



Impact of E-Word of Mouth (E-WOM) on Consumers' Purchase Intention for Cosmetic Products: The Mediating Role of Brand Image (With reference to Facebook Users)

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ABSTRACT

Social media marketing (SMM) is one of the emergent trends and a different marketing strategy that advertisers worldwide use today with the competition. In day-to-day life, cosmetics play a significant part as cosmetics are used as a regular ritual by almost everyone. The Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) generated by the comments on social networking sites can influence the consumers' purchasing decisions due to the vital role played by the SMM. However, consumers' adoption of E-WOM information is influenced by different factors. This study aims to investigate factors that affect E-WOM adoption on consumer purchase intention with the mediating effect on the brand image. The lack of research attention has been given on the impact of E-WOM on purchase intention with the mediating effect of Brand image. Hence, the current research addresses the knowledge and empirical gap. The researcher used the quantitative method and the data was collected from a sample of 384 respondents from Facebook users from Generation Z residing in Western province based on random sampling techniques. The collected data were analyzed by the Smart PLS. According to the findings, the researcher concluded that E-WOM has a significant impact on purchase intention. Further, results revealed a partially mediating effect of brand image on the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention. The findings provide insights for cosmetics marketers to successfully manage the E-WOM activities. Moreover, the spread of



accurate information through Facebook can foster a strong brand image, which will finally result an actual purchase behavior by consumers.

Keywords: *Brand Image, Electronic Word of Mouth, Facebook, Purchase Intention, Social Media Marketing*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing is one of the emergent trends and a different marketing strategy that advertisers worldwide use today by paying attention to digital conversations on social media before they make an actual purchase. But, in the past, the consumer experiences were shared, expressed their views about a product or a service using their daily dialogues which is simply termed as Word of Mouth (WOM), and this also has become a free advertising to that particular product or service (Farha et al., 2017). However, with the digitalization the present society has become complex and all the information about anything is at the fingertips of the consumers and anything can be accessed with just a single touch. Thus, E-WOM (Electronic Word of Mouth) plays a major role in the present businesses (Kamalasena & Sirisena, 2021).

When it comes to cosmetics, it plays a significant part in the day-to-day life of the people as cosmetics are used as a regular ritual by almost everyone. Thus, this E-WOM generated by the comments on social networking sites can be influenced by the consumers' purchasing decisions. Specially Cosmetics category being one of the main contributors to the Sri Lankan economy it is necessary to open the eyes and minds on the ideas shared among social media platforms as it affects on the growth and the survival of the industry (Jayawardhana, 2020). According to Kamalasena and Sirisena (2021), one of the most impressive marketing tools for present businesses is the growth of social media. This study is extremely important for the companies to identify new opportunities with the growing competition, for marketers to advertise their business by selecting the most appropriate method and platform, for consumers to improve the attitudes of consumers, for policy makers to implement policies for



business development related to digital marketing field and finally for the academics as well.

Very few studies have been done academically in Sri Lanka on the impact of E-WOM on purchase intention with the mediating effect of Brand Image. Although Sri Lanka faces difficulties in physical purchasing as most of the people now are engaged in work, there is little attempt to academically examine this area (Kamalasena & Sirisena, 2021). Even though there are substantial quantity of literature on WOM, it is significant and important to say that E-WOM is still under researched and it needs further evaluation as there are fewer studies on this concept in Sri Lanka mainly when considering to cosmetics industry (Jayawardhana, 2020). However, most of the previous studies on E-WOM focused on the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, the limited number of studies demonstrate a mediator variable. Moreover, traditional WOM has moved from the real world to the virtual world as "E-WOM", and it becomes very important to investigate how E-WOM could impact the buying behavior of consumers through Facebook as there are lack of researches on Facebook in case of social media (Lkhaasuren & Nam, 2018). Therefore, the researcher identifies these empirical gaps. From the perspective of E-WOM with social media studies revealed that there is a gap between intention and actual behavior (Kamalasena & Sirisena, 2021). Although intention is a predictor of purchasing behavior people always will not behave based on the intention (Balroo et al., 2019). In this study researcher tries to analyses that using Brand image. This study also aims to analyses knowledge gap in that manner. Moreover, there is no any research done with the support of a mediating variable for E-WOM and purchase intention towards the cosmetics industry in Sri Lanka, and therefore still there is a gap which could explain the relation of E-WOM via Facebook with purchase intention towards cosmetics products (Lkhaasuren & Nam, 2018). Therefore, this study has considered this question important because of the lack of research attention has been given on the impact of E-WOM on purchase intention with the mediating effect of Brand image. Hence, the current research addresses the knowledge and the empirical gap.



