Impact of firm-created and user-generated social media marketing on customers' purchase intention in the fashionwear industry: evidence from Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the relative impact of firm-created (FC) and user-generated (UG) social media marketing communication on fashionwear customers' purchase intention (CPI) in Sri Lanka. The primary objective is to identify the influence of social media marketing on the purchasing intention (PI) of customers in the fashionwear industry in Sri Lanka.

Design/methodology/approach – A standardized online survey was conducted, generating 312 datasets for analysis.

Findings – The empirical findings reveal that both firm-produced and UG social media fashionwear marketing communication has a significant influence on CPI. However, firm-produced social media fashionwear brands demonstrate a higher impact on CPI.

Originality/value – This study highlights the importance of social media marketing communication in shaping customers' PI in the fashionwear industry in Sri Lanka. Both FC and UG content on social media platforms play a crucial role in influencing customers' intention to purchase fashionwear products. However, firm-produced social media fashionwear brands exert a stronger impact on CPI. These findings emphasize the need for marketers to incorporate effective social media strategies, including both FC and UG content, to enhance customer engagement and drive purchase decisions in the fashion-wear industry.

Keywords Social media marketing, Firm-created communication, User-generated communication, Customer purchase intention, Fashionwear industry, Word of mouth marketing

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The fashion industry has been around for over a hundred thousand years, dating back to the availability and use of textiles by mankind. Over time, the industry has added economic and material value to humans while growing with society, making it a very relevant facet of human life as well as a common area of inquiry, especially in the current technologically driven world (Johnstone and Lindh, 2022). Globally, the fashion business contributes

This study evaluates the impact of FCC and UGC on CPI in an emerging market for online fashion retailing, particularly in a technology-driven society.

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approximately US$3000bn or approximately 2% of global GDP (Adeola *et al.*, 2021). Today, the Internet and technical advancements have permitted the formation of online fashion retail platforms, which have displaced portions of traditional store patronage (Adeola *et al.*, 2021). Nonetheless, more study on sustainable knowledge for the fashion sector is required by business growth (Azemi *et al.*, 2022). This is arguably because the majority of existing research focuses on business success rather than firm-created (FC) and user-generated (UG) fashionwear social media marketing in the customers' purchase intention (CPI) contexts.

Social media are defined as online tools, media and platforms that encourage user communication, teamwork and content sharing. Due to its synergy-inducing magnitude, the linked marketing component makes it extremely straightforward to disseminate information, showcasing social media as a useful option for such a purpose (Yang *et al.*, 2022). In fact, an essential component of assuring the success of social media marketing is efficient information dissemination (Olof Lagrosen and Grundén, 2014). According to Yang *et al.* (2022), Chinese social media users climbed by 100 m in 2018, and the number of social media users worldwide increased by 3.8bn at the beginning of 2020. According to the Global Web Index, a user regularly uses social media for up to two hours and 42 min each day (Yang *et al.*, 2022). Companies are using social networking sites (SNS) to promote and disseminate information about their brands using Web 2.0 technologies (Karunasingha and Abeysekera, 2022). With more than 34% of the world's population accessing the Internet and 1.2bn monthly active users accessing the social network site Facebook, brands such as dUCkscarves, Zara and Nesty Gal use social media channels to connect with customers and improve brand communication (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012). Traditional business communication is being transformed by social media. Internet users are gradually shaping previously controlled and administered fashionwear brand communication. According to Adeola *et al.* (2021), traditional one-way communication is being replaced with multidimensional, two-way and peer-to-peer communication.

