DETERMINANTS OF MICROBLOG MUSIC REVIEW CREDIBILITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (eWOM) ADOPTION

by

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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This dissertation is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Technologiae: Marketing

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The dissertation is the result of my own independent work/ investigation, except otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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LANGUAGE EDITING

This is to certify that I language-edited the dissertation "*Determinants of microblog music review credibility and its influence on electronic word of mouth (eWOM) adoption*", by Mdumiso Mazibuko for the M.Tech degree in Marketing, in the Faculty of Management Sciences, Vaal University of Technology.

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

While more than half of the South African adult population are active microbloggers, the most common topics that are discussed include current affairs, sports and music entertainment. Nonetheless, there exists intrinsic fear about the credibility of digital content, which stems from the fact that there are limited standards for quality control in the microglogging sphere. Consequently, this apprehension exacerbates potential problems pertaining to ascertaining the reliability of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) communication. In this vein, this study seeks to investigate the salience of selected determinants on consumers' perceptions about the credibility of microblog music reviews and future eWOM adoption.

The sample comprised 485 self-reporting microbloggers residing in the southern Gauteng region of South Africa. The study applied a quantitative approach, whereas cross-sectional data were collected only once from the sample using a paper and pencil based self-administered questionnaire in 2018. Moreover, a positivist philosophy was followed, whereas hypotheses were framed from the credibility heuristics theory, posited as the underlying cues that aid consumers in the online credibility verification process. The formal protocol for research ethics were followed upon collecting empirical data, whereas the multi-item survey questionnaire was tested for reliability and validity.

The hypotheses testing comprised an estimation of two regression models. From the findings obtained, it is evident that source credibility, information quality, homophily and prior beliefs confirmation are the four heuristics that pose a significant effect on the evaluation of microblog music reviews by consumers, yielding approximately 43.3 percent explanatory power on the overall credibility of microblog music reviews. Moreover, the second regression model proved the positive effect of microblog music review credibility on eWOM adoption, whereas the independent variable explains 30.7 percent of the variance in eWOM adoption. These findings point to the significance in applying the heuristics in evaluating microblog music reviews created by South African consumers. As such, the findings could assist both microblog administrators and marketing communication practitioners to better design the platforms to facilitate reader credibility evaluations about various products.

Keywords: credibility, heuristics, music reviews, microblogs, South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The convergence of music production, creation, distribution, exhibition and presentation enabled by new communications technology has seized the global music industry (Moore 2013:369). Moreover, the Internet breakthrough has enabled the music industry to mature at a high speed in order to bring musicians, fans and cultures together (Weissenberger 2015:918). In particular, many transitions in the music industry have followed, including the introduction of new technologies such as microblogs. Microblogs differ from other blogs because users tend to write short, expressive and distinctive messages. Microblogging has become popular among individuals who frequently update and follow each other's posts, while creating a sense of online communication. In particular, Beger and Sinha (2012:19) pinpoint that approximately 60 percent of young people in Africa are using microblogs, while more than 50 percent of South Africans are active on microblogs. Notably, the most common topics discussed on microblogs include current affairs, sports, technology and music entertainment (Wang, Uesugi, Ting, Okuhara & Wang 2015:548), whereas the most popular microblogs include Twitter™, 12Seconds™, FriendFeed™ and Tumblr™.

The emergence of microblogs has enabled consumers to come together in groups to share updates and re-live experiences through electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Moran, Muzellec & Nolan 2014:202). Koekemoer (2014:431) defines eWOM as any positive or negative statement made by customers about a product or a service, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions through the Internet. eWOM can play a role in information dissemination as it includes numerous channels such as text messages, social networking sites and blogs (Cheung, Luo, Sia & Chen 2009:9). Owing to the development of microblogs, consumers are now able to share thoughts about people, brands and products by creating their own messages and uploading them directly onto different digital media platforms. Nevertheless, Hattersley and McJannet (2008:217) acknowledge that regardless of how eWOM content is delivered, the most important aspect in consumers' evaluations is the extent to which the content is trustworthy, truthful and timely.

Cheung *et al.* (2009:9) contend that eWOM has opened up massive collective knowledge about products and services while operating through the abundance of anonymous reviews (Leurdijk, Munck, Broek, Plas, Manshanden & Rietveld 2012:6). Of note, music reviews comprise brief content posts about music genres, artists and musical compositions as they are posted online (Santini 2011:214). The extent to which consumers are able to verify the credibility of online music reviews is not clear. Despite this notion, eWOM derived from online reviews is vital in understanding the process by which the consumer evaluates the credibility and transparency of information (Cheung & Thadani 2010:336; Durmaz & Yuksel 2017:237). Subsequently, positive credibility evaluations could lead to the eventual adoption of eWOM processes in future encounters.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Wathen and Burkell (2002:136) point out that a key early stage in the message persuasion process is the receiver's judgment of the message's credibility. Credibility refers to an individual's perception of the proven truth of a portion of information (Eisend 2016:2). In fact, Shamhuyenhanzva, Van Tonder, Lombard and Hemsworth (2016:440) denote credibility as the degree to which consumers perceive the recommended information about the product to be factual. This surmises the believability of the music reviews posted on microblogs. In addition, McKnight and Kacmar (2007:424) highlight that information credibility is a strong predictor of information for readers' further actions. For example, depending on the degree of eWOM persuasiveness, online users are able to make relevant purchase decisions (Durmaz & Yuksel 2017:232). In the same light, a consumer who believes the online information to be credible has no reason not to adopt eWOM messaging such as reviews (Metzger 2007:2082).

This study is situated within the theoretical foundations of the Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) put forward by Chaiken (1980:754-756). In particular, the study is premised upon Metzger, Flanagin and Medders's (2010:415) five credibility heuristics, which are instrumental towards exerting a significant influence on eWOM credibility. The heuristics are tantamount to the short-cut cues that consumers utilise in making evaluations of online information in a quick and effortless manner (Metzger & Flanagin 2013:214). Notably, the heuristics correspond with the following five determinants, namely, source credibility (reputation heuristic), information quality (expectancy violation heuristic), homophily (endorsement heuristic), review consistency (consistency heuristic) and prior beliefs

confirmation (self-confirmation heuristic). These factors are tantamount to cognitive heuristics in that consumers utilise them as short-cut cues to make evaluations of online information in an effortless and quick manner (Metzger & Flanagin 2013:214).

First, the online environment presents surmounting difficulty in terms of making inferences about the expertise of the eWOM sender or his or her incentives to post the information. The reader's evaluation of the credibility of a microblogger is based on recognisability and familiarity (Weiss, Lurie & Maclnnis 2008:429). In other words, microblog source credibility could be imputed based on other information that is linked to the username, number of reviews that the microblogger has written, as well as the number of likes or co-signatures the blogger has received from other people. Despite this impeded environment, it is believed that source credibility is as important online as it is offline when determining the credibility evaluations of music reviews. Word of mouth (WOM) sources are considered credible if they are unbiased. In other words, credible sources should have no strong affiliation to the company, or any reasons or incentives to embellish their experiences with the product or service. If the information is not considered to be credible it might be discounted and consequently, lose its persuasiveness.

Secondly, Arumugam and Omar (2015:1866) specify that consumers could possibly evaluate the quality of information by considering the persuasive strength of the message content. This is because social media information is in the hands of almost anyone, implying that the quality of some online information inevitably diminishes. Information quality is the value of the information as perceived by the consumer (Jonsson & Gustavsson 2008:281). In this vein, information quality is best encapsulated as the extent to which users think that information is relevant, timely, accurate and complete (Cheung 2014:46).

Online users generally demonstrate a tendency to evaluate content based on how much effort went into producing it. For example, apt spelling, lyrical grammar, format and overall structure of the posted music reviews are likely to increase evaluations of credibility. Jonsson and Gustavsson (2008:291) confirmed that information quality has a direct effect on credibility. Relatedly, Cheung *et al.* (2009:15) note that argument strength is synonymous with the quality of the received information, of which it affects the eventual acceptance of messages that are posted online. ThuWu (2013:973) confirmed the importance of detailed information quality in providing convincing information to online consumers.

Thirdly, eWOM credibility is influenced by the tendency to associate with other referents. This assertion is tied closely to the notion of associative influence, denoting that homophily could possibly affect the credibility evaluations of content provided by consumers (Mull, Wyss, Moon & Lee 2015:164). In light of this, Badar, Frantz and Jabeen (2016:764) broadly define homophily as the degree to which communicating entities are similar in specific characteristics. For specificity, Aghakhani and Karimi (2013:3) allude to the level to which groups of individuals share similarities in socio-demographic attributes such as age, gender, education and social status. In the same vein, Zhang, Hu, Zhang and Liu (2016:477) point out that homophily refers to the tendency of a microblogger to associate and bond with similar individuals. By implication, music reviews are posted by different microbloggers whereby readers utilise cues such as demographic similarity and bloggers' preferences to evaluate the credibility of posted music reviews.

Fourthly, Cheung and Thadani (2010:336) define consistency as the extent to which existing eWOM recommendations are consistent with other providers' experiences regarding the same product or service evaluation. Durmaz and Yuksel (2017:232) reinforce this assertion by indicating that consistency refers to the extent to which one's belief is consistent with others who are discussing the same product or service. Recommendation consistency is a concept that explains the similarity of eWOM beliefs between different opinion givers. Interestingly, Cheung *et al.* (2009:29) found that consistency has a significant effect on perceived eWOM review credibility. In agreement, the findings of Durmaz and Yuksel (2017:237) as well as Ismagilova, Dwivedi, Slade and Williams (2017:39) provide support for the positive effect of recommendation consistency on perceived eWOM credibility.

Finally, prior belief is the level of confirmation or disconfirmation between the received information and what consumers believe relates to the reviewed product or service (Cheung *et al.* 2009:17). This factor relates to how well arguments made in a review possibly resonate with the reader's pre-existing opinions (Watts & Lindström 2014:9). Wang (2016:620) established that prior beliefs significantly influence perceived eWOM review credibility. This is because when consumers read reviews that augment their pre-existing beliefs and attitudes about products, the reviews are likely to be considered as credible. Ultimately, the review information is accepted as certain. In another study, Lopes, Abrantes and Kastenholz (2013:49) demonstrate that confirmed prior beliefs influence the online review credibility in a positive manner.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Scant research has been conducted on the credibility of microblog music reviews. The majority of research has been conducted with ample focus on the influence of eWOM on consumers' purchase of high involvement products such as automobiles (Murtiasih & Siringoringo 2013:42). In the same vein, the literature alludes to the effectiveness of traditional WOM in the purchase of regular and low involvement products such as apparel (Xiaofen & Yiling 2009:25) and mobile phones (Viljoen, Dube & Murisi 2016:1-7). Nevertheless, limited effort has been expended in enumerating the specific cues that individuals consider when making eWOM credibility judgements. This anomaly is anticipated, considering that there are inherent misgivings about credibility within the digital media environment stemming from the fact that there are few (if any) standards for quality control and online evaluation (Metzger & Flanagin 2013:211). In view of this, digital information may either be misrepresented or even created under false pretences. This malleability of digital information exacerbates potential problems regarding the reliability of eWOM information.

Moran and Muzellec (2017:154) allude to the fact that consumers are reluctant to adopt eWOM because it is not easy for them to determine the level of credibility of online information. Relatedly, Fan, Miao, Fang and Lin (2013:58) suggest that credibility of information remains vague in a eWOM environment. While this may be so, Cheung *et al.* (2009:9) make an appeal for increased investigations on the manner in which consumers evaluate the credibility of online reviews. The scholars attest that this area of study would be a significant and interesting topic that could clearly advance the understanding of the process by which eWOM is evaluated and used, consequently.

In this research, the traditional notion of source trustworthiness and source expertise advanced by Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953:355) and later explored among South African consumers in the work of Shamhuyenhanzva *et al*. (2016:448) is altered owing to its insufficiency in fully explaining the credibility of online music reviews. The key reasons for this inadequacy are twofold. First, the view that credibility evaluation entirely rests upon the characteristics of the source as defined by the elements of source trustworthiness and source expertise is restrictive on two accounts, namely it discounts the influence of the information user's self-judgement (Reichelt, Sievert & Jacob 2014:67), as well as external influences such as normative power (Cheung *et al.* 2009:10). Secondly, since online users

spend a limited amount of time on any given platform, they are likely to develop rapid strategies for assessing credibility, implying that investigating source attributes alone may not be a satisfactory means of making credibility judgements of microblog music reviews. This study concurs with Metzger (2007:2082) and Fogg (2003:15) who pinpoint that credibility evaluation of web information is processed using peripheral cues. Such an investigation is important since it has the potential to determine consumer behavioural outcomes such as eWOM adoption, an element that has been instrumental in amplifying the effectiveness of marketing communications (Cheung 2014:45). Therefore, this study expands the knowledge base by attempting to establish the salient credibility heuristics that influence eWOM adoption, albeit as this path is mediated by the music review credibility evaluations of South African consumers.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following research objectives were formulated for this study:

1.4.1 Primary objective

The primary objective for this study was to investigate the influence of selected determinants of microblog music review credibility and future eWOM adoption among microbloggers in the southern Gauteng region of South Africa.

1.4.2 Theoretical objectives

The theoretical objectives were**:**

- to provide an overview of the literature on marketing communication;
- to theoretically review the WOM communication model;
- to conduct a comprehensive review of the literature on eWOM communication;
- to appraise the literature on microblog eWOM communication in the music industry;
- to conduct a literature review on the evaluation of eWOM credibility;
- to conduct a literature study on the eWOM credibility theories;
- to theoretically review the application of the credibility heuristics in eWOM research; and
- to review the literature on the determinants of eWOM credibility and eventual adoption of online platforms.

1.4.3 Empirical objectives

The empirical objectives were:

- to establish the determinants of microblog music review credibility among a cohort of microbloggers based in southern Gauteng;
- to determine microbloggers' evaluation of the overall credibility of microblog music reviews;
- to examine the influence of microblog music review credibility on future eWOM adoption by microbloggers in southern Gauteng; and
- to test empirically a model of source credibility, information quality, homophily, review consistency, prior beliefs confirmation, music review credibility and eWOM adoption.

1.5 HYPOTHESES FOR THE STUDY

From the aforementioned empirical objectives and the undertones of the HSM as inferred by Metzger's (2007:2079) credibility heuristics, the following two-tailed hypotheses were formulated and tested empirically in this study:

H_{o1}: *Source credibility does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a1}: *Source credibility positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{o2}: *Information quality does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a2}: *Information quality positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{o3}: *Homophily does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a3}: *Homophily positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{o4}: *Review consistency does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a4}: *Review consistency positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{o5}: *Prior beliefs confirmation does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a5}: *Prior beliefs confirmation positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{o6}: *The credibility of microblog music reviews does not positively influence future eWOM adoption by microbloggers.*

H_{a6}: *The credibility of microblog music reviews positively influences future eWOM adoption by microbloggers.*

Section 3.9 of this study provides a detailed description of how the aforementioned hypotheses and linkages were identified from the literature, culminating in the development and subsequent testing of a conceptual model. Of the stated hypotheses, the alternative hypotheses Ha1, Ha2, Ha3, Ha5 and Ha6 were supported whereas Ha4 was not supported by the empirical data and thereby rejected. The results are discussed in sections 5.12 and 5.13 of this study.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

According to Babin and Zikmund (2016:67), a research design is "a recipe that specifies the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing the needed information". Since the primary objective of this research was to investigate the extent of influential relationships, a descriptive-explanatory research design was found befitting. Specifically, the study applied a single, cross-sectional survey, whereby a sample of respondents were drawn only once from the target population (Malhotra, Nunan & Birks & 2017:74). The methodology that was followed in this study commenced with a review of the relevant literature, followed by an empirical investigation.

1.6.1 Literature review

A thorough examination of the role of eWOM in marketing communication was conducted through a review of various secondary data sources. Furthermore, the available literature

on eWOM communication formats as well as existing credibility theories was reviewed. In particular, the literature study utilised textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, media reports, microblog data and conference proceedings as sources of information.

1.6.2 Empirical study

In view of collecting primary data for this research, an empirical investigation was conducted. Specifically, the study employed a quantitative research approach. The main reason for using this approach is that it is useful when testing relationships between relevant variables (Babin & Zikmund 2016:111). Notably, quantitative studies yield rich data owing to their ability to utilise statistics, facts and figures to describe influential relationships amongst constructs (McDaniel & Gates 2013:81). Upon following a quantitative approach, the empirical study applied several steps in terms of the sampling design process put forward by Malhotra *et al*. (2017:414) as follows:

1.6.2.1 Target population

The target population comprised microblog participants who had posted music reviews within six months from the survey date (1 July 2018 to 30 November 2018). In this study, microbloggers are considered as the purveyors of eWOM communication via online music reviews.

1.6.2.2 Sampling frame

According to Brown, Suter and Churchill (2018:206), a sampling frame represents the list of population elements from which the actual sample is drawn. This procedure is used to sample rare populations (McDaniel & Gates 2013:293), as has been identified in this study. The chance of finding a suitable sampling frame for this study was considered minimal to an extent that the rare characteristic of being an active microblogger who posts music reviews could not be easily identified. It is not possible to find a singular database populating all South African microbloggers owing to the privacy rights befitting social media platforms.

1.6.2.3 Sampling technique

The study was amenable to the use of a non-probability sampling technique since a complete list of microbloggers could not be identified in this work. The snowball technique

was applied in view of targeting the few individuals who possess the desired characteristics (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:424).

1.6.2.4 Sample size

The study used a sample size of 500 microblog participants. Determination of this sample size was guided by two approaches. First, the historical evidence approach was considered by evaluating similar sample sizes other researchers have used before (Brown *et al.* 2018:212). Secondly, the sample size determination was extrapolated from the thresholds put forward by Field (2013:139) and Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2018:185).

1.6.2.5 Method of data collection and measuring instrument

A self-administered survey was conducted between 1 July 2018 and 30 November 2018. The study utilised a closed-ended questionnaire comprising five (5) sections. To avoid redundancy, details about the questionnaire structure, format and content are explained in Section 4.9 of this study.

1.7 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

After completion of the fieldwork, data were captured on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. This process allowed for the preliminary transformation of raw data into information through editing checks, cleaning and coding (McDaniel & Gates 2013:335). Thereafter, the data were transferred to a software program, namely the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25.0, wherein descriptive statistics, tabulations and frequency distribution charts were computed (refer to sections 5.5 and 5.6 of this study). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were performed in view of simplifying the factor-component structure of the study. In addition, inferential statistics such as computing a correlation matrix were conducted to ascertain the strength and direction of relationships among the variables identified in this research (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:638). Furthermore, regression analysis was conducted in view of ascertaining the predictive validity of the hypotheses that were being tested in this work.

1.8 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE STUDY

This study was subjected to a series of data quality checks in view of enhancing the authenticity of the empirical findings. In light of this, Babin and Zikmund (2016:281) allude to the evaluation of reliability, validity and sensitivity in the assessment of empirical

measurements. In the main survey, the scale items were rendered internally consistent after observing the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (ranging between 0.635 and 0.808) reported in Section 5.9 of this study.

This study tested for face validity, content validity and construct validity. Initially, face validity was evaluated through a pre-test with two subject matter experts from the online consumer behaviour discipline as well as the study leader. Content validity was evaluated by checking if the measurement items represent the entire universe of the task at hand (Babin & Zikmund 2016:281). Specifically, a pilot study was conducted on a conveniently selected sample of 62 university students who alluded to having previous experience with posting music reviews along microblogs. The results of the pilot survey provide sufficient justification for adequate content validity culminating in a decision to proceed with the instrument at the main survey (refer to section 5.2 of this study).

At the main survey, construct validity was assessed by evaluating convergent, discriminant and nomological validity elements (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:362). A discussion relating to the validity issues that were addressed in this research is proffered in Section 4.11.2 of this dissertation.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For the successful completion of a marketing research project, it is vital to follow specific principles and standards before, during and after data collection (Brown *et al*. 2018:20). Notably, this study complied with ethical norms at different stages of the research as explained in Section 4.10.

1.10 CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY

The following key concepts are clarified in terms of how they have been used within the context of this research:

- **WOM** refers to oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator concerning a brand, product, service or organisation, of which the communicator is perceived as non-commercial (Ismagilova *et al*. 2017:7).
- **eWOM** is the informal and non-commercial form of WOM communication where experienced consumers share information about music content, releases, lyrics, videos

and other advice with a large body of consumers and institutions using microblog reviews. Also termed word-of-mouse by Jamil and Hasnu (2013:172).

- **Credibility** is the believability or trustworthiness of the information's quality as well as the quality of the source, from where the information comes (Sharif *et al*. 2017:786). This infers that credibility of online communication relates to the reliability of both the online message content itself, as well as the believability of the message communicator.
- **Microblogs** refer to the Web 2.0 applications, which allow for information sharing whereby the communicator posts and receives short and frequent posts (Webb & Wang 2013:207). The microblog posts are usually limited in terms of size and length, whereas they can comprise various multi-media formats such as text, audio and video clips.
- **A microblogger** refers to the individual participant who actively broadcasts information along microblogs (Skyring 2013:14). Specific to this research, microbloggers create and post content pertaining to music reviews.
- **eWOM adoption** refers to the response by eWOM receivers, resulting from accepting what the communicator advocates as well as the continual use of the eWOM platform (Fang 2014:75). This study considers the long-term and continuous decision to accept and rely on eWOM content about music, as it is posted along microblogs.
- **Music** refers to the vocal and instrumental sounds (or both) which is combined in such a way that it produces beauty of form, harmony and the expression of emotions (Oxford dictionary 1533).

1.11 GENERAL

- The referencing style is based on the Vaal University of Technology referencing guide (adapted Harvard style).
- Tables and figures are placed on the relevant pages, as indicated in the Table of Contents section of this dissertation.
- The Bibliography lists all the sources that have been used within the text.
- Annexures are placed at the end of this dissertation.

1.12 DISSERTATION OUTLINE

This research is compiled in the form of an academic dissertation including chapter divisions with headings and sub-headings as follows:

Chapter 1 is the preface to this report, typically stating the introduction, background and problem under investigation. The chapter also enlists the research objectives and hypotheses that were subsequently tested in this research. An overview of the research design and methodological procedures that were followed are also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 2 comprises a discussion on the marketing communication process as well as the WOM model. The technologies applied in eWOM communications are reviewed, whereas the characteristics, platforms and formats of eWOM communication are outlined, leading to a discussion on microblogs as a platform of choice for sharing music content. The chapter also highlights the contribution and the drivers of the music industry.

Chapter 3 provides a theoretic review of the manner in which consumers evaluate the credibility of microblog eWOM communication. The definitions and characteristics of eWOM credibility are also examined in this chapter. Selected credibility theories are reviewed, including the dual-process theories wherein the HSM lies. A synthesis of the credibility heuristics culminates in the prescription of a corresponding selection of factors that influence the eWOM credibility evaluation of online music content. This literature review concludes with the development of hypotheses based on identified linkages from the literature.

The design and scientific research process that was utilised in this study are scrutinised in Chapter 4. Specifically, the sampling procedure and method of data collection are stated and justified. The development of the questionnaire is explained thoroughly, in terms of its format, structure and content. Furthermore, the methods for assessing the reliability and validity of this study are also highlighted. The data preparation and statistical analysis methods that were applied in this work are elaborated on.

In Chapter 5, the data preparation procedures are specified, in the order in which they were implemented after the fieldwork. This comprises a presentation of the actual data cleaning and coding that were performed. Thereafter, the chapter presents the empirical findings in the order of statistical analysis, including a presentation of the descriptive and multivariate statistics. In addition, the results of regression analysis procedure are presented and interpreted, whereas the results are interpreted in view of either supporting or refuting the stated hypotheses.

In Chapter 6, the study conclusions are drawn based on the extrapolated empirical findings and the extent to which the research objectives have been achieved. Drawing from the main findings of this study, the chapter spans to proffer useful recommendations to both microblog administrators and marketing practitioners. Limitations of the study are noted, thereby creating a fruitful opportunity for future research.

1.13 CONCLUSION

Generally, the determination of eWOM credibility is a complex affair, since the content is usually posted by unfamiliar persons. Moreover, there is a myriad of platforms wherein eWOM communication can be disseminated. When consumers consider adopting product information that is posted through electronic platforms, they are faced with doubt and misgivings regarding its reliability. In this regard, the primary objective of this study was to investigate the influence of selected determinants of microblog music review credibility and the effect on future eWOM adoption among microbloggers. In view of achieving this objective, a decision was made to follow a quantitative research approach by testing hypotheses and analysing data statistically. In this vein, a single cross-sectional study was conducted whereby data were collected only once from a sample of microbloggers. A sample was drawn using the snowball sampling method. Data collection was administered using a self-administered survey. Moreover, a decision was taken to assess a quality of the research instrument (questionnaire) by observing various reliability and validity measures.

The next chapter discusses the communication process in detail, with a view to provide an understanding of how consumers become a source of information to other consumers and influence them to utilise certain information through WOM. The concept of WOM in general is reviewed in the following chapter. Furthermore, the marketing communication process is discussed in light of the eWOM communication model. The various eWOM communication formats and platforms are examined, whereas a decision is taken to focus this work on microblog reviews. Consistent with the focus area of this research, the spotlight is shed on the music and entertainment industry, whereas the drivers and contribution of the sector are discussed.

CHAPTER 2

eWOM COMMUNICATION THROUGH MICROBLOG MUSIC REVIEWS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

WOM communication is prevalent in seeking and passing on product-related information among consumers (Matos & Rossi 2008:578). Consumers interact by engaging in general conversations, which in turn provide a valuable platform for marketers to exchange product and brand-related information with various stakeholders. However, owing to technology advancements, the Internet permeates society by playing a significant role in consumers' lives, advancing dramatic shifts in the way consumers interact and exchange information (Moran & Muzellec 2017:149). In particular, consumers are exposed to vast amounts of information, which is posted online through various platforms, whereas researchers refer to this consumer sharing activity as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication (Cheung *et al*. 2009:9). eWOM communication provides an opportunity for diverse consumers to connect while creating communication networks with the broader global community.

In order to establish a comprehensive understanding on the subject of eWOM communication, it is essential to review the literature on the aspects that will aid in the achievement of the theoretical objectives formulated at the beginning of this study. In view of this, Section 2.2 of this chapter provides a review on how communication is transmitted from one person to another by evaluating the basic communication process. Thereafter, for specificity and relevance to the disciplinary context of this research, section 2.3 deliberates on the marketing communication process whereas Section 2.4 discusses the general occurrence of WOM communication. Section 2.5 introduces the WOM communication model and provides in-depth literature on the various elements that contribute towards the input seeking and output-giving behaviour of consumers across various modes of WOM communication. Drawing from this, the digital environment is explicated in Section 2.6 whereby an overview of eWOM communication is delivered, while Section 2.7 delves into a meticulous comparison between traditional WOM and eWOM communication in view of providing clarity on the differentiating factors between traditional WOM and eWOM communication. Furthermore, a detailed examination of eWOM communication

characteristics is conducted in Section 2.8, which is followed by an evaluation of the existing eWOM communication platforms and formats in sections 2.9 and 2.10, respectively. Section 2.11 spans to deliberate on how music, a unique element of the global entertainment industry is communicated using microblogs. Thereafter, Section 2.12 reviews the global entertainment and music industry in terms of its drivers and contribution as a way of justifying the distinguishing elements of the music industry as the selected domain in this work. Finally, Section 2.13 brings the chapter to a close and also hints at the next theoretical review chapter.

2.2 THE BASIC COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Communication is defined as a process in which individuals share their feelings and thoughts with other individuals through the use of symbols (Samovar, Porter & McDaniel 2009:16). The term was initially derived from the Latin word, *communis*, which means common (Wilcox, Ault, Agee & Cameron 2000:163). Relatedly, Lunenburg (2010:1) states that for communication to occur, information should be transmitted between individuals with a common understanding. This means that in the absence of a common understanding, the information exchange is ultimately rendered ineffective.

According to Schiffman *et al*. (2014:224), the basic communication model consists of five elements, namely the sender, message, channel, receiver and feedback as illustrated in Figure 2.1.

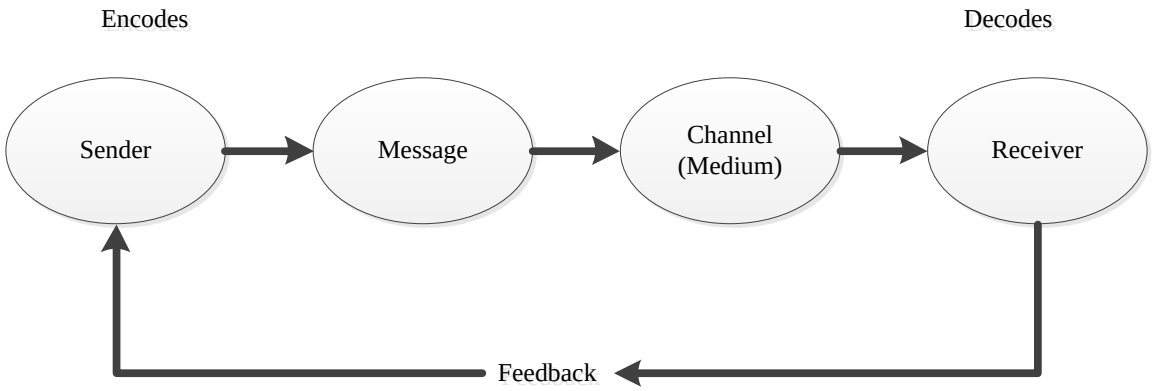


Figure 2.1: The basic communication process

Source: Schiffman *et al.* (2014:224)

2.2.1 Sender

Consistent with the tenets of the basic communication process, the primary goal of communication is to encode the message from the sender or the source to an extent that the receiver's reactions are fairly similar to those of the sender (Badenhorst *et al*. 2003 cited by Bosman 2012:30). In particular, the sender is an individual who has the desire to transfer a concept or an idea to others (Lunenburg 2010:1). Koekemoer (2014:108) alludes that the sender's ability to encode the message successfully depends on their knowledge, feelings, experiences and attitude. Inevitably, the message is encoded through various channels or mediums. According to Bosman (2012:30), the sender is the initiator of the communication, who can be either a formal or informal source. By extension, the marketing point of view intimates that formal communication sources represent either for profit or non-profit organisations, while informal sources refer to individuals whom the message receiver knows in person, such as a friend who freely gives out product information (Schiffman *et al*. 2014:224).

2.2.2 Message

Bosman (2012:30) describes a communication message as the combination of text, images and sounds that are combined in a relevant manner aimed at delivering a certain idea. In essence, the message comprises the verbal and non-verbal unit of communication that is conveyed to various audiences. Wilcox and Cameron (2012:166) emphasise that communication messages should be well-designed, in order to be received by the intended audiences. This might include incorporating appropriate, meaningful, clear and organised content (Balduzzi 2015:31). However, it follows that for a communication message to be understood, it ought to be believable and easy to remember. This has implications for the choice of communication media, since the encoded message can only be directed to a specific target market through a selected channel.

2.2.3 Channel (medium)

For a communication message to reach people in different locations, it must be delivered through a particular medium or channel, which entails the third element in the communication process. Primarily, communication channels can follow either formal or informal routes in terms of how the message travels (Bosman 2012:30). Formal channels of communication comprise the conventional platforms that are supported by organisations in an official capacity, whereas informal channels include unsanctioned mediums that

spread information rapidly such as the grapevine. Secondarily, communication channels can be either interpersonal or impersonal depending on the type of message that is being encoded. Interpersonal channels comprise one-to-one communication such as salespersons, friends and family members communicating product information in a physical location. Impersonal channels reflect one-to-many communication, including advertisements, public relations agencies and spokespersons. The latter may incorporate communication channels through broadcast and/or spoken messages such as radio, television and telephone as well as written messages comprising fax, email, short message service and blogs (Wilcox & Cameron 2012:165). Nevertheless, the choice of a specific communication channel is not immune to the challenge of noise, implying interference and disturbance that can cloud the message flow or even strive against the communication of the message (Koekemoer 2014:110). As such, communicators or marketers should select an appropriate channel of communication wherewithal to send the desired message so that it reaches the target audience of interest.

2.2.4 Receiver

The fourth component in the communication process is the receiver who is defined as "the primary target to whom the communication is directed" (Lunenburg 2010:2). Relatedly, Schiffman *et al.* (2014:224) delimit the message receivers as consumers of various products and services, who receive and decode the message. Albeit some consumers (unintended consumers) also receive communication which is not necessarily directed at them. Notably, it is the successful decoding and message interpretation that leads receivers to have the desire to ultimately act on the message (Koekemoer 2014:110). Nevertheless, upon planning the communication message, it is essential for the sender to remember that receivers' perceptions about the communication are sometimes selective and/or subjective and hence, emphasis should be placed on what is important and makes sense to them.

2.2.5 Feedback

Feedback is an essential component in the communication process because it is the reaction that indicates whether the communication process has successfully achieved its intended goals, or not (Bosman 2012:31). Generally, the receiver's reaction is exhibited through overt or actionable feedback such as observable changes in consumer behaviour and increased purchases while covert behaviour is demonstrable through a change in attitude (Schiffman *et al.* 2014:224). By capturing the receivers' attention, the receiver

acknowledges to the sender that the message was interpreted in the way it was supposed to be interpreted (Koekemoer 2014:111).

2.3 THE MARKETING COMMUNICATION PROCESS

In today's global economy, marketing communication has mutated into a complex and diverse process (Koekemoer 2014:100). The overall goal of communication is to inform, persuade and archive mutual understanding (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2012:252). Similarly, Schiffman *et al*. (2014:224) state that companies engage in marketing communication in order to make consumers aware of the product or service on offer, while also inducing consumers to make purchases and generate commitment towards their brands. The primary marketing communication process involves the use of various forms of content messages designed to enhance customers' impressions of the product or service (Wilcox & Cameron 2012:163). As with the basic communication process discussed in Section 2.2, the marketing communication process also includes the five components of source, message, channel, receiver and feedback.

According to Schiffman *et al.* (2014:224), the marketing communication process commences with either a formal or informal source encoding a marketing message with words, symbols or gestures. In an interpersonal conversation, the sender may be a parent, friend or a sales person. However, in the case of an advertisement or press release, the sender is the company or the organisation that converts the ideas into a message through a process called encoding. Lamb *et al*. (2012:253) describe message-encoding as the process whereby text, images and sound combine in a relevant manner, while being transmitted over appropriate media channels (e.g. newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet). The step that follows prior to the marketing message being received by the target audience is known as decoding. Bruijs *et al*. (1998:544 cited by Bosman 2012:30) highlights that message receivers engage in a process of interpreting, meaning making and forming mental images of the message that is conveyed. As an ultimate test of the communication's effectiveness, the receiver of a communication message reacts or responds to the message. Nonetheless, the challenge lies in identifying the most effective communication context for persuading the target audience with success.

Steinberg (2006:61) pinpoints that organisations are at liberty to fulfil their communication objectives by applying different contextual approaches. In essence, these contexts differ according to the types of communication situations, number of people in the interaction as

well as the degree to which they are able to interact. Notably, the scholar agrees with Schiffman *et al*. (2014:224) who state that communication contexts comprise either impersonal and/or interpersonal communication, also termed channels of marketing communication. As such, a discussion on these two contextual approaches in marketing communication is proffered next.

2.3.1 The impersonal communication context

Impersonal communication is the communication context whereby the communicator is separated from the receivers of the communication in terms of time and spatial differences (Lunenburg 2010:3). In other words, the communication takes place whereas the receivers are in a different time and location from the sender, implying that there is no immediate interaction between them. Moreover, impersonal communication is referred to as mass communication, since communication messages are encoded on a large scale, to numerous individuals simultaneously (Wilcox & Cameron 2012:217). In marketing communication, the sources of impersonal communication include both profit and non-profit organisations that communicate appropriate messages through marketing departments, spokespersons and public relations agencies (Schiffman *et al*. 2014:224). The receivers of such information are usually specific audiences or several audiences that the company is trying to influence, inform or persuade, while it is also possible that some unintended audiences could be receptors of the same marketing message. Nevertheless, owing to the indirect nature of impersonal communication, feedback is often considered very weak and delayed until after analysis is complete (Koekemoer 2014:405). Obviously, the inference is that any feedback from impersonal communication would have to be derived, rather than direct, such as analysing subscription rates, purchases and actual sales volumes.

2.3.2 The interpersonal communication context

Interpersonal communication is defined as the communication process that takes place between two or more individuals in the same locale (Wilcox & Cameron 2012:216). Relatedly, DeFleur, Kearney and Plax (1993:134) emphasise that in the interpersonal context, the communicating parties are required to be near each other, in terms of proximal geographic location. This proffers the advantage of instantaneous feedback (Arndt 2011:6), whereas the effects of the communicated messages can be directly observed through verbal and non-verbal cues. Therefore, it can be inferred that interpersonal communication provides the sender an opportunity to correct the message and plan for remedial action

thereby enhancing an agreeable reception (Mahmud 2014:129). The direct nature of the feedback from interpersonal communication renders this method very valuable, hence personal selling is considered one of the most effective elements of marketing communication (Singh 2014:36).

Schiffman *et al.* (2014:224) suggest that the sources of interpersonal communication can be either formal or informal. Formal communication is characterised by complex and thorough information exchange between parties sanctioned by an organisation (Kandlousi, Ali & Abdollahi 2010:52). This information can either flow vertically from sales personnel in a physical store location trickling down to consumers, or horizontally, between organisational members at the same level. On the hand, informal communication entails a general conversation between familiar parties, whereby unconventional language and figures of speech are used (Nagendra & Manjunath 2008:123). Sources of informal communication comprise communication with peers, usually face-to-face, whereby parties communicate directly and can express their emotional tone (Kandlousi *et al*. 2010:52). In the marketing context, individuals are prone to share opinions and information with their social ties, implying that such informal communication (termed WOM communication) has an important bearing on consumer behaviour. Interestingly, informal communication is perceived to be credible as communication takes place between friends and families whereas the element of trust is very strong (Raisiene & Jonusauskas 2011:258). Therefore, since WOM communication plays a major role in directing the behaviour of consumers, it becomes integral to have a clear understanding of the concept of WOM communication.

The section that follows provides a detailed explanation of WOM communication.

2.4 DEFINING WORD OF MOUTH COMMUNICATION

Research in the area of information dissemination and consumer behaviour began through a process known as WOM communication (Bosman 2012:27). Table 2.1 illustrates the dominant scholarly definitions of WOM communication in the past semi-centennial (between 1967 and 2017).

Table 2.1: Definitions of WOM communication

Author/s	Definition	Citations
Arndt (1967:293)	Oral person-to-person communication that takes place between a sender and a receiver, of which the former is perceived to be a non-commercial entity.	Gelb and Johnson (1995:56); Buttle (1998:242); Chatterjee (2001:129); Breazeale (2009:297)
Webster (1970:186)	Interpersonal communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a product or service.	Nyilasy (2005:3); Herold, Tarkianen and Sundqvist (2016:65)
Holmes and Lett (1977:35)	Product related information transmitted by satisfied customers.	Nyilasy (2005:3); Van Scheers and Prinsloo (2014:338)
Richins (1984:697)	Interpersonal communication among consumers concerning a marketing organisation or product which denigrates the object of communication.	Anderson (1998:6); Silverman (2005:193)
Westbrook (1987:261)	The informal interaction between consumers in regard to the ownership, usage and characteristics of certain goods, services and even their sellers.	Anderson (1998:6)
Bone (1992:579)	An exchange of comments, thoughts and ideas among two or more individuals in which none of the individuals represent a marketing source.	Anderson (1998:6); Kim, Han and Lee (2001:276)
Schiffman *et al.* (2014:225)	The process whereby one party is offering advice or information to another party regarding a certain product or a service.	Kimmel and Kitchen (2014:8); Pace, Balboni and Gistri (2017:138)
Ismagilova *et al.* (2017:7)	Oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator (whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial) concerning a brand, product, service or organisation	Not available

Source: Author's compilation (2018)

The original definition cited in the Oxford dictionary (1533) refers to WOM communication as "oral communication or written and other forms of expression". While this definition proves to be too simplistic for adoption in scholarly writings, it is useful as a starting point in understanding that WOM communication enables individuals to express themselves through various forms of communication. In particular, the definitions depicted in Table 2.1 enable the extrapolation of five assumptions. First, WOM communication is a type of oral communication, denoting that it occurs in a face-to-face environment. In addition, Stern (1994:7) alludes that WOM communication is an ephemeral exchange of communication, implying that the discussions about consumption experiences are short-lived and terminated as soon as the face-to-face interaction is over. Moreover, the

conversations about products and services are conducted in a natural and real-life setting, without *a priori* planning. Secondly, the definitions infer that WOM communication is informal. This means it involves two or more persons, either friends, peers or friends who are familiar with each other outside institutionalised structures (Patti & Chen 2009:360). Thirdly, WOM communication involves the transfer of information. This indicates that as the communication is ongoing, information sharing between parties automatically occurs since the aim is to inform, teach and give advice about certain products (Kimmel and Kitchen 2014:6). Fourthly, as elaborated in the contextualisation by Arndt 1967 (cited by Breazeale 2009:297), WOM communication is non-commercial, implying that it is independent of any influence from commercial organisations. By extension, Buttle (1998:243) delimits WOM communication as 'free advertising'. Finally, the definitions by Westbrook (1987:261) and Schiffman *et al*. (2014:225) both allude to the instrumental role of WOM communication in shaping consumers' attitudes and behaviour.

Owing to the flexibility of WOM communication, it is possible to enhance trust and credibility of information, thereby impacting on purchase decisions and other consumer behaviour elements (Meuter, McCabe & Curran 2013:242). Patti and Chen (2009:360) contend that WOM communication is influential since it is obtained cost-effectively and/or freely from known persons. This implies that WOM communication could be considered credible based on a duality of elements. Primarily, WOM communication lends its credibility status to its origin from known or familiar sources. At the secondary level, WOM communication can be regarded as credible owing to the absence of a commercial motive during transfer. In agreement, Wang, Uesugi, Ting, Okuhara and Wang (2015:426) confirm that WOM communication possesses persuasive abilities, especially as it originates from experienced consumers. Furthermore, WOM communication is persuasive as it involves face-to-face communication between friends and family (Kumar 2007:333). Summative, WOM communication is perceived to be credible because it is proffered based on actual consumption experiences, without the company's direct sanctioning. The various forms of WOM communication are elaborated on next.

2.4.1 Forms of WOM communication

Unlike other forms of communication, WOM communication is very powerful and it greatly influences consumers' decisions. Herold *et al*. (2016:64) concedes that WOM communication is the most powerful source of communication. For instance, some

companies motivate certain individuals to spread positive messages about the company or certain products in return for something afterwards, while some consumers are internally motivated to have regular conversations about certain products or brands. According to the delineations by Bosman (2012:28), WOM communication can be separated into two distinct constituents, namely institutional WOM and everyday WOM communication. In particular, both institutional and everyday WOM communication are useful as they impact the image of the company, brand or product and also influence the final decision of the customer (Meuter *et al*. 2013:241). Therefore, it is important for a company to ensure that they control news that is being spread about the company's brands or products.

2.4.1.1 Institutional WOM communication

Institutional WOM communication transpires when consumers are motivated by a financial incentive to endorse a particular product or service to their friends, family or peers (Bosman 2012:28). According to Buttle (1998:243), some companies enlist the services of product endorsers who spread various marketing communication messages by way of WOM communication. This is usually done in return for either a monetary or a non-monetary incentive such as points and rewards (Herold *et al*. 2016:65). In this regard, utilitarian-driven consumers who receive direct benefits from WOM information giving are responsible for spreading WOM communication (Kim & Ulgado 2014:225).

Groeger and Buttle (2016:369) submit that institutional WOM communication consists of the ordinary conversations among consumers, albeit in a modified format as they are influenced by a desire to push company sales or profits. Rossiter (2008:113) also states that agencies or consumers who are paid to spread WOM communication are encouraged to make the marketing campaign a major theme in daily communication. Nonetheless, owing to the profit-objective, the credibility of institutional WOM communication is very limited since individuals that are appointed to spread this form of WOM communication are actually paid. In addition, Carl (2008:626) upholds that while institutional WOM communication has a significant influence on consumption behaviour, other non-paid consumers also exert an influence on the purchase behaviour of consumers. This is because while consumers might be exposed to a product advertisement and additional information from paid agencies, they are active consumers in that they also make proper research about a product prior to making a purchase decision.

2.4.1.2 Everyday WOM communication

Everyday WOM communication is described as the natural and unplanned exchange and communication of information between two or more individuals regarding a certain product or service that they have experienced as either pleasing or unsatisfactory (Bosman 2012:28). Largely, the consumption experience is what usually drives consumers to engage in everyday WOM communication. According to Schiffman *et al*. (2014:226), information regarding certain products and services is transferred from one person (sender) to the other (receiver) with an aim to suggest the best product or service on offer. Generally, consumers engage in communication with others for various reasons, including information acquisition, persuasion and impression management (Herold *et al*. 2016:66). During this process, individuals are able to share and transfer product knowledge freely.

Everyday WOM communication incorporates regular dialogue between individuals who know and trust each other (Groeger & Buttle 2016:369). In everyday communication, participants share their personal thoughts about a product or brand freely and on a voluntary basis (Rossiter 2008:113). In this instance, everyday WOM communication is more persuasive and influential on what consumers are buying since the facts on how well the product performs are stated by experienced persons (Carl 2008:606). Moreover, everyday WOM communication is perceived to be credible since it is proffered by familiar individuals.

2.4.2 Characteristics of WOM communication

Compared to other sources of communication, WOM communication is different in many aspects (Patti & Chen 2009:359). In particular, Buttle (1998:243-245) alludes to five characteristics that distinguish WOM communication from other forms of communication, namely valence, focus, timing, solicitation and intervention. These characteristics are discussed next.

2.4.2.1 Valence

The valence of WOM communication is described as the evaluative direction of WOM, of which it can either be positive or negative (Moon, Costello & Koo 2017:252). According to Zhang, Zhang and Law (2014:166), positive valence occurs when customers spread positive news about the company and its offerings to other prospects customers. This can be in the form of positive testimonials, reviews, recommendations and endorsements.

Contrastingly, negative valence refers to the precarious information distributed from one person to another, intended at slandering the product, service or company by highlighting customers' complaints about the product or their feelings of dissatisfaction, which ultimately harms the company's image (Dalzotto, Basso, Costa & Bassegio 2016:419). In response, management can attempt to influence the direction of negative valence through service recovery programmes and an effective complaint management system (Buttle 1998:244).

2.4.2.2 Focus

While bad news travels faster than good news (Kim & Ulgado 2014:224), it behoves the researcher to state that customers are the most significant influencers of WOM communication. According to Buttle (1998:244), the clear focus of WOM communication is that of a satisfied customer communicating with a prospect. In other words, WOM communication purports to draw customers onto the loyalty ladder, thereby converting prospects into real customers (Herold *et al*. 2016:65). Nevertheless, whilst it is conceivable that some WOM communication functions to migrate a customer up a company's loyalty ladder, other WOM communication may equally promote defection, away from the loyalty ladder.

2.4.2.3 Timing

Most consumers adopt WOM communication as an information-seeking tool in order to eliminate the risk of purchasing wrong products and services. In this vein, WOM communication timing can be delivered either before the purchase of a certain product or after a purchase. As stated by Buttle (1998:244), input WOM communication operates as an important source of pre-purchase information while customers provide output WOM communication after a purchase or consumption experience. In this regard, WOM communication provides solutions to consumers concerning information-gathering problems. It influences consumers' service expectations (Patti & Chen 2009:360). WOM communication serves to affirm product performance as well as satisfaction experiences after the actual purchase (Pace *et al*. 2017:139).

2.4.2.4 Solicitation

Ismagilova *et al*. (2017:7) infer that customers are not the only initiators of WOM communication. As a result, WOM communication can either be solicited or unsolicited

(Buttle 1998:245). Solicited WOM communication refers to communication that is offered to customers who have requested for product advice, whereas unsolicited WOM communication is offered to consumers even though it is not asked for. In solicitation, consumers tend to look for information from opinion leaders and influencers prior to making purchase decisions especially in the case of high-involvement products (Fang 2014:67). Therefore, consumers have a choice to either make decisions based on what they have heard through normal conversations or find additional information from alternative sources.

2.4.2.5 Intervention

A large number of organisations are taking responsibility to pro-actively intervene and manage WOM communication activities (Buttle 1998:245). Companies may intervene either at the individual level or at the organisational level (Bosman 2012:28). At the individual level, companies take a proactive stance of offering incentives to consumers, either monetary or non-monetary. Organisational interventions might include the formal appointment of individuals responsible for creating and distributing impressive WOM communication to be transferred to the public (Pace *et al*. 2017:136). Nonetheless, the manner in which WOM communication is spread and the degree of its usefulness in product selection remains questionable. As such, the following section examines the different types of referrals used in WOM communication.

2.4.2.6 Taxonomy of WOM communication referrals

Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012:14) consider WOM communication to be an exceptionally powerful referral tool as it has a strong influence on consumers' decision-making processes. In particular, consumers engage in WOM communication for different motives, including among others, to share opinions with others as well as to vent frustrations about bad product experiences (Kim & Ulgado 2014:224). In lieu of this, Payne (1991:6) cited by Buttle (1998:245) introduced two referral types, namely customer referrals and non-customer referrals.

Customer-initiated WOM communication referrals can also be referred to as generic WOM communication or user generated content (UGC) as they are generated and implemented by customers, themselves (Ding, Eliashberg & Stremersch 2014:45). According to (Buttle 1998:245), customer referrals can be either customer initiated or company initiated. Customer initiated referrals originate from both current and former customers who while

acting as unpaid advocates, proceed to share information with others pertaining to products they have actually used and/or how they have found the consumption experience (Kim & Ulgado 2014:224). In this case, natural WOM communication occurs between customers as they share their experience and express their gratitude and satisfaction (or lack thereof) with the actual product performance. As such, customers will refer other prospective customers to use that particular product or service. Conversely, company initiated referrals take place as companies are attempting to increase the power of WOM communication by offering incentives to customers in return for referring their families and friends to the company (Bosman 2012:28). Nevertheless, while the level of control and intervention on customer-initiated referrals is limited, marketing organisations tend to benefit equally from both types of referrals.

Most companies encourage their internal stakeholders to undertake referral-generation behaviour that is termed non-customer referrals (Dobele & Lindgreen 2011:276). This can comprise stakeholder sources such as networks, multipliers, third-party and consulting agencies (Rahman, Karpen, Reid & Yuksel 2015:288). These stakeholders can create and also encourage professionalism by establishing interpersonal bonds with both staff members and consumers. This is commonplace, for example, in the artistry professional services marketing, whereby production houses, music stables and branding strategists develop a referral network. While these parties might have not used some of the music products and services offered by the referring company, they are encouraged by their referral networks to endorse what is on offer.

While the forms, characteristics and type of referrals used in WOM communication have been extensively alluded to in this section, it is imperative to provide a systematic explanation of exactly how the process operates. In lieu of this, Buttle (1998:246) advocates for an inclusive model that comprises different sets of variables associated with how WOM communication is generated. The WOM communication model is explained in the following section.

2.5 THE WOM COMMUNICATION MODEL

Figure 2.2 illustrates the WOM communication model presented by Buttle (1998:246).

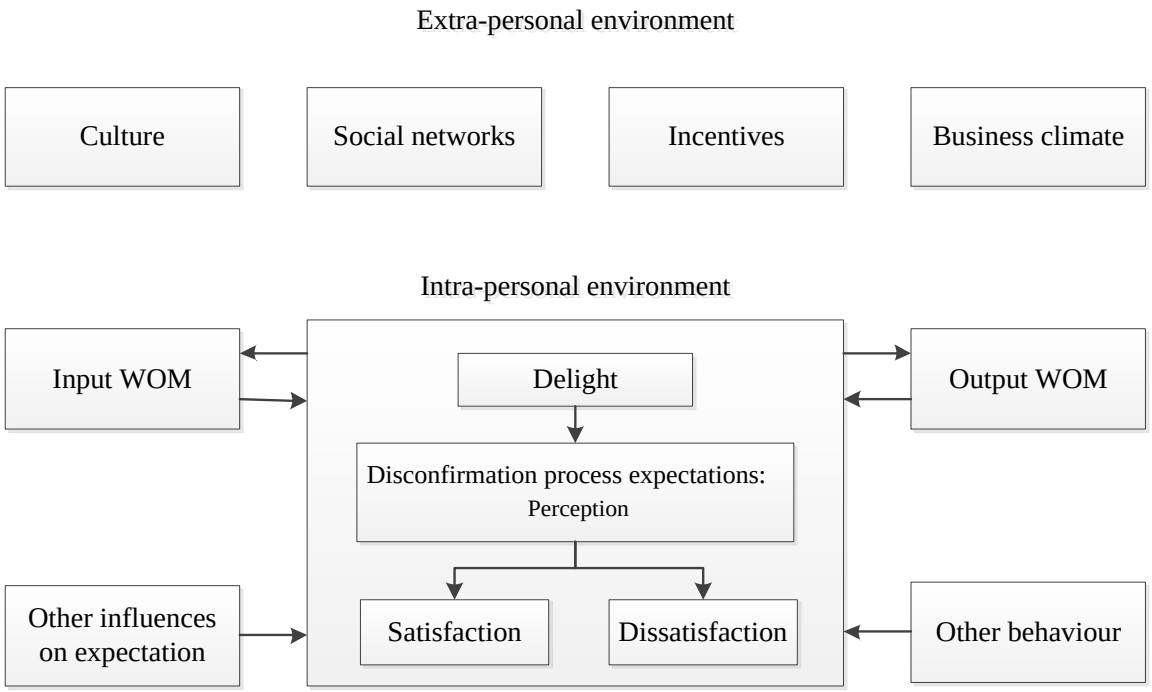


Figure 2.2: The WOM communication Model

Source: Buttle (1998:246)

While the WOM communication Model extends the dual process of seeking and receiving communication, it also alludes to the various factors and influential variables that affect consumers during the stages of WOM information seeking and information giving. The elements of the WOM communication model are discussed next.

2.5.1 Input WOM

Patti and Chen (2009:359) posit that consumers make considerable attempts to eliminate the risk associated with new product purchases by seeking out product information. In fact, Sweeney, Soutar and Mazzarol (2008:349) believe that perceived risk is the main reason that drives consumers to opt for pre-purchase trials of products and services. Examples of perceived risk include financial, performance, psychological and time loss risk (Schiffman *et al*. 2014:243). As such, references from WOM communicators can be useful as a risk reduction strategy that minimises discomfort and any feelings of risk exposure in different purchase scenarios. In this case, consumers put their safety first before making a final purchase, especially where they have to pay a price (Kimmel & Kitchen 2014:9). Therefore, consumers initiate input WOM communication when they actively look out for product information (seeking information). Similarly, input WOM emanates from market

influentials who pro-actively give out product advice (give information) to consumers freely. In this regard, Buttle (1998:245) views input WOM communication as a characteristic phenomenon that manifests prior to making a final product decision.

Buttle (1998:248) asserts that product information first flows to influential individuals in the marketplace, termed opinion leaders. These consumers spread the message through testimonies and referrals thereby influencing the receivers' attitude and behaviour. Therefore, input WOM communication evokes a dual paradox for consumers. First, the implications for source trustworthiness are significant in WOM communication because consumers find the recommendations from familiar sources such as family, friends and colleagues to be credible when compared to solicited marketers' messages (Sormunen 2009:18). This is because the product advice is given freely with no profit-motive, which is the case with communication from marketers who often have the sole intention to sell products or services to consumers. Secondly, Sweeney *et al.* (2008:347) emphasise the importance of source expertise, another factor that influences the credibility of the communicator in the WOM communication process. In this vein, Bansal and Voyer (2000:169-170) found that information seekers do not necessarily obtain information from key influencers or opinion leaders only, but also from individuals perceived to be knowledgeable in the required product or service category they are enquiring about.

2.5.2 Output WOM

Generally, consumers have an inert desire to share and exchange opinions and knowledge that others will comprehend and find relevant in future consumption encounters (Arumugam & Omar 2015:1865). According to Buttle (1998:246), the process whereby consumers give WOM information about their post-purchase experiences is termed output WOM communication. Stich, Golla and Nanopoulos (2014:203) uphold that output WOM communication has its origins from experienced consumers, whereas dissatisfied consumers may cause a substantial deviation from the intended product positioning and yield inappropriate reactions from customers against the product.

Keller (2007:449) found that nearly half of the receivers of WOM communication are likely to share product advice, whereas consumers also spread knowledge about the experiences of others, not only their own. Nevertheless, perceptions about products or services before a purchase will determine the level of sentiment consumers express after that purchase. Specifically, positive perceptions drive an increased likelihood of disseminating positive

WOM communication (Buttle 1998:247). Relatedly, Barreda, Bilgihan and Kageyama (2015:22) submit that customer satisfaction, joy and delight about a product or service experience positively influences WOM communication. Stich *et al.* (2014:203) contend that negative WOM communication arises when consumers experience product and service quality that is inferior to that initially perceived (Sormunen 2009:36-37). In this regard, consumers reduce tension arising from cognitive dissonance in this imbalanced situation by sharing negative WOM communication, termed negative output WOM.

2.5.3 Variables influencing WOM communication

Consumers are motivated by various reasons to engage in WOM communication (Herold *et al.* 2016:65), including the sharing of product experiences and seeking for more information about products and services. In the study of marketing communication, it is important to have a clear understanding of the specific triggers that influence consumers' WOM seeking and giving behaviour. Therefore, drawing from Buttle's (1998:249) extrapolation, the following section elaborates on some variables in the extra personal and intrapersonal environment as the underlying factors that influence consumers' inclinations towards seeking and spreading WOM communication.

2.5.3.1 Variables in the extrapersonal environment

While considering the consumer as an inter-dependent entity that operates within a broad, social environment, Buttle (1998:249) conceptualised a set of extra personal variables, which are described as the contextual conditions that influence WOM communication. While these external variables are beyond the control of marketing organisations, they are deemed sacrosanct towards directing consumers' inclinations to both seek and give out WOM communication.

- **National culture (collectivist versus individualist)**

The prevailing culture in a given society has a significant influence on consumers' affinity to seek input WOM communication. According to Buttle (1998:249), in a collectivist culture negative WOM communication and complaining behaviour about a personally unsatisfactory experience are not uttered if the collective view towards the product or service is favourable. Put simply, collectivistic cultures as is the case in South Africa, among other African cultures, tend to encourage consumers to develop strong emotional ties to products and services relative to the majority view. The individualistic culture that

is predominant in a majority of the Western countries upholds that the consumer's view and decision about products and services is self-contained and autonomously determined by the consumer with limited societal influence, if any.

- **Social networks**

WOM communication has proven to be one of the most important inputs in the decision-making process of consumers (Bosman 2012:32). This is because prior to making final decisions, consumers tend to seek additional information from their friends, peers and family rather than sponsored promotional services (Herold *et al*. 2016:65). Such input WOM communication received from social networks tends to have a significant influence than the information which is provided by paid promoters who have a profiteering objective. Relatedly, Moon *et al*. (2017:252) posit that consumers objectively share their experiences with other consumers in their immediate circle, be they positive or negative consumption experiences. Therefore, it is through such WOM communication that marketers are able to inculcate a desirable attitude in the receiving consumers' minds, thereby shaping consumers' perceptions about a product or service. In this regard, social networks play a significant role in both WOM giving and seeking as consumers tend to rely much on this form of communication for both information gathering and decision-making purposes.

- **Incentives**

Similar to institutional WOM communication, Herold *et al*. (2016:65) submit that some companies remunerate certain consumers in return for endorsing their products and services in an official capacity. In this regard, some consumers are driven by a financial motive when they are more likely to utter a favourable view about the company's products when disseminating product information to other consumers.

- **Business climate**

The prevailing business climate presents a significant influence on how consumers disseminate WOM communication. First, in accordance with Buttle (1998:250), the voice and exit behaviour of consumers vary negatively with the level of concentration in an industry. For instance, where many players exist in an industry, a customer is limited in terms of the available complaining options. In this regard, the cost of expressing dissatisfaction increases, therefore output WOM communication declines whereas the

likelihood of not buying in the future increases. Stich *et al*. (2014:204) mention that when organisations give consumers a chance to express their ideas and opinions in terms of complaints and suggestions, the likelihood that the customers will spread positive WOM communication to others increases as they become confident that the organisation is interested in keeping them happy.

Secondly, supplier receptivity influences the spread of WOM communication among consumers. This is because if suppliers take evident remedial actions to rectify their mistakes in an active service recovery programme, consumers might utter positive WOM communication. Conversely, if suppliers are indifferent in terms of their response after a service failure occurrence, consumers are likely to spread negative WOM communication about the supplier to other consumers, while the probability of switching behaviour increases (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh & Best 2007:623). In the latter scenario, if consumers are dissatisfied with the supplier's response, they utilise different channels to voice their complaints (Wells & Foxall 2012:173). Subsequently, the manner in which suppliers react to customer complaints could determine the nature of WOM communication messages that are communicated.

Thirdly, price is the other business-related element influencing both positive and negative WOM communication. For example, Zhang, Yang, Yang, Tang and Wu (2017:1) uphold that consumers are more willing to purchase and recommend products to others if they are sold at a high price as that is an indirect indicator of product quality, while products that are sold at discounted prices generally trigger conversational power among bargain hunters. In lieu of this, the type of product and the level of risk associated with it have a significant influence on consumers' affinity to either seek or spread WOM communication. For example, high involvement products tend to be more risky as they require extensive amounts of money to be expended on them. In this regard, consumers rely on what other consumers are saying about those products or services to minimise cognitive dissonance during pre-purchase evaluation (Buttle 1998:250). Relatedly, Huang, Chou and Lan (2007:301) state that consumers tend to seek more input WOM communication when consuming services rather than tangible goods. The rationale behind this behaviour is that services are difficult to evaluate, owing to their intangible nature. Therefore, output WOM communication is useful as it aids consumers to make accurate purchase decisions.

Finally, the repetition of product advertisements in the media has a considerable influence on input WOM communication. This is because consumer awareness of various products and services tends to increase owing to repetitive exposure (Donnellan 2016:2). Therefore, consumers will pursue product information that is topical in the media. Likewise, marketers can make deliberate efforts to deliver ambiguous product advertisements, thereby confusing consumers. The ambiguity can spark high conversation value among consumers regarding the advertisement as well as the products or brands in question. Put simply, vague advertisements could be a deliberate marketing effort aimed at generating consistent sentiments about a company's products or brands.

