

## **Effect of Social Media Influencers' Attributes on Customer Purchasing Behavior in Sri Lankan Context (Special References to Facebook and Instagram)**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to identify how social media influencer's attributes can be useful to tune the customer purchasing behavior. Since social media influence highly affects the day-to-day life of people, he/she highly impacts on decision making of customers to purchase products in the market. Therefore, it is essential to identify how these significant attributes support him/her to influence customer purchasing behavior. Through the literature, attractiveness, expertise, prestige, follower base, and trustworthiness are identified as major attributes and are considered as independent variables, while customer attitude and customer mimicry desire act as the mediating factors of the relationship between these attributes and customer purchasing behavior. The research is designed as a quantitative study and primary data were collected from a sample of 405 participants through questionnaire. All the Facebook and Instagram users in the country are considered as the population. Reliability and validity of data are ensured through pilot test and data were analyzed through factor analysis, correlation analysis developing multiple regression models and hypothesis testing. Considering the findings, all the attributes show positive correlation, and all the correlations are significant at the point of  $P = 0.001$ . The conceptual framework is acceptable since all the hypotheses are supported. The conclusion is that there is a positive and significant impact of social media influencer's attractiveness, expertise, prestige, follower base, and trustworthiness on customer purchasing behavior while customer attitude and customer mimicry desire act as mediators. Policy implication of the study is to identify the suitable social media influencer and determine the criteria for selecting the social media influencer for social media marketing. The selected

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influencer will highly support the company by marketing its products and ensuring the customer attraction. He can apply these results and improve his follower base earning more through effective marketing campaigns. Hence, he can ensure high demand for the product, maintain competitiveness, and contribute to profit maximization. Novelty of the study is that it shows the significance of social media influencer's attributes on social media marketing. By utilizing these attributes, he can attract new customers, retain existing customers, change customer perception towards the brand. Eventually, he will cause the brand to become the market leader.

**Keywords:** Facebook, Instagram, Social media influencer, Social media marketing.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to identify the social media influencer's attributes which will be useful to tweak the customer purchasing behavior. Since social media influencer (SMI) highly affects the daily life of people nowadays, he greatly impacts on the way which customers make decisions when purchasing products in the market. Therefore, it is essential to identify the substantial attributes which support him to influence on customer purchasing behavior. Hence, the main objective of the research is to determine the significant attributes of SMIs towards customer purchasing behavior. Sub objectives are to determine the impact of SMI's attractiveness on customer purchasing behavior, identify the impact of SMI's expertise on customer purchasing behavior, identify the impact of SMI's prestige on customer purchasing behavior, identify the impact of SMI's follower base on customer purchasing behavior, and identify the impact of SMI's trustworthiness on customer purchasing behavior.

With the emergence of social media platforms, SMIs play a major role in the marketing industry (Carter, 2016). The concept of social influencers has evolved with the rapid popularity of using peer reviews, comments and tweets on products and services when making the purchasing decisions. According to Khamis, Ang and Welling

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(2017), SMIs are also known as “Social Media Celebrities” or “Micro Celebrities”. According to the global state in 2021 January, social media usage worldwide is 68% of Facebook, 12% of Pinterest, 9% of Twitter and so on. In addition to that, considering the global SMIs, mobile marketer stated that 51% of social media users believe in SMIs. Furthermore, mobile marketers reported that nearly 45% of social media users follow an influencer, and among them, 34% have discovered a brand solely based on influencer posts.

Infographic shows that Instagram is the major source of social media influencing (Gorry & Westbrook, 2009). Sri Lanka showed 7,613,000 internet users on December in 2020, and 35.4% penetration, per IWS (Asia Internet Usage Stats Facebook and 2021 Population Statistics, 2021). In Sri Lanka, SMIs highly supported to promote relatedness, engagement, authenticity, and loyalty of personal and beauty care products (Lakmal et al., 2019). Furthermore, social media marketing creates brand equity and brand image among the consumers (Hilal, 2018) and brand awareness and brand image mediated the effect of social media making on purchase intention (Jayasuriya et al., 2018).

With the emergence of social media concept, social media influencing concept has become an emerging trend in the marketing field (Lim et al., 2017). Corresponding to a Nielsen marketing survey, influencer marketing yields 11 times higher than digital marketing. Moreover, almost 80% of online marketers claimed that SMIs were great in taking their business to the next level (Forbes, 2017). This significant effect has driven the world of research to conduct more research on this domain. Most of the researchers have addressed the influencing factors such as brand image, and product matchup source of attraction (Hermanda et al., 2019).

