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## Article

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# **Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Intention of Fashion Products on Social Networking Websites**

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## **Abstract**

The growth of social networking sites has changed the living style of people around the globe and it has also become an important tool for marketers. This growth has also emerged electronic word of mouth that significantly shapes the purchase intention of consumers. This study investigates the outcome of electronic word of mouth on purchase intention of Facebook users. It also identifies the major factors influencing the electronic word of mouth to buy fashion products. A survey was conducted to collect data from 503 Facebook users. Data collected through questionnaire was empirically analyzed using SPSS Process macro developed by Hayes and Preacher (2014). The findings confirm the electronic word of mouth is an effective factor influencing purchase intention of fashion brands. The findings also confirm the role of homophily, trustworthiness, expertness, informational influence and high fashion involvement as major factors influencing electronic word of mouth. Findings from the study help to assist the companies that use social networking sites like Facebook for promotion of their products in targeting the factors that have major influence on purchase intention of fashion products.

**Keywords:** electronic word of mouth, purchase intention, homophily, expertness, trustworthiness, informational influence, high fashion involvement, Facebook usage intensity.

## **1. Introduction**

Globalization and technological development both have frequently changed the life style of people around the globe. Moreover, Internet has become a significant part of our lives that has altered the way people communicate with each other. The internet has also imposed significant changes for business, where conversations now take place between people, not marketers (Levin et al., 2009). The conversation between people in the form of word of mouth has always gained attention among marketers as a powerful and effective tool as compare to other conventional marketing tools.

Word of mouth is the verbal communication about products and brands that has a positive and strong influence on the consumer buying behavior. The reason customers find it more credible is that it comes from customers like them, therefore, it is recommended that

credible marketers should use the benefits of word of mouth, because on an average consumer discusses products two hundred and twelve times in a year (Keller et al., 2007). The source credibility theory as proposed by Hovland, Janis and Kelly (1953) also identified that “people or receivers are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible” (as cited in Umeogu, 2012).

The internet growth has brought forth electronic word of mouth that has more interactive capabilities and enhances consumers’ interaction with each other in digital world. Due to this advent, conventional marketing tools are not much effective on the Web as “people are discovering and inventing new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed” (Srikantaiah et al., 2010)

Day by day, the internet like a black hole absorbs new tools and technologies. Social networking websites or social media based on the concept of web 2.0 technology provide an interactive community to the users e.g. Wikipedia, Facebook and Twitter etc. Social Networking Sites (SNS) have become a part of our daily life and it has also provided new venues for businesses to inform, understand and connect with their customers. The collaborative and social nature of SNS enables brand related consumer-to-consumer conversations (Chu & Kim, 2011).

Nowadays, consumers rely mostly on online information created or shared by other consumers to make purchased decisions (Hu et al., 2012). Hence, social media highly influence the brand awareness, opinions and attitudes of consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Several pages on social networking websites are created by the companies and groups so that customers can discuss the features of products. Online pages are operated by companies while groups are usually operated by the customer. In these pages, customers share their views about products and services and this is how they contribute in an electronic word of mouth. In present era, everyone uses internet in their daily life, thus, they contribute and involve in electronic word of mouth before and after the purchase of any product (Berger, 2014).

Marketing experts have also realized the importance of social marketing and electronic word of mouth. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are very popular among consumers to spread the experience of products and services consumed. In the electronic word of mouth context, customers are very interested to read the negative and positive reviews of the other user’s experience. These positive and negative remarks affect the purchase intention of fashion products among the potential customers. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the important factors that can have significant effect on electronic word of mouth and purchase intention of fashion products in social networking websites. Previously many studies conducted in context of electronic word of mouth have less focused on factors determining electronic word of mouth influence on individual consumers’ attitudes and behaviors (López & Sicilia, 2014). Baber et al., (2016) have also identified that most of the studies conducted on electronic word of mouth focused on the tourism industry, movie discussions or restaurant experiences. Therefore, this study with the help of empirical data sought to identify the factors that have impact on electronic word of mouth about fashion products in social networking

websites. The identified factors are Homophily, Expertness, Trustworthiness, Informational Influence and High Fashion Involvement. Along with it, it also attempted to identify the possible outcome of electronic word of mouth on purchase intention of fashion products consumers. The specific objectives of the study are:

- To analyze the impact of eWOM Involvement on purchase intention of fashion products in social networking websites.
- To analyze the factors affecting eWOM Involvement of fashion products in social networking websites.
- To analyze the moderating role of Facebook usage intensity between eWOM Involvement and purchase intention fashion products in social networking websites.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Theoretical Background*

Theory of reasoned action by (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) was developed as an improvement and upgrading of Information Integration Theory (IIT) by (Anderson, 1971) which predicts the attitudes. Fishbein & Ajzen, (1975) made two changes in IIT, first reasoned actions includes one more element to the procedure of persuasion and behavioral intention. Reasoned actions are concerned with attitudes and behavior. This theory also identified that there are other reasons which affect and limit the attitude on behavior. For example, money can change our behavioral intention and is a reasoned action.

The second change, reasoned action theory made in informational integration theory is that it uses two elements instead of one. Reasoned theory use attitudes and norms and explain norms as the expectations of others to predict the behavioral intention. For example our attitudes suggest doing one thing but that is against our culture and norm, so our norms suggest us to do something else. Reasoned action theory says that behavioral intent occurs due to two reasons, our attitude and our subjective norms (Terry et al., 1993).

On the basis of Theory of Reasoned action, (Ajzen, 1988,91) also proposed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) which predicts an individual's intention to engage in a behavior. Behavioral intent is the key component to this model. The TPB has been used in a variety of fields such as health, informatics, technology and advertisement etc. theory of planned behavior deals with believes and behaviors of individuals. The level of personal psychological interest can control the behavior and its effect on intentions and on actions. The theory of planned behavior is different from the reasoned action theory as it also includes the perceived behavioral control.

