

The Influence of Digital Social Responsibility via Social Media on Online Word of Mouth and Purchase Intent: A Case of Startups in the Cambodian Context

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Abstract

Social responsibility is one of the most essential strategic requirements for organizations around the world. Firms have changed social responsibility programs into digital platforms - digital social responsibility (DISR). The goal of this study is to determine how DISR influences online word of mouth (ONWM) and purchase intent (PUIN) in a social media scenario among Cambodian startup bossiness. An online survey was used to obtain data from 150 students from higher education institutions in Cambodia. In this work, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to assess and evaluate the hypotheses offered. The results demonstrated that perceived DISR has a significant influence on consumers' perceptions (CUPE) and ONWM. According to the mediation analysis, CUPE partially mediated the link between DISR and online ONWM and completely mediated the association between DISR and PUIN. Despite the fact that few previous studies have investigated the impact of DISR on online ONWM and PUIN, these results confirm its influence on CUPE and ONWM. This empirical study can help managers understand the impact of DISR on consumer perceptions and online ONWM via social media. This study is a first attempt in Cambodia to examine the applicability of DISR activities in a social media context on CUPE and behavior. The results should also encourage firms to engage in DISR initiatives in order to increase favorable consumer views and spread positive word of mouth about their operations.

Keywords: Digital Social Responsibility, Social Media, Online Word of Mouth, Purchase Intent, Startup, Cambodia

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study and Problem Statement

One of the most important strategic movements for businesses is social responsibility. Businesses that maintain positive relationships with their customers and other stakeholders can gain an advantage. In a business environment, businesses should use their legal or economic responsibilities to better society (Carroll, 2016). This paradigm shift, the long-term value of a company's relationships with many stakeholders, such as consumers, shareholders, and employees, is the focus of social responsibility. According to a prior study of Back and Parks (2003), social responsibility affects a variety of customer variables such as attitude, contentment, purchasing intent, and brand loyalty. Furthermore, social responsibility can improve business performance and reputation, as well as product evaluations, allowing it to become a popular marketing strategy around the world.

Advances in information and communication technology, as well as online social networking, have transformed how people live and communicate around the world. Social media communication is more colorful and inexpensive than traditional media. In terms of technology, social media has huge potential for expanding communication processes, increasing involvement in the program by businesses and audiences, and so improving direct connection (Thackeray et al., 2008). Specifically, individuals can use social networking services to interact, actively participate in conversations, learn about current events, and express their opinions in a free and fair manner. Customers today have access to powerful internet technology and mobile phones, which they utilize to express themselves and create change in their lives. Furthermore, it facilitates in the distribution of essential information on demand or when others request it (Fortunati & Taipale, 2014).

Guided by these perspectives, more information about mobile technology and its acceptance in Cambodia can be found in We are Social's Global Digital Report 2020. According to the poll, Cambodia has 12 million mobile internet users out of 18 million people, representing a 75% penetration rate. According to the survey, 12 million people use social media on the internet. Furthermore, an average Khmer user spends 9 hours each day on the internet, with 97% of Khmer internet users using mobile internet. To illustrate, Cambodia has the highest rate of

internet banking service access (74% of the population), followed by Sweden (71%), and Turkey (68%). According to a survey conducted among global users aged 16 to 64 in the second and third quarters (Leesa-Nguansuk, 2019), the top five most active social media and messenger platforms accessed by internet users are Facebook (93%), YouTube (91%), Line (84%), Facebook Messenger (72%), and Instagram (65%).

1.2. The Purpose of the Study

It is widely acknowledged that digital social responsibility (DISR) is an important corporate strategy. However, past research has shown that nothing has been done to investigate the impact of DISR on purchasing intent (PUIN), customer perception (CUPE), and online word of mouth (ONWM). The current study seeks to get a complete empirical understanding of the influence of DISR on CUPE, ONWM, and PUIN using social media.

1.3. Research Hypotheses

Based on the purpose of the study, eight hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: CUPE is directly influenced by DISR efforts.
- H2: Initiatives promoting DISR have a direct impact on PUIN.
- H3: Initiatives promoting DISR have a direct impact on ONWM.
- H4: CUPE influences PUIN.
- H5: CUPE has a direct impact on ONWM.
- H6: ONWM influences PUIN.
- H7: As mediated by CUPE, DISR has a strong positive indirect effect on PUIN.
- H8: As mediated by CUPE, DISR has a considerable positive indirect effect on ONWM.

