

A conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour

by

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I declare that A CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED THEORETICAL MODEL FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE

Mrs J Hanekom

.....

DATE

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I humbly acknowledge that by myself I can do nothing and that this is only possible through Him who gives me strength.

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ABSTRACT

The study addresses the limited and fragmented approaches of consumer behaviour studies in the existing literature and a lack of comprehensive integrated theoretical models of online consumer behaviour. The aim of the study is to propose a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour which suggests a deviation from the existing purchasing approaches to consumer behaviour - hence a move towards an understanding of consumer behaviour in terms of two new approaches, namely the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, is proposed.

The study addresses two main research problems, namely that inadequate knowledge and information exist on online consumers' behavioural processes, especially their internal psychological behavioural processes during their exposure to web-based communication messages and their progression through the complete web-based communication experience; and that there is no conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour in the literature.

This study, firstly, allows for systematic theoretical exploration, description, interpretation and integration of existing literature and theory on offline and online consumer behaviour including the following: theoretical perspectives and approaches; determinants; decision making; consumer information processing and response; and theoretical foundations. This systematic theoretical exploration and description of consumer behaviour literature and theory commences with the contextualisation and proposal of a new definition, perspective and theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour; the discussion and analysis of the theory of the determinants of consumer behaviour; the discussion and analysis of decision-making theory; the proposition of a new online information decision-making perspective and model; the discussion and analysis of consumer information-processing and response theory and models; the discussion and analysis of the theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour; and the identification of theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour.

Secondly, the study develops a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour, thereby theoretically grounding online consumer behavioural processes in the context of internal psychological behavioural processes and exposure to web-based communication messages. It is hence posited that the study provides a more precise understanding of online consumers' complicated internal cognitive and psychological behavioural processes in their interactive search for and experience of online web-based communication and information, which can be seen as a major contribution to the field of study.

KEYWORDS

Consumer behaviour, online consumer behaviour, consumer behaviour perspectives, consumer behaviour approaches, determinants of consumer behaviour, consumer decision making, consumer information processing and response, consumer behaviour theory, consumer behaviour models, web-based communication exposure approach, internal psychological behavioural processes approach

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie spreek bestaande gefragmenteerde benaderings van verbruikersgedragstudies in bestaande literatuur aan, asook die tekort aan voldoende, geïntegreerde teoretiese modelle van aanlynverbruikersgedrag. Die doel van die studie is om 'n konseptuele geïntegreerde teoretiese model vir aanlynverbruikersgedrag voor te stel, wat 'n afwyking vanaf bestaande aankoopbenaderings tot verbruikersgedrag aandui - dus word die verduideliking van verbruikersgedrag vanuit twee nuwe benaderings, naamlik die webgebaseerde kommunikasieblootstellingsbenadering en die interne psigologiese gedragsprosessebenadering, voorgestel.

Die studie spreek twee primêre navorsingsprobleme aan, naamlik, dat onvoldoende kennis en inligting bestaan oor aanlynverbruikersgedragsprosesse, veral hulle interne psigologiese gedragsprosesse wanneer hulle aan webgebaseerde kommunikasieboodskappe blootgestel word en deur die totale webgebaseerde ondervinding vorder; en dat geen konseptuele geïntegreerde teoretiese model vir aanlynverbruikersgedrag in die literatuur bestaan nie.

Dit is om hierdie redes dat die studie dus eerstens voorsiening maak vir sistematiese teoretiese beskrywings, interpretasies en integrasie van bestaande literatuur en teorie van aflyn- en aanlynverbruikersgedrag, insluitend die volgende: teoretiese perspektiewe en benaderings; determinante; besluitneming; verbruikersinligtingsprosessering- en respons; en teoretiese grondslae. Hierdie sistematiese teoretiese beskrywing van verbruikersgedragliteratuur- en teorie begin met die kontekstualisering en voorstel van 'n nuwe definisie, perspektief en teoretiese benaderings tot aanlynverbruikersgedrag; die bespreking en analise van die teorie van die determinante van verbruikersgedrag; die bespreking en analise van besluitnemingsteorie; die voorstel van 'n nuwe aanlyn inligtingsbesluitnemingsperspektief- en model; die bespreking en analise van verbruikersinligtingsprosessering- en responsteorie en modelle; die bespreking en analise van die teoretiese grondslae van verbruikersgedrag; en die identifisering van teoretiese kriteria vir aanlynverbruikersgedrag.

Die studie ontwikkel tweedens 'n konseptuele geïntegreerde teoretiese model vir aanlynverbruikersgedrag waardeur aanlynverbruikersgedragsprosesse teoreties begrond word in die konteks van interne psigologiese gedragsprosesse en blootstelling aan webgebaseerde kommunikasieboodskappe. Dit word derhalwe voorgestel dat die studie 'n meer voldoende begrip van aanlyn verbruikers se komplekse, interne kognitiewe en psigologiese gedragsprosesse in hul interaktiewe soeke na en ervaring van aanlyn webgebaseerde kommunikasie en inligting, teweeg bring, wat beskou kan word as 'n belangrike bydrae tot die studieveld.

SLEUTEWORDE

Verbruikersgedrag, aanlynverbruikersgedrag, verbruikersgedragsperspektiewe, verbruikersgedragsbenaderings, determinante van verbruikersgedrag, verbruikersbesluitneming, verbruikersinligtingsprosessering- en response, verbruikersgedragsteorie, verbruikersgedragsmodelle, webgebaseerde kommunikasieblootstellingsbenadering, interne psigologiese gedragsprosessebenadering

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
LIST OF TABLES	xvii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	1
1.1.1 Background	1
1.1.2 Purpose of the study	4
1.1.3 Relevance of the study and relation to the discipline of communication	7
1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY	9
1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	16
1.3.1 The primary research objective	16
1.3.2 Secondary research objectives	16
1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN	20
1.4.1 Type of study	20
1.4.1.1 <i>Exploratory research</i>	20
1.4.1.2 <i>Descriptive research</i>	21
1.4.2 Qualitative research paradigm	22
1.4.3 Research methodology	23
1.4.3.1 <i>Literature review</i>	23
1.5 ANTICIPATED FINDINGS	23
1.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	24
1.7 CONCLUSION	24
CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALISATION OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: PROPOSED WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION EXPOSURE AND INTERNAL PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOURAL PROCESSES APPROACHES	

2.1	INTRODUCTION	26
2.2	CONTEXTUALISING AND DEFINING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	27
2.2.1	Contextualising and defining the study of consumer behaviour	27
2.2.2	Defining consumer behaviour: existing offline perspectives	29
2.2.3	Defining consumer behaviour: existing online perspectives	31
2.2.4	Online consumer behaviour: a proposed new contextualisation and definition	34
2.3	APPROACHES TO CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	35
2.3.1	Existing approaches to consumer behaviour	39
2.3.1.1	<i>The managerial approach</i>	39
2.3.1.2	<i>The holistic approach</i>	40
2.3.2	New theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour	41
2.3.2.1	<i>The web-based communication exposure approach</i>	42
2.3.2.2	<i>The internal psychological behavioural processes approach</i>	46
2.4	CONCLUSION	74
 CHAPTER 3: DETERMINANTS OF OFFLINE AND ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR		
3.1	INTRODUCTION	76
3.2	CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE DETERMINANTS OF OFFLINE AND ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND DEFINITIONS	77
3.2.1	Contextualisation	77
3.2.2	Definition of the determinants of online consumer behaviour	80
3.3	INTERNAL DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	82
3.3.1	Motivation as internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour	82
3.3.1.1	<i>Types of motive</i>	84
3.3.1.2	<i>Goals</i>	84
3.3.2	Personality as an internal determinant of offline and online	

	consumer behaviour	86
3.3.2.1	<i>Personality traits</i>	87
3.3.2.2	<i>Self-concept, self-esteem and self-image as determinants of personality</i>	90
3.3.3	Perception as an internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour	92
3.3.4	Learning as an internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour	95
3.3.4.1	<i>Cognitive learning</i>	97
3.3.4.2	<i>High and low information processing and involvement learning</i>	99
3.3.5	Attitude as an internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour	100
3.4	EXTERNAL DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	102
3.4.1	Reference groups and family as external determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour	102
3.4.2	Social class as an external determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour	105
3.4.3	Culture as an external determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour	105
3.4.4	Subculture as an external determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour	107
3.5	APPLICATION OF THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TO THE ONLINE CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY	108
3.6	UNIQUE DETERMINANTS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	110
3.6.1	Trust	111
3.6.2	Consumer familiarity, technology acceptance, prior interaction and technology attitude	113
3.6.3	Functional, symbolic and experiential benefits	114
3.6.4	The total web experience	116
3.6.5	Emotional and cognitive responses, perceived control,	

	concentration, attention focus and message involvement	117
3.6.6	Usability	119
3.7	CONCLUSION	120
CHAPTER 4: CONSUMER DECISION MAKING: TOWARDS AN ONLINE INFORMATION DECISION-MAKING PERSPECTIVE		
4.1	INTRODUCTION	121
4.2	DEFINING CONSUMER DECISION MAKING: EXISTING OFFLINE PERSPECTIVES	122
4.3	CATEGORIES AND STRATEGIES OF CONSUMER DECISIONS: EXISTING OFFLINE PERSPECTIVES	124
4.4	EXISTING OFFLINE CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING MODELS AND THEORIES	129
4.4.1	The schematic general model of a decision matrix	132
4.4.2	Stochastic models of consumer choice behaviour	133
4.4.3	An interaction framework of consumer decision making	134
4.4.4	An integrative framework for constructive choice processes	136
4.4.5	A basic model of complex decision making	137
4.4.6	Analysis and application of the existing offline consumer decision-making models and theories to the online context	139
4.5	CONTEXTUALISING AND DEFINING ONLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION DECISION MAKING: A NEW PROPOSED PERSPECTIVE	141
4.6	THE ONLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION DECISION- MAKING PROCESS	144
4.6.1	Determinants of the online consumer information decision-making process	145
4.6.1.1	<i>Individual differences</i>	146
4.6.1.2	<i>Environmental influences</i>	148
4.6.1.3	<i>Psychological processes</i>	149
4.6.1.4	<i>Online atmospherics</i>	151
4.6.2	A proposed online consumer information decision- making model	153

4.6.2.1	<i>Stage 1: the input stage</i>	155
4.6.2.2	<i>Stage 2: processing</i>	160
4.6.2.3	<i>Stage 3: the output stage</i>	163
4.7	CONCLUSION	165
CHAPTER 5: CONSUMER INFORMATION PROCESSING AND RESPONSE: OFFLINE AND ONLINE PERSPECTIVES		
5.1	INTRODUCTION	167
5.2	CONCEPTUALISING CONSUMER INFORMATION PROCESSING AND RESPONSE	168
5.3	THE CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CONSUMER INFORMATION-PROCESSING AND RESPONSE MODELS AND THEORY	172
5.4	TRADITIONAL OFFLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION-PROCESSING AND RESPONSE MODELS	174
5.4.1	The traditional sequential paradigm	176
5.4.1.1	<i>The AIDA model</i>	179
5.4.1.2	<i>The hierarchy of effects model</i>	182
5.4.1.3	<i>The innovation adoption model</i>	184
5.4.1.4	<i>The information-processing model</i>	186
5.4.2	The factorial variability paradigm	188
5.4.2.1	<i>The three-orders model of information processing</i>	188
5.4.2.2	<i>The FCB planning model</i>	192
5.4.2.3	<i>The integrated information response model</i>	196
5.4.3	The inclusive facets paradigm	200
5.4.3.1	<i>The association model of the advertising communication process</i>	200
5.4.3.2	<i>The facets model of effects</i>	207
5.4.4	The elaboration likelihood model	215
5.5	A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ONLINE CONSUMER RESPONSE	219
5.5.1	Pre-exposure level	223
5.5.2	Exposure level	224

5.5.3	Perception level	224
5.5.4	Cognitive level	225
5.5.5	Interactive level	227
5.5.6	Affective/emotional level	228
5.5.7	Decision-making level	229
5.5.8	Conative/behavioural level	230
5.6	THE INTERNAL CONSUMER RESPONSE PROCESS: AN INTEGRATED CONCEPTUAL MODEL	232
5.7	CONCLUSION	240

**CHAPTER 6: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CONSUMER
BEHAVIOUR: OFFLINE AND ONLINE PERSPECTIVES**

6.1	INTRODUCTION	241
6.2	ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: A PURCHASING PERSPECTIVE	242
6.3	THE THEORY OF REASONED ACTION AND ITS EXTENSIONS: OFFLINE FOUNDATIONS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	246
6.3.1	The theoretical model of behavioural intention prediction and factors influencing intention-behaviour relations	249
6.3.3.1	<i>Attitudes</i>	250
6.3.2	The theoretical model of behavioural prediction	252
6.3.3	Normative beliefs and attitudes as determinants of behavioural intentions	253
6.3.4	The attribution of responsibility	254
6.4	THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR: AN OFFLINE FOUNDATION OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	255
6.4.1	Boundary conditions and behavioural prediction	256
6.4.2	Behavioural control and aggregation	257
6.4.3	Behavioural intention	258
6.4.4	Beliefs	259
6.5	THE TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL (TAM): AN	

	ONLINE FOUNDATION OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	259
6.5.1	Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use	261
6.5.2	Theoretical extensions of TAM	262
6.5.2.1	<i>TAM 2</i>	263
6.5.2.2	<i>TAM 3</i>	265
6.6	APPLICATION OF THE EXISTING OFFLINE AND ONLINE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TO THE ONLINE CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY	268
6.6.1	Analysis and application of the theory of reasoned action and its extensions	268
6.6.2	Analysis and application of the theory of planned behaviour	270
6.6.3	Analysis and application of TAM and its extensions	271
6.7	CONCLUSION	273
 CHAPTER 7: THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR		
7.1	INTRODUCTION	274
7.2	A SUMMARY OF THE SECONDARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES IN RELATION TO THE MAIN THEORETICAL CRITERIA	275
7.3	THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR FROM THE WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION EXPOSURE AND INTERNAL PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOURAL PROCESSES APPROACHES	279
7.3.1	A new perspective on online consumer behaviour based on existing offline and online perspectives	282
7.3.2	Online consumer behaviour: a proposed web-based communication exposure approach	284
7.3.3	Online consumer behaviour: a proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach	285
7.3.3.1	<i>Preinformation acquisition perception attributes</i>	286

7.3.3.2	<i>Preinformation acquisition consumer attitudinal attributes</i>	286
7.3.3.3	<i>Postinformation acquisition consumer attitudes</i>	287
7.3.3.4	<i>Emotion and reason as motivation for online consumer behaviour</i>	287
7.3.3.5	<i>The communication of emotion and reason</i>	287
7.3.3.6	<i>Forms of emotion</i>	287
7.3.3.7	<i>Consumer motivation</i>	288
7.3.3.8	<i>Factors affecting motivation</i>	288
7.3.3.9	<i>Consumer ability</i>	289
7.3.3.10	<i>Exposure</i>	289
7.3.3.11	<i>Attention</i>	289
7.3.3.12	<i>Perception</i>	289
7.3.3.13	<i>Knowledge and understanding</i>	290
7.3.3.14	<i>Attitude formation</i>	290
7.3.3.15	<i>Consumer memory and retrieval</i>	292
7.4	THEORETICAL CRITERIA OF THE DETERMINANTS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	293
7.4.1	The determinants of online consumer behaviour contextualised	295
7.4.2	Internal determinants of online consumer behaviour	295
7.4.2.1	<i>Motivation</i>	296
7.4.2.2	<i>Personality</i>	297
7.4.2.3	<i>Perception</i>	299
7.4.2.4	<i>Learning</i>	300
7.4.2.5	<i>Attitude</i>	302
7.4.3	External determinants of online consumer behaviour	302
7.4.3.1	<i>Reference group and family</i>	303
7.4.3.2	<i>Social class</i>	303
7.4.3.3	<i>Culture</i>	303
7.4.3.4	<i>Subculture</i>	304
7.4.4	Online determinants of online consumer behaviour	304
7.4.4.1	<i>Trust</i>	304

7.4.4.2	<i>Web-based communication familiarity, prior interaction, technology acceptance and technology attitude</i>	305
7.4.4.3	<i>Symbolic and experiential benefits</i>	306
7.4.4.4	<i>The total web experience</i>	306
7.4.4.5	<i>Emotional and cognitive responses, perceived control, concentration, attention focus and message involvement</i>	307
7.4.4.6	<i>Usability</i>	307
7.5	THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION DECISION MAKING	308
7.5.1	Online consumer information decision making defined	310
7.5.2	Online consumer decision-making categories and strategies	311
7.5.3	Consumer decision-making theory	313
7.5.3.1	<i>The schematic decision matrix</i>	313
7.5.3.2	<i>Stochastic consumer choice behaviour</i>	314
7.5.3.3	<i>Interaction framework of consumer decision making</i>	314
7.5.3.4	<i>Constructive choice processes</i>	315
7.5.3.5	<i>Complex decision making</i>	316
7.5.4	Determinants of online consumer information decision making	317
7.5.4.1	<i>Individual differences</i>	317
7.5.4.2	<i>Environmental influences</i>	317
7.5.4.3	<i>Psychological processes</i>	318
7.5.4.4	<i>Online atmospherics</i>	318
7.5.5	Online consumer information decision making	319
7.5.5.1	<i>Need recognition</i>	319
7.5.5.2	<i>Search for information</i>	320
7.5.5.3	<i>Pre-evaluation of message alternatives</i>	320
7.5.5.4	<i>Message acceptance</i>	321
7.5.5.5	<i>Message consumption/processing</i>	321

7.5.5.6	<i>Postmessage consumption evaluation/ postinformational consumption evaluation</i>	321
7.6	THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION PROCESSING AND RESPONSE	322
7.6.1	Online consumer information processing and response	326
7.6.1.1	<i>Pre-exposure</i>	327
7.6.1.2	<i>Web-based communication exposure</i>	328
7.6.1.3	<i>Perception</i>	329
7.6.1.4	<i>Cognition</i>	330
7.6.1.5	<i>Interaction</i>	331
7.6.1.6	<i>Affection</i>	332
7.6.1.7	<i>Decision making</i>	333
7.6.1.8	<i>Conation</i>	334
7.6.2	Determinants of online consumer information processing and response	335
7.7	THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	337
7.7.1	Offline and online theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour	339
7.7.1.1	<i>Individual reasoned action</i>	340
7.7.1.2	<i>Behavioural intention prediction</i>	341
7.7.1.3	<i>Factors influencing behavioural intentions and the attribution of responsibility</i>	342
7.7.1.4	<i>Planned behaviour</i>	343
7.7.1.5	<i>Technology acceptance</i>	344
7.8	CONCLUSION	345
 CHAPTER 8: A CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED THEORETICAL MODEL FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR		
8.1	INTRODUCTION	347
8.2	A CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED THEORETICAL MODEL FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	348
8.3	ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	351

8.4	DETERMINANTS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	355
8.4.1	Internal determinants of online consumer behaviour	355
8.4.1.1	<i>Psychological processes</i>	357
8.4.1.2	<i>Individual differences</i>	357
8.4.1.3	<i>Personality</i>	358
8.4.1.4	<i>Attitude</i>	359
8.4.1.5	<i>Personal normative beliefs</i>	360
8.4.1.6	<i>Social normative beliefs</i>	360
8.4.1.7	<i>Ability</i>	360
8.4.1.8	<i>Factors affecting motivation</i>	360
8.4.1.9	<i>Informational motivations</i>	361
8.4.1.10	<i>Awareness level</i>	361
8.4.2	External determinants of online consumer behaviour	361
8.4.2.1	<i>Culture</i>	362
8.4.2.2	<i>Subculture</i>	362
8.4.2.3	<i>Social class</i>	362
8.4.2.4	<i>Reference group and family</i>	363
8.4.2.5	<i>Social influence processes</i>	363
8.4.2.6	<i>Situation behaviours</i>	363
8.4.2.7	<i>Availability of information</i>	363
8.4.2.8	<i>Dependence of behaviour on the cooperation of significant others</i>	364
8.4.3	Online determinants of online consumer behaviour	364
8.4.3.1	<i>System and information trust</i>	365
8.4.3.2	<i>Web-based communication familiarity</i>	366
8.4.3.3	<i>Prior interaction</i>	366
8.4.3.4	<i>Technology acceptance</i>	366
8.4.3.5	<i>Technology attitude</i>	366
8.4.3.6	<i>Symbolic and experiential benefits</i>	366
8.4.3.7	<i>Emotional and cognitive responses</i>	367
8.4.3.8	<i>Perceived consumer control</i>	367
8.4.3.9	<i>Attention focus and concentration</i>	367
8.4.3.10	<i>Message involvement</i>	367

8.4.3.11	<i>Usability</i>	368
8.4.3.12	<i>Online atmospherics</i>	368
8.4.3.13	<i>Perceived risk</i>	368
8.4.3.14	<i>Exposure conditions</i>	368
8.4.3.15	<i>Characteristics of online stimuli</i>	368
8.5	THE COMPLETE WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE	369
8.5.1	Interaction	370
8.5.2	Information search	372
8.5.3	Information access	373
8.5.4	Information gathering	373
8.5.5	Information pull and regulation	373
8.5.6	Information evaluation	373
8.5.7	Information consumption	374
8.6	THE WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION EXPOSURE PROCESS	374
8.6.1	Pre-exposure	376
8.6.2	Input	376
8.6.2.1	<i>Need recognition</i>	376
8.6.2.2	<i>Search for information</i>	377
8.6.3	Web-based communication and information exposure	377
8.6.4	Attention	378
8.6.5	Pre-evaluation of message alternatives	378
8.6.6	Behavioural intention prediction	379
8.6.7	Technology acceptance	379
8.6.8	Cognitive instrumental predictive processes	380
8.6.9	Individual reasoned action	380
8.7	THE INTERNAL PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOURAL PROCESS	381
8.7.1	Perception	382
8.7.1.1	<i>Preinformation acquisition perception attributes</i>	383
8.7.1.2	<i>Online consumer perceptual phase progression</i>	383
8.7.2	Attitude formation	384

8.7.2.1	<i>Preinformation acquisition consumer attitudinal attributes</i>	384
8.7.2.2	<i>Attitude formation process</i>	385
8.7.3	Emotion and reason	386
8.7.3.1	<i>The communication process of emotion and reason</i>	386
8.7.3.2	<i>Forms of emotion</i>	387
8.7.4	Motivation formation	387
8.7.5	Affection	388
8.8	THE COGNITIVE INFORMATION-PROCESSING AND RESPONSE PROCESS	388
8.8.1	Cognitive behavioural phase	390
8.8.2	Learning	390
8.8.2.1	<i>Types of learning process</i>	391
8.8.3	Knowledge and understanding	392
8.8.4	Memory and retrieval	392
8.9	THE INFORMATION DECISION-MAKING PROCESS	393
8.9.1	Decision strategies	394
8.9.2	Schematic decision matrix	396
8.9.3	Stochastic choice behaviour	397
8.9.4	Interaction framework of consumer decision making	397
8.9.5	Constructive choice phase	398
8.9.6	Complex decision making	398
8.9.7	Decision phases	398
8.10	THE OUTPUT PROCESS	399
8.10.1	Web-based communication message acceptance	400
8.10.2	Comprehension	400
8.10.3	Postinformation acquisition consumer attitudes	400
8.10.4	Postmessage consumption and informational evaluation	401
8.10.5	Conation	401
8.11	SUMMARY OF THE MAIN ARGUMENTS THAT FLOW FROM THE PROPOSED MODEL	402
8.12	CONCLUSION	403

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION		
9.1	INTRODUCTION	405
9.2	MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS RELATING TO THE SECONDARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	405
9.2.1	The concept of online consumer behaviour	406
9.2.2	Online consumer behaviour: proposed theoretical approaches	408
9.2.3	Determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour	409
9.2.4	Consumer decision making	411
9.2.5	An online consumer information decision-making perspective and model	412
9.2.6	Consumer information processing and response	413
9.2.7	Theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour: offline and online perspectives	414
9.2.8	Theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour	415
9.3	THE CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED THEORETICAL MODEL FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	416
9.4	CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY	418
9.5	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	421
9.6	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	421
	LIST OF SOURCES	423

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
Figure 2.1	Approaches to consumer behaviour	36
Figure 2.2	Contextualisation of online consumer behaviour in terms of the newly proposed approaches and main theoretical constructs which will form the basis for the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour	42
Figure 4.1	A chronological depiction of the most relevant existing offline consumer decision-making models and theories	131
Figure 4.2	A model for online consumer information decision making	154
Figure 5.1	The chronological development of consumer Information- processing and response models and theories	173
Figure 5.2	Hanekom and Barker’s (2009:142) three-order paradigmatic consumer response model categorisation	176
Figure 5.3	A summarised graphical depiction of the traditional response hierarchy models adapted from Belch and Belch (2012:155)	178
Figure 5.4	Alternative response hierarchies: the three-order model of information processing adapted from Belch and Belch (2012:160)	189
Figure 5.5	Vaughn’s (1980) FCB grid adapted from Belch and Belch (2012:164)	193
Figure 5.6	Smith and Swinyard’s (1982) integrated information response model adapted from Belch and Belch (2001:156)	197
Figure 5.7	Preston’s (1982:4) association model of the	

	advertising communication process	201
Figure 5.8	Moriarty et al's (2009:109) facets model of effects	208
Figure 5.9	The elaboration likelihood model adapted from Belch and Belch (2012:167)	216
Figure 5.10	A theoretical framework for online consumer response (Hanekom 2006:187)	223
Figure 5.11	The integrated marketing communication internal consumer response model (Hanekom & Barker 2009:157)	239
Figure 6.1	The theory of reasoned action (Davis et al 1989:984)	246
Figure 6.2	The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991:182)	255
Figure 6.3	TAM (Venkatesh & Bala 2008:276)	260
Figure 6.4	TAM 2 (Venkatesh & Davis 2000:188)	263
Figure 6.5	TAM 3 (Venkatesh & Bala 2008:280)	266
Figure 8.1	A conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour	350
Figure 8.2	The internal determinants of online consumer behaviour	356
Figure 8.3	External determinants of online consumer behaviour	362
Figure 8.4	Online determinants of online consumer behaviour	364
Figure 8.5	The complete web-based communication experience	370
Figure 8.6	The web-based communication exposure process	375
Figure 8.7	The internal psychological behavioural process	381
Figure 8.8	The cognitive information-processing and response process	389
Figure 8.9	The information decision-making process	394
Figure 8.10	The output process	399

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
Table 1.1	The alignment and integration of the secondary research objectives, key theoretical concepts, theoretical perspectives, major theoretical approaches and chapters	17
Table 2.1	Existing approaches and perspectives and proposed new approaches to consumer behaviour	37
Table 3.1	Internal, external and unique online determinants of consumer behaviour	81
Table 3.2	The influence of the internal and external determinants on online consumer behaviour	108
Table 4.1	The determinants of online consumer information decision making	145
Table 5.1	Strong's (1925) varying depictions of the mental processes of buyer response represented by the AIDA model	179
Table 6.1	A chronological summary of online consumer behaviour authors and their key theoretical consumer behaviour constructs from a purchasing context	243
Table 6.2	A summary of the key theoretical constructs of the theory of reasoned action	247
Table 7.1	Summary of the secondary research objectives in relation to the main theoretical criteria, theoretical perspectives, theoretical approaches and main theoretical criteria/variables/constructs of online consumer behaviour	276
Table 7.2	Theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes	

	approaches	279
Table 7.3	Theoretical criteria of the determinants of online consumer behaviour	293
Table 7.4	Theoretical criteria for online consumer information decision making	308
Table 7.5	Theoretical criteria for online consumer information processing and response	322
Table 7.6	Determinants of online consumer information processing and response	335
Table 7.7	Theoretical criteria for the theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour	334

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

1.1.1 Background

The study of consumer behaviour is usually multi- and cross-disciplinary (Taylor & Strutton 2009), and there is limited knowledge and literature on online consumer behaviour. Online consumer behaviour is regarded as a complex sociotechnical phenomenon (MacInnis & Folkes 2009) involving numerous determinants that influence complex online behavioural processes, and prior consumer behaviour integration studies have not focused on proposing comprehensive integrated theoretical models of online consumer behaviour. Hence no attempt has been made to conduct a systematic theoretical analysis and integration of the various determinants and complex internal cognitive and psychological behavioural processes of online consumers in their consumption and experience of online communication and information. For example, previous studies such as those of Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), Koufaris (2002), Cheung, Zhu, Kwong, Chan and Limayem (2003), Assael (2004), Goldsmith and Flynn (2004), Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2006), Demangeot and Broderick (2007), Gurau (2008), Koo, Kim and Lee (2008), Chen, Yen and Tsui (2008b), Dennis, Merrilees, Jayawardhena and Wright (2009) and Hardesty and Bearden (2009), presented fragmented empirically tested processes of limited concepts of online consumer behaviour and did not consider theoretical analyses of online consumer behavioural processes. Cheung et al (2003:194) substantiate this statement by explicating that the “scope of previous [online consumer behaviour] studies is rather broad, the studies appear relatively fragmented and no unifying theoretical model is found in this research area”. Cheung et al (2003) further recommended that future research should concentrate on addressing the fragmented nature of online consumer behaviour literature and include factors affecting the online consumer behaviour process, while Taylor and Strutton (2009) propose that the focus of online research should shift from the website to the web customer and that marketing academics should become the primary drivers of such studies.

Cheung et al (2003) further suggest that online consumer behaviour is a distinctive dissimilar process from consumer behaviour from the offline perspective and that it warrants a distinguishing conceptualisation, thus justifying online consumer behaviour as an emerging research area. Although this topic has been studied in terms of different multi- and cross-disciplinary approaches such as classical consumer behaviour research, behavioural learning, personality research and information processing and attitude (Cheung et al 2003), it is argued that a conceptual integrated unifying theoretical model of online consumer behaviour is needed. It is therefore suggested that a comprehensive model be developed to encompass online consumer behaviour from the stages of deliberation, need recognition and preparation for exposure to the stages of decision making and internally processing and responding to web-based communication messages, taking into account different factors and variables that influence online behavioural processes. To this end, existing and new theories, models and theoretical frameworks will be explored and described when investigating online consumer behaviour in terms of different perspectives, viewpoints and approaches. Although Cheung et al (2003), for example, attempted to address this gap, the theoretical framework for online consumer behaviour they proposed was limited in that the main focus was on intention, adoption and continuance as broad phases of online consumer behaviour. The critique of this study is in line with that of the other research studies which arguably addressed fragmented components of online consumer behaviour such as persuasion, acceptance, cognitive and emotional responses (Koufaris 2002). An additional limitation of Cheung et al's (2003) study is that it does not encompass the complete process of online consumer behaviour which comprises several behavioural processes and phases.

Based on these existing gaps in the literature, the research problem for this study is as follows:

Inadequate knowledge and information exist on online consumers' behavioural processes, especially their internal psychological behavioural processes when they are exposed to web-based communication messages and proceeding through the complete web-based communication experience; and that no conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour exists in the literature.

This study therefore proposes a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour based on an exhaustive and in-depth literature review, exploration and in-depth description of the existing literature and theory on consumer behaviour. This includes an exploration and description of existing offline and existing online perspectives of consumer behaviour; existing offline and online consumer behavioural approaches; the determinants of consumer behaviour in the offline and online environments; offline and online consumer decision making; offline and online information processing and response; and the original offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour.

The main aim of the proposed conceptual model for online consumer behaviour is to provide a better understanding of online consumers' behavioural processes embedded in their interactive information-seeking and consumption actions. Hence two new approaches to online consumer behaviour are proposed, namely the web-based communication exposure approach and the internal psychological behavioural processes approach, which will lead to specific perspectives and understandings of the phenomenon of consumer behaviour. In contrast to existing consumer behaviour studies (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Koufaris 2002; Cheung et al 2003; Assael 2004; Goldsmith & Flynn 2004; Blackwell et al 2006; Chaudhuri 2006; Demangeot & Broderick 2007; Chen et al 2008b; Gurau 2008; Koo et al 2008; Dennis et al 2009; Hardesty & Bearden 2009) which proposed consumer behaviour approaches which focused on consumers' product consumption behaviour, this study endeavours to explain online consumer behaviour in terms of the complete web-based communication experience and subsequent internal behavioural processes and phases during exposure to web-based communication messages. Hence an adjustment from a "purchasing" perspective to that of an information and web-based communication message "seeking and consumption" perspective is proposed.

1.1.2 Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour based on two new proposed approaches, namely the web-based communication exposure and the internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. The proposed conceptual model will provide a theoretical framework for explaining online consumer behaviour as parallel, transactional and reciprocal behavioural processes determined and affected by internal, external and online factors. It will also promote a better understanding of online consumers' complete web-based communication experiences when seeking, consuming and disposing of web-based communication messages and experiences and the subsequent behavioural processes and phases they pass through.

The proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour is different from existing consumer behaviour models and approaches in that it proposes a move away from explaining online consumer behaviour in terms of purchasing behaviour and product consumption, to focusing on online consumers' internal behavioural and web-based communication exposure processes when they are seeking and consuming online information and messages.

The proposal of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour and the indication of the main behavioural processes and phases that online consumers experience during their complete web-based communication experience, as well as the indication of the determinants that affect this complete process, are based on Cheung et al's (2003) recommendation for building online consumer behaviour theory and models.

The indication of the online consumer behavioural process, which is embedded in the online consumers' complete web-based communication experience, and the subsequent processes and phases are derived from the following theoretical discussions and explanations that are approached from existing offline and online perspectives:

- Existing offline and online perspectives and approaches to consumer behaviour (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Koufaris 2002; Cheung et al 2003; Assael 2004; Constantinides 2004; Godsmith & Flynn 2004; Blackwell et al 2006; Chaudhuri 2006; Demangeot & Broderick 2007; Chen et al 2008b; Gurau 2008; Koo et al 2008; Dennis et al 2009; Hardesty & Bearden 2009; MacInnis & Folkes 2009; Martinez-Lopez, Cabal, Gazquez-Abad & Rodriguez-Ardura 2009; Taylor & Strutton 2009)
- Determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour (Callebaut 2000; Fink & Laupase 2000; Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Moreau, Lehmann & Markman 2001; Koufaris 2002; Assael 2004; Constantinides 2004; Strydom 2004; Blackwell et al 2006; Chaudhuri 2006; Wright 2006; Chen & Barnes 2007; Salo & Karjaluoto 2007; Solomon 2007; Atcharyachanvanick & Sonehara 2008; Grabner-Krauter & Faullant 2008; Ranaweera et al 2008; Benamati, Fuller, Serva & Baroudi 2009; Chiu, Chang, Cheng & Fang 2009; Doong, Tai & Wang 2010; Jansson-Boyd 2010; Lin, Wang & Hwang 2010; Lu & Zhu 2010; Wang & Liang 2010; Wyer & Xu 2010; Yang 2010; Ooi, Sim, Yew & Lin 2011)
- Offline decision-making theory and models (Chaffee & Mcleod 1973; Montgomery & Ryans 1973; Bonoma & Johnston 1979; Punj & Stewart 1983; Bettman, Luce & Payne 1998; Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Erasmus, Boshoff & Rousseau 2001; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Xia & Sudharshan 2002; Benson & Dresdow 2003; Foreman 2003; Smith & Rupp 2003; Assael 2004; Leo, Bennett & Hartel 2005; Patwardhan & Ramaprasad 2005; Blackwell et al 2006; Wells, Moriarty & Burnett 2006; Solomon 2007; Han, Lerner & Keltner 2007; Fuller, Serva & Benamati 2007; Yang & Wu 2007; Chen, Jiang & Hsiao 2008a; Katsikopoulos & Gigerenzer 2008; Belch & Belch 2009; Chrzan 2009; Comegys, Hannula & Vaisanen 2009; Jin, Chen & Lingling 2009; Pfeiffer, Duzevik & Rothlauf 2009; Shao, Lye & Rundle-Thiele 2009; Tang 2009; Vohs, Nelson & Rawn 2009; Wang & Benbasat 2009; Darley, Blankson & Luethge 2010; Maity 2010; Wang & Liang 2010; Zellman, Kaye-Blake & Abell 2010; Kim, De Benedetto & Lancioni 2011; Roozmand, Ghasem-Aghaee & Hofstede 2011)

Consumer information processing and response in terms of the traditional offline and web-based communication perspectives (Strong 1925; Lavidge & Steiner 1961; Rogers 1962; Ray 1973; McGuire 1978; Vaughn 1980; Preston 1982; Smith & Swinyard 1982; Petty & Cacioppo 1983; MacInnis & Price 1987; Darley & Smith 1995; Levin, Huneke & Jasper 2000; Liefeld, Wall & Heslop 2000; Peters & Slovic 2000; Rodgers & Thorson 2000; Forgas & George 2001; Putrevu 2001; Swait & Adamowicz 2001; Tiedens & Linton 2001; Tremayne & Dunwoody 2001; Del Barrio-Garcia & Luque-Martinez 2003; Huitt & Valdosta 2003; Lee 2003; Peterson & Merino 2003; Kardes, Cronley, Van Kleef, De Dreu & Manstead 2004; Kaufman-Scarborough & Cohen 2004; Kellaris & Posavac 2004; Peracchio & Luna 2006; Sojka & Giese 2006; Tam & Ho 2006; Thompson & Hamilton 2006; Hanekom 2007; Jensen & Jepsen 2007; Carlson & White 2008; Kidwell & Jewell 2008; Hanekom & Barker 2009; Moriarty, Mitchell & Wells 2009; Savolainen 2009; Nielsen, Shapiro & Mason 2010; Wyer & Xu 2010; Belch & Belch 2012)

- The original offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969; Ajzen & Fishbein 1970; Ajzen & Fishbein 1972; Fishbein & Ajzen 1973; Ajzen & Fishbein 1974; Ajzen & Madden 1986; Sheppard, Hartwick & Warshaw 1988; Davis 1989; Ajzen 1991; Koufaris 2002; Cheung et al 2003; Lim & Dubinsky 2005; Huang, Lurie & Mitra 2009; Taylor & Strutton 2009;)
- Theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour

The main objective of this study is therefore to propose a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour that addresses the limited and fragmented approaches to this type of behaviour which do not make provision for the intrinsically complex internal behavioural processes of online consumers. It is argued that this conceptual model will contribute to the field of communication science by presenting a comprehensive, integrated and unified model. This model will explain online consumer behaviour from an integrated perspective, based on newly proposed approaches that augment the published studies in this area of research which are broad and fragmented with contradictory results. The study draws from an

in-depth and exhaustive review, exploration and description of the existing literature and theory on offline and online consumer behaviour.

The secondary research objectives of this study are mainly as follows: to contextualise, develop and propose a new definition and perspective of the concept of online consumer behaviour; propose new theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour; to identify, explore and describe the theory of the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour; to identify, explore and describe the main thrusts of existing offline consumer decision-making theory; to propose a new perspective on consumer decision making by developing a model for online consumer information decision making; to identify, explore and describe offline and online consumer information-processing and response theory and models; to identify, explore and describe the main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour; and establish and propose theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour.

1.1.3 Relevance of the study and relation to the discipline of communication

The study of communication is a scientific discipline since it uses scientific research methods in a systematic and disciplined manner to provide a body of knowledge and theory (Steinberg 2007:28). In the communication science discipline, theories are needed in order to explain and predict the communication of individuals and *organisations* (Steinberg 2007:29) and different contexts/fields of study, such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, intercultural, small group, public communication, *organisational communication* and mass communication are evident (Tubbs, Moss & Papastefanou 2012).

Organisational communication focuses on communication in and *of/around* the organisation and should thus be understood in terms of the contexts of an organisation and its environments and refers to “all communication occurring in an organizational context, internally or *externally*” (Steinberg 2007:292; Tubbs et al 2012:279; Angelopulo & Thomson 2013:6).

This study is contextualised within the *external organisational communication context*, underscoring Angelopulo and Thomson's (2013:13) conceptualisation of organisational communication as an umbrella concept that covers all communication that occurs in the contexts of organisations which includes planned communication such as *integrated marketing communication (IMC)* and marketing communication. IMC can be defined as "the communication element that is embedded in the marketing process" (Angelopulo & Thomson 2013:19); and as "a collective term for all the various types of planned messages used to build a brand" (Ouwersloot & Duncan 2008:9).

Digital/online/web-based communication is one of the tools/elements of IMC and in the general field of marketing communication (Assael 2004:4; Ouwersloot & Duncan 2008:228; Moriarty, Mitchell & Wells 2009:131; Belch & Belch 2012:109; Angelopulo & Thomson 2013:19; Barker, du Plessis & Hanekom 2013) because it makes interactivity in a rich information setting possible (Ouwersloot & Duncan 2008:228).

Hence, this study is contextualised as an applied area of IMC, specifically within the digital/online/web-based communication context. It addresses the new emphasis that is placed on *consumer research* in IMC literature (Belch & Belch 2012:110), specifically *consumer information* and the *factors that underlie consumer behaviour*, since these are necessary in order to perfect integrated marketing communication strategies and promotional programmes. This study further addresses the need for the *description of consumer behaviour*, information regarding *message and information choices*, and knowledge on how consumers, as an audience, *respond to and consume* integrated marketing communication messages or web based (online) communication messages (Belch & Belch 2012).

In the digital/online/web-based communication context, Wells et al (2009:294) emphasise the informational role of online communication and the importance of knowing how online consumers *search for and use online marketing communication/web-based communication messages*. This *online informational focus* underlines the need for the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour which will be developed in this study.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study reviews the existing academic literature on perspectives on and theoretical approaches to offline and online consumer behaviour. As mentioned earlier, this study addresses a gap in literature with regard to online consumer behavioural processes in terms of *exposure* to web-based communication messages and subsequent internal psychological behavioural processes during interactive information-seeking and consumption activities. Hence this perspective warrants a uniquely different approach to that of the existing purchasing and technical perspectives on the process of consumer behaviour. In order to achieve this, various theoretical perspectives, approaches, theories and models that address fragments of consumer behaviour will be explored, described, contextualised and incorporated into a conceptual integrated unifying theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. This model will explain online consumer behaviour specifically in terms of *exposure* to web-based communication messages and internal consumer psychological behavioural processes.

In each chapter, the theoretical discussions indicate the progression from existing offline and online viewpoints to the new online perspective on consumer behaviour as proposed in this study.

As a result, the study will focus on the following ten main areas.

Firstly, the study commences with the contextualisation and definition of consumer behaviour from existing offline perspectives. It will be indicated that the scope of consumer behaviour has evolved from focusing on buying, purchasing or acquiring products to consumption analysis, explaining why and how people use products. Based on the definitions of consumer behaviour of authors such as Strydom (2004), Wells et al (2006) and Belch and Belch (2009), it is inferred that the study of consumer behaviour in terms of needs development and recognition, as well as the factors that lead to and impact on purchase decisions and behaviours (Belch & Belch 2009:110), are important. Furthermore, an understanding of consumer behaviour is necessary to anticipate the motives for consumer behavioural processes. Since the

aim of this study is to explain consumer behaviour in the online environment as part of the online consumers' complete web-based communication experience, this is in contrast to existing offline and online consumer behavioural studies (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Assael 2004; Blackwell et al 2006) that focus on consumers' behaviour in order to perfect marketing communication strategies.

Secondly, a new definition and perspective of the concept of online consumer behaviour is contextualised, developed and proposed. Although existing offline perspectives on consumer behaviour are significant in contributing theoretical concepts, this particular study focuses on online consumer behaviour from a web-based communication perspective. While major authors such as Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), Koufaris (2002), Cheung et al (2003), Assael (2004), Goldsmith and Flynn (2004), Blackwell et al (2006), Demangeot and Broderick (2007), Chen et al (2008b), Gurau (2008), Koo et al (2008), Dennis et al (2009) and Hardesty and Bearden (2009), explain online consumer behaviour in terms of purchasing behaviour, this study endeavours to contextualise online consumer behaviour in terms of the progression through several behavioural processes when seeking and consuming web-based communication messages and information. Therefore, the theoretical concepts concerning consumer behaviour that are derived from existing offline and online perspectives will be applied to the online consumer behavioural perspective of this study. Another existing online perspective adopted is that of Koufaris (2002), who regards the online consumer as a transformed consumer who should be regarded as both a shopper and computer user. Based on his study, constructs from information systems (the technology acceptance model [TAM]), marketing (consumer behaviour) and psychology (flow and environmental psychology) were formulated into an integrated theoretical framework of online consumer behaviour to direct his study's focus on the consumers' intention to return to a website and their likelihood of making unplanned purchases based on their emotional and cognitive responses when visiting a website, which are indicated by their shopping enjoyment and perceived usefulness of the site. For the purposes of this study, it is proposed that online consumer behaviour should be viewed in terms of online consumers' complete web-based communication experience, consisting of several interactive

information-seeking and consumption actions, leading to several behavioural processes and phases.

Thirdly, the existing managerial and holistic approaches to consumer behaviour proposed by Assael (2004) play a vital part in guiding the proposal of two new theoretical approaches specifically developed for online consumer behaviour, namely the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. Since existing consumer behavioural approaches regard consumer behaviour as a pure, applied social science, the new and uniquely proposed approaches help to contextualise and promote a better understanding of online consumer behaviour in terms of the internal psychological behavioural processes of online consumers' behavioural patterns during exposure to web-based communication messages. Because these two theoretical approaches contradict the usual technical purchasing perspectives that underscore existing consumer behaviour approaches, they make a significant contribution to an original approach to consumer behaviour literature.

Fourthly, the study will identify, explore and describe the theory of the determinants of offline consumer behaviour and online consumer behaviour (Moreau et al 2001; Koufaris 2002; Constantinides 2004; Doong, Tai & Wang 2010; Lin et al 2010; Lu & Zhu 2010; Wang & Liang 2010; Yang 2010). It will further categorise the determinants into internal and external determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour and online determinants of online consumer behaviour by, firstly, considering the factors that influence consumer behaviour from the existing offline perspective; secondly, from the existing online perspective; and lastly, the specific factors that influence online consumer behaviour, which are only applicable to the online environment. These internal, external and online factors will subsequently be adapted to the online context of this study and will thus be termed determinants of online consumer behaviour. Although the majority of existing studies (Moreau et al 2001; Koufaris 2002; Constantinides 2004; Doong, Tai & Wang 2010; Lin et al 2010; Lu & Zhu 2010; Wang & Liang 2010; Yang 2010) consider the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour in purchasing and retailing contexts, the focus of this study is determined by the proposed web-based communication exposure and

internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. The internal, external and online determinants are hence considered to impact on the manner in which online consumers behave during their exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages and information. For the purpose of this study, internal determinants are regarded as the basic psychological determinants of online consumer behaviour, while external determinants refer to social and cultural aspects that influence online consumer behaviour. Of importance to the online context of this study are the unique online determinants that influence consumer behaviour in the online environment. These determinants are considered to be indicative of the complete web-based communication experience and are therefore regarded as factors that cause behavioural parallelism and reciprocity, leading to abbreviated or expanded online behavioural processes and phases.

Fifthly, the study will identify, explore and describe the main thrusts of existing offline consumer decision-making theory (Chaffee & Mcleod 1973; Montgomery & Ryans 1973; Bonoma & Johnston 1979; Punj & Stewart 1983; Bettman, Luce & Payne 1998; Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Erasmus, Boshoff & Rousseau 2001; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Xia & Sudharshan 2002; Benson & Dresdow 2003; Foreman 2003; Smith & Rupp 2003; Assael 2004; Leo, Bennett & Hartel 2005; Patwardhan & Ramaprasad 2005; Blackwell et al 2006; Wells, Moriarty & Burnett 2006; Solomon 2007; Han, Lerner & Keltner 2007; Fuller, Serva & Benamati 2007; Yang & Wu 2007; Chen, Jiang & Hsiao 2008a; Katsikopoulos & Gigerenzer 2008; Belch & Belch 2009; Chrzan 2009; Comegys, Hannula & Vaisanen 2009; Jin, Chen & Lingling 2009; Pfeiffer, Duzevik & Rothlauf 2009; Shao, Lye & Rundle-Thiele 2009; Tang 2009; Vohs, Nelson & Rawn 2009; Wang & Benbasat 2009; Darley, Blankson & Luethge 2010; Maity 2010; Wang & Liang 2010; Zellman, Kaye-Blake & Abell 2010; Kim, De Benedetto & Lancioni 2011; Roozmand, Ghasem-Aghaee & Hofstede 2011). Although the focus of this study is on web-based communication message and information decision making in the online environment, the study considers existing offline consumer decision-making theories and models in order to apply them to the online context. This section will therefore focus on the most prominent literature, theory and decision-making models such as the schematic general model of a decision matrix, the stochastic model of consumer choice behaviour, an interaction

framework of consumer decision making, an integrative framework for constructive choice processes and a basic model of complex decision making to identify decision making as a central process of online consumers' behavioural processes.

Sixth, since this study is approached from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, which will be proposed in chapter 2, the conceptualisation of consumer decision making in terms of web-based communication and information decisions, in contrast to decision making in a purchasing context, is critical. Hence the study proposes a new perspective on consumer decision making by developing a model for online consumer information decision making, addressing the shortfalls in existing decision making models and theories in explaining online consumers' web-based communication message and information decision making. The perspective on information decision making will focus on the explanation of the decision-making process that online consumers go through when exposed to web-based communication messages and information in the online environment, based on the argument that consumer decision-making model building and theorising are limited – hence the proposal of the online consumer information decision-making model which focuses on information and message consumption decisions in the online environment. The proposed online consumer information decision-making model will explain online consumer decision-making processes in terms of input, processing and output stages, consisting of various steps which are influenced by different determinants such as individual, environmental, psychological and online atmospherics.

Seventh, this study identifies, explores and describes offline and online consumer information-processing and response theory and models in order to provide a deeper understanding of how consumers respond to and process information. The focus will thus be on consumers' exposure (Poncin, Pieters & Ambaye 2005), perception, integration and utilisation of integrated marketing communication messages and web-based communication messages in the information-processing and response phases. The phenomenon of consumer information processing and response will be specified by conceptualising it, theoretically grounding it based on consumer

information-processing and response theory, chronologically depicting traditional offline consumer information processing and response models (Strong 1925; Lavidge & Steiner 1961; Rogers 1962; Ray 1973; McGuire 1978; Vaughn 1980; Preston 1982; Smith & Swinyard 1982; Petty & Cacioppo 1983; Moriarty et al 2009), and considering an integrated theoretical framework for online consumer response (Hanekom 2006) and an integrated conceptual model of the internal consumer response process (Hanekom & Barker 2009). Since this study will be conducted in terms of the new proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, the consideration of consumer information processing and response specifically draws attention to the information processing and response stages of online consumer behaviour, which are associated with their web-based communication message and information processing.

Eighth, this study identifies, explores and describes the main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour. The study is based on the existing offline and online literature relating to consumer behaviour and provides the theoretical underpinnings of consumer behaviour and the original theories and models of consumer behaviour. These models and theories will be presented from a cognitive psychological and social behavioural predictive perspective. The main theoretical thrusts of the theory of reasoned action will be used (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969; Ajzen & Fishbein 1970; Ajzen & Fishbein 1972; Fishbein & Ajzen 1973; Ajzen & Fishbein 1974) to explicate attitudinal and normative beliefs as predictors of behavioural intentions and most human behaviour. The main theoretical contributions of the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen & Madden 1986; Ajzen 1991), which focus on perceived control, attitudes and subjective norms over behavioural achievement as determinants of individuals' intentions and behaviour, will be incorporated. The main thrust of TAM (Davis 1989), which predicts and explains the use of new technology and information systems, will also be used. Two theoretical constructs from these theories will be specifically relevant, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as fundamental determinants of system use. These main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer

behaviour will specifically be analysed and subsequently be applied to the online perspective of this study.

Ninth, the study will establish and propose theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour by summarising, integrating, exploring and describing the theoretical underpinnings of consumer behaviour from existing offline and online perspectives and will then apply these criteria to the online perspective of this study. The main theoretical perspectives and constructs will be categorised, assessed, integrated and summarised in order to gain a more precise understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of online consumer behaviour. The identification of theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour will serve the purpose of interpreting, assessing and integrating all relevant offline and online theories, models and theoretical foundations.

Lastly, a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour will be developed through an integration and critical interpretation of theoretical contributions, theories and models. The development of the model is justified by the argument that there is a lack of adequate knowledge and information about online consumers' behavioural processes during exposure to web-based communication messages and information and their subsequent progression through several internal psychological behavioural processes. The conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour will provide a theoretical review and critical interpretation of online consumer behaviour by indicating a move away from explaining online consumer behaviour in terms of purchasing behaviour and product consumption, to focusing on how online consumers behave, specifically in terms of their web-based communication exposure and mostly internal behavioural processes when they are seeking and consuming online information and messages.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 The primary research objective

The primary research objective is to develop a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour.

1.3.2 Secondary research objectives

The secondary research objectives are in line with the primary research objective and focus specifically on the existing offline and online perspectives, as well as the web-based communication message exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes perspectives. In order to achieve the primary research objective, the following secondary research objectives will be attained:

Secondary research objective 1

To contextualise, develop and propose a new definition and perspective on the concept of online consumer behaviour

Secondary research objective 2

To propose new theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour

Secondary research objective 3

To identify, explore and describe the theory of the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour

Secondary research objective 4

To identify, explore and describe the main thrusts of existing offline consumer decision-making theory

Secondary research objective 5

To propose a new perspective on consumer decision making by developing a model for online consumer information decision-making

Secondary research objective 6

To identify, explore and describe offline and online consumer information-processing and response theory and models

Secondary research objective 7

To identify, explore and describe the main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour

Secondary research objective 8

To establish and propose theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour

Table 1.1 is a graphical depiction of the manner in which the secondary research objectives, key theoretical concepts, theoretical perspectives and major theoretical approaches are aligned and integrated in the respective chapters of this study.

Table 1.1: The alignment and integration of the secondary research objectives, key theoretical concepts, theoretical perspectives, major theoretical approaches and chapters

Primary research objective: To develop a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour (chapter 8)				
Secondary research objectives	Key theoretical concepts	Theoretical perspectives	Theoretical approaches	Chapters
To contextualise, develop and propose a new definition and perspective on the concept of online consumer behaviour	Offline consumer behaviour Online consumer behaviour	Offline Online	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Chapter 2 Contextualisation of consumer behaviour: Proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological

				behavioural processes approaches
To propose new theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour	Holistic approach Managerial approach Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Offline Online Web-based communication	Holistic approach Managerial approach Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Chapter 2 Contextualisation of consumer behaviour: Proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches
To identify, explore and describe the theory of the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour	Internal determinants External determinants Online determinants	Offline Online	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Chapter 3 Determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour
To identify, explore and describe the main thrusts of existing offline consumer decision-making theory	Categories and strategies of consumer decision making Decision-making models and theories	Offline Online	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Chapter 4 Consumer decision making: towards an online information decision-making perspective
To propose a new perspective on consumer decision making by	Online consumer information decision-making process	Offline Online	Web-based communication exposure approach	Chapter 4 Consumer decision making: towards an

developing a model for online consumer information decision-making	Determinants of online consumer information decision making	Online consumer information decision making	Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	online information decision-making perspective
To identify, explore and describe offline and online consumer information-processing and response theory and models	Offline consumer information processing and response Online consumer information processing and response	Offline Online	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Chapter 5 Consumer information processing and response: offline and online perspectives
To identify, explore and describe the main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour	Reasoned action Planned behaviour Technology acceptance	Cognitive psychological behavioural perspective Social behavioural perspective Expectancy theoretical perspective	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Chapter 6 Theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour: offline and online perspectives
To establish and propose theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour	Theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour	Offline Online	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Chapter 7 Theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

1.4.1 Type of study

The research design of the study indicates the type of study and research and refers to the plan or blueprint of how the intended research is going to be conducted in order to address the research problem (Babbie & Mouton 2005:74). It additionally indicates the structure, guidelines and methods that are going to be followed in the execution of the research (Bryman 2012:45). Babbie and Mouton (2005:79), Neuman (2006:34) and Vos et al (2007:106) indicate that a study can combine different types of research such as exploratory and descriptive research. For the purpose of addressing the primary research problem of this study, the research follows a combination of *exploratory* and *descriptive* research within a *qualitative research paradigm* by means of an *exhaustive literature review*, which will be discussed next.

1.4.1.1 *Exploratory research*

In exploratory research, researchers explore an *unknown area/topic of research*, *identify key concepts*, the consequences of problems and provide a basic familiarity with that topic, facts and concerns (Du Plooy 2002:48; Babbie & Mouton 2005:79; Neuman 2006:33; Babbie 2007:88). According to Babbie (2007:88), this approach is typically used when a researcher examines a *new* interest or when the subject of study is relatively new in that it satisfies the researcher's curiosity and desire for a *better understanding of a phenomenon* and to create a general mental picture thereof (Du Plooy 2002: 48-49; Babbie & Mouton 2005:80; Neuman 2006:33). Babbie and Mouton (2005:80), Babbie (2007:89) and Vos et al (2007:106) argue that, although exploration is an attempt to develop an initial understanding of some phenomenon, exploratory research is valuable and essential in that it breaks new ground, addresses a *lack of basic information on a new area* of interest and provides *new insights* and acquaintance with a research topic.

In addition, exploratory research asks the ‘what’ question (Neuman 2006:33; Vos et al 2007:106) within a qualitative research paradigm (see section 1.4.2), in order to *provide a foundation* on which future more extensive studies can be based (Neuman 2006:33). Further, within exploratory research *all sources of information* (Neuman 2006:33) should be explored since one of the pertinent research design or method considerations of exploratory research is, amongst others, “a review of the related social science and other pertinent literature” (Babbie & Mouton 2005:80), since it leads to insight and *comprehension* of the field of study under investigation.

Hence, in this study, exploratory research is used since *all sources of information* on consumer behaviour, the determinants of consumer behaviour, consumer decision-making, consumer information-processing and response and the theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour will be explored by means of a literature review. The *new area of interest* and *unfamiliar topic* of online consumer behaviour from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches will be *explored*, which will lead to *comprehension* and *new insights* on the phenomenon of online consumer behaviour. In addition, the *key concepts* of online consumer behavioural processes within the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches will be identified to address the *lack of information* on online consumer behaviour from the new proposed approaches, to *provide a foundation* on which future studies can be based.

1.4.1.2 *Descriptive research*

A major purpose of social scientific research aims primarily at description (Babbie & Mouton 2005:81; Babbie 2007:89). Du Plooy (2002:49), Babbie and Mouton (2005:105) and Neuman (2006:34) explain description as the *precise/accurate/detailed description* of the characteristics of some phenomenon or subject, while Vos et al (2007:106) elaborate by explaining that it “provides a picture of the specific details of a situation”. Qualitative description leads to “thick descriptions” (Babbie & Mouton 2005:272) which refer to rich, *detailed and lengthy descriptions* of specific phenomena. According to Vos et al (2007:106) “description is

more likely to refer to a more *intensive examination of phenomena and their deeper meanings*.

More specifically, Babbie and Mouton (2005:81) maintain that the description of phenomena may include description by means of literature reviews, while Keyton (2006:5) and Neuman (2006:34) argue that it can be applied to the communication context, therefore indicating that it describes a communication phenomenon as well as behaviour. Hence, when descriptive research is used to describe behaviour, it should *describe processes* (Keyton 2006:5) and the outcome should be a detailed picture of the phenomenon, answering a 'how' question.

Descriptive research is relevant to this study since *detailed descriptions* of existing offline and online consumer behaviour perspectives, approaches, theories and concepts are provided based on a literature review in order to *intensively examine the phenomena* and to *describe the process*.

1.4.2 Qualitative research paradigm

The goal of research within the qualitative research paradigm is to provide *in-depth descriptions*, information and descriptive detail and to emphasise the *understanding of phenomena* (Du Plooy 2002:83; Babbie & Mouton 2005:53; Vos et al 2007:74; Bryman 2012:36). Du Plooy (2002:83) and Bryman (2012:36) argue that the research within a qualitative research paradigm can be to *explore* and *describe* and is concerned with generation rather than testing of theories. Bryman (2012:401) emphasises that description and detailed information serve the purpose of providing the context within which the research is done. Because the main emphasis of qualitative research is on words, the subjective point of view of the researcher, *theoretical elaboration*, an unstructured research process, philosophical descriptions, holistic understanding of phenomena, in-depth knowledge, *accumulation of knowledge* and delving into complexities and processes (Keyton 2006:72; Vos et al 2007:74; Bryman 2012:408), this study will apply a qualitative research paradigm.

1.4.3 Research methodology

1.4.3.1 Literature review

The research method used in this study is the literature review based on a combination of exploratory and descriptive research to explore an unknown/new field of study (online consumer behaviour) by firstly providing in-depth descriptions of offline and online consumer behaviour from existing perspectives and then by providing in-depth descriptions of online consumer behaviour from the new web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. This will be done in line with the following goals and methods indicated in the literature:

To demonstrate *familiarity with a body of knowledge* and to establish credibility; to show previous research and how the current study is linked to it; to *integrate* and *summarise* what is known in an area of research and to learn from others in order to stimulate ideas; to *demarcate the concepts and theories* that are relevant to the particular study; to weigh up the literature and *subject it to critical appraisal*, ideally to lead to a *new or interesting perspective* (Neuman 2006:111; Bryman 2012:101).

1.5 ANTICIPATED FINDINGS

The main contribution of this study is the development of the integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. Hence, the main criticisms on prior studies are that they omitted integrated, nonpurchasing approaches to online consumer behaviour, leading to fragmented conceptualisations thereof. The anticipated distinctiveness of the contributions of this study lies in the integrated and original alternative approaches to studying online consumer behaviour from the new proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, with the focus on online consumers' information-seeking and consumption experiences. This study furthermore addresses the need for a unifying, cohesive and integrated model of the online consumer behavioural process highlighted by various researchers (Cheung et al 2003; Taylor & Strutton

2009). Hence a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour will be presented on the basis of the following: theoretical discussions, explorations and descriptions of consumer behaviour from offline and online perspectives; existing approaches to consumer behaviour and the subsequent proposal of two new approaches to online consumer behaviour; the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour, offline and online consumer decision making, offline and online consumer information processing and response; and the main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour. In addition, and in contrast to past studies, this study theoretically argues for a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour that applies an online information-seeking and consumption perspective consistent with the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. This model will therefore allow for the systematic study of online consumer behaviour according to new approaches and perspectives, moving away from the usual technical purchasing approaches of existing consumer behaviour studies. It is argued that the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour can serve as foundation for future research aimed at refining and testing the proposed model.

1.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is envisaged that this study will not hold any methodological and ethical implications and that the integrity of this research will remain since it will conform strictly to Unisa's ethics policy.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter contextualised the study in the realm of communication science by highlighting the background to and explaining the purpose of the study. It provided an overview of and explained the type of study and identified the primary and secondary research objectives. The research method to be followed was highlighted and the anticipated findings and ethical considerations explained.

The conclusive arguments underscore the rationale for this study, namely to address the intrinsically complex web-based communication messages and information-seeking and consumption behavioural processes of online consumers by developing a comprehensive, integrated and unifying conceptual theoretical model that explains online consumer behaviour in terms of the proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. It therefore addresses the problems of the existing limited approaches that focus only on fragments of online consumer behaviour and purchasing behaviour.

The next chapter considers the existing offline and online perspectives of consumer behaviour and proposes two new approaches to online consumer behaviour, namely a web-based communication exposure approach and an internal psychological behavioural processes approach.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUALISATION OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: PROPOSED WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION EXPOSURE AND INTERNAL PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOURAL PROCESSES APPROACHES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses secondary research objectives 1 and 2 and will focus on the following: the existing offline and online perspectives on consumer behaviour and the proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches to consumer behaviour. Based on the existing offline and online perspectives, a new theoretical approach to online consumer behaviour will be proposed to theoretically direct the development of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. The chapter further considers existing consumer behaviour approaches and elaborates on existing technical purchasing approaches by proposing the new web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

In line with the primary research objective of this study, namely to develop a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour, the primary purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the phenomenon of consumer behaviour from the existing offline and online perspectives, to apply it to the proposed web-based communication perspective and to contextualise it in terms of the approaches and perspectives from which it will be considered.

This chapter is structured as follows: firstly, contextualising and defining consumer behaviour as a study; secondly, defining it from existing offline perspectives; thirdly, defining it from existing online perspectives; and fourthly, contextualising and defining it from a proposed new perspective. The existing approaches to consumer behaviour are then considered, followed by the proposal of two new theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour, namely the web-based communication exposure approach and the internal psychological behavioural processes approach.

2.2 CONTEXTUALISING AND DEFINING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

In the subsequent sections, consumer behaviour is discussed as follows: contextualising and defining the study of consumer behaviour; defining consumer behaviour from existing offline perspectives; defining consumer behaviour from existing online perspectives; discussing online consumer behaviour from a new proposed perspective; and formulating a new definition of online consumer behaviour.

2.2.1 Contextualising and defining the study of consumer behaviour

According to Strydom (2004:38), the study of consumer behaviour is “concerned with all the activities and influences that occur before, during and after the purchase itself”, and that it “comprises the behaviour patterns of decision units (individuals as well as families) which precede, determine and follow on the decision-making process for the acquisition of need-satisfying products, ideas and service”. In addition, Wells et al (2006:126-127) contend that the study of consumer behaviour “describes how individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products – as well as describing the needs that motivate these behaviours”.

The study of consumer behaviour is furthermore regarded by Assael (2004) as something necessitated by a realisation that consumer behaviour determines an organisation’s profitability, where profitability is generated by having a loyal consumer base - hence the need for all integrated marketing communication strategies to satisfy consumers in order to establish a loyal consumer base. The focus of developing effective integrated marketing communication strategies to enhance the profitability of any organisation should therefore be to understand the factors underlying consumer behaviour (Assael 2004), such as the psychological and social forces that are likely to condition consumer behaviour.

For the past 50 years, academics have increasingly researched consumer behaviour (MacInnis & Folkes 2009) and endeavoured to classify the study of this phenomenon

as either an independent discipline or as an interdisciplinary discipline. In their research to determine the field of study's properties and parameters, MacInnis and Folkes (2009) concluded that, as a subdiscipline of marketing, the consumer behaviour field of study has neither become an independent discipline nor interdisciplinary. However, since it involves the acquisition, consumption and disposition of products, services and experiences, it is regarded, for the purpose of this study, as multidisciplinary, or as Taylor and Strutton (2009) see it, cross-disciplinary.

To underscore the aim of contextualising the study of consumer behaviour in terms of its disciplinary position and for the purpose of providing a theoretical foundation, existing contextualisations of consumer behaviour by Hardesty and Bearden (2009), MacInnis and Folkes (2009) and Taylor and Strutton (2009) are presented. It is thus posited that consumer behaviour is different from human behaviour in that it (1) stimulates exchange relationships between buyers and sellers and thus produces unique interpersonal relationships, (2) increases mass media persuasive messages that involve unique contextual features, and (3) involves topics that are specific to certain realms such as materialism. Although consumer behaviour is different from human behaviour, the scope of human behaviour that includes consumer behaviour is wide. It is furthermore recognised and suggested that consumer research consumption contexts will play a prominent role in theorising about consumer behaviour in the context of this study.

Since consumer behaviour is, for the purpose of this study, regarded as more than product or service consumption and disposal, it is necessary to contextualise it to include more than acquisition through economic exchange to reach beyond the marketing perspective. Even though this contextualisation could also include the more negatively portrayed aspects of marketing such as advertising to children and unethical advertising, as well as the “negative consequences of acquisition, consumption and disposal for consumers, marketers and society (e.g. theft, gambling, addiction)” (MacInnis & Folkes 2009: 905), these contextualisations are irrelevant to this particular study. Further contextualisations include perspectives on

end users' acquisition, consumption and disposal and the factors that influence those actions. The topics under investigation (MacInnis & Folkes 2009) also began to include factors such as emotions, goals, temptations, self-control dilemmas, satisfaction and materialism. This, in turn, led to research on symbolic consumer behaviour, consumption rituals, collections, consumer identity, brand-self connections, brand communities, endowment effects, consumer inferences and product and brand categorisation processes, as well as studies in product and brand involvement, consumer protection and behavioural decision making (MacInnis & Folkes 2009).

It is hence argued that it is imperative to emphasise the consumer context when contextualising consumer behaviour from any perspective. Whereas MacInnis and Folkes (2009) concluded that there is a possibility of applying human behaviour theories to the consumer behaviour context, and previous consumer behaviour studies included human behaviour as a perspective in their studies by focusing mainly on memory and its importance for consumer behaviour, this study also focuses on the human behavioural context by emphasising the internal behavioural processes that consumers proceed through.

Based on the general contextualisations of the study of consumer behaviour above, it is propounded that the study of consumer behaviour should be approached from a variety of multi- and cross-disciplinary perspectives and include various differing contextualisations. For the purpose of this discussion, the study of consumer behaviour is contextualised in terms of the human consumer context - hence the following definition is proposed by the author:

The study of consumer behaviour concerns the explanation and description of individual consumer behavioural patterns when selecting, purchasing and disposing of products.

2.2.2 Defining consumer behaviour: existing offline perspectives

It is propounded that, for the purpose of identifying existing offline consumer behaviour theoretical constructs that are applicable to the online consumer

behaviour perspective of this study, consumer behaviour should be considered from existing offline perspectives. Consumer behaviour from the existing offline perspective is thus defined as “activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services” (Blackwell et al 2006:4); as “the study of how and why people consume products and services” (Chaudhuri 2006:1); and as “behavior that reflects the totality of consumers’ decisions with respect to the acquisition, consumption and disposition of goods, services, time, and ideas by (human) decision making units [over time]” (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:4). Belch and Belch (2009:111) further define consumer behaviour as “the process and activities people engage in when searching for, selecting, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services so as to satisfy their needs and desires”. Consumer behaviour is further defined by Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:5) as the study of “how individuals make decisions to spend their available resources (time, money, effort) on consumption-related items. That includes what they buy, why they buy it, when they buy it, where they buy it, how often they buy it, and how often they use it”.

For the purpose of defining consumer behaviour from existing offline perspectives, Chaudhuri’s (2006:1) view that all consumer behaviour is subject to the “characteristics of the individual, the environment that surrounds the individual and the inherited genetics that constitute the biological makeup of the individual” is supported. According to him, the personality, perceptions, attitudes, needs and motivations of the individual constitute his or her characteristics, while the environment of the individual consists of the culture, subculture, family, friends and institutions that he or she lives in. Chaudhuri (2006) further argues that the genetics of the individual are significant in explaining and defining individual consumer behaviour from the existing offline perspective, and this concept is therefore explained as the biological codes unique to each individual.

Based on the definitions of consumer behaviour from the existing offline perspective provided above, the author proposes the following definition of offline consumer behaviour:

Consumer behaviour constitutes product acquisition, consumption and disposal activities which are dependent on individual characteristics and environmental factors and motivated by specific needs.

2.2.3 Defining consumer behaviour: existing online perspectives

It is posited that although the definitions and contextualisations presented above are important in explaining consumer behaviour from existing offline perspectives for applicability to the online context, this particular study requires consumer behaviour to be contextualised and defined in line with the online perspective, since the main aim of the study is to develop a conceptual integrated theoretical model for *online* consumer behaviour. Although renowned authors (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Koufaris 2002; Cheung et al 2003; Assael 2004; Goldsmith & Flynn 2004; Blackwell et al 2006; Demangeot & Broderick 2007; Chen et al 2008b; Gurau 2008; Koo et al 2008; Dennis et al 2009; Hardesty & Bearden 2009) explain consumer behaviour in terms of why people buy in the offline environment, this study views consumer behaviour, and in particular online consumer behaviour, not in terms of consumers' purchasing behaviour, but in terms of how they behave when *exposed* to online messages.

It is emphasised that although it was argued in the preceding sections that existing offline consumer behavioural studies (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Assael 2004; Blackwell et al 2006) focus on consumers' behaviour in order to improve marketing communication strategies, the aim of this section is to explain consumer behaviour in the online environment.

It is further argued that the reason for considering consumer behaviour from an online perspective is mainly because the scope of consumer behaviour has evolved from focusing on buying or purchasing behaviour to consumption analysis, explaining why and how people use products (Blackwell et al 2006) and "describing more than just buying (or purchasing) to include the complete Web experience" when considering online consumer behaviour (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001: 5; Constantinides 2004). This proposes a wider perspective on the initial "why" and "how" of purchasing behaviour since it includes issues that arise after the purchase

process has occurred. It therefore begins by describing how consumers acquire products (acquisition behaviour), and then explains usage as the very core of consumer behaviour. In the final phase of consumer behaviour it examines disposition, that is, when consumers dispose of an offering they have previously acquired (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001).

The significance of distinguishing between consumer behaviour from existing offline perspectives and existing online consumer behaviour perspectives is emphasised by authors like Cheung et al (2003), Constantinides (2004), Koufaris (2004), Demangeot and Broderick (2007), Gurau (2008), and Dennis et al (2009). In contrast to other authors, these above authors emphasise the significant differences that warrant a distinguishing conceptualisation. For example, Koufaris (2004) makes it clear that although in the online consumer all the characteristics of the traditional offline media consumer are present, he/she can also be regarded as a computer user who is unable to depend on all five senses when being exposed to online messages. Koufaris (2002) also posits that this online consumer's social and work environment differs from that of the traditional offline media consumer's environment and is to a certain extent more powerful, demanding and utilitarian. Since the locus of power seems to be shifting from the organisation to the online consumer, factors such as perceived risk and ease of use are considered to influence attitude towards online purchasing as well as web-based communication messages. Demangeot and Broderick (2007) ascribe the difference in online and offline consumer behaviour to the diverse environments in which they function, and they argue that the online virtual versus the traditional offline real consumer environment differs, for example, in terms of size and sensory representation. Although online consumers share some characteristics with their offline counterparts, Constantinides (2004) argues that significant differences also occur, of which the following are the most prevalent: the addition of another step to the online buying process, that is, the step of building trust or confidence; interactivity, which elucidates the possibility of direct interaction between individuals and software applications; transparency, which refers to information being published online that can be accessed by any internet user; and

the ability of the internet to store information on the network until it is erased (Gurau 2009).

For the purpose of comprehensively defining consumer behaviour in the online context of this study, the following existing contextualisations and perspectives of online consumer behaviour are considered:

Constantinides (2004:113) defines what he refers to as the web experience as “the consumer’s total impression about the online company resulting from his/her exposure to a combination of virtual marketing tools under the marketer’s direct control, likely to influence the buying behaviour of the online consumer”. Gurau (2008) expands this view on online consumer behaviour by explaining the control, as a differentiating factor, that the online consumer has over the communication process by easily searching, selecting and accessing information, contacting online organisations or other individuals and expressing their opinions/views in a visible and lasting manner. Gurau’s (2008) view concurs with that of Constantinides (2004), and both continue to explain the web experience as one that includes elements such as searching, browsing, finding, selecting, comparing and evaluating information as well as interacting and transacting with the online firm. They further indicate that the online consumer’s web experience is influenced by many factors such as design, events, emotions and atmosphere.

Other existing online perspectives that merit consideration include the following: existing theories and models of online consumer behaviour that explain online consumers’ behaviour in terms of intention, adoption and continuance (Cheung et al 2003); their emotional and cognitive responses to web-based communication messages; their likelihood of returning to make unplanned purchases (Koufaris 2002); and the “e-behaviour” process whereby attitudes, perceptions and evaluations interact to influence purchasing intentions (Taylor & Strutton 2009).

Hence, based on the existing definitions and contextualisations of online consumer behaviour provided above, it is propounded that in the existing literature, online

consumer behaviour is seen as buying or purchasing behaviour in the online environment, specifically in terms of online consumers' searching, browsing, finding, selecting and comparing products. It is also clear that one of the primary factors that differentiates consumer behaviour in the offline context from the online context, is consumers' control and interactivity in the online environment. These major differentiating factors suggest that consumers' behavioural patterns in the offline context differ from online consumers' behavioural patterns. Control thus provides the online consumer with the ability to determine online activities and online purchasing actions, while interactivity allows online consumer interaction and multidirectional communication.

2.2.4 Online consumer behaviour: a proposed new contextualisation and definition

The alternative contextualisation of consumer behaviour proposed in this section is justified, inter alia, by the need identified by authors and researchers like MacInnis and Folkes (2009) and Taylor and Strutton (2009) specifically. These authors emphasised the need to consider a more expansive view of consumer behaviour and to move away from the restrictive purchase and technology acceptance focus of consumer behaviour addressed by existing models, which are based on technology acceptance and diffusion of innovation theories. Hence it is proposed that the focus of consumer behaviour should be on consumers' online behaviour, including their internal psychological behavioural processes during their exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages.

The main contextual difference therefore lies in the move away from focusing on consumer behaviour as purchasing behaviour, to considering consumers' behaviour in terms of their search for and consumption of communication experiences, specifically consumers' behaviour in the online context when they are exposed to web-based communication messages. Hence the emphasis is on online consumers' behaviour with the focus on their communication and informational experiences.

Further, in this proposed context, online consumer behaviour is considered in terms of how online consumers go through several online behavioural processes during their exposure to web-based communication messages or experience of such messages. For the purpose of this study therefore, online consumer behaviour is seen as a consequence of exposure to web-based communication messages, as well as the complete informational experience of web-based communication messages. In line with the preceding arguments in which consumer behaviour was contextualised as behaviour in relation to information-seeking and message consumption actions, a web-based communication perspective becomes evident.

Although this contextual adaptation considers consumer behaviour from the new online perspective proposed for this study, it is necessary to consider and integrate existing offline and online theoretical constructs for their relevance and application to the new proposed contextualisation and definition of online consumer behaviour.

To summarise, this section contextualised consumer behaviour as the search and consumption processes of communication experiences through exposure to web-based communication messages, signifying online behavioural processes.

For the purpose of emphasising the online context according to which this study is approached, a definition of *online consumer behaviour*, for the purpose of this study and drawing from the definitions of existing offline and online consumer behaviour perspectives, is formulated as follows by the author:

Online consumer behaviour comprises a complete web-based communication experience that manifests in web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes leading to cognitive information-processing and response, information decision-making and output processes, determined by internal, external and online factors.

2.3 APPROACHES TO CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

In addition to two existing approaches proposed by Assael (2004), namely the holistic and managerial approaches to consumer behaviour, two new proposed

theoretical approaches will be discussed, that is, the web-based communication exposure approach and the internal psychological behavioural processes approach.

Figure 2.1 depicts the different approaches to consumer behaviour. The highlighted blue circles illustrate the consumer behavioural approaches that have been newly developed for the purposes of this study and to explain the context in which this study will be conducted.

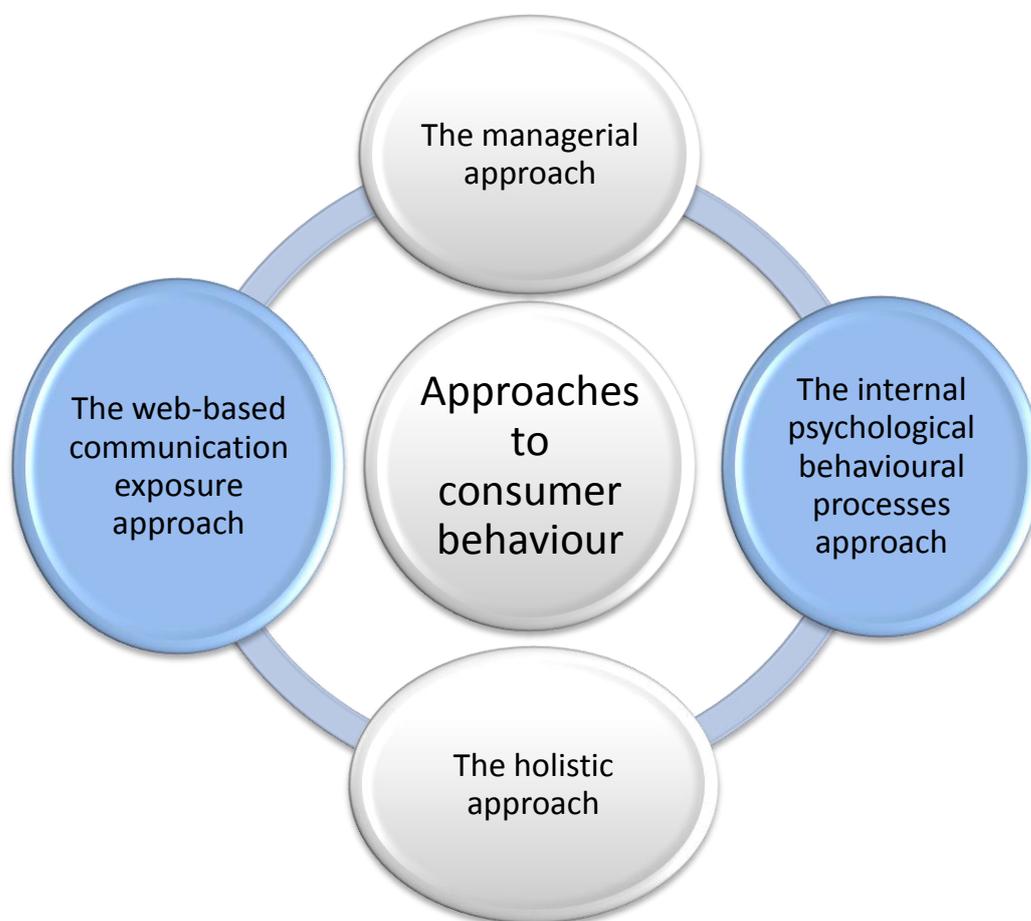


Figure 2.1: Approaches to consumer behaviour

In this study and the subsequent theoretical discussions in succeeding chapters, the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches to online consumer behaviour proposed in subsequent sections, are regarded as the overarching approaches to online consumer behaviour

from which all of the perspectives and views proposed in the remainder of the study, are derived.

