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**THE IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH IN SOCIAL NETWORKING
SITES ON A HIGH-INVOLVEMENT PURCHASE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF
SOUTH AFRICAN BRIDES' INTENTION TO PURCHASE THE "ONCE-IN-A-
LIFETIME" WEDDING DRESS**

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23 May 2016

Dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

South Africa is home to a burgeoning wedding industry valued at ZAR27.2 billion. Much of the profit generated in this industry is from the sales of wedding dresses, with 57.1% of South African brides having purchased a new wedding dress from a bridal boutique in 2013. Previous research has looked at the effect of social media, in the form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), on purchase intention. However, few studies have analysed this effect for high-risk, “once-in-a-lifetime” products such as wedding dresses.

In South Africa alone, social media users increased by 20% in 2014, with 29% of the population using social media applications. However, it is uncertain whether this widespread adoption of social media influences the purchase of high-risk, “once-in-a-lifetime” products like wedding dresses. The “eWOM in SNS’s model” is applied to this context, where the influence of eWOM, trust and value co-creation, on the purchase intention of a wedding dress, is compared using an experimental design.

One hundred and fifty-two (n=152) engaged South African females, between the age of 18 and 29 years, partook in an experiment. The experiment involved a control group and an experimental group, who viewed eWOM on the Facebook fan page of a wedding dress vendor. The study showed that while the “eWOM in SNS’s model” was both valid and reliable in this context, the influence of eWOM on purchase intention was much diminished and fully mediated through value co-creation.

The managerial implications of this study’s findings, aimed at wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, were all geared towards stimulating value co-creation, given its effect on the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention. The implications involved maximising visual content, appropriately responding to negative comments, publishing posts at suitable times and frequencies, observing the available Facebook reports and posting customer testimonials.

Keywords: electronic word-of-mouth, value co-creation, purchase intention, social media, social networking sites, wedding dresses, South Africa, Facebook

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVC	–	Attribute of Value Co-creation
AVE	–	Average Variance Extracted
CBSEM	–	Covariance-based Structural Equation Modelling
CMO	–	Chief Marketing Officer
ELM	–	Elaboration Likelihood Model
eWOM	–	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
GD	–	Goods-Dominant
IE	–	Intentions-as-Expectations
IP	–	Intentions-as-Plans
IW	–	Intentions-as-Wants
OLS	–	Ordinary Least Squares
PLS	–	Partial Least Squares
PLS-SEM	–	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling
Q&A	–	Question-and-Answer
QR	–	Quick Response
SD	–	Service-Dominant
SEM	–	Structural Equation Modelling
SNS	–	Social Networking Site
TRA	–	Theory of Reasoned Action
TPB	–	Theory of Planned Behaviour
UK	–	United Kingdom
USA	–	United States of America
WOM	–	Word-of-Mouth
ZAR	–	Zuidafrikaanse Rand

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The fast-paced growth of the internet, along with the onset of social media, has allowed word of mouth to go online: This brought about the phenomenon of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which is online consumer commentary regarding firms or products (Henning-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler 2004; Park & Lee, 2009; Verhoef, Reinartz, & Krafft, 2010). eWOM holds advantages over word of mouth (WOM), which refers to verbalised and casual, yet advisory consumer statements (Arndt, 1967 in Xiaobo, 2014; East, Hammond & Lomax, 2008). This is because eWOM allows for information to be diffused to a considerably larger audience, faster, and with fewer efforts than is possible when employing WOM (Chatterjee, 2001; Duana, Bin, & Whinston 2008; Gottsch, 2001; Podnar & Javernik, 2012; Shankar, Smith & Rangaswamy, 2003).

eWOM has been found to be a key contributing factor to purchase intention. This involved forming and/or testing models that reflect this relationship, and exploring the influence of eWOM on other factors that affect purchase intention (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Lee, Wu, Lin & Lee, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2009). Purchase intention has for decades remained a significant notion in marketing, and has in many instances been used for marketing management decision-making and sales forecasting (Armstrong, Morwitz & Kumar, 2000; Morrison, 1979; Morwitz, 1997; Morwitz, Steckel & Gupta, 2007; Sun & Morwitz, 2010). This is since it has frequently been found to be a competent predictor of purchase behaviour (Armstrong *et al.*, 2000; Bemmar, 1995; Chandon, Morwitz & Reinartz, 2005; Morwitz & Schmittlein, 1992; Newberry, Kleinz & Boshoff, 2003). The link between purchase intention and purchase behaviour is stronger than what it otherwise would have been, in the event that the outcomes of buying are substantial, and the consumer has spent a considerable amount of time contemplating the purchase. This is likely to be true when the purchase in question is that of a high-involvement product (Morwitz *et al.*, 2007).

Previous research however, rarely investigates the impact of eWOM on the intention to purchase high-involvement, high-risk, “once-in-a-lifetime” products such as wedding dresses. A wedding dress may be considered a high-involvement product, since it is an expensive item of deep personal significance, which conjures intense emotions and has significant risks attached to it. Furthermore, purchasing a wedding dress often entails a substantial degree of problem solving and informational processing (Arend, 2003; Boden, 2001; Buckley, 2010; Choy & Loker, 2004; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993; Otnes, Lowrey & Shrum, 1997; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2008). Wedding dress ideas are regularly collected via social media channels, which have become extensively used for wedding planning activities (Barker, 2012; Beitler, 2013; Erin, 2015; Gormly, 2013; Laudon, 2014; mashable.com, 2012 in Roberts,

2012; Ries, 2012; Smith, 2012; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Velasco, 2013). Moreover, wedding dresses are a popular topic of eWOM conversations among brides on social media, especially the social networking site (SNS), Facebook (Beitler, 2013; Clay, 2012; Laudon, 2014; Nizam, 2012; Silverman, 2015; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weers, 2015).

South African brides have joined in the conversation too (Danny Roberts, 2015; Marinette Strydom, 2015). South Africa's internet users and social media accounts have increased to 24.9 million and 11.8 million respectively, conceivably creating potential for eWOM generation (Internet Live Stats, 2015; We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015). In addition to South Africa's growing digital activity, is its thriving wedding industry. Using an exchange rate of ZAR8.3773 to \$1, applied throughout this dissertation, it can be deduced that South Africa's wedding industry is valued at ZAR27.2 billion (\$3.25 billion) (exchangerates.org.uk, 2016; Nick, 2012; Liene Stevens, 2011a). The ZAR1.8 billion joint cost of weddings in the Western Cape each summer, evidences the economic benefit that the industry has to offer the country (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014). Furthermore, having 57.1% of the country's brides, purchasing a brand new wedding dress from a bridal boutique in 2013, suggests that much of the revenue that is produced in the industry hails from the sale of wedding dresses (Hitched Wedding Industry Facts and Economics (WIFE), 2013a, 2013b).

Although South Africa has a substantial wedding industry and an increasing proportion of citizens embracing digital media, the effect of eWOM on the South African wedding industry is under-researched, and deserves further attention (Liene Stevens, 2011; We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015). Paired with the lack of research on the impact of eWOM, on the intention to purchase high-involvement, "once-in-a-lifetime" products, it would be beneficial to particularly focus on the purchase of wedding dresses. The model compiled by See-To and Ho (2014), hereinafter referred to as "the eWOM in SNS's model", lends itself well to better understand the stated problem. The model acknowledges a possible indirect influence of eWOM on purchase intention, via both trust and value co-creation, in an SNS environment. However, the model is purportedly untested. Hence, the following research question is developed:

Does the eWOM in SNS's model hold, for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females?

Should the eWOM in SNS's model hold, for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, a second research question would be applicable:

Which construct, in the eWOM in SNS's model, has the greatest influence on engaged, young adult, South African females intention, to purchase high-risk, high-involvement products, such as wedding dresses?

This study contributes to marketing literature by aiming to fill two voids in existing research. The first pertains to the impact of eWOM, on the purchase of high-involvement, “once-in-a-lifetime” products, such as wedding dresses. The second is with regards to the effect of eWOM in the South African wedding industry. This study will undertake to address these research lacks by examining the effect of eWOM in SNS's, on South African bride's intention to purchase wedding dresses. Moreover, this study offers wedding dress vendors insights, on the manner in which eWOM influences their customers' intentions to purchase their products, so that they may tailor their digital marketing strategies accordingly.

This chapter serves as a basis for the upcoming contents of this dissertation and proceeds by offering background information on this study's main themes. Thereafter, the research questions, along with their corresponding objectives, are stated. Subsequently, key features of the methodology are discoursed. Next, the contribution of this study towards marketing literature and industry is highlighted. This chapter closes by providing a layout of the remainder of this dissertation.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Herein, the underlying theory of this study is discussed. To begin with, the materialisation and advantages of eWOM are explained, before outlining former research on eWOM. Thereafter, the wedding dress as a high-involvement product is elucidated. Following this, the South African wedding industry and social media in the wedding industry are discoursed. Finally, an overview of the eWOM in SNS's model is provided.

1.2.1 The Rise of eWOM

In a constantly accelerating world, individuals are beginning to acknowledge that greater speed in their actions will propel their success or quicken the onset of their failure. Shoppers and consumers will persist in their lust for speed without pardon for laggardness. Technology plays the vital part of a catalyst or enabler in satisfying the consumer demand for speed, with the internet serving as a hub of infinite opportunities to fulfill consumer needs 24 hours a day (Blackburn, 2012). The internet has undergone rapid progression such that the number of users is in excess of 900 million globally, with information traffic doubling every 12 to 18 months (Fallows, 2005 in Prendergast, Ko & Yuen, 2010; Peterson & Merino, 2003 in Prendergast *et al.*, 2010; Floh, Koller & Zauner, 2013; Kaynar & Amichai-Hamburger, 2008 in Lee, 2009; Riegner, 2007; Sandes & Urdan, 2013; Tsen, Kuo & Chen, n.d). Therefore, it can be said that the “traditional spears used by... ancestors have been replaced by

electronic spears designed to enhance... lives. They are still a weapon of choice in a trajectory of evolution touching almost every aspect of (individuals') lives," (Blackburn, 2012).

The internet impacts individuals' lives since it empowers its users to engage, and largely promotes customer interconnectivity (Shankar *et al.*, 2003). This suggests that the prime function of the internet is to serve as a mechanism for interpersonal communication (Riegner, 2007). Modern technology has permitted individuals to communicate, and advances in electronic communications technology, has resulted in a substantial increase in the amount and kinds of informal communications channels (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2014; Vazquez-Casielles, Suarez-Alvarez & Rio-Lanza, 2013). One such channel is social media, which Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content," (See-To & Ho, 2014). Social media has encountered an upswing in popularity and transformed the approach through which internet users correspond with one another (Goh *et al.*, 2013; Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Kumar, Aksoy, Donkes, Venkatesan, Wiesel, & Tillmanns, 2010 in Meuter, McCabe & Curran, 2013; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009 in Meuter *et al.*, 2013; Mikalef, Giannakos & Pateli, 2012). It assists consumers with building up their network of connections and maintaining contact with existing connections (Mikalef *et al.*, 2012).

The advent of social media, together with the aforementioned growth of the internet, has given rise to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), defined by Henning-Thurau *et al.* (2004) as "any positive or negative statement 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," (Henning-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Park & Lee, 2009; Shankar *et al.*, 2003; Verhoef *et al.*, 2010). eWOM has been described as an evolution or mediated form of word-of-mouth (WOM) (Xiaobo, 2014). WOM can be explained as an "oral form of interpersonal, non-commercial communication", that is "passed between consumers", and which is comprised of "informal advice", (Arndt, 1967 in Xiaobo, 2014; East *et al.*, 2008). Given that eWOM is linked to WOM by being a "mediated" form of WOM, it is suggested that the advantages of WOM are likewise relevant to eWOM (Arndt, 1967 in Xiaobo, 2014).

1.2.2 Advantages of eWOM

It has often been claimed that WOM is an incredibly "influential" form of communication, while firm-generated communications are experiencing a loss of efficiency (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Keller, 2007 in Vazquez-Casielles *et al.*, 2013; Nail, 2005 in Prendergast *et al.*, 2010; Podnar & Javernik, 2012). This is because WOM is controlled by consumers and is therefore perceived as more believable or authentic than firm-generated communications (Arndt, 1967 in Prendergast *et al.*,

2010). Furthermore, the escalation in the amount of media, advertisers and advertising space has caused an expansion in the quantity of information exposed to consumers, such that consumers are unable to process everything (Elliott & Surgi Speck, 1998 in Podnar & Javernik, 2012; Jančič, 2001 in Podnar & Javernik, 2012; Yeshin, 2003 in Podnar & Javernik, 2012). Consumers have therefore resorted to techniques by which to cope with the influx of information and have become more discerning, resulting in majority of the information delivered by firms being ignored (Yeshin, 2003 in Podnar & Javernik, 2012). This explains the loss of efficiency of promotional methods such as advertising, which is not applicable to WOM (Smith, 2004 in Podnar & Javernik, 2012).

Despite the credibility of WOM, when contrasting WOM with eWOM, it is evident that eWOM possesses benefits that cannot be acquired through participating in WOM. Previous researchers have stated that because individuals are not nearby when communicating through eWOM, eWOM does not allow for the use of “social context cues” that can be used when communicating through WOM, resulting in the development of impressions based purely on “the linguistic content of written messages,” (Knapp & Daly, 2002 in Prendergast *et al.*, 2010; Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007 in Prendergast *et al.*, 2010). However, the restricted cues cause those engaging in eWOM to be less reserved, worried and self-conscious than they would be had they been engaging in WOM (Sun, Youn, Wu & Kuntaraporn, 2006 in Meuter *et al.*, 2013). It also allows for eWOM partakers to appear to be more eager to reveal personal information, and to be more truthful and forthcoming when communicating their opinions (Roed, 2003 in Meuter *et al.*, 2013).

Nevertheless, the key assets of eWOM are that it allows for information to be transmitted to a significantly larger audience, faster, and with less effort than is possible when utilising WOM (Chatterjee, 2001; Duana *et al.*, 2008; Gottsch, 2001; Podnar & Javernik, 2012; Shankar *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, some researchers have deemed eWOM to be more efficient or powerful than WOM (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Prendergast *et al.*, 2010). This demonstrates the necessity of marketing practitioners and researchers devoting attention to eWOM, and in particular, its effect on purchase intention.

1.2.3 Prior Research on the Relationship Between eWOM and Purchase Intention

Numerous researchers have concentrated on eWOM, and found that eWOM affects consumer behaviour, or behavioural intention (Chiang & Hsieh, 2011; East *et al.*, 2008; Flanagin, Metzger, Pure, Markov & Hartsell, 2014; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2009; Lee, Park & Han, 2011; Meuter *et al.*, 2013; Park & Lee, 2008; Podnar & Javernik, 2012; Prendergast *et al.*, 2010; Sandes & Urdan, 2013). In online retail and digital marketing research, authors have looked at the influence of eWOM on purchase intention (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2014;

Lee & Lee, 2009). Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) established a model that serves as a foundation for the expected impact of eWOM on brand image and purchase intention mentioned in previous literature. Furthermore, Lee *et al.* (2014) concluded that eWOM and product knowledge largely affects purchase intention, such that a greater amount of eWOM commentary and vaster product knowledge, results in higher purchase intention. Moreover, Lee and Lee (2009) found that eWOM in the form of customer ratings, affects the influence of product quality and product preference, on purchase intention, for different types of goods.

Although the aforementioned models outline the impact of eWOM on purchase intention, the product types taken into account are seldom high-involvement and “once-in-a-lifetime” products, such as a wedding dress (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2009). Furthermore, taking into account Morwitz *et al.*'s (2007) explanation of a novel product, a wedding dress would not be classified as a product of this type since wedding dresses typically do not have tangible features that no other current competitor has. A wedding dress would therefore be classified as extant. Moreover, considering Kotler and Keller's (2006:324) elucidation of a sturdy product, a wedding dress would be considered as a product of this kind, as it is palpable and could last through numerous usages (Morwitz *et al.*, 2007). Morwitz *et al.* (2007) found that the connection between purchase intention and purchase behaviour is more robust for extant and sturdy products, described as high-involvement products, than for novel and non-sturdy products. This insinuates that the connection between purchase intention and purchase behaviour, for high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, is too robust, yet remains scarcely tested. Consequently, this study investigates the influence of eWOM on the intention to purchase wedding dresses. The next section explains the significance of this purchase to consumers.

1.2.4 The Wedding Dress as a High-Involvement Product

A high involvement product is very meaningful to the consumer, necessitates more problem solving and informational processing, holds a large degree of perceived risk, has a high price, and cultivates much emotional involvement (Kumar, 2009:454; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:229). A wedding dress may be considered a high-involvement product since as shown hereunder; each of the aforesaid traits of high-involvement products is applicable to wedding dresses.

Firstly, it is regarded as an established symbol of nuptial identity associated with an “once-in-a-lifetime” right of passage, which most brides have romanticised about since they were little girls (Boden, 2001; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993; Otnes & Pleck, 2003 in Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2008). This indicates that a wedding dress is of deep personal significance and fosters emotional involvement in brides. Moreover, brides need to evaluate various possible wedding dresses and manage their time such that the purchase decision is made in time for the wedding (Arend,

2003; Buckley, 2010; Choy & Loker, 2004; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993; Otnes *et al.*, 1997; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2008). This signifies that purchasing a wedding dress entails problem solving. Furthermore, making the wedding dress purchase decision involves a consideration of the opinions of other individuals, and several other factors restricting the decision (Arend, 2003; Buckley, 2010; Otnes *et al.*, 1997; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2008). This points out that purchasing a wedding dress involves processing a considerable amount of information.

Considering perceived risk, the fact that the bride's self-esteem may suffer should the wedding dress be deficient, demonstrates the psychological risk associated with wedding dresses. This is due to a link between the dress and her identity (Boden, 2001; Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993). Facing possible rejection by the bridal community should the bride go against the norm when selecting her wedding dress, emphasises the social risk linked to wedding dresses (Arend, 2003; Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972; Kofi-Nicklin, 2015; Rettig, 2009). Additional noteworthy factors when assessing perceived risk are the high time costs, and the even more influential, high monetary costs, which highlight the time and financial risks associated with wedding dresses (Arend, 2003; Choy & Loker, 2004; Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972; Otnes *et al.*, 1997; Thomas & Peters, 2011; Weiss, 2008). It is suggested that in South Africa, a substantial proportion of the revenue generated in the country's promising wedding industry is due to wedding dress sales (Hitched WIFE, 2013a, 2013b). This industry is henceforward elaborated on.

1.2.5 The South African Wedding Industry

The South African wedding industry is valued at ZAR27.2 billion (\$3.25 billion) and has encountered a boom in recent years (Liene Stevens, 2011; Nick, 2012; southafrica.net, 2015; Wedding Diary, 2009). South Africa has been renowned as a popular wedding destination for international visitors due to lower costs, and the country's sunny weather, picturesque environment and gifted local suppliers (destinationweddings.com, 2014; Pam Black Weddings n.d in Finweek, 2014; southafrica.net, 2015; Wedding Diary, 2009). The average cost of a wedding in South Africa is ZAR128 045, although it was pointed out that foreign couples expend more on their weddings than local South African couples (Hitched WIFE, 2013a, 2013b; Wedding Diary, 2009). Given the large number of wedding venues in the Western Cape, 2000 weddings of international couples may be hosted in the Western Cape every summer. The collective cost of these weddings is ZAR1.8 billion (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014). This provides proof of the substantial economic benefit that the country's wedding industry may offer.

Focusing on the economic benefit derived from wedding dresses, it is clear that this benefit is rather substantial. It has been implied that in 2008, each of 203 257 South African brides spent around ZAR25 000 on her wedding dress (Pressly, Solgado,

Cokayne & de Vries, 2010). In addition to this, it was unveiled that in 2013, 57.1% of South African brides purchased a “brand new” wedding dress from a bridal boutique (Hitched WIFE, 2013a, 2013b). It has been shown that brides draw inspiration to make wedding dress, and other wedding-related purchase decisions, from online channels such as social media (Barker, 2012; Gormly, 2013; Laudon, 2014; Ries, 2012; Silverman, 2015; Smith, 2012; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weers, 2015; Velasco, 2013).

1.2.6 Social Media in the Wedding Industry

Weddings have become digitalised and the use of social media among modern brides for wedding planning purposes, widespread (Beitler, 2013; Erin, 2015; Laudon, 2014; mashable.com, 2012 in Roberts, 2012; theknot.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012; mashable.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012). Brides partake in eWOM on a variety of social media platforms, regarding the wedding dress, which is a seemingly popular subject matter in conversation (Beitler, 2013; Clay, 2012; Laudon, 2014; Nizam, 2012; Silverman, 2015; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weers, 2015). These platforms include SNS's such as Skype, Instagram and Pinterest (Barker, 2012; Beitler, 2013; Erin, 2015; Laudon, 2014; mashable.com, 2012 in Roberts, 2012; Smith, 2012; Velasco, 2013). However, it has been said that brides use Facebook and Twitter “to share everything about their big day” (Smith, 2012). Facebook in particular is used by many brides to relay their opinions on wedding dress vendors (Business Lounge, 2012; Clay, 2012; Love Bridal, 2012; Made With Love, 2014; Nizam, 2012; Olivia Rose Bridal, n.d; Zazou's Bridal Boutique, n.d).

Facebook is at present the world's most prevalent SNS. SNS's are a type of social media defined by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) as “networks that provide users with ‘space’ for virtual webpages where users can create a profile, establish a network of social contacts, and create new social connections,” (Mull & Lee, 2014; See-To & Ho, 2014). Facebook has been dubbed a tabloid that is used to remain abreast with the events in social contacts' lives (Chih, Hsu, Wang & Lin, 2014; Leung, 2012; Svensson, 2011). Facebook users could in addition use the SNS to make decisions such as purchase decisions. The trust that a Facebook user has in the SNS, represents their belief that Facebook's security features will safeguard them from potential misfortunes, and allows them to be comfortable with using the SNS to make purchase decisions (See-To & Ho, 2014).

Approximately 50% of Facebook users also use the SNS to engage with brands on Facebook fan pages, where these include wedding brands (Chih *et al.*, 2014; Clay, 2012; Close, 2012; Facebook, 2015a; Nizam, 2012; Padovani, 2015; Priode, 2012; Rocco, 2012; Smith, 2012; Yankee, 2009). With respect to brides, 77% of brides have joined the Facebook fan pages of wedding brands while 47% use Facebook to retain contact with wedding vendors (theknot.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012; mashable.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012). South African brides have likewise adopted

this trend (Danny Roberts, 2015; Marinette Strydom, 2015). This is likely due to the rise in internet users and social media accounts in the country, resulting in 24.9 million and 11.8 million internet users and social media accounts respectively (Internet Live Stats, 2015; We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015). This upsurge in digital activity could have created potential for eWOM production amongst South African brides, as they have been noted to engage in eWOM on wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages (Danny Roberts, 2015; Marinette Strydom, 2015; We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015).

Using a wedding dress vendor as an example of a wedding brand, the trust that a bride has in the vendor with a Facebook fan page, signals the confidence that she has, that the vendor is kind, upright and of an adequate skills level. She will co-create value with the wedding dress vendor when she uses the vendor's Facebook fan page, by for example, creating eWOM (See-To & Ho, 2014). The eWOM generated by brides on vendors' fan pages is often positive and involves the expression of joy and gratitude for the wedding dresses provided to them (Business Lounge, 2012; Love Bridal, 2012; Olivia Rose Bridal, n.d; Zazou's Bridal Boutique, n.d). However, the eWOM occasionally indicates dissatisfaction and disappointment (Clay, 2012; Nizam, 2012). In both types of scenarios, the eWOM was shown to be highly impactful (Business Lounge, 2012; Clay, 2012; Love Bridal, 2012; Nizam, 2012; Olivia Rose Bridal, n.d; Zazou's Bridal Boutique, n.d).

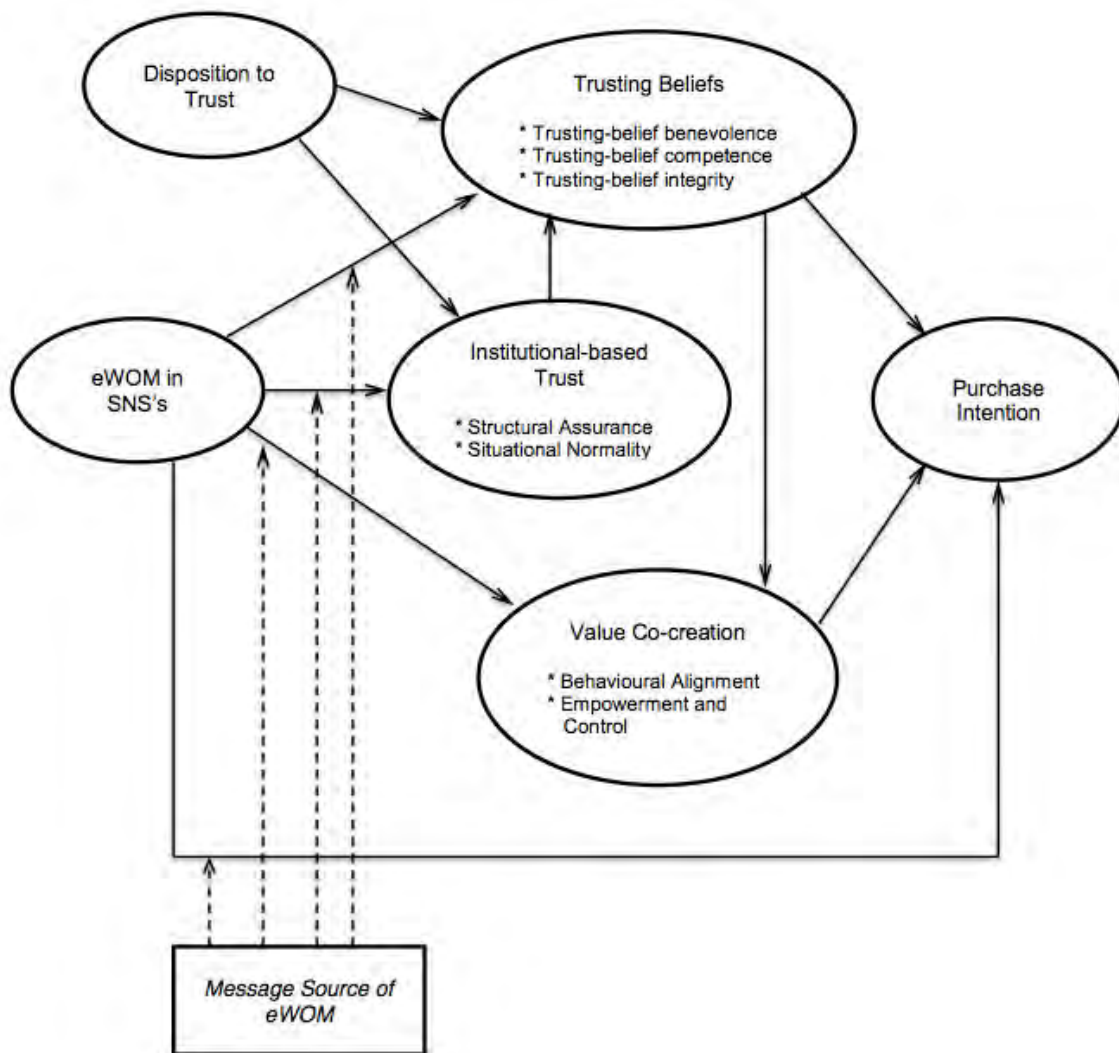
This shows that the concepts of trust and value co-creation are of significance in an SNS setting, and play a part in the relationship between the bride and the wedding dress vendor with an SNS fan page, such as a Facebook page (See-To & Ho, 2014). As highlighted before, eWOM models in earlier studies account for the influence of eWOM on purchase intention, although not the potential indirect influence through both trust and value co-creation, in the context of SNS's (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2009). Studies that acknowledge such an influence for high-involvement, "once-in-a-lifetime" products like wedding dresses, in the South African wedding industry, have not been conducted. This, in spite of South Africa's enhanced digital activity, and its prosperous wedding industry.

The above facts demonstrate that there is firstly, a shortage of research on the effect of eWOM, particularly in SNS's, on the intention to purchase high-involvement products such as wedding dresses. Secondly, it illustrates the dearth of research on the South African wedding industry, more specifically, the influence of eWOM on this industry. Therefore, this study endeavours to address these research shortfalls by investigating the impact of eWOM in SNS's, on South African bride's intention to purchase wedding dresses. In order to do so, See-To and Ho's (2014) eWOM in SNS's model, which highlights the concepts of eWOM, purchase intention, trust and value co-creation, is utilised.

1.2.7 An Overview of the eWOM in SNS's Model

The eWOM in SNS's model, shown below, acknowledges the influence of eWOM on purchase intention, through both trust and value co-creation, within an SNS environment. The model occupies the void in extant literature regarding firstly, the effect of eWOM on purchase intention in an SNS environment, and secondly, value co-creation from the perspective of the consumer (See-To & Ho, 2014).

Figure 1: The eWOM in SNS's Model



Key: Direct Effect \longrightarrow
 Moderating Effect \dashrightarrow

SOURCE: See-To & Ho (2014)

See-To and Ho (2014) began building the model by incorporating a facet of trust, *disposition to trust*, which may be defined as the trust that one individual would have in another, in any ordinary scenario. This serves as an antecedent to two more facets of trust integrated in the model, namely institutional-based trust and trusting beliefs. *Institutional-based trust*, in the context of the study, refers to the trust of an individual in SNS's overall. *Trusting beliefs* on the other hand, denotes an individual's opinions that the firm will carry out what will be in one's best interest, and consist of beliefs concerning kindness, capability and honesty (See-To & Ho, 2014). The initial suggestions were that eWOM directly affects institutional-based trust, trusting beliefs and purchase intention. It was further suggested that positive eWOM would bolster the institutional-based trust, trusting belief or purchase intention, while negative eWOM will cause it to subside. It was thereafter proposed that the degree of trusting beliefs has a positive effect on purchase intention (See-To & Ho, 2014).

See-To and Ho (2014) proceeded by shifting the focus to *value co-creation*, the procedure whereby the "consumer and the firm are intimately involved in jointly creating value that is unique to the individual consumer and sustainable to the firm." They stated an expectation of eWOM having a direct influence on value co-creation. An additional expectation was that positive eWOM promotes the procedure of value co-creation whereas negative eWOM deters it. Next, it was supposed that the degree of trusting beliefs positively influences the value co-creation procedure (See-To & Ho, 2014). See-To and Ho's (2014) second last estimation was that the value co-creation procedure has a positive effect on purchase intention. The anticipation that the message source of eWOM, moderates the effect of eWOM on consumer trust, value co-creation and purchase intention, concludes the model (See-To & Ho, 2014).

The eWOM in SNS's model is supposedly untested. However, it is appropriate for resolving the aforementioned research shortfalls, given its recognition of the influence of eWOM on purchase intention, through both trust and value co-creation, within an SNS environment. Therefore, the model has allowed for the research questions and corresponding research objectives, presented hereafter, to be formed.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The background information above, pointed out that former research identified a relationship between eWOM and purchase intention. This relationship was however, seldom studied with respect to the purchase of high-involvement, "once-in-a-lifetime" products such as wedding dresses, in the context of SNS's. Furthermore, the effect of eWOM on South Africa's wedding industry remains under-researched even though the industry was shown to be highly successful, and the adoption of digital media, on the rise. In order to tackle these research deficits, this study will strive to test the eWOM in SNS's model, leading to the following research question:

Does the eWOM in SNS's model hold, for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females?

The research objectives concerning this research question are as follows:

1. To determine the reliability of the eWOM in SNS's model for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females.
2. To determine the validity of the eWOM in SNS's model for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females.
3. To determine whether the proposed relationships in the eWOM in SNS's model, hold for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females.

If the model is both reliable and valid, the following second research question would be applicable:

Which construct, in the eWOM in SNS's model, has the greatest influence on engaged, young adult, South African females intention, to purchase high-risk, high-involvement products, such as wedding dresses?

The research objective associated with this research question is:

4. To determine which of the constructs of eWOM, trusting beliefs and value co-creation, has the greatest influence on engaged, young adult, South African females intention, to purchase high-risk, high-involvement products, such as wedding dresses.

A brief discussion of the methodology executed to confront the aforementioned research questions and objectives, follows.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

This section succinctly explains notable aspects of the methodology. These include the research design and method, and target population and sampling method, employed in this study. Thereafter, the measurement instrument, data collection procedure and data analysis techniques used, are concisely described. A more comprehensive discussion of the methodology is offered in a subsequent chapter.

1.4.1 Research Design and Method

This study represented a causal, conclusive research design. The method of an experiment was utilised in order to test hypotheses, elaborated on in Chapter 4,

concerning the eWOM in SNS's model (See-To & Ho, 2014). The experiment included an experimental group that was shown eWOM in SNS's pertaining to wedding dresses, and a control group, that was not. No pre-measurement was involved and respondents were randomly placed in a particular group, hence this study can be said to have followed the true experimental design of posttest-only control group (Malhotra, 2010:261).

This experimental design boasts major benefits since it allows for time and funding to be saved and the sample size requirements are not stringent. Taking into account this study's low budget, short time frame and the fact that the pool of potential respondents would be relatively narrow, caused the researcher to select this design. It was however necessary, to be mindful of the challenge in ascertaining, whether the experimental group respondents who quit are similar to those in control group who quit. In addition to this, it was not possible to identify changes in individual respondents (Malhotra, 2010:261).

1.4.2 Target Population and Sampling Method

The target population was comprised of engaged, young adult, South African females. In the context of this study, "young adult" refers to a person who is a minimum of 18 years of age, yet not older than 29 years of age. In addition to this, the targeted females had observed the Facebook pages of wedding dress vendors, although not yet chosen a wedding dress to purchase.

The non-probability sampling method of judgmental sampling, a type of convenience sampling, was implemented. This was due to the lack of a sampling frame, and an identified probability of each element in the target population being chosen (Malhotra, 2010:379). Applying judgmental sampling yielded a sample of 152 respondents, equally split between the experimental and control groups.

1.4.3 Measurement Instrument

A questionnaire served as the measurement instrument for this study. Because the experimental group was exposed to eWOM in SNS's, and the control group was not, the questionnaire came in two forms. See Appendix 1 for the form completed by the experimental group, and Appendix 2 for the form completed by the control group. The questionnaire's 45 items were contained in six Likert and seven semantic differential scales.

1.4.4 Data Collection

The location for data collection was the Canal Walk Shopping Centre branch of *Bride&co*, in Century City, Cape Town. Data collection was carried out over a period of forty days, from 10 December 2015 to 21 January 2016, usually from 9am to 6pm.

These times differed on a few days due to the availability of the researcher and *Bride&co's* trading hours.

1.4.5 Data Analysis

This study strives to test a model, which involves multiple and interrelated dependence relationships, between latent variables included in proposed theory. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) allows for such relationships to be tested, and was therefore concluded to be an appropriate statistical technique for analysing this study's data (Hair, Ringle, Sarstedt & Mena, 2012a; Hensley, Hubona & Ray, 2016; Iacobucci, 2009; Malhotra, 2010:723, 727). Covariance-based SEM (CBSEM) and Partial Least Squares (PLS) SEM are distinct yet "complementary" statistical methods through which to carry out SEM (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt 2012b; Hair, Sarstedt, Pieper & Ringle, 2012c).

PLS-SEM is more fitting during the premature phases of theory formation, when the researcher aims to identify relationships amongst latent variables (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair *et al.*, 2012b; Hair *et al.*, 2012c; Reinartz, Haenlein & Henseler, 2009). This study aims to establish relationships between latent variables, thereby testing a purportedly untested model, the theory development of which is still in its early stages. PLS-SEM was therefore deemed to be suitable for use in this study. Furthermore, when using PLS-SEM, the unfavorable impacts of small sample sizes can be offset fairly simply. This causes PLS-SEM to be appropriate for studies with small sample sizes such as this one, further justifying the utilisation of the method in this study (Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). *SmartPLS* was the statistical software consulted in order to execute PLS-SEM (SmartPLS, 2015).

The results obtained from putting into practice the aforesaid methodology, will allow for this study to make a contribution to marketing literature and industry. This contribution is delineated next.

1.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Through examining the impact of eWOM in SNS's on South African bride's intention to purchase wedding dresses, this study sets out to occupy two gaps in the existing marketing literature. The first, is the impact of eWOM, particularly in SNS's, on the intention to purchase "once-in-a-lifetime", high-involvement products such as wedding dresses. eWOM was found to have a relationship with purchase intention, which has regularly been proven to be a reliable indicator of purchase behaviour (Armstrong *et al.*, 2000; Bemmaor, 1995; Chandon *et al.*, 2005; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2009; Morwitz & Schmittlein, 1992; Newberry *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, it has been posited that the association between the purchase intention and purchase behaviour of high-involvement products like wedding dresses, is more robust than it is for other product types (Morwitz *et al.*,

2007). Moreover, eWOM in SNS's is widely available for wedding dress purchase decision-making (Beitler, 2013; Clay, 2012; Laudon, 2014; Nizam, 2012). Given that wedding dresses are associated with an "once-in-a-lifetime" right of passage, significant time, effort and funding is invested in their purchase (Arend, 2003; Boden, 2001; Buckley, 2010; Choy & Loker, 2004; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993; Otnes *et al.*, 1997; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2008). This demonstrates the necessity of investigating the impact of eWOM in SNS's, on the intention to purchase wedding dresses.

The second void in the existing marketing literature, that this study ventures to fill, is the impact of eWOM on the South African wedding industry. The South African population's increasing embrace of digital media, with a rise in both internet users and social media accounts occurring, plausibly created potential for eWOM production (We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015). South African brides have participated in the country's digital activity, by resorting to SNS's such as Facebook, in order to engage in eWOM pertaining to wedding dresses (Danny Roberts, 2015; Marinette Strydom, 2015). Moreover, the South African wedding industry is flourishing and was valued to be worth ZAR27.2 billion (\$3.25 billion) (Nick, 2012; Liene Stevens, 2011a). It has been suggested that wedding dress sales make a substantial contribution to the revenue generated by this industry, with 57.1% of brides purchasing a brand new wedding dress from a bridal boutique in 2013 (Hitched WIFE, 2013a, 2013b). However, the wedding industry is seldom researched and the South African wedding industry even more so. It in addition appears that there has to date, been no studies undertaken that concentrate on the effect of eWOM on the South African wedding industry. This illustrates the importance of considering the effect of eWOM in this industry, and it is highly likely that this study will be the first to do so.

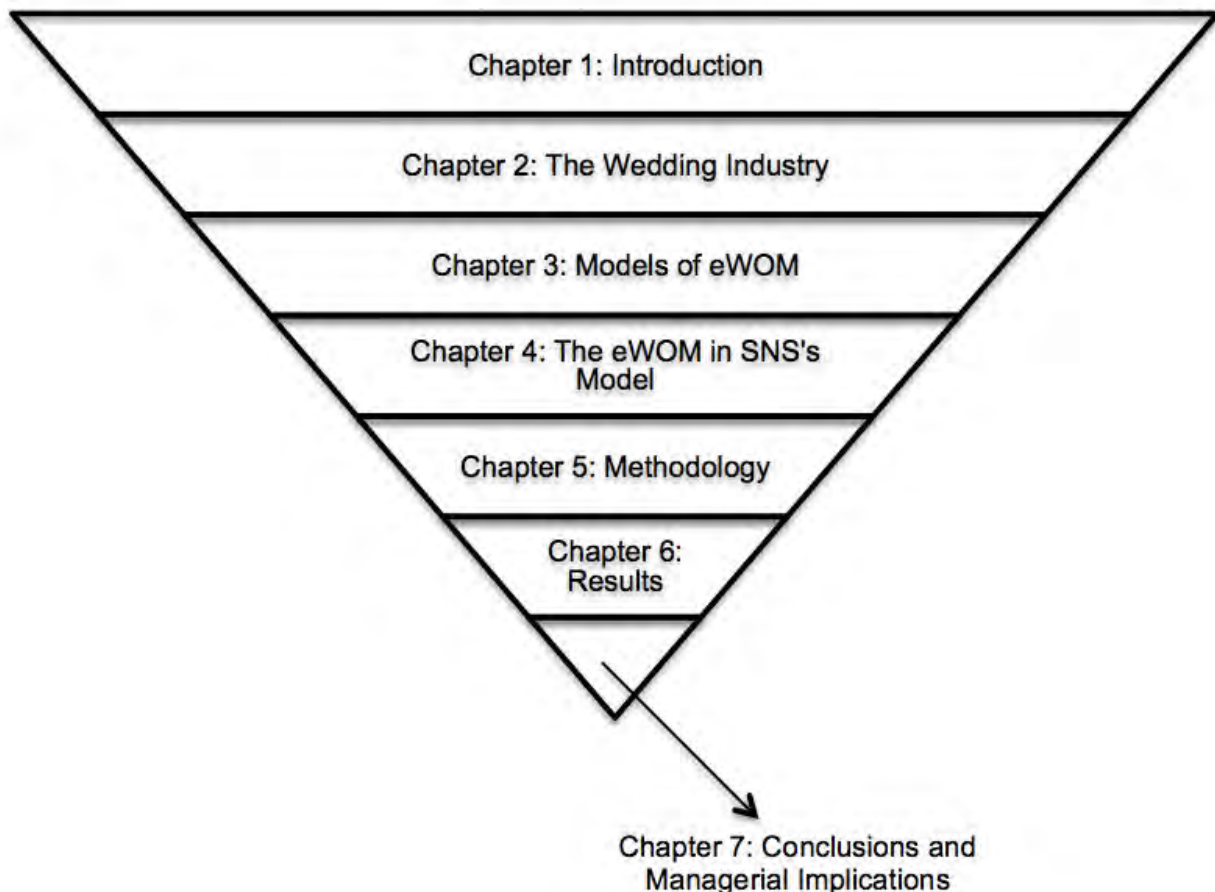
In order to address the aforesaid research shortfalls, See-To & Ho's (2014) eWOM in SNS's model will be employed. The model recognises the indirect effect of eWOM in SNS's on purchase intention, through both trust and value co-creation, where these constructs are meaningful in the relationship between a bride and a wedding dress vendor with an SNS fan page. The model was therefore deduced to be appropriate for use in the study, although is purportedly untested. Therefore, this study will aim to add to the existing body of tested eWOM models, by establishing whether the model holds, in the under-researched wedding industry context.

