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The Importance of Factors Influencing on e-WOM Engagement towards Consumer Purchase Intention in Clothing Retailers, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The electronic word of mouth is a hardly studied phenomenon in the Sri Lankan context. Accordingly, the present study investigates the importance of factors influencing on electronic word of mouth engagement towards consumer purchase intention. By using convenience sampling technique, 501 questionnaires were distributed among respondents between the ages of 18-50 who are using Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp resultant respond rate was 77%. The correlation and regression tests were done through the use of AMOS software, while the SPSS software was used to test reliability. The study found that trustworthiness and electronic word of mouth engagement towards purchase intention have a positive impact whereas, high fashion involvement has a negative impact to the electronic word of mouth engagement. The study is useful for retailers to improve their online presence by developing electronic word of mouth among consumers.

Keywords: E-WOM Engagement, Clothing Retailer, High Fashion Involvement, Purchase Intention, Trustworthiness

Introduction

In times at which people are mainly engaged with modernization of technology, e-WOM has become necessary among the consumers who are spending incremental time in Online. Recently e-WOM enables people who are seeking for latent fashion items to share their assessing about those various products via online. It is noticed that nowadays there are much more consumers who are posting and reading online reviews, comments over the internet through social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp etc. Researchers demonstrated that e-WOM has partially and simultaneously affected to certain variables which helps to investigate the efficacy of consumers using e-WOM that pertain to the acquisition of clothing products. There are people who rate more in upcoming latest fashion trends and have massive interest as clothing buyers towards their perceptions of fashion products (Sitinjak, Diana, Gunawan, & Muchardie, 2016). Also, when it comes to the facts that published using e-WOM, consumers rely more on the information provided by

another party via social media platforms. Study of the Wolny and Mueller (2013), It indicate that trustworthiness act as a source to decide the effect that e-WOM has on purchasing decision of customers since they are generally giving ideas, suggestions and opinions on the internet with the participation of e-WOM. According to the López and Sicilia (2014), Considering the consumers who are inclined of e-WOM, it is important to identify the degree of how customer tend to think of what he/she will buy as it is beneficial for the purchase intention of consumers. With the emergence of online platforms, there are clothing retailing companies who have rapidly accustomed on social media in terms of getting benefits by attracting customers to purchase products and services from their clothing shops (Saleem & Ellahi, 2017). When consumers engage in e-WOM, creating and sharing about a product's information through social networking sites will aid to increase the purchasing intention of customers. Even though there are many industries which take advantage is using e-WOM, clothing Industry deemed to be particularly exposing day by day by perceiving more benefits. e-WOM has become the most successful concept among global context and there are number of researches done in several countries about the beneficiary of using e-WOM. But when regarding to Sri Lankan context, there are only limited researches discovered about the influence of electronic word of mouth. Considering that this study is focusing on identify factors influences to the engagement in electronic word of mouth to the consumer purchase intention towards clothing retailers.

Thus, this study will provide valuable spotlight to e-WOM in terms of rebounding benefits to the community. It will significantly contribute to the existing and potential customers in clothing retailing industry, to know better about the importance of e-WOM and to get ideas about the degree to which factors influencing to the Sri Lankan context concerning profit maximization. Not only for the retailers, the impact of e-WOM is very important for the consumers and the beginners who want to get knowledge or having lack of knowledge regarding the positive side of its implication.

Moreover, the gaps were clearly identified regarding the Sri Lankan context; this study will focus on identifying factors influences to the engagement in electronic word of mouth to the consumer purchase intention towards clothing retailers. In order to fill this gap, the significance of this study is identified as it provides valuable opportunities for the Sri Lankan retailers, customers, businesses and other parties who are more keen and attentive to know about the importance of e-WOM.

Literature Review

WOM and e-WOM

WOM can be impact on consumer purchase intention by getting the shared information as well as assessing the buyers where they escort and extending according to the preferences towards products and services of the people (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). This refers as the mode of reciprocate the information in-between the consumers who are willing to buy products and services (Grewal, Thomas, Cline, & Antony, 2003). WOM known as communication happened between the two-person defined as receiver and the communicator where the person who communicate about certain product or service delivered in an oral way communication (Arndt, 1967).

With the development of the internet, consumers were able to interact with each other easily either it could be a positive or a negative statement along with that the circumstances has been initiated which can be known as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (Brown, Amanda, Broderick, & Nick, 2007). By specifying the distinctive essence of the social networking site communication,

discriminating the factors influenced with regards to the relationship evolved to share about the certain brands on social networking sites known as a primary process of e-WOM.