1.1. Significance of the Study

This study is extremely important for the companies, consumers to identify new opportunities in the highly competitive global environment. Further this topic will benefit to the parties like Marketing Managers, Policy makers, Advertisers, consumers and academics as well. This study will help Enterprises and marketers who tend to advertise their business related to cosmetics on Facebook and support marketers to develop effective strategies based on consumers' requirements towards cosmetic products, to motivate the consumers to buy the products. This effectively impact on markets when choosing a relevant E-WOM component to promote their products. If they choose a wrong component to deliver the message for target audience, that may damage their brand image and cannot get the desire outcome. Thus, this help markets to understand about the Face Book as a good source for marketing as the modern world marketers pay more attention toward the social media marketing because with the pandemic situation it becomes more effective media and marketers can reach and link with a large audience. At the same time it further explains on how marketers can improve profits by taking the use of E-WOM communications that are shared by the potential and existing consumers on social media platforms. This will be benefited for managers to manage the marketing activities too. In the consumer perspectives, this study helps to improve the attitudes of consumers towards E-WOM in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the study explains the benefits of using E-WOM communication in order to experience the maximum comfort while doing a purchase. Further, this study will provide better information for policy makers, who involves in business development in order to implement policies to marketing fields and this topic will support for students and undergraduates (Academics) to get an idea about E-WOM context depending on its dimensions and mediating factors with its behavior on consumer purchasing intention. Finally, this study will help the society to understand the importance of E-WOM on the intention of a potential customer.

2. LITREATURE REVIEW

2.1. E-WOM (Electronic Word of Mouth)

Word of Mouth is the way how consumers express their views about a product or a service using their daily dialogues (W. Lee et al., 2017). Mainly the consumer experiences shared which becomes a free advertising to that particular product or service does direct impacts on both positive and negative ways even than the expected level (W. Lee et al., 2017). But, with the digitalization of the world, traditional WOM has moved towards E-WOM and people communicate with each other through the support of various social media platforms. According to Nuria Huete- Alcocer, (2017) this E-WOM impact in the behavior and attitudes of the consumers in case of doing purchases. However, this E-WOM is any attempt that a consumer makes via online to give their negative or positive perception on a particular product or a service (Mehyar et al., 2020). Moreover, Kamalasena and Sirisena(2021) stressed that this E-WOM becomes more advantageous as everyone can share their experiences online so that all others can read the product reviews before making an actual purchase. With the growth of the social media the desire of consumers towards digital platforms are rapidly increasing (Al-gasawneh & Al-adamat, 2020).

When paying attention for the recent researches done on the influence of E-WOM, Menon and Sivakumar (2005) did an experiment to identify the influence of E-WOM on consumer buying behavior and identified that majority of the consumers accept the information's shared on social networking sites and also it was identified that the involvement of consumers is also increasing. Moreover, Xu Lin (2007) developed the same study and illustrated that the reliance of the reader, a communication platform, the relationship between information sender and receiver, website quality and friendliness, risk shows a positive impact on the credibility of E-WOM information.

This study of the researcher has gone through large amount of analysis done on several years which influence E-WOM information on consumer purchase intention. However, the researcher identified that there are rare researches done on the effect and on the relationship of E-WOM quantity dimension, E-WOM quality dimension

and E-WOM credibility dimension, which becomes the dimensions of E-WOM. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of E-WOM on consumer purchase intention with the mediating effect of Brand Image.

