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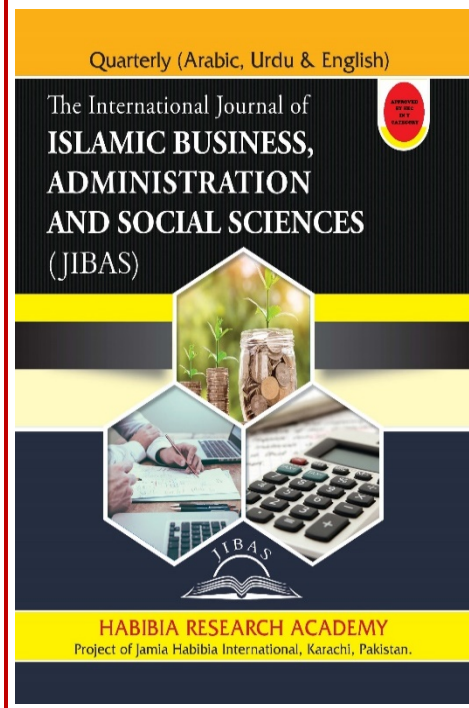
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TOPIC:

**AMPLIFYING PURCHASE INTENTION OF FASHION ITEMS:
UNRAVELING THE INFLUENCE OF WORD-OF-MOUTH ON BRAND ATTITUDE
AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR**

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AMPLIFYING PURCHASE INTENTION OF FASHION ITEMS: UNRAVELING THE INFLUENCE OF WORD-OF-MOUTH ON BRAND ATTITUDE AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

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ABSTRACT:

In the higher education sector, technology plays an increasingly important role in determining what students intend to purchase in the future. After obtaining information from different sources of the environment and their colleagues, students decide whether or not to purchase a product or service based on their brand attitude. An investigation was conducted on the effect of brand attitude on word-of-mouth/electronic word-of-mouth and purchase intention. Furthermore, further research is being conducted to find out whether brand knowledge can moderate the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention. A cross-sectional research design with minimal interference from the researcher is employed in this study. To collect a sample of three hundred students from universities in the public and private sectors of the higher education sector, a self-administrative questionnaire is used as the primary method. The results of the study show that word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth have a smaller direct impact on purchase intentions than brand attitudes do. The intention to make a purchase is partially mediated by word of mouth/electronic word of mouth as well as by the impact of word of mouth. Students in Pakistan develop a brand attitude by researching products and services they are interested in before purchasing them, which may prove beneficial to big brands in the Pakistani industry as it indicates that students develop a brand attitude. This study is significant in unlocking the black box of eWOM/WOM and purchase intention, specifically regarding brand attitude and knowledge, since these aspects have not been extensively studied in Pakistan's fashion industry or higher education, which makes it an important contribution to unlocking the picture of eWOM /WOM and purchase intention in the country.

KEYWORDS: *Word of mouth, electronic word of mouth, purchase intention, brand attitude, and brand knowledge.*

INTRODUCTION:

In the internet age, fashion has undergone a great deal of change. Digitalized online plans have been modified to accommodate new digital consumers (Doherty 2007). Many online groups have become very popular due to the digitized social world, such as electronic mailing lists, discussion groups, and weblogs (Xia and Bechwati 2008; Sen and Lerman 2007; Chatterjee 2001; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006) it is evident that word-of-mouth communication influences and shapes buyer viewpoints and behavior patterns. According to studies (Trusov et al. 2009; Bickart and Schindler 2002), word-of-mouth messages are more active than other media communication methods, as they are regarded as relatively reliable information about purchases intentions (Gruen, Osmonbekov, and Czaplewski 2006). University students are likelier to trust information from friends, family, and other trusted sources. WOM is more persuasive than advertising because it is more personal and relevant to students' needs. For example, Kumar et al. (2023) found that WOM influenced purchase intentions more than advertising. In addition, eWOM may be used to discover reviews, which are crucial in persuading university students to trust brands (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). The process by which students make a purchase decision involves acquiring

electronic reviews and information regarding other colleagues' experiences with the service they are considering purchasing. Social networks like Facebook have become integral to students' lives, affecting word of mouth, and transforming it completely. To influence others' decisions and provide feedback about brands, students share their opinions about them with others (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Lane and Jacobson 1995).

In addition to influencing students' purchase intentions about fashion items, WOM/eWOM can influence brand attitude and knowledge. Brand attitude relates to a brand's overall appraisal, whereas brand knowledge refers to a student's awareness and comprehension of a brand. WOM/eWOM can influence brand attitude by providing students with negative or positive information about a brand. WOM/eWOM also influences brand knowledge by informing students about the fashion brand's features, benefits, and competitive positioning. The effect of WOM/eWOM on brand attitude and knowledge can be explained by the fact that WOM/eWOM is a more credible and persuasive basis of information than any other source. Students are likelier to trust information from friends, family, and other trusted sources. WOM/eWOM is also more personal and relevant to the student's needs, which makes it more likely to be remembered and processed by them (Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Chatterjee 2001; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). The brand survey is generally accepted as the most effective method of measuring brand awareness. To pursue purchase intention, for example, a brand image conveys strong, ideal, and remarkable brand relationships in memory (Keller 2003).

