



**THE IMPACT OF E-WOM AND BRAND IMAGE ON
PURCHASE INTENTION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY
THROUGH THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR**

BY

SAMI AHMEDRESHID ABDUREHIM

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ABSTRACT

This study explores factors affecting customers' intentions to purchase smartphones among the International Islamic University Malaysia student population. A quantitative approach was applied whereby data was collected through the use of 360 structured questionnaires distributed among local and foreign students in the university. This study proposes a conceptual model based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) with new additional variables. It investigates the direct impact of the TPB factors, namely, Attitude toward Behaviour (ATB), Subjective Norms (SN) and Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC), with the newly considered factors namely Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) and Brand Image (BI) on the student's intention to purchase a Smartphone. To test factor validity and effectiveness of the proposed model, factor analysis and multiple regressions were applied. The findings revealed that e-WOM, Brand Image, and Perceived Behavioural Control contribute significantly to customers' intentions whereas, Attitude toward Behaviour and Subjective Norms have no significant effect. These findings are valuable for marketing managers and telecommunication companies that promote smartphones alongside data plans among student populations.

خلاصة البحث

تبحث هذه الدراسة عن العوامل المؤثرة في نية المستهلكين لشراء الهاتف الذكي في ماليزيا. اعتمدت هذه الدراسة على المنهج الكمي، وقد تم جمع البيانات عن طريق توزيع ٣٦٠ استبانة منظمة بين الطلبة المحليين، والطلبة من ذوي الجنسيات الأخرى في الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية بماليزيا. وتقتصر هذه الدراسة نموذجاً نظرياً على أساس نظرية السلوك (TPB)، مع متغيرين إضافيين. تبحث هذه الدراسة عن العناصر المأخوذة من نظرية السلوك (TPB)، وهي على التوالي: موقف اتجاه السلوك (ATB)، والمعايير الموضوعية (SN)، والإدراك السلوكي (PBC)، مع عاملين جديدين بصورة العلامة التجارية (BI)، والتداول الإلكتروني بالأحاديث (eWOM)، بنية تشجيع المستهلك لشراء الهاتف الذكي بناءً على المعطيات السابقة وتأثيرها على قراراته. ومن أجل اختبار عامل صحة النموذج وجودته، فقد قامت الدراسة باستخدام طريقة تحليل العوامل، وتحليل الانحدارات المتعددة. وقد كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن الإدراك السلوكي وصورة العلامة التجارية والتداول الإلكتروني بالأحاديث، لها مساهمة كبيرة في التأثير على نية المستهلك لشراء الهاتف الذكي، في حين أن الموقف تجاه السلوك، والمعايير الموضوعية لم يكن لها تأثير واضح على نية المستهلك لشراء الهاتف الذكي. وتعد هذه النتائج التي تم التوصل إليها في هذه الدراسة، ذات أهمية كبيرة لمديري التسويق، ولشركات الاتصالات التي تسعى لاستقطاب المستهلكين سواء أكانوا محليين أم من جنسيات أخرى.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Science (Marketing).

.....

Muhammad Tahir Jan
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Science (Marketing).

.....

Zabeda Abdul Hamid
Examiner

.....

Kalthom Abdullah
Examiner

This dissertation was submitted to the Department of Business Administration and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science (Marketing).

.....

Noor Hazilah Bt. Abd. Manaf
Head, Department of Business
Administration

This dissertation was submitted to the Kulliyyah of Economics and Management Science and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science (Marketing).

.....

Hassanuddeen Abd. Aziz
Dean, Kulliyyah of Economics
and Management Sciences

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents in detail an overview of the current research with regard to the relevance of the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) to study factors influencing brand image on social media and how it affects the intention to purchase smartphones, gaining some supporting evidence among the social media users of International Islamic University (IIUM) Students in Malaysia.

The chapter begins with a comprehensive interpretation of the background of the study, which clarifies the general overview in current phenomena of E-WOM on social media as a means to increase and enhances brand image which affects customer intention to purchase. It also shed a light on the current position of Malaysia in terms of social media users. It is followed by the statement of the problem for study by which the researcher examines and evaluative the reasons and the motives to conduct the research at hand. The research questions, and the objectives are furthermore explained in this chapter, followed by the significance of the study and the scope of the study. Lastly, the conceptual definitions of the key terms are explained in pursuance of giving a clear guideline for understanding the research topic.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In an interview with Willie Francis Sutton in 1952 who robbed more than 100 banks in the United State of America, with a total estimated of two million dollars; the interviewer asked him, why he robbed banks? He said, “because that's where the money is”. A quick spin toward the future we see ourselves in the current marketing world, marketers, and business owners are racing to have the advantage edge over the

online network and specifically social media since that is where customers, retailers, suppliers, and employees are.