2.5.3.2 Variables in the intrapersonal environment

Intrapersonal variables are states or inert processes associated with either seeking input WOM or precipitating output WOM communication. The following intrapersonal factors are instrumental towards driving the WOM information seeking behaviour of consumers:

- **Prior experience with a product**

Generally, the process of spreading output WOM communication commences with the performance of a product. When a product performs very well, it is likely that consumers' expectations will be met. All other things being equal, consumers will utter positive WOM if a product performs as expected (Herold *et al*. 2016:68). As a result, consumers with prior product experience with products are likely to refer non-users to try out the same products through WOM recommendations, which are considered credible.

- **Customer delight, satisfaction and dissatisfaction**

When consumers purchase products or services, they have the belief that it will meet their expectations. Usually consumer expectations are formed as a result of learning, which occurs after consumers have gathered relevant information about the product through WOM communication. It is through such learning processes that consumers are able to make an evaluation of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction, based on the cognitive process in which consumers weigh their initial expectations against the overall product performance (Moon *et al*. 2017:253). Research conducted by Anderson (1998:5) indicates that the satisfaction-dissatisfaction frequencies form a U-shaped curve, which suggests that consumers actively participate in sending either positive or negative sentiments through

output WOM communication when they are either highly satisfied or highly dissatisfied, respectively (Sormunen 2009:18).

According to Herold *et al*. (2016:65), a product may perform beyond the expectation of consumers, whereby customer delight occurs. In this vein, both satisfied and delighted customers spread positive WOM communication (Buttle 1998:250). Satisfied customers recommend and motivate other consumers to use similar products and services in future encounters. Conversely, customer dissatisfaction arises when the performance of a product falls short of customer expectations (Schiffman *et al.* 2014:250). As a result, customer dissatisfaction may result from either unsuccessful shopping experiences or product failure that eventually triggers negative emotions such as frustrations, anger and irritation. In this case, customers are likely to spread negative WOM communication (Stich *et al*. 2014:204). The unhappy consumers will want others to know how they feel after the product has failed to meet their expectation. Kim and Ulgado (2014:224) attest that negative WOM communication spreads faster than positive WOM communication since the venting of frustration and anger by customers is easily believable, thereby impacting negatively on the company.

When consumers have little or no knowledge about the product, they tend to seek more input WOM communication before making a final decision. Buttle (1998:242) substantiates that WOM communication represents the primary source of product knowledge and consumer buying behaviour. Therefore, consumers engage in WOM communication to seek more product information and find out what others are saying about the advertised product or service. As a first port of call, consumers refer to other consumers whom they consider knowledgeable about market trends. In this case, Patti and Chen (2009:358) advocate that WOM communication presents itself as a credible and cost-effective medium to acquire product insights from other consumers within a short period of time. Specifically, information moves from opinion leaders who give out the largest amounts of output WOM communication in the marketplace (Herold *et al*. 2016:68). Kimmel and Kitchen (2014:6) infer that opinion leaders normally pass on the information to other consumers in order to aid in making accurate purchase decisions. Relatedly, market mavens are another influential genre of consumers who voluntarily give output WOM communication before anyone else in the market (Meuter *et al*. 2013:242).

While the WOM communication model enables researchers and practitioners alike to understand the underlying drivers of consumer behaviour in seeking and spreading WOM communication, the evolution of the digital era has augmented the communication process through the rise of eWOM communication, wherein consumers are able to share and gather product information through Internet-enabled means. As a primer to the context of this research, the ensuing section provides an overview of eWOM communication.

2.6 OVERVIEW OF eWOM COMMUNICATION

The advancement of information and communication technology has enabled consumers to communicate with each other through mobile technology, smartphones and wireless computers, which allow consumers to easily access information across ubiquitous locations. Figure 2.3 depicts the flow of offline and online WOM communication as suggested by Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012:16).

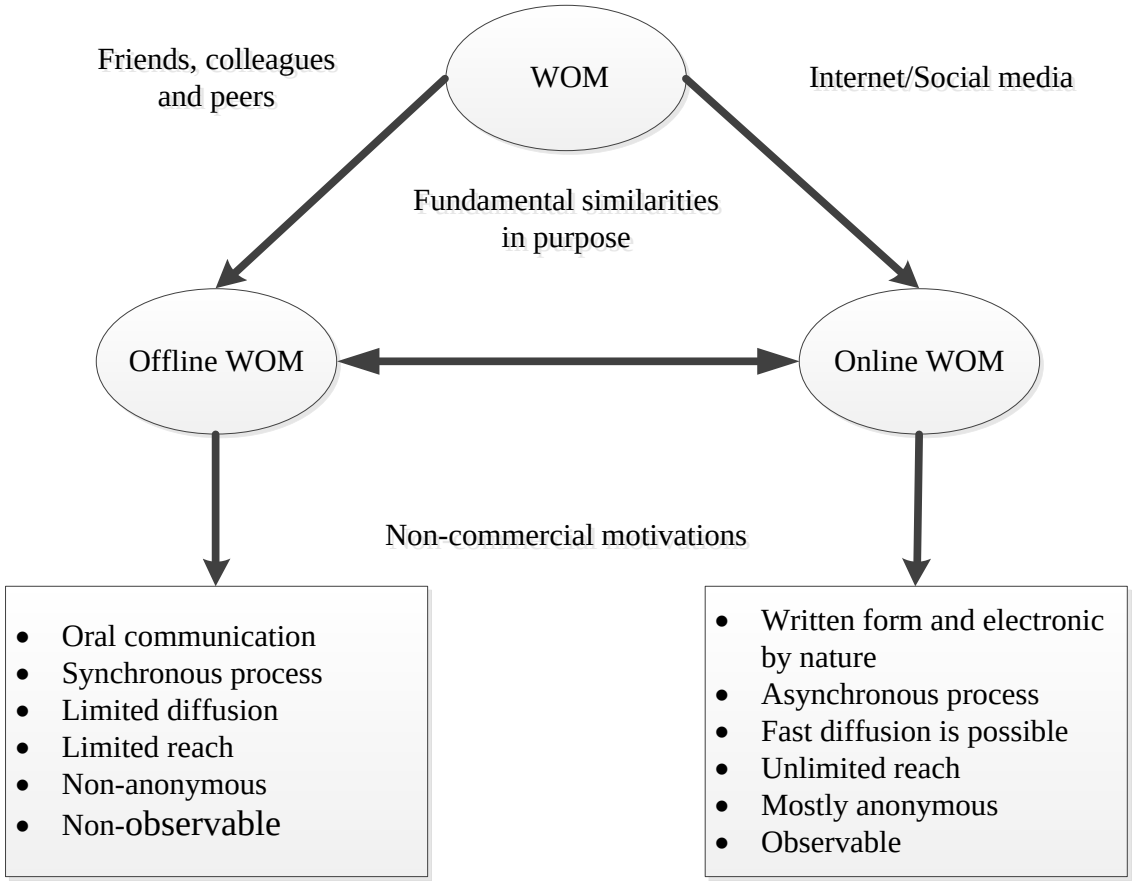


Figure 2.3: The WOM communication flow

Source: Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012:16)

Figure 2.3 shows that consumers can provide and receive communication through either offline WOM or online WOM communication. According to Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012:16), the overarching motive for spreading either offline (hereinafter referred to as traditional WOM) or online WOM (hereinafter referred to as eWOM) is an altruistic desire to help others, which is purely non-commercial by nature. Nevertheless, traditional WOM communication is provided by familiar sources comprising the immediate cohort of friends, family members, peers and colleagues. In this instance, the mode of communication occurs in oral form, of which the participants should be able to speak face-to-face and verbally. This implies that the speed and scope of traditional WOM communication about new products and services is limited because communication takes place between consumers who are in the same physical environment.

eWOM communication is a form of consumer-generated WOM communication arising from a large number of unknown participants of which they share their inhibitions, experiences and motivations (Cheung *et al*. 2009:11). Pham (2016:1873) defines eWOM communication as "any positive or negative feedback from consumers regarding various issues through electronic devices". Relatedly, Hu (2015:16) defines eWOM communication as "any form of computer-mediated-communication (CMC), delivered by different online media with varied emphasis". According to Arumugam and Omar (2015:1865), eWOM communication is important since it allows consumers to socially interact with one another while sharing knowledge and advice about various topics using CMC. This form of communication is unique because it is delivered by participants across different physical locations and time zones, pointing to its asynchronous nature. In other words, communication about products can reach a large volume of consumers in a short time frame, which ensures fast diffusion. Nonetheless, eWOM communication is derived from both familiar and unfamiliar sources, alluding to its anonymous nature as consumers might not always know the provider of communication. In view of this, Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Glemer (2004:39) defined eWOM communication as "statements made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet".

eWOM communication is transmitted using written formats since it is made available online, of which it is accessible by a large number of consumers. In addition, Daugherty and Hoffman (2014:84) put forward that eWOM communication permits consumers to have access to vast amounts of information at a lower cost and easily. As consumers are

exposed to eWOM communication, they spend limited amounts of money in the information search process. Owing to its ability to reach masses of consumers within a short period of time, the marketer's message is easily exposed and reaches different people in different places, thereby creating awareness for the company and its products. Furthermore, the communication network in eWOM terms is broad, since eWOM communication is accessible using a plethora of methods when compared to traditional WOM communication (Jalilvand 2011:44). The most popular formats for transmitting eWOM communication are discussed in in Section 2.10 of this dissertation.

In this study, an operational definition of eWOM communication is posited as "the informal and non-commercial form of WOM communication where experienced consumers disseminate reviews about music content, releases, lyrics, videos and other advice with a large body of consumers and institutions using microblogs". Also termed word of mouse by Jamil and Hasnu (2013:172), eWOM communication is studied in this research in the context of microblog music reviews.

2.7 TRADITIONAL WOM VERSUS eWOM COMMUNICATION

Chu (2009:17) enumerated the key similarities and differences between traditional WOM and eWOM communication as shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Similarities and differences between traditional WOM and eWOM

Offline WOM		**eWOM**
Similarities		
• Forms of interpersonal communication • Influence decision making • Bi-directional in nature • Interactive		
Differences		
	Offline WOM	eWOM
Mode	Spoken (person-to-person) Identified sources Consumers have little control	Numerous online platforms Both identified and unidentified sources Consumers have high control
Scope	Geographic and time limitations One-to-one type of communication	Without geographic and time limitations One-to-many type of communication
Speed	Slow Limited in scale	Fast Can reach large masses

Source: Chu (2009:17)

While Blennsjo (2014:14) narrowly labels eWOM communication as "an extension of traditional WOM communication made available on the Internet". Chu (2009:17) contends that the two forms of WOM communication have distinguishing attributes. Nevertheless, eWOM communication shares the elemental similarities of purpose with traditional WOM communication (Steffes & Burgee 2009:43). In other words, while both traditional WOM and eWOM occur in isolation, under varied conditions they should be studied as complementary entities since they share common attributes, yet still differing in some ways.

2.7.1 Similarities between traditional WOM and eWOM communication

Chu (2009:17) states that traditional WOM and eWOM communication are similar on three accounts, namely interpersonal communication, influential power, as well as the inherent direction of communication. These similarities are elaborated on next.

2.7.1.1 Interpersonal communication

The main distinguishing factor between mass media and WOM communication is the level of interaction between the communicators. For example, in interpersonal communication, communicating parties should interact from the same location as well as close to each other in order for them to be able to share information (Wilcox & Cameron 2012:216). Furthermore, Dominick (2009:8) highlights that interpersonal communication usually takes place without the aid of mechanical devices. Therefore, the priority emphasis in both traditional and eWOM communication scenarios is to share product information and experiences with other consumers (Schiffman *et al*. 2014:224).

2.7.1.2 Influence decision making

Both traditional WOM and eWOM communication have the ability to influence consumers' decision-making processes. A study by Shamhuyenhanzva (2014:74) validated that both traditional WOM and eWOM communication have an influence on consumer attitude towards certain brands and product involvement. In the same vein, Herold *et al*. (2016:65) indicated that consumers rely on traditional WOM communication when they have to make buying decisions. This is because traditional WOM is perceived to be a trustworthy source of information in that it helps to reduce risk perceptions and further simplify any complexities in the anticipated consumption experience. Moreover, a study by Pham (2016:1873) asserts that consumers engage in eWOM communication in order to find

product information easily and quickly, thereby aiding decision making. In this regard, both traditional and eWOM communication serve to enhance consumer confidence when making purchase decisions.

2.7.1.3 Bi-directional

Generally, WOM communication (albeit traditional WOM and/or eWOM communication) is a two-way process which enables consumers to actively engage with one another (Meuter *et al*. 2013:240). The bi-directional notion alludes to the input seeking and giving behaviour of consumers. This implies that WOM communicators are both information providers in as much as they are information seekers, culminating in a symbiotic relationship among the participants. Moreover, the bi-directional nature of WOM communication infers interpersonal communication influence that is garnered from the personalised and social relational interactions among participants.

2.7.1.4 Interactive

While consumers are expected to be close to each other for communication to take place in traditional WOM communication (Ismagilova *et al*. 2017:7), they might not necessarily be familiar with each other in the eWOM communication arena. Nonetheless, the same level of interaction and collaboration exists whether the WOM communication occurs in traditional or electronic platforms (Shamhuyenhanzva 2014:74). Both traditional WOM and eWOM communication have made it possible for consumers to share ideas, opinions, suggestions and experiences that they might have regarding certain products and/or services in an interactive manner.

2.7.2 Differences between traditional WOM and eWOM communication

The differences between traditional WOM and eWOM communication exist along the mode, scope and speed frames of reference.

2.7.2.1 Mode

Mode refers to the manner in which WOM communication is presented (Dewatripont & Tirole 2005:1218). In traditional WOM communication, consumers engage in face-to-face interactions, enabling them to judge the sender's credibility as they engage with them in an oral, yet personal capacity (Blennsjo 2014:14). In this way, consumers receive WOM communication that is spoken by their peers, friends or family (Patti & Chen 2009:360).

Nonetheless, traditional WOM communication can be easily manipulated and diluted as it progresses between members of a communicating network owing to its fleeting and verbal nature (Shamhuyenhanzva 2014:75). Generally, eWOM communication is presented in a written format comprising text, graphics, audio and video, which can be accessed and retrieved easily (Berg, Arentze & Timmermans 2012:990). Mishra and Satish (2016:223) further posit that the flexibility of eWOM communication technology enables consumers to express varied content using rich multimedia resources, rather than text only. Interestingly, the uniqueness of the music product category infers that the content can be communicated online using various graphics including text, animations, audio and music videos (Leurdijk *et al*. 2012:38).

2.7.2.2 Scope

The concept of message scope refers to the sphere of influence of WOM communication (Blennsjo 2014:14). In this vein, the scope of WOM communication embraces three elements comprising the number of participants, time difference during communication, and geographic location. In this regard, traditional WOM communication occurs between two individuals in one-to-one communication, thereby inferring a personalised form of communication (Herold *et al*. 2016:65). This scenario presents three challenges in terms of restricting the scope of traditional WOM communication. First, when consumers search for information they are limited to a few sources with whom they are able to speak to in person and also in the same time zone (Cheung & Thadani 2010:329). Secondly, the information sources should be in a similar proximal distance with the WOM communication receivers in terms of language, time and location (Kandlousi *et al*. 2010:52). Thirdly, for traditional WOM communication to occur, there must be common understanding between the communicators who must also be within the same geographic location at the same time. Therefore, in the traditional WOM communication scenario, communication ends when the participants move away from each other.

The scope limitations of traditional WOM are overcome along digital platforms. This is because it is possible to reach a vast number of consumers in different locations using eWOM communication (Shamhuyenhanzva 2014:75). According to Rennison (2011:14), the Internet and other digital platforms have increased the ability of consumers to reach a large number of people concurrently, thereby changing the dynamics of one-to-one communication to that of one-to-many communication. In the same vein, eWOM

communication has virtually unlimited reach, hence it is referred to as a type of 'one-to-world' communication (Steffes & Burgee 2009:43). Accordingly, Luo *et al*. (2013:93) add that eWOM communication expands the communication network by allowing a large number of information givers and audiences to participate at the same time. eWOM communication operates irrespective of the spatial and time differences among the participants. This implies that consumers that engage in eWOM communication are able to preserve existing contact with others, across varied geographic contexts (Moran & Muzellec 2017:153). Notably, due to the separation of both space and time between the senders and receivers of information, eWOM communication is viewed as an asynchronous process (Guerrero 2012:35; Danver 2016:328).

2.7.2.3 Speed

Speed refers to the amount of time that it takes for WOM communication to reach the intended audience (Fox & Longart 2016:213). Traditional WOM communication takes place offline through face-to-face interactions, thereby lending credence to its sluggish flow of communication messages. Moreover, in traditional WOM communication, consumers are only able to share product information with other consumers with whom they are connected, including friends, acquaintances and family (Shamhuyenhanzva 2014:75). As a result, unfamiliar consumers are excluded from accessing traditional WOM communication, in so doing hampering the speed and rapidity with which the information is spread. Conversely, eWOM communication occurs among individuals who are dispersed geographically (Fanoberova & Kuczkowska 2016:31).

Compared to traditional WOM communication, information shared through online media spreads at a high speed since it occurs in real-time (Menkveld 2013:10). In particular, eWOM communication has the ability to diffuse faster due to its ability to reach many consumers simultaneously, thereby rendering it more effective when compared to traditional WOM communication (Cheung & Thadani 2010:330; Gfrerer & Pokrywka 2012:15; Moran & Muzellec 2017:150). In this vein, eWOM communication has the potential of reaching masses of consumers who are geographically dispersed (Shamhuyenhanzva 2014:75). In addition, the rapid speed with which eWOM communication spreads has led other scholars to apply the terms buzz marketing (Yang 2012:9) and viral marketing (Goyette, Ricard, Bergeron & Marticotte 2010:8) when referring to WOM communication that is proffered through electronic media. In other

words, eWOM encourages consumers to pass on marketing messages to others by creating a buzz and network marketing through the Internet (Sudarević, Surjanović & Vlahović 2015:102).

Considering that the primary objective of this research was to investigate the influence of selected determinants of the credibility of microblog music reviews and their effect on eWOM adoption, a holistic understanding of eWOM is in order. Therefore, the subsequent section delves into the predominant character elements of eWOM communication as they are elicited from the literature.

2.8 CHARACTERISTICS OF eWOM COMMUNICATION

Based on a synthesis of existing studies, King, Racherla and Bush 2014:169-170) identified six characteristics that clearly delimit the unique nature of eWOM communication. These are explained next.

2.8.1 Volume

Volume refers to the amount of eWOM information that is dispersed to consumers (Lee & Young 2009:479). Different consumers contribute opinions and experiences cumulatively, regarding certain products and services, thereby increasing the amount of information spread across electronic platforms (Arumugam & Omar 2015:1865). Moreover, owing to the written form in which most eWOM communication is made available as well as the vast platform options available in digital spaces, a wide array of information can be harvested (Blennsjo 2014:14).

2.8.2 Platform dispersion

According to Godez and Mayzlin (2004:546), platform dispersion refers to "the extent to which product-related conversations are taking place within a broad range of communities". Specifically, the Internet has created an opportunity for consumers to deliberate on various product related issues across a broad array of platforms. Examples of such platforms include discussion forums, social networking sites, bulletin boards, review sites and blogs (Arumugam & Omar 2015:1866). As a result, the nature of the platform can have a large impact on the incidence and volume of information that is communicated (Ismagilova *et al.* 2017:20). For instance, the prevalence of communicating music related content using eWOM communication platforms is very high owing to the nature of the product, which is easily available in digital formats. The various eWOM communication

platforms that consumers are privy to are discussed in depth in Section 2.9 of this dissertation.

2.8.3 Persistence

Arumugam and Omar (2015:1866) define eWOM persistence as "the continuous availability of eWOM communication on public sources". Relatedly, Kozinets, De Valk, Wojnicki and Wilner (2010:74) submit that the information made available through eWOM communication remains in the online platforms for a long period for future reference by other consumers. In particular, the asynchronous discussions in online platforms are retained for some time to enable consumers to participate or read the messages at their own pace and time (Dancer, Filieri & Grundy 2014:292). Moreover, eWOM communication is both persistent and timeless, implying that the content is searchable as it is available for an indefinite period of time (Cheung *et al*. 2009:9). Consumers can easily refer back to platforms where other consumers shared their experiences and look at the stored information in order to compare what they already know with ensuing expectations about various products and services. By inference, eWOM communication significantly influences future eWOM adoption, owing to its archival properties.

2.8.4 Anonymity

By and large, eWOM communication flows from individuals who may be unfamiliar with each other, thereby conveying the notion of anonymity (Kozinets *et al*. 2010:74). Specifically, with the pre-eminence of digital platforms, various eWOM communication formats including product reviews, likes, ratings and recommendations emanate from unknown sources. In that case, its quality should be prioritised over quantity, since the messages originate from individuals or groups with unproven reputation. Moreover, owing to the probable incidence of information deception by eWOM communication sources that might be responsible for delivering inaccurate and/or subjective information, implications are presented whereby its sources could lack credibility (Cheung *et al*. 2009:11).

2.8.5 Community engagement

eWOM communication provides an opportunity for consumers to collaborate and share ideas, regardless of their geographic location (Cheung *et al*. 2009:11). Arumugam and Omar (2015:1866) highlight that online communities support the assemblage of numerous consumers with related interests, irrespective of their physical location thereby creating

active consumer communities. In view of this, Moran, Muzellec and Nolan (2014:202) denote that the emergence of microblogs and social networking sites have enhanced the ability of consumers to come together as groups of friends and strangers in view of sharing opinions. Likewise, consumers are able to influence each other across various online platforms by sharing product advice and experiences. Generally, online communities act as the first port of call for consumers who seek to eliminate uncertainty during product pre-purchase search (Jelyta 2015:8).

2.8.6 Salience of valence

Based on a synthesis of previous studies, King *et al*. (2014:170) highlights that salience of valence is an important characteristic of eWOM communication. This refers to either positive or negative ratings assigned to products, services or brands by consumers (Dumarz & Yuksel 2017:232). In the digital arena, it is easy to interpret the valence of the sender's opinion based on the numerical ratings such as star ratings of hearts inferring liking.

It is noted that the identified eWOM characteristics prove that the digital landscape has fashioned an easy path for communicating marketing messages among consumers. Nevertheless, for eWOM communication to occur, there are certain platforms that exist to facilitate this engagement. In this regard, typical eWOM communication platforms are discussed in the next section.

2.9 eWOM COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS

The advancement of the Internet has offered consumers a variety of tools that can aid consumers to communicate (Cheung & Thadani 2010:329). The literature attests that there are different types of online platforms with different characteristics where people can interact and thereby shape the direction and flow of eWOM communication. For instance, Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008:463) established three diverse categories upon describing the plethora of eWOM communication platforms that are at the consumers' disposal. First, the scholars allude to platforms that are based on one-to-one messaging, such as electronic mail (eMail) and telephonic platforms. Second, the scholars specify the category of one-to-many eWOM communication platforms comprising websites, social networking sites and discussion forums. The third category of eWOM communication platforms comprises the many-to-many platforms, namely blogs and microblogs. These are explained next.

2.9.1 One-to-one eWOM communication platforms

This category of eWOM communication platforms refer to instances when the communicator is an individual and wishes to convey marketing messages to one recipient at a particular time. email and telephonic platforms are the most common examples in this category.

2.9.1.1 Electronic mail (email)

According to Kaijasilta (2013:17), email is among the most frequently utilised eWOM communication platforms. Litvin *et al*. (2008:468) define email as the asynchronous medium which enables individuals to pass communication to other consumers at lower cost and within a short period of time. When using email communication, the communicator should be privy to the mailing list of the consumers to whom the communication is targeting. The mailing lists usually comprise email addresses that are active on various domains. Nonetheless, consumers utilise this communication method to connect with other consumers with whom they are able to recommend or criticise certain products or services (Gfrerer & Pokrywka 2012:7). While limited research has been conducted on email usage owing to its private and personalised nature, a study by Yates, Adams and Brunner (2009:317) was conducted regarding emails as a platform for teaching and learning at a university in Florida, United States of America (USA). Their findings emphasised the benefits of email communication as well as its effectiveness in teaching and the subsequent impact on improving student learning and technological skills.

2.9.1.2 Telephonic

According to Flynn (2012:109), consumers use telephonic means to transmit eWOM communication because it is cost effective and time efficient. The telephone, albeit fixed or mobile, allows for information transfer among consumers within a short period of time while expending limited amounts of money and effort. However, White and Pauxtis (2010:70) contend that the communicator's message should be as clear as possible for telephonic eWOM communication to be understood and interpreted correctly by consumers. This is because the telephonic platform is susceptible to noise (Pride & Ferrell 2010:80). Specifically, Wang (2018:101) asserts that owing to the absence of visual cues, telephone-based eWOM communication presents the challenge of message ambiguity and confusion as the communicator is not able to demonstrate the products physically to

consumers. Moreover, network challenges may limit the extent to which the intended recipients of eWOM communication interpret the message.

2.9.2 One-to-many eWOM communication platforms

One-to-many eWOM communication platforms comprise websites, social networking sites as well as discussion forums. These platforms enable communicators to convey the marketing messages to a vast number of recipients simultaneously.

2.9.2.1 Websites

A website refers to a collection of related pages which include multimedia content that are identified by a common domain name and published on at least one web server (Yang, Li, Kim & Kim 2015:1). Alternately, Erkans and Evans (2016:2) suggest that websites are platforms which allow the occurrence of eWOM communication between online users, where consumers are able to exchange ideas and opinions regarding certain products and services. For marketing organisations, websites enable the display of product catalogues. In addition, companies utilise their websites to post upcoming events and new product releases. While websites primarily comprise the general corporate site, there exists more specialised websites like ePinions or TripAdvisor where products, hotels, restaurants and other services are rated and commented on (Zhang, Ye, Law & Li 2010:695). In South Africa, Trivago and Hippo Websites are renowned for being specialist in providing ratings and updates on cheap hotel and insurance products and related services, respectively. In terms of music, SoundCloud™ is renowned for enabling the latest music downloads and authentic comments from various interested parties.

Contemporary research has not shunned away from shedding the spotlight on the efficacy of websites as eWOM communication platforms. A case in point is the study by Erkans and Evans (2016:7), which compared the impact of eWOM communication on both social media and shopping Websites among university students in the United Kingdom (UK). Their study results revealed that eWOM communication is effective in terms of the quality, credibility and usefulness of information that is shared. Furthermore, the study established that when compared with social media communication, eWOM communication that is disseminated along shopping websites tends to influence consumers' online purchase intentions even more.

2.9.2.2 Social networking sites

Social networking sites are defined as "the computer-generated communities that permit consumers to communicate with each other by means of popular Web-based tools" (Daugherty & Hoffman 2014:84). Relatedly, Chu (2009:18) defines social networking sites as "Web-based services, which allow consumers to construct their profiles and articulate a list of contacts with whom they desire to communicate with". Consumers post content and socialise with each other on social media (Flynn 2012:332). According to Miller, Parsons and Lifer (2010:377), social networking sites permit consumers to interact directly with friends and other consumers through their identified profiles. Specifically, a study conducted by Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley (2010:51) established that the primary gratifications sought by young consumers in utilising social networking sites include *inter alia*, to communicate with friends, share information and maintain existing relationships. Nevertheless, the most popular social networking sites to date include Instagram™, Snapchat™ and Facebook™. Specifically, Facebook™ recorded over 2.2 billion monthly active users by the end of 2017, although this audience size is expected to have truncated in the second quarter of 2018 owing to the Cambridge Analytica™ scandal on data privacy.

Lin and Lu (2011:1158) conducted an empirical investigation that aimed to understand the usefulness of the Facebook™ social networking site among Taiwanese users. The scholars revealed that network externalities (number of members, peers and perceived complementarity), site usefulness and enjoyment are the three primary motives for the continued intention to use Facebook™. While a majority of consumers are motivated by the need for pleasure as they communicate and interact with friends, they also have an inherent desire to follow what their peers are doing and will connect on Facebook™ because a large number of their friends and peers are using the social networking site. Be that as it may, this study alludes that while consumers may communicate at a social level, it is inevitable for their discussions to transcend towards product and services related conversations, thereby subconsciously engaging in the spread of eWOM communication about various marketing messages. This assertion is consistent with Callaghan and Bower (2012:1) who pinpointed that social networking sites "do not only allow consumers to make new friends, but they provide a place where consumers obtain vast amounts of information and social skills".

2.9.2.3 Online discussion forums

Online discussion forums are eWOM platforms that provide an avenue for consumers to share opinions in real-time (Cheung *et al*. 2009:11). Also known as a discussion board or an online forum, this platform consists of an original post, usually a question but sometimes a provocative statement, which other participants then answer or respond to in subsequent posts. The communicator who initiates the discussion is able to attach the discussion with a topic so that interested parties can read and respond with comments on the relevant discussion thread. Various marketing organisations have been able to tap into this novel platform by applying special software that provides discussion board capabilities on their websites.

According to Shih, Lai and Cheng (2013:138), consumers acquire both informational and socio-emotional communication from discussion forums, thereby fostering sharing behaviour among the participants. Of particular relevance to this research, discussion forums facilitate the transfer of ideas among consumers who have experience regarding certain products and/or services. Therefore, the messages posted on the online discussion forums make it easier for consumers to make vital buying decisions. Akin to this notion is a study by Savolainen (2011:881), which established that online discussion forums are a relevant arena for presenting questions to potential helpers, with regard to accessing services aimed at solving issues on clinical depression. Specifically, the scholar found that participants are able to provide opinions and evaluations on related issues by answering the questions that are posed by others on the online forums. Relatedly, the empirical investigation by Weil, McGuigan and Kern (2011:248) demonstrated that online discussion forums expose consumers to others' opinions, while enhancing their ability to critically review product information.

2.9.3 Many-to-many eWOM communication platforms

The many-to-many communication paradigm is one of three major Internet computing paradigms characterised by multiple users contributing and receiving information, with the information elements often interlinked across different web platforms. In this vein, blogs and microblogs are discussed in this section.

2.9.3.1 Blogs

Blogs are defined as personal publishing and content management systems where consumers post information on various topics (Jin & Liu 2010:431). Relatedly, Flynn (2012:315) delineates blogs as those online platforms that permit users to publish written content, post links and images, which are updated in real-time. Consumers can create and post content or they can comment on recently posted content from other participants. Since blogs permit users to disseminate eWOM communication (Koekemoer 2014:496), consumers receive a series of posts containing a variety of textual and multimedia content. Notably, blog entries are displayed in a reverse, chronological order starting with the most recent posts appearing at the top. The online blogging content is expressed in a conversational manner in as many words as the blogger enjoys. Nevertheless, some online blog posts are intended for wide public readership, while others are intended for limited audiences such as friends and family members, only (Flynn 2012:315). As an example, 2017 saw the premiere launch of the first South African music blog, namely Feedback musiq™ (also known as FDBQ music), a blog that is dedicated towards assisting South African music artists to post their music production and other music information online, while receiving noteworthy commentary from the public (Mdaka 2018:1).

Chen and Morawitz (2017:3) highlight that blogs are becoming the most important eWOM communication source, globally. This is because blogs enable users to express their feelings and share ideas via text, photographs, videos and Uniform Resource Locator links (URL) (Tse & Zhang 2013:316). In this regard, consumers are able to access a variety of specialised blogs such as corporate blogs, professional blogs and personal blogs in order to receive information posted by other interested parties (Grewal & Levy 2014:93).

Blogs differ from microblogs in terms of message length as well as the ease in message transmission (Flynn 2012:326). For example, the message characters on blogs are unlimited, while convention restricts the number of characters along microblogs to approximately 200 characters (Ivanova 2011:18). In addition, blogs differ from microblogs in terms of data persistence. In particular, Webb and Wang (2013:207) highlight that blog posts are available for an extended period of time and can be searchable against the credentials of the blogger. Conversely, microblog posts are only relevant for short periods, depending on whether the microblog topic is still a broiling debate among participants. Nonetheless, microblogs provide an opportunity for differentiation and personalised access.

Moreover, microblogs are renowned for the efficacy in spreading information about products and services universally. Shu (2014:667) denotes that among the existing eWOM communication platforms, microblogs are the most preferred by consumers. This is because microblogs permit consumers to exploit various matters of interest, while being able to express attitudes that they intend to share with others in a public forum. As such, as an outcome of this literature review, a decision was taken in this research to restrict this study towards the study of microblogs. The microblog platform is explained next.

2.9.3.2 Microblogs

According to Webb and Wang (2013:207), microblogs refer to Web 2.0 applications, which allow for information sharing and communication among consumers whereby the communicator posts short and frequent posts. Skyring (2013:14) defines a microblog as a "form of online social networking used by participants (also referred to as microbloggers or broadcasters) to post limited message characters and short content to the public". In more specific terms, Fuchs (2014:179) defines a microblog as an "Internet-based service in which participants have a public profile where they post short public messages, frequently update and re-post content on various issues, which are then broadcast publicly". The implications put forward in these definitions are dual-pronged. First, microblog content is differentiated as it is predominantly drawn from different spheres of the social, entertainment and economic lives of participants. Secondly, microblog content is transmitted in real-time with ease, usually consisting of instant updates of users' deeds and thoughts among strong and weak ties (Stricker 2011:12). Nevertheless, the uniqueness of this eWOM communication platform lies in that the content posted on microblogs is limited in terms of actual and aggregate size. In principle, microblogs allow broadcasters to share information pertaining to either private or professional aspects in less than 200 characters at a time (Ivanova 2011:18), whereas microblogs such as Twitter™ limit the length of written content to 140 characters and/or images and short video or audio clips that are approximately seven-seconds long (Cui & Lin 2015:353).

Some of the microblog platforms that consumers are privy to include Twitter™, Jaiku™, 12Seconds™, Dailybooth™, Tumblr™, FriendFeed™ and Plurk™ (Shu 2014:667). Among these, Twitter™ is the most preferred microblog platform, globally (Lamb *et al*. 2012:359). Consumers use the Twitter™ platform to share opinions on various topics including services and brand-related information. Twitter™ allows the subscribing

individuals to post written and multi-media based entries through their registered Twitter™ handles, which are accessible on different technologies such as mobile phones, computers, notebooks and tablets (Skyring 2013:14). According to Schneigansz (2013:50), Twitter™ is one of the most dominant microblog platforms in South Africa. In support of this notion, the Blue-Magnet media report (2016:3) points to the massive growth of Twitter™ usage that was witnessed in the country, ranging between 1.1 million to 7.7 million users during the period 2012 and 2016. Likewise, STATISTA (2017:2) reported over 330 million monthly active users of Twitter™ during the last quarter of 2017, with the majority of participants being young adults in the income generating age category. This indicates a favourable trend towards microblogging in South Africa. Relatedly, marketing organisations are able to host their businesses on the Twitter™ platform by posting vital messages to both existing and potential customers.

Akin to the Twitter™ platform, Jaiku™ can be considered the closest competition to the Twitter™ microblog since a majority of the features on the Jaiku™ platform are similar to those on Twitter™ (Goggin 2011:124). Nonetheless, Jaiku™ is only delimited to users in Taiwan and other parts of South East Asia (Kaplan & Haenlein 2011:106). Jaiku™ allow consumers to update their brief status using written messages. The platform also permits an update of activities, availability and location, whereas the subscribers are also able to view the updates of their contacts on the Jaiku™ pages.

The 12Seconds™ microblog permits users to post video content that plays for a maximum of twelve seconds, while Dailybooth™ is a microblog platform which allows consumers to post pictures of a limited size, up to one megabyte only. Participants on the Tumblr™ microblog are able to transmit eWOM communication in various formats, including text, pictures, videos, audio and hyperlinks (Lotich 2013:152). Additionally, Friendfeed™ permits users to aggregate all social media information into one social stream. For example, Friendfeed™ aggregates all of the tweets from Twitter™, pictures from Facebook™ updates as well as videos from 12Seconds™ into one cohesive platform. Finally, the Plurk™ microblog allows users to post either one or two written sentences with a maximum length of 210 text characters.

In terms of authorship, microblog posts emanate from individuals with an account from specified microblogs, which is transmitted to subscribers within the same microblog database (Skyring 2013:14). This means that communication in microblogs only takes

place between consumers who subscribe to a specific microblog account. Nevertheless, microblogs are unique in that individuals can decide whose posts they wish to receive, but not who can receive their posts (Fuchs 2014:180). In other words, when a post is made, all microblog subscribers will be exposed to the message, thereby denoting that access to microblog-based eWOM communication is not only based on the strength of ties or relationships but also on subscription.

Microblog research has been conducted across various contexts, with compelling findings. For example, Ciu and Lin (2015:359) conducted a study on how microblogs could be adapted for journalistic use through both professional and organisational interventions. Their study established that microblogs are an indispensable platform for conveying global news and updates on various political affairs. Similarly, Tse and Zhang (2013:326) reviewed the salience of microblog eWOM communication in terms of enhancing the travel experiences of tourism visitors in mainland China.

Marketing and consumer behaviour theorists have also taken up empirical investigations on microblogs. For example, Coyle, Smith and Platt (2012:38) found that microblog posts that provided solutions to customers' enquiries led to strong perceptions of company trustworthiness, company benevolence and overall attitude towards certain brands. Relatedly, in a study by Zheng, Zheng, Zhao and Gupta (2017:591), it was established that microblog posts by companies are generally considered as an eWOM communication vehicle that delivers positive brand experiences if they portray human character elements. Additionally, the findings of their research also revealed that consumers tend to have a positive brand experience if enterprise microblogs permit two-way interaction. Likewise, Viljoen *et al*. (2016:6) ascertained that credible Twitter™ message posts have a strong and direct relationship with the mobile phone purchase intentions of South African consumers.

This section highlighted the myriad platforms wherein eWOM communication can take place. While this is the case, the messages that are transmitted along these platforms tend to take various formats. Therefore, the next section discusses the plethora of eWOM communication formats that consumers utilise to share product information and experiences while online.

2.10 eWOM COMMUNICATION FORMATS

eWOM communication is relevant for marketing organisations desiring to establish an online presence. Nonetheless, eWOM communication presents consumers with a broad range of communication formats to choose from (Bosman 2012:5). In this regard, Litvin *et al.* (2008:462) distinguish between synchronous eWOM communication comprising instant messaging as well as asynchronous eWOM communication, ratings, testimonials, recommendations and online reviews.

2.10.1 Synchronous eWOM communication

Different types of electronic media have a direct impact towards interpersonal relationships. This includes synchronous eWOM communication which possesses unique features (Litvin *et al*. (2008:462). According to Jones and Gallen (2016:616), synchronous communication allows consumers to communicate through audio clips and also share whiteboards and documents in real-time. In synchronous communication consumers are able to have direct, social interaction while exchanging feedback, which leads to high levels of consumer engagement (Giesbers, Rienties, Tempelaar & Gijselaers 2013:31). Synchronous eWOM communication can be facilitated using instant messaging since there is limited time lapse between the communication exchanges.

2.10.1.1 Instant messaging

Instant messaging is gaining popularity among consumers since it delivers chat reference services (Ward 2006:103). Flanagin (2005:176) suggests that instant messaging is used to fulfil a variety of needs, such as connecting with friends and acquaintances as well as giving and receiving information. Through instant messaging, short messages are typically communicated between two or more parties, whereby one user completes a thought in the form of short written text and then sends it to a recipient. Meulemans, Carr and Ly (2010:4) highlight that more advanced instant messaging enables consumers to make limited file transfers, clickable hyperlinks as well as sending video chats. The instant messaging applications facilitate connections between known users using an identifiable contacts list. Moreover, instant messaging permits immediate (rather than delayed) acknowledgement by the recipients (Ward 2006:104). Some of the most common instant messaging applications include WeChat™, WhatsApp™, SnapChat™, AOL's instant messenger™ and Google's g-talk™ (Bosman 2012:40).

2.10.2 Asynchronous eWOM communication

Asynchronous eWOM communication (also referred to as delayed communication) is a type of communication which suggests a time delay between consumers and the sender of the message (Guerrero 2012:35). In asynchronous communication, consumers can thoroughly revise the communication at their own pace prior to giving feedback, without any pressure of immediate interaction. Asynchronous communication provides an opportunity for consumers to reflect on the eWOM communication and thereby develop it (Giesbers *et al*. 2013:31). The literature alludes to various forms of asynchronous eWOM communication as follows:

2.10.2.1 Ratings

Cheung *et al*. (2009:18) contend that product ratings involve consumers' evaluation of the communicated message whereby they either give a low or high score, in accordance with the perceived accuracy of the message. Dumarz and Yuksel (2017:232) highlight that in eWOM communication scenarios, consumers are able to attribute a numerical score that is consistent with the actual performance of the product and/or services. Relatedly, Cheung *et al.* (2009:18) assert that consumers are able to rate the content posted on eWOM platforms by either giving symbolic or numerical estimates based on consumers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction levels. For instance, a high or low score is given based on the rater's perceptions (Ismagilova 2017:56). Common ratings include instances whereby consumers assign numerical value to rate the performance of a product or service, whereby a rating of one (1) represents poor service and five (5) represents excellent service experience. Where moderate scores are attributed, as in the case of a rating of three (3), this could signify mediocre evaluation by the customers. Other common options whereby consumers are able to rate products or services include star ratings (Bosman 2012:56), where consumers attribute a certain number of stars to rate the actual performance, with one star representing the lowest level of performance, usually inferior or below satisfactory and five-star rating generally inferring sterling product performance or superior service delivery.

2.10.2.2 Testimonials

Testimonials are any positive or negative eWOM communication provided by consumers in written or spoken format with regard to product performance and services (Bachleda & Fathi 2016:113). Testimonials come as evidence which consists of factual assertions made

by consumers after direct experimentation with the product or service (Perloff 2003:180). Martin, Wentzel and Tomczak (2008:29) state that testimonials come from both known and unknown consumers whereby they inform other consumers about their delightful experience or provide warning advice about the shortcomings of consuming the product in question. Through testimonials, consumers are able to express themselves, make descriptions and share experiences with potential users of products (Ueberwimmer, Gaisch, Fureder & Costa 2017:11).

In consumer behaviour research, Spillinger and Parush (2012:60) conducted a study on the impact of testimonials on purchase intentions by using a fictitious e-commerce website. The scholars found that when testimonials are present on websites, consumers demonstrate interest and readiness to buy. Relatedly, Wang (2003:158) examined how streams of customer testimonials and news clips affect consumers' trust building and attitude towards online shopping, thereby revealing that USA consumers' trust and purchase decisions were significantly influenced by the testimonials and news clips read online.

2.10.2.3 Recommendations

Recommendations are consumer-generated content that derive reference from a consumer's knowledge and past experience with a product or service (Benlian, Titah & Hess 2012:240). Cheung *et al*. (2009:12) describe recommendations as those views given by consumers about certain products, services or other aspects of the marketplace. For example, experienced customers provide recommendations to other consumers who demonstrate interest in certain products and services. Recommendations are usually included as part of the publicity component of a marketer's promotional mix elements. This is because marketers are able to utilise the consumer-generated product evaluations to publicise positive aspects about their product and service offerings (Blennsjo 2014:1; Luzzani 2015:40). When recommendations are posted online as a form of eWOM communication, consumers are able to see others' suggestions in view of endorsing a final purchase decision.

2.10.2.4 Unboxing videos

Unboxing videos are a type of eWOM communication whereby consumers narrate their product usage actions in the form of a recorded video (Marsh 2016:369). In particular, a consumer is able to video-record themselves while unpacking a recently purchased product. Thereafter, they are able to film themselves and upload the video to a platform like

YouTube™, so that people can see the product being used in a real setting by a real customer. However, unboxing videos remain an unexplored field and the potential of this eWOM communication format is still unknown (King, et al. 2014:172).

2.10.2.5 Online reviews

Online reviews are a form of eWOM communication that represents messages that are posted on the Internet with the intention of influencing consumers' judgements of products or services (Wang, Cunningham & Eastin 2015:151). Mudambi and Schuff (2010:186) define online reviews as "peer-generated product evaluations that are posted on company or third-party Websites and allow consumers to post open-ended customer-authored comments". In other words, online reviews are those written comments posted online by consumers who have consumed certain products or services (Burton & Khammash 2010:230). In the reviews, consumers voluntarily elect to express their feelings and opinions based on product performance.

In terms of recent empirical investigations, a study conducted by Mo, Li and Fan (2015:424) revealed that positive online reviews positively influence consumer buying behaviour. Relatedly, Cui, Lui and Guo (2012:53) investigated the effects of online consumer reviews on new product sales in the USA. The findings of their study revealed that the volume and quality of online reviews has a significant effect on new product sales. This proves the impact of online reviews on the consumer decision making process. Arumugam and Omar (2015:1867) highlighted that the majority of consumers trust online reviews since they report both positive and negative consumption experiences. Therefore, marketers can utilise online reviews to improve the quality of their products and services, thereby enhancing their professional reputation (Bradley, Sparks & Weber 2015:747).

The next section introduces the WOM technology framework, which pre-empts a primer on the dynamics and constituents of a WOM episode.

2.11 THE WOM TECHNOLOGY FRAMEWORK

In spite of the abundant literature on eWOM communication, researchers are inconclusive regarding the universal terminology to be used when describing key WOM and eWOM elements and objects (Kimmel 2010:130). Therefore, based on its universal application, this study adapts the WOM terminology framework that was developed after the first WOM Marketing Association (WOMMA) conference in 2005 (WOMMA Research and Metrics

Council 2005:4-5). In its original form, the framework puts forward various metrics and/or terminology for researchers to use.

According to the WOMMA Research and Metrics Council (2005:4-5), a single WOM episode is projected as a single occurrence of WOM communication, comprising five classes, namely, the who object (participants), how (actions), says and does what (units), where (venues) as well as the effects or results (outcomes). Each class has its unique set of attributes as shown in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: The traditional WOM technology framework

WOM episode	Who?	How?	What?	Where?	Results
Object/class	Participants	Action	WOM unit	Venue	Effects
Attributes	Propensity Demographics Credibility Reach	Velocity Distribution spread Source diversity	Topicality Timeliness Polarity Clarity Depth	Population Audience Rules	Sales volumes WOM adoption

Source: WOMMA Research and Metrics Council (2005:5)

Based on the terminology framework, the WOM classes are divided into four, with each class having unique attributes. These classes and attributes are discussed in detail next.

2.11.1 Participants in the WOM technology framework (who?)

The WOMMA Research and Metrics Council (2005:4) define participants as "those individuals whose actions make up a WOM episode." Along digital platforms, participants comprise individuals that take part in the eWOM communication process. In this instance, the participants comprise the message senders and receivers who are the sole custodians of open channels of eWOM communication (Monteiro, Painho & Vaz 2015:159).

In the technology framework, participants have four qualities, namely propensity, demographics, credibility and reach. In terms of propensity, this refers to the probability that participants can take a particular action (Kimmel 2010:132). For example, the WOMMA Research and Metrics Council (2005:6) states that a high-propensity communicator is a person who frequently spreads information to other consumers. Nonetheless, demographic elements, comprising the gender, age, marital status as well as income and occupation levels of the participants are also pivotal for the effective spread of

WOM communication (Sharma, Arroyo & Pandey 2012:43). In light of personal demographics, WOM participants are known to be individuals with similar interests and sometimes of similar age group. Reach refers to the percentage of consumers who are exposed to a communication message. Reach is an important attribute in that it provides WOM participants with direct exposure to the marketer's message. Finally, credibility refers to the measure of participants' ability to influence the opinions and behaviour of message recipients. However, a divergence of views exist with regard to which opinions are considered credible between expert and non-expert based opinions in any WOM communication episode (Kimmel & Kitchen 2014:9).

2.11.2 Actions in the WOM technology framework (how?)

According to the WOMMA Research and Metrics Council **(**2005:7), actions refer to "what participants do in the WOM communication process". In concert, Monteiro *et al*. (2015:159) posit that actions are activities that are conducted by participants. Three attributes influence the effectiveness of the actions of WOM participants, namely velocity, distribution spread and source diversity. According to the WOMMA Research and Metrics Council (2005:7), the speed at which the communication message is dispersed (velocity) as well as the number of receivers that are exposed to the message (distribution spread) are both influential qualities in directing the actions of WOM participants. Relatedly, source diversity alludes to the available options through which the WOM action can be delivered (Kimmel 2010:132).

2.11.3 Units in the WOM technology framework (what?)

According to the WOMMA Research and Metrics Council (2005:4), WOM units comprise the "single units of marketing-appropriate information that is shared by consumers in a WOM communication network." Relatedly, Kimmel (2010:131) denotes WOM units as the information that is directly shared among consumers, relating to various products and brands that are promoted by the sender or marketing organisation. In simple terms, WOM units comprise the actual marketing message being disseminated. In lieu of this, five attributes influence the quality of WOM units. First, topicality influences the effective dissemination of WOM units, implying the representation of message topics as trending areas of interest among WOM participants. Secondly, the WOM unit is influenced by timeliness, which depicts the measure to which it reaches consumers in time. This could include disseminating marketing messages as early as possible before they become

obsolete. Thirdly, WOM units have the element of polarity which is essential for effective eWOM communication. Polarity refers to the ability to integrate both positive and negative content when disseminating the WOM unit (Patti & Chen 2009:360). This improves the credibility of the message since WOM participants are able to express their level of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with the product and brand in question while simultaneously spreading the marketing message. Fourthly, clarity refers to the extent to which the message is understood by the receiver (Barker 2009:270), which alludes to the language and terminology that is used during the WOM communication process. Fifth, depth of a WOM unit infers the richness of information that is included in the WOM communication with the aim to increase persuasiveness.

2.11.4 Venues in the WOM technology framework (where?)

The WOMMA Research and Metrics Council (2005:4) allude to venues as "the medium or physical location where communication takes place". In the same vein, Monteiro *et al*. (2015:159) define venues are vehicles or mediums, which provide a channel for WOM communication to occur. The WOM venue is supported by three elementary attributes, namely, population, audience and rules. According to the WOMMA Research and Metrics Council (2005:5), population refers to the total potential audience for WOM units along WOM venues whereas audience refers to the specific consumers who are targeted to receive the WOM unit within a given venue. This implies that the effective dissemination of WOM communication is largely defined by the specific audience size and also the type of consumer segments who patronise a specific venue.

2.11.5 Outcomes of the WOM communication (Results)

The WOMMA research and metrics council (2005:10) indicates that outcomes are "the resulting influence and direct impacts of a WOM episode". Notable response behaviour of participants in the WOM communication process include engaging in overt consumption of products and services as well as initiating inquiries based on the WOM units that are presented along various WOM communication venues (Kimmel 2010:132).

Whereas the framework detailed in this section was conceived within the frames of traditional WOM communication, this study upholds its relevance in explaining a single eWOM episode, albeit as it occurs within an Internet-enabled environment. In light of the specific context of this study, the next section elaborates on how each class and sample

class object in the WOMMA framework contributes towards the eWOM sharing of music content along microblogs.

2.12 ADAPTING THE WOM TERMINOLOGY FRAMEWORK TO AN ONLINE MUSIC ALBUM CONTEXT

Consistent with the WOM terminology framework posited by Sharma *et al*. (2012:42), this research adapts the technology framework shown in Figure 2.4 by considering the domain of spreading eWOM content relating to music albums using microblogs as a vehicle.

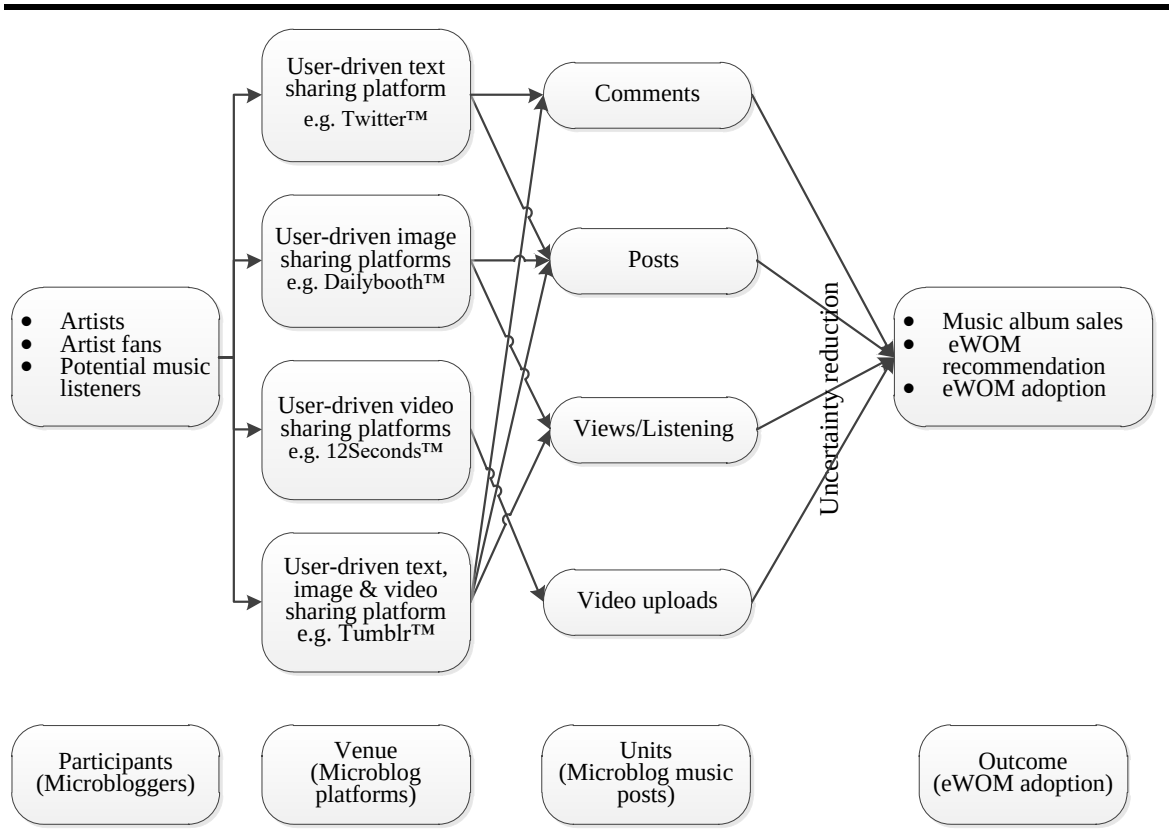


Figure 2.4: A framework on eWOM communication of music content

Source: Adapted from Sharma *et al*. (2012:46)

2.12.1 eWOM communication participants (Microbloggers)

According to Figure 2.4, participants comprise microbloggers who subscribe to a specific microblog platform, which permits them to have a public profile through which they can post music content and also conduct frequent updates and replies to other members within the same microblog platform (Fuchs 2014:179). This includes music artists who create new music content and post it on various eWOM communication platforms. Participants also

comprise artists' fans (both current and potential) who receive posts from artists as well as other consumers. Apart from being passive recipients of music marketing messages, artists' fans are also able to re-post and reply to others' posts. According to Sharma *et al*. (2012:44), the key participants in the eWOM communication process include video sharing site users, users of social networking sites, bloggers and blog visitors, commentators, viewers and video uploaders. Therefore, both senders and receivers are participants in the eWOM communication process as the interaction occurs between both of them (Kimmel & Kitchen 2014:9).

The dissemination and effective interpretation of eWOM communication is influenced by the degree to which subscribers have common preferences in terms of microblog platform selection, age, education and other areas of common interest. Arguably so, Sharma and Pandey (2011:54) posit that homophily and social ties play a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness of eWOM communication among participants. Nonetheless, whereas audience size and reach may be small and localised in the case of traditional WOM communication, multitudes and vast numbers of global subscribers can be reached in a single eWOM communication episode. In addition, the credibility of the participants is crucial for an effective eWOM communication episode to occur. While both experts and non-experts may proffer their views along microblogs, a study conducted by Morimoto and Trimble (2012:45-60) proved that consumers tend to demonstrate a favourable attitude towards consumer-generated content over corporate-based blog content as the primary source of information. Likewise, Prendergast, Paliwal and Chan (2016:12) conducted a study on consumers' trust of online recommendations. Interestingly, their results showed that female university students in Hong Kong tend to prefer product recommendations from known acquaintances rather than those made by experts. Another study conducted by Cheong and Morrison (2008:45) demonstrated that consumers mainly obtain user generated information and recommendations prior to making a final purchase decision. These findings substantiate the importance of eWOM communication as it is delivered by peers across digital channels.

2.12.2 eWOM communication actions and units (Microblog music posts)

The participants during a eWOM communication episode may serve multiple roles that include creating, spreading and receiving information (Kimmel 2010:132). Specific to a music context, eWOM participants are able to comment, post, view and/or listen as well as

make uploads and/or downloads of music albums (Sharma *et al*. 2012:42). In agreement, Monteiro *et al*. (2015:159) assert that an eWOM unit can either take the form of content posts as well as replies and/or comments made by participants, whereas broadly speaking, music creation and distribution have been a pervasive and significant activity among artists and their fans (Chen & Yen 2011:283).

While eWOM communications units are easily disseminated in real-time across participants who may be geographically spread, it is the trending topics that acquire the largest and most persistent distribution spread. For example, Senzo Mfundo Vilakazi, a renowned South African rap music celebrity also known as (A.K.A) Kwesta, made headlines in 2017 after receiving a record-breaking five awards during the 23rd annual South African Music Awards (SAMA). Interestingly, popular microblog platforms such as Twitter™ and 12Seconds™ were a buzz with various reviews and comments regarding the award-winner. In the same vein, microbloggers also spent a considerable amount of time spreading both positive and negative comments regarding the allegations of award-rigging made by Bongekile Simelane (A.K.A Babes WoDumo), who had failed to receive a single award regardless of the fact that her song had made it to the top of the music charts across all radio stations throughout the year.

2.12.3 eWOM communication venue (Microblog platform)

The eWOM communication venue in this research is delimited as the microblog platform. Microblogs enable the transfer of music content among eWOM participants (Webb & Wang 2013:207). The broad spectrum of available microblogs in the online domain is elaborated on in Section 2.9.3 of this study. For example, Twitter™ is a microblog platform that participants can use to create and distribute text-based music content such as lyrics. Participants can utilise Dailybooth™ to distribute images such as album covers, whereas the 12Seconds™ platform is very useful in terms of creating and distributing music content among participants using multi-media technology that incorporates videos in different formats (Lotich 2013:152). In this regard, the depth and richness of the eWOM communication units across microblog venues is immaculately enhanced through unique writing and other visual elements used when marketing music. Moreover, microblogs are governed by a set of rules, terms and conditions that participants ascribe to when they sign into a specific eWOM communication venue. Collectively, these rules are encapsulated in the microblog user agreement with examples that include rules that prohibit sharing videos

with graphic violence and other prohibited content. In addition, microblog rules include establishing comprehensive systems for registering consumers, verifying published information and managing participants' posts and comments.

2.12.4 eWOM communication outcome (eWOM adoption)

Initial exposure of online users to various eWOM units and actions produces both covert and overt responses, enlisting the outcome of an eWOM communication episode. The primary outcome of the eWOM communication process is the direct impact on sales (Pace *et al*. 2017:138). For example, participants can be motivated to make album purchases immediately after receiving posts and/or reading comments that are posted on microblogs (Sharma & Pandey 2011:54). At the secondary level, either favourable or unfavourable comments can be posted about certain organisations and their products, whereas this amounts to either positive or negative eWOM communication with the potential to reach large masses of people.

Apart from album purchases, this study posits that another subjective measure of the direct outcome of the eWOM communication process along microblogs is eWOM adoption and dissemination of the music content in subsequent instances. Consistent with Cakim[1] (2009), this study posits that when a consumer learns about a new music album release, he/she can post videos or short sound clips about the song to produce the first generational output of the eWOM communication. Subsequently, when each recipient re-posts the same and/or additional information to other participants, this creates a second wave of communication through eWOM adoption. By implication, each time a participant relays an eWOM unit to other peers, a new eWOM generation begins, whereas the eWOM unit travels even further, which ultimately affects the sales and revenues of music stables among other marketing organisations (Patti & Chen 2009:361; Blennsjo 2014:12).

While the technology framework has been very useful in terms of grounding the domain of this study, there remains a need to elaborate on the specific industry wherein the music business is situated. In this regard, the next section provides an overview of the music

[1] Cakim (2009) is a coaching guide on implementing Word-of-Mouth Marketing comprising strategies and craft stories for managers. The guide describes how to measure the reach and impact on online Word-of-Mouth in Part IV (Creating Online Word-of-Mouth campaigns) of Chapter 12. Note that the eBook source contains no page numbers.

industry, to give the reader an understanding of the dynamics of the sector, including the drivers, contribution and constraints of the music and entertainment industry.

2.13 AN OVERVIEW OF THE MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

The music sector is one of the most buoyant contributors to the global entertainment industry in that it comprises both companies (termed music stables) and individuals who earn profits by producing and distributing live concerts, music albums and music singles in both audio and video formats (Hughes 2010:1). Strictly speaking, the growth of this industry has been spiralled heavily by selected drivers, which are explained in the next section.

2.13.1 Drivers of the music industry

According to Noyes, Allen and Parise (2012:140), music as a component of the entertainment industry is one of the most affluent economic spheres, which is gaining popularity alongside the film and television industry. Driving this trajectory are key growth elements including globalisation, culture, technology and innovation as well as the changing tastes and preferences of consumers.

2.13.1.1 Globalisation

Globalisation poses a significant impact on the creation of music output as music is used as a main tool to share thoughts and stories globally (Negus 2011:1). Nonetheless, the manner in which globalisation stimulates the distribution of music across the world has a notable influence on the nature of music outputs that are also created by artists. In this vein, Chukwudi (2010:69) suggests that globalisation poses a significant influence towards the music industry as it conveys the concept of universal music, which consequently enacts a challenge for music artists who wish to remain relevant by developing music careers that are relevant and can be adaptable in a global environment. This in turn motivates musicians to be creative by producing new songs, which will help them gain global fame and further grow the entire industry and the country's status (Salm 2010:1331). Through globalisation some music artists acquire career success in foreign countries, where their music is more widely accepted. Owing to the diverse eWOM communication formats and available digital devices, consumers across the globe are able to easily access, purchase and download latest releases of music singles and albums from artists across the world through platforms such

as ITunes™. This tends to increase the direct financial returns of the music industry through the artefacts of globalisation (Letts 2003:2).

