



The Effectiveness of Soft Liquor Product Placement as a Dark Marketing Strategy and Its Influence on Consumer Purchase Intention.

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Abstract

Product placement is a promotional strategy which can be identified as a purposeful incorporation of product into an influential manner with a use of any other media. However, most of the countries have prohibited advertising soft liquor products via traditional media because of health issues caused by soft liquor products. Thus, the soft liquor manufacturers tended to invest in product placement. This paper reports the findings of how product placement influence on consumer purchases intention of soft liquor products. The study has focused on investigating the possible reasons for consumers to influence on product placement strategies and the product elements that they exposed to and used to, even in the presence of a wider range. Suggestions for further research are presented in the form of propositions.

Keywords– soft liquor, product placement, dark marketing, consumer purchase intention.

1. Introduction

Many countries in the world have restricted the traditional advertising for liquor products due to the rules and regulations pertain in those specific countries. In that scenario, it is important for manufacturers of these products to discover new ways to communicate the brand messages to their customers. According to World Health Organization's 2015 report, Soft liquor is a non-ethical product which causes to create a lot of health issues. Based on these reasons many countries have prohibited advertising on these products through traditional media. Therefore, most of the manufacturers use product placement to advertise their products.

Product placement influences the consumer purchase intention in many ways. According to Kotler and Keller (2012) consumer purchase intention is the manner how individuals and groups select, buy, and use goods and services to satisfy their needs and wants. Further the consumer purchase intention is influenced by personal, social, cultural and psychological factors of the consumers (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Therefore, analyzing the influence of soft liquor product placement on consumer purchase intention is important.

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Product placement is an advertising technique used by companies to subtly promote their products through a non-traditional advertising technique, usually through appearances in film, television, or other media can be categorized under product placement and it focuses to have direct impact on consumers.

Moreover, some authors have identified product placement as an effective dark marketing strategy while some disagree (Lacroix and Martin, 2013; Gibson and Maurer, 2000). Therefore, analyzing the effectiveness of Alcoholic product placement as a dark marketing strategy and its influence on consumer purchase intention is significant.

When consider about soft liquor, the research study is mainly based on Beer, Wine, Sake and Ciders. However, Beer is the oldest and most widely consumed soft liquor drink in the world, and the third most popular drink overall after water and tea. Beer is brewed from cereal grains most commonly from malted barley, though wheat, maize (corn), and rice are also used.

According to the Sri Lankan context it is highly relevant that the soft liquor consumption will increase with the consumption spend increases. Thus, emphasizing how well the soft liquor product placement influence on consumer to make a purchase decision towards a particular brand needs to be clearly identified. As explained above, there could be several reasons that lead to consumers to be motivated enough to purchase products. These reasons could vary and be further refined when purchasing products such as soft liquor.

However, there has been a lack of studies conducted regarding the soft liquor product placement, especially in the Sri Lankan context. This may be due to the gray area of the industry implied because of the government regulations or the lack of opportunities available to carry out proper marketing campaign. However, in a situation where almost all brand communication has been restricted, how a brand expresses its message to the customer remains questioned. Therefore, with these identified gaps in existing theories and researches findings, following research problem is addressed.

“To what extent the effectiveness of soft liquor product placement as a dark marketing strategy influence on consumer purchase intention?”

The purpose behind this research is to explore how consumers make their purchase intention based on the different product placement strategies associated with soft liquor products and to identify its impact on negative and positive consumer purchase intention along with product placement content. Further, the research will be aiming at identifying the relationship between product placement and consumer purchase intention of soft liquor products. In this research product placement will act as the independent variable whereas consumer purchase intention will be the dependent variable.

2. Theory Overview

2.1 Research on Product Placement in Soft Liquor Products

Although there have been previous researches carried out regarding the product placement and consumer purchase intention towards soft liquor in many foreign countries, only a slight attention has been devoted to soft liquor product placement experience from a Sri Lankan context. Incidentally, this study would be highly significant as it would help fill a void in literature in relation to soft liquor product placement that influences in purchase intention of a Sri Lankan outlook.

Product placement consists of an advertiser or company producing some engaging content in order to sell something (Falkow, 2010). As such, product or brand placement continues to be an important practice within advertising and integrated marketing communications in which advertisers push their way into content far more aggressively than ever before (The Economist, 2005). While product placement is riskier than conventional advertising, it is becoming a common practice to place products and brands into mainstream media including films, broadcast and cable television programs, computer and video games, blogs, music videos/DVDs, magazines, books, comics, Broadway musicals and plays, radio, Internet, and mobile phones (Stephen and Coote, 2005). Due to media fragmentation, media proliferation, and declining advertising efficacy, product placement increasingly is becoming an effective way to reach consumers and non-users (Mackay, Ewing, Newton, and Windisch, 2009). It is estimated that two-thirds of TV viewers cut the sound during commercials, channel-surf, or skip them altogether because they are annoying or irrelevant (Kiley, 2006). Smit, van Reijmersdal, and Neijens (2009) have found that the industry considers brand placement and brand-integrated programs as the future of television advertising. In recent years, product placement frequently has been used as the basis of multi-million-dollar marketing and promotional campaigns with more than 1000 firms that specialize in product placement (Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan, 2006; Argan, Velioglu, and Argan, 2007).

