THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOSITY ON INTERPERSONAL TRUST ASPECT TOWARDS THE PURCHASE INTENTION IN B2C E-COMMERCE IN SRI LANKA

N. H. R. Premarathna[1,*] and P. G. Munasinghe[2]

[1,2]Department of Information Systems, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka

*Corresponding author (email: rajithapremarathnanh@gmail.com)

INTRODUCTION

Business-to-Consumer (B2C) business model widely implemented in e-commerce can be identified as an electronic-oriented business model among end customers and vendors. Religiosity is known as the level of an individual's beliefs in religious values and practices, and studies indicate that religiosity influences purchasing decisions (Delener, 1990). The study of Sohaib and Kang (2014a) indicates religion, human behaviour can affected the e-purchasing decisions, and the authors have justified that the impact of religiosity on purchase intention towards buyer behaviour has insufficiently examined in the e-commerce context. This study examined the impact of religiosity towards online purchasing with two aspects, interpersonal cognitive-based trust (built upon available knowledge) and affect-based trust (built upon emotional ties between partners) (McKnight & Norman, 2001). The study was supported by previous literature (Sohaib & Kang, 2014b, 2015, 2016; Alam & Siddiqui, 2019; Mohd Nawi & Sulaiman, 2021). The study considered religiosity along with the individualistic and collectivistic characteristics of the religions, as it reflects the factors like ethnicity, education, culture, trust, risk, other's opinion, attitude, etc. (Mohd Nawi & Sulaiman, 2021). Studies in e-commerce will help e-businesses platforms in Sri Lanka since studies help to understand how religiosity influences interpersonal trust and purchase intention. Currently, there are limited studies carried out in Sri Lanka concerning the effect of religion on purchase intention. The study's main focus was to identify religion's effect on interpersonal trust and, subsequently, purchase intention. The study's objectives were "investigate the effect of the religion on interpersonal trust aspect and subsequently purchasing intention" and "find the differences among religions on interpersonal trust aspect and subsequently purchase intention."

METHODOLOGY

The conceptual framework of researchers has been developed as follows (Figure1).
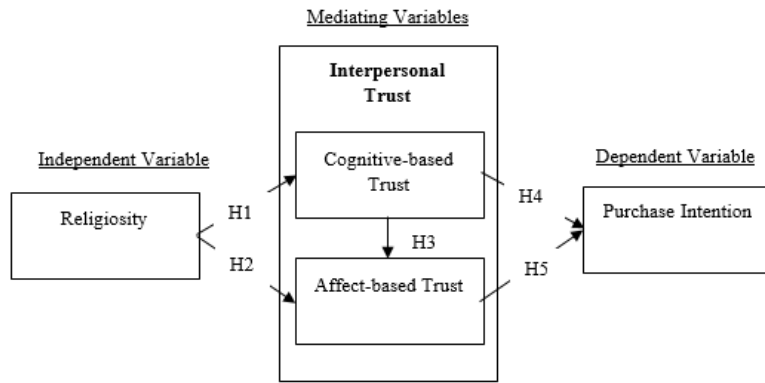
Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

This study focuses on two religions which are Buddhism and Hinduism as the selected religions that represent the largest shares of 69.3% and 13.6% respectively of the population ranking in Sri Lanka in Sri Lanka, the majority who identified as Buddhists belong to the ethnicity of Sinhalese, whereas Hindus belong to the ethnicity of Tamil. The study was conducted considering these two religions to address the study objectives, researchers have developed five hypotheses. Religion is a crucial factor in purchase intention (Sohaib & Kang, 2014b, 2015, 2016). As indicated by Sohaib and Kang (2014a), religious differences should be considered when determining the mix of web design strategies. Sohaib and Kang (2014b) justified that collectivistic buyers are more religious toward e-purchasing than individualistic buyers. Therefore, researchers have hypothesized;

H_1: Relationship between religiosity and cognitive-based trust is higher for Hindus than Buddhists.
H_2: Relationship between religiosity and affect-based trust is higher for Hindus than Buddhists.

Solomon (2017) found that e-retailers use religious themes, and followers of that religion are expected to abide by the rules set by their religious principles. Meanwhile images that include religious-oriented symbols should be carefully selected. Lee et al. (2011) found that social influence according to a specific religion can build consumer trust in e-shopping for collectivistic religions than individualistic. Sohaib and Kang (2014b) argued that affect-based trust builds upon indirect interaction sources such as recommendations from others.

H_3: Relationship between cognitive and affect-based trust is higher for Buddhists than Hindus.
H_4: Relationship between cognitive-based trust and online purchase intention is higher for Buddhists than Hindus.
H_5: Relationship between affect-based trust and online purchase intention is higher for Hindus than Buddhists.

To validate and test the hypotheses in the research model, the survey study was conducted through convenience sampling since, it is considered to be the best sampling method when the participants are conveniently available. The questionnaire was shared among undergraduates at Rajarata University of Sri Lanka since it is among the top 10 universities in Sri Lanka.

Undergraduates are considered users who use the internet most often and are applicable as e-consumers (Chen & Barnes, 2007).

