

Moderating Influence of Word-of-mouth on the Relationship between Customer Perceived Risks and Online Purchase Intention in Yobe State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the moderating influence of word-of-mouth on the relationship between customer-perceived risks and online purchase intention. To accomplish the study's objectives, a quantitative cross-sectional survey was implemented targeting 2390 employees of Yobe State University Damaturu and Federal University Gashua in Yobe State. A total sample size of 510 was utilised, with primary data gathered through purposive sampling using structured questionnaires. 347 valid responses were recorded and analysed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 3.0 software. The results indicated that perceived product performance risk has a significant negative relationship with online purchase intention; perceived financial risk has a negative but statistically insignificant relationship with online purchase intention; word-of-mouth has a significant positive influence on online purchase intention and significantly moderated the relationship between perceived financial risk and online purchase intention. Consequently, it is recommended that online marketers elicit positive word-of-mouth by exciting customers by delivering superior products and services that can exceed customers' expectations.

Keywords: Delivery Risk, Financial Risk, Online Purchase Intention, Product Risk, Word-of-Mouth

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the internet alongside other digital technologies has resulted in the development and significant increase of online shopping and buying behaviour. Consequently, this shopping avenue provides both e-tailers and customers greater convenience to engage in exchange relationships. On one hand, it provides customers with the conveniences of purchasing products at any time and place via the use of internet connectivity; the opportunity to purchase products not available at local stores; and chances to enjoy discounts and special offers, on the other hand, it gives the e-tailers opportunities to expand their markets, eradicating geographical and time barriers (Gaberamos & Pasaribu, 2022; Gabriel, 2016; Meixiam, 2015).

Butali, Bintu & Solomon. Moderating Influence of Word-of-mouth

Customer purchase intention and actual purchase behaviour are significantly correlated as there is empirical evidence that purchase intention is among the basic information being used by marketing managers in sales forecasts aimed at predicting how their actions will affect consumers' purchasing behaviour (Morwitz, 2014). Nevertheless, due to the shifts in human interactions resulting from enhanced internet access, the rising use of smartphones, and Nigeria's transition to a digital economy, online shopping is anticipated to gain significant traction (Adekunle & Dimowo, 2023). Despite the prospects and advantages, it appears that many customers are not willing, ready or planning to engage in online purchases as a significant number of customers in Nigeria, using the internet, is reported to still favour traditional stores for shopping (Aminu et al, 2019). One of the major impediments to online purchase intention, as suggested by previous studies, is a customer-perceived risk, as it is deliberated as the most significant psychological situation that negatively influences customers' online purchase behaviour (Amirtha et al, 2021; Sadiq et al, 2021), however, word-of-mouth appears to be an enabler of online purchase intention as it provides to potential customers the details of experiences of actual customers, therefore, may serve as risk reliever (Lin & Lu, 2010).

Previous studies have established the influences of customer perceived risk on customers' online purchase intention and online shopping behaviour (Aminu et al, 2019; Ariffin et al, 2018; Sharma & Garga, 2017; Ashoer, 2016). Although, all the above studies found that perceived risk exerts significant influences on online purchase intention and behaviour, with risk factors such as product performance risk indicating strong effects, however, certain risk dimensions have indicated inconsistent effects across settings. Moreover, Kim et al (2001) suggested that where the relationship between variables is strong, surprisingly weak or inconsistent, moderator variables can be introduced. Hence, the use of word-of-mouth as a moderator in this study.

Furthermore, some studies have assessed the moderating influence of word-of-mouth. For instance, Mintah (2018), Sun (2013), and Lin and Lu (2010) have ascertained the moderating influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on consumer perceived risk and online shopping, website attributes and consumer trust and trust and consumer purchase intention, respectively. Conversely, none of the studies combined the three variables of customer perceived risk, online purchase intention and word-of-mouth, additionally, the majority of these studies were carried out in countries other than Nigeria and as a result, the findings cannot be generalised due to socioeconomic and cultural differences. Besides, few of the studies conducted in Nigeria have given little attention to the staff of universities as a population, hence the need for this study to bridge these gaps by providing new insights. Therefore, the moderating effect of word-of-mouth on the relationship between customers' perceived risks and online purchase intention of staff of universities in Yobe State has received little scholarly attention. Thus, the objective of this paper is to assess the moderating influence of word-of-mouth on the relationship between customer-perceived risks and online purchase intention of staff of universities in Yobe State, Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Purchase Intention

