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## Effect of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Intentions of Women's Clothing and Accessories

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### ABSTRACT

This article investigates the effect of social media marketing on purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories. It explores the role of consumers' brand perception and as moderators of the aforementioned relationship. In addition, it investigates how the results vary among different generational cohorts particularly X and Y Generations. Primary data was gathered through a structured questionnaire distributed online. The sample was selected on a convenient basis and contained 150 females in the Western province aged between 18 and 55. Before final data collection, a pilot study was conducted to determine the psychometric properties of the questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed through regression analysis. A moderate positive relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories was found. Consumers' brand perception moderates the aforementioned relationship in a considerable manner. Further, purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories of Generation Y is affected more by social media marketing campaigns than Generation X. The findings of the study are significant to the fashion industry of Sri Lanka. The results of the study show the importance of better formulating social media marketing campaigns based on the age of the target markets in the women's clothing and accessory market.

**KEYWORDS:** Social media marketing, purchase intentions, women, brand perception

### I. INTRODUCTION

Social Media has been able to redefine the relationship between customers and business organizations. With the emergence of social media, the communication landscape has been subjected to drastic changes and has significantly impacted marketing communication (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt & Füller, 2013). Companies have found the ability to listen and respond to consumers and obtain reviews on a virtual and real-time basis through social media marketing. Further, user-generated content and the ability to share content on social media platforms have enabled marketing to be carried out at a different level. The fashion industry is subjected to constant changes in trends. Information in the fashion industry plays a crucial role. Currently, social media marketing acts as an ideal platform to reach current and potential customers. According to E-marketer (2012), apparel and accessories are one of the rapidly emerging e-commerce product categories and are expected to reach sales of \$73 billion by 2016 in US, which will account for 20 percent of all purchases done online. And marketing women's clothing and accessories through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube has become a growing trend. Sri Lanka possesses a population of around 21 million, of which 2.8 million are active social media users, which amounts to 14% of the total population (Hewagama, 2015). These statistics provide a fertile ground to practice social media marketing.

This study was conducted to identify whether social media marketing is useful in a developing country like Sri Lanka and whether Sri Lankan females are ready to embrace new modes of communication in order to obtain information provided on social media platforms at the time of making purchase decisions so that it will be of proven worth for business organizations to make attempts to conduct social media marketing campaigns. Within the highly competitive nature of the fashion industry, on the one hand, it is critical to make the customers loyal towards fashion brands with the provision of higher value for money through high-quality products whereas on the other hand, effective communication will ensure reduced time and energy the consumers have to devote to learn about and reach the products. Consumers' brand perception can be identified as one of the key influencing

factors on purchase intentions. A brand may influence customers' perceptions and attitudes in several ways, including brand awareness, perceptions about the image, and preference for the brand (Godey et al., (2016, p. 3). Therefore, this research aims to provide insights into how consumers' perception regarding a particular brand affects the purchase intentions provoked by social media marketing efforts taken by an organization. Further, it profiles the users of social media based on Generations X and Y as it is assumed that most of the middle-aged females in Sri Lanka are not active users of social media and demonstrate more reliance on traditional marketing methods with regard to clothing and accessories. It is worth identifying dissimilarities shown about social media marketing based on age.

This study is significant in numerous ways. Sri Lankan apparel industry is one of the highest foreign currency earning sectors. It is evident that there is a high level of demand for Sri Lankan apparel due to the new normal and the restricted imports in the recent past. Suppose Sri Lankan retailers can expand their scope by directly offering their products to Sri Lankan consumers. In that case, undoubtedly Sri Lanka can earn more foreign currency through the elimination of foreign merchants. Social media, as a highly effective mode of communication, has the ability to bridge geographical barriers and are ideal for this scenario. The findings of this study can be used to invest in such initiatives.

