

Marketing Communication in the Digital Age and Intention to Purchase from Online Food Delivery Services in Colombo District, Sri Lanka

Impact
Investments

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Abstract

With the increase in the number of internet users and its use in daily communication at the individual and organizational levels, there has been a significant growth in revenue within the online food delivery industry globally. The researcher aimed to investigate the influence of digital marketing communication on the intention to purchase from online food delivery services among consumers in Sri Lanka, and to identify remedies to boost revenue growth, specifically addressing three forms of digital marketing communication, namely, online communities, online advertisements, and electronic-word of mouth based on past literature. The Technology Acceptance Model and the Uses and Gratifications theory were used as the base of this research. The study was of a deductive and quantitative nature and employed a survey strategy where data was gathered by way of Google Forms from 404 participants who purchased food online and resided within the Colombo district. Non-probabilistic Convenience sampling was used to collect the data, and SPSS was used to analyze the data. The results demonstrated that online advertisements and electronic word of mouth exert a significant positive influence on intention to purchase, while online communities have an insignificant impact on intention to purchase. The findings of the study also revealed that food delivery apps are the most used digital marketing communication platforms for purchasing food online in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Online food delivery services; Online communities; Online advertisements; Electronic-word of mouth; Intention to purchase.

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Introduction

In this digital era, the expanding global Internet user population has opened up new prospects for online business, particularly in terms of extending market reach (Pitchay et al., 2021). According to the Internet World Statistic, there were 5.473 billion Internet users across the globe, as of June 2022, accounting for 69% of the world's population (Internet World Statistic, 2022), and that number is predicted to continue to rise (Pitchay et al., 2021). Along with creating new opportunities, the rapid expansion of Internet usage has enhanced the consumer and marketing environments globally (Troise et al., 2021). The internet not only connects people with digital communication but can also be used as a link between consumers, facilitating communication in the form of marketing promotions through cyberspace (Erlangga et al., 2021).

Marketing communication in the digital age involves “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Krings, Palmer and Inversini, 2021). Companies can use various digital marketing communication (DMC) channels to reach out to specific target audiences, including emails, corporate websites, blogs, and social media. They are expected to engage with social media users on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube, among others, and respond to them promptly. This way, they will be in a position to amplify their messages (Troise and Camilleri, 2021).

Globally, the Food and Beverage (F&B) industry is one of the fastest-growing industries. The advances in digital technology have revolutionized the industry toward online food ordering and delivery services, which gained popularity following the global pandemic. The demand for OFD services is now expanding globally due to the changing societal norms of social isolation and staying at home (Ramos, 2021; Koay et al., 2022). Hence, the global pandemic has made the OFD market very profitable, luring numerous new OFD service providers into the market (Ramli et al., 2021; Koay et al., 2022).

The OFD industry has shown acceptable levels of growth, globally as well as in the South Asian region. Today, the global industry for food delivery is worth more than \$150 billion and has more than tripled since 2017. Following a good historical increase of 8%, the market has more than doubled in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic (McKinsey & Company, 2021). The industry's global revenue grew at a rate of 9.1% from 2021 to June 2022, while that of the South Asian region grew at a rate of 16.5% during this time (Statista, 2022). On the other hand, in Sri Lanka, the industry revenue grew insignificantly at 0.9% from 2021 to June 2022 (Statista, 2022).

Nevertheless, 58% of the internet users in Sri Lanka use mobile applications for Social Networking while 20% use them for food delivery purposes, signifying the high usage of digital communication in the country. Further, the Asian Development Bank report on ‘Value chain analysis of Key F&B products in Sri Lanka (2017) identified and stressed the ineffective marketing system which is limiting the industry's potential. The KPMG report on ‘Responding to Coronavirus (Covid-19): Restaurants and Food Businesses’ (2020) emphasized that restaurants must reach out to their customers directly to keep them updated and informed about what the

business is up to despite the unprecedented situation. The report further stressed that all marketing campaigns to be carried out by restaurants and food businesses must ideally attract more customers and increase the revenue per customer and highlighted that leading fast-food chains are sharing information on their updated menus and prices through digital platforms such as social media. (KPMG Report, 2020).

Despite the growth potential and the prevailing insignificant progress in revenue of OFD services in Sri Lanka, studies that address the use of various DMC platforms that could potentially influence the intention to purchase (IP) from OFD services are very limited in the existing literature. Moreover, research studies about OFD services are also scant in the Sri Lankan context. Hence, the objective of this research is to establish an integrated model that explores the relationship of selected forms of DMC; online communities, online advertisements, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), with the IP from OFD services among the urban population in Sri Lanka. By addressing these gaps, this study can provide a clear understanding for OFD service providers, future restaurant owners, and small and medium-sized food business start-ups considering OFD services to understand the importance of DMC forms and platforms in influencing the intention of consumers to purchase from OFD services and thereby enabling marketers to devise strategies to promote awareness and engagement among internet users for their OFD services, which can stimulate the digital communication users to purchase OFD services. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the impact of DMC forms on the IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka, and hence the study assessed the following objectives;

1. To study the influence of OC usage on IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka.
2. To examine the influence of OA usage on IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka.
3. To ascertain the influence of EW usage on IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka.
4. To analyze the most influential DMC form that will induce IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka.
5. To identify the most used DMC platform to purchase food online in Sri Lanka.

