

CRITICAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE SUCCESS OF FASHION-CLOTHING BRANDS IN ULAANBAATAR, MONGOLIA

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Abstract

Background

When it comes to success of a brand, there are numerous strategies and tools to take advantage of nowadays. Social media has become one of the most important business marketing strategies and it allows companies to produce and share content quickly, help showcasing brands, relationship building and offers marketing channel creating brand awareness. It is a great way to surpass business's peers in both revenue and profit when used effectively. However, there seems to be various numbers of problems such as low engagement with customers, limited word of mouth and not reaching with clients through the right social media platforms and collaborations with influencers. In this thesis, different discussion concepts related to success of a clothing brand and influences of social media in clothing brand are discussed. The study introduces the concepts of social media, and brand awareness and customer engagement. It proposes the use of quantitative approach and the respondents who participated were Millennials residing in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The data of this research was collected using a self-administered questionnaire survey. Smart PLS version 3.0 was used to analyze the data in this research. The study's findings revealed that choice of platform and customer engagement play a significant role in the success of fashion clothing brands in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Keywords: *Social Media, Choice of Platform, Customer Engagement, Brand Awareness, Influencers*

1.0 Introduction

Fashion is a global market with a dynamic framework that works on several different levels to reach everybody from fashionistas to those that simply buy garments as a necessity of daily life (Posner, 2015). Clothes are very vital to our basic needs from staying warm, expressing ourselves to staying stylish. Social media became one of the most important tools to advertise and introduce a brand for a fashion industry. Social media refers to various applications and websites that are designed in such a way that they allow people to quickly and efficiently share real-time information (Bruhn, Schoenmueller and Schäfer, 2012). It enables designers to reach their audience faster and get a feedback way quicker than traditional marketing. Traditional marketing is one sided where social media can be two sided. Thus, social media in fashion clothing line is extremely influential and has a massive impact on consumer buying products worldwide. An invention of social media platforms and its features such as shopping and purchasing within a click has totally changed the way we perceive and our shopping experiences. Furthermore, with an effective marketing strategy in place, fashion industries are able to use social media platforms to cultivate their image and show clients exactly what the brand stands for.

It is challenging to be successful in any businesses since there are many competitors in the marketplace. A strong company identity will help build brand value through enhanced recognition, awareness, and consumer loyalty, which in turn helps make a company extra successful (Wheeler, 2013). There are many factors and strategies that can help brand to succeed. For instance, Gucci is one of the most popular luxury clothing brands and their secrets to success are leadership, brand equity focus, creativity and most importantly having a customer centricity strategy. Having a great customer service is literally everything when it comes to gaining a good reputation as a brand. Paying attention to customer's need and expectation and listening to them will help enhance good image and improve the brand.

According to Seturi (2017), the key factor in brand's success is held by building its positive image and making sure its recognizability and awareness. Brand recognition can help bring in more profits and sales if the retailers use the right strategy. Thus, customer satisfaction and providing good quality of clothing is important when it comes to being a successful clothing brand. In addition, social media influencers are becoming one of the key role players in the market now, thus taking advantage and promoting a product through them is essential nowadays. Taking clothing brand Revolve as an example, they used mega influencers and celebrities to boost brand awareness that turned into billion-dollar success and now many brands are approaching the same strategy. There are many platforms to reach out to the audience but choosing the best for the organisation is vital. In order to succeed, a company must engage with customers, earning their trust and keeping to promises. Also, keeping up with the competitors and being innovative is key to success.

1.2 Problem Statement

Many designers and fashion brands face challenges everyday. Fashion brand designers face many problems including positioning in the market and differentiation, using the right strategy and promoting the product, being innovative, providing great customer service and satisfying customers. According to Aiolfi and Sabbadin (2019), the challenge for fashion designers is to control every touch points and ensure an interesting brand involvement that is reliable with the brand's values.

