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# **The Driving Factors of Consumer Online Buying Behavior in South-Korean Golf Gear Industry**

A Socio-Cultural Perspective

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**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA****School of Marketing and Communication**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This study examines the impact of sociocultural factors on the intention to purchase in the context of South Korean online golf equipment retail. As digital commerce grows, it is increasingly important to understand how cultural and social factors influence consumer behavior in online environments.

The study focuses on key socio-cultural factors, such as social influence and symbolic value, as well as website-related factors, such as site reputation and perceived quality. The role of these factors is examined as part of the formation of consumers' purchase intentions.

The study will be conducted as a quantitative study, and data will be collected using a structured questionnaire. The data will be analyzed using statistical methods, such as correlation and regression analyses, to assess the relationships between variables. The study is based on a deductive approach, in which existing theories are applied to the selected context.

The results indicate that the influence of sociocultural factors is not uniform. Some factors influence purchase intention more clearly, while others have a lesser impact. The results suggest that in online shopping, consumer decision-making is strongly guided by individual assessments and trust-related factors.

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**KEYWORDS:** social influence, buying intention, purchase intention, socio-cultural factors, e-commerce, online buying behavior, digital commerce

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**VAASAN YLIOPISTO****School of Marketing and Communication**

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**TIIVISTELMÄ:**

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan sosio-kulttuuristen tekijöiden vaikutusta verkkokaupan ostoaikomukseen Etelä-Korean golfvälineiden verkkokaupan kontekstissa. Digitaalisen kaupankäynnin kasvaessa on yhä tärkeämpää ymmärtää, miten kulttuuriset ja sosiaaliset tekijät vaikuttavat kuluttajakäyttäytymiseen verkkoympäristöissä.

Tutkimuksessa keskitytään keskeisiin sosio-kulttuurisiin tekijöihin, kuten sosiaaliseen vaikutukseen, symboliseen arvoon sekä verkkosivustoon liittyviin tekijöihin, kuten sivuston maineeseen ja koettuun laatuun. Näiden tekijöiden roolia tarkastellaan osana kuluttajien ostoaikomuksen muodostumista.

Tutkimus toteutetaan kvantitatiivisena tutkimuksena, ja aineisto kerätään strukturoitua kyselylomaketta käyttäen. Aineisto analysoidaan tilastollisin menetelmin, kuten korrelaatio- ja regressioanalyysien avulla, jotta voidaan arvioida muuttujien välisiä yhteyksiä. Tutkimus perustuu deduktiiviseen lähestymistapaan, jossa olemassa olevia teorioita sovelletaan valittuun kontekstiin.

Tulokset osoittavat, että sosio-kulttuuristen tekijöiden vaikutus ei ole yhtenäinen. Osa tekijöistä vaikuttaa ostoaikomukseen selkeämmin, kun taas toisten merkitys jää vähäisemmäksi. Tulokset viittaavat siihen, että verkkokaupassa kuluttajien päätöksentekoa ohjaavat vahvasti yksilölliset arviot ja luottamukseen liittyvät tekijät.

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**AVAINSANAT:** social influence, buying intention, purchase intention, socio-cultural factors, e-commerce, online buying behavior, digital commerce

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## Abbreviations

TPB- Theory of Planned Behaviour  
 AI- Artificial Intelligence

# 1 Introduction

This chapter builds the background of the study step by step. Based on this, the research question and objectives are defined to clarify the focus and scope of the study. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the structure of the thesis to guide the reader through the following chapters.

## 1.1 Background of the Research

During the last few decades, digitalization has disrupted many industries, one of which is the sporting goods industry. Digitalization and electronic commerce together have enabled businesses to do cross-border business more easily than ever before. E-commerce refers to the business conducted electronically. The largest golf market in the world is the United States of America, with approximately 47 million people who have played golf in some way. Other large golf markets in the world are Asia, Europe, the United Kingdom, and Australia (R&A Global Golf Participation Report, 2023). The primary golf markets in Asia are in Japan and in South Korea. According to R&A Global Golf Participation report (2023, p.2.) there were 61.2 million adults engaged with golf in outside the United States and Mexico in 2023. The top five largest golf markets by 9-and 18-hole players (USA & Mexico excluded) are Japan, Canada, South Korea, England, and Germany (R&A Global Golf Participation report, 2023, p.7.). In Asia, there are approximately 26.2 million adults engaged with the sport of golf, and from that amount, 6.9 million comes from South Korea and 10.7 million comes from Japan (R&A Global Golf Participation report, 2024, p.19.). Thus, Japan and South Korea together account for around 61% of the whole golf market in Asia. By comparison, Europe has 20.3 million adults engaged in golf across approximately 44 countries in the European region (R&A Global Golf Participation Report, 2023, p. 25). To conclude, there is a huge market to be captured in Asia. For golf brands to successfully expand to the Asian market, they can grow significantly as a company, but also as a competitor in the golf industry.

In addition to the market potential, e-commerce plays a critical role for companies aiming to enter or deepen their presence in foreign markets. Online channels allow firms to bypass high entry barriers related with physical retail, such as distribution networks, local partnerships and store operations (Eriksson et al., 2019). Through e-commerce, firms can test market demand, adapt offerings and engage directly with consumers while collecting real-time data on preferences and behaviour (Park and Kim, 2003). However, success in cross-border e-commerce also requires understanding in local consumer decision-making processes.

Prior research on online buying behaviour has predominantly examined factors such as trust, perceived risk, usability, convenience and purchase intention, often treating culture as a background variable rather than a central explanatory factor (Ashman et al., 2015, Park and Kim, 2003, Pavlou and Fygenon, 2006). Moreover, much of the literature focuses on Western or multi-country samples, offering limited insight into culturally specific mechanisms (Zimu, 2023, Bray, 2008). This reveals a gap in understanding how socio-cultural factors such as collectivism, social influence, symbolic consumption and aging population shape online buying behaviour in culturally significant markets like South Korea. Addressing this gap justifies the focus of this study and motivates the research question. With a successful thesis, businesses can gain valuable insights, how to operate in the South-Korean market.

## **1.2 Research Question, Objectives and Delimitations**

**Research question:** What is the influence of socio-cultural factors in South Korean consumers online buying intention in the golf industry?

Socio-cultural factors are the social and cultural influences that shape how people think, behave and make decisions as consumers (Kotler and Keller, 2016). The RQ aims to explore how socio-cultural factors such as values, norms, collectivism, social identity and

cultural preferences affect buying intention in digital environments. In this context, buying intention is defined as the process through which consumers recognize needs, search for information, evaluate alternatives and make purchase decisions. Online buying behaviour is influenced by digital interactions, social influence and socio-cultural factors. Where culture and e-consumer behaviour meet, the study seeks to understand how cultural context shapes online consumer patterns especially in golf.

**The research objectives of this study:**

1. Identify the socio-cultural factors relevant to online buying behaviour in South Korea based on behavioural theories.
2. Analyse how socio-cultural factors affect consumers buying behaviour in online purchases.
3. Examine the importance of each socio-cultural factor in influencing South Korea's online buying behaviour for golf products.

The findings of this research can be valuable for enterprises planning to expand their e-commerce business to South Korea. This research will be taking a socio-cultural perspective to answer to the RQ and research objectives.

The purpose of this research is to explore the socio-cultural factors that influence consumer online buying behaviour, especially in South Korean golf gear industry. This thesis focuses on providing comprehensive understanding of consumer buying intention through e-commerce business and how does it reflect when it comes to golf gear purchasing behaviour and norms.

From managerial perspective, the purpose of the study is to provide valuable insights for e-commerce companies aiming to expand into Asian markets, in sporting industry like golf. The findings are intended to support businesses to enter a culturally sensitive communications, product positioning and customer engagement strategies to align with local consumer values for the best possible outcome.

From an academic perspective, this research aims to integrate socio-cultural dimensions into the research of online consumption on consumer behaviour and e-commerce. It seeks to extend theoretical understanding of how collectivism, social identity and symbolic consumption influences consumer buying behaviour in digital environments.

### **Delimitations**

In conducting this research, certain delimitations have been identified and applied to maintain focus, feasibility and relevance. These delimitations define the scope of the research and at the same time hinders its capability to apply it for other purposes.

This research is focused to South Korea, which is a significant part of Asian market for golf gears (Statista, 2025). Limiting the study geographically can enable a more focused analysis, but it also constrains the possibility to generalize the findings to other Asian countries, especially from the socio-cultural perspective. The research can deeply explore specific local norms like high-context communication and the preference for domestic platforms such as Naver and Coupang.

The research solely investigates the golf gear industry and specifically online behaviour in golf gear. This niche focus allows the study to address the unique symbolic value of golf and e-commerce in South Korea, where the sport often represents social prestige, professional success, and lifestyle aspiration. It allows the investigation to bypass broader sporting goods trends and instead focus on high-capital.

The study prioritizes socio-cultural factors as the primary explanatory variables for online buying behaviour. By focusing on "how" and "why" consumers buy based on their social environment, the study provides a deeper psychological profile of the Korean consumer beyond only usability or price-consciousness.

Frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, acts as analytical tools to interpret data rather than as subjects for empirical testing. These models are used as "lenses" to structure and explain the observed behaviours in the South Korean market. Using these as a guide rather than testing the theories themselves ensures the research remains an applied study of the South Korean golf industry.

By establishing these delimitations, the study can be specified in analyzing socio-cultural factors influencing online buying behaviour.

### **1.3 Structure of the Research**

This thesis is structured into five chapters with subchapters, each contributing to addressing the research question and supporting the overall research objectives.

Chapter 1 introduces the study by presenting the research background and context. It defines the research problem and outlines the research question, objectives and delimitations. The chapter establishes the relevance of examining socio-cultural factors in online consumer behaviour, particularly within the South Korean golf gear industry.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical foundation of the study. It reviews relevant literature on online consumer behaviour, socio-cultural influences and e-commerce around golf gear. Key theoretical frameworks, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Hofstede's Cultural dimensions are discussed and used to explain consumer decision-making. Based on the literature, the research hypotheses are developed to guide the empirical analysis. These theoretical frameworks are used to understand the South Korean culture more thoroughly.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology. It explains the chosen research approach and research design, as well as the data collection method and sampling process. The chapter also describes the operationalization of variables and the statistical methods used in the analysis. In addition, considerations related to reliability, validity, and research ethics are addressed.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the collected data, discusses and interprets the results. The results of the online survey are analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression analysis. The findings are structured according to the research hypotheses in order to examine the relationships between socio-cultural factors and online purchase intention providing a deeper understanding of how socio-cultural factors influence online buying behaviour in the South Korean golf gear industry.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings and providing a direct answer to the research question. It further presents the implications of the study, discusses its limitations and offers suggestions for future research.

