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## Influence of YouTube commercial communication on organic eWOM, purchase intent and purchase associations among young consumers

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**Abstract:** This study ascertains if YouTube (YT) commercial communication (CC) influences the organic electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), purchase intention and purchase associations among young consumers. A sequential sampling method was employed in a survey of 2,122 South African high school learners. Structural equation modelling was utilised to investigate the hypothesised associations. The analysis established that organic eWOM had a positive impact on purchase intent and purchase. Favourable organic eWOM → purchase intent and eWOM → purchase associations were also shown for young consumers who accessed YT via both personal computers and mobile, were inexperienced YT users, used YT daily, used YT for briefer periods of time, were aged 15–18 years, and were of White ethnicity. Organisations could take advantage of the positive organic eWOM and behavioural attitude relationships, as well as the favourable responses regarding usage and demographic characteristics.

**Keywords:** YouTube; organic electronic word-of-mouth; eWOM; purchase; purchase intent; intention-to-purchase; commercial communication; generation Z.

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**Biographical notes:** Rodney Graeme Duffett is an Associate Professor of Marketing at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town, Faculty of Business and Management Sciences. He holds a DTech in Marketing and has been teaching marketing communication-related courses at undergraduate and postgraduate for 25 years. He has over two decades of practical marketing communications experience working on a number of projects and campaigns in the South African advertising industry. He has authored and co-authored articles in 30+ journals; and reviewed papers for 40+ local and international journals. His main research interest relates to any form of digital interactive/social media and marketing communications.

## 1 Introduction

The incredible growth of digital video sharing platforms (DVSPs), social media, mobile and other interactive information communication technology (ICT) channels are showing incremental growth in developing economies and pervasively used by young consumers (known as Generation Z or Gen Z). The Generation Z cohort is characterised by the omnipresent internet, wireless mobile and multimedia devices (e.g., smartphones), social media, video-on-demand, video games and high-definition screens. A majority of Generation Z watch YT videos, especially since they see this DVSP as a form of entertainment and a source of information, which is frequently shared and received via electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Naumovska, 2017; Mishra et al., 2018; Haddouche and Salomone, 2018; Smith, 2019). Online DVSPs such as YouTube (YT) have become popular among Generation Z in recent years, which provide a continuous gateway for entertainment, information, engagement and influence purchase decisions (Westenberg, 2016; Viertola, 2018). The distinction between various forms of organisational communications have become blurred, and so are collectively referred to as commercial communication (CC). CC includes all forms of communication (e.g., broadcast, print and digital advertising, out-of-home, sales promotions, public relations, direct marketing, sponsorship, events, product placements, branded entertainment, etc.) that are used to promote an organisation's products offerings to other businesses and consumers with the aim of making a profit (Siegert et al., 2017; Belch and Belch, 2021). The CC expenditure on DVSPs is estimated to reach 4.5 billion of consumers and grow to \$37 billion by 2022. YT will account for 25% of all DVSP CC and has more than 1 billion hours of daily video views, especially by younger generations (Foye, 2018; Viertola, 2018; Smith, 2020). Campaign Monitor (2019) and Koch (2019) reveal that Generation Z accounts for four out of ten consumers who spend \$143 billion and influence \$600 billion of family purchases per annum. Therefore, it is essential for organisations to make use of YT CC to target and stimulate positive behavioural intentions among this young lucrative target market, which is infamously challenging to reach and maintain attention (Mishra et al., 2018; Smith, 2019; Belanche et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Hansen et al. (2014) reveal that user-generation content (UGC) generally yields more favourable responses among younger generations and increases eWOM, especially in the age of online advertising avoidance among younger generations (Belanche et al., 2017; Chinchanchokchai and de Gregorio, 2020; Tefertiller, 2020). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Bahtar and Muda (2016) describe eWOM as any favourable or unfavourable discourse made by prospective, current or past consumers about an organisation (its products, brands and/or CC content), which is disseminated and can be viewed by a number of other individuals via digital interactive media. The aforementioned definition includes the use of influencers, celebrity endorsers, vloggers and YouTubers who are regularly compensated to disseminate positive eWOM. However, organic eWOM emanates directly from consumers without compensation (as defined in this study). Mishra et al. (2018) note that young consumers are significant online content contributors via instant messaging and social media, which are used for liking, sharing and communicating with online affiliates and other consumers. Smith (2019) agree that young consumers enjoy creating content and partaking in online communities to interact with people, which influence product and brand choice decisions by expressing their likes and dislikes. Hence, this study addresses this research gap since it is important for

organisations to understand whether organic eWOM has a favourable effect on Gen Z consumers' purchase intent (intention-to-purchase) and purchases.

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) model was used by several of the aforementioned studies as the basis for their theoretical models. This model suggests that behaviour is mainly influenced by behavioural intentions and a behavioural attitude function (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Hence, this study also adopted the TRA model, but seeks to expand on previous research by combining the TRA theoretical model with the latter phases of the hierarchy-of effects model (HEM), *vis.* purchase intent and purchase (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961). This study will not only consider the influence of organic eWOM on purchase intent, but will expand on previous digital platform research by considering the influence of organic YT eWOM on purchase since the HEM provides for a divergent order of the various attitudinal phases (Barry, 1987). The research will also consider the mediating effect of purchase intent between the aforementioned elements.