Among various social media platforms available, this study only focused on social media marketing activities carried out on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and only on the category clothing and accessories relating to females such as sunglasses, jewelry and handbags. Females aged between 18 and 55 were selected for the study. The aforementioned age range facilitates the comparison between generations X and Y. The data was gathered from the Western province, which is the most populated province in Sri Lanka.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Social Media :** Social media have become one of the essential aspects in the day-to-day lives of hundreds of millions of internet users worldwide (Akar&Topçu, 2011). Pereira Correia, García Medina, Fabiola González Romo, and Contreras-Espinosa (2014) state that the need for socialization and the sense of belongingness to a community are the primary motivators for participation in social media. Social media is a group of applications that operate based on the internet, which provides users the ability to create and exchange content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As per Thackeray et al. (2008), the content generated, created, organized, and shared on social media is under the control of its consumers. Erdoğan and Çiçek (2012) state that Social Media applications are participatory, collaborative, knowledge sharing and user-empowering. There are different social media forms such as social networking sites, photo sharing sites, microblogging tools, social tagging, newsreaders, and content community sites (Akar&Topçu, 2011). As per Pereira Correia et al. (2014) survival of a business organization heavily depends on its socialization level. Social media acts as a revolutionary trend that entices corporates to participate in the online world and allows business organizations to engage in direct and real-time communication with customers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). With similar sentiments, Wang, Yu, and Wei (2012) state that social media facilitates increased interactivity, opening new horizons to improve relationships. Forms of social media useful for business organizations comprise blogs, company-sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer product or service rating websites, and forums. Internet discussion boards and forums, moblogs (sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs), and social networking sites also provide enormous potential for business organizations (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Bolton et al. (2013) identify Social Media as a source of market intelligence. Similarly, Park and Cho (2012) also point that the importance of social media as a source of information is relatively high due to its continuous growth and increased participation. Further, according to Pookulangara and Koesler (2011), social media enables organizations to keep track of customer sentiment and customer service problems. Effective use of social media can become a potential competitive advantage as organizations can maintain connections through innovative and unique techniques (Pereira Correia et al., 2014).

**Social Media Marketing :** Pereira Correia et al. (2014) emphasize that the present-day marketing activities are far more extensive compared with traditional marketing activities and have brought massive changes for consumers, markets, etc. According to them, a new marketing model has been created through an electronic flow of real-time information and connects with a wider audience of consumers. An important role is played by continuous communication, along with technology and other factors. Marketers are learning how to incorporate Social Media as an element in the marketing strategies and campaigns of organizations to successfully attract and please customers (Akar and Topçu, 2011).

Social media marketing communications demonstrate social connectivity and user interactivity, facilitating relationships between business organizations and consumers (Chi, 2011). It is phenomenal that relationships with

customers can be maintained even at the individual level based on social media (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). It is also possible to perform integrated marketing activities on social media platforms with less effort and low cost (Kim & Ko, 2012). As per Mangold and Faulds (2009), consumers recognize Social Media as a reliable source of information and place higher emphasis than traditional corporate-sponsored marketing. There can be different forms of social media marketing, such as product/service advertising, reviews, public relations activities, and social media brand communities. Advertising based on social media has become a grown phenomenon (Chi, 2011). According to Park and Cho (2012), reviews through the internet would impact preferences towards products and brands effectively. Further, according to them, consumers provide reviews on various products by posting their opinions on social media forums and personal experiences are shared on social media providing tips and advice on the usage and quality of products and news regarding trends. Business organizations also proclaim their public relations activities through social media platforms.

Through brand communities, brands and consumers interact with each other irrespective of time, location, and mode of communication, enabling them to develop new products, services, and values collaboratively (Kim & Ko, 2012). According to Hutter et al. (2013), some consumers demonstrate commitment towards brand pages due to their activities and psychological involvement with particular brands. From previous studies, Felix et al. (2017) have identified that the impact that can be created through social media marketing depends on the industry and the type of the product. According to Thomas, Peters and Tolson (as cited in Park & Cho, 2012), fashion and apparel shopping is suggested as one of the most popular discussion topics on Social Media. Through this platform, apparel retailers can obtain direct feedback from consumers while monitoring online communities' discussions on Social Media. According to such organizations strengthen the relationships between the brands and the consumers (Touchette, Schanski, & Lee, 2015).

**Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intentions :** Akar and Topçu (2011) have identified that the recent times demonstrate a growing trend of consumers seeking information on the internet to rationalize their purchase decisions. As Pookulangara and Koesler (2011) identified, social media has facilitated consumers to 'social shop' on online platforms. It has transformed the consumer decision-making process from the research stage to the post-purchase evaluation stage. With similar sentiments, Wang et al. (2012) state that interactions with friends influence consumer behavior including Purchase Intentions, family, through messages relating to positive and negative experiences, reviews, comments, suggestions, or discussions. As per Hutter et al. (2013), purchase decisions are highly influenced by social media communications. The study conducted by Kim and Ko (2010) indicates that consumers generate purchase intentions while sharing information and opinions with other consumers or with the brand itself on Social Media.

**Use of Social Media according to Age: Analysis between Generations X and Y :** Generation X is highly centered around media forms such as radio, TV, films, and the Internet and has proven to be regular patronizers of the internet (Leung, 2013). According to Stephen and Galak (2012), social media was once dominated by the younger generation, who quickly adopted new technologies. However, in recent experience, Social Media is adopted by a more extensive demographic range. Leung (2013) states that Generation Y is comfortable with and enthusiastic about social media platforms as they are considered to be very much familiar with technology than any other generation. However, as Bolton et al. (2013) identified, their addiction hugely influences this generation's social media to use the internet.

**Social Media Marketing and Brand Perception on Purchase Intentions :** Hutter et al. (2013, p. 342) state that brands play an important role in consumer decision making and guide consumers in the process of making a purchase decision. The probability of purchasing a particular product is amplified by a positive attitude towards a brand (Akar & Topçu, 2011). According to Kim and Ko (2010), brands and customers communicate with each other based on social media without any restrictions on time, place, or mode of communication, often leading to close attention and even affection toward brands (Kim & Ko, 2012). Positive effects can be observed concerning brand awareness and purchase intentions due to social media interactions carried out, proving the relevance of social media interactions in contributing to brands' management (Hutter et al., 2013). Giving another viewpoint, Kietzmann et al. (2011) state that brand related communications on Social Media platforms can occur with or without the business organizations' control. Further, marketing-related communication on Social Media platforms is mixed with perceptions that are held regarding the brand by different parties rather than the business organization passing information relating to a specific brand (Erdoğan & Çiçek, 2012). Consumers are sensitive towards brands and trends relating to clothing and accessories (Park & Cho, 2012). Interactions on social media platforms result in creating word-of-mouth effects especially relating to fashion and its trends (Kim & Ko, 2012). Therefore, it can be said that interactions on social media platforms relating to clothing and accessory brands affect perceptions held regarding brands and eventually impact purchase intentions.

**Hypothesis Development :** Through activities such as creating relationships with other users, receiving customized services from business organizations, and contents and reviews published on social media, purchase intentions are enhanced (Kim & Ko, 2010). With similar sentiments, Wang et al. (2012) state that customers learn attitudes and Purchase behaviors through communication on social media. As per the study conducted by Kim and Ko (2010) on the impacts of luxury fashion brands' social media marketing on customer relationship and purchase intention, a positive effect is created on Purchase Intentions through social media marketing. Therefore, to identify the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories, this hypothesis has been proposed. H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories. According to Hutter et al. (2013) consumer decision-making process is considerably influenced by brands. Perceptions held regarding a brand can be identified to be long lasting, and a positive assessment strengthens favorable behavior towards the brand (Spears & Singh, 2004). As per the study conducted by Chen-Yu, Cho, and Kincade (2016), brand perception and brand repurchase intent in online apparel shopping affects purchase intentions on online platforms. Therefore, to identify the moderating effect of brand perception on the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories this hypothesis has been proposed.

H<sub>2</sub>: Consumers' brand perception moderates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories.