The fashion industry is experiencing a rapid transformation with the rise of online platforms. According to industry statistics, it is estimated that by 2027, 40% of all market income will be generated through online channels, including electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) marketing and electronic reviews (Balchandani et al. 2020). Numerous online channels, such as social media platforms, product reviews, discussion forums, and messaging apps, have witnessed a surge in eWOM communication (Dwyer, Hiltz, and Passerini 2007). This expansion of eWOM is an adaptation of traditional word-of-mouth communication in the digital age, where online media networks have facilitated and influenced these interactions (Jeong and Koo 2015). Researchers have recognized the significant role of social eWOM on various informal communication platforms in the marketing landscape, even amidst the popularity of online customer surveys (Hu et al., 2014). Social eWOM occurs when customers informally recommend specific products and utilize informal communication tools to share their opinions.

For renowned fashion brands like Khaadi, J., Gulahmed, alkaram, and Limelight, understanding students' purchase intentions and the mechanisms involved in the era of e-commerce is crucial. It involves assessing whether students comprehensively understand brands and know the appropriate channels and platforms for electronic marketing and promotion. It provides them with relevant information and reviews about the products they want. It is worth noting that students' reviews have shifted from traditional WOM to eWOM, and potential customers rely on the feedback and comments shared by previous customers to make their purchasing decisions. Additionally, students' attitude toward a

brand significantly influences their buying intentions. Companies must ensure that students hold a positive attitude toward their brand to influence purchase decisions effectively.

Study Context

The study context is set in a rapidly evolving fashion industry, where online sales accounted for 23% of global revenues in 2022 (Statista, 2022). This upward trend is expected to continue, driven primarily by East and Southeast Asian regions, resulting in the transformation of the shopping system and new job opportunities (KPMG,2022). To adapt to the changing consumer landscape, especially the young generation studying in universities, it is essential to integrate the convenience of online shopping seamlessly into the content presented through digital channels. It will facilitate high-speed student conversions and transactions, catering to the increasing number of consumers using mobile devices for fashion-related activities. However, despite the growth in online sales, it is projected that by 2025, the online acquisition of fashion items in Pakistan will represent only 18% of the total market income (Balchandani et al. 2020). Hence, understanding the factors that significantly impact electronic and verbal communication and influence students' expectations and preferences in informal communication forums is crucial. Existing studies have explored the effects of electronic and verbal exchanges on students' attitudes and behaviors, including the role of brand information (López and Sicilia 2014). This study examines the influence of brand attitude and word-of-mouth (WOM)/eWOM on students' purchase intentions. Transforming traditional word-of-mouth into eWOM has increased student interaction through social sites(Jeong and Koo 2015). This research bridges the gap in the academic literature by studying the simultaneous impact of WOM and eWOM in the fashion industry of Pakistan. It also investigates the function of brand knowledge in regulating the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention, as well as the role of brand attitude in mediating the relationship between WOM and eWOM. These aspects have not been extensively studied in Pakistan's fashion industry and higher education, making this research significant in unlocking the black box of eWOM/WOM and purchase intention, specifically concerning brand attitude and knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Word of Mouth and Brand Attitude

Word of mouth (WOM) shapes consumers' brand attitudes. When individuals receive positive recommendations or experiences from trusted sources such as friends, family members, or opinion leaders, it influences their perception and evaluation of a brand. Research conducted by Brown et al. (2007) shows that positive WOM has a stronger influence on brand attitude when it follows intergroup persuasion, such as advertising. Another study by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explores how consumers' participation in eWOM platforms influences brand attitude, revealing that consumers engage in eWOM to share opinions, seek social connections, and enhance their self-image.

Multiple studies have observed the impact of WOM on brand attitude. Bone (1995) found that WOM significantly influenced brand attitude, particularly in the long term, with positive WOM leading to more positive brand evaluations and negative WOM having stronger and longer-lasting negative effects. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) focused on

online book reviews. They found that positive WOM significantly affected sales and brand attitude, with a higher volume of positive reviews correlating with increased sales and improved brand perception. East, Hammond, and Wright (2007) discovered that negative WOM had a more substantial influence on brand attitude than positive WOM, with negative experiences and opinions having a stronger impact on purchase intentions and brand evaluations.

Inconsistent WOM also affects brand attitude, as found by Herold, Tomczak, and Herrmann (2009). Consumers exposed to inconsistent WOM about an inexperienced brand tend to have an impartial attitude compared to those exposed to consistent WOM. However, they show stronger certainty about their formed attitude and a stronger association between attitude and purchase intention. Rafiee, Hashemi, and Samiei (2020) found that brand attitude positively influenced revisit intentions and WOM in the restaurant sector, highlighting the positive correlations between these concepts and their impact on consumer behavior. Torlak, Charo, and Setiawan (2015) discovered that eWOM significantly and positively impacts brand image, brand attitude, and consumers' purchasing intention, with brand image strongly influencing consumers' attitudes toward a specific brand.