2.2 Research on Dark Marketing in Soft Liquor Product Placement

Collet (2007, p.1) defines dark marketing as 'the concept of brand building and demand creation through largely invisible (in terms of tracking spenders) and unregulated media - marketing below the radar". She says that in the light of the ever-increasing restrictions on the advertising of tobacco products, tobacco companies are typical suspects of this style of promotion. Related marketing techniques are guerrilla marketing (when a campaign is run at a venue, real or virtual, and marketers access the venue against known rules that forbid them to be there), subversive marketing (a marketing program designed to simulate a real-world campaign) (Scott, 2003) and stealth marketing (indirect marketing through publicity and exposure) (Goodman, 2006). Dark marketing has been used for ages and is still used in marketing illegal products and/or services such as drugs, prostitution, pornography, human trafficking, trade in body organs and online gambling.¹ The technique is also similar to that of approaching and convincing a person to engage in espionage or becoming part of an illegal project.

At the heart of dark marketing is social infiltration by a representative of a product and/or service based on the premise that people can be influenced to change their purchasing behavior in a number of ways (Collet, 2007). As human beings, we are driven by our own set of values, perceptions, needs, goals, personality, psychographics and our social and cultural environment - all of which inform our receptivity to influence. Therefore, an influencing model to be used in dark marketing should be approached from different angles, including at least personality, behavior and the social and cultural environment. Also important to grasp is the impact of people's upbringing on the formation of their life world. Knowledge of the effect of all these factors will lead to a better understanding of ways to influence people to change their purchasing behavior. However, as this is such a broad field, one is forced to investigate consumer choice and consumer influencing from the vantage point of a specific product and/or service, even more so as the particular product or service may also play a part in the inclination to be influenced.'

2.3 Research on Consumer Purchase Intention in Soft Liquor Product Placement

Alcohol promotion as sponsorships of sport and entertainment events has already increasing scrutiny been subject to regulation in many countries, (Howard and Crompton, 1995; O'Connell, 1989).

It is well known by alcohol retailers themselves that Point of Sales promotions can play a significant part in alcohol purchasing behaviors. For example, the British Beer and Pub Association's Good Practice Guide for Pub Owners and Licensees (British Beer and Pub Association, 2002) advises that POS promotions 'can be a valuable marketing tool for enhancing product awareness among customers.

Alcohol marketing is highly regulated globally (Butler 2009), and in view of advertising restrictions regarding traditional media and alcohol products, marketers continually need to find alternative ways to reach their target audience. To this aim, marketing practitioners have begun to exploit 'the diverse new media and other promotional opportunities increasingly favored by young people' (McCreanor et al. 2005, 582). New technologies, particularly recent developments on the Internet, provide an effective communication platform for companies trying to develop sophisticated digital strategies in order to engage with people and start a dialogue.

To understand how product placement affects a consumer's buying behavior, consumers connect the world of movies with their social life (DeLorme et al., 1994). Their buying behavior is affected by their everyday life. How they perceive products placed in movies or how a movie carries out a product strongly affects buying decision.

The use of product placement provides an association between entertainment stars and a brand through a suggestive context in a less contrived setting than traditional advertisements

(Hackley & Tiwsakul, 2006). Through this mutually beneficial partnership, both the artist and brand are promoted.

2.4 Summary

Consumer purchase intention to purchase a soft liquor product, depends on its underlying characteristics and attributes. As explained in the background to the study, when focusing on the purchase of soft liquor products with the effect of product placement. Accordingly, through the theoretical review of this study, marketers in Sri Lanka and around the world, would be able to gain promising insights and derive conclusions as to what factors would affect to consumer purchase intention to soft liquor products as well as the various norms and ideologies that influence purchasing products from the perspective of a developing country as Sri Lanka. Therefore, through the findings of this research the marketers could introduce innovative marketing strategies and introducing new marketing models to further cater to the requirements of the customer base, therefore the soft liquor manufacturers would gain a competitive advantage over other competing sellers. Therefore, this research would be practically important to brand managers in making decisions as to how they should use product placement to reflect the desired brand message to influence on consumer purchase intention. which will ultimately generate sales for manufacturer.

