



Social Media Marketing Impact on Agri-Machinery Purchases Decisions

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ABSTRACT

Today, social media has become one of the key elements of business marketing strategy. The rapid growth of internet usage and social media across the country, especially from 2019 to 2022 has created challenges as well as new opportunities for both consumers and businesses in Sri Lanka. The primary objective of the study is to investigate the impact of social media marketing on purchase decisions of agricultural equipment and machinery under the framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985). For this purpose, a structured questionnaire was distributed among 318 agricultural equipment and machinery customers of a prominent organisation operating in the agricultural sector of Sri Lanka. Hypotheses were developed based on literature and tested using a multiple linear regression. It was found that there is a significant impact of the age of the customer, the internet and social media awareness and usage, features and characteristics of social media, availability of product information, and prior experience with online product searching and shopping on social media on customer purchase decisions of agricultural equipment and machinery. Moreover, it was found that there is no significant impact of the perception of social media as well as demographic factors of customers such as education level, gender, and the number of members in the household on the customer purchase decisions of agricultural equipment and machinery on social media. These findings tend to shed light on an often-overlooked area of the impact of social media marketing on the purchase decision of agricultural equipment and machinery.

Keywords: *Agricultural Equipment and Machinery, Purchase Decisions, Social Media, Theory of Planned Behavior*





1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of The Study

The Internet has created a perfect medium for businesses to reach out to their customers and public in an online environment through more new tools and platforms to grab new market opportunities (Stelzner, 2010). Social media is defined as a group of the Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Golden (2011), social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are dynamic tools that facilitate online relationships.

Social media marketing is the use of these social media applications or platforms in businesses to connect with the audience and build online relationships to build brand, increase sales, and drive website traffic (Evans, 2010). According to Davis (2001), brand is one of an organization's most valuable assets. The modern organizations need to realize the importance of capitalizing on brands in order to achieve business growth, profitability objectives and sustainability (Davis, 2001). Brands influence customer choice, where one customer influences another customer's buying decision. These chains of events affect repurchases, which further drive towards future earnings and long-run organizational sustainability (Oliveira & Sullivan, 2003). According to the Annual Market Insight Report 2021, 78% of the Internet users in Sri Lanka seek or check on online customer reviews before making a purchase decision (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, 2021). Hence, social media is a perfect platform where one customer's comments, recommendations and reviews affect the purchase decision of another customer.

Social media marketing involves publishing content on social media profiles, listening to and engaging your audience and followers, analyzing insights and results, and social media advertisements (Thuseethan & Kuhanesan, 2014). When compared to the other marketing tools and platforms, it is a relatively low-cost form of marketing and allows organizations to engage in direct and end-user contact (Kaplan



& Haenlein, 2010). With compared to other traditional and digital media, social media is conducive to timely, interactive, two-way communication and content exchange among the creator and the audience, the customer (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007).

Sri Lanka's total population is 21.86 million (Department of census and statistics, 2022). When analyzing the Internet and social media usage in the country, among the total population, 14.58 million are the Internet users in any device (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, 2023). This means, 66.7% of the total population uses the Internet in Sri Lanka. Around 7.2 million Sri Lankans (32.9% percent of the total population) are active users on social media where 98% of them access social media via mobile phones (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, 2021). According to the Annual Market Insight Report 2023 of Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing, the most popular social media platforms in Sri Lanka today are Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, TikTok, and Snapchat. According to the survey results, 43% of the Internet users in Sri Lanka use Facebook Messenger to get more details specially the price, availability, delivery options of a product or service that they are interested in buying. Only 16% attempts to call the company to get more details.

Even though social media has been demonstrated to open many new opportunities and is widely used by Sri Lankan business organizations today in industrial marketing practices, locally published academic research on this area is still limited due to the relative novelty of social media in business. The use of social media for marketing has created many opportunities for businesses over the years. For many businesses, online selling and social media selling have become a lifeline to customers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Particularly, the long-lasting lockdowns have limited customers behind the borders physically and restricted traditional, physical marketing activities. These restrictions have significantly changed the traditional consumer behavior. In a way, the pandemic seems to have accelerated the growth of online consumer behavior and since most consumers are using the internet as a source of infotainment and



communication, the online presence of businesses is crucial than ever before (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, 2023).

According to DATAREPORTAL global platform, the number of the Internet users in Sri Lanka has been increased by 800 thousand (+7.9%) and the number of social media users has been increased by 1.5 million (+23%) between 2020 and 2021 (Datareportal, 2022). In such a situation, it is an advantage for businesses to use social media marketing to reach out to customers. As organizations become more globally competitive, it is important for marketing strategy to explore more innovative and compelling avenues to attract larger pools of customers (Rockendorf, 2011). With the observed changes in consumer consumption and buying behaviors during last two years, it is predicted that the upcoming years will bring more changes in terms of the social media usage and consumption and buying patterns of Sri Lankan customers (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, 2023).