### *2.2 Dual-Process Theory*

Dual-process Theory by (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) explains that how influences (informational and normative factors) affects the credibility and persuasiveness of the message. Theory explains the conditions under which the process of credibility and

persuasiveness occurs (Chaiken & Trope, 1999). Dual process theory helps in examining the importance and control of processing in making customers perceptions and behavior. Cheung and Thadani (2012) stated that eWOM involves communication from various dynamic sources that is why dual process theory is very helpful and applicable in that context.

Many studies on eWOM adopted a dual process theory. The most noticeable theories of dual process are the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Massaro et al., 1988) and the heuristic systemic model (HSM) (Chaiken, 1980). These models investigate the way behaviors and attitudes are changed due to different aspects of a message such as strength of arguments, source credibility etc.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model was developed by (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and it has proposed two routes of persuasion, one is the central route and the other is peripheral route. The central route is that person carefully and thoughtfully considers the pros and cons of the information received in support of advocacy. The results of this elaboration of message is change attitude, against or favorable and predictive behavior. The peripheral route persuasion results personal positive or negative intuition and cues about the message (Perloff, 1994). Decision made under the peripheral route by individuals are generally those decisions which are not understandable logically. The cues and intuitions are reasons of the credibility, attractiveness and quality of message. The likelihood of elaboration is determined by personal motivation and ability to judge the message (Payne, 2007).

Heuristic-Systematic Model of Information Processing (HSM) is presented by (Maheswaran et al., 1992). HSM model attempts to explain how people receive messages and how they process the messages. HSM is a dual process Model positing two concurrent modes of qualitatively different social information processing. This model suggests that individual can process message in two ways, heuristically or systematically. This model states that individual opt to make easy decision rather than using the cognitive ability of making a decision (Chaiken & Trope, 1999). According to systematic view receiver of the information uses the cognitive effort to analyze and evaluate the message to assure the validity of the message. On the other side, the heuristic view of persuasiveness states that individuals put comparatively less efforts to understand and evaluate the information of message rather they rely on other factors about the information like source identity and unrelated signals like intuitions in deciding to accept the information or not. Systematic view of persuasion emphasizes on detailed processing of message and heuristic system rely on opinion and simple rules like cognitive cues (Chaiken, 1980). HSM model is very familiar with Elaboration Likelihood Model; both the models were developed in early 1990 and both share the somehow same idea of persuasiveness of the message (Ryu & Kim, 2014).

### *2.3 Purchase Intention*

Intention is the behavior that motivates person sense to perform behavior (Rezvani et al., 2012). Purchase intention is what customer thinks that he/she will buy. It can also be explained as an act and physiological action of purchase towards a product (Lin & Lu, 2010). Lim et al., (2016) explained that in theory of reasoned action and theory of

planned behavior “Ajzen (1991) suggested that intentions are presumed to be an indicator of to what extent people willing to approach certain behavior and how many attempts they are trying in order to perform certain behavior” (p. 3). In the light of theory of reasoned action and theory of planned behavior, this intention is dependent on the person’s or consumer’s positive attitude towards performing that behavior, hence, in this study if Facebook users receive positive electronic word of mouth they their purchase intention will likely be high. Therefore, purchase intention is taken as dependent variable in this study.

#### *2.4 Electronic Word of Mouth Involvement*

Word of mouth (WOM) is the oral communication where information is shared in social setting or circle. It is the informal communication in which consumer discuss about the brands, products and services. It plays a very effective part in promotional part of marketing (Nguyen & Romaniuk, 2014). With the introduction of web 2.0 technology, eWOM has an essential impact on consumers’ purchase intentions, since they trust on eWOM before making any product purchase (Doh & Hwang, 2009). According to Cheunga and Lee (2012), purchase intention is the extensive outcome variable of electronic word of mouth communication). In their study, they further studied purchase intention as outcome of eWOM and stated that 10 out of 25 studies examined the purchase intention as outcome of eWOM and 10 studies focused impact of incentives on the purchase intention of customers. Most of the researchers investigated the characteristics of the eWOM like quantity, quality and relevance and their effect on the purchase intention (Lin et al., 2013). Shabsogh et al., (2012) in their study found that “the relationships between source characteristics and trustworthiness are largely irrelevant to eWOM” and its effect on purchase intention. Wolny and Mueller (2013) analyzed motive for consumer’s engaging in electronic word-of-mouth in context of fashion brands on social networking sites by using an extended Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) model. In another study Teng et al., (2014) found that quality, credibility, source attractiveness and style are important factors of electronic word of mouth message which customers use to make their future purchase decision. In a recent study, Vahdati and Nejad (2016) also confirmed e-WOM having a positive and significant effect on the purchase intention of bank customers. Hence, eWOM among consumers significantly affect their purchase intention in social networking websites. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that

- **H<sub>1</sub>:** eWOM involvement has a significant positive effect on purchase intention of fashion products in social networking websites.

#### *2.5 Homophily*

Homophily is defined as a degree to which individuals’ share same characteristics like age, gender, education and income, in the extent to which individuals communicates when they have common characteristics. Consumer who share high level of homophily, participate more in eWOM with each other which ultimately shapes their purchase decisions (Chu & Kim, 2011). The Elaboration model also states that people make a

decision on the characteristics of the message provider, if the reader finds that person is somehow like him, then the message become more persuasive to the reader (Petty & Cacioppo., 1981). In a recent study, Phua et al., (2017) found that “For SNS homophily, users who saw their SNS network as being more heterogeneous (low homophily) increased their bridging social capital, but decreased their bonding social capital with increased SNS use”. A study conducted by Steffes and Burgee (2009) also stated that information from homophilous sources are preferred as compared to heterophilous, and information from homophilous is more influential in making consumer decision. Jalees et al., (2015) found a significant impact of homophily on electronic word of mouth communication in context of social media and virtual marketing. Thus, it has been hypothesized that

- **H<sub>2</sub> (a):** Homophily among consumers has a significant positive impact on electronic word of mouth in social networking websites.
- **H<sub>2</sub> (b):** eWOM Involvement mediates the relationship between homophily and purchase intention in social networking websites.

