

The Buying Behaviour of Consumers in an Online Shopping Environment within the Sedibeng District of Gauteng

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Keywords

COVID-19

Online shopping

Consumer behaviour

Abstract

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

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

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

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

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

1.2. Problem Statement

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

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

The problem of lack in understanding influential factors in an online consumer shopping environment could make it difficult for online marketers to know where to focus their marketing efforts and capital, when matching consumers' needs with a company's products and services (Pütter, 2017:7).

1.3. Research objectives

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

Secondary objectives are as follows:

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

The following sections will focus on literature review, research methodology, the results and findings as well as the conclusions on the study at hand.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

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

2.2. Psychological factors

Psychological factors involve the psychology of a consumer or individual that leads him or her to find satisfaction when purchasing an item or service (Frankham, C., Richardson, T. & Maguire, N., 2020). Research by Yuen, K.F., Wang, X., Ma, F. & Li, K.X. (2020:2) outlines that behavioural changes may occur amongst consumers, following major events such as disease outbreaks and natural disasters that disrupt their social lives. The psychology of consumers directs their behaviour to find a need for a satisfying product or service. These psychological factors include beliefs, motivation, perception and learning (Dhaliwal, A., Singh, D.P. & Paul, J., 2020:5). Psychological factors further affect consumers' intentions to purchase in an online environment. Research by Ali (2020:270) reveals that socio-

economic, psychological and consumer habits have increasingly influenced consumer online shopping as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic regulations.

2.3. Electronic word-of-mouth

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

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

Scholars have distinguished the traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in different typologies. E-commerce was one of the ways that was utilised by companies to increase their sales. A study conducted by Nowakowski (2021:957) confirms that consumers may now choose from a wider range of products and compare them to see which ones would meet their needs. Nwankwo et al. (2019:3) confirm that delivery service is influencing consumer-buying behaviour online. For Huete-Alcocer (2017:3), eWom is used by consumers to minimise risk during the decision-making process. When comparing WOM and e-WOM, the message in traditional WOM is private while there is no privacy in e-WOM. Furthermore, in e-WOM, reviews are written and can be checked anytime, while in WOM, the message can disappear once it has reached the receiver.

2.4. Factors influencing online purchasing

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

2.4.1. The price factor

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

2.4.2. The convenience factor

Consumers' desire for convenience has increased as more consumers are looking for alternative ways to save time and efforts when buying. These consumer resources of effort and time are classified as non-monetary costs that influence consumer-buying behaviour (Duarte, P., e Silva, S.C. & Ferreira, M.B., 2018:162).

2.4.3. The payment factor

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

2.4.4. The product delivery factor

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

2.5. Impact of social media

Social media are online platforms that people use to create social networks with other users who share similar interests, activities or backgrounds or real-life connections (Akram & Kumar, 2017:347). The increase in the usage of the internet as well as mobile technology has significantly influenced the growth of social media platforms. Social networking platforms are increasingly becoming an important part of customers' daily activities, with fundamental transformations in buying behaviour. Social media platforms play a crucial role in communication among users online. They can be utilised by companies to increase their engagements with customers as well as to increase their brand awareness and influence consumers' buying decisions (Al-Abdallah, G., Khair, N. & Elmarakby, R., 2021:559). Valaskova et al. (2021:3) purport that the impact of social media during a pandemic may cause consumers to make panicky but also smart decisions. This shows that social media can shape and create consumer panic.

2.6. The impact of COVID-19 on consumer behaviour

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

COVID-19 occasioned several consequences and challenges which still affect business organisations globally. The COVID-19 lockdown regulations affected economies due to related risks and uncertainties. The global economy has been affected negatively by COVID-19: it caused many

organisations to close their offices, the cancellation of social events, as well as face-to-face business interactions cancellations (Ali, 2020:270).

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

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

2.7. Perceived risks in consumer online shopping

Perceived risk is defined as the doubt resulting from a bad decision that the consumer may make when making a buying decision. It can also pertain to the uncertainty a consumer might experience when buying a product or service (Wai, K., Dastane, O., Johari, Z. & Ismail, N.B., 2019:246). Lăzăroiu, G., Neguriță, O., Grecu, I., Grecu, G. & Mitran, P.C. (2020) demonstrate that consumers' intention to make an online purchase is affected by their confidence in the website.

A comprehensive literature review by Lim, Y.J., Osman, A., Salahuddin, S.N., Romle, A.R. & Abdullah, S. (2016:402), reveals that more consumers are facing challenges when logging in on online shopping, due to other businesses' websites not being user-friendly. Evidentially, online businesses must design user-friendly sites and effectively manage social media channels.