Table 2.1 indicates the main approaches and perspectives from which consumer behaviour is approached in the existing literature. The main theoretical thrusts of each of the approaches and perspectives are indicated. For the purpose of indicating alternative consumer behavioural approaches, the newly proposed web-based communication exposure approach and the internal psychological behavioural processes approach are indicated in the last two columns. The main theoretical thrusts of each of these new theoretical approaches are also indicated, as well as the similarities and differences with regard to existing approaches and perspectives. Assael’s (2004) managerial and holistic approaches, as well as the newly proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches are discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

Table 2.1: Existing approaches and perspectives and proposed new approaches to consumer behaviour

Approaches and perspectives	Existing offline perspective on consumer behaviour	Existing online perspective on consumer behaviour	The managerial approach to consumer behaviour (Assael 2004)	The holistic approach to consumer behaviour (Assael 2004)	Proposed new web-based communication exposure approach to online consumer behaviour	Proposed new internal psychological behavioural processes approach to online consumer behaviour
Similarities	Purchasing products	Purchasing products online	Product purchasing perspective			
	Influenced by environmental factors		Influenced by environmental factors (macro facet)	Environmental context	Influenced by environmental factors (external determinants)	Influenced by environmental factors (external determinants)
	Influenced	Influenced by	Influenced by		Influenced by	Influenced by

	by individual characteristics	individual characteristics	individual differences (micro facet)		individual characteristics (internal determinants)	individual characteristics (internal determinants)
		Interactivity			Interactivity	Interactivity
Differences	Selection, use and disposal of products	Online consumer as a computer user	Applied social science Micro facet	Pure social science Focus on consumption	Behavioural processes of online consumers	Internal psychological behavioural processes
	Consumption of products	Importance of building trust/confidence Control Searching, browsing, finding, selecting and comparing Evaluating products	Macro facet	experience	Exposure to web-based communication messages Experiences of web-based communication messages Informational experience Information-seeking and consumption actions	Psychological variables and constructs Preinformation consumer perception attributes Preinformation consumer attitudinal attributes Postinformation consumer attitudes Emotion and reason Consumer motivation Exposure, attention and perception Knowledge and understanding Attitude

						formation Memory and retrieval
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2.3.1 Existing approaches to consumer behaviour

Assael (2004) considers consumer behaviour in terms of the managerial and holistic approaches. The *managerial approach* views consumer behaviour as an applied social science that functions as a foundation for developing integrated marketing communication strategies. The *holistic approach* regards consumer behaviour as a pure as opposed to an applied social science (Assael 2004), which recognises the importance of the study of consumer behaviour in and of itself, and a study that is not necessarily linked to marketing communication strategies.

2.3.1.1 *The managerial approach*

The managerial approach focuses on the micro cognitive facets and macro facets of consumer behaviour (Assael 2004). Assael (2004:20) proposed a micro perspective on consumer behaviour which he defines as “the individual facets concerning consumer behaviour”. The micro facet refers to the individual consumer in terms of his/her attitudes, perceptions, lifestyle and demographic characteristics, whereas the macro environmental facet, such as reference groups, family and culture, are explained in relation to how they influence the individual consumer (Assael 2004). When considering the micro facet of consumer behaviour, the central intention is on the cognitive elements which include the thought processes of individual consumers and the factors that influence their decisions. The three primary categories of information required from individual consumers in the managerial approach are needs (desired product benefits), thought processes (attitudes and perceptions) and characteristics (lifestyle and demographics) (Assael 2004). This information is used to categorise consumers and to target them with specific offerings from the organisation. This approach thus focuses on the rational cognitive systematic processes that consumers go through when considering products or services that

meet their needs. Assael (2004), however, argues that such systematic processing may not always occur when consumers buy products for symbolic value, on an impulse or addictive basis.

The main criticism against this approach is that an exactly cognitive approach may not support or explain the complete nature of consumers' behavioural processes, especially their internal psychological behavioural processes, while a micro facet could overlook environmental factors such as culturally derived behaviours, which may have a significant influence on consumer behaviour.

2.3.1.2 *The holistic approach*

The holistic approach focuses more on the consumption experience than on the purchasing process (Assael 2004). This approach emphasises the broader, culturally derived context of consumption which is viewed as symbolic and functional, antisocial and social, and idiosyncratic and normative (Assael 2004). In this approach, purchase behaviour is of little interest except for its impact on the consumption experience and if considered, it is in the context of shopping, which is culturally derived as opposed to being based on decision making.

It is posited that Assael's (2004) approaches thus consider consumer behaviour in terms of micro and macro processes that include cognitive considerations as well as factors influencing behaviour in a culturally derived context of consumption. On the strength of the above it is argued that the holistic approach is more focused on the environmental context of the consumer's present actions, while the managerial approach involves predicting what the consumer may do in future.

Since these approaches are considered limiting in the context of this study, the following two additional approaches are suggested: the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

2.3.2 New theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour

In addition to Assael's (2004) approaches to consumer behaviour, this section will elaborate on and contribute to the literature on consumer behaviour by adding two new and unique approaches to the study of consumer behaviour from the web-based communication perspective, namely the web-based communication exposure approach and the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. These added approaches will help to contextualise this study in terms of the focus on internal psychological behavioural processes of the online consumer's behavioural patterns during exposure to web-based communication messages, as opposed to shopping or purchasing behaviour.

For the purpose of contextualising online consumer behaviour, figure 2.2 depicts the new approaches and theoretical constructs from which the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour will be developed.

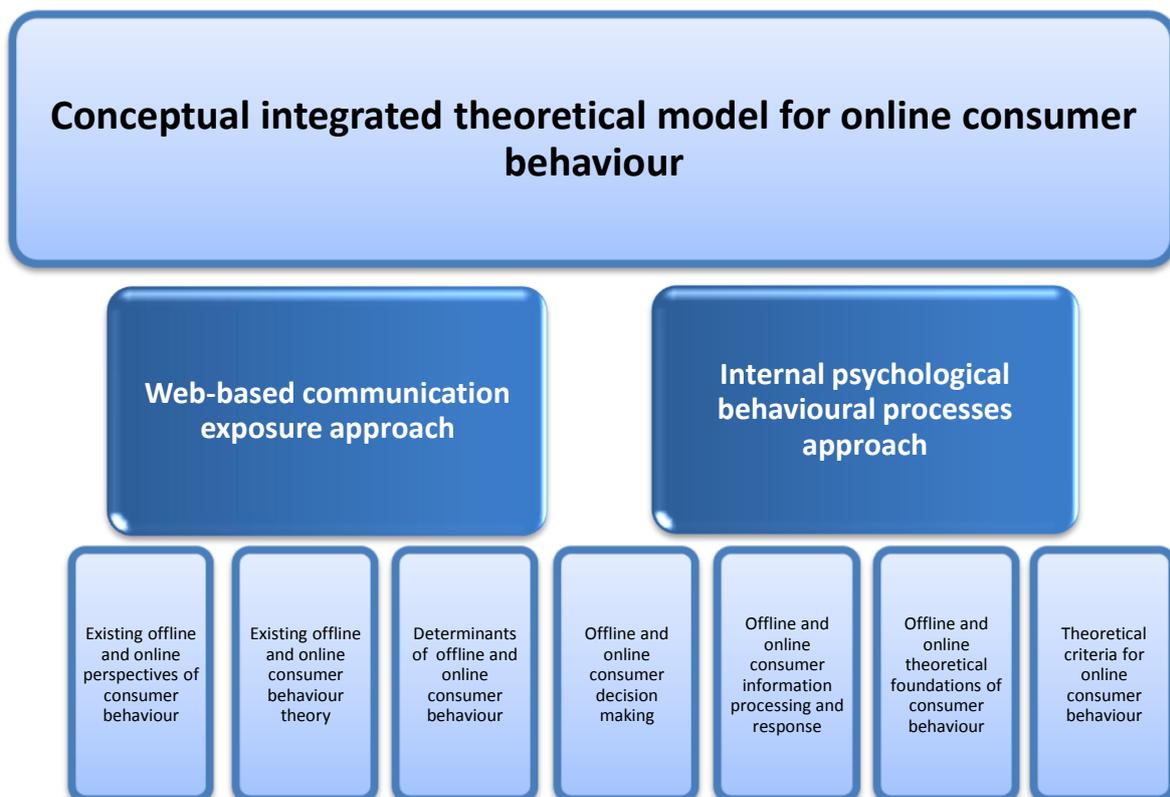


Figure 2.2: Contextualisation of online consumer behaviour in terms of the newly proposed approaches and main theoretical constructs which will form the basis for the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour

2.3.2.1 *The web-based communication exposure approach*

The web-based communication exposure approach does not exist in the literature and is proposed to indicate an alternative approach to the usual purchasing approach to consumer behaviour, namely a web-based communication exposure approach. However, to theoretically explicate this new approach and provide a theoretical foundation, certain existing theoretical constructs of existing online consumer behaviour theory are considered below. These existing theoretical constructs are subsequently applied to the new proposed approach.

Based on the existing literature, the proposed web-based communication exposure approach, which explains online consumer behaviour in terms of behavioural processes of online consumers during their exposure to web-based communication messages in their search for and experience of online information and messages, underscores the suggestion of Koufaris (2002), Constantinides (2004) and Demangeot and Broderick (2007) that online consumer behaviour studies should not only consider the online consumer's purchasing behaviour (Koufaris 2002; Cheung et al 2003; Demangeot & Broderick 2007; Dennis et al 2009), but should also regard him/her as a computer user who experiences the complete web experience. According to these authors, this includes a combination of online functionality factors dealing with the website's usability and interactivity, psychological factors that may lower the consumer's uncertainty by communicating trust and credibility and content factors such as the aesthetic aspects of the site. Koufaris (2002), Constantinides (2004) and Demangeot and Broderick (2007) suggest that the complete web experience reaches beyond the 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) of the traditional marketing mix to include information acquisition and the search for escapism, fantasy and fun. It is argued that a new perspective in addition to the

traditional buying behaviour frameworks is essential to consider in understanding online consumer behaviour. This perspective should explain that the prime medium of delivering the web experience is the corporate website, which Constantinides (2004: 112) defines as “the interfacing platform between the firm and its online clients”. Well-designed websites will offer online consumers products to buy or services to use and also assist them through the steps of the buying process. Websites should thus be seen as significant instruments of customer service and persuasion instead of merely an online catalogue of products (Constantinides 2004).

In addition, in their study of online consumer behaviour, Cheung et al (2003) proposed a framework that influences the process of online purchasing behaviour comprising the following five domain areas: individual/consumer characteristics, environmental influences, product/service characteristics, medium characteristics and online merchant and intermediary characteristics. Although Cheung et al (2003) conceptualised the online purchasing process within this proposed theoretical framework, it is argued that, and in line with the web-based communication exposure approach, this could be simplistically applied to the online consumer behavioural process. Cheung et al’s (2003) model explains online consumer purchasing processes as a linear process consisting of consumer online purchase intention, consumer online purchase adoption and consumer online repurchase continuance. Hence the major determinants, according to Cheung et al (2003), are attitude, subjective norm and perceived behaviour. According to their model, a number of factors affect consumers’ purchases online in the consumer online purchase adoption phase. Similar to online purchasing processes, when exposed to or experiencing web-based communication messages, the online consumer will be affected by intention, attitude, subjective norm, perceived behaviour control, ease of use and perceived usefulness when deciding whether or not to use the information accessed. The last proposed phase of the model of intention, adoption and continuance (MIAC) proposed by Cheung et al (2003) is the consumer online repurchase continuance phase. They suggested that when online consumers are exposed to web-based communication messages, several factors such as postulated

satisfaction, confirmation and loyalty incentives will influence their continuance of the communication endeavour.

Based on the discussion above it is thus deduced that Cheung et al's (2003) proposed framework for online consumer behaviour is similar to Demangeot and Broderick's (2007) consideration of the cognitive behaviour of online consumers, which is, in turn, in line with Assael's (2004) micro and macro perspective of cognitive processes as influenced by culturally derived contextual factors (see section 2.3). Although these authors refer to the online purchasing/shopping experience, it is argued that this approach can also be applied to online consumers' general experience during exposure to web-based communication messages, which is therefore proposed in the web-based communication exposure approach. Hence, it is argued that online environments should be perceived in a more cognitive manner than the offline environments owing to the higher cognitive effort expected from consumers when interacting in this environment. Because computer-mediated activities are less intuitive than the offline environment and depend instead on cognitive processes in cognitive landscapes (Demangeot & Broderick 2007), it is more two-dimensional. This explains that online consumers' understanding of the information on the webpage and the involvement they experience during interaction on the webpage will determine their liking of and behavioural intention towards a webpage (Demangeot & Broderick 2007). All online consumers are engaged in information-gathering processes, be it during the prepurchase information-gathering phase or when browsing the website, but this should be linked to the information-seeking processes of online consumers to make sense and the need to explore. These two needs exist concurrently (Demangeot & Broderick 2007) and resemble the distinction between cognitive and experiential routes to gaining information. The ease of use and usefulness of websites determine sense making and exploratory potential. Online consumers' interest, arousal and involvement increase as they perceive the website to be useful and reasonably easy to use. This again ties in with behavioural intentions that can be predictors of behaviour. Demangeot and Broderick (2007:7) suggest that involvement produces both hedonic and utilitarian value and that the "immersive state of involvement is also enjoyed for its intrinsic benefits".

Furthermore, involvement mediates a relationship between exploratory potential and utilitarian value, which contributes to the intention to revisit the site in similar proportions.

The views presented above provide essential theoretical concepts for consideration in the proposal of the new web-based communication exposure approach to online consumer behaviour. In the existing literature, the online consumer is merely regarded as a computer user who engages with online functionality factors in searching for products, escapism, fantasy and fun. It was further indicated that the corporate website is important during the process of purchasing online and that this involves the following five domain areas: individual/consumer characteristics, environmental influences, product/service characteristics, medium characteristics and online merchant and intermediary characteristics. It is thus clear that the existing approaches to online consumer behaviour regard the online consumer behavioural process in terms of a purchasing process influenced by online functionality and technological factors.

Following the existing viewpoints expressed in the literature, as explained above, the suggested web-based communication exposure approach serves the purpose of approaching this study from an online consumer behavioural perspective and therefore explains online consumer behaviour in terms of exposure to and the experience of web-based communication messages. This approach examines online consumers' behaviour when *exposed* to and experiencing web-based communication messages, as opposed to, but also inclusive of certain existing theoretical constructs of online consumer behaviour when *purchasing* online. In the context of this approach, the informational perspective is emphasised in that it explains online consumer behaviour as information-seeking and consumption actions as a result of exposure to web-based communication messages. This approach therefore considers consumers' online behaviour in terms of the *exposure* to or *experience* of web content, be this organisational websites or integrated online marketing communication messages (online marketing, online advertising, online public relations and online promotional messages), which, in this study, are referred

to as web-based communication. It should be emphasised that although online consumer behaviour is considered here in terms of *exposure* to web-based communication, one should bear in mind that this exposure can ultimately lead to buying or purchasing. Purchasing behaviour is thus not excluded from this point of view, but is regarded as an integral part of the behavioural processes that online consumers go through when exposed to web-based communication messages.

Hence in the context of this approach, reference is made to online consumers' behaviour in terms of exposure to web-based communication messages, which refers to their experience and behaviour towards web-based communication messages that market products, but also to web-based communication messages that provide informational organisational content. Thus, according to this approach, online consumer behaviour encompasses all web-based communication exposure and experience occasions relating to information search and message consumption and not only purchasing behaviour. It is further posited that when online consumers are exposed to or experience web-based communication messages (not necessarily with the intention of buying or purchasing a product), they will proceed from a stage of intentionally approaching web-based communication messages, whether for their commercial function or informational function.

In addition to viewing online consumer behaviour in terms of a web-based communication exposure approach, it is also proposed that online consumer behaviour should be considered to include behavioural processes at the internal psychological level. This suggests another new approach, which is subsequently termed the internal psychological behavioural processes approach.

2.3.2.2 *The internal psychological behavioural processes approach*

The internal psychological behavioural processes approach to online consumer behaviour is proposed on the basis of the realisation of the need to consider the internal psychological behavioural processes that online consumers pass through when exposed to web-based communication messages, as opposed to the usual

technical orientation focusing on website experience, including click-throughs, (Martinez-Lopez et al 2009) of existing research studies on online consumer behaviour. By considering online consumer behaviour from an internal psychological behavioural approach, this study posits, inter alia, the internal behavioural processes that online consumers pass through when exposed to web-based communication messages by considering psychological variables and constructs. This new approach thus expands on the limited existing online consumer behaviour literature with a clear user/consumer focus orientation by explicating the psychological elements that explain online consumer behaviour.

Because this proposed approach focuses on the internal psychological behavioural processes that online consumers go through when experiencing web-based communication messages, it expands on the existing literature by considering cognitive, affective, emotional and rational theoretical constructs. For the purpose of this study, these are collectively referred to as psychological constructs, which will be subsequently termed the *internal psychological behavioural processes approach*. Hence according to this approach, online consumers go through certain internal psychological processes during their exposure to web-based communication messages and experience of online information.

The new internal psychological behavioural processes approach proposes an alternative approach to the usual technically oriented approach to online consumers' behavioural processes by suggesting an internal psychological behavioural processes approach. However, to theoretically explicate this new approach, the psychological constructs that exist in the literature are used as a theoretical foundation for the new approach.

It is put forward that online consumers' internal psychological behavioural processes influence their behaviour, which is determined by and composed of internal constructs such as preinformation consumer perception attributes, preinformation consumer attitudinal attributes, postinformational consumer attitudes, emotion and

reason, motivation, exposure, attention, perception, knowledge and understanding, attitude formation, memory and retrieval.

The internal psychological behavioural processes approach explains internal behavioural processes according to the following psychological theoretical constructs, in terms of the online perspective based on existing authors' viewpoints. Each psychological construct will be explained by first providing an overview of existing viewpoints, followed by the application thereof in the online context of this study.

- **Pre-information consumer perception attributes**

Taylor and Strutton (2009) identify four *prepurchase* consumer perception attributes, namely *perceived ease of use*, *perceived usefulness*, *perceived value* and *perceived risk* as the key predictors of online consumers' behavioural intentions. *Perceived ease of use* explains online consumers' perception of the level of difficulty of the use of a particular website or web-based communication message. The technical attributes such as visual design, user interfaces and navigation influence consumers' perception of the "ease of use" of a particular message or website. *Perceived usefulness* of the online system that is going to be utilised, needs to provide the online consumer with the possibility of enhancing the online experience. *Perceived value* that a product provides to a consumer refers to the value of a product in terms of the consumer's "overall assessment of a product's utility based on perceptions of what is given and received", as well as the benefits received from the seller after providing monetary value to purchase the product (Taylor & Strutton 2009:3). Another attribute influencing online consumers' behavioural intentions is *perceived risk*. Taylor and Strutton (2009:4) define *perceived risk* as "a consumer's belief about the likelihood of gains and losses being associated with a given consumption decision".

If Taylor and Strutton's (2009) *prepurchase* consumer perception attributes are applied to the internal psychological behavioural processes approach of this study,

they are subsequently termed preinformation consumer perception attributes. It is argued that, in the context of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach, the website or web-based communication message needs to be relatively easy to use when providing useful information or other advantages to the online consumer, because of its influence on the online consumers' internal psychological behavioural processes. Furthermore, it is argued that *perceived value* should refer to the value that online consumers experience during exposure to or interaction with web-based communication messages. The contention is that consumers may not necessarily have the intention to purchase a product or service, but may need information on a particular product, service or organisation and will not necessarily purchase the product, but in the process will be exposed to different web-based communication messages. In this instance, *perceived value* will also play a role in online consumers' perception and attitude formation of the entire web-based communication experience. Perceived risk, in this context, refers to the uncertainty associated with online communication encounters which influences online consumers' interaction with web-based communication messages.

- **Preinformation consumer attitudinal attributes**

Taylor and Strutton (2009) refer to *prepurchase* consumer attitudinal attributes as those pre-existing attitudes towards online purchases and encounters that online consumers usually have. They identify three main factors that influence prepurchase consumer attitudinal attributes, namely *trust*, *literacy* and *affinity*. *Trust* refers to faith or confidence that the other party, who is part of the exchange, has the integrity and will fulfil obligations, which in a purchasing context, refers to the online consumer being able to trust the online retailer to provide the product or service promised. Trust in the online environment is associated with a privacy concern that is exacerbated by the fact that personal information flows over a network of interconnected computers. *Literacy* and *affinity* refer to the need for online consumers to be literate in terms of being able to read and write, but also the need to be internet literate to be able to use an internet-connected computer and internet application (Taylor & Strutton 2009).

In the context of the proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach, prepurchase consumer attitudinal attributes are termed preinformation consumer attitudinal attributes. In this context, *trust* is applied to the web-based communication experience and explains the trusting relationship that needs to exist between the online consumer and the organisation. Online consumers need to be able to trust the organisation to provide trustworthy information that will increase the perceived usefulness and value and reduce the perceived risk of informational content and web-based communication messages.

- **Postinformational consumer attitudes**

According to Taylor and Strutton (2009), *postpurchase* consumer attitudes refer to *positive* and *negative disconfirmation*, which relates to *satisfaction*, which will lead to *ease of use* and *perceived usefulness* as indicated in the preceding discussion. Positive disconfirmation takes place if, after the purchase, the experience of the consumer was better than expected, while negative disconfirmation occurs when the online consumer is worse off than expected (Taylor & Strutton 2009).

In the context of the proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach, *postpurchase* consumer attitudes are termed *postinformational* consumer attitudes and posit that both positive and negative disconfirmation refers to the *satisfaction* that consumers experience after they have been exposed to web-based communication messages and interacted online. It is argued that satisfaction with the communication encounter will lead to trust, which in turn will bring about the perception of *ease of use* and *perceived usefulness*, and ultimately a feeling that the informational or web-based communication encounter or experience was valuable.

- **Emotion and reason as the motivation for consumer behaviour**

Motivations of emotion and reason are significant contributors to consumers' choices of products and services and their processing of communication messages such as marketing communication messages. Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer (1999:184) define

emotions as “mental states of readiness that arise from appraisals of events or one’s own thoughts”. Reason refers to consumers analysing and processing information in terms of the attributes of products and services, which constitutes ratiocination and reason for the optimisation of decisions (Chaudhuri 2006). The emotional (knowledge by acquaintance) and rational manner (knowledge by description) in which consumers behave are separate, but also complementary means of gaining knowledge. An immediate and direct subjective experience that is self-evident is described as knowledge by acquaintance (emotion), whereas knowledge by description (reason) explains the interpretation of sensory data and involves judgements about phenomena (Chaudhuri 2006).

When this is applied to the proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach to explain how online consumers process information obtained from web-based communication messages, it can explain the manner in which the brain uses two different ways of acquiring knowledge when exposed to communication messages, namely the emotional (knowledge by acquaintance) and rational (knowledge by description) functions.

The communication of emotion and reason

Although emotion and reason are both ways of gathering and interpreting information, they explain internal consumer behavioural patterns differently. According to Chaudhuri (2006), the communication of a stimulus can be spontaneous or symbolic. Spontaneous communication is biologically shared, nonintentional or automatic, nonpropositional and is expressed through signs that make motivational-emotional states externally accessible. In symbolic communication, rational messages are symbolically communicated, while being socially shared, intentional and propositional, requires knowledge by description and is based upon learnt symbols. He also argues that emotional and rational messages are usually communicated simultaneously and interact and modify one another. These types of communication are practically demonstrated by Chaudhuri (2006) as follows: All nonverbal communication in an advertisement can be regarded as

emotional communication messages, along with the facial expressions of the actors, as well as the colour and settings in the advertisement. Symbolic communication is represented by all language that use symbols to convey meaning.

Based on Chaudhuri's (2006) viewpoint, it can be said that communication in the online and offline environment can be executed in a rational or emotional manner, and it is also processed by consumers in a rational or emotional mode. These types of processing clarify consumers' processing methods or tools which form part of the proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach to explain the complex internal psychological behavioural processes of consumers during exposure to information and messages.

Forms of emotions

Chaudhuri (2006) identifies various forms of emotions as follows: *Emotion I (EI)*: The heart rate changes, and blood pressure and sweating are altered to support action. These are referred to as physiological responses which adapt the body to changes in the environment and keep it in balance. *Emotion II (EII)*: This type of emotion reveals a person's motivational-emotional state, its purpose being to socially coordinate by means of facial expressions, gesture and posture, which are referred to as spontaneous and expressive behaviour. *Emotion III (EIII)*: This type of emotion can be referred to as affect and refers to immediate and direct subjective experiences – commonly thought of as emotion. These emotional responses also include physiological reactions (EI) and facial expressions (EII).

According to Chaudhuri (2006), these emotional and rational systems of behaviour are continuously in interaction. He explains this as follows: Emotional stimuli first invade the emotional system; then the subjective experience provokes the rational-cognitive system and is itself informed through the appraisal of internal and external information (Chaudhuri 2006). These interactions and cross-informative actions lead to goal-directed behaviour and determine the behaviour of consumers.

Chaudhuri (2006) further contends that the online consumer's intention to return to a website, for example, is influenced by psychological and marketing variables. In the psychology context, emotional responses to the environment mediate the relationship between the environment and the consumer's behaviour. In addition, an individual's emotional state is influenced by physical and social stimuli in the environment. The emotional responses of pleasure, dominance and arousal are impacted on by an individual's personality traits. These emotional responses influence an individual's feelings, which in turn influence behaviour, social interaction and purchasing and communication exposure behaviour.

In line with this study's focal aim on online consumer behaviour and internal psychological behavioural processes, emotions need to be explained in terms of online consumer behaviour. Koufaris (2002) explicates that online purchasing can elicit both emotional and cognitive responses, therefore, it is argued that exposure to web-based communication messages and information will also elicit both emotional and cognitive responses. These responses are thus indicative of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach because they signify internal psychological constructs.

The concept of flow

Another theoretical explanation by Koufaris (2002) of emotion in consumer behaviour refers to the concept of *flow*. He explains it as follows: *Flow* is studied in the context of information technologies and computer-mediated environments and has been recommended as a possible metric of the online consumer experience. *Flow* also relates a consumer's experience when he/she is totally involved in an activity. During this emotional state, the consumer typically narrows the focus of awareness so that irrelevant perceptions and thoughts are filtered out. The consumer further "loses self-consciousness by responsiveness to clear goals and unambiguous feedback and by a sense of control over the environment" (Koufaris 2002:208).

According to Koufaris (2004), the following emotional and cognitive components constitute *flow*:

- *Shopping enjoyment*: The level of intrinsic enjoyment as a measure of *flow* can be applied to the online shopping experience. Since the intrinsic enjoyment of an activity is similar to the “emotional response of pleasure from environmental psychology” (Koufaris 2002:208), it is argued that intrinsic enjoyment can also be applied to consumers’ pleasure in searching for online information and consequently the exposure to web-based communication messages occasion. It is thus clear that this relates to the internal psychological behavioural processes approach proposed in this section.
- *Perceived control*: Perceived control is a similar concept to that of the emotional response of dominance from environmental psychology. This thus refers to the control that the consumer has over his/her web-based communication messages exposure process or purchasing behaviour. Koufaris (2002:208) defines it as “the level of one’s control over the environment and one’s actions”. Online consumers are regarded as utilitarian because of their need for control and they therefore tend to prefer sites, online information, online actions and online processes that afford them the opportunity to execute perceived control to which they react with loyalty.
- *Concentration/attention focus*: An online consumer is regarded to be in *flow* when he/she concentrates on the online activity being executed. Concentration and attention are influenced by any distractions that may occur while the online consumer is performing an online action.

- **Consumer motivation**

Hoyer and MacInnis (2001:54) define motivation as “an inner state of arousal with aroused energy directed to achieving a goal”, while Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:63) see it as “the driving force within individuals that impels them to action”. Hence consumer motivation will lead to the following: (1) being energised, ready and willing to engage in a goal-relevant activity; (2) engaging in goal-relevant behaviour, which

describes consumers' willingness to engage in behaviours that are relevant to their goals; (3) experiencing an affect in the sense that consumers process the information and make decisions, because when a consumer is highly motivated to achieve a particular goal, he/she pays careful attention to the goal, thinks about it, tries to comprehend the message, evaluates it critically and remembers the information for future retrieval; and (4) evoking a psychological state in consumers referred to as involvement (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001). Involvement is a major component of motivation which, according to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), refers to the psychological experience of felt involvement, which can be described in terms of the following four types:

- *Enduring involvement*: This type of involvement exists when consumers show an interest in an offering over a long period of time.
- *Situational involvement*: Consumers experience situational involvement during a particular offering or activity.
- *Cognitive involvement*: A distinction between cognitive and affective involvement is of importance to the study of consumer behaviour. Cognitive involvement means that consumers think about, process and learn about the offering or information,
- *Affective involvement*: Affective involvement means that the consumer has feelings about the offering or that he/she spends emotional energy on processing information.

Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) elaborate on involvement by explaining that consumers can be involved in different objects such as (1) *product categories*, which involve, say, cars, computers or clothes; (2) *brands*, which refer to brand loyalty when consumers are emotionally or cognitively involved with them; and (3) *objects*, which may refer to their involvement with advertisements.

Hence when consumers are involved in advertisements, they are motivated to attend to and process advertising message information (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001). Consumers are usually more involved in an advertisement when the message and

information are relevant to them. Low-involvement and high-involvement media that convey the advertising message can also be an object of involvement for consumers, as can involvement with decisions, which is referred to as response involvement (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001).

Because of the focus of this study and the proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, only the third category (objects), is regarded relevant. *Objects* were defined above as referring to consumers' involvement with advertisements. When this is applied to the internal psychological behavioural processes approach, it could be argued that it refers to online consumers' involvement with web-based communication messages and information during their exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages. Since these messages refer to integrated online marketing communication messages, which describe the integrated nature of all online advertising, promotional, public relations and marketing communication messages, this *object* involvement accurately describes online consumers' involvement with online messages.

Personal relevance as a determinant of motivation

Personal relevance influences consumer motivation which, in turn, is affected by three factors, namely *values*, *goals* and *needs* (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Wright 2006). According to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), personal relevance refers to the extent to which something is personally relevant to the consumer, thus explaining how significantly the consequences have implications for his/her life. When information is personally relevant, consumers process information and make decisions and process information with a great deal of effort. Personal relevance is increased when information is consistent with values, goals and needs. *Values* are beliefs that guide what is good or important, while *goals* are objectives that consumers wish to achieve and constitute another factor that can influence motivation (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001).

In the context of the proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach, *needs* are regarded as an important internal psychological factor that influences motivation and is highlighted for the purpose of this discussion. When a need arises, tension is produced in the individual experiencing the need (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001). This motivates him/her to find a way to fulfil the need. This process takes place because each need has an equilibrium level at which it is in a state of satisfaction. When this equilibrium is disturbed, tension is produced.

Maslow (1970) proposed the well-known theory of needs by categorising *needs* into five categories or levels: (1) physiological (the need for food, water and sleep); (2) safety (the need for shelter, protection, and security); (3) social (the need for affection, friendship, and acceptance); (4) egoistic (the need for prestige, success, accomplishment and self-esteem); and (5) self-actualisation (the need for self-fulfilment and enriching experiences). According to this theory, lower-order needs need to be satisfied before higher-order needs can be satisfied. Needs are furthermore categorised in terms of (1) social and nonsocial needs, and (2) functional, symbolic and hedonic needs. Social needs require the presence or actions of other people, while nonsocial needs refer to needs in which achievement is not based on other people. Functional needs, however, refer to the motivation to search for products that solve consumption-related problems, while symbolic needs are connected to senses of the self. Hedonic needs relate to inherent desires for sensory pleasure, while needs for cognition and stimulation refer to certain personality characteristics that are relevant to needs (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001). Hence consumers with a need for mental stimulation (cognition) actively process information from marketing communication messages, while consumers with high optimum stimulation level (OSL) seek information about brands.

Consumer ability

Hoyer and MacInnis (2001:71) define *ability* as “the extent to which consumers have the necessary resources (generally knowledge, intelligence and money) to make the

outcome happen”. Since consumer action is driven by motivation, if consumers do not have the *ability* to process information, action will not be the final outcome of the behavioural processes. In addition, based on Hoyer and MacInnis’ (2001) viewpoints on consumer ability below, it is posited that active decision making is also only possible if consumers have the *ability* to process information, which is, in turn, influenced by product knowledge and experience, cognitive style, intelligence, education and age. Consumers with product knowledge and experience will engage in complicated information-processing activities and think deeply about the information they are exposed to. Consumers’ *ability* to process information differs in terms of their cognitive style of information processing. Some consumers process information visually, while others process it verbally. Others again engage in complex cognitive information processing by making distinctions when processing information and considering a greater diversity of information when making these decisions (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:71).

It is hence argued that consumer ability is a theoretical psychological construct which, inter alia, illustrates the internal psychological behavioural approach in that it indicates that if the consumer does not have the ability to process information adequately, he/she will not be able to engage in the final action step of the consumer behavioural process.

- **Exposure, attention and perception**

The previous section explained that consumer motivation has an important influence on the complete consumer behavioural process. Certain factors influence consumer motivation in terms of acceptance of the marketing communication message and of the purchasing process. The subsequent discussion indicates the significance and influence of exposure and attention, as examples of internal psychological behavioural factors, on the perception of the marketing communication message.

Exposure

Exposure is, according to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), the process in which the consumer comes into physical contact with a stimulus. Before any type of information processing can take place, exposure to the marketing message needs to occur. Since consumer behaviour is examined from the proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches in this section, it is argued that offline and online consumer behaviour should be described and explained in terms of how consumers behave when they are *exposed* to and experience marketing communication messages or web-based communication messages and not in terms of how they behave when purchasing or attempting to purchase a product or use a service.

Attention

Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) regard attention as the devotion of a mental activity to a stimulus in order to process information, thereby contextualising the discussion on attention below which is based on their viewpoints:

One of the key aspects of attention is that it is selective in the sense that consumers decide which of the numerous stimuli they wish to pay attention to, or alternatively, divide mental resources into units and allocate some to one task and some to another. This division of attention among multiple elements can only be done if processing them is relatively automatic, well practised and effortless. A form of attention is preattentive processing, which occurs when information is processed from the peripheral vision even if there is no awareness that they are being attended to. With this type of processing, attentional resources are devoted to one thing, leaving limited resources for attending to something else. Consumers' ability to process information preattentively therefore depends on whether the stimulus is a picture or a word and whether it is placed in the right or left visual field. If brand names are processed preattentively, they will be more liked than if there has been no exposure to them at all.

It is thus posited that preattentive processing makes a brand name familiar and things that are familiar are usually liked and in the context of the proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach, preattentive processing leads to familiarity of the web-based communication message and information.

Perception

Wright (2006:109) explains perception as “the perceptual process through which the individual constructs thought, mental pictures and concepts in his/her mind as stimuli from the outside world bombarding his/her body and entering the brain and consciousness through the senses”. This perceptual process can be deliberate or habitual or anywhere in between, according to Wright (2006), who notes that numerous inputs/stimuli try to enter the individual’s senses. However, Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) and Assael (2004) explain perception as stimuli that are registered by one of the five senses: vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch. According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) and Assael (2004), perceptions are explained by means of three factors. Firstly, sensory processing is simplified by the fact that many stimuli do not enter conscious awareness because of a minimal level of stimulus intensity needed for a stimulus to be perceived, referred to as the absolute threshold. Secondly, an intensity difference, referred to as the differential threshold, between stimuli is also needed before it is possible to perceive that stimuli are different. Thirdly, subliminal perception refers to stimuli presented below the threshold level of awareness and is therefore referred to as subliminal perception.

- **Knowledge and understanding**

This section explains how consumers obtain knowledge and understand the world around them, according to Hoyer and MacInnis’ (2001:104) view, namely that “consumers relate what they perceive and attend to with what they already know – their prior knowledge”. This requires an understanding of knowledge content and structure. These differences are subsequently highlighted on the basis of Hoyer and

MacInnis' (2001) perspectives. Knowledge content refers to the information that is already learnt, while knowledge structure refers to the manner in which knowledge is organised into categories. Consumers differ in terms of their knowledge content and knowledge structure because of the differences in their cultural system and level of expertise. The cultural system in which consumers function affects their knowledge system in the following ways:

- *Different associations linked to a concept:* Because individuals from different cultural groups will associate different concepts with different meanings, the nature and strength of associations linked to a concept will vary across various cultural systems.
- *Different category members:* Consumers from different cultural systems assign different category members to diverse categories. Consumers will differ, for example, in terms of how they categorise food categories.
- *Different category prototypes:* Different brand positioning strategies are required for different cultural groups since this may vary across cultures.
- *Different correlated associations:* Different cultural groups will correlate information and the direction of information differently.
- *Different brand derived categories:* Different cultural groups have different entities in goal-derived categories. Not all cultural groups will, for example, assign importance to wearing sexy clothing.

The subsequent section considers the knowledge formation and comprehension processes and is based on Schiffman and Kanuk's (2000) and Hoyer and MacInnis's (2001) perspectives.

Consumers' decisions are not only influenced when they attend to and perceive stimuli, but they also need to interpret and assign meaning to them. Consumers' prior knowledge furthermore influences the interpretation that they award stimuli, which coincides with the first step in the process of using knowledge to understand. This first step occurs when consumers categorise an object on the basis of their prior knowledge to label, identify and classify something new. The categorisation of an object furthermore depends on the inferences, elaboration, type of evaluation,

consideration, choice and satisfaction it provides to consumers. The categorisation of an object thus refers to the process of identifying an entity, whereas the next step in the process of using knowledge to understand is comprehension. Comprehension, according to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), is the process of extracting higher-order meaning from it and consumers engage in two types of comprehension. The first is objective comprehension, which explains the process of consumers extracting the intended meaning from the message, while the second type is subjective in the sense that the consumer adds to a message different or additional meaning, which was not necessarily intended. Objective comprehension thus refers to the process that consumers engage in when they accurately understand the message as intended by the communicator, while subjective comprehension relates to the process of reflecting what is thought to be known, whether it is accurate or not. During the comprehension process, whether objective or subjective, the consumer can engage in a process of miscomprehension which is influenced by consumers' motivation, ability and the opportunity that arises during the communication process. Subjective comprehension, however, involves interaction between what is in a message and what consumers know.

It is clear that consumers move through different levels of subjective comprehension to assign meanings to communication messages.

- **Attitude formation**

When thoughts are linked to attitudes in terms of the thinking effort that consumers put into forming an attitude and processing a marketing communication message, attitude formation takes place. Hoyer and MacInnis's (2001:131) definition of an attitude is an "overall evaluation that expresses how much we like or dislike an object, issue, person or action", while according to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:200), an attitude is "a learned predisposition to behave in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way with respect to a given object". Assael (2004:214) explains that "attitudes are learned predispositions to respond to an object or class of objects in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way". From this one can infer that an attitude

is *learnt* and can push a consumer towards a message or pull him/her away from it. These attitudes stay fairly consistent, but are not necessarily permanent, since change can occur when the situation or context in which the attitude is formed or utilised, changes (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000). The situation changes the relationship between the attitude and the behaviour displayed.

The subsequent discussions on attitude formation address the attributes of attitudes, the affective/emotional foundations of attitudes, the three major dimensions that lead to positive attitudes and the circumstances in which attitudes influence consumer behaviour. These discussions will summarise Schiffman and Kanuk's (2000) and Hoyer and MacInnis's (2001) views.

The following are regarded as *attributes of attitudes*:

- Attitudes reflect an overall evaluation of communication messages based on associations linked to it.
- An attitude can be liked or disliked (favourability) and is accessible when it is easily and readily retrieved from memory.
- Attitudes also vary in strength, which refers to attitude confidence.
- In addition, attitudes vary in terms of endurance or persistence and may last for a short time or lengthy period. Those attitudes that last for a long time and are based on loyalty are particularly resistant to change.
- The foundations of attitudes can be based on cognitions (thoughts) or beliefs from an external source or information recalled from memory, or alternatively on our own emotions or emotions observed from other individuals.
- Attitudes are also based on the amount of thinking or elaboration that consumers are involved with in forming and changing attitudes. When there is substantial personal involvement in forming and changing attitudes and consumers actively put in a lot of effort into thinking about information, central-route processing takes place. Central processing occurs because consumers' attitudes are based on a careful consideration of the central issues contained in the message, while peripheral-route processing is used when limited elaboration (thinking and effort) is used for attitude formation.

The *affective (emotional) foundations* of attitudes are vital factors that contribute to the contextualisation of this study in terms of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. The affective (emotional) foundations of attitudes refer to the amount of emotional energy that consumers put into processing a message on an emotional basis. These emotional reactions can create favourable and enduring attitudes that are resistant to change. Hence when affective involvement is high, consumers experience strong reactions to a stimulus which can, in turn, influence attitudes. When affective responses occur, consumers' feelings are used as sources of information and are used to evaluate the stimulus. When consumers see others are experiencing strong emotions, they also experience certain feelings that can hamper the consumer's effort to develop a cognitive attitude. The emotional basis of attitudes is difficult to research, which is the case with most psychological constructs. This emotional basis is therefore not fully understood, but what is generally known is that consumers process information on a general level rather than analytically when affective involvement is high.

When attitudes towards the advertisement or, in the context of this study, towards marketing communication messages in the online environment (ie web-based communication messages) are formed, *three major dimensions can lead to a positive attitude*. The first one is the informational value in the advertisement. When the advertisement is informative, it is better liked and generates more positive responses and attitudes. This is referred to as the *utilitarian or functional dimension*. The second dimension is known as the *hedonic dimension* and refers to advertisements that can create positive feelings or emotions. Advertisements that elicit positive experiences or thoughts from memory are liked and attended to. The third is the *interest dimension* of the advertisement, that is, the amount of curiosity and attention it arouses.

After attitudes have been formed, they will *affect consumers' behaviour only under certain circumstances*. The first requirement is that *cognitive involvement should be high*. When the level of involvement or elaboration is high and consumers thoroughly think about the information in the communication message, their attitude will

probably influence their behaviour. Secondly, when the consumer is *knowledgeable* about or experienced with the object of the attitude, attitudes will be strong and may predict behaviour (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001). Thirdly, when attitudes are *easily accessible* and can be easily remembered, they will influence behaviour. This refers to the accessibility of attitudes. *Attitude confidence* is the fourth factor that can influence the ability of attitudes to influence behaviour. Consumer confidence in the attitude is stronger when the attitude is based on a considerable amount of trustworthy information. The fifth factor, the *specificity of attitudes*, refers to attitudes being good predictors of behaviour when the behaviour they are trying to predict is specific. *Situational factors*, the sixth factor, explain that “intervening situational factors can prevent a behaviour from being performed and can thus weaken the attitude-behaviour relationship” (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:151). *Normative beliefs and motivation*, the seventh factor, also affect the attitude-behaviour relationship. The last factor that can predict attitude-behaviour relationships is *personality variables*. This factor explains that certain personality types will demonstrate stronger attitude-behaviour relationships than others.

Ajzen and Fishbein (1969), Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) and Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) proposed several models to describe attitude formation – in other words, how thoughts are related to attitudes when consumers are likely to put a lot of effort into processing information and making decisions:

The cognitive response model: The focus of this model is on the manner in which consumers’ thought reactions to a message affect their attitudes. Cognitive responses therefore refer to the recognitions, evaluations, associations, images, ideas and thoughts that consumers have when exposed to communication messages. The following three categories describe the types of cognitive responses experienced when exposed to communications:

- *Counterarguments (CAs):* Counterarguments refer to thoughts that express disagreement with the message.
- *Support arguments (SAs):* Support arguments are thoughts that express agreement with the message.

- *Source derogations (SDs)*: Source derogations are thoughts that discount or attack the source of the message.

According to this model, these responses affect consumers' attitudes, especially counterarguments and source derogations that result in less favourable initial attitudes or resistance to attitude change. This model thus suggests that consumers do not always blindly accept communication messages, but they also resist the message or certain meanings contained in the messages.

The tricomponent attitude model: The tricomponent attitude model coincides with the theory of reasoned action (TORA) model since both explain attitude formation in terms of the cognitive, affective and conative component (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000). In the same vein as the discussion above, the *cognitive component* relates to attitudes that are formed on the basis of the knowledge and perceptions obtained from the *attitude object* and associated information. The *affective component* refers to an individual's *evaluative emotions* or *feelings* towards a brand or message and constitutes the assessment of the *attitude object*. The tricomponent attitude model lastly refers to the *conative component* as being indicative of the *likelihood* or *tendency* that the consumer will engage in certain behaviour and act in a certain way when confronted with a particular *attitude object*.

The attitude-toward-object model: This model was developed to indicate attitudes towards certain products or brands. According to this model (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:205), consumers will evaluate the beliefs or attributes associated with the specific product and will act positively towards those products or brands that possess ample required attributes. The *attitude-toward-object model* is relevant to the context of this study since it can similarly predict attitudes towards messages, whether offline or online, that possess positive or negative attributes.

The attitude-toward-behaviour model: According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:206), this model predicts behaviour with respect to an object as a result of an attitude towards behaving or acting with respect to that specific object. This model's

focus is thus more on the actual behaviour with regard to an object than on the attitude towards the object directly.

The theory of reasoned action (TORA) model (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969): Although the theory of reasoned action is discussed in detail in chapter 6 and regarded a theoretical foundation of consumer behaviour, it is briefly contextualised here in terms of attitude formation and the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. The theory of reasoned action (TORA) coincides with the expectancy-value models (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001) that have been widely applied in the consumer behaviour field to explain how attitudes form and change. The TORA, like the tricomponent model, posits that attitude is made up of a cognitive, affective and conative component with the intention to act being influenced by subjective norms based on what relevant others think. In an individual's motivation to comply with relevant others by assessing normative beliefs he/she is influenced by his/her subjective norms.

Hence the TORA model in particular explains attitudes by incorporating the principle of attitude specificity, which in turn explains that the more specific the attitude is to the behaviour of interest, the more likely the attitude will be related to the behaviour. It is useful for marketers to examine consumers' attitudes towards engaging in behaviours, instead of examining attitudes towards the offerings. In addition to examining consumers' attitudes and the manner in which they are formed, the TORA model also considers how other people in the social environment influence consumer behaviour, thus describing the *normative beliefs* that an individual has of significant others. These are also referred to as *normative influences* and they play a vital role in forming and changing attitudes, as opposed to *subjective norms*, which influence the individual's intent to act or respond in a certain manner.

Attitudes based on low and high consumer effort

Based on Schiffman and Kanuk's (2000) and Hoyer and MacInnis's (2001) arguments relating to the formation of attitudes based on low and high consumer

effort, the following theoretical constructs are subsequently discussed: low consumer effort, high consumer effort, low-level beliefs, low-effort affective processes, classical conditioning and consumers' attitude towards the advertisement and moods.

When consumers' attitudes are not based on detailed consideration, thus *low consumer effort*, they are utilising the peripheral route to persuasion based on peripheral cues that are easily processed. When attitudes are formed on the basis of *high consumer effort*, central routes to persuasion are utilised. When peripheral routes to persuasion are evident in the attitude formation process, simple inferences are made. These are formed when consumers acquire simple beliefs by forming simple inferences that can be based on attributions or explanations for an endorsement. However, consumers can form heuristics, which are simple rules of thumb that are easy to invoke and require little thought, while frequency heuristic refers to consumers' belief formation based on a number of supporting arguments.

Low-level beliefs based on peripheral cues are not the only way that consumers can form attitudes with little effort – they can also be based on consumers' affective or emotional reactions to these easily processed peripheral cues. *Low-effort affective processes* include the mere exposure effect where familiar objects are preferred to unfamiliar ones.

Classical conditioning is another theory that impacts on the understanding of consumers' processing of information with little or a lot of effort. Classical conditioning is one way of influencing consumers' attitudes without invoking much processing effort. Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) and Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) used Ivan Pavlov's classical conditioning theory as an example of one of the best-known theories that explain processing and conditioning. This theory is based on the fact that hungry dogs salivate automatically when they see food. Pavlov developed his theory around the notion that he could condition dogs to salivate when they hear a bell ringing. According to this theory, the food was an unconditioned stimulus (UCS) and the salivation response to the food was an unconditioned response (UCR). A stimulus can be called unconditioned when it automatically elicits an involuntary

response – hence the dogs could not help but salivate when they saw the food. A conditioned stimulus (CS) does not automatically elicit an involuntary response by itself (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001). To explain this according to Pavlov's theory, the bell alone could not make the dogs salivate, but by repeatedly pairing the food (unconditioned stimulus) with the bell (conditioned stimulus), an involuntary unconditioned response (salivation) occurred. The salivation, however, became conditioned with the sound of the bell. The response was thus now evoked in the presence of the conditioned stimulus alone, and the response can thus be referred to as a conditioned response (CR).

The next concept that helps to explain the affective bases of attitudes in low-effort situations is the *consumer's attitude towards the advertisement*. When consumers really like an advertisement, they can transfer their positive feelings towards the advertisement to the brand. This process can also be described by the dual-mediation hypothesis, which explains the relationship between the consumer's feelings for the advertisement and the brand advertised in the advertisement. This hypothesis explains that consumers have a favourable attitude towards the advertisement because they find it believable or because they like it. It thus proposed that consumers' attitudes towards the advertisement can influence brand attitudes which, in turn, will influence the incentive to purchase. In addition, the effect of consumers' attitudes towards the advertisement or attitude towards the brand depends on prior attitudes towards the brand.

In addition to consumers' attitudes towards the advertisement, their *moods* also influence their affective attitudes. *Mood-congruent direction* refers to the manner in which moods can bias attitudes. Moods are different from classical conditioning in that they do not require a repeated association between two stimuli and can affect consumers' evaluations of any object, not only the stimulus.

- **Consumer memory and retrieval**

Consumer memory reflects prior knowledge and implies knowledge of products, services and consumption experiences that are stored in a personal storehouse. The process of remembering or accessing the stored information is called retrieval which, together with memory, are dependent on consumers' motivation, ability and opportunity to process the information (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001).

The discussion of consumer memory and retrieval is based on Schiffman and Kanuk's (2000) and Hoyer and MacInnis's (2001) views and is structured according to the following main theoretical concepts: the categories of memory, the main processes that influence memory formation, the retention process and the retrieval process.

Memory can be classified into the following four categories:

- *Sensory memory*: The information received through the senses is referred to as sensory memory and stored in a short-term storage area called the sensory store, which can store any type of memory such as echoic memory (memory of things heard) and iconic memory (sensory memory of things we see). Sensory memory operates automatically and thus refers to consumers' ability to store sensory experiences temporarily as they are produced. Although the senses receive information in fragmented pieces and transmit it to the brain in parallel, this information is stored in the actual sensory form and can also disappear if attention is focused on something else or if it is not analysed immediately.
- *Short-term memory*: Hoyer and MacInnis (2001:178) interpret short-term memory (STM) as "the portion of memory where we encode or interpret incoming information in light of existing knowledge". It is also referred to as working memory (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000) and explains information that is stored for a short period. However, if this information undergoes a process known as rehearsal and is mentally repeated, it is transferred to the long-term

memory. Different forms of short-term memory are identified. Discursive processing occurs when individuals think of an object such as a tree, which is then represented by the word *tree*. The object can also be interpreted visually, auditorally, tactilely, gustatorally or olfactorally, which then refers to imagery processing.

With both these types of memory (imagery and discursive), information in STM varies in terms of how much is elaborated on it. STM may consist of a simple reproduction of a stimulus when motivation, ability and opportunity are low. When these factors are conversely high, then consumers use “elaborated imagery processing to engage in daydreams, fantasies, and visual problem solving, or elaborated discursive processing to think about upcoming events or work out solutions to current problems” (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:179). STM is limited in that it can only hold a certain number of things at a specific time and is also short-lived unless transferred to long-term memory.

- *Long-term memory*: The part of memory that is stored for a more extensive period of time and saved for later use is referred to as long-term memory (LTM). LTM can be divided into autobiographical, episodic and semantic memory. Autobiographical and episodic memory represents knowledge about the self and the individual's past. These memories are usually primarily sensory and represent past experiences as well as emotions and sensations tied to those experiences. Certain concepts that exist in memory cannot be related to specific experiences. All individuals, for example, have memory of certain concepts such as “dog”, “table” and “computer”. This represents knowledge about the world that is detached from specific episodes, and is referred to as semantic memory.
- *Rehearsal and encoding*. In order to transfer information from the STM to the LTM, repetition and rehearsal of the information in the STM are necessary in order to transfer it to the LTM. As soon as a stimulus competes for attention, it can be lost and encoding cannot take place. Schiffman and Kanuk

(2000:178) explain encoding as “the process by which we select a word or visual image to represent a perceived object”. It is because of this encoding process that individuals “learn” pictures more easily and quickly than verbal information. This has consequences for learning in the online environment which is known for its information-intensive communication messages. Although a multimedia approach is possible in the online environment, the information intensity of messages sometimes reduces the use of graphics and visual images, thus hampering the possibility of learning taking place.

Three main processes influence the STM and increase the likelihood that information will be transferred to the LTM. *Chunking*, for example, occurs when a group of items is processed as a unit and increases the likelihood that information will not be lost from STM, while rehearsing takes place actively and is the process of interacting with the material the individual is trying to remember while transferring the information to LTM. It thus includes the process of recoding what has already been encoded to include larger *chunks* of information. Another way of transferring information to LTM is *recirculation*. The process of recirculation entails active attempts to remember information while recirculating it through the STM when it is encountered repeatedly. In recirculation, no attempt is made to remember the information, unlike the process of rehearsal where information is repeated in order to be remembered. *Information* can also be transferred into LTM by means of deeper levels of processing. This process is known as elaboration because information is actively linked to prior knowledge and past experiences.

Before any retrieving of information can take place, information should be organised and linked to renew links between different types of information – hence the process of *retention* takes place (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:179). Retention also includes a process of *activation* when old and new information is cognitively related in order to make it more meaningful. The term *schema* refers to bringing associations to mind when a cue is triggered, thus simplifying cognition and understanding. When information is stored in the LTM in the order that it is acquired, it is stored

episodically, but when stored according to significant concepts, it is stored *semantically* (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000).

Memory, however, cannot be used effectively if information cannot be retrieved from memory. *Retrieving* is defined as “remembering information and accessing it from a semantic (or associative) network” (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:185) and the “process by which we recover information from long-term storage” (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:181). A lot of information can be available in the memory, but it may be difficult to retrieve some of it at a specific point in time. The stronger the link between information and a product, for example, the stronger the trace strength and the more easily that specific information will be retrieved from memory. *Spreading of activation* is a factor that explains what is retrieved from memory. When there is a strong link between information and memory, the likelihood exists that retrieval will take place. The opposite also holds true and thus explains that retrieval sometimes fails when information cannot be remembered. When memory links decay over time when they are unused, it is explained by the trace strength concept. *Trace strength*, for example, fades when individuals attempt to remember things from their childhood. The process of decay can be reduced when individuals attempt to recirculate or retrieve information. Another process of retrieving failure, *interference*, relates to the problem of semantic networks that are too closely aligned, leading to uncertainty about which piece of memory to relate to which concept. In addition to memory decay and inferences, *primacy* and *recency* effects (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001) also explain retrieval failure and explain that individuals remember first and last occurrences the best.

Retrieval takes place from the explicit or implicit memory. *Explicit memory* is conscious memories actively retrieved from past experiences by recalling or recognising it. Recognition is the process of identifying something that has been seen before and recall involves the extensive activation of the links in memory. *Implicit memory* is activated when things are remembered without conscious awareness. Retrieval can also be made possible by means of *retrieval cues* which are stimuli that internally or externally facilitate the activation of memory. In terms of

the study of consumer behaviour, the brand name can act as a retrieval cue. When consumers see familiar brand names, they immediately retrieve from memory information relating to the brand name. This process has implications for consumer behaviour, since consumers do not remember a lot about the advertisement when they are making brand decisions in store. Advertisers and marketers therefore need to be aware of the fact that information processed through imagery is remembered better than information processed discursively. Dual coding occurs when concepts are processed in imagery form as pictures and words that provide extra associative links in memory. When information is processed only verbally, it is processed only discursively, and consequently only has one retrieval path. Consumers' moods influence the recall and retrieval of memory since when they are in a positive mood they will most likely retrieve positive information and when they are in a negative mood they will retrieve negative information. It is thus important for marketers and advertisers to place consumers in a positive mood in order for them to process and retrieve the information positively.

Based on the discussion of existing views and new perspectives, it is argued that memory and retrieval can play a key role in explaining some of the complex internal behavioural processes that online consumers go through when exposed to web-based communication messages. These concepts were discussed above in terms of existing offline consumption or buying behaviour perspectives. This will form the basis for explaining sections/phases/levels of the online consumer behavioural process from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed the first secondary research objective of this study by proposing a new web-based communication perspective on the concept of online consumer behaviour in addition to the existing offline perspectives. This was done by contextualising and defining consumer behaviour, firstly, as a study; secondly, from

existing offline perspectives; thirdly, from existing online perspectives; and lastly, from the proposed new web-based communication perspective.

In addressing secondary research objective 2, two new approaches to consumer behaviour, in addition to existing managerial and holistic approaches, were proposed. Firstly, the web-based communication exposure approach suggested a consideration of online consumer's behaviour in terms of being exposed to web-based communication messages and experiencing online communication as opposed to purchasing behaviour. This approach considered online consumers' behaviour, not only when they are purchasing online, but also when they are exposed to integrated online marketing communication messages (web-based communication messages). Secondly, the internal psychological behavioural processes approach elaborated on the usual technical orientation of existing online consumer behaviour approaches and considered psychological variables and constructs that are evident in the online consumer behavioural process and which are at times not considered in the existing technologically oriented purchasing models of online behaviour.

The next chapter provides an in-depth discussion and interpretation of the internal, external and unique online determinants that influence consumer behaviour from both the existing offline and the web-based communication or online perspective.

CHAPTER 3: DETERMINANTS OF OFFLINE AND ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 contextualised consumer behaviour and proposed two new theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour namely, the internal psychological behavioural processes approach and the web-based communication exposure approach. The first explained the internal psychological processes that online consumers go through during exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages, thus encompassing their total web experience. The internal psychological behavioural processes approach encompassed theoretical constructs such as motivation, perception, attitude formation, memory and retrieval, emotion and reason, ability, attention and knowledge and understanding. These theoretical constructs illustrated the cognitive and affective internal processes that online consumers proceed through when they are exposed to web-based communication messages. A few of the discussions on the internal determinants of consumer behaviour in the subsequent sections of this chapter overlap with the discussions on the psychological constructs as set out in the internal psychological behavioural processes approach in the previous chapter. The reason for the inclusion of several of these constructs in this chapter is that they are also regarded as internal determinants of consumer behaviour that fulfil a vital role in explaining consumer behaviour from the perspective of the internal psychological behavioural approach.

Critical to the goal of this study of developing a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour, this chapter addresses secondary research objective 3 and aims to foster an understanding of and provide a comprehensive overview of the theory of the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour.

Several aspects/factors influence the manner in which consumers act and react when they are exposed to offline and online marketing communication messages. In this chapter, these aspects/factors are referred to as the determinants of consumer

behaviour. They thus have an impact on the manner in which consumers behave during exposure to integrated marketing communication messages in the offline environment, as well as web-based communication messages in the online environment.

This chapter is structured as follows:

- It contextualises the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour and formulates a unique definition of the determinants of online consumer behaviour.
- It discusses the internal and external determinants of an individual's behaviour when exposed to integrated marketing communication messages in the offline environment as well as web-based communication messages in the online environment. The internal determinants include motivation, personality, the self and self-image, perception, learning and attitudes, while the external determinants include reference groups, family, social class, culture and subculture.
- It applies the internal and external determinants to the online context of this particular study.
- It concludes by indicating the unique determinants of online consumer behaviour, which are exclusive to the online environment.

3.2 CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE DETERMINANTS OF OFFLINE AND ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND DEFINITIONS

3.2.1 Contextualisation

For clarification purposes, it is stressed that in the existing literature, the factors that influence consumer behaviour are termed *factors/aspects*. However, for the purpose of this chapter, the *factors/aspects* that influence/affect consumer behaviour are referred to and discussed as *determinants* of consumer behaviour.

The consideration of determinants of consumer behaviour is stressed by various authors' propositions of factors/aspects that may influence or alter consumer

behavioural processes (Constantinides 2004; Lin et al 2010; Wyer & Xu 2010). For example, Wells et al (2006) regard culture, social class, reference groups and family as external factors that influence consumer behaviour. These authors also consider internal processes and elements that influence consumer behaviour and collectively refer to them as psychological elements, including personality, motivations, attitudes, values and psychographic influences. Cheung et al (2003) furthermore stress the importance of investigating personal motivations as a key personality trait, affecting the intention and adoption of consumers' online processes. Koufaris (2002) identifies the social and physical stimuli that affect an individual's emotional state, namely pleasure, dominance and arousal which, in turn, influence behaviour and interaction.

It is posited that since the focus of this study is on online consumer behaviour, it is necessary to emphasise the determinants that are unique to the online environment. Constantinides (2004) supports this viewpoint that although many researches do not acknowledge the fundamental differences between offline and online buying/consumer behaviour, new factors/aspects need to be added to the online consumer behaviour process namely, trust and confidence. Because the context of this study allows for the inclusion of online determinants of online consumer behaviour, Koufaris (2002), for example, specifies perceived risk, perceived consumer control and online atmospherics as key online determinants of online consumer behaviour. Constantinides (2004) elaborates on this by identifying usability, functionality factors (interactivity) and content credibility. In the same vein, Taylor and Strutton (2009) identify factors that appear to influence online consumers' behavioural intentions as prepurchase user perception attributes such as perceived risk, value, ease of use and usefulness.

Constantinides (2004) regards online consumer behaviour from a technological perspective, thus linking his contextualisation closely to the web-based communication exposure approach proposed in the preceding chapter and categorises the determinants of online consumer behaviour as either controllable or uncontrollable. He further explains that individuals online are not only shoppers, but also information technology users who experience the complete web experience (this concept will be dealt with in detail in a subsequent section of this chapter),

consisting, inter alia, of mind-sets comprising cognitive and motor behaviour. These procedural mind-sets are thus activated in the course of cognitive and motor activity that influence behaviour further and, in turn, impact on comprehension, judgements and decision making (Wyer & Xu 2010:03). Whether shopping or engaging with web-based communication messages, the behaviour that online consumers demonstrate is influenced/affected by several factors, which for the purpose of this study, are labelled determinants of online consumer behaviour.

Although the majority of studies (Moreau et al 2001; Koufaris 2002; Constantinides 2004; Doong et al 2010; Lin et al 2010; Lu & Zhu 2010; Wang & Liang 2010; Yang 2010) consider the determinants of online consumer behaviour in purchasing and retailing contexts with the aim of, according to Lin et al (2010:03) (1) determining the tendency that influence consumer behaviour; (2) developing theories and behaviour models to explain purchase intention; (3) planning websites by determining the content; and (4) determining the factors that influence decision making in the online purchasing context, the focus of this chapter is on the proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches (chapter 2). Hence in this chapter the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour evident in the purchasing approach to consumer behaviour are considered for their applicability to the new proposed theoretical approaches.

Doong et al (2010) focus on consumer behaviour in cross-channel decision making by means of information searches, price comparisons and purchasing, that is, on the determinants of retailing and purchasing behaviour as decisive factors that influence behaviour. Yang's (2010) discussion is pertinent because it explains that purchasing motivation is influenced by internal feelings and cognitive factors, while Moreau et al (2001) regard entrenched knowledge and high comprehension as determining factors that influence the consumer adoption process.

Although these authors refer to the purchasing context, it is argued that the determinants are also applicable to the context of this study, specifically when considered from the perspective of the internal psychological behavioural processes

approach, since reference is made to the psychological motivation determinants of consumer behaviour as emotional motivational factors and feelings (Yang 2010).

In contrast to prior studies, models and theories such as the technology acceptance model (TAM) and the theory of planned behaviour, which primarily consider the influence of the information system on consumer behaviour (Lin et al 2010) from a purchasing perspective, this study argues for the consideration of internal, external and online determinants of consumer behaviour from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. This contributes by, firstly, addressing the determinants of consumer behaviour from the existing offline perspective; secondly applying these determinants to the online context and explaining their relevance to the online context of this study; and thirdly, examining the specific determinants of online consumer behaviour which are only evident in the online environment.

It is reiterated that the focus of this study is on online consumer behaviour, but since there is scant information on the determinants of online consumer behaviour, this chapter considers the internal and external determinants of consumer behaviour in the existing offline context and then applies them, where applicable, to the online context.

3.2.2 Definition of the determinants of online consumer behaviour

In line with the online focus of this study and based on the theoretical discussion on the determinants of consumer behaviour from the various perspectives proposed by different authors above (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Moreau et al 2001; Koufaris 2002; Constantinides 2004; Doong et al 2010; Lu & Zhu 2010; Wang & Liang 2010; Yang 2010), as well as the author's own interpretation and application of the discussion, the following definition of the determinants of online consumer behaviour underlies the theoretical perspectives of this chapter:

The determinants of online consumer behaviour are controllable and uncontrollable internal, external and unique online aspects that cognitively and affectively influence and affect online consumer behaviour during the total web experience in the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

Table 3.1 depicts the classification of the determinants of consumer behaviour proposed in this chapter, which are subsequently discussed.

Table 3.1: Internal, external and unique online determinants of consumer behaviour

INTERNAL DETERMINANTS	EXTERNAL DETERMINANTS	UNIQUE ONLINE DETERMINANTS
Motivation	Reference groups and family	Trust
Personality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality traits • The self-concept, self-esteem and self-image 	Social class	Consumer familiarity Prior interaction Technology acceptance Technology attitude
Perception	Culture	Functional, symbolic and experiential benefits
Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive learning • High- and low-involvement learning and information processing 	Subculture	The total web experience
Attitude		Emotional and cognitive responses, perceived control, concentration, attention focus and message involvement

3.3 INTERNAL DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

The internal determinants of consumer behaviour are regarded as the basic psychological determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour, thus linking up with the internal psychological behavioural processes approach suggested and discussed in the previous chapter. In the literature (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Assael 2004; Blackwell et al 2006; Chaudhuri 2006; Wright 2006), the internal determinants illustrate the factors/aspects that have an influence on consumers' purchasing behaviour only. Although this study proposes an alternative approach to the usual purchasing approach to consumer behaviour, these factors/aspects, which influence consumers' purchasing behaviour, will be applied to the offline and online perspectives of this chapter in terms of the determinants of consumer behaviour. The determinants will, firstly, be contextualised in terms of consumers' exposure to traditional marketing communication messages, and secondly, in terms of online consumer's exposure to web-based communication messages.

3.3.1 Motivation as an internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour

Further to Hoyer and MacInnis's (2001:54) definition of motivation in the previous chapter, namely that motivation is "an inner state of arousal with aroused energy directed to achieving a goal", in the context of this chapter it is necessary to revisit Schiffman and Kanuk's (2000:63) definition. They regard *motivation* as "the driving force within individuals that compel them to an action" as a result of an unfulfilled need caused by internal tension. Wright (2006:208) concurs, adding that it is "a process that starts with some kind of motive or need, perhaps for a drink of water, the drive or action to satisfy that need, and the fulfilment of the need, obtaining the water". Yet another definition explains that motives are "general drives that direct a consumer's behaviour toward attaining his or her needs" (Assael 2004:33), while

Jansson-Boyd (2010:115) simply describes motivation as “the processes that lead people to behave in a particular way”. Individuals are thus driven to engage in a certain behaviour they believe will reduce their internal tension and in return satisfy the particular *need* they experience. The specific action the individual performs to avoid the tension previously felt, depends on his/her individual thinking processes (cognition) and previous learning.

Motivation is thus caused by specific needs (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Blackwell et al 2006; Wright 2006; Jansson-Boyd 2010). In chapter 2, needs were explained on the basis of Maslow’s (1970) theory, but for the purpose of this chapter, it should be noted that some of an individual’s *needs* are innate (Wright 2006), while others are acquired (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000). *Innate needs* refer to the primary needs of all people and animals for food, water, air and sex, thus physiological needs that motivate them to stay alive. *Acquired needs*, however, refer to “needs that we learn in response to our culture or environment” (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Jansson-Boyd 2010:116) and as a result of interaction with other individuals. These acquired needs may include needs for self-esteem, prestige, affection, power and learning (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000). These needs are also regarded as secondary needs or motives because they result from the individual’s “subjective psychological state and from relationships with others” (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Wright 2006:210;).

Needs are furthermore never fully satisfied, and new ones develop when previous ones have been satisfied, thus forming a hierarchy of needs with differing strengths (Wright 2006). Assael (2004:34), Blackwell et al (2006), Wright (2006:209) and Solomon (2007:122) and regard physiological (biogenic) and security needs as the most basic and primary of needs, while social, self-fulfilment and spiritual needs will only be realised when all the other more basic needs have been satisfied. Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), Assael (2004), Blackwell et al (2006), Wright (2006), Solomon (2007) and Jansson-Boyd (2010) thus categorise needs for the purpose of consumer behaviour in terms of a hierarchy, including biogenic, physiological, security, social, self-fulfilment, spiritual, utilitarian and hedonic needs.

In line with the offline and online perspectives followed in this chapter, Schiffman and Kanuk's (2000) classification of the following "trio of needs" is regarded as relevant and will be elaborated on next:

- the need for power
- the need for affiliation
- the need for achievement

The *need for power* is regarded as an individual's desire to control his/her environment. This need can also describe the online consumer's need to control his/her communication encounter. This attribute of online consumer control is uniquely assigned to the web-based communication experience since few offline communication experiences award the consumer control over the communication encounter. The *need for affiliation* is a social motive that has been widely researched and explains the consumer's need for certain products in order to be recognised socially. It can be argued that in the online environment, the consumer will seek affiliation with consumers who belong to a certain community, thus showing his/her interest in similar social elements. The third need is described as the *need for achievement*, which describes the individual consumer's egoistic and self-actualisation needs.

3.3.1.1 Types of motive

Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) and Wright (2006:213) distinguish between different types of motive, namely *rational*, *emotional* and *instinctive motives* in the purchasing behaviour context. These motives describe the motivation behind rationally deciding on a product because of its physical attributes, emotionally deciding on a product because of personal or subjective criteria or instinctively behaving in a certain way because of inherent instinct.

3.3.1.2 Goals

Goals "are the sought-after results of motivated behaviour" (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:65), "what an individual is trying to accomplish; it is the object or aim of an

action” (Jansson-Boyd 2010), and are fulfilled because of an individual’s motivation to achieve the goal (Wright 2006).

Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) and Jansson-Boyd (2010:117) identify two types of goals, namely *product-specific* and *generic goals*. The first refers to a need for a specific brand of product and the latter to general classes or categories of goals that most individuals aspire to.

Needs and goals are the result of motivated behaviour (Jansson-Boyd 2010) and, according to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), interdependent. Individuals are also usually more aware of their physiological needs than of their psychological needs and it is difficult to identify the psychological needs preceding action. Similarly, the internal psychological behavioural process that consumers go through during exposure to integrated marketing communication messages and web-based communication messages is difficult to identify and describe - hence the fact that this process is not usually described in the literature. This study attempts to add the internal psychological behavioural processes approach to existing consumer behaviour approaches, which will also be added to the conceptual integrated theoretical model that will subsequently be developed later in this study.

Based on the theoretical discussions presented above, it is argued that in terms of the context of this particular study, the motivation to search for and engage with web-based communication messages is caused by tension because of an unfulfilled informational need. The consumer will thus perform certain actions in order to reduce the tension felt because of an unfulfilled informational need. The fulfilment of this particular communication need will motivate the consumer to search for and engage with communication messages, offline or online, which will ultimately lead to an individual performing a particular action.

Hence, when this argument is applied to the web-based communication exposure context, it describes the online consumer’s need in terms of his/her informational/communication needs. Self-actualisation can follow after the online consumer has satisfied the need for information and communication encounters.

It is further propounded that although the motivational types mentioned above are not significant to this particular study in terms of their purchasing context, they are relevant in describing the rational, emotional and instinctive motivational processes that offline and online consumers go through when seeking integrated marketing communication and web-based communication messages exposure. The consumer can thus, whether offline or online, be motivated by a rational or information-seeking motive, by an emotional, or psychological, personal and subjective motive or by an instinctive motive.

In addition, a third type of goal is identified for the purposes of this study, namely the *communication/informational goal*. This is described as a goal that individuals seek when tension develops as a result of a need for communication or information. This goal ties in with the web-based communication exposure approach proposed in chapter 2, thus describing a communication/informational goal that results from the need for information/communication messages in the online environment. The specific informational/communication goal may be a result of a diverse spectrum of the needs discussed above.

3.3.2 Personality as an internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour

Solomon (2007:196) regards personality as “a person’s unique psychological makeup and how it consistently influences the way a person responds to her environment”, while Blackwell et al (2006:271) define it as “an individual’s unique psychological makeup, which consistently influences how the person responds to his or her environment”. According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:94), *personality* can be defined as “those inner psychological characteristics that both determine and reflect how a person responds to his or her environment”. Wright (2006:297), however explains it as “how we perceive the world, our learning experiences, the beliefs and attitudes we adopt, what motivates us, both conscious and unconscious influences and the effect of social factors all intertwine to make up the personality of each individual”. Hoyer and MacInnis (2001:431) regard personality as “the distinctive patterns of behaviours, tendencies, qualities, or personal dispositions that

make one individual different from another and lead to a consistent response to environmental stimuli". Personality is thus arguably a result of heredity, early childhood experiences and broader social and environmental influences that determine inner characteristics and the manner in which each individual reacts and responds to a particular situation or stimulus.

Furthermore, personality reflects *individual differences* of the inner characteristics of an individual that manifest in a particular combination. Most individuals have at least one characteristic that other individuals share (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000), which allows categorisation of consumers into different groups. Since consumer behaviour is, inter alia, determined by personality (Assael 2004; Wright 2006), marketers appeal to specific consumer characteristics in their target group of consumers because personality is *consistent* and *enduring* (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000), but also subject to change. The maturation process and different circumstances can change an individual's personality.

It is thus argued that consumers are unaware of the exact reasons for buying specific products and that they unconsciously decide on certain products and services. The consumer's behaviour, whether offline or online, is therefore determined by his/her personality and the elements/systems comprising it.

Based on the conceptualisation of personality above, the following definition of personality is proposed for the purpose of this study:

Personality refers to an individual's unique psychological makeup and characteristics suggesting consistent and enduring individual differences.

3.3.2.1 Personality traits

Personality traits are regarded as the building blocks of personality (Wright 2006). Solomon (2007:201) defines them as "identifiable characteristics that define a person", while, according to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001:433), "a personality ... is composed of characteristics that describe and differentiate individuals". Blackwell et

al (2006:272) define personality traits as “any distinguishable, relatively enduring way in which one individual differs from another”. It is vital for marketers and advertisers to understand how different personalities react to different products, services and messages. Hence it is also necessary to understand how different personalities or personality traits, as an important determinant of offline consumer behaviour and online consumer behaviour, react and respond differently to integrated marketing communication and web-based communication messages.

Hoyer and MacInnis (2001:433), Blackwell et al (2006) and Solomon (2007:203) identify different personality traits, which are discussed below.

- Individuals can be categorised in terms of the degree to which they are socially outgoing (the trait of extroversion) or quiet and reserved (the trait of introversion).
- Innovativeness refers to the degree to which a person likes to try new things.
- Materialism has to do with the amount of emphasis placed on acquiring and owning products.
- Self-consciousness is the degree to which the individual deliberately monitors and controls the image of the self that he/she projects to others.
- The need for cognition relates to the degree to which a person likes to think about things and by extension expends the necessary effort to process brand information.
- *Dogmatism* refers to “a personality trait that measures the degree of rigidity (open- or close-minded) that individuals display toward the unfamiliar and toward information that is contrary to their own established beliefs” (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:433). A dogmatic person is defensive in unfamiliar situations and, in the context of communication exposure, will react uneasily and uncertainly towards unexpected communication exposure situations (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:101).
- *Social character* “ranges on a continuum from inner-directedness to other-directedness” (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:101). *Inner-directed* individuals will react to communication messages on the basis of their inner values and standards, while *other-directed* individuals will take into account the social

environment in which they function and will base their acceptance or rejection of the message on their own social acceptance.

- *Cognitive personality factors* consist of *the need for cognition* and *visualisers versus verbalisers* (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000). Cognitive personality refers to the individual who wants to *think* about the communication messages, thus having a need for cognition and to process messages. Individuals can also be categorised in terms of their need for *visualisation* or *verbalisation*. Consumers with the need for *visualisation* will focus on the visual and graphical aspects of the message (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:104).

From the above it is argued that the following personality traits are relevant to the context of this study and evident in the online environment. Firstly, it is argued that visualisers, indicated above as a specific personality trait in certain individuals, are evident in the online environment where complicated graphics that provide visual stimulation are possible. Dogmatism is also deemed to be as a determinant of online consumer behaviour in the internal psychological behavioural processes phase. Online marketers and advertisers specifically need to consider these two personality traits since the online consumer has control over the communication encounter in the online environment. It is thus also necessary to consider the offline and online consumer who has a need for verbalisation (the preference for written or verbal information). This is especially true of the online environment, where consumers specifically use it because of its information-intensiveness.

To summarise, an individual's personality consists of several different traits that differentiate him/her from other individuals. In terms of the existing offline and online perspectives in this chapter, personality traits are seen as vital internal determinants of consumer behaviour since they undeniably influence consumers' behavioural processes.

3.3.2.2 Self-concept, self-esteem and self-image as determinants of personality

According to Solomon (2007), between the 11th and 15th centuries, the thought of a collective self, where the individual draws his/her self-image from the group, diminished, and the notion that the self consists of a self-concept, self-esteem and self-image was born. The discussion of the self-concept that follows is based on the views of Solomon (2007:156), who defines *self-concept* as “the beliefs a person holds about his own attributes, and how he evaluates these qualities”. He regards the self-concept as a highly complex system comprising the following five different attributes:

- content (facial attractiveness versus mental aptitude)
- positivity (self-esteem)
- intensity
- stability over time
- accuracy (the degree to which one’s self-assessment corresponds to reality)

However, Solomon (2007:157) refers to *self-esteem* as “the positivity of a person’s self-concept” (Solomon 2007:157). Individuals with a low self-esteem evaluate themselves more negatively than individuals with a high self-esteem. An individual’s self-esteem is directly influenced by his/her acceptance or rejection by significant others. This process usually takes place by means of social comparison and individuals evaluate themselves according to the feedback they receive from significant others.

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:111) and Solomon (2007:157), individuals do not necessarily have only one *self-image*, but sometimes host multiple selves that respond differently to various communication messages in different contexts. Each individual develops a unique self-image because of personal experiences and background, and thus evaluates products as well as information on the basis of these factors. Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:13) and Solomon (2007:157) differentiate as follows between the actual, ideal, social and expected self-image:

- The *actual self-image* refers to the way individuals perceive themselves and can be defined as “our more realistic appraisal of the qualities we have and don’t have” (Solomon 2007:157).
- The *ideal self-image* refers to the way individuals would like to perceive themselves, and is defined by Solomon (2007:157) as “a person’s conception of how he or she would like to be”.
- The *social self-image* refers to the way individuals feel others observe them (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000).
- The *ideal social self-image* refers to the way individuals would like others to observe them (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000).
- The *expected self-image* refers to the way individuals visualise themselves at a specific point in the future (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000).

It is clear that each personality consists of multiple selves and different differential self-images. Each of these selves is activated at a different point in time and is developed during different stages in an individual’s life. For example, Solomon (2007:158) explains that the sociological tradition of symbolic interactionism stresses the importance of the relationships that individuals have with significant others and the influence they have on the development of their self-images. This means that individuals exist in a symbolic environment and each individual assigns meaning to each situation or object by interpreting the symbols. Since individuals are members of a specific society and culture, they learn to agree on certain shared meanings of particular symbols. Each individual thus interprets his/her own identity on the basis of the evolving assessment of situations and people, and meanings are thus negotiated over time. Behaviour is usually based on the perceived expectations of others and subsequently forms a self-fulfilling prophecy. The individual thus behaves in the way in which significant others expect him/her to behave and thus confirms the expectations and perceptions that others might have.

Solomon (2007:159) goes on to discuss imagining the reactions of others and subsequently refers to the *looking-glass self*. In terms of this perspective, individuals determine their own self-worth or self-image by interpreting significant others’ “signals” and trying to determine what impression they have of us. The individual’s

perspective of himself/herself will thus differ, depending on the person's appraisal that he/she is considering.

It is argued that these different components of the self as discussed above, can determine consumer behaviour, especially in terms of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. Hence in this study, self-concept, self-esteem and self-image (collectively referred to as the self) are regarded internal determinants of consumer behaviour in the offline and online environments.

When the self and its components are specifically applied to the online perspective of this study, the *virtual self* (Barker 2008a; Barker 2008b; Barker 2008c; Barker 2009) is identified. Barker (2013) also refers to the "technoself", which, for the purpose of this chapter, is regarded as being similar to the "virtual self" and defined by Barker (2013) as follows: "The technoself is produced based on expressions of the life-world own self to create an identity which presents the contextual living action as experienced by the own self on cyberstage". The virtual self thus provides the opportunity to create an "online self" that can take on several personalities. These online personalities will determine the online consumer's behaviour during exposure to web-based communication messages.

3.3.3 Perception as an internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour

In chapter 2, perception was defined as "the perceptual process through which the individual constructs thought, mental pictures and concepts in his/her mind as stimuli from the outside world bombarding his/her body and entering the brain and consciousness through the senses" (Wright 2006:109). Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:122) define perception as "the process by which an individual selects, organizes, and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world".