### *2.6 Expertness*

Ohanian (1990) defined expertness as “the degree to which a person perceived to possess knowledge, skills or experience and thereby is considered to provide accurate information” Many empirical studies showed that the influence of the word of mouth increase when the WOM is generated from an expert of that specific field (Gilly et al., 1998). Fan et al., (2013) argued that in ELM model, “involvement is associated with the motivation to process information, and expertise is associated with the ability to process information” (p.3). A study conducted by Lis (2013) on eWOM found that the higher level of reviewer’s expertise, the higher his or her suggestion will be used which will have higher impact on the purchase decision. The expertness of the individuals is important factor for making the eWOM message more persuasive and increase the purchase intention. Thus, it is hypothesized that

- **H<sub>3</sub> (a):** Expertness has a significant positive impact on electronic word of mouth in social networking websites.
- **H<sub>3</sub> (b):** eWOM Involvement mediates the relationship between expertness and purchase intention in social networking websites.

### *2.7 Trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness is the credibility of the source of information (East et al., 2008). The concept of trustworthiness is directly related to the trust and objectivity of the sender of information (Dimitrakos, 2012). A research conducted by Lis (2013) investigated the relationship between the level of trustworthiness and the credibility of the recommendations and found that receivers of the eWOM recommendations mostly rely on the trustworthiness of the sender. When customers interact with each other on social networking sites, these communications encourage weak ties not the strong relationships that is why the generalized trust is built among the customers and trust has important role in building eWOM (Hsu & Tran, 2013). Lis (2013), argued that “trust refers to the aspect

of behavior in the form of willingness or intention to rely on a different person” (p.3), this can be referred to theory of planned behavior and reasoned action where a positive feeling leads to intention and then actual behavior. Hence, it can be inferred that trustworthiness of the content provider enhances strength of eWOM which ultimately affect the purchase intention of fashion products in social media. Therefore,

- **H<sub>4</sub> (a):** Trustworthiness has a significant positive impact on electronic word of mouth in social networking websites.
- **H<sub>4</sub> (b):** eWOM mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and purchase intention in social networking websites.

### *2.8 Informational Influence*

Informational social influence results from an individual thinking that someone else has more accurate information than they do (Chu & Kim, 2011). Two dimensions of interpersonal influences are identified in literature, which are normative and informative influence (Bearden et al., 1989). Normative influence is the capacity to fulfill the expectations of norms, values and attitudes of other whereas the informative influence is the capacity to accept the information from other knowledgeable person to select a product or brand (Burnkrant & Cousineau 1975). Informational influence is the tendency to accept the knowledge and make a wise buying decision and it refers to trustworthy proof of reality. Dual process theory focusses on interpersonal dependency and emphasizes the effect of informative and normative influence on the credibility and persuasiveness of the message. In social networking sites, informational influence drives a useful eWOM behavior and it contributes in a positive way. A study by Chu and Kim (2011) found that there is positive effect of informational influence on eWOM Involvement and purchase intention that is a good source of advertisement for organization. Thus,

- **H<sub>5</sub> (a):** Informational influence has a significant positive impact on electronic word of mouth in social networking websites.
- **H<sub>5</sub> (b):** eWOM involvement mediates the relationship between informational influence and purchase intention in social networking websites.

### *2.9 High Fashion Involvement*

Fashion means anything which is up-to-date and modern. As fashion related products are risky, complex in evaluating and personal image is associated with it that is why people often use social networking sites to receive feedback about those products though their peers (Lin & Lu, 2011). Fashion products are high involvement products and theory of planned behavior is also applied to high involvement products..... “The higher the degree of involvement, the stronger beliefs consumers will form” (Jansler, 2013). Fashion products are considered as the high involvement products where customers tend to seek information from the different sources before making purchase decision because it involve money and linked with the personal identity of the consumer. It has been observed that high involvement products seek more involvement of customers on online



communities and social networking sites (Gu et al., 2012). A study by Wolny and Mueller (2013) found that high fashion Involvement has major role in engagement in fashion related electronic word of mouth. Thus,

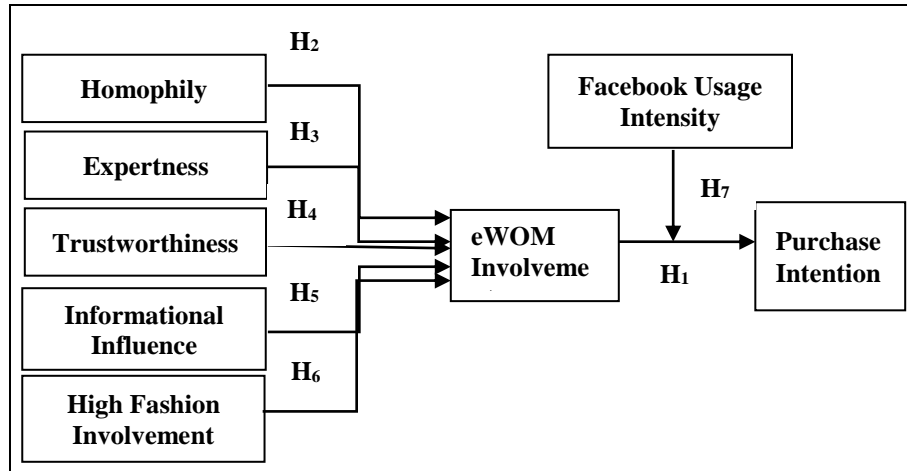
- **H<sub>6</sub> (a):** High Fashion involvement has a significant positive impact on electronic word of mouth in social networking websites.
- **H<sub>6</sub> (b):** eWOM involvement mediates the relationship between high fashion involvement and purchase intention in social networking websites.

#### *2.10 Facebook Usage Intensity*

Facebook is the largest online community in the world where millions of people interact with each other on daily basis and share about their life and feelings. Facebook usage intensity is the time which is spent on daily basis on Facebook. The active participation of the information provider may also results in increased trust of the information reader. The more the time a person spends on Facebook, the more he or she will participate in eWOM activities. The Facebook usage intensity moderates the relationship between eWOM involvement and purchase intention (Park & Kim, 2009 ). Park and Kim (2013) also identified that theoretically, intensity of SNS use can be used as a moderator. Hence, it is hypothesized that

- **H<sub>7</sub>:** Facebook usage intensity moderates the relationship between eWOM involvement and purchase intention.