Overall, WOM substantially influences brand attitude, playing a vital role in shaping consumers' perceptions, judgments, and actions. It is regarded as a valuable source of information, providing comprehensive and trustworthy insights that influence brand evaluations and purchase decisions (Gremler, Gwinner; Martin and Lueg 2013). Consumers perceive WOM as credible and rely on it to form favorable attitudes toward brands (Brown and Reingen 1987). The impact of WOM on brand attitude is a crucial area of research in understanding consumer behavior in the commercial marketplace. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between word of mouth and brand attitude.

Word of Mouth and Purchase Intention

Several research studies have found that WOM significantly influences consumers' purchase intention. Godes and Mayzlin (2009) discovered that WOM has a notable impact on purchase intention, with positive WOM having a stronger influence than negative WOM. Liu, Malthouse, and Kim (2010) emphasized the significance of WOM in adopting new products, with consumers being more probable to acquire a new product if they receive positive WOM from friends or family. Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels (2009) focused on eWOM and establish that positive eWOM has a stronger impact on consumer purchase intention than negative eWOM.

These studies collectively suggest that WOM can significantly influence purchase intention. Positive WOM can drive more consumers to purchase a product & service, while negative WOM can discourage potential customers. Businesses can leverage this knowledge by actively encouraging positive WOM about their offerings, increasing the likelihood of purchasing. In addition to the mentioned studies, other research has established a positive relationship between word of mouth and purchase intention.

These findings underscore the power of WOM for businesses to influence purchase intention. By fostering positive WOM and addressing negative WOM, companies can

shape consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards their products or services, ultimately impacting their purchase decisions. Consumers rely on WOM as a reliable factor when making purchase choices, emphasizing its effectiveness in influencing their decisions (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Bughin et al. 2010). The closeness and expertise of the source delivering the WOM also play a crucial role in its effectiveness (Coulter and Roggeveen 2012). By strategically managing WOM, businesses can tap into its potential to drive consumer behavior and enhance their market presence.

H2: There is a positive relationship between word of mouth and purchase intention.

Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention

Brand attitude refers to consumers' overall evaluation or perception of a particular brand. It encompasses their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about the brand, including its image, reputation, quality, and value. Brand attitude is crucial in shaping consumer behavior and influencing their purchase decisions. Brand attitude has been extensively studied concerning purchase intention, and the findings consistently highlight its significant impact on consumer behavior. Mittal and Lee (1989) discovered that consumers are more probable to buy a product or service if they hold a positive attitude toward the brand. It was supported by Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (2001), who emphasized the role of brand attitude in the consumer decision-making process, indicating that positive brand attitudes increase the likelihood of purchase. These studies collectively underline the importance of brand attitude as a critical factor influencing purchase intention. Hence, we can say that,

H3: There is a relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention.

Positive Social Electronic Word of Mouth and Brand Attitude

The influential power of online reviews in evaluating and shaping brand opinions is undeniable (Park and John 2012). eWOM, especially online reviews, has significantly impacted consumer opinions about brands. When consumers seek information about a specific product or service, online reviews have become a convenient and reliable source (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). Trustworthy and dependable sources of information are highly valued in forming opinions through online reviews (Wu and Wang 2011). Brand attitude is impacted by the information exchanged within the online review ecosystem. As consumers review and share brand information, positive purchase intentions and brand value are generated (Schivinski and Dabrowski 2014).

The influence of positive social eWOM on brand attitude has been identified by many studies. For example, Chen and Xie (2012) found that positive social eWOM significantly influences brand attitude, indicating that consumers are more probable to develop a positive attitude towards a brand when they encounter positive social eWOM about it. Similarly, Lin and Chen (2013) further emphasized the role of positive social eWOM in brand image formation, revealing that consumers are more probable to hold a positive brand image when they come across positive social eWOM regarding the brand. Moreover, Ho-Dac, Carson, and Moore (2013) established that positive social eWOM significantly impacts consumer purchase intention, indicating that consumers are more inclined to purchase a product or service if they have seen positive social eWOM. These studies highlight the substantial

influence of positive social eWOM on brand attitude. The formulation of a hypothesis in this investigation is influenced by these arguments.

H4: There is a relationship between positive electronic word of mouth and brand attitude.

Positive Social Electronic Word of Mouth and Purchase Intention

These studies highlight the significant impact of positive social eWOM on consumer purchase intention. Godes and Mayzlin's (2009) studies in the United States revealed that consumers are likelier to purchase a product or service if they have seen positive social eWOM. Similarly, Liu, Malthouse, and Kim (2010) found that positive social eWOM plays a vital role in consumer decision-making, influencing their purchase choices. Additionally, Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels (2009) demonstrated that positive social eWOM influences purchase intention and consumer behavior, leading to product/service recommendations and brand loyalty.

These findings emphasize the power of positive social eWOM in shaping consumer behavior and purchase decisions. Businesses can leverage this influence by encouraging positive social eWOM about their products or services. By creating positive customer experiences and providing excellent customer service, companies can foster positive brand attitudes among consumers, ultimately increasing purchase intention and brand loyalty. Furthermore, other studies have also observed a positive relationship between purchase intention and social eWOM. For instance, Chen and Xie (2012) found that positive social eWOM is more influential than traditional advertising in shaping purchase intention. Lin and Chen (2013) discovered that positive social eWOM has a greater impact on purchase intention than price. Therefore, by actively promoting positive social eWOM, companies can enhance consumers' likelihood of purchasing their products or services. The formulation of a hypothesis in this investigation is influenced by these arguments.