Online purchase intention is consumers' willingness to buy products via the Internet (Sadiq et al, 2021). Accordingly, it is seen as the vision and willingness of customers to use the Internet to buy products (Akram et al, 2021; Gamama, 2020; Gamama et al, 2020). Similarly, it is viewed as the preference of customers to purchase products online (Younus et al, 2015). Since intention mostly serves as a prelude to almost every human action, the place of online purchase intention can be significantly imperative in online consumer behaviour (Athapaththu & Kulathunga, 2018), as purchase intention is being considered mostly in the literature among the important determinants of consequent purchase behaviour (Babin et al, 1999). Consequently, its influence in predicting actual online shopping behaviour is adequately recorded in the extant literature (Sadiq et al, 2021). Hence, this study considers online purchase intention as the willingness, readiness and desire of a customer or group of customers to engage in online buying behaviour.

Perceived Risk

The concept of perceived risk was first brought into marketing and consumer behaviour research by Bauer in 1960 (Durmus et al, 2017; Hwang et al, 2021; Okoye et al, 2021). Bauer (1960) characterised perceived risk as the risk that consumers consciously recognise due to a lack of understanding of product information; and he subsequently, incorporated perceived risk into the study of consumer behaviour analysis. Since then, it has been frequently employed to address concerns in marketing and consumer behaviour, particularly in emerging areas and issues including online purchases (Hwang et al, 2021). Notably, the risk perception of every person can be a result of real circumstances, nonetheless, since it represents an anticipation of loss, it is more likely to have a negative influence on individuals' attitudes about a given behaviour (Sanchez-Canizares et al, 2020).

Accordingly, perceived risk plays a significant role in influencing customers buying intentions (Ariffin, et al., 2018). Consequently, the literature signifies that perceived risk and online purchase behaviour are negatively related (Sadiq et al, 2021). Thus, it influences customers' ambiguity regarding their satisfaction, and as a result, is an important research aspect, specifically, in e-commerce (Bernarto et al, 2022).

Perceived risk implies a subjective possibility of loss resulting from hesitation to which a certain probability of happening could be apportioned (Sanchez-Canizares et al, 2020). Similarly, Kumar (2016) viewed customer-perceived risks as those risks observed by customers in the process of purchasing products. Thus, customer-perceived risk, as used in this study, is a subjective anticipation of loss arising from customers' indulgence in online purchase behaviour. More so, although there are many dimensions of risk perception, however, only product performance, financial and delivery risk dimensions are considered in this study.

Product Performance Risk

Performance risk relates to the quality and performance of market offerings that customers may purchase online (Tham et al, 2019). Hence, it occurs when the purchased product fails to match the anticipated quality by the customer (Ashraf, et al., 2018), and when the product does not meet the expected standard set by the consumers based on online vendor-provided information (Popli & Mishra, 2015). Thus, product risk is defined in this study as the probability of loss when products from online sources fail to match customers' pre-purchase expectations.

Studies have documented the influences of this risk parcel in many settings and contexts. Ariffin, Mohan and Goh, (2018), reported that it is negatively influencing the online purchase intention of consumers. Similarly, product risk has a significant negative effect on online shopping behaviour (Bhatti, et al., 2020), and Tran, (2020) found product risk to negatively affect intention for online shopping. Consequently, it is hypothesised as below:

H1: Product Performance risk has a significant negative influence on Online Purchase Intention

Financial Risk

Financial risk is the probability of losing money in purchasing products through e-commerce, particularly, wherever security in payment is an imperative factor in ordering products (Bernarto et al, 2022). Hence, it represents customers' security and safety concerns about monetary transactions that might involve using payment cards and exposure of personal information (Tham et al, 2019). Therefore, it is the risk associated with loss of money or spending more money on buying products via the Internet (Ashraf, et al., 2018). Thus, financial risk is defined in this study as the possibility and expectation of monetary loss as a result of engaging in online purchase behaviour.

