

Social Media and Buying Behavior of Women in Pakistan toward Purchase of Textile Garments

Saadia Nasir¹, Dr. Prakash Vel² & Hafsa Mateen³

Abstract

There is a boom in textile industry of Pakistan. Apparels produced in Pakistan are becoming popular amongst local women. This business is gaining momentum as a good designer dress is considered to be a status symbol amongst women. Added to this trend is the growth of usage of Social networking sites amongst the women of Pakistan alongside social interaction in person. This research focuses on the buying behavior of women in Pakistan. A study has been carried out on 200 female respondents from the city of Lahore in Pakistan. The results indicate that women of Pakistan consider traditional word of mouth to be more authentic than social media for making purchase decisions related to their apparels.

Key words: Word of Mouth, Social Media Networking, Buying behavior



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INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a major exporter of apparels including readymade garments, bed linen and knitwear. It exported 27 million dozen apparels worth 12 million US dollars in 2009-10 (Memon 2010).

In Asia, Pakistan is the 8th largest exporter of textile products. The contribution of this industry to the total GDP is 8.5%. At present, there are 1,221 ginning units, 442 spinning units, 124 large spinning units and 425 small units which produce textile products providing employment to 30% of the country's workforce (Yasin).

Although the fashion industry is in a nascent stage, Pakistan has still been able to make quite a mark in it. It has a lot of fashion designers, professionals and leading textile groups working in this field. Pakistan has attained a credible position worldwide because of its large scale textile industry. Pakistan's apparel industry underwent many changes and peoples attitude changed from getting clothes stitched from tailors to readymade garments. There are many designers and textile groups such as Maria B, Junaid Jamshed, Sana Safinaz, Gul Ahmed, Mausummery, Wardah, Firdous and Lala Textiles who are manufacturing cloth and ready to use garments. Within Pakistan they are marketed through Radio, TV, Print and online media. They are sold at outlets and exhibitions held locally and internationally. A lot of marketing campaigns are now being carried through Social Media Networking sites (Ghani 2010). These marketing campaigns have different effects on the women buying behaviour. Word of Mouth and social media marketing can positively as well as negatively affect the purchase process.

Keeping in mind the importance of this industry and growing importance of liking for fashion apparels, we decided to evaluate the effectiveness of traditional word of mouth against social media marketing amongst the female population of Lahore, being a metropolitan city in Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Elements in a communication process

Communication does not always require language or to be vocalized. It can occur through gestures such as eye contact and body language. Hence, communication is "A verbal or non-verbal exchange of knowledge and/or information between one another."

Various marketing media are used to reach the customers. When a product or service is marketed the message is interpreted by the potential customer. After that the customer gives his/her response. This response may be in the form purchase/repurchase behavior or simply by not purchasing the product or service. The whole process including the interpretation of the message is influenced by the customer's knowledge, demand, brand loyalty, friends and family, marketing media, brand impression, etc (Kotler, et al, 2008).

¹ Kinnaird College for Women, Faculty of Department of Computer Science. E-Mail: nasir.saadia@gmail.com

² University of Wollongong in Dubai, Faculty of Business and Management. E-Mail: prakashvel@uowdubai.ac.ae

³ Kinnaird college for Women, Lahore, Mphil of Department of Business Studies. E-Mail: hafsa.mateen@gmail.com

Word Of Mouth: Marketing Tool

Word of mouth is communicating information among people about the performance of product or service (Brown, Broderick and Lee 2007). It may be Oral or written. As given by Kotler, *et al.* (2008) "People to people oral or written communication that relates to the merits or experiences of purchasing or using products or services". Word of mouth is believed to have a major influence on what people think and do (Buttle 1998). Three things of a speaker which are quite significant in persuading the listener are Ethos, Pathos and Logos (Buttle 1998). Ethos refers to the credibility of the speaker. We usually like to listen and agree with the person we like and/or respect. Pathos refers to emotional appeals that convince us to do something. The choice of words plays an important part over here as they are responsible for gaining audience's emotional attention and for enhancing communication. Logos means convincing under the light of logics and reasoning (Ramage and Bean 1998).

