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"Excavate" The Impact of Word of Mouth Towards the Intention to Purchase Mobile Phone Among Older Consumers

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Abstract

Mobile phones in modern times are a 'must have' item in keeping up with the latest happenings. Internal and external influences can however impact consumers' intention to purchase a mobile phone. This paper aims to investigate the impact of word of mouth (WOM) towards older consumers' purchase intention for mobile phones. Literature indicated that older consumers are vulnerable to this sort of influence especially when they deemed the content of advertising messages originated from a credible source. Furthermore, emotional appeal messages are influential in the behavioural purchase intention of the older population compared to the younger population due to the limited time perceived by older consumers and their decreased cognitive abilities. Primary data in this study is collected by a self-administered questionnaire involving 180 respondents selected through the simple random sampling approach. The sample population was all pre-determined to be aged above 50 years old. Analyses of data collection were done using SPSS to test the proposed hypotheses. Findings from this study aid marketer with their marketing campaigns for mobile phones with an enhanced understanding of the older consumer segment which possesses higher disposable income and purchasing power.

Keywords: mobile phone, older consumers, purchase intention, word of mouth

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INTRODUCTION

The mobile phone industry continues to evolve together with rapid technological advancement. In recent years, the industry has managed to become the fastest-growing communication sector ("All about the cell phone industry," 2016). Thomes (2015) credited the growth of the mobile phone industry to the population increase and urbanization development in developing countries such as Latin America, Asia Pacific, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa. In the current mobile phone industry, consumers are saturated with a variety of product options that they can choose from. The saturation according to Epstein (2016) compelled mobile phone companies to seek alternative marketing strategies to differentiate their products from competitors. Consumers, therefore, are vulnerable to different marketing strategies adopted by mobile phone companies. Bughin, Doogan, & Vetvik (2010) however warned that consumers might become overwhelmed by the availability of various product options. Consumers particularly those aged 60 years old and above are projected to grow in numbers. United Nations (2015) projected that such numbers will exceed 2 Billion by 2050. Regarding marketing, the elderly prefer to use interpersonal resources over mass media resources to gain product information (Tongren, 1988). They put more value on product information that is personally recommended as the information gained is independent of any product company. In the United States, a study by Pew Research Center discovered that 77% of senior adults have mobile phones in 2014 as compared to 69% in 2012 (Smith, 2014). The increased percentage of mobile phone consumers demonstrated their purchasing power and the prosperous business opportunities that marketers should take note of. This study shall thus focus on the intention of purchasing mobile phones among older consumers in response to the growing elderly population

Research Gaps

Parallel to the mobile phone industry, the practice of marketing also continues to evolve with time hence traditional marketing strategies might not be effective as they used to be. This study instead suggests the adoption of word of mouth (WOM) as a suitable alternative strategy to market mobile phones. In a survey on WOM, Marketing Association and American Marketing Association reported that 64% of marketers found WOM marketing more effective than traditional marketing (Asada & Yong, 2016). Nevertheless, studies that are dedicated to examining how WOM impacts consumer's purchasing intention are lacking even though there are studies on the relationship between WOM and consumer behaviour (e.g. Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2013; Maxham, 2001; Van Vaerenbergh, Lariviere, & Vermeir, 2012). Such impact is more obscure towards the elderly's intent to purchase.

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Furthermore, Fung & Carstensen (2003), Tongren (1988) and Wolfe (2005) concluded that preferential difference towards advertising strategies between the older and younger population exists. It is thus imperative to study emerging marketing strategies such as WOM to cater for the purchase intention of the older population. Asada & Yong (2016) recommended that such a study should emphasise factors that determine the impact of WOM. In particular, the tie strength between sender and recipient should be included as a moderating variable as its inclusion would further shed light on the relationship between WOM and consumer behaviour (Baker, Donthu, & Kumar, 2016; Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). In this study, the impact of WOM towards the intention to purchase mobile phones among older consumers is examined. The study will also examine the role of tie strength in moderating the relationship between WOM and purchasing intention of the elderly.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