The rest of the paper is chronologically arranged. Section 2 examines the theoretical background in terms of eWOM and YT, as well as provides an outline of the theoretical model and hypotheses. Section 3 expounds on the study's methodology, and Section 4 provides the results and data analysis. Section 5 discusses the YT organic eWOM and behavioural attitudinal associations, and the YT usage and demographic elements influence on these associations. Section 6 summarises the conclusions and implications, which are derived from the results. Section 7 presents the main limitations and directions for additional inquiry.

## 2 Theoretical background and hypotheses

### 2.1 eWOM and YT

Hu and Ha (2015) describe eWOM as the non-commercial (freely) communication of brand, product and company content through online channels, which may include comments, likes, dislikes, views and the consumers' own content, which is forwarded or shared CC sources with other consumers and organisations. Bi et al. (2019) describe the creation of product review videos by consumers, which are posted on YT and other online sources, and the forwarding or sharing of existing company, product and brand-related videos on YT as a video-based eWOM (vWOM). Many inquiries also consider different elements of eWOM and YT CC, which are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1** eWOM and YT CC research

<i>Source</i>	<i>Summary of eWOM and YT CC research</i>
Hansen et al. (2014)	Hansen et al. (2014) reveal that YT consumer-generated advertising (CGA) is more trusted than organisational-generated advertising among American students.
Tang et al. (2014)	Tang et al. (2014) establish that neutral eWOM, which emanates from Facebook and YT, positively affect product sales.
Lee and Watkins (2016)	Lee and Watkins (2016) reveal that YT vloggers para-social interactions result in a positive influence on student perceptions towards brands and purchase intentions in the USA.
Westenberg (2016)	Westenberg (2016) determine that YT celebrity endorsers have a large influence on product awareness and behaviour among Dutch teenagers.

**Table 1** eWOM and YT CC research (continued)

<i>Source</i>	<i>Summary of eWOM and YT CC research</i>
Wu (2016)	Wu (2016) emphasises that transparency should be increased in YT advertising, where companies and YouTubers provide clear and conspicuous disclosure of marketing content to viewers in the USA.
Baek et al. (2017)	Baek et al. (2017) ascertain that Twitter eWOM favourably influence box office sales in terms of the initial movie opening stages, whereas there were evident due to YT eWOM in the USA.
Baramidze (2018)	Baramidze (2018) indicate a positive effect on behavioural attitudes owing to YT influencers among Georgian and Lithuanian students.
Evans et al. (2018)	Evans et al. (2018) report an increase in positive parental sentiment and mediation due to YT pre-roll advertising sponsorship transparency in child sponsored influencer videos in the USA.
Horáková (2018)	Horáková (2018) indicates that most that most of the Czech Millennial participants purchase products based on YouTuber recommendations.
Kujur and Singh (2018)	Kujur and Singh (2019) reveal that positive affective appeals used in YT advertising have a favourable impact on consumer engagement in India.
Rasmussen (2018)	Rasmussen (2018) ascertains that American students are likely to purchase products recommended by highly popular YT celebrities (behavioural).
Viertola (2018)	Viertola (2018) reports that that YouTubers did not have complete influence on Finnish teenagers' (15–17 years) purchase decisions, since they were skeptical or distrustful of product reviews due to the cooperation with brands.
Zaitceva (2018)	Zaitceva (2018) reveals that YT advertising stimulates engagement between consumers and companies via comments and video among young Finnish, Russian, German, French and Spanish consumers.
Bi et al. (2019)	Bi et al. (2019) suggest that the third-person effect result in positive YT product review video eWOM, whereas self-effect sharing cause negative vWOM among American students.
Chen and Dermawan (2020)	Chen and Dermawan (2020) reveal that Generation Z consumers have purchase products due to YouTuber recommendations in Indonesian.
Coates et al. (2020)	Coates et al. (2020) reveal that YouTuber influencer marketing efforts are effective among children (10–11 years) in the UK. However, the children are able resist these promotion efforts, especially in terms of high in fat, sugar and salt food products.
Corrêa et al. (2020)	Corrêa et al. (2020) ascertain that YouTubers result in favourable conative attitudes due to engagement by young Brazilian consumers.
Park and McMahan (2020)	Park and McMahan (2020) indicate that YT eWOM generated by consumers generally led to higher engagement than professionally generated content.
Rosara and Luthfia (2020)	Rosara and Luthfia (2020) show that YT influencers have a favourable effect on purchase intent, whereas consumer eWOM did not yield a significant influence on purchase intention among Indonesian students.
Sokolova and Kefi (2020)	Sokolova and Kefi (2020) report that YT and Instagram influencers' para-social interaction and credibility result in favourable associations purchase intent among young French consumers.

**Table 1** eWOM and YT CC research (continued)

<i>Source</i>	<i>Summary of eWOM and YT CC research</i>
Anand et al. (2021)	Anand et al. (2021) show that the view count of YT videos initially grow from subscribers, and a second growth curve results from eWOM owing to the virality of the videos in the USA and India.
García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ramón (2021)	García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ramón (2021) posit that pro-consumption YouTuber videos received less consumer engagement (via eWOM comments, likes, dislikes and views) than anti-consumption videos.
Muda and Hamzah (2021)	Muda and Hamzah (2021) ascertain that Millennial attitudes toward YT UGC positively influence eWOM and purchase intention among Malaysian students.

