



Impacts of Social Networking Sites on Apparel Purchasing

Behavior of Female Consumers

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of social networking sites on the apparel purchasing behavior of female consumers. The study's primary goal is to identify the difference between female university students' socio-demographic characteristics and apparel purchasing habits. The study employed a cross-sectional research design vis-à-vis the survey method to carry out this research. By choosing the purposive sampling technique, data is collected from 500 female respondents through a self-administered questionnaire. The theoretical framework of this study is based on the uses and gratification theory. To analyze the difference between different demographic variables, t-test and one-way ANOVA were applied. The results revealed a significant difference in mean scores of younger and older women, rural and urban residents, and junior and senior students. Moreover, it is concluded that online advertisements through social networking sites greatly influence the apparel purchasing habits of young students compared to their older fellows. The findings suggest that apparel manufacturers and companies should adopt social media marketing strategies to promote their products.

Keyword: *Social Networking Sites; Apparel Purchasing Behavior; Online Advertisement; Apparel Brands; Female Consumer; Purchasing Habits.*

Introduction

Social media has changed the prospects of marketing (Shaheen & Lodhi, 2016). It has gained the attention of business corporations, celebrities, artists, and creative personnel who use social

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networking sites to influence the general public and grow business (Miles, 2014). Social media is an essential constituent of marketing in the contemporary media landscape that significantly affects the brand image (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schäfer, 2012). It plays a bridge between organizations and customers (Evans, 2010; Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012). The rapid advancement of social media has increased its significance even now organizations consider it mandatory for attaining marketing goals (Farooq & Jan, 2012). Contrary to conventional media, social media is regarded as a new medium that plays the role of a trendsetter. Social media has made traditional media marketing less effective (Phillips & Noble, 2007). Apparel companies use social networking sites to promote their products (Maurer & Wiegmann, 2011; Toor, Husnain, & Hussain, 2017). It increases brand loyalty and generates brand consciousness among women (Cao, Meister, & Klante, 2014; ElAydi, 2018; Tritama & Tarigan, 2016).

Pakistan is one of the major exporters of apparel. Its primary manufacturing industry is textile that contributes 60% to the country's export. Pakistan is the 8th biggest exporter of textile supplies in Asia (Khan & Khan, 2010). Pakistani originated clothing brands such as Khaadi, Bareeze, Sapphire, Gul Ahmed, Pasha, Junaid Jamshed, ChenOne, and Ideas are liked in the entire world. These brands promote their products through tagged-based marketing strategies and regularly upload new updates on their web pages. In this way, brand outlets encourage and motivate customers to buy their products online by using social media.

Empirical literature shows that social media marketing positively affects brand consciousness and apparel purchasing behavior (Bilal, Ahmed, & Shahzad, 2014; Siddique & Rashidi, 2015; Shabbir & Safwan, 2014). However, little is known about the role of social media on the apparel purchasing behavior of female consumers having different socio-demographic characteristics. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap in the existing literature by identifying the difference between other socio-demographic variables such as age, locality, qualification, and institution and apparel purchasing habits of female consumers.

Literature Review

Usage of Social Networking Sites in Pakistan

A survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan found that 92% of Pakistani internet consumers regularly use social networking sites. The findings further revealed that among these 92% netizens, 87.9% were female social media users (Gallup, 2016). Therefore, it is assumed that social media sites exercise a strong influence on the opinion of netizens. The youngsters in Pakistan use social networking sites for various purposes. However, they mostly use for infotainment (Zaheer, 2018). Therefore, social networking sites are prevalent among young users. The annual report of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority reveals that there are 36 million active users of Facebook and 6.30 million users of Instagram in Pakistan (PTA, 2019). In this regard, Hussain and Pervez (2016) found that Facebook was more popular than Twitter among a sample of 500 students.

Social Media Marketing

In recent years, social media marketing has gained popularity. Mariana, Wibawa, Hammad, Herdianto, and Haviluddin (2017) found that users trusted online stores and recommended them to others. Similarly, the study of Toor, Husnain, and Hussain (2017) indicated a significant relationship between social media marketing and customer purchase intention. It also established a positive mediating role in consumer engagement. In the context of news media marketing and decision-making, Shaheen and Lodhi (2016) found positive effects of new media marketing on customers' decision-making process. Advertisements on social networking sites were found to shape the existing opinion of consumers. Likewise, Farooq and Jan (2012) argued that the unique feature of Facebook tagged-based marketing has had a significant influence on the process of marketing. The majority of the respondents endorsed online marketing. It is found that customers prefer to buy online products due to several factors such as convenience, time, and discount deals (Nazir, Tayyab, Sajid, Rashid, & Javed, 2012).

