

**“The role of YouTube in pre-purchase consumer information search:
evaluating the impact of product review videos.”**

Research dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of MSc in International Business Management

Griffith College Dublin

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4th September 2019

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I certify that the dissertation entitled:

“The role of YouTube in pre-purchase consumer information search: evaluating the impact of product review videos.”

submitted for the degree of: MSc in International Business Management is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

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Abstract

“The role of YouTube in pre-purchase consumer information search: evaluating the impact of product review videos.”

Maria Teresa Del Gaudio

Globalization and Internet development are the reasons why the market has exploded and consumers nowadays suffer the confusion caused by choice overload. There are many brands offering similar, largely undifferentiated types of product, and it is becoming more and more difficult for consumers to make the right purchase decision. Moreover, as consumers are constantly bombarded by advertising clutter, they need a medium that can help them feel confident when selecting the product that most fits their needs. This is where eWOM and social media can come into play. The Internet has become one of the most used sources of consumer information, raising potential questions about the most effective use of social media in the marketing field. New approaches aimed at understanding the integration of social media into the consumer decision-making context are needed. Since YouTube and product related videos uploaded on the platform have been identified as having a positive effect on consumer purchase intentions (Mir and Rehman, 2013), it is vital to extend the research on YouTube in relation to consumer behaviour in order to identify what works most effectively in influencing in the decision making process of the customer in relation to product reviews. Therefore, this study aims to propose a conceptual model of **consumer purchase intentions under the influence of YouTube product related videos**. Following an approach influenced by a Grounded Theory approach to research, this research focuses its attention on the viewing experience and perceptions of the participants involved. Data was gathered from a sample of 10 participants through the aid of semi-structured interviews. Findings revealed that the consumer-decision making process in digital era is a non-linear process that changes according to the different types of consumer behaviour online and, in YouTube scenario, according to the influence of interrelated factors in product related videos enhancing consumers purchase intentions. The research provides more detailed and useful insights for social media marketing through the development of a model aimed to understand consumer decision making process under the influence of YouTube videos. Therefore, it could be used as a guideline for marketers to overcome the complexity of consumer behaviour and to better develop their digital marketing strategies.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Globalization and the technological development that followed have significantly changed people's lifestyle all around the world. In addition to that, the growth of the Internet has enhanced the development of new social media sites, which have become an integrated part of our daily life and have undoubtedly altered the way individuals socialize and communicate with each other. Social media are indeed creating online a new interactive community, which enables users to create user-generated content, socialize with each other, and at the same time it also favours the circulation of information within users (Tang *et al.*, 2012). These online interactive communities constitute the environments wherein customers share their ideas, experiences and opinions regarding products and services. A direct consequence of this process is that the Internet and social media represent nowadays the replacement to the traditional offline word of mouth communication.

When facing a purchasing decision scenario, consumers nowadays have become significantly more reliant on the information they find online, which have been created and uploaded by other users. Previously, purchase decisions were primarily based on traditional advertisements and on the information regarding a product that vendors and brands were sharing. However, the diffusion of online product reviews has inexorably increased consumers' tendency to trust mostly online reviews to make purchase decisions (Hu *et al.*, 2012). A study conducted by the data and measurement firm Nielsen confirms in fact that up to 66% of consumers trust other consumers opinions shared online (Nielsen [Online], 2015).

The online interchange of positive or negative opinions regarding products or brands delivering those products is free and easy to access to everyone online (Barreto, 2015), and can be generally referred to as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010). Other users' opinions on products and services being uploaded online directly impact purchase intentions of those consumers who are referring to those opinions (Chen and Xie, 2008). Studies have shown in fact that this happens due to their speed and easy to access nature (Michelle, 2018).

It is not a surprise that the power of social media has become the subject of interest to marketers. Once recognized, the fast penetration of social media into consumers' daily life and its power on consumer behaviour, companies are now integrating them as an

essential part of their marketing campaigns (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). Indeed, social media represents for brands a new and efficient tool through which attract new clients (Mikalef *et al.*, 2013), by offering companies an opportunity to engage with their customers, understand them (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012) and potentially also manipulate the conversations happening online (Hu *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, it is vital to understand those factors in social networking websites that can have significant impact on consumers' behaviour.

This research aims to contribute to the existing literature on consumer behaviour, by exploring the factors of product related videos on YouTube that might enhance consumers purchase intentions.

1.2 Research Purpose

The main purpose of this research is to explore how consumers process the information gained through the videos of product reviews they watch on YouTube and act in response to factors and elements which, without their complete knowledge, are influencing their decision-making process.

This work is an inductive study which aims to give a conceptual model through which to understand how consumers make decisions under the influence of YouTube product related videos. Through the search of common patterns, the model will give more insights on the influence of the video-sharing platform on consumers purchase intentions.

1.3 Justification of the Study

Besides being part of the group of the active users of the platform, the researcher has been working in the YouTube Creator Support Team for Accenture for over two years now. Working hand in hand with the YouTubers to improve their channel performance through search engine optimization techniques, providing consultation on product placement and endorsements, have made the researcher realize how much social media represents nowadays an influential tool for brands and consumers. Due to the direct working experience with the product, in order to avoid any unintentional bias, the researcher adopted a self-critical approach when conducting the research, consisting in always guaranteeing a complete transparency throughout the research process and through the support of the discussions with the supervisor of this dissertation.

For the purpose of boosting sales with the use of social media platforms, it has become vital for marketers to understand the way consumers make decisions. Behind every act of making a purchase, there is indeed a decision-making process which needs to be deeply investigated and understood. Understanding consumer behaviour patterns constitutes in fact the way through which to develop successful marketing strategies and gain a more effective positioning of marketing resources (Shao *et al.*, 2008). Once having gained an idea on the assumptions which drive decision making, marketers will then be able to predict consumers' choices, and consequently they will also be able to calculate the return on investment of a marketing campaign.

The advent of the Internet has significantly changed the way people shop, by giving them access to huge amounts of information they might use for making buying decisions, and by creating online environments where consumers are enabled to exchange feedback and opinions on brands and on the quality and performance of the products and services those brands are delivering. Social media has become one of the primary sources of information, and has a massive influence on consumers, who are no longer playing a passive role in the purchasing process. Because of the effectiveness of social media, marketers need to understand consumer behaviour under the influence of social media platforms, see how consumers' decision-making process changes in relation to this influence so that they can develop digital marketing strategies accordingly.

Based on the above, the justification and significance of this research are to provide useful insights to brands by looking at the factors in product related videos on YouTube playing a decisive role on consumer buying behaviour. The main aim of this research is to contribute to the existing literature on the topic and serve as an additional research, exploring how consumers take their buying decisions in the social media context.

1.4 Research Objectives

Understanding consumer behaviour under the influence of the use of Web 2.0 social media has become one of the primary needs of marketers. Following this need, the fundamental aim and questions of this dissertation can be summarized as follows:

Aim: To provide useful insights on consumer decision making process and on the factors affecting consumer purchase intentions while watching product related videos on YouTube.

Questions: What are the key reasons that push a consumer to seek for product information before buying a product? What elements potentially influence consumer purchase intentions when watching YouTube videos?

In order to be able to achieve the main aim of this dissertation and to fully answer to the research questions, the following objectives have been developed:

- To identify the key motivators behind pre-purchase information search.
- To identify the key factors of YouTube videos affecting purchase intentions.
- To develop a conceptual model aimed to give more insights on consumer behaviour under the influence of YouTube videos for future research in social media marketing.

1.5 Structure of the Study

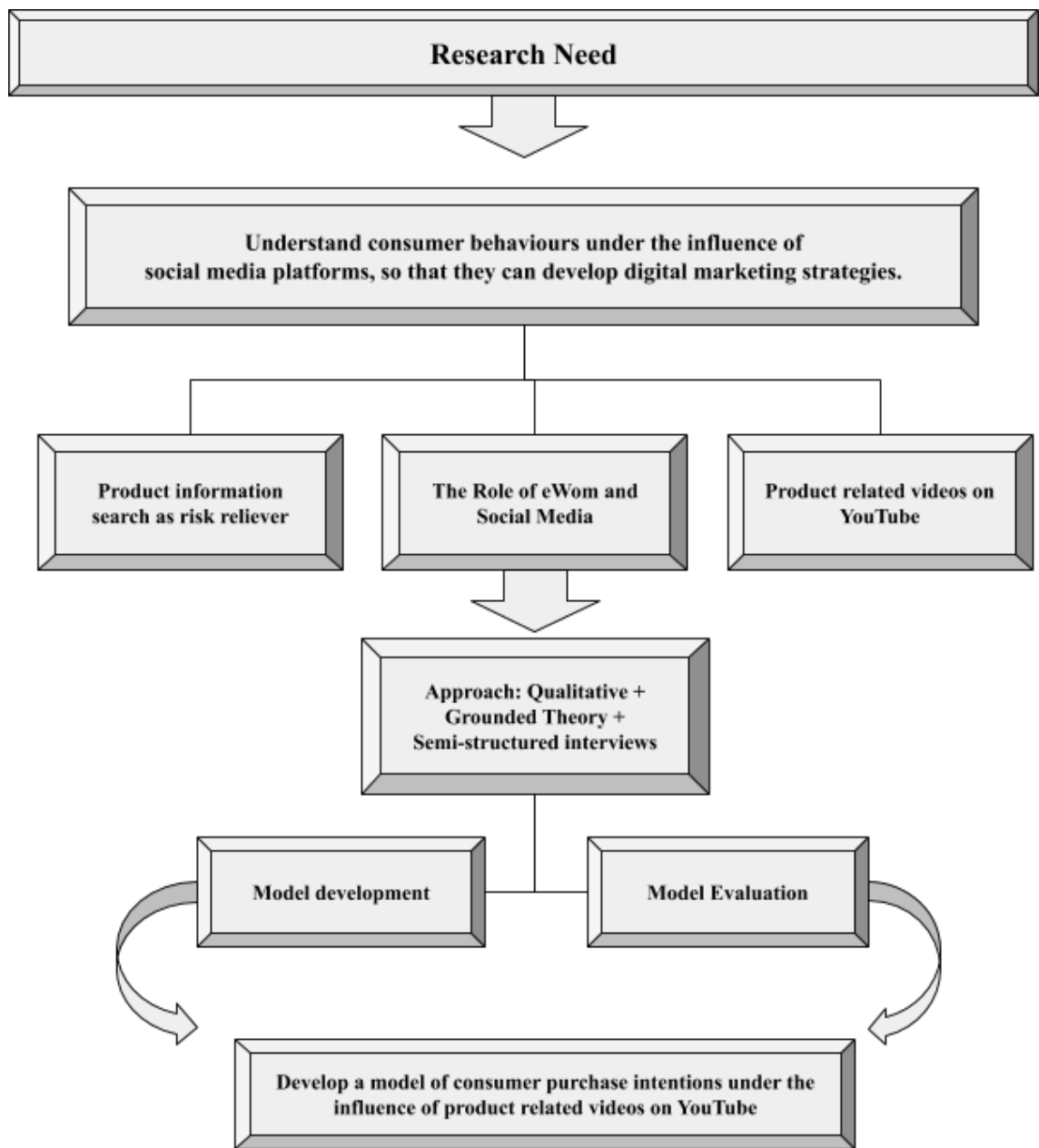


Figure 1: Structure of the study

The first step to take in this study is to identify the need behind the research, that is the one of providing useful insights on how consumers make buying decisions under the influence of product reviews on YouTube.

The second step is to conduct a literature review to further investigate the topic of the research. In particular, the literature review will be looking at product information search as consumers' strategy to overcome the perceived risk associated to a purchasing decision scenario. The role and the involvement of social media will also be analysed to understand how consumers get influenced by eWOM during the decision-making process. Since the research is focused on the use of YouTube as a source of information, the literature review will also be looking at those elements within product reviews that can enhance consumers purchase intentions.

Lastly, the application of the grounded theory methodology will allow the analysis of data collected from participants through the aid of semi-structured interviews. Findings from the analysis will reveal the eventual opportunity to reuse concepts from previous research and literature which will help to further assess the validity of this research and its findings. Findings will also provide new implications, that combined with previous models and research, are going to support in the achievement of the research objectives.

In conclusion, the research will develop a conceptual model that can explain consumer decision-making processes under the influence of product reviews on YouTube. The development of the model will be based on the review of prior model and the addition of new concepts emerging from participants' experience on the platform.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In order to be able to answer the research questions of this dissertation, the researcher has conducted a review of the existing literature on the topic selected. Different journals and conference papers have been investigated through the consultation of different databases, such as Science Direct, Sage, JSTOR, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ACM, Emerald Insight. The keywords utilized for the research were: *purchase intention, pre-purchase information search behaviour, online search behaviour, perceived risk, consumer search behaviour, motives of pre-purchase information search, the impact of social media on purchasing decision defining word of mouth, eWOM and purchase intentions, user generated content, YouTube and purchase intentions.*

This chapter includes the results of the literature review conducted and is structured as follows:

- The first part will include an introduction to pre-purchase information search with an overview of the main characteristics.
- The second part will examine the concept of perceived risk as main motive enhancing information search in a purchase situation.
- The third part of this chapter will introduce the concept of word of mouth used by consumers as a risk reliever in purchasing decision scenarios.
- The last part of this chapter will explore how the evolution of social media platforms have changed the way consumers seek information. It will then examine YouTube, trying to understand its shift from a platform with only amateur videos into one with more professionalized content with commercial interests. The last section will also attempt to answer one of the research questions by looking at the elements in product related videos on YouTube enhancing consumer purchase intentions.

2.2 Definition of Pre-purchase Information Search

Pre-purchase information search represents the stage during which consumers proactively collect information regarding a product or service they are interested in. According to the model (Figure 2) proposed by John Dewey (1910), pre-purchase information search constitutes the second stage of the customer buying process.



Figure 2: The five stages of the Customer Buying process (John Dewey, 1910)

Consumer pre-purchase information search can be considered one of the main topics of research in the marketing field, since it has become fundamental for brands to understand it and re-adapt their communication strategies accordingly, in order to be able to reach and engage with their consumers more efficiently. Blackwell *et al.* (2006, p.106) defined consumer information search as “*the motivated activation of knowledge stored in memory or acquisition of information from the environment*”. As suggested by this definition, it is possible to distinguish two main types of information search, such as: internal and external. Bettman (1979) assumed that internal search is related to the elaboration of the information stored in the memory, which has been acquired through previous personal experience and to which individuals may refer whenever they are facing a purchasing decision. The external search, instead, represents the action of collecting useful information from the surrounding environment, when an individual’s memory does not have enough relevant information to make the appropriate decision.

When trying to obtain information, consumers might rely on different types of information sources, which can be broadly classified into two main categories: offline and online (Akalamkam and Mitra, 2018). Offline information sources, as the word suggests, include all the offline advertisements, such as: journals, radio, TV, offline word of mouth coming from family, friends, shopping assistants’ recommendations, and so on. Whereas, online information sources might include: brands’ websites, online advertisements, electronic word of mouth and product reviews.