The perceptual process is dependent on the reception of stimuli, which, according to Assael (2004:148), are "any physical, visual, or verbal communications that can influence an individual's response". In the realm of consumer behaviour, the most

important types of stimuli that influence consumer behaviour are marketing and social and cultural (environmental) stimuli (Assael 2004:148). Perception determines consumer behaviour by influencing the way each individual recognises, selects, organises and interprets communication messages. It is thus a result of sensation detected by the sensory organs/receptors as a stimulus that the senses recognise (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:123).

In chapter 2, the absolute threshold in perception was briefly explained as a theoretical construct in the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. However, in the context of this discussion, it is necessary to elaborate on the absolute threshold and to include a discussion on the various aspects of perception, namely the differential threshold, the subliminal perception point, selective exposure, selective attention and perceptual blocking. These different aspects of perception are discussed below and contextualised as internal determinants of consumer behaviour.

Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), Assael (2004) and Wright (2006) and indicate the threshold level (absolute threshold) at which the consumer is able to detect variations in the stimuli entering the senses. The *absolute threshold* (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:123; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:96; Solomon 2007:61), for the purpose of this chapter and the contextualisation thereof as an internal determinant of consumer behaviour, is defined as “the lowest level at which an individual can experience a sensation” (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:96); or “the minimal level of stimulus intensity needed for a stimulus to be perceived” (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:123). Solomon (2007:61) defines it as “the minimum amount of stimulation that can be detected on a sensory channel”. An individual’s *absolute threshold* thus indicates the point at which he/she experiences a difference between “something” and “nothing”.

Once the individual is used to something, he/she has reached the point of adaptation (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:123) which determines and influences consumer behaviour in that consumers may adapt to communication messages and no longer perceive them to be important or interesting. In such a situation, the *differential threshold*, which refers to the comparison of two stimuli (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:96;

Assael 2004:153), “the intensity difference needed between two stimuli before people can perceive that the stimuli are different” (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:96) and “the minimal difference that can be detected between two similar stimuli” (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:124), will be a determining factor in the sense that the individual will not be able to clearly discriminate between two different stimuli. Solomon (2007:61) further posits that the differential threshold refers to “the ability of a sensory system to detect changes or differences between two stimuli”. He argues that if an individual cannot clearly discriminate between two different stimuli, it can pose a danger in both the offline context and the online web-based communication exposure context, in that consumers no longer perceive the difference between diverse communication messages and will thus not respond or internalise those messages. In such a case marketers and advertisers should strive to penetrate consumers’ *subliminal perception point* (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:128; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001: 98) when the stimulus is perceived to be below the conscious level of awareness but can still influence thinking, emotion and action (Wright 2006). However, consumers are also selective in their perception of stimuli from the external environment because of previous experiences, their motives at the time of stimulation and their expectations (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:131). In terms of perception in the offline and online web-based communication contexts, it is argued that consumers will selectively expose (*selective exposure*) themselves to integrated marketing communication and web-based communication messages when they seek out messages that are relevant to their particular contexts. It is further suggested that they will then pay *selective attention* when choosing which integrated marketing communication or web-based communication messages to perceive and pay attention to. It is argued that this holds true specifically in the online context where the consumer has control over the communication encounter and can therefore be more selective in choosing which messages and information to take in. In the online environment, online consumers will also subconsciously be perceptually defensive and apply *perceptual blocking* by consciously and unconsciously blocking out stimuli that are psychologically threatening. It is posited that after the individual consumer has consciously decided on which stimuli to regard, he/she will organise them as unified wholes instead of regarding each stimulus separately.

3.3.4 Learning as an internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour

Even though learning is difficult to define because of its individual nature, Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:161) define it as “a process; that is, it continually evolves and changes as a result of newly acquired knowledge (which may be gained from reading, from discussions, from observation, from thinking) or from actual experience”. Wright (2006:156) elaborates on this by regarding learning as “a relatively permanent change in behaviour and ways of thinking, brought about by perceptual and cognitive experiences and social and cultural interactions”. Jansson-Boyd (2010:25) describes learning as “a relatively permanent change in behaviour which is linked to experience”.

Learning also depends on an individual’s experience and existing or entrenched knowledge, resulting in expertise which, in turn, results in higher comprehension (Moreau et al 2001), and can be intentional (when the individual intentionally learns something) or incidental (when learning occurs incidentally) (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:161).

Moreau et al (2001) base their research on consumers’ adoption process (learning process) of new technologies and the factors affecting it, on innovation-diffusion literature. This discussion assumes that consumers’ adoption processes (learning processes) (Moreau et al 2001) and particularly the factors affecting these processes can be applied to consumers’ behaviour in the offline and online environment during their exposure to traditional marketing communication messages or web-based communication messages, indicating specifically the internal psychological behavioural processes they proceed through.

The basic elements of learning, according to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:161), Moreau et al (2001) and Jansson-Boyd (2010:25) are internal drive, motivation, learning cues, response, comprehension, transfer, reinforcement and retention. Although motivation was previously discussed as an internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour, the context in which it is presented here differs. For

the purpose of the discussion below, motivation is contextualised as part of the access stage of the learning process and serves the purpose of acting as a learning activator. This is the view of Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), Moreau (2001) and Jansson-Boyd (2010) and it does not contradict the previous discussion of motivation, but in fact adds the dimension of learning activation. The basic elements of learning are briefly highlighted below.

- An individual's *internal drive* encourages him/her to take action and to learn. Emotional or rational responses may influence the internal drive to learn.
- The concept of *motivation* or the *access stage* is the learning activator or source of information.
- The concept of motivation or the access stage motivates the *learning cues* that refer to stimuli that give direction to motives and identify similarities. Cue stimuli refer to external stimuli that encourage learning.
- An individual's reaction and behaviour when transferring a considerable amount of knowledge as a result of certain stimuli, represent his/her *response*. The individual's response refers to the manner in which he/she responds to the internal drive and the cue stimuli. When the internal drive and the cue stimuli occur together, the likelihood that a reaction will occur, intensifies.
- An individual's response furthermore constitutes the *comprehension* and *transfer phases*.
- Once a specific response has been *reinforced*, there is a possibility that the exact response will reoccur.
- Once the learnt material reaches the long-term memory, retention occurs and can subsequently be remembered.

Based on the above discussions, it is argued that in the offline context, exposure to marketing communication messages is usually incidental, resulting in incidental learning and knowledge. However, in the online web-based communication context of this study, exposure is usually intentional because of the consumers' control over the communication encounter and their search for information-intensive communication messages, thus resulting in intentional learning and knowledge gathering.

It is further posited that in order for learning to take place in both the offline and online consumer behaviour contexts, certain learning cues or stimuli will have to motivate the consumer to respond in a specific manner after an association between two mental representations has been made. Also, the consumer's behaviour or response will have to be reinforced for future learning.

3.3.4.1 Cognitive learning

Cognitive learning, also referred to as cognitive associative learning, focuses on the individuals' internal mental processes (Jansson-Boyd 2010:31). Cognitive learning indicates the relationship between the conditioned and the unconditioned stimulus, and how it influences expectations which, in turn, influence behaviour. This type of learning thus focuses not on what is learnt, but on how it is learnt. Cognitive learning indicates a rational thinking and preference creation process, leading to conscious hypothesis formation and action. In addition, cognitive learning allows for the formation of logical and perceptual relations between different events and depends on the type of conditioning that occurs (Jansson-Boyd 2010).

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:166), the following three concepts are related to cognitive learning: repetition, stimulus generalisation and discrimination. *Repetition* inhibits the possibility of forgetting by increasing the strength of the association between the conditioned and the unconditioned stimulus. Learning furthermore depends on the individual's ability to generalise the stimulus. This means that the consumer is able to respond in the same way to a slightly different previous stimulus. More learning subsequently occurs because of *stimulus generalisation*. In order to ensure consumer attention in the offline and online web-based communication exposure contexts, consumers should be able to select a specific stimulus from similar stimuli, thus *discriminating* between similar stimuli.

Jansson-Boyd (2010:31) subdivides the learning process into the following five main processes: attention, comprehension, learning, recall and reconstruction and feedback.

- *Attention:* Consumers first have to pay attention to the message before any learning or information processing can take place.
- *Comprehension:* After the consumer has paid attention to the message, the relevant new information is entered in the short-term memory. This information is then rapidly analysed, and the consumer then determines whether or not it interests him/her. The new information that is entered in the short-term memory is influenced by the information already stored there. New information is learnt and stored, provided that it links up with the prior information in some other way.
- *Learning:* Once the information has been integrated into the individual's existing knowledge and has been elaborated upon, learning can occur. New information can fit into the existing knowledge framework or can alter the existing knowledge. If consumers do not think further about the information or message, it is improbable that it will be stored in the long-term memory.
- *Recall and reconstruction:* Consumers are exposed to many different marketing communication messages and this makes it difficult for them to remember the exact information that was presented. If the information fits into their existing cognitive script or existing knowledge, they may remember it or alternatively reconstruct ambiguous information so that it fits into their existing cognitive script. This then sometimes causes the message that is recalled to be completely different from what the original message entailed.
- *Feedback:* The feedback that consumers receive during the learning process plays a vital role in whether or not they will elaborate on the message, integrate it into their existing cognitive script or receive the information positively.

Based on the preceding discussions, it is suggested that in the online web-based communication context, cognitive learning takes place in the online consumer who is an information seeker forming sophisticated representations of the world and web-based communication messages on the basis of his/her construction of logical and perceptual relations between events or messages. It is propounded that this process of constructing logical and perceptual relations between events refers to an internal process, therefore qualifying cognitive learning in the online environment as an

internal determinant of consumer behaviour. It is further proposed that the way in which learning in the online environment takes place depends on the type of conditioning the consumer is exposed to.

It is further put forward that in the online environment, the individual selects a specific online stimulus from similar online stimuli, thus *discriminating* between similar online stimuli. Hence it is argued that the consumer should be able to select the most relevant stimuli to that particular situation. In terms of the web-based communication context of this study, the online consumer should arguably then differentiate between and select the most appropriate web-based communication message.

3.3.4.2 High and low information processing and involvement learning

Information processing depends on the difficulty of information, consumers' cognitive ability to process the information, the stimulus they receive as input (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:176) and how involved or interested they are in the information or message presented to them (Jansson-Boyd 2010:31). It is apparent that consumers do not all have the same cognitive ability or keenness to learn and thus do not process information in a similar manner. Moreover, individual consumers differ in terms of imagery (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:176), which refers to their ability to recall information and the extent to which they think about a message or the information received (Jansson-Boyd 2010:33). Hence consumers who think carefully about a message engage in high involvement processing and learning and consumers who do not engage in low involvement learning and processing.

The manner in which information is stored, retained and retrieved was discussed in chapter 2 (section 2.3.4.9) as theoretical constructs of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach that was proposed. This section highlights the different ways in which this information is stored in the memory before it is processed. Information processing and memory structure is of paramount importance because they indicate the manner in which the consumer, whether in the offline or online context, will receive, process and store important information

obtained from traditional marketing communication and web-based communication messages. Arguably, since web-based communication messages are usually more information-intensive than traditional integrated marketing communication messages, the online consumer needs to have the cognitive and imagery ability to comprehend, process and store web-based communication messages.

One of the most common forms of learning is rote learning, which refers to repetition. It can occur through the visual (iconic rote memory) and auditory (echoic rote memory) (Jansson-Boyd 2010:33). After information has been stored in one of the possible types of memory, it should be organised to update links between different types of information and then retrieved to recover what has been learnt (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:181).

The process of retrieval was discussed in detail in chapter 2, but it is worth mentioning again here in order to contextualise consumer learning as an important phase/level in the online consumer behavioural process of the conceptual integrated theoretical model to be developed in this study.

3.3.5 Attitude as an internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour

Chapter 2 discussed in detail attitude formation and change as theoretical constructs of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. Different models, such as the cognitive response model, the theory of reasoned action model, the tricomponent model, the attitude-toward-object model, the attitude-toward-behaviour model and the theory-of-reasoned-action model, that clarify the formation and change of attitudes, were explained. Based on that discussion, it is argued that attitude should be indicated as an internal determinant of consumer behaviour in the offline and online context.

Hence the following definitions of attitude are pertinent in this context: Attitude is the “feelings, beliefs and ways of behaving that people develop about objects, events, people and issues over a lifetime through learning and experientially interacting with people and the environment” (Wright 2006:256); and it is “an overall disposition

towards an object or person” (Chaudhuri 2006:39). On the strength of these two definitions, it should also be mentioned that behaviour can precede or follow attitude formation (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000) and that attitude is not necessarily learnt during childhood, but usually formed by means of a combination of “cognitive beliefs” and “affective feelings” (So, Wong & Sculli 2005).

According to Assael (2004) and Chaudhuri (2006:40) attitudes consist of three components, namely cognitive (beliefs), affective (overall attitude) and conative (behaviour). The cognitive component refers to the beliefs that the individual cognitively adheres to, while the affective component relates to the overall attitude of the individual. The conative component refers to the individual’s actual behaviour, which is based on his/her general attitude.

According to (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000), dissonance or discomposure occurs when an individual’s thoughts are in conflict about an attitude. It is argued that this will also occur in the online context when an online consumer’s thoughts are in conflict about an attitude or belief that he/she has towards a specific message or communication experience. This conflict of attitudes or beliefs will cause similar dissonance to that of postpurchase dissonance (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Jansson-Boyd 2010;), which a consumer may experience after purchasing a specific product. Postpurchase dissonance is caused by feelings of doubt after purchasing a specific brand as opposed to another brand (Jansson-Boyd 2010). It is suggested that a similar type of dissonance may be evident in online consumers’ behaviour after they have been exposed to web-based communication messages and decided to behave or act in a certain way. Following a feeling of postpurchase dissonance, a consumer may engage in a specific action or behaviour and subsequently change his/her attitude (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000).

Based on the views highlighted above, it is argued that regardless of the manner in which consumers attribute internal or external factors to their attitudes or behaviour, attitudes should be regarded as important determinants of consumer behaviour. Although the preceding sections focused mainly on explaining how consumers form and alter attitudes in the offline environment during purchasing encounters, these

perspectives can, for the purpose of this study, be applied to the online consumer being exposed to web-based communication messages. It is propounded that the online consumer's attitudes could be formed and altered in a similar manner.

It is further argued that in the application of attitude formation as an internal determinant in the web-based communication exposure approach, online behaviour (conation, referring to the behavioural component) can precede or follow attitude formation by means of cognition and affection in the online environment. Hence attitudes will arguably unavoidably determine and influence online consumer behaviour in the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

Even though it is suggested in this study that internal psychological processes (the internal psychological behavioural processes approach) should be incorporated into the literature, this discussion cannot be limited to the internal determinants of consumer behaviour. It is argued that the external determinants that influence and alter consumer behaviour should also be taken into account in order to fully comprehend the factors that determine offline and online consumer behaviour.

3.4 EXTERNAL DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

In addition to the internal factors that determine and influence consumer behaviour in the offline and online environment, many social and cultural factors externally determine consumer behaviour in the different environments. This section will explore the external determinants of consumer behaviour, whether offline or in the online context.

3.4.1 Reference groups and family as external determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour

Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:264) define a reference group as “any person or group that serves as a point of comparison (or reference) for an individual in forming either general or specific values, attitudes, or a specific guide for behavior”. In terms of this

definition, a reference group can be regarded as a frame of reference for purchasing decisions, but evidently, in the web-based communication exposure context of this study, also as a frame of reference for message acceptance and behaviour.

Blackwell et al (2006) and Ooi et al (2011) regard an individual's peers, reference groups and family as primary influences and normative constructs that influence or impact on their behaviour while consuming. According to them, normative constructs consist of primary influences, and this discussion therefore centres on different reference groups and the family as important determinants in influencing online consumer behaviour. Although the above authors' studies investigated broadband adoption, in the current study, these factors will be applied to online consumer behaviour in the web-based communication context.

Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:264) and Assael (2004) identified the following nine reference groups: normative/membership groups, comparative groups, indirect groups, disclaimant groups, dissociative groups, friendship groups, work groups, family groups and virtual groups. These groups will be discussed below.

A *normative/membership* reference group is viewed as a group that influences individuals' general values and behaviour, while a *comparative* reference group is used as a measure against which to benchmark attitudes and behaviour. An *indirect* reference group influences consumer behaviour in an indirect manner, which means that it excludes face-to-face contact. This reference group usually consists of movie stars and television and radio personalities. Once these groups are regarded as credible, they will be able to change individual's behaviour. Reference groups can also be viewed in a negative light when an individual joins a group and then rejects that group's values. In this instance, the group would be a "disclaimant group" for the particular individual, and individuals may also regard a certain group as something to be avoided, which is then referred to as a "dissociative group" (Assael 2004:401).

It is suggested that reference groups, as a social and cultural influence, will determine or change consumers' behaviour in the online environment. They are thus

regarded as valuable in determining how online consumers will behave when they are exposed to and respond to web-based communication messages.

Some groups, such as *friendship* groups, are informally constructed and determine consumer behaviour in an unstructured manner (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:269). These groups usually lack authority levels, but still determine consumers' behaviour in the offline and online contexts. Formal groups such as *work* groups that work together as a group or a team consequently also determine or influence consumer behaviour. *Virtual* groups are referred to as virtual communities and described as comprising "sets of social relations among people" (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:269). These individuals share interests and group themselves online according to their interests, thus influencing each other during their exposure to web-based communication messages. These groups or communities have freedom of expression because of their anonymity. The *family* is included here as a group that determines consumer behaviour socially and culturally, and it is defined as "two or more persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption who reside together" (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:275).

For the purpose of this discussion and the context of the study, virtual groups are singled out as one of the most important reference groups that could influence online consumers' behaviour. It is inferred that virtual groups are groups of people who are grouped together in the online environment on the basis of their interests and other similar characteristics. The specific virtual group to which an individual online consumer belongs will determine his/her behaviour in the online environment.

Based on the definitions provided above, the following definition of reference groups is proposed for the purpose of this study:

Reference groups guide individual behaviour in terms of values, norms and attitudes and serve as a frame of reference in comparing individual behaviour with significant others' behaviour.

3.4.2 Social class as an external determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour

Social class determines offline and online consumer behaviour, also referred to as “social stratification” (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Assael 2004; Blackwell et al 2006; Wright 2006; Solomon 2007). Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:297) define it as “the division of members of a society into a hierarchy of distinct status classes, so that members of each class have relatively the same status and members of all other classes have either more or less status”. Solomon (2007:457) further defines social stratification as “those processes in a social system by which scarce and valuable resources are distributed unequally to status positions that become more or less permanently ranked in terms of the share of valuable resources each receives”.

Social class is arranged on a continuum according to social positions, which are referred to as strata in the literature (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:297). Hence it is argued that social class could influence or determine consumer behaviour in the online context when consumers are searching for and engaging with web-based communication messages.

Based on the definitions provided above, the following definition of social class is proposed for the purpose of this study:

Social class refers to the hierarchical division of individual members of society into social classes, also referred to as social stratification.

3.4.3 Culture as an external determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour

Culture is one of the main determinants of consumer behaviour (Fink & Laupase 2000; Assael 2004; Constantinides 2004; Blackwell et al 2006), and is defined by Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:322) as “the sum total of learned beliefs, values, and customs that serve to direct the consumer behaviour of members of a particular society”. Callebaut defines it (2000:7) as “patterns, traits and products considered as

the expression of a particular period, class, community, or population, and furthermore as patterns, traits, and products considered with respect to a particular category, such as a field, subject, or mode of expression". Blackwell et al's (2006:426) definition is similar and also centres the key elements of culture around the values and symbols that direct individuals' behaviour as part of society. Blackwell et al (2006:426) thus define culture as "a set of values, ideas, artefacts, and other meaningful symbols that help individuals communicate, interpret, and evaluate as members of society". Key to these definitions are beliefs and values that are described as the collected feelings, precedence and mental images that individuals have of aspects of their environments that impact on their attitudes. Attitudes, however, as discussed in a preceding section, also influence response.

Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) provide three explanations of the manner in which individuals learn culture. The first is formally, where the individual is explicitly taught and assimilated into the existing culture, focusing on language and symbols. Secondly, culture is informally passed on to individuals when they imitate significant others' behaviour. Thirdly, culture is technically passed on to individuals in an educational environment when teachers teach them the important values and norms that exist in that particular society and environment. In general, it is argued that culture is formally and informally shared through group customs.

It is suggested that culture could influence online consumers in terms of their attitudes which, in turn, influence their evaluation of messages. In the context of this study and in terms of the web-based communication exposure approach, it is argued that the evaluation of online messages and behaviour as a result of web-based communication messages are based on an individual's general values which are entrenched in his/her culture.

Based on the definitions provided above, the following definition of culture is proposed for the purpose of this study:

Culture directs individual behaviour by providing values, symbols, beliefs and customs which are seen as relevant to particular members of society.

3.4.4 Subculture as an external determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour

Whereas culture refers to the beliefs, norms and values that are formally and informally shared by members of the broader society, subculture refers to “members of a specific subculture that possess beliefs, values and customs that set them apart from other members of the same society” (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000:346). Similarly, subculture refers to a small group of people who share beliefs and values in a common culture (Wright 2006). Assael (2004:342) defines subculture as “groups of people who have norms, values, and behaviours that are distinct from the culture as a whole”, while, according to Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:346), it is “a distinct cultural group that exists as an identifiable segment within a larger, more complex society”. It thus contributes to the cultural profile of society that comprises the unique beliefs, values and customs and a central theme or core that is shared by most of the population.

Assael (2004) argues that subculture only influences consumer behaviour when several factors are evident. For example, the higher the subcultural group’s endeavour to preserve its identity, the greater the potential influence on individual consumers’ behaviour will be. Assael (2004) refers to this process as subcultural distinctiveness. Assael (2004) further explains subcultural homogeneity as a subculture’s influence on consumers’ behaviour as a result of the homogeneous values evident among its members. As soon as a subculture is excluded from a society or the greater culture, there is subcultural exclusion. It would appear that the subcultural group’s influence on consumer behaviour in this instance, will also be higher.

Based on the definitions provided above, the following definition of subculture is formulated for the purpose of this study:

Subculture is the beliefs, values and norms of a distinct group of people that functions within the larger context of an existing culture.

3.5 APPLICATION OF THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TO THE ONLINE CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

The previous sections indicated how offline and online consumers are influenced by numerous internal and external determinants which, for the purpose of this study, are applied to the online context. Table 3.2 thus indicates the internal and external determinants of consumer behaviour and the manner in which they influence online consumers' behaviour in the online environment. The theoretical constructs indicated in table 3.2 below are therefore only applicable to the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches proposed in chapter 2.

Table 3.2: The influence of the internal and external determinants on online consumer behaviour

Internal determinants of consumer behaviour	Motivation	In the online environment, rational, emotional and instinctive motivations are caused by tension that results from unfulfilled informational needs.
	Personality	Because personality refers to an individual's unique psychological makeup and characteristics suggesting consistent and enduring individual difference, it will arguably influence online consumers' behaviour in the online environment during exposure to web-based communication messages and information.
	Perception	Online consumers use selective exposure when they seek out

		<p>messages that are relevant to their particular contexts and then pay selective attention when choosing the most relevant web-based communication message. Subconsciously, online consumers may be perceptually defensive and apply perceptual blocking when they do not wish to be exposed to certain web-based communication messages and information.</p>
	Learning	<p>In the online context of this study, incidental learning seldom takes place since exposure is usually intentional because of the online consumer's control over the communication encounter and his/her search for information-intensive communication messages.</p>
	Attitude	<p>The process of attitude formation in the online environment influences online consumers' online behaviour.</p>
External determinants of consumer behaviour	Reference groups and family	<p>Normative/membership, indirect, disclaimant, dissociative, friendship, work, virtual and family reference groups are social and cultural influences that determine or change online consumers' behaviour in the online</p>

	environment.
Social class	Because social class is arranged in strata, which explains online consumers' "positions" in society, it could alter or determine their online behaviour.
Culture	In the online environment, the evaluation of web-based communication messages is based on the individual's general values and norms, which in turn constitute his/her culture.
Subculture	Since subculture is the beliefs, values and norms of a distinct group of people that functions in the larger context of an existing culture, it is argued that it could influence online consumers' behaviour in the online environment.

3.6 UNIQUE DETERMINANTS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

For the purpose of this study and in line with its focus, it is necessary to discuss the determinants of online consumer behaviour that particularly affect online consumers in the online environment during exposure to web-based communication messages. The following online determinants were identified in the existing literature, and are subsequently discussed: trust; consumer familiarity, prior interaction, technology acceptance and technology attitude; functional, symbolic and experiential benefits; the total web experience; perceived control, concentration, attention focus, emotional and cognitive responses and message involvement; and usability.

3.6.1 Trust

Chen and Barnes (2007), Atchariyachanvanich and Sonehara (2008), Grabner-Krauter and Faullant (2008), Ranaweera et al (2008), Benamati, Fuller, Serva and Baroudi (2009) and Doong et al (2010) and regard *trust* as an important determinant of successful e-commerce. Grabner-Krauter and Faullant (2008) and Doong et al (2010) argue that *trust* is a multidimensional and decisive factor for e-commerce transactions because it eliminates uncertainty, perceived risk and interdependence in the online environment (Chen & Barnes 2007). Benamati et al (2009:4) define trust as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to or depend on the actions of another party in situations of risk”, thus also constituting “a belief, an attitude or a behavioural intention”, as well as a personal disposition which is “a general tendency or inclination in which people show faith or belief in humanity and adopt a trusting stance toward others” (Chen & Barnes 2007:3). Chiu et al (2009:4) further define it as “the extent to which a consumer believes that online shopping will enhance his or her transaction performance”, and Salo and Karjaluoto (2007:605) as “a dependence on the integrity, ability, or character of a person or a thing”. Salo and Karjaluoto’s (2007), Chiu et al’s (2009), and Doong et al’s (2010) and definitions are relevant to the purchasing context, but if they are regarded from the web-based communication exposure approach, they should explain how trust describes consumers’ beliefs that exposure to web-based communication messages will enhance their total web experience.

Despite the above authors’ reference to trust as a determinant of successful e-commerce, here it is applied to the online context by regarding it as a key determinant of online consumer behaviour in general. Although this concept, *inter alia*, forms part of the theory of reasoned action and TAM (which will be discussed in chapter 6) and underscores the purchasing context of online consumer behaviour, it is suggested here that trust applies to the context of this study since it can also be regarded as having an impact on the online consumer’s total web-based communication experience. It is further argued that this concept should not be restricted to a specific theory or model, but should be mentioned because it is

consistent with this discussion on the specific, unique determinants of online consumer behaviour.

Various authors (Chen & Barnes 2007; Salo & Karjaluoto 2007; Atcharyachanvanich & Sonehara 2008; Grabner-Krauter & Faullant 2008; Ranaweera et al 2008; Doong et al 2010) discuss different types of trust, namely technology, online, competence-based, intentional and individual and specific trust.

The particular types of trust that are most relevant to this discussion are *technology trust* (Grabner-Krauter & Faullant 2008) as a form of internet trust, *competence-based trust* and *online trust* (Grabner-Krauter & Faullant 2008) because these most accurately explain the form of trust necessary in the online environment and for the total web experience. *Online trust* is regarded as comprising a hard and a soft dimension. According to Grabner-Krauter and Faullant (2008), the hard dimension is functionality based, and refers to the predictability and ability of the technological aspect of the online interaction, while the soft dimension refers to the credibility and impetus of the trustee to operate in the interest of the trustor. It is thus clear that the technology itself needs to be trustworthy and credible.

Salo and Karjaluoto (2007) and Ranaweera et al (2008) regard *competence-based trust* and *intentional trust* as important. Because the online environment comprises many technological challenges, in the context of this study, competence-based trust is central to this discussion. Intentional trust, however, refers to “the end-users’ beliefs as to whether the service provider is honest or intends to keep its promises” (Salo & Karjaluoto 2007:604). They add the sociology and social psychology contexts to this discussion and mention direct trust and third-party trust. However, these are excluded from this discussion because of the particular context of the study.

Ranaweera et al (2008) also regard *individual specific trust* as significant. The individual component refers to the attitudinal or affective component and mirrors the overall view of the world, while the specific component refers to the contextual and cognitive (Ranaweera et al 2008). In the online environment, much attention has

been focused on the specific component of trust, namely the contextual and cognitive component, since these determine the technological side of the online experience.

Regardless of the different types of trust, it is necessary to indicate the elements that make up trust, namely trusting beliefs, trusting intentions, trusting behaviour, system trust, dispositional trust and situational decision to trust. Salo and Karjaluoto (2007) discuss these six elements of trust as follows:

- *Trusting beliefs*: Trusting beliefs occur when an individual believes that the trustee is dependable in a particular situation.
- *Trusting intentions*: Mutual reliance by both parties in a particular situation refers to trusting intentions.
- *Trusting behaviour*: Even when risks in a specific situation occur, an individual will provide another party with the power over him/her to depend on the other party.
- *System trust*: This trust construct is of particular interest to this study, since it refers to trust that is devoted to an impersonal structure that supports trusting intentions.
- *Dispositional trust*: This construct of trust is situational and refers to when a specific preference is linked to and expected by the truster.
- *Situational decision to trust*: A situational decision to trust occurs when individuals are prepared to trust other individuals to a similar level in a particular situation.

3.6.2 Consumer familiarity, technology acceptance, prior interaction and technology attitude

Benamati et al (2009) and Doong et al (2010:1) define these concepts as follows: *Consumer familiarity* is “an assessment of how well the consumer knows the e-vendor and understands the Website’s procedures”. *Technology acceptance* is closely related and describes how well online consumers accept the medium they are utilising. In addition, *prior interactions* with the e-vendor will reduce social complexity and will promote familiarity with and acceptance of the medium or

technology used. Benamati et al (2009) regard *technology attitude* as a determinant of online consumer behaviour and explain it as an online consumer's evaluative (cognitive) or affective (emotional) response to web-based communication messages.

Doong et al (2010) also identify brand familiarity, which relates to the direct and indirect experience with the brand as well as the amount of time spent to process information about the brand. However, in the web-based communication exposure approach, brands are unrelated – hence the adaptation of Doong et al's (2010) view to include and refer to *web-based communication familiarity*, which leads to *trust*. As indicated, trust leads to specific online consumer intentions and behaviour with an added notion of low perceived risk. In this context, it is believed that these factors will lead to *e-loyalty* which guarantees revisits to the online environment. It is therefore posited that the higher the online trust, the higher the degree of e-loyalty will be.

Technology attitude represents the online consumer's favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the technology used. Technology attitude as explained by Benamati et al (2009) is preceded by technology readiness (Ranaweera et al 2008). The online consumer thus needs to prepare for using online technology and to be ready to reduce any insecurity and uncertainty.

It is argued that if the factors explained above are applied to online consumer behaviour according to the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, it is inferred that consumers' *familiarity* with online procedures and prior web-based communication messages will lead to trust during the total web-based communication encounter. *Prior interactions* with web-based communication messages will then create knowledge of what transpires during the encounter.

3.6.3 Functional, symbolic and experiential benefits

In the traditional purchasing and retailing context, functional benefits refer to the fundamental advantages of products or services and match with product attributes,

while symbolic benefits refer to nonproduct-related attributes, the need for societal endorsement, interpersonal action and outer-directed self-esteem (Wang & Liang 2010). However, experiential benefits relate to product and nonproduct-related attributes, including user imagery, convenience and positive experiences with a retailer (Wang & Liang 2010). Once the functional, symbolic and experiential benefits are established and linked to the technical and functional attributes of a product, a quality relationship can be established that results in repurchasing behaviour.

Wang and Liang (2010) elucidate that functional, symbolic and experiential benefits determine purchasing motivation. In the purchasing context, these benefits are, in turn, determined by the technical and functional attributes of a product. Wang and Liang (2010:14) define attributes as “those descriptive features that characterise a product or service, such as what consumers think the product or service is or has and what is involved with its purchase or consumption”.

Lu and Zhu (2010) concur with Wang and Liang’s (2010) view that certain benefits or factors influence online consumers’ behaviour, especially their intention to return to a website. Lu and Zhu (2010) classify these as external or internal factors. The external factors refer to the application of technology, the advancement of the functions of the website and the design of the business model, accurately described by TAM, while the internal factors relate to perceptive factors in the consumption environment, purchase intention and the desire to revisit an online site, described and explained by the flow theory. This theory includes factors such as control, happiness and enjoyment as internal determinants of online consumer behaviour, while TAM includes perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as determinants of online consumer behaviour.

Although functional, symbolic and experiential benefits as vital determinants of online consumer behaviour in general were explained in the preceding section, these concepts can also be applied to the web-based communication exposure approach. The emphasis in the existing literature again is on purchasing behaviour, but it is argued that it could be applied to this study to explain online consumers’ behaviour during exposure to and interaction with web-based communication messages. While

it was explained above that functional, symbolic and experiential benefits determine whether consumers remain with or defect from an organisation, it is argued here that these benefits are likewise decisive factors in online consumers' decisions to accept or decline online exposure and interaction. It is also argued that the technical and functional attributes of web-based communication messages tie in with the benefits of the online message and thus determine a return to the web-based communication encounter.

3.6.4 The total web experience

Constantinides (2004) regards the total web experience as the main factor that impacts on online consumers' behaviour and it is viewed as a determinant of online consumer behaviour from a technological perspective that includes functionality, psychological and content factors. The total web experience is defined as "a combination of online functionality, information, emotions, cues, stimuli and products/services, in other words a complex mix of elements going beyond the 4Ps of the traditional marketing mix" and "the consumer's total impression about the online company" (Constantinides 2004:112-113). According to Constantinides (2004), the total web experience that impacts on the online consumer's behaviour comprises the following three main building blocks:

- *Functionality factors:* The usability and interactivity elements of the website and total web experience determine the functionality of the website and web-based communication messages. Ease of navigation and search constitute the usability of the website and online information, while convenience is regarded a prime motivator for online consumers to stop and interact in the online environment. Online consumers furthermore expect easy site navigation and fast-loading accessible information. Truly interactive elements reduce uncertainty and cognitive dissonance in the online environment.
- *Psychological elements - online trust:* During the total web experience process, system, personal and interpersonal forms of trust lead to institutional and dispositional trust (trust as an important determinant of online consumer behaviour was discussed in a preceding section of this chapter).

- *Content elements*: The first content factor that affects the total web experience is aesthetics, which refers to website credibility and the creative elements of the online presentation. It creates the website's atmosphere and influences online consumer behaviour. The marketing mix is another concept that is thought to contribute to the web experience in terms of providing quality information that compensates for the lack of physical contact with the product or organisation.

Based on the discussion above, it is inferred that the total web experience will influence online consumers' behaviour when they are exposed to web-based communication messages and in particular refer to the technological functionality elements that constitute the total web experience.

3.6.5 Emotional and cognitive responses, perceived control, concentration, attention focus and message involvement

For the purpose of this discussion, emotional and cognitive response, perceived control, concentration, attention focus and message involvement are regarded significant online determinants of online consumer behaviour. These concepts are subsequently discussed on the basis of Koufaris's (2002) views.

Emotional and cognitive responses to web-based communication messages are influenced/affected by different factors such as message involvement, emotional responses (pleasure, dominance, arousal), cognitive responses, perceived control, concentration, attention focus and personality traits (Koufaris 2002).

It is argued that these factors relate to the internal psychological behavioural approach that was proposed in the previous chapter to indicate the internal processes that online consumers proceed through during exposure to web-based communication messages.

Koufaris (2002) further mentions that the *emotional and cognitive responses* that online consumers demonstrate mediate the relationship between the environment, in

this case the online environment, and their behaviour. Every individual's unique personality trait has an impact on his/her emotional state, which consists of pleasure, dominance and arousal.

Perceived control is defined as "the level of one's control over the environment and one's actions" (Koufaris 2002:208) and is regarded as a determinant of online consumer behaviour. It is subsequently argued that perceived risk/risk aversion (Chaudhuri 2006; Choe, Hwang, Kim & Moon 2007; Grabner-Krauter & Faullant 2008; Ranaweera et al 2008) and ease of use (Lin et al 2010) are the facets that influence a consumer's perception of the amount of control he/she has over the online communication encounter. The higher the perceived risk/risk aversion and the more difficult the online encounter seems to be, the less control the online consumer perceives himself/herself to have.

Although *concentration* and *attention focus* are also deemed to be important in completing an online purchasing activity, the focus of this study is on online consumers' behaviour when exposed to web-based communication messages and not specifically and exclusively on the purchasing context. Concentration and attention focus are therefore mentioned here, but considered in terms of online consumers' concentration on and attention to web-based communication messages and information. Koufaris's (2002) positive correlation of concentration with the intention to return to a website can be applied to this study's focus and can thus demonstrate the importance of online consumers' concentration and attention focus in ensuring that they return to the online environment for more exposure to web-based communication messages, thus to benefit from the total web experience.

The concept *message involvement* is not evident in the literature, but for the purpose of this study, it is suggested that it refers to the enjoyment, control and concentration that online consumers display during a web-based communication encounter. In addition, this involvement in the message requires information gathering to satisfy needs and communication decisions. This proposed viewpoint contextualises Koufaris's (2002:211) argument that product involvement is an important determinant of online consumer behaviour, which he describes as "(a) a person's motivational

state (i.e arousal, interest, drive) towards an object where (b) that motivational state is activated by the relevance or importance of the object in question”.

3.6.6 Usability

Usability, in the context of this study, particularly refers to the technology used when exposure to web-based communication messages occurs, as well as to the utilisation of the websites and web-based communication messages, thus a cognitive appraisal (Chiu et al 2009) of the technological and informational elements of the total web experience. Venkatesh and Agarwal (2006:368), Chu and Lu (2007), Chiu et al (2009) and Lin et al (2010), and regard usability or perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as key factors in influencing and predicting purchase behaviour. Therefore, in line with preceding arguments to contextualise the determinants of online consumer behaviour in terms of the web-based communication exposure approach, this section argues that usability should refer to the usability of web-based communication and online information and messages.

Venkatesh and Agarwal (2006:368) contend that “in order for technological devices to be successful, their design must pay attention to the complexities associated with the human-computer interface”. The website and messages contained in them thus need to be engineered to be useful and easy to use (perceived ease of use) (Chiu et al 2009) in order to ensure adoption of and return to the website.

Of particular interest to this study is the usability of the content, which should be relevant and contain breadth, depth and current and timely information (Chiu et al 2009). Chu and Lu (2007) further clarify perceived usefulness in terms of the functional benefits of the website. This is of particular interest to this study since the focus is on the total web experience that online consumers enjoy during exposure to web-based communication messages. In this instance, the functional benefits of the websites and messages are important because of their information-intensive nature that needs to provide information satisfaction (Park & Kim 2003) to the online consumer.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Building on existing research, which proposed factors that influence consumer behaviour, this chapter presented the categorisation of these factors as determinants of consumer behaviour, specifically in terms of internal, external and unique online determinants. The internal determinants applied to the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches included motivation, personality, perception, learning and attitude, while the external determinants were identified as reference groups and family, social class, culture and subculture. For the purpose of emphasising the online context of this study, the online determinants of trust, consumer familiarity, prior interaction, technology acceptance, technology attitude, functional, symbolic and experiential benefits, the total web experience, emotional and cognitive responses, perceived control, concentration, attention focus, message involvement and usability were discussed.

The identification of the factors that influence the manner in which consumers in the offline and online environments behave and interact with communication messages is deemed significant because of the suggestion that these factors will determine offline and online consumer behaviour. In addition, this chapter indicated that the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour, for the purposes of this chapter and study, should not be restricted to purchasing behaviour, but should include exposure to web-based communication messages.

The next chapter addresses consumer decision making from an offline perspective and then proposes a new perspective on consumer decision making for the purpose of contextualising this study in terms of online consumers' search for and consumption of web-based communication messages and online information.

CHAPTER 4: CONSUMER DECISION MAKING: TOWARDS AN ONLINE INFORMATION DECISION-MAKING PERSPECTIVE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Various authors see the study of consumer decision making as complex and dynamic (Shao et al 2009) and that it involves different disciplines such as sociology, social psychology, marketing communication, computer sciences and economics (Smith & Rupp 2003; Darley et al 2010; Zellman et al 2010; Roozmand et al 2011). The focal point in the realm of consumer science literature is consumption behaviour with the emphasis on the humane aspects of these processes (Bettman et al 1998; Erasmus et al 2001). In the marketing and business domains, the focus is mostly on buyer behaviour where an understanding of consumers' decision processes in a purchasing context is deemed important (Erasmus et al 2001; Vohs et al 2009).

In contrast to the existing consumer behaviour and consumer decision-making perspectives (Chaffee & McLeod 1973; Montgomery & Ryans 1973; Bettman et al 1998; Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Erasmus et al 2001; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Assael 2004; Blackwell et al 2006; Solomon 2007; Vohs et al 2009; Zellman et al 2010), this chapter moves towards an understanding of consumer decision making according to the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches proposed in chapter 2. It is argued that critical to these approaches and to the discipline of communication science, is the conceptualisation of consumer decision making in terms of message exposure and information processing, in contrast to, but also inclusive of, certain processes of the consumer decision-making process in a purchasing context. The focus of this proposed perspective is not on consumer and marketing sciences or product consumption, but on *information* and *message* search, consumption and decision making in the online environment. Because of a lack of literature on consumer *information* decision making, especially in the online environment, this chapter will draw on and apply existing offline literature on consumer decision making in the purchasing context from both consumer and marketing sciences perspectives.

The previous chapters proposed new perspectives on and approaches to the study of online consumer behaviour (chapter 2) and explained the determinants of consumer behaviour in the offline and online contexts (chapter 3). The main arguments in this chapter are based on these perspectives and approaches and are structured as follows: to identify, explore and describe the main thrusts of existing offline consumer decision-making theory (secondary research objective 4); and to propose a new perspective of consumer decision making by developing a model for online consumer information decision making (secondary research objective 5).

This chapter commences by firstly defining consumer decision making from existing offline perspectives; secondly, the categories and strategies of consumer decisions from existing offline perspectives will be discussed; thirdly, existing offline consumer decision making models and theories will be explained and analysed; fourthly, online consumer information decision making from a proposed new perspective will be contextualised and defined; and lastly, the online consumer information decision-making process will be proposed.

4.2 DEFINING CONSUMER DECISION MAKING: EXISTING OFFLINE PERSPECTIVES

Blackwell et al (2006:70) regard consumer decision making as “a road map of consumers’ minds that marketers and managers can use to help guide product mix, communication, and sales strategies”, while Schiffman and Kanuk (2000:437) argue that consumer decision making is “the selection of an option from two or more alternative choices”. Ratner et al (2008) conceptualise consumer decision making in terms of several reasons why individuals lose track when making important decisions. According to these authors, these reasons include the neglected consequences of distributed choices, intertemporal trade-offs and self-control problems, prediction failures, processing difficulties and emotion and deliberation-based distortions. To assist consumers in their decision-making processes and to avoid losing track when making decisions, these authors suggest that interventions such as providing information and decision tools, tapping emotions, organising

decision options, restricting decision options, adding restrictive decision options and managing decision expectations can prevent suboptimal decision making.

According to Wells et al (2006), even though each consumer makes decisions in a different way, predictable steps in the decision-making process such as need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and postpurchase evaluation constitute a similar decision process for consumers in general. Different variables such as low- and high-involvement purchase decisions and risk and value assessment as fundamental psychological processes (Han et al 2007) can alter the decision-making process and, according to Belch and Belch (2009), involve various internal psychological processes that are, for the purposes of this study, explained and applied to consumer behaviour in the online context. Furthermore, Han et al (2007) calculate the influence of specific emotions on consumer decision making by means of two streams of research, namely the emotional carry-over effects on the assessment of risk and the carry-over effects on the assessment of monetary value. In the light of the various views of the above authors, Shao et al (2009) conclude that “consumer decision making is complex and no single perspective offers a complete theory of consumer decision making”.

It is therefore clear that consumer decision making can be scrutinised from a variety of theoretical perspectives which, according to Foxall (1998), Katsikopoulos and Gigerenzer (2008), Tang (2009) and Zellman et al (2010), fall within the realm of cognitive psychology, radical behaviourism, neoclassical theory and bounded rationality theory, typically making use of several diverse perspectives, such as the economic, passive, cognitive and emotional perspectives (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000) to express its intricate nature. The most prominent are the rational models of consumer decision making, rational choice theory and bounded rationality in the purchasing context which explain a sequence of events with reference to constructive processing and developed by normative theorists (Bettman et al 1998; Solomon 2007; Shao et al 2009). These rational choice theories and models are outcome-focused forecasting models (Shao et al 2009) and mainly explain the amount of information individuals use in making decisions and how they combine accessible information to make a choice to purchase. Other perspectives are the

behavioural influence perspective, which refers to a learnt response to environmental cues, or the experiential perspective which relates to the totality of the product or service (Solomon 2007).

4.3 CATEGORIES AND STRATEGIES OF CONSUMER DECISIONS: EXISTING OFFLINE PERSPECTIVES

Consumer decisions can be categorised on the basis of the amount of effort and complexity required for the decision process (Solomon 2007), the facets of decision processing (Bettman et al 1998) and the attributes used to reach a decision (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001). When considering this in terms of a continuum, *habitual decision making* requires limited problem solving (Solomon 2007:307) at the one end and *extended problem solving*, which requires complex processing, at the other. Pfeiffer et al (2009:1585) thus define decision behaviour as “a decision strategy which consists of several mental steps”, while Yang and Wu (2007:86) define decision-making categories and strategies as “a mental orientation characterizing a consumer’s approach to making choices”, and add that it has cognitive and affective characteristics. Bettman et al (1998), Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), Assael (2004), Leo et al (2005), Blackwell et al (2006), Solomon (2007:307), Katsikopoulos and Gigerenzer (2008), Chrzan (2009), Pfeiffer et al (2009), Shao et al (2009), Wang and Benbasat (2009), Wang and Liang (2010) and Zellman et al (2010) suggest the following categories and strategies of consumer decisions:

- *Extended problem solving*: Extended problem solving occurs when a motive that is central to the self-concept is recognised and as much as possible information is collected from internal memory and external information sources. Careful and deliberate consideration of a higher degree of complexity is part of this process.
- *Limited problem solving*: In the case of limited problem solving, consumers use simple decision rules of a lower degree of complexity to choose between alternatives. These provide cognitive shortcuts, which are general guidelines that they can fall back on instead of proceeding through the decision process

from scratch, also referred to as inertia-based habits. This type of decision strategy is also referred to as a low-effort judgement process, also called the representativeness heuristic. This takes place when consumers make simple judgements or comparisons to the category prototype or exemplar. Another low-effort judgement process is the availability heuristic which refers to the ease with which accessible or vivid events can be brought to mind.

- *Habitual decision making*: Here, consumers use little or no conscious mental effort to make a decision.
- *Problem recognition*: The consumer recognises that a problem needs to be solved when there is a considerable difference between the current state of affairs and some desired or ideal state of affairs.
- *Information search*: While searching for information, the consumer reviews the environment for usable information in order to make a sensible decision. When the consumer recognises a need and searches for specific information, he/she engages in a *prepurchase search*. When information is sought in a regular fashion, the consumer is engaging in an *ongoing search*. Consumers furthermore search for information internally when they access information stored in memory and externally when utilising outer sources such as family and cultural groups. Existing knowledge may be the result of *directed learning*. This occurs when the consumer has searched for relevant information previously, while *incidental learning* takes place when exposure to messages is incidental. It is this phase/step of information search and decision making that this chapter highlights. As explained above, the focus here is thus on the manner in which offline and online consumers make decisions about information and messages and not exclusively on the manner in which they make decisions about purchasing products or using services.
- *The economics of information*: The *economics-of-information* approach to decision making centres around the gathering of information in order to make informed decisions. The information is selectively gathered and can lead to the consumer making rational or emotional decisions. This approach is also in line with the informational and message consumption approach followed and proposed in this chapter.

- *Weighted adding strategy*: The choice of a specific alternative is based on the decision-making process. Extended processing of alternatives occurs when the choices are in conflict and negative emotions are aroused as a result. The *evoked set* refers to the alternatives the consumer knows about, while the *consideration set* includes the deliberations about which alternatives to include and which not. The weighted adding strategy thus refers to the contemplation of options by assessing the significance of each feature and assigning a subjective importance to it. The processing the consumer thus engages in when making these decisions is compensatory and extensive.
- *The lexicographic strategy*: Here the most valuable attribute or characteristic is selected after deliberating on a hierarchy of attributes. The processing here is thus limited and noncompensatory, and illustrates how negative information leads to the immediate rejection of an option from the consideration set. This process requires a great deal of effort since each brand is evaluated on different key attributes and those that are not adequate on any one attribute are eliminated. This process proceeds in a simple, sequential manner.
- *Satisficing*: In satisficing, alternatives are considered in a sequential fashion, while the value of each characteristic is examined with regard to the predetermined cutoff level. Although consumers are not necessarily aware of all the available alternatives, the first acceptable alternative that meets the decision criteria on all attributes is chosen. The satisficing strategy is the direct opposite of the optimisation strategy.
- *Elimination-by-aspects (EBA)*: This strategy combines the lexicographic and satisficing strategies and is also referred to as the *conjunctive model*. It involves consumers eliminating options that do not meet the minimum cutoff value for the most significant characteristic. The *disjunctive model* is similar, but here, consumers decide on acceptable levels for the cutoff when choosing between several of the most important attributes.
- *The equal weight utility maximisation strategy*: The equal weight strategy is also referred to as the *neoclassical decision-making theory*. Here, all of the possible alternatives and attribute values are considered, a relative importance is assigned to each attribute and an overall value for each alternative based on the impact of the attribute and relative weight is chosen

before deciding on the alternative with the best value and proceeding through a decision strategy.

- *The confirming dimensions strategy:* When applying this strategy, consumers process alternatives in pairs until only one option remains.
- *Variance in the amount of information processed:* Consumers may give meticulous consideration to a large amount of information, or give little consideration to limited information available. In the case of considering detailed information, consumers usually employ rational choice models.
- *Different amounts of information processed for each alternative:* In selective processing, different amounts of information are processed for different attributes or alternatives. Alternatively, the same amount of information can be utilised for each attribute or alternative. In these instances, the consumer will make use of selective attention to the information since the process will be highly selective.
- *Information processed by alternative:* Here, numerous features of a single alternative are processed before another alternative is considered.
- *Compensatory strategies:* Compensatory strategies refer to the degree to which a strategy is compensatory. This strategy explains that a high-quality value on one alternative compensates for a poor value on another alternative. The choice, in the case of compensatory decisions is based on the brand, service or message with the greatest number of positive features. Compensatory attribute-processing models are referred to as additive difference models and explain that brands are compared by attribute, two brands at a time. Each attribute of each product is evaluated and then combined into an overall preference.
- *Noncompensatory strategies:* In contrast to the compensatory attribute-processing strategies, the noncompensatory strategies are heuristics that bridge the choice set and do not take all attributes into consideration when narrowing down alternatives.
- *Attribute processing:* In attribute processing, the consumer processes one attribute at a time.
- *Affective strategies:* In contrast to the most frequent rational decision-making processes, consumers also make decisions more holistically on the basis of

feelings or emotions. In some instances emotional decisions overwhelm rational thoughts and decisions. The focus here is on the consumer's internal psychological processes when deciding on information. This ties in with the internal psychological behavioural processes approach that was proposed in chapter 2 of this study.

- *One-reason heuristic strategy*: Here, multiple attributes are available for a decision. A stopping rule is applied when a single attribute is found that enables the consumer to make a choice.
- *Elimination heuristic strategy*: This is another noncompensatory heuristic which, according to Zellman et al (2010:274), "is suitable for choosing between several alternatives when a single attribute cannot discriminate between alternatives". Increasingly more attributes are thus eliminated until the set of remaining alternatives provides only a single option to choose.
- *Multiattribute utility maximisation (MAU)*: This strategy is referred to as the classic utility-maximising strategy and describes the process whereby the individual chooses the alternative with the highest overall utility score. According to Pfeiffer et al (2009), the score is "the sum of the products of attribute-weights and utilities of attribute levels".

It is clear from the above discussion that individual consumers engage in various strategies and procedures when proceeding through a decision making process. The type of decision strategy the consumer will use depends on several internal and external factors. It is argued that consumers will make use of the decision strategies discussed above when they are making a decision in the offline context, which could also be applicable in the online context. Of significance here is the fact that the decision strategies mentioned in the preceding section are not mutually exclusive and that an individual consumer may proceed through only one and/or several of these decision strategies simultaneously when making a decision.

4.4 EXISTING OFFLINE CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING MODELS AND THEORIES

Erasmus et al (2001:83) refer to decision-making models that indicate the stages of the decision-making process as “flow charts of behavioural processes”, while Benson and Dresdow (2003:998) add that they represent “networks of concepts and relationships that represent a generalization of the world in which we live, work and make decisions”, constructed by the “decision makers themselves” (Xia & Sudharshan 2002:265). A graphical depiction of the decision-making process can afford researchers the opportunity to visually grasp what happens when variables and circumstances change (Erasmus et al 2001) and to further specify the interrelationship of variables, thereby contributing to theory building.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the first models to indicate the stages of the consumer decision-making process were developed, but because there was limited theory building, these models were not developed from a purely theoretical base, leaving the comprehension of this significant process as a “black box” (Bonoma & Johnston 1979; Erasmus et al 2001;). These models primarily indicated the stages that consumers proceed through as highly complex decision making that started with problem recognition and therefore typified a rational approach to decision making. Following the rational approaches to consumer decision making, was the logical positivism approach which focused on cognitive factors that explained the mental activity that portrayed these decision processes (Erasmus et al 2001). All of these models, especially the rational models, were developed from limited theoretical grounding and were criticised because they attempted to explain nonconscious behaviour from a consciously oriented approach. This caused ambiguity about the manner in which consumers proceed through the decision-making process (Erasmus et al 2001; Foreman 2003). In addition, these models mostly regarded the rational or cognitive processes and disregarded the emotional and psychological information processing.

The early decision-making authors regarded the decision-making process as a series or sequence of interlocked stages flowing in a linear and staged manner

(Bonoma & Johnston 1979; Benson & Dresdow 2003; Smith & Rupp 2003; Patwardhan & Ramaprasad 2005; Jin et al 2009). However, the new models view the process in a more parallel manner, recognising the fact that some of the stages occur simultaneously and interact in a reciprocal manner, leading to abbreviated or expanded hierarchies (Erasmus et al 2001; Benson & Dresdow 2003; Patwardhan & Ramaprasad 2005). These developments in consumer decision making led to different combinations of the consumer decision-making process. According to Smith and Rupp (2003) and Patwardhan and Ramaprasad (2005) these included the following: the (1) rational, learning and behaviouristic hierarchies (cognitive, affective and conative); (2) the dissonance attribution hierarchy (conative, affective and cognitive); and (3) the low-involvement hierarchy (cognitive, conative and affective).

Decision-making authors thus regard decision making as a process involving multiple complex levels, phases or stages that consumers may proceed through simultaneously in a parallel manner. Although the phases or stages indicated by different authors (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Erasmus et al 2001; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Foreman 2003; Haas 2003; Smith & Rupp 2003; Assael 2004; Patwardhan & Ramaprasad 2005; Blackwell et al 2006; Wright 2006; Chen et al 2008; Lin & Wang 2008; Vohs et al 2009; Darley et al 2010; Roozmand et al 2011;) typically overlap, each author presents a unique model of the consumer decision-making process.

Most of the existing offline consumer decision-making models consider the consumer as a rational and adaptive individual who goes through a series of mental and motor steps progressing from problem or need recognition through information search and evaluation, to a purchase decision and postpurchase behaviour. At the core of consumer decision making is a knowledge-attitude-behaviour sequence (Smith & Rupp 2003) which focuses on a rational, goal-oriented approach process of decision making. The consumer thus goes through the awareness and knowledge stages (cognitive stage), to the liking and preference stages (affective stage), and lastly to the conviction and purchase stages (conative stage) (Smith & Rupp 2003; Patwardhan & Ramaprasad 2005; Darley et al 2010).

It is clear that various authors have proposed models and theories to explain consumer decision making from existing offline perspectives. Figure 4.1 chronologically depicts the models, theoretical frameworks and theories of Chaffee and McLeod (1973), Montgomery and Ryans (1973), Punj and Stewart (1983), Bettman et al (1998) and Assael (2004). For the purpose of this study, these models are regarded as the most fundamental theoretical foundations of existing decision-making theory which can provide a theoretical basis on which the application of existing offline decision-making theory to the online context of this study can be based.

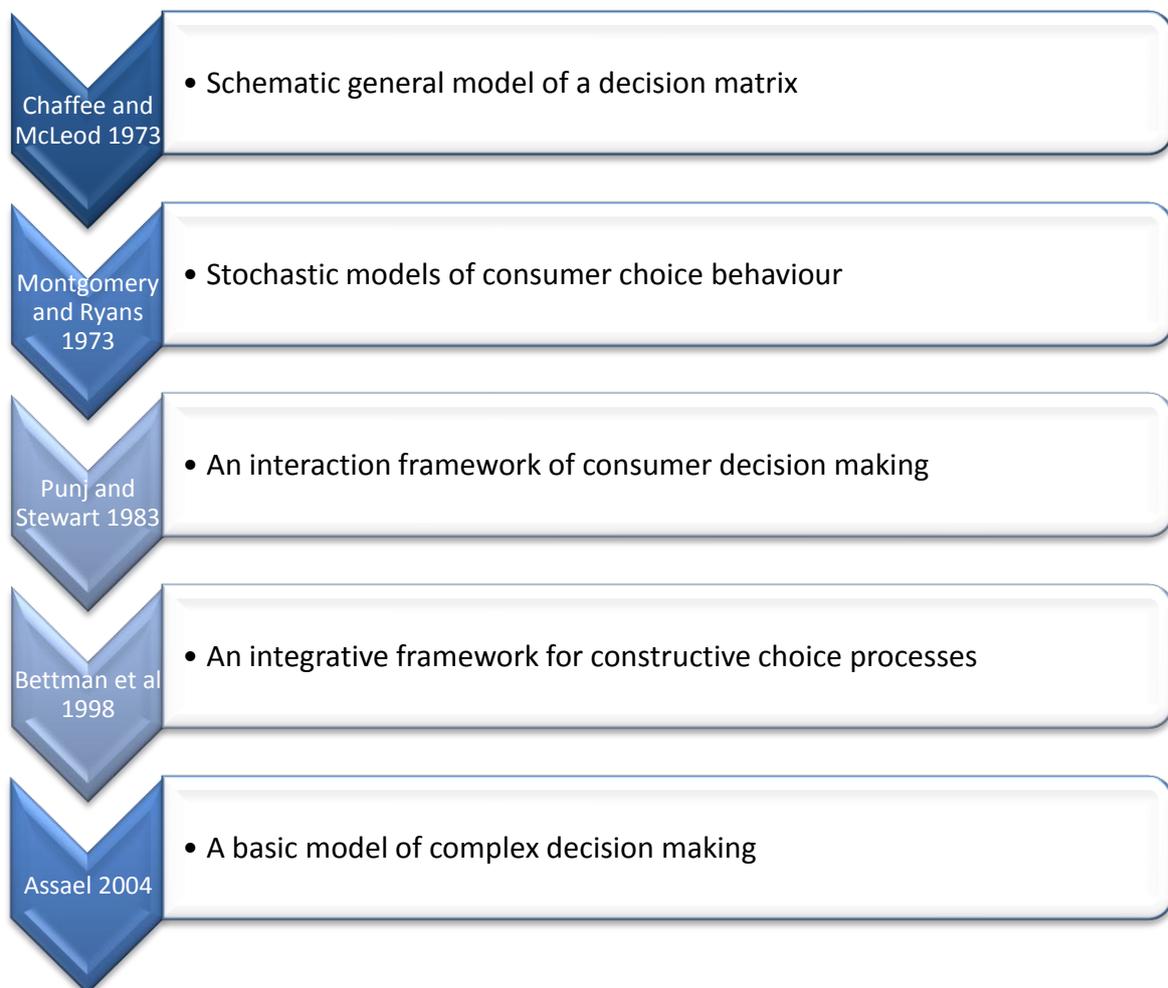


Figure 4.1: A chronological depiction of the most relevant existing offline consumer decision-making models and theories

Each of these will be discussed below.

4.4.1 The schematic general model of a decision matrix

Chaffee and McLeod (1973) focus their schematic general model of a decision matrix on the notion that information is the principal component in any decision-making situation from a purchasing perspective. Although the model is presented from a purchasing perspective, it is relevant to this study's context of online exposure to web-based communication messages, since the focus of this study is not on purchasing, but on information search and information decision making. The most important dimensions of a decision matrix are identified by Chaffee and McLeod (1973) as follows: decisions, communication, product attributes, attribute values, product involvement, perceived risk and information processing.

In the broader context of consumer behavior, Chaffee and McLeod (1973) argue that two major classes of behaviour are involved, namely decisions and communication. They propose a conceptual matrix for the analysis of *decisions*, and a model of the stages in the decision-making process, with all of these processes indicating a complex *communication* situation. Chaffee and McLeod's (1973) approach to this model is from a psychological model of information perspective that corresponds to the main elements of decisions. Each specific *product attribute* is assigned a value in terms of the object it belongs to where an attribute is defined as "a dimension of judgment on which two or more objects can be compared" (Chaffee & McLeod 1973:390). According to these authors, at least two objects and one attribute are needed in order for a decision to take place. In a consumption situation, the alternatives usually differ and the consumer decides in favour of the object with the higher *attribute value*. A complete decision matrix (Chaffee & McLeod 1973) identifies all the alternative objects, all of the relevant attributes and a value for each. This is an example of an ideal decision matrix which is theoretically possible, but rarely realistic in a real-life decision-making situation.

Other essential factors in the decision-making process are, for example, product involvement and perceived risk. In the context of this chapter, *product involvement* can be adapted to message involvement in order to illustrate the amount of a consumer's involvement during exposure to and engagement with online and offline

integrated marketing communication messages. Closely related to the concept of involvement is *perceived risk* (discussed in chapter 2 as a psychological construct of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach) which refers to the amount of risk the consumer perceives the communication encounter to possess. Complex consumer decision-making processes will be followed by a complex process of *information processing* (information processing and response will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 5) (Chaffee & McLeod 1973).

Chaffee and McLeod (1973) further propose stages in the decision-making process and illustrate them on a flow chart with various stages: the inceptive, the product-attribute cognisance, product evaluation, product decision, brand-attribute cognisance, brand evaluation, brand decision and post-decisional cognisance stages.

4.4.2 Stochastic models of consumer choice behaviour

Montgomery and Ryans (1973) proposed a stochastic model of consumer choice behaviour that regards consumer response and decision making as the outcome of some probabilistic process. They further affirm that the present state of knowledge regarding consumer behaviour “does not allow us to predict behavior with complete accuracy, and even if we were aware of all the variables that affect behavior in a given situation, we would probably ignore some to reduce the problem to manageable proportions” (Montgomery & Ryans 1973:522). The most fundamental elements of a stochastic model of consumer choice behaviour are choice probability (probabilities) and the time of choice. Choice probability is further divided into interconsumer and intraconsumer factors. This illustrates that consumers differ in terms of their choice probabilities and that consumers are heterogeneous.

Montgomery and Ryans (1973:523) propose five stages of consumer buying that can be applied to the decision-making process. The first stage signifies the perception of a need, the next stage is the prepurchase activity, followed by the purchase decision, usage behaviour, and lastly, postpurchase evaluation. They further suggest three

basic types of stochastic models: the zero-order model, the Markov model and the linear-learning model. These models will be briefly discussed below.

- *Zero-order models:* Zero-order models explain that “the response probability changes from trial to trial, but in which this change is not affected or altered by the particular sequence of choices the consumer has made” (Montgomery & Ryans 1973: 527). This model thus asserts that the history of the purchase, or in the context of this chapter, the history of the message encounter does not affect the probability of purchasing or message consumption at a specific purchase or message exposure occasion.
- *Markov model:* The Markov model is another type of stochastic model that functions in contrast to the Zero-order model. The Markov model explains that the likelihood of choosing a certain option is a function of what the consumer has formerly done.
- *Linear-learning model:* It is probable that a particular response will occur in future if it has occurred previously. This type of model assumes that past choices will affect the choice of alternatives in future. Thus, every time a particular alternative is chosen, the probability that it will be chosen in future increases.

4.4.3 An interaction framework of consumer decision making

According to Punj and Stewart (1983), two approaches to decision making, namely trait theory and situationism, are inadequate in explaining consumer decision making. They therefore integrate three streams of research on consumer decision processes in an interaction framework of consumer decision making. These three streams form the basis of this integrated framework for identifying individual and task taxonomies, namely task characteristics, individual differences and the interaction between the task and the individual.

Punj and Stewart (1983:181) developed this framework according to the notion that “behavior occurring under one set of variable types and levels (e.g. task variables) is not independent of the type and level of other variables (e.g. individual differences)”. The interactionist perspective is therefore based on the view that behaviour is a function of task-related variables, individual differences and task-individual interactions, with the absence of one of them resulting in an incomplete decision-making process. Each of these variables influences the decision-making process differently, depending on which variable is regarded as the primary influence. Based on this, it is argued that behaviour or decision making fundamentally depends on the situation in which the individual makes the decision. This is in contrast to the perspectives of the trait theory and situationism, which predict that an individual’s behaviour will not change or will only change slightly because of the situation in which the decision is made.

Of importance here is the fact that different views on decision making exist, and they present decision-making models differently. Punj and Stewart (1983) first explain that theories that emphasise task as a determinant of behaviour would present a model as follows:

behaviour = task + error

Secondly, theories that regard individual differences as a determinant of behaviour or decision making would propose the following model:

behaviour = individual + error

Finally, based on the conceptualisations above, Punj and Stewart (1983) propose their interaction model as follows:

behaviour = task + individual + (task + individual) + error

The interaction framework of consumer decision making recognises the task and individual as key variables, but it also acknowledges the importance of the

interaction between them. Since Punj and Stewart (1983) believe that no model of consumer decision making is complete without the explicit consideration of the interaction between the task and the individual in the decision-making situation, they proposed two taxonomies, namely the task and individual taxonomies.

The *task taxonomy* refers to the simple abilities that individuals have acquired in certain situations in order to perform tasks successfully. This task process evidently signifies the internal representation of the individual's environment which consists of task effects and context effects. Task effects are the structural characteristics of a decision such as time pressure and the mode of problem and information presentation. Context effects depend on the individual, and include elements such as the attractiveness of alternatives. The task taxonomy further describes the two components of the task, namely the decision problem and the decision environment, which also influence the individual's behaviour in the decision-making situation.

The *individual taxonomy* refers to the main difference between individuals during decision-making processes and is the hierarchy of responses they proceed through. According to Punj and Stewart (1983), the main individual variables that influence decision-making processes include knowledge, ability and motivation. Individuals furthermore categorise their individual experiences in terms of unique personal constructs.

4.4.4 An integrative framework for constructive choice processes

Bettman et al (1998:9) proposed an integrative framework for constructive choice processes and explained that “decision makers select strategies in a situation based on some compromise between the desire to make an accurate decision and the desire to minimise cognitive effort”. This framework explains constructive decision making in terms of principles of human perception, since our senses detect change on which decisions about gains and losses need to be made.

Bettman et al (1998) discuss the framework for understanding constructive decision making and postulate that it comprises the following elements:

- *Consumer goals*: Consumers make decisions to achieve certain goals, based on a goal hierarchy that can consist of meta goals such as maximising the accuracy of a decision and minimising the cognitive effort necessary for the decision. All these decisions are evaluated in a social context by either the individual or others.
- *Attention, information selectivity and perceptual interpretation*: Selectivity in information processing and decision making is essential since consumers have limited capacity to process information and therefore engage in voluntary and involuntary attention focus. Voluntary attention is directed to information that is regarded as relevant, while involuntary attention is directed at elements from the environment that are unexpected.
- *Choice heuristics*: Different consumers have different strategies for making decisions. These strategies have advantages and disadvantages, depending on the goals that need to be accomplished and the environment in which the strategy is used. Consumers will select the decision strategy that is most relevant to the situation and environment.

Bettman et al (1998) also analyse situations in which accuracy and effort goals predominate and find that in situations where there is little emotional involvement, the accuracy of the decision is maximised, while the cognitive effort involved in reaching that decision is minimised. Their goals framework is most useful if there are appropriate and calculable measures of the various goals, and they propose measures of cognitive effort and accuracy that explain that any complex decision strategy can be divided into more elementary information processes and decision strategies.

4.4.5 A basic model of complex decision making

Assael (2004) proposed a basic model of complex decision making that emphasises the interaction between the marketer and the consumer. The central component of this model is consumer decision making, which Assael (2004:21) defines as “the process of perceiving and evaluating brand information, considering how brand

alternatives meet the consumer's needs and deciding on a brand". He furthermore explains two broad influences that determine the consumer's choice. The first influence is at an individual level where the consumer's decision making and behaviour are influenced by his/her needs, perceptions of brand characteristics, attitudes towards alternatives, demographics, lifestyle and personality characteristics; the second influence is the consumer's purchasing environment, which is represented by culture (the norms and values of society), subcultures (a part of society with distinct norms and values) and face-to-face groups (family, friends and reference groups). The marketing environment is also regarded as a component of the consumer's environment because the organisation provides the product or service that can satisfy the consumer's needs and wants.

Key to this model is the recognition of consumers' needs. Once the type or level of need has been recognised, the individual enters his/her *psychological set* which, according to Assael (2004:36), refers to "his or her state of mind at the time needs are recognized and motives are aroused". Part of this psychological set (state of mind) is the benefits sought by the individual by considering the benefit criteria attached to the decision.

Assael (2004:32) identifies several input variables that influence need recognition:

- *Consumers' past experiences*: Consumer decisions are partly based on previous experiences that cause expectations. When deviations from these expectations occur, alternatives may be considered.
- *Consumer characteristics*: Consumers' characteristics differ in terms of demographics, lifestyle and personalities. These are input variables that alter need recognition during the consumer decision-making process.
- *Consumer motives*: A motivational drive develops because of a disparity between a consumer's current situation and desired goal.
- *Environmental influences*: Because consumer decisions take place in a social setting, this setting determines choice behaviour.

Postpurchase evaluation occurs after the consumer has made a decision. This is represented in Assael's (2004) model as feedback to the consumer. The consumer subsequently evaluates his/her behaviour and may then change his/her behavioural patterns of acquiring information, evaluating and selecting the brand. In this model, a feedback loop also leads back to the environment which explains that consumers use word of mouth to communicate their purchase and consumption experiences to friends and family which is in line with the managerial approach (discussed in chapter 2). This model shows that consumer feedback motivates and drives marketing strategies. Accordingly, marketers and organisations need information and feedback from the consumer, as well as from the environment in order to adapt marketing strategies. Assael (2004) further argues that organisations need to determine how cultural and social norms and the corporate image in the context of social responsibility influence purchases of products and consumer behaviour.

4.4.6 Analysis and application of the existing offline consumer decision-making models and theories to the online context

It is propounded that the *schematic general model of a decision matrix's* major contribution to decision-making theory lies in its identification of the concept of *product involvement* which, in the information and web-based communication exposure context of this study, can be adapted to *message involvement* in order to illustrate the amount of consumer involvement during exposure to and when engaging with online web-based communication messages. It is argued that closely related to the concept of involvement is *perceived risk* (previously addressed in chapter 2 as a preinformation consumer perception attribute) which, in this context, refers to the amount of risk the consumer perceives the web-based communication encounter to possess. The schematic general model of a decision matrix proposes that complex consumer decision-making processes will be followed by a complex process of *information processing*. The stages that would follow are *product attribute cognisance, product evaluation, product decision stage, brand attribute cognisance, brand evaluation, brand decision stage and postdecisional cognisance*. It is argued that although each of these stages describes a product decision-making process, they can also be applied to the web-based communication exposure and information

decision-making contexts of this chapter. The reason is that the same process the consumer goes through when deciding which brand of product to use can be applied to the process he/she goes through during exposure to web-based communication messages and his/her response to these messages.

It is further argued that the major contribution of the *stochastic models of consumer choice behaviour* lies in their identification of the five stages of consumer buying. For the purpose of applying these stages to the web-based communication and information perspectives of this study, they can be applied to the online consumer information decision-making process as follows: The first stage proposed by the stochastic models of consumer choice behaviour signifies the perception of a need; the next stage is the prepurchase activity, followed by the purchase decision, then usage behaviour and, lastly, postpurchase evaluation. When these stages are applied to the communication exposure context of this chapter, it is posited that the consumer will first go through the stage where he/she perceives a need to be satisfied. He/she next engages in pre-exposure activity when he/she decides whether or not to, in the case of online consumer behaviour, access online websites and messages. The message decision follows - in other words, which message to react to or regard, and then usage, exposure and information-processing behaviour. The consumer finally engages in postexposure evaluation. During this stage, the consumer evaluates the communication encounter and decides whether or not to proceed with it.

The *interaction framework of consumer decision making* contributes to the decision-making literature by proposing a model of consumer decision making that explicitly considers the interaction between the task and the individual during decision-making processes. This model is thus more complete than the models that merely consider the task and individual as variables in the process, thus adding the dimension of interactionism. In the context of this study, the interaction between the individual and the web-based communication encounter is deemed important in that it explains the online consumer's information decision-making process when deliberating information sources and message alternatives.

It was indicated that the *integrative framework for constructive choice processes* analyses situations in which accuracy and effort goals predominate, and that in situations in which there is little emotional involvement, the accuracy of the decision is maximised and the cognitive effort involved in reaching that decision is minimised. This framework is most useful if there are appropriate and calculable measures of the various goals, and if they propose measures of cognitive effort and accuracy that explain that any complex decision strategy can be divided into more elementary information processes and decision strategies. In the online context of this study, it is argued that the accuracy of the decision on information alternatives and web-based communication messages is the highest when little emotional involvement is evident, which will heighten the cognitive effort in making the information or message decision.

It is postulated that the *basic model of complex decision making* is valuable to this study in that it explains consumer decision making, as well as individual and environmental influences on consumer decision making. However, the model is criticised because it fails to consider consumer decision making in terms of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. The main reason is that this model does not elucidate on the consumer's internal psychological levels and phases during exposure to web-based communication messages and deciding on information and messages alternatives. The model is thus somewhat simplistic in explaining the complete consumer behavioural processes which comprise only decision-making and consumer response phases with individual and environmental influences determining behaviour. These phases can nevertheless be applied to online consumer information decision making and can therefore contribute some theoretical constructs to the proposed model for online consumer information decision making.

4.5 CONTEXTUALISING AND DEFINING ONLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION DECISION MAKING: A NEW PROPOSED PERSPECTIVE

The main criticism against the existing offline decision-making models discussed above and the manner in which model building has been approached previously, is

that they are presented exclusively from a purchasing perspective, thereby restricting the consumer decision-making process to a mere consideration of product attributes and alternatives. It is argued that a new perspective and model should be proposed with a focus on *information* and *message* alternatives decisions, as well as *information* decision making during web-based communication exposure, specifically from an *online* perspective of consumer behaviour.

This view is theoretically supported by Chen, Jiang and Hsiao (2008a), who argue that there is a noteworthy difference between online and offline decision making. They also contend that the main difference is the transparency and abundance of information on the internet, which accelerates the online consumer's search speed and reduces information asymmetry (Chen et al 2008a). Patwardhan and Ramaprasad (2005), for example, proposed a rational hierarchical path model of online decision making which focuses specifically on the prepurchase search, evaluation and actual purchase stages. Although the focus of their model is on the purchasing process, in addition to the other models, it can be applied specifically to the context of the newly proposed online information decision-making perspective in this chapter.

Furthermore, in order to justify the online perspective of consumer information decision making, it is argued that the internet is regarded as a "rational" (Patwardhan & Ramaprasad 2005) medium for information seekers because of its goal directedness and information-intensive nature. Because online consumers are exposed to a huge amount of information to address needs and it is easy to obtain this information in the online environment, this chapter and model focus on *information* decision making as opposed to purchase decision making.

Hence, in line with the purpose of this chapter, it is argued that a comprehensive view of consumer decision making is not possible by adopting only one of the existing perspectives discussed above. Therefore, in addition to the perspectives mentioned above, this chapter proposes an *online* consumer *information* decision-making process perspective which is derived from the web-based communication

and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches that were proposed in chapter 2.

Once again it is emphasised that discussions of offline consumer decision making in the existing literature from the traditional purchasing and product consumption decision-making perspectives could be used as a theoretical foundation upon which the new *online information decision-making perspective* will be based. This will lead to a proposed informational perspective on consumer decision making, which will be specifically applicable to the online context. This perspective will focus on explaining online consumers' decision-making processes during their exposure to web-based communication messages in the online environment and their subsequent decisions about *online information* and *messages*.

Hence, in line with the new perspective proposed in this chapter, the following definition of online consumer information decision making is proposed:

Online consumer information decision making refers to the internal low- and high-effort informational processing progression of individual consumers when consuming web-based communication messages with the aim of deliberating and deciding on information alternatives.

To summarise, it is argued that existing consumer decision-making model building and theorising are limited. To address this gap, the next section illustrates the proposed new perspective and model of the consumer decision-making process, namely the online consumer information decision-making process perspective and model. This is done by integrating and applying some of the theoretical constructs of the existing offline decision-making models and the existing literature on decision-making theory, which will provide a theoretical foundation for the new model. The online and information perspectives are subsequently added to finally propose an online consumer information decision-making process model and perspective. It is propounded that this chapter will contribute by building on the existing offline purchasing decision-making models by proposing a new online information decision-making process perspective and model.

4.6 THE ONLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

By expanding on various authors' existing views on offline and online consumer decision making from a purchasing perspective (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Hoyer & MacInnis 2001; Foreman 2003; Haas 2003; Smith & Rupp 2003; Leo et al 2005; Patwardhan & Ramaprasad 2005; Blackwell et al 2006; Wright 2006; Fuller et al 2007; Han et al 2007; Vohs et al 2009; Darley et al 2010; Han & Kim 2010; Maity 2010; Wyer & Xu 2010; Kim et al 2011; Roozmand et al 2011), this section proposes a new perspective on consumer decision making, namely *online consumer information* decision making. This perspective is derived from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches proposed in chapter 2 and argues for a focus on *online consumers'* decision-making processes during their exposure to web-based communication messages and their decision making on *information and messages*. This perspective thus builds on the existing offline and online perspectives of consumer decision making discussed in the preceding sections, which focused on consumers' decision-making processes relating to product alternatives.

This section explains the proposed *information* decision-making process of *online* consumers by, first considering the individual, environmental, psychological processes and online atmospheric determinants that influence this process. The discussion then provides a graphical depiction of the proposed model for the online consumer information decision-making process, followed by a discussion of each of the phases and steps that constitute the online consumer information decision-making process.

It is reiterated that although the phases and steps proposed in the model were uniquely developed for this study, the discussion and informational and online application thereof are based on existing authors' views on theoretical constructs such as the factors that influence decision making, need recognition, product search, evaluation of product alternatives, product acceptance, product consumption and postproduct consumption evaluation. It is clear from the above discussions that existing authors' views on these theoretical constructs are founded on a purchasing

perspective on consumer decision making, and the main contribution of this chapter is therefore to apply these theoretical constructs to the proposed *information* and *online* perspectives.

4.6.1 Determinants of the online consumer information decision-making process

Various authors like Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), Smith and Rupp (2003), Leo et al (2005), Blackwell et al (2006), Fuller et al (2007), Han et al (2007), Darley et al (2010), Maity (2010), Wyer and Xu (2010) and Kim et al (2011) identify factors that influence and determine offline and online consumer decision making. For the purpose of applying these factors to the online information decision-making perspective proposed in this chapter, they are subsequently termed *determinants* of the online information decision-making process. Some of these determinants overlap with some of the determinants of consumer behaviour, which were discussed and evaluated in chapter 3, but are worth summarising briefly again in order to contextualise the aspects that play a role in specifically altering individual consumer’s decision-making processes.

Table 4.1 illustrates the individual differences, environmental factors, psychological processes and online atmospherics that affect online consumer information decision making.

Table 4.1: The determinants of online consumer information decision making

Individual differences	Environmental influences	Psychological processes	Online atmospherics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychographics and values • Personality • Consumer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture • Social class • Family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information processing • Learning • Attitude and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website quality • Website interface

<p>resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation • Knowledge • Attitudes • Self-awareness • Emotional orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal influences • Situation behaviour • Availability of information 	<p>behaviour change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to process information • Individual perception • Memory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website satisfaction and website experience • Perceived risk • Perceived benefit • Trust • Consumer control
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The following discussion is based on Hoyer and MacInnis's (2001), Xia and Sudharshan's (2002), Benson and Dresdow's (2003), Smith and Rupp's (2003), Leo et al's (2005), Blackwell et al's (2006), Fuller et al's (2007), Han et al's (2007), Kim, Ferrin and Rao's (2007), Kim et al's (2011) and Roozmand et al's (2011) identification of the various factors that influence offline and online consumer decision making. These are termed the determinants of the online information decision-making process and subsequently applied to the online consumer information decision-making context.

4.6.1.1 *Individual differences*

- *Psychographics, values, personality, traits and beliefs:* In the online information decision-making context, individuals' characteristics and personalities differ and therefore have an impact on the manner in which they make decisions. These aspects include values, traits and beliefs. Roozmand et al (2011:1079) define personality in terms of four dimensions of openness, namely "conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism". These dimensions describe the different types of personalities that influence the online consumer information decision-making process.
- *Consumer resources* Individual consumers bring various primary resources to any online consumer information decision-making situation, including time, money and information reception and processing capabilities or attention. The

latter is particularly important, since the focus is on *online information decision making* and message consumption.