Literature Review

With rapid technological advancement and human adaptability to these changes, the dimension of communication has evolved, moving a large portion of communication practices to digital environments. The swift progress of technology has made it easier to incorporate into social practices, and the evolution of media into a digital dimension encourages this social change (Bazarcı, 2020). Digital marketing communication is facilitated through a ‘technological environment that supports the uses of digital tool platforms to share ideas and experiences and to communicate with other persons’ (Alawdat and Hodges, 2021). These marketing communications take place through digitized content which can be communicated across computer networks or the internet including text, audio, video, and graphics Bazarcı (2020). These encompass all forms of online media, such as social media platforms, websites, emails (Taşkıran, 2019), blogs (Bazarcı, 2020), display, or search media (Papp-Váry, and Kerti, 2022), applications, video, and virtual reality (Dagnon, and Demsky, 2022). These reflect that online communities (OC) which facilitate communication on digital platforms, as well as online

advertisements (OA) and e-WOM (EW) which involves content created and transmitted over the internet are aspects of DMC.

The food industry is one of the industries with high growth potential globally, as well as in Sri Lanka. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the food service and retail industries, particularly restaurants, and supermarkets. Restaurant sales have dropped, while home food deliveries have increased (Hossain, 2020). In simple terms, the industry underwent a major transformation, with many opting for the OFD option. This was possible with the rapid development of technology, and the significant increase in the number of mobile phone users (Ayoobkhan and Haleem, 2020). Ray et al. (2019) define OFD services as ‘internet-based services through which customers can order food and get it delivered to their doorsteps’, and the order can be placed through websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, and many others. OFD services provide a wide range of restaurant lists, allowing customers to compare menus, prices, and even reviews from other users by restaurant type. Furthermore, the distribution of mobile devices has provided customers with a new platform—food delivery apps—that is available when they order food online (Jun et al., 2021).

However, numerous technological models were introduced by previous researchers to explain individuals’ purchasing behavior. Predominantly, two theories explain the effect between online communities (OC), online advertisements (OA), and e-WOM (EW), and internet users’ IP from OFD services. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was used as the basis for the relationship between OA and IP from OFD services (Athapaththu and Kulathunga, 2018; Alghizzawi and Habes, 2019; Jun et al., 2021), while the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) explained the association of OC, and EW with IP from OFD services (Ray et al., 2019; Kamboj 2019; Karunanayake and Madubashini, 2019; Corrada, Flecha, and Lopez, 2020). Davis (1989) introduced the TAM which describes the user’s response to technology in the working environment where, depending on certain beliefs, an individual forms an attitude toward a particular object, based on which he intends to behave concerning that object. The two fundamental beliefs of TAM, namely PU and PEOU explains the link between OA and IP from OFD services. Accordingly, PU explains the digital communication user’s belief that the online advertisement they come across will provide them with necessary details and will improve their decision to confidently use OFD services, while PEOU supports the belief that viewing online advertisements before deciding on using OFD services will not require any effort (Athapaththu and Kulathunga, 2018; Alghizzawi and Habes, 2019). Katz et al. (1973) developed the UGT which aims to understand why and how people actively seek content in different media to meet their needs. Among the variables of the UGT is the ‘information seeking’ motive, which supports the relationship between the use of OC and EW on the IP from OFD services. In this study, the OC members engage in information seeking to obtain information on other users’ experiences with online food ordering as well as suggestions on the best food options to buy, giving the community members a sense of satisfaction, and confidence about the food product they hope to purchase, influencing their IP from OFD services (Kamboj, 2019). Moreover, the users of EW seek to obtain information such as product reviews, and experiences of those who previously purchased food online, from posts, UGC, influencer, and blogger posts as well as online reviews. This develops a feeling of contentment which creates their IP from OFD services (Karunanayake and Madubashini, 2019).