The key difference between these two types of information sources, according to Alba *et al.* (1997) is that online sources can provide much more information to consumers and potentially make the decision process much more efficient for them. Moreover, it must be underlined how the development of technology has completely revolutionized the way consumers can now get the information they need. One of the most important benefits of the Internet is in fact that consumers have access to a wider, and possibly better, quantity of information at minimum cost and effort. According to the economics of information theory proposed by Stigler (1961), generally consumers tend to search for information until they get to the point when they start feeling that the marginal benefits of the information search is equivalent to the marginal cost. Therefore, this theory assumes that when selecting a search strategy, consumers tend to prefer a cost-benefit approach with low effort and cost. Following this theory, it is not surprising that the Internet has become for consumers one of the primary sources of information, where they can easily get high quantity of information (Xiao, 2008). Other benefits of using online sources for information search have also been identified. Kulviwat *et al.* (2004), for example, have proposed consumers satisfaction and the ease of use, whereas Lynch and Ariely (2000) have highlighted the aspect related to the product differentiation available online.

Despite these obvious benefits connected with the use of the Internet as an information source, other researches have disagreed and contended that the extended volume of information might actually lead consumers into confusion (Chernev *et al.*, 2015). A wide range of alternatives from which to choose may actually represent for consumers a double-edged sword. On one hand, in fact, the benefit of it is pretty clear and obvious: the greater the number choice of available options, the higher will be the chances that one of these options fit the needs of the customer. On the other hand, instead, the marginal benefit coming from each extra option is actually inclined to decrease in parallel to an assortment size increase. As a consequence, overload choice related to large assortments can result in customer confusion and dissatisfaction (Chernev *et al.*, 2015).

2.3 Perceived risk as primary motive of Pre-purchase Information Search

A good way to understand the time and effort involved into consumers information search is by looking at it as a function of determinants, motives and outcomes of pre-purchase information search (Jansen, 2011). The following paragraph analyses the concept of

perceived risk, seen as the primary motive to enhance an active consumer engagement in pre-purchase information search.

Previous researches have shown that information seeking can be looked at as a consumers' method to both decrease the perceived risk and raise the confidence they feel in a purchase situation (Locander and W. Hermann, 1979). Information seeking behaviour is, therefore, highly motivated in circumstances of high perception of risks. Various models aimed to understand consumer behaviour have been proposed by marketing scholars (Nicosia, 1966; A Howard and Sheth, 1969; Bettman, 1979; Blackwell et al., 2006), and despite the differences, they all commonly look at consumer behaviour as a sequence of several stages which might lead to the final action of making a purchase. In this regard, it must be underlined that perceived risk is not only recognizable during the pre-purchase information search stage. V-W. Mitchell (1992) assumed in fact that consumers actually perceive risk throughout every single stage of the consumer buying decision making process. This research, however, will only be focusing on the impact of perceived risk on information seeking behaviour.

The paragraph below will indeed look at the concept of perceived risk involved in a purchase decision. It will include a definition of perceived risk with the relevant models of risk information seeking and processing which have been proposed by risk scholars. It will then also include a classification of the different types of risks, and a list of the several strategies from which consumers might pick when facing a risk.

2.3.1 Definition of Perceived Risk

Perceived risk refers to the level of uncertainty that consumers have regarding the potential outcomes of a purchase decision. The first to introduce the concept into the marketing world was N. A. Bauer (1960). He believed that "consumer behaviour involves risk in the sense that any action of a consumer will produce consequences which he cannot anticipate with anything approximating certainty, and some of which at least are likely to be unpleasant" (1960, p. 24). Otherwise stated, he connected perceived risk with two main structural dimensions, such as: uncertainty and consequences.

After Bauer, researches on the topic have all agreed on conceptualizing perceived risk as a multidimensional construct, subdivided into different types of risks. Jacoby and Kaplan

(1972) identified five dimensions of perceived risk, such as: financial, psychological, physical, performance and social. Performance risk is related to the possibility that a service or a product might not perform as expected. Physical risk is connected to any threats regarding the appearance of a product or service being purchase. Financial risk concerns any money loss which can be caused by a product malfunction or by consumers' over-expectations on a product. Performance risk concerns any social threat coming from family or friends, who might perceive own's purchase as a potential wasted expenditure or as the result of a bad decision. To these five types of risks, Roselius (1971) added a sixth type, namely time risk. Time risk is related to the time required for the delivery or for the repair and/or replacement of a merchandise. The six dimensions of risk, proposed by Jacoby and Kaplan (1972) and Roselius (1971), were further examined by Brooker (1984), who identified into performance and financial risk the two strongest dimensions of all the risk dimensions. A useful way to understand the correlation between information seeking processes and the concept of perceived risk is through the use of a conceptual model. A good example can be the risk information seeking and processing model which was proposed by Griffin, Dunwoody and Neuwirth (1999). The RISP model sees its roots in the heuristic systematic model (Chaiken and Ledgerwood, 2012), however, Griffin *et al.* (1999) have developed it and implemented several concepts gained from the literature on risk. Figure 3 better illustrates the model.

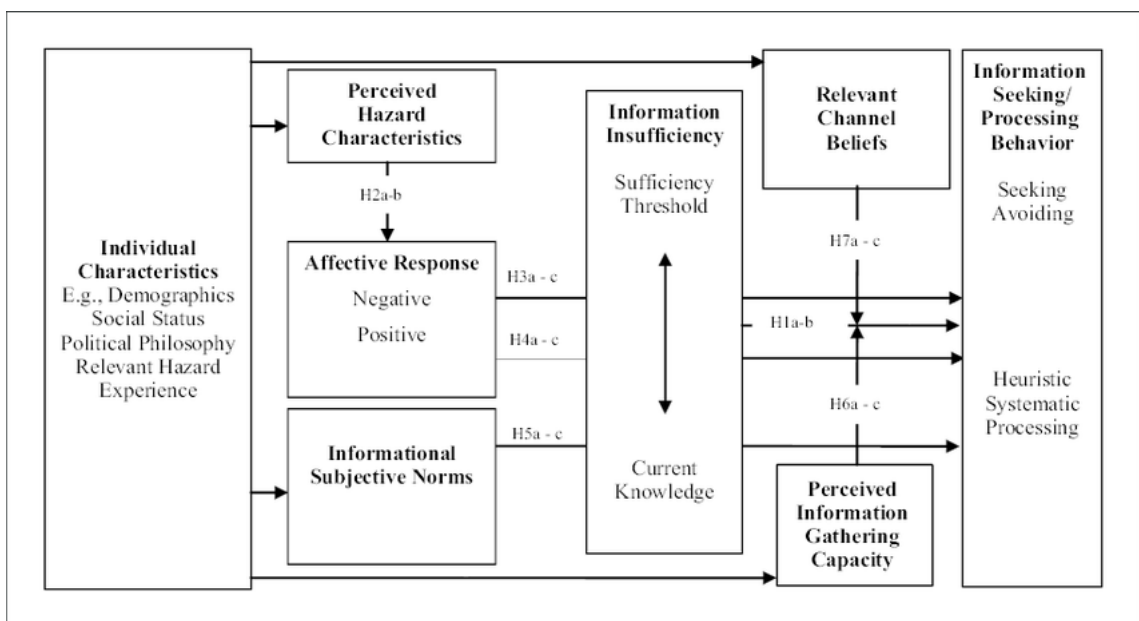


Figure 3: The risk information seeking and processing model (Griffin et al. 1999)

The RISP model is based on the concept of *information insufficiency*, which proposes that consumers will strive to process information up to the point where they feel confident enough about their ability to make the right judgement. In other words, the RISP model suggests that information seeking is driven by the need to reach judgemental confidence and succumb to a lack of available information. When, indeed, an individual's existing information is able to fulfil this confidence, consumers might actually avoid information search. Following the heuristic systematic model, the RISP framework suggests that information search is used by consumers to fill the gap between an individual's current knowledge and the sufficiency threshold.

As mentioned before, however, Griffin *et al.* (1999) have added other components which have a direct impact on user engagement in information search. These are a result of individual characteristics and are denominated as: perceived hazard characteristics, affective responses, information subjective norms, channel beliefs, perceived information gathering capacity.

Perceived hazard characteristics. This refers to the cognitive evaluation an individual might have regarding risk. According to the RISP model, this directly influences the way individuals perceive information insufficiency, and it can consequently result into a more active engaged information search.

Affective responses. These refer to the emotions felt by individuals when facing a situation of risk, and are generally negative. They might also result into a more active information search.

Information subjective norms. Influenced by the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), this component is based on the idea that individuals tend to act in conformity with social norms. When applying this concept to risk information seeking, the RISP model suggests then that if people have the feeling that others expect them to seek information regarding a risk, then they will be more likely to actively engage in information search.

Perceived information-gathering capacity. As for the previous component, also this one is directly related to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). When consumers indeed seek information in order to meet social expectations, they will anyway need the ability to seek information. This component refers to an individual's perceptions of his/her abilities in seeking and processing information. According to Griffin *et al.* (1999),

the higher the perceived information-gathering capacity, the higher will be the perception of control one has on information seeking and processing.

Relevant Channel beliefs. This component refers to the extent to which individuals perceive that an information channel is useful and reliable. In this regard, (Wu et al., 2013) suggested that trusting in information search has a direct impact on purchase intentions.

2.3.2 Information search as a risk reduction method

Another topic which has been researched in connection to risk perception is risk reduction methods. The first to propose a classification of strategies of risk reduction was Roselius.

When facing the purchasing dilemma, Roselius (1971) believed that buyers might decide within four different strategies to pursue in order to reduce the risks. The first strategy concerns the pre-purchase information search aimed to reduce the risk of product failure. The second strategy consists in buyers deciding to shift from one type of risk loss to another, which might be considered more tolerant. The third strategy implies that buyers postpone the purchase, thus delaying the situation of risk. Lastly, buyers might decide to proceed with the purchase and face the risks which might come along with it, if any.

If selecting one of the first two strategies mentioned above, buyers can rely on the use of a *risk relievers*, which are the methods used to guarantee a purchase success. Eleven risk relievers have been identified (Roselius, 1971), such as: brand loyalty, endorsements, private testing, word of mouth, shopping, government testing, money-back guarantee, expensive model, store image, major brand image, free samples. Generally, consumers tend to use a mix of these strategies when facing a purchasing decision. In this research, however, the primary focus will be on Word of mouth.

2.4 Definition of WOM

A definition of WOM was first provided by Arndt (1967, p. 295), who defined the phenomenon as an “*oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator who the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or service*”. Later on, Westbrook (1987, p. 261) suggested that WOM refers to “*all informal communications from consumers directed to other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers*”.

2.4.1 Characteristics of WOM

Buttle (1998) identified in WOM five different characteristics, which are: valence, focus, timing, solicitation and intervention.

Valence. From a marketing perspective, a valence represents the value assigned by a person to a product, a service or a brand. This can be positive or negative. Positive WOM occurs when a satisfied customer shares his/her experience of a product or service with other people. Whereas, negative WOM occurs when a customer shares negative testimonial of a product or service. See-To and Ho (2014) suggested that when consumers find that a product or service has a high quantity of positive WOM, they tend to start having positive expectations regarding the quality of the product or the service that a brand delivers, thus consumers might actually start feeling more confident in making the purchase. Situation changes when instead consumers find a high quantity of negative WOM. In this case, the consequent expectations regarding the quality of the product or service being delivered by a brand will be negative, thus reducing their trust and, consequently, negatively impacting consumers' purchase intentions.

Huefner and Hunt (2000) suggested that according to the intentions of consumers, negative WOM can be classified into two main types. The first type can be associated to a form of retaliation against the sellers, in other words, a way for consumers to manifest their dissatisfaction and, at the same time, an attempt to damage the company. The second type of negative WOM can be seen as an act of altruism performed by an unsatisfied consumer and which consists in alerting other users of the possible risks.

Focus. The primary focus of the management of WOM communications, which is conducted by brand, should not only target the customers. Their efforts should also be concentrated towards other directions, for example: suppliers, competitors and other company's stakeholders.

Timing. WOM communication can happen either *before* a purchase, thus functioning as an essential pre-purchase information source, or *after* a purchase, thus providing other consumers useful consumption experience. Buttle (1998) suggested that the first type is referred to as *input* WOM, whereas the second one as *output* WOM.

Solicitation. WOM communication can be either *solicited* or *unsolicited*. Solicited WOM occurs when consumers are deliberately looking for other consumers' ideas and opinions,

where unsolicited WOM occurs instead without solicitation, for example, during a conversation between friends.

Intervention. Online WOM can be either sponsored or non-sponsored. Ghosh *et al.* (2014) argued that both types of WOM have the common final goal of sharing information and having an impact on the opinions of the receivers. However, they also present some crucial differences, which can be identified in their origins and in their different final expectations. From the point of view of the sender, in the case of the non-sponsored word of mouth, the action of delivering information is the result of an unconscious process which happens on a sender's level and which aims to guarantee that the individual receives social benefit from the action of sharing information. Different researches have indeed agreed on recognizing self-enhancement as one of the main motives behind the act of sharing one's personal consumption experience of a product (Ditcher, 1966; Sundaram *et al.*, 1998; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Blackwell *et al.*, 2006). According to these studies, consumers tend to share positive experiences in an attempt to fulfil a need to be associated by others with those positive facts. Whereas, when it comes for the sponsored WOM, it is a third party, which can potentially be the brand or an organization, to ask the sender to share a specific message about a product or service through the use of social networks in exchange of benefits delivered by the third party. This happens because companies are much more aware of the advantages they can benefit from online communication channels since consumers' ways of pre-purchase information search have changed completely. More specifically, companies have now clear that turning their consumers into their primary brand ambassadors represent their new strategy to obtain new clients. It must be said, however, that these two types of WOM might have different impact on consumers. In relation to sponsored WOM, although this kind of advertisement can be in the eye of the consumers less invasive compared to traditional strategies (Minton *et al.*, 2012), if the receiver perceives that the sender is going to benefit from the message he/she is delivering, then the credibility of the information being delivered might be negatively affected. On the contrary, if the source is considered not to have any commercial interests and the information delivered being purely experience based, then this type of word of mouth will be perceived as more personal, independent from the influence of marketers and consequently more reliable and trustworthy. Therefore, this type of word of mouth can actually positively influence consumer's awareness and purchasing decisions.

Today the advent of the Internet and the launch of new forms of online communication channels have revolutionized the way people interact with each other and have enabled users online to share their opinions and ideas about products in a much quicker and easier-to-access way. All the conversations happening in cyberspace on products and services are referred to as Electronic Word of mouth (Sigala and Gretzel, 2017).