- *Motivation*: Motivation is the internal psychological process that inspires online consumers to act in a specific manner when engaged in an online information decision-making process. When motivation is high, the online consumer will engage in an active compensatory decision strategy.
- *Knowledge*: Knowledge is stored in the memory and plays a major role in any online consumer's information decision-making process.
- *Attitudes*: Attitudes refer to an overall negative or positive evaluation of an alternative, are difficult to change and direct online consumers' information decision-making processes.
- *Self-awareness*: Self-awareness helps individuals to understand their own motivations and assumptions and to delineate the online information necessary for the online information decision-making process.
- *Emotional orientation*: Emotions have a definite impact on the manner in which individuals perceive situations and issues in the online environment and therefore influence their online information decision-making processes. For the purpose of the online consumer information decision-making perspective proposed in this chapter, Han et al's (2007) identification of two types of emotions that can influence a consumer's decision-making process is particularly relevant (in chapter 2, emotion was discussed in detail as a psychological construct which makes up the internal psychological behavioural processes approach) and applicable to the online information decision-making perspective. The first is integral emotion, which encompasses the influences of subjective experiences on the emotional state of the individual consumer, while the second is incidental emotion, which refers to subjective emotional experiences. Han et al (2007:159) further identify six cognitive dimensions that define the "underlying appraisal patterns of different emotions, namely certainty, pleasantness, attentional activity, control, anticipated effort and responsibility", which are all applicable to the online information decision-making context, particularly because of their influence on the decision-making process.

4.6.1.2 Environmental influences

The following environmental influences determine online consumer information decision making:

- *Culture*: Although culture was discussed extensively in chapter 3 as an external determinant of consumer behaviour, it is argued that the following definitions merit consideration in the online information decision-making context of this discussion: Blackwell et al (2006:87) define culture in the context of decision making as “values, ideas, artefacts, and other meaningful symbols that help individuals communicate, interpret and evaluate as members of society”. Leo et al (2005), however, state that culture underlies individuals’ thoughts and mental processing, therefore ultimately influencing their decisions. For the purpose of this discussion, culture is thus one of the external influences on group level that determine online consumer information decision making. Some of the dimensions of culture include, according to Hofstede (1991) and Roozmand et al (2011:1076), “power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long term orientation”. In terms of culture, the need to reduce the gap between the desired and actual state that is larger than the individual’s tolerance threshold, is determined by the online decision behaviour of people with a similar or lower status who aspire to have similar information decision-making behaviours to people of a higher status.
- *Social class*: Because society is made up of different segments or divisions that are composed of different individuals who share similar values, norms, interests and behaviours, social class determines the manner in which the online individual proceeds through the online information decision-making process.
- *Family*: Although family was discussed extensively in chapter 3 as an external determinant of consumer behaviour, it is argued that it should be mentioned again in the online information decision-making context of this discussion. The family is often regarded as the primary decision-making unit, thus influencing the online process that consumers proceed through when making decisions online.

- *Personal influences:* Personal influences involve significant others that affect consumers in their online information decision making by providing expectations and comparisons.
- *Situation behaviours:* The online situations in which information decisions are made change from time to time and no decision-making situation is similar to the previous one because it will differ in terms of message alternatives and information attributes.
- *Availability of information:* The type of decision strategy that the individual will use in the online environment depends on the amount and type of online information available. The greater the amount of information, the more complex the information decision strategy will be, because more information will provide the online consumer with more knowledge. However, as soon as the information is too much, the online consumer will experience information overload.

4.6.1.3 *Psychological processes*

This section discusses the psychological processes that alter or determine online consumer information decision making, based on and applied to the online context in terms of the findings of the authors listed below on offline and online decision making. These findings relate to the internal psychological behavioural processes approach that was proposed in chapter 2: Schiffman and Kanuk (2000), Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), Smith and Rupp (2003), Leo et al (2005), Blackwell et al (2006), Fuller et al (2007), Han et al (2007), Darley et al (2010), Maity (2010), Wyer and Xu (2010) and Kim et al (2011). These processes are intrapersonal and differ from individual to individual.

- *Information processing:* The process whereby the individual receives, processes and acts on a web-based communication message is referred to as information processing. The manner in which the online individual processes online messages and information influences the online information decision-making process. In addition, online information processing, as well as the individual's information search behaviour, is influenced by the different cognitive styles that individuals utilise during these processes.

- *Learning*: Although learning was indicated as an internal determinant of consumer behaviour in chapter 3, for the purpose of contextualising it as a psychological process that influences online consumer information decision making, it is briefly mentioned again. The learning process changes the individual's knowledge and understanding of specific topics and is also indicative of the online information decision-making process that online individuals go through during exposure to web-based communication messages since they will be aware of their own reflecting, connecting, deciding and acting processes.
- *Attitude and behaviour change*: Although attitude was indicated as an internal determinant of consumer behaviour in chapter 3, for the purpose of contextualising it as a psychological process that determines online consumer information decision making, it is briefly discussed again. Attitude and behaviour are determinants of the online information decision-making process in that they reflect basic psychological behavioural processes that influence the online consumer's behaviour significantly.
- *Ability to process information*: Certain online consumers have a greater ability to evaluate, compare and judge alternatives than others, referring to "consumption vocabulary" (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001:239).
- *Individual perception*: Each individual's characteristics determine the manner in which he/she will proceed through the perceptual process and how he/she, inter alia, applies selective perception in order to be able to pay attention to only the most individually relevant messages.
- *Memory*: Although memory was indicated as a theoretical construct in the internal psychological behavioural processes approach in chapter 2, for the purpose of contextualising it as a psychological process that influences online consumer information decision making, it is briefly mentioned again. According to Wyer and Xu (2010:108), memory includes "semantic concepts that are used to interpret specific pieces of information, configurations of attributes that pertain to either a particular referent or a more general one, episodic representations of specific experiences we have had, more prototypic sequences of events that occur frequently, facts and propositions about ourselves or the world in which we live, attitudes and opinions, and

implicit theories”. Memory thus consists of knowledge-related procedures that are used to pursue online informational goals that need to be attained. Each of these procedures can be retrieved and consulted when the individual needs the information.

4.6.1.4 Online atmospherics

For the purpose of this discussion, it is argued that online atmospherics refer to those determinants that are exclusive to the online environment and influence online consumers’ satisfaction with and experience of websites and web-based communication messages. Online atmospherics are regarded here as determinants that influence the online information decision-making process and constitute the following:

- *Website quality, interface, satisfaction and experience*: The technical aspects of the online experience play a key role in influencing the online information decision-making process of the individual online consumer. When the quality, interface and experience on the website are positive, the individual will experience satisfaction and return to the website for additional information. The quality of the website furthermore influences the quality of the information the individual will receive (Kim et al 2007) and base his/her decisions on.
- *Perceived risk*: Although perceived risk is one of the major theoretical constructs of TAM, the model discussed in chapter 6, it is key to the decision-making context of this chapter in order to discuss it as an online atmospheric that influences online consumer information decision making. Kim et al (2007:546) define perceived risk as “a consumer’s belief about the potential uncertain negative outcomes from the online transaction”. It is argued that the information that online consumers engage with is often incomplete and imperfect, resulting in them feeling at risk when utilising the information. Once the perceived risk is high, the online consumer will regard the benefit of the message encounter or the value of the information received negatively (Comegys et al 2009). One of the primary types of risk that is relevant to the context of this chapter is online information risk, which refers to the security of

the online consumer's information encounter and information submitted online.

- *Perceived benefit:* Kim et al (2007:547) define perceived benefit as “a consumer's belief about the extent to which he or she will become better off from the online transaction with a certain website”. This definition can be applied to the online informational decision-making context of this chapter by arguing that the perceived benefit of the message or information content refers to the extent to which the online consumer is better off after obtaining the information than before the message exposure occasion.
- *Trust:* Trust was defined in chapter 3 as an online determinant of online consumer behaviour. However, here it is also regarded as an online atmospheric that determines the online consumer's information decision-making process. Trust is, according to Kim et al (2007:547) and Fuller et al (2007), an important factor that influences online consumer information decision making since there is always a level of risk involved in any online communication situation. Fuller et al (2007: 677) define trust as “the willingness of a party (i.e. the trustor) to be vulnerable to the actions of another party (i.e., the trustee)”. The most prominent characteristics of perceived trustworthiness of an online information source are ability, benevolence and integrity. These characteristics influence the level at which online consumers trust the online source of information.
- *Consumer control:* In the online environment especially, consumer control plays a key role in influencing or affecting the online consumer's information decision-making process. When consumers have a choice and control over the communication encounter, they feel less intruded on, which may lessen the negative effect of information overload (Xia & Sudharshan 2002).

4.6.2 A proposed online consumer information decision-making model

Figure 4.2 graphically depicts and explains the online consumer information decision-making model by illustrating the following:

- the integration of various theoretical constructs of existing offline decision-making literature, termed from the online information decision-making perspective and based on existing authors' viewpoints. The stages and steps will be explained by first providing an overview of existing views on theoretical constructs of offline decision making, followed by the application of these constructs to the online informational context of this chapter
- the new information decision-making perspective
- the online perspective to consumer information decision making
- the determinants of online consumer information decision making
- the sequence of the online consumer information decision-making process
- the online consumer information decision-making stages and steps

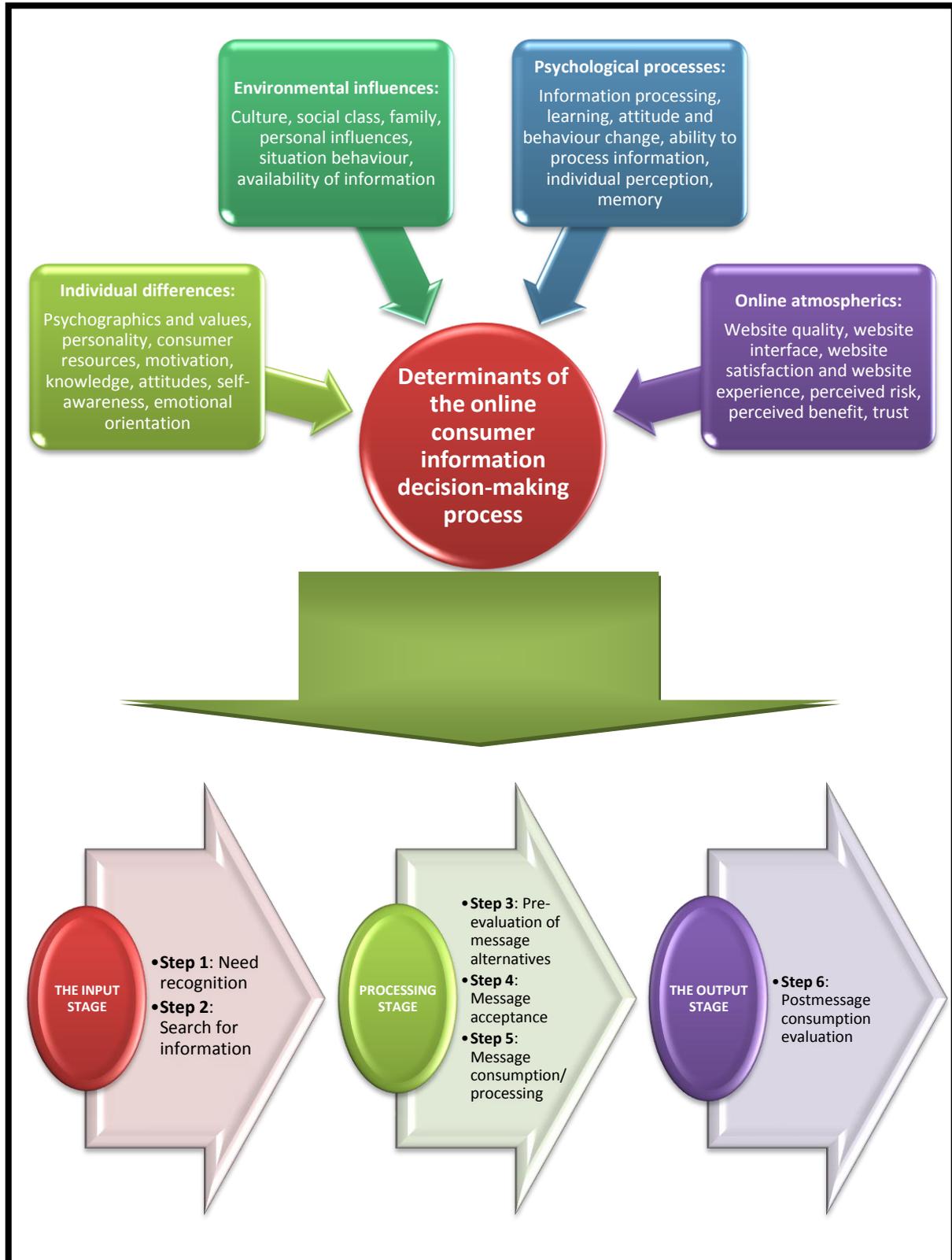


Figure 4.2: A model for online consumer information decision making

The next section explains the proposed model for online consumer information decision making in terms of several stages and steps which indicate the online consumer information decision-making process. The theoretical constructs included in the stages and steps of the proposed model are termed from the online perspective and based on existing authors' views on specific theoretical constructs which, in the existing literature, relate to decision making in the offline environment.

Need recognition, information search, pre-evaluation of product alternatives, product acceptance, product consumption and postpurchasing evaluation are concepts that are related to decision making in the offline environment. These concepts are regarded as relevant to the context of this study and chapter in particular and discussed by authors like Hoyer and McInnis (2001), Foreman (2003), Haas (2003), Assael (2004), Patwardhan and Ramaprasad (2005), Blackwell et al (2006), Wright (2006), Vohs et al (2009), Han and Kim (2010) and Roozmand et al (2011). For the purpose of this chapter and in line with the proposed online information decision-making perspective and model, these theoretical constructs are organised into stages and steps which indicate the proposed online consumer information decision-making process, as applied to the online context.

4.6.2.1 *Stage 1: the input stage*

- **Step 1: need recognition**

Although needs were discussed as a psychological construct of the proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach in chapter 2, for the purpose of contextualising need recognition in terms of the decision-making process and to theoretically ground it in the realm of the proposed online consumer information decision-making perspective, several existing definitions of need recognition are first considered from an offline perspective. They are then applied to the online consumer information decision-making perspective in order to indicate the proposed first step of the first stage of online consumer information decision making.

Hence from an existing offline perspective, Blackwell et al (2006:71) regard need recognition as a process that “occurs when an individual senses a difference

between what he or she perceives to be the ideal versus the actual state of affairs”. Assael (2004:31) concurs by positing that “need arousal, or recognition of a need, represents a disparity between a consumer’s current situation and some desired goal”. Similarly, Wright (2006:27) argues that need recognition is “the realisation, gradual or immediate, by the potentially interested consumer that they have some kind of problem or need for a product or service”. Hoyer and McInnis (2001:199) summarise this need (or problem) recognition as “the perceived difference between an ideal and an actual state” and contend that “this stage is critical because it motivates the consumer to action”. Roozmand et al (2011: 1075) add the importance of the tolerance threshold, which they see as the significance of each need for the consumer.

Needs were classified in chapter 2 into physiological, safety, social, ego, self-actualisation, utilitarian and hedonic needs. It was indicated that each of these levels of needs has to be addressed and satisfied before the next need is recognised or aroused. For the purpose of proposing need recognition as the first step in the online consumer information decision-making process, these levels exemplify utilitarian needs that specify needs of a practical nature that may be beneficial to the individual and have an informational focus. Hedonic needs, however, refer to the desire to achieve pleasure from decisions and to satisfy emotions. It is thus clear that in this situation, individuals will strive to satisfy utilitarian needs before they start to satisfy hedonic needs.

Based on the definitions and discussions above, online consumers’ need recognition is defined as follows:

Need recognition refers to the online consumers’ perception of a discrepancy between a current informational situation and a desired informational situation with regard to an online informational goal.

It is propounded that during the first need recognition step of the input stage of online consumer information decision making, it is evident that online consumers realise that they have an informational or message-related need or desire when there is a difference between their current informational situation and the informational

situation they wish to be in as a result of internal and external stimuli. An informational need is recognised when this difference reaches a particular threshold. This informational need or desire creates a problem for the consumer, whereupon he/she needs to be exposed to web-based communication messages or information and consult online informational sources and web-based communication message alternatives in order to address this desire.

It is further argued that during this initial need recognition step in the input stage of the online consumer's information decision-making process, the online consumer recognises a need for information consumption in order to, inter alia, gain knowledge and gather information.

- **Step 2: search for information**

This is regarded the next step in the online consumer information decision-making process. This theoretical construct was not discussed earlier since it was not relevant in the previous sections. Hence for the purpose of contextualising information search in terms of the decision-making process and to theoretically ground it in the realm of the proposed online consumer information decision-making perspective, several definitions and theoretical discussions of the construct are first considered from existing offline and online perspectives. They are then applied to the online consumer information decision-making perspective in order to indicate the proposed second step of the first stage of online consumer information decision making.

Hence, Blackwell et al (2006:109) define the search for information as “the motivated activation of knowledge stored in memory or acquisition of information from the environment about potential need satisfiers”. The information required, such as attribute information, can be obtained internally from memory, genetic tendencies or externally from peers, family and the marketplace (Hoyer & MacInnis 2000; Blackwell et al 2006).

Different variables play a role in the amount of time spent on the search, including personality, social class, income, size of purchase, past experience, prior brand perceptions and customer satisfaction (Blackwell et al 2006). Consumers further perceive stimuli commonly when they “conform to consumers’ past experience, conform to consumers’ current beliefs about a brand, are not too complex, are believable, relates to a set of current needs and do not produce excessive fears and anxieties” (Assael 2004:39).

Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) also emphasise information processing and identify factors that increase consumers’ motivation to search for information. The amount of involvement in a product or message and the perceived risk, for example, play a vital role in motivating consumers to search for and process information. When consumers perceive the product, service or message to have numerous benefits, they will add these to their consideration set, which consists of a number of attractive alternatives (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001). When there is a discrepancy in the information, consumers will use their stored knowledge and engage in information searches to alter their attitude towards the search positively (Hoyer & MacInnis 2001). The amount of information available and the format in which it is provided influence the manner in which consumers search for information and the time spent on seeking the information.

It is suggested that even though consumers go through similar decision-making stages in the offline and online environments, Haas (2003), for example, explains that online consumers search for information by engaging in a series of decisions and these are influenced by the user’s current knowledge and the configuration of the information retrieval system. However, Foreman (2003) and Patwardhan and Ramaprasad (2005) comment that because information searches are at the heart of online activity and information is readily available in the online environment, information overload sometimes occurs during this stage in the online consumer information decision-making process. When individuals experience information overload, they are less motivated to search for information and tend to process the information less systematically.

Prior to the search for information online, the consumer prepares for the search by recognising the existence of an information need and decides to satisfy the need for information, or to live with the unsatisfied need or the anomalous state of knowledge (Haas 2003). Online consumers endeavour to strike a balance between the elements of the search environment and their information need. Once the balance has been achieved, individuals will make their decisions with confidence on the basis of their domain knowledge (their knowledge of the subject area in question) and their search knowledge (their knowledge of conducting an online search) (Haas 2003).

Hence, it is argued that during the second step of the online consumer information decision-making process, in order to address their needs, consumers start to search for relevant information as part of the solution to their recognised problem. This step illustrates the exposure to and perception and retention of information. It is propounded that during the second step of the input stage of the online consumer information decision-making process, the online consumer addresses his/her informational need by actively searching for online web-based communication information and messages. It is postulated that since information is readily available in the online environment, information searches are a central part of the online consumer's information decision-making process.

It is arguably clear that the online information decision-making process always begins with an informational need that has to be satisfied by obtaining information and constantly deciding on informational alternatives and the utilisation thereof. The online consumer information decision-making process is therefore based on the decisions during the information retrieval process. It is suggested that several factors influence the step of searching for online information, namely the objective of the online consumer in seeking the information, the personal characteristics of the online consumer and his/her knowledge of the information system.

4.6.2.2 Stage 2: processing

- **Step 3: pre-evaluation of message alternatives**

This step in the second stage of the online consumer information decision-making model and process is discussed and contextualised in terms of the proposed online consumer information decision-making model and process, based on existing offline viewpoints on the *pre-evaluation of product alternatives*. The existing views on the pre-evaluation of *product* alternatives are subsequently explained in terms of and applied from an online information decision-making perspective. This explanation will thus deal with the step involving the proposed pre-evaluation of message alternatives in the online consumer information decision-making process.

Hence, to theoretically ground the pre-evaluation of message alternatives step, it is discussed from the existing offline perspective, initially termed *pre-evaluation of product alternatives*. Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) explain the pre-evaluation of product alternatives from an offline perspective and argue that it is based on the following processes:

- high- or low-effort processes
- anchoring and adjustment processes
- hierarchy of effects processes
- thinking-behaving-feeling sequences

High- or low effort processes, which occur during the pre-evaluation of *product* alternatives, are also referred to as the estimation of likelihood. This occurs when the consumer determines the likelihood that something will occur or that certain products or services will satisfy his/her needs. Consumers also engage in *anchoring and adjustment processes* during which they will anchor their judgement on the basis of initial or previous knowledge and values and then adjust their judgements according to additional information.

Consumers alternatively proceed through a *hierarchy of effects* in a high-effort situation by first engaging in a thinking process, then a feeling process and lastly a behavioural process when considering product alternatives. Consumers also proceed through a low-effort situation which follows a slightly different sequence of behaviour, namely a *thinking-behaving-feeling sequence*. According to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), during the pre-evaluation of product alternatives stage in the purchasing context, the consumer compares the different brands. The brand or option receiving the most favourable evaluation will be chosen.

It is thus argued that during the information search process (step 2 of the online consumer information decision-making process), the online consumer identifies several message alternative options which are compared, questioned, considered and judged during the pre-evaluation of *message alternatives* step of the second processing stage of the online consumer information decision-making process. It is propounded that the evaluative criteria used to evaluate message alternatives differ from individual to individual because of each individual's diverse development of a priority of desired informational benefits.

It is further propounded that, during the pre-evaluation of message alternatives step of the online consumer information decision-making process, high- or low effort processes will arguably occur when message alternatives are considered. The online consumer thus determines the likelihood that certain informational sources or message alternatives will satisfy his/her needs. Online consumers will anchor their judgements of the information and message alternatives on the basis of their prior knowledge and values and will subsequently make further judgements in terms of additional information.

It is further propounded that in the online consumer information decision-making context, the consumer evaluates the different informational alternatives and then decides what information to consider, to further consult and to reject. Because of the online context of this chapter, it should be noted that the evaluation of message and information alternatives in this context is information based and usually intangible, thus emphasising the information perspective of the online decision-making process.

- **Step 4: message acceptance**

In the existing offline literature, *product acceptance* is a delicate stage during which options are decided on and the consumer purchases the product. Since the online consumer information decision-making model is regarded from an online informational perspective, product acceptance could arguably be termed *message acceptance* and applied to the online informational perspective.

It is thus proposed that in the online web-based communication exposure and information decision-making processes context of this chapter, this step describes the point in the online information decision-making process where the online consumer decides which web-based communication message to regard, accept, react to, utilise or examine and describes the online consumer's satisfaction with his/her informational choice. In the online context, this is arguably the step during which the online consumer decides whether or not he/she wishes to access links, additional messages and/or to further search for more relevant information and messages.

- **Step 5: message consumption/processing**

It is proposed that message consumption is the opposite of the product consumption process, because it is argued that during the message consumption/processing step, the online consumer starts making sense of and using the message he/she has chosen in the previous stage. Message consumption can either start immediately or be delayed until the consumer finds it necessary to subsequently engage with the message.

It is further argued that to process information in the online environment, online consumers need to engage with their cognitive resources when paying attention to and accepting a web-based communication message, which represents the mental capacity that consumers have available. It is proposed that consumers are selective during this cognitive process because it is impossible to process all internal and external stimuli while paying attention to a specific message, thus directing their

attention and cognitive processing abilities towards a specific portion of the process. The intensity with which they cognitively engage with a specific message also differs in terms of the type of message they are exposed to.

4.6.2.3 *Stage 3: the output stage*

- **Step 6: postmessage consumption evaluation/postinformational evaluation**

Postmessage consumption evaluation/postinformational evaluation does not exist in literature and is a new term formulated to identify the last step in the online consumer information decision-making process. In addition, for the purpose of contextualising postmessage consumption evaluation/postinformational evaluation in terms of the decision-making process and to theoretically ground it in the realm of the proposed online consumer information decision-making perspective, several existing views on *postpurchasing evaluation* are first considered from an offline perspective. They are then applied to the online consumer information decision-making perspective in order to indicate the proposed last step of the last stage of online consumer information decision making.

Blackwell et al (2006) and Han and Kim (2010) explain *postpurchasing evaluation* in the purchasing context as the consumer's feelings of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the product, illustrating his/her post-consumption behaviour. If the product performs as expected and provides the necessary value, the consumer will experience satisfaction, but if the product falls short of expectations, the consumer will experience dissatisfaction.

In the literature it is indicated that one of the best ways to theoretically describe dissatisfaction is, according to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001:285), by means of attribution. The process of attribution explains how consumers need an explanation if the product or service does not fulfil their expected needs, and dissatisfaction will occur if the cause of these needs is permanent. One way of reducing cognitive dissonance is to ignore the dissonant information and to selectively interpret the

information. Consumers can also lower their expectations and seek positive information (Assael 2004).

In contrast to the existing offline views presented above, this discussion postulates that the last step for the online consumer when he/she progresses through the online information decision-making process, is the *postmessage consumption evaluation/postinformational evaluation step*. It is argued that during this step the consumer becomes satisfied or dissatisfied with the web-based communication message and the value of the information interaction that occurred during the previous stages. If the consumer is highly satisfied with the message encounter, it is arguably possible that future encounters will take place. If the consumer deliberates on the value of the web-based communication message encounter, he/she may experience cognitive or postdecision dissonance with respect to the web-based communication message encounter that occurred. If the latter takes place, the online consumer may then attempt to reduce the anxiety that led to the cognitive dissonance he/she experienced after the web-based communication message encounter by searching for additional information.

Hence if the message has performed better than expected, there is positive disconfirmation and satisfaction. If the performance is on the same level as expected, a simple confirmation has occurred, but if the performance is lower than expected, negative disconfirmation and dissatisfaction result.

To reiterate, it should be noted that online consumers can go through the proposed stages and steps of the online consumer information decision-making process in a sequential manner, but some of the stages and steps may be omitted and others may be passed through simultaneously. The manner in which online consumers proceed through these steps and stages is influenced by the individual, environmental, psychological and online factors discussed in the previous section.

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter explained online consumer information decision making, based on the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches that were proposed in chapter 2. The arguments in this chapter stated that online consumer decision making should be approached from an informational decision-making perspective, in contrast to prior decision-making studies that merely engaged in decision making in a purchasing context. Hence, in this chapter, an online consumer information decision-making perspective was proposed, restricting the process of decision making to decision making during informational and message encounters in the online environment.

This chapter contributes to this study by addressing the need for research on the decision-making process that is usually depicted as interlocked stages flowing in a linear and staged manner in the offline environment. In contrast to previous research in the offline environment, this chapter theoretically argues for an online informational perspective on the existing offline consumer decision-making process. Given the online perspective of this study, this chapter proposed and graphically depicted a new model for online consumer information decision making, combining and integrating existing offline and online consumer decision-making theoretical constructs and adding an online and informational perspective. This model further indicates the online consumer information decision-making process in a more parallel manner, proposing that some of the stages and steps occur simultaneously and interact in a reciprocal manner.

To form the basis of this model and an alternative perspective to consumer decision making, the following were provided: defining consumer decision making from existing offline perspectives; a discussion of the categories and strategies of consumer decisions from existing offline perspectives; a discussion and analysis of existing offline consumer decision-making models and theories; the contextualisation and definition of online consumer information decision making from a proposed new perspective; and the proposal of the online consumer information decision-making process.

The next chapter scrutinises consumer information processing and response through a systematic investigation of consumer information-processing and response processes which are crucial to the context of the web-based communication exposure approach, highlighting the consumer behavioural processes in terms of exposure to and consumption of communication and information.

CHAPTER 5: CONSUMER INFORMATION PROCESSING AND RESPONSE: OFFLINE AND ONLINE PERSPECTIVES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 4, an online information decision-making perspective and a model for online consumer information decision making were proposed, specifically in terms of the proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

The main aim of this chapter is to expand on and highlight information processing and response by consulting existing knowledge and theory on offline and online information processing and response to provide a deeper understanding of how consumers respond to and process information. This chapter identifies, explores and describes offline and online consumer information-processing and response theory and models, thereby addressing secondary research objective 6 of this study.

In the context of this chapter and because of the informational focus of this study, consumer information processing and response will be used interchangeably to indicate the complex internal mental procedures of consumers' progression through response processes when processing information. Hence, in the literature, some of the models that will be discussed and analysed in this chapter are termed consumer response models, while others are termed consumer information-processing models. For the purpose of this study, it is proposed that consumer information processing and response refer to a similar cognitive process which indicates the response to and processing of information.

The chapter will initially discuss and analyse existing offline consumer information-processing and response models, and then presents an online perspective of consumer information processing and response by discussing and analysing online consumer information-processing and response models.

Since this study in general is approached from the web-based communication exposure and the internal psychological behavioural processes approaches (see

chapter 2), this chapter draws attention to the information-processing and response stages of consumer behaviour in general and online consumer information decision making specifically. The focus is on consumers' exposure to and perception, integration and utilisation of integrated marketing communication messages in the information-processing and response phases.

The chapter commences by conceptualising consumer information processing and response and then indicates the chronological development of consumer information processing and response models and theories and the structure of the chapter. To theoretically ground the consumer information-processing and response process and to indicate the development of consumer information-processing and response theory, the traditional offline consumer information-processing and response models are presented chronologically. This is followed by a theoretical framework for online consumer response proposed by Hanekom (2006), which provides an online perspective. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the integrated conceptual model of the internal consumer response process proposed by Hanekom and Barker (2009), which distinctively includes variables that influence the consumer information-processing and response processes.

5.2 CONCEPTUALISING CONSUMER INFORMATION PROCESSING AND RESPONSE

Various theoretical perspectives, approaches, paradigms and conceptualisations of consumer information processing and response exist in varying disciplines. This section focuses on the main theoretical conceptualisations, perspectives and paradigms from which consumer information processing and response in general are approached.

Research literature in disciplines such as cognitive science, communication studies, consumer research, management science, philosophy, information studies and especially cognitive psychology (Rodgers & Thorson 2000; Putrevu 2001; Tremayne & Dunwoody 2001; Carlson & White 2008; Savolainen 2009) frequently refer to

information processing and response, but seldom venture further than beyond generic conceptualisations.

It is thus argued that consumer information processing and response should be conceptualised in terms of the various perspectives, approaches and paradigms from which it is considered. Consumer information processing and response are usually approached from constructivist, functionalist, human information processing and social cognition perspectives (Rodgers & Thorson 2000; Savolainen 2009; Nielsen et al 2010) which, in the existing literature, are regarded as the most sophisticated views on information processing and response. Since the concepts of information processing and response were developed in psychology with its roots in functionalism, according to Rodgers and Thorson (2000:42) and Putrevu (2001), the following three areas of psychology were integrated to create information processing and response and cognitive psychology: (1) artificial intelligence, problem solving and verbal learning; (2) information theory which conceptualised communication in terms of information flow, signals and filters; and (3) linguistics.

Furthermore, based on empirical and theoretical research in the cognitive psychological, social cognition and behaviourist research paradigms (Rodgers & Thorson 2000:47; Putrevu 2001; Tremayne & Dunwoody 2001; Nielsen et al 2010:1139), mental and cognitive processing approaches are evident. The cognitive information-processing paradigm dominated the information-processing and response literature, depicting this process as “conscious and deliberative” (Peracchio & Luna 2006:25).

Based on the arguments of the various paradigms and perspectives provided above, it is propounded that the area in cognitive psychology that should be emphasised in this chapter in particular, is information theory which conceptualises communication in terms of information flow, signals and filters. It is posited that this conceptualisation is linked to the focus on information exposure of the study in general, and the focus on information processing of this chapter in particular.

It is important to note that researchers such as Peracchio and Luna (2006) question the conscious cognitive processing paradigm and argue for a move towards noncognitive processing. This approach and subsequent “automatic” or “unconscious” processes are characterised by Peracchio and Luna (2006:25) as missing the intention of conscious awareness and control without deliberate effort. Most of the traditional consumer response models discussed in section 5.4 of this chapter are based on conscious processing, using cognitive resources and signifying intentionality and controllability.

Based on these various perspectives, paradigms and approaches, the existing literature proposes that hierarchical information processing and response take place in terms of 16 types of processors or processing styles (MacInnis & Price 1987; Darley & Smith 1995; Tremayne & Dunwoody 2001; Del Barrio-Garcia & Luque-Martinez 2003; Huitt & Valdosta 2003; Lee 2003; Peterson & Merino 2003; Cronley, Kellaris & Posavac 2004; Meng 2004:694; Scarborough & Cohen 2004; Van Kleef et al 2004; Sojka & Giese 2006: 995; Thompson & Hamilton 2006; Kardes, Jensen & Jepsen 2007; Kaufman- Kidwell & Jewell 2008), which depend on the individual’s epistemic motivation and prior behavioural influences. These 16 types are as follows: high affect and low cognition; low affect and high cognition; high affect and high cognition; low affect and low cognition; relational, item-specific, internal, external, effortless heuristics; effortful, systematic heuristics; cognitive elaboration; parallel-distributed/connectionistic processing; habitual processing; concrete information processing; abstract information processing; imagery, analytical processing; and hierarchical information processing and response.

For the purpose of this discussion and in line with the context of the study and this chapter, the following are relevant and subsequently elaborated on: relational processing, item-specific processing, parallel-distributed processing, imagery, analytical processing and hierarchical information processing. Meng (2004:694) explains *relational processing* as “the encoding of similarities or commonalities among discrete items”, with the emphasis on organisational processing. *Item-specific processing*, however, is defined by Meng (2004:694) as “a kind of in-depth processing of single items and can be activated by, for instance, showing pictures of specific product attributes.” Relational processing demonstrates an increase in

categorisation, while item-specific processing and processing from multiple sources (Moore & Reardon 1987) lead to diligent processing and better performance in recognition tasks. Huit and Valdosta (2003) explain *parallel-distributed processing*, which is also referred to as the connectionistic approach to information processing and response. Here, information is processed simultaneously by different parts of an individual's memory instead of sequentially, storing information in multiple locations in the brain in the form of networks or connections.

According to Thompson and Hamilton (2006:531), because *imagery* and *analytical processing* are not mutually exclusive, one type of processing usually dominates. Imagery processing typically involves “nonverbal, sensory representation of perceptual information in memory, as opposed to more semantic, reasoned processing” (Thompson & Hamilton 2006:531), while in contrast, the analytical mode of information processing is detached from sensory experiences, is data driven and focuses on verbal retrieval and encoding.

It is further propounded that the traditional consumer response models that are discussed in section 5.4 connote *hierarchical information processing* and response phases to consumers' individual and complex (Levin et al 2000:171; Swait & Adamowicz 2001) information gathering, attribute processing (Liefeld et al 2000), comprehension, attitude formation, affect formation (Peters & Slovic 2000; Forgas & George 2001; Tiedens & Linton 2001), memory (Tam & Ho 2006:865; Wyer & Xu 2010), evaluation and action processes. This indicates an integration of affect (visual processors), cognition (logic and rational data) (Sojka & Giese 2006), relational concepts (Putrevu 2001), item-specific concepts (Meng 2004) and internal, external, selective and contextual processing (Darley & Smith 1995; Putrevu 2001; Peterson & Merino 2003; Kardes et al 2004:368; Meissner & Decker 2009; Trudel & Murray 2011).

It is argued that because the conceptualisations and disciplinary perspectives indicated above led to terminological inconsistency, the directive aim of this chapter is to explain consumer information processing and consumer response as interchangeable concepts that pinpoint consumers' internal psychological processes

during their exposure to offline and online integrated marketing communication messages. This chapter will conceptualise consumer information processing and response in communication science in terms of the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches proposed in chapter 2. The reason for this is that, as stated above, consumer information processing and response are regarded as internal processes that occur when consumers are exposed to offline integrated marketing communication messages or online web-based communication messages.

To reiterate, it is argued that in this chapter, information processing and response include conscious cognitive, motor and emotional procedures, based on cognitive resources and implying intentionality and controllability.

5.3 THE CHRONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CONSUMER INFORMATION-PROCESSING AND RESPONSE MODELS AND THEORY

Figure 5.1 graphically depicts the chronological development of existing offline and online consumer information-processing and response models and theory, and also indicates the structure of this chapter. In the existing literature, some of the models are termed response models, while others are termed information-processing models. Since these two terms are used interchangeably in this chapter to indicate consumers' internal cognitive processes when they are processing and responding to information and messages, the models are subsequently discussed chronologically.

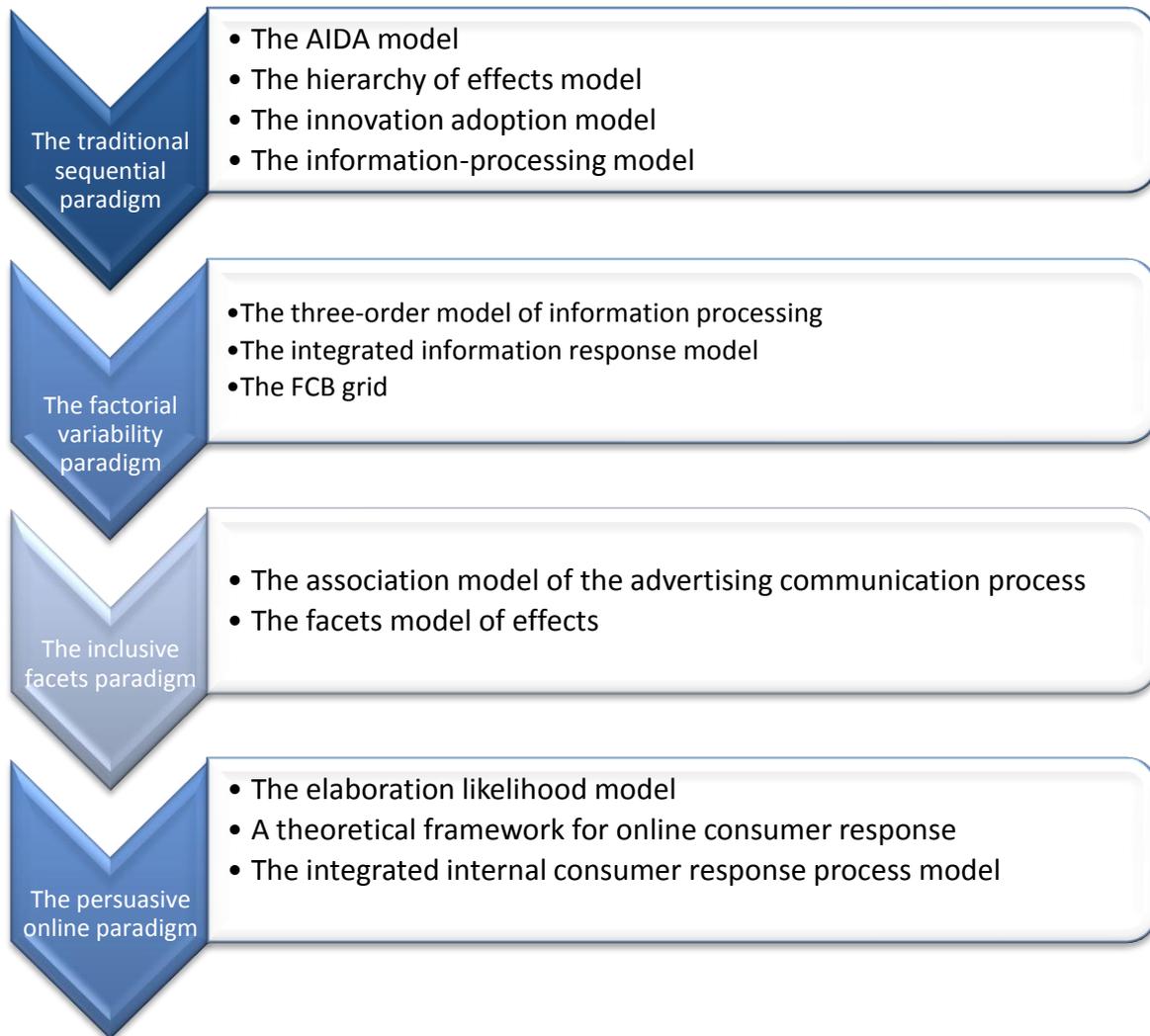


Figure 5.1: The chronological development of consumer information-processing and response models and theories

The sections below provide in-depth discussions, critical analyses and interpretations of the consumer information-processing and response models and theories indicated in figure 5.1.

5.4 TRADITIONAL OFFLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION-PROCESSING AND RESPONSE MODELS

The traditional consumer information-processing and response models are rooted in cognitive psychology (Rodgers & Thorson 2000:47), explicating mental activities during information processing and response. The first development in the stage models of advertising and integrated marketing communication processing represented hierarchies that indicated “how consumers gather information from commercials they ‘attend’ to, comprehend that information, link it with what they already know, evaluate the information, form attitudes and intentions to purchase, and as a function of these processes, consumer behavior is created” (Rodgers & Thorson 2000:47). These models became increasingly complex because they included additional processes such as involvement, central and peripheral processing, systematic and heuristic processing and affect. Subsequent models focused on needs, motivation, ability, attention, cognitive and emotional processing and attitude formation.

The most important and best-known consumer information-processing and response models were developed by Strong (1925), Lavidge and Steiner (1961), Rogers (1962), Ray (1973), McGuire (1978), Vaughn (1980), Preston (1982), Smith and Swinyard (1982), and Petty and Cacioppo (1983).

It is argued that these models explain the consumer information-processing and response process as a predominantly linear and sequential process with little or no recognition of its complex transactional nature, or the influence of different variables on these mainly internal processes, thus signifying the progression through the response and information processing stages in uncomplicated situations.

In order to address these limitations, Hanekom (2006) proposed a theoretical framework for the online consumer response process depicted in figure 5.10 that indicates eight different online response levels with various online consumer response phases encompassed therein. Hanekom and Barker (2009) subsequently developed a conceptual integrated model for the internal consumer response

process (figure 5.11) to enhance the traditional consumer response models and, in addition, to (1) provide an online perspective of consumer response; (2) explicate the response process in a transactional as opposed to a linear manner; and (3) identify the variables that influence these response processes.

Even though these two models provide a more comprehensive and integrated perspective of the consumer response process, it is important to the context of this chapter and study in general to discuss the traditional offline consumer information-processing and response models. This will identify relevant stages/phases that will be included in the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour that will be proposed and developed in a subsequent chapter. In addition, the discussion of these traditional information-processing and response models is necessary to provide a chronological, exhaustive and comprehensive theoretical explanation and evaluation on which the formulation of the theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour and the subsequent model will be based.

The discussion on the existing consumer information-processing and response models that follows is based on Hanekom and Barker's (2009) suggestion of a new categorisation of the existing consumer information-processing and response models into three central paradigms, namely the traditional sequential, factorial variability and inclusive facets paradigms (figure 5.2). This paradigmatic classification by Hanekom and Barker (2009:142) is based on the main principles of each of the models and provides a framework for organising and structuring the subsequent discussion of the traditional consumer information-processing and response models in the next section.

PARADIGMS	The traditional sequential paradigm	The factorial variability paradigm	The inclusive facets paradigm
MODELS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIDA • Hierarchy of effects • Innovation adoption • Information processing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-orders model of information processing • Integrated information response • FCB grid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association model of the advertising communication process • Facets model of effects

Figure 5.2: Hanekom and Barker's (2009:142) three-order paradigmatic consumer response model categorisation

5.4.1 The traditional sequential paradigm

Hanekom and Barker (2009:142) categorise the AIDA model (Strong 1925), the hierarchy of effects model (Lavidge & Steiner 1961), the innovation adoption model (Rogers 1962) and the information-processing model (McGuire 1978) into the traditional sequential paradigm. These four models are jointly referred to as the *traditional response hierarchy models* (Hanekom 2007; Hanekom & Barker 2009; Belch & Belch 2012) and are chronologically the first consumer information-processing and response models that explain the information-processing and response process consumers go through from being unaware of a product or service to the actual behavioural stage.

Belch and Belch (2001), Mortimer (2002), Koekemoer (2004), Hanekom (2006), Hanekom and Barker (2009), Moriarty et al (2009) and Belch and Belch (2012)

highlight the main premises of these traditional response hierarchies by broadly indicating that consumers first proceed through a cognitive stage, then an affective stage and finally a conative stage. This means that consumers experience a sequence of stages by, firstly, being exposed to and learning information, secondly, processing it emotionally, and lastly, acting on these messages. The sequence the consumer thus follows in these traditional response hierarchy models is a “learn-feel-do” pattern.

Hanekom (2006) broadly summarises these cognitive, affective and behavioural phases of the four traditional response hierarchy models (AIDA, hierarchy of effects, innovation adoption and information-processing models) and concludes that the *cognitive stage* includes attention, awareness, knowledge, presentation and comprehension stages and explains the consumer’s awareness, gathering of information and understanding of the marketing communication message. During the *affective stage*, the response stages include interest, desire, liking, preference, conviction, evaluation, yielding and retention (Hanekom 2006). This stage evokes emotions of interest and desire. The last stage, the *conative stage*, includes action, purchase, trial, adoption and behaviour stages and signifies the action the consumer takes on the basis of the marketing communication message (Hanekom 2006).

Even though these traditional hierarchy models are considered significant in the context of this chapter and study in particular, the main criticisms are the fact that they present a simple linearity and chronological depiction of what is regarded as a complex internal psychological process that consumers experience during their exposure to online and offline integrated marketing communication messages.

This view is also supported by Hanekom (2006) and Hanekom and Barker (2009), who criticise these models because of their linear depiction of the cognitive, affective and conative phases that consumers experience. These authors suggest that consumers may alternate through these response phases during different exposure occasions and may even omit some of the phases or stages – hence admonishing them for not adequately explaining the complex consumer response process. In addition, these models assume that consumers remain passive during exposure

occasions. In many instances, the converse is true when consumers actively search for relevant information and provide feedback when engaging in and interacting with the message and information.

Even though these models are criticised for their simplicity and linear depiction of the consumer response stages, Belch and Belch (2001) argue that their usefulness lies in the demarcation of the stages that consumers go through from a stage of being unaware of a product or service, to the stage of acting, using or purchasing it. It can also be argued that the traditional hierarchies show that consumers may proceed through different stages of the hierarchy when exposed to different messages, depending on their needs and the relevance of the message. Figure 5.3 summarises the stages portrayed by the traditional response hierarchy models.

MODELS				
Stages	AIDA model	Hierarchy of effects model	Innovation adoption model	Information-processing model
Cognitive stage	Attention	Awareness Knowledge	Awareness	Presentation Attention Comprehension
Affective stage	Interest Desire	Liking Preference Conviction	Interest Evaluation	Yielding Retention
Behavioural stage	Action	Purchase	Trial Adoption	Behaviour

Figure 5.3: A summarised graphical depiction of the traditional response hierarchy models adapted from Belch and Belch (2012:155)

Each of the traditional response hierarchy models indicated in figure 5.3 is subsequently discussed.

5.4.1.1 *The AIDA model*

The aim of Strong's (1925:9) illustrious "attention, interest, desire, action, satisfaction" model, briefly referred to as the AIDA model, is to illustrate the mental processes involved in the buying process and to highlight the importance of taking the purchaser's perspective into consideration. The AIDA model depicts these processes in a linear hierarchy of response components and is one of the best-known response hierarchy models. Even though Strong's (1925) famous model provides the foundation for consumer response research, he recognises that "any formula which represents mental processes is inadequate and tends to misrepresent the facts" (Strong 1925:16).

Strong (1925) proposed six different versions of the AIDA model, with varying depictions of the mental processes, before he finalised his research and decided on the "attention, interest, desire, action" model (Strong 1925), which is summarised by the author in table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Strong's (1925) varying depictions of the mental processes of buyer response represented by the AIDA model

PROPOSED MENTAL STAGES IN THE BUYER RESPONSE PROCESS	DESCRIPTION OF THE BUYER RESPONSE PROCESS
MODEL 1 Want Solution Purchase	Strong (1925:14) commenced his analysis and model building of the process by reducing it to its most fundamental elements.
MODEL 2 Want Solution Purchase	Strong (1925:15) supplemented his previous research with additional research and determined a fourth element that should be included in the model of consumer response, where the

<p>Satisfaction</p>	<p>buyer response process should include satisfaction as well.</p>
<p>MODEL 3</p> <p>Want Commodity Trade name (retail store) Purchase Satisfaction/dissatisfaction</p>	<p>After additional analysis and research, two more components, namely trade name and commodity, were added to the depiction of the buyer process.</p>
<p>MODEL 4</p> <p>Want Commodity (adequacy established, pleasant feelings) Trade name/store (adequacy established, pleasant feelings) Purchase Satisfaction</p>	<p>Strong’s (1925:17) next attempt at analysing and describing the buyer response process included even more components.</p>
<p>MODEL 5</p> <p>Attention Interest Desire Action Satisfaction</p>	<p>Strong (1925) portrayed a complex selling process during which the salesperson persuades the buyer that he/she wants or needs something of which he/she has not been aware of before. This indicates an intricate selling process, defined and explained by Strong (1925:34) as follows: “the process of purchasing, in the broad sense, starts with the rise of a want and ends with the experiencing of the purchased solution”.</p>

	After these attempts of describing the purchasing and response process during especially a personal selling process (Strong 1925:34), the AIDA model consisted of “attention, interest, desire, action, satisfaction”.
<p>MODEL 6</p> <p>Attention</p> <p>Interest</p> <p>Desire</p> <p>Action</p>	Strong (1925) concluded his research on the mental process that the buyer goes through when entering a personal selling situation by omitting the last “satisfaction” component – hence the development of the famous AIDA model of consumer response. The AIDA model, as it is known today, was finalised to include only “attention, interest, desire and action”.

The AIDA model is explained by various authors such as Ashcroft and Hoey (2001), Hanekom (2006), Hanekom and Barker (2009) and Belch and Belch (2012) specifically in terms of the cognitive, affective and conative stages of consumer response as follows: The first stage in the consumer response process is the *cognitive stage* during which the consumer becomes aware that a product or service exists and starts paying attention to the message. Once the consumer pays attention, he/she becomes interested in the product or service being advertised, depicting the cognitive stage of the consumer response process. Once the consumer has displayed strong levels of interest, the next stage, the *affective stage*, commences with him/her desiring the product or service being advertised. When the consumer believes that the product or service is beneficial, he/she experiences an advanced desire for the product or service and engages in the affective stage. The last stage of the AIDA model, the *action stage*, depicts the period during which the

consumer takes action or acts in a particular manner that is relevant to the marketing communication message.

Despite the criticisms of Hanekom (2006), Hanekom and Barker (2009) and Belch and Belch (2012) that the AIDA model is an exceptionally uncomplicated and basic model of the consumer response process (Hanekom 2006), it is argued that Strong's (1925) AIDA model makes a significant contribution to the consumer response and processing literature by providing the fundamental steps of consumer response and subsequently adding to consumer response theory building. The importance of the AIDA model is its depiction of the mental (ie internal) processes of consumer response, which are aligned to the internal psychological processes approach proposed in chapter 2 of this study. Although the AIDA model depicts a simple linear and mechanistic consumer response process, without acknowledging its transactional nature (alternative ordering of the consumer response phases), it promotes the comprehension of the complex internal consumer response and information-processing stages and will be included in the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour to be developed in a subsequent chapter.

5.4.1.2 *The hierarchy of effects model*

Lavidge and Steiner's (1961) hierarchy of effects model is an extension of Strong's (1925) AIDA model in that it suggests that the consumer response process consists of a series of seven steps and that advertising effects occur over time and not necessarily immediately. This model extends the steps proposed by the AIDA model by adding knowledge, liking, preference and conviction. Also, according to Lavidge and Steiner (1961), this model can be used to set and measure advertising objectives.

The core of Lavidge and Steiner's (1961:59) hierarchy model is indicated in the following seven steps that individuals proceed through during exposure to the "advertising force":

- *Unawareness of the existence of the product or service being advertised:* At this point, the consumer is unaware of the advertising message, product or service.
- *Awareness of the advertising message, product or service:* The consumer becomes aware of the advertising message, as well as the product or service being advertised.
- *Product knowledge:* The consumer now becomes aware of what the product or service entails and what it can offer.
- *Liking of the product:* During this step, the consumer starts to like the product because of the advertising message.
- *Point of preference:* Once the consumer feels favourably towards the product and likes it, he/she will now display preference for the product or service advertised.
- *Conviction:* Once preference and desire are combined, the consumer displays a conviction that the purchase would be wise and beneficial.
- *Purchase:* During this final step of the hierarchy of effects, the consumer's positive attitude is translated into purchase or similar action.

These seven steps are directly linked to the classic psychological model of cognition-affect-conation on which most of the traditional response hierarchy models are based. The cognitive component refers to the intellectual, mental or rational stages individuals go through when exposed to advertising or integrated marketing communication messages. The affective component encompasses the emotions or feelings that individuals possess during the response process. The individual enters the conative component which is alternatively referred to as the motivational component and relates to the individual's positive or negative regard for an object and his/her subsequent behaviour.

Lavidge and Steiner's (1961) hierarchy of effects model is linked to the classic psychological cognition-affect-conation model in that it indicates the following three major functions of advertising:

- The first two steps, the awareness and knowledge steps, relate to information or ideas – hence cognition.

- The second two steps, liking and preference, tie in with attitudes and feelings towards the product or service – hence affection.
- The last steps, conviction and purchase, refer to the action phases during which the consumer acts in a predictable manner and acquires the product or uses the service – hence conation.

It is put forward that this model suggests a hierarchy indicating a consumer's progression through seven response phases from awareness, knowledge acquisition, liking, preference, conviction, and lastly, purchase, indicating consumer's progression through these phases in a hierarchical fashion, completing the previous before progressing to the next. The completion of one phase seems to be a prerequisite for progression to the next. The hierarchy of effects model is thus, similar to the AIDA model, criticised for its hierarchical and mechanistic depiction of the consumer response process (Sinclair & Barenblatt 1993; Chisnall 1995; Hanekom 2006; Hanekom & Barker 2009; Belch & Belch 2012). It is hence argued that consumers can go through these phases in an alternative sequence and that the one step does not necessarily lead to the next.

Chisnall (1995) is responsible for the main criticisms of this approach, and contends that attitude change should not precede behavioural amendment. He argues for a more complex depiction of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, which should be a more reciprocal relationship. Regardless of this criticism, it is argued that it offers a comprehensive elaboration of the AIDA model by expanding the consumer response process by adding knowledge, liking, preference and conviction.

5.4.1.3 *The innovation adoption model*

The third traditional hierarchy response model was developed by Rogers (1962) who based his understanding of the consumer response process on the diffusion of innovation approach, referring to the following five stages in the adoption of new innovations process:

- *Awareness stage*: During this stage of the innovation adoption process, the consumer is exposed to information on the innovation and becomes aware of it, but still needs the motivation to acquire comprehensive information.
- *Interest stage*: Once the consumer is interested in the new innovation, he/she will be motivated to gather relevant information.
- *Evaluation stage*: If the weighted advantages of the new innovation prove to be able to prevail over the disadvantages, the consumer will try it, based on a mental representation of the relevance of the innovation to his/her present and future situation.
- *Trial stage*: During this stage, the usefulness of the innovation is determined to a small extent in terms of the consumer's personal situation, and the consumer will become aware of the innovation's usefulness for possible future adoption.
- *Adoption stage*: If the consumer reaches this stage of innovation adoption process, he/she continues with the full use of the innovation.

Belch and Belch (2001), Hanekom (2006), Hanekom and Barker (2009) and Belch and Belch (2012) note that Roger's (1962) innovation adoption model coincides with the other models presented in the traditional sequential paradigm because of the sequential and hierarchical indication of the consumer response process of consumers' adoption of new innovations. It is an improvement on the AIDA and hierarchy of effects models because the innovation adoption model is especially indicative of a response process in which consumers are allowed to test or try a product or service for a particular period of time. Once the product or service has been tried and evaluated positively, a decision may be taken to adopt or reject the innovation.

It is propounded that despite of the advancement of this model, the innovation adoption model's depiction of set hierarchical stages during the response and adoption processes proposes a restrictive view of the complex stages that consumers go through, even during a trial period. It is argued that consumers' adoption of an innovation should not be restricted to mere awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption stages that are said to be experienced in a hierarchical

manner, indicating no alteration or adaptation of these stages in different circumstances.

5.4.1.4 *The information-processing model*

McGuire's (1978:156) model was developed from an information-processing perspective and is particularly useful in explaining an individual's information-processing procedures during exposure to persuasive advertising and integrated marketing communication messages. McGuire (1978:156) explains that "the gist of this approach is to view the individual exposed to a persuasive communication as an information-processing machine which must proceed through a chain of behavioural steps, each probabilistically linked to the preceding one, leading finally to the criterion behaviour (for example, purchase of the advertised product) only if it is not interrupted at any point".

McGuire's (1978:59) model explains the consumer response process as sequential behavioural steps which the individual goes through when being persuaded through messages. He contends that as a problem solver, when exposed to persuasive messages, the consumer will follow six hierarchical steps, which he referred to as a response hierarchy. According to McGuire (1978:159), the communication persuasion process comprises the following steps:

- The individual is exposed to formal and informal media in which a persuasive advertising message is presented, urging a purchase or use of a particular service.
- The consumer has to pay attention to the message.
- The consumer now has to comprehend the relevant messages which he/she has paid attention to.
- After comprehension, the consumer has to yield to the accurately understood messages.
- If yielding has taken place, the next step is to retain this new behavioural inclination until the opportunity arises to purchase or use the service.

- Lastly, the consumer needs to act on this behavioural inclination and buy the product or use the service.

The main criticisms against McGuire's (1978) information-processing model are incorporated into the critical evaluation by Belch and Belch (2001), Hanekom (2006), Hanekom and Barker (2009) and Belch and Belch (2012). These authors indicate that the model resembles the previous traditional response hierarchy models in that the attention and comprehension stages are similar to the awareness and knowledge stages of the other three traditional response hierarchy models, and that the yielding stage is similar to the liking stage mentioned in the other three traditional response hierarchy models. They also indicated that this model differs in terms of the retention stage that is introduced, which refers to the individual's ability to maintain the section of the comprehended information that is relevant to his/her situation. It can thus be concluded that this retention stage/phase sets this model apart and shows an advancement on the previous traditional consumer response hierarchies, because it indicates that the consumer is not always expected to immediately act on an advertising or marketing communication message, but sometimes needs to retrieve information when the necessary exposure occurs.

It is propounded that although McGuire's (1978) information-processing model is regarded as the final advancement of the traditional response hierarchies, it is also criticised for the linearity and mechanistic manner in which the stages of the communication persuasion process are depicted. It is thus proposed that consumers may not proceed through these stages in a similar linear manner and may even omit some of them in certain situations.

From a positive perspective, Belch and Belch (2001:150) see each of the stages in McGuire's (1978) information-processing model as an independent variable that can be regarded as an objective in the communication persuasion process with feedback which can be obtained from successfully retaining the relevant message.

Even though the traditional response hierarchy models provide a comprehensive view of consumers' response and information-processing processes during exposure

to advertising or integrated marketing communication messages, it is concluded that they are simplistic in their presentation of these processes.

5.4.2 The factorial variability paradigm

The models that compose the factorial variability paradigm, also referred to as the alternative response hierarchies (Belch & Belch 2001; Hanekom 2006; Hanekom & Barker 2009; Belch & Belch 2012), include the three-orders model of information processing (Ray 1973), the Foot, Cone and Belding (FCB) grid (Vaughn 1980) and the integrated information response model (Smith & Swinyard 1982).

The three-orders model of information processing (Ray 1973), includes the standard learning hierarchy, the dissonance/attribution hierarchy and the low-involvement hierarchy, which provide alternative orderings of the response phases that depend on two variables, namely topical involvement and perceived product differentiation (Hanekom 2006). Vaughn's (1980) FCB model follows on the three-orders model of information processing and was developed to include variables such as involvement and thinking and feeling dimensions. The last model is Smith and Swinyard's (1982) integrated information response model which, according to Hanekom (2006), recognises the importance of the formation of attitudes and emphasises that it is not only advertising messages that influence consumer response.

5.4.2.1 *The three-orders model of information processing*

Ray (1973) combines his alternative response hierarchies in the three-orders model of information processing (Belch & Belch 2001; Hanekom 2006; Belch & Hanekom & Barker 2009; Belch 2012) and describes it as follows: "The basic hierarchy-of-effects model consists of a sequence of mental stages or levels which an audience member is supposed to experience during a communication campaign. The typical sequence is from simple to more complex response stages" (Ray 1973:149).

Ray's (1973:151-152) model includes the learning hierarchy, dissonance-attribution hierarchy and low-involvement hierarchy and describes the consumer's mental

response and information-processing processes. The *learning hierarchy* shows a cognitive-affective-conative ordering of the information-processing phases, the *dissonance-attribution hierarchy* shows a conative-affective-cognitive ordering of these phases and the *low-involvement hierarchy* shows a cognitive-conative-affective ordering of these phases.

Because of the inclusion of the topical involvement and perceived product differentiation variables, the succession order of the response phases (cognitive, affective, conative) are altered according to the total influence of the variables (Ray 1973). He further proposes that this ordering of the hierarchical phases will adjust, depending on the communication situation.

Figure 5.4 graphically depicts the three alternative orderings of the consumer information-processing phases, namely the three-orders model of information processing.

TOPICAL INVOLVEMENT			
		HIGH	LOW
PERCEIVED PRODUCT DIFFERENTIATION	HIGH	(Learning model) Cognitive ↓ Affective ↓ Conative	(Low-involvement model) Cognitive ↓ Conative ↓ Affective
	LOW	(Dissonance/attribution model) Conative ↓ Affective ↓ Cognitive	

Figure 5.4: Alternative response hierarchies: the three-orders model of information processing adapted from Belch and Belch (2012:160)

With his three-orders model of information processing, Ray (1973) addresses the linearity of the traditional response hierarchy models by proposing that consumers proceed through these phases differently, depending on their perceived product differentiation and topical involvement, as opposed to the traditional response hierarchies that propose that all phases progress in a linear manner. Ray (1973) labels these alternative orderings the standard learning hierarchy, the dissonance/attribution hierarchy and the low-involvement hierarchy. Each of these orderings is discussed below.

- *The standard learning hierarchy:* This hierarchy proposes a cognitive-affective-conative ordering of the information-processing phases because of high topical involvement and high perceived product differentiation (Ray 1973:151). This learning hierarchy alternatively refers to a learn-feel-do sequence of processes, signifying an information-processing procedure which indicates the mental processes allowing consumers to first gather adequate information, secondly, to develop attitudes and feelings towards the message, product or service, and, lastly to act according to the amount of involvement and differentiation involved. Hanekom (2006) indicates that Ray's (1973) development of the standard learning hierarchy shows an advancement of the traditional response hierarchies and even though it still suggests a linear progression through the response phases, it includes the variables that influence the process and therefore successfully suggests an alternative ordering of the information-processing phases.
- *The dissonance/attribution hierarchy:* The second alternative ordering of the information-processing phases is indicated by Ray (1973) as the dissonance-attribution theory. This hierarchy shows that when consumers are highly involved in the message or product being purchased, but their perception of product differentiation is low, they will proceed from conation to affection, and finally, to cognition. This sequence thus follows a do-feel-learn pattern (Belch & Belch 2001; Hanekom 2006; Hanekom & Barker 2009; Belch & Belch 2012), presenting the direct opposite progression of the standard learning hierarchy. Similar to the standard learning hierarchy, the

dissonance/attribution model shows a move away from the traditional cognitive, affective, conative progression of response phases, but they are still presented in a linear fashion.

- *The low-involvement hierarchy:* The low-involvement hierarchy was specifically developed to determine the reason for the collective belief that television has a strong shared effect, while research regularly indicates that the individual's attitudes are seldom changed because of television exposure (Ray 1973:152). He came to the conclusion that the reason for the small attitude change is the low involvement of individuals during exposure to television messages. This low involvement will only change if repetition occurs and there is a shift in the individual's cognitive structures, causing "the next time they are in a purchasing situation, that name comes to mind, they buy, and attitude is subsequently changed as a result of experience with the product. Hence the low-involvement hierarchy is a cognitive-conative-affective one" (Ray 1973:152). His alternative hierarchy subsequently suggests a learn-do-feel sequence because of low topical involvement and low perceived product differentiation, causing individuals to first gather information, secondly, to purchase the product, and lastly, to develop feelings and attitudes towards it. In this alternative response hierarchy, the typical consumer will engage in passive learning and be inattentive to information-intensive messages because of low involvement and inactivity in information searching.

It is reiterated that Ray's (1973) three-orders model of information processing depicts the standard learning hierarchy, the dissonance/attribution hierarchy and the low-involvement hierarchy, showing a clear deviation from the traditional response hierarchies. It is further argued that regardless of the deviation from the traditional response hierarchies, certain similarities are also evident. These similarities are indicated in the linear succession of the process indicating cognition, affection and conation. What sets Ray's (1973) model apart from the traditional hierarchy models is that he provides three different orderings of the cognitive, affective and conative

phases, depending on perceived product differentiation and topical involvement as variables that influence these processes.

It is further argued that although Ray (1973) proposes that the response process alternates according to the communication situation, it disregards the fact that some of the phases are irrelevant during certain communication situations and therefore still engages in a mechanistic representation of the consumer response processes.

5.4.2.2 *The FCB planning model*

Vaughn (1980) introduced the Foote, Cone and Belding (FCB) grid to build advertising effectiveness theory based on traditional advertising theories that were prevalent in the 1950s, consumer behaviour models that were evident in the 1960s and developments in high and low involvement and right and left brain theories (Vaughn 1980:27).

Figure 5.5 depicts Vaughn's (1980) FCB grid indicating the informative, affective, habit formation and self-satisfaction strategies based on high and low consumer involvement and thinking and feeling dimensions.

	THINKING	FEELING
HIGH INVOLVEMENT	1. Informative (thinker) Car-house-furnishings-new products Model: learn-feel-do (economic?)	2. Affective (feeler) Jewellery-cosmetics-fashion apparel-motorcycles Model: feel-learn-do (psychological?)
LOW INVOLVEMENT	3. Habit formation (doer) Food- household items Model: do-learn-feel (responsive?)	4. Self-satisfaction (reactor) Cigarettes-liquor-candy Model: do-feel-learn (social?)

Figure 5.5: Vaughn’s (1980) FCB grid adapted from Belch and Belch (2012:164)

Vaughn (1980:30) explicates that “in order to provide a structure that will integrate the traditional theories and LEARN-FEEL-DO hierarchy models with consumer involvement and brain specialization theories, a new FCB approach to advertising strategy is called for. This requires building a matrix to classify products and services.”

The four quadrants of the FCB model consist of the components of “thinking” and “feeling” and “high” and “low” involvement implicating alternative orderings of the learn-feel-do sequence (Vaughn 1980:30) and implying the fundamental hypothesis of this FCB model as follows: “An advertising strategy is determined by specifying (1) the consumer’s point-of-entry on the LEARN-FEEL-DO continuum and (2) the priority of learn versus feel versus do for making a sale” (Vaughn 1980:32).

The FCB model's quadrants include the informative, affective, habit formation and satisfaction strategies. Each of these quadrants/strategies explains the amount of involvement and thinking an individual puts into deliberating about a specific product and suggests an alternative ordering of the basic cognitive-affective-conative information processing and response phases (Vaughn 1980). Each of the four quadrants of the FCB model is discussed below.

- *The informative strategy:* The first quadrant, the informative strategy suggests that high involvement and thorough thinking imply a large need for information because of the type of product the “thinking” consumer needs to decide on. The consumer thus necessarily thinks rationally about the purchase of the product following a learn-feel-do information-processing sequence (Vaughn 1980:30-31). Advertising messages that are supposed to force the consumer through the learn-feel-do sequence in the informative quadrant can be researched by means of recall and diagnostic tests to determine their effectiveness. In this quadrant, the advertising messages are directed at consumers who favour long copy formats and reflective vehicles, with the creative side of the advertising message providing specific information and demonstrations (Vaughn 1980:31).
- *The affective strategy:* The second FCB quadrant is referred to as the affective strategy and describes the “feeling” consumer, whose affection and involvement are both high, following a feel-learn-do sequence of response. In this strategy, “this product decision is involving, but specific information is less important than an attitude or holistic feeling” (Vaughn 1980:31), referring to a psychological model of response with high emotional involvement. Advertising message effectiveness can be determined by means of attitude and emotional arousal tests regarding the creative executional aspects of the messages.
- *The habit formation strategy:* Vaughn (1980:31) adds the habit formation strategy, which is based on response theory, to refer to product decisions which involve “minimal thought and a tendency to form buying habits for convenience”. In this quadrant, the consumer follows a do-learn-feel

response sequence and does not think rationally about the purchase. Hence this usually represents a habitual consumer response ritual.

- *The self-satisfaction strategy*: In this quadrant, “imagery and quick satisfaction are involved” (Vaughn 1980:32), following a do-feel-learn sequence relating to social theory. The consumer experiences low involvement and limited feelings in his/her striving to satisfy personal tastes, being labelled a reactor because of the importance of the product experience as part of the learning process.

According to Vaughn (1980:32), the FCB model is a simple but progressive representation of consumer’s response hierarchies in terms of emotion-rationality and high and low involvement, providing more than the four possibilities that are explicitly indicated in the model.

Based on the traditional response hierarchy models and the alternative response hierarchies, the notion emerged that the concept of involvement should be added to the information-processing and response hierarchies (Hanekom 2006; Belch & Belch 2012).

Sinclair and Barenblatt (1993), Dube, Chattopadhyay and Letarte (1996), Burnett and Moriarty (1998) and Mortimer (2002), and also note that the FCB model is an adaptation of the traditional response hierarchy models because of its explanation of attitudes in terms of affect or cognition and its indication of information-processing styles based on involvement levels. Even though the FCB model contributes to and extends the traditional response hierarchy models, it can be criticised for its linear depiction of the response stages that are evident in each quadrant of the model. Evidence of this is Hanekom’s (2006) criticism of the sequential and hierarchical manner in which the consumer response process is depicted, although she does suggest alternative orderings of these processes.

It is hence argued that the FCB model contributes to and expands on the traditional response hierarchy models by indicating high and low involvement and thinking and feeling processes. It is further propounded that this model contributes to consumer

information processing and response theory specifically because it explains the consumer's response sequences in terms of different products based on information (learn), attitude (feel) and behaviour (do).

5.4.2.3 *The integrated information response model*

Smith and Swinyard (1982:85) integrate different streams of consumer information-processing and response research specifically on cognition, affect and conation and provide a revised interpretation of the advertising response sequence (figure 5.6).

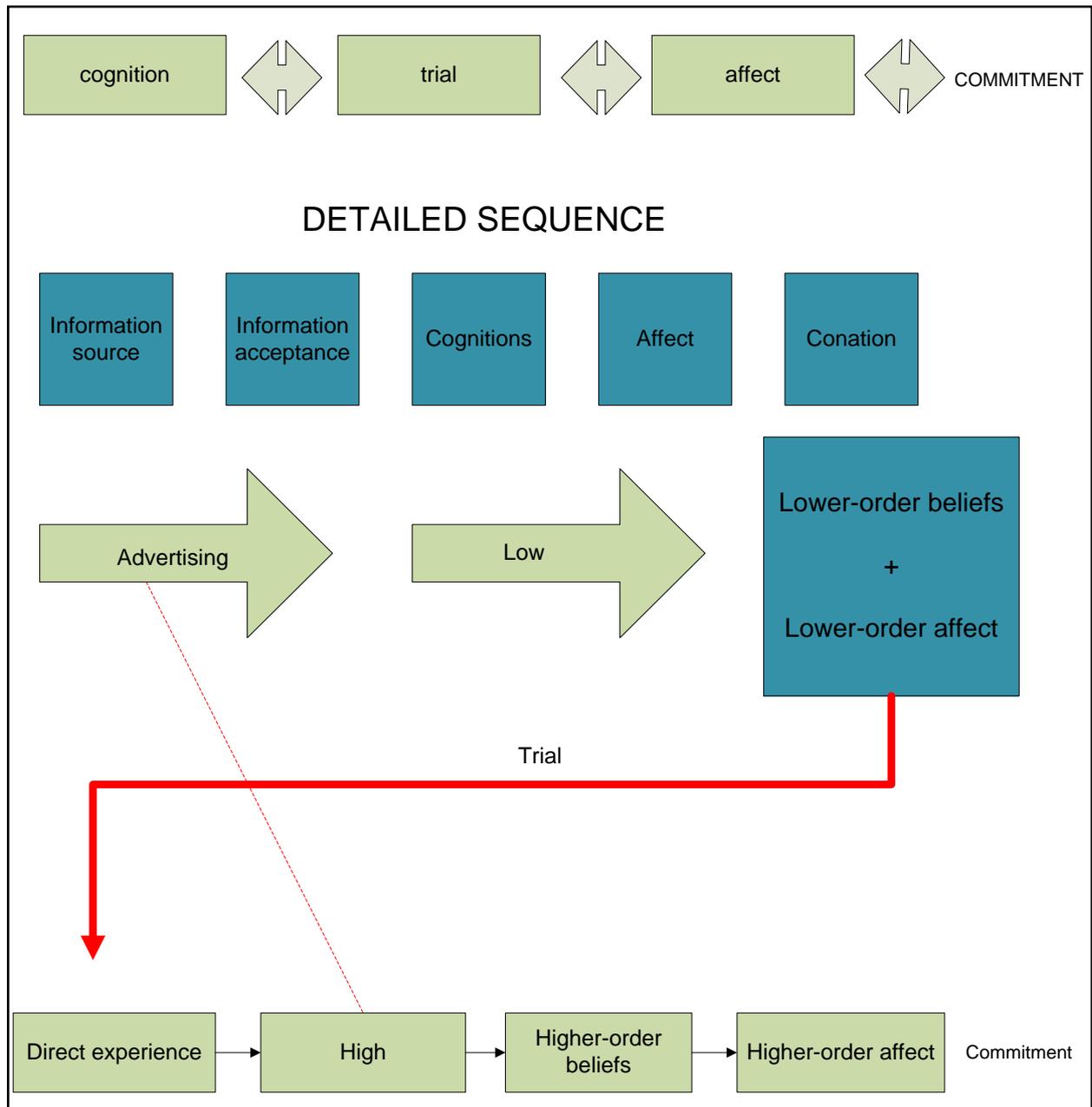


Figure 5.6: Smith and Swinyard’s (1982) integrated information response model adapted from Belch and Belch (2001:156)

According to this model, advertising exposure will generate minimal message acceptance and lower-order beliefs. This argument is based on the perception that advertising is “usually perceived to be a vested interest source and will, therefore, be subjected to high levels of discounting, source derogation, counterarguing, and message rejection” (Smith & Swinyard 1982:85). They explain the model as follows:

Advertising will generate lower-order beliefs such as awareness and uncertainty. If a consumer wishes to reduce uncertainty by establishing higher-order beliefs, the most important source of information will be trial, because it is accepted at a relatively high level. However, if a higher-order response sequence is followed, direct experience is accepted at higher-order magnitudes with higher-order beliefs and higher-order affect as a result, followed by preference and commitment.

The main thrust of the model is the suggestion of the following different response sequences as a result of advertising exposure:

- *The cognition-affect-commitment sequence:* This response sequence is similar to the traditional hierarchy response models and represents a learn-feel-do sequence, although the integrated information response models do not suggest that this is the only ordering of these phases of the response process.
- *The cognition-trial-affect-commitment sequence:* This response sequence clarifies the relationship between affect and purchase based on the notion that trial purchase precedes affect, while committed purchase follows affect.
- *The cognition-trial-trial-trail ... sequence:* Implicit in the integrated information response model is the trial iteration path. This response sequence indicates that in some individual cases preference will not precede selections.

Based on the arguments above, Belch and Belch (2001:154) and Hanekom (2006) identify the following characteristics that are unique to the integrated information response model:

- The traditional and the low-involvement response hierarchy perspectives are integrated into the integrated information response model, providing it with a diverse perspective on consumer information processing and response.
- Direct experience and trial are accounted for in this model.

- Advertising and personal experience will result in different levels of belief strength.

It is propounded that this is the first model to introduce trial as a variable in the response process and indicates that it would be induced by advertising messages that reduce perceived risk by means of repetition and familiarity (Belch & Belch 2001; Hanekom 2006) and followed by advertisements that should reaffirm the positive features of the trial. A prerequisite for affect development is message acceptance, which is part of the higher-order response sequence, which usually leads to affect development. Hanekom (2006) argues that the model explains the occurrence of many purchase occasions because of a need for information and not necessarily because of commitment or loyalty to a specific brand.

The integrated information response model can arguably be distinguished from other response models because of the realisation that consumers obtain information from more sources than mere advertising messages. For the purpose of considering this model's worth in indicating the consumer response process, it is argued that the integrated information response model can be distinguished from the traditional response hierarchy models and the two alternative response hierarchy models that were discussed in the preceding section. The reason for this is that the model provides alternative orderings of the traditional response hierarchies' cognitive, affective and conative components by explicating the response path for lower- and higher-order response sequences.

It is additionally suggested that the integrated information response model appears to promote a progressive understanding of the consumer response process, especially by including trial and high- and low-order response paths and the possibility of integrating information from advertising, other marketing communication sources and direct experiences.

To conclude the discussion of the models encompassed in the factorial variability paradigm, namely the three-orders model of information processing (Ray 1973), the FCB planning model (Vaughn 1980) and the integrated information response model

(Smith & Swinyard 1982) discussed above, it is propounded that the models presented in this paradigm provide interesting and valuable alternatives to the traditional response hierarchies. This is because variations on the usual cognitive-affective-conative sequence are presented in line with different identified variables that have an influence on these sequences. It is argued that these alternative models provide advertising and marketing communication planners with suggestions on strategically planning their communication by taking into account involvement levels, product differentiation, consumers' use of various information sources and levels of experience with the product (Belch & Belch 2001; Hanekom 2006; Belch & Belch 2012). An understanding of these processes will provide the marketer and advertiser with information on how to design their communication activities successfully to benefit the organisation.

5.4.3 The inclusive facets paradigm

Preston's (1982) *association model of the advertising communication process* and Moriarty et al's (2009) *facets model of effects* are the last two models that Hanekom and Barker (2009:153) categorise in the inclusive facets paradigm. The reason for the above authors' categorisation is the models' completeness in explaining the consumer response and information-processing processes and their inclusion of various additional phases/stages of consumer response and information processing.

5.4.3.1 The association model of the advertising communication process

According to Preston (1982:3), the reason for developing the association model of the advertising communication process is to extend and improve on the traditional response hierarchy models and to "incorporate all of the measures of research commonly used in advertising".

The association model of the advertising communication process (Preston 1982:3) is based on its traditional predecessors such as the AIDA, and was developed in order to compare its premises with previous models by including various research steps. The model further incorporates relatable elements from traditional psychology and

the latest consumer information-processing research. The main thrust of the association model of the advertising communication process (Preston 1982:3) is its recognition of “association” and its function in the advertising communication process, as well as its identification of individual steps of each of the standard measures that are commonly used for “recognising each type of research measure by a designation of a distinct step of consumer response that it indexes” (Preston 1982:3). Figure 5.7 depicts the steps in the consumer information-processing and response process, as illustrated in the association model of the advertising communication process.

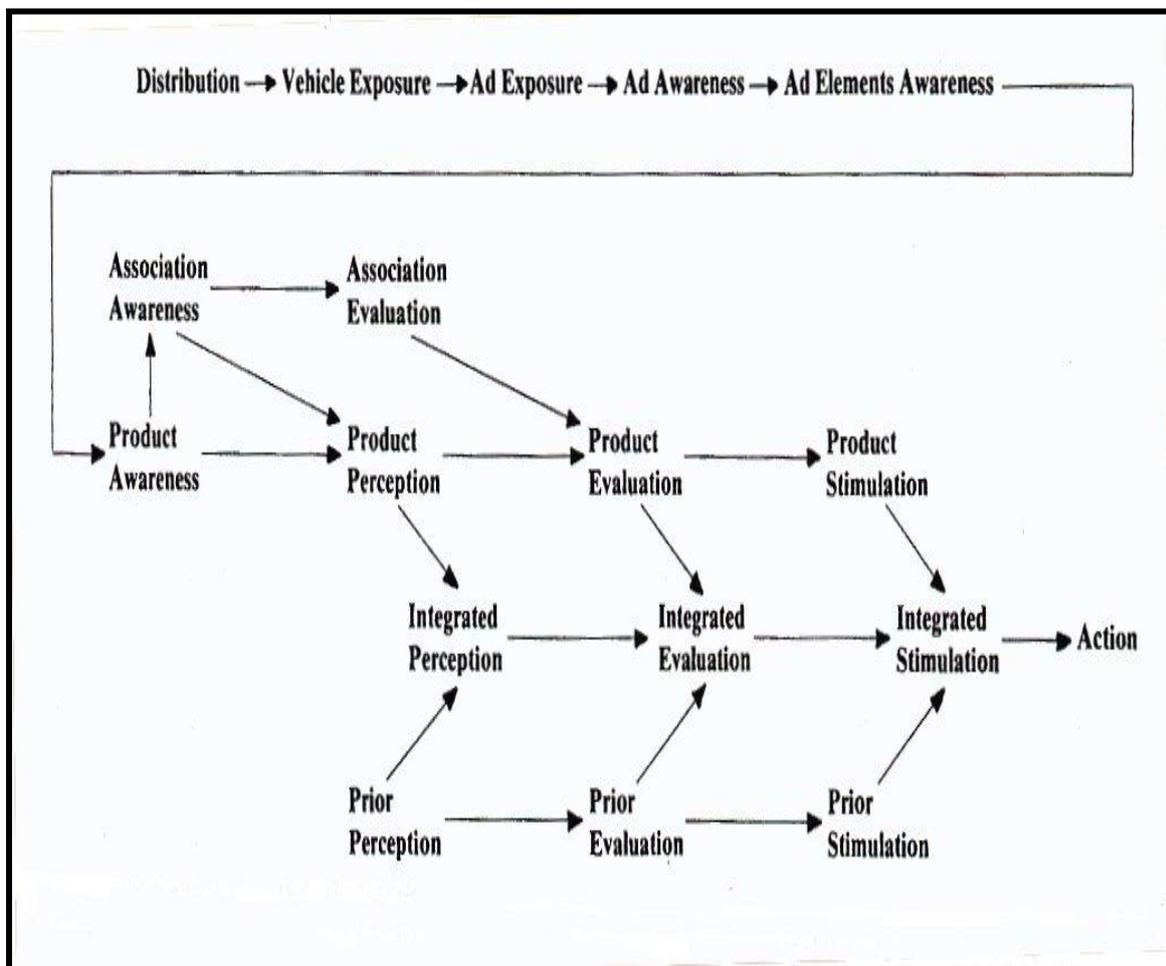


Figure 5.7: Preston’s (1982:4) association model of the advertising communication process

The individual steps in the association model of the advertising communication process are discussed below.