2.13.1.2 Culture

According to Garfias (2004:13), "the conscious creation of music is defined culturally". This assertion alone points to the impact of various forms of culture on the creation and development of music content. For example, some artists use music to express their inner state of being by expressing their feelings and attempting to define the specific cultural groups to which they belong (Rensburg 2017:18). For example, Reggae music is a distinct genre of music which is mostly used by members of the Rastafari religious and cultural group who believe that this kind of music and song performance styles has a special cultural and social role to play in the human connection system (Barton 2003:27). Relatedly, Fahey (2011:149) alludes that artists can create music with the aim to express their cultural identity through language, dance, dress code and other visual elements. Genres such as urban hip hop have been developed around teaching and celebrating specific ethnic cultures across countries, thereby leading to the emergence of the Hip Hop subculture, a movement that has its origins in the Bronx town of New York, USA. In this regard, music has been used to celebrate cultural norms, values and traditions among music artists (Lebaka 2014:1). In South Africa, different genres have been created such as Maskandi and Mbaqanga music, which celebrates the Zulu tribal origins, among others. Through music, both children and adults are able to recognise and applaud their cultural identity, while learning more about themselves and their ethnicity while upholding a consistent lifestyle.

2.13.1.3 Technology and innovation

According to the Eventbrite report (2017:2), the trajectory in the music industry can be attributed to the recent advances in technology which enables the easy and speedy access and distribution of music content. The same report denotes music streaming as the most dominant and significant digital music format, with more than 100 million users subscribing to the paid-form of music streaming, globally. In addition, ITunes™, an Internet music broadcaster developed by Apple iMusic™ is widely acknowledged as the most preferred and cost-effective music distribution platform for various music singles produced by new and emerging artists. A more recent music streaming services such as YouTube™ (the subscription-based version), NetEase™, Spotify™ and Pandora™ have had an increase in subscriptions since 2018. In this regard, the comprehensive report

developed by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI Global music report 2017:11), states that the sales of digital music increased dramatically by 4 percent between 2014 and 2016 at the global level, whereas consumers' preference for physical CDs declined by 12 percent during the same period. This represents an evident pattern of increased and consolidated interest in digital music.

2.13.1.4 Changing consumer tastes and preferences

According to Na and Agnhage (2013:110), different music genres appeal to varied consumer tastes, thereby creating an opportunity for artists to create a unique type of music that is preferred by a certain consumer segment. In this way, the changing consumers' tastes and preferences tend to have an impact on the creation and distribution of music. In other words, the changes in consumers' tastes and preferences influence the creation of music and the industry as a whole. This is because artists are compelled to adopt new ways of creating music owing to the changing tastes of consumers. For example, in South Africa, the millennials are a generational cohort that is synonymous with the Urban Hip Hop culture as well as contemporary Rhythm and Blues music genres. This is exemplified by the dress code, instruments and language used in the specific songs in that music genre, which largely resonates with that particular consumer cohort.

2.13.2 Contribution of the music industry

The contribution of the music and entertainment industry to the triple bottom line is best encapsulated by enumerating the economic, socio-cultural and technological elements, as discussed next.

2.13.2.1 Economic contribution

The economic contribution of the music industry encapsulates the actual sales and revenues from album sales, thereby stimulating broader economic growth of the industry and country as a whole. According to the IFPI global music report (2017:34), record companies are the primary investor in the global music industry, to which they contribute more than US$4.5 billion, which is vested and shared among various activities including Artist and Repertoire (A&R) marketing, discovering as well as nurturing and promoting new artists and their music. In terms of sales revenue from album sales worldwide, Edward Christopher Sheeran (A.K.A. Ed Sheeran) is the leading musician in terms of the best-selling album worldwide with a total of 9.636 million album sales as of 2017. Nevertheless, the economic

contribution of music is felt across the board, since music remains the primary source of income for the majority of artists. To confirm the contribution of the music industry in terms of the financial returns to both artists and countries, Table 2.4 depicts the top ten highest paid musicians in the world.

Table 2.4: Annual income of highest-paid musicians in the world as of June 2017

World ranking	Artist/s	Country	Music genre	Artist earnings (US dollars)
1	Sean John Combs (A.K.A Diddy)	USA	Contemporary Rhythm & Blues and Pop	130 Million
2	Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter (A.K.A Beyonce)	USA	Contemporary Rhythm & Blues and Pop	130 Million
3	Aubrey Drake (A.K.A Drake)	Canada	Hip Hop and Pop-rap	94 Million
4	Abel Makkonen Tesfaye (A.K.A The Weekend)	Canada	Rhythm and Blues and Soul	92 Million
5	Chris Martin, Guy Berryman, Will Champion and Jonny Buckland (A.K.A Coldplay)	UK	Rock and Roll music and Post Britpop	88 Million
6	Slash, Axl Rose, Izzy Stradlin and Duff McKagan (A.K.A Guns N' Roses)	USA	Hard Rock and Heavy Metal	84 Million
7	Justin Drew Bieber (A.K.A Justin Bieber)	Canada	Contemporary Rhythm & Blues and Pop	83.5 Million
8	Bruce Frederick Joseph Springsteen (A.K.A Bruce Springsteen)	USA	Heartland Rock and Rock and Roll	75 Million
9	Adele Laurie Blue Adkins (A.K.A Adele)	UK	Blue-eyed Soul	69 Million
10	James Hetfield, Lars Ulrich and Kirk Hammett (A.K.A Metallica)	USA	Heavy metal	66.5 Million

Source: STATISTA (2017:1)

At the secondary level, music artists benefit from the winnings that are given to award-winning artists at various public contests including the South African Metal Music awards (SAMMA) and the Gramophone (GRAMMY) awards, with ceremonies being hosted in South Africa and the USA, respectively.

2.13.2.2 Socio-cultural contribution

Music has an impact on the socio-cultural experiences of consumers in that some music is composed with the aim to educate listeners about certain cultures and values and to celebrate traditions through demonstrating a unique set of musical practices and/or

language expressions (Frith, Straw & Street 2001:26). In this regard, some artists create music in view of learning about their own culture and other people's cultures as well (Garfias 2004:57). In this manner, music is a helpful tool to the extent that it can foster integration among societal members. The composition and distribution of music content influences the physical health and general lifestyle of individuals across different age groups. In concert with this notion is a study conducted by Dibben (2006:110), which revealed that music and related performance activities were instrumental in terms of improving the academic and emotional well-being of students in a tertiary institution. By extension, music in itself is renowned for its capacity to enhance inner happiness thereby providing a form of therapy to both young and old consumers. Nonetheless, music can also be considered a vital educational tool for understanding various cultures and society in general. Specifically, the deliberate exposure to global music yields a positive impact towards unravelling the cultural experiences of different people including foreign languages and other anthropology elements. Relatedly, music is attributed to the genesis of different religions and cultural groupings such as the Rastafarian religion and culture, which originates from Jamaica (Fonorow 2012:13).

2.13.2.3 Technological contribution

Recent advances in technology have helped to shape the music industry in general. Interestingly, a variety of record companies and artists are collaborating in order to deliver music content to music fans using the latest technological developments (Rensburg 2017:73). For instance, various computer software programmes such as Dr Drum beat maker and Fruity Loops (FL) studio are hailed for improving sounds and beats in the creation of music. Similarly, Salm (2010:1331) pinpoints that the introduction of electronic guitars and amplification enabled bands to incorporate various instruments also help artists produce music in a unique manner.

While the use of technology has had a significant impact on the creation and recording of music, the same influence has been witnessed in the manner in which music content is eventually distributed to consumers. With the explosion of Internet radio broadcasters, Internet-based streaming services and mobile device management applications such as Amazon™, Spotify™ and iTunes™, music has been interlinked across consumers throughout the globe (Misje 2013:12). For example, iTunes is a popular platform that is designed to allow consumers to sample, listen to and also purchase music, online (Sobel

2007:268). To access iTunes, users (usually artists) create an iTune profile, where an administrator provides the user with log-in information and instructions (Arditi 2014:416). Once the profile is created, artists can then upload content such as audio and video files which can be accessed and purchased by iTunes subscribers, only. This creates a cost-effective platform of promoting music singles and/or albums for artists, without the hassle of having to pay a recording company for promotional expenses. Other digital platforms such as YouTube™ and Amazon™ video shorts also allow participants the opportunity to upload, publish and view both official and unofficial videos, nonetheless with the technical constraints of standard browser software (Jenkins & Hartley 2009:1).

2.13.3 Constraints and regulation of the music industry

Certain legal aspects come to the fore whenever the discussion about the creation and distribution of music is advanced. For example, Brauneis (2014:2) posits that the implementation of laws in the music industry such as copyright laws tends to reinforce the production and creation of music in terms of ownership and patenting of the music lyrics and songs in general. In this regard, the laws serve to protect artists' work from piracy and misuse, which negatively impacts the sales of music albums and songs as well as the reputation of artists (Standler 2014:4). Notably, various laws affecting the music industry are helpful in ensuring that music outputs occupy a distinct and privileged place in the entertainment industry. Specifically, laws relating to contracts, copyright and royalties are paramount towards the successful and credible development of the music industry in South Africa. By implication, legal aspects play a crucial role within the music industry as the laws motivate artists to produce more albums and thereby stimulate growth of the industry with the assurance that their work is legally protected.

2.14 CONCLUSION

The role played by microblogs as the eWOM communication platform of choice is elaborated on in this chapter. Furthermore, the global music industry is examined, bearing in mind the drivers and contribution made by the music sector in terms of its economic, socio-cultural and technological contribution. In this synthesis, music is found to be significant to global economic growth in the form of album sale revenues, artists' incomes as well as financial rewards paid out to artists for their performance. In addition, the music industry contributes to society through cultural development as well as technology innovations that are used during the creation and distribution of music.

Since the heart of this study lies in the understanding of the credibility of microblog music reviews and its influence on eWOM adoption, the next chapter deliberates on the credibility of microblog eWOM communication of music. This comprises a general discussion on credibility as a concept as well as a structured review of the various theories that seek to explain the process of credibility evaluation of eWOM communication. Chapter 3 elaborates on the determinants of eWOM credibility, culminating in the development of hypotheses and a conceptual model that was later tested in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3

THE CREDIBILITY OF MICROBLOG eWOM COMMUNICATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The explosion of digital media content as well as the availability of multiple devices has brought about increased access to information by consumers. With the aid of the Internet, consumers are now able to connect easily and exchange information using various digital platforms (Arumugam & Omar 2016:1865). However, one issue that affects the unabated flow of information exchange is the element of credibility. Principally, the persuasiveness of a marketing message is determined by the extent to which the online information is truthful and reliable. Relatedly, credibility determines consumers' level of learning and the extent to which the marketing information can be applied in future consumption scenarios (Pham 2016:1874). This is because as more consumers utilise online information to make final purchase decisions, the method by which they assess the credibility of digital information comes to the fore (Cheung *et al*. 2009:9).

This chapter evaluates the concept of credibility. From the conceptualisation of credibility, the study goes further to discuss how credibility is assessed in the traditional WOM communication context as well as in the eWOM communication sphere. The chapter also investigates the characteristics of credible eWOM communication and then examines its drivers in sections 3.3 and 3.4, respectively. To gain perspective regarding the study's theoretical framework, a discourse is proffered in Section 3.5. Specifically, the dual process theories in light of the HSM are reviewed and elected as the most relevant framework for positioning the determinants of eWOM credibility in this research. To support this, Section 3.6 discusses the cognitive heuristics, depicted as the peripheral cues that guide consumers in their credibility evaluation decisions about online music content. Subsequently, a description of how the cognitive heuristics can be applied is made in Section 3.7 by extrapolating the vital determinants considered by consumers. Section 3.8 elucidates on eWOM adoption as it is the endogenous variable for this study, while Section 3.9 clarifies the identified determinants of eWOM credibility and the relationship between overall microblog review credibility and eWOM adoption, culminating in the development of

tentative hypotheses and a conceptual model for empirical testing. Sections 3.10 concludes the chapter and hints at the next chapter.

3.2 CREDIBILITY DEFINED

The Oxford dictionary (1533) defines credibility as "the quality of being trusted and believed in". In the context of traditional WOM, Lim and Heide (2015:68) conceptualised credibility as "the extent to which consumers consider information believable". Likewise, contemporary scholars have defined credibility by using terminology such as believable, true and factual (Pham 2016:12). In addition, Fan *et al*. (2013:59) emphasised the definition that was proffered by Cheung *et al*. (2009:12) in that they defined the credibility of eWOM recommendations which are believable, true and factual. Shamhuyenhanzva *et al*. (2016:440) affirmed this by expanding on the view that credibility describes the extent to which "consumers believe that the information regarding products, reviews and online recommendations is accurate and based on facts".

Other scholars describe eWOM credibility as the degree to which a communicator of an eWOM is perceived to be believable, competent and trustworthy by receivers (Arumugam & Omar 2015:1866). Metzger (2007:2078) and Menkveld (2013:11) conceived the opinion that the information source should be as believable as the information itself. In this regard, Sharif *et al*. (2017:786) affirmed this description by emphasising the believability or trustworthiness elements of the information source. In this regard, credibility is evaluated based on the reliability of the source of information.

This study adopts the definition by Sharif *et al*. (2017:786), which asserts that credibility is "the believability or trustworthiness of the information's quality and the quality of the source from where the information comes". This definition alludes to a dual perspective comprising truthfulness of eWOM communication messages as well as believability of the communicator. Therefore, it can be inferred that credibility in the eWOM context relates to both the online message content and the communicator (Moran & Muzellec 2017:151). This means that the content that is captured along various eWOM communication formats such as microblog reviews should be worthy of consumers' trust and confidence. One way of asserting the level of trust of online information is to evaluate the reliability of the organisation or individual responsible for posting the comments. While this may be complex, owing to the anonymous nature of some authors, the final responsibility of passing credibility judgements rests upon the receiver of online information. Whereas the

main objects of credibility assessments have varied among fields, it is generally agreed that credibility is based on a person's (e.g. a listener, user, recipient, consumer) perception, rather than the objects of assessments. That is, the essential part of credibility assessment concerns how people perceive the reviews as credible, which then should theoretically be applicable for all types of credibility assessments, regardless of the objects under investigation.

3.2.1 Credibility assessment in traditional WOM communication

Credibility assessment is a highly dynamic and contextual process. While credibility is evaluated differently across online and traditional fronts, the evaluation of the latter seems unassuming since there is a direct opportunity for face-to-face, interpersonal communication. Drawing from the dictionary definition posited in Section 3.2 of this study, the concept of credibility is based on specific qualities or virtues (also known as the underlying dimensions), which are dominant in making people believe something. In light of understanding the dimensions underlying credibility assessment in traditional WOM contexts, Choi and Stvilia (2015:7) propose a confluence of five principal factors that are pivotal in consumers' WOM evaluation decisions. These include trustworthiness, expertise, dynamism, goodwill and personal attraction.

3.2.1.1 Trustworthiness

Hovland *et al*. (1953:22) defines trustworthiness as "the degree to which consumers or audiences believe that a message source intends to convey valid declarations". Relatedly, trustworthiness has been situated in respect to the "scrupulousness and believability of a source" (Umeogu 2012:114). In view of this, trustworthiness is built upon the notion of source believability and the conception of a message source as a disseminator that is a believable and valid assertion towards certain subjects. Trustworthiness is widely recognised as a valuable dimension in source credibility studies such as research that focuses on the persuasive impact of celebrity endorsers of various products (Schiffman *et al*. 2014:224).

3.2.1.2 Expertise

Pham (2016:1874) defines expertise as "the level of understanding of a person who is considered to also possess knowledge, skills and experience". As a result, the expert communicator is perceived to have the ability to process information accurately. Wu

(2013:14) defined expertise as "the extent to which the WOM information source is considered to be skilful, authoritative and have qualifications and competences towards a specific subject". In this regard, source expertise manifests as the level of knowledge, skills and experience that the communicator possesses in terms of academic qualifications, work experience and trades, of which the communicator is perceived to provide accurate information. Other scholars posit that expertise is deciphered from the articulacy and fluency of a message source regarding a specific subject and is instrumental in terms of inspiring confidence and belief in what is being said (O'Reilly, Macmillan, Mumuni & Lancendorfer 2016:79). In this regard, source-related features such as whether or not the speaker is intelligent, respectful, honest and active etc. are usually evaluated. While these expert-related characteristics also have a significant impact on the perception of credibility in the web contexts, obviously the level of source reliability is decrypted more effortlessly in face-to-face contexts.

3.2.1.3 Dynamism

Choi and Stvilia (2015:7) contend that dynamism (also termed activity) is another factor that consumers consider when evaluating the credibility of traditional WOM communication. It describes the quality of being vibrant, while exhibiting a positive attitude, energy and ideas with an affinity for innovative thinking (Oxford dictionary 1533). If a WOM communicator is perceived to be dynamic, it is likely that the audience will perceive him/her to be credible. In this regard, dynamism is narrowly recognised in the literature in that it is sometimes attributed to as a source of WOM communication in studies such as that conducted by Epega (2008:5).

3.2.1.4 Goodwill

Lim and Heide (2015:68) define goodwill as "the perception that the other has one's best interests at heart". WOM communicators who display goodwill show that they have interest towards the receiver and are caring (Saleh 2016:1352). In other words, goodwill refers to the communicator's ability to convey the notion that they value consumers' interests and are empathic towards their needs (Perloff 2017:302). Finally, goodwill has an important implication towards WOM credibility since communicators who convey the element of care and empathy towards their audiences will easily earn their trust. Ultimately, the WOM communication from sources that emphasise goodwill is considered persuasive.

3.2.1.5 Personal attraction

Choi and Stvilia (2015:7) stated that personal attraction is used to evaluate the credibility of WOM communication. Personal attraction refers to the physical appearance of a WOM communicator, which either may positively or negatively affect the credibility of the WOM communicator in various ways (Epega 2008:5). Relatedly, Luzzani (2015:28) postulates that personal attraction tends to be important in WOM communication since many people tend to believe that physically attractive people are likely to be warm, honest and intelligent even though that is not lucidly true. Nonetheless, the implication is that WOM communicators who are considered to have favourable attraction to their audiences have a good chance of earning their audiences' attention and persuade them to their point of view.

3.2.2 Credibility assessment in eWOM communication

Wathen and Burkell (2002:135) as well as Park, Wang, Yao and Kang (2011:75) concur that in online contexts, information persuasion begins with thoughtful judgements made by consumers regarding the extent to which they consider a particular information source as being credible. In light of this, it is widely acknowledged that credible information tends to be accepted easily by consumers, whereas it remains instrumental in influencing subsequent behaviour, be it positive or negative (Pham 2016:12). Moreover, previous scholars have demonstrated that credibility is one of the most important antecedents of eWOM adoption, even proving that information credibility is a vital predictor of an online consumer's further action (McKnight & Kacmar 2007:428). In support, Fan *et al*. (2013:59) postulate that consumers' perceptions of information credibility are a primary determinant in consumers' decision-making processes and further assist in truncating uncertainty in both business and social interactions.

Cheung *et al*. (2009:27) as well as Fan *et al*. (2013:63) concluded that consumers' perceptions of eWOM credibility present a significant and positive impact on eWOM adoption. Accordingly, if consumers are convinced that online information is credible then it gives them no reason not to adopt it. Lis (2013:129) confirmed the important role of eWOM credibility on the usage of product recommendations posted by members of an online discussion forum. Other studies have also validated the salience of eWOM credibility in the technology adoption decisions of consumers. For example, Moran and Muzellec (2017:158) found that consumers are likely to adopt social media communication or sites if they have positive perceptions of the credibility of the eWOM content that is

posted on those sites. Relatedly, Fang (2014:90) found that eWOM credibility is a direct predictor of consumers' decisions to use online information from eWOM reviews. In view of this, the current study of eWOM credibility seems befitting as a vital force for unfettering the advent of the fourth industrial revolution.

3.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF CREDIBLE eWOM COMMUNICATION

Consumers deliberate on the credibility of eWOM communication to a greater extent than traditional WOM communication when seeking product recommendations and will only take online advice that they perceive to be reliable (Wathen & Burkell 2002:139). This is because the digital arena is limited in terms of its capacity to permit consumers to evaluate products using the haptic system, as they would in a traditional context. While considering the unique features of the web, including the proliferation of peer-production mechanisms such as Wikis and other social content creation communities, the traditional cues and measures of traditional WOM credibility discussed in Section 3.2.1 may not adequately reflect the credibility of online resources in a comprehensive manner. By implication, the credibility judgements of online information can only be based on the product information and the entire presentation of the product online.

While enlisting the vital elements to consider when reviewing the reliability of online information, Scholars such as Chung, Nam and Stefanone (2012:179) draw attention to media and genre-specific structural features of web resources, such as domain names, navigation tools and hyperlinks to other sites. Jessen and Jørgensen (2012:1-2) highlight that authors' credentials and authority markers can be used to interpret the truthfulness of online information. Nonetheless, the attributes identified by these scholars are either not easily discernible nor are they universally recognised as standard cues. Moreover, ordinary consumers might not always have the necessary acumen to interpret such technical elements. As such, this section proffers the most simplistic yet widely recognised characteristics that are relevant for evaluating the credibility of eWOM communication.

3.3.1 Objectivity

Usually, consumers assign their trust to communication sources based on the objectivity of the message content (Wu 2013:17). Objectivity involves judging whether the information provided on the online site is a fact or an opinion (Metzger 2007:2079). This implies that consumers tend to demonstrate a favourable attitude and trust towards online information

if they are certain that it is fact, rather than individualised opinions. In agreement, Ryan (2010:11) stated that objectivity refers to whether the online communication is composed of facts or opinions and whether the communicator has potential interest in gaining something by providing the communication. This infers that objectivity is based on understanding whether there are commercial benefits or possible conflicts of interest on the nature of relationships between related information sources.

Stricker (2011:5) highlights that objectivity is considered the most important element of effective eWOM communication because it consists of both positive and negative aspects of the message content. In other words, credibility explains the extent to which the communicator has the appropriate knowledge and competence in reporting impartialness (Eagly, Wood & Chaiken 1978:426). In this vein, Sharma *et al*. (2012:44) concur that consumers who freely comment online on various things such as books, entertainment and music are in a position to share both the good and bad experiences, thereby rendering the eWOM communication, credible. This implies that the key character trait of credible eWOM communication is unbiased opinions. In view of delivering objective on music content, microbloggers often incorporate a holistic assessment of both affirmations and criticisms about the released music album by way of posting accurate lyrics, sound effects as well as the harmony in the beats and accompanying acoustics. In this regard, objectivity acts as a very important cue in terms of assisting online users in their judgements about the fairness and accuracy of the online music that is posted along microblogs.

3.3.2 Authority

According to Shamhuyenhanzva *et al*. (2016:441), authority determines the degree to which consumers perceive eWOM communication to be believable, owing to the communicator's ability to bring about a change in the recipients' reasons for action. The authority of eWOM communication pertains to the credentials of the author. This can be checked by observing whether the online content is provided on behalf of that individual or an organisation. For example, Grewal and Levy (2014:93) distinguish among online content that is posted along corporate blogs, professional blogs and personal blogs, of which the platforms differ in terms of authoritativeness. Relatedly, the authority of online content can be assessed by evaluating the respective author's qualifications, expertise and affiliations. Consistent with eWOM communication of music, the authority of the communicator can be identified through the ratings and comments that other consumers

post in response to the communicator's posts. It can also be identified by evaluating the achievements as well as any other insignia pointing to the professional organisations that the message source is affiliated to.

3.3.3 Accuracy

The Oxford dictionary (1533) defines accuracy as "the degree to which the results of specification conform to the correct standard". Within the eWOM communication context, Metzger (2007:2079) posits three sub-elements when explaining the accuracy characteristic. First, accuracy denotes the degree to which the eWOM communication is free from error or mistakes. This includes explicit errors, such as grammatical and stylistic errors in the online content (Savolainen 2011:867). Secondly, accuracy can be measured in terms of the verifiability of the information by third parties, whereas information that can be easily cross-referenced with other content is considered accurate. For example, consumers tend to rate online content as credible if it clearly corresponds with other related content in social media, mainstream news and other conventional information sources (Cheung *et al*. 2009:18). Thirdly, accuracy is measured by the general reliability and truthfulness of the content at face value, which eludes online content that generally seems 'too good to be true'. In terms of music content that is posted online, consumers are able to evaluate its accuracy by checking if different music experts and artists are corroborating the same information in terms of release dates, album details, music quality etc. In the case of music images and videos, online users can check possible duplication or repetition of small areas of another photograph (termed cloning) as well as identification of any suspicious removal of multi-media details (termed airbrushing) using software such as WonderShare Filmora™.

3.3.4 Currency

Consumers evaluate the timeliness of information whereby if it is recent, it is perceived to be credible (Fanoberova & Kuczkowska 2016:23). This means that the frequency and recency of information provides a clue as to its veracity. According to Metzger (2007:2079), currency refers to the extent to which the eWOM communication is up to date. Ryan (2010:11) points to "a measure of how recent the posted information is." In other words, currency denotes the time that the information was actually communicated. Put simply, the more recent the online information, the more up to date it is likely to be. While the content may be based on out of date information or events that have occurred in

the past, it is easy to trace it back to its source. Interestingly, this characteristic is easily discernible along online platforms since time and date stamps are a regular phenomenon in all digital signatures. Moreover, the more frequently an eWOM communication source is updated in terms of the number of real time re-posts, the less likely it is to come from an opportunistic hoaxer. In terms of posting music content online, consumers are able to check the recency of song releases, the number and frequency of retweets about the particular song release and the timing of important events in the music industry.

3.3.5 Coverage

Coverage is a measure of the comprehensiveness or depth of the information that is provided on the eWOM platform (Metzger & Flanagin 2013:213). Ryan (2010:11) suggests that coverage can also be referred to as scope, which enumerates the exhaustiveness or comprehensiveness of information. In other words, coverage measures if the information provided on the eWOM platform is complete and further incorporates all relevant aspects in the domain. In eWOM communication of music content, coverage encapsulates the totality of artist details, song length, completeness of lyrics as well as the comprehensiveness of sounds used during the music creation.

3.4 DRIVERS OF CREDIBLE eWOM COMMUNICATION

The primary effectiveness of eWOM communication lies in the opinion leader's lack of material interest, genuine care for others' well-being as well as his or her knowledge and experience (Jin & Liu 2010:437). This means that credible communication is directed by the authenticity of the message source. Relatedly, previous researchers argue that one of the most attractive factors in the online environment is the source of the communication (Yu & Natalia 2013:796).

Cheung *et al*. (2009:10) pointed out that the credibility of eWOM communication is founded upon the reliability of the message source as well as the information quality. In agreement, Gfrerer and Pokrywa (2012:9) indicate that consumers are more likely to assimilate eWOM communication and perceive it to be credible if it comes from a trustworthy source, unlike if the communication comes from a less reliable source. Nevertheless, the online environment is confounded by a plethora of message sources (both known and unknown), who are at liberty to post content of their choice without censure. In this regard, consumers utilise various strategies to determine the reliability of the

information. For example, the music content that emanates from familiar artists and/or record labels is often considered credible owing to the authenticity of these professional entities. In instances where the consumers are uncertain, they may engage in cross-verification with other channels or by comparing archived posts from other consumers (Cheung *et al*. 2009:11). Consequently, there is an increased likelihood of realising credible eWOM communication since consumers are able to compare and verify the music content prior to taking further actions, such as making album sales.

While a primer on the credibility of eWOM communication has been proffered in this section, it is imperative at this stage to provide a systematic assessment of the underlying theoretical frameworks that have been put forward on the subject. In this regard, an evaluation of the existing theoretical frameworks that consumers use to evaluate online communication credibility is in order.

3.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS ON THE CREDIBILITY OF eWOM COMMUNICATION

According to Buttle (1998:242), traditional communication theories indicate that information factors such as the source, message and the receiver are the foremost elements that influence consumers' information evaluation. By implication, the credibility of the message depends on the trustworthiness of the source and the quality of information presented by the sender. However, a more complex situation is presented in the digital arena, which confounds the credibility evaluation process. First, online information is submitted by unfamiliar sources who may even be total strangers. Secondly, online marketing messages may be posted using numerous, unrelated formats as explained in Section 2.10 of this study. It is clear that traditional communication factors are still relevant, yet inadequate in explaining the process of eWOM credibility evaluation (Cheung *et al*. 2009:10). In this regard, various scholars have attempted to put forward theories and models that are attuned to the unique context of the eWOM communication scenario. Specifically, this study recognises the dominant literature put forward by previous scholars, including Fogg's (2003:123-140) Taxonomy of credibility, Wathen and Burkell's (2002:140-142) Three-stage model and Chaiken's (1980:753-760) dual process theories. These theoretical frameworks are explained next.

3.5.1 Fogg's (2003:123-140) Taxonomy of credibility

The Taxonomy of credibility was developed by Fogg (2003:123-140) within the context of human communication. The taxonomy sheds insight as to the specific elements to be considered when evaluating credibility in online environments, such as web information and online content. Figure 3.1 alludes to the basic components of the taxonomy.

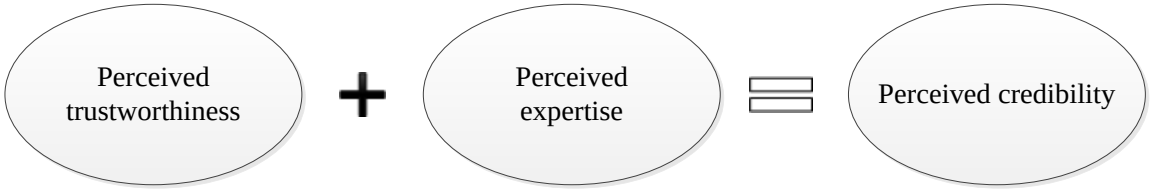


Figure 3.1: Key dimensions of credibility

Source: Fogg (2003:123)

Fogg's (2003:123-140) taxonomy suggests that when evaluating credibility of online information, consumers assess both trustworthiness and expertise in order to arrive at an overall credibility assessment.

Perceived expertise reflects the "perceived knowledge, skills and experience of the source" (Fogg 2003:123), alluding to the extent to which the online users view the message source as a holder of sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to act as a custodian and provider of accurate online information (Pham 2016:23). Relatedly, Iduozee (2015:29) referred to the expertise of consumers who post online reviews as "how well the communicator of the message is able to provide effective assertions." Lis (2013:131) posits that perceived expertise refers to the level of knowledge that the sender has with regard to putting forward online posts and comments regarding certain products and/or services.

For an online message to be considered credible, the source must have the element of expertise in order to make certain judgements about the product or service, as was the case in the study by Luzzani (2015:13) on YouTube™ video reviews. In their study of consumers who had made an online purchase after reading an online review, O'Reilly, Macmillan, Mumuni and Lancendorfer (2016:80) contend that an online source is considered credible if he/she possesses a certain level of expertise and appears to be unbiased regarding what action the consumer should take. In addition, Lange (2008:18) suggests that the likelihood of a source being considered credible is very high if the

communicator has no strong association to the message sender (in the case of a formal organisation) and has no reason or any incentive expectation to embellish their experience. In this regard, consumers are almost certain that the source of the online message content invariably exudes unbiased information. Consequently, if the information is considered to hold the right level of expertise, it therefore becomes persuasive.

In traditional contexts, perceived trustworthiness is defined as "consumers' assurances that the communicator is giving out information in an objective and honest manner" (Hovland *et al*. 1953:22). In other words, trustworthiness reflects the "perceived morality of the source" (Fogg 2003:123). This assertion is buttressed by Lis (2013:131) in his study of consumers who post entries and online recommendations for location-based businesses, locations and services. In addition, the term is used to describe the extent to which a message communicator provides truthful and reliable information to consumers (Yeap & Ramayah 2014:252). Relatedly, Iduozee (2015:29) views trustworthiness as that specific element, which motivates the communicator to share online information with other consumers. Of note, message sources are trustworthy if they are motivated by truly altruistic inclinations, with no vantage point to be gained. This means that when the communicator is perceived as having nothing to gain, they are likely to be considered trustworthy, whereas consumers gain confidence in using the same information in their decision-making (Chu 2009:44). Accordingly, Wu (2013:16) states that perceived trustworthiness plays a major role in the assessment of credibility in online settings. Specifically, trustworthiness has a positive impact on the perceived credibility of communication and is likely to influence consumers to make further action (Lin & Xu 2017:363).

Fogg's (2003:135-138) taxonomy states that credibility is composed of perceptions of trustworthiness and expertise, which are formed based on an examination of an information source's presumed, surface, reputed and earned credibility. This led the researcher to develop a taxonomy of credibility types based on the two dimensions. Presumed credibility is a credibility judgement based on previously held assumptions and beliefs (Ryan 2010:10). Consumers may rely on a specific website because it is believed to be trustworthy. For example, the website may declare that the source behind it is a research institute. In that case, it may assist consumers to evaluate favourably the level of credibility. Surface credibility is an unforeseen judgement based on initial exposure to the source of information. It infers a type of credibility evaluation that is related to exposure to an

interface design. In evaluating surface credibility, a poorly designed interface may lead consumers to mistrust the information source (Menkveld 2013:14). Since the website interface is the first element that the consumer considers during the online credibility evaluation, surface credibility matters the most when consumers are browsing on the Internet since they tend to leave the site if it projects a negative first impression.

Reputed credibility is based on what other people are saying, including third-party comments, endorsements and referrals (Metzger 2007:2089). Fogg (2003:163) states that perceptions of online credibility often centre on reputed credibility that is based on the endorsement or recommendation of the third party. Within the web, reputed credibility is demonstrated through site awards, seals of approval, associative links and corresponding online endorsements from other people (Sundar 2008:76). Conversely, earned credibility is the most deliberate type of credibility since it is based on the continued use of information and persistent exposure to an information source (Ryan 2010:10). This is exhibited by insistent activities such as consumers spending more time on an eWOM communication platform, making repeated purchases and telling other non-users about it. While earned credibility tends to be the most difficult type of credibility to gain, it is likely to lead to attitudinal and behavioural changes (Luzzani 2015:8).

In terms of validation of the taxonomy in empirical contexts, a study by Everard and Galletta (2005:77) utilised the credibility taxonomy to analyse how content presentation flaws affect consumers' perceptions of site quality, trust and intention to purchase from an online store. Their study revealed that when content is presented by a trustworthy source, consumers are likely to engage in financial transactions with the organisation. A study by Llamero (2014:964) utilised the credibility taxonomy to assess how credibility judgements intervene in the consumption of eWOM content in a tourism context. The findings of that study indicated that while trustworthiness plays a dominant role, both trustworthiness and expertise play an influential role in explaining the persuasiveness of online content, thereby confirming the multidimensionality of the credibility concept. Similarly, a study by Folks and Apostel (2013:11) employed the taxonomy upon evaluating the credibility of web search engines. They established that consumers demonstrate a healthy degree of concern for the trustworthiness of information, whereas they trust information from experts who have an established reputation rather than strangers they just meet online. Furthermore, the results from the study emphasised that search engines, among other online resources should focus on delivering credible content by utilising experts. Nonetheless, bearing in mind that

online information often does not always reach sufficient levels of factual analysis, the dimensions posited in this taxonomy may be limited. In fact, Fogg's (2003:123-140) taxonomy provides a contextual view of credibility, where the perception of the individual making the credibility judgment figures prominently, albeit to the exclusion of all features of the information object. The simple Three-stage model seeks to overcome the weaknesses of the credibility taxonomy by extending other evaluative elements.

3.5.2 Wathen and Burkell's (2002:140-142) Three-stage Model

Wathen and Burkell's (2002:141:142) Three-stage model is a result of a breakthrough study attempting to clarify the credibility assessment process. It highlights that the credibility of online information is affected by three components, namely, evaluation of surface credibility (impact of the messenger), evaluation of the message (source and message credibility) and the evaluation of the content (cognitive state of the credibility evaluator) as illustrated on Figure 3.2 of this study.

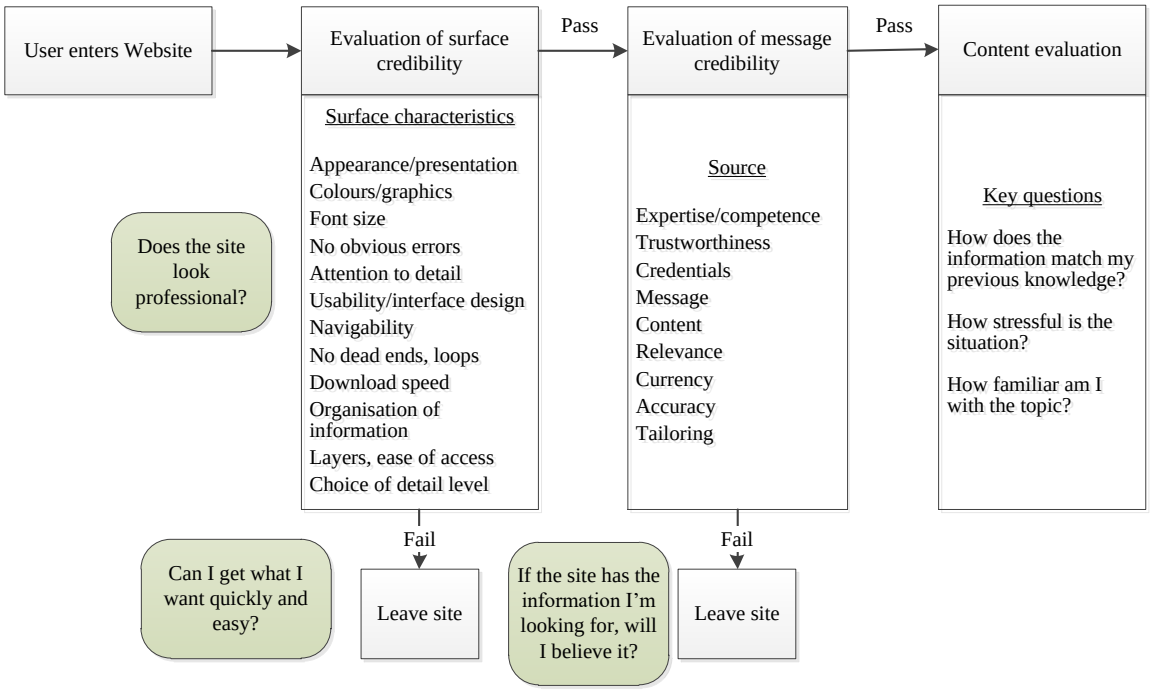


Figure 3.2: Theoretical model of how users judge the credibility of online information

Source: Wathen and Burkell (2002:141)

3.5.2.1 Evaluation of surface credibility (Stage 1)

In the Three-stage model, the process of evaluating credibility of communication on eWOM platforms starts by evaluating the surface credibility, comprising the external characteristics (Wathen & Burkell 2002:141). In particular, Hilligoss and Rieh (2008:1470) highlight that it is the user's first task to rate the credibility of the medium based on surface characteristics such as the presentation, interface design and the organisation of the information. According to Ryan (2010:13), this stage answers implicit questions that may be posed by the credibility evaluator such as: 'does the source appear professional' and 'can I find what I want quickly and easily'. In this regard, the evaluation of surface credibility is the quickest of the three stages, in that it relies on heuristic judgments of visual cues that can be made without thoroughly reading the material in question.

In terms of appearance, online users tend to focus on the colours, graphics and font sizes that have been used in the online post (Ryan 2010:13; Choi & Stvilia 2015:21). For example, if fonts that are used in the online communication are either too big or too small, they may not appeal to consumers. Such an evaluation infers the need for orderliness and a well-executed online post. According to Sundar (2008:76), the presentation of online content also plays a pivotal role in terms of the acceptance of web information. In support, Metzger (2007:2082) attests that the presentation of online content has a significant impact towards consumers' judgement of credibility. Online users are also able to evaluate the communicator's attention to detail, as exhibited by the limited amount of obvious errors (if any) in the online post, since accuracy is a paramount attribute when evaluating eWOM communication.

In terms of usability, the evaluators of online content tend to assess the interface design (Metzger 2007:2082). This includes the number of clicks before consumers get to what they need. In addition, Choi and Stvilia (2015:21) state that the usability of online content also includes the aspect of downloading speed, ease of access of the information and the choice of detailed level. In agreement, Hilligoss and Rieh (2008:1470) assert that a user's first task when evaluating an online content is to rate the usability of the website. This infers that consumers check if they are able to use the online site easily without coming across complications. For an online site to be viewed as credible, it should prioritise an easy to use interface and possess a professional outlook (Webber 2016:5).

With regard to the organisation of online content, Wathen and Burkell (2002:140) state that even a small spelling mistake can give an impression of 'amateurism' which may lead consumers to reject the online site and perceive it as lacking credibility.

If consumers feel like the visual presentation and other surface characteristics of the eWOM communication meet their personal expectations for what a credible online platform should look like, they then proceed to the next stage of evaluating the credibility of the message as well as the source (Hargittai, Fullerton, Trevino & Thomas 2010:471).

3.5.2.2 Evaluation of message and source credibility (Stage 2)

After the surface characteristics have been evaluated, then the next step consumers take is to evaluate the credibility of the message and the source (Wathen & Burkell 2002:141). Assuming that some amount of reading of the online content has occurred, the evaluator proceeds to examine both the source characteristics as well as the message characteristics (Ryan 2010:14). This stage answers the implicit question, 'does the site have the information that I am looking for?' and 'will I believe it?' Nonetheless, while the evaluation of message credibility is a more in-depth process than the evaluation of surface credibility, it still does not require a thorough reading of posted content.

Upon evaluating the source, elements of the expertise, trustworthiness and credentials of the source are examined. This includes an examination of the author's competence in terms of being able to convey the message with proficiency (Choi & Stvilia 2015:30). In addition, Metzger (2007:2078) cites that source elements that can be examined during credibility evaluation include the judgement of the trustworthiness of the source such as ratings of the source. Consumer-based judgements involve an evaluation of the communicator's credentials (Wathern & Burkell 2002:141), such as checking if the source is associated with a reputable organisation or university.

Message characteristics are evaluated in terms of the content, relevance, currency and accuracy. In this regard, the credibility evaluator considers the overall content and checks whether the post is relevant in meeting consumers' needs (Choi & Stvilia 2015:30). Wathen and Burkell (2002:141) suggest that credibility evaluators also consider the currency of the message in an online site. For example, consumers may evaluate the credibility of the content based on the date when the post was published, to check if it is still relevant and useful. Similarly, Metzger (2007:2078) states that consumers also pay attention to the

message accuracy by conducting a thorough examination of possible errors and truthfulness of the online content prior to accepting it.

3.5.2.3 Evaluation of the content (Stage 3)

The last stage of eWOM credibility evaluation as proposed by the Three-stage model is evaluation of the content (Wathen & Burkell 2002:141). This stage is the most situation-specific of the three stages in that it places chief prominence on the cognitive state of the individual making the credibility judgment. Furthermore, content evaluation considers the extent to which the individual's cognitive state interacts with both surface and message credibility (Pham 2016:15). The scholars assert that when individuals evaluate the credibility of the online content, the implicit questions that are posed include: 'how does the information match with my previous experience?', 'how important is this information to me', 'how familiar am I with the topic?'; 'am I ready to believe this information?' and 'am I ready to act on it?'.

The cognitive and effective state is most significant for conclusions that are drawn during content evaluation (Ryan 2010:14). Therefore, the final stage of this model is defined as a comprehensive examination of the material in question that is related to the analysis of consumers' rational and emotional states. In the evaluation of content, there is an interaction between the presentation and content with what consumers already know, termed the cognitive state (Hilligos & Rieh 2008:1470). At this stage, consumers consider what they already know with what they have learnt on the online site (Wathen & Burkell 2002:141). Likewise, during content evaluation, consumers also consider the affective state, where their emotional states can either be expressed in terms of positive and/or negative affect.

Content evaluation is the most time-intensive of the three stages in the model since it requires a thorough understanding of the material to address the questions asked. This means that an individual may not be able to reach this stage if deterred by a source's unfavourable design or out-dated information during the evaluation of the credibility of the surface and message characteristics, respectively. The third stage is defined as a thorough analysis of the online content that has been posted, whereas the analysis is contingent upon an individual's cognitive and affective state.

Wathen and Burkell's (2002:141) model proceeds from the quickest and most general evaluations to the longest and most in-depth evaluations. As shown in Figure 3.2, consumers start by evaluating the surface characteristics prior to proceeding to the next stage. Nonetheless, since digital platforms are information-rich and there are too many online platforms to choose from (widely dispersed), it is very easy for online users to leave unsatisfactory eWOM platforms. For instance, there is as likelihood that consumers may leave the site if they are not satisfied with surface characteristics such as the appearance of the information on the eWOM communication platform, the use of bright colours, disturbing images, illuminations and/or fonts. An unsatisfactory design and disorderliness on the online platform may cause certain consumers to leave the site during the first stage of evaluation. However, consumers who are satisfied with the site's surface characteristics easily proceed to the second stage of evaluating the message credibility. While this is so, consumers can also leave the site during the second stage of evaluating the message credibility if they feel that the source is not trustworthy or if the source possesses limited expertise about products and/or brands. Failure to provide relevant and accurate message content can provide fertile ground for consumers to leave the site immediately, before they get to the final stage of evaluating the site content.

3.5.3 Chaiken's (1980: 753-760) Dual process theories

The Dual-process theories state that the information-processing outcomes (i.e. credibility judgements) emanate from the interaction between two different pathways, which lead consumers to arrive at specific conclusions (Chaiken & Trope 1999:38). The first route involves a situation where consumers process the information fast, grounded in low-effort heuristics that are deficient in details and context (Ryan 2010:25). Contrariwise, the second route involves consumers being able to process the information slowly and deliberately, while applying information in a more explicit and detailed manner, yielding on high-effort systematic reasoning (Cheung *et al*. 2009:13).

In consumer psychology contexts, the Dual process theories place emphasis on how communication influences models that are based on receivers' self-judgments of both the informational and normative power of audiences (Jeylta 2015:14). Informational influence is based on the verification of the reality of the acquired message, involving judgements of the message content, source and other receivers as well (Baek, Lee, Oh & Ahn 2015:292). For instance, informational influence may emanate from the power of the communicator if

he/she is considered more authoritative and erudite about the presenting topic. For that reason, informational influences are based on the receiver's self-judgments about the received information (Cheung *et al.* 2009:17; Son 2011:32). To impress upon this notion, Wathen and Burkell (2002:138) submit that the relevant components of the information, such as the content, source and receiver are important sources of informational influence. In this vein, Metzger, Flanagin and Medders (2010:420) pinpoint that the reliability of a message depends on the credibility of message sources and the quality of message arguments they present. Credibility evaluations that are based on normative influences are not only enriched by the received information but also by others' opinions (Cheung *et al.* 2009:71). In this way, the tenets of the Dual process theories underlie that both informative and normative paths lead to the assessment of credibility of online content (Baek *et al.* 2015:292).

Hilligoss and Rieh (2008:1470) point to two specific dual-process theories that are relevant when describing the process of persuasive communication at the base of information evaluation. In particular, the scholars allude to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) put forward by Petty and Cacioppo (1986:125-127) as well as the heuristic-systematic model (HSM) conceived by Chaiken (1980:754-756).

3.5.3.1 The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The ELM describes an individual's attitudinal changes as they evaluate information sources and shows how these changes lead to the individual focusing on either peripheral cues or the content itself (Ryan 2010:25). The ELM was developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986:125-127) within the social communication context. The model postulates that when consumers process information they take two routes, either the central route or the peripheral route as shown in Figure 3.3.

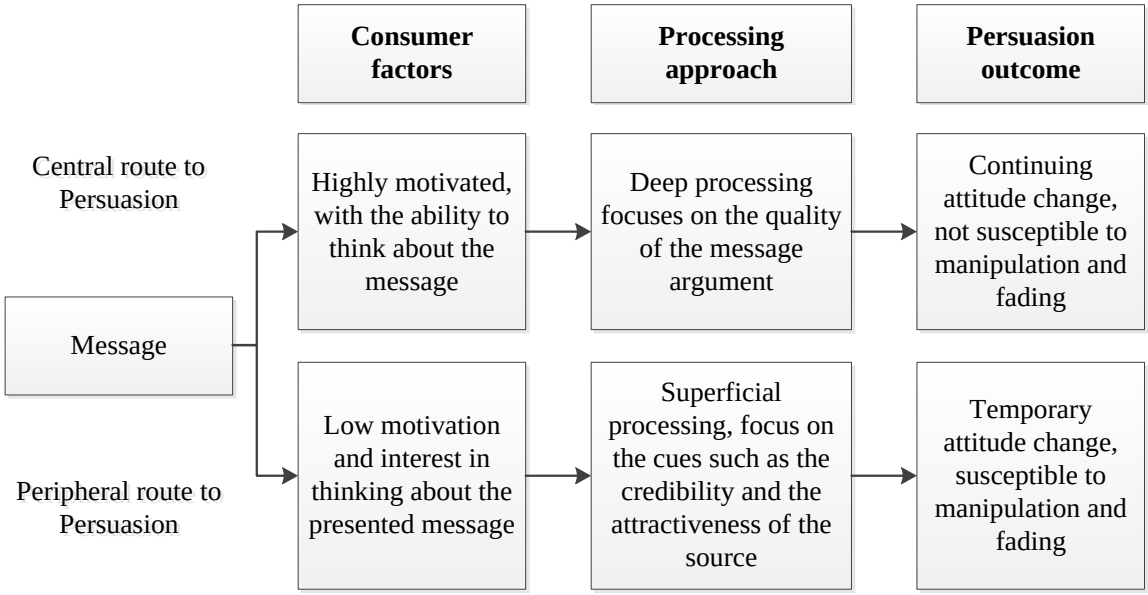


Figure 3.3: The Elaboration Likelihood Model

Source: Griffin (2009:194)

Petty and Cacioppo (1986:125) suggest that the persuasive communication is likely to emanate from a consumer's first consideration of the factual importance of the communication presented, which is the central route. When consumers chose to follow the central route, they look thoroughly at the relevant information prior to forming a certain attitude (Purcarea, Gheorghe & Petrescu 2013:255). Therefore, the central route involves the thorough, careful and cognitive evaluation that often culminates in persistent behaviour and attitudinal changes (Wathen & Burkell 2002:134). This infers deep processing of communication that focuses on the quality of the message argument, thereby yielding an enduring attitudinal change.

The peripheral route is a type of persuasion that is likely to occur because of simple cues, which do not necessarily evoke extensive scrutiny of the true merits of the communication (Petty & Cacioppo 1986:125). For examples, cues such as the attractiveness of the message source can be used when following the peripheral route. Specifically within the eWOM contexts and also in the evaluation of low-involvement products such as online music, consumers concentrate on non-content cues that include the product popularity, ratings, number of stars and likes, etc. (Mishra & Satish 2016:224).

3.5.3.2 The Heuristic systematic model (HSM)

This study is premised within the theoretical foundations of the Heuristic systematic model (HSM) put forward by Chaiken (1980:754-756). According to Ryan (2010:27), the HSM is mostly suited to explain the credibility judgements in an online environment using the two evaluation methods, low-effort evaluation and high-effort systematic analysis. In this manner, the HSM investigates how different levels of information processing and heuristics affect persuasive communication (Cheung *et al*. 2009:13), by following one of the two routes. The HSM describes how an individual's motivation and ability leads to a focus on either low-effort heuristic processing or high-effort systematic processing. Whereas the former reflects a quick evaluation of the messenger elements and cues such as the source reputation and surface design, the latter reflects an evaluation of the merits of the actual content of the message, as shown on Figure 3.4 of this study.

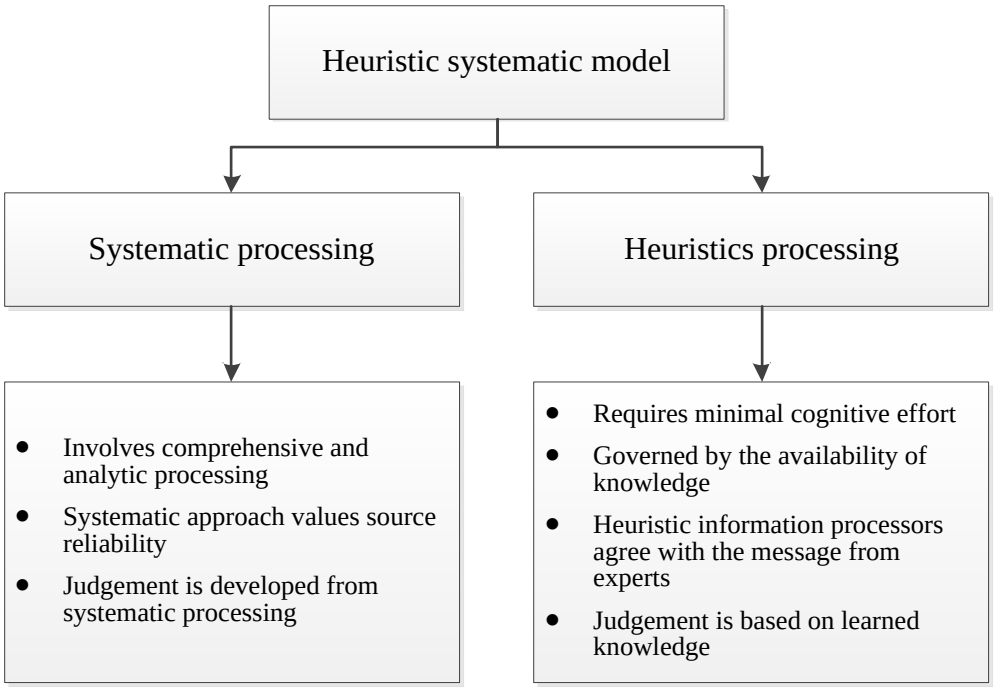


Figure 3.4: The Heuristics Systematic Model

Source: Bhattacharjee (2016:3)

Lee and Yang (2015:437) suggest that in systematic processing, consumers make additional efforts to scrutinise the content of the message prior to adopting it, rather than considering only the peripheral issues. So, when consumers take their time to analyse information and become extensively involved in credibility assessment evaluations of online information,

they are following the systematic processing route. In other words, systematic processing involves an in-depth evaluation of the overall content of the message, evidenced by the use of extensive cognitive effort (Cheung *et al*. 2009:13). Likewise, Purcarea *et al*. (2013:255) submit that systematic processing involves making a comprehensive effort to examine and understand the information. In this way, consumers are able to critically evaluate the arguments in a message and assess the message validity in relation to the conclusions (Baek, Ahn & Choi 2012:101).

Heuristic (low-effort) processing utilises limited cognitive effort and depends largely on heuristic-general rules, stereotypes and shortcuts in making credibility judgements (Ryan 2010:27). This includes the evaluation of the identity of a source, credibility of a source as well as the opinions of other consumers (Lee & Yang 2015:437). According to Purcarea *et al*. (2013:255), individuals apply the heuristic processing route when they have insufficient motivation, time and skill in interpreting online information. In this regard, the individuals opt to rely on readily available information such as the identity of the source and other non-content cues (Baek *et al*. 2012:101).

The HSM has been applied by different scholars in different studies. For example, a study by Zhang, Zhao, Cheung and Lee (2014:85) employed the HSM in order to understand the impact of online reviews on consumers' decision-making. Their findings indicated that systematic factors such as argument quality, source credibility and perceived quantity are important determinants of consumers' behavioural intentions towards purchase. Furthermore, the study by Teng, Khong, Goh and Chong (2014:758) utilised the HSM in examining the antecedents of persuasive eWOM messages in a social media context. Their research established the salience of source credibility and argument quality as the determining factors of persuasive eWOM messages.

While not described as such, Chaiken's (1980:754-756) study can be understood as a credibility study that examines how the likeability or reputation of the information source affects an individual's ability to evaluate the online message content based on its merits. This is because consumers either expand their effort in assessing credibility or build their own beliefs and decisions, or they may simply employ little cognitive effort and depend on heuristics when looking at the social world (Zhang *et al*. 2014:79). While the HSM routes can be used independently of each other, some researchers have argued that the application of both routes can play an important role in assisting people to cope with the overwhelming

amounts of information they are faced with on a daily basis (Gigerenzer & Todd 1999:12). This is especially relevant in the case of online consumers who do not always have the time to invest their full mental capacities in information evaluation tasks (Metzger & Flanagin 2013:213). The use of cognitive heuristics is a simple and acceptable strategy in this research since it enables consumers to manage the perceived costs of information search and information overload. This theoretical framing underlies the premise of this dissertation. Specifically, Metzger (2007:2079) postulated the five criteria of credibility termed the credibility heuristics, albeit within the field of communication and information literacy. The rationale for applying these criteria lies in that this research is centred upon an evaluation of a low-involvement product, namely music, which therefore bequests minimal cognitive effort and reliance on heuristics and cues when evaluating the music posts placed on microblogs.

3.6 THE COGNITIVE HEURISTICS

Cognitive heuristics are "information processing strategies that enable individuals to make decisions more quickly and with less effort than more complex methods and thereby reduce cognitive load during information processing" (Metzger & Flanagin 2013:214). In particular, Metzger *et al.* (2010:415) proposed five heuristics, which are instrumental in exerting a significant influence on the credibility evaluation of online information.

First, the **reputation heuristic** pertains to the recognition of a website, product or brand name of which reputation serves as a heuristic cue, allowing online users the opportunity to evaluate credibility with limited effort (Metzger & Flanagin 2013:214). This heuristic is likely rooted in a basic heuristic principle of favouring recognised sources of information whose names are easily recognisable, even without having thoroughly inspected the actual content or the source's credentials (Gigerenzer & Todd 1999:14).

Secondly, consumers apply an **expectancy-violation heuristic** when evaluating the credibility of information online, whereby if an online platform fails to meet their expectations in some way, they immediately judge it as lacking credibility (Metzger & Flanagin 2013:216). The research by Metzger *et al.* (2010:429) shows that the most prevalent expectancy-violations stem from the presence of typographical errors (also termed typos), grammatical errors and poor visual appearance, all of which result in persistent negative credibility evaluations.

The **endorsement heuristic** is the third cognitive cue, which speaks to individuals' inclinations to believe information that is believed by others also (Metzger & Flanagin 2013:215). This heuristic explains the mechanistic operations of the bandwagon effect, whereby online consumers display a tendency to trust online platforms and eWOM communication that originates from both known and unknown sources because others also trust in that same information (Sundar 2008:78; Metzger *et al.* 2010:427).

Fourthly, the **consistency heuristic** refers to the cross-validation of information by checking to see if information across different sources is consistent (Metzger *et al.* 2010:421). This is a relatively fast and frugal means of evaluating online information credibility (Metzger & Flanagin 2013:215). This heuristic is closely aligned to Chaiken's (1980:755) consensus heuristic whereby individuals assume that consensus implies correctness.

Finally, the **self-confirmation heuristic** describes the tendency for consumers to view information as credible if it confirms their pre-existing beliefs. Conversely, the information is judged as lacking credibility if it counters existing beliefs, regardless of how well argued the information might be presented (Metzger *et al.* 2010:423).

In view of presenting a robust understanding of how individuals actually perform the credibility judgment process, it is important to examine a set of corroborative factors that affect this process, and the past research that has examined them. These factors are discussed in the next section.

3.7 APPLYING THE COGNITIVE HEURISTICS IN CREDIBILITY EVALUATION OF eWOM COMMUNICATION

There is no agreement within the literature as to which set of factors is more important, as demonstrated by the divergence of eWOM credibility theories discussed in Section 3.5 of this study. Nonetheless, three overarching suppositions were made in this work in lieu of establishing a holistic combination of factors considered vital for evaluating information on digital platforms. First, the study alludes that both central and peripheral cues are admissible during the cognitive evaluations of online music reviews that are posted along microblogs. Secondly, since music is a low-involvement product that is not costly, this permits superfluous processing of information using external cues prior to adopting it. More especially, the low-effort cues for processing online information are significant during the

pre-purchase evaluation stage, which this is relevant for this study as it considers eWOM adoption as the outcome. Thirdly, this research concurs with Metzger's (2007:2079) five credibility heuristics, which emphasise source reputation, status and standing as a source of credible information as well as upholding certain online quality expectations. In addition, credibility evaluations consider the extent to which the online information is accepted by a plethora of sources, whether the information is easily cross-validated across different platforms and/or channels as well as the extent to which the information confirms the pre-existing beliefs of the consumer, *per se*.

This study heeds the call put forward by Cheung *et al.* (2009:10), who propose further empirical investigations regarding the factors considered by consumers upon evaluating the credibility of online information. This is considered a significant and interesting topic that could advance an understanding of the processes by which eWOM communication of music content is evaluated. Furthermore, this kind of communication has been given the distinctive characteristics of Internet communication, which is available to consumers without the limitations of time and location (Luo *et al*. 2013:92). Therefore, while resonating with Metzger's (2007:2079) five credibility heuristics, this study considers a set of five corresponding determining factors, namely: source credibility (reputation heuristic); information quality (expectancy-violation heuristic); homophily (endorsement heuristic); review consistency (consistency heuristic); and prior-belief confirmation (self-confirmation heuristic). These factors are discussed next.

3.7.1 Source credibility

Source credibility is classified as one of the factors that influence the credibility of eWOM communication. This concept was framed in communication research by Hovland *et al*. (1953:355). Schiffman *et al*. (2014:224) defines source credibility as "the perceived honesty and objectivity of the communicator". In simpler terms, Jelyta (2015:15) defines source credibility as "the extent to which consumers find the source of the message credible". This reflects on the character traits of believability, competence and trustworthiness (Arumugam & Omar 2016:1866). By implication, the source is considered credible if consumers perceive the communicator to provide information that is based on facts and objective, external attributions, rather than internal subjective reasoning.

Arumugam and Omar (2015:1866) highlight that the role of source credibility in distributing eWOM communication is very important. This is because the information that

comes from credible sources is likely to be accepted easily when compared with information originating from sources with limited credibility (Iduozee 2015:28). In agreement, Lange (2008:18) emphasises that an information source is considered credible if it has the right expertise and remains unbiased in all forms of communication. Nonetheless, if the information is not considered credible, it is automatically discarded and consequently delimited as lacking in persuasiveness. By inference, consumers can devote their trust to microbloggers based on the history of their posts, whereas the ratings of other consumers can indirectly signal the extent to which the posts made by that microblogger are trustworthy.