1.4 Conceptual Framework of the Study

As stated earlier, after reviewing existing research in this field, a study design was developed to assess the impact of DISR via social media on ONWM and PUIN. The eight theories were explained. Figure 1 depicts the study's conceptual framework.

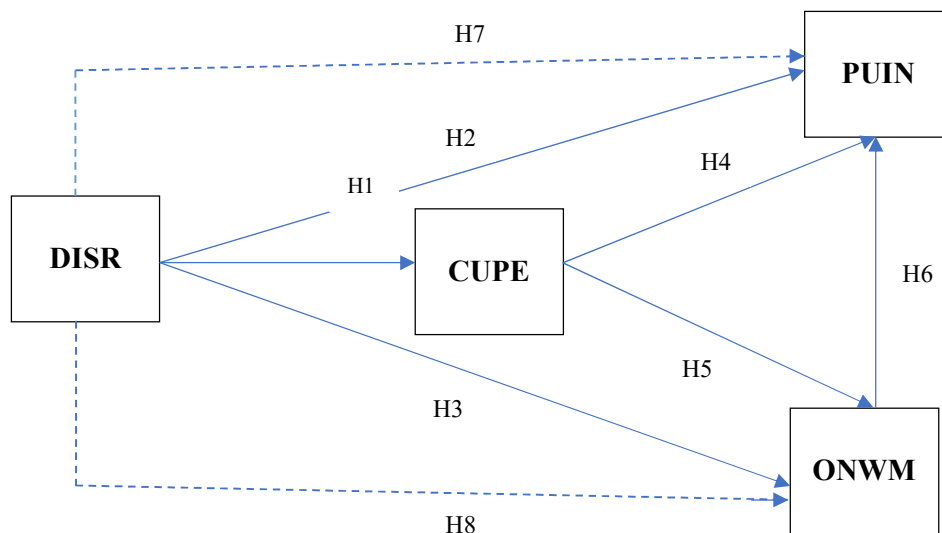


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Used in the Study

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Perspectives on Digital Social Responsibility (DISR)

Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have grown in popularity over the last decade and are an excellent way for businesses to engage with their customers and stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 2016). As internet technology advances, previously offline corporate social responsibility initiatives and activities have evolved into online and virtual corporate social responsibility - digital social responsibility (DISR). Previous research has demonstrated that using social media can improve the effectiveness of DISR communication (Fernández-Hartmann & Apaolaza, 2021). DISR refers to any efforts, initiatives, or activities taken by a person, group, or business to develop and implement a corporate social responsibility notion online or through any digital platform. In other words, DISR on social media refers to the time at which customers begin to utilize

social media to communicate with organizations about social responsibility. It also describes how consumers connect with a company's social responsibility activities through social media, such as Facebook likes, shares, and comments.

Social networking sites have proven to be one of the most effective methods for implementing DISR (Colleoni, 2013). According to Farzin and Fattahi (2018), organizations with a higher DISR rating are more likely to have an online presence, such as more Facebook page followers, than those with a lower DISR rating. Furthermore, Tao and Wilson (2015) found that Facebook is the most popular social media platform for implementing digital social responsibility when compared to other social media sites. Organizations of various sizes and types began depending heavily on this type of media to implement and communicate their social responsibility in a variety of ways (Coleoni, 2013). Using social media to execute DISR improves the efficiency of firms' social engagement since it allows for the easy sharing of digital social responsibility projects and activities. According to Fatma et al. (2020), the use of DISR on social media is likely to play an important role in DISR concepts. DISR can be implemented faster and at a lower cost than traditional media such as television, print, and radio.

2.2 Perspectives on Customer Perception (CUPE) and Purchasing Intent (PUIN)

Customer perception (CUPE) is the process by which consumers perceive, organize, interpret, and provide meaning to a marketing stimulus (LaMarco, 2018). Previous research has discovered a correlation between customer perceptions and purchasing intent on social media (Khodabandeh & Lindh, 2021; Johnstone, & Lindh, 2021). Based on perception, one can deduce a person's psychological tendencies, as well as their likes and dislikes for an object. A person's perception of an object has the potential to influence his or her judgement, information processing, and behavior. Previous studies found a correlation between a consumer's perception and purchasing intent. Individuals who have a good perception are more likely to buy a product, whether they like or detest it.

