

THE MODERATING ROLE OF BRAND AWARENESS BETWEEN THE RELATIONSHIP OF EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT, BRAND RELATIONSHIP AND POSITIVE WORD OF MOUTH

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Abstract: The purpose of the current study is to determine the significance of positive word of mouth by users as effective marketing tactic. The study examined the relationship between dependent variable word of mouth of Thai online users influenced by brand relationship and emotional attachment towards specific brand. The study also investigated the moderating role of brand awareness between the relationships of brand relationship, emotional attachments with brand and creating positive word of mouth for associated brand. Using the data collected from 500 female online users of apparel products in Thailand, we applied PLS-SEM approach for data analysis. Surprisingly, all direct relationship between independent and dependent variable were statistically accepted, and moderating effect of brand awareness between emotional attachment and word of mouth was observed, on the other hand, there was no moderation observed between brand relationship and brand awareness. The research used descriptive research and conducted cross sectional design. The hypothesis of research model was examined by using SmartPLS through structural and Measurement Model. The research demonstrates that online technology-based applications play role in creating brand awareness, emotional attachment, brand relationship and all independent constructs influence the positive word of mouth.

Key words: emotional attachment, brand relationship, word of mouth, brand awareness

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Introduction

Technology and internet based applications systems are used by two billion young populations under eighteen years of age which is approximately one-third of worlds' population. The usage of internet based media and applications has increased in recent years as firms operate online for large number of customers and market share as compare to previous conventional methods including satellite, cable TV, newspapers, radio stations and magazines (Degeratu et al., 2000). Today, availability of internet and internet based media with less official control and easily accessible in majority part of the world used by firms to conduct business operations such as communication, sales, marketing, HR and gain customer satisfaction. The flow of information, emails conversation and images sharing

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around the world faster and easier than ever before; which is helping to create know-how about product, service or brand easier and quicker (Yuvaraj, 2014). Number of countries and firms using internet based applications and Thailand is one of most attractive platform for social networking and internet based applications and users are growing with the passage of time. Studies have reported that Thailand is one of the youngest market globally with young internet users which depicts higher web population and spent time on internet surfing. Thailand is an emerging market with greater social media and internet based usage firms through Asia, tourism, retail and other industries are booming recently and their online presence playing significant role in success of organizations and businesses. It has been reported that Thai business found to be quick in adoption internet based and technological based applications for business operations for promotion and advertising of their services to address and access international users (Chen, 2018).

Table 1: A snapshot of the Thailand’s key digital statistical indicators (Chen, 2018)

Total population	Internet Users	Active social media users	Mobile Subscriptions vs. Population	Active Mobile Social Users
68.22 Million	46.00 Million	46.00 Million	90.94 Million	42.00 Million
Urbanisation	Penetration	Penetration	vs. Population	Penetration
52%	67%	67%	133%	62%

The above Table 1 shows general information and age of digital marketing in Thailand during recent years; the statistics shows that there are 46 million social media active users; where the total population of Thailand is 68.22 million; which clearly shows that 67% total population of Thailand is active on internet and use technology based applications for purchases. Further, the statistics shows that 42 million mobile users are active on social media which are 62% of total population; which shows that mobile social media users are higher in market shares in Thai market (Chen, 2018).

Several prior studies have been conducted on investigating the impact of viral marketing on brand reputation; and researcher in the study explained various tools including buzz, guerrilla and word of mouth as part of marketing strategy for positive brand awareness (Lekhanya, 2014). The purpose of the marketing strategy and viral marketing strategy is to spread positive word of mouth for encouraging people to spread messages further in the community. By utilizing positive word of mouth and its rapid spread encourage new trends through internet and social media applications play role in effective communication and build strong relationship with target outcomes and these efforts found to be effective in building brand reputation (Barri et al., 2017).

The current study intends to examine the influence of emotional attachment and brand relationship on word of mouth (WOM) in Thailand. Emotions are described and categorized as positive or negative feelings of individuals; these feelings largely associated with brand in different contexts (Cheung et al., 2007).

Researchers have argued that emotion is an important component of brand relationship; and brand relationship is referred as significant indicator of level of behavior of consumer' relations for specific brand (Erdoğan and Cicek, 2012). Previously studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between brand relationship and word of mouth and reported mixed findings.

The objectives of the current study are threefold, it includes to examine the relationship between emotional attachment and word of mouth about brand on Thai sample of online user for apparel industry, further it will examine the relationship between brand relationship and word of mouth; third the moderating effect of brand awareness between independent and dependent variable will be investigated.