## **2 Theoretical Foundations and Online Consumer Behaviour**

This section of literature review aims to explain the consumer behaviour around e-commerce and sporting industry in South Korea utilizing theories and empirical studies. By doing so, this chapter intends to build a strong basis for answering the central RQ of socio-cultural role in South Korean consumers online buying decisions.

The models and frameworks presented in this study are used as analytical tools to explain, structure and interpret online buying behaviour. Process-oriented model Theory of Planned Behaviour model is used to identify key stages in the purchase process, while socio-cultural frameworks, including Hofstede's cultural dimensions, support the analysis of cultural influences such as collectivism and social norms. These frameworks guide the interpretation of findings rather than being empirically tested.

Consumer buying behaviour has been a central field of research for a long time especially in marketing and business environments (Ashman, 2015), with theories seeking to simplify and explain how consumers recognize needs, evaluate options and eventually make a purchase decision. These theories are often used by businesses to understand and explain the target consumer behaviour to gain market advantage (Lim et al., 2016). While early research often describes the decision-making process as rational and linear. However, the growth of e-commerce has introduced new elements, such as trust in digital platforms, peer influence through online reviews and the role of technology adoption in shaping consumer choices (Dennis et al., 2009).

### **2.1 Behavioural and Attitudinal Theories**

#### **Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)**

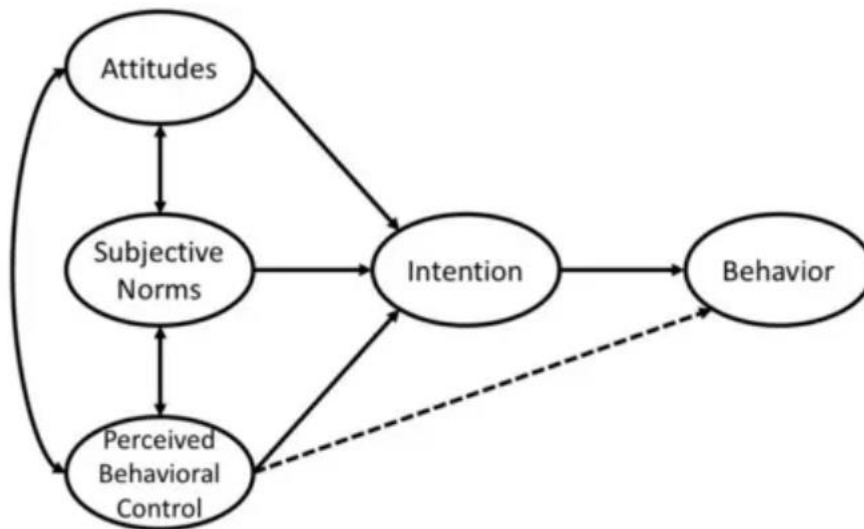
Behavioural and attitudinal theories aim to explain the core motivations and intentions that drive consumer actions. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) developed by Ajzen

in 1991, is well known framework in psychological and human behaviour areas (Hagger and Hamilton, 2025).

TPB suggests that consumer intentions are shaped by attitudes towards the behaviour, subject norms and perceived behaviour control (Ajzen, 2005). Attitudes towards the behaviour are established from one's perception of beliefs, how does a person feel about doing something. In online environments, positive attitudes, such as viewing online shopping as convenient, time-saving and offering better product variety can significantly increase the likelihood of purchase intention (Pavlou and Fygenson, 2006). In contrast, negative attitudes are tied to risk, privacy or product uncertainty, which can discourage online purchases.

Subject norms such as social pressure and expectation from people around us, shapes our general thinking of good and bad which furthermore influences our behaviour. In digital environments, social influence through reviews, ratings and social media endorsements heavily affects purchase decisions (Lim et al., 2016).

Perceived behaviour control refers to one's confidence of how much control a person has over performing a behaviour. It reflects one's skills, ability, information, and environmental challenges (Ajzen, 2005).



**Figure 1.** Theory of Planned Behaviour (Sansom, 2021).

According to TPB, humans motivate their act based on what we think, what others expect and what we believe we can do (Ajzen, 2005). When it comes to online buying behavior, these three dimensions are crucial since combined, they determine behavioural intention.

However, the model assumes that individuals behave rationally and aims to predict the actual behaviour. Yet, studies around consumer behaviour indicates that online purchases are often driven by impulsivity, emotional state and motivation rather than rational evaluation (Verplanken and Herabadi, 2001). In a digital environment, consumers are constantly exposed to targeted advertising, social media endorsement and influencer marketing, which can trigger emotional and even spontaneous purchase decisions (Lim et al., 2016).

### **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs proposes that humans have a hierarchy that is driven by five levels of needs, the basic psychological needs such as food and safety, placed at the bottom and complex psychological needs such as recognition and self-actualization at the top (Mcleod, 2025). The needs down in the hierarchy must be satisfied in order

to achieve higher needs, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Mcleod, 2025). The hierarchy goes as follows:

1. Physiological needs explain the basic survival needs of food, shelter, water etc.
2. Safety needs explain security, health and stability.
3. Love and Belonging explain the need for friendship, family and community.
4. Esteem explains the need for respect, recognition, freedom and confidence.
5. Self-actualization explains the desire for personal potential and self-fulfillment.



**Figure 2.** Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Bering, 2024).

In consumer behaviour, these levels explain why people buy, not just only what they buy. Maslow's framework has been widely adopted to understand how different levels of needs can influence purchasing behaviour, especially in markets where symbolic value and self-expression are significant (Kotler and Keller, 2016). For example, brands like Apple and Nike are constantly referring to consumers needs from basic needs like product reliability to esteem and self-actualization through branding,

customer experience and status (Meshram, 2023). It can also explain and categorize the different needs of each person, for instance, consumers in China's rural areas might have different needs than those in the coastal big cities. Moreover, the needs of the consumers can be predictable from Maslow's framework perspective (Mcleod, 2025). For example, a rapidly growing area can also reflect to the hierarchical growing needs.

In the context of online consumer behaviour, the hierarchy of needs can provide a useful perspective how digital environments influence in psychological and social needs beyond the actual use of a product (Kotler and Keller, 2016). As online platforms continuously analyze consumption experiences, factors like trust, social belonging and self-expression becomes critical to understanding consumer behaviour (Kim et al., 2018).

Physiological and safety needs can be reflected to consumers desire for security and assurance in online transactions and the product itself that it matches the description of the product. Park and Kim (2003) states that website reliability, authenticity of products and secure payment systems significantly influence online purchase decisions in East Asian markets. However, while these factors are significant, it might not be the most relevant factors to focus on, especially when applied to consumers with evolved digital literacy and trust in e-commerce ecosystems like South-Korea (Almoussa, 2013). On the other hand, digital maturity can shift the focus toward conveniency, brand reputation and social influences. Meshram (p. 644, 2023), reminds that: "The rise of digital technology has introduced new dimensions to consumer needs, such as digital security, virtual social interactions, and online self-expression. Modern adaptations of Maslow's theory need to account for these technological influences."

When it comes to love and belonging needs, social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram where most companies operate to engage with consumers, directly affect to

the needs of social interaction, connection and community-building. It is a digital way to enhance and maintain relationships (Meshram, 2023).

## **2.2 Online Consumer Behaviour**

Online consumer behaviour refers to the process where consumers search, evaluate and purchase products or services over the internet, also referred as e-consumer behaviour (Dennis et al., 2009). Online shopping provides consumers a greater access to information and product options. In contrast, it will also increase the importance of understanding how it will change their behaviour. For a long time, researchers have been aware that shopping is also about the experience, enjoyment and entertainment rather than just buying the product, and it also applies to e-shopping (Ashman et al., 2015).

With the rise of digital technologies and e-commerce, a significant difference has occurred between online consumer behaviour (e-consumer behaviour) and traditional consumer behaviour (Dennis et al., 2009). While both involve similar purchasing patterns, the environment, influencing factors and consumer motivation can differ significantly.

Traditional consumer behaviour is highly related to physical environments such as retail stores and word of mouth. The decision-making process is influenced by tangible and interpersonal factors like personal needs, face-to-face communication and the ability to inspect products physically (Kotler and Keller, 2016).

In contrast, e-consumer behaviour takes place in a virtual environment, where there is no possibility for physical interactions. Instead, the online environment focuses on satisfying these needs through online reviews, social media and websites influencing to consumers both social belonging and esteem needs by community engagement and personalized experiences (Meshram, 2023). However, despite the convenience and

personalization that online environments offer, research suggests that trust and perceived risk still remains major barriers to online purchasing behaviour (Raza and Nikhat, 2023). Park and Kim (2003) argues that, online trust must be established through website visuals, security assurances, brand reputation and third party reviews. Therefore, the absence of physical presence is replaced with symbolic and technological signals (Raza and Nikhat, 2023).

Yim et al., (2021) state that sport consumers are more engaged with social commerce with their sports consumption. Farivar et al. (2017) mentioned that in social commerce, consumers perceived trust is one of the most important factors affecting consumer behaviour. Looking back, it was stated multiple times that trust is an important factor for consumers to have for a purchase to be successfully completed. Moreover, Chiu et al. (2023) found in their study that consumers who adopt information are more likely to make a purchase when compared to consumers who don't adopt information. More importantly, the study found that the credibility and quality of the sporting goods-related shared information in social media acts as a threshold for the usefulness of the information, and thus for purchase decisions.