The three characteristics of Word of mouth are that it is 1) Credible: People trust those who they know and respect (Kotler, *et al.* 2008). They are influenced by their reference group. Therefore, word of mouth proves to be an authentic and credible source of information. 2) Personal: When people communicate with each other they share their experiences and opinions (Kotler, *et al.* 2008). Hence word of mouth (most of the times) reflects a friendly opinion and/or suggestion. 3) Timely: Word of mouth is done when people are interested in sharing their experience or knowledge and therefore contains significant information, events and experiences (Kotler, *et al.* 2008).

The past researches generally support that WOM is more influential on behavior than other marketer-controlled sources. WOM influences awareness, expectations, perceptions, attitudes, behavioral intentions and behavior of consumers. It has been proved to be more effective than any advertising in case of raising awareness and customer acquisition and the reason behind this is trustworthiness in personal source. An important factor of WOM is its source. Therefore, it is important for the WOM to be effective that its source is reliable. WOM has proved to be nine times as effective as advertising and it converts unfavorable or neutral attitudes into positive attitudes (Buttle 1998).

WOM can influence people's decisions both positively and/or negatively. The greater impact is that of negative WOM. The study reports that dissatisfied customers are likely to tell twice as much as a satisfied customer (Day 1971).

In the world of communication, word of mouth (WOM) is thought to be the most universal object. Personal communication, such as, communication with family and relatives are termed as stronger and more powerful communication whereas ones with friends at work and other people we know are termed as weaker. A recent technique called the stochastic cellular automata derived from Complex Systems Analysis has been used to examine the data. The results showed that firstly, the effect of the weaker relations in a person's life is almost as strong as that of the stronger communications. Secondly although advertising is a really strong means of publicizing any given product but its effects are not everlasting. Hence w-o-m through both strong and weak relations is always more effective than advertising (Goldenberg, Libai and Muller 2001).

There have been growing interests in understanding how word of mouth on the Internet (eWOM) is generated and how the consumers' purchase decisions are influenced by it at retail outlets (Duan, Gu and Whinston 2008). WOM is an important way of consumer interaction online. Existing theories would not be able to explain and evaluate the purchases generated by eWOM. The website is the primary "actor" in digital social networks (Brown, Broderick and Lee 2007). Talking about the effect of eWOM in hospitality and tourism, the two things that play a vital role when a consumer is making a purchase decision are interpersonal influence and word-of-mouth (WOM). When this WOM becomes eWOM it gets potential to introduce new ways of capturing, analyzing, interpreting, and managing the influence that one consumer may have on another (Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan 2008).

Since last two decades the retailing industry is undergoing constant evolution and transformation and globalization, mergers and acquisitions, and technological developments have played drastic role in it. Moreover, the growth of Internet has proved to be the main catalyst in this process (Constantinides, Romero and Boria 2008). Word-of-mouth is becoming more and more important technique of marketing. In this type of marketing the marketers deliberately try to influence what customers talk among themselves (Kozinets, *et al.* 2010). WOM referrals are a strong way of acquiring new customers in social

networking sites. Hence as compared to traditional ways of marketing, online word of mouth has proved to be more efficient in acquiring new customers (Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels 2009). Retailer have realized that today's consumer is well informed and critical than that of past. Web 2.0 (social media) has proved to be something that has given consumers more control and information and this has posted retailers a lot of challenges. It is a new strategic marketing tool and has a lot of opportunities for both retailers and consumers (Constantinides, Romero and Boria 2008). Word-of-mouth communications have allowed the marketers to target and influence consumer opinion in the networks that people form within their groups and communities (Kozinets, *et al.* 2010).

Social Media Networks

Social Networking Site (or SNS) is a place over the internet that enables users to

- Make a profile
- Have a list of other users with whom they want to connect
- View and navigate their own list of connections and sometimes those made by others within the system.

The nature and organization of these services varies from site to site (Boyd and Ellison 1998).

A few examples of such sites are Facebook, Myspace, Bebo, Blogs, Twitter and Google+ etc.

