



## **THE INFLUENCE OF E-WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING ON THE STUDENTS' INTENTION TOWARDS SELECTION OF MANAGEMENT DEGREE PROGRAMS: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO UNDERGRADUATES OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Social media and internet has become one of the most influential aspects of individual's life. . Even it is apparent that social media spreads rumors quickly people have changed their behavior patterns and mostly they rely on the information provided by online platforms (Doerr, B., et al, 2011). such case, the influence of e-word of mouth can be identified as a one of the key marketing elements which is growing rapidly with the development of online platforms in the world. Nowadays, in social marketplaces, customers no longer depend on only the provided information from the company sites. Normally, It can be seen sharing information, seeking feedback, creating relevant content, and making selection decisions through these diversified online platforms (Moscato, 2011) As a result, online marketers and social media managers use social media to generate customer-to-customer electronic word-of-mouth to improve a considerable growth in marketing activities (Bughin, J., et al, 2010).However, it is tried by the marketers to encourage consumers to create and spread word-of-mouth communication, based on direct consumption experience such as customer reviews and comments, to attract potential customers. In this research, researcher has attempted to investigate the influence of E-Word of mouth marketing for the students' intention towards management degree selection with special reference to undergraduates of The Open University of Sri Lanka.

Further, there has been a significant lack of empirical studies have been conducted to test the influence of e-word of Mouth for the students' intention towards degree selection. Specific objectives of the study are,

- I. To examine the influence of eWOM quality on students' intention towards the degree selection
- II. To examine the influence of quantity of eWOM on students' intention towards the degree selection
- III. To examine influence of credibility of eWOM on students' intention towards the degree selection.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The main purpose of this research is to examine the influence of e-word of mouth marketing for the students' intention towards management degree selection. As per the literature, Yang,H.S.,( 2015) emphasized it needs to enlarge the population size and it is better to use existing and potential students. This study concern both these groups and the conceptual model was developed by taking a hybrid form of Hanandeh.A et al, (2019) and Ismagilova,E., et al, (2019) whose research studies were mainly conducted using the key variables of Quality, Quantity and Credibility. In this study, each independent variable had three dimensions and all dimensions were measured using 16 indicators. Dimensions of eWOM quality were argument quality, reviewer expertise and usefulness. Moreover, dimensions of eWOM quantity accounts for amount of information, level of involvement and the membership length. Dimensions of the final variable, eWOM credibility were reviewer credibility, trust in message and the source credibility. However, previous studies on influence of eWOM marketing on students' intention towards the degree selection for Sri Lankan context are very limited. Thus, this paper contribute to the field of academic research and future researchers will find a useful



compilation of knowledge towards eWOM marketing and students’ intention towards the degree selection in Sri Lanka by referring to this research. Convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample and the sample size was 384. The survey method was used to collect data and sample data was collected using self-administered questionnaire which was distributed among respondents.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to test the research hypotheses, correlation analysis simple linear regression and multiple regression analysis have been used to examine the influence of independent variables eWOM credibility, eWOM quality, and eWOM quantity on the students’ intention, which is the dependent variable . The results can be summed up as below.

Table 1. Correlation Coefficients

		Student. Intention	Quality
Student. Intention	Pearson Correlation	1	.822**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	283	283
Quality	Pearson Correlation	.822**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	283	283

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the details in table 1 eWOM quality has a strong positive relationship with students’ intention towards degree program selection. Its value of the Pearson’s Correlation is 0.822. The significant level is 0.000 at 95% confident level.

Table 2. Correlation Coefficients

		Student. Intention	Quantity
Student. Intention	Pearson Correlation	1	.623**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	283	283
Quantity	Pearson Correlation	.623**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	283	283

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



According to the details in table 2 eWOM Quantity has a moderate positive relationship with students' intention towards degree program selection. Its value of the Pearson's Correlation is 0.623. The significant level is 0.000 at 95% confident level.

Table 3. Correlation coefficients

		Student. Intention	Credibility
Student Intention	Pearson Correlation	1	.870**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	283	283
Credibility	Pearson Correlation	.870**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	283	283

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the details in table 3 eWOM credibility has the strongest positive relationship with students' intention towards degree program selection. Its value of the Pearson's Correlation is 0.870. The significant level is 0.000 at 95% confident level.