However, it is evident that most of the abovementioned studies generally focus on student-based samples in developed countries (especially the US and European countries), and mainly consider the impact of influencers regarding the dissemination of eWOM. YT influencers, YouTubers, vloggers and celebrity endorsers disseminate information via DVSPs, which is either received from the brand or developed by the influencers. This study specifically excludes influencers, which forms part of eWOM, but not organic eWOM since influencers often receive payment for their services. Therefore, this inquiry addresses these research gaps by assessing the influence of organic eWOM and behavioural attitude associations in an African emerging economy.

## 2.2 Theoretical model

As briefly mentioned in prior text, the TRA posits that behaviour is generally influenced by behavioural intentions, which are decided by subjective norms (the perceived social influence to execute the behaviour) and attitudes. Attitudes can be described as the lasting learned predispositions or mental states to respond in a consistent positive or negative manner to different objects or stimuli (such as a product, CC and eWOM) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). TRA was used by a number of other inquiries to assess the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention on various social media channels (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Wang and Yu, 2017; Hussain et al., 2018; Yusuf et al., 2018), but none of these investigations considered YT. The HEM suggests three attitude consumer attitude phases: cognitive, affective and behavioural, which consumers can experience owing to CC, and includes purchase intent and purchase as the final hierarchical phase (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961). The study also uses the HEM since this model makes provision for divergent sequence or even the exclusion of attitude phases (Barry, 1987), which is important for the study's conceptual model development that is explained in the next section.

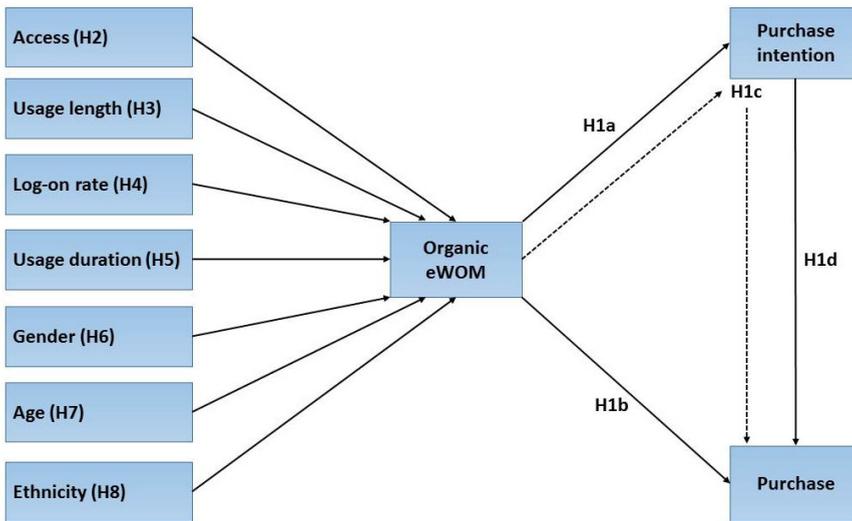
## 2.3 YT organic eWOM and behavioural attitudinal hypotheses

Several qualitative studies posit that eWOM directly influences purchase (Horáková, 2018; Rasmussen, 2018; Viertola, 2018; Chen and Dermawan, 2020), but this notion is yet to be empirically tested. Hence, this research will assess the direct impact of organic YT eWOM on purchase, in addition to the organic eWOM and purchase intent association (Barry, 1987). Other studies investigate various YT marketing

communication influences, which include behavioural attitudinal elements (purchase intent and purchase) among Generation Y (Marthinus et al., 2014; Mucha et al., 2014; Dehghani et al., 2016; Tan et al., 2018; Duffett, 2020; Duffett et al., 2020), but did not explore the effect of organic eWOM. Lee and Watkins (2016), Rosara and Luthfia (2020), Sokolova and Kefi (2020), and Muda and Hamzah (2021) also maintain that eWOM (mainly in the form of influencers, YouTubers and vloggers) result in a positive impact on purchase intent. However, the above mentioned studies (and others outlined in Table 1) predominately sampled older generations, namely Millennial students. The studies were also mainly conducted in developed countries, so an African developing country may yield divergent attitude responses. Hence, this investigation sought to assess the effect of organic eWOM on behavioural attitudes among young consumers via the HEM and TRA models, which led to the following hypotheses (refer to Figure 1):

- H1a YT organic eWOM is positively related to purchase.
- H1b YT organic eWOM is positively related to purchase intent.
- H1c Purchase intent mediates the association between YT organic eWOM and purchase.
- H1d Purchase intent is positively associated with purchase due to YT CC.