When a company does not listen nor connect with their customers, many problems arise within the company and can lead to bankruptcy. It is crucial for companies to understand what the customer wants and deliver quality products and great service. Also, there are many designers who are not taking the best advantages of social media, and not maximizing on what they're doing. Another challenge fashion brand designers face is low engagement with customers. In addition, finding an audience for businesses on the right platform can be challenging. Although, majority of designers are using social media to introduce and advertise their new design and clothing line, some important factors like engaging with customers to responding to EWOM and taking action on reviews are undertaken. From the marketers' point of view, refusing to ignore competition, lack of understanding all these strategies mentioned above can lead to failure of business. Therefore, the problem to be addressed was what are the underlying factors associated with the success of a fashion brand in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Choice of Platform

Social engagement is one of the most important factors in order to have successful and meaningful brand. The choice of social media platform is important for promotion for building a strong brand. There are many ways to promote a product/garments through social media these days. However, Instagram seems to be the best tool for most designers and marketers. In findings of Phua, Jin and Kim (2016), Instagram was ranked the highest on following fashion, with users using the platform primarily as a fashion guide, compared to Snapchat, Facebook and Twitter. Instagram has tons of benefits and it is the fastest way to promote a product by using its features and it is a creative outlet. Instagram has skyrocketed into fame by reaching one billion monthly users in 2018. This compelling photo sharing app has an impressive user base and have it's advantages when it comes to marketing. It is an amazing platform for telling a brand's story in a creative, visually inspired and direct way. Successful platforms like Instagram, can be a boon for retailers which can deepen connections with customers, drive sales and most importantly foster brand loyalty.

Choosing the right platform to use can improve the customer service offerings where customers can reach out with questions, concerns, and complaints. Another benefit to using the right platform is to reach out to new audiences who are receptive to the product and services, increasing brand awareness. However, to target an audience and building strong brands, the brand must stick with the right platform. It will aid to reach bigger audience and stay consistent with customers and posts. Therefore choosing a perfect platform and reach the right audience is the best strategy for most companies.

2.2 Social Media Influencers

Social media has become very common in connecting people through the use of social media channels. With clothing brands now ready to have a communication and offer to clients any place they are on the planet, online has changed the fabric of the business far to unrecognizable (Bearne, 2016). The most commonly used social media network sites include Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, and Facebook, among others. Youtube is highly used by various companies in their marketing strategies and the creation of brand awareness online (ElAydi, 2018). Social media tool is also highly used in marketing and creating brand awareness by engaging the customers directly, especially the roadshows advertisements. Social media marketing acts as a means for the adoption

of integrated communications for marketing strategies to build corporate brands in consumers' minds. The process of developing consumer brands in the accounts of the social media users gives specific impacts to their satisfaction and establishment of loyalty to the company and all the products it produces (André, 2015).

Social media influencers are individuals who are recognized for their personality, lifestyle and fashion style and their interests and engaged with their audiences online. Many successful clothing designers are taking this opportunity to collaborate with them and work with them to promote their new or existing garment items. Designers are pay them up to tens of thousands dollar just for a single post on their Instagram. For instance, when bloggers or influential people on social media recommend a product; there is a huge immediate spike in sales. According to Gerona, Revolve clothing brand's Chief Brand Officer, in 2018, influencers drove 70% of the sales for the company, which was valued at \$1.2 billion. She also mentioned that Instagram is the key platform for communicating with their customers and it is constantly evolving. However, a brand must be very careful with who they partner with, since there were many failed sponsored posts that led to a failure and bad reputation for companies. An influencer has an ability to affect buying decision of people, because of their authority, experience, status or relationship with their audience. (Kadekova, Holencinova, 2018).

2.3 Competitors

In today's competitive landscape, for brand owners and designers, observing and keeping up to date to see what is trending is very beneficial in order to come up with a product offer to clients. By analyzing the competitors' business strategy, the brand can get useful data such as how they position themselves in the marketplace. Learning from competitors will not only help to strengthen the brand, but to innovate continuously. To be really successful in competitive marketplace, organisations must be at forefront of new ideas and services. By providing unique content, engaging materials to promote products and services can really help being the stronger brand and engaging customers without worrying about losing a customer to competitors. According to Adhikari (2011), innovation would be effective in true sense if the organisation is able to consider the needs of the customer and then create the products that satisfy those needs. Being innovative can help engage customers and improve performance of the business.

2.4 E-WOM

As stated by Verma & Yadav (2020), E-WOM is a large source of customer perception, and marketers are mining it for their improvements. The power of E-WOM is one of the biggest forms of marketing. And it plays an important role in marketing because comments can evoke and influence behavior (Aramendia-Muneta, 2017). Customers have access to give their opinions through social media whenever and however they want. The internet, subsequently, as a vehicle for conveying data, influences consumer's conversation behavior equivalently to face-to-face WOM communication (Levy and Gvili, 2015).