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

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

- a. Product risk, which includes risk regarding the performance of the product or quality of the product and services that consumers select during online buying.
- b. Financial risk, which relates to consumers' uncertainty around security and online safety when using their bank cards or credit cards as well as the disclosure of personal information.

- c. Convenience risk is linked to the perception of consumers that they will face challenges in ordering goods and services online or will not be able to cancel the placed order, or there might be delays with the delivery of goods and services. According to Bhatti, A., Saad, S. & Gbadebo, S.M. (2018:2), online buying normally fails due to consumers being unable to complete online transactions. Additionally, a lack of technological literacy plays a huge role.
- d. Non-delivery risk: a study by (Aminu, S., Olawore, O. & Odesanya, A., 2019:77) found that there is a strong relationship between online shopping and perceived delivery risk. Non-delivery risks have a negative influence on consumers' attitudes when shopping online (Makhitha & Ngobeni, 2021).
- e. Product return policy risk: Product return policy is the exchange of return policies that assure consumers that they can return the purchased product if they are not satisfied.

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

2.8. Online shopping in South Africa

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

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

2.9. New trends in an online consumer shopping environment

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

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

In the digital marketing space, social media platforms are increasingly becoming more established as marketing instruments globally, including in South Africa (Administration IT, 2021). Compared to first-world countries, South Africa has created significantly fewer sustainable behaviour frameworks. In South Africa's formal cosmetics sector there are around 250 players, with growth primarily coming from SMMEs (Shimul, A.S., Cheah, I. & Khan, B.B., 2022:38).

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

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

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

3.2. Research design

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

3.3. A classification of the study's overall research design

Quantitative data: quantitative data refers to information that can be measured or counted (Bergin, 2018). In this paper, data that was collected was quantitative, because of the main objective of study which was to understand the factors that influence consumer buying behaviour.

3.4. Sampling

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

This section explains the sampling approach utilised for this paper. The section further concentrates on the target population, the sampling method and the size of the sample for this paper. Target population refers to the total group of people from whom the sample might be drawn (Otzen & Manterola, 2017). The target population for this study comprised online consumers who reside in the Gauteng Province. The study targeted the following characteristics:

- a. Age: The respondents were over the age of 18 years including the following categories: 18 to 65.
- b. National status: The research advertisement was placed using geographical targeting of respondents residing, working or studying in the Vaal area (Sedibeng region). The Sedibeng region community social media pages were used to recruit respondents from the Sedibeng region.
- c. Online shopping experience: The respondents had to have online shopping experience.

According to Kumar (2018), the unit of analysis are; individuals, groups, organisations, spatial, institutional, cultural and societal units. The targeted population in the Sedibeng region of Gauteng consists of a population of around 774 000 people (Data, 2019). Furthermore, Markets (2021) purports that the number of e-commerce users in South Africa was around 18 million in the year 2020. This constitutes 33% of the overall population in South Africa. The Sedibeng district of Vaal's 33% is 255 420, therefore a sample of 384 respondents was used for the purpose of this paper. A sample of 384 respondents was used for this study. This sample size is based on a 0.05% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, correlating with the indicated population. The method of convenience sampling was used because it allows a sample to be selected because it is convenient for the researcher. With convenience sampling, the respondents are readily available, affordable and data is easily collected (Mapande & Appiah, 2018).

3.5. Data collection

The chosen topic for this paper involves consumer behaviour in an online environment. An electronic questionnaire was created using Google Forms and a link was disseminated to respondents to complete the questionnaire.

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

3.5.1. Questionnaire design

The questions used in the questionnaire permitted the researcher to accomplish the study objectives. The questions used in the questionnaire were piloted and amended appropriately to fit the research objectives of this study.

Table 3.1 Research objectives and question numbers

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

Source: Own compilation

3.5.2. Measurement

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

3.6. Pre-test study

The pre-test study was conducted before the actual data collection to evaluate the effectiveness of the questionnaire, i.e., if it measures the necessary data. A small sample of 10 respondents was randomly selected containing different age groups to identify challenges such as unclear wording, duplicates, logical questioning and understanding of key questions. During the pre-testing phase, the researcher was looking for similar responses such as selecting the "neutral "option in a rating scale. This was because a researcher is required to explore why most respondents select the "neutral option" during pre-testing.

3.7. Data management

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

3.7.1. Data validation

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

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

3.7.2. Data editing and coding

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

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

This resulted in high data quality for statistical analysis. The quality of the data directly impacted the reporting of research results and recommendations, especially for research which was intended to advise an organisation. A pre-coded questionnaire permits the researcher to capture data easily, and to be understood by statistical analysis software - Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.

3.7.3. Data cleaning and entry

In this paper, all collected data was captured into a statistical analysis software programme (SPSS).