In fact, purchase intent (PUIN) remains an important statistic for firms (Anastasiadou, Lindh, & Vasse, 2019). This is because firms can predict whether a buyer would purchase a product within a given time frame. This variable also functions as a proxy for actual behavior (Cohen, Blake, & Goodman, 2016). According to Green and Peloza (2014), social responsibility influences customer purchase decisions when a brand's products or services include ethical offerings and the product indicates a commitment to defending consumers' interests. According to Palacios-Florencio et al. (2018), one of the most important factors in a customer's purchasing decision is the social responsibility initiative.

As per its limitations, Prendergast et al. (2010) found that ONWM had a direct impact on consumer purchasing intent. It influences a customer's faith in a firm or its products. According to Palacios-Florencio et al. (2018), the buyer evaluates the unethical and misleading actions of firms before making a purchasing decision. Customers expect businesses to be ethical, or they will avoid doing business with them. When DISR is used, it has the potential to positively influence consumers' perceptions, leading in good ONWM and, eventually, influence their buy intent.

2.3 Perspectives on Online Word of Mouth (ONWM)

The conventional concept of word of mouth has given way to online word of mouth (ONWM). Previous research has established a correlation between a company's social responsibility initiatives and favorable consumer feedback (Jalilvand, et al., 2017). According to Du et al. (2010), one of the primary behavioral effects of DISR activities is a consumer's willingness to talk positively about a firm that participates in social responsibility activities. Yang (2017) defines positive the word of mouth as the preference to spread positive communication about a brand with others. The word of mouth influences a wide range of characteristics, including awareness, behavior intention, actual purchasing behavior (both offline and online), attitudes and views.

By virtue of its importance, Litvin et al. (2018) define ONWM as an informal conversation between a firm and its customers using internet-based technology about product or service aspects. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2003) defined online word-of-mouth (ONNWM) as any kind of message, whether positive or negative, made by potential, real, or existing customers about goods or services and transmitted across to reach crowds of individuals and organizations via information and communications technology. Fatma et al. (2020) argue that ONWM through social media has various advantages over traditional offline word of mouth, including quick and spontaneous information transmission. It can also be used to develop common ideals for corporate social responsibility.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), quantitative research is a type of investigation that examines the relationships between the variables in the study. Variables and numerical data are measured using statistical approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). According to Neuman (2014), a quantitative inquiry was required because the study looked at and analyzed variables to test hypotheses. With regard to the selection of research design, this design style was best suited to investigating the study's research topics and testing its hypotheses.

3.2 Research Samples

A total of 200 surveys were returned. After the questionnaires had been completed, 150 genuine surveys were used for further study. Purposive sampling was used to distribute a self-administered online questionnaire to Khmer Facebook users via Google Form. In addition, Anderson and Gerbing (1988) suggested a minimum sample size of 150 for a study. Because structural equation modeling (SEM) is the major method used in this study, a minimum sample size of 150 is sought throughout data collection.

3.3 Research Instrument, Its Development, Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study employed the surveyed questionnaire as the main research instrument. Typically, the questionnaires were divided into three sections: (1) preliminary screening questions; (2) general information on the study participants' demographic and behavioral characteristics; and (3) construct measurement items. Only measurement items from prior studies were used in this investigation. The items in the range of strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) were measured using a five-point Likert scale (5). The suggested model's independent variable, DISR, was measured using a five-item scale derived from Butt (2016).

The researcher used a four-item scale developed by Herrero and Martnez (2020), and Chu and Chen (2019) to assess the customer's perception. In the case of ONWM, measurements were taken using a four-item scale from the literature of Kwok et al. (2019) and Chu and Chen (2019). Tien et al. (2019) analyzed PUIN using a three-item measure. Table 1 displays all of the scale items used in the investigation, which totaled 16 on the measuring scales.