This study adopts the theory of reasoned action and complements it with Aristotle's rhetoric theory. Kennedy (2006) explained that the theory of reasoned action concerns the impact of subjective norms towards purchasing intention. Hence, the consumer's intent to purchase can be impacted by WOM though the degree of impact is dependent on others' opinions that the consumer value. Meanwhile, Aristotle's rhetoric theory already concerns the impact of WOM on consumers' purchase intention. Sweeney, Soutar & Mozzarol (2012) however emphasised that Aristotle's rhetoric theory is more focused on the quality of the message delivered through WOM. Besides that, another theory is integrated into the study's theoretical framework since this study involves the purchasing intention of older consumers. The theory; of selective optimisation with compensation (SOC) was developed by Paul B. Baltes and Margret M. Baltes. Johnson & Mutchler (2013) explained that SOC concerns life choices made by strategizing to select available outcomes according to their chronological age and in return optimising personal enjoyment while compensating for circumstances caused by old age.

Older Consumers' Purchase Intention

Chang & Wildt (1994) and Spears & Singh (2004) defined purchase intention as the tendency of personal action towards a certain brand. The intent to purchase however can be influenced by others. Tsai, Chin & Chen (2010) clarified that others' influence whether intentional or not, affects consumer behaviour as consumers are inclined to trust those important to them. Today's older population act upon their purchasing intent when there are possible benefits gained from the purchase (Szimigin & Carrigan, 2001). Most elderly nonetheless have difficulties fully comprehending technological products such as mobile phones

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due to their decreased cognitive abilities. They are often labelled as 'latecomers' in adopting new technologies compared to the younger population though recent studies suggest that the label might not reflect reality. The elderly are prone to adopt technological innovation that eases daily life transactions such as electronic fund transfers. The elderly also are more persuaded by advertising messages that provoke their emotions rather than informative and rational ones (Williams & Drolet, 2005). Older consumers, therefore, act upon their purchasing intention once they have considered their ulterior objectives, cognitive abilities and the personal gain from such purchase.

Source Credibility: Expertise and Trustworthiness

The content of WOM messages is more credible if the delivery is made by an expert. Yoon, Kim & Kim (1998) regard someone as an expert when they can make correct assertions. Determining whether someone possesses the expertise required nevertheless remains subjective. Gotlieb & Sarel (1991) and Sweeney, Soutar & Mazzarol (2014) determine someone possessing a high degree of expertise based on their knowledge and competency. Meanwhile, Schiffman, O'Cass, Paladino & Carlson (2013) consider their occupation and social training in regarding someone as an expert. Experts thus are deemed to know about a product better than others and their WOM messages are perceived as useful in consumers' purchasing deliberation. Such expertise holds more weight in product adoption as the purchase intention involved risks that are unfamiliar to the consumer (Lim & Chung, 2014). Hence, the possibility that consumers regard WOM messages come from a credible source is likely. Ohanian (1990a) though emphasized that acceptance of the message content is reliant on how much trust the recipient has towards the sender. Trustworthiness implies the confidence level of the consumer that the information delivered is honest, sincere, fair and honourable (Chu & Kamal, 2008; Ohanian, 1990b and Priester & Petty, 2003). Any instances that might jeopardize consumer confidence should be avoided. Expertise and trustworthiness therefore could sway consumers' perception of the credibility of WOM messages and subsequently influence the impact towards consumers' purchase intention. The following are the hypothesized relationships between source credibility and purchase intention.

H_{1a}: The expertise of word-of-mouth sources is positively related to older consumers' purchase intention toward the mobile phone.

H_{1b}: The trustworthiness of word-of-mouth sources is positively related to older consumers' purchase intention toward the mobile phone.