While Sri Lankans practice social media influencing as a marketing strategy, no proper investigation has been carried out in Sri Lanka and there are no proper criteria for selecting SMIs for an organization. Apart from that, a limited number of studies has been done to identify the characteristics that SMIs should have to enhance effectiveness of social media marketing for turning customers to the purchasing intention (Guruge, 2018). Therefore, the main problem addressed in

this research is to identify significant attributes of SMIs for effective social media marketing which tend customers for purchasing intention. Considering all the literature and marketing industry, this research will fill up the literature gap in Sri Lankan context and identify and measure the significant factors of SMIs that derive high effectiveness for social media marketing.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Influence framework: According to the influence model, there was a mechanism of turning target into specific action such as purchasing behavior. It was developed by Scheer and Stern (1992). This had basically four steps as following.

1. Influencer's influencing attempt
2. Target audience's attitude behavior toward the influencer
3. The target desire for complying.
4. The targets' behavioral outcome.

In the first step of this model, influencer identified its target audience and the power resource to attract the target audience. According to past literature, Ki and Kim (2019) studied SMI's attractiveness, prestige, expertise, information and interactive Instagram contents. Wiedmann & von Mettenheim (2020) studied social influencer's attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness. Guruge (2018) studied influencer's credibility, follower base and attractiveness. Out of these sources of power, attractiveness, expertise, prestige, trustworthiness, and follower base were used in this study. Furthermore, according to the literature, these were identified as the core sources of power.

The second phase of this mechanism described the influencer's attempt on controlling power sources' effect on the target audience's attitude. According to Ki and Kim (2019), this attitude either became positive or negative. Furthermore, it stated that the positive attitude could become either taste leadership or opinion leadership. Taste leadership referred to someone who knew what looked better and opinion leadership referred to someone who suggested and provided opinion on what was better. However, this study concerned customer attitude as a positive attitude of SMIs.

According to the third phase of this mechanism, after the target audience received positive attitude toward the influencer, audience encouraged to comply with the influencer. When the target audience was more inspired with the influencer, they became the role model of the target audience (Ruvio et al., 2013). Therefore, according to this model, when the target audience's positive attitude increased, the desire to comply with the influencer also increased which eventually led to behavioral change.

According to the final stage of this mechanism, pleasing outcome came as the final stage. For instance, when target audience received positive attitude toward the influencer, they tended to comply with the influencers such as commenting on their post, sharing the posts, and trying to imitate their lifestyle. Finally, they tried to reach the influencers' lifestyle. This led to customer's behavioral outcomes such as buying behavior.

Doppelganger effect: This theory highlighted the desire to comply in the influencing model. According to the Ruvio, Gavish and Shoham (2013) doppelganger effect mainly affected the customer purchasing decision. Based on this theory, customers were spectacle in which individuals copy others' consumption purposely in response to a desire to look or behave like those they model. Furthermore, this role model could be bidirectional such as mother and daughter or sisters. Or it could be an untraditional relationship such as SMI. However, the mimicry desire has had a significant effect on customer lifestyle and purchasing decisions.

Considering all the points in the theory, the doppelganger effect could be embedded to the influencing model and the desire to comply was more illustrated in this theory. Therefore, we believed that the desire to mimicry (doppelganger effect) would turn the customers into delightful actions such as purchasing behavior.

### **Attractiveness of SMI and Customer Attitude**

Human beings were more visually attractive creatures (Patzner, 1983). Attractiveness refers to the degree to which a source was perceived as

visually attractive or esthetically appealing. In some research, attractiveness was defined as the ability to reach the great opinion leader (Horai et al., 1974). Furthermore, attractiveness or attractive individuals were defined as being more in line with a desirable normative profile (Lorenzo et al., 2010).

Attractiveness could be identified as a major equipment in marketing (Hoyer & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). It was the personal judgment associated with individual judgments, artistically appealing or design. Several studies were being carried out on the effectiveness of social influences. Most of the time, attractiveness was tested with several other attributes such as trustworthiness. But attractiveness was not the most important requirement for SMIs in their winning strategy (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). Nonetheless, presenting attractive posts represented that he/she had good taste (McQuarrie et al., 2013). However, there was a significant impact of attractiveness on customer attitude which shaped customer purchasing intention that was done through Instagram platform (Ki & Kim, 2019).

Based on this literature, the following hypothesis could be gained.

H1: Attractiveness of the SMI has a significant impact on customer attitude.

### **SMI's Expertise and Customer Attitude**

Expertise was the quality of having more knowledge and experience (in making product choices or decisions) than others (McQuarrie et al., 2013). Also, Erdogan, Baker and Tagg (2001) defined expertise as the extension which a communicator was perceived to be sourced of valid assertion. The knowledge and experience of someone had better standards and can better identify what was esthetically pleasing or visually appealing, and thus demonstrate better esthetic taste (McQuarrie et al., 2013). According to the source credibility model, one of the main supplements was expertise.