3. Methods

We chose a quantitative research approach which involves statistical analysis and provides numerical values to make conclusions and to test specific hypotheses. Sukamolson as cited in Cui (2011) also suggests that quantitative research is suited, when specific hypotheses are tested in a study. This study also uses statistical data analysis methods such as regression analysis, and tries to test specific hypotheses to make conclusions by using numeric values. Based on these characteristics the researchers selected quantitative research approach to address the research problem.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The early study of brand placement provides an understanding of the effect of brand placement for marketing purposes. Research done on brand placement in past two decades is relatively little but has become an interesting topic in marketing (Balasubramanian et al., 2006). The role of brand placement has become more important because of evolving traditional and digital media. Brand communication plays as a key component of branding. It determines if a brand is successfully established and ultimately turns a profit (Conchar, M. P., Crask, M. R., & Zinkhan, G. M., 2005). Conventional forms of brand communication via advertising, and public relations have achieved success but their effectiveness is declining due to growing consumer resistance to traditional broadcast advertising (Elliott, 2008). Therefore,

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brand placement through digital technology has been widely expanded and attracted the attention from academics (DeLorme & Reid, 1999).

Conceptual framework is the base of the entire research. The framework was logically developed, described and elaborated the relationship among the variables considering to the relevant problem situation and which have been identified through past literature. Both independent and dependent variables were identified by the conceptual framework which was tested through a questionnaire.

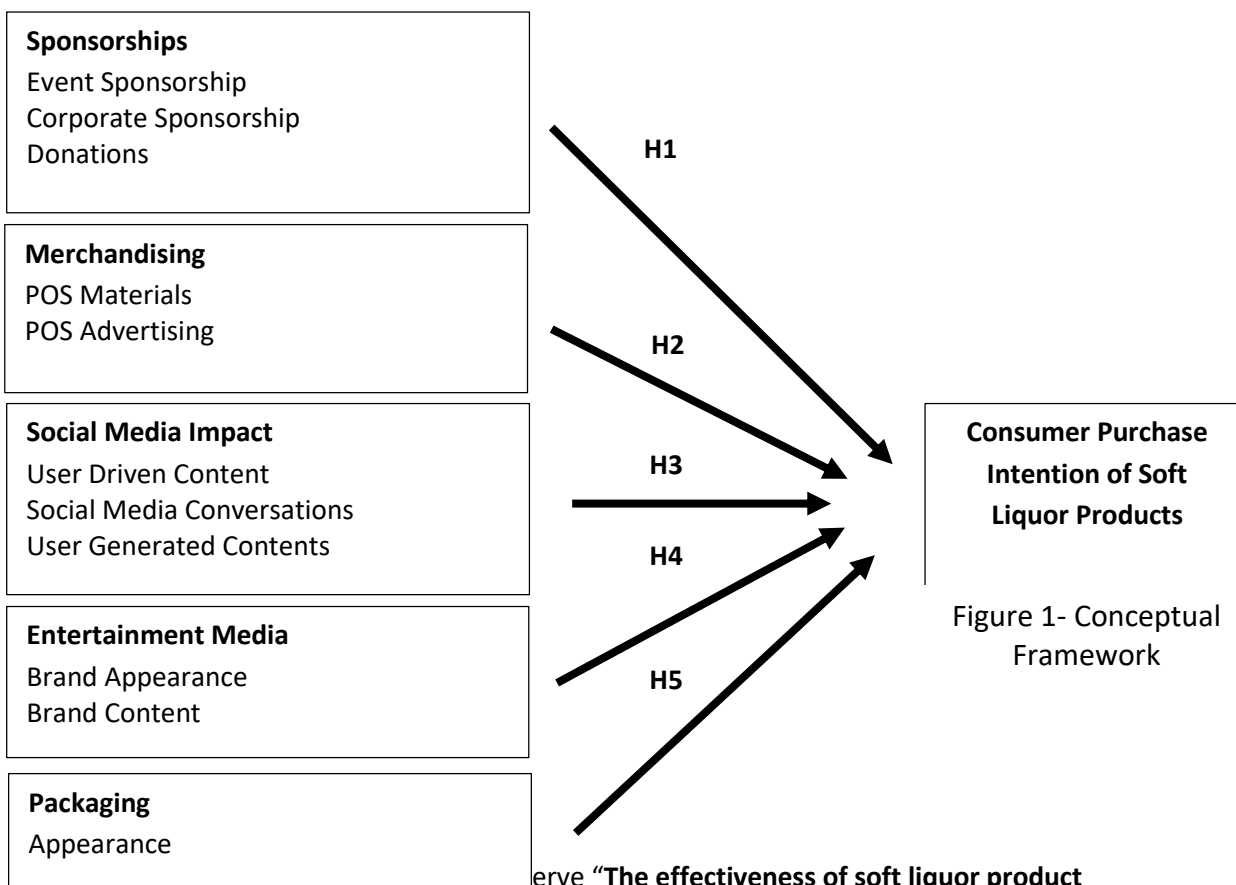


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework

serve “The effectiveness of soft liquor product placement as a dark marketing strategy and its influences on consumer purchase intention”

