

“IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON BRAND LOYALTY IN ONLINE FASHION RETAIL INDUSTRY IN SRI LANKA (SDG 09): THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND CONSCIOUSNESS”

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to elucidate the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty in the online fashion retail sector in Sri Lanka mediated by brand consciousness (SDG 09).

Theoretical Framework: The research is firmly supported by the social comparison theory, which states that comparison with other people plays a major role in social life, as it gives meaning and self-relevant knowledge. This theory is widely used in the marketing literature to change customer attitudes while enhancing consumer Behavior.

Method: A survey was conducted among 385 customers who follow the selected online fashion retail shops. The present research was adapted to the convenience sampling method. Furthermore, descriptive, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were used with an inclusive analysis of the empirical results. The mediating variable is analyzed with the help of the structural equation model (SEM) by using SmartPLS.

Results and Discussion: The findings confirmed that brand consciousness has a high positive impact on brand loyalty in online fashion retail shops. Additionally, the findings demonstrated a strong effect of interaction, trendiness, and e-word of mouth on social media among online fashion retail stores. Social media marketing on brand loyalty is not entirely about brand consciousness. The results show that there is partial mediation.

Research Implications: The findings of the study are significant for marketing professionals in the fashion retail sector to enhance their strategies and develop more effective social media strategies.

Originality/Value: This research explored that social media marketing involves targeting the audience through social networks by creating content that matches the interests of a particular user group and fits into the specifics of the functioning of a certain business activity.”

Keywords: brand consciousness, brand loyalty, online fashion retail, social media marketing, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG 09.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the modern digital landscape, social media possesses considerable significance. Consumers can now obtain critical product information from online sources before making purchases. Social media platforms enable the distribution of information and the release of content to the public (Rajapaksha & Dk, 2019). Additionally, "social media" refers to a platform, internet program, or mass media tool that facilitates user engagement and cooperation (Yoel, Ellitan, & Lukito, 2021). According to Rajapaksha & Thilina (2019), there are 6.7 million internet users and 6 million social media users in the Sri Lankan context, representing a 29% penetration rate compared to the country's total population.

According to the data provided by Digital Outlook (2022), a substantial shift in consumer behavior has happened globally. To ensure that their value delivery process satisfies the most current client expectations, businesses have begun incorporating digital technologies into all facets of their operations. Facebook is the predominant social media platform in Sri Lanka, with internet users comprising 82% of active female users and 92% of active male users, as indicated by data on social media usage patterns in the country. As a result, a company is more likely to build profitable relationships with its customers by encouraging higher interactions and conversations with them, which could improve brand loyalty (Hanaysha & Momani, 2021).

According to Ahmed & Saeed (2021), acquiring brand-loyal customers is the only way to guarantee long-term growth and market competitiveness. Consumers exhibiting elevated brand consciousness are inclined to choose pricier and renowned brands. Ismail (2017) defined brand consciousness as the cognitive inclination to choose renowned and extensively promoted products. They use brands as symbols of status and prestige (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Consumers with elevated brand consciousness tend to prefer purchasing expensive and more renowned brands (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

In examining social media within the fashion industry, we identify social networking platforms and digital interfaces that facilitate interaction with consumers through contemporary social networking technologies (Ahmad,

Salman, & Ashiq, 2015).

The variety of consumer demands in the fashion business is driving up competition in the retail sector. Given the industry's explosive growth in the fashion retail sector, marketers must devise plans to satisfy consumer demand (Jayasuriya & Azam, 2017).” In Sri Lanka, the fashion retail industry is a cutting-edge and growing sector. There is an opportunity for fashion retailers to establish and maintain strong relationships with clients, fostering loyalty. In this context, the purpose of this study is to explain **“how social media marketing influences brand loyalty toward the online fashion industry with the mediating role of brand consciousness.”**

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty with the mediating role of brand consciousness is unfulfilled and still needs to be filled up in areas related to the fashion retail industry in Sri Lanka. Consequently, the realm of social media within the Sri Lankan context presents substantial opportunities that remain largely untapped for commercial enterprises. The underlying factors contributing to this inadequate online presence include a deficient understanding of social media's capabilities, as well as the need for a tactile experience within the fashion retail sector. Therefore, there is a problem raised whether the Sri Lankan fashion retailers have adopted social media marketing for their sales and promotions, and if they have adopted the most precise social media marketing strategies, to what extent those strategies influence consumer brand loyalty and brand consciousness. Further, when referring to the literature, there is a huge dilemma to be solved, whether social media marketing impacts consumer brand loyalty towards fashion-related products, especially in the Sri Lankan context, with the mediating role of brand consciousness. Moreover, the elements used in past literature did not align, and very limited research has been conducted on the mediating role of brand consciousness. Therefore, a huge literature gap exists in the field. Hence, this should be investigated and fulfilled by future researchers. According to the aforementioned research gap, further study in this area is definitely necessary.