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Word of Mouth (WOM) Message: Richness and Advocacy

Valence with the influence of WOM messages according to Anderson (1998) varies as positive WOM is related to pleasant experiences while negative WOM is related to unpleasant experiences. Such influence is affected by the content richness and advocacy strength of the message delivered by WOM. Sweeney et al. (2012) described the richness of message content as the depth in which the message is considered informative to the recipient while the strength of advocacy is how strong of an impact is perceived when the message is delivered. The delivery of WOM messages can be through several means of communication in writing and verbally. The richest mean however is face-to-face communication as it enables direct message delivery through two-way communication (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987). In terms of advertising, the narrative message regarding product information is considered to be the best option by Adaval & Wyerjr (1998), Padgett & Allen (1997) and Phillips & McQuarrie (2010). The message delivered through this sort of WOM communication is more persuasive as it is based on fact instead of fabricated by the sender. WOM persuasiveness is influenced by how the message is delivered to recipients. Sweeney, Soutar & Mazzarol (2008) asserted that WOM messages that are delivered with strength and enthusiasm are more significantly perceived by both the sender and recipient. The delivery of WOM messages nonetheless mostly involves non-verbal communication such as body language and vocal tone (Gabbott & Hogg, 2000; Sweeney et al., 2008; Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2013). Non-verbal communication further influences the elderly's purchase intention as they prioritize fulfilling emotional and social goals due to their perceived limited time. The following are the hypothesized relationships between WOM messages and purchase intention.

H_{2a}: The richness of WOM message content is positively related to older consumers' purchase intention toward the mobile phone.

H_{2b}: The strength of advocacy of WOM is positively related to older consumers' purchase intention of the mobile phone.

Tie Strength as Moderator

Brown & Reingen (1987) revealed that messages delivered through WOM communication all involved social relationships. Specifically, the relationship is between the message sender and the information recipient. In this study, the tie strength of a such relationship is looked at according to Baker et al. (2016)'s classification of strong ties and weak ties. Strong ties imply that the relationship is significant whereby it involves frequent interaction with those close to the message recipient such as friends and family. Baker et al. (2016) deemed

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that WOM message from strong ties possesses a higher degree of trust as the message source is more credible. Strong ties also have a greater influence on recipient behaviour as the frequency and perceived importance of social interaction subsequently impact consumers' purchase intention (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Chu & Kim, 2011). Meanwhile, weak ties imply that the relationship is non-significant whereby it involves less frequent interaction with acquaintances or strangers. Weak ties nevertheless have a role in information dissemination as any delivered information is considered novel despite its infrequent interaction and untrusted sources. The following are the hypothesized relationships between tie strength and purchase intention.

H_{3a}: Tie strength positively moderate the relationship between the expertise of WOM source and older consumers' purchase intention.

H_{3b}: Tie strength positively moderate the relationship between the trustworthiness of WOM source and older consumers' purchase intention.

H_{3c}: Tie strength positively moderate the relationship between the richness of message content of WOM and older consumers' purchase intention.

H_{3d}: Tie strength positively moderate the relationship between the strength of advocacy of WOM and older consumers' purchase intention.

METHODOLOGY

Since this study is quantitative, empirical data is collected from a questionnaire survey involving 180 respondents. All the questions posed were pilot tested and structured under 6 different categories: purchase intention, sender's expertise, sender's trustworthiness, the richness of the message, the strength of advocacy and tie strength. The questionnaire uses a 7-point Likert scale to quantify feedback given by respondents. The targeted respondents consist of the older population who have or intend to purchase mobile phones. They were approached through simple random sampling. This type of sampling according to Kumar, Talib & Ramayah (2013) enables potential respondents to be drawn from the targeted population on an equal basis of opportunity. The study defines the older population as those aged 50 years old and above (Yoon, Laurent, Fung, Gonzalez, Gutchess, Hedden, Lambert-Pandraud, Mather, Park, Peters & Skurnik, 2005). The study scope was limited to Klang Valley. Sumarjan, Mohd, Mohd, Zurinawati, Mohd, Saiful, Artinah, Bakhtiar, Hafiz & Hanafiah (2013) reckoned the area is among the rapidly growing metropolitan cities in Malaysia with

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approximately 7.2 Million residents. The demographic layout was an ideal area of study considering the time and financial constraints. Once data collection is completed, feedback from the questionnaire survey is compiled and analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software version 21.0. SPSS in this study ensures the reliability and validity of the collected data. The overall process of data analysis involves descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, bivariate correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis and moderation test.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the previous literature' discussion, the following theoretical framework is developed against the hypotheses which assumed the potential effect and influence of the four direct variables which are the sender's expertise, the sender's trustworthiness, the richness of the message, the strength of advocacy and one moderating variable which is tie strength on the older consumers' intention to purchase a mobile phone.