Intention to purchase (IP) is the possibility that consumers will plan to purchase a particular good or service in the future, proving that it is the basis for the behavior that is now being observed in the market (Martins et al., 2019). Previous studies have shown that a rise in IP corresponds to a rise in the likelihood of making a purchase. In their study, Athapaththu and Kulathunga (2018) define IP as "Consumers' willingness to buy a product or service from a particular website" and assert that after a customer chooses a product, the customer's intention will determine whether or not they decide to make the purchase. Naeem (2019) in his study revealed that OA, OC, EW, and reviews on services are beneficial in improving service awareness, assurance, high levels of customer participation, and effective communication. Thus, these factors indicate higher levels of IP for banking services. This study reveals a positive relationship between each of OA, OC, EW, and IP. However, these findings are limited to social networking platforms and have the potential to be explored on a broader level in many aspects of DMC. In addition, since the study was concerned with banking services, it can be tested in the use of OFD services too. Cabigting et al. (2022) showed that three Social Media Marketing (SMM) mediums – OA, OC, and EW have significant positive effects on both IP as well as on brand loyalty. The study described was limited to the social media platforms and thereby the findings can be generalized to the broader aspect of DMC by investigating the influence of the same mediums of OA, OC, and EW on IP throughout DMCs.

Online Communities (OC), according to Dover and Kelman (2018), are groups of people that connect digitally around a shared interest or goal in a setting that is generally constrained and well-defined. The emergence of these OC provides platforms for internet users to communicate and exchange opinions and information about goods and services (Kamalasena and Sirisena, 2021). Ayuni (2020) explained that experiences shared (e-WOM) in virtual communities affect IP, the study revealed that as long as a company has a positive and well-managed social e-WOM, people will still accept the information provided and increase their intention to buy the product, indicating a positive impact of virtual communities on IP. This study solely focused specifically on members of big brand communities on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube which are managed by businesses, whereas the findings can be generalized and validated by investigating a broader scope of virtual communities managed by consumers and on other platforms, such as blogs, forums, and WhatsApp groups. Zhao and Shi (2022) revealed that the three dimensions of community experience such as information experience, entertainment experience, and interactive experience, had a significant positive effect on brand identity, and brand identity had a significant effect on IP, hence, concluding that brand identity mediates the relationship between community experience and IP. The study only focuses on brand communities that are specific to certain brands managed by the respective businesses. However, studying a general online community concerning food products may give better insights to consumers on various online food service providers' products and services for them to make better decisions on what to purchase. Hence, examining the impact of the usage of OC on the purchase of OFD services in Sri Lanka becomes worthwhile.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between the use of OC and IP from OFD services.

Online advertising is the most popular strategy used by businesses to advertise specific items or brands in the present era of technology (Cabigting et al, 2022).. Social media advertising has developed into a potent form of business communication due to the accessibility of Internet connections (Cabigting et al, 2022). Dash and Piyushkant (2020) defined social media ads as appearing as pop-up ads, links to original websites, clickable ads, HTML ads, and dark posts. According to Maria et al. (2019), advertisements that are created to be as appealing as possible can pique consumers' interest in the brand image that the advertisement promotes, which gives them the incentive and desire to try the product out and make a purchase. Kamath et al. (2021) revealed the various characteristics such as creative characteristics, attention-grabbing details, emotional appeal, and celebrity endorsement all affected how social media advertising was evaluated, and thus these elements have a significant impact on IP. This will provide advertisers with a better insight as to the essential features they need to incorporate in their social media advertisements so that they can effectively grab the attention of the viewers and successfully convert them to customers. However, the study was conducted in India, and would be meaningful to incorporate these into the study of the impact on IP from OFD services, in particular, in the Sri Lankan context. NGO et al. (2022) unveiled four factors of TikTok advertisements that affect the IP of Gen Z consumers, including information, entertainment, trust, and social interaction, and proved that they all have a positive impact on IP online in the South of Vietnam. The study emphasized an entertaining feature of OA, namely the use of videos, which are likely to capture the interest of the users of the product or services being advertised. However, since the findings are limited to the TikTok platform, it will be worth investigating OA across all DMCs as a whole.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between the use of OA and IP from OFD services.

Electronic word-of-mouth (EW) means any attempt by a previous, potential, or existing customer to display the positive or negative features or experiences of a product/service online (Al-Ja'afreh, and Al-Adaileh, 2020). Online notifications, reviews, and recommendations are all simple ways for Internet users to share word-of-mouth information. These sources also inform current, past, and potential clients about a product or service. Rahayu, Utama, and Novianty, (2021) proved that there is a positive and significant influence of online customer reviews on IP in Indonesia. The results of the study suggested that the description of online customer reviews is in a good category, the description of IP in the good category, the variable online customer reviews that have a high influence on IP is the source credibility dimension, while the dimension that has the lowest influence is the quality of the argument. As per the findings of the research, IP is influenced by online customer reviews with a strong category. Furthermore, this research paves the way for future researchers to study the impact of online customer reviews on IP on other DMC platforms. Nosita and Lestari (2019) proved in their study that user-generated content (UGC), which is a form of EW, affects IP toward beauty products. The outcomes implied that attitudes towards UGC content on YouTube and perceived credibility affect purchasing intentions. Further, it showed that Beauty vloggers are considered more credible than producer-generated content and that activities such as searching for, liking, subscribing, or commenting does not necessarily indicate IP. This content is generally shared on social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. Also, the use of Beauty vloggers is an important aspect as credibility if the content shared is perceived to be effective by the viewers,

and hence studying the influence of UGC by celebrities, influencers and other popular figures on IP is useful.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between EW and IP from OFD services.

