ANTECEDENTS OF GENERATION Y STUDENTS' INTEREST AND INTENTION TO USE EBOOKS

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─Abstract─

The origin of the eBook can be traced back to 1971, when the declaration of independence was digitised. However, from there, the evolution of the eBook was slow-moving. It was only after companies such as Apple and Amazon had pushed for a new digital era for books that eBooks really became more popular. This popularity has slowly increased across the globe, but is a growth that has mostly passed South Africa by. This study investigated several reasons for this seeming lack of interest and proposed a model to assess the likelihood of individuals' eBook usage. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 370 Generation Y students between the ages of 18 and 24, collecting data on a 6-point Likert scale. This study ensured that the data were valid and reliable before a conceptual model for the data was created. The variables used were environmental awareness, self-reported use, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and interest and intention to use.

The conceptual empirical model showed insufficient model fit and was therefore adapted to find the best fit. The model showed that environmental awareness, self-reported use, and perceived ease of use had a direct impact on both perceived usefulness, and interest and intention to use. Moreover, perceived usefulness had

an influence on interest and intention to use. The empirical model showed that several factors impact whether the Generation Y cohort makes use of eBooks. Thus, it would benefit industry leaders as well as universities to showcase the environmental benefits of using eBooks, demonstrate the ease with which eBooks can be used, and enhance the abilities of eBooks and software to improve the experience. The perceived usefulness could therefore increase, which could lead to higher intention to use and interest eBooks.

Key Words: attitude, eBooks, Generation Y, interest and intention.

JEL Classification: M31

1. INTRODUCTION

The cultural preference of reading printed media has remained stagnant for decades; even now, people prefer to use regular books instead of eBooks as innovation and cultural values compete (Hom, 2016; Walton, 2008). Thus, despite some making use of eBooks, printed books are in most cases far from disappearing or being replaced (Natale & Ballatore, 2016; Van der Velde & Ernst, 2009). However, in the future, as advantages to using eBooks become more popular, the traditional way of reading might become outdated (Thomas, 2011; Renner, 2007).

The first digital library for eBooks, namely Project Gutenburg, was created in 1971. This library was one of the first steps towards the modern eBook (Lebert, 2009) and would lead to contemporary eBook technology, which some have argued is the future of academia (Schwartz, 2012) as well as the future of reading (Jeong, 2012). The use and acceptance of eBooks have increased in academic, scientific and consumer sectors, mostly as it offers unparalleled access to knowledge, storage of high quantities of information as well as portability (Romero-Otero *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, education can be enhanced when received digitally through the use of eBooks (Picciano, 2012). In addition, students are more likely to use interactive features of digital texts, which could lead to better course outcomes (Berry *et al.*, 2010). Motivating students to read is important; therefore, piquing their interest through interactive content can prove vital (Taylor, 2011).

Despite that eBooks are digital in nature and therefore theoretically able to cross boundaries with ease (Wischenbart *et al.*, 2014), South Africa has been slow to make use of eBooks and its myriad of advantages, compared to developed nations (Wischenbart *et al.*, 2014; Akabor, 2013). Unfortunately, the eBook market within

South Africa has remained stagnant in the introduction stage as per the product life cycle (Lidwell *et al.*, 2010:150). This means that its significant potential has gone unused. As such, eBook markets stand to gain much ground, which is important to both readers and eBook publishers (Myburgh, 2013).

The Generation Y cohort is identified as one of the most prominent forces in the modern market place with a purchasing power that surpasses many other cohorts (Mafini *et al.*, 2014). Markert (2004) defines Generation Y as individuals who were born between 1986 and 2005. This generation was the first to be raised in a technology-driven, digitally connected world and therefore has very high expectations of technology (Sox *et al.*, 2014; Weidauer, 2012; DialogTech, 2016). Consequently, they are the ideal target market for eBooks. Generation Y accounted for 36 per cent of South Africa's population in 2018 (Statistics South Africa, 2018). This study specifically focussed on the student segment of the Generation Y cohort. According to Bevan-Dye *et al*. (2009), those with a tertiary qualification generally have a higher future earning potential and tend to attain greater role model status.

This study aimed to measure attitudes towards eBooks to build a structural model to explain the attitudes and behaviours of Generation Y students. Organisations such as universities and publishers can use this information to adapt their marketing strategies to better market and position eBooks amongst the Generation Y cohort. Moreover, the research can add to the scarce literature available regarding eBook preferences in South Africa, which might be used by organisations or academics to further their own research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The advent of the eBook is mostly attributed to Michael Hart, who uploaded the first eBook to the web in 1971. Although it was not accessible to most people, it laid the groundwork for an entirely new way of reading and engagement (Taylor, 2015). The eBook is the natural evolution of print to digital, which gives it a myriad of advantages over its print predecessor (Van der Velde & Ernst, 2009). These advantages include being able to search text, being available wherever the user has an internet connection or digital device, mobility, as well as taking up much less space than printed books (Jeong, 2012; Zinn & Langdown, 2011; Sharifabadi, 2006).