The sub objectives of the study are as follows,

- To investigate the effect of sponsorship characteristics on consumers’ purchase intention over soft liquor products.
- To inspect the effect of merchandising characteristics on consumers’ purchase intention over soft liquor products.
- To identify the effect of social media impact on consumer’s purchase intention over soft liquor products.

- To examine the effect of entertainment media characteristics on consumers' purchase intention over soft liquor products.
- To observe the effect of packaging characteristics on consumers' purchase intention over soft liquor products.

Hypotheses are constructed to meet each of these sub objectives. Above mentioned conceptual framework is taken as a basis to develop hypothesis for the study by the researchers.

H0 = Null Hypothesis

H1 = Alternative Hypothesis

3.2 Hypothesis Formulation

This research conducted based on the following hypothesis and it conveys the objectives of this research.

Hypothesis 1

- H0 - There is no significant relationship between sponsorship and Purchase Intention of soft liquor products.
- H1 - There is a significant relationship between sponsorship and Purchase Intention of soft liquor products.

Hypothesis 2

- H0 - There is no significant relationship between Merchandising and Purchase Intention of soft liquor products.
- H1 - There is a significant relationship between Merchandising and Purchase Intention of soft liquor products.

Hypothesis 3

- H0 - There is no significant relationship between Social Media Impact and Purchase Intention of soft liquor products.
- H1 - There is a significant relationship between Social Media Impact and Purchase Intention of soft liquor products.

Hypothesis 4

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- H0 - There is no significant relationship between Entertainment Media and Purchase Intention of soft liquor products.
- H1 - There is a significant relationship between Entertainment Media and Purchase Intention of soft liquor products.

Hypothesis 5

- H0 - There is no significant relationship between Packaging and Purchase Intention of soft liquor products.
- H1 - There is a significant relationship between Packaging and Purchase Intention of soft liquor products.

3.3 Theoretical Sampling, Data Collection, and Case Development

Researchers identified the study problem by referring the secondary data. Then researchers have identified the appropriate theoretical framework relevant to the current problem through literature review. Also by identifying dependent and independent variables, researchers developed research objectives. Afterwards researchers gathered both primary and secondary data to address the issue and to identify current situation, researchers developed the questionnaire and carried out the survey by using a questionnaire and analyzed data using statistical software and gave recommendation to address the problem context.

This study also tries to develop insights for a problem and try to test predetermined hypotheses to identify the impact of clearly defined five variables on Purchase Intention of soft liquor products. Based on the literature background, this study uses descriptive research design to collect data about customers and target market and help decision makers to select a course of actions by using the information of the research study.

Through the observations, it was found that, there are no studies conducted to identify impact of product placement which influences on consumer purchase intention. Therefore, this study will provide more rational guidelines to the soft liquor manufacturers to maintain its market leadership.

The study conducted in the normal setting of the environment with less interference by the researchers. A non-contrived setting was used to conduct this research. For this study, data gathered from people who resides in the Western Province of Sri Lanka, those who are mainly in Colombo district. Therefore, the responses would be considered as an individual data source.

This study investigates the effectiveness of product placement as a dark marketing strategy and its influences on soft liquor products. Therefore, the entire population of the study was

consisted with currently soft liquor buyers (mainly focused on men) who are located in Colombo district.

Even though the final consumer consists both of male and female, but the research mainly focused on male category, who are in the age category of 15-40 years, ultimate decision makers have more influencing power for purchase decision.

Simple random sampling was used for this research. The simple random sample is a subset of the population. Each member of the subset has an equal probability of being chosen. Data gathered from 300 individuals, following the time limitation. The sample of 300 respondents was closely monitored. The respondents demonstrated fairly devised among the gender.

Convenience sampling technique is used to extract the sample from the population since the total population is unknown. Therefore, probability sampling was not used as it might generate inaccurate results and it creates difficulty on get hold of the sampling frame work.

The relevant data collection for the research was done through both primary as well as secondary sources. The primary data was collected through a questionnaire, whereas for the secondary data collection; previous research studies carried out on the same research topic and other relevant topics were considered. Further journal articles, newspapers and internet were used as important tools.