In the literature, several research papers mentioned expertise as one of the key formulas for SMIs (Horai et al., 1974; Guruge, 2018). Also,

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followers believed that influencers have gained expertise through formal or informal studies showcasing in the reference's topic (Guruge, 2018). In addition to that, expertise was the major influencing factor for the brand image (McQuarrie et al., 2013). Furthermore, there was a significant impact of expertise on taste leadership (Ki & Kim, 2019). Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) have considered that expertise was one of the key formulae for influencers, but it was not the major factor when considering trustworthiness and attractiveness. Besides, Li & Du (2011) revealed that expertise derived an excellent opinion leader.

Based on the literature above, the following hypothesis can be made.

H2: Expertise of the SMI has a significant impact on customer attitude.

### **SMI's Prestige and Customer Attitude**

Prestige was defined as the extension which someone perceived as conveying relatively high statues (EM Steenkamp et al., 2003). Furthermore, Hoyer and Stockburger-Sauer (2012) identified prestige as a key attribute of SMIs on customer attitude. It referred to the reputation of SMIs of which followers considered and how much she/he gained a name in social media in a positive manner.

Prestige has been considered as one of the major factors in digital marketing arena (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). Several studies have carried out prestige as one of the common key terms of their studies. Someone's visual taste depended on whether those with high social standing appreciated it (Ki & Kim, 2019). Evidence showed that prestige had a positive moderating effect on the relationship between consumers' engagement in online communities and brand loyalty intention (Nesi et al., 2017). In addition to that, it provided evidence that the prestige of the influencer affected the number of followers in fashion industry. Also, influencers with luxury lifestyle have gained more attraction from the followers and in the fashion industry (McQuarrie et al., 2013).

Based on this literature, the following hypothesis could be gained.

H3: Prestige of the SMI has a significant impact on customer attitude.

### **Number of Followers and Customer Attitude**

Social media followers were the people, or the network interested in having interaction and keeping connection with their interested personalities (Beal, 2022). The follower was someone in Twitter, blogs, and other social media sites, who subscribed to receive updates. Based on the number of followers, there were four types of influencers as mega, macro, micro and nano influencers (Guruge, 2018).

Cooperating with influencers with a high number of followers might not be the best marketing choice for promoting divergent products, as this decreased the brand's perceived uniqueness and consequently brand attitudes (De Veirman et al., 2017). Also, customers' reactions toward an influencer's posts differed based on whether they were followers of the influencer and whether they were highly or lowly involved with the promoted product (Belanche et al., 2020).

According to this literature, the following hypothesis could be derived.

H4: Follower base of the SMI has a significant impact on customer attitude.

### **SMI's Trustworthiness and Customer Attitude**

In general context, trustworthiness referred to the ability to be relied on as honest or truthful (Erdogan, 1999). It came up with the reliability of the person or content. It was also the target audience perception related to an endorser regarding his/her honesty, integrity, and believability. Nevertheless, Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) have considered trustworthiness as one of the key formulae for influencers.

Trustworthiness was considered as the major factor in social media marketing and celebrity endorsement (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). According to the source credibility model, one of the main supplements was trustworthiness. It was also the most effective factor in social media influencing when considering attractiveness and expertise. Moreover, there was a significant impact of trustworthiness

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on celebrity endorsement in Sri Lanka (Weerasiri & Wanninayake, 2009). Among 175 respondents, 52% respondents indicated that they had paid their special attention to celebrities' trustworthiness when taking the purchasing decisions.

Based on this literature, the following hypothesis could be made.

H5: Trustworthiness of the SMI has a significant impact on customer attitude.

### **Customer Attitude and Customer Mimicry Desire**

In general context, customer mimicry desire referred to the willingness for imitating someone's actions, fashions, styles, language etc (Scheer and Stern, 1992). According to the influencer framework, customer mimicry desire was defined as the second phase of turning customer towards actionable influence in social media influencing. Individuals mimic others' consumption behavior intentionally in response to a wish to look or behave like those they are modeling, adopting a role model perspective (Ruvio et al., 2013). Furthermore, the doppelganger effect of the customer emphasized the effect of customer mimicry desire on customer decision. Also, it revealed that the customer had bidirectional or unidirectional role model as the consumption role model.

In the marketing research area, customer attitude referred to the mindset that created in the customer through the influencer (Ki & Kim, 2019). The influencer could create either test leadership or opinion leadership attitude on customer mindset. Furthermore, according to the doppelganger effect, customer attitude towards the specific influencer derived to the mimicry desire which eventually drove to the customer consumption desire (Ruvio et al., 2013). This model was further investigated by Ki and Kim (2019) and they revealed that taste leadership and opinion leadership (customer attitude) led to positive behavioral outcomes through customers' desire for mimicking.

Based on the literature, the following hypothesis could be developed.

H6: Customer attitude has a significant impact on customer mimicry desire.