According to King et al. (2014), E-WOM communications are asynchronous and are able to reach a tremendous number of individuals in a brief period of time. The power of EWOM could completely transform the image of a brand whether good or bad depending on the customer's comments or reviews. Park & Cho (2012) mentioned that whereas the significance of social media online communities is extraordinary. It has been obscure how a social network online community

impacts the clothing consumer's decision making. When customer reads positive comment about a brand, they are most willing to buy that specific garment. Conversely, negative reviews about a product can affect customers purchase intention. One single bad review about a product and brand can hurt its business reputation and purchase decision nowadays. Thus, for retailers, the most crucial consideration for improving and enhancing E-WOM should be the continuation of credibility (Moran and Guzellec, 2014).

2.5 Customer Engagement

In this age of digital disruption, customer engagement is indeed one of the most important parts of businesses. Current and future clients form experience-based relationships through strong involvement with the brand by way of the special experiences they have with the offerings and performances of the business (Vivek, et.al, 2012). There is always a store that customers will go back to because of one of these reasons; the quality, price, convenience, luxury, user friendly or good customer service. The stronger the tie with the customer, the stronger the brand will be. When a brand engages with a customer, it creates customer loyalty. Once the organisation has a loyal customer, it will bring measurable results and success to the organisation. Customers want an experience they can count on. Thus, delivering on promises, and offer and walking the talk is crucial for brands. If a customer trusts a brand, it builds customer loyalty.

According to Agrawal (2012) with trust as an antecedent, clients create commitment and become loyal to the organization. Building a customer engagement is basically an effort to make as a business to connect and create a valuable relationship with the customer. Prioritizing a customer is probably the most valuable strategy in all businesses. Understanding the customer, connecting with them, and what they expect from your brand, and how they feel about the product and services offered is everything. As Nazari et. al (2012) explained that businesses must focus all their pursuit and strengths towards the client satisfaction, because clients are the only origin for return on investment (ROI). Many businesses make a common mistake by focusing on their just brand and products only and not so much about the customer service and experience, which can really hurt your business. Thus customer centric strategy is probably one of the most important ways to engage with customers.

For Ngo and O'Cass (2011) value of the customer to the firm and brand performances are the two customer-centric indicators for customer-centric value. Another important factor for customer engagement is to provide a good service and experience for current and future customers. Engaging with the customer more can increase sales and improving customer service can help to enhance brand reputation. When faced with challenges with customers, small improvements in customer engagement metrics can dramatically increase the organisation's value with the customers. The importance of customer engagement is indeed important to continue to thrive as a business and continue to have a good relationship as a business.