The attributes of eBooks provide theoretical advantages. However, as per the diffusion of the innovation process (Burton, 2012; Rogers, 2003), eBooks are taking much longer than many other products to diffuse to even the early majority

(PWC, 2017). Therefore, it is important that a method be adopted to reach the early adopters, early majority and, later, the late majority.

The technology acceptance model (TAM) has generally been used to predict behaviour regarding the acceptance of technology (Jin, 2014:472). When an eBook is regarded as easy to use and useful, it will be much more likely to be accepted and incorporated into one's daily life (Jin, 2014; Van der Velde & Ernst, 2009). Studies regarding the use of eBooks have been conducted across the world, namely in the Netherlands (Van der Velde & Ernst, 2009), Canada (Martin & Quan-Haase, 2011), South Korea (Jin, 2014) and Nigeria (Nwagwu & Okafor, 2014). However, in South Africa, data regarding eBooks are still limited. This study proposes a model in which perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are modeled in conjunction with self-reported use, environmental awareness and interest and intention to use.

Perceived usefulness (PU) essentially states that an individual will make use of a technology that will improve their lives in some way, be it personal, in studies or professionally (Khayati & Zouaoui, 2013). Moreover, it is a strong predictor to gauge behavioural intent (Padilla-Meléndez *et al.*, 2013). PU is relevant to eBooks based on the various advantages of digital reading material compared to a physical book.

Perceived ease of use (PEOU) is a subjective perception of the complexity of a given technology (Gerlach & Buxmann, 2013). Technologies that are generally easier to use and which have a clear indication of functions and benefits tend to be more readily adopted, compared to technologies that are seen as complex (Martin & Quan-Haase, 2013). Where eBooks are concerned, the case for PEOU can also be made, as Jin (2014) and Wiese and Du Plessis (2014) show that among those who perceive eBooks as easy to use, there is higher adoption thereof.

Intention to use is a part of the TAM framework, and looks at the link between acceptance and usage of technology. Thus, intention investigates the actual plan to use a product or service (Agrebi & Jallais, 2014). Interest and intention is an important variable in measuring the decision-making process, as it measures behavioural intention (Jung & Chan-Olmsted, 2012). Self-reported use looks at the actual use of a product or service, which can then show whether usage affects whether an individual will be interested to use it in the future (Perry, 2005; Horton *et al.*, 2001). This study used self-reported use to gauge whether Generation Y individuals used eBooks, firstly, and secondly, to ascertain whether their current

usage had any impact on whether they perceived them as useful. This, in turn, would determine whether they had any intention to use eBooks in the future.

Environmental awareness advocates that humanity should protect and preserve the world, due to the harm caused to the environment by human activity (Pachamama Alliance, 2014). Thus, a pro-environmental individual would act in a way that is pro-environment (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). However, the onus of pro-environmental behaviour also requires regulation, technology and more widespread environmental awareness globally (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011). There are many ways in which individuals can decrease their environmental footprint, of which using eBooks is one. The use of eBooks will result in fewer trees being felled for the making of paper (Eccleston, 2007). However, it is only when each individual makes use of more eBooks than regular books that a net positive impact can be seen, which is why it is important for eBooks to diffuse to the majority (Brown, 2013; Gattiker *et al.,* 2012; Jeong, 2012). This study hypothesised that environmental awareness is mediated by perceived usefulness, interest and intention to use (Metin, 2010).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The target population for this study was Generation Y individuals, aged between 18 and 24, registered at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in South Africa. The sampling frame consisted of the 26 registered HEIs in South Africa, of which two were selected in the Gauteng Province. The province is home to a high number of people and is the economic hub of South Africa (Alexander, 2017). A non-probability, convenience sample of 400 Generation Y students registered at the two HEIs was used to gather information. A self-administered questionnaire was used to gather data from the respondents. The adapted measuring scales that were used include: self-reported use (Perry, 2005; Horton *et al.*, 2001), perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Jin, 2014). Finally, their environmental awareness (Metin, 2010) and interest and intention to use eBooks (Jung *et al.*, 2012) were also included. The scaled responses were measured using a six-point Likert scale.

4. RESULTS

The demographics reported on in this study (Table 1) are age, gender, institution and province of origin.