Accompanied by the extension and the evaluation of information and the technologies e-WOM many researches have appeared, Study of the Dellarocas (2003), stated that where they buyers and sellers are meet on the online communication platforms; giving the feedbacks by the receivers known as an important channel for making a trust in consumers. According to the Calder and Kotler (2008), e-WOM engagement considered as the consumer loyalty towards the product or a service which they had experienced may pretentious by the information sharing among the social media platforms since the e-WOM media enhanced the consumer opinion sharing and engaging.

High Fashion Involvement and e-WOM Engagement

Fashion can be conceptualized as an intention such as fashion clothing as well as social influence through the dissemination of a comportment process (Creekmore, 1974). Fashion is act as a mode of magnify the self-reflection of the consumer who are willing to wear certain brand. Study of the Law, Zhang, and Leung (2004), according to him, consumer willingness to buy a certain fashion clothing product can be influenced by the continuous changes in fashion trends or a fashion. Since the fashion is updating trend in any industries including the fashion industry, those products are in fashion industry contemplated as the high complicity products where the consumers have the tendency to entreat from the others before purchase anything (Gu, Park, & Konana, 2012). High fashion involvement study of the Reynolds (1968), has found out that the reason because to existence of the fashion as *"Necessarily public... a secret fashion is a contradiction in terms"* (p.45). Fashion is classified as a powerful indicator which is highly engaging, means that it is expensive, rarely purchased, personal identity related or high risky; it has been perceived that the consequential number of high engagement product attracted online conversations (Gu et al., 2012). Study of the Knox (2012), declared that the choice built up consumers themselves to do the styles, to experience the latest fashion trends are incessant, accomplished by the variegated products and trends with respect to changing fashion movements continuously. Fashion products are high-involvement products. These are considered high performance products that tend to get information from different sources before making a purchase decision the customer is involved in money and personal identity. More customers are expecting the participation of high-level intervention communities and social networking sites (Gu et al., 2012). participating hot couture plays an important role in fashion related e-WOM. Be consistent with fashion related message characteristics will always surprise the loyal customers who are highly engage in with the social networking sites.

H1: There is a significant impact of high fashion involvement on e-WOM engagement.

Trustworthiness and e-WOM Engagement

Trustworthiness can be defined as an important factor influencing towards the consumers' buying decision as well as the factors will engage in e-WOM on social media platforms by impacting on consumers' readiness to buy a product or a service. The factor "Trust" has been identified as an important factor built in communication along with the relationship where the people who are using social networking sites (Couch & Jones, 1997). This affected to the level of believe on receiver about on what sender had been sent (Gunther, 1992). As stated by the Sparks and Browning (2011), revealed that necessary consumers are mostly using reviews where have been mentioned in an online platform to minimize the risk as well as the unreliability with respect to the consumer purchase

intention. Whereas consider about the online context, trust is basically built up on conclusions with respect into the trustworthiness of the sender (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002). Study of the Kim and Park (2013), has been explored that the extraction of trust directly influences on to the consumer purchase intention along with the e-WOM engagement in an online platform. Trust is constructed on a message provided by the sender brought up to the perception in consumer's mind on the information included in the message can be assured as well as the research found out that there is a strong linkage between the message given with the accurate information where it has built up the trust and consumer purchase intention (Ho & Chien, 2010).

H2: There is a significant impact of trustworthiness on e-WOM engagement.

E-WOM Engagement

e-WOM Communications provides customers with product / service information. Consumers benefit from more reliable e-WOM communication than traditional media (Ismagilova, Slade, Rana, & Dwivedi, 2019). Using e-WOM communication when making a purchase decision helps consumers to have more confidence in understanding products and services, to reduce their risk of making bad purchase decisions and to gain social approval (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2003). It is well known in the literature that e-WOM communication considerably influences consumer behavior. Several studies have studied the relationship between existing AFOs and their impact on purchasing intentions (Gu et al., 2012; Saleem & A Ellahi, 2017).