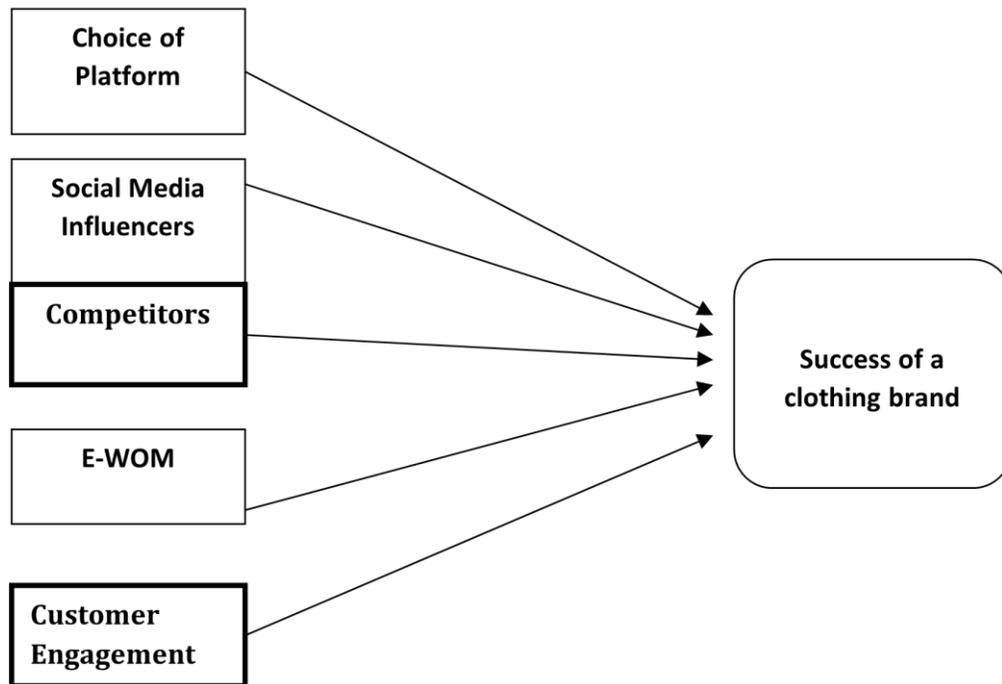


Figure 1: Research Framework

3.0 Methodology

The main purpose of this research is to determine critical factors that affect success of fashion-clothing brands in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The researcher conducted explanatory research, which generally focused on exploratory and descriptive purposes, and goes beyond focusing on a summary of the subject (Strydom, 2013). In this study, quantitative method was used and data was collected and analyzed in numerical way. This study used primary data through questionnaire survey as the instrument. Questionnaires were sent through online and emailed to people residing in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

The sample population for this research is the population of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Simple random sampling was used in this study. The researcher used G*Power Calculator for the sample size. G*Power was developed to serve an effective, broadly applicable, easy to use research tool (Erdfelder, Faul and Buchner, 1996). Compared to other analysis tools, this tool is fast and efficient which allows the researcher analyze the data faster and easier. The researcher selected “Linear Multiple regression” Fixed model, R2 increase” and put five predictors to get the sample size. This tool computed a sample size of 138 for this research. The researcher used software of Smart PLS 3.0 to analyze the data and generate more useful information and findings.

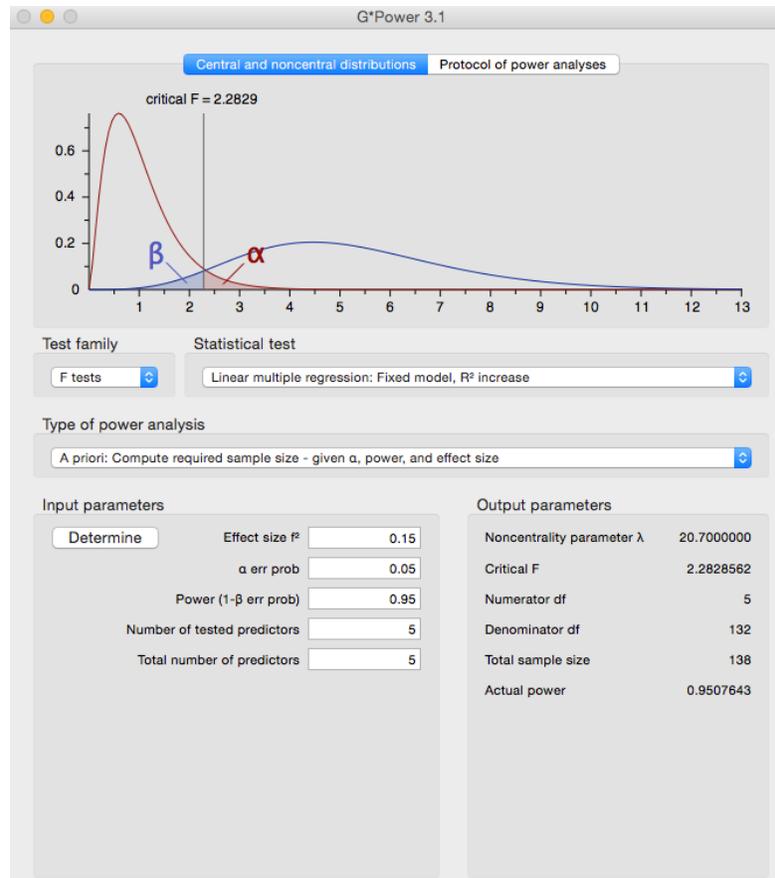


Figure 2: G*Power Sample Size Calculator

4.0 Results and Findings

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis is a form of factor analysis, which most commonly used in social research. According to Prudon (2015), researchers also use confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to create validity of questionnaires, especially when the tests are expected to be multidimensional. Also, it is a great tool that is used to confirm or reject the measurement theory. In CFA, the researcher first develops a hypothesis on the factors that underlying the measures by imposing the constraints to be consistent with the theory, then model fit could be obtained, and lastly, if they constraints on the model are inconsistent with sample data, then the statistical test of model fit indicate a poor fit which will be rejected (Shau, 2017). However, according to Zainudin (2017), factor loading should be a minimum of 0.6, since poor factor loading shows that items are not contributing in measuring the construct itself, thus, poor loading items should be removed.