H5: There is a relationship between positive electronic word of mouth and purchase intention.

Mediating Role of Brand Attitude

A consumer's brand attitude, which encompasses their overall evaluation of a brand, plays a crucial role in the WOM and purchase intention relationship. Brand attitude is shaped by multiple factors, including the consumer's past experiences with the brand, the brand's reputation, and the consumer's perceptions of its attributes. Research studies suggest that brand attitude acts as a mediator between WOM and purchase intention. For instance, a study by Godes and Mayzlin (2009) demonstrated that positive WOM significantly affected brand attitude, which, in turn, significantly impacted purchase intention. Notably, the study establishes that the influence of WOM on purchase intention was particularly pronounced for products that were new or unfamiliar to consumers, indicating the importance of WOM in such contexts. Another study by Liu, Malthouse, and Kim (2010) emphasized the substantial role of positive WOM in consumer decision-making. It revealed that consumers were more probable to buy a product or service when exposed to positive WOM about it.

Moreover, the impact of WOM on purchase intention was particularly strong for products characterized as high-risk or high involvement, further highlighting the importance of

WOM in shaping consumer behavior. These studies provide empirical evidence that brand attitude is a crucial mediator between WOM and purchase intention. Henceforth, we can develop the hypothesis.

H6a: Brand attitude mediates between word of mouth and purchase intention.

A study by Godes and Mayzlin (2009) found that positive eWOM significantly impacted brand attitude and purchase intention. The study suggested that the impact of eWOM on purchase intention was stronger for products that were new or unfamiliar to consumers. Another study by Liu, Malthouse, and Kim (2010) found that positive eWOM played a substantial role in consumer decision-making, with consumers more probable to buy a product or service if they had seen positive eWOM about the product or service. The study also found that the impact of eWOM on purchase intention was stronger for products considered high-risk or high involvement. The formulation of a hypothesis in this investigation is influenced by these arguments.

H6b: Brand attitude mediates the positive electronic word of mouth and purchase intention.

The moderating role of brand knowledge

To moderate the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention, brand knowledge plays a crucial role. The evidence provided in support of this claim has been provided by several studies. Among consumers with high levels of brand knowledge as compared to those with low levels of brand knowledge, a study by Park and Kim (2003) suggested that brand attitude has a stronger impact on purchase intentions among those consumers with high levels of brand knowledge. Furthermore, the study revealed that the effect of brand attitude was particularly pronounced for products categorized as high involvement, which is characterized by consumers putting in more effort and time when making purchasing decisions. Similarly, Chen and Xie (2012) concluded that brand knowledge also plays an important role in moderating the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention in their study. As reported by the study, consumers with a high level of brand knowledge were more likely to be influenced by brand attitude and purchase intention, especially for products that were new or unfamiliar to them. Based on the findings of this study, it is plausible to hypothesize that consumers' attitude-behavior consistency will be enhanced if they gain a higher level of brand knowledge among themselves.

H7: Brand knowledge moderates between brand attitude and purchase intention.

Theory of Planned Behavior and Attribution Theory Perspective

Based on Singh and Wilkes's (1996) theory of planned behavior, behaviors are influenced by expectations and are objectively coordinated. In the context of eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) communication, it is recommended that individuals carefully consider the outcomes and consequences before engaging in such conversations and making decisions. The perspectives on eWOM communication are generally regarded as credibility indicators and are not entirely specific. These perspectives are shaped by one's beliefs about their actions' consequences and perceived appeal. Before sharing their opinions online,

consumers may feel a sense of moral obligation to benefit others by expressing their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with products or services.

Attribution theory holds particular significance in understanding how recipients interpret the viewpoints of senders when receiving information and how it shapes their purchasing behavior (Hilton 1995). The process of WOM communication involves social and reciprocal exchanges. According to Jones and Davis (1965) and Kelley (1967), attribution theory focuses on how individuals perceive social interactions (Jones and Davis 1965; Kelley, 1967). The information senders convey in WOM messages influences the causal attributions made by recipients. Additionally, the strength of the brand name associated with the central brand also influences recipients' causal attributions. These attributions then contribute to the evaluation of the brand by authorities. Consequently, WOM brand evaluation and affiliation are influenced by attributions. The model aligns with the theoretical framework of social communication, suggesting attributions can impact a recipient's evaluation of the central product (Hilton 1995).

According to Singh and Wilkes's planned behavior theory, expectations influence behaviors. In eWOM communication, individuals should consider the consequences of their actions before engaging in such conversations. Attribution theory plays a crucial role in understanding how recipients interpret information and how it shapes their purchasing behavior. The attributions made by recipients based on WOM messages and the brand's name strength influence brand evaluation and affiliation. These theoretical frameworks provide insights into the dynamics of eWOM communication and its impact on consumer behavior.

