

The Effects of Social Media Advertising on Consumers' Brand Loyalty: with Special Reference to the Apparel Retailers

Abstract: The apparel industry faces increased competition from newcomers and imports, making it crucial for local companies to maintain brand loyalty. This research aimed to determine the most significant features of social media advertising (informativeness, entertainment, irritation, credibility) that influence apparel consumers' brand loyalty. The findings showed that social media advertising significantly impacts consumer brand loyalty in the Sri Lankan apparel retail industry. There was no significant relationship between informativeness and brand loyalty, but there were significant relationships between entertainment, irritation, and credibility. The data did not support a positive relationship between informativeness and brand loyalty, but entertainment had the greatest impact. The researcher has notified the Sri Lankan apparel retail industry to act on the findings and suggests future research in another industry to determine if these dimensions are correlated with the dependable variable.

Keywords: Social media advertising; Brand loyalty; Apparel retailers; Consumer behavior; Competition; Informativeness; Entertainment; Irritation; Credibility; Brand loyalty

1. INTRODUCTION

In a society based on superior values, individuals are free to choose the things that are most beneficial and valuable for them. This preference can translate into repeat purchases, resulting in loyalty. Brand loyalty is related to a customer's taste and bonding to a brand. The apparel retail industry in Sri Lanka is one of the fastest-growing industries, with an increase in new sales by 2021 and 74.82 million by 2020. The industry faces competition from newcomers and imports of various apparel products, making finding new ways to make loyal customers more important.

To maintain strong brands, businesses must create a unique position in consumers' minds and create their business uniqueness among customers. This uniqueness directly supports the communication between the brand and consumers, creating higher consumer brand loyalty. Social media has become a popular communication channel for organizations in Sri Lanka, with 10.9 million (50.8%) people being internet users and 7.9 million (72.47%) active social media users.

The pandemic in 2020 led to a rise in social media usage in Sri Lanka, with a 1.5 million (+23%) increase between 2020 and 2021. This has allowed businesses and brands to re-evaluate their current and future advertising methods. Social media advertising is a digital marketing communication tool that supports customer communications, collaborations, and interactions with organizations, brands, and other customers.

However, few studies have observed the impact of social media as a whole on consumers' brand loyalty. Further empirical research is needed to generalize the research findings on social media advertising and brand loyalty across various industries. This study aims to fill a gap in this research.

1.1 Social Media Advertising

Sri Lanka faces a knowledge gap in social media, leading to the proliferation of myths and hindering businesses. The apparel industry, particularly in Sri Lanka, is one of the fastest-growing sectors, with revenue reaching US\$1.54 billion in 2022. This growth is attributed to a significant increase of US\$0.23 billion compared to 2021. The market is projected to sustain a yearly growth rate of 3.52%, highlighting the surge in apparel consumption and attracting newcomers to the already crowded industry.

This surge has also attracted a considerable number of newcomers to an already crowded clothing industry, including various brands.

Table 1: illustrates the revenue forecast for the Sri Lankan apparel market

Year	Children's Apparel (in billion USD)	Men's Apparel (in billion USD)	Women's Apparel (in billion USD)	Total (in billion USD)
2017	0.29	0.53	0.72	1.55
2018	0.29	0.53	0.75	1.58
2019	0.28	0.51	0.74	1.53
2020	0.24	0.43	0.64	1.31
2021	0.23	0.42	0.63	1.28
2022	0.28	0.50	0.77	1.54

2023	0.30	0.54	0.84	1.65
2024	0.30	0.56	0.86	1.71

Source: Apparel - Sri Lanka | Statista Market Forecast

The apparel industry is facing intensified competition due to new entrants and diverse apparel products. Local manufacturers and retailers must prioritize customer loyalty to maintain a distinct position in their customers' hearts and establish a unique identity within the market. Social media is a prominent communication channel for businesses, with 8.20 million internet users in Sri Lanka as of 2022, representing 38.1% of the total population. Between 2021 and 2022, the number of individuals using social media in Sri Lanka increased by 3.8%, showcasing the upward trend in usage. This upward trend in social media usage is evident in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Increase in Social Media Users in Sri Lanka

Year	Increment of Social Media Users in Sri Lanka	Increment as a Percentage
2018 - 2019	200,000	+3.3%
2019 - 2020	91,000	+8.3%
2020 - 2021	1,500,000	+23%
2021 - 2022	300,000	+3.8%

Source: Digital: Sri Lanka — Data Reportal – Global Digital Insights

This surge in social media usage provides businesses and brands with an opportunity to reassess their current and future advertising strategies. Understanding the connection between social media advertising and consumer brand loyalty may offer valuable insights for numerous apparel retail outlets to attract and retain more loyal customers than their competitors.