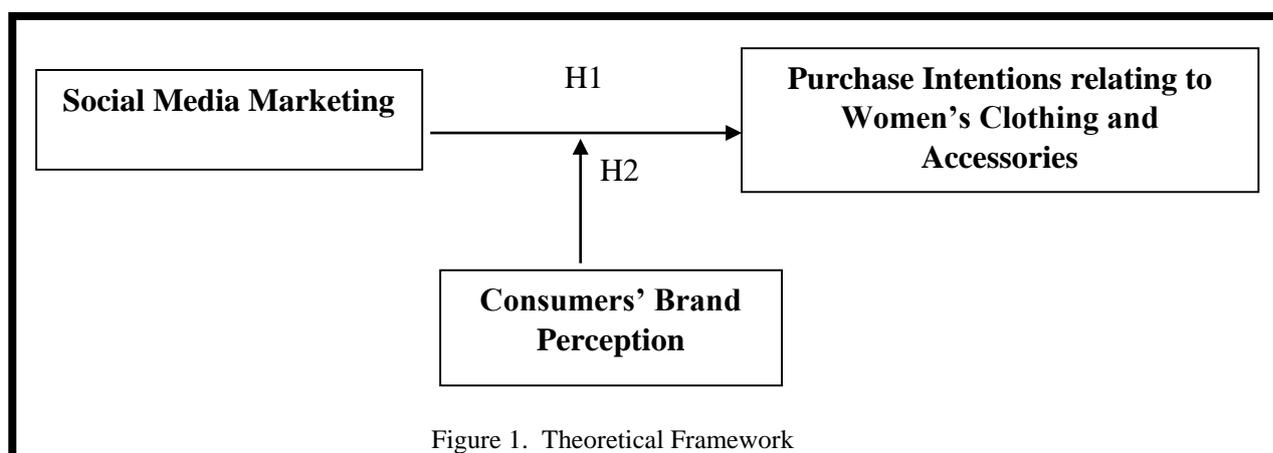


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

### III. RESEARCH METHOD

**Sample and Procedure :** Males and females demonstrate different levels of involvement in clothing. Females consider clothing as a focal point of their lives, thus indicating a higher level of involvement in responding to advertisements on clothing and purchasing and wearing Clothing (O' Cass, 2000). The sample population for the study was Sri Lankan females from the Western province (Gampaha, Colombo, and Kalutara districts), which is the most populated province in Sri Lanka. The sample selected was aged between 18 and 55. This age range facilitates the analysis between Generations X as the study intends to identify whether age could influence the results as suggested by previous studies such as Y. O' Cass (2000). A survey strategy was used to collect data for the study. A pilot survey was carried out to refine the questionnaire to ensure that the questionnaire was well structured and the questions were clear and not repeated. A total of 15 copies of the printed questionnaire were distributed among five persons from Generation X and ten persons from Generation Y. It was identified that an average time of nine and a half minutes was required to fill the questionnaire. Respondents made suggestions on the clarity and suitability of the questions, the questionnaire structure, and changes were made accordingly. An online questionnaire was created through Google forms to gather data, since it was inexpensive and had the potential for wider and quick reach. The respondents were provided with the convenience of answering the online questionnaire at any time within the stipulated period of three weeks. Data gathered were quantitative and were analyzed using SPSS to identify significance, correlations, and degree of association between and among variables under this study. A convenience sampling method was utilized, and during the data cleansing, stage 150 responses out of 179 responses were chosen for the final study, ensuring that Generation X is represented by a minimum of 40% of the sample and Generation Y is represented by a maximum of 60% of the sample.

**Measure Development :** At the beginning of the questionnaire, a screening question was used to eliminate respondents who do not follow clothing and accessory brands on social media. The questionnaire consisted of six

sections. Sections 1,2 and 3 consisted of multiple-choice questions on personal information, social media usage, and respondent’s purchases relating to clothing and accessories. Section 4, 5, and 6 consisted of questions on behavior and perceptions pertaining to Social Media Marketing, Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intentions and Consumers’ Brand Perception and Purchase Intentions. Positively worded questions and one open-ended question were presented in the sections mentioned above. Further, the measurement scale used was a 1-5 point Likert scale, an interval scale, and a widely used technique for measuring attitudes (Ranasinghe & Fonseka, 2011). The scale included responses ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Section 4, which included questions relating to social media marketing, was operationalized using indicators relating to following/monitoring social media, using social media, knowledge on social media, attitudes towards marketing with social media, and being affected by the internet and social media. Ten measures were derived under the indicators mentioned above. These indicators have been researched and presented by Akar and Topçu (2011). In Section 5, questions relating to social media marketing on purchase intentions were operationalized using indicators relating to entertainment, customization, interaction, word of mouth and trend. Five measures were derived under the indicators mentioned above. These indicators have been researched and presented by Kim and Ko (2010). Section 6 started with an open-ended question on the most frequently purchased clothing and accessory brand followed on social media, followed by questions relating to consumers’ brand perception, which were operationalized using indicators relating to brand experience, Brand image-congruence, brand affect and brand trust. Seven measures were derived under the indicators mentioned above. These items have been researched and presented by Chen-Yu et al. (2016). The reliability test indicated an alpha score of 0.871, which pointed out higher internal consistency in all scales.