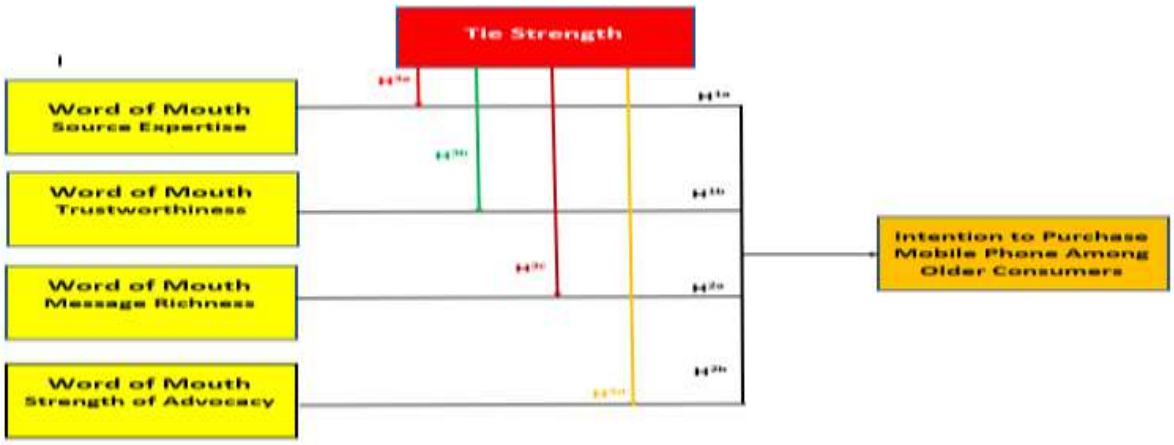


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

Measurements and Reliability Analysis

The reliability analysis was carried out to assess the reliability of the data collected in this study. Results from the analysis indicate that all the study's variables can be accepted as a Cronbach's Alpha of a minimum of 0.7 is considered reliable by Meyers, Gamst & Guarino (2013). As shown in Table 1, the range for Cronbach's Alpha of each variable is between 0.841 to 0.929. Purchase intention has a reliability amount of 0.929, source of expertise of word of mouth is valued at 0.841 and word of mouth source trustworthiness Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.891. As for the richness of the message sent and received from word of

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mouth, the message has a high-reliability value which is 0.923 while the strengths of the message content sent and received from the word of mouth are 0.911. Lastly, the moderator for this study which is the tie strength has a reliability value of 0.915. All variables have a high-reliability value which is considered good and reliable to be scientifically tested in detail using scientific research tools as mentioned before.

The questionnaire designed for this study consist of a series of questions which were developed by credible past researchers. There are five items were adopted from past researchers to measure purchase intention (dependent variable), and four items were adopted to measure the linkage between the source's expertise and older consumers' purchase intention. The source's trustworthiness was measured using five items adopted from the existing researchers while three items consecutively were adopted to measure the richness of message content and the strength of message delivery. Finally, the moderator variable which is tie strength was measured using five items which were also adopted from past studies. Table 1 summarizes the reliability values of each variable as well as the number of items used for this study.