2.5 The impact of Social Media

Social media has nowadays become part of people's daily basis, having a great impact on the way people communicate with each other, socialize, seek information and make decisions (Constantinides and J. Fountain, 2008). The last decade has seen the launch of new social media platforms, such as: MySpace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and many more (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), which are now being an integrated part of consumers' everyday life.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media can be defined as a “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content”. A basic classification has been proposed by Constantinides and J. Fountain (2008), who identified five different types of social media sites, as per below:

- **Blogs**, which are online diaries where people can share their views and experiences.
- **Social networks**, which allow users to communicate with each other and share personal information like images, comments, etc.
- **Content Communities**, which give users the possibility to share multimedia content online.
- **Forums**, which are based on the exchange of ideas and information.
- **Content Aggregators**, which aggregate different Web content from multiple sources into one unique website.

As previously mentioned, the development of the Internet and the emergence of new social media sites have been changing not only the way people interact and socialize with each other, but also the way consumers get access to information about products or services they are interested in and about the brands which deliver those products and services. The Internet is now in fact the new place where people can obtain the information they are looking for through a series of new, fast and easy to access online

tools. Users are indeed no longer limited to their offline interpersonal network when they need to get recommendations on a product, but they can instead, through the use of blogs, forums and other online applications, benefit from the experience that is shared via web by unknown people (Barreto, 2015). More and more consumers nowadays seek for recommendations before making purchase decisions from the reviews of products and services which are posted by other users on social media platforms, which are free to access to everyone online. In the literature, this new type of online recommendation is referred to as *electronic word of mouth (e-WOM)*.

Considered one of the oldest strategies of marketing communication, it is undisputed that word of mouth, plays an important role in consumer purchase behaviour. Therefore, it has been not only one of the most discussed topics in marketing literature but also an important phenomenon to be understood by companies.

2.5.1 YouTube

YouTube represents the second social media platform being preferred by brands for their marketing campaign (Figure 4)

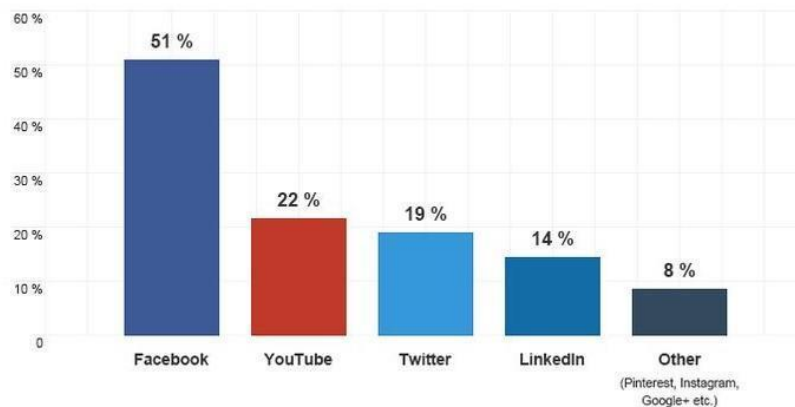


Figure 4: Statistics of social media platforms mostly used by brands for marketing strategies. Source: (SocialPilot [Online], 2017)

Developed in 2005 by three employees of PayPal, what differentiates YouTube from other social media platform is the amateur nature which characterizes the videos being uploaded by users online (Arthurs *et al.*, 2018). YouTube is indeed one of the biggest video-sharing communities with more than 100 million videos being uploaded every day.

October 2006 represents for Kim (2012) the date which marks the start of a new era for YouTube as a platform, and which is characterized by a series of events resulting in a

complete evolution of YouTube. According to Kim (2012), in fact, the acquisition of YouTube from Google and the implementation of tools aimed to safeguard the copyright laws caused the start of a process resulting in the shift of YouTube from an amateur user-generated content platform into one based on professional produced content with commercial interests. As a consequence of this transition, brands have started to look at the platform as a possible communication channel to implement in their marketing campaigns and YouTube creators as potential brand ambassadors and partners for collaborations.

The attractiveness of YouTube for advertisers has caused a significant explosion of product related videos on the platform. Wu (2016) identified three types of product related videos on YouTube, such as:

- **Advertising videos:** wherein the YouTuber agrees to promote a brand or a product in the video, which is being fully sponsored and financed by the company itself;
- **Product placements:** creators uploading this type of videos are not being necessarily paid by a company. Most likely, instead, the company might provide the YouTuber free samples of products from their brand with the final scope to encourage the creator to feature them in their clips, highlight its characteristics and usage, and give their personal opinion about it.
- **Videos with affiliate links:** these videos are the result of a partnership between the company and the YouTuber, who has previously agreed to create a clip specifically to show a product. What differentiates this type of videos from the others is the presence of affiliate links in the description box underneath the video itself, which are used to track the revenues coming from the specific URL or coupon code, which then are attributed to the creator, who receives a pre-established compensation.

The large amount of product review videos on YouTube has made the platform a potential information source tool, which consumers consult when seeking for recommendations before making their purchasing decisions. It is obvious, then, that it has become a primary goal for marketers to identify the factors of product related videos, which mostly affect consumer behaviour and purchase intentions.

2.5.2 Factors of product related YouTube videos affecting purchase intention

Following the objectives outlined in the previous chapters, through the help of the literature review, different factors have been identified to be directly impacting users' purchase intentions when watching product review videos on YouTube. These are listed below with the relevant supportive literature review.

Factor One: The level of digital engagement on the video.

Perceptions of consumers regarding the content they are watching is highly dependent on the level of digital engagement which other users have with the video itself. According to the Digital Engagement Guide (<https://www.digitalengagement.info/>), the term describes anything connected to the level of online interaction, which from YouTube videos' perspective, refers to video metrics, such as: the views count, the number of likes/dislikes and comments, and the amount of uploader's replies to audience's comments. These indicators are indeed said to be the unit of measurement through which users identify the popularity of a video on YouTube (Smith *et al.*, 2012).



Figure 5: Video from YouTube

All these metrics, located beneath the video (Figure 5), are clearly visible for the users' eye, and might have a great impact on their purchase intentions, as they can be associated to brand approvals and recommendations for consumers to purchase products.

Moreover, for consumers who are looking for information online, according to O'Reilly and Marx (2011), the number of comments plays a decisive role for the credibility of the information found. Same happens with the number of likes/dislikes, the views count and YouTuber's level of responsiveness to other users' comments. These metrics highly impact the usefulness of the video content and its credibility (Mir and Rehman, 2013).

Factor Two: Perceived source credibility

Source credibility can be defined as the ability or motivation of the source of a message to deliver authentic and reliable information (Kelman and Hovland, 1953). In the user-generated content situation, source credibility is associated to the credibility of the user-generator, in YouTube's case – the video uploader. When looking for product information, usually consumers are more likely to trust other consumers, and this is because they have the perception that their message is sincerer and more reliable. This trust comes from the belief that consumers' opinion, shared through the video uploaded online, is free from commercial interests, as creators spontaneously decide to express their ideas and share both positive and negative characteristics of a product, coming from their direct experience with it (Aerts *et al.*, 2017). There is therefore a positive link between credibility and purchase intentions (Tripp *et al.*, 1994). In order to better understand how source credibility can positively impact consumer purchase intentions, it is useful to refer to the existing literature on source credibility.

Ohanian (1990) suggested that source credibility is composed of three different dimensions, such as: expertise, attractiveness and trustworthiness. These constructs can be explained through the use of three different models. These are: the source credibility theory (Hovland and Weiss, 1951), the source attractiveness model (McGuire, 1985), and the match-up hypothesis (Forkan, 1985).

The source credibility model (Hovland and Weiss, 1951) asserts that a credible source can provoke positive responses in its audience. The two most important factors associated with credibility are: expertise and trustworthiness. The source expertise is the level of knowledge that a source has on the topic of the message. Whereas, source trustworthiness is the extent to which a source's audience perceives that the source will tell the truth. If applying this theory to this study, then we can argue that a YouTuber who is perceived to be an expert of the product category he/she is talking about is more persuasive than someone who is perceived to lack in expertise, thus also enhancing the usefulness of the information being shared. Moreover, thanks to the knowledge on products characteristics

and functionalities, an expert will also be able to reassure the audience and reduce any possible concern regarding product's side effects (Aaker and Myers, 1987). In relation to the trustworthiness, consumers tend to trust more online product reviews as these appear to be free from any control or influence of the brand, thus affecting consumer experiences and opinions of the product.

The attractiveness model (McGuire, 1985), as shown in Figure 6, identifies in attractiveness three main dimensions, such as: likeability, familiarity and similarity.

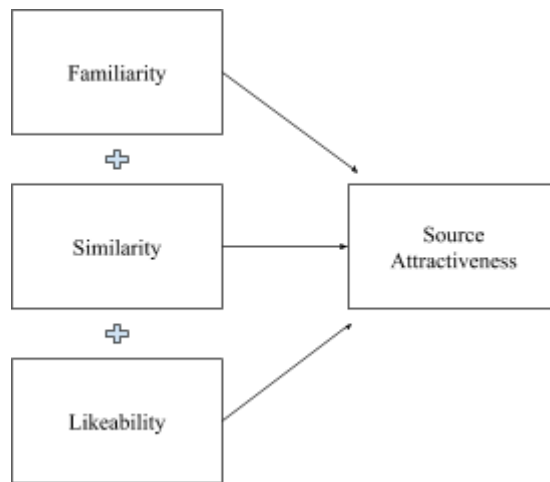


Figure 6: Source attractiveness model, readapted from McGuire (1985)

Likeability refers to physical appearance and behavioural characteristics (McCraen, 1989). Studies in psychology have confirmed in fact that physical attractiveness might have an influence on social perception (Eagly *et al.*, 1991). Similarity is the resemblance that the audience perceives to exist between themselves and the message source (Erdogan, 1999) and it includes areas like opinions, ideas, personality and lifestyle (Cialdini, 2007). Generally, people have the tendency to trust more individuals who are very similar to them. Lastly, familiarity is defined as “*the knowledge of a source through exposure*” (Erdogan, 1999, p.299). In other words, this refers to the ability of the source of a message to be recognizable with the audience and hold viewers' attention. According to this model (Figure 6), if a YouTuber is perceived by the audience as likeable, familiar and similar, then most likely their message is going to be more effective.

Finally, the match-up hypothesis tries to explore the influence that an appropriate fit between the source, the product and the receiver of the message might have on the effectiveness of the message itself. Kamins and Gupta (1994) proposed that a match

between a product and a message source is fundamental to guarantee the effectiveness of the communication and the source credibility and some researches have confirmed that. For example, different studies focused on the match between an endorser and a product based on physical attractiveness were conducted. These studies confirmed that messages for beauty products promoted by physically attractive endorsers are more effective (Dillard and Shen, 2013). Other studies instead stress the role of expertise on enhancing the match between a product and an endorser. Friedman and Friedman (1979) suggested in fact that athletes promoting energy bars were more persuasive.

In conclusion, we can argue that source credibility has a positive influence on consumer purchase intentions and on the usefulness of the information being shared. Moreover, it is important to stress that source credibility also plays a decisive role on digital engagement. A study conducted by Hung *et al.* (2011) suggested that in an online environment wherein there is interpersonal trust viewers are more willing to take action on the information they are exposed to. The same study contended that there is a positive correlation between the concept of perceived credibility and digital engagement. Once gained perceived credibility, a YouTuber will then gradually be more popular on the platform. His or her popularity will attract more users to watch, comment and rate the videos they are watching and subscribe to the channel (Mir & Rehman, 2013).

Factor Three: Video Characteristics

There are some characteristics in YouTube videos which might have an impact on consumer purchase intentions. One of the first we are going to look at is video quality. High definition is a video format which provides the highest resolution and the best picture quality. Originally YouTube only offered a unique quality level, that is a resolution display of 320x240 pixels. Since 2008, YouTube has gradually started to offer higher video resolution (720p HD in 2008, 1080p HD in 2009), and today viewers are given the possibility to increase the video quality until 4096x3072 pixels of Ultra HD resolution. In addition to this, the video window has also been improved from a 4:3 aspect ratio to 16:9 (Moon, 2014). These changes have not only improved viewers experience on the platform, but studies have shown that video quality and image size have both positive effects on consumer behaviour.

A concept that might help to understand the influence of these two video characteristics on video viewing experience and on consumer behaviour is the one of “*presence*”. Developed from *telepresence* (Minsky, 1980), the term describes the teleoperators’

sensation of being physically in a place, even if only through the interaction with a virtual reality. In the context of a video viewing experience, presence is related to viewers' sensation of physically "being there" in the video. Returning to video characteristics, different studies have been conducted to test the impact of image quality. Bracken (2005) suggested that enhancing image quality in television results in the generation of presence. Viewers contended in fact that the information watched in high definition was perceived as more credible. Bracken (2005) also proposed that high quality image might influence an audience's perceptions of reality judgments, the message itself and attitudes. Studies have shown that also improving image size has a positive effect on viewing experience and generates presence (Troscianko *et al.*, 2012). The size image has indeed a direct impact on the perception viewers have of the content and it increases their involvement and attention. This can be explained by the fact that viewers develop a feeling of being able to see a product, which as a consequence enhances a stronger belief in the information being shared (Kim and Biocca, 1997). To sum up, enhanced video quality and image size have a positive impact on the usefulness of the information being shared.

Another video characteristic having an impact on consumer behaviour is the video length. Different studies have explored the impact of video length on the effectiveness of a message shared. Singh and Cole (1993) proposed that there is a relationship between the length of a video and the ability of viewers to learn the information shared in the video. Longer videos allow in fact viewers to process and encode the information they are acquiring. When watching shorter videos, on the contrary, viewers do not have enough time to process the information received. Due to the repeated brand recall's exposure, longer videos have a positive effect on the perceived usefulness of the information shared (MacKenzie, 1986).

An important role is also played by the type of product being discussed about. Generally speaking, products can be classified into two main categories, such as: high involvement/risk and low involvement/risk. The level of involvement shows how important or interested consumers are in a product and how much information is needed to decide (Sadasivan *et al.*, 2011). Low involvement/risk products require less important purchase decisions, usually because of the lower price. High involvement/risk products, instead, require a much more difficult decision, which generally involves time and effort from consumers side because of the price or because of the level of importance for the consumers. The higher the level of product involvement, the more consumers will engage

in information seeking and comparing of product information, in order to complete a purchase decision (Chao and Chen, 2016). As suggested by Grunert and Grunert (1995), high involvement products usually require that consumers have a higher knowledge of the product itself. Therefore, this might suggest that longer videos are best suitable for high involvement products, whereas shorter videos might actually represent the best format for low involvement products.

The last video characteristics to be discussed is the emotional tone of the message used by the YouTuber to communicate with the audience. The most used emotional tone of voice is characterized by the use of humour (Eisend, 2009), which is said to create in viewers' attention and awareness. By favouring positive cognition, the use of humour might also have an impact on consumer purchase intentions. According to Chan (2011), this happens because when using humour viewers perceive products to be more positive, thus developing a higher intention to purchase them. However, the appropriateness of the use of humour also depends on the product being discussed. The use of humour is said to be more successful when used for existing products rather than brand new products, and when used for low involvement products rather than high involvement products (Olsson and Larsson, 2005).