### **Customer Mimicry Desire and Customer Purchasing Behavior**

Customer purchasing behavior was defined as “the behavior that consumers display in searching for purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services that would satisfy their needs” (Schiffman et al., 2005). It included any action which the customer takes with customer purchasing intention. Furthermore, it involved in the purchase and use of goods and services, resulting from customers' emotional and mental needs and behavioral responses (Deshpande & Saxena, 2017). Considering this, it went beyond customer purchasing intention to customer post experience.

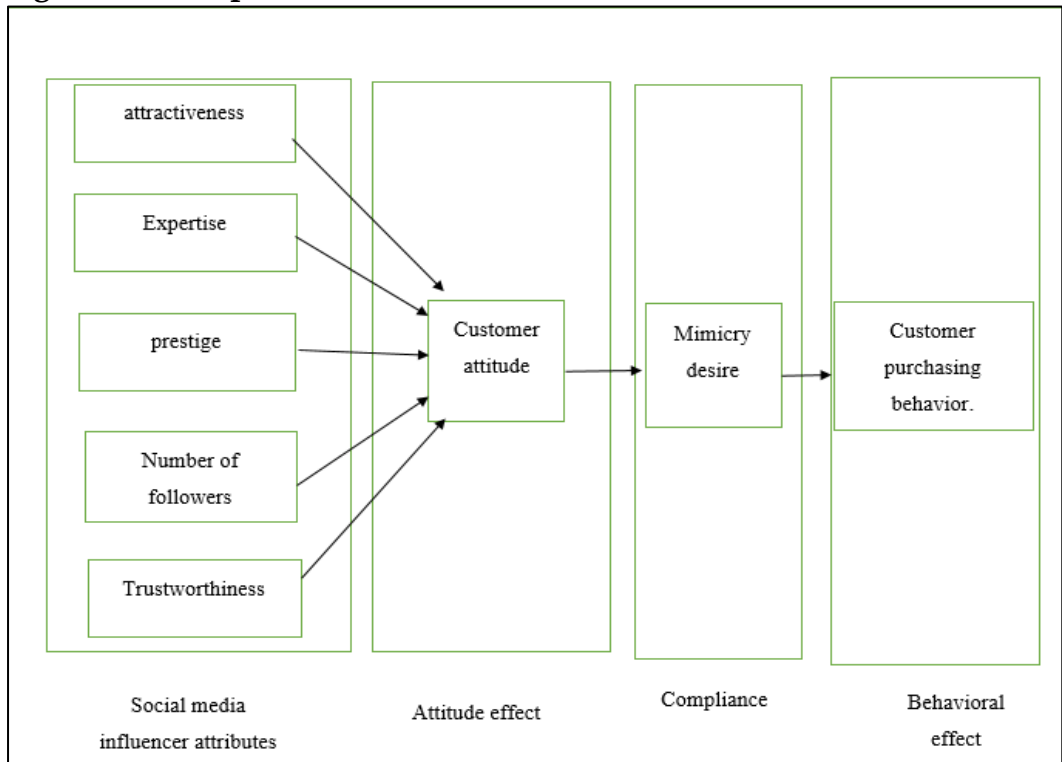
Mimicry had the effect of social behavior (Lakin et al., 2003). According to the influencing model, the outcome was the target's behavioral outcomes which were the customer purchasing behavior (Scheer and Stern, 1992). Apart from that, customer mimicry desire led to positive behavioral outcome (Ki & Kim, 2019). This behavioral outcome was customer purchasing intention.

Based on this, the following hypothesis could be made.

H7: Customer mimicry desire has a significant impact on customer purchasing behavior.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Conceptual framework was developed using the influencing theoretical model (Scheer & Stern, 1992) and conceptual model (Ki & Kim, 2019). According to Scheer and Stern (1992), there was a mechanism consisting of four steps as mentioned in the theoretical background. These four stages were elaborated in this conceptual framework.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

Source: Authors' compilation

## Methodology and Experimental Design

### Research Design

The main objective of the study is to identify the impact of SMIs' attributes on customer purchasing behavior. This is a quantitative survey-based study. This study uses positivism research philosophy to uncover logical social media behaviors. Positivism is the philosophy which indicates the ability to describe reality from the viewpoint of objectives (Zefeiti & Mohamad, 2015). Deductive approach and abduction research approach are also used to test the predeveloped theories. The deductive approach aims to use previous studies and test the theories done by the researcher (Melnikovas, 2018). Abduction research approach aims to clarify the most relevant evidence in the environment.

### **Study Population and Sample**

The major social media platforms in this study are Facebook and Instagram. Research population includes all the Facebook and Instagram users in Sri Lanka. According to the statistics, 2 310 000 social media users are identified as Facebook users and 440 000 social media users are identified as Instagram users (Social Media users in Sri Lanka - January 2020, 2021). Convenience sampling is selected for the study. In determining the sample size, 95% confidence level and 5% margin error are used. Considering that, 405 participants were selected as the sample.