Therefore, it is significant to investigate this phenomenon in the Sri Lankan online fashion retail industry using an empirical study. Hence based on this situation this research is centered on measuring ***how social media marketing influences brand loyalty towards the online fashion retail industry with the mediating effect of brand consciousness.***

The objectives of this research study can be listed as follows;

1. To examine the impact of entertainment in social media marketing on brand loyalty in the online fashion retail industry in Sri Lanka.
2. To examine the impact of interaction in social media marketing on brand consciousness in the online fashion retail industry in Sri Lanka.
3. To examine the impact of trendiness in social media marketing on brand consciousness in the online fashion retail industry in Sri Lanka.
4. To examine the impact of customization in social media marketing on brand consciousness in the online fashion retail industry in Sri Lanka.
5. To examine the impact of E-WOM in social media marketing on brand consciousness in the online fashion retail industry in Sri Lanka.
6. To investigate the mediating impact of brand consciousness on social media marketing and brand loyalty in the online fashion industry of Sri Lanka.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is firmly supported by the social comparison theory which states that comparison with other people plays a major role in social life as they give meaning and self-relevant knowledge. According to this theory, Festinger, (1954) demarcated social comparison as the process of thinking about the self with other people. For comparison, people tend to select a person or group to serve as a point of comparison or as a reference group (Khan, Rahmani, Hoe, & Chen, 2015). There are two types of social comparison such as upward social comparison and downward social comparison (Graham-Bermann & Miller-Graff, 2015).

2.1 PREVIOUS STUDIES

2.1.1 Social media marketing

According to Erdogmus & Cicek (2012), social media is a community of internet-based applications built on Web 2.0 's user-generated content to be produced and shared. Hossain & Sakib, 2016 mention that consumers actively behave with a certain purpose toward media content and seek such content based on their internal motivations. Also, social media platforms allow companies' marketing staff to identify the target audience's choices, identify areas of interest for this audience, and offer effective advertising to these audiences in line with their needs and expectations (Saravanakumar, & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). Nowadays, customers go to social media to follow the product and promotional campaigns of a brand. Companies need to create more interactive, participatory, and exciting applications to attract the attention of customers (Alves, Fernandes, & Raposo, 2016).

2.1.2 Brand loyalty

The brand loyalty is a strong commitment to subscribing to making purchases on brands consistently in the future. Moreover, brand loyalty is described as a manifestation of dogmatic behavior during the purchasing process, leading to a predisposition towards specific brands in decision-making (Puspaningrum, 2020). Ahmed and Saeed (2021) asserted that loyal customers exhibit reduced price sensitivity and contribute to the acquisition of additional potential customers for their preferred brand. Consumers use multiple sources of information once they recognize their needs in purchasing a product or service. During the purchase stage of services, customers search information, read materials, interact with other customers based on their needs, evaluate what they have found and then decide to make the purchase decisions (Tarabeih, 2017).

2.1.3 Mediating effect of brand consciousness

Brand consciousness will be built from where the brands are sold. The more luxurious the place is, the stronger the brand consciousness and brand image will be (Yoel, Ellitan, & Lukito, 2021) Brand consciousness varies from fashion consciousness in relation to the goal and personal value evaluation of the item by customers.

Prior surveys indicate that conventional advertising mediums (television, radio, newspapers, etc.) positively influence numerous constructs, including brand loyalty, brand association, and brand awareness. Currently, customers increasingly rely on social media for information, perceiving it as a more reliable resource than traditional marketing communication methods (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). It is therefore presumed that Social Media Marketing actions have a positive effect on Brand Consciousness.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research study is grounded in empirical data; hence, both exploratory and descriptive research were conducted before hypothesis testing. The study employed a deductive methodology and a positivist framework. Additionally, the research included a self-administered questionnaire for the survey. According to that situation, when concerning to the total population of Sri Lanka in 2017 amounted to 21.4 million (Department of Census and Statistics, 2017). The selected sample size for the present study is 385 and it was calculated through the morgan sample calculator. The target population was the total number of Facebook followers for the selected online fashion retail outlets which is 4,807,441. The selected sampling method for the current study was the convenience sampling method.

The impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable is analyzed with the help of the structural equation model (SmartPLS). The impact of mediate variables on the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty is tested based on this model. For data analysis, two main software were used i.e. IBM SPSS 25 and PLS 4.0. The methods employed in this

software were pilot testing of variables, factor analysis, path analysis, reliability and validity tests, and bootstrapping.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

The present study consists of one independent and dependent variable along with the mediating variables such as social media marketing, brand loyalty, and brand consciousness. Social media marketing has five dimensions such as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and E-WOM. Each element three to four indicators were used to develop the questionnaire. The summary of the results is illustrated in the table below.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha, Summary of the Reliability Test

Variables		No: of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Loyalty		04	0.892
Brand Consciousness		04	0.901
Social Media Marketing	Entertainment	03	0.886
	Interaction	03	0.882
	Trendiness	03	0.881
	Customization	03	0.879
	E-WOM	03	0.881

Source: Author's Work

Conferring to the above-given table, Cronbach's alpha value of each element of an independent, dependent variable, and mediating variable ranged above 0.8. Hence, for the present research, Cronbach's alpha values were within the acceptable range, and reliability of all the scales and internal consistency were assured."

4.2 CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Analyzing all factors, this study used correlation analysis for the present research perspective. The correlation coefficient (r) value was 0.622 between social media marketing and brand loyalty at the 0.01 significance level. The p-

value is equal to 0.000 and less than the alpha value. It shows that there is a strong positive relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

P-value between social media marketing and brand consciousness of online fashion retail shops were equal to 0.000 ($p < 0.05$).”And the value of the correlation coefficient, which was 0.466 falls under the coefficient range of 0.3 to 0.49. This indicates there is a medium positive relationship between social media marketing and brand consciousness.

The correlation coefficient (r) value was 0.630 between brand loyalty and brand consciousness at the 0.01 significance level. The p-value was equal to 0.000 and less than the alpha value. It shows that there is a strong positive relationship between brand loyalty and brand consciousness of the online fashion retail industry.

4.3 STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING

In general, the Structural Equation Model (SEM) is composed of two sub-models, the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model identified the nature of the relationship between the manifest indicators and latent variables. According to the findings of the factor loadings, the indicator of brand consciousness which is prestige is below 0.7 which means weaker loadings but closer to 0.7 therefore it has not been removed from the measurement model. Further, the indicator of social media marketing which is the easy conversation is below 0.7 which means weaker loadings but closer to 0.7 therefore it also has not been removed from the measurement model. Except those two, all other indicators and variables are above 0.7 which means there is a strong loading.

To assess the level of collinearity in PLS-SEM, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is looked at. According to the table VIF value for the indicators in the study, that VIF for each of the indicators is below the recommended threshold. Convergent validity is established when items in a particular measure converge to represent the underlying construction. Statistically, convergent validity is established when the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is > 0.50 . As per the findings, the convergent validity is established for all the