Literature Review

The survey from Global Web Index presented various Asian countries with active users on web and social media; the statistics shows that Indonesia has 79.7% active social media users, Philippine as 78%; Malaysia 72% and China as 67% active users (Lee et al., 2009). The users on internet use social media applications based on Web 2.0 technology which enable firms for creation idea and information sharing and exchange among users (Aaker, 2012; Gerlitz, 2016). Social media usage at large scale among internet users for information communication with similar interest has emerged since a decade (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018; Mičik and Mičudová, 2018). Various social media platforms have large scale popularity in different countries such as usage of Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Various businesses and industries use social media and internet based applications for their business operations and to increase their brand awareness among large number of users (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media usage around the world by large number of active users has dominant the importance of technology based applications for digital communication and to conduct business including creating brand awareness (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The researchers have argued that social media applications influence emotions of users towards specific brand and usage of social media can produce favorable results for businesses for example social media can influence positive word of Mouth (Mecke et al., 2004; Mičik and Mičudová, 2018).

Emotional Attachment and Word of Mouth

The researchers have argued that positive word of mouth found to more credible and influential in grabbing attention of consumers in highly competitive and large market (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018). The marketer must be able to understand those factors which instigate positive WOM and even better opinion about the brand and positive WOM and must be able to organize the factors which can shape the opinion of consumers. Thus, the positive WOM must be used as marketing communication and work more effectively and efficiently (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018). Researchers have focused that marketing managers must be able to analyze consumers' behavior and consider few aspects including affective and cognitive

state, consumer behavior and environment of consumer (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018). Marketing manager must pay extra ordinary attention towards helping brand for creation positive emotions and mitigate negative emotions for meeting long term objectives of gaining competitive edge and gain positive emotional attachment (Phau and Lau, 2001). Emotional attachment is observed as highest form of relationship which resulted from investment in relationship between firm and its brand. The marketing department must be able to generate different product categories for better brand and intimate relationship between brand and consumers (d Astous et al., 2006; Rahmadini and Halim, 2018).

The current study intends to investigate the relationship between emotional attachment and word of mouth in Thai market. On the basis of above discussion following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Emotional attachment positively influences word of mouth among Thai apparel online buyers

Brand Relationship and WOM

The long term association of an individual consumer towards specific brand shows the strength and depth of relationship which emerges as brand relationship (Rahmadini & Halim, 2018). The interdependence of relationship between brand and the consumers stated as key indicator that the relationship with brand and quality of relationship with other human beings are similar; demonstrate the level of association with specific brand and further it resulted in positive word of mouth and plays important role in attracting new consumers (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018; Gavurova et al., 2018). Researchers have argued and stated that quality of relationship between brands and consumers demonstrate motivational level towards the brand which positively influences the buying decision and acquiring of new consumers (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018).

The current study entails 'brand relationship' construct to determine the word of mouth in Thai apparel industry among online buyers and online active community. There is scarcity of empirical studies for investigating the relationship between brand relationship and word of mouth. The current study will be one of the pioneers to examine the relationship in Thai context. On the basis of above discussion following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Brand Relationship positively influences the word of mouth among Thai online apparel consumers.

Brand Awareness (Moderating Role)

Literature has considered the importance of brand awareness and reported interesting findings in relationship of various factors contribute of creating brand awareness for consumers. Brand awareness is associated with the mind set of consumer that whenever customer thinks about any category of product or service does a specific brand comes to the mind for affiliation with name or ease

of collaboration (Shimp, 2003). Brand awareness is reported as initial challenge for any new brand to maintain high level of awareness and establish goodwill in market. The researchers have categorized level of awareness as brand recognition and brand recall. Brand recognition refers the superficial level of awareness; whereas brand recall is stated as deeper form of awareness (Shimp, 2003). Usually, reminders are given to consumers to recall the name of brand, sometimes consumers are able to identify and recall the brand name without any reminders; which demonstrate the deeper level of awareness. The efforts of marketing managers focus on shifting from brand awareness to brand recognition. The researchers have recommended investigating the brand awareness in relation with other influential variables and outcomes (Cardoso et al., 2017). The current study intends to investigate the relationship between Word of Mouth (WOM) and emotional attachment; brand relationship and its influence on Word of Mouth (WOM); the other objective includes the investigating moderating role of brand awareness between independent and dependent variables. On the basis of above discussion following hypothesis have been formulated:

H3: Brand awareness positively influence word of mouth

H4: Brand awareness moderate relationship between Emotional attachment and word of mouth among Thai apparel online buyers

H5: Brand awareness moderate relationship between brand relationship and word of mouth among Thai apparel online buyers

Methodology

Statistics demonstrated that there are 57,000,000 Thai internet active users and total population is equal to 121,000,000 (Internet World Stats, 2018). Researchers applied Yamane's sampling calculation (1967) for designing number of data collection. Further quota sampling was used as 500 female online users of apparel products between the age of 25 to 45 in Thailand as mostly online shopping relevant to females in this age group. The questionnaire was floated among female apparel Thai users for examining the relationship of proposed framework.