2.2. Brand Image

Brand is any term, sign, symbol, image, name or a combination of all these which is made to differentiate with different products and businesses (Kotabe, M. and Helsen, 2011). While Image according to Arif, (2019) is a set of ideas, impressions, attitudes and beliefs regarding any product or service. However, Mangantar, Marjam M, (2021) identified brand image as any observation that is expressed by the relation of a brand association held in the consumers' memory. According to Erkan and Evans (2018), potential consumers compare the information available about the brand on social network sites before making their actual purchase. Therefore, marketers must be creative to grab the attention of the consumers towards their brand by understanding the present desires of the consumers. The buying decisions of the consumers are highly affected by the Brand Image as the trust towards the brand in consumers' minds is also created through the brand image (Rahman et al., 2020). In addition according to Amaya, (2018) brand image results to attract more customers mainly in digital businesses and it results in consumers to retain or exit with the business in long run. Brand image may be positive or negative. A positive brand image is a good point to expand their influence and leadership in the market for any product (Yousuf Bhat et al., 2020). Therefore, it is a major factor of gaining competitive advantage and the main objective of building brand image is the effectiveness of communication.

2.3. Purchase Intention

Purchase intention means willingness to purchase a product or service in the future. Intention may be positive or negative. Positive intention leads to actual purchase behavior while negative intention restricts the purchase of products (Zaman et al., 2014). According to Saleem et al., (2015), the final decision of buying or ignoring a

product depends on the consumer. Therefore, predicting of consumer behavior towards purchasing should be done specifically by the businesses (Evgeniy et al., 2019). Purchase intention may vary according to the gender. When considering to past literatures some studies argue that females have more concerns in doing purchasing through digital media than males (Fan & Miao, 2012). Purchase intention is explored as a mediating variable which mean to a subjective appraisal of one's readiness to perform the behavior (Adiwijaya, 2020). A measure of intention taken prior to an observation of the behavior may differ from the intention at the time the behavior is observed as the intention is something that change with the time. Normally before actual purchase of a product in social media platforms, the consumers should possess an intention towards the particular product. Therefore, as emphasized in the prior literatures Purchase intention is a major concept in marketing (Zaman et al., 2014).

Several previous studies (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Nuria Huete- Alcocer, 2017; Stefanus Kaihatu, 2020) identified various factors like company image, attitude, trust, country image and so on effects the purchase intention of consumers towards cosmetics products. However, there has been no study done on the impact of E-WOM with the mediating effect of brand image on purchase intention towards Cosmetics products.

2.4. E-WOM and Purchase Intention

According to previous literature E-WOM powerfully influence on the purchase intention of consumers who are highly seeking to purchase products through online platforms. However it is reported that E-WOM as a motivating factor for consumers to buy products with a higher convenience(Sharif & Ahmad, 2016). In addition recent studies have also identified that E-WOM has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention Kamalasena & Sirisena, (2021). Thus, it can be hypothesized that E-WOM has a significant impact on consumer purchase intention among Z generation.

2.5. E-WOM and Brand Image

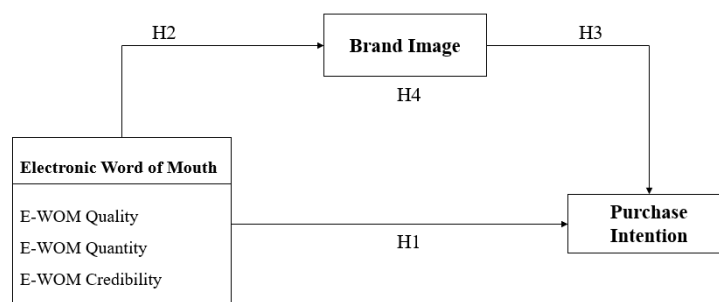
According to the study by Arif (2019) through E-WOM, consumers are free to exchange their experiences through social media sites and it can be either negative or positive. In a similar study by Mehryar, Saeed, Baroom, et al., (2020) identified that positive E-WOM created through comments has the ability to increase the positive view of brand and goods rather than negative views. In addition, Consumers have the ability to interact with the social media sites like twitter, facebook and You Tube as these sites create new opportunities to consumers to decide what accurate brand they should purchase through the observed correct informations of E-WOM on social media sites (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014).

2.6. Brand Image and Purchase Intention

Brand image is the way how consumers interpret about a particular brand with the product characteristics (Roy et al., 2020). But Armstrong & Morwitz, (2000), argued that having a well communicated image can establish a reputed brand in the market place. Thus, brand image is a result of company's achievement of long term goals as it impacts on the consumers buying decision. Therefore, companies must be able to identify the desires of consumers towards the brands as it will result to create a purchase intention.