### **Questionnaire Design**

This study was mainly conducted based on primary data through empirical survey. The questionnaire was created using expert opinion and past literature and distributed through the online platform. It contained two parts as demographic questions and factor analysis questions. Demographic questions addressed the background of the respondent. Factor analysis questions considered SMIs' attractiveness, their expertise, their trustworthiness, their follower base, their prestige, customer attitude and mimicry desire. These were five-point Likert-scale questions with five scales as strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree.

### **Data Analysis**

Reliability and the validity of data were ensured using a pilot test. The next steps were factor analysis, correlation analysis developing multiple linear regression models and hypothesis testing based on the main data collection. The analysis was conducted based on the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

### **Pilot Test**

Pilot test was conducted to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed to measure the effect of eight variables which were attractiveness, expertise, prestige, number of followers, customer attitude, customer mimicry desire and customer purchasing behavior. Demographic factors in the pilot test are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic factors in the pilot test**

| Variable       | Items              | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender         | Male               | 30        | 50%        |
|                | Female             | 30        | 50%        |
| Age            | Under 20           | 2         | 3.4%       |
|                | 20 – 40            | 56        | 94.4%      |
|                | 40 – 60            | 2         | 3.2%       |
|                | Undergraduate      | 47        | 79.7%      |
| Status         | Graduate           | 3         | 5.1%       |
|                | Unemployed         | 5         | 8.5%       |
|                | Employed           | 5         | 6.7%       |
| Internet Usage | Several time a day | 58        | 98.3%      |
|                | Once a month       | 2         | 1.7%       |

Source: Authors' representation based on SPSS results

### Reliability Measurement

Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability. As attractiveness, expertise, prestige, number of followers, trustworthiness, customer attitude, customer mimicry desire, and customer purchasing behavior have Cronbach's alpha values above the acceptable level of 0.7, it was reasonable to state that the questionnaire was reliable for data collection and further analysis. Table 2 represents the reliability analysis of variables in the pilot study.

**Table 2: Reliability analysis of the variables in the pilot study**

| Variable                      | Cronbach Alpha | Final Items |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Attractiveness                | .887           | 6           |
| Expertise                     | .895           | 6           |
| Prestige                      | .876           | 6           |
| Number of followers           | .886           | 6           |
| Trustworthiness               | .877           | 6           |
| Customer attitude             | .874           | 6           |
| Customer mimicry desire       | .844           | 6           |
| Customer purchasing behaviour | .923           | 6           |

Source: Authors' representation based on SPSS results

## Results

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 3 shows the results of demographic analysis.

**Table 3: Demographic characteristics of respondents**

| Variable               | Items              | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender                 | Male               | 182       | 44.9%      |
|                        | Female             | 223       | 55.1%      |
| Age                    | Under 20           | 74        | 18.3%      |
|                        | 20 – 40            | 262       | 64.7%      |
|                        | 40 – 60            | 51        | 12.6%      |
| Status                 | Undergraduate      | 192       | 47.4%      |
|                        | Graduate           | 103       | 25.4%      |
|                        | Unemployed         | 53        | 13.1%      |
|                        | Employed           | 57        | 14.1%      |
| Online Retailing Usage | Several time a day | 308       | 76%        |
|                        | Once a month       | 8         | 2%         |
|                        | Once a day         | 65        | 16%        |
|                        | Once a week        | 24        | 5.9%       |

Source: Authors' representation based on SPSS results

According to the results obtained in the Table 4, 55.1% of respondents were female and 44.9% of respondents were male. In the age category, there were three groups as "under 20", "20 to 40" and "40 to 60". Out of these categories, most respondents were from the age group of "20 to 40" which was 64%. The minimum participation was from the age group of "40 to 60" which was 12.6%. Under the employment status, there were four categories as undergraduate, graduate, unemployed and employed. The majority of respondents was from the undergraduate category which was 47.4% out of all categories. Minimum participation was recorded from the unemployed category which was 13.1%. In addition to that, 25.4% of respondents belonged to the graduate category and 14.1% of respondents belonged to the employed category. Considering the online retailing usage, most of the respondents used online retailing several times a day. As a percentage, it was 76%. The minimum usage of respondents was recorded as once

a month, which was 2% as a percentage. 16% of respondents used online retail once a day and 5.9% of respondents used it once a week.

### Factor Analysis

Before moving to the factor analysis, Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test were performed to check adequacy of data. Internal consistency was measured using the inter-item correlation which was in the range from 0.3 to 0.85 (BrckaLorenz & Chiang, 2014). Considering all the points in the factor analysis, reliability tests were conducted. Results are indicated in Table 4.