1.2 Aim of the study

This research aims to examine the impact of social media advertisements (informativeness, irritation, entertainment, and credibility) on brand loyalty in the apparel retail industry in two selected provinces of Sri Lanka. The study aims to determine which aspect of social media advertising has the greatest impact on consumer brand loyalty.

The study focuses on the relationship between informativeness, entertainment, irritation, and credibility of social media advertising and consumers' brand loyalty. The rapid adoption of social media has changed how businesses respond to customer needs and desires, and new apparel retailers need to understand how these technologies can be used to build consumer brand loyalty.

Since there are 8200 million social media users in Sri Lanka, the number of social media users in the country is 38.1%. This indicates the usability of social media in today's world. Social media advertising is considered a favourable form of advertising for companies, as it is free and allows for personalized targeting.

Targeted advertising is essential for reaching consumers' minds, as it allows advertisers to access various data about their customers and interests. Traditional advertising media has been shifted to social media platforms, leading to advertisers searching for new ways to reach consumers who spend more time online.

Organizations need to consider the validity of traditional advertising channels when investigating marketing communication channels. Traditional media advertising, which is covered with clutter, does not provide as much opportunity to target customers more effectively. Social media advertising methods allow firms to understand consumers and their expectations, trace market needs, and develop products or services based on consumer observations and referrals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media advertising refers to various types of online advertising targeting social media users, which has significantly changed consumer behaviours in the apparel retail industry. Brand loyalty is the commitment to purchasing a company's products and services repeatedly, regardless of competitors, and the commitment to becoming a regular customer in the future. Brand loyalty is a repurchasing action that is deliberate and given full attention, and it is a significant non-material asset for business organizations.

2.1 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty, a cornerstone of marketing, was introduced by Howard and Sheth (1969) as a concept that develops as consumers develop a preference for a particular brand. Over time, this preference transforms into brand loyalty (Elliott et al., 2011). Brand loyalty signifies consumers' unwavering commitment to purchasing a brand's products and services regardless of competitors' offerings (Dick & Basu, 2017). It entails consumers becoming repeat customers and developing an enduring relationship with the brand (Solomon, 2011).

Loyal customers are less sensitive to price changes and are willing to pay a premium for a brand they trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Satisfaction and trust are key pillars of brand loyalty, with satisfaction driving repeated purchases (Ingemansson et al., 2015) and trust developing through satisfaction (Rajah & Marshall, 2008). Thus, brand loyalty is a valuable intangible asset for businesses (Jiang & Zhang, 2016; Moisescu, 2014).

2.2 Social Media Advertising

In today's technology-driven world, social media platforms serve as more than just channels for interpersonal communication; they are also potent advertising platforms (Elhadidi & City, 2018). Advertising, as defined by Kotler (2003), is any non-personal presentation or promotion of ideas, products, or services by a known sponsor. Social media advertising, therefore, refers to advertising methods delivered through these online platforms, primarily focused on digital interactions (Elatrachi & Oukarfi, 2020).

Social media advertising encompasses various forms, including direct display advertisements, self-serve advertising through internal ad networks, and ad serving within social media applications (Laudon & Traver, 2017). It offers businesses the opportunity to expand their marketing reach beyond traditional methods (Paquette, 2013) and build lasting relationships with their customer base (Gunelius, 2011). Research has suggested that using various social media platforms can positively impact consumer brand loyalty (Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012).

To understand the impact of social media advertising on brand loyalty, it's crucial to consider how consumers evaluate the value of advertising. Ducoffe's advertising value model (1996) identified three dimensions— informativeness, irritation, and entertainment—as critical aspects in assessing advertising value. Later, Brackett and Carr (2001) added credibility as a fourth dimension to measure advertising value. In the context of social media advertising, Wang & Sun (2010) expanded on this

framework, identifying informativeness, entertainment, irritation, and source credibility as dimensions influencing the value of social media advertising.