Online consumers are exposed to huge amount of information, allowing them to compare alternatives and increase the overall competition (Kalia et al., 2023). This has categorized the consumers to so called "empowered consumers", which are more aware, less brand loyal and more price-conscious (Accenture, 2024). However, this has also led to choice overload reducing decision satisfaction and complicate the decision-making process. E-consumer behaviour tends to be driven by utilitarian motivations like convenience, time saving, efficiency and affordability (Dennis et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the role of social influence in online context is significant. These influences are online reviews and social media engagement, which have been shown to strongly influence purchase intentions (Ahn, and Lee, 2024). Consumers seek virtual belonging and community engagement through online reviews, brand communities and social

media interactions. Together with easily accessible information, it will amplify the reach and social influence of the social and esteem needs, allowing peer recommendations and influencer marketing to shape consumer perceptions globally (Galdon et al., 2024). Moreover, it is found that influencers like-mindedness with consumers, have strong ties to shaping influencers and consumers relationship. Hence, this can have an impact on the purchasing intention. However, such online influences can sometimes lack authenticity as fake reviews and information, raising concerns about the credibility of online environments.

### **2.3 Internal and External Cultural Factors**

Culture is a fundamental factor of consumer behaviour. It is strongly connected to shared values, norms and practices that determines people's attitudes and behaviours (Zimu, 2013). According to Rachwal-Mueller and Fedotova (2024), cultural factors can be divided into internal (micro) and external (macro) factors. Internal factors that influence the consumer behaviour are values and beliefs, religion and moral principles, language and communication style, and education and knowledge systems.

Values and beliefs provide the foundation for how consumers perceive products, needs and evaluate alternatives (Rachwal-Mueller and Fedotova, 2024). It guides what consumers perceive as desirable and appropriate differentiating consumers.

Closely connected to values are religion and moral principles, which guide ethical behaviour and social responsibility (Zimu, 2013). These moral frameworks can influence preferences for brands and products perceived as ethical, transparent and socially responsible (Rachwal-Mueller and Fedotova, 2024).

Language and communication styles play a key role in explaining and interpreting cultural meaning. For example, in high-context cultures like South Korea, communication relies in subtle cues, shared common understanding and indirect

messages (Nickerson, 2023). These factors can affect how marketing messages, product descriptions and consumer reviews are received at the same time highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive communication. Furthermore, it could make marketing, market penetration and consumer behaviour unpredictable and could result unintentionally unwanted results (Wang et al., 2019).

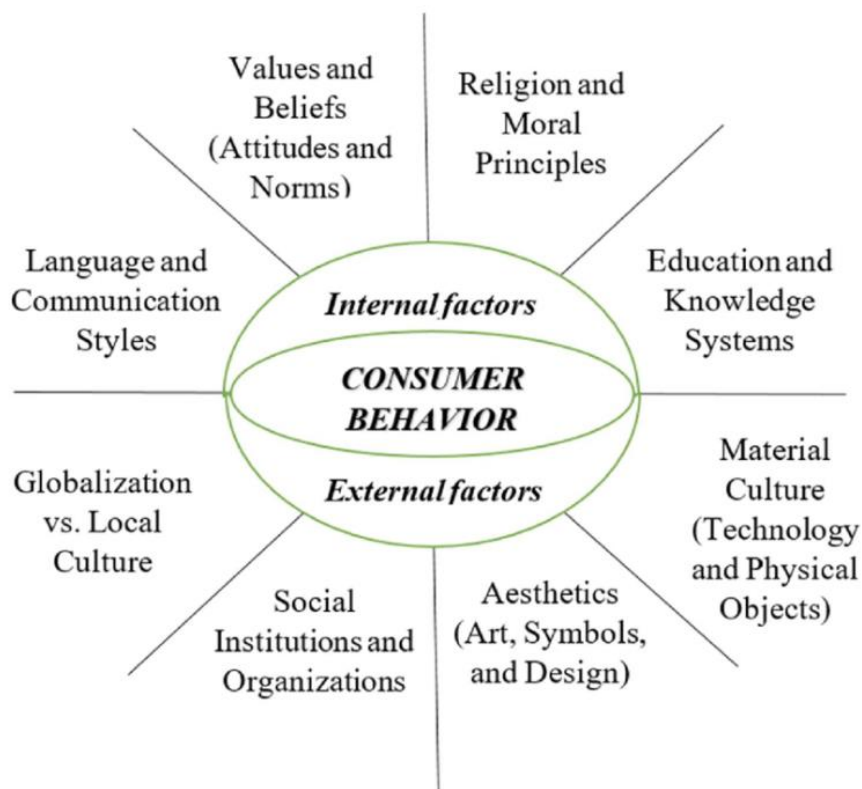
Education and knowledge systems refers to the consumers way to process information. Highly educated consumers adopt a more informed and analytical consumer behaviour including careful research and critical evaluation before making a purchase decision (Lim et al., 2016). It is also found that education interacts with values, moral principles and communication norms, creating consumer to not only seek quality and functionality, but also credibility, authenticity and same values from products and brands (Kotler and Keller, 2016).

External factors are globalization vs local culture, social institutions and organizations, aesthetics, and material culture. External cultural factors refer to broader social, economic and environmental factors that shape consumer behaviour by influencing norms, expectations and interactions in society (Rachwal-Mueller and Fedotova, 2024). The tension between globalization and local culture separates the population into those who are exposed to international brands and lifestyle, while local cultural traditions continue to shape how these global offerings are perceived and adopted (Tsai et al., 2021).

Social institutions and organizations like family, education, networks and community organizations influence consumption norms and social expectations. Individuals learn which behaviours, brands and products are considered appropriate and social approval often guides choices, especially where status and recognition are valued (Hofstede, 2016).

Aesthetics refers to visuals and stylistic aspects of a product and marketing communication visuals. Cultural preferences for certain shapes, colours, styles or designs affect product attractiveness (Rachwal-Mueller and Fedotova, 2024). For example, red colour is deeply linked to luck and joy during celebration in Chinese culture (Xu, 2024).

Material culture refers to physical products, technologies and artifacts that have symbolic meanings embedded into them. They are tools and ways for consumers to express their identity, status and lifestyle (Xu, 2024). Artefacts can serve as a meaning of achievement, taste or belonging. For instance, golf expresses discipline, control, self-improvement and community, mirroring one's identity further into broader social life (Chang, 2025).



**Figure 3.** Internal and External Cultural Factors (Rachwal-Mueller and Fedotova, 2024).

Internal factors shape consumer preferences and attitudes, while external factors focus in purchasing behaviour. This framework encourages companies to adapt to both global trends and regional features.

## **2.4 Collectivism and Social Influence in South Korea**

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory provides a useful framework for understanding how cultures affect the values and behaviours of a society. According to the framework, South Korea scores high in collectivism and uncertainty avoidance and low in individualism. Collectivism is the practice of placing the groups priorities over the individual (Cho, 2024). Individualistic culture like Germany likely react to direct and low-context communication, whereas collectivist cultures like South Korea tend to respond to indirect, high-context communication and social norms (Kong et al., 2021). They often lean towards social harmony, community acceptance and risk reduction making it one of the most collectivist societies in the world (Hofstede, 2011). This has multiple key factors in explaining their consumer behaviour. As a result, South Korean consumers often rely on social cues, reviews and endorsements when making purchase decisions (Cho, 2024).

In South Korea, subjective norms are particularly important due to the collectivist nature of the culture, where social harmony and group consensus are highly valued. Subjective norms refers to the social pressure towards shaping one's behaviour based on the individual's motivation to comply with social expectations (Cho, 2024). Research shows that Korean consumers are often guided by peer recommendations, online influencers, and community-based discussions when making purchasing decisions (Kim, Han & Lee, 2013). However, Cho (2024) brings up that, Korean society expect its members to fit in and most of the Koreans think that it is the correct way to live their life. In contrast, individualistic cultures like the US and Germany, act based on their own motivation and personalities. According to these statements, it can be more effective to influence the whole group, rather than individuals when it comes to marketing and consumer

behaviour. The social needs are more important to collectivism culture rather than others (Nickerson, 2013). Collectivist consumers rely more on social connections and unity before making a purchase decision (Zimu, 2023).

South Korea also being an uncertainty avoidance culture, they embrace a more cautious and skeptical behaviour, requiring higher level of reassurance and certainty (Hofstede, 2011). Due to the collectivism features, they are more likely to seek assurance and certainty from online reviews, recommendations and family/friend networks. It is argued that the reason for their trust for each other in collectivist culture, relies in their individual reputation (Cho,2024). For example, the one giving recommendations places a great value on their reputation to give reliable opinions and experiences for the one seeking for social proof. Otherwise, their reputation can be stained for not being helpful. As a group, this enhances group consensus. However, Han (2021) notes that collectivist behaviour can lead to standardized consumption pattern, where consumers prefer established brands that align with social expectations. On the other hand, it increases behaviour predictability but make it challenging for new brands.

For industries like golf gear, these socio-cultural dynamics are especially relevant. Golf in South Korea can be reflected to a symbol of social prestige, professional success, and lifestyle aspiration and can be explained by collectivism culture. The products associated with it, carry both functional and symbolic meanings that reflect deeper cultural values. Understanding how these socio-cultural forces shape online consumer behaviour is therefore crucial for foreign companies seeking to enter and compete in the South Korean market. Still, not to exclude the significance and importance of PESTLE (political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, legal and environmental) factors in shaping consumer behaviour.

### **3 Online Shopping Behaviour in South Korea Golf Industry**

South Korea has one of the most advanced e-commerce ecosystems globally in the world. It is fuelled by its high internet usage, mobile consumer habits, and strong logistics infrastructure. The country's fast digitalization and collectivist culture have together shaped definite online buying behaviours, where technological trust, convenience, and social validation strongly influence purchase intentions. Building on the theoretical discussion in section 2.2, this part explores how these cultural and technological dimensions show in South Korean online shopping behaviour and their implications for industries such as golf gear.

#### **3.1 Growth and Development of E-commerce in South Korea**

South Korea is a highly digital environment, and it is one of the world's leaders in technology (Eriksson et al., 2019). E-commerce is important in South Korea, as in 2017 the country had the highest level of e-commerce usage in the whole Asia Pacific region at 74%, and it was ranked as the third largest e-commerce market globally, 16% of South Korea's retail sales coming from online (Eriksson et al., 2019). One e-commerce booster in South Korea, which is one of the world's leaders in IT infrastructure and high-speed technology, has been the high usage of the internet (Eriksson et al., 2019). Lee et al. (2024) stated that since 2015, the online sales in South Korea had grown by 320% due to new technological advancements, such as the adoption of payment technologies, advancements in logistics infrastructure, and the growth of mobile platforms. To further explain the growth, Chun et al. (2024) mentioned that during the last decade, South Korean online buying was increasing approximately 1.5 % points per year; however, after the Covid-19 outbreak, the country's online sales grew by 2.5% points, which equals approximately one and a half years of growth in a few months. The pandemic thus assisted with the increase of e-commerce in South Korea and likely in other countries as well.