**Figure 1** YT usage and demographic elements impact on the organic eWOM, purchase intent and purchase associations conceptual model (see online version for colours)



#### 2.4 YT usage, organic eWOM and behavioural attitude hypotheses

Generation Z is hyper-connected and has never known life without the internet or the omnipresent cell phones, which makes this cohort, true digital natives (Cameron and Pagnattaro, 2017). An increasing number of Generation Z members own smartphones in developed countries and ownership of such devices is also rapidly growing in South Africa, which has increased access to social media (Smith, 2019; Ngubelanga and Duffett, 2021). Mishra et al. (2018) posit that a greater amount of time is spent using online platforms by young consumers. Hence, this increases the probability of them

finding and engaging with brand, product and service CC content, as well as making comments, reviews, and recommendations. Moreover, these encounters generally result in greater eWOM dissemination and consumption among teenagers. Moscardelli and Divine (2007) postulate that the heavy usage of online platforms usage increase the vulnerability of teenagers due to poorly developed consumer socialisation abilities, which further enhances their online dependence. However, a majority of eWOM and YT only view access, usage length, log-on rate, and usage as descriptive statistics, and did not consider the effect of these independent elements on YT organic eWOM, purchase intent and/or purchase associations (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Lee and Watkins, 2016; Yusuf et al., 2018; Lee and Choi, 2019; Muda and Hamzah, 2021). Hence, to bridge these gaps in knowledge, this research investigates several YT usages element hypotheses (refer to Figure 1):

- H2 The association between YT organic eWOM and purchase intent (H2a) and purchase (H2b) differs due to access.
- H3 The association between YT organic eWOM and purchase intent (H3a) and purchase (H3b) differs due to usage length.
- H4 The association between YT organic eWOM and purchase intent (H4a) and purchase (H4b) differs due to log-on rate.
- H5 The association between YT organic eWOM and purchase intent (H5a) and purchase (H5b) differs due to usage duration.

## 2.5 *YT demographic elements, organic eWOM and behavioural attitude hypotheses*

A number of investigations only used YT demographic elements such as gender (Wang and Yu, 2017; Chang and Wang, 2019; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ramón, 2021), age (Corrêa et al., 2020; Rosara and Luthfia, 2020; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Muda and Hamzah, 2021), and ethnic or cultural group (Baramidze, 2018; Feng and Xie, 2018; Zaitceva, 2018) to describe the sample. Balakrishnan and Manickavasagam (2016) also indicate that there is a lack of inquiry on demographic and usage elements influence on attitudes due to social media CC. Gallant and Arcand (2017) ascertain that gender did not have an influence on eWOM among Canadian respondents. Abubakar et al. (2016) indicate that purchase is influenced by eWOM, but also found that there was no difference between genders. Bento et al. (2018) affirm that a younger cohort (Generation Y) is more prone to eWOM referral intentions than an older cohort (Generation X). Moliner-Velázquez et al. (2015) agree that older Spanish consumers (over 40 years) tend to share experiences via WOM, whereas younger consumers make greater use of eWOM. Zhang et al. (2017) report that family influence has a larger influence on eWOM engagement among young American respondents (21–24 years) in comparison to older respondents (25–35 years). South Africa has a unique cultural heritage that includes several major population group classifications, namely White, mixed ancestry, Black and Indian/Asian. Muda and Hamzah (2021) mandate that additional YT UGC research is needed on cultural diversity in developing economies. Nelson (2018) indicates that there is an opportunity to conduct research on the influence of cultural factors and ethnicity on consumer socialisation among children. Mahapatra

and Mishra (2017) also suggest that cultural influences (e.g., population groups) should be investigated to establish the effect on eWOM. Furthermore, Duffett et al. (2020) consider the influence of YT CC on behavioural attitudes between two emerging markets (South Africa and Romania), but did not assess the influence of eWOM. Therefore, to address these gaps in theory, this investigation examines several YT demographic element hypotheses (refer to Figure 1):

- H6 The association between YT organic eWOM and purchase intent (H6a) and purchase (H6b) differs due to gender.
- H7 The association between YT organic eWOM and purchase intent (H7a) and purchase (H7b) differs due to age.
- H8 The association between YT organic eWOM and purchase intent (H8a) and purchase (H8b) differs due to ethnicity.

### **3 Methodology**

#### *3.1 Sample and data collection*

Young Gen Z South African consumers (aged 13–18 years) formed the basis of the research population. A sequential sample method (that included several steps) was employed to select an apt sample of high schools to participate in the study (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The Western Cape Province was purposively used to survey college and high school learners in South Africa. The Education Department's directory in the Western Cape was utilised to choose 22 high schools via systematic sampling. Ethical permission acquired from the Department of Education in the Western Cape, as well as from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. The chosen high schools were contacted via telephone to request permission to conduct the survey, but permission was not received from all high schools, so the next schools on the list were selected as replacements. Self-administered questionnaires were used and a quota of 100 learners from each school and/or college (who had used YT to receive or disseminate organic eWOM) were invited to voluntary partake in the study. An acceptable response rate was achieved, since the researchers were at hand to answer any questions and waited for the completion and submission of the questionnaires, which were administered in class groups. Furthermore, the good response rate was aided by: the brevity of the questionnaire, only closed questions were used, and anonymity was guaranteed (no personal information was collected) (Maree, 2007; Haydam and Mostert, 2018). Consequently, the disadvantage was that there could not be a follow-up and 78 questionnaires were discarded, since they were either incomplete or unusable. Therefore, the total sample included 2,122 Generation Z cohort members, which comprised of high school and college learners in South Africa. Table 2 offers a description of the sample's YT usage and demographic elements.