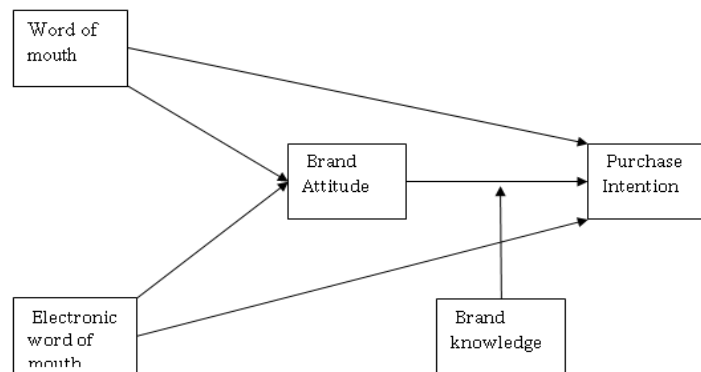


Figure 1. Research Model

Research Design

A cross-sectional design was used in the study, as well as a post-positivist philosophy. The study's objectives were achieved using a multistage sampling method, and data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire and a web-based survey. The study's target population was students at public and private universities in Lahore. Companies seeking to understand the perspectives and purchasing behaviors of students enrolled in

higher education represent a significant market. In addition, external factors such as WOM, eWOM, and brand awareness affect their brand attitude and purchase intention.

The number of universities in Lahore is approximately 36, including 16 public institutions and 20 private ones. During the sampling process, the first step involved grouping the universities according to their disciplines, such as engineering, medicine, fine arts, and general universities. A questionnaire was distributed to students within a selected university from each group in the second stage of the study. This sampling strategy was designed to guarantee a fair representation of each selected cluster in Pakistan's higher education industry.

Hair et al. (2014) recommended a rule of thumb to determine the sample size. To estimate the requisite sample size, the number of items in the questionnaire was multiplied by 10. This rule of thumb guided the selection of 270 participants for this study. The actual sample size was three hundred student respondents. Personal visits were made to universities before data collection began. Data collection was conducted with the consent of university representatives, including the department head and the university administration. The questionnaires were distributed to participants once the necessary approvals had been obtained. The respondents were given adequate time to complete and return the questionnaires, ensuring a high response rate.

Measurement of variables

All measurements of variables are adapted from the literature and evaluated using a five-point Likert scale. Using the six-item scale developed by (Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold 2011), Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold 2011 evaluated electronic word of mouth. A four-item scale has been developed by Colliander and Dahlén (2011) as well as Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014) to measure brand attitude. To measure purchase intention, Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014), Yoo and Donthu (2001), and Shukla (2011) developed a five-item scale. A four-item scale was developed by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) to assess word of mouth. Keller's (1993) Brand Knowledge Scale assesses brand knowledge.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS STATISTICS

There were more males (m=152) than females (f=148) among respondents in higher education institutions. According to the survey, 40.7% of respondents were 18-25, 55.8% were 26-30, and 4.3% were 31-50. The data shows that 41 percent of students with a bachelor's degree, 52 percent with a master's degree, and 22 percent with a doctorate. Additionally, 48.7% of these students had experience with online purchasing for less than two years, 45.3% for 3-5 years, and 6.0% for 6-10 years.

CORRELATION MATRIX

As shown in Table 1, there is a significant correlation between eWOM and WOM. Furthermore, the correlation between brand attitude and word of mouth is significant at a value of .576**. There is, however, a significant correlation between WOM and brand knowledge (.578). Electronic word of mouth and brand attitudes are significantly correlated, with a value of .539**. Contrary to this, the value of .570 indicates that eWOM

substantially impacts brand awareness. Variable brand knowledge and attitude are statistically associated with a significant positive relationship.

Table 1- Correlation Matrix

Variables	WOM	eWOM	BA	BK	PI
Word of Mouth	1				
Electronic Word of Mouth	0.531**	1			
Brand Attitude	0.576**	0.539**	1		
Brand Knowledge	0.576**	0.576**	0.570**	1	
Purchase Intention	0.612**	0.555**	0.602**	0.521**	1
Mean	3.22	3.29	3.22	3.27	3.11
Cronbach alpha	0.865	0.919	0.888	0.891	0.811

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Table 2 provides an overview of multiple statistics, including the normalized chi-square test, the comparative fit index, the root mean square approximation, the Tucker and Lewis indices, and the standardized root mean square residuals. According to the hypothesized model, the CMIN/df is 1.731, the CFI is 0.952, the TLI is .948, the SRMR is 0.041, the RMSEA is 0.049, and the PClose is 0.559 the best fit to the observed data. Hence, it is necessary to have a CFI greater than 0.95 and an SRMR greater than 0.08 to pass the test. This conclusion is further strengthened by Hu and Bentler (1999) who provide further evidence to support it.

Table 2 Model Fit Measures

Fit Indices	Threshold	Estimates of Model
CMIN/DF	Between 1 and 3	1.632
CFI	>0.95	0.957
TLI	>0.90	0.911
SRMR	<0.08	0.051
RMSEA	<0.06	0.053

There are three standardized regression weights in Table 3, which are more than 0.5 for the entire construct, and the factor loadings in the following table range from and meet this requirement. Based on the results in Table 3, composite reliability values have been calculated. For WOM, eWOM, Brand Attitude, Brand Knowledge, and Purchase Intention, there has been a composite reliability value of 0.787, 0.888, 0.891, and 0.801, respectively. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the composite reliability of each construct is greater than that suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999). We used the AMOS plugin, developed by Gaskin and Lim (2016), to check the convergent validity of variables in the study using the master validity tool created by Gaskin and Lim (2016). In an effort to evaluate the validity of the scale of composite reliability and average variance at the threshold level of 0.70 and 0.50, Hair et al. (2014) recommend considering these variables

to be indicators of convergent validity. There is convergent validity established by CR and AVE values exceeding the threshold.