To understand more about South Korea's large e-commerce economy, the revenue stream has to be located. Kim (2023) mentioned that in 2021, the largest e-commerce platforms in South Korea, Kakao and Naver, were both in the top 10 by market capitalization in South Korea. Further, in 2018, the Korean search engine Naver had more annual visitors than Google, which is the largest search engine in the world. Eriksson et al. (2019) found that in 2018, in South Korea, Naver had almost 30 million annual visitors, whereas Google had only 13 million annual visitors. This pattern reflects South Koreans' preference for familiar, domestically developed platforms, consistent with earlier discussions on collectivism and cultural trust in local institutions. As mentioned earlier, technological advancements and a strong infrastructure on logistics have been important factors in the growth of e-commerce in South Korea. The culture has also played an important role in the growth of e-commerce. South Korea's high trust and collectivistic culture together have improved confidence in domestic platforms, while social expectations have forced companies to perfect fast delivery and better customer satisfaction (Eriksson et al., 2019; Hofstede, 2011).

### **3.2 Consumer Attitudes Toward Online Shopping**

This chapter will go through the South Korean consumer attitudes towards online shopping. As seen earlier, South Korea has a large internet usage and e-commerce. It is a wealthy country, and in 2024, from the approximate total sales volume in South Korea of 648 trillion Korean won, 259 trillion came from online shopping (Jobst, 2025). When converted to USD and EUR, the e-commerce sales accounted for €156 billion EUR and \$181 billion USD out of the whole €391 billion EUR, and \$455 billion USD. Thus, the online sales account for almost 40% of the total sales in South Korea.

A study by Baganzi et al. (2019) found that perceived trust, benefits, and website quality in South Korea are important factors influencing consumer attitudes. The study found that trust comes from perceived website quality, benefits and electronic word of mouth. Trust was found to be the most important factor influencing consumer attitudes

in online shopping in Korea. Second most important factor in the study was perceived benefits, which refer to ease of use, time and cost savings, and fast delivery. Finally, the study also found that perceived website quality had an important effect on consumer attitudes. Positive website quality fostered electronic word of mouth, which led to increased trust (Baganzi et al., 2019).

To further understand the importance of consumer attitudes, another study by Zimu (2023) reinforced that the social influence in consumer behaviour, especially in collectivistic cultures, such as Korea, is heavily influenced by social media influencers, reviews, and friends and family. The study also found that the use of native language, cultural symbols, and communication style can increase consumer trust.

Further, to tie the culture and colours, it is important to know what each colour symbolizes. White website backgrounds can thus feel familiar and therefore bring trustworthiness for Korean consumers. Furthermore, as discussed, design and website quality can influence perceived trust within Korean consumers.

In addition to cultural symbols and social influence, age differences can impact online shopping attitudes. Younger generations have an easier adaptation to online shopping when compared to older people. According to a survey by Statista (2024), 100% of the respondents aged 20-49 had previously used online shopping, and the number was still high 86.6% out of respondents aged 50-59. However, out of respondents aged 60-69, the percentage was under 50%, and the percentage was under 20% for the respondents over 70 years old. The data supports that younger generations are more adaptive to online shopping, whereas older people seem to have more challenges in online shopping as the online shopping experience gradually decreases with older age. South-Korea as a rapidly aging population with median age being 46 in 2025 with projections until 2050 being 57 (Statista, 2025), this might raise a significant challenge for e-commerce businesses. Consumer age play a significant role in South Korea's online buying behaviour especially as an aging population.

### 3.3 Socio-Cultural Influences on Online Shopping

Continuing from the theoretical foundations in section 2.1, and the socio-cultural factors in section 2.2, this section will analyse how the socio-cultural factors have an influence on consumer behaviour in online environments in South Korea. As found earlier, according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, South Korea scores high in collectivism and uncertainty avoidance, indicating that many Koreans rely on reviews and others' feedback.

A study by Wang et al. (2019) found that in collectivistic cultures, companies should focus more on the aesthetics of the product (design, looks, feels etc.). In contrast, in individualistic cultures, the ads could be focused more on the product usability. The same study also noted that in collectivistic cultures, in online consumer reviews, consumers want to align with the group rather than give individual feedback on the product. Thus, in collectivistic cultures, reviews and marketing strategies emphasizing community approval and agreed satisfaction can perform better.

As seen earlier, South Korea is also a country with higher uncertainty avoidance. Belkhamza and Wafa (2019) mentioned that in countries with high uncertainty avoidance, individuals are uncomfortable in uncertain and ambiguous situations, and individuals in these cultures are not likely to engage in online shopping when compared to cultures with low uncertainty. Furthermore, in South Korea, for an effective and positive online shopping experience, consumers seek to have a feeling of trust. As mentioned, trust can come from online reviews, electronic word of mouth, and friends and family.

From the earlier discussions, we saw that the sport of golf in South Korea is not only a sport, but it also symbolises wealth, success, and aspiration. In eastern cultures, like in South Korea, individuals tend to buy certain products to showcase that they belong to the group, and to respond to social pressures (Cha & Kwon, 2018). Cha & Kwon (2018)

noticed from their study and from previous studies that self-identity in Korea and other collectivistic countries can be formed by observing others being. Golf seems to still be a respected sport in South Korea; however, it is nowadays more accessible for everyone rather than only for businessmen (Chang, 2025).

Coe & Lee (2006) demonstrated how Samsung partnered with Tesco and developed a localization strategy for successful market entry. Samsung helped Tesco enter the market. Localization can reduce uncertainty and build trust with consumers, especially in countries with high uncertainty avoidance. Eriksson et al. (2019) demonstrated how Korean search engines were most used when compared to, for example, Google. That is another demonstration of how cultural factors can influence consumer behaviour. Foreign brands can cause more uncertainty, whereas domestic brands will give a feeling of trust and certainty. However, Kwon and Lee (2011) argued that foreign brands' perceived globalness positively influenced consumer behaviour. Additionally, Baek et al. (2017) also demonstrated that a foreign brand's perceived globalness positively influenced consumers' purchase intention. Tsai et al. (2021) found in their study that a foreign brand's localization in South Korea improved its perceived quality and prestige. The same study also demonstrated that the effect of globalness would become less prominent for brands with affordability as a competitive advantage.

### **3.4 Challenges in South Korean E-commerce**

While South Korea has one of the most advanced e-commerce ecosystems in the world, there are still a variety of different challenges that need to be taken into account. The challenges can range from consumer expectations to domestic competition to logistical issues. In order for a successful e-commerce business in South Korea, the barriers must be understood to avoid any inconvenient bottlenecks. As mentioned previously, the e-commerce market in South Korea already has a strong foundation, with the market being dominated by the domestic platforms like Gmarket, Naver, and Coupang. Kim et

al. (2011) argued in their study that for a business to have successful e-commerce in South Korea, customers need to feel trustworthy.

Kim (2024) claimed in a case study of online service users in South Korea that one of the challenges in e-commerce, especially in South Korea, is personal identity proofing. The same case study showed that in the Republic of Korea, each person is assigned a resident registration number at birth. Moreover, the number is an individual's personal identity number, which they can use to identify themselves when making purchases online. For foreign businesses, this information can be used to improve customer satisfaction by including a box on the website where citizens can identify themselves. For foreign brands, to avoid any bottlenecks, an understanding around South Korean legislation is evident.

Another thing to consider as a challenge is the expectations of the consumers. Yoo et al. (2023) found in their study that customer satisfaction and shopping loyalty have a positive and significant relationship. The same study claimed that fulfilling customer needs leads to customer satisfaction, which creates loyalty. Kim and Yum (2024) found in their study that e-commerce platforms should focus on customer satisfaction. Furthermore, in the study, one critical factor of customer satisfaction was found to be service quality. Therefore, a strong emphasis on service quality should also be placed on.

As mentioned previously, trust is an important feeling for customers to have in association with the purchasing process. Therefore, for foreign brands trying to enter South Korean e-commerce market, they could focus on providing trust for the consumers. Moreover, foreign brands should thus study how collectivism might be seen in the culture, and how the information can assist with building the e-commerce platform. Berqvist and Zhou (2016) argued that consumers are more likely to evaluate products more positively if those are approved by the people which they consider credible. For foreign brands, one way for a successful entry could be a joint venture. Additionally, for consumers to feel trust, the company could use social media

influencers or other credible people such as golf professionals to review and play with the products. Shin et al. (2013) found in their study that in the Korean online e-commerce context communication is important because it helps consumers to communicate their perceptions to others. If consumers have trouble in communicating, they might go to a different store. Consumer trust and commitment were also found to have a positive relationship with repurchase intentions. Thus, with good customer satisfaction, the customer is likely to visit the store again rather than go to another store, as the positive experience has already been achieved.

### **3.5 Golf and Sporting Gear Market in South Korea**

The South Korean golf market is the second largest in Asia, right after Japan. R&A's global golf participation report reported approximately 20.3 million golfers in Asia, from which 10.7 million were from Japan, and 6.7 million in South Korea. Moreover, the two countries account for approximately 85% of the whole golf market in Asia. Even though South Korea has around 6.7 million golfers, there are only around 191 thousand registered golfers in the country, of which 159.4 thousand are men, and 29.4 thousand are women. Moreover, the number of registered golfers in Korea has decreased approximately 10% since 2023.

Until the 1990s, golf was recognized as a sport of high-profile businessmen, available only for the elite (Chang, 2025). However, everything changed after the 1998 Women's US Open when, at the time, a South Korean rookie, Se Ri Pak, was seen on TV. Since that moment, the South Korean golf market has grown, and the game is nowadays available for almost everyone (Chang, 2025). LPGA (2025) also added that Se Ri Pak works as an inspiration for many generations in South Korea. Furthermore, Lee and Lee (2025) mentioned that in South Korea, golf has become a popular free-time sport due to social networking and self-actualization.

As seen from R&A's global golf participation report, the majority of South Korean registered golfers are men, and only a small portion are women. To understand this more, golf can be looked back to the late 1900s. As mentioned, South Korea is a very collectivistic and hierarchical country. Like Chang (2025) mentioned, until the 1990s, golf was seen as a sport for only the elite businessmen. Thus, golf has only then started to be more available for everyone, and females are slowly starting the sport as well. According to R&A's 2024 global golf participation report, South Korea has 2346 registered junior golfers.

