Influence of Customer Generated e-WOM on Purchase Intention of Cosmetic Products in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of eWOM on consumer purchase intention. Moreover, this study examines the extent to which relationship exists between eWOM credibility, eWOM review quantity, eWOM perceived usefulness and consumer purchase intention in cosmetic products in Sri Lanka. The primary data was collected through an online survey with the help of a standardized questionnaire from 400 cosmetic product consumers in Sri Lanka. The items of the questionnaire extracted from previous research and altered them as per study requirement.

The result of this research implies that eWOM Credibility, eWOM Review Quantity and eWOM Perceived Usefulness has significant impact on Purchase Intention. The element that has the highest impact is eWOM perceived usefulness which entirely contributes to the effectiveness of eWOM while eWOM credibility and eWOM

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review quantity have less impact. These three elements thoroughly perform different roles in influencing consumer purchase intention.

This research is limiting only three main determinants such as eWOM credibility, eWOM review quantity and eWOM perceived usefulness which determine the purchase intention. There may be other factors also which are affecting that can be considered for further research. Companies could use tactics to encourage potential customers to thoroughly read eWOM provided in social media or consumer reviews. This study provides valuable insights into the eWOM which affects consumer purchase intention.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Marketers are required to interact via digital media to encourage customers to read about their market offerings in this era of digital marketing and, more specifically, with the spread of covid 19. One of these is via social media, where customers can read hundreds of comments made by other customers about their experiences with a particular product that may or may not be owned by marketers. With the development of different social media channels, buyers now have access to a wealth of information, but the most critical aspect of marketing is for marketers to instill trust in the items they offer (Bueno & Bueno, 2021; Ishar Ali & Basker, 2021). Social media is widely regarded as one of the most effective methods of disseminating information in the course of commercial operations. Through this online media, they attempt to use a variety of techniques in order to maintain consumer acceptance and trust in their products. Trust in the digital environment fosters consumer confidence in product brands and increases customer interest in purchasing (Ishar Ali et al., 2021; Susanti & Wulandari, 2021).

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Numerous corporations and institutions have now embraced Web 2.0 as a critical avenue for communicating with their clients (Davidson & Keup, 2014). Thus, online shopping has evolved into a socioeconomic activity, with consumers leaving comments and writing online evaluations on social media pages, allowing them to voice their ideas via the internet (Sai Wang, Nicole R. Cunningham & Matthew S. Eastin, 2015).

According to Henning-Thurau et al. (2004), "eWOM" refers to "any good or negative statement made about a product or firm by a future, present, or past consumer that is accessible to a large number of individuals and institutions over the internet." eWOM has a significant impact in today's society, as the majority of customers have access to social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube (Mehyar, Saeed & Baroom, 2020).

Customer reviews and comments as online feedback are deemed critical because the quality and quantity of these online suggestions have a favorable effect on other consumers' purchasing interest. Consumer behavior that manifests, frequently in response to external stimuli, is impacted by a group of individuals or a community. These stimuli will be sifted by a person's personality before he decides to make a purchase (Susanti & Wulandari, 2021; Bueno & Bueno, 2021).

Consumer behavior, strategic perspective, consumer loyalty, and typology are the primary emphasis areas of eWOM research on social media. In summary, the studies fall into two broad categories: emotion-based research and content-based research. The emotion-based examination of eWOM aims to ascertain people's positive, neutral, and negative sentiments about eWOM marketing. In terms of content-based research, scholars are more interested in gathering online consumer reviews. Through evaluations, scholars hope to demonstrate how eWOM helps marketing persuasion (Shen, 2021)

1.2. Problem Statement

The study's problem statement is that it is difficult to estimate the influence of all eWOM information. Despite the fact that some earlier studies identified the impact of eWOM on social media, the determinants of this link between eWOM on social media and consumers' purchase intentions remain unknown for cosmetic products.

1.3. Research Objectives

The main purpose of the paper is to examine the factors influencing electronic word of mouth on consumers' purchase intention in Sri Lanka. In this research, to achieve the general objective, the following objectives were set and formulated.