- **Distribution, vehicle exposure and advertisement exposure**

Preston (1982:3) discusses the distribution, vehicle exposure and ad exposure steps together since he argues that the first two steps are indicators of the third step. This demonstrates that when distribution of the advertising message and exposure of the advertising vehicle have occurred, advertisement exposure is not a logical consequence. Preston (1982:3) based his model on the following arguments: (1) Advertisement exposure is generally regarded as the first step in the advertising response process and is also immeasurable, thus compelling researchers to measure distribution and vehicle exposure instead as indicators of advertisement exposure which can usually only be measured in the case of outdoor and point-of-purchase advertising since they are regarded as complete advertisements with measurable exposure; and (2) because of the difficulty in measuring advertisement exposure, a researcher “rather infers it from research on one of the two earlier steps”; (3) advertisement exposure should be the first step in the advertising response process but he also realises that (4) distribution and vehicle exposure are the only variables that are measurable by means of research. He therefore he concludes that advertisement exposure is estimated from research on these variables.

- **Advertisement awareness**

Advertisement awareness is not an automatic consequence of advertisement exposure, but indicates several steps that consumers proceed through when becoming aware of an advertisement (Preston 1982:4). Advertisement awareness thus refers to the individual’s actual discernment of the advertisement with no indication that the specific differential elements of the advertisement have been noticed.

- **Advertisement elements awareness**

According to Preston (1982:5), the previous advertisement awareness step indicated that the individual becomes aware of the advertisement as a whole, while the advertisement elements awareness step signifies an awareness of the different elements/parts that the advertisement is composed of. Most of these separate elements in an advertisement are used to draw an individual's attention to the advertising message, in the hope that he/she will regard the specific elements of the advertisement that indicate the product or service being advertised. He argues that some of the elements contained in an advertisement are not deliberately meant to indicate the product or service, but are used as filler content or included accidentally, therefore reducing the importance of this advertisement elements awareness step in the complete model. However, Preston (1982) deemed these elements to be important enough to include in his association model of the advertising communication process since they might, in certain advertisements, affect the response to the overall advertisement.

- **Product awareness**

According to Preston (1982:5), this is the most important step for advertisers because product awareness involves the recognition of the specific product or brand being advertised. He recognises the fact that it is possible for individuals to become aware of the advertisement and the different elements contained in it without noticing the product or service being advertised. Hence, the advertiser seemingly needs the consumer to correctly perceive the product and brand being advertised and for this reason this step is indicated as a separate step in the association model of the advertising communication process.

- **Association awareness**

During the association awareness step, the product is described in terms of its identified attributes, claims made about it, depiction of the people using it and the benefits associated with it – hence associations established between the product and

the items/elements that the advertiser uses in the advertisement (Preston 1982:5). Preston's (1982) association model stems from the association awareness step, thus referring to the critical step of associations made between the product or service advertised and the elements depicted in the advertisement. According to Preston (1982:5), the value of the product or service depends on the value of the associations depicted in the advertisement. Moreover, because consumers do not necessarily see the associations or perceive them as depicted, it is necessary to separate the association awareness and product awareness steps.

- **Association evaluation**

Association evaluation is the step during which each individual regards the associations between the product and advertisement elements positively or negatively (Preston 1982). This means that although advertisers anticipate a positive evaluation from individuals, some may regard the associations negatively, while others may even view them in a neutral manner. According to him, consumers make these decisions in two ways:

- The consumer's response choice is parallel to that of association awareness where he/she will see/not see the evaluation offered. The individual will see it either as the advertiser intended or not.
- The consumer has an evaluation as a prior state of mind based on prior encounters with the associated item. In this instance, the individual evaluates the advertising message and product on the basis of prior evaluations and links with the product or brand name.

- **Product perception, prior perception and integrated perception**

According to Preston (1982), the total picture the consumer gleans from the advertisement is product perception which is cognitive and nonevaluative. This step is therefore more than product awareness, which represents the mere noticing of the product as a subject in the advertisement. Preston (1982:6) posits that it is almost similar to the sum of association awareness and association evaluation, but also more than that. He argues that while association awareness and association

evaluation refer to the consumer's separate responses to separate associations between product and message or advertisement elements, "product perception represents an integrated summation of all those responses" (Preston 1982:6). Accordingly, prior perception refers to the consumer's perception of the product prior to being exposed to the advertisement, based on individual responses and prior interactions. The consumer therefore combines product perception and prior perception into integrated perception, which represents the overall evaluation and perception of the product on which he/she will base his/her future perceptions.

- **Product evaluation, prior evaluation and integrated evaluation**

Integrated evaluation is based on prior evaluation and product evaluation on direct advertising input, which is in turn formed when consumers form their product perception. Preston (1982:6) combines these three elements as being similar to product perception, prior perception and integrated perception. He regards product evaluation as representing what consumers see the advertisement communicating to them at an affective level, while prior perception indicates their previous perceptions of the product, and integrated evaluation represents how the consumers decide to feel about the product and the advertisement.

- **Product stimulation, prior stimulation and integrated stimulation**

In Preston's (1982) model, before finally proceeding to the action step, the consumer will proceed through product stimulation, prior stimulation and integrated stimulation. This step is necessary since the consumer will obtain an internal motivation towards the final action step. In order to acquire an integrated stimulus, the consumer will need to proceed through product stimulation and prior stimulation, which are derived from direct advertising input. Preston (1982:7) argues that as soon as a favourable product stimulation is created, a favourable integrated stimulation may be the consequence.

- **Action**

As indicated by Preston (1982:7), “the integrated stimulation, positive or negative, weak or strong, now will prompt the final step of action”. According to his model, this is the last step of the information-processing and response steps of the advertising communication process and evidently demonstrates sales or some other type of action. Preston (1982:10) argues for the inclusion of these steps in his association model of the advertising communication process in terms of the rationale that they demonstrate the different types of research methods that can be used in advertising message research.

It is postulated that, in general, Preston’s (1982) association model of the advertising communication process elaborates on the traditional and alternative response hierarchies and the integrated information response model by including new steps in the information-processing and response process and also by using the original terms.

Preston (1982) indicates that this model is based on the hierarchy of effects model, and it is therefore used as a foundation by including each of those steps in the association model of the advertising communication process. Because of this, Preston’s (1982) model can also be criticised for the incomprehensive manner in which the model presents the types of consumer responses which cannot be accommodative enough. However, what sets this model apart from the hierarchy of effects model, for example, is its expansion on the model’s scope and the inclusion of distribution, vehicle exposure and advertisement exposure steps as predecessors to awareness. This model arguably also contributes to the consumer response literature by including research criteria for advertising message research.

It is proposed that Preston’s (1982) association model of the advertising communication process provides a unique view on the individual information-processing and response process that consumers go through when considering advertising and integrated marketing communication messages. Even though it is regarded as an advancement on the previous response models, it is argued that it

still depicts the response sequence in a linear manner, similar to the traditional and alternative response hierarchies without regarding the variables that could influence or alter the response process.

In line with the information and communication exposure context of this study, and despite these criticisms, it is argued that the association model of the advertising communication process provides a valuable, systematic explanation of the possible steps that consumers may progress through when they are considering advertising messages. Although depicted in a linear fashion and from a purchasing perspective, for the purpose of this study, these steps are regarded as complete in their explanation of the consumer response process.

5.4.3.2 *The facets model of effects*

Moriarty et al (2009) propose the facets model of effects (figure 5.8) to explain how advertising creates various types of consumer responses and information-processing processes. This is a move away from the typical linear depiction of the response phases by the traditional consumer response models. Moriarty et al (2009:108) explain that the rationale for the development of this model was to “present a model of advertising effects that does a more complete job of explaining how advertising creates various types of consumer responses”. The model furthermore indicates a move away from the original attention, awareness and exposure concepts of the traditional consumer response models to include a perceptual dimension that explains the way beliefs and attitudes are created or changed and conviction established (Moriarty et al 2009:108), but builds on the think-feel-do approach. The steps/stages of the information-processing and response process that are unique to the facets model of effects are perception, brand association and persuasion.

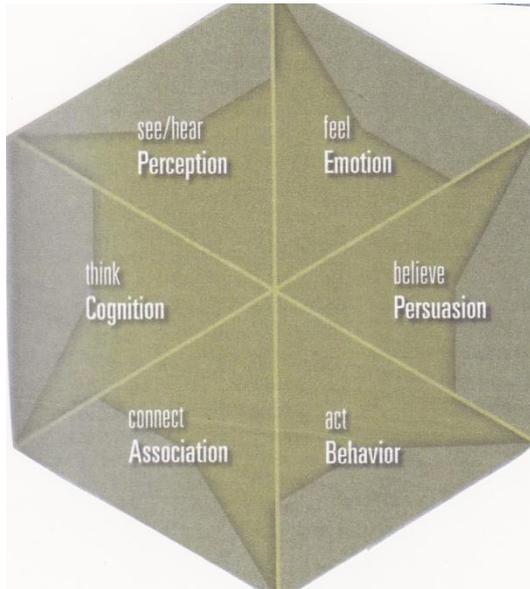


Figure 5.8: Moriarty et al's (2009:109) facets model of effects

Using their facets model, Moriarty et al (2009) explain how advertising works by proposing that effective advertising creates six types of consumer responses, namely see/hear, feel, think/understand, believe, connect and act/do. All of these facets work together to represent a unique, holistic consumer response to an advertising message, also referred to by Moriarty et al (2009:108) as an “integrated perception”. These facets are discussed below.

- **See/hear: the perception facet**

Every individual only notices a small amount of the stimuli he/she is exposed to every day, because of the perceptual process. Moriarty et al (2009:110) define perception as “the process by which we receive information through our five senses and assign meaning to it”. They argue that when consumers are exposed to advertising messages, they engage in a selective perception process which enables them to distinguish between important and unimportant and relevant and irrelevant messages. This further allows the consumer to only regard those messages that he/she wishes to pay attention to. According to the above authors, several key factors of perception are relevant to advertising and marketing communication

effects. These factors are briefly discussed below on the basis of Moriarty et al's (2009:110) categorisation.

- *Exposure*: Consumers need to be exposed to the advertising or marketing communication message in order for perception and subsequent communication to occur. In a nutshell, the message needs to be heard or seen.
 - *Selection and attention*: The next perception driver or factor that needs to be taken into account is selective attention. In this case, consumers selectively decide which message or stimulus to regard and which to disregard.
 - *Interest and relevance*: When “the receiver of the message has become mentally engaged in some way with the ad and the product” (Moriarty et al 2009:110), interest has occurred on the basis of the receiver's interest in the message.
 - *Awareness*: In the perception context, awareness refers to the familiarity of the message or stimulus because of prior exposure.
 - *Recognition*: Recognition refers to the process whereby the consumer recognises that he/she has seen the message prior to the current exposure occasion. The consumer can also, in some instances, recall the message when he/she remembers what the message said or meant.
-
- **Feel: the affective or emotional facet**

Moriarty et al (2009:111) assert that affective responses to messages reflect individuals' feelings about something, describing something that stimulates wants, touches the emotions, creates liking and elicits feelings. The affective or emotional facet is placed next to the perception facet in the facets model of effects, because of the interactivity between them, which indicates that the perceptual process begins with perception as a result of affection as a driving force. Moriarty et al (2009) further their discussion of the affective or emotional facet by indicating that because of the powerful nature of emotional responses, they determine whether consumers' unconscious reactions become conscious. Moriarty et al (2009:113) identify the following response drivers:

- *Wants*: Wants are the result of emotions of wishing, longing and craving something.
- *Feelings*: Consumers' feelings are addressed in advertisements and marketing communication messages by means of emotional appeals, which are believed to have a greater impact than rational appeals.
- *Liking*: Liking means that the consumer has developed a positive feeling for the advertisement or the brand being advertised and is regarded as one of the best predictors of consumer behaviour.
- *Resonate*: Messages or brands that resonate with the consumer are relevant to his/her personal circumstances and help him/her to identify with the brand at a personal level.

- **Understand: the cognitive facet**

Once an affective response has been elicited by the advertising or marketing communication message, Moriarty et al (2009) regard the next most important message response as a cognitive one during which comprehension is established. According to these authors, cognition refers to the way consumers learn and understand messages and represents a rational reaction as opposed to an emotional or affective one. The following key drivers of consumers' cognitive responses are considered according to Moriarty et al's (2009:115) categorisation:

- *Needs*: Even though needs were addressed in chapter 3 as the predecessors to motivation as an internal determinant of consumer behaviour, and in chapter 4 as a need recognition step during the input stage of the proposed online consumer information decision-making model, for the purpose of this discussion, Moriarty et al (2009) regard needs as key drivers of consumers' cognitive responses. Hence, in this context, by referring to needs, "we are usually talking about the cognitive impact of a message that describes something lacking in consumers' lives" (Moriarty et al 2009:115). A consumer's needs are addressed during the cognitive facet of the advertising response process since needs refer to consumers' thoughts surrounding products or services.

- *Cognitive learning*: Consumers cognitively learn about products and services via two different routes, namely cognitive and conditioned learning. The different types of learning were addressed in chapter 3 and are thus only briefly mentioned here. This section touches on cognitive learning in the context of the cognitive facet of consumer response, while conditioned learning will be addressed in the section on association. Cognitive learning occurs when understanding flows from facts, information and explanations. When a consumer gathers information before buying a product and comprehends the messages, it typically represents the cognitive learning driver of the cognitive facet of advertising effects.
- *Differentiation*: Differentiation is an indication that cognitive learning has occurred because of the consumer's ability to separate one brand from another in a specific product group. When consumers understand that there is a difference between competing brands, they have grasped the competitive advantage.
- *Recall*: The previous section explained that perception is a prerequisite for recognition, while learning and understanding are prerequisites for recall. As soon as information processing has occurred, ideas are stored in the memory and recall can take place.

It should be noted that all the facets in Moriarty et al's (2009) facets model of effects are interdependent and that thinking and feeling, for example, work together to form integrated cues in the memory for subsequent utilisation.

- **Connect: the association facet**

According to Moriarty et al (2009:116), association is the "technique of communicating through symbolism". They contend that through the process of making symbolic associations between a brand and certain characteristics, people or situations, consumers learn about a brand's personality and image. They describe association as a three-way process when "(1) the brand relates to (2) a quality that (3) customers value". Moriarty et al (2009:116) classify the following association drivers:

- *Symbolism*: The brand takes on symbolic meaning when it is associated with certain characteristics, representing something abstract.
- *Conditioned learning*: Cognitive learning has been addressed as part of the cognitive facet. Even though cognitive learning and evaluation are important parts of the consumer response and information processing process, marketing communication messages are sometimes structured to educate noncognitive associations through conditioned learning – “a group of thoughts and feelings become linked to the brand through repetition of the message” (Moriarty et al 2009:116).
- *Transformation*: As soon as the transformation of the product from a mere brand name to something meaningful has taken place, the association process has been completed successfully. Transformation will further lead to a network of associations and knowledge structures which will assist individual’s future associative thinking.

- **Believe: the persuasion facet**

Once the product and brand name have been associated with relevant elements and knowledge structures are in place, persuasion can take place. According to Moriarty et al (2009:117), persuasion is “the conscious intent on the part of the source to influence or motivate the receiver of a message to believe or do something”. The main aim of the persuasion facet is to create affirmative attitudes by ensuring that the consumer’s inclination and mental readiness to react to a situation in a given way are positive. As soon as individuals have a positive attitude towards a particular message or are convinced of something that is advocated in the message, their attitudes can be expressed as beliefs.

According to Moriarty et al (2009:117), the persuasion facet is an area in which cognitive and affective factors are interrelated, since persuasion is conveyed through rational arguments as well as by touching emotions. They identify the following factors that drive persuasion:

- *Motivation*: Motivation was discussed in chapter 2 as a psychological construct of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach; in

chapter 3 as an internal determinant of consumer behaviour; and in chapter 4 as a determinant of the online consumer information decision-making process. Hence, for the purpose of this discussion, Moriarty et al (2009) contend that the motivation a person experiences during a persuasion occasion influences his/her openness to persuasion.

- *Influence*: Opinion leaders usually influence individual's attitudes by convincing them to do the "right" thing.
- *Involvement*: Moriarty et al (2009:117) define involvement as "the degree to which you are engaged in attending to an ad and the process you go through in responding to a message and making a product decision". Different messages and products call for different degrees of involvement.
- *Conviction*: When consumers agree with a persuasive message and reach a state of certainty by formulating a belief about the message, conviction has occurred.
- *Preference and intention*: Consumers' beliefs should be integrated with their preferences or intentions before they will be motivated for conviction.
- *Loyalty*: Brand loyalty refers to a preference or attitude, liking or emotion and repeat purchase or action by consumers after being persuaded. When brand loyalty is established, attitude, emotion and action are integrated, thus building customer satisfaction.

From this discussion it would seem that persuasion can only take place when the source is perceived to be credible and trustworthy.

- **Act: the behaviour facet**

Moriarty et al (2009) explain the behaviour facet in terms of individuals' specific direct or indirect action/behaviour, which is based on the specific ways in which advertising and marketing communication messages are formulated. They identify the following behavioural response factors:

- *Try*: Consumers often act on an advertising message by trying a product or service. Trial poses a lesser threat than buying or using the product from the outset.

- *Buy*: Advertising and marketing communication messages are formulated to persuade consumers to buy a particular product, by motivating them to action.
- *Contact*: Except for buying a product or using a service, responding by making contact with the sender can also be an important measure of an advertisement's behavioural effectiveness.
- *Advocate and refer*: If persuasion has been successful, consumers will advocate and refer the brand to other users.
- *Prevent*: Some advertising and marketing communication messages are designed especially to prevent consumers from engaging in a certain action or buying a specific product.

It is argued that Moriarty et al's (2009) facets model of effects moves away from the linearity proposed in the traditional consumer response models, and although it is simplistic in its depiction of the consumer response stages/facets, it emphasises that the process should start with a perceptual process/facet, which is an addition to the traditional consumer response models' arguments. It is further propounded that this model's association facet is linked to Preston's (1982) emphasis on association, thereby significantly expanding on previous consumer response models. The facets model of effects arguably identifies the missing categories/stages/phases in the traditional consumer response models and addresses them in this model.

Moriarty et al's (2009) facets model of effects is the last model in Hanekom and Barker's (2009) paradigmatic categorisation of response models. This categorisation and subsequent detailed discussion of each of the response hierarchy models are significant in the context of this chapter and study in general in that they provide a comprehensive overview of the different response phases, levels and stages through which consumers go during exposure to advertising and marketing communication messages. These phases and stages will provide a valuable theoretical grounding in the consideration of consumer information processing and response for the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour, which will be developed in a subsequent chapter.

5.4.4 The elaboration likelihood model

Petty and Cacioppo's (1983) elaboration likelihood model was not included in Hanekom and Barker's (2009) paradigmatic categorisation of the response models, but is included here to provide an exhaustive discussion of consumer information-processing and response models.

The elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo 1983) indicates an association between involvement and cognitive processing, thereby integrating different types and levels of cognitive processing. It thus explains how persuasive communication leads to persuasion by manipulating attitudes, indicating the diverse ways consumers respond to and process persuasive messages (Belch & Belch 2001:161; Mortimer 2002; Hanekom 2006; Belch & Belch 2012). This is done by referring to elaboration as the effort that individuals put into making sense of an incoming stimulus based on prior and existing information (Sinclair & Barenblatt 1993:24). This model is depicted in figure 5.9.

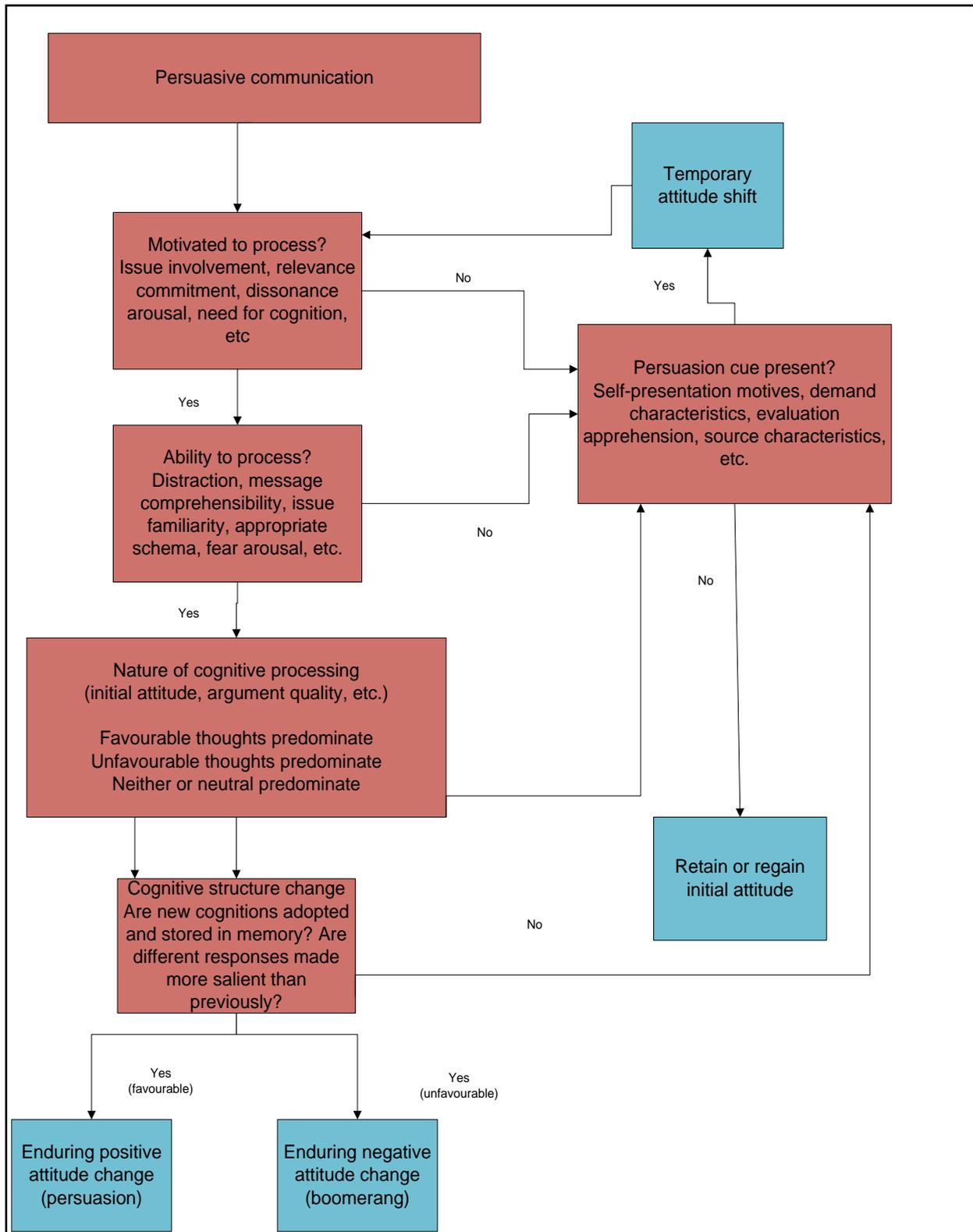


Figure 5.9: The elaboration likelihood model adapted from Belch and Belch (2012:167)

Petty and Cacioppo's (1983) elaboration likelihood model mainly addresses persuasive communication as a result of attitude manipulation, indicating the concept of elaboration of relevant information as differential processing responses to persuasive communication.

The main thrust of this model is to identify two routes of persuasion, the central and peripheral routes, each indicating a different route through which persuasive communication leads to persuasion by influencing attitudes. High elaboration (central route to persuasion) refers to an individual's careful consideration, thinking and evaluation of information, while low elaboration (peripheral route to persuasion) refers to the inferences the individual makes without engaging in active processing or thinking processes (Petty & Cacioppo 1983; Assael 2004; Belch & Belch 2012).

According to Petty and Cacioppo (1983), at the *central route* of persuasion during which attitude formation or change processes occur, the individual thoroughly thinks about and carefully deliberates the messages and information during a *high elaboration* process. High elaboration as the central route of persuasion is indicative of a person's deliberation and consideration of the message and information received. According to the model, the following procedures take place when "issue-relevant thinking" constitutes the high elaboration process:

- attention to the appeal
- retrieval of associations, images and experiences from memory
- elaboration of the external message in relation to the information available in memory
- analysis of the merits of the arguments for a recommendation based on the appeal and information in memory
- an overall attitude towards the recommendation

This model indicates the *central route* to persuasion as being indicative of the following:

- an involved individual
- an individual with the ability to attend to, comprehend and evaluate messages
- close attention to the message

- an analysis of persuasive arguments
- a high level cognitive response activity and processing
- positive cognitive responses leading to favourable changes in cognitive structures
- negative cognitive processing leading to unfavourable negative attitude change

Petty and Cacioppo (1983) explain *low elaboration* as the peripheral route to persuasion occurring when the motivation or ability to elaborate is low and persuasive messages are not thoroughly deliberated on, but instead inferred on the basis of positive and negative information cues. They contend that the low elaboration process is indicative of individuals who are unlikely to engage in detailed cognitive processing, relying on peripheral cues that are mostly supplementary to the central argument. Petty and Cacioppo (1983), Cacioppo and Petty (1985), Cacioppo and Petty 1989, Sinclair and Barenblatt (1993), Hanekom (2006) and Belch and Belch (2012) emphasise the importance of two elements of the elaboration likelihood model, namely motivation and ability. *Motivation* refers to the individual's involvement, personal relevance to and needs and arousal levels regarding the message he/she is exposed to. *Ability*, however, depends on individual knowledge, intellectual capacity and message process opportunity.

It is posited that the main contribution of Petty and Cacioppo's (1983) elaboration likelihood model is that it improves on the response hierarchy models through the realisation that different individuals react differently to diverse communication messages by especially addressing attitude, motivation and ability. Another contribution is that the model has implications for marketing communication practitioners since the focus is on the individual's involvement level as an indicator of the level of elaboration or cognitive processing that will occur. In other words, when elaboration/involvement is high, the advertising message should contain strong relevant arguments, but if elaboration/involvement is low, peripheral cues are more important than strong arguments.

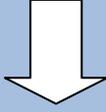
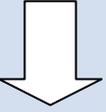
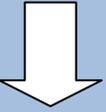
This model's relevance to this study lies mainly in the type of processing during differing communication situations. It is suggested that when the consumer is highly involved in the advertising message, he/she will follow a detailed central processing style of message content. However, if the consumer is not involved in the advertising message, he/she will follow the peripheral processing style.

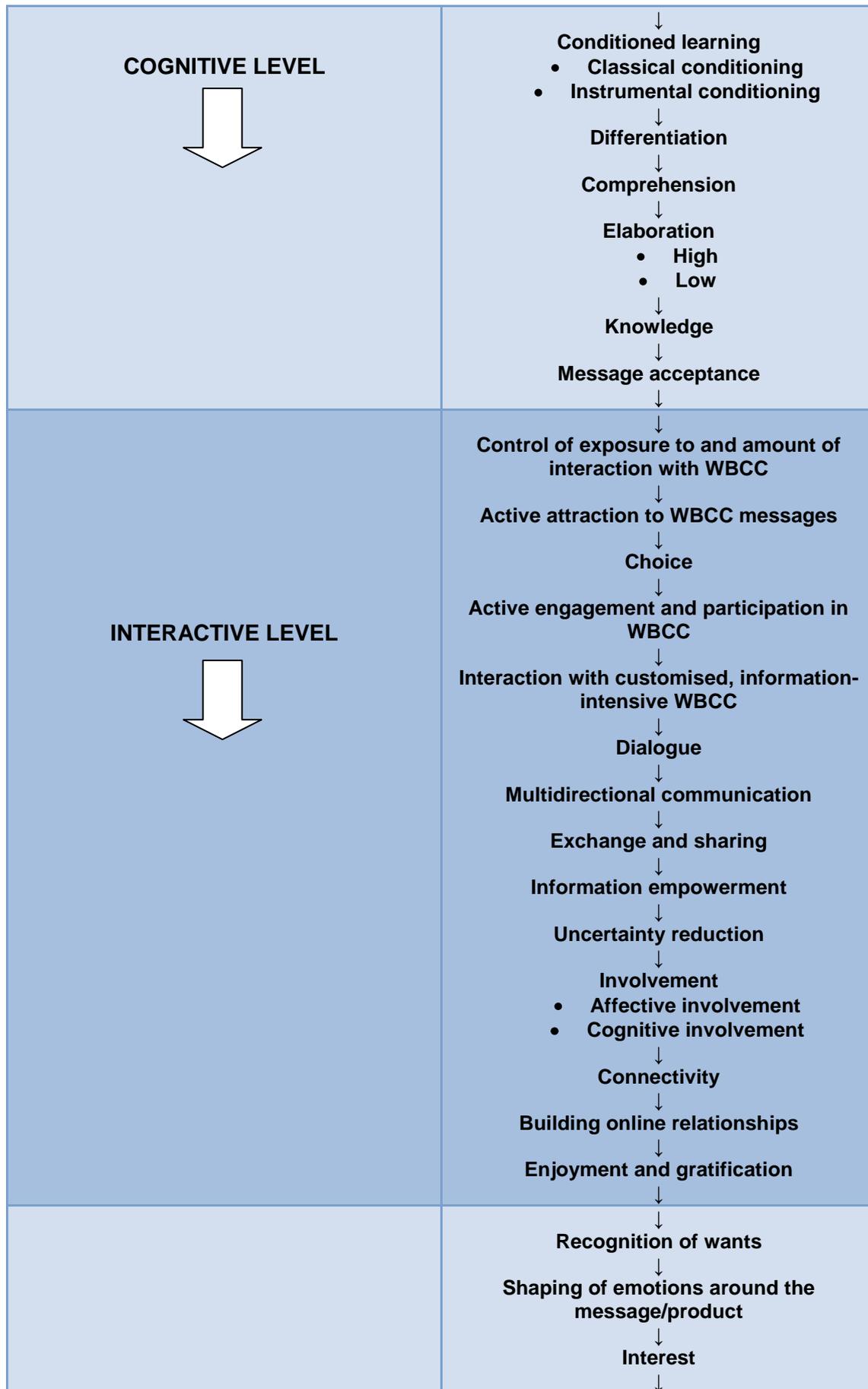
Following on the traditional consumer response models, Hanekom (2006) integrated some of the most relevant levels and phases of the existing consumer response models and applied them to the online environment, proposing a theoretical framework for online consumer response that indicates different phases and levels of the process that consumers go through during exposure to integrated marketing communication messages. This theoretical framework is discussed below.

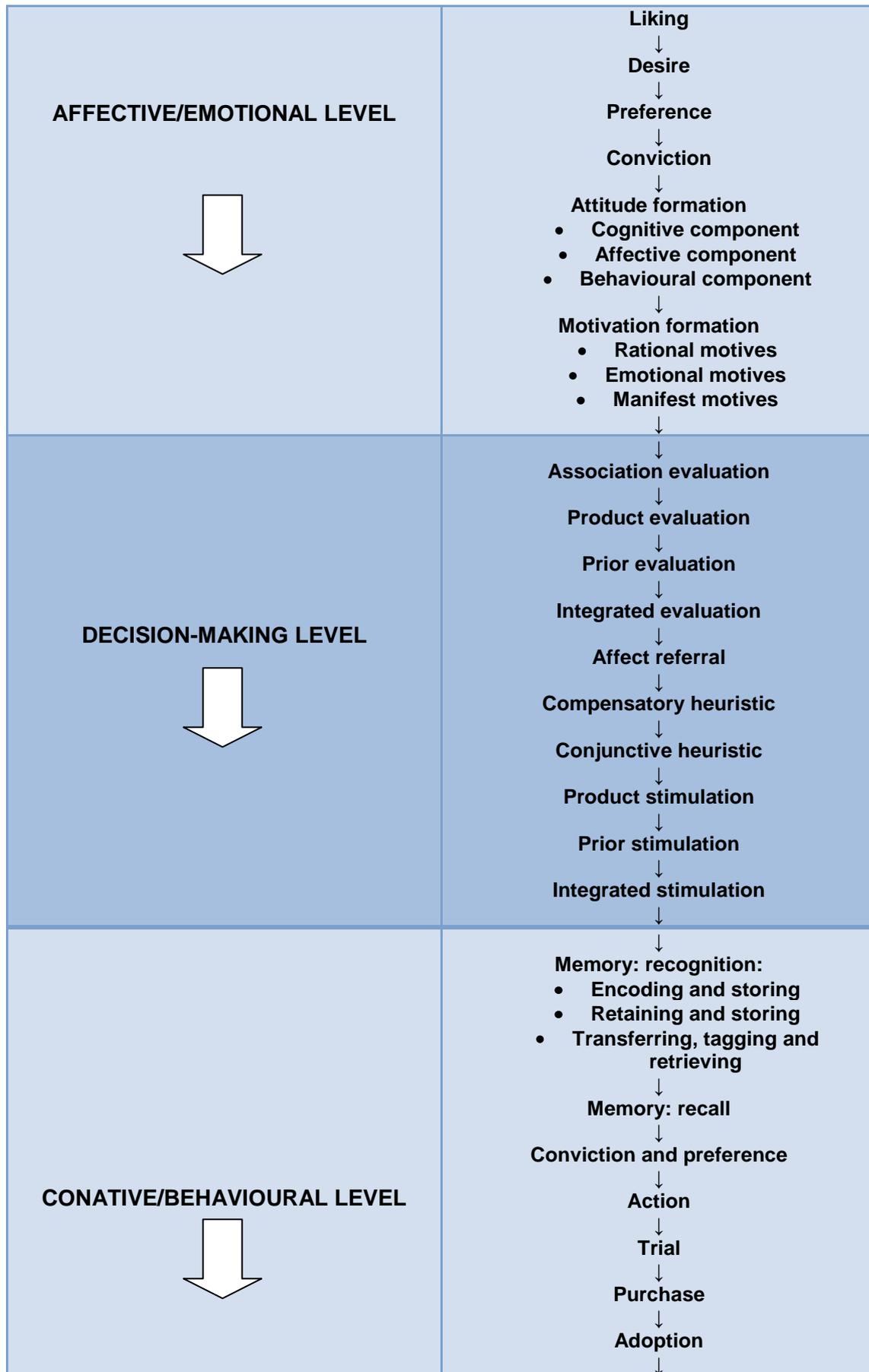
5.5 A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ONLINE CONSUMER RESPONSE

Hanekom (2006) proposed theoretical criteria for the general consumer response process and for web-based commercial communication. Based on this, she proposed a theoretical framework for online consumer response by indicating eight different online response levels encompassing various online consumer response phases. Hanekom (2006) clearly indicates that these response levels do not necessarily follow in the proposed sequence, but overlap and are sometimes omitted.

Figure 5.10 depicts Hanekom's (2006) proposed theoretical framework for online consumer response, comprising eight online consumer response levels and various online consumer response phases.

ONLINE CONSUMER RESPONSE LEVELS	ONLINE CONSUMER RESPONSE PHASES
<p style="text-align: center;">PRE-EXPOSURE LEVEL</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Literacy (general and computer)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Intent</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Voluntary access</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">EXPOSURE LEVEL</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Vehicle exposure</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Deliberate and desired exposure</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Information pull and regulation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">WBCC exposure</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Awareness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WBCC awareness • WBCC elements awareness • Product awareness • Association awareness <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">PERCEPTION LEVEL</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Product perception</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Prior perception</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Integrated perception</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Selective perception</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Perceptual distortion</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Perceptual vigilance</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Perceptual defence</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Perceptual equilibrium</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Perceptual organisation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Perceptual interpretation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Attention</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Recognition of needs</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Gathering of information</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Association</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cognitive learning</p>





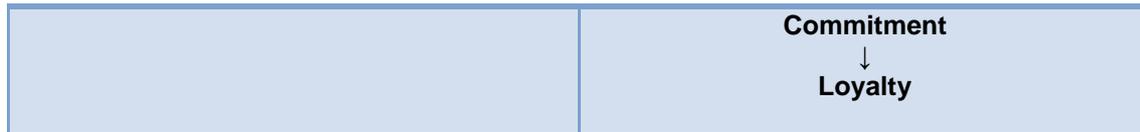


Figure 5.10: A theoretical framework for online consumer response (Hanekom 2006:187)

Hanekom (2006) identified the following online consumer response levels: pre-exposure level, exposure level, perception level, cognitive level, interactive level, affective/emotional level, decision-making level and conative/behavioural level, which are briefly discussed below.

5.5.1 Pre-exposure level

Hanekom (2006:192) posits that “during the pre-exposure level of the online consumer response process the online consumer proceeds through literacy, intentional and voluntary access phases during which he/she prepares for exposure to and interaction with WBCC messages, since exposure is not accidental, but deliberate and desired”.

According to Hanekom (2006), in contrast to the offline environment in which consumers are accidentally and unintentionally exposed to marketing communication messages, in the online environment, they proceed through several phases prior to exposure. This pre-exposure is a cognitive process during which consumers consciously decide to be exposed to the medium and subsequent messages. This intentionality allows for preparation, causing the following pre-exposure phases:

- *Literacy*: This is a prerequisite for accessing, operating and interacting online. This type of literacy does not only specify alphabetical literacy, but “document” and “tool” literacy as well, which should allow for interpretation and usage of information.
- *Intent*: In the offline environment, consumers are usually accidentally exposed to traditional integrated marketing communication messages, whereas in the online environment, exposure is a result of deliberate and desired intention based on an active choice, signifying an intentional phase.

- *Voluntary access*: Consumers access any amount of information at high speed and at a global level through the voluntary access phase of the pre-exposure level.

5.5.2 Exposure level

According to Hanekom (2006), during the exposure level, the consumer becomes aware of the web-based commercial communication message and subsequently proceeds through the following five response phases:

- *Vehicle exposure*: Exposure to the vehicle or medium is prerequisite for message exposure.
- *Deliberate and desired exposure*: Exposure in the online environment is not accidental because consumers actively choose whether or not they wish to be exposed to the messages and also select the amount of exposure they desire.
- *Information pull and regulation*: During online interactions, the consumer deliberately pulls information that suits his/her needs and interests through links to directories and other sites.
- *Web-based commercial communication (WBCC) message exposure*: After “the consumer has deliberately been exposed to the Internet as WBCC vehicle and has started to pull and regulate information, he/she is *exposed to WBCC*” (Hanekom 2006:196). Exposure in the online environment is deliberate and intentional.
- *Awareness*: The awareness phase consists of the “WBCC message awareness”, “WBCC elements awareness”, “product awareness” and “association awareness” steps.

5.5.3 Perception level

According to Hanekom (2006:197), online consumers go through the following phases during the perception level of online consumer response. These phases are touched on below.

- *Product perception*: This initial step during the perception level indicates that individuals form perceptions of the product, organisation and services being communicated.
- *Prior perception*: Perceptions and inputs that were acquired prior to the current exposure occasion are now retrieved from memory.
- *Integrated perception*: During the integrated perception phase, the consumer forms a perception based on prior perception and the perception that he/she is forming while interacting with the WBCC message.
- *Selective perception*: Consumers selectively decide which WBCC message and elements depicted in the message they are going to regard.
- *Perceptual distortion*: The online consumer disregards some information or changes the meaning of some of the messages in order to perceive the message closely to what is already familiar.
- *Perceptual vigilance*: During the perceptual vigilance phase, the consumer will only regard, attend to and retain information that is relevant to his/her needs.
- *Perceptual defence*: During this phase, consumers protect and defend themselves from threatening or contradictory stimuli by distorting information that is inconsistent with existing values and beliefs.
- *Perceptual equilibrium*: Consumers desire psychological equilibrium that lacks conflict and contradictory information.
- *Perceptual organisation*: During this phase, consumers organise information and stimuli into something that is useful and that can be grouped with existing information.
- *Perceptual interpretation*: Perception is selective and subject to organisation, and therefore also interpretative, causing different individuals to interpret stimuli diversely.

5.5.4 Cognitive level

According to Hanekom (2006:200), during the cognitive level, the consumer actively and cognitively gathers information in order to engage with the WBCC message. This level involves several phases which are briefly highlighted below.

- *Attention:* After positive connections with the message have been established, during this attention phase, the consumer will pay attention to the message and incoming stimuli.
- *Recognition of needs:* The consumer now cognitively recognises his/her needs and starts thinking about what he/she needs.
- *Gathering of information:* Once the consumer has recognised his/her needs, he/she will start gathering information in order to determine whether the product or service will satisfy the specific need.
- *Association:* During this phase, the consumer becomes aware of the associations between the product, service or organisation and certain elements in the WBC message.
- *Cognitive learning:* Cognitive learning has been addressed previously as an internal determinant of offline and online consumer behaviour, but for the purpose of this discussion, during the cognitive learning phase, learning is a result of the internalisation of facts, information and explanations which lead to problem solving.
- *Conditioned learning:* During this phase, consumers learn by means of either a classical or instrumental conditioning process, responding either automatically or involuntarily or because of rewards or punishment.
- *Differentiation:* The differences between the different brands are indicated during this phase by means of comparison.
- *Comprehension:* The consumer needs to understand the message before interaction, adaptation or buying will occur.
- *Elaboration:* During this phase, differentiated, relevant and learnt information is processed via high or low elaboration response processes.
- *Knowledge:* After processing, the consumer gains knowledge relating to the information, mental and rational states of the online consumer.
- *Web-based commercial communication message acceptance:* During this phase, the online consumer accepts the WBC message which culminates in interaction, which is the next consumer response level that is going to be discussed.

5.5.5 Interactive level

Hanekom (2006) suggests the interactive level of consumer response as a unique online consumer response level which indicates interaction as a possibility during any level of online consumer response. During this level, the consumer will interact with the information and will go through the following phases:

- *Control of exposure to and amount of interaction with WBCC:* During this initial phase, the online consumer controls the “exposure to and the amount of interaction” with WBCC (Hanekom 2006:206), thus exercising control by cognitively deciding on his/her actions in controlling the amount of interaction desired.
- *Active attraction to WBCC messages:* The consumer in this case, actively and voluntarily finds or visits the WBCC message after being actively attracted to it.
- *Choice:* The choice phase of online consumer response sets it apart from the traditional consumer response process with regard to the consumer’s choice of whether he/she wishes to approach the organisation through its website and whether he/she wishes to interact with the contents of the website.
- *Active engagement and participation in WBCC:* This phase describes the consumer’s active and interactive engagement and participation in WBCC.
- *Interaction with customised, information-intensive WBCC:* During this phase, the online consumer “interacts with customised, information-intensive WBCC messages” (Hanekom 2006:208). Information intensity is one of the unique characteristics of web-based communication and indicates the emphasis on content delivery and less on visual persuasion.
- *Dialogue:* Another unique feature of web-based communication is the fact that consumers can engage in a dialogue with the organisation by, say, providing direct feedback, and thus enter a process of exchange.
- *Multidirectional communication:* This process differs from the dialogue process mentioned above because consumers engage in multidirectional communication by conversing with other interconnected organisational stakeholders.

- *Exchange and sharing.* Besides the process of engaging in a dialogue with the organisation and conversing with other interconnected organisational communication stakeholders, online consumers further exchange and share information with all stakeholders.
- *Information empowerment:* Online consumers are empowered by the information they receive and interact with and use this information to make informed decisions.
- *Uncertainty reduction:* Informational uncertainty is reduced during this phase because the online consumer receives directly disseminated information from the organisation, and no gatekeeper or third party can, in this instance, cause misinterpretation.
- *Involvement:* Online consumers become either affectively involved with the message or product advertised by processing symbolic quality and image dimensions with the right brain, or cognitively involved by intensely processing information with the left brain. During this phase thus, involvement is established by means of interaction with personally relevant information.
- *Connectivity:* The consumer is connected to the organisation during this phase and therefore shares and exchanges information by means of dialogue and multidirectional communication.
- *Building online relationships:* Because of connectivity and dialogue, online relationships are built with organisational stakeholders.
- *Enjoyment and gratification:* Enjoyment and gratification signify the possibility that consumers will return to a website or seek more encounters with a specific message, sometimes even causing habitual return to a website.

5.5.6 Affective/emotional level

According to Hanekom (2006:212), the affective or emotional level of consumer response indicates the level of affection or emotional positivity with which consumers regard the organisational message and product. This level comprises the following phases:

- *Recognition of wants:* After interactivity, the consumer recognises his/her wants in terms of the product, service and elements portrayed in the WBCC message.
- *Shaping of emotions around the message/product:* The consumer now develops either positive or negative emotions about the product, service, message or organisation.
- *Interest:* During this phase, the online consumer becomes interested in the product, service or organisation.
- *Liking:* Liking is a result of the consumer being interested in the product, service or WBCC message, and a prerequisite for desire.
- *Desire:* Once the consumer is positive about the product, service or message and likes it, he/she will desire the product or service being advertised.
- *Preference:* During this phase, preference is established by forming favourable attitudes or feelings towards the product or service.
- *Conviction:* During this phase, the consumer assures and convinces himself/herself that he/she has made the correct choice by purchasing the product or using the service.
- *Attitude formation:* Positive or negative attitude formation determines the consumer's disposition towards the product, service or organisation.
- *Motivation formation:* The last phase of the affective/emotional level indicates consumer's motivation formation, compelling him/her to act in a certain manner.

5.5.7 Decision-making level

According to Hanekom (2006), in the decision-making level, consumers decide whether or not they are going to take action. This decision is based on all the previous phases they have been through. The following phases are included in the decision-making level:

- *Association evaluation:* The consumer associates different elements of the message with the product that is advertised and subsequently evaluates these associations.

- *Product evaluation*: The product itself is now evaluated on the basis of the information presented, while the consumer decides whether or not he/she is going to buy it.
- *Integrated evaluation*: Current product evaluations and prior evaluations are integrated to form a composite evaluation of the product or service being advertised.
- *Affect referral*: During this phase of the decision-making level, the consumer retrieves his/her attitudes towards different brands from memory and chooses the brand with the most positive connections.
- *Compensatory heuristic*: The consumer bases his/her purchasing decisions on the attributes and benefits he/she values most.
- *Conjunctive heuristic*: Conjunctive heuristic refers to the consumer practising a noncompensatory strategy by considering only those elements that meet or exceed standards.
- *Product stimulation*: The consumer is now favourably stimulated towards the product in order to be motivated to act on the stimulation by buying the product.
- *Prior stimulation*: Previous stimulation encounters need to be retrieved from memory during this phase.
- *Integrated stimulation*: Product stimulation and prior stimulation are integrated to form an integrated stimulation which is a process “during which the online consumer acquires an internal motivation towards the last level of the online consumer response process” (Hanekom 2006:220).

5.5.8 Conative/behavioural level

The conative or behavioural level signifies the last level in the consumer response process as depicted by Hanekom's (2006) theoretical framework for online consumer response. During this final level, the consumer usually acts in a certain manner by buying the product, using the service or approaching the organisation. According to Hanekom (2006), the conative or behavioural level consists of the following phases:

- *Memory: recognition:* Previous WBCC messages should be retrieved from memory and assist in deciding on the way in which the consumer is going to act towards the product or service.
- *Memory: recall:* The specific product message is remembered during this phase and the consumer successfully recalls the message while comprehension takes place as he/she assigns meaning to the elements of the message content and forms new representations which can also be stored in memory.
- *Conviction and preference:* During the conviction and preference phase, the consumer remembers the claims in the WBCC message to be true – hence suggestive of successful persuasion and bases his/her conviction and preference on this experience.
- *Action:* The consumer now starts behaving in a particular manner, thus engaging in a specific action.
- *Trial:* The consumer tries out the product or service during the trial phase.
- *Purchase:* After the consumer has tried out the product or service, he/she might purchase it or use the service advertised.
- *Adoption:* If the consumer is pleased with the product, he/she will probably purchase the same product or use the same service during a subsequent encounter.
- *Commitment and loyalty:* Commitment and loyalty will only follow once the consumer is satisfied with the product that he/she has purchased or the service he/she has used.

Hanekom (2006) thus proposed a theoretical framework for online consumer response consisting of eight online consumer response levels, namely the pre-exposure level, exposure level, perception level, cognitive level, interactive level, affective/emotional level, decision-making level and conative/behavioural level. It was argued that consumers go through each of these consumer response levels during their response process and subsequently through several integrated phases.

The next model, the internal consumer response process conceptual model proposes an internal response process which indicates consumer information

processing in terms of several levels and phases as well as the variables that could alter or influence this process.

5.6 THE INTERNAL CONSUMER RESPONSE PROCESS: AN INTEGRATED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

In an extended study based on Hanekom's (2006) theoretical framework for online consumer response, Hanekom and Barker (2009:138) proposed an internal integrated consumer response model. The purpose of this model is to include variables that alter the response process and to indicate an adjustment to the general simplistic linear and sequential manner in which consumer response is normally depicted by means of the following: (1) proposing a paradigm shift from advertising consumer response to integrated marketing communication response; (2) systematising existing consumer response models by arranging them into three proposed paradigms; and (3) depicting eight internal consumer response levels, consisting of different internal consumer response phases.

The focus of Hanekom and Barker's (2009) model is on the internal consumer response process which results from integrated marketing communication exposure, the move towards integrated communication, integrated marketing communication and existing consumer response models. This move contextualised consumer response in terms of moving towards using a synergistic and integrated perspective on consumer response processes, thereby including integrated marketing communication messages instead of only advertising messages. The main contribution of this model is its categorisation of existing consumer response models into three main paradigms and "developing an integrated marketing communication internal consumer response model which identifies variables which could alter internal consumer response at each individual consumer response level" (Hanekom & Barker 2009:139).

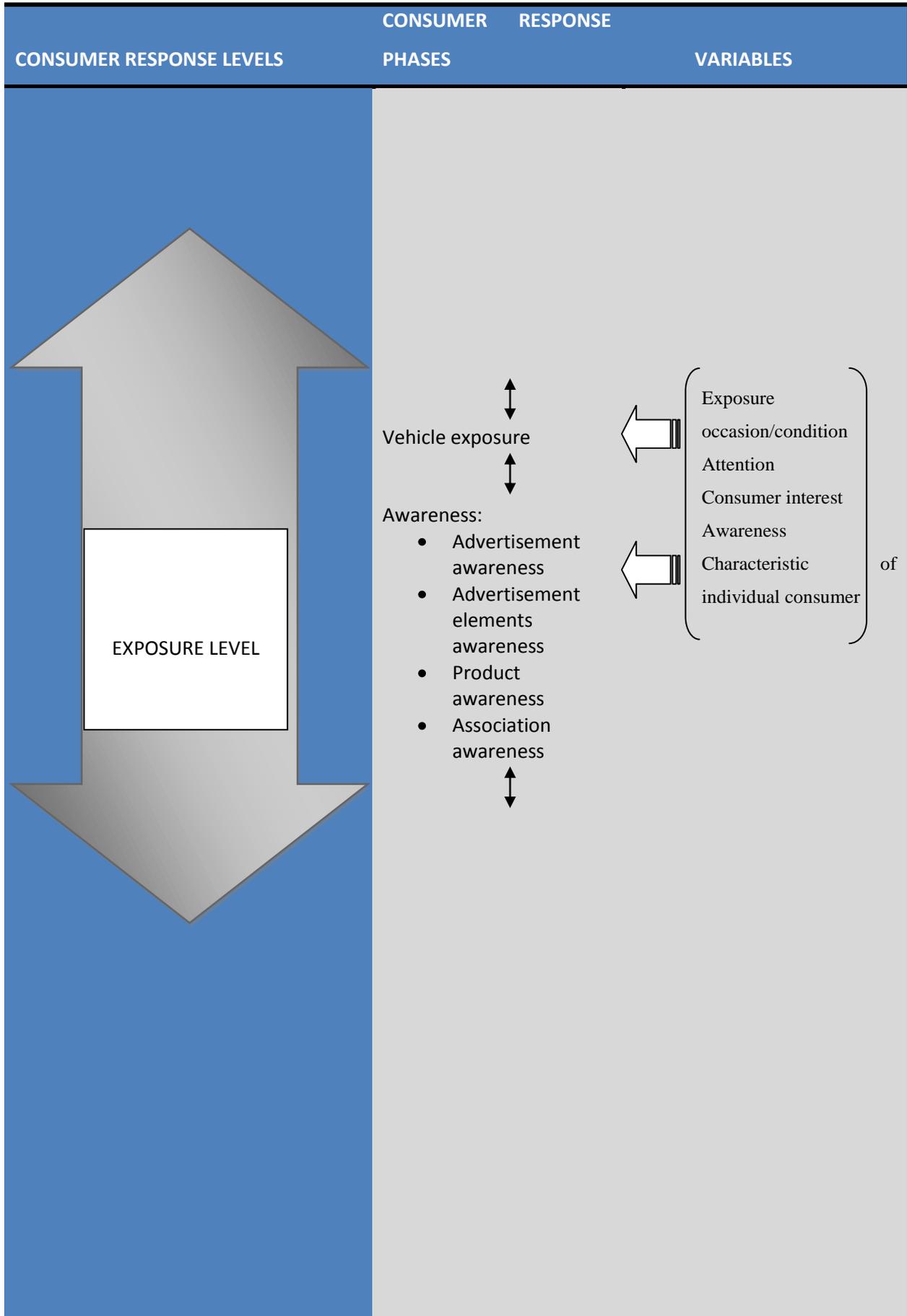
In the context of this chapter, the following definition of integrated internal consumer response proposed by Hanekom and Barker (2009:139) is relevant:

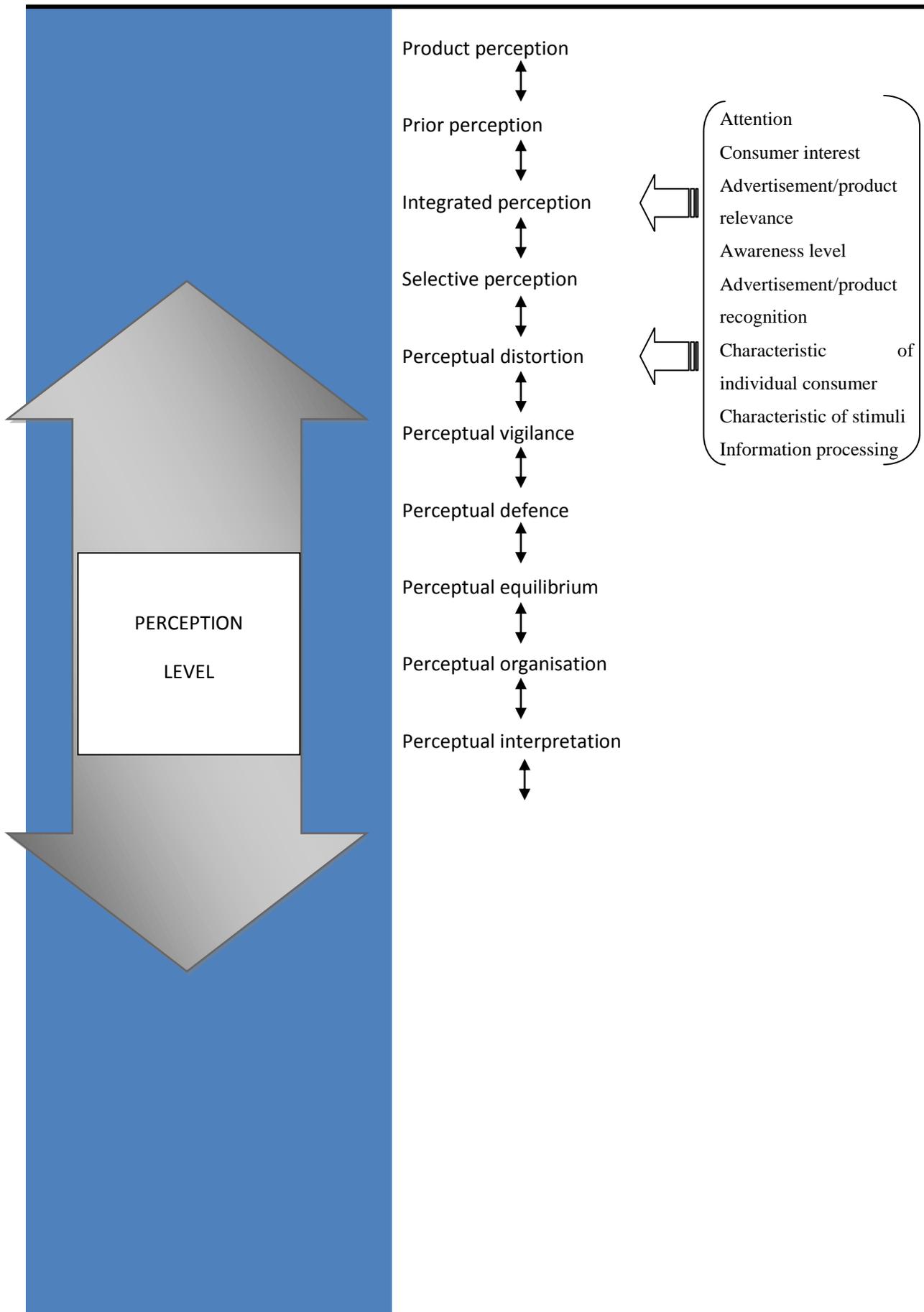
Integrated internal consumer response is an internal response process which is dependent on diverse variables which could alter the sequence of the response levels and phases. Consumers proceed through these when exposed to integrated marketing communication messages with the intent of moving them through certain internal response phases and stages prior to purchasing a product, using a service or proceeding to a certain type of action.

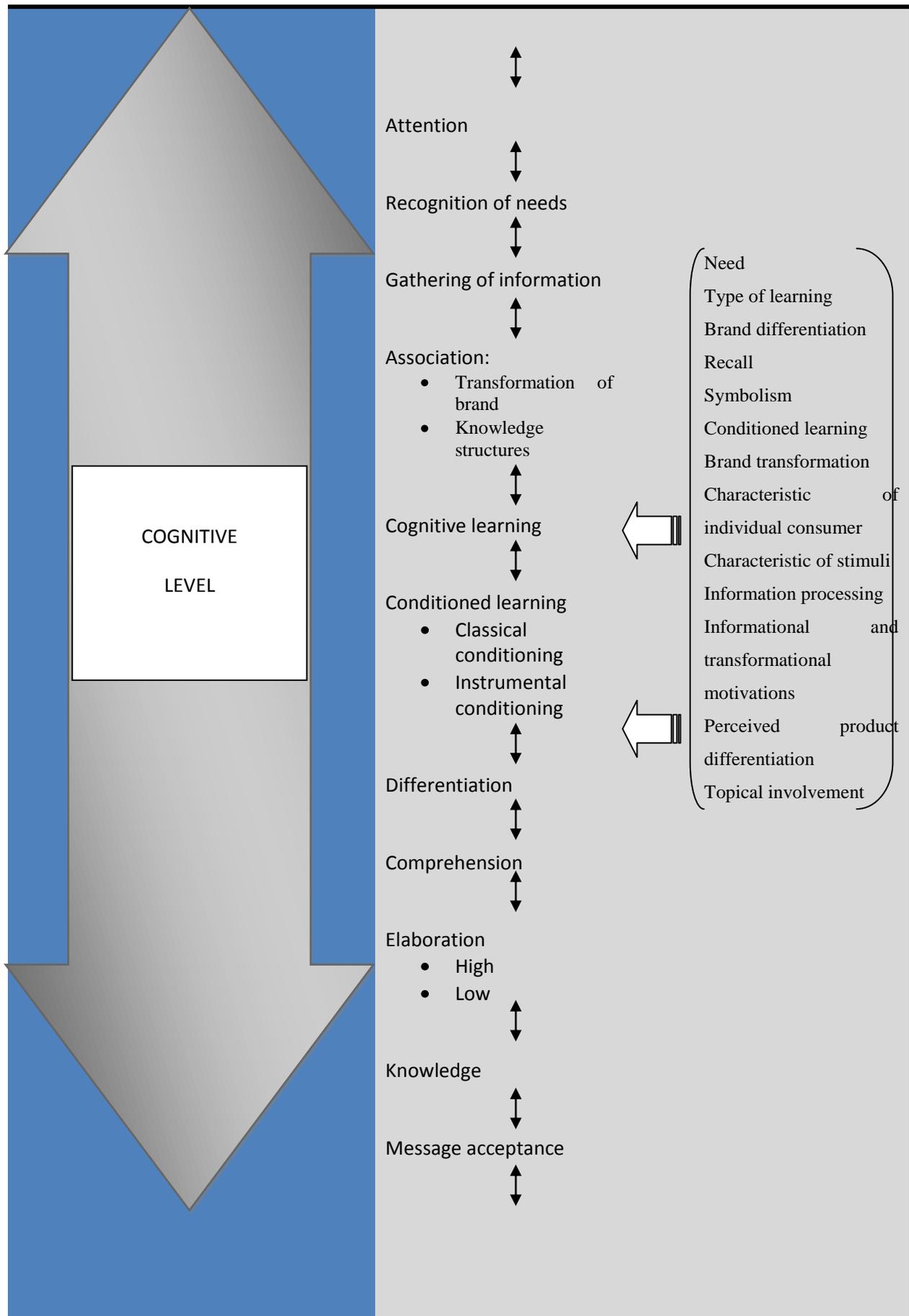
Hanekom and Barker (2009) based their three-order paradigmatic classification on the diverse features of the existing traditional consumer response models. This classification was used in section 5.4 of this chapter to provide a categorisation whereby the existing consumer response models could be discussed and presented chronologically, and will not be repeated here.

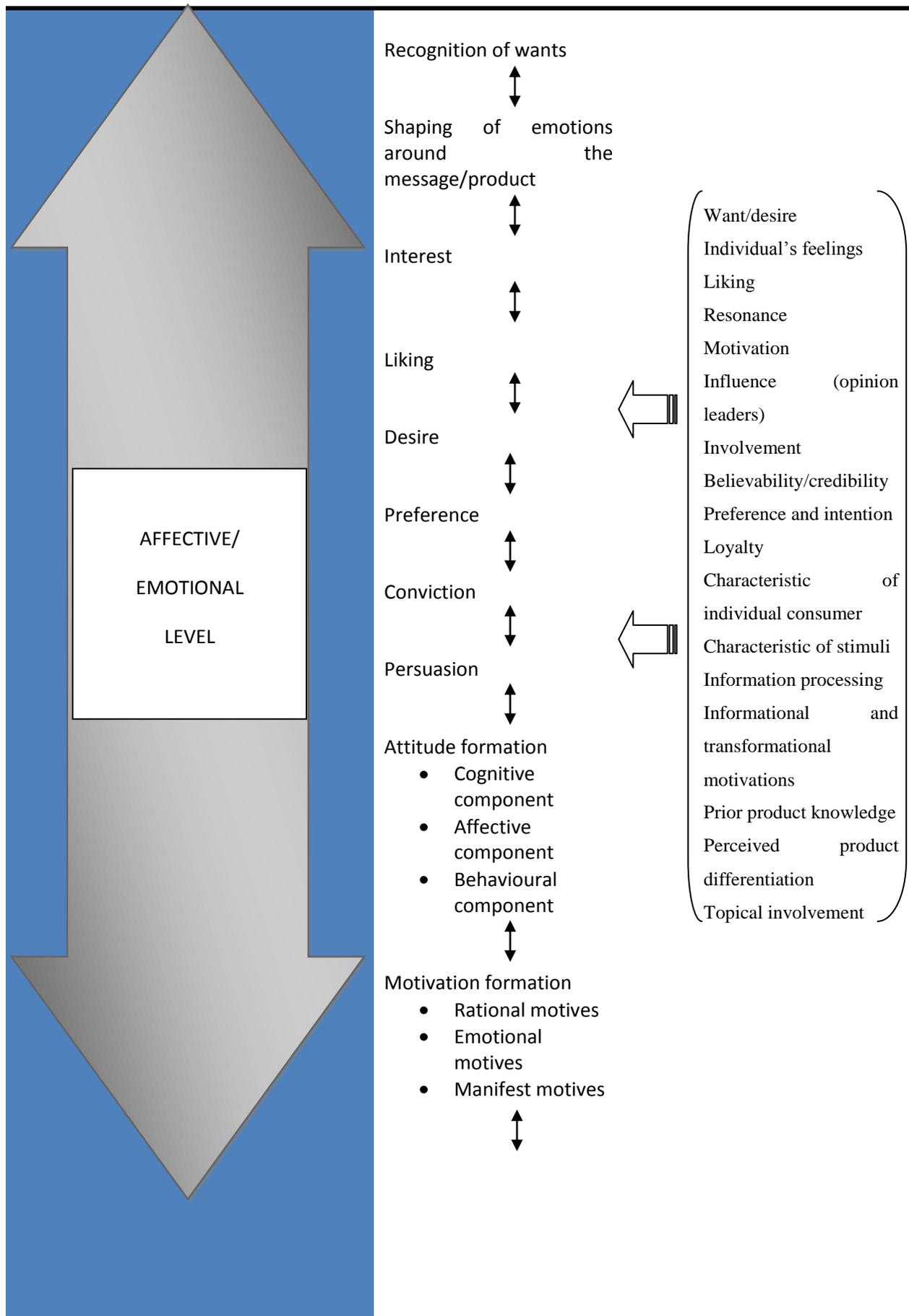
The main thrust and contribution of Hanekom and Barker's (2009) model are that it consists of six consumer response levels and various response phases. These levels and phases recognise and incorporate variables to explain the influence of each variable on each different response level and phase, realising the impact that each variable has on the order or sequence in which consumers move through the different response levels and phases.

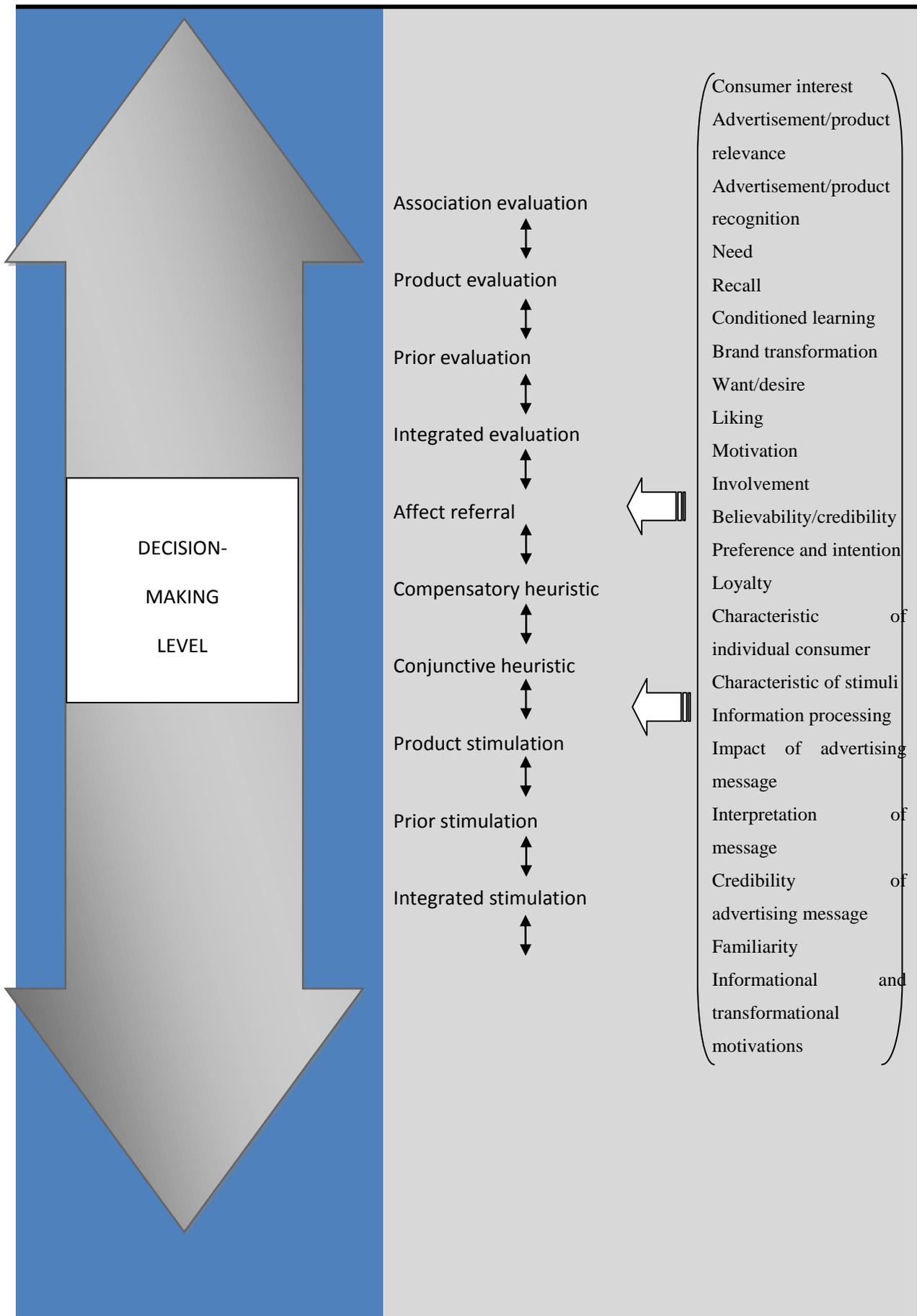
Hanekom and Barker's (2009) integrated internal consumer response model is illustrated in figure 5.11 and clearly indicates the transactional manner (the alternative ordering of the consumer's progression through the levels) in which consumers sometimes simultaneously move through the different levels and phases of consumer response, providing a comprehensive process from an integrated marketing communication perspective.











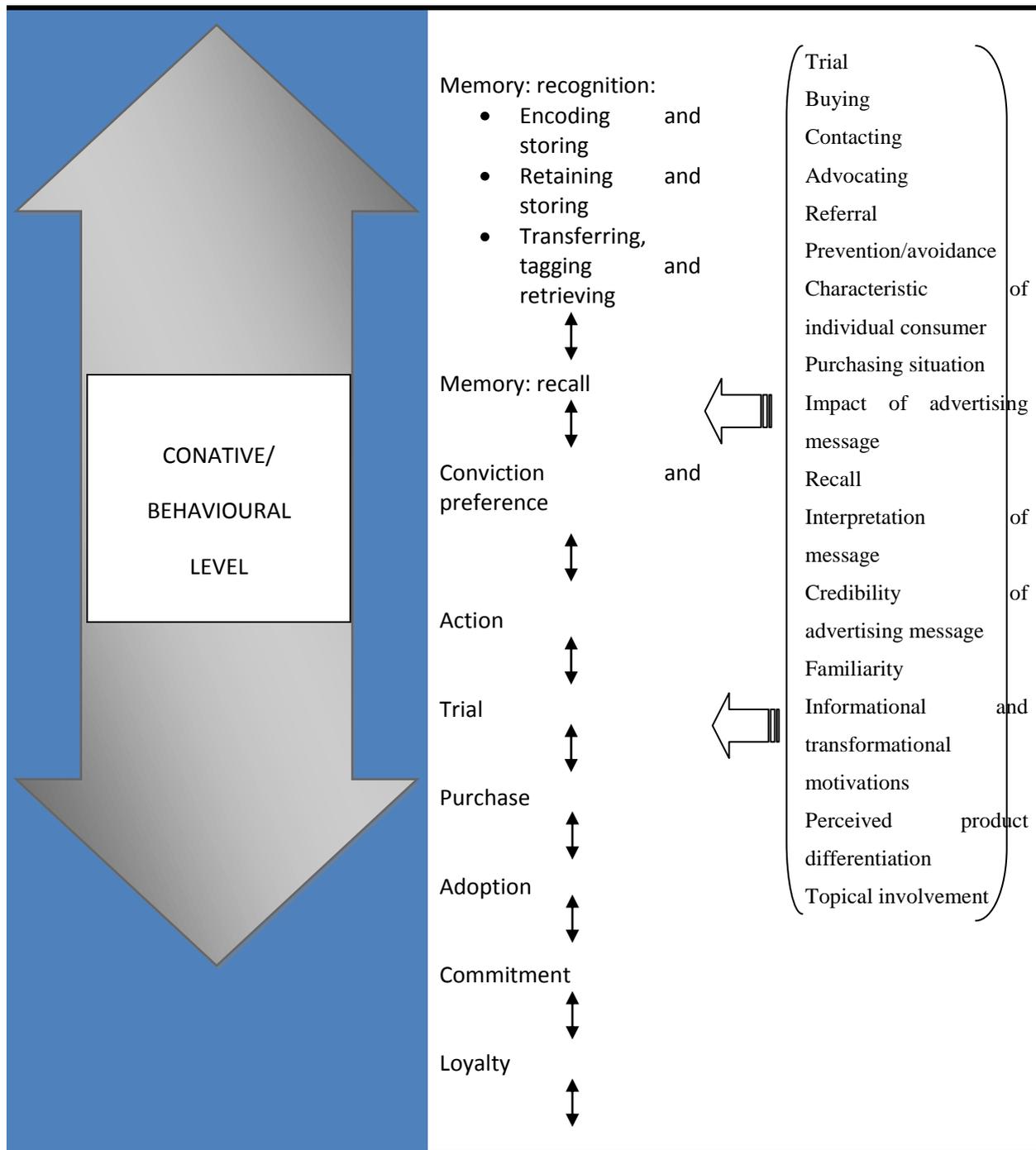


Figure 5.11: The integrated marketing communication internal consumer response model (Hanekom & Barker 2009:157)

The main thrust of this model is to present consumer response as a transactional process from an integrated marketing communication perspective, including several variables that influence this process and identifying variables that influence the internal consumer response process.

5.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter elaborated on the online consumer information decision-making model developed in the previous chapter and expanded on the processing stage of that model in order to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers respond to and process information.

The chapter commenced by conceptualising consumer information processing and response by indicating the mental and cognitive processing approaches which are represented by the traditional consumer response hierarchy models. This chapter then theoretically grounded and chronologically depicted the development of consumer information-processing and response research and literature by discussing the traditional offline consumer information-processing and response models, namely the AIDA model, the hierarchy of effects model, the innovation adoption model, the information processing model, the three-orders model of information processing, the FCB planning model, the integrated information response model, the association model of the advertising communication process, the facets model of effects and the elaboration likelihood model. In order to provide an online perspective, Hanekom's (2006) theoretical framework for online consumer response was discussed, as well as Hanekom and Barker's (2009) integrated internal consumer response model to highlight variables that influence the consumer information and response processes.

The next chapter interprets the main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour models and theories, focusing specifically on their application to online consumer behaviour.

CHAPTER 6: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: OFFLINE AND ONLINE PERSPECTIVES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided theoretical explanations of consumer information processing and response and indicated how consumers in the offline and online environments respond to and process information by moving through a complex transactional response hierarchy, with the main focus on internal information-processing and response processes.

This chapter focuses on the existing offline and online theoretical underpinnings of consumer behaviour, thereby addressing secondary research objective 7, namely to identify, explore and describe the main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour.

Both the offline and online consumer behaviour models and theory are based on specific cognitive psychological and social behavioural predictive (Ajzen & Fishbein 1970) theoretical foundations and familiar social psychological concepts. It is proposed in this chapter that most of the theoretical foundations and premises on which the theory of consumer behaviour are grounded are obtained from the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969; Ajzen & Fishbein 1970; Ajzen & Fishbein 1972; Fishbein & Ajzen 1973; Ajzen & Fishbein 1974), the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen & Madden 1986; Ajzen 1991) and the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis 1989).

The chapter commences with a brief contextualisation of online consumer behaviour models which are presented in the literature in a pure purchasing context. These models are included in a summarised format for contextualisation purposes and to provide a few theoretical constructs that may be useful in developing a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour in a subsequent chapter. The key theoretical premises of the models are touched on in chronological order,

followed by in-depth discussions of what is arguably the main theoretical foundations of offline and online consumer behaviour.

This chapter therefore establishes the theoretical grounding for offline and online consumer behaviour by indicating the main theoretical thrusts of the theory of reasoned action that explicates attitudinal and normative beliefs as predictors of behavioural intentions and most human behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969; Ajzen & Fishbein 1970; Ajzen & Fishbein 1972; Fishbein & Ajzen 1973; Ajzen & Fishbein 1974; Sheppard et al 1988). This is followed by an elaboration of the major theoretical implications of the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen & Madden 1986; Ajzen 1991; Lim & Dubinsky 2005) as the incorporation of perceived control, attitudes and subjective norms over behavioural achievement as determinants of individuals' intentions and behaviour. The chapter then presents the main theoretical thrusts of TAM of predicting and explaining the use of new technology and information systems by means of two theoretical constructs emphasised throughout the study. These constructs are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as fundamental determinants of system use. The chapter concludes by applying the existing offline and online theoretical foundations to the online context of this study.

6.2 ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: A PURCHASING PERSPECTIVE

Various authors have proposed models and theories for online consumer behaviour from a purchasing perspective (Novak, Hoffman & Yung 2000; Sohn, Joun & Chang 2002; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis & Davis 2003; Chih-Chung & Chang 2005; Martinez-Lopez, Luna & Martinez 2005; Moore, Shaw & Chipp 2005; Sanchez-Franco & Roldan 2005; Stibel 2005; Lee, Fiore & Kim 2006; Hansen 2008; Huang 2008; Kim & Forsythe 2008; Suki, Ramayah & Suki 2008; Benamati et al 2009; Chen & Cheng 2009; Dennis et al 2009; Hu, Sun, Zhang, Zhang, Luo & Huang 2009; McMahan, Hovland & McMillan 2009; Richard, Chebat, Yang & Putrevu 2009; Vazquez & Xu 2009; Wang & Hu 2009; Liu & Yang 2010; Kopetz, Kruglanski, Arens, Etkin & Johnson 2011; Mazaheri, Richard & Laroche 2011). These models and theories are worth mentioning here in a summative manner for contextualisation purposes, but will not be discussed in detail. However, the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen &

Fishbein 1969), the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen & Madden 1986) and TAM (Davis 1989) will be explained in detail in a subsequent section because it is argued, for the purpose of this study and in line with the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches proposed in chapter 2, that these models entail the main, original theoretical premises from which both offline and online consumer behaviour have been derived.

The models indicated in the table below are indicative of customer behaviour in an online purchasing context and are not necessarily consistent with the theoretical thrusts suggested by the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches (chapter 2).

Table 6.1 provides a chronological summary of the researchers in online consumer behaviour and their key theoretical contributions in terms of online consumer behaviour from a purchasing context.

Table 6.1: A chronological summary of online consumer behaviour authors and their key theoretical consumer behaviour constructs from a purchasing context

Author(s)	Key theoretical constructs
Novak et al (2000)	The concept of flow is important in understanding consumer behaviour and online consumer behaviour.
Sohn et al (2002)	The amount of time spent on an online network and conventional marketing communication sources determines the knowledge an individual possesses.
Venkatesh et al (2003)	Three moderators, namely organisational context, user experience and demographic characteristics influence user acceptance of information technology or systems.
Chih-Chung & Chang (2005)	The theory of planned behaviour can be used to measure behavioural intentions in online shopping.
Martinez-Lopez	The central or peripheral route of internet expertise determines

et al (2005)	consumers' affective and behavioural responses.
Moore et al (2005)	The theoretical construct of flow influences internet users' perceptions, motivations and activities.
Sanchez-Franco & Roldan (2005)	There is a distinction between goal-directed and instrumental online users. The latter are motivated by the online process, while the former are motivated by instrumental factors that influence their decision-making process.
Stibel (2005)	Online experiences depend on the manner in which individuals use and process information.
Lee et al (2006)	Consumers' attitude and behavioural intentions are influenced by perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment.
Hansen (2008)	Online consumers' willingness to buy groceries online depends on personal values, attitude, social norms and perceived behavioural control.
Huang (2008)	Online consumers' use intentions are accurately predicted by ease of use, perceived usefulness (constructs of TAM discussed in section 6.5), irritation, surfing experience and entertainment gratification.
Kim & Forsythe (2008)	Sensory-enabling technologies consist of interactivity and customer involvement and can enhance the entertainment value of individuals' shopping experiences.
Suki et al (2008)	The determinants of TAM, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, influence buying intentions.
Benamati et al (2009)	The two major predictors of user intention are trust and technology acceptance.
Chen & Cheng (2009)	Consumers' intention to use and actual product use are significant determinants of their usage behaviour.
Dennis et al (2009)	Factors such as image, attitude, trust, emotional states, interactivity, social factors and consumer traits determine online decision making.
Hu et al (2009)	The constructs of TAM, namely perceived ease of use and

	perceived usefulness, used in addition to perceived entertainment and perceived risk influence online consumers' attitudes towards online shopping.
Jin et al (2009)	Consumer decision making is linked to image theory which predicts decision making in terms of different stages.
McMahan et al (2009)	Online consumer behaviour and consumers' perceptions about interactivity differ according to gender.
Richard et al (2009)	Consumers' attitudes and prepurchase evaluations are determined by exploratory behaviour, website involvement, web atmospherics and internet experience.
Vazquez & Xu (2009)	Online consumer behaviour is influenced by attitudes, motivations and information searches.
Wang & Hu (2009)	Online consumers' website behaviour is determined by their increasing satisfaction stemming from website operation.
Liu & Yang (2010)	The four key building blocks of online consumer behaviour are information, intention, adoption and evaluation.
Kopetz et al (2011)	Online consumer behaviour is goal driven and constitutes cognitive constructs that are chronologically active.
Mazaheri et al (2011)	Emotions such as pleasure, arousal and dominance impact on perceptions of site atmospherics such as informativeness, effectiveness and entertainment.