Table 1 Results for Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Purchase intention	0.929	5
Source's expertise	0.841	4
Source's trustworthiness	0.891	5
The richness of message content	0.923	3
Strength of message delivery	0.911	3
Tie Strength	0.915	5

RESULTS

Bivariate Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Results from Bivariate Correlation Analysis

	Source's Expertise	Source's Trustworthiness	The richness of Message Content	Strength Of Message Delivery
Pearson Correlation	.639**	.643**	.582	.314
Purchase Intention Sig. (2-	.000	.000	.000	.000

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tailed) N	180	180	180	180

Pearson correlation is used to assess the correlation and the relationship between the study's variables. Taylor (1990) considers the correlation efficiency of r ≤ 0.35 as a weak or low correlation, 0.36 to 0.67 as a moderate or modest correlation and 0.68 to 1.0 as a high or strong correlation. Results from the analysis as shown in Table 2 imply that the relationship between the source's expertise and purchase intention, the source's trustworthiness and purchase intention and the richness of message content and purchase intention is moderate positive while the relationship between the strength of message delivery and purchase intention is weak positive. Despite the difference in Pearson correlation, the value of Sig. (2-tailed) for all variables is 0.000 which implies that there is a statistically significant correlation between variables at a p-value of less than 0.01

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 3: Results for Results for Multi Linear Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	*-.226*	*.401*		*-.563*	*.574*
Expertise	.483	.121	.368	3.996	.000
Trustworthiness	.308	.156	.236	1.975	.050
The richness of message content	.307	.137	.249	2.240	.026
Strength of advocacy	-.195	.084	-.173	-2.313	.022

Results from the analysis are summarized in Table 3. The value of Beta (β) for expertise, trustworthiness, richness of message content and strength of advocacy implies that the source's expertise has the most impact on the purchasing intention among older consumers. Meanwhile, the t-statistics indicate that the relationship between variables is supported at a confidence interval of t > 1.960 (2-tailed). The results also indicated a significant level of the p-value of less than 1% for expertise (0.000) or 5% for trustworthiness (0.050), the richness of message content (0.026) and strength of advocacy (0.022). These imply that the proposed

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hypotheses; the expertise of WOM source is positively related to consumers' purchase intention (H_{1a}), the trustworthiness of WOM source is positively related to consumers' purchase intention (H_{1b}), the richness of WOM message content is positively related to consumers' purchase intention (H_{2a}) and the strength of advocacy of WOM message is positively related to consumers' purchase intention (H_{2b}), are supported.

Moderation Test Analysis

Table 4a: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3a})

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.6429	.4133	1.1701	41.3321	3.0000	176.0000	.0000

Table 4b: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3a})

Model	Coefficient	SE	t	p
Constant	.6371	.7333	.8688	.3861
Tie Strength	-.2156	.2173	-.9924	.3224
Expertise	.8128	.1724	4.7147	.0000
int_1	.0273	.0420	.6512	.5158

Table 4c: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3a})

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
int_1	.0014	.4240	1.0000	176.0000	.5158

Results from the analysis shown in Table 4a indicate that it is a significant model between H_{3a} variables. The results also indicated that 41.33% of the variables are being explained. Results from the analysis shown in Table 4b indicate tie strength as moderating factor between the source's expertise and purchase intention. The results imply that there is a modest relationship between the variables. The p-value was not statistically significant for tie strength at a significant level of 5% and the interaction between tie strength and the source's expertise at a significant level of 5% whilst the p-value was statistically significant for the source's expertise at a significant level of 1%. Results from the analysis shown in Table 4c indicate that there is no significant change when the moderation variable; tie strength is added to the regression analysis. The results also indicate that the p-value of the interaction between moderator or tie strength and predictor variable or source's expertise is not statistically significant as $p > 0.05$. This implies that the proposed hypothesis; tie

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strength positively moderates the relationship between the expertise of WOM sources and older consumers' purchase intention is not supported.