Table 1: Sample description

Age	%	Gender	%	Institution	%	Province	%
18	7,8	Male	44,9	Traditional	52	Gauteng	58,4
19	17,6	Female	54,6	University of Technology	47,4	Mpumalanga	11,6
20	20,5	Missing	0,5	Missing	0,6	Free State	10,5
21	22,2					Other	5,1
22	15,9					North West	4,9
23	9,2					Northern Cape	4,6
24	4,1					KwaZulu-Natal	2,7
Missing	1,4					Eastern Cape	1,6
						Western Cape	0,3
						Missing	0,3

The average age of the respondents was 20.6 years and most respondents indicated that they were from the Gauteng Province. There were more female respondents (54.6%) than male respondents (44.9%). The respondents' HEI type was almost equally distributed with 52% of respondents' coming from a traditional university, while 47.2% were studying at a university of technology. Table 2 outlines the summary of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for all the scaled measures.

Table 2: Factors and Factor loadings

Scale	Factor	No. of items	Eigenvalues	Factor loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
IITU	Interest and intention to use	5	7.715	0.600 – 0.844	0.902
SRU	Self-reported use	4	2.303	0.738 – 0.849	0.870
PU	Perceived usefulness	3	1.569	0.730 – 0.845	0.903
PEOU	Perceived ease of use	3	1.336	0.655 – 0.866	0.828
EA	Environmental awareness	4	1.124	0.656 – 0.813	0.795

KMO = 0.891

Bartlett's test of sphericity (chi square = 4389.239, 171 dfs, $p \leq 0.01$)

The EFA returned a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.891 measure for sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's test of sphericity (chi square = 4389.239, 171 dfs, $p \leq 0.01$), indicating the factorability of the data. Furthermore, all of the extracted factors exhibited acceptable factor loadings (above 0.6) and Eigenvalues above 1. Additionally, internal consistency reliability is suggested by the Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7. The coefficients, tolerance values and VIFs are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation matrix and collinearity diagnostics

Factor	IITU	SRU	PU	PEOU	EA	Tolerance values	VIF values
IITU	1						
SRU	0.443**	1				0.785	1.274
PU	0.544**	0.450**	1			0.573	1.745
PEOU	0.510**	0.338**	0.565**	1		0.615	1.626
EA	0.444**	0.176**	0.422**	0.453**	1	0.752	1.330

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

CI = 14.694

The results of the correlation matrix show significance in a 2-tailed direction, with a positive weight for each variable as per expectation. Therefore, nomological validity can be inferred. Next, tolerance values and VIF levels are at acceptable levels (Hair *et al.*, 2014; Gaskin, 2011), suggesting that there are no serious multi-collinearity issues. The condition index of 14.694 is considered high in some circumstances; however, it is to be expected when multiple variables are tested.

The measurement model was run next. All variables covaried where the first loading on each factor was automatically set to 1. The result from the covaried model showed 190 distinct sample moments, and 48 distinct parameters to be estimated. This resulted in a degrees of freedom (df) of 142 and a chi-square value of 462.449. The probability level was 0.000.

Table 4 shows the standardised loading, error variance, *a*, CR, AVE and √AVE for the variables and items.

Table 4: Estimates for the measurement model

Latent factors	Standardised loadings	Error variance	*A*	CR	AVE	√AVE
IITU (F1)	0.730	0.533	0.902	0.833	0.500	0.707
	0.800	0.614				
	0.819	0.670				
	0.860	0.739				
	0.826	0.682				
SRU (F2)	0.704	0.496	0.870	0.799	0.500	0.707
	0.746	0.556				
	0.884	0.781				
	0.830	0.688				
PU (F3)	0.903	0.815	0.903	0.749	0.500	0.707
	0.946	0.895				
	0.773	0.598				
PEOU (F4)	0.713	0.509	0.828	0.749	0.500	0.707
	0.810	0.656				
	0.858	0.737				
EA (F5)	0.654	0.428	0.795	0.798	0.500	0.707
	0.737	0.543				
	0.811	0.658				
	0.615	0.379				
Correlations:	F1 ↔ F2	0.502		F2 ↔ F4	0.365	
	F1 ↔ F3	0.582		F2 ↔ F5	0.217	
	F1 ↔ F4	0.545		F3 ↔ F4	0.582	
	F1 ↔ F5	0.506		F3 ↔ F5	0.463	
	F2 ↔ F3	0.510		F4 ↔ F5	0.537	