Factor Four: Consumer attitude toward purchase.

The best way to understand factor four is by referring to the theory of Reasoned Action (Figure 7).

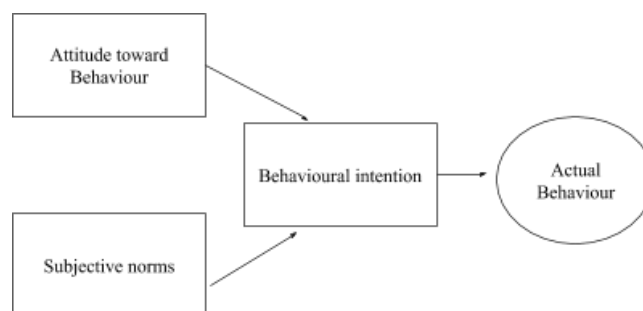


Figure 7: Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980)

According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), a person's behavioural intentions are the result of two factors, such as attitude toward the behaviour and subjective norms. Attitude toward behaviour represents an individual's positive or negative feelings regarding performing a specific behaviour. Whereas, subjective norms constitute the social

influence that an individual perceives while performing a behaviour. In other words, subjective norms refer to the person's perception of the social pressures regarding whether or not to perform a behaviour. The more positive attitude and subjective norms are toward performing a behaviour, the stronger will be an individual's intention to perform a behaviour. For the reasons explained below, this theory seems to be suitable for investigating and predicting consumer purchase intentions.

If applying the theory to this study, then consumer attitude toward purchase will represent consumers' beliefs and opinions toward the act of purchasing a product after having watched a video on YouTube. Mir and Rehman (2013) suggested that there is a positive relation between consumers' attitudes toward user generated content on YouTube and the intention of using YouTube for purchase decisions. As suggested by the theory of reasoned action, in situations where there is a positive attitude, the result will be an increased behavioural intention. Therefore, since consumers have a positive perception of YouTube as pre-purchase information tool, they most likely are going to make purchase after having watched videos on the platform. The other component in the theory of reasoned action affecting behavioural intention is the subjective norm. In the case of YouTube, this is represented by the influence of other consumers, who form a membership group to which consumers belong (Assael, 1992). Being part of that group, consumers will do anything to fit with the norm of the group. Therefore, if group members have positive thoughts regarding a product, then it is mostly likely that no member of the group will have an objection toward purchasing that product (Chuchinprakarn, 2011). In conclusion, we can argue that positive attitude toward purchase and positive subjective norms positively impact consumer purchase intentions.

Factor Five: Perceived usefulness of the information provided in the video.

The last factor being impacting on consumers purchase intentions on YouTube is the perceived usefulness of the information being provided in the video. Perceived usefulness can be defined as the extent to which an individual think that using the information system might improve his or her performance (Amin *et al.*, 2014). If applying this definition to this study, then perceived usefulness refers to the degree to which consumers perceive that using YouTube videos as pre-purchase information search tool will improve their performance. One of the primary factors that has been identified to have an influence on perceived usefulness is detailed product information (Cho and Sagynov, 2015). On YouTube in fact users can find huge amounts of detailed information regarding products

characteristics and features. Due to the physical limitations which characterize the online environment, wherein consumers do not have the possibility to see, touch and as a consequence check the quality of a product, they will then have to rely on highly detailed product information videos.

Moreover, in the context of UGC, Racherla and Friske (2013) proposed that consumers prefer to receive information about the products they are interested in from other users because the content shared by other users seem much easier and quicker to understand, in other words: “user-friendly”. Another study focused on the use of blogs (Bouhleb *et al.*, 2010) proposed that perceived usefulness might be associated with the advantages that come when using a blog, such as: reducing the risks of wasting time and the possibility to easily and quickly access information, which contains different opinions about products.

In conclusion, we can assume that perceived usefulness has a positive impact on consumer attitudes toward purchase and on purchase intentions (Amin *et al.*, 2014).

2.6 Conceptual Framework

From the literature review conducted, it emerged that there are five main factors in YouTube videos to have an impact on consumer purchase intentions. The next step is to draw a conceptual framework that will guide the researcher through the next stage of the research study. The conceptual framework will serve as a visual representation of the existing relationships between the different elements emerged from the literature review, and it will also function as a screening tool for selecting the necessary questions for the data collection. Having said that, below the conceptual framework (Figure 8) that will help the researcher proceeding with the data collection.

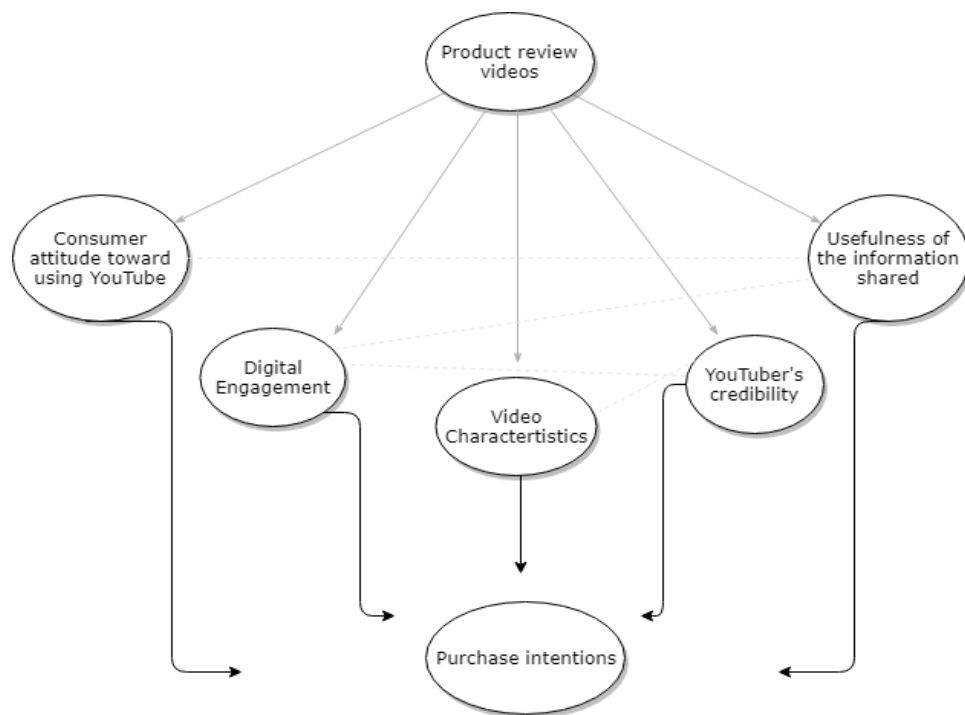


Figure 8: Conceptual Framework

As reflected in the conceptual framework, all the five different factors have a positive impact on consumer purchase intentions. There are however also existing relationships between some of them:

1. Digital engagement has a positive impact on the perceived usefulness of the information being shared in the video and on source credibility.
2. Source credibility has a positive impact on the perceived usefulness of the information shared.
3. Video characteristics have a positive impact on the perceived usefulness of the information.

4. Perceived usefulness of the information shared has a positive impact on consumer attitude toward purchase.

2.7 Conclusion

To sum up, the literature review in this chapter has discussed the concept of pre-purchase information search as one of the stages of the consumer buying decision making process. When seeking for information, consumers might decide different types of sources, but the development of the Internet and the emergence of social media platforms have favoured consumers' tendency to prefer online sources, which are quicker, free to access and offer a wider range of options from which to choose. The primary motive to enhance customer engagement into information search is the perceived risk felt in a purchasing decision scenario. It is when there is a high perception of risk that information search is highly motivated. The two concepts are, therefore, positively correlated and their relationship has been explained through the use of the RISP model (Griffin *et al.*, 1999). When selecting information search as a strategy to overcome the perceived risk of a purchasing scenario, consumers might decide to use the risk reliever of the word of mouth. It is through the use of social media platforms like YouTube that consumers gain the information they need to take a purchasing decision. The next step is therefore to explore the factors of YouTube videos through the data collection.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is focused on outlining the research approach, the methodology and the strategy being adopted. It will include a definition of the research paradigm; a description of the overall strategy and it will also cover the methodology of data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research Paradigm and Overall Approach

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the main objectives of this research are to assess consumer behaviour and explore the potential influence that videos of product reviews being uploaded on YouTube might have on consumers during the pre-purchase information search stage of the consumer buying process. Following these objectives, this research was based on the *interpretivist approach*. As opposed to the positivist approach, this research paradigm is focused on the belief that social reality cannot be entirely explained by objective assumptions, since it is shaped by human feelings and perceptions (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Each individual can be considered as unique since each of us has their own way of thinking and approaching things. Contrary to the positivist approach, the interpretivist one is, therefore, much more subjective rather than objective since it admits the multitude of human worldviews (Thanh and Thanh, 2015).

As a consequence, this research was based on an **inductive** approach, in the sense that the research process began with looking at previous observations and theories, to identify patterns and regularities which were then reviewed to reach conclusions. The use of qualitative research methods, more specifically semi-structured interviews, helped to define patterns and observations aimed at giving give more detail and insight to theories and assumptions which have been identified through the aid of the literature review (Thomas, 2006).

3.3 Research Strategy

This section includes an overview of the research strategy used in this dissertation to collect the necessary data to answer the research questions. This research adopted qualitative research techniques. A qualitative approach helped to deal with the complexity and the multitude of factors which characterize of human behaviour and decision making (Gummesson, 2006).

More specifically, the researcher collected primary data through the use of semi-structured interviews. This interactive and conversational method allowed a better understanding of the factors that emerged from the literature review and which have an impact on consumers purchase intentions when watching a product review video on YouTube. Participants were asked to describe and share their viewing experience on the platform.

For the purposes of this study, semi-structured interviews represented the most suitable methodology for collecting data. By nature in fact semi-structured interviews are organized as a normal conversation, during which the researcher can ask for classifications on the answers received and participants are given the possibility to fully express their own thoughts and feelings.

3.4 Collection of Primary Data

3.4.1 Sources of data

3.4.1.1 One-to-one semi-structured interviews

Since this was an exploratory and descriptive research, which aimed at understanding consumer purchase intentions under the influence of YouTube videos based on the experiences shared by participants, the primary focus of the interviews was to explore participants' ideas and opinions. In order to fully answer the questions of this research, interviews were structured in a way which aimed to collect individuals' perceptions, thoughts and feelings regarding their experience as consumers during the pre-purchase information search on YouTube.

3.4.2 Nature of data

The primary data was collected with the aid of semi-structured interviews which were conducted face-to-face in Dublin. Data was gathered from a sample of 10 people of different nationalities between the age of 25-34, who declared to generally use YouTube as pre-purchase information search tool. This number of participants allowed the researcher to reach data saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Participants were mostly co-workers and friends. The estimated duration of the interviews was around 30-40 minutes. Interviews primarily covered two main sets of "guiding" questions:

1. General questions regarding the use of YouTube and participant's opinions on online product reviews.
2. More specific questions on elements of YouTube videos being recognized to have a positive impact on consumer purchase intentions.

These were, moreover, supplemented by probing questions which were made according to interviewees' replies. The final scope of the interviews was to gather through participants' narrative information regarding their viewing experience on YouTube when facing a purchasing decision scenario.

3.4.3 *Access issues*

Since the research study was primarily focused on understanding consumers perspective, there was no problem accessing this source of data. Moreover, statistics analysing the demographics of YouTube active users had previously confirmed that the largest age group is the one between 25-34 (Blattberg, 2015). This age group represents the primary target for advertising campaigns. Because the researcher belongs to this age group, it was easy reaching interviewees of the same age.

In addition to being part of this age group, the second requirement for participants taking part in the research study was that they needed to use YouTube as product information tool before making a purchasing decision. Participants were mainly friends and co-workers, living in Ireland. The nationalities included: Italian, Ukrainian, Portuguese, Spanish and Greek.

3.5 Analysis of the data collected

The methodology adopted in this research study for the data analysis was the Grounded Theory by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Original audio recording files were transcribed and then analysed by following the three stages of coding suggested by the grounded theory. These are: open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

Before starting the analysis of the data, however, a list of a priori codes was generated. These pre-set codes derived from the conceptual framework and the existing literature. The main scope of generating an a priori framework of codes was to guarantee complete transparency throughout the different stages of the coding process. Table 1 below shows the list of codes and their corresponding description. These codes were applied to the text and then complemented by new and extended themes gained through open coding.

Table 1: A priori coding

Codes	Properties
Product information search	Consumers' act of searching for product information before making a purchasing decision.
Perceived risk	Level of uncertainty consumers perceive when facing a purchasing decision scenario.
Benefits of UGC	Advantages of referring to user generated content online to reduce perceived risk.
Word of Mouth	Any natural and free from personal interests conversation regarding a product or service.
Sponsored word of mouth	A specific message regarding a product shared only for the exchange of benefits from the related brand.
YouTube video search	The act of searching and selecting videos to watch on YouTube with the intention to gain product information.
Assessing credibility	Methods adopted to assess the credibility of the video watched.
Source trustworthiness	A source that is worthy of trust.
Perceived usefulness	The level of usefulness of an information system in relation to improving consumers' performance.
Video characteristics	Elements that characterize a video, such as: video resolution, video length, video thumbnails, video structure.
Video metrics	Units of measurement of the level of digital engagement on a video

3.5.1 Open Coding

The first stage of the Grounded Theory is represented by the open coding. This basically involves the classification of the data collected into meaningful *categories* on the basis of their properties and characteristics. In other words, it consists in recognizing events, interactions, characteristics and other relevant phenomena in the transcribed text, and then label them by utilizing terms used in the literature. Essentially, each line and sentence of the interview transcripts are read with the intention to search for the answer to the question: “What is this about?”.

Table 2: Example of Open Coding

Open codes	Properties	Examples of participants' words
Product category	A group of products or services characterized by similar features and functions.	Technological devices/phones/PC/cameras/make up/ hair products/lipstick

Product involvement	It shows consumer' level of interest in buying a product. It determines how much information seeking/how many comparisons and evaluations are needed to decide.	I dreamed to buy an Apple PC. Quite expensive/Fancy The more expensive the purchase is, the more time you have to spend to learn about this.
Knowledge and experience of a product prior to the research on YouTube	The knowledge and experience of a product a consumer has prior research and which is accrued through friends, family, past experience, advertising, etc.	I don't know enough about those products. I just got this P.C from my friend, I used it for a couple of days.
Social Engagement	Any activities related to participation on YouTube. It might include reading, liking/disliking, following, engaging with the platform.	I am subscribed to five YouTube channels. I follow/I read/I comment

3.5.2 Axial Coding

This second stage of the grounded theory consists in identifying, through inductive and deductive thinking, links and relations between the different codes and labels emerged from the open coding stage.