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Data gathered were analyzed using SPSS 16.0 using correlation analyses, simple regression analysis, multiple regression analysis, and moderated regression analysis. Descriptive statistics revealed that 41.3% of the participants belonged to Generation X, whereas the remaining amounting to 58.7% of the participants belonged to Generation Y. Among them, 22.7% of the respondents hold a professional qualification, whereas 34.7% have a Bachelor’s degree. More than 75% of the respondents are employed. Thus, it can be assumed that most of them are not dependent and can afford their clothes and accessories. Half (50%) of the Respondents have an average monthly income of more than 45,000, indicating a considerable level of spending capacity on clothing and accessories. More than 75% of the respondents use both personal computers and mobile devices to access social media. Further, it was evident that no respondent access social media only through personal computers. This gives great insight for those who develop social media applications, especially when certain features facilitate effective communication and such features are provided through specific applications. The responses received to confirm that Sri Lankan females are active users of social media. more than 45% of the respondents spend more than 4 hours on social media every week. It was evident that more than 75% of the respondents make clothing and accessory purchases at least once in two months. More than 95% of the respondents preferred purchasing clothing and accessories through a physical store. More than 85% of the respondents demonstrated a behavior where they utilize information published through social media marketing campaigns to search regarding trends and latest styles offered by retailers and do not engage in online transactions but prefer to visit physical stores to make purchases. The majority of the respondents were willing to spend a considerable amount of money on clothing and accessories encouraging retailers to carry out frequent marketing campaigns to inform their offerings. The responses justified that regular social media marketing campaigns are required to induce purchases since the consumers are willing to spend a considerable amount of money.

TABLE 1  
*Summary of sections 1,2 and 3 of the questionnaire.*

	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Participation to the study according to Generation	Generation X	62	41.3
	Generation Y	88	58.7
Demographic Characteristics	Advanced Level Examination	4	2.7
	Certificate Level	5	3.3
	Highest level of Education (1 year or less than 1 year of study)	41	27.3
	Diploma Level (1-2 years of study)	34	22.7
	Professional Qualification		

	Bachelor's Degree	52	34.7
	Master's Degree	10	6.7
	Law or Medical Degree	4	2.7
	Student/ Undergraduate	34	22.7
	Intern/ Trainee	34	22.7
	Team Leader	6	4.0
Occupational level	Non-Executive	7	4.7
	Executive	31	20.7
	Manager	34	22.7
	Lawyer	1	.7
	Doctor	3	2.0
Level of Income	Below Rs. 15,000	46	30.7
	Rs. 15,000 -Rs. 29,999	20	13.3
	Rs. 30,000-Rs. 44,999	9	6.0
	Rs. 45,000-Rs. 59,999	11	7.3
	Rs. 60,000-Rs.74, 999	4	2.7
	Rs. 75,000 and above	60	40.0
Mode of Access	Mobile device	36	24.0
	Both Mobile device and PC	114	76.0
Social Media Usage	Average timespent on Social Media		
	Less than 1 hour	13	8.7
	1-2 hours	34	22.7
	2-3 hours	17	11.3
	3-4 hours	16	10.7
	More than 4 hours	70	46.7
Frequency of purchasing Clothes and Accessories	Regularly (more than once a month)	38	25.3
	Often (Once in 2 months)	75	50.0
	Occasionally (During festive seasons)	30	20.0
	Rarely	7	4.7
Preferred mode of purchasing Clothes and Accessories	Through a physical store	143	95.3
	Online	7	4.7
Response to Social Media Marketing campaigns	I mostly use it for purchasing	5	3.3
	I mostly use it for searching information	129	86.0
	I just use it to pass time	16	10.7
Spending on Clothing and Accessories on a monthly basis	Less than Rs. 5,000	83	55.3
	Rs. 5,000 - Rs. 10,000	65	43.3
	Rs. 10,000 - Rs. 15,000	1	.7
	More than Rs. 15,000	1	.7