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

3.8. Statistical data analysis

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

3.8.1. Reliability assessment of rating scales

Cronbach's alpha was used and indicates the degree of internal consistency in a group of items (Amirrudin, M., Nasution, K. & Supahar, S., 2021). The internal consistency reliability of the multi-item scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha as a statistical measurement tool.

3.8.2. Descriptive statistics for demographics

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

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Introduction

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

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

4.2 Descriptive statistics

4.2.1 Sample results

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

4.2.2 Demographic profiles of the respondents

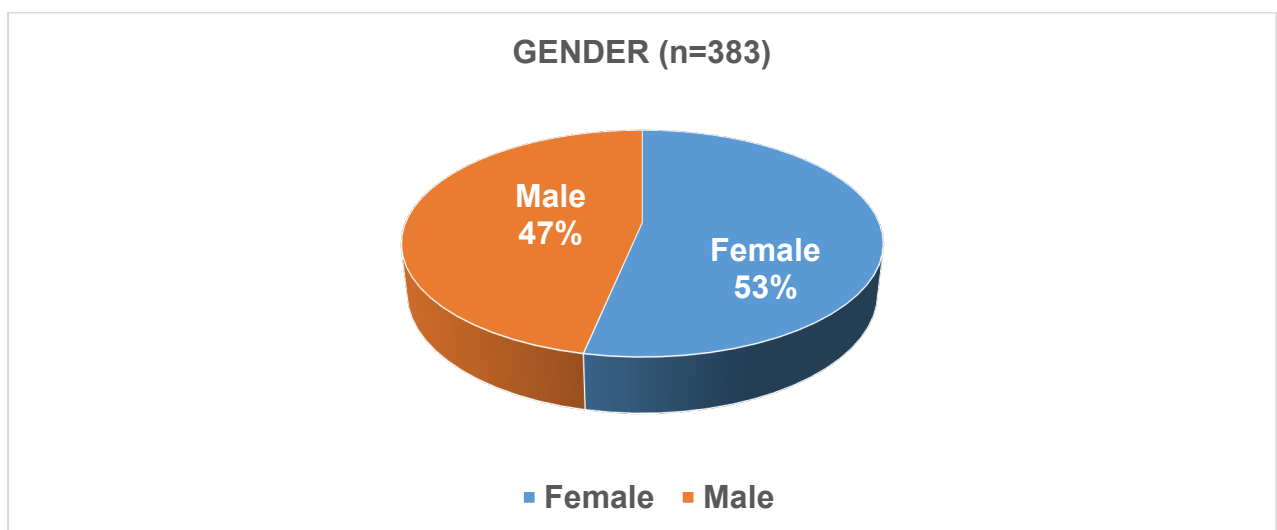


Figure 4.1 Gender

Source: Authors' own construction.

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

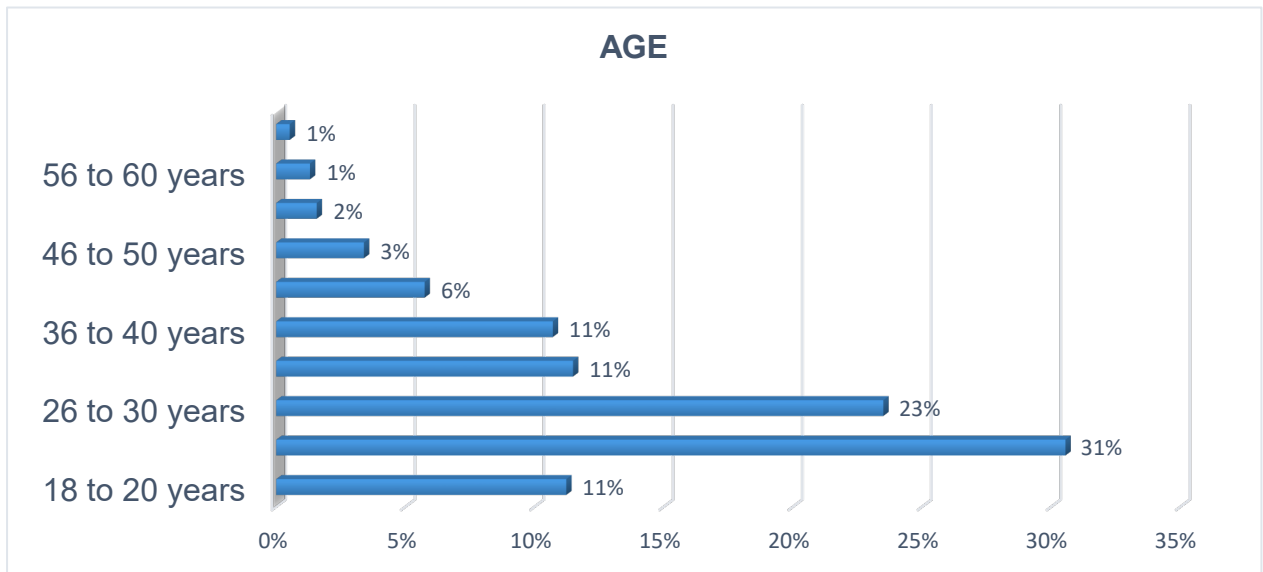


Figure 4.2 Age group in years
Source: Authors' own construction.