Table 5a: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3b})

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.6503	.4229	1.1511	42.9857	3.0000	176.0000	.0000

Table 5b: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3b})

Model	Coefficient	SE	t	p
Constant	.2236	.7178	.3115	.7558
Tie Strength	-.1079	.2218	-.4867	.6271
Expertise	.9830	.1691	5.8115	.0000
int_1	-.0078	.0419	-.1870	.8519

Table 5c: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3b})

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
int_1	.0001	.0350	1.0000	176.0000	.8519

Results from the analysis shown in Table 5a indicate that it is a significant model between H_{3b} variables. The results also indicated that 42.29% of the variables are being explained. Results from the analysis shown in Table 5b indicate tie strength as moderating factor between the source's trustworthiness and purchase intention. The results imply that there is a modest relationship between the variables. The p-value was not statistically significant for tie strength at a significant level of 5% and the interaction between tie strength and the source's trustworthiness at a significant level of 5% whilst the p-value was statistically significant for the source's trustworthiness at a significant level of 1%. Results from the analysis shown in Table 5c indicate that there is no significant change when the moderation variable; tie strength is added to the regression analysis. The results also indicate that the p-value of the interaction between moderator or tie strength and predictor variable or source's trustworthiness is not statistically significant as $p > 0.05$. This implies that the proposed hypothesis; tie strength positively moderates the relationship between the trustworthiness of WOM sources and older consumers' purchase intention is not supported.

Table 6a: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3c})

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p

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.5900	.3481	1.3002	31.3281	3.0000	176.0000	.0000

Table 6b: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3c})

Model	Coefficient	SE	t	p
Constant	.0819	.7618	.1075	.9145
Tie Strength	.1941	.2117	.9169	.3604
Expertise	1.0130	.2009	5.0431	.0000
int_1	-.0624	.0446	-1.3984	.1637

Table 6c: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3c})

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
int_1	.0072	1.9557	1.0000	176.0000	.1637

Results from the analysis shown in Table 6a indicate that it is a significant model between H_{3c} variables. The results also indicated that 34.81% of the variables are being explained. Results from the analysis shown in Table 6b indicate tie strength as moderating factor between the richness of message content and purchase intention. The results imply that there is a modest relationship between the variables. The p-value was not statistically significant for tie strength at a significant level of 5% and the interaction between tie strength and richness of message content at a significant level of 5% whilst the p-value was statistically significant for the richness of message content at a significant level of 1%. Results from the analysis shown in Table 6c indicate that there is no significant change when the moderation variable; tie strength is added to the regression analysis. The results also indicate that the p-value of the interaction between moderator or tie strength and predictor variable or richness of message content is not statistically significant as $p > 0.05$. This implies that the proposed hypothesis; tie strength positively moderates the relationship between the richness of message content of WOM and older consumers' purchase intention is not supported.

Table 7a: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3d})

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.4378	.1916	1.6122	13.9086	3.0000	176.0000	.0000

Table 7b: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3d})

Model	Coefficient	SE	t	p
Constant	-.0038	.8230	-.0046	.9963

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Tie Strength	.9040	.2074	4.3583	.0000
Expertise	.8307	.2429	3.4197	.0008
int_1	-.1596	.0496	-3.2168	.0015

Table 7c: Results for Moderation Analysis (H_{3d})

	R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p
int_1	.0475	10.3480	1.0000	176.0000	.0015

Results from the analysis shown in Table 7a indicate that it is a significant model between H_{3d} variables. The results also indicated that 19.16% of the variables are being explained. Results from the analysis shown in Table 7b indicate tie strength as moderating factor between the strength of advocacy and purchase intention. The results imply that there is a modest relationship between the variables. The p-value of; tie strength, the strength of advocacy and the interaction between tie strength and strength of advocacy, at a significant level of 1% was statistically significant. Results from the analysis shown in Table 7c indicate that there is a significant change when the moderation variable; tie strength is added to the regression analysis. The results also indicate that the p-value of the interaction between moderator or tie strength and predictor variable or richness of message content is statistically significant as $p > 0.05$. This implies that the proposed hypothesis; tie strength positively moderates the relationship between the strength of advocacy of WOM and older consumers' purchase intention is supported.

DISCUSSION

Discussion on source credibility (expertise and trustworthiness of WOM source).