## V. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

**H1: there is a positive relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories.**

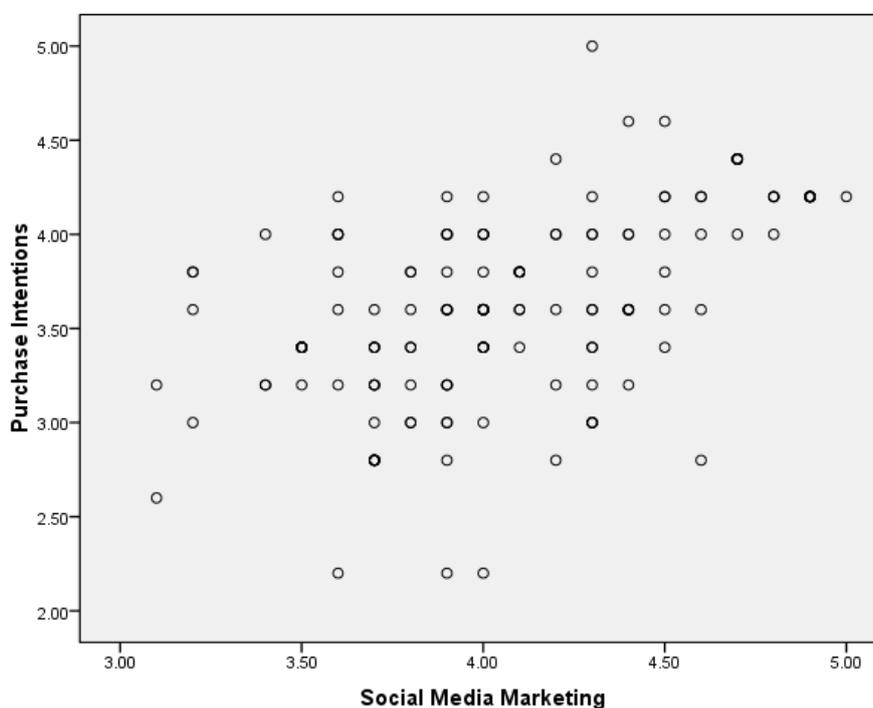
Pearson Correlation Analysis revealed a significant association (at 0.01 level) between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories. The correlation is 0.533; hence there is a positive and moderate relationship. The simple regression analysis indicated an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> which depicted that 28% of the variation in purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories is explained by social media marketing. The Durban Watson value of 1.639 indicates the goodness of fit of the model if applied to another sample. The F value, calculated through ANOVA, is greater than 10 with a significance value (P value) of 0. Hence the validity or the significance of the estimated regression line between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories could be established. As per regression coefficients, the coefficient of social media marketing is significant at 1% level. Social media marketing with a

regression coefficient of 0.616 contributes towards explaining the variation of purchase intentions relating to women’s clothing and accessories.

TABLE 2  
Summary of statistical results relating to H1

		Purchase Intentions relating to Women’s Clothing and Accessories				
Pearson Correlation		Pearson Correlation	<b>.533</b>			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	Social Media Marketing	N	150			
Simple Regression Analysis		R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson	
		.285	<b>.280</b>	.43661	1.639	
ANOVA		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	11.222	1	11.222	<b>58.865</b>	.000
	Residual	28.213	148	.191		
	Total	39.435	149			
Regression Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
	(Constant)	1.110	.329		3.375	.001
	Social Media Marketing	<b>.616</b>	.080	.533	7.672	.000

As per the scatter plot, it is evident that there is a positive relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women’s clothing and accessories. Further, it is evident that there is no heteroscedasticity.