86 responses from Buddhists and 35 from Hindus were collected from the questionnaire developed on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of measurements was evaluated by the internal consistency of measures, which was determined by Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR) tests. Measurements for reflective variables were evaluated by construct validity, determined by convergent validity and discriminant validity. The formative construct (religiosity) was assessed by collinearity analysis and determined by Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The study used Partial Least Squares (PLS) Method to analyze the research model using SmartPLS (version 3) software. The PLS method is considered an appropriate method in this type of research as it allows the researcher to assess the measurement and structural models simultaneously. It allows the testing of both reflective constructs and formative constructs together (Sohaib & Kang, 2014b). Current study model, cognitive and affect-based trust can be identified as reflective indicators since they were viewed as effects of latent variables. Whereas, religiosity can be identified as a formative construct as it is a multidimensional human phenomenon developed under behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, feelings and experience. Mediation analysis was conducted to find the effect of mediating variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability for both samples shown in Table 1 resulted significant as it showed the CR values for both in higher than the recommended value of 0.700 and the Cronbach's Alpha values were higher than the adequate benchmark of 0.700. Validity for both samples shown in Table 1 resulted significantly as the convergent validity reflected in Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was higher than 0.500 for both samples, and the discriminant validity reflected in Fornell-Larcker Criterion and the results were significant.

Table 1 Reliability and validity Assessment of Buddhist and Hindu Sample

Construct	Buddhist Sample (n=86)							Hindu Sample (n=35)						
	C Alpha	CR	AVE	Fornell-Larcker Criterion				C Alpha	CR	AVE	Fornell-Larcker Criterion			
				AT	CT	PI	RE				AT	CT	PI	RE
AT	0.839	0.893	0.681	0.825				0.784	0.863	0.623	0.789			
CT	0.534	0.757	0.598	0.769	0.773			0.899	0.93	0.77	0.807	0.878		
PI	0.715	0.827	0.574	0.789	0.721	0.758		0.838	0.891	0.672	0.788	0.848	0.82	
RE	NA	NA	NA	0.618	0.536	0.548	1	NA	NA	NA	0.797	0.772	0.755	1

Notes: AT: Affect-based Trust, CT: Cognitive-based Trust, PI: Purchase Intention, RE: Religiosity
C Alpha: Cronbach's Alpha, CR: Composite Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted

Collinearity Analysis assessed reliability and validity for religiosity, and VIF values for constructs of religiosity resulted in recommended VIF values of less than 3.3. The significance of the path coefficient and the variance (R^2) assessed the structural model and the hypothesis. To compare the differences between Buddhists and Hindus, multi-group PLS analysis was employed, which is appropriate for the study area. It is recommended to have *p* scores less than 0.050 (*p* value<0.05) and *t* scores greater than 1.960 (*t* value>1.960) to have/identify a significant impact on the relationships. The significance of the paths was determined using the

t-statistical test calculated with the bootstrapping technique (1000 subsamples). Results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 T-Statistics and Path Coefficient (Independent Sample t-test) for Buddhist and Hindu Samples

Path	Buddhist Sample (n=86)			Hindu Sample (n=35)		
	Path Coefficient (β)	*t*-Value	*p*-Value	Path Coefficient (β)	*t*-Value	*p*-Value
RE-> CT	0.536	6.691	0	0.772	10.562	0
RE -> AT	0.288	3.377	0.001	0.432	2.098	0.036
CT -> AT	0.615	8.406	0	0.473	2.175	0.03
CT -> PI	0.275	2.32	0.021	0.611	3.843	0
AT -> PI	0.577	4.893	0	0.297	1.754	0.08

Significant at *t* value> 1.960, *p* value<0.050

Notes: AT: Affect-based Trust, CT: Cognitive-based Trust, PI: Purchase Intention, RE: Religiosity

In order to calculate the multi-group differences, variance (R^2) analysis was employed and the results in Table 3 revealed that the impact is significant.

Table 3 Variance (R2) of the Variables

Variable	Buddhist Sample (n=86)	Hindus Sample (n=35)
	Variance (R^2)	Variance (R^2)
CT	0.287	0.596
AT	0.652	0.725
PI	0.653	0.754

Notes: AT: Affect-based Trust, CT: Cognitive-based Trust, PI: Purchase Intention

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study's main findings revealed that interpersonal trust for an e-retailer could vary with the consumer's religiosity and, subsequently, e-purchasing intention. Results showed that the Hindu (collectivistic) religion's interpersonal trust effects could transfer to the same religious web context. Thus, in the B2C context, the relationship between religiosity and interpersonal trust was significant compared to Buddhists. Hindus had significantly more positive purchase intentions compared to Buddhists. This suggests that religious attitude is an essential element of trust in purchase decisions and may affect a buyer's perception of confidence to buy online. Parties involved in e-businesses can customize their websites accordingly, plan their strategies, goals, and objectives, implement plans, and maintain effective communication with customers. The study provided a guideline for website developers to use pictures, symbols, colours, and other related things to their websites accordingly. The study will provide many potential paths for future researchers as there were insufficient studies conducted in the Sri Lankan context. In future research, it is recommended to use a larger sample size as it is helpful to evaluate the stability and dependability of the findings. It is recommended to carry out studies addressing all the religions in Sri Lanka. The moderating effect has not been examined in the current study, and it is recommended to use moderating variables in the future.

***Keywords*:** B2C e-commerce, interpersonal trust, purchase intention, religiosity

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