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

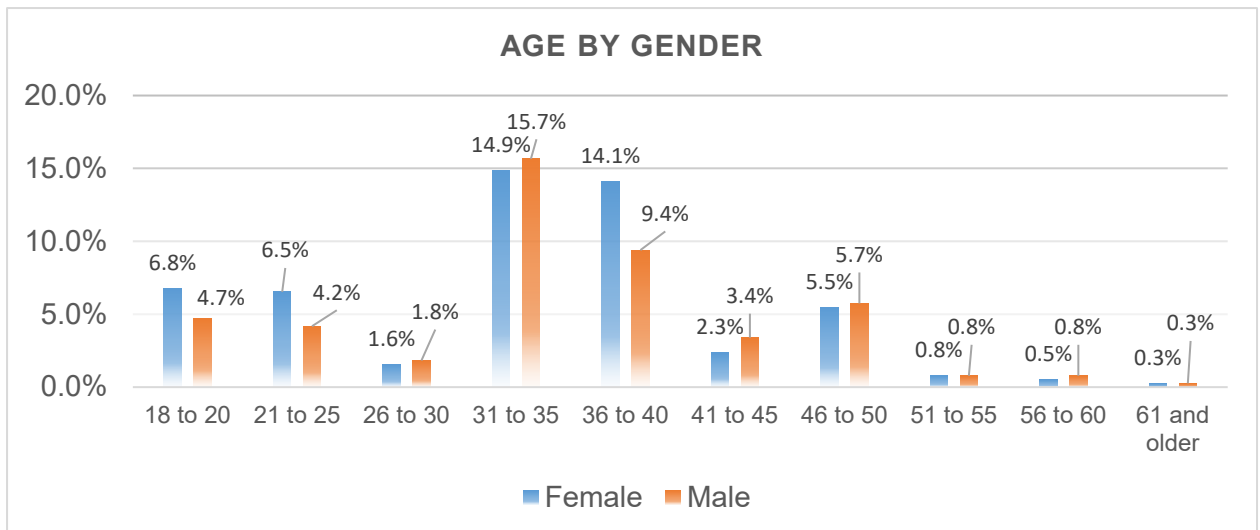


Figure 4.3 Age by gender
Source: Authors' own construction.

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

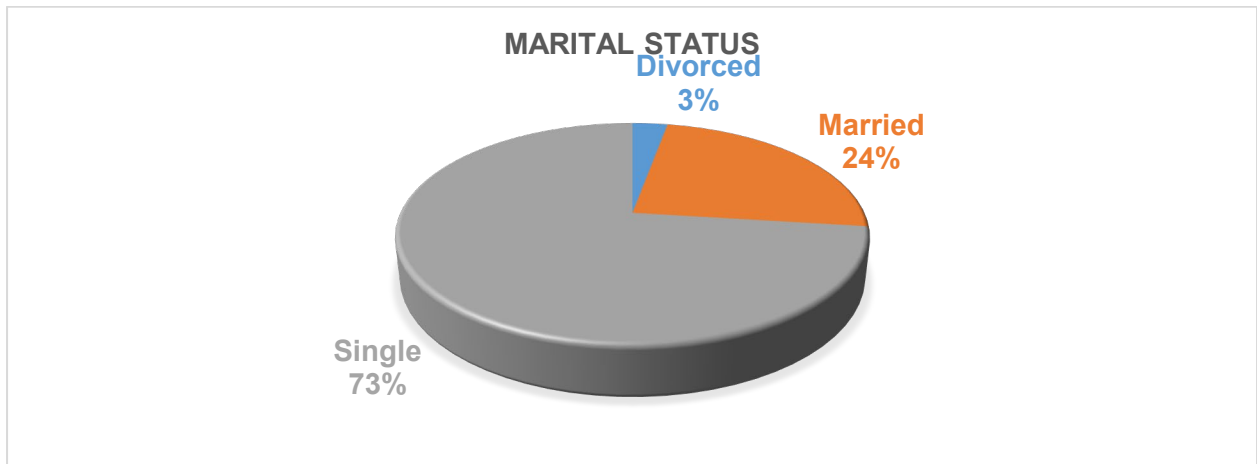


Figure 4.4 Marital status of the respondents
Source: Authors' own construction.