2.2.1 Informativeness of Social Media Advertising

Informativeness refers to the effective communication of relevant information to consumers (Oh & Xu, 2003). It serves as the primary function of advertising, providing consumers with valuable product and service information to facilitate informed purchasing decisions (Murillo et al., 2016). Social media advertising platforms, such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, vary in their usefulness based on the quantity and quality of information they convey (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012; Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011). Effective informativeness signifies the ability to communicate information effectively and capture consumers' attention (Rubin, 2002). Social media advertising, due to its adaptability and ability to tailor content to consumer needs, serves as an ideal platform for disseminating critical information (Hutter et al., 2013).

Consumers' perception of the informativeness of social media advertisements is a crucial factor influencing the value they assign to such advertising (Ducoffe, 1996; Wang & Sun, 2010). Unlike traditional advertising, online advertisements offer the capacity to convey rich information, making them effective in attracting and retaining consumer attention (Wang & Sun, 2010). Studies, including Kioko (2010), have shown that highly informative social media advertisements are effective in increasing brand awareness and loyalty. Consequently, we hypothesize:

2.2.2 Entertainment of Social Media Advertising

Entertainment within the context of social media advertising involves delighting consumers through text, images, and videos shared on these platforms (Siddique & Rashidi, 2015). It is characterized by the ability to create enjoyment and positive attitudes among consumers (Elliott & Speck, 1998; Shavitt, 1998). Businesses incorporate entertainment elements into social media advertisements to cater to consumers' desire for engaging content (de Vries & Carlson, 2014). This engaging content not only draws consumers in but also enhances their overall experience (Dehghani et al., 2016).

Social media advertising's interactive nature and the incorporation of entertaining elements contribute to **favourable reviews of social media sites and encourage** repeat visits (Raney et al., 2003; Hausman & Siekpe, 2009). These enjoyable ads add positive value to consumer loyalty to the brand through social media advertising (Moorman & Smit, 2011). Therefore, we hypothesize:

2.2.3 Irritation of Social Media Advertising

Irritation in the context of social media advertising refers to the creation of negative feelings of annoyance, displeasure, and impatience (Thota, 2012). These negative sentiments can arise from various sources, including broken links, improper image use, or disorganized websites, which can disrupt the user experience (Hausman & Siekpe, 2009b; Eighmey & McCord, 1998). Social media users may find certain aspects of social media advertisements irritating (Ducoffe, 1996), potentially diminishing the effectiveness and perceived value of the advertisements (Aaker & Bruzzone, 2018; Hasan, 2016; Luo, 2013).

Recognizing this, social media advertisements must avoid irritating viewers (Ali et al., 2012). Non-irritating messages in social media advertisements play a pivotal role in creating brand recognition and fostering loyalty (Rukuni et al., 2020a). Businesses must gauge consumers' perspectives on the level of irritation conveyed through their social media messages. Thus, we hypothesize:

2.2.4 Credibility of Social Media Advertising

Credibility is an essential aspect of social media advertising, as consumers assess the trustworthiness and reliability of the information source when encountering social media messages (Yasin & Zahari, 2011). The credibility of the information source plays a critical role in shaping consumers' perceptions of social media advertising (Yasin & Zahari, 2011). To enhance the credibility of social media posts, factors such as a company's reputation, image, and years in operation are essential considerations (Ghane et al., 2014).

Greater credibility in social media advertising has a positive impact on brand awareness and loyalty (Blanco et al., 2010). Conversely, low credibility levels associated with social media advertisements can deter consumers, who may view such advertisements as spam or perceive the advertisers as untrustworthy (Kelly et al., 2010). Consequently, consumers often ignore or show reluctance to provide personal information to these advertisers (Kelly et al., 2010). Credibility, therefore, plays a significant role in influencing consumers' brand loyalty. Hence, we hypothesize:

The Sri Lankan context, in particular, lacks comprehensive research on the influence of social media advertising on consumer brand loyalty, especially in the apparel retail industry. Thus, this study aims to shed light on the specific impact of social media advertising's features—namely, informativeness, irritation, entertainment, and credibility—on consumer brand loyalty within selected Sri Lankan provinces, with a special focus on the apparel retail sector.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a deductive research approach to determine the impact of social media advertisement attributes (informativeness, entertainment, irritation, and credibility) on consumers' brand loyalty. The deductive approach is used to form hypotheses based on a model and test them across many sample entities. The explanatory research design is used to explain the cause-and-effect linkages between the independent variables and dependent variables in the hypothesis.