Taking into account the benefit of this study for the wedding industry, this study will offer insights to wedding dress vendors that will allow them to adjust their digital marketing strategies to better suit themselves and their customers. More specifically, they will be informed of potential manners in which to control for eWOM, trust and value co-creation, on their SNS fan pages, for the sake of enhancing their customers' intentions to purchase wedding dresses.

1.6 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

This dissertation consists of seven chapters, the contents of which are portrayed in the figure below. The current chapter is the first of these seven chapters and put forward the purpose of this study, its research questions and objectives and the key theory underlying it.

Figure 2: Contents of the Chapters



The second chapter serves as the beginning of a more thorough review of the relevant theory by concentrating on the wedding industry. The third chapter then presents different models of the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, and highlights the model chosen for this study, the eWOM in SNS's model. Thereafter, the fourth chapter delves more deeply into the theory behind the eWOM in SNS's model, by explaining each of its constructs and the relationships between them. The fifth chapter elucidates in detail, the methodology that was carried out to satisfy this study's objectives. The sixth chapter presents the research results that obtained by implementing the aforementioned methodology. The seventh and final chapter delineates conclusions and managerial implications construed from this study's results, before relaying limitations and propositions for future research.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided the base theory of this study, which involved an explanation of the rise of eWOM and its advantages, along with previous research on eWOM models. It then introduced the wedding dress as a high involvement product, briefly described the South African wedding industry, and discoursed the use of social media, including SNS's, in the wedding industry. The final piece of theory put forward was an overview of the model that this study tested, the eWOM in SNS's model. After the discussion of the theory, this chapter charted this study's research question and objectives. Next, it concisely elucidated a couple of vital features of this study's methodology, namely the research design and method, and target population and sampling method. Subsequently, the contribution of this study was highlighted before concluding with an outline of the contents in the remainder of this dissertation. The following chapter initiates a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to this study, with a focus on the wedding industry.

CHAPTER 2: THE WEDDING INDUSTRY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The global wedding industry is worth billions of dollars. The value of the wedding industries in three countries, namely the United States of America (USA), China and India, add up to ZAR3.19 trillion (\$381 billion) alone. South Africa's wedding industry has also been assessed to be of a high value, at over ZAR8.4 billion, (\$1 billion) and is expected to resume its growth (Liene Stevens, 2011a). Furthermore, the wedding dress has been recognised as a deeply sentimental item, associated with an "once-in-a-lifetime" right of passage (Boden, 2001; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993; Otnes & Pleck, 2003 in Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2008). Despite this, marketing literature on the wedding industry is scant. This is even more so in South Africa, a country in which there appears to be no studies conducted in the wedding industry. Hence, this study set out to examine the effect of eWOM in SNS's, on the intention to purchase wedding dresses, in the context of the South African wedding industry.

This chapter commences with an overview of South Africa's wedding industry. Thereafter, the characterisation of a wedding dress as a high-involvement, "once-in-a-lifetime" product is addressed. The chapter concludes by discoursing eWOM in the wedding industry, including a discussion of several social media platforms used for eWOM generation. eWOM in South Africa's wedding industry is also acknowledged.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF SOUTH AFRICA'S WEDDING INDUSTRY

South Africa, as an emerging market, enjoys a flourishing wedding industry that has undergone a boom in recent years, which is expected to continue (Nick, 2012; southafrica.net, 2015; Wedding Diary, 2009). Market researcher Liene Stevens (2011a), specialising in market research in the wedding and lifestyle industries, indicated that the country's wedding industry, has been evaluated to be worth ZAR27.2 billion (\$3.25 billion). This amount nearly reaches the value of wedding industries in developed market regions, such as Canada and Australia, which have ZAR33.5 billion (\$4 billion) and ZAR36 billion (\$4.3 billion) wedding industries, respectively (Liene Stevens, 2011a).

South Africa's wedding industry success is largely due to the country being an appealing wedding location for those overseas, with *The New York Times* listing Cape Town as one of 53 places to visit in 2014. There is an influx of international visitors choosing to hold their weddings in South Africa, where such weddings are referred to as "destination weddings" (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014; southafrica.net, 2015; Wedding Diary, 2009). According to esteemed wedding co-ordinator Aleit Swanepoel (2009 in Wedding Diary, 2009), these couples have only provided positive feedback and viewed the service that they received in the country

as being brilliant. Majority of them, and occasionally their guests, choose to prolong their stay in the country for a honeymoon or holiday (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014; Wedding Diary, 2009).

One of the main factors that cause engaged couples to be lured to South Africa for their weddings, is that it is more affordable to host a wedding in the country (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014; Wedding Diary, 2009). Other factors include the warm weather, variety of picturesque wedding venues, and flair of local wedding suppliers (destinationweddings.com, 2014; Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014; southafrica.net, 2015; Wedding Diary, 2009).

Concerning the affordability, it was found that due to the exchange rate, it is usually the British market that can afford to hold their weddings in South Africa (Wedding Diary, 2009). Furthermore, the typical price of hosting a wedding in the United Kingdom ranges from £20 000 to £25 000, which equates to roughly ZAR360 000 to ZAR450 000. This range is dramatically reduced to approximately ZAR130 000 to ZAR180 000 when hosting a wedding in South Africa, indicating huge savings for, and facilitating the holding of luxury weddings by, United Kingdom (UK) couples (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014). Taking into account the weather, it is evident that Cape Town experiences around 2980 hours of sunshine per year, while London experiences only 1480 hours. The time period of such pleasant weather comprises only 13 weeks in the UK, although is extended to 39 weeks in South Africa (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014; Wedding Diary, 2009).

With respect to wedding venues, those available include beach, city, vineyard, farm and bushveld venues, which reflect the aesthetic value that South Africa has to offer, and the original features that the country is known for (destinationweddings.com, 2014; southafrica.net, 2015; Wedding Diary, 2009). More or less 200 of these venues are situated in the Western Cape, and should one wedding take place at each venue, each week during the summer period of December to March, 4000 weddings will be held in four months. South African wedding suppliers pointed out that half of their earnings are gained through destination weddings, indicating that 2000 destination weddings are hosted in the Western Cape every summer (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014). Lastly, the country's wedding suppliers have been described as offering "top class" and "world class" service, and as being capable of accommodating all budgets and requirements (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014; southafrica.net, 2015). Service and venues such as those mentioned above do however have a price tag.

Focusing on the price that couples are willing to pay for a wedding, the average cost of a wedding in South Africa was estimated to be in the range of ZAR70 000 to ZAR80 000, although this range has increased to ZAR130 000 to ZAR180 000 (Great Occasions, 2011; Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014; Wedding Diary 2009). A survey by Hitched WIFE (2013a, 2013b) provides a more specific figure of R128

045, with 84% of this figure allotted to the wedding and 16% to the honeymoon. The fact that couples in South Africa typically exceeded their budgets by 15%, further demonstrates the value of a South African wedding (Hitched WIFE, 2013a). An important purchase to budget for is that of the wedding dress. The South African Bridal Industry Association (n.d) conducted a survey that discovered that ZAR2.5 billion is expended on wedding dresses annually. Furthermore, Statistics South Africa (n.d) indicated that 2008 saw 203 257 officially recorded civil marriages, customary marriages and civil unions taking place in the country. Should this figure represent the projected market for wedding dresses at the time, it would denote that the typical bride in South Africa paid approximately ZAR25 000 for her wedding dress (Pressly *et al.*, 2010).

Foreign brides and grooms in particular, were noted to disburse more funds on their weddings in South Africa, than local couples. For instance, an assumption was made that ZAR80 000 was spent on a “destination wedding”. The wedding may involve added expenses, including overseas guests’ transport and accommodation, shopping allowances and a post-wedding South African holiday or honeymoon. Acknowledging the initial ZAR80 000 together with the extra expenses, clarifies that such a wedding is highly likely to cost over ZAR1 million (Wedding Diary, 2009). Concentrating on the large proportion of young South Africans residing in the UK and who return to South Africa for their weddings, weddings of such individuals are estimated to involve costs between ZAR600 000 and ZAR1 million, should between 30 and 50 international guests fly to South Africa for each wedding. This is partly because it is probable, that each guest will incur daily expenses in the range of ZAR1000 and ZAR1500, for the duration of a 12-day stay. If the cost in the range of ZAR600 000 to ZAR1 million is multiplied by 2000, the number of destination weddings that could occur in the Western Cape each summer, the resulting cost is an astounding ZAR1.8 billion; bearing in mind that additional weddings may take place in other South African locations (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014).

The aforementioned figures illustrate the huge proportion of revenue that may be generated by the wedding industry in South Africa. Even if only 50% of the weddings in the country were held, and at 50% of the cost, a significant amount of income would be generated (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014). It should furthermore be noted that every 12-15 visitors to South Africa results in a job being created, causing the wedding industry to create between 6000 and 8000 jobs (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014; Wedding Diary, 2009). Promoting weddings in the country provides an opportunity for the existing job posts to be continued and new job posts to arise (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014). Finally, given that destination weddings result in tourists arriving in South Africa, the country’s wedding industry could in turn strengthen its tourism industry (Pam Black Weddings, n.d in Finweek, 2014; southafrica.net, 2015; Wedding Diary, 2009). Therefore, it is clear that South Africa’s wedding industry can be of substantial benefit to its economy.

It has been suggested that much of the revenue produced in South Africa's wedding industry is sourced through the sale of wedding dresses. This is because Hitched WIFE's (2013a, 2013b) research showed that 57.1% of brides in South Africa bought a "brand new" wedding dress from a bridal boutique. Hereafter, the classification of a wedding dress as a high-involvement, "once-in-a-lifetime" product, is considered.

2.3 THE HIGH-INVOLVEMENT, HIGH-RISK, "ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME" WEDDING DRESS

Schiffman and Kanuk (2010:229) state that consumer involvement refers to the extent of "personal relevance that the product or purchase holds for the consumer". A high involvement product is very significant to the consumer, requires more problem solving and informational processing, possesses a great degree of perceived risk, has a high price, and fosters much emotional involvement (Kumar, 2009:454; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:229). A wedding dress may be considered a high-involvement product because as will be shown below, each of the aforementioned characteristics of high-involvement products are germane to wedding dresses. These are elaborated on in turn, hereafter.

2.3.1 Great Significance of Wedding Dresses

Wedding dresses have been acknowledged as having "ritualistic significance" because brides, more so than grooms, regard wedding rituals as meaningful, with the wedding dress being a vital aspect of the wedding ritual (Lowrey & Otnes, 1994 in Thomas & Peters, 2011; Otnes *et al.*, 1997). Furthermore, Otnes and Lowrey's (1993) research on the wedding ritual revealed that a wedding dress is considered a sacred wedding artefact. An artefact is defined as an object that is bought, utilised or "dictated" by the bride, while sacred consumption is defined by Belk, Wallendorf and Shen (1989:13 in Otnes & Lowrey, 1993) as "that which is regarded as more significant, powerful and extraordinary than the self". The fact that wedding rituals are regarded as meaningful and sacred, with the wedding dress being a vital aspect of the wedding ritual, demonstrates substantial significance held by the product (Otnes & Lowrey, 1993).

2.3.2 Problem Solving in Wedding Dress Purchasing

The price of wedding dresses may present a potential problem as brides have limited budgets to allocate towards wedding dresses (Greene, 2015; Kofi-Nicklin, 2015; Naoise, 2015). This leads to the issue of problem solving. Apart from finding a wedding dress at an affordable price, brides need to ensure that they have chosen their wedding dress by the deadline. In order to do so, the wedding date, time for fittings and ordering time need to be taken into account (Brides, 2014; Greene, 2015; Kofi-Nicklin, 2015; Naoise, 2015; Weiss, 2008). Even though price and time frame need to be considered, a daunting aspect of wedding dress purchase is the

evaluation of several wedding dresses before reaching a final choice (Arend, 2003; Buckley, 2010; Choy & Loker, 2004; Greene, 2015; Jacobs, 2012; Kofi-Nicklin, 2015; Levine, 2015; Naoise, 2015; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993; Otnes *et al.*, 1997; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2008). Greene (2015) noted that the bride could be exposed to thousands of options whilst searching for her wedding dress.

2.3.3 Informational Processing in Wedding Dress Purchasing

Typically, various individuals, from the bride's family members and friends to salespeople and fellow brides, will have views about the wedding dress options available to her (Arend, 2003; Buckley, 2010; Greene, 2015; Kofi-Nicklin, 2015; Levine, 2015; Naoise, 2015; Otnes *et al.*, 1997; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2008). These views could represent information that the bride is required to process in making her choice. Arend (2003) and Kofi-Nicklin (2015) indicated that some brides encounter severe pressure from their mothers to choose, or forego the consideration of, particular wedding dresses. She also mentioned that salespeople develop opinions regarding fashion and the appropriateness of the wedding dress for the bride's body type. Thomas and Peters (2010, 2011) on the other hand stated that brides request each other's standpoints regarding unconventional styles or types of wedding dresses, and different wedding dress brands. Apart from the opinions of others, brides are exposed to a plethora of wedding resources that provide additional information, to process about wedding dresses. These include magazines such as *Brides Magazine* and *You & Your Wedding*, television programs such as *Say Yes to the Dress*, and websites such as *theknot.com* (Boden, 2001; Jacobs, 2012; Laudon, 2014; Naoise, 2015; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011).

2.3.4 Wedding Dresses as High-Risk Products

The phenomenon of perceived risk comes in five different forms, where four of these have been shown to be applicable to wedding dresses, namely psychological risk, social risk, time risk and financial risk (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972). Psychological risk refers to a disturbance to self-image that could occur when purchasing a defective product (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972; Snoj, Korda & Mumel, 2004 in Kharazi, 2014). Boden (2001) and Otnes and Lowrey (1993) have stated that there is a connection between the wedding dress and the identity of the bride, indicating that should the wedding dress be substandard, the ego of the bride could be threatened. This illustrates the psychological risk associated with wedding dresses. Social risk in contrast, connotes a threat to acceptance within a certain group (Lee, 2009 in Kharazi, 2014). Because brides occasionally purchase wedding dresses due to feeling compelled to do so by others, and could face exclusion from the bridal community if they deviate from the norm, wedding dresses carry a social risk (Arend, 2003; Kofi-Nicklin, 2015; Rettig, 2009).

Time risk on the other hand denotes the time spent to make the purchase (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972). Certain authors show that wedding dresses possess a time risk by pointing out that brides spend numerous weeks or months in attempt to purchase their wedding dress (Arend, 2003; Greene, 2015). Finally, financial risk represents a possible loss of funds due to acquiring an item that is not worthy of the funds (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972). A wedding dress has been recognised as a costly item and comes with additional expenses, demonstrating that a large proportion of funds may be lost should the bride not find her wedding dress to be worthy of its price (Arend, 2003; Choy & Loker, 2004; Kofi-Nicklin, 2015; Naoise, 2015; Otnes *et al.*, 1997; Thomas & Peters, 2011; Weiss, 2008). Therefore, wedding dresses hold a financial risk. The fact that wedding dresses have been identified as being costly also signifies the high price of wedding dresses that is typical of high-involvement products (Arend, 2003; Choy & Loker, 2004; Jacobs, 2012; Kofi-Nicklin, 2015; Otnes *et al.*, 1997; Thomas & Peters, 2011; Weiss, 2008).

2.3.5 Emotional Involvement in Wedding Dress Purchasing

Gunelius (2012, 2015) suggested that emotional involvement refers to the extent to which emotion is elicited in consumers. Fantasy is a strong theme associated with wedding dresses and relates to brides' desires, allowing the product to be one of great emotional involvement. It has been noted that a large number of girls dream of their wedding dress for years, and can utilise their wedding dress to realise their wish of feeling like a princess on their wedding day (Arend, 2003; Boden, 2001; Otnes & Lowry, 1993; Otnes & Pleck, 2003 in Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2008). Brides cry out of joy when they become aware that they have found their ideal wedding dress, and those who are yet to go shopping for their wedding dress, have been advised to "have some tissues" at hand (Greene, 2015; Jacobs, 2012; Kofi-Nicklin, 2015). This shows that the experience of finding a dress for her "once-in-a-lifetime" wedding, acknowledged as her rite of passage, is one filled with emotion for the bride (Arend, 2003; Boden, 2001; Choy & Loker, 2004; Currie, 1993; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993; Weiss, 2008).

Brides share the feelings that they encounter during this experience by means of an online channel (Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011). This shows that brides engage in eWOM pertaining to wedding dresses, and that eWOM is therefore relevant in the wedding industry. eWOM in this industry is henceforward examined.

2.4 eWOM IN THE WEDDING INDUSTRY

The use of social media is highly prevalent in the wedding industry and it may be employed as a means through which to convey eWOM (Barker, 2012; Beitler, 2013; Clay, 2012; Laudon, 2014; Mittal, Gupta, Dewan & Kumaraguru, 2014; Mull & Lee, 2014; Nizam, 2012; theknot.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012; mashable.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Velasco, 2013). The effect of social

media on the wedding industry is briefly discussed below. Thereafter, a few social media platforms, which may be used to engage in eWOM in the wedding industry, are elaborated on. Subsequently, a special focus is placed on Facebook as a channel for spreading eWOM in the wedding industry. This is followed by a review of eWOM in South Africa's wedding industry.

2.4.1 Social Media as an Instrument for Engagement in Wedding Industry eWOM

A few years ago, it was considered normal for brides to carry thick bridal magazines, the pages of which were marked with post-it notes, or to fill wedding binders with inspirational magazine cutouts, during the wedding planning process (Barker, 2012; David's Bridal, 2013 in PR Newswire; Laudon, 2014). To this day, brides are still fond of wedding print media, although are found to be engrossed in the use of tablets and other mobile devices, scrolling through social media content (David's Bridal, 2013 in PR Newswire, 2013; Laudon, 2014; theknot.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012; mashable.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012). Social media has completely transformed the task of wedding planning with brides utilising it in all stages of the wedding planning process (Beitler, 2013; Erin, 2015; Laudon, 2014; mashable.com, 2012 in Roberts, 2012; Smith, 2012; USA Bridal, 2015). The modern bride is both "connected and social"; she creates hashtags and Quick Response (QR) codes and is familiar with their use (theknot.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012; mashable.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012). This shows that "weddings have officially become digitalised" (David's Bridal, 2013 in PR Newswire, 2013).

Social media facilitates participation in eWOM since it is used to bond with groups of alike others. Furthermore, it is employed to seek and offer recommendations, opinions, counsel and support, exchange ideas and provide updates; all whilst communicating with other consumers, or people in their non-commercial capacity (Clay, 2012; Erin, 2015; Laudon, 2014; Nizam, 2012; Roberts, 2012; Silverman, 2015; Smith, 2012; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weers, 2015). A seemingly popular subject matter in the eWOM conversations of brides is the wedding dress (Beitler, 2013; Clay, 2012; Laudon, 2014; Nizam, 2012; Silverman, 2015; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weers, 2015). The factors that cause a wedding dress to be a high involvement product, as conferred above, could drive eWOM conversations concerning wedding dresses (Laudon, 2014; Silverman, 2015; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weers, 2015).

Given that this study is concerned with eWOM in SNS's, where an SNS is a type of social media, some of the social media channels that allow for these conversations to take place, are subsequently detailed. In so doing, the elements of eWOM conversations, which suggest that a wedding dress possesses the characteristics of a high involvement product, are highlighted. This illustrates the potential that these characteristics have, to drive the eWOM conversations.

2.4.1.1 Wedding Industry eWOM on e-Forums, Wedding Blogs, Skype, Instagram and Pinterest

Each of the social media channels of e-forums, wedding blogs, Skype, Instagram and Pinterest, serves as a unique offering to brides, which provides them with an opportunity to converse about their wedding days (Barker, 2012; Beitler, 2013; Laudon, 2014; Mittal *et al.*, 2014; See-To & Ho, 2014; Silverman, 2015; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weers, 2015). Through focusing on each form of social media individually, the key differences between them, and the manner in which brides have employed them, are outlined hereafter. Where applicable, attention is also drawn to the parts of eWOM conversations, which insinuate that a wedding dress has features of a high-involvement product. This shows that these features may have spurred the eWOM conversations.

- **e-Forums**

e-Forums, or discussion boards, are websites that act as online locations for individuals to ask questions and provide answers (PC Mag, 2015). The e-forum of *Brides Magazine* (brides.com) is greatly frequented by brides. Whilst conversing with one another on this e-Forum, brides bonded with other brides through relaying the feelings encountered when coming across their ideal wedding dress. They also requested viewpoints regarding unconventional styles or types of wedding dresses, and different wedding dress brands. In addition to this, they counseled one another on which bridal outlets to go shopping at and how much to expend on a wedding dress. Finally, they asked for and offered support, in deciding which wedding dress to wear, and dealing with familial disagreements regarding which accessories should accompany the wedding dress (Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011).

Every aspect of the eWOM discussions on e-forums mentioned above, hints that a wedding dress holds qualities, of a high-involvement product. Talks on feelings experienced when discovering the perfect wedding dress insinuates that a wedding dress is an item that generates significant emotional involvement. Discussing various wedding dress styles, brands and shopping outlets, indicates that choices need to be made about such styles, brands and shopping outlets, which could constitute problem solving. Seeking counsel regarding coping mechanisms for familial disagreements, suggests that the bride may risk a loss of acceptance from her family, should she not act according their views. This signals a possible social risk. Irrespective of the issue that the e-forum concentrates on, considering the many different opinions provided for each issue involves a high level of informational processing.

- **Wedding Blogs**

A blog is a website that presents a continuous record of information, consisting of a list of posts, appearing in reverse chronological order (WordPress Codex, n.d). Wedding and lifestyle marketing researcher Liene Stevens (2011b) explains that the professional wedding blog industry, is not comprised of the blogs of professional wedding vendors who promote themselves through their blogs, but rather wedding blogs that are businesses. The fact that there are over 200 such blogs worldwide with more than 4.3 million readers every month, suggests that a large proportion of eWOM could be engaged in through this form of media (Liene Stevens, 2011b).

Brides could engage in eWOM conversations about wedding dresses in the comments sections of such blogs. An example of this is a conversation, below a post pertaining to wedding dress trends, on the well-known professional wedding blog, *stylemepretty.com*. Brides expressed their views on which trends they admired the most and whether those trends would suit them (Lindsay {Everistta Bridal}, 2015; Silverman, 2015; Weers, 2015). A discussion on the appropriateness of contrasting wedding dress trends could signify engagement in problem solving. This is since the trends showcased in the blog post would need to be evaluated in order to determine whether they suit the bride.

- **Skype**

Skype is an SNS that makes available a service, for international phone calls, carried out using a computer (Digital Unite, 2015). This SNS is used to participate in eWOM conversations with family and friends who are not physically present, in order to decide which wedding dress to wear (Laudon, 2014). According to Brian Beitler (2013), the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) of bridal store *David's Bridal*, brides have been observed contacting their family members via Skype whilst fitting on wedding dresses at the store. This implies that the views of family members are considered when making a choice on which wedding dress to wear. This in turn, insinuates the necessity of problem solving and a possible social risk. Problem solving may take place whilst examining the views of family members in order to make a final choice. If however the bride selects a dress that her family disapproves of, she faces potential rejection by her family, pointing out a conceivable social risk.

- **Instagram**

Instagram is an SNS that Laudon (2014) said one could “easily spend countless hours on”. This SNS is a mobile application that offers users the opportunity to take and edit, photographs or videos, on their tablet, computer or smart phone (TechBoomers, 2015). Laudon (2014) furthermore proposed that Instagram be used to post pictures from wedding exhibitions or fashion shows, for friends to comment on. This, she indicated, will allow for the gathering of their opinions on one’s best-

loved wedding items. It could also facilitate eWOM conversations surrounding wedding dresses since a wedding dress may be regarded as a wedding and/or fashion item. Should comments on Instagram concerning wedding dresses, which permit the collection of individuals' opinions, be made; these opinions could represent data to be processed. Hence, a bride who peruses these opinions would be occupied by information processing.

- **Pinterest**

Pinterest is the SNS that appears to have had the greatest impact on the wedding industry (Barker, 2012; Gormly, 2013; Laudon, 2014; Ries, 2012; Velasco, 2013). Pinterest, with its largely female user base of approximately 80%, has been dubbed an essential tool for brides (Barker, 2012; Mittal *et al.*, 2014; Velasco, 2013). Moreover, the remark was made that weddings are the key purpose of the existence of Pinterest (Ries, 2012). Editor-in-Chief of *Brides Magazine*, Anne Fulenwider (2012 in Barker, 2012), aptly described the impact of Pinterest on the wedding industry by stating that Pinterest has “exploded and really changed the conversation”.

Pinterest is an “image-based, online social network” that allows users to add pictures and share them with others (Barker, 2012; Barnes, 2014; Gormly, 2013; Hoffman & Daugherty, 2013; Mittal *et al.*, 2014; Mull & Lee, 2014; Ries, 2012; Velasco, 2013). It lends itself to the creation of “pinboards” (hereinafter referred to as boards), which are “virtual bulletin boards” comprised of groups of pictures pertaining to a specific topic (Gormly, 2013; Hoffman & Daugherty, 2013; Mittal *et al.*, 2014; Mull & Lee, 2014; Velasco, 2013). Each picture posted on a board is labeled a “pin”, with the deed of posting a “pin” being called “pinning”, and that of distributing an already posted picture being named “re-pinning” (Mittal *et al.*, 2014; Mull & Lee, 2014). Board names, descriptions of boards and “pins”, and comments regarding “pins”, comprise textual information on Pinterest (Hoffman & Daugherty, 2013; Mittal *et al.*, 2014; Mull & Lee, 2014). The action of subscribing to another user or their boards is referred to as “following” (Mittal *et al.*, 2014).

Wedding-themed boards have become immensely popular, and Pinterest conjectures that there are tens of thousands of such boards, filling the SNS (Barker, 2012; Velasco, 2013). A case in point would be the *Brides Magazine* boards. Fulenwider (2012 in Barker, 2012) indicated that the *Brides Magazine* boards are followed by an additional 500 users each week, with the most-loved board being *Couture-inspired wedding gowns*. This wedding dress-themed board is followed by 10 000 users (Barker, 2012). Of these users, those who are consumers could “re-pin” pictures from this board onto their own boards, name the boards, and provide descriptions for the boards and their “pins”, which may be viewed by other consumers. They could in this manner produce eWOM pertaining to wedding dresses. An alternative manner of producing eWOM pertaining to wedding dresses, would be to do the same for pictures of wedding dresses, “pinned” from other sources, onto their own wedding-

themed boards.

Despite the availability of the aforementioned social media channels, including certain SNS's, Facebook and Twitter are according to Experian Market Research (in Barker, 2012), the two most popular SNS's. Furthermore, it has been said that brides utilise Facebook and Twitter to relay all the details on their special day, implying that they could partake in eWOM conversations concerning wedding dresses on these SNS's. Given the prominence of Facebook as an outlet for expressing eWOM related to weddings, and the fact that this study concentrates on eWOM in SNS's such as Facebook, Facebook is henceforth considered (Smith, 2012).

2.4.1.2 Wedding Industry eWOM on Facebook

The past decade has seen SNS's such as Facebook experiencing an immense progression, with Facebook currently standing as the most widely used SNS in the world (Chih *et al.*, 2014; Leung, 2012; Svensson, 2011). There are more than 1.44 billion monthly active Facebook users, and 936 million of them login to Facebook daily (Facebook, 2015 in Noyes, 2015). The SNS dominates others to the extent that individuals are considered "non-existent" should they not be Facebook users (Svensson, 2011). Interacting on Facebook has furthermore overtaken email as the most prevalent internet-based action (Keenan & Shiri, 2009).

Facebook consists of several user-based profiles and attention was devoted to the identity of the user instead of the subject of conversation, as on e-forums and other virtual communities (Keenan & Shiri, 2009). However, users have become more occupied with mingling and disseminating information than viewing profiles (Wise, Albahash & Park, 2010 in Svensson, 2011). This has been made possible by means of various collaborative features provided by the SNS. These include status updates, which are "thoughts" communicated through short messages, checking-in, which indicates that a user is at a certain location, sharing, which is the passing of information from another Facebook account, and uploading images (Keenan & Shiri, 2009). A dominant feature is newsfeed, a stream of up-to-date activity of a user's Facebook connections or "friends". Given this, Facebook has been described as a "social newspaper" that allows a user to be enlightened on the happenings of their friends' lives, rather than the current affairs that would typically appear in a newspaper. Browsing newsfeed has moreover been labelled "a given activity of the day" (Svensson, 2011).

Just as regular users socialise with one another, so too do brides who are Facebook users (Clay, 2012). Even though the abovementioned features are the prime Facebook offerings, there are additional offerings available to brides that allow them to communicate with their friends, family and bridal party (Hejny, 2011; Naylor, 2013; Nies, 2015). One of those most commonly mentioned on wedding websites, is the private Facebook group that a bride could create, in order to interact with all those

assisting her with wedding planning, simultaneously (Naylor, 2013; The Logical Bride, 2014). All members of the group are given the opportunity to post content on the group's page, and are alerted to the most recent updates (The Logical Bride, 2014). Another group, which connects not only the bride and her entourage and/or guests, but an entire community, is a wedding community group. Groups such as this may be referred to in order to buy items that may be required for the wedding, such as a discounted wedding dress (Nies, 2015).

Wedding-related shopping trips could be highlighted as Facebook events, for example, "*Dress shopping*", which when created, informs the invitees of the time and location, and provides invitees who confirm attendance, with a reminder on the day of the event (The Logical Bride, 2014; Hejny, 2011). Attendants are also allowed to post comments on the event's "wall", a virtual space comprised of text boxes that contain the comments (Hejny, 2011). More interactive than an event, is a wedding fan page. These Fan Pages may incorporate a number of applications referred to as widgets. Examples of widgets include a wedding day countdown widget, a map widget that shows the wedding venue's locality, an RSVP widget, and a polling widget should the bride wish to obtain speedy feedback from her wedding guests concerning particular issues (Hejny, 2011). In addition to this, posting behind the scenes images of wedding details such as the wedding cake on the fan page, can generate hype amongst the guests, and cause them to feel included in the wedding planning process, whilst still allowing the bride to regulate the content of the page. Yet a further advantage of fan pages is that they may be created to reflect the personality of the bride or bridal couple (Hejny, 2011).

Facebook is used in order to develop an image that matches an individual's personal identity. Given this, information relayed on Facebook facilitates the development of a sought after identity (Svensson, 2011). An individual's Facebook page is not an accurate representation of him or her, but an indication of the manner in which he or she prefers to be perceived (Casteleyn, Mottart & Rutten, 2009 in Svensson, 2011). This postulates that part of the information that an individual transmits on Facebook is cautiously contemplated because it is linked to the building of his or her identity (Svensson, 2011). Therefore, consumers have fostered a "material culture" in which individuals continuously attempt to form and uphold identities by employing assorted brands (Gabriel & Lang, 2006 in Svensson, 2011). Brands are an "extension of oneself", and shopping does not merely refer to the gaining of material items, but the purchase of an identity. Consequently, the diffusion of eWOM could serve as a method by which to build an identity. If eWOM is spread for the purpose of selling oneself in a particular manner, consumers may be unconsciously yet concurrently promoting brands and products (Svensson, 2011).

Half of all Facebook users are "connected with a brand", and this fashion has enticed a large amount of brands that have devoted their attention to constructing relationships with consumers by means of SNS's (Chih *et al.*, 2014). These brands

include wedding brands (Clay; 2012; Close, 2012; Nizam, 2012; Padovani, 2015; Priode, 2012; Rocco, 2012; Smith, 2013; Yankee, 2009). Brides have been advised to use wedding brands' Facebook fan pages to gather ideas, discover their ideal wedding vendors, and become notified of news from them (The Logical Bride, 2014; Smith, 2013; Stonebrook Manor Event Center & Gardens, 2013). According to a survey conducted by wedding website *theknot.com* (2012, in Smith, 2012) and *mashable.com* (2012, in Smith, 2012), 77% of brides have joined the Facebook fan pages of wedding brands while 47% use Facebook to maintain contact with wedding vendors. The activity of brides on wedding vendors' Facebook fan pages has proven to be beneficial for the vendors, particularly wedding dress vendors. Wedding dress vendors have reported increased sales, and greater website and physical store traffic as a result of their presence on Facebook (Business Lounge, 2012; Facebook, 2015a; Made With Love, 2014; Rocco, 2012).

Wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, like the aforesaid Facebook offerings of groups, events and wedding fan pages, provide brides with an opportunity to engage in eWOM about wedding dresses (Business Lounge, 2012; Clay, 2012; Love Bridal, 2012; Made With Love, 2014; Nizam, 2012; Olivia Rose Bridal, n.d; Zazou's Bridal Boutique, n.d). The eWOM may be positive or negative, and is discussed in further detail hereafter.

- **Positive and Negative eWOM in the Wedding Industry: Examples on Facebook**

Like the eWOM conversations pertaining to wedding dresses that took place on other types of social media, the conversations on Facebook implied that a wedding dress holds traits of a high-involvement product, which puts forward the possibility that these traits prompted the conversations. This is true in cases of both positive and negative eWOM, which is showcased below (Clay, 2012; Love Bridal, 2012; Made With Love, 2014; Nizam, 2012; Olivia Rose Bridal, n.d; Zazou's Bridal Boutique, n.d).

1. *Positive eWOM on Facebook*

Positive eWOM on Facebook serves as testimonials that are displayed on wedding dress vendors' websites (Business Lounge, 2012; Love Bridal, 2012; Olivia Rose Bridal, n.d). Alternatively, the website directs visitors to the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page in order to view the "positive feedback" (Zazou's Bridal Boutique, n.d). Many brides stated that they had found their idyllic wedding dress at the relevant wedding dress vendor's boutique, that their overall experience was very pleasant, and that the staff was affable, caring and knowledgeable (Love Bridal, 2012; Olivia Rose Bridal, n.d). Their comments revealed that they experienced heightened levels of happiness and satisfaction, and that it was necessary to consider several dresses, in certain cases nearly all the dresses in store, before making a final decision on which wedding dress to wear. This implies that wedding

dresses have a great degree of emotional involvement attached to them, and that brides undertake problem solving in the process of purchasing their wedding dress. Focusing on the instance of considering all the dresses in store, such a situation suggests that there was a significant time risk involved, in confirming the preferred wedding dress.

2. Negative eWOM on Facebook

Quality Bridals, an online wedding dress retailer, acts as an example of an unfortunate vendor whose customer conveyed negative eWOM. A customer indicated that the wedding dress that was delivered to her was the incorrect colour (Nizam, 2012). An incorrect colour could be classified as a defect in the dress, and use of a defective wedding dress may harm the bride's self-esteem, given that a wedding dress is linked to her identity (Boden, 2001; Otnes & Lowrey 1993). Hence, the dress in question could have presented a psychological risk, and made the bride's encounter with the vendor a disagreeable one. *Quality Bridals* successfully altered this potentially distasteful scenario from a shameful misfortune, into an act of commendable customer service, by promptly responding with guidelines for returning the dress (Nizam, 2012).

David's Bridal in contrast, did not react to negative eWOM in the same manner as *Quality Bridals*, leading to an author's statement that an instance of negative eWOM could ruin the business. After a customer left the store due to deficient service, she commented on the *David's Bridal* Facebook fan page to communicate her experience. The customer's Facebook post uncovered that the sales assistant, who initially helped the customer, said that her presence was required at the front desk, when noticing that the customer was profoundly tattooed on her back. The sales assistant's behaviour resulted in the customer receiving no help at all, leading to heartache and crying. This incident differed vastly from the usual occurrence of finding a wedding dress. As alluded to earlier, the experience of finding a wedding dress is often jubilant since the dress will allow the bride's fantasy of feeling like a princess on her wedding day, to become a reality (Arend, 2003; Boden, 2001; Greene, 2015; Jacobs, 2012; Kofi-Nicklin, 2015; Otnes & Lowry; 1993; Otnes & Pleck, 2003 in Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weiss, 2008). Because the bride with the profoundly tattooed back did not have such an experience when going wedding dress shopping, it may be said that she was deprived of the typically joyous occasion, causing her to face a high level of negative rather than positive emotional involvement.

Her post generated a tremendous 11 000 comments, along with thousands more posts revealing alike encounters (Clay, 2012). The criticism resulted in a discussion that urged brides to search for their wedding dresses elsewhere and to shun the formerly well-liked wedding dress store. *David's Bridal* answered the upset customer's comment a week after it was originally posted, and reacted very

insensitively. They also offered no public apology to her, or any of the many other dissatisfied customers. This generated yet further negative eWOM and the incident was dubbed “a social media disaster” (Clay, 2012). This illustrates the power of eWOM on Facebook. The benefits of such eWOM that allow it to be so powerful are specified hereunder.

- **Benefits of eWOM on Facebook**

eWOM on Facebook in particular is recognised as especially instrumental since it possesses benefits of both WOM and eWOM. The following are such advantages:

1. *eWOM on Facebook is Highly Reliable*

The high reliability of eWOM is insinuated due to the fact that the eWOM sender is in majority of situations familiar to the eWOM receiver, and possibly an offline friend (Keenan & Shiri, 2009, Wu, Wang & Hsu, 2014). Furthermore, being connected as “friends” on Facebook elevates the trust between individuals. This is since it creates a sensation of “knowing”, given that “friends” are constantly being kept up-to-date with one another’s circumstances and engagements. Resultantly, even those “friends” who are merely acquaintances rather than close companions, are considered to be trustworthier when distributing eWOM than they would be in person. This is a scarce boon made possible by Facebook (Svensson, 2011).

2. *eWOM on Facebook Reaches Many People*

The fact that eWOM on Facebook reaches a large amount of people, is also true for eWOM on other platforms (Svensson, 2011; Wu *et al.*, 2014). This is a result of the newsfeed phenomenon, that fulfils Facebook users’ need, to be continually kept abreast with their friends’ current situations and activities. As recently mentioned, even though some “friends” are simply acquaintances, Facebook users nevertheless lust after information regarding their lives’ events. However, information concerning “friends” who are close contacts is classified as more newsworthy (Svensson, 2011). Facebook users seek information from all of their “friends”, instead of only close companions, due to the fact they could otherwise be deprived of exciting information. Because of this, it is highly likely that eWOM on Facebook will reach majority of a Facebook user’s “friends” (Svensson, 2011). Taking this into account, the eWOM could effortlessly travel from one “friend’s” network to another’s, once it is sent, causing eWOM on Facebook to carry an advantage of reaching plenty people (Chuan & Yoojung, 2011 in Svensson, 2011).

In summary, it can be said that Facebook is the perfect medium for delivering eWOM. This is because it facilitates “a combination of WOM and eWOM’s main benefits; reaching a larger audience while maintaining the trustworthiness of your social circle.” A further advantage of eWOM is that it may be highly persuasive,

depending on which route of persuasion is active and the characteristics of the eWOM message (Svensson, 2011). The factors that cause eWOM on Facebook to be persuasive are listed in the following passage.

- **Persuasion through eWOM on Facebook: The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**

The delivered eWOM can persuade individuals through one of two routes of persuasion of the ELM, the central route or the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986 in Svensson, 2011). An individual may be persuaded by means of the central route in the event that the receiver classifies the eWOM message as pertinent. The message is sensibly examined, which incorporates a judicious analysis of the characteristics of the argument. An individual could on the other hand be persuaded via the peripheral route should he or she not regard the message as pertinent. In this case, he or she will devote attention not to the content of the message itself, but other signals such as the message presentation and the appeal of the message source. Different factors affect whether Facebook users are swayed by eWOM, depending on which route of persuasion is in action (Svensson, 2011). The fact that a wedding dress is an item of great significance suggests that eWOM messages concerning wedding dresses would be relevant to brides on Facebook who are exposed to such messages (Buckley, 2010; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993; Thomas & Peters, 2011; Weiss, 2008). Therefore, brides would be influenced through the central rather than peripheral route (Svensson, 2011). Given this, a couple of aspects impacting whether Facebook users are convinced, when the central route is at work, appear hereafter

1. Strength of the Argument in the Message

Subjective messages lack a strong argument and are viewed with suspicion. It appears that the social ranking and reliability of the sender establishes the influence of the message. Consequently, a low amount of Facebook friends would be victorious in disseminating subjective eWOM. Objective messages in contrast do contain a robust argument that determines the influence of the message. It is suggested that objective eWOM would be more successfully disseminated than subjective eWOM (Svensson, 2011).

2. Legitimacy of the Message

Painting a rosy picture of oneself on Facebook could generate cynicism. Furthermore, the message may undergo a loss of dependability and therefore relevance, or even be cast off (Svensson, 2011). This is aligned with the results of a study by Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2010 in Svensson, 2011), which indicated that legitimacy is vital for profitable branding on Facebook. A lack of legitimacy could result in receivers rejecting the eWOM and not processing the actual content of the

message, which is necessary for it to be persuasive (in Svensson, 1986 & Cacioppo, 1986).

The aforesaid factors of legitimacy, cogent argument, extensive reach and high reliability, could result in eWOM on Facebook concerning wedding dresses, being accessed by and influencing brides. There is a great likelihood of such eWOM being generated since as acknowledged earlier, a wedding dress can be labeled a high involvement item, and much conversation pertaining to these items is produced online (Gu, Park & Konana, 2012 in Wolny & Mueller, 2013). In South Africa in particular, eWOM pertaining to wedding dresses may be created on Facebook. This is because it has been shown, that apart from the country boasting a highly active wedding industry, South Africans utilise Facebook, among other forms of social media, for more than three hours each day (Hitched WIFE, 2013a, 2013b; Pam Black Weddings in Finweek, n.d; Pressly *et al.*, 2010; We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015; Wedding Diary, 2009). Digital activity in South Africa, with special mention of eWOM in the South African wedding industry, are discoursed below.