In paying attention to the agricultural sector in Sri Lanka, according to the latest Agricultural Household Survey (AHS) results of 2017, the number of households with agricultural operators in Sri Lanka was approximately 2.1 million and estimated population of these households was 8.1 million where 48.8% of household population was males and balance was females (Department of census and statistics, 2017). Among the agricultural operating household population, 71% was aged 20 years and above and 17% was aged 60 years and above. In Sri Lanka, family members of agricultural operating households are also contributing to crop production activities frequently. Therefore, age and sex of household members are two important variables in decision making in Agri-production or farming related purchases.

Agricultural Machinery is considered as an asset of the agricultural household. According to the AHS 2017 survey data, only 34% of agricultural households were having and using at least one Agricultural Machinery (Department of census and statistics, 2017). When compared to the other countries in the region, Sri Lanka has been slow to adopt mechanized farming. The current government's top priorities are to increase productivity in the agriculture sector and to increase mechanization and



grow higher value cash crops such as fruit, flowers, and other export-oriented crops (Export Development Board, 2021).

1.2. ABC Agriculture Holdings Limited

ABC Agriculture has been operating in Sri Lanka since the 1950s. Being among the top ranked firms in the local market ABC Agriculture also exports value-added Agro produce to major buyers in the international arena. The customer base of ABC Agri Equipment Division includes both B2B and B2C customers. B2B customers include large scale farms, greenhouse cultivators, plantation companies and municipalities and the B2C customers include mainly the paddy farmers, tea, coconut and rubber smallholders, vegetable farmers, field crop growers and dairy farmers. According to the Company database, more than 80% of the Agriculture Equipment and Machinery customers are B2C customers where the majority of them are Paddy cultivating farmers from North Central, Northern, Eastern and North Western provinces (ABC Agriculture Holdings Limited, 2022). Hence this study is mainly focused on B2C customers of Agricultural Equipment and Machinery.

The Company is currently present on several social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and operates business profiles and channels. An external agency manages these business profiles for the Company at a fixed monthly fee. Apart from the fixed charges, the Company spends on social media advertisements and post boosting on post by post basis. According to the Company data, the key market competitors of the Company are also having social media business profiles on above mentioned social media platforms. Among them, some profiles are having higher engagements rates with compared to the engagement rates of ABC Agriculture social media business profiles (ABC Agriculture Holdings Limited, 2022).



1.3. Problem Statement

The Sri Lankan digital footprint will be further widened in the coming years. The rapid growth of the internet usage and social media across the country, especially during the 2019 to 2021 has created challenges as well as new opportunities for both consumers and businesses in Sri Lanka (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, 2021). ABC Agriculture has been using social media business profiles since year 2013, starting from the Facebook business account, YouTube channel, and LinkedIn account. Over the years, social media has evolved from a simple communication experiment to a massive digital world spread over various platforms. Businesses make use of social media to expand their reach and visibility, while customers use social media to research new companies, products and services. According to the Company records up to date, there are a lot of benefits for the Company, both financial and non-financial, especially for the Agri Equipment Division, from using social media, while a monthly cost factor is attached for social media management. Moreover, the Company is planning to create new business profiles on Instagram and TikTok (ABC Agriculture, 2022). This can be mainly due to the fact that Instagram and Tik Tok are becoming rapidly growing social media sites in Sri Lanka (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, 2023) and this might provide an opportunity for ABC Agriculture company to increase its visibility even in these growing social media sites.

This study attempts to investigate and analyse the elements of consumers' online purchasing behavior in online environments and the impact of social media during the consumer's decision-making process when purchasing Agri Equipment and Machinery. The study aims to identify the factors affecting consumers' purchase decisions on Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media, the most effective social media platforms and elements that bring in more benefits to the Company and whether social media marketing presents an opportunity for ABC Agriculture to reach its customers of Agri Equipment and Machinery in an online environment.

1.4 Research Questions





- i. *What are the factors affecting customer's purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media?*

Answering this research question might be useful in identifying various determinants of consumer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

- ii. *What is the impact of social media marketing on customer's purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery?*

Given the growing influence of social media platforms on all aspects of consumers from infotainment, communication, purchase of goods and services, education et., it might be important to investigate the impact of social media marketing on customer's purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery.