The questionnaire was developed for measuring the relationship between dependent variable Word of mouth and independent variables emotional attachment and brand relationship; moderating effect of brand awareness was also measured. All the items of each scale were examined on 5 point Likert scale. Where 1 presents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree. Emotional attachment was examined on adapted items related to affectionate, friendly, peaceful, delightful, passionate and loved, connected and attached from the study of (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018). Brand relationship was measured on 16 items and was adopted from the study of (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018). For measuring word of mouth; scale was adopted and was measured on the basis of statement of respondents' willingness for recommending specific brand to their relatives and friends. Brand awareness was examined by using the measurement scale adopted from (Dehghani and Tumer, 2015).

Research Analysis and Discussion

The respondents of the study were the female's online customers of apparel products in Thailand. The respondents' profile is presented in Table 2. The cronbach' alpha and composite reliability of each construct was examined in the present study for investigating the relationship of proposed framework. The study employed SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) approach where the level of significance was considered as 5%. The Table 3 below demonstrates the Cronbach alpha and composite reliability.

Table 2: Profile of respondents

	Catagory	Numbers	Percentage
Age	25-30	153	30.6
	30-35	103	20.6
	35-40	125	25.0
	40-45	119	23.8
Education	High School	159	31.8
	Becholars	251	50.2
	Masters and Above	90	18.0
Years as online user	<5	121	24.2
	>5	379	75.8
Total		500	100

Table 3: Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Remarks
Word of Mouth	0.912	0.713	Acceptable
Emotional Attachment	0.831	0.783	Acceptable
Brand Relationship	0.716	0.813	Acceptable
Brand Awareness	0.691	0.901	Acceptable

Relevancy of model with latent variables is demonstrated by R-Square (R²). The value of R² falls closer to 1 is shows relevancy with model, as Cohen (1998) also cited in various other studies that value of R² between 0.26, 0.13 and 0.02 for dependent variable in SME and indicated model as "good" or "weak" fit.

Table 4: Expected Variance

	R²	Remarks
Word of Mouth (WOM)	0.65	Moderate

The current study examined discriminate validity of variables of the proposed framework and value of AVE is also given and compared with correlation among variables. The value of AVE square root on latent variable must be higher that correlation it indicates good discriminate validity as suggested by Latan and

Ghozali (2015). The Table 5 below demonstrates the discriminate validity of the constructs.

Table 5: Discriminate validity

Constructs	WOM	ES	BR	BA
WOM	0.768			
ES	0.766	0.811		
BR	0.581	0.791	0.799	
BA	0.601	0.671	0.710	0.891

The above Table 5 demonstrates the discriminate validity values, the figure in bold (AVE) must be higher than correlation values under the same column, on the first column WOM (Word of Mouth) variable found to be higher as compare to correlation between WOM and EA (Emotional attachment), which posits good discriminate validity. The remaining variables such as BR (Brand Relationship), BA (Brand Awareness) found to be having higher AVE values in subsequent columns as compare to correlation values. These values demonstrate good discriminate validity.

The independent variable will be significantly influential on dependent variable and can be based on t-statistics test with 5% error margin and significant level. T-value must be higher than the cutoff point 1.96.

Table 6: T-Statistics: Direct relations

Hypothesis	B	T Statistics	Remarks
EA-> WOM	1.132	2.197	Significant
BR-> WOM	0.991	4.140	Significant
BA-> WOM	2.321	3.012	Significant

The Table 6 shows the t-Value statistics, the cutoff point is 1.96; value below cutoff point will be rejected, and value higher than 1.96 will be consider as accepted and significant. The first hypothesized relationship emotional stability influence word of mouth found to be significant as the value is reported as 2.197 which is higher than cutoff point. So, the hypothesis H1 is statistically accepted; similarly, H2, BR (Brand Relationship found to be 4.140 which is higher than cutoff point 1.96; and accepted. Further, H3; BA (Brand awareness) reported as 3.012 t-values and higher than 1.96 cutoff point and accepted significantly.

In Table 7, moderating role of brand awareness has been examined between EA and WOM; hypothesis 4; the results below in table 5 demonstrated that t-value is higher than 1.96; hence hypothesis 4 accepted statistically; as BA moderate the relationship between EA and WOM. Further, hypothesis 5; the moderating role between brand relationship and WOM statistically rejected on the basis of t-value as it found to be lower than 1.96, therefore, H5 is rejected on statistical grounds.

Moderating role of brand awareness created by online and technological based applications was examined and several conclusions were drawn.