The element of source credibility has been studied by many scholars in different studies across various contexts. For example, in a study by Cheung *et al*. (2009:27), source credibility was included as a lower-order construct in the credibility evaluation of recommendations posted along online consumer discussion forums. The scholars established that source credibility has a significant influence on perceived eWOM credibility. Relatedly, a study by Arumugam and Omar (2015:1867) investigated the importance of source credibility on eWOM information adoption among online consumers. In that study, source credibility was found to have a direct influence on the eWOM adoption of information by online consumers. Furthermore, Luo *et al*. (2013:98) found a positive effect of source credibility on recommendation credibility in their study of the impact of informational factors influencing online recommendation credibility.

3.7.2 Information quality

Information quality is also regarded as one of the factors that influence the credibility of eWOM communication. Teng *et al*. (2014:748) define information quality as "the persuasive strength of the communicated message". In addition, Yeap and Ramayah (2014:252) propose that information quality is the value of informational output, as perceived by the receivers of that content. Whereas information quality has been measured in different ways, a majority of the scholars agree that the variable plays an important role in information adoption as well as influence consumers' attitudes in online environments (Sussman & Siegal 2003:50; Fanaberova & Kuczkowska 2016:22).

A study by Cheung *et al*. (2008:242) investigated the motivations behind the adoption of online opinions and found that information quality has a positive and significance influence towards information usefulness, thereby culminating in eWOM adoption. In that research,

the variable was measured in terms of the relevance, timeliness, accuracy and comprehensiveness of the information. In another study, Cheung *et al*. (2009:27) measured information quality in terms of the argument strength, thereby uncovering that the variable positively affects the adoption of eWOM communication, albeit through mediation of the perceived credibility construct.

3.7.3 Homophily

Aghakani and Karimi (2013:3) mention that homophily occurs as a natural phenomenon amongst human beings, whereby people associate themselves with those who are similar to them. Similarly, Shamhuyenhanzva *et al*. (2016:441) described homophily as "the tendency in which individuals associate with other individuals who are similar to them or possess the same characteristics and attributes as theirs". Whereas homophily is not only based on common demographic characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity, Varabyova (2014:16) argues that the variable also emanates among individuals with shared interests and mind-sets, which is perceived to be instrumental in enhancing the credibility perceptions of eWOM communication. This is because the presence of homophily makes it easier for consumers to perceive eWOM communication as credible, owing to the presence of other individuals who belong to mutually identified areas of interest. According to Lange (2008:19), the similarity of the source of the eWOM communication with other consumers has a positive effect on the extent to which the message is considered credible, culminating in message persuasiveness.

Homophily has been proven to play an essential role in shaping and positively influencing the persuasive process in online communication (Shamhuyenhanzva *et al*. 2016:441). Specifically, Reichelt *et al*. (2014:70) denote that the theory of homophily advocates that the more one is similar to the other on both perceptual and demographic variables such as cultural values and beliefs, the greater the level of credibility and empathic understanding. Wu (2013:20) further posits that homophily is the most influential factor in consumers' decision-making processes. As such, homophily remains an important factor that bears a significant influence in all forms of human communication.

Wu (2013:47) explored the criteria that consumers use to judge the factuality of eWOM information. Their study established that homophily has a significant influence on consumers' decisions as well as on the credibility of eWOM information. Relatedly, Wang, Walther, Pingree and Hawkins (2008:365) found homophily to be a driver of credibility,

whereas Lange (2008:44) established that homophily is a very important characteristic of eWOM communication within a high-involvement context. By extension, the influence of this attribute is expected to be protracted towards a low-involvement context, as in the case of online music content.

3.7.4 Review consistency

Review consistency speaks to the degree to which a recommendation that is made online is consistent with other assertions that have been validated in other consumption encounters (Cheung & Thadani 2010:336). This may be in the form of constant and unswerving declarations being made by other consumers during their evaluations of the same product or service scenario (Cheung *et al*. 2009:18). For example, a recommendation about Senzo Vilakazi's (A.K.A Kwesta) new music album is consistent with the notion that the artist in question won an award during the 23rd annual South African Music Awards (SAMA) in 2017.

Cheung *et al*. (2009:9) highlights that in eWOM communication, consumers are presented with the opportunity to consult various sources of information to expand or validate the messages they are receiving. Interestingly, a majority of the consumers use various search engines on the Internet to find out more information about certain products or services, prior to making final decision. Durmaz and Yuksel (2017:233) suggest that as consumers go through the information search process, they usually consider the opinions from other consumers rather than experts, of which the former are considered credible sources. This is because actual consumers have gone through every process of consuming and experiencing that particular product, first-hand. The consistency of facts from various users of products and services is very important and has a significant impact towards the final acceptance of an eWOM message (Luzzani 2015:18).

Information consistency was introduced as a determinant of eWOM credibility by Cheung *et al*. (2009:33). The scholars found that the consistency of recommendations posted by various users of products and services has a significant influence towards other consumers' perceptions of the credibility of an eWOM message. Following on, Durmaz and Yuksel (2017:237) evaluated the effects of eWOM review credibility on the purchase intentions of Turkish e-commerce users, whereas the findings of these scholars supports the notion that recommendation consistency has a positive effect on perceived eWOM review credibility.

3.7.5 Prior-belief confirmation

Cheung *et al*. (2009:17) refer to the confirmation of prior-beliefs as the level of confirmation and/or disconfirmation between the received communication and the receiver's previously held beliefs about particular products or services. Usually, these prior-beliefs are held in the memory of a consumer as a result of direct experience and/or the indirect experiences of other individuals within the same circle (Luzzani 2015:17). This suggests that if the eWOM communication confirms consumers' prior-beliefs towards a product or a service, it is easily affirmed and accepted, thereby being perceived as believable. This is especially true for those consumers that have a high capacity to retrieve relevant information. The information is rendered persuasive and consumers develop confidence in adopting such communication (Cheung *et al*. 2009:17; Menkveld 2013:16). Nevertheless, consumers who possess a very low capacity in retrieving attitude relevant information usually make use of prior-beliefs and experience sparingly (Luzzani 2015:17).

Various scholars have demonstrated that the confirmation of prior-beliefs poses a significant impact towards the credibility of the received information. For example, a study by Cheung *et al*. (2009:27) demonstrates that prior-belief confirmation has a positive impact on the perceived credibility of online consumer discussion forum, evaluating the credibility of online consumer recommendations posted in discussion forums. Another study conducted by Luzzani (2015:52) analysed the determinants that affect the perceived credibility of video eWOM reviews. The results proved that confirmation of prior-beliefs has a positive influence on the perceived credibility of video eWOM reviews on YouTube™.

Following the review of the selected determinants of eWOM credibility in this section, a summary of the identified factors as well as their use and broad application in previous studies on eWOM credibility is made in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Summary of studies evaluating the determinants of eWOM credibility

Author/s	Determinants	Outcome variable	Key findings	Sample	Country
Cheung *et al.* (2008:229-247)	Source credibility Argument quality	Information usefulness Information adoption	Strong significant impact on information adoption	Online customers who share opinions about restaurant services	China
Cheung *et al.* (2009:9-38)	Argument strength Source credibility Confirmation of prior beliefs Recommendation consistency	Perceived eWOM review credibility	Significant influence on perceived eWOM credibility	Users of online discussion forums	China
Fan *et al.* (2013:58-65)	Source credibility eWOM quantity eWOM quality	Perceived eWOM credibility eWOM adoption	Significant effect on perceived eWOM credibility	College and graduate students who are online consumers of cosmetic products	Taiwan
Luo *et al.* (2013:92-102)	Source credibility Completeness Persuasiveness	Recommendation credibility Recommendation adoption	Positive effect on recommendation credibility and recommendation adoption	Online consumers in discussion forums	China
Wu (2013: 971-984)	Source credibility Perceived risk	Trust Purchase intentions	Significant impact on purchase intentions	Online users of user generated media	China
Arumugam and Omar (2016: 1865-1869)	Argument quality Source credibility	Information usefulness eWOM adoption	Direct influence on the adoption of eWOM information	Online consumers and Internet shoppers	Malaysia
Erkan and Evans (2016:1-17)	Argument quality Source credibility	Information usefulness Information adoption	Significant impact on information usefulness and purchase intentions	University students who are users of social media Websites and online shoppers	UK
Pham (2016: 1871-1885)	eWOM credibility Expertise Involvement	eWOM adoption Purchase intentions	Positive relationship on both eWOM adoption and purchase intentions	Online consumers of cosmetic products	Vietnam

Table 3.2: Summary of studies evaluating the determinants of eWOM credibility (continued …)

Author/s	Determinants	Outcome variable	Key findings	Sample	Country
Durmaz and Yuksel (2017: 231-239)	Recommendation rating Argument strength Recommendation consistency	Review credibility Purchase intentions	Positive effect on credibility	Users of e-commerce sites	Turkey

Source: Author's compilation (2018)

The next section sheds light on the dependent variable for this research.

3.8 eWOM ADOPTION

eWOM adoption entails a decision where consumers choose to use a certain online platform as a provider and/or disseminator of various messages of varying significance. Lis (2013:133) defines eWOM adoption as the "acceptance recommendation of the relevant review", whereas Cheung and Thadani (2010:465) referred to eWOM adoption as "the process by which consumers purposefully engage in using eWOM for communication purposes." This means that in this process, consumers utilise various input tools to evaluate their decision-making, among which credibility evaluations are a part. In the same vein, Fang (2014:75) postulated a varying conceptualisation when he described eWOM adoption as "the response by eWOM receivers, resulting from accepting what the communicator advocates as well as the continual use of the eWOM platform." The latter definition is upheld in this research for two reasons. First, eWOM adoption emanates from a deliberate encounter with an online message, to an extent that the receiver evaluates it and resorts to accepting the message based on its merits. To this effect, Moran and Muzellec (2017:155) found eWOM adoption to be analogous to online engagement processes. Secondly, the definition regards eWOM adoption as a continuous process, which is indicative of the long-term and sustained reliance on online messages for making various consumption decisions. Therefore, this study considers the long-term and continuous decision to accept and rely on eWOM content about music, as it is posted along microblogs.

Notably, the decision to adopt eWOM depends on the level of trust that consumers have on the eWOM communication. Should consumers consider the eWOM communication

credible, then there is a greater likelihood that they will have confidence in adopting the messages and also use the information to make consumption decisions (Cheung *et al*. 2009:12). By implication, if the eWOM communication is perceived to be less credible, it yields a negative impact on the overall adoption of eWOM content (Erkan & Evans 2016:7), since it may be considered fake news. In this vein, considerable researchers have made painstaking efforts to reveal the salience of this variable by demonstrating the existence of a direct relationship between eWOM credibility and eWOM adoption. Some empirical studies that have been conducted include studies by Fan *et al*. (2013:63), Lis (2013:137) and Pham (2016:1881) who demonstrated the positive relationship between perceived eWOM review credibility and eWOM adoption. This study extends this path by considering the influence of South African microbloggers' perceptions of music review credibility on eWOM adoption.

3.9 HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR THE STUDY

Drawing from the aforementioned review of the literature on the determinants of eWOM credibility and eWOM adoption processes, Figure 3.5 is presented as the conceptual model for this study. It depicts how online credibility heuristics, namely source credibility, information quality, homophily, review consistency and prior-belief confirmation (independent variables) influence the credibility of microblog music reviews (intervening variable) and subsequent adoption of eWOM (outcome variable).

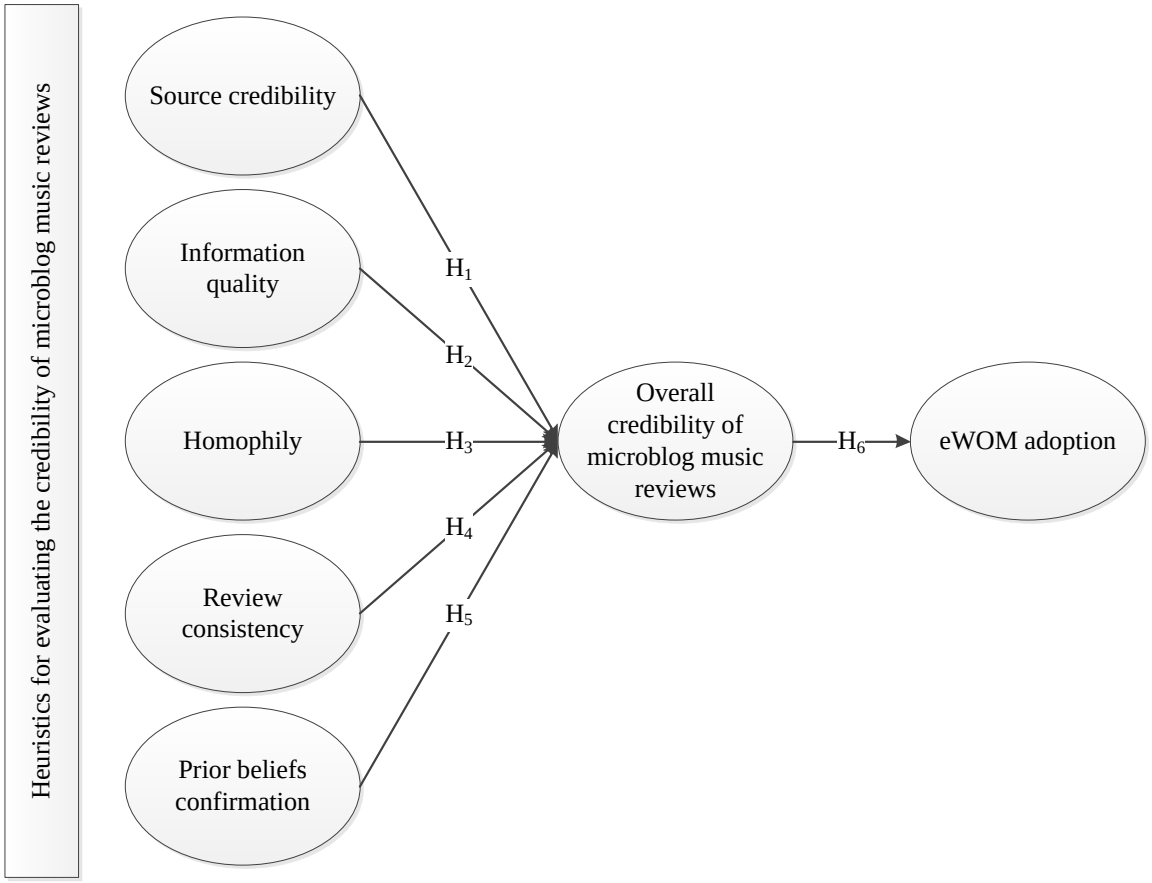


Figure 3.5: A conceptual model on the adoption of eWOM on microblogs

Source: Author's compilation

Supporting hypotheses are presented in the sections that follow.

3.9.1 Source credibility and the credibility of microblog music reviews

Source credibility has been shown to affect the adoption of eWOM communication through the perceived information credibility construct (Jelyta 2015:15). Arumugam and Omar (2016:1866) contend that source credibility is invaluable in eWOM environments since various posts are made by anonymous individuals with credentials that are not easily verifiable. Cheung *et al.* (2009:16) posit that the information source poses a significant impact on the credibility of a message that is posted on eWOM platforms. In support, Luo *et al.* (2013:98) found that source credibility has a direct effect on recommendation credibility. Similarly, the results by Iduozee (2015:28) affirmed that source credibility has a direct effect towards the overall information credibility assessments that are made by online consumers. In this study, source credibility was anticipated to influence consumers'

perceptions of the credibility of microblog music reviews. This path was hypothesised as follows:

H_{o1}: *Source credibility does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a1}: *Source credibility positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

3.9.2 Information quality and the credibility of microblog music reviews

The manner in which consumers perceive information to be credible is influenced by the quality of the information presented. In this regard, Arumugam and Omar (2015:1866) suggest that consumers can use certain cues to evaluate the quality of posted information, such as considering the persuasive strength of the communication. Notably, Lopes *et al*. (2013:49) state that the measurement of information quality is an important element of online media communication since it presents a strong bearing on whether or not consumers view the platforms as reliable disseminators of information *per se*. In terms of validated empirical findings, Cheung *et al*. (2009:27) established that information quality has a positive and significant impact on recommendation credibility. Relatedly, Erkan and Evans (2016:7) found information quality to have a significant impact on eWOM adoption of content on social media and shopping websites. In light of these findings, this study evaluates consumers' perceptions of microblog information quality based on the language clarity, timeliness (latest releases), formatting (audio and video) as well as the completeness of posted music reviews, albeit within a South African context. In this vein, this research tested the following hypotheses:

H_{o2}: *Information quality does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a2}: *Information quality positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

3.9.3 Homophily and the credibility of microblog music reviews

Lange (2008:17) stated that homophily can be measured based on a sender's and a consumer's similarities concerning values, preferences and lifestyle. This declaration is tied closely to the concept of associative influence, suggesting that homophily could probably

affect the credibility evaluations of online communication. Empirically, Wang *et al.* (2008:365) found that homophily is a driver of credibility in an online environment. Locally, the research by Shamhuyenhanzva *et al*. (2016:436) established homophily to be a driver of online message credibility. Furthermore, the findings by Wu (2013:19) support the notion that homophily influences consumers' judgements of the information they receive online. In view of this, the current study tested the following hypotheses:

H_{o3}: *Homophily does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a3}: *Homophily positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

3.9.4 Review consistency and the credibility of microblog music reviews

In online environments, when information is submitted by more than one expert and the information is consistent throughout, it is perceived to be credible and consumers easily adopt it (Cheung *et al*. 2009:18). Generally, when consumers search for information online, they find different types of information from different sources of which they consider the information to be credible if different sources confirm a similar aspect (Durmaz & Yuksel 2017:232). The findings of Lee (2016:1988) suggest that consistency positively affects eWOM adoption through the credibility construct. By implication, music reviews that are posted by different microbloggers can be vetted against the comments and posts made by other consumers on the same eWOM platform. Alternatively, microblog music reviews could be cross-referenced with information from other media channels such as broadcast media. In this study, it was expected that review consistency would influence consumers' perceptions of microblog music reviews. This path was hypothesised as follows:

H_{o4}: *Review consistency does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a4}: *Review consistency positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

3.9.5 Prior-belief confirmation and the credibility of microblog music reviews

If the eWOM communication confirms what consumers already know, it is easily accepted as credible. The perceived credibility of information is therefore influenced by the

confirmation of prior-beliefs of consumers (Lopes *et al.* 2013:49). Previous studies have demonstrated that prior-beliefs are an important antecedent of perceived eWOM credibility. For example, a study by Ismagilova *et al*. (2017:59) provides valid empirical findings as to the positive influence of consumers' prior-beliefs on their positive evaluations of online information. Relatedly, a study by Cheung *et al*. (2009:27) demonstrates that prior-belief confirmation positively influences the perceived credibility of online reviews. Similarly, in this study of an emerging market, it was expected that confirmed prior beliefs influence the credibility evaluations of music reviews. This path was hypothesised as follows:

H_{o5}: *Prior beliefs confirmation does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a5}: *Prior beliefs confirmation positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

3.9.6 The credibility of microblog music reviews and eWOM adoption

The adoption of eWOM communication depends on the reliability of information found on that eWOM communication platform. McKnight and Kacmar (2007:424) found that perceived credibility was a strong predictor of eWOM adoption in the context of websites. Similarly, numerous other studies have demonstrated that credibility is the most important antecedent in consumers' eWOM adoption decisions (Wathen & Burkell 2002:136; Metzger 2007:2082; Cheung *et al.* 2009:10; Fang 2014:75). Likewise, Sussman and Siegal (2003:61) opined that information usefulness, eWOM credibility and eWOM adoption are related theoretically. This supposes that information credibility mediates the causal relationship between central and peripheral factors with information adoption. Therefore, for nomological completeness, consumers overall perceptions of the credibility of microblog music reviews were evaluated against their eventual decision to adoption and continue using eWOM communication platforms. This path was hypothesised as follows:

H_{o6}: *The credibility of microblog music reviews does not positively influence future eWOM adoption by microbloggers.*

H_{a6}: *The credibility of microblog music reviews positively influences future eWOM adoption by microbloggers.*

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a theoretic frame of reference in understanding how consumers evaluate the credibility of eWOM communication. In order to define credibility, this study alludes to a twofold set of beliefs whereby the reliability of the eWOM content as well as the reliability of the eWOM communicator are considered. The latter is important since most individuals who post online content are anonymous. Specifically, this study is concerned with the eWOM credibility of music reviews that are posted on microblogs. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that consumers are faced with limited time and skill when evaluating the information that is posted on a low-involvement product, such as music. Hence, the study elected to apply principles of the HSM by identifying selected determinants that correspond with the major five credibility heuristics. Specifically, source credibility, information quality, homophily, review consistency and prior-belief confirmation were elected as the determinants of the credibility of microblog music reviews. In addition, consumers' perceptions of the credibility of microblog reviews is purported to yield increased participation and long-term use of online platforms termed eWOM adoption. In this vein, hypotheses were formulated and the conceptual model presented for empirical testing in this work.

The following chapter provides a comprehensive discussion on the research design and the methodology followed in this study. This includes an explanation of the research process, approach, design, sampling plan and data collection procedures. Additionally, a discussion on the data analysis procedures that were applied in the empirical component of this study is proffered in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Bilau, Witt and Lill (2018:599), the research methodology comprises research questions, study aims and objectives, which guide the research methodology and design for conducting a research. Likewise, Malhotra *et al*. (2017:9) uphold that the chosen research methodology should acquire a reasonably adequate basis for empirically grounded conclusions in a certain discipline. In this vein, a review of the specific research design and methods applied in this study are outlined. Initially, a review of the literature was made with an emphasis on online music review credibility and its influence on the adoption of eWOM along microblogs in the previous chapters. Likewise, various theories for evaluating eWOM credibility were considered. This theoretic reference provided a starting point with which to conceptualise the key variables in this research. Summative, the literature review and the conceptual framework presented in chapters two and three respectively, together with the research design and methodology outlined in this chapter indicate the approach that was applied upon addressing the research objectives stated in Section 1.4 of this study.

Chapter four outlines the research design employed. It begins by providing the scope of the study in Section 4.2 of this dissertation, which clarifies the delimitations of the work to the reader. Thereafter, an overview is given on the specific methodology that was followed in the empirical portion (Section 4.3). Furthermore, a breakdown of the marketing research process is provided in Section 4.4 of this dissertation. A perspective on the research design and approach that was applied is made in sections 4.5 and 4.6 of this dissertation, respectively. The sampling design procedure as well as the data collection process are explained in sections 4.7 and 4.8 to reflect on the information collected from the subset of population elements comprising microbloggers. Moreover, an outline is given on both questionnaire development and research ethics that were relevant to this work under sections 4.9 and 4.10, respectively. Section 4.11 reviews the process of scale evaluation by elucidating on the reliability and validity issues pertaining to this research. Subsequently, a perspective on the data preparation steps that were applied prior to conducting the

statistical analysis is made in Section 4.12. Section 4.13 reviews the methods that were applied on the sample data to show how data were statistically analysed. In addition, a discussion on regression analysis is outlined in Section 4.14 of this study to anchor the statistical application for this work. Section 4.15 closes this chapter and hints at the next chapter.

4.2 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Several choices and sacrifices were made in view of delimiting the scope of this study to a postgraduate dissertation. First, this study focuses on an eWOM communication platform, specifically microblogs. As already discussed in Section 2.9 of this study, microblogs allow consumers to share short and frequent eWOM messages in real-time. This study is interested in the eWOM sharing activities of consumers along platforms such as Twitter™, 12Seconds™, DailyBooth™, Tumblr™ and FriendFeed™ owing to their universality. The study also considers posts made in the form of product reviews. Notably, reviews differ from other online posts in that they provide regular information and updates whilst simultaneously delivering recommendations about product quality. The information presented in microblog reviews has become a major informational source for consumers in their decision-making (Burton & Khammash 2010:230). Whereas testimonials and recommendations are proffered upon request from clients and/or businesses, online reviews are unsolicited, yet offer highly opinionated judgments about various products and/or services, hence their relevance in this study. Interestingly, the volume and quality of online reviews tends to influence sales and the ultimate reliance on eWOM communication platforms for judging product performance (Cui *et al*. 2012:54).

This study further elected to focus on music specifically. The rationale for choosing music as a product category is dual-pronged. First, music involves a low-involvement decision, meaning that it is usually inexpensive and thereby poses a low risk to consumers when buying it. Secondly, music is considered a low risk product since consumers usually do not require extensive effort when evaluating the credibility of music and entertainment information. As consumers are limited in terms of time when evaluating the credibility of music content, they can either apply routine response behaviour and only process information at a superficial level by applying swift heuristics. This could probably explain the ranking of music as the fifth most sought-after online product category in South Africa, with a rapid annual growth of 7.8 percent in both the primary music streaming services and

digital downloads (STATISTA 2017:1). Nevertheless, whilst the findings of this study relate to a low-involvement decision, the results may differ considerably in the case of a high-involvement decision-making scenario.

Fourthly, this study focuses on eWOM adoption as the outcome variable. Whilst a plethora of scholars established that eWOM credibility and purchase intentions are positively related (Wu 2013:44; Erkans & Evans 2016:6), limited research has investigated the continual reliance on microblog reviews for product information. There is a possibility that if consumers find microblog platforms credible, they will adopt similar platforms for future product evaluation encounters during pre-purchase. Finally, the study is restricted to consumers who are based in the southern Gauteng region of South Africa only. The rationale for focusing on these consumers is the limited time and financial constraints, which constrained access to only those individuals in close proximity.

A discussion on the chosen research methodology for this study follows.

4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Creswell (2015:16) defines a research paradigm as the "philosophical worldview, assumptions, beliefs, values and methods within which research is conducted." This means that the choice of a research paradigm is instrumental in influencing beliefs about what is considered legitimate or justifiable in any research. In this study, a positivist paradigm was followed. The positivist research paradigm is a scientific empiricist method that is designed to yield pure data and facts that are not influenced by bias or human interpretation (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016:136). Positivists uphold the view that science is the only foundation for true knowledge (Denscombe 2014:2). In addition, the positivist view infers that predictions can only be made based on previously observed and explained reality (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:159). In the same vein, Bryman (2016:21) maintains that positivist research strives to explore, confirm and forecast law-like sets of behaviour. Resultantly, Wilson (2014:13-14) notes that a majority of the research that seeks to test theory and hypotheses leans towards the positivist paradigm.

Denscombe (2014:2) postulates that assumptions about the nature of reality in research paradigms can be classified in terms of ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology. First, **ontology** is concerned with articulating the nature of reality (Wilson 2014:11). Nevertheless, Saunders *et al.* (2016:127) allude that positivists observe a tangible reality

that is constant across time and settings. Drawing from this, Bryman (2016:21) denotes that the positivist paradigm is hinged upon laws and theories which provide the basis of explanation, prediction and anticipation of social phenomena. Upon taking this stance, positivists endorse pro-theoretic reasoning. Moreover, positivists assume that reality is independent and provides an objective view of the researchers. This means that the researcher takes an external, independent yet objective position when conducting the research (Saunders & Tosey 2012:58; Bryman *et al.* 2017:12).

According to Bryman *et al*. (2017:12), **epistemology** denotes the nature of human knowledge and understanding that can possibly be acquired when applying the same principles, procedures and ethos as natural science. In this regard, epistemology is concerned with how individuals comprehend knowledge. The epistemology followed by positivists is that only observable phenomena can provide credible data and facts (Denscombe 2014:2). This means that researchers observe general patterns of behaviour among individuals by forming a normative base for predicting and explaining social phenomena (Saunders *et al.* 2016:136). The phenomenon is reduced to simple elements by focusing on causality and law generalisations that depict truth statements about the entire universe (Saunders & Tosey 2013:58; Bilau *et al*. 2018:600). This view concurs with the notion of a social world that conforms to certain fixed and unalterable laws in an endless chain of causation.

Thirdly, Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2015:94) define **axiology** as a philosophical position that examines individuals' judgements of values, as they act as the guiding factor of human action. In the positivist paradigm, research is undertaken in a value-free way, whereby the researcher is neutral and independent of the data (Saunders *et al*. 2016:136). Put simply, the researcher takes the stance of a viewer and/or observer, only.

Finally, the **methodology** in the positivist philosophy is evoked by developing tentative statements to be proven, termed hypotheses (Denscombe 2014:2; Saunders *et al*. 2016:136). Thereafter, the researcher attempts to understand how theoretic facts about the social phenomena correspond with reality by testing the hypotheses empirically (Bryman 2016:24). The hypotheses testing and scrutiny might comprise field observations, whereby the phenomenon is reduced into simple elements (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:84). The research is objective, structured and highly organised, whereas large samples are utilised. Positivists further believe that the right data-gathering instrument will produce absolute

truth for a given enquiry (Eriksson & Hovalainen 2016:270). In this vein, structured questionnaires may be utilised where the nominated research strategy is experimental, quasi-experimental or survey-based (Bilau *et al.* 2018:600). In lieu of this, the empirical findings are then compared with the hypotheses to obtain an enhanced understanding of the situation. Confirmation and verification of the hypotheses using accurate empirical analysis then yields valid generalisation of sample findings to the wider population of interest.

This study leans towards the positivist philosophy since it seeks to test specific propositions (hypotheses) derived from the application of the HSM and credibility heuristics to the context of eWOM dissemination of music content through microblogs. Furthermore, the empirical research objectives formulated in Section 1.4.3 were framed in a quantitative manner by assuming that there are *a priori* causal relationships among certain variables. Consistent with Wilson (2014:9), the study seeks to use general accounts of empirical reality drawn from a sample of microbloggers based in the southern Gauteng region of South Africa to either confirm or refute the posited relationships. Nevertheless, during the empirical assessment, a detached, neutral and non-interactive position was maintained in view of perpetuating an objective and value-free interpretation of data (Bryman *et al.* 2017:12). This methodology was followed in lieu of obtaining reliable and valid findings. Furthermore, a quantitative research strategy was followed in this study since positivists prefer an analytic and factual interpretation of quantifiable data (Saunders *et al.* 2016:137).

The following section elaborates on the different steps that were followed in the marketing research process followed in this work.

4.4 THE MARKETING RESEARCH PROCESS

Marketing research is defined as "the application of a scientific method when searching for the truth about marketing phenomena and the market, at large" (Babin & Zikmund 2016:5). In this vein, marketing research is a necessary part of any organisation since it improves the decision-making capabilities of managers (Bosman 2012:44). While this is so, researchers vary in terms of the precise number of steps that should be followed upon conducting research. For example, Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:31) outline a lean six-step approach for conducting scientific social research. Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2008:57) promulgated a seven-step approach whereas Burns, Veeck and Bush (2017:68) pointed to an extended research process comprising eleven steps. Notwithstanding this, the

six-step extrapolation by Malhotra *et al.* (2017:10) was followed in this research (refer to Figure 4.1) owing to its brevity and relevance for marketing research contexts.

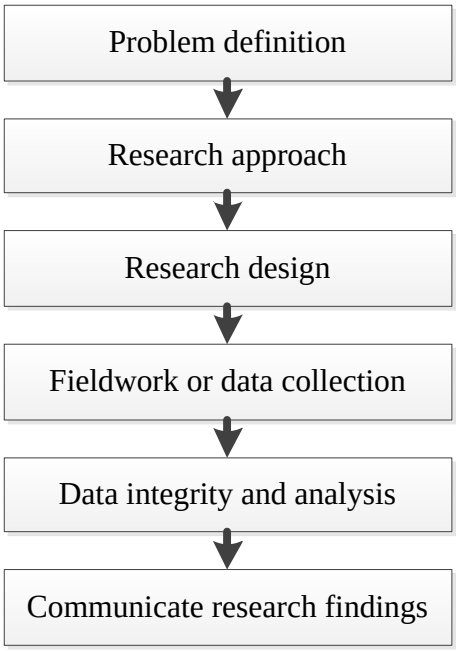


Figure 4.1: The marketing research process

Source: Malhotra et al. (2017:10)

The steps in the marketing research process are discussed next.

4.4.1 Problem definition

Numerous scholars agree that the first step in the marketing research process is to define the problem at hand (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:34; Tustin *et al*. 2010:77; Brown *et al.* 2018:16). Defining a research problem entails narrowing down a generic topic to a scalable topic that is small enough to be researched. This might involve consultations with industry experts as well as conducting preliminary analysis of secondary data. In this way, the research problem can be identified in such a way that it stimulates scientific enquiry. The problem definition stage does not always entail that there is something wrong for the research to be initiated. In a majority of instances, the problem definition simply implies that a specific situation needs to be clarified in light of an existing or futuristic anomaly or that a novel opportunity has arisen in the market, which needs to be explored (Babin & Zikmund 2016:62). Problem definition might comprise understanding an existing problem and attempting to provide marketing-related solutions. Whereas the former is termed

problem-identification research, the latter is referred to as problem-solving research (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:15).

This study was problem-solving oriented since the aim was to understand the underlying credibility elements related to eWOM communication adoption. This research problem was aimed at addressing the marketing decision problem at the level of an extended marketing communication mix that is based on credible eWOM. In this study, the review of secondary data sources conducted in chapters two and three helped to clarify the research problem. First, the literature review pointed to the absence of universal cues for evaluating the credibility of eWOM communication. Secondly, the literature revealed gaps in light of unclear delimitations regarding the salient factors that are paramount when ascertaining the truthfulness of microblog reviews that are posted about online music. Thirdly, it was observed that no scholarly submissions had been put forward (to date) regarding the credibility of microblog reviews about online music, from a South African context. As a result, the identification of these gaps guided the researcher in maintaining focus and proceeding with the project towards the achievement of the research objectives specified in Section 1.4 of this study.

4.4.2 Research approach development

The second step in the marketing research process is the research approach development. Malhotra *et al*. (2017:9) highlight that this step involves identifying the factors that influence research design. In this regard, the decision regarding the type of approach to be used is influenced by the type of study that is being undertaken. According to the scholars, three main components underlie this step, namely the paradigm, theoretical framework and the analytical model.

Collis and Hussey (2014:10) state that the preliminary phase in the entire research process is to determine the specific research philosophy, also termed a research paradigm. In light of this, the research paradigm is described as a set of assumptions consisting of agreed knowledge, criteria of judgement, problem fields and ways to consider them (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:50). In fact, Saunders *et al.* (2016:126) allude that research involves a reflexive process of understanding one's beliefs and assumptions as well as their influence on the chosen philosophy as well as the design of the research. The nominated research problem will affect the paradigm that will be adopted as it is built upon a set of assumptions. In this

study, a positivist paradigm was followed as it enables the observation of empirical reality to produce law-like generalisations.

The second component in this step is the selection, adaptation and development of an appropriate theoretical framework to underpin a research design (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:51). Since theory infers a conceptual scheme that is based on truthful foundations, researchers should base their investigations upon objective evidence. Hence, sound theory is needed for a researcher to understand the nature of the target participants, the issues to be selected from them including how data will be collected and analysed (Bryman *et al*. 2017:30). In this study, theory was gathered by compiling relevant findings regarding the eWOM credibility concept from secondary data as reported in chapters two and three.

Finally, a graphical model was developed and presented in Section 3.9 of this study. This model was based on a set of variables and interrelationships designed to represent in whole, a real process.

4.4.3 Research design development

According to Malhotra *et al.* (2017:9), a research design is defined as "the blueprint or a framework for conducting a marketing research project". Other scholars position a research design as the "mind-map of a study" or a "recipe that specifies the methods and procedure for collecting data and analysing the required information" (Babin & Zikmund 2016:67). Therefore a research design can be considered as a set of advance decisions or master plan that specifies the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing empirical data (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:57). By implication, the development of a research design helps researchers to obtain the answers that are needed for decision-making.

Saunders *et al.* (2016:174-175) state that researchers can choose to apply either exploratory or explanatory designs research designs, of which the latter comprise both descriptive and causal research. Exploratory research designs aim to identify new ideas that may become a true business opportunity (Aaker, Kumar, Leone & Day 2013:65). This serves to clarify the situation that amounts to a particular problem that needs to be solved, as is the case with problem-identification research. Conversely, explanatory research is conducted in view of elucidating on the relationships between the variables under study (Brown *et al*. 2018:18). As such, researchers wishing to test cause and affect relationships with a component of manipulation can follow causal research designs. Similarly, a descriptive research design

can be followed in view of describing and clarifying a given phenomenon of interest. This study pursued a descriptive research design, of which an explanation of the eWOM credibility phenomenon from the perspective of the online consumers served as the basis for the empirical investigation.

4.4.4 Field work or data collection

Data collection is the process of collecting or gathering data from the target population (Babin & Zikmund 2016:69). The researcher can collect data on his/her own or using syndicated agencies (Tustin *et al*. 2010:99). The process of data collection involves selecting, training and supervising persons who are collecting and managing data (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:475). This process also involves specifying the most appropriate measurement with which to operationalise the variables under examination (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:30). In particular, researchers can make use of various forms to collect data from the target population. In the case of survey-based research, a structured questionnaire can be a useful instrument for collecting empirical data (Brown *et al*. 2018:37). This study utilised a questionnaire as a data-gathering instrument. Further clarity on the data collection process that was followed in this work is provided in Section 4.8 of this study.

4.4.5 Data integrity and analysis

After the empirical fieldwork process is complete, the next step would be to evaluate the data integrity and further conduct statistical analysis. This means the data should be prepared to ensure its truthfulness and authenticity. Hair *et al*. (2013:242) referred to data integrity as the inspection of quality of the data that is collected from the fieldwork. In respect to this, Section 4.11 of this study evaluates rigorous statistical measures that were computed in view of enhancing the integrity of the sample data. This included testing for the reliability, validity and sensitivity of the study. Relatedly, after the fieldwork, data were prepared through conducting visual scanning for consistency and accuracy before entering it into the computer to transform it. Tustin *et al*. (2010:452) highlight four specific phases involved when preparing data for eventual statistical analysis, namely data editing, coding, capturing and cleaning. In specific terms, data editing involves conducting questionnaire checks to determine the completeness and accuracy of the completed questionnaires (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:530). In this step, the questionnaires are checked for consistency of the reported information, legibility as well as any missing information. Thereafter, mutually exclusive labels and numeric values are assigned to the responses through a process termed

coding (Brown *et al*. 2018:241). Coding is done to ease the data capturing process, which normally involves transferring the codes ascribed to each respondent to a computer terminal by keypunching. Finally, the data that has been captured onto a spreadsheet can then be transferred to a statistical package for processing, whereas cleaning checks are conducted first to eliminate any possible punching errors as well as the treatment of missing values (Field 2013:19; Bernard 2018:20). A detailed discussion on how data for this study were prepared is presented in Section 4.12 of this study. This step paved the way for the eventual statistical analysis of this work.

4.4.6 Communicate research findings

The last step in the marketing research process is to communicate the research findings. Malhotra *et al*. (2017:12) stress that any research project culminates with the compilation of a written report that addresses the specific research questions, approach, design, data collection, analysis as well as the major findings of the study. This means that the research report should emphasise clarity and readability so that the information can be presented in a manner that is understandable for the target audience. Likewise, Babin and Zikmund (2016:70) mention that research reports should make use of alternative means to communicate the findings, including visuals, images or infographics to enhance the clarity and impact of the findings. In addition, the research report should point to recommendations and/or a specific course of action that should be followed by either managers or researchers (McDaniel & Gates 2013:396). Above all, it is important for the research report to be written in a simple manner, yet demonstrating adequacy in terms of the steps followed upon conducting the research (Brown *et al*. 2018:308).

The submission of this academic dissertation encompasses a concise report that aims to capture the entirety of the marketing research process that was followed. Specifically, the subsequent sections in the rest of this chapter provide detail pertaining to the various elements of the marketing research process that have just been addressed. The chapters outline the findings in graphical and illustrative terms (Chapter 5 of this dissertation) as well as the major findings and key recommendations emanating from this work (Chapter 6).

The next section elaborates on the research design for this study.

4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is defined as "a framework for collecting and analysing data in order to answer the research question and achieve specific research objectives" (Saunders *et al*. 2016:726). In other words, the research design comprises the initial plan for conducting a research. Tustin *et al*. (2010:82) referred to a research design as a plan to be followed in order to realise the research objectives and hypotheses of a study. In specific terms, the research design details the procedures necessary for obtaining the information needed to structure or solve marketing research problems (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:61). In this way, the choice of a research design reflects the decisions regarding the importance attached to various dimensions of the research process (Bryman *et al.* 2017:100). Guided by the nature of objectives pursued in research, the specific designs available among researchers encapsulate the choice among exploratory, causal and/or descriptive research (Babin & Zikmund 2016:67). Figure 4.2 illustrates the classification of research designs used in marketing research.

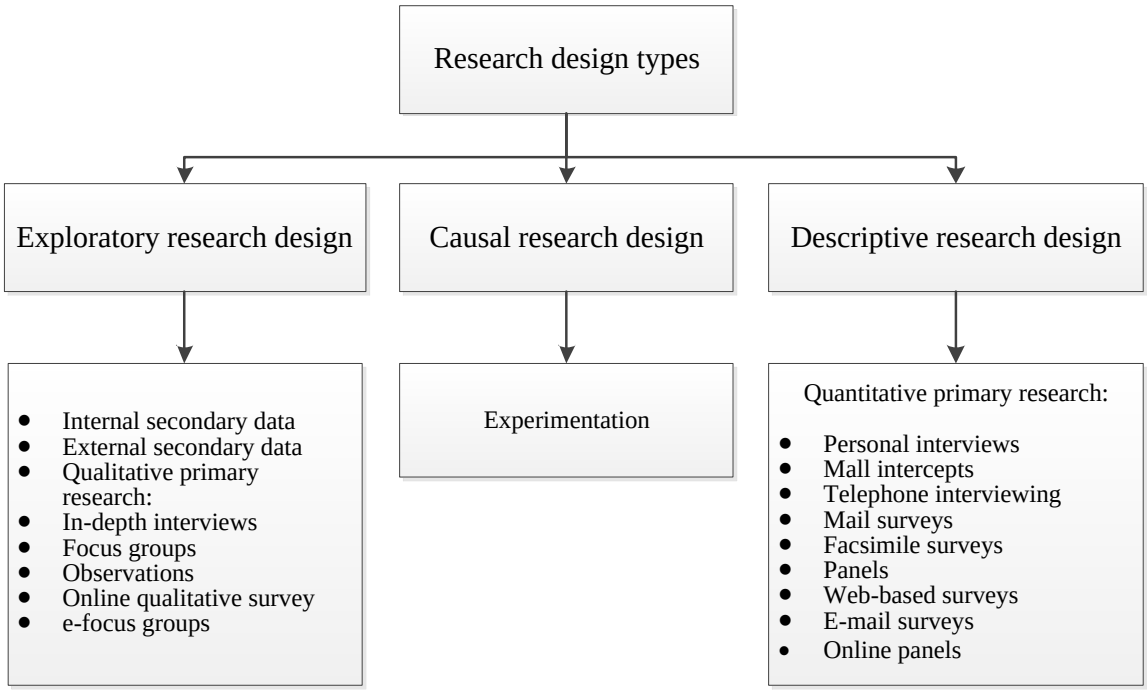


Figure 4.2: Classification of research designs

Source: Tustin *et al*. (2010:83)

According to Tustin *et al.* (2010:83), specifying the research design for a study culminates in a discussion on the specific data collection methods, measurement and scaling, sampling

design process as well as the data analysis strategy that was followed. This notion informed the discussion of the three research designs in this section.

4.5.1 Exploratory research

According to Burns *et al*. (2017:94), the primary purpose of an exploratory research design is to define the problem more precisely, while identifying probable insight into the general nature of a research problem. Bernard (2018:7) highlights that exploratory research leans towards an inductive epistemological stance, which supposes the development of theory by observing and subjectively interpreting social reality. Likewise, Saunders *et al.* (2016:174) claim that exploratory research seeks to discover what is happening and gain insights about the topic of interest using a small number of respondents. Regardless of any particular method used, exploratory research always utilises a small sample size (Brown *et al*. 2018:42). This means the design of the research emphasises depth of understanding of the marketing phenomenon (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:60).

While not instrumental in directing recommended actions to marketing researchers, exploratory research is useful as an initial step for clarifying ambiguous situations that may amount to true business opportunities. This might involve the scrutiny of various forms of established data such as books, journals, special reports, bulletins and newsletters (Burns *et al*. 2017:96). According to Brown *et al.* (2018:16) as well as Bernard (2018:8), this evaluation might involve referring to internal company records, published marketing reports as well as investigating existing studies and engaging with industry experts to clarify a research problem.

In terms of the strategy that is followed in exploratory research, qualitative research is dominant. This involves conducting research whose findings are not subjected to quantification or quantitative analysis (McDaniel & Gates 2013:80). In general, the qualitative research approach utilises personal value judgements and thereby generates data that are difficult to quantify (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:30). The data collection methods that are applied in exploratory research are unstructured, comprising literature searches, experience surveys, focus groups, interviews with key informants and ethnographies (Burns *et al*. 2017:96). Problem-identification research often leans towards exploratory research approaches, which follow qualitative strategies. Moreover, to gain more insight from consumers, exploratory research make use of open-ended questions and probing techniques during interviews (Tustin *et al*. 2010:84). In terms of data analysis, qualitative

researchers usually conduct document analysis (Creswell 2015:5). Moreover, the empirical results from exploratory research cannot be generalised to the entire population of interest owing to the use of unrepresentative samples (Babbie 2016:91). In general, the empirical findings from exploratory qualitative research are tentative, implying that they only seek to interpret the status quo rather than confirm theory or draw conclusions (Babin & Zikmund 2016:135).

4.5.2 Causal research

The causal research design is effective when the researcher wants to investigate whether one variable determines the value of other variables in a study (Brown *et al*. 2018:112). In this regard, Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:59) point out that causal research provides confirmation of the extent to which two or more variables occur together or vary together systematically, as predicted by the proposed hypotheses. Furthermore, Wilson (2014:185) denotes that the causal research design is used to obtain confirmation of cause-and-effect (causal) relationships amongst associated variables. Nevertheless, Tustin *et al*. (2010:292-293) assert that the uniqueness of causal research lies in that causality is premised in a set of three conditions, namely concomitant variation, time order of occurrence and elimination of extraneous variables.

Concomitant variation refers to whether a variation between a cause and an effect is true and not because of some other variable (Babin & Zikmund 2016:58). This means that the cause and an effect occur together in the same way as predicted by the assumptions predicted by the hypotheses. Since researchers are always inferring rather than proving that a causal relationship exists, a lack of association between variables cannot be taken as conclusive evidence that there is no causality between them (Tustin *et al.* 2010:293). This is because in some cases, variables can be related to the cause-and-effect variables in a way that hides the true relationship between them (Brown *et al*. 2018:114).

The time order of occurrence of variables is another type of evidence of a causal relationship between variables in a study. Time order of occurrence is important for causality because causes cannot occur after the effects (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:60). This means one event cannot cause another event if it takes place after the other event or if it does not take place at all. Therefore, in time order of occurrence, one event must occur before the effect or it may take place simultaneously with the effect (Tustin *et al.* 2010:293). As such, the effects or the results are dependent on the occurrence of the event.

Finally, elimination of extraneous variables is a requirement for causality to be inferred, whereby research should be conducted after eliminating extraneous variables other than the ones being studied (Brown *et al*. 2018:115). This implies that for perfect causation to occur, the examination of variables should be in a relatively controlled and manipulated environment such as a laboratory setting (Burns *et al.* 2017:102). In this regard, Tustin *et al.* (2010:293) suggest that researchers can keep other factors constant or adjust the results to remove the effects of factors that do not vary, as in the case with semi-quasi and pure experiments.

4.5.3 Descriptive research

By reviewing prior knowledge about phenomenon, a researcher is able to identify what to investigate, but does not have the answers to the research questions. Therefore, the descriptive research design seeks to have an understanding of the status of the subject of the present practice. Resultantly, Malhotra *et al.* (2017:73) highlight that descriptive research is a type of conclusive research that has its major objective being the description of certain market characteristics or functions. Similarly, descriptive research enables the estimation of the proportion of members that participate in a study in view of proffering specific predictions and/or conclusions (Brown *et al*. 2018:128). Descriptive research may be useful as an input in recommending a specific course of action to be taken by marketers owing to its conclusive nature (Saunders *et al.* 2016:175). In this regard, descriptive research assumes the use of large and representative samples.

Descriptive research is applied in view of establishing the existence of relationships between two or more variables (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin 2013:56). Hence, it is directed by the formulation of hypotheses, as was the case in this study. Likewise, Babin and Zikmund (2016:54) point out that descriptive studies are "constructed in order to answer the "who, what, when, where and how questions" of research. This means that descriptive studies gain a description of events, targeted individuals or situations under study (Saunders *et al*. 2016:175). These questions give a clear picture of the phenomenon that the researcher wishes to collect data on. In marketing research, descriptive research aims to understand different variables relating to consumers (who), including their attitude, perceptions and opinions (what), where they buy, where they shop and how they relate to the products in question (Burns *et al*. 2017:99).

With regard to the timing of research, descriptive studies can either be conducted as longitudinal or cross-sectional studies (Brown *et al*. 2018:128). Longitudinal research is a type of research where respondents are questioned at multiple points in time, while using a fixed sample of population elements (Zikmund *et al*. 2013:197). In other words, the sample is measured repeatedly on the same variables, albeit over an extended period of time that can span several years. Cohort analysis and panel data are often cited as the most useful forms of longitudinal research (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:76).

Cross-sectional research measures units from a sample of the population at one specific point in time (Saunders *et al*. 2016:200). Since cross-sectional research is a once-off measurement, it can be described as "snapshots of the population" (Burns *et al.* 2017:98). While cross-sectional sample surveys are based on either small or large samples, the sample is drawn out to be representative of the broader population that is being measured (Brown *et al*. 2018:128). Nevertheless, Malhotra *et al.* (2017:74) distinguish between single and multiple cross-sectional research. Single cross-sectional research involves drawing the data only once from a singular sample. Conversely, multiple cross-sectional research involves the use of more than one sample of participants, whereas the data is obtained once.

This study applied a single cross-sectional form of descriptive research. Specifically, the target population were identified as microblog participants who had posted music reviews within six months from the survey date. A single cross-sectional design was considered useful in providing a clear picture of the respondents' shared opinions and perceptions regarding microblog eWOM credibility with a view to make some predictions on eWOM credibility and eWOM adoption. Upon following single cross-sectional design, data were collected once from the identified target population. Specifically, the sample of microbloggers (who) was identified, including the specific factors or variables they consider superior when evaluating the credibility of microblog music content (what). In addition, the research was conducted as a once-off exercise between 1 July and 30 November 2018 (when), whereas the participants were nominated from within the southern Gauteng region within an emerging market (where) by way of a structured sample survey strategy (how).

Consistent with the choice of a descriptive research design, the next section clarifies the research approach followed in this study.

4.6 RESEARCH APPROACH

In the social sciences, either quantitative or qualitative research approaches are applied when conducting a research project in view of presenting distinct views of marketing phenomenon. In other cases, researchers elect to use a combination of both approaches in order to benefit from the strengths of either. In this regard, Saunders *et al.* (2016:164) allude to the choices between qualitative, quantitative or mixed research approaches.

4.6.1 Qualitative research approach

Qualitative research is concerned with the collection and analysis of non-numeric data (Bryman *et al*. 2017:41). Burns *et al*. (2017:144) describe qualitative research as the research method that discusses marketing objectives using techniques that provide elaborate interpretations of market phenomena without reliance on numerical measurements. Scholars that follow the qualitative research approach aim to discover new ideas, thoughts, feelings, while delivering preliminary insight into novel ideas and objects (Saunders *et al*. 2016:166). In support, Wiid and Diggines (2015:64) posit that qualitative research is exploratory in nature because it seeks to understand the underlying reasons and motives behind individual actions. This alludes to its character elements of being a diagnostic and problem-identifying form of research.

Since qualitative research is oriented towards problem-identification, Burns *et al*. (2017:144) note that this research approach applies unstructured means of collecting data. Deep probing and open-ended questioning are some of the techniques used in qualitative research (Schiffman *et al.* 2014:38). In terms of data analysis, qualitative researchers make use of researcher-dependent analytic methods such as de-briefing, reflective and interpretive analysis content analysis, discourse analysis and thematic narrative analysis (Creswell 2015:5; Saunders *et al.* 2016:601-608). Such analysis is often subjected to the subjective interpretations of the researcher (Zikmund *et al.* 2013:132). By implication, the approach should only be used by skilled researchers who are trained in terms of collecting, interpreting and analysing data in a qualitative manner (Hair *et al*. 2013:79). Furthermore, qualitative research makes use of small, yet non-representative samples (Babin & Zikmund 2016:111; Brown *et al*. 2018:42). This means qualitative research focuses on new insights and expressed personal value judgements obtained from in-depth interviews, focus groups and case studies (Tustin *et al*. 2010:90), which are described as direct qualitative research techniques as well as projective techniques, which are an indirect qualitative research

technique. As a result, the quality of qualitative research is garnered from the depth of information that is collected from the small samples, as compared to the breadth of the same. Nevertheless, with limited representativeness, generalisation and conclusions cannot be drawn from qualitative research.

4.6.2 Quantitative research approach

The quantitative research approach pertains to the collection of numerical data that provides links between theory and empirical research (Bryman *et al*. 2017:31). Burns *et al.* (2017:144) assert that in quantitative research the researcher formulates the research objectives to be achieved and proceeds to collect primary data on a large number of representatives from the field. In other words, quantitative research follows deductive reasoning, which commences with theory, research questions and the development of hypotheses. Thereafter, empirical measurements are conducted to provide an objective conceptualisation of social reality (Wilson 2014:13-14). Likewise, since the researcher maintains distance from the phenomenon being measured, quantitative research allows researchers to make use of statistical means of analysing empirical data that will answer the research questions or hypotheses (Creswell 2015:4).

According to Babin and Zikmund (2016:111), the main purpose of applying a quantitative research approach is to generalise sample findings to a broader population of interest. Mostly, this would entail the use of large sample sizes while collecting data (Tustin *et al*. 2010:90). In this regard, quantitative theorists are prone to applying structured methods of collecting data, comprising surveys, field observations and experiments (Creswell 2015:5). Therefore, the use of large samples enables researchers to draw conclusions by projecting the sample results to a wider population thereby allowing for generalisability (Denscombe 2014:249). Likewise, quantitative research enables the researcher to offer predictions and make recommendations to managers (Burns *et al*. 2017:144). Nevertheless, whereas large numbers of sample elements are utilised, it is vital that they remain representative of the true population, meaning that quantitative research generalises information about a specific population based on the results obtained from a representative sample of that particular population (Bryman *et al*. 2017:31).

4.6.3 Mixed-methods approach

Mixed-methods research refers to a combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Saunders *et al*. 2016:169). Creswell (2015:7) postulates that mixed-methods

entails the use of at least two methods for conducting research including the collection and analysis of data. This means that the mixed-methods research combines both elements of qualitative and quantitative research in a single study (Wiid & Diggines 2015:65). In the commonly used mixed-method notation system, components of qualitative and quantitative research are indicated as *qual* and *quan* respectively in order to emphasise primacy for qualitative and quantitative research (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017:108).

Saunders *et al*. (2016:170) uphold that the mixed methods approach can be used to test a theoretical proposition and develop a richer theoretical understanding. The underlying paradigm for it is termed pragmatism. Furthermore, mixed methods provide more evidence in an argument. This can be achieved by combining both qualitative and quantitative data through interviews, observations, survey and/or experimental data (Zikmund *et al*. 2013:229). In this instance, the mixed methods approach can be applied as a form of triangulation, whereby concepts are measured using more than one method (Bryman 2016:324). In this vein, researchers are able to crosscheck that the findings obtained from one strategy, such as interviews can be corroborated by another unrelated strategy such as a survey questionnaire. Once the findings from both strategies are aligned, then the results can be accepted and confirmed for drawing conclusions.

In this study, a quantitative research approach was followed owing to time and financial constraints. Consistent with the assertion made by Babin and Zikmund (2016:150), the quantitative research approach permitted the researcher to acquire a broad yet comprehensive understanding of credibility assessment of eWOM communication, while applying a sample survey methodology. The decision to elect a quantitative research approach was further justified by the need to utilise objective information and test the possible existence of relationships between variables (Hair *et al.* 2013:154). This means that the quantitative approach enabled the researcher to test the relationships between the variables postulated in the conceptual model presented in Section 3.9 of this study and thereby link the empirical findings with existing theory. Inferences were then drawn based on observations of a large sample (485 participants), advancing the empiricism state of this research. In turn, the empirical assessment culminated in the quantification of the research objectives after applying statistical analysis tools to confirm the hypotheses for the study.

Considering the importance of specifying the research approach that is followed in a study, it essential to note that the procedure for designing a sample is "…a particularly critical

aspect of a survey since it provides a foundation for sound measurement" (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:51). Therefore, the following section elaborates on the sampling design procedure that was followed in this work.

4.7 SAMPLING DESIGN PROCESS

Babin and Zikmund (2016:337) state that the sampling process comprises any technique that draws conclusions based on measures of a portion of all the population elements. This means that sampling involves examining parts of a defined population with the aim of making judgements about those parts of the population that have not been investigated. This study followed the procedure put forward by Malhotra *et al*. (2017:414) for drawing a sample as shown in Figure 4.3 of this study. The process comprises six stages, namely defining the target population from which the sample was drawn, determining the sample frame, selecting a sampling technique, determining the sample size, clarifying the execution of the sampling process, as well as validating the sample.

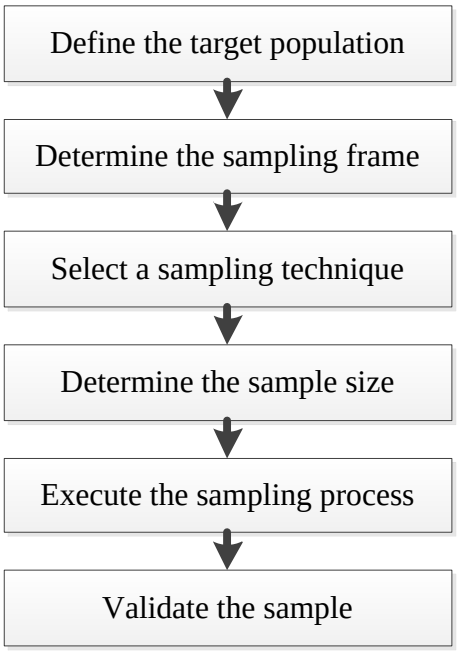


Figure 4.3: The sampling design process

Source: Malhotra *et al.* (2017:414)

The steps included in the sampling design process are explained next.

4.7.1 Defining the target population

Brown *et al*. (2018:205) define the target population as "the individuals or objects that meet specific requirements for membership in the overall group". Saunders *et al.* (2016:729) refer to the same group as "the individuals that the researcher is focusing on for the research inquiry and from which a sample may be drawn". The qualifying individuals are also referred to as the population elements. Therefore, Babin and Zikmund (2016:341) postulate that it is important for a researcher to be precise in deciding whom to include or exclude in the study. This is because inferences about the population are drawn from the responses given by the elements in the target population. In view of this, Tustin *et al.* (2010:340) as well as Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:282) agree that the target population of any research project should be defined in terms of the sampling elements, units, time as well as geographic context. This view was upheld upon defining the target population in this study.

First, a sampling element infers the primary level of investigation by the researcher (Tustin *et al.* 2010:340). In other words, the sampling element is the actual object that possesses the information sought by the researcher about which inferences are to be made. In this study, the sampling elements comprise both male and female consumers aged between 18 years and 65 years, while spanning across all the ethnic categories representative of the South African consumer population. The sampling unit comprises "a specific unit that contains the element that is available for selection at some stage of the sampling process" (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:414). In this work, sampling units comprise microbloggers who subscribe to a specific microblog such as Twitter™, 12Seconds™, DailyBooth™, Tumblr™, FriendFeed™ and Plurk™. Consistent with the prescription of identifying microbloggers as the relevant sampling units for this research, a filter question was added on the survey instrument. As such, item B1 on the research questionnaire in Appendix A was added, asking the question *'Have you posted a music review on any microblog in the past 6 months (between January 2018 and June 2018)'.* The filter question was included in the measuring instrument in view of delimiting this distinctive consumer cohort that had posted a recent music review on a microblog. Finally, the geographic context was restricted to microbloggers who reside in the five major towns of Lenasia, Meyerton, Roshnee, Vanderbijlpark and Vereeniging. These are emergent towns that not only contribute towards the development of the Gauteng province, but also significantly contribute to the economy of the country as a whole.

4.7.2 Determining the sampling frame

Brown *et al*. (2017:415) define a sampling frame as a representation of the elements of the target population that comprise the listing of population elements from which a sample can be drawn. Such lists may include the telephone directory, customer lists, research company databases, email addresses, social network group postings or targeted website promotions (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:415). Nonetheless, Tustin *et al.* (2010:343) denote that the sufficiency of a sampling frame rests in its completeness as well as its freedom from duplicate and/or foreign elements. In other words, a sampling frame should only be used if it consists of a full list of names and details of the desired sampling elements, whereas there should be no redundancy or alien elements. This begs the need for updated sampling frames that are usually expensive to obtain from syndicated marketing research firms.

Where a sampling frame cannot be identified, a researcher can choose among three options. First, a researcher can opt to re-define the target population and establish new parameters for the study (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:282). Should this not be possible, a researcher can elect to use multiple lists in view of countering the limitations of using any singular sampling frame (Saunders *et al*. 2016:277; Bernard 2018:116). Nonetheless, where both these remedial acts cannot be implemented, a researcher is left with a final option of not utilising any sampling frame. The latter option was the only feasible option for this research since there is no known list of South African-based microbloggers to date. As the chance of finding suitable sampling frame was considered minimal, this study was amenable to drawing out sampling elements using non-probability based sampling techniques.

4.7.3 Selecting a sampling technique

The process of selecting a sampling technique involves making a choice between applying techniques that fall under the ambit of either probability or non-probability sampling (Brown *et al.* 2018:207) as shown in Figure 4.4 of this study.