Effects of Social Media on Apparel Purchasing Behavior

ElAydi (2018) identified the impact of social media marketing on Brand Awareness among 402 respondents. The findings showed a positive association between social media marketing activities on Facebook and brand consciousness. In this study, age was found to be a significant moderator between online communities and brand awareness. Likewise, Mbayong (2017) examined online apparel shopping behavior among a sample of 121 college students by adopting the convenience sampling technique. The results revealed a significant association between shopping

orientation and information search. There was no significant difference between male and female when it comes to shopping online. However, female students enjoyed more online shopping as compared to male students. Social media marketing and brand awareness are also associated. It is found that marketing communication has significant impact on a company's product brand awareness. Put it differently; social media enhances product attraction and the company's revenue. (Tritama & Tarigan, 2016). By contrast, some studies indicated a negative relationship between social media and brand consciousness (Siddique & Rashidi, 2015). It was noted that females were more brand conscious than males and adult respondents were less brand aware than young respondents. Nevertheless, other studies have found gender differences regarding consumer shopping in terms of brand, price, and fashion consciousness (Shabbir & Safwan, 2014).

Social Media is also considered to influence consumers' decision-making. The content generated through social media affects the perception of government performance (Raza, Emenyeonu, Yousaf & Iftikhar, 2021). In a similar vein, the platforms such as Facebook, blogs, and YouTube had a positive influence on the apparel purchasing behavior of consumers (Bilal, Ahmed, & Shahzad, 2014). Facebook is associated with changing the buying behavior of young consumers. The analysis of 304 Facebook young users showed that advertisements through Facebook had significant effects on the purchasing patterns of active consumers with positive gender moderating effects (Rehman, Ilyas, Nawaz, & Hyder, 2014). It is also assumed to

exercise a more substantial impact at the first stage of information searching to find new outfits (Cao, Meister, & Klante, 2014). The analysis of secondary data also supports the trends. It was found that e-shopping is more appropriate because it saves time, effort, and money. Youngsters are more inclined towards online shopping, and females mostly prefer to buy apparel online (Chaturvedi & Gupta, 2014). In purchasing textile garments, it was noted that women considered interpersonal communication to be more reliable than social networking sites for making apparel buying decisions. There is also a positive relationship between household income and buying behavior (Nasir, Vel, & Mateen, 2012).

A critical review of previous studies shows that many people keenly use social networking sites (Hussain & Pervez, 2016; PTA, 2019; Zaheer, 2018). And different companies are utilizing social networking sites to promote their products because these sites have a significant influence on customers' purchasing behavior (Farooq & Jan, 2012; Shaheen & Lodhi, 2016; Toor, Husnain, & Hussain, 2017). Social media marketing has positive effects on brand consciousness and apparel purchasing behavior (Bilal, Ahmed, & Shahzad, 2014; ElAydi, 2018; Siddique & Rashidi, 2015; Shabbir & Safwan, 2014; Tritama & Tarigan, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This study investigated the effects of social networking sites on the apparel purchasing behavior of female consumers. This study was conducted with the theoretical underpinnings of Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), also known as functional theory,

which was proposed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 (West & Turner, 2010). This theory states that media consumers are free to choose and use media to gratify their needs and personal satisfaction. According to this theory, media users are active and media use is goal-oriented (Baran & Davis, 2011). Therefore, people gratify their needs by using media for various purposes. In short, the uses-and-gratification approach famously asks not ‘What do media do to people?’ but ‘What people do with the media?’ (Siapera, 2012).

The UGT is relevant to this study because social media users are active participants who have easy access to different social networking sites and use social media to view their interests and needs. After observing this study in the context of this theory, it can be said that media consumers have free choice to select a particular medium. If they choose social media, they are free to explore content related to their choice on social networking sites. From the uses and gratification perspective, “Individuals who seek entertainment experience from media content online are said to be motivated by a set of cognitive and affective stimulation needs” (Bryant & Oliver, 2009, p. 573). Female university students are the target audience who use social networking sites to gratify their esteem needs.

Hypotheses

In the light of the above review of literature, we proposed the following hypotheses for this study:

H1. It is assumed that young female students are influenced more for apparel ads on social networking sites than their older fellows.

H2. Female consumers of rural areas are more inclined towards brand advertisements on social networking sites.

H3. Social networking sites have powerful effects on the apparel purchasing behavior of junior students.