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

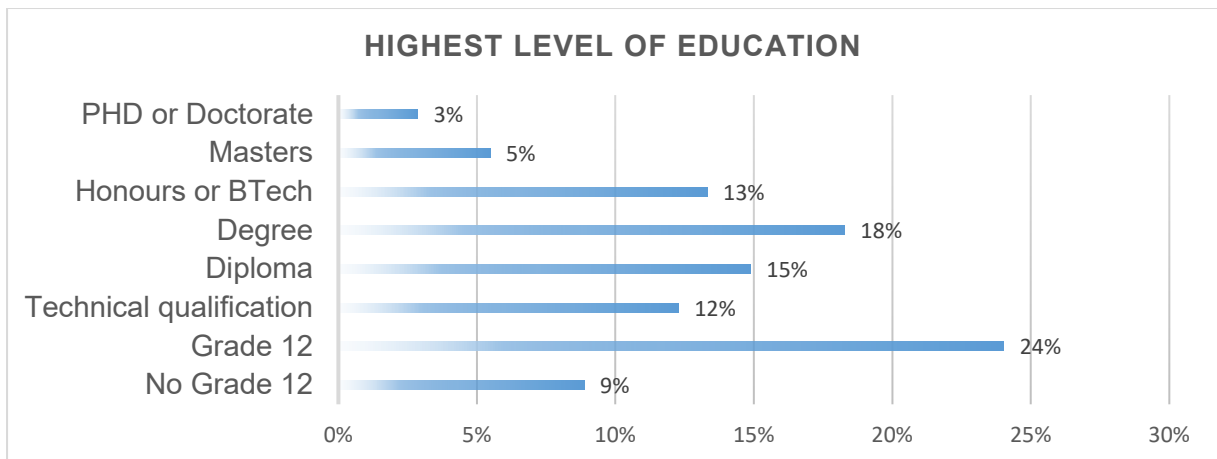


Figure 4.5 Highest level of education
Source: Authors' own construction.

Figure 4.5 depicts the respondents' highest level of education. About 24% of the respondents have a grade 12, while 18% have a degree; 15% of the respondents have a Diploma, 13% have Honours or BTech, 12% have a technical qualification, 9% have no matric, 5% have a Master's degree and 3% have a PhD or Doctorate.

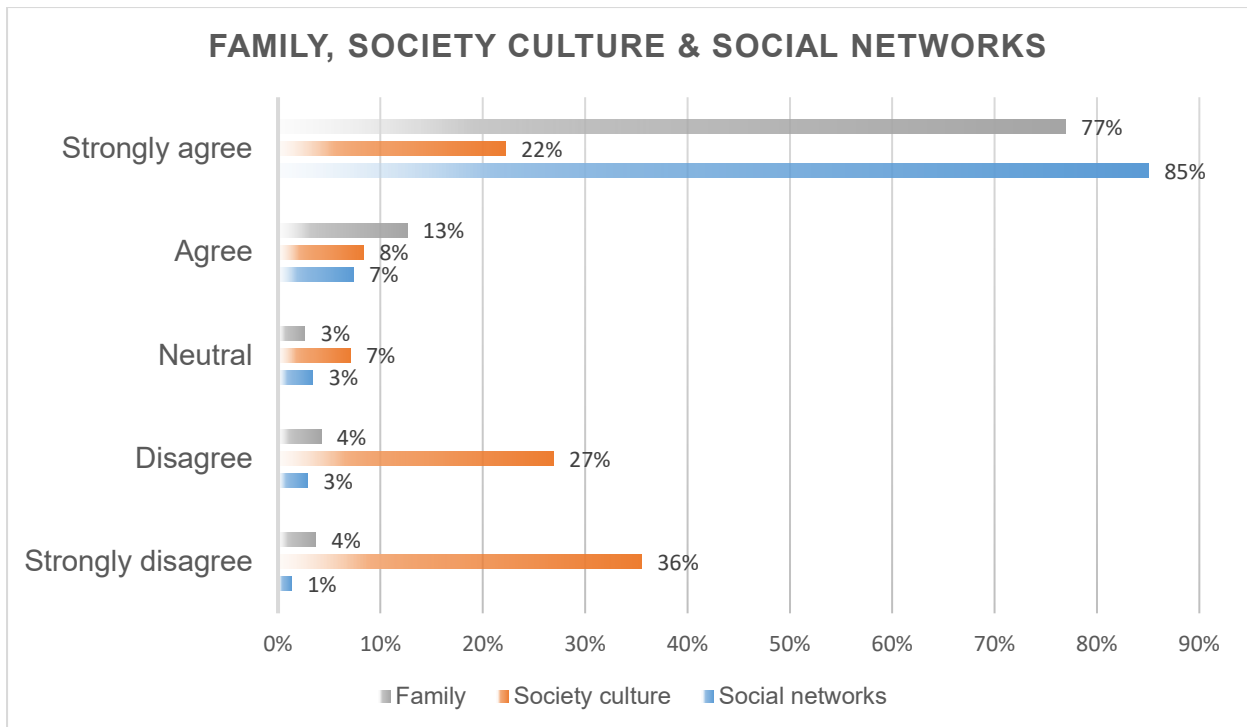


Figure 4.6 Influential factors
Source: Authors' own construction.