**Table 4: KMO values and Cronbach's alpha**

| Attribute                     | KMO value | Cronbach's alpha |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Attractiveness                | 0.875     | 0.819            |
| Expertise                     | 0.745     | 0.761            |
| Prestige                      | 0.844     | 0.849            |
| Number of followers           | 0.866     | 0.862            |
| Trustworthiness               | 0.899     | 0.895            |
| Customer attitude             | 0.912     | 0.902            |
| Customer mimicry desire       | 0.854     | 0.895            |
| Customer purchasing behaviour | 0.877     | 0.892            |

Source: Authors' representation based on SPSS results

Table 4 shows that all the data were in acceptable condition.

### Correlation Analysis

Results of correlation analysis are given in Table 5.

**Table 5: Correlation analysis results**

|                     |                   | r value | P-value |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------|---------|
| Attractiveness      | Customer attitude | 0.730   | 0.001   |
| Expertise           | Customer attitude | 0.699   | 0.001   |
| Prestige            | Customer attitude | 0.747   | 0.001   |
| Number of followers | Customer attitude | 0.793   | 0.001   |
| Trustworthiness     | Customer attitude | 0.847   | 0.001   |

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|                         |                              | r value | P-value |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Customer attitude       | Customer mimicry desire      | 0.802   | 0.001   |
| Customer mimicry desire | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.680   | 0.001   |
| Attractiveness          | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.680   | 0.001   |
| Expertise               | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.665   | 0.001   |
| prestige                | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.563   | 0.001   |
| Number of followers     | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.624   | 0.001   |
| trustworthiness         | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.695   | 0.001   |

Source: Authors' representation based on SPSS results

According to the Table 5, attractiveness, expertise, prestige, number of followers and trustworthiness had positive moderate correlation ( $r > 0.7$ ) to the customer attitude. Customer attitude and customer mimicry desire had a high positive ( $r = 0.8$ ) correlation. Moreover, customer mimicry desire and customer purchasing behavior had positive and moderate correlation ( $r = 0.680$ ). Furthermore, attractiveness, expertise, prestige, number of followers, and trustworthiness had moderate positive correlation ( $r > 0.6$ ) with the customer purchasing behavior. Hence, all the attributes showed positive correlation and all the correlations were significant at the point of  $P = 0.001$ .

### Regression Analysis

In this study, multiple linear regression was conducted based on the conceptual framework. Results of regression analysis are given in Table 6.

**Table 6: Regression analysis results**

|                         |                              | <b>The<br/>Actual<br/>Beta<br/>Value</b> | <b>S.E.</b> | <b>P-<br/>Value</b> | <b>Results</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Attractiveness          | Customer attitude            | 0.904                                    | 0.042       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Expertise               | Customer attitude            | 0.895                                    | 0.046       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Prestige                | Customer attitude            | 0.894                                    | 0.040       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Number of followers     | Customer attitude            | 0.866                                    | 0.033       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Trustworthiness         | Customer attitude            | 0.832                                    | 0.026       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Customer attitude       | Customer mimicry desire      | 0.919                                    | 0.034       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Customer mimicry desire | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.454                                    | 0.025       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Attractiveness          | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.579                                    | 0.038       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Expertise               | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.655                                    | 0.037       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Prestige                | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.518                                    | 0.038       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Number of follower      | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.525                                    | 0.033       | 0.000               | Significant    |
| Trustworthiness         | Customer purchasing behavior | 0.526                                    | 0.027       | 0.000               | Significant    |

Source: Authors' representation based on SPSS results

### Hypothesis Testing

Results of hypothesis testing are given in Table 7.

**Table 7: Hypothesis testing results**

| Hypothesis statement of path analysis                                                 | Estimate | P-Value | Result of Hypothesis |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------|----------------------|
| H1: Attractiveness of the SMI has a significant impact on customer attitude           | 0.904    | 0.000   | Supported            |
| H2: Expertise of the SMI has a significant impact on customer attitude                | 0.895    | 0.000   | Supported            |
| H3: Prestige of the SMI has a significant impact on customer attitude                 | 0.894    | 0.000   | Supported            |
| H4: Follower base of the SMI has a significant impact on customer attitude            | 0.866    | 0.000   | Supported            |
| H5: Trustworthiness of the SMI has a significant impact on customer attitude          | 0.832    | 0.000   | Supported            |
| H6: Customer attitude has a significant impact on customer mimicry desire             | 0.919    | 0.000   | Supported            |
| H7: Customer mimicry desire has a significant impact on customer purchasing behavior. | 0.454    | 0.000   | Supported            |