Studies on the influences of this kind of risk indicated that financial risk is negatively influences the online purchase intention of consumers (Arrifin et al, 2018), and financial risk has a negative but insignificant effect on online shopping behaviour (Bhatti, et al., 2020), also, Tran (2020) found the perceived financial risk to be negatively influencing customer satisfaction in online shopping. Accordingly, it is hypothesised as follows:

H2: Financial Risk has a significant negative influence on Online Purchase Intention

Delivery Risk

Delivery risk is a risk dimension associated with the possibility of delay in delivery or non-delivery of the product after purchase (Okoye et al, 2021). Thus, it characterises concerns by online customers that they might not get the purchased product due to damages or losses during delivery (Tham et al, 2019). Hence, delivery-related factors such as delay and damage to products during delivery may influence consumers to avoid shopping over the Internet (Tanadi et al., 2015). Thus, this study views delivery risk as the propensity of loss concerning the delivery of purchased products from online sources.

Previous studies have indicated the influences of delivery risk on online purchases. For instance, Ashoer (2016) observed that it has been significantly impacting online shopping intention and Garga and Sharma (2017) reported that delivery risk negatively influences online shopping experience, making it difficult for customers to accept online shopping. Consequently, the hypothesis below is proposed:

H3: Delivery risk has a significant negative influence on Online Purchase Intention

Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is informal and non-commercial advice shared by customers about a product, a buying method or a company. It is normally collaborative, rapid and devoid of commercial interests (East et al, 2008). Hence, it involves exchanging marketing information among customers which is influential, cheap and effective (Nurgiyantoro, 2021). Furthermore, it is advice by one customer to another in the form of endorsement or disapproval of a particular product or service (Hamzah et al, 2020). Thus, in this work, word-of-mouth is seen as positive or negative information about a product, service, company or marketing channel shared by a customer or group of customers to others through informal means in which the sender has no commercial interest.

Previous research indicated that word-of-mouth significantly influences online purchase intention. This is empirically confirmed by the study of Setragraha et al (2021), where word-of-mouth was reported to have a significant positive influence on purchase decisions. Similarly, Juliana et al (2020) observed that word-of-mouth and observational learning have significant effects on the online buying decision. Moreover, the study of Nusier (2019) indicated that e-WOM has a significant positive influence on online purchase intention. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Word-of-mouth has a significant positive influence on online purchase intention;

H5: Word-of-mouth significantly moderates the influence of product performance risk on online purchase intention;

H6: Word-of-mouth significantly moderates the influence of financial risk on online purchase intention; and

H7: Word-of-mouth significantly moderates the influence of delivery risk on online purchase intention.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative survey research approach where structured questionnaires were used in collecting primary data from a population of 2390 staff of Yobe State University Damaturu and Federal University Gashua based on purposive sampling. The sample size used in the study is 510 arrived at after adding 170 to the calculated minimum sample size of 340. The addition of 170 is to take care of the non-response rate so that sufficient responses can be gathered for analyses. However, the minimum sample size is arrived at using Dillman's (2007) Formula as below:

Butali, Bintu & Solomon. Moderating Influence of Word-of-mouth

$$n = \frac{(N) (p) (1-p)}{(N-1) (B/C)^2 + (p) (1-p)}$$

- Where: n = sample size needed
 N = size of population
 p = proportion expected to answer a certain way (0.5 is the most conservative)
 B = acceptable level of sampling error (0.05)
 C = Z statistic associated with confidence interval (1.960 for 95% confidence level)

Applying the above formula, therefore:

$$n = \frac{(2390) (0.5) (1-0.5)}{(2390-1) (0.05/1.960)^2 + (0.5) (1-0.5)}$$

$$n = \frac{1465 (0.5)}{(2929) (0.00065) + 0.25}$$

$$N = \frac{732.5}{2.15385}$$

$$n = 340.08867841$$

$$n = 340$$

Thus, to decrease the level of non-response and achieve at least the minimum sample required for this study, the suggestion by Salkind (1997) for adjusting the sample size by 40 per cent to 50 per cent, which is generally employed in survey research (Bartlett et al, 2001) was adopted. Hence, 50 per cent of the calculated sample size (170), was added based on the above suggestion to make it 510.