Social media, such as Instagram, Facebook, WeChat, YouTube, and Google Plus, and Twitter have been characterized as a group of Internet-based applications that assembled on the ideological and innovative establishments of Web 2.0, and that enables the creation and trade of the user-generated (Rauniar et al., 2014).

Social media is defined as “any type of online production or presence that permits intuitive correspondence, including, however not limited to, social networking, websites, blogs, online forums and wikis” (NYC, 2012).

Social media transformation has changed the communication landscape and has altogether affected the way companies are marketing their products. As the number of users is continuously increasing on Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram, and it has a clear influence on their behaviour. When customers spend hours on social media, nearly every day, an increasing share of information, comments, or reviews will occur in social media network between the users.

Customers' online activities in social media have been found based on customers' conduct online. These days customers are utilizing social media as their achieving tools for their reason or intention to purchase. Customer's reason for involving in social media give bits of knowledge into customers' activities. Customers have three primary satisfactions or reasons for utilizing the social media as a medium, to be specific, information sharing, entertainment and fun, and social aspects. This inspiration is in one of the two fundamental groups: rational appeals, such as knowledge-sharing and advocacy, and emotional appeals, such as social connection and self-expression. Their motivation could be associated to their long-time friends, companies, or the reviews to back their decision to purchase. Feedback and reviews

on social media developed to be a second-hand resource to support customers' decision-making. However, reviews on social media not as just affect luxury products it affects inexpensive products or services as well. Individuals most of the time look for reviews on smartphones as many brands have been introduced to the market every three months. Those reviews can influence the intent to purchase or support consumers opinion by making it more reasonable and easy to spend the money on it (Scholarsarchive.jwu.edu, 2017).

The Smartphone market is daily growing market since Dynamic Adaptive Total Area Coverage 8000x that was established back in 1983 by Motorola, the subscribers of the mobile now around the world has reached nearly 5.3 billion users, with more than 77 percent of the world's population now using a mobile phone. In a very short time, mobile phones have changed from a small simple device for two functions only which are calling and texting to something necessary and 'smart' where people literary can't live without. Smartphone has transformed everything from the way we look at things to how we execute them, the part Smartphone plays in nowadays with our lives is remarkable. Today's Smartphone is considered as a computer and more people are using it as an alternative to their computer, checking emails, replying, shopping, and even writing up articles. And it's all done with hands on this small device. (Mackenzie, 2011)

According to (Cassavoy, 2012) we can define Smartphone to be a small device that allow its user to make a phone simultaneously it allows them to do some other activities that were not possible in the past unless they used a personal computer, for example as sending and receiving e-mails, editing a written document, sharing your feelings and experience with others which known as eWOM.

The most significant thing is that individual can distinguish a Smartphone from a cell

phone. The features are the differences such as, Operating system, as the operating system is what enable the Smartphone to run its applications. Another difference is the type of the operation System, for instance, iPhone runs IOS, BlackBerry runs The BlackBerry OS, other kinds of handsets runs Google's Android OS, HP's web OS, and some other runs Microsoft's Windows Phone.

Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) marketing has attracted both scholars and practitioners of marketing to investigate its effect on brands, firms and buying behaviour, both online and offline. Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) takes place across numerous online channels such as discussion forums, product reviews, social networking sites and emails. It quickly becomes evident that E-WOM is an augmentation of traditional WOM communication, and social media networks have altered this face-to-face communication into computer-mediated WOM communication (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

Henning-Thurau et al. (2004) defined E-WOM as exchanging information which is generally acknowledged to play a considerable role in influencing and forming consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions. Research has shown that WOM communication is more influential than communication through other sources such as editorial recommendations or advertisements because it is perceived to provide comparatively reliable information. Consequently, this type of communication is considered as having a great persuasiveness through higher perceived credibility and trustworthiness. Whereas WOM communication initially referred to the idea of a person-to-person conversation between consumers about a product the worldwide spread of the internet brought up a less personal but more ubiquitous form of WOM communication, so-called online WOM communication (Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

For a customer to be intended to purchase they look at brands. Any brand consists of either a name, logo, sign, or symbol, or any combination of them, that aim to show a distinctive benefit a company can provide to customers through a particular product or service, in terms of attributes, culture, and value (Kotler, 1997).

