Goh et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2023; Kim, 2019) have used such factors as informativeness, entertainment and irritation to explain the characteristics of MC messages. This implies that consumers' attitude and behavioural intentions in the digital MC environment are influenced by perceived informativeness, entertainment and irritation of MC messages. To this end, the study adopts the IAM to support the ELM claims in order to specifically explain the above-mentioned digital MC message characteristics.

3.2.3 Theory of planned behaviour (TPB)

Whereas the ELM and IAM explain the characteristics of IMCC messages, Icek Ajzen (1991)'s TPB explains human behaviour as shaped by one's attitudes, the presence of social norms and the exercise of volitional control. The key assumption of the TPB is that, "behavioural intentions are determined by a combination of three factors: attitudes toward the behaviour; subjective norms; and perceived behavioural control", (Ajcen, 1991). In the TPB, consumer attitude reflects a consumer's psychological willingness and inclination to respond, either positively or negatively, to marketing stimuli (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Sharma et al., 2021).

It refers to, the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour of interest, (Ajzen, 1991). Subjective norms refer to a person belief that a significant other would expect him/her to perform a particular behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In general, people consider the social context whenever they make decisions about whether or not to behave in a certain way. Behavioural intention is described as, an individual's subjective probability that he/she will perform some specific behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In the general sense, for an individual, it is a measure of the desire and willingness to perform or act in a certain manner.

Therefore, in this study, the TPB provides a sound theoretical basis for understanding the outcome variables consumer attitude and behavioural intention. The theory was adopted because of its predictive power in terms of the behaviour of customers. Put simply, the TPB proposes a causal link between an individual's attitudes and their actual behaviour mediated by behavioural intentions. In this study, there is a proposed relationship between the attitude of Gen Z consumers and behavioural intentions regarding IMMC. Hence, the TPB provides a theoretical model that explains this relationship. This is supported by past researches in the MC field (see Sharma et al., 2021; Arora & Agarwal, 2020) which viewed the TPB as a useful model given its relevance in predicting behavioural intentions instead of actual behaviour. The implication is that when consumers have a favorable attitude toward marketing stimuli, their willingness to purchase increases (Arora & Agarwal, 2020). Put simply, it is believed that IMMC will generate positive attitude, which will in turn, positively influence the behavioral intentions of the Gen Z consumers. This is substantiated by Sharma et al., (2021), who discovered that consumer attitude towards SMS-based commercials influence their behavioral intentions.

Moreover, in this study, consumer attitude captures the willingness of an individual Gen Z consumer to engage or respond to IMMC messages. It is a measure of the degree to which Gen Z cohort consumers hold favourable or unfavourable dispositions towards IMMC which eventually influences their behavioural intentions. In essence, the way Gen Z cohort consumer process and respond to IMMC is reflected by their attitude toward IMMC. Thus, the study adopts factors from the TPB (i.e., consumer attitude, subjective norms and perceived control) as the predictor variables that influence behavioural intentions of the Gen Z cohort consumers.

To this end, behavioural intention is the outcome variable which is influenced by several characteristics of IMMC mediated by consumer attitude.

In sum, the three theoretical models presented above can be integrated as the theoretical foundations underpinning this study. In particular, the ELM and IAM helps to classify the characteristics of IMMC messages in terms of the central route factors (i.e., informativeness, entertainment, irritation and personalisation) and peripheral route factors (i.e., credibility, interactivity and media richness). In the same vein, the TPB explains consumer behavioural responses towards IMMC efforts as indicated by consumer attitude and behavioural intentions. Therefore, the combination of these three models makes it possible to achieve the major objective of this study which is to critically analyse the influence of IMMC on the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

3.2.3 The integrative theoretical approach

The combination of these established MC theories helped to strengthen the predictive power of the research model. First, one of the criticisms levelled against the ELM is that, although the model clearly identifies the central and peripheral route characteristics, it falls short on explaining attitude formation. In other words, the model lacks sufficient detail of how the actual process of consumer attitude formation and change take place. Thus, individually, the ELM may not adequately offer a plausible explanation of the formation of Gen Z consumers' attitude and behavioural intentions towards IMMC. In this regard, TPB complements this shortcoming of the ELM by providing a basis for understanding consumer attitude and behavioural responses. Essentially, one of the major strengths and justifications for the use of the TPB in the marketing domain is that, the TPB proposes a causal link between an individual's attitudes and their actual behaviour mediated by behavioural intentions. This, in essence, is one of the main objectives of this study. Hence, the integration of the two theories provides a sound theoretical model that explains the relationship between the attitude of Gen Z consumers and behavioural intentions regarding IMMC. Put simply, whereas the ELM supports the predictor variables (i.e., central and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC), the TPB enhances the outcome variables (i.e., consumer attitude and behavioural responses)

Secondly, the incorporation of the Information Adoption Model (IAM) was premised on the fact that IMMC is rooted in two broad disciplines: information technology and marketing communication. Resultantly, the IAM is a contemporary model which stipulates the characteristics of technology-mediated MC messages. In view of the lack of empirical studies on the efficacy of IMMC in influencing Generation Z consumers, especially in the context of Zimbabwe, the IAM highlights the need for understanding how central and peripheral route characteristics affect consumer behavior. Additionally, it is worth noting that the ELM is originally rooted in the science of persuasion, thus it falls short when applied to mobile technology-based communication. To this end, an integration of ELM and IAM helps to strengthen the theoretical foundations of the independent variables specified in this study. Put simply, the IAM provides a contemporary perspective to the way individual consumers perceive and process (i.e., information adoption) organisational and peer information propagated in emerging communication technologies such as MIM apps.

In light of the above discussion, the integrative approach helped to solidify and fortify the predictive power of the theories adopted in this study. Essentially, given the paucity of studies linking Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe and IMMC, an integrative approach was deemed necessary for determining the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC messages. More importantly, the three theories complement each other in explaining both the independent and dependent variables. Given the rapid proliferation and subsequent fragmentation of MC channels, the traditional theories of MC may become obsolete and inapplicable to the new MC context. To this end, the study may offer an overall MC framework that could become the basis for understanding the evolving contextual forces and how they interactively influence the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers.

3.3 The conceptual framework

In this study, the independent variables were categorised into two classes. The first category relates to central route characteristics of IMMC and the second class pertains to the peripheral route characteristics. The framework also shows the outcome variables behavioural intention and consumer attitude. It also depicts the TPB constructs, namely; subjective norms and

perceived control. The moderating role of consumer impulsiveness is also discussed in this section which ends with the development of the statements of hypotheses.

3.3.1 Central route factors

In the ELM, the central route is key to persuasion, attitude formation and change as it requires consumers to think prudently and examine message content-relevant arguments (Shao et al., 2023). Previous researches by Chang et al., (2020) and Gao et al., (2021) note that the central route factors disclose the reliability and persuasiveness of information presented in a message (Kitchen et al., 2014). According to Shimp and Andrews (2018), emotion-based and message-based elements of communication represent the central route factors which influence consumer attitude. Hence, in online MC, the informative and entertainment characteristics of MC messages can influence consumer behavioural actions, (Ducoffe, 1995). Several previous researches considered the role of message/content qualities as central route factors in view of the uniqueness of online MC tools (Hashim, et al., 2018; Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Gaber et al., 2019; Kim, 2019; Wang et al., 2019; Goh et al., 2020; Kurtz et al., 2021). Based on the above discussion, this study therefore considers informativeness, entertainment, personalisation and irritation as central route characteristics of IMMC whose influence on the attitude of Gen Z customers warrants empirical examination.

3.3.1.1 Informativeness

Informativeness can be described as the degree to which a MC message offers a consumer helpful information about a brand, goods or service, (Chang et al., 2020). It is, "the ability of the MC message to inform the recipient about product and services alternatives in order to enhance satisfaction" (Ducoffe, 1996; Gaber et al., 2019). Sigurdsson, et al., (2018) submit that informative messages, not only improve consumers' knowledge and understanding about products or brands, but they also help to satisfy cognitive needs for information relating to products or brands (Ducoffe, 1995). Among the key dimensions of informativeness as reported in previous researches on online-based MC are: ability to supply relevant information, (Liu et al., 2012; Sigurdsson et al., 2018); provision of timely information, (Liu et al., 2012; Wang &

Sun, 2010); supplying good source of information about products (Ducoffe, 1996; Sharma et al., 2021).

From a marketing perspective, consumer decision-making is aided by MC, which serves as a significant source of information (Duffett, 2017). According to Murillo-Zegarra et al., (2020), among the key mobile advertising content characteristics, informativeness improves the consumer attitudes towards mobile advertising alerts. Informativeness denotes the reliability of information presented in a MC message (Amaoko et al., 2023; Panggati et al., 2023). Accordingly, previous studies (Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Drossos et al., 2014; Gaber et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2017; Kim, 2019; Martins et al., 2019) have investigated how the informativeness of online MC messages influence consumer attitude and behavioural intentions and observed that perceived informativeness of MC messages positively influences consumer attitude towards MC (Sirgudsson et al., 2018).

In light of the above, it is worth pointing out that MIM applications allow for ubiquitous, real-time interactive engagement between brands and consumers. A such consumers are continually exposed to promotional messages, whilst at the same time, conveniently search for information. Through search functions, MIM apps provide rapid and convenient access to varied information relevant to numerous product categories, hence increasing the informative utility (Arora & Lata, 2020). Perhaps, more importantly, consumer attitudes towards IMMC can be influenced by the information they have received and imbibed. Thus, IMMC will enable firms to employ creative messages to attract the attention and influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers, who are heavy users of MIM apps (Duffett, 2016). Thus, it is worth establishing how informativeness of IMMC will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC.

3.3.1.2 Entertainment

One of the key factors under the central route is the perceived entertainment of a message. Kim and Han (2014) suggest that the entertainment qualities of MC messages connote the ability of a message to suit consumer hedonic demands including pleasure, amusement, enjoyment, and

likeability. Ducoffe (1995) advances this notion by asserting that the perceived entertainment value of MC information is positively connected to consumer perceptions of its worth. Hence, entertainment is, the ability of MC message to fulfil consumer needs for escapism, diversion, aesthetic enjoyment or emotional release (Roth-Cohen et al., 2022). Put simply, entertainment characteristics of MC messages refer to the likeability of the message, including the pleasure and enjoyment derived from the message (Gupta et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2024). Previous researches have measured the consumers' opinion regarding perceived entertainment of MC messages in terms of such factors as: entertaining, (Ducoffe, 1996; Sharma et al., 2021); enjoyable, (Liu et al., 2012; Wang & Sun, 2010); pleasing, (Xu, 2006); fun to use and exciting (Hanaysha, 2021).

When viewing MC messages, consumers are continuously looking for fun, which increases the efficacy of the MC (Martins et al., 2019). Hence, Gen Z consumers may use MIM apps for fun, pleasure, and enjoyment among other reasons (Tang & Hew, 2022). According to Smith (2017), Gen Z consumers have a strong preference for entertaining mobile MC messages. These interactions may include 'liking, commenting and sharing' the MC messages with contacts in the platform. Zhang and Mao (2016) submit that the executional style of MC messages entail that consumers expect entertainment values to be enriched. Thus, MC practitioners create entertaining messages arguing that they increase the effectiveness of MC messages, (Hamouda, 2018). Previous researches discovered a link between perceived entertainment and consumer attitude when it comes to new media technologies (Martins et al., 2019; Hamouda, 2018; Zhang & Mao, 2016). Moreover, MC practitioners may rely on entertainment features of a MC message to enhance message effectiveness. Therefore, it is worth studying how the entertainment characteristics of IMMC will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC.

3.3.1.3 Personalization

In the general MC literature, the term personalization is used to refer to the transmission of MC messages to customers based on their demographic profiles, preferences, context and content (Gaber et al., 2019; Kim, 2019; Xu, 2006). It includes MC message characteristics such as message relevance, (Sharma, et al., 2021; Teng et al., 2014), customised messaging, (Lee et al.,

2017), personal relevance, (Pentina et al., 2018) and message congruity (Zhang & Mao, 2016). According to the ELM, personal relevance of a message influences an individual's motivation to process or respond to it (Kitchen et al., 2014). With regards to MC, Kim and Han (2014) found that personalisation is an important attribute, as personalized messages appeal to each individual consumer easily. Based on this, one can argue that businesses can employ customised messaging, personalised banner advertising, or any other individualized transactions (Gaber et al., 2019). The benefit of this to marketers is that it helps to enhance their IMMC efforts, as personalisation mitigates against media clutter (Jung, 2017).

In addition, MC practitioners argue that personalisation of MC messages helps to reduce irritation and enhance the effectives of MC messages (Kim, 2019; Kim & Han, 2014). In agreement with the above fact, Lee et al., (2017) emphasizes that, mobile technologies allow personalised messaging than non-mobile technologies. This, in turn, positively contributes to context awareness of mobile MC messages. Inevitably, past researches observed a strong positive association between personalisation of mobile MC messages and consumer attitude (Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Jung, 2017). Therefore, it is anticipated that Gen Z consumers prefer personalised messages that do not carry their names, rather, that are location and context-specific, (Smith, 2017). To this end, personalisation is considered to be a key determinant factor influencing consumer attitude towards IMMC (Xu, 2006; Sirgudsson et al., 2018). This is further supported by Murphy (2021) who opines that amongst the key MC capabilities of MIM apps, is the ability to convey personalised messaging, timely and relevant promotional messaging. Given the above background information, the study deemed it fit to explore the effect of personalisation on consumer attitude with respect to Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

3.3.1.4 Irritation

Whereas informativeness, entertainment and personalisation describe the positive features of MC messages, MC messages can be viewed negatively by consumers. Ducoffe (1996) posits that irritation occurs when a person feels annoyed, unhappy or slightly angry as a result of exposure to a MC message. In fact, researchers argue that MC messages can annoy, distract, offend or insult targeted recipients or obstruct consumers' concentration thereby evoking

negative emotions such as irritation (Kim & Han, 2014, Martins et al., 2019; Goh et al., 2020). In this regard, irritation can be conceptualised as, the capacity of advertisements to stimulate negative emotions such as displeasure and thus denotes to the perceived cost of advertising (Kim, 2019). Hence, in accord with above, irritation is caused by MC messages that irritate, distract, and block consumers' concentration, thereby generating negative feelings in the process (Kim & Han, 2014).

In the mobile MC context, irritation can result from irrelevant and overrated message content, (Goh et al., 2020), confusing and unrelated messages (Kim, 2019). It can also be caused by superabundance of information sent by marketers through viral messaging (Sirgudsson et al., 2018), and concerns for consumer privacy (Wang et al., 2020). Although consumers are increasingly accepting and using MIM apps because they are affordable, and user friendly, (Marino & Presti, 2018), there are growing concerns about a loss of customer privacy due to intrusiveness (Agora & Agarwal, 2019). More importantly, irritation may result from the over use of push rather pull MC messages. This is because push messages can be viewed as spam, viral or generally unsolicited messages.

Previous researches confirm that irritation and customer attitude are negatively correlated (Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Gaber et al., 2019; Goh et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019; Sirguddson et al.,2017). This implies that when viral messages are regarded confused, insulting, or unduly manipulative, they might irritate consumers (Ducoffe, 1995). Furthermore, given that consumers spend huge amounts of time on MIM apps on a daily basis, it can be argued that a high level of exposure to MC messages can lead to negative perspective and negative attitude of consumers towards IMMC (Goh et al., 2020). Therefore, irritating MC message attributes are more likely going to negatively influence consumer attitude towards IMMC. In light of this, it is justified that the study investigates the role of irritation in influencing the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

3.3.2 Peripheral route factors

According to the ELM, in the peripheral route, individuals tend to evaluate messages on the basis of positive or negative cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983). To this end, the peripheral route

characteristics comprise processes cues rather than argument or content characteristics (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006). In support of the above, Kitchen et al., (2014), posit that, the peripheral route requires little cognitive effort compared to the central route. As such, an individual's evaluation of a message is based upon external cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983). This is validated by Shao et al., (2023) who affirm that, within the peripheral route, consumers use simpler or more superficial inference about the merits of a message. Thus, past researches identified several peripheral route factors namely: source credibility and heuristics, (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006; Kitchen et al., 2014; Teng at el., 2014), and message design elements (Cyr et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2020).

In contrast to traditional MC tools, MIM apps possess unique MC capabilities stemming out of their technological affordances such as mobility, immediacy and interactivity. Hence, it is worthy investigating how peripheral cues such as source credibility and interactivity, influence attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. Source credibility and, interactivity have been widely used in web-based MC literature (Sreejesh et al., 2020; Goh et al., 2020). However, the study extends the peripheral route factors and introduces a new dimension, i.e., the role of perceived media richness in shaping consumer attitude within the MIM context.

3.2.1.1 Credibility

In general, credibility is viewed as a measure of consumers' perception of the level of honesty and believability of MC messages (Metzger et al., 2005). It influences a consumer's perception of the truthfulness and trustworthiness of a MC message (Sirgudsson et al., 2018). Earlier researches on online-mediated MC have measured the credibility of message sources on the basis of honesty, believability, truthfulness and trustworthiness (Wang & Sun, 2010; Ducoffe, 1996; Xu, 2006). In the mobile MC context, credibility is an important and applicable construct (Hashim et al., 2018). As such, a message source that has high credibility will affect a consumer's cognitive evaluation of a MC message (Goh et al., 2020). Some studies on online MC reported that consumers consider web-based MC messages to be less credible compared to newspapers (Metzger et al., 2005; Xu, 2006). This conclusion could have been attained in the early stages of web-based MC which was characterised by vast amount of 'fake news' spreading over online platforms. It is speculated that this could have led to the negative

consumer perception. However, recent studies show that due to experience gained as people frequently use and depend on internet technologies, online MC tools are now trusted sources (Goh et al., 2020; Maseeh et al., 2021; Lütjens et al., 2022).

Therefore, in this study, it can be argued that the credibility of a message source may influence consumer attitude and behavioural responses. The nature of communication in MIM apps is such that users can engage with people that are familiar to them as well complete strangers. In addition, the viral nature of communication in MIM apps makes it difficult for message recipients to ascertain the authenticity and credibility of the message source. Therefore, source credibility can influence the way recipients process and respond to that particular message. This is supported by findings from previous studies which established a positive effect of credibility on consumers' perception of the value of MC messages (Liu et al., 2012; Kim & Han, 2014; Hamouda, 2018; Martins et al., 2019; Arora & Agarwal, 2020). Moreover, other studies on online MC observed that credibility influences consumer attitude, (Xu, 2006; Sirgudsson et al., 2018). Therefore, it is envisaged that group-chats and broadcast messaging in MIM apps enable individual users to engage with both strangers and comrades. In this regard, credibility could be an important determinant of consumer attitude towards IMMC messages. Thus, in light of the aforementioned, this study intends to examine how credible IMMC messages will positively influence consumer attitude.

3.2.1.2 Interactivity

In a general sense, the concept of interactivity simply describes the interactions between a consumer and a product (Solomon, 1983). It is viewed as the dialogic, reciprocal, and symmetrical exchanges between the marketer and the potential or existing customer (Humbani et al., 2015). As a key characteristic feature of digital media, interactivity can be viewed as a process of message exchange or a particular technological feature embedded in a specific technology (Park & Yoo, 2020). This conceptualisation of interactivity the propositions made by McMillan and Hwang, (2002) who defined interactivity in two ways. On the one hand, interactivity describes the responsiveness and communication between individuals and organisations or advertisers and consumers. On the other hand, interactivity captures the technological characteristics that facilitate mutual communication and user control. Thus, in

this study, interactivity is viewed largely as a process or technological feature (Srajeesh et al., 2020). Unlike traditional MC tools, such as television, radio and newspaper which have limited interactivity, (Park & Yoo, 2020), MIM communication technologies enable real-time peer-to-peer interactions wherein individual users can post and respond to other users' posts.

In some early studies, interactivity is viewed as a multidimensional construct with several measures. Some of the measures of interactivity include perceived user control, synchronization, reciprocal messaging, friskiness and interpersonal engagement (Gao, Rau & Slavendy, 2009). Park and Yoo (2020), however, observed that the three elements most commonly identified in the literature were controllability, responsiveness, and communication. Therefore, in this study, interactivity describes the degree of control that consumers have on IMMC messages or the way consumers respond to those received messages (Shimp & Andrews, 2018). It describes how fast an MIM app user can navigate to access IMMC messages (Koyen, 2022), as well the two-way communication between users, (i.e., marketers and consumers). For example, MIM platforms like WhatsApp allow consumers to decide when they can be online, when they can view a status-update, and when they can read or respond to a message or post. Thus, they are in control of what, how, when to communicate and exchange information with other parties. Therefore, in light of the aforementioned, this study empirically tests how interactivity influences the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

3.2.1.3 Perceived media richness

Media richness is described as the degree to which a medium can facilitate shared meaning (Daft & Lengel, 1986). It is the relative ability of a communication tool to deliver messages containing rich information, (Tseng et al., 2019). In the Media Richness Theory (MRT), Daft and Lengel (1986) explained the role played by channel (medium) characteristics in information processing. According to Ishii et al. (2019), the "richness" of a communication channel is based on availability of four key dimensions: immediate feedback, multiple cues, language variety, and personal focus. Therefore, in this study, the two factors, immediate feedback and personal focus, are akin to measures of interactivity and personalisation respectively, therefore were discussed earlier. Hence, multiple cues and language variety will be applied in this study. Multiple cues denote a wide-ranging set of communication cues that

can be part of the message, and language variety entails a diversity of meanings which can be articulated by the symbols of a language (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

Whereas multiple cues include voice inflection, body gestures and facial expressions, (Tseng et al., 2016), language variety factors help to foster common understanding in communication and mitigate against equivocality and uncertainty (Daft & Lengel, 1986). In the context of MIM, multiple cues can include key multimedia features such as text, video, image, emoticons, emoji and or audio messages (Tang & Hew, 2020; Vazquez et al., 2017). In addition, language variety factors can help to create common understanding between MIM users and thereby influence affective responses towards MIM messages. In the literature, the role and media capacity of MIM apps as MC tools can be explained using the propositions of the MRT (Tseng et al., 2016).

Tseng et al., (2019) posit that a communication tool has inherent features and attributes which determines their capability to transmit certain information. The implication is that media richness can be considered along with other peripheral route factors that could influence consumers' attitude and behavioural responses. This is because media richness focuses on the platform itself rather the message content. Although there is scant literature and few empirical studies on the effect of media richness on consumer attitude, particularly within the MIM context, (Tseng et al., 2019; Vazquez et al., 2017), it is anticipated that the perceived media richness of MIM will influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers.

3.3.3 Consumer attitude

Consumer attitude is an important concept in research on application of emerging technologies in MC (Hashim, 2018). In general, attitude can be defined as a learned predisposition of people which reflects the way they would respond to an idea or opinions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In the MC literature, the attitude of a consumer is a psychological approach of a consumer that portrays their positive and negative responses to the MC messages (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). It reflects a consumer's mental willingness and inclination toward acting in a certain way in response to their exposure to MC. Kotler and Armstrong (2018) view attitude as, a consumer's

enduring favourable or unfavourable evaluation, emotional feeling and behaviour tendency towards a marketing stimulus. It can be categorised into three sequential phases: cognitive, affective and behavioural. According to the hierarchy of effects (HOE) model of MC, cognitive attitude correlates with, first awareness and then knowledge, while affective attitude involves liking and preference, and behavioural attitude starts with intention and ends with actual behaviour (Duffett, 2020; Duffett, 2017; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

Previous researchers have identified consumer attitudes regarding MC as an important indicator of the effectiveness of MC (Zhang & Zhou, 2016; Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Duffett, 2020; Febriyantoro, 2020). In their seminal work, MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) posit that consumer attitude plays an important role in shaping a behavioural intention toward MC. This is corroborated by consumer behavior theorists who suggest that attitudes and behavioral intent have a beneficial link (Ajzen, 1985). This means that in general, when a consumer has a positive attitude toward an item or service, they are more likely to buy it. In the context of MC, a positive attitude towards MC stimuli entails that the consumer will probably buy the promoted product or brand.

Thus, in a study of SMS advertising, Sharma et al., (2021) affirm that consumer attitude positively influences behavioural intentions, resulting from exposure to SMS advertisements. In addition, other previous studies (Alalwan, 2018; Arora et al., 2020; Duffett, 2020; Hamouda, 2018, Duffet, 2017; Wang et al., 2020), confirm a significant link between MC, customer attitudes and behavioral intentions. In particular, Duffett (2017) found that technology-mediated MC had an impact on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitude components of teenage consumers. Given this context, it is prudent that the study examines how the attitude of Gen Z customers toward IMMC will influence their behavioural intentions.

3.3.4 Subjective norms

Subjective norms refer to a person belief that a significant other would expect him/her to perform a particular behaviour, (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In general, people consider the social context whenever they make decisions about whether or not to behave in a certain way. According to Ajzen (1991), subjective norms are an important factor which determines future behavioural intention. Venkatesh and Davis (2000) opine that subjective norms are one of the

important social variables which guide consumer behaviour with respect to new technologies. The implication of subjective norms is that people have normative beliefs about the expectations of their peers for them behave in a particular way. Hashim et al., (2018) submit that research on mobile MC is increasingly using subjective norms as a determinant of consumer attitude and behavioural intentions. Thus, the effect of subjective or social norms on consumer attitude and behavioural intentions has been widely reported in past studies on mobile advertising literature (Kim, 2019; Komulainen et al., 2019).