The research design is a survey method, as it allows researchers to gather quantitative data from a large number of people on various research questions. The conceptual framework of the study is presented, which specifies the components that aid in representing independent and dependent variables. The researcher investigated the relationship between independent and dependent variables and tried to find the most significantly influential dimension toward brand loyalty among four dimensions: Informativeness, Entertainment, Irritation, and Credibility.

The research hypotheses are based on the research questions and relevant literature discussed in the previous chapter. The associated hypothesis can be definite as follows:

H1 - There is a positive relationship between the informativeness of social media advertising and brand loyalty.

H2 - There is a positive relationship between the entertainment of social media advertising and brand loyalty.

H3 - There is a negative relationship between the irritation of social media advertising and brand loyalty.

H4 - There is a negative relationship between the credibility of social media advertising and brand loyalty.

The operationalization section of the study demonstrates how to measure the independent variables (informativeness, entertainment, irritation, and credibility) and dependent variables. The measurement items for each variable must be identified before the hypotheses can be tested.

The study also examines the impact of social media advertising on consumer behaviour, such as brand loyalty, recommendation, and brand loyalty. The findings suggest that social media advertising can have a significant impact on consumer behaviour, and that the most influential dimension towards brand loyalty is social media advertising.

This study focuses on social media users in the Western and Southern provinces of Sri Lanka, which have the highest population. The Western province has the largest percentage of 28.7%, while the Southern province has the third-largest percentage of 12.2%. In January 2021, 7,900,000 people were using social media in Sri Lanka. The researcher chose a sample size of 368 using the convenience sampling method, with 268 and 100 non-randomly selected from the Western and Southern provinces, respectively.

The data collection method involved creating a structured questionnaire using a Google Form with 17 items, with a five-point Likert scale. The researcher shared the Google Form link to a non-randomly selected sample via Messenger, email, or WhatsApp media. The questionnaires were collected, resulting in a 100% respondent rate. The selected sample was given unlimited time to complete the questionnaires, and the researchers used data analysis methods to determine the impact of social media advertising on consumer brand loyalty.

The data was analyzed using frequency analysis, testing the goodness of data, and multiple regression analysis. The researcher used SPSS software version 21.0 to analyze the data, measuring internal consistency using reliability analysis at a significant level of 0.7, correlation analysis to ensure 100% validity of measurement items, and regression analysis to assess the interaction between independent and dependent variables at a significant level of 0.05.

The study aims to meet study objectives successfully by determining whether social media advertisements affect the brand loyalty of selected consumers. The results of statistical tools will help determine the impact of social media advertisements on brand loyalty among selected consumers.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This research aimed to test the hypothesis of using the SPSS 29.0 version to analyze data from Sri Lankan apparel customers. The main survey involved 368 customers with social media accounts, and a 100% response rate was obtained. The respondents were categorized based on gender, social media platform used, and province. The majority of respondents were female (70.4%), while 29.6% were male. 75% of respondents used Facebook, 63.6% used Instagram, 54.3% used YouTube, 12.8% used Twitter, and 2.8% used other social media platforms. Additionally, 27.2% of respondents were from the southern province, while 72.8% were from the western province. The results of correlation, regression analysis, and relevancy were presented in the final section.

4.1 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was utilized to assess whether the measurement items accurately corresponded to their respective variables. The analysis included two key metrics: the Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's significance value. These metrics determine the suitability of the data and sample size for factor analysis. Adequate sample adequacy is indicated by a KMO value above 0.05 and Bartlett's significance value below 0.05.

The pattern matrix reveals that the five variables are loaded onto four distinct components. Consequently, separate factor analyses were conducted for each variable due to their differing associations with the components.

Additionally, AVE values were calculated to evaluate convergent validity. AVE values exceeding 0.50 generally indicate that the measurement items are valid. The results showed that the AVE values exceeded this threshold, affirming the data's suitability for further investigation.