In today's digital age, social media platforms have become not only a means of communication but also powerful marketing tools for businesses, particularly within the fashionwear industry. In this dynamic landscape, understanding how firm-created content (FCC) and user-generated content (UGC) social media fashionwear brand communication influences CPI is not merely an academic pursuit; it is a crucial insight that holds immense practical significance for fashion businesses striving to thrive in the digital era (Johnstone and Lindh, 2022). In today's hyper-competitive business landscape, where consumer choices are intricately tied to brand narratives, the impact of FCC and UGC social media on shaping consumer behavior is undeniable. This influence is especially critical for fashionwear brands, where the trends can change in an instant (Karunasingha and Abeysekera, 2022). Understanding the link between social media engagement and CPI is essential for businesses. It enables fashion brands to allocate resources wisely, tailor messaging effectively and engage with consumers in ways that drive sales. In an era of soaring marketing costs, the ability to leverage social media for customer conversion is not just an advantage; it is a necessity for survival (Olof Lagrosen and Grundén, 2014). A deep understanding of how social media affects purchase intention (PI) can lead to increased sales, greater brand loyalty and a competitive edge. This research also empowers consumers by helping them distinguish genuine brand communication from opportunistic marketing in a saturated digital environment.

This research is significant from the existing studies and contributes to the literature in four ways. First, authors conceptualize originality as the degree to which a scientific discovery provides subsequent studies with unique knowledge that is not available from previous studies. Second, while previous studies have contributed significantly to people understanding of social media's role, an unexplored area remains the specific impact of social media communication in the fashionwear sector on CPI. This research gap serves as the

catalyst for this study, aiming to offer a comprehensive view of how both FC and UG social media content shape CPI in fashionwear. Third, in the authors' pursuit to unravel the intricate dynamics of social media, fashionwear brand communication and CPI, a conspicuous void emerges within the existing literature. While a plethora of studies have diligently explored the influence of social media on consumer behavior and brand perception, an unmistakable gap remains, namely, the scarcity of research focusing on the direct impact of social media fashionwear brand communication on CPI. Fourth, this study uniquely delves into the impact of FGC and UGC on PI within the Sri Lankan fashion industry. Motivated by distinct cultural and consumer behavior dynamics, it contributes fresh insights to this underexplored context. Despite global social media trends, developing countries like Sri Lanka show limited online fashion demand, especially for UG cloths. Therefore, this research serves as a vital conduit, providing valuable insights to sellers and researchers, illuminating the unique challenges and opportunities in these evolving markets.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: section 2 describes the method. Section 4 examines empirical findings and finally, section 5 asserts the concluding segment with policy implications that align with this study.

2. Literature review

The emergence of Web 2.0 has revolutionized the accessibility and prevalence of social media platforms, empowering stakeholders to engage across various channels. This has led to dynamic interactions among stakeholders, encompassing both user-to-user and user-to-brand exchanges (Jayawardena *et al.*, 2022; Nigam *et al.*, 2022; Pereira *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, social media marketing has emerged as a pivotal component of corporate communication strategies in recent years. Marketers and public relations managers recognize the significance of cultivating a robust social media presence, evident in the substantial budgets allocated to social media marketing initiatives. According to Seo *et al.* (2019), an impressive $25bn was invested in social media advertising in 2018, with forecasts anticipating a notable increase to around $34bn by 2021. This financial commitment underscores the growing importance of social media in shaping contemporary marketing and communication landscapes.

Recent developments in internet technology have brought about substantial shifts in both personal behaviors and corporate creative practices (Behl *et al.*, 2023; Jayawardena and Dewasiri, 2023). Research by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) has demonstrated that organizations have increasingly recognized the value of social media marketing communication by actively participating in online communities and harnessing the potential it offers. The advent of Web 2.0 technologies has granted internet users unprecedented exposure to a myriad of online experiences, with social media emerging as the most prominent among them (Sandunima *et al.*, 2019). Social media platforms have ushered in new avenues for interaction between businesses and their customers. Marketers now seek to engage with loyal customers, shape public perceptions of their products, disseminate information, and gain insights into their target audience (Koren and Pető, 2020). Notably, social media has transcended traditional communication modes, evolving into a mass phenomenon with wide-ranging demographic appeal (VanDyke *et al.*, 2023). The rapid dissemination of information via the internet has amplified the appeal of social media, particularly among fashionwear businesses.