In the context of IMMC, subjective norms refer to the expectation that one would behave in a particular way after exposure to IMMC messages. This behaviour may include either viewing a peer's status update, reading a text message or play a video or audio message. For example, in WhatsApp, MIM users can only view a peer's status update if they have saved their contact number. Also, MIM users can track through the notification icon, whether the recipients of a message have opened, read or viewed the messages through the grey or blue tick icon. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the role of subjective norms on the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

3.3.5 Perceived control

Perceived control refers to "a person's perceptions of the availability of skills and opportunities necessary for displaying a particular type of behaviour" (Ajzen 1991:5). It indicates the degree to "which an individual is able to control his/her own behaviour", (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975:3). In past studies, perceived control has been identified as a strong predictor of consumer attitude towards MC and their behavioural intentions (Humbani et al., 2015; Hashim et al., 2018). In an online marketing environment, perceived control is reflected by the ability of the consumers to control the messages and information directed to them. Studies on SMS marketing technologies have related perceived control to such factors as; consent, risk avoidance and privacy concerns (Sharma et al., 2021; Humbani et al., 2015). Accordingly, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions will be determined by a person perception of the degree of control they have over the MC messages they receive. In fact, Humbani et al., (2015) assert that consumers are most likely to be actively involved with MC messages when they consent to receive the particular messages.

In the context of IMMC, perceived can be measured by the extent to which MIM users can control their behaviour towards opening, reading or respond to IMMC messages. Unlike SMS technologies, MIM applications allow the user to determine when and whether they can check on MIM messages, view the message contents and respond. Put simply, consumer involvement with MIM messages is largely under the control of the particular consumer. If the consumer is not interested in receiving MC messages from a particular MIM user, they can easily use the block function, which effectively cuts of the communication between them. Accordingly, the TPB postulates that perceived control is a critical antecedent of consumer attitude and behavioural intention. This implies that, "an individual's belief of their ability to control their behaviour regarding an object or idea, will influence their attitude and intention to perform that particular behaviour", (Ajzen, 1991:5). Therefore, the study explores the effects of perceived behavioural control on behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

3.3.6 Behavioural intention

Behavioural intention has been observed to be one of the foremost outcome variables in most studies on MC, both offline and online (Mukherjee & Banarjee, 2017; Drossos et al., 2014). In the literature, behavioural intention is described as "an individual's subjective probability that he/she will perform some specific behaviour" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975:3). It indicates the willingness of an individual to perform a specific activity or behave in a certain manner. Behavioural intention refers to "the motivational factors that influence a given behaviour. The stronger the intention to perform the behaviour, the more likely the behaviour will be performed" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975:6). Consumer behaviour theorists posit that the behaviour of a consumer is determined by their intention to carry out a behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Accordingly, past studies have used purchase intention as a key component of consumer behavioural intentions (Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Duffett, 2020; Febriyantoro, 2020; Sharma et al., 2021). However, related studies on the use of SMS technologies in MC suggest that behavioural intentions could be expanded to include; word of mouth intention (Mukherjee & Banarjee, 2017). Some researchers refer to these as, forwarding intention and contacting intention (Tseng &Teng, 2016; Le & Wang, 2020). Accordingly, given the similarities between SMS technologies and MIM applications, this study examines the behavioural intentions of

Gen Z consumers. In essence, the study examines behavioural intention as the outcome variable as this consistent with previous studies on technology-mediated MC (Sharma et al., 2021; Arora & Lata, 2020; Kim, 2019; Mukherjee & Banarjee, 2017; Drossos et al., 2014).

3.3.7 Consumer impulsiveness

Consumer impulsiveness is viewed as a social psychological trait that an individual possesses which defines their willingness and ability to respond or act instantly without thinking or planning (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998). Put simply, consumer impulsiveness indicates the ability and willingness of a consumer to act promptly triggered by some external cue which renders their rationality irrelevant. In other words, a consumer behaves as the occasion suits with prior consideration or planning. Thus, the concept has been traditionally used in merchandising and sales promotion to induce consumers to behave in a particular way in the short-term. Consequently, in the consumer behaviour literature, researchers argue that consumers who are highly impulsive tend to perform certain behaviours suddenly, rather than adopting a methodical approach (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998). In the context of online MC, consumers with strong impulsiveness characteristics have a tendency of encouraging others to view promotional messages, undertake actual purchase or enquire for further information about the promoted product or service (Chang et al., 2020).

Past studies (Drossos et al., 2014; Chang, et al., 2020) have suggested that consumer impulsiveness moderates the attitude- intention relationship. In a study of mobile text advertising, Drossos et al., (2014) explored the moderating role of consumer impulsiveness on the relationship between product involvement and purchase intention. They observed that consumers with higher impulse buying tendencies are more willing to purchase the advertised products. Furthermore, in a study of consumer respond action to firm MC efforts on Facebook, Chang, et al., (2020) used consumer impulsiveness as the moderating role on the relationship between consumer attitudes and behaviour. They discovered that highly impulsive consumer tends to respond immediately without thinking or planning (Chang et al., 2020). Therefore, this study accordingly examines the moderating effect of consumer impulsiveness on the relationship between the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

3.4 Hypotheses development

3.4.1 Informativeness and consumer attitude

Consumers anticipate marketing communication to not just educate them but, rather provide detailed information (Arli, 2013). Consequently, a strong positive association has been observed in some current studies on informative MC and consumers' attitudes (Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Gaber et al., 2019). For instance, in a recent study on SMS advertising, Sharma et al., (2021) affirm a strong positive relationship between informativeness and consumer attitude. Moreover, an early study on mobile MC by Blanco et al., (2010) asserted this relationship. They stated that consumers' attitude towards mobile marketing communication is greatly influenced by the informational aspects of mobile marketing communication. This was further confirmed by Drossos et al. (2014) who observed that there existed a significant and positive relationship between informativeness and the perception of SMS advertising among younger customers. Accordingly, it is anticipated that perceived informativeness of IMMC will strongly influence the Gen Z consumer's attitude. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H_1: The perceived informativeness of IMMC will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC.

3.4.2 Entertainment and consumer attitude

Hamouda (2018) indicated that the perceived entertainment of MC messages transmitted via new media technologies positively influence consumers' perceived value and attitude. In a study of mobile advertising, Wang and Genç, (2019) revealed that the more the consumer believes that mobile advertising messages provide entertainment experiences, the more positive the consumer attitude. This observation is consistent with the findings by Gaber et al., (2019) and Kim (2020) who established that the perceived entertainment of mobile MC messages favourably influences young consumers' attitude. This implies that entertaining MC messages are positively related to positive consumer attitude, hence, to ascertain this relationship in the context of this study, it is hypothesized that:

H_2: Perceived entertainment of IMMC will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC

3.4.3 Personalisation and consumer attitude

Trang et al., (2023) suggest that one of the key objectives of personalisation is to ensure the dissemination of the right message to the right audience at the right time. This implies that personalisation involves individualised communication to a specific consumer on the basis of their actual or supposed preferences. To this end, several past studies established that personalised MC messages significantly and positively influence consumer attitude (Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Lee et al., 2017; Xu, 2006; Jung, 2017). A study by Humbani et al., (2015) showed that consumers have a more favourable attitude and thus respond positively to SMS advertising that is personalized. Furthermore, a recent study by Bakr et al., (2019), concur that accurate personalisation is crucial to ensure that mobile MC messages are useful and relevant to recipients. In the context of MIM apps, personalisation is considered to be a key determinant factor influencing consumer attitude towards IMMC (Xu, 2006; Sirgudsson et al., 2018). Hence, in accord with the above and to further analyse this relationship with respect to Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, the following statement of hypothesis is proposed:

H_3: Personalisation of IMMC will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

3.4.4 Irritation and consumer attitude

Kumar and Mittal (2020) assert that the cost of annoying, offensive and overly irritating MC messages is reduced message efficiency and dwindling trust of a MC channel. As such, MC practitioners need to guard against annoying and distractive MC messages. The drawback of such messages is that they negatively influence consumer attitude. Put simply, an annoyed consumer has a general tendency of developing a negative attitude towards the MC message (Ducoffe, 1995). In support of this, several previous researches (Sharma et al., 2022; Lee, et al., 2017; Kim & Han, 2014; Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Gaber et al., 2019; Goh et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019; Sirguddson et al., 2018), affirm a negative association between irritation and consumer attitude. This implies that when consumers regard mobile MC messages as confusing, insulting, or unduly manipulative, they develop a negative attitude towards such messages. In order to explore the relationship further, in particular, in the context of IMMC and Gen Z consumers, the study hypothesizes that:

H_4: The irritation felt from IMMC will negatively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

3.4.5 Credibility and consumer attitude

The credibility of a message source in a technology-mediated MC environment helps to validate the potency of the MC message. Wang and Genç (2019) opine that credibility is at the centre of all online MC messages. In an earlier study by Ducoffe (1996), it was reported that the credibility of online MC is positively associated with consumers' attitudes. The observations are supported by Maseeh et al., (2021) and Gaber et al., (2019) who reported that credibility is a very important factor which has a strong and significant positive influence on consumers' attitude. Furthermore, in studying individual user's adoption of mobile advertising in China, Gao and Zhang (2016) concluded that credibility is positively associated with consumers' attitude. Also, Wang and Genç, (2019) studied mobile advertising in Asia and observed that among other factors, credibility emerged as significant belief factor which positively influences consumers' attitude. This indicates that, for IMMC, credibility is a crucial factor which shapes consumers' attitude. Therefore, in light of this above discussion and to further analyse the influence of credibility of IMMC on Gen Z consumers' attitude in Zimbabwe, the study hypothesizes that:

H_5: Credibility will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

3.4.6 Interactivity and consumer attitude

Several studies on technology-mediated MC have discussed the influence of interactivity on consumer attitude (Srajeesh et al., 2020; Arora and Agarwal 2020; Liu et al., 2019). In the context of mobile MC, past researchers have confirmed that interactivity is a predictor of consumer attitude (Humbani et al., 2015; Duffet, 2016). In a study of consumer acceptance of mobile advertising, Liu et al., (2019) state that interactivity is one of the most key determinants of consumer attitude. They further suggest that interactivity influences the acceptance of emerging MC tools including mobile media, particularly for young consumers. In addition, Arora and Agarwal (2020) and Wang et al., (2020) conclude that interactivity positively influences consumer attitude towards MC in virtual communities. This relationship is further

cemented by Park and Yoo, (2020) who found out that the three interactivity dimensions (i.e., controllability, responsiveness, and communication) positively influence consumers' attitude. Based on these findings, with respect to the Gen Z consumers' attitude in Zimbabwe, it is hypothesized that:

H_6: Interactivity will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

3.4.7 Media richness and consumer attitude

In a study of mobile media richness and online consumer behaviour, Tseng and Wei (2020) observed a significant and positive relationship between media richness and consumer behavioural responses. In their seminal work, Simon and Peppas (2004) revealed that the perceived media richness of a website as a MC tool positively influences users' attitude. Previous researches highlighted a positive relationship between media richness and behavioural attitude as measured by MIM apps users' satisfaction and loyalty (Tseng et al., 2016; Tseng et al., 2019). Therefore, the study considers it worthwhile to analyse the influence of perceived media richness on consumer attitude with respect to Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, hence, it is proposed that:

H_7: The perceived media richness of IMMC will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

3.4.8 Consumer attitude and behavioural intentions

Consumer attitudes regarding MC have previously been reported to be an important indicator of the effectiveness of MC (Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Duffett, 2020). In their seminal work MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) indicated that consumer attitude plays an important role in shaping behavioural intentions toward MC. Their claim is confirmed in a recent study on SMS advertising by Sharma et al., (2021) who affirmed that consumers' attitude positively influences their behavioural intentions. Therefore, in accord of the similarities between SMS technologies and MIM applications, this study examines the influence of consumers' attitude toward IMMC on behavioural intentions. This is consistent with related past researches (see Sharma et al., 2021; Arora & Lata, 2020; Kim, 2019; Mukherjee & Banarjee, 2017; Drossos et al., 2014). Furthermore, evidence from related studies on social media MC by Alalwan (2018), Hamouda

(2018), and Duffet (2017), confirm a significant positive relationship between MC, customer attitudes and behavioral intentions. Given the aforementioned, it is hypothesized that:

H_8: Gen Z consumers' attitude towards IMMC will positively influence their behavioural intentions.

3.4.9 Subjective norms, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z

According to Venkatesh and Davis (2000), one of the most significant social influence variables that affects consumer behavior with regard to emerging technology is subjective norm. Hashim et al., (2018) contends that research on mobile MC increasingly uses subjective norms as a determinant of consumer attitude and behavioral intentions. As a result, the impact of subjective norms on consumer attitude and behavioral intentions has been extensively reported in previous studies on mobile MC (Kim, 2019; Komulainen et al., 2019). Sharma et al. (2021) emphasized a favorable association between customers' attitudes and behavioral intentions and subjective norms in a research of SMS advertising. These results are supported by a study on mobile advertising by Kim (2020), which suggests that subjective positively influence consumers' attitude and behavioral intentions, particularly young consumers. To ascertain this association in the context of IMMC and Gen Z cohort consumers in Zimbabwe, the study hypothesizes that:

H_9: Subjective norms will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

H_{10}: Subjective norms will positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

3.4.10 Perceived control, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z

To understand the influence of perceived control on consumers' attitude and behavioural intentions, previous studies have related perceived control to factors such as; consent, risk avoidance and privacy concerns (Sharma et al., 2021; Humbani et al., 2015). This implies that in an online marketing environment, perceived control measures the ability of the consumers to control the messages and information directed to them. Hence, it has been found to be a strong predictor of consumer attitude towards advertising and their behavioural intentions (Humbani et al., 2015; Hashim et al., 2018). Furthermore, according to the TPB, perceived

control positively influences consumers' attitude and behavioural intention (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991). This has been confirmed in past studies (Sreejesh et al., 2020; Wang, 2020; Drossos et al., 2014). Thus, in the context of IMMC, it is envisaged that a person's perception of their ability to control their behaviour regarding IMMC messages, will influence their attitude toward IMMC and behavioural intention. In view of this background, it is hypothesized that:

H_{11}: Perceived control will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

H_{12}: Perceived control will positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe

3.4.11 Moderating role of impulsiveness on relationship between attitude and behavioural intention of Gen Z consumers

The literature on consumer behaviour generally agrees that consumers that are highly impulsive often act in specific ways unexpectedly rather than methodically (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998). Therefore, the association between consumer attitude and behavioural intentions has been studied previously using consumer impulsivity as a moderating variable (Drossos et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2020). In particular, Drossos et al. (2014) studied the moderating influence of consumer impulsiveness in a research of mobile text advertising. They found that customers with higher impulse buying tendencies are more likely to buy the advertised products. Additionally, Chang, et al. (2020) used consumer impulsiveness as a moderating variable of the relationship between consumers' attitude and behaviour in an examination of consumers' respond actions to MC messages on Facebook. The study results proved that people who are highly impulsive have a tendency to act without thinking or planning (Chang et al., 2020). As a result, the following hypothesis is made in order to investigate the moderating role of consumer impulsivity on the relationship between attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe:

H_{13}: Impulsiveness has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between consumer attitude and behavioural intention

3.4.12 Summary of the hypotheses

The table below shows a summary of the statements of hypotheses.

Table 3.1: Summary of Hypotheses

Central route characteristics	**Statement of hypotheses**
Informativeness (H_1)	*The perceived informativeness of IMMC will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC*
Entertainment (H_2)	*Perceived entertainment of IMMC will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC*
Personalisation (H_3)	*Personalisation of IMMC will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*
Irritation (H_4)	*The irritation felt from IMMC will negatively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*
Peripheral route characteristics	
Credibility (H_5)	*Credibility will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*
Interactivity (H_6)	*Interactivity will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*
Media richness (H_7)	*The perceived media richness of IMMC will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*
TPB Factors	
Consumer attitude (H_8)	*Gen Z consumers' attitude towards IMMC will positively influence their behavioural intentions.*
Subjective norms (H_9)	*Subjective norms will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*
Subjective norms (H_{10})	*Subjective norms will positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*
Perceived control (H_{11})	*Perceived control will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*
Perceived control (H_{12})	*Perceived control will positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*
Impulsiveness	
Impulsiveness (H_{13})	*Impulsiveness has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between consumer attitude and behavioural intention*

3.5 Proposed research model

The research model shows the interaction relationships between the independent variables, central route factors and peripheral route factors, consumer attitude, the moderating variable

(consumer impulsiveness) and the outcome variable (i.e., behavioural intention). It is drawn up based on the theoretical propositions of the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), information adoption model (IAM) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), (see Figure 3.1). The relationships depicted in the model are also supported by empirical studies as discussed earlier in this chapter. The ELM and IAM depict the central route characteristics (i.e., informativeness, entertainment, irritation and personalisation) and peripheral route characteristics (i.e., credibility, interactivity and perceived media richness) of IMMC, whilst the TPB shows the relationship between consumer attitude (CA) towards IMMC and behavioural intention (BI). Also, the research model shows the moderating effects of consumer impulsiveness (CI) on the relationship between consumer attitude towards IMMC and behavioural intentions.

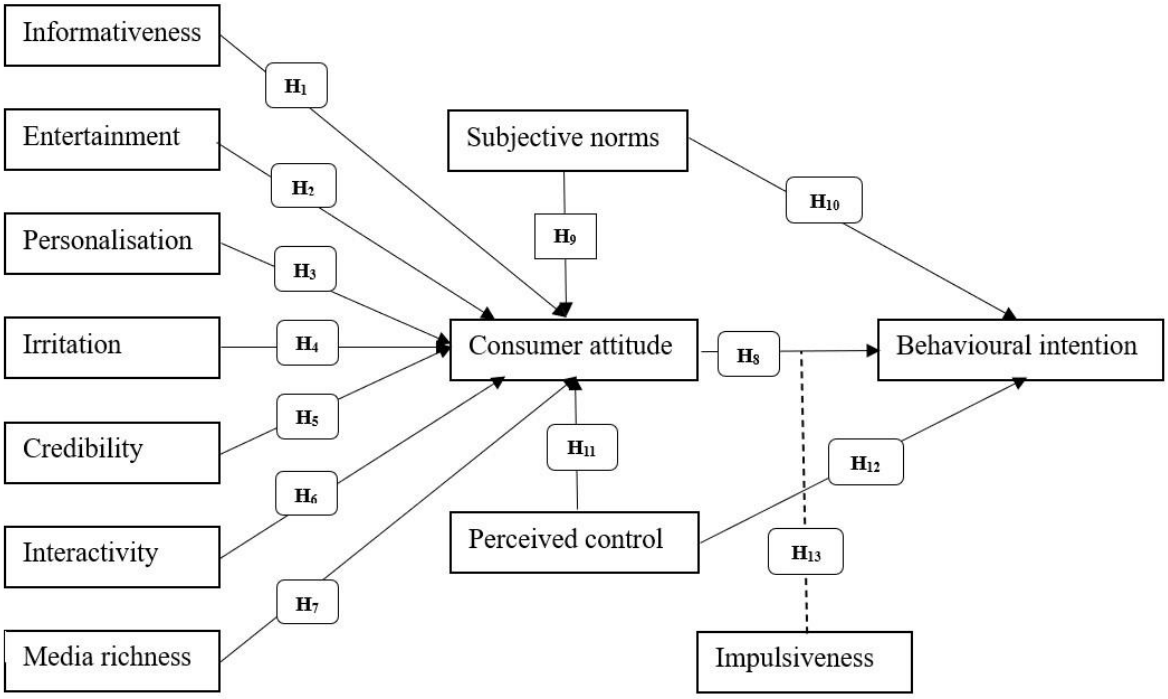

Figure 3.1: Research model

3.6. Chapter summary

This chapter detailed the theoretical underpinnings of the study, focusing on the ELM, IAM, and TPB. The chapter also reviewed empirical literature pertaining to the central route characteristics (informativeness, entertainment, personalization, and irritation), peripheral route characteristics (credibility, interactivity, and media richness), and consumer attitude, subjective norms, perceived control and behavioural intentions. The research model that shows

the links between the predictor factors, moderating variables, and outcome variables also received special scholarly attention. The next chapter presents the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology used to collect and analyse data. To begin with, the chapter presents the guiding research philosophy, which is followed by a discussion of the research approach and the research design employed in the study. In addition, the chapter outlines the target population and sampling strategy including the determination of the sampling frame and actual sample size. Furthermore, the chapter highlights and justifies the use of the questionnaires as the data collection instrument including such issues as pilot testing, validity and reliability. Finally, the last sections of the chapter focus on the data analysis procedures and ethical considerations.

4.2 Research questions

Despite the extensive review and critical assessment of the related literature, it can be observed that this did not sufficiently address the research problem and the set hypotheses. To this end, empirical research through scientific inquiry is necessary to assess the associated relationships between independent and dependent variables and validate the proposed conceptual model. Thus, the principal research questions presented in the introductory chapter are restated:

- What is the influence of central route characteristics of IMMC on the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC?
- What is the influence of peripheral route characteristics of IMMC on the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC?
- What role do the subjective norms, perceived control and attitude of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC play on their behavioural intention?
- How does consumer impulsiveness moderate the influence of Gen Z consumers' attitude towards IMMC on behavioural intention?

4.3 Research philosophy

In general, philosophy is a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019). In his seminal work, Thomas Kuhn, an American philosopher, suggested that researchers have shared beliefs and assumptions about how problems can be understood and tackled (Khun, 1970). This essentially determines how they view the world around them and influence the conduct of research (Creswell, 2017). Thus, in business and management research, research philosophy helps to define what constitutes knowledge and truth. Accordingly, Saunders et al. (2019) submit that there are three philosophical assumptions in research, namely, ontology, epistemology and axiology. Whereas ontology pertains to the 'nature of reality', epistemology emphasises the theory of knowledge, particularly its validation and axiology concern the role of values and ethics in research, (Maholtra, 2010; Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism are considered the key research philosophies that draw on ontology, epistemology and axiology (Saunders et al., 2019).

Positivism, which can also be described as empirical science, or post-positivism, is a 'deterministic philosophy in which causes probably determine effects or outcomes' (Creswell, 2017). It assumes a rationalistic and objective rather than an intuitive and subjective approach to knowledge development. The realism philosophy suggests that reality exists independently of the individual's mind (Hair et al., 2020). This implies that an individual's perception and thoughts have no influence on the existence of reality (Saunders et al., 2019). Hence, interpretivism is highly subjective wherein researchers view real-world circumstances as they occur organically (Collis & Hussey, 2014). In pragmatism, researchers essentially the situational approach to the generation of knowledge (Creswell, 2017). It anchors mixed methods studies.

This study was guided by the positivist research philosophy. Proponents of the positivist philosophy argue for the application of the principles of natural sciences into social sciences (Makumbe, 2020). This entails the development of knowledge through the discovery of explanatory linkages or causal correlations of subjects using quantitative methodologies (Creswell, 2017). As a guiding framework that directs a researcher's conduct and behaviour,

the positivist philosophy believes that reality is observable and genuine knowledge can be developed from conclusion drawn up from observations and experiments (Saunders et al., 2019).

In addition, the positivist research philosophy is premised on the hypothetico-deductive paradigm of science (Sekeran and Bougie, 2016). Therefore, the positivist research philosophy was chosen as the preferred worldview for research, as it accentuates quantifiable observations that can be analysed statistically (Makumbe, 2020). The philosophy was deemed congruent with the aim of this study, which resembled the characteristics of the positivist research philosophy. For example, through the integration of the three theories, (i.e., ELM, IAM and TPB), the study aimed to test the complex and malleable influence of central and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC on Gen Z consumers' attitude and behavioural intention. Under this approach, data can be quantified and analysed through statistical mechanism such as descriptive and inferential statistics including regression analysis. Thus, in view of this, and coupled with the expected research outcomes presented above, this study adhered to the positivist research philosophy.

4.4 Research approach

In general, the research approach is a crucial component of business research which directs the specific methods to be employed. According to Bryman (2012), research approach is "the broad strategy that provides the overall direction of how the research will be conducted". The two major categories of research approaches used in business research are qualitative and quantitative. While the quantitative research approach is deemed to be deductive, the qualitative approach is considered as inductive. Accordingly, in this study, the quantitative research approach as employed. In addition, Hair et al. (2020) describes quantitative research approach as, "a data collection method that considers the use of formalised, standard, structured questioning practices where the response options have been predetermined by the investigator who administers it to large numbers of respondents". Saunders et al., (2019) opine that quantitative research approach is a highly structured methodology. Therefore, this approach is considered as a structured method aimed at addressing research problems through statistical means for the purpose of attaining conclusive and generalisable results.