**H2: Consumers’ brand perception moderates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women’s clothing and accessories.** The Durban Watson value of 1.784 derived through the moderated regression analysis indicated the goodness of fit of the model if it is applied to another sample. The F value identified through ANOVA is greater than 10 with a significance value (P value) of 0, hence the validity or the significance of the estimated regression line between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women’s clothing and accessories, moderated by consumers’ brand Perception can be established.

Based on the significance value of 0.002 as per moderated regression coefficients, it can be said that the coefficient of the moderator is significant and consumers’ brand perception acts as a moderator between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women’s clothing and accessories. Further, the variance inflation factor (vif) under collinearity statistics depicted that the independent variables are not highly correlated. Hence there is no multicollinearity. The Multiple Regression Analysis carried out indicated a positive influence of 0.264 by consumers’ brand perception on the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women’s clothing and accessories.

TABLE 3  
Summary of statistical results relating to H2

Simple Regression Analysis		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson	
		.614	.377	.364	.41023	1.784	
Analysis of Variances		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Regression		14.865	3	4.955	<b>29.442</b>	.000 <sup>a</sup>	
Residual		24.570	146	.168			
Total		39.435	149				
Moderated Regression Coefficients		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance VIF
(Constant)		.556	.336		1.657	.100	
Consumers’ Brand Perception		.272	.076	.264	3.587	.000	.785 1.273
Social Media Marketing		.511	.086	.442	5.961	.000	.775 1.291
Moderator		-.099	.032	-.204	-3.078	<b>.002</b>	.975 1.025
Multiple Regression Analysis		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)		.671	.343			1.958	.052
Social Media Marketing		.479	.087	.415		5.473	.000
Consumers’ Brand Perception		<b>.264</b>	.078	.257		3.393	.001

**Relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intentions: Analysis Between Generations X and Y :** There is a significant correlation of 0.684 between social media marketing and purchase intentions concerning generation Y, and a regression coefficient of 0.698 can be identified. On the other hand, there is a significant correlation of 0.435 between social media marketing and purchase intentions concerning Generation X with a regression coefficient of 0.549. Based on the above statistics, it is evident that the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions and the level of purchase intentions relating to women’s clothing and accessories affected by social media marketing concerning Generation Y is higher.

TABLE4  
Correlation and Regression Coefficients of Generations X and Y

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
Generation Y	(Constant)	.758	.397		1.909	.061
	Social Media Marketing	<b>.698</b>	.096	<b>.684</b>	7.256	.000
Generation X	(Constant)	1.394	.499		2.794	.006
	Social Media Marketing	<b>.549</b>	.123	<b>.435</b>	4.478	.000

## VI. DISCUSSION

This study tested two hypotheses to identify a relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories and determine whether consumers' brand perception moderates the relationship above. In addition to that, an analysis was carried out to identify differences in generations X and Y in responding to social media marketing. The effect of social media marketing on purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories is moderate and positive as the correlation between the two variables is 0.533. Further, through the regression analysis, a 1% increase in the level of social media marketing campaigns carried out would increase by an increase of 0.616% with respect to purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories. These findings support prior findings of Hutter et al. (2013), where it was identified that social media is a viable mode of marketing and social media activities positively affect consumer decision-making process. Similar to the findings of Kim and Ko (2010) and Godey et al. (2016), this study also identified that elements such as: entertainment, customization, interaction, word of mouth and trend included in social media marketing campaigns have positive influences on purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories.

Consumers' brand perception moderates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories as it was identified that consumers' brand perception with a regression coefficient of 0.264 exert an influence on the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories. These findings support the findings of the study conducted by Chen-Yu et al. (2016) where it was identified that consumers' brand perception has a positive influence over purchase intentions relating to apparel. It was evident that brand experience and brand affect have a highly positive impact over purchase intentions. Trust towards fashion brands positively affect social media marketing efforts made to arouse purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories. Findings relating to brand image-congruence are similar to the study conducted by Giovannini et al. (2015).