Miller (2022) reported that South Koreans spend more per capita on golf equipment than any other country in the world. In the same article, Miller stated that Asia has already become the centre for women professionals. South Korea has many talented women professionals. Inside the women's top 30 players in the world, there are 6 players from South Korea, of which 1 is inside the top 10 players in the world (LPGA.com, 2025). That is very impressive as in the men's top 30 in the world, there are no players, the current best Sungjae Im at 36 (OWGR, 2025). South Korean women golfers thus have more success in terms of world rankings.

The general interest in sports has been growing in South Korea due to the economic growth (Roh & Chang, 2022). Roh and Chang (2022) state that social stratification and gender are critical factors in choosing sports, and that individuals in higher economic classes typically play sports such as tennis and golf, because they are symbolically connected to the higher class. Gemar (2021) states that social stratification has a role in defining the sport and its continuity. Roh and Chang (2022) found in their study that South Korean people play different sports in different economic categories. For example, the study showed that only the top class of people, who earn approximately 4000 USD or more monthly, play sports such as tennis and golf, whereas the low category with an income of under 3000 USD and without a higher-level educational degree tend to play gateball. The study also showed that golf as a sport is kept as a masculine and high-capital sport. The finding also helps to understand why there are so many more men

playing golf in South Korea than women. The findings from the study show that women prefer to play more feminine sports such as yoga and dance sports. Roh and Chang (2022) state based on the results, sports played by men and women are divided by income, education, and occupation, which are associated with social stratification. For foreign golf companies entering the market, it could be rational to focus on the upper, upper-middle-class men. Another thing to consider is the product. As golf is kept as a high capital and very masculine sport in South Korea, the product has to be localized to meet those needs.

### **3.6 Role of Socio-Cultural Factors in Golf Gear Consumption**

Consumers can be studied by their golf gear consumption. Especially in South Korea, where belonging to a society is crucial, the reason for choosing specific golf gear can be understood by socio-cultural factors. Buying decisions are not rushed, and social influence has the power to influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Kongsompong et al., 2009). As seen previously, golf is kept as a masculine and high-capital sport in South Korea. Moreover, people with better occupations might ask and choose similar products to their colleagues due to the collectivistic culture in South Korea. In her research, Buja (2016) mentioned that South Korea has a higher power distance score, meaning that there is a larger gap between rich and poor, and a gap between social positions, meaning that there is a level of hierarchy which people respond to respectfully. The same study also noted that South Korea is not a masculine country, showing that there isn't a large social hierarchy between male and females.

As South Korea is still viewed more collectivistic country, screen golf still maintains social values by allowing people to belong together. According to Statista (2025), the revenue from golf equipment in 2025 totals to approximately USD 589\$ million. Furthermore, Suh (2024), in an article, emphasized that South Koreans purchase youthful, trendy, and luxury golf apparel. Moreover, she emphasized that traditional golf brands, for example, Titleist, Taylormade, and Callaway, still influence the South Korean market. Han (2021)

mentioned that as golf wear was traditionally designed for upper-class sports, the wear was often used as a sign of financial power and social importance in South Korea. Consequently, this can be tied to the earlier-mentioned social stratification and status. In his article, Liuxinzhi (2024) argued that an individual's value and identity are based on how others see them. Moreover, it can be viewed as a way of showing an individual's success and importance. Liuxinzhi (2024) also included that, as golf is a luxury sport in South Korea, wearing expensive clothes and using branded golf equipment is a way of showing their status. Based on the above literature, golf gear consumption is indeed influenced by socio-cultural factors such as status and financial power.

### **3.7 Trends and Opportunities in Golf Gear E-commerce**

E-commerce has opened up many opportunities for businesses by allowing people to make purchases online from anywhere in the world with access to the internet. According to Statista (2025), the worldwide e-commerce market is expected to reach \$3.66 trillion USD by the end of 2025. More importantly, e-commerce has opened up a way for foreign brands to enter new markets without a huge threshold. For golf gear brands, e-commerce has opened up many different opportunities. Traditionally, golf gear has been bought in person from physical stores. The statement is more concerned with golf clubs rather than golf apparel. However, with e-commerce, all of the equipment can be bought online nowadays. For a consumer who knows exactly what they need, online shopping can be more convenient and efficient when compared to offline shopping. Direct-to-consumer brands and e-commerce platforms can have more competitive prices due to lower distribution costs (Coherentmarketinsights, 2025). Zhou (2015) adds that in the context of e-commerce, businesses are more committed to meeting customer demands and offering more personalized experiences.

Sharma et al. (2023) mentioned that digitalization has removed geographical limitations and thus e-commerce businesses can easily enter foreign markets. AI technologies allow businesses to learn about the consumption patterns of their customer base, and thus,

they can provide personalized product recommendations and targeted marketing based on consumers' online behaviour (Castillo et al., 2023). Moreover, for golf gear brands, e-commerce and the digital infrastructure open many opportunities. AI can suggest the correct golf gear for consumers, which can remove the need for offline fitting. There are already businesses with an online fitting tool that recommends products based on the answers. When technology develops further, the need for a real person and a physical retail store can diminish completely, which will then open more opportunities for digital platforms and e-commerce businesses. In an ideal world, consumers can purchase a new set of golf gear from home with an electronic device that would be delivered to their address in a few days. For the future of golf gear consumption in South Korea, companies will have to align their digital capabilities with the country's socio-cultural values and consumer expectations.

However, as mentioned, the golf society in South Korea is traditional and relies on long-lasting traditions and culture, so it can be a challenge for e-commerce companies to enter a market like South Korea without physical evidence and trust. Additionally, South Korea is a country with an aging population. The average age in South Korea is approximately 45 years in 2025 (statista, 2025). Moreover, it might be challenging for e-commerce businesses to enter the market if the older population is more conservative and used to offline shopping.

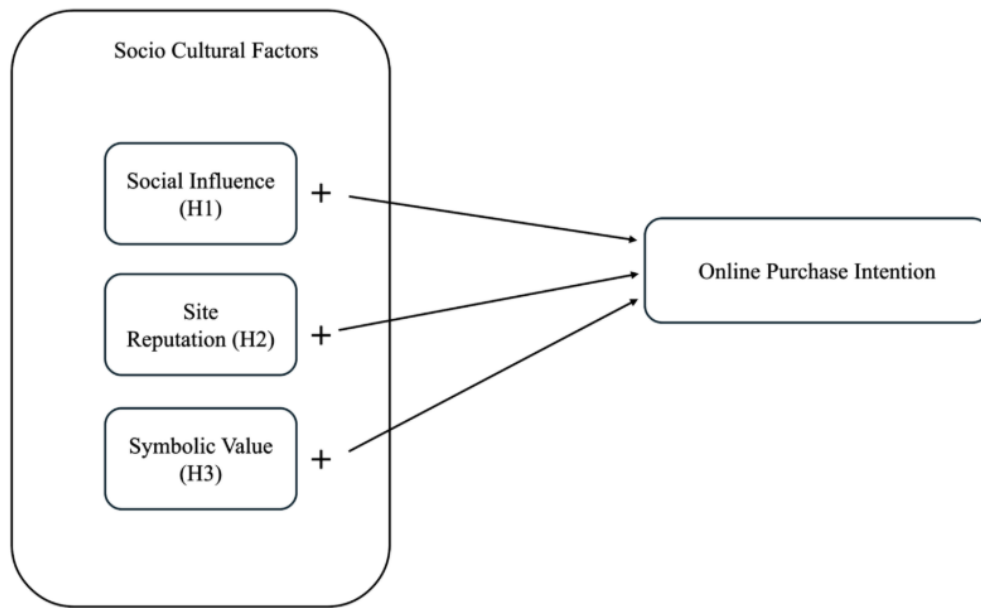
## 4 Summary of Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis

The hypotheses are formed with the support and validation of the literature review to research the drivers of online buying behaviour in the South Korean golf industry. These hypotheses have a ground in the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, specifically adapted to the characteristics of the South Korean market.

Within the framework of the TPB, subjective norms are driven by social pressure and expectations which shapes buying behaviour. In digital environments, this can be seen in peer reviews, social media endorsements and influencer content to reduce uncertainty. Furthermore, online environments are characterized by a lack of physical interaction, making trust and perceived risk primary challenges to adoption. According to the literature, South Korean consumers exhibit high uncertainty avoidance and prioritize website reliability and brand reputation as signals of security.

As explained in Maslow's Hierarchy, golf gear in South Korea serves as more than functional equipment. It satisfies higher-level needs of esteem and social belonging within a professional and social context. As a high-context culture, the literature suggests that localization is more effective than standardization in reducing psychological distance and building trust.

- H1: Social influence (online reviews, influencer endorsements, and peer recommendations) will positively affect on the online purchasing intention of South Korean golf gear consumers.
- H2: Site reputation will positively affect online purchase intention of South Korean golf consumers.
- H3: he symbolic value of golf gear (prestige and social stratification) will positively affect the online purchase intention of South Korean golf consumers.



**Figure 4.** Conceptual framework of socio-cultural factors influencing online buying decisions.

## 5 Methodology

This chapter explains the quantitative research strategy used to investigate the socio-cultural drivers of online buying behaviour in the South Korean golf industry. It will explain thoroughly the whole methodology process and data collection phases.