The analysis of literature review points out that most of the previous researches on commercial usage of SNS have focused on assessing the effect of SNS or social media on brands awareness and their commercial success. However, to understand the motivational factors of consumers to engage in brand related eWOM on social networking websites is also necessary (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). In short, it can be said that despite the extensive literature on WOM, there is still a slow progress of researches on consumer behaviour in social networking websites especially for fashion products. This study has tried to fill the literature gap by studying the factors affecting consumers' eWOM in SNS as well their effect on purchase intention. Figure 1 represents the theoretical model including independent, mediator, moderator and dependent variables.



**Figure 1: Research Model**

### 3. Research Methodology

This research is a causal study which aims to investigate the effect of homophily, Expertness, trustworthiness, informational influence, electronic word of mouth and high fashion involvement on the purchase intention of customer in Social Networking Sites (SNSs). The Population of this study is Facebook users. Everyone who has a Facebook profile and is an active and frequent user is a part of the population of this study.

#### 3.1 Sampling Technique

Everyone who has a Facebook profile and is an active and frequent user was part of the population of this study. The sample chosen for this study consists of respondents who are above the age of 18, having some online shopping experience or information about online product reviews. Secondly, deliberately only those respondents were chosen who were users of Facebook? Due to this judgment or purpose, the sampling technique chosen for this study falls in non-probability sampling technique type i.e. purposive or judgmental sampling technique. The main feature of purposive sampling technique is that it focuses on the particular characteristics of the population which are of interest of the study and they help best to answer the research questions (Neuman, 2005). Random sampling was not possible because not every Facebook users is an online shopper and this study aimed to investigate the effect of eWOM on purchase intention of fashion products on Facebook. The sample was chosen from two cities of Pakistan i.e. Rawalpindi and Islamabad from the social circle of the researchers.

#### 3.2 Research Instrument

Questionnaire developed on five point Likert scale was used as a tool of data collection. The Independent variables; homophily have 6 items, expertness have 7 items,

trustworthiness have 6 items, informational influence have 5 items and high fashion Involvement have 6 items. The mediator variable electronic word of mouth involvement has 5 items and the moderator variable Facebook usage intensity has 5 items. Dependent variable purchase intention has 6 items. The other section of questionnaire contained questions regarding demographical information of the respondents such as age, gender, income, education level and occupation. For data analysis, SPSS software and its Process Macro by Hayes and Preacher was used to test the hypotheses.

### *3.3 Data Collection*

Data was collected by administrating a close ended questionnaire. Two different methods were used to collect data, one was web based questionnaire and the other was manual (hardcopy) of the questionnaire which was distributed among the respondents. For collecting data electronically “Google forms” were created and questionnaires were circulated among the respondents through social networking sites like Facebook .For the manual collection of data, printed hardcopies of the questionnaire were distributed among the respondent in different places. The response rate of electronic method was very low. Out of 117 circulated questionnaires by targeting the friend lists, only 53 (45%) responses were returned back. To meet the targeted sample size of 500, further printed copies of questionnaire were distributed among the respondents by accessing them in university cafeteria, public parks and cinema. Due to this method, 450 out of 500 printed questionnaires were returned with a response rate of 90%. This sample size was calculated using online sample calculator with 95% confidence interval. The Facebook users in 2015 (at the time of study) were approximately 15 million. Hence, using the formula, the recommended minimum sample size was around 400. Therefore, to avoid any error in the filled questionnaires, sample size more than 400 was selected.

## **4. Data Analysis and Results**

### *4.1 Demographical Background*

The demographic section of the questionnaire contains four sections which include gender, education, age, and income. Table 1 shows the results of the demographic section of questionnaire.

**Table 1: Demographic Background of Respondent**

	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Options</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	<b>Gender</b>	Male	376	75.2%
		Female	127	24.8%
2	<b>Education</b>	Metric	34	6.76%
		Undergraduate	202	40.1%
		Master	87	17.3%
		Diploma	106	21.07%
		Others	74	14.71%
1	<b>Age</b>	Less than 18	27	5.36%
		18- 25	195	38.76%
		25-30	187	37.17%
		Above 30	94	18.68%
4	<b>Income</b>	Above Rs 30,000	39	7.75%
		Above Rs 40,000	57	11.33%
		Above Rs 50,000	78	15.50%
		Above Rs 60,000	205	40.75%
		Above Rs 70,000	124	24.65%

#### 4.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation is used to show the relationship among variables. Table 2 shows the Pearson correlation among all variables showing that all the variables are positively correlated with other. The table also contains the values of mean, standard deviation and values of reliability analysis. The values in table 2 show that the highest correlation exist between trustworthiness and expertness ( $r=.527$ ) and the lowest correlation exists between Facebook usage intensity and homophily ( $r=.159$ ). The values further confirm that that none of the inter-item correlation is greater than 0.90 indicating no do not multicollinearity issues.

#### 4.3 Reliability Analysis

In order to check the internal consistency of items, reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha. For this purpose, pilot testing was also conducted. Table 2 shows that all values of Cronbach's alpha are above 0.7 which shows that the items in the questionnaire are consistent with each other. Table 2 shows that reliability of electronic word of mouth was the highest ( $\alpha= 0.89$ ,  $M= 3.0$ ,  $SD= .66$ ) followed by high fashion involvement ( $\alpha=.86$ ,  $M= 3.1$ ,  $SD= .66$ ), Expertness ( $\alpha=0.85$ ,  $M= 3.1$ ,  $SD= 0.58$ ),

Informational influence ( $\alpha=.85$ ,  $M= 3.0$ ,  $SD= 0.61$ ), purchase intention ( $\alpha=.85$ ,  $M= 2.9$ ,  $SD= 0.68$ ), Facebook usage intensity ( $\alpha=.81$ ,  $M= 3.2$ ,  $SD= 0.70$ ), Homophily ( $\alpha=.78$ ,  $M= 2.9$ ,  $SD= 0.47$ ) and Trustworthiness ( $\alpha=.77$ ,  $M= 3.0$ ,  $SD= 0.56$ ). Since these reliabilities are greater than 0.70, therefore internal consistency of the items were confirmed.