As mentioned by Keller (2008), a significant role played by a brand is that it allows customers to recognise a company's products/services and can distinguish them from other competitors. Indeed, customers are facing an increasingly varied range of smartphone products on the market, while companies usually know more about their products and brands than do customers. This information failure accessibility may cause uncertainty or doubts in customer's minds when they intend to make the purchase. In these situations, brands can be viewed as symbols or signals for product positioning (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

Brand image is an extremely important factor for companies' ongoing profit and their cash flow in the long term as well as their acquisition decisions, competitive edge, stock price, and their success in the marketplace. The brand image is referred to as the sum of ideas gathered by customer's perceptions and view regarding a product that is formed in the consumers' mind, for that reason, the brand image includes consumers' experience and evaluations related to the brand and influences the intention to purchase.

Another factor that influences customer's intention to purchase is TPB. As stated by the theory planned behaviour (TPB), an individual's action of a certain behaviour is decided by his or her intent to perform that behaviour. Intent itself educated by attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control and the perceptions about whether the customer will be able to effectively engage in the target behaviour. (Rauniar et al., 2014). theory of planned behaviour implies that

the most significant determinant of every behaviour is the intention to do it. This intention on its own is influenced by attitude toward behaviour (how effective is your evaluation of certain behaviour), subjective norms (perceived social pressure from others surrounding you and how they feel toward you are doing that behaviour), and perceived behavioural control (the easiness of doing that behaviour or whether it can be controlled or not). The theory of planned behaviour is believed to be one of the essential models (TPB; Ajzen, 2002; Armitage & Conner, 2001). For instance, it has been found by Stone, Jawahar, and Kisamore (2009) that the theory of planned behaviour could explain 47 percent of the inconsistent in purchase intention.

To use the theory of planned behaviour TPB, Ajzen (1991) stated that behavioural intention is influenced by perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, and behavioural attitude. Considering that customer's purchase intention for smartphones is determined by brand image and the latter is influenced by a factor not related purely to intention, such as electronic word of mouth is an interested research examination. Theory of planned behaviour is a good theory to help me examine and explain how behaviour attitude, and subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control alongside E-WOM influence brand image and as a result affect intention to purchase smartphones.

An underlying premise of this study is that beliefs about electronic word of mouth in social media impact attitudes toward brand image which influence customer intention to purchase. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) provides a robust theoretical basis for testing such premise, along with a framework for testing whether E-WOM is indeed related to intent to engage in a particular behaviour, which itself should be related to the actual behaviour which is purchasing. Based on the theory, beliefs about

how important referent others feel about sharing information on social media, and motivation to comply with the views of other users or customers, should also influence intent to purchase. Finally, beliefs about having the necessary opportunities and resources to engage in Internet purchasing should influence intent to purchase as well as directly influence purchasing behaviour itself. (George, 2004)

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationships between purchase intention and electronic word of mouth (E-WOM), brand image, and the three elements of the theory of planned behaviour. Specifically, how do these factors of the theory of planned behaviour and E-WOM, and brand image on social media result in customer's intention to purchase a smartphone?

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

These days social media turn out to be a piece of a man's life, for example, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn has a numeral number of the client and continues developing each day. It is assessed that more than 500 million individuals are interfacing with social media worldwide (Ostrow, 2010). However, according to Statista 2017 the number of social media users in 2017 reached up to 2.4 billion users worldwide and expected to reach more than 3 billion by 2021 (billions), 2017).

A study prepared by Statista show us a clear picture of the most used social media globally, with Facebook ruling supreme which should not be a surprise to anyone! With nearly over 1,870 million active users, it holds an 18 percent of market share, 7 percent more so than its closest competitor, the Facebook-owned, WhatsApp. In addition, forester's mobile audience data mentioned that Facebook's dominance is truly extraordinary. Not only does it take the top spot, it's other platforms also take second and third respectively. Facebook Messenger helps engagement and interaction between the customers, and Instagram (also owned by Facebook) comes second for engagement (Smart Insights, 2017).

The number of social media users growing has attracted marketers. Marketers have recognized that social media marketing is an important part of their marketing communication strategies. In addition, social media helps businesses to communicate with their customers. These social media activities enable advertisers to determine their customer's need and comprehend what their market may resemble. Key business components of social media empower purchasers to assess things, impact recommendations to their personal contacts or to the mass users, and offer any of the purchases through their social media (Neti, S.2011).