This approach was chosen for the study as it is best suited for evaluating causal interactions amongst variables through statistical and mathematical models (Saunders et al., 2019). In particular, the quantitative approach typifies the tenets of positivism research philosophy which presumes an 'objective empirical examination and measurement of the relationships between theory and research as deductive' (Bryman, 2012). To this end, the approach resonated with the objectives of the study which include, inter alia, examining the interactive relationships between central and peripheral route factors and consumers' attitude towards IMMC and their behavioural intention. Furthermore, the quantitative research approach allowed for the researcher to operationalise and quantitatively measure concepts such as attitude, subjective norms, perceived control, consumer impulsiveness and behavioural intention. More importantly, unlike the qualitative research approach which is naturalistic and subjective, the quantitative approach follows an objective scientific and quantifiable structure (Saunders et al., 2019). This, in essence, fitted well with the present study.

However, despite the notable strengths of the quantitative research approach, Jonker and Pennick (2009), have suggested that it falls short in terms of accounting for unexpected events in the world. They further criticise this approach, arguing that it has a strict, scientific and rigid methodological slant (Jonker & Pennick, 2009). In particular, the fact that the quantitative approach follows a predetermined structure in data collection and analysis, implies that it eliminates subjectivity, uncertainty and intrigue associated with research results (Mbengo, 2016). Notwithstanding, the problem at hand motivated the researcher to employ the quantitative research approach. The decision is supported by research experts such as Cooper and Schindler (2017) who argued that a quantitative approach makes it feasible for the researcher to measure attitude and behaviour.

Moreover, the decision to adopt this approach is in line with previous researches on consumers' attitude toward digital MC (Finne & Grönroos, 2009; Sreejesh et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2019). The aforementioned authors agree that the quantitative approach is best applicable to studies wherein the researcher constructs hypotheses prior to data collection and test the relationship using empirical data. This argument has also been advanced by a prior study such as Mutsikiwa (2018), who stated that, "quantitative approach reduces ambiguity as consumer perceptions can

be converted into quantifiable categories". Thus, the approach afforded the researcher the opportunity to test and validate the ELM, IAM and TPB theories in the context of IMMC and establish relationships between the predictor and outcome variables.

4.5 Research design

In business and management research, Kothari (2004) opine that research design is, 'the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure'. In this regard, the essence of research design is to translate a research problem into data for analysis so as to provide relevant answers to research questions (Saunders et al., 2019). Specifically, the purpose of a research design is to "describe the plan for fieldwork and analysis of research results bearing in minding the principal research questions, objectives and propositions" (Hair et al., 2020).

The literature categorises research designs into several classes, namely, exploratory and conclusive, (Malhotra et al., 2017), descriptive and causal research design, (Kothari, 2014), as well as experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational (Creswell, 2017). Nevertheless, what is important in any study is to ensure that the research design follows the nature and context of the research problem as described by the research questions or objectives. Therefore, in line with the positivist research philosophy and quantitative research approach, the study employed the descriptive research design as the blue print for data collection and analysis. Malhotra et al. (2017) view descriptive research design as a form of conclusive research wherein data can be collected via a cross-sectional survey to describe relationships between marketing phenomena. Moreover, Sallis et al. (2021) opines that descriptive research designs are theory-based wherein the researcher is primarily interested in describing relationships between variables. Also, Creswell (2017), affirms that they can be best applied to case studies, observations and surveys.

The essence of a descriptive design, in particular, a cross-sectional survey is to collect, measure and analyse quantifiable data regarding two or more constructs from more than one observable case at a single point in time (Bryman, 2012). According to Blumberg et al., (2011) cited in Mbengo (2016), descriptive design is, "a method that tries to define a subject normally by

profiling a group of problems, people or events through tabulation of frequencies and use of univariate analysis or hypothesis". To this end, the descriptive research design allowed for the researcher to identify, describe and explain through quantitative data, the nature of the interactive relationships between the predictor and outcome variables. In addition, since this design is associated with large samples and huge volumes of data, (Hair et al., 2020; Mudondo, 2020), it resonated with this particular study. In essence, this study followed a predefined formal structure wherein selected theories (i.e., ELM, IAM and TPB) are empirically tested through statistical computations and structural mathematical models.

In particular, the use of a single cross-sectional survey method was preferred chiefly because it facilitates the collection of primary data from a sample of the target population (Saunders et al., 2019). In this particular case, the Gen Z cohort consumers in Zimbabwe. More importantly, the study intended to collect data at once so as to make inferences about the influence of central route and peripheral route factors on Gen Z consumers attitude regarding IMMC. According to Saunders at al., (2019), using a single cross-sectional survey enables researchers to explore the relationship between variables without prior ordering since the data is gathered simultaneously.

Moreover, the design allows for the use of structured mechanisms for collecting data. This includes the adoption of probability sampling methods and use of structured research data collection instruments (Malhotra et al., 2017). For this and other reasons presented earlier, the descriptive research design, in particular the cross-sectional survey method was considered apt to collect data. The decision was motivated by the fact that this method allowed for the researcher to measure variables (i.e., consumer attitude, subjective norms, perceived control and behavioural intention) without modifying them. Also, it enables the researcher to examine associations or correlations in data in order to validate the proposed research model.

4.6 Target population and sampling

In general, researchers have used the word population to describe all elements in the field of investigation (Kothari, 2004). Put simply, population is the larger group from which sampling components are chosen and to whom results will be generalised. Thus, it contains every component that makes up the unit of analysis. In support of the aforementioned definitions,

Saunders at al., (2019) view population as, the totality of an identifiable set of members of the community being investigated by the researcher. Hence, in this study, population refers to the individual Gen Z consumers from which the researcher collected data and to which the research findings are generalised. The properties of the research population are discussed on the ensuing section.

4.6.1 The Gen Z cohort group

The literature has described Generation Z as the group of people born between 1995 and 2010 (Brown, 2020; Maggs, 2019). This generation now account for a third of the global population and have significantly high spending power (Brown, 2020). Therefore, it can be observed that, as at this point, this group includes people whose age ranges between 14-29 years. Consequently, in line with guidelines on the conduct of ethical research which discourages the use of minors, the older Gen Z cohort group which comprise young people whose age ranges from 18 to 28 years, are considered as key participants in the survey. In this regard, it can be argued that these young people have attained the minimum age of consent and therefore can be invited to participate and contribute in this study.

Furthermore, the use of Gen Z in this study was motivated by several factors and gaps in the literature. To begin with, it is worth noting that recent studies on technology mediated MC have largely focused on Generation Y consumers (commonly known as millennials) (Arora et al., 2020; Duffett, 2017; Suziana & Games, 2020). This evidently indicates that there is scant empirical research on the Generation Z (also known as digital natives) cohort. Notwithstanding, a typical member of Gen Z has grown up with access to the internet, social media, and mobile communication. They spend more time online searching for information, sharing buying experiences with peers, and communicating with brands and businesses (Duffett, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Feger, 2024). A similar argument was advanced by Hossain (2018) who opine that the Gen Z cohort group is deemed to possess greater computer and digital skills than any other previous generation. Duffett (2020) is of the view that this generation has never lived without social media, mobile devices, personal computers, the Internet. As such, they are constantly connected, always carrying out multiple tasks at once, constantly seeking rapid gratification, and they are heavily reliant on technology (Feger, 2024).

More importantly, Zimbabwe's the demographic profiles indicate that there is a rising young population which account for more than 50% of the national population. In this regard, empirical studies on Gen Z consumers are essential. In particular, findings from such studies can help marketers and MC practitioners with insights on the attitude and behavioural intentions towards IMMC. This would help to contribute the knowledge applicable to national economic planning particularly in terms of policy development and investment planning. With this in mind, data were collected from a representative sample drawn up from university students. The university were deemed to represent the older generation (i.e., 18+ years) of the Gen Z cohort consumers in Zimbabwe. In addition, university students possess unique characteristics which are believed to be necessary for addressing the research problem at hand.

For example, they have considerably higher access to mobile internet services which allow them to use MIM apps (Duffett, 2020). In fact, this group of the Gen Z consumers is regarded as highly techy-savvy (Feger, 2024) and hence, considered to be heavy users of MIM apps. Furthermore, a 2017 Education report by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) revealed that undergraduate enrolment at Zimbabwean universities is dominated by the 19-24 age group. This age group typifies the typical Gen Z cohort. Most notably, the collection of data from Gen Z cohort consumers is in tandem with the clarion call from prior studies on MIM apps (see Rambe & Bere, 2013; Tang & Hew, 2020; Duffett, 2016). In particular, Duffett (2016) further observes, "that there is a lack of research into young consumers' attitudes towards advertising on IM platforms in emerging nations". Hence the study attempts to fill in this gap.

4.6.2 Sample size

A sample can be viewed as a representative portion of the entire population (Saunders et al., 2019). It is essential for assessing the correctness and quality of research findings (Mudondo, 2020). Some researchers define sample size as the total number of study components (Hair et al., 2019). The selection of a sample is determined by a number of factors. Bell et al. (2018) suggest that a sizable sample size is required in a quantitative investigation in order to accurately generalise the research findings. Thus, the optimal sample size should be proportionate to the size of the population it represents. Previous studies have suggested that there are numerous methods for calculating sample sizes. For instance, according to Israel

(1992), 'for any population between 900 and 1 000, a sample of 277 is sufficient'. In addition, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table can be used to calculate the sample size for a known population, but, for unknown population, one can use the Rao soft sample size calculator. Also, Slovin's sample size formular is considered when there is not enough information about the behaviour of a particular population or the distribution of the behaviour of that population. This mirrors the context of the study. In fact, it is not clear how Gen Z consumers' attitude and behavioural intentions will be influenced by IMMC. Thus, Slovin's sample size formular was used to determine the actual sample size. The formular states that:

n = N / (1 + Ne^2)

where *n*= sample size, *N* = total population and *e* is the margin of error to be decided by the researcher.

Presently, according to statistics obtained from the student records section of Great Zimbabwe University, the combined student population is estimated at over 12000 across all faculties. However, for the purposes of this study, the undergraduate students who make up the Gen Z cohort group would be included in the actual sample. To this end, the total number of registered students (i.e., November 2022 semester) in the four biggest faculties equaled 8799 (see Table 4B). Accordingly, using the Slovin sample size calculator, at 4% confidence level, the sample size (N) will comprise 468 respondents.

4.6.3 Sampling technique

In this study, stratified random sampling method which falls under probability sampling was used. Essentially, the Gen Z consumers are classified according to their area of specialisation. In particular, Great Zimbabwe University has enrolled students into several academic disciplines including arts and humanities, education, social sciences and business sciences. Each discipline contributes a significant portion to the total student enrolment figures. According to the statistics obtained from the student records, there are a total of 8799 undergraduate students enrolled in several disciplines and Table 4.2 below shows the stratification exercise.

Table 4.1 Stratification of respondents 1

Faculty	Social sciences	Arts & Culture	Commerce	Education	Total
No. of students	2530	1414	2802	2053	8799
% Contribution	29%	16%	32%	23%	100%
Actual sample (N=468)	135	75	150	108	468

Hence, in accordance with this, stratified sampling helped to develop a representative sample that included many undergraduate students who make up the Gen Z cohort group. This is supported by Creswell (2017), who stated that the primary purpose of stratified sampling is to "concentrate on specific features of a population that are of interest". This is considered as one of the most effective ways for the researcher to answer research questions (Hair et al., 2020). Additionally, stratified sampling methods was employed essentially because it captured the fundamental descriptors of the survey population. With this in mind, the technique allowed for ensuring that the key properties of the survey population were considered and hence, reflected those of the entire population (Wilson, 2014). Although critics of this method indicate that it suffers from overlapping, wherein subjects can fall into multiple subgroups, this is was not the case in the present study. In fact, the observed phenomenon was mutually exclusive such they could not be in more than one sub-group. For instance, at no point would an undergraduate student enrol for more than one degree program at any given point in time. In the overall, stratified sampling methods allows for an efficient, accurate, affordable and manageable way of collecting data. This technique guaranteed proportionate representation which is key for the generalisation of research findings.

4.7 Data collection instrument

4.7.1 Survey questionnaire

In the literature, several data collection instruments are identified, namely; interview guides, observation schedules, and questionnaires among others. In this study, a structured questionnaire was employed. According to Malhotra et al., (2017), a questionnaire is, "a formalised set of questions for obtaining information from respondents". Kothari (2004) considers a questionnaire as a "document that has a list of questions asking respondents, about their opinions and other issues of interest to the study". Saunders et al., (2019) submit that a

questionnaire “is an instrument used in data collection in which a person is asked to respond to a similar set of questions in a predetermined manner”. Malhotra et al., (2017) suggest that, ‘the overriding objective is to translate the researcher's information needs into a set of specific questions that respondents are willing and able to answer’. Thus, from these definitions, one can say that questionnaires are research instruments used to collect data pertaining to pre-set categorical responses to judge the respondents’ views on a particular subject.

Sekeran and Bougie (2016) posit that in a quantitative survey, a structured questionnaire becomes the reliable instrument for data collection. Unlike an unstructured questionnaire which contain open-ended questions, a structured questionnaire comprises a sequence of closed-ended questions. In this regard, the benefit of a structured questionnaire is that it “contains standardised questions which can be interpreted the same way with targeted respondents thereby enhancing the quality of the research output” (Makumbe, 2020). In light of this, the use of a structured questionnaire was justified because of several reasons. Firstly, a structured questionnaire facilitated easy result presentations, analysis and discussion of findings. Secondly, given that responses were gathered in a consistent manner, a structured questionnaire ensured consistency between measurements which made data analysis simple. Moreover, using structured questionnaires was faster, less expensive, and allowed for the collection of a large amount of data. In sum, structured questionnaires gave respondents time to consider their responses before responding, resulting in well-thought-out responses.

4.7.2 Questionnaire design

In designing the questionnaire, simple language was used to made it easy for respondents to insert in their responses. Both the independent and dependent variables were measured using measurement items and scales adapted from pre-validated measured and literature review. In particular, the items used in past studies on SMS advertising, mobile advertising and social media advertising were adopted and adapted to suit the present study. The measures were based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), Neutral (3) agree (4), strongly agree (5). In justifying the use of Likert scales, McLeod (2019) suggest that they do not solicit for simple dichotomous responses but rather allows for respondents to express their

opinions. McLeod (2019) further argues that Likert scales enable for the easy generation of quantifiable data which can be analysed without much difficulty and complexity.

Overall, the questionnaire comprised three major sections as indicated in Table 4.2. The first section contained introductory information which explained the purpose and aim of the study to the respondents. The rationale behind such a section was to establish a rapport with the respondents. The second section contained information on the demographic profiles of the respondents in terms of gender, age and area of study, as well questions on their rate of MIM usage which reflects access and frequency of use of MIM apps. The third section contained questions addressing the research variables (i.e., predictor and outcome) which provided answers to principal research questions and objectives. Table 4.2 indicate the operationalisation of variables (i.e., measurement scales) and their respective sources.

Table 4.2: Measurement scales

Code	Construct/Items	Source
	Informativeness	
IF1	I think that promotional messages in MIM apps are a good source of information about products	Ducoffe (1996); Sharma et al., (2021)
IF2	I believe that promotional messages in MIM apps supply relevant information on products or brands	Liu et al., (2012); Sigurdsson et al., (2018)
IF3	Promotional messages in MIM apps provide timely information	Liu et al., (2012); Wang and Sun (2010)
IF4	Promotional messages in MIM apps provide extensive information	Duffett (2020)
IF5	I can say that I obtain in-depth information from promotional messages in MIM apps	
IF6	I think that I get complete information from promotional messages in MIM apps	Arora and Agarwal (2020)
IF7	I believe that I obtain useful information from promotional messages in MIM apps	
	Entertainment	
EN1	I think promotional messages in MIM apps are entertaining	Ducoffe (1996); Sharma et al., (2021)
EN2	I believe promotional messages in MIM apps are enjoyable	Wang and Sun (2010); Liu et al., (2012)
EN3	Promotional messages in MIM apps are amusing	Liu et al., (2012); Sharma et al., (2021)
EN4	I consider promotional messages in MIM apps to be pleasant	Xu (2006)
EN5	Promotional messages in MIM apps are fun to watch	
EN6	To me, promotional messages in MIM apps are interesting	Hanaysha (2021)

	Personalisation	
PS1	Promotional messages in MIM apps are personalised	Xu (2006); Kim and Han (2014)
PS2	The content of promotional messages in MIM apps is tailored for my preferences	Xu et al., (2011); Kurtz et al., (2021)
PS3	I feel that promotional messages in MIM apps are personalized for my usage	Xu (2006); Gaber et al., (2019)
PS4	I think promotional messages in MIM apps fit to my interests	Hanaysha (2021)
PS5	Promotional messages in MIM apps are relevant to me	
	Irritation	
IR1	I think the content of advertisements in MIM apps is often annoying	Ducoffe, (1996); Xu, (2006); Liu et al., (2012)
IR2	I believe that promotional messages in MIM apps disturb my use of MIM apps	Xu, (2006)
IR3	Promotional messages on MIM app are intrusive to me	Sharma et al., (2021), Chowdhury et al., 2006
IR4	Advertising messages on MIM apps are irritating	Ducoffe, (1996); Xu, (2006); Liu et al., (2012)
IR5	I feel that promotional messages in MIM apps are too insistent	Ducoffe (1996)
	Credibility	
CR1	I can say that promotional messages in MIM apps are convincing	Liu et al., (2012)
CR2	I think that promotional messages in MIM apps are believable	Ducoffe (1996); Xu, (2006)
CR3	I believe that the content provided by businesses on MIM apps is credible	Xu, (2006); Wang and Sun (2010)
CR4	The content provided by businesses on MIM app is trustworthy	Wang and Sun (2010)
	Interactivity	Gao et al., (2009)
IN1	I feel that MIM apps enable me to respond to promotional messages very fast	
IN2	I feel I have a lot of control over what to do when I want to communicate back on MIM apps	
IN3	While using MIM apps, I can get instantaneous information when I respond to promotional messages	
IN4	Advertising in MIM apps gives customers the opportunity to talk back	Arora and Agarwal (2020)
IN5	MIM apps makes it possible to share information with others	Hanaysha (2021)
IN6	It is easy to convey my opinion with other users in MIM apps	
	Perceived media richness	Carlson and Zmud, (1999); Brunelle, (2009)
MR1	MIM apps allow businesses to communicate using video, stickers, text or audio	
MR2	While using this MIM app, businesses can send/receive information quickly	

MR3	MIM apps enable businesses to tailor their message to meet the current situation of the receiver	
MR4	While using this MIM app, businesses can use rich language to communicate meaning	
MR5	While using this MIM app, businesses can use varied language to communicate meaning	
	Consumer attitude	Wang and Sun (2010), Sharma et al., (2021)
ATT1	I consider promotional messages on MIM apps as a good thing	
ATT2	Overall, I like promotional messages in MIM apps	
ATT3	Overall, reading or viewing promotional messages on MIM apps is important to me	
	Subjective norms	Kamphuis and Ramnarain, (2012)
SN1	I like forwarding interesting promotional messages on WhatsApp to friends and family	
SN2	I like receiving interesting promotional messages on WhatsApp from friends and family	
SN3	I consider sending/ receiving promotional messages on WhatsApp as a good way of socialising	
	Perceived control	
PC1	Exposure to promotional messages in MIM apps is entirely under my control	Le and Wang (2020)
PC2	I have the resources and knowledge to use MIM apps	
PC3	I will receive promotional messages when I have given my permission in advance	
PC4	It is necessary for me to choose promotional messages in MIM apps that match my interests	
	Consumer impulsiveness	Rook and Fisher (1995)
IMP1	I often buy things spontaneously	
IMP2	I often buy things without thinking	
IMP3	I buy things according to how I feel at the moment	
IMP4	I carefully plan most of my purchases	
IMP5	Sometimes, I am a bit reckless about what I buy	
	Behavioural intention	Martins et al., (2019); Sharma et al., (2021)
BI1	I would consider buying products promoted in MIM apps	
BI2	I intend to purchase products advertised in MIM apps	
BI3	I would probably buy products promoted in MIM apps	
BI4	I pay close attention to promotional messages in MIM apps	Arora and Agarwal (2020)
BI5	I use promotional messages in MIM apps to get more information about advertised products or service	

From Table 4.2 above, it can be noted that the measurement scales for the variables under investigation were adapted from past studies and adopted to suit the IMMC context. In particular, the measurement scales for central route factors such as informativeness (IF), entertainment (EN), personalisation (PS) and irritation (IR) were adapted from key authors such as Sharma et al., (2021), Ducoffe (1996), Liu et al., (2012), Sigurdsson et al., (2018), Xu (2006), Kim and Han (2014). In addition, the measurement scales for peripheral route factors were adapted from several scholars, for example, items for measuring credibility (CR) were adapted from Wang and Sun (2010), Ducoffe (1996), Xu, (2006) and Liu et al., (2012), and interactivity (IN) were adapted from Gao et al., (2009) with items for measuring perceived media richness adapted from Carlson and Zmud, (1999) and Brunelle, (2009). Furthermore, items for measuring consumer attitude (CA) were adapted from Wang and Sun (2010) and Sharma et al., (2021); subjective norms (SN) from Kamphuis and Ramnarain, (2012); perceived control (PC) from Leong et al., (2022); behavioural intention (BI) from Martins et al., (2019); Sharma et al., (2021) and impulsiveness (IM) from Rook and Fisher (1995).

4.7.3 Pilot study

Zikmund et al., (2010) specify that a pilot study is, “a small-scale research project that collects data from respondents similar to those who will participate in the full study”. In accord with the above explanation, before administering the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a pilot study with a sample of a total of twenty Gen Z cohort consumers. Consultations with academic and research experts were also made prior to administering the questionnaire. The key objectives of conducting a pilot study were to gauge the questionnaire wording, structure and overall quality. This included the need to amend the questions or response options in light of the feedback from the pre-testing exercise. The benefit of this was to ensure that the data resonated with the actual opinions of the survey participants. Essentially, in business and management research, conducting a pilot study is a standard practice wherein the researcher pre-tests the survey instrument prior to full-scale administration to the actual survey participants. So, this helped to minimise errors and ensure face validity of the data collection instrument (Wilson, 2014).

Furthermore, previous researches by Mudondo (2020), Mbengo (2016) and Nyatsambo (2021) have advocated for pilot testing the data collection instrument. They further argue that pilot studies help to evaluate the validity and feasibility in soliciting for actual data that addresses the set research questions. In essence, pre-testing was meant to ensure that questions are easy to understand, free from interviewer or researcher bias and sensitive to culture and sub-cultural issues such as language and symbolisms. Hence, in accord with the feedback from sample of the Gen Z cohort consumers, research experts and statisticians, the editing of the question items was conducted. This approach helped to improve the simplicity and relevance of the questions. It guaranteed logical flow, balanced framing and clear language thereby making data collection process easy, faster and highly economical.

4.7.4 Data collection procedures

In this study, the researcher used the cross-sectional survey method to gather data. Given the quantitative nature of this study, and its aim to examine the relationships between independent and dependent constructs, data are collected using a cross-sectional survey. According to Malhotra et al., (2017) the cross-sectional method assumes that survey respondents will only fill out the questionnaire once. Hence, Kothari (2004) suggest that this strategy allows the researcher to use a single sample from the target population and a single data collection process. This suggests that the dominating linkages between the constructs will have already been established through an extensive review of related literature. Since it was important for practical considerations, the cross-sectional survey approach was chosen because it is comparatively quick, simple, and inexpensive to conduct.

Cognizant of the relaxation of the lockdown measures and regulations on social distancing and remote working due to the scourge of COVID-19, a physical survey was instituted. In particular, the customer intercept method was used to administer the research instrument. In this method, data were collected through the help of research assistants who intercepted Gen Z consumers around the GZU campuses and request them to fill-in the questionnaires. Specifically, the questionnaire was issued to university students found on campus on particular days of the week. In fact, the questionnaire administration exercise was done over a period of eight weeks. The necessary permission was sought from the responsible authorities at GZU and

a letter of approval (see Appendix 3) was issued out granting the researcher access to the study participants.

4.8 Data quality control

4.8.1 Reliability

In the context of this study, it was crucial to establish the research instrument's reliability and validity. Essentially, this was necessary because the questionnaire contained questions and measuring items that were modified from previous researches done in different nations and MC situations. Justifying the need for reliability and validity, Cooper and Schindler (2014) state that this helps to ensure that results obtained from any measurement are indicative of what was actually intended to be measured. Hence, reliability and validity are considered the key indicators of the quality of a research instrument (Mutsikiwa, 2018). Saunders et al., (2019), suggest that reliability is, "concerned with the robustness of the questionnaire and, in particular, whether or not it will produce consistent findings at different times and under different conditions".

In order to test the reliability (i.e., internal consistency) of the research instrument, the researcher used the Cronbach's alpha index as reflected in Table 5.18. The Cronbach's alpha was invented by Lee Cronbach, and it is widely regarded as the ideal method for determining internal consistency. The Alpha values range from 0 to 1, with the usually accepted value being 0.7. However, some researchers argue that the coefficient of the scales value of 0.6 falls into the acceptable range (Zikmund et al., 2010). In the context of this study, all constructs in the hypothesised model were computed to test their reliability and were accepted at alpha value is greater than 0.7.