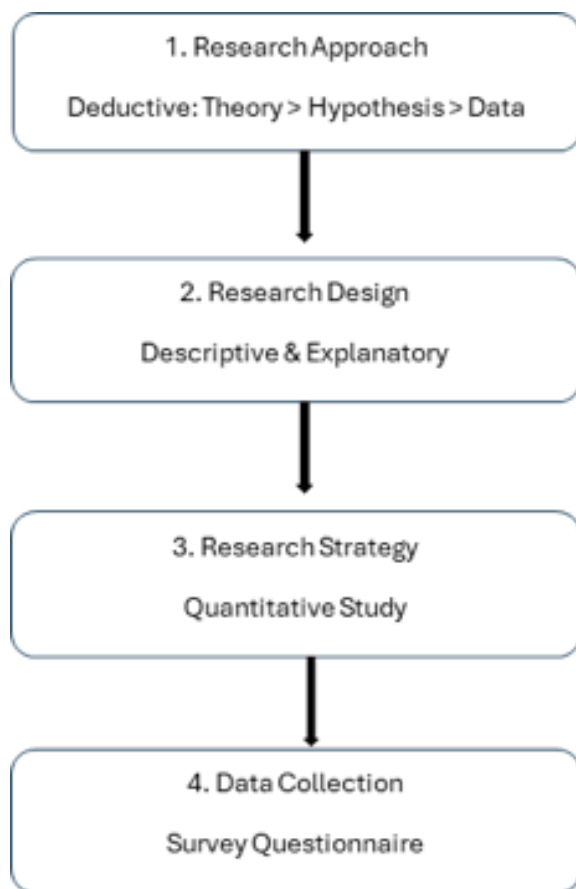
### 5.1 Research Approach, Strategy and Design

Deductive approach is used in this study. Deductive approach is a top-down theory-based approach starting with a theory, followed by formulating hypotheses and finally testing them with data (Cambridge Proofreading, 2025a). After testing the data, the hypothesis will either be accepted or rejected. Deductive reasoning will start with Theory of Planned Behaviour model Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

A quantitative methodology was selected for this study to prioritize the amount of data over depth of individual data. As the South Korean golf market comprises millions of participants, a quantitative approach promotes the collection of a large-scale dataset, ensuring the results are statistically representative of the broader population. Furthermore, this approach allows for the operationalization of socio-cultural perceptions into measurable metrics like Likert scales. By converting consumer buying behaviour into numerical data, it is possible to maintain a clear objective and apply statistical tests to determine the strength of the relationship between socio-cultural drivers and purchasing behaviour (Saunders et al., 2007).

As evidenced by the literature review, the South Korean golf market is expansive with approximately 6.7 million participants. Consequently, this study prioritizes quantity over depth to identify the broad trends and patterns essential for understanding a new foreign market. While a qualitative approach offers an option for gathering in-depth knowledge on concepts and experiences (Saunders et al., 2007), it carries a higher risk of researcher misinterpretation or respondent bias during interviews. In contrast, a

quantitative strategy is more appropriate for testing theories and assumptions (Saunders et al., 2007). By utilizing standardized quantitative measures, this research increases objectivity and reduces the likelihood of the researcher misconstruing respondent intent, ensuring a more precise investigation into the socio-cultural factors driving buying behaviour. The complete structure of the research is provided in Figure 5.



**Figure 5.** Research Structure.

The research follows a mix of descriptive and explanatory approach. The descriptive approach aims to answer what is being studied and explanatory approach aims to answer why and how it is being studied by testing the relationship between purchase decisions and socio-cultural factors (Saunders et al., 2007). Descriptive approach tries to show the characteristics of a phenomenon or population, whereas explanatory approach investigates the causal relationships and tries to understand why something

happens and tests the hypothesis from the theory (Cambridge Proofreading, 2025b). Moreover, the explanatory approach aims to answer if socio-cultural factors have an impact to consumer buying decisions in the South Korea e-commerce golf market. By conducting a survey, the study aims to examine whether socio-cultural factors influence consumer's buying decisions. The explanatory approach allows us to understand more about the causal relationships. For example, we could learn that because of South Korean collectivistic culture and appreciation for domestic brands, Koreans use domestic platforms more comfortably than foreign sites.

In the context of this thesis, this design allows for the documentation of consumer demographics, the frequency of online purchases and the identification of which socio-cultural factors are most prevalent among the 6.7 million golfers in the region. By applying a dual-approach design, it is possible to test the influence of specific socio-cultural drivers such as social influence and symbolic value on the dependent variable of online buying intention. This allows for the statistical validation of the hypotheses (H1, H2 and H3) and establishes whether a causal link exists between cultural perceptions and consumer decision-making.

The delimitations focus on socio-cultural drivers while still understanding the important role of other macro and micro factors. A critical design opted for the data collection is the use of the Korean language in the survey. The use of Korean language helps participants to fully understand what is asked, while lowering the threshold of answering the survey and it should limit non-relevant answers. According to a survey by Linguistica international (2020), 76% of online shoppers prefer to buy products from websites that have info in their native language and 92% of consumers in Korea reliant on local language content.

## **5.2 Data Collection**

This section will go through data collection strategies and implementations. Processes, strategies and tactics is explained in detail.

### **5.2.1 Online Survey**

An online survey was chosen as the main data collection tool for this research since it is an effective method for conducting a large-scale quantitative study in a digitalized market environment. Thus, surveys are widely used for deductive and quantitative research among business and economics studies (Saunders et al., 2007). Additionally, online survey is a natural fit for a population characterized by high internet usage and mobile consumer habits.

The questionnaire is developed in partnership of an international golf manufacturing company (referred as partnership company). The questionnaire format is designed to be simple, convenient and easy to answer for the target audience to get as much usable and quality data for the data analysis and reliable results. The surveys format and content are planned in a way it can be easily used in different platforms.

The goal was for the respondents to understand the questions in a standardised way. It's essential to a deductive approach, where the goal is to systematically test and either support or reject established hypotheses.

### **5.2.2 Sampling Strategy**

The target population for the research are South Korean consumers that have had a relationship with golf in any way. The sample South Korean consumers could have had e.g. previous experience playing golf, exposure from golf content in any format or

general interest in golf. Although, having a niche and specific sample target, framing the sample to only South Korean golf consumers will maximize quality and usable data.

With the partnership company, the survey was developed with a purpose sampling to obtain credible data. The partnership company's social media creator was utilised to reach as much target audience as possible. This way, data collection and sampling were implemented efficiently.

The creator's social media followers are golfers who follow the creator because of the content type. It is safe to say, that the followers are interested in golf in some way. The survey was shared by the creator to the creator's followers.

The partnership company established a partnership with the South Korean golf content creator (influencer/ambassador) to give away its golf gear in return for a survey answer. The idea is to encourage target sample to answer to the survey in return for the opportunity to win golf gear. South Korean influencers and ambassadors enhance the probability to approach South Korean golf consumers.

The creator has around 15 000 followers on Instagram. The survey link was in the creator's story for 24 hours reaching approximately 7 000 followers, from which 101 responses was created, and 95 results was taken into the data analysis process.

### **5.3 Operationalization of Variables**

To test the hypotheses, a structured questionnaire was developed, using a 5-point Likert scale system. The questionnaire had 22 questions. It was also conducted in Korean language in addition to English to mitigate the chance of misinterpretation of participants due to language barrier. A pilot test was conducted to ensure the questionnaire is relevant, accurate and clear. First, the survey was sent for the creator to confirm that the Korean language was grammatically correct. Secondly, the

partnership company's Chief Strategy Officer and Data Analyst confirmed the questionnaire to be in line with their interests. This assessment was essential for verifying that questions are phrased in a way that minimize respondent ambiguity. By identifying potential linguistic or technical threats, the pilot test could enhance the questions validity and clarity. This process ultimately strengthened the reliability of the survey results.

The questionnaire has a funnel design. A funnel design first asks easy to answer, general questions and slowly transitions to more sensitive, and narrow questions (Rosala & Moran, 2022). The questionnaire will start with screening questions, to make sure, we're surveying the correct people. Questions presented to the participants are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Operationalization Table.

Construct	Questions & Scale	Source
	Measuring Scale 1-5.  1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree  Scale implemented to each answer.	
Identity and Contact	1. First name, last name and email	
Social Influence	2. Online customer ratings and reviews are a source of information for me when evaluating golf gear.  3. I prefer golf brands that are recommended by professional	Kwahk & Kim (2017)

	<p>golfers and influencers on social media platforms.</p> <p>4. I consult other people to help choose the best alternative available related to golf gear.</p>	
Site Reputation	<p>5. I believe that trusted websites are fair in its conduct of transactions between seller and buyers.</p> <p>6. I believe that trusted websites are fair in its use of private user data collect during a transaction.</p> <p>7. High brand reputation reduces the risk associated with online transactions.</p> <p>8. I am willing to buy golf gear from online platforms rather than from a physical store.</p> <p>9. Brand reputation affects my trust towards its website.</p> <p>10. Domestic online platforms for golf gear are well-known for their reliability.</p> <p>11. The reputation of a domestic platform serves as a signal of high quality for the golf gear they sell.</p> <p>12. I feel secure providing personal information to online websites.</p> <p>13. I trust that online websites will protect my privacy.</p>	Paul A. Pavlou, 2003. & Kim et al., 2008
Symbolic Value & Prestige	<p>14. I believe that using well-known, premium golf brands helps</p>	Lu, Zhao & Wang (2010)

	<p>me maintain a professional image when playing with others.</p> <p>15. It is important to me that the brands I use are recognized for their prestige and high standing within the golfing community.</p> <p>16. I prioritize high-end products over budget-friendly options when selecting equipment.</p> <p>17. Golf equipment that meets my specific quality standards will positively affect my purchase intention.</p>	
Online Purchase Intention	<p>18. The likelihood of me choosing a domestic platform for my next purchase is high.</p> <p>19. I intend to purchase golf gear from a domestic online platform.</p> <p>20. I would consider purchasing golf gear from a domestic online platform in the future.</p> <p>21. The likelihood of me choosing a foreign platform for my next golf purchase is high.</p> <p>22. I intend to purchase golf gear from foreign online platform.</p> <p>23. I would consider purchasing golf gear from a foreign online platform in the future.</p>	Kwahk & Kim (2017)

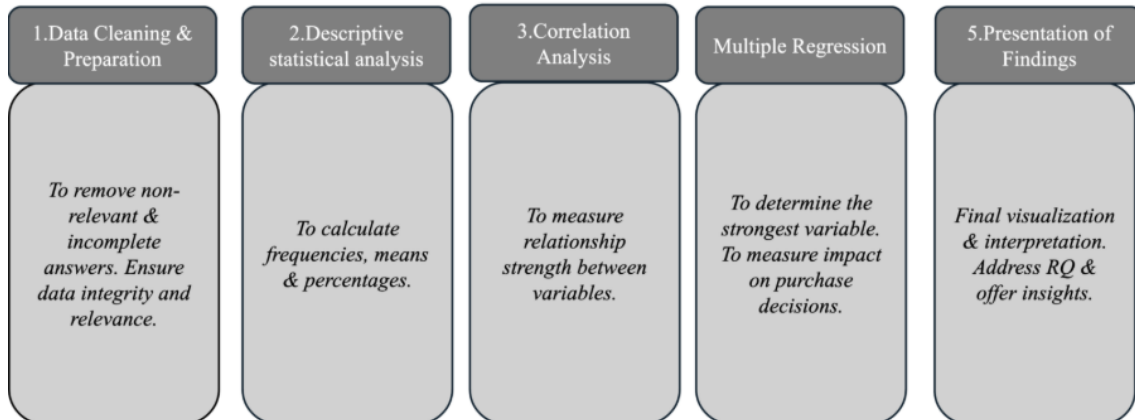
## 5.4 Data Analysis Process

The end goal is to transform the raw data into key findings showing, how socio-cultural factors impact buying decisions. The first step is to prepare the data, removing all necessary answers from the list. After all the incomplete and not qualified answers have been removed, the analysis can begin. The analysis introduces descriptive statistics, meaning that the results will be described, and summarized with a simple overview of the results.