#### *3.2 Research measures*

The questionnaire (self-completion) comprised of three sections and two filter questions, which were used to determine if the teenagers participated in YT organic eWOM, and

secondly, to confirm that they had not received compensation for doing so. Information was requested about the Generation Z cohort’s YT usage elements via multiple-choice questions in terms of: access, usage length, usage rate, and duration of usage (in hours). The next section collected demographic data regarding gender, age and ethnicity elements. Refer to Table 2 for YT usage and demographic elements’ summary of responses. The final section gathered attitudinal data using three five-point Likert scale statements, which included strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree response options. The YT CC purchase intent and purchase constructs were adapted from Duffett (2015a, 2015b, 2015c) and each of these constructs comprised of four statements. The YT organic eWOM construct comprised of five statements and was adapted from Isaacs et al. (2013). Table 3 summarises of the constructs and Likert scale items.

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics – YT usage and demographic elements

		<i>n</i>	%
Access	Personal computer	339	16.0
	Mobile phone	597	28.1
	PC and mobile phone	1 186	55.9
Usage length	≤ 1 year	241	11.4
	2 years	484	22.8
	3 years	535	25.2
	4 years	394	18.6
	≥ 5 years	468	22.1
Log-on rate	Daily	1 058	49.9
	2–4 times a week	502	23.7
	Once a week	274	12.9
	2–4 times a month	154	7.3
	Once a month	134	6.3
Usage duration	≤ 1 hour	929	43.8
	2 hours	545	25.7
	3 hours	309	14.6
	4 hours	148	7.0
	≥ 5 hours	191	9.0
Gender	Male	1 185	55.8
	Female	937	44.2
Age (years)	13–14	414	19.5
	15–16	890	41.9
	17–18	818	38.5
Ethnicity	White	880	41.5
	Black	387	18.2
	Mixed ancestry	681	32.1
	Indian/Asian	174	8.2

## 4 Data analysis and results

### 4.1 Measurement model

Amos and SPSS were used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis and consider the validity and reliability of the measurement model. The attitudinal constructs' reliability was evaluated via composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ). Table 3 reveals that the CR values for the YT purchase intent, purchases and organic eWOM constructs ranged from 0.844–0.882, and the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values ranged from 0.762–0.806, which surpassed the universally acceptable level of 0.70 mandated by Pallant (2010). Therefore, the three YT attitudinal constructs displayed robust reliability. Convergent validity was examined via an assessment of the three attitudinal constructs' factor loadings' and average variance extracted (AVE) and values, which should exceed 0.5 (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). Table 3 reveals that the AVE values for the YT purchase intent, purchase and organic eWOM constructs ranged from 0.577–0.603, and the factor loadings' values ranged from 0.621–0.899, which exceeded the aforementioned universally acceptable standard, and so were suggestive of convergent validity.

**Table 3** YT CC attitude responses – confirmatory factor analysis

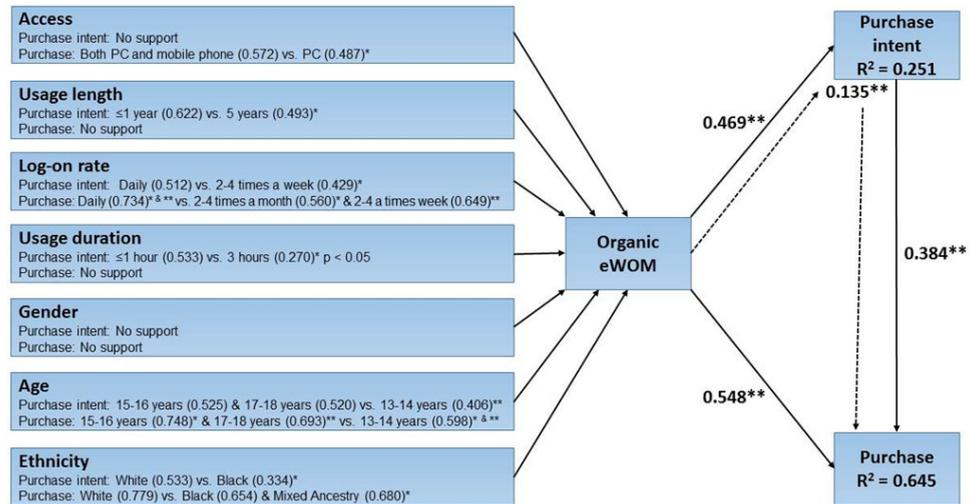
<i>Attitudinal responses</i>	<i>Factor loadings</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></i>
<i>Purchase intention</i>				
I will purchase brands featured on YT in the foreseeable future	0.734	0.577	0.844	0.762
I desire to purchase the brands advertised on YT	0.793			
CC on YT increase intention-to-purchase of featured products	0.846			
CC on YT have a favourable effect on decisions to purchase brands	0.653			
<i>Purchase</i>				
CC on YT increase my loyalty to purchase products	0.621	0.627	0.868	0.806
I purchase brands promoted on YT	0.882			
I utilise a number of brands advertised on YT	0.899			
I buy brands products promoted on YT	0.733			
<i>Organic eWOM</i>				
I repeatedly inform friends about CC seen on YT	0.630	0.603	0.882	0.837
I receive advice about brands through YT	0.778			
I often pass on positive product views via YT	0.883			
I regularly pass on CC information from YT	0.840			
I repeatedly receive YT commercials from friends	0.726			

Fornell and Larcker's (1981) measure was used to examine discriminatory validity via an assessment of the AVE square root for the YT purchase intent, purchase and organic eWOM constructs, which were compared to the constructs' correlation. Table 4 exhibits the three attitudinal construct AVE square root measures and exceed the correlation measures that are suggestive of discriminant validity.