The positive impact of brand communication on social media, specifically highlighting its influence on CPI (Sharma and Verma, 2018), and their findings reveal that the augmentation of value equity stems from the provision of innovative value to consumers and fostering two-way communication opportunities with brands. Concurrently, improvements in product quality result from increasing purchase behavior, leading to a positive influence on business

growth. While these insights shed light on the affirmative outcomes of social media interactions, it is important to consider the nuanced perspective presented by Duffett (2017). They contend that interactive media may not universally surpass traditional media in all scenarios. This nuanced understanding invites a more comprehensive evaluation of the role and impact of interactive media within the broader landscape of marketing strategies.

Furthermore, as highlighted in the study by Hu *et al.* (2022), social media platforms empower internet users to create and share content, including discussions about brands and products. Consequently, businesses no longer hold exclusive control over brand communication (Karunasingha and Abeysekera, 2022). Studies indicate that people often regard social media as a more trustworthy source of information compared to traditional marketing communication tools employed by businesses (Olof Lagrosen and Grundén, 2014). Given these factors, marketing and brand promotion strategies increasingly rely on both FCC and UGC through social media channels to enhance fashionwear brand communication. In evaluating the impact of social media on fashionwear brand communications, it is imperative to distinguish between these two sources. While FC social media communication remains under the direct control of companies, UG social media communication operates independently, amplifying the reach and influence of fashionwear brand messaging. This differentiation is pivotal in understanding how fashionwear brands leverage social media's unique dynamics to engage with their audience and shape perceptions in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

In Sri Lanka, there is a noticeable surge in marketing products and brands through social media, marking a significant shift in consumer behavior. Despite being in its early stages compared to developed countries, this trend is gaining momentum (Dewasiri *et al.*, 2021). The prevailing skepticism among the majority of the population toward online products, especially among older individuals who are more accustomed to traditional marketing formats, presents a challenge (Kashif *et al.*, 2022). The preference for physically trying on and purchasing clothes, driven by concerns about return policies for online purchases, further contributes to the slower adaptation of the online cloth buying process in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, a promising development is the increasing inclination of the youth demographic toward buying clothes online. This shift in consumer behavior is encouraging for online fashion sellers, who can leverage this growing trend to their advantage. As the younger generation embraces online shopping, there is a potential for the online cloth buying market to expand and evolve in Sri Lanka.

As customer roles in the communication process transition from passive to active, corporations are gradually relinquishing control over brand construction and management activities (Morra *et al.*, 2018). However, information classified as "FCC" remains under the firm's purview (Bao *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015) argue that firms confront a range of challenges, including determining the extent of integration between social and traditional media, internal organizational adjustments and monitoring business activities. Morra *et al.* (2018) underscore the importance of monitoring peer-to-peer communication to gain timely insights into customer perceptions, strengths, weaknesses and market trends. Additionally, social media analysis equips companies with the ability to comprehend the dynamics of social networking sites and identify pivotal information for customers as well as optimal engagement strategies (Gandhi and Kar, 2022). Ultimately, marketers must assess customer attitudes toward advertising across social and traditional media, gauging its efficacy on business performance (Chuang, 2020). Indeed, understanding the impact of social media on company performance constitutes a critical component in determining the optimal balance of media and clothing branding strategies. In the academic realm, the study of FC social media fashionwear brand communication has predominantly centered on word of mouth (WOM) and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) studies (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). FC WOM represents a hybrid between traditional advertising and

consumer-generated WOM, with its initiation stemming from the firm but its implementation relying on consumers (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012). There is a consensus within the WOM literature that customer-to-customer communication serves as a potent source of information dissemination (Morra *et al.*, 2018). Social media platforms offer companies a cost-effective and alternative means to access and tap into customer-to-customer communication (Anning-Dorson, 2018). Given this backdrop, the authors advance the following hypothesis:

H1. Firm-created social media communication positively influences customers' purchase intention in Sri Lanka.