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

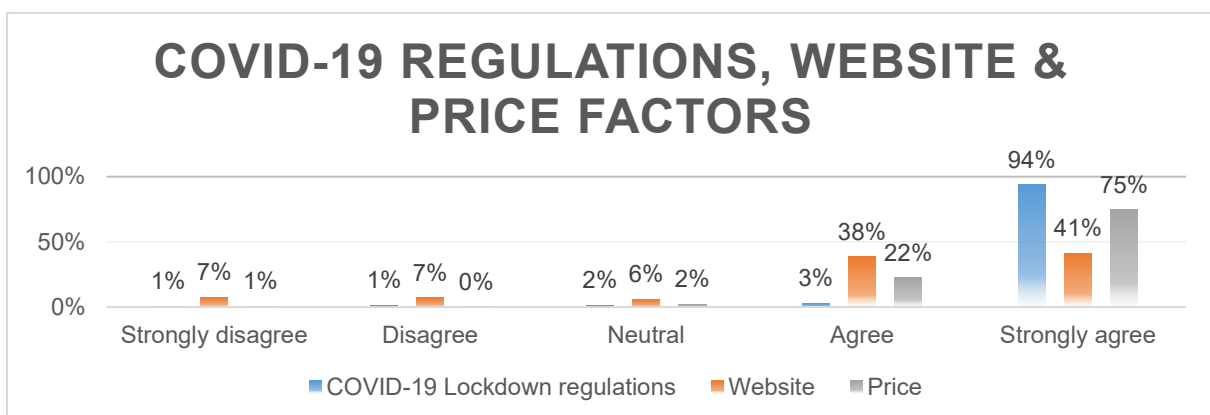


Figure 4.7 Contributing factors
Source: Authors' own construction.

Figure 4.7 indicates that 94% of the respondents strongly agree that COVID-19 lockdown regulations significantly influenced consumers in an online shopping environment. About 75% of the respondents strongly agree that price influences consumers in an online shopping environment. Almost half (41%)

strongly agree while 38% agree that a website influences online shopping. Only few respondents (1%, 7% and 1%) strongly disagree that COVID-19 regulations, websites and price are influential in an online shopping environment respectively.

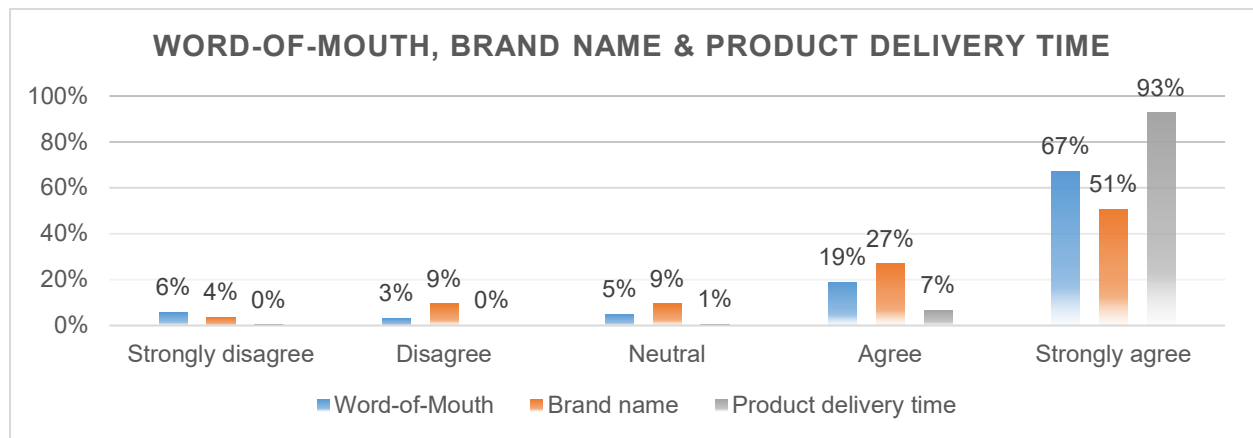


Figure 4.8 Word-of-mouth, brand name and product delivery time graph

Source: Authors' own construction.