4.8.2 Validity

In general, validity refers to the extent to which a measure or set of measures correctly represents the concept of study (Sekeran & Bogue, 2016). Essentially, a measurement instrument with perfect validity is one which yields results that are free of errors. Although

researchers suggest several classifications of test of the validity of a measurement instrument, often they discuss content validity or face validity, criterion-related validity and construct validity (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). With this in mind, only two measures of validity (i.e., content and construct validity) were conducted and herein discussed.

According to Saunders et al. (2019), content validity refers to how well the research questions are covered by the measurement instrument (i.e., a questionnaire). It is a methodical and subjective assessment of how well a measurement scale's content corresponds to what is really being measured (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Researchers frequently evaluate if the measuring scale contains all the measurement items (i.e., question items) of the research construct in order to determine whether the measurement instrument has content validity (Mutsikiwa, 2018). In essence, content validity assesses whether the measurement scale fully encompasses all of the theoretical domains of the research constructs. Saunders et al., (2019) suggest two basic techniques to evaluate content validity. One of it involves the use of experts who can determine if each measurement item in the questionnaire is necessary. The second one involves conducting a critical analysis of the existent literature that relates to the measured construct to determine if all the are included in the measurement scale. Therefore, in the context of the study, content validity was measured via a thorough literature search of how the research constructs have been measured in prior studies. This move ensured that the researcher only adopted question items that have been empirically validated in past studies on technology-mediated MC.

Convergent validity and discriminant validity are two separate categories of evidence that are addressed by construct validity. Contrastingly, discriminant validity occurs when scores of a scale show that constructs are uncorrelated, as previously predicted, based on existing theory, (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Convergent validity describes the extent to which scores on one scale associate with the scores of another scale intended to measure the same construct (McGivern, 2013). Therefore, construct validity focuses on the extent to which a certain measure corresponds with other measures (Malhotra et al., 2017). This entails creating manifestations for speculative psychological ideas through rigorous hypothesis testing and scientific procedures (Mbengo, 2016). According to Bryman and Bell (2012), researchers can evaluate construct validity by drawing conclusions about hypotheses from theories that are

pertinent to the research environment. Hence, confirmatory factor analysis to was used to ascertain how much the constructs related to one another.

4.9 Data analysis plan and techniques

The analysis of data involved a number of phases. The first stage involved defining the measurement scales that pertain to the question items. This was followed by data preparation and capturing, normality tests and hypotheses and model testing through structural equation modelling (SEM).

4.9.1 Measurement scales and data

In general, measurement scales and data can be categorised into four major classes, namely, nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio (Wilson, 2014). The main traits of nominal scales include their applicability and relevance to data whose values are challenging to quantify numerically. However, the data are differentiated by being grouped into mutually exclusive sets where the numbers assigned to the measurement items are merely labels without any numerical value (Saunders et al., 2019). Thus, the gender of the respondents and their confirmation of prior exposure to MIM advertisements were categorised using a nominal scale in this study. According to Cooper and Schindler (2014), referenced by Nyatsambo (2021), nominal scales are frequently used in surveys and allow for statistical analysis such as descriptive statistics and Chi-Square testing. For this reason, the researcher chose to employ them.

Ordinal scales indicate the sequence of values rather than necessarily displaying the size of differences between items (Hair et al., 2019). According to Saunders et al. (2019), ordinal scales involve “data whose values cannot be measured” quantitatively but may be accurately ranked or arranged in order. Additionally, Bryman (2012), suggest that ordinal scales are frequently used to “measure variables whose response categories can be ranked”. This means that while there are no absolute differences in the measured data, there is some degree of variance. Hence, variables like the duration of MIM app use, the frequency of logins, and the amount of time spent signed on to MIM applications were taken into consideration as ordinal data in this study.

Saunders et al., (2019) describe interval scales as "numerical data for which the difference or 'interval' between any two data values for a given variable may be expressed, but for which the relative difference cannot be stated". They connote the idea of interval equality in addition to having traits of both ordinal and nominal scales (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Thus, interval scales are believed to deliver the highest level of measurement precision as they allow for the researcher to compare the differences between two variables (Hair et al., 2020). This, therefore, implies that any mathematical computations can be performed on the collected data. In this study, variables drawn up from the theoretical models (i.e., central route and peripheral route characteristics, consumer attitude, behavioural intention, subjective norms, perceived control and impulsiveness) were regarded as interval scales primarily because they represent the opinions of survey participants. Accordingly, as indicated earlier, the question items on the main research constructs for this study were in interval data.

4.9.2 Data preparation and capturing

Prior to subjecting the data for further statistical analysis, data were coded and edited after collection of raw data via a structured questionnaire. Coding involves grouping and assigning values to responses to questions in a measurement instruments, (Hair et al., 2020). In other words, it involves classifying the response-categories through the use of numerical figures. Editing is a process of checking for mistakes on how the study participants have completed the questionnaire. Saunders et al., (2019) submit that editing of the research data describes the activities that relate to checking the data for errors, so as to ensure that the data meets the expected standards of accuracy and precision. The editing process involves identifying and selecting incomplete questionnaires which are deemed irrelevant, as they cannot be analysed (Malhotra et al., 2017). Therefore, in this study, closed-ended questions were used to collect data and thus coding was done during questionnaire design and prior to questionnaire administration.

Notwithstanding, editing was done to verify the eligibility of respondents, identify errors such as partially-completed questionnaires as well as incorrectly filled questions. The rationale for editing was to ensure that the data has been checked for errors. This helped to guarantee that the accuracy of the data which is a key ingredient in the statistical analysis of survey data. Most

importantly, this hugely affected the quality of the statistical computations, interpretations and analysis. After editing, the data were captured for analysis using SPSS-AMOS. This was done in order to establish the associations between the predictor and outcome variables and test the proposed research model. However, before that, the data were subjected to normality test.

4.9.3 Normality tests

In order to enable accurate, relevant interpretations and conclusions, research specialists like Cooper and Schindler (2014), Saunders et al. (2019), and Hair et al. (2019) argue for the validation of normality assumptions prior to the execution of any statistical computation. In essence, normality tests are performed to determine whether sample data was taken from a population that has a normal distribution (Wilson, 2014). This can be accomplished by doing a Kurtosis test as part of the skewness test. Other tests of normality, such as multi-variate normality (Mahalanobis Distance), multicollinearity (Tolerance statistic and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), and homoscedasticity was computed in order to meet the requirements for efficient usage of structural equation modelling (SEM).

4.9.4 Structural equation modelling (SEM)

Structural equation modelling (SEM) can be described as, “a comprehensive statistical method for examining relationships between latent and observable variables” (Hoyle, 1995). It is a statistical tool that is extremely flexible and comprehensive and may be used to represent, approximate, and test relationships between constructs. According to Hair et al. (2019), SEM is a statistical tool that researchers employ to analyze multivariate data and illuminate correlations between various factors. Mueller and Hancock (2008) noted that SEM, which is based on two conventional ideas, namely variable path analysis and confirmatory factor analysis, has developed into trending tool for assessing correlational hypotheses in recent years.

In this study, SEM was used to test the hypothesized model. First, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was computed before further SEM analysis. Secondly, to test the hypotheses of the study, covariance-based SEM was conducted in Smart PLS 4 software to examine relationships amongst observable and latent variables. For the goodness-of-fit, four fit indices are used, namely, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI); the Normed Fit Index (NFI); the Tucker-

Lewis index (TLI) and the Goodness-of-Fit statistic (GFI). This is in line with previous relevant studies (Sharma et al., 2021; Kim, 2019).

4.10 Ethical considerations

Cooper and Schindler (2014) view research ethics as key principles that guide the behaviour of researchers, including survey participants and research clients. The implication is that if ethics are breached, both the researcher and the validity of the research can be questioned. Thus, ethics describe moral principles that control or influence a person's behaviour and regulate relationships between individuals, such as researchers and subjects (Hair et al., 2020). In this study, ethical issues extended to informed consent, (see Appendix 4), confidentiality and debriefing respondents about what the research was all about. In particular, prior to the actual fieldwork, the researcher first sought for an approval letter from the authorities at GZU (see Appendix 3). The study participants were informed of their rights, which include, specific details about that completing the questionnaire would take 20 minutes of their time. This was stated in the informed consent form, (See Appendix 4). They were also informed of their right to discontinue and terminate their participation in the survey at any point, should they think that it was needful. By adopting pseudonyms or fabricating a situation in which the names of people and places are anonymous (or fictitious), unless otherwise agreed, the researcher ensured confidentiality. The principle of confidentiality governs every research interaction. Thus, observing ethical issues was important for it guided the researcher and respondents on what was acceptable or unacceptable behaviour in the execution of research.

4.10.1 Ethical Clearance

The researcher obtained gatekeepers permission from the Registrar at the Great Zimbabwe University (see Appendix A). The researcher applied for ethical clearance (EC) from the Research Ethics Committee of the UKZN, which was granted, (see Appendix B - Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005841/2023).

4.11 Chapter summary

This chapter covered the research methodology employed in this study. It highlighted the research philosophy, research approach, research design and the population and sampling. It also outlined the sample size and sampling techniques, data collection procedures, research instrument, reliability and validity, data analysis plan and ethical considerations. The next chapter focuses on data analysis and discussion of results.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the research methodology followed to collect and analyze data on the influence of instant message marketing communications on consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions. This chapter aims to present and analyse the research findings of the study. The chapter begins by reporting on the response rate, data cleaning and preliminary analysis, and the demographic characteristics of the participants. IBM SPSS Statistics software v26 was used to analyse the results of the demographic characteristics of generation Z consumers. To test the hypotheses of the study, covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) was conducted in Smart PLS 4 software. As part of the CB-SEM process, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted first, prior to further analysis. When the measurement model met the initial conditions, a structural model was developed to evaluate the effect of the influence of instant message marketing communications on consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions among Generation Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

5.2 Preliminary Data Analysis

Data cleaning involves the identification and correction of errors, missing and duplicate values, and outliers. The researcher assigned alpha-numeric codes to the questions to simply data entry into Microsoft Excel 365. The responses of the respondents were also assigned value labels. In this regard, 410 cases considered to be reliable for further analysis in IBM SPSS Statistics and Smart PLS 4 software packages. Preliminary data analysis was carried out in three steps namely data coding, data cleaning and tabulation to identify unusual observations. The aim is to ensure that the data is accurate, complete, and fully representative of the population of interest.

5.2.1 Coding

Table 5.1: Coding of variables

Coding for Central Route Factors		
Construct	**Codes**	**Value Labels**

Informativeness	IF1 to IF7	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Entertainment	EN1 to EN6	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Personalization	PS1 to PS5	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Irritation	IR1 to IR5	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Coding for Peripheral route factors		
Construct	**Code**	**Value Labels**
Credibility	CR1 to CR4	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Interactivity	IN1 to IN6	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Media Richness	MR1 toMR5	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Coding for TPB variables		
Construct	**Code**	**Value Labels**
Subjective Norms	SN1 to SN3	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Consumer Attitude	CA1 to CA3	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Perceived Control	PC1 to PC4	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Impulsiveness	IM1 to IM5	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Behavioural Intent	BI1 to BI5	1= Strongly disagree (SA); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A) or 5=Strongly agree (SA).
Coding for demographic information		
Variable	**Short Name**	**Value Labels**
1. Do you use instant messaging apps (e.g., WhatsApp)?	Use MIM app	1=Yes, 2=No
2. Have you noticed an advertisement on instant messaging apps?	Noticed an advert on MIM app	1=Yes, 2=No
3. How do you access instant messaging apps?	Device used	1=Mobile Device, 2= PC (Laptop) 3= Mobile device & PC
4. How long have you used instant messaging apps?	Time using MIM app	1= <1 Year, 2= 2 Years, 3= 3 Years, 4 = 4 Years, 5 = 5 Years & Above

5. How often do you log on to instant messaging apps?	Login frequency	1 = Daily, 2 = 2 - 4 Times a week, 3= Once a week, 4 = 2-4 times a month, 5 = once a month
6. How many hours do you spend on instant messaging per log-in?	Session length	1 = < 1 Hour, 2 = 2 Hours, 3 = 3 Hours, 4 = 4 Hours, 5 = 5 Hours and above
7. Gender	Gender	1= Male, 2 = Female
8. Age	Age	1 = 18 -22 Years, 2 = 23 - 27 years, 3 28 -32 years
9. Study Mode	Study mode	1 = Conventional, 2 = Block release, 3 = Weekend School

The ensuing section presents an analysis of the descriptive statistics for the Likert-scale items.

5.2.3 Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Items

Table 5.2: Descriptive Statistics of Central route characteristics

Construct	Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Entertainment	EN1	410	3.91	1.26
	EN2	410	3.90	1.27
	EN3	410	3.87	1.29
	EN4	410	3.92	1.99
	EN5	410	4.01	2.05
	EN6	410	3.95	2.01
Informativeness	IF1	410	3.95	1.17
	IF2	410	3.96	1.18
	IF3	410	4.03	1.12
	IF4	410	4.09	2.04
	IF5	410	3.94	2.00
	IF6	410	3.97	2.00
	IF7	410	4.10	1.99
Irritation	IR1	410	4.32	1.02
	IR2	410	3.29	1.04
	IR3	410	3.27	1.01
	IR4	410	3.35	.98
	IR5	410	3.92	2.00
	IR6	410	4.07	2.04
Personalization	PS1	410	3.37	1.02
	PS2	410	3.34	1.01

	PS3	410	3.32	1.03
	PS4	410	4.01	2.01
	PS5	410	3.96	2.09

As for central route factors, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement using the scale 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree to 24 measurement items concerning central route factors under the construct 'entertainment', 'informativeness', 'irritation', and 'personalization'. The responses and mean values reflected in Table 5.2 show that the majority of the respondents Agreed with all the statements on entertainment (EN-EN6). The mean score values ranged from 3.87 (EN4) to 4.01 (EN1). For the informativeness construct, the results show that the respondents agreed with all the statements on informativeness. The mean scores ranged from 3.94 (IF5) to 4.10 (IF7). The third central route factor irritation had a total of 6 items. The results indicate that the respondents agreed with all the statements, with the lowest mean score value of 3.27 observed on IR3 and the highest mean score value of 4.07 observed on IR6. Concerning the personalisation construct, the results that respondents were in agreement with all the statements (PS1-PS5) with the highest mean score observed on PS4 (4.01) and the lowest mean score on PS3 (3.32). The findings show that the respondents consider the central route characteristics of instant message marketing communication messages when making purchase decisions.

Table 5.3: Descriptive Statistics of Peripheral route characteristics

Construct	Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Credibility	CR1	410	4.10	1.71
	CR2	410	3.68	1.67
	CR3	410	3.78	1.67
	CR4	410	4.01	1.73
Interactivity	IN1	410	3.61	1.16
	IN2	410	3.57	1.08
	IN3	410	3.39	1.11
	IN4	410	4.02	1.96
	IN5	410	3.88	1.98
	IN6	410	4.09	2.00
Media richness	MR1	410	3.29	1.02
	MR2	410	4.04	.97
	MR3	410	4.03	1.01
	MR4	410	3.24	1.08

	MR5	410	4.01	2.05

With regards to peripheral route factors, the respondents have presented 15 items under the constructs, namely; 'credibility', 'interactivity', and 'media richness'. It is evident from the results reflected in Table 5.3 that the respondents showed agreement with all the statements on peripheral route factors. The lowest mean score was observed on media richness (MR4=3.24; SD = 1.08) and the highest mean score on credibility (CR1=4.10; SD = 1.71). The findings show that the respondents view peripheral route characteristics of instant message marketing communication messages as influential when making purchase decisions.

Table 5.4: Descriptive Statistics of TPB constructs

Construct	Items	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Behavioural Intent	BI1	410	3.60	1.9
	BI2	410	3.72	1.9
	BI3	410	3.59	1.9
	BI4	410	3.89	1.9
	BI5	410	3.60	2.0
	BI6	410	3.54	2.0
Consumer Attitude	CA1	410	3.64	2.0
	CA2	410	3.86	2.0
	CA3	410	3.92	2.0
	CA4	410	3.90	2.0
Perceived Control	PC1	410	3.76	1.9
	PC2	410	3.62	1.9
	PC3	410	3.84	1.9
	PC4	410	4.12	2.0
Impulsiveness	IM1	410	3.54	1.7
	IM2	410	3.52	1.7
	IM3	410	3.62	1.7
	IM4	410	4.10	2.0
	IM5	410	4.20	2.1
Subjective Norms	SN1	410	3.60	1.9
	SN2	410	3.86	1.8
	SN3	410	3.82	1.8

The results in Table 5.4 reflect that the mean scores for the 22 statements on 'behavioural intent' (BI1-BI6), 'consumer attitude' (CA1-CA4), 'perceived control' (PC1-PC4), 'impulsiveness' (IM1-IM5) and 'subjective norms' (SN1-SN3) were rated above 3.5. The highest mean score

was observed on the impulsiveness construct (IM5 = 4.20; SD =2.0) which read, “Sometimes, I am a bit reckless about what I buy”. The lowest mean score was observed on impulsiveness again (IM2 = 3.52; SD = 1.7) which read, “I often buy things without thinking”. It is apparent, from the results shown in Table 5.4 that the study participants concurred with all the statements.

5.3 Response rate

Table 5.5: Response rate

Target Sample	Valid responses	Response Rate
468	410	87.6%

The targeted sample size was 468, of which results from only 410 respondents were eventually considered valid for analysis. This indicates a high response rate of 87.6% which is acceptable for further statistical analysis of the data. The decision is supported by such researchers as Saunders et al., (2019) and Sekaran and Bougie (2016) who assert that in survey research, any response rate which is above 30% is considered acceptable. This is further supported by Mellahi and Harris (2016), who affirm that there are no universally agreed standards of response rates among researchers, and as such, an acceptable response rate range between 16% to 91%.

5.4 Demographic profiles of participants

The demographic variables of interest in this study include socio-demographic profiles (gender, age and study mode) as well as MIM apps usage characteristics as measured by the time spent using instant mobile messaging application, session length, log in frequency and exposure to advertising messages on MIM apps. The results are explained using tables and graphs below.

5.4.1 Socio-demographic profiles of respondents

Table 5.6: Respondents' socio-demographics profiles

Variables	***Categories***	**N (%)**
Gender	*Male*	214 (52.2)
	Female	196 (47.8)
Age (years)	*18-22*	145 (35.4)
	23-27	135 (32.9)
	28-32	130 (31.7)
Study mode	*Conventional*	136 (34)
	Block release	127 (30.1)
	Weekend class	147 (35.9)

Source: *Primary data*

The results of the study displayed in Table 5.6 indicate that 52% of the survey respondents were males and 48% were females. In terms of the range, the majority of the respondents (35.4%) fell into the 18 to 22 years age category whilst the 28 to 32 years age category had the least number of respondents (31.7%). As for the study mode, the results in the table above reflect that the highest number of survey respondents (35.9%) were enrolled in the weekend class study mode and the least (30.1%) were enrolled in the block release study mode.

5.4.2 Period of use of MIM apps

The time period the respondents used instant mobile messaging applications was an important variable in this study. To gain insights into this variable, a contingency table was constructed by looking at 2 variables namely time using the instant mobile messaging application and if one used the instant mobile application. The results are presented in Table 5.6 below.

Table 5.7: Period of using MIM apps

Time using MIM app	Do you use MIM app?			
	Yes		No	
	N	N %	N	N %
< 1 year	16	3.9%	0	0.0%
2 years	85	20.7%	0	0.0%
3 years	76	18.5%	0	0.0%
4 years	103	25.1%	0	0.0%
> 5 years	130	31.7%	0	0.0%
Total	410	100.0%	0	0.0%

When asked about their use of MIM apps, all the respondents suggested that they used the applications. This study worked with participants who had experience in using instant mobile messaging applications and this added to the reliability of the answers given to the questionnaire. Results in Table 4.6 also indicate that about 31.7% of the participants have been using the MIM apps for more than five years. Additionally, 25.1%, 18.5%, 20.7%, and only 3.9% used MIM apps for four years, three years, and two years in less than one year respectively. It is clear from this tabulation that most of the participants had enough experience to give reliable information on their experiences with regard to the instant mobile applications they use.

5.4.5 Session length and age of participants

Results in Table 5.8 below is a cross-tabulation that shows the relationship between session length on application and the age of the participants.

Table 5.8: Relationship between session length on app and age of participants

Session length * Age Crosstabulation						
			Age			Total
			18 - 22	23 - 27	28 -32	
Session length	< 1 hour	Count	4	12	80	96
		% within Session length	4.2%	12.5%	83.3%	100.0%
		% within Age	2.8%	8.9%	59.7%	23.4%
	2 Hours	Count	11	11	37	59
		% within Session length	18.6%	18.6%	62.7%	100.0%
		% within Age	7.8%	8.1%	27.6%	14.4%
	3 Hours	Count	31	58	7	96
		% within Session length	32.3%	60.4%	7.3%	100.0%

		% within Age	22.0%	43.0%	5.2%	23.4%
	4 Hours	Count	15	40	6	61
		% within Session length	24.6%	65.6%	9.8%	100.0%
		% within Age	10.6%	29.6%	4.5%	14.9%
	> 5 Hours	Count	80	14	4	98
		% within Session length	81.6%	14.3%	4.1%	100.0%
		% within Age	56.7%	10.4%	3.0%	23.9%
Total		Count	141	135	134	410
		% within Session length	34.4%	32.9%	32.7%	100.0%
		% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Examination of marginal totals in Table 5.8 above reviews that 23.4%, 14.4%, 23.4%, 14.9% and 23.9% of the participants had session lengths of less than one hour, two hours, three hours, five hours and above 5 hours respectively. As previously noted, three age groups were considered namely those between 18 and 22, those between 23 and 27 and those between 28 and 32 years. A closer inspection of the inner cells within the table suggested that for those who were between 18 and 22 years old, 81.6% spent more than five hours on MIM apps. Additionally, for those between 23 and 27 years of age, about 60.4% spend more than three hours on MIM apps. It is also clear that those between 28 and 32 years spend less time less time MIM apps as shown by a frequency of 59.7%. Table 5.9 below shows the chi-square test statistics for the relationship between session length app usage and age of the participants. These metric measures are also given.

Table 5.9: Relationship between session length on app and age of participants

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	307.963[a]	8	.000
Likelihood Ratio	306.304	8	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	190.744	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	410		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19.28.			

Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.867	.000
	Cramer's V	.613	.000
N of Valid Cases		410	

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to compare the relationship between session length on the MIM app and the age of the participants, $X^2(8) = 307.96$, $p = 0.000$. The results of the analysis show a significant positive relationship between the two values. Both the Phi and Cramer's V show that the relationship between the two variables has a strong positive correlation. The possible implication of this result is that young people tend to spend much time on MIM applications. On the other hand, those who are between 28 and 32 years spent less time on MIM applications. This study argues that marketers and advertisers should come up with MIM adverts that target people based on their session lengths.

5.4.6 Session length and study mode of participants

This study also compared the relationship between session length and study mode of the participants. Table 5.10 below is a cross-tabulation of the relationship between session length and study mode of the participants.

Table 5.10: Relationship between session length and study mode of participants

Session length * Study mode Crosstabulation						
			Study mode			
			Conventional	Block Release	Weekend school	Total
Session length	< 1 hour	Count	12	44	40	96
		% within Session length	12.5%	45.8%	41.7%	100.0%
		% within Study mode	8.7%	34.9%	27.4%	23.4%
	2 Hours	Count	10	19	30	59
		% within Session length	16.9%	32.2%	50.8%	100.0%
		% within Study mode	7.2%	15.1%	20.5%	14.4%
	3 Hours	Count	25	42	29	96
		% within Session length	26.0%	43.8%	30.2%	100.0%
		% within Study mode	18.1%	33.3%	19.9%	23.4%
	4 Hours	Count	11	14	36	61
		% within Session length	18.0%	23.0%	59.0%	100.0%
		% within Study mode	8.0%	11.1%	24.7%	14.9%
	> 5 Hours	Count	80	7	11	98
		% within Session length	81.6%	7.1%	11.2%	100.0%
		% within Study mode	58.0%	5.6%	7.5%	23.9%
Total		Count	138	126	146	410
		% within Session length	33.7%	30.7%	35.6%	100.0%
		% within Study mode	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Three study modes were considered in this study. These are conventional [full-time students], block release and weekend school students (part-time students). The results show that about 33.7%, 30.7% and 35.6% of the participants reported that they were conventional, block release and weekend school students in that order. About 58.0% of conventional students spent more than five hours on MIM applications. Additionally, about 43.8% of block release students spent about 3 hours on MIM applications. On the other hand, 50.8% of weekend school students reported that they spent about two hours while 27.4% spent less than one hour on MIM applications. These results suggest that there is a positive relationship between session length and study mode with conventional students spending more time on MIM applications compared to block release and weekend school students. Table 5.11 below shows the Chi-square test statistics conducted to test the direction and significance of this relationship.