3.5.3 Selective coding

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), selective coding is “process of integrating and refining the theory”. This last stage of the grounded theory consists in fact in selecting a core category and relate the remaining ones to it. Essentially, it involves the development of one unique storyline.

Table 3: Example of Axial and Selective Coding

Open codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
Product category	Product category, product involvement and the level of knowledge and expertise a consumer has regarding a product and the perception of risk associated with them determine the level of consumers' product information seeking, product evaluation and comparison to face the risk associated with a purchasing decision. Normally, the information searching process include a combination of different sources of information, and it doesn't necessarily start with YouTube. Consumers are aware of the marketing	Basic information search Once become aware of a product knowledge gap, consumers start engaging in information search to overcome the risks associated with a purchasing decision, consumers might choose different types of sources of information.
Product involvement		
Knowledge and experience of a product prior research on YouTube		
Basic Research outside YouTube		

Social engagement	strategies brands adopt, therefore, their research switch to UGC on YouTube.	
Marketing Strategies		

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter covered the entire approach adopted in this research and also attempted to justify the application of the Grounded theory, by stressing its connection to the main topic of the dissertation. It also showed the methodology of data collection and analysis through which it was possible to reach the aims and objectives of this dissertation.

Chapter Four: Preparation and Discussion of the Findings

4.1 Introduction

The analysis of the data confirmed that there are five factors affecting consumers purchase intentions while watching product reviews on YouTube, such as: the level of digital engagement, the YouTuber's credibility, the usefulness of the information shared, the video characteristics and consumers attitude towards using YouTube as an information tool. This chapter will include an explanation of how the data was analysed, the main findings and a conceptual model aimed to better explain the interrelations between the elements mentioned above.

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Open Coding

The first stage of the analysis consisted in the identification of open codes within participants' words. The interviews were first transcribed, and then read and analysed in order to segment the text into meaningful sequences, consisting of words or groups of words. Those sequences were then grouped together to form *open codes*, that are categories describing similar concepts or actions. The result of this process was a list of 25 open codes, which are displayed below in Table 4 with the explanation of the relevant properties and examples of the words utilized by participants during the interviews.

Table 4: Open Coding

Open codes	Properties	Examples of participants' words
Product category	A group of products or services characterized by similar features and functions.	Technological devices/phones/PC/cameras/make up/ hair products/lipstick
Product involvement	It shows consumer' level of interest in buying a product. It determines how much information seeking/how many comparisons and evaluations are needed to make a decision.	I dreamed to buy an Apple PC. Quite expensive/Fancy The more expensive the purchase is, the more time you have to spend to learn about this.
Knowledge and experience of a product prior to the research on YouTube	The knowledge and experience of a product a consumer has prior research and which is accrued through friends, family, past experience, advertising, etc.	I don't know enough about those products. I just got this P.C from my friend, I used it for a couple of days.

Social Engagement	Any activities related to participation on YouTube. It might include reading, liking/disliking, following, engaging with the platform.	I am subscribed to five YouTube channels. I follow/I read/I comment
Product Expectations	Benefits and values consumers can get from a product or service. How consumers think that a product might meet their needs.	I want to use the camera for a certain scenario.
Basic Research outside YouTube	The action of seeking for product information with the final aim of being able to understand a product.	I usually start with Google. I go to the company website.
YouTube search and video Selection	Criteria and methods in which users search and select videos to watch on YouTube to gain the product information they need.	I use keywords. I usually look at the suggested ones. I usually go with the top of the list, and then work my way down. If I recognize a channel or someone that I usually trust their reviews, I'm gonna start with that one.
Video metrics	Units of measurement of the level of digital engagement on a video Video metrics are usually associated with a YouTuber's popularity and usefulness of the content. Therefore, it might be a method of video selection.	Views/Likes/Subscribers/View Count It's more popular. We are used to believing that the most viewed video is the most popular and maybe the most helpful.
Video characteristics	Elements that characterize a video, such as: video resolution, video length, video thumbnails, video structure. Video characteristics might influence how consumers select the videos and how they assess the usefulness of the information of the content.	Video length, video quality, low quality video If you watch just short ones, you probably will not get all the information. Very low quality for me it means you didn't put effort at all to make that video.
To assess a YouTuber knowledge and expertise on the product	Elements consumers look at in order to evaluate the level of expertise and knowledge a YouTuber has of a product.	You know, initially I just pay attention to the words when he describes the products. By the language, posture, you can understand by what they are addressing in their reviews.

Peer approval	The importance of other users' opinions, ratings and recommendations.	If you read six different reviews and the five of them are positive, I'm more inclined to trust. I'll go and read the comments and see what other people thought.
To assess a YouTuber's credibility	Methods consumers use to verify a YouTuber's trustworthiness.	If that person is funny, smiling, very positive, it attracts me a lot. I feel very close to them because they do stuff that I do in my ordinary life. Anyone would trust an expert opinion more. If you go on a channel, that is just reviews of many things, many different things, you can't really trust.
Marketing strategies	Marketing practises adopted by brands to sell products	They can say whatever they want in order to sell the product It will enhance the positive aspects, which I'm sure a lot, but it won't give me a critical view.
Sponsored word of mouth	A specific message regarding a product shared by a YouTuber only for the exchange of benefits from the related brand.	He has to give something, at least in most of the cases must be a positive opinion.
Unsponsored word of mouth	Any natural and free from personal interests conversation regarding a product or service.	Independent Many people buy a product and make a review because they want to make it easier for others to buy the same product.
To assess if a YouTuber is sponsored by the company	Elements consumers recognize in a video and which prove them a YouTuber is being sponsored by a company to review their products.	You can just open the channel and you can see what brands he is reviewing. So if he normally has most of the videos from Apple...so... They usually say: "I got this device from this store, or I was sent to this P.C from"
Benefits of watching product reviews	Benefits consumers recognize in the use of YouTube as a pre-purchase product information tool.	More independent/This is very useful
Passive consumer behaviour online	No involvement from consumers' side, apart from learning the information they need.	I don't comment/ I don't look at comments/I stay away from comments/I am not subscribed to any channel
Active consumer behaviour online	Consumers getting more engaged on YouTube by asking additional questions to get information, contributing to the community and creating	I am creating my own channel. I can interact with them, with comments or stuff like this. I ask them and comment on a specific question I comment just to thank them.

	content online, thanking the YouTuber.	
Holding from taking a decision/Giving up	When consumers are still in doubt regarding whether or not a product might meet their needs, they can: a) either hold on from taking the decision and continue their research, b) or give up.	I will choose another video/ I skip to the next.
Knowledge and experience obtained from a YouTube video	Knowledge and experience obtained after having engaged in product information search on YouTube. Information search might influence initial consumers' initial product expectations.	You follow a YouTuber and they upload their video and they're showing you a very good makeup tutorial using, you know, this cheap brand, which you didn't give much thought to. That would really influence your opinion.
Rearrangement of product expectations	How product expectations might change after having watched product reviews on YouTube.	I just got reassured by watching the videos that this PC will definitely satisfy me
To assess the usefulness of the content of a video	Elements consumers expect to find in a video and that satisfy their research.	I want a full description of the product, how it works. All the things that can offer. It can maybe how she's applying the product. I would want to see what the end result is, whatever consideration she's making about how maybe she likes it better than or less than another. You need to see comparisons with other similar products.
Decision	Consumers taking the decision to proceed with a purchase.	It truly helped me to understand that I really want this PC.
Loyalty to the YouTuber	Users showing loyalty to the YouTuber they are following, favouring her/him over another.	If they're going to review something completely different out of the blue, it might even make you more curious

4.2.2 Axial and Selective Coding

The process of axial and selective coding is illustrated from Table 5 to Table 7. Axial coding consisted in combining into groups the codes previously obtained in the open coding stage. Selective coding represented the last stage of the coding process, when no new concept could have been obtained from interviews and the saturation level had been reached. The final scope of the selective coding process was to build up a storyline of consumers buying decision making process under the influence of YouTube videos. Following this purpose, all the axial codes were grouped together to summarize the concepts found and be able to draw a conceptual model of the information search process and the elements of YouTube videos affecting consumer purchase intentions. The model is represented in Figure 9.

Table 5: Axial and Selective Coding - Basic information search

Open codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
Product category	<p>Product category, product involvement and the level of knowledge and expertise a consumer has regarding a product determine the level of consumers' product information seeking, product evaluation and comparison to face the risk associated with a purchasing decision.</p> <p>Normally, consumers start with a generic research. However, if still perceiving feelings of uncertainty, and being also conscious of the marketing strategies brands adopt, their research might switch to UGC on YouTube.</p>	<p>Basic information search</p> <p>Once become aware of a product knowledge gap, consumers start engaging in information search to overcome the risks associated with a purchasing decision. Consumers might choose different types of sources of information, such as: search engines, company's website, direct experience with the product. If still in doubt, consumers might then decide to involve social media.</p>
Product involvement		
Knowledge and experience of a product prior to the research on YouTube		
Basic Research outside YouTube		
Product expectations		
Marketing Strategies		

Table 6: Axial and Selective Coding - Product information search on YouTube

Open codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
Social Engagement		Product information search on YouTube

Peer approval	Element 1: Consumer attitude toward using YouTube as an information tool.	In order to evaluate the expectations of the product they are interested in and make the appropriate decision, consumers try to obtain more information from YouTube videos to base their decision while a mix of the elements 1-5 impact their purchase intentions.
Benefits of watching product reviews	Consumers are aware of the benefits of using the platform as a source of information, and are therefore more motivated them to engage in product information search on YouTube.	
Un-sponsored word of mouth		
Video Metrics	Element 2: Digital Engagement	
YouTube search and video selection	The level of digital engagement on a video includes video metrics, such as: view count, number of subscribers, number of comments. This parameter represents the first criterion of video selection as the level of digital engagement is associated to the popularity of the channel, the usefulness of the information shared and the credibility of the YouTuber.	
To assess a YouTuber's credibility		
To assess the usefulness of the information		
Video Characteristics	Element 3: Video Characteristics	
YouTube search and video selection		
To assess the usefulness of the information		
To assess a YouTuber's credibility		- the usefulness of the content of the video,
Product expectations		- the credibility of the YouTuber.
To assess the knowledge and expertise of a YouTuber		
Knowledge and experience obtained from a YouTube video	Element 4: YouTuber's credibility	
To assess a YouTuber knowledge and expertise on the product	If the creator of the video is considered to be "trustworthy", then consumers are more likely to be persuaded by the message he/she is delivering. While	

Peer approval	watching the video, consumers actively rely on methods to assess the trustworthiness of the YouTuber, which consist in looking at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the knowledge and expertise on the product being discussed, - the popularity of the channel, - the preparation of the video. 	
To assess a YouTuber's credibility		
Sponsored word of mouth		
Unsponsored word of mouth		
To assess if a YouTuber is sponsored by the company		
To assess the usefulness of the content of a video		
Loyalty to the YouTuber		
Benefits of watching product reviews	Element 5: Usefulness of the information shared in the video	
Knowledge and experience obtained from a YouTube video	Consumers determine the usefulness of the content being watched by looking at the support the video gives in assessing the quality and functions of a product, thus answering to consumers' doubts and questions regarding product expectations. A product review is also considered useful in terms of the help it provides in evaluating and comparing the different available alternatives. The support in the decision-making process received by a product review confirms the benefits connected to the use of the platform, thus enhancing consumer attitudes (Element 1).	
Knowledge and experience of a product prior to the research on YouTube		
Product Expectations		
To assess the usefulness of the content of a video		

Table 7: Axial and Selective Coding - Decision making

Open codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
Social Engagement	Through the aid of product reviews and the opinions of both the YouTuber and the other users online, consumers obtain new information on the product they are interested in.	Decision making Consumers rely on filter one and two to be able to make a purchasing decision.
YouTube search and video Selection		
Product expectations		
Knowledge and experience obtained from a YouTube video	Through the information obtained, consumers might either confirm their	

Rearrangement of product expectations	previous product expectations or rearrange them accordingly.	
Peer approval		
Active consumer behaviour online		
Decision	If feeling confident enough, consumers might decide to proceed with their purchase. If still in doubt, instead, the options are either holding on or giving up.	
Holding from taking a decision/Giving up		

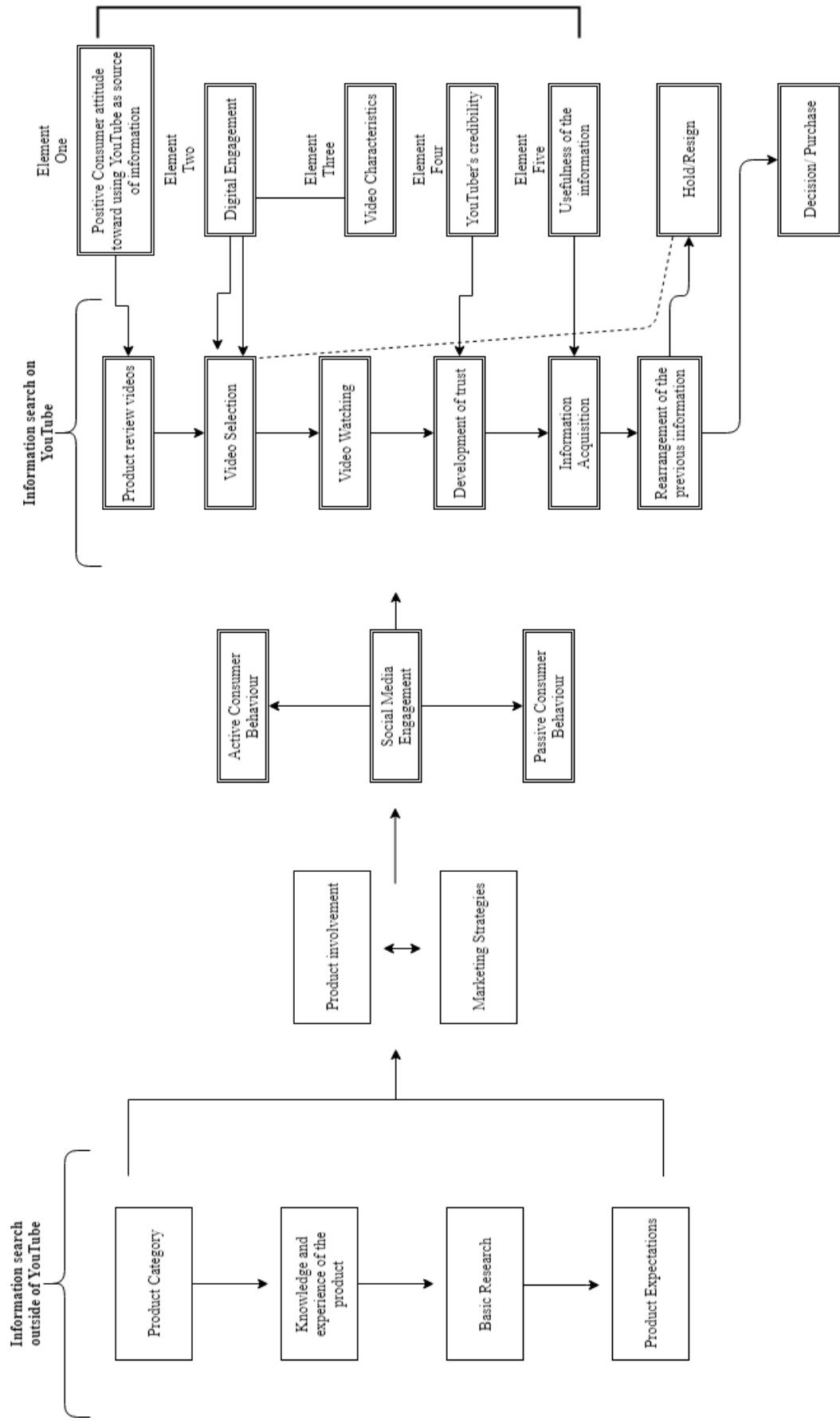


Figure 9: Model of Consumer Purchase Intentions under the influence of product related videos on YouTube

4.3 Explanations of the Findings

The application of the Grounded Theory approach to the research allowed the researcher to draw a model that can further explain consumers purchase intentions under the influence of product reviews on YouTube (Figure 9) that adds to and enhances the existing body of research knowledge available in the literature. The analysis of the data collected helped to confirm that the primary motivator to enhance consumers' engagement in information seeking and processing is the perceived risk in a purchasing decision scenario. As seen in Table 5, perceived risk, combined with the level of product knowledge, product involvement and the expectations consumers have regarding the product they are interested in, will determine the structure and the intensity of the research. Different sources of information might be selected by consumers, and one of these, as discussed in this research, is represented by product reviews on YouTube. Once started watching videos on YouTube, consumers will then either confirm their initial product expectations or rearrange them according to the new information obtained, and decide whether to proceed with the purchase or, if still in doubt, continue with their research or resign. The results of the data analysis are better explained in the paragraphs below.