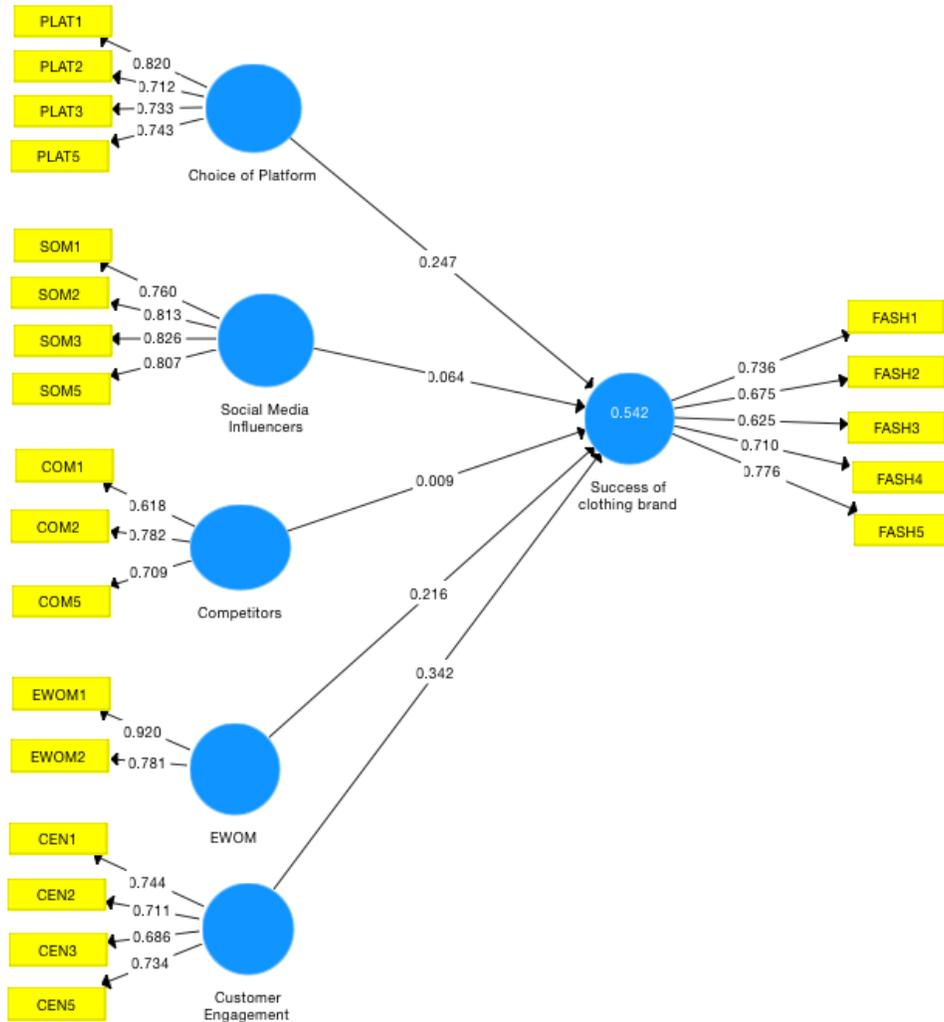


Figure 3: Factor Loadings After Final Deletion

Therefore, PLAT4, SOM4, COM4, EWOM3, EWOM4, EWOM5 AND CEN4 were deleted. The PLS algorithm was calculated again and all items were found to be above the threshold of 0.6 and retained.