The questionnaire items used for the study were adapted from previous studies. Specifically, online purchase intention is defined in this study as the willingness, readiness and desire of a customer or group of customers to engage in online buying behaviour and the measure is adapted from Hasan *et al* (2015), and Chen and Barnes (2007) as modified by Zarrade and Debabi (2012); product performance risk is defined as the probability of loss when products from online sources fail to match customers' pre-purchase expectations; financial risk is defined as the possibility and expectation of monetary loss as a result of engaging in online purchase behaviour; and delivery risk is considered as the propensity of loss concerning the delivery of purchased products from online sources. The measures for customer-perceived risk dimensions are adapted from Durmus *et al* (2017) and Masoud (2013). Word-of-mouth is seen as positive or negative information about a product, service, company or marketing channel shared by a customer or group of customers to other customers through informal means in which the sender has no commercial interest and the measures of WOM were adapted from Talwar et al (2020), as modified from (Chen et al, 2018; Fang et al, 2016; Liao et al, 2014) and Goyette et al (2010). The questionnaire was measured on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in analysing 347 usable responses. SPSS was used to conduct the descriptive analyses while Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used for the inferential analyses with SmartPLS 3.0. These methods of analysis were used due to the complexity of the study model and data type as the PLS-SEM strategy is well-suited for datasets obtained through questionnaires due to its lack of requirement for data normality assumptions, which promotes the optimisation of associations between the collected items and the established latent variables, as well as among those latent variables themselves (Ringle et al, 2020).

RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSES

Demographic Statistics of Respondents

The descriptive analysis shows that 267 respondents (76.9%) were males and 80 respondents (23.1%) were females. In terms of their age, 78 respondents (22.5%) were between the ages of 20 to 29 years, 181 respondents (52.2%) were in the age range of 30 to 39 years, 70 respondents (20.2%) were 40 to 49 & years old, 12 respondents (3.5%) were in the age range of 50 to 59 years and 6 respondents (1.7%) were 60 years old and above.

Accordingly, further evaluation of the descriptive results shows that with regards to educational qualification, 44 respondents (12.7%) were PhD holders, 108 respondents (31.1%) were MSc holders, 138 respondents (39.8%) were Degree/HND holders, whilst 41 respondents (11.8%) were NCE/ND holders, and 16 respondents (4.6%) are SSCE holders. Moreover, the analysis indicates that in terms of job cadre, 165 respondents (47.6%) were academic staff whilst 181 respondents (52.2%) were non-academic staff. Concerning online purchase frequency, however, the descriptive analysis shows that 74 respondents (21.3%) have not previously purchased products from online stores, 53 respondents (15.3%) have purchased products online only once, 69 respondents (19.9%) have purchased products online between two to five times, whilst 64 respondents (18.4%) have previously purchased products from online stores for more than five times, and 87 respondents (25.1%) have purchased products online for many times.

Measurement Model Analyses

The evaluation of the measurement model involves the assessment of individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity (Hair et al, 2019).