**Table 1: Correlation and Reliability Analysis of Study Variables**

	Variables	M	S.D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	$\alpha$
1	Homophily	2.9	.47	1								.78
2	Expertness	3.1	.58	.482**	1							.85
3	Trustworthiness	3.0	.56	.474**	.527* *	1						.77
4	Informational influence	3.0	.61	.313**	.422* *	.356**	1					.85
5	High fashion Involvement	3.1	.66	.321**	.255* *	.313**	.480**	1				.86
6	Purchase intention	2.9	.68	.269**	.170* *	.265**	.519**	.475**	1			.85
7	Electronic word of mouth	3.0	.66	.227**	.181* *	.289**	.364**	.462**	.492**	1		.89
8	Facebook usage intensity	3.2	.70	.159**	.177* *	.213**	.309**	.298**	.256**	.367**	1	.81
<i>M = Mean, S.D = Standard Deviation, <math>\alpha</math> = Cronbach's alpha</i>												

4.4 Validity Analysis

In order to check the validity or accuracy of the instrument, few measures have been taken which are as follows:

Content validity: the content validity of the instrument was conducted by taking the professional judgment of the experts. For this purpose, opinions of the supervisors who hold senior faculty positions having strong research background were taken.

Construct validity: which contains two sub types i.e. convergent and discriminant validity was calculated by theoretically building variables to be measured. The convergent validity intended to see how big indicator shares in a single construct. An indicator is said to converge if it has a factor loading value is high and significant. In addition, it has a standardized factor loading estimate greater than 0.5. The construct validity is determined by factor analysis. For this purpose, confirmatory factor analysis was done using AMOS 22 through maximum probability valuation. For the goodness of fit of the model, the following fit indices are reported: the model chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI), goodness of fit index (GFI) and adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI). RMSEA is a measure of the average of the residual variance and covariance; good models have RMSEA values that are at or less than 0.08. CFI is an index that fall between 0 and 1. When comparing models, a lower chi-square value indicates a better fit, given an equal number of degrees of freedom. The CFA test also calculated the standardized loadings of each item on its respective factor. The results of this CFA indicated an adequate model fit and confirmed the validity of the constructs. The values of CFA model fit are shown in table 3.

**Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

	<b>Variables</b>	$\chi^2$	<i>Df</i>	$\chi^2/df$	<b>CFI</b>	<b>GFI</b>	<b>AGFI</b>	<b>RMSEA</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Homophily</b>	5.068	1	5.068	.97	.90	.65	.25
<b>2</b>	<b>Expertness</b>	4.997	3	1.66	.92	.95	.81	.29
<b>3</b>	<b>Trustworthiness</b>	4.357	2	2.17	.90	.89	.87	.24
<b>4</b>	<b>High Fashion Involvement</b>	6.754	3	2.25	.91	.88	.50	.27
<b>5</b>	<b>eWOM Involvement</b>	30.612	7	4.37	.94	.92	.61	.22
<b>6</b>	<b>Purchase Intention</b>	12.560	5	2.51	.86	.91	.66	.28
<b>7</b>	<b>Facebook Usage Intensity</b>	18.450	4	4.61	.99	.86	.61	.21

#### *4.5 Hypothesis Testing*

Hypotheses were tested with the help of SPSS process Macro by Hayes and Preacher (2014). This SPSS Process macro incorporates the bootstrapping effect method and provides the significance of conditional indirect and direct affects. To test the acceptance and rejection of the mediation hypothesis regression by (Hayes & Preacher, 2014) model 4 was applied. Below are the direct effects of independent variables on purchase intention with and without bootstrapping and indirect effect (mediating effect) of eWOM involvement.

**Table 4: Regression Analysis of Variable**

<b>Predictors</b>		<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>(SE)</b>	<b><i>t</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
1	<i>Path a</i>				
	Homophily --- eWOM	.31	.06	5.22	.000
	Expertness --- eWOM	.20	.04	4.11	.000
	Trustworthiness --- eWOM	.33	.05	6.75	.000
	Information Influence --- eWOM	.39	.04	8.75	.000
	High fashion Involvement --- eWOM	.46	.03	11.67	.000
2	<i>Path b</i>				
	eWOM --- Purchase Intention	.47	.04	11.5	.000
3	<i>Path c</i>				
	Homophily --- Purchase Intention	.38	.06	6.24	.000
	Expertness --- Purchase Intention	.19	.05	3.85	.000
	Trustworthiness --- Purchase Intention	.32	.05	6.15	.000
	Information Influence --- Purchase Intention	.58	.04	13.6	.000
	High fashion Involvement --- Purchase Intention	.49	.04	12.07	.000
4	<i>Path c' (Including Mediator)</i>				
	Homophily --- Purchase Intention	.23	.05	4.20	.000
	Expertness --- Purchase Intention	.09	.04	2.12	.034
	Trustworthiness --- Purchase Intention	.16	.04	3.33	.000
	Information Influence --- Purchase Intention	.44	.04	10.33	.000
	High fashion Involvement --- Purchase Intention	.32	.04	7.56	.000
	<b>Bootstrap Results for Indirect Effect (Purchase Intention)</b>	<b>Effect</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>LLCI (95%)</b>	<b>ULCI (95%)</b>
	<i>eWOM</i>	.1488	.0312	.093	.216
<i>Note. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention., LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit. N = 503; Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported</i>					