As shown in Table 4, internal-consistency and composite reliability are evident as CR and *a* values exceed 0.700 for each factor. Convergent validity is also evident as CR values exceed 0.700 and AVE equals 0.500 in each case. Moreover, in each case, the correlation coefficients did not exceed √AVE, which implies that

discriminant validity is present. Next, model fit was assessed, and the following was found: IFI = 0.928, TLI = 0.913, CFI = 0.928, RMSEA = 0.076. SRMR = 0.067. Consequently, attitude towards eBooks is a five-factor model that shows internal-consistency reliability, composite reliability, construct validity and proper model fit. Based on the measurement model, a conceptual model was created that hypothesised that environmental awareness, self-reported use and perceived ease of use are mediated by perceived usefulness to interest and intention to use. The model fit for the conceptual model yielded the following results: IFI = 0.912, TLI = 0.896, CFI = 0.912, RMSEA = 0.084, SRMR = 0.092. As these results did not show adequate model fit, an adapted model was constructed to achieve model fit according to the data. The following model was hypothesised, where EA, SRU and PEOU are mediated by PU, but also affected IITU directly. Model fit for the second model is as follows: IFI = 0.926, TLI = 0.910, CFI = 0.926, RMSEA = 0.078, SRMR = 0.062. As the model shows adequate model fit, it is implied that attitude towards eBooks is a five-factor model where EA, SRU and PEOU are mediated to IITU through PU and influence IITU directly. The unstandardised and standardised regression coefficients, standard error estimates and p-values for the structural model are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Structural model estimates

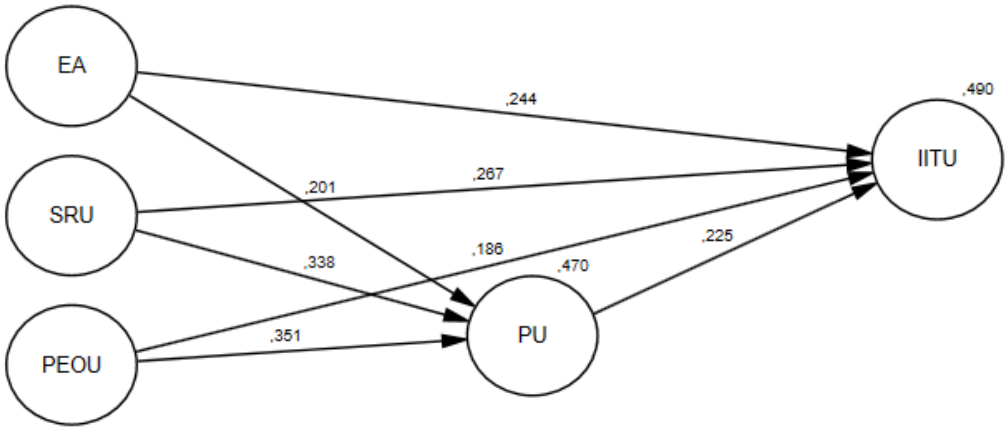
Paths	**Un-standardised β**	**β**	**SE**	***p***
EA → PU	0.299	0.201	0.090	0.00
SRU → PU	0.360	0.338	0.057	0.00
PEOU → PU	0.528	0.351	0.097	0.00
PU → IITU	0.176	0.225	0.051	0.00
EA → IITU	0.284	0.244	0.073	0.00
PEOU → IITU	0.219	0.186	0.079	0.01
SRU → IITU	0.223	0.267	0.048	0.00

β: beta coefficient; SE: standardised error; *p*: two-tailed statistical significance

As seen in Table 5, all regression paths were positive and statistically significant ($p \leq 0.01$). Environmental awareness ($\beta = 0.201$, $p < 0.01$), self-reported use ($\beta = 0.338$, $p < 0.01$) and perceived ease of use ($\beta = 0.351$, $p < 0.01$) have an effect on perceived usefulness. Perceived usefulness ($\beta = 0.225$, $p < 0.01$), environmental awareness ($\beta = 0.244$, $p < 0.01$), perceived ease of use ($\beta = 0.186$, $p \leq 0.01$) and self-reported use ($\beta = 0.267$, $p < 0.01$) have an effect on interest and intention to

use. The structural model with the standardised regression estimates are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Structural model



The combination of environmental awareness, self-reported use, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and interest and intention to use explain 49 per cent of variance according to the calculated squared multiple correlation coefficient.

5. CONCLUSION

The eBook industry in South Africa is currently diffusing at a very slow rate. This could change if the Generation Y cohort started using this technology and spread its benefits to the wider population in South Africa. The empirical model shows that several factors impact whether Generation Y students make use of eBooks. The growth of the eBook industry could be sparked if the environmental benefits of using eBooks are communicated in the marketing approach by eBook publishers. Furthermore, the results suggest that once the respondents had used eBooks (self-reported use), it would influence their perceptions regarding the usefulness of eBooks as well as their intention to use eBooks in the future. Publishers of eBooks should make trial versions of their books available to encourage students to use eBooks without any financial implications. Moreover, publishers should focus on the ease with which eBooks can be used, and enhance the abilities of eBooks and software to improve the experience. Publishers can also showcase the features of eBooks with “how-to” video guides. This might influence the perceptions regarding the ease of use of eBooks and the perceived

usefulness would increase, which could lead to higher intention and interest in using eBooks.

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