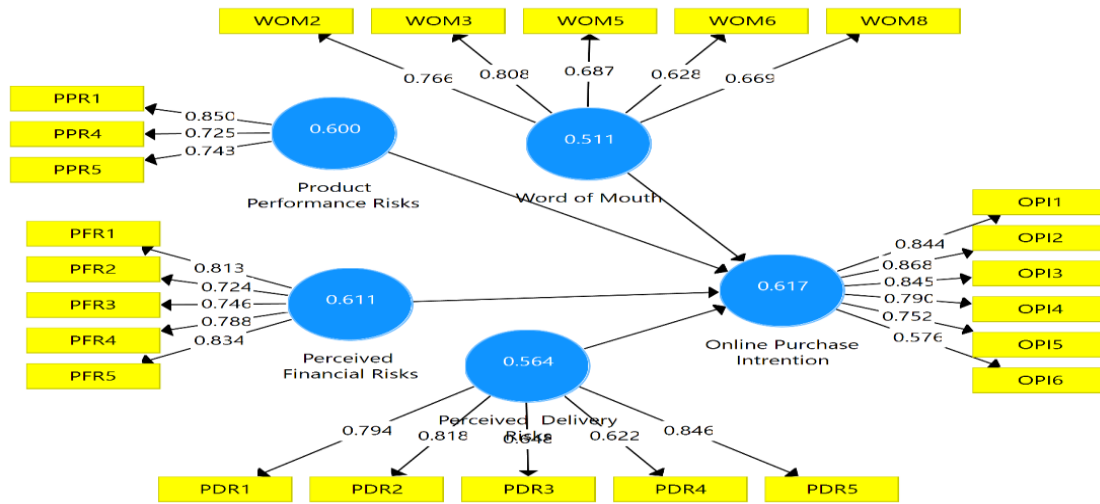


Fig. 1: Measurement Model

Firstly, factor loadings of individual constructs were used in assessing indicator item’s reliability. Consequently, items with loadings below 0.40 were removed from the model of this study resulting in retaining 24 items out of 29 (Hair et al, 2014).

Secondly, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability. Thus, reliability figures indicated that composite reliability of the constructs ranged from 0.817 to 0.905, and Cronbach’s alpha ranged from 0.699 to 0.873 signifying internal consistency of the constructs in the study (Hair et al, 2019; Hair et al, 2014).

Table 1: Loadings, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

| Items/Variables | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | AVE |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Online Purchase Intention | 0.873 | 0.905 | 0.617 |
| Perceived Delivery Risks | 0.807 | 0.864 | 0.564 |
| Perceived Financial Risks | 0.846 | 0.887 | 0.611 |
| Product Performance Risks | 0.699 | 0.817 | 0.600 |
| Word of Mouth | 0.776 | 0.838 | 0.511 |

Source: Analysis of Primary Data

Table 2: Latent Variables Correlations and Square Roots of Average Variance Extracted

| Variables | OPI | PDR | PFR | PPR | WOM |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Online Purchase Intention | 0.785 | | | | |
| Perceived Delivery Risks | -0.131 | 0.751 | | | |
| Perceived Financial Risks | -0.146 | 0.746 | 0.782 | | |
| Product Performance Risks | -0.184 | 0.685 | 0.682 | 0.775 | |
| Word of Mouth | 0.322 | 0.213 | 0.228 | 0.180 | 0.715 |

Source: Analysis of Primary Data

Thirdly, Average variance extracted (AVE) was used in appraising the construct’s convergent validity. AVE values of the current study range from 0.511 to 0.617, indicating acceptable convergent validity in the study as an AVE of 0.50 or better is acceptable as it demonstrates that the construct explains not less than 50 per cent of the variance of its items (Hair, et al., 2019).

Finally, the square root of AVE which is expected to be greater than the correlations between latent variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) were used in assessing for discriminant validity. Thus, the square roots of the AVE for all the constructs are greater than the correlations between latent variables, suggesting discriminant validity.

Structural Model Evaluation

The study, upon adoption of the two-step approach (Hensler et al, 2009), as well as a bootstrapping procedure using 5000 samples of bootstraps, evaluated the path coefficients’ significance (Hair et al, 2014; Henseler et al, 2009). The results are as in the figure below:

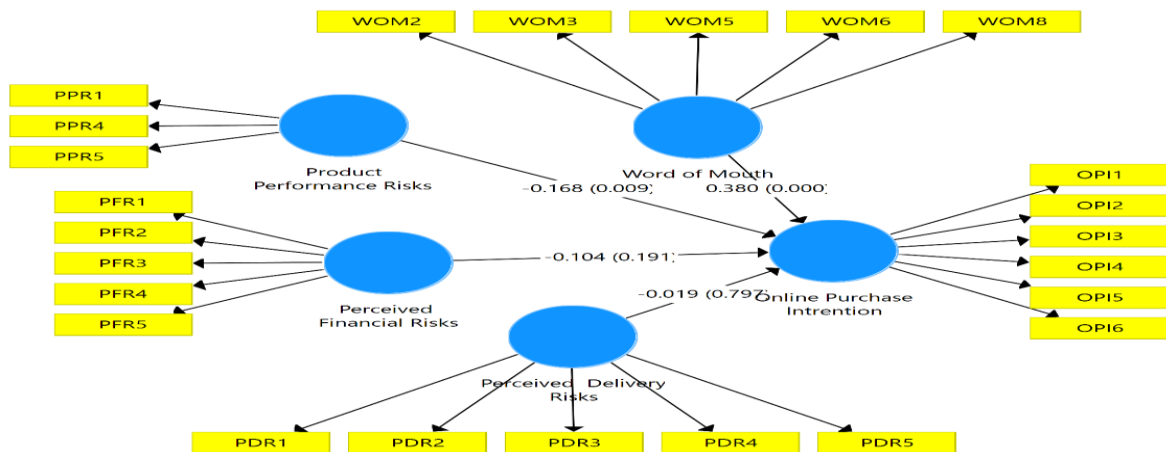


Fig. 2: Assessment of the Direct Relationships (Bootstrapping)

Structural Model Significance of Direct Relationships

The analyses indicate that perceived product performance risk has a significant negative association with online purchase intention ($\beta = -0.168$, $T = 2.608$, $P < 0.009$). Similarly, results indicated that perceived financial risks have a negative but statistically insignificant association with online purchase intention ($\beta = -0.104$, $T = 1.307$, $P > 0.191$). Moreover, the result shows that perceived delivery risks have a negative but statistically insignificant association with online purchase intention ($\beta = -0.019$, $T = 0.257$, $P > 0.797$). Additionally, the result of the analysis indicated that word-of-mouth has a significantly positive association with online purchase intention ($\beta = 0.380$, $T = 7.153$, $P < 0.000$).

Table 3: Results of Direct Relationships between PPR, PFR, PDR, WOM and OPI (Hypotheses Testing)

| Hypo. | Relationships | B | T Stat. | P Values | Decision |
|-------|---------------|--------|---------|----------|---------------|
| H1 | PPR => OPI | -0.168 | 2.608 | 0.009 | Supported |
| H2 | PFR => OPI | -0.104 | 1.307 | 0.191 | Not Supported |
| H3 | PDR => OPI | -0.019 | 0.257 | 0.797 | Not Supported |
| H4 | WOM => OPI | 0.380 | 7.153 | 0.000 | Supported |

Source: Analysis of Primary Data

Moderating Influence of WOM between PPR, PFR, PDR and OPI

This section examined the moderating influences of word-of-mouth on the connections between customer-perceived risk and online purchase intention. The results show that word-of-mouth insignificantly influences the association between perceived product performance risks and online purchase intention ($\beta = 0.120$, $T = 1.239$, $P > 0.216$); it has a statistically significant positive influence between perceived financial risks and online purchase intention ($\beta = 0.294$, $T = 2.448$, $P < 0.014$); and finally, word-of-mouth has an insignificant influence on the correlation of perceived delivery risks and online purchase intention ($\beta = 0.153$, $T = 1.632$, $P > 0.103$).

Table 4: Results of Moderating Relationship (Hypotheses Testing)

| Hypo. | Relationships | B | T Stat. | P Values | Decision |
|-------|----------------------|-------|---------|----------|---------------|
| H5 | PPR =>WOM => OPI => | 0.120 | 1.239 | 0.216 | Not Supported |
| H6 | PFR => WOM => OPI => | 0.294 | 2.448 | 0.014 | Supported |
| H7 | PDR =>WOM => OPI => | 0.153 | 1.632 | 0.103 | Not Supported |