Research Design

This study utilized a cross-sectional research design vis-à-vis survey method to investigate the impact of social networking sites on the apparel purchasing behavior of female consumers. First, a sample of 500 female students was drawn by following the purposive sampling technique. Then, three major universities of Lahore were randomly selected to get the questionnaire filled from the female students aged between 18 to 30 years. These universities are the University of Central Punjab, Punjab University, and Lahore College for Women University. Data were collected with the assistance of a self-administered questionnaire containing close-ended questions. The questionnaire consisted of 22 close-ended items. Overall, the respondents took five to ten minutes to fill the questionnaire. Then, all items were combined to form one index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$). The researchers analyzed data through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 25.0. To check the difference between different variables, Independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance were applied.

Results

The findings showed that 103 (20%) respondents use social networking sites from 1 to 2 hours, 147 (29%) 3 to 4 hours, 103

(20%) 5 to 6 hours, and 147 (29%) students more than 6 hours. Moreover, 47 (9.4%) respondents frequently use Facebook, 165 (33%) respondents use Instagram, 8 (1.4%) use Twitter, 268 (53.6%) respondents use WhatsApp and 12 (2.4%) respondents use others social networking sites. There are diverse uses of social networking sites as results indicated that 22 (4.4%) respondents use social networking sites for getting information, 18 (3.6%) for attaining education, 120 (24%) for entertainment, an overwhelming majority 332 (66.4%) use for all reasons as mentioned earlier and 8 (1.6%) respondents use for other reasons. An overwhelming majority of the respondents 426 (85%), had experienced shopping online.

To empirically test hypotheses, inferential tests of difference were used. As a result, the following results were observed:

Table 1: *The difference in the mean social media influence in creating trends concerning garments for younger and older females*

Grouping Variable	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Younger Users (age 18-22)	315	47.6	8.85	2.31	462.1	.021
Elder Users (age 23-30)	185	45.9	6.78			
Total	500					

N = total respondents; M = mean score; SD = standard deviation; t = values; df = degree of freedom; Sig = level of significance.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the influence of social networking sites on the apparel purchasing behavior of female consumers of different ages. There was a difference in scores for younger females aged between 18-22 years (M = 47.6, SD = 8.85) and elder females aged between 23-30 (M =

45.9, SD = 6.78); $t(462) = 2.31, p = .021$. It clearly shows that ads of clothing brands on social networking sites have more influence on younger students than their older fellows.

Table 2: *The difference in the mean score of female consumers of rural and urban areas*

Grouping Variable	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Rural	191	48.11	9.10	2.37	498	.021
Urban	309	46.25	7.47			
Total	500					

An independent-samples t-test was used to compare the effects of social networking sites on the apparel purchasing behavior of female students of rural and urban areas. There was a difference in scores for females residing in rural areas (M = 48.11, SD = 9.10) and those living in urban areas (M = 46.25, SD = 7.47); $t(498) = 2.37, p = .012$. This shows that ads of apparel brands on social networking sites have more influence on students residing in rural areas.

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics in one-way analysis of variance to compare the mean score of three qualification groups for social media influence in creating trends regarding apparel brands*

Qualification value	N	M	SD
BS	246	47.55	8.21
MSC	162	46.89	8.76
M. Phil	92	45.54	6.79
Total	500		

Table 3b. *One-way Analysis of Variance of three qualification groups*

Source	Sum of squares	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	272.011	2	136.006	2.044	.13
Within Groups	33072.411	497	66.544		
Total	33344.422	499			

A one-way analysis of variance was used to compare the effect of the level of qualification on apparel buying behavior. Qualification was categorized into three groups. There was a statistically significant difference $p = .13$ for the three groups. In addition, post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's test show that mean scores for the three groups differ significantly.

Table 4. *Descriptive statistics in one-way analysis of variance to compare the mean score of three educational institutions*

Source	N	M	SD
University of Central Punjab	189	46.5	7.82
Punjab University	197	48.1	8.87
Lahore College for Women University	114	45.7	7.22

Table 4b. *One-way Analysis of Variance of three educational Institutions*

Source	Sum of squares	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	472.718	2	236.359	3.574	.029
Within Groups	32871.704	497	66.140		
Total	33344.422	499			

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to compare the effect of educational institutions on the apparel purchasing behavior of female students. A statistically significant difference $p = .02$ exists between the three groups. Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's test show that mean scores for the three groups differ significantly.