Questionnaire was used to collect primary data. It was distributed via social media. Distributing questionnaire via social media helped researchers to collect data within a very short period of time.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data gathered through a questionnaire where the respondent rate is 100%. Data collected via Google forms by means of secretly choosing respondents. The questionnaire was distributed among 300 respondents who are aged above 15 and selected from Colombo District in order to gather data on the factors that impact more in when they purchase soft liquor products. According to this data study, it is conducted in identifying the most prominent factor that influences on purchasing intention of soft liquor products. Also, all data were analyzed using SPSS 20.0 software.

Researchers presented the results of the validity and reliability testing which was done to interpret the findings of the research.

Additionally, this research includes an analysis of independent and dependent variables in the form of descriptive and inferential statistics. Researchers used both descriptive and inferential statistics in the form of frequencies, central tendency measurements, as well as Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis to interpret the findings.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive Statistics									
Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Sponsorship	300	1.38	5.00	3.2142	.75005	.026	.141	-.506	.281
Merchandising	300	1.00	4.63	3.0871	.82775	-.485	.141	-.315	.281
Social Media	300	1.00	4.57	2.7252	.82622	-.013	.141	-.484	.281
Entertainment Media	300	1.00	5.00	2.7740	.89098	-.108	.141	-.500	.281
Packaging	300	1.00	5.00	3.0689	.96409	-.244	.141	-.450	.281
Purchase Intention	300	1.00	5.00	3.1442	.93979	-.329	.141	-.427	.281
Valid N (list wise)	300								

Table 1-Descriptive Statistics
Source: Survey Data, December 2017

According to table 1, sponsorship has the highest mean value (3.2142) with 0.75005 standard deviation and social media has the lowest mean value (2.7252) with 0.82622 standard deviation. Mean values for merchandising, entertainment media and packaging are 3.0871, 2.7740 and 3.0689 respectively while purchasing intension achieves 3.1442 mean value and a standard deviation of 0.93979. Overall, all the mean values for variable are near to 3. It indicates that all of these variables (Both dependent and independent) are performing at a satisfactory level of 3.1442 mean value of purchasing intension indicates that the influence level of product placement is moderate as found in the study.

4.2 Reliability Test

According to the reliability test done to the five independent variables and the one dependent variable of the study it is clearly demonstrated all the variables have passed the minimum level of reliability acceptance, in this level which is considered to be (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.6)

Scale	No of Items	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Sponsorships	08	Brand awareness, Brand image, Likelihood, Impression of the organization, Impression of the public attitude, Acceptance, Socialization, Self interest	0.888
Merchandising	08	Posters, Store Signage, Window Display, Price offs, Premiums, Free product samples, Customer contents, Prizes	0.913
Entertainment Media	05	Movies, Music Videos, TV Dramas, Music lyrics, YouTube Videos	0.925
Packaging	03	Label style, Bottle shape, Packaging color	0.889
Purchasing Intention	04	Future Purchase, Purchase based on product placement, Search brands, Search information	0.898

Table 2 - Reliability Test
Source: Survey Data, December 2017

4.3 Validity Test

In this study, KMO measure of sampling adequacy for all variables are greater than 0.5. KMO for purchasing intension is 0.723, sponsorship is 0.862, merchandising is 0.884, social media impact is 0.857, entertainment media is 0.836 and packaging is 0.742. Results of the Bartlett's test of Sphericity indicate that all the factors are significant at 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Based on these results, it can be concluded that factor analysis is appropriate. To extract valid items for further analysis, value of the factor loading is used. Items that have factor loading greater than 0.5 are selected as valid items. Under that, all 08 questions are valid for sponsorship, 08 questions for merchandising, 07 questions for social media impact, all 05 questions of entertainment media, 03 questions for packaging, and all 04 questions for Purchasing Intention.

Variable	KMO	Comment	No of Indicators
Sponsorships	0.862	Acceptable	08
Merchandising	0.884	Acceptable	08
Social Media Impact	0.857	Acceptable	07
Entertainment Media	0.836	Acceptable	05
Packaging	0.742	Acceptable	03

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Purchasing Intention	0.723	Acceptable	04
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Table 3-Factor Analysis
Source: Survey Data, December 2017

4.4 Normality

Skewness and Kurtosis Indices are used to measure the normality. To have the normality in the data set, values of Skewness and Kurtosis should be near to Zero (Field 2009). Table 4 shows that data obtained from the sample is not completely normally distributed, but when considering the reliability and the validity test, it is sufficient enough to conduct parametric test.