E-WOM Engagement and Purchase Intention

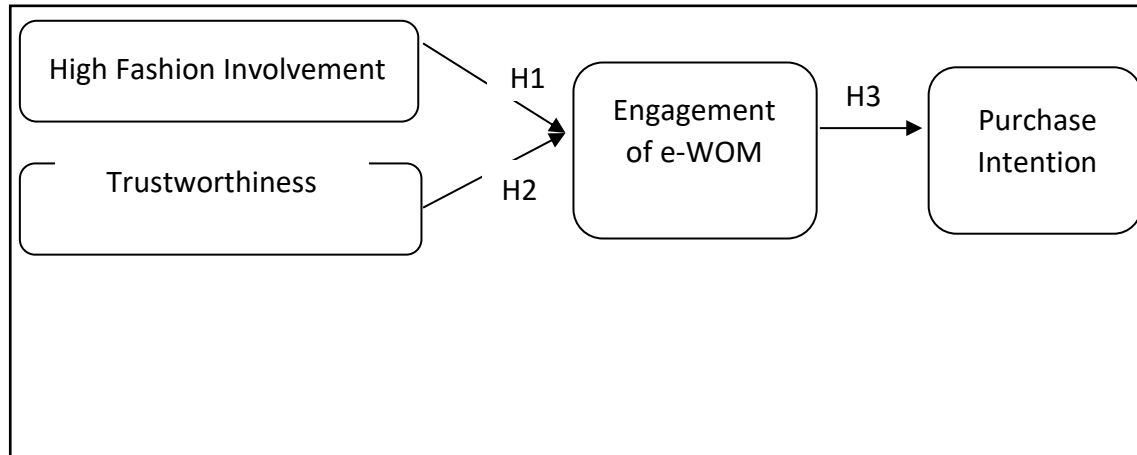
Word of mouth (WOM) is verbal communication that exchanges information in a social setting or in a circle. It is an informal communication where the consumer discusses brands, products and services. It plays an effective and efficient role in the promotional part of marketing According to the Nguyen and Romaniuk (2003), it is identified as a persuasive factor on consumer purchase intention by referring the several past researches (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Chan & Ngai, 2011; Huang, 2010; Kumar & Benbasat, 2006; Park, Lee, & Han, 2007; See-To & Ho, 2014; Zhang et al., 2010). With the improvement of technology, e-WOM has initial impact on consumers' purchasing intentions because it relies on e-WOM before making any purchase. According to Chan and Ngai (2011), purchase intention is the widest repetition variable in the electronic word of oral communication. In their study, they looked more closely at e-WOM's takeover intentions, most of the studies looked at e-WOM's takeover intentions, and another studies looked at the impact of incentives on consumers' purchase intentions. Declared Many researchers have examined the characteristics of e-WOM, such as quantity, quality and relevance, and their impact on purchasing intentions (Lin, Featherman, Brooks, & Hajli, 2018). In another study found that quality, reliability, attractiveness of sources and style are important factors in the electronic message that consumers use to make future purchasing decisions. In a recent study by e-WOM (Teng, David Stuart, Wei Khong, Wei Goh, & Yee Loong Chong, 2014). There is a significant effect of buyers on their buying intentions. Therefore, among consumers, e-WOM can significantly influence their buying intentions on social networking sites.

H3: There is a significant impact of e-WOM engagement towards the consumer purchase intention.

The main purpose of this study was to demonstrate that factors high fashion involvement and trustworthiness affecting on to the consumer purchase that facilitates through e-WOM. To achieve

this goal, a conceptual framework has been developed that describes the relationships between the main variables to identify the factors that can influence users' decisions through e-WOM. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Developed for research purpose

Methodology

According to the Krejcie (1970), sample size has been taken as 384 for this study by concentrating on individuals who are in age 18-50 residing in Western Province in Sri Lanka. Sample size defines as the major part of the empirical study; based on that, the convenience sampling method chose as a method of collecting data by reason of gathering accurate as well as the convenient sample for carry out this research. Further consider about the subjective study, it has been used deductive approach to collect the quantitative data as this research based on quantitative research type, purpose of collecting data, online questionnaire has been created to share through the social media platforms; Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp among the participants of 384. When developed the questionnaire, it mainly considers about the factors influence on to the e-WOM engagement with respect to the purchase intention in clothing retailers in Sri Lankan context. Moreover, the questionnaire consists with the 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly agree to 5=Strongly disagree). Further discussion, the analysis part was done by using correlation and regression mainly the correlation was tested the relationship between independent variables known high fashion involvement and trustworthiness, mediator defined as e-WOM engagement and the dependent variable as a purchase intention and the regression analysis was tested the impact of those variables, this analysis was carried out to retrieve a most accurate outcome.

Findings and Discussion

Data was collected from 501 participants and among them only 384 selected to analyze data since 117 were rejected as outliers because they are not experienced the reviews and comments in relation to clothing item. Out of 384, 211 respondents were female and rest were male. Most of the participants are belongs to the age category 24 to 29 and Facebook becomes the highest most preferred information sharing method while Instagram becomes second.

Table2: SEM Fitting Index

Index of fit	Chi-sq/df	RMSEA	CIF
Values	1.918	0.049	0.951

Source: Authors' representation based on AMOS results.

The Model fit evaluated using three indexes and the above table 2 shows the results of those indexes. The Chi-sq. value is below the 5.0 and it reveals that the model is fit for the study. The RMSEA value of the study is 0.049 and it below the margin of 0.08 which indicates a perfect fitness. The final index CIF is more than the cutoff value 0.9 and it also shows high accuracy in the model.