4.2 Internal Consistency Test

Internal consistency is a measure based on the correlations between different items on the same test. In this study, researcher has used composite reliability in order to test the reliability and validity of the factors and items. Composite reliability is a measure of internal consistency in scale items. It is an unbiased estimation of the reliability of a general case multidimensional calculation for weighted or unweighted dimensions (Widhiarso and Ravand, 2014). According to Ogasawara (2009) one advantage of using this measure instead of the Cronbach's alpha is that it accommodates different, acceptable weights for each dimension, that can achieve higher value reliability.

Table 1: Composite Reliability

| Constructs | Composite Reliability |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Choice of Platform | 0.839 |
| Competitors | 0.747 |
| Customer Engagement | 0.811 |
| EWOM | 0.842 |
| Social Media Influencers | 0.878 |
| Success of Clothing Brand | 0.832 |

Table 1 illustrates that Choice of Platform, Competitors, Customer Engagement, EWOM, Social Media Influencers and Success of Clothing brand are 0.839, 0.747, 0.811, 0.842, 0.878, and 0.832 respectively which are all above 0.7 or more, meaning they are acceptable.

4.3 Construct Validity Test

Construct validity is basically to test the validity of a test, used in education, social sciences and psychology. However, Embretson (2007) states that construct validity has always been the most controversial type of validity because it involves logic and the relationship between data and theory. AVE for latent variables such as Choice of Platform, Customer Engagement, EWOM, Social Media influencers, and are all above 0.5, also Competitors and Success of Fashion clothing Brand is 0.499 which rounds up to 0.5. Thus, all six latent variables have high level of validity.

Table 2: Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

| Constructs | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Choice of Platform | 0.567 |
| Competitors | 0.499 |
| Customer Engagement | 0.517 |
| EWOM | 0.728 |
| Social Media Influencers | 0.643 |
| Success of Clothing Brand | 0.499 |

4.4 Discriminant Validity

The discriminant validity means that measuring items of a construct measure what they expected to measure. Assessment of discriminant validity has become a normally accepted requirement for analyzing relationship between latent variables (Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2014). The Fornell-Larcker criterion has been used to assess the degree of shared variance between the latent variables of the model. Fornell-Larcker criterion is a test of discriminant validity which compares the square root of the AVE of each construct with its correlations with all other constructs in the model (Sani, Ahmad and Mokhtar, 2019).

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker

| Constructs | Choice of Platform | Competitors | Customer Engagement | EWOM | Social Media Influencers | Success of Clothing Brand |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Choice of Platform | 0.753 | | | | | |
| Competitors | 0.564 | 0.706 | | | | |
| Customer Engagement | 0.719 | 0.576 | 0.745 | | | |
| EWOM | 0.429 | 0.502 | 0.578 | 0.853 | | |
| Social Media Influencers | 0.336 | 0.367 | 0.462 | 0.649 | 0.802 | |
| Success of Clothing Brand | 0.621 | 0.477 | 0.685 | 0.565 | 0.448 | 0.706 |

4.5 Predictive Model Fit

Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2013) suggests that in scholarly research which focuses on marketing situations, r square values of 0.75, 0.50 or 0.25 for endogenous latent variables can, as a rule of thumb, be respectively described as substantial, moderate or weak. R square is a fit measure for linear regression models, which indicates the percentage of the variance in the dependent variable that the independent variables explain collectively.

Table 4: R Square

| | R Square | R Square Adjusted |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Success of Clothing Brand | 0.542 | 0.525 |

Table 4 shows that R square value for this study is 0.542. It indicates that the 5 independent variables have supported 54.2% of variance towards the dependent variable, which is success of clothing brand among respondents in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. In this finding, R square is in between moderate and substantial, therefore, the value is acceptable.

4.6 Path Coefficients

A path coefficient indicates the direct effect of a variable assumed to be a cause on another variable assumed to be an effect. The results show that Customer Engagement (IV) has the strongest relationship with Success of fashion clothing brand (DV), followed by Choice of Platform, E-WOM Social Media Influencer and Competitors.

Table 5: Path Coefficients

| Constructs | Choice of Platform | Competitors | Customer Engagement | EWOM | Social Media Influencers | Success of Clothing Brand |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Choice of Platform | | | | | | 0.247 |
| Competitors | | | | | | 0.009 |
| Customer Engagement | | | | | | 0.342 |
| EWOM | | | | | | 0.216 |
| Social Media Influencers | | | | | | 0.064 |
| Success of Clothing Brand | | | | | | |

4.7 Hypotheses Test

Bootstrapping method is a resampling method used to estimate statistics on a population by sampling a single dataset with many simulated samples as a replacement. Stine (1989) states that using multiple samples from the initial observations, these methods require fewer assumptions and provide more precision and insight than traditional methods in many issues. For the bootstrapping method, the researcher has used the sample size of 5000.