Findings indicate that the expertise and trustworthiness of WOM sources do impact the intention of purchasing mobile phones among the older population. Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger & Yale (1998), Jun, Cha & Aggarwal (2011) and Martin & Lueg (2013) reasoned that the information provided by experts is persuasive enough as their knowledge and experience are of higher value. The elderly thus is likely to be persuaded to act upon their purchase intention based on any information from messages delivered by those perceived as experts. This is because the delivered message would be more effective in tempting the intention of older consumers towards purchasing as the possibility of them accepting instead of debating any expert's information is higher. A trustworthy source may also affect a consumer's purchase intention. Older consumers in particular emphasize trustworthiness when it comes to communication and the perceived honesty of the message source might prompt

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the elderly to make the purchase. Findings also indicate that tie strength does not moderate the relationships between the source's expertise and older consumers' purchase intention and the source's trustworthiness and older consumers' purchase intention. The elderly value their bond with others even though the depth of such bond might lessen the impact of the source's expertise towards older consumers' purchase intention. Trocchia & Janda (2000) clarified that the elderly are more inclined to change their decision to align themselves with the opinions of others whom they perceived as important. The elderly nevertheless is exposed to risk whenever they put their trust in others as it would mean becoming vulnerable to the actions of others.

Discussion on Word of Mouth (WOM) message (richness and strength of advocacy).

Findings indicate that WOM's message in terms of richness and strength of advocacy does impact the intention of purchasing mobile phones among the older population. Sweeney et al. (2008) consider the content of WOM messages to be rich when it provides informative product details. The provided details in turn might be perceived as credible and persuasive and subsequently affect consumers' behavioural intentions. Sweeney et al. (2008) also consider the strength of advocacy of WOM messages to be significant for the recipient and sender. The strength of advocacy is apparent through the manner of message delivery. WOM message that is positively delivered affects the consumer's perception and as a result, affects their behavioural intention as well. The elderly in particular tend to be more convinced by emotional messages (Fung & Carstensen, 2003). Tie strength for WOM messages indicates opposing findings as tie strength does not moderate the relationship between the richness of message content and older consumers' purchase intention while tie strength does moderate the relationship between the strength of advocacy and older consumers' purchase intention. The elderly tend to rely upon their bonds with others (Jun et al., 2011) whenever information is needed to clarify any uncertainties that arise. Such a tendency however might affect consumers' thought processes depending on the closeness of the consumer with the information provider.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

The population of older consumers is growing in numbers however efforts in marketing mobile phones to them remain lacking. Such efforts are emphasized in this study as the outcomes would be beneficial to both sides, marketers and consumers. Hence, the outcomes of this study aid marketers with their mobile phone campaigns by providing a better understanding of how WOM could impact consumers' purchasing intention particularly among the older population. The outcomes would help enhance the current practice whilst

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developing marketing strategies that take advantage of their new understanding. Moreover, companies' awareness regarding their adopted marketing plan can further be improved by incorporating WOM communication so that their competitive advantage could be sustained in the long run. This study is aimed at understanding the impact of WOM towards the intent to purchase mobile phones among older consumers. The impact is examined through hypothesized relationships and tie strength as a moderator between variables. The study's variables were all related to WOM and consist of the source's expertise, source trustworthiness, richness of message content, strength of advocacy, tie strength and older consumer purchase intention. Data analysis based on empirical collection indicated that all the hypotheses proposed were supported. The support implied that WOM source and message content do have their role to play in influencing the elderly purchasing intent. In terms of tie strength as moderator, the data analyzed supported only one hypothesis which was strong tie does moderate the impact of the strength of advocacy of WOM and the purchase intention of older consumers. The literature revealed that the tendency to be persuaded by advertising appeals that are infused with emotions is higher in older consumers due to their perceived limited time and declining cognitive abilities. Findings suggested that older consumers are more likely to act upon their purchase intention when they received credible recommendations from others whom they trust. The elderly also are inclined to make purchases when the recommendations are rich in informative content. Such recommendations have a strong emotional appeal that attracts the older population's attention. Limitations faced in this study are mainly rooted in the study scope as time and financial constraints affected the data collection process. Hence, future studies should include different age groups and areas to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

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