2.7. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



2.7.1. Hypothesis

- 01) H₁ - There is a significant impact of E-WOM on consumer purchase intention
- 02) H₂ - There is a significant impact of E-WOM on Brand Image
- 03) H₃ - There is a significant impact of brand image on purchase intention
- 04) H₄ - Brand image mediate the relationship between E-WOM on purchase intention

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used quantitative method in conducting this study. The data was collected from a sample of 384 respondents from the Facebook users from Generation Z residing in Western province based on random sampling techniques. The questionnaire includes two main sections. Section one includes seven close ended questions to identify the respondent's Demographic profile. Section two comprises questions related to the E-WOM (E-WOM Quality, E-WOM Quantity, E-WOM Credibility), Brand image and Purchase intention. In here the researcher picks the respondents using random sampling that is without sticking into one particular cosmetics brand and all the reviewers of cosmetics pages in Face Book will be considered at a random way so that it want make any biasness to any cosmetic brand. The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between the factors of E-WOM and Facebook users purchase intention towards cosmetics products based on huge sampling from the target audience. In here the response have to be gathered immediately without any biasness. All the answers to the questions in this section are organized on 5-point Likert scale. Finally, the collected data were analyzed by the Smart PLS-SEM.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS DISCUSSION

Using Smart PLS software, the partial least squares (PLS) approach was also used to evaluate the model (Ringle et al., 2005). This method consists of a statistical

modelling-based technique utilising structural equations that enables the simultaneous estimation of a group of equations by measuring the concepts (measurement model) and the relationships between them (structural model) and is equipped to address concepts that are not otherwise directly observable. The PLS-SEM encompasses two steps of model assessment. Step one is evaluating the outer model; that is, evaluating the internal consistency of the measurement model (reliability) using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability. And validity assessment using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Step two: model's structural assessment using R², Q² and F². Researchers often detect weaker outer loadings, mainly when newly established scales are garnered in social science studies (Hulland, 1999). Therefore, researchers must carefully assess the effects of construct removal on the composite reliability and the construct's content validity. When outer loading is <0.70, the researcher must analyse the impact of indicator deletion on AVE and composite reliability. Further, if deletion increases measures above the threshold researcher have to delete the reflective indicator. If deletion does not increase the measure above the threshold, the researcher can retain the reflective indicator. Removal of indicators affects content validity. Indicators with weaker outer loadings are sometimes retained based on their contribution to content validity (Hair et al., 2021). Therefore, in this research, AVE and content validity fall under the standard threshold, and all the indicators are retained.

4.1. Assessment of Measurement Model

Before testing the hypothesis, the model's internal consistency and validity were assessed in this study. According to Hair et al. (2021), Cronbach's Alpha Composite Reliability (CR) values should be greater than 0.7. Thereby, (see table 1) in this study, all constructs' values are well above the suggested threshold. Thus, it indicates the internal consistency of the model. The model's convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). AVE values of each construct should be higher than the value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2021). In this study, the construct's AVE

values are greater than the rule of thumb. Thereby, it signifies that the model's convergent validity is met.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	Cronbach Alpha>0.7	Composite Reliability>0.6	AVE>0.5
E-WOM	0.929	0.941	0.616
Brand Image	0.899	0.937	0.833
Purchase Intention	0.860	0.906	0.673

Table 2: Predictive Relevance of the Model

	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)
BI	300.000	200.959	0.263
EWOM	1000.000	1000.000	
PI	500.000	270.943	0.458

The model's predictive relevance was assessed using the blindfolding procedure in PLS-SEM. To ensure predictive relevance, the Q² value should be greater than zero (Hair et al., 2014). In this model, the value of Q² is greater than zero; thus, it implies that the model has a strong predictive relevance.