Table 10: Summary of Hypothesis

| Developed Hypotheses | T Statistics | P Value | Result |
|--|---------------------|----------------|---------------|
| H1: There is a significant relationship between choice of platform and success of fashion clothing brand | 2.179 | 0.029 | Accepted |
| H2: There is a significant relationship between social media influencers and success of fashion clothing brand | 0.786 | 0.432 | Rejected |
| H3: There is a significant relationship between competitors and success of fashion clothing brand. | 0.111 | 0.912 | Rejected |
| H4: There is a significant relationship between EWOM and fashion clothing brand | 2.018 | 0.044 | Accepted |
| H5: There is a significant relationship between customer engagement and fashion clothing brand. | 3.201 | 0.001 | Accepted |

5.0 Discussion

Research findings indicates that there is a positive relationship between choice of platform and success of clothing brand. Therefore, it shows that choice of social media platform for brands is essential to target audiences and reach customers. Choosing the right social media platforms and implementing social media marketing strategy is vital to saving you time and money in the long run (McCormick, 2018). Based on the result shows that respondents believe that social media platform can help boost brand awareness, and can help brands to build relationships with customers as well as can affect success of a fashion-clothing brand in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

However, the findings revealed a non-significant relationship between social media influencers and success of a clothing brand. This means, that the respondents do not give that much of an importance to social media influencers when it comes to brand awareness. Also, social media influencers do not affect the way respondents see the brand or influence in purchase intention. Therefore, the findings suggest that there is non-significant relationship between social media influencers and success of clothing brand. Also, findings show that there is non-significant relationship between

competitors and success of a clothing brand. From the respondents' perspective, they seem to believe that this variable is not that significant when it comes to success of a clothing brand.

Based on the result, it is evident that there is a positive relationship between EWOM and success of a clothing brand. Moreover, the results mean that the EWOM has affected the respondents' buying decision on clothing products. A negative or positive attitude towards a product or service can affect the customers' future purchase intentions, by enabling them to equate the actual product or service with their expectations (Yang, 2016). Based on the path coefficients results, EWOM value is 0.216, which means that the EWOM has obtained a significant influence on success of fashion clothing brand.

From the research findings, respondents agree that they purchase from a brand that has more engaging materials, and by satisfying them, they stay loyal to the brand. According to Traster (2018), customer engagement has been shown to improve cross-selling, increasing customer retention, enhancing brand loyalty and encourages brand promotion. Roberts and Alpert (2010) states that secret to developing satisfied customers is to develop a distinct and meaningful customer value proposition, communicate it effectively, engage your staff and deliver the value proposition with unforgettable customer experience. Therefore, the customer engagement indeed has the major impact on the success of clothing brand in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

5.0 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to determine the relationship between choice of platform, social media influencers, competitors, EWOM and customer engagement and success of a fashion-clothing brand among millennials in Ulaanbatar, Mongolia. Social media Influencers and Competitors were rejected due to lack of significance in the statistical data results. Therefore, choice of platform EWOM and customer engagement influences the success of fashion clothing brand in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

5.1 Recommendations

Marketers and managers should firstly pick and choose a right platform for their brand to target their audience. By choosing the right platform, marketers can save time and reach their messages and promote their products and services to the right audience. Then, focusing on engaging with customers by communicating and understanding the customer, satisfying their needs and be a good storyteller of a brand when it comes to promoting a product and services. Since EWOM can affect the success of fashion brand, having a good brand reputation is crucial. Increasing customer engagement can really boost a brands' awareness and reputation.

It is important to discuss recommendations and opportunities for future research as it helps to improve and gain new insights and knowledge to the subject. Further studies using larger sample size, from different geographical diversity would be helpful in validating the outcome of the research. In this study, Competitors and Social media Influencers were rejected in order to be successful as a fashion-clothing brand. Thus, future researcher could do research on those rejected predictors and its' lack of significance. In addition, researchers could do exploratory study conducting case study which could offer more in depth and reliable results.

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