Methodology

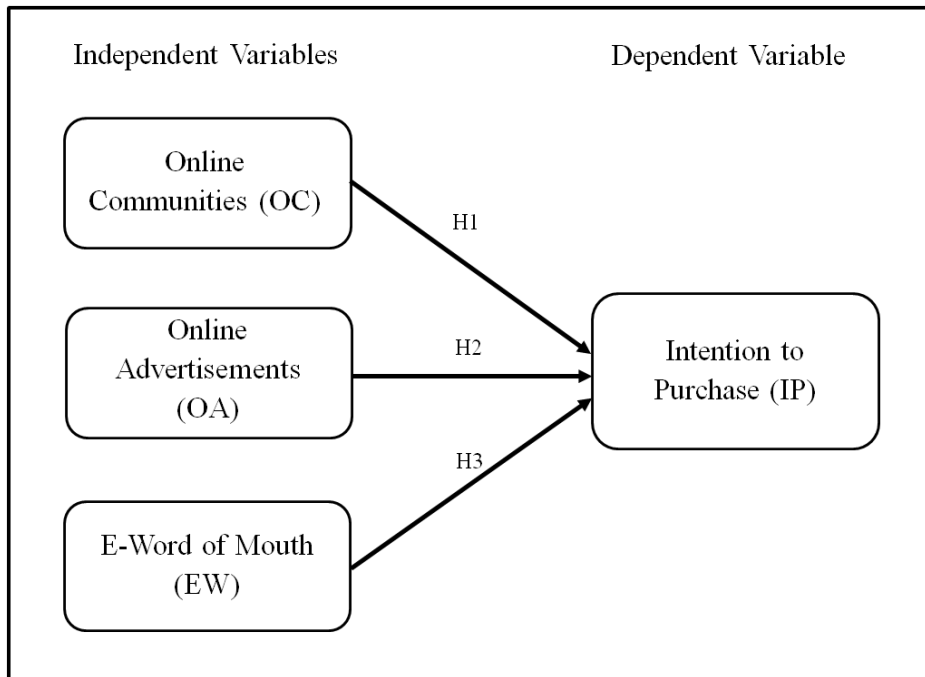


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's compilation based on the literature review

TAM and UGT have been employed as theoretical bases to develop and support the conceptual framework of online marketing communication's impact on IP from OFD services. Following a thorough analysis of the empirical literature, OC, OA, and EW were identified as some of the online marketing communication influencing IP. Hence, the conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 was developed to study the impact of online marketing communication on IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka.

Sampling Design and Data Collection Procedure

The samples were collected from internet users aged 20 to 59 who order food online within the Colombo district, Sri Lanka. representing different levels of education, income, social class, and lifestyle. Colombo district is considered the highest populated district with an estimated total population of 2,463,810 (Table 2). The age groups from 20 to 59 represent the highest percentage of active internet users (Digital Outlook Report - APIDM & Department of Marketing Management, University of Kelaniya, 2022). The total population of the targeted age groups is 1,409,170 representing 57.2% of the total district population (Table 2). Since the number of internet users in the Colombo district, specifically, is concealed it cannot be measured

as a total number of individuals. The obtained study's total population (2,463,810) has also been supported by Krejcie & Morgan (1970). Further, due to the unavailability of published population statistics, both district and age group-wise, for 2022, an estimate was computed based on the statistics published by the Department of Census and Statistics, 2012 (Table 1).

Table 1: 2022 Population Estimate

Sri Lankan Population 2022	21,594,168	(Worldometers.info, Sri Lanka 2022)
Sri Lankan Population 2012	20,359,439	(Department of Census and Statistics, 2012)
	1,234,729	
% Change from 2012 to 2022	6.06%	

Source: Author's compilation

Table 2: Age Group Proportion

District	Total District Population	Ages (20 - 59)	Proportion
Colombo (2012)	2,324,349	1,328,654	
Population increase (6.06%)	139,461	80,516	
Colombo (2022)	2,463,810	1,409,170	57.2%

Source: Author's compilation

Quantitative data collection was carried out by administering structured questionnaires through Google forms across various online platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and WhatsApp, and the data collection lasted three months. Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used as the sampling method. Although the research is a quantitative study, the researcher opted to use convenience sampling given the limited time and resources available for the researcher to obtain responses from participants who meet the narrow criteria outlined in this study. Similar studies have also employed the convenience sampling method to study the impact of online communities and e-word of mouth on purchase intention (Kamalaseena and Sirisena, 2021), as well as the impact of online advertisements on purchase intention (Cabigting et al, 2022).