**Table 4** AVE square root and attitude component correlation matrix

Purchase intent	0.760		
Purchase	0.523	0.792	
Organic eWOM	0.406	0.482	0.776

**Figure 2** YT usage and demographic elements impact on the organic eWOM, purchase intent and purchase associations (see online version for colours)



Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.001$ .

A structural equation model was employed to evaluate the YT purchase intent, purchase and organic eWOM construct hypothesis associations, whereas the effect of the YT demographic and usage elements on the purchase intent, purchase and organic eWOM constructs' hypothesis associations were assessed via multi-group SEM. Configural invariance yielded satisfactory goodness-of-fit measures (SRMR = 0.013; RMSEA = 0.006;  $\chi^2/df = 1.069$ ; TLI = 0.999; GFI = 0.994; NFI = 0.992; and CFI = 0.999) when considering the model fit (freely estimated) across several groups. An invariance metric measure was employed to compel the fully constrained and unconstrained models to be equivalent. The  $\chi^2$  test found that the models did not exhibit a significant difference ( $p = 0.644$ ), and therefore invariant. The YT data was collected via self-stated responses from the high school learner respondents, so the  $\chi^2$  test was used to consider the unconstrained versus the constrained common method factor measurement models. The  $\chi^2$  test ascertained a difference at  $p < 0.05$  that shows shared variance, so the unconstrained measurement model was retained. The Cook's distance measure was employed to ascertain if the Generation Z sample displayed any outlying responses, but all exhibited a normal Cook's distance distribution, which lead to the acceptance of all respondent responses. The multi-collinearity measure was used to determine if the YT purchase intent, purchase and organic eWOM constructs showed unacceptable correlation, which would negatively impact the estimate reliability in terms of coefficient regression. Field (2009) proposes that the variation inflation factors should be less than ten and tolerance should be greater than 0.1. The multi-collinearity test revealed that the

attitudinal constructs tolerance and VIF were 0.780 and 1.282 respectively, which verifies that there were not overly high levels of correlation between the constructs.

## 4.2 Hypothesis testing

The significance ( $p$ ), variance ( $R^2$ ), and beta standardised coefficients ( $\beta$ ), regarding the SEM and multi-group SEM analysis of YT organic eWOM and behavioural attitudinal hypothesised associations, are displayed in Figure 2. Additionally, the effect of the YT demographic and usage elements on the organic eWOM and behavioural attitude associations are also exhibited in Figure 2.

The standardised path coefficients revealed the following positive YT associations: organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase intent ( $\beta = 0.501, p < 0.001$ ); organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase ( $\beta = 0.699, p < 0.001$ ); and purchase intent  $\rightarrow$  purchase ( $\beta = 0.384, p < 0.001$ ). Purchase intent was also found to mediate a positive association between organic eWOM and purchase. Hence, all of the YT organic eWOM and behavioural attitudinal association hypotheses (H1a–H1d) were supported. Additionally, YT organic eWOM explained 25.1% of purchase intent's variance and 64.5% of purchase's variance among young consumers (refer to Table 5). No significance difference was found for the organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase intent association in terms of YT access, so H2a was not supported. Organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase association was more positive among Generation Z who accessed YT via both PC and mobile devices ( $\beta = 0.572, p < 0.05$ ) compared to teenagers who accessed YT only by means of PC ( $\beta = 0.487, p < 0.05$ ), which supported H2b. Organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase intent association was more positive among Generation Z who used YT for  $\leq 1$  year ( $\beta = 0.622, p < 0.05$ ) in comparison to young South African consumers who used YT for  $\geq 5$  years ( $\beta = 0.493, p < 0.05$ ), which supported H3a. No significance difference was found for the organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase association, so H3b was not supported. Organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase intent association was more favourable among teenagers who used YT daily ( $\beta = 0.512, p < 0.05$ ) in comparison to those who used this DVSP for  $\geq 5$  years ( $\beta = 0.429, p < 0.05$ ), which supported H4a. Organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase association was more favourable among Generation Z who used YT daily ( $\beta = 0.734, p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.001$ ) versus teenagers who used this DVSP 2–4 times a month ( $\beta = 0.560, p < 0.05$ ) and 2–4 times a week ( $\beta = 0.649, p < 0.001$ ), which supported H4b. Organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase intent association was more positive among teenagers who used YT for  $\leq 1$  hour ( $\beta = 0.533, p < 0.05$ ) in comparison to those who used YT for three hours ( $\beta = 0.270, p < 0.05$ ), which supported H5a. No significance difference was found for the organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase association in terms of YT usage duration, so H5b was not supported. No significance differences were found for the YT organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase intent and organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase associations among young consumers due to gender, so H6a and H6b were not supported. YT organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase intent association was more positive among Generation Z aged 15–16 years ( $\beta = 0.525, p < 0.001$ ) and 17–18 years ( $\beta = 0.520, p < 0.001$ ) in comparison to those aged 13–14 years ( $\beta = 0.406, p < 0.001$ ), which supported H7a. YT organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase association was more positive among Generation Z aged 15–16 years ( $\beta = 0.748, p < 0.05$ ) and 17–18 years ( $\beta = 0.693, p < 0.001$ ) in comparison to those aged 13–14 years ( $\beta = 0.598, p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.001$ ), which supported H7b. YT organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase intent association was more positive among White Generation Z cohort members ( $\beta = 0.533, p < 0.05$ ) in comparison to Black Generation Z

cohort members ( $\beta = 0.334, p < 0.05$ ), which supported *H8a*. YT organic eWOM  $\rightarrow$  purchase association was more positive among White Generation Z cohort members ( $\beta = 0.779, p < 0.05$ ) versus Black ( $\beta = 0.564, p < 0.05$ ) and mixed ancestry ( $\beta = 0.680, p < 0.05$ ) Generation Z cohort members, which supported *H8b* (refer to Table 5).