In Malaysia eight in ten Internet users (80 percent) visited social media sites, of that

96.5 percent claimed that they owned a Facebook account. Half of them accessed their accounts on a daily basis. This is followed by WeChat Moments with 61.2 percent of account ownership and 31.7 percent of daily visitors. About 46 percent of Internet users have an Instagram account and 42.1 percent of YouTube account users. On the contrary, social media that required some literacy skills such as Twitter and LinkedIn accounted for less than one-third of users. On average, one user registered for four types of social media account. However, 60 percent of them thought that each person should own only one account for any social media. In terms of the usage frequency in a day, these social media followers were mostly connected for four hours or less. There were 4.1 percent users who browsed the social media for more than twelve hours in a day. The majority of Internet users also used social media as their preferred source of information. Of late, it has become one of the active platforms for fundraising efforts besides being used as a source of information. The survey found that 18.6 percent of social media users used it to contribute while the remaining 81.4 percent were cautious (Mcmc.gov.my, 2017).

Therefore, since most of the customers look for information and reviews on social media when it comes to the second stage of customer's buying process (information search) especially in smartphones and most of the businesses small or medium are using social media as a tool for getting noticed by the customers and some are independent on the customer's review, feedback and electronic word of mouth the author thinks it is necessary to make further investigations which elucidate the influence of E-WOM on social media channel has an impact on Brand image and as a result influence customer's intention to purchase smartphone.

The main emphasis of this research is to identify and get insight into the electronic word of mouth on social media that influence brand image which impacts customer's

intention to purchase a smartphone.

An in-depth study of literature based on the theory of planned behaviour was not done to identify if attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, perceived behavioural, and electronic word of mouth will influence brand image and determine customer's intention to purchase smartphones (Wang, 2014).

Therefore, the relationship of these factors to one another and how it leads to a purchase intention are also worth studying.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 General Objectives:

The general objective of this study is to investigate how electronic word of mouth along with the theory of planned behaviour and brand image influence customer intention to purchase smartphones.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives:

- 1) To study the relationship between E-WOM intention to purchase Smartphones.
- 2) To investigate the relationship between brand image and intention to purchase of Smartphones.
- 3) To identify the relationship between the attitude toward behaviour and intention to purchase Smartphones.
- 4) To examine the relationship between subjective norms and intention to purchase Smartphones.
- 5) To identify the relationship between perceived behaviour control and intention to purchase Smartphones.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to provide responses to the following questions:

1. Does E-WOM have a positive impact toward customer's intention to purchase a smartphone?
2. Does Brand image have a positive impact on customer's intention to purchase a smartphone?
3. Does subjective norms has a positive link with customer's intention to purchase a smartphone?
4. Does attitude toward behaviour has a positive relationship with customer's intention to purchase a smartphone?
5. Does the perceived behavioural control has an impact on customer's intention to purchase a smartphone?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research offers valuable insights to the theory of planned behaviour as well as the relationship between the theory and the electronic word of mouth(E-WOM) and the impact both make on brand image and how that will influence customer intention to purchase a smartphone. It will provide a better understanding of the social media and the impact of sharing information or a review on the brand image of smartphones and how that leads to customer's intention to purchase a smartphone.

From a Management perspective, this study helps managers to understand how powerful is the electronic word of mouth on social media and its relation to brand image, and the link between the theory of planned behaviour variables and brand image and how all affect customer's intention to purchase. It will help them to understand that the market has changed, and it is the customer's review, experiences, and their feelings that everyone pays attention to rather than the traditional advertisement methods.

1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focused on identifying the factors which affect purchase intention on social media among International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) students in Malaysia. Electronic word of mouth and brand image with the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) factors are tested if they have a positive impact on customer's purchase intention.

1.8 DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

In this study, the researcher mentioned the definition of the important key terms in order to help understand the theme of the study.

1.8.1 Social Media

According to Christensson, P. (2013, August 7) Social media is “a collection of Internet-based communities that allow users to interact with each other online. This includes web forums, wikis, and user-generated content (UGC) websites. However, the term is most often used to describe popular social networking websites,”

1.8.2 E-WOM Electronic Word of Mouth

It is a form of buzz marketing and it can become viral if the message is persuasive or funny enough. In eWOM, we focus on person-to-person contacts that happen on the internet. You may think this is new but in fact, it's the oldest type of marketing we know.

1.8.3 Attitude toward behaviour

It is defined as a personal evaluation of either positive or negative feeling out of performing a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1985).

1.8.4 Subjective norms

It's the perception that individual has of pressure social media put on an individual to engage or not to engage in certain behaviour (Ajzen, 1985).

1.8.5 Perceived behavioural control

Perceived behavioural control refers to the easiness level that faces individuals when they intend to perform a particular behaviour