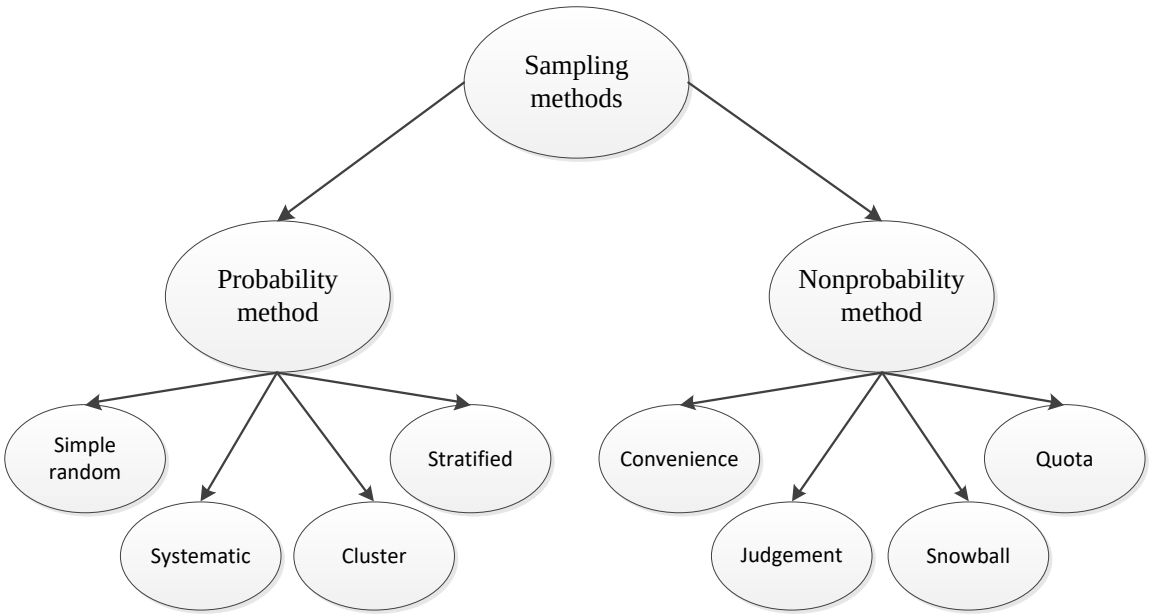


Figure 4.4: Classification of sampling methods

Source: McDaniel and Gates (2013:282)

In probability sampling, each element of the population has an equal chance of being selected for inclusion in a study (Wegner 2012:154). This means that the selection of elements can be determined statistically by applying probabilistic rules. In essence, each member of the population has a definite opportunity or non-zero chance of being selected in a sample (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:285). This is because probability-based samples rely on a finite population or universe, usually inferred from a complete sampling frame. Brown *et al*. (2018:209) mention that probability-sampling techniques comprise simple random sampling, stratified sampling, systematic sampling, cluster sampling as well as multi-stage sampling.

Simple random sampling involves selecting sample members randomly for inclusion in the sample, where all population elements have an equal chance of being selected in a study (Brown *et al.* 2018:209). This simple technique works well with a complete sampling frame. Stratified sampling describes the process of dividing the population into sub-groups known as strata, and then selecting sample elements randomly from each group (Wegner 2012:156). The population may be sampled in proportion to its size in the overall population (proportionate stratified sampling) or sample members of different strata may have disproportionate chances of being selected (disproportionate stratified sampling) (Tustin *et al.* 2010:355; Bernard 2018:119). Systematic sampling is about choosing

sampling members at regular intervals after a random starting point (Hair *et al*. 2013:143) whereas cluster sampling involves dividing the population elements into sub-groups based on geographic location, termed clusters.

In non-probability sampling, the likelihood of any particular member of the population being chosen is relatively unknown (Burns *et al.* 2017:241). This evokes the need for applying the researcher's judgement and personal intuition. In this regard, there is no way of estimating the probability that any particular member of the target population will be included in the sample (Brown *et al.* 2018:207). According to McDaniel and Gates (2013:282), non-probability sampling techniques comprise convenience sampling, purposive sampling, judgemental sampling, quota sampling as well as snowball sampling.

Convenience sampling involves choosing sample members who are easily accessible to the researcher (Hair *et al*. 2013:143). The selection of sample members using this method is easy because the researcher approaches elements who are in close proximity or available. Judgemental sampling entails choosing sample members based on the researcher's judgement (Wegner 2012:154). Put simply, the researcher uses his/her own personal judgement on what constitute the representative sample of the population of interest. In quota sampling, the researcher chooses sample members based on satisfying some pre-specified criteria (Tustin *et al*. 2010:346). The researcher is free to choose which element should be included in the sample as long as they possess the sought-after characteristics. Finally, snowball sampling entails choosing sample members on a referral basis (Brown *et al*. 2018:208).

Considering that the estimation of microblog participation is a rare characteristic, snowball sampling was applied in this research. In snowball sampling, an initial group of participants is selected either at random or based on the researcher's personal judgement that they possess certain desired characteristics (Burns *et al.* 2017:256). Thereafter, the identified participants are asked to identify others who also belong to the target population of interest. This is done because it is not easy to identify respondents who possess sought characteristics (Bernard 2018:151).

In this study, the researcher commenced by applying personal judgement and knowledge to recruit an initial pool of respondents who are known to be active in terms of posting and reading music reviews on microblogs. In essence, this pool comprised the researcher's colleagues, acquaintances and social media networks who regularly post online reviews

about music, among other product-related content. Thereafter, the researcher requested the initial group of respondents to refer at least three other microbloggers whom they knew to be active in terms of posting music reviews. Consistent with Burns *et al.* (2017:256), the respondents in this study provided the names and contact details of other respondents who qualified to take part in the survey, based on the defined characteristics of the target population. Nonetheless, it was noted that the referrals also had similar demographic and psychographic characteristics with the respondents. As such, the snowball chain effect came to the fore as the desired target population was identified. This referral process was carried out in waves, yielding a "snowball effect" (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:424) until the required sample size was attained.

4.7.4 Determining the sample size

The sample size refers to the number of elements that are included in a study (Kumar 2014:233). As such, it is imperative for scholars to nominate an accurate sample size, in light of the empirical objectives as well as the research design and approach being pursued in the research. Nevertheless, the scholars note that determining the sample size is very complex as it involves several qualitative and quantitative considerations. For example, Tustin *et al.* (2010:359) as well as Brown *et al*. (2018:214) concur that the sample size can be estimated based on the anticipated degree of precision, confidence as well as the degree of variability in the population. This means the chosen sample sizes vary across studies for different reasons.

In this study, the sample size determination was drawn from a tripartite set of considerations. First, consistent with Shukla (2008:56), the sample size was determined from similar studies. By using previous studies as a point of comparison for the researcher's judgement, a sample size of 500 was settled for in this study. Table 4.1outlines the previous studies that were considered.

Table 4.1: Sample size determination based on empirical precedence

Authors	Scope of the study	Sample	Country	Sample size
Cheung *et al*. (2009:20)	eWOM determinants of online consumer recommendations	Users of online discussion forums	China	159
Fan *et al.* (2013:61)	eWOM adoption through consumers' perceived credibility	College and graduate students	Taiwan	435
Luo *et al*. (2013:95)	Impact of informational factors on online recommendation credibility	Online consumers	China	199
Yu and Natalia (2013:796)	The effect of user generated video reviews on consumers' purchase intentions	Online consumers	Taiwan	500
Elseidi and El-Baz (2016:271)	eWOM effects on brand attitude, brand image and purchase intention	Undergraduate students	Egypt	550
Durmaz and Yuksel (2017:233)	The effects of credible eWOM on purchase intentions at e-commerce sites	Users of e-commerce sites	Turkey	330

Source: Author's compilation

Considering that this study followed a quantitative research approach (refer to Section 4.6 of this study), a second consideration was made in light of the use of rules of thumb put forward by research methodology scholars. Specifically, methodology scholars (Hair *et al*. 2018:95) agree that large sample sizes with a minimum sample of 50 and preferably 100 observations for most research situations are required if regression analysis is to be applied in a study. Similar thresholds have been put forward by other scholars. For instance, based on the assumption that there exists a medium-sized relationship between criteria variables (refer to Section 5.11), the rule of thumb by Green (1991) cited in Van Voorhis and Morgan (2007:48) was also considered in this work. The scholar put forward the following formula:

$$\mathbf{N \geq 50 + 8M}$$

Where;

N= Minimum sample size

M=Number of variables in a study

Calculated as follows: $[N \geq 50 + (8*7) = 116]$

The minimum sample size for this study was pegged at 116 respondents.

The rule of thumb put forward by Pallant (2011:187) of sample sizes above 150 being used in statistically oriented research was also considered. Similarly, Cooper and Schindler (2011:390) maintain that research that is focused on problem-solving should retain sample sizes of 200 and greater. Likewise, Shukla (2008:58) suggests that sample sizes ranging between 300 and 500 are sufficient when dealing with problem-solving research. In view of the aforementioned guiding rules as well as the empirical evidence posited in Table 4.1, a large sample size of 500 microbloggers was still supported.

Thirdly, Burns *et al.* (2017:265) emphasise the consideration of striking a balance with the practically feasible aspects about the research. In this regard, a final sample size of 500 microbloggers was deemed appropriate owing to the resource constraints (time and financial) involved in the completion of a Master's research project.

4.7.5 Executing the sampling process

Execution of the sampling process requires a detailed specification of how the sampling decisions with respect to all the steps in the sampling process have been implemented (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:417). As such, Figure 4.5 summarises the choices and decisions that were taken in this study. These were made in view of ensuring that the right sampling elements are included in this study, whereas foreign elements were excluded, thereby minimising sampling error (Tustin *et al.* 2010:336).

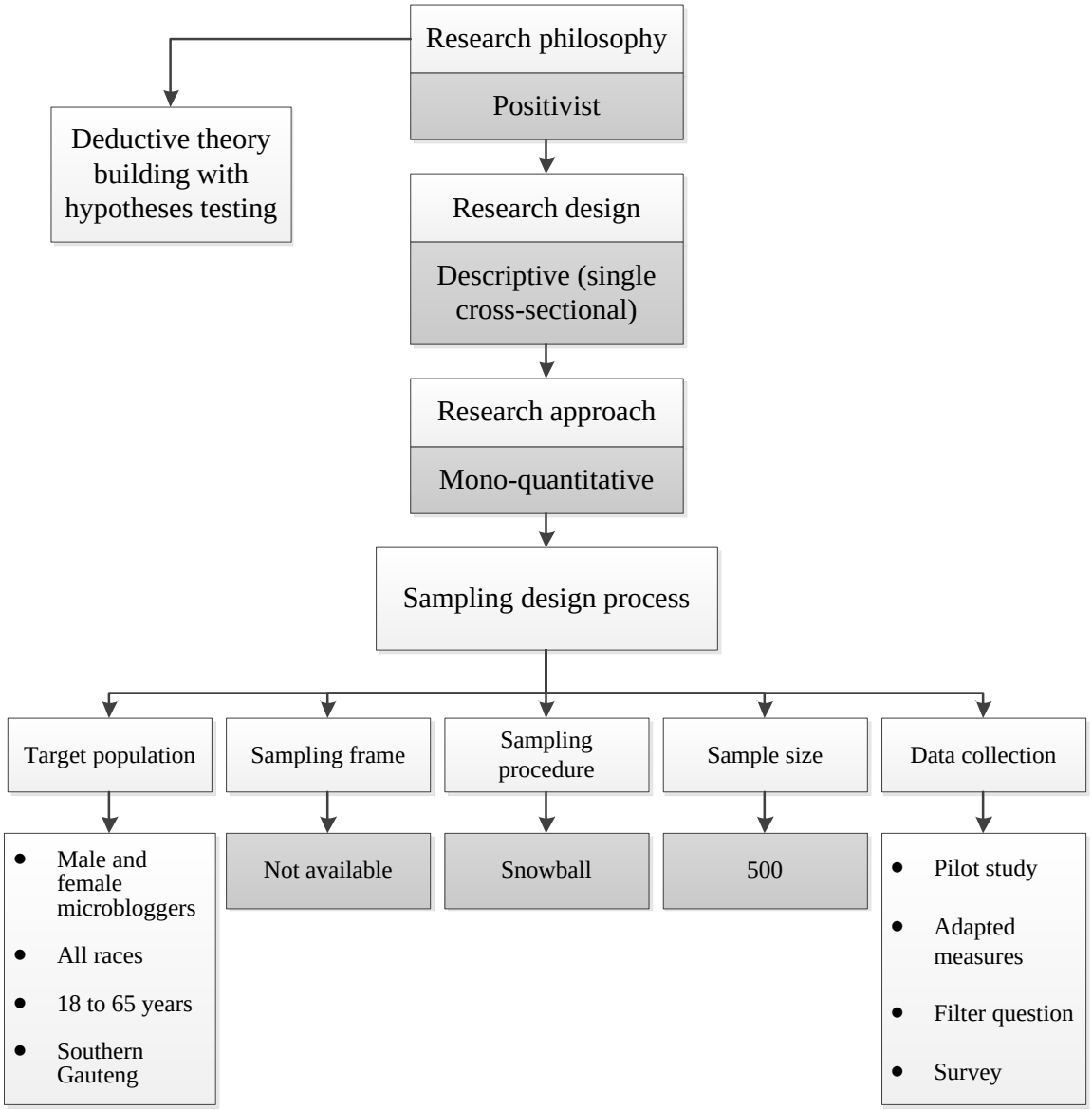


Figure 4.5: Summary of the methodological choices applied in this study

Source: Author's compilation (2018)

4.7.6 Validating the sample

The last step in the sampling process is to validate the sample. The main aim of sampling validation is to account for sampling frame error by screening the participants during fieldwork (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:418). Participants can be screened with respect to demographic characteristics, product usage and other characteristics to ensure that they satisfy the criteria for the target population. Brown *et al.* (2018:187) maintain that screening helps to eliminate inappropriate elements that are contained in the sampling frame so that the information that is collected may yield useful data. In this study, validation checks were

conducted in the field as the researcher interacted with the respondents. This involved using the filter questionnaire (item B1) to verify the microblog usage activities of the respondent. Furthermore, since the questionnaires were hand-delivered, an opportunity was provided for conversation-generation as well as visual inspection of the respondents *Vis a vis* what they had reported on the demographic (Section A) as well as the microblog usage (section B) sections of the questionnaire.

4.8 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

In research, the data collection process involves the process where respondents give their answers in response to inquiries posited by the researcher (Burns *et al*. 2017:290). Furthermore, the data collection process commences once the researcher has clearly formalised the sampling plan (Babin & Zikmund 2016:69). In this study, data were collected in two phases, namely the secondary data collection phase and the primary data collection phase.

4.8.1 Secondary data collection (desk-research)

Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:143) describe secondary data as the information that already exists that aid the firm to solve its problem. The secondary data are already available because they were collected for another purpose other than the task at hand (Hair *et al*. 2013:50; Brown *et al.* 2018:60). As such, published works were consulted in view of collating the secondary data for this work. Specifically, the desk-based research was constituted under the review of the literature discussed in chapters two and three of this study. Of note, the review of published journal articles, textbooks, media and other institutional reports was useful for addressing the theoretical objectives set out in Section 1.4.3 of this study. Notwithstanding the value of secondary data, it is vital to collect primary data in order to complete the research.

4.8.2 Primary data collection (Fieldwork)

Malhotra *et al.* (2017:472) state that survey fieldwork is the stage whereby the researcher makes direct contact with potential participants. Primary data originates from the researcher for the specific purpose of addressing the research problem or opportunity at hand (Hair *et al*. 2013:26). Relatedly, Saunders *et al*. (2016:724) uphold that primary data is collected specifically to address the objectives of a research. This data is usually collected for the first time with specific reference to the particular study in question (Brown *et al*. 2018:60).

A sample survey was nominated as the most applicable strategy for collecting primary data in this research. A survey is described as a research technique that involves asking people questions using phones, the Internet or postal services with the aim of obtaining information from those people (Denscombe 2014:7). Relatedly, McDaniel and Gates (2013:119) highlight that surveys are used mostly when the researcher wants to acquire certain information about participants such as their opinions, attitudes and behaviour. Figure 4.6 illustrates the classification of survey methods put forward by Wilson (2014:157).

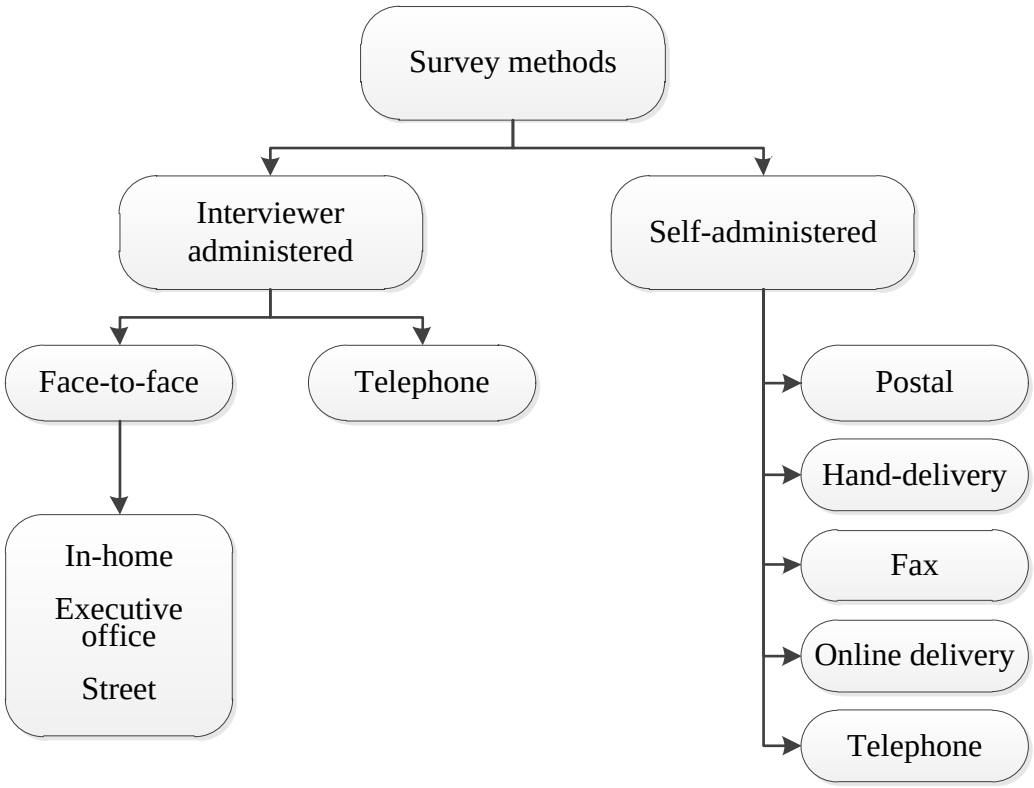


Figure 4.6: Classification of survey methods

Source: Wilson (2014:157)

According to Wilson (2014:152), surveys can be classified as either interviewer or self-administered, whereby the former are facilitated by the interviewer verbally, face-to-face or telephonically. Verbal interviews include one-on-one conversations whereby one person plays the role of an interviewer (researcher) and the other plays the role of an interviewee (participant). In this case, the interviews may be conducted in the interviewer's presence at home or even telephonically. In terms of application of these interviews, Brown *et al.* (2018:158) mention that interviewer-administered surveys are flexible and provide an opportunity for the interviewer to ask questions, record the answers and make further

clarification when required to do so. Nonetheless, other scholars suggest that interviewer-administered surveys may lack anonymity (Babin & Zikmund 2016:178) owing to the interviewer's involvement in the capturing of responses. Relatedly, Tustin *et al.* (2010:425) cite the time-consuming and expensive nature of these interviews as a major drawback of conducting interviewer-administered survey.

Self-administered surveys comprise structured questionnaires that are distributed to a target population and are to be completed by the respondents without the aid of the interviewer (Tustin *et al*. 2010:185). In general, self-administered surveys are preferred among researchers since they generate vast amounts of information (McDaniel & Gates 2013:116). For example, in postal surveys the researcher sends out the questionnaire through posted mail of which the survey is completed by the respondents in his or her own time and pace (Burns *et al*. 2017:192). Nevertheless, the disadvantage of postal surveys lies in that there is no control over who takes part in a survey, which increases the chances of bias (Wegner 2012:16). Likewise, a researcher can send the questionnaire through facsimile and/or online. While faxed surveys entail a respondent receiving the questionnaire via fax and then utilising the same platform to re-send the completed questionnaire, online-administered surveys engage some form of computer-mediated communication such as Snap Survey™ and Survey Monkey™ (Saunders *et al*. 2017:443). In this case, the researcher distributes the questionnaire to the target respondents through an online link or an email address for completion. Nevertheless, the use of mail, faxed or online surveys is prone to low response rates compared to the cases where a researcher delivers the questionnaire in person. In fact, Rubin and Babbie (2016:180) highlight that when a researcher delivers the questionnaire or picks it up, the completion rate seems higher than straightforward mail surveys.

In this study, a self-administered survey was conducted. The survey instrument was hand-delivered to the respondents' homes and places of learning and work in the form of a paper and pencil-based questionnaire, termed the 'drop and pick later' survey (Burns *et al.* 2017:192). This choice was motivated by the need for giving respondents time to think about their replies when completing the questionnaires. Furthermore, the authenticity of hand-delivery in a comfortable venue increased the possibility that the respondents would answer all the items on the questionnaire, truthfully (Burns *et al*. 2017:175). Moreover, the social interaction during the delivery of the survey questionnaires also provided an opportunity to justify the importance of the research while the survey was ongoing. In sum, the hand-delivery aided in enhancing response rates.

Notably, surveys make use of large sample sizes where data are collected in a systematic and economic way as this ensures that the study fully represents some larger population (Burns *et al*. 2017:172). This means that the results from a representative sample of elements in a survey can be generalised to a broader population. The research was conducted in the form of a survey scheduled between 1 July 2018 and 30 November 2018 among microblogging individuals located within the southern Gauteng region. Data were collected at different time intervals and days of the week to ensure randomisation. Moreover, the individuals who had been identified were initially contacted by telephone to set up an interview appointment.

Since the survey made use of a questionnaire as the main instrument for collecting the empirical data, issues to do with the design of the questionnaire are discussed in the next section.

4.9 QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:221) suggest that a questionnaire is a vital tool used for building responses to specific research questions. Similarly, Schiffman *et al*. (2014:37) concede that a survey questionnaire is the "primary data collection instrument in quantitative research", which is a welcome acknowledgement for research is that has a particular focus in consumer behaviour. Saunders *et al.* (2016:457-458) concur with Brown *et al*. (2018:198) in saying that the use of questionnaires as the main survey instrument helps to standardise the data collection process by ensuring that all the study respondents are asked the same question in the same manner as they appear on the questionnaire. Apart from providing an indelible record of the fieldwork exercise, the questionnaire generated useful data that assisted with the achievement of the empirical research objectives set out in Section 1.4.3 of this study.

The manner in which a survey questionnaire is designed can have an influence on the respondents' willingness to participate in a study. Therefore, researchers should pay careful attention to the phrasing, format, content and sequencing of all questionnaires prior to the fieldwork.

4.9.1 Questionnaire phrasing

Researchers are able to separate questionnaire items into two, based on the amount of freedom they have in providing responses. According to Babin and Zikmund (2016:306),

open-ended questions (also termed free-answer questions) ask the respondents to respond to a question in their own words. This means that in an interview setting, an opportunity is provided for the research to apply probing techniques. Open-ended questions are preferably used in exploratory research designs (Saunders *et al.* 2016:452). Nevertheless, Tustin *et al.* (2010:397) highlight that open-ended responses are time consuming, labour intensive and also expensive, hence their undesirability in research.

Closed-ended questions (also termed fixed alternative questions) give the respondents a limited number of pre-determined responses from which to choose (Brown *et al.* 2018:190). Nevertheless, the scholars attest that it is very important to ensure that the response categories are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. In this study, only closed-ended questions were chosen since they take less time and are easier for the respondents to answer (McDaniel & Gates 2013:253).

4.9.2 Questionnaire format

According to Tustin *et al.* (2010:393), the format of questions can be unstructured, semi-structured or structured. With unstructured questions, the interview is conducted without any pre-formulated responses, meaning that the respondent can easily express his/her own opinion (Aaker *et al*. 2013:252). Conversely, the scholars attest that semi-structured questions can be used where there is need to accommodate widely differing responses from respondents. In this regard, a researcher can elect to use a structured question as an introduction to the subject at hand and then apply follow-up questions that are unstructured in nature.

In this study, only structured questions were included in the survey questionnaire. This means that the possible response categories were framed in advance, prior to the fieldwork (Hair *et al*. 2013:190). In this vein, McDaniel and Gates (2013:253) submit that structured questions can take different forms, including dichotomous, multiple-choice and scaled response questions. Dichotomous questions provide a binary of responses or only two response alternatives, whereas multiple-choice questions offer more than two fixed-alternative responses (Babin & Zikmund 2016:309). Scaled responses capture completeness or intensity of responses (Tustin *et al.* 2010:400). Table 4.2 illustrates the specific questionnaire format and scaling that was applied in this research.

Table 4.2: Questionnaire format and scaling

Section	Nature of question	Item	Format	Measurement scale
Section A	Demographic information	A1: Gender	Dichotomous	Nominal
		A2: Age	Multiple choice	Ratio
		A3: Ethnic group	Multiple choice	Nominal
		A4: Marital status	Multiple choice	Nominal
		A5: Highest educational qualification	Multiple choice	Ordinal
		A6: Monthly income before tax	Multiple choice	Ratio
Section B	Information about microblog music review posts	B1: Experienced in posting microblog music reviews	Dichotomous	Nominal
		B2: Most preferred posted content on Microblogs	Multiple choice	Nominal
		B3: Frequency of microblog music review posts	Multiple choice	Ordinal
		B4: Microblog with the highest music review posting experience	Multiple choice	Nominal
		B5: Most preferred microblog platform	Multiple choice	Nominal
Section C	Factors influencing the credibility of microblog music reviews	Source credibility (Items C1 to C6)	5-point Likert scale	Interval
		Information quality (Items C7 to C12)		
		Homophily (Items C13 to C17)		
		Review consistency (Items C18 to C21)		
		Confirmation of prior beliefs (Items C22 to C25)		
Section D	Overall credibility of microblog music reviews	Overall credibility (Items D1 to D6)	5-point Likert scale	Interval
Section E	eWOM adoption	eWOM adoption (Items E1 to E5)	5-point Likert scale	Interval

Source: Author's compilation (2018)

Section A comprised the demographic profile of the respondents. This included one dichotomous question relating to the respondents' gender (A1). The section included multiple-choice questions pertaining to the respondents' age (A2), ethnicity (A3), marital status (A4), highest education level (A5) and monthly income (A6) of the respondents. In terms of the level of scale measurement, nominal scales were used in this section (A1, A3, A4 and A5). In nominal data, the respondents are able to mark only one response with a

number, which attributes a label or tag for identifying or classifying the specific object in question (Tustin *et al.* 2010:592). A ratio scale was applied on the question asking the respondents' age (A2) and monthly income (A7). The use of a ratio scale enabled the researcher to compare the intervals or differences on the scale represented by equal values being measured (Burns *et al.* 2017:207). Conversely, an ordinal scale was applied when asking the respondents to indicate their highest education level (A6), in which case the chosen response allows for categorisation based on how much a categorisation exists relative to others (Brown *et al.* 2018:274).

Section B sought information about the music review posts that were made by the respondents on microblogs. The questions requested the participants to answer whether they had previously posted a music review on any microblog within six months of the survey (B1). This question (filter question) was a dichotomous type of question. Moreover, the question was designed as a filter question, aimed at eliminating those participants who had not posted music content recently and therefore could not form part of the targeted consumers for this study. Participants who selected 'yes' on B1, were allowed to continue completing the questionnaire. In addition, the section contained four questions that were anchored along multiple-choice statements. These included a question relating to the most preferred content when the respondents post music reviews on microblogs (B2), a question asking about the frequency with which microbloggers post music reviews on microblogs (B3). Furthermore, question B4 pursued information relating to the specific microblog that the respondents have experienced using (B4), whereas question B5 asked the respondents to indicate their most preferred microblog platform for posting music reviews (B5). The questions included in Section B were anchored along nominal scales, except for item B3, which was ordinal as it inferred a ranking of sorts in terms of the least to the most frequent times in which the respondents had posted music reviews on microblogs.

Multi-item scales contain a broad form of response points, which provide a great degree of flexibility in outlining the phenomenon under study (Babin & Zikmund 2016:296). As such, sections C, D and E comprised 36 scale items, anchored along a 5-point Likert scale. A Likert scale is described as a measure of constructs using a rating scale with a continuum of labelled categories designed to allow respondents to rate the extent to which they either agree or disagree with carefully constructed statements (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:212). These items were anchored along interval scales of measurement implying a quantitative rating scale where the difference between two variables is meaningful (Burns *et al.*

2017:207). In this case, a Likert scale was utilised based on the ease of construction and administration, thereby rendering the scale suitable for personal surveys (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:350). Likewise, scaling enabled easy pre-coding in this research since participants' responses were easily converted into a numerical format ranging between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree), prior to the statistical analysis. Moreover, a Likert scale was preferred in this research because it is considered flexible and easy for the researcher to apply as well as for the respondents to understand.

In this study, measurement scale adaptation was elected based on the valid psychometric properties of the scales reported in Section 4.9.3 of this dissertation. According to Saunders *et al.* (2016:452), the adaptation of scale items enables researchers to save time and further make reliability comparisons with variables that have been empirically tested in previous research. Nevertheless, limited modifications were made to the wording of the items in order to fit the context of the study as explained next.

4.9.3 Questionnaire content

The questionnaire consisted of a cover letter and five sections as reported in Appendix A.

4.9.3.1 Cover letter

A cover letter has become a critical part of most questionnaire surveys. Saunders *et al*. (2016:713) refer to a cover letter as the letter that accompanies a research questionnaire, which explains the purpose of the survey. The cover letter helps to motivate the respondents to participate in a survey (Tustin *et al*. 2010:187). In this study, a cover letter was included as a primer to the questionnaire, which served to explain the purpose of the study and arouse the respondents' interest in participating. The legitimacy of the study was assured by including details about the institution of affiliation on the cover letter. The contact details of the researcher as well as the study leaders were also included on the cover letter. Furthermore, reference was made to the estimated amount of time it would take to complete the questionnaire as well as the ethical elements that were upheld upon conducting the research. In sum, the information provided on the cover letter served to stimulate co-operation rates.

4.9.3.2 Sections of the questionnaire

Section A of the questionnaire comprised seven questions (A1 to A7) measuring the demographic profile of the participants, whereas Section B of the questionnaire had only five questions (B1 to B5) that measured microblog usage behaviour.

Section C of the questionnaire comprised 25 Likert-scaled items, which aimed to identify the underlying factors that influence the respondents' credibility evaluation of microblog music reviews. Specifically, five items measuring source credibility (items C1 to C5) were adapted from Luo *et al*. (2013:101), whereas an additional item C6 (*expert information*) was added in order to capture the full essence of the definition of source credibility. The original scale reported very high internal consistency reliability among the scale items as observed by a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.925 as well as composite reliability value of 0.944. Similarly, six items measuring information quality (items C7 to C12) were adapted from Lin *et al*. (2013:38), whereas the original scale reported a composite reliability value of 0.876. Moreover, the section included five items measuring homophily (items C13 to C17), gleaned from the original work by McCroskey, Richmond and Daly (1975:3285), whose work was later adapted by Wu (2013:59). The homophily sub-scale yielded satisfactory reliability in the original study as reported by a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.792. In addition, the questionnaire comprised four items measuring review consistency (items C18 to C21) as well as four items measuring prior beliefs confirmation (items C22 to C25), whereas both scales were operationalised from a study by Cheung *et al*. (2009:21). The scholars reported high composite reliability values of 0.850 and 0.823, respectively. In terms of modification, the study context was incorporated in the questions, whereas the phrase "the music reviews posted on this microblog…" prefaced all the questions in this section. The response options in Section C were anchored along 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree.

Section D comprised six scale items measuring the overall credibility evaluation of microblog reviews (items D1 to D6) adapted from Durmaz and Yuksel (2017:234). The scale items on this scale reported a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.740. Likewise, the response options were anchored along 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree.

Section E comprised five scale items relating to eWOM adoption (items E1 to E5) adapted from Cheung *et al*. (2009:21). Notably, the scale returned high reliability in the reported study, as demonstrated by a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.772 as well as a high composite reliability score of 0.842. The response options were anchored along 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree.

4.9.4 Questionnaire layout and sequence

According to Wison (2014:163), the layout of the questionnaire should be logical, user-friendly, without spelling mistakes and appealing to the target sample. The decision regarding the questionnaire layout is key in view of making the questionnaire easy to understand (Aaker *et al.* 2013:221). In agreement, Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:221) attest that the physical appearance of a questionnaire has a major impact towards respondents' co-operation. If the questionnaire looks untidy and sloppy, respondents are likely to perceive the study as unimportant and thereby decide not to participate. Nonetheless, if the questionnaire is user-friendly and well designed, respondents are likely to demonstrate interest in answering the questionnaire. In this study, a decision was taken to develop an interesting and logical questionnaire by considering the guidelines put forward by Tustin *et al. (*2010:391-392) regarding question sequencing:

- The first question should be simple and interesting in order to put respondents at ease and motivate them to participate in the survey.
- The researcher should indicate which respondents have to answer which questions.
- A logical sequence of questioning should be followed.
- If required, sensitive or embarrassing questions should be positioned as near to the end of the questionnaire as possible.
- Questions requiring classified information should be nearer to the end of the questionnaire.

4.9.5 Pre-testing the questionnaire

In this study, an expert de-brief was conducted as part of the pre-test exercise to improve the order, wording and layout of the questions. The pre-test was also done in order to establish the appropriateness of the Likert scale format that was used in the study. The briefing exercise was conducted with the study leader and two other subject matter experts from the online consumer behaviour discipline. While doing so, negatively worded and

double-barrelled questions were eliminated. As a final adjustment, consultation with a statistician led to substantial improvements to the wording of the final questionnaire, including limited stylistic and language modifications.

4.9.6 Pilot study

In order to identify and eliminate any potential problems, a questionnaire should be tested on a small sample of respondents. In this test, the survey questionnaire is completed by a few respondents to evaluate its content validity (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:224). Specifically, Zikmund *et al.* (2013:59) highlight that pilot testing is important in helping to refine survey questions and reduce the potential risk of the entire study being unreliable. The pilot survey helps to evaluate the internal consistency of the scale items, whereas the statistics that are applied are not robust (McDaniel & Gates 2013:37). In this study, the researcher initially developed the questionnaire. Thereafter, a pre-test was conducted with subject experts. In addition, a pilot test of a questionnaire was conducted with 62 respondents. The pilot sample comprised participants who were conveniently selected from a university of technology. Nevertheless, the participants in the pilot test indicated that they had prior experience with posting music reviews on microblogs. In this way, the group of respondents that were included in the pilot had similar characteristics with the target population but were excluded from the main survey to avoid response bias. The results of the pilot-test are presented in Section 5.2 of this dissertation.

4.10 RESEARCH ETHICS

Since marketing research is a form of human conduct, it is necessary that such investigations conform to acceptable values and norms (Brown *et al.* 2018:20). In this respect, researchers adhere to specific ethical guidelines before, during and after the data collection process. Saunders *et al.* (2016:239) refer to research ethics as the set of standards of behaviour that guide researchers' conduct in relation to the rights of other individuals or participants who become the subject of a study or are affected by it. As such, research ethics seek to protect the well-being of participants, while extending into areas such as scientific misconduct and plagiarism. According to Tustin *et al.* (2010:46-51), research activities are governed by five categories of ethical obligations. These include the researcher's obligation to respondents, the marketing researcher's obligation to respondents, the respondents' obligation to the researcher, disclosure requirements and the prevailing code of conduct. These ethical obligations are discussed next.

4.10.1 Researcher's obligation to research participants

As marketing research involves an interaction between two and more parties, researchers can be faced with ethical dilemmas. In this case, there are certain obligations that preserve the social interaction between researchers and participants, which should be upheld when undertaking research projects. Tustin *et al*. (2010:46) highlight that a researcher's obligation to participants include the notion that participants should not be harmed and deceived. This ethical obligation also entails collecting data from willing participants as well as the reporting of all participants' information in confidence.

4.10.1.1 Participants should not be harmed

During the fieldwork process, the primary obligation of a researcher is to ensure that participants in the study are not harmed in any way (Tustin *et al*. 2010:47). Harm can occur if the researcher behaves in any manner that causes risk to the participants' emotional wellbeing, mental or physical health. Relatedly, indirect maleficence includes subjecting the participants to discomfort or embarrassment in the process of undertaking a research project. The use of stereotyped and/or threatening language is also considered an unethical means of enacting maleficence on the participants (Saunders *et al*. 2016:236). In light of attempting to avoid causing harm to participants during the data collection process, the study avoided harming the participants by asking questions that did not result in mental or social pressure. Likewise, the respondents were asked questions that were not threatening in order to avoid emotional harm. Stressful and conflict-ridden questions were avoided. In addition, the research steered clear from asking personal, sensitive or embarrassing questions.

4.10.1.2 Participants should not be deceived

McDaniel and Gates (2013:24) mention that deception in marketing research can result in participants' unwillingness to participate in a research project. Respondents should be given honest information to secure their co-operation. For this purpose, a cover letter was attached to the questionnaire used in this study. It clearly specified that this research was purely for academic purposes and the results would be reported in the form of an MTech dissertation. To legitimise the study, the university logo was inscribed on the questionnaire together with the names of the researcher and the study leaders (refer to Appendix A).

4.10.1.3 Participants should be willing and informed

Participants should be informed and their consent obtained prior to participating in a research project (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:898). This means voluntary agreement of a verbal or written nature should be obtained first, prior to the participants' involvement in a research project. This includes informing the participants about the potential risks associated with completing the questionnaire as well as the potential benefits of taking part in the study (Saunders *et al*. 2016:244). In this study, permission to conduct the study was sought from each participant in respect of upholding voluntary participation. Likewise, it was highlighted on the cover letter that the participants had the right to withdraw from the study should they feel uncomfortable at any stage. Nonetheless, no known risks were posited to be encountered from taking part in the study, except for time risk, whereas the cover letter stipulated that taking part in the study would take approximately 12 minutes of the respondents' time.

4.10.1.4 Participants' data should be held in confidence

Participants' data should be held in confidence by not attributing any personal identifiers such as names and addresses during the data collection process (McDaniel & Gates 2013:26). This is done by not asking or forcing participants to disclose their names before, during and after completing the questionnaire. In addition, Burns *et al.* (2013:59) advocate for the privacy of participants during surveys. Moreover, the researcher should maintain anonymity and the data they provide should be processed to make it non-attributable to specific individuals, unless there is an explicit agreement to attribute any given comment (Saunders *et al*. 2016:244). Confidentiality of participants as well as their identity was protected by using random numbers to identify each case. In this study, the presentation of results in Chapter five steered clear from ascribing the responses to specific individuals. Furthermore, the responses were not disclosed to specific participants, exclusively. Instead, all the research results were reported on an aggregated basis. Finally, electronic passwords were used to secure the data spreadsheet on Microsoft Excel, whereas the hard copies of the questionnaires were kept under lock and key in view of upholding confidentiality of information.

4.10.2 Marketing research supplier's obligation to clients

Sometimes a marketing research project can be conducted by a marketing research supplier (organisation) on behalf of a company or individual. In this case, there are certain ethical

obligations that need to be upheld by the organisation as the supplier of processed data. These include following proper procedures, not overstating the benefits of the research, confidentiality of client information as well as not distorting the research results (Tustin *et al.* 2010:49). While it is acknowledged that this study was not conducted for any commercial purpose, the aforementioned ethical principles are still relevant for academic research.

4.10.2.1 Use of proper procedures

Tustin *et al*. (2010:49) submit that researchers should use proper procedures in collecting and analysing data in order to assure the reliability and validity of the results. In this study, correct methodical procedures and scientific guidelines for conducting marketing research were followed. This comprised making constant reference to several authoritative methodology scholars to frame the confines of this work as was done in this chapter. Out of courtesy and professionalism, the participants completed the questionnaires at their own time and pace to honour their busy schedules. Further to upholding professional and fair conduct, a standardised questionnaire was administered to all the participants, with the same type of questions being asked.

4.10.2.2 Not overstating the benefits of the research

McDaniel and Gates (2013:27) note that it is "unethical to overstate the benefits of the results with the aim of earning participants' trust". In commercial research projects, some research suppliers promise results that are more accurate in order to be awarded and commissioned new projects (Tustin *et al.* 2010:50). The benefits of this research were stated in Chapter 6 of this study as recommendations for further research and/or implications for marketing managers. Moreover, the academic dissertation was made available in the university library to any participants who were interested in the report after its compilation.

4.10.2.3 Confidentiality of client information

Saunders *et al*. (2016:244) suggest that the reliability of information is likely to be influenced by the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. In this regard, the ethical assurances about anonymity and confidentiality were observed, as explained in Section 4.10.1.4 of this dissertation.

4.10.2.4 Not distorting the research results

Malhotra *et al*. (2017:898) point out that the deliberate act of misusing statistics, falsifying figures, withholding and/or misinterpreting research results with the objective of supporting a personal point of view is an act of unethical research conduct. Instead, data should be captured as it is and the results should be reported fully and accurately irrespective of whether they contradict the expected results (Saunders *et al*. 2016:244). In agreement, Burns *et al*. (2017:60) suggest that research results should be reported accurately and honestly without being falsified or omitted. This ethical obligation was strictly upheld in this work through close supervision by the study leaders. For transparency, the key limitations that were encountered while conducting this research were enlisted in Chapter 6.

4.10.3 Clients' obligations to research suppliers

Respondents typically give their time and opinions to researchers on a voluntary basis. However, there are certain obligations that they also need to adhere to when taking part in research projects. McDaniel and Gates (2013:27) caution that respondents should refrain from making any false promises to the researcher, such as agreeing to participate and then not being available at the agreed upon time. Moreover, respondents should not request the research result if they intend to misrepresent the findings.

4.10.4 Disclosure requirements for the research results

According to Burns *et al.* (2017:51), marketing research information should be carefully handled in a manner that will protect the confidentiality of the respondents. Moreover, the preparation and presentation of these results should point to the prioritising of data integrity (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:898). In this study, the research results were presented in the form of an academic dissertation wherein a copy of the main survey questionnaire was made available as an appendix. The dissertation outlined the data collection process, including a description of the sample design and execution. In addition, the statistical results from the sample data were reported using extracts of data outputs from the statistical packages that were applied in this work.

4.10.5 Code of conduct in research

Every marketing research organisation is guided by a code of ethics that outlines the obligations of the various parties involved in a research project (Tustin *et al*. 2010:52). In South Africa, the Southern African Marketing Research Association (SAMRA) guides the

planning, supervising and setting standards for the industry and promoting professionalism in marketing research activities. Nevertheless, to ensure that the study did not transgress the behavioural norms established by the university, the first port of call in this work was to respect the guidelines provided by the university's research ethics committee, which are consistent with those established by the SAMRA.

Having deliberated on the design of the questionnaire as well as the ethical guidelines that guided the data collection process in this research, the next section evaluates how the reliability and validity of the measuring instrument were assessed.

4.11 SCALE EVALUATION

Any research project is subject to a series of data quality checks in view of enhancing the authenticity of the empirical findings. In light of this, Babin and Zikmund (2016:281) allude to the evaluation of reliability, validity and sensitivity elements in the assessment of empirical measurements.

4.11.1 Reliability assessment

Any measurement used by a researcher should be both reliable and valid (Burns *et al*. 2017:215). Nonetheless, reliability is a precursor to valid measurement. Reliability is defined as "an assessment of the degree of consistency between multiple measurements of a variable" (Hair *et al*. 2018:161). Put simply, Saunders *et al*. (2016:726) describe reliability as the extent to which the techniques used to collect data yield consistent findings. According to McDaniel and Gates (2013:216), there are three measures of reliability, namely test-retest reliability, alternative-forms reliability and internal consistency reliability.

4.11.1.1 Test-retest reliability

Test-retest reliability is defined as the ability of the research instrument to yield consistent results when used a second time under conditions that are as similar as possible to the original conditions (Field 2013:13). This means that test-retest reliability is attained by repeating the same measurement twice, under comparable conditions. Pallant (2011:97) denotes that the two tests should ideally be administered within a six months interval, after which the differences in the correlation coefficients among the scale items are observed. If the measurement is reliable, both correlation tests should yield consistent results (Hair *et al*. 2013:166). Nevertheless, this measure of reliability has a major drawback in that it may

not be plausible to locate and/or gain cooperation from the same respondents for a second round of reliability (Kumar 2014:217).

4.11.1.2 Alternative forms reliability

Alternative form reliability is approach for assessing reliability that requires two equivalent forms of the scale to be constructed and then the same respondents are measured at two different intervals (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:360). This measure of reliability is also known as equivalence forms reliability or parallel forms reliability (Kumar 2014:217). In this case, the same group of participants are measured at two different times with corresponding scale forms being administered each time. Thereafter, the correlation scores from the administration of the alternative scales are then evaluated to see if they produce consistent results in both instances (Iacobucci & Churchill 2010:258). Nevertheless, research methodology scholars affirm that the dual administration of measurement scales brings with it challenges in that it may be expensive and even difficult to construct two different equivalent forms of scale (Hair *et al.* 2013:166; McDaniel & Gates 2013:217). More so, the time interval for the administration of these two scale forms is usually between two to four weeks, which may be considered time-consuming (Saunders *et al.* 2016:451). By and large, these shortcomings have contributed towards the truncated use of the alternative forms to measure reliability among researchers.

4.11.1.3 Internal consistency reliability

Internal consistency reliability refers to the ability of an instrument to yield equivalent results when used to measure phenomenon on distinct samples during the same period (Pallant 2011:6). Alternately, Kumar (2014:218) simplifies internal consistency reliability by referring to it as the "extent to which the scale items are measuring the same underlying attribute". McDaniel and Gates (2013:217) posit that internal consistency reliability can be assessed using two methods, namely split-half tests and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

In split-half reliability tests, the items of a scale measuring a certain aspect of the variable are summed up in order to come up with a total score that represents the construct measured by the entire scale (Hair *et al.* 2013:166). Thereafter, the total set of measurement items are divided into two halves whereby one half represents odd-numbered scale items and the other half denotes the even-numbered scale items (Field 2013:708). The resulting half scores are then correlated against each other and then compared. Internal consistency

reliability of the study is confirmed if the two scales relate correlate highly (Nunnally 1978:245).

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is a measure of internal consistency reliability that determines the average of all possible split-half coefficients resulting from different splitting of the scale items (McDaniel & Gates 2013:217). The coefficient demonstrates whether the different items converge on some single point (Saunders *et al*. 2016:451). According to Malhotra *et al*. (2017:360), Cronbach's Alpha coefficients range in value from zero (meaning no consistency) to one (meaning complete consistency). In general, researchers agree that a benchmark of 0.70 and greater is acceptable on the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Nunnally 1978:245) Pallant 2011:7; Hair *et al*. 2018:161). In this study, the reported Cronbach's Alpha coefficients range between 0.635 and 0.808 as explained in Section 5.9 of this study. Whereas the lowest reported value in this study fell below 0.70, Babin and Zikmund (2016:281) insist that any values ranging between 0.60 and 0.70 can still be retained as they still point to fair reliability of a study.

4.11.2 Validity assessment

Babin and Zikmund (2016:281) define validity as the "extent to which the quality of a questionnaire ensures that what is measured reflects reality". Likewise, Field (2013:12) delimits validity to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. In this vein, Hair *et al.* (2018:124) maintain that a study should be free of any systematic or non-random error if perfect validity is to be obtained. Therefore, this study sought to highlight the validity of this work by evaluating the face, content and construct validity elements.

4.11.2.1 Face validity

Face validity is described as the assessment of the correspondence between the measurement items and the concepts that they are supposed to measure (Hair *et al*. 2018:161). McDaniel and Gates (2013:218) emphasise that face validity is the weakest form of validity since it involves scrutinising and revising the questionnaire subjectively through the use of judgement by researchers and experts. In this study face validity was evaluated through a pre-test with two subject matter experts from the online consumer behaviour discipline as well as the study leader (Refer to Section 4.9.5 of this study). Evidence of face validity was obtained when the judges agreed that the content of the questionnaire items was a real match of the variables included in the study. Moreover, pre-

testing helped to resolve problems relating to language as well as the layout of the questionnaire (Tustin *et al*. 2010:413).

4.11.2.2 Content validity

Content validity measures the extent to which a construct represents all the relevant dimensions in a study (Pallant 2011:7). Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:258) allude to content validity as the degree of sufficiency with which a scale grasps the theoretical constructs under study. In this study, a literature search as well as the opinions of the experts during the pre-test help to identify all the items to be included in the study. Thereafter, a pilot study was conducted on a conveniently selected sample of 62 students from a university of technology who had experience with posting music reviews along microblogs. To avoid sampling bias, individuals from the university were excluded from the main survey.

4.11.2.3 Construct validity

Construct validity is defined as the extent to which a measure confirms the hypotheses created from theory based on the concepts under study (Hair *et al.* 2013:167). In this vein, Malhotra *et al*. (2017:362) impresses upon the assessment of convergent, discriminant and nomological validity elements.

Convergent validity refers to "the extent to which scale correlate positively with other measures of the same construct" (Pallant 2011:7). Whereas different scale items are used to measure the same construct, the point where these items overlap indicates convergent validity (Saunders *et al*. 2016:451). In other words, for convergence to occur, the measurement items must depict high internal consistency to infer consistent meaning. In this study, three statistics were initially considered upon assessing the convergent validity of the scale items, namely the item-to-total correlation coefficients, the factor loadings as well as the average inter-item correlation coefficients.

The rule of thumb is to have corrected item-to-total correlation coefficients above 0.30 (Field 2013:2047). Similarly, the factor loadings extracted during the EFA procedure should be statistically significant (p <0.01) large, ranging between 0.50 and 1.00 (Hair *et al.* 2011:146). In terms of the average inter-item correlation coefficients, Clark and Watson (1995:316) suggest a threshold within the 0.15 and 0.50 range be maintained, whereas Pallant (2011:97) recommends that average inter-item correlation coefficients between

0.20 and 0.40 be considered evidence of the convergent validity of a study. The corrected item-to-total correlation coefficients reported in sections 5.7 and 5.8 of this dissertation were higher than 0.30. Likewise, the loadings across the extracted factors were larger than 0.50, whereas the average inter-item correlation coefficients (0.239 to 0.419) reported in Section 5.9 were within acceptable parameters.

Hair *et al*. (2018:163) concurs on a simple description by delimiting discriminant validity as the uniqueness of a construct, which makes it differ from other constructs used theoretically in a study. In general, low correlation coefficients between measurements infer that the constructs used in a study are theoretically different from each other (Hair *et al*. 2013:167). This study emphasises the guideline by Saunders *et al*. (2016:549) that correlation coefficients below ±0.90 signify the discriminant validity of a study.

Nomological validity refers to "the extent to which a scale measurement correlates in theoretically predicted ways with measures of different but related constructs" (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:362). The results reported in Section 5.11 of this study point to statistically significant correlation coefficients ranging between 0.303 and 0.544 (at p less than 0.01) were significantly below 1.0 and lower than 0.90 even justifying the nomological validity of this work.

4.11.3 Sensitivity assessment

Sensitivity refers to an instrument's ability to measure accurately the variability in stimuli or responses (Babin & Zikmund 2016:228). Sensitivity of this research was enhanced in two ways. First, numerous categories were included on the measurement scale. Primarily, a 5-point Likert scale was utilised on the non-categorical data set as this enhanced the accuracy of the response options. Secondly, a multi-item scale was utilised, as single-item scales are prone to be less sensitive to data variability. The decision to use a broad 5-point multiple item scale comprising multiple-scale items (refer to Section 4.9) was made in view of increasing sensitivity of the instrument. Accordingly, the use of broader scale response options and multiple scale items tends to increase the probability of correctly identifying some condition of perception.

Having explained the evaluation of the measurement scale, the next section provides detail regarding the manner in which the data were processed immediately after the fieldwork.

4.12 DATA PREPERATION

Data preparation is often regarded as tedious administrative work (Tustin *et al*. 2010:452). Nevertheless, this is a significant phase in the research process since the analytical results depend on the accuracy of primary data. Hair *et al*. (2018:253) describe data preparation as the inspection of the quality of the data after the questionnaire administration process, subsequent to converting it into usable coded data for analysis. As such, Cooper and Schindler (2011:490) agree with Tustin *et al*. (2010:452) in that there are four phases in data preparation, namely; data editing, coding, capturing, and cleaning. These phases were employed in chronological order in this work to ensure that the data were complete and ready for statistical analysis.

4.12.1 Editing

Data editing entails the process of checking completeness, consistency, comprehensibility and legibility of data while making the data ready for coding and storage transfer (McDaniel & Gates 2013:326). The process of editing the questionnaire includes a physical review of each completed questionnaire. In so doing, researchers can easily detect errors and omissions on each questionnaire (Brown *et al.* 2018:241). In this study, questionnaires were reviewed by the researcher upon collection from each respondent, implying that field editing was conducted. In field editing, checks were done to make sure that all the questions had been answered and that the handwriting was legible (Tustin *et al*. 2010:100). Moreover, central editing was conducted after the fieldwork whereby the researcher checked for any out of the ordinary cases, duplications and inconsistencies.

4.12.2 Coding

Burns *et al*. (2017:306) define data coding as the technical procedure by which raw data are transformed into symbols after specifying the alternative categories or classes into which the responses are to be placed and assigning code numbers or labels to the respective class. In this way, the coding process enables the researcher to assign the respondents' responses prior to entering them into SPSS for analysis (Pallant 2011:13). Nevertheless, Wiid and Diggines (2015:289) emphasise that the codes utilised by researchers should be mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive and appropriate to the research purpose and further derived from a single dimension.

In this study, numerical values were applied as codes. The coding was undertaken by the researcher in conjunction with the supervisor and the statistician. In particular, pre-coding was applied to the scaled responses in this work (sections C, D and E of the questionnaire), whereby the codes ranged between 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree), consistent with the choice of a 5-point Likert scale applied. Conversely, post-coding was applied to the categorical data (Sections A and B) after completing the fieldwork process and then reviewing the actual responses provided by the participants. Resultantly, a coding table was developed and included in Section 5.4.2 of this study.

4.12.3 Capturing

Data capturing involves transferring coded data from a questionnaire directly into a computer by means of keypunching (Tustin *et al*. 2010:101). Also termed data transcribing, this phase involves manipulation and transformation of data by the researcher into useful information for data analysis (Hair *et al*. 2013:252). Subsequent to data editing and developing a coding manual/table, data for this research were captured onto a Microsoft Excel™ spreadsheet in order to prepare for statistical analysis. For identification purposes, each respondent was captured as a case number since their names were not required. Thereafter, the actual responses given by each case for all the questions were then captured in terms of the codes that had been created for this study (refer to Table 5.3). This culminated in the creation of a data file on Microsoft Excel.

4.12.4 Cleaning

Data cleaning is the most imperative part of the data preparation process (McDaniel & Gates 2013:334). It involves applying computational methods to correct errors in data sets (Pallant 2011:43). In addition, data cleaning includes consistency checks and treatment of missing responses, in cases of inaccurate imputation during the data capturing process (Tustin *et al*. 2010:470). In this study, the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was imported onto SPSS (Version 25.0) for cleaning purposes. In this process, each case was inspected for out of range values and/or missing values.

The next section evaluates the statistical analysis method that was applied in this research.

4.13 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

After completing the data cleaning process, it was now possible to run the statistical analysis on SPSS (Version 25.0). This section outlines the specific statistical analysis that were applied in this study.

4.13.1 Frequency distributions

Frequency distributions refer to tables with a summary of data for each variable in a study so that specific values can be read (Saunders *et al*. 2016:512). They are useful in describing categorical variables such as the demographic profile of the sample (Pallant 2011:55). Moreover, frequency distributions are useful for detecting the popularity of responses and/or non-responses made by each unit of analysis (Tustin *et al.* 2010:523). In this study, frequency distribution tables were constructed showing in absolute and relative terms the frequency with which the different values of the variables in sections A and B were encountered in the sample. This information was also presented in illustrative terms using bar charts and pie charts in section 5.5 and 5.6 respectively, which were useful in characterising the sample and understanding the data composition.

4.13.2 Tabulation

Tabulation refers to arranging and summarising collected data in an orderly manner using a table format or any other summary format that shows the number of responses to each response category (Babin & Zikmund 2016:395). Iacobucci and Churchill (2010:352) postulate that tabulation can be in the form of a simple table, also known as one-way tabulation, or cross-tabulation. With simple tabulation, each variable is separately counted, whereas the number of responses given by participants to each possible response in the questionnaire is also counted. Cross-tabulation is a multivariate technique that is used for studying the relationship between two or more categorical variables (Brown *et al.* 2018:269), where they are compared and reported simultaneously. This study utilised simple tabulation in Section 5.4.4 of this study to determine the response choices made by the respondents along the non-categorical data in sections C, D and E.

4.13.3 Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

EFA is defined as the process of identifying the underlying dimensions or factors that explain the correlations between a set of variables (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:710). In fact, EFA focuses on reducing and summarising a large set of variables into a smaller set of

manageable factors. The data summarisation is made possible by actively seeking inter-correlations that group factors together from among a set of variables (Pallant 2011:181). Hair *et al*. (2018:127-159) outline five steps that are involved when conducting EFA.

4.13.3.1 Define the objective of factor analysis (research problem)

The first step in factor analysis like any other statistical techniques is to formulate the research problem (Hair *et al*. 2018:127). In general, the purpose of EFA is to find an alternative way to summarise information that is contained in a dataset comprising original variables that are condensed into a small set of new factors with minimum information. In this study, observed variables that were used in the survey questionnaire were specified from theory and adapted from previous researchers. Thereafter, EFA was conducted in order to reduce the data set into identifiable factors since the preliminary goal in this research was to identify a set of factors that stimulate the credibility of music reviews that are posted along microblogs.

4.13.3.2 Design the EFA model

Once the research problem has been formulated, the next step is to design EFA. It involves making decisions regarding the design of a study in terms of the variables, measurement of properties of variables and type of allowable variables, sample size necessary and the calculation of input data (correlation matrix) to meet the specified objectives of grouping variables respondents (Hair *et al*. 2018:132). In view of this, McDaniel and Gates (2010:448) suggest that for EFA to be appropriate, variables must be correlated thereby yielding a correlation matrix. In this study, a correlation matrix was computed. Thereafter, factorability of the data was observed by computing the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy as well as Bartlett's test statistic and Chi-square.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is the index that compares the size of the observed correlation coefficients to the magnitude of the partial correlations (Field 2013:2485). Whereas the statistic ranges between zero and one, small KMO values depict that the association between pairs of variables cannot be explained by other variables since the correlations are too small and not significant (Hair *et al*. 2018:136). Therefore, EFA may not be appropriate in this case. Nonetheless, KMO values that are greater than 0.5 are desirable for EFA to be considered in a study (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:714).

Bartlett's test of Sphericity is a measure of the presence of correlations among variables (Hair *et al*. 2018:136). The appropriateness of factor analysis is usually deduced from a large and significant Chi-square transformation of the determinant of the matrix, signalling the rejection of the null hypotheses that the appropriateness of EFA is questionable. Therefore, the statistic provides the statistical significance level (p less than 0.01), which indicates the extent to which the correlation matrix has significant correlations among at least some of the variables.

After observing the two statistics, an appropriate method for running the EFA procedure can then be applied. For example, the Common factor analysis method can be applied if the intention is to identify underlying factors that reflect what the variables share in common (Hair *et al*. 2018:139). In other words, Common factor analysis only considers common or shared variance among the variables. The Principal components analysis method considers the total or maximum variance in a dataset (Field 2013:1925). Since the interest is in identifying only that limited number of factors that yield the highest percentage of variance, the Principal components analysis method was applied in this research.

4.13.3.3 Satisfy the assumptions of EFA

The key assumptions underlying EFA are more conceptual than statistical (Hair *et al*. 2018:135). In EFA, much concern is placed on the character and composition of the variables included in the analysis rather than their statistical qualities. In view of this, Phakiti, De Costa, Plonsky and Starfield (2018:426) outlines the following assumptions for conducting EFA and these were upheld in this research:

- The sample should be homogenous with respect to the underlying factor structure.
- The sample size should be more than 200, preferably. In some cases, a sample size rule of approximately five observations per variable in the instrument may be considered.
- Reliability analysis should be conducted to check the homogeneity between variables.
- Correlation coefficients of at least 0.30 are required between the research variables.
- There should be no outliers in the data.

4.13.3.4 Deriving factors and assessing model fit

After the variables have been specified and the correlation matrix prepared, the researcher is then ready to apply EFA by classifying the underlying relationships between a set of

variables (Hair *et al*. 2018:136). In doing this, decisions must be based on the methods chosen for extracting factors as well as the permissible number of factors selected to represent the underlying structure in data dataset. In order to shorten the information contained in the original variables, a small number of factors should be extracted based on the following elements:

- **Eigenvalues**

Eigenvalues are a measure of the percentage of the total variance in the variables that are explained by each factor (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:712). The sum of the eigenvalues is the representation of the total of variance to be explained by the factor analysis and the ratio of each of the eigenvalues to the sum indicates the percentage of variance explained by the relevant factor. Consistent with Pallant (2011:184) as well as Wiid and Diggines (2015:243), only those factors with eigenvalues that are greater than one were retained in this study. Applying this criterion was considered important since those factors yielding eigenvalues less than one are regarded as explaining less than one variable's worth of variance (Hair *et al*. 2018:182).

- **Percentage of variance**

The percentage of variance refers to the percentage of total variance attributed to each factor (Hair *et al*. 2018:123). This means that the number of factors to be extracted in a study can be determined so that the cumulative percentage of variance extracted by all the factors reaches a satisfactory level (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:718). After conducting EFA on Section C of the questionnaire, the cumulative percentage of variance was reported at approximately 60 percent (refer to Section 5.7.2). Relatedly, the cumulative percentage of variance reported for Sections D and E was slightly below 60 percent since a minimal number of factors were extracted (refer to Section 5.8).

- **Scree plot**

A scree plot is represented in the form of a graph, designed to detect whether or not an eigenvalue is large enough to represent a meaningful factor (Field 2013:639). In other words, a scree plot is useful when extracting factors since it reveals the relative importance of each factor. Normally, the plot has the distinct break between the steep slope of factors representing large eigenvalues, whereas a regular trailing off after the distinct break is usually associated with the rest of the factors in a study. Malhotra *et al*. (2017:718) denote

that the point at which the 'scree' begins denotes the true number of factors that should be extracted. This implies that the number of factors determined by the scree plot might be fewer than that which is determined by the eigenvalue criterion.

4.13.3.5 Interpreting factors

Interpretation is assessed by classifying the variables that have loadings on the same factors. This can be done by rotating the EFA model, either at right angles (orthogonal rotation) or by disregarding the right-angled axis during factor rotation (oblique rotation). Orthogonal rotation is where "factors are extracted so that their axes are maintained at 90 degrees" whereas with oblique rotation the axes are not maintained at right angles (Hair *et al*. 2018:123).