Within the realm of social media, consumer-to-consumer communication emerges as a leading force, significantly influencing the tone and availability of information disseminated by businesses (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012). This class of information is encapsulated by the term "UGC," signifying the active involvement of customers in content creation, driven by motives ranging from self-promotion to intrinsic satisfaction or a desire to shape their personal brand image (Morra *et al.*, 2018). Both academic researchers and industry practitioners are keen on unraveling the underlying motivations that propel individuals to engage with businesses on social media platforms. eWOM communication, in particular, occupies a pivotal role in shaping attitudes, defining purchasing intentions and molding the perception of fashion brands (Mukherjee, 2020). With the ubiquitous availability of peer-generated content, user product reviews emerge as one of the most influential sources of information during the pre-purchase decision-making process. Existing research often frames UG feedback and the rise of new marketing platforms as market competitors that exert an impact on people's perception of reality (Lee, 2012). The term "UGC" is central to this investigation. Prior examinations of UGC have unraveled a spectrum of motivations driving users to actively contribute to content creation, encompassing motives like self-promotion, intrinsic gratification and the desire to shape public perceptions (Morra *et al.*, 2018). This study focuses on UGC derived from Facebook, particularly within the context of the fashion industry and its influence on CPI.

H2. User-generated social media communication positively influences customers' purchasing intention in Sri Lanka.

Despite the growing significance of UGC in the global digital landscape, there remains a notable lack of attention to this phenomenon in Sri Lanka. Similarly, FCC struggles to gain substantial visibility and recognition within the country. This research endeavors to bridge this gap by delving into the customer perspective within the fashion industry in Sri Lanka. By exploring the dynamics surrounding both UGC and FCC, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into the reception and impact of these content types among consumers. Understanding how users perceive and engage with content in the fashion sector can offer crucial information for businesses, helping them tailor their strategies to the unique context of the Sri Lankan market. In Table 1, the supporting articles of the literature have been categorized into two main variables of the study, such as the FCC and UGC on CPI.

Variables	Citations
FCC	Bao *et al.* (2023), Gandhi and Kar (2022), Chuang (2020), Morra *et al.* (2018), Anning-Dorson (2018), Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), Bruhn *et al.* (2012)
UGC	Mukherjee (2020), Morra *et al.* (2018), Bruhn *et al.* (2012), Lee (2012)
Source(s): Authors' compilations	

Table 1.
Variables and
supporting research
articles

3. Method

3.1 Research sample

The research design employed in this study followed a cross-sectional approach, utilizing convenience sampling as the primary method for data collection. The Krejcie and Morgan 1970 table and the sample size online calculator were used to determine the sample size recommendation. The study aimed to survey 353 individuals, ultimately obtaining 312 valid survey responses. This yielded an impressive response rate of 88.5%, showcasing the robustness of the data collection process. To reach potential respondents, the research team strategically posted the survey link on various fashionwear brand fan pages on Facebook. Additionally, the researchers distributed the online survey through Facebook Messenger, targeting randomly selected customers who had interacted with fashionwear seller pages on the platform. Drawing from four research articles, the choice of quantitative methodology was guided by a focus on quantitatively weighted research questions, as emphasized by Dewasiri *et al.* (2018). Table 2 provides a concise summary of their methodological characteristics.

The questionnaire is composed of four (04) sections. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to collect the demographic characteristics of the correspondents. The second and three sections focused on independent variables, FCC and UGC. Finally, the fourth section was designed to identify customer purchase intention. Drawing upon insights gleaned from previous research, the questionnaire for this study was meticulously developed. All four indicators were covered by Likert scale questions from 1 to 5 rating scale, depicting (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree to collect respondents' attitudes and opinions. Each respondent took about 10–15 min to complete answering the questionnaire and took approximately 5–7 min to fill out the questionnaire. Furthermore, the average values were calculated to measure the value given by respondents for each indicator. Of the 353 surveys initiated, 41 responses were excluded due to incomplete information. The survey instrument featured a set of close-ended questions, making it accessible and easy for respondents to complete. The study's participant pool encompassed individuals from diverse backgrounds, including students, working professionals, the self-employed and the unemployed, creating a representative sample within the Sri Lankan context.