The sample size of the research consists of 384 internet users from different age categories and backgrounds who purchase food online and was determined from the table provided by Krejcie & Morgan (1970). Since the target population is more than 1 million, the corresponding sample size of 384 was adopted (Table 3). However, a total of 404 responses were gathered. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to draw conclusions from this in-depth investigation.

Table 1. Sample Size Computation

District	Total District Population	Ages (20 - 59)	Proportion	Sample
Colombo (2022)	2,463,810	1,409,170	57.2%	384 Krejcie & Morgan (1970)

Source: Author's compilation

Results and Discussion

Results

The responses were analyzed in accordance with demographics as well as the online food-purchasing lifestyle of the respondents as illustrated in Table 4. All of the survey participants resided in the Colombo district in Sri Lanka, and represented different levels of education, income, social class, and lifestyle.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Questionnaire Respondents

Characteristic	Range	Respondents	%
Preferred Language	English	333	82.4%
	Sinhala	66	16.3%
	Tamil	5	1.2%
Gender	Female	218	54.0%
	Male	186	46.0%
Age category	Less than 20	0	0.0%
	20 – 29	310	76.7%
	30 – 39	73	18.1%
	40 – 49	18	4.5%
	50 – 59	3	0.7%
	More than 59	0	0.0%
Educational Background	Ordinary Level	8	2.0%
	Advanced Level	45	11.1%
	Undergraduate	192	47.5%
	Bachelor's degree	101	25.0%
	Master's degree	50	12.4%
	Doctoral degree	1	0.2%
	Other	7	1.7%

Monthly Average Income (LKR)	Below 10,000	34	8.4%
	10,000 - 30,000	47	11.6%
	30,000 - 50,000	89	22.0%
	50,000 - 70,000	74	18.4%
	70,000 - 90,000	40	9.9%
	Above 90,000	120	29.7%

Source: Author's compilation

As per Table 4, out of 404 valid respondents, the majority chose to fill out the survey in English, which represented 82.4% (333 respondents) of the total respondents, while 16.3% (66 respondents) opted to fill it in Sinhala and 1.2% (5 respondents) preferred to fill it in Tamil. 54% of respondents are females, while 26% are males. The population's age group is between 20 to 59 years, and 94.8% was recorded from those between 20 and 39 years of age. 47.5% of them are undergraduate students, while more than 37% of them have bachelor's degrees or higher qualifications. Moreover, around 80% of the respondents have a monthly average income of LKR 30,000 or more.

Table 3. Online Food-Purchasing Lifestyle of the Respondents

Item	Range	Respondents	%
Do you purchase food online through food delivery apps or on the internet?	Yes	404	100.0%
	No	0	0.0%
How often do you order food online from restaurants and food service providers?	Once in a while	142	35.1%
	Daily	13	3.2%
	Weekly	96	23.8%
	Bi-weekly	48	11.9%
	Monthly	97	24.0%
	Yearly	8	2.0%
What are the online platforms on which you mostly browse for food and beverage options to purchase?	Food delivery apps (Example: Uber Eats, PickMe Foods)	303	75.0%
	Social Media	50	12.4%
	Company websites	29	7.2%
	Messenger Apps	1	0.2%
	Internet Browsers	11	2.7%
	Online Communities	4	1.0%
	Other	6	1.5%

What are the online platforms on which you mostly place online orders for food?	Food delivery apps (Example: Uber Eats, PickMe Foods)	321	79.5%
	Social Media	26	6.4%
	Company websites	36	8.9%
	Messenger Apps	2	0.5%
	Internet Browsers	0	0.0%
	Online Communities	0	0.0%
	Other	19	4.7%

Source: Author's compilation

The survey population comprised those who purchase food online. More than 59% consists of those who purchase food online on a weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly basis, while 35.1% occasionally. In addition, 75% of the respondents use Food delivery apps such as Uber Eats, and PickMe Foods to browse and search for food and beverages to buy online, while 19.6% use social media and company websites. Furthermore, nearly 80% of them use Food delivery apps for placing orders for food online (Table 5).

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett's Test Results

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.866
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1923.369
	df	120
	Sig.	0.000

Source: SPSS output based on survey data

The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy reveals the presence of common variance in a dataset, suggesting probable underlying components and the likelihood of performing an EFA (Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974; Kaiser, 1970 cited in Howard, 2016). KMO value was 0.866, which is above the acceptable level of 0.6 (Howard, 2016), indicating that the sample is sufficient for further analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity determines whether the correlation matrix to be factored is an identity matrix, which has the attribute of having all off-diagonal values of zero (Tobias & Carlson, 1969, Cited in Howard, 2016). Table 6 shows the p-value in Bartlett's test of sphericity is 0.000, suggesting a significant statistic and indicating the presence of a correlation between items in the data instrument.