In this study, the factors were rotated using the Varimax rotation method with Kaiser Normalisation converged in seven iterations. The rotation procedure was considered useful for establishing a clean set of variables that load fairly on each factor. Thereafter, three statistics were observed, namely the residuals, communalities and factor loadings to determine the best combination of scale items that load best on the extracted factors.

Reproduced residuals comprise the differences between the observed correlations (R-matrix) and the correlations based on the model (reproduced correlations) (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:657). According to Field (2013:2011), if more than 50 percent of the reproduced residuals are greater than 0.05, then this could be grounds for concern. In this study, relatively few residuals reported insignificant absolute values ($p > 0.05$) comprising only 21 percent of the variables. Drawing from this result, the fit of the EFA model was confirmed.

Communalities measure the percentage of variance in a variable that is commonly shared and/or explained with the other variables in the study (Tustin *et al*. 2010:670). Communalities are calculated as the sum of the squared loadings for a variable (Hair *et al*. 2018:122). According to Larose and Larose (2015:109), communalities greater than 0.50 are considered acceptable when running EFA, whereas Field (2013:1974) denotes that communality values below 0.50 are generally low. In this vein, items C2, C10, C21, C24 and C25 were considered candidates for deletion during the EFA, since they reported low communality values.

Malhotra *et al*. (2017:720) advocate that a researcher can check the high loading variables on each factor and then give a name that can closely describe that factor. In fact, only those

variables with loadings ranging between 0.50 and 1.00 are considered significant and were retained in this study. This means that those variables which had weak factor loadings below 0.50 (items C2, 10 and C21) had to be deleted. Similarly, the rotation procedure helps to identify cross-loadings. Cross-loadings infer a scenario whereby a variable has high factor loadings on more than one factor, thereby making it difficult to single out where the variable belongs during the factor interpretation process (Hair *et al*. 2018:122). This means that the ideal scenario is to have a variable with a strong loading on one factor and a relatively small loading on another factor. In this study, items C24 and C25 were eliminated as they cross-loaded in an unsatisfactory manner onto two different factors. Notably, all five items (C2, C10, C21, C24 and C25) yielded unsatisfactory results along the communalities (below 0.40) as well as by way of cross loading, thereby justifying their omission from further statistical analysis.

After the rotation procedure, it became easier to interpret and label each factor in descriptive terms in accordance with the specific variables that loaded on each factor (Hair *et al*. 2018:146). In this way, each factor was given a label that closely described it, based on the corresponding items.

4.13.3.6 Validation of EFA

According to Hair *et al*. (2018:158), after the interpretation of factors, the next step in EFA is to validate the extent of generalisability of the results to the population and the potential influence of individual cases or respondents on the overall results. The issue of generalisability is critical for each of the multivariate methods, but it is most important for an inter-dependence method such as EFA because it describes a data structure that should be representative of the population as a whole.

4.13.3.7 Data reduction

The last step in EFA is data reduction. Hair *et al*. (2018:159) suggest that its primary purpose is to extend the factor results by creating replacement variables representing each factor for subsequent application to the other statistical technique.

4.13.4 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistical enable the researcher to describe and compare variables numerically (Saunders *et al*. 2016:527). The use of descriptive statistics was two pronged in this study.

First, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the composition of the sample responses and then were computed as an indirect indicator of the normality of the dataset.

Three measures are discussed as descriptive statistics, namely the measures of central tendency, measures of variability as well as measures of shape.

4.13.4.1 Measures of central tendency

According to Hair *et al.* (2013:170), the measures of central tendency (also known as the measures of central location) are the most basic summary statistics used to locate the central distribution of responses. This means that measures of central tendency are used to explain or clearly describe the centre of a data. Brown *et al.* (2018:259) enumerate such statistics as the mean, median and mode.

The mean is the arithmetic average value of the responses on a variable (Wegner 2012:64). In this case, it is calculated by dividing the sum of the scores in a distribution by the total number of scores or observations (Brown *et al*. 2018:260). The mean is a basic yet most commonly used summary measure in research. In this study, the mean value along the five-point Likert scale responses in sections C, D and E was set at 3.0.

The median is defined as the value in the middle of a set of variables (Tustin *et al*. 2010:540). This value can be found when data are arranged from either the largest to smallest number or the smallest to largest number (Field 2013:22). In an odd-numbered data set such as the five-point Likert scale used in this study, the median value was established as the middle value of 3.0 (1, 2, [3], 4 and 5). Nevertheless, in an even data set, the median can be calculated by adding the two middle values and dividing the total by two (Burns *et al.* 2017:319), whereby the statistic denotes the 50th percentile (Saunders *et al.* 2016:529).

Another measure of central tendency is the mode. It refers to a value that occurs most frequently in a data set (Wegner 2012:67). Burns *et al*. (2017:319) state that mode is a value that has the highest frequency in a frequency distribution. When distribution graphs are used to observe data, the mode is used to signify the maximum peak on that graph (Hair *et al.* 2013:269).

4.13.4.2 Measures of variability

Measures of variability (also known as measures of dispersion) comprise the range, variance, standard deviation and coefficient of variation (Wegner 2012:77-80).

The range is a simple function of the sample maximum and minimum values (Tustin *et al*. 2010:550). This means that the range is equal to the minimum value subtracted from the maximum value, whereby the smallest score is subtracted from the largest score. In this study, the lowest value on the Likert scale was set at one (minimum) whereas the highest value was set at five (maximum). Any values beyond this range are considered outliers and not acceptable in this research.

Variance is a measure of the average squared deviation from the central value (Wegner 2012:77). Field (2013:27) refers to the variance as the sum of squares divided by the number of observations in the data set.

Notably, the standard deviation is the square root of the calculated variance on a variable (Brown *et al*. 2018:260). Since the sample standard deviation provides a convenient measure of the variation in responses for continuous data, the standard deviation (rather than the variance) results for sections C, D and E were reported in Section 5.10 of this study. Malhotra *et al*. (2017:563) state that standard deviation describes the average distance of the distribution of values from the mean, thereby representing the gap between the values on average from the mean. In general, the standard deviation values for a normal data set should be approximated around ±1.

4.13.4.3 Measures of shape

Tustin *et al*. (2010:554) state that measures of shape are necessary in order to understand the nature of the data distribution. They are significant when a researcher aims to conduct advanced statistical techniques since they could be used to interpret whether or not a data set is normally distributed (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:564). In view of this, Brown *et al*. (2018:259) highlight that measures of the shape of distribution comprise skewness and kurtosis.

Skewness describes "the shape of a unimodal histogram for numeric data" (Wegner 2012:81). It explains the degree of deviation that occurs on the left or right of the mean of a data distribution (Pallant 2011:57). Malhotra *et al*. (2017:564) submit that a data distribution can be either skewed or symmetrical. A symmetrical distribution means that

the mean, mode and median are equal on either half of a data distribution. Contrastingly, a skewed data set represents the tendency of deviations from the mean to be smaller on either side, to the left (negative skewness) or right (positive skewness).

Kurtosis refers to the pointedness or flatness of the distribution compared with the normal distribution (Saunders *et al*. 2016:519). Field (2013:20) states that zero kurtosis value indicates a normally distributed data set. Positive kurtosis values (lepokurtic) that are cluttered to the right of the axis indicate the peakedness of the data distribution compared to a normal distribution whereas negative kurtosis values (platykurtic) that are cluttered towards the left of the axis imply that the distribution is flat relative to a normal distribution (Wiid & Diggines 2015:254; Hair *et al*. 2018:94).

The cut-off values for skewness falling within the range of -2 and +2 denote a substantially normal, rather than a skewed distribution data set. Similarly, the kurtosis values should range between ±2 to depict a normally distributed data set (Field 2013:612). The skewness values (ranging between -0.153 and -0.494) as well as the kurtosis values (ranging between -0.018 and -0.432) reported in this study denote that the data used in this research is normally distributed.

4.13.5 Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis is applied in order to measure the strength of the linear association between two numeric scaled variables (Wegner 2012:305). Likewise, Pallant (2010:129) denotes that correlation analysis is used to describe the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. By inference, correlation analysis involves measuring the closeness of the relationship or joint variation between two variables at a time (Saunders *et al*. 2016:545). In which case, correlation analysis establishes the degree to which changes in one variable are associated with changes in another variable and attempts to estimate the extent of the changes (McDaniel & Gates 2010:560; Kumar 2014:13).

Correlation analysis can be assessed using one of three statistics, namely Pearson's correlation coefficient (r), Spearman's *rho* (r_s) or Kendall's Tau correlation coefficient (τ) (Field 2013:276).

Non-metric variables can be correlated using either Spearman's rho (rs) or Kendall's Tau correlation coefficient (τ), which are both non-parametric tests that do not assume a normal distribution. Spearman's correlation coefficient is a non-parametric statistic based on

ranked data set that is used to minimise the effects of extreme scores or the effects of violations of the assumptions (Field 2013:276). Spearman's *rho* (r_s) contains both descriptive and inferential elements. The descriptive element infers the calculation of Spearman's *rho* coefficient (r_s) values and then describes the nature of relationships between the variables being correlated. Conversely, the inferential element seeks to test the significance of the relationship between the variables, at either the 95 percent (p=0.05) or 99 percent (p=0.01) level of confidence. Nonetheless, if the data is ranked in some way, Kendall's Tau correlation coefficient may be computed (Field 2013:858).

In this study, the variables were correlated using Pearson's correlation coefficient. This statistics measures the strength of linear relationship between two variables. Pearson correlation coefficient hinges on two key assumptions of linearity and homoscedacity. Linearity assumes association between each pair of variables, while homoscedasticity assumes that the variables have equal variances (Saunders *et al*. 2016:548). The coefficient ranges between -1 (perfect negative and linear association among variables) and +1 (perfect positive and linear association among variables). Nonetheless, a value of zero implies that there is no association among the variables.

The correlation coefficients reported in this research were all positive and statistically significant, ranging between +0.303 and +0.544 at p less than 0.01. This implied that there was linearity among the variables utilised in this work. Furthermore, the strength of association among the variables in this research can be considered moderate, yet positively associated. These results are reported in Section 5.11 of this study.

In the next section, bivariate regression analysis is discussed as the anchor statistical technique that was used in testing the conceptual model in this research.

4.14 REGRESSION ANALYSIS

According to Pallant (2011:148), regression analysis is a type of statistical tool that can be used to address variety of research questions and thereby enable the determination of how well a set of variables is able to predict a particular outcome. Therefore, the aim of regression analysis is to figure a regression model or a prediction equation connecting the dependent variable to one or more independent variables. It is a statistical technique that can achieve the best linear prediction equation between independent variables and the dependent variable (Aldlaigan & Buttle 2008:317). Regression analysis presumes that one

dependent variable is explained by at least one or more independent variables. Leedy and Ormrod (2014:301) emphasise that regression analysis yields an equation in which two or more independent variables are utilised in order to predict a single dependent variable.

Figure 4.7 illustrates the steps that are involved when conducting bivariate regression analysis.

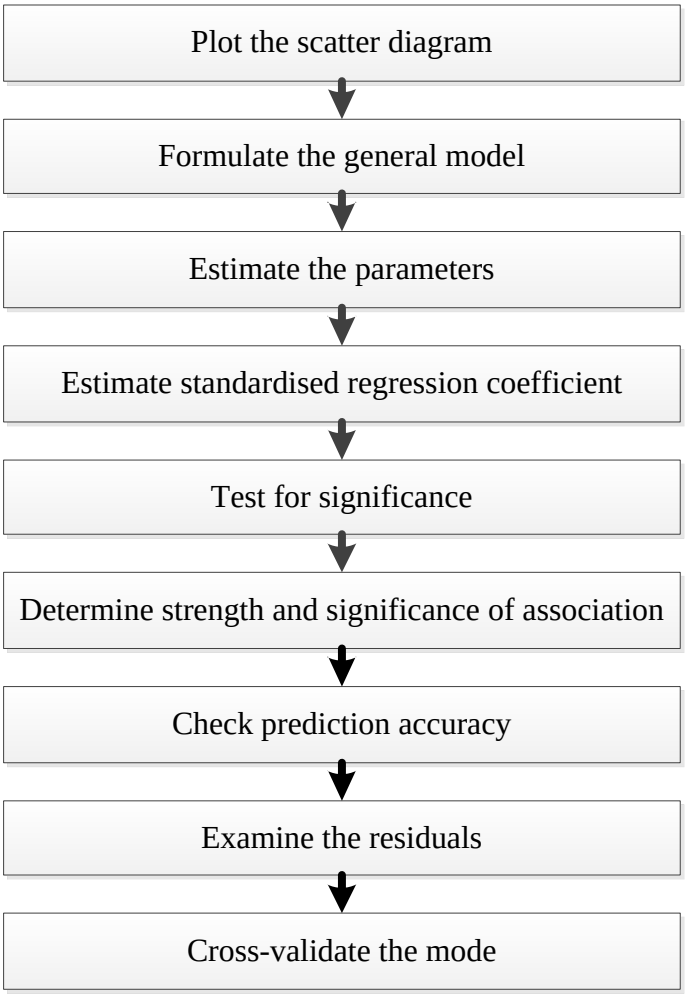


Figure 4.7: Conducting bivariate regression analysis

Source: Malhotra *et al*. (2017:643)

4.14.1 Plot the scatter diagram

A Scatter plot displays the data points of two numeric variables on a X-Y graph (Tustin *et al*. 2010:650). The Scatter diagram shows the nature of the relationship between two variables in terms of strength, shape, direction and any outliers (Wegner 2012:42). In this way, the Scatter plot points to the patterns in the dataset. Generally, if the relationship

between variables is linear, this is depicted when one variable increases and so does another variable (Saunders *et al*. 2016:548). Linearity may be influenced by two things. First, the individual cases with extreme values (termed outliers) on one or more variable may violate the assumption of linearity. Subsequently, the researcher needs to identify outliers and exclude them from the analysis. Secondly, the values of one or more variable may violate the assumption of linearity. This means, for these variables the data values may need to be transformed.

The least-squares procedure is a popular method that is used by researchers for finding the best-fitting line to a straight line to a scatter diagram by minimising the square of the vertical distances of all the points from the line and the regression procedure (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:644).

4.14.2 Formulate the Bivariate regression model

According to Malhotra *et al.* (2017:652), the general form of a bivariate regression model is as follows:

$$\mathbf{Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_2 + \beta_2\, x_2 + \beta_3\, x_3 \cdots \beta_k x_k + \boldsymbol{e}}$$

Where:

Y = dependent variable

X= independent variable

β_0= intercept of the line

β_1= slope of the line

e= constant

In the regression model, a deterministic relationship is inferred whereby the dependent variable (Y) is completely determined by the independent variable (X). Nonetheless, since in real research terms it is rare to find such a purely deterministic scenario, therefore the model produces an error term (e) to account for the probabilistic or stochastic nature of the relationship.

According to Malhotra *et al.* (2017:651), the following assumptions are made in estimating the parameters and significance testing of a regression model:

- The error term should be approximately normally distributed **(normal distribution).**
- The means of all the normal distributions of Y given X lie on a straight line with slope b **(evidence of linearity and absence of collinearity)**.
- The expected mean error term of the regression model is zero.
- The variance of the error term is constant **(Homoscedasticity)**.
- The error terms are uncorrelated, implying that each observation has been drawn independently **(absence of autocorrelation)**.

4.14.3 Estimate the parameters

Included in the regression model are parameters (β_0 and β_1), which are estimated from the sample observations using the equation:

$$\grave{Y}_i = a + bx_i$$

$\grave{Y}_i$ is the estimated or predicted value of Y_i, whereas 'a' is the estimator of β_0 and 'b' is the estimator of β_1. Based on these parameters, 'a' is also inferred as the intercept on the regression line, whereas 'b' is the slope of the regression line. The constant 'b' is also referred to as the non-standardised regression coefficient, whereas the statistic indicates the expected change in Y when X is changed by one unit. In general, a positive sign of the slope coefficient (+b) indicates that the relationship between the variables is positive whereas a negative sign (-b) implies that when X increases, Y decreases in value.

4.14.4 Estimate the standardised regression coefficient

Regression coefficients represent the mean change in the response variable for one unit of change in the predictor variable while holding other predictors in the model constant (Hair *et al*. 2018:267). This absolute value of the regression coefficient isolates the role of one variable from all the others in the model by signalling the strength and effect of the predictor variable in explaining the dependent variable in the model. Nevertheless, the regression coefficients are estimated based on untransformed data. Therefore, standardisation refers to a process of transforming raw data into new variables that have a mean of zero and a variance of one (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:646). The intercept assumes a value of zero when the data are standardised. The standardised version of the 'b' coefficients represents the Beta values, and the ratio of Beta coefficients is the ratio of the relative predictive power of the independent variables (Pestorius 2007:121). In other words, Beta values explain the

average amount by which the outcome variable increases when the input variable increases by one standard deviation whereas the other input variables are held constant (Tustin *et al.* 2010:656). Put mathematically, the slope obtained by the regression of Y on X (B_{yx}) is the same as the slope obtained by the regression of X on Y (B_{xy}). Moreover, each of these regression coefficients is equal to the simple correlation between X and Y.

4.14.5 Test for significance

The size and direction of Beta values signal the importance of the independent variable as well as its relative influence over the dependent variable in question. However, the capacity with which each regression coefficient is individually equal to zero is tested by evaluating the individual parameters' t-values (Sarstedt & Mooi 2014:226). If this is the case, therefore the parameter is insignificant. The statistical significance of the linear relationship between X and Y may be tested by examining the following hypotheses:

$$\mathbf{H_0: B_1 = 0}$$

$$\mathbf{H_1: B_1 \neq 0}$$

The null hypothesis (H_0) assumes that there is no linear relationship between X and Y, whereas the alternative hypothesis (H_1) infers that there is an existing relationship between X and Y, which can either be positive or negative. In this two-tailed test, a *t*-statistic is computed with n-2 degrees of freedom, where the non-standardised coefficient ('b') is divided by its own standard deviation, termed the standard error, as follows:

$$t = \frac{b}{SEb}$$

In general, the *t*-value should be larger than the critical value if the null hypotheses is to be rejected and thereby assert that there is a significant and linear relationship between two variables.

4.14.6 Determine the strength and significance of association

Further to asserting the existence of a relationship between variables, regression analysis goes further to infer the strength of the association between variables by determining the coefficient of determination, whereas the F statistic is computed in view of determining the significance of the association (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:649).

The coefficient of determination measures the proportion of variation in the independent variable that is explained by the independent variable (Wegner 2012:309). The coefficient of determination is also known as multiple R (R^2), whereas the statistic ranges between zero (implying no explanatory effect) and one (implying perfect explanatory effect) (Burns *et al*. 2017:413). In general, a high value of the coefficient of determination indicates that the regression plane applies well to the scatter of points, while low values of multiple R indicate that the straight-line model does not apply well to the data.

The F statistics is a generalised form of the *t*-statistic, which infers an unequal distribution that has a minimum value of zero, but no maximum value (Wegner 2012:281). The curve reaches a peak not far to the right of zero and then progressively approaches the horizontal axis, the larger the F value is. In other words, the F distribution approaches, but never quite touches the horizontal axis. Tustin *et al*. (2010:627) mention that if the F-value is close to unity, the sample variances are similar. However, if the F-value is large, the more dissimilar the sample variance is. In general, the F-statistic should be larger than the critical value, to infer that the relationship between variables is significant at the *p* less than 0.05 level (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:650).

4.14.7 Check the predictive accuracy

Once the significance of the relationship between the variables is verified through the F-statistic, it becomes necessary to check the predictive accuracy of the results of the regression model. This is accomplished by calculating the standard deviation values of the actual Y values from the predicted Ỳ values. This statistic is termed the standard error of estimate. It is a kind of average residual or average error used in predicting Y form the regression line.

4.14.8 Examine the residuals

Residuals are used in the calculation of several statistics associated with regression. Residuals provide more useful insights in examining the appropriateness of the underlying assumptions and model fitted.

4.14.9 Cross-validate the model

Cross-validation scrutinises whether the regression model continues to hold while using comparable data that was not originally used in the estimation. Field (2013:954) postulates that cross-validation is the process of assessing the accuracy of the model across different

samples. According to Hair *et al*. (2018:32), the basic principle of cross-validation is that the original sample is divided into a number of smaller sub-samples and the validation fit is the average fit across all of the sub-samples. The process of cross-validating the regression model is imperative prior to assessing the relative importance of the predictors. In addition, Malhotra *et al*. (2017:663) submit that the cross-validation process used in the marketing research follows the following procedure:

- The regression model is estimated using the entire data set.
- The available data are split into two parts, the estimation sample and the validation sample, with the sample containing 50 to 90 percent of the total sample.
- The regression model is estimated using the data from the estimation sample only.
- The estimated model is applied to the data in the validation sample to predict the values of the dependant variable for the observations in the validation sample.
- The observed values and the predicted values in the validation sample are correlated to determine the simple R^2.

4.15 CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology followed in this study and to justify accordingly and motivate the use of the selected methodological aspects. The specific layout that was set to obtain the empirical evidence for successfully achieving the research objectives is provided. The chapter begins by outlining the positivism research paradigm, which was the philosophy anchored in this research. Furthermore, a quantitative research strategy was chosen as it allows for the objective testing of relationships between variables as per the empirical objectives established at the beginning of the study. Moreover, the research design, sampling strategy, sample frame and sampling procedures are elaborated.

The survey data collection technique used in this study is outlined. The data collection instrument (questionnaire) is described in terms of its format, layout and content. The sequence that was followed in the data analysis process is outlined as well as the reliability and validity assessment procedures applied in this research. The chapter concludes by discussing bivariate regression analysis and how it was applied in this work. The next chapter provides a report on the statistical findings obtained from the sample data and interprets the results in light of the sample data.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results and discussion obtained from the field with the aim of achieving the research objectives and hypotheses that were formulated in this study. The process of data analysis is useful in research as it provides the preliminary insights into the nature of the responses obtained from the participants (Tustin *et al*. 2010:523). In this manner, data analysis in marketing research is a useful step in discovering the information that will aid the researcher in testing proposed hypotheses and further drawing conclusions that will yield meaningful feedback for decision making.

The chapter commences with a presentation of the pilot results in Section 5.2, whereas Section 5.3 outlines data gathering process with a view to summarise how data in the main study were collected for this study. The Chapter describes the statistical analysis results in three phases. First, the preliminary composition of the sample is explained, including the extent of their interaction with microblog music reviews. This phase involved discussing the preliminary data preparation procedure in Section 5.4, thereby focusing on data editing, coding, cleaning and tabulation of responses. Section 5.5 presents the demographic profile of the sample, which is presented in the form of illustrative pie charts and bar graphs with the aim of summarising the information. Furthermore, Section 5.6 provides a summary of the microblog usage information by the participants.

In the second phase of the analysis, data were reduced or summarised so as to gain an initial meaning from it. Furthermore, the data were assessed for possible linear relationships among the variables. This includes the results presented in sections 5.7 and 5.8, depicting the EFA procedures that were conducted for the responses reported in sections C, D and E of the questionnaire, respectively. The reliability assessment and descriptive statistical analysis results of the extracted factors are presented in sections 5.9 and 5.10, consecutively. Section 5.11 discusses the results of the correlation analysis that were performed in terms of checking the linearity and correlation among the factors.

The final phase of the data analysis comprised the hypotheses testing procedure for the first regression model and the second regression model that was conducted as the anchoring multivariate statistical application for the study. This procedure is explained in sections 5.12 and 5.13, respectively, in light of the two regression models that were estimated in this work. Section 5.14 discusses the results of the regression analyses, culminating in the chapter closure in Section 5.15 of the study.

5.2 PILOT RESULTS

A pilot study was undertaken to ensure that the questionnaire was aptly constructed. It served as a trial run to help eliminate any potential fatal flaw that would render the final results useless (Babin & Zikmund 2016:64). Moreover, the pilot was used to refine the questionnaire since the scale items had been adapted from previous scholars in order to fit the context of this research. A sample of 62 university students took part in the pilot test that was anchored on a 5-point Likert scale Table 5.1 reports on the pilot test results.

Table 5.1: Summary of the pilot test results

Items	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient	Average inter-item correlation coefficient	Mean	Standard deviation
C1 to C6	1.00	5.00	0.809	0.482	4.151	0.803
C7 to C12	1.33	5.00	0.604	0.348	4.328	0.581
C13 to C17	1.20	5.00	0.646	0.357	4.109	0.715
C18 to C21	1.50	5.00	0.704	0.341	4.335	0.621
C22 to C25	1.50	5.00	0.732	0.355	4.319	0.639
D1 to D6	1.50	5.00	0.811	0.424	4.177	0.737
E1 to E5	1.60	5.00	0.721	0.347	4.403	0.694

Source: Author's compilation

Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated to define the internal-consistency reliability of the scale during the pilot phase. A majority of the reported values were above 0.70, which is considered evidence of acceptable reliability by Hair *et al*. (2018:161). From among the credibility dimensions, the source credibility scale (C1 to C6) returned a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.809, while review consistency (C18 to C21) returned a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.704 and prior beliefs confirmation (C22 to C25) returned a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.732. Likewise, the mediating scale termed overall

microblog review credibility (D1 to D6) returned a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.811 whereas eWOM adoption (E1 to E5) returned a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.721. Nevertheless, both information quality (C7 to C12) and homophily (C13 to C17) returned Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.604 and 0.646, respectively, which is slightly below the recommended threshold of 0.70. Notwithstanding this, Babin and Zikmund (2016:281) point to all values ranging between 0.60 and 0.70 as posing fair reliability. Therefore, considering that a limited sample size had been utilised in the pilot survey (N=62), a decision was taken to proceed with the scale items during the main survey without any major modification.

Average inter-item correlation values were also computed with the aim of assessing the convergent validity of the scales. Consistent with the rule of thumb by Pallant (2011:6) that the average inter-item correlation values should range between 0.20 and 0.40 to infer convergent validity, four of the five heuristics scales returned average inter-item correlation values that were within the recommended range. In particular, information quality (0.348), Homophily (0.357), review consistency (0.341), and prior beliefs confirmation (0.355) yielded average inter-item correlation coefficients that were below 0.40. Similarly, the adoption scale (0.347) was also within the recommended threshold. Nevertheless, source credibility (0.482) and overall review credibility (0.424) returned average inter-item correlation values that were slightly above 0.40, suggesting that the items were highly correlated among each other.

In terms of the descriptive statistics, the reported mean values during the pilot study ranged between 4.109 and 4.403, whereas the standard deviation values were close to one, with information quality (SD=0.581) reporting a wide divergence in terms of the responses provided by the microbloggers.

After the assessment of the pilot results, the study proceeded with collecting data for the main survey with minor technical and language changes to the questionnaire. The following section elaborates on the data gathering process that was conducted for the main research.

5.3 DATA GATHERING PROCESS (MAIN SURVEY)

This study followed the procedure put forward by Malhotra *et al.* (2017:414), in terms of the sampling design (refer to Section 4.7). Data were collected from a sample of microbloggers who are located in the southern region of the Gauteng province in South

Africa. A self-administered survey was conducted in the form of a hand-delivered 'drop and pick later' survey. The researcher personally delivered 500 questionnaires to microbloggers whose contacts he had been given and were referred to by other participants. The respondents were drawn from the five major towns of southern Gauteng. The survey was conducted between 1 July 2018 and 30 November 2018. To stimulate responses, a cover letter was attached to the questionnaire, clarifying the purpose, nature and legitimacy of the study. The following section elaborates on the preliminary data preparation checks that were undertaken after completing the fieldwork process.

5.4 PRELIMINARY DATA PREPARATION

Preliminary data preparation checks were concerned with editing, cleaning, coding and tabulation of data.

5.4.1 Data editing

During the fieldwork, data editing and cleaning involved visual checks of questionnaires for completeness, comprehensibility and legibility. Where hand-writing was not clear, the researcher immediately returned the questionnaire to the respondent for clarity. Thereafter, central editing was conducted in the office after completion of fieldwork, whereby a thorough scrutiny of the questionnaires was done to eliminate any major inconsistencies, rendering the data ready for coding and storage transfer. Table 5.2 summarises the number of questionnaires distributed and those considered admissible for statistical analysis.

Table 5.2: Data editing and questionnaire return rate

Fieldwork activity	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires distributed	500	100%
Collected the questionnaire but respondents not available for collection	9	1.8%
Incomplete/ inconsistent responses	4	0.82%
Responded and returned completed	487 (500-[9+4])	97% 100 - (1.8%+0.82%)
Observations identified with outliers during data cleaning	2(Case 120 and 353)	0.4%
Admissible observations	485 (487-2)	100 - (1.8%+0.82%+0.4%) 96.9% response rate

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Of the distributed questionnaires, nine respondents (1.8% of the sample) were not available on the agreed upon date when the researcher made several attempts to collect the completed questionnaires. Nonetheless, the researcher proceeded to conduct central editing on the collected 491 questionnaires. In central editing, four questionnaires (0.82% of the sample) were observed as having redundant and inconsistent responses, rendering their assessment meaningless. To avoid annoying the participants with second-time requests for clarity, the four questionnaires were omitted from the study. This process yielded a total of 487 completed and usable questionnaires.

5.4.2 Data coding

The 487 usable questionnaires were then captured onto Ms Excel for coding purposes and a spreadsheet was drawn up. Pre-coding was applied in sections C, D and E, whereby codes ranging between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree) were applied directly to the questionnaire prior to its administration, consistent with the choice of a 5-point Likert scale (refer to Appendix A). However, the codes for sections A and B were only assigned after the central editing process had been completed (post-coding). Table 5.3 presents the codes that were assigned to the questionnaire variables.

Table 5.3: Data coding at the main survey

Section A: Demographic information			
Question	**Code**	**Variable**	**Value assigned to responses**
Question 1	A1	Gender	Male (1), Female (2)
Question 2	A2	Age	18 to 20 years (1), 21 to 30 years (2), 31 to 40 years (3), 41 to 50 years (4), 51 to 65 years (5)
Question 3	A3	Ethnic group	Black African (1), Coloured (2), Asian (3), White (4)
Question 4	A4	Marital status	Single/ Never been married (1), Married (2), Separated (3), Divorced (4), Widowed (5)
Question 5	A5	Highest educational qualification	Grade 12/Matric (1), Diploma (2), Degree (3), Postgraduate (4), Other (5)

Table 5.3: Data coding at the main survey (Conti…)

Question 6	A6		Less than R5 000 (1), R5 000 to R10 000 (2), R10 001 to R20 000 (3), R20 001 to R30 000 (4), Above R30 000 (5)
Section B: Demographic information			
Question	**Code**	**Variable**	**Value assigned to responses**
Question 1	B1	Posting of a music review on a microblog within the last 6 months	Yes (1), No (2)
Question 2	B2	Most preferred content on microblog review posts	Celebrity news (1), Entertainment (2), Politics (3), Sports (4), Other (5)
Question 3	B3	Frequency of music review posts	Once a year (1), At least twice a year (2), Three times a year (3), At least 12 times a year (4), At least 52 times a year (5)
Question 4	B4	Microblog with usage Experience	DailyBooth™ (1), 12Seconds™ (2), Friendfeed™ (3) Tumblr™ (4), Twitter™ (5)
Question 5	B5	Most preferred microblog for posting music reviews	DailyBooth™ (1), 12Seconds™ (2), Friendfeed™ (3) Tumblr™ (4), Twitter™ (5)
Item 1 to 6	C1 C2 C3 C4 C5 C6	Source credibility	Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5)
Items 7 to 12	C7 C8 C9 C10 C11 C12	Information quality	Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5)
Section C: Factors influencing the credibility of microblog music reviews			
Question	**Code**	**Variable**	**Value assigned to responses**
Items 13 to 17	C13 C14 C15 C16 C17	Homophily	Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5)

Table 5.3: Data coding at the main survey (continued …)

Items 18 to 21	C18 C19 C20 C21	Review consistency	Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5)
Items 22 to 25	C22 C22 C23 C24 C25	Prior beliefs confirmation	Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5)
Section D: Overall credibility of microblog music reviews			
Question	**Code**	**Variable**	**Value assigned to responses**
Items 1 to 6	D1 D2 D3 D4 D5 D6	Microblog music review credibility	Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5)
Section E: eWOM adoption			
Question	**Code**	**Variable**	**Value assigned to responses**
Items 1 to 5	E1 E2 E3 E4 E5	eWOM adoption	Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly agree (5)

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

5.4.3 Data cleaning

The Ms Excel spreadsheet comprising 487 observations was carefully coded in line with Table 5.3 and then captured onto the software (SPSS Version 25.0), ready for cleaning. During the data cleaning process, the researcher was able to check for missing values that could have been omitted during the editing process. Data editing also enabled the researcher to check for any influential observations that were out of the ordinary cases since they could potentially distort the results. Case 120 and 353 were the notable outliers in this research. These two observations were deleted from the study as it was asserted that they could pose extreme effects on the results. Consequently, only 485 questionnaires were considered admissible for statistical analysis, yielding a 97 percent response rate for this research (refer to Table 5.2).

5.4.4 Tabulation of responses (frequency distributions)

Table 5.4 provides a summary of the frequencies that were obtained along the non-categorical (continuous) data that comprised section C, D and E of the questionnaire.

Table 5.4: Frequency table of responses

Scale items	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Section C: Factors influencing the credibility of microblog music reviews n(%)					
C1	46(9.5)	62(12.8)	172(35.5)	110(22.7)	95(19.6)
C2	18(3.7)	53(10.9)	145(29.9)	165(34)	104(21.4)
C3	35(7.2)	63(13)	167(34.4)	142(29.3)	78(16.1)
C4	64(13.2)	85(17.5)	161(33.2)	113(23.3)	62(12.8)
C5	34(7)	75(15.5)	169(34.8)	127(26.2)	80(16.5)
C6	39(8)	74(15.3)	161(33.2)	140(28.9)	71(14.6)
C7	34(7)	70(14.4)	143(29.5)	144(29.7)	94(19.4)
C8	51(10.5)	65(13.4)	170(35.1)	117(24.1)	82(16.9)
C9	37(7.6)	105(21.6)	144(29.7)	128(26.4)	71(14.6)
C10	36(7.4)	70(14.4)	155(32)	129(26.6)	95(19.6)
C11	43(8.9)	69(14.2)	149(30.7)	123(25.4)	101(20.8)
C12	47(9.7)	61(12.6)	159(32.8)	138(28.5)	80(16.5)
C13	32(6.6)	44(9.1)	108(22.3)	140(28.9)	161(33.2)
C14	18(3.7)	41(8.5)	106(21.9)	131(27)	189(39)
C15	39(8)	53(10.9)	134(27.6)	133(27.4)	126(26)
C16	29(6)	57(11.8)	125(25.8)	127(26.2)	147(30.3)
C17	31(6.4)	45(9.3)	125(25.8)	144(29.7)	140(28.9)
C18	34(7)	55(11.3)	161(33.2)	135(27.8)	100(20.6)
C19	25(5.2)	83(17.1)	161(33.2)	135(27.8)	81(16.7)
C20	29(6)	65(12.4)	169(34.8)	138(28.5)	84(17.3)
C21	25(5.2)	83(17.1)	161(33.2)	135(27.8)	81(16.7)
C22	56(11.5)	51(10.5)	144(29.7)	113(23.3)	121(24.9)
C23	27(5.6)	80(16.5)	137(28.2)	160(33)	81(16.7)
C24	40(8.2)	58(12)	100(20.6)	123(25.4)	164(33.8)
C25	35(7.2)	58(12)	138(28.5)	150(30.9)	104(21.4)
Section D: Overall credibility of microblog music reviews n(%)					
D1	47(9.7)	57(11.8)	145(29.9)	140(28.9)	96(19.8)
D2	34(7)	74(15.3)	139(28.7)	144(29.7)	94(19.4)
D3	19(3.9)	64(13.2)	153(31.5)	159(32.8)	90(18.6)
D4	33(6.8)	71(14.6)	123(25.4)	168(34.6)	90(18.6)
D5	34(7)	79(16.3)	146(30.1)	139(28.7)	87(17.9)
D6	38(7.8)	55(11.3)	151(31.1)	135(27.8)	106(21.9)

Table 5.4: Frequency table of responses (continued …)

Scale items	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Section E: eWOM adoption n(%)					
E1	63(13)	65(13.4)	113(23.3)	130(26.8)	114(23.5)
E2	21(4.3)	51(10.5)	115(23.7)	162(33.4)	136(28)
E3	28(5.8)	53(10.9)	142(29.3)	139(28.7)	123(25.4)
E4	44(9.1)	50(10.3)	129(26.6)	127(26.2)	135(27.8)
E5	50(10.3)	49(10.1)	111(22.9)	125(25.8)	150(30.9)

Source: Author compilation (2019)

Upon observing the frequency of responses collated in Table 5.4, it can be noted that a greater weight of responses favouring agreeability were given as evidenced by the modal responses and high frequencies being given along the 3 (neither agree nor disagree), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree) category response options in Sections C, D and E of the questionnaire.

5.5 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE (SECTION A OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE)

This section provides the sample description, with reference to their demographic information. For clarity, pie charts and bar graphs are used to represent the information that was acquired from the respondents.

5.5.1 Sample composition

A description of the sample with respect to their gender, age, ethnic group, marital status, highest education level and monthly income before tax is given.

Figure 5.1 provides an overview of the respondents' gender profile pertaining to item A1 on the questionnaire.

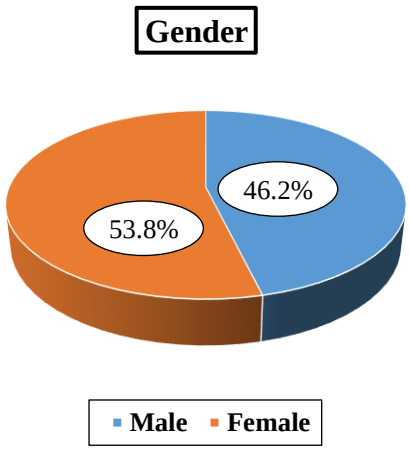


Figure 5.1: Respondents' gender

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Regarding the gender distribution of the respondents, Figure 5.1 indicates that out of the 485 respondents that contributed towards this research, the majority were female (n=261; 53.8% of the sample), while the remainder comprised male respondents (n=224; 46.2% of the sample). This indicates a high proportion of females who are posting music reviews on microblogs, thereby implying that female microbloggers could be more active on social media when compared to their male counterparts.

Figure 5.2 presents an overview of the distribution of the respondents' age with respect to question A2.

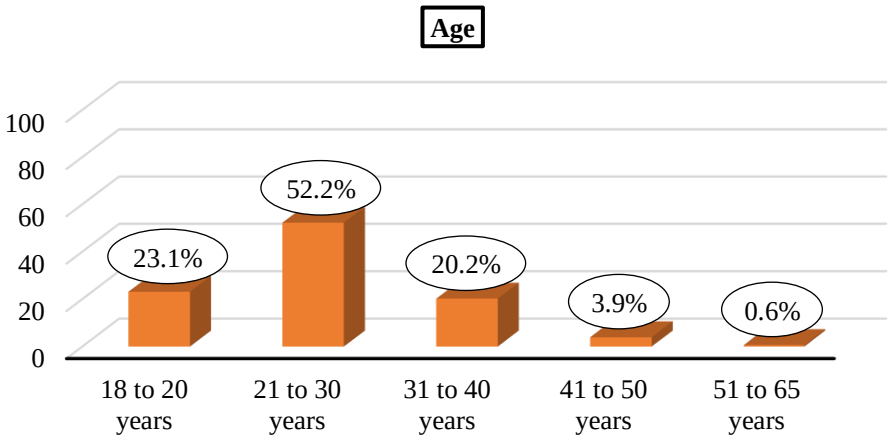


Figure 5.2: Respondents' age

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

The age composition of the sample reflects the assumption that the majority of the respondents were between the age of 21 to 30 years (n=253; 52.2% of the sample), followed by the youngest cohort of respondents who were between 18 to 20 years (n=112; 23.1% of the sample). Those individuals in the thirties (n=98; 20.2% of the sample) as well as those in the forties (n=19; 3.9% of the sample) came third and fourth place, in terms of the modal count in the sample. Finally, the least represented age distribution comprised the older respondents who were between 51 and 65 years (n=3; 0.6% of the sample) at the time of the survey. Interestingly, this latter outcome is consistent with the conservative nature of these individuals who were born before the time of technology and might be sceptical about the credibility of online music and related music review posts.

Figure 5.3 provide a summary of the respondents' ethnic group relating to question A3.

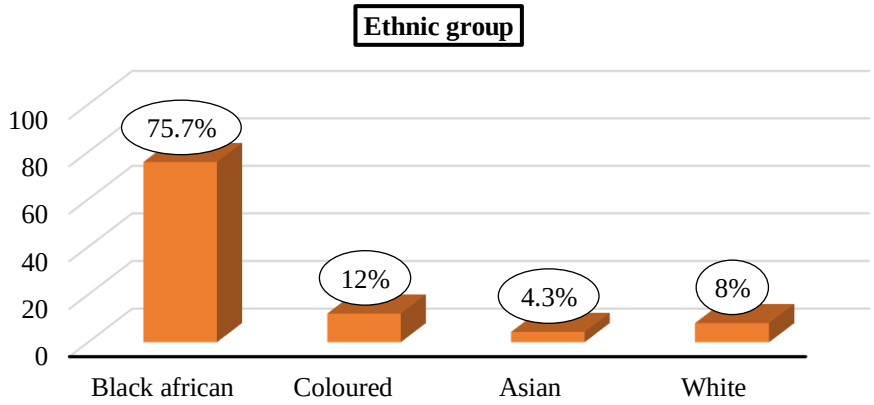


Figure 5.3: Ethnic Group

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Figure 5.3 provide a breakdown of the respondents' ethnic group. The majority of respondents were Black African (n=367; 75.7% of the sample), consistent with the demographic representation of the survey location i.e. southern Gauteng region. Nevertheless, individuals who reported that they were of Coloured (n=58; 12% of the sample), White (n=39; 8% of the sample) and Asian (n=21; 4.3% of the sample) descent were representative of the second, third and fourth place in terms of the frequency distribution in the sample, respectively.

Figure 5.4 depicts the respondents' marital status as pertaining to variable A4 of the survey questionnaire.

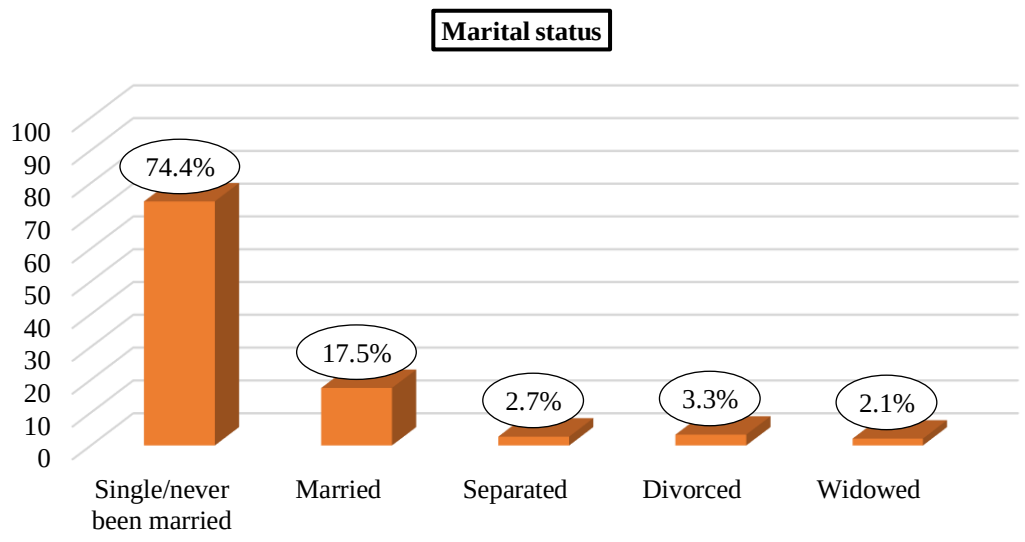


Figure 5.4: Respondents' marital status

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

The majority of respondents that contributed towards this research purported to be single and never been married (n=361; 74.4% of the sample) as shown in Figure 5.4. This outcome is consistent with the notion of limited access and proximity to the researcher. Contrariwise, the widowed individuals (n=10; 2.1% of the sample) were in the minority segment. The individuals who claimed to be married represented 17.5 percent of the sample (n=85). This was followed by those individuals who indicated that they were either divorced (n=16; 3.3% of the sample) or legally separated from their spouses (n=13; 2.7% of the sample) who were in the minority margin of the sample.

Figure 5.5 provides a summary of the responses to question A5, relating to the highest educational qualifications earned by the respondents.

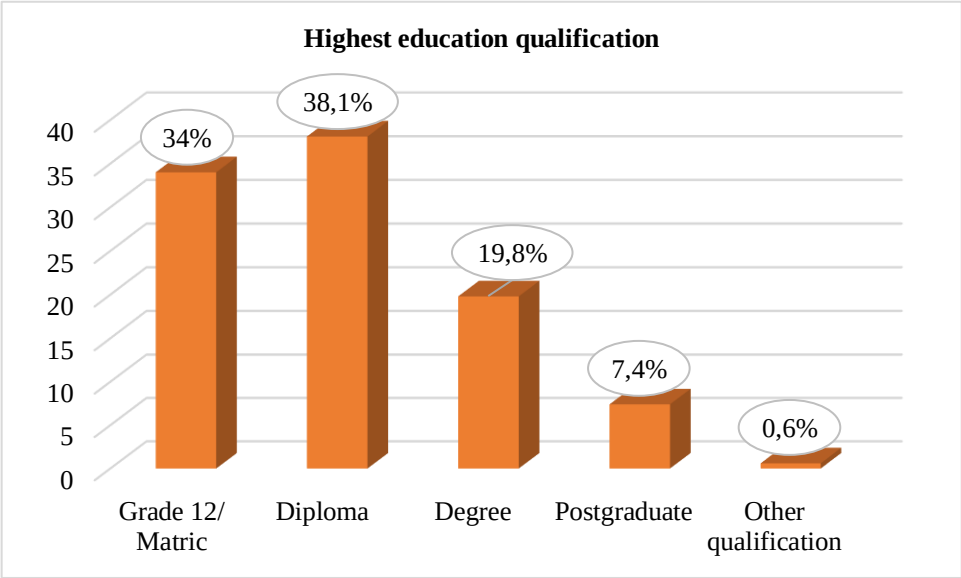


Figure 5.5: Respondents' highest educational qualification

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

According to Figure 5.6, the majority of the respondents were in possession of a Diploma (n=185; 38.1% of the sample) as a highest qualification, followed by those respondents who had only attained Grade 12 or Matric (n=165; 34% of the sample). This outcome suggests that tertiary education is not a pre-requisite for participation along microblogs since the requirements for engagement comprise a measly subscription to a microblog, only. Nevertheless, the remaining respondents indicated that they had acquired a university degree (n=96; 19.8 % of the sample) and/or a postgraduate qualification obtained after completion of a first degree qualification (n=36; 7.4% of the sample) as their highest educational qualification. In the sample, three respondents (0.6% of the sample) alluded to having obtained 'other' qualifications from those specified in the conventional route to tertiary education in South Africa. In particular, two respondents mentioned that they had attained Nated certificates from private colleges, whereas another respondent indicated that they had acquired a Journeyman Trades certificate.

Figure 5.6 illustrates the respondents' monthly income before tax pertaining to question A6.

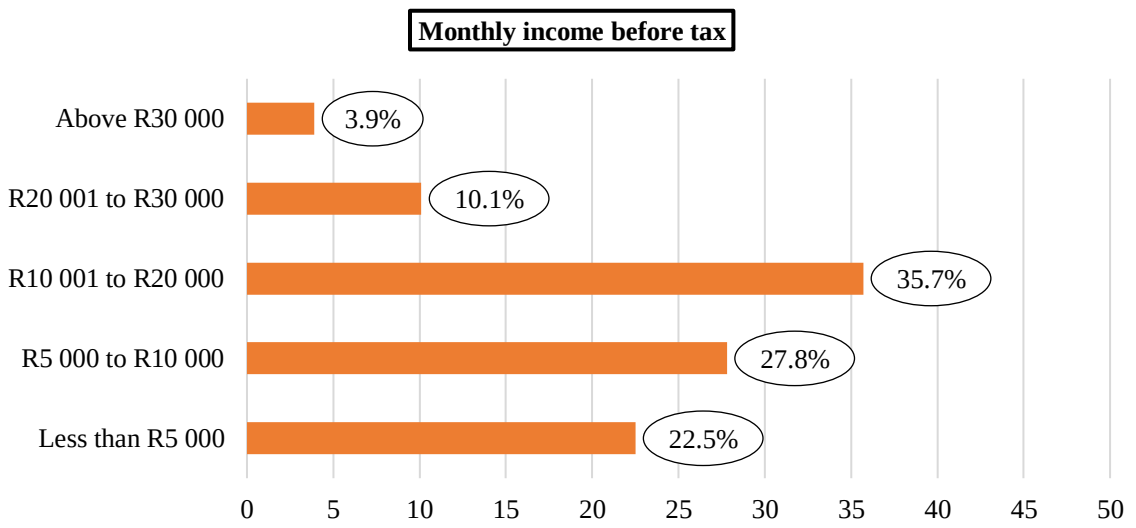


Figure 5.6: Respondents' monthly income before tax

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Figure 5.6 indicates that the majority of the respondents (n=173; 35.7% of the sample) receive a monthly income ranging between R10 001 and R20 000, followed by those that indicated earnings ranging between R5 000 and R10 000 (n=135; 27.8% of the sample) and those that indicated earning less than R5 000 (n=109; 22.5% of the sample) per month. This outcome suggests that more than three quarters of the sample comprised either low to lower-middle income earners. This result is consistent with the age distribution reported in this sample. Nevertheless, the remaining respondents indicated that they received monthly income before tax ranging between R20 001 and R30 000 (n=49; 10.1% of the sample) while 3.9 percent of the sample (n=19) comprised respondents who mentioned that they were middle income earners, receiving more than R30 000 before tax, every month.

5.6 MICROBLOG USAGE INFORMATION (SECTION B OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE)

Section B of the questionnaire comprised five questions, aimed at acquiring information relating to microblog usage habits and practices among the respondents. Frequency distribution charts were drawn up to visually depict the results.

Consistent with the target population requirements that were specified in the sampling design procedure delineated in Section 4.7.1 of this study, the respondents of the main survey needed to have posted a music review on a microblog within six months from the survey date. Information relating to this was reflected in question B1, whereby the question

was posed upon initial contact with the respondents who had been referred for participation in the study. Considering that the participants referred the researcher to other individuals whom they knew belonged to the same microblog community and had similar online habits, it was inevitable that all the respondents (N=485) indicated that they had posted a music review on a microblog.

Question B2 of the questionnaire sought to identify the respondents' most preferred content on microblogs. The resulting responses along this question were captured in Figure 5.7.

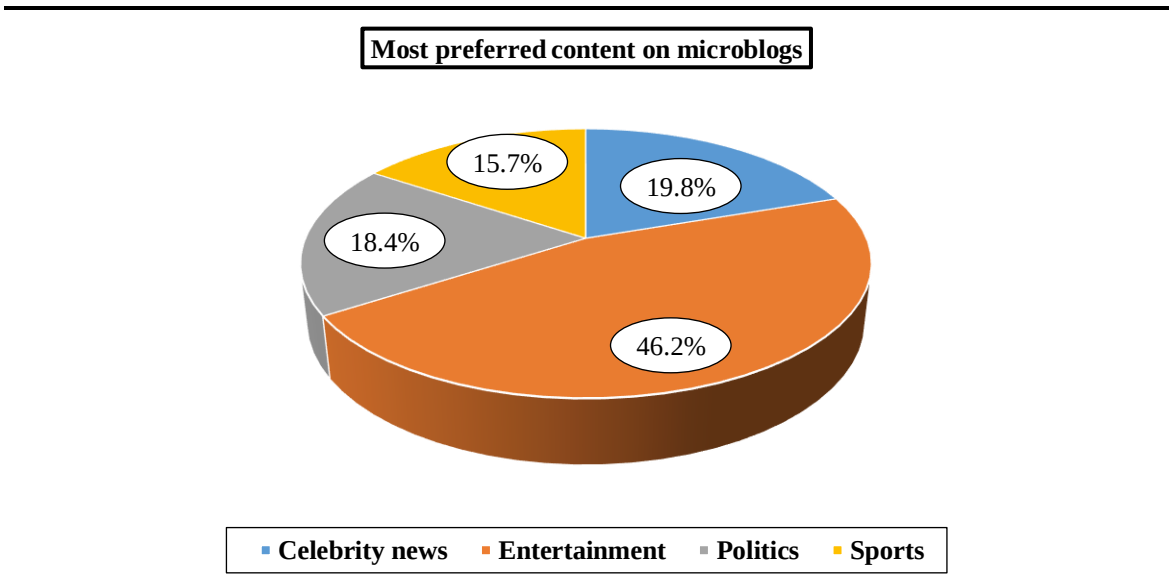


Figure 5.7: Most preferred content on microblogs

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Figure 5.7 indicates that the surveyed respondents preferred entertainment content (n=224; 46.2% of the sample) on microblogs. The second most preferred content is celebrity news (n=96; 19.8% of the sample), followed closely by politics (n=89; 18.4% of the sample) and sports (n=76; 15.7% of the sample).

Considering that the respondents had indicated that they were active in terms of posting music reviews along microblogs, it was considered necessary to evaluate the actual frequency with which they post reviews on their favourite microblog. The resulting responses are summated in Figure 5.8 as they pertain to question B3 of the questionnaire.

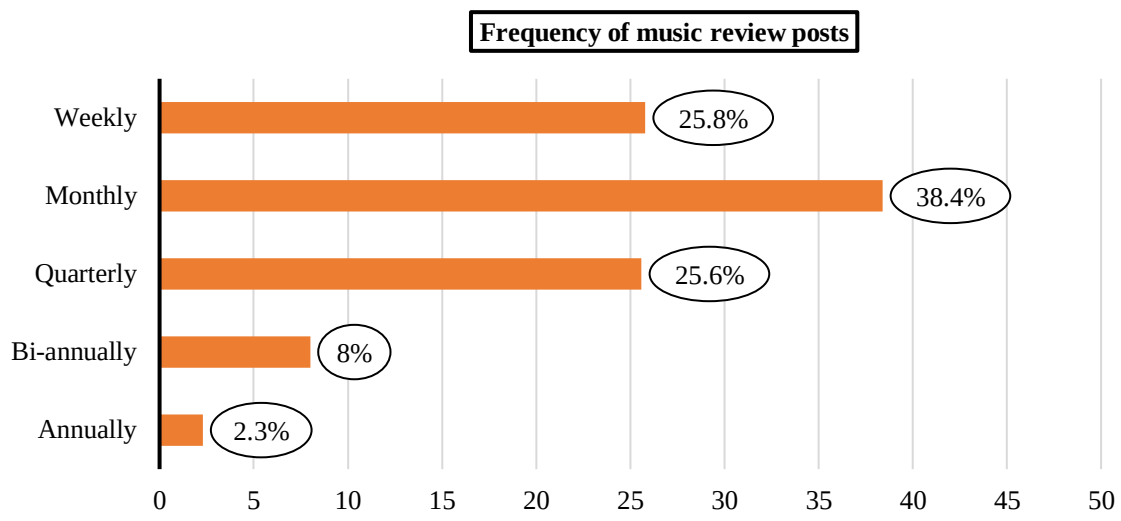


Figure 5.8: Frequency of microblog music review posts

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

According to Figure 5.8, the majority of respondents (n=186; 38.4% of the sample) indicated that they post music reviews on their favourite microblog at least once a month, averaging 12 music review posts per year. A total of 125 respondents (25.8% of the sample) further approximated the frequency of their music review posts to an average of 52 posts per year or one post made every week, whereas a similar number of respondents alluded to making less frequent posts, averaging three posts per year (n=124; 25.6% of the sample). Of the remaining individuals, 8 percent of the sample (n=39) indicated that they post music reviews on their favourite microblog at least twice a year, while the least number of respondents admitted to making the most infrequent music review posts on microblogs (n=11; 2.3% of the sample).

Figure 5.9 provides a summary of selected microblogs that the respondents indicated to have used. These responses pertain to item B4 of the survey questionnaire.

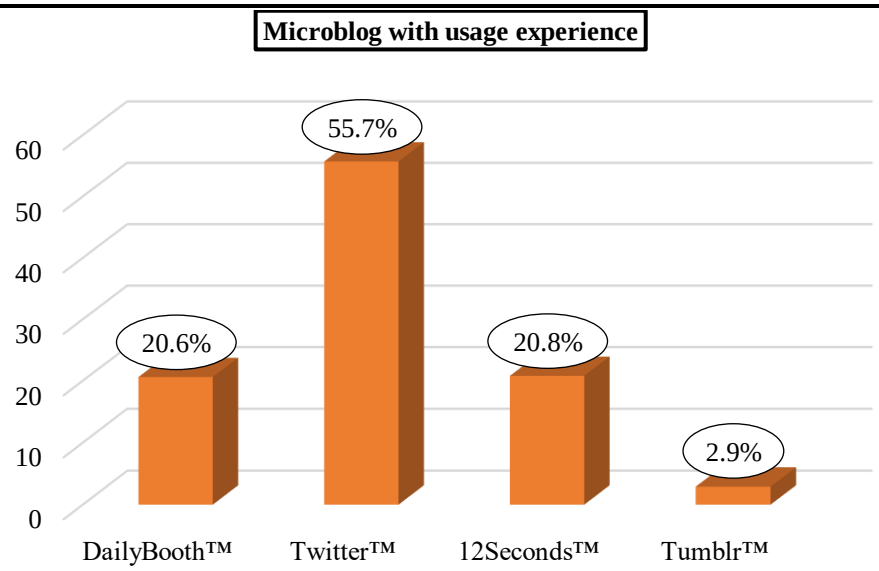


Figure 5.9: Microblogs that respondents' have experience with using

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Figure 5.9 reveals that the most popular microblog that respondents have experience of using is Twitter™ (n=270; 55.7% of the sample). This result is followed by 12Seconds™ (n=101; 20.8% of the sample), comprising the second most popular microblog that respondents have experienced of using. Furthermore, DailyBooth™ (n=100; 20.6% of the sample) was rated the third most popular microblog that respondents have experienced of using, whereas Tumblr™ (n=14; 2.9% of the sample) was ranked as the fourth and least popular microblog among the respondents.

Of the identified microblogs which the respondents indicated to have experience of using, it was considered necessary to also inquire as to the respondents' most preferred microblog platform for posting music reviews. The responses were collated in Figure 5.10 as it pertains to item B5 of the questionnaire.

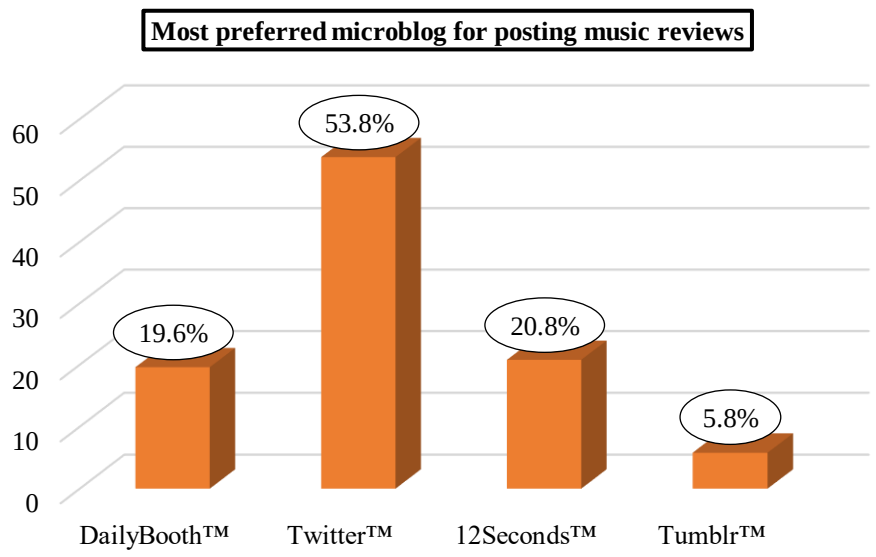


Figure 5.10: Most preferred microblog for posting music reviews

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Figure 5.10 indicates that the most popular microblog platform for posting music reviews is Twitter™ (n=261; 53.8% of the sample). This response is consistent with the responses provided regarding the microblog which the respondents have experience of using. The second most popular microblog platform for posting music reviews was reported as 12Seconds™ (n=101; 20.8% of the sample). Likewise, the third most popular microblog that the respondents make use of when posting music reviews is DailyBooth™, represented by 19.6 percent of the sample (n=95). Finally, Tumblr™ (n=28; 5.8% of the sample) was cited as the least preferred microblog platform for posting music reviews among the sample of microbloggers based in the southern Gauteng region of South Africa.

5.7 EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (SECTION C OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE)

An initial EFA procedure was conducted in view of understanding the underlying structure of the credibility heuristics underpinned by the 25 scale items included in Section C of the questionnaire. This study utilised Principal Component Analysis (PCA) as the extraction method based on two reasons. First, the method is the default method for data reduction on SPSS (Version EFA). Secondly, PCA is valued owing to its consideration of the maximum variance brought into the factor matrix without losing valuable information (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:716). Put simply, PCA is an invaluable extraction method where scale items have been adapted from previous scholars and the dimensionality of the factor structure is largely

unknown. The EFA are reported as a set of five chronological procedures, consistent with Hair *et al*. (2018:159), namely checking the appropriateness of EFA, deriving (extracting) the factors, factor rotation, interpreting the factors, validating the factors as well as data reduction.

5.7.1 Checking the appropriateness of EFA

Upon ascertaining that the data were suitable for EFA, two tests were conducted and reported in view of determining the sample adequacy, namely Kaiser-Meyer Olkin's (KMO) test of sampling adequacy as well as the Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) values for each variable. In addition, the Bartlett's test of Sphericity was conducted in view of checking the predictive accuracy of the factor model. Table 5.5 reports on the initial results of the EFA design.

