

**CHARITHA HARSHANI PERERA**

School of Business & Management, RMIT University, Viet Nam

**RAJKISHORE NAYAK**

School of Communication & Design, RMIT University, Viet Nam

**LONG THANG VAN NGUYEN**

School of Communication & Design, RMIT University, Viet Nam

## **ROLE OF SOCIAL WORD-OF-MOUTH ON EMOTIONAL BRAND ATTACHMENT AND BRAND CHOICE INTENTION: A STUDY ON PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES IN VIETNAM**

### **Abstract:**

Prospective students are increasingly using social media to gather information about the higher education institutes (HEIs) while seeking the experiences and recommendations from others to evaluate the HEIs in order to make enrolment decision. Although the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social media is increasingly adopting in Vietnam, the association of social word-of-mouth (sWOM) in the higher education sector in Vietnam is an under-researched area. Accordingly, using users and gratification theory, this study aims to identify the role of sWOM in developing emotional attachment with the brands. This study has focused to examine the prospective students' interaction with sWOM to develop emotional attachment with HEI brands and thus brand choice intention.

Based on the survey of a sample of undergraduates in the private institutes in Vietnam, this study develops framework consisting of sWOM as independent variable, emotional brand attachment and brand choice intention as dependent variables, and social media interactivity, perceived information usefulness and sWOM credibility as mediating variables. The results were analysed using correlation and regression analysis. Structural Equation Modelling was adopted to measure the model fit of the framework. The results showed that sWOM has a significant impact on emotional brand attachment and brand choice intention in the higher education sector. Social media interactivity, perceived information usefulness and sWOM credibility strengthened the relationship among sWOM and emotional brand attachment. This paper offers a better understanding of how emotional brand attachment with social media affected is by sWOM and thus brand choice intention.

### **Keywords:**

Social word-of-mouth, Emotional Brand Attachment, Higher Educational Institutes, Brand choice intention, Social media interactivity, Perceived information usefulness, SWOM credibility

**JEL Classification:** M31, M39