Source: Analysis of Primary Data

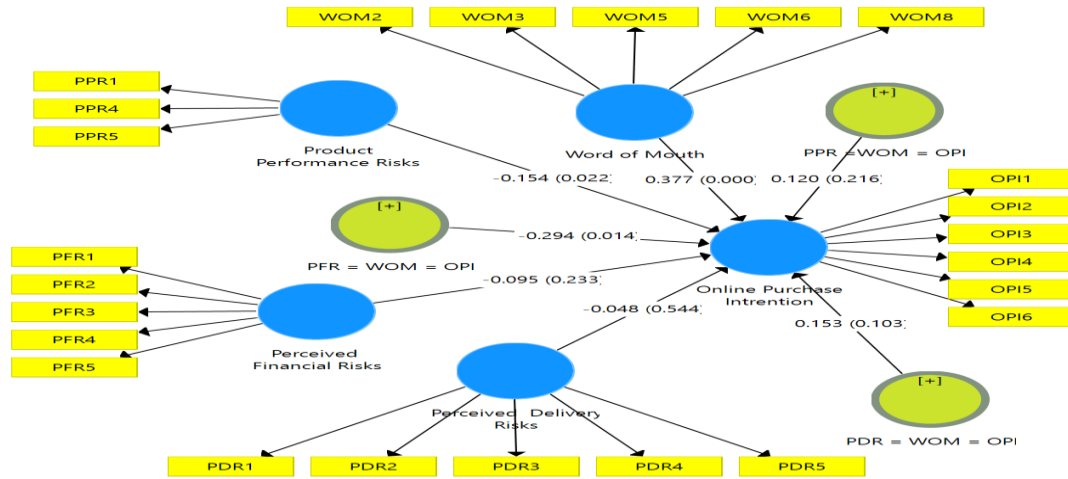


Fig. 3: Moderating Relationships among the Variables (Bootstrapping Results)

Assessment of Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination, R^2 measures the in-sample prediction of all endogenous constructs (Hair et al, 2020). In effect, the R^2 shows the level of variance in the outcome variable caused by single or many independent variables (Hair et al, 2010). Thus, Chin (1998) suggested R^2 of 0.67 as substantial, 0.33 as moderate and 0.19 as weak. Moreover, R^2 figures of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 are taken as weak, moderate and substantial respectively, particularly in studies aimed at examining customer satisfaction and loyalty (Hair et al, 2014; Henseler et al, 2009).

In the present study, the R^2 value is 0.171 as in Table 5.0. The value indicates that the exogenous variables in the study (perceived product performance risks, perceived financial risks, perceived delivery risks and word-of-mouth) accounted for 17.1 per cent of the variance in the endogenous variable, online purchase intention. The remaining 82.9 per cent is influenced by other factors outside the model. Although going by the above suggestions, on the rule of thumb basis, the R^2 value explained by the predictor variables in the study is weak, however, an R^2 value greater than 0.10 is satisfactory (Falk & Miller, 1992).

Table 5: Assessment of Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

| Endogenous Variable | R Square | R Square Adjusted |
|---------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Online Purchase Intention | 0.171 | 0.162 |

Source: Analysis of Primary Data

Assessment of Effect Size (f^2)

Effect size f^2 measures the degree of effect that is free from sample size (Benitez et al, 2019). Cohen (1988) suggested as a rule of thumb, that figures higher than 0.35, 0.15 and 0.02 respectively represent large, medium and small effect sizes. Accordingly, Benitez et al (2019)

recommended effect sizes ranging from 0.020 to 0.150 as weak, 0.150 to 0.350 as medium and greater or equivalent to 0.350 as large effect size.

As in Table 7.0, the f^2 for perceived delivery risks perceived financial risks, perceived product performance risks and word-of-mouth are 0.000, 0.005, 0.016 and 0.165 respectively. Hence, according to Benitez et al (2019) and Cohen (1988), the effect sizes of the four predictor variables in this study can be considered as none, none, weak (small) and moderate respectively.

Table 6: Assessment of the Effect Size (f^2)

| Latent Variables | f^2 | Effect Size |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Perceived Delivery Risks | 0.000 | None |
| Perceived Financial Risks | 0.005 | None |
| Product Performance Risks | 0.016 | Small |
| Word of Mouth | 0.165 | Moderate |

Source: Analysis of Primary Data

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study assessed the moderating influences of WOM on the associations between customer perceived risk and online purchase intention considering three perceived risk dimensions including product, financial and delivery risk. Results of the analyses revealed that perceived product performance risks have a significantly negative influence on online purchase intention confirming the findings of some previous studies. Specifically, however, it is in agreement with Sudiby et al (2020). In effect, the finding indicates that perceived product performance risks are a serious concern that online retailers must devise strategies towards addressing it. The negative influence implies that the higher the perceived product performance risk anticipated by consumers, the lesser will be their inclination towards online purchase behaviour.