The values presented in above table show that homophily ( $\beta=.31(.06)$   $t(5.22)$ ,  $p=.000$ .) is significantly related to electronic word of mouth. Thus, confirming the hypothesis 2 (a)

which stated that homophily has a significant positive effect on electronic word of mouth in social networking sites. Further the effect of homophily on purchase intention was also found significant ( $\beta = .38(.06)$ ,  $t=6.24$ ,  $p=.000$ ). The effect of eWOM on purchase intention was also significant ( $\beta = .47(.04)$ ,  $t=11.5$ ,  $p=.000$ ) which confirmed the assumption of hypothesis 1 that eWOM significantly effects purchase intention of fashion products in social networking sites. Regarding mediating effect of eWOM between homophily and purchase intention, the values show that when eWOM as mediator was included, then effect of homophily on purchase intention was reduced from ( $\beta = .38$  to  $\beta = .23$ ) but still significant ( $p=.000$ ) which clearly indicates the effect of partial mediation. Hence, the hypothesis 2(b) was accepted. This partial mediation in this case implies that there is not only a significant relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, but also some direct relationship between homophily and purchase intention. In table 4 indirect effects were also significant the 95% level of significance, as indicated by the values of LLCI and ULCI when the lower and upper levels of the confidence intervals did not show zero. Thus, hypothesis 1, 2 (a) and 2(b) were accepted. When expertness was regressed on eWOM, its effect was also positive and significant ( $\beta=.20(.04)$ ,  $t (4.11)$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Thus, supporting the hypothesis 3(a) of the study. In case of mediation analysis, the effect of expertness on purchase intention was reduced from ( $\beta=.19(.05)$ ,  $t (3.85)$ ,  $p=.000$ ) to ( $\beta =.09(.04)$ ,  $t=2.12$ ,  $p=.000$ ). This reduced but still significant result shows partial mediation confirming the direct as well as indirect effect of expertness on purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis 3(b) was also accepted.

The results also show that trustworthiness ( $\beta=.33(.05)$ ,  $t (6.75)$ ,  $p=.000$ ) is significantly related to electronic word of mouth supporting hypothesis 4(a). Further the effect of trustworthiness on purchase intention was also found significant ( $\beta =.32(.05)$ ,  $t=6.15$ ,  $p=000$ ). When electronic word of mouth was included, this effect of trustworthiness on purchase intention was reduced to ( $\beta =.16(.04)$ ,  $t=3.33$ ,  $p=000$ ). Thus, again confirming the partial mediation effect of trustworthiness on purchase intention through electronic word of mouth and supporting hypothesis 4(b).

The results also show that information influence ( $\beta=.39(.04)$ ,  $t (8.75)$ ,  $p=.000$ ) is significantly related to electronic word of mouth providing support to hypothesis 5(a).. Further the effect of informational influence on purchase intention was also found significant ( $\beta =.44(.042)$ ,  $t=10.33$ ,  $p=.000$ ) but reduced from ( $\beta =.58(.042)$ ,  $t=13.6$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Thus, again indicating partial mediation and supporting hypothesis 5(b). Similarly the analysis show that high fashion involvement ( $\beta=.46(.03)$ ,  $t (11.67)$ ,  $p=.000$ .) is significantly related to electronic word of mouth confirming hypothesis 6 (a). Further the effect of high fashion involvement on purchase intention was also found significant ( $\beta =.49(.04)$ ,  $t=12.07$   $p=.0000$ ) but reduced ( $\beta =.32(.04)$ ,  $t=7.56$ ,  $p=.000$ ) when electronic word of mouth was included. Thus, accepting hypothesis 6(b). The partial mediation in all cases implies that there is not only a significant relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, but also some direct relationship between independent variables and purchase intention.



**Table 5: Regression Results for Testing Moderation of Facebook Usage Intensity**

		$\beta$	SE	$t$	$p$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$	$p$
	<i>Step 1</i>								
1	Electronic word of mouth	.74	.18	4.02	.000	.251		55.93	.000
2	Facebook usage intensity	.30	.15	1.98	.048				
	<i>Step 2</i>								
3	eWOM $\times$ FUI	-.07	.04	-1.46	.143		.003	2.15	.143

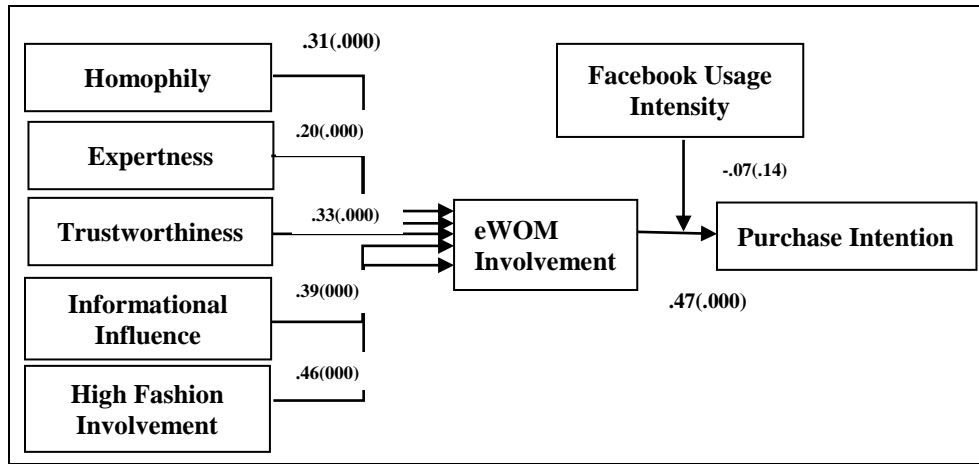
#### 4.6 Moderation Effect

In order to test the moderation effect of Facebook usage intensity on eWOM and purchase intention (Hayes & Preacher, 2014) model one was used. Table 5 shows the effect of Facebook usage intensity ( $\beta=.30$ ,  $t(1.98)$ ,  $p=.0001$ ) and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) ( $\beta=.74$ ,  $t(4.02)$ ,  $p=.048$ ) on purchase intention was significant.

The values confirmed that eWOM has positive effect on purchase intention and Facebook usage intensity is also having a positive and significant effect on purchase intentions. Hence, it can be said that Facebook usage intensity as a separate variable is a useful variable. However, as hypothesized in literature, when interaction term was regressed, it did not produce significant effect ( $\beta=-.0722$ ,  $t(-1.46)$ ,  $p=.143$ ) which can be regarded as no moderation effect was proved. Hence, H7 is rejected that *Facebook Usage Intensity moderates the relationship between eWOM Involvement and Purchase intention*.