Table 7: Reliability of Measurement Mode

Construct	Alpha	CR	AVE
OC	0.627	0.761	0.518
OA	0.775	0.811	0.465

EW	0.743	0.802	0.508
IP	0.769	0.851	0.588
Construct	Alpha	CR	AVE

Source: Author's estimates based on survey data

Table 7 shows the overview of reliability for the four measures of the study in terms of Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and the average variance explained (AVE) coefficient. The Cronbach's alpha for all the constructs are above the threshold of 0.6, which is considered to be of high reliability in some cases (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), although 0.7 is known to be the most acceptable level. In addition, the CR of all four measures ranges from 0.76 to 0.85, which meets the acceptable level of 0.60 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Lam, 2012). Moreover, the AVE values of most of the constructs meet the recommended level of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Lam, 2012).

Table 8. Regression Analysis Results

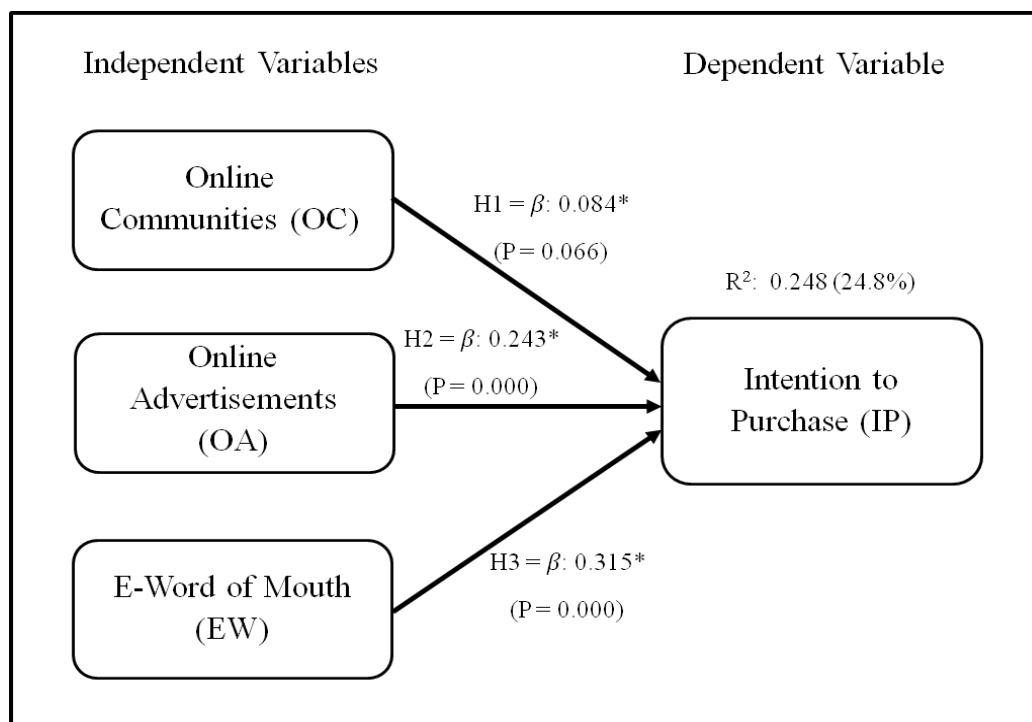
Variables	Parameter coefficient	Std. Error	T	Sig.	R Square
(Constant)	1.622	0.221	7.350	0.000	0.248
OC	0.084	0.046	1.843	0.066	
OA	0.243	0.052	4.678	0.000	
EW	0.315	0.054	5.869	0.000	

a. Predictors: (Constant), OC, OA, EW

b. Dependent Variable: IP

Source: Author's estimates based on survey data

Table 8 and Figure 2 show the regression analysis results and the conceptualized model. The beta coefficients for all predictor variables were positive indicating positive relationships with the dependent variable, while the extent of the relationships was on the weaker side due to values less than 0.5. The statistical significances for OA and EW were high ($p < 0.05$) while OC was insignificant ($p > 0.05$). As a result, hypothesis H1 was rejected, while H2 and H3 were accepted. Moreover, when comparing the beta coefficients in the regression analysis, EW had the highest value of 0.315, indicating that it has the greatest influence on IP in comparison to other independent variables in the study. Furthermore, the R² value of 0.248 suggests that all the independent variables (OC, OA, EW) collectively explain the dependent variable (IP) by 24.8%, which is theoretically a low goodness of fit. However, the R-squared value is predicted to be low since people are inherently more unpredictable than physical systems (Farook and Abeysekara, 2016). In addition, there may be many other reasons apart from the use of the specified marketing communication forms in this research that may influence an individual's IP from OFD services. Thus, a low R-squared score is not always a bad thing (Farook and Abeysekara, 2016).