**Table 5** Hypothesis outcomes

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Significance</i>	<i>Support</i>
H1a: Organic eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase intent	$p < 0.001$	Yes
H1b: Organic eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase	$p < 0.001$	Yes
H1c: Purchase intent $\rightarrow$ purchase	$p < 0.001$	Yes
H1d: Purchase intent mediates between organic eWOM and purchase	$P < 0.001$	Yes
H2a: Access – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase intent	-	No
H2b: Access – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase	$p < 0.05$	Yes
H3a: Usage length – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase intent	$P < 0.05$	Yes
H3b: Usage length – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase	-	No
H4a: Log-on rate – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase intent	$P < 0.05$	Yes
H4b: Log-on rate – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase	$p < 0.001, p < 0.05$	Yes
H5a: Usage duration – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase intent	$P < 0.05$	Yes
H5b: Usage duration – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase	-	No
H6a: Gender – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase intent	-	No
H6b: Gender – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase	-	No
H7a: Age – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase intent	$P < 0.001$	Yes
H7b: Age – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase	$p < 0.001, p < 0.05$	Yes
H8a: Ethnicity – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase intent	$p < 0.05$	Yes
H8b: Ethnicity – eWOM $\rightarrow$ purchase	$P < 0.05$	Yes

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 YT organic eWOM and behavioural attitudinal associations

The findings revealed that YT organic eWOM was positively associated with purchase intent and purchase in South Africa. Additionally, purchase intent mediated the association between YT organic eWOM and purchase, and purchase intent was positively associated with purchase. These findings come as no surprise, since young consumers continually view YT videos and CC, which are often shared, reviewed, liked, and recommended via eWOM (Smith, 2019; García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ramón, 2021). The findings are further supported by several studies. Westenberg (2016) reveals that Generation Z cohort members purchase products owing to YT influencers' recommendations among 20 Dutch teenagers. Viertola (2018) establish that YT influencers have some influence on Generation Z's purchase decisions among seven Finnish teenagers, but was limited, since young consumers were skeptical or distrustful of

product reviews owing to the cooperation with organisations and their brands. Chen and Dermawan (2020) showed that 10 young consumers purchased products based on the recommendations of YouTubers in Indonesia. The aforementioned studies focused on YT influencers, YouTubers and/or celebrity endorsers, but did not quantitatively assess purchase in terms of organic eWOM.

### *5.2 YT usage elements influence on organic eWOM and behavioural attitude associations*

Over 70% of YT viewers use mobile devices to access this DVSP. Younger generational cohorts are susceptible to mobile CC since the use of the ever-present smartphones and other mobile devices are used to make purchases and interact with the rest of world (Smith, 2019, YouTube, 2021b). Hence, it is a rational supposition that young consumers who accessed YT via both PC and mobile devices resulted in a more favourable organic eWOM → purchase association than those who only used a PC. Duffett (2016) and Duffett (2017) confirm that South African Generation Z members exhibit more positive consumer attitudes when viewing social media CC via mobile devices.

The study ascertained that teenagers who were inexperienced in the use of YT showed a more positive organic eWOM → purchase intent association than those who had used this DVSP for longer periods. Lesame (2013) and Petzer and Meyer (2013) suggest that a number of young South African consumers only receive smartphones when their families can afford to provide them with this luxury due to the economic limitations of an African developing country, which results in a delay of access to social media. Several eWOM-related studies only considered usage length as a descriptive measure (Wang et al., 2016; Wallace et al., 2017).

The findings showed that organic eWOM had positive effect on purchase intent and purchase on young consumers who use YT with a higher frequency. The study's findings are supported by Baramidze (2018) who confirm that Generation Z teenagers who use to YT daily exhibit more favourable attitudes due to their association with influencers and celebrity endorsers. Other inquiries examined log-on rate/frequency as a descriptive sample statistics (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Tien et al., 2019), but did not conduct cross-tabulation regarding this independent element.

The investigation showed that teenagers who spend briefer periods on YT were more likely to have a favourable organic eWOM → purchase intent relationship. The Generation Z cohort are notorious for having short attention spans, especially in terms of reading, which may include comments and product reviews received from their affiliates (Smith, 2019). Baramidze (2018), Lee and Choi (2019), and Tien et al. (2019) also considered usage duration, but only as a descriptive element, so this investigation fulfils this research gap.

### *5.3 YT demographic elements influence on organic eWOM and behavioural attitude associations*

Gender showed no effect on the YT organic eWOM and behavioural attitudinal relationships among the South African Gen Z cohort. Several other studies ascertained that gender did not have an effect on eWOM and attitudes on various digital interactive media platforms (Abubakar et al., 2016; Gallant and Arcand, 2017).