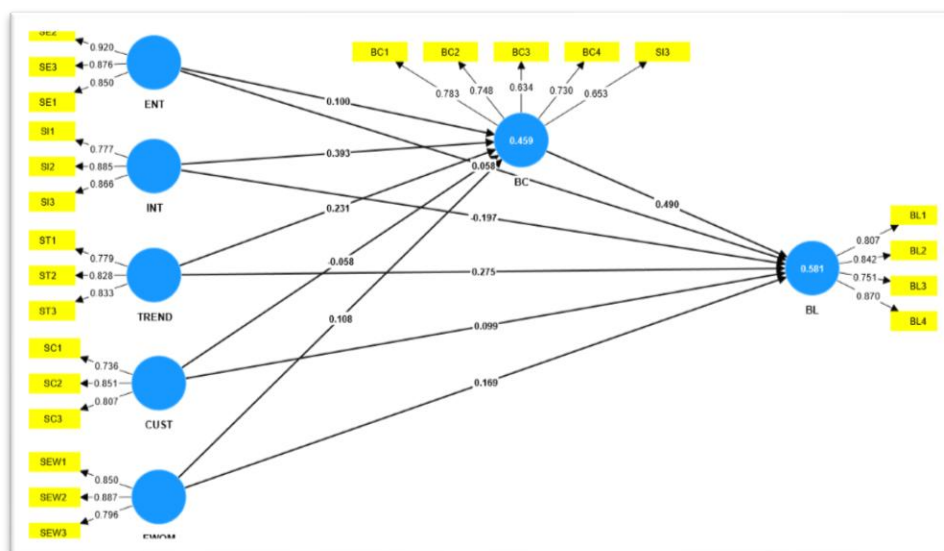


indicators in this study since the AVE is greater than 0.5. “The discriminant validity assessment has the goal to ensure that a reflective construct has the strongest relationships with its indicators (e.g., in comparison with any other construct) in the PLS path model (Hair et al., 2022). Discriminant validity assessment has become a generally accepted prerequisite for analyzing relationships between latent variables. To achieve discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE should be greater than the correlations among the latent variables. In the study, the square root of the AVE is more than the correlations among the latent variables.

4.4 MEASUREMENT MODEL - LOW ORDER CONSTRUCT

The model comprises four constructs, including three reflective first-order constructs. These constructs were measured using seven-point, multi-item measurement scales drawn from previously tested and validated published research. Figure 1 depicts all the five constructs and their corresponding measurement items.

Figure 1
Measurement Model - Low Order Construct



Source: Author’s Work

4.5 STRUCTURAL MODEL - HIGHER ORDER CONSTRUCT

Higher-order constructs (also known as hierarchical component models (HCM) in the context of PLS-SEM) provide a framework for researchers to model a construct on a more abstract dimension (referred to as higher-order component) and its more concrete subdimensions (referred to as lower-order components).

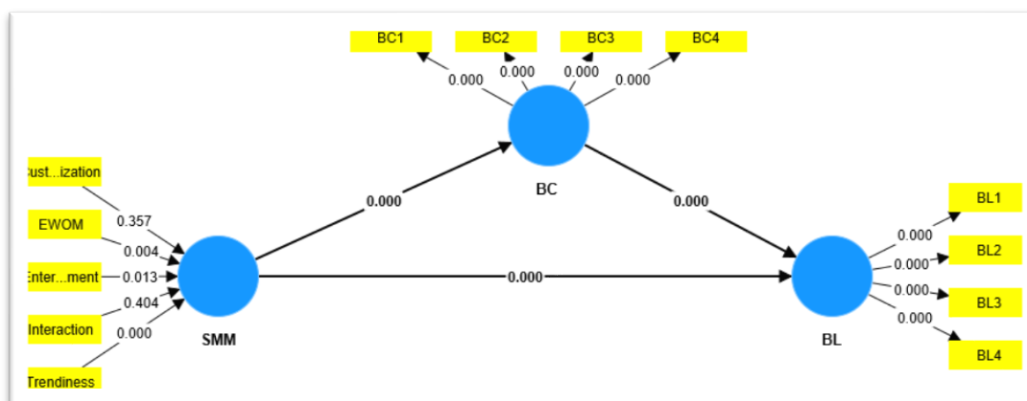
HCM refers to a more general construct that is measured at a higher level of abstraction, while simultaneously assessing several sub-components (dimensions). Hence, by specifying lower-order components, HCM covers concrete traits of a more general conceptual variable of interest (Sarstedt, Hair, Cheah, Becker, & Ringle, 2019).”

4.6 STRUCTURAL MODEL

PLS-SEM enables maximizing the variance of the dependent variable explicated by the independent variables without reproducing the empirical covariance matrix. This approach employs the PLS algorithm to validate the outer (measurement) models, followed by bootstrapping techniques to determine the significance of estimated parameters such as factor loadings, outer weights, and path coefficients (structural relationships among the latent factors).”

Figure 2

Structural Model - Higher Order Construct



Source: Author’s Work

As figure 2 illustrated, the results show there is a strong correlation between social media marketing and brand loyalty since the beta value is 0.64 and it shows a positive relationship. The P value of the model is 0 and it is less than 0.05. Findings confirmed that social media marketing has a high positive impact on brand loyalty of online fashion retail shops. There is a strong correlation between social media marketing and brand consciousness since the beta value is 0.50 and it shows a positive relationship. The P value of the model is 0 and it is less than 0.05.