This rejection of hypothesis does not discard the Facebook usage intensity variable. It is indicating an insignificance result of this variable as moderating variable in this research. This variable can be tested in other forms like Thoumrungroje (2014) in his study used social media intensity as having both direct and indirect influences via mediating variable of eWOM on conspicuous consumption. Choi and Scott (2012) in another study found positive effect of intensity of use of SNSs on trust and identification having an ultimate effect on eWOM quality.

In a very recent stud, Prasad et al., (2017) also confirmed positive effect of social media usage and EWOM on purchase-decision involvement. Overall, it can be inferred that in this study, Facebook usage intensity did not appear having a strong effect on building eWOM and purchase intention relation of fashion products. However, as singular variable it did effect positively on purchase intention.



**Figure 2: Research Model with Beta Values**

### 5. Discussion

The study aimed to find those important determinants of electronic word of mouth, which may also affect the purchase intention of the fashion products in social networking websites. Findings of the study confirm that factors that motivate consumers to engaging themselves in electronic word of mouth are homophily, trustworthiness, informational influence, expertness and high fashion involvement that enhance electronic word of mouth and purchase intention of fashion products in social networking sites.

Previous literature identified homophily as a determinant of eWOM and this study confirmed that there is a positive significant relationship between the homophily and purchase intention, and eWOM does mediate the relationship between homophily and purchase intention (Allsop et al., 2007). Finding of this study can be justified with Elaboration likelihood model which states that people make a decision on the characteristics of the message provider, if the reader finds that person is somehow like him, then the message becomes more persuasive to the reader (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). When the readers find out that the message provider share the same attributes, then they use the given information without any long evaluation of the message. Chaiken (1980) stated that people make Heuristic decision without evaluation of information rather than systematic decision where they have to analyze the information (Koh & Sundar, 2010). This finding is in alignment with the previous studies which stated that homophily is an important determinate of involvement in eWOM (e.g. Chu & Kim, 2011). If the Facebook user feels that the person is similar and finds some homophily between the sender and receiver, then he/she will react favorably to the eWOM that can ultimately lead to a purchase intention for the recommended product. This underlines that homophily has a significant and positive interpretation of the information coming from the individuals that share same interest and likings. In general, homophily speeds up the communication process when the communicator and receiver have same demographical

and personal attributes (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). If the fashion products get recommended by the reference group with a similar demographic and personal attributes then the eWOM reader will be more likely to engage himself in the electronic word of mouth and develops a purchase intention. Thus, eWOM involvement does mediate the relationship between homophily and the purchase intention of fashion related products.

Expertness is the knowledge and the information about the specific field. Information about any product from an expert has more influence on the purchase intention. Results show that there is a significant relationship between expertness and purchase intention and eWOM involvement mediates the relationship between expertness and purchase intention. Findings of this study can be justified with the help of Elaboration Likelihood Model and with Heuristic-Systematic Model of Information Processing (HSM)), both models state that people chose to make easy decision rather than time and effort taking decisions where they have evaluated the message on the basis of knowledge, expertness and credibility of the sources (Payne, 2007). Thus, the results of this study are consistent with previous studies e.g Cheung and Thadani (2012) argued that it is for communicating the attributes of the product or service, it is necessary to have expertise of the source especially when receiver have less product knowledge. Although in online review, reader does not know about the knowledge and skills of the content provider (Lis, 2013), however, it can be said that knowing the expertness level of the reviewer encourages more to participates in electronic word of mouth and thus motivating their purchase intention of the fashion products. These findings are also aligned with the study of (v. Wangenheim & Bayón, 2007) and (Lis, 2013) who argued that experts in electronic word of mouth hold more persuasive power, as their knowledge and experience has the ability to convince the consumers.

Trustworthiness is the credibility of the information provider. If the source of information is reliable and plays active role in different forums, then the information provider becomes trustworthy in the eyes of the readers (Allsop et al., 2007). Information from a credible and trustworthy resource has more effect on the reader of the review in SNS. The more the trust in the social networking, the greater the chance that they will engage themselves in the electronic word of mouth and will try to seek and give opinion about the experience of the product (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). From social networking point of view, trustworthiness of the source of the information is considered as very essential for the opinion seeking members to evaluate the value of the information given and thus has a very serious effect on the involvement of eWOM. As a result of the perceived trust in the friends on Facebook, the willingness to rely on the information gained and make the intention to purchase the product is greater. The information from any trustworthy source is considered as more useful for information seekers and thus creates a positive purchase intention (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). Trustworthiness is more important when it comes to use of fashion products, people who have more interest in fashion products, they tend to seek more information from the people they think are more trustworthy. Accurate and latest fashion related information is very important for fashion conscious people and they try to seek information from people on Facebook which they consider reliable and trustworthy, and they involve themselves in eWOM only when they

find the source trustworthy and have a purchase intention depending on that information (Fan et., 2013). This can be aligned with the dual process theory that normative influences like trust or correctness also bring more persuasive power of a message. Finding of this study are parallel with many previous studies e.g. (Shabsogh, 2013).

Informational influence is the conformity which occurs when one person needs the information from the other person to make the purchase decision. Informational influence occurs when individuals need information for making an effective purchase decision (Teng et al., 2014). Dual-Process Theory explains that informative and normative influence affect the credibility and persuasiveness of the message. Findings of this study states that informational influence of the content provider helps to create the purchase intention about the product. If the person thinks that he/she does not have the information which is required to make an affect purchase decision, then he/she will seek the information from the person which he/she thinks have the required information. Statistical findings of the study shows that informational influence have a significant effect on the purchase intention of fashion products and people with high fashion interest and involvement try to seek more information from people they think have fashion related information. People having high fashion need use social networking sites to get the latest information about the product of their interest. Interpersonal and informational influences are significantly associated with the engagement in eWOM on social networking sites and consumer purchase intention of fashion related products. Individuals who are more agreed to the informational influence give importance to the information transmitted (Cleveland et al., 2011). Engagement in eWOM through Facebook leads the individuals to purchase the fashion products. The tendency to gather worthy information about the products from other Facebook knowledge and skilled users also motivates to participate in eWOM. Informational influence focuses on the information seeking behavior of the user rather than the information giving behavior (Bearden et al., 1989).