2.4.2 eWOM in the South African Wedding Industry

The amount of internet users in South Africa underwent a 24% increase during 2014, resulting in the country now holding 24.9 million users, comprising nearly half of the population (Internet Live Stats, 2015; We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015). 51% of internet users are female while 49% are male (mybroadband, 2014b). Those internet users who have access to various types of media, spend double the amount of time spent on television, on internet products (We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015).

Focusing on social media, the amount of active social media accounts in the country also experienced an increase during 2014. According to a report by social media marketing and communications company We Are Social (2014 in Shezi, 2015), this was a 20% increase that occasioned 11.8 million active social media accounts. 10.6 million of these accounts are accessed through mobile phones. The use of social media applications is the main activity performed by mobile phone users with 29% of the population using social media applications (We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015).

As highlighted earlier, Facebook was recognised as the most popular SNS worldwide, and is too the most popular SNS in South Africa (Chih *et al.*, 2014; Leung, 2012; Svensson, 2011; We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015). Another report, by marketing research company World Wide Worx (2014 in mybroadband, 2014a), and analytics company Fuseware (2014 in mybroadband, 2014a), revealed that like internet usage, Facebook usage in South Africa has risen. This culminated in 11.8 million Facebook users in the country, representing 22% of the population. In addition to this, Facebook is the first “high-tech service or platform” in South Africa to have an equal split between male and female users. Furthermore, the user base of the SNS is starting to become aligned with the country’s urban population, whereby the highest

growth in the amount of users has occurred in the country's major economic centres. Majority of South African Facebook users, 8.8 million specifically, access the SNS via mobile phones (World Wide Worx, 2014 in mybroadband, 2014a; Fuseware, 2014 in mybroadband, 2014a).

The aforementioned growth in internet users and active social media accounts presents an opportunity for eWOM to be generated in South Africa. There is a dearth of research on eWOM in South Africa, although a study by Beneke, Mill, Naidoo and Wickham (2015), investigated eWOM in the country as it pertained to the high-involvement product of airline services. Beneke *et al.* (2015) concentrated on negative eWOM, and found that a rise in willingness to participate in negative eWOM, negatively affected brand attitude. Brand attitude consisted of the dimensions of brand trust, brand affect and consumer purchase intent (Beneke *et al.*, 2015). This indicates that eWOM has an impact on the purchase intention of South African consumers for high-involvement products.

Considering a wedding dress as a high-involvement product, it appears that eWOM generated by South Africans concerning this product, and South Africa's wedding industry in general, has not been researched. However, it is evident that a vast amount of South African wedding vendors have active social media accounts, which their clients and prospective clients use to communicate.

Two examples of such wedding vendors are *Janita Toerien Wedding Gowns* and *Bride&co*, both of which supply wedding dresses. Janita Toerien is an independent designer with her own fashion label, whereas *Bride&co* is a bridal department store. Both vendors' Facebook fan pages generate the most conversation in comparison to their other SNS accounts such as Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest. This was anticipated due to the dominance of Facebook in South Africa relative to other SNS's (We Are Social in Shezi, 2015). The most common messages that consumers posted on the vendor's Facebook fan pages were messages of praise and thanks, or positive eWOM messages. These messages came in the form of comments on pictures, reviews and posts to the pages. Negative eWOM was very rare.

To provide examples, one *Janita Toerien Wedding Gowns* consumer said: "I absolutely LOVED every single second I got to spend in my dress... Thank you so much Janita for the creation, it truly is a work of art and everyone was in awe," (Danny Roberts, 2015). In addition, a *Bride&co* consumer said: "Thank you to Bride&Co for my amazing dress! Can't wait to share our photographer's photos! 13 June 2015 was perfect!" (Marinette Strydom, 2015). Both of the above comments could act as evidence of the strong extent of emotional involvement associated with wedding dresses, given that the brides expressed adoration for their dresses, and excitement to share wedding photographs. However, the first comment does not only speak of the bride's feelings, but the opinions of others, by stating that they were stunned by her wedding dress. This hints that the bride could have chosen her dress

in light of her guests' likely opinions, to avoid being frowned or looked down upon. It is therefore suggested that there was a social risk connected to her dress, which the bride took action to prevent herself from being susceptible to.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrated that South Africa has a prominent wedding industry. Furthermore, the high-involvement, high-risk, "once-in-a-lifetime" purchase of a wedding dress was highlighted as a significant purchase. Thereafter, eWOM in the wedding industry was discussed in detail, where the discussion recognised various social media platforms, and placed a special focus on the SNS of Facebook. Attention was in addition devoted to South Africa's digital activity, and the generation of eWOM in the country's wedding industry. This study strives to investigate the effect of eWOM in SNS's, on South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. This issue may be addressed using a model that incorporates a relationship between eWOM and purchase intention. Specific models, which acknowledge such a relationship, are deliberated on hereafter, and a model to be utilised in this study is selected.

CHAPTER 3: MODELS OF eWOM

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter highlighted the advantages of eWOM over WOM, including the main benefits of eWOM, which cause it to be more powerful than WOM. This makes eWOM a subject that is deserving of the attention it has received in marketing research. Certain researchers have focused on models that incorporate a relationship between eWOM and purchase intention (Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2009). However, the wedding industry, detailed in the former chapter, is under-researched. Hence, after taking the existing models of eWOM into account, a model is selected for employment in this study, to consider the effect of eWOM in SNS's, on South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses.

The first two models to be discussed are those researched by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) and Lee *et al.* (2014). A more complex model, in a study by Lee and Lee (2009), is explained thereafter. The eWOM in SNS's model, compiled by See-To & Ho (2014), is then pointed out as the model selected for utilisation in this study, and the reasoning for choosing the model is elucidated.

3.2 MODELS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN eWOM AND PURCHASE INTENTION

Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) have established a model that serves as a foundation for the expected impact of eWOM on brand image and purchase intention mentioned in previous literature. It was found that eWOM is a vital antecedent of both brand image and purchase intention given the substantial positive influence that eWOM had on these constructs. It was also noted that brand image is an antecedent of purchase intention due to the effect of brand image on purchase intention. Another model, included in the study by Lee *et al.* (2014), proposed that eWOM, product knowledge and promotions, all impact purchase intention. The study concluded that eWOM and product knowledge largely affect purchase intention such that a greater amount of eWOM commentary and vaster product knowledge results in higher purchase intention. A disparity between promotional methods, namely price reductions and coupons on the other hand, was not discovered to have a statistically significant influence on purchase intention. Nevertheless, it was noted that consumers do prefer price reductions to coupons. Yet a further model, proposed by Lee and Lee (2009), differs from the models of Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) and Lee *et al.* (2014).

This model allows for the investigation of the impact of product evaluation on purchase intention, whereby product evaluation is divided into an objective and subjective domain. It is possible for a product to be objectively evaluated in the presence of a "ranking-based standard for evaluation", whereas the product will be

subjectively evaluated in the absence of such a standard, creating an objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy. Product quality can be objectively assessed, causing it to correspond with the objective domain of product evaluation. Product preference in comparison cannot, causing it to correspond with the subjective domain of product evaluation. Product quality and product preference were hence the two principles used for product evaluation, and pointed out as antecedents of purchase intention. eWOM, which in the context of the study was comprised of customer ratings, was included in the model as a factor that affects the influence of product quality and product preference on purchase intention (Lee & Lee, 2009).

The effect of movements in the average and variance of eWOM, on the influence that product quality and product preference have on purchase intention was examined. This examination was carried out for two types of goods, namely quality and preference goods. A quality good is one that would typically be evaluated on the basis of quality, such as a laptop, whereas a preference good is one that would usually be evaluated by means of preference, for example a magazine (Lee & Lee, 2009). It was learnt that with respect to quality goods, when the eWOM average rises, the effect of product quality on purchase intention heightens, and that of product preference lowers. Also with respect to quality goods, when the eWOM variance rises, only the effect of product quality on purchase intention is statistically significant, with this effect being boosted. Progressing to preference goods, when the eWOM average rises, the influence of both product quality and product preference on purchase intention becomes stronger. Lastly, as with quality goods, when the eWOM variance rises, only the influence of product quality on purchase intention is statistically significant, with this effect being intensified (Lee & Lee, 2009).

The above-discussed models by researchers Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), Lee *et al.*, (2014) and Lee and Lee (2009), demonstrate the effect of eWOM on purchase intention. Yet, they do not acknowledge the indirect impact of eWOM on purchase intention, via trust and value co-creation, the procedure whereby “the consumer and the firm are intimately involved in jointly creating value that is unique to the individual consumer and sustainable to the firm.” The eWOM in SNS’s model recognises this influence within the environment of SNS’s, a type of social media, making the model well suited to address this study’s research problem (See-To & Ho, 2014).

As illustrated in the previous chapter on the wedding industry, social media has to a large extent been incorporated into wedding planning and the formation of wedding-related decisions, including wedding dress decisions (Barker, 2012; Beitler, 2013; Laudon, 2014; theknot.com, 2012 and mashable.com, 2012 in Smith, 2012; Silverman, 2015; Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011; Weers, 2015). SNS’s in particular, such as Facebook, serve as a prime vehicle for the generation of eWOM amongst brides, with many brides resorting to SNS’s to voice their viewpoints on and experiences with wedding dress vendors (Barker, 2012; Beitler, 2013; Clay, 2012; Laudon, 2014; Nizam, 2012; Smith, 2012). These include brides in South Africa,

where a surge in activity on SNS's such as Facebook, has taken place (Danny Roberts, 2015; Marinette Strydom, 2015; We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015). In the environment of SNS's, trust and value co-creation play a role in the relationship between the customer, and the firm with an SNS fan page (See-To & Ho, 2014). Therefore, trust and value co-creation play a role in the relationship between the bride and the wedding dress vendor with an SNS fan page, such as a Facebook fan page. This demonstrates the appropriateness of the eWOM in SNS's model for this study.

3.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter specified the available models of the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, specifically those models tested by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), Lee *et al.* (2014), and Lee and Lee (2009). The findings of the studies that incorporated these models were also briefly discussed. The findings of the study by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) revealed that eWOM is a crucial antecedent of both brand image and purchase intention. In addition, Lee *et al.* (2014) discovered that a larger amount of eWOM commentary and more extensive product knowledge causes higher purchase intention. Moreover, Lee and Lee (2009) found that shifts in the average and variance of eWOM, affected the influence of product quality and product preference on purchase intention. This effect was unveiled to vary for two distinct types of goods, specifically product and preference goods. Following this, See-To & Ho's (2014) eWOM in SNS's model was highlighted as the chosen model for use in this study. This is because it recognised a possible effect of eWOM in SNS's on purchase intention, through both trust and value co-creation, where these concepts are significant in the relationship between the bride and the wedding dress vendor, with an SNS fan page. The succeeding chapter elaborates on the model by concentrating on each of its constructs and the relationships between them.

CHAPTER 4: THE eWOM IN SNS'S MODEL

4.1 INTRODUCTION

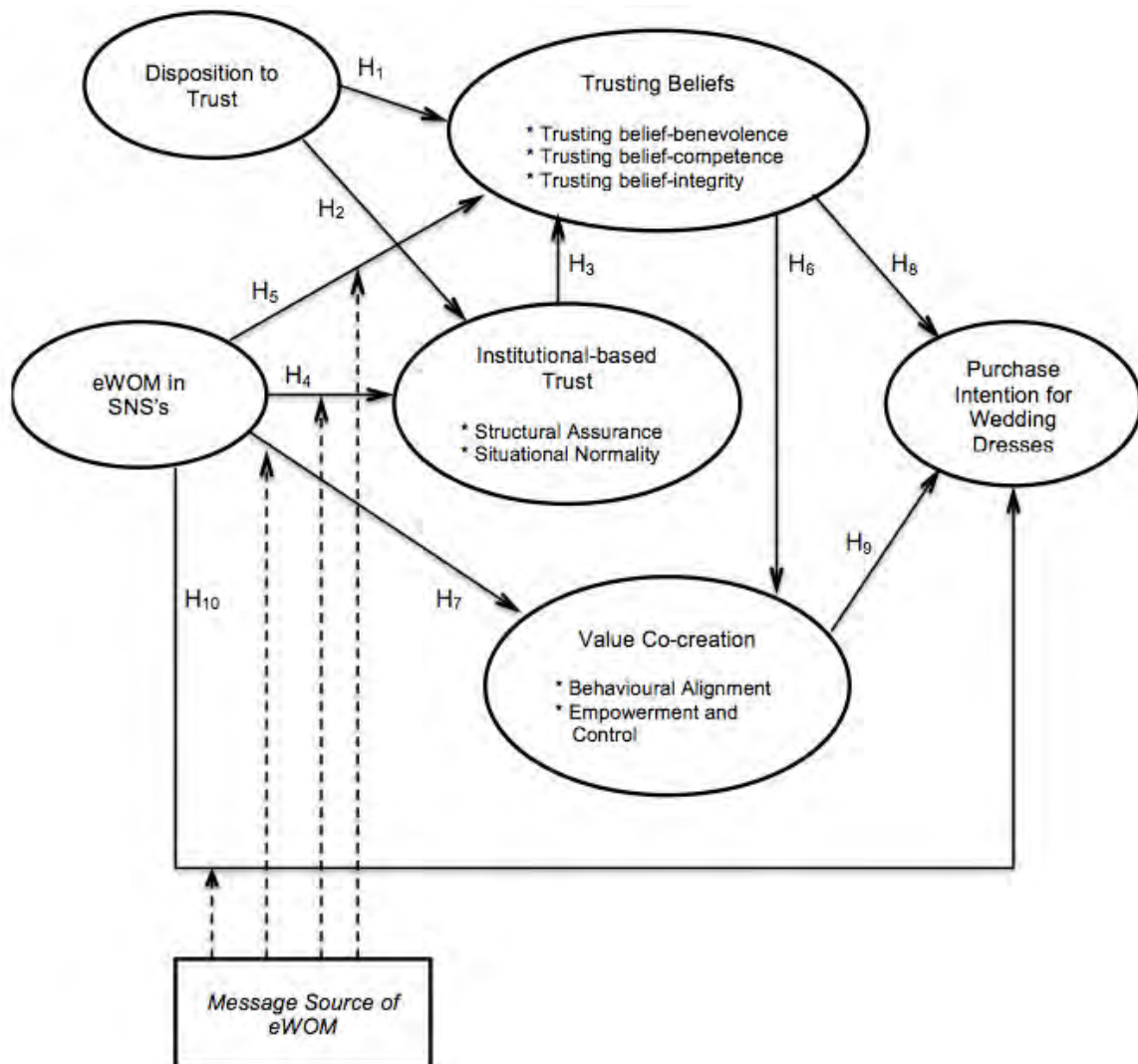
The eWOM in SNS's model, put forward by See-To and Ho (2014), acknowledges the influence of eWOM on purchase intention, through both trust and value co-creation, within the environment of SNS's. It was therefore deemed to be appropriate for investigating the impact of eWOM in SNS's on South African brides' intention to purchase the high-involvement product of a wedding dress. Hence, this study sets out to test the eWOM in SNS's model.

This chapter endeavours to provide further detail on the model. It begins with an overview of the relationships in the model. It then resumes with an in-depth discussion of the constructs of the model, namely trust, value co-creation and purchase intention, and the relationships in which they are included. Finally, the message source of eWOM is discussed as a moderator, together with the source characteristics of tie strength, perceptual affinity and demographic similarity. The hypotheses that were tested in this study are discoursed where appropriate, in the review of the literature.

4.2 OUTLINE OF THE eWOM IN SNS'S MODEL

The eWOM in SNS's model occupies the void in extant literature regarding firstly, the effect of eWOM on purchase intention in an SNS environment, and secondly, value co-creation from the perspective of the consumer (See-To & Ho, 2014). A diagram of the model, with an indication of the hypotheses to be tested, can be found below. The succeeding sections elaborate on each of the model's constructs and the relationships that they are involved in. However, the model in its entirety is first concisely delineated.

Figure 3: The eWOM in SNS's Model with Hypotheses



Key:
 Direct Effect \longrightarrow
 Moderating Effect \dashrightarrow

SOURCE: See-To & Ho (2014)

To begin with, disposition to trust acts as an antecedent to two more components of trust, specifically institutional-based trust and trusting beliefs (H₁, H₂). In addition, institutional-based trust was posited to have a direct relationship with trusting beliefs (H₃). Considering eWOM, this construct was suggested to directly impact institutional-based trust and trusting beliefs (H₄, H₅). It was furthermore proposed that the degree of trusting beliefs has a positive effect on value co-creation (H₆) (See-To & Ho, 2014). Another postulated direct relationship involving value co-creation was

that between eWOM and value co-creation (H₇). Taking into account purchase intention, this construct was conjectured to be directly influenced by three other constructs, particularly trusting beliefs, value co-creation and purchase intention (H₈, H₉, H₁₀). The anticipation that the message source of eWOM, moderates the effect of eWOM on consumer trust, value co-creation and purchase intention, completes the model (See-To & Ho, 2014). Each of these constructs, and the message source of eWOM, is detailed in turn in the subsequent section.

4.3 CONSTRUCTS AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE eWOM IN SNS'S MODEL

In this passage, the discussion of the constructs of trust, value co-creation and purchase intention, draw attention to the different subcontracts, attributes or components of each of these main constructs. This discussion also states the relationships that the constructs are involved in. Thereafter, the moderating factor of the eWOM message source is acknowledged.

4.3.1 Trust

Trust has been recognised as a crucial feature of all human relationships and all facets of life (Das & Teng, 2004; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Given the significance of trust, it is necessary to define the term (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Researchers in a variety of disciplines, especially those in the social sciences, including sociology, psychology and economics, have directed their focus to trust (Das & Teng, 2004). However, theorists have agreed that there is perplexity regarding its conceptualisation (Das & Teng, 2004; Li, 2007; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). This is because trust has been defined within the limits of individual disciplines, rather than being broadly defined such that the definition may be applicable across disciplines (Li, 2007; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). It is also due to the fact that the term has been used haphazardly and in several manners, many of which are dissimilar (Das & Teng, 2004; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). In order to elucidate trust, theorists have developed numerous conceptualisations of trust (Das & Teng, 2004). See-To and Ho (2014), whilst proposing their research model, opted to utilise the typology designed by McKnight and Chervany (2001).

McKnight and Chervany (2001) have formed a typology according to which trust has five components, namely trusting intentions, trust-related behaviour, trusting beliefs, institutional-based trust and disposition to trust (See-To & Ho, 2014). These researchers have turned to different disciplines in order to create a distinction between the components. In so doing, they aimed to produce a conceptualisation of trust, which encompasses the quintessence of trust definitions, across numerous disciplines. Institutional-based trust has been clarified by referring to sociology theory, and disposition to trust, by consulting psychology and economics theory. Trusting intentions, trust-related behaviour and trusting beliefs in contrast, have been explained by looking to the theories of social psychology and additional disciplines

(McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

Trusting intentions and trust-related behaviour, although part of McKnight and Chervany's (2001) trust typology, are excluded from the eWOM in SNS's model. See-To and Ho (2014) clarified that this is because these components explain the social psychological behaviour of people, which is associated with their adoption behaviour, including desire to do business and purchase intention. They further stated that trusting intentions and trusting behaviour are not required in the eWOM in SNS's model, due to the fact that purchase intention, a construct that will be later discussed, has already been included. The trust components that are included in the eWOM in SNS's model, namely trusting beliefs institutional-based trust and disposition to trust, are henceforth elaborated on. Thereafter, the relationships between these components are elucidated.

4.3.1.1 Trusting Beliefs

Trusting beliefs represent cognitive perceptions regarding the qualities or traits of the trustee (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002a; McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002b). It can in addition connote the degree to which an individual has faith, whilst feeling moderately safe, that another has traits that will be advantageous to the individual (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b). In the context of See-To and Ho's (2014) research, it is the trust that one has in a firm and one's viewpoints that the firm will carry out what will be in one's best interest. McKnight *et al.* (2002a), have a strong belief, based on the presumptions of cognitive-based trust literature, that trusting beliefs develop fast, or at an early stage of interaction when those involved do not have valuable information about each other. They further believe that trusting beliefs could alter as interaction progresses.

The four subconstructs of this component are trusting belief-benevolence, trusting belief-competence, trusting belief-integrity and trusting belief-predictability (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b). Trusting belief-benevolence denotes an individual's strongly held faith that another is considerate towards the individual, and is driven to do what will be beneficial for the individual. Trusting belief-competence relates to a person's firmly held faith that another is capable of performing tasks for the person, should it be necessary for those tasks to be performed. Trusting belief-integrity indicates an individual's deeply held faith that another enters into contracts, with honourable intentions, is honest and will do what is promised (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b). Trusting belief-predictability signifies a person's faith, that another's deeds are unchanging, to such an extent that his or her deeds may be foreseen (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b). According to Mayer *et al.* (1995 in McKnight *et al.*, 2002b), should a trustee display all of the above components as characteristics, he or she will be a highly covetable transaction partner since they will act in a virtuous, caring, proficient and "consistent" manner during the transaction.

See-To and Ho (2014) have chosen to incorporate three of the trusting beliefs subconstructs into the eWOM in SNS's model, trusting belief-benevolence, trusting belief-competence and trusting belief-integrity in particular. These subconstructs are the ones that as claimed by McKnight *et al.* (2002a), are used most regularly. See-To and Ho (2014) gave a description of each of the subconstructs as they apply to their research, and these descriptions follow.

Trusting belief-benevolence represents one's confidence that a firm regards one highly, and is determined to behave in such a way, that one can gain from the firm's actions. Considering the subconstruct from an SNS perspective, it represents an SNS user's confidence, that a firm with an SNS fan page, holds the SNS user in high esteem, and is concerned with their level of satisfaction (See-To & Ho, 2014). The subconstruct may also be explained using Facebook as an example of an SNS, and a wedding dress vendor as an example of a firm. In this case, trusting belief-benevolence would represent a bride on Facebook's confidence, that a wedding dress vendor with a Facebook fan page, holds the bride in high esteem, and is concerned with her level of satisfaction.

Trusting belief-competence on the other hand, connotes one's credence, that a firm is capable of making products and/or services, available in a satisfactory manner. Examining the subconstruct from an SNS perspective, it connotes an SNS user's credence that a firm is skilled enough to decently provide products and/or services (See-To & Ho, 2014). Once again employing Facebook as an example of an SNS, and a wedding dress vendor as an example of a firm, trusting belief-competence connotes a bride on Facebook's credence, that a wedding dress vendor with a Facebook fan page, is skilled enough to decently provide wedding dresses.

Trusting belief-integrity in contrast, alludes to one's confidence that a firm makes arrangements, regarding the standard of the products and/or services, offered to its consumers, in a respectable manner. Taking the subconstruct into account from an SNS perspective, it alludes to an SNS user's confidence that a firm fulfils the promises, conveyed on its SNS fan page, concerning the standard of its products and/or services (See-To & Ho, 2014). Like the aforementioned subconstructs, this subconstruct can be elucidated utilising Facebook as an example of an SNS, and a wedding dress vendor as an example of a firm. In this instance, trusting belief-integrity alludes to a bride on Facebook's confidence, that a wedding dress vendor fulfils promises, conveyed on its Facebook fan page, concerning the standard of its dresses.

Trusting beliefs is a component of McKnight and Chervany's (2001) trust typology that is associated with interpersonal trust, since it is concerned with people's personal traits. It is however possible for trust to be directed towards scenarios and "structures" instead of human beings (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). A component of

McKnight and Chervany's (2001) typology that deals with such trust is henceforth delineated.

4.3.1.2 Institutional-based Trust

Institutional-based trust can be defined as one's "perceptions of the institutional environment", or the trust that one has in a "sociological structure" (McKnight *et al.*, 2002b; See-To & Ho, 2014). In the context of SNS's, as mentioned before, this component represents the overall trust that one has in SNS's such as Facebook (See-To & Ho, 2014). Institutional-based trust originates from the sociology tradition postulating that individuals may depend on others due to "structures, situations or roles", which ensure that all will run smoothly (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a). It connotes the faith that individuals have in those security "structures" rather than the "people involved", demonstrating that it concentrates on an impersonal item. Yet, it is necessary to note that institution-based trust impacts interpersonal trust since it puts the trustor at more ease with trusting other individuals in the scenario (McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

The two subconstructs that this component consists of are structural assurance and situational normality. Structural assurance denotes an individual's firmly held faith that security "structures", which could include warranties and rules, and which allow for "situational success", are available (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b; See-To & Ho, 2014). Situational normality in contrast, relates to a person's strongly held faith that a scenario in a precarious undertaking, or the atmosphere, is ordinary, or lends itself to "situational success" (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b). Stated otherwise, it is the trust one has, that the scenarios one is involved in, whilst engaging with the institution, will be commonplace (See-To & Ho, 2014). Situational normality portrays Garfinkel's (1963) concept that trust is the perception that the conditions of a scenario are typical, correct or appropriate (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Garfinkel (1963 in McKnight & Chervany, 2001) pointed out that individuals do not trust others when the conditions of a scenario become strange or unexplainable.

Just as was done with the subconstructs of trusting beliefs, See-To and Ho (2014) explained structural assurance and situational normality as they apply to the context of their study. Acknowledging structural assurance from an SNS perspective, it indicates an SNS user's credence that security features, for example the "legal protection or technological design of the SNS", can safeguard the SNS user from difficulties, that may arise in utilising the data on the SNS to make decisions, such as purchasing decisions. Using Facebook as an example of an SNS, structural assurance indicates a bride on Facebook's credence, that security features can safeguard her from difficulties, which may arise in utilising the information on Facebook to make decisions, such as a purchasing decisions regarding a wedding dress. Analysing situational normality from an SNS perspective, it signifies the trust

of an SNS user that allows him or her to feel at rest, with utilising the SNS for purchase decision-making (See-To & Ho, 2014). Yet again employing Facebook as an example of an SNS, situational normality signifies the trust of a bride on Facebook, which allows her to feel at rest with utilising the SNS, for purchase decision-making, such as the decision to purchase a wedding dress.

As can be seen above, situational normality deals with general scenarios. Disposition to trust on the other hand, pertains to people in general. This trust component is discoursed below.

4.3.1.3 Disposition to Trust

Disposition to trust, as alluded to in an earlier section, is the trust that one individual would have in another, in any ordinary scenario (See-To & Ho, 2014). A more detailed definition of this component, is provided by describing it as the degree to which an individual shows a regular inclination, to rely on “general others” across a wide range of scenarios and people (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a). Individuals acquire a disposition to trust as they mature, although it undergoes changes due to experiences that occur later in their lives (McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

The subconstructs of this component are faith in humanity and trusting stance. Having faith in humanity relates to a person’s supposition that “general others” are truthful, kind, adept and calculable (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a). Just as trusting beliefs is divided into the categories of benevolence, competence and integrity, so too has it been suggested that faith in humanity is comprised of these categories (McKnight *et al.*, 2002a). A difference between faith in humanity and trusting beliefs also exists whereby faith in humanity regards “general others” and trusting beliefs is applicable to only certain individuals (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Trusting stance in contrast, denotes that irrespective of what one would typically presume with regards to others, one deduces that one will accomplish preferable results, through handling others as one would handle them, in the event that they are dependable and have good intentions. In other words, trusting stance indicates a personal decision or plan to trust other people “until they have proven one wrong”, regardless of whether they display good qualities (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a).

Given the above, it can be said that faith in humanity refers to the characteristics of “general others”, whereas trusting stance encompasses a personal technique which may be used to cope with other people (McKnight *et al.*, 2002a). These two subconstructs do however share a similarity since they both refer to an inclination to trust others. Their explanations originate from different areas of theory or research, with the faith in humanity explanation originating from psychology theory and the trusting stance explanation originating from economics-based trust research. The

latter is due to the fact that trusting stance is associated with a decision that is supposedly founded, on subjective computation, of the likelihood of triumph in an undertaking (McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

Disposition to trust has relationships with both trusting beliefs and institutional-based trust. Likewise, trusting beliefs and institutional-based trust have a relationship with each other. The following passage sheds light on the relationships between these trust components.

4.3.1.4 The Relationships Between Disposition to Trust, Institutional-based Trust and Trusting Beliefs

One of the subconstructs of disposition to trust, faith in humanity, has a greater likelihood of being an antecedent to trusting beliefs than the other component, trusting stance, due to the fact that faith in humanity is concerned with individuals' traits (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Nevertheless, disposition to trust in its entirety, plays the role of an antecedent to trusting beliefs (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a). Therefore, the hypothesis below is formed:

H₁: Engaged, young adult, South African females' disposition to trust, has a positive impact on their trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with SNS fan pages.

However, Bigley and Pierce (1998 in McKnight *et al.*, 2002a) and Rotter (1971 in McKnight *et al.*, 2002a), claim that this effect is expectedly the most intense in the event that the "institutional context" and particular trustee are unknown to the trustor. Should a person have had numerous encounters with an "institutional context", although not a particular trustee, those encounters will "directly" affect institutional-based trust, causing the relationship between disposition to trust and trusting beliefs to be nearly fully mediated by institutional-based trust (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a).

This mediating effect draws attention to a positive relationship between disposition to trust and institutional-based trust. This relationship is formed since a person's opinions with respect to others should typically be transferred to the institutions which others form part of (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Considering this, the following hypothesis is developed:

H₂: Engaged, young adult, South African females' disposition to trust has a positive impact on their institutional-based trust in the SNS.

Institutional-based trust has been noted to have a positive relationship with trusting beliefs (McKnight *et al.*, 2002a). Institutional-based trust impacts interpersonal trust because developing trust in a scenario, causes an individual to more easily trust those involved in the scenario, since there is an inclination to form the opinion, that

they have reliable characteristics (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a). Because trusting beliefs refers to interpersonal trust, this proves that institutional-based trust also impacts trusting beliefs (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Consequently, the hypothesis hereafter is formulated:

H₃: Engaged, young adult, South African females' institutional-based trust in the SNS has a positive impact, on their trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with SNS fan pages.

If there is a large proportion of eWOM included in a firm's SNS fan page, institutional-based trust could increase. This because an SNS user may develop the perception that other SNS users, believe that their security will not be threatened, in voicing their opinions about the firm, on its SNS fan page (See-To & Ho, 2014). See-To and Ho (2014) proposed that positive eWOM will intensify an SNS user's institutional-based trust in the SNS, while negative eWOM will cause it to deteriorate. Hence, the hypothesis hereunder is formed:

H₄: Positive eWOM on the SNS fan pages of wedding dress vendors, has a positive impact on engaged, young adult, South African females' institutional-based trust in the SNS, while negative eWOM has a negative impact.

Like institutional-based trust, three of subconstructs of trusting beliefs were proposed to have a direct relationship with eWOM. These subconstructs are namely trusting belief-benevolence, trusting belief-competence and trusting belief-integrity. Positive eWOM on a firm's SNS fan page could boost trusting belief-benevolence. This is since positive eWOM implies that the firm is considerate towards its consumers through making respectable goods and services available to them. Negative eWOM in contrast, implies that the firm is inconsiderate towards its consumers and could worsen trusting-belief benevolence (See-To & Ho, 2014). Turning to trusting belief-competence, comments of former consumers on a firm's SNS fan page could assist other consumers in assessing the firm's competence, thereby causing trusting belief-competence to be bolstered or waned (See-To & Ho, 2014). Focusing on trustin belief-integrity, positive eWOM will deepen other consumers' beliefs that the firm is capable of providing the good or service as promised, and increase trusting-belief integrity. Negative eWOM on the other hand, will cause this belief to become less firm, and decrease trusting-belief integrity (See-To & Ho, 2014).

For all three of the above-discussed trusting beliefs, See-To and Ho (2014) proposed that positive eWOM will heighten an SNS user's trusting belief in a product, which is vended by a firm that uses an SNS fan page to foster eWOM. They further proposed that negative eWOM would diminish an SNS user's trusting belief in a firm that uses an SNS fan page to foster eWOM. Given this, the subsequent hypothesis is developed:

H₅: Positive eWOM on the SNS fan pages of wedding dress vendors, has a positive impact on engaged, young adult, South African females' trusting beliefs, in wedding dress vendors with SNS fan pages, while negative eWOM has a negative impact.

Trust has been explored in numerous studies (Das & Teng, 2004; Li, 2007; McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b). The incorporation of value co-creation in the eWOM in SNS's model however, is what allows the eWOM in SNS's model to fill the void in extant literature, since value co-creation is considered from the perspective of the consumer. Value co-creation has furthermore been claimed to be one of the latest research areas in marketing and information systems (IS) (See-To & Ho, 2014). Given the distinct nature of value co-creation, a passage on value co-creation follows.

4.3.2 Value Co-creation

The notion of value is challenging to define and has been deliberated on since the 4th century Before Christ (BC) or the Classical era. It has been interpreted in different manners in the field of economics and in the examination of market exchange (Vargo, Maglio & Akaka, 2008). The conventional interpretation of value is referred to as goods-dominant (GD) logic, whereas the "alternative" interpretation of value is referred to as service-dominant (SD) logic (Lubrica, Mukhtar & Abdullah, 2011; Vargo *et al.*, 2008; Williams, 2013). It is from SD logic that the term value co-creation emerged (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008; Vargo *et al.*, 2008; Williams, 2013). Researchers have resultantly developed theoretical models that provide a detailed outline of the process of value co-creation, and identified attributes of value co-creation (AVC's) (Ng, Nudurupati & Tasker, 2010; Payne *et al.*, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

This passage begins by giving an explanation of GD logic before proceeding to a discussion of SD logic. It then progresses to presenting a theoretical model of the process of value co-creation, and concludes by recognising the AVC's relevant to the eWOM in SNS's model.

4.3.2.1 The Conventional View of Value- GD Logic

According to Adam Smith (1776 in Vargo *et al.*, 2008), the term value could be understood in two different ways, which he referred to as "value in use" and "value in exchange". Value in use was acknowledged as the "utility" of a certain item, whereas value in exchange was recognised as the power of buying alternate goods, which possession of that item communicates (Ng *et al.*, 2010; Vargo *et al.*, 2008). Smith (1776 in Vargo *et al.*, 2008) founded his beliefs on the effectiveness of the partitioning between labour and exchange, where labour can be defined as the "application of specialised skills and knowledge." He claimed that "real value" rested in the labour that was necessary, in order to have the means for the essentials and

luxuries of life, which linked “real value” to value in use. He further stated that “nominal’ value was the price paid in market exchange”, tying “nominal value” to value in exchange (Vargo *et al.*, 2008).

Even though labour was identified as “the real basis for value”, Smith (1776 in Vargo *et al.*, 2008) chose to focus on the nominal value of tangible goods due to the challenges of measuring labour. In other words, he decided to concentrate on value in exchange instead of value in use. He in addition classified “productive activities” to be those that provided value in exchange via the fabrication and allocation of tangible goods, a classification that most economic researchers during his time were in favour of (Vargo *et al.*, 2008). A good that made available “utilities” or value in exchange, became the core of neoclassical economics, and GD logic is founded on the value in exchange interpretation of value (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Ng *et al.*, 2010; Vargo *et al.*, 2008; Williams, 2013). Therefore, economic science became based on GD logic (Vargo *et al.*, 2008).

According to this logic, producers and consumers hold discrete responsibilities (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo *et al.*, 2008). Value generation is considered to be a succession of actions carried out by the firm, with value being implanted into the firm’s goods through its fabrication process. The value is dispensed in the market, typically by means of the exchange of goods and currency (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Vargo *et al.*, 2008; Williams, 2013). The value of the good exchanged is denoted by the market price or what the consumer, who will devour the value, is prepared to pay (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Vargo *et al.*, 2008).

Despite this view of value being commonly accepted, consumers, and their relationships with suppliers, began undergoing certain changes. Consumers now have more options available to them that result in lower gratification. They have “access to information” from all over the globe and can make more educated choices. In addition to this, the long-established top-down method of marketing communications is reversed, since influential “thematic consumer communities”, give consumers the opportunity to communicate thoughts and emotions, and disseminate word of mouth (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Consumers also provide unsought feedback to firms and each other. They furthermore have the desire to exert their power on each area of the commercial system, and to “interact with firms” to a greater extent (Payne *et al.*, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Such changes necessitate the reconsideration of the conventional view of value that has prevailed over the last century. A new approach to value creation is now required (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The new approach has its roots in SD logic, the alternative view of value, which is elaborated on next (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Payne *et al.*, 2008; See-To & Ho, 2014; Vargo *et al.* 2008; Williams, 2013).

4.3.2.2 The Alternate View of Value- SD Logic

As noted by Vargo & Lusch (2004), service is the employment of “knowledge and skills” by one party to the advantage of another. Vargo & Lusch (2004) further states that service is the “common denominator” of exchange rather than a distinct type of exchange or an alternative to goods. This progressively recognised understanding of service is at the heart of SD logic, which is associated with the value in use interpretation of value (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Payne *et al.*, 2008; Vargo *et al.* 2008; Williams, 2013). According to this logic, producers and consumers do not hold discrete responsibilities (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo *et al.* 2008). Instead, the firm and the customer (or beneficiary) generate value in unison, with the value being tailored to the individual customer and “sustainable to the firm” (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Payne *et al.*, 2008; See-To & Ho, 2014; Vargo *et al.* 2008; Williams, 2013). This is done via their interactions, and by the assimilation of resources and utilisation of skills (Vargo *et al.* 2008; Williams, 2013). This fresh approach to generating value is termed value co-creation (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Payne *et al.*, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; See-To & Ho, 2014; Vargo *et al.* 2008; Williams, 2013).

In the process of co-creating value, the firm puts forward a value proposition and provides an offering that acts as an input (Ng *et al.*, 2010; Payne *et al.*, 2008; See-To & Ho, 2014; Vargo *et al.* 2008; Williams, 2013). The offering is principally a service, which provided directly would be the provision of “knowledge and competencies”, and indirectly would be “knowledge and competencies” entrenched within a good (Vargo *et al.* 2008). Should they accept the firm’s value proposition, customers employ the firm’s offering “in the context of their own lives” (See-To & Ho, 2014; Vargo *et al.* 2008). The offering acts as a resource for the customer, which as a result of originating from a firm, is known as a market-facing resource. In employing the offering, the customer consolidates it with private and public resources, known as non-market-facing resources, in order to generate value (Vargo *et al.* 2008; Williams, 2013). Therefore, market-facing and non-market-facing resources are consolidated in order to generate value (Vargo *et al.* 2008). It is crucial to note that value will not be generated in the absence of the customer’s contribution, meaning that it is the customer or beneficiary that will finally establish value (Ng *et al.*, 2010; Vargo *et al.* 2008; Williams, 2013). Given that the value is generated “in the context of” the customer’s life, the value can be identified as value in use (Vargo *et al.* 2008).

Just as was done with trust, See-To and Ho (2014) elucidated the value co-creation process in the context of SNS’s. An SNS fan page created by a firm, which acts as a means for branding goods and/or services and spreading marketing information, also serves as an input for value co-creation. The customer will thereafter utilise the fan page to gather information and post messages, and this participation ultimately allows value to be co-created. Should the customer not utilise the fan page, no value will be generated (See-To & Ho, 2014). Facebook may be considered as an example of an SNS, and a wedding dress vendor an example of a firm, to clarify the value co-

creation process. In this scenario, a Facebook fan page created by the wedding dress vendor acts as an input for value co-creation. The bride on Facebook will thereafter view the page to gain inspiration, and could produce eWOM about the vendor's dresses on the page. She could furthermore share content from it on her own Facebook page, thus making the content available to a wider audience. This engagement ultimately causes value to be co-created.

Abela and Murphy (2008) implied that trust impacts value co-creation because it is necessary that the customer have an adequate degree of trust in the firm, in order for him or her to settle, to co-create the value of a good or service with the firm. Therefore, trust is a precondition for value co-creation (Abela & Murphy, 2008). See-To and Ho (2014) proposed that the degree of trusting beliefs in a product, which is vended by a firm that uses an SNS fan page to foster eWOM, has a positive influence on the value co-creation process. Taking this into account, the ensuing hypothesis is formed:

H₆: Engaged, young adult, South African females' trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with SNS fan pages, has a positive impact on the value co-creation process.

Key information regarding value co-creation, including a delineation of the value co-creation process, was presented above. Certain researchers have however compiled theoretical models that supply a more thorough outline of the value co-creation process (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Payne *et al.*, 2008). An explanation of such a model follows.

4.3.2.3 A Theoretical Model of Value Co-creation: Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) "DART" Model

The "DART" model, developed by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), is aimed at assisting firms with overseeing the value co-creation process (Payne *et al.*, 2008). Current research includes instances of organisations that have executed value co-creation, yet lacks insight with respect to the manner in which value is co-created (Payne *et al.*, 2008). Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) model concentrates on business-to-consumer markets, and is henceforth elucidated (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011).

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) have asserted that because the co-creation of value lies in the "interaction" between firms and customers, it is necessary to develop a grasp of the value co-creation process by means of its main constituents. These constituents are dialogue, access, risk-assessment and transparency, the initials of which form the acronym "DART", which gives the model its name (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Ng *et al.*, 2010; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). An explanation of each constituent is offered hereunder.