Table 5.11: The relationship between session length and study mode of participants

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	153.532[a]	8	.000
Likelihood Ratio	151.093	8	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	57.523	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	410		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 18.13.			

Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.612	.000
	Cramer's V	.433	.000
N of Valid Cases		410	

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to test the relationship between session length and study mode of the participants $X^2(8) = 153.53$, $p = 0.000$. A positive relationship between the two values was established with conventional students spending more time on MIM applications compared to weekend school and block release students. The Phi and Crammer's V suggest that there is a strong relationship between the two variables as shown by the coefficients of 0.612 and 0.433 respectively.

5.4.7 Login Frequency and device used

The study also examined log-in frequency and the type of device used by the participants. Table 5.12 below is a three-by-three contingency table that shows the relationship between log-in frequency and device used.

Table 5.12: Relationship between login frequency and device used

Login Frequency * Device used Crosstabulation						
			Device used			
			Mobile device	PC (Laptop)	Mobile device & PC	Total
Login Frequency	Daily	Count	278	12	16	306
		% within Login Frequency	90.8%	3.9%	5.2%	100.0%
		% within Device used	90.8%	38.7%	21.9%	74.6%
	2 -4 times a week	Count	20	12	19	51
		% within Login Frequency	39.2%	23.5%	37.3%	100.0%
		% within Device used	6.5%	38.7%	26.0%	12.4%
	Once a week	Count	8	7	38	53
		% within Login Frequency	15.1%	13.2%	71.7%	100.0%
		% within Device used	2.6%	22.6%	52.1%	12.9%
Total		Count	306	31	73	410
		% within Login Frequency	74.6%	7.6%	17.8%	100.0%
		% within Device used	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

A closer look at the marginal total suggested that 74.6% of the participants log in on their MIM application daily. Additionally, 12.4% and 12.9% reported that they log in on their MIM applications two to four times a week and once a week respectively. The results also show that the most frequently used devices are the mobile devices, followed by PC and mobile devices and PC only with 74.6%, 7.6%, and 17.8% respectively. Table 5.13 below is the Chi-square test of association for log-in frequency and device used.

Table 5.13: The relationship between login frequency and device used

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	193.798[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	172.013	4	.000

Linear-by-Linear Association	179.612	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	410		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.86.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.688	.000
	Cramer's V	.486	.000
N of Valid Cases		410	

The Chi-square test of association conducted shows a significant positive relationship between log-in frequency and device used $X^2(4) = 193.79$, $p = 0.000$. These results suggest that most of the participants use mobile devices to access MIM messages. There is a significant positive relationship between these two variables. Both Phi and Crammer's V show a significant, moderately strong positive relationship between log-in frequency and device used. Users of mobile devices find it easier to log into their MIM applications compared to individuals using either a laptop or a combination of a laptop and mobile device.

5.4.8 Exposure to an advert and Gender

The study also examined the relationship between gender and whether one ever noticed an advert on MIM application. The results are presented in Table 5.14 below.

Table 5.14: Relationship between exposure to an advert and gender

Exposure to an advert on MIM app * Gender Crosstabulation

			Gender		
			Male	Female	Total
Noticed advert on MIM app	Yes	Count	189	176	365
		% within Noticed advert on MIM app	51.8%	48.2%	100.0%
		% within Gender	87.9%	90.3%	89.0%
	No	Count	26	19	45
		% within Noticed advert on MIM app	57.8%	42.2%	100.0%
		% within Gender	12.1%	9.7%	11.0%
Total		Count	215	195	410
		% within Noticed advert on MIM app	52.4%	47.6%	100.0%
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As previously reported, 52.4% of the participants were males while 47.6% were females. Additionally, 89% of the participants reported that they had noticed an advert on their MIM

application while 11% reported that they had not. Table 5.15 below is the Chi-square test of association for the relationship between ever noticing an advert and the gender of the participants.

Table 5.15: The relationship between ever noticing an advert and gender

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.578[a]	1	.447		
Continuity Correction[b]	.362	1	.547		
Likelihood Ratio	.580	1	.446		
Fisher's Exact Test				.528	.274
Linear-by-Linear Association	.576	1	.448		
N of Valid Cases	410				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 21.40.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	-.038	.447
	Cramer's V	.038	.447
N of Valid Cases		410	

The results of the Chi-square test of association suggested that there is no significant relationship between gender of the participants and noticing an advert on the MIM application $X^2(1) = 0.578$, $p = 0.447$. The possible implication of this results is that messages posted on MIM applications do not segregate individuals based on gender. The messages that are posted on MIM applications are random and do not consider gender as part of the marketing strategies among generations that consumers.

5.5 Testing for Common Method Bias (CMB) using One Factor CFA

As the study employed a cross-sectional design and relied on self-report items, precautions were taken to address the potential influence of common method variance. Common method bias (CMB) refers to consistent variations that can arise from a specific data collection method, such as self-reported surveys (Min et al., 2016). According to Kock (2015), CMB can occur when a single factor can explain a significant portion of the variation. To assess the presence

of common method variance, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using a one-factor solution (Aguirre-Urreta & Hu, 2019; Jordan & Troth, 2020). If CMB is not present in a data set, using one factor CFA, RMSEA and SRMR should be above .08, and other fit indices, GFI, CFI, TLI, and NFI should be less than 0.90. JASP 0.18.3 software (JASP, 2024) was employed to run Harman's one factor CFA. The outcome of this analysis is presented in Table 5.16 below.

Table 5.16: Harman's one factor CFA results.

Fit indices	Value
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.49
Goodness of fit index (GFI)	0.42
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.46
Bentler-Bonett Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.48
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.22
Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)	0.13

Following the one-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the findings indicated that the model did not exhibit a substantial overall fit. The computed fit indices suggested that the single-factor model was not well-suited. The values for GFI, CFI, TLI, and NFI were lower than 0.90. Furthermore, the RMSEA and SRMR values exceeded 0.8, indicating a lack of fit for the one-factor model. These outcomes suggest that common method bias (CMB) did not pose a significant challenge in this study.

5.6 Assessment of measurement model using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Before the development of the structural model to test the hypothesis of the study, CFA should be conducted to examine measurement model fitness (Saliya, 2022). The Maximum Likelihood Estimation technique was employed, which enables the simultaneous estimation of model parameters by the researcher (Frey, 2022; Thakkar, 2020). As part of the CFA procedure, several measurement model fit indices were examined in this study. In Smart PLS 4, every latent variable was correlated with another to examine if the measurement model met the minimum requirements for CFA. Figure 5.1 below is a diagrammatic representation of the measurement model drawn for this study.

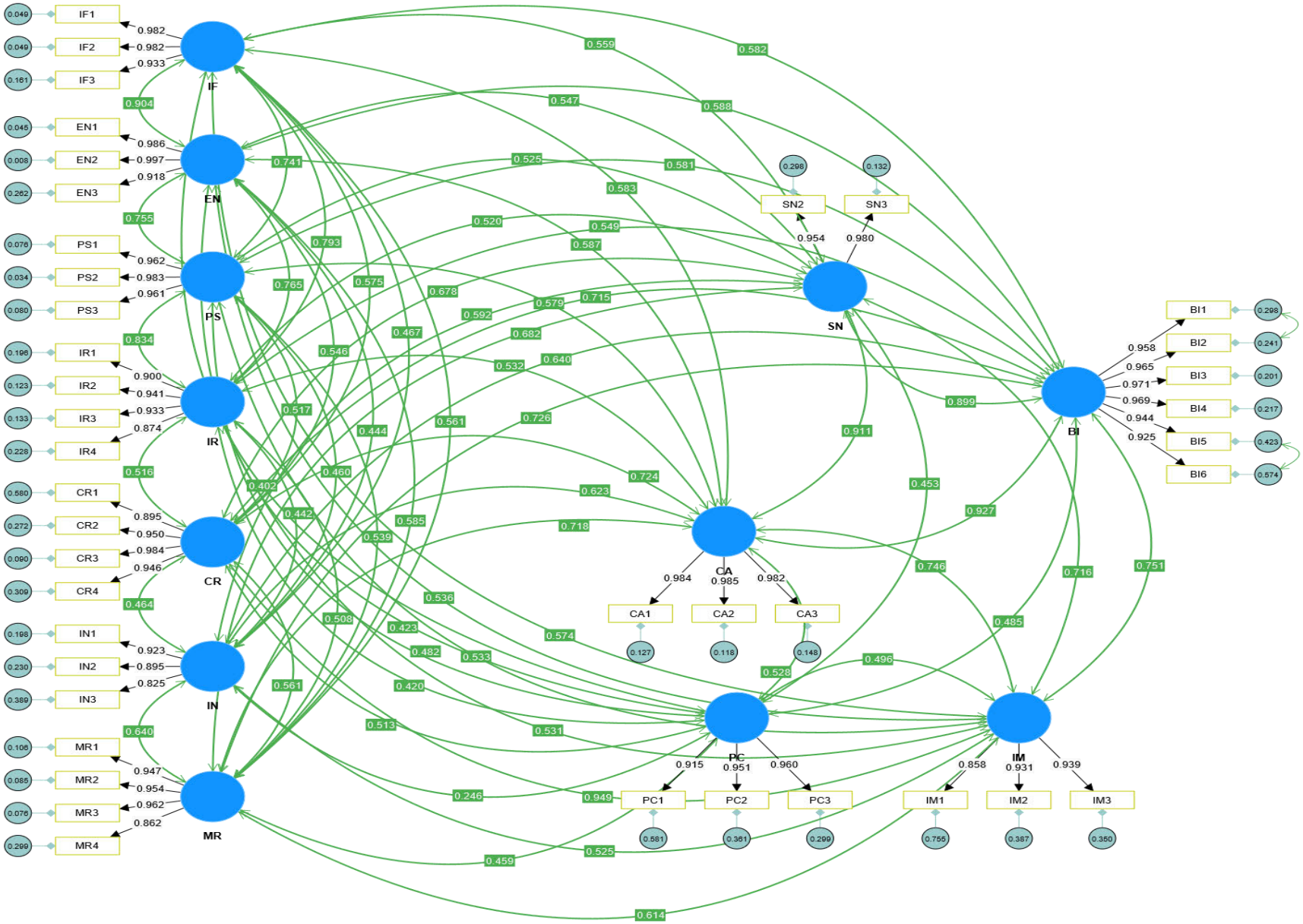

Figure 5.1: CFA Path Model 1

The results in Figure 5.1 above are the CFA path model developed to test the influence of MIM apps on CA and BI. The conceptual model was developed to assess the influence of MIM apps on customer attitudes and behavioral intention among Generation Z consumers in Zimbabwe. The diagram shows the items for each respective construct as well as the factor loadings. In this diagram, both exogenous and endogenous latent constructs were included to examine measurement model fitness. The results of measurement model fit indices, factor loadings, correlations, construct validity and reliability and discriminant validity are fully explained below.

5.6.1 Measurement model fit indices

Several measurement model fit indices were examined in this study. Table 5.17 below shows the CFA model fit indices and the comments made with regard to the minimum standards.

Table 5.17: CFA Model Fit Indices

Name of Index	Estimated model indices	Comments
ChiSqr/df	2.942	Good fit since the value is less than 5.0
RMSEA	0.069	Good fit, value less than 0.08
SRMR	0.031	Good fit, value less than 0.05
NFI	0.932	Good fit, value above 0.90
TLI	0.947	Good fit, value above 0.90
CFI	0.954	Good fit, value above 0.95

The results in Table 5.17 above show that the CFA model developed for this study met the minimum requirements for all the above model fit indices. The Chi-square/DF was 2.942 which was below the minimum threshold of 5 and this suggested that the model was acceptable. The RMSEA and SRMR are 0.069 (less than 0.08) and 0.031 (0.05) suggesting a good model fit. The NFI, and TLI were 0.932 and 0.947 respectively. These indices were above the minimum threshold of 0.9 suggesting good model fit. Additionally, the CFI value of 0.954 was above the recommended threshold of 950 suggesting a highly satisfactory model fit. The results of the measurement model suggested that the items used in this study were the true representations of the underlying constructs. By the same token, these indices suggested that the model fitted the data well as recommended in running structural equation modeling (Denis, 2021; Yang & Luo, 2022). The next step was to examine the factor loadings.

5.6.2 Measurement model factor loadings

Table 5.18 below shows the CFA factor loadings for the study. Factor loadings show to which questionnaire items are mini representations of the underlying construct (Hair et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2020). Values above 0.7 are satisfactory for an item to be included in the modelling framework (Denis, 2021; Hair et al., 2021; Hamaker et al., 2021).

Table 5.18: CFA Factor Loadings

	BI	CA	CR	EN	IF	IM	IN	IR	MR	PC	PS	SN
BI1	0.958											
BI2	0.965											
BI3	0.971											
BI4	0.969											
BI5	0.944											
BI6	0.925											
CA1		0.984										
CA2		0.985										
CA3		0.982										
CR1			0.895									
CR2			0.95									
CR3			0.984									
CR4			0.946									
EN1				0.986								
EN2				0.997								
EN3				0.918								
IF1					0.982							
IF2					0.982							
IF3					0.933							
IM1						0.858						
IM2						0.931						
IM3						0.939						
IN1							0.923					
IN2							0.895					
IN3							0.825					
IR1								0.9				
IR2								0.941				
IR3								0.933				
IR4								0.874				
MR1									0.947			
MR2									0.954			
MR3									0.962			
MR4									0.862			
PC1										0.915		

PC2										0.951		
PC3										0.96		
PS1											0.962	
PS2											0.983	
PS3											0.961	
SN2												0.954
SN3												0.98

According to Mehmetoglu and Venturini, (2021), factor loadings assist the researcher in the selection of items that can explain the highest variance in the underlying construct. The higher the factor loading, the better the item is a mini representation of the underlying latent construct. In our study, behavioral intention had 6 items with factor loadings ranging from 0.925 to 0.971. The other constructs had three or four items with factor loadings above 0.7 except for subjective norms which had only two items. The study retained 2 items for subjective norms to preserve model validity and reliability as well explanatory power of the construct. The items for SN had good factor loadings above 0.95. The results of the factor loadings above suggested that all the items included in the analysis had acceptable values in explaining the respective constructs.

5.6.3 Correlation coefficients between latent constructs

After examination of the factor loadings, the next step was to observe the correlation coefficients between the variables of interest. Table 5.19 shows the correlation coefficients between the different sets of latent constructs.

Table 5.19: Correlation coefficients of exogenous latent constructs 1

	BI	CA	CR	EN	IF	IM	IN	IR	MR	PC	PS	SN
BI	1											
CA	0.927	1										
CR	0.715	0.724	1									
EN	0.588	0.587	0.546	1								
IF	0.582	0.583	0.575	0.904	1							
IM	0.751	0.746	0.949	0.536	0.574	1						
IN	0.640	0.623	0.464	0.444	0.467	0.525	1					
IR	0.549	0.532	0.516	0.765	0.793	0.531	0.442	1				
MR	0.726	0.718	0.561	0.585	0.561	0.614	0.640	0.508	1			
PC	0.485	0.528	0.513	0.423	0.402	0.496	0.246	0.420	0.459	1		
PS	0.581	0.579	0.517	0.755	0.741	0.533	0.460	0.834	0.539	0.482	1	
SN	0.899	0.911	0.678	0.547	0.559	0.716	0.592	0.520	0.682	0.453	0.525	1

The purpose of running correlation analysis in SEM is to observe the extent to which the latent constructs are related and detect multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2020). In structural equation modeling, latent constructs should be allowed to correlate but should not suffer from multicollinearity. In this study, both exogenous and endogenous constructs were included as part of the correlation analysis. The highest correlation was observed between behavioral intention and consumer attitudes with a coefficient of 0.927 followed by the relationship between information and entertainment with a coefficient of 0.904, followed by subjective norms and behavioral intention with a coefficient of 0.899 and finally irritation and personalization of 0.834. Multicollinearity is a situation whereby 1 two or more sets of predictor variables are highly related thereby leading to inaccurate results about the effect of 1 variable on another. All the other exogenous constructs had coefficients less than 0.8 suggesting the absence of multicollinearity. In this study, most of the constructs had weak to moderately strong correlations, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a major concern. Therefore, this study observed that the exogenous constructs included in the analysis were independent of each other.

5.6.4 Construct reliability and validity

Construct validity and reliability measures for the study were estimated. These measures include the Cronbach' alpha, composite reliability and average variance extracted. The results are presented in Table 5.20 below.

Table 5.19: Validity and Reliability measures for model variables

Variable	Cronbach's alpha (standardized)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
BI	0.985	0.977	0.913
CA	0.989	0.989	0.967
CR	0.969	0.970	0.892
EN	0.976	0.977	0.937
IF	0.976	0.977	0.933
IM	0.934	0.936	0.829
IN	0.912	0.914	0.778
IR	0.952	0.953	0.833
MR	0.962	0.962	0.869
PC	0.959	0.960	0.888
PS	0.978	0.979	0.939
SN	0.966	0.966	0.935

5.6.5 Internal Consistency Reliability

After presenting the results of reliability indicators, the next step in evaluating the measurement model involves examining internal consistency reliability. Kock (2015) suggested that in SEM, one of the primary measures used for this purpose is composite reliability (C.R), which indicates the level of reliability. Higher values of C.R. indicate higher levels of reliability (Cheah et al., 2018). For all the constructs in this study, the C.R values exceeded 0.7, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The coefficients for all the latent constructs met the criteria for both Cronbach's alpha and C.R measures. As can be seen above, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were also above 0.7.

5.6.6 Convergent validity

The results of the convergent validity assessment are also presented in Table 5.19 above. Hair et al., (2020) noted that convergent validity refers to the extent to which a construct explains the shared variance among its indicators. To evaluate convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was calculated. A minimum threshold of 0.50 is typically considered acceptable for AVE (Hair et al., 2020). A value of 0.50 or higher indicates that the construct accounts for 50 percent or more of the observed variance in its indicators. In Table 5.20, the lowest reported AVE was 0.829 for IM, while the highest value of 0.967 was for CA. The measurement model satisfied the requirements of convergent validity. The subsequent step involved examining discriminant validity for all the constructs.

5.6.7 Discriminant validity

Table 5.21 below shows the HTMT ratios which were estimated to measure discriminate validity among the latent constructs.

Table 5.21: HTMT Ratios

	BI	CA	CR	EN	IF	IM	IN	IR	MR	PC	PS	SN
BI												
CA	0.845											
CR	0.743	0.740										

EN	0.587	0.577	0.555									
IF	0.587	0.586	0.591	0.824								
IM	0.774	0.757	0.847	0.542	0.588							
IN	0.629	0.619	0.490	0.440	0.468	0.535						
IR	0.555	0.528	0.526	0.762	0.799	0.546	0.444					
MR	0.738	0.738	0.598	0.596	0.566	0.639	0.641	0.509				
PC	0.505	0.533	0.533	0.422	0.407	0.514	0.250	0.412	0.487			
PS	0.589	0.578	0.547	0.754	0.748	0.553	0.459	0.836	0.551	0.491		
SN	0.825	0.810	0.698	0.541	0.556	0.721	0.588	0.518	0.694	0.457	0.519	

To satisfy the requirements of discriminant validity, the ratio between any pair of variables should be less than 0.9 (Hair et al., 2021). In this study, most of the relationships had HTMT values less than 0.9. All the relationships satisfied the minimum requirements of the discriminant validity. The highest value of 0.847 was observed for the relationship between IM and CR.

5.7 Structural Equation Model (SEM): Central route factors, peripheral route factors, consumer attitude and behavioural intent

After examination of the CFA model, the next step was to develop the structural model. In this study, central root factors, and peripheral root factors were hypothesized to have a direct influence on consumer attitudes. By the same token, consumer attitude and other behavioral; variables would influence behavioral intention among Generation Z consumers.

5.7.1 SEM Path Model Diagram

Figure 5.2 below depicts the SEM path model.

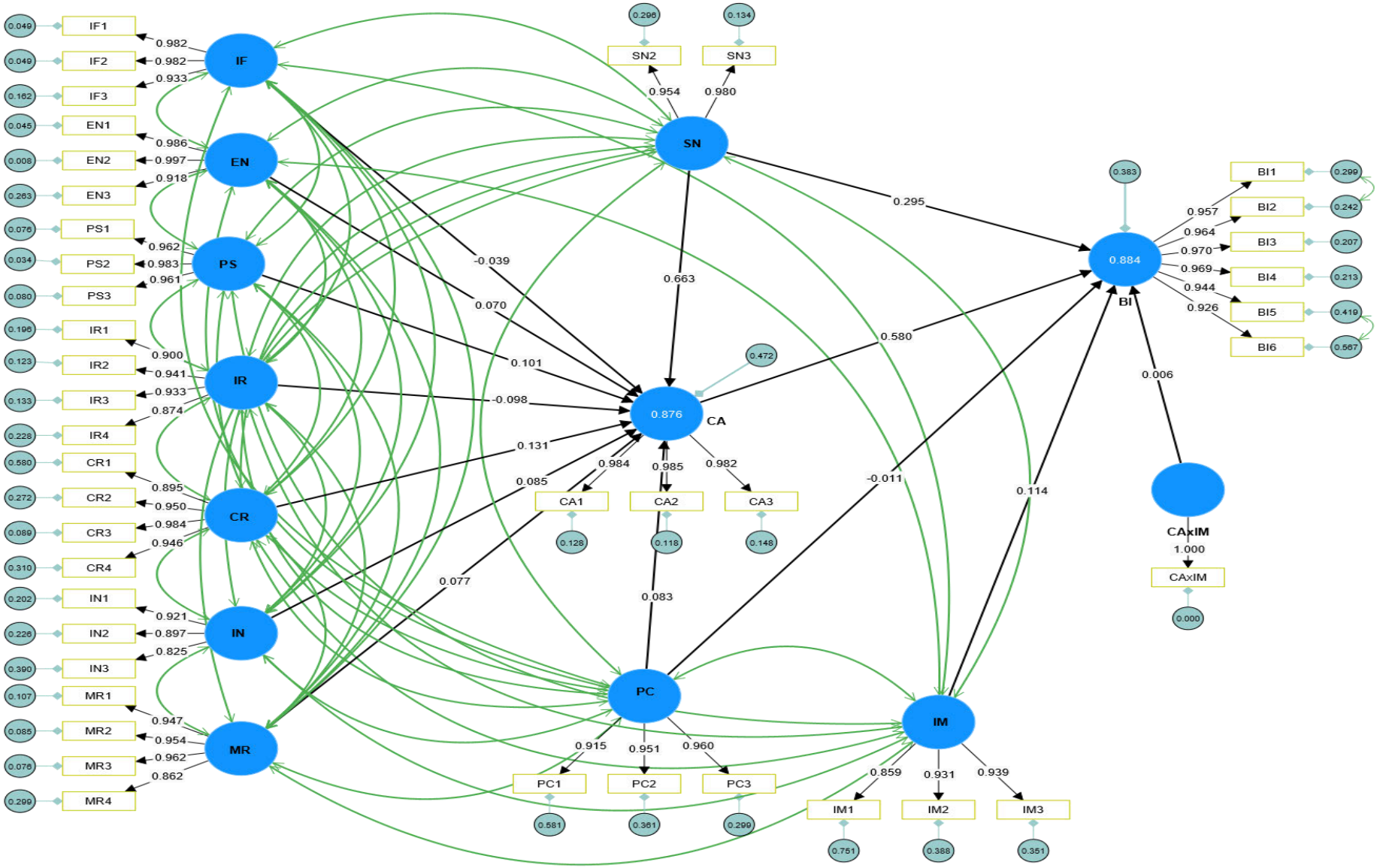

Figure 5.2: SEM Path Model

As reflected in Figure 5.2, the central route factors (IF=informativeness, EN=entertainment, PS=personalisation and IR=irritation) and peripheral route factors (CR=credibility, IN=interactivity and MR=media richness) influenced consumer attitude. Additionally, consumer attitude (CA) also affected behavioural intentions (BI).

This study also included a moderating variable impulsiveness (IM). To estimate the interaction effects as part of the moderation analysis, double mean centering (Mehmetoglu & Venturini, 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2020) was that is the appropriate approach in the development of the variable CAIM (which indicates consumer attitude multiplied by impulsiveness). Table 5.22 below shows the standardized regression coefficients for the central route factors, peripheral route factors and the theory of planned behavior variables.

Table 5.22: Standardized regression coefficients

Paths	std estimates	Std errors	T values	P values
Central Route Factors on CA				
IF -> CA	-0.039	0.09	0.737	0.462
EN -> CA	0.07	0.079	1.385	0.167
PS -> CA	0.101	0.082	2.448	0.015
IR -> CA	-0.098	0.094	2.227	0.026
Peripheral route factors on CA				
CR -> CA	0.131	0.038	4.376	0.000
IN -> CA	0.085	0.054	2.891	0.004
MR -> CA	0.077	0.066	2.353	0.019
TPB factors on CA				
PC -> CA	0.083	0.028	3.324	0.001
SN -> CA	0.663	0.037	19.259	0.000
Drivers of BI				
CA -> BI	0.58	0.055	9.884	0.000
IM -> BI	0.114	0.039	3.658	0.000
PC -> BI	-0.011	0.024	0.479	0.632
SN -> BI	0.295	0.054	5.563	0.000
Moderation/Interaction effects				
CAxIM -> BI	0.006	0.013	0.295	0.768

Figure 5.3 below further illustrates the standardized regression path coefficients for the model. The visualization allows one to examine which coefficients had the highest and lowest influence on outcome variables. Additionally, the direction of influence can also be visualized in this diagram. Coefficients with positive influence were represented by the green color while those with negative influence were represented by the red color.