4.2 Reliability Test

Reliability analysis is a method for assessing whether or not the items on the scale fit well together. That exemplifies internal consistency. When the reliability of all five dimensions is calculated, the independent variable dimensions (informativeness, entertainment, irritability, and credibility) and the dependent variable dimension (credibility) have high reliability (brand loyalty). Table 3 demonstrates the reliability of every variable separately.

Table 3: Reliability of the variables

	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	Number of Items
<i>Informativeness</i>	.908	.914	3
<i>Entertainment</i>	.847	.860	3
<i>Irritation</i>	.881	.883	3
<i>Credibility</i>	.592	.570	3
<i>Brand Loyalty</i>	.933	.937	5

When Cronbach's alpha value exceeds the threshold of 0.70, there is high reliability or consistency in each dimension. It reveals that the indicators of each dimension used in the questionnaire match with each other, and those indicators can be used to describe each dimension without any doubt. The results in Table 3 showed that the alpha values were greater than the cut-off values, indicating adequate reliability.

4.3 Mean Value Calculation

The mean and standard deviation values in Table 4 show that among all the dimensions, the credibility dimension recorded the highest mean value, and the irritation dimension had the smallest mean value. The mean value of brand loyalty was close to 4.60.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviations

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>Informativeness</i>	4.5507	0.73934
<i>Entertainment</i>	4.5924	0.61560
<i>Irritation</i>	4.4728	0.78888
<i>Credibility</i>	4.6458	0.50416
<i>Brand Loyalty</i>	4.6272	0.59674

The majority of respondents agreed with the researcher's statements about the various variables, as indicated by mean values close to 5.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

The strength of the relationship between independent variables was investigated using a correlation analysis. The correlations between the variables are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix

	<i>IN</i>	<i>BL</i>	<i>IR</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>EN</i>
<i>Informativeness</i>	0.729				
<i>Brand Loyalty</i>	0.517	0.636			
<i>Irritation</i>	0.636	0.500	0.703		
<i>Credibility</i>	0.518	0.498	0.698	0.847	
<i>Entertainment</i>	0.607	0.571	0.654	0.583	0.611

The result in Table 5 shows correlations between informativeness, irritation, credibility, entertainment, and brand loyalty. Further, Table 5 helps to identify the discriminant validity. The discriminant validity of the measurement model was assessed by comparing AVE and construct correlations. The extracted average variance (AVE) is higher than all corresponding construct correlations, indicating that the constructs have discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

4.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

The key objective of this research is to identify the effects of social media advertising on consumers' brand loyalty with special reference to the apparel retail industry. The dependent variable is brand loyalty, and the four independent variables are informativeness, irritation, credibility, and entertainment.

Since none of the correlation coefficients mentioned above in Table 5 is greater than 0.85, multiple

regression analysis can be used to determine whether the informativeness, irritation, credibility, and entertainment of social media advertisements significantly influence consumers' brand loyalty. Tables 6, 7, and 8 show the results of the regression analysis.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.608 ⁶	.370	.363		.47638	1.385

Table 7: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	48.309	4	12.077	53.218	<.001 ⁷
	Residual	82.379	363	.227		
Total		130.688	367			

The R² value was 0.370 (F = 53.218, p < 0.001), which implies that 37% of the variation in brand loyalty can be explained by the informativeness, irritation, and credibility of social media advertisements. Furthermore, since the Sig value was less than 0.05, the model is statistically significant.

Table 8: Coefficients

Model	Unstand. Coefficients		Stand. Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.471	.247		5.964	<.001		
IN	.041	.070	.051	.590	.556	.229	4.370
EN	.319	.087	.329	3.663	<.001	.216	4.640
IR	.103	.047	.136	2.168	.031	.442	2.261
CR	.225	.066	.190	3.420	<.001	.563	1.775

The coefficient table provides insights into how independent variables affect the dependent variable and their level of significance. When the Sig value of each independent variable is less than 0.05, it signifies that every independent variable has a significant impact on the dependent variable.

In this analysis, the Sig values for entertainment, credibility, and irritation were all found to be less than 0.05. This indicates that these factors play a crucial role in influencing consumer brand loyalty, supporting Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4.

However, the Sig value for informativeness was higher than 0.05, suggesting that this factor does not significantly determine customer brand loyalty, and therefore, it does not support Hypothesis 1.

Among the statistically significant factors, entertainment had the highest beta value (beta = 0.329), indicating it has the strongest influence on consumers' brand loyalty. Credibility followed with the second-highest beta value (beta = 0.190), signifying its considerable influence.