Figure 1: Structural Model

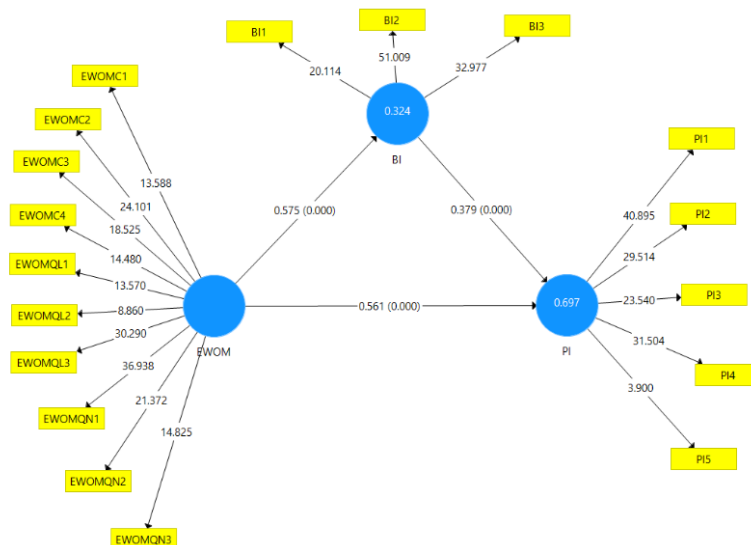




Table 3: Path Coefficient

	Path Coefficient	t-Statistic	P Values
EWOM → PI	0.560	22.921	0.000
EWOM → BI	0.575	5.642	0.000
BI → PI	0.380	3.602	0.000

4.2. Discussion

According to the regression findings of the current study it revealed that E-WOM has a significant impact on purchase intention. Through correlation analysis it is recorded as 0.779 correlation coefficient in the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention. According to the correlation criteria there is a strong linear relationship among the variables. This is further proved from the research findings of Kamalasena & Sirisena, (2021) that E-WOM Quality, E-WOM Quantity are positively related with the purchase intention. Previous studies found that there is a significant relationship between E-WOM on customer buying decisions (Mehyar, Saeed, Al-Ja'afreh, et al., 2020). According to the survey conducted by the researcher with the 384, Generation Z consumers in Western Province, it proved that majority of them are highly interested on the information that are shared via the Facebook platform about the cosmetics products. Consumers are highly aware on the opinions given by the previous consumers about the product. According to the findings, consumers differentiate the differences of various cosmetics brands through the ratings of the particular page at Facebook and through the understandability of the content of the product provided with the descriptions and also by evaluating on the positive feedbacks of the product as well. Further findings prove that both male and female consumers are using cosmetics even at present and many of them depend on the information shared through Facebook when making purchase decisions. Moreover, female is more sensitive than male in making the actual purchase decision. Researcher could be able to identify that there is no huge gender difference in purchase intention of cosmetics products. This supports to achieve the first objective which is to investigate the impact of Electronic Word of mouth on consumer's purchase intention of cosmetics products.



Objective 02: To investigate the mediating effect of Brand image in the relationship between Electronic word of mouth and purchase intention.

In mediator analysis, the impact of E-WOM and purchase intention is significant. It is denoted that there is a significant relationship between E-WOM and Brand image. It also significant at 0.000. The current study proves that there is a significant impact of Brand image on purchase intention. This is consistent with findings of (Evgeniy et al., 2019; Sutanto & Aprianingsih, 2016) and according to its findings the factors of online customer reviews, brand image, review valence, review quality have a direct effect on purchase intentions. As a result, the association between Electronic word of mouth and purchase intention is significant, because the p value is less than 0.05. As a result, brand image appears to play a role in moderating the relationship between electronic word of mouth and purchase intention. According to the findings researcher drew a conclusion that there is a significant impact of E-WOM on purchase intention. Further, results led to reveal that there is a partially mediating effect of brand image on the relationship between E-WOM and purchase intention. The findings provide insights for the cosmetics marketers to successfully manage the E-WOM activities that can create consumer attention towards cosmetics products.

5. CONCLUSION

The objective of the study is to investigate the impact of Electronic word of mouth on customer purchase intention with the mediating effect of Brand image towards cosmetics products. 384 sample of Generation Z in Western province including both male and female selected for the study and data were gathered through a self-administered questionnaire. In order to analyze the gathered data, IBM SPSS software and Smart PLS were used. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, evaluating the measurement model and structural model in order to achieve research objectives and test the hypotheses of the study.

According to the correlation analysis it proved that there is a strongly linear positive relationship among Electronic word of mouth and purchase intention and also in between Electronic word of mouth and Brand image, further among Brand image and



purchase intention. Therefore by satisfying the assumption, the researcher could be able to run the regression analysis in order to achieve the objectives and to test the hypothesis. Through the regression analysis it supported to prove that all hypothesis of the study is accepted accordingly.