The demographic breakdown of respondents reveals that a significant portion (55.3%) is students, with additional representation from the working class (29.5%), self-employed individuals (6.90%) and the unemployed (8.3%). The study also considered generational factors, with participants falling into Generation X (above 40 years, 5.4%), Generation Y (20–30 years, 72.8%) and Generation Z (below 20 years, 9.3%). Moreover, the sample showed a slightly higher representation of females (52.9%) compared to males (47.1%), providing a well-rounded view of the Sri Lankan customer landscape (Table 3).

3.2 Scale validity and reliability

The Cronbach's alpha reliability test (α), which measures internal consistency for each construct item, is as follows: FCC has α value of 0.85, UGC has α value of 0.75 and CPI has α value of 0.80. According to Kautish and Sharma (2018), Cronbach alpha values are all greater than 0.7, which is the recommended minimum acceptable level. Overall and for each variable, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) statistic serves as a measure of sampling adequacy and if the KMO value is greater than 0.5, which is the suggested acceptable level (Fonseca *et al.*, 2013). The FCC has a KMO value of 0.81, UGC has a KMO value of 0.81 and CPI has a KMO value of 0.92.

4. Results

4.1 Regression analysis

In pursuit of these research objectives, the authors conducted a comprehensive multiple regression analysis to examine the influence of FCC and UGC on PI. The outcomes are meticulously detailed in Table 4.

Author(s)	Research topic	Objective(s)	Methodology/ Approach	Weighting
Morra *et al.* (2018)	"Social vs traditional media communication: brand origin associations strike a chord."	To develop an analytical comparison between the impact of social media communication (both UG and FC) and the effects of traditional media communication	A total of 192 questionnaires were gathered via a survey link on Italian beer brand pages. Applied structural equation modeling assessed the influence of social and traditional media communication on brand equity	Quantitative
Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015)	"The impact of brand communication on brand equity through Facebook."	To fill the gap in the discussion of the ways in which FC and UG social media brand communication impacts consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) metrics through Facebook	Analyzed 302 data sets from a standardized online survey to explore the influence of FC and UG social media brand communication on brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty using structural equation modeling, examined the impact of social media communication on consumers' perception of brand equity metrics	Quantitative
Bruhn *et al.* (2012)	"Are social media replacing traditional media in terms of brand equity creation?"	To investigate the relative impact of brand communication on brand equity through social media as compared to traditional media	393 datasets were collected through a standardized online survey. The analysis, employing structural equation modeling, delved into the interaction between social media and traditional media, exploring both general patterns	Quantitative
Lee (2012)	"That's not the way it is: how user-generated comments on the news affect perceived media bias."	To investigated UG comments on Internet news sites affect readers' inferences about public opinion and, subsequently, their perceptions of media bias and how ego-involvement moderates such effects	A South Korean online survey company enlisted 240 participants for a web-based experiment. Applied regression analysis	Quantitative

Source(s): Authors' compilations

Notably, the authors' analysis unveils that FCC wields a substantial and influential effect on PI among customers. This is evidenced by a noteworthy coefficient value of 0.406 and a p-value of 0.026 ($p < 0.05$). This underscored association between FCC and PI suggests that

Variable	Characteristics of respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	52.9
	Male	47.1
Age	Below 20	9.3
	20–30	72.8
	30–40	12.5
	Above 40	5.4
Occupation	Student	55.3
	Unemployed	8.3
	Self-employed	6.90
	Other professions	29.5
Monthly income	Less than RS. 25,000	45.8
	RS. 25,000–RS. 50,000	23
	RS. 50,000–RS. 100,000	23.1
	RS. 100,000–RS. 150,000	4.1
	More than RS. 150,000	4
Educational qualifications	Secondary school leaving certificate	15.6
	Diploma and undergraduate degree	66.7
	Master or Ph.D. degree	17.7
Online purchase frequency	Once a month	34.6
	Once in two month	17.8
	Once in three month	27.3
	Once in four month	20.3