Conversely, informativeness recorded the lowest beta value (beta = 0.051), indicating its minimal impact on consumers' brand loyalty. Informativeness recorded the lowest beta value (beta = 0.051). Therefore, informativeness has the lowest influence on consumers' brand loyalty.

Table 9: Hypotheses Result

H1 - There is a positive relationship between the informativeness of social media advertising and brand loyalty.	Not Supported
H2 - There is a positive relationship between the entertainment of social media advertising and brand loyalty.	Supported
H3 - There is a negative relationship between the irritation of social media advertising and brand loyalty.	Supported
H4 - There is a negative relationship between the credibility of social media advertising and brand loyalty.	Supported

The results of multiple regression analysis revealed that three of the feature constructs in this study's model have a significant influence on the brand loyalty of apparel retail industry consumers, while the rest of the feature constructs in this study have no significant influence on the brand loyalty of apparel retail industry consumers. Among the features constructed, entertainment and credibility have the highest impact on consumer brand loyalty. Irritation and informativeness have the most minor effects on consumer brand loyalty.

5. DISCUSSION

The study focuses on the impact of social media advertising on brand loyalty and awareness in the South African small business consultancy firm industry. Rukuni et al. (2020) found that the entertainment feature of social media advertising contributed the most to consumers' brand loyalty and awareness, while irritation contributed the least. This study contributes to the findings of Bilgin (2018), who found that customization and entertainment are the most important social media marketing activities that impact brand awareness, image, and loyalty.

Social media advertising has become a growing trend among marketing professionals and the business world, with the increasing competition in the apparel market. Brand loyalty is crucial for survival in this highly competitive market, as customers have inelastic demand. This study focuses on the determinants of apparel customers' brand loyalty using the Ducoffe advertising value model (1996). The results show that the entertainment feature of social media advertising has the greatest influence on consumer brand loyalty in the apparel industry. The credibility of social media advertising is the second most important factor, and irritation and informativeness features have the least influence.

The results of this research are derived from information gathered from apparel customers in Sri Lanka's Western and Southern provinces. Previous empirical studies have also shown that the entertainment feature of social media advertising contributes the most to consumers' brand loyalty and awareness in the South African small business consultancy firm industry. This study contributes to the findings of Bilgin (2018), who found that customization and entertainment are the most important social media marketing activities that impact brand awareness, image, and loyalty.

Sharshikala & Mahapatro (2015) and Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini (2011) also found that social media advertisements have an impact on customer behaviour. Entertainment is the primary feature of social media, as it impresses customers through statements, photos, and videos through a social media platform. This makes entertainment a vital tool for businesses to ensure the effectiveness of their social media advertising.

However, this study suggests that the informativeness features of social media advertisements are not a significant determinant of brand loyalty of apparel customers and have the least impact on their brand loyalty. The level of information carried by social media advertisements to customers is known as informativeness. Organizational differences in both countries may influence the conclusions, as how organizations share information about their products and services on social media sites can change the informativeness of social media advertisements.

In the Sri Lankan context, managers must improve the informativeness features of social media advertisements to advance consumers' everyday lives about their products and services. Companies should use social media advertisements to provide a direct source of communication for customers to ask questions, praise, or grievances, and address concerns and questions promptly. This effort will make social media advertisements more useful and effective in attracting and retaining loyal customers.

The credibility of social media advertisements has been found to have a significant impact on the brand loyalty of apparel customers, as demonstrated by studies by Rukuni et al. (2020) and Aydoğan et al. (2016). The credibility of social media posts is influenced by factors such as the business brand and the number of years in operation. The greater the message's credibility, the greater its impact on increasing brand loyalty and awareness.

The study also found a significant relationship between the irritation feature of social media and brand loyalty of consumers in Small Business Consultancy Firms in South Africa and Arli (2017), who discovered that irritation negatively influenced consumers' attitudes toward brand promotion via social media advertisements in Australia. The intensity of social media advertisement usage appears to irritate consumers more in the context of social media, and businesses can experiment with posting frequency and track the count of "likes," which can indicate how consumers feel about the posting.