Table 3 Standardized Regression Weights, Validity, and Reliability

Variables	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Word of mouth	WOM1	0.785	0.877	0.611
	WOM2	0.784		
	WOM3	0.764		
	WOM4	0.795		
Electronic Word of Mouth	EWOM1	0.849	0.888	0.557
	EWOM2	0.825		
	EWOM3	0.822		
	EWOM4	0.810		
	EWOM5	0.780		
	EWOM6	0.685		
Brand Attitude	BA1	0.803	0.909	0.574
	BA2	0.830		
	BA3	0.793		
	BA4	0.841		
Brand knowledge	BK1	0.865	0.891	0.673
	BK2	0.858		
	BK3	0.779		
	BK4	0.741		
	Bk5	0.796		
	BK6	0.706		
	BK7	0.707		
	BK8	0.756		
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.767	0.801	0.557
	PI2	0.777		
	Pi3	0.711		
	PI4	0.733		
	PI5	0.788		

Hypothesis Testing and Path Analysis

According to Table 4, the specified model consists of the following values: CMIN=661.229, DF=374, CMIN/df=1.768, which are below the maximum threshold value of 3, while CFI=0.956, which is more than the threshold value of 0.95, exceeds the maximum threshold value of 3. In addition to this, the TLI value is also less than 0.95, which makes the value acceptable in this case. It is important to note that the RMSEA value of 0.051 is below the threshold value of 0.06, while the PClose value is 0.422, close to the good value of 0.42. It is important to note that these values are within the range of Hu and Bentler's (1999) threshold value of 0.06.

Table 4 Model Fit Measures

Measures	Threshold	Estimates of model
CMIN	-	661
DF	-	374
CMIN/df	Between 1 and 3	1.768
CFI	>0.95	0.956
TLI	>0.95	0.942
RMSEA	<0.06	0.051
PClose	>0.05	0.422

According to Table 5, there are significant relationships between WOM and brand attitude, with an increase of .537, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, H1 can be accepted. As a result of the data, it can be concluded that word of mouth is significantly and positively associated with purchase intention ($p = .445$, $p = 0.01$). Regarding H3 acceptance, the study's results demonstrate a significant positive correlation between brand attitude and purchase intention ($\beta = .148$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, eWOM tends to be more skewed toward brand attitude ($\beta = .768$, $p < 0.001$), and H4 is accepted. eWOM also positively correlates with purchase intentions; therefore, H5 is accepted with ($\beta = .278$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 5 Path Analysis

Hypothesis	Paths	Beta coefficient	Significant value	Status
H1	WOM → BA	.537	***	Accepted
H2	WOM → PI	.445	***	Accepted
H3	BA → PI	.148	.004	Accepted
H4	EWOM → BA	.768	***	Accepted
H5	EWOM → PI	.278	***	Accepted

Note 1: *** is $p < 0.001$

Mediation Analysis

This study shows the mediation effect (see Table 6), indicating that H6a is acceptable since it has been established that brand attitude mediates the relationship between WOM and purchase intentions with ($\beta = .471$, $p < 0.00$). The bootstrapping mediation process was a requirement to test the mediation analysis methods (Hayes and Preacher 2004) to find a mediation solution. Additionally, bootstrapping was performed in AMOS by employing 2000 bootstrap samples to identify the direct and indirect effects between variables. There is evidence of partial mediation since the beta value of the indirect effect is lower than that of the direct effect (Baron and Kenny 1986).

Table 6 Path Analysis

	Relationship	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Mediation
H6a	WOM→ BA→ PI	0.424***	0.471***	Partial mediation
H6b	EWOM→ BA→ PA	0.537***	0.554***	Partial mediation

The effect of eWOM on purchase intentions is mediated by brand attitude, as shown in the table. Tests and processes used in the last mediation in this study were the same as those used in this study. According to the table, H6b has been accepted by the mediator. The P Values of mediation indicate there is a mediation among the electronic word of mouth and purchase intent partially because the direct effect is stronger (Baron and Kenny 1986) ($\beta=.757***$) than the indirect effect ($\beta=.554***$).

Moderating Effect

The influence of brand attitude on purchase intentions is moderated by brand knowledge (H7), according to hypothesis seven (H7). In order to examine the relationship between purchase intention and brand attitude on a 95% confidence interval level, the Hayes process macro was utilized. As a result, this means that the moderation of brand knowledge considerably determines the purchase intention, which is in line with Hypothesis Seven and Table 7. There is no doubt that a customer's brand attitude is amplified when they possess the right brand knowledge about a brand.