Figure 4.8 indicates that most of the respondents (93%) strongly agree that product delivery time is very influential in an online shopping environment. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the respondents strongly agree that word-of-mouth is important in an online shopping environment.

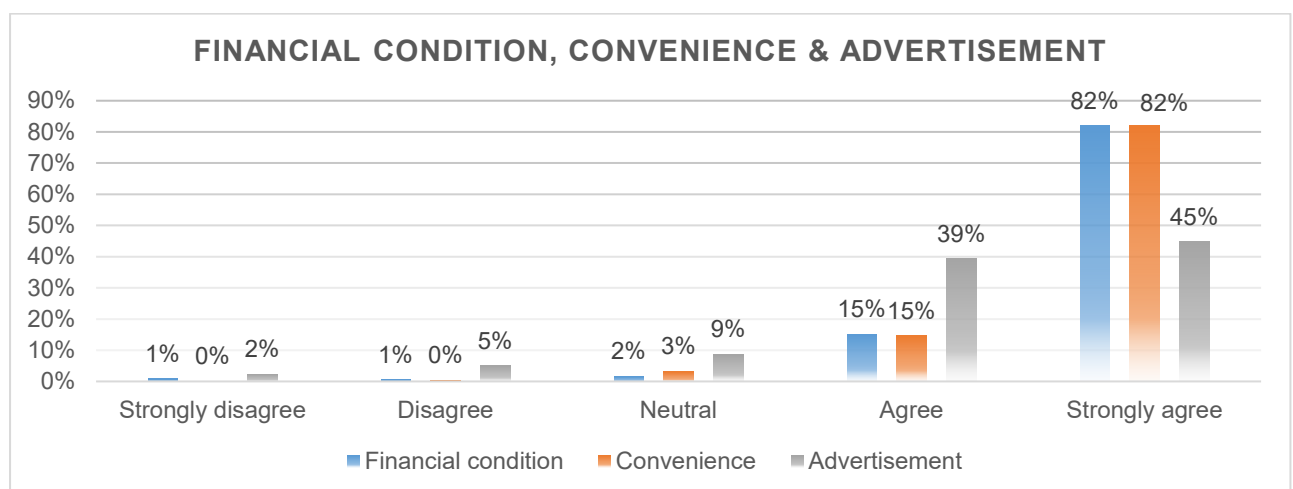


Figure 4.9 Financial condition, convenience & advertisement

Source: Authors' own construction.

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

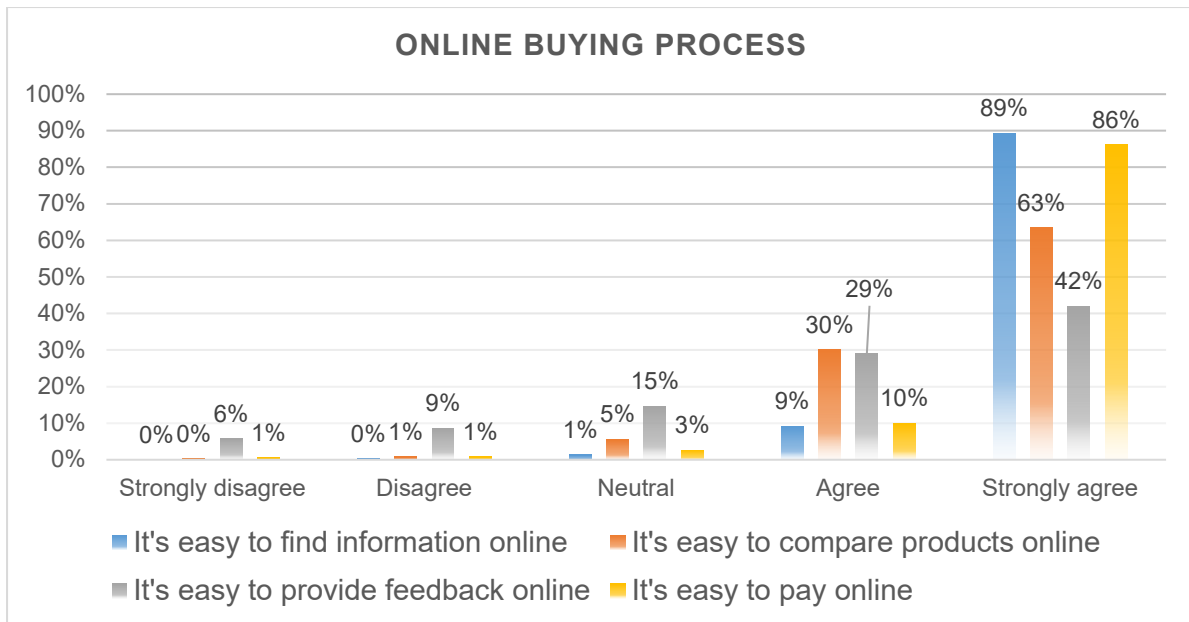


Figure 4.10 Online purchasing process

Source: Authors' own construction.