During the pre-test stage, three researchers examined the questionnaire's content validity to assess the relevance and validity of its questions. If the questions are acceptable, the item-objective congruence (IOC) index, originally proposed by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977) and mentioned by Turner and Carlson (2003), produces IOC values ranging from 0.67 to 1.00. Undergraduate students participated in a pilot study, and the results were used to assess the validity and understandability of the scale items (Awang, 2015). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the questionnaire's reliability, and it was found to be in the 0.7 or above range for all variables, indicating that the questionnaire was trustworthy. Table 1 provides additional information.

Table 1: Questionnaire Development by Each Variable

No.	Statement
<u>Digital Social Responsibility (DISR)</u>	
DISR-1	Startup, in my perspective, has an excellent track record of digital social.
DISR-2	Startup is a brand that is committed to digital social responsibility.
DISR-3	In terms of societal obstacles, Startup is working hard to deploy DISR to help resolve these issues.
DISR-4	In terms of environmental issues, Startup is making a strong effort to use DISR to educate customers about its environmental procedures and safeguards.
DISR-5	In the face of economic challenges, Startup is making a concerted effort to implement DISR in order to build strong relationships with its clients and secure long-term economic success.
<u>Customers' Perception (CUPE)</u>	
CUPE-1	I think that like, sharing, and commenting on Startup's efforts on social media platforms is a great concept.
CUPE-2	I enjoy the idea of using social media to like, share, and comment on startup activities.
CUPE-3	It appears exciting on social media to like, share, and remark on Startup's work.
CUPE-4	My sentiments towards the Startup are excellent.
<u>Online Word of Mouth (ONWM)</u>	
ONWM-1	I would like the DISR projects and statements from Startup.
ONWM-2	I would like to share such DISR activities and messages from Startup.
ONWM-3	I would want to comment on Startup's DISR initiatives and statements.
ONWM-4	I am more inclined to spread positive word about Startup on social media.
<u>Purchasing Intent (PUIN)</u>	
PUIN-1	I would prefer buy items or brands that are involved in DISR initiatives than other (competing) products.
PUIN-2	When I need something, I will buy it from Startup.
PUIN-3	I would want to share the products or brands that are implementing DISR initiatives with my friends and other people on social media.

To ensure the eligibility of the samples, the responders were first asked three questions. "Do you have a

Facebook account that you used in the preceding month?” was the first question posed to the respondents. The second question was, “Do you like or follow any company's official Facebook page?” “Have you ever noticed any Facebook postings expressly mentioning the organization's contribution or donation to a charitable cause, volunteer efforts, or involvement in the communities in which it operates?” The third query was: According to the researcher, only persons who answered yes to all three initial screening questions were eligible to participate in the actual survey. Participants were prompted to review and revise their survey responses based on their opinions of DISR initiatives on social media.

As previously stated, the goal of this study is to evaluate the impact of DISR on ONWM and purchase intent in the context of social media. The authors employed a quantitative approach to test the offered hypotheses. A questionnaire was used to assess DISR, consumer attitude, ONWM, and purchase intent. AMOS 22.0 was used to review and analyze the data, evaluate the study's hypotheses, and assess the applicability of theories as well as the positive correlation of variables using SEM.

4.0 Results

4.1 Results of Demographic Data

The information for this study was gathered via an online self-administered questionnaire. The research samples were asked to recall their most recent engagement with an organization's official Facebook Page post that expressly addressed the company's donation, charitable activity, volunteering, or community activities, regardless of location. The researcher samples were then invited to complete the questionnaire based on their impressions of the DISR initiatives as expressed in the Facebook posts. Table 2 below provides the summary of variable classification and their items.

Table 2: Classification, Variable Items, Frequency and Percentage of the Collected Data

Demographic Data (n=150)			
Classification	Variable Items	Frequency	Percentage
1. Gender	Male	65	43.33
	Female	85	56.67
2. Daily Use of Social Media	< 1 hour	6	4.00
	1 hour - 2 hours	21	14.00
	3 hours - 4 hours	82	54.67
	> 4 hours	41	27.33
3. For me, social media is a handier venue than traditional ones for participating in social responsibility activities.	Yes	109	72.67
	No	10	6.66
	Maybe	31	20.67
4. I believe that companies should use social media to engage stakeholders in fixing social and environmental challenges.	Yes	123	82.00
	No	5	3.33
	Maybe	22	14.67

A total of 150 valid survey questions were ready for further processing. Table 2 presents the results, which reveal that males accounted for 43.33% of the total participants, while females made up 56.67%. The bulk of respondents (54.67%) spend 3–4 hours per day on social media. The majority of respondents (72.67%) believe that social media is a more convenient medium for participation in social responsibility activities than traditional media, and businesses should use social media to engage stakeholders in tackling social and environmental concerns (82.0%).