	Sponsorships	Merchandising	Social Media	Entertainment Media	Packaging	Purchase Intention
Skewness	0.026	-0.485	- 0.013	-0.108	-0.244	-0.329
Kurtosis	-0.506	-0.315	- 0.484	-0.500	-0.450	-0.427

Table 4-Normality Distribution
Source: Survey Data, December 2017

4.5 Correlation

Variable	Sig. value	Acceptance	R value	Level of Relationship
Sponsorship	0.000	Accepted	0.568	Strong
Merchandising	0.000	Accepted	0.694	Strong
Social Media Impact	0.000	Accepted	0.516	Strong
Entertainment Media	0.000	Accepted	0.572	Strong
Packaging	0.000	Accepted	0.621	Strong

Table 5-Correlation-Summary
Source: Survey Data, December 2017

4.6 Regression Analysis

Model Summary										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.770 ^a	.594	.587	.60425	.594	85.851	5	294	.000	2.120
a. Predictors: (Constant), Packaging, Social Media, Sponsorship, Entertainment Media, Merchandising										
b. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention										

Table 6-Regression-Model Summary
 Source: Survey Data, December 2017

Table 6 shows the model summary of regression analysis. Value of the explanatory power (R²) shows the degree to which extent the variance of the dependent variable is explained by independent variables. Looking at R², it can be concluded that, 59.4% (0.594) of the variance of purchasing intention of soft liquor products is explained by sponsorships, merchandising, social media impact, entertainment media and packaging. Only 40.6% of the variance of purchasing intention is explained by other influencing factors which are not covered by the current study.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test shows that the regression model is significant since the significant level is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Thus, the model fit of the regression model can be seen as follows.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	156.731	5	31.346	85.851	.000 ^b
	Residual	107.346	294	.365		
	Total	264.077	299			
a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Packaging, Social Media, Sponsorship, Entertainment Media, Merchandising						

Table 7-Analysis of Variance
 Source: Survey Data, December 2017

Hypothesis	R Value	R Square	Impact Level
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Sponsorship	.568 ^a	.323	Moderate
Merchandising	.694 ^a	.482	Moderate
Social Media Impact	.516 ^a	.266	Moderate
Entertainment Media	.572 ^a	.328	Moderate
Packaging	.621 ^a	.386	Moderate

Table 8-Summary of Hypothesis Analysis
 Source: Survey Data, December 2017

According to the table 8, this shows that merchandising has the highest impact to the purchasing intention of the soft liquor products. Also, this indicates that sponsorship, social media impact, entertainment media and packaging will impact moderately on the purchasing intention of the soft liquor products.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.799	.291		-2.748	.007
	Brand Awareness	.007	.040	.007	.183	.855
	Brand Association	.171	.074	.116	2.328	.021
	Perceived Quality	1.036	.058	.815	17.716	.000
	Brand Loyalty	.025	.065	.017	.383	.703

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		

1	(Constant)	-0.04	0.169		-0.239	0.811
	Sponsorship	0.169	0.062	0.135	2.748	0.006
	Merchandising	0.371	0.064	0.326	5.749	0
	Social Media	0.147	0.054	0.129	2.736	0.007
	Entertainment Media	0.128	0.054	0.121	2.364	0.019
	Packaging	0.242	0.047	0.248	5.115	0

Table 9-Coefficient

Source: Survey Data, December 2017

Table 9 shows the coefficient table of the regression analysis. B value of the table represents the degree to which extent the dependent variable can be affected by a certain independent variable while other independent variables remain constant.

B coefficient for sponsorship is 0.169 indicates that increasing 1 unit of sponsorship causes to increase purchasing intention in 0.169 units while other independent variables remain constant. Anyhow, this conclusion can be done only with the 99.4% of confident interval since the significant value is 0.006.

Merchandising involves 0.371 B value which denotes, when merchandising increases by 1 unit purchasing intention also increases by 0.371 units and vice versa. This conclusion can also be done with 100% confident interval. Because, significant value is 0 which denotes the probability of rejecting this conclusion is 0%.

B coefficient for social media impact is 0.147 indicates that increasing 1 unit of social media impact causes to increase purchasing intention in 0.147 units while other independent variables remain constant. Anyhow, this conclusion can be done only with the 99.3% of confident interval since the significant value is 0.007.

Entertainment media has 0.128 B value which indicates that, when entertainment media increases by 1 unit, purchasing intention increase by 0.128 units while other independent variables remain constant and vice versa. This conclusion can be done with 98.1% of confident interval since the significant value is 0.019 which means that, there is no probability to reject this conclusion.

Finally, analyzing the B coefficient of packaging, it can be concluded as it has 0.242 B value, when packaging increases by 1 unit purchasing intention also increase by 0.242 units and vice versa. This conclusion can also be done with 100% confident interval. Because, significant value is 0 which denotes the probability of rejecting this conclusion is 0%.

5. Discussion

Findings of the current research can be listed as below after conducting an in-depth analysis for the collected data.