Fashion is anything which is latest and up to date. Fashion changes every day and fashion conscious people need to change their life style, for this purpose they need information and in present era they use social networking sites to seek information about the products. Finding of the study states that if a person has high fashion involvement then he/she will participate and involve him/herself in the fashion related electronic word of mouth. The eWOM engagement will lead to the purchase intention of the discussed product (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Park et al., (2008) found the evidence of the relationship between involvement and purchase intention. They argued that the level of involvement of consumers affect the eWOM, as high involved consumers have more knowledge of the product thus want more information about it. Thus, supporting the finding of this study. In line with the theory of reasoned action by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), high Fashion involvement is a part of the personal norms and behavioral intention that is why people seek information from eWOM and make a purchase intention as reasoned action. Theory of planned behavior (TPB) is also helpful to understand the reason why people having high fashion involvement have intention to purchase the fashion products as fashion is a part of subjective norms, and behavior and attitude towards fashion combine to make

intention to purchase product (Kim & Karpova, 2009). Social media users share fashion related information with their friends with the expectation of receiving the others point of view about that product (Lin & Lu, 2011). The fact that fashion related new information keeps on coming and high fashion involved individuals always have something to discuss and purchase. Fashion brands introduce different kind of social networking activities to engage the customer in feedback and increase the purchase intention (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Finding of this study states that high fashion involved persons have purchase intention of the discussed products and eWOM does mediate the relationship between high fashion involvement and purchase intention.

Facebook usage intensity is the amount of time spent on Facebook. Statistical findings of the study state that Facebook usage intensity does not moderate the relationship between electronic word of mouth and purchase intention. There is no strong evidence found that the amount of time spent on social media sites effect the purchase intention of the fashion related product. Chiosa and Anastasiei (2015) also found that eWOM behavior of people on Facebook, their daily time spent on Facebook was found with the smallest importance. Lambić (2016) also found that in their research “no significant difference in the frequency of use of Facebook for general purposes has been reported”. In this study, Facebook usage intensity as a moderator was not significant, however, in future studies, it could be examined as independent variable or in any other context, as this research was specifically concerned with fashion products.

#### **6. Theoretical Contributions**

The study followed theories provided by literature i.e. theory of planned behaviour, theory of reasoned action and dual process theory. These theories helped to identify the factors that lead to the purchase intention and eWOM in social networking sites. As this study found significance of almost all factors except time spent on Facebook, hence, supporting the theoretical assumptions made in the light of these theories. The most important contribution of this study is confirming applicability of these theories in marketing especially in fashion related context on Facebook. This could be distinctive from many previous studies, as they applied these theories in many other disciplines and less in fashion industry. Overall, this study confirmed the assumptions of theories taken for developing theoretical framework. The theoretical framework developed in this study confirming the notions of theories, may provide many implications to managers for harnessing the power of eWOM for their commercial gain.

#### **7. Managerial Implications**

From a managerial perspective, this study provides marketers especially of fashion industry with a frame of reference to understand the impact of eWOM in Facebook on consumers' purchase intentions. Facebook and other social networking sites are essential for marketers because of the large number of user and its influential power. Hence, these websites have more utilization in terms of eWOM. Hence, the factors affecting eWOM identified in this study are valuable in terms of the practicality. Findings of this study helps fashion industry to make strategies to involve their customers more in electronic word of mouth which ultimately affect purchase intention of customers. The factors of

homophily, expertness, trustworthiness, high fashion involvement and information influence identifies the need of developing such social media platforms that can attract people with similar or homophilous interest, as Facebook alone is not enough for big marketing plans. Companies and marketers are working hard in seeking optimal ways for the promotion of their marketing strategies especially in fashion industry where high level of change and uncertainty exists. The social media platform provides them such accessibility to reach wider customer base with quick reviews. The results of this study will help marketers to enhance the potential of eWOM to their best interest by understanding the factors influencing eWOM and purchase intention, in particular in the context of Facebook. Instead of making investment into conventional marketing campaigns, companies should recognise the importance of eWOM communication on social networking sites and incorporate it into their overall marketing campaign.

### **8. Conclusion**

Overall, the findings of this study has statistically confirmed that there are few factors that are highly important for the influence of eWOM on the purchase intention. For example, the consumers having similar values and preferences etc. may have more profound impact on eWOM. Similarly, source having more knowledge has more power to influence the eWOM effect on purchase intention. In addition to it, trustworthiness and informational influence are another two main factors having equal importance for eWOM. As the study was related to fashion products, hence, high fashion involvement of consumers could not be overlooked. The results have also confirmed that high involvement in fashion activities further deepen the effect of eWOM on purchase intention of such products. Although, frequency of time spent on Facebook could not be proven as a moderating variable, however, as an independent variable, it could yield more insights.

Negative and positive eWOM can be both loss and potential for firms respectively. Therefore, companies should carefully control and manage the eWOM process on social networking sites. By deeply understanding the factors affecting eWOM and thus purchase intention will better help companies to promulgate positive eWOM related to their products on social networking sites to by attracting large customer base.

This research hopes to paint a true picture of eWOM and its effect on the purchase intention and what different benefits eWOM Involvement provide them and how they help them to make a proper and wise decision. Research regarding motivating factors of consumer purchases as a result of eWOM in social networking websites is still in its infancy. One of the main limitations of the current study is that it has examined only social networking websites out of whole social media. Other limitations include limited number of sample size, data collection from only two cities, focus on consumer's views and on fashion products only.

As the research only focused on social networking website of all social media, hence, in future, it would be beneficial to further expand the investigation to other social media tools like blogs to examine their roles for marketing. Future researchers should also do a

detailed investigation of social media commerce, especially the ways through which companies can engage users to do more purchase and to become loyal customers. It is also recommended to use mix method research approach by including the organizations and qualitative data collection, as well to know the complete scenario. There is also a scope to conduct the research by introducing new variables like tie strength, normative influence, gender etc. Despite its limitations, the findings from this study opens new avenues for future research that can extend the theoretical framework developed to other contexts.

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