Although these theoretical arguments provide a theoretical starting point for understanding online consumer behaviour, it is argued that they are not necessarily applicable to the process of online consumer behaviour in terms of web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes. This is because they are presented in a pure purchasing context, which is in contrast to the informational and web-based communication exposure focus of this study. However, some of these theoretical constructs can arguably assist and be applied to the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches of this study in the development of a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. The author selected the theoretical perspectives in the subsequent sections to be elaborated on as it is argued that the

relevance to the context of this chapter and study were in terms of their original theoretical contributions, specifically consumer acceptance, use and behaviour.

6.3 THE THEORY OF REASONED ACTION AND ITS EXTENSIONS: OFFLINE FOUNDATIONS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

The main thrust of the theory of reasoned action depicted in figure 6.1 is primarily motivational (Ajzen & Madden 1986) and predicts behavioural intention and behaviour in social situations based on the following theoretical constructs as identified by Ajzen and Fishbein (1969), Ajzen and Fishbein (1970), Ajzen and Fishbein (1972), Fishbein and Ajzen (1973), Ajzen and Fishbein (1974), Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) and Sheppard et al (1988): behavioural intention prediction, attitudes and subjective norms (normative beliefs), motivation and the intention-behaviour relationship.

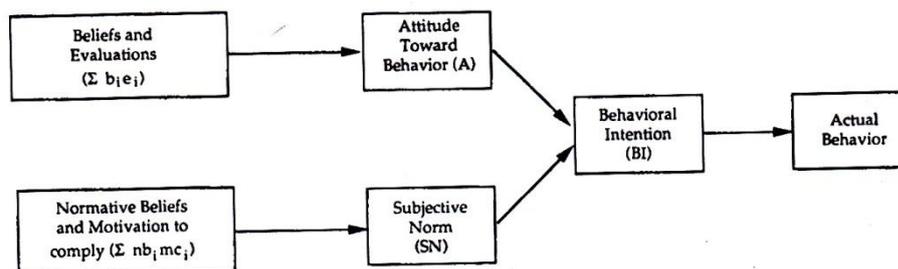


Figure 6.1: The theory of reasoned action (Davis et al 1989:984)

Ajzen and Fishbein (1969; 1970; 1972; 1974) and Fishbein and Ajzen (1973), in their proposition of the theory of reasoned action, the theoretical model of behavioural prediction and the theoretical model of *behavioural intention prediction*, explicate that “behavioral intentions for single acts as well as for acts in dichotomous and multiple choice situations were a function not only of attitudes toward the acts but also of normative beliefs with respect to those behaviors” (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969:400). Also, “a person’s *behaviour (B)* is a function of his *behavioral intention (BI)* which is determined by his attitude toward the act (A-act) and by his beliefs about the expectations of the other player, i.e., social normative beliefs (NBs)” (Ajzen & Fishbein 1970:466). Sheppard et al (1988:325) further indicate that “a behavioral

intention measure will predict the performance of any voluntary act, unless intent changes prior to performance or unless the intention measure does not correspond to the behavioral criterion in terms of action target, context, time-frame and/or specificity”. These theoretical statements thus relate to the main theoretical thrust of the theory of reasoned action of predicting intentions and behaviour by means of the individual’s intention to perform the act in question. This intention is a function of the individual’s attitude towards the specific act, as well as his/her attitude towards his/her perception of the expectations of relevant others, multiplied by the individual’s motivation to comply with norms (Ajzen & Fishbein 1974).

In their presentation of the theory of reasoned action, Ajzen and Fishbein (1969; 1970;1972;1974) and Fishbein and Ajzen (1973) make use of specific theoretical constructs to explain attitudinal and behavioural intention prediction based on subjective norms. For the purpose of this discussion, these key theoretical constructs and explanations are summarised in table 6.2 by the author:

Table 6.2: A summary of the key theoretical constructs of the theory of reasoned action

Theoretical key	Explanation
NBp	An individual’s personal beliefs – also referred to as personal normative beliefs
NBs	An individual’s beliefs of the expectations of significant others in terms of the individual’s behaviour in specific situations – also referred to as social normative beliefs
BI	The individual’s intentions in terms of the behaviour or action he/she is engaging in – also referred to as behavioural intentions
B	The individual’s actual behaviour – also referred to as overt behaviour
A-act	The individual’s attitude towards behaviour in a certain situation
Mcs	The individual’s motivation to comply with social normative beliefs – that is, others’ expectations of his/her behaviour in a certain situation

Ao	The individual's attitude towards a specific object in a certain behavioural situation
Mc	The individual's motivation to comply with the norms stipulated in a specific situation

The theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969; 1970; 1972; 1974) and Fishbein and Ajzen (1973) thus succeeds in predicting behavioural intention and intention of an individual's single behaviour in terms of his/her *attitudes* and *subjective norms* towards a specific behaviour. Normative beliefs (subjective norms) and attitudes thus need to be taken into consideration when predicting behavioural intentions and overt behaviour. The immediate concern of the theory of reasoned action is therefore to predict the behavioural intention that intercedes overt behaviour. This is based on the notion that *behavioural intentions* are the result of attitudes towards performing a specific action in a specific situation guided by the norms that direct that behaviour and multiplied by the *motivation* that steers compliance with those norms. It is inferred that the main determinants of overt behaviour are attitudes, subjective norms and intentions towards the behaviour.

Intention-behaviour relationship

For the purpose of explicating the relationship between an individual's intention to behave in a specific manner and the actual behaviour that follows, Ajzen and Fishbein (1969) contend that during *behavioural intention situations*, the normative component includes the individual's personal beliefs about what he/she should be doing in a specific situation (NBp), as well as his/her perception of what others expect him/her to do (*social normative beliefs* – NBs). In addition, the theory of reasoned action identifies other situational variables and personality characteristics that could influence behavioural intentions (BI) if they are related to the attitude towards the behaviour in a given situation (A-act), the individual's personal beliefs (NBp) and what others believe he/she should do in a particular situation (NBs) (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969).

Regarding the intention-behaviour relationship, Sheppard et al (1988:325) posit that the theory of reasoned action is particularly applicable in the following situations: where the individual is unable to completely control his/her target behaviour, where the particular situation involves a problem with choice, and where the individual's intentions are evaluated during a situation in which intention is not clear.

In their evaluation of the theory of reasoned action, Sheppard et al (1988) highlight the difficulty in distinguishing between *goal intention* and behavioural intention. This distinction has significant implications for the context of this chapter in that it is argued that consumers' goal intention may fail in certain situations, and this failure should be taken into account when predicting goal and behavioural intention in the context of consumer behaviour in the offline and online contexts.

The theory of reasoned action thus indicates *intention* as the antecedent of any behaviour, depending on the following two independent determinants: (1) the *attitude* towards the behaviour, and (2) *subjective norm*, which is a social factor that refers to the "perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour" (Ajzen & Madden 1986:454). Attitude and subjective norm can thus jointly be regarded as determinants of behavioural intention. Ajzen and Madden (1986) further explain that *behavioural and normative beliefs* can influence attitudes towards behaviour and constitute the determinants of subjective norms.

6.3.1 The theoretical model of behavioural intention prediction and factors influencing intention-behaviour relations

Ajzen and Fishbein's (1969) theoretical model of behavioural intention prediction expanded on the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969; 1970; 1972; 1974; Fishbein & Ajzen 1973; Sheppard et al 1988) to include prediction and corresponding behaviours (based on decision theory), and indicates the prediction of behavioural intentions (based on attitudes and normative beliefs). The general purpose of the extended theory of reasoned action is to include aspects of decision theory by predicting behavioural intentions for a single behavioural act that extends beyond normal behavioural situations to choice situations. In this instance, the

attitude towards the object (Ao) relates to the model's predictors and will similarly correspond to behavioural intentions (BI). However, Ajzen and Fishbein (1969) found that when the attitude towards the behaviour in a given situation (A-act), the individual's personal beliefs (NBp) and the individual's belief about what others expect of him/her (NBs) remain constant, in calculating of the correlation between the attitude towards the object (Ao) and the behavioural intention (BI), the relationship should reduce the Ao-BI correlation. In choosing between two or more mutually exclusive behavioural acts, behavioural intention in the choice situation is accurately predicted when the attitude towards each of the alternatives is considered instead of prediction based on one of the behavioural acts alone (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969).

To summarise, this model proposes that an individual's personal normative beliefs (NBp – personal normative beliefs) are accurate predictors of behavioural intention (BI) in addition to attitudes and that attitude towards the behaviour in a given situation is also a significant predictor of the individual's choice behaviour.

6.3.1.1 Attitudes

According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1969:402), the attitude towards a particular behavioural act (A-act) relates to the "individual's attitude toward performing a particular act in a given situation with respect to a given object, rather than his attitude toward the object or class of objects per se". This means that the theory of reasoned action, with regard to attitudes, refers to the individual's attitude in terms of his/her performance of a particular act in a specific situation and not his/her attitude towards a specific person, object or situation.

They further specify that the attitude towards the object (Ao) may in some instances be related to the attitude towards the behaviour in a given situation (A-act) and to the normative aspects of the model.

According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1977:888), attitude is thus one of the many factors that influence behaviour, but in some instances may be unrelated to behaviour in

that it can influence the individual's overall response to a particular object, but does not necessarily predict any particular action. This indicates that behaviour is influenced by intention, which again is a function of an individual's attitude towards behaving in a particular manner. Individuals' actions are influenced by attitude and the nature of those attitudes. Attitudes are further related to a significant other, a physical object, a behaviour or a policy and "represents his evaluation of the entity in question" (Ajzen & Fishbein 1977:889), where behavioural entities consist of the following different elements: the action, the target which specifies the direction of the action, the context in which the action takes place and the time at which the action takes place. Hence, the central notion is that the attitude-behaviour relationship is dependent on the association between attitudinal and behavioural units. Ajzen and Fishbein (1977:913) summarise their theoretical findings on attitude and suggest that low attitude-behaviour relations are a result of incomplete correspondence between attitudinal and behavioural units.

Regarding attitude, Ajzen and Fishbein (1969:413) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1974) found that, in contrast to decision theory, normative beliefs, social norms, habits, motivation, personality characteristics and situational variables should be taken into account when predicting behavioural intentions in addition to the attitudes towards the alternative acts. In addition, personal normative beliefs seem to be more important in predicting behavioural intentions than the attitudes and normative beliefs of significant others. Individuals' intention to perform a specific behaviour furthermore correlates with their "attitudes toward the behaviors" and with their "normative beliefs about the behaviors, multiplied by their motivation to comply with the norms" (Ajzen & Fishbein 1974:1).

The main contributions of the theory of reasoned action and its extensions to attitude are in terms of the accurate prediction of an individual's attitude towards an object, based on the knowledge of the relationship between attitude and behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein 1974:1) and of the individual's beliefs about the "attitude object" and the "evaluative aspects of those beliefs", formulated as the "sum of the beliefs multiplied by their respective evaluative aspects" (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969:402).

It is argued that the theory of reasoned action and its theoretical extensions are in line with existing attitudinal theory and social psychology where attitudes are seen as multidimensional, indispensable concepts in the study of human behaviour. It can determine and predict human behaviour and action, therefore collectively expanding on the original definition of attitude by including cognitive, affective and conative components in addition to the typical factors that include social norms, the expected consequences of the behaviour, situational variables and personality characteristics of the subjects.

6.3.2 The theoretical model of behavioural prediction

In a further expansion of the theory of reasoned action and the previous model, Ajzen and Fishbein (1970) proposed the theoretical model of behavioural prediction (Ajzen & Fishbein 1969). This model explains social behaviour by means of familiar social psychological concepts such as behavioural prediction in asserting that an individual's behaviour (B) is a result of his/her behavioural intention (BI) which is also determined by his/her attitude toward the act (A-act) and by his/her beliefs about what the other individual expects of him/her (social normative beliefs – NBs). The main theoretical thrust of this model lies in the “prediction of behavioral intentions (BI) which are assumed to mediate overt behavior” (Ajzen & Fishbein 1970:467). The focus is on the individual's *intention* to perform a specific act which is based on his/her attitude towards the act (A-act) and his/her beliefs about what is expected of him/her (normative beliefs – NBs). Ajzen and Fishbein (1970) further extend this theoretical notion by multiplying the individual's motivation to comply with the norms (Mc). The normative component of the model thus refers to the individual's perception of what significant others expect of him/her, referred to by Ajzen and Fishbein (1970:467) as “social normative beliefs” (NBs), as well as the “individual's personal normative beliefs (NBp)” (Ajzen & Fishbein 1970:467), which indicate what the individual believes his/her behaviour should constitute, influencing his/her motivation to comply (Mc).

The theoretical model of behavioural prediction (Ajzen & Fishbein 1970:468) determines the following three basic determinants of behaviour: attitudes towards the performance of the behaviour, normative beliefs and the weights of these predictors.

Ajzen and Fishbein's (1970:468) theory thus holds that additional variables such as situational variables and personality characteristics will indirectly influence behavioural intentions and the individual's position towards the object, provided there is comprehension of the person's view on the object and the evaluative aspects of those beliefs.

The theoretical model of behavioural prediction specifically draws attention to the high correlation between behavioural intention (BI) and actual behaviour since behavioural intention (BI) mediates the effects of attitude towards the act (A-act) and normative beliefs about overt behaviour (B). Behavioural intention can therefore accurately predict behaviour, with behavioural intention being predicted by the attitude towards the act (A-act) and of social normative beliefs (NBs).

6.3.3 Normative beliefs and attitudes as determinants of behavioural intentions

Ajzen and Fishbein (1972) expand on the theory of reasoned action by extending it to social behaviour and theorising that *normative beliefs* and *attitudes* impact on behavioural intentions, disparaging the notion that behavioural intentions (BI) mediate overt behaviour (B). According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1972:1), "an individual's intention to perform a given act is a joint function of this attitude toward performing that behavior (A-act) and of his beliefs about what others expect him to do in that situation". These normative beliefs (NB) can also be multiplied by the individual's motivation to comply with norms (Mc). In concurrence with the theory of reasoned action, A-act refers to the individual's attitude towards performing a specified action and not his/her attitude towards the object. The individual's attitude towards the specified action is also determined by the act's perceived consequences and the value of these consequences to that specific individual.

Ajzen and Fishbein (1972) argue that these statements are indicative of the theory's attitudinal component, but the normative component (NB)(Mc) should also be emphasised because, in addition to the attitudinal component, it makes up the main theoretical constructs of the extended theory of reasoned action. They emphasise that social normative beliefs (NBs) refer to how others believe the individual should respond and act in a particular situation, while personal normative beliefs (NBp) relate to the individual's personal beliefs. Ajzen and Fishbein (1972:2) also propose that "a person's normative beliefs are at least in part a function of the perceived attitude of relevant others toward the act in question", being determined by subjective probabilities of the consequences. The main aim of Ajzen and Fishbein's (1972) extension of the theory of reasoned action was therefore to obtain information on the source of normative belief (NB), and they found that others' attitude towards the act (Aact) determines the individual's belief of what others expect of him/her.

6.3.4 The attribution of responsibility

The last extension of the theory of reasoned action proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1973) explains in more detail the *attribution of responsibility* by indicating that "an analysis of the attribution process, the severity or desirability of an act's outcomes will result in dispositional attribution only when the observer assumes intentionality on the part of the actor. Since the situations used in studies of attribution of responsibility for an accident clearly imply lack of intentionality on the part of the actor, no effect of outcome severity would be expected" (Fishbein & Ajzen 1973:149).

The following five levels of responsibility are distinguished: (1) association as the primary level; (2) commission in terms of responsibility for producing a specific effect; (3) foreseeability if the effects have been foreseen; (4) intentionality in terms of being held responsible for the foreseen effects; and (5) justification when the intended behaviour was not justifiable and caused by something uncontrollable. Fishbein and Ajzen (1973) postulate that individual responsibility attribution decreases when attribution to the environment is higher, thus signifying two levels of responsibility

attribution, namely the individual's attribution of responsibility and the attribution of responsibility to the context of the situation in which the behaviour occurs.

6.4 THE THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR: AN OFFLINE FOUNDATION OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Ajzen and Madden's (1986) theory of planned behaviour (figure 6.2) explains and predicts the complexities of social human behaviour in specific contexts by incorporating perceived control, attitudes and subjective norms over behavioural achievement as determinants of individuals' intentions and behaviour. They affirm that "as expected, the theory of planned behavior permitted more accurate prediction of intentions and goal attainment than did the theory of reasoned action" (Ajzen & Madden's 1986:453). The main theoretical thrust that serves as an extension of the theoretical premises of the theory of reasoned action lies in the indication of perceived behavioural control or cognitive self-regulation (Ajzen & Madden 1986:180; Lim & Dubinsky 2005) as a significant determinant in the prediction of intentions and ultimately behaviour.

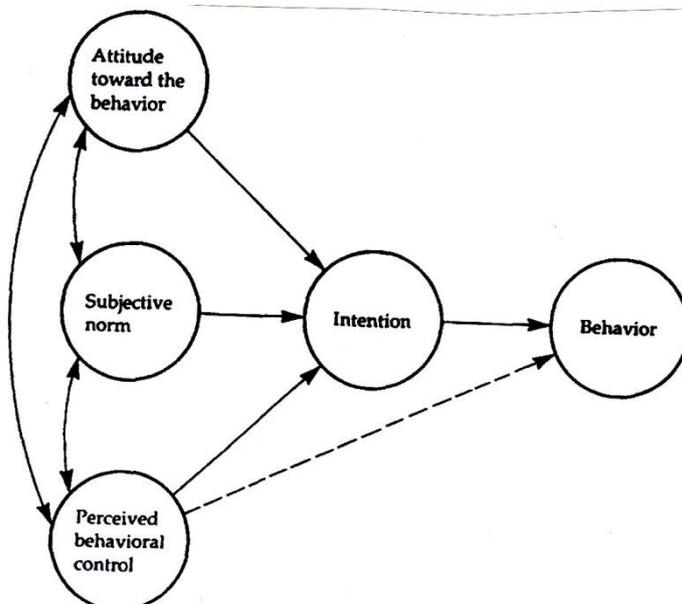


Figure 6.2: The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991:182)

The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen & Madden 1986; Ajzen 1991), as an expansion on the theory of reasoned action, primarily considers the following main theoretical constructs: boundary conditions and behavioural prediction, behavioural control and aggregation, behavioural intention and beliefs. These will be discussed below.

6.4.1 Boundary conditions and behavioural prediction

Ajzen and Madden (1986) and Ajzen (1991) suggested the theory of planned behaviour to address the problems relating to the theory of reasoned action's *boundary conditions* and the emphasis on general dispositions as predictors of human behaviour in certain situations. According to the theory of reasoned action, the connection between intention and behaviour depends on the following three prerequisites (Ajzen & Madden 1986:455):

- The generality of the intention measure must correspond to the behavioural criterion.
- For the purpose of assessing the intention, it must not have changed between the time it is assessed and the time when the behaviour is observed.
- The observed behaviour must be under volitional control.

According to Ajzen and Madden (1986), behaviours can be described on a continuum ranging from behaviours, at the one extreme, that encounter only a few control problems, and behaviours over which individuals have little control, at the other. Behaviours that are intended and planned and have a certain degree of uncertainty are labelled *goals* (Ajzen & Madden 1986:456).

In addition, the theory of planned behaviour is proposed in reaction to the theory of reasoned action's proposition that *intention is the sole predictor of behaviour*. Ajzen and Madden (1986:456) argue that intention as a sole predictor of behaviour will be insufficient when "control over the behavioral goal is incomplete". Internal factors such as adequate planning, skills, abilities, knowledge, normative influences (compliance with others' expectations), informational influences (acceptance of

informational influences) (Lim & Dubinsky 2005:837) and external factors (such as dependence of the behaviour on the cooperation of other people, opportunity and time determine the control over the intended behaviour), and hence, the capability of the individual to control behaviour, should be taken into account. Accordingly, individuals' perceived control over their behaviour is increased with an increase in resources and opportunities.

6.4.2 Behavioural control and aggregation

Ajzen and Madden's (1986) theory of planned behaviour assumes that perceived *behavioural control* has motivational implications in that resources and opportunities do not necessarily form behavioural intentions. It further proposed that perceived behavioural control correlates with attitude and subjective norm with perceived behavioural control entirely mediated by intention, which in turn is a prerequisite for goal-directed behaviour. Behaviour can further be influenced by perceived behavioural control via intentions, thus forming a direct association between perceived behavioural control and behaviour. However, an association between perceived behavioural control and behaviour can be dependant not only on intention, but also on behavioural control that is thus not mediated by intention.

Based on the theoretical extensions of the theory of reasoned action described above, Ajzen (1991) concluded that the emphasis of the theory of reasoned action on attitude as a major predictor of human behaviour should be reassessed to include *aggregation* of specific behaviour across specific occasions. Ajzen (1991:180) clarifies the meaning of the concept of aggregation by suggesting that not only specific general dispositions influence behaviour, but also that behaviour is more likely to be influenced by various other factors unique to a specific situation.

A central factor in the theory of planned behaviour is the individual's intention to engage in specific behaviour, also indicating the motivational factors that precede behaviour. According to Ajzen (1991), behavioural intention can only predict behaviour if the behaviour is under volitional control (ie when an individual can decide whether or not to perform the specific behaviour). Behaviour thus depends on

motivation or intention and the ability or behavioural control exercised during the specific action. Ajzen (1991:183) further distinguishes between behavioural control and *perceived* behavioural control, which plays an important role in the theory of planned behaviour. Perceived behavioural control refers to “people’s perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest” (Ajzen 1991:183).

According to the theory of planned behaviour, a combination of perceived behavioural control and behavioural intention can predict behaviour. Ajzen (1991:185) identifies the following conditions as prerequisites for accurate behavioural prediction:

- Intention and perceived behavioural control measures should correspond to the predicted behaviour.
- Intentions and perceived behavioural control should remain constant between assessment and observation.
- The perceptions of behavioural control should reflect control.

6.4.3 Behavioural intention

Although intention is not seen as the sole predictor of *behavioural intentions* and behaviour in general, it still plays a key role in predicting behavioural intentions. Ajzen (1991:188) thus identifies the following three determinants of intention:

- *Attitude toward the behaviour*: The attitude towards the behaviour refers to the favourable and unfavourable evaluation of the individual’s behaviour. In their application of the theory of planned behaviour to a marketing context, Lim and Dubinsky (2005) suggest that because there is a causal relationship between attitude and behavioural intention, it can be regarded as one of the strongest predictors of consumers’ buying behaviour.
- *Subjective norm*: Subjective norm refers to the social pressure put on an individual to either perform or not perform the specific behaviour. Lim and Dubinsky (2005:840) apply subjective norm to a marketing context, suggesting that subjective norm refers to a group or significant others’ influences on the individual’s behaviour.

- *Perceived behavioural control*: Perceived behavioural control refers to the individual's perception of the difficulty or ease of the behaviour, which is regarded by Lim and Dubinsky (2005:841) in a marketing context as internal factors that describe an individual's confidence as well as his/her self-efficacy.

Hence Ajzen (1991:188) predicts that “as a general rule, the more favourable the attitude and subjective norm with respect to a behaviour, and the greater the perceived behavioral control, the stronger should be an individual's intention to perform the behaviour under consideration”. It is argued that the prediction in terms of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control will fluctuate, depending on the behavioural occasion and subsequent situation.

6.4.4 Beliefs

In addition to the above attempts to explain human behaviour by predicting attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, Ajzen (1991) proposes that relevant information and *beliefs* should be added as additional determinants to establish individual intentions and specific actions. According to Ajzen (1991:189) these are as follows:

- *Behavioural beliefs*: Behavioural beliefs specifically influence individuals' attitudes towards a type of behaviour.
- *Normative beliefs*: Normative beliefs can be regarded as the determinants of subjective norms.
- *Control beliefs*: The theory of planned behaviour includes control beliefs as a basis for perceptions of behavioural control.

6.5 THE TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL (TAM): AN ONLINE FOUNDATION OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

In order to predict and explain user acceptance, intentions and behaviour, some researchers have suggested intention models from social psychology (Davis et al 1989:983) and the theory of reasoned action. Davis (1989) however, furthered these

notions by developing TAM (figure 6.3) from different theoretical perspectives such as the expectancy theory, self-efficacy theory, behavioural decision theory, diffusion of innovations theory and marketing and human-computer interaction theory, using the theory of reasoned action as the main theoretical foundation.

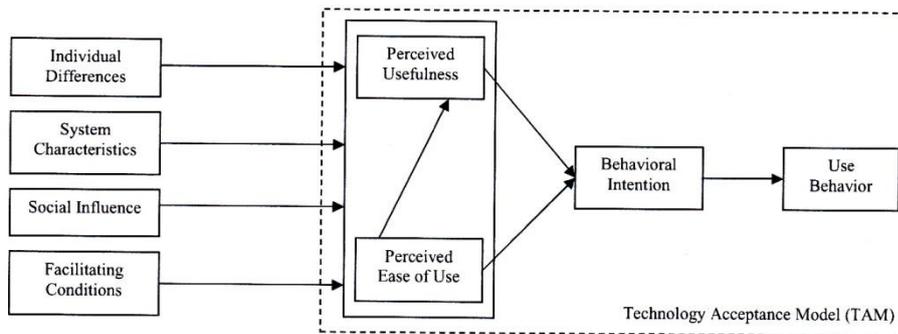


Figure 6.3: TAM (Venkatesh & Bala 2008:276)

TAM (King & He 2006) built on the theory of reasoned action by indicating additional external factors to perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use that influence individuals' intentions and behaviours. These include system design characteristics, cognitive styles, personality variables, task characteristics, the nature of the development process, political influences and organisational structure (Davis et al 1989:984). TAM is thus an adaptation of the theory of reasoned action “specifically tailored for modelling user acceptance of information systems” (Davis et al 1989:985) in order to explain computer acceptance, user behaviour and technological innovation (King & He 2006), based on the following key theoretical constructs: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, behavioural intention, user acceptance, internal factors, external factors and cognitive styles. These constructs will be discussed below.

TAM predicts and explains the use of new technology and information systems by indicating two main theoretical constructs, namely *perceived usefulness* and *perceived ease of use* and the dependent variable, *behavioural intention* (King & He 2006) as fundamental determinants of system use by including attitudes, intentions and actual computer adoption behaviour as important determinants (Davis et al 1989:983).

Davis (1989) developed TAM to address *user acceptance* which was an issue that required explanation and investigation and because of a shortage of methods for determining the major determinants of user acceptance and, finally, to project a better understanding of why individuals accept or reject new technology and information systems in order to predict individuals' responses. Davis et al (1989) further emphasise the need to identify the *internal factors* (beliefs and attitudes), *external factors* (technical design) and the *cognitive styles* that influence user involvement.

The main theoretical constructs identified by TAM are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, which are discussed below.

6.5.1 Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use

Davis (1989:320) developed TAM to indicate why individuals accept or reject information technology by proposing two variables that explicate this phenomenon:

- *Perceived usefulness*: The concept of perceived usefulness is linked to behavioural decision theory in explaining that individuals will use or not use an application on the basis of their beliefs of the extent to which that particular application will improve their job performances or not. Davis (1989:320) defines perceived usefulness as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance”, while Davis et al (1989: 985) define it as “the prospective user’s subjective probability that using a specific application system will increase his or her job performance within an organisational context”. Individuals will adapt more easily to using information technology when its usage is easy and it enhances their routines (Venkatesh & Bala 2008).
- *Perceived ease of use*: This concept is derived from self-efficacy theory and the adoption of innovation approaches, and it refers to the individuals' beliefs of the simplicity or difficulty of a particular application or system. Davis (1989:320) defines perceived ease of use as “the degree to which a person

believes that using a particular system would be free of effort”, while Davis et al (1989:985) and Venkatesh and Bala (2008:275) likewise define it as “the degree to which the prospective user expects the target system to be free of effort”. TAM claims that if one application is easier to use than another, an individual will tend to use the easier one.

TAM thus regards perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as the primary determinants of behaviour, especially in terms of the adoption of new technology and information systems. Davis (1989:334) concludes that a significant theoretical finding of TAM is that “perceived usefulness is a strong correlate of user acceptance and should not be ignored by those attempting to design or implement successful systems”.

It is reiterated that TAM is based on three main theoretical constructs, namely the prediction of behavioural intention based on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the online context of this study, these three theoretical constructs are considered to predict individuals’ computer and information system use, their intentions to use computers and information systems and their perceived ease of use of these systems.

6.5.2 Theoretical extensions of TAM

Venkatesh and Bala (2008:276) extended TAM on the basis of the following three main areas:

- replicating TAM for the purpose of focusing on the psychometric aspects of specific TAM elements
- providing the theoretical underpinnings for the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness theoretical constructs
- expanding TAM by adding more theoretical constructs and determinants of user acceptance and behaviour

Two of their major extensions of TAM are discussed below.

6.5.2.1 TAM 2

Venkatesh and Davis (2000:186) advanced user adoption theory and extended TAM to develop a newer model, TAM 2 (figure 6.4) by explaining perceived usefulness and usage intentions in the context of “social influence and cognitive instrumental processes”.

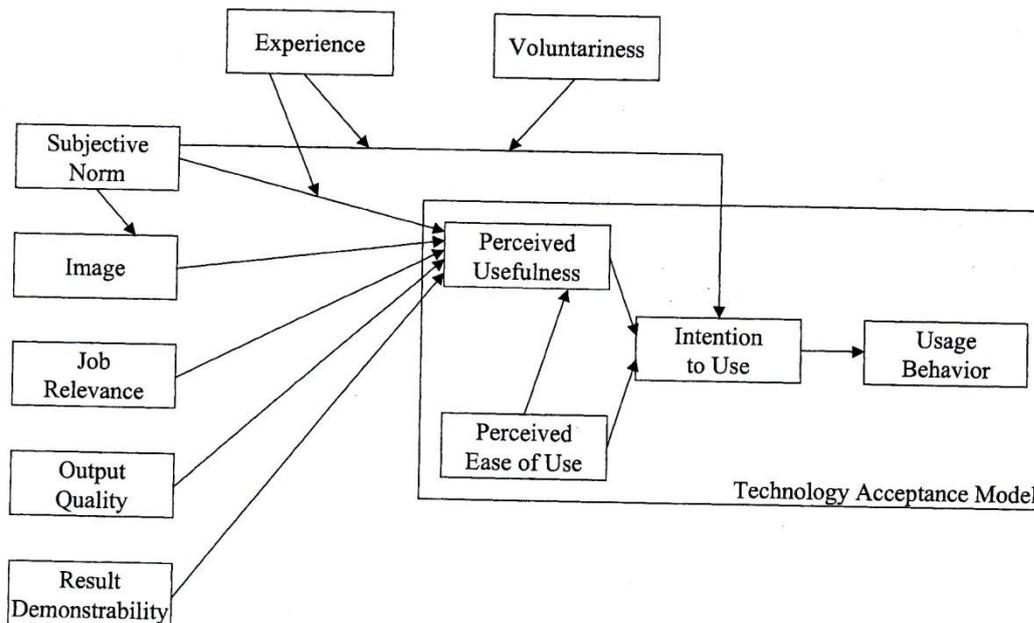


Figure 6.4: TAM 2 (Venkatesh & Davis 2000:188)

TAM 2 specifically identifies the following factors that influence user acceptance (Venkatesh & Davis 2000:186):

- *Social influence processes:* TAM 2 explains the influence of interrelated social forces which affect user acceptance and adoption of information technology and systems. The first one is *subjective norm* which Venkatesh and Davis (2000:187) define as “a person’s perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behaviour in question”. Subjective norm is also identified in the theory of reasoned action as a major determinant of behavioural intention by explaining that individuals will sometimes engage in a certain activity or action not because they themselves believe that they should perform the activity, but because

important others expect them to perform it. However, subjective norm will decrease as system experience increases. The second social force that impacts on user acceptance is *voluntariness* and compliance with social influence. Venkatesh and Davis (2000:188) define voluntariness as “the extent to which potential adopters perceive the adoption decision to be non-mandatory”. The last social force identified by Venkatesh and Davis (2000) is *image*. Individuals usually engage in specific social activity in order to be accepted by the reference group. Thus, according to Venkatesh and Davis (2000:189), image refers to “the degree to which use of an innovation is perceived to enhance one’s ... status in one’s social system”.

- *Cognitive instrumental processes*: TAM 2 explains four cognitive instrumental determinants of perceived usefulness. The first determinant is *job relevance*, defined by Venkatesh and Davis (2000:191) as “an individual’s perception of the degree to which the target system is applicable to his or her job” – in other words, explaining that job relevance is the relevance of the tasks that the system supports. The second cognitive instrumental determinant of perceived usefulness is *output quality*, which refers to “over and above considerations of what tasks a system is capable of performing and the degree to which those tasks match their job goals (job relevance), people will take into consideration how well the system performs those tasks, which we refer to as perceptions of output quality” (Venkatesh & Davis 2000:191). There is thus a relationship between perceived output quality and perceived usefulness. The third cognitive instrumental determinant of perceived usefulness is *result demonstrability*, defined as “tangibility of the results of using the innovation” (Venkatesh & Davis 2000:192), that will influence perceived usefulness. The last cognitive instrumental determinant of perceived usefulness is *perceived ease of use*, which Venkatesh and Davis (2000:192) identify as “a direct determinant of perceived usefulness” that can directly be linked to intention.

Venkatesh and Davis (2000) thus realised the need for research in terms of users’ adoption of information technology and supported the original TAM, which explains usage intentions and behaviour in terms of the theory of reasoned action and the

theory of planned behaviour. In proposing TAM 2, Venkatesh and Davis (2000:187) argued for a better understanding and identification of additional determinants of perceived usefulness in order to gain a better understanding of the influence of these determinants on user experience. This model thus integrated further theoretical constructs from social influence processes such as subjective norm, voluntariness and image and cognitive instrumental processes such as job relevance, output quality, result demonstrability and perceived ease of use, exerting a significant effect on user intentions, despite perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

6.5.2.2 TAM 3

Venkatesh and Bala (2008) extended Davis's (1989) TAM and Venkatesh and Davis's (2000) TAM 2 to develop TAM 3 (figure 6.5), which elaborates on the determinants of user acceptance and behaviour, such as perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Venkatesh and Bala's (2008) TAM 3 denotes a nomological network of the determinants of user adoption and behaviour at an individual level; they then went on to test the model empirically, and finally presented a research agenda for future research on technology acceptance and behaviour. Venkatesh and Bala (2008:274) further justified their development of TAM 3 by indicating that the most common criticisms of the original TAM (Davis 1989) was "the lack of actionable guidance to practitioners".

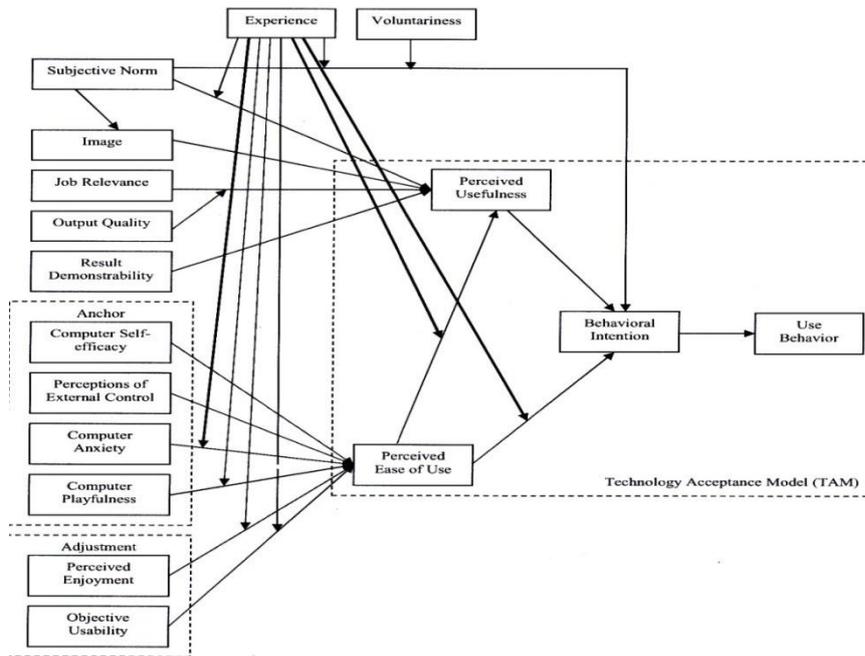


Figure 6.5: TAM 3 (Venkatesh & Bala 2008:280)

In order to synthesise previous research, Venkatesh and Bala (2008) developed a theoretical framework to explain user acceptance and behaviour and thereby integrate the existing body of research on technology acceptance and behaviour. TAM 3's major contribution to technology acceptance and consumer behaviour literature lies in its identification of the following four determinants of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Venkatesh & Bala 2008:276):

- *Individual differences*: Individual determinants such as personality, demographics, traits, gender and age influence an individual's perception of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness.
- *System characteristics*: Each system has prominent characteristics that assist in individuals' development of positive or negative perceptions of a system's usefulness and ease of use.
- *Social influence*: Different social aspects influence individuals' perceptions of the usefulness or uselessness of a specific system.
- *Facilitating conditions*: Facilitating conditions refer to support received from the organisation in terms of the use of different technologies and systems.

Drawing on various theoretical perspectives such as work motivation theory, action identification theory and behavioural decision theory, Venkatesh and Bala (2008) furthermore based their development of TAM 3 on TAM 2's four cognitive instrumental processes that influence perceived usefulness as job relevance, output quality, result demonstrability and perceived ease of use. They likewise based their development of the model on TAM 2's determinants of perceived ease of use, namely computer self-efficacy, computer anxiety, computer playfulness and perceptions of external control or facilitating conditions.

By combining the original TAM and TAM 2, Venkatesh and Bala's (2008) development of TAM 3 provided a complete set of the determinants of individuals' technology acceptance, use and behaviour. TAM 3 theorises that social influence and cognitive instrumental processes are the only theoretical processes that adequately explain the relationship between the determinants of perceived usefulness. In contrast to TAM 2, TAM 3 does not suggest that perceived ease of use will influence perceived usefulness.

In the development of TAM 3, Venkatesh and Bala (2008:281) suggested that experience plays a major role as a determinant of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, and thus added the following three relationships:

- *Perceived ease of use to perceived usefulness, moderated by experience:* This argument is based on action identification theory and suggests that individuals' experience will influence their perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of a specified system.
- *Computer anxiety to perceived ease of use, moderated by experience:* Another original determinant of perceived ease of use is computer anxiety which will decrease as individuals gain experience.
- *Perceived ease of use to behavioural intention, moderated by experience:* Individuals' experience will influence their perception of the ease of use of a system, which will lead to behavioural intention.

6.6 APPLICATION OF THE EXISTING OFFLINE AND ONLINE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TO THE ONLINE CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

6.6.1 Analysis and application of the theory of reasoned action and its extensions

Since the main focus of the *theory of reasoned action* is to predict an individual's behavioural intention and overt behaviour on the basis of his/her attitude towards the particular act and his/her perception of what significant others expect of him/her, it is argued that this applies to consumer behaviour in general, but also specifically to the online context of this study. In the online environment, specifically in terms of web-based communication exposure and behavioural intentions, behaviour per se can arguably be predicted on the basis of the online consumer's attitudes and social normative beliefs (perception of what significant others expect). It is propounded that motivation is an additional important determinant of behavioural intention as well as overt behaviour in that it is guided by the individual's norms. Hence in the online environment, behavioural intention situations may include a normative component which could consist of an individual's personal beliefs as well as his/her perception of what others expect of him/her.

It is hence argued that the theory of reasoned action's main theoretical thrust is linked to the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches proposed in chapter 2 in accurately explicating consumers' internal psychological behavioural processes in terms of behavioural intentions and behaviour per se. Of particular significance in the context of this chapter is the *intention-behaviour relationship* which indicates a strong relationship between an individual's intention to behave or act in a particular situation and his/her ultimate overt behaviour.

With regard to this particular study and in terms of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour that will be proposed in a subsequent chapter, the latter is of particular significance in that a consumer's

prediction of behaving in the online environment can be based on his/her intention to behave in a specific manner.

It is suggested that *the theoretical model of behavioural intention prediction* predicts behavioural intentions and not behaviour per se. These behavioural intention predictions are based on attitudes and normative beliefs, thereby including aspects of decision theory. It is argued that, in the context of online consumer behaviour, this means that predicting behavioural intentions for a single online behavioural act can extend beyond normal online behavioural situations to choice situations. This can arguably be linked to the proposition of the online information decision-making perspective in chapter 4. When the theoretical model of behavioural intention prediction is applied to the online context of this study, it could be argued that an individual's personal normative beliefs may be accurate predictors of his/her behavioural intentions in addition to attitudes.

The *theoretical model of behavioural prediction* is arguably applicable to the online context of this study in that it predicts online behaviour by means of social psychological concepts such as behavioural prediction. It is posited that this could explain an individual's online behaviour in terms of online information and message search and consumption as a result of his/her behavioural intention – in other words, his/her intention to engage with web-based communication messages and information. It is suggested that the individual's intention is also determined by his/her attitude towards the web-based communication act and his/her beliefs about what others expect of him/her.

In terms of *normative beliefs and attitudes as determinants of behavioural intentions*, it is suggested that in the online environment, normative beliefs and attitudes impact on behavioural intentions. In this context, it is necessary to obtain information on the source of the individual's normative beliefs in terms of what significant others expect of him/her.

Furthermore, in the online context of this study, *the attribution of responsibility* means that individual responsibility attribution decreases when attribution to the

online environment is higher. This means that the individual operating in the online environment is attributed less responsibility than the online environment in which he/she functions.

6.6.2 Analysis and application of the theory of planned behaviour

It is argued that the theory of planned behaviour is an extension of the theory of reasoned action because it includes perceived behavioural control, attitude and subjective norm as important factors in predicting behavioural intentions and behaviour and distinguishes three different types of beliefs, namely behavioural, normative and control beliefs.

The predictive powers of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control as the main theoretical constructs of the theory of planned behaviour are suggested by Ajzen (1991) to be applicable to behaviour in many different situations and contexts. For example, Lim and Dubinsky (2005) applied it to the online context to determine consumers' purchase intentions in e-commerce, therefore determining which of the factors play a more decisive role in predicting intention and behaviour in online purchasing.

Since the theory of planned behaviour predicts behaviour, it is propounded that it provides a useful theoretical framework for applying it to the online context of this study in explaining online human behaviour in terms of the prediction of behavioural intention and general behaviour. It is further suggested that the theory of planned behaviour supports some of the predictive behavioural processes that online consumers in the online contexts engage in and will therefore, *inter alia*, be employed in the development of a conceptual integrated theoretical model of online consumer behaviour.

In particular, the theory of planned behaviour indicates perceived behavioural control and cognitive self-regulation as an accurate prediction of intentions and goal attainment. As indicated in the literature, this addresses the problems relating to the theory of reasoned action's boundary conditions. In applying this to the online

perspective of this study, it is posited that online consumers' perceived control that they have over their own behaviours and the self-regulation that occurs cognitively, could arguably accurately predict their intentions in terms of the informational goals they wish to attain in the online environment.

The theory of planned behaviour describes individual behaviour on a continuum ranging from encounters with a few control problems to encounters in which individuals have little control. Hence the theory of planned behaviour identifies internal, information and external influences on behaviour, which opposes the theory of reasoned action's suggestion that intention is the sole predictor of behaviour. The identification of internal, information and external influences on behaviour ties in with the identification of the internal, external and online determinants of consumer behaviour in chapter 3.

The theory of planned behaviour further expands on the theory of reasoned action's viewpoint that attitude is a major predictor of human behaviour, arguing that it should be reassessed to include aggregation of specific behaviour across specific occasions. In this context, aggregation means that behaviour is influenced by various factors unique to the specific situation.

It is proposed that the theory of planned behaviour can be applied to consumer behaviour in the online environment in that online consumers' perceived behavioural control may entirely be intervened by their behavioural intention, which in turn is a prerequisite for goal-directed behaviour.

6.6.3 Analysis and application of TAM and its extensions

The principal contribution of TAM is arguably its application to the online context of this study. TAM is regarded as being relevant to the online context for the following three reasons: the concepts of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are significant determinants of online consumer behaviour; perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use indicate online consumers' perception of the usefulness and ease of use of web-based communication messages and information; and perceived

usefulness and perceived ease of use indicate online consumers' perception of the easiness or difficulty of their engagement with web-based communication messages and information.

Hence TAM's main contribution is that it helps to provide an online context by predicting and explaining how online consumers use new technology (including the internet) and web-based communication messages and information, based on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. The main theoretical thrust of TAM to predict user acceptance and to practise methods to predict and explain use, based on "two specific variables, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, which are hypothesized to be fundamental determinants of user acceptance" (Davis 1989:319), is therefore relevant to the online context proposed in this chapter and study.

Regarding TAM 2, it is argued that its major theoretical findings and the context of social influence and cognitive instrumental processes can be applied to the online environment by explaining online consumers' perceived usefulness of the web-based communication message and their usage intentions in terms of online information. This means that several social forces (for the purpose of this study, these include the external and online determinants of consumer behaviour proposed in chapter 3) have an influence on user acceptance and adoption of information technology and systems in the online environment. This provides a better understanding and identification of additional determinants of user adoption, but arguably also for consumer behaviour, in order to gain a better understanding of the influence of these determinants on user experience.

TAM 3's indication of user acceptance and behaviour theoretically contributes to this study's online context in terms of the comprehensive manner in which it explains the determinants of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as factors that influence individuals' acceptance, usage and behaviour in terms of technological innovation. It is posited that TAM 3's major contribution to this study lies in its identification of four determinants of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, namely individual differences, system characteristics and social influence and

facilitation conditions, which all impact on online consumer behaviour. It should be noted that these determinants are linked to the internal, external and online determinants of consumer behaviour proposed in chapter 3.

6.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter commenced by briefly tabling the online consumer behaviour models developed in a pure purchasing context because it was argued that these models could, to a certain extent contribute some theoretical constructs that could be used in the development of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour.

The online models that were presented in a pure purchasing context were presented in a summative format only because it was argued that the main offline and online theoretical foundations of offline consumer behaviour and online consumer behaviour are the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behaviour and TAM and its extensions. It was postulated that these models and theories help to identify the major theoretical thrusts of offline consumer behaviour and online consumer behaviour, including attitudinal and normative beliefs as predictors of behavioural intentions and most human behaviour; perceived control, attitudes and subjective norms; and perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. The main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour were then applied to the online context of this study.

The next chapter will build on the theoretical underpinnings of the study and develop, propose and identify theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour, specifically based on a summative, interpretivistic analysis and evaluation of the main theoretical findings in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER 7: THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses subproblem 8, namely establishing and proposing theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour, and is based on the theoretical discussions of consumer behaviour from the offline and online perspectives presented in the preceding chapters. Hence of critical significance to the goal of this chapter are the evaluation, integration and summation of the main theoretical criteria of existing perspectives to promote a better understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of consumer behaviour in the online environment according to the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. The theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour are therefore identified through a systematic theoretical analysis of all preceding theories, models and theoretical foundations from an interpretivistic evaluative perspective. The theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour are further based on and provide an overview of existing authors' views on offline and online consumer behaviour and are subsequently applied to the online context of this study. Hence the theoretical criteria specified will function as the structure and theoretical outline of the composition of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour, thereby providing the theoretical underpinnings and a foundation for online consumer behavioural processes.

The chapter commences by (1) providing a summary of the secondary research objectives in relation to the main theoretical criteria; and then proposes theoretical criteria for (2) online consumer behaviour according to the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches; (3) the determinants of online consumer behaviour; (4) online consumer information decision making; (5) online consumer information processing and response; and (6) the theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour.

7.2 A SUMMARY OF THE SECONDARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES IN RELATION TO THE MAIN THEORETICAL CRITERIA

The proposed theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour in this chapter are based on the following main theoretical constructs which are deemed relevant to this study:

- the contextualisation and defining of online consumer behaviour in terms of web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes
- the web-based communication exposure approach
- the internal psychological behavioural processes approach
- the internal determinants of online consumer behaviour
- the external determinants of online consumer behaviour
- the unique online determinants of online consumer behaviour
- a new perspective on consumer decision making, namely an online information decision-making perspective, referring to online consumers' decision-making processes in terms of message exposure and information processing
- decision categories and strategies
- the online consumer information decision-making processes
- the determinants of online consumer information decision making
- consumer decision-making theory
- online consumer information processing and response
- the determinants of online consumer information processing and response
- the conceptualisation of the offline and online theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour
- reasoned action
- behavioural intention prediction
- the factors influencing behavioural intentions and the attributions of responsibility
- planned behaviour

- technology acceptance

Table 7.1 provides a summary of the secondary research objectives in relation to the main theoretical criteria, the relevant theoretical perspectives, the main theoretical approaches and the proposed main theoretical criteria, variables/constructs of online consumer behaviour as set out in the preceding chapters of this study. Table 7.1 also contains a broad summary of the main theoretical criteria/variables/constructs that are significant in the context of this chapter. Subsequent tables and discussions of each main theoretical construct will elaborate on these theoretical criteria/variables/constructs from an online perspective in order to lay the theoretical foundation for the development of a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour.

Table 7.1: Summary of the secondary research objectives in relation to the main theoretical criteria, theoretical perspectives, theoretical approaches and main theoretical criteria/variables/constructs of online consumer behaviour

CHAPTER	SECONDARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES/	THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	THEORETICAL APPROACHES	MAIN THEORETICAL CRITERIA/ VARIABLES/ CONSTRUCTS
Chapter 2: Contextualisation of consumer behaviour: proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes	Secondary research objective 1: To contextualise, develop and propose a new definition and perspective on the concept of online consumer behaviour	Offline Online	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Online consumer behaviour from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches Online consumer behaviour: a proposed web-based communication exposure approach

approaches	Secondary research objective 2: To propose new theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour			Online consumer behaviour: a proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach
Chapter 3: Determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour	Secondary research objective 3: To identify, explore and describe the theory of the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour	Offline Online	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Internal determinants of online consumer behaviour External determinants of online consumer behaviour Online determinants of online consumer behaviour
Chapter 4: Consumer decision making: towards an online information decision-making perspective	Secondary research objective 4: To identify, explore and describe the main thrusts of existing offline consumer decision-making theory Secondary research objective 5: To propose a new perspective on consumer decision making by developing a	Offline Online Online consumer information decision making	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Online consumer information decision making Online decision-making categories and strategies Consumer decision-making theory Determinants of online consumer information decision making

	model for online consumer information decision-making			
Chapter 5: Consumer information processing and response: offline and online perspectives	Secondary research objective 6: To identify, explore and describe offline and online consumer information-processing and response theory and models	Marketing communication Integrated marketing communication Offline Online	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Online consumer information processing and response Determinants of online consumer information processing and response
Chapter 6: Theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour: offline and online perspectives	Secondary research objective 7: To identify, explore and describe the main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour	Cognitive psychological perspective Social behavioural perspective Expectancy theoretical perspective	Web-based communication exposure approach Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	Offline and online theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour Individual reasoned action Behavioural intention prediction Factors influencing behavioural intentions and the attribution of responsibility Planned behaviour Technology acceptance

7.3 THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR FROM THE WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION EXPOSURE AND INTERNAL PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOURAL PROCESSES APPROACHES

Table 7.2 indicates the theoretical perspectives, theoretical approaches, main authors and a summary of the main theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

Table 7.2: Theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches

THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR FROM THE WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION EXPOSURE AND INTERNAL PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOURAL PROCESSES APPROACHES	
Offline perspective	Online perspective
Web-based communication exposure approach	Internal psychological behavioural processes approach
MAIN AUTHORS	
Schiffman & Kanuk (2000); Hoyer & MacInnis (2001); Koufaris (2002); Cheung et al (2003); Assael (2004); Constantinides (2004); Godsmith & Flynn (2004); Blackwell et al (2006); Chaudhuri (2006); Demangeot & Broderick (2007); Chen et al (2008b); Gurau (2008); Koo et al (2008); Dennis et al (2009); Hardesty & Bearden (2009); MacInnis & Folkes (2009); Martinez-Lopez, Cabal, Gazquez-Abad & Rodriguez-Ardura (2009); Taylor & Stratton (2009)	
THEORETICAL CRITERIA	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A new perspective on online consumer behaviour based on existing offline and online perspectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offline perspective • Exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages • Information access and evaluation • Consumption and disposition of online communication experiences • Online behaviour including internal psychological behavioural processes during exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages 2. Online consumer behaviour: a proposed web-based communication exposure approach 	

- Exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages and web content
 - Complete web experience
 - Consumers' interactivity
 - System, website and information content trust and credibility during the acquisition of information
 - Information search and consumption
 - Cognitive effort and behaviour
- 3. Online consumer behaviour: a proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach**
- **Cognitive and affective internal psychological behavioural processes**
 - ***Preinformation acquisition perception attributes***
 - Perceived ease of use
 - Perceived usefulness
 - Perceived value
 - Perceived risk
 - ***Preinformation acquisition consumer attitudinal attributes***
 - Trust
 - Literacy
 - Affinity
 - ***Postinformation acquisition consumer attitudes***
 - Positive and negative disconfirmation
 - Satisfaction
 - ***Emotion and reason as motivation for online consumer behaviour***
 - Emotional knowledge acquisition
 - Rational knowledge acquisition
 - ***The communication of emotion and reason***
 - Emotion is unintentional, automatic, nonpropositional, spontaneous and communicated through signs
 - Rational messages are socially shared, intentional, propositional, require knowledge of learnt symbols and are symbolically communicated.
 - ***Forms of emotions***
 - Emotion I (EI): physiological responses
 - Emotion II (EII): motivational-emotional state
 - Emotion III (EIII): affect (immediate and direct subjective experiences), commonly known as emotion (include physiological reactions [EI] and facial expressions [EII])
 - Perceived control
 - Concentration/attention focus
 - ***Consumer motivation***
 - Readiness and willingness to search for, acquire and process web-based

communication messages and information

- Cognitive involvement
- Affective involvement
- **Factors affecting motivation**
 - Values
 - Goals
 - Needs
- **Consumer ability**
 - Depends on resources (knowledge and intelligence), cognitive styles and information-processing techniques
- **Exposure**
 - Consumer comes into physical contact with the web-based communication message/information
- **Attention**
 - Selective attention
 - Preattentive processing
- **Perception**
 - Absolute perception threshold
 - Differential threshold
 - Subliminal perception
- **Knowledge and understanding**
 - Knowledge content
 - Knowledge structure
 - Objective comprehension
 - Subjective comprehension
- **Attitude formation**
 - Counterarguments (CAs)
 - Support arguments (SAs)
 - Source derogations (SDs)
 - Utilitarian or functional dimension
 - Hedonic dimension
 - Interest level
 - High cognitive involvement
 - Knowledgeability of the message or information
 - Easy accessibility of attitudes
 - Attitude confidence
 - Specificity of attitudes
 - Situational factors

- Normative beliefs and motivation
- Personality variables
- Cognitive component
- Affective component
- Conative component
- Dual-mediation hypothesis
- **Consumer memory and retrieval**
 - Sensory memory
 - Short-term memory
 - Long-term memory
 - Rehearsal and encoding
 - Chunking
 - Recirculation
 - Elaboration
 - Retention
 - Activation
 - Schema
 - Episodic storing
 - Semantic storing
 - Retrieval
 - Spreading of activation
 - Interference
 - Optimacy and recency
 - Explicit memory
 - Implicit memory
 - Retrieval cues

The theoretical criteria, summaries, interpretations and critical analyses provided below are based on the existing literature of offline and online consumer behaviour presented in chapter 2.

7.3.1 A new perspective on online consumer behaviour based on existing offline and online perspectives

In order to address the main aim of this study to develop a conceptual integrated theoretical model for *online* consumer behaviour which will focus on the complete

web-based communication experience in terms of web-based communication exposure and the subsequent internal psychological behavioural processes, it was necessary to discuss, evaluate and scrutinise the existing offline perspectives of consumer behaviour. This was done to gain a comprehensive and integrative understanding of the complete online consumer behavioural process from the existing offline and online perspectives. The critical discussion and analysis of the theoretical constructs of existing *online* consumer behaviour literature in chapter 2 indicated that online consumer behaviour is usually approached in a fragmented manner. This means that these existing approaches lack systematic theoretical analysis which proposes inconsistent theoretical perspectives in that they provide contradictory and contrasting results, not considering any perspective that is beyond the scope of a purchasing perspective. In chapter 2, the theoretical constructs of existing offline and online consumer behaviour theory were applied to the online consumer behavioural perspective followed in this study, based on the argument that although online and offline consumers' behaviour is significantly related, it also differs markedly in that, for example, additional steps such as building trust or confidence, interactivity, transparency, control, information access and information evaluation should be added to the online experience.

Most existing authors consider offline consumer behaviour and online consumer behaviour from a purchasing perspective (Schiffman & Kanuk 2000; Koufaris 2002; Cheung et al 2003; Assael 2004; Goldsmith & Flynn 2004; Demangeot & Broderick 2007; Chen et al 2008b; Gurau 2008; Koo et al 2008; Dennis et al 2009; Hardesty & Bearden 2009; MacInnis & Folkes 2009; Taylor & Strutton 2009), indicating consumers' behaviour in terms of what, why, when and where they buy it. By contrast, this study approaches online consumer behaviour in terms of consumers' exposure and experience of web-based communication messages and their subsequent inward psychological behavioural processes.

This study thus theoretically argues for a move away from traditional offline and online purchasing perspectives towards the consideration of online consumer behaviour in terms of web-based communication exposure and experience and internal psychological behavioural processes. This proposed perspective further

signifies an emphasis on online consumers' consumption and experience of their web-based communication encounters. Throughout the study, discussions on online consumer behaviour thus refer to consumers' online behaviour (not purchasing) when *exposed to* and *experiencing* web-based communication messages, including their internal psychological behavioural processes.

In chapter 2, online consumer behaviour was contextualised from existing offline and online perspectives and the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches to online consumer behaviour were proposed. Hence various definitions of offline and online consumer behaviour by different authors were considered in chapter 2, guiding the development of a definition of online consumer behaviour by the author. This definition is reiterated here:

Online consumer behaviour comprises a complete web-based communication experience that manifests in web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes leading to cognitive information-processing and response, information decision-making and output processes, determined by internal, external and online factors.

7.3.2 Online consumer behaviour: a proposed web-based communication exposure approach

In chapter 2, a web-based communication exposure approach was proposed, which contextualised this study from an online behavioural perspective, hence explaining online consumer behaviour in terms of exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages and web content. It was argued that for the purpose of this study, web-based communication messages include all communication on organisational websites or integrated online marketing communication messages (online marketing, online advertising, online public relations and online promotional messages), thus referring to the complete web experience. It was indicated that the complete web experience thus refers not only to online consumers' experience and behaviour towards web-based communication messages that market products, but also web-based communication messages that provide informational organisational content. The complete web experience includes online consumers' interactivity with

web content, their trust of the content and system and the credibility of the content, information and system in their acquisition of online information.

It was therefore argued in chapter 2 that online consumer behaviour in the context of this study, in addition, includes all web-based communication exposure and experience occurrences pertaining to information search and consumption, referring to the online consumers' complete web experiences. Because of the emphasis on information search and consumption, online consumers' cognitive effort and behaviour during information gathering and understanding were deemed to be significant.

7.3.3 Online consumer behaviour: a proposed internal psychological behavioural processes approach

Critical to the goal of this study is the need to understand consumers' psychological processes and to gain a more precise understanding of the cognitive and affective internal processes relating to online consumer behaviour that are integrated in the online consumers' behaviour during their exposure to and experience of the complete web experience. Hence an internal psychological behavioural approach was proposed, suggesting the cognitive and affective internal psychological behavioural processes of online consumers' behaviour in particular. Although authors like Assael (2004) proposed a micro perspective on consumer behaviour by indicating the cognitive elements and the factors that influence these processes, this new approach suggested the need for an understanding of online consumer behavioural processes in terms of internal psychological constructs that illustrate the internal psychological behavioural processes that consumers go through in the online environment.

In chapter 2 it was stated that the internal psychological behavioural processes approach explains internal behavioural processes in terms of the psychological theoretical constructs mentioned below, termed from the online perspective based on existing authors' views on offline consumer psychological constructs. Each psychological construct was explained by first providing an overview of existing

viewpoints followed by their application in the online context of this study. These psychological constructs are subsequently briefly reiterated for the purpose of generating theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour.

7.3.3.1 *Preinformation acquisition perception attributes*

It was indicated in chapter 2 that the existing offline literature refers to prepurchase consumer perception attributes when explicating perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived value and perceived risk as the key predictors of offline consumers' behavioural intentions.

In line with the informational focus of this study and the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approach in particular, prepurchase consumer perception attributes were contextualised by proposing that perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived value and perceived risk refer to *preinformation acquisition perception attributes*. Consumers will take these concepts associated with the message or information into account before acquiring information and engaging in message consumption.

7.3.3.2 *Preinformation acquisition consumer attitudinal attributes*

The previous discussion of prepurchase acquisition consumer attitudinal attributes from an existing offline perspective indicated that these attributes are influenced by trust, literacy and affinity.

These attributes were applied to the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches proposed in this study, and were subsequently adjusted to refer to *preinformation acquisition consumer attitudinal attributes*. In this context, it was indicated that these attitudinal attributes first consist of trust, which refers to the trusting relationship of faith and confidence that needs to exist between the consumer and the organisation; secondly, literacy, which refers to the online consumers' ability to read and write; and thirdly, affinity, which refers to internet literacy.

7.3.3.3 *Postinformation acquisition consumer attitudes*

It was stated in chapter 2 that the existing literature refers to postpurchase consumer attitudes in terms of consumers' feelings after a purchase has been completed. In the context of this study it was argued that this theoretical construct should be referred to as *postinformation acquisition consumer attitudes*, which differ in the sense that they refer to positive and negative disconfirmation as prerequisites for satisfaction. This was based on the argument that positive disconfirmation exists when an online consumer considers the complete web-based communication experience better than expected. Negative disconfirmation suggests the opposite in that it refers to the online consumer feeling worse off than expected after the web-based communication encounter has been completed.

7.3.3.4 *Emotion and reason as motivation for online consumer behaviour*

Emotion and reason were previously defined as predictors of the optimisation of decisions in that online consumers acquire knowledge either emotionally (knowledge by acquaintance) or rationally (knowledge by description).

7.3.3.5 *The communication of emotion and reason*

It was previously indicated that emotion was defined as unintentional or automatic, nonpropositional, expressed through signs and that it can be communicated spontaneously. Rational messages, however, are socially shared, intentional, propositional, require knowledge of learnt symbols and are symbolically communicated.

7.3.3.6 *Forms of emotions*

The forms of emotion were identified in chapter 2 as emotion I (EI) (physiological responses), emotion II (EII) (motivational-emotional state) and emotion III (EIII) (affect [immediate and direct subjective experiences]), commonly known as emotion (which includes physiological reactions [EI] and facial expressions [EII]).

It is argued that in the online context, emotions can further be explained in terms of the consumer's control over the web-based communication encounter (perceived control), as well as the concentration or attention focus that is executed during the web-based communication experience, which elaborates on the view presented in chapter 2.

7.3.3.7 Consumer motivation

It was indicated that motivation is aroused energy directed at achieving a specific goal, while in the context of this study, it is argued that motivation refers to consumers' readiness and willingness to engage in web-based communication information searches in order to acquire information and process the messages during the total web experience. It was further explained in chapter 2 that motivation refers to "felt involvement", and includes the following four types of involvement: (1) enduring involvement; (2) situational involvement; (3) cognitive involvement; and (4) affective involvement.

For the purpose of the context of this study, only cognitive involvement and affective involvement are regarded as relevant, since cognitive involvement refers to online consumers' thinking processes, while affective involvement refers to online consumers' feelings about the web-based communication encounter and emotional energy while experiencing the complete web experience. Both these types of involvement indicate internal psychological behavioural processes.

7.3.3.8 Factors affecting motivation

It was stated in chapter 2 that consumer motivation is influenced by the following three personal relevance factors: *values* (consumers' values guide their decisions in terms of importance), *goals* (the objectives consumers wish to achieve) and *needs* (tension leads to motivation). It was argued that values, goals and needs also influence motivation in the online environment.

7.3.3.9 Consumer ability

It was previously indicated that consumer ability refers to consumers' capability to comprehend information and make decisions based on prior knowledge. In the online environment, consumers' ability to search for, acquire and process information depends on their knowledge and intelligence (resources) and differs in terms of their cognitive styles and information-processing techniques.

7.3.3.10 Exposure

It was indicated in chapter 2 that during exposure, the consumer in the offline context comes into physical contact with the product.

It is propounded that this criterion is especially relevant to the web-based communication exposure and experience approach, in that the concept of exposure refers to the occasion during which the consumer comes into physical contact with the web-based communication message/information.

7.3.3.11 Attention

As indicated in chapter 2, consumers' attention could refer to their selective attention and subsequent processing of product information.

It is thus argued that in a similar vein, online consumers' devotion towards processing information refers to their selective attention and preattentive processing of online information. It was posited that this type of selective attention and preattentive processing occurs in the peripheral processing route, referring to consumers' unawareness of the information processed.

7.3.3.12 Perception

It was previously stated that perception occurs through the five senses of vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch. Similarly, perception in the online environment also

occurs through vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch. It was argued in chapter 2 that the absolute perception threshold refers to the minimal level of stimulus intensity during the perceptual process, while the differential threshold refers to an intensity difference of perceived stimuli; and subliminal perception to below the threshold level of awareness.

It is suggested that the same perceptual process that occurs during exposure to traditional integrated marketing communication, also takes place during the online consumer's perceptual processes.

7.3.3.13 Knowledge and understanding

Based on the discussion of knowledge and understanding in chapter 2, it was argued that in the context of this study, *knowledge* in general refers to the manner in which consumers interpret and assign meaning to messages and information, while *knowledge content* refers to information that has already been learnt; and *knowledge structure* refers to the manner in which knowledge is organised. Information cannot become knowledge without comprehension. Hence *objective comprehension* refers to the process of extracting the intended meaning from a message, while *subjective comprehension* relates to the process of reflecting what is thought to be known, whether or not it is accurate.

It was suggested that this process of acquiring knowledge that ultimately leads to understanding, is applicable to the online context since a similar knowledge acquisition process will occur during a web-based communication encounter.

7.3.3.14 Attitude formation

It was indicated in chapter 2 that the following cognitive responses lead to attitude formation: *counterarguments (CAs)* (thoughts that are in disagreement with the message), *support arguments (SAs)* (thoughts that express agreement with the message) and *source derogations (SDs)* (thoughts that discount or attack the source of the message).

It was further indicated that the following three sources lead to consumers' positive attitudes towards product messages: The *utilitarian or functional dimension* involves informative messages that have informational value that mostly generate positive attitudes. The *hedonic dimension* relates to information and messages that can create positive feelings and emotions. The *interest level* has to do with the amount of curiosity and attention a message or information arouses. It is suggested that in the online environment, these three sources will lead to online consumers' positive attitudes towards web-based communication messages and information.

Based on the discussions in chapter 2 of the circumstances affecting consumers' behaviour in the offline environment, it is argued that online consumers' behaviour will only be affected by attitudes under the following circumstances and because of the following factors: high cognitive involvement, knowledge of the message or information, easy accessibility of attitudes, attitude confidence, specificity of attitudes, situational factors, normative beliefs and motivation and personality variables.

Of further significance to the context of this study and in terms of the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour that will be developed in the next chapter, the components that constitute attitudes need to be explained. These components were indicated in chapter 2 as follows: The *cognitive component* refers to attitudes that are formed on the basis of the knowledge and perceptions that are obtained from the attitude object and associated information. The *affective component* relates to an individual's evaluative emotions or feelings, constituting the assessment of the attitude object. The *conative component* has to do with the likelihood or tendency that the individual will act or behave in a specific manner. It is suggested that these components are also applicable to the online environment.

It was further indicated previously that attitudes can be processed with low consumer effort when *peripheral cues* are used to form *low-level beliefs* and *low-effort affective processes* that refer to mere exposure where familiar objects are preferred to unfamiliar ones. It was argued in a preceding chapter that once consumers have a

favourable attitude towards advertisements because they believe them to be true, or like them, the *dual-mediation hypothesis* is evident.

It is argued that in the online environment, attitudes will be processed with low consumer effort when the consumer prefers familiar online message structures to unfamiliar ones.

7.3.3.15 Consumer memory and retrieval

It was indicated in chapter 2 that memory can be classified into four categories. The following four categories of memory are deemed important to this study: *Sensory memory* refers to short-term memory and can store echoic memory (memory of things heard) and iconic memory (sensory memory of things seen). *Short-term memory* is also referred to as working memory and stores information for a short period of time. Discursive processing occurs when an individual thinks of an object represented by a word. *Long-term memory* is stored for an extensive period of time. *Rehearsal and encoding* relate to the fact that repetition and rehearsal of the information in the short-term memory are necessary in order to transfer the information to the long-term memory.

It was argued that these types of memory are significant in the online context because online consumers can make use of sensory memory, short-term memory, long-term memory or rehearsal and encoding when storing the information they have gathered in the online environment.

It was further indicated in chapter 2 that the following processes are indicative of the transfer of information into memory: *Chunking* refers to a group of objects that are processed as a unit. *Recirculation* means that information is recirculated through the short-term memory when it is encountered repeatedly. *Elaboration* occurs when information is linked to prior knowledge. *Retention* involves information being linked to renew the links between different types of information. *Activation* relates to old and new information being cognitively related. *Schema* simplify cognition and understanding. *Episodic storing* is the process of storing information in the long-term

memory so that it is acquired. *Semantic storing* is the process of storing information according to significant concepts. *Retrieval* is the process whereby information is remembered. *Spreading of activation* relates to what is retrieved from memory. *Interference* is the process of retrieving failure. *Optimacy and recency effects* refer to retrieval failure. *Explicit memory* is memory that is conscious and actively retrieved from past experiences by recalling it. *Implicit memory* relates to information remembered without conscious awareness. *Retrieval cues* are stimuli that internally or externally facilitate the activation of memory.

It was suggested that these processes are also indicative of the transfer of information into memory during web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes in the online environment.

7.4 THEORETICAL CRITERIA OF THE DETERMINANTS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Table 7.3 indicates the theoretical perspectives, theoretical approaches, main authors and a summary of the main theoretical criteria of the determinants of online consumer behaviour.

Table 7.3: Theoretical criteria of the determinants of online consumer behaviour

THEORETICAL CRITERIA OF THE DETERMINANTS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR	
Offline perspective	Online perspective
Web-based communication exposure approach	Internal psychological behavioural processes approach
MAIN AUTHORS	
Callebaut (2000); Fink & Laupase (2000); Schiffman & Kanuk (2000) Hoyer & MacInnis (2001); Moreau, Lehmann & Markman (2001); Koufaris (2002); Assael (2004); Constantinides (2004); Strydom (2004); Blackwell et al (2006); Chaudhuri (2006); Wright (2006); Chen & Barnes (2007); Salo & Karjaluoto (2007); Solomon (2007); Atcharyachanvanick & Sonehara (2008); Grabner-Krauter & Faillant (2008); Ranaweera et al (2008); Benamati, Fuller, Serva & Baroudi (2009); Chiu, Chang, Cheng & Fang (2009); Doong, Tai & Wang (2010); Jansson-Boyd (2010); Lin, Wang & Hwang (2010);	

Lu & Zhu (2010); Wang & Liang (2010); Wyer & Xu (2010); Yang (2010); Ooi, Sim, Yew & Lin (2011)

THEORETICAL CRITERIA

1. The determinants of online consumer behaviour contextualised

- Controllable and uncontrollable internal, external and online determinants that cognitively and affectively influence online consumer behaviour in terms of web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes.

2. Internal determinants of online consumer behaviour

- Motivation
- Personality
 - Personality traits
 - The self-concept, self-esteem and self-image
- Perception
- Learning
 - Cognitive learning
 - High and low involvement learning and information processing
- Attitude

3. External determinants of online consumer behaviour

- Reference groups and family
- Social class
- Culture
- Subculture

4. Online determinants of online consumer behaviour

- Trust
- Web-based communication familiarity, prior interaction, technology acceptance and technology attitudes
- Symbolic and experiential benefits
- The total web experience
- Emotional and cognitive responses, perceived control, concentration, attention focus and message involvement
- Usability

The theoretical criteria, summaries, interpretations and critical analyses provided below are based on the existing literature of offline and online determinants of consumer behaviour presented in chapter 3.

7.4.1 The determinants of online consumer behaviour contextualised

Chapter 2 interpreted the determinants of consumer behaviour in the offline and online perspectives and suggested that they have an impact on the manner in which consumers behave during their exposure to and experience of offline and web-based communication messages. It was indicated that most authors specify *factors* that influence consumers' *purchasing* behaviour, but, it was also argued that in the context of this study, the factors of consumer behaviour in a purchasing context should be termed *determinants* and should be categorised as internal, external and online determinants that influence online consumer behaviour. This indicated an extension of previous studies that had considered the impact of the information system on consumer behaviour. The following definition was formulated by the author to contextualise and propose the theoretical perspectives that underlie the identification of internal, external and unique online determinants of online consumer behaviour and is reiterated here.

The determinants of online consumer behaviour are controllable and uncontrollable internal, external and unique online aspects that cognitively and affectively influence and affect online consumer behaviour during the total web experience in the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

7.4.2 Internal determinants of online consumer behaviour

For the purpose of this study and in line with the web-based communication exposure, as well as the internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, the internal determinants of online consumer behaviour were regarded as the basic psychological determinants of online consumer behaviour during exposure to and experience of online or web-based communication messages, as indicated previously. Most authors cite these internal determinants from a purchasing perspective. For the purpose of this study, an informational perspective was proposed arguing that these determinants could be applied to consumers' behaviour during their exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages and information. The internal determinants of online consumer behaviour identified and discussed in chapter 3 comprise the following theoretical criteria:

7.4.2.1 Motivation

Motivation was indicated as a theoretical criterion for the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. Hence, for the purpose of indicating it as an internal determinant of online consumer behaviour and based on the discussion of motivation in chapter 3, it is regarded as an individual driving force resulting from an unfulfilled informational need generated by internal tension. It was postulated that motivation is further regarded as being dependent on the individual's thinking processes (cognition) and previous learning – hence the contention that these processes drive the individual to seek online communication exposure.

In chapter 3 it was suggested that motivation is caused by the following hierarchy of *needs*: *Innate needs* are believed to include primary, physiological (biogenic) security needs that motivate individuals to stay alive. *Acquired needs* are the result of interaction with significant others and can also be referred to as secondary needs, social, self-fulfilment and spiritual needs. *The need for power*, in the online environment, refers to the individual's desire to control the communication encounter/exposure/experience, which is usually only evident in an online communication situation. The *need for affiliation* is based on a social motive, referring to the online consumer seeking to belong to a certain online community that is interested in a similar social aspect. The *need for achievement* is egoistic and self-actualising in terms of the individual's informational/communication needs. *Rational needs* refer to the individual's rational decisions about the physical attributes of a message. *Emotional needs* concur with the individual's emotional decisions about the message or information in terms of his/her personal or subjective criteria. *Instinctive needs* relate to the individual's behaviour that is based on his/her inherent instinct.

It is argued that all of the needs identified above could motivate online consumers to seek web-based communication exposure and online information in order to fulfil a particular informational need. Hence for the purpose of this study, an online consumer's motivation to search for online information and web-based

communication messages is driven by innate, acquired, rational, emotional and instinctive needs, as well as the need for power, affiliation and achievement.

Goals were regarded as the results of behaviour caused by motivation, and in the literature review in chapter 3, generic and product-specific goals were identified. However, it is posited that those goals are not relevant to the context of this study. Instead, another type of goal, namely a *communication/informational goal* was proposed (chapter 3). It was argued that this type of goal results in motivation because of tension that develops as a result of an individual's need for communication or information.

7.4.2.2 Personality

In chapter 3, it was stated that personality influences consumer behaviour in the offline context. Hence, based on existing definitions, the author formulated the following definition of personality:

Personality refers to an individual's unique psychological makeup and characteristics suggesting consistent and enduring individual differences.

It was also argued that personality consists of theoretical criteria of which the following are relevant in the context of this study and are explained below in terms of their application to the online context:

Personality traits are the building blocks for personality and comprise several elements (previously indicated in chapter 3). For the purpose of this study and in line with the online context, the following elements are regarded as being relevant to the development of a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour: According to the web-based communication exposure approach, *dogmatism* refers to the open- or close-mindedness of individuals in unfamiliar informational situations. It further describes an individual who will react defensively, with discomfort and uncertainty towards unexpected communication exposure situations. In the online informational context, *innovativeness* refers to a person who tries new communication situations and information. In the online context in

particular, the *need for cognition* refers to the need for information that individuals manifest and their subsequent thinking processes. An individual's *social character* can be *inner-directed* when he/she reacts to online communication messages based on inner values and standards, or *other-directed* when the online environment is taken into account. *Cognitive personality factors* come into play when the online individual with a cognitive personality thinks about information and web-based communication needs to process information cognitively. *Visualisation and verbalisation* are relevant in the online environment, when the individual with a visual orientation will focus on the graphical depiction of the online message, while an individual with a verbal orientation prefers written or verbal information which is usually evident in an online environment because of its information intensiveness.

It was indicated in chapter 3 that *the self-concept* refers to the individual's evaluation of his/her own attributes. It was further postulated that self-concept can be explained in terms of *self-esteem* which refers to the positive or negative manner in which an individual evaluates himself/herself and the acceptance or rejection thereof by significant others.

Several components of self-esteem were mentioned in chapter 3, but for the purpose of this discussion in the context of this study, only the following components are deemed to be significant in specifying theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour and they are mentioned based on the discussions of several authors' views as set out in chapter 3. *The actual self-image* refers to how individuals perceive themselves. *The ideal self-image* relates to the way individuals would like to perceive themselves. *The social self-image* refers to the way individuals think others observe them, constituting the *looking-glass self* which refers to individuals' determination of their own self-worth based on significant others' perception of them. *The ideal social self-image* has to do with how individuals would like others to observe them. *The expected self-image* refers to the way individuals visualise themselves at a specific point in the future. *The virtual self* is important in the context of this study, particularly in relation to the web-based communication exposure approach and the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. The so-

called “online” self can assume different personalities and subsequently determines individuals’ online behaviour.

In summary it is argued that personality traits and the “self”, which comprise various components, influence online consumer behaviour and can thus be regarded as the determinants of online consumer behaviour as well as theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour.

7.4.2.3 Perception

Although the perceptual process was discussed in chapter 2 as being indicative of the online consumer’s internal psychological behavioural processes during exposure to web-based communication messages, it was also mentioned in chapter 3 as an internal determinant of consumer behaviour. Hence for the purpose of this study, perception is regarded as indicating not only the internal psychological behavioural processes approach, but also as an internal determinant of online consumer behaviour. It is argued that perception, or the perceptual process, is an internal individual determinant which influences online consumers’ behaviour in that it recognises, selects, organises and interprets web-based communication messages. Various perceptual constructs were mentioned and discussed in chapter 3. However, the following constructs are regarded as significant indicators of the online consumers’ perceptual process in the online environment and they are based on the theoretical discussions in chapter 3: An individual’s *absolute threshold* is the point at which he/she experiences a difference between something and nothing. *Adaptation* is the point at which an individual adapts to communication messages and no longer regards them important. The *differential threshold* causes the individual to be unable to discriminate between different stimuli. The *subliminal perception point* occurs when the stimulus is perceived below the conscious level of awareness, but is still capable of influencing thinking, emotion and action. *Selective perception* means that individuals are selective in their perception of stimuli from the external environment because of previous experiences and future expectations. *Selective exposure* refers to the process during which individuals only select stimuli that are relevant to their particular individual contexts. *Selective attention* means that individuals selectively

pay attention when deciding which messages to perceive and which to pay attention to. *Perceptual blocking* occurs when the individual consciously and unconsciously blocks out stimuli that are psychologically threatening when organising them as unified wholes.

7.4.2.4 Learning

Learning is indicated as a theoretical criterion for online consumer behaviour in that it is, for the purpose of this study, deemed to be an internal determinant of online consumer behaviour.

Based on the theoretical discussions in chapter 3, it is argued that learning in the online context is incidental in the sense that incidental learning and knowledge collection occur. It is posited that in the online web-based communication exposure context, exposure is usually intentional because of the consumer's control over the communication encounter and his/her search for information-intensive communication messages, resulting in intentional learning and knowledge gathering.

The following basic elements of learning were discussed in chapter 3 on the basis of the various authors' existing offline viewpoints and are regarded here as internal determinants of online consumer behaviour because of their relevance to the development of theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour: *internal drive* (based on emotional or rational responses, which encourage individuals to take action and learn) and *learning cues* (external stimuli that encourage learning).