Table 3.
Demographic
characteristics of
respondents

Source(s): Online survey data

Variable(s)	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.751	0.159		4.724	
FCC	0.406	0.047	0.436	8.557	0.026
UGC	0.357	0.054	0.338	6.631	0.027

Table 4.
Regression analysis
results

Note(s): Dependent variable: Purchase intention R = 0.518, R^2 = 0.269, F = 13.883** = Significant at the 0.05 or 0.01 level, respectively
Source(s): Online survey data

the presence of FCC on the social media profiles of prominent fashionwear businesses undeniably shapes CPI. However, the authors acknowledge the need for further investigation to delve deeper into how FCC influences customer PI, particularly in distinguishing between fashionwear brands. The authors' findings align with those of Morra *et al.* (2018) who similarly reported a strong positive impact of both FCC and UGC on CPI. In this study, the authors corroborate their observations, emphasizing the significant influence that both types of social media marketing communication exert on customers' intentions to make a purchase. This consistency in findings across different studies underscores the robust relationship between social media communication and CPI within the fashionwear industry.

Furthermore, this research illuminates that UGC plays a pivotal role, exerting a significant and positive impact on PI, with a coefficient value of 0.357 and a *p*-value of 0.027 ($p < 0.05$). This implies that heightened levels of UGC are intricately linked to more profound levels of PI among customers. Furthermore, this study's findings resonate with those of Bruhn *et al.* (2012), who also observed that FC social media communication plays a significant role in

shaping fashionwear brand image when compared to UG social media communication. This research strengthens this existing evidence, suggesting that the influence of FCC on brand image remains robust in the context of the fashionwear industry in Sri Lanka. This consistency in findings across different studies underscores the enduring importance of FC social media marketing in shaping brand perception among consumers.

Lastly, this regression analysis unveils an R^2 value of 0.269, signifying that the independent variables (FCC and UGC) can account for 26.9% of the total variance in the dependent variable (PI). Moreover, the F value of 13.883 ($p = 0.000$) underscores the statistical significance of this regression model in predicting the outcome variable.

5. Discussion and implications

The study's findings highlight the consequential influence of FCC and UGC on CPI in Sri Lanka. This suggests that the impact of social media marketing communication, specifically regarding FCC and UGC factors, significantly contributes to the growth of CPI within the fashion industry in the country.

In current research, the authors unveil a moderate relationship between the FCC social media marketing communication and CPI. Additionally, the present findings highlight a discernible relationship between UG social media marketing communication and CPI, albeit with a weaker association. Nevertheless, both FCC and UGC exert a noteworthy influence on CPI, underscoring the substantial impact of social media communication within the fashion industry. Consequently, the acceptance of H1 and H2 in the current study is warranted.

Based on the research findings, there is a notable preference among females for online clothing compared to their male counterparts in the country. The findings provide valuable insights into the dynamics of social media marketing communication and its impact on consumer behavior. The research reveals a prevailing trend among the majority of young respondents, indicating a strong preference for purchasing clothes online, coupled with a substantial level of experience in online clothing transactions (Pereira *et al.*, 2022). The findings underscore the perception among customers that online platforms offer heightened convenience, particularly for busy individuals who can save time by avoiding traditional clothing stores. The results of this study align with prior research, corroborating the significance of both FCC and UGC in positively shaping CPI (Karunasingha and Abeysekera, 2022; Kim and Martinez, 2013; Long *et al.*, 2022) in the fashionwear market. This preference for FCC over UGC may be attributed to Sri Lankan shoppers' emphasis on brand reputation and quality, aligning with the focus of the fashion-wear industry (Adeola *et al.*, 2021). The adoption of online platforms not only brings benefits to customers but also offers advantages to sellers (Azemi *et al.*, 2022). Through this online marketing process, sellers can efficiently reach a vast audience within a relatively short time period, presenting a cost-effective method for sellers to promote their products.