To test the hypotheses, the surveys questions were categorized per concept as shown in Figure 6. Each concept was created by combining each set of indicators into a single measure. This was done by calculating the mean value of the responses, which allowed the individual questions to represent one unified variable.

To test all hypotheses, the two methods were used, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. The correlation analysis is used to determine the strength and direction between socio-cultural factors and purchase intentions. The multiple regression analysis is used to determine, which socio-cultural factor has the largest impact on the buying behaviour.

Once the data has been analysed, the findings are presented in a way that it is easy for the reader to understand them. The figure below shows a more thorough understanding of the whole data analysis process.



**Figure 6.** Data Analysis process.

## 5.5 Reliability and Validity of the Study

Credibility is fundamental when conducting academic research in order for it to be reliable and gain validity (Saunders et al., 2023). In conducting this research, several ethical considerations are addressed to ensure the credibility of the study and the protection of participants. Since the study utilizes a quantitative methodology and a deductive approach to test socio-cultural drivers, maintaining objectivity and data integrity is fundamental.

Research validity refers to how accurately the study measures the relevancy of the research and data compared to the research question and objectives (Saunders et al., 2023). In this study, validity will be ensured through the use of previously validated measurement scales from prior research. By utilizing established theories such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the survey accurately targets the intended socio-cultural factors identified in the literature review. Research reliability refers to the consistency of the results in the study (Sürücü & Maslakçı, 2020). If someone would use the same survey, and similar audience, the results should be similar, to what we'll receive. If that would be the case, the research would be

considered as a reliable study. Reliability is further strengthened using standardized quantitative measures, such as Likert scales, which increase objectivity and reduce the likelihood of the researcher misconstruing respondent intent.

To further ensure the reliability of the data, the survey is administered in the Korean language. This reduces the risk of misinterpretation or language barriers that could lead to non-relevant or "noisy" data, thereby strengthening the validity of the statistical analysis. Furthermore, to maintain objectivity and mitigate "social desirability bias," the distribution of incentives is handled by the consulting company rather than the researcher, ensuring that the reward does not influence the honesty of the responses. Additionally, the survey is found from the appendix to increase validity.

Every respondent was informed about the purpose of their participation in the online survey. Additionally, it should be made clear that participation is strictly voluntary and participants have a right to withdraw from the survey at any time without any consequences. Readers do not have access to the identities behind the email addresses, as responses are analysed in an anonymous format. Furthermore, while the literature identifies that personal identity proofing is common in South Korean e-commerce, this study does not collect resident registration numbers, financial details, or sensitive identifiers. The filtering of South Korean email addresses is conducted in compliance with relevant data protection laws, ensuring only users who have consented to receive communications are approached.

Reliability testing for the concepts was conducted by making a Chronbach's alpha test. For the social influence, the Cronbach's Alpha was .499, suggesting that the results were inconsistent throughout the social influence questions. For the site reputation, the Cronbach's alpha was .743, for symbolic value, the Cronbach's Alpha was .645, and for purchase intention, it was .814. For the data consisting of social influence, the lower alpha test should be taken into consideration, and the results have to be analysed with caution.

**Table 2.** Cronenbach's Alpha.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Number of items</b>
Social Influence	.499	3
Site Reputation	.743	9
Symbolic Value	.645	4
Purchase Intention	.814	6

## 6 Findings

This chapter goes through the results of the data collection provided from the online survey. The results are presented according to the research hypotheses. Each questions results are summarized and categorized to each hypothesis as descriptive statistics. Hypotheses are tested using correlation and multiple regression analysis. The three social influence variables are tested how it influences the purchase intention. The analysis follows a structured approach, beginning with descriptive statistics, and concluding with hypothesis testing.

To evaluate the tendency, variation and distributional characteristics of the dataset, mean, standard deviation, median, skewness and kurtosis were calculated for each variable.

The mean scores for all constructs range from 3.19 to 4.03, indicating a generally positive trend in responses in the 5-point Likert scale of answers. Social Influence shows the highest level of mean, suggesting that the respondents agree with the “Social Influence” statements. Conversely, Symbolic Value presents the lowest level of mean, while remains above the midpoint.

The Standard Deviation for all categories is between 0.60 and 0.71. Because the values are well below 1.0, it shows that the answers are very similar. Instead of the responses being spread out, they are closely grouped around the average. This means that there is a high level of agreement among the participants. Furthermore, the close value of the Mean suggests that the distributions are relatively balanced without significant distortions from extreme outliers.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistical Analysis.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Influence	4.0281	.71237	-1.642	5.269
Site Reputation	3.4614	.70292	-.617	2.265
Symbolic Value	3.6987	.59628	-.792	2.669
Purchase Intention	3.1912	.68975	-.257	.795

The skewness of the data is negatively skewed, Social Influence being the most significant with  $-1.64$  value. When the data is negatively skewed, the data distribution leans towards lower values on the left side, meaning that most of the respondents provided high scores, but a few lower scores are pulling the average down. This result is recognized throughout the skewness of each hypothesis.

The kurtosis of the data describes the distribution of the data in the answers, the concentration of data in the center versus the extreme ends. The Social Influence kurtosis value adopts a high positive value, indicating that respondents were consistent in their answers. A normal distribution typically has a near zero value.

Overall, the data presented are generally acceptable for assuming a normal data distribution. The values for skewness between  $-2$  and  $+2$  and are kurtosis values between  $-7$  and  $+7$  are considered acceptable to present relevant and reliable data (Watson, 2018).

To test the relationship between all variables, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed. As shown in the correlation matrix below, the independent variables, social

influence ( $r = .381, p < .001$ ), site reputation ( $r = .566, p < .001$ ) and symbolic value ( $r = .418, p < .001$ ) showed a significant positive correlation with Online Purchase Intention. Site Reputation shows the strongest correlation with Purchase Intention, suggesting that trust-related factors are the most influential at a general level.

The correlation matrix also shows that a strong correlation was found between Social Influence and Site Reputation ( $r = .542, p < .001$ ) showing an overlap how these two have an impact on consumer behaviour. This indicates that consumers who rely on recommendations and reviews also tend to value website credibility and quality.

**Table 4.** Correlation Analysis.

Variable	Social Influence	Site Reputation	Symbolic Value	Purchase Intention
Social Influence	1			
Site Reputation	.542***	1		
Symbolic Value	.340***	.449***	1	
Purchase Intention	.381***	.566***	.418***	1

An initial review of the descriptive statistics reveals that social influence has the highest mean score (4.03). This indicates that most participants strongly agree that social factors play a critical role in their initial selection process when considering new clubs. Specifically, the data confirms that consumers use customer ratings and reviews as a primary source of information, prefer brands recommended by professionals and influencers, and actively consult others to choose the best alternative. The second highest mean was observed for site reputation (3.70), demonstrating a high

appreciation for website quality and credibility. Conversely, symbolic value recorded the lowest mean (3.19), suggesting that while still relevant, status and image were somewhat less prioritized by the respondents. Importantly, the standard deviation for all variables was under 1.0, indicating that the responses are tightly grouped and that there is a high level of consensus among the participants.

Building on the descriptive data, the correlation matrix shows a statistically significant relationship between all variables. The strongest correlation was found between site reputation and purchase intention ( $r = .566$ ), suggesting that trust-related factors have the largest direct impact on a consumer's intention to buy a product. Another important finding is the strong correlation between social influence and site reputation ( $r = .542$ ). This overlap indicates that consumers who highly value the opinions of professionals and influencers also place a strong emphasis on website quality, meaning these two factors are closely intertwined in the consumer's mind.

## **6.1 Simple Regression Analysis**

Each independent variable was first tested individually to assess its direct effect on Purchase Intention. The variables will be further tested together in multiple regression analysis.

Social Influence shows a statistically significant positive effect on Purchase Intention ( $\beta = .381$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 14.5% of the variance ( $R^2 = .145$ ). This indicates that social factors such as reviews and recommendations have a meaningful influence when considered independently.

**Table 5.** Regression Analysis: Social Influence.

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta <math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
(Constant)	1.948	.387		5.034	<.001
Social Influence	.376	.095	.381	3.972	<.001

Site Reputation demonstrates a stronger effect, with a significant positive relationship ( $\beta = .566$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 32.0% of the variance ( $R^2 = .320$ ). This highlights the importance of trust, credibility and website quality in influencing consumer behaviour.

**Table 6.** Regression Analysis: Site Reputation.

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta <math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
(Constant)	.994	.378		2.632	0.10
Site Reputation	.667	.101	.566	6.621	<.001

Symbolic Value also shows a significant positive effect ( $\beta = .418$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 17.4% of the variance ( $R^2 = .174$ ). This suggests that status, identity and social meaning associated with golf gear contribute to purchase intention.

**Table 7.** Regression Analysis: Symbolic Value.

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta <math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
(Constant)	2.103	.313		6.710	<.001
Symbolic Value	.426	.096	.418	4.434	<.001

Each variable was tested on their own, confirming that all factors, Social Influence, Site Reputation and Symbolic Value have a positive impact on Purchase Intention when considered on their own.

## 6.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the combined influence of three independent variables on the Online Purchase Intention of South Korean golf gear consumers.

The results of the multiple regression analysis showed that the model is statistically significant ( $F(3,91) = 16.919, p < .001$ ). In the multiple regression analysis, the R square value was .358, suggesting that 35.8% of the variance in Online Purchase Intention is explained by Social Influence, Site Reputation and Symbolic Value.