- To identify the level of eWOM credibility, eWOM review quantity, eWOM perceived usefulness and consumer purchase intention in cosmetic products in Sri Lanka
- To determine the extent to which relationship exists between eWOM credibility, eWOM review quantity, eWOM perceived usefulness and consumer purchase intention in cosmetic products in Sri Lanka
- To examine the most influential factor on purchase intention through eWOM.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

In e-commerce, information sharing is critical for establishing consumer trust. This information sharing has shifted from offline to online during the last decade as a result of the growth of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), most notably social networks. Recognizing this fact, businesses are encouraging e-commerce communication (Bueno & Bueno, 2021; Shen, 2021; Mubarak & Ishar Ali, 2018).

Cheung & Lee (2012) explained that as the Internet and Web 2.0 have grown in popularity, the transition from conventional Word of Mouth to Electronic Word of

Mouth has ushered in a new era of communication. Consumers employ eWOM via a variety of online platforms, including websites, emails, chat rooms, social networking sites, and blogs (Gupta & Harris, 2010). Consumers have chosen to voice their ideas or complaints digitally for two reasons: convenience and efficacy (Pham, 2016). Additionally, consumers seek online opinions, reviews, and comments in order to alleviate ambiguity, anxiety, and risk associated with the product's quality and seller's credibility (Huang et al., 2009). eWOM is an invaluable resource because it not only mitigates risk but also has a significant impact on customer behavior and buying decisions (Chen & Xie, 2008).

Due to the lack of trust in advertising, consumers value the opinions of their peers more than those of advertisers, which has increased the visibility of eWOM (Little, 2015; Mubarak & Ishar Ali, 2018). Prior to acquiring items or services, prospective customers do a visual search for data from past clients in order to obtain visually supporting facts that will keep them safe and comfortable during the decision-making process (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

2.2. eWOM Credibility

eWOM Credibility refers to the extent to which a source is seen as credible, factual, and true for recommendation purposes in social media and other online tools (Fogg et al., 2002). It is critical to determine the credibility of an eWOM because if it is perceived as credible, customers may use it to influence their purchasing decisions, resulting in changes in attitude and behavior. If it is perceived as less credible, the customer will likely disregard it and it will be discounted (Shan, 2016; Mubarak & Ishar Ali, 2018). It is critical to maintain eWOM credibility in light of the ongoing introduction of new social media platforms and consumer behavior. As a result, there might have a significant impact on a customer's trust and loyalty formation (Gruen et al. 2006; Ha, 2004). Given that the majority of online review sites allow users to initiate discussions and upload comments, there is a possibility that an anonymous person with no expertise in the subject may join the debate, misleading the readers. The possibility that individuals will not be required to identify their identities

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increases the risk of discussion credibility and the likelihood of impacting the consumer's overall image of the product. Users perceive this as a risk associated with relying on online reviews. Given the vital nature of source trustworthiness, it is an important factor to consider when examining how people perceive reviews.

2.3. eWOM Review Quantity

Bataineh (2015) defined eWOM review quantity as the number of reviews a product receives in order to determine if it is popular and worthwhile or not. Consumers may require a reference to boost their confidence and alleviate emotions of confusion and worry while purchasing a product, owing to the massive amount of information shared online by peers (Aljahdali, 2016). People assume that a large number of reviews implies that a product is popular since it has been purchased by a large number of people who were able to persuade others to make a purchase choice (Park et al., 2007). According to a study conducted by Sher and Lee (2009), customers prefer to read reviews posted on online blogs, message boards, social media, chatrooms, and product review websites rather than on the product's official website.

2.4. eWOM Perceived Usefulness

Because information on online platforms may come from a variety of sources such as advertisers, friends, and peers, the degree to which the information supports consumers in making their purchase decision is referred to as eWOM perceived utility (Davis, 1989). In other words, it is the persuasive ability of comments embedded within an eWOM message (Bhattacherjee, 2006). Similar to the amount of eWOM reviews, eWOM perceived usefulness enables consumers to develop the confidence necessary to make sound purchasing decisions and to be satisfied with their purchase. Due to the prevalence of incorrect material on social media, content with appropriate depth and breadth is essential to attract additional consumers (Sullivan, 2000).