4.3.1 Basic product information search outside of YouTube

Once the need to buy a certain product is recognized, consumers first rely on their own knowledge and past experience to elaborate their expectations on the product or service they are interested in. However, in most cases, when facing a purchasing decision scenario, consumers start to perceive a risk associated with that decision. Perceived risk is primarily and directly influenced by the level of product knowledge they have prior to the research. If perceiving feelings of uncertainty and unfamiliarity with one or multiple aspects of the product, consumers become aware of an existing potential product knowledge gap which will motivate them in engaging in information search. The feeling of uncertainty related to the level of product knowledge was recognizable in participants' sentences such as:

I don't know enough about those products. (Female, 24 years old, Italian)

I feel that I don't know exactly about this kind of device. (Male, 27 years old, Ukrainian)

When I decide to buy a product, I need to understand what are the characteristics of the product I am looking for. (Male, 30 years old, Portuguese)

Nowadays there are so many products around basically the same specs. So you want to buy the best that you can find. Let's say that the best for your needs. That's what I'm looking for. (Male, 35 years old, Italian)

I don't know how much does it last or if it was a good deal, if I can find a cheaper product somewhere else or you know. (Female, 28 years old, Italian)

In order to overcome these negative feelings, consumers will engage in information search and perform a basic research, which primarily involves browsing search engines, asking friends, going directly to a shop to test the product, or visiting the company website with the final scope to have an idea of what the product is, how it works, its price and functionalities.

The first thing that I did it was, you know, a real-life connection with this device, so first of all I just went to the closest shop store and I tried to, you know, to touch this MacBook to see what's going on, because sometimes it's very hard to understand how it looks if you have never seen it in real life. (Male, 27 years old, Ukrainian)

I usually start from Google. I start with a generic search. (Female, 28 years old, Italian)

First, I had some experience with this PC - real life - I just got this PC from my friend, I used it for a couple of days. (Female, 28 years old, Ukrainian)

In most of the cases, participants had their own ideas regarding what to expect from the product they wanted to buy. Those expectations included the characteristics and the benefits they could get from using that specific product, and represented the criteria through which comparing and picking the most appropriate one able to meet their needs. The results also showed that another factor enhancing information search is the level of product involvement. This is basically the result of a combination of factors, such as: consumer interest in a specific product category, product price, the complexity of certain product features, etc. The level of product involvement - which can be either low or high - determines the time and effort consumers put in their research. In other words, the higher the level of product involvement, the more consumers engage in product information seeking, evaluation and comparison before actually proceeding with a purchase. When a consumer is particularly involved in a product category, they might even decide to switch from a basic information search to a deeper one, characterized by the use of social media and user generated content, which is a typical feature of social media platforms like YouTube. Product reviews on YouTube are indeed able to give consumers a visual idea

of what the product is, and also detailed information and instructions on its functionalities. Product information seeking on social media is applied when consumers need further details and opinions coming from the direct experience that other consumers had of the product itself. Findings have shown that the intention to rely on UGC is also intensified by the fact that consumers are more and more aware of the tactics used by marketers to influence them, thus confirming that customers are not passively receiving a message from companies anymore. Participants in fact stressed their ability to recognize the attempts brands make to persuade them to buy their products, mostly by showing consumers only the misleading “bright side” of a product, which might not meet their real needs.

Brand description will enhance the positive aspects, which I'm sure a lot, but it won't give me a critical view. (Male, 33 years old, Greek)

The manufacturer itself may say and promise some things that the product is not actually really able to deliver. (Female, 24 years old, Italian)

It is at this point then that participants extend their product information research into social media, more specifically, by using product reviews on YouTube.

4.3.2 Product information search in YouTube

Social engagement is characterized by consumer behaviour on online social media platforms, more specifically, it involves consumer behaviour on YouTube. This could include watching videos, reading or writing comments, getting information from the videos, engaging with the YouTuber, liking or disliking the videos, following and subscribing to channels. It is necessary to point out that participants were not equally involved in social engagement on YouTube. Some of them seemed to more actively engage online, while some others less intensively. Therefore, two major types of consumer behaviour have been identified, such as: passive consumer behaviour and active consumer behaviour. In the first case, participants declared to use product reviews only to learn the necessary information to make their purchasing decision. No other major communication interaction is performed. Participants showed a disinterest in following, subscribing or interacting with the YouTuber or other consumers online commenting underneath the video. The only reason behind the social engagement online was limited to the product information search. On the contrary, active consumers declared to interact in the community, by subscribing to channels, generating content on the platform, and

communicating with other users through comments with the intention to get additional information and approval for their purchasing decision.

Sometimes I can interact with them, like with comments or stuff like this. When I have time, I just go on the channel and I see if there is a new video. (Female, 28 years old, Italian)

I am creating my own channel for pilates. (Female, 34 years old, Spanish)

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, findings have confirmed the existence of five different factors in product review videos on YouTube to favour the development of consumer purchase intentions. The first factor is undoubtedly consumer attitude toward using YouTube as an information tool, or in other words, the benefits that participants see in using the platform as a source of information and which therefore motivates them to use it in the first place when facing a purchasing decision scenario. The main benefit of using YouTube is represented by the fact that participants can rely on the free of personal interest opinion coming from other consumers (who can be both the YouTuber and the people commenting underneath the video) who already had experience of that product and who can share pros and cons of the product. This aspect of product reviews on YouTube is what primarily differentiates them from the information shared by the brand that, as mentioned before, would instead primarily attempt to persuade consumers with misleading information. The second benefit of using YouTube videos is that creators usually provide comparisons between different products of potential competitors, thus helping the users to make the appropriate decision on which is the most suitable product for their needs.

Some of them compare the new product with a previous model or with a competition, which is something I'm more interested in. And I get, as I said, a more independent view. (Male, 33 years old, Greek)

The second factor affecting consumers purchase intentions is the level of digital engagement, or in other words, the amount of views, likes, subscribers and comments in a video. In most cases, participants confirmed to associate these numbers to the popularity of a channel and, consequently, to the usefulness of the information shared. Moreover, since the algorithm of YouTube favours videos with higher interactions when populating a list of results, this factor represents the primary criterion of video selection when searching for videos on YouTube. Participants declared in fact that after having typed keywords in the search bar and having the system populated the results, the first video picked would potentially be the one with the highest number of views. Since in fact other

users have been watching, commenting and liking the video, it is most probably assumed that the information shared will be useful for their decision. However, this can only be confirmed once actually started playing the video and assessing its real content. The only situation where the first video selected does not correspond to the one with the highest number of views is when participants recognize within the list of results a YouTuber they are already familiar with and whom they already trust.

I usually select the first ones because it means that they have more views, the channel has more subscribers. So, they used to be more trustworthy, of course, but I don't know. (Female, 28 years old, Italian)

We are used to believing that the most viewed video is the most popular and maybe the most helpful. So, you just give them a try and watch that video, you're starting from the most popular, but it doesn't mean that it would be the best one. (Male, 27 years old, Ukrainian)

I mean, the search results are based on how many people watch the videos and also like based on relevance. So, you first get before the most relevant results. So I usually see if from the first results I can recognize a channel that I know, so if I recognize a channel or someone that I usually trust their reviews, I'm going to start with that one. Or if not, I'm just going to go with either the view count or the thumbnail that really catches my eye. (Female, 24 years old, Italian)

The third factor impacting consumer purchase intentions and also participants' criteria of video selection is the video characteristics. Findings have shown that there are two main characteristics involved:

1. the quality of the image;
2. the video length.

Participants declared they have the tendency to prioritize videos with higher resolution and the reasons behind this choice are multiple. First of all, video quality was associated by several participants to a proof of the efforts the YouTuber made to prepare that video, and consequently, video quality represents a confirmation of the YouTuber's credibility. Participants in fact recognized the complexity of editing a video and appreciated the work done by the YouTuber, who automatically becomes more trustworthy and knowledgeable in their eyes. Together with that, watching a video in high resolution also represents a pleasant viewing experience from consumers' side, who are then more motivated to remain engaged and interested in the content being shown. Moreover, although the video quality does not influence consumers' final opinion of a product, participants confirmed that this specific video characteristic might help them to get a better visual idea of the

product itself, thus enhancing consumers' decision of using product reviews on YouTube instead of other sources of information. Therefore, video quality positively impacts consumers attitude towards using YouTube as an information tool.

I'm honest, I'm usually skip like straight away the video with very, very low quality because for me it means that you didn't put effort at all to make that video. (Female, 28 years old, Italian)

The fact that someone that has a low-quality camera, that's key into making YouTube videos, does not really say anything on the quality of the product. (Female, 24 years old, Italian)

It's not that they are just recording from their phone. They are prepared. And I know it's a long process as well to prepare a video. It's like a lot of work. This means they care and they want the best. That's why I trust them.

As for the quality, If I'm seeing a video that is low resolution compared to a video in 4K and I see the camera really close to me, I'm having the feeling to have the camera in my room so that I kind of touch it. So, the quality really matters and the way they filmed it. It is like touching it, trying it. As you know, there are lots of people who do unboxing. It is actually a silly thing. But if you think carefully why people enjoy watching unboxing just for the pleasure of receiving something new and just triggered that kind of pleasure that you have when you expect something from Amazon, for example. (Male, 31 years old, Italian)

The second video characteristics is video length. The duration of the video is in fact another criterion through which consumers select a video and remain engaged and interested in the information being shared. Participants agreed that the perfect video length should be around 10-15 minutes. Longer videos would in fact be considered redundant, and possibly, loose the core topic of the video (i.e. the product and its functionalities) in favour of unrelated themes. Shorter ones, on the other hand, have been identified by participants to present the possible risk of not including all the necessary information to help them to make the appropriate decision. It is then assumed that video length is associated with the usefulness of the information.

The fourth factor impacting consumer purchase intentions while watching product reviews is the YouTuber's credibility, that determine whether consumers might trust or not the author of a video. Findings confirmed that consumers associate the credibility of the YouTuber with the level of knowledge and expertise regarding the product being reviewed. This can be assessed by looking at:

1. YouTuber's communication style and ability to adapt the language to the person they are talking to;

2. The coherence within the videos being reviewed in the entire channel. Most of the participants in fact confirmed they would trust more YouTubers who only review one specific category of products. A YouTuber would, therefore, lose credibility if performing a review of a product category never discussed before. The only reasons why participants will watch the video regardless of the sudden change of product category would be either an interest in that specific type of product or just as a means of loyalty to the YouTuber. This particular scenario, however, would not have an influence on consumer purchase intentions. Participants declared in fact they would prefer to rely on someone else's opinion.
3. The match between the YouTuber's lifestyle and the type of product being reviewed. The message of the YouTuber seems to be more effective if there is a match between a YouTuber's lifestyle and the product reviewed. Example: *I mean, if you're talking about traveling and you don't travel, how can you trust this person? I mean, they don't know anything about the subject. How can you trust someone who is ignorant to review a product or what's something you are buying? (Male, 30 years old, Portuguese)*

As mentioned before, the high level of digital engagement of a video is associated with the popularity and credibility of the video itself. However, for some participants this represents a double-edged sword. On one hand, in fact, the level of digital engagement favours the selection of a video over another because it might potentially include useful information. On the other hand, however, participants also perceive the popularity of the channel as the potential threat of an existing sponsorship between the YouTuber and the brand, thus negatively impacting the YouTuber's credibility and trustworthiness. In order to make sure that the content of the video is free of gain for the YouTuber and only pure and genuine word of mouth, some participants have shared the methods through which assessing if a YouTuber is sponsored or not. These include:

1. The presence of sentences that confirm the YouTuber received the product directly from a brand. Example: *Some of them at the beginning of the video, they usually say: "I got this device from this store, or I was sent to this P.C from...", it means he got it for free, so he has to give something, at least in most of the cases must be a positive opinion. If they buy this stuff for themselves... For example, if the guy says: "I just bought this P.C.... I've been using it for half of the year so go on" - I will definitely believe. (Male, 27, Ukrainian)*

2. The predominance in the channel of reviews of product from one specific brand. Example: *You can just open the channel and you can see what brands he is reviewing. So, if he normally has most of the videos from Apple...so...Most probably is a sponsor. (Female, 28, Ukrainian)*
3. The presence of promotion codes and affiliate links. Example: *I used to check if there is a product placement in the video or not, because, for example, if I want to buy clothes, many YouTubers have kind of promotion or discount if you use it. They say: "If you put this code in this Web site, you will have a discount."*

Finally, the last factor enhancing consumer purchase intentions is the usefulness of the information being shared. Participants confirmed to consider a video as useful when:

- It includes comparison between very similar product or competitors, thus facilitating the process of alternatives evaluation;
- It is supported with real life examples on which to base their product expectations;
- It covers both the advantages and the disadvantages of using a product in order to give consumers a better understanding of how exactly the product works and what's the best option for them.