Of further significance to the establishment of theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour are the different types of learning (discussed in chapter 3 based on various authors' perspectives). For the purpose of this discussion, these types of learning are regarded as internal determinants of online consumer behaviour. These types of learning are mentioned here on the basis of the in-depth discussions in chapter 3. It was indicated that *cognitive learning* can be referred to as cognitive associative learning, which focuses on individuals' internal mental processes during their engagement with the learning process. Cognitive learning further indicates a

relationship between a conditioned stimulus and an unconditioned stimulus, focusing on the learning process. The cognitive learner is an information seeker who forms sophisticated representations and perceptual relationships between messages.

On the strength of this, it is argued that in the online environment, cognitive learning occurs because the online individual engages in a learning process based on an information-seeking process during which sophisticated and perceptual relations between various web-based communication messages and information are formed.

It was suggested in chapter 3 that the following three concepts are related to cognitive learning and are regarded as being relevant to the online context of this study: *Repetition* is relevant here because by repeating information, the strength of the association between the conditioned and unconditioned stimulus is increased. *Stimulus generalisation* is relevant here because learning occurs when stimuli are generalised. *Stimulus discrimination* is relevant in this context because the individual should be able to discriminate between similar stimuli.

It was indicated that the cognitive learning process consists of various processes. The following processes were applied to the online context of this study and are briefly mentioned below for the purpose of establishing theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour (based on the views of various authors expressed in chapter 3): Online consumers need to pay *attention* to a web-based communication message before learning can occur. *Comprehension* is relevant here in that the online consumer now determines whether or not the online information interests him/her before entering it into memory. The new information is influenced by the existing information when comprehension occurs. *Learning* is relevant here because new online information either enters the existing knowledge framework or alters it. *Recall and reconstruction* relates to the online information fitting into an individual's existing cognitive script so that recall can take place. The *feedback* that online consumers receive during the learning process determines whether or not they will elaborate on the web-based communication message.

It was further mentioned in chapter 3 that *high and low involvement learning and information processing* consist of rote learning that exists when there is repetition through the visual (iconic rote memory) and auditory (echoic rote memory) .

7.4.2.5 Attitude

Although attitude was indicated as a theoretical criterion of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach in the previous section, it is also regarded an internal determinant of online consumer behaviour. It was stated in chapter 3 that attitude can precede or follow behaviour in that it is believed to be a combination of cognitive beliefs and affective feelings. It was further indicated that attitudes consist of a cognitive (beliefs) component, an affective (overall attitude) component and a conative (behaviour) component.

It is argued that even though the literature indicates that postpurchase dissonance specifies an individual's conflicting thoughts about a purchase, it is propounded that postinformational dissonance occurs in the online environment when an individual has conflicting beliefs or attitudes towards a specific message or certain informational content.

7.4.3 External determinants of online consumer behaviour

For the purpose and context of this study and for the establishment of theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour, it is argued that external determinants of online consumer behaviour refer to social and cultural concepts that influence consumers' behaviour during their exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages.

The external determinants of online consumer behaviour comprise the following theoretical criteria which were discussed in detail in chapter 3, but are mentioned again below for the purpose of applying them to the online context and specifying the theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour:

7.4.3.1 Reference groups and family

It was stated in chapter 3 that peers, family and reference groups are regarded as primary normative constructs which provide a frame of reference for message acceptance and behaviour. A *normative reference group* was said to influence general values and behaviour, while a *comparative reference group* can be used as a benchmark for comparing attitudes and behaviour. *Indirect reference groups*, however, influence online consumer behaviour indirectly, while a *dissociative group* refers to groups that need to be avoided.

It is argued that the different reference groups mentioned above could have an impact on the manner in which online consumers behave during their exposure to web-based communication messages and engagement with online information. It is further posited that in the online context of this study, a *virtual group* is significant in that it refers to virtual communities and comprises sets of social relationships between people.

7.4.3.2 Social class

In chapter 3 it was indicated that social class refers to social stratification that specifically determines literacy. It is argued that social class is an external determinant of online consumer behaviour.

7.4.3.3 Culture

It was previously indicated that in general, culture refers to a set of values, ideas and artefacts that are formally learnt when individuals are explicitly taught and assimilated into an existing culture. It is argued, for the purpose of establishing theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour, that culture is passed on informally and could in fact be regarded as an external determinant of online consumer behaviour.

7.4.3.4 Subculture

As stated in chapter 3, a subculture strives to preserve its identity or subcultural distinctiveness by means of subcultural homogeneity, which refers to a subculture's influence on online consumers' behaviour as a result of homogeneous values. It is suggested that subcultural homogeneity could arguably have an influence on online consumers' behaviour in the online environment.

7.4.4 Online determinants of online consumer behaviour

It is posited that it is important to the web-based communication exposure context of this study in particular, to identify the unique online determinants of online consumer behaviour in order to specify them as theoretical criteria. The unique online determinants of online consumer behaviour were discussed in chapter 3 on the basis of various authors' views, and they are considered here as theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour, as set out below.

7.4.4.1 Trust

Trust was indicated as a multidimensional and decisive factor in the online environment in that it eliminates uncertainty, perceived risk and interdependence. For the purpose of identifying theoretical criteria in the context of online determinants of consumer behaviour, the following types of trust are deemed significant and mentioned here on the basis of previous discussions in chapter 3: It was indicated that *technology trust* refers to online consumers' internet trust. It was stated in chapter 3 that *online trust*, firstly, consists of a hard dimension, which refers to a functionality-based dimension of the predictability and ability of the technological aspects of the online interaction. Secondly, the soft dimension refers to the credibility of the trustee (organisation) to operate in the interest of the trustor. *Contextual and cognitive trust* are specific online types of trust and relate to the specific technological trust that needs to exist in the online environment. *Competence-based trust* is central to the context of this study because it refers to the competence of the online consumer in that the online environment comprises many technological

challenges that he/she needs to be technologically competent to overcome. *Intentional trust* refers to the users' beliefs about whether the communicator is honest.

It was posited in chapter 3 that *trust* comprises different constructs which are not all deemed to be relevant to this study. In the online context of this study, the following constructs of trust are considered relevant and are mentioned below according to various authors' viewpoints as expressed in chapter 3: *trusting behaviour* refers to the online consumer's trust in the "other" party's intentions. *System trust* plays a role in the online environment in that it relates to the online consumer's trust of an impersonal structure.

7.4.4.2 *Web-based communication familiarity, prior interaction, technology acceptance and technology attitude*

It was indicated in chapter 3 that *web-based communication familiarity* refers to how familiar the consumer is with the website and organisation he/she is interacting with, and that *prior interactions* determine online consumer behaviour because they reduce social complexity and generate familiarity and acceptance. *Technology acceptance* relates to how well online consumers accept the medium they are using, while *technology attitude* refers to an online consumer's evaluative (cognitive) and affective (emotional) response to web-based communication messages and that he/she has to display technology readiness before he/she can show technology attitude.

It is postulated that all of these online concepts are significant to the online context of this study because they are unique in their application to the online environment. These concepts could arguably be important online determinants of online consumer behaviour that should be incorporated into the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour.

7.4.4.3 Symbolic and experiential benefits

The literature defines functional, symbolic and experiential benefits. Functional benefits were not regarded as important or relevant online determinants in this study and were thus excluded as theoretical criteria. It is argued that symbolic benefits, however, refer to nonproduct-related attributes, the need for societal endorsement, interpersonal action and outer-directed self-esteem, and are therefore regarded as relevant theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour. It was indicated in chapter 3 that experiential benefits are user imagery, convenience and positive experiences with a retailer and were therefore also highlighted as significant to the context of this study and as theoretical criteria for online determinants of online consumer behaviour.

7.4.4.4 The total web experience

It is posited, for the purpose of this study, that the total web experience is the most important factor that impacts on online consumers' behaviour and that it provides a technological perspective on the determinants of online consumer behaviour.

In chapter 3, the following three constructs of the total web experience were discussed on the basis of various authors' views and are deemed to be important theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour. They are therefore reiterated below. *Functionality factors* relate to the usability (ease of navigation and search) and interactivity elements that reduce uncertainty, and cognitive dissonance determines the functionality factors of the website and web-based communication message. As far as *psychological elements: online trust* are concerned, although trust was previously been identified as a key determinant of consumer behaviour, it should be noted that personal and interpersonal forms of trust lead to institutional and dispositional trust. *Content elements* relate to the aesthetics of the website – that is, site credibility and creative elements determine online consumers' behaviour.

7.4.4.5 Emotional and cognitive responses, perceived control, concentration, attention focus and message involvement

According to the discussion in chapter 3, *emotional* and *cognitive responses* mediate the relationship between the environment and online consumers' behaviour. It was further indicated that an online consumer's perception of the amount of control he/she possesses in the online environment (*perceived control*) refers to the online consumer's perceived risk/risk aversion and ease of use during the web-based communication encounter. An online consumer's *attention focus* and *concentration* ensure that he/she returns to the online environment for more exposure to the web-based communication message and information, that is, to benefit from the total web experience. *Message involvement* describes the enjoyment, control and concentration that online consumers display during a web-based communication encounter.

It is argued that emotional and cognitive responses, perceived control, concentration, attention focus and message involvement are vital online determinants of online consumer behaviour, and can therefore be regarded as significant theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour.

7.4.4.6 Usability

Usability was indicated as an online determinant of online consumer behaviour in chapter 3 and when applied to the web-based communication exposure approach, it is regarded a cognitive appraisal and refers to the technology used during web-based communication encounters and the utilisation of the website. It is argued that of particular importance here is the usability of the content which should be relevant in terms of breadth, depth, currency and timely information. Web-based communication messages are further considered usable when information satisfaction occurs.

7.5 THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION DECISION MAKING

Table 7.4 indicates the theoretical perspectives, theoretical approaches, main authors and a summary of the main theoretical criteria for online consumer information decision making.

Table 7.4: Theoretical criteria for online consumer information decision making

THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION DECISION MAKING		
Offline perspective	Online perspective	Online consumer information decision-making perspective
Web-based communication exposure approach	Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	
MAIN AUTHORS		
Chaffee & Mcleod (1973); Montgomery & Ryans (1973); Bonoma & Johnston (1979); Punj & Stewart (1983); Bettman, Luce & Payne (1998); Schiffman & Kanuk (2000); Erasmus, Boshoff & Rousseau (2001); Hoyer & MacInnis (2001); Xia & Sudharshan (2002); Benson & Dresdow (2003); Foreman (2003); Smith & Rupp (2003); Assael (2004); Leo, Bennett & Hartel (2005); Patwardhan & Ramaprasad (2005); Blackwell et al (2006); Wells, Moriarty & Burnett (2006); Solomon (2007); Han, Lerner & Keltner (2007); Fuller, Serva & Benamati (2007); Yang & Wu (2007); Chen, Jiang & Hsiao (2008a); Katsikopoulos & Gigerenzer (2008); Belch & Belch (2009); Chrzan (2009); Comegys, Hannula & Vaisanen (2009); Jin, Chen & Lingling (2009); Pfeiffer, Duzevik & Rothlauf (2009); Shao, Lye & Rundle-Thiele (2009); Tang (2009); Vohs, Nelson & Rawn (2009); Wang & Benbasat (2009); Darley, Blankson & Luethge (2010); Maity (2010); Wang & Liang (2010); Zellman, Kaye-Blake & Abell (2010); Kim, De Benedetto & Lancioni (2011); Roozmand, Ghasem-Aghaee & Hofstede (2011)		
THEORETICAL CRITERIA		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Online consumer information decision making defined <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New perspective of online consumer information decision making, referring to online consumers' decision-making processes in terms of message exposure and information processing. 2. Online consumer decision-making categories and strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Extended problem solving</i> • <i>Limited problem solving</i> • <i>Habitual decision making</i> • <i>Problem recognition</i> 		

- *Information search*
- *Weighted adding strategy*
- *The lexicographic strategy*
- *Satisficing*
- *Elimination-by-aspects (EBA)*
- *The equal weight utility maximisation strategy*
- *The confirming dimensions strategy*
- *Information processed by alternative*
- *Compensatory strategy*
- *Noncompensatory strategy*
- *Attribute processing*
- *Affective strategies*
- *One-reason heuristic strategy*
- *Elimination heuristic strategy*
- *Multiattribute utility maximisation (MAU)*

3. Consumer decision-making theory

- The schematic decision matrix
- Stochastic consumer choice behaviour
- Interaction framework of consumer decision making
- Constructive choice processes
- Complex decision making

4. Determinants of online consumer information decision making

• Individual differences

- *Psychographics, values and personality*
- *Consumer resources*
- *Motivation*
- *Knowledge*
- *Attitudes*
- *Self-awareness*
- *Emotional orientation*

• Environmental influences

- *Culture*
- *Social class*
- *Family*
- *Personal influences*
- *Situation behaviours*
- *Availability of information*

• Psychological processes

- *Information processing*
- *Learning*
- *Attitude and behaviour change*
- *Ability to process information*
- *Individual perception*
- *Memory*
- **Online atmospherics**
 - *Website quality, interface, satisfaction and experience*
 - *Perceived risk*
 - *Perceived benefit*
 - *Trust*
 - *Consumer control*
- 5. Online consumer information decision making**
 - *Need recognition*
 - *Search for information*
 - *Pre-evaluation of message alternatives*
 - *Message acceptance*
 - *Message consumption/processing*
 - *Postmessage consumption evaluation/postinformational consumption evaluation*

The theoretical criteria, summaries, interpretations and critical analyses provided below are based on the existing literature of offline and online decision making as presented in chapter 4.

7.5.1 Online consumer information decision making defined

For the purpose of developing theoretical criteria for online consumer information decision making in terms of the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, online consumer information decision making needs to be defined to illustrate consumers' decision-making processes in terms of web-based communication message exposure and information processing before information and message consumption occurs. A new perspective on consumer decision making, namely online consumer information decision making was proposed in chapter 4 – hence the following definition of online consumer

information decision making that was formulated in chapter 4 by the author is reiterated below.

Online consumer information decision making refers to the internal low-effort and high-effort informational processing progression of individual consumers when consuming web-based communication messages with the aim of deliberating and deciding on information alternatives.

7.5.2 Online consumer decision-making categories and strategies

Although many different decision strategies were discussed in chapter 4 on the basis of various authors' views, it is argued that the decision strategies below are relevant to this study and the online context and are thus proposed as theoretical criteria for online consumer decision making. The decision strategies mentioned below are based on existing authors' perspectives on decision strategies as discussed in chapter 4. However, for the purpose of establishing theoretical criteria, they are applied to the online context. Hence the following decision-making strategies that were specified on the basis of an offline perspective were applied to the online context in that they specify the decision strategies that online consumers adopt when they are deliberating and deciding on web-based communication messages and online informational alternatives:

Regarding *extended problem solving*, it was indicated that during an extended problem-solving strategy, online individuals collect as much information as possible from internal memory and external information sources before carefully and deliberately considering alternatives. *Limited problem solving* refers to simple decision rules of a lower degree of complexity to choose between online message alternatives, providing *cognitive shortcuts* and *inertia-based habits* which culminate in *representativeness heuristics*. During *habitual decision making*, little or no conscious mental effort is employed to make a decision. In *problem recognition*, when there is a considerable difference between the current state of affairs and some desired or ideal state of affairs, the online individual recognises that a problem needs to be addressed and solved. Regarding *information search*, before the consumer becomes involved in sensible online information decision making, he/she

engages in an ongoing *preinformational search* by reviewing usable information. *Weighted adding strategy* refers to the extended processing of alternatives when choices are in conflict and negative emotions are aroused as a result. During this process, individuals know about the alternatives, referred to as the *evoked set*, while the *consideration set* refers to the deliberations about which alternatives to include and which not. *The lexicographic strategy* involves the use of online decision making in the sense that a *hierarchy of attributes* is considered before the most valuable attribute or characteristic is selected. Processing is limited in this case. In *satisficing*, the application of these decision strategy alternatives is considered in a sequential fashion while examining the value of each characteristic with regard to the predetermined cutoff level. In *elimination-by-aspects (EBA)*, the *conjunctive strategy* refers to online consumers' elimination of options that do not meet the minimum cutoff value for the most significant characteristic. The *disjunctive strategy* refers to online consumers' decisions on acceptable levels for the cutoff when choosing between several of the most important attributes. *The equal weight utility maximisation strategy* involves considering all possible alternatives and attribute values. A relative importance is then assigned to each attribute and an overall value for each alternative, based on the impact of the attribute and relative weight, is chosen before deciding on the alternative with the best value and adopting a decision strategy. *The confirming dimensions strategy* relates to alternatives being processed in pairs until only one option remains. In the *information processed by alternative* strategy, numerous features of a single online informational alternative are processed before another alternative is considered. The *compensatory strategy* relates to a high-quality value on one alternative compensating for a poor value on another alternative. *Noncompensatory strategies* refer to heuristics that do not take all possible attributes into consideration when narrowing down alternatives. In *attribute processing*, the consumer processes one attribute at a time. *Affective strategies* involve decisions being made holistically on the basis of feelings or emotions. In the *one-reason heuristic strategy*, a stopping rule is applied when a single attribute among multiple attributes is found that enables the consumer to make a choice. An *elimination heuristic strategy* relates to attributes being eliminated until only a single option is left. The *multiattribute utility maximisation (MAU) strategy* is also referred to as the *classic utility maximising strategy*, which describes the

process whereby the individual chooses the alternative with the highest overall utility score.

7.5.3 Consumer decision-making theory

The specific theoretical decision-making concepts that are briefly discussed below and applied to the online context are based on the following theories of decision making by different authors, which were discussed in chapter 4: the schematic general model of a decision matrix (Chaffee & McLeod 1973); the stochastic models of consumer choice behaviour (Montgomery & Ryans 1973); an interaction framework of consumer decision making (Punj & Stewart 1983); an integrative framework for constructive choice processes (Bettman et al 1998); and a basic model of complex decision making (Assael 2004).

For the purpose of specifying theoretical criteria for online consumer decision making, the theoretical concepts contained in the theories mentioned above, are indicated as theoretical criteria and applied to the online consumer information decision-making context as follows:

7.5.3.1 The schematic decision matrix

As discussed in chapter 4, conceptual matrix analysis *decisions* are deemed to consist of complex *communication* situations. It was further indicated that each decision situation regards *message attributes*, which refer to a value relating to the object it belongs to.

On the basis of the theoretical explanation of the schematic decision matrix in chapter 4, it is argued that in an online information decision-making situation (*complete decision matrix*), the online consumer will probably choose the message alternative with the higher *attribute value* and which comprises all the possible *alternative message/informational objects*. *Message involvement* refers to the online consumer's involvement with a specific message and his/her subsequent perception of the risk involved when interacting with the specified message.

Although a complete decision matrix for online information decision making is not specified in literature, it is proposed here (based on the discussion of a complete decision matrix in the offline context in chapter 4) that a complete online information decision matrix could consist of the following stages: During the *inceptive stage*, the online information decision-making process commences. During the *information attribute cognisance stage*, the online consumer takes cognisance of the value of the information he/she is deciding on. During the *information evaluation stage*, various information content is evaluated. During the *information decision stage*, the consumer decides which messages/information to regard, respond to and consume. During the *postdecisional cognisance stage*, once the message/information has been decided on, the consumer either feels positive or negative about the communication encounter.

7.5.3.2 Stochastic consumer choice behaviour

It was postulated in chapter 4 that consumer decision making is the outcome of some probabilistic process with elements such as *choice probability*, which comprises *interconsumer* and *intraconsumer factors*, and *time of choice*.

It is argued that the stochastic consumer choice process discussed in chapter 4 could indicate that the online consumer first recognises an informational need, engages in a pre-exposure activity, takes decisions about the message, then proceeds to processing behaviour, and lastly, engages in postexposure evaluation.

7.5.3.3 Interaction framework of consumer decision making

As suggested in chapter 4, the interaction framework of consumer decision making refers to theoretical constructs such as *task characteristics*, *individual differences* and the *interaction* between the task and the individual. It was further indicated that from an *interactionist perspective*, behaviour is a function of *task-related variables*, *individual differences* and *task-individual interactions*, the absence of one of them resulting in an incomplete decision-making process.

It was also indicated that the interaction between the task and the individual in the decision-making situation depends on two taxonomies, which are applied to information decision making in the online environment as follows: Regarding the *task taxonomy*, individuals acquire *abilities* in different situations in order to complete tasks successfully. When applied to the online environment, this means that online individuals require certain abilities to enable them to complete online tasks relating to web-based communication messages. It was indicated in chapter 4 that the task process is an *internal representation* of the individual's *environment* which consists of task and context effects. When applied to the online environment, it is argued that the online individual's environment (internal and external determinants specified in chapter 3) comprises different effects, namely task effects (relating to the interactive action in the online environment) and context effects (relating to the influence of the online environment on the online consumers' decisions). It was also indicated that the task comprises the *decision problem* and the *decision environment*. When this is applied to the online environment, it means that the online individual's task relates to the problem pertaining to the decision being made and the characteristics of the online environment in which this occurs. Regarding the *individual taxonomy*, it was indicated in chapter 4, that individuals proceed through their hierarchy of responses differently. It is hence argued that individuals in the online environment will also go through their response hierarchy differently (the consumer information-processing and response process is addressed in the subsequent section).

7.5.3.4 Constructive choice processes

As posited in chapter 4, constructive choice processes can be organised into an integrative framework to explain constructive decision-making processes in terms of human perception, consisting of the following theoretical constructs: *Consumer goals* are organised into hierarchies that consist of metagoals such as maximising the accuracy of a decision and minimising the cognitive effort necessary for the decision. *Attention, information selectivity and perceptual interpretation* refer to the fact that consumers' decision-making processes are selective because of their limited capacity to process information. They therefore engage in voluntary and involuntary attention focus. *Choice heuristics* refer to individuals' decision-making strategies that

depend on goals that need to be attained, as well as the environment in which the strategy is used.

It is argued that these choice processes can be applied to the online and informational context of decision making as follows:

Online consumers' goals refer to their maximisation of the accuracy of their information decisions and the minimisation of the cognitive processes they proceed through when making an online decision about information and web-based communication messages. Online consumers' information decision-making processes are further selective because they have limited capacity to process online information, therefore causing differentiating attention focus. An online individual's choice heuristic in the online environment depends on the informational goals that need to be attained, as well as on the online environment in which this occurs.

7.5.3.5 *Complex decision making*

It was explained in chapter 4 that interaction during decision making refers to the individual's perception and evaluation of information which is influenced at individual level (needs, perceptions, attitudes, demographics, lifestyle and personality), and environmental level (culture, norms, values, subcultures and groups). After an individual has made a decision, postpurchase evaluation in the form of feedback serves the purpose of evaluating behavioural patterns.

It is argued that complex decision making can be applied to the online information decision-making perspective of this study in that it refers to the online individual's perception and evaluation of online information and web-based communication messages, being influenced by his/her individual needs, perceptions, attitudes, demographics, lifestyle and personality. In addition, the individual's perception and evaluation in the online environment could be influenced by culture, norms, values, subcultures and groups.

7.5.4 Determinants of online consumer information decision making

Some of the determinants that influence online consumer information decision making that will be mentioned below are similar to the determinants of online consumer behaviour that were discussed in section 7.4. Although there is a certain amount of overlapping, in the context of this discussion, it is necessary to briefly mention all the relevant determinants that have the potential to influence online consumer information decision making and for the purpose of specifying applicable theoretical criteria for online consumer information decision making. The determinants listed below were discussed in chapter 4 on the basis of various authors' views on the factors that influence decision making in the offline environment. The individual differences, environmental influences, psychological processes and online atmospherics listed below are regarded as theoretical criteria for online consumer information decision making:

7.5.4.1 Individual differences

The individual differences that influence online consumer information decision making include the following: *psychographics*, *values* and *personality* (values, traits and beliefs); *consumer resources* (time, money and information reception and processing capabilities or attention); *motivation* (when consumers' motivation is high, a compensatory decision strategy will be engaged in); *knowledge* (stored in memory); *attitudes* (the overall negative or positive evaluation of an alternative); *self-awareness* (helps individuals to understand their own motivations); and *emotional orientation* (integral emotion refers to the influence of subjective experiences on the individual's emotional state, whereas incidental emotion refers to subjective emotional experiences).

7.5.4.2 Environmental influences

The environmental influences that have an impact on online consumer information decision making include the following: *culture* (underlies individuals' thoughts, mental processing and decisions); *social class* (different social segments comprising

individuals with similar values, norms, interests and behaviours); *family* (the primary decision-making unit); *personal influences* (significant individuals who have expectations and provide comparisons); *situation behaviours* (situations differ in terms of alternatives and attributes); and *availability of information* (any decision relies on the amount and type of information available).

7.5.4.3 Psychological processes

The psychological processes that influence online consumer information decision making include the following: *information processing* (an individual's reception and processing of and action based on specific messages and an individual's information-processing style influence the manner in which he/she makes decisions); *learning* (learning as a result of an individual's knowledge and understanding of certain topics indicate the individual's decision-making process); *attitude and behaviour change* (basic psychological behavioural processes that influence the consumer's behaviour significantly); *ability to process information* (a consumer's ability to evaluate, compare and judge alternatives is referred to as "consumption vocabulary"); *individual perception* (an individual's characteristics and selective perception processes determine his/her progression through the perceptual processes); and *memory* (knowledge-related procedures that are used to pursue goals).

7.5.4.4 Online atmospherics

The online atmospheric elements that impact on online consumer information decision making include the following: *website quality, interface, satisfaction and experience* (the technical quality of the website influences consumers' online experience); *perceived risk* (online information can be incomplete and imperfect, resulting in feelings of perceived risk); *perceived benefit* (the consumer's perception that he/she is better off than before the message exposure occasion); *trust* (trust in the online environment refers to the online consumers' perception of the risk level involved during the online communication situation); and *consumer control* (as soon

as the online consumer feels in control of the communication encounter, he/she experiences less information overload).

7.5.5 Online consumer information decision making

The online consumer information decision-making perspective was put forward in chapter 4 to suggest an information perspective to online consumer decision making. Although this was indicated as a process and uniquely developed for the purpose of this study, the stages and steps were compiled from existing authors' views on differing concepts that are relevant to offline decision making. These concepts were thus integrated and adapted to propose the unique online consumer information decision-making perspective indicated in chapter 4. The theoretical criteria for online consumer information decision making below are based on the existing literature.

7.5.5.1 Need recognition

Although need recognition was discussed in chapter 4 in various contexts, based on various authors' views, the following arguments indicate how need recognition is seen in the context of this study and in terms of the proposed online information decision-making perspective:

It was argued in chapter 4 that when an online consumer realises that there is a difference between what he/she perceives to be the ideal state versus the actual state of affairs, as a result of internal and external stimuli, a need has been recognised. Recognising a need for information motivates the consumer to act in a specific way. The moment the individual recognises a need for information, he/she has entered his/her psychological set. It is hence argued that online consumers recognise needs in order to gain knowledge and gather information to enable them to consume information.

7.5.5.2 Search for information

It was posited that the online consumer has a need to search for relevant information as part of the solution to an informational or message-related problem. It was indicated in chapter 4, based on the existing literature, that during this step, the consumer perceives information and retains it from memory, genetic tendencies (internally) or from peers and family (externally).

It was further argued, based on the theoretical views of various authors specified in chapter 4, that the search for information in the online environment could proceed along the following path: During *exposure* to web-based communication messages, the senses are activated. *Attention* to the web-based communication message is obtained by means of information-processing capacities to the received information. *Comprehension* occurs during online information and message analyses and comparisons. *Acceptance* is evident when the online consumer decides whether or not to accept the message and adjust his/her existing beliefs and attitudes accordingly. *Retention* of online information is the ultimate goal and should thus be stored in memory.

7.5.5.3 Pre-evaluation of message alternatives

It was stated in chapter 4 that in the existing offline literature, this refers to the *pre-evaluation of product alternatives*, and it was applied to the online informational context of this study on the basis of the existing theoretical views expressed in chapter 4, thereby indicating the following:

The online consumer compares, questions, considers and judges different informational alternatives in order to decide which information to consume and further consult and which to reject. This occurs during the following processes: *High- or low-effort processes* are also referred to as the estimation of likelihood and determine the chances of something occurring or that certain products, services or information will satisfy needs. During *anchoring and adjustment processes*, consumers will anchor their judgement on the basis of initial or previous knowledge

and values. Judgements will then be adjusted according to additional information. *Hierarchy of effects processes* occur when online consumers proceed through high-effort situations by engaging in thinking processes, then feeling processes and lastly behavioural processes. *Thinking-behaving-feeling sequences* refer to low-effort situations.

7.5.5.4 Message acceptance

It was argued on the basis of the theoretical discussions of *product* acceptance in chapter 4, and its subsequent application to the information and online perspectives of this study, that message acceptance indicates the online consumer's decisions about which information or message to regard, accept, react to, utilise or examine. In addition, it was posited that information processing occurs during which online consumers need to engage with their cognitive resources while paying attention to and accepting a web-based communication message which represents the mental capacity consumers have available. During the cognitive process, online consumers are selective because they are unable to process all internal and external stimuli, directing their attention and cognitive-processing abilities at a specific portion of the process.

7.5.5.5 Message consumption/processing

It was suggested that during the message consumption/processing process, the online consumer starts making sense of and using the web-based communication message and information, which refers to message consumption that starts immediately or at a later stage.

7.5.5.6 Postmessage consumption evaluation/postinformational consumption evaluation

It was suggested in chapter 4 that on the basis of whether or not the online consumers' informational expectations have been met, the online consumer becomes satisfied or dissatisfied with the message consumption occasion and the

value of the information interaction during the previous stage. This refers to either positive disconfirmation or postdecision dissonance (positive disconfirmation and postproduct consumption dissonance were referred to in chapter 4 in terms of *product* usage and applied here to the online information decision-making context). It was posited that if the consumer is satisfied with the web-based communication message and information encounter/interaction and positive disconfirmation that has occurred, he/she will engage in future message and informational interactions, but if he/she is dissatisfied, there is cognitive or postdecision dissonance, and future online interactions will be limited.

7.6 THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION PROCESSING AND RESPONSE

Table 7.5 indicates the theoretical perspectives, theoretical approaches, main authors and a summary of the main theoretical criteria for online consumer information processing and response.

Table 7.5: Theoretical criteria for online consumer information processing and response

THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR ONLINE CONSUMER INFORMATION PROCESSING AND RESPONSE		
Offline perspective	Integrated marketing communication perspective	Online perspective
Web-based communication exposure approach	Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	
MAIN AUTHORS		
Strong (1925); Lavidge & Steiner (1961); Rogers (1962); Ray (1973); McGuire (1978); Vaughn (1980); Preston (1982); Smith & Swinyard (1982); Petty & Cacioppo (1983); MacInnis & Price (1987); Darley & Smith (1995); Levin, Huneke & Jasper (2000); Liefeld, Wall & Heslop (2000); Peters & Slovic (2000); Rodgers & Thorson (2000); Forgas & George (2001); Putrevu (2001); Swait & Adamowicz (2001); Tiedens & Linton (2001); Tremayne & Dunwoody (2001); Del Barrio-Garcia & Luque-Martinez (2003); Huitt & Valdosta (2003); Lee (2003); Peterson & Merino (2003); Kardes, Cronley, Van Kleef, De Dreu & Manstead (2004); Kaufman-Scarborough & Cohen (2004); Kellaris & Posavac (2004); Peracchio & Luna (2006); Sojka & Giese (2006); Tam & Ho (2006); Thompson & Hamilton (2006);		

Hanekom (2007); Jensen & Jepsen (2007); Carlson & White (2008); Kidwell & Jewell (2008); Hanekom & Barker (2009); Moriarty, Mitchell & Wells (2009); Savolainen (2009); Nielsen, Shapiro & Mason (2010); Wyer & Xu (2010); Belch & Belch (2012)

THEORETICAL CRITERIA

1. Online consumer information processing and response

- Online consumer information processing and response refer to the internal psychological processes online consumers proceed through during exposure to online web-based communication messages
- **Pre-exposure**
 - *Literacy*
 - *Intent*
 - *Voluntary access*
- **Web-based communication exposure**
 - *Vehicle exposure*
 - *Deliberate and desired exposure*
 - *Information pull and regulation*
 - *Web-based communication exposure*
 - *Awareness*
- **Perception**
 - *Message perception*
 - *Prior perception*
 - *Integrated perception*
 - *Selective perception*
 - *Perceptual vigilance*
 - *Perceptual defence*
 - *Perceptual organisation*
 - *Perceptual interpretation*
- **Cognition**
 - *Attention*
 - *Recognition of needs*
 - *Gathering of information*
 - *Association*
 - *Cognitive learning*
 - *Conditioned learning*
 - *Differentiation*
 - *Comprehension*
 - *Elaboration*
 - *Knowledge*
 - *Web-based communication acceptance*

- **Interaction**
 - *Web-based communication control*
 - *Active attraction to web-based communication messages*
 - *Choice*
 - *Active engagement and participation with web-based communication messages*
 - *Interaction with customised, information-intensive web-based communication*
 - *Dialogue*
 - *Multidirectional communication*
 - *Exchange and sharing*
 - *Information empowerment*
 - *Uncertainty reduction*
 - *Involvement*
 - *Connectivity*
 - *Building online relationships*
 - *Enjoyment and gratification*
- **Affection**
 - *Recognition of wants*
 - *Shaping of emotions around the message*
 - *Interest*
 - *Liking*
 - *Desire*
 - *Preference*
 - *Conviction*
 - *Attitude formation*
 - *Motivation formation*
- **Decision making**
 - *Association evaluation*
 - *Integrated evaluation*
 - *Affect referral*
 - *Compensatory heuristic*
 - *Conjunctive heuristic*
 - *Message stimulation*
 - *Prior stimulation*
 - *Integrated stimulation*
- **Conation**
 - *Memory: recognition*
 - *Memory: recall*
 - *Conviction and preference*
 - *Action*

- *Commitment and loyalty*

2. Determinants of online consumer information processing and response

• *Web-based communication exposure*

- Web-based communication exposure occasion/condition
- Online consumer's attention level
- Online consumer interest
- Online consumer awareness
- Characteristics of the individual online consumer

• *Perception*

- Web-based communication/information relevance
- Web-based message recognition
- Characteristics of the online stimuli
- Information-processing style

• *Cognition*

- Web-based communication/informational need
- Type of learning
- Web-based communication message differentiation
- Recall
- Conditioned learning
- Informational and transformational motivations
- Perceived web-based communication messages differentiation
- Topical involvement

• *Affection*

- Informational want/desire
- Individual's feelings
- Liking
- Resonance
- Motivation
- Influence (opinion leaders)
- Web-based communication involvement
- Believability/credibility
- Preference and intention
- Loyalty

• *Decision making*

- Online consumer interest
- Web-based communication relevance
- Message recognition
- Impact of web-based communication message
- Interpretation of web-based communication message

- Credibility of web-based communication message
- Familiarity
- **Conation/behaviour**
 - Trial
 - Contacting
 - Advocating
 - Referral
 - Prevention/avoidance
 - Interpretation of web-based communication message
 - Credibility of web-based communication message

The theoretical criteria, summaries, interpretations and critical analyses provided below are based on the existing literature on offline and online consumer information processing and response, as presented in chapter 5.

7.6.1 Online consumer information processing and response

The theoretical criteria stipulated in the section below indicate the online consumer *information-processing and response phase* of the *online consumer information decision-making process* that was discussed in section 7.5. The main aim of this section is to highlight and propose theoretical criteria for online consumer information processing and response, which can provide a deeper understanding of how online consumers respond to and process information. Since two important online approaches on which this study is based are the internal psychological behavioural processes approach and the web-based communication exposure approach, the internal information-processing and response processes of consumers in the online environment are highlighted. In the context of this study, consumer information processing and consumer response are used as interchangeable concepts that indicate the internal psychological processes that online consumers proceed through during exposure to web-based communication messages, responding to them and processing the information.

The theoretical criteria for online consumer information processing and response below are an integration, summary and application to the online environment of all the theoretical concepts contained in the existing offline and online consumer

response and information-processing models and theories indicated and discussed in chapter 5. For the purpose of this section, the theoretical criteria are organised into broad categories that indicate online consumers' information-processing and response progression during their exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages. This encompasses all the relevant phases, stages and theoretical explanations that are indicated in the existing offline and online models and theories of consumer information processing and response presented in chapter 5.

7.6.1.1 Pre-exposure

As indicated in chapter 5, since exposure in the online environment is deliberate and desired, online consumers proceed through cognitive pre-exposure processes during which preparation for exposure to and interaction with web-based communication messages occur.

Pre-exposure is an additional phase to the existing offline consumer response hierarchies that were discussed in chapter 5 and therefore indicates an additional phase in the online consumer information-processing and response process, specifically in terms of the online environment. It is argued that in the online environment, the online consumer has intentions to be exposed to web-based communication messages and that exposure is usually not unintentional.

It was suggested in chapter 5 that online consumers' intentionality allows for preparation for the web-based communication encounter, consisting of the following theoretical criteria: Regarding *literacy*, alphabetical, document and tool literacy are prerequisites for accessing, operating and interacting online. As far as *intent* is concerned, in the online environment, exposure is a result of deliberate and desired intention, based on an active choice, thus signifying an intentional phase. *Voluntary access* relates to consumers accessing any amount of information voluntarily at a high speed and global level.

It is proposed that the theoretical criteria highlighted above indicate pre-exposure in the online environment, and thus specifically support the online context of this study. They are therefore arguably applicable as theoretical criteria for online consumer information processing and response.

7.6.1.2 Web-based communication exposure

Although it was indicated in chapter 5 that the next phase in the consumer response process is exposure, in line with the online informational perspective proposed in this study, it is postulated that the next phase in the online consumer information-processing and response process should be web-based communication exposure.

It is thus argued that exposure to web-based communication messages is usually not accidental in the online environment. The following theoretical criteria indicate exposure to web-based communication messages, based on the theoretical discussions in chapter 5 and applied to the online exposure and informational context of this study:

Vehicle exposure means that exposure to the vehicle or medium (internet) is a prerequisite for web-based communication exposure. *Deliberate and desired exposure* refers to the fact that consumers deliberately choose the amount of exposure they require. *Information pull and regulation* relate to the fact that when online consumers are exposed to web-based communication messages and go through an informational experience, they deliberately pull information that suits their needs and interests. *Web-based communication exposure* means that after deliberate exposure to the medium and pulling of information, the online consumer is exposed to web-based communication messages. *Awareness* means that the online consumer becomes aware of the web-based communication message, the different elements in it and the associations between the message and existing knowledge.

7.6.1.3 Perception

Although perception was previously indicated as a psychological theoretical criterion in the internal psychological behavioural processes approach, as well as an internal determinant of online consumer behaviour, it is argued that perception can also be classified as a theoretical criterion for online consumer information processing and response.

It was stated in chapter 5 that online consumers' perceptual processes comprise the following concepts: product perception, prior perception, integrated perception, selective perception, perceptual distortion, perceptual vigilance, perceptual defence, perceptual equilibrium, perceptual organisation and perceptual interpretation.

For the purpose of applying these elements of perception to online consumer information processing and response from an informational perspective, they are applied as follows in terms of the discussions in chapter 5:

Message perception means that individuals perceive the web-based communication message and information through their five senses. *Prior perception* relates to message and information perceptions and inputs that were acquired prior to the current exposure occasion which are now retrieved from memory. During the *integrated perception* phase, the online consumer experiences a perceptual process on the basis of prior perception and his/her immediate experience during exposure to web-based communication messages. *Selective perception* means that online consumers selectively perceive web-based communication messages and information. *Perceptual distortion* relates to the online consumer disregarding some of the information in order to perceive messages that are close to already familiar information. *Perceptual vigilance* entails the online consumer only regarding, attending to and retaining information that is relevant to his/her needs. *Perceptual defence* means that online consumers protect and defend themselves from threatening or contradictory stimuli by distorting information that is inconsistent with existing values and beliefs. *Perceptual equilibrium* refers to the fact that online consumers seek psychological equilibrium that lacks conflict and contradictory

information. *Perceptual organisation* relates to online consumers organising information and web-based communication messages into something that is useful and can be grouped with existing information. *Perceptual interpretation* involves the formation of perceptions based on individual interpretations of web-based communication messages and information.

7.6.1.4 Cognition

It was posited in chapter 5 that information seeking, gathering, organisation and interpretation, as well as web-based communication message engagement and consumption, refer to cognitive processes that collectively indicate several consumer response processes. In Chapter 5, the following were specified as elements of cognition: attention, recognition of needs, gathering of information, association, cognitive learning, conditioned learning, differentiation, comprehension, knowledge and message acceptance.

For the purpose of applying these elements of the cognition phase of consumer response to online consumer information processing and response from an informational perspective, they are applied as follows in terms of the discussions in chapter 5: *Attention* can be paid to the web-based communication message after positive connections with the message have been established. *Recognition of needs* means that the online consumer cognitively realises message and informational needs. *Information is gathered* in order to satisfy an informational need. *Associations* are formed between the web-based communication message and the various elements contained in it. *Cognitive learning* occurs when facts, information and explanations are internalised for problem solving. *Conditioned learning* means that online consumers learn by means of classical or instrumental learning by responding either automatically or involuntarily because of rewards or punishment. *Differentiation* involves consumers weighing up the differences between various web-based communication messages and information sources. *Comprehension* occurs only when the online consumer understands the message and therefore also acts as a prerequisite for interaction and adaptation. *Elaboration* involves the processing of relevant, differentiated and learnt information via high or low

elaboration response processes, referring to the online consumer's mental and cognitive processes in information processing. *Knowledge* in this context means that the online consumer now possesses knowledge based on the information obtained and the consumption of the web-based communication message. *Web-based communication acceptance* relates to the fact that when the online consumer accepts the web-based communication message, he/she internalises the information and opens up the possibility of future interactions with web-based communication messages.

7.6.1.5 Interaction

It is argued that interaction is a theoretical criterion for online consumer behaviour that is significant in the online context in that consumers interact with information and web-based communication messages. It was stated in chapter 5 that the interaction phase of the online consumer information-processing and response process consists of the following: control of exposure to and the amount of interaction with web-based commercial communication (WBCC); active attraction to the WBCC messages; choice, active engagement and participation in WBCC; interaction with customised, information-intensive WBCC; dialogue; multidirectional communication; exchange and sharing; information empowerment; uncertainty reduction; involvement; connectivity; building online relationships; and enjoyment and gratification.

These elements of the interaction phase of consumer response to online consumer information processing and response are applied as follows in terms of the discussions in chapter 5: In *web-based communication control*, the online consumer cognitively controls the type of exposure and amount of interaction during the web-based communication exposure and experience situation. Regarding *active attraction to web-based communication messages*, if the online consumer is actively attracted to the web-based communication message, he/she will voluntarily seek relevant information. *Choice* means that the online consumer actively decides whether or not he/she wishes to interact with the message or the available information. Regarding *active engagement and participation with web-based communication messages*, the online consumer actively and interactively engages

with the web-based communication message. As far as *interaction with customised, information-intensive web-based communication* is concerned, online interaction is possible with information-intensive web-based communication messages that focus on content delivery. *Dialogue* means that online consumers can engage in a dialogue with the organisation or other online users because of the interactive nature of the medium. *Multidirectional communication* involves online consumers also engaging in multidirectional communication by conversing with other interconnected organisational stakeholders. Regarding *exchange and sharing*, online consumers further exchange and share information with all stakeholders. *Information empowerment* means that because of the information-intensive nature of web-based communication, online consumers are empowered by the information they receive and interact with and use this information to make informed decisions. *Uncertainty reduction* relates to the fact that because of the information-intensive nature of web-based communication, informational uncertainty is reduced because of the abundance of information available online. Online consumers' *involvement* is either affective when they process symbolic quality and image dimensions with the right brain, or cognitive when they intensely process information with the left brain. Involvement is established by means of interaction with personally relevant information. Owing to connectivity, the online consumer is able to share and exchange information by means of dialogue and multidirectional communication. *Building online relationships* is possible in an interactive environment. *Enjoyment and gratification* means that when online consumers experience enjoyment and feel gratified, they will return to a website to seek more web-based communication encounters with specific informational content, sometimes leading to habitual return to a website.

7.6.1.6 Affection

It is argued that affection refers to online consumers' emotions and feelings about web-based communication messages and informational content. It was suggested in chapter 5 that affection consists of the following theoretical concepts: recognition of wants, shaping of emotions around the message/product, interest, liking, desire, preference, conviction, attitude formation and motivation formation.

For the purpose of applying these elements of affection to online consumer information processing and response, they are applied as follows in terms of the discussions in chapter 5: *Recognition of wants* means that the online consumer recognises his/her wants and needs. In the informational perspective of this study, this refers to the online consumer's needs and wants regarding web-based communication interaction and informational needs. *Shaping of emotions around the message* means that the consumer now develops either positive or negative emotions about the web-based communication message. *Interest* refers to the fact that the online consumer is interested in the web-based communication message. Interest results in *liking*, which is a prerequisite for desire. *Desire* means that the online consumer desires web-based communication interaction and information. *Preference* is established by forming favourable attitudes or feelings towards the web-based communication message. *Conviction* means that the online consumer assures and convinces himself/herself that he/she has made the correct choice by engaging with a specific web-based communication message. In *attitude formation*, positive or negative attitude formation determines the online consumer's disposition towards the message. *Motivation formation* means that when the online consumer's motivation is formed, he/she is motivated to act/respond in a certain manner.

7.6.1.7 Decision making

Although the theoretical criteria for online consumer *information decision making* were discussed in a previous section, some of the theoretical criteria are again identified in this section as part of the online consumer information-processing and response process indicated in chapter 5. The elements of decision making as part of the consumer response process were indicated in chapter 5 as follows: association evaluation; product evaluation; prior evaluation; integrated evaluation; affect referral; compensatory heuristic; conjunctive heuristic; product stimulation; prior stimulation; and integrated stimulation.

These elements of decision making contained in the consumer response process are applied as follows to online consumer information processing and response, on the basis of the discussions in chapter 5: *Association evaluation* means that the online

consumer evaluates web-based communication message associations on which decisions are based. *Integrated evaluation* means that current information and web-based communication evaluations and prior information and web-based communication evaluations are combined to form an integrated information and web-based communication evaluation to support the decision being made. In *affect referral*, the online consumer retrieves his/her attitudes from memory and chooses message interactions with the most positive connections. *Compensatory heuristic* means that the online consumer bases his/her decisions on the message attributes and benefits he/she values most. *Conjunctive heuristic* relates to the online consumer adopting a noncompensatory strategy by considering only those factors that meet or exceed standards. *Message stimulation* means that the online consumer is now stimulated favourably towards the message in order to be motivated to act positively on the stimulation. *Prior stimulation* encounters need to be retrieved from memory. *Integrated stimulation* means that current and prior stimulation are combined to form an integrated stimulation which refers to online consumers' acquisition of internal motivations.

7.6.1.8 Conation

It is argued that conation refers to action or behaviour that occurs online during exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages. As indicated in chapter 5, conation/action consists of the following elements: memory, transferring, tagging and retrieving; memory, recall, conviction and preference, action, trial, purchase, adoption, commitment and loyalty.

For the purpose of applying these elements of conation to online consumer information processing and response, they are applied as follows on the basis of the discussions in chapter 5: *Memory: recognition* means that previous web-based communication messages are retrieved from memory and help to decide the way in which the online consumer is going to act. *Memory: recall* relates to the online consumer successfully recalling the message during comprehension as he/she assigns meaning to the elements of the web-based communication message content and forms new representations which can also be stored in memory. The online

consumer bases his/her *conviction and preference* on memory of the web-based communication message. In the web-based communication context, *action* refers to the online consumer's specific behaviour in terms of web-based communication message consumption. *Commitment and loyalty* to message and information sources follow once the consumer is satisfied with the web-based communication encounters and outcomes.

7.6.2 Determinants of online consumer information processing and response

Although determinants of online *consumer behaviour* in general were specified in a previous section (section 7.4), this section provides the theoretical criteria for the determinants of online consumer *information processing and response* in summary format in table 7.6. It should be emphasised that there is a certain amount of overlapping between some of the determinants of online consumer *information processing and response* and the general determinants of *online consumer behaviour*, which were dealt with in section 7.4. However, in the context of online consumer information processing and response in terms of the informational and online perspectives proposed in this study, only those determinants that are deemed to be relevant are briefly touched on again. It is further argued that these determinants could alter the order or sequence of online consumer's *information-processing and response processes*. The determinants highlighted below are further related to the various theoretical concepts of online consumer information processing and response mentioned above, and are deemed to be relevant to the context of this discussion based on the theoretical discussions in chapter 5.

Table 7.6: Determinants of online consumer information processing and response

Determinants of:	Determinants
Web-based communication exposure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web-based communication exposure occasion/condition • Online consumer's attention level • Online consumer interest

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online consumer awareness • Characteristics of the individual online consumer
Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web-based communication/information relevance • Web-based message recognition • Characteristics of the online stimuli • Information-processing style
Cognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web-based communication/informational need • Type of learning • Message differentiation • Recall • Symbolism • Conditioned learning • Informational and transformational motivations • Perceived web-based communication message differentiation • Topical involvement
Affection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational want/desire • Individual's feelings • Liking • Resonance • Motivation • Influence (opinion leaders) • Web-based communication involvement • Believability/credibility • Preference and intention • Loyalty
Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online consumer interest • Web-based communication relevance • Message recognition • Impact of web-based communication message • Interpretation of web-based communication message • Credibility of web-based communication

	message <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity
Conation/behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial • Contacting • Advocating • Referral • Prevention/avoidance • Interpretation of web-based communication message • Web-based communication message involvement

7.7 THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Table 7.7 indicates the theoretical perspectives, theoretical approaches, main authors and a summary of the main theoretical criteria for the theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour.

Table 7.7: Theoretical criteria for the theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour

THEORETICAL CRITERIA FOR THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR		
Cognitive psychological perspective	Social behavioural perspective	Expectancy theoretical perspective
Web-based communication exposure approach	Internal psychological behavioural processes approach	
MAIN AUTHORS		
Ajzen & Fishbein (1969); Ajzen & Fishbein (1970); Ajzen & Fishbein (1972); Fishbein & Ajzen (1973); Ajzen & Fishbein (1974); Ajzen & Madden (1986); Sheppard, Hartwick & Warshaw (1988); Davis (1989); Ajzen (1991); Koufaris (2002); Cheung et al (2003); Lim & Dubinsky (2005); Huang, Lurie & Mitra (2009); Taylor & Strutton (2009)		
THEORETICAL CRITERIA		
1. Offline and online theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical criteria that indicate behavioural intentions, behaviour and technology acceptance 		

2. Individual reasoned action

- Individual's personal beliefs (personal normative beliefs) (NBp)
- Individual's beliefs of the expectations of significant others in terms of the individual's behaviour in specific situations (social normative beliefs) (NBs)
- The individual's intentions in terms of the behaviour or action he/she is engaging in – also referred to as behavioural intentions (BI)
- The individual's actual behaviour – also referred to as overt behaviour (B)
- The individual's attitude towards behaviour in a certain situation (A-act)
- The individual's motivation to comply with social normative beliefs; that is, others expectations of his/her behaviour in a certain situation (Mcs)
- The individual's attitude towards a specific object in a certain behavioural situation (Ao)
- The individual's motivation to comply with the norms stipulated in a specific situation (**Mc**)

3. Attitude

- Cognitive component
- Affective component
- Conative component
- Action
- The target that specifies the direction of action
- The context in which the action occurs
- The time during which the action occurs

4. Behavioural intention prediction

- Behavioural intention determined by attitude towards the act, other individuals' expectations and personal normative beliefs

5. Factors influencing behavioural intentions and the attribution of responsibility

- The act's perceived consequences
- Values
- The source of normative beliefs
- Association
- Commission
- Foreseeability
- Intentionality
- Justification

6. Planned behaviour

- Perceived control, attitude and subjective norms determine individual intentions and behaviour
- Internal factors (adequate planning, skills, abilities, knowledge, normative influences and informational influences)
- External factors (dependence of behaviour on the cooperation of other people and the

opportunity and time that determine the control over the intended behaviour)

- Intention that consists of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control
- Beliefs that consists of behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs

7. Technology acceptance

- Perceived ease of use
- Perceived usefulness
- Social influence processes
 - Subjective norm
 - Voluntariness
 - Compliance
 - Image
- Cognitive instrumental processes
 - Demonstrability
 - Perceived ease of use
- Individual differences
 - Personality, demographics, traits, gender
- System characteristics
 - System characteristics determine positive or negative perceptions of the system
- Social influence
 - Social factors influence individuals' perception of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness

The theoretical criteria, summaries, interpretations and critical analyses provided below are based on the existing literature on the offline and online theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour as set out in chapter 6.

7.7.1 Offline and online theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour

The main theoretical premises and foundations on which the theory of consumer behaviour is grounded and from which the subsequent theoretical criteria are derived, are the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behaviour and the technology acceptance model (TAM). These theories were discussed in detail in chapter 6 and were regarded as significant in the context of this study, mainly because they describe the following major factors considered to influence behavioural intentions, behaviour and technology acceptance.

7.7.1.1 Individual reasoned action

The summary below is obtained from the main theoretical thrusts of the theory of reasoned action which was discussed and applied to the online context in Chapter 6 and which, for the purpose of this chapter, provides specific theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour indicating motivation in predicting behavioural intention and behaviour in social situations.

It was indicated in the theoretical discussions in chapter 6 that an *individual's behaviour (B)* is a function of his/her *behavioural intention (BI)*, which is determined by his/her *attitude towards the act (A-act)* and by his/her beliefs about the *expectations of the other individuals (subjective norm)* involved – in other words, his/her *social normative beliefs (NBs)*. The main theoretical thrust is thus the *prediction of intentions* and behaviour by means of *attitude* and *subjective norm*, which are in turn determined by *behavioural* and *normative beliefs*. Behavioural intentions are the result of *attitudes* towards performing a specific action in a specific situation, guided by the *norms* that direct that behaviour and multiplied by the *motivation* that steers compliance. The *normative component* refers to individual personal beliefs about what should be done in a specific situation (*NBp*) and the individual's perception of *significant others' expectations*.

- **Attitude**

Attitude as a theoretical criterion for consumer behaviour was discussed in previous sections, but is mentioned again here to emphasise that it should be regarded as a theoretical criterion of individual reasoned action. It was indicated in chapter 6 as a multidimensional, indispensable theoretical construct in predicting human behaviour. It was previously suggested that attitude includes *cognitive, affective and conative components* that refer to the individual's attitude in terms of his/her performance of a particular act in a specific situation and not his/her attitude towards a specific person, object or situation. In some instances, attitude towards the object (*Ao*) may relate to the attitude towards the behaviour in a given situation (*A-act*) and to the normative aspects of the model.

Attitude, as previously indicated, comprises the following elements: the action, the target that specifies the direction of the action, the context in which the action occurs and the time of the action.

Based on the theoretical discussions of the theory of reasoned action, it is posited that, for the purpose of this study, this theory's significance lies in its prediction of an individual's behavioural intention and overt behaviour based on his/her attitude towards the particular act and his/her perception of what significant others expect of him/her.

In chapter 6, the theory of reasoned action was applied to the online context of this study, indicating the following: In the online environment, specifically in terms of web-based communication exposure and behavioural intentions, behaviour per se can arguably be predicted on the basis of the online consumer's attitudes and social normative beliefs (perception of what significant others expect). In chapter 6, it was further argued that in the online environment, particularly in terms of web-based communication exposure and behavioural intentions, behaviour per se can arguably be predicted in terms of the online consumer's attitudes and social normative beliefs (perception of what significant others expect). It was further suggested that motivation is an additional key determinant of behavioural intention as well as overt behaviour in that it is guided by the individual's norms. It was also previously indicated that in the online environment, behavioural intention situations may include a normative component which could involve an individual's personal beliefs as well as his/her perception of what others expect of him/her.

7.7.1.2 Behavioural intention prediction

The summary below was obtained from the main theoretical thrusts of the theoretical model of behavioural intention prediction which were discussed and applied to the online context in chapter 6 and which, for the purpose of this chapter, provides specific theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour indicating social behaviour in terms of individuals' *behaviour (B)* resulting from *behavioural intention (BI)*, which is determined by *attitude towards the act (A-act)* and by beliefs about what the *other individuals expect of him/her (NBs)*. Of significance in the context of this study is the

individual's *motivation to comply with the norms (Mc)* and *personal normative beliefs (NBp)*. *Situational variables* and *personality characteristics* were further regarded as influences on *behavioural intentions* and the *individual's position towards the object*.

It was argued in chapter 6 that, in the context of online consumer behaviour, predicting behavioural intentions for a single online behavioural act can extend beyond normal online behavioural situations to choice situations. It was suggested that this could be linked to the proposition of an online information decision-making perspective in chapter 4.

In applying the theoretical model of behavioural intention prediction to the online context of this study, it was posited that an individual's personal normative beliefs may be accurate predictors of his/her behavioural intentions in addition to attitudes.

7.7.1.3 Factors influencing behavioural intentions and the attribution of responsibility

The summary below was derived from the main theoretical thrusts of the factors influencing behavioural intentions and the attribution of responsibility, which were discussed and applied to the online context in chapter 6 and which, for the purpose of this chapter, provide specific theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour indicating *normative beliefs (NB)*, which impact on behavioural intentions and can be multiplied by the *individual's motivation to comply with norms (Mc)*. It was further indicated in the theoretical discussions of the factors influencing behavioural intentions and the attribution of responsibility, that an individual's attitudes are also determined by the *act's perceived consequences* and the *value* thereof to that specific individual. The *source of normative beliefs (NB)* is determined by others' *attitude towards the act (Aact)* in terms of the individual's belief of what others expect of him/her.

It was argued that attribution of responsibility is a vital theoretical construct in explaining online consumer behaviour and that it comprises the following levels: association, commission, foreseeability, intentionality and justification.

It was further propounded that in the online context of this study, the *attribution of responsibility* means that individual responsibility attribution diminishes when attribution to the online environment is higher. This means that the individual operating in the online environment is attributed less responsibility than the online environment in which he/she functions.

7.7.1.4 Planned behaviour

The summary below on planned behaviour was derived from the main theoretical thrusts of the theory of planned behaviour which were discussed and applied to the online context in Chapter 6 and which, for the purpose of this chapter, provide specific theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour indicating that the theoretical constructs relating to the theory of planned behaviour predict social human behaviour by incorporating perceived control, attitudes and subjective norms over behavioural achievement as determinants of individuals' intentions and behaviour. Of significance here is perceived behavioural control or cognitive self-regulation. Internal factors such as adequate planning, skills, abilities, knowledge, normative influences (compliance with others' expectations) and informational influences (acceptance of informational influences), as well as external factors such as dependence of the behaviour on the cooperation of other people and the opportunity and time that determine the control over the intended behaviour, were indicated. It was further postulated that behaviour is influenced by perceived behavioural control via intentions and aggregation of specific behaviour across specific occasions. Intention, as a determinant of behaviour, was further specified to be determined by the following three determinants: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control. Three types of belief were mentioned in the theoretical discussion of the theory of planned behaviour, namely behavioural, normative and control beliefs.

It was argued in chapter 6 that the theory of planned behaviour provides a useful theoretical framework for applying it to the online context of this study in explaining human behaviour in terms of the prediction of behavioural intention and general behaviour. It was further posited that the theory of planned behaviour supports some

of the predictive processes that consumers in the online contexts engage in, and it was argued that it could, inter alia, be employed in the development of a conceptual integrated theoretical model of online consumer behaviour.

7.7.1.5 *Technology acceptance*

The summary below on technology acceptance is obtained from the main theoretical thrusts of TAM and its extensions, which were discussed and applied to the online context in chapter 6. For the purpose of this chapter, the model and its extensions provide specific theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour indicating the use of new technology and behavioural intention as being determined by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

It was suggested in chapter 6, based on the theoretical explanations of TAM, that, in line with the web-based communication exposure approach, *perceived usefulness* can predict the way online consumers perceive the usefulness of online information and messages and can subsequently determine whether an individual will or will not use an application or message. It was argued, however, that *perceived ease of use*, is able to predict online consumers' perception of the ease or difficulty of the web-based communication messages and information-gathering processes – hence the simplicity or difficulty of web-based communication messages or informational applications.

It is argued that TAM contributes the following theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour: behavioural intention, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

An expansion on technology acceptance indicated in chapter 6, explained perceived usefulness and usage intentions in the context of social influence and cognitive instrumental processes, by identifying the following factors that influence user acceptance: *Social influence processes* determine consumer behaviour by means of *subjective norm*, which refers to an individual's perception of what significant others expect of him/her. *Voluntariness* and *compliance* refer to individuals' perception that the adoption process is nonmandatory. *Image* refers to the individual's status in

his/her social system. The determinants of *cognitive instrumental processes* that are relevant to this study are result demonstrability, which is the tangibility of the results of using the innovation and *perceived ease of use*, which determines perceived usefulness.

For the purpose of identifying theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour in the context of technology acceptance, the following determinants of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are indicated, as previously discussed in chapter 6: Regarding *individual differences*, personality, demographics, traits and gender influence individuals' perception of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. The *system's prominent characteristics* determine an individual's positive or negative perceptions of the system's usefulness and ease of use. *Social influence* means that social factors influence individuals' perception of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness.

It was previously argued that the primary contribution of TAM is its application to the online context of this study. It was posited that TAM is deemed relevant to the online context for three reasons: (1) the concepts of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are significant determinants of online consumer behaviour; (2) perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use indicate online consumers' perception of the usefulness and ease of use of web-based communication messages and information; and (3) perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use indicate online consumers' perception of the easiness or difficulty of their engagement with web-based communication messages and information.

7.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour derived from the main theoretical perspectives addressed in chapters 2 to 6 of this study, which formed the basis of the theoretical criteria proposed. These criteria are indicative of the online consumer behavioural processes from the web-based communication exposure approach and the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. The criteria will subsequently form the theoretical foundation on

which a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour will be developed in the next chapter.

This chapter indicated that the main theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour are derived from the theoretical constructs of online consumer behaviour from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches; the determinants of online consumer behaviour; online consumer information decision making; online consumer information processing and response; and the theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour.

In the next chapter a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour will be proposed based on the theoretical discussions, underpinnings and analyses presented in the preceding chapters and the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

CHAPTER 8: A CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED THEORETICAL MODEL FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the main research problem of this study, namely to develop a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. This is done on the basis of an evaluative analysis, integration and interpretation of the theoretical contributions in the previous chapters. This main research objective was motivated by the argument that the knowledge and information on online consumers' behavioural processes is inadequate, especially on internal psychological behavioural processes where consumers are exposed to web-based communication messages and proceeding through the complete web-based communication experience, as well as by a lack of existing systematic theoretical analyses. The conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour proposed in this chapter signifies the progression from existing approaches, which explain offline and online consumer behaviour in terms of purchasing behaviour and product consumption (addressed in the previous chapters), to a new approach. This approach focuses on online consumers' internal behavioural and web-based communication exposure processes when searching for and consuming online web-based communication information and messages.

In addition, the proposed conceptual model provides a theoretical framework that allows for the systematic theoretical study and analysis of consumer behaviour in the online environment. It is critical to understand the behavioural processes of online consumers and gain a more precise understanding of the following: the internal, external and online determinants that influence online consumers' behaviour; the complete web-based communication experiences and subsequent interactive information-seeking and consumption actions; the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes and subsequent behavioural phases online consumers proceed through when experiencing a complete web-based communication experience; and the cognitive information processing and response processes, information decision-making processes and

output processes that result from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes.

The main aim of this chapter is to theoretically argue for a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour that presents an understanding of online consumer behaviour from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

The layout of the chapter is as follows: Firstly, it commences with a brief description and graphical depiction of the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. Secondly, it explains online consumer behaviour based on the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour which is approached from the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. Lastly, the determinants, processes and phases that make up the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour are discussed in detail.

8.2 A CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED THEORETICAL MODEL FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Based on a culmination of the preceding chapters on existing viewpoints and a critical analysis thereof, as well as new and adapted perspectives, a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour is proposed in figure 8.1. This model presents online consumer behaviour as parallel, transactional and reciprocal behavioural processes determined and affected by internal, external and online factors. The parallelism of online consumer behavioural processes indicates the possibility that online consumers may proceed through several processes simultaneously, while transactionality and reciprocity refer to the probability that online consumers may progress from one process or phase to the next in different sequences, contrary to the usual linear depiction of online behavioural processes. Online consumer behaviour indicates online consumers' progression through the complete web-based communication experience that signifies their search for and consumption of communication and informational experiences which comprise

several interactive information-seeking and consumption actions. According to the model, online consumers' complete web-based communication experiences consist of two main consumer behavioural processes, namely the web-based communication exposure process and the internal psychological behavioural process. The model further indicates that each of these processes consists of several behavioural phases. Moreover, the web-based communication exposure process and internal psychological behavioural process subsequently lead to cognitive information-processing and response processes, information decision-making processes and output processes and also comprise several behavioural phases.

The main difference between the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour presented in figure 8.1 and existing models that present hierarchical linearity is the proposal that the online consumer progresses through the behavioural processes in a parallel and reciprocal manner, depending on individual internal, external and online determinants. It is also indicated that some of the processes and phases may occur simultaneously and interact in a reciprocal manner, leading to abbreviated or expanded online behavioural processes and phases. Hence it is argued that it can cause the probability that individual online consumers may in fact proceed through the online consumer behavioural processes and phases in a dissimilar fashion and alternative order, in some instances even omitting some of them.

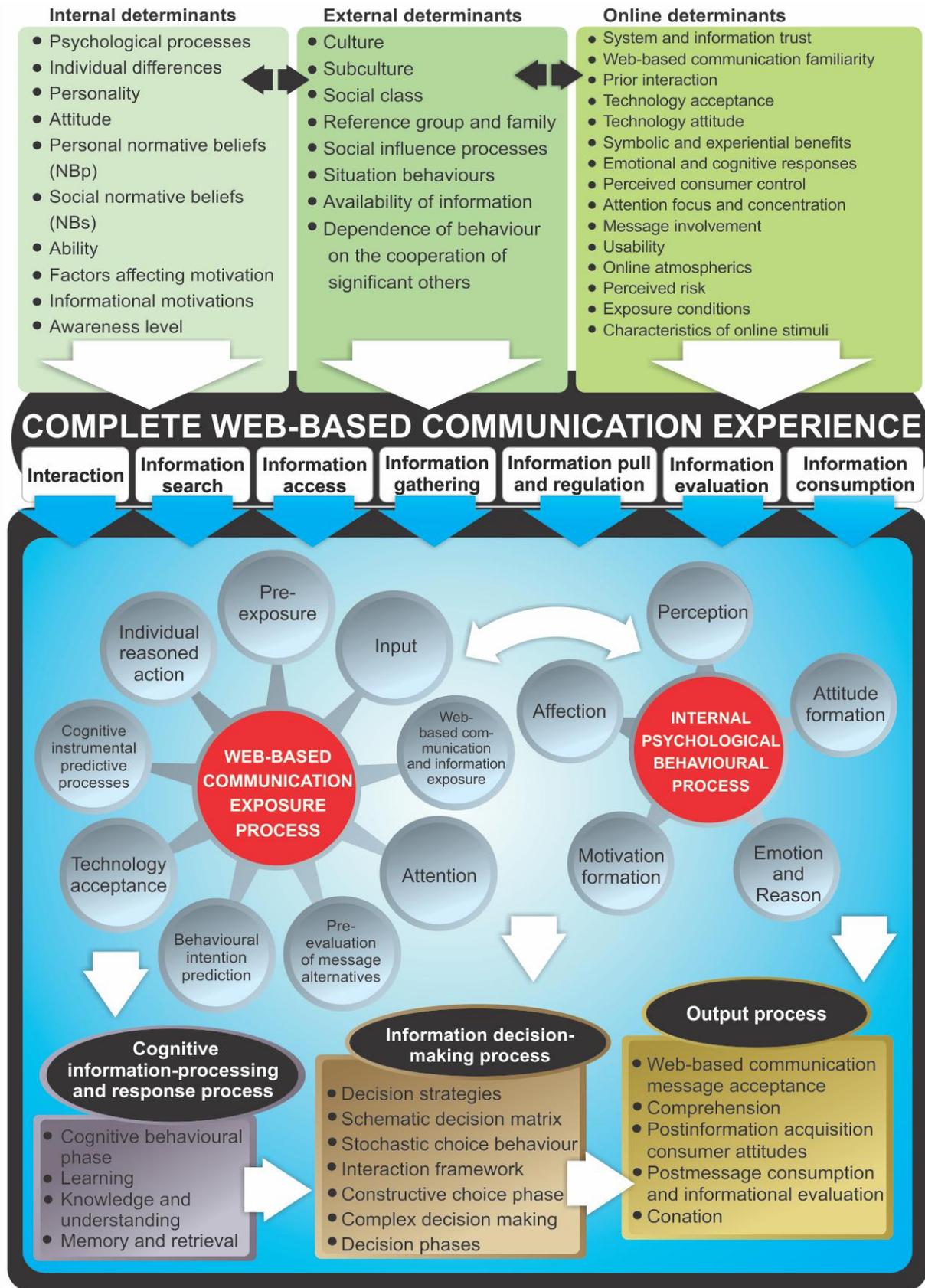


Figure 8.1: A conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour

This section briefly introduces the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour in order to orientate the reader towards figure 8.1 wherein the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour is visually depicted. In the subsequent section, the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour forms the basis for demonstrating online consumer behavioural processes, actions, phases and determinants.

Since the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour indicates online consumer behaviour, the next section elaborates on all the processes and phases indicated in the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour in order to demonstrate online consumer behaviour sufficiently, based on Figure 8.1.

8.3 ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

According to the depiction of online consumer behaviour in figure 8.1, it is firstly argued that online consumer behaviour is determined by internal, external and online determinants causing behavioural parallelism and reciprocity, leading to abbreviated or expanded online behavioural processes and phases that include the following: The *internal determinants* of online consumer behaviour include psychological processes, individual differences, personality, attitude, personal normative beliefs (NBp), social normative beliefs (NBs), ability, factors affecting motivation, informational motivations and awareness level. The *external determinants* of online consumer behaviour include culture, subculture, social class, reference group and family, social influence processes, situation behaviours, availability of information and dependence of behaviour on the cooperation of significant others. The *online determinants* of online consumer behaviour include the following: system and information trust; web-based communication familiarity; prior interaction; technology acceptance; technology attitude; symbolic and experiential benefits; emotional and cognitive responses; perceived consumer control; attention focus and concentration; message involvement; usability; online atmospherics; perceived risk; exposure conditions; and characteristics of online stimuli. These determinants thus cause dissimilar individual movement through the behavioural

processes, thus altering the sequence of progression and even causing omissions of some of the behavioural processes and phases.

Secondly, it is proposed that online consumers' behaviour is embedded in a complete web-based communication experience comprising several interactive information-seeking and consumption actions, namely interaction, information search, information access, information gathering, information pull and regulation, information evaluation and information consumption. Because prior consumer behaviour studies approached consumer behaviour from purchasing perspectives, the consideration of online consumers' complete web based-communication experience comprising several embedded behavioural processes and phases is a significant contribution in focusing on online consumers' consumption of information and communication experiences, leading to a more expansive view of online consumer behaviour.

Thirdly, the complete web-based communication experience mainly consists of a web-based communication exposure process and internal psychological behavioural process. In addition, both consist of several behavioural phases. The web-based communication exposure process is the first main process and consists of the following phases: pre-exposure, input, web-based communication and information exposure, attention, pre-evaluation of message alternatives, behavioural intention prediction, technology acceptance, cognitive instrumental predictive processes and individual reasoned action. The web-based communication exposure process is indicative of the consideration of online consumer behaviour from the proposed web-based communication exposure approach in that it indicates a move towards web-based communication exposure and communication experiences instead of purchasing and product consumption. The web-based communication exposure process reaches beyond online purchasing to consider online consumers' information acquisition and consumption during exposure to web-based communication messages, referring to web content that markets products and provides informational organisational content. The focus during this process is on online consumers' cognitive and experiential phases during their exposure to web-based communication messages and going through the process of, inter alia, paying

attention, accepting technology functionality and cognitively predicting subsequent reasoned action.

Fourthly, the second main process of the complete web-based communication experience is the internal psychological behavioural process which indicates online consumers' subsequent, concurrent or reciprocal procession. This process is indicative of the second approach, namely the internal psychological behavioural processes approach that was proposed in order to explain consumer behaviour in terms of internal psychological behavioural processes that consumers proceed through in their quest for and consumption of information. This process thus comprises the following phases: perception, attitude formation, emotion and reason, motivation formation and affection. This process predominantly considers affective emotional processes and psychological variables and constructs, opposing the traditional technical orientation of online consumer behaviour. The web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes lead to cognitive information processing and response, information decision making and output processes which, in turn, consist of several behavioural phases.

Fifthly, online consumers may subsequently, concurrently or reciprocally proceed to the cognitive information-processing and response process which, in turn, comprises the following phases: the cognitive behavioural phase, learning, knowledge and understanding and memory and retrieval. Although the cognitive information-processing and response process also indicates internal behavioural processes, it differs from the internal psychological behavioural process which only indicates the affective and emotional internal behavioural processes, whereas the cognitive information-processing and response process mainly indicates cognitive processing phases. The cognitive information-processing and response process of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour provides a deeper understanding of how online consumers respond to and process information, referring to their mental and cognitive processing procedures. Although these cognitive response and processing processes are usually presented in the literature in a hierarchical fashion, the phases depicted in the cognitive information-processing and response process of the new model are in-depth parallel-distributed processing,

indicating a connectionist approach in which consumers may proceed through different response processes simultaneously or reciprocally.

Sixth, the next process in the complete web-based communication experience, following the cognitive information-processing and response process, is the information decision-making process. Yet again, this process may be proceeded through subsequently, or in a transactional, reciprocal parallel manner, depending on the internal, external and online determinants of online consumer behaviour. The information decision-making process of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour comprises the following behavioural phases: decision strategies, schematic decision matrix, stochastic choice behaviour, interaction framework, constructive choice phase, complex decision-making and decision phases. The usual focal point of consumer decision making in the realm of consumer science is on product consumption behaviour, but the information decision-making process conceptualises decision making in terms of web-based communication message exposure and information processing, focusing on information and message consumption, hence the proposed information decision-making process.

The last online consumer behavioural process depicted in the model is the output process comprising the following phases: web-based communication message acceptance, comprehension, postinformation acquisition consumer attitudes, postmessage consumption and informational evaluation and conation. When the complete web-based communication experience is almost complete and most of the online consumer behavioural processes have been concluded, the online consumer may move through the final output process of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. The output process indicates online consumers' evaluation of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the informational and web-based communication message experience, resulting in deliberations on the value of the information interaction and complete web-based communication experience that occurred.

After proceeding through the complete web-based communication experience involving several actions, processes and phases, the online consumer may terminate

the experience or may alternatively go through some of the processes or phases again.

The determinants, actions, processes and phases of the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour are discussed separately and depicted graphically in the subsequent sections in order to provide a detailed description of the online consumer behavioural process based on the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

8.4 DETERMINANTS OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Since it was argued that the internal, external and online determinants discussed previously and reiterated in this section are controllable and uncontrollable factors that cognitively, affectively and technologically influence online consumer behaviour and all subsequent processes and phases of online consumer behaviour, they should be considered before explaining the online consumer behavioural process.

These determinants are proposed to be indicative of the complete web-based communication experience and should therefore be seen as factors that can cause behavioural parallelism and reciprocity and lead to abbreviated or expanded online behavioural processes and phases. It is emphasised that these determinants can cause dissimilar individual procession through the behavioural processes, hence altering the sequence of progression and even causing omissions of some of the behavioural processes and phases. It is reiterated that these determinants are also arguably able to cause omissions of some of the online behavioural processes and subsequent phases.

8.4.1 Internal determinants of online consumer behaviour

The internal determinants of online consumer behaviour indicated in figure 8.2 are proposed as the basic psychological determinants of online consumer behaviour because they are deemed to influence online consumers' behaviour during their exposure to and experienced of web-based communication messages.

Internal determinants of online consumer behaviour	
Psychological processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information processing • Learning • Attitude and behaviour change • Ability to process information • Individual perception • Memory
Individual differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychographic differences • Consumer resources • Knowledge • Self-awareness • Emotional orientation
Personality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality traits • Self-concept • Self-esteem • Self-image
Attitude	
Personal normative beliefs (NBp)	
Social normative beliefs (NBs)	
Ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and intelligence • Cognitive styles • Information-processing techniques
Factors affecting motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values • Goals • needs
Informational motivations	
Awareness level	

Figure 8.2: The internal determinants of online consumer behaviour

Each of these internal determinants is briefly discussed below.

8.4.1.1 Psychological processes

The psychological processes proposed as internal determinants that affect the online consumer behavioural process are as follows: *Information processing* relates to the individual's information-processing style which is the manner in which he/she receives, processes and acts on the basis of a specific message. This processing style determines his/her online behaviour. *Learning* as a result of an individual's knowledge and understanding of certain topics indicates his/her online behavioural process. *Attitude and behaviour change* processes are basic psychological behavioural processes that significantly influence the online consumer's behaviour. A consumer's *ability to process information* relates to his/her ability to evaluate, compare and judge alternatives, which is referred to as "consumption vocabulary". This has a bearing on his/her online behavioural processes. *Individual perception* means that an individual's characteristics and selective perception processes determine his/her progression through the perceptual processes, which in turn influence his/her online behavioural processes. *Memory* involves different knowledge-related procedures that are used to pursue goals and influence online consumer behaviour.

8.4.1.2 Individual differences

It is argued that the following individual differences are internal to each individual and determine the online consumer's behavioural processes: *Psychographics* refer to online consumers' psychological composition, which entrenches their individual *values*. *Consumer resources* include time, money and information reception and processing capabilities or attention. *Knowledge* is stored in the memory and differs from individual to individual. *Self-awareness* helps individuals to understand their own motivations. Regarding *emotional orientation*, online consumers' integral emotion refers to influences of subjective experiences on their emotional states, while incidental emotion refers to their subjective emotional experiences.

8.4.1.3 Personality

On the strength of the argument that each individual's personality differs, personality is included as an internal determinant of online consumer behaviour. It is proposed that because of different personality traits, unique self-concepts, self-esteems and self-images, all online consumers will proceed through the online behavioural processes in a different manner and sequence.

It is proposed that personality as a determinant of online consumer behaviour includes the following components which were discussed in previous chapters and proposed to determine online consumer behavioural processes:

Personality traits were defined in a previous chapter and are considered the building blocks of personality, comprising the following elements that are important determinants of online consumer behaviour: *Dogmatism* relates to the open- or close-mindedness of individuals in unfamiliar informational situations such as web-based communication exposure and experience situations and determines the manner in which they will behave in the online situation. Some individuals will react defensively, show discomfort and behave uncertainly towards unexpected communication exposure situations, hence determining their progress through the rest of the behavioural processes and phases. *Innovativeness* determines online consumer behaviour in that it refers to individuals who try new communication situations and information. *The need for cognition* refers to the need for information that individuals display and their subsequent thinking processes. An individual's *social character* can be *inner-directed* when he/she reacts to communication messages on the basis of inner values and standards, or *other-directed* when the social environment is taken into account. The individual's inner- or other-directedness will subsequently determine the manner and sequence of his/her online behavioural processes. *Cognitive personality factors* mean that an individual with a cognitive personality thinks about information and needs to process information cognitively. Regarding *visualisation and verbalisation*, an individual with a visual orientation focuses on the graphical depiction of the message, whereas an individual with a verbal orientation prefers written or verbal information which is evident in the information-intensive web-based communication exposure and experience

occasions. *The self-concept* refers to the individual's evaluation of his/her own attributes which also determines his/her behaviour in the online environment. *Self-esteem* refers to the positive or negative manner in which an individual evaluates himself/herself, and the acceptance or rejection of him/her by significant others is an internal determinant of online consumer behaviour.

The following components of self-esteem were defined in previous chapters and are subsequently deemed to be significant internal determinants of online consumer behaviour: *The actual self-image* refers to the way individuals perceive themselves. *The ideal self-image* relates to the way individuals would like to perceive themselves. *The social self-image* refers to the way individuals think others observe them, constituting the *looking-glass self*, that is, individuals' determination of their own self-worth based on significant others' perception of them. *The ideal social self-image* relates to the way individuals would like others to observe them. *The expected self-image* refers to the way individuals visualise themselves at a specific point in the future. *The virtual self* means that the "online" self can assume different personalities and this subsequently determines an individual's online behaviour.

8.4.1.4 Attitude

As indicated previously, attitudes consist of a cognitive (beliefs) component, an affective (overall attitude) component and a conative (behaviour) component, which differs from individual to individual. This therefore impacts on the manner in which online consumers go through the online consumer behavioural processes and phases. It was argued that attitude formation is indicated as one of the phases in the model that online consumers experience when progressing through the internal psychological behavioural process. However, it is also an internal determinant of online consumer behaviour in that it precedes or follows behaviour as a combination of cognitive beliefs and affective feelings. It is also posited that postinformational dissonance can occur in the online environment when an individual has conflicting beliefs or attitudes towards a specific message or certain informational content.

8.4.1.5 Personal normative beliefs (NBp)

Another determinant that was indicated is the normative component of an individual's personal beliefs about what should be done in a specific situation (NBp). As mentioned earlier, the intention to behave in a certain way is individually determined, signifying an individual approach to online behavioural processes and subsequent phases.

8.4.1.6 Social normative beliefs (NBs)

Social normative beliefs are proposed to be internal determinants, and it is argued that they affect the manner in which consumers proceed through online behavioural processes and phases. As stated earlier, they refer to consumers' beliefs of the expectations of significant others in terms of their behaviour in specific situations.

8.4.1.7 Ability

It is posited that consumers' ability to search for, acquire and process web-based communication messages and information depends on their knowledge and intelligence (resources) and differs in terms of their cognitive styles and information-processing techniques. Online consumers' ability as an internal determinant will therefore determine their progression through the online consumer behavioural processes and phases.