It has been concluded by some that SNSs are at times used to make the existing offline social networks stronger. Therefore, for some of SNSs, to attract people it is important that their users have a part of their pre-existing offline social relations online. The research suggests that Facebook is used to solidify existing offline relations (or connections). These relationships may be weak at times, but typically there is some common offline element among individuals who friend one another. Research in this vein has investigated how online interactions interface with offline ones. Facebook users search for existing offline connection more than they search for complete strangers. Whereas another research shows that 91% of US teens who use SNSs do connect with their existing friends. Since these sites enable users to connect with each other therefore they have become an integral part of their lives (Boyd and Ellison 1998).

Companies are practicing multiple things through the use of technology. This includes attracting new clients, servicing current clients, making money, promoting brand image, providing helpful services, and gearing up targeted advertising campaigns. A study showed that nearly six out of ten United States users believe that companies should interact with the customers via Social Networking Sites. SNS provide individuals and organizations with various communication medias, for example, emailing service, chat, blogs, discussion group, and others (Bolotaeva and Cata 2010).

Bolotaeva and Cata (2010) have defined four P's of SNS. They are i) Personal: Social networking sites are personally relevant. The information in social websites resonates to the personal interest of users. ii) Participatory: SNSs allow their users to participate. iii) Physical: Many social networking websites allow users to meet online and outside the cyberspace. iv) Plausible: There are some rules and regulation according to which users participate in social networking websites. These rules allow them to function.

Word of Mouth and Social Networking Sites

Communication over social media sites is also considered as a type of word of mouth communication. The question arises, what is the difference between Traditional Word of Mouth and interaction through Social Networking Sites? In traditional WOM people usually interact with those whom they know or are close to. In SNSs people interact with a lot of people which includes friends, family, friends of friends and complete strangers. This interaction may be direct or indirect. For example, when our friend's friend posts on our friend's wall on Facebook we are able to read it, if the allowed by that user. This is a form of indirect communication between us and our friend's friend. The impact of traditional WOM is different than that of SNSs'. How? On social networking sites there are people who are complete strangers or whose opinion does not matter so much, therefore the chances are that you do not find the information authentic. Whereas, in traditional WOM people usually interact with those whom they trust or know well. When we meet people we try to make a judgment about whatever they say and then analyze their statements and then we decide whether to trust that statement or not. Interaction over social networking sites lacks this element of body language, thus limiting their credibility and our decision making.

Staying in connection and sharing activities, events, lifestyles and knowledge are few of the objectives attained through online communities. For this reason virtual communities have been created and this has

helped greatly in businesses done online since they become the potential sites for new customers. Members' approach towards a community, the way they comprehend them and their social attitude are the significant factors which affect people's decision to become members of these communities (Lin 2006). Social Networks are sites that allow their users to interact with one another. During these interactions they share their knowledge about their interests which sometimes include products and services offered by different organizations. They are one of the best marketing ways if they can be integrated with marketing mix (Bolotaeva and Cata 2010). Boyd and Ellison (2007) define these communities or Social Networking sites as the ones that allow their users to make their existence online. This existence is by making a profile, have a list of other users to communicate with and view and navigate through the information by others. According to them, one of the most important things that facilitate these networks is the availability of offline networks of their users.

Senecal and Nantel (2004) investigated the usage of recommendation sources that are available online to customers. They took three websites, four recommendation sources and two products under consideration with sample size of 487. Their research revealed that consumers who consulted product recommendation are likely to select recommended products twice as often as consumers who did not consult recommendations. The online recommendation source was proved to be more influential than traditional recommendation i.e. by humans. It is to be noted that there was significance in type of product and choice of product upon recommendation. Lin (2006) applied the structural equation modeling technique on a survey of 165 members of a community. It was concluded that member's approach towards a community and their social attitude effect their decisions on whether or not to leave that community.

Majority of the college students spend major portion of their day in using these website and purpose behind doing so is that they want to make new friends and connect with old friends. Moreover, both men and women of traditional college age are also engaging themselves in online communication (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke 2008). There are various privacy issues associated with SNSs especially with students because information related to home town and date of birth is being misused by the users (Boyd and Ellison 2007).