All these elements are seen as benefits and advantages of using product reviews online, as they help to prevent the waste of time during the research and make consumers able to access additional useful information and perspectives about the products they are interested in. As a consequence, the perceived usefulness of the information has been confirmed to positively impact consumers attitude towards using UGC on YouTube for purchasing decision.

4.3.3 Decision making

Watching product reviews on YouTube allowed consumers who had their own initial opinions and expectations on the product to have a better understanding of the product or service they searched for more information on. This enables them to make the relevant evaluation of the available alternatives and take a decision accordingly to what best suits their needs. At this stage, consumers might have built up a completely new set of product expectations as a consequence of the new information obtained or they might have simply rearranged their initial idea. With the number of available alternatives now narrowed down, consumers are finally able to pick the most suitable option and proceed with the purchase. Alternatively, if still perceiving feelings of uncertainty, consumers might decide to carry on their research according to the relevant suggested content or just resign their decision.

4.4 Implications for Research Objectives and Questions

4.4.1 Response to the research objectives

The research objectives established at the beginning of the dissertation were:

To develop a conceptual model aimed to give more insights on consumer behaviour under the influence of YouTube videos.

The application of the Grounded Theory allowed the researcher to draw a conceptual model which explains why consumers engage in information search, how they structure their research and how they get influenced by YouTube videos up the point when they actually decide to proceed with a purchase. The development of a conceptual model favours a better visual understanding of consumers decision making process in its difference stages under the influence of a social media platform like YouTube and also provides useful insights on the elements of product reviews affecting consumers purchase intentions.

4.4.2 Response to the research questions

As mentioned at the beginning of the dissertation, the aim of this research is to provide useful insights on consumer decision making process and on the factors being affecting consumer purchase intentions while watching product related videos on YouTube.

Following these purposes, the following questions were also stated: **What are the key reasons that push a consumer to seek for product information before buying a product? What elements potentially influence consumer purchase intentions when watching YouTube videos?**

Through the aid of the literature review and the data collection and analysis, it has been possible to respond to the research questions. As for the first question, the key motivator of consumers' pre-purchase information search is assumed to be perceived risk. When facing a purchasing decision scenario, consumers perceive feelings of uncertainty associated with the purchase, which might potentially result in a chance of loss. This is mostly connected to the product category and price, or to the level of product involvement consumers have. The strategy adopted by consumers to overcome these risks is product information search on social media. This process is characterized by a mutual effect, wherein while consumers consciously take the decision to require the use of product reviews on YouTube to support their decision, YouTube videos at the same time play a decisive role on how consumers act on the platform and finalize their buying decision. The answer to the second research question can be found in the existence of five elements to influence consumers purchase intentions during their research on YouTube, such as:

the level of digital engagement on a video, the video characteristics, the YouTuber's credibility, the usefulness of the information shared in the video and consumers' attitudes towards the use of YouTube as a source of information for purchasing decisions. The data collection and analysis allowed to confirm that these elements are not individually impacting consumers' decision-making process, but they are all interrelated to each other.

4.5 Implications of Findings

Generally, in traditional marketing, consumers are seen as to be passively receiving the messages of a brand. The last decades, however, have seen significant changes in the use of the Internet and social media platforms which have resulted in a consequent change in consumer behaviour. Consumers are no longer passive receivers of the messages from a brand. They have in fact developed knowledge and awareness of the tactics that marketers use to persuade them. Thanks to this knowledge, consumers are now able to identify the motives behind the persuasion attempts, and also recognize when they occur and how these are structured, thus being also able to actively and consciously respond to them and adapt their behaviour online accordingly. On the other hand, companies are constantly integrating social media in their marketing strategies to favour the communication with customers. In order for this process to be effective, marketing strategies will need to be restructured to face consumers' knowledge and awareness of brands' persuasion techniques.

4.5.1 Opportunity to reuse concepts from previous literature

Different concepts emerged in this research findings are matching with previous literature, thus resulting into an opportunity to re-use and integrate previous findings to this research with the aim of verifying the validity of this research through the consolidation of previous theories. These are listed in bullet points as per below:

- Consumer behaviour seen as a sequence of several stages.
- The concept of perceived risk as motivator of product information search, the existence of offline and online source of information and consumers' reliance on WOM and peer reviews to overcome the risks connected to purchasing scenarios.
- The existence of five factors in product reviews on YouTube enhancing consumer purchase intentions and their interrelation to one another.
- The concept of high and low product involvement through which consumers base the effort in engaging in information search and in decision making.

4.5.2 New implications from the findings

Other meaningful implications emerged from the findings are:

- Consumer decision making process under the influence of product reviews online is not necessarily linear, but it might be flexible.
- Consumer decision to proceed with a purchase might not happen right after the information search. After having watched a video online, in fact, consumers might decide either to put their decision on hold or to give up.
- Consumers decision making process when watching product reviews online is not totally irrational. Consumers are aware of the persuasion tactics operating in the social media context and consciously respond to these.

4.5.3 Implications for social media marketing

This research provided further insights on how consumers use a social media platform like YouTube to support their buying decision making process. Findings have confirmed that, although consumers have their own initial level of product knowledge and product expectations, they might actually rearrange them at the end of their research according to the new information obtained from product reviews online. This means that product reviews represent a valuable marketing tool thanks to which companies are enabled to engage and reach a higher number of customers. Findings have also confirmed that the primary benefit consumers see in the use of product reviews on YouTube as a source of information for their decision-making process is the presence of two-sided messages regarding the product being reviewed, in other words, the presence of both positive and negative opinions on the attributes of a product. Consumers are now able to recognize one-sided messages thus making brands' manipulative intent more visible and consumers less easy to persuade. Companies are then suggested to incorporate two-sided messages strategy in their marketing communication.

4.6 Conclusions of Findings

In the attempt of developing a conceptual model, aimed to give more insights on consumer behaviour, different concepts emerged to be in line with previous theories and literature, thus giving the researcher the opportunity to further verify the validity of this research. In addition to that, new concepts have also arisen in response to the involvement of product reviews on YouTube into product information search. Consumer decision making process emerged to be as flexible process, wherein consumers might adopt different types of behaviour online as a result of the stimuli received from the context they are engaging in. Findings have shed new light on consumer behaviour in the social

media environment and they might be used as a guideline with which better understanding consumers' decisions.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

5.1 Overview

This last chapter will include a brief summary of the research, by looking at research background, approach and results. It will also cover the contributions and limitations, together with the recommendations for future research. Finally, the last section represents the researcher's personal reflection with a summary of experiences and perceptions.

5.2 Brief Summary of the Research Study

In order to conclude this research, a brief recap is needed and it will cover the following points: the research background, the research approach and the research findings.

The **research background** addressed the need for extending the research on YouTube influence on consumer behaviour and proposing a conceptual framework aimed at better understanding consumer purchase intentions when viewing product related videos on YouTube. It started with an overall look at pre-purchase information search, which represents consumer strategy to face perceived risk in a purchasing decision scenario. YouTube product related videos were recognized to be a new potential tool for product information search and evaluation. Within a video, five different factors were identified to stimulate consumer purchase behaviour: digital engagement, video characteristics, source credibility, perceived usefulness of the information provided in the video and consumer attitude toward purchase. At this point, new approaches were needed to better understand how these factors influence consumer viewing experience on the platform and their purchase intentions.

The **research approach** consisted in adopting the constructivist grounded theory approach to the research to extrapolate from the participants involved in the research study more insights on the elements influencing their buying decisions.

The **research results** are summarized in a model attempting to give a better idea of consumer decision making process under the influence of social media. The research findings have also demonstrated the possibility to reuse concepts previously discussed in the literature, whereas other meaningful implications have also emerged to be addressed.

5.3 Contributions and Limitations of the Research

The main contribution of this research study is to have provided a potential guideline to understand consumer decision making process under the influence of YouTube videos, by highlighting how elements from product related videos are interrelated to one another. The complexity of the consumer decision-making journey in the digital age represents one of the biggest challenges for marketers when it comes to trying to map customers journey. In order to avoid being left behind in favour of other alternative sources of information, there is a need for marketers to engage with their stakeholders through new and efficient ways. There is a need to build a new model which helps understanding consumer behaviour in the ever evolving and dynamic digital era and the important stages of the decision-making process under the influence of social media. Once able to obtain a better understanding of how consumer behaviour works, marketers will also then be able to adapt and customize their marketing approach by strategically allocating their resources according to the different types of consumer behaviour and needs.

The model proposed in this research offers an overview of the buyer decision-making process while watching product related videos on YouTube. It can provide marketing scholars a meaningful guide through which to understand how consumers respond to different stimuli received online, when and why consumers might decide to put on hold or give up their decision and how they move towards a purchasing decision. The contribution of the model is then to have mapped consumers' decision-making journey on YouTube.

This research study presents, however, also some limitations. First of all, the model has been built up on data gathered from a relatively small number of participants compared to the actual number of YouTube users worldwide, which amounts up to 1.8 billion every month (Gilbert, 2018). Moreover, although the sample of participants belong to the same largest demographic group of YouTube users (Blattberg, 2015), it still represents a limited range of age. Quantitative research is therefore needed to verify the validity of the model. Moreover, the analysis of consumer viewing experience on YouTube when seeking for product information prior to a purchase decision was done without specifying the type of product involved. Although different product categories have been mentioned by the participants during the interviews, further research would be necessary to test the suitability of the model according to the specific product category.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

As mentioned in the previous section, quantitative research can help to test the validity of the model proposed in this research study, as well as the effectiveness of the factors being recognized in product related videos on YouTube to have a positive impact on consumer behaviour. A survey could be the best option to identify which of the five different factors represents the most powerful when it comes to influence consumer purchase intentions.

Moreover, since the data was collected from a sample of YouTube users between the ages of 24 and 35 years, it would be useful to extend the age range. Generation X might have completely different viewing tastes, it would be interesting to investigate further by making a comparison between the two different generations to identify the elements affecting purchase intentions.

Finally, participants mentioned different types of product categories during the interviews. It would be helpful to verify the extensiveness of the model according to the type of product being searched by consumers.

5.5 Personal Reflections

Throughout the research process, I have faced multiple challenges. The first challenge was represented by searching and selecting the most appropriate research approach that could be able to describe the complexity of consumer behaviour. Even after selecting the grounded theory, my inexperience of the coding process constituted for me a big challenge, as my main concern was not being able to capture all the meaningful categories within the text.

Luckily, the grounded theory approach resulted to be very useful to describe the topic selected. Thanks to the research, I managed to acquire new research skills and my interest in social media marketing has significantly increased

Finally, the biggest challenge I have faced during the research process is related to time management. Trying to find a balance between working full time, writing the dissertation and studying for my last exams have given me the chance to improve my time-management skills. The entire journey conducted have enriched academically and personally and this dissertation represents for me one of the greatest achievements of my career.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Interviews Questionnaire

Basic question

1. How often do you use YouTube?
2. How do you normally use it? (recreation, work, product review, etc.)
 - a. Have you ever looked at product reviews on YouTube?
3. What do you think of product reviews online?
4. What drives you to search info online before purchasing a product?
5. Do you trust the product reviews on YouTube? To which extent do you trust them?
 - a. To what extent do you trust YouTube reviews? What are the important factors that influence you trust in them?
6. Do you search for product company videos or third-party reviews? Or both?
 - a. What benefits can you get from using YouTube videos when considering to buy a product or service?

Advanced questions on factors affecting purchase intentions

F1: Digital Engagement

1. How do you search for a product (review) on YouTube?
2. How do you select which video to watch?
3. If you had to choose between two videos, with similar title and content, one has 100 views, the other one has 100k views, which one would you watch? Why?

F2: Video Characteristics

1. How important is for you the length of a video? Why?
2. To which extent do you think that the video quality and the preparation of the video can influence your viewing experience and your opinions on the product?

F3: Source Credibility

1. How important is for you that a YouTuber has knowledge and expertise of a product?
 - a. How do you assess this?
2. Can you tell me about a time when a product review video reassured you from concerns regarding a product you were interested in?
3. Do you usually comment videos to ask additional questions or to show gratitude for the content shared?
4. Are you subscribed to any channel from which you regularly follow updates and news? If yes, can you give some examples?
5. Are you subscribed to a channel of a creator with whom you share passions, lifestyle or hobbies?
6. How would you react if all of a sudden a YouTuber you follow and perceive as an expert in a specific product type started to review products of a complete opposite category?

F4: Perceived usefulness of the information

1. How would you measure the usefulness of the information shared in a video?
2. What differentiates for you a product description shared on a video on YouTube and the one shared by the company?

F5: Attitude toward purchase

1. Would you say you trust YouTube as an information tool when you plan to buy a product/service?
2. Do you usually read other subscribers' opinion underneath the video? How important do you consider them in relation to your decision?
3. What can affect your final decision on a product?

Appendix B - Example of Interview Transcript

Participant: Female, 24 years old, Italian

(Interviewer: M)

(Participant: P)

M: How often how do you usually use YouTube?

P: How often? I'd say every day. Mainly because I work for this platform, but also because there are a couple of channels that I really like and follow. What do I use it for? Mainly I'd say outside from when I'm looking for something specific, I follow a lot of documentary or educational channels, like Ted talks. That's what I do watch. But I also I would say that when I open YouTube because I'm looking for something is usually because I'm looking for a product review or a tutorial on how to do something.

M: Have you ever looked at product reviews on YouTube?

P: Yes. It's my "to go method" because it's very easy.

M: What do you think of product reviews online in general?

P: I'd say that it's actually, you know, getting the user feedback on a product is maybe like more truthful than, you know, the manufacturer itself may say and promise some things that the product is not actually really able to deliver. But then when you look at reviews made by other people that use the product, you can get a real life expectation of what you can get.

M: What usually drives you to say, like, I'm going to look for information with this product before buying it?

P: Mainly two factors. I'd say the number one reason why if I decide to look at a review online is usually because I'm buying the product online. So I'm not able to see it first hand until I buy it and it arrives. I'm not able to know how big it is and what it looks like. So it's easier to look at a video review because you can get all of those information rather than maybe even read an article about it. Then I look at a lot of actually mainly I look at hair products. So it's actually better to see the video and the review where you usually see the person using the product and then the result. So I can see if I can achieve the same thing with my type of curls.

M: So the main concern before buying the products actually see if it's worth it.

P: Yeah. If it's worth it.

M: Coming back to YouTube, do you trust the product reviews on YouTube? And if yes, to which extent?

P: I'd say I do trust them. I would not say a 100 percent, but In most cases, when you when you start looking at the reviews, you'd see that some people are gonna give a lot of positive reviews and a lot of people are also going to be giving negative reviews. And it really depends on your taste and what you're looking for.

So I would say that in this case, in case of Internet reviews, online reviews in general, the majority counts like I trust YouTube reviews and online reviews as long as I see that. OK. If you read six different reviews and the five of them are positive, I'm more inclined to trust. Whenever there is a tie, like three positive reviews on three, not so positive reviews, I'd rather maybe not buy the product, but it's more like when you do a poll, you know.