In the light of the above results, hypothesis 1 is supported in the light of result illustrated in table 1 as it shows that young female students aged between 18-22 years ($M = 47.6$, $SD = 8.85$) get more influence on apparel ads on social media when compared to their elder fellows aged between 23-30 ($M = 45.9$, $SD = 6.78$); $t(462) = 2.31$, $p = .021$. It was hypothesized that female consumers of rural areas are more inclined towards brand advertisements on social networking sites. Hypothesis 2 is supported as the findings of Table 2 show a significant difference in mean scores for females residing in rural areas ($M = 48.11$, $SD = 9.10$) and those living in urban areas ($M = 46.25$, $SD = 7.47$); $t(498) = 2.37$, $p = .012$. The results prove that advertisements of apparel brands on social networking sites have more influence on students residing in rural areas. Hypothesis 3 is also supported. The findings of table 3 indicate that junior students ($M = 47.55$, SD

= 8.21) are more inclined towards brand advertisement on social networking sites than their senior fellows ($M = 46.89$, $SD = 8.76$).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study utilized a cross-sectional research design vis-à-vis survey method to investigate the impact of social networking sites on the apparel purchasing behavior of female consumers. The study proposed three hypotheses. The findings of this study support all hypotheses. The results support that those young female students who study in junior classes and reside in rural areas are more inclined towards brand advertisements. The findings of this study like the previous scholarly studies indicate a strong association between social media marketing and apparel purchasing behavior (Bilal et al., 2014; ElAydi, 2018; Siddique & Rashidi, 2015; Shabbir & Safwan, 2014; Tritama & Tarigan, 2016). However, this study moved a step forward and identified the difference between sociodemographic characteristics of university female students and apparel purchasing behavior. The findings showed a significant difference between younger and older women. They indicated that apparel advertisements on social networking sites greatly influence younger students, that is to say, aged between 18-22 years (see Table 1). Younger students are active social media users associated with their favorite apparel brands through social networking sites. They used to get the latest information about the arrival of the latest textile articles. Compared to younger students, social media had gradual, limited, and indirect effects on older students. These results also support the findings of previous studies (Chaturvedi & Gupta, 2014).

This study observed a significant difference between respondents of rural and urban areas (see Table 2). Online advertisements of apparel have more influence on students residing in rural areas. Interestingly, social media had limited effects on students who were studying at a higher level. As illustrated in table 3, online advertisements on social media had powerful effects on BS students. Social networking sites less influenced master students as compared to graduate students. Surprisingly, the students of the master of philosophy were least affected by social media. Based on observed results, it can be said that higher education minimizes the effects of social networking sites by developing critical media literacy skills among individuals resulting in a more logical decision before adopting a thing (Kellner & Share, 2005). In a nutshell, younger students who are undergraduates are highly inclined towards social media. They use social media for the sake of gratifying their needs. In short, the overall results of this study support previous scholarly work which claimed that social media has a significant influence on the purchasing habits of female customers (Cao et al., 2014; ElAydi, 2018; Rehman et al., 2014; Siddique & Rashidi, 2015). The advertisement of apparel brands on social networking sites increases the tendency of e-shopping, and brand commercials on social media are more quickly recognized than traditional media. The results of this study have also supported the propositions of the uses and gratification theory as this theory considered the audience as active and independent users and recognized the more significant potential for audience initiative, choice, and activity (Baran & Davis, 2011; West & Turner, 2018). The majority

of respondents of this research are heavy social media users who use social networking sites for more than four hours daily. The findings of social media using habits of female students have proved the authenticity of Asano's statement, who observed that people spend more time on social media than on eating, drinking, grooming, or socializing (Asano, 2017).

This study limits generalizability because of employing a sampling technique of non-probability sampling. Future studies should generalize results through a large representative sample. Future investigations should also identify the mediating effects of apparel brand equity in the relationship between social media usage and apparel purchasing behavior. Besides, this study is limited to Lahore that focused only on female respondents and online apparel advertisements. In the future, researchers should identify the effects of conventional media in generating brand consciousness by collecting data from both males and females.

Similarly, further studies can be conducted to identify the gender difference in terms of online shopping behavior. Despite limitations, this study makes an academic advancement by contributing to the existing literature. Additionally, its results can also be helpful for advertisers as well as brand outlets. Apparel companies should adopt the strategy of social media marketing to promote their products. In light of the results of this study, textile advertisers can design display ads to gain the attention of young customers.

Summarizing the above discussion, it is concluded that social media greatly influence the apparel purchasing behavior of female university students. Online apparel advertisements more

influence young female university students as compared to their older fellows. Apart from the age factor, a significant difference was also found in locale, qualification, and institution regarding the effects of online ads exposure on apparel purchasing habits. The overall results of this study showed that new media had a significant influence on the apparel purchasing behavior of female consumers.

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