Internet which is a new tool of communication has changed the way people interact with each other (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke 2008). Fischera and Reuber (2011) have discussed in their paper the role that is being played by Social interaction in the decision making processes. Their study includes how these decision making processes are impacted when entrepreneurs use Twitter. They have given basic introduction of Twitter and how it works. Another significant factor is the availability of free time which increases the level of social interaction of an entrepreneur through twitter. Two other factors which are important in influencing and regulating a person's decision in interacting and establishing communication with other's through twitter are the general inclination of a community and the standard of a community.

Online recommendation and feedback

Iyengar, Han and Gupta (2009) conducted an empirical study to determine the influence of friends in purchases in social networks. There has been a rapid growth in social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace have witnessed a rapid growth in their membership. Some of these SNSs have tried introducing an advertising-based model which has not proved to be very successful. Also, they have not yet evaluated how much their members influence each other. The sites have potential to provide businesses with unique marketing opportunities. This is dependent upon the consideration that friends influence each other. There were three questions that were answered in this research. First one was to determine whether friends influence purchases of users in an online social network or not. Second was to see what type of users is more influenced by this social pressure. Third was to determine whether the social influence in terms of increase in sales and revenue can be quantified or not. To get answers to these questions they chose Cyworld, an online social networking site in Korea. The users of this SNS create mini-homepages to interact with their friends. Users decorate these pages with items like wallpapers, music, etc and they become media of expression for the users. Data was gathered from 202 users and an individual level model of choice (buy or not to buy) and quantity (how much to spend on buying) was designed. Bayesian approach and MCMC approach were used to estimate this model. Their results

showed that there are three categories of users with varying behaviour. The low-status group (48% of users), middle-status group (40% users) and the high-status group (12% users). The users belonging to low-status group are not well connected and they show limited interaction with other members and therefore are unaffected by social pressure. Users belonging to middle-status group are moderately connected and show reasonable non-purchase activity on the site and they are strongly and positively influenced by the friends' purchases. Users belonging to the high-status group are well connected and very active on the site. They show a significant negative effect due to friends' purchases. In other words, users belonging to high-status group have lower purchases and strongly follow non-purchase related activities. This social influence leads to almost 14% drop in the revenue of this group.

Real World Social Interactions and Influences

Ercan (2010) examined the relationships among the consumer's ethnocentrism, Attention-to- Social-Comparison-Information (ATSCI) level, Country of Manufacture (COM), Country of Design (COD) cues, and Country Image Effect (CIE). He used the information gathered to determine how they affect consumers' intentions in purchasing apparel. He selected American and Turkish university students. The apparel product categories he chose were jeans and sweaters. The results showed that positive attitude towards the product resulted in purchasing it, whereas, no significant relationship was found between ethnocentrism, COM and country image. On the other hand, there was significant relationship between COD, ATSCI, ethnocentrism, and country image but no significance was found between COM and country image for apparel product categories for Turkish consumers.

The research conducted by Beaudoin and Lachance (2006) aimed to understand the determinants of interest of adolescents in clothing brand names. It was determined that how different psychological, social, and socioeconomic factors influence the choice of brand of adolescents. Multiple linear regression analysis was used which showed that susceptibility to peer influence, gender, fashion innovativeness, consumer competence, self-esteem, brand importance for father, and age were significantly related to brand sensitivity. Rahman (2011) discussed the determinants of consumers' purchasing intent toward denim jeans. His research also focused on perceptions and behavior of Canadian consumers towards denim jeans. He conducted a survey in which he took 380 respondents. The survey consisted of Likert scale and open-ended questions. He analyzed and collated the results by making the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The results showed that the fit of denim jeans was very important and then comes style and quality. On the other hand brand names and country-of-origin were relatively insignificant. Furthermore, fabric was strongly correlated with style, comfort and quality. Vieira, *et al.* (2009) has discussed the importance of phenomena of fashion behavior in their study, an extended theoretical model of fashion clothing involvement. The main goal of this study is to test an extended and adapted theoretical model of fashion clothing involvement. The technique they used to conduct this research was survey in which they took 315 respondents. Their results showed that there is a need of exploring the fashion involvement antecedents because from the three constructs supposed to be antecedents, just one was supported (i.e. Age). Furthermore, the results supported the fact that fashion clothing involvement consider two theoretical relations: a) age and commitment, and b) age and subjective knowledge.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Lahore. Keeping in mind the research topic, target population was restricted to females who use social networking sites. The sample size taken was 200 women. For this research both primary and secondary data were required. Questionnaire was designed to collect data. Research papers, books and websites were used to collect secondary data. SPSS and Ms Excel are the software used to analyze data. The statistical techniques used are comparison tables, bar charts, crosstabs, cronbach alpha, chi-square and two sample t-test with equal variances. We used cronbach alpha to combine different types of question and two sample t-test with equal variances was used to test the hypothesis. For testing the research questions we used chi-square and comparison tables and charts.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives for our study were as following:

1. What is the basic source of marketing communication chosen by women for brand awareness?

2. Which source of marketing communication is more powerful: WOM or SNS?
3. What are the ways in which communication media is influencing the consumers' decision making process?
4. Is there any correlation between the household income and buying power of branded clothes?
5. Is there any significant relationship between household income and the monthly buying behavior?

HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis for our study is as following:

H₀: Traditional Word of Mouth is **less** persuasive than Social Networking Sites in case of women apparel in Pakistan.

H₁: Traditional Word of Mouth is **not less** persuasive than Social Networking Sites in case of women apparel in Pakistan.

RESULTS

Preferred Basic Marketing Communication Mix and Brand Awareness

Customer feedback and product reviews are an important determinant in brand image building and awareness. We wanted to empirically evaluate the impact of apparel/brand reviews on perspective customers' buying intentions, so we asked our respondents where they get to know about the new arrivals. We found out that according to the collected data, 56% come to know about new arrivals through friends/family, 27% stated that it was through company ads and only 17% came to know about them through Social Networking sites. So, friends/family i.e. WOM and referral plays an important role in creating brand awareness amongst Pakistani women.

The literature also shows that friends/family's referral and word of mouth plays a significant role in creating brand awareness and purchase decision process. WOM and eWOM both influence the consumer's brand perception.

However the literature also reveals that in some cases, depending upon the product and product type online recommendation is more influential as compared to traditional word of mouth.

Influence of Communication Media on Purchase Decision Making of Customers

Respondents were asked whether they have ever purchased apparel on the recommendation given by friends/family. 72.3% said yes while 27.7% said no. To evaluate the influence of social media on purchase decision making the respondents were asked whether they have bought anything on the basis of recommendation available online on these social communities. 27% responded as yes while 73% said no. The results reveal that friends/family's reference is more influential on Pakistani women's purchase decision as compared to online recommendation. This could be due to the social, cultural and economic factors of the Pakistani society.

The literature also supports this empirical evaluation and shows that purchase decision making is influenced by many factors such as cultural and social differences, income groups and online connectivity. The number of purchases done through online recommendation is not very high and although social networking sites are coming up with different advertising models they still are not trusted by the viewers.

Furthermore, the study conducted by Akir and Othman (2010) concludes that most of the times the decisions of people are influenced by the ads found in magazines and brochures/catalogs and TV ads.

Correlation between Household Income and Preference of Branded Clothes

We applied Chi-square test to determine whether there is a relationship between monthly household income and preference of branded clothes or not. We found that the p value for test was greater than the value of alpha i.e. $0.167 > 0.05$ therefore we conclude that there is no co-relation between the two variables. Majority of respondents from each income bracket prefers branded clothes.

The literature also supports positive relationship between household income and customer buying power. It is considered to be one of the most important determinants that influence the purchase decisions of consumers. The study conducted in Czech Republic reveals that there is a positive relationship between the preference of branded clothes and household income (Foret and Prochazka 2007) which contradicts with our results obtained from Pakistani women.

Relationship between Household Income and Monthly Buying behavior

We empirically wanted to compare the monthly house hold income and average number of dresses purchased every month. To do so we applied Chi-square test and the results showed that P-value < alpha or $0.035 < 0.05$. Therefore, we conclude that as income increases the number of monthly dresses also increases. Hence there is a positive relationship between income and number of dresses bought every month.