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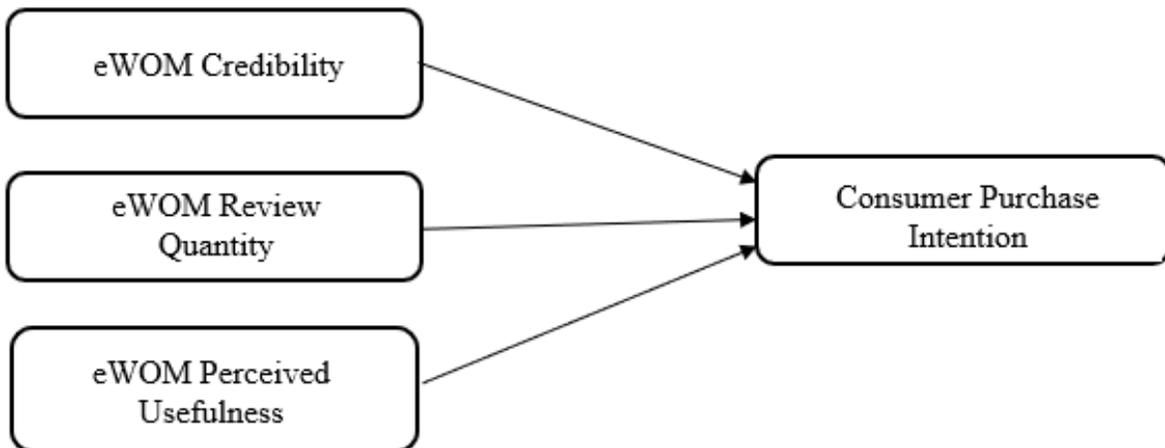
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2.5. Purchase Intention

It is a notion that compels buyers to purchase a particular product in a variety of circumstances. In other words, it is a decision-making stage that represents the consumer's behavioral outcome (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Businesses' efforts to identify a customer's buying intention for a product or brand are critical, and the reach of that effort is a powerful indicator of customer behavior (Kudeshia & Chetna, 2017). Via this study, we examined the influence of eWOM in social media on customer purchase intention using criteria such as eWOM trustworthiness, eWOM review number, and eWOM perceived utility.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, the conceptual framework is used to indicate the relationship between the variables (Sekaran, 2006). Based on the theoretical explanations and the empirical finding, this study has conceptualized the independent variable and dependent variable as shown in Figure below.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Adapted from Mehyar et al., (2020)

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3.1. Research Hypothesis

Credibility of eWOM is critical in the eWOM environment. It relates to establishing consumer trust in a product or brand (Hussain et al., 2018). If the consumer believes the information, he or she has gathered is credible, the consumer will have more confidence in using it to make a purchase decision (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). It is critical to understand how eWOM credibility affects a customer's buying intention. As a result, Koo (2016) examined previous research on the relationship between eWOM credibility and purchase intention, finding that eWOM credibility has a significant positive association with the purchase intention of 302 South Korean students for airline tickets, a meal at a family restaurant, and a skin care service. Consequently, it can be hypothesized that:

H1: The eWOM credibility has a significant statistical impact on consumers' purchasing intention.

The quantity of online reviews is one approach to determine a product's popularity, as it represents the product's performance in the market (Mayzlin & Chevalier, 2006). Additionally, the quantity of eWOM reviews reflects the number of positive experiences buyers had with their previous purchase (Chatterjee, 2001). It is critical to understand how the quantity of eWOM reviews effects a customer's buying intention. Thus, Mehyar et al. (2020) conducted a study of 283 Karak governante people in the Middle East, examining and concluding that the number of eWOM reviews has a large and favorable effect on purchase intention. Consequently, it can be hypothesized that:

H2: The eWOM Review Quantity has a significant statistical impact on consumers' purchasing intention.

Consumers believe that the perceived utility of eWOM will aid them in making buying selections (Cheung et al., 2008). While Chiang and Jang (2007) emphasized the need of studying the association between eWOM perceived usefulness and purchase intention, other investigations (Lee and Koo, 2015) discovered positive

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traces between eWOM perceived usefulness and purchase intention. The perceived usefulness of information in eWOM is so strong that it can instill customer confidence and influence purchasing decisions (Nabi and Hendriks, 2003). As a result, this study will examine the eWOM perceived utility and its association with purchase intention. Consequently, it can be hypothesized that:

H3: The eWOM Perceived Usefulness has a significant statistical impact on consumers' purchasing intention.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

The researcher found it appropriate that a descriptive research design was appropriate for this study because this study was concerned with finding out what the eWOM factors are those influence consumers' purchase intention in Sri Lanka. For conducting the research, primary data was collected. The aim of descriptive research is to produce an accurate and valid representation of the factors that are relevant to the research question.