Findings confirmed that social media marketing has a highly positive impact on the brand consciousness of online fashion retail shops. Moreover, there is a strong correlation between brand loyalty and brand consciousness since the beta value is 0.42 and it shows a positive relationship. The P value of the model is 0 and it is less than 0.05. Findings confirmed that brand consciousness has a high positive impact on brand loyalty of online fashion retail shops.

4.7 MEDIATION RELATIONSHIP

Mediation occurs when a third mediator variable intervenes between two other related constructs. A modification in the exogenous construct induces a variation in the mediator variable, which subsequently leads to a change in the endogenous construct inside the PLS path model. A mediator variable regulates the nature of the link between two conceptions. Analyzing the strength of the mediator variable's relationships with the other constructs allows for substantiating the mechanisms that underlie the cause-effect relationship between an exogenous construct and an endogenous construct.

The analysis primarily examines a single mediator variable; however, the route model can incorporate numerous mediator variables concurrently (i.e., multiple mediator analysis). Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2017) delineate the systematic mediator analysis procedure in PLS-SEM. As per the results in the construct, direct effect and indirect effect are significant since the P value is less than 0.005. So, social media marketing is influencing brand loyalty in the presence of brand consciousness. Social media marketing on brand loyalty is



not entirely on brand consciousness. The results show that there is partial mediation. The findings showed that brand consciousness has mediated the relationship between brand loyalty and social media marketing in the online fashion retail industry. So, the H3 is accepted.”

5 CONCLUSION

Social media has emerged as a crucial source for customers seeking product information and has established a platform for them to express their opinions regarding items and businesses. Users of social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter can access the opinions of others regarding a certain product or service,

in addition to those of their close friends, family, and coworkers. A robust customer-brand relationship fostered by social media marketing will enhance consumer loyalty. Those consumers with high levels of brand consciousness tend to buy more expensive and well-known brands. It has been a success worldwide, especially among fashion retailers, and is now regarded as a crucial marketing tool.

In Sri Lanka, the fashion retail industry is a cutting-edge and growing sector in Sri Lanka, the increasing trend is visible in brands like ODEL, Zigzag, Cool Planet, Kelly Felder, Gflock, Nolimit, and Hameedia. This study mainly contain with six objectives to investigate the impact of social media marketing on brand loyalty with the mediating effect of brand consciousness. According to the findings categorization, entertainment, interaction, trendiness and e-word of the mouth of social media of online fashion retail stores are at a high level as the mean value is reported above 3.67 and standard deviation as 0.8. Brand loyalty of Sri Lankan consumers in terms of fashionable products for online fashion retail stores is at a medium level. Findings confirmed that brand consciousness has a high positive impact on brand loyalty in online fashion retail shops.

Hypotheses were tested on Smart PLS using a bootstrapping approach. It is concluded that H1, H3, and H4 are accepted. Although the findings demonstrated a strong effect of customization and entertainment on brand



loyalty in the online fashion retail sector which is insignificant since the P value of the model is greater than 0.05. Therefore, H1a and H1d are not supported. As per the results in the construct, direct effect and indirect effect are significant since the P value is less than 0.005. So, social media marketing is influencing brand loyalty in the presence of brand consciousness. Social media marketing on brand loyalty is not entirely on brand consciousness. The results show that there is partial mediation. The findings showed that brand consciousness has mediated the relationship between brand loyalty and social media marketing in the online fashion retail industry.

Social media marketing involves targeting the target audience through social networks by creating content that matches the interests of a particular user group and fits into the specifics of the functioning of a particular social service.”

A company to ensure competitive advantages in social networks should analyze the specified environment and respond promptly to changes in user behavior, the introduction of innovative digital marketing technologies, transformation into relevant services through the implementation of appropriate marketing decisions. From the recommendation point of view, this research distinguishes between the value of the consumer's fashion consciousness principles and the desire to revisit online fashion apparel.

With financially feasible marketing policies, e-commerce strategies remains to grow. Consequently, executives and developers of business portals should create appealing online environments that guide consumers toward their value. The research indicates that the fashion industry and online apparel should focus their marketing strategies on integrating client significance regarding fashion and items. The quality dimension enables online fashion executives to harmonize their marketing strategies across the industry.





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