However, it is crucial to note that Sri Lankan consumers appear to heavily rely on the opinions of family, friends and fellow users when assessing the quality of online fashion-wear services offered by textile companies, thus emphasizing the significance of social networks in consumer decision-making (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Also prior to making a fashion purchase, a significant number of users engage in the practice of reviewing comments on product pages (Chuang, 2020). Therefore, the credibility of business websites emerges as an essential component in shaping customer perceptions.

For fashion brands operating in Sri Lanka, the authors' findings underscore the importance of strategic social media marketing. In the nascent stage of social media marketing in Sri Lanka, it is imperative for sellers to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of the efficient online market dynamics for fashion items. By crafting engaging FCC and UGC content on social media platforms, brands can positively influence

CPI (Gandhi and Kar, 2022). This marketing approach necessitates trustworthiness and aims to instantly captivate customers through visually appealing items. Ensuring fairness in pricing and prioritizing convenience further enhance the overall customer experience (VanDyke *et al.*, 2023). Tailoring marketing efforts to the unique characteristics of FCC and UGC can enhance their effectiveness. Crucially, a significant majority of customers place high importance on prompt delivery post-order placement. Any delays in delivering items result in a considerable number of users hesitating to revisit the product, highlighting the pivotal role of timely delivery in customer satisfaction and retention (Yang *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, maintaining high website credibility is vital for fostering consumer trust and reducing the likelihood of brand switching.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the distinctions between FCC and UGC within the fashionwear industry. The adoption of social media marketing platforms is a novel concept within the Sri Lankan fashion industry, with notable acceleration observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating rapid growth in the country's utilization of this medium. It highlights that consumers evaluate fashionwear brands differently based on the source of social media communication. Facebook stands out as a widely acclaimed and prominent marketing channel in the country, commanding significant popularity and influence. Furthermore, this research expands on previous findings by comparing the effects of social media brand communication across the fashion industry, emphasizing the need for tailored marketing approaches based on business type.

5.1 Conclusion and future research directions

In this study, the authors investigated the impact of two types of social media marketing communication, FCC and UGC, on CPI within the context of the Sri Lankan fashion industry. Research findings provide valuable insights and implications for both theory and practice. The results of this study unequivocally demonstrate that both FCC and UGC wield significant and positive influences on CPI. Fashion brands in Sri Lanka can strategically utilize social media platforms to promote their products or services, effectively enhancing customers' intentions to make purchases (Nigam *et al.*, 2022). Notably, the authors' research revealed that customers exhibit a high degree of receptiveness to both FCC and UGC on social media platforms. This underscores the paramount importance of social media marketing in driving customer purchase intention.

5.2 Limitations

This study exhibits several limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, it predominantly emphasizes the customers' perspective, neglecting an exploration of the seller's standpoint. Secondly, the research methodology relies exclusively on convenience sampling, with a sample size confined to 353 individuals. Thirdly, it is crucial to acknowledge that the context of Sri Lanka may introduce a bias, as there is a relatively low level of awareness among the populace regarding the practice of purchasing products through social media platforms. Fourthly, this study concentrated exclusively on the fashionwear (apparel) market in Sri Lanka, omitting other industries. These limitations underscore the need for caution in generalizing the findings and highlight avenues for further research that could address these gaps.

5.3 Further recommendations

Future research endeavors should delve deeper into the alignment between stated purchase intentions and subsequent behaviors, as individuals may not always follow through with their intended actions. Future researchers can broaden their scope to explore different

sectors, providing insights into the nuances of online shopping trends and the impacts of technological innovations across various domains. The researchers should consider random sampling techniques, triangulate methodologies by using the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model, and extend geographical coverage to enhance the robustness and generalizability of findings.

In conclusion, this study underscores the pivotal role of social media marketing in influencing CPI in the Sri Lankan fashion industry. Fashion brands can harness the power of social media platforms to create engaging content, both FC and UG, that resonates with their target audience. While recognizing these significant contributions, the authors acknowledge the study's limitations and advocate for further research to address these gaps, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics between social media marketing and consumer behavior in evolving markets.

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