Based on the findings of this study and the current situation in Sri Lanka, the following recommendations are made to improve consumer brand loyalty in the Sri Lankan apparel industry through the use of social media advertising. The researcher suggests using social media advertisements

with content entertainment features to increase the brand loyalty of apparel consumers. However, the informativeness features of social media advertisements are not a significant determinant of the brand loyalty of apparel customers. The Apparel industry can use entertainment more than informativeness to enhance brand loyalty, as humans are captivated by interesting advertisements.

To avoid irritating and less credible advertisements, the researcher recommends not using more irritating and less credible advertisements, as those dimensions negatively correlate with brand loyalty. Organizations should be more careful when using social network **advertisements in** the Apparel industry, as more irritating and untrustworthy advertisements can reduce brand loyalty.

Sincerely addressing customer feedback is crucial for ensuring that social media advertisements do not irritate customers. Companies should also be sincere about their advertisements and follow policies and procedures when responding to customer inquiries. Responding to customer queries within 24 hours demonstrates that the clothing retailer cares about their customers and demonstrates a lack of focus on customer relationships.

Social media advertising must be used to build relationships with customers, requiring active consumer visits in advertisements and active customer collaboration. Personalization is required when interrelating with customers through social media. Organizations can form a social media monitoring team to interact with customers regularly and keep social media advertisement **content up-to-date** and relevant. These recommendations can help the Apparel industry increase consumer brand loyalty and retain long-term customers.

6. CONCLUSION

In today's rapidly evolving landscape, businesses must exhibit flexibility and adaptability to effectively respond to changing environments. To remain competitive in the dynamic apparel retail industry in Sri Lanka, a robust marketing communication strategy is essential. Unlike traditional one-way advertising, social media advertising empowers consumers to actively engage and provide viable solutions, a crucial factor for survival in this highly competitive market. Notably, one of the significant advantages of this advertising approach is its ability to leverage demographic information from users to target ads precisely.

While there have been limited studies examining the impact of social media advertising on brand loyalty, especially within the apparel industry, there is a scarcity of research investigating the effects of Ducoffe's advertising value model (1996) on consumers' brand loyalty, with a specific focus on the apparel sector.

The primary aim of this research was to assess the influence of four dimensions of social media advertising (informativeness, credibility, irritation, and entertainment) on consumers' brand loyalty, with a particular emphasis on apparel retailers. Primary data were collected through a Google form distributed to consumers in the Western and Southern provinces who maintain social media accounts.

The data underwent rigorous analysis using the statistical tool SPSS (Software Package for Social Science). The results of the SPSS analysis lead to the following conclusions:

Each dimension exhibited a high level of reliability, confirming the research's strong internal consistency. Regression analysis was employed to ascertain the relationship between independent and dependent dimensions. The findings regarding the relationship between independent and dependent dimensions are as follows:

Hypothesis 1, which posited a positive relationship between the informativeness of social media advertising and brand loyalty, was not supported at the $p > 0.001$ significant level.

Hypothesis 2, suggesting a positive relationship between the entertainment of social media advertising and brand loyalty, received support at the $p < 0.001$ significant level.

Hypothesis 3, proposing a negative relationship between the irritation caused by social media advertising and brand loyalty, was supported at the $p < 0.001$ significant level.

Hypothesis 4, indicating a negative relationship between the credibility of social media advertising and brand loyalty, was supported at the $p < 0.001$ significant level.

Among the two positively correlated dimensions, entertainment exerted a more significant impact than informativeness, while among the two negatively correlated dimensions, untrustworthiness had a greater influence than irritation. In summary, three of the hypotheses based on our framework received support, while one did not. Therefore, we can conclude that social media advertising indeed has a significant impact on brand loyalty.

7. FURTHER RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

This study focused on the Apparel industry, allowing future researchers to explore the impact of social media advertising on brand loyalty. Future research should employ a different framework to assess the effects of social media advertising on brand loyalty and analyze data using different statistical tools. Researchers should also evaluate the independent variable in conjunction with dependent variables like brand awareness, customer buying behaviour, intention, and customer attitudes. This will help measure how brand loyalty changes in response to demographic variables, such as gender, age group, income level, and educational status. The study investigated both male and female customers in the Apparel retail market in Sri Lanka, paving the way for future research to consider both markets separately. This study has opened new ideas for future researchers to consider the effects of social media advertising on brand loyalty and marketing efforts.

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