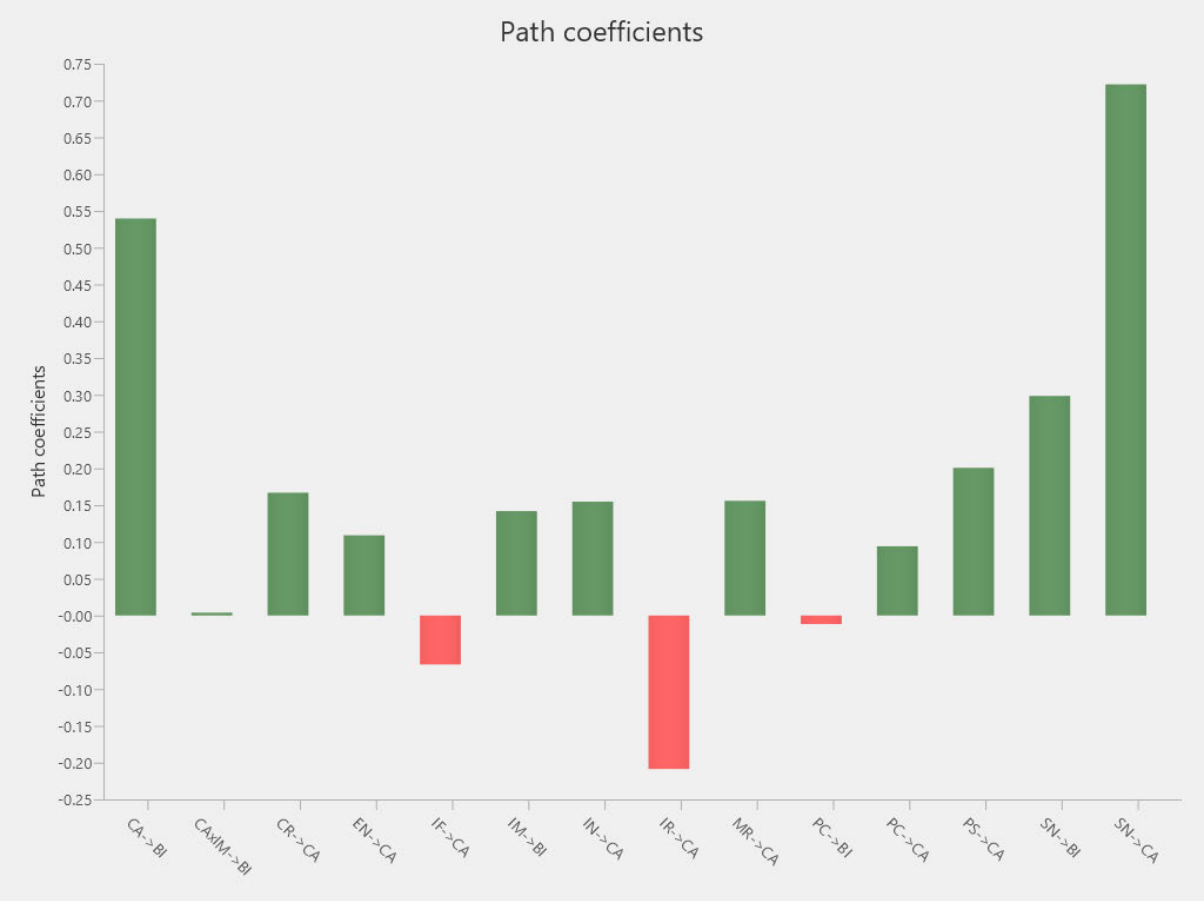

Figure 5.3: Paths Coefficients

The results in Figure 5.3 show that subjective norms had the highest standardized regression coefficient followed by consumer attitudes on behavioral intervention. The lowest coefficient was observed for the effect of CAIM on behavioral intention. Informativeness and irritation had negative influence on consumer attitude as reflected by the diagram. Additionally, perceived control also had negative influence on behavioral intention. The rest of the relationships were positive as shown in Figure 5.3 above.

5.7.2 Model Explanatory Power

Before interpreting the standardized regression coefficient, the study went on to examine model explanatory power through examination of the R-square values for the outcome variables. As previously noted, the outcome variables for this study were behavioral intention and consumer attitude. Table 5.23 below shows the coefficient of determination for each of the outcome variables.

Table 5.23: R-Sqaure Value

	R-square
BI	0.884
CA	0.876

Figure 5.4 below shows the R-square values in diagrammatic form.

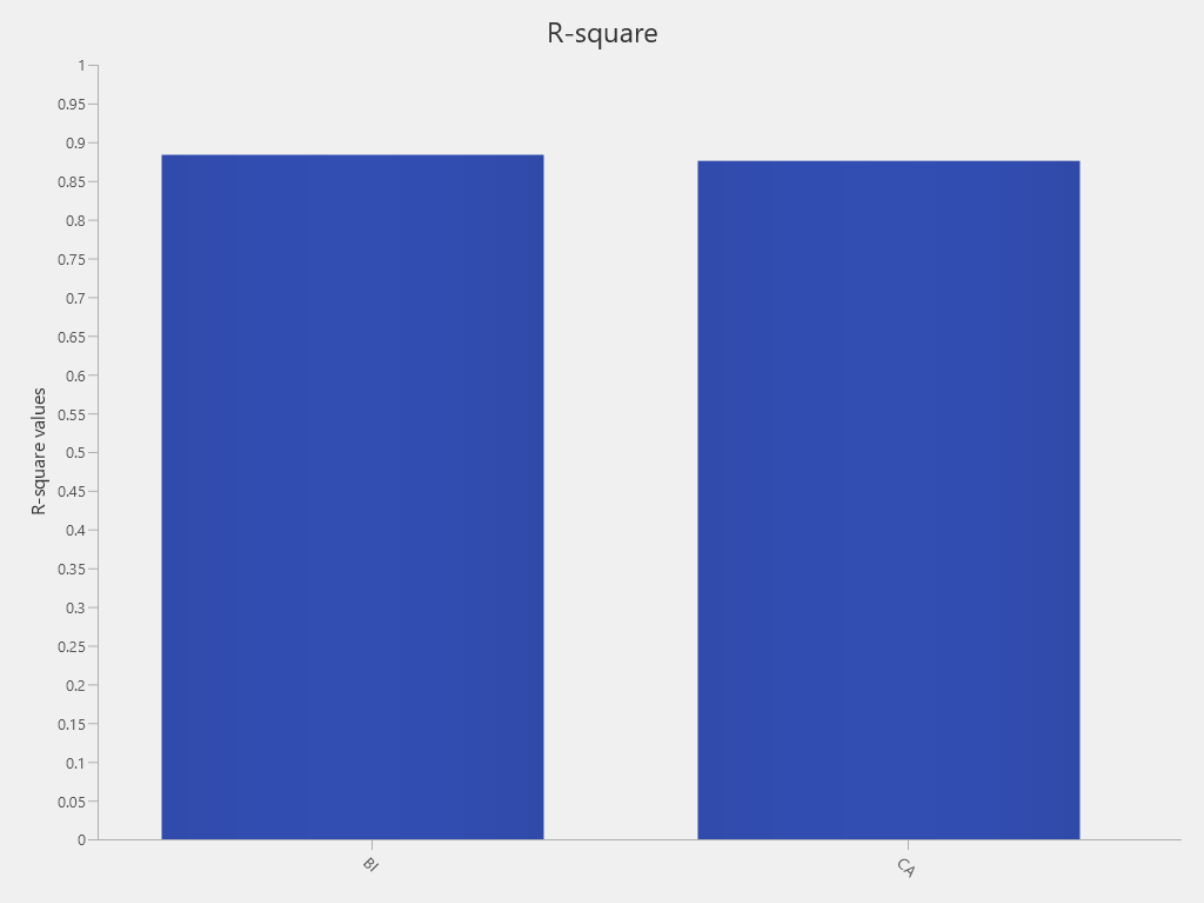

Figure 5.4: R-Square values

It can be observed that behavioural intention had an R-square value of 0.88 while consumer attitude had a value of 0.87. These results suggest that about 88% of the variation in behavioral intention could be explained by the central route factors, peripheral route factors and variables around the theory of planned behavior. Additionally, the other set of variables could also explain about 87% of the variation in consumer attitudes. These values suggest that the explanatory variables had very high influences on the outcome variables. Changes in consumer attitude and behavioral intention could therefore be attributed to average changes in central route factors, peripheral route factors and variables around the theory of planned behavior.

Based on these results and the CFA fit indices previously explained, this study argues that the constructs were the true representations in the study. Therefore, it was necessary to examine the effect of each of the constructs on consumer attitudes and behavioral intention.

5.8 The influence of central route factors on consumer attitude

As previously noted, the central route factors were informativeness, entertainment, personalization and irritation. These variables had different influences on consumer attitude is fully explained below.

5.8.1 The effect of Informativeness on Consumer attitude

Informativeness had a non-significant negative influence on consumer attitude as reflected by the standardized regression coefficient of -0.039 with a p-value of 0.462. These results suggest that informativeness does not have a significant influence on consumer attitudes among Generation Z consumers in Zimbabwe. Therefore, the hypothesis that informativeness has a significant positive influence on consumer attitude was rejected. The possible implication of these results is that informativeness is not a significant factor among Generation Z consumers when it comes to MIM apps.

5.8.2 The effect of Entertainment on Consumer attitude

Entertainment was also another central route factor of interest in this study. The study established that entertainment had a non-significant positive influence on consumer attitude as reflected by the regression coefficient of 0.07 with a p-value of 0.167. Therefore, the hypothesis that entertainment has a significant positive influence on consumer attitudes among Generation Z consumers was rejected. In the context of this study, chances are high that Generation Z consumers find entertainment to be of no significant influence on their attitudes towards instant messaging mobile applications communication messages.

5.8.3 The effect of Personalization on Consumer attitude

This study established that personalization had a significant positive influence on consumer attitude as shown by the regression coefficient of 0.101 with a p-value of 0.015. These results suggested that a unit increase in personalization will result in consumer attitudes toward MIM applications increasing by approximately 0.101 units. If advertisers and marketers personalize their different instant messages, chances are high that this increases consumer attitude among Generation Z consumers. Therefore, the hypothesis that personalization has a significant positive influence on consumer attitude could not be rejected.

5.8.4 The effect of Irritation on Consumer attitude

The study also established that irritation had a significant negative influence on consumer attitude as reflected by the coefficient of -0.098 with a p-value of 0.026. A unit increase in irritation among Generation Z consumers will result in their attitude decreasing by approximately 0.098 units. Therefore, their hypothesis that irritation has a significant negative influence on consumer attitudes among generations that consumers could not be rejected.

5.9 The influence of Peripheral route factors on Consumer attitude

Three peripheral route factors were also examined in this study. These are Credibility, Personalisation and Media richness. The effect of each variable on consumer attitude is fully explained below.

5.9.1 The effect of Credibility on Consumer Attitude

Credibility had a significant positive influence on consumer attitude as shown by the coefficient of 0.131 with a p-value of 0.000. These results suggest that a unit increase in credibility would result in an attitude towards MIM applications by approximately 0.131 among Generation Z consumers. If advertisers increase the credibility of their MIM apps, chances are high that consumer attitudes will be enhanced. Therefore, the hypothesis that credibility has a significant positive influence on consumer attitude could not be rejected. These results also suggested that

consumer attitude is enhanced if customers perceive the MIM app as coming from a credible source.

5.9.2 The effect of Interactivity on Consumer Attitude

This study also established that interactivity had a significant positive influence on consumers' attitude as reflected by a coefficient of 0.085 with a p-value of 0.004. A unit increase in interactivity in the instant messaging app will result in consumer attitude increasing by approximately 0.085 units. The possible implication of these results is that marketers who make their messages interactive are more likely to realize positive consumer attitudes among Generation Z consumers. Therefore, the hypothesis that interactivity has a significant positive influence on customer attitude could not be rejected.

5.9.3 The effect of Media richness on Consumer attitude

Media richness had a significant positive influence on consumer attitude as reflected by the coefficient of 0.077 with a p-value of 0.019. A unit increase in media richness will result in consumer attitudes towards MIM apps increasing by approximately 0.077 units. Therefore, the hypothesis that media richness has a significant positive influence on consumer attitude could not be rejected. The possible implication of these results is that if the media is rich with enough content, attitudes towards MIM apps will be enhanced among Generation Z consumers. Marketers who share rich messages with their customers are more likely to realize increased positive attitudes toward MIM applications.

5.10 The influence of Planned behaviour factors on consumer attitude

The planned behaviour factors were also hypothesized to influence consumer attitude. These were Perceived control and Subjective norms. The results are explained below.

5.10.1 The effect of Perceived control on Consumer attitude

The study established that perceived control had a significant positive influence on consumer attitude as reflected by a regression coefficient of 0.083 with a p-value of 0.001. These results suggested that a unit increase in perceived control among Generation Z consumers will result in attitudes towards MIM apps being enhanced. Therefore, the hypothesis that perceived control has a positive influence on consumer attitude could not be rejected.

5.10.2 The effect of Subjective Norms on Consumer attitude

This study also established that subjective norm had a significant positive influence on consumer attitudes. This is shown by a coefficient of 0.663 with a p-value of 0.000. A unit increase in subjective norms will result in consumer attitude increasing by approximately 0.663 units. Therefore, the hypothesis that subjective norms had a significant positive influence on consumer attitude could not be rejected. The implication of these results is that consumers who hold positive subjective norms are likely to realize increased attitude towards MIM applications.

5.11 The drivers of behavioural intent

The study also hypothesized that behavioral intention was an outcome of Consumer attitude, Impulsiveness, Subjective norms and Perceived control. The coefficients of these variables on behavioral intention were also examined below.

5.11.1 The effect of Consumer attitude and Behavioural intention

Consumer attitude had a significant positive influence on behavioral intention as reflected by the coefficient of 0.58 with a p-value of 0.000. A unit increase in consumer attitude will result in behavioral intention increasing by approximately 0.58 units. These results suggest that consumer attitudes toward MIM apps are a significant predictor of behavioral intention.

Therefore, the hypothesis that consumer attitude has a significant positive influence on behavioral intention among Generation Z consumers could not be rejected. The possible implication of these results is that the higher the consumer attitude, the higher the behavioral intention.

5.11.2 The effect of Subjective Norms on Behavioural intention

The results above also suggest that subjective norms had a significant positive influence on behavioral contention as reflected by the positive coefficient of 0.295 with a p-value of 0.000. These results suggested that a unit increase in subjective norms would result in behavioral intention increasing by approximately 0.295 units. Therefore, the hypothesis that subjective norms have a positive influence on behavioral intention could not be rejected. In the context of this study, chances are high that Generation Z consumers who hold positive subjective norms are more likely to have high behavioral intention towards MM apps.

5.11.3 The effect of Perceived control on Behavioural intention

This study also established that perceived control had a non-significant negative influence on behavioral intention as reflected by a regression coefficient of -0.011 with p-value 0.632. Therefore, the hypothesis that perceived control has a significant positive influence on behavioral intention was rejected. In this case, perceived control does not have any significant effect on behavioral intention among Generation Z consumers.

5.11.4 The effect of Impulsiveness on Behavioural intention

This study also tested the moderation or interaction effects of impulsiveness on the relationship between consumer attitude and behavioral intention. The interaction term, consumer impulsiveness had no significant influence on behavioral intention as shown by the regression coefficient of 0.006 with p-value 0.768. These results suggest that the relationship between consumer attitude and behavioral intention is not influenced by impulsiveness among Generation Z consumers.

5.12 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings and discuss the results of on the influence of MIM apps on consumer attitude and behavioral intention among Generation Z consumers. The chapter started by presenting the results of the preliminary analysis. Thereafter, demographic variables such as age, gender, study mode, experience MIM apps were also examined. Where necessary, the Chi-square test of independence was examined among the different variables through use of cross tabulations in IBM SPSS Statistics software. To evaluate the influence of central and peripheral route factors on consumer attitude and behavioral intention, CB-SEM was the preferred analytical approach. As part of CFA, several fit indices were requested in Smart PLS 4 software, and the results revealed that the measurement model was satisfactory. After running CFA, the study went on to evaluate the effects of each of the construct on consumer attitude and behavioral intention. Before commenting on the standardized regression coefficient explanatory power was examined using the coefficient of determination (R-square) for consumer attitude in behavioral intension. The results in this chapter were presented using appropriate tables and figures. The next chapter gives the summary of findings conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

The broad aim of the study was to analyse the effect of instant message marketing communication (IMMC) on the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. It was also aimed to examine the influence of central route and peripheral route characteristics of instant message marketing communication messages on the attitude of Gen Z consumers, assess the impact of the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC on their behavioural intentions and evaluate the moderating effect of impulsiveness on the relationship between the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers.

Due to widespread acceptance and use, MIM apps could be a highly effective MC tool for reaching young consumers, particularly in developing economies. Researchers argue that consumer attitude toward marketing communication in a specific marketing tool is a key measure of marketing communication effectiveness (Alalwan, 2018; Martins et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding the attitudes and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers is important for IMMC practitioners because this generation is a native of the digital spaces (Feger, 2024), have considerable high economic power, and are heavy users of MIM technologies (Brown, 2020). Also, the proliferation of MIMs, combined with the resulting decline and shift away from traditional MC tools, creates new opportunities and challenges in the design, implementation, and evaluation of MC efforts.

The study was premised on the knowledge gained from the theoretical practicalities of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TLB) and the Information Adoption Model (IAM) to conceptualise IMMC and explain consumers' attitude and behavioural intentions. In the extant literature, the aforementioned theories have been widely adopted and applied in prior related studies evaluating the interaction relationships between central route factors (such as informativeness, entertainment, irritation, personalisation) and peripheral route characteristics (such as credibility, interactivity and media richness) of emerging MC tools and consumer behavioural responses (such as attitude and behavioural intention).

In light of this, the study was guided by the following research questions which informed the research objectives and therefore subsequently guided the discussion of the research findings:

- What is the influence of central route characteristics on the attitudes of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC?
- What is the influence of peripheral route characteristics on the attitudes of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC?
- What role does the perceived control, subjective norms, and attitude of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC play on their behavioural intentions?
- How does consumer impulsiveness moderate the relationship between the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe and their behavioural intentions?

6.1 The influence of central route characteristics of IMMC on consumer attitude

As previously reported, the central route characteristics of IMMC were informativeness, (H_1), entertainment (H_2), personalization (H_3) and irritation (H_4). The findings on the influence of these characteristics on consumer attitude are fully discussed below.

With regard to H_1 which postulated a positive influence of informativeness on the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC, the findings revealed a non-significant negative relationship. In essence, the proposed relationship was not supported by the findings. It therefore implies that, informativeness of IMMC does not significantly influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers. That is, despite the expected influential role of informativeness, Gen Z consumer did not consider promotional messages in MIM apps to be a good source of information about products. They also did not believe that IMMC supplied relevant information on products or brands, provided up-to-date complete product or brand information. However, this contradicts the observations reported by Murillo-Zegarra et al. (2020). These authors concluded that, among the key mobile advertising content characteristics, informativeness improves the consumer attitudes of Spanish towards mobile advertising alerts.

In addition, these findings are not consistent with results reported on similar online MC efforts, namely; social media advertising (Arora & Agarwal, 2020), digital advertising (Panggati et al., 2023) and SMS advertising (Amaoko et al., 2023). These researchers affirm that informativeness, which denotes the reliability of information presented in a MC message, positively influence consumer attitude. Moreover, these results did not verify the theoretical perspectives of the advertising value propounded by Ducoffe (1996) who specified informativeness as a key antecedent of consumer behaviour in the context of online MC.

It is speculated that this could be indicative of the notion that MIM apps are largely mobile social media communication tools. Although they have created a rich MC channel which support dialogic communications with consumers, MIM apps are widely used as social messaging tools rather than MC tools. Furthermore, given the huge amounts of time spent on MIM apps by the Gen Z consumers, it is likely that high levels of exposure to MC messages can trigger negative perceptions of IMMC (Goh et al., 2020). This corroborates the observation reported by Roth-Cohen et al., (2022) which suggests that Gen-Z consumers are not only extremely selective about the information they accept. Rather, they are also thought of as the first generation born into a digital world, where they interact virtually with their favourite brands and spend a large portion of their lives online. As such, they may find IMMC campaigns that provide product features and facts unattractive. This could be attributed to the notion that this generation is accustomed to high-tech sources of information (Feger, 2024), and have access to more information than any other generation, (Roth-Cohen et al., 2022).

H_2 stated that the perceived entertainment of IMMC positively influences influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC. The findings established that perceived entertainment had a non-significant positive influence on consumer attitude. Hence, the aforementioned hypothesis statement was rejected. This means that Generation Z consumers in Zimbabwe indicated that entertainment did not significantly influence their attitudes towards IMMC. Gen Z consumers did not find promotional messages in MIM apps entertaining, enjoyable, and pleasant. This view can be corroborated by Hassan (2024) who studied the advertising features that enhance consumers' positive responses to social media advertisements. Hassan concluded that entertainment had no significant influence on consumer attitude. This is also supported by other researchers such as Roth-Cohen et al., (2022) and Smith (2017). These authors argued

that the non-significant correlation of entertainment and attitude of Gen Z consumers is attributed to the notion that, any strong positive emotion will influence Gen Z consumers other than humorous, fun, pleasurable or enjoyable IMMC messages.

However, this finding is also inconsistent with prior studies in the digital marketing communication domain reported by Gupta et al., (2024), Ye et al., (2024) and Korgaonkar et al., (2024), who all observed that entertainment had a significant and positive association with consumer attitude. Whereas, Gupta et al., (2024) studied the antecedents of digital natives' attitudes towards online advertising in India, Korgaonkar et al., (2024) tested a theoretical framework on engagement intention toward social media advertising. Korgaonkar et al., (2024) reported that the highest consumer attitude was generated by social media advertisements which contained perceived entertaining information. This can be corroborated by Ye et al., (2024) who conducted a meta-analytic study to verify the antecedents of advertising value and reported that entertainment was amongst the top three antecedents. Moreover, the findings also contradict the assertion by Shimp and Andrews (2018) that, in the online MC environment, emotion-based message content characteristics such as entertainment significantly and positively contribute to consumer attitude.

One plausible explanation is that, in some cases, mobile social media users tend to consider the entertainment functions of the actual social media platform instead of the MC messages transmitted via the platform. Moreover, from a societal perspective, MIM apps have created intricate social interactions which allow users to send or receive messages, share stories and build credible and solid social relationships with each other. Hence, it is argued that Gen Z consumers do consider other factors other than entertainment to have a positive influence on the attitude towards IMMC. Furthermore, one can say that, although MIM platforms are becoming more popular and used (Marino & Presti, 2018), they can lead to a loss of customer privacy due to intrusiveness (Agora & Agarwal, 2020). It then follows that these shortcomings of MIM apps have the potential to overshadow the entertainment characteristics of IMMC messages, thereby insignificantly contributing to the attitude of Gen Z consumers. It could also be attributed to the fact MIM apps effectively facilitate push MC rather pull MC, spam, viral and generally unsolicited messages which may cause frustration, hence, also the non-significant positive influence on Gen Z consumers' attitude.

As for H_3 which postulated that personalisation of IMMC will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, the findings confirmed this relationship. Hence, the hypothesis was accepted. This affirms the observations reported in several prior studies by De Keyzer et al., (2021) who observed that perceived personalisation of MC messages improves the consumers' attitude. This is achieved through increasing the consumers' perceptions of the relevance of the MC message and decreasing the perceived intrusiveness. Chen et al., (2023) also concluded that, the two dimensions of perceived personalisation, that is; social relevance and personal relevance, have a significant and positive association with consumer attitude. The findings are also corroborated by Gaber et al., (2019), Bakr et al., (2019), Maseeh et al., (2021) who observed that consumers have a favourable attitude towards more personalised MC messages.

This implies that accurate personalisation is crucial to ensure that mobile MC messages are useful and relevant to recipients (Winter et al., 2021). As consumers receive personalised MC messages, they are more likely to respond positively to the MC messages (Trang et al., 2023). Thus, the higher the perceived personalisation of MC messages, the higher the consumer's attitude (Panggati et al., 2023; Maseeh et al., 2021). Moreover, personalised MC messages can lead to perceived social and personal relevance of the messages which then generates positive consumer behavioural responses and outcomes (Winter et al., 2021). It can also be argued that, promotional messages that are non-personal may have a negative influence on Gen Z consumers attitude and their trigger a negative response. Due to the ubiquitous and pervasive nature of mobile MC channels, consumers may be exposed to huge amounts of MC messages which may cause annoyance and trigger negative consumers responses, thereby raising questions about overall MC effectiveness (Sharma et al., 2022).