- *Dialogue*, relates to “interaction”, connection and both the firm and customer’s tendency to take action (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). “Interaction” in particular, has been described as the foundation for value co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Moreover, the firm simply listening to customers has been declared insufficient since dialogue suggests that joint “learning and communication” occurs between firms and customers.
- *Access*, is initiated by means of “information and tools.” Firms may provide customers with access to information about production and quality processes (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).
- *Risk* connotes the likelihood of damage to the consumer (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Customers will demand that firms comprehensively educate them on risks, which includes supplying data and suitable techniques for evaluating “personal and societal risk” (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).
- *Transparency* signifies the fact that firms cannot withhold information about prices, costs and profit margins any longer (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Generating “new” degrees of transparency is becoming more covetable due to data regarding goods and services, technologies and commercial systems, becoming more reachable (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Both Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), and Payne *et al.* (2008), recognised the importance of the customer experience in value co-creation. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) claimed that “the co-creation experience of the customer becomes the very basis of value”. Firms should concentrate on the standard of experiences, and not purely the standard of their goods and/or services (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). “Experience environments” which allow for value to be co-created by means of interfaces, which are tailored to each customer, should be established (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004 & Payne *et al.*, 2008). Ultimately, the function of the firm and the customer shift toward a distinctive co-creation encounter, or “experience of one” (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

eWOM mentioned on a firm’s SNS fan page produces consumers’ value by accumulating and diffusing their encounters as required. Moreover, it is expected that positive eWOM mentioned on the SNS fan page improves the image of the good or service and promotes the participation of consumers in value co-creation (See-To & Ho, 2014). See-To and Ho (2014) proposed that positive eWOM on an SNS fan page promotes the value co-creation process, while negative eWOM on an SNS fan page deters the process. Therefore, the hypothesis below is developed:

H7: Positive eWOM on the SNS fan pages of wedding dress vendors stimulates the value co-creation process, while negative eWOM deters it.

The above explained theoretical model of value co-creation shows the actions that need to be taken in order to achieve value co-creation, although does not clarify the attributes that should be present in order for value co-creation to take place. These attributes are presented in the subsequent discussion.

4.3.2.4 Attributes of Value Co-creation

Ng *et al.* (2010) conducted research regarding outcome-based contracts (OBC's) in business-to-business (B2B) markets in the UK, where an OBC serves as an indenturing tool that permits the customer to pay only once the firm has produced results, instead of simply having carried out assignments (See-To & Ho, 2014). An OBC may also be described as a "new model" that incorporates value co-creation, since the contract's success may only be realised with the participation of the customer, and the customer becomes involved in the production system (Ng, Ding & Yip, 2013). The qualitative data of Ng *et al.*'s (2010) research revealed seven AVC's necessary for effectual value co-creation (Lubrica *et al.*, 2011; See-To & Ho, 2014).

These are comprised of behavioural alignment, process alignment, congruence in customer expectations, congruence in firm expectations, empowerment and perceived control, behavioural transformation, and complementary competencies. These attributes transcend operational and "discipline" limitations, in addition to allowing for "two-way interactions" to occur between the firm and the customer, in order for value co-creation to take place. They also cause value-in-use to be generated and make it possible for value co-creation to be measured (Ng *et al.*, 2010). See-To and Ho (2014) have noted that two of the seven attributes, behavioural alignment and empowerment and control, are relevant to their proposed model. These are subsequently expanded on.

- **Behavioural Alignment**

Behavioural alignment refers to the firm and customer assuring that the proper actions are practiced in order to guarantee that value is co-created effectually (Ng *et al.*, 2010; See-To & Ho, 2014, Williams, 2013). It was stated that the accomplishment of value co-creation is greatly reliant on "personal relationships", resulting in the assertion that the correct actions, including "co-operation, teamwork, trust and open communication", is vital (Williams, 2013).

See-To and Ho (2014), clarified behavioural alignment in the context of SNS's by saying that it represents a scenario, whereby the firm and the customer are able to effectually convene on the SNS fan page, in order to devise fresh concepts regarding the firm's goods and/or services. Behavioural alignment can also be explained by

utilising Facebook as an example of an SNS, a wedding dress vendor as an example of a firm and a bride as an example of a customer. Behavioural alignment would occur when the wedding dress vendor and the bride, efficiently confer on the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page, in order to formulate novel ideas pertaining to the vendor's wedding dresses.

Williams (2013) further explored AVC's by developing a model, which aimed to specify the aptitudes that firms, such as wedding vendors, need to possess in order for value to be co-created. When developing the model, the AVC's were mapped against what Williams (2013) labelled "dimensions of capability". These dimensions are comprised of competence, capacity, culture, systems, structure and infrastructure. In the event that behavioural alignment is mapped against any of the dimensions, the resulting "organisational capability" is often associated with alterations in customer behaviour, whether this be acknowledging, adjusting to, observing or overseeing such alterations (Williams, 2013).

Just as behavioural alignment was explained in the context of SNS's, and recognised when determining the necessary competencies of firms, so too was empowerment and control. Further detail is henceforward provided on this AVC.

- **Empowerment and Control**

In presenting the seven AVC's, Ng *et al.* (2010) discovered that the aspects of perceived control and empowerment could be merged into one attribute, namely empowerment and control. Thus, empowerment and control is defined as the amalgamation of a "sense of empowerment", to acknowledge a readiness to transform others for effectual co-creation, and instituting a structure, that causes the firm and the customer, to have a "perception of control" (Ng *et al.*, 2010; See-To & Ho, 2014). Ng *et al.* (2013) indicated that in order for an effective partnership to ensue, empowerment is required. Empowering staff members to convert tribulations into "opportunities", and implement "personal judgement" for stronger efficiency, will enhance the effectualness of the service to the benefit of the firm and customer (Williams, 2013). Spreitzer (1995 in Ng *et al.*, 2013) noted that according to majority of the empowerment literature, empowerment also allows for a comprehension of the standard of service delivery. An improved perception of control on the other hand, can be created for both the firm and customer should customers be granted adequate access to "service delivery information" and procedures (Williams, 2013).

Referring to empowerment and control in the context of SNS's, See-To and Ho (2014) stated that it denotes a scenario, whereby the SNS user has a sense of "control", over whether he/she makes the choice, to include or exclude eWOM found on the SNS fan page, in his/her decision-making procedure. Empowerment and control may be further explained by using Facebook as an example of an SNS, a wedding dress vendor as an example of a firm and a bride as an example of a

customer. Empowerment and control is present when a bride has power over whether she makes the choice, to acknowledge or dismiss eWOM found on a wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page, in her wedding dress decision-making procedure.

Empowerment and control was too considered in the study by Williams (2013) mentioned above. Williams (2013) included empowerment and control in a model that specified the "organisational capabilities" necessary for value to be co-created. In perusing the model, it is evident that when empowerment and control is mapped against any of the "dimensions of capability", the resulting "organisational capability" involved looking after the interests of stakeholders, including customers, or ensuring a just allotment of "control" or "authority" (Williams, 2013).

The above explanation of empowerment and control and behavioural alignment, concludes the passage on value co-creation, and therefore the discussion of the independent variables of the eWOM in SNS's model. A discussion of the dependent variable and final construct of the model, purchase intention, ensues hereafter.

4.3.3 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention has for decades remained a significant notion in marketing (Morrison, 1979). Several studies have recognised it as being the ultimate forecaster of and antecedent to purchase behaviour, the most crucial issue in business (De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007; Pavlou, 2003; Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006; Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Shaw & Shui, 2002; Vermier & Verbeke, 2008). This is because Ajzen and Fishbein's (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) resulted in the firm belief or assumption, that intention and behaviour are linked (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, Brown & Carvajal, 2004; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2010; Chang, 1998; De Cannière, De Pelsmacker & Geuens, 2009; Stefani, Cavicchi, Romano & Lobb, 2008).

Ajzen (1985) subsequently updated the TRA to become the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), also positing that intention leads to behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen *et al.*, 2004; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Chang, 1998; De Cannière *et al.*, 2009; Stefani *et al.*, 2008). These theories have been regularly relied upon in order to comprehend the purchase decision-making process, and have been cited in a number of studies investigating purchase intention (Carrington *et al.*, 2010; De Cannière *et al.*, 2009; Fukukawa, 2003 in Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2014; Hansen, Jensen & Solgaard, 2004; Lee & Lee, 2015; Stefani *et al.*, 2008).

Henceforth, the link between intention and behaviour, as indicated by the theories, is discoursed. After the consideration of the TRA and TPB, a conceptualisation of intention, which may be applicable to purchase intention, is outlined. Lastly, a number of factors that were proposed to influence purchase intention, are discussed.

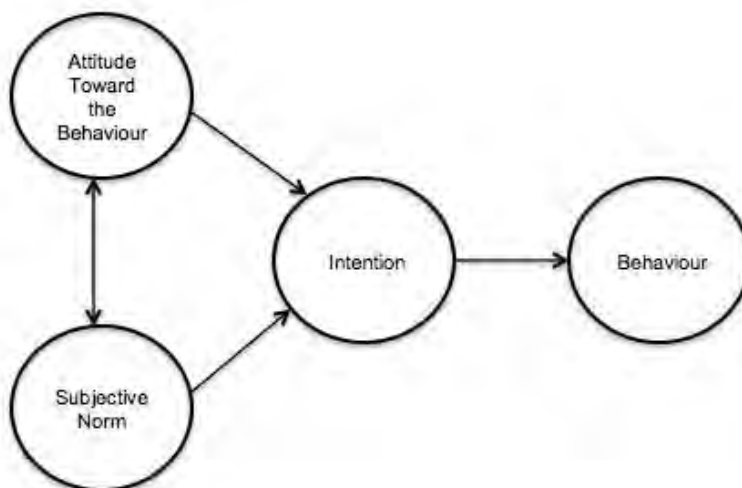
4.3.3.1 The Link Between Intention and Behaviour

Brief overviews of the TRA and TPB are provided below. The overview of each theory, explains the link between intention and behaviour, according to the theory.

- **The Link Between Intention and Behaviour According to the TRA**

Ajzen and Fishbein initially postulated the TRA in 1975 to elucidate the manner in which one with an attitude develops an intention, and consequently behaves (Lee & Lee, 2015). The constructs of the model have been described as “fundamentally motivational in nature” (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). They can be viewed in the figure below, and are comprised of attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norm, intention and behaviour (Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Chang, 1998; De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975 in Hansen *et al.*, 2004; Stefani *et al.*, 2008).

Figure 4: The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)



SOURCE: Ajzen & Madden (1986)

Intention to carry out a specific behaviour is a core construct in the model. It is presumed that intentions encompass the “motivational factors” that affect behaviour. Intentions signify to what extent individuals are prepared to attempt to perform the behaviour, and the exertion that they set out to apply in order to perform the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Söderland & Öhman, 2005, 2006). The TRA indicates through its other constructs, attitude toward the behaviour and subjective norm in particular, how intentions develop.

Attitude toward the behaviour and subjective norm are “conceptually independent” antecedents to intention (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980 in Stefani *et al.*, 2008; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Chang, 1998; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975 in Hansen *et al.*, 2004). Attitude toward the behaviour is a personal factor and denotes the extent to which one has an approving or disapproving assessment of the relevant behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Chang, 1998 ; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975 in Hansen *et al.*, 2004). Subjective norm on the other hand is a social factor and indicates the “perceived social pressure” to undertake the behaviour, or how one should behave based on the opinions of notable referent individuals or groups (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2002 in De Cannière *et al.*, 2009; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Chang, 1998; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975 in Hansen *et al.*, 2004; Stefani *et al.*, 2008).

Just as attitude toward the behaviour and subjective norm serve as antecedents to intention, the TRA signifies that behavioural intention is the direct precedent of behaviour. The firmer one’s intention, the greater the likelihood that one will attempt to carry out the behaviour, and the higher the probability that the behaviour will be undertaken (Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Lee & Lee, 2015). A definitive connection between intention and behaviour requires the fulfilment of three conditions.

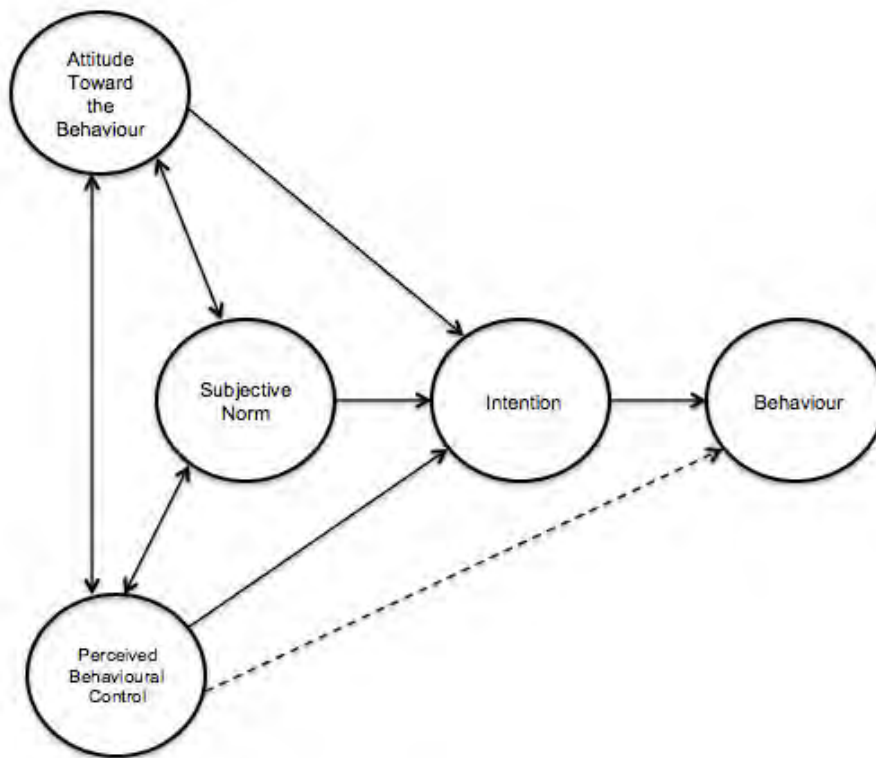
Firstly, it is necessary that the intention being examined be precisely the same as the behaviour to which it relates. Secondly, it is required that the intention being examined not be altered in the time between the evaluation of the intention and the observation of the behaviour (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Lastly, it is important that the behaviour in question be under complete volitional control, meaning that an individual can choose “at will”, whether to carry out the behaviour or not (Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Chang, 1998; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975 in Hansen *et al.*, 2004). Possessing complete volitional control requires that the undertaking of the behaviour not be dependent on the availability of suitable opportunities, or access to satisfactory resources such as time and funds. However, it has been suggested that people do not have complete volitional control over most actions (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Madden, 1986). The TPB was formed in order to address this issue, and is presented next.

- **The Link Between Intention and Behaviour According to the TPB**

When aiming to precisely determine behaviour over which people have incomplete volitional control, considering only intention, as done in the TRA, is inadequate. It is also necessary to acquire an estimate of the degree of behavioural control that one has over the relevant behaviour (Ajzen *et al.*, 2004; Ajzen & Madden, 1986). The TPB is an expansion of the TRA that includes all the constructs of the TRA, and accounts for behavioural control, by incorporating an additional construct named Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen *et al.*, 2004; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Hansen *et al.*, 2004; Stefani *et al.*, 2008). PBC may be described as the perception of the simplicity or hardship with which an

action may be undertaken (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Hansen *et al.*, 2004). PBC as contained in the TPB may be viewed in the figure below.

Figure 5: The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)



SOURCE: Ajzen & Madden (1986)

There are two versions of the TPB, each considering PBC in the formation of intention and the determining of behaviour. The first version excludes the broken line between PBC and behaviour in the above figure, and the second version contains the broken line (Ajzen & Madden, 1986).

According to the first and second version of the TPB, PBC has “motivational implications” for intention, and attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norm and PBC jointly determine intention (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2002 in Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Ajzen *et al.*, 2004; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; De Cannière *et al.*, 2009; Hansen *et al.*, 2004; Stefani *et al.*, 2008). The more positive a person’s attitude toward the deed in question, the more strongly significant referral people or groups approve of the deed, and the higher the PBC, the firmer a person’s intention to execute the deed will be.

PBC has control beliefs that serve as its antecedent, which also contribute to the eventual establishment of behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen *et al.*, 2004; Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Control beliefs relate to the availability or scarcity, of the necessary resources and opportunities, to accomplish a deed. If individuals' perceive that they do not possess the required resources and opportunities that allow for the realisation of a certain deed, suggesting that PBC is weak, the chances of developing firm intentions to perform the deed are low. This is applicable even in the event that individuals have positive attitudes toward the deed and salient referral people or groups advocate engaging in the deed. It is therefore anticipated, that there is a direct link between PBC and intention, which attitude toward the behaviour and subjective norm does not mediate (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Therefore, when considering the link between intention and behaviour according to the TPB, it is necessary to acknowledge that unlike the TRA, this connection is influenced by behavioural control, accounted for by PBC (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen *et al.*, 2004; Ajzen & Madden, 1986; Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Hansen *et al.*, 2004; Stefani *et al.*, 2008).

Given that a link has been established between intention and behaviour, marketers may for a variety of reasons utilise purchase intentions data. To begin with, purchase intentions may be used to predict the sales of currently available goods, and have been proven to offer preferred results to that of merely extrapolating extant sales data (Armstrong *et al.*, 2000; Morrison, 1979; Morwitz *et al.*, 2007). These predictions may be beneficial for decision-making concerning whether to rise or decrease production levels, whether to alter the amount of sales staff and/or whether to introduce a price adjustment. With respect to new goods, purchase intentions may be employed in concept tests to assist in ascertaining whether concepts should be advanced. They may furthermore be utilised in product tests to determine whether a new product should be released to the market (Morwitz *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, purchase intentions may be consulted to pretest advertising and assess suggested promotions for both new and extant goods (Bird & Ehrenberg, 1966 in Morwitz *et al.*, 2007).

It would however be beneficial, for marketers to devote attention to the postulation, that intention be conceptualised as a multidimensional construct. This is because the conceptualisation, outlined below, may be applicable to purchase intention (Söderland & Öhman, 2006).

4.3.3.2 The Conceptualisation of Intention

Söderland and Öhman (2003, 2006) stated that the creation of an intention forms a link between a person and his or her future, and involves making a proposal that ties a person to a "future behavioural act". Such a proposal has been referred to as "evaluation-free", which differentiates intention from other constructs such as attitude. In addition to this, the proposals may be viewed as rudimentary elements in a web of proposals, that come about when people participate in cognitive processes regarding

the future, including “wishes, mental simulation, planning, imagination, goal setting, and ruminations” (Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2005). Furthermore, it was claimed that the capability to create intentions is exclusive to humans, and that this capability is worthy of having “intentions theory” developed, with different theoretical components of intention being acknowledged (Söderland & Öhman, 2005, 2006). Yet, only a small amount of studies on consumer behaviour conceptualise intention such that distinct components may be recognised, which is remarkable considering the extensive work done on the precedents of intention such as attitude and satisfaction (Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2005, 2006).

Therefore, a multidimensional conceptualisation of intention was developed and it was contended that intentions-as-expectations (IE), intentions-as-plans (IP) and intentions-as-wants (IW) are the three components of intention. This conceptualisation could be applied to purchase intention, since marketing literature has indicated that intentions are constantly formed with respect to a variety of deeds, including buying an item “for the first time” and repeat buying (Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2005, 2006). The different components of intention are each individually elaborated on below.

- **Intention Component 1: Intentions-as-Expectations**

IE signifies one’s appraisal of the likelihood that one will carry out a certain deed in the future, and is a regularly utilised component of intention (Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2005, 2006). Söderland and Öhman (2006) claim that the key cognitive process of this component is related to the assessment of the chances that a certain result will occur. Because of this, IE has been dubbed “outcome oriented”. From a solely conceptual outlook, such assessments may not involve any consideration of the reasoning, behind the performance of the deed. Furthermore, they do not provide any indication of the extent to which one is ready to perform the deed (Söderland & Öhman, 2006).

- **Intention Component 2: Intentions-as-Plans**

As the name implies, IP denotes one’s plan to execute a specific action in the future, and symbolises a possibly varied set of intentions. This is since one may not consider one’s proposals relating to intending, deciding, picking and arranging, as being exactly the same. IP is highly similar to the dictionary explanation of intention and is the most widely recognised component of intention in extant literature (Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2005, 2006). The concepts of willpower, “effort” and decision-making are all relevant to IP (Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2006). It has been contended that this component encompasses the “motivational factors” that impact people’s actions, and that it pertains to making a choice regarding whether to fulfil the action (Conner, Mark, Warren, Close & Sparks, 1999 in Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2006; Malle & Knobe, 1997 in Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2006). IP has therefore

been described as having a “preparedness-orientation”. However, IP does not relate to evaluations of results, or the reasoning for a result being wanted (Söderland & Öhman, 2006).

- **Intention Component 3: Intentions-as-Wants**

Certain researchers, such as Heider (1958 in Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2005), have stated that an intention is the same as an aspiration or desire. Because the function of desires is linking a person to his or her future deeds, Söderland and Öhman (2003, 2005, 2006) have recognised wants as a component of intention. Even though Fishbein and Stasson (1990 in Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2005, 2006) and Norman and Smith (1995 in Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2005, 2006) have also acknowledged wants as a component of intention, IW is the component that is utilised the least regularly (Söderland & Öhman, 2006). Examples of scenarios in which IW controls one’s link with one’s future are impulse buying and engaging in a reverie regarding a deed that may never be realised (Söderland & Öhman, 2006). Söderland and Öhman (2006) assert that IW is “problem oriented”, due to the fact that it is concerned with perceptions of a disparity, between a present and a sought after future mental state. Nevertheless, these perceptions are not with regard to judgments of the likelihood of outcomes, or appraisals of preparedness to carry out a deed (Söderland & Öhman, 2006).

IW is distinguished from IE and IP due to yet a further factor regarding its precursors (Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2006). As pointed out earlier, a large amount of research has been conducted on the precursors of intention, where these precursors may be referred to as “global evaluations” (Söderland & Öhman, 2006). The association between a given component of intention and its precursors, or “evaluation-intention links”, differs from one component of intention to the next. It was found that “global evaluations” are better determinants of IW than of any other component (Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2005, 2006). This is because of the place that IW fills on a sense-of-ownership dimension, in comparison to those filled by IE and IP (Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2006).

Söderland and Öhman (2003, 2006) presumed that IW is “subject to” the greatest degree of perceived ownership since developing a desire is contingent on less external limitations. Judgments of the likelihood of outcomes, or appraisals of preparedness to carry out a deed on the other hand, are conditional on more external restraints. Three factors, noted by Pierce, Rubenfeld and Morgan (2001 in Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2006), were taken into account to make the aforementioned presumption about IW. These factors were “perceived control of an object, intimate knowledge of an object, and self-investment in the object”, and it was concluded that IW is marked by greater extents of each of them in comparison to IE and IP (Pierce, Rubenfeld and Morgan, 2001 in Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2006).

In summary, this analysis of intention highlights that each component corresponds with a distinct kind of orientation “towards the future”; IE has been described as “outcome oriented”, IP has been noted to have a “preparedness orientation” and IW has been labelled as “problem oriented” (Söderland & Öhman, 2006). Furthermore, “evaluation-intention links” are different for each component of intention (Söderland & Öhman, 2003, 2005, 2006). A final and crucial point to acknowledge is that the components “co-exist” in all persons, although are “accessed” to varying degrees for any particular action. Because of this, it has been posited that it may be lucrative to utilise various components of intention when aiming to determine behaviour (Söderland & Öhman, 2006).

When the behaviour in question is purchase behaviour, it can be said that trust has an impact on the components of intention, which will together form the full intention. This is since Gefen, Karahanna and Straub (2003) have proven that trusting beliefs has an effect on purchase intention. Additionally, Wen, Prybutok and Xu (2012 in See-To & Ho, 2014) demonstrated that trust might have an indirect effect on online purchase intention in certain scenarios.

Further research has shown that a customer’s trust in a product, engendered by eWOM, causes a strengthening of purchase intention (Gefen *et al.*, 2003; Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2009 in See-To & Ho, 2014; Sia, Lim, Leung, Lee, Huang & Benbasat, 2009 in See-To & Ho, 2014). This is since results from studies, such as those of Ba and Pavlou (2002), Lee, Im and Lee (2000) and Yoo, Ho and Tam (2006), imply that when a customer recognises a great proportion of positive eWOM, pertaining to a good or service vended by a firm, he or she will acquire a positive anticipation regarding the standard of this good or service (See-To & Ho, 2014). This positive anticipation will result in the consumer feeling assured enough to buy the good or service from the firm (Ba & Pavlou, 2002; Lee *et al.*, 2000 in See-To & Ho, 2014; Yoo *et al.*, 2006). Bailey (2004) indicated that unlike positive eWOM, when a customer recognises a significant amount of negative eWOM concerning a good or service vended by a firm, he or she will acquire a negative anticipation regarding the standard of this good or service. This negative anticipation will result in both lower trust and purchase intention (Bailey, 2004).

Furthermore, according to Awad and Ragowsky (2008 in See-To & Ho, 2014), the “quality of eWOM” has a positive effect on online customers’ trust in a firm, which in turn positively affects online purchase intention. Moreover, Bailey (2004), Xia and Bechwati, (2008 in See-To & Ho, 2014) and Chan and Ngai (2011 in See-To & Ho, 2014), proved that eWOM sways trust and purchase intention, on various online tools such as websites, e-forums and blogs. See-To and Ho (2014) proposed that the degree of trusting beliefs in a product, which is vended by a firm that uses an SNS fan page to foster eWOM, has a positive effect on the SNS user’s purchase intention towards the product. Considering this, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₈: Engaged, young adult, South African females' trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with SNS fan pages, has a positive impact on their intention to purchase wedding dresses.

See-To and Ho (2014) mentioned a scenario, whereby the SNS user has a sense of “control”, over whether he/she makes the choice, to include or exclude eWOM found on the SNS fan page, in his/her decision-making procedure. This sense of authority is referred to as empowerment and control, which as explained earlier, is one of the attributes of value co-creation. See-To and Ho (2014) proposed that the value co-creation process positively influences an SNS user's purchase intention towards a product. Consequently, the hypothesis hereafter is formed:

H₉: The value co-creation process has a positive impact on engaged, young adult, South African females' intention to purchase wedding dresses.

Apart from value co-creation and trusting beliefs, eWOM was also posited to have a direct relationship with purchase intention (See-To & Ho, 2014). See-To and Ho (2014) recognised this direct relationship by consulting the findings of a number of studies, which indicated that eWOM mentioned “in sellers profiles in the electronic marketplaces”, has a substantial effect on the closing price of electronic auctions (Ba & Pavlou, 2002; Lee *et al.*, 2000 in See-To & Ho, 2014; Rice, 2012 in See-To & Ho, 2014; Yoo *et al.*, 2006; Zhou, Dresner, & Windle, 2009 in See-To & Ho, 2014). More specifically, positive eWOM heightens the closing price of auctions whereas negative eWOM reduces them (See-To & Ho, 2014).

According to See-To & Ho (2014), eWOM having a substantial effect on the closing price of electronic auctions can be construed as eWOM having a direct effect on purchase intention. This suggests that positive eWOM heightening the closing price of auctions and negative eWOM reducing them, can be interpreted as positive eWOM heightening purchase intention and negative eWOM reducing it. See-To and Ho (2014) proposed that positive eWOM will intensify an SNS users' purchase intention towards a product, which is vended by a firm that uses an SNS fan page to foster eWOM, and that negative eWOM will cause such purchase intention to subside. Hence, the hypothesis hereunder is developed:

H₁₀: Positive eWOM on the SNS fan pages of wedding dress vendors, bolsters engaged, young adult, South African females' intention to purchase wedding dresses, while negative eWOM causes their intention to subside.

It was proposed, that the aforementioned, hypothesised relationships that involve eWOM, are moderated by the message source of eWOM, which is subsequently discoursed. This discourse highlights certain characteristics of the source, specifically, tie strength, perceptual affinity and demographic similarity.

4.4 THE MESSAGE SOURCE OF eWOM AS A MODERATOR

See-To and Ho (2014) proposed that the message source of eWOM on an SNS fan page moderates the relationships between eWOM and each of the constructs of purchase intention, institutional-based trust, trusting beliefs and value co-creation. The research of Dou, Walden, Lee and Lee (2012 in See-To & Ho, 2014) and Naylor, Lamberton and West (2012 in See-To & Ho, 2014), classified the message source as a close or unfamiliar friend, or the firm, and posited that it influences the user's trust in eWOM. See-To and Ho (2014) therefore expected that eWOM sent by a close friend, would have a greater effect on purchase intention, trust and value co-creation, than that sent by an unfamiliar friend or the firm. Furthermore, Forman, Ghose, and Wiensenfeld (2008 in See-To & Ho, 2014), who considered identifiable and unidentifiable sources, demonstrated that eWOM sent by identifiable sources is better received than that sent by unidentifiable sources, since it is perceived to possess a greater degree of assistance. Hence, See-To and Ho (2014) expected that the effects of eWOM, be influenced by the identity of the sources that generate eWOM on an SNS fan page.

The eWOM source possesses the characteristics of tie strength, perceptual affinity and demographic similarity (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Perceptual affinity and demographic similarity may be regarded as types of homophily (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Tie strength and homophily have been acknowledged in WOM literature as core elements that illustrate the "nature of social relationships" and affect the flow of WOM (Chu & Kim, 2011). They have been described as highly capable of improving the current comprehension of WOM behaviour since they deal with the characteristics of social relations that cause WOM to occur (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Moreover, it has been proven, that these characteristics are pertinent in the selection and/or purchase, of high-involvement products, where the present study investigates the purchase of one such product (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Gilly, Graham, Wolfenbarger & Yale, 1998; Steffes & Burgee, 2009; Wang & Chang, 2013). Given this, tie strength, perceptual affinity and demographic similarity are henceforward discoursed. The two latter characteristics will be considered as types of homophily.

4.4.1 Tie Strength

Tie strength is defined as the mergence of the proportion of time, emotional strength and closeness that distinguishes the tie (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1982 in De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Weimann, 1983 in De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). In the subject area of eWOM, tie strength has been recognised as the most crucial aspect explicating the influence of WOM communications (van Noort, Antheunis & van Reijmersdal, 2012). Pigg and Crank (2004) have clarified the difference between two types of ties, particularly strong and weak ties. Instances of strong ties are family and friends, individuals with whom one would have deeper, more intimate bonds, and who are capable of providing practical and emotional care. Examples of weak ties on the

other hand are acquaintances and colleagues, who form part of a large group of individuals with whom one has “less personal” bonds, but also assist in the search for information (Pigg & Crank, 2004). A widely acknowledged concept regarding strong and weak ties, which was originally established by Granovetter (1973), is that strong ties facilitate the distribution of information within close-knit groups in society, whereas weak ties make possible the distribution of information between such groups (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Burt, 1992 in De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Chu & Kim, 2011; Steffes & Burgee, 2009; Weimann, 1983 in Chu, 2009; Wu *et al.*, 2014). This was confirmed in the study conducted by Brown and Reingen (1987).

Furthermore, strong-tie sources were typically found to be more influential than weak-tie sources, specifically with respect to the impact that strong-tie sources have on decision-making, such as purchase decision-making (Brown and Reingen, 1987; Shaikh, 2014; Wu *et al.*, 2014). A possible reason for strong-tie sources being more influential is that they may be regarded as more reliable than weak tie sources (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Wu *et al.*, 2014). Individuals could moreover be keener to possess values and interests affinitive to that of strong ties. Therefore, the commendations of strong ties may be more appealing (Wu *et al.*, 2014).

Contacts or social ties may be regarded as similar or dissimilar to each other in certain respects, which like tie strength, could also have an effect on the influence of eWOM or WOM communicators (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Gilly *et al.*, 1998; Shaikh, 2014; Steffes & Burgee, 2009). The research that explores this influence will be addressed hereunder.

4.4.2 Homophily

Rogers (1983 in Brown & Reingen, 1987) described homophily, as the extent to which people are alike with regards to features such as age, gender, education and social standing. Given that these features are demographic features, the homophily in the above description constitutes demographic homophily, which De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) label “demographic similarity”. However, a further type of homophily has been recognised, namely perceptual homophily (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013; Chu, 2009, Gilly *et al.*, 1998; McLoughlin, 2012), dubbed as “perceptual affinity” by De Bruyn and Lilien (2008). Perceptual affinity is expressed as commonalities between two individuals’ “values, likes, dislikes, and experience” (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Hereinafter, a few key facts with respect to perceptual affinity and demographic similarity will be mentioned, and the terms “homophily”, “similarity” and “affinity” will be used interchangeably.

4.4.2.1 Perceptual Affinity

A study that is frequently referred to, and that acknowledged perceptual affinity, is that by Gilly *et al.* (1998). Gilly *et al.* (1998) determined that perceptually affinitive

sources are more influential than sources that are not perceptually affinitive. Potential causes for this are the perceived straightforwardness of interaction with similar sources, higher levels of access to them due to proximity, and the possibility of an information pursuer choosing a source that has the same values as him or her (Price & Feick, 1954 in Gilly *et al.*, 1998). Moreover, it is more probable that similar people will have product requirements and desires that are alike than dissimilar people, causing the “most personally relevant product information” to be shared (Feldman & Spencer, 1965 in Gilly *et al.*, 1998).

Once reviewing past literature, Shaikh (2014) too deduced that affinitive sources are more influential than sources that are not affinitive, particularly with regard to the effect that they had on purchasing decisions. Even though Shaikh (2014) did not differentiate between perceptual and demographic affinity, this researcher’s examination of literature from which deductions were drawn, appeared to be centred on perceptual factors, hinting that the above finding is applicable to this review of perceptual affinity. Shaikh (2014) cited a few reasons for the stronger influence of affinitive sources, each pertaining to a specific model or theory. Firstly, according to Kelman (1961 in Shaikh, 2014), the source-attractiveness model, proposes that receivers can better relate to senders that are akin to them. Secondly, Festinger’s (1954 in Shaikh, 2014) theory of social comparison postulates, that an individual’s inclination, to juxtapose him or herself with another, rises in the event that the individual perceives them, to be alike to him or her (Shaikh, 2014). This is due to an implicit presumption that those who are alike possess corresponding requirements and tastes (Shaikh, 2014). Lastly, the match-up hypothesis posits that influence varies with the uniformity between the image of the sender and the product, and that between the sender and the self-concept of the receiver (Kamins, 1990 in Shaikh, 2014).

4.4.2.2 Demographic Similarity

Brown and Reingen’s (1987) work is one of the most recognised pieces of work exploring demographic similarity. This work, and that of Steffes and Burgee (2009), indicated that demographically similar sources are more influential than demographically dissimilar sources, expressly with regard to decision-making. A potential cause for this is that similar sources could be perceived as being trustworthier than dissimilar sources (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Moreover, it could highlight that eWOM receivers considered a correspondence in demographic characteristics imperative in order for the eWOM source’s opinion to be esteemed (Steffes & Burgee, 2009).

Gilly *et al.*’s (1998) research differed from that of Brown and Reingen (1987) and Steffes and Burgee (2009), because they unveiled that the effect of demographic similarity, on the influence of WOM sources, varies with product category. With regard to the product categories studied in Gilly *et al.*’s (1998) research,

demographic similarity had no effect on the influence of WOM sources for all product categories except that of consumer durables. Concerning this product category, demographically dissimilar sources were discovered to be more influential than demographically similar sources.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter began by briefly mentioning the relationships contained in the eWOM in SNS's model. Thereafter, the constructs of trusting beliefs, institutional-based trust, disposition to trust, value co-creation and purchase intention were discussed in-depth. Where applicable, this included an explanation of any subconstructs, and the manner in which the construct may be applied to interactions on the SNS fan pages of wedding dress vendors. Lastly, the moderator, the message source of eWOM, together with three characteristics of the source, namely tie strength, perceptual affinity and demographic similarity, were elaborated on. The termination of this chapter, brings to a close the discourse, of the theory on which this study is founded. The methodology that was employed to execute the study is next relayed.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters elaborated on the theory on which this study was based. This included a thorough discussion of the wedding industry, an outline of various eWOM models, and a detailed presentation of the model that was selected to be tested in this study, the eWOM in SNS's model. This chapter offers an outline of the steps that were taken and the tools that were employed in order for the model to be tested in the context of the South African wedding industry. Firstly, it clarifies this study's research design and method and thereafter its target population and sampling method. An intricate description of its measurement instrument is subsequently given and its data collection process, discoursed. The chapter then proceeds by acknowledging this study's ethical considerations. The chapter closes with a comprehensive discussion of the data analysis method, which includes an explanation of the chosen statistical technique and tools.

5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This study took the form of a causal, conclusive research design. The method of an experiment was used in order to test hypotheses regarding, and study relationships in, the eWOM in SNS's model (See-To and Ho, 2014). The experiment included an experimental group that was exposed to eWOM in SNS's pertaining to wedding dresses, and a control group, that was not. The respondents were randomly allocated to a group and pre-measurement was not taken. Stated differently, two groups of respondents were involved, and only one measurement was taken for each group. Therefore, this study followed a post-test only control group, true experimental design (Malhotra, 2010:261).

This experimental design is largely advantageous because it necessitates a relatively low amount of time and funding and the sample size requirements are not strict. Considering this study's small budget, tight time frame and the fact that the pool of possible respondents would be relatively narrow, resulted in the researcher choosing this design. It was however important, to be attentive of the hardship in establishing, whether the experimental group respondents who quit are alike to those in control group who quit. In addition to this, it is not possible to observe changes in individual respondents (Malhotra, 2010:261).

5.3 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING METHOD

This subsection explains the target population and sampling method, including a justification for the method. Variables that were controlled for in the sample are thereafter briefly acknowledged.

5.3.1 Target Population

The target population was comprised of engaged, young adult, South African females. In the context of this study, “young adult” refers to an individual who is at least 18 years of age, although not older than 29 years of age. This is because studies concerning digital activity, just as this one does, have classified individuals in this age group as young adults (Pew Research Center, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

Furthermore, the targeted young adults had viewed the Facebook pages of wedding dress vendors, although not yet decided which wedding dress to purchase. Facebook was selected as an SNS due to the popularity of Facebook in South Africa and the high prevalence of South African wedding vendors on the SNS (We Are Social, 2014 in Shezi, 2015; World Wide Worx, 2014 in mybroadband, 2014a; Fuseware, 2014 in mybroadband, 2014a). Because of this, the eWOM in SNS's, that the experimental group was exposed to, was eWOM on Facebook.

5.3.2 Sampling Method

The absence of a sampling frame, and a known probability of each element in the target population being selected, resulted in this study employing a non-probability sampling method of judgmental sampling. This yielded a sample size of 152 respondents, equally split between the experimental and control groups.

Judgemental sampling has the advantages of not consuming a large amount of time or funding (Malhotra, 2010:379). Given that it is a form of convenience sampling, it is implied that respondents forming part of a judgmental sample are reachable, simple to measure and accommodating (Malhotra, 2010:377). The advantages of consuming a low amount of funding and reachable respondents were of particular importance in this study due to the low budget available and the difficulty of obtaining respondents in the target population.

As with many non-probability sampling methods, the employment of judgemental sampling does not give the researcher the opportunity to make direct generalisations to a certain population, typically since the population is not clearly defined (Malhotra, 2010:379). With respect to this study however, the target population is clearly defined. Furthermore, the judgment of this study's researcher was considered to yield a sample that is to a fair extent representative of the target population. This is because the researcher shares traits or often comes into contact with people who share traits, with the target population. Moreover, the researcher's task of approaching South African females, with the characteristic of being engaged, was very simple. This is since a noticeable cue of an engaged female in South Africa is a ring worn on the ring finger of the left hand.

5.3.3 Control Variables

See-To and Ho (2014) proposed that the message source of eWOM moderates the relationship that eWOM has with each of the constructs of institutional-based trust, trusting beliefs, value co-creation and purchase intention. The eWOM source holds the traits of tie strength, perceptual affinity and demographic similarity (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Therefore, tie strength, perceptual affinity and demographic similarity, were measured as control variables, or were controlled for in the sample.

5.4 MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

The measurement instrument for this study took the form of a questionnaire, which measured the original variables in the eWOM in SNS's model, in addition to the eWOM source characteristics that were controlled for. Given that the experimental group was exposed to eWOM on Facebook, and the control group was not, there were two versions of the questionnaire. See Appendix 1 for the version that was completed by the experimental group, and Appendix 2 for the version that was completed by the control group. The layout of these versions of the questionnaire was identical, with the exception of the information presented to the respondents, in the section measuring the effect of eWOM.

The passage below explicates the layout of the questionnaire, highlighting the difference between the versions targeted at the experimental and control group. Following this, an in-depth discussion of the scales used in the questionnaire, ensues. It should be noted that there was a numbering error in Appendix 2, whereby all items after item 32 were numbered one unit higher than what they should have been. Therefore, the items mentioned in the remainder of this chapter refer to those in Appendix 1.

5.4.1 Layout of the Questionnaire

Before the items of the questionnaire appeared, the researcher, topic of the research and ethical approval of the research were mentioned. Thereafter, respondents were requested to participate in the study by answering the questionnaire, and the details concerning their participation were outlined. This included a mention of the incentive, that being entry into a draw to win a tiara worth over ZAR500. Therefore, respondents were asked to provide a mobile number at which they could be contacted in case they win, before the items of the questionnaire were presented. See Appendix 3 for images of the tiara.

The total of 45 items began with four filtering questions, which aimed to determine the respondents' suitability for participation in the study. Respondents were thereafter instructed to continue or thanked for their time, based on their answers to the filtering questions.

The remainder of the questionnaire was divided into eight sections. The first section, containing items 5-18, measured the trust constructs of disposition to trust and trusting beliefs, and the structural assurance component of institutional-based trust. Items 5-8 were related to disposition to trust, items 9-14 to trusting beliefs and items 15-18 to the structural assurance component of institutional-based trust. The situational normality component of institutional-based trust was measured in the second section that held items 19-21.

Subsequently, the respondents in the experimental group were asked to view a screenshot from a Facebook fan page containing eWOM, while the respondents in the control group were not. The questionnaire's third set of items, items 22-24, then appeared, where these items measured the effect of eWOM. In the version of the questionnaire answered by the experimental group, the items made reference to the screenshot, although this was not the case with the version of the questionnaire answered by the control group.

The fourth section of the questionnaire, comprising items 25-29, measured value co-creation, and fifth section, consisting of items 30 and 31, measured purchase intention. At this point in the questionnaire, the measurement of the original variables in the eWOM in SNS's model was complete. The last three sections of the questionnaire that appeared thereafter, measured the eWOM source characteristics that were controlled for.