8.4.1.8 Factors affecting motivation

Even though motivation formation is stipulated as a phase that online consumers go through when progressing through internal psychological behavioural processes in a subsequent section, the following factors were identified previously as affecting motivation and are regarded as internal personal relevance determinants of online consumer behaviour: Consumers' *values* guide their decisions in terms of the importance of online messages and information. *Goals* are the objectives that consumers wish to achieve in terms of online messages and information. *Needs*

relates to the fact that tension motivates consumers to act in a specific manner online.

8.4.1.9 Informational motivations

Information motivations are identified as internal determinants that affect the manner in which online consumers proceed through the online behavioural processes and phases in that they refer to their motivation in terms of information and message needs.

8.4.1.10 Awareness level

Individual awareness levels were discussed as referring to the online consumer's awareness of web-based communication messages and information which subsequently determine the sequence of consumers' online behavioural processes and phases, depending on the intensity of the awareness.

8.4.2 External determinants of online consumer behaviour

The external determinants of online consumer behaviour indicated in figure 8.3 were discussed as those social and cultural aspects that influence online consumers' behaviour during their exposure to and experience of the complete web-based communication occurrence.

External determinants of online consumer behaviour
Culture
Subculture
Social class
Reference group and family
Social influence processes
Situation behaviours
Availability of information
Dependence of behaviour on the cooperation of

significant others

Figure 8.3: External determinants of online consumer behaviour

The constructs below were identified as the external determinants of online consumer behaviour which alter online consumers' movement through the different online consumer behavioural processes and phases.

8.4.2.1 Culture

As discussed in a previous chapter, the formally learnt set of values, ideas and artefacts, collectively referred to as culture, are explicitly taught when individuals are assimilated into an existing culture. It is argued that because individuals and culture differ significantly, culture alters the manner in which online consumers behave online and proceed through the complete web-based communication experience.

8.4.2.2 Subculture

Since it was previously indicated that a subculture strives to preserve its identity or subcultural distinctiveness by means of subcultural homogeneity, which refers to a subculture's influence on online consumers' behaviour as a result of homogeneous values, it is proposed as an external determinant of online consumer behaviour because it affects the manner in which online consumers go through the different online consumer behavioural processes and phases.

8.4.2.3 Social class

As discussed in a previous chapter, social class is an external determinant of online consumer behaviour which refers to social stratification that especially determines literacy which, in turn, influences online consumers' informational expectations and experiences.

8.4.2.4 Reference group and family

As stated earlier, peers, family and reference groups are primary normative constructs which provide a frame of reference for online message acceptance and behaviour. It was also posited that a normative reference group influences general values and behaviour, while a comparative reference group serves as a benchmark for comparing attitudes and behaviour. Indirect reference groups, however, influence online consumer behaviour indirectly. It is suggested that of particular importance is virtual groups as external determinants of online consumer behaviour because of their significance as virtual communities consisting of social relationships between individuals online, and their impact on online consumers' behavioural processes.

8.4.2.5 Social influence processes

It is argued that social influence processes determine online consumer behaviour by means of subjective norms, which were said to refer to an individual's perception of what significant others expect of him/her. In previous discussions, it was suggested that each individual has a particular image which refers to his/her status in his/her social system which impacts on his/her progression through the complete web-based communication experience.

8.4.2.6 Situation behaviours

As indicated previously, individuals' situational behaviours differ because of the variations in situations in terms of alternatives and attributes. It is argued that because individuals differ, their situational behaviours subsequently also differ, hence impacting on their online behavioural processes.

8.4.2.7 Availability of information

It was previously suggested that every informational or message decision the online consumer takes in the online environment during his/her complete web-based

communication experience is dependent on the amount and type of information available.

8.4.2.8 Dependence of behaviour on the cooperation of significant others

During the complete web-based communication experience, online behaviour relies on cooperation of significant others and the system, as well as, as previously indicated, the opportunity and time that determine control over the intended online behaviour.

8.4.3 Online determinants of online consumer behaviour

Certain online elements pertaining to technology and online content determine online consumers' progression through different web-based communication processes and phases. Each individual experiences these online elements differently, and will therefore have a dissimilar impact on each online consumer's web-based communication experience. The online determinants of online consumer behaviour, as discussed in previous chapters, are depicted in figure 8.4 and comprise the following:

Online determinants of online consumer behaviour	
System and information trust	
Web-based communication familiarity	
Prior interaction	
Technology acceptance	
Technology attitude	
Symbolic and experiential benefits	
Emotional and cognitive responses	
Perceived consumer control	
Attention focus and concentration	
Message involvement	
Usability	
Online atmospherics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website quality

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website interface • Website satisfaction • Website experience
Perceived risk	
Exposure conditions	
Characteristics of online stimuli	

Figure 8.4: Online determinants of online consumer behaviour

8.4.3.1 System and information trust

It is argued that trust in the online environment determines online consumers' behaviour in that it signifies the online consumers' perception of the risk level involved during the online communication situation. It was also previously indicated that a trusting relationship of faith and confidence is required between the online consumer, the online system and the organisation.

As stated in a previous chapter, trust is multidimensional and a decisive factor in the online environment that determines the manner in which online consumers go through the different processes and phases in that it eliminates uncertainty, perceived risk and interdependence. It is argued that the following types of trust are important determinants of online consumer behaviour in the online environment, as indicated in previous chapters: *Technology trust* refers to online consumers' internet trust. *Online trust* firstly comprises a hard dimension, which refers to a functionality-based dimension of the predictability and ability of the technological aspects of the online interaction. Secondly, the soft dimension refers to the credibility of the trustee (organisation) to operate in the interest of the trustor. *Contextual and cognitive trust* is a specific online type of trust, referring to the specific technological trust that needs to exist in the online environment. *Competence-based trust* is central to online consumer behaviour in that it refers to the competence of the online consumer, which is relevant in the online environment which comprises many technological challenges that require technological competence. *Intentional trust* refers to the online consumer's beliefs about whether the organisation and online system are honest. *Trusting behaviour* refers to the online consumer's trust in the "other" party's

(the organisation's) intentions. *System trust* is important in that it refers to the online consumer's trust of an impersonal structure, namely the online system.

8.4.3.2 *Web-based communication familiarity*

It is argued that online consumer's familiarity refers to the degree of website and organisation familiarity the consumer possesses while interacting online. It was suggested that online consumers' familiarity arguably impacts on their online behavioural processes.

8.4.3.3 *Prior interaction*

It is propounded that prior online interactions determine online consumer behaviour in that these interactions reduce social complexity and cause familiarity and acceptance.

8.4.3.4 *Technology acceptance*

As previously indicated, technology acceptance refers to the ease with which online consumers accept the medium they are using.

8.4.3.5 *Technology attitude*

Technology attitude was defined in a preceding chapter as a concept that refers to an online consumer's evaluative (cognitive) and affective (emotional) response to web-based communication messages. It is argued that the consumer has to display technology readiness before he/she can show technology attitude, which affects his/her behaviour in the online environment.

8.4.3.6 *Symbolic and experiential benefits*

Symbolic benefits were defined earlier as indicating nonproduct-related attributes such as system attributes that arguably affect online consumer's behaviour which

link to experiential benefits such as user imagery, convenience and positive experiences with an online organisation, which determine online consumers' behaviour.

8.4.3.7 *Emotional and cognitive responses*

It was stated earlier that online consumers' emotional and cognitive responses mediate the relationship between the environment and online consumers' behaviour hence their impact on the manner in which the online consumer will go through the behavioural processes and phases.

8.4.3.8 *Perceived consumer control*

The online consumer's perception of the amount of control he/she possesses in the online environment (perceived control) arguably determines his/her online behaviour in that it refers to the individual's perceived risk/risk aversion and ease of use during the web-based communication encounter, as previously indicated.

8.4.3.9 *Attention focus and concentration*

It is argued that online consumers' attention focus and concentration in the online environment influence their behaviour in ensuring that they return to the online environment for more exposure to web-based communication messages and information, in order to benefit from the complete web experience.

8.4.3.10 *Message involvement*

It was posited earlier that message involvement describes the enjoyment, control and concentration that online consumers manifest during a web-based communication encounter that influence their movement through the different behavioural processes.

8.4.3.11 Usability

As an online determinant of online consumer behaviour, usability was previously defined as a cognitive appraisal which refers to the technology used during web-based communication encounters and the utilisation of the website. Of particular importance here is the usability of the content, which should be relevant in terms of breadth, depth, currency and timely information. It is further argued that web-based communication messages are considered usable when information satisfaction occurs.

8.4.3.12 Online atmospherics

Online atmospherics, previously defined as website quality, interface, satisfaction and experience were indicated as aspects that refer to the technical quality of the website and arguably influence consumers' online experience.

8.4.3.13 Perceived risk

It is propounded that online information can be incomplete and imperfect, resulting in feelings of perceived risk which determine the way in which online consumers behave and go through the behavioural processes.

8.4.3.14 Exposure conditions

It is argued that the individual conditions under which exposure occurs are vital online determinants in that they establish the conditions for the rest of the web-based communication experience.

8.4.3.15 Characteristics of online stimuli

The characteristics of the online stimuli arguably determine online consumer behaviour, resulting in positive or negative web-based communication experiences.

8.5 THE COMPLETE WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE

The internal, external and online determinants that influence and affect online consumers' complete web-based communication experience were touched on in the section above. The complete web-based communication experience implies online consumers' interactive search for and consumption of web-based communication messages and informational experiences, involving several interactive information-seeking and consumption actions. It is hence argued that online consumer behaviour is signified in the complete web-based communication experience, which encompasses all the interactive information-seeking and consumption actions, the web-based communication exposure process, the internal psychological behavioural process, the cognitive information-processing and response process, the information decision-making process and the output process. Because it is argued that the complete web-based communication experience indicates online consumers' behavioural processes, a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour was proposed based on and in line with the definition of online consumer behaviour that was formulated in chapter 2 in order to propose a new perspective and approach to online consumer behaviour. The definition is reiterated here.

Online consumer behaviour comprises a complete web-based communication experience that manifests in web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes leading to cognitive information-processing and response, information decision-making and output processes, determined by internal, external and online factors.

In terms of this definition and the new model, it is argued that while online consumers are performing the actions that signify the complete web-based communication experience of searching for and experiencing informational content, they go through the two main online consumer behavioural processes. These are the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes which, in turn, comprise several behavioural phases. These two broad behavioural processes lead to the cognitive information-processing and response, information decision-making and output processes, which also include several behavioural phases.

The complete web-based communication experience is depicted in figure 8.5, and comprises the following: interaction, information search, information access, information gathering, information pull and regulation, information evaluation and information consumption actions.



Figure 8.5: The complete web-based communication experience

Each of these components is briefly discussed below.

8.5.1 Interaction

It is argued that interaction is one of the main actions that online consumers perform when going through the complete web-based communication experience, and that this interaction is a unique feature of online consumers' complete web-based communication experiences. It is further suggested that interaction is evident in the control, active engagement and participation of online consumers with online informational content, which culminates in dialogue and multidirectional communication. As previously indicated, since exchange and sharing are possible in the online environment as opposed to the offline environment, involvement and connectivity are also probable. Interaction is evident throughout the complete web-based communication experience and is therefore significant in explaining the manner in which online consumers engage with web-based communication messages and information. As discussed in previous chapters, the following actions are indicative of interaction in the online environment:

- *Web-based communication control:* During online interaction, the online consumer cognitively controls the type of web-based communication

exposure and amount of interaction he/she requires during the complete web-based communication experience.

- *Active attraction to web-based communication messages:* Interaction during the web-based communication experience leads to online consumers' active attraction to web-based communication messages and voluntarily finding of relevant information.
- *Active engagement and participation with web-based communication messages:* The online consumer actively and interactively engages with web-based communication messages.
- *Interaction with customised, information-intensive web-based communication messages:* Online consumers interact with information-intensive web-based communication messages that focus on content delivery.
- *Dialogue:* Online consumers can engage in a dialogue with the organisation or other online users because of the interactive nature of the medium.
- *Multidirectional communication:* Online consumers also engage in multidirectional communication by conversing with other interconnected organisational stakeholders.
- *Exchange and sharing:* Online consumers further exchange and share information with all stakeholders.
- *Information empowerment:* Because of the information-intensive nature of web-based communication and the possibility of online consumers interacting with these information-intensive messages, they are empowered by the information they receive and interact with, and use it to make informed decisions.
- *Uncertainty reduction:* Because of online consumers' interaction with information-intensive web-based communication messages, informational uncertainty is reduced because of the abundance of information available online.
- *Involvement:* Online consumers' interactive involvement is either affective when they process symbolic quality and image dimensions with the right brain, or cognitive when they intensely process information with the left brain. Involvement is established by means of interaction with personally relevant information.

- *Connectivity*: Because of connectivity, the online consumer is able to share and exchange information by means of dialogue and multidirectional communication.
- *Building online relationships*: In an interactive environment, online relationship building is possible.
- *Enjoyment and gratification*: When online consumers experience enjoyment and feel gratified during their interaction with web-based communication messages, they will return to a website to seek more web-based communication encounters with specific informational content, sometimes leading to habitual return to a website.

8.5.2 Information search

It is posited that during online consumers' complete web-based communication experiences, one of the most significant actions is the search for information, be it web-based communication messages on organisational websites or integrated online marketing communication messages (online marketing, online advertising, online public relations and online promotional messages). It was further argued that because of the information intensiveness of the online environment, online consumers seek information that markets products, but also web-based communication messages that provide informational organisational content.

As indicated in a previous chapter, the search for information can proceed along the following path that may occur simultaneously with the other actions depicted in the complete web-based communication experience:

- *Exposure*: During exposure the senses are activated.
- *Attention*: Attention to the message is obtained by means of information-processing capacities to deal with the received information.
- *Comprehension*: During information and message analyses and comparisons, comprehension occurs.
- *Acceptance*: The online consumer now decides whether or not to accept the message and adjust his/her existing beliefs and attitudes accordingly.

- *Retention*: Retention of information is the ultimate goal and information should thus be stored in memory.

8.5.3 Information access

It is propounded that while online consumers search for information, at a certain point, they proceed to an information access action where they access the information they have been seeking. It is suggested that the information access action is a truly interactive action when the online consumer accesses web-based communication messages by accessing websites or clicking on information links.

8.5.4 Information gathering

It was propounded that information gathering is one of the actions that online consumers engage in when they proceed through the complete web-based communication experience in order to satisfy an informational need. In gathering information, online consumers arguably employ cognitive effort and behaviour by making use of informational content and system elements.

8.5.5 Information pull and regulation

When online consumers are exposed to web-based communication messages and proceed through an informational experience during the complete web-based communication experience, it is argued that they deliberately pull information that suits their needs and interests.

8.5.6 Information evaluation

It is suggested that after online consumers have searched for, gathered, pulled and regulated information, an informational evaluation process commences in order to determine the usefulness and relevance of information and web-based communication messages and the credibility of the content, information and system.

8.5.7 Information consumption

It is propounded that during the complete web-based communication experience, online consumers' consumption of relevant information and web-based communication messages is an interactive process which demonstrates content and system credibility and trust, signifying their intention to proceed through the subsequent web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes.

8.6 THE WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION EXPOSURE PROCESS

It was proposed earlier that the complete web-based communication experience consists of two main behavioural processes, namely the web-based communication exposure process and the internal psychological behavioural process which online consumers may proceed through in a parallel, reciprocal and transactional manner, thus simultaneously or subsequently. These two main behavioural processes are indicative of the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural approaches that were proposed in chapter 2 in order to contextualise the focus and context of this study, namely online consumers' predominant internal psychological behaviour during exposure to web-based communication.

This study's focus and context thus indicate online consumers' behaviour in terms of their information-seeking and consumption behaviour and the subsequent internal psychological behavioural processes that they proceed through when they are engaging with information or web-based communication messages.

This section deals with the web-based communication exposure process, and it is argued that it comprises several behavioural phases that online consumers proceed through during their exposure to web-based communication messages, as indicated in figure 8.6.



Figure 8.6: The web-based communication exposure process

The web-based communication exposure process is identified and discussed as one of the two major behavioural processes comprising the complete web-based communication experience and indicates the behavioural phases that online consumers proceed through during exposure to web-based communication messages. This process mainly points to online consumers' intentionality in their approach to web-based communication messages during exposure to and the subsequent consumption and disposition of their communication experiences. It is important to note that online consumers do not necessarily proceed through any process or phase in the exact order indicated in the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour in figure 8.1. The internal, external and online determinants alter the sequence and arrangement of behavioural processes, indicating a unique behavioural processes progression. It is argued that online consumers proceed through the following phases in the web-based communication

exposure process, and this discussion is based on a brief summary of preceding chapters and literature reviews:

8.6.1 Pre-exposure

It is argued that because exposure in the online environment is deliberate and desired, online consumers experience an initial, cognitive pre-exposure phase during which they prepare for exposure to and interaction with web-based communication messages.

Online consumers' intentionality allows them to prepare for the web-based communication encounter, comprising the following elements that were discussed in a previous chapter: Alphabetical, document and tool *literacy* are prerequisites for accessing, operating and interacting online. *Intent* in the online environment, means that exposure is a result of deliberate and desired intention based on active choice. *Voluntary access* means that consumers access any amount of information voluntarily at high speed and at global level.

8.6.2 Input

It is proposed that during the input phase of the web-based communication exposure process, the online consumer recognises his/her informational needs and wants and realises the need to search for information and relevant web-based communication messages. The input phase comprises the following subphases:

8.6.2.1 Need recognition

It is put forward that once an online consumer realises a difference between what he/she perceives to be the ideal internal state versus the actual state of affairs pertaining to information, as a result of internal and external stimuli, an informational need has been recognised. During the input phase of the web-based communication exposure process, online consumers recognise needs in order to gain knowledge and gather information. Furthermore, recognising an informational need motivates

the consumer to act in a specific manner in the online environment in terms of information acquisition. The moment the individual recognises a need for information, he/she has entered his/her psychological set (defined in a previous chapter), which links up with the other main process that is evident during the online consumer's complete web-based communication experience, namely the internal psychological behavioural process.

8.6.2.2 Search for information

It is proposed that after the consumer has recognised an informational need during the input phase of the web-based communication exposure process, he/she needs to search for relevant information as part of the solution to the problem. During this subphase, the online consumer perceives information and retains it, as previously indicated, from memory, genetic tendencies (internally) or from peers and family (externally). It is suggested that the search for information during the web-based communication exposure process can occur parallel to the search for information action, which is evident during the complete web-based communication experience (section 8.5).

8.6.3 Web-based communication and information exposure

It is proposed that the web-based communication exposure process is not accidental and indicates the point where the online consumer comes into contact with online messages and information, comprising the following subphases, which were indicated in previous chapters: *Vehicle/message exposure* means that exposure to the vehicle or medium (internet) and message is a prerequisite for any online behavioural process. *Deliberate and desired exposure* means that online consumers deliberately choose the amount and type of exposure required. *Web-based communication exposure* means that after deliberate exposure to the medium and pulling of information, the online consumer is exposed to web-based communication messages, information and content. During the *awareness* phase, the online consumer becomes aware of the web-based communication message, the different elements of the message and the associations between the message and his/her

existing knowledge. *Physical contact with web-based communication messages and information* means that during the web-based communication exposure process, physical contact with web-based communication messages and information refers to the occasion on which the consumer comes into physical contact with the web-based communication message/information.

8.6.4 Attention

Attention was discussed in preceding chapters and described as a web-based communication exposure phase that specifies online consumers' devotion to processing information and refers to their selective attention and preattentive processing of information. This selective attention and preattentive processing occurs in the peripheral processing route, thus referring to consumers' unawareness of the information processed.

8.6.5 Pre-evaluation of message alternatives

It is argued that during the web-based communication exposure process, message alternatives are pre-evaluated. This phase arguably indicates online consumers' comparison, questioning, consideration and judgement of different informational alternatives in their consideration of which information to consume, further consult and accept or reject. The pre-evaluation of message alternatives process follows the subphases that were indicated in previous chapters, and reiterated here: *High- or low-effort processes* are also referred to as the estimation of likelihood that determines the chance of something occurring or certain types of messages or information satisfying needs. During *anchoring and adjustment processes*, consumers anchor their judgement on the basis of initial or previous knowledge and values. Judgements are then adjusted in terms of additional information. In *hierarchy of effects processes*, online consumers experience high-effort situations by engaging in thinking processes, then feeling processes, and lastly, behavioural processes when pre-evaluating message alternatives. *Thinking-behaving-feeling sequences* refer to low-effort situations in terms of pre-evaluating message alternatives during the web-based communication exposure process.

8.6.6 Behavioural intention prediction

During the web-based communication exposure process, the online consumer proceeds through a phase during which intention prediction in terms of web-based communication messages and information consumption is possible. As indicated previously, the online consumer's behaviour (B) resulting from behavioural intention (BI), which is determined by attitude towards the act (A-act) and by beliefs about what the other individuals expect of him/her (NBs) can be predicted. As stated in a previous chapter, the individual's motivation to comply with the norms (Mc) and personal normative beliefs (NBp) is also regarded as important. Situational variables and personality characteristics influence behavioural intentions and the individual's position towards the object.

As indicated earlier, normative beliefs (NB), which impact on behavioural intentions, can be multiplied by the individual's motivation to comply with norms (Mc). Also, an individual's attitudes are determined by the act's perceived consequences and the value thereof to that particular individual. The source of normative beliefs (NB) is determined by others' attitude towards the act (Aact) or the individual's belief of what others expect of him/her.

It was stated previously that during the intention prediction phase, association, commission, foreseeability, intentionality and justification occur.

8.6.7 Technology acceptance

It is put forward that when the online consumer is exposed to web-based communication messages and information, he/she has to accept the technology through which the message is delivered. Technology acceptance is perceived to be a phase in the web-based communication exposure process which explains the use of technology and behavioural intention as being determined by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

In the web-based communication exposure process, perceived usefulness (defined in a preceding chapter) can predict how online consumers perceive the usefulness of online information and messages and can subsequently determine whether an individual will or will not use an application or message. It is further argued that perceived ease of use, however, can predict online consumers' perception of the ease or difficulty of the messages and information, and thus the simplicity or difficulty of web-based communication messages or informational applications.

8.6.8 Cognitive instrumental predictive processes

It is put forward that during web-based communication exposure, online consumers go through a phase during which the determinants of cognitive instrumental processes, previously defined as result demonstrability (the tangibility of the results of using the innovation) and perceived ease of use (which determines perceived usefulness), are considered.

8.6.9 Individual reasoned action

It is argued that, during the web-based communication exposure process, online consumers go through motivational and behavioural intention prediction phases which predict their behaviour in online situations.

As discussed in a preceding chapter, the online consumer's behaviour (B) is a function of his/her behavioural intention (BI), which is determined by his/her attitude towards the act (A-act) and by his/her beliefs about the expectations of the other individuals (subjective norm) involved, in other words, his/her social normative beliefs (NBs). As previously indicated, the main phase is the prediction of intentions and behaviour by means of attitude and subjective norm which, in turn, are determined by behavioural and normative beliefs. Behavioural intentions, it was posited, are the results of attitudes towards performing a specific action in a specific situation, guided by the norms that direct that behaviour and multiplied by the motivation that steers compliance. The normative component was previously defined as an individual's personal beliefs about what should be done in a specific situation

(NBp) and the individual's perception of significant others' expectations. It is suggested that the primary factor in the context of this study is the intention-behaviour relationship, which refers to the individual's intention to behave in a specific manner in the online environment.

8.7 THE INTERNAL PSYCHOLOGICAL BEHAVIOURAL PROCESS

It is proposed that the internal psychological behavioural process indicated in figure 8.7 should be seen as a vital affective involvement process to indicate the internal psychological behavioural processes and subsequent internal psychological phases that online consumers proceed through when exposed to web-based communication messages in their procession through the complete web-based communication experience.

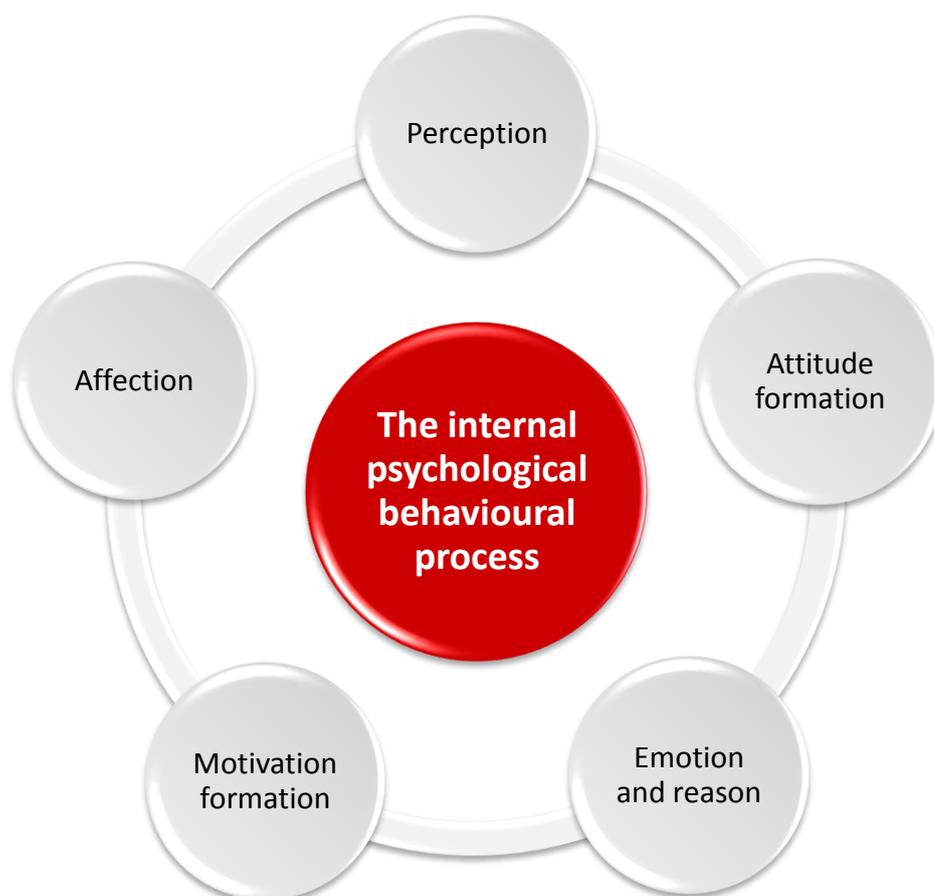


Figure 8.7: The internal psychological behavioural process

The internal psychological behavioural process is argued to be one of the processes that indicate the online consumer behavioural process and it is linked to the internal psychological behavioural processes approach that was proposed in chapter 2. This approach indicates the affective internal psychological behavioural processes of online consumers' behaviour. This process suggests a move away from considering online consumer behaviour in terms of outward and mostly technically related behaviour, to focusing more on the inward psychological processes that online consumers proceed through during their exposure to web-based communication messages.

Critical to the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour proposed in figure 8.1 is the need to depict online consumers' psychological and emotional processes and to gain a better understanding of the predominant affective internal processes relating to online consumer behaviour. These internal processes are integrated in online consumers' behaviour during their exposure to web-based communication messages and their encounter of the total web-based communication experience.

It is suggested that the internal psychological behavioural process emphasises an understanding of online consumer behavioural processes in terms of internal psychological variables and constructs that illustrate the internal psychological behavioural processes that online consumers proceed through during their exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages.

Based on preceding discussions, it is argued that the following phases are indicative of the internal psychological behavioural process:

8.7.1 Perception

During the internal psychological behavioural process, online consumers first proceed through a perceptual phase during which stimuli are perceived through the five senses of vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch. Online consumers pass through the absolute perception threshold, which was defined in a preceding chapter

as the minimal level of stimulus intensity, during the perceptual process. They can alternatively progress through a differential threshold, which was previously defined as a process in which an intensity difference of perceived stimuli is perceived. Online consumers can also perceive by means of subliminal perception, which was defined as being below the threshold level of awareness. It is further argued that during the perceptual phase, online consumers will advance through a preinformation acquisition perception attribute phase.

8.7.1.1 Preinformation acquisition perception attributes

As indicated previously, the process of considering pre-information acquisition perception attributes explains that online consumers will take the perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, perceived value and perceived risk associated with web-based communication messages or information into account before acquiring online information and engaging in web-based communication message consumption.

8.7.1.2 Online consumer perceptual phase progression

During the internal psychological behavioural process, online consumers proceed through an online consumer perceptual phase progression which, as indicated in the literature review, comprises the following phases: *Message perception* involves online consumers perceiving web-based communication messages and information through their five senses. *Prior perception* means that perceptions and inputs that were acquired prior to the current exposure occasion are now retrieved from memory. *Integrated perception* means that during the integrated perception phase, the online consumer goes through a perceptual process based on prior perception and his/her immediate experience during exposure to web-based communication messages. *Selective perception* refers to the fact that consumers selectively perceive web-based communication messages. *Perceptual distortion* describes the online consumer's disregard for some of the information for the purpose of perceiving messages that are close to already familiar information. *Perceptual vigilance* means that the online consumer only regards, attends to and retains information that is relevant to his/her needs. *Perceptual defence* means that online

consumers protect and defend themselves from threatening or contradictory stimuli by distorting information that is inconsistent with existing values and beliefs. *Perceptual equilibrium* entails online consumers seeking psychological equilibrium that lacks conflict and contradictory information. *Perceptual organisation* involves online consumers organising information and web-based communication messages into something that is useful and can be grouped with existing information. *Perceptual interpretation* means that perceptions are formed on the basis of individual interpretations of web-based communication messages and information.

8.7.2 Attitude formation

It is argued that after online consumers have moved through the perceptual process, attitudes are formed. During the attitude formation process, online consumers' thoughts are linked to attitudes in terms of the thinking effort that they put into forming an attitude and processing a web-based communication message. As indicated previously, attitudes are multidimensional, indispensable factors in predicting online consumers' behaviour in terms of the complete web-based communication experience and subsequent web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes. It was also suggested that before attitude formation, online consumers go through a preinformation acquisition consumer attitudinal attribute process during which attitudinal attributes are considered.

8.7.2.1 Preinformation acquisition consumer attitudinal attributes

During attitude formation in the internal psychological behavioural process, preinformation consumer attitudinal attributes, which were previously indicated as being influenced by trust, literacy and affinity, are considered. Trust, was defined as the trusting relationship of faith and confidence that is required between the consumer and the organisation; literacy, was indicated as referring to the online consumers' ability to read and write; and affinity, was said to refer to internet literacy. Trust, literacy and affinity are all attitudinal attributes that influence the way in which attitudes are formed.

8.7.2.2 Attitude formation process

As discussed earlier, attitudes are formed through the following processes: *Counterargument (CA) formation* relates to thoughts that are in disagreement with the message. *Support argument (SA) formation* happens when thoughts that express agreement with the message are formed. In *source derogation (SD) formation*, thoughts that discount or attack the source of the message are formulated.

As indicated previously, three sources lead to online consumers' positive attitudes towards web-based communication messages and experiences when proceeding through the internal psychological behavioural process: *Utilitarian or functional dimension information* involves informative messages that have informational value that mostly generates positive attitudes. *Hedonic dimension information* is information or messages that can create positive feelings, emotions and attitudes. *Interest level* is the amount of curiosity and attention a message or information arouses, leading to positive or negative attitudes.

According to the discussions in the previous chapters, the attitude formation process only affects online consumers' behaviour in the following circumstances and because of the following factors: high cognitive involvement, online consumer knowledge about the message or information, easy accessibility of attitudes, attitude confidence, specificity of attitudes, situational factors, normative beliefs and motivation and personality variables.

As stated earlier, attitude formation comprises the following components of the individual's attitude in terms of his/her performance of a particular act in a specific situation and not his/her attitude towards a specific person, object or situation. In some instances, attitude towards the object (Ao) may be related to the attitude towards the behaviour in a given situation (A-act) and to the normative aspects of the behaviour, consisting of the following components, as indicated previously: The *cognitive component* refers to attitudes that are formed on the basis of knowledge and perceptions obtained from the attitude object and associated information. The

affective component relates to an individual's evaluative emotions or feelings, constituting the assessment of the attitude object. The *conative component* refers to the likelihood or tendency that the individual will act or behave in a specific manner.

As argued earlier, attitude formation can occur with low consumer effort when peripheral cues are utilised to form low-level beliefs and low-effort affective processes that refer to mere exposure where familiar objects are preferred to unfamiliar ones. Once consumers have a favourable attitude towards a web-based communication message or information because they believe it to be true or like it, the dual-mediation hypothesis is evident.

8.7.3 Emotion and reason

It was posited earlier that while online consumers proceed through the internal psychological behavioural process, they form the primal motivations of emotion and reason. It is further suggested that emotion and reason are significant contributors to online consumers' information and message choices and the subsequent processing thereof. Emotions were previously defined as mental states of readiness in one's own thoughts, while reason was defined as the process of analysing and processing information in terms of attributes, also referred to as ratiocination. It was indicated in previous chapters that emotion and reason are predictors of the optimisation of decisions in that consumers acquire knowledge either emotionally (knowledge by acquaintance) or rationally (knowledge by description) during the internal psychological behavioural process.

8.7.3.1 The communication process of emotion and reason

As suggested in a previous chapter, emotion is unintentional, automatic and nonpropositional. It is expressed through signs and can be communicated spontaneously. It was also indicated that rational messages, however, are socially shared, intentional and propositional, require knowledge of learned symbols and are symbolically communicated.

8.7.3.2 Forms of emotions

As indicated in a preceding chapter, during the emotion formation process, which is a phase of the internal psychological behaviour process, the following forms of emotions are produced: *emotion I (EI)*: physiological responses; *emotion II (EII)*: motivational-emotional responses; and *emotion III (EIII)*: affect (immediate and direct subjective experiences), commonly known as emotion (include physiological reactions [EI] and facial expressions [EII]).

It is argued that emotions direct the control the consumer has over the web-based communication encounter (perceived control), as well as the concentration or attention focus that is applied during the web-based communication experience.

8.7.4 Motivation formation

As indicated earlier, motivation formation is part of the internal psychological behavioural process because of aroused energy directed at achieving an informational and web-based communication message processing goal. It was suggested, that during the motivation formation process, online consumers become ready and willing to engage in web-based communication information searches with a view to acquiring information and processing messages during the total web experience.

As indicated previously, during this motivation formation process, felt involvement is experienced, which refers to the following four types of involvement processes: enduring, situational, cognitive and affective involvement.

It is proposed that after this motivation formation process, the online consumer is now motivated to act or respond in a certain manner when being exposed to web-based communication messages during the complete web-based communication experience.

As stated previously, the individual's motivation to comply with social normative beliefs (others' expectations of his/her behaviour in a certain situation [Mcs]) and his/her motivation to comply with the norms stipulated in a specific situation (Mc) are also formed during the motivation formation process and leads to the next phase, affection.

8.7.5 Affection

It is put forward that the affective phase of the internal psychological behavioural process indicates the level of affection and emotional positivity that online consumers obtain with regard to web-based communication messages and information. As previously indicated, the affection phase consists of the following online consumer behavioural processes: *Shaping of emotions around the message* means that the online consumer develops either positive or negative emotions towards the web-based communication message and complete web-based communication experience. *Affective interest* relates to the fact that the online consumer is affectively interested in the web-based communication message and complete web-based communication experience. *Liking* means that affective interest results in liking, which is a prerequisite for the desire to continue with more web-based communication encounters. *Desire* refers to the online consumer experiencing a process in which he/she desires web-based communication information and interaction. *Preference* is established by forming favourable attitudes or feelings towards the web-based communication message and complete web-based communication experience.

8.8 THE COGNITIVE INFORMATION-PROCESSING AND RESPONSE PROCESS

The previous sections proposed the determinants of online consumer behaviour (section 8.4) that impact on the complete web-based communication experience (section 8.5), which involves several interactive information-seeking and consumption actions. It was argued that if online consumers perform the complete web-based communication experience actions, they progress through two main

behavioural processes, namely the web-based communication exposure process (section 8.6) and the internal psychological behavioural process (section 8.7), which consist of several behavioural phases. It was argued that online consumers' progression through the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes may result in their processing and responding to the information they have obtained, making decisions about the information they have obtained or acting on the information they have obtained. These three possible actions thus indicate the last three processes of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour, namely the cognitive information-processing and response process, the information decision-making process and the output process. Because the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour indicates online consumers' progression through the complete web-based communication experience and subsequent web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes in a transactional, parallel and reciprocal manner, these processes do not always necessarily result in cognitive information processing and response, information decision making or output processes. Online consumers may thus progress through either one or through all of them, depending on the internal, external and online determinants, as well as on their motivation for their online activities.

The proposed online consumer cognitive information-processing and response processes and subsequent behavioural phases are indicated in figure 8.8.

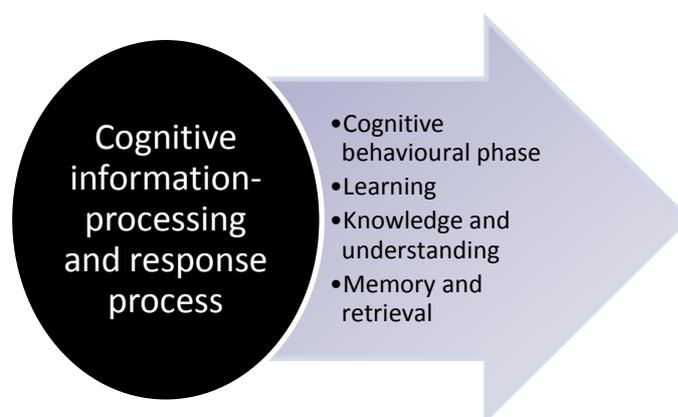


Figure 8.8: The cognitive information-processing and response process

The focus is on online consumers' conscious integration and processing of web-based communication messages and information, using cognitive resources and signifying intentionality and controllability.

The cognitive information-processing and response process refers to the mental and cognitive processing of information and web-based communication messages, depicting a conscious cognitive process. During the cognitive information-processing and response process, in-depth processing of stimuli is activated causing categorisation and parallel-distributed processing, thus referring to a cognitive motor process that comprising the phases discussed below.

8.8.1 Cognitive behavioural phase

It was argued that during the cognitive information-processing and response processes, there is a cognitive behavioural phase during which information organisation and interpretation are evident. Moreover, this phase refers to web-based communication and information engagement and consumption, indicating cognitive processes, which were indicated in previous chapters, and which collectively move in the following sequence: *Associations* between the web-based communication message and the various elements contained in the message are formed. In *differentiation*, comparison occurs when the differences between various messages and information sources are weighed up against each other. *Elaboration* entails the processing of relevant, differentiated and learnt information via high or low elaboration response processes. These processes refer to the online consumer's mental and cognitive processes during information processing.

8.8.2 Learning

It is put forward that learning is a phase of the cognitive information-processing and response process during which intentional learning occurs. The following basic elements of learning were discussed in a preceding chapter: An individual's *internal drive* is based on emotional or rational responses and encourages him/her to take action and to learn. *Learning cues* refer to external stimuli that encourage learning.

8.8.2.1 Types of learning process

Online consumers may go through the following types of learning processes, as defined in previous chapters:

Cognitive learning can also be referred to as cognitive associative learning which focuses on internal mental processes that individuals undergo when they engage in the learning process. Cognitive learning further indicates a relationship between a conditioned stimulus and an unconditioned stimulus, focusing on the learning process. The cognitive learner is an information seeker who forms sophisticated representations and perceptual relationships between messages.

The following three concepts were previously indicated to be related to cognitive learning: *Repetition* means that by repeating information, the strength of the association between the conditioned stimulus and the unconditioned stimulus is increased. *Stimulus generalisation* relates to more learning taking place when stimuli are generalised. *Stimulus discrimination* means that the individual should be able to discriminate between similar stimuli.

In a preceding chapter it was indicated that the cognitive learning process involves the following phases: Consumers need to pay *attention* to a message before learning can occur. *Comprehension* means that the consumer now determines whether the information interests him/her or not before entering it into memory. The new information is influenced by the existing information when comprehension takes place. *Learning* involves new information either entering the existing knowledge framework or altering it. *Recall and reconstruction* refer to the fact that if information fits into an individual's existing cognitive script, recall can occur. The *feedback* that consumers receive during the learning process determines whether or not they will elaborate on the message.

High- and low-involvement learning and information processing: As indicated previously, the most important type of high-involvement learning is rote learning

which exists when there is repetition through visual (iconic rote memory) and auditory (echoic rote memory).

Conditioned learning: As suggested previously, online consumers learn by means of classical or instrumental learning by responding either automatically or involuntarily because of rewards or punishment.

8.8.3 Knowledge and understanding

It was posited earlier that during the cognitive information-processing and response processes, online consumers experience a knowledge and understanding phase. During this phase the following are integrated: *knowledge*, previously referred to as the manner in which consumers interpret and assign meaning to messages and information; *knowledge content*, previously referred to as information that is already learnt; and *knowledge structure*, previously referred to as the manner in which knowledge is organised. It was also suggested that information cannot become knowledge without comprehension. Hence objective comprehension takes place, which refers to the process of extracting the intended meaning from a message, while subjective comprehension, as previously indicated, refers to the process of reflecting what is thought to be known, whether or not this is accurate.

8.8.4 Memory and retrieval

It is put forward that when online consumers proceed through the cognitive information-processing and response process, they also progress through a memory and retrieval phase when they store information in their memory or retrieve existing memory to integrate with new information. Memory comprises the following categories, as discussed previously: *Sensory memory* refers to short-term memory and can store echoic memory (memory of things heard) and iconic memory (sensory memory of things seen). *Short-term memory* is also referred to as working memory and stores information for a short period of time. Discursive processing occurs when an individual thinks of an object that is represented by a word. *Long-term memory* is stored for an extensive period of time. Regarding *rehearsal and encoding*, repetition

and rehearsal of the information in the short-term memory are necessary in order to transfer the information to the long-term memory.

During cognitive information processing and response, online consumers proceed through the following processes when they transfer information into memory. These processes were indicated in a previous chapter: *Chunking* refers to a group of objects that are processed as a unit. *Recirculation* involves information being recirculated through short-term memory when it is encountered repeatedly. *Elaboration* takes place when information is linked to prior knowledge. *Retention* involves information being linked to renew the links between different types of information. *Activation* involves old and new information being cognitively related. *Schema* simplify cognition and understanding. *Episodic storing* refers to the process of storing information in the long-term memory so that it can be acquired. *Semantic storing* refers to the process of storing information according to significant concepts. *Retrieval* is the process whereby information is remembered. *Spreading of activation* is a process that explains what is retrieved from memory. *Interference* is the process of retrieving failure. *Primacy and recency effects* relate to retrieval failure. *Explicit memory* relates to memory that is conscious and actively retrieved from past experiences through recall. *Implicit memory* refers to information remembered without conscious awareness. *Retrieval cues* are stimuli that internally or externally facilitate the activation of memory.

8.9 THE INFORMATION DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

This proposed process refers to online consumers' internal low- and high-effort informational-processing progression when consuming web-based communication messages and information and it follows on the cognitive information-processing and response process discussed in the previous section. The information decision-making process explains the decision-making process that online consumers proceed through when they are exposed to web-based communication messages. This process is based on and in line with the following proposed definition of online consumer information decision-making as formulated in chapter 4:

Online consumer information decision making refers to the internal low- and high-effort informational processing progression of individual consumers when consuming web-based communication messages with the aim of deliberating and deciding on information alternatives.

It is posited that during the information decision-making process, individuals combine accessible web-based communication and information to make a choice by proceeding through several decision-making phases which are indicated in figure 8.9.

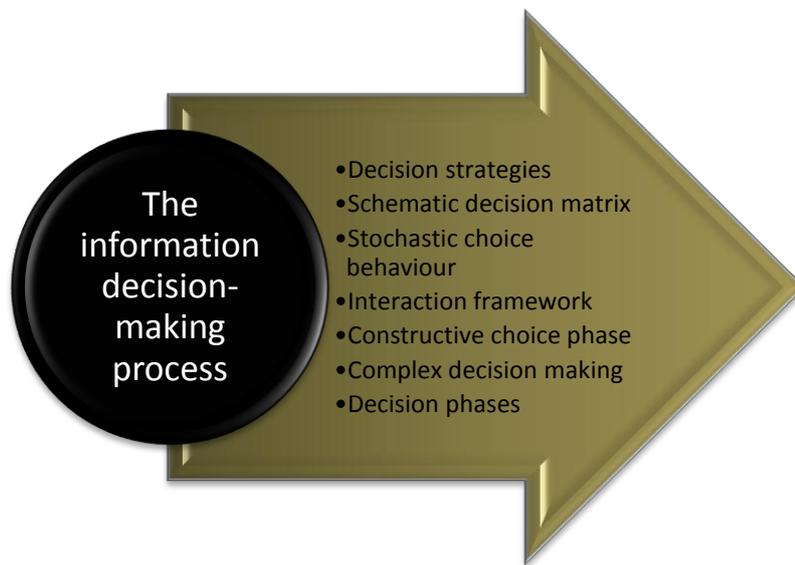


Figure 8.9: The information decision-making process

Each of these components is briefly discussed below.

8.9.1 Decision strategies

As previously indicated, online consumers' decision strategies depend on the amount of effort and complexity required for the decision process, the facets of the decision processing and the attributes used to reach a decision. Online consumers apply one of the decision strategies below, as discussed in the literature review, when they are progressing through the information decision-making process. *Extended problem solving* means that when adopting an extended problem-solving strategy, individuals collect as much as possible information from internal memory and external information sources before carefully and deliberately considering

alternatives. *Limited problem solving* refers to the application of simple decision rules of a lower degree of complexity when choosing from alternatives, providing cognitive shortcuts and inertia-based habits which culminate in representativeness heuristics. In *habitual decision making*, little or no conscious mental effort is used to make a decision. In *problem recognition*, when there is a considerable difference between the current state of affairs and some desired or ideal state of affairs, the individual recognises that a problem needs to be addressed and solved. *Information search* means that before sensible information decision making, the online consumer engages in an ongoing preinformational search by reviewing usable information. *Weighted adding strategy* refers to extended processing of alternatives when choices are in conflict and negative emotions are aroused as a result. Here, individuals know about the alternatives, referred to as the evoked set, while the consideration set refers to the deliberations about which alternatives to include or exclude. *Lexicographic strategy* involves a hierarchy of attributes that is considered before the most valuable attribute or characteristic is selected. Processing is limited in this instance. *Satisficing* means that during the application of this decision strategy, alternatives are considered in a sequential fashion while examining the value of each characteristic for the predetermined cutoff level. *Elimination-by-aspects (EBA)* is a conjunctive strategy, which refers to consumers' elimination of options that do not meet the minimum cutoff value for the most significant characteristic. The disjunctive strategy refers to consumers' decisions about acceptable levels for the cutoff when choosing between several of the main attributes. In the *Equal weight utility maximisation strategy*, all possible alternatives and attribute values are considered. A relative importance is assigned to each attribute and an overall value for each alternative, based on the impact of the attribute and relative weight, is chosen before deciding on the alternative with the best value, and then applying the decision strategy. *Confirming dimensions strategy* means that alternatives are processed in pairs until only one option remains. *Information processed by alternative* means that numerous features of a single alternative are processed before another alternative is considered. *Compensatory strategy* involves a high-quality value on one alternative compensating for a poor value on another alternative. *Noncompensatory strategies* refer to heuristics that do not take all possible attributes into consideration when narrowing down alternatives.

Attribute processing involves the consumer processing one attribute at a time. *Affective strategies* means that when decisions are made holistically, on the basis of feelings or emotions, affective decision strategies are applied. *One-reason heuristic strategy* involves applying a stopping rule when a single attribute among multiple attributes is found that enables the individual to make a choice. In the *elimination heuristic strategy*, attributes are eliminated until only a single option is left. *Multiattribute utility maximisation (MAU)*, also referred to as the classic utility-maximising strategy, describes the process whereby the individual chooses the alternative with the highest overall utility score.

8.9.2 Schematic decision matrix

In addition to the decision strategies that online consumers may apply when progressing through the information decision-making process described above, another phase they may encounter is the schematic decision matrix. As previously indicated, this phase describes a decision process comprising complex communication situations. In a preceding chapter it was indicated that each decision situation considers message attributes, which means that a value is assigned to the object the attribute belongs to. During information decision making (complete decision matrix), the consumer chooses the message alternative with the higher attribute value and which consists of all the possible alternative objects. Message involvement was previously defined as the online consumer's involvement with a specific message and his/her perceived risk thereof.

It is argued that if an online consumer proceeds through a complete schematic decision matrix during the information decision making process, it will involve the following stages, which were discussed in a previous chapter: During the *inceptive stage*, the process commences. In the *information attribute cognisance* stage, the consumer takes cognisance of the value of the information he/she is deciding on. *Information evaluation* happens when different informational content is evaluated. During the *information decision stage*, the consumer decides which messages/information to regard, respond to and consume. *Postdecisional*

cognisance means that after the message/information has been decided on, the consumer either feels positive or negative about the communication encounter.

8.9.3 Stochastic choice behaviour

It is propounded that during the information decision making process, online consumers may alternatively proceed through the stochastic choice behavioural phase which indicates the outcome of some probabilistic processes with elements such as choice probability which consists of interconsumer and intraconsumer factors and time of choice. During this phase, as indicated in a previous chapter, the online consumer first recognises a need, next engages in a pre-exposure activity, then takes decisions about the message, moves on to processing behaviour and lastly engages in postexposure evaluation.

8.9.4 Interaction framework of consumer decision making

It is propounded that during information decision making, the online consumer can alternatively go through a decision-making phase during which variables such as task characteristics, individual differences and the interaction between the task and the individual are considered. As argued before, from an interactionist perspective, decision making is a function of task-related variables, individual differences and task-individual interactions, with the absence of one of them resulting in an incomplete decision-making process.

The interaction between the task and the individual in this decision-making situation is dependent on two taxonomies, previously indicated in chapter 4. In the *task taxonomy*, individuals acquire abilities in different situations in order to complete tasks successfully. The task process is an internal representation of the individual's environment which consists of task and context effects. The former are structural characteristics (time pressure and mode of problem) of a decision, while the latter refer to the attractiveness of alternatives. The task also consists of the decision problem and the decision environment. In the *individual taxonomy*, individuals proceed through their hierarchy of responses differently.

8.9.5 Constructive choice phase

It is argued that during the information decision making process, online consumers may proceed through a constructive choice phase, which was indicated in a previous chapter as comprising the following: In *consumer goal identification*, consumers' goals are organised into hierarchies consisting of meta goals such as maximising the accuracy of a decision and minimising the cognitive effort necessary for the decision. Online consumers first need to determine the specific decisive goal that needs to be attained. *Attention and information selectivity* means that online consumers' decision-making processes are selective because of their limited capacity to process information. Consumers therefore engage in voluntary and involuntary attention focus. *Choice heuristics* involves online consumers applying decision-making strategies that depend on goals that need to be attained, as well as the environment in which the strategy is used.

8.9.6 Complex decision making

It is put forward that during complex information decision making, online consumers progress through an interactive phase during which there is interaction between web-based communication messages and information, depending on the individual's perception, attitudes, demographics, lifestyle, personality, culture, norms, values, subcultures and groups.

8.9.7 Decision phases

During the information decision making process, online consumers may proceed through the following decision phases, which were identified in a preceding chapter: In the *association evaluation* phase, the online consumer evaluates message associations on which decisions are based. *Integrated evaluation* means that current evaluations and prior evaluations are integrated to form an integrated evaluation for support of the decision to be taken. *Affect referral* means that the online consumer retrieves his/her attitudes from memory and chooses message interactions with the most positive connections. *Compensatory heuristic* means that the online consumer

bases his/her decisions on the message attributes and benefits he/she values most. *Conjunctive heuristic* involves the online consumer practising a noncompensatory strategy by considering only those factors that meet or exceed standards. *Message stimulation* means that the online consumer is now stimulated favourably towards the message in order to be motivated to act positively on the stimulus. *Prior stimulation* means that previous stimulation encounters need to be retrieved from memory. *Integrated stimulation* means that current stimulation and prior stimulation are integrated to form an integrated stimulation which refers to online consumers' acquisition of internal motivations.

8.10 THE OUTPUT PROCESS

It is proposed that the output process indicates online consumers' actual or overt behaviour in terms of web-based communication messages and information acceptance, comprehension and postmessage and informational evaluation. During this process, the online consumer demonstrates phases of postinformational consumption behaviour, implied by satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the web-based communication encounter and complete web-based communication experience, as indicated in figure 8.10.

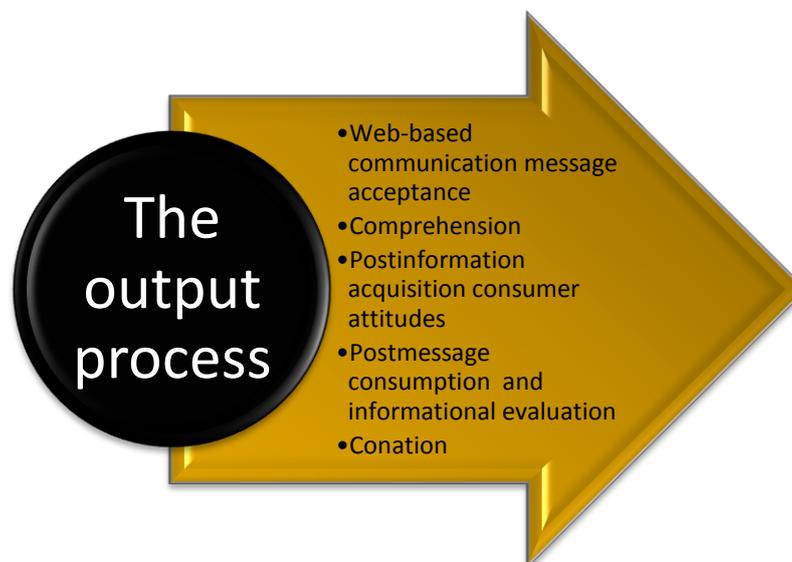


Figure 8.10: The output process

Each of these phases is discussed below.

8.10.1 Web-based communication message acceptance

It is propounded that during the last process of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour, the output process, the first phase which online consumers proceed through indicates the online consumer's regard, acceptance, reaction and utilisation of the web-based communication message or information. It was previously indicated that online consumers engage with their cognitive resources while accepting a message which represents the mental capacity that online consumers have available. It is further postulated that during the output process, consumers are selective with differentiating intensity since they are unable to accept and act on all internal and external stimuli, directing their attention and cognitive processing abilities at the specific last portion of the process. When the online consumer accepts the web-based communication message, he/she internalises the information and opens up the possibility of future interactions with web-based communication messages.

8.10.2 Comprehension

It is argued that the comprehension phase of the output process can only occur once the web-based communication message has been accepted, therefore also acting as a prerequisite for further interactions and adaption.

8.10.3 Postinformation acquisition consumer attitudes

It is propounded that during the output process, online consumers proceed through a postinformation acquisition attitude formation phase when they establish feelings after a web-based communication encounter and complete web-based communication experience, which refers to online consumers' positive and negative disconfirmations as prerequisites of satisfaction. Positive disconfirmation, which was defined in an earlier chapter, is seen in this context as an online consumer's consideration of the total online experience as being better than expected. Negative disconfirmation, however, suggests the converse in that it refers to the online

consumer feeling worse off than expected once the web-based communication encounter has been completed.

8.10.4 Postmessage consumption and informational evaluation

It is put forward that, based on whether or not the online consumers' expectations have been met, he/she becomes satisfied or dissatisfied with the message consumption and the value of the information interaction during the previous processes. This refers to either positive disconfirmation or postdecision dissonance that occurred during the previous phase of the output stage. If the consumer is satisfied and there is positive disconfirmation, he/she will engage in future message and informational interactions. However, if he/she is dissatisfied, cognitive or postdecision dissonance occurs and there will be no future interactions.

8.10.5 Conation

As proposed earlier, the last phase of the output process of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour is the conation phase which describes the action or behaviour that occurs online after online consumers have proceeded through all the actions, processes and phases of the complete web-based communication experience. The conation phase involves the following actions, as indicated in a preceding chapter: *Conviction and preference*: The online consumer bases his/her conviction and preference on memory of the web-based communication message and complete web-based communication experience. *Action*: During the action step, the online consumer takes a specific action on the basis of his/her positive or negative disconfirmation regarding the complete web-based communication experience and the subsequent interactive information-seeking and processing activities, consisting of several behavioural processes and phases. *Commitment and loyalty*: Commitment and loyalty to web-based communication message and information sources follows once the consumer is satisfied with the complete web-based communication experience.

8.11 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN ARGUMENTS THAT FLOW FROM THE PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED THEORETICAL MODEL FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Based on the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour in figure 8.1, it is argued that online consumer behaviour is determined by internal, external and online determinants that cause behavioural parallelism and reciprocity, leading to abbreviated or expanded online behavioural processes and phases. It is further argued that these determinants cause dissimilar individual movement through the behavioural processes. It is further proposed that online consumer behaviour is embedded in a complete web-based communication experience comprising several interactive information-seeking and consumption actions, signifying online consumers' consumption of information and communication experiences. More specifically, it can be put forward that one of the main behavioural processes that online consumers proceed through when exposed to web-based communication messages is the web-based communication exposure process which indicates the consideration of online consumer behaviour from the proposed web-based communication exposure approach. The next important online consumer behavioural process is the internal psychological behavioural process which indicates online consumers' subsequent, concurrent or reciprocal procession in terms of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. It is further proposed that the cognitive information-processing and response process follows the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes and also consists of additional phases. The next online consumer behavioural process is the cognitive information-processing and response process, indicating cognitive processing phases and providing a deeper understanding of how online consumers respond to and process information, referring to their mental and cognitive processing procedures. Further, based on the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour, it can be argued that online consumers next proceed through the information decision-making process which focuses on information and message consumption. The last argument that flows from the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour is that online consumers lastly proceed through an output process where

they evaluate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the informational and web-based communication message experience.

8.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed the main research objective of this study, namely to develop a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. The foundation of this model was the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches in that it indicated two main online consumer behavioural processes embedded in the complete web-based communication experience, namely the web-based communication exposure process and the internal psychological behavioural process with their subsequent behavioural phases.

The proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour further proposed that online consumer behaviour should be studied in terms of information-seeking and consumption processes which are an alternative perspective to the general existing purchasing perspectives. It was further argued that online consumer behaviour involves a complete web-based communication experience during which online consumers engage in several interactive information-seeking and consumption actions. While proceeding through the complete web-based communication experience actions, online consumers progress through two main behavioural processes, namely the web-based communication exposure process and the internal psychological behavioural process comprising several behavioural phases. It was posited that online consumers' progression through the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes may result in them processing and responding to the information they have collected, making decisions about the information they have gathered, or lastly, acting on this information. These three possible actions indicate the last three processes of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour, namely the cognitive information-processing and response process, the information decision-making process and the output process.

Furthermore, since the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour deviates from linearity, the internal, external and online determinants of online consumer behaviour can arguably cause online consumer behavioural processes to proceed in a parallel and reciprocal manner, which may happen simultaneously or alternatively. The determinants of online consumer behaviour thus posit the probability that individual online consumers proceed through the online consumer behavioural processes and phases in a dissimilar fashion and alternative order, even with the probability of omitting some of them.

The next chapter provides a critical interpretation of the major findings relating to the primary and secondary research objectives of the study and concludes with a discussion of the contributions, limitations and suggestions for possible future research.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a concluding discussion of the main underpinnings and contributions of the study. It commences with a critical interpretation of the major findings relating to the secondary research objectives of this study. It then provides a critical interpretation of the primary research objective of the study, namely the development of the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. In conclusion, it touches on the contributions, limitations and suggestions for future research.

9.2 MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS RELATING TO THE SECONDARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The secondary research objectives were addressed in chapters 2 to 6 to guide the development of a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. These chapters steered the critical discussions, interpretations, explorations and descriptions of the existing literature on the offline and online perspectives of consumer behaviour, approaches to consumer behaviour, the theory of the determinants of consumer behaviour, the theory of consumer decision making, the theory of consumer information processing and response and the theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour. These approaches and perspectives were then applied to the specific online context of this study on the basis of the argument that in an online context, online consumer behaviour should be studied in terms of the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. This is a new approach which appears to be different from the approaches in the existing literature and studies of offline and online consumer behaviour. The latter approaches present a fragmented view of consumer behaviour from both purchasing and product consumption perspectives. It is argued that this study addresses these gaps and proposes an alternative viewpoint through the integration of numerous theoretical concepts of consumer behaviour from the existing offline and online perspectives where the new online perspective indicates

parallel, transactional and reciprocal online consumer behavioural processes during consumers' exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages and information. It was then indicated that online consumer behavioural processes are indicative of the complete web-based communication experience which comprises several interactive information-seeking and consumption actions, embedded in web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes and subsequent cognitive information-processing and response, information decision-making and output processes.

It can therefore be argued that the perspectives proposed in this study, firstly, contributed to the offline perspectives in that they elaborated on existing offline perspectives and approaches to consumer behaviour. Secondly, the perspectives contributed in terms of the online consumer behaviour literature by proposing the following: new perspectives and approaches to online consumer behaviour; determinants of online consumer behaviour; an online information decision-making perspective; consumer information-processing and response processes; theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour; and theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour, which were discussed in detail in the preceding theoretical chapters.

Against this background, the primary research objective and the secondary research objectives were addressed as follows:

9.2.1 The concept of online consumer behaviour

Secondary research objective 1: to contextualise, develop and propose a new definition and perspective of the concept of online consumer behaviour

The contextualisation, development and proposition of a new definition and perspective of the concept of online consumer behaviour was addressed in chapter 2 by presenting the following key theoretical arguments: contextualising and defining of the study of consumer behaviour; defining of consumer behaviour from existing offline perspectives; defining consumer behaviour from existing online perspectives;

and formulating a new contextualisation and definition of online consumer behaviour. The contextualisation and definitions of online consumer behaviour from the online perspective proposed in this study were derived from definitions of consumer behaviour from the existing offline and online perspectives, in which the focus was mainly on specifying consumer behaviour as the study of consumer activities when obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services. These concepts were applied to the online perspective followed in this study, and it was argued that online consumer behaviour is a distinctively dissimilar process because of the focus on interaction based on the transfer of power in diverse environments that merits a distinct conceptualisation. Hence an alternative contextualisation was suggested which considered online consumer behaviour in terms of exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages and the subsequent inward psychological behavioural processes of online consumers.

This approach is different from existing offline and online perspectives which regard offline consumer behaviour and online consumer behaviour as purchasing and product consumption processes; and argued that it should not be restricted to offline consumer behaviour and online consumer behaviour as a mere product search, choice, consumption and disposal processes. Instead, it should be a broader perspective in which online consumer behaviour comprises internal psychological behavioural processes which online consumers proceed through during their exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages. Hence online consumer behaviour was seen to be indicative of online consumers' web-based communication and information search and consumption processes. For the purpose of this study, therefore, online consumer behaviour was grounded in web-based communication exposure and experience, focusing more on the human (consumer) element than on the usual existing purchasing and technical perspectives. The focus of online consumer behaviour and the proposition of the web-based communication perspective thus validated online consumer behaviour in relation to human behaviour theories, as opposed to the existing social-technical and purchasing theories of existing offline and online perspectives.

The contextualisation and proposition of the new perspective culminated in the formulation of the following new definition of online consumer behaviour which theoretically grounded the study (see chapter 2):

Online consumer behaviour comprises a complete web-based communication experience that manifests in web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes leading to cognitive information-processing and response, information decision-making and output processes, determined by internal, external and online factors.

9.2.2 Online consumer behaviour: proposed theoretical approaches

Secondary research objective 2: to propose new theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour

In addition to the existing holistic and managerial approaches proposed by Assael (2004), the proposal of two new theoretical approaches to online consumer behaviour was addressed in chapter 2 in terms of the following key theoretical arguments: a critical exploration and description of existing offline consumer behavioural approaches, namely the managerial and holistic approaches; and the proposal of two new approaches, namely the web-based communication exposure approach and the internal psychological behavioural processes approach. To this end, online consumer behaviour was viewed from different offline and online theoretical perspectives such as classical consumer behaviour research, behavioural learning, purchasing behaviour and personality and attitude research, based on technical, purchasing, managerial and holistic approaches. It was argued that a move from a technical purchasing approach to a web-based communication exposure approach is needed to include information and web-based communication message and information-seeking and consumption perspectives. This led to the proposal of the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. In contrast to existing technical purchasing approaches to online consumer behaviour, these approaches make a significant contribution to the consumer behaviour literature in the following ways:

Firstly, it was argued that a web-based communication exposure approach is needed which explains online consumer behaviour in terms of exposure to web-based communication messages and information when proceeding through the complete web-based communication experience. Web-based communication exposure, which is seen as a prerequisite for information gathering, thus refers not only to exposure to web-based communication messages and information that market products, but also to web-based communication messages that provide informational organisational content.

Secondly, an internal psychological behavioural processes approach was proposed. Critical to this goal was the need to understand the psychological behavioural processes that online consumers proceed through during their exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages and information, as opposed to the usual technical orientation of most of the online consumer behaviour literature, which tends to focus on website experience, including click-throughs, system trust and credibility, ease of use and usefulness. The proposal of the internal psychological behavioural processes approach focused on the theoretical psychological constructs that explain online consumers' behavioural processes which were labelled as the following constructs: preinformation acquisition perception attributes; preinformation acquisition consumer attitudinal attributes; postinformation acquisition consumer attitudes, emotion and reason; consumer motivation, attention and perception; knowledge and understanding; attitude formation; and memory and retrieval.

9.2.3 Determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour

Secondary research objective 3: to identify, explore and describe the theory of the determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour

The identification, exploration and description of the theory of the factors that influence offline consumer behaviour culminated in the proposal of the determinants of online consumer behaviour, which were addressed in chapter 3 in terms of the following key theoretical arguments: the contextualisation and definition of the

determinants of offline and online consumer behaviour; the development of a new definition of the determinants of online consumer behaviour; and the categorisation of the determinants of online consumer behaviour into internal, external and online determinants.

In the literature review it was indicated that several authors identify factors that influence consumer behaviour in retailing and purchasing contexts (Moreau et al 2001; Constantinides 2004; Doong et al 2010; Lin et al 2010; Wyer & Xu 2010; Yang 2010). However, for the purpose of this study, those factors were considered in terms of the web-based communication exposure approach, and it was argued that in an online context, these factors could be referred to as determinants. This new perspective contributes to the existing literature by categorising existing offline and online factors as internal, external and online determinants in the online perspective. Based on these arguments, a definition of the determinants of online consumer behaviour was proposed in chapter 3 as follows:

The determinants of online consumer behaviour are controllable and uncontrollable internal, external and unique online aspects that cognitively and affectively influence and affect online consumer behaviour during the total web experience in the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

It was further argued that the determinants of online consumer behaviour could cause behavioural parallelism and reciprocity, leading to abbreviated or expanded online behavioural processes and phases. These determinants could thus cause individual online consumers to proceed through online behavioural processes in a dissimilar fashion, hence altering the sequence and sometimes omitting some of the processes and phases. The internal determinants were deemed to be motivation, personality, perception, learning and attitude, while the external determinants were identified as reference groups and family, social class, culture and subculture. The unique online determinants were proposed as trust; consumer familiarity; prior interaction; technology acceptance; technology attitude; functional, symbolic and experiential benefits; the total web experience; emotional and cognitive responses; perceived control; concentration; attention focus; message involvement; and usability.

9.2.4 Consumer decision making

Secondary research objective 4: to identify, explore and describe the main thrusts of existing offline consumer decision making theory

The identification, exploration and description of existing offline consumer decision making theory was addressed in chapter 4 in terms of the following key theoretical arguments: defining consumer decision making from existing offline perspectives, categories and strategies of consumer decisions from existing offline perspectives and existing offline consumer decision-making models and theories. The complexity of the study of consumer decision making was emphasised in the literature review in different disciplines such as sociology, social and cognitive psychology, marketing communication, computer sciences, radical behaviourism, neoclassical theory and bounded rationality theory, with the focus on consumption decision-making behaviour. The discussion of consumer decision making from existing offline perspectives was also linked to the marketing and business domains by suggesting that it should be regarded as a process of selecting an option from two or more alternatives involving various types of strategies and processes.

For the purpose of this study, offline consumer decisions were categorised in terms of the amount of effort and complexity required for the decision-making process, ranging from habitual to extended decision making. In habitual decision making, at the one extreme of the decision-making continuum, and extended decision making, at the other, the following existing offline decision strategies were discussed: the economics of information; weighted adding strategy; lexicographic strategy; satisficing; elimination-by-aspects (EBA); equal weight utility maximisation; confirming dimensions; compensatory; noncompensatory; attribute processing; affective; one-reason heuristic; elimination heuristic; and multiattribute utility maximisation (MAU).

The most significant theories and models of consumer decision making were addressed to provide a comprehensive overview of existing offline consumer decision-making literature. These include the schematic general model of a decision

matrix, the stochastic model of consumer choice behaviour, an interaction framework of consumer decision making and a basic model of complex decision making.

9.2.5 An online consumer information decision-making perspective and model

Secondary research objective 5: to propose a new perspective of consumer decision making by developing a model for online consumer information decision making

The proposition of a new perspective of online consumer decision making and the development of the model for online consumer information decision making was addressed in chapter 4 according to the following key theoretical arguments: the contextualisation and definition of online consumer information decision making by proposing a new perspective; the indication of the determinants of the online consumer information decision-making process; and the proposal of an online consumer information decision-making model.

It was argued that the conceptualisation of online consumer decision making in terms of message exposure and information processing is critical to the context of this study and the realm of communication science, in contrast to existing viewpoints, which view consumer decision making in a purchasing context. From an online perspective, it was proposed that the focus should not be restricted to consumer and marketing science or product consumption decisions, but should be on information and message consumption decisions and in line with the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. Hence online consumer information decision making was defined in chapter 4 as follows:

Online consumer information decision making refers to the internal low- and high-effort informational processing progression of individual consumers when consuming web-based communication messages with the aim of deliberating and deciding on information alternatives.

The proposal of the online consumer information decision-making perspective and the development of the model for online consumer information decision making

addressed the identified limitations in existing offline decision-making models and theories to explain online consumers' web-based communication message and information decision-making processes. The information decision-making perspective explained online consumers' decision-making processes in the online environment during their exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages and information. Since it was argued that consumer decision-making model and theory building are limited in providing a comprehensive view of online consumer information decision making, this study contributes to the existing consumer decision-making literature through the proposed online consumer information decision-making model which focuses on information and message decisions in the online environment. The proposed model explained online consumer decision-making processes in terms of input, processing and output stages, comprising various steps which are influenced by different individual, environmental, psychological and online atmospheric determinants, which differ from other existing perspectives.

9.2.6 Consumer information processing and response

Secondary research objective 6: to identify, explore and describe offline and online consumer information-processing and response theory and models

The identification, exploration and description of consumer information-processing and response theory and models were addressed in chapter 5 in terms of the following key theoretical arguments: the conceptualisation of consumer information processing and response; a chronological categorisation of existing consumer information-processing and response models and theories; a discussion and evaluation of existing offline consumer information-processing and response models based on a three-order paradigmatic consumer response model categorisation; and a discussion and analysis of existing online consumer response models.

The categorisation, analysis and evaluation of existing consumer information processing and response theory and models provided a deeper understanding of how consumers respond to and process information. The information-processing and

response models and theories considered in this study were found to be based on conscious processing, using cognitive resources and signifying intentionality and controllability. These models and theories were presented and evaluated in line with a three-order paradigmatic classification, which indicated the traditional sequential, factorial variability, inclusive facets and persuasive online paradigms. It was argued that the traditional consumer response models are rooted in cognitive psychology, explicating linear and sequential mental activities during information processing and response, with little or no recognition of their complex transactional nature. The theoretical framework for online consumer response and the conceptual integrated model for the internal consumer response process represented a shift in consumer information processing and response by conceptualising it as mental and cognitive-processing processes, especially in terms of the proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches.

In the consideration of consumer information processing and response, specifically in the online context and in terms of the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, attention was drawn to the information-processing and response stages of online consumers which are associated with their web-based communication message and information processing. It was argued that the focus of the usual generic conceptualisations of information processing and response in disciplines such as cognitive science, consumer research, philosophy and cognitive psychology should change to a more internal psychological conceptualisation of online consumer information processing and response, indicating online consumers' processing and response processes during their exposure to web-based communication messages and consumption of information.

9.2.7 Theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour: offline and online perspectives

Secondary research objective 7: to identify, explore and describe the main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour

The identification, exploration and description of the main offline and online theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour were addressed in chapter 6 by presenting the following key theoretical arguments: online consumer behaviour from a purchasing perspective; the theory of reasoned action and its extensions as offline foundations of consumer behaviour; the theory of planned behaviour as an offline foundation of consumer behaviour; the technology acceptance model (TAM) and its extensions as online foundations of consumer behaviour; and an application of these theories and models to the online perspective of this study.

It was argued that although the existing consumer behaviour models and theory are based on specific cognitive psychological and social behavioural predictive theoretical foundations and familiar social psychological concepts, the main theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour which could be applied to the online context of this study, are those of the theory of reasoned action, the theory of planned behaviour and TAM. Therefore it can be said that this study established the theoretical grounding of online consumer behaviour by indicating the main theoretical thrusts of the theory of reasoned action that explicate attitudinal and normative beliefs as predictors of behavioural intentions and most human behaviour; followed by elaborating on the major theoretical implications of the theory of planned behaviour as the incorporation of perceived control, attitudes and subjective norms over behavioural achievement as determinants of individuals' intentions and behaviour. It can be concluded that the main theoretical thrusts of TAM, with its prediction and explanation of the use of new technology and information systems by means of two theoretical constructs, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, could contribute to the identification of theoretical constructs for the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour.

9.2.8 Theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour

Secondary research objective 8: to establish and propose theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour

The establishment and proposition of theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour were addressed in chapter 7 by interpreting the main theoretical underpinnings of the theoretical discussions presented in the preceding chapters. Critical to the establishment of theoretical criteria were the description, evaluation, integration and summation of the main existing offline and online theoretical perspectives and constructs in order to provide a more precise understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of consumer behaviour in general, which were highlighted in the existing consumer behaviour literature. This was done through a systematic and theoretical integration, summation and evaluation of all theories, models and theoretical foundations. Secondly, these criteria were adapted, changed and applied to the online context and proposed theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour, specifically in terms of the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. This was based on the following main theoretical constructs: the contextualisation of online consumer behaviour in terms of the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches; the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches; the determinants of online consumer behaviour; consumer decision making; online consumer information decision making; online consumer information processing and response; and the main theoretical foundations of online consumer behaviour.

9.3 THE CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED THEORETICAL MODEL FOR ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Primary research objective: to develop a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour

To address the primary research objective of this study, a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour was developed in terms of the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches presented in chapter 2. The primary research objective was based on the research problem, which stated that inadequate knowledge and information exist on online consumers' behavioural processes, especially consumers' internal

psychological behavioural processes when they are exposed to web-based communication messages and proceed through the complete web-based communication experience and that no conceptual integrated theoretical model exists in the literature. The conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour contributes to existing consumer behaviour literature by proposing a move away from the focus on purchasing behaviour and product consumption, to the online context on online consumers' internal behavioural and web-based communication exposure processes when they are seeking and consuming online information and messages. The conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour was developed on the basis of an exploration, description and theoretical integration of existing literature and theory; new proposed perspectives on offline and online consumer behaviour; consumer behavioural approaches; the determinants of consumer behaviour; consumer decision making; information processing and response; and the theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour.

The conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour depicts online consumer behaviour as parallel, transactional and reciprocal behavioural processes determined by internal, external and online factors. The model further proposed online consumers' progression through the complete web-based communication experience that signifies their search for and consumption of communication and informational experiences, which involves several interactive information-seeking and consumption actions. It was posited that online consumers' complete web-based communication experiences primarily comprise two main consumer behavioural processes, namely the web-based communication exposure process and the internal psychological behavioural process. In addition, each of these processes consists of behavioural phases which online consumers experience in their progression through the specific behavioural process. It was argued that web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes subsequently lead to cognitive information processing and response processes, information decision-making processes and output processes which also involve several behavioural phases as discussed.

9.4 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

In chapter 1 this study was contextualised within the realm of the discipline of communication science, the field of organisational communication and integrated marketing communication, specifically the digital/online/web-based communication context. It was indicated that consumer behaviour is an applied area of integrated marketing communication and that an understanding and description of consumer behaviour, information regarding message and information choices, and knowledge on how consumers respond to and consume marketing communication messages or web based (online) communication messages, are needed in order to theoretically contribute to integrated marketing communication literature and to ultimately assist in perfecting integrated marketing communication strategies. In addition, it was indicated that digital/online/web-based communication is an integral tool/element of IMC and therefore this study contributes by focusing on *online* consumer behaviour and indicating how online consumers search for and consume online marketing communication/web-based communication messages.

Based on these contextualisations of consumer behaviour within the discipline of communication science, this study makes the following specific significant contributions:

- a wider and distinct conceptualisation of online consumer behaviour, suggesting an alternative approach in terms of exposure to and experience of web-based communication messages and subsequent inward psychological behavioural processes of online consumers, in contrast to the usual product consumption approach evident in the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behaviour processes of the conceptual integrated theoretical model of online consumer behaviour. This conceptualisation of online consumer behaviour and the proposal of alternative approaches were addressed in chapter 2.
- the formulation of new original definitions of the study of consumer behaviour, offline consumer behaviour, online consumer behaviour, determinants of consumer behaviour, personality, online consumer information decision making and consumer information processing and response, incorporated in

the complete new proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour evident in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5.

- the proposal of a move from a technical purchasing perspective to an information and web-based communication message and information-seeking and consumption perspective – hence the proposed web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, evident in the indication of the complete web-based communication experience in the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour. The proposal of a move from a technical purchasing perspective to an information and web-based communication message and information-seeking and consumption perspective were addressed in chapter 2.
- the categorisation of factors influencing consumer behaviour into internal and external determinants, adding the online perspective by indicating unique online determinants of online consumer behaviour, indicated in the determinants of online consumer behaviour in the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour and described in chapter 3.
- the proposal of a new online information decision-making conceptualisation of consumer decision making based on the web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches, indicated in the information decision-making, web-based communication exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes depicted in the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour in chapter 4.
- the proposal of an online consumer information decision-making model in chapter 4.
- an information-processing and response perspective, indicated in the cognitive information-processing and response process depicted in the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour and also addressed in chapter 5.

- proposed theoretical criteria for online consumer behaviour depicted in the complete conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour and addressed in chapter 7.

Since the main research objective of this study was the development of a conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour, the significance of the proposed model specifically lies in the following: Firstly, it contributes by addressing the dearth in the literature on online consumer behaviour. Secondly, it addresses the lack of comprehensive integrated theoretical models of online consumer behaviour that allow for systematic theoretical interpretation, assessment and integration of complex online consumer behavioural processes embedded in interactive information-seeking and consumption actions, which should contradict the usual product consumption perspectives of most consumer behaviour studies. Thirdly, it provides a new perspective on online consumer behaviour by promoting a more precise understanding of online consumers' internal psychological behavioural processes during their exposure to web-based communication messages and information and engagement in interactive information-seeking and consumption actions, as opposed to the usual existing technical, purchasing and product consumption perspectives. Fourthly, it indicates a move from a purchasing approach to web-based communication message exposure and internal psychological behavioural processes approaches. Fifthly, it provides a theoretical framework for explaining online consumer behaviour as parallel, transactional and reciprocal behavioural processes determined by internal, external and online determinants. Sixth, the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour was based on the integration of various fields of study and theoretical viewpoints such as the traditional offline perspectives, online perspectives, different theoretical approaches, determinants, decision making, information processing and response and theoretical foundations of consumer behaviour, which addressed the existing fragmented approaches to consumer behaviour studies.

9.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The main limitation of this study was its exploratory nature and the specific perspectives and approaches from which it was approached, which may have presented a somewhat restricted view of consumer behaviour. Another limitation was that the proposed conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour is lacking in the sense that it fails to explain the exact manner in which the internal, external and online determinants of online consumer behaviour alter, expand or reduce online consumers' behavioural processes and progression sequence. Although the aim of the model is to integrate the different behavioural phases into encompassing behavioural processes, it was difficult to indicate the overlapping between behavioural processes and phases as a result of the influence of the internal, external and online determinants. It is further argued that although it was suggested that, because of the specified determinants of online consumer behaviour, online consumers do not necessarily go through all the online behavioural actions, processes and phases as indicated in the model, it was not specified which actions, processes or phases are altered or omitted because of the influence of certain determinants. The final limitation of the study was its lack of empirical research and the paucity of empirical evidence in the existing consumer behaviour literature.

9.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Exploratory and descriptive research were conducted in this study by means of a literature review, which contributed to the development of the integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour and in addition, provided a theoretical foundation on which future studies can be based. The research in this study was therefore conducted non-empirically (literature review) (Babbie & Mouton 2005:78), therefore leaving an opportunity for future studies to refine and empirically test the integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour.

Two main suggestions are made for future research: Firstly that the conceptual integrated theoretical model for online consumer behaviour be refined in terms of the

following: Expanding or adapting it to include new and alternative perspectives and approaches to online consumer behaviour; the behavioural parallelism and reciprocity, which could lead to abbreviated or expanded online behavioural processes because of the influence of the internal, external and online determinants on the complete web-based communication experience, should be determined; and the reciprocity and parallelism of the different behavioural phases that constitute the web-based communication exposure, internal psychological, cognitive information-processing and response, information decision-making, and output processes, should be determined. Secondly, it can be used in empirical research to test its viability in order to gain a deeper, objective understanding of online consumers' behavioural processes.

Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.

(Sir Winston Churchill 1942)

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