*Significant at: *p<0.05, t-value >1.960)

Figure 2: Influence of DMC on IP from OFD services in the Colombo district

Source: Author’s estimates based on survey findings

Discussion

The purpose of this research is to investigate how DMC can influence IP from OFD services to improve the revenue of the OFD segment in Sri Lanka given its growth potential. Accordingly, five objectives and questions of the study were developed; the first three were focused on examining the influence of three selected DMC forms, based on past literature, namely; OC, OA, and EW on IP, each of these within the context of the OFD services in Colombo district, Sri Lanka. This was conceptualized into a model, in which each of the three relationship paths was supported using TAM and UGT. Moreover, the fourth objective and question were dedicated to analyzing which of the three DMCs in the model was most influential to induce IP, while the fifth emphasized identifying the most prominent DMC platform used for purchasing food online in Sri Lanka.

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Actual Beta*	P-Value	Results
H1	There is a positive significant relationship between the use of OC and IP from OFD services.	0.084	0.066	Reject

H2	There is a positive significant relationship between the use of OA and IP from OFD services.	0.243	0.000	Accept
H3	There is a positive significant relationship between EW and IP from OFD services.	0.315	0.000	Accept

(Significant at: * $p < 0.05$, t-value > 1.960)

Source: Author's estimates based on survey findings

Table 9 summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing. OC, OA, and EW were associated with IP. As explained by Davis (1989), PU and PEOU variables of the TAM justifies the use of OA to determine one's purchase behavior and intention for OFD services. Moreover, Katz et al. (1973) clarified the 'information-seeking' variable of the UGT as the reason behind the use of OC and EW by customers in forming their IP and the decision to purchase food online. Nevertheless, hypothesis 1 tested the impact of OC on IP, and its p-value is insignificant ($p > 0.001$). On the other hand, hypotheses 2 and 3 assessed the influence of OA and EW on IP, respectively, and p-values are highly significant ($p < 0.001$) for both. Hence, hypothesis 1 was not accepted, while hypotheses 2 and 3 were accepted. In addition, the study concentrated on finding answers to two specific objectives.

Table 6. Objective Results

Objective	Objective Statement	Hypothesis	Summary	Results
Objective 1	To study the influence of OC usage on IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka.	H1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The estimated value of 0.084 indicated between variables. The p-value was insignificant (0.066). Hypothesis H1 was rejected. 	Not Achieved
Objective 2	To examine the influence of OA usage on IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka.	H2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The estimated value of 0.243 indicated between variables. The p-value was highly significant (0.000). Hypothesis H2 was accepted. 	Achieved
Objective 3	To ascertain the influence of EW usage on IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka.	H3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The estimated value of 0.315 indicated between variables. 	Achieved

	Lanka.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The p-value was highly significant (0.000) • Hypothesis H3 was accepted. 	
Objective 4	To analyze the most influential DMC form that will induce IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka.	H1, H2, H3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The p-values for OA and EW are highly significant, except OC. • OC, OA, and EW collectively explained 24.8% (R-squared value) of the variance in IP from OFD services in Colombo district. • Thus, the EW was the most influencing factor. 	Achieved
Objective 5	To identify the most used DMC platform to purchase food online in Sri Lanka.	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics for online Food-Purchasing Lifestyle of the respondents of the survey indicated the use of different DMC forms for purchasing food online, namely company websites, food delivery apps, messenger apps, social media and others. • The highest percentage was identified for food delivery apps, with 79.5%, which was followed by company websites with 8.9%. • In addition, the usage rate of food delivery apps, in relation to other DMC 	Achieved

platforms, was highly significant.

- Hence, Food delivery apps were the most popular DMC platform for purchasing food online.
-

Source: Author's presentation

Most Influencing DMC Affecting IP

The results of the regression analysis suggested that the DMC form in this study with the highest impact on IP is EW due to this variable having the highest beta coefficient value of 0.315 when compared to OC and OA. This indicates that EW is most influential when it comes to convincing consumers to purchase from OFD services when compared to OC and OA. Previous research by Rahmawati (2022) which studied the impact of SMM, EW, and brand loyalty on millennial IP in the Indonesian context revealed that EW has a significant effect and the highest influence on IP when compared to other predictor variables. In addition, Kamalasena and Sirisena (2021) also found that EW has the highest influence on IP when compare to OC. Moreover, findings from the study by Moslehpour et al. (2022), indicated that the dimensions of SMM with the top two most influential factors on IP are entertainment and word-of-mouth. Therefore, the identification of EW as the most influential DMC communication form in this study is supported by prior literature.