The implication of the afore-mentioned findings is that the attitude of Gen Z consumers can be influenced by disseminating the right message to the right audience at the right time. Hence, individualised communication to a specific consumer on the basis of their actual or supposed preferences may trigger positive responses. This is supported by Koyen (2022) who argues that the nature of communication in MIM apps provides a holistic mobile MC approach. In this approach, Koyen insinuates that MIM apps provide a 'single point of contact' that eliminates the need to switch to other MC channels. Moreover, owing to 'big-data analytics', MC

practitioners can now create more relevant, tailored and timely IMMC messages, based on insights gained from monitoring mobile data usage statistics. As MIM apps are increasingly becoming a prominent choice for marketers to promote their products and services, it is suggested that accurate personalisation is crucial to ensure that mobile MC messages are relevant and useful to recipients (Bakr et al., 2019). It therefore follows that, marketers who take cognisance of the consumers' personal and behavioural data profiles (Lim et al., 2022), have better chances of creating effective MC messages tailored to the expectations of the intended recipients.

With respect to hypothesis H_4, which stipulated that the irritation felt from IMMC will negatively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers, the findings confirmed this relationship. The study established that irritation had a significant negative influence on consumer attitude as reflected by the coefficient of -0.098 with p-value of 0.026. This implies that when Gen Z consumers regard IMMC messages as confusing, insulting, or unduly manipulative, they develop a negative attitude towards such messages. For this reason, it is imperative that IMMC practitioners address the several facets of irritation such as interrupting MIM app users' activities. For example, they can avoid to send text messages, make phone calls, or provide subpar IMMC content. In addition, they can desist from bombarding users with irrelevant information or inundating Gen Z consumers with MC messages they did not seek (Murillo-Zegarra et al., 2020).

Therefore, these findings are in concurrence with previous researches by Maseeh et al., (2021) and Lütjens et al., (2022) who, conducted meta-analytic studies and syntheses of extant digital and mobile advertising literature. They concluded that, irritation has a negative association with consumer attitude. Furthermore, from a digital marketing communication perspective, scholars have argued that the negative relationship between consumer attitude and irritation may result from MC messages which are manipulative, misplaced or targeting the wrong audience (Arora & Agarwal, 2020; Goh et al., 2020). This includes forced exposures and extreme advertising (Gaber et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the findings are supported by the psychological reactance theory, which contends that, individuals have a tendency of responding negatively when they feel as though their freedoms are in danger (Brehm, 1989; Roth-Cohen et al., 2022). Thus, one can suggest that

Gen Z consumers may negatively respond to IMMC messages which are intrusive or contain offensive and insulting language. More importantly, even if the Gen Z cohort group is known for constantly sharing personal information and status updates on MIM apps (Roth-Cohen et al., 2022), IMMC messages that are incommodious, invasive, and overly persuasive—especially when they come from unidentified sources—may still be seen unfavourably.

6.2 The influence of peripheral route characteristics of IMMC on consumer attitude

Another objective of the study was to examine the influence of peripheral route characteristics of IMMC on the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. As previously noted, the peripheral route characteristics of IMMC were credibility, (H_5), interactivity (H_6), and media richness (H_7). The findings on the influence of these characteristics on consumer attitude are fully discussed below.

With regard to the fifth hypothesis (H_5), which was postulated to address the objectives relating to peripheral route characteristics, the findings confirm a positive relationship between credibility and the attitude of Gen Z consumers. These results show that credible IMMC messages would positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers. This therefore means that the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC would be positive when promotional messages in MIM apps are convincing, believable, trustworthy and overall credible. The results are consistent with findings reported in prior researches by Hamouda (2018) and Arora and Agarwal, (2020) who observed that credible MC messages positively influence the attitude of consumers. These findings can be supported by several other studies (Murillo-Zegarra et al., 2020; Goh et al., 2020), that credible mobile MC messages improve the attitude of consumers. As such, researchers such as Martins et al., (2019), Maseeh et al. (2021), Lütjens et al. (2022) emphasize that credibility is a key antecedent of consumer attitude.

This finding may be attributed to the fact that the nature of communication in MIM apps is such that users can engage with people that are familiar to them. In this regard, the communication exchanges are perceived to be credible. Another plausible explanation is that, even though MIM apps facilitate group-chats and broadcast messaging which entails

interacting with strangers and peers alike, it is now much easier to identify and detect messages whose credibility is questionable. This was echoed by Goh et al., (2020) who opine that, the viral nature of communication in MIM apps makes it difficult, in some cases, for recipients to ascertain the authenticity and credibility of the message sources. Nonetheless, the experience gained as people frequently use and depend on internet technologies, suggests that online MC tools are now trusted sources Goh et al., 2020). Thus, the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC can be enhanced when consumers perceive that the IMMC message is coming from a credible source.

In terms of H_7 which stipulated that perceived interactivity will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, the hypothesis was accepted. The results show a significant positive influence of IN on CA as reflected by a coefficient of 0.085 with p-value of 0.004. This finding implies that high levels of interactivity between the IMMC practitioner and targeted communication audience, will result in significant positive attitude of the consumers towards the IMMC message. In essence, the attitude of Gen Z consumers can be positively influenced by the interactive nature of IMMC messages. These findings build on existing empirical evidence reported in the extant mobile communication literature by Humbani and Jordaan (2015), Sreejesh et al., (2020) and Nguyen et al., (2023). According to Nguyen et al., (2023), the benefit of enhancing the interactivity of any digital MC platform is that it helps to generate relevant recommendations and positive word of mouth from users. Thus, one can say that interactive mobile MC messages enable consumers to socialize and network more effectively (Sreejesh et al., 2020). This probably justifies why interactivity has increasingly dominated a new stream of research on mobile MC (Maseeh et al.,2021).

Based on this finding, it is apparent that MC practitioners can enhance the positive attitudes of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC through ensuring the following: consumers feel that MIM apps allow them to respond to promotional messages very fast; have a lot of control over what to do when they want to communicate back on MIM apps; and they can get instantaneous information when they respond to promotional messages. This is similar to the propositions by Park and Yoo, (2020) who reported that three interactivity dimensions (i.e., controllability, responsiveness, and communication) positively influence consumers' attitude. Since MIM platforms like WhatsApp allow consumers to decide when they can be online, users feel that

they control of their internet behaviour. As a result, the results imply that marketers who make their messages interactive are more likely to realize positive consumer attitude among Generation Z consumers.

As for hypotheses H_7 which stipulated that perceived media richness of IMMC positively influences the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, the findings confirmed this relationship. This is reflected by the coefficient of 0.077 with p-value of 0.019. Thus, H_7 was accepted. This means that the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC will be positive when businesses communicate using various multimedia formats such as video, stickers, text or audio. Moreover, this can also be achieved when businesses can send/receive information quickly, tailor their message to meet the current situation of the receiver and use rich and varied language to communicate meaning. Based on these findings, one can therefore say that the higher the perceived media richness of IMMC, the higher the likelihood of triggering positive attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

This finding resonates with the view put forward by Tang and Hew (2020) who argue that MIM apps offer multiple cues and language variety which helps to create common understanding between MIM users. This therefore influences affective responses towards IMMC messages. A similar opinion was expressed by Tseng and Wei (2020) who agree that media richness has a significantly positive impact on consumer behavioural responses. This is also supported by Tseng et al., (2019) who posit that a communication tool has inherent features and attributes which determines their capability to transmit certain information. As such, Tseng et al., (2019) argued that media richness is a key peripheral route factor that influences the attitude of Gen Z consumers. The implication of the findings is that, if an IMMC message is rich with enough content, attitudes towards that IMMC message will be enhanced among Generation Z consumers. Therefore, IMMC practitioners who share rich messages with their customers are more likely to realize increased positive attitudes towards IMMC messages.

6.3 The relationship between perceived control, subjective norms, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions

In order to understand the role perceived control, subjective norms, and attitude of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC play on their behavioural intentions, another objective of the study was formulated. First, the study sought to examine the influence of the TPB factors, namely; subjective norms and perceived control on consumer attitude. Secondly, the study investigated the relationship between subjective norms, perceived control, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. The results are explained below.

With regard to hypothesis H_8, the study confirmed a positive and significant relationship between the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers as indicated by the coefficient of 0.58 with a p-value of 0.000. Thus, H_8 was accepted. These results suggest that, for Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, attitude towards IMMC is a significant predictor of behavioural intention. This implies that IMMC messages that trigger positive consumer attitude have a greater chance of driving the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. This finding can be corroborated by outcomes reported by Nguyen-Viet and Nguyen (2023), Arora et al. (2020), Duffett (2020), Hamouda, (2018), Sharma et al (2021), Wang et al. (2019) and Sreejesh et al. (2020). All the aforementioned researchers concur that, young consumer's favourable attitude towards mobile MC significantly and positively influences their behavioural intentions. According to Duffett (2020), it is crucial for digital MC practitioners to understand the attitude-intention relationship as this helps to create sustainable MC campaigns. More importantly, this provides essential insights of future behavioural predispositions. Hence, MC practitioners can now understand better, the transmittal effect of consumer perceptions and attitude on behavioural intentions (Sreejesh et al., 2020). The benefits of this to marketers is that it also fosters better decision-making to devise strategic and effective mobile MC campaigns using mobile messaging applications (Safieddine et al., 2021).

Moreover, the relationship between consumer attitude and behavioural intentions have been verified by consumer behaviour theories (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Rogers, 1985; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Ajzen, 1991) and other previous empirical studies. In particular, Duffett (2020) concluded that technology-mediated MC had an impact on the cognitive, affective, and

behavioural attitude components of young consumers in South Africa. Thus, from a MC perspective, one could say that exposure to IMMC will likely influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC which would ultimately influence their behavioural intentions (Roth-Cohen et al., 2022). To MC practitioners, this infers that when Gen Z consumers have a positive attitude toward a MC stimulus, they will probably or definitely buy the promoted product or brand, and or even transmit the message to other Gen Z consumers through online word-of-mouth.

Hypothesis H_9 was confirmed which implies that subjective norms positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe towards IMMC. The outcomes also disclosed that a path coefficient of 0.663 was realised which was significant with a p-value of 0.000 after testing hypothesis H_9. This outcome is similar to those reported by Hashim et al. (2018), Komulainen et al., (2019), Kim (2020), and Sharma et al., (2021). All the aforementioned authors supported the view that subjective norms had a significant positive influence on the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC. It is apparent that Gen Z consumers like to exchange interesting promotional messages with friends and family, as a good way of socializing. In this regard, one can therefore say that, due to subjective norms, Gen Z consumers are more likely to behave in a particular way after exposure to IMMC messages. This includes, either viewing a peer's status update, reading a text message or playing a video or audio message. Thus, Komulainen et al., (2019), submit that, owing to the social-interactive nature of MIM apps, marketers can expect the 'significant others' to influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers after exposure to IMMC messages. In others words, Gen Z consumers can exhibit certain behavioural traits to conform to social influence and the expectations of others.

Hypothesis H_{10} which stated a positive significant relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intentions of Gen consumers was confirmed. This is reflected by the positive coefficient of 0.295 with p-value of 0.000. It implies that Gen Z consumers who consider sending, receiving and forwarding promotional messages in MIM apps a way of socializing with friends and family are more likely to buy the promoted products. In other words, Gen Z consumers with high subjective norms have a high propensity of purchasing the promoted products. This outcome is similar to those reported in past studies by Kim (2020), Sun et al. (2020), Soliman (2021), and Adeline et al. (2023) who all affirm the predictive effect of

subjective norms on young consumers' behavioural intentions. Kim (2020) and Adeline et al. (2023) further argue that following the rapid explosion of smartphone devices and the impressive improvements in mobile communications, favourable consumer attitude can be triggered by the expectations of the significant others to act or behave in that particular way. Hence, these findings affirm the predictive power and propositions of the planned behaviour theoretical perspective. Moreso, this is validated by empirical evidence which points to the view that an individual's behavioural intent can be influenced by the consideration of the responses of essential social referent groups to a particular behaviour (Liu et al., 2020). Therefore, based in these findings, there is a high chance that Gen Z consumers who hold positive subjective norms are more likely to demonstrate high behavioural intention towards IMMC messages.

As for H_{11} which postulated that perceived control will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe towards IMMC, it emerged from the study that perceived control had a significant positive influence on consumer attitude. This is reflected by a regression coefficient of 0.083 with p-value of 0.001. These results suggested that an increase in perceived control among Generation Z consumers will result in attitude towards MIM apps being enhanced. Hence, the hypothesis H_{11} was accepted. This therefore means that the attitude of Gen Z consumers is directly influenced among other factors by perceived behavioural control factors such as; consent, risk avoidance and privacy concerns. This view concurs with observations reported by Humbani and Jordaan (2015) and Srejeesh et al., (2020), who all argued that in an online marketing environment, perceived control measures the ability of the consumers to control the messages and information directed to them.

It is further argued by Sreejesh et al., (2020) that, perceived control impresses upon an individual consumer the notion that they are in control of the MC messages they are exposed to and how the consume and process them. This will ultimately influence their behavioural responses (Srejeesh, et al., 2020). In light of this, a favourable attitude will be triggered when an individual consumer actually believes that they are in control of when, what, and how they process MC messages (Hashim et al., 2018). To this end, it is evident that consumer involvement with MIM messages is largely under the control of the particular consumer. Moreover, if the consumer is not interested in receiving MC messages from a particular MIM

user, they can easily use the block function, which effectively cuts of the communication between them.

With regard to H_{12}, which stated a positive relationship between perceived control and behavioural intentions of the Gen Z consumers, the findings of this study established that perceived control had a non-significant negative influence on behavioural intention. This is reflected by a regression coefficient of -0.011 with p-value 0.632. It therefore follows that the hypothesis that perceived control has a significant positive influence on behavioural intention was rejected. This means that, perceived control does not have any significant effect on behavioural intention among Gen Z consumers. Not only was the relationship between perceived control insignificant, the results also showed that this relationship was negative. In the mobile MC environment, behavioural intentions could be expanded to include word of mouth intention (Mukherjee & Banarjee, 2017), also known as, forwarding intention and contacting intention (Tseng & Teng, 2016; Le & Wang, 2020).

As such, perceived control entails that the consumer has the power to decide when, how and why they can behave in a particular depending upon the degree to which they believe they are in charge of the actual decision and its consequences. Therefore, this outcome is contrary to the findings reported by Khoa (2023), Murillo-Zegarra et al. (2020), and Soliman (2021) who concluded that perceived control had a significant positive influence of behavioural intentions. In fact, according to Murillo-Zegarra et al., (2020), when individual consumers perceive that they are in control of the MC they receive, process and respond to, their propensity to act on the basis of such messages is high. This was also observed by Khoa (2023) who observed a positive association between perceived control and behavioural intentions towards online advertising services.

A plausible explanation of these findings is that, the cohort group under study (Gen Z), has been thought of as the first generation born into a digital world, (Feger, 20240, where they interact virtually with their favourite brands and spend a large portion of their lives online (Roth-Cohen et al., 2022). As such, their perception of online behavioural control may not be significant to predict behavioural intent. This view has been advanced in prior studies by Roth-

Cohen et al., (2022), Axcell and Ellis (2023), who argue that Gen Z consumers are accustomed to high-tech sources of information and have access to more information than any other generation. Thus, one can speculate that, this generation has far more experience in using MIM apps for other purposes besides consumer-brand relationships. This, in turn, imply this generation may not consider perceived control of IMMC to be a significant predictor of behavioural intentions. This can be supported by the results reported by Dhir et al., (2020) and Kaur et al., (2018) who concluded that continuance intention to use MIM apps amongst young people was not directly or significantly influenced by perceived behavioural control.

6.4 The moderating influence of consumer impulsiveness on the relationship between the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe and their behavioural intentions

With respect to hypothesis H_{13} which was stated to examine the moderating effects of consumer impulsiveness on the relationship between consumer attitude and behavioural intention, the results did not support this relationship. Hence H_{13} was rejected. The findings revealed that the interaction term, CAIM had no significant influence on behavioural intention as shown by the regression coefficient of 0.006 with p-value 0.768. Moreover, these findings show that the relationship between the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers is not moderated by the fact that Gen Z consumers often buy things spontaneously, without thinking, or careful planning.

Although the study added the impulsiveness construct to the original research model, these outcomes are contrary to the findings reported by Alam et al., (2023) who observed that impulsiveness act as a significant moderator. This view suggests that, in the social media context, impulsiveness significantly moderates the effect of central route factors and peripheral route factors on consumer behavioural responses. To this end, one may suggest that, for Gen Z consumers, MIM apps are a cogent part of their daily lives (Roth-Cohen et al., 2022) and as such, impulsiveness triggered by IMMC may not significantly alter neither their attitude or behavioural intentions.

Table 6.1: Hypotheses testing results

Central route characteristics	Statement of hypotheses	Decision
Informativeness (H_1)	*The perceived informativeness of IMMC will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC*	**Rejected**
Entertainment (H_2)	*Perceived entertainment of IMMC will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC*	**Rejected**
Personalisation (H_3)	*Personalisation of IMMC will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*	Accepted
Irritation (H_4)	*The irritation felt from IMMC will negatively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*	Accepted
Peripheral route characteristics		
Credibility (H_5)	*Credibility will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*	Accepted
Interactivity (H_6)	*Interactivity will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*	Accepted
Media richness (H_7)	*The perceived media richness of IMMC will positively influence the attitudes of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*	Accepted
TPB Factors		
Consumer attitude (H_8)	*Gen Z consumers' attitude towards IMMC will positively influence their behavioural intentions.*	Accepted
Subjective norms (H_9)	*Subjective norms will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*	Accepted
Subjective norms (H_{10})	*Subjective norms will positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*	Accepted
Perceived control (H_{11})	*Perceived control will positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*	Accepted
Perceived control (H_{12})	*Perceived control will positively influence the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe*	**Rejected**
Impulsiveness		
Impulsiveness (H_{13})	*Impulsiveness has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between consumer attitude and behavioural intention*	**Rejected**

6.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the findings were discussed guided by the set research objectives, postulated statements of hypotheses and relevant empirical evidence. The discussion of findings was also based on the assessment of results of the study in view of the relevant extant literature and previous studies, in order to either affirm or disconfirm the results of this study. It emerged from the discussions that the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC is hugely influenced by peripheral route characteristics as compared to central route characteristics and that subjective norms and attitude significantly influence their behavioural intention. The following summarises the findings of this study and presents the conclusions, recommendations, managerial implications, limitations and areas for further studies.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the summary of the major research findings guided by the aim and objectives of the study, as well as the principal research questions set in the first chapter. The conclusions drawn from the results and discussions presented in chapter six, implications of the study to MC practitioners, contributions of the study, limitations of the study and areas of further research are also presented.

7.2 Summary of key research findings

Based on the theoretical propositions of the elaboration likelihood model, theory of planned behaviour and information adoption model along with the relevant empirical studies, 13 hypotheses were postulated relating to central route and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC and the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. The hypotheses were tested through analysis of the data gathered from Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. The subsequent sections herein present a summary of the major findings as informed by the research objectives.

With regard to the influence of central route characteristics of IMMC on the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, four hypotheses were postulated relating entertainment, informativeness, personalisation and irritation and consumer attitude. The findings revealed a positive significant association between personalisation and the attitude of Gen Z consumers, whilst a negative and significant relationship was reported between irritation and the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC. It also emerged from the study that both entertainment and informativeness of IMMC had no significant association with the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. Therefore, it can be concluded that, whereas personalised IMMC messages positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, irritation has a negative association, while entertaining and informative IMMC messages have no significant influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

As for the relationship between peripheral route characteristics of IMMC and the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, IMMC characteristics as credibility, interactivity, and media richness were investigated. Three hypotheses were postulated and tested to achieve this objective. The findings demonstrated that all the three dimensions of peripheral route characteristics (credibility, interactivity and media richness) of IMMC have a positive and significant influence on the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. These findings confirm the notion that, Gen Z consumers, who are regarded as the first generation born in the digital era, are more likely to be influenced by the peripheral route as opposed to central characteristics of IMMC messages.

In a bid to comprehend the influence of subjective norms, perceived control, and consumer attitude on behavioural intentions, five hypotheses were postulated and tested. Firstly, based on the planned behaviour theoretical framework, the study tested the influence of subjective norms and perceived control on consumer attitude. The results revealed that both subjective norms and perceived control positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC in Zimbabwe. Secondly, it was observed that while perceived control played no significant role, subjective norms and consumer attitude played an important role in shaping the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. Thus, it is evident that, due to their relatively extensive experience in using MIM apps, Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe somewhat felt that they are in control of what, how and when to send, receive and respond to MIM messages. Hence, perceived control plays no important part in their behavioural responses to IMMC.

Concerning the moderating influence of consumer impulsiveness on the relationship between the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC in Zimbabwe and their behavioural intentions, it became evident from the results that impulsiveness had no significant influence on behavioural intention. Consequently, the relationship between the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers is not moderated by impulsiveness. This showed that the Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe did not believe impulsiveness controls the influence of attitude towards IMMC on their behavioural intentions.

7.3 Recommendations

The findings of the study revealed that several central route and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC influence the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. In view of this, several recommendations are suggested in the ensuring section.

7.3.1 Central route factors

7.3.1.1 Informativeness and consumer attitude

Based on the findings that no significant relationship exists between informativeness of IMMC and the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, it is advised that mobile MC practitioners do consider other factors that influence consumer attitude as it a key predictor of behavioural intentions. This is vital because it forms the bedrock upon which key antecedents of consumer attitude towards mobile-mediated MC efforts are explored. Notwithstanding, MC practitioners should still ensure that they strive for quality, relevance, comprehensiveness in their communication. Moreover, an understanding of these key determinant factors shed more light on the consumer attitude and behavioural responses to IMMC.

7.3.1.2 Entertainment and consumer attitude

It was apparent from the results that no significant relationship existed between entertainment and the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC. In view of this, it is suggested that, when targeting the Gen Z consumers, MC practitioners in Zimbabwe and beyond should pay little attention to humour when designing and planning IMMC campaigns. Essentially, this may be due to the notion that this generation does not highly rate the role of enjoyable, pleasurable, interesting and overall entertaining MC messages bearing in mind that they have vast experience in using mobile devices and applications. In this regard, marketers may consider other interactive MC messages. This, in turn, could trigger positive attitude as Gen Z consumers prefer online engagement where their views are also considered.

7.3.1.3 Personalisation and consumer attitude

Since it also emerged from the study that personalisation of IMMC positively influences the attitude of the Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, it is recommended that MC designers and planners focus on ensuring that their messages are tailored to suit the expectations of the targeted recipients. To achieve this, they can start by effectively monitoring the Gen Z consumers' behaviour, experience and profiles. This may include studying Gen Z consumers' attitudinal and behavioural responses to previous IMMC messages. Thereafter, they can segment these consumers on the bases of their preferences and interests, and ultimately design messages that suit the profile of each segment. Moreover, there is need of designing IMMC messages embedded in such qualities as social relevance, personal relevance, customised messaging among others. This would help to positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers.

7.3.1.4 Irritation and consumer attitude

In view of the fact a negative association between irritation and the attitude of Gen Z consumers towards IMMC was confirmed by the findings of the study, it is suggested that MC practitioners should avoid messages which can be perceived as annoying, irritating, overly confusing and manipulative by consumers. This would trigger a negative attitude and subsequent negative response. Moreover, it advised the MC planners and designers should be oriented on how to develop MC messages which do not trigger negative emotions. They can consider becoming more creative and innovative in designing their MC messages. In this instance, they can consider the use of different multimedia mix (i.e., audio, video, image combinations) in order to trigger positive emotional responses. This, will in turn, generate intrinsic value and lead to positive consumer attitude and behavioural intentions.

7.3.2 Peripheral route factors

7.3.2.1 Credibility and consumer attitude

As for credibility and consumer attitude, a strong positive relationship was confirmed in the study findings. As such, it is recommended that, in the context of mobile-mediated MC, the messages sources should strive to uphold high levels of trustworthiness. Marketers should endeavour to provide useful and reliable MC messages as this helps consumers when making purchase decisions. From a customer's perspective, IMMC messages which are trustworthy make it is easy for the Gen Z consumer to believe the message and respond accordingly. In this regard, MC practitioners should avoid deceptive messages as they reduce message valency. Instead, adhering to credible messages increases the authenticity and believability which are key qualities for attracting the attention of the Gen Z consumers. Moreover, once the message source is perceived to be credible, the attitude of the Gen Z consumer becomes positive, and so does the behavioural intention.

7.3.2.2 Interactivity and consumer attitude

It also emerged from the study that interactive IMMC messages positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe. In accord with this, it is advised that mobile MC message planners and designers should create channels and avenues for the intended audiences to give feedback and timeous response. More so, facilitating dialogic communication and engagement with consumers is the hallmark of the co-production and co-consumption virtues of online-based MC efforts. In this regard, MC practitioners should strive to motivate their consumers to become more engaged with their MC messages. This can be done through encouraging consumers to give feedback and comment on MIM posts. Also, MC practitioners should track and respond to consumers comments and queries. Not only should MC practitioners gather feedback from consumers, they should also address the customers' queries, as this helps to positively influence their attitude.