Table 7 Results Model Summary

	Relationship	Beta coefficient	Significant value	Status
H7	BA x BK	.2764	.0000	Accepted

Figure 2 shows that there is a moderate relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention, and this relationship is moderated by the knowledge of the brand in the market. The correlation between brand attitude and purchase intention is positive when the brand knowledge variable is present in the model. In terms of mediating the relationship between purchase intention and brand attitude, brand knowledge has been found to have a positive impact on the relationship between the two.

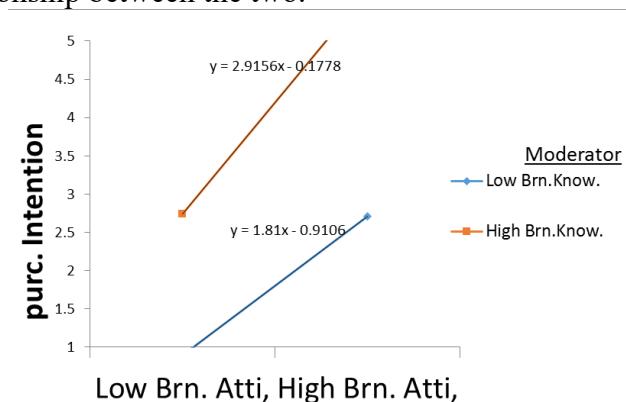


Figure 2 Moderating Effect

Discussion and Conclusion

Higher education plays a significant role in developing an economy and society. There is a great deal of change in higher education institutions. Students' work activities and task characteristics can lead to uncertainty, but they may also be beneficial. The internet has caused the world to transform, and students' purchasing habits and trends are changing the current market environment. Before making a purchase, students are aware of the benefits and disadvantages of a product or service, and they pay attention to the feedback provided by previous customers or consumers. Through electronic internet platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and company web portals, consumers increasingly express their opinions about products and services they have experienced. By providing positive or negative feedback, students recommend or caution their colleagues about products and services. University campuses are well known for attracting young people who are well-versed in technology use and competing for their education there. It implies that they play a significant role in shaping perceptions of a company's brand, whether positive or negative. Organizations must study their purchase mechanisms to understand these guys' purchase mechanisms and the hidden black box.

As a result of this relationship between word of mouth and brand attitude, H1 has considerable effects. There is a very intelligent and smart generation of young people who do not waste money on false claims made by companies. Before purchasing a product or service, they pay close devotion to feedback from previous or experienced customers who have used the company's products and services and their expectations. What is the positive or negative word of mouth generated by the company's products and services? Students use word-of-mouth to determine which brands to choose. As a result of the creation of WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages, students have been able to communicate among themselves and share their feedback and experiences regarding the products and services they have been using. As a result, companies emphasize the quality of their products and services, as 13 people share a negative experience, while 4 people share a positive experience. Therefore, a brand must develop a positive reputation through word of mouth. One of the key factors influencing the formation and impact of WOM in the university student context is the social interactions among peers. University campuses serve as social hubs where students engage in frequent discussions, conversations, and information sharing. Students share their opinions, recommendations, and experiences on fashion items and brands within these social networks. Positive WOM is a source of social validation, influencing students' perceptions of fashion brands and positively shaping their brand attitudes. Therefore, fashion marketers should recognize the importance of tapping into the social dynamics within university environments to leverage positive WOM and enhance brand attitudes.

According to the results of the second hypothesis (H2), a positive correlation was observed between word of mouth and purchase intention based on the results of the first hypothesis (H1). Word of mouth plays an important role in the formation of students' opinions about the products and services they have purchased as well as the experiences they have had with them as a result of their purchases. There is a particular trend among

female students in this regard. Additionally, because they have good experiences with the products or services that they have purchased in the past, they recommend them to their friends. It is also important for them to warn others against buying products and services they have had bad experiences with in the past or have wasted their money on. In addition, there are companies that claim to provide quality products and services to their customers. Customers are offered inferior products and services and false promises are made to them by these companies. Taking this issue seriously is something that is taken very seriously both by companies and by individuals alike.

From the findings of this study, i.e., H3, it can be established that brand attitude influences purchase intention positively. As a result of word-of-mouth, university students develop a brand attitude toward brands by gaining knowledge about the products and services that interest them. Clothing and jewelry items are examples of fashion items and products. In addition to being more aware of the latest fashion trends and product prices, students are also more concerned with quality. Companies must take into account this antecedent of purchase intentions. The first step in developing a brand attitude is to acquire information about a product or service from its environment before making a purchase decision. To encourage purchase intentions, companies should ensure that positive word-of-mouth or feedback is provided.

Accordingly, the literature demonstrates a positive association between electronic word of mouth and brand attitude, supporting the fourth hypothesis (H4). In today's digital age, people use Facebook pages, WhatsApp accounts, Twitter accounts, and TikTok accounts to share their feelings, emotions, and feedback regarding things they have used or purchased. Follow these pages to see what others say about these products and services. Consequently, they develop a brand attitude regarding the product or service they plan to purchase. E-commerce has become an essential part of today's world. Before purchasing a product or service, people visit companies' websites like Amazon, Ali Express, Ali Baba, etc. As a result of other people's positive or negative comments, these products are ranked by other people based on a thesis based on other people's opinions. Therefore, companies must use positive electronic word of mouth on social media to influence students' brand attitudes before purchasing their products.