Most Prominent DMC Platform for Purchasing Food Online

Based on the data gathered through the survey, the most used DMC platform for purchasing food online in Sri Lanka is found to be food delivery apps. According to the Digital Outlook Report by APIDM Sri Lanka, 20% of the Internet users in Sri Lanka use mobile applications for Food Delivery purposes. Moreover, in research conducted by Kimes (2011), out of the 470 internet users surveyed in the US nearly half of them had ordered food online through food delivery apps. Selvan and Andrew (2021), in their study, mentioned that as the use of food delivery Apps in India's major cities is on the rise, the same is being observed in smaller cities. They also stated that given the convenience and transparency offered by these mobile apps, customers these days demand a similar experience to that which they would get from the outlet itself. The popularity in the use of food delivery apps for ordering food online is not only the case in Sri Lanka, but also in the global context, and hence, these validate the findings of this study. According to Leong (2016), using an OFD system such as food delivery Apps can cause a restaurant's business to expand and will support their ability to conduct substantial business online.

Implications

Implication for Practice

The research investigated the influence of online marketing communications on the IP among customers in the Sri Lankan OFD industry as a remedy to boost revenue growth, particularly concerning three forms of online marketing communications; OC, OA, and EW. The study facilitates examining the consumers' perception of the adoption of online marketing communication by OFD service providers as a marketing strategy. The research findings will provide marketers, restaurateurs, and entrepreneurs as well as potential start-ups in the OFD industry with an insight into how OFD services can be effectively marketed to existing and potential consumers through various forms of digital communications as well as will provide them with a knowledge of the consumers' purchasing behavior in the industry. In understanding the prevalence and relationships between each of the online marketing communication forms and IP, marketing strategists within this industry will be able to formulate strategies to market their F&B products. This involves deciding which digital channels to use to reach their target audience and communicate with them as well as what strategy they need to implement through each channel. Thereby, it will assist with the adoption of their digital marketing strategies and aid with campaign planning and execution to increase revenue.

Implication for Research

The research investigated the influence of DMC on the IP among customers in the Sri Lankan OFD industry, specifically addressing three forms of online marketing communication; OC, OA, and EW, based on past literature. The findings of this study address the theoretical gap that exists in the existing literature pertaining to the use of DMCs for marketing OFD services. Ample studies relate to various forms of marketing through social media (Balakrishnan et al., 2014; Separamadu et al., 2021; Kamalaseena and Sirisena, 2021; Cabigting et al., 2022), while there is a dearth in relation to research in DMC. On the other hand, many aspects of OFD services have been previously studied (Ray et al. 2019; Ayoobkhan and Haleem, 2020; Jun et al., 2021; Saad, 2021; Chai and Yat, 2019; Koay et al., 2022; Pitchay et al., 2021; Troise et al., 2021), while further research was required to understand how OFD services could be marketed to increase IP. Thus, the present study bridges these theoretical gaps by way of its findings regarding the use of various DMC platforms that could potentially influence the IP from OFD services.

Conclusion

The research aimed to investigate the impact of online marketing communication on consumers' IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka. Following a critical review of existing literature, OC, OA, and EW were identified as forms of online marketing communication that could influence IP from OFD services. Subsequent to analyzing the gathered data, OA, and EW were found to significantly influence IP, while OC had an insignificant impact. In addition, EW was ascertained as the most influencing form of online marketing communication on IP from OFD services in Sri Lanka. Moreover, Food delivery apps were recognized as the most prominent digital platform for ordering food online in Sri Lanka. As a contribution, the study delved into the perception of the customers about which digital communication forms draw them towards ordering food online, which is critical to identify means for the development of OFD services in Sri Lanka.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

With regard to the limitations, the study focused mainly on OFD services in Sri Lanka, particularly concentrating on the Colombo district, which may not be representative of the whole country. Thus, there is an opportunity to study another district, province, region, or sector. Further, the study is confined to selected DMC forms like OC, OA, and EW, which were not studied as part of social media marketing, but marketing through digital media as a whole. Hence, there is an opportunity to explore the impact of other DMC forms such as company websites, social media, blogs, and forums that are used by consumers in this industry. Moreover, the researcher used a quantitative approach in this study which limits the ability to get an in-depth understanding of the relationships between the variables. Also, the sample size of the research was limited to 404 respondents which is an insignificant number when compared to the actual population of the Colombo district and therefore may not represent the population accurately. In addition, due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Sri Lanka, it may require more time to complete the data collection as well as barriers may exist when it comes to collecting data from across various parts of the Colombo district in Sri Lanka. Additionally, given the time constraints, the study was performed on a cross-sectional time horizon due to time constraints, limiting the ability to make comparisons of the effectiveness of DMC forms over time. Furthermore, this research conceptualized the relationship between the variables with the support of TAM and UGT perspectives only, however, other theories as well as moderating variables may explain better the phenomenon between the variables. Besides, since the study is conducted on OFD services in general, and the findings may not be sufficient for marketers of OFD services and other similar businesses to devise marketing strategies specific to their organization. Hence, these limitations are open for future researchers to take into consideration for further studies.

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