In addition to Anova, the coefficients table shows, how each variable contributes to the results, when all the variables are considered at the same time. The data showed that Site Reputation was the strongest and most significant variable ( $\beta = .436, p < .001$ ). Hence, the results show that for South Korean golf consumers, the perceived trustworthiness and standing of the online platform is a main driver in the intent to purchase.

Symbolic Value also maintained a significant and positive effect with ( $\beta = .195, p = .042$ ) suggesting that image and status within golf gear remains as an important factor.

Social Influence, against all expectations, when analysed with Symbolic Value and Site Reputation, was not a significant factor of Purchase Intention ( $\beta = .078, p = .440$ ).

**Table 8.** Multiple Regression Analysis: Coefficients.

	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta <math>\beta</math></b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
(Constant)	.615	.417		1.475	.144
Social Influence	.514	.125	.436	4.109	<.001
Site Reputation	.199	.097	.195	2.060	.042
Symbolic Value	0.77	.099	.078	.776	.440

Social Influence on its own is a significant driver as stated in simple regression analysis, however as seen from multiple regression analysis, the effect is largely decreased when Site Reputation is present. This suggest that trust is more important for South Korean golf consumers than influence of their social circle. Hence, social influence might get a consumer to look at the product, however trust is what triggers the purchase.

All three variables showed a significant relationship when tested individually, the multiple regression revealed that site reputation is the most important variable, followed by Symbolic Value and interestingly Social Influence didn't have a significant impact. This indicates that while social influence plays a role in shaping initial consumer interest, its effect is reduced when trust and symbolic value are considered.

## **7 Conclusion**

The final chapter discusses the empirical findings for the reader to understand them thoroughly. This is followed by an explanation of theoretical contributions which is followed by managerial implications for the practical part. To conclude the research, research directions and limitations of the research are explained.

### **7.1 Summary of Findings**

The aim of this study was to explore, what is the influence of socio-cultural factors on the online buying intention of South Korean golf gear consumers, more specifically on the purchase intention. This study is a quantitative study and a survey was conducted to gather primary data to analyse and present the findings.

The RQ of the study was “What is the influence of socio-cultural factors in South Korean consumers online buying intention in the golf industry?” This study successfully identified that socio cultural factors, more specifically, social influence, site reputation and symbolic value which all have a significant impact on the purchase intention when measured individually. When measured together, site reputation and symbolic value have the most significant impact on the purchase intention. To answer, what is the influence of socio-cultural factors, socio cultural factors have a significant impact on the purchase intention in South Korean consumer online buying intention in the golf industry and thus socio-cultural factors need to be studied before a market entry.

These combined results present a clear picture of the online purchasing journey for South Korean golf consumers. Because social influence holds the highest initial agreement but loses its statistical significance in the final decision-making model, it functions primarily as a hook. Peer reviews and influencer recommendations are highly effective at capturing a consumer's attention, shaping their initial interest, and driving them to a platform. However, social influence alone is not enough to close a sale. It is

ultimately the site reputation and the symbolic value of the products that build the necessary trust with the consumer, serving as the deciding factors that help them complete the purchase.

**Table 9.** Hypothesis Results Summary.

Hypothesis	Coefficient (beta)	t-value	p-value	Supported?
H1	.381	3.972	<.001	Yes
H2	.566	6.621	<.001	Yes
H3	.418	4.434	<.001	Yes

As seen in the literature review, South Korean consumers tend to be more collectivistic, rather than individualistic people. As seen in the literature, Park and Kim (2003) mentioned that website reliability, authenticity of products and secure payment systems significantly influence online purchase decisions in East Asian markets. The findings also suggested that website trust is a significant factor affecting purchase intention for the South Korean consumers. Moreover, as Hofstede's cultural dimensions show Korea is a more collectivistic culture (Kong et al., 2021), social influence, website trust and symbolic value all can have an impact to the purchase intention. The data shows that all of the mentioned have an impact on the purchase intention, however for symbolic value and social influence, the correlation isn't huge. Site reputation was seen as the most important variable affecting purchase intention. In the literature, as theory of planned behaviour explained, consumer intentions are shaped by attitudes towards behaviour, subject norms and perceived behaviour control (Ajzen, 2005). The data showed that while H1 was supported individually, the multiple regression analysis showed that the significance disappeared when that was analysed alongside other variables.

## **7.2 Theoretical Contributions**

This study contributes to the existing literature on online consumer behaviour by applying established consumer behaviour theories within the specific context of South Korean golf gear e-commerce. While theories such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour and socio-cultural frameworks have been widely used, this research extends their application by examining how they function in a digitally advanced and culturally distinct market.

The findings highlight that socio-cultural factors do not influence online purchase intention equally. Social influence was found to be less significant in the final model, whereas symbolic value and site reputation played a stronger role. This suggests that, in this context, traditional assumptions about the importance of social influence in collectivist cultures may not fully apply to online consumer behaviour.

Additionally, the study reinforces the importance of combining cultural and digital perspectives when analysing consumer behaviour. It shows that while socio-cultural theories provide a useful foundation, their explanatory power may be limited in modern e-commerce environments where factors such as trust, perceived quality, and individual preferences play a more dominant role.

Overall, the study contributes by offering a more context-specific understanding of how socio-cultural and behavioural theories apply in online purchasing, particularly within niche markets such as golf gear in South Korea.

## **7.3 Managerial Implications**

Entering a foreign market is difficult, and since socio-cultural factors change from the domestic market, there are multiple different factors that need to be taken into consideration before a market entry. When a foreign brand enters South Korean market

and they build an e-commerce site, the brand should focus on factors such as website quality, social influence, and symbolic value. One way of creating trust is in South Korea is with a reliable website, hence prioritizing website trust can work with the market entry. Additionally, social influence is a significant factor on its own; the factor could work as a hook. In practice, a foreign brand should then use social media influencers, pro athletes, celebrities and other people with influence to hook consumers in Korea to the brand. Another important socio-cultural factor to consider is symbolic value. In South Korea, values are in high appreciation. Hence for foreign brands to get recognized, it could focus on being known as a brand of high quality and prestige. South Korea has the second largest golf market in the whole Asia, almost with 7 million golfers and hence there is a big growth opportunity for golf brands to enter to. Successful market entry can bring significant amounts of new market share, and future benefits.

Trust and uncertainty avoidance plays an important role in the South Korea. For a foreign golf brand to be trusted, it can localize their e-commerce, sponsor professionals, celebrities, and social media influencers. Consumers can gain better trust and be more confident about a purchasing intention, when they receive service in their own language and when they see familiar faces using the products. Foreign e-commerce golf brands should focus on understanding the culture. Once a culture is understood, a brand can prepare a website to focus on consumer trust, low uncertainty avoidance, customer satisfaction, and other factors to maximize it's goals.

#### **7.4 Limitations**

The research solely investigates the golf gear industry and specifically online behaviour of golf gear and related equipment. Even when it provides valuable insights into golf gear e-commerce, it includes insights from broader sports equipment markets, which may even have overlapping consumer behaviours (for example tennis and baseball).

This study focuses only on selected theories (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Theory of Planned Behaviour) that support the research objective. The theories are used as a framework to guide the analysis rather than being tested themselves. Additionally, the study mainly focuses on socio-cultural factors. While focusing on socio-cultural factors, it may completely ignore important factors like economic, technological, and psychological factors that might be relevant in explaining consumer behaviour. This helps to keep the research focused but also narrows the overall scope of the study. In general, many of the consumer behaviour theories used in this study simplify decision-making into structured processes. However, online consumer behaviour is more dynamic and influenced by multiple factors at the same time, which limits how accurately these theories can reflect real-life situations.

The increasing sales in e-commerce and consumer behaviour are currently shaped by post-Covid online shopping trends (Tahmid, 2025). While this ensures relevance, it can limit the study's ability to account for long-term behavioural and future technological innovations that may reshape the online consumer behaviour in general.

The research is also limited to South Korean consumers in the golf gear e-commerce context. Because of this, the findings and theoretical application are specific to this setting and cannot be fully generalized to other markets or industries.

The study follows a deductive approach, where theories are used to form hypotheses that are tested with data. This means the role of the theories is limited to supporting the analysis rather than developing new theoretical insights.

## **7.5 Further Research**

This research studied, how socio-cultural factors, especially social influence, symbolic value and site reputation have an impact on purchase intention. This specific topic has been studied little to none, and hence a broader and wider study regarding the

South Korean golf market should be conducted. Additional further research should take into consideration, how the aging population impacts online shopping habits, and while younger generation are more adaptive, the median age is growing year by year.

As mentioned in the literature, AI is a technological advancement that is going to create loads of new opportunities, and therefore a more specific study of AI focusing to South Korea and golf industry could be useful for the future.

Even though this study focused on a wider consumer base, the literature suggested that golf in Korea has traditionally been a more male dominated sport, future research could perform a comparative analysis between male and female consumer behaviour, to identify more specific drivers.

As the study was limited to South Korea, future research could focus on a comparative analysis between other large golf markets in Asia, for example to Japan. As Japan is the largest golf market in the Asia, it could help and be useful for researchers to see if there are similarities with the countries, or if every country would need an own localized entry strategy.

Overall, the South Korean golf consumers need to be studied more for a more thorough understanding of the market.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1. Statement of Use of AI**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used during the development of this thesis to support the research and writing process. This is disclosed to ensure transparency. ChatGPT and Gemini were used for idea generation, conducting background research, summarizing long academic articles, guiding SPSS procedures, and supporting the analysis of results.

In addition, Microsoft Word autocorrect was used to assist with spelling, grammar, and overall language consistency. AI tools also helped in forming clearer academic sentence structures and improving the flow of the text.

All content generated with the assistance of AI was carefully reviewed, critically evaluated, and further refined by the author. The final interpretations, analysis, and conclusions presented in this thesis are the author's own work.

**Appendix 2. A Clause of Equal Contribution**

This thesis was conducted as a collaborative effort between the authors and both contributed equally to all stages of the research process. This includes the development of the research idea, literature review, data collection, data analysis and the writing of the thesis.

Both authors have participated actively in the interpretation of the results and the formulation of conclusions. Therefore, the contribution of each author is considered equal.