Older teenagers displayed more positive YT organic eWOM and behavioural attitudinal associations in comparison to their younger counterparts. Older teenagers generally have more monetary means to purchase products, which were recommended via eWOM channels. Several studies suggest heterogeneity within generational cohorts due to differing life stages that may include such as employment, discretionary income and education level (Bolton et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2017). Duffett et al. (2019a, 2019b) found that older South Africa and Romanian Generation Y respondents display more positive consumer attitudes in response to YT CC, but none of these studies explored Gen Z's behavioural influences in terms of organic eWOM.

White Generation Z cohort members showed more favourable YT organic eWOM and conative relationships than Black and/or mixed ancestry respondents. A vast majority of previously disadvantage individuals (PDI) (mixed ancestry, Black and Indian/Asian) were negatively affected by the apartheid. The income per capita for many PDI might still be lower than some of their White counterparts due to lower education and job opportunities owing to the historical inequalities. Hence, some of the PDI teenagers might not have the finances to consider the purchase product and brand mentions, likes and comments viewed in YT organic eWOM (Petzer and Meyer, 2013; Dovey et al., 2018). This is one of the first studies that considers the influences of ethnicity in terms of organic YT eWOM, whereas other studies only consider cultural or population groups as descriptive elements (Feng and Xie, 2018; Zaitceva, 2018).

## **6 Conclusions and implications**

Young consumers typically share and discuss information about their purchases on digital interactive platforms, which serve as online recommendations, and may result in greater purchase intentions and trust among family, friends and peers (Mishra et al., 2018). Therefore, a greater understanding of young consumers' attitudes towards the organic eWOM and behavioural attitude relationships are very important. Several recent investigations examined eWOM in terms of YT influencers (Chen and Dermawan, 2020; Rosara and Luthfia, 2020; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Muda and Hamzah, 2021), but did not consider the influence of YT organic eWOM on purchase. This study concluded that YT organic eWOM favourably affected purchase intent and purchase among Gen Z consumers in an African emerging economy.

From a practical implication viewpoint, marketers should strive to develop creative, personalised, entertaining and informative YT CC content, which could stimulate engagement among young consumers. The Generation Z cohort expects seamless information and product/brand flow in terms of online realms when considering purchase decisions that can be facilitated by eWOM. Hence, organisations could use promotional tactics that actively encourage Generation Z consumers to create positive UGC, like, comment and disseminate YT content. For example, a brand could run a competition where consumers are required to create a short video, which shows them enjoying the brand with their friends, and then post it on YT. The consumers should further be encouraged to canvas likes and comments from their affiliates. The most creative videos and those with the most likes would win prizes. Innovative YT promotional tactics can stimulate a significant amount of organic eWOM and achieve positive purchase intent and purchase sentiment among young consumers.

Organisations should also take into consideration that teenagers have short attention spans, especially in terms of reading, but have much longer attention spans for interactive activities such as watching videos (Smith, 2019). Accordingly, this research ascertained that teenagers who accessed YT via both personal computers and mobile, were new YT users, logged on to YT daily, used YT for shorter periods of time, older aged teenagers, and were from the White ethnic group in South Africa exhibited the most favourable YT organic eWOM → purchase intent and purchase relationships. Previous studies only considered these usage and demographic elements as descriptive statistics. Hence, these independent elements can be used by organisations to develop more targeted and effective YT CC, which can be measured by YT's detailed metrics and analytical tools (YouTube, 2021a).

From a theoretical viewpoint, the aforementioned results make a notable contribution to the HEM and TRA theoretical frameworks in terms of the YT organic eWOM and purchase intent and purchase associations, especially since YT organic eWOM was previously not considered from an African country perspective. Additionally, the effect of purchase (as an antecedent from a global viewpoint) was not previously considered in relation to YT organic eWOM and purchase intent. Furthermore, there is general research lack on the cross-tabulation of YT usage and demographic elements (i.e., as independent elements) regarding the HEM and TRA theoretical frameworks.

In summary, this study addresses several of the aforementioned research gaps by providing new insight into the use of YT as an effective organic eWOM mechanism from an African emerging economy viewpoint. The investigation also provides significant evidence that YT organic eWOM favourable influences purchase intention and purchase attitudes among the Gen Z cohort in South Africa.

## **7 Limitations and directions for additional inquiry**

This research has several limitations that provide the opportunity for additional investigation regarding eWOM, YT and CC among different social media conduits, cohorts and countries. The research was implemented in a solitary emerging African country, whereas further research could determine if similar YT organic eWOM and behavioural attitudinal associations, and usage and demographic elements influences are evident in other countries (developed and developing). Only the Generation Z cohort was examined, while further inquiry could survey different generations to establish if heterogeneity is also evident among the other cohorts, namely Generation Y and X. YT was the sole social medium considered in this study, whereas different social media channels warrant further investigation to ascertain if similar organic eWOM and behavioural attitudinal associations are evident. The study used a quantitative survey to gather the data, whereas future inquiry could consider qualitative and longitudinal research approaches. Finally, Baramidze (2018) notes that the influence of additional independent elements (for example income, occupation and education) could also be explored in terms of the aforementioned associations.

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