In Figure 4.10, eighty-nine percent of the respondents strongly agree that it is easy to find information online. Eighty-six percent (86%) of the respondents also strongly agree that it is easy to make payment online. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the respondents strongly agree that it is easy to compare products online. Only forty-two (42%) of the respondents strongly agree that it is easy to provide feedback online.

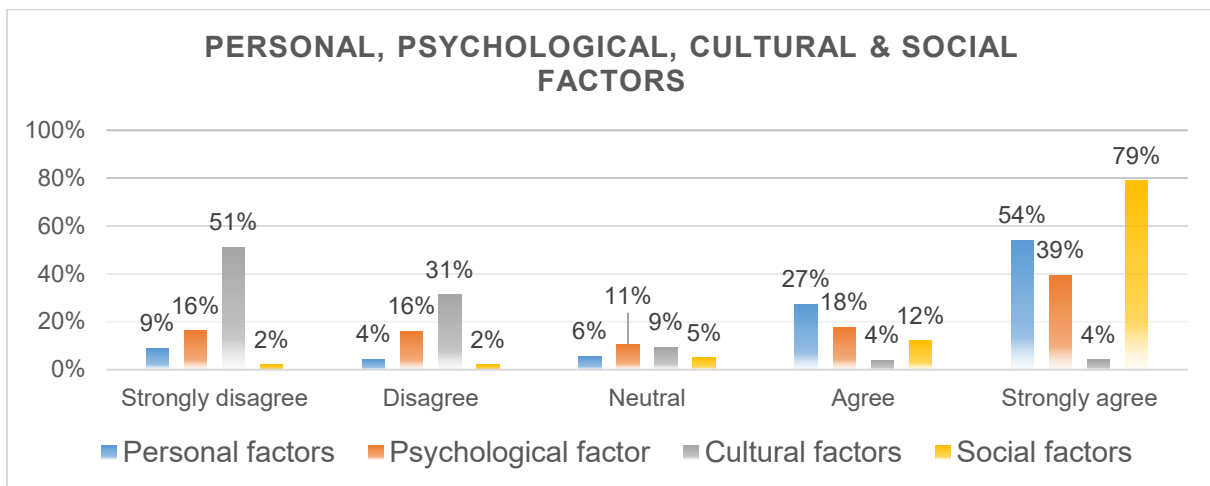


Figure 4.11 Personal, psychological, cultural and social factors

Source: Authors' own construction.

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

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

4.3 Statistical analysis

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

4.4 Reliability

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

Table 4.1 Reliability and convergent validity

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

Source: Own compilation

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

4.5 Conclusion

This section presented the demographic profiles of the respondents who participated in this study. Some demographic variables were cross tabulated amongst one another. The respondents' responses were analysed, and the results confirm that COVID-19 lockdown regulations, product delivery time and social networks are the factors customers consider important in an online shopping environment. The results also indicate that societal culture is the least influential factor in an online shopping environment.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

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

5.1 Revisit the problem statement

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The literature suggests that financial and convenience risks play a crucial role during consumer online shopping. Very often buyers do not have an idea who the seller is and the perceived risks might create doubt in the mind of the consumer (Bhatti et al., 2018:3). The results (Question 8) indicate that respondents strongly agree with the statements that social factors such as “other happy customers” and “social media networks” spur on online shopping, with statistic means of 4.72 and 4.74 respectively.

The statement finds resonance in literature which hold that social networking platforms have a significantly positive influence on the online buying decision process (Al-Abdallah et al., 2021:560). Consumers are easily influenced by recommendations and personal words from other happy customers (Qazzafi, 2020:1207). Consumers are surrounded by a wide range of influences such as social media networks, natural disasters (COVID-19) and family and friends in their environment that affect them when making a decision to buy products online.

5.2 Managerial Implications

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

5.3 Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

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

The literature regarding contributing factors such as social, natural disasters, economic and psychological factors was reviewed. The main results confirm that social media networks, COVID-19 regulations, other happy customers and financial situations contribute positively to an online shopping environment.

The general findings indicate that natural, COVID-19, social and economic factors contribute to online shopping behaviour. Implications express that retailers must financially invest in digital marketing, thus amending business operating models to fit customer needs are recommended.

The limitations stated that the paper focused only on the Sedibeng region; participants were between the ages of 18 to 65; only an online survey was used; advertisements of the study were placed only on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

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

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