There is a significant effect of social media marketing on purchase intentions of generation X relating to women's clothing and accessories since it was identified that there is a correlation of 0.435 between social media marketing and purchase intentions with respect to Generation X. Further, through the regression analysis it was identified that 1% increase in social media marketing results in an increase of 0.549% for purchase intentions relating to women's clothing and accessories. However, social media marketing is relatively lesser compared with generation Y as there is a significant effect of social media marketing on purchase intentions of generation Y relating to women's clothing and accessories as there is a significant correlation of 0.684 between social media marketing and purchase intentions with respect to Generation Y. Further, through the regression analysis it was identified that 1% increase in Social Media Marketing results in an increase of 0.698% in Purchase Intentions relating to Women's Clothing and Accessories.

These findings are consistent with the findings of the study carried out by Leung (2013). Further, the relatively higher effect can be justified based on Brosdahl and Carpenter (2011) study where it was identified that consumers belonging to generation Y enjoy shopping at a greater degree than other generations. Therefore, it can be said that a higher degree of responsiveness towards Social Media Marketing campaigns is demonstrated by generation Y, and similar to the findings of Pereira Correia et al. (2014) younger generations follow social media at a higher level to learn about products and services replacing other communication tools.

## VII. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study provide valuable insights to social media marketers in the fashion industry. Since social media marketing demonstrates distinctive characteristics, it is advisable to develop effective social media

marketing strategies with special emphasis on aspects such as the nature of the industry, type of products/services offered, nature of the consumer and image of the brand maintained. Further, amongst numerous social media platforms, the most appropriate platforms should be chosen for the purpose of marketing and emphasis should be given on factors that are proven to be important when marketing with social media. Since consumers are willingly and regularly use social media, the marketers should take advantage of this. Therefore, content should be published on social media in a manner to stimulate visitors desire to learn more about a product or think more about the product category, whether by highlighting the values of their offerings, the commonalities between the reviewer and the reader, or the need for empathy with the reviewer (Wang et al., 2012). Further, companies' social media accounts should be user-friendly to attract and retain customers. Activities enabled by Social Media such as creating relationships with other users, publishing content, providing customized services, and obtaining feedback regarding products/services provided (Kim & Ko, 2010) should be characterized with entertainment to simulate purchase intentions. All interactions on social media should be customized to ensure higher consumer engagement. Further, content published should be frequently updated, especially with regard to marketing products such as clothing and accessories. Since social media marketing is relatively more effective among Generation Y, the marketers should focus on unique attributes of this Generation when creating marketing campaigns so that tailored social media marketing campaigns would be more effective and highly capable of inducing consumes of Generation Y.

To maintain 'brand-image congruence' organizations should develop products that fulfill physical as well as psychological needs of the consumers (Chen-Yu, Cho, & Kincade, 2016) and market such offerings on social media platforms in such a manner where the consumer easily understand that best possible options are offered to them. Measures should be taken to build trust between followers of social media marketing campaigns especially with regard to reviews as trust is vital to maintain strong and long lasting relationships with customers.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Social media marketing provides a good platform to market for women's clothing and accessories. Consumers acknowledge that marketing campaigns take place on social media platforms and demonstrate a favorable attitude towards social media campaigns. Further, their purchase decisions are influenced mainly by communication on social media platforms. Social media also provides a considerable level of interaction and sharing of information among other users. By familiarizing the brand before purchasing or building on brand image, the local brands will influence the customers, particularly the Y generation, to improve sales. The results of this study should be interpreted with several limitations in mind. The study was carried out with a sample of 150 respondents only from the Western province. A better analysis can be done through a sample with a higher number of respondents and the representation of all nine provinces in Sri Lanka to generate generalizable findings. The study was conducted based on women. Therefore, additional studies can be undertaken to identify the viability of social media marketing campaigns directed towards men. It would enable to identify any variance in the effect of social media marketing based on gender. Out of the various Social Media platforms available, this study only focuses on social media marketing activities carried out on Social Networking Sites, Blogging Tools, and Content Communities. Further research can be carried out to identify the effect of social media marketing on platforms such as Photo Sharing Sites, Social Tagging, Newsreaders etc. Future research can also be directed towards identifying what kind of social media marketing campaigns should be carried out in order to positively and highly affect purchase intentions especially relating to women's clothing and accessories. Further, studies can be directed towards exploring the post-interaction behavior of consumers with social media marketing campaigns.

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