Table 7: Moderating Effect

Hypothesis	B	T Statistics	Remarks
EA *BA -> WOM	2.132	4.197	Significant
BR*BA -> WOM	0.091	1.140	In-Significant

First of all emotional attachment of users specifically online active users towards brand, hypothesis 1 was accepted statistically that emotional attachment influence the positive word of mouth, further, the brand relationship influence the positive word of mouth hence hypothesis 2 was accepted statistically. Hypothesis 3 was also accepted as brand awareness also found to be influential for positive word of mouth. The study contributed for demonstrating moderation role of brand awareness between independent and dependent variables of proposed framework. The findings of the current study are similar and in-line with previous studies of (Rahmadini and Halim, 2018), hence it validate the hypothesized relationship between constructs. The moderating hypothesis demonstrated interesting findings, hypothesis 4 was accepted statistically, as brand awareness (BA) moderate relationship between EA and WOM by increasing the beta value and t-value higher than 1.96. Contrary, brand awareness did not moderate between brand relationship and WOM; hence hypothesis 5 was rejected statistically.

Conclusion

The study contributed for investigating relationships between constructs to measure word of mouth from online marketing perspective. The study contributed in examining the relationship between emotional attachment & brand relationship to be influential towards creating positive word of mouth for specific brand among Thai apparel industry. The findings of the study have inferred that brand relationship and brand emotional attachment of online active users influence the positive word of mouth. Further, the brand awareness also found to be influential for positive word of mouth. The study also investigated the moderation role of brand awareness between brand relationship, brand emotional attachment of online active users and the positive word of mouth. The results of moderation analyses explains that the brand awareness (BA) moderate relationship between EA and WOM significantly. Whereas, there is now empirical evidence found for the significant moderation of brand awareness between brand relationship and WOM. The study has several limitations including they study was conducted on active online Thai users and majority of the respondents were from Bangkok, if the data collection and technique changes than it may produce different results. Moreover, the distribution of data collection tool was physical distributed among female online active users. If sample includes male members as well, it may produce new and interesting comparative results. The future study may also include the purchase intention as another intervening construct to examine the relationship of existing framework.

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MODERUJĄCA ROLA ŚWIADOMOŚCI MARKI MIĘDZY RELACJAMI EMOCJONALNEGO PRZYWIĄZANIA, RELACJI MARKI I POZYTYWNYM KOMENTARZEM

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest określenie znaczenia pozytywnych ustnych wypowiedzi uczestników, jako skutecznej taktyki marketingowej. W badaniu zbadano związek między zmiennymi słowami ustnymi wypowiedzi tajlandzkich użytkowników online, na które mają ma związek emocjonalnego przywiązanie do konkretnej marki. W badaniu zbadano również moderującą rolę świadomości marki między relacjami emocjonalnymi przywiązania do marki i tworzeniem pozytywnych ustnych wypowiedzi do powiązanej marki. Korzystając z danych zebranych od 500 kobiet korzystających z zakupów online produktów odzieżowych w Tajlandii, w badaniu wykorzystano podejście PLS-SEM do analizy danych. Co zaskakujące, wszystkie bezpośrednie relacje między zmienną niezależną i zależną zostały statystycznie zaakceptowane, a zaobserwowano wyciszający wpływ świadomości marki pomiędzy przywiązaniem emocjonalnym a przekazem ustnym, z drugiej strony nie zaobserwowano takich relacji między marka a świadomością marki. W badaniach wykorzystano badania opisowe i przeprowadzono projekt przekrojowy. Hipotezę modelu badawczego zbadano za pomocą SmartPLS poprzez model konstrukcyjny i pomiarowy. Badanie pokazuje, że aplikacje oparte na technologii online mają wpływ na budowanie świadomości marki, przywiązania emocjonalnego, relacji z marką, co odzwierciedla pozytywne wypowiedzi.

Słowa kluczowe: przywiązanie emocjonalne, związek z marką, świadomość marki

情感依恋, 品牌关系和积极口碑之间品牌意识的调节作用

摘要: 本研究的目的是确定用户正面口碑作为有效营销策略的意义。该研究调查了受品牌关系影响的泰国在线用户的因变量口碑与对特定品牌的情感依恋之间的关系。该研究还调查了品牌意识在品牌关系, 情感依恋与品牌之间的关系以及为相关品牌创造正面口碑之间的调节作用。利用从泰国500名服装产品在线女性用户那里收集的数据, 我们将PLS-

SEM方法应用于数据分析。令人惊讶的是, 统计上接受了自变量和因变量之间的所有直接关系, 并且观察到品牌意识在情感依恋和口碑之间的调节作用, 而在品牌关系和品牌意识之间没有观察到调节作用。该研究采用描述性研究并进行了截面设计。通过结构和度量模型, 使用SmartPLS检验了研究模型的假设。这项研究表明, 基于在线技术的应用程序在建立品牌知名度, 情感依恋, 品牌关系中起着重要作用, 所有独立的结构都会影响积极的口碑。

关键字: 情感依恋, 品牌关系, 口碑, 品牌意识