There is a strong positive relationship (0.568) between sponsorship dimension and purchase intention of soft liquor products. Further, it was identified that there is a significant impact of sponsorship dimension and soft liquor product placement in Sri Lankan soft liquor market ($p < 0.05$, $b = 0.169$).

There is a strong positive relationship (0.694) between merchandising dimension and purchase intention of soft liquor products. Further, it was identified that there is a significant impact of merchandising dimension and soft liquor product placement in Sri Lankan soft liquor market ($p < 0.05$, $b = 0.371$).

There is a strong positive relationship (0.516) between social media impact dimension and purchase intention of soft liquor products. Further, it was identified that there is a significant impact of social media impact dimension and soft liquor product placement in Sri Lankan soft liquor market ($p < 0.05$, $b = 0.147$).

There is a strong positive relationship (0.572) between entertainment media dimension and purchase intention of soft liquor products. Further, it was identified that there is a significant impact of entertainment media dimension and soft liquor product placement in Sri Lankan soft liquor market ($p < 0.05$, $b = 0.128$).

There is a strong positive relationship (0.621) between packaging dimension and purchase intention of soft liquor products. Further, it was identified that there is a significant impact of packaging dimension and soft liquor product placement in Sri Lankan soft liquor market ($p < 0.05$, $b = 0.242$).

The objectives of this whole research were based on the following objectives.

- To investigate the effect of sponsorship characteristics on consumers' purchase intention over soft liquor products.
- To inspect the effect of merchandising characteristics on consumers' purchase intention over soft liquor products.

- To identify the effect of social media impact on consumer's purchase intention over soft liquor products.
- To examine the effect of entertainment media characteristics on consumers' purchase intention over soft liquor products.
- To observe the effect of packaging characteristics on consumers' purchase intention over soft liquor products.

By conducting a comprehensive literature review on the research topic, the researchers were able to identify five determinants of product placement. Further, researchers were able to identify the most suitable dimensions for independent variables. The independent variables are Sponsorship of product personality was measured three main dimensions, namely; event sponsorship, corporate sponsorship and donations. Merchandising was measured using two dimensions; namely POS materials and POS advertising. Social media impact dimension was measured through three dimensions; user driven content, social media conversation, user generated content. Entertainment media was measured based on two dimensions, namely brand appearance and brand content. Packaging was measured through one dimension, namely appearance. Hypotheses were developed and tested by the researchers and all five hypotheses were accepted.

In order to make sure that there is no problem pertaining to the questionnaire and with the objective of building a high-quality questionnaire, researchers created the questionnaire based on the available literature review.

First objective is to identify the impact of product placement on consumer purchase intention of soft liquor products in the Sri Lankan soft liquor industry. From the results extracted from analyzing the relationship between the cumulative effect of product placement dimensions have on consumer purchase intention is clearly elaborated.

As per the research findings, five out of the five dimensions of product placement was shown to have a strong positive relationship with consumer purchase intention, where merchandising of product placement identified as the strongest effect (0.694) on consumer purchase intention.

Second objective which is to identify what are the factors that most effect of product placement dimensions on consumer purchase intention was achieved through hypotheses testing and based on the findings it was clear that sponsorship, merchandising, social media impact, entertainment media and packaging has a significant relationship between consumer purchase intention of soft liquor products.

According to H1, significant value of the relationship between sponsorship and purchase intention of soft liquor products is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This means that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. Therefore, in this scenario, it can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis of there is a significant relationship between sponsorship and the purchasing intention of soft liquor products, with 95% level of confidence. Further, in these statistical figures clearly show that Pearson correlation coefficient is a positive value which means there is a positive relationship between the two variables. Also, Pearson correlation coefficient for above-mentioned relationship is 0.568 which is more than to 0.5 and this indicates a positive and Strong relationship in between sponsorship and purchasing intention.

According to H2, significant value of the relationship between merchandising and purchase intention of soft liquor products is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This means that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. Therefore, in this scenario, it can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis of there is a significant relationship between merchandising and the purchasing intention of soft liquor products, with 95% level of confidence. Further, in these statistical figures clearly show that Pearson correlation coefficient is a positive value which means there is a positive relationship between the two variables. Also, Pearson correlation coefficient for above-mentioned relationship is 0.694 which is more than to 0.5 and this indicates a positive and Strong relationship in between merchandising and purchasing intention.

According to H3, significant value of the relationship between social media impact and purchase intention of soft liquor products is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This means that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. Therefore, in this scenario, it can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis of there is a significant relationship between social media impact and the purchasing intention of

soft liquor products, with 95% level of confidence. Further, in these statistical figures clearly show that Pearson correlation coefficient is a positive value which means there is a positive relationship between the two variables. Also, Pearson correlation coefficient for above-mentioned relationship is 0.516 which is more than to 0.5 and this indicates a positive and Strong relationship in between social media impact and purchasing intention.