Before proceeding with the items that measured the eWOM source characteristics, the respondents were presented with a scenario whereby a particular person begins a conversation with them on the Facebook fan page of a wedding dress vendor. They were asked, in item 32, to select a person, from a variety of possible people, who would typically start such a conversation. The rest of the questionnaire's items all pertained to this person.

The questionnaire's sixth set of items, items 33-36, measured demographic similarity, and asked how demographically similar the respondent believed herself to be, to the person selected in item 32. The seventh section of the questionnaire, encompassing items 37-41, measured tie strength, and asked how strong the respondent considered the tie between herself, and the person selected in item 32, to be. The questionnaire's eighth and final set of items, items 42-45, measured perceptual affinity, and asked how perceptually affinitive the respondent thought herself to be, to the person selected in item 32.

5.4.2 Scales in the Questionnaire

This study's questionnaire was comprised of both Likert and semantic differential scales. The benefits and shortcomings of each of these scales are henceforward elaborated on. Following this, the various Likert and semantic differential scales

selected for utilisation in this study are discussed in detail.

5.4.2.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Likert and Semantic Differential Scales

A total of 13 scales were used in the questionnaire, six of which were Likert scales, and seven of which were semantic differential scales. Likert scales are simple to compile and manage, and are straightforwardly and willingly comprehended by respondents (Malhotra, 2010:309; “Types of Scale...”, n.d). This causes such scales to be appropriate for a variety of data collection methods including mail, personal, telephone or electronic interviews (Malhotra, 2010:309). Semantic differential scales were also described as versatile, and they were revealed to be highly efficient across different techniques of administration, such as questionnaires and personal interviews (Hawkins, Albaum & Best, 1974; Malhotra, 2010:311). Both Likert and semantic differential scales make it possible for the respondent to indicate impartiality towards the concept being measured, and allow for an average score to be calculated for this concept (“Types of Scale...”, n.d).

Likert scales are unfortunately more time-consuming for respondents to complete than other itemised rating scales due to the necessity of reading each item (Malhotra, 2010:309). Respondents are also engaged in substantial decision-making when answering Likert scales’ items (“Types of Scale...”, n.d). Construal of responses to Likert scales’ items could furthermore be challenging, particularly if the item incorporates a negative assertion (Malhotra, 2010:309). It has moreover been raised that Likert scales’ items may not be answered accurately if respondents are focused on answering in a manner that will positively affect their image. On the other hand, it has been suggested, that results produced from semantic differential scales’ items, may not be comparable across respondents, because different respondents could have different understandings of the adjectives used in the scale (“Types of Scale...”, n.d). In addition to this, it is necessary that respondents, answering semantic differential scales’ items, be intellectual, knowledgeable about language and capable of creating “fine distinctions”. The scale would not for example, be suitable for children, unless it is a basic version (“Semantic differential”, n.d).

Despite the aforementioned drawbacks of Likert and semantic differential scales, it was decided that these scales would nonetheless be suitable for use in this study. This is because it was concluded that each of the drawbacks could be combatted, or would not present a problem for this study. To begin with, since this study’s Likert scales would be slightly time-consuming for respondents to complete, an incentive was provided to lure potential respondents. The incentive was that respondents were entered into a draw to win a tiara worth over ZAR500. A tiara was chosen as a prize given that tiaras are resurfacing as a bridal fashion trend, but are less easily obtained than other accessories such as necklaces or bracelets, due to a lower number of stores stocking tiaras (Bussey, 2013; Clarke, 2015; Princess Poppy Tiaras, 2015;

Treble, 2013; Zoara, 2010). Tiaras are also more tailored to the needs of a bride given that women are advised to wear a tiara only on their wedding day (Bussey, 2013; You and Your Wedding, 2014). Therefore, the concept of winning a tiara was considered to be sufficiently appealing to potential respondents, to encourage them to participate in the study, in spite of the fact that the questionnaire would be slightly time-consuming to complete.

Concerning the substantiality of decision-making, it was deduced that this would not cause an issue because the most of the decisions that respondents needed to make were not complex decisions, and hence not thought to be particularly troublesome. Construing the responses to Likert scales' items was not presumed to be challenging given that the statements required minimal effort for the researcher to comprehend. In addition to this, there was only one negative statement, which indicated that claims made are "not false", meaning that the claims could only be considered as true, if the respondent disagreed with the statement. This showed that there would be no confusion in interpreting the responses to the statement.

Responses were furthermore not inferred to be inaccurate due to respondents' concerns about image, since the questionnaire would be completed anonymously. The researcher would resultantly not be able to trace the answers to a certain respondent, and develop a perception of the respondent's image based on her answers. Turning to the handling of shortcomings associated with semantic differential scales, it was concluded that it would not be likely, that different respondents, would interpret the adjectives in these scales, differently. This is because the adjectives were simplistic and had a low potential of being interpreted in various manners.

Lastly, the requirement of recruiting respondents, who are intellectual, knowledgeable about language and capable of creating "fine distinctions", was also not considered to be a hitch ("Semantic differential", n.d). This is due to the fact that all respondents would be literate adults rather than illiterate adults, or children. Moreover, possessing the intellectual ability to select a wedding dress and to use Facebook, suggested that respondents would possess the intellectual ability to complete the questionnaire, since the intellectual ability that is necessary to perform these tasks is similar. Given that the methods of dealing with the disadvantages of Likert and semantic differential scales have been illustrated, the specifics of the Likert and semantic differential scales incorporated in the questionnaire are now discussed.

5.4.2.2 Likert and Semantic Differential Scales Used in this Study

The 45 items in this study's questionnaire, spread across six Likert and seven semantic differential scales, were used to measure constructs in the eWOM in SNS's model, subconstructs of certain constructs and the eWOM source characteristics that were controlled for. The following table provides a summary of the particulars of the

scales used in this study.

Table 1: Specifics of the Scales Used in this Study

	Scale Position	Scale Type	Number of Scale Points	Scale Items	Number of Scale Items	Source of Scale
Disposition to Trust	1st	Likert	7	5-8	4	Gefen & Straub (2004)
Trusting Beliefs	2nd	Likert	7	9-14	6	Gefen (2004)
Institutional-based Trust (Structural Assurance)	3rd	Likert	7	15-18	4	McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar (2002b)
Institutional-based Trust (Situational Normality)	4th	Likert	5	19-21	3	Eastlick & Lotz (2011)
eWOM	5th	Likert	5	22-24	3	Park, Wang, Yao & Kang (2011)
Value Co-creation	6th	Likert	7	25-29	5	Peña, Jamilena & Molina (2014)
Purchase Intention	7th	Semantic Differential	6	30	1	Park, Lee & Han (2007)
	8th	Semantic Differential	6	31	1	Park, Lee & Han (2007)
Demographic Similarity	9th	Semantic Differential	7	34	1	De Bruyn & Lilien (2008)
	10th	Semantic Differential	7	35	1	De Bruyn & Lilien (2008)
	11th	Semantic Differential	7	36	1	De Bruyn & Lilien (2008)
Tie Strength	12th	Semantic Differential	7	37-41	5	De Bruyn & Lilien (2008)
Perceptual Affinity	13th	Semantic Differential	7	42-45	4	De Bruyn & Lilien (2008)

The details reflected in the above table are elaborated on in the passage below. The scales measuring the different trust constructs and subconstructs are first delineated; followed by the scales used to measure eWOM, value co-creation and purchase intention. Lastly, the scales measuring the eWOM source characteristics are acknowledged.

- **Trust Scales**

The initial scales that appeared after the filtering questions, measured the trust constructs/components of disposition to trust, trusting beliefs and institutional-based trust. These scales encompassed four of the six Likert scales used in the questionnaire, and consisted of a total of 17 items, items 5-21.

The first scale, containing four items, items 5-8, measured disposition to trust. The second scale, including six items, items 9-14, measured trusting beliefs. Different items in this scale focused on different trusting beliefs, with items 9 and 10 pertaining to trusting-belief competence, items 11-13 concerning trusting belief integrity and item 14 relating to trusting-belief benevolence. The third scale, holding four items, items 15-18, measured the structural assurance component of institutional-based trust. These three scales were seven-point scales, in which point one was labelled as “Strongly Disagree” and point seven as “Strongly Agree”. A score of one signified a low degree of the relevant trust construct being measured, while a score of seven signified a high degree of the said trust construct. None of the items, on any of the three scales, were reverse scored.

The fourth scale, involving three items, items 19-21, measured the situational normality component of institutional-based trust. This scale differed from the aforementioned three scales since it was a five-point scale, in which point one was labelled as “Very Strongly Disagree” and point five as “Very Strongly Agree”. A score of one signified a low degree of situational normality, while a score of five signified a high degree of situational normality. None of the items on this scale were reverse scored.

Most of the abovementioned scales were adapted from studies that examined trust in an online environment. This examination included a consideration of the relationship between trust and purchase intention, or similar concepts (Eastlick & Lotz, 2011; Gefen & Straub, 2004; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b).

To begin with, the scale that measured disposition to trust was taken from the research conducted by Gefen and Straub (2004). Their research authenticated a scale for measuring trusting beliefs, in online shopping settings, for both goods and services. Their research furthermore determined the influence of social presence on purchase intention, through trusting beliefs, where disposition to trust was acknowledged as an antecedent to trusting beliefs. However, Gefen and Straub

(2004) consulted Gefen's (2000) work, which also investigated trust in an online shopping setting, in order to obtain the statistically, highly reliable disposition to trust scale. This demonstrated that a highly reliable scale was used in assessing the relationship between disposition to trust and trusting beliefs, which was also assessed in the present study (Gefen & Straub, 2004). This in turn showed that there is a similarity between what the disposition to trust scale was used to establish in Gefen and Straub's (2004) research, and what it would be used to establish in the present study. Furthermore, the scale was fairly succinct in comparison to other disposition to trust scales (McKnight *et al.*, 2002b). This meant that the scale items would be simple and convenient for respondents to answer, and it was believed that this would produce a higher response rate. Therefore, Gefen and Straub's (2004) disposition to trust scale was acknowledged as an appropriate one to utilise in the present study.

The scale that measured the situational normality component of institutional-based trust hailed from Eastlick and Lotz's (2011) work. Their work explored institutional-based trust and cognitive perceptions, as antecedents to trusting beliefs and trusting intentions, in addition to the impact of trusting beliefs and trusting intentions, on purchase intention (Eastlick & Lotz, 2011). Eastlick and Lotz (2011) referred to the study by Chen, Gillenson and Sherrell (2002), which clarified the aspects that determine consumers' utilisation of online stores, in order to access the scale items used to measure situational normality. Even though the scale was discovered to statistically, be greatly reliable, it was also very concise in comparison to other situational normality scales (McKnight *et al.*, 2002b). Therefore, it was understood that this scale would too contribute to a higher response rate. Resultantly, it was deemed to be fitting for employment in the present study.

Progressing to structural assurance, the scale that measured this component of institutional-based trust was adapted from a study by McKnight *et al.* (2002b). The study postulated and authenticated measures, for a multidisciplinary, multidimensional model of trust in e-commerce. The use of such measures, which were statistically, found to be greatly reliable, should permit results to be compared across different bodies of research (McKnight *et al.*, 2002b). The fact that the trust measures were proposed and validated by the author who conceptualised trust, as it is used in the eWOM in SNS's model, suggested that the measures are robust. They were therefore considered apt for usage in research pertaining to the eWOM in SNS's model, such as the present study.

The last trust-related scale to be discussed is that of trusting beliefs, taken from the research conducted by Gefen (2004). His research investigated the factors that make the relationship, between Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) vendors, and their customers, worthwhile (Gefen, 2004). ERP is described as the software, used for the automation and amalgamation of key corporate activities, including accepting customer orders and holding records of stock (Syspro, n.d). Although Gefen's (2004)

research did not analyse trust within an online environment, and had objectives that were fairly different from that of the present study, other factors regarding the trusting beliefs scale made the scale worthy of use in the present study.

Firstly, the scale is comprised of separate items for each trusting belief, rather than items that serve as an overall measure of trusting beliefs (Gefen, 2004). Considering each trusting belief individually would be beneficial, since employing items that act as a general measure, disguises the motivation, for particular “signals” being more efficient than others, in impacting purchase intention (Schlosser, White & Lloyd, 2006). Additionally, like previously discussed scales, Gefen’s (2004) trusting belief scale was terse relative to other trusting beliefs scales, yet statistically, greatly reliable (Eastlick & Lotz, 2011; Gefen, 2004; Gefen & Straub, 2004; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b; Ridings, Gefen & Arinze, 2002; Schlosser *et al.*, 2006). This, as recognised earlier, was expected to generate a higher response rate. Finally, the scale was used in the context of the relationship between a “specialist consultant” vendor and their customer (Gefen, 2004). A wedding dress vendor may too be classified as a “specialist consultant”, given that a wedding dress is a product that is consumed on an occasion, regarded as a rite of passage, that typically occurs once in a lifetime (Arend, 2003; Boden, 2001; Choy & Loker, 2004; Currie, 1993; Otnes & Lowrey, 1993; Weiss, 2008). Hence, there was evidence of a match between the context in which the scale was used in Gefen’s (2004) research, and the context in which it would be used the present study. Consequently, the scale was regarded as suitable for utilisation in the present study.

The scale’s items mentioned the name of a specific ERP vendor, although Gefen (2004) abbreviated the name to guard the vendor’s privacy. Therefore, in order to apply the scale to the present study, it was necessary for the name of a wedding dress vendor, to be mentioned in the items that measured trusting beliefs.

Due to the inclusion of a particular wedding dress vendor in the questionnaire, all respondents needed to be customers or potential customers of the said vendor. *Bride&co* was the chosen wedding dress vendor for this study. This is because the likelihood of gathering respondents from this vendor would be higher than that of gathering respondents from another vendor. The reason for the higher likelihood is that *Bride&co* is the only bridal department store, and largest bridal retailer in South Africa, stocking “(wedding dress) styles to suit all (body) shapes and budgets” (Bride&co, 2015a, 2015b). This suggests that a large number of brides would carry out wedding dress shopping at this vendor’s stores. Moreover, the *Bride&co* Facebook fan page has over 70 000 likes and a strong prevalence of eWOM (Bride&co, 2015b). A screenshot of eWOM on a wedding dress vendor’s Facebook fan page, appeared in the experimental group’s version of the questionnaire, before the items that measured the effect of eWOM, were listed. The fact that the experimental group needed to examine eWOM in the screenshot, in order to answer these items, necessitated the use of a wedding dress vendor’s Facebook fan page,

with a strong incidence of eWOM, such as the *Bride&co* Facebook fan page. Hence, the screenshot of eWOM, in the experimental group's version of the questionnaire, was taken from the *Bride&co* Facebook fan page. The measurement of eWOM is explained hereunder.

- **eWOM Scale**

The scale that measured the effect of eWOM was the fifth of six Likert scales used in the questionnaire, and was comprised of three items, items 22-24. The scale was a five-point scale, in which point one was labelled as "Strongly Disagree" and point five as "Strongly Agree". A score of one showed that the eWOM was not effective while a score of five showed that the eWOM was highly effective. None of the items on the scale were reverse scored. The scale hailed from Park, Wang, Yao and Kang's (2011) work, which assessed the factors impacting the influence of eWOM. The scale measured the "eWOM effect", which in the context of Park *et al.*'s (2011) study, referred to the effect of eWOM on purchase decision-making. The scale was aimed at the eWOM receiver rather than the eWOM sender (Park *et al.*, 2011). Even though statistically, the scale was only satisfactorily rather than greatly reliable, it was acknowledged as being appropriate for employment in the present study. This is since the present study examines the effect of eWOM on purchase intention, from the perspective of the eWOM receiver, which is similar to what the scale was used to measure in Park *et al.*'s (2011) study. The construct that was measured after eWOM was value co-creation.

- **Value Co-creation Scale**

The scale that measured value co-creation was the sixth and final Likert scale used in the questionnaire, and encompassed five items, items 25-29. The scale was a seven-point scale, in which point one was labelled as "Totally Disagree" and point seven as "Totally Agree". A score of one indicated that the customer perceived the firm to have a low capability, of co-creating value during interactions with her. A score of seven on the other hand, specified that the customer perceived the firm to have a high capability, of co-creating value during interactions with her. None of the items on the scale were reverse scored.

The scale was adapted from a study by Peña, Jamilena and Molina (2014), that observed a firm's capacity to co-create value whilst interacting with customers, and investigated whether value co-creation impacted consumer behaviour. Peña *et al.* (2014) compiled the value co-creation scale by consulting literature that concentrated on conceptual applications alike to value co-creation, and additional concepts connected to value co-creation, such as perceived value. The present study, like that of Peña *et al.* (2014), examines the relationship between value co-creation and consumer behaviour, where the relevant aspect of consumer behaviour is purchase intention. Hence, it was realised that there is a likeness between what the value co-

creation scale was used to ascertain in Peña *et al.*'s (2014) research, and what it would be used to ascertain in the present study. Resultantly, Peña *et al.*'s (2014) value co-creation scale was deemed to be fitting for usage in the present study. The next construct that was measured was the dependent variable, namely purchase intention.

- **Purchase Intention Scales**

The two scales that measured purchase intention were the initial two of six semantic differential scales used in the questionnaire. Each of them consisted of one item, where the first scale contained item 30 and the second, item 31. The scales were both six-point scales, in which point one was labelled as "Extremely Unlikely" and point six as "Extremely Likely". A score of one denoted a weak intention to purchase, whereas a score of six denoted a strong intention to purchase. Neither of the scales' items was reverse scored.

The scales were extracted from the research conducted by Park, Lee and Han (2007), which explored the moderating impact of involvement, on the influence of online consumer reviews, on purchase intention. In the context of Park *et al.*'s (2007) research, online consumer reviews were classified as eWOM. Therefore it can be said that Park *et al.* (2007) investigated the effect of eWOM on purchase intention. Although focusing on consumer comments as a form of eWOM rather than consumer reviews, the present study nevertheless aimed to test the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention. This showed that the objective that the scales were used to achieve in Park *et al.*'s (2007) study, is similar to the objective that they would be used to achieve in the present study. This insinuated that the scales referred to by Park *et al.* (2007), would be apt for use in the present study. The measurement of purchase intention concluded the measurement of the variables of the eWOM in SNS's model. The rest of the scales used in the questionnaire measure the eWOM source characteristics that were controlled for.

- **eWOM Source Characteristic Scales**

Of the three eWOM source characteristics, demographic similarity was measured first. Different demographic traits were considered, and the traits of age, occupation and education level were each measured with a separate semantic differential scale. This meant that the third, fourth and fifth semantic differential scales used in the questionnaire, measured demographic similarity. Each scale contained only one item, none of which was reverse scored, and had seven points.

The scale that measured similarity in age contained item 34. Point one of this scale was labelled as "I am much younger", point four, the midpoint, as "Same Age", and point seven, as "I am much older". It is therefore clear that a score of one or seven specified a low level of demographic similarity, whereas the midpoint score specified

a high level of demographic similarity. The following scale measured similarity in occupation and held item 35. Point one of this scale was labelled as “Not At All Similar” and point seven as “Extremely Similar”. Hence, it is evident that a score of one stipulated a low level of demographic similarity, and a score of seven, a high level of demographic similarity. The last demographic similarity scale measured similarity in education level and was comprised of item 36. Point one of this scale was labelled as “Yes” and point seven was labelled as “No”. As in the previous scale, a score of one illustrated a low level of demographic similarity, and a score of seven, a high level of demographic similarity.

After the measurement of demographic similarity, came the measurement of tie strength. The scale that measured tie strength was the sixth semantic differential scale used in the questionnaire, and included five items, items 37-41. The scale was a seven-point scale, in which point one, of items 37-40, was labelled as “Not At All Likely” and point seven, as “Very Much Likely”. For item 41, point one was labelled as “Not At All Close” and point seven as “Extraordinary Close”. A score of one represented a weak tie whereas a score of seven represented a strong tie. None of the items on the scale were reverse scored.

The seventh semantic differential scale, and final scale used in the questionnaire, measured perceptual affinity. It involved four items, items 42-45. The scale was a seven-point scale, in which point one was labelled as “Not At All Similar” and point seven as “Extremely Similar”. A score of one represented a low level of perceptual affinity, and a score of seven, a high level of perceptual affinity. None of the items on the scale were reverse scored.

The study by De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) made available the aforementioned scales. The scales that measured tie strength and perceptual affinity, were borrowed from earlier works, that of Frenzen and Davis (1990) and Gilly *et al.* (1998), respectively. However, De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) reduced the number of items in Frenzen and Davis’s (1990) scale to five, and that in Gilly *et al.*’s (1998) scale, to four.

The research of Frenzen and Davis (1990) focused on the concept of embeddedness, which occurs when customers acquire utility from the characteristics of a product, and the social capital found in established bonds, between purchasers and traders. They studied the influence of embeddedness on purchase behaviour, and found that the tie strength between the purchaser and trader has a substantial impact on purchase probability (Frenzen & Davis, 1990). Marsden and Campbell (1984) highlighted two kinds of tie strength measures, namely indicators and predictors. Indicators are divisions of tie strength such as intimacy or care. Predictors are features of relationships that are linked to tie strength although are not definite divisions of it, such as the “role content of the relationship or the number of common, overlapping organisational memberships”. Marsden and Campbell’s (1984) analysis proved that indicators are more dependable than predictors. The tie strength scale

employed by Frenzen and Davis (1990), made use of indicators rather than predictors, implying that the scale is dependable. Furthermore, it was discovered to statistically, be very reliable. It was therefore considered to be suitable for use in the present study.

Proceeding to perceptual affinity, Gilly *et al.* (1998) founded the scale items that measured this moderator, on Wolfenbarger and Gilly's (1993) work, which explored dyads of gift givers and receivers. Wolfenbarger and Gilly (1993) concluded that the scale was statistically, highly reliable. The scale was then integrated into Gilly *et al.*'s (1998) study, and was utilised to test a "model of active interpersonal information search", and establish the factors that affect interpersonal influence in WOM communication. Perceptual affinity was found to be one of them (Gilly *et al.*, 1998). The present study considers perceptual affinity in an analogous manner, by testing whether it affects the impact of eWOM on purchase intention. The similarity in what the scale was used to determine in Gilly *et al.*'s (1998) study, and what it would be used to determine in the present study, together with the high statistical reliability of the scale, suggested that the scale would be appropriate for utilisation in the present study.

5.5 DATA COLLECTION

The means, by which the measurement instrument was pre-tested, is elucidated herein. Following this, the method of data collection is described.

5.5.1 Pre-test of the Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire was pre-tested through being completed by a sample of 16 engaged, young adult South African females. These females were required to have "liked" the Facebook pages of wedding dress vendors. A "like" refers to clicking a symbol of a thumbs-up to indicate approval of an item (Facebook, 2015b). Should this item be the Facebook page of a wedding dress vendor, all those who "liked" it will consequently receive a stream of information from this vendor (Facebook, 2015b; Stonebrook Manor Event Center & Gardens, 2013).

Apart from "liking" the above-mentioned Facebook pages, they needed to have a wedding date occurring nine or fewer months from the time of the pre-test. Lastly, it was necessary for them to not yet have decided which wedding dress to purchase. They were however not required to provide a mobile number. This was since they were not entered into the draw to win the tiara to the value of ZAR500, and hence did not need to be contacted again.

In addition to this, they were not customers of *Bride&co.* As a result, the items in the questionnaire that measured trusting beliefs did not make mention of *Bride&co.* Instead, respondents were asked to consider the single wedding dress vendor that

they would most likely purchase their dress from, and to answer the items as they applied to that vendor. It was deemed acceptable to omit the name of a particular wedding dress vendor, such as *Bride&co*, from the pre-test questionnaire, despite the original questionnaire from Gefen's (2004) study, containing the name of a particular ERP vendor. This was because the pre-test was only a practical exercise done for the purpose of identifying issues with the design of the questionnaire, rather than gathering data for analysis. See Appendix 4 for the pre-test questionnaire.

The questionnaire was made available to the pre-test respondents online via *Google Forms*, and may be viewed at the following link: <http://goo.gl/forms/eEEgKSLDTT>. In order to gather these respondents, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts, which contained the link, were created and shared by the researcher. The post explained that clicking on the link would allow for respondents to assist with academic research. Furthermore, the researcher sent private messages to Facebook contacts, requesting that they share the link to the questionnaire on their Facebook pages, which many of them did.

The results of the pre-test indicated that the requirements of having a wedding date nine or fewer months from the time of the pre-test, and having "liked" the Facebook pages of wedding dress vendors, were too stringent. This was deduced from the fact that many of the pre-test respondents did not meet these requirements, although met the other requirements of being a young adult and not yet having chosen a wedding dress. Therefore, the requirement of having a wedding date nine or fewer months from the time of the pre-test was discarded. Moreover, the requirement, of having "liked" the Facebook pages of wedding dress vendors, was changed such that respondents were only required to view these pages. The aforementioned adjustments to the prerequisites of participation in the study were reflected in the above subsection regarding sampling.

The final adjustment that was made based on the results of the pre-test, was that the instruction of item 32 was stated in a bold font. It was concluded that this adjustment would be necessary since item 32 specified that only one person should be selected from the provided list of people, yet certain pre-test respondents selected more than one person.

5.5.2 Data Collection Method

Data was collected at the Canal Walk Shopping Centre branch of *Bride&co* in Century City, Cape Town. As customers browsed through the store, the researcher approached them. In the event that this was not possible, they were approached after their wedding dress fitting. Customers were approached based on the researcher's judgment relating to whether or not they met the criteria of the target population. Hence, only customers who appeared to be in the age group of 18 to 29, and who wore a ring on the ring finger of their left hand, were approached.

The researcher introduced herself to customers who appeared suitable, briefly explained the topic of her research and requested that they complete the questionnaire for the purposes of her research. Should the customers have agreed to participate, they were handed a copy of the questionnaire on a clipboard and offered a seat. Once they submitted the completed questionnaire, they were thanked and handed a chocolate as a token of appreciation.

Forty days were spent on the *Bride&co* premises during the period of 10 December 2015 to 21 January 2016, typically from 9am to 6pm, with a break between 1pm and 2pm, in order to collect data. On certain days, these times differed due to the availability of the researcher and *Bride&co*'s trading hours.

5.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There was a range of ethical considerations associated with this study. These included characteristics of the respondents, specifically gender, age, race and affiliations of the respondents, acquiring organisational permission, obtaining informed consent from the respondents and risks to the respondents.

Given that wedding dresses, the product that was under investigation, caters to the needs of females rather than males, all respondents were female. 18-year-old females, who may be regarded as children, were targeted. This was necessary since this study is concerned with the effect of eWOM, a digital phenomenon, on young adults' purchase intention, and studies concerning digital activity, have classified individuals aged 18 to 29 as young adults (Pew Research Center, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Focusing on race, this characteristic of the respondents was of no significance in this study.

However, the study required that the respondents be affiliated to a particular wedding dress store through being its customers, or potential customers. This was because certain items in the questionnaire pertained to a particular wedding dress store. It was in addition due to the fact that data was collected on the premises of such a store in order to gain access to apt respondents. As explained earlier, *Bride&co* was the chosen wedding dress vendor for this study. In order to collect data on *Bride&co*'s premises from its customers or potential customers, organisational permission was obtained.

In order to acquire permission, a telephone call was made to the Canal Walk Shopping Centre branch of *Bride&co*, where the researcher spoke to the assistant manager of the store. After expressing interest in utilising the brand for academic research purposes, the researcher was directed to a *Bride&co* marketer in Johannesburg, to further discuss the matter. The marketer requested a letter from the University of Cape Town (UCT) to prove that the research would not be conducted by a competitor of *Bride&co*. After providing the letter, the marketer

enquired about time needed for data collection and access to findings. Once these enquiries were answered, the researcher was informed via email that permission would be granted to collect data at the Canal Walk Shopping Centre branch of *Bride&co*, provided certain conditions. The researcher agreed to these conditions over email, and supplied a signed letter to offer evidence of her agreement. She also asked that the marketer sign and date another letter, addressed to a representative of UCT's Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee. This letter was intended to serve as verification, of the fact that *Bride&co* had given the researcher consent, to collect data on their premises. See Appendix 5 for the letter.

After the signed letter was obtained from the *Bride&co* marketer, an application for ethical approval was made to UCT's Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee. The receipt of ethical approval was mentioned in the cover letter of the questionnaire that was distributed to the respondents. The cover letter also notified them of the purpose of this study, and additional particulars regarding their participation in it. These included the fact that their participation was voluntary, that they may withdraw at any time, and the duration of completing the questionnaire. The fact that they were not required to provide any identifiable information, and that all responses would remain confidential and anonymous, was furthermore stated. This eliminated the need for a consent form. The cover letter concluded with the contact details of the researcher, which they could refer to if they took interest in making enquiries about this study. This study did not pose any risks to the respondents.

5.7 DATA ANALYSIS

This section sheds light on the statistical methods and tools used to analyse the data collected, as described above. The statistical technique of SEM is first explained, after which the two approaches to SEM, co-variance and variance-based SEM, are described. Lastly, the manner in which to analyse the output yielded from the statistical software, which was used to carry out SEM, *SmartPLS*, is elucidated.

5.7.1 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

SEM is a multivariate statistical technique that integrates factor analysis, more specifically confirmatory factor analysis, and multiple regression (Hair *et al.*, 2012b; Iacobucci, 2009). It may be said that the development of SEM is the most crucial and powerful statistical advancement in recent years (Hair *et al.*, 2012b). SEM is especially useful for the formation and testing of theories, and has become a "quasi-standard in research" (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair *et al.*, 2012b; Henseler, Hubona & Ray, 2016). The technique is valuable to marketing researchers, and may be applied to secondary data such as loyalty programme data, or data collected from an experiment, like that of the current study's data on purchase intentions (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Reinartz, Haenlein & Henseler, 2009). This is due to the fact that SEM is "orthogonal to the substantive domain of data on which it is implemented" (Iacobucci,

2009).

A major advantage of SEM is that two or more regression paths, which are linked via for instance a mediation effect, may be fitted concurrently rather than separately. Therefore, SEM allows for the testing of multiple and interrelated dependence relationships (Iacobucci, 2009; Malhotra, 2010:723). Furthermore, SEM allows for latent variables or unobservable concepts in the aforementioned relationships, to be displayed, where these concepts form part of theories on which the posited model is based (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Iacobucci, 2009; Malhotra, 2010:727). Given that this study aims to test a model, which involves multiple and interrelated dependence relationships, between latent variables included in proposed theory, SEM was deduced to be an appropriate statistical technique for analysing this study's data.

An additional advantage to those mentioned above is that SEM has the capacity to cope with measurement error (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Iacobucci, 2009; Malhotra, 2010:724). When performing regression analysis, measurement error, and the error caused by the model's insufficient fit, are not parsed individually. When undertaking SEM however, these errors are distinguishable, which makes possible "finer diagnostics" for enhancing the model, and alleviates issues of multicollinearity. The errors are distinguishable since a full SEM model is comprised of two portions, namely a measurement model and structural model, with distinct error attributable to each of them (Iacobucci, 2009).

The measurement model, also labeled the "outer model", is the portion of the overall model that indicates the relationships between the manifest variables or indicators, and the latent variables or unobservable concepts that they are designed to measure (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Iacobucci, 2009; Malhotra, 2010:726). These indicators may be formative or reflective, and the type of indicator affects the type of measurement model, where this may be a composite model or a factor model (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Jarvis, MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2003).

A set of formative indicators collectively cause, and hence have the capacity to alter, the latent variable that they are assigned to. Therefore, eliminating an indicator, from a set of formative indicators assigned to a latent variable, can change the conceptual definition of the latent variable. Because formative indicators affect instead of being affected by latent variables, they may be correlated with one another, although are not required to, as they could be mutually exclusive (Collier & Bienstock, 2009; Jarvis *et al.*, 2003). Latent variables caused by formative indicators are known as composites, and measurement models comprised of formative indicators are referred to as composite models (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Jarvis *et al.*, 2003).

A set of reflective indicators in contrast are caused by, and consequently do not have the power to induce changes in, the latent variable that they are designed to measure (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Jarvis *et al.*, 2003). Resultantly, removing an indicator, from a

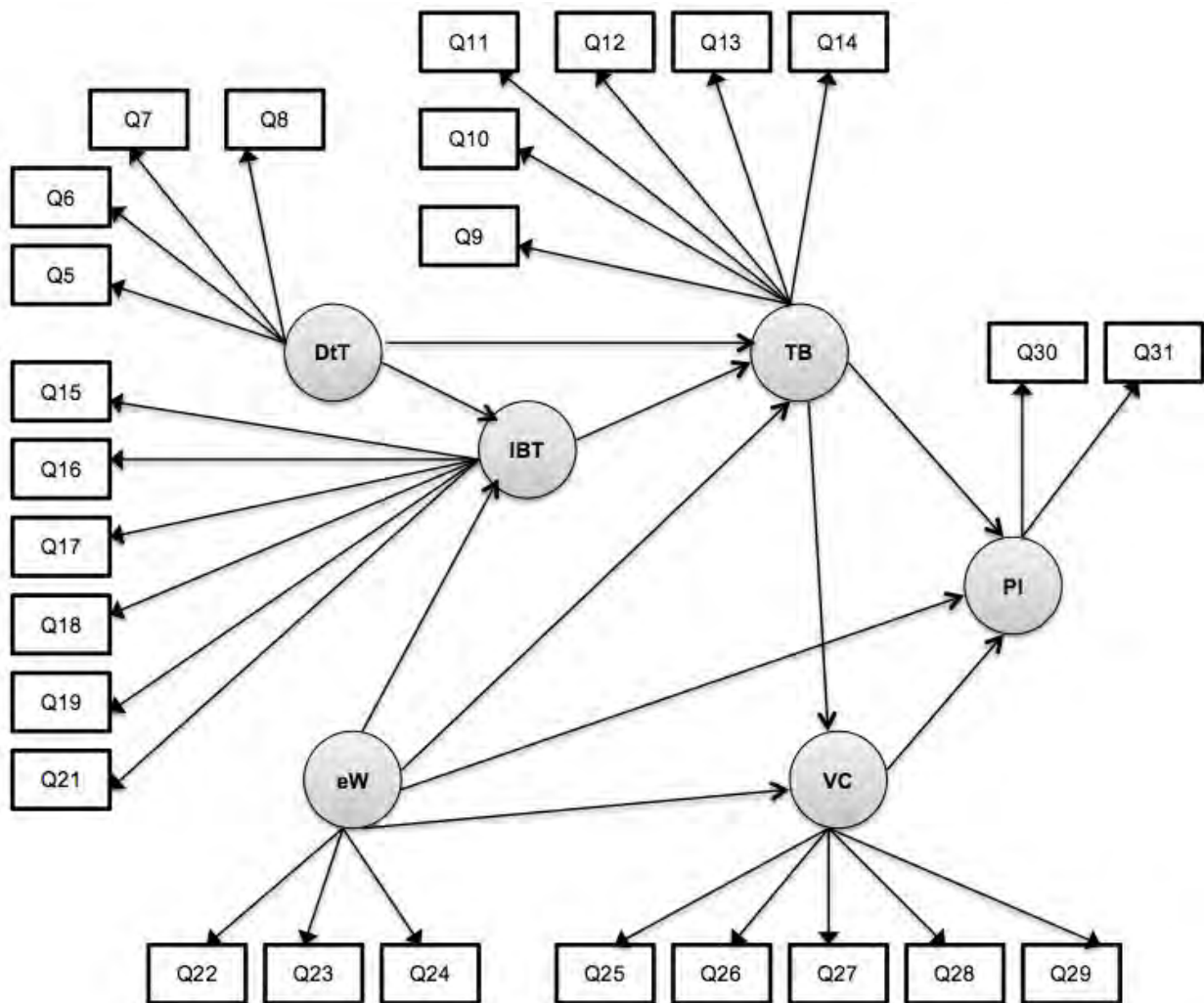
set of reflective indicators assigned to a latent variable, will not change the conceptual definition of the latent variable. Given that reflective indicators are influenced by rather than influence latent variables, it is necessary that they be correlated with one another. In other words, reflective indicators mirror the variation in the latent variable because their covariation is made possible by the latent variable (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003). Models consisting of reflective indicators are called factor models. The factor model has been dubbed the customary model of behavioural research, and this study's measurement model takes the form of a factor model (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Jarvis *et al.*, 2003).

In contrast to the measurement model, the structural model, also known as a path model, clarifies the relationships between the latent variables or unobservable concepts (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Iacobucci, 2009; Malhotra, 2010:726). It therefore signifies firstly, which latent variables the model is comprised of, and secondly, the manner in which they are hypothesised such that they be interconnected (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The structural model is founded on theory and is at the heart of the research question and hypotheses. This part of the complete model contains endogenous and exogenous variables. Exogenous variables are not determined by any of the other latent variables in the model, and are therefore independent variables. Conversely, endogenous variables are determined by other latent variables in the model, and are consequently dependent variables (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Iacobucci, 2009; Malhotra, 2010:727-728). Despite being predicted by certain latent variables in the model, it should be noted that an endogenous variable might also predict other variables in the model (Malhotra, 2010:728).

Exogenous and endogenous variables are traditionally symbolised with ovals (or circles), and indicators, with boxes (Iacobucci, 2009; Malhotra, 2010:727). Arrows are used to link the indicators to their assigned latent variables, and to show the relationships between the latent variables (Iacobucci, 2009; Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Jarvis *et al.*, 2003; Malhotra, 2010:727). Should the indicator be a formative indicator, an arrow will lead from the box that represents the indicator, to the latent variable that the indicator is assigned to. Should the indicator be a reflective indicator, an arrow will lead from the latent variable that the indicator is designed to measure, to the box that represents the indicator (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003).

Progressing to latent variables, if the variable is exogenous, arrows will lead out of the oval that represents the variable, and into the oval of the endogenous variable that it determines (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Iacobucci, 2009; Malhotra, 2010:727). However, since an endogenous variable may also determine other variables in the model, it is possible for arrows to in addition, lead out of the ovals representing endogenous variables (Malhotra, 2010:727-728). The diagram below depicts the measurement and structural models, or full model of this study, including the necessary exogenous and endogenous variables, their indicators and arrows to demonstrate relationships

Figure 6: The Measurement and Structural Models



Key:

Q – Question

eW – eWOM

DtT – Disposition to Trust

IBT – Institutional-based Trust

TB – Trusting Beliefs

VC – Value Co-creation

PI – Purchase Intention

As can be seen in the figure above, eWOM, disposition to trust, institutional-based trust, trusting beliefs, value co-creation and purchase intention, are the model's latent variables, which are represented by circles. Q5-19, and Q21-31, all refer to items in this study's questionnaire and are the indicators, which are represented by boxes. All arrows attached to the boxes that represent indicators, leading from the latent

variable that the indicator is designed to measure, to the box that represents the indicator, shows that the indicators are reflective indicators. This furthermore demonstrates that the measurement model of this study is a factor model.

Turning to the depiction of the structural model, eWOM and disposition to trust are exogenous variables, with arrows leading out of the circles that represent them. Institutional-based trust, trusting beliefs, value co-creation and purchase intention on the other hand, are endogenous variables, which have arrows leading into the circles that represent them. Institutional-based trust, trusting beliefs and value co-creation are endogenous variables that have been proposed to predict other variables in the model. It has been suggested that institutional-based trust predicts trusting beliefs and that trusting beliefs predicts value co-creation and purchase intention. Value co-creation has likewise been posited to predict purchase intention (See-To & Ho, 2014). These relationships, together with those between the latent variables and indicators described above, form the full model of this study.

A model such as this, may be tested using different types of SEM, namely CBSEM or variance-based SEM (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair *et al.*, 2012b, Hair *et al.*, 2012c; Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). These kinds of SEM are hereafter discussed.

5.7.2 Covariance-based SEM (CBSEM) and Variance-based SEM

CBSEM and variance-based SEM are distinct although “complementary” statistical tools through which to conduct SEM, and have a shared origin (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair *et al.*, 2012b; Hair *et al.*, 2012c). Researchers have an obligation to ensure the promotion of the practice, of implementing each tool properly. This requires a clarification of the function that each tool was created to perform, and being honest about its employment (Hair *et al.*, 2012b). The advantages of one tool are the disadvantages of the other (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair *et al.*, 2012b; Hair *et al.*, 2012c). The differences between CBSEM and variance-based SEM will herein be delineated.

CBSEM aims to estimate model parameters such that the disparity between the “theoretical” covariance matrix suggested by the model, and the “empirical” covariance matrix noticed within the estimation sample, is minimised. In contrast, variance-based SEM, also labeled PLS-SEM, strives to estimate model parameters, in a manner that “maximizes the explained variance of the endogenous latent variables” via an iterative succession of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair *et al.*, 2012b; Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). Variance-based SEM will hereinafter be referred to as PLS-SEM.

Due to the difference between CBSEM and PLS-SEM highlighted above, PLS-SEM is more appropriate during the premature phases of theory formation, when the researcher aims to determine the latent variables in the model, and specify relationships amongst them. Therefore, PLS-SEM has been said to possess a prediction orientation (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair *et al.*, 2012b; Hair *et al.*, 2012c;

Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). CBSEM however, concentrates on verifying theoretically presumed relationships, and has consequently been described as possessing a confirmatory orientation (Hair *et al.*, 2012b; Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). Given that this study endeavours to test a purportedly untested rather than an established or seminal model, it can firstly be said that the researcher desires to pinpoint relationships between latent variables, and secondly that the development of the model's theory is still in its early stages. Therefore the prediction-based approach of PLS-SEM was decided upon for employment in this study.