4.2. Population and Sample

There were two types of data used for this research study such as primary data and secondary data. According to Krejcie & Morgna (1970), the right sample size for the amount population which is or exceeds 1,000,000. Therefore, this study conveniently selected 400 cosmetic product consumers in Sri Lanka using convenient sampling technique as its primary data. The questionnaires were distributed online which was supported by google form. Out of the 400 responses received, 7 questionnaires were eliminated leaving a response rate of 96.25%. Consequently, 385 questionnaires were analyzed.

4.3. Research Instruments

A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was used to measure the variables. Items were adapted from previous research and modified to suit the context of this study. The author used SPSS 2.0 software to validate the data collected.

4.4. Research Approach

This research is carried out based on a deductive approach. The deductive approach uses to spot causality between variables and theory. Particularly, after reviewing the literature on a subject, the researcher develops a theory that supported the literature review phase. Then, the researcher will craft hypotheses, which are able to be tested using quantitative data. As a part of this process, a structured methodology must be selected; the variable to be measured must be expressed in its simplest form (reductionism); and so, a measure would wish to be created so it is possible to measure it (operationalized).

4.5. Research Choice

The current study employed a quantitative research design, as examining the eWOM factors influencing consumers' purchase intention requires a scientific instrument to gather data from the chosen sample population. Because the study enumerates the problem through creating numerical data and allows the researcher to measure and analyze data and can be used to test the hypothesis.

Univariate and bivariate measures are calculated for each variable. To tedious work involved in the calculation the univariate and bivariate measures and SPSS (20.0) windows have been used for delivering distribution, the measure of central tendency, the measure of dispersion, and the measure of correlation and regression.

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5. DATA ANALYSIS

5.1. Analysis of reliability of instruments

Table 1.1: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

Instruments	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
eWOM Credibility	4	0.817
eWOM Review Quantity	4	0.841
eWOM Perceived Usefulness	4	0.858
Consumers Purchase Intention	4	0.867

(Source: Survey Data)

Hair et al., (1998) claims that the reliability or Cronbach's alpha that is the lowest acceptable point is 0.6, and the value that is higher than 0.8 indicates that all of the elements have a strong coherence. Hence, the results of the current study show a strong coherence level of reliability for all our constructs (as shown in Table 1.1).

5.2. Descriptive Analysis

5.2.1. Frequency Descriptive Analysis – Demographic Profile

Under this section, demographic information collected from three hundred and eighty-five respondents has been described. For this, tables were included to describe the demographics of the sample and to display the frequency of various outcomes in a sample. Demographic properties of the consumers who participated in this study have been grouped and examined according to gender, age, higher qualification, income, relationship status, and few other users background questions about social media and its usage.

Out of the total respondents, more than half of them where females constitute 63.6%. When it comes to the age of respondents, 59.5% of them were in 25-34 age range, similarly 36.4% of them were 18-24 years of age range, and altogether 18 – 34 age group constitute 95.8% of the total respondents. 54.3% of the respondents earn below Rs. 30, 000 monthly, another 26% earning falls in the range of Rs. 30, 000 – Rs. 60,

000 while only 8% of the respondents' monthly income is above Rs. 120, 000. According to the responses received 67.5% of them are single while only 28.8% are married, minor percentage of the respondents do not want to disclose their relationship status. With regard to the social media usage, 94% of the respondents use social media everyday while 0.5% use rarely, while others use social media frequently. Among the 385 respondents, 44.7% use face book, 24.9% use Instagram and 23.9% use youtube, these three channels constitute 93.5% but the frequency of time used to read online reviews indicates 12.2% use more than six times while other 10.4% use five to six times a day, 34% use three to four times. Average time spent by the respondents vary but most of them use 1-15 minutes which is 58.4% while just 6.,8% of the respondents use more than 60 minutes to read online reviews. 33.2% of the respondents use social media to read reviews because of credibility and trustworthy, 28.8% for convenience13% use for accuracy and 24.7% use for variety of information.

5.3. Univariate Analysis

In this study, mean was used to measure the central tendency while dispersion is described by using standard deviation. Under the univariate analysis researcher used descriptive statistics. For this analysis mean values and standard deviation of the variables were taken into consideration.