According to H4, significant value the relationship between entertainment media and purchase intention of soft liquor products is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This means that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. Therefore, in this scenario, it can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis of there is a significant relationship between entertainment media and the purchasing intention of soft liquor products, with 95% level of confidence. Further, in these statistical figures clearly show that Pearson correlation coefficient is a positive value which means there is a positive relationship between the two variables. Also, Pearson correlation coefficient for above-mentioned relationship is 0.516 which is more than to 0.5 and this indicates a positive and Strong relationship in between entertainment media and purchasing intention.

According to H5, significant value of the relationship between packaging and purchase intention of soft liquor products is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This means that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. Therefore, in this scenario, it can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis of there is a significant relationship between packaging and the purchasing intention of soft liquor products, with 95% level of confidence. Further, in these statistical figures clearly show that Pearson correlation coefficient is a positive value which means there is a positive relationship between the two variables. Also, Pearson correlation coefficient for above-mentioned relationship is 0.516 which is more than to 0.5 and this indicates a positive and Strong relationship in between packaging and purchasing intention.

6. Recommendations

According to the study, the impacts of product placement on consumer purchase intention were proved to be moderate to high. This is consent with what literature suggests that the results of sponsorship, merchandising, social media impact, entertainment media and

packaging dimensions have an impact on consumer purchase intention. As mentioned before, researchers have identified out of the five dimensions that define the independent variable of product placement, all five dimensions were proven to have an impact on the dependent variable. All these dimensions were measured based on each of the dimensions' sub components defined in the conceptual framework.

These findings would be useful for soft liquor brands in Sri Lanka to reach out more audiences, gain more consumers and boost the profits further by understanding the product placement dimensions and their target audience prefers out of their favorite or preferred soft liquor product placement method.

From the hypothesis developed to measure the effectiveness of product placement on consumer purchase intention, it is proven that consumers do influence over through product placement.

It is advisable for Businesses operating in the Sri Lankan soft liquor industry to focus on managing their respective product placement strategy in a way that it makes the consumers are influenced to make the consumer decision of purchasing the product. The study identified how important the product placement is, especially in a context where almost all marketing communication channels are prohibited. Literature proves that the product placement is one of the core elements that the marketers could concentrate on, as the markets show to be greatly responsive on what is being communicated by the marketing communication materials. It was said that advertisements were the most preferred means by which the marketer could communicate their brand message.

Since product placement on soft liquor products do not vary with demographic changes, marketers can evaluate and makes decision regarding the market place with respect to consumer purchase intention in a broader manner rather than paying attention of narrow market segments separately.

7. Suggestions for Future Research

The research can be extended to wide geographical area in order to increase the representativeness of the sample population. A larger sample is required to improve the validity of the results.

Research conduct focusing on soft liquor products will help to understand the impact of product placement on purchase intention and their responses would have been biased based on preferences towards their brands. It would have been more meaningful to carry out a study on the liquor industry and take the sample profile as liquor consumers. Then we can get real insights of the customers and it would be much easier for researchers as it becomes a broad research topic.

The research study has achieved the set objectives and opened avenues and directions for future researches. The findings highlight the need for future studies that should explore more variables other than these five variables discussed that drives purchase intention of soft liquor products because there can be other major factors which influence heavily on purchase intention in Sri Lankan context.

Further investigations in other type of products and markets may give additional insight in to the findings of the study. Also, there are number of qualitative factors which cannot be explained by the quantitative research when study about purchase intention.

This study was only focused on the Western Province of Sri Lanka. But in order to get more accurate results, research should be expanded to the other regions as well to cover rural, suburban, and urban population of the country.

The study was driven for understanding how product placement dimensions could affect purchase intention in a market where dark market conditions prevail. In such context where almost all of the prominent ATL and BTL marketing communication channels are restricted by the legal barriers, other concepts that could be used in reaching the consumer is very important. In such situation, product placement could be known as one of the most important means by which the brand can be taken to the consumers. However, future research can also focus on identifying the relation of impact of word of mouth on purchase intention of soft liquor products.

It could also be noted that this study is only based on product placement. Further studies could be based on identifying other industries such as hard alcohol market and finding out the relationship between product placement dimensions in such context, However, current research represents the Sri Lankan soft liquor industry and it could be applicable in a dark market condition. But its applicability in other industries is questionable. The study could be

extended to other industries as well. So, it will make the research more generalizable.

It is also important to note that the study was done as a descriptive research, and the research limits the findings to statistically proven outcomes. However, a qualitative research performed under the same research area would lead to more in depth findings and outcomes.

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