Moreover, results from the analyses of data indicated that though the association between perceived financial risks and online purchase intention is negative, however, it is statistically insignificant. This confirms the findings of Ibrahim et al (2014) and Mamman et al (2015). However, this finding is contrary to the findings of Alshahrani (2020) and Dig et al (2017). The above inconsistencies explain the rationale for the introduction of word-of-mouth as a moderating variable in this study. However, the findings suggest that financial risk is not a serious concern to customers in the study area.

Furthermore, the results of the analyses indicate that although the relationship between perceived delivery risks and online purchase intention appears to be negative, however, it is statistically insignificant. This is in agreement with a previous study by Folarin and Ogundare (2016). However, in contrast, the finding is contrary to the study of Masoud (2013), Ashoer (2016) and Garga and Sharma (2017). The study finding in this regard signifies that delivery-

related factors are not sources of serious concern to consumers in the context of the study.

More so, the analyses of data, established that the relationship between word-of-mouth and online purchase intention is positive and strongly significant. The above finding confirms the findings of Setragraha et al (2021), Nusier (2019). In effect, this finding highlights the importance of word-of-mouth in enhancing online purchase intention because the greater the word-of-mouth, the better the customers' online purchase intention.

The moderating influence of word-of-mouth on the association between customer-perceived risks and online purchase intention was also evaluated. Accordingly, the analyses disclosed that word-of-mouth does not significantly moderate the relationship between perceived product performance risks and online purchase intention. This finding agrees with the findings of Mintah (2018), and Sun (2013) who revealed that positive word-of-mouth moderated the influence of trust on purchase intention. In essence, the finding indicates that the higher the word-of-mouth, the lower the perceived financial risks and the greater the online purchase intention. Accordingly, the analyses revealed that word-of-mouth does not significantly moderate the relationship between perceived delivery risks and online purchase intention which is contrary to the findings of Mintah (2018).

The study findings have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it tested the influences of perceived risk dimensions and WOM on online purchase intention, providing insights that these variables can be integrated into existing behavioural theories such as the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) to provide a clearer understanding of the factors influencing online purchase intention and online shopping behaviour. Practically, the insights can assist marketers engaged in online retailing in designing suitable marketing strategies, considering customers' concerns relating to product quality issues, and the propensity of financial and delivery-related loss. Importantly, it emphasises the importance of WOM in influencing online purchase intention, which may be harnessed by online retailers through purposeful attempts to elicit positive WOM from customers by thrilling them and exceeding their expectations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined the moderating influences of WOM on the connection between customer-perceived risk and online purchase intention. Employing a quantitative research approach, primary data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analysed with PLS-SEM. The findings indicated that though there are negative relationship between perceived risk factors examined and online purchase intention, only perceived product risk has a statistically significant influence. Moreover, WOM has a significant positive impact on online purchase intention and significantly moderated the relationship between financial risk and online purchase intention. The insights from the study could be of significant importance to online marketers and other industry stakeholders as it revealed the degree of associations among the variables of the study which can greatly assist in developing and designing their marketing strategies to achieve success in the growing marketing phenomena. Thus, it is recommended that:

Butali, Bintu & Solomon. Moderating Influence of Word-of-mouth

- i. Since customer-perceived risks negatively impact online purchase intention, particularly, perceived product performance risks, online retailers should provide sufficient information through their marketing communication programmes and channels that would assure customers that they will get exactly what they order regarding product quality, product size, colour and design.
- ii. Moreover, word-of-mouth appeared to have the greatest positive influence on online purchase intention among all the exogenous variables examined, online retailers should ensure that they do not only meet customer expectations to achieve customer satisfaction, rather they should aim to exceed customer expectations to excite customers to share positive word-of-mouth about them to others in their social circle which in effect will enhance online purchase intention and behaviour.
- iii. Finally, word-of-mouth moderated the association of perceived financial risks and online purchase intention. This implies that increased positive word-of-mouth will result in a decrease in perceived financial risks. Thus, online retailers should inspire customers to spread information about their experiences to others to convince them that financial dealings with online vendors are secured. The aim is to reduce their expectation of financial loss through positive word-of-mouth towards increasing online purchase intention which may result in actual purchase behaviour.

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