M: So, let's consider that you want to buy a product. You decide that you want to buy product, but you still have some doubts? So, what do you usually do? You first? I mean. Which is the first you checked? The video provided by the company or some other third-party reviews?

P: At first, if there is any video provided by the company, I'll see that. That gives you an idea of what they are advertising, you know, as a product. Then, of course, I look at the videos of the people that purchased the product and used it. And that will give me an idea of, that is more truthful. From the from the company's video of advertising you got an idea of what the product is for or what the product is meant for. But then from the other reviews, you really see what it actually works for.

M: Coming back to YouTube, do use it as an information tool for specific types of products or for any kind of products?

P: Not really, any kind of product. Like I find myself looking at hair product reviews and laptop reviews, books. Really anything.

M: And if you had to justify this search of information on YouTube, how would you justify in terms of benefits that you see?

P: As a person, it really bugs me whenever I have to buy things online that I don't know. It's kind of like always kind of a gamble, you know. So it really gives me peace of mind. I would say that it's in order for me to have the peace of mind, because if I don't read or watch the videos for product reviews, I can never really decide to purchase the product. So, it's like I'm going to be in that indecisive state. I'd just decide not to get it and I'll probably buy something that I can find in a local shop.

M: Let's start now from scratch. You are on the platform (YouTube) and you're looking for a specific product you said about you were talking about hair products. So how do you search for the products you need on YouTube?

P: Well, that also depends. If I am looking for information on a specific brand or I'm just looking for information or a type of product that then can come in different brands. So I would say that let's say, for example, I'm looking for a good conditioner. I'll first try and see: "videos" or "Top 10 best products for natural hair". I'll see first those reviews and then maybe narrow it down from the ones that interest me between the brands that I may know or the ones that I don't know, or maybe the price - if the prices are in the range I can afford.

M: Let's say you said like "top 10 conditioner". So, you type into the search bar the words and the keywords and YouTube gives you a list of results. So how do you select the first one you're going to watch?

P: Luckily, the algorithm does most of the job for us. Like I mean, the search results are based on how many people watch the videos and also like based on relevance. So, you first get before the most relevant results. So, I usually see if from the first results I can recognize a channel that I know, so if I recognize a channel or someone that I usually trust their reviews, I'm going to start with that one. Or if not, I'm just going to go with either the view count or the thumbnail that really catches my eye.

M: So, you said you inserted this type keywords and you have two videos that have more or less the same title. One has, let's say, 10000 views and one other has very little view count. So, you will go for the one that has the highest number.

P: Yes, I will go for the one that has the highest view count unless I know the channel of the other video with less views, because if I know the channel I mean like I may already trust that person's judgment. So, I don't have to base my decision on the community, you know, on how many people watched.

M: How important is for you the length of the video?

P: It's very important.

M: Why?

P: Well, because I mean, so most times you're browsing on the Internet. You're about to buy something and then you're not sure and you want to watch a video as a review. But that is, you know, it's kind of a bracket, the parentheses in what you're already doing. So, I mean, I don't really want to spend the next 15 minutes watching the video. I would rather go back to what I was doing and decide if I want to buy the product or not. Like if I especially you know, it depends because if it's a product review where you're going to show me how you use it and how your hair looks like afterwards, the video can be even 30 minutes long. It really depends on how much interest I have in the product to begin with.

M: Let's say that video is 30 minutes long and it's from one of your favourite YouTuber. What would keep you interested in watching?

P: Oh, I'm going to skip. I'm going to skip ahead until I get to the parts that I'm interested in.

M: For example?

P: It can maybe how she's applying the product. I would want to see what the end result is, whatever consideration she's making about how maybe she likes it better than or less than another.

M: So basically if we had to sum up: 1) the how to, 2) the results And then 3) the opinions.

P: Yeah.

M: So let's consider instead the quality of the video. To which extent do you think that the video quality and the preparation of the video can actually influence your viewing experience and also your opinion of the product?

P: If I start watching a video and it has a very low video quality and then it's also very long, I'm not going to watch you till the end and that's the thing for everyone. I mean it might not really influence that much my opinion on the product, because I mean, you know, the product is there, it is available for everyone to buy, the fact that someone that has a low-quality camera, that's key into making YouTube videos, purchases the product and then uses it, does not really say anything on the quality of the product. But then I mean, it's also true that if the video is not of the best quality I might not watch, so I might not finish the review and, you know, just move on to another product. It really depends maybe on how much time you have at your disposal to research.

M: Let's consider now the YouTuber. Do you think that it's very important that YouTube has a knowledge and expertise of the product?

P: Well, it is important. I mean, on one hand, yes, we can all use a product and then give our opinions, even if we are not experts on what we're doing. But I would say that anyone would trust an expert opinion more.

M: How would you assess the expertise?

P: Generally, on YouTube you would assess it on like the topic of the channel, the theme of the channel. So, if this is a channel about hair, and the YouTuber has natural hair, and she has long hair, her hair is beautiful - of course, you're going to trust that that person is an expert in what are talking about. If you go on a channel, that is just reviews of many things, many different things, you can't really trust that person's opinion because if you have hair products and technology products and food all on the same channel.

M: So, you would rather trust more a person who was a main big passion.

P: Yeah.

M: How would you react if one of the girls you're following who gives product reviews on hair products, out of the blue started to do reviews of something that is completely opposite, let's say cars or I don't know, whatever that is.

P: Ok. I mean, of course, people can have different interests and passions in life. So, I can be an expert in hair and still be an expert on cars and computers. So, I'd say that usually if you're already following the person, there's kind of trust that she's all right. Like you trust that person's opinion. So even if they're going to review something completely different out of the blue, it might even make you more curious. Like you may be more curious towards the odd one than the usual content. But I'd say that if I'm thinking about buying a car, I may not base my decision on that video. I'd watch you probably. But then also I'd watch other videos of people that are more specialized in that particular topic or type of products and see if they actually agree.

M: So, as we are talking about like beauty products, do you think then that the person who is describing them has to match on physical aspect or, you know, more aesthetical aspect with the products that they are reviewing?

P: Oh, OK. I've never really thought about that. It's not something that I've really given some thought to. But I would also say that it's kind of yeah. You know, you follow YouTuber, you look at their video, you look at their product reviews and sometimes you're surprised to see: "Oh, my God, this person is using this?" or "Oh, wow, someone is actually using these. So, this is good." You know what I'm saying? These are really weird examples. But there are some brands of makeup that, you know, they're not the best and they're not those brands that you are used to seeing reviews on YouTube. Well, maybe then you follow a YouTuber and they upload their video and they're showing you a very good makeup tutorial using, you know, this cheap brand, which you didn't give much thoughts to. That would really influence your opinion. That may actually change your mind and think: "OK, maybe I'm going to try it". So it's kind of like, yes, you should. You know, you start to you expect from certain people to use certain products And it's also weird because I'd say that if you were doing a review of a natural hair product and you don't have a natural hair. You know, why should I trust you if your opinion from the matter? And of course, your result is going to be completely different than mine that I have natural hair.

M: Are you actually subscribed to a channel from my YouTube or with whom you share passions, lifestyles, you know, hobbies as well?

P: No, I subscribe very rarely to channels like I think I'm subscribed to three channels and none of these channels actually make positive reviews. I'm subscribed to educational channels, where I watch a documentary. I rarely subscribe to channels that make product reviews. But then I remember...

M: You would be able to recognize them?

P: Yeah

M: So you don't follow their updates and news?

P: No, no. It's just more when I need to. Like if I need to and I'm like: "OK, I want to do this with my hair. What product should I use?", then I'll go on the channel and see if there's anything any of them is.

M: Would you consider any of them to be more or less similar to you?

P: Well, yeah. Although I would say that it really depends. Like if you're talking about the beauty products that I mainly view on YouTube then, yes. But also, because my searches are going to be very specific. Like, if I'm looking for hair products, they're going to be for natural afro hair. If I'm looking for makeup, they're going to be like, I don't know, like brands that do foundations in different shades where I can also find my shades or you know what colour lipstick really matches my skin tone, which is kind of more niche because I'm a minority. So, I really have to get specific. And most of the beauty YouTubers that I know and that I follow, they kind of have to be similar to me.

M: Let's say you find video that you like that shares good information but you still have doubts. Would you comment there to ask for more info? Or how much attention do you pay to the comments?

P: I do read comments. I do especially when it's about reviews. Like after I watch the videos, if I still have doubts, I'll go and read the comments and see what other people thought. But I very rarely comment on the videos. In general, I am more of, you know, like passive user. I still do consider comments. I read them. I even read the comments replies most of the times. But then, I would never comment myself and ask.

M: How do you think they impact your decision?

P: They do impact my decision. I mean, of course. Let's say you're going to watch a video, a review of a product. The video has 100 comments and 50 comments are like: "OK. No, I don't agree with these. I totally don't even agree with this" - It's very hard, then, for me to agree with the video and to be sure about the product.

M: Speaking about the usefulness of the information in the video, how would you measure that? How would you say that this video was really useful to me?

P: A lot of times when people are doing product reviews, they tend not to stick to the point. It's a YouTube video, so most of the time is like you're having a conversation in front of a camera and you tend to digress and you tend to talk about other things. So, for me, a video is useful if it's like of acceptable length and it sticks to the point. The moment you digress and you know, a lot of times the title says something and then the video is 30 minutes and you only get like 10, 15 minutes of what the title says. So, I'm not really going to consider a video like that as useful.

M: So, if you had to describe what's the main difference between a product description shared on the video on YouTube and the one shared from the company itself?

P: Well, the number one thing is the fact that I as a consumer, if I'm making a product review, it's usually not for my own gain. I'm doing the product review because maybe I used it and I loved it and I know that there are people out there that are also struggling with their hair. So, I'm going to post a product review. So, there's an element of truth that it's, you know, very predominant in reviews rather than the company video. The company is advertising. So, they're showing you what they know that you want to see.

M: Would you on an overall perspective say that you actually trust YouTube as informational tool?

P: Yeah, yeah, I do. I do.

M: If we had to summarize, what are the elements that actually affect your final decision on a product? Which one would you say?

P: I'd say how popular a product is. I mean, in general, the more a product is more popular than the more it's effective and it's working and people are happy with it. I'd also say the price range really does, especially because as I said before, when I'm looking at a product review is mainly because I'm buying online. So, for me, it's always a bit like gambling. So, if the price range is too high, I start thinking that it's not really worth it. I know it's not a logical thought process. Also, then the company itself. I usually also research the companies. Since now we've been talking mainly about beauty products, I'd like to see if they do animal testing. What kind of products they used, the reputation, etc.

Appendix C - Example of Coding Process

Participant: Male, 33 years old, Greek

(Interviewer: M)

(Participant: P)

Codes: Social Engagement, Product Category, Knowledge and experience of the product, Peer approval, Marketing strategies, Assessing the usefulness of the information, unsponsored word of mouth, YouTube search and Video Selection, Hold/Give up, video characteristics, video metrics, assessing YouTuber's credibility, assessing YouTuber's knowledge and expertise, product expectations, passive consumer behaviour, decision/purchase, benefits of using product reviews

How often and how do you normally use YouTube?

About Ten times a week. Mostly videos about movies. Trailers. And some research on some products I might be interested in.

Have you ever looked at product reviews on YouTube?

Oh, yes. Yes, I have.

What do you think about product reviews online?

Some can be informative, some not. It would depend on the product review.

Do you only look for a specific category of product or for any product that you are interested in?

Well, more technical products like mobile phones or gaming consoles or computers or tablets. Nothing that is relatively simple. for example, I don't look for books.

What do you think drives you to look for information before you actually decide to buy this product?

Well, because I don't know a lot. I don't know enough about those products. So I need somebody who probably knows more than me to give me an opinion.

Do you also search for the product description shared by the company itself?

No, no, no. That's mostly marketing. So it will enhance the positive aspects, which I'm sure a lot, but it won't give me a critical view.

What do you think are the benefits of looking for information outside the brand itself. On YouTube, for example.

Some of them compare the new product with a previous model or with a competition, which is something I'm more interested in. And I get, as I said, a more independent view.

Let's consider that you want to buy a phone, as you said, or a similar technical product. How do you search for the product on YouTube?

Well, I look for the name of the product plus "review". I use keywords, basically.

Then the system will give you a list of videos. Which one are you going to select?

I usually go with the top of the list. And then work my way down depending on the first few minutes of the video. So if there are videos that are not really what they say, I skip to the next.

Do you think it is gonna keep you interested in watching the videos?

If somebody is talking about what I want to hear and not whatever they want to talk about. So if it's a product review, I want to hear about the product being reviewed, not about the user's experience or his previous experience or whatever else.

So does the length of the video duration of the actually influence?

It does. If it's a video of half an hour, I don't have half an hour to give to a video. So if it's up to 10 minutes I might watch.

And what about instead the views and the popularity of the channel?

Not really. No. You know that views and popularity is not necessarily a measurement of quality. So, no.

Speaking about quality, what about the video quality itself, the preparation, if it's available in a higher solution or, you know, a lighter solution?

No, that the bit of technical quality, No, I don't care. I want the guy to be prepared for what he has to present. So there is no gaps. He has to have done some work before. And you can see if he has. But I don't care about the quality of the video or how steady the camera is or if it's moving around. I just want the info.

How do you assess that this person is actually knowledgeable or has expertise on the product?

Ok, so if they're not just reading the leaflet of the product and then just going line after line and they are giving me the benefit behind that, whatever spec it is that you're talking about, that's when I know they're more prepared rather than just making a video to get more views.

And do you look at the comments?

No, I don't look at the comments.

Are you subscribed to any of this channel?

No, I don't really subscribe to any of those channels and I never look at the comments on YouTube. I think that most of them are poisonous. Most of them don't really make me feel nice. I think there's a lot of negativity on their sides.

How important is for you that the product the person is describing has to match with their lifestyle. For example, in the case of photography, do you think that it would impact, for example, that the person is actually a photographer in his or her daily life?

I guess it will help them in terms of knowledge, but I don't think it will affect me in terms of selecting the video. For example, I know a lot of about basketball, but I don't play the game. I just like it. So I learn. Maybe somebody else doesn't have to be a photographer, but they know about cameras.

When you are watching a video, how would you say that this video is actually useful to you to make your decision?

Well, whenever I want to buy something like a phone, let's say, I need to cover some needs with the phone. Now, if I see you in the video that my needs are covered by this phone, then I will be considering buying it. Again, if it's talking about needs and not just specs over the phone. So it's not about how big the screen is, but what does that offer you as a user the size of the screen. What does it offer you? It should be translating this information, which is more or less something that I don't know much about, like sizes or analysis. Something that actually has meaning to me.

Would you say that you trust you to present information tool?

Not all of them. Some of them, yes. Some of them, yes. But not all of them.