4.2 Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

This study conducted confirmatory factor analyses to evaluate the link between each component and the retained item. In this estimation, the models were submitted to an overall goodness of fit test as well as specific tests to verify their usefulness in identifying the assumed link between the variables. The model consisted of four structures and 16 individual elements. Table 3 shows the most relevant indicators of the measurement model used in this study.

Table 3: Model Measurement among Indicators (n=150)

No.	Classification	Loading	t-value	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
1.	DISR			0.82	0.92	0.57
	DISR-1	0.72				
	DISR-2	0.73	13.11			
	DISR-3	0.76	13.42			
	DISR-4	0.80	15.12			
	DISR-5	0.77	14.14			
2.	CUPE			0.84	0.89	0.54
	CUPE-1	0.74				
	CUPE-2	0.76	17.23			
	CUPE-3	0.70	14.89			
	CUPE-4	0.72	15.09			
3.	ONWM			0.83	0.91	0.60
	ONWM-1	0.75				
	ONWM-2	0.78	15.98			
	ONWM-3	0.76	15.76			
	ONWM-4	0.79	16.12			
4.	PUIN			0.85	0.87	0.57
	PUIN-1	0.75				
	PUIN-2	0.76	16.09			
	PUIN-3	0.74	15.87			

As indicated in Table 3 above, Cronbach's alpha values for all structures and subscales fall between 0.82 and 0.85. This value represents the model's varied reliability. All of the values above the minimum level of 0.70, confirming the model's constructions' internal coherence. This study also determined the conceptions' convergent and discriminant validities. Three indices establish the former validity: composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and all factor loadings, with values more than 0.70, 0.50, and 0.70, respectively (Awang, 2015). One of the criteria for appropriate discriminant validity is a high square root of AVE for each construct in comparison to the correlation between that construct and other components in the study model. According to the AVE computation, the square root of AVE for each construct (DISR = 0.57; CUPE = 0.54; ONWM = 0.60; PUIN = 0.57) exceeds the correlation between that construct and other constructs. As a result, the discriminant validity of all ideas is supported.

The results demonstrated a reasonable level of concept validity for both convergent and divergent validities. This suggests that the research constructs are well suited to assessing the structural model. The goodness-of-fit metrics for the measurement model above are as follows: Chi-square = 199.38; df = 98; CMIN/df = 2.03; GFI = 0.91; NFI = 0.91; TLI = 0.91; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.03. These numbers suggested a good fit between the model and the data when using structural model analysis.

4.3 Results of Structural Equation Modeling

The structural model was examined by testing the hypotheses proposed in the research model. Path analysis was used to establish causal relationships between constructs. The goodness-of-fit indices for this model were: chi-square = 221.56, df = 98, CMIN/df = 2.26, GFI = 0.90, NFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.91, CFI = 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.03. All of the indicators met the cutoffs, indicating that the model is a good fit. Table 4 summarizes the hypothesis testing data, highlighting the significance of varied relationships.

Table 4: Results of Hypothesis Testing Summarization

Research Hypothesis	Correlational Variables	Coefficient	t-value	Null Hypothesis
H1: CUPE is directly influenced by DISR efforts.	DISR → CUPE	0.51	0.67	Accepted
H2: Initiatives promoting DISR have a direct impact on PUIN.	DISR → PUIN	0.10	0.77	Rejected
H3: Initiatives promoting DISR have a direct impact on ONWM.	DISR → ONWM	0.36	5.33	Accepted
H4: CUPE influences PUIN.	CUPE → PUIN	0.35	5.22	Accepted
H5: CUPE has a direct impact on ONWM.	CUPE → ONWM	0.43	4.57	Accepted
H6: ONWM influences PUIN.	ONWM → PUIN	0.12	1.35	Rejected

The regression results show that DISR has a significant positive impact on CUPE (Beta = 0.52; $p < 0.001$; accepting H1) and ONWM (Beta = 0.36; $p < 0.001$; accepting H3), but not on PUIN (Beta = 0.10; rejecting H2). Additionally, CUPE significantly improves ONWM (Beta = 0.43; $p < 0.001$; accepting H5) and PUIN (Beta = 0.36; $p < 0.001$; accepting H4). Finally, the structural model results show that ONWM has no effect on PUIN (Beta = 0.12, rejecting hypothesis 6).