Power of WOM versus SNS

Respondents were asked whether they take opinion from friends/family or check social networking sites before making a purchase decision. The results showed that 26.2% of respondents always take opinion from friends/family whereas a huge number, 64.6% said that they sometimes take opinion from their friends/family and only 9.2% said that they never take opinion from them before making an apparel purchase. On the other hand only 6.2% said that they always take opinion from SNS, 51.5% said that they sometimes take opinion from SNS whereas 42.3% said that they never take opinion from SNS before making an apparel purchase.

The comparison of taking opinion from friends/family and social networking sites reveals that women are still reluctant in taking online opinion regarding clothes. If we compare there is a huge difference amongst the percentage of consumers taking opinion from friends/family and online recommendations.

Authenticity of an opinion matters a lot especially when it is about spending money. Undoubtedly, it depends upon the source from where one is getting the information. Our respondents were asked which media of communication they find more authentic: WOM or SNS. The results showed that 44.6% of the people find information through WOM authentic whereas only 4.6% does not find it authentic. Another large number, 50.8% says that they find information from friends/family (i.e. through WOM) somewhat authentic. If we compare these results to that of SNS only 16.2% find it authentic, 56.2% find it somewhat authentic and 4.6% doesn't find it authentic at all.

Cronbatch alpha was applied and various questions were grouped together under 2 categories i.e. WOM and friends/family. After that we applied two sample t-tests with equal variances. The output is shown in table 1:

Insert table 1 here

Confidence Interval

To test, we considered the confidence interval of 95%. This means that the value for alpha is 0.05.

t Stat

The value for t stat is -34.24458891 and to evaluate the result we take the absolute value of t stat.

P(T<=t) one-tail

Since we are considering that mean of WOM is less than mean on SNS so we consider the value of one tail. The value is 2.95793E-98 which is less than alpha = 0.05 i.e., $2.95793E-98 < 0.05$

Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that states, WOM is more persuasive than SNS in case of women apparel purchase behavior.

t Critical one-tail

We know that if t critical is less than t stat we reject null hypothesis. We have t critical = 1.650781103 and value for t stat is 34.24458891. t critical is less than t stat i.e. $1.650781103 < 34.24458891$

So we reject null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that states, WOM is not less persuasive than SNS in case of women apparel purchase behavior.

On the basis of the results mentioned above, we conclude that Pakistani women consider friends/family's WOM more trust worthy than online opinion. This is supported by the literature also where consumers' decision making is more dependent upon word of mouth rather than online recommendation.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of results obtained we conclude that Word of mouth has greater impact than Social networking sites. The reason behind this is the reliability of word of mouth. The reason found out is that people trust their friends/family's opinion more than other marketing media. Although social

networking sites have high reach but even then it is less effective than word of mouth. Moreover, there is a positive relationship between household income and monthly buying behavior. On the other hand, there is no co-relation between household income and preference to designer clothes. This means that household income does not play a role in preferring designer clothes. It has been found out that people belonging to low income groups also prefer buying designer clothes.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

As does any research, this study has some limitations that should be addressed. Firstly, we have considered female population of Lahore. To have a better idea of overall population of the city further study can be conducted in which both male and female population can be considered. Another limitation was that of the sample size. Only 200 women were taken to conduct the study, however, it is better to consider a bigger sample size which corresponds to the population of the city. The study can be conducted country wide also or at least from the major metropolitan cities of Pakistan. For this study we only collected data from the women who use social networking sites. However, the result might differ if we consider both, users and non-users of the social networking sites.

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Table 1

	WOM	SNS
Mean	3.523076923	9.123076923
Variance	0.623494335	2.852951699
Observations	130	130
Pooled Variance	1.738223017	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	258	
t Stat	-34.24458891	
P(T<=t) one-tail	2.95793E-98	
t Critical one-tail	1.650781103	
P(T<=t) two-tail	5.91586E-98	
t Critical two-tail	1.969201329	