7.3.2.3 Media richness and consumer attitude

Since it was established that media richness positively and significantly influences the attitude of Gen Z consumers, it is suggested that mobile MC practitioners focus on evaluating the perceived richness of MIM apps as these qualities are key in influencing consumer attitude.

They can endeavour to use the multimedia formats embedded in MIM apps. This includes, using video, audio, image and text formats to emotionally attract the attention of the Gen Z consumers. To achieve this, there is need for MC planners and designers to constantly monitor improvements in the technological affordances of MIM apps. These improvements have the potential to enhance the perceived media richness of MIM apps, which in turn positively influence consumer attitude.

7.3.3 Subjective norms, perceived control, consumer attitude, and behavioural intentions

In light of the fact that the study results confirmed that subjective norms positively influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe towards IMMC, it is recommended that MC practitioners should be wary of the role played by an individual consumer's significant others such as peers and family. These social influences play a critical role in influencing the attitude and behavioural responses to MC messages. More so, social-interactive nature of MIM app communities entail that these 'significant others' will be both online and onsite. Resultantly, it is advised that MC practitioners constantly assess and monitor both online and offline consumer behaviours as this would assist in designing effective and appealing MC messages and campaigns.

Since the results revealed that perceived control had a significant positive relationship with consumer attitude and no relationship with behavioural intention, it is therefore recommended that MC practitioners consider the extent to which consumers believe they are in control of what MC they receive, when and how. This is pivotal in shaping the consumers' attitudinal responses to MC messages. In essence, perceived control enhances positive consumers attitude by reducing perceived intrusiveness.

Finally, given that the findings of the study proved that consumer attitude significantly and positive influence behavioural intention, it is therefore proposed that MC practitioners should be abreast with key factors predicting consumer attitude. The benefit of this is that it helps to predict the influential role of attitude on behavioural intention.

7.4 Implications of the study

The mobile technology revolution has significantly transformed people's lives including the conduct of marketing activities. This has been spurred by the increasing rate of mobile phone penetration and overall mobile internet access and connectivity. This, in turn, has resulted in the widespread adoption and use of MIM applications. From the business viewpoint, MIM apps have transformed MC by creating a ubiquitous, pervasive, and rich channel which supports interactive and dialogic communications with consumers. For business managers, marketers and MC practitioners, this calls for the need to keep abreast with and manage the transition from traditional MC channels to mobile MC tools. These emerging MC tools have the potential to affect the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z cohort group. Not only does this cohort group require strategic and effective MC tactics, but, the future of MC as it relates to young consumers promises to be even more challenging. In light of this background, it is envisaged that the results of this study become even more important as they shed more light concerning, the key determinant factors that influence the attitude and behavioural intent of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC.

More importantly, the findings of this study can assist MC practitioners to appraise the role of MIM apps as a distinct MC tool for influencing consumer behaviour, and realization of sustainable competitive advantage. The insights gained from the findings of this study provide business managers, marketers and MC practitioners with the relevant ammunition for the effective design, implementation and evaluation of IMMC efforts. In particular, by highlighting the central route characteristics and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC which influence the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, the results of the study lay the groundwork for critical assessment and or projection of the expected outcome of any company's IMMC effort. Thus, the benefits of the outcomes of this study extend to other consumer groups in different countries, operating in different industries or economic sectors. This may also extend to other technology-mediated MC tools outside MIM apps and their respective users and audiences.

Furthermore, given the proliferation and growing popularity of MIM apps, combined with the resulting decline and shift away from traditional MC tools, the study advises that business

managers and MC practitioners learn the best practices for planning effective IMMC campaigns which trigger positive consumer behavioural responses. Accordingly, the outcomes of the study indicate the key considerations for IMMC message design in light of the expectations of Gen Z consumers. For instance, the study has important business and marketing implications since it recognizes the critical role of central route and peripheral route message characteristics in influencing the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC. As a result, when designing IMMC messages, MC planners and designers must consider such important content characteristics as personalisation, irritation, credibility, interactivity and media richness.

7.5 Contributions of the Study

From a theoretical perspective, the insights generated from this study add to and complement the theoretical discussion on MC in the context of mobile media. In particular, the study contributes to the emerging stream of literature on the application of new media technologies such as MIM apps in MC. More specifically, the study makes significant contributions to this body of knowledge by highlighting the critical central route and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC. In essence, the integration of established MC theories helped to strengthen the predictive power of the research model and develop a framework that explains the relationship between the attitude of Gen Z consumers and behavioural intentions regarding IMMC. Whilst the ELM and IAM support the predictor variables (i.e., central and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC), the TPB enhances the outcome variables (i.e., consumer attitude and behavioural responses). Thus, this integrative approach may provide insights into the effectiveness of this novel mobile MC tool as compared to traditional avenues. In this regard, the study provides important directions on the relationship between IMMC and the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe and other developing economies.

The study is also one of the pioneering works to highlight the MC implications of MIM apps, with respect to the Gen Z cohort group in developing country markets. In the extant MC literature, there has been considerable attention on MC implication of social networking sites such as Facebook, (Alalwan, 2018; Arora et al., 2020), Youtube, (Duffett, 2020), and Instagram, (Gaber et al., 2019), among others. In light of this, the study is one of the few attempts to

empirically examine the influence of IMMC on Gen Z consumers' attitude and behavioural intentions. This understanding is critical, as it provides the basis for MC practitioners to effectively deploy IMMC to influence the behaviours of this growing generation of consumers.

Furthermore, this study advances marketing knowledge by examining the application of elaboration likelihood within contemporary MC tools. This was achieved through the integrating the Elaboration Likelihood Model, Information Adoption Model and the Theory of Planned Behaviour which have been predominantly used in traditional MC tools such as radio and television. Due to the proliferation and continued fragmentation of MC tools, this approach lays the foundation for the application of these established MC theories in an international setting by examining the influential role of each variable in a developing country like Zimbabwe. This integrative approach may provide insights into the effectiveness of this novel mobile MC tool as compared to traditional avenues. In view of this, the study adds a contribution to the understanding of IMMC by extending new variables (that is, interactivity and media richness) to the peripheral route characteristics of MC messages. The insight into these new variables is essential as helps to provide empirical evidence which adds weight to the growing literature on consumer behavioural responses to emerging mobile MC tools in general and MIM apps in particular.

The study also contributes to the body of knowledge by indicating the confirmed relationships between the elaboration likelihood constructs (that is central route and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC) and consumer attitude as well as the relationships between the planned behaviour constructs (subjective norms, perceived control, consumer attitude and behavioural intentions). Out of the thirteen hypotheses which were developed in this study, nine were accepted and four were rejected. Based on the accepted hypotheses, the revised conceptual model is presented in Figure 7.1.

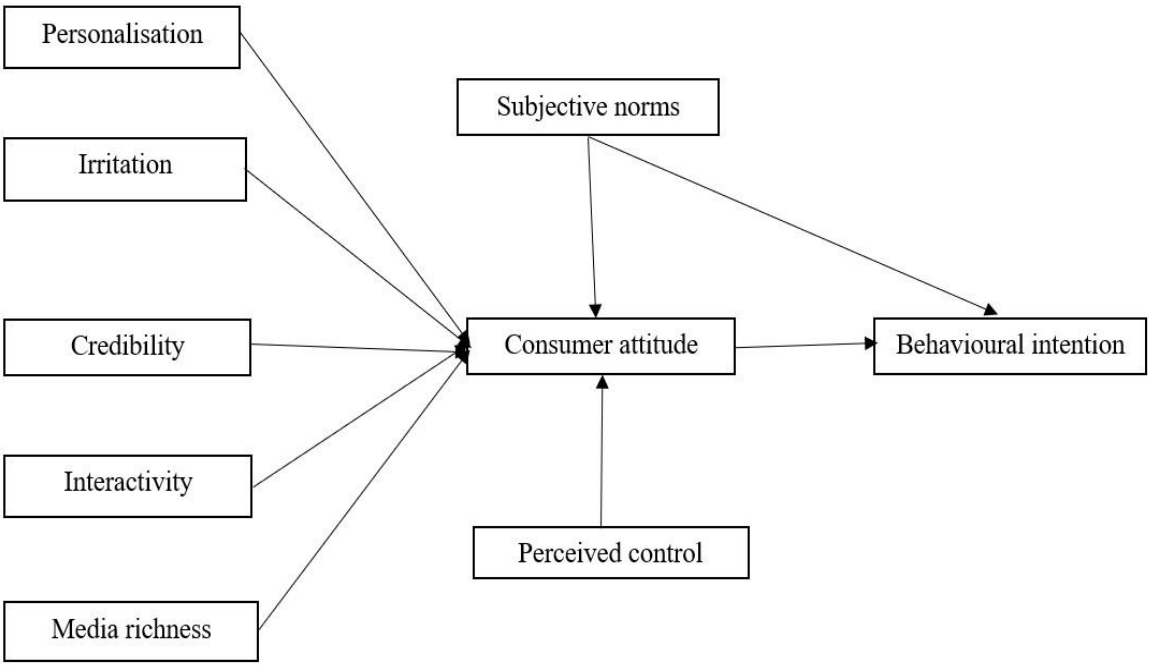

Figure 7.1: Proposed Framework

The revised framework will help to better understand the important central route and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC which influence the attitude of Gen Z consumers. Moreover, the revised model also shows the key planned behaviour constructs which help to predict the behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers.

In a world with mobile instant messaging, the study has also added new perspectives on current MC methods and strategies. It is believed that this widens and deepens the understanding of mobile MC appeals and the broad impact of MIM technologies on the field of MC. Furthermore, from a practitioner's perspective, the information gained from the study helped marketers in developing countries to comprehend what young consumers value most when it comes to IMMC. Thus, it is envisaged that the study has added new details that will culminate in the design, implementation and assessment of novel MC strategies and tactics which are appealing to young consumers, especially within the developing country markets.

7.6 Limitations of the study and further research

Even though this study was premised on sound theoretical and methodological foundations, certain shortcomings and limitations were taken into account. These are highlighted in the ensuing discussion. First, the participants in this study were drawn up from a population of Gen Z consumers at Great Zimbabwe University, situated in the city of Masvingo, Zimbabwe. This may compromise the representativeness of the research population and generalizability of the research findings. Future studies may consider a survey of Gen Z consumers from all ten provinces of Zimbabwe to gauge the attitudinal and behavioural responses regarding IMMC.

Secondly, it is worth noting that the research model was formulated based on the research constructs culled from the integrated theoretical framework of the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Theory of Planned Behaviour. Several variables from other MC theories such as the Hierarchy of Effects Model could be explored to provide more insightful outcomes and depth in understanding the antecedent factors influencing consumer attitude and behavioural intentions in the context of IMMC. In particular, future studies may consider several dimensions of consumer attitude, such as, cognitive, affective and behavioural.

Thirdly, although WhatsApp is the most popular and widely used MIM app in most developing countries, future studies could explore MC in the context of other MIM apps in either emerging or developed economies. It is believed that this would enhance the knowledge of how these mobile social media tools are influencing the attitudes and behavioural intentions of young consumers who form the majority of today's world population.

Furthermore, the focus on one particular cohort group (Gen Z) may negatively affect the generalizability of the research results as this suffers from a lack of representation. It would be interesting to see how a comparative study of different consumer groups such as Gen X, Gen Y along Gen Z would yield important insights that would guide MC strategies in a world of MIM apps. Perhaps more importantly, future studies may consider expanding the scope of the cohort groups under investigation by extending to other Gen Z consumers in rural areas as this would deepen the insights gained from the study.

In addition, the use of MIM apps in the broader and more general marketing communications field was uniquely addressed in this study. There are a number of MC elements that are used to influence the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers. Future studies can therefore explore these elements individually, rather than collectively. For example, MIM advertising, omni-channel, advertising features and stakeholder relations management. In the same vein, this study did not investigate specific product or brand MC campaigns. Rather, the general instant message marketing communications were examined. Hence, future studies could address this gap by analysing particular product or brand IMMC campaigns.

Finally, in this study, a quantitative research approach was adopted and as such, it is suggested that future studies consider a mixed-methods approach or qualitative research approach to broaden the understanding of consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions regarding IMMC.

7.7 Conclusion

In light of the widespread adoption and use of MIM apps, the study was initiated as a response to the call for critical enquiry into the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC in developing countries like Zimbabwe. Moreover, evidence from extant literature suggests that empirical studies into IMMC are scant and hence, very little is known about the central route and peripheral route characteristics of IMMC that can influence the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers. Thus, one can say there is a paucity of studies that investigate IMMC and Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe, to which, this study was conducted to address the identified gap.

In the marketing communication literature, elaboration likelihood has long been considered an important predictor of consumers' attitudinal and behavioural responses to MC stimuli. To this end, several researchers have examined the elaboration likelihood of MC messages propagated via traditional avenues such as radio, television, newspapers and magazines. Therefore, given the emergence of new MC tools such as social media, corporate websites, and mobile messaging apps among others, there was the need to institute an empirical study to gain an

understanding of how business managers, advertising planners and overall MC practitioners can take advantage of these novel MC tools. Thus, it was evident that the central route characteristics (informativeness, entertainment, personalisation and irritation) and peripheral route characteristics (credibility, interactivity and media richness) of IMMC could determine the attitude and behavioural responses of the Gen Z consumers in Zimbabwe.

A structured questionnaire, which was developed based on the measurement items reported in prior studies and adjusted to suit the IMMC context, was administered to a sample of 468 Gen Z consumers. The Gen Z cohort group was chosen primarily because it is considered the first generation to be born into the world of technology, and are heavy users of MIM apps as they spend most of their time online interacting with peers, family and brands. The data were analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) which is one the most important tools used to test the research hypotheses relating to predetermined relationships between research constructs through regression and factor analysis.

The study revealed that informativeness and entertainment which are key dimensions of the central route characteristics of IMMC did not influence consumer attitude whereas personalisation had a positive influence with irritation generating a negative association. It also emerged from the study that all the peripheral route characteristics of IMMC, namely; credibility, interactivity and media richness had a significant and positive influence on the attitude of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC. Concerning the planned behaviour constructs, namely; subjective norms and perceived control, the findings revealed a significant and positive association with consumer attitude. However, when these TPB constructs were tested against behavioural intention, only subjective norms and consumer attitude were significantly and positively related to behavioural intention whilst perceived control demonstrated a negative association.

Based on these findings, it is therefore suggested that, when designing IMMC messages and campaigns, practitioners should pay special attention to peripheral route factors, namely credibility, interactivity and media richness and other central route characteristics, such as personalisation and irritation. Moreover, the role of perceived control and subjective norms should equally be considered within the context of IMMC designing, implementation and

evaluation, to positively influence the attitude and behavioural intentions of Gen Z consumers regarding IMMC.

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List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Research instrument for consumers

My name is John Marumbwa, I am studying towards a PhD in Marketing at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN). I am carrying out research to establish the influence of instant message marketing communications on consumers attitude and behavioural intention: A study of Generation Z consumers in Zimbabwe. Participation in this study is voluntary, anonymous and responses will be treated as confidential, and will be used for academic purposes only. Participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

INSTRUCTION: Please read each of the following statements carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Options include: 1= Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree or 5=Strongly agree.

	Construct/ measurement items	**Response options**				
		1	2	3	4	5
IF1	I think that promotional messages in MIM apps are a good source of information about products					
IF2	I believe that promotional messages in MIM apps supply relevant information on products or brands					
IF3	Promotional messages in MIM apps provide timely information					
IF4	Promotional messages in MIM apps provide extensive information					
IF5	I can say that I obtain in-depth information from promotional messages in MIM apps					
IF6	I think that I get complete information from promotional messages in MIM apps					
IF7	I believe that I obtain useful information from promotional messages in MIM apps					
EN1	I think promotional messages in MIM apps are entertaining					
EN2	I believe promotional messages in MIM apps are enjoyable					
EN3	Promotional messages in MIM apps are amusing					
EN4	I consider promotional messages in MIM apps to be pleasant					
EN5	Promotional messages in MIM apps are fun to watch					
EN6	To me, promotional messages in MIM apps are interesting					
PS1	Promotional messages in MIM apps are personalised					
PS2	The content of promotional messages in MIM apps is tailored for my preferences					
PS3	I feel that promotional messages in MIM apps are personalized for my usage					
PS4	Personalised MIM advertising makes me feel that I am a unique customer					
PS5	I prefer adverts that are adjusted to my preferences					

IR1	The content of advertisements in MIM apps is often annoying					
IR2	Promotional messages in MIM apps disturb my use of MIM apps					
IR3	I feel that promotional messages on MIM app are intrusive					
IR4	I feel that advertising messages on MIM apps are irritating					
IR5	I feel that MIM advertisements are deceptive					
IR5	I think promotional messages in MIM apps are everywhere					
CR1	I feel that promotional messages in MIM app are convincing					
CR2	I feel that promotional messages in MIM apps are believable					
CR3	The content provided by businesses on MIM apps is credible					
CR4	The content provided by businesses on MIM app is trustworthy					
IN1	I feel that MIM apps enable me to respond to promotional messages very fast					
IN2	While I was on this MIM app, I could choose freely what I wanted to see					
IN3	I feel I have a lot of control over what to do when I want to communicate back on MIM apps					
IN4	While using MIM apps, I can get instantaneous information when I respond to promotional messages					
IN5	Promotional messages on MIM apps allow me to get information from the advertiser very instantly					
IN6	The advertiser facilitates two-way communication between him/herself and MIM app users					
MR1	MIM apps allow businesses to communicate using video, stickers, text or audio					
MR2	While using this MIM app, businesses can send/receive information quickly					
MR3	MIM apps enable businesses to tailor their message to meet the current situation of the receiver					
MR4	While using this MIM app, businesses can use rich language to communicate meaning					
MR5	While using this MIM app, businesses can use varied language to communicate meaning					
CA1	I consider promotional messages on MIM apps as a good thing					
CA2	Overall, I like promotional messages in MIM apps					
CA3	Overall, reading or viewing promotional messages on MIM apps is important to me					
CA4	I have a positive attitude towards promotional messages in MIM apps					
SN1	I like forwarding interesting promotional messages on WhatsApp to friends and family					
SN2	I like receiving interesting promotional messages on WhatsApp from friends and family					
SN3	I consider sending/ receiving promotional messages on WhatsApp as a good way of socialising					
IM1	I often buy things spontaneously					
IM2	I often buy things without thinking					
IM3	I buy things according to how I feel at the moment					
IM4	I carefully plan most of my purchases					
IM5	Sometimes, I am a bit reckless about what I buy					

BI1	I would consider buying products promoted in MIM apps					
BI2	I intend to purchase products advertised in MIM apps					
BI3	I would probably buy products promoted in MIM apps					
BI4	Promotional messages in MIM have a positive influence on my purchase decisions					
BI5	I am likely to buy some of the products advertised in MIM apps					

Instructions: Please answer all questions. Mark with an "X" where applicable.

1. Indicate your mode of study: Conventional ☐ Block Release ☐ Weekend class ☐

2. Have you noticed an advertisement on instant messaging apps? Yes ☐ No ☐

3. How do you access instant messaging apps? Mobile device ☐ PC (Laptop) ☐
Mobile device & PC ☐

4. How long have you used instant messaging apps?

≤ 1 Year ☐ 2 Years ☐ 3 Years ☐ 4 Years ☐ ≥ 5 Years ☐

5. How often do you log on to instant messaging apps?

Daily ☐ 2-4 times a week ☐ Once a week ☐ 2-4 times a month ☐ Once a month ☐

6. How many hours do you spend on instant messaging per log-in?

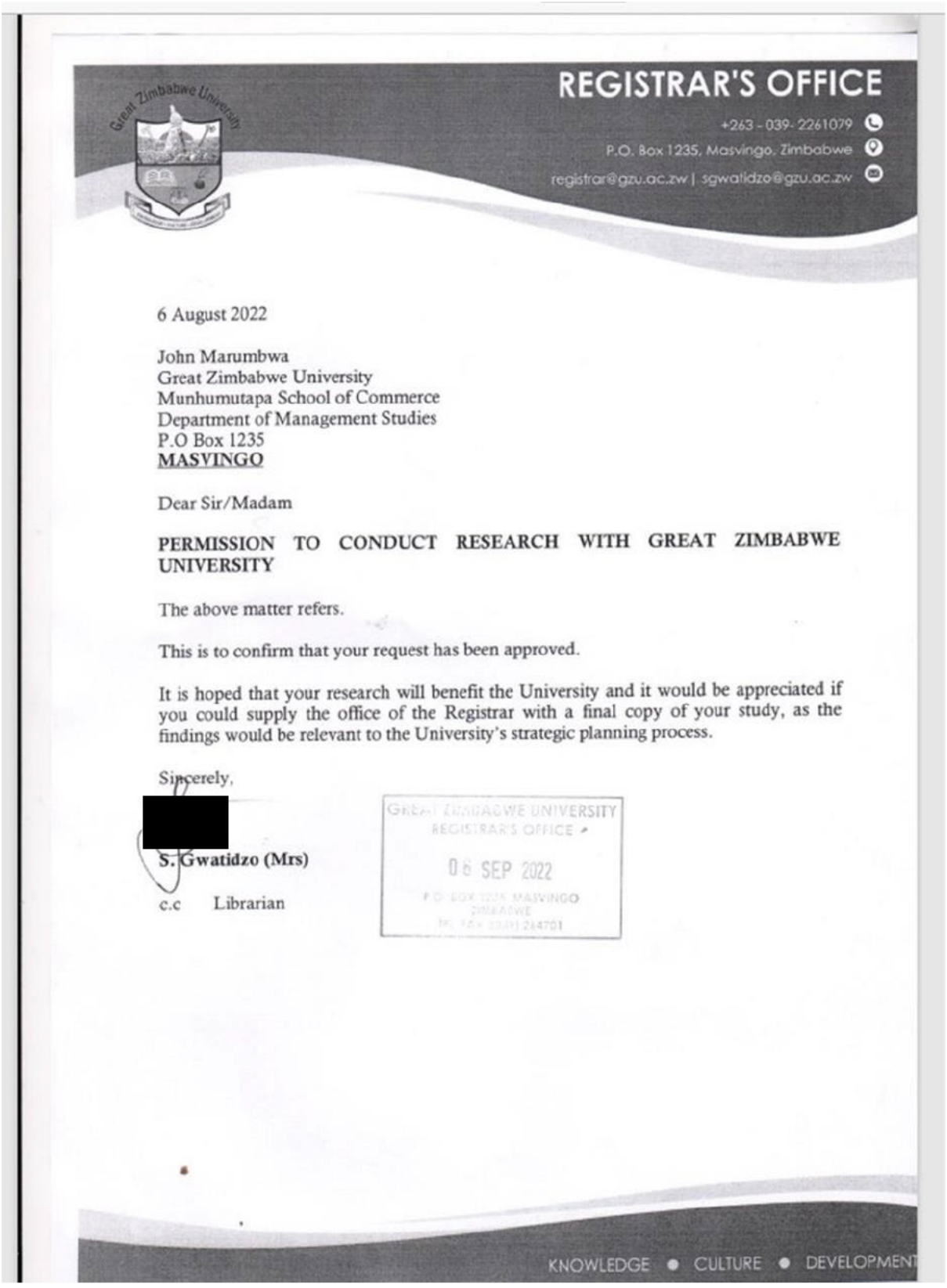
≤ 1 Hour ☐ 2 Hours ☐ 3 Hours ☐ 4 Hours ☐ ≥ 5 Hours ☐

7. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

8. Age: 18 – 22 years old ☐ 23 – 27 years old ☐ 28 – 32 years old ☐

Thank you for your time and participation!

Appendix 2: Gatekeepers letter from GZU



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6 August 2022

John Marumbwa
Great Zimbabwe University
Munhumutapa School of Commerce
Department of Management Studies
P.O Box 1235
MASVINGO

Dear Sir/Madam

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY

The above matter refers.

This is to confirm that your request has been approved.

It is hoped that your research will benefit the University and it would be appreciated if you could supply the office of the Registrar with a final copy of your study, as the findings would be relevant to the University's strategic planning process.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

S. Gwatidzo (Mrs)

c.c Librarian

GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY
REGISTRAR'S OFFICE
08 SEP 2022
P.O. BOX 1235, MASVINGO
ZIMBABWE
TEL/FAX (039) 264701

KNOWLEDGE • CULTURE • DEVELOPMENT

Appendix 3: Ethical Clearance letter from UKZN

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

21 August 2023

John Marumbwa (221120785)
School Of Man Info Tech & Gov
Westville Campus

Dear J Marumbwa,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005841/2023
Project title: Exploring the influence of instant message marketing communication on the attitudes and behavioral intentions of Generation Z consumers in Zimbabwe
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 22 June 2023 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 21 August 2024.
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.

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

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd