

**THE ROLE OF SELECTED E-RETAILER ATTRIBUTES AND BEHAVIOURS IN
CULTIVATING ONLINE SHOPPERS' REPURCHASE INTENTION**

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Abstract

This study evaluated the impact of selected online retailer attributes and behaviours on online shoppers' repurchase intention. A model testing affordable delivery cost, transactional protection and order fulfilment was used to determine the impact of these attributes on shoppers' repurchase intention. Data was collected from 580 online shoppers who had made online purchases within the three months preceding the survey. The model was tested using the structural equation modeling technique. The findings suggest that online retailers who offer affordable delivery, transaction protection and prompt order fulfilment have a significant direct effect on shoppers' repurchase intention. The managerial implications of the findings are presented.

Key terms: Online shopping, repurchase intention, delivery cost, transaction protection, order fulfilment, repurchase intention

INTRODUCTION

Developments in technology such as the internet are having a profound impact on all sectors of business (Trivedi & Yadav, 2018). One of the sectors that is undergoing significant changes due to the advent of the internet is the retail sector (Doherty & Chadwick, 2010). The use of a new shopping channel – electronic retailing or e-retailing – has revolutionised how the retail business is conducted (Jain & Sareen, 2013; Pappas, Patel, Giannakos & Chrissikopoulos, 2014). The emergence of e-retailing is an innovation which enables consumers to search for products, compare products from different stores at any time from any location and make transactions (Nguyen, de Leeuw & Dullaert, 2016; Vrechopoulos, Pramataris, Doukidis & Lekakos, 2003; Yun & Good, 2007). Furthermore, online shopping eliminates unpleasant experiences such as long queues at pay points or the lack of secure parking which are commonplace in traditional shopping malls (Fong, 2013). Customers also prefer to shop online because it saves them time for visiting different traditional stores (Pilik, Klimek, Jurickova & Palka, 2016). For retailers, e-retailing has created new opportunities to expand their reach and increase sales beyond their geographic boundaries (Al-Maghrabi & Dennis, 2011).

Given its benefits, many retailers are migrating to online channels (Marta, Descal, Molina & Eugenia, 2017). In the mid-1990s, the number of online shops was limited, however in recent years, most retailers are recognising the advantages of online channels and are not only venturing into e-retailing but are also investing time and effort into improving their shoppers' experience (Riggins & Rhee, 1998; Boeck, Bendavid & Lefebvre, 2009). The increase in the number e-retailers is creating greater competition amongst these retailers, who jostle to attract online shoppers' attention to gain their share of the online shopping market. To remain competitive, e-retailers are implementing a number of strategies to attract and retain customers. The attributes and behaviours of e-retailers are therefore crucial in cultivating online shoppers' repurchase intention (Dholakia & Zhao, 2010). Thus, an understanding of these attributes and behaviours would be of practical relevance to e-retailers in their efforts to retain their online shopping customers.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Customer retention on online platforms is of the utmost importance as studies show that it is five times cheaper to retain a customer than obtain a new one (Gera, 2011). Moreover, research suggests that e-retailers' success is positively influenced by their ability to retain customers (Safa & von Solms, 2016). It is therefore crucial for e-retailers to encourage existing customers to repurchase more products or services (Bao, Li, Shen & Hou, 2016). Nevertheless, existing

South African studies on e-retailing (McClatchey, Cattell & Michell, 2007; Frazer & Stiehler, 2014; Kloppers, 2014; Chinomona, Masinge & Sandada, 2014) have not specifically addressed the question of e-retailer attributes and behaviours which influence the retention of online shoppers.

Prior e-commerce research (Pham & Ahammad, 2017; Bezes, 2016; Chahal, Sahi & Rani, 2014) suggests that e-retailer attributes (such as affordable delivery cost and perceived transaction protection) and behaviours (such as prompt order fulfilment) are critical to consumer online shopping choice selection. However, the extent to which those factors influence repurchase intention is yet to be addressed in the extant South African literature. Therefore, gaps remain in the literature on the role of delivery cost, perceived transaction protection and prompt order fulfilment on online repurchase intention. The present study bridges this gap by addressing the following research question:

What is the role of affordable delivery cost, transaction protection and prompt order fulfilment in influencing South African online shoppers' repurchase intentions?

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to identify the impact of selected online retailer attributes and behaviours on online shoppers' repurchase intention. In order to achieve the above aim, the following objectives are set:

- To examine the impact of affordable delivery cost and online shoppers' repurchase intentions.
- To examine the impact of perceived transaction protection on online shoppers' repurchase intentions.
- To examine the impact of prompt order fulfilment on online shoppers' repurchase intentions.

RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

Consistent with prior literature, the study proposes a model (Figure 1) that posits that affordable delivery cost, transactional protection and order fulfilment have significant and positive effects on online shoppers' repurchase intention.

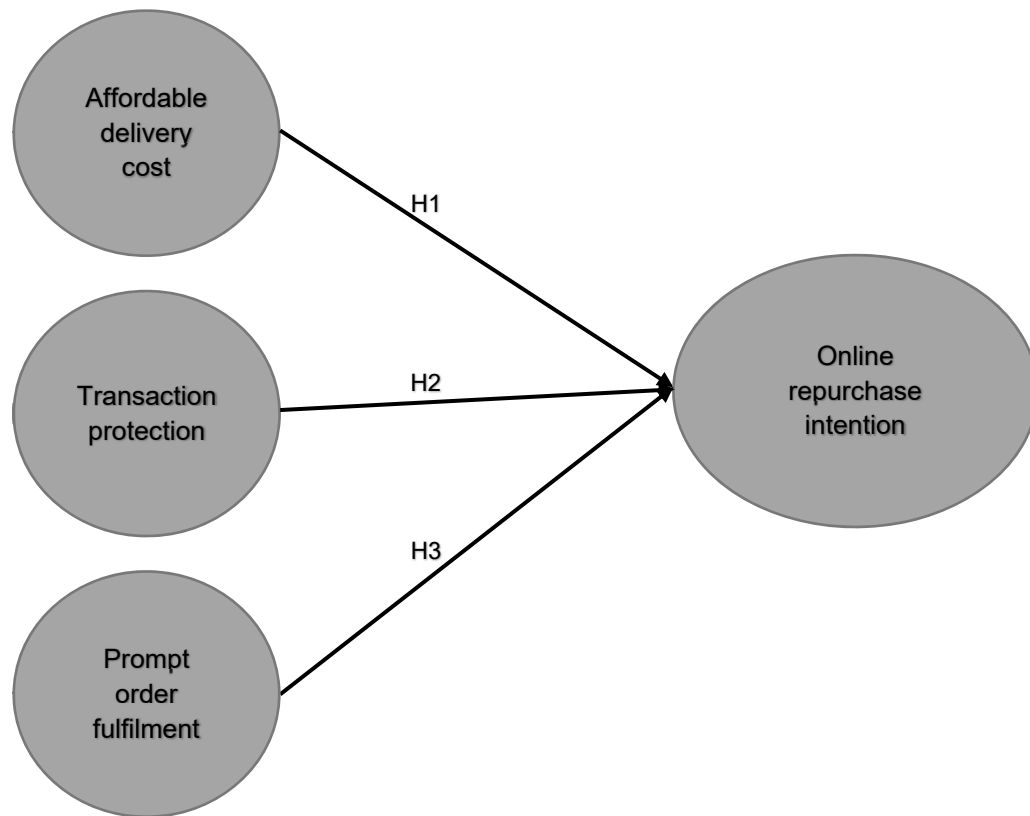


FIGURE 1: Research Model

The relationships between the constructs in the conceptual model are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Affordable delivery cost and online shopper repurchase intention

The cost of delivery associated with online purchase is a critical determinant of online shoppers' shopping behaviour (Jiang & Rosenbloom, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Ma, 2017). Indeed, Huang and Oppewal (2006) and Xiao, Wang and Liu (2018) note that delivery fees can be a deterring factor for most online grocery shoppers and for these shoppers, repurchase behaviour would be unlikely. Similarly, the results of a study conducted by Lewis (2006) on online shoppers in the United States revealed that higher delivery cost had a negative impact on ordering rates and had a detrimental effect on attracting new customers and retaining existing ones. Based on the overview presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Affordable delivery cost will have a significant positive effect on online shoppers' repurchase intention.

Transaction protection and online shopper repurchase intention

Transaction protection (security) is a key factor affecting consumers' online purchasing behaviour (Jun & Chung, 2006; Meskaran, Ismail & Shanmugam, 2013; Rezaei, Amin & Ismail, 2014). Research indicates that despite the growth of e-commerce, consumers' high perception of risks remains a serious challenge to e-retailers' ability to leverage the potential of online sales, especially in emerging countries (Trivedi & Yadav, 2013; Wu & Ke, 2015). Many consumers are still sceptical about the safety of sharing their personal information on online platforms (Bart, Shankar, Sultan & Urban, 2005). Thus, perceptions of the security of online transactions influence customers' repurchase decisions (Hartono, Holsapple, Kim, Na & Simpson, 2014; Shin, Chung, Oh & Lee, 2013; Trivedi & Yadav, 2018). A study by Chang and Chen (2009) reveals that high levels of perceived security encourage customer loyalty and increase the likelihood of repurchase. Based on the evidence presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Transaction protection will have a significant positive effect on online shoppers' repurchase intention.

Prompt order fulfilment and online shopper repurchase intention

Bart *et al.* (2005) describe order fulfilment as the process of delivering products or services that match what has been ordered by the consumer. Previous studies conducted by Cheung, Chan and Limayem (2005), Dholakia and Zhao (2010) and Lee, Eze and Ndubisi (2011) suggest that reliable, on-time delivery and customer support are important elements that lead to desirable customer experience and retention. Based on the overview presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Prompt order fulfilment will have a significant positive effect on online shoppers' repurchase intention.

METHODOLOGY

Measurement

The data was collected using a structured, paper-based questionnaire. A multi-item scale, adapted from prior related literature, was used to measure the constructs. Repurchase intention,

which consisted of four items, was adapted from Rose, Clark, Samouel and Hair (2012). Prompt order fulfilment, with four items, was adapted from Davis-Sramek, Mentzer and Stank (2008). Transaction protection, also with four items, was adapted from Park and Kim (2003). All the items were measured as reflective items on their corresponding constructs with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree'.

A convenience sample of 40 respondents was used to pilot the questionnaire. Each respondent completed a copy of the questionnaire and commented on its structure, content and the clarity of instructions. The feedback was positive, and as a result, no amendment was made to the final questionnaire.

Sampling and data collection

The target population of this study was online shoppers aged 18 years and above, residing in Gauteng, who had engaged in online shopping within the three months preceding the survey. Given the absence of a sampling frame, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to obtain the data for this study. For this reason, the targeted sample was invited to participate in the study based on their availability and willingness.

A group of trained research assistants approached potential respondents in their homes and public areas. After explaining the purpose of the survey and the measures taken to protect confidentiality and anonymity, the respondents were asked for their consent to participate in the survey. Willing participants were given a copy of the questionnaire to complete. Participants were further made to understand that they could terminate their participation at any point in time without any negative consequences.

A total of 1 002 potential participants was approached, however, only 580 usable responses were realised, translating into an effective response rate of 57.89%.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data was analysed using the partial least squares structural equation modelling technique, employing SmartPLS 3 software. Following the recommendation of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the measurement model was first examined for its validity. Subsequently, the structural model was assessed to determine the significance of the hypotheses.

Measurement model analysis

The measurement model was examined for its convergent and discriminant validities. To ascertain the convergent validity, the standardised factor loading, composite reliability and

average variance extracted (AVE) were examined. To achieve convergent validity, the standardised factor loading should exceed 0.7, the composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha should be greater than 0.7 while the AVEs should be greater than 0.5 (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2017). The results in Table 1 show that the factor loadings ranged from 0.791 – 0.883, thus they exceeded the recommended 0.7 threshold. The CR ranged from 0.862 – 0.910 with Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.762 – 0.868. These estimates were above 0.7 recommended cut-off point. The AVEs ranged between 0.677 – 0.716, thereby exceeding the 0.5 cut-off point. These results therefore confirmed the convergent validity of the measurement model.

TABLE 1: Convergent Validity of the Measurement Model

	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
Affordable delivery cost		0.762	0.863
I think the cost of online shopping delivery is affordable.	0.824		
I think the cost of online shopping delivery is within my budget.	0.848		
The overall cost of online shopping is lower.	0.795		
Transaction protection		0.868	0.910
Online shopping websites have enough safeguards to make me feel comfortable using them to shop online.	0.842		
I feel assured that legal and technological structures adequately protect me from problems of online shopping.	0.883		
I feel confident that encryption and other technological advances on the online shopping websites make it safe for me to purchase products.	0.853		
In general, the online shopping websites are now a robust and safe environment in to purchase products.	0.804		
Prompt order fulfilment		0.865	0.908
Upon arrival, shipment matched my order.	0.868		
Upon arrival, quality was the same as the description on the website.	0.879		
The goods I bought from this website were delivered to the right place.	0.835		
The goods I bought from this website were delivered on time.	0.791		
Repurchase intention		0.863	0.907
This website is my first choice when I need to make a purchase.	0.820		
I expect to repurchase from this online store in near future.	0.839		
I intend to browse this online store first for my next purchase.	0.871		
I will regularly repurchase from this online store.	0.838		

After confirming the convergent validity of the model, discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell and Larker (1981) technique. According to this technique, discriminant validity is

achieved if the correlation between latent constructs is less than the square root of the AVEs. The results presented in Table 2 show that the highest inter-factor correlation was 0.605 while the lowest square root of the AVEs was 0.823. Given that the highest correlation estimate was less than the lowest square root of the AVE, the discriminant validity of the measurement model was confirmed.

TABLE 2: Discriminant Validity of the Measurement

		AVE	1	2	3	4
1	Affordable delivery cost	0.677	0.823			
2	Prompt order fulfilment	0.712	0.467	0.844		
3	Perceived transaction protection	0.716	0.361	0.565	0.846	
4	Repurchase Intention	0.709	0.417	0.579	0.605	0.842

Confirmation of the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model paved the way for the structural model analysis.

Structural model analysis

The structural model was analysed to determine the significance of the hypotheses and variance explained in the dependent variable (online shoppers' repurchase intention) by the significant independent variables. The significance of the structural path was estimated using 5 000 resamples. The results of the structural model equation are presented in Figures 2 and 3.

According to the results, affordable delivery cost was significant and positively related to online shoppers' repurchase intention ($\beta=0.139$, $p < 0.001$), thereby providing statistical support for H1. For H2, the relationship between transaction protection and online shoppers' repurchase intention was significant ($\beta=0.294$, $p < 0.001$), therefore providing support for H2. Similarly, there was a significant positive relationship between prompt order fulfilment and online shoppers' repurchase intention ($\beta=0.338$, $p < 0.001$), thus providing support for H3.

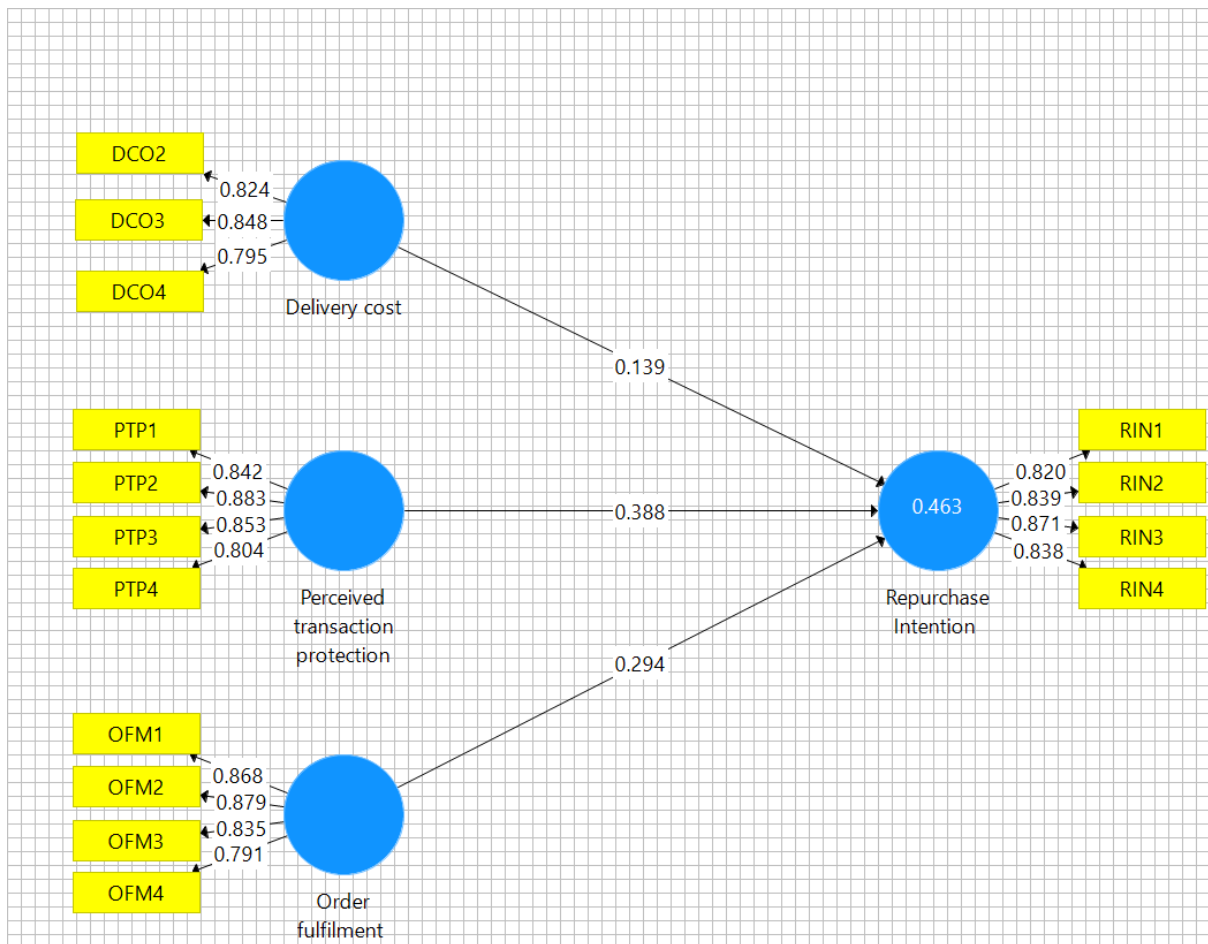


FIGURE 2: SmartPLS Results of Measurement and Structural Model

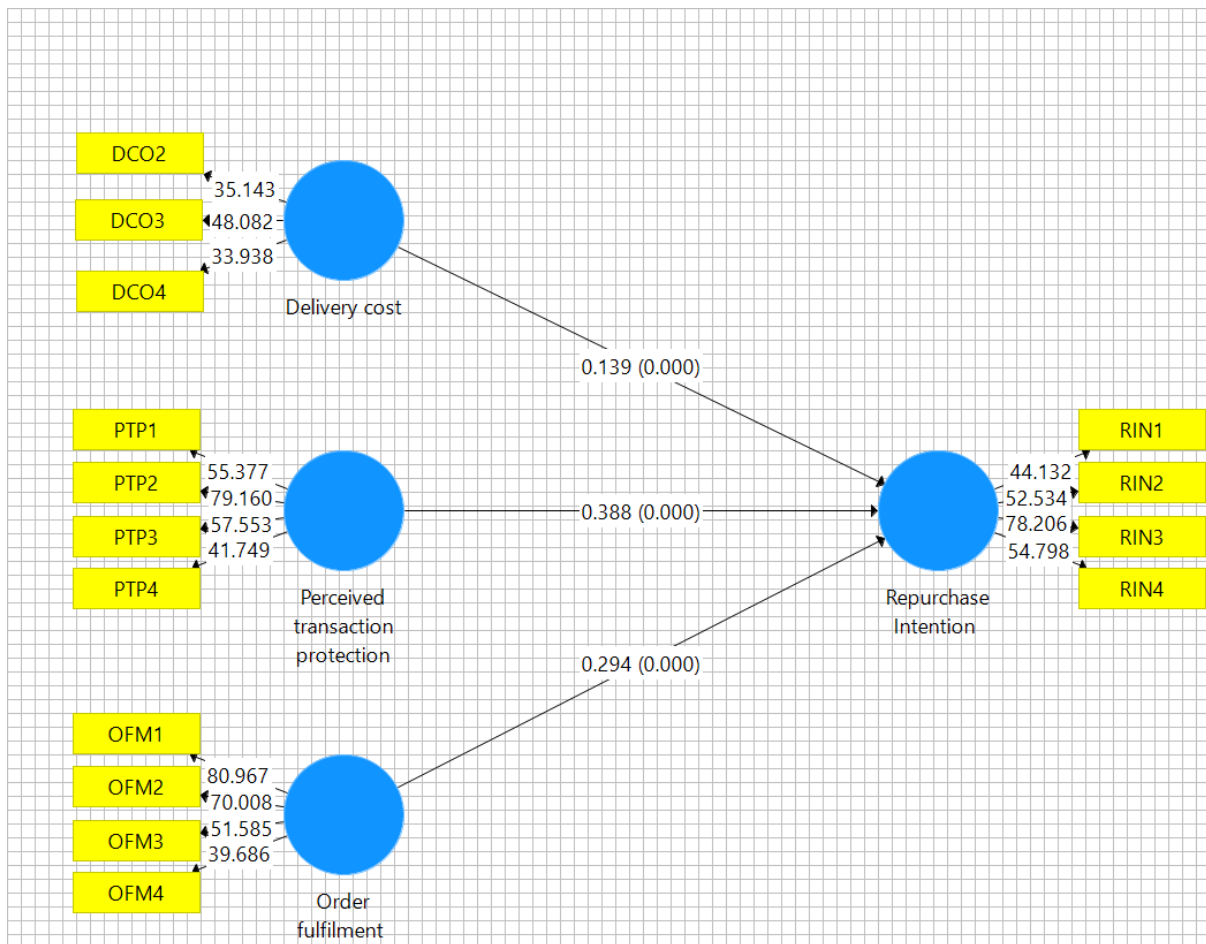


FIGURE 3: SmartPLS Results of Measurement and Structural Model

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the role of affordable delivery cost, perceived transaction protection and prompt order fulfilment on online shoppers' repurchase intention. The findings suggest that affordable delivery cost is positively associated with repurchase intention. This finding is in line with existing studies (Lewis, 2006; Ma, 2017; Xiao *et al.*, 2018) and implies that online shoppers who perceive the cost of delivery to be affordable are likely to buy again from the same vendor. Thus, in order to retain their current customers and influence their repurchase intention, e-retailers need to implement affordable delivery options. Currently, some e-retailers offer free delivery for orders above specific amounts; this strategy would be useful in reinforcing the perceived affordability of delivery cost. Moreover, online vendors could consider establishing collection points for customers in major towns and cities to offset the delivery expenses for shoppers who may be willing to collect their purchases in person.

The findings of this study also show that perceived transaction protection has a direct impact on online repurchase intention. This result corroborates the findings of previous studies

(Meskaran *et al.*, 2013; Rezaei *et al.*, 2014). This finding suggests that South African online shoppers who perceive that their personal information is secure on a website will be likely to repurchase from that particular website. Thus, for online vendors to encourage repeat purchases, they need to consider implementing state-of-the-art security mechanisms, monitoring their security updates regularly and tightening their existing online security systems to protect shoppers' transactions. These security measures ought to be communicated to customers regularly for them to know that their transactions are secure. E-retailers' success in doing this is likely to reduce customers' perceptions of risk associated with using online shopping portals.

Prompt order fulfilment is another important factor underlying online shoppers' repurchase intention. Indeed, the results revealed that prompt order fulfilment has a significant positive effect on repurchase intention. This finding is consistent with prior studies (Dholakia & Zhao, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2011) and implies that prompt delivery of customer orders will lead to sustained levels of online repurchase intentions. This finding has practical implications for e-retailers interested in seeing repeat purchases from their customers. E-retailers should implement advanced ordering systems linked to their delivery departments; this would ensure that the correct order is processed on time and shipped using the customer's preferred delivery method. Closely linked with prompt delivery is the issue of delivery cost. Ma (2017) found that although customers are prepared to pay for quicker delivery, they are reluctant to pay when delivery time is longer. Therefore, online vendors who can deliver orders to customers promptly are likely to see repeat purchases, as online shoppers will perceive the delivery cost as value-for-money.

In terms of the theoretical implications of the study, extant literature focuses mainly on customer repurchase intention in off-line shopping situations (Fang, Chiu & Wang, 2011; Izogo, 2016; Moslehpour, Wong, Pham & Aulia, 2017). There are limited studies examining the drivers of online repurchase intention, especially in the context of emerging economies such as South Africa (Chiejina & Olamide, 2014; Tandon, Kiran & Sah, 2017). The findings of the current study confirm the impact of selected e-retailer attributes and behaviours that influence South African shoppers' online repurchase intention, and thus contribute to the literature from the perspective of an emerging African market economy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study proposed and tested a model that examined how selected e-retailer attributes and behaviours, namely, affordable delivery cost, perceived transaction protection and prompt order fulfilment, influence South African online shoppers' repurchase intention using data obtained from 580 online shoppers. The study found that all three factors had a direct impact on online shoppers' repurchase intention, with a variance explained of 46.3 %. The managerial implications to encourage repurchase intentions were also stated.

Although the study makes a valuable contribution, like other studies, it is not without limitations. First, the study was conducted in the Gauteng province only. Although this is the most densely populated province and the most cosmopolitan region of South Africa, it is largely urban and as such, the results may not apply to customers in more rural areas. Moreover, the data was cross-sectional and was collected using non-probability sampling. Therefore, causal inferences cannot be made on the relationships tested in this study. Future research could expand the scope of the study to include other provinces, using probability sampling and longitudinal designs to broaden the generalisability and validity to a wider population.

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