Despite the fact that social media marketing is increasingly important, there have been few earlier studies examining the effects of EWOM on purchase intention in generation Z with the mediating effect of brand image. As a result, this research adds to the understanding of the evolution of both theoretical and managerial components of the social media marketing industry. As previously stated, research interest in understanding the elements influencing purchase intention in marketing cosmetics items through Facebook among generation Z is quite low in both local and worldwide contexts. As a result, this study contributes to the current literature by providing information on E-WOM, purchase intention, and brand image, with a focus on generation Z.

When considering the cosmetics market in Sri Lankan context, consumers are concerning on the safe and health products with the accurate information about the cosmetics products. Therefore, the study suggests marketers to improve their marketing campaigns by conveying the message on how their product could help to reduce the skin problems/ issues and how the customers were being responsible to filter and take the accurate information from the social media platforms among the bulk of recommendations given by the other consumers as all the information's on social media are not totally true or totally false. Thus, the consumer is responsible in grabbing the needed updated information's. Majority of people are not aware on the EWOM concept. The study suggests more awareness programs in relation to EWOM concept to develop positive attitudes. Accordingly the government and organizations should more focus to give more exposures to customers through awareness programs. According to the responses received from the consumers, it is found that they are more concern and aware on the accuracy and reliability of the information when they are engaging with an actual purchase. In order to improve the Brand image of the companies the study suggest marketers to provide sponsorships to cosmetics products



that are traded through the Facebook platform. Then consumers can build a good brand image regarding the companies. Finally, that image will lead to create purchase intention towards the products.

Further, the researcher discovered that Brand image partially mediates the association between Electronic word of mouth and purchase intention through mediator analysis. As a result, EWOM Quality, EWOM Quantity, and EWOM Credibility have an impact on cosmetics product purchase intention, and brand image has an indirect impact on the association between EWOM and purchase intention. The findings provide insights for the cosmetics marketers to successfully manage the E-WOM activities that can create consumer attention towards cosmetics products. Moreover, the spread of accurate information through Face book can foster strong brand image, which will result to make actual purchase decision by consumers. Moreover, the main objective of the study which is to investigate the impact of Electronic word of mouth on customer purchase intention with the mediating effect of Brand image towards cosmetics products were achieved.

The recommendation of this study is, the social media marketing is increasingly important, there have been few earlier studies examining the effects of EWOM on purchase intention in generation Z with the mediating effect of brand image. As a result, this research adds to the understanding of the evolution of both theoretical and managerial components of the social media marketing industry. As previously stated, research interest in understanding the elements influencing purchase intention in marketing cosmetics items through Facebook among generation Z is quite low in both local and worldwide contexts. As a result, this study contributes to the current literature by providing information on E-WOM, purchase intention, and brand image, with a focus on generation Z.

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5.1. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research has a few limitations involving gathering data and generalising the findings. First, the sample size acquired for this study is limited; data was collected using only Facebook users. Different social media platforms operate different opinions with E-WOM marketing and purchase intention. Some users do not actively use Face Book. So, when researcher only focuses on Facebook, is cause for fail to target the overall social media contribution for E-WOM marketing. Another limitation is the study is lack of exciting academic researchers. Most of the researchers have done through E-WOM by focusing on all social networking sites apart from focusing on one platform-like Face Book. Currently E-WOM is an emerging trend that can be used to promote products to the customers.

This study could add to the body of knowledge in consumer studies by describing Generation Z's buying intentions using E-WOM. As a result, there are some possibilities for additional research. A qualitative investigation, particularly in regard



to E-WOM, is suggested by the researcher. Further, it is suggested that future studies might investigate more indicators that effect on EWOM. Future researchers can explore this topic related to the service industry, FMCG sector, textile industry, tourism industry. Although some of the previous studies show some contradict results on E-WOM on actual purchase behavior, the study proved that E-WOM impact on purchase intention. Therefore, future researchers can examine the ways to translate this purchase intention into actual purchase behavior by fulfilling the action gap. The findings of the current study are based on the Generation Z in Western province in Sri Lanka. Future studies can be done in order to cover the whole population of the country without been biased.

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