Table 3: Correlation between variables

		r value	p value
HF	↔ T	0.513	0.001
HF	↔ PUR	0.381	0.001
T	↔ PUR	0.787	0.001
HF	↔ EW	0.275	0.001
EW	↔ PUR	0.614	0.001
T	↔ EW	0.680	0.001

HF= high Fashion Involvement, T= Trustworthiness, PUR= Purchase Intention, EW= e-WOM engagement

Source: Authors' representation based on AMOS results.

When analyzing the correlation between independent variables the high fashion involvement and trustworthiness it showed that there is a moderate positive relationship among the variables. When determining the relationship between independent variables and the moderating variable both variables recorded a positive relationship while trustworthiness and e-WOM engagement recorded a much high positive relationship with the value of 0.680 among the variables. The moderate variable e-WOM engagement positively relates to the dependent variable purchase intention with r value of 0.614. The p value represents the significance level of the variables and it reveals that all the variables were highly significant.

Table4: Regression and hypothesis testing

		Beta value	p value	Results of Hypothesis
HF	→ EW	-0.082	0.104	Not Supported
T	→ EW	1.122	0.001	Supported
EW	→ PUR	0.665	0.001	Supported

HF= high Fashion Involvement, T= Trustworthiness, PUR= Purchase Intention, EW= e-WOM engagement

Source: Authors' representation based on AMOS results.

By referring the Table 4 it constitutes the regression analysis as well as the hypothesis testing of the objectives with respect to this study. As the first objective, it focuses attention on the impact of high

fashion involvement on e-WOM engagement towards the consumer purchase intention. While consider about the consumers in Sri Lankan context according to this research, by exploring the impact between the two variables of HF and EW, the indicated regression weight taken as ($\beta = -0.082$) at a $P > 0.05$ at a not significant point. social networking sites to make their decision on buying clothing items has no significance, by reason of Sri Lanka's online shopping desire at the minimum level so people constantly visits physical stores to fulfill their need of buying fashionable wear. (**H1**: There is a significant impact of high fashion involvement on e-WOM engagement).

While contemplate the second objective, it was to investigating the impact of trustworthiness on e-WOM engagement towards the consumer purchase intention. With respect to the Sri Lankan context based on to this study it has taken as the indicated regression weight is ($\beta = 1.122$) at a $P < 0.001$ at a significant point, since the trust is built upon with an accuracy of an information provider along with the receiver. As mentioned by Lis (2013), also criticized that, there is a relationship between the trustworthiness and e-WOM with the information sender and the receiver through reviews of products in online platforms as well as it has a positive impact on trustworthiness towards the e-WOM engagement. (**H2**: There is a significant impact of trustworthiness on e-WOM engagement).

As a third objective of this research indicated as to investigate the impact of e-WOM engagement towards the consumer purchase intention. In an online platforms e-WOM plays a major role while gathering the large number of consumers according to their purchase intention approaching to the clothing retailers in the industry. Based on that the researchers found the result as regression weight of ($\beta = 0.665$) at a $P < 0.001$ at a significant point, means according to the past researches, e-WOM a positive impact on consumer's purchase intention (**H3**: There is a significant impact of e-WOM engagement towards the consumer purchase intention).

Conclusion

e-WOM and purchase intention is known as one of the necessary objects interims of marketing aspects in an any industry, especially in the clothing industry since it helps clothing retailers to be exquisite and reached to the competitors at the industry. Clothing retailer will be benefiting by using the data gathered through this research since it makes certain strategies for them to make profitable their field among the other industries as well as their competitors. Through the non-probability convenience sampling method has been used to gather data, with respect to that research could found out that the factors such as social support and innovativeness did not support for the e-WOM engagement, with respect to that this research found out that when buying clothing items, there is a positive significant impact on e-WOM engagement depends on the consumer purchase intention. There upon, the conclusion can be mentioned as there are several factors that positively impact on consumers purchase intention through the engagement of e-WOM by knowing those variables clothing retailers in the Sri Lankan context can be boost their profit as well as they can improve their sales by catching up the targeted customers through the online platform as well. With respect to this study it provides significance to the clothing retailers as well as any other marketers who would have intention to use e-WOM as a marketing tool for their business in the form of managerial implications by exploring the influential factors to the e-WOM engagement. While considering the theoretical contribution, insightful findings of this study can add up to already existing literature based on the context of factors influences on e-WOM engagement towards the consumer purchase intention.

Moreover, the study could facilitate similar researchers in the arena of studying the influence of e-WOM towards other industries or situations other than the clothing retailers.

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