Source: Authors' representation based on SPSS results

According to the Table 7, the first hypothesis (H1) was supported with P value < 0.05 and an estimated weight of 0.904. The second hypothesis (H2) was supported with P value < 0.05 and an estimated weight of 0.895. The third hypothesis (H3) was supported with P value < 0.05 and an estimated weight of 0.894. The fourth hypothesis (H4) was also supported with P value < 0.05 and an estimated weight of 0.866. The fifth hypothesis (H5) was supported with P value < 0.05 and an

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estimated weight of 0.832. The sixth hypothesis (H6) was supported with P value < 0.05 and an estimated weight of 0.919. The seventh hypothesis (H7) was supported with P value < 0.05 and an estimated weight of 0.454. As all the hypotheses were supported, the conceptual framework was significantly acceptable.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Discussion**

The first objective of this study is to determine the impact of attractiveness of SMI on customer purchasing behavior. It is statistically proven that the SMIs' attractiveness has a significant impact on customer purchasing behavior. Furthermore, according to the Table 7, attractiveness has a positive ( $B = 0.579$ ) relationship with customer purchasing behavior.

According to literature, attractiveness was a major strategy of influencing customer purchasing behavior (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). In this research, trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness are a winning strategy and attractiveness is a major formula and it also proves that attractiveness is a significant factor in influencing customers. In addition to that, Ki and Kim (2019) proved that attractiveness had a significant positive impact on customer attitude. Results of this research also prove the same finding in the Sri Lankan context.

The second objective is to determine the impact of SMI's expertise on customer purchasing behavior. It is statistically proven that the SMIs' expertise has a significant positive impact on customer purchasing behavior. Furthermore, Table 7 reveals that SMI's expertise has a positive ( $B = 0.655$ ) impact on customer purchasing behavior.

Past literature revealed that there was a significant impact of expertise on leadership (Ki & Kim, 2019). This study proves that expertise has a significant effect on customer attitude. Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) considered expertise as one of the key formulae for influencers. However, this study shows that expertise is not the major factor when considering trustworthiness and attractiveness but in the Sri Lankan context, expertise has a high positive significant effect in

influencing customers when considering each factor separately. Besides, expertise was a major influencing factor for the brand image (McQuarrie et al., 2013). According to this study's results, expertise is a key influencing factor for the brand image, customer attitude and customer purchasing behavior. Li and Du (2011) revealed that expertise derived a better opinion leader than the less expertise leader. This study results provide more evidence for Li and Du (2011).

The third objective is to determine the impact of SMI's prestige on customer purchasing behavior. It is statistically proven that SMIs' prestige has a significant positive impact on customer purchasing behavior. Table 7 proves that prestige has a significant positive ( $B=0.518$ ) impact on customer purchasing behavior.

Literature showed that prestige had a positive moderating effect on the relationship between consumers' engagement in online communities and brand loyalty intention (Nesi et al., 2017). However, this study shows that there is a positive moderate impact of prestige on customer purchasing behavior like brand loyalty intention. Likewise, Ki and Kim (2019) proved that prestige had a significant effect on customer attitude based on social media platform of Instagram. This study proves that their findings are valid even in platforms like Facebook. Also, influencers with luxury lifestyle have gained more attraction from the followers and in the fashion industry (McQuarrie et al., 2013) but this study results show that prestige is the key influencing factor for all the industries.

The fourth objective is to determine the impact of SMI's follower base on customer purchasing behavior. It is statistically proven that SMIs' follower base has a significant positive impact on customer purchasing behavior. Table 7 proves that SMI's follower base has a significant positive moderate ( $B=0.525$ ) impact on customer purchasing behavior.

The literature has provided the need for evaluating the impact of follower base as a factor (Ki & Kim, 2019). This study results fill a huge gap in the literature. De Veirman et al. (2017) found that the number of followers had a significant positive impact on brand creation in

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marketing. Although this research does not consider branding, this shows that the number of followers influences on customer purchasing behavior same as the brand development.

The fifth objective is to determine the impact of SMI's trustworthiness on customer purchasing behavior. It is statistically proven that SMIs' trustworthiness has a significant positive impact on customer purchasing behavior. Table 16 shows that there is a moderate positive ( $B = 0.526$ ) impact of SMI's trustworthiness on customer purchasing behavior.

The literature shows that there was a significant impact of trustworthiness on celebrity endorsement in the Sri Lankan context (Weerasiri & Wanninayake, 2009). Among 175 respondents, 52% indicated that they paid their special attention to celebrities' trustworthiness when making the purchasing decision. Though this research considers social media influencers, this provides evidence that celebrity endorsement and social media influencing customers have a positive impact of trustworthiness. Furthermore, trustworthiness has been identified as the most effective factor in social media influencing when considering attractiveness and expertise (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). But in the Sri Lankan context, social media influencer's trustworthiness is not an effective factor compared to attractiveness and expertise.