Table 1.2 Overall Values of Independent and Dependent Variable

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision Attribute
eWOM Credibility	3.73	0.545	High level
Review Quantity	3.54	0.639	High level
Perceived Usefulness	3.85	0.559	High level
Purchase Intention	3.77	0.653	High level

(Source: Survey Data)

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5.4. Bivariate Analysis

5.4.1.Pearson's Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis was used to determine the nature (direct or inverse) and the degree of association between two or more variables of this study. If the data are quantitative and population parameters of the variable are normally distributed the Pearson's correlation coefficient technique with two tailed tests of significance was considered.

Table 1.3 Results of Correlation Analysis of Independent and Dependent Variable

		eWOM Credibility	Review Quantity	Perceived Usefulness	Consumer Purchase Intention
eWOM Credibility	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
Review Quantity	Pearson Correlation	.534**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
Perceived Usefulness	Pearson Correlation	.560**	.511**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
Consumer Purchase Intention	Pearson Correlation	.593**	.545**	.635**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) (*Source: Survey Data)*

According to Table 1.3, the eWOM credibility and consumer purchase intention express strong positive relationship (r= 0.539) and the relationship statistically significant (p<0.01). Review quantity and consumer purchase intention express strong positive relationship (r= 0.545) and the relationship statistically significant (p<0.01). And also, perceived usefulness and consumer purchase intention express strong positive relationship (r= 0.635) and the relationship statistically significant (p<0.01).

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5.5. Multiple Regression Analysis

5.5.1.Multiple Regression Between E-Wom Credibility, E-Wom Review Quantity, E-Wom Perceived Usefulness, And Consumer Purchase Intention

Multiple regression analysis used to determine the impact of independent variables on dependent variable. Here the multiple regression analysis is used to determine the factors influencing on consumer purchase intention.

Table 1.4: Multiple Regression Analysis Model Summary

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.717a	.514	.510	.45701	1.872
a. Predictors: (Constant), eWOM Perceived Usefulness, eWOM Review Quantity, eWOM Credibility					
b. Dependent Variable: Consumer Purchase Intention					

(Source: Survey Data)

The "R Square" statistic indicates that 51.4% of the variation in the consumer purchase intention is explained by eWOM credibility, review quantity and perceived usefulness. The "Adjusted R Square" 51.0% indicates that it is an adjustment of the R Square that penalized the addition of extraneous predictors to the model. The linear regression (F=134.086, df=3, 381) p<0.05. It indicates the model is significant.

Table 1.5 Multiple Regression Analysis Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.120	.185		.649	.517
eWOM Credibility	.324	.055	.271	5.892	.000
Review Quantity	.211	.045	.207	4.664	.000
Perceived Usefulness	.441	.053	.378	8.357	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Purchase Intention					

(Source: Survey Data)

The beta coefficients may be negative or positive. If the beta coefficient is positive, the interpretation is that for every one unit increase in the independent variable, the dependent variable will increase by the beta coefficient value. If the beta coefficient is negative, the interpretation is that for every one unit increase in the independent variable, the dependent variable will decrease by the beta coefficient value. Since the beta coefficient of all independent variables are positive, there is positive relationship.

Once the beta coefficient is determined, then a regression equation can be written. Using the beta coefficient above, the equation can be written as follows:

$$Y = a + \beta 1x1 + \beta 3x2 + \beta 3x3 + \varepsilon$$

$$CPI = 0.120 + 0.324 \, (C) + 0.211 \, (RQ) + 0.441(PU) + \varepsilon$$

The B coefficient for eWOM credibility is 0.324, B coefficient for the review quantity is 0.211 and B coefficient for perceived usefulness is 0.441. This means that on average, if goes up 1 point on eWOM credibility, review quantity, perceived usefulness scale, consumer purchase intention, will improve by 0.324 units, 0.211 units and 0.441 units respectively.

Based on Table 1.5, Alpha value of eWOM credibility ($p = 0.000$) was less than the significant level 0.05, alpha value of review quantity ($p = 0.000$) was less than the significant level 0.05 and alpha value of perceived usefulness ($p = 0.000$) was less than the significant level 0.05. Thus, step concludes that eWOM credibility, review quantity, perceived usefulness statistically significant influence on consumer purchase intention.

6. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Conclusion Based on Background Analysis

According to descriptive analysis for demographic factors, the majority of the respondents (63.6%) to the study were female, indicating that more females are interested to purchase cosmetic products compared to males (36.4%). Age levels of

consumers are highly between 25 - 34 years which shows a considerable amount of 59.5 percent (229). Considering the higher qualification level of the consumers, the majority of the respondents are having qualification of bachelor's degree 73.8% (284), indicating that most probably graduates and undergraduates are consuming cosmetic products. By looking at the monthly income level of consumers, it can be clearly stated that 209 out of 385 consumers are getting a monthly income of below 30,000 which represents 54.3 percent of the sample. The data obtained from the questionnaire reveals that the majority of the respondents 67.5% (260) of consumers are single.

The majority 94.0 % (362) of the respondents use social media websites every day. They confirmed that Facebook is the most visited platform to read online reviews and comments with 44.7% (172) respondents. 43.4 percent of the participants confirmed that they read an online review before making a purchase of a certain product 1 to 2 times. The average time the respondents spend on reading eWOM and online review is varied. Among them, 58.4 percent of respondents read quite a few from 1 to 15 minutes. The most common answer for respondents to read online review more than other types of sources is Credibility/ Trustworthy with a frequency of 128 with a percent of 33.2.

6.2. Multiple Regression Between E-Wom Credibility, E-Wom Review Quantity, E-Wom Perceived Usefulness and Consumer Purchase Intention

To test the hypotheses about the effect of eWOM credibility, eWOM review quantity, eWOM perceived usefulness on consumer purchase intention, multiple linear regression analysis techniques were used. Table 1.4, the researcher found that the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.514, which means that the influence of eWOM credibility (X1), eWOM review quantity(X2) and eWOM perceived usefulness (X3) only affects 51.4 percent of consumer purchase intention (Y), while the rest (48.6 percent) is influenced by other variables. The results of multiple regression analysis indicated that there is a significant relationship between eWOM credibility and consumer purchase intention. Since the p value of eWOM credibility (0.000) is less than 0.05, H1 can be accepted.

Meanwhile, there is a significant relationship between eWOM review quantity and consumer purchase intention. Since the p value of eWOM review quantity (0.000) is less than 0.05, H2 can be accepted. And also, there is a significant relationship between the eWOM perceived usefulness and consumer purchase intention. Since the p value of eWOM perceived usefulness (0.000) is less than 0.05, H3 can be accepted.

According to the hypothesis testing, among the three factors, eWOM perceived usefulness is considered the most influencing factor on consumer purchase intention based on beta values and significance followed by eWOM credibility and eWOM review quantity respectively. Therefore, eWOM perceived usefulness is proven to be the most influencing eWOM factor on consumers' purchase intention of cosmetic products in Sri Lanka.

7. CONCLUSION

In brief, e-WOM is a highly effective kind of communication that can significantly improve a user's experience with a product or service on a variety of levels. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the elements that influence purchasing intent in an online eWOM environment.

This study discovered that Sri Lankans frequently use online reviews as a primary mediator in influencing their buying decision. 385 data points were gathered from an online channel and analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The finding establishes that all three eWOM variables have a considerable effect on customer purchasing intention. The most influential factor is eWOM perceived utility, which accounts for 100% of eWOM effectiveness, while eWOM credibility and eWOM review quantity have a lesser impact. These three components each play a critical role in influencing consumer purchasing intention.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

This research can be used to make recommendations for future standards, guidelines, and development in the cosmetic business and related sectors. This research proposes

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that cosmetic enterprises place a greater emphasis on eWOM Perceived Utility, as it adds much more to the efficacy of eWOM than other criteria. Additionally, this research found that the majority of persons (over the age of 45) lack access to technology, resulting in a lack of understanding about eWOM. As a result, cosmetic companies must take steps to include that demographic as well.

The scope of future research can be determined by the study's limitations; the study's geographic area may need to be increased. Because the respondents come from a confined geographic area and this study is based on a small sample size, it has the potential to be expanded. Additionally, it is advised that future research examine the association between customer purchase intention for cosmetic items and other eWOM criteria other than eWOM trustworthiness, eWOM review volume, and eWOM perceived utility. Due to the fact that this research was conducted utilizing an online questionnaire in a single language, English, it is recommended that more research be conducted using in-depth interviews with respondents to gather more specific and accurate data for further study.

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