Table 5.5: KMO and Bartlett's test results (Section C of the questionnaire)

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of Sampling adequacy 0.894		
Bartlett's test of Sphericity	**Approx. Chi-square**	**2394.316**
	df	**231**
	Sig	**0.000**
MSA values from the anti-image matrices		
C1 to C6		0.819 to 0.939
C7 to C12		0.841 to 0.910
C13 to C17		0.881 to 0.923
C18 to C21		0.883 to 0.919
C22 to C25		0.816 to 0.859

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Pallant (2011:183) mentions that KMO values range from 0 to 1, with the KMO value of 0.6 suggested as the minimum value for a good factor analysis procedure. Nonetheless, Hutcheson and Sofroniou (1999) cited by Field (2013:1975) provided more specific guidelines for checking the adequacy of the sample during the EFA, as follows:

- Marvellous = KMO values in the 0.90s
- Meritorious = KMO values in the 0.80s
- Middling = KMO values in the 0.70s
- Mediocre = KMO values in the 0.60s
- Miserable = KMO values in the 0.50s
- Merde = KMO values below 0.50 (unacceptable).

The results presented in Table 5.5 indicate that the KMO value that was computed for the data is 0.894, pointing to meritorious sample data that is suitable for conducting EFA. Moreover, the high KMO value that is close to 1, signals that the items in this study are correlated, whereas the pattern of the correlation is relatively condensed implying that an EFA procedure would effectively yield dissimilar and reliable set of components.

The Bartlett's test of Sphericity was also computed in view of assessing if the variables were correlated significantly. The test is based on the assumption that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix with no correlation among the variables (H_0). In this study, the Bartlett's test of Sphericity produced satisfactory values with a large Chi-square test value of 2394.316, with 231 degrees of freedom. The test was significant at the *p* less than 0.01 level, denoting that the null hypothesis that the variables are uncorrelated can be rejected as there are sufficient correlations among the variables. Moreover, the determinant of the *R*-matrix was reported at 0.009, which is greater than 0.00001, implying that there was no problem of multicolinearity or singularity in the data.

Finally, the sampling indices for the scales were observed along the anti-image matrices since the MSA values enable the researcher to acquire information regarding the grouping of survey items. Notably, all the items returned MSA values above 0.80, which is considered acceptable for EFA. In particular, the MSA values for items C1 to C6 ranged between 0.819 and 0.939. Items C7 to C12 returned MSA values ranging between 0.841 and 0.910, whereas MSA values for C13 to C17 ranged from 0.881 to 0.923. Scale items C18 to C21 returned MSA values ranging between 0.883 and 0.919, whereas C22 to C25 reported MSA values ranging between 0.838 and 0.859. Based on these results, EFA can be considered an appropriate procedure for analysing the correlation matrix.

5.7.2 Deriving the factors and assessing model fit

Researchers should determine the most appropriate number of factors to extract in a study since both over-extraction and under-extraction can have deleterious effects on the interpretation of the results (Osborne & Costello 2005:3). Moreover, EFA is conducted in view of providing a balance between parsimony and the ability to adequately represent the underlying correlations, thereby distinguishing between the most important factors and the meaningless ones (Taherdoost, Sahibuddin & Jalaliyoon 2014:376). Upon deriving the factors, this study applied an unrestricted EFA procedure on the 25 scale items included under Section C of the questionnaire. The factor extraction followed the PCA method.

Three criteria were considered upon deriving the factors in this study, namely Kaiser's (1956:141-151) criterion, Cattell's (1966:245-276) scree graph as well as the cumulative percentage of variance.

First, to avoid the artificial quandary of constraining the number of factors to be extracted in a study, the "eigenvalues greater than one" criterion was applied in this study. This criterion is the default method for all unrestricted EFA models on the SPSS (Version 25.0) software. Table 5.6 illustrates the factors that were extracted in this study, together with the corresponding eigenvalues.

Table 5.6: Rotation sums of squared loadings (Section C of the questionnaire)

Total variance explained						
Initial Eigenvalues				**Extraction sums of squared loadings**		
Components	**Total**	**% of variance**	**Cumulative %**	**Total**	**% of variance**	**Cumulative %**
1	5.756	26.165	26.165	5.756	26.165	26.165
2	1.647	17.485	43.650	1.647	17.485	43.650
3	1.337	6.077	49.727	1.337	6.077	49.727
4	1.169	5.314	55.040	1.169	5.314	55.040
5	1.013	4.603	59.644	1.013	4.603	59.644
6	0.930	4.227	63.871			
7	0.882	4.011	67.881			
8	0.847	3.852	71.733			
9	0.797	3.622	75.356			
10	0.776	3.527	78.882			
11	0.742	3.371	82.253			
12	0.703	3.197	85.450			
13	0.677	3.075	88.526			
14	0.629	2.861	91.386			
15	0.606	2.755	94.141			
16	0.577	2.623	96.765			
17	0.542	2.465	99.230			
22	0.408	1.853	100.000			

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Since eigenvalues express the percentage of the total variance in the variables that are explained by each factor (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:712), it is always advisable to retain only

those factors with the highest extracted eigenvalues in a study. In other words, a large eigenvalue implies that the factor is useful, whereas factors with small or negative eigenvalues denote redundant and meaningless factors. In this study, it may be worthwhile to retain only five factors since they returned eigenvalues greater than one. In fact, the column labelled "extraction sum of squared loadings" shows that the first component returned a high eigenvalue of 5.756, followed by component 2 and 3 with eigenvalue of 1.647 and 1.337, respectively. Component 4 yielded an eigenvalue of 1.169, whereas component 5 returned an eigenvalue of 1.013. The remaining components 6 to 22 yielded eigenvalues less than one (eigen values ranging between 0.408 and 0.930), suggesting that the components could only explain less than one variable's worth of variance (Hair *et al*. 2018:182). As a result, only components 1 to 5 were considered useful for this research. Nevertheless, the eigenvalues' criterion is somewhat problematic in that it tends to either overestimate or underestimate the correct number of factors to extract by only considering the arbitrary distinction between those components with eigenvalues greater than one and those just below one (Taherdoost *et al.* 2014:379). Based on this, it was considered vital to incorporate a second criterion in the factor retention decision.

Cattell's (1966:246) Scree plot were considered. In fact, the shape of the scree was checked in view of separating the useful factors from the redundant and meaningless ones. The graph depicts factors plotted in decreasing eigenvalue order, whereas the point of inflexion helps to select the number of factors appearing to separate factors with large versus small eigenvalues. Figure 5.11 presents the scree graph that was plotted on SPSS (Version 25.0).

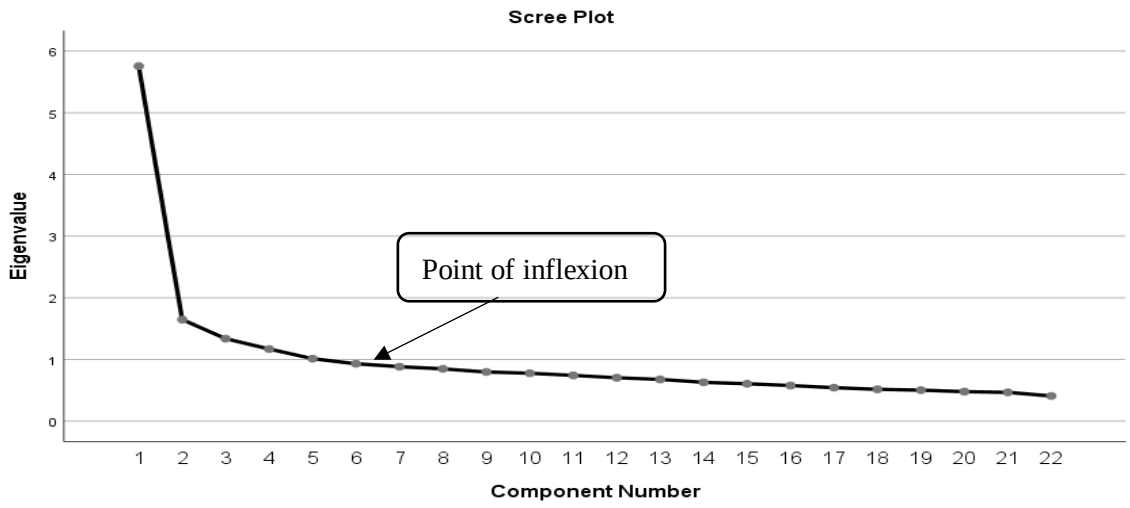


Figure 5.11: Scree plot (Section C of the questionnaire)

Source: Author's compilation

The scree graph plots the principal components in their sizes as a diminishing series. Nonetheless, Malhotra *et al*. (2017:718) indicate that the point at which the distinct break begins (known as the scree) denotes the true number of factors that should be extracted. In addition, Osborne and Costello (2005:3) advocated that the number data points that are above break (excluding the point where the break occurs) is normally the number of factors to be retained. This point on the graph's elbow in Figure 5.11 (also known as the point of inflexion) occurs on the sixth component, meaning that the first five components are relevant as they contribute the greatest percentage of variance in the study. Nonetheless, those components found on the right side of the elbow were considered trivial and of lesser importance, hence were omitted from the study.

Thirdly, the study considered the actual percentage of variance explained by each extracted component. Taherdoost *et al.* (2014:378) submit that in the natural sciences, factors should be extracted at 95 percent of the variance. However, a less restrictive threshold is maintained in the humanities, whereby explained variance that is as low as 50 to 60 percent is considered acceptable. Likewise, Malhotra *et al*. (2017:718) emphasises that the true number of factors should be determined when the cumulative percentage of variance extracted by all the factors reaches a satisfactory level of 60 percent.

In this study, the cumulative percentage of variance reported in Table 5.6 accounted for by the five components was returned at 59.644 percent which is close to 60 percent. Moreover,

the first component returned the highest percentage of variance of all the extracted components, which was reported at 26.165 percent. Therefore, a decision was taken to settle for five components only, in the factor extraction.

5.7.3 Factor rotation and scale purification

Factor rotation was conducted in view of classifying the proper composition of the variables that make up each extracted factor. Whereas factor rotation cannot improve the basic aspects of the analysis, such as the amount of variance extracted from the items (Osborne & Costello 2005:4), it is a useful procedure for obtaining a clean factor structure that reveals significant factor loadings on each respective factor that has been extracted in the research. In this study, the Varimax rotation method with Kaiser Normalisation converged in seven iterations were applied to the data based on its popularity among researchers. The rotation yielded a clean factor structure that is easy to interpret. Nevertheless, three considerations were made upon interpreting the rotated factor model in this research.

First, the extracted residuals were considered since they help to ascertain fit of the factor model. Residuals explain the differences between the observed correlations (R-matrix) and the correlations based on the model (reproduced correlations). According to Field (2013:2011), if more than 50 percent of the reproduced residuals are greater than 0.05, then this could be grounds for concern. In this study, relatively few residuals reported insignificant absolute values ($p > 0.05$) comprising only 21 percent of the variables in the study. Drawing from this result, the fit of the EFA model was confirmed.

Secondly, the study considered the value of the communalities since communalities explain the amount of variance contributed by each scale item to its respective factor prior to rotation. In particular, the PCA factor extraction method works on the initial assumption that all variance is common. Therefore, before extraction the communalities are all one, as shown in Table 5.7 of this study. The communalities in the column labelled *Extraction* reflect the common variance in the data structure. From the table, variables with high values are well represented in the common factor space, while variables with low values in the *Extraction* column are identified and labelled for possible removal after examination of the pattern matrix.

Table 5.7: Communalities (Section C of the questionnaire)

Items	Initial	Extraction
C1	1.000	0.491
C2*	1.000	0.319
C3	1.000	0.415
C4	1.000	0.490
C5	1.000	0.506
C6	1.000	0.411
C7	1.000	0.478
C8	1.000	0.605
C9	1.000	0.462
C10*	1.000	0.367
C11	1.000	0.513
C12	1.000	0.497
C13	1.000	0.444
C14	1.000	0.465
C15	1.000	0.590
C16	1.000	0.606
C17	1.000	0.478
C18	1.000	0.569
C19	1.000	0.617
C20	1.000	0.443
C21*	1.000	0.334
C22	1.000	0.537
C23	1.000	0.511
C24*	1.000	0.297
C25*	1.000	0.314

Source: Author's compilation

Osborne and Costello (2005:4) put forward a clear guideline whereby communalities that range between 0.80 and 1 are known as high and those ranging between 0.40 and 0.70 are known as low to moderate communalities. Likewise, communalities below 0.40 are generally considered as being weak. A similar rule of thumb put forward by Hair *et al*. (2018:133) suggests that communalities that range between 0.4 and 0.7 are acceptable when running EFA if the sample size is at least 200. Therefore, based on the aforementioned guidelines, all variables that yielded communality values above 0.40 were accepted in this research since they explain at least 40 percent of the variance in the variable. Drawing from

Table 5.7 of this study, item C19 returned the highest communality value of 0.617, meaning that C19 explains 61.7 percent of the variance in the variable. Nevertheless, items C2 (0.319), C10 (0.367), C21 (0.334), C24 (0.297) and C25 (0.314) returned weak communality values which were below 0.40 implying that the identified items might struggle to load well on any single factor. As a result, the five scale items were considered potential candidates for deletion since they reported weak communality values.

Thirdly, the rotated component matrix was considered. The matrix presents a pattern of loadings that is easy to interpret by reducing the number of factors that explain the underlying variables in a study. This pattern, termed the rotated factor matrix is presented in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8: Rotated component matrix (Section C of the questionnaire)

Items	Components						
	1	2	3	4	5	Corrected item to total correlations	Measures of sampling adequacy (MSA)
C1	0.194	0.170	0.531	0.047	0.375	0.427	0.939
C2*	0.281	0.010	0.102	0.398	0.294	0.372	0.819
C3	0.209	0.106	0.599	0.018	0.020	0.406	0.897
C4	0.144	0.312	0.608	0.038	-0.038	0.460	0.901
C5	-0.064	0.132	0.668	0.191	0.048	0.411	0.903
C6	0.156	0.024	0.587	0.202	0.011	0.419	0.871
C7	0.525	0.224	0.097	0.208	0.253	0.479	0.896
C8	0.702	0.104	0.086	0.028	0.158	0.514	0.841
C9	0.678	0.093	0.044	0.203	0.015	0.484	0.882
C10*	0.181	0.032	0.117	0.156	0.235	0.436	0.910
C11	0.568	0.015	0.175	0.166	0.312	0.474	0.905
C12	0.626	0.142	0.209	-0.031	0.049	0.464	0.903
C13	0.038	0.543	0.328	0.062	0.266	0.477	0.923
C14	0.098	0.749	0.159	-0.044	0.085	0.543	0.899
C15	0.133	0.650	0.105	0.102	-0.001	0.449	0.908
C16	0.073	0.648	0.147	0.182	0.182	0.525	0.917
C17	0.158	0.609	0.060	0.0287	0.123	0.513	0.881
C18	0.141	0.313	-0.020	0.566	-0.073	0.544	0.919
C19	0.073	0.135	0.205	0.610	0.164	0.571	0.910
C20	0.083	0.057	0.198	0.717	0.162	0.535	0.887
C21*	0.479	0.067	0.140	0.426	-0.414	0.346	0.883

Table 5.8: Rotated component matrix (Section C of the questionnaire) (continued …)

Items	Components						
	1	2	3	4	5	Corrected item to total correlations	Measures of sampling adequacy (MSA)
C22	0.230	0.261	0.082	0.123	0.653	0.465	0.859
C23	0.292	0.253	0.019	0.276	0.625	0.465	0.825
C24*	0.345	0.157	0.485	0.510	0.064	0.260	0.738
C25*	0.009	0.055	0.548	0.517	0.162	0.313	0.816

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.[a]
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

To assist in the identification of marker items associated with each factor, that is, those with strong loadings on one factor and weak loadings on the others, the Rotated component matrix was evaluated. First, the study considered the components with significant loadings. Taherdoost *et al.* (2014:378) emphasise that loadings of 0.50 and above are significant and therefore comprise a desirable rule of thumb for the minimum loading of an item with no cross-loadings on it. In this regard, component 1 comprised five significant loadings, namely C1 (0.531), C3 (0.599), C4 (0.608), C5 (0.668) and C6 (0.587), which loaded satisfactorily on this factor, whereas component 2 consisted five items, namely C7 (0.525), C8 (0.702), C9 (0.678), C11 (0.568) and C12 (0.626) that yielded significant loadings on this factor. The third components comprised five significant loadings also, C13 (0.543), C14 (0.749), C15 (0650), C16 (0.648) and C17 (0.609) with significant loading above 0.50. Likewise, the fourth component comprised three items, namely C18 (0.566), C19 (0.610) and C20 (0.717), whereas the fifth component comprised only two significant variables, item C22 (0.653) and C23 (0.625) that loaded satisfactorily on this factor.

Secondly, this study considered dropping problematic items that had low loadings (below 0.50). Notably, scale items C2, C10 and C21 were deleted from further analysis owing to insignificant loadings (below 0.50) across all the extracted components during the EFA (Refer to Table 5.8). In other words, the three scale items did not return sufficient variance to constitute useful elements on any of the five components that were extracted in this research.

Thirdly, the study considered omitting those variables that were either freestanding on a single component or those items that were cross-loading into more than one component. None of the 25 scale items included in the EFA were free-standing yet, scale items C24 and C25 were considerably cross-loading onto components 3 and 4, consecutively which made it difficult to discriminate under which component the scale item belonged. Cross-loadings infer a scenario whereby a variable has high loadings on more than one component, thereby making it difficult to single out where the variable belongs during the component interpretation process (Hair *et al*. 2018:122). According to Osborne and Costello (2005:5), a cross-loading item is an item that loads at 0.32 or higher on two or more factors. In this regard, a decision ought to be taken with regard to either retaining the item or deleting it in cases where there are several adequate to strong loaders in the matrix. In this study, cross-loadings were evoked on item C24 since the difference in loadings of this item between component 3 (0.485) and component 4 (0.510) was small (Hair *et al.* 2018:153), thereby making it relatively difficult to prove beyond reasonable doubt where the variable belongs. Similarly, item C25 was cross-loading onto component 3 (0.548) and component 4 (0.517), consecutively. Moreover, visual inspection of the questionnaire items revealed that C24 and C25 differed conceptually from the scale items that had successfully loaded under component 3 and 4 of the matrix.

5.7.4 Interpreting the factors

The first component was labelled **information quality**. It comprised five items (C7, C8, C9, C11 and C12) with significant loadings ranging between 0.525 and 0.702. The items on this component describe the extent to which music reviews provide comprehensive music information. This component returned an eigenvalue of 5.756 and the percentage of variance of 26.165 percent. The communalities reported along this component ranged between 0.462 and 0.605, which means that the five items contributed between 46 percent and 61 percent of the variance in the component. Corrected item-total correlation values for the respective scale items ranged between 0.464 and 0.514, implying satisfactory cohesiveness among the items.

The second component was named **homophily**. The component comprised five items (C13, C14, C15, C16 and C17) with significant loadings ranging between 0.543 and 0.749. The items loading on this component described the extent to which similarity of consumer demographics tends to influence the choice and decision on which music posts to read and

review on selected microblogs. The component returned an eigenvalue of 1.647 and the percentage of variance of 17.485 percent. The communalities for this component ranged between 0.444 and 0.606, which means that the five items contributed between 44 percent and 61 percent of the variance in the component. The corrected item-total correlation ranged between 0.449 and 0.543.

The third component was named **source credibility**. The component comprised five items (C1, C3, C4, C5 and C6) that loaded satisfactorily on this component with significant loadings ranging between 0.531 and 0.668. Together, the items on this component describe the extent to which the source of music content provides credible microblog reviews. The component attained an eigenvalue of 1.337 and the percentage of variance of 6.077 percent. The communalities for this component ranged between 0.411 and 0.506, which means that the five items contributed between 41 percent and 51 percent of the variance in the component. Furthermore, the corrected item-total correlation ranged between 0.419 and 0.460.

The fourth component was named **review consistency**. The component comprised three items (C18, C19 and C20) which loaded satisfactorily on this component (loadings ranging between 0.566 and 0.717). The three items describe the extent to which the microblog music posts are consistent with music posts from other media platforms. This component returned an eigenvalue of 1.169, whereas the component explained 5.314 percent of the variance in the component structure. The communalities for this component ranged between 0.443 and 0.617, which means that the three items contributed between 44 percent and 62 percent of the variance in the component. In addition, the corrected item-total correlation values for this component ranged between 0.535 and 0.571 denoting convergent validity.

Finally, the last component was labelled **prior beliefs confirmation**, comprising only two items (C22 and C23) that loaded significantly on this component with a significant loading of 0.625 and 0.653 respectively. While this component yielded a weak component with only two items, the loadings were significant and the component was considered reliable since the items were highly correlated with each other (above 0.60) and relatively uncorrelated with all the other variables in the component matrix. The two items both described the extent to which the music posts confirm the beliefs that consumers already have about the music. This aspect was considered relevant for the conceptualisation of the

credibility heuristics in this research. Moreover, the component returned an eigenvalue of 1.013, with an extracted variance of 4.603 percent. Furthermore, the communalities for this component ranged between 0.511 and 0.537, which means that the two items contributed at least half of the variance in the component. Nonetheless, the corrected item-total correlations for each item on this component was returned at a value of 0.465.

5.7.5 Validating EFA

In order to assess the generalisability of the EFA results reported in this section, a second procedure was conducted using a Maximum likelihood technique since it allows for the computation of a wide range of indexes of the goodness of fit of the model. The technique also permits statistical significance testing of the loadings and correlations among factors and the computation of confidence intervals. The study yielded a goodness of fit index of 0.006, whereas five components were extracted similar to the initial EFA procedure. Likewise, the same variables loaded highly on the same factors. Resultantly, a decision was taken to accept the results of the EFA model as depicting a stable solution. In addition, the results of the Pearson correlation matrix presented in Section 5.10 also serve to validate the generalisability of the factor structure that is reported in this work.

5.7.6 Data reduction

Data reduction infers estimating the scores that respondents would have received on each of the factors had they been measured directly. The options for reducing data include selecting variables with the highest loadings and replacing the original set of variables. In this study, surrogate variables were created using the 'compute variable' command on SPSS (Version 25.0). This involved computing the average of the standardised variables that loaded highly (above 0.50) on each extracted factor. Thereafter, each factor was saved in accordance with the respective name or label for subsequent multivariate analysis.

The next section discusses the EFA output of the mediating and outcome variables.

5.8 EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (SECTIONS D AND E OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE)

A second EFA procedure was conducted on the items in sections D and E of the questionnaire. The PCA method of factor extraction was applied. In order to ascertain that the captured data was suitable for EFA, Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) of sampling adequacy

test and the Bartlett's test of Sphericity were computed. The results for these tests are illustrated in Table 5.9 of this study.

Table 5.9: KMO and Bartlett's test results (sections D and E of the questionnaire)

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of Sampling adequacy 0.891		
Bartlett's test of Sphericity	**Approx. Chi-square** **df** **Sig**	**1627.136** **55** **0.000**
MSA values from the anti-image matrices		
D1 to D6 E1 to E5		0.894 to 0.926 0.839 to 0.897

Source: Author's compilation

The KMO value that was reported for the second EFA model was 0.891, which infers meritorious sampling adequacy. Moreover, the Bartlett's test of Sphericity produced satisfactory values with a Chi square test of 1627.136, with 55 degrees of freedom. Moreover, the test was significant at the *p* less than 0.01 level, denoting that the null hypotheses that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix can be rejected in favour of the alternative hypotheses that there exist correlated items in the data set that can be adequately reduced into distinct latent variables. Again, the determinant of the *R*-matrix was reported at 0.034, which is greater than 0.00001 implying that there was no problem of multicolinearity or singularity in the data.

In terms of the MSA values, all the items returned MSA values above 0.80, which is considered adequate for EFA. Section D (D1 to D6) returned MSA vales that ranged between 0.894 and 0.926, whereas items in Section E (E1 to E5) returned MSA vales that ranged between 0.859 and 0.897. Therefore, EFA can be considered an appropriate procedure for analysing the correlation matrix based on the adequate sample size.

In terms of the decision as to the number of factors to extract, the eigenvalues criterion, Scree plot and percentage of variance criteria all pointed to the extraction of only two latent factors. Table 5.10 illustrates the eigenvalues and percentage of variance that was extracted from the factor model.

Table 5.10: Rotation sums of square loadings (sections D and E of the questionnaire)

Total variance explained						
Initial Eigenvalues				Extraction sums of squared loadings		
Components	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	4.459	40.539	40.539	4.459	40.539	40.539
2	1.370	12.458	52.996	1.370	12.458	52.996
3	0.787	7.154	60.150			
4	0.704	6.402	66.552			
5	0.700	6.366	72.918			
6	0.575	5.225	78.143			
7	0.554	5.037	83.180			
8	0.537	4.882	88.062			
9	0.488	4.438	92.500			
10	0.434	3.947	96.446			
11	0.391	3.554	100.000			

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

According to Table 5.10 of this study, it is evident that component 1 returned an eigenvalue of 4.459, whereas component 2 returned an eigenvalue of 1.370. Only these two components yielded meaningful eigenvalues above 1.0, consistent with the recommendation by previous methodology scholars (Pallant 2011:184; Wiid & Diggines 2015:243). Conversely, components 3 to 11 were considered redundant and meaningless because of the reported weak eigenvalues that were reported below 1.0.

A scree plot was also computed for the scale items included in sections D and E of the questionnaire. The scree plot is presented in Figure 5.12 of this study.

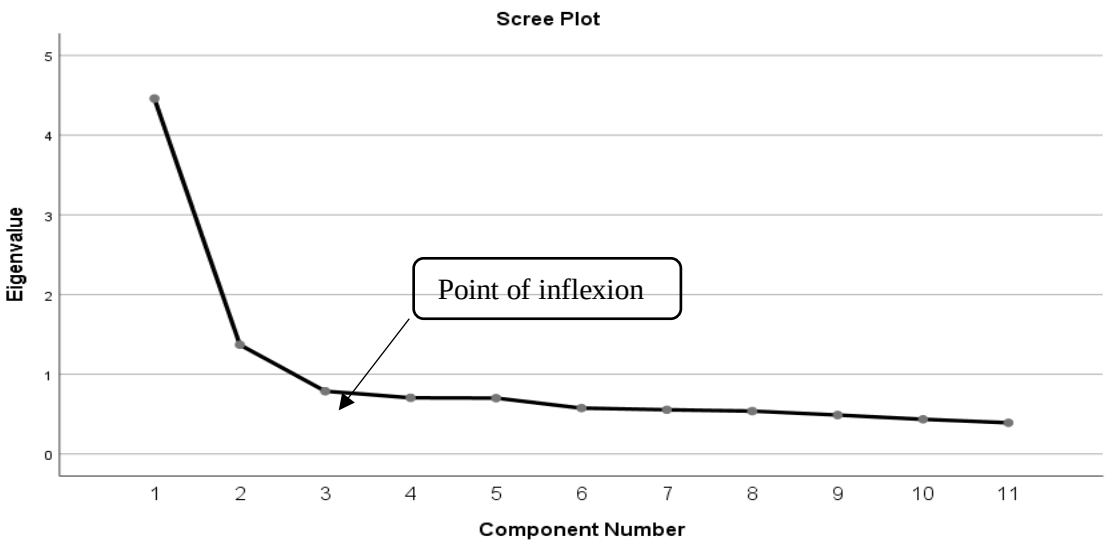


Figure 5.12: Scree plot (sections D and E of the questionnaire)

Source: Author's compilation

Figure 5.12 denotes the graph levelling off after three components. In other words, the line begins to change direction and be more horizontal after the third component. Since factor 3 represents the point of inflexion, it is safe to say that only two components should be extracted as they represent the highest percentage of variance in the factor solution.

In terms of the actual percentage of variance extracted from the EFA procedure, both components returned a cumulative percentage of variance of 52.996, which is slightly below the recommended cumulative output of 60 percent variance (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:718). However, this result was accepted in this research since it pertained to the extraction of only two components.

The residuals were also considered in the second EFA procedure for the responses in sections D and E of the questionnaire since they aid in ascertaining fit of the factor model. Therefore, residuals were computed between the observed and reproduced correlations, whereas only 3 (5.0%) non-redundant residuals with absolute values greater than 0.05 were observed. This value is significantly lower than 50 percent of the computed residuals, implying that there was no cause for concern with respect to the fit of the factor model (Field 2013:2011).

Table 5.11 shows how much of variance in the variables was accounted for by the extracted factors.

Table 5.11: Communalities (Section D and E of the questionnaire)

Items	Initial	Extraction
D1	1.000	0.413
D2	1.000	0.530
D3	1.000	0.553
D4	1.000	0.564
D5	1.000	0.482
D6	1.000	0.446
E1	1.000	0.582
E2	1.000	0.573
E3	1.000	0.554
E4	1.000	0.553
E5	1.000	0.579

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

All the variables reported in sections D and E of the questionnaire yielded communality values above 0.40, consistent with Osborne and Costello (2005:4) as well as Hair *et al.* (2018:133). In fact, communality values for Section D range between 0.413 and 0.564, denoting that the variables explain between 41.3 percent and 56.4 percent of the variance in the respective factor. Relatedly, communality values for Section E range between 0.553 and 0.582, denoting that all the items incorporated in Section E of the questionnaire actually explained more than half of the variance in that extracted factor.

The factor solution was rotated using Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalisation, converged in three iterations in order to produce a factor solution that is clean and easy to interpret. All the variables were observed at an individual level while three issues were considered when identifying variables that were candidates for deletion in sections D and E.

First, significant loadings were observed, whereas all the scale items in sections D and E of the questionnaire yielded loadings greater than 0.50 during the EFA procedure. Section D yielded factor loadings that range between 0.587 and 0.733, whereas Section E had factor loadings that range between 0.689 and 0.745. Nevertheless, no cross-loadings or freestanding items were evident in the rotated component matrix, implying that the two-factor solution is a stable solution. The rotated component matrix is presented in Table 5.12 of this study.

Table 5.12: Rotated components matrix (sections D and E of the questionnaire)

	Components			
Items	**Component 1**	**Component 2**	**Corrected item to total correlations**	**Measures of sampling adequacy (MSA)**
D1	0.604	0.219	0.493	0.914
D2	0.718	0.123	0.560	0.897
D3	0.720	0.187	0.590	0.901
D4	0.733	0.163	0.591	0.894
D5	0.667	0.193	0.530	0.903
D6	0.587	0.318	0.517	0.926
E1	0.195	0.738	0.604	0.886
E2	0.134	0.745	0.578	0.867
E3	0.201	0.717	0.577	0.897
E4	0.199	0.716	0.596	0.859
E5	0.323	0.689	0.619	0.876

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

The first component was named **microblog review credibility**. It consisted of six items (D1 to D6), which loaded satisfactorily on this variable. They describe the overall credibility of microblog music review posts. This variable returned an eigenvalue of 4.459 and a percentage of variance of 40.539. The communality values for the items loading on this variable range between 0.413 and 0.564, which means that the six items contribute between 41 percent and 56 percent of the variance of the entire component that has been extracted. Furthermore, the corrected item-total correlation values for this component range between 0.493 and 0.591, pointing to the high cohesiveness among the scale items on this component.

The second component was named **eWOM adoption,** comprising five items (E1 to E5) which also loaded satisfactorily on this variable. The component describes the extent to which the respondents are willing to adopt music-related eWOM that is proffered through microblogs. The variable returned an eigenvalue of 1.370 and a percentage of variance 12.458 upon extraction. The communalities for this variable ranged between 0.553 and 0.582, which means that the five items contributed between 55 percent and 58 percent of the variance in the component. Moreover, the corrected item-total correlation for this

variable range between 0.577 and 0.619, thereby pointing to the convergence among the scale items reported along this component.

5.9 RELIABILITY ASSESSMENT

This section focuses on the psychometric properties that relate to the measurement instrument. In other words, reliability testing was conducted with the aim of checking the internal consistency of the research measures. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients and average inter-item correlation values were computed for each of the identified factors in sections 5.7 and 5.8, namely source credibility, information quality, homophily, review consistency, prior beliefs confirmation, overall music review credibility and eWOM adoption. Table 5.13 summarises the results of the reliability assessment for these variables.

Table 5.13: Reliability analysis results

Factor label	Scale items	N	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient	Average inter-item correlation
Source credibility	C1, C3, C4, C5 and C6	485	0.666	0.326
Information quality	C7, C8 ,C9, C11 and C12	485	0.724	0.392
Homophily	C13, C14, C15, C16 and C17	485	0.739	0.419
Review consistency	C18, C19 and C20	485	0.728	0.344
Prior beliefs confirmation	C22 and C23	485	0.635	0.239
Overall review credibility	D1, D2, D3, D4, D5 and D6	485	0.793	0.413
eWOM adoption	E1, E2, E3, E4 and E5	485	0.808	0.442
Recommended threshold			**≥ 0.60 fair reliability** **≥ 0.70 adequate reliability**	**≥ 0.30**

Source: Author's compilation

A high level of Cronbach's alpha coefficient (closer to 1.0) confirms exceptional reliability of any scale. Nevertheless, Babin and Zikmund (2016:281) advance a less strict threshold by stating that Cronbach's Alpha coefficients below 0.60 have poor reliability whereas coefficients ranging between 0.60 and 0.70 indicate fair reliability. They further note that those coefficients ranging between 0.70 and 0.80 point to good reliability of a scale, whereas those ranging between 0.80 and 0.96 signal very good reliability of a measure.

In this study, homophily returned the highest Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.739, followed closely by review consistency and information quality, which returned

Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.728 and 0.724 respectively. This shows that these three variables (homophily, review consistency and information quality) yielded satisfactory internal consistency as demonstrated by the good reliability values. While this is so, prior beliefs confirmation and source credibility only returned fair Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.635 and 0.666 respectively. The internal consistency of the scale items in sections D and E of the questionnaire were also examined. In this regard, both overall review credibility and eWOM adoption reported good reliability along these measures, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.793 and 0.808 along the respective factors.

Average inter-item correlations were also computed, to ascertain internal-consistency among the items in the constructs. Pallant (2011:6) suggests that the average inter-item correlation values should range between 0.20 and 0.40. Information quality returned an average inter-item correlation value of 0.392, while review consistency had an average inter-item correlation of 0.344. Source credibility returned an average inter-item correlation value of 0.326, followed by prior beliefs confirmation, which reported the least average inter-item correlation value of 0.239. These average inter-item correlation values fell within the acceptable range of 0.20 to 0.40, further confirming the internal consistency reliability of these scales. Nonetheless, homophily (0.419), overall review credibility (0.413) and eWOM adoption (0.442) yielded average inter item correlation values above 0.40, which higher than the recommended range. Nonetheless, the reported values were within the threshold recommended by Clark and Watson (1995:15), ranging between 0.15 and 0.50, which indirectly indicates the construct validity of the variables reported in this research.

5.10 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Table 5.14 illustrates the descriptive statistical analysis results for this study in view of summarising the sample responses as well as to report on the data structure.

Table 5.14: Descriptive statistical analysis results

Construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Source credibility	485	1.00	5.00	3.251	0.755	-0.364	0.067
Information quality	485	1.00	5.00	3.293	0.812	-0.253	-0.227
Homophily	485	1.00	5.00	3.686	0.827	-0.494	-0.018

Table 5.14: Descriptive statistical analysis results (continued …)

Construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Review consistency	485	1.00	5.00	3.384	0.815	-0.153	-0.401
Prior beliefs confirmation	485	1.00	5.00	3.530	1.009	-0.464	-0.432
Overall review credibility	485	1.00	5.00	3.413	0.808	-0.356	-0.125
eWOM adoption	485	1.00	5.00	3.544	0.924	-0.478	-0.341
Recommended threshold				**≥ 3.0**	**Close to 1.0**	**Between -2 and +2**	**Between -2 and +2**

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Considering that a 5-point Likert scale was utilised on the non-categorical data, it was inevitable that the reported minimum (1) and maximum (5) values on the data yielded a range of 4 (5-1). The mean values were computed as the main measure of the central tendency in the data. Mean values greater than 3.0 are acceptable in this study as they relate with agreement among the scales [(1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5) ÷ 5)]. Notably, homophily returned the highest mean rating of 3.686, followed by prior beliefs confirmation with a mean rating of 3.530 as well as review consistency, which reported a mean rating of 3.384. Likewise, information quality yielded a mean rating of 3.293, whereas source credibility returned the lowest mean rating in the study, which was reported at 3.251. This means that the extracted factors returned acceptable mean values since they were all higher than the pre-determined mean value of 3.0, and all reflect a greater agreement by participants with regards to the elements that actually determine the credibility perceptions of consumers towards microblog music reviews. In addition, overall review credibility and eWOM adoption (sections D and E) also returned high mean ratings of 3.413 and 3.544, respectively. As such, the results of this study were satisfactory since the high mean score denote agreeability towards the consumers' perceptions of music review credibility as well as their future intention to adopt eWOM communication of music along microblogs.

Standard deviation values were also computed with the view of measuring the variance of responses on each variable. In general, the standard deviation values for a normal data set should be approximated around ±1. In this study, the variable prior beliefs confirmation returned the highest standard deviation value of 1.009 which is slightly above 1. Table 5.14

indicates that eWOM adoption and homophily returned standard deviation values of 0.924 and 0.827 respectively, whereas review consistency yielded a standard deviation value of 0.815. In addition, information quality, overall review credibility and source credibility reported the lowest standard deviation values of 0.808, 0.812 and 0.755, respectively. The reported standard deviation values, around ±1 denote an acceptable measure of the tolerable variation in responses along the Likert-scale based responses in sections C, D and E of the questionnaire.

The skewness and kurtosis were computed in order to evaluate the level of dispersion in the data set. The cut-off values for skewness falling within the range of -2 and +2 denote a substantially normal, rather than a skewed distribution data set, whereas the kurtosis values should range between ±2 to depict a normally distributed data set (Field 2013:612). According to Table 5.14, the skewness statistics reported in this study range between -0.153 and -0.494. Conversely, the kurtosis statistics range between -0.067 and +0.432. Both results along the skewness and kurtosis statistics point to a normally distributed dataset since none of the skewness values and kurtosis values fall outside the ±2 threshold.

5.11 CORRELATION ANALYSIS

In view of determining the strength and linearity among the variables derived from the empirical research, a correlation matrix was constructed. In particular, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed. Saunders *et al*. (2016:545) put forward the following threshold for evaluating Pearson correlation coefficients:

Table 5.15: Strength of relationships between variables

Size of correlation coefficient (r)	Interpretation
+1	Very strong positive relationship
+0.6 to +0.8	Strong positive relationship
+0.35 to +0.59	Moderate positive relationship
+0.20 to +0.34	Weak positive relationship
0	None (Perfect independence among the variables)
-0.2 to -0.35	Weak negative relationship
-0.36 to -0.6	Moderate negative relationship
-0.7 to -0.8	Strong negative relationship
-0.9 to -1	Very strong negative relationship

Source: Saunders *et al.* (2016:545)

The test was subjected to a two-tailed test at a highly significant level ($p<0.01$). The results produced in the correlation analysis conducted in this research are presented in Table 5.16.

Table 5.16: Correlation analysis results

Constructs	Source credibility	Information quality	Homophily	Review consistency	Prior beliefs confirmation	Overall review credibility	eWOM adoption
Source credibility	1						
Information quality	0.420**	1					
Homophily	0.481**	0.390**	1				
Review consistency	0.373**	0.408**	0.407**	1			
Prior beliefs confirmation	0.324**	0.369**	0.337**	0.303**	1		
Overall review credibility	0.484**	0.544**	0.457**	0.378**	0.438**	1	
eWOM adoption	0.400**	0.431**	0.453**	0.341**	0.407**	0.539**	1
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)							

Source: Author's compilation

Consistent with the rule of thumb put forward by Saunders *et al* (2016:545), weak to moderate positive correlation coefficients were computed in this study, ranging between +0.303 and +0.544 at the <less than 0.01 level. In particular, the highest coefficient was the moderate positive relationship that was computed between information quality and overall review credibility (r=+0.544; $p<0.01$). This infers that the quality of the music review content is positively related to consumers' perceptions of how credible the music review actually is. Likewise, the other four heuristics, namely source credibility (r=+0.484; $p<0.01$), homophily (r=+0.457; $p<0.01$), prior beliefs confirmation (r=+0.438; $p<0.01$) and review consistency (r=+0.378; $p<0.01$) yielded moderate and positive yet significant coefficients when correlated with overall review credibility. In essence, the results point to the evident linearity among the five heuristics when correlated against the mediating variable in this research. Therefore, when the author of the music review is reliable and rated highly (source credibility), the overall credibility evaluation by microbloggers tends to increase consistently. Furthermore, the quality of the review post in terms of the information content (information quality) as well as the fit of the music review source with the demographics of the microbloggers (homophily) also tend to enhance the credibility

evaluation of music review posts. In addition, microbloggers will rate the music review posts as being credible if they decipher consistency in the posted music reviews with other media content (review consistency) as well as their already existing beliefs about music quality (prior beliefs confirmation).

The second highest correlation coefficient was computed between overall review credibility and eWOM adoption (r=+0.539; p<0.01). This outcome was a moderate and positive correlation coefficient denoting that the more credible the music review post, the more likely microbloggers will be willing to adopt eWOM music communication that is proffered through microblogs, in future encounters. Interestingly, the outcome variable in this research, namely eWOM adoption, also returned moderate and positive Pearson correlation coefficients when correlated with review consistency (r=+0.341; p<0.01), source credibility (r=+0.400; p<0.01), prior beliefs confirmation (r=+0.407; p<0.01), information quality (r=+0.431; p<0.01) and homophily (r=+0.453; p<0.01). This cohort of empirical results indicate that linear and significant relationships of moderate strength exist between the dependent variable in this research (eWOM adoption) and the independent variables that were included in the conceptual model posited in Figure 3.5 of this dissertation.

Upon checking for evidence of linearity among the independent variables themselves, moderate and positive correlation coefficients that are significant were reported between review consistency with source credibility (r=+0.373; p<0.01), homophily (r=+0.407; p<0.01) and information quality (r=+0.408; p<0.01), separately. Similar moderate-sized correlations were reported after correlating homophily with information quality (r=+0.390; p<0.01) and source credibility (r=+0.481; p<0.01), respectively. Relatedly, the inter-factor correlation matrix reported positive and significant correlation coefficients of a moderate-size between source credibility and information quality (r=+0.420; p<0.01).

Finally, Table 5.16 reports weak, positive and significant correlations exist between prior beliefs confirmation, when correlated with review consistency (r=+0.303; p<0.01), source credibility (r=+0.324; p<0.01) and homophily (r=+0.337; p<0.01), respectively. The weak correlation pattern along these three correlations suggests that whereas linearity exists among the variables, the extent of the variable increase is minimal. However, a moderate and positive correlation was computed between prior beliefs confirmation and information quality (r=+0.369; p<0.01).

The next section presents the regression analysis results of this study.

5.12 HYPOTHESES TESTING RESULTS FOR THE FIRST REGRESSION MODEL

In this study, multiple regression analysis was conducted in view of estimating the relationship between several independent variables against their respective dependent variable. From the initiation of this research in Section 1.5 of this dissertation, several hypotheses were formulated for testing, of which the initial five hypotheses categories relate to the first regression model that was estimated in this work. The hypotheses are as follows:

H_{o1}: *Source credibility does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a1}: *Source credibility positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{o2}: *Information quality does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a2}: *Information quality positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{o3}: *Homophily does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a3}: *Homophily positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{o4}: *Review consistency does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a4}: *Review consistency positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{o5}: *Prior beliefs confirmation does not positively influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

H_{a5}: *Prior beliefs confirmation positively influences consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews.*

5.12.1 Data requirements for regression analysis

Three aspects pertaining to data were considered prior to estimating the regression model in this work, consistent with the prescription by Sarstedt and Mooi (2014:196). First, the scale indicators in sections C, D and E of the questionnaire were anchored along interval data as reported in Section 4.9.2 of this study. Secondly, a significantly large sample size was utilised (N=485), which presents a good chance of finding significant results, if they are actually present. In fact, the assertion by Tabachnick and Fidell (2012:613) that if multivariate statistics like EFA and regression are to be applied "it is comforting to have 300 or more cases", was prized. Therefore, the sample size used in this research was considered to be sufficiently representative of the respective population of microbloggers. Thirdly, sufficient variation was reported among the variables since the highest correlation coefficient reported in Section 5.11 was well below 0.70.

5.12.2 Estimation of the first regression model

Multiple regression analysis was applied since the aim was to test the effect of several independent variables on a dependent variable (Saunders *et al.* 2016:551). Upon estimating the first regression model, the variables were nominated individually by the researcher for inclusion into the regression model based on their usefulness, as they have been listed on the hypotheses of the study. Table 5.17 shows the variables that were entered into the first regression model.

Table 5.17: Variables Entered in the first regression model

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Review consistency, Prior beliefs confirmation, Source credibility, Information quality, Homophily[b]	.	Enter
Dependent variable: Overall review credibility **All requested variables entered.**			

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

The variable selection process was performed by applying the Enter method of regression analysis through the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) procedure, which is the default estimation procedure on SPSS. In this regard, source credibility, information quality,

homophily, review consistency and prior beliefs confirmation were entered as the predictors in the regression model, whereas the variable overall review credibility was captured as the dependent variable.

5.12.3 Testing the assumptions of the first regression model

Five assumptions were evaluated in lieu of providing valid results pertaining to the regression model. These are of significant importance as they ensure that statistical inferences are made without bias.

5.12.3.1 Linearity

The first assumption relates to the linearity among the variables used in this study. This infers that the regression model can be written as follows:

$$\mathbf{Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_2 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 + \beta_4 x_4 + \beta_5 x_5 + \boldsymbol{e}}$$

First, the results of the correlation analysis reported in Section 5.11 ascertain that there is linearity among the study variables. Secondly, plotting the independent variables against the variable overall review credibility as the dependent variable yielded scatter plots. The scatter plots illustrated in Appendix B reveal scores concentrated in the middle, tangential to the zero-point with no curvilinearity. This produced a distinctive fan or cone shaped pattern on the residual plots.

Thirdly, Figure 5.13 of this study illustrates the normal P-P plot of standardised residuals that were reported in view of ascertaining the linearity of the data.

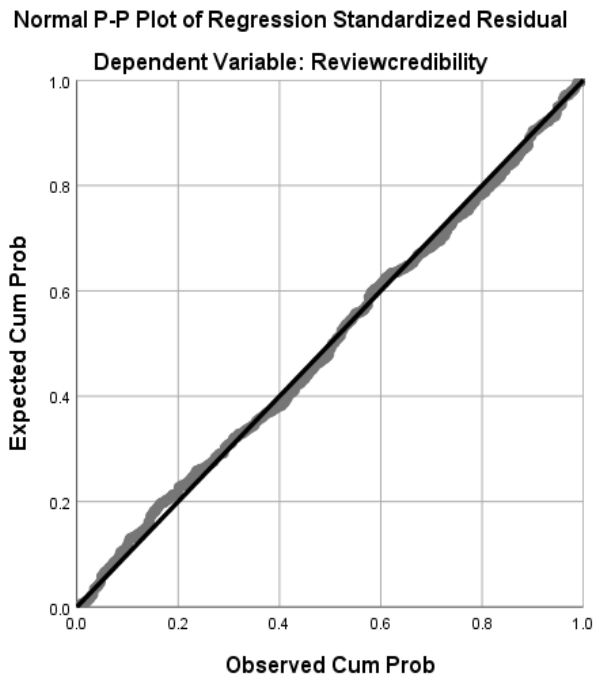


Figure 5.13: P-P plot of regression standardised residuals for the first regression model

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

In Figure 5.13 it can be observed that the values on the P-P plot fell along the diagonal line with no substantial departures from the line, whereas it was observed that the observed residuals fell on the 45 degree line as expected, thereby signalling data normality.

5.12.3.2 Data normality

A principal assumption of regression analysis is that data is normally distributed, implying that for each fixed value of X, the distribution of Y is normal. Non-normally distributed data presents a severe chance of distorting relationships and significant tests (Rencher & Christensen 2012:19). A visual inspection of the histogram of the standardised residuals depicted in Figure 5.14 was a useful starting point for verifying the normality of data.

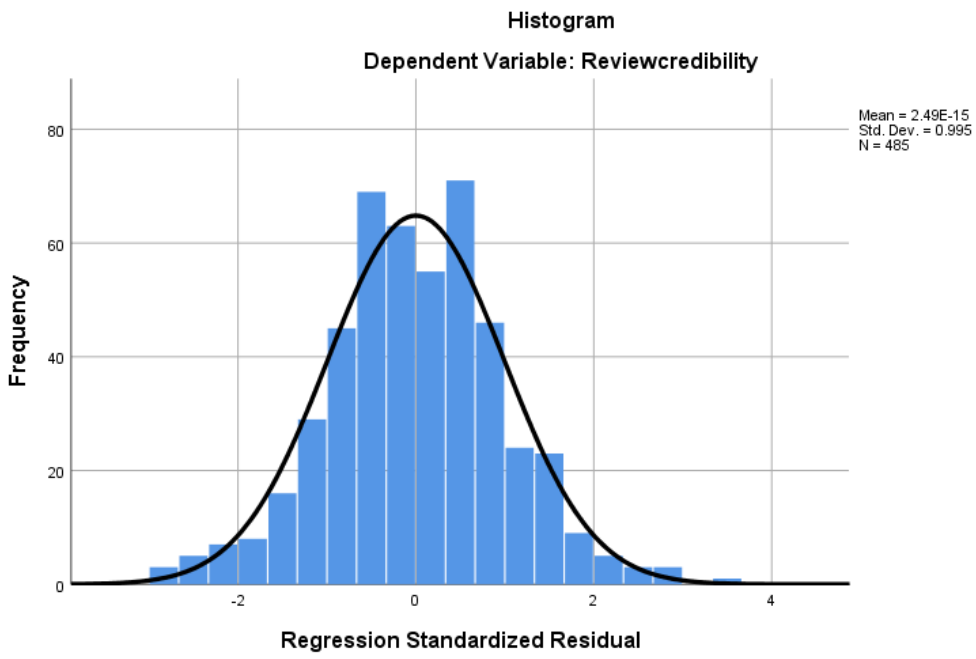


Figure 5.14: Histogram of standardised residuals for the first regression model

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

A histogram is a vertical bar graphical presentation of a single variable that represents the frequency of occurrences within data categories (Malhotra *et al*. 2017:843). The frequencies are plotted to examine the shape of the distribution of values. Evidently, the black line superimposed on the histogram depicted in Figure 5.14 represents the bell-shaped "normal" curve.

The skewness and kurtosis values were also observed in lieu of determining the data symmetry. Notably, the skewness (ranging between -0.153 and -0.494) and kurtosis (ranging between -0.432 and +0.067) values that were reported in Section 5.10 of this study were within the ±1 threshold, thereby pointing to a somewhat symmetric and normally distributed data distribution.

5.12.3.3 Homoskedasticity

The third assumption of regression analysis is that the variables have equal variance, implying that the mean of the error term is zero, termed homoscedasticity (Saunders *et al*. 2016:548). In simple terms, homoscedasticity deals with the constancy of the residuals across the values of the independent variable (Hair *et al*. 2018:343).

In this study, homoscedasticity was assessed by conducting a visual inspection of the partial regression plots or scatter plots across all five variables that were entered in the first regression model. Again, there was no reason to assume that the data were not homoscedastic since the tell-tale pattern on the residual plots shows that as the fitted values on the independent variable increases, the variance of the residuals also increases, within an approximated range of -2 and +2. Moreover, the scatterplots reveal scores concentrated in the middle, tangential to the zero-point with no curvilinearity. This produced a distinctive fan or cone shaped pattern on the residual plots presented in Appendix B.

5.12.3.4 Absence of autocorrelation

Regression analysis assumes that the error terms of the observations are uncorrelated, implying that each observation has been drawn independently (Malhotra *et al.* 2017:651). This points to a scenario where autocorrelation does not exist. In other words, autocorrelation refers to a scenario in which one regression residual is correlated with another in the same series, whereas residuals are the unexplained portions of each dependent variable, termed the prediction errors (Chatterjee & Simonoff 2013:52).

The Durbin-Watson (*d*) test statistic was computed to check whether the residuals from the regression model were independent. While the *d* statistic always ranges between zero and 4.0, with a value of 2, indicating the absence of autocorrelation in the sample, meaning the residuals are uncorrelated. A value of zero points to positive autocorrelation whereas a value close to 4.0 depicts negative autocorrelation (Saunders *et al.* 2016:553). The seminal scholars with respect to the Durbin-Watson statistic postulated that any values outside the $1.5 \leq d \leq 2.5$ range indicate the presence of autocorrelation, which is undesirable (Durbin & Watson 1951:159). Therefore, in the first regression model computed in this research, the majority of the residual autocorrelations were within the 95 percent confidence intervals closer to zero (ranging between 0.020 and 0.386).

Table 5.18: Durbin Watson statistic results for the first regression model

	Change Statistics		
Model 1	Df	Sig. F Change	Durbin Watson Statistic
	485	0.000	1.924

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Table 5.18 reports a Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.924 for the first regression model that was estimated in this work. This result indicates that autocorrelation was absent in the dataset and that the estimations made in this regard comprised independent observations.

5.12.3.5 Absence of multicollinearity

The final assumption of regression analysis made was that there was little or no multicollinearity, signalling that the variance of the error term is constant and independent of the values assumed by X. Conversely, multicollinearity occurs when independent variables correlate (are dependent on) each other, which makes it difficult to determine the separate effects of individual variables, yielding odd results of the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable. In this study, multicollinearity was assessed by checking different collinearity coefficients computed during the estimation of the regression model. Table 5.19 reports on the collinearity coefficients for the first regression model.

Table 5.19: Collinearity coefficients for the first regression model

	95.0% Confidence interval for B		Collinearity statistics	
	Lower Bound	Upper bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.110	0.748		
Source credibility	0.125	0.299	0.681	1.468
Homophily	0.070	0.230	0.675	1.480
Information quality	0.226	0.386	0.700	1.429
Prior beliefs confirmation	0.093	0.213	0.798	1.254
Overall review credibility	0.020	0.135	0.736	1.359

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Pallant (2011:158) denotes that the Tolerance values measure the strength of the relationship (influence) between one independent variable and the other independent variables and should always be above 0.10, to infer the absence of multicollinearity. The values reported in Table 5.19 of this study satisfied this requirement, whereas the Tolerance values ranged between 0.675 and 0.798. Secondly, the inverse of the Tolerance values, termed the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were computed for each independent variable included in the regression model. VIF is a measure of the impact of collinearity amongst the variables and should be less than 10. The reported VIF values for the first

regression model ranged between 1.254 and 1.480, which is within acceptable thresholds and did not indicate any multicollinearity threat.

Thirdly, the collinearity diagnostics for the regression model were assessed and reported in Table 5.20. This involved checking the eigenvalues, condition index values and variance proportions for the variables that were included in the regression model.

Table 5.20: Colinearity diagnostics for the first regression model

Dimensions	Eigenvalue	Condition index	(Constant)	Source credibility	Homophily	Information quality	Prior beliefs confirmation	Review consistency
Overall review credibility	5.832	1.000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Source credibility	0.051	10.676	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.09	0.06
Information quality	0.034	13.024	0.01	0.28	0.16	0.27	0.00	0.37
Homophily	0.033	13.230	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.43
Prior beliefs confirmation	0.025	15.160	0.08	0.06	0.48	0.02	0.01	0.10
Review consistency	0.024	15.736	0.09	0.00	0.32	0.02	0.01	0.04

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

The condition index is a measure of tightness or dependency of one variable on the others (Tabachnick & Fidell 2012:173). A high condition index (values of 30 or greater) is associated with variance inflation in the standard error of the parameter and is therefore a sign that multicollinearity is a concern. The results reported in Table 5.20 depict that the highest condition index reported for the first regression model was 15.736, implying that there is no cause for concern about multicollinearity.

Following on, the eigenvalues were also considered as a collinearity diagnostic tool. Conventionally, all eigenvalues less than 0.01 indicate significant multicollinearity, which points to a period where collinearity begins to affect statistical estimates (Belsley, Kuh & Welsch 1980:18). In this study, the lowest eigen value was reported for the variable review consistency at 0.024, which is greater than 0.01.

None of the observed variance proportions on the collinearity diagnostics Table 5.20 were greater than 0.50 for each dimension. This consideration does not include the column labelled constant, which is the Y intercept (the value of the dependent variable when the independent variables are all zero).

Finally, the correlation matrix reported in Table 5.15 yielded only weak to moderate yet positive and statistically significant inter-factor correlations, returning a maximum correlation coefficient of +0.544 at *p* less than 0.01. This outcome suggests that there was no substantial collinearity in this research since all the computed correlations coefficients were below 0.90 (Saunders *et al.* 2016:549). As such, the results presented in the study confirm that severe multicollinearity problems did not exist, whereas the regression model could be fitted.

Since the five assumptions of linear regression analysis were met in this research, it could then be inferred that the data were a reliable reflection of the accuracy of the views and/or orientation of the population of microbloggers.

5.12.4 Assessing fit of the first regression model

Table 5.21 presents a summary of the model fit.

Table 5.21: Fit of the first regression model

Model 1	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	R square change	F change	df1
	0.663[a]	0.439	0.433	0.60825	0.439	74.950	3

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

The overall fit of the model was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2) as well as the significance of the F-value. The R^2 measures the proportion of variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables, relative to the mean. The coefficient of determination is calculated using the following formula:

$$\mathbf{R^2\ (coefficient\ of\ determination)} = \frac{SSreg}{SSy}$$

Where:

SS_{reg} = Variation accounted for by the regression line calculated by subtracting the residual variation from the total variation.

SS_y = Total variation

Wegner (2012:310) submits that the strength of association depends on how closer R^2 lies either to zero or one. If R^2 is closer to zero, it indicates a weak association between the

independent and dependent variables, whereas if the R^2 lies closer to one, a strong association between the variables is posited.

Researchers are generally interested in regression models that explain data well. In this regard, the adjusted R^2 is considered as it is intended to control for over-estimates of the population R^2 resulting from small samples, high collinearity or small subject/variable ratios. In this study, the adjusted R^2 was reported at 0.433, which means that about 43.3 percent of the variation in overall review credibility is explained by the five credibility heuristics posing as the explanatory variables of overall review credibility, namely source credibility, information quality, homophily, review consistency and prior beliefs confirmation. Notably, Sarstedt and Mooi (2014:226) maintain that any R^2 values that are above 0.30 are satisfactory for cross-sectional surveys. Adequate fit was ascertained for the first regression model, whereas it may be asserted that the remaining 57 percent is accounted for by other extraneous factors that were not considered in this research.

The F-test is used to find out the overall probability of the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables occurring by chance (Saunders *et al.* 2016:551). Table 5.22 reports on the test statistic's F-Value as a result of the analysis of variance that tests the null hypotheses that all regression coefficients together are equal to zero (Sarstedt & Mooi 2:014:212). According to Wegner (2012:281), the F-statistics is calculated using the following formula:

$$\textbf{F statistic} = \frac{\mathbf{SSreg}}{\mathbf{SSres/(n-2)}}$$

Where:

SS_{reg} = Variation accounted for by the regression line.

SS_{res} = Residual variation.

Malhotra *et al.* (2017:650) postulate that the F-statistic should be larger than the critical value, to infer that at least one or more of the regression coefficients in the model is significant at the *p* less than 0.05 level. Table 5.22 depicts the f-statistic value for the first regression model.

Table 5.22: Analysis of variance for the first regression model

Model 1		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	138.646	3	27.729	74.950	.000
	Residual	177.215	482	0.370		
	Total	315.860	485			

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

In Table 5.22, the first regression model returned an F-value of 74.950 at $p<0.01$, given 3 degrees of freedom, only. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that at least one of the regression coefficients included in the model differs significantly from zero. This result indicates that the regression model as a whole is a significant fit for the empirical data in this work.

5.12.5 The effect of individual variables in the first regression model

Having established that the first regression model is significant and that the R^2 value for the first regression model is satisfactory thereby denoting model fit, it becomes imperative to interpret the effects of the various independent variables that have been used to explain the dependent variable. In this regard, the following elements are interpreted:

- The t-values reported for each individual parameter.
- The Significance level or *p*-value.
- The size and direction of the regression coefficients.

Table 5.23 presents the regression coefficients for the first regression model that was estimated.

Table 5.23: Regression coefficients for the first regression model

	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients			Decision
	B	**Standard error term**	**Beta**	**T**	**Sig.**	
(Constant)	0.429	0.162		2.646	0.008	
Source credibility	0.212	0.044	0.198	4.780	0.000	Reject H_o1 Accept H_a1
Information quality	0.306	0.041	0.307	7.506	0.000	Reject H_o2 Accept H_a2

Table 5.23: Regression coefficients for the first regression model (continued …)

	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients			Decision
	B	Standard error term	Beta	T	Sig.	
(Constant)	0.429	1.162		2.646	0.008	
Homophily	0.150	0.041	0.154	3.688	0.000	Reject H_o3 Accept H_a3
(Constant)	0.429	0.162		2.646	0.008	
Review consistency	0.057	0.040	0.058	1.449	0.148	Fail to reject H_04
Prior beliefs confirmation	0.153	0.031	0.191	4.992	0.000	Reject H_o5 Accept H_a5

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

The magnitude of the t-statistics provides a means to judge relative importance of the independent variables. Based on the results presented in Table 5.23, there are four regression coefficients which are statistically significant at *p* is less than 0.05, whereas the constant is excluded from further interpretation.

In this study, the regression coefficient's *p*-values (indicated in SPSS by the column headed by Sig.) for source credibility, information quality, homophily and prior beliefs confirmation are below 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the four variables relate significantly to the dependent variable (overall review credibility).

With regard to the size of regression coefficients, the Beta values range from -1 to +1, signalling the strength of the predictor variable under review. Nevertheless, the rule of thumb is that if the regression coefficient from the regression model changes by more than 10 percent, then X_2 is said to be a confounder, denoting the size of the effect (Sullivan & LaMorte 2016:1). This infers that Beta values higher than 0.1 point to evidence of explanatory effect of the predictor variable on the dependent variable.

In the multiple regression equation, 0.307 is the estimated regression coefficient that quantifies the association between information quality and the outcome, overall review credibility, adjusted for 0.041, standard error term. Interestingly, this relationship was positive and also yielded the strongest effect in the regression model (β=+0.307; t=7.506; p<0.01). Therefore, H_o2 can be rejected in favour of the alternative H_a2.