Hence, attractiveness, expertise, prestige, follower base, and trustworthiness are the attributes that SMIs should have for effective social media marketing to tend customers for purchasing intention. SMI must have an attractive appearance to make customers look at him or her more than once. He or she must have a good knowledge and experience in marketing. Only then, he or she will know how to approach different customers. He or she must have prestige because Sri Lankan people always prefer to believe anyone with prestige. When he or she has a great follower base, customers will be tempted to be a part of the follower base. Currently in Sri Lanka, most of the marketers tend to be cunning in marketing products. But it is a futile attempt because customers prefer the truth talking and honest marketer.

Therefore, he or she must be trustworthy to convince customers about the benefits of purchasing a product.

### **Conclusion**

Main objective of this research was to identify the attributes of SMIs in the Sri Lankan context that turn customers into purchasing behavior. For the understanding and analysis purpose, five sub objectives were identified. Under each sub objective five attributes were tested such as attractiveness of the SMI, expertise of the SMI, prestige of the SMI, follower base of SMI and trustworthiness of SMI. The objectives and the attributes considered in this research were derived through past studies. Several technical analyses were conducted on the primary data which were collected through the questionnaire. Based on research objectives and design, target population was Facebook and Instagram users in Sri Lanka. Based on the responses, most of the responses were recorded by females which were 55% out of total responses. Moreover, most of them were recorded under the age group of 20 to 40 years. When analyzing the state of their employment, most of the respondents were undergraduates. Based on the results, the SMIs are mostly attracted by the younger generation in Sri Lanka.

The first objective of this study is to determine the impact of SMI's attractiveness on customer purchasing behavior. According to the results, there is a positive and moderate impact of SMI's attractiveness on customer purchasing behavior. Therefore, effectiveness of the social media marketing depends on attractiveness of the SMI. When the influencer is an attractive person, the customers will be tempted to follow his guidance and purchase the products he recommends. The second objective is to identify the impact of SMI's expertise on customer purchasing behavior. According to the results, there is a high and positive impact of social media influencer's expertise on customer purchasing behavior. Therefore, selecting expertise in a specific and related field for marketing campaigns has high impact on customer purchasing behavior. When the influencer has the expertise, he knows the strategies for attracting many customers to purchase the product. The third objective is to identify the impact of SMI's prestige on customer purchasing behavior. According to the results, there is a

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positive and moderate effect of SMI's prestige on customer purchasing behavior. Therefore, SMI's prestige must be considered for effective social media marketing. When he has high prestige, the customers will always admire and respect him and ultimately it will lead to them purchasing products recommended by him. The fourth objective is to recognize the impact of SMI's follower base on customer purchasing behavior. According to the results, there is a moderate and positive impact of SMI's follower base on customer purchasing behavior. Therefore, having a high number of followers always guarantees a large audience in the market. High follower base indicates that the influencer is very popular among the customers. Hence, it will be straightforward for him to tempt customers to purchase a high quantity of the product. The final objective is to identify the impact of SMI's trustworthiness on customer purchasing behavior. According to the results, there is a moderate and positive impact of SMI's trustworthiness on customer purchasing behavior. Hence, customers are concerned about the SMI's trustworthiness in purchasing the recommended products. When customers always trust the influencer, he can clearly explain the high quality, value, and other significant characteristics of the product. Hence, customers will obviously purchase it since it is recommended by a trustworthy influencer. Accordingly, the study has successfully achieved all the objectives and explained how to conduct effective social media marketing by considering the attributes of SMI.

### **Implications**

In this research, there are two major implications in the marketing field. The first one is that the results can be applied to pick up the suitable SMI and determine the criteria for selecting the SMI for social media marketing. Another application is that SMIs can apply these results and improve their follower base and earn more on effective marketing campaigns.

### **Recommendation**

This research considered Facebook and Instagram as the main platforms. Therefore, it will be interesting to investigate other platforms such as YouTube. Likewise, this research revealed that SMI's prestige is significant on social media marketing. However, it will be

interesting to investigate whether negative prestige and customer purchasing behavior in Sri Lankan context as negative marketing is becoming viral on social media. Furthermore, this research considered attractiveness, prestige, expertise, follower base and trustworthiness. Adding more attributes such as SMIs' creativity and perceived quality will add more value to this. Apart from that, focusing on interaction with SMIs will also add value to this research.

### **Acknowledgement**

First and foremost, the authors would like to convey their heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Wasantha Rajapakshe, for providing the opportunity to conduct an inspiring research with many challenges and opportunities to make the research journey more remarkable, and it was really encouraging to succeed in the career path with more confidence. They also need to thank the other academic staff members at SLIIT Business School for giving them necessary instructions to continue this study in a successful manner.

The authors would also like to extend their gratitude to those who filled out the questionnaires by volunteering time to voice their thoughts on this research. Moreover, the authors are grateful to everyone who helped them directly and indirectly to achieve this goal.

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