Table 4. Coefficient table of simple linear regression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.667	.192		3.472	.001
	Quality	.869	.036	.822	24.188	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Student. Intention

As per the results of simple linear regression out of the three models developed, eWOM quality influences on Student intention is  $Y_1 = 0.667 + 0.869(x_1)$  where the explanatory power (R<sup>2</sup>) illustrates the degree to which the extent the variance of the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable. Here the R<sup>2</sup> is 67%, it can be concluded that 67% of the variance of dependent variable, student intention is explained by the independent variable electronic word of mouth quality. Where the p value is 0.000 in model summary and the ANOVA table. The coefficient table can be shown as above. B coefficient for eWOM quality is 0.869. It indicates that increasing one unit of eWOM quality causes to increase Student's Intention towards BMS degree selection in 0.869 units while other independent variables remain constant. The significant value is 0.000 at 95% of confidence level.

Table 5. Coefficient Table of simple linear regression



### Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
2	(Constant)	2.645	.200		13.217	.000
	Quantity	.497	.037	.623	13.343	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Student. Intention

The second simple linear model where eWOM quantity influences student intention is  $Y=2.645+0.497(x_2)$ . According to the model summary, the explanatory power (R<sup>2</sup>) illustrates the degree to which extent the variance of the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable. It is 38% and it can be concluded that 38% of the variance of dependent variable, student intention is explained by independent variable electronic word of mouth quantity. Where the p value is 0.000 in model summary and the ANOVA table. The coefficient table can be shown as follows.

The  $\beta$  coefficient for eWOM quality is 0.497. It indicates that increasing one unit of eWOM quality causes to increase students' intention towards BMS degree selection in 0.497 units while other independent variables remain constant. The significant value is 0.000 at 95% of confidence level.

Table 6. Coefficient table of simple linear regression

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
3	(Constant)	1.022	.145		7.031	.000
	Credibility	.768	.026	.870	29.642	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Student. Intention

The final simple linear model explains that credibility affects students' intention is  $Y=1.022+0.767(X_3)$  The explanatory power (R<sup>2</sup>) illustrates the degree to which extent the variance of the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable. R<sup>2</sup> is 75% and, it can be concluded that 75% of the variance of Dependent variable, student intention is explained by independent variable electronic word of mouth quantity. P value for the model and ANOVA are 0.000.  $\beta$  coefficient for eWOM quality is 0.768. It indicates that increasing one unit of eWOM credibility causes to increase Student's Intention towards BMS degree selection in 0.768 units while other independent variables remain constant. The significant value is 0.000 at 95% of confidence level.



Table 7. Multiple linear regression

Model		Coefficients					95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
		B	Std. Error	Beta				
4	(Constant)	.378	.152		2.494	.013	.080	.676
	Credibility	.498	.040	.564	12.489	.000	.419	.576
	Quality	.344	.048	.326	7.207	.000	.250	.438
	Quantity	.061	.028	.076	2.205	.028	.007	.115

a. Dependent Variable: Student Intention

Moreover, multiple regression analysis was conducted to test how all these factors influences for student intention when they are taking as a whole. The multiple models can be mentioned as  $Y = 0.378 + 0.344(X1) + 0.061(X2) + 0.498(X3)$  where it revealed eWOM has a significant impact on student intention. However, the findings revealed that eWOM has a significant impact on student intention. where all these factors have a significant influence and among those eWOM credibility is the most influential factor which it had a higher beta standardized coefficient when compared with other two variables. From the literature perspective the findings are somewhat different from the earlier findings in literature and in some cases similar too. Mehyar.H et al, (2020) had also used Quality,Quantity and Credibility to represent eWOM and suggested that only Quality and ,Quantitiy have a significant impact on customers’ purchasing intention and which are similar with these findings but it was found that credibility has no significant impact on customer intention which is different from this research findings. Hanandeh.A et al, (2019) has used Quality, Quantity and credibility where it was found that all three variables have a significant impact on customer intention which is very much similar with this research findings but the above mentioned two researchers pointed out that eWOM Quantity is the most influential factor and which is different with our research findings. Azizi, S.M., et al, (2019) also pointed out that Quality is highly influential on students intention

**CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS**

Studying the influence of e-WOM on students’ intention towards degree selection is essential for both OUSL and potential degree applicants. The findings will enable OUSL to think beyond the advertising effort. Further, findings are helpful for other profit oriented higher educational institutes. As this highly focus on comments, reviews, and likes the findings will be highly effective for social media managers and advertisers to maintain their social media groups and fan pages. Moreover, findings revealed eWOM credibility is more powerful which is different from previous findings. It is advisable for future researchers to use different variables other than what this research has been used. Further, the data should be collected both in online and offline methods. as this research only used online method. This research focuses only on management undergraduates and potential students’ perception. Future researchers may take different available degrees for their studies. Changing the research area such as banking field, insurance field are also advisable as findings cannot applied to all other fields.



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