Source credibility was ranked second in terms of the strength of the variable effect on overall review credibility (β = +0.198; t-value = 4.780; $p < 0.01$). This result implies that source credibility is a confounder in the first regression model. The hypothesis H_o1 is rejected based on the empirical data whereas H_a1 is accepted in this study.

The variable prior beliefs confirmation yielded a statistically significant regression coefficient in the regression model, with an estimated regression coefficient of 0.191 that quantifies the association between the predictor and the overall review credibility (β = +0.191; t-value = 4.992; $p < 0.01$). Therefore, H_o5 is rejected based on the empirical data whereas H_a5 is accepted in this study.

The standardised coefficient for homophily is 0.154, implying that a one standard deviation change in the explanatory variable results in a 0.154 standard deviation change in the dependent variable overall review credibility, holding other parameters constant. Notably, the predictor homophily ranked fourth place in terms of the size effect on overall review credibility (β = 0.154; t-value = 3.688; $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis H_o3 is rejected based on the empirical data whereas H_a3 is accepted in this study.

Finally, the variable review consistency did not reach statistical significance in the multiple regression model (β = 0.058; t-value = 1.449; $p = 0.148$). Drawing from this result, it can be concluded that there is insufficient evidence to support the rejection of the null hypotheses posited between review consistency and overall review credibility. Therefore, The results of this research failed to reject H_a4.

5.13 HYPOTHESES TESTING RESULTS FOR THE SECOND REGRESSION MODEL

Linear regression analysis was applied since only one independent variable (overall review credibility) was being estimated against a singular dependent variable (eWOM adoption). This model aimed to test the last hypotheses that was postulated in Section 1.5 of this study as follows:

H_{o6}: *The credibility of microblog music reviews does not positively influence future eWOM adoption by microbloggers.*

H_{a6}: *The credibility of microblog music reviews positively influences future eWOM adoption by microbloggers.*

5.13.1 Estimation of the second regression model

The variable overall review credibility was nominated for inclusion into the regression model as the only predictor variable whereas eWOM was elected as the dependent variable, consistent with the linearity outlined in the conceptual model presented in Figure 3.5 of this dissertation. The variable selection process was performed by applying the Enter method of regression analysis, through the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) procedure. Table 5.24 illustrates this information.

Table 5.24: Variables entered in the second regression model

Variables entered	Variables removed	Method
Overall review credibility	.	Enter
a. Dependent variable: eWOM adoption. b. All requested variables entered.		

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

5.13.2 Testing the assumptions of the second regression model

The results of the correlation analysis reported in Section 5.11 of this study ascertain that there is linearity between overall review credibility and eWOM adoption (r=+0.539; p <0.01). In addition, the normal P-P plot of standardised residuals depicted in Figure 5.15 served to ascertain linearity of variables in the second regression model.

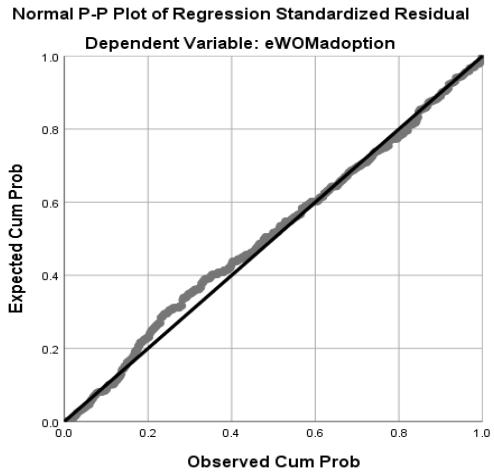


Figure 5.15: P-P plot of regression standardised residuals for the second regression model

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

In Figure 5.15 it can be observed that the values on the P-P plot fell along the diagonal line with no substantial departures from the line signalling data normality. Likewise, Figure 5.16 was a useful indicator for verifying the normality of data, with respect to the second regression model.

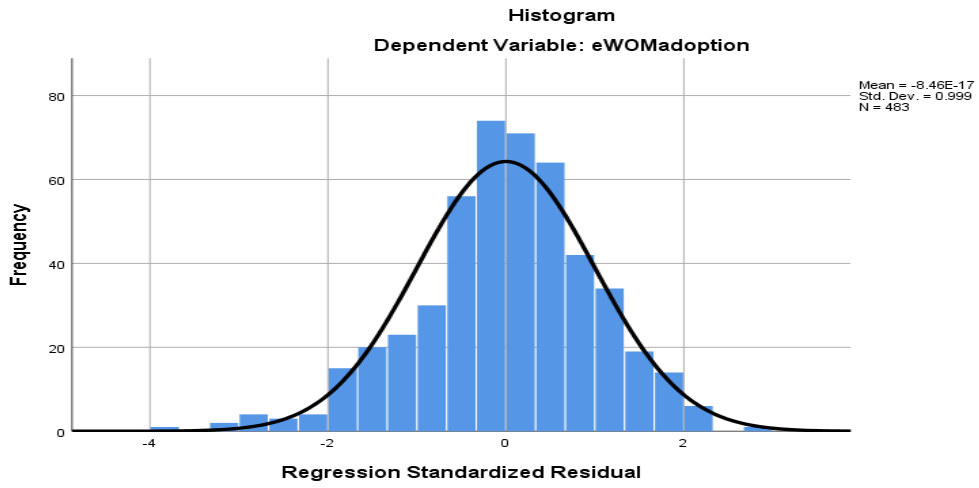


Figure 5.16: Histogram of standardised residuals for the second regression model

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

The diagonal line on the P-P regression plot of standardised residuals in Figure 5.15 as well as the bell-shaped curve of the histogram presented in Figure 5.16 depict the normality of the data set.

When autocorrelation exists, the observations may be lacking in terms of independence, which presents an undesirable scenario. Put simply, autocorrelation means that the regression errors are correlated either positively or negatively over time, implying that the predictions made may seem to be significant when in fact it may not actually be significant in any way. The seminal scholars with respect to the Durbin-Watson statistic postulated that any values outside the $1.5 \leq d \leq 2.5$ range indicate the presence of autocorrelation, which is undesirable (Durbin & Watson 1951:159). Therefore, in the second regression model computed in this research, the majority of the residual autocorrelations were within the 95 percent confidence intervals closer to zero as reported by a value of 1.984 on the Durbin Watson statistic, shown in Table 5.25.

Table 5.25: Durbin Watson statistic results for the second regression model

	Change Statistics		
Model 2	Df	Sig. F Change	Durbin Watson Statistic
	485	0.000	1.984

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Multicollinearity was not an issue in the second regression model since it is only of concern where multiple independent variables have been utilised to estimate the model. Therefore, since the Tolerance and VIF values have a reciprocal relationship, they are equal to one in a linear regression model where only one predictor is entered into the regression equation. The collinearity statistics are reported in Table 5.26.

Table 5.26: Collinearity coefficients for the second regression model

	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.068	1.667		
Overall credibility	0.550	0.720	1.000	1.000

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Table 5.27 illustrates the specific diagnostics for checking collinearity issues within the second regression model.

Table 5.27: Collinearity diagnostics for the second regression model

Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions	
			(Constant)	Overall review credibility
eWOM adoption	1.973	1.000	0.01	0.01
Overall review credibility	0.027	8.614	0.09	0.09

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

The presence of multicollinearity was assessed by examining the eigenvalue and the condition index value for the predictor variable. In particular, the eigenvalue for overall review credibility was reported as 0.027, which is well above the 0.01 threshold suggested by Belsley *et al.* (1980:18). In addition, the predictor variable yielded a condition index value of 8.614, which is below 30, thereby depicting that collinearity is not a problem and is unlikely to affect the statistical estimates of this regression model.

5.13.3 Assessing fit of the second regression model

Tables 5.28 and 5.29 show the findings from the regression analysis as well as the ANOVA test. A coefficient of determination of 0.308 with an adjusted R^2 value of 0.307 (30.7% variation) shows that nearly 31 percent of the variation in eWOM adoption of microblogs among consumers can be solely attributed to the independent variable labelled overall review credibility. Through this result, adequate fit was ascertained for the second regression model.

Table 5.28: Fit of the second regression model

Model 2	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	df1
	0.555	0.308	0.307	0.76718	0.308	214.078	

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Table 5.29 depicts the analysis of variance (ANOVA) table that was checked in view of determining the statistical significance of the second regression model.

Table 5.29: Analysis of variance for the second regression model

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	125.998		125.998	214.078	0.000
Residual	283.099	485	0.589		
Total	409.097	485			

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

Drawing from the ANOVA result, an F value of 214.078 and a significance level of 0.000 ($F = 214.078$, $p < 0.05$) suggests that indeed the independent variable reliably predicts the dependent variable. That is to say, overall review credibility can be used as a predictor of the eWOM adoption behaviour of microbloggers. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that at least the regression coefficient including in the model differs significantly from zero. In this respect, the next section discusses the regression coefficients reported on the second regression model.

5.13.4 The effect of individual variables in the second regression model

The regression coefficients are computed in view of understanding the effect of the only independent variable that was entered into the second regression model, on its dependent variable. Table 5.30 reports on the regression coefficients for the second regression model.

Table 5.30: Regression coefficients for the second regression model

	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients			Decision
	B	Standard error term	Beta	T	Sig.	
(Constant)	1.368	0.152		8.976	0.000	
Overall review credibility	0.635	0.043	0.555	14.631	0.000	Reject H_o6 Accept H_a6

Source: Author's compilation

Overall review credibility yielded a statistically significant regression coefficient in the second regression model. Notably, the predictor variable yielded an estimated regression coefficient of 0.555 that quantifies the association between overall review credibility and eWOM adoption ($\beta = +0.555$; t-value = 14.631; $p < 0.01$). Therefore, the null hypothesis H_o6 is rejected based on the empirical data whereas H_a6 is accepted in this study.

The next section delves into an interpretive discussion of the results that are reported in sections 5.12 and 5.13 of this chapter.

5.14 DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis H_a1 stipulates that source credibility influences overall microblog review credibility in a positive and statistically significant manner, whereas H_o1 posits that no such influential relationship exists between the two variables. The empirical results presented in Section 5.12.5 of this dissertation provide ample evidence that source credibility does indeed influence consumers' evaluation of microblog music review credibility as depicted by the second highest Beta regression coefficient in the first regression model ($\beta = +0.198$; t-value = 4.780; $p < 0.01$). These results are consistent with the findings of Cheung *et al*. (2009:27) who also found a statistically significant influence of source credibility on the eWOM credibility perceptions of online consumers. Consistently, Iduozee (2015:69) found similar results of a positive effect of source

credibility on the credibility evaluation of online reviews. This result means the reputation of the communicator plays an important role upon evaluating the credibility of online content. Furthermore, the reputation of the communicator tends to influence the credibility of eWOM music reviews.

The second hypotheses aimed at testing whether information quality was a predictor of the credibility of microblog music reviews. Interestingly, the statistically significant result along this regression path indicated that among the five heuristics, information quality yields the strongest effect on consumers' overall perceptions of microblog review credibility (β=+0.307; t=7.506; p<0.01). This empirical result provided support for H_a2 in this research. Support for this result are found in previous research where Cheung and Thadani (2012:464) found that argument quality positively influences eWOM credibility. This means the manner in which the eWOM music review is easy to understand influences the overall credibility evaluations of the eWOM music content. In other words, it can be expected that if a microblogger is looking for authentic music content, he/she expects the content to be accurate, flawless and easy to understand.

The third hypotheses proposed the existence of a possible influential relationship between homophily and overall credibility of microblog music reviews. The empirical results of this work supported the alternative hypothesis H_a3 (β =+0.154; t-value = 3.688; p < 0.01). In the regression model, homophily was proven to be in fourth place out of five, in terms of the strength of effect on the dependent variable, overall review credibility. Notwithstanding the weak effect, the statistically significant result (p less than 0.01) provides sufficient evidence of the importance of this variable in explaining review credibility perceptions among consumers. In agreement, Wang *et al.* (2008:365) found that homophily is a vital driver of credibility in online environments. Likewise, Shamhuyenhanzva *et al*. (2016:436) established that the more homophilous the consumers are, the more they perceive online message to be credible. In the context of online music, homophily would be interpreted as having related and near equal interests and mindsets towards music.

The fourth hypotheses aimed at testing whether review consistency was a predictor of the credibility of microblog music reviews. Regrettably, the empirical results provided insufficient evidence that review consistency could influence consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews (β = 0.058; t-value = 1.449; p = 0.148). Hence, the current study failed to reject the hypothesis H_o4. While this is so, contrasting findings by

Cheung *et al.* (2009:29) established that recommendation consistency is a more influential factor in evaluating review credibility. Likewise, Pham (2016:46) demonstrated that consistency is a significant determinant of perceived review credibility in cosmetics websites. The inconclusive nature of these results could be explained by the fact that microbloggers actually discuss multiple topics, products and brands simultaneously. This renders it problematic for consumers to have time to check the consensus of the eWOM communication across multiple platforms, when seeking fast means to judge the credibility of music reviews. Hence, as outlined in this study, it can be concluded that review consistency is not a legible heuristic that is considered when microbloggers seek to evaluate the credibility of music review.

The fifth hypotheses proposed the existence of a possible influential relationship between prior beliefs confirmation with the overall credibility of microblog music reviews. The empirical results provided sufficient evidence for a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($\beta = +0.191$; t-value = 4.992; $p < 0.01$). Consequently, H_o5 is rejected, whereas H_a5 is accepted. This result is consistent with the findings of Lopes *et al.* (2013:49) who found that consumers are likely to perceive online reviews in a positive light if the content confirms the beliefs they previously held. For example, if information received online confirms that which consumers already know, then it is easy for them to receive that information and perceive it as credible. In agreement, Ismagilova *et al.* (2017:59) provides valid empirical findings as to the positive influence of consumers' prior-beliefs on their positive evaluations of online information. These findings validate that prior beliefs confirmation indeed contributes to the consumers' evaluation of credibility of the microblog music reviews.

Finally, Section 5.13 presents the results that pertain to the sixth hypotheses, whereas the relationship between overall review credibility and eWOM adoption was tested. The empirical results provided sufficient evidence that the mediating variable overview credibility positively influences consumers' intention to adopt eWOM along microblogs in the future ($\beta = +0.555$; t-value = 14.631; $p < 0.01$). The results further pointed to the predictor having approximately 31 percent of the explanatory power in eWOM adoption. The hypothesis H_o6 was rejected whereas H_a6 was accepted, instead. Similarly, Fan *et al.* (2013:63) found that eWOM perceived credibility positively influenced eWOM adoption of online reviews, whereas the regression path showed that credibility explained 46 percent of the variance in eWOM adoption of the online users. A different study by Fang (2014:75)

demonstrated that credibility is the most important antecedent in the adoption of reviews posted along social networking sites, whereas the variable predicts and explained approximately 56 percent of the variance in consumers' eWOM adoption decisions.

5.15 CONCLUSION

This chapter reports on the empirical data analysis that was conducted in this work, leading to the hypotheses testing. The step-by-step assessment of the results commences with a review of the pilot study, whereas the acceptable reliability statistics allowed for the research to proceed to the main survey. At the main survey, the data coding process as well as the frequency distributions are illustrated pictorially. Thereafter, the data reduction process involved testing two EFA models, whereas a statistically-informed decision was taken to exclude items C2, C10, C21, C24 and C25 from further analysis. Thereafter, the empirical data satisfied the expected thresholds for reliability testing and descriptive statistical analysis. Correlation analysis were also performed in order to ascertain the linearity among the variables that were computed in this research.

Upon testing the hypotheses that were populated in Section 1.5 of this study, two regression models were estimated. Taken as a whole, the findings of the first regression model presents an interesting insight into the significance of at least four of the five heuristics that were postulated at the beginning of this work, namely information quality, source credibility, prior beliefs confirmation and homophily, in order of importance. In the second regression, model, overall review credibility was also proven to be a statistically significant predictor of eWOM credibility. Chapter six seeks to draw conclusions from the findings of this research by focusing on the extent to which the empirical research objectives and hypotheses were satisfactory. Moreover, the next Chapter elaborates on how the conceptual model postulated in Section 3.9 were adequately addressed by the empirical data. Several recommendations emanating from this study are drawn, whereas limitations that were encountered upon conducting this research are elaborated on in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STUDY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The importance and growing popularity of eWOM communication has received substantial attention from scholars and practitioners. This is because the eWOM communication phenomenon aids businesses to better capture the buying behaviour and experiences of consumers and then develop optimal business strategies. Interestingly, the reviews posted by various content authors are considered a "new element in the marketing communication mix that also play a role as free sales assistants" (Pham 2016:5). This role is considered critical in the case of goods and services such as music, of which the actual performance evaluation is difficult to assess prior to actual purchase.

The study attempts to investigate the influence of selected determinants of microblog music review credibility on the future adoption of eWOM communication by microbloggers. It considers the credibility heuristics, which are peripheral cues, yet they play a significant role in altering the credibility perceptions of consumers towards online reviews. In particular, important elements including source credibility, information quality, homophily, review consistency, prior beliefs confirmation, overall eWOM review credibility and eWOM adoption were considered. This angle was followed because a majority of the studies in the field of eWOM communication have attempted to carve an understanding of the informational and normative factors that influence online recommendation credibility (Luo *et al*. 2013:92-102).

Finally, this chapter discusses how the theoretical and empirical research objectives outlined at the beginning of this study were met. In particular, the achievement of the theoretical research objectives emanates from the theory and desk-research conducted in chapters two and three. Furthermore, the achievement of the empirical research objectives emanates from the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the sample data explained in chapters four and five of this dissertation.

6.2 ACHIEVEMENT OF THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective for this study was to investigate the influence of selected determinants of microblog music review credibility and future eWOM adoption among microbloggers in the southern Gauteng region of South Africa (Refer to Section 1.4.1 of this study). In lieu of achieving this primary objective by applying a quantitative research approach, a decision was taken to follow a dual-pronged approach towards collecting data by conducting a review of both secondary and empirical data. In this regard, a cohort of eight theoretical research objectives as well as four empirical research objectives were formulated.

6.2.1 Evaluation of the theoretical research objectives

This section provides a description on the evaluation of the theoretical objectives addressed in the form of a literature review conveyed in chapters two and three as illustrated in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Achievement of the theoretical research objectives

Specific theoretical research objective	Theoretical research objective being addressed	Section where the research objective was addressed in the dissertation
Theoretical objective 1	To provide an overview of the literature on marketing communication	Sections 2.2 and 2.3
Theoretical objective 2	To theoretically review the WOM communication Model	Sections 2.4 and 2.5
Theoretical objective 3	To conduct a comprehensive review of the literature on eWOM communication	Sections 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9 and 2.10
Theoretical objective 4	To appraise the literature on microblog eWOM communication in the music industry	Sections 2.11, 2.12 and 2.13
Theoretical objective 5	To conduct a literature review on the evaluation of eWOM credibility	Sections 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4
Theoretical objective 6	To conduct a literature study on the eWOM credibility theories	Sections 3.5 and 3.6
Theoretical objective 7	To theoretically review the application of the credibility heuristics in eWOM research	Section 3.7
Theoretical objective 8	To review the literature on the determinants of eWOM credibility and eventual adoption of online platforms	Sections 3.8 and 3.9

Source: Author's Compilation (2019)

The first theoretical research objective sought to provide an overview of the literature on marketing communication, which was achieved in sections 2.2 and 2.3 of this study. The

sections relate to the basic communication process as well as the marketing communication process. Commencing from this departure point provides a theoretic foundation and building blocks for this study from a marketing and consumer behaviour context.

The second theoretical research objective aimed to review the WOM communication model. This was achieved in sections 2.4 and 2.5 of this study. First, the WOM concept was conceptualised from the vantage points of different scholars. Thereafter, clarity regarding the WOM concept was provided through a discussion on the different forms of WOM communication, which include institutional WOM and everyday WOM communication. Moreover, the descriptive character elements that portray WOM communication were described, comprising valence, focus, timing, solicitation and intervention. The variables that influence WOM communication were identified with the hope to distinguish WOM communication from other forms of communication. In Section 2.5 the WOM communication model put forward by Buttle (1998:246) was elaborated on, with a view to specifying the intrapersonal and extrapersonal variables that influence the dissemination of input and output WOM communication.

The third theoretical research objective relating to conducting a comprehensive review of the literature on eWOM communication were achieved in sections 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9 and 2.10, commencing with a description of the flow of eWOM communication in Section 2.6. Thereafter, a clear demarcation between traditional WOM and eWOM communication was delivered in Section 2.7. This demarcation clarified the key similarities and/or differences between traditional WOM and eWOM communication. A decision was then taken to direct the literature study towards the primary focus of this research by delving into the inherent characteristics of eWOM communication in Section 2.8. Volume, platform dispersion, persistence, anonymity and community engagement were identified as the primary characteristics of eWOM communication. While this is so, Section 2.9 was a literature review of the existing eWOM platforms under three categories, namely one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many eWOM communication platforms. It is in this Section that the uniqueness of the microblog platform as an underlying contextual platform for this research was identified. In Section 2.10 of this study, various eWOM communication formats are discussed, which include synchronous and asynchronous eWOM communication, whereas music reviews comprise the latter communication format.

The fourth theoretical research objective pertains to appraising the literature on microblog eWOM communication of music. This objective was achieved in sections 2.11, 2.12 and 2.13. The WOM technology framework is discussed and thereafter the framework adapted to an online music album context by considering the domain of spreading eWOM content relating to music albums using microblogs as a vehicle. Over and above this, an overview of the music and entertainment industry is provided in Section 2.13 in view of elaborating on the context of this research. The literature unravelled the underlying drivers and contribution of the music and entertainment sector to the triple bottom line as well as the constraints and regulation of the music industry as a whole.

The fifth theoretical research objective seeks to review how eWOM communication is evaluated for credibility. This is achieved in Section 3.2, whereby the definitions of credibility are provided in the context of eWOM communication. Furthermore, Section 3.3 narrowed down the specific focus of this work by granularising the characteristics of credible eWOM communication as objectivity, authority, accuracy, currency and coverage. Moreover, the fifth theoretical research objective was consolidated through a discussion of the drivers of credible eWOM communication in Section 3.4 of this dissertation.

The sixth theoretical research objective aims to conduct a literature synthesis of the eWOM credibility theories. This a-theoretic perspective was fulfilled in sections 3.5 and 3.6. The evaluation of the five credibility theories in Section 3.5 helps to clarify the discourse as to the differences in terms of the frameworks and models that have been historically applied upon evaluating credibility of information. Thereafter, Section 3.6 introduces the credibility heuristics strategy of information processing, which proved to be a relevant angle for assessing information regarding a low-involvement and sensory product such as music.

The seventh theoretical research objective seeks to theoretically review the application of the credibility heuristics in eWOM research. This objective was achieved in Section 3.7, where five heuristics were nominated as the principal cues that are admissible during the cognitive evaluation of online music through microblog reviews.

The last theoretical research objective aims at reviewing the literature on the determinants of eWOM credibility and the eventual adoption of online communication platforms. This objective is achieved in sections 3.8 and 3.9, respectively.

6.2.2 Evaluation of the empirical research objectives

In this study, four empirical research objectives are formulated and outlined in Section 1.4.3. They were addressed by conducting the fieldwork and liaising directly with a sample for data collection. In light of this, the data were collected in view of testing the conceptual model for the study and also in lieu of proffering a statistically-supported decision with regard to the set of hypotheses specified in Section 1.5. The achievement of the empirical research objectives is discussed next.

- **To establish the determinants of microblog music review credibility among a cohort of microbloggers based in southern Gauteng**

The first empirical research objective that was formulated in this study relates to establishing the determinants of microblog music review credibility among a cohort of microbloggers based in southern Gauteng. Upon achieving this empirical objective, data were reduced into identifiable factors as explained in Section 5.7. This procedure led to the extraction of a five-factor solution, with unique components that are regarded as the vital determinants of consumers' perceptions of the credibility of microblog music reviews.

The first component labelled information quality yielded five scale items with significant factor loadings greater than 0.50 (C7, C8, C9, C11 and C12). The identified items on this factor demonstrated satisfactory cohesiveness. The second component, named homophily, comprised five items with significant loadings ranging between 0.543 and 0.749 (C13, C14, C15, C16 and C17). The third extracted component was named source credibility owing to the five scale items which loaded on the same factor with significant weight (C1, C3, C4, C5 and C6). The fourth component named review consistency, comprised three items only, which loaded satisfactorily on this component (C18, C19 and C20). Finally, the last component labelled prior beliefs confirmation, yielded only two items that loaded significantly on this component (C22 and C23).

The extracted factors demonstrated adequate construct validity as well as internal cohesiveness among their underlying scale items. They also yielded either fair or adequate reliability, when evaluated using the Cronbach's Alpha test, whereas coefficients ranging between 0.635 and 0.808 were reported.

- **To determine microbloggers' evaluation of the overall credibility of microblog music reviews**

The second empirical research objective formulated for this study pertains to determining microbloggers' evaluation of the overall credibility of microblog music reviews. The results of the descriptive statistics (refer to Section 5.10) proved that consumers consider credibility heuristics when evaluating microblog music reviews. This outcome was determinable since the reported mean values of the extracted factors were all higher than the pre-determined mean value of 3.0. This means that the respondents reflected a greater degree of agreement with regard to the salience of each identified element in influencing their credibility perceptions towards microblog music reviews. While the reported standard deviation values for each factor ranged between -1 and +1, it is only the variable prior beliefs confirmation that returned a value of 1.009, which is only marginally above +1 and therefore did not point to any significant deviation in the responses provided by the microbloggers.

Section 5.11 illustrates the correlation matrix that was computed in this work. The same section alludes to microbloggers' evaluation of the overall credibility of microblog music reviews, as purported in the second empirical research objective. Positive and significant correlations were established in this study after correlating microblog review credibility with information quality (r=+0.544; p<0.01), source credibility (r=+0.484; p<0.01), homophily (r=+0.457; p<0.01), prior beliefs confirmation (r=+0.438; p<0.01) and review consistency (r=+0.378; p<0.01). The established correlation coefficients were of moderate strength, signalling the moderate influence of each of the identified determinants on consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music review. Moreover, the statistically significant correlations denote the existence of linearity among the five heuristics with the mediating variable, overall review credibility.

- **To examine the influence of microblog music review credibility on future eWOM adoption by microbloggers in southern Gauteng**

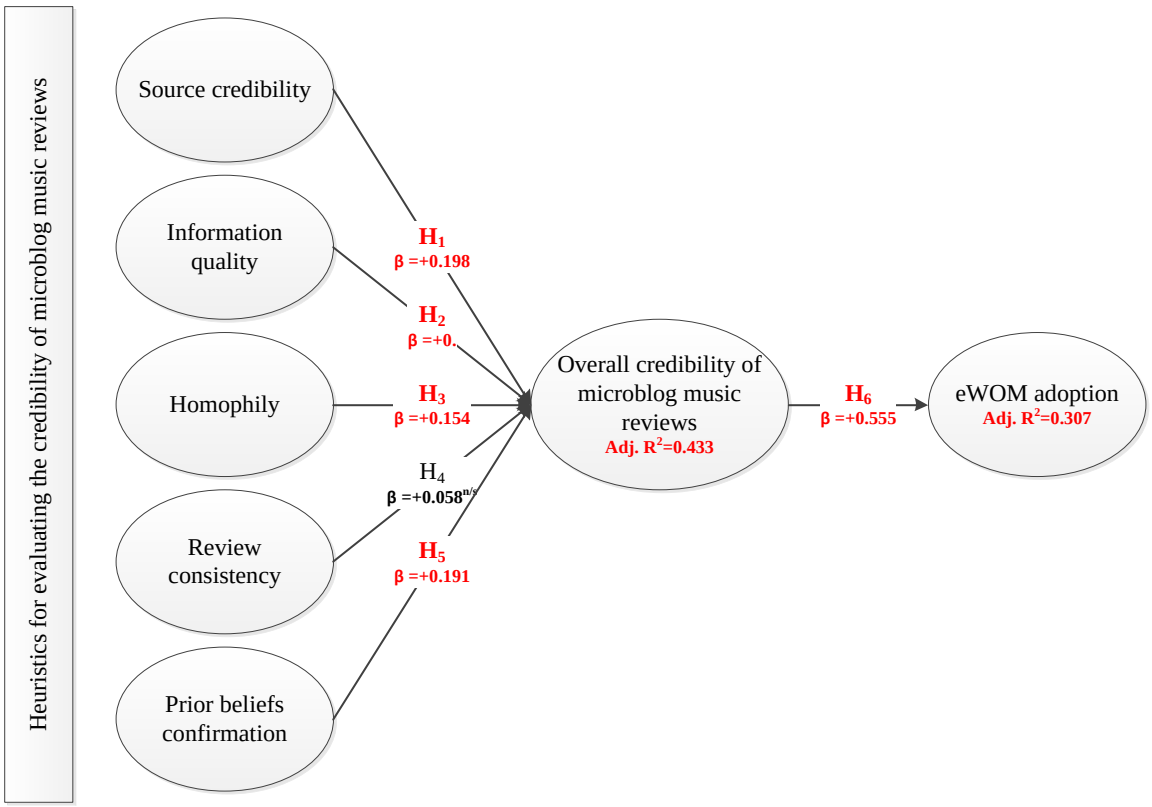
The third empirical research objective formulated in this study aimsto examine the influence of microblog music review credibility on future eWOM adoption by microbloggers. This objective was met by conducting multiple statistical analysis that links the two variables. First, correlation analysis was performed, whereas a positive correlation of moderate strength was established between microblog music review credibility and

eWOM adoption (r=+0.539; p<0.01). This result proves that overall review credibility poses a direct relationship with a linearity effect on mcrobloggers' future decisions to adopt eWOM communication.

The results of the second regression model presented in Section 5.13 of this study also served to answer the third empirical research objective that as posited in this research. In particular, a positive and statistically significant path was established between microblog review credibility and eWOM adoption. Moreover, the path yielded adequate fit, as demonstrated by a moderate adjusted R^2 value, reported at approximately 31 percent variance in eWOM adoption (adjusted R^2=0.307).

- **To test empirically a model of source credibility, information quality, homophily, review consistency, prior beliefs confirmation, music review credibility and eWOM adoption**

Upon testing the model comprising the five credibility heuristics, overall music review credibility and eWOM adoption, Figure 6.1 illustrates the outcome of the empirical testing procedure.



n/s: not significant

Figure 6.1: A conceptual model on the adoption of eWOM on microblogs

Source: Author's compilation (2019)

The research model with six relative hypotheses statements was tested in Section 5.12, which led to the achievement of the fourth empirical research objective. In the hypotheses testing, two regression models were estimated after satisfying the *a priori* assumptions for conducting the multivariate procedure. The empirical data set were then assessed against the results of the specified standardised regression coefficients. In the first regression model, the results of the hypotheses testing confirmed that source credibility positively influences the consumers' overall evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews, whereas the variable yielded the second highest Beta value ($\beta = +0.198$; t-value = 4.780; $p < 0.01$). Resultantly, a decision was taken to reject H_o1 and accept the alternative hypothesis H_a1, instead. These results are consistent with the findings of Cheung *et al*. (2009:27) who also found a significant influence of source credibility towards eWOM credibility. The strong results along this path suggest that South African microbloggers do indeed consider the element of reputation and trustworthiness of the music review author when evaluating the credibility of microblog music reviews.

The second hypothesis aimed to test the influence of information quality towards the overall microblog music review credibility. The results obtained from the hypothesis testing confirmed that information quality has a positive and statistically significant influence on consumers' evaluation of the credibility of microblog music reviews (β = +0.307; t-value = 7.506; $p < 0.01$), leading to the decision to reject H_o2 and accept H_a2, instead. Notably the regression path yielded the strongest effect on the outcome variable, Consistently, Cheung *et al.* (2008:233) found that the quality of the argument on online opinion platforms directly influences the usefulness of eWOM communication, whereas Cheung (2009:27) further added the notion that useful information serves to strengthen the argument being asserted in a discussion forum, thereby yielding positive perceptions of eWOM review credibility. Likewise, consumers' perceptions of the credibility of microblog music reviews is based on the accuracy and completeness of the information that is posted on microblogs platforms.

With respect to the third hypothesis, homophily was found to have a direct and significant influence on the credibility of microblog music reviews (β = +0.154; t-value = 3.688; $p < 0.01$). This led to a statistically-informed decision to reject H_o3 and accept H_a3, instead. Nevertheless, homophily yielded the weakest, yet statistically significant influence on the outcome variable. Perhaps, the weak influential strength of this variable is explained by the fact that while an online music review post is made, all microblog subscribers will be exposed to the message, thereby denoting that access to microblog-based eWOM communication is not only based on the strength of ties or relationships but also on subscription.

The sample data could not establish adequate support for the path relationship between review consistency and consumers' perceptions of the credibility of music reviews (β = +0.058; t-value = 1.449; $p = 0.148$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, with respect to the fourth hypotheses, the data failed to reject H_o4, whereas H_a4 was not supported in this research.

With respect to the fifth hypothesis, a positive and statistically significant standardised regression coefficient was established between confirmed prior beliefs and the variable overall credibility of microblog music reviews (β = +0.191, t-value = 4.992, $p < 0.01$). This result led to a decision to accept H_a5 and reject H_o5, implying that prior beliefs confirmation is a peripheral cue that does indeed pose a significant influence on consumers' perceptions of the credibility of microblog music reviews. This finding is consistent with the findings

of Lopes *et al*. (2013:49) who demonstrate that confirmed prior beliefs influence online review credibility in a positive manner.

In sum, the statistically significant paths indicate that the identified heuristics explain 43.3 percent of the overall perceptions of consumers about the credibility of microblog music reviews (adjusted R^2=0.433).

Finally, with regard to the relationship between overall microblog music review credibility and eWOM adoption, a second regression model was estimated. The empirical results provided statistically sound evidence of a positive and statistically significant influence of microblog review credibility on eWOM adoption (β = +0.555; t-value = 14.631; $p < 0.01$). This outcome denotes that the credibility of microblog music reviews can consequently lead to the adoption of eWOM communication. Moreover, the path yielded adequate fit, as demonstrated by a moderate adjusted coefficient of determination, reported at approximately 31 percent variance in eWOM adoption (adjusted R^2=0.307). Consequently, H_o6 was rejected in this study whereas H_a6 were accepted, based on the sample data.

The major contribution of the empirical findings of this study is discussed in the next section by advancing the significance of this work to the broader discipline of marketing and consumer behaviour.

6.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Regarding theory, the significance of this study lies in the application of communication theories and frameworks on message persuasion. In particular, the Heuristic systematic model (HSM) put forward by Chaiken (1980:754-756) and later adapted in the work by Metzger *et al.* (2010:413-439) was applied in this research. Henceforth, the results of this study are relevant in that they may advance the work by microblog administrators and marketing communication practitioners to improve design platforms that facilitate online credibility evaluations about a variety of products.

It is evident that consumers are exposed to large amount of information that is posted in online platforms by known and unknown consumers. This research adds to the body of knowledge by testing a research model that presents a cohort of heuristics that should be considered when attempting to evaluate the credibility of information that is posted online and further consider the adoption of an online platform. In this regard, the study validated source credibility, information quality, homophily and confirmed prior beliefs as the salient

determinants of microblog music review credibility. In addition, the microblog review credibility was established as a predictor of eWOM adoption. This model is simple to apply and could be used by microblog administrators and online marketing communication practitioners in the design of holistic platforms that foster credibility evaluations.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STUDY

In accordance with the literature review and the empirical findings derived from the microbloggers that participated in this study, the following recommendations are made for both microblog administrators and online marketing communication managers:

6.4.1 Utilise software technologies to empower message content and cues

The fact that information quality yielded the highest predictive power of all the heuristics that were tested in this research points to the salience of this factor. As a result, microblog administrators are encouraged to pay close attention to the use of in-built software and technologies that help to improve the quality of information being posted on microblogs. This could include the use of software that permits the authoring of music reviews using various multi-media formats and also in multiple dimensional graphics such as fourth-dimensional effects (4-D). Other software can also be incorporated to help improve the language accuracy of the music content. In addition, the music production companies should also provide direct links on their microblog pages that allow for free yet rigorous editorial processing and factual verification of content prior to its release by the online music review authors.

6.4.2 Consider promoting microblog content authors to enhance their credibility

Music organisations should make a concerted effort to promote the credibility of online music content authors who pay vested efforts in commenting and posting music reviews. This can be achieved by advertising the aggregated ratings of the music reviewers on multiple social media sites affiliated with the music organisations. In addition, publicising the total number of reviews written by the content author will improve perceived reviewer expertise. Moreover, the marketing communication managers of various music organisations can provide opportunities for online music reviewers to self-disclose certain identity-descriptive information on the record company's official microblog page and other related social media links. For example, the content authors should be provided an

opportunity and further encouraged to curate their online profiles with photographs, names and background information about the music shows and concerts patronised. Such self-disclosure will increase the credibility of the reviews. This will enhance transparency rather than the use of avatars or fictitious names. Again, such disclosure of the credibility of an online source of eWOM communication has been found to supplement or substitute product information when consumers make a purchase decision and also when evaluating the helpfulness of online reviews, thereby influencing eWOM credibility positively.

6.4.3 Create interest-based communities of microbloggers

True eWOM consists of consumers sharing experiences of product and services consumption with peers. Interestingly, in the music and entertainment world, the sharing of experiences transcends mere demographic similarity elements such as age, ethnicity and gender. Instead, individuals with similar genre-tastes and mind-sets tend to amalgamate to discuss and share related matters pertaining to music. Microblog administrators should encourage the formation of communities of interest as well as curated lists of microblog users so there can be information sharing and networking across the platform. Currently, Twitter™ boasts of several lists of microbloggers who share music interest. These lists include *@verified/music*, *@mashable/music* as well as the *@musicinafrica* microblog lists. Nonetheless, more can still be done to improve the affiliation and networking ability of the followers and members of such communities of interest. For example, the administrators from these microblog lists can adapt a strategy whereby the reviews of new content in certain genres of music can be downloadable for specific target groups effortlessly, such as reviews on the latest House and Hard Rock music hits aimed at generation Y consumers.

6.4.4 Introduce microblog data mining to understand the prior beliefs of microbloggers

The most useful music reviews are those that confirm to what consumers already think or know because they only trust information that already confirms the views similar to their own. Essentially, it should be anticipated what consumers are thinking, so it will be easy for them to accept the online music reviews as credible sources of eWOM communication. On a more practicable scale, microblog administrators should invest in microblog data mining software that can help predict the music chart preferences of consumers. Such a system that can help monitor microbloggers, track conversations (with permission) and potentially improve diffusion impact of music-related content.

6.4.5 Sponsor content authoring about music reviews to stimulate eWOM adoption

The volume of eWOM about a particular product or service represents the popularity of the product or service in question. Music marketers may encourage microbloggers to write more reviews online, possibly with the promise of non-financial incentives such as discount coupons for future purchase of music CDs, attendance of concerts and/or entering reviewers into prize draws. While incentivised eWOM may be perceived by some as only chasing economic gain, it is a useful conduit through which harmonised eWOM messages about music content may be disseminated along microblogs. Consequently, the authors of online music reviews can act as informal sales agents on behalf of the music organisations and/or the respective music artists. Furthermore, microblog administrators should make sure that their content is designed in a way that will capture and draw attention of microbloggers. There should be concerted attempts to deliver exceptional service and create the most memorable experience that will entice microbloggers to end up commenting about the service encounters on microblogs platforms and further draw attention of their peers.

6.5 STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research presented valuable insight into the determinants of review credibility and its influence on eWOM adoption of microblog music review content. Notwithstanding this, the study was predisposed to several limitations, which are expected to provide opportunities for further research exploration in the future. First, in terms of the scope, a major limitation of this study is that it focused on microbloggers who reside in the southern Gauteng region, only. A weakness in this geographic consideration is that the results may not present the perception of South African microbloggers with accuracy. For a comprehensive picture of the credibility phenomenon, it would be interesting to focus on the other regions and/or provinces inclusive of South Africa. Likewise, the results posited in this work will also require further empirical verification when applied across different product categories, customer cohorts, cultures as well as across the plethora of online platforms discussed in Section 2.9 of this dissertation.

Secondly, the study utilised a mono-quantitative method, implying that data were only collected using one method, which is statistically-oriented. The negative outcome of this methodological choice is dual in that the study lacks the accuracy of a longitudinal study that aims to measure perceptions of consumers over an extended period of time. The study

did not reap the rewards of applying a triangulation and/or mixed methods approach. Conducting various tests such as Harman's one factor test should be conducted in view of checking for common method bias in future work. Likewise, to assess the true level of causality among the variables, future research should consider utilising a marketing-based experimental methodology where participants are requested to evaluate product reviews posted by different sources on a fictitious or real review microblog platform.

Thirdly, the study utilised a snowball sampling method to elect participants of which the sampling procedure is not based on any probability estimation. This means that the results of the study may not present the full spectrum of microbloggers, whereas the empirical results of this work may only apply to participating respondents only. In other words, the results of the study are not necessarily true for the population at large. Furthermore, snowball sampling presents implications for sampling error that has the potential to contaminate the results. Therefore, future research should be conducted by considering probability-based sampling methods that permit statistical estimations of the mean and sample population parameters.

In terms of the theoretical limitation of this work, it should be noted that only the heuristics-approach was followed upon determining the primary factors influencing overall review credibility. The identified cohort of five credibility heuristics were hinged upon the credibility heuristics proposed by Metzger *et al.* (2010:415). As an outcome of the empirical investigation of this work, only four of the five heuristics were statistically significant (source credibility, information quality, homophily and prior beliefs confirmation), proving to have approximately 43 percent of the overall variance in microblog review credibility. This implies that the other 57 percent outstanding variance is explained by non-heuristic elements that follow the systematic processing route, which was not considered in this study. Consequently, future researchers should respond to the outcome of this research by considering the composite effect of the systematic processing and heuristic processing routes in order to deliver a balanced estimation of eWOM credibility perceptions of consumers. Further research can also proceed to study the moderation and interaction effects of culture, age, gender, personality and habit on the path between review consistency and review credibility.

6.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

A crucial dilemma for contemporary marketing communication managers is the anonymity, publicity and limited credibility of online platforms and the internet as a medium itself. This steered the course of this work whereas the digital arena is growing and the amount of information available in it grows, the level of credibility of various online platforms is becoming low. Notably, it was established in this study that the credibility assessment of eWOM communication content is influenced by an assortment of factors. Evidently, there is no one factor that will instantly make a review to be credible and completely perfect. Nonetheless, owing to the plurality of the determining factors, the credibility of eWOM communication can be relatively brittle, hence, it requires genuine management to protect its integrity such as the use of artificial intelligence.

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APPENDIX A: MAIN SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

DETERMINANTS OF MICROBLOG MUSIC REVIEW CREDIBILITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (eWOM) ADOPTION

Dear Sir/Madam

I am currently undertaking a research project for the MTech degree in Marketing. The purpose of my study is to determine the factors that influence electronic word of mouth adoption among consumers. Specifically, this questionnaire relates to the factors, which are considered peripheral cues, yet influencing the credibility judgements of consumers when they evaluate microblog music reviews. Of particular focus, the statements reflected on this questionnaire relate to online participants who are active in spreading electronic word of mouth (eWOM) through posting music reviews on selected microblogs.

It will be appreciated greatly, if you could assist by completing the attached questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 12 minutes to complete. Your input is very valuable. Your participation is voluntary and as such, you are free to withdraw from the study should you feel uncomfortable at any stage. Your responses will be treated in the strictest confidentiality and you will remain anonymous at all times. There are no wrong or right answers. The information gathered from this survey will be aggregated for research purposes only, in the form of an academic dissertation of which the reported results will be made available to you upon request.

Thank you for your time and effort in completing the questionnaire enclosed.

Yours faithfully

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SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please answer the following questions by selecting the appropriate box. Mark with 'X' to show your selection.

A1	**Gender:**	Male	Female

A2	**Age range:**	18 to 20 years	21 to 30 years	31 to 40 years	41 to 50 years	51 to 65 years

A3	**Ethnic group:**	Black African	Coloured	Asian	White

A4	**Marital status:**	Single/Never been married	Married	Separated	Divorced	Widowed
	Other (specify):					

A5	**Highest educational qualification:**		
	Grade 12 / Matric	Diploma	Degree
	Postgraduate	Other (specify):	

A6	**Monthly income (before tax):**				
	Less than R5 000	R5 000 – R10 000	R10 001 – R20 000	R20 001 – R30 000	Above R30 000

SECTION B: MICROBLOG USAGE INFORMATION

B1	**Have you posted a music review on any microblog in the past 6 months (between January 2018 and June 2018)?**	Yes	No

If you response to B1 is YES, then you can proceed to complete the rest of the questions in this questionnaire. If your answer is NO, then you are not eligible to take part in this study:

B2	**Which is your most preferred content on microblogs?**				
	Celebrity news	Entertainment	Politics	Sports	Other (Please specify)……

B3	**On average, how many times do you post reviews on your favourite microblog?**				
	Once a year (Annually)	At least twice a year (Bi-annually)	Three times a year (Quarterly)	Once a month (Monthly)	Once a week (Weekly)

B4	**Please specify the microblog that you have experience with using**	DailyBooth™	12Seconds™	Friendfeed™	Tumblr™	Twitter™

B5	**Please specify your most preferred microblog platform for posting music reviews**	DailyBooth™	12Seconds™	Friendfeed™	Tumblr™	Twitter™

SECTION C: FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CREDIBILITY OF MICROBLOG MUSIC REVIEWS

All the questions in this section relate to your response to B5, comprising your most preferred choice of the microblog where you have actually posted and reviewed music content. Please indicate in your opinion, the extent to which you agree with the following statements anchored along 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neither agree nor disagree), 4 (Agree) and 5 (Strongly agree). Mark only one number with a 'X' for each statement.								
C1	The music reviews posted on this microblog can be trusted	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C2*	The music reviews posted on this microblog are rated highly	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C3	The music reviews posted on this microblog are believable	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C4	The music reviews posted on this microblog are dependable	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C5	The music reviews posted on this microblog are reputable	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C6	The music reviews posted on this microblog present expert information	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C7	The music reviews posted on this microblog are sufficient for my needs	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C8	The music reviews posted on this microblog are in-depth	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C9	The music reviews posted on this microblog provide me with comprehensive information	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C10*	The music reviews posted on this microblog are useful	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C11	The music reviews posted on this microblog provide me with all the detailed information I need	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C12	The reviews posted on this microblog are informative for my music needs	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C13	Using this microblog to review online music fits well with my friends and colleagues	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C14	Using this microblog to review online music fits well with people who are in my age group	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C15	Using this microblog to review online music fits well with people who are of the same gender as myself	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C16	Using this microblog to review online music fits well with people who have the same interests as myself	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C17	Using this microblog to review online music fits well with people who are similar to me	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C18	The music reviews posted on this microblog are consistent with other media	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C19	The music reviews posted on this microblog are consistent with similar content on other digital platforms	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C20	The music reviews posted on this microblog do not contradict similar content on other social media platforms	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C21*	The reviews posted on this microblog support my overall impression about music	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C22	The music reviews posted on this microblog are consistent with my prior beliefs	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C23	The reviews posted on this microblog confirm the beliefs that I already have about music	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
C24*	The reviews posted on this microblog resonate with my previous expectations about music	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree

C25*	The reviews posted on this microblog reinforce the information I previously knew about music	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree

SECTION D: OVERALL CREDIBIITY OF MICROBLOG MUSIC REVIEWS

This section describes your overall evaluations regarding the credibility of music reviews that are posted on your favourite microblog, mentioned in question B5. Please indicate in your opinion, the extent to which you agree with the following statements anchored along 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neither agree nor disagree), 4 (Agree) and 5 (Strongly agree). Mark only one number with a 'X' for each statement.								
D1	The music reviews posted on this microblog originate from credible sources	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
D2	The music reviews posted on this microblog come from trustworthy individuals	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
D3	The music reviews posted on this microblog present accurate information	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
D4	The music reviews posted on this microblog are reliable	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
D5	The music reviews posted on this microblog are dependable	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
D6	Overall, I think the music reviews posted on this microblog are credible	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree

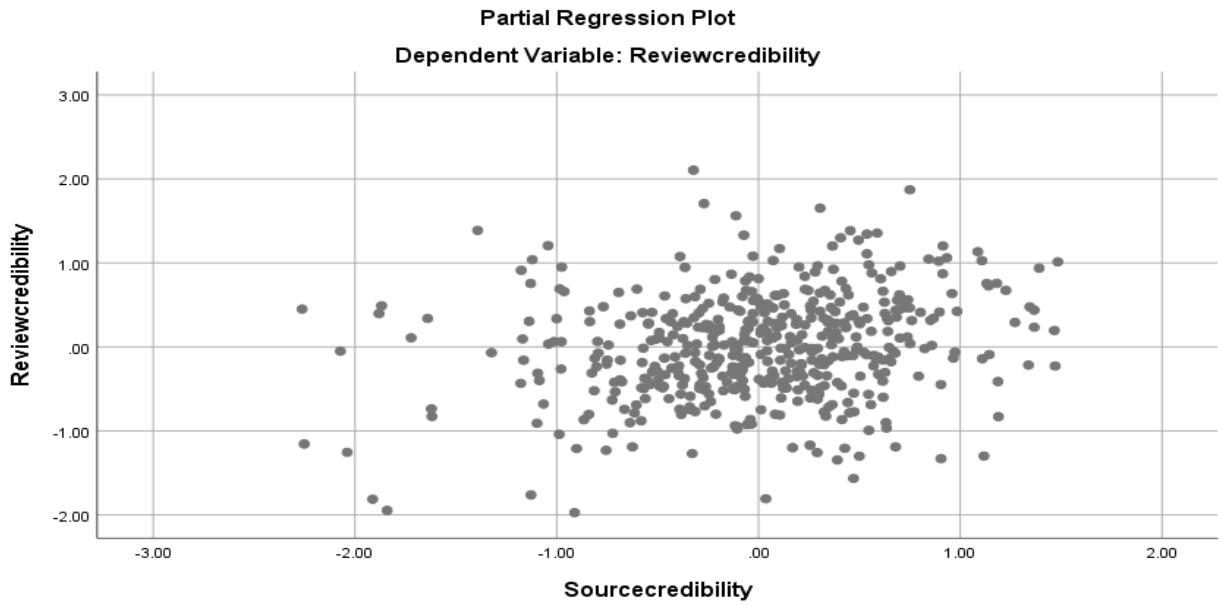
SECTION E: ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (eWOM) ADOPTION

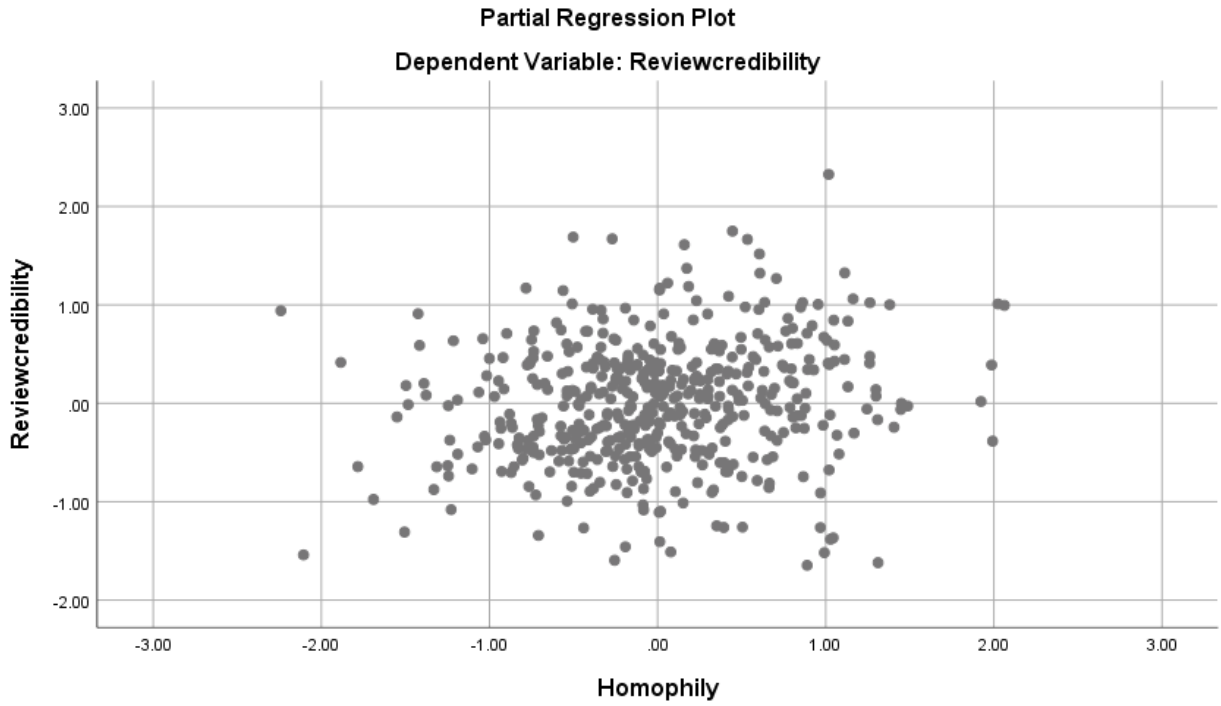
The following statements refer to the extent to which you are likely to spread electronic word of mouth by posting music reviews on your favourite microblog in the future. Please indicate in your opinion, the extent to which you agree with the following statements anchored along 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neither agree nor disagree), 4 (Agree) and 5 (Strongly agree). Mark only one number with a 'X' for each statement.								
E1	The reviews on this microblog motivate me to post music content on this microblog	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
E2	Posting music reviews on this microblog contributes to my knowledge about the latest music trends	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
E3	Posting music reviews on this microblog has made it easier for me to evaluate music content	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
E4	In future, I intend to post music reviews on this microblog	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
E5	Overall, I will continue to actively post music reviews on this microblog	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree

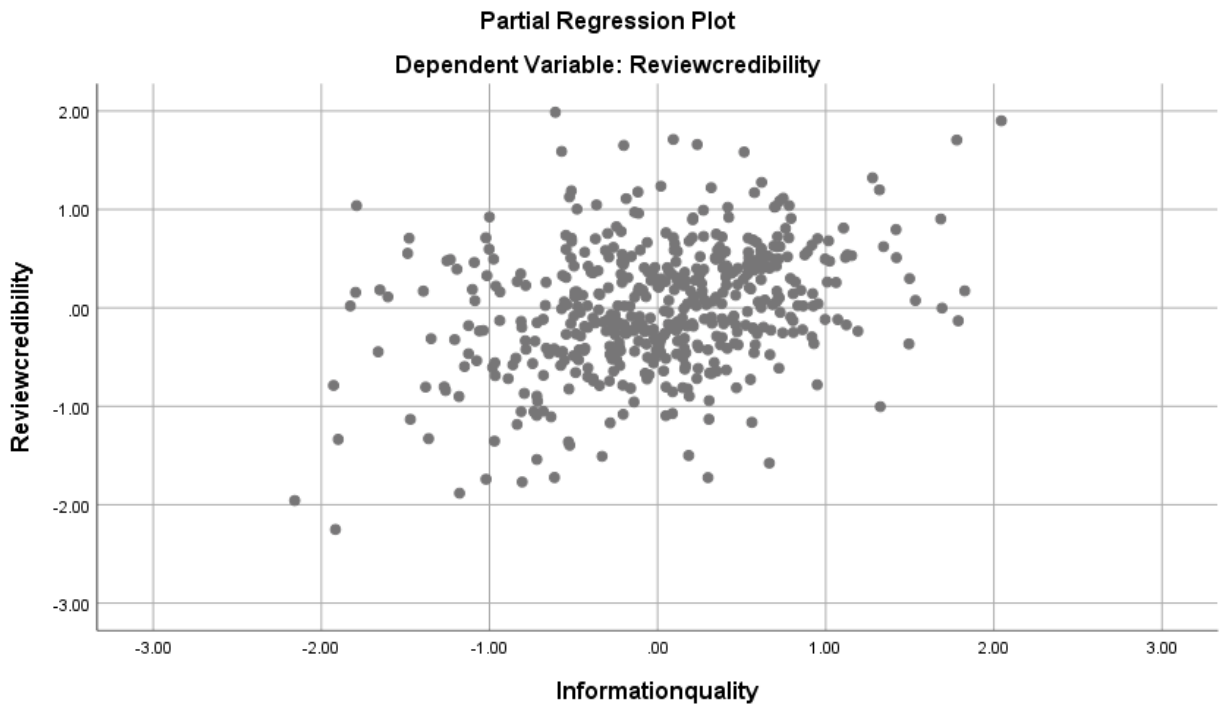
Thank you for time and your cooperation. Your views are appreciated.

NB: *Measurement items C2, C10, C21, 24 and C25 were deleted during the EFA analysis

APPENDIX B: PARTIAL REGRESSION PLOTS (FIRST REGRESSION MODEL)



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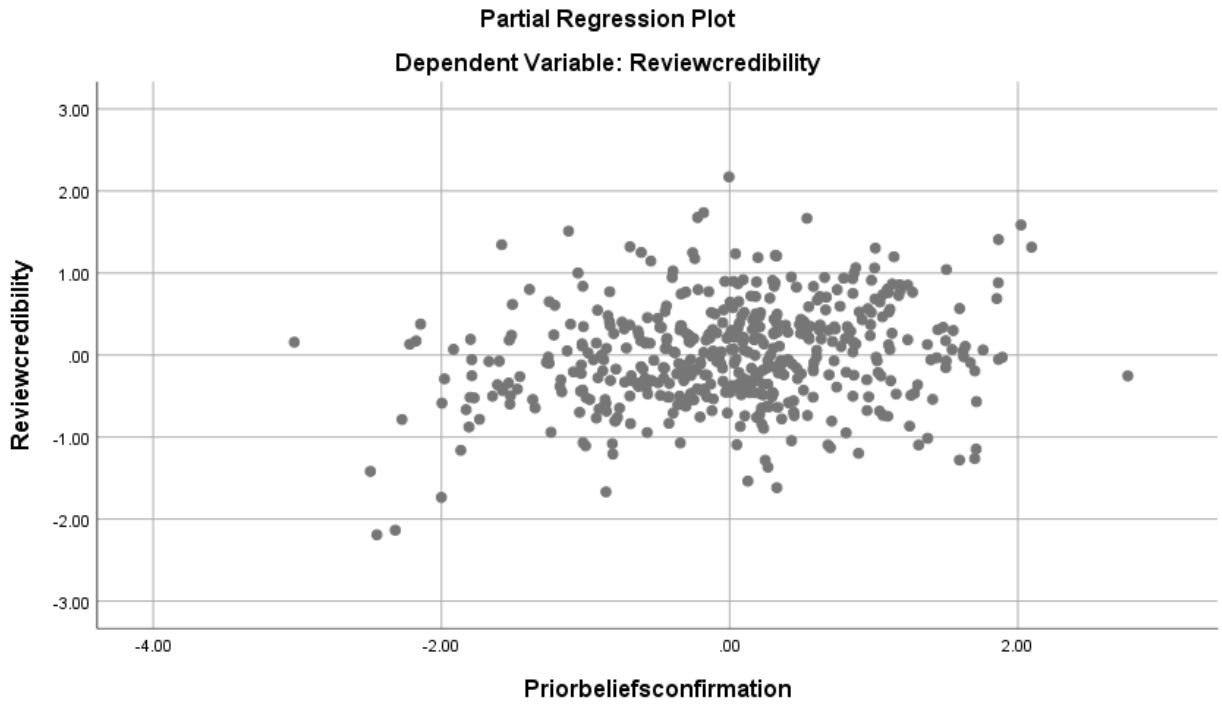
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Dependent Variable: Reviewcredibility
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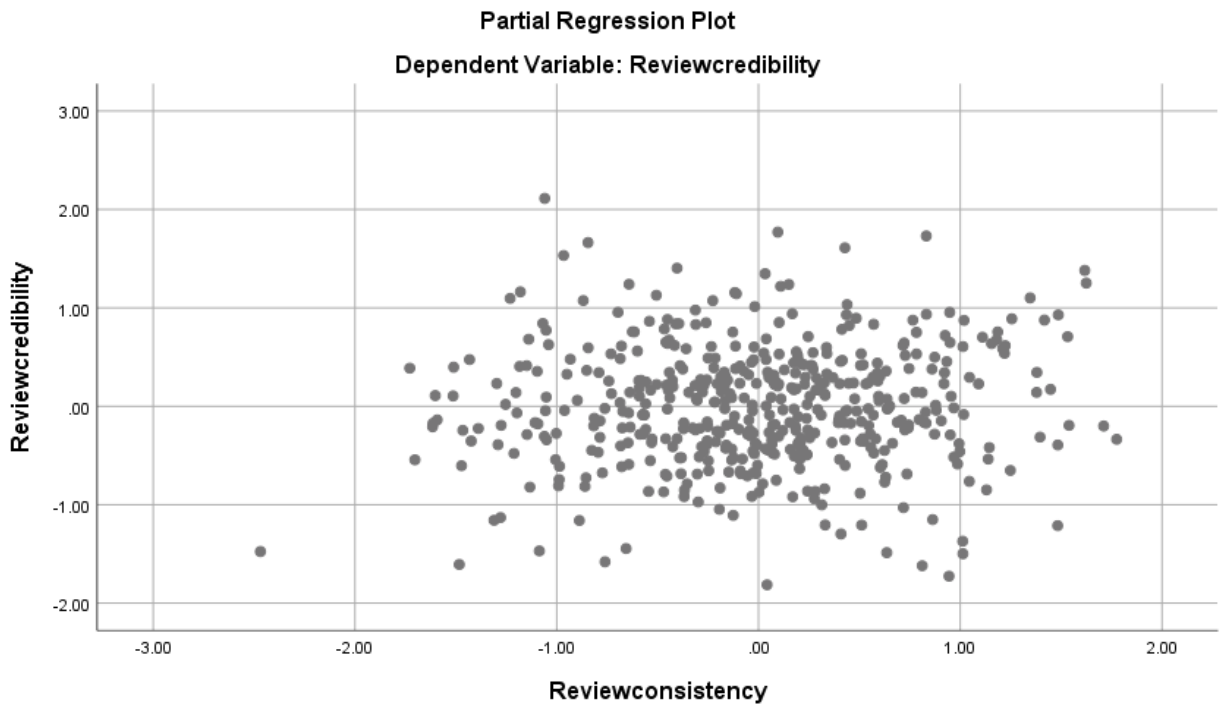
Priorbeliefsconfirmation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Dependent Variable: Reviewcredibility
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Reviewconsistency