Additional key differences between CBSEM and PLS-SEM are related to the distribution or measurement scale of the indicators, the sample size of the study and the type of indicators in the measurement model (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair *et al.*, 2012b; Hair *et al.*, 2012c; Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). In order to use CBSEM, it is necessary that the data be normally distributed and that variables follow an interval scale (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair *et al.*, 2012c; Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, a minimum sample size of 200 is needed in order to prevent non-convergence and improper solutions (Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). However, in the social sciences, the research actuality is recognised by restricted sample sizes and budding theoretical formulation, causing it to be unmanageable to satisfy the stringent assumptions of CBSEM (Hair *et al.*, 2012b). PLS-SEM was created as an alternative to CBSEM that lessens the strains regarding data and specification of relationships, and has regularly been termed a "distribution-free", "soft modeling approach". It is resultantly suitable for studies in which it is not possible for CBSEM's assumptions to be completely satisfied (Hair *et al.*, 2012a).

Estimating model parameters by means of an iterative succession of OLS regressions allows for the assumptions concerning multivariate normality and relatively large sample sizes to be waived when employing PLS-SEM (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Hair *et al.*, 2012c; Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). Despite this, PLS-SEM constantly possesses statistical power that is greater than or equivalent to that of CBSEM (Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). The results obtained from PLS-SEM are hardly even in the event that data is highly skewed (Hair *et al.*, 2012a). Furthermore, it is typical that only half of the data, that is needed to attain a specific level of statistical power, when using CBSEM, is needed when using PLS-SEM. It has been advised that PLS-SEM be the selected tool in all studies with a sample size of less than 250. Moreover, when employing PLS-SEM, the absolute relative error of parameters rises at a slower pace with a reduction in sample size, than it does when using CBSEM. The detrimental impacts of small sample sizes can be counteracted quite simply, by heightening the amount of indicators assigned to each latent variable, or by utilising indicators that have higher loadings (Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). This study's small sample size of 152 was less than 250, and in the case of most latent variables in the study, alternative scales with additional indicators are available for use if the small sample size presents any issues. These facts further explain the reasoning for the use of PLS-SEM in this study.

The type of indicators in the measurement model brings to the forefront the next notable difference between CBSEM and PLS-SEM. CBSEM can only accommodate measurement models with formative indicators under specific circumstances in order to safeguard model identification. PLS-SEM in comparison is not restricted by identification issues, even if the model is complicated (Hair *et al.*, 2012a). PLS-SEM has the capacity to nearly limitlessly cope with formative and reflective indicators (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). Usage of PLS-SEM only necessitates that the latent variables be “structurally linked”, and hence offers greater flexibility when formative indicators are included in the model (Hair *et al.*, 2012a). Although this study does not involve formative indicators, the aforementioned difference pertaining to formative indicators was presented for the sake of completeness.

Given that the type of statistical technique utilised in this study, SEM, and the tool that will be consulted in order to implement it, PLS-SEM, have been outlined, the following section elucidates the evaluation of a PLS-SEM model.

5.7.3 Partial Least Squares (PLS) SEM

Herein, a brief description of the software *SmartPLS*, that was used to perform PLS-SEM in this study, is given. Subsequently, the assessment of the two divisions of a structural equation model, the measurement and structural model, is discoursed. The statistical concepts involved in the assessment are clarified. Furthermore, the necessary figures to pay attention to, as contained in the output of *SmartPLS*, are pointed out.

5.7.3.1 SmartPLS

SmartPLS is one of the most prominent software apparatuses for carrying out PLS-SEM (SmartPLS, 2015). The most recent version of the software, *SmartPLS 3*, has been described as a breakthrough in latent variable modeling that gives researchers the opportunity to develop an improved comprehension of measurement-related topics and structural patterns (Hair, n.d in SmartPLS, 2015; Sarstedt, n.d in SmartPLS, 2015). The software incorporates the latest methods and has a user-friendly, instinctive interface, which allows for aesthetically pleasing path models to be created. This has caused researchers in both academia and industry, to have a positive user experience with *SmartPLS*, and to therefore be in favour of it (SmartPLS, 2015).

5.7.3.2 Measurement Model

The characteristics of the measurement model that are necessary to evaluate, are dependent on the indicators that the measurement model contains. If the indicators are reflective, the two characteristics that should be evaluated are reliability and validity (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016). Given that the measurement model in this study contains reflective indicators, reliability and validity of the model need to

be assessed.

- **Reliability of the Measurement Model**

Reliability is the degree to which a scale generates consistent outcomes, should ongoing measurements of the latent variable that the scale aims to measure, be carried out (Malhotra, 2010:318). Two types of reliability ought to be taken into account, specifically internal consistency reliability and indicator reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2012a).

Internal consistency reliability is a means through which to examine the reliability of a scale, which encompasses several items that are summated, in order to develop a total score for the scale (Malhotra, 2010:319). A Cronbach Alpha value, and a composite reliability value, can be used to determine internal consistency reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Malhotra, 2010:319). Should the Cronbach Alpha value be greater than 0.7, the indicators in a scale may be classified as internally consistent (Nunnally, 1978 in Reynaldo & Santos, 1999). In addition, it is necessary that the composite reliability value be higher than 0.7 if the model being tested is new, and 0.8 if the model has already been established (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

After assessing internal consistency reliability, it is necessary that indicator reliability be assessed. Indicator reliability is determined by the item loadings of each indicator, where these loadings are required to be greater than 0.7 in order for the indicators in a scale to be considered as possessing indicator reliability (Hulland, 1999).

Although a model may be confirmed as being reliable, that does not show that the model is valid. Validity is the next feature of the measurement model that ought to be evaluated.

- **Validity of the Measurement Model**

Validity is the degree, to which variations in the scale scores, depict actual variations in the concept that the scale purports to measure, instead of systematic or random errors (Malhotra, 2010:320). Like reliability, there are two kinds of validity that need to be assessed, namely convergent and discriminant validity (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016). Both of these types of validity can be categorised as construct validity, which indicates which concept is being measured by the scale.

Convergent validity is the degree to which “the scale correlates positively with other measures of the same construct,” (Malhotra, 2010:321). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value may be employed to evaluate convergent validity, with an AVE of 0.5 or more serving as an indication of convergent validity (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The second type of validity, discriminant validity, is the degree to which a measure fails to correlate with constructs from which it ought to diverge (Malhotra, 2010:321). There are two means that a researcher can turn to in order to determine discriminant

validity, the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion and cross loadings (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion will be satisfied when the square root of the AVE value, associated with each construct, is higher than the correlation that the construct has with any other construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The satisfaction of this criterion symbolises discriminant validity. With regards to cross loadings, discriminant validity is present when the factor loading of each item, on the construct that it aimed to measure, is larger than the factor loading of any another item, on that construct. In other words, each item loading onto the construct that it aimed to measure and not onto other constructs, serves as proof of discriminant validity. (Chin, 1998 in Hair *et al.*, 2012a).

The estimates of the “inner” or structural model, will serve no purpose unless the “outer” or measurement model has been shown to portray reasonable degrees of reliability and validity, according to the criteria presented earlier (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). Should measures fall short of reliability and validity, inner model estimates may be markedly biased, which may result in researchers failing to recognise relationships that could be significant (Hair *et al.*, 2012a). Therefore, it is only after the measurement model has been deemed to be reliable and valid, that the researcher may progress with an assessment of the structural model (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The manner in which to evaluate the structural model is explicated next.

5.7.3.3 Structural Model

The main statistic that should be examined when evaluating the structural model is the co-efficient of determination, or R-squared, which signifies the proportion of variance of each endogenous latent variable, that is explained by the model (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Iacobucci, 2009). There is no universally acknowledged, satisfactory R-squared value, as what would be regarded as satisfactory differs from one study to the next. It is dependent on the context of the study and the importance of the construct in the model (Hair *et al.*, 2012a). However, according to Chin, Marcolin & Newsted (2003), R-squared values of 0.19 are classified as weak, R-squared values of 0.33 are considered moderate, and R-squared values of 0.67 are deemed to be substantial.

Another statistic that deserves attention is path coefficients (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016). Path coefficients are principally standardised regression coefficients, which may be evaluated according to their sign and absolute size. They ought to be construed as the variation in the dependent variable, should the independent variable rise by one unit, whilst all other independent variables remain constant (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The significance of path values may be assessed by examining the t-values obtained through a procedure known as bootstrapping (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Martinez-Ruiz & Aluja-Banet, 2009). A t-value that is greater than 2 may be recognised as significant (Martinez-Ruiz & Aluja-Banet, 2009). This principle can be applied when testing hypotheses, such that those path

coefficients with an associated t-value higher than 2, represent a significant relationship. This would typically mean that the researcher fails to reject the alternative hypothesis regarding relationships, as the null hypothesis states that there is no relationship (Hair *et al.*, 2012a).

5.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter identified this study's research design and method, before describing the target population and sampling method. Next, the measurement instrument was detailed with a focus on its layout and all the scales that it contained. Following this, the data collection process, including pre-test data collection, was then elaborated on. Thereafter, the ethical considerations that the researcher acknowledged in carrying out this study were described. The chapter closed with an explanation of the data analysis method. This entailed elucidating the selected statistical technique of SEM, highlighting differences between CBSEM and PLS-SEM, and delineating the manner in which the output of PLS-SEM should be analysed to produce results. These results will be outlined in the forthcoming chapter, along with a description of the realised sample and a discussion of descriptive statistics.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The former methodology chapter defined the criteria for this study's target population and specified the selected sampling method of judgement sampling. It furthermore indicated the means by which data was collected and explained the statistical technique, PLS-SEM, which was chosen to analyse the data. This was done to establish how the research questions were tested. In this chapter, the results to these research questions are provided.

Firstly, the realised sample is discussed, whereafter descriptive statistics for the scales are provided. Following this, the output produced through employing the statistical technique of PLS-SEM, is analysed. This entails an examination of the measurement and structural models, including the results of the hypotheses tests.

6.2 REALISED SAMPLE

The respondents for this study were required to be engaged South African females in the 18-29 year age group, who had viewed the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, and were yet to make a final decision on which wedding dress to purchase. All respondents who filled in a questionnaire, 155 respondents, met the above criteria. However, 3 respondents failed to answer one or more items in the questionnaire, resulting in a total sample of 152.

Tie strength, perceptual affinity and demographic similarity, were measured as control variables, or were controlled for in the sample. This is because as highlighted previously, the eWOM source has the features of tie strength, perceptual affinity and demographic similarity (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). The message source of eWOM was posited to moderate the relationship between eWOM and each of the constructs of institutional-based trust, trusting beliefs, value co-creation and purchase intention (See-To & Ho, 2014).

6.3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

This set of statistics sheds light on the various answers that respondents could have provided, and which were utilised as data for this study. The descriptive statistics for nominal data outlines respondents' answers to items 32 and 33, given that these items pertained to nominal data. The descriptive statistics for interval/ratio data presents the means and standard deviations, of respondents' answers to the remaining items, since these items were concerned with interval/ratio data, with the exception of items 1-4.

6.3.1 Descriptive Statistics for Nominal Data

Item 32 indicated that respondents should choose a person from a group of possible people, whereas item 33 directed respondents to specify the chosen person's gender. Given that types of people and gender types are classified as nominal data, the answers provided for items 32 and 33 are delineated hereunder.

Item 32 instructed respondents to select the individual who would be most likely to begin a conversation with them on the Facebook fan page of *Bride&co*. The percentages for all possible individuals that could be chosen are tabulated below. No respondents chose their neighbour or child therefore these options are excluded from the table.

Table 2: Percentages for Item 32

Individual	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percent
Colleague	4	2.6	2.6	2.6
Acquaintance	3	2.0	2.0	4.6
Friend	38	25.0	25.0	29.6
Close Friend	42	27.6	27.6	57.2
Best Friend	26	17.1	17.1	74.3
Fiancé	9	5.9	5.9	80.3
Parent	10	6.6	6.6	86.8
Sibling	10	6.6	6.6	93.4
Relative	7	4.6	4.6	98
Other	3	2.0	2.0	100
Total	152	100	100	

As can be seen in the table above, a close friend was the most commonly selected individual who would be most likely to begin a conversation with a respondent on the Facebook fan page of *Bride&co*. 27.6% of the respondents selected a close friend. This option was closely followed by a friend at 25.0% and a best friend at 17.1%. There was a tie between a colleague, and any other person not listed, with each of these options being selected by only 2% of the respondents.

Concerning item 33, the valid percentages showed that 95.4% of respondents indicated that the aforementioned individual selected by them, was a female. Only 4.6% indicated that the aforementioned individual selected by them, was a male. In this instance, the selected individual was typically the respondent's fiancé.

6.3.2 Descriptive Statistics for Interval/Ratio Data

The statistics discussed herein consist of the mean scores and standard deviations of the scores, for items 5-45, since these items pertained to interval/ratio data, with the exception of items 32 and 33. The discussed statistics are split between those associated with the constructs in the model, and those relevant to the eWOM source characteristics that were used as control variables.

6.3.2.1 Descriptive Statistics for the Constructs

The mean scores and standard deviations of the scores, for items 5-31, are discussed below. Since items 5-31 measure the constructs of the model, the means and standard deviations depicted in the following table are applicable to the constructs. These constructs are namely, disposition to trust, trusting beliefs, institutional-based trust, eWOM, value co-creation and purchase intention.

Table 3: Minimum Descriptive Statistics for the Constructs

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Disposition to Trust	4.34	1.20
Trusting Beliefs	5.79	1.06
Structural Assurance (Institutional-based Trust)	4.59	1.36
Situational Normality (Institutional-based Trust)	2.94	0.92
eWOM	2.69	1.17
Value Co-creation	4.20	1.30
Purchase Intention	4.00	1.37

According to the above table, the mean values ranged from 2.69 to 5.79. All standard deviations were greater than one, except for that of the situational normality component of institutional-based trust, and ranged from 0.92 to 1.37. Further detail on the minimum descriptive statistics for each individual construct will now be provided. Since *Bride&co* was the chosen wedding dress vendor, and Facebook the chosen SNS for this study, any interpretations that would have pertained to a specific wedding dress vendor or an SNS, relate to *Bride&co* and Facebook respectively.

Starting with the trust constructs of disposition to trust, trusting beliefs and the structural assurance component of institutional-based trust, these trust constructs were all measured on seven-point Likert scales in which point one was labelled as “Strongly Disagree” and point seven as “Strongly Agree”. A score of one represented a low degree of the relevant trust construct being measured, while a score of seven signified a high degree of the said trust construct. Collectively, these scales encompassed 14 items, items 5-18.

For disposition to trust, the mean score of 4.34 and standard deviation of 1.20 showed that most of the respondents gave a response between 3.14 and 5.54 for the items measuring disposition to trust. Taking into account the structural assurance component of institutional-based trust, the mean score of 4.59 and standard deviation of 1.36 denoted that most of the respondents gave a response between 3.23 and 5.95 for the items measuring structural assurance. Both of the above sets of statistics indicated that most respondents had a medium level of disposition to trust and structural assurance. Stated differently, most of the respondents had a moderately regular inclination, to rely on other general individuals, across a wide range of scenarios and people. In addition, most of the respondents had moderately deep beliefs, that Facebook's security features can safeguard them from difficulties, which may arise in utilising the information on Facebook to make decisions.

The spread pertaining to to the disposition to trust and structural assurance scores, was however slightly large. This demonstrated that certain respondents had either a regular or relatively irregular inclination, to rely on others general individuals, across a wide range of scenarios and people. It further pointed out that certain respondents had either deep or relatively weak beliefs, that Facebook's security features can safeguard them from difficulties, which may arise in utilising the information on Facebook to make decisions.

Considering trusting beliefs, this construct had mean score of 5.79 and a standard deviation of 1.06, indicating that majority of the respondents gave a response between 4.73 and 6.85 for the items measuring trusting beliefs. This highlighted that unlike disposition to trust and the structural assurance component of institutional-based trust, majority of the respondents had strong trusting beliefs. Stated otherwise, they had a large amount faith that *Bride&co* would do what would be in their best interest, or would display kindness, proficiency and honesty.

Turning to the situational normality component of institutional-based trust, and the effect of eWOM, these constructs were measured on five-point Likert scales. The scale that measured situational normality contained 3 items, items 19-21. Point one was labelled "Very Strongly Disagree" and point five as "Very Strongly Agree". A score of one connoted a low level of situational normality, while a score of five connoted a high level of situational normality. The scale that measured the effect of eWOM also consisted of three items, items 22-24. Point one was labelled as "Strongly Disagree" and point five as "Strongly Agree". A score of one evidenced that the eWOM was not effective while a score of five evidenced that the eWOM was highly effective.

Acknowledging situational normality, this component of institutional-based trust had a mean score of 2.94 and standard deviation of 0.92 specifying that majority of the respondents gave a response between 2.02 and 3.86 for the items measuring situational normality. These figures were similar to those of eWOM, where the mean

score of 2.69 and standard deviation of 1.17 denoted that majority of the respondents gave a response between 1.52 and 3.86 for the items measuring eWOM. These sets of statistics prove that majority of the respondents had a relatively low level of situational normality and thought eWOM to have a low level of influence on their decision to purchase a wedding dress. Conveyed differently, they had little trust that would allow them to feel at rest with utilising Facebook for purchase decision-making. Furthermore, consumer comments on Facebook had only a meagre effect on their wedding dress purchase decision-making. Considering spread, the spread of situational normality scores was fairly low, further emphasising the low level of trust that majority of the respondents had, that would allow them to feel at rest with utilising Facebook for purchase decision-making.

Proceeding to value co-creation, this construct was measured on a seven-point Likert scale that held five items, items 25-29. Point one was labelled as “Totally Disagree” and point seven as “Totally Agree”. A score of one signified that the customer perceived the firm to have a low capability, of co-creating value during interactions with her. A score of seven in contrast, signified that the customer perceived the firm to have a high capability, of co-creating value during interactions with her. The value co-creation mean score of 4.20, and standard deviation of 1.30, revealed that most of the respondents gave a response between 2.90 and 5.50 for the items measuring value co-creation. This points out that most of the respondents perceived wedding dress vendors to have adequate capability, to co-create value during interactions with them. Nonetheless, the spread of value co-creation scores was marginally large, illustrating that particular respondents believed that wedding dress vendors would have either a high or relatively low capability, of co-creating value during interactions with them.

Lastly, purchase intention was measured on two, six-point semantic differential scales, each encompassing one item. The first scale was comprised of item 30 and the second, of item 31. Point one was labelled as “Extremely Unlikely” and point six as “Extremely Likely”. A score of one represented a weak intention to purchase, whereas a score of six represented a strong intention to purchase. The purchase intention mean score of 4.00, and standard deviation of 1.37, disclosed that majority of the respondents gave a response between 2.63 and 5.37 for the items measuring purchase intention. This clarified that majority of the respondents had a modest intention to purchase a wedding dress. Nevertheless, the spread amongst respondents’ purchase intention scores was slightly large, meaning that specific respondents may have had either a strong or a moderately weak intention to purchase a wedding dress.

6.3.2.2 Descriptive Statistics for the Control Variables

The mean scores and standard deviations of the scores, for items 34-45, are acknowledged here. Because items 34-45 measure the eWOM source

characteristics or control variables, the means and standard deviations that appear in the subsequent table are germane to the characteristics. The characteristics are specifically, tie strength, perceptual affinity and demographic similarity.

Table 4: Minimum Descriptive Statistics for the Control Variables

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Tie Strength	6.06	1.21
Perceptual Affinity	5.09	1.03
Demographic Similarity	3.77	1.30

The contents of the table above show that the mean values ranged from 3.77 to 6.06. All standard deviations were greater than one and ranged from 1.03 to 1.30. Additional detail on the minimum descriptive statistics for each unique eWOM source characteristic will now be offered. It should be noted that all eWOM source characteristics were measured on seven-point semantic differential scales.

To begin with, tie strength was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale that included five items, items 37-41. Point one, of items 37-40, was labelled as “Not At All Likely” and point seven, as “Very Much Likely”. In item 41, point one was labelled as “Not At All Close” and point seven as “Extraordinary Close”. A score of one illustrated a weak tie whereas a score of seven represented a strong tie. Considering the tie strength mean score of 6.06 and standard deviation of 1.21 showed that most of the respondents gave a response between 4.85 and 7.27 for the items measuring tie strength. This indicated that most respondents had a strong bond with their eWOM source. The spread amongst respondents’ tie strength scores was nevertheless marginally large, meaning that particular respondents may have considered themselves and their eWOM source to have either a very strong or only moderately strong bond.

Progressing to perceptual affinity, this characteristic was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale involving four items, items 42-45. Point one was labelled as “Not At All Similar” and point seven as “Extremely Similar”. A score of one represented a low level of perceptual affinity, and a score of seven, a high level of perceptual affinity. Recognising the perceptual affinity mean score of 5.09, and standard deviation of 1.03, indicated that most of the respondents gave a response between 4.06 and 6.12 for the items measuring perceptual affinity. This denoted that most respondents thought that there was a somewhat high extent of perceptual affinity between themselves and their eWOM source. Stated differently, most respondents thought that there to be a somewhat high extent of similarity between their likes, dislikes, values and interests, and that of their eWOM source.

Finally, demographic similarity was measured by considering the traits of age, occupation and education level. Each trait was measured with a separate, seven-point semantic differential scale. The scale that measured similarity in age was

comprised of item 34. Point one of this scale was labelled as “I am much younger”, point four, the midpoint, as “Same Age”, and point seven, as “I am much older”. The next scale measured similarity in occupation and contained item 35. Point one of this scale was labelled as “Not At All Similar” and point seven as “Extremely Similar”. The final demographic similarity scale measured similarity in education level and held item 36. Point one of this scale was labelled as “Yes” and point seven was labelled as “No”. As is evident from the aforesaid description of the scale points, a score of one represented a low level of demographic similarity, and a score of seven, a high level of demographic similarity.

Taking into account the demographic similarity mean score of 3.77, and standard deviation of 1.30, signified that most of the respondents gave a response between 2.47 and 5.07 for the items measuring demographic similarity. This showed that most respondents considered themselves to possess moderately similar demographic characteristics in comparison to that of their eWOM source. The spread amongst respondents’ demographic similarity scores was slightly large however, meaning that certain respondents may have deemed themselves and their eWOM source to have either a fairly high or low degree of demographic similarity.

The aforementioned recognition of the mean scores, and standard deviations of the scores, applicable to the eWOM characteristics, concludes the discussion of this study’s descriptive statistics. Conclusions however, cannot be drawn from these statistics, although can be drawn from the inferential statistics, which are presented hereafter.

6.4 INFERENCE STATISTICS: PLS-SEM MODEL

This set of statistics may be used to develop inferences about the sample population. It contains the results of the structural equation modelling procedure, carried out via the statistical tool *SmartPLS*, in order to test the hypotheses relevant to the eWOM in SNS’s model. Initially, the measurement model is presented, followed by an explanation of the structural model, since the estimates of the structural model, will not be of use if the measurement model has not been shown to depict satisfactory levels of reliability and validity (Henseler *et al.*, 2016).

6.4.1 Measurement Model

Due to the fact that the indicators of this study are reflective, two characteristics of the measurement model that should be evaluated are reliability and validity (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016). Evaluating reliability will indicate whether the scales produce consistent outcomes. Evaluating validity on the other hand, will demonstrate whether changes in the scale scores, illustrate the true changes in the latent variable that the scale strives to measure, instead of systematic or random errors (Malhotra, 2010:320). Therefore, this passage sheds light on the reliability and

validity of the scale items used to measure the latent variables of the eWOM in SNS's model.

Two types of reliability were assessed, particularly internal consistency reliability, which is a means by which to study the reliability of a summated scale, and indicator reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2012a). In order to assess internal consistency reliability, Cronbach Alpha values and composite reliability values were used (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Malhotra, 2010:319). If the Cronbach Alpha value exceeds 0.7, the indicators in the scales may be considered as internally consistent (Nunnally, 1978 in Reynaldo & Santos, 1999). Alternatively, it is required that the composite reliability values be greater than 0.7 if the model being tested is new, and 0.8 if the model is well-recognised (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Indicator reliability in contrast, was examined by referring to the item loadings of each indicator, where it was necessary for these loadings to be more than 0.7 in order for the indicators in the scales to be acknowledged as possessing indicator reliability (Hulland, 1999). Hereafter, internal consistency reliability is appraised before an appraisal of indicator reliability ensues.

The following table displays the internal consistency reliability indicators, specifically Cronbach Alpha values and composite reliability values.

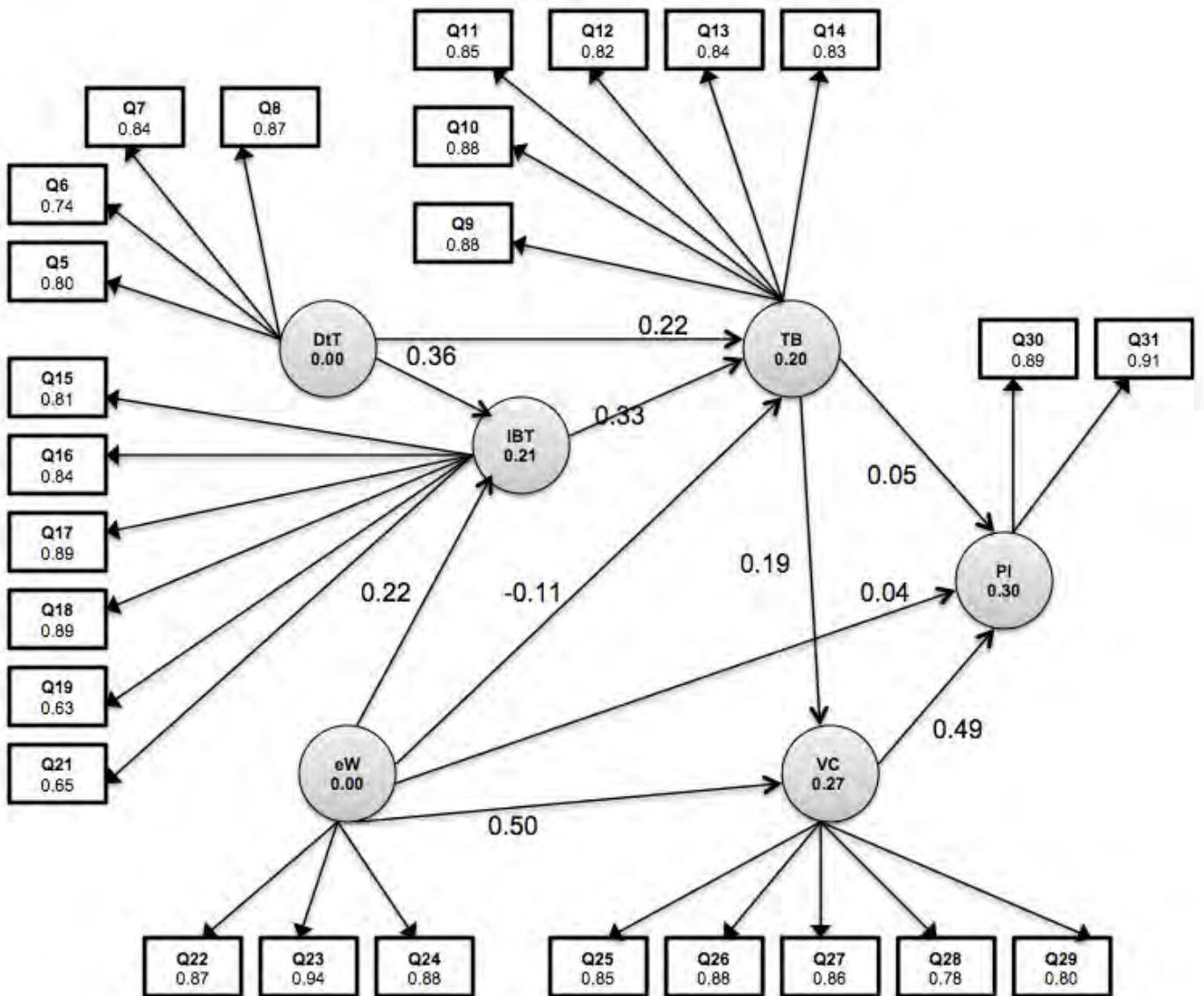
Table 5: Internal Consistency Reliability Indicators

	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
Disposition to Trust	0.84	0.89
Trusting Beliefs	0.92	0.94
Institutional-based Trust	0.88	0.91
eWOM	0.87	0.92
Value Co-creation	0.89	0.92
Purchase Intention	0.77	0.89

The contents of the above table show that the sets of scale items, used to measure the model's constructs, are highly internally consistent, as all Cronbach Alpha values exceed 0.7 and all composite reliability values exceed 0.8. Trusting beliefs has the most reliable set of measures with Cronbach Alpha and composite reliability values of 0.92 and 0.94 respectively, whereas purchase intention had the least reliable measures with Cronbach Alpha and composite reliability values of 0.77 and 0.89 respectively.

Progressing to indicator reliability, the item loadings displayed in the figure of the PLS Algorithm below, will allow for this form of reliability to be assessed. The item loading for each item is contained in the box that represents the item.

Figure 7: PLS Algorithm



Key:

Q – Question

eW – eWOM

DtT – Disposition to Trust

IBT – Institutional-based Trust

TB – Trusting Beliefs

VC – Value Co-creation

PI – Purchase Intention

Taking into account the aforementioned figure, it is evident that majority of the items loaded onto the constructs that they aimed to measure. Furthermore, most item

loadings are larger than 0.7. Resultantly, the scale items used to measure the model's constructs were deemed to have a substantial degree of indicator reliability. However, items 19 and 21 had item loadings lower than 0.7, and item 20 was removed since it was insignificant and therefore violated validity and reliability assumptions. Items 19, 20 and 21 aimed to measure the situational normality component of institutional-based trust. Therefore, caution should be implemented when interpreting results concerning institutional-based trust. Nevertheless, additional multiple items were used to measure institutional-based trust and all indicators were reflective indicators. Therefore, even after item 20 was removed, sufficient items with which to measure institutional-based trust remained, and the meaning of the construct was unchanged.

Considering the aforesaid results pertaining to reliability, it can be stated that nearly all scales used are reliable and would therefore generate consistent results if the relevant constructs were to be measured several times. Given that reliability has been established, validity may now be evaluated.

Two types of validity were evaluated, namely convergent validity and discriminant validity. Assessing convergent validity will demonstrate whether "the scale correlates positively with other measures of the same construct". Assessing discriminant validity in contrast, will signify whether a measure fails to correlate with constructs from which it ought to diverge (Malhotra, 2010:321). Convergent validity was evaluated by examining AVE values, with an AVE of 0.5 or more symbolising convergent validity (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Discriminant validity, on the other hand, was evaluated by employing the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion and cross loadings (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion is fulfilled, and the presence of discriminant validity confirmed, in the event that the square root of the AVE value, associated with each construct, is greater than the correlation that the construct has with any other construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). With respect to cross loadings, presence of discriminant validity is verified when the factor loading of each item, on the construct that it aimed to measure, is higher than the factor loading of any another item, on that construct. In other words, each item loading onto the construct that it strived to measure and not onto other constructs, serves as evidence of discriminant validity (Chin, 1998 in Hair *et al.*, 2012a). Hereafter, internal consistency reliability is appraised before an appraisal of indicator reliability ensues.

The following table exhibits the AVE values that were necessary for determining the convergent validity, of the scale items used to measure the constructs in the model.

Table 6: Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values

	AVE
Disposition to Trust	0.66
Trusting Beliefs	0.72
Institutional-based Trust	0.62
eWOM	0.80
Value Co-creation	0.70
Purchase Intention	0.81

According to the above table, all AVE values exceed 0.5, signifying that the scale items used to measure the constructs in the model have evidence of convergent validity. The highest AVE value of 0.80, associated with eWOM, suggests that the scale items used to measure eWOM have greater convergent validity than that of any other set of scale items. Conversely, the lowest AVE value of 0.62, associated with institutional-based trust, suggests that the scale items used to measure institutional-based trust have less convergent validity than that of any other set of scale items. In general, it may be stated that each scale utilised correlates positively with other measures of the same construct that it aimed to measure.

Proceeding to discriminant validity, as stated previously, this type of validity can be established if the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion is satisfied (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016). The correlation matrix hereunder shows how strongly each construct correlates with itself and every other construct, and includes the square roots of the AVE values along the diagonal. These values were consequently used in order to determine whether the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion was satisfied.

Table 7: Correlation Matrix with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values

	Disposition to Trust	Trusting Beliefs	Institutional-based Trust	eWOM	Value Co-creation	Purchase Intention
Disposition to Trust	0.81					
Trusting Beliefs	0.33	0.85				
Institutional-based Trust	0.40	0.39	0.79			
eWOM	0.21	0.29	0.29	0.89		
Value Co-creation	0.26	0.21	0.45	0.51	0.84	
Purchase Intention	0.29	0.15	0.31	0.29	0.51	0.90

The Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion, displayed in the table above, shows that the square root of the AVE value, associated with each construct, is higher than the correlation that the construct had with any other construct. This indicates that the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion was satisfied. In addition to this, the factor loading of each item, on the construct that it aimed to measure, is larger than the factor loading of any another item, on that construct. In other words, each item loads onto the construct that it aimed to measure and not onto other constructs. Given this, the scale items, used to measure the constructs in the model, have proof of discriminant validity. Stated differently, none of the scale measures correlate with constructs from which they ought to diverge. In closing, all scales employed are valid and adjustments in the scale scores will portray the true changes in the latent variables that the scales strive to measure, instead of systematic or random errors.

Based on the results above, it can be confirmed that eWOM in SNS's model is both reliable and valid. Thus, it is appropriate to proceed with an analysis of the structural model (Henseler *et al.*, 2016).

6.4.2 Structural Model

It is necessary that two aspects of the structural model be considered. The first is the co-efficient of determination, or R-squared statistic (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Iacobucci, 2009). The second is the path values of each hypothesised relationship, which specifies the magnitude and direction of each relationship (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016). This discussion delineates the R-squared values of the various latent endogenous variables and thereafter the results of the hypotheses tests, which recognises the path values.

6.4.2.1 R-squared Values

R-squared values provide an indication of the model's capacity to explain the variation in each of its latent endogenous variables (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Iacobucci, 2009). According to Chin *et al.* (2003), R-squared values of 0.19 are classified as weak, R-squared values of 0.33 are considered moderate, and R-squared values of 0.67 are deemed to be substantial. The R-squared values of the latent endogenous variables in the model, or the percentage of their variation explained by the model, were diagrammatically presented in Figure 7, shown earlier. They are furthermore, tabulated below.

Table 8: R-squared Values

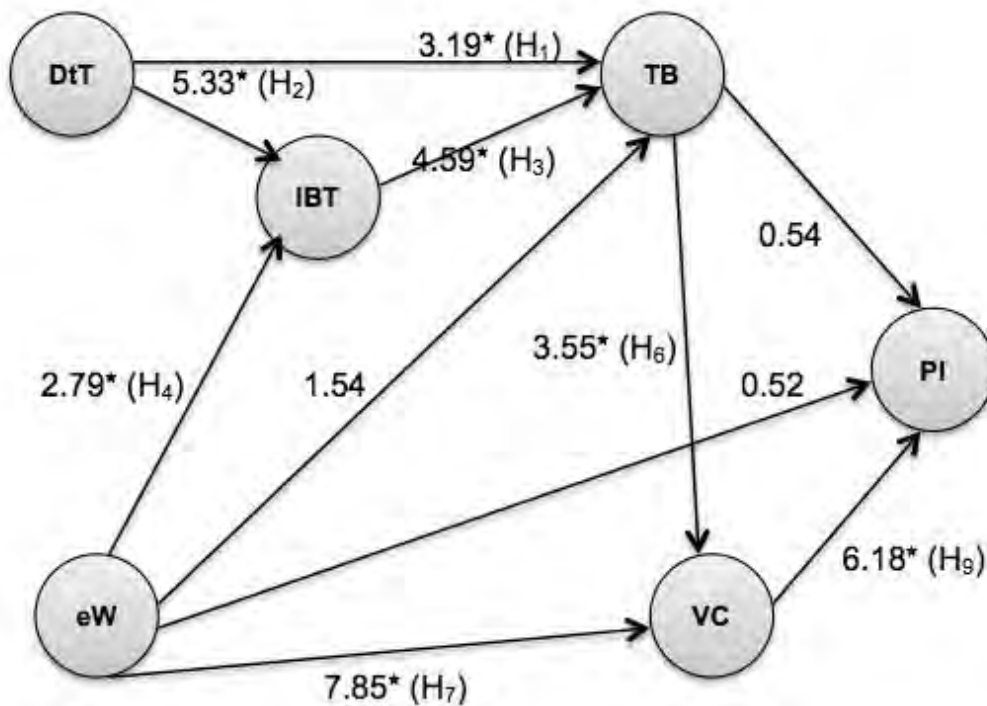
	R-squared Value
Trusting Beliefs	0.20
Institutional-based Trust	0.21
Value Co-creation	0.27
Purchase Intention	0.30

Every latent endogenous variable in the model was considered to have a fairly weak R-squared value since the values are greater than 0.19 although less than 0.30. With an R-squared value of 0.2, 20% of the variation in trusting beliefs is explained by the model. With an almost similar R-squared value of 0.21, the model accounts for 21% of the variation in institutional-based trust. In addition, 27% of the variation in value co-creation is explained by the model, as proven by the R-squared value of 0.27. Lastly, a nearly moderate R-squared value of 0.3 shows that the model accounts for 30% of the variation in purchase intention. Overall, given that all R-squared values were lower than 0.33, the model rather poorly explains the variation in its latent endogenous variables.

6.4.2.2 Hypotheses Testing and Path Coefficients

Several hypotheses were tested in order to ascertain whether the relationships in the model hold. Each relationship has a path coefficient, which is essentially a regression coefficient that shows the variation in the dependent variable, in the event that the independent variable rises by one unit, whilst all other independent variables remain constant (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). Path coefficients with an associated t-value higher than 2, represent a significant relationship (Martinez-Ruiz & Aluja-Banet, 2009). The t-values resulting from the hypotheses tests are presented in the following figure.

Figure 8: t-values and their Associated Hypotheses



* Significant at a 5% level of significance

Key:

eW – eWOM

DtT – Disposition to Trust

IBT – Institutional-based Trust

TB – Trusting Beliefs

VC – Value Co-creation

PI – Purchase Intention

The t-values in the above diagram, will in the table below, be set aside their corresponding path coefficients and the significance status of the relationship that they are associated with. The path coefficients were graphically presented in Figure 7, displayed previously.

Table 9: Path Coefficients, t-values and Significance Status of the Tested Relationships

	Path Coefficient	t-value	Significance Status
H ₁ : Disposition to Trust → Trusting Beliefs	0.22	3.19	Significant
H ₂ : Disposition to Trust → Institutional-based Trust	0.36	5.33	Significant
H ₃ : Institutional-based Trust → Trusting Beliefs	0.33	4.59	Significant
H ₄ : eWOM → Institutional-based Trust	0.22	2.79	Significant
H ₅ : eWOM → Trusting Beliefs	-0.11	1.54	Insignificant
H ₆ : Trusting Beliefs → Value Co-creation	0.19	3.55	Significant
H ₇ : eWOM → Value Co-creation	0.50	7.85	Significant
H ₈ : Trusting Beliefs → Purchase Intention	0.05	0.54	Insignificant
H ₉ : Value Co-creation → Purchase Intention	0.49	6.18	Significant
H ₁₀ : eWOM → Purchase Intention	0.04	0.52	Insignificant

As can be seen from the above table, seven of the ten hypothesised direct relationships were significant and three, insignificant, namely those between eWOM and trusting beliefs, trusting beliefs and value co-creation and trusting beliefs and purchase intention. Each of the relationships portrayed in the table will now be individually recognised. To streamline the discussion, the targeted respondents of engaged, young adult South African females, will hereinafter be labeled as “South African brides”. Moreover, because Facebook was the SNS decided upon for utilisation in this study, any results that would have related to SNS’s, make reference to Facebook.

H₁ proposed that South African brides’ disposition to trust, has a positive impact on their trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages. H₁, with an associated t-value of 3.19, which exceeded the critical value (t_{crit}) of 2, was not rejected. Therefore, South African brides’ disposition to trust, has a positive impact on their trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages. Considering the path coefficient of 0.22 shows that a 1-unit increase in disposition to trust induces a 0.22-unit increase in trusting beliefs.

H₂ proposed that South African brides’ disposition to trust, has a positive impact on their institutional-based trust in Facebook. H₂, with an associated t-value of 5.33, which exceeded the t_{crit} of 2, was not rejected. Therefore, South African brides’

disposition to trust has a positive impact on their institutional-based trust in Facebook. Considering the path coefficient of 0.36 shows that a 1-unit increase in disposition to trust induces a 0.36-unit increase in institutional-based trust.

H₃ posited that South African brides' institutional-based trust in Facebook has a positive impact on their trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages. The researcher failed to reject H₃, with an associated t-value of 4.59, which was greater than the t_{crit} of 2. Hence, South African brides' institutional-based trust in Facebook has a positive impact on their trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages. Recognising the path coefficient of 0.33 indicates that a 1-unit increase in institutional-based trust provokes a 0.33-unit increase in trusting beliefs.

H₄ posited that positive eWOM on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, has a positive impact on South African brides' institutional-based trust in Facebook, while negative eWOM has a negative impact. The researcher failed to reject H₄, with an associated t-value of 2.79, which was greater than the t_{crit} of 2. Hence, positive eWOM on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, has a positive impact on South African brides' institutional-based trust in Facebook, while negative eWOM has a negative impact. Recognising the path coefficient of 0.22 indicates that a 1-unit increase in positive eWOM provokes a 0.22-unit increase in institutional-based trust, whereas a 1-unit increase in negative eWOM provokes a 0.22-unit decrease in institutional-based trust.

H₅ postulated that positive eWOM on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, has a positive impact on South African brides' trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, while negative eWOM has a negative impact. H₅, with an associated t-value of 1.54, which was lower than the t_{crit} of 2, was rejected. Thus, positive eWOM on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, does not have a positive impact on South African brides' trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, while negative eWOM does not have a negative impact.

H₆ postulated South African brides' trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, has a positive impact on the value co-creation process. H₆, with an associated t-value of 3.55, which was higher than the t_{crit} of 2, was not rejected. Thus, South African brides' trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, has a positive impact on the value co-creation process. Acknowledging the path coefficient of 0.19 demonstrates that a 1-unit increase in trusting beliefs stimulates a 0.19-unit increase in value co-creation.