Upon investigating the outcomes of the 5th hypothesis, it became evident that electronic word of mouth is positively related to purchase intentions; as previously discussed, we live in an era of technology and the Internet, which has led people to prefer to purchase through the Internet, which is referred to as e-electronic purchasing. In today's world, e-commerce is the norm, students place orders on companies like Amazon, Ali Express, and Alibaba via their websites. Based on the data, it appears that before making any purchase decision, consumers look at the comments of previous buyers who have purchased the product; therefore, they pay careful attention and consider them when making a purchasing decision. There is no doubt that the 6th hypothesis plays a role in explaining how the relationship between word of mouth and purchase intention is mediated by brand attitude. Although there is a direct association between word of mouth and purchase intent, the partial mediation shows that the relationship becomes stronger when the brand attitude serves to

mediate the relationship in a way that enhances it. As a result, companies must identify the factors that lead to purchase intention, how the purchasing process starts, and what factors or variables play a role in the purchasing process in order to achieve this. In terms of purchase intentions, word of mouth does play a role, however, it is not the only factor affecting them. In order to make a purchasing decision, people gather relevant information regarding a company's products and services in order to build a brand attitude.

Similarly, hypothesis 6bth reveals that brand attitude mediates the relationship between electronic word of mouth and purchase intentions. A direct link exists as well, but it is strengthened when the brand attitude acts as a mediator between electronic word of mouth and purchase intent. When it comes to e-commerce, people acquire information about products or services from comments or feedback on the company's website on products or services. Customer feedback and comments must be considered because the products or services are ranked accordingly based on positive feedback. Many big companies rank products or services according to the comments of their customers, such as Amazon, eBay, and Ali Express. Thus, people form opinions about a brand before purchasing based on electronic word of mouth.

A positive relationship exists between brand knowledge and brand attitude, as evidenced by hypothesis 7. Brand knowledge is composed of two components: brand image and brand awareness. Through advertisement or positive/negative word of mouth, students form a brand attitude to buy or not buy a fashion product or service when they learn about it on social, medical, and print media. A second aspect is brand image, which determines the brand's attitude toward its products or services before purchasing them. Students with a positive brand image about the products or services will have a better chance of building positive brand attitudes and purchasing them.

Practical Implications

The empirical findings in this study can make a significant contribution to the nascent literature based on the empirical findings obtained in this study. There has been no systematic analysis of the relationship between brand attitude and word of mouth or emotional word of mouth within the fashion industry, especially among the young generation of Pakistan studying in Lahore's universities. Based on the results of this study, it is obvious that the big brands in Pakistani industry going to benefit from this study, such as Gul Ahmed, Khaadi, J., and Limelight since they indicate that students develop a brand attitude by seeking information about the products and services they are interested in before making a purchase decision. It is important to mention that the results of this study open a black box regarding how students' purchase decisions are influenced by brand knowledge. Having people's feedback on social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp can be incredibly helpful when it comes to helping students make the right buying decision because they do not want to waste their money on false claims made by companies that fail to deliver on their promises. There are several practical implications that can be drawn from the findings of the study based on the findings of the study:

1. Strengthening brand reputation: Fashion brands can leverage the power of positive word-of-mouth to amplify purchase intention. They can focus on building and maintaining

a strong reputation through various means, such as providing high-quality experiences, encouraging satisfied students to share their positive experiences, and actively managing online reviews and testimonials.

2. Encouraging positive student experiences: The research highlights the role of positive student experiences in generating positive WOM, which, in turn, influences brand attitude and knowledge. Big brands should strive to enhance the student experience by providing excellent fashion items according to their needs. Satisfied students are likelier to engage in positive WOM, leading to increased brand awareness and improved perceptions.

3. Leveraging social media and online platforms: In the age of social media, fashion brands should capitalize on online platforms to amplify word-of-mouth and influence brand attitude and knowledge. By engaging with customers on social media channels, responding to inquiries, and encouraging user-generated content, brands can facilitate positive conversations and encourage sharing experiences. Additionally, partnering with influencers and collaborating on social media campaigns can further amplify brand reach and create a buzz around fashion items, increasing purchase intention.

4. Fostering alumni engagement: companies can focus on fostering a strong sense of connection and engagement with their alumni network. It can be achieved through alumni events, networking opportunities, mentorship programs, and providing ongoing support and communication channels. Engaged and satisfied alumni are more likely to contribute to positive WOM and act as brand ambassadors for the institution.

5. Influencing brand attitude: Positive word-of-mouth plays a vital role in shaping brand attitude in the fashion industry. Brands should strive to provide exceptional customer experiences, high-quality products, and innovative designs that generate positive conversations among customers. By consistently delivering on these aspects, fashion brands can build a positive brand image and foster favorable brand attitudes, leading to increased purchase intention.

6. Building brand knowledge: Word-of-mouth is a powerful information source in the fashion industry. Brands can enhance brand knowledge by engaging with customers, providing accurate and transparent product information, and sharing behind-the-scenes insights. By educating consumers about their brand values, sustainability initiatives, and unique selling propositions, fashion brands can increase brand knowledge, instilling confidence and trust in potential customers.

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