The bootstrapping methodology was used to investigate the mediating influence of DISR on ONWM and PUIN via CUPE. DISR has a significant direct influence on ONWM (0.36; $p < 0.001$; 95% CI [0.17, 0.43]) and a significant indirect effect on ONWM via CUPE (0.17; $p < 0.001$; 95% CI [0.13, 0.30]), indicating that partial mediation is confirmed. According to the data, DISR has a minimal direct influence on PUIN (0.102; 95%CI [-0.111, 0.085]), but a significant indirect effect on PUIN via CUPE (0.20; $p < 0.001$; 95%CI [0.13, 0.30]). As a result, the whole mediation effect has been demonstrated. Table 5 summarizes the mediation analysis results obtained via bootstrapping.

Table 5: Results of Mediation Analysis Using Bootstrapping (n=150)

Research Hypothesis	DE	IE	Null Hypothesis
H7 DISR → CUPE → PUIN	0.10	0.20***	Full Mediation
H8 DISR → CUPE → ONWM	0.36***	0.17***	Partial Mediation

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.05$, DE = Direct Effect, IE = Indirect Effect

5.0 Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendation

5.1 Discussion

Based on data from 150 samples from Cambodian higher education institutions, the current study discovered that DISR improved CUPE and ONWM. This study's findings reflect previous research by Fatma et al. (2020), which found that DISR actions can boost consumer sentiments and lead to excellent ONWM. DISR initiatives and activities can serve as a cost-effective and time-saving platform for engaging stakeholders. Businesses should think about DISR as a strategic implementation option. Firms should, however, implement a segmentation plan to identify clients for DISR activities, and traditional social responsibility methods continue to play a role in certain segments because not all customers have access to a digital platform. Practically speaking, DISR can be viewed as a marketing activity that can assist businesses in developing positive brand advocacy. Advocacy via social media appears to be a promising means of sharing information. It consists of third-party cheerleaders, or brand advocates, who help organizations promote themselves through their own social media channels. Companies can gain brand advocacy using DISR by having Facebook users or Page followers like, comment on, and share their DISR activity.

The study's results will be useful for practitioners. Businesses must first realize that DISR activities and investments can help them achieve beneficial CUPE and ONWM. DISR appears to be a more effective means of promoting positive consumer sentiment and word-of-mouth. Customers can join in and get involved in social responsibility activities via digital channels like social media, which are significantly more convenient and time-

consuming than traditional ones. As social media technology evolves, businesses will find it harder to design comprehensive online and offline social responsibility initiatives that satisfy stakeholders and generate a competitive advantage.

5.2 Conclusion

There have been relatively few empirical studies on DISR and its impact on CUPE and behavior in the setting of social media. Social media has become one of the most essential channels for businesses to interact with and engage customers in social responsibility issues, projects, and activities. Despite the fact that DISR appears to be a vital strategic decision for businesses, scholars are still working to fully understand its impact on consumer perceptions, ONWM, and purchase intent. The current study investigated the effect of DISR on ONWM and purchase intent, as well as the mediating role of CUPE in the link between DISR, ONWM, and PUIN.

5.3 Recommendation for Further Research

The study aimed to increase people's understanding of DISR in the setting of social media. There are a few shortcomings to the study that must be addressed. Our initial research focused on the influence of DISR on social media, using Facebook to represent social networking sites.

1. Further research is needed to determine the impact of DISR programs on ONWM and purchase intent across various social media platforms, including Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Tumblr, Flickr, Google+, Pinterest, and others.
2. This study only examined a few buildings that may be influenced by DSR. Other dimensions, such as customer loyalty, brand equity, and brand image, could be incorporated in future studies and tested using empirical data.
3. Samples were collected in Cambodia. The findings should not be generalized without extreme caution. Cultural considerations may alter customers' impressions of the DISR. Additional research could include data collection and cross-national comparisons.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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Ethics

Participant consent was waived due to the minimal risk to the subjects involved.

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