H₇ conjectured that positive eWOM on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, has a positive impact on the value co-creation process, while negative eWOM has a negative impact. The researcher failed to reject H₇, with an associated

t-value of 7.85, which was more than the t_{crit} of 2. Consequently, positive eWOM on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, has a positive impact on the value co-creation process, while negative eWOM has a negative impact. Taking into account the path coefficient of 0.50 signifies that a 1-unit increase in positive eWOM instigates a 0.50-unit increase in value co-creation, whereas a 1-unit increase in negative eWOM instigates a 0.50-unit decrease in value co-creation.

H₈ conjectured that South African brides' trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, has a positive impact on their intention to purchase wedding dresses. The researcher rejected H₈, with an associated t-value of 0.54, which was less than the t_{crit} of 2. Consequently, South African brides' trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, does not have a positive impact on their intention to purchase wedding dresses.

H₉ suggested that the value co-creation process has a positive impact on South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. The researcher failed to reject H₉, with an associated t-value of 6.18, which surpassed the t_{crit} of 2. Accordingly, the value co-creation process has a positive impact on South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. Acknowledging the path coefficient of 0.49 demonstrates that a 1-unit increase in trusting beliefs rouses a 0.49-unit increase in value co-creation.

H₁₀ suggested that positive eWOM on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, has a positive impact on South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses, while negative eWOM has a negative impact. The researcher rejected H₁₀, with an associated t-value of 0.52, which fell behind the t_{crit} of 2. Accordingly, positive eWOM on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, does not have a positive impact on South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses, while negative eWOM does not have a negative impact.

Taking into account the rejection of H₁₀, together with the failure to reject H₇ and H₉, draws attention to a full mediating effect. With the presence of value co-creation in the model, the direct link between eWOM and purchase intention is insignificant, as shown by the rejection of H₁₀. However, eWOM has a significant direct relationship with value co-creation, which has a significant direct relationship with purchase intention, as proven by the failure to reject H₇ and H₉ respectively. This indicates that a link between eWOM and purchase intention is only possible with the aid of value co-creation, meaning that value co-creation fully mediates the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention.

Considering both the path co-efficient between value co-creation and purchase intention, and the fact that there is a significant direct relationship between these constructs, points out that value co-creation has the greatest influence on purchase intention. The path co-efficient of 0.49, between value co-creation and purchase

intention, is greater than the path coefficient of any other relationship involving purchase intention. eWOM and trusting beliefs were each proposed to have a direct relationship with purchase intention, with the path coefficients of these relationships, at 0.04 and 0.05 respectively, being substantially smaller than 0.49. Furthermore, both of the aforementioned relationships were found to be insignificant.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter showed that a realised sample of 152 out of 155 respondents, both satisfied the target population criteria, and provided usable data. The descriptive statistics pertaining to nominal data and thereafter those related to interval/ratio data were offered. This involved an indication and interpretation of the mean scores and standard deviations of the scores. Following this, the chapter analysed the results yielded from the implementation of PLS-SEM. This entailed an assessment of the measurement model, which was found to display satisfactory levels of reliability and validity. The analysis furthermore included an evaluation of the structural model, which showed that the eWOM in SNS's model explained a low proportion of the variance in all its endogenous latent variables. Lastly, the results of the hypotheses tests revealed that seven of the ten direct relationships in the eWOM in SNS's model were significant. The results however also revealed that the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, is fully mediated by value co-creation, and that value co-creation had the greatest influence on purchase intention.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the impact of eWOM in SNS's, more specifically Facebook, on engaged, young adult South African females intention, to purchase wedding dresses. In so doing, the study aimed to uncover the influence of eWOM on the intention to purchase high-involvement products. Another eWOM effect, that this study endeavoured to discover, was the effect of eWOM on the South African wedding industry. In order to carry out the investigation, a model compiled by See-To and Ho (2014), which has purportedly not before been tested, was tested in the context of the South African wedding industry.

Chapter two of this dissertation began by shedding light on this context, by offering an overview of the industry. It thereafter focused on the wedding dress by outlining the characteristics of the product that classify it as a high-risk, high-involvement product. Following this, the role of eWOM in the wedding industry was discoursed. Six different social media platforms were explained, together with the manner in which brides utilised them for the purpose of engaging in eWOM, pertaining to wedding dresses. Facebook, as a social media platform, was however elaborated on in greater detail in comparison to the others, given the popularity of this SNS. Finally, eWOM in the South African wedding industry was discussed, which included insights on South Africa's digital activity.

Chapter three presented different eWOM models where each of these models recognised a relationship between eWOM and purchase intention. The chapter pinpointed that of all the eWOM models that were taken into account, the eWOM in SNS's model was the model that was selected to be tested in this study. This was because the model acknowledged a potential indirect relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, through both trust and value co-creation, where these concepts were of relevance in the relationship between a bride and a wedding dress vendor with an SNS fan page.

Chapter four discussed the eWOM in SNS's model in depth, by detailing each of its constructs, namely disposition to trust, institutional-based trust, trusting beliefs, value co-creation and purchase intention. Each construct was defined, and the components of each construct, identified where applicable. The constructs and their components were in addition, explicated in the context of SNS's. Throughout the discussion of the constructs, the hypotheses that this study strived to test were pointed out where necessary. Subsequently, the moderator that was included in the model, the message source of eWOM, was also briefly acknowledged. However, three characteristics of the source were highlighted, specifically, tie strength, perceptual

affinity and demographic similarity, due to their significance in the purchase of high-involvement products.

Chapter five provided an elucidation of the methodology that was implemented in this study. The research design, that being a causal, conclusive research design, and the research method, that being an experiment, were identified. The target population and sampling method were next described. The target population consisted of engaged, young adult South African females within the 18-29 year age group, who had viewed the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, although not yet made a final decision regarding which wedding dress to purchase. The sampling method was noted to be a form of convenience sampling known as judgement sampling. The measurement instrument, specifically a questionnaire, was then discoursed, where this discourse described the layout of the questionnaire and all the scales that it was comprised of. Thereafter, the data collection process, including both pre-test data collection, was then elaborated on. The pre-test was conducted online by means of *Google Forms* and the data to be analysed was collected at the Canal Walk Shopping Centre branch of *Bride&co* in Century City, Cape Town. The following methodological aspect to be recognised was the ethical considerations that the researcher took into account in carrying out this study. The chapter was concluded with an explanation of the data analysis method. This involved explicating the chosen statistical technique of SEM, differentiating between CBSEM and PLS-SEM, and outlining the manner in which the output of PLS-SEM was interpreted, to generate results.

Chapter six conveyed the results of this study. The realised sample was briefly acknowledged before delineating the study's descriptive statistics. Subsequently, the inferential statistics of this study were presented, where this set of statistics was divided between those linked to the measurement model, and those associated with the structural model. The measurement model was found to be both reliable and valid, allowing the researcher to proceed with an analysis of the structural model. The R-squared values showed that the model explained between 20% and 30% of the variation in the constructs of institutional-based trust, trusting beliefs, value co-creation and purchase intention. The path coefficients showed that the strongest relationship was that between eWOM and value co-creation. Lastly, the results of the hypotheses testing were relayed, which revealed that seven out of the ten proposed direct relationships were statistically significant.

The remainder of the current chapter will provide a thorough interpretation of the above-mentioned results. To begin with, conclusions associated with the first research question are provided, before offering conclusions related to the second research question. These conclusions allowed for managerial implications to be developed that are subsequently put forward. The chapter closes by drawing attention to the limitations imposed on the researcher whilst conducting this study, and suggestions for future research.

7.2 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In light of the fact that this study aimed to test the eWOM in SNS's model, in order to examine the impact of eWOM in SNS's, on South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses, the following research question was formed:

Does the eWOM in SNS's model hold, for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females?

Three research objectives pertain to the research question, which are as follows:

1. To determine the reliability of the eWOM in SNS's model for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females.
2. To determine the validity of the eWOM in SNS's model for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females.
3. To determine whether the proposed relationships in the eWOM in SNS's model, hold for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females.

Research objectives one and two are addressed hereunder before addressing research objective three, and noting the associated conclusions.

7.2.1 Conclusions Regarding Research Question One

Earlier, it was highlighted that the estimates of the structural model will be of no use unless the measurement model has been proven to demonstrate satisfactory degrees of reliability and validity (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). If the measures are lacking in reliability and validity, inner model estimates may be considerably biased, which may result in researchers failing to acknowledge relationships that could be significant (Hair *et al.*, 2012a). Hence, it is only after the measurement model has been confirmed to be reliable and valid, that the researcher may proceed with an examination of the structural model (Hair *et al.*, 2012a; Henseler *et al.*, 2016).

Research objectives one and two are concerned with the reliability and validity of the measurement model. Research objective three on the other hand relates to the structural model, since the proposed relationships that the objective sets out to test, form part of the structural model. Determining whether these relationships hold, allow for conclusions to be made with respect to research question one. Given this, it is necessary that objectives one and two be addressed before objective three can be addressed, and conclusions can be made.

7.2.1.1 Research Objective One

By referring to Table 5 in Chapter 6, it becomes evident that the sets of scale items, used to measure the eWOM in SNS's model's constructs, are highly internally consistent. This is since all Cronbach Alpha values exceed 0.7 and all composite reliability values exceed 0.8. Figure 7 in Chapter 6 clarifies that majority of the items loaded onto the constructs that they strived to measure. The figure also shows that most item loadings are greater than 0.7. Consequently, the scale items used to measure the model's constructs were deemed to have a substantial degree of indicator reliability.

These results demonstrate that the eWOM in SNS's model has high internal consistency and indicator reliability. Therefore, it was determined that the model is reliable, for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females.

7.2.1.2 Research Objective Two

According to Table 6 in Chapter 6, all AVE values surpass 0.5, evidencing that the scale items used to measure the constructs in the model have proof of convergent validity. In addition to this, Table 7 in Chapter 6 indicates that the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion has been satisfied. This is because it shows that the square root of the AVE value, associated with each construct, is higher than the correlation that the construct had with any other construct. Moreover, each item loads onto the construct that it aimed to measure and not onto other constructs. Therefore, the scale items, used to measure the constructs in the model, have proof of discriminant validity.

These results prove that the eWOM in SNS's model, has evidence of both convergent and discriminant validity. Hence, it was determined that the eWOM in SNS's model is valid, for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by engaged, young adult, South African females.

Given that reliability and validity, as attended to in objectives one and two above, has been established, it is appropriate for evaluation of the structural model to ensue, which is attended to in objective three. This objective, and the conclusions made are addressed hereafter.

7.2.1.3 Research Objective Three

In order to ascertain whether the proposed relationships in the structural model hold, it was necessary to perform hypothesis tests. The following points note the results of the hypothesis tests, and the conclusions that were made based on these results. Each hypothesised relationship and its associated conclusions are discussed individually. To simplify the statement of conclusions, the targeted respondents of

engaged, young adult South African females, will hereinafter be referred to as “South African brides”. Furthermore, since Facebook was the SNS selected for employment in this study, any results that would have involved SNS’s, refer to Facebook.

- **The Relationship Between Disposition to Trust and Trusting Beliefs (H₁)**

The hypothesised direct relationship between disposition to trust and trusting beliefs, in H₁, was found to be significant. The path coefficient of 0.22 proves that the relation between the two constructs is positive. Therefore, it can be concluded that a strengthening of South African brides’ disposition to trust, strengthens their trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages. Stated differently, a more regular inclination, to rely on “general others” across a wide range of scenarios and people, will enhance South African brides’ beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will carry out what will be in the brides’ best interest. This result is in line with what was initially supposed by See-To & Ho (2014).

Trusting beliefs and disposition to trust do however have components, which when taken into account will allow for a more comprehensive interpretation of the above result. The components of disposition to trust are faith in humanity and trusting stance, and those of trusting beliefs are trusting belief-benevolence, trusting belief-competence and trusting belief-integrity. Given this, it can be said that if South African brides’ belief, that other general individuals are kind, adept and truthful becomes intensified, their beliefs that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages are kind, adept and truthful, will likewise become intensified. It may furthermore be deduced that if South African brides become more inclined, to opt to trust other people until they provide a reason not to be trusted, their beliefs that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, are kind, adept and truthful, will be deepened.

Despite the aforementioned positive impact, it should be noted that since the path coefficient is low, the impact of disposition to trust on trusting beliefs is relatively weak. Acknowledging this shows that a more frequent inclination, to depend on other general individuals, across a wide range of scenarios and people, will only to a small extent boost South African brides beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will do what will be of the greatest benefit to the brides.

- **The Relationship Between Disposition to Trust and Institutional-based Trust (H₂)**

The hypothesised direct relationship between disposition to trust and institutional-based trust, in H₂, was discovered to be significant. The path coefficient of 0.36 evidences that the link between the two constructs is positive. Consequently, it can be concluded that a boost in South African brides’ disposition to trust, boosts their institutional-based trust in Facebook. Stated otherwise, a more regular inclination, to

rely on other general individuals across a wide range of scenarios and people, will deepen South African brides' overall trust in Facebook. This result matched what was originally postulated by See-To & Ho (2014).

Like trusting beliefs, institutional-based trust too has components, which if recognised, along with the components of disposition to trust stated earlier, will make possible a more rigorous interpretation of the aforesaid result. The components of institutional-based trust are structural assurance and situational normality. Considering this, it can be construed that if South African brides' beliefs, that other general individuals are caring, skilled and honest becomes strengthened, their beliefs that Facebook's security features can safeguard them from difficulties, which may arise in utilising the information on Facebook to make decisions, will likewise become strengthened. It may moreover be inferred that if South African brides become more inclined, to choose to trust other people until they provide a reason not to be trusted, the trust that allows them to feel at rest with utilising Facebook, for purchase decision-making, will be enhanced.

- **The Relationship Between Institutional-based Trust and Trusting Beliefs (H₃)**

The hypothesised direct relationship between institutional-based trust and trusting beliefs, in H₃, was learned to be significant. The path coefficient of 0.33 shows that the connection between the two constructs is positive. Hence, it can be concluded that an intensification of South African brides' institutional-based trust in Facebook, will intensify their trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages. Presented differently, an enhancement of South African brides' overall trust in Facebook, enhances their beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will carry out what will be in the brides' best interest. This result reflects what was initially posited by See-To & Ho (2014).

Acknowledging the different components of institutional-based trust and trusting beliefs noted previously, will ensure a more detailed interpretation of the aforementioned result. By doing so, it can be understood that a boost in South African brides' beliefs, that Facebook's security features can safeguard them from difficulties, which may arise in utilising the information on Facebook to make decisions, will similarly boost their beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, are compassionate, proficient and uphold promises. It may in addition be gathered that a deepening of South African brides trust, that allows them to feel at rest with utilising Facebook for purchase decision-making, will deepen their beliefs that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, are compassionate, proficient and uphold promises.

- **The Relationship Between eWOM and Institutional-based Trust (H₄)**

The hypothesised direct relationship between eWOM and institutional-based trust, in H₄, was uncovered to be significant. The path coefficient of 0.22 highlights that the association between the two constructs is positive. Thus, it can be concluded that positive eWOM on Facebook will strengthen South African brides' institutional-based trust in Facebook, whereas negative eWOM on Facebook will weaken their institutional-based trust in Facebook. Presented otherwise, positive consumer comments on Facebook will enhance South African brides' overall trust in Facebook, whereas negative consumer comments on Facebook will impair their overall trust in Facebook. This result is aligned with what was originally proposed by See-To & Ho (2014).

The following, more meticulous interpretation of the abovementioned result is offered, by taking into consideration the components of institutional-based trust mentioned previously. Positive eWOM will heighten South African brides' beliefs, that Facebook's security features can safeguard them from difficulties, which may arise in utilising the information on Facebook to make decisions. Negative eWOM in contrast, will lessen South African brides' beliefs, that Facebook's security features can safeguard them from difficulties, which may arise in utilising the information on Facebook to make decisions. Furthermore, positive eWOM will boost South African brides' trust, which allows them to feel at rest with utilising Facebook for purchase decision-making. Conversely, negative eWOM will cause South African brides' trust, which allows them to feel at rest with utilising Facebook for purchase decision-making, to subside.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to bear in mind that since the path coefficient is low, the effect of eWOM on institutional-based trust is fairly weak. Recognising this indicates that positive eWOM will only to a meagre extent intensify South African brides' overall trust in Facebook. Negative eWOM in comparison will only to a meagre extent cause South African brides' overall trust in Facebook to deteriorate.

- **The Relationship Between eWOM and Trusting Beliefs (H₅)**

The hypothesised direct relationship between eWOM and trusting beliefs, in H₅, was revealed to be insignificant. Accordingly, it can be concluded that positive eWOM on Facebook will not significantly deepen South African brides' trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, nor will negative eWOM on Facebook significantly reduce their trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages. This result is contrary to what was initially suggested by See-To & Ho (2014).

Nonetheless, one ought to take cognisance of the fact that there exists an indirect relationship between eWOM and trusting beliefs through institutional based trust. This becomes clear when considering the two preceding results, which indicate a

positive direct relationship between eWOM and institutional-based trust, and between institutional-based trust and trusting beliefs. This denotes that positive consumer comments on Facebook, intensifying South African brides' overall trust in Facebook, will generate a heightening of the brides' beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will do what will be of the greatest benefit to the brides. Conversely, negative consumer comments on Facebook, causing South African brides' overall trust in Facebook to dwindle, will generate a diminishment the brides' beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will do what will be of the greatest benefit to the brides.

Given this, positive consumer comments on Facebook will only deepen South African brides' beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages will do what is in the brides' best interest, if these comments increase the brides' overall trust in Facebook. In contrast, negative consumer comments on Facebook will only diminish South African brides' beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages will do what is in the brides' best interest, if these comments decrease the brides' overall trust in Facebook. SocialBakers (2013, in Woollaston, 2013) found that millions of Facebook users across the USA, UK and Ireland have discontinued usage of the SNS. This, according to research from Vienna University, is mainly due to information security problems and anxiety about privacy (Woollaston, 2013). This indicates the importance of institutional-based trust in Facebook, specifically structural assurance, and further suggests the necessity of brides possessing overall trust in Facebook, before content on the SNS such as consumer comments on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, can exercise an influence on their beliefs.

- **The Relationship Between Trusting Beliefs and Value Co-creation (H₆)**

The hypothesised direct relationship between trusting beliefs and value co-creation, in H₆, was unveiled to be significant. The path coefficient of 0.19 points out that the tie between the two constructs is positive. Therefore, it can be concluded that a strengthening of South African bride's trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will induce the value co-creation process. Conveyed otherwise, South African brides' beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will do what will be of the greatest benefit to the brides, stimulates the process of two-way interaction between the brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages. This result corresponded with what was originally posited by See-To & Ho (2014).

An alternative interpretation of the above result may be offered by taking into account the components of trusting beliefs stated earlier. That being, that an enhancement of South African brides' beliefs that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages are generous, dextrous and sincere, will cause them to engage in reciprocal

interaction with wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages.

However, one ought to pay attention to the fact that since the path coefficient is low, the influence of trusting beliefs on value co-creation is quite feeble. Considering this signifies that South African brides' beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages will do what is in the brides' best interest, will only to a minor degree cause the brides to engage in collaborative communication with wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages.

- **The Relationship Between eWOM and Value Co-creation (H₇)**

The hypothesised direct relationship between eWOM and value co-creation, in H₇, was disclosed to be significant. The path coefficient of 0.50 symbolises that the bond between the two constructs is positive. Consequently, it can be concluded that positive eWOM encourages the value co-creation process, whereas negative eWOM deters it. Stated differently, positive consumer comments on Facebook promote the process of two-way communication between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, whereas negative consumer comments on Facebook hinders the process. This relationship is the most robust of all the relationships in the model, connoting that the impact of consumer comments on Facebook, on the reciprocal communication between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, is more substantial than any other effect. This result resembles what was initially conjectured by See-To & Ho (2014).

- **The Relationship Between Trusting Beliefs and Purchase Intention (H₈)**

The hypothesised direct relationship between trusting beliefs and purchase intention, in H₈, was disclosed to be insignificant. Hence, it can be concluded that deepening South African brides' trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will not significantly strengthen the brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. This result is the opposite of what was originally theorised by See-To & Ho (2014).

Although *Bride&co's* customers had high levels of trusting beliefs in them as a wedding dress vendor, the fact that a wedding dress is a high-risk, high-involvement product, means that there are many more factors to consider apart from where to go shopping for a wedding dress. The study by Thomas and Peters (2010) provides a comprehensive discussion on these factors, which include styles or types of wedding dresses, wedding dress brands, how much to expend on a wedding dress and the opinions of their families (Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011). Considerations such as the above, furthermore point out some of the risks that are associated with wedding dresses (Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972). For instance, it is clear that a financial risk may be

present due to brides' concerns about their budget, and it is evident that a social risk may be present given brides' concerns regarding their families' viewpoints (Thomas & Peters, 2010, 2011). Taking into account the above considerations suggests that strong trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors is not sufficient to significantly affect a bride's intention to purchase a wedding dress. Rather, it is their trusting beliefs, along with other factors, that influence this intention.

- **The Relationship Between Value Co-creation and Purchase Intention (H₉)**

The hypothesised direct relationship between value co-creation and purchase intention, in H₉, was found to be significant. The path coefficient of 0.49 denotes that the relation between the two constructs is positive. Thus, it can be concluded that increased value co-creation between South African brides and wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, heightens the brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. Stated otherwise, more frequent collaborative interaction between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, intensifies the brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. This result is aligned with what was initially put forward by See-To & Ho (2014).

Furthermore, the aforesaid result is noteworthy, since it assists in explicating the lacking connection between trusting beliefs and purchase intention pointed out previously. The direct relationship between trusting beliefs and value co-creation that was formerly mentioned, together with the direct relationship between value co-creation and purchase intention, emphasises an indirect relationship between trusting beliefs and purchase intention through value co-creation. This shows that a heightening of South African brides' beliefs, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will do what is in the brides' best interest, rouses two-way interaction between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, which then deepens the brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. Therefore, in the event that a bride believes that the wedding dress vendor will do what is in her best interest, this belief will only produce a stronger intention to purchase a wedding dress, if she has had the opportunity to interact with the wedding dress vendor on their Facebook fan page first.

- **The Relationship Between eWOM and Purchase Intention (H₁₀)**

The hypothesised direct relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, in H₁₀, was disclosed to be insignificant. Accordingly, it can be concluded that positive eWOM or consumer comments on Facebook, will not significantly strengthen South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses, nor will negative eWOM or consumer comments on Facebook, significantly weaken their intention to purchase wedding dresses. This result is opposing what was originally suggested by See-To & Ho (2014).

Nevertheless, one should take heed of the fact that there exists an indirect relationship between eWOM and purchase intention through value co-creation. The chain of effects formed by this indirect relationship is the most robust in the model, as the path coefficients of the direct relationships involved, were the highest at 0.50 and 0.49 respectively. The direct relationships involved, as demonstrated earlier, existed between eWOM and value co-creation, and between value co-creation and purchase intention.

Given the indirect relationship, positive consumer comments on Facebook, encourages collaborative communication between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, which then strengthens the brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. Alternatively, negative consumer comments on Facebook, hampers two-way communication between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, which then weakens the brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses.

Consequently, positive consumer comments on Facebook will only strengthen South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses, if these comments promote reciprocal interaction between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages. On the other hand, negative consumer comments on Facebook will only weaken South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses, if these comments hinder reciprocal interaction between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages. It was formerly mentioned that the results of a study conducted by *theknot.com* (2012, in Smith 2012) and *mashable.com* (2012, in Smith 2012), indicated that 47% of brides use Facebook to uphold contact with wedding vendors. This in addition, demonstrates the significance of interaction between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages.

Jointly taking into account the results of the hypotheses tests, it can be concluded that the eWOM in SNS's model does to a large extent, hold for the purchase of high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, by South African brides. This is because seven out of ten direct relationships in the model were found to be significant, and only three, namely those between eWOM and trusting beliefs, trusting beliefs and purchase intention and eWOM and purchase intention, were learnt to be insignificant. Therefore, the model competently explains the factors that affect South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. Given this, the research question hereunder became germane to this study.

Which construct, in the eWOM in SNS's model, has the greatest influence on engaged, young adult, South African females intention, to purchase high-risk, high-involvement products, such as wedding dresses?

Research objective 4, which applies to the above research question, is as follows:

To determine which of the constructs of eWOM, trusting beliefs and value co-creation, has the greatest influence on engaged, young adult, South African females intention, to purchase high-risk, high-involvement products, such as wedding dresses.

Conclusions pertaining to this research question, and its associated objective, are relayed below.

7.2.2 Conclusions Regarding Research Question Two

Herein, three relationships are discussed to make a deduction regarding which construct in the model has the greatest influence on South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. Trusting beliefs, eWOM and value co-creation were all proposed by See-To & Ho (2014) to have a direct relationship with purchase intention. However, both eWOM and trusting beliefs had an insignificant relationship with purchase intention. Value co-creation on the other hand, had a significant relationship with purchase intention. Moreover, the path coefficient of the relationship, at 0.49, was substantially higher than any of the other relationships' path coefficients, which were 0.04 and -0.11 respectively. This ultimately proves that it is value co-creation that has the greatest influence on South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses. Stated otherwise, two-way interaction between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, intensifies the brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses, more than positive eWOM and/or the belief, that wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will do what will be of the greatest benefit to the brides.

A further point to note about value co-creation is that it is the only construct that has a direct link with purchase intention. Therefore, if any other factor were to impact South African brides' intention to purchase high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses, the factor in question would first need to affect the collaborative communication between the brides, and wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages. Bearing this in mind, the following section outlines managerial implications for wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages.

7.3 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The previous chapter showed that value co-creation is the only direct link to, and has the greatest influence on, purchase intention. Therefore, South African brides and wedding dress vendors are required to interact with one another, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, in order for the intention to purchase wedding dresses, to be affected. Given this, it is necessary for the value co-creation process to be induced so that the intention to purchase wedding dresses may be

strengthened. Taking this into account, this section delineates recommendations for wedding dress vendors regarding the management of their Facebook fan pages, that will allow for value co-creation to be stimulated.

Two indirect relationships formerly stated form the basis for the following managerial implications. The first is that between eWOM and purchase intention through value co-creation, and the second, that between trusting beliefs and purchase intention through value co-creation. The first indirect relationship shows that positive eWOM encourages the value co-creation process, which then intensifies South African bride's intention to purchase wedding dresses. Negative eWOM on the other hand deters the process, which then diminishes South African bride's intention to purchase wedding dresses. The second indirect relationship indicates that the enhancement of South African bride's trusting beliefs in wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, will induce the value co-creation process, which will heighten the brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses.

Given the above facts, the presence of eWOM and trusting beliefs should be intensified in order for value co-creation to take place, and purchase intention to be consequently influenced. Hence, the managerial implications below involve the creation of positive eWOM, prevention or reduction of negative eWOM, monitoring eWOM, efficient timing of posts and enhancing trusting beliefs.

7.3.1 Encourage the Creation of Positive eWOM

Because positive eWOM will promote the two-way interaction of South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, and resultantly heighten purchase intention, it is necessary that the creation of positive eWOM be encouraged. Hence, the guidelines below offer potential strategies for increasing positive eWOM, which in this study constitutes consumer comments.

The generation of comments on Facebook is acknowledged as a form of engagement. Engagement and the visibility of the content, on a business's Facebook fan page, form a cycle. Should visibility improve, engagement will improve, and should engagement improve, visibility will improve (Kriel, 2013). Facebook employs a system known as *Edgerank*, which determines the content that is visible in the "newsfeed" of any Facebook user. The more visible the content of a business's Facebook fan page, the higher the page's *Edgerank* (Kriel, 2013; Hubspot, n.d). Given the relationship between visibility and engagement, increasing engagement through for instance, encouraging the creation of comments, will consequently enhance *Edgerank*. Therefore, the following points explain how to both induce the production of comments and heighten *Edgerank*.

- **Gain Knowledge on Facebook Fans**

In order to generate comments, wedding dress vendors need to develop the type of content that would yield comments (Porterfield, 2014; Shukle, 2016). The greater their knowledge on their Facebook fans, the greater the efficiency at which they develop content, will be (Hubspot, n.d). Their Facebook fans would recognisably be internet users, individuals who are on the internet to find a solution to an issue or to be entertained (Baer, n.d in Gingerich, 2014). The prime motivation for Facebook usage in particular, is remaining abreast with the happenings in friends' lives (Gingerich, 2014; Kriel, 2012). A Facebook user's choice about what to comment on, is based on the opinion that they believe their friends will have of them, should they make a comment. Thus, their choice is based on the perception that they desire their friends to have of them. Due to this, wedding dress vendors should, before posting content, determine how their Facebook fans would like to be perceived, and whether the content will cause them to be perceived in that manner (Gingerich, 2014). They furthermore need to gain an understanding of their Facebook fans' personal traits and interests (Hubspot, n.d).

- **Request Responses from Facebook Fans**

One of the most effective methods for wedding dress vendors to gain comments on their Facebook fan page is to explicitly request that Facebook fans respond to posts (Hubspot, n.d; Loomer, 2012; Porterfield, 2014). Alternatively, a question or statement that stimulates a response could be incorporated into posts (Loomer, 2012; Verve Search, n.d; Shukle, 2016). Posts such as these have a much higher likelihood of producing comments, in comparison to other types of posts (Loomer, 2012). In certain cases, it has been found that posts that pose questions at Facebook fans produce twice the amount of comments of posts that do not (Patel, 2014). The question words of "when" and "where" were noted to result in a larger number of comments than the word "why", which it was pointed out resulted in the lowest number of comments (Hubspot, n.d).

- **Maximise Visual Content**

Many marketing consultants agree that featuring visual content, which may involve photographs, memes, infographics, gif's and videos, on a Facebook fan page, is a highly successful means through which to arouse engagement on the page (Hubspot, n.d; Loomer, 2012; Phibbs, 2015; Soskey, 2015, Verve Search, n.d; Walsh-Phillips; 2015). In some cases, it has been said that visual content is the optimal content for driving engagement (Loomer, 2012; Soskey, 2015).

Entries of the Facebook Awards, which honours the finest creative work on Facebook, have demonstrated a "shift to visual language". Digital marketing on SNS's such as Facebook presumes to be driven by visual media, with video

surfacing as the leading medium on Facebook in 2015. In only one year, Facebook has seen a 75% rise in the amount of video posts per user on the SNS, worldwide (Bailey, 2015). This demonstrates the importance of visual media in digital marketing on SNS's.

The visual media of pictures and videos, each offer special advantages. A picture is more attention grabbing than a text-based post, whereas a video is the closest form of communication to in-person communication (Loomer, 2012; Walsh-Phillips, 2015). Hubspot (n.d) has shown that pictures cause a 120% growth in engagement and videos, double engagement. Another form of digital media that can bolster engagement is emoticons, or digital cartoons, which have been discovered to heighten the amount of comments by 33% (Hubspot, n.d; Patel, 2014).

There are various means by which wedding dress retailers can leverage the benefits of posting visual content. With respect to pictures, a post of a picture containing a dress could be accompanied by a request, that Facebook fans offer suggestions, on how the dress might be customised. Furthermore, Facebook fans could be asked to caption pictures of dresses. In comparison to other ordinary posts, asking fans to caption pictures engagement by 550% (Hubspot, n.d). Moreover, one picture showing a selection of dresses could be posted, and Facebook fans could be requested to indicate which of them is their favourite. Concerning videos, a video showcasing behind-the scenes events could be posted (Phibbs, 2015; Walsh-Phillips, 2015). This may be a video of staff members participating in role-play of a consultation with a customer, or a video of a photo shoot for the wedding dress vendor's new dress collection.

- **Post Different Types of Content**

Posting a variety of content allows for a more attractive Facebook fan page and strengthens the probability of the content being viewed by Facebook fans (Hubspot, n.d; Loomer, 2012; Soskey, 2015). Posting visual content in excess could negatively impact engagement on the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page, despite proof of this type of content being beneficial (Soskey, 2015). On the other hand, it has been indicated that businesses that diversify their content, obtain the optimal response from their Facebook fans (Phibbs, 2015). Types of content that could be shared apart from the visual content mentioned above, include special offers, events and links to articles (Loomer, 2012; Soskey, 2015).

- **Personify the Business**

Personification of businesses whilst they are present on Facebook fosters a deeper bond between those businesses and their Facebook fans (Hubspot, n.d). In order to do so, content regarding the personal lives of the wedding dress vendor's staff members could be shared with Facebook fans (Hubspot, n.d, Lacy, 2011; Phibbs,

2015; Walsh-Phillips, 2015). Facebook fans could then be requested to comment on the content (Hubspot, n.d). For instance, it could be announced that a sales consultant, or one of their family members or friends, has recently gotten married in a dress supplied by the wedding dress vendor. Facebook fans could be provided with a photograph of the bride in her dress and be asked for their opinion on the dress.

A sales consultant's wedding may be considered a current event, and conversing with Facebook fans about current events is another manner in which wedding dress vendors can personify their business. However, it is recommended that they also discourse more well-known events that are applicable to their business (Hubspot, n.d). Taking into account that the wedding dress vendor forms a part of the wedding industry, industry-related occasions would be the most relevant occasions to discuss. These may consist of bridal exhibitions or fashion shows, such as those hosted by local shopping centres, at which the wedding dress vendor's dresses were displayed. Photographs of the dresses on show at the event could be shared, and Facebook fans could be invited to highlight their favourite feature of each dress.

- **Incorporate Humour into Content**

Just as the personification of the business nurtures a relationship between a business and its Facebook fans, so too does humour (Hubspot, n.d). Humorous posts lead to higher engagement, as such posts are more straightforward to comment on (Gingerich, 2014; Phibbs, 2015). It is therefore understandable that the general population will comment on funny Facebook posts (Gingerich, 2014). A wedding dress vendor can create a funny Facebook post by combining an amusing wedding or marriage-related quote, with a photograph of staff members. The staff members, whilst donning dresses stocked by the vendor, may perform comical poses in an attempt to reflect what is said in the quote. It has been suggested that quotes, specifically, is a type of content that will generate significant engagement (Patel, 2014).

- **Host a Competition**

A Facebook competition serves as an exciting means through which to prompt comments on the wedding dress retailer's Facebook page, since the comments may be used as entries for the competition (Hubspot, n.d, Loomer, 2012; Shukle, 2016). It is advisable that participation in the competition be limited only to those who are fans of the Facebook page (Loomer, 2012). The wedding dress vendor could host a competition entitled "Win a Wedding Dress" in celebration of their birthday or other special occasion. A picture of the wedding dress available to be won could be posted, along with details such as its value, designer, style and fabrics. Facebook fans may be required to comment on the post by explaining what they admire most about the dress in order to partake. It should however be noted that Facebook

upholds stringent regulations regarding competitions, which need to be adhered to (Hubspot, n.d; Loomer, 2012).

- **Offer Rewards for Comments**

Given that Facebook users are occupied with their own commitments and activities, they may not have thought of engaging with the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page, in the absence of an incentive to do so. Therefore, providing an incentive could encourage engagement (Lacy, 2011; Hubspot, n.d). Making Facebook fans feel valued could serve as an incentive for engagement. Apart from thanking them, a points system could be implemented whereby the more regularly Facebook fans comment on posts, the more points they are given. Achieving a specific amount of points could allow Facebook fan to be eligible for certain rewards. These rewards could be access to exclusive information or events, or discounts on products. The fans that gather the highest amount of points could be flaunted on the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page in order for their accomplishments to be recognised (Shukle, 2016).

- **Ensure that Posts are Succinct**

As stated earlier, the main reason for using Facebook is remaining up to date with the occasions in friends' lives, rather than interacting with businesses (Gingerich, Kriel, 2012; 2014; Loomer, 2012). Furthermore, Facebook users may have hundreds of friends and have "liked" the pages of may other brands, suggesting that their newsfeeds will be populated with content from these sources Loomer, 2012). As Facebook users browse through their newsfeeds, they skim the content on the lookout for stimulating information, and speedily make choices concerning which posts to interact with by for example, commenting on them (Gingerich, 2014; Loomer, 2012; Verve Search, n.d). Lengthy posts will be disregarded (Loomer, 2012; Verve Search, n.d). A maximum post length of two lines is brief enough to be assured of Facebook fans reading the post (Verve Search, n.d). It has been found that the most fruitful Facebook posts are shorter than 80 characters, and gain 23% more engagement than longer posts (Loomer, 2012; Patel 2014).

- **Pin Posts to the Top of the Page**

"Pinning" a post refers to attaching it to the top of the Facebook page so that it is not forced downwards as new content is posted (Hubspot, n.d; Loomer 2012; Soskey, 2015). The pinned post will be the first post to appear when a Facebook fan visits the page, and prevents the post from being dominated by other content (Hubspot, n.d; Soskey, 2015). Wedding dress vendors could employ this tactic for attracting attention to the posts that they wish to have their Facebook fans comment on, or the posts that they are aware will be well-received by their Facebook fans (Hubspot, n.d). If for instance the wedding dress vendor chooses to run a competition on their

Facebook fan page, the post that allows Facebook fans to enter the competition could be pinned.

- **Promote Posts**

Wedding dress vendors promoting the posts that are generating the most comments, could allow for even more comments to be created, since more Facebook fans will be likely to view those posts (Loomer, 2012). Setting a small budget to promote the posts that are favoured by Facebook fans may have a large impact (Soskey, 2015). Promotion of posts could be considered as a means through which to amplify the amount of engaged Facebook fans, and the vendor will not be restricted to posting only at the times when their Facebook fans are online (Loomer, 2012).

Facebook Insights should be used in order to ascertain which posts are the most popular and should consequently be promoted (Haydon, 2015; Loomer, 2012). Facebook Insights makes available five reports, namely the “Overview Report”, “Likes Report”, “Reach Report”, “Posts Report” and “People Report”. The “Posts Type” division of the “Posts Report” will inform the wedding dress vendor of the performance of different types of posts based on engagement (Cleary, 2015). The “All Posts Published” division of the same report will give the wedding dress vendor the opportunity to rank posts according to their level of engagement (Haydon, 2015).

7.3.2 Prevent and/or Reduce the Creation of Negative eWOM

Negative eWOM was proposed by See-To & Ho (2014) to have the opposite effect of positive eWOM. Given that negative eWOM will deter the collaborative interaction of South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors’ Facebook fan pages, and consequently lessen purchase intention, it is necessary that the creation of negative eWOM be prevented and/or reduced. Hence, the guidelines below offer potential strategies for preventing and/or reducing negative eWOM.

- **Allow Existing Negative Comments to Remain on the Page**

Eradicating a negative comment made by a Facebook fan that has had an unpleasant customer encounter, could cause the disenchanted Facebook fan to become an enraged Facebook fan, and increase the likelihood of them making their pessimistic feelings known. There is a possibility that the distressed Facebook fan may again, attempt to post the negative comment that was deleted. Therefore, the development of negative eWOM could be promoted rather than prevented should the wedding dress vendor eliminate negative comments from their Facebook page (Rio, 2013).

If however, negative comments are available for Facebook fans to read, they may develop the impression that the wedding dress vendor is open and honest, and that the content on their Facebook fan page is realistic. The presence of negative comments could furthermore create the impression that the wedding dress vendor is since comments in general, are positive (Rio, 2013).

There are nevertheless, exceptions to this recommendation. Certain comments may be made by “trolls”, individuals whose blog or website is dedicated to harming others, or another Facebook fan who aimed to be insulting, abusive or hateful (Rio, 2013; Soskey, 2014). Comments created by such individuals, in addition to comments perceived as spam, should be removed (Ayres, 2016; Rio, 2013). In the event that a negative comment has sufficient impact to pose a threat to the reputation of the wedding dress vendor, the vendor should execute their greatest efforts to have the comment removed (Stokes, 2011:431).

- **Reply to Existing Negative Comments**

Neglecting to reply to negative comments, like removing negative comments, could encourage the generation of negative eWOM instead of preventing it (Rio, 2013). Conversely, should negative comments be replied to, the wedding dress vendor will have a chance to correct the situation, and Facebook fans who were once dissatisfied customers could evolve into devoted customers (Loomer, 2012; Rio, 2013; Shukle, 2016; Stokes, 2011:428).

When replying to negative comments, wedding dress vendors should always be prompt (Gleeson, 2012; Hubspot, n.d; Rio, 2013; Shukle, 2016; Stokes, 2011:431). It may be necessary to take the time, to cautiously contemplate a reply to the customer, although this may be problematic since Facebook fans have an aversion to delayed replies. They anticipate almost immediate replies (Gingerich, 2013; Rio, 2013). Therefore, if it is not possible to reply immediately, the Facebook fan should be informed that the matter is being investigated. Wedding dress vendors should aim to reply within 24 hours of the comment being made (Shukle, 2016).

Moreover, they ought to bear in mind that each Facebook fan is a unique person with unique needs (Verve Search, n.d). Facebook fans are additionally, in a position of superiority and wedding dress vendors ought to approach the discussion as they would a “conversation, not a dictation” (Stokes, 2011:430). They should furthermore try to place themselves in the position of their Facebook fan and handle the Facebook fan in the same manner in which they would wish to be handled (Rio, 2013; Stokes, 2011:430; Verve Search, n.d).

Replies should always be truthful, “transparent” and polite, although different situations could stir on negative commentary, and the precise contents of the reply and its tone, depend on the nature of the negative comment (Hubspot, n.d; Lacy,

2011; Rio, 2013; Soskey, 2014; Stokes, 2011:427; Verve Search, n.d). Replies specific to various types of negative comments will be outlined below.

1. Dissatisfied Customer Critique

If the negative comment was a critique by a Facebook fan, that had an unpleasant customer encounter, the wedding dress vendor's response should begin with an apology, instead of a defence (Lacy, 2011; Rio, 2013). This ought to be followed by a potential solution for the Facebook fan's issue (Rio, 2013; Lacy, 2011; Soskey, 2014, Stokes, 2011:428). Otherwise, the Facebook fan could be lead to an alternative channel to be assisted (Soskey, 2014). In the event that the issue is of a highly sensitive or personal nature, a solution is not available, or compensation is required, the Facebook fan should be invited to discuss the problem outside of Facebook, or the wedding dress vendor should send them a private message (Hubspot, n.d; Rio, 2013).

2. Incorrect Information

If the negative comment was an untrue statement formed by a mislead Facebook fan, the wedding dress vendor should rectify the Facebook fan and deliver proof of the correct facts (Soskey, 2014; Stokes, 2011:429, 431). This could be done through including links to sources of the proof, in the reply (Soskey, 2014). The wedding dress vendor could also propose to keep the Facebook fan updated on upcoming news (Stokes, 2011:431).

3. Damaging Comments

If the negative comment was made by a "troll", or another Facebook fan that aimed to be insulting, abusive or hateful, the wedding dress vendor should replace the removed comment with an explanation for doing so (Rio, 2013; Soskey, 2014). It ought to be made clear that even though all comments are welcome, insulting, abusive or hateful language is unnecessary. The Facebook fan should then be offered the opportunity to express their thoughts in another manner (Rio, 2013).

4. Comments that Threaten Brand Reputation

The wedding dress vendor ought to deal with threatening comments according to the class of comment as delineated above. However, if the information in the comment is true, the wedding dress vendor should provide a defence for their actions. Additional labour should also be invested in partaking in the discussion surrounding the problem, as this will result in Facebook fans holding the brand in higher esteem than what they otherwise would have. It will also allow for the wedding dress vendor to form a genuine voice that will cause communication to come across as being more

sincere. If all possible options have been exhausted, the wedding dress vendor should simply apologise and continue with business (Stokes, 2011:431, 432).

- **Confront the Matter of Underperformance**

Negative comments signify unfulfilled brand promises, which is indicative of “underperformance on expectations”. This is usually due to an “underlying” issue and the contents of the negative comment offer the wedding dress vendor a locus for settling it. The complaint furthermore highlights areas in which the wedding dress vendor could better their performance (Stokes, 2011:428). Should the “underlying” issue be resolved, and performance enhanced, it is probable that less negative comments will be made with respect to it.

- **Regulate Negative Diction on the Page**

Facebook makes available two mechanisms for controlling the language mentioned on Facebook fan pages, which wedding dress vendors should utilise, namely the “Moderation Blocklist” and “Profanity Filter”. The “Moderation Blocklist” will give the wedding dress vendor the opportunity to choose specific words that will be forbidden from appearing on their Facebook fan page. The “Profanity Filter” in contrast will allow the wedding dress vendor to ban blasphemous language on their Facebook page, to a particular extent, whether that be “weak”, “medium” or “strong”. Facebook deciphers which words to ban by employing the most frequently reported words and phrases classified as insolent by Facebook users (Ayres, 2016).

7.3.3 Monitor Comments on the Page

Observing comments on the Facebook fan page will provide the wedding dress vendor with an indication of the degree of pervasiveness of each type of eWOM. This will then denote to which extent the creation of positive eWOM should be encouraged, and the creation of negative eWOM, prevented and/or reduced. Consequently, the passage hereunder lists different means by which to screen comments.

- **Switch on Email Alerts**

Facebook makes available email notices that can be turned on in the “Page Admin” (Gingerich, 2013; Hackman, 2011). Once the wedding dress vendor turns them on, Facebook will deliver an email notice each time new content, including comments, appears on the wedding dress vendor’s Facebook fan page. An added advantage is that a response to the email notice will serve as a response to the comment, which will then appear on the Facebook fan page. This feature offers a convenient method for monitoring comments whilst out of office or travelling (Gingerich, 2013).

- **Observe the “Reach Report”**

As pointed out before, Facebook fan pages have five reports, with one of these being the “Reach Report”. The “Likes, Comments and Shares” division of the report highlights positive engagement, which as the name implies, includes comments. The “Hide, Report as Spam, and Unlikes” division in contrast, emphasises negative engagement (Haydon, 2015). The wedding dress vendor devoting attention to the “Likes, Comments and Shares” division, would allow for both positive and negative eWOM to be recognised, since a comment could be positive or negative. Focusing on the “Hide, Report as Spam, and Unlikes” division, would allow for only negative eWOM to be recognised, due to the fact that spam is considered negative eWOM.

- **Use “HyperAlerts”**

“HyperAlerts” is a service offered at no charge, which will send the wedding dress vendor email notifications, similar to that which will be received, when utilizing Facebook’s email alerts. On the “HyperAlerts” website, the wedding dress vendor can insert the web addresses of the pages that they would like to monitor, select which kinds of content they would like to be notified about, and how often. “HyperAlerts” will then send the wedding dress vendor email notifications whenever content that complies with those requirements is posted on their Facebook fan page. Therefore, if the wedding dress vendor selects comments as a kind of content, they will be notified when comments are posted to their Facebook fan page (Gingerich, 2013; Hackman, 2011).

The pages that can be monitored are not limited to those managed by the wedding dress vendor. This is what provides the wedding dress vendor with the opportunity to monitor competitors’ Facebook fan pages without “liking” those pages, which is a bonus benefit of using “HyperAlerts” (Gingerich, 2013; Hackman, 2011).

- **Use the Facebook Page Manager Application**

The Facebook Page Manager application is a free application downloadable on iPhone and Android devices. A crucial feature of this application is the option of choosing to obtain push-notifications. Should the wedding dress vendor select this option, pop-up notifications will appear on the screen of the smartphone, every time that there is a post on the wedding dress vendor’s Facebook fan page, such as a comment. Moreover, the application may be used to reply to comments (Gingerich, 2013).

7.3.4 Execute Efficient Timing of Posts on the Page

South African brides will be encouraged to participate in the value co-creation process due the presence of positive eWOM. Therefore, there will be greater two-

way interaction between brides and wedding dress vendors, on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors. This necessitates efficient timing of posts, where timing of posts has been proven to be a notable aspect of managing a business's Facebook fan page (Beckbessinger, 2011; Hubspot, n.d; Kriel, 2012; Loomer, 2012; Phibbs, 2015; Soskey, 2015; Shukle, 2016; Verve Search, n.d). In light of these facts, possible tactics for effectively timing Facebook posts are outlined below.

- **Publish Posts at Suitable Times**

The times at which Facebook posts are published will affect the performance of the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page in the long run (Soskey, 2015). Large volumes of content are published on Facebook each day, and publishing posts at appropriate times will better the chances of them being viewed, and therefore being engaged with (Hubspot, n.d; Shukle, 2016). Publishing posts at the time when majority of Facebook fans are online will allow for them to be viewed by as many Facebook fans as possible (Verve Search, n.d). The "Posts Report" in Facebook Insights, mentioned earlier, has a division called "When Your Fans Are Online", which as the name implies, will indicate the times at which it is suitable to publish posts (Haydon, 2015; Loomer, 2012; Phibbs, 2015; Shukle, 2016; Soskey, 2015; Verve Search, n.d). Observing this report will therefore guide the wedding dress vendor, when making decisions, about the timing of posts, that would be beneficial to the business.

- **Publish Posts at Suitable Frequencies**

Just as the publishing times impact the performance of the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page in the long run, so too does the frequency at which Facebook posts are published (Soskey, 2015). It is crucial to maintain a balance between publishing posts too often and too seldom. Publishing posts too seldom will result in insufficient engagement, whereas publishing posts too frequently is damaging, as it is the prime reason for Facebook fans "unliking" pages (Kriel, 2012; Soskey, 2015; Verve Search, n.d). Should a large number of posts be published within a short space of time, Facebook's algorithm may cluster them together, making the concealed post almost unusable (Soskey, 2015). A period of time should pass to allow posts to "filter off" the newsfeed before a new post can surface. Facebook may in addition consider excessive posting as spamming (Verve Search, n.d).

Apart from maintaining a balance between publishing posts too often and too seldom, consistency has also been highlighted as a key consideration (Beckbessinger, 2011; Kriel, 2012; Verve Search, n.d). It is more beneficial to be consistent than to post very regularly on certain occasions and rarely on others (Beckbessinger, 2011; Kriel, 2012). However, the wedding dress vendor should ensure that their Facebook fan page is always alive with activity and never silent (Beckbessinger, 2011). It has been advised that for optimal engagement, posts should be published more than once a

day, or 5-10 times a week (Hubspot, n.d; Kriel, 2012). However, different publishing frequencies are fitting for different types of businesses, and Facebook Insights should be used in order to determine the most apt frequency for each business (Kriel, 2012; Shukle, 2016).

- **Prepare a Content Calendar**

Having a calendar will be useful especially for those wedding dress vendors who have various staff members managing their Facebook fan page. The calendar should stipulate which staff member should publish the post, the contents of the post and the time at which it should be published. Strict adherence to the calendar may not always be essential, although it does allow for better management of the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page (Loomer, 2012).

- **Schedule Posts**

Scheduling posts entails choosing a specific upcoming date and time at which to publish posts, which can be done whilst formulating the post (Loomer, 2012). This could assist with saving time spent on managing the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page and offer them an opportunity to balance the kinds of content published (aabdesigninc, 2015; Soskey, 2015). Furthermore, scheduling posts could be particularly helpful for wedding dress vendors whose Facebook fans are based in a different time zone, to the staff members who manage the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page. This is because those responsible for managing the page, and the Facebook fans in another time zone, may not be online simultaneously. Should the wedding dress vendor not schedule posts, they will be losing opportunities to engage with Facebook fans in other time zones (Loomer, 2012).

- **Fix Expiry Dates for Posts**

Setting expiry dates is advantageous for posts pertaining to time-sensitive issues such as future events and "limited-time special offers" (Soskey, 2015). For instance, should the wedding dress vendor be hosting a sale, all Facebook posts in relation to the sale could be assigned an expiry date so that they do not feature on the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page after the sale has ended. This can also assist in avoiding confusion and disappointment amongst Facebook fans who misunderstood the timing of the sale.

7.3.5 Enhance Trusting Beliefs

Apart from eWOM, trusting beliefs was too indicated to act as a spur, for the process of reciprocal interaction between South African brides and wedding dress vendors, on the wedding dress vendors' Facebook fan pages, and resultantly intensify purchase intention. Therefore, the succeeding recommendations elucidate manners

in which the three types of trusting beliefs may be enhanced.

- **Display Trusting Belief-Benevolence**

Given that benevolence refers to kindness, the subsequent ideas propose methods through which to treat Facebook fans with kindness, so that trusting belief-benevolence may be displayed (McKnight *et al.*, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b; See-To & Ho, 2014).

1. *Request Feedback from Facebook Fans*

Benevolence could be shown by requesting Facebook fans' feedback on products and services (Hubspot, n.d; Lacy, 2011; Shukle, 2016; Verve Search, n.d). This could be done through the use of posts that are fairly enjoyable to interact with such as polls, or posts that appear to be of a more serious nature, such as surveys (Hubspot, n.d; Lacy, 2011). The wedding dress vendor may ask Facebook fans to vote on dresses from specific designers by means of a poll, where the results of the poll may be visually represented via a colourful graph. Alternatively, a link to a survey on customer service could be posted.

2. *Reply to Facebook Fans' Comments*

Replying to comments is particularly critical since it was suggested that if only text is presented, Facebook fans assess dependability based on how rapidly others reply to them (mashable.com, n.d in Lacy, 2011). Comments are an indication of Facebook fans' desire to interact with the wedding dress vendor, and the vendor's reply suggests that they care enough, to reciprocate the interaction (Loomer, 2012). The reply could be an answer to an enquiry about trading hours, or the availability of a specific style of dress (Shukle, 2016).

3. *Thank Facebook Fans*

Facebook fans that share information about the wedding dress vendor deserve to be shown gratitude since they are assisting the to "spread the word" about the vendor's business. Private Facebook messages may be sent to Facebook fans in order prove that they are appreciated. If possible, the wedding dress vendor could obtain the Facebook fan's postal address and send them a letter in the mail. This is a seldom-used tactic that could differentiate the wedding dress vendor from other businesses with Facebook fan pages (Lacy, 2011).

- **Display Trusting Belief-Competence**

A thought leader is a person or business that is regarded as a principal "expert" in their field, and is therefore sought after for advice (Gleeson, 2012; Prince & Rogers,

2012; Walsh-Phillips, 2015). Given this, conveying thought leadership involves relaying expertise (Gleeson, 2012; Walsh-Phillips, 2015). Because competence relates to expertise, conveying thought leadership showcases competence (McKnight *et al.*, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b; See-To & Ho, 2014). Taking this into account, the ensuing points put forward possible ways in which to communicate thought leadership, and hence competence, whilst interacting with Facebook fans.

1. Offer Counsel in Posts

The wedding dress vendor could create Facebook posts, which deliver advice to be employed for resolving, wedding dress shopping or wedding planning dilemmas (Beckbessinger, 2011; Phibbs, 2015; Walsh-Phillips, 2015). These posts could be made aesthetically appealing by being presented as infographics or through using distinctive fonts and colours (Gleeson, 2012).

2. Host Question-and-Answer (Q&A) Sessions

Q&A sessions refer to gatherings in which questions are posed at a knowledgeable entity that answers them. On a Facebook fan page, these gatherings could take place in real-time, with questions being asked and answered in the comments section of a post. The Q&A session could also materialise as fans pose questions in a comments section, with the responses to those questions being given in a video, posted later. Like the aforementioned Facebook posts could be used to offer solutions to the predicaments of Facebook fans, so too could Q&A sessions. The wedding dress vendor could host a Q&A session each week, with staff members being appointed to answer the necessary questions (Shukle, 2016). The staff members could rotate as the weeks pass such that each member has an opportunity to deliver their expertise.

3. Post Behind-the-Scenes Videos

Posting behind-the-scenes videos will offer Facebook fans a deeper understanding of the wedding dress vendor's business, and will allow the vendor to implement openness in their relationship with their Facebook fans (Shukle, 2016; Walsh-Phillips, 2015). Openness has been noted to be vital in building trust between businesses with Facebook fan pages and their Facebook fans (Lacy, 2011; Gleeson, 2012; Shukle, 2016). Practicing "tactical" openness in particular is advisable, and involves the wedding dress vendor utilising social media mechanisms, to generate genuine discussions, about their wedding dresses (Lacy, 2011). Moreover, behind-the-scenes videos enhance the personification of the wedding dress vendor's business (Shukle, 2016). An example of a behind-the-scenes video would one of seamstresses making alterations to a wedding dress. Watching a video such as this will allow the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fans to have a near firsthand experience of the wedding

dress vendor demonstrating expertise.

4. Formulate Posts that Feature Staff Members

The wedding dress vendor could develop Facebook posts that emphasise the abilities of each staff member. A photograph of the staff member at work could be included in the post, together with a mini-interview about their career experiences and guidance that they would offer (Hubspot, n.d; Shukle, 2016). Incorporating personal questions in the interview such as those concerning hobbies, likes and dislikes, could also assist with personifying the wedding dress vendor's business (Hubspot, n.d). Furthermore, just as posts of behind-the-scenes videos represent openness in the relationship between the wedding dress vendor and their Facebook fans, so too do posts focusing on the characteristics of each staff member (Shukle, 2016).

5. Create Milestones

Milestones will appear on the timeline of the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page, and may be used to commemorate the accomplishments of the vendor. Accomplishments could be events such as store openings or product launches. Since accomplishments could be considered a sign of competence, and milestones can act as a means of honouring accomplishments, milestones could also display competence (Loomer, 2012; Shukle, 2016).

6. Have Content Shared by Social Media Influencers

Influencers on Facebook are those who are adept in their field, and sufficiently well-known and admired, to have their posts be easily found, by those searching for products or brands on Facebook. The wedding dress vendor forming a relationship with such individuals opens up the possibility of them sharing the vendor's content (Lacy, 2011). Having their content shared by those who are deemed to be competent could give the impression that the wedding dress vendor is similarly competent.

- **Display Trusting Belief-Integrity**

Since integrity can be implemented through the fulfillment of promises, the activities listed hereafter, serve as techniques through which to express that promises have been fulfilled, so that trusting belief-integrity may be displayed (McKnight *et al.*, 2001; McKnight *et al.*, 2002a; McKnight *et al.*, 2002b; See-To & Ho, 2014).

1. Post Photographs and/or Videos of Satisfied Customers

Photographs and/or videos of happy brides can serve as concrete evidence that wedding dress vendor has fulfilled their promise of supplying a wedding dress to the bride's satisfaction. Such content can provide Facebook fans with an endorsement of the wedding dress vendor, from pleased customers (Meyerson, 2015; Phibbs, 2015).

This is crucial since it has been claimed that customers no longer trust businesses, but each other, and that social media is therefore the ideal means through which to develop trust (Beckbessinger, 2011).

The wedding dress vendor could request that Facebook fans submit their wedding photographs or wedding video trailers to be featured on their Facebook fan page (Hubspot, n.d; Phibbs, 2015; Shukle, 2016). In the event that photographs are submitted, they could be combined to form a video or slideshow that can be used as content for a Facebook post (Phibbs, 2015). Alternatively, the wedding dress vendor could take photographs of customers in store, with their appointed sales consultants, after they have chosen which wedding dress to purchase. These photographs could then be incorporated into Facebook posts.

2. Post Customer Testimonials

Just as photographs of contented brides could act as an endorsement of the wedding dress vendor, from pleased customers, so too could customer testimonials. Customer testimonials have been dubbed an influential type of content and could take the form of a written message, an image or a video (Meyerson, 2015.) In order to have testimonials appear on their Facebook fan page, the wedding dress vendor could contact current Facebook fans, either through private message or other means, and ask whether they would be willing to write a testimonial for their Facebook fan page. Another option would be to approach customers in store, and ask whether they would be prepared to offer a verbal testimonial, via a voice recording or video, to be posted on the wedding dress vendor's Facebook fan page.

The aforementioned recommendation brings to a close the managerial implications that this study can provide. Despite offering findings, recommendations to wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, this study was not conducted without limitations, that presented challenges in putting forward these findings and recommendations. Potential limitations are listed in the subsequent section.

7.4 POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This section draws attention to the restrictions of this study, which had they been overcome, would have culminated in more robust results. The issues discussed below indicate that the results of this study could have been improved through usage of a more representative sample and more readily available respondents.

7.4.1 Geographical Reach

Respondents for this study were approached at only one particular branch of one particular wedding dress vendor. Customers at other store branches of the chosen wedding dress vendor, elsewhere in the Western Cape or South Africa, and other

wedding dress vendors, were not included. Therefore, the sample of this study cannot be said to be fully representative of the population of engaged, young adult, South African females.

7.4.2 Age of Respondents

As mentioned earlier, a young adult in the context of this study referred to an individual in the 18-29 year age group. Whilst collecting data however, it was noted that a substantial proportion of the wedding dress vendor's customers were in their early thirties. Had the relevant age group for this study been extended, such that engaged South African females in their early thirties could form part of the sample, the sample would have better represented the population of engaged, young adult, South African females.

7.4.3 Availability of Respondents

Potential respondents were occupied with either wedding dress fittings or browsing the wedding dress vendor's store during the time that the researcher was in store. The researcher was therefore only able to hand them a questionnaire to complete, once they had completed their engagements in store. In certain cases, potential respondents had further commitments after their visit to the store, and were therefore unable to participate in the research.

Limitations such as the aforementioned, restricted the researcher when investigating the impact of eWOM in SNS's, on South African bride's intention to purchase wedding dresses. Future research could explore a similar area, and in so doing, aim to overcome these limitations. Forthcoming research could in addition, take into account factors that this study did not. These factors will be outlined hereafter.

7.5 FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

This section puts forward future research suggestions that if followed, will allow researchers to delve deeper into the areas of eWOM, social media and the wedding industry. This involves taking into account different types of eWOM and SNS's, in addition to different types of wedding dress vendors.

7.5.1 Utilise Alternative Forms of eWOM

In the context of this study, eWOM constituted written comments on an SNS. However, with the growing popularity of visual aids for communication on social media, other phenomena, such as images and videos, could be recognised as eWOM in future studies (Bailey, 2015). Furthermore, actions such as "sharing" on Facebook, which have been proven to be an influential form of endorsement, may also be regarded as eWOM in future studies (Cleary, 2015).

7.5.2 Investigate Alternative SNS's

Although Facebook is a globally well-liked SNS, it was suggested that Pinterest has the strongest impact on the wedding industry (Barker, 2012; Chih *et al.*, 2014; Gormly, 2013; Laudon, 2014; Leung, 2012; Ries, 2012; Svensson, 2011; Velasco, 2013). Furthermore, whilst data collection took place, potential respondents for this study confirmed that Pinterest was a widely used wedding resource. Potential respondents also considered Instagram, another SNS, as another means through which to gather wedding dress ideas. Therefore, future studies could explore these SNS's.

7.5.3 Study the Consumers of Bridal Fashion Houses Instead of Bridal Stores

This study took into account one bridal store that stocked wedding dresses from different bridal fashion houses, such as *Oleg Cassini* and *Viola Chan* (Bride&co, 2015). However, numerous other bridal fashion houses, such as *Pronovias*, whose wedding dresses are stocked at their own stores, are available to brides for the selection of their wedding dresses (Pronovias, 2016). Future studies could examine consumers of such fashion houses.

7.6 SUMMARY

This study showed that the eWOM in SNS's model does offer a substantial explication of the factors that affect South African brides' intention to purchase high-risk, high-involvement products such as wedding dresses. More particularly, it demonstrates that eWOM in SNS's has an impact on South African brides' intention to purchase such products, although only through value co-creation. Value co-creation was moreover, the only factor with a direct connection to purchase intention, in addition to having the greatest influence on purchase intention. Therefore, in order to strengthen South African brides' intention to purchase wedding dresses, wedding dress vendors with Facebook fan pages, were advised to utilise the tools and opportunities available to them, in order to stimulate reciprocal interaction between themselves and South African brides, on their Facebook pages.

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**APPENDIX 1:
VERSION OF QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EXPERIMENTAL GROUP**

Respondent no.: _____



Hello, my name is Zeenat Mowzer and I am a Master of Business Science student at the University of Cape Town (UCT). My research aims to investigate the impact of word of mouth, conveyed through social networking sites (SNS's), on the purchase of wedding dresses. This research has been approved by the UCT Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

I would appreciate it if you could please fill in a questionnaire to assist me with the collection of data for my research. By completing this questionnaire, you are consenting that this information will only be used for the purposes of this research and will not be used for analysis at a personal level. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw at any time. All responses will remain **confidential** and **anonymous**. The questionnaire will take approximately **10-15 minutes** to complete. When you have completed the questionnaire, you will be entered into a draw to win a tiara worth more than R500. Should you have any questions concerning this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at: Zeenat.Mowzer@alumni.uct.ac.za.

Please fill in a mobile number at which you can be contacted in case you win: _____

Please answer the following questions.

		Yes	No
1.	Are you a South African female who is engaged to be married?	1	2
2.	Are you between the ages of 18 up until and including 29?	1	2
3.	Have you looked at the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors?	1	2
4.	Have you made your final decision on which wedding dress to purchase?	1	2

If you answered yes to questions 1-3, and no to question 4, please continue. If not, thank you for your time and have a nice day.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing "Strongly Disagree" and 7 representing "Strongly Agree".

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
5.	I generally trust other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	I tend to count upon other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I generally have faith in humanity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	I feel that people are generally reliable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	Bride&co is competent in their field.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	Bride&co is knowledgeable concerning their products.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	Promises made by Bride&co are reliable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	Bride&co does not make false claims.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
13.	Bride&co is open in dealing with their customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	I believe that Bride&co will be ready and willing to assist and support their customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	Facebook has enough safeguards to make me feel comfortable using it to make purchase decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16.	I feel assured that legal and technological structures adequately protect me from problems on Facebook.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	I feel confident that encryption and other technological advances on Facebook cause it to be safe for me to use them to make purchase decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	In general, Facebook currently provides a robust and safe environment in which to make purchase decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing “Very Strongly Disagree” and 5 representing “Very Strongly Agree”.

		Very Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Very Strongly Agree 5
19.	Making purchase decisions on Facebook is superior to making purchase decisions on other SNS's.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Making purchase decisions on Facebook is compatible with my lifestyle and shopping needs.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	It is easy to make purchase decisions using Facebook.	1	2	3	4	5

Bride&co posted a picture on their Facebook fan page, which Facebook users commented on. Please take a look at the screenshot of the picture and its comments on the next page, and follow the instructions that appear thereafter



Based on what you saw above, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing “Strongly Disagree” and 5 representing “Strongly Agree”.

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
22.	I will purchase a wedding dress because the consumer comments, on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, like those in the screenshot above, are positive.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I rely on the consumer comments, on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, like those in the screenshot above, when I purchase my wedding dress.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	The consumer comments, on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, like those in the screenshot above, affect my wedding dress purchase decision crucially.	1	2	3	4	5

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing “Totally Disagree” and 7 representing “Totally Agree”.

		Totally Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Totally Agree 7
25.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has provided me with appropriate information about wedding dress choices.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Totally Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Totally Agree 7
26.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has provided me with an efficient way to manage time when choosing a wedding dress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has enabled me to undertake appropriate transactions securely.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has provided me with adequate directions that make the vendors easy to find and accessible.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has enabled me to generate value for an adequate price.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please answer the following questions by selecting the option that best corresponds with the likelihood that you will perform the action in question. 1 represents “Extremely Unlikely” and 6 represents “Extremely Likely”.

		Extremely Unlikely 1	2	3	4	5	Extremely Likely 6
30.	How likely is it that you will purchase a wedding dress, from a wedding dress vendor, with a Facebook fan page?	1	2	3	4	5	6
31.	How likely is it that you will recommend a wedding dress, from a wedding dress vendor with a Facebook fan page, to your engaged friend/s?	1	2	3	4	5	6

Assume that a Facebook user starts a conversation with you on the Bride&co Facebook fan page.

32. Who would this person typically be? **Please select one person.**

- Colleague Fiancé
 Neighbour Parent
 Acquaintance Sibling
 Friend Child
 Close Friend Relative
 Best Friend Other

The remainder of the questionnaire is with regards to the person selected in question 32.

Please answer the following questions by choosing the most applicable option.

33. What is the gender of the person selected in question 32?

- Male
- Female

34. How much younger or older are you compared to the person selected in question 32? 1 indicates that you are much younger, 4 indicates that you are the same age and 7 indicates that you are much older.

I am much younger. 1	2	3	Same Age 4	5	6	I am much older. 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

35. How similar is your occupation to that of the person selected in question 32? 1 represents “Not At All Similar” and 7 represents “Extremely Similar”.

Not At All Similar 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely Similar 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

36. Do you have the same level of education as the person selected in question 32 (e.g.: high school diploma, college diploma, bachelor's degree, honours degree, masters degree, doctoral degree)? 1 represents “No”, 4 represents “More or Less” and 7 represents “Yes”.

No 1	2	3	More or Less 4	5	6	Yes 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please proceed to answer the following questions by selecting the option that best corresponds with the likelihood that the action in question will occur. 1 represents “Not At All Likely” and 7 represents “Very Much Likely”.

		Not At All Likely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very Much Likely 7
37.	There are some people in our daily lives with whom we are willing to share personal confidences. How likely would you be to share personal confidences with the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Not At All Likely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very Much Likely 7
38.	There are some persons in our daily lives with whom we would gladly spend a free afternoon socialising. There are others with whom we would rather not spend our free time. How likely would you be to spend some free time socialising with the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39.	How likely would you be to perform a <i>large</i> favour for the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40.	In your opinion, how likely would the person selected in question 32 be, to perform a <i>large</i> favour for you?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

41. Please rate your closeness to the person selected in question 32.

Not At All Close 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extraordinary Close 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please indicate the level of similarity between yourself and the person selected in question 32. 1 represents "Not At All Similar" and 7 represents "Extremely Similar".

		Not At All Similar 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely Similar 7
42.	Considering your outlook on life, how similar are you and the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
43.	Considering your likes and dislikes, how similar are you and the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
44.	Considering your values and experiences, how similar are you and the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
45.	To the best of your knowledge, how similar are your tastes in products, compared to that of the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Thank you! 😊

**APPENDIX 2:
VERSION OF QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CONTROL GROUP**

Respondent no.: _____



Hello, my name is Zeenat Mowzer and I am a Master of Business Science student at the University of Cape Town (UCT). My research aims to investigate the impact of word of mouth, conveyed through social networking sites (SNS's), on the purchase of wedding dresses. This research has been approved by the UCT Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

I would appreciate it if you could please fill in a questionnaire to assist me with the collection of data for my research. By completing this questionnaire, you are consenting that this information will only be used for the purposes of this research and will not be used for analysis at a personal level. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw at any time. All responses will remain **confidential** and **anonymous**. The questionnaire will take approximately **10-15 minutes** to complete. When you have completed the questionnaire, you will be entered into a draw to win a tiara worth more than R500. Should you have any questions concerning this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at: Zeenat.Mowzer@alumni.uct.ac.za.

Please fill in a number at which you can be contacted in case you win: _____

Please answer the following questions.

		Yes	No
1.	Are you a South African female who is engaged to be married?	1	2
2.	Are you between the ages of 18 up until and including 29?	1	2
3.	Have you looked at the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors?	1	2
4.	Have you made your final decision on which wedding dress to purchase?	1	2

If you answered yes to questions 1-3, and no to question 4, please continue. If not, thank you for your time and have a nice day.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing "Strongly Disagree" and 7 representing "Strongly Agree".

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
5.	I generally trust other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	I tend to count upon other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I generally have faith in humanity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	I feel that people are generally reliable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	Bride&co is competent in their field.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	Bride&co is knowledgeable concerning their products.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	Promises made by Bride&co are reliable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	Bride&co does not make false claims.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
13.	Bride&co is open in dealing with their customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	I believe that Bride&co will be ready and willing to assist and support their customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	Facebook has enough safeguards to make me feel comfortable using it to make purchase decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16.	I feel assured that legal and technological structures adequately protect me from problems on Facebook.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	I feel confident that encryption and other technological advances on Facebook cause it to be safe for me to use them to make purchase decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	In general, Facebook currently provides a robust and safe environment in which to make purchase decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing "Very Strongly Disagree" and 5 representing "Very Strongly Agree".

		Very Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Very Strongly Agree 5
19.	Making purchase decisions on Facebook is superior to making purchase decisions on other SNS's.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Making purchase decisions on Facebook is compatible with my lifestyle and shopping needs.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	It is easy to make purchase decisions using Facebook.	1	2	3	4	5

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing "Strongly Disagree" and 5 representing "Strongly Agree".

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
22.	I will purchase a wedding dress because the consumer comments, on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, are positive.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I rely on the consumer comments, on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, when I purchase my wedding dress.	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
24.	The consumer comments, on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, affect my wedding dress purchase decision crucially.	1	2	3	4	5

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing “Totally Disagree” and 7 representing “Totally Agree”.

		Totally Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Totally Agree 7
25.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has provided me with appropriate information about wedding dress choices.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has provided me with an efficient way to manage time when choosing a wedding dress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has enabled me to undertake appropriate transactions securely.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has provided me with adequate directions that make the vendors easy to find and accessible.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has enabled me to generate value for an adequate price.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please answer the following questions by selecting the option that best corresponds with the likelihood that you will perform the action in question. 1 represents “Extremely Unlikely” and 6 represents “Extremely Likely”.

		Extremely Unlikely 1	2	3	4	5	Extremely Likely 6
30.	How likely is it that you will purchase a wedding dress, from a wedding dress vendor, with a Facebook fan page?	1	2	3	4	5	6
31.	How likely is it that you will recommend a wedding dress, from a wedding dress vendor with a Facebook fan page, to your engaged friend/s?	1	2	3	4	5	6

Assume that a Facebook user starts a conversation with you on the Bride&co Facebook fan page.

32. Who would this person typically be? **Please select one person.**

- Colleague Fiancé
- Neighbour Parent
- Acquaintance Sibling
- Friend Child
- Close Friend Relative
- Best Friend Other

The remainder of the questionnaire is with regards to the person selected in question 32.

Please answer the following questions by choosing the most applicable option.

34. What is the gender of the person selected in question 32?

- Male
- Female

35. How much younger or older are you compared to the person selected in question 32? 1 indicates that you are much younger, 4 indicates that you are the same age and 7 indicates that you are much older.

I am much younger. 1	2	3	Same Age 4	5	6	I am much older. 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

36. How similar is your occupation to that of the person selected in question 32? 1 represents “Not At All Similar” and 7 represents “Extremely Similar”.

Not At All Similar 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely Similar 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

37. Do you have the same level of education as the person selected in question 32 (e.g.: high school diploma, college diploma, bachelor's degree, honours degree, masters degree, doctoral degree)? 1 represents “No”, 4 represents “More or Less” and 7 represents “Yes”.

No 1	2	3	More or Less 4	5	6	Yes 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please proceed to answer the following questions by selecting the option that best corresponds with the likelihood that the action in question will occur. 1 represents “Not At All Likely” and 7 represents “Very Much Likely”.

		Not At All Likely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very Much Likely 7
38.	There are some people in our daily lives with whom we are willing to share personal confidences. How likely would you be to share personal confidences with the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39.	There are some persons in our daily lives with whom we would gladly spend a free afternoon socialising. There are others with whom we would rather not spend our free time. How likely would you be to spend some free time socialising with the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40.	How likely would you be to perform a <i>large</i> favour for the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
41.	In your opinion, how likely would the person selected in question 32 be, to perform a <i>large</i> favour for you?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

42. Please rate your closeness to the person selected in question 32.

Not At All Close 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extraordinary Close 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please indicate the level of similarity between yourself and the person selected in question 32. 1 represents “Not At All Similar” and 7 represents “Extremely Similar”.

		Not At All Similar 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely Similar 7
43.	Considering your outlook on life, how similar are you and the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
44.	Considering your likes and dislikes, how similar are you and the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
45.	Considering your values and experiences, how similar are you and the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
46.	To the best of your knowledge, how similar are your tastes in products, compared to that of the person selected in question 32?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**APPENDIX 3:
THE TIARA USED AS AN INCENTIVE**



**APPENDIX 4:
PRE-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE**

Respondent no.: _____



Hello, my name is Zeenat Mowzer and I am a Master of Business Science student at the University of Cape Town (UCT). My research aims to investigate the impact of word of mouth, conveyed through social networking sites (SNS's), on the purchase of wedding dresses. This research has been approved by the UCT Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee.

I would appreciate it if you could please fill in a questionnaire to assist me with the collection of data for my research. By completing this questionnaire, you are consenting that this information will only be used for the purposes of this research and will not be used for analysis at a personal level. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw at any time. All responses will remain **confidential** and **anonymous**. The questionnaire will take approximately **10-15 minutes** to complete. Should you have any questions concerning this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at: Zeenat.Mowzer@alumni.uct.ac.za.

Please answer the following questions.

		Yes	No
1.	Are you a South African female who is engaged to be married?	1	2
2.	Are you between the ages of 18 up until and including 29?	1	2
3.	Have you liked the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors?	1	2
4.	Is your wedding taking place nine or less months from now?	1	2
5.	Have you made your final decision on which wedding dress to purchase?	1	2

If you answered yes to questions 1-4, and no to question 5, please continue. If not, thank you for your time and have a nice day.

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing "Strongly Disagree" and 7 representing "Strongly Agree".

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
6.	I generally trust other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I tend to count upon other people.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	I generally have faith in humanity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	I feel that people are generally reliable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Think of one wedding dress store from which you will most likely purchase your wedding dress. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, as they apply to that wedding dress store. 1 represents “Strongly Disagree” and 7 represents “Strongly Agree”.

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Disagree 7
10.	The wedding dress store is competent in their field.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	The wedding dress store is knowledgeable concerning their products.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	Promises made by the wedding dress store are reliable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.	The wedding dress store does not make false claims.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	The wedding dress store is open in dealing with their customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	I believe that the wedding dress store will be ready and willing to assist and support their customers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing “Strongly Disagree” and 7 representing “Strongly Agree”.

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree 7
16.	Facebook has enough safeguards to make me feel comfortable using it to make purchase decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	I feel assured that legal and technological structures adequately protect me from problems on Facebook.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	I feel confident that encryption and other technological advances on Facebook cause it to be safe for me to use them to make purchase decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19.	In general, Facebook currently provides a robust and safe environment in which to make purchase decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing “Very Strongly Disagree” and 5 representing “Very Strongly Agree”.

		Very Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Very Strongly Agree 5
20.	Making purchase decisions on Facebook is superior to making purchase decisions on other SNS's.	1	2	3	4	5

		Very Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Very Strongly Agree 5
21.	Making purchase decisions on Facebook is compatible with my lifestyle and shopping needs.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	It is easy to make purchase decisions using Facebook.	1	2	3	4	5

Bride&co posted a picture on their Facebook fan page, which Facebook users commented on. Please take a look at the screenshot of the picture and its comments below, and follow the instructions that appear thereafter.



Based on what you saw above, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing “Strongly Disagree” and 5 representing “Strongly Agree”.

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
23.	I will purchase a wedding dress because the consumer comments, on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, like those in the screenshot above, are positive.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	I rely on the consumer comments, on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, like those in the screenshot above, when I purchase my wedding dress.	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5
25.	The consumer comments, on the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors, like those in the screenshot above, affect my wedding dress purchase decision crucially.	1	2	3	4	5

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements, with 1 representing “Totally Disagree” and 7 representing “Totally Agree”.

		Totally Disagree 1	2	3	4	5	6	Totally Agree 7
26.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has provided me with appropriate information about wedding dress choices.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has provided me with an efficient way to manage time when choosing a wedding dress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has enabled me to undertake appropriate transactions securely.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has provided me with adequate directions that make the vendors easy to find and accessible.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30.	Interaction with the Facebook fan pages of wedding dress vendors has enabled me to generate value for an adequate price.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please answer the following questions by selecting the option that best corresponds with the likelihood that you will perform the action in question. 1 represents “Extremely Unlikely” and 6 represents “Extremely Likely”.

		Extremely Unlikely 1	2	3	4	5	Extremely Likely 6
31.	How likely is it that you will purchase a wedding dress, from a wedding dress vendor, with a Facebook fan page?	1	2	3	4	5	6
32.	How likely is it that you will recommend a wedding dress, from a wedding dress vendor with a Facebook fan page, to your engaged friend/s?	1	2	3	4	5	6

Assume that a Facebook user starts a conversation with you on the Bride&co Facebook fan page.

33. Who would this person typically be?

- Colleague Fiancé
- Neighbour Parent
- Acquaintance Sibling
- Friend Child
- Close Friend Relative
- Best Friend Other

The remainder of the questionnaire is with regards to the person selected in question 33.

Please answer the following questions by choosing the most applicable option.

34. What is the gender of the person selected in question 33?

- Male
- Female

35. How much younger or older are you compared to the person selected in question 33? 1 indicates that you are much younger, 4 indicates that you are the same age and 7 indicates that you are much older.

I am much younger. 1	2	3	Same Age 4	5	6	I am much older. 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

36. How similar is your occupation to that of the person selected in question 33? 1 represents “Not At All Similar” and 7 represents “Extremely Similar”.

Not At All Similar 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely Similar 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

37. Do you have the same level of education as the person selected in question 33 (e.g.: high school diploma, college diploma, bachelor's degree, honours degree, masters degree, doctoral degree)? 1 represents “No”, 4 represents “More or Less” and 7 represents “Yes”.

No 1	2	3	More or Less 4	5	6	Yes 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please proceed to answer the following questions by selecting the option that best corresponds with the likelihood that the action in question will occur. 1 represents “Not At All Likely” and 7 represents “Very Much Likely”.

		Not At All Likely 1	2	3	4	5	6	Very Much Likely 7
38.	There are some people in our daily lives with whom we are willing to share personal confidences. How likely would you be to share personal confidences with the person selected in question 33?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39.	There are some persons in our daily lives with whom we would gladly spend a free afternoon socialising. There are others with whom we would rather not spend our free time. How likely would you be to spend some free time socialising with the person selected in question 33?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40.	How likely would you be to perform a <i>large</i> favour for the person selected in question 33?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
41.	In your opinion, how likely would the person selected in question 33 be, to perform a <i>large</i> favour for you?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

42. Please rate your closeness to the person selected in question 33.

Not At All Close 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extraordinary Close 7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please indicate the level of similarity between yourself and the person selected in question 33. 1 represents “Not At All Similar” and 7 represents “Extremely Similar”.

		Not At All Similar 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely Similar 7
43.	Considering your outlook on life, how similar are you and the person selected in question 33?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
44.	Considering your likes and dislikes, how similar are you and the person selected in question 33?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
45.	Considering your values and experiences, how similar are you and the person selected in question 33?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
46.	To the best of your knowledge, how similar are your tastes in products, compared to that of the person selected in question 33?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**APPENDIX 5:
LETTER OF ORGANISATIONAL PERMISSION FROM BRIDE&CO**

Natasha Otten
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Corner Witkoppen and Achter Roads
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19 November 2015


University of Cape Town Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee
Leslie Commerce Building
Engineering Mall
Upper Campus
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Cape Town
7701

Dear Ethics in Research Representative

This serves to confirm that I, Natasha Otten, marketer at Bride&co, grant Zeenat Mowzer, Masters student at the University of Cape Town's School of Management Studies, permission to collect data on the Bride&co Canal Walk premises, for research purposes only, using a questionnaire approved of by Bride&co, provided the following conditions:

1. All research gathered is to be shared with Bride&co.
2. Zeenat conducts herself in a courteous manner, given the importance of customers to Bride&co.
3. All research gathered remains confidential.
4. Should Bride&co be of the opinion that Zeenat's project is interfering with business of any sorts, Bride&co has the right to revoke their permission.

Yours faithfully


Signed

19 / 11 / 2015
Dated