- iii. *What are the most effective social media platforms and elements which bring in more benefits to the Company?*

There are various social media platforms from Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as well emerging social media platforms such as Tik Tok. Accordingly, it can be suggested that this research question aims to identify the most effective social media platforms and elements that bring more benefits to the Company by increasing its customer base.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Customer Purchase Decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery

According to Martins et al. (2019) purchase intention is indicated as buying behavior. A significant number of papers has published on purchase intention and decision on online platforms (Rahim et al., 2016). Purchase intention is a mixture of consumers' interests in and likelihood of purchasing the product (Kim & Ko, 2012). Determining purchase intention adopts buyer future behavior based on their attitudes (Kim & Ko, 2012). On social media platforms, there is exchange of information, ratings and responses that enables people to have trust and overcome the insecurities, which result in willingness to buy firms product (Bong, 2017). Consumers will usually



undertake a process of appreciating the intended product or service to purchase, research, and analysis of the product before pledging to buy it (Lim et al., 2016). Online buying intentions become key element that can influence the usefulness of online stimuli (Lu et al., 2016). According to Martins et al. (2019), purchase intention is the basis of demonstrating buying behavior.

u2.1.1 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was developed by Ajzen in 1985, which is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Azjen and Fishbein (1975). According to Bojei and Abu (2016), TPB is the degree to which an individual has either a positive or negative assessment of a specific behavior. The TPB claims that three elements of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control that influence the purchase intention of consumers. Attitudes refer to subjective evaluation that might be positive or negative, subjective norms refer to a person's beliefs about his actions that he should engage in based on the opinions of those who matter to him the most and perceived behavioral control refers to the degree of ability for an individual to achieve a goal. TPB says that, many human behaviors can be predicted from behavior intention and that consumers can behave in a planned manner and deliberately (Lim et al., 2016). In this study, the dependent variable (purchase decision) is anchored on the framework of theory of planned behavior (TPB), because purchase intention and decision are incorporated under the concept of behavioral intention (Ahmed & Zahid, 2014). According to TPB, customers appreciate the product that he or she is intended to buy by getting more information about the product or the service by doing research, getting others' feedback, collating more information, etc. When the customer is getting more and more information about the product or the service, that would affect the direct purchase decision positively. In TPB, the intention is perceived as a direct forebear of genuine behavior (Choi, 2016). Since most of the existing social media research has been conducted in the United States (Choi, 2016), there is still a lack of emerging perspectives in the local context. Studying in the Sri Lankan context can therefore help to shed more light on the

importance and universality of previously recognized interrelations. Accordingly, this study attempts to provide insights into the use of social media marketing, online consumer behavior and customer decisions relating to agricultural product purchases, which often seemed to be overlooked, especially in the Sri Lankan and South Asian context. The TPB models the influence of motives and attitudes on intention and, subsequently, intention on decision and behavior.

2.1.2 Consumer's Demographic Factors

According to Kumar (2014), consumer purchase behavior doesn't remain the same or constant over time and it changes over time. There are various factors which affects consumer purchase behavior. The demographic factors which affect consumer behavior are; age, gender, marital status, income, family background, education, occupation, family size, geographic factors and psychological factors (Kumar, 2014). When these factors change, consumer behavior also changes.

H₁ – There is a significant impact of consumer's demographic factors on consumer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

H_{1a} - There is a significant impact of consumer's age on consumer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

H_{1b} - There is a significant impact of consumer gender on consumer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

H_{1c} - There is a significant impact of consumer education level on consumer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

2.1.3 Consumer's Internet and Social Media Usage

Around 47% of the total population uses the Internet in Sri Lanka. 6.4 million Sri Lankans (30% percent of the total population) are active users on social media where 98% of them access social media via mobile phones (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, 2021). According to the mentioned report, the most popular

social media platforms in Sri Lanka today are Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, TikTok, and Snapchat. According to DATAREPORTAL global platform, the number of internet users in Sri Lanka has been increased by 800 thousand (+7.9%) and the number of social media users has been increased by 1.5 million (+23%) between 2020 and 2021 (Datareportal, 2022). The Sri Lankan digital footprint will be further widened in coming years. The rapid growth of Internet usage and social media across the country, especially during the 2019 to 2021 has created challenges as well as new opportunities for both consumers and businesses in Sri Lanka (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, 2021).

H₂ – There is a significant impact of consumer's Internet and social media usage on consumer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

2.1.4 Consumer's Previous Experience in Using the Internet and Social Media for Searching, Ordering And Purchasing of Products

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2007), consumers normally search for information relevant about a specified consumption-related need from their past experiences before looking for external sources of information. Here, past purchase experience is regarded as an internal source of information that a consumer relies on before deciding. In addition, according to Schiffman and Kanuk (2007), several consumers' decisions are most likely to be formed by integrating past purchase experience.

H₃ – There is a significant impact of consumer's previous online purchasing experience on consumer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

2.1.5 Features and Characteristics of Social Media Platforms

The findings of Mwangi and Wagoki (2016) through a survey done on the effect of social media on the performance of advertisement business in the mainstream media



in Kenya, indicate that the characteristics of social media such as, real-time interactivity has a significant positive relationship with the performance of the advertisement. When compared to the other marketing tools and platforms, social media allows organizations to engage in direct and end-user contact (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). With compared to other traditional and digital media, social media is conducive to timely, interactive, two-way communication and content exchange among the creator and the audience, the customer (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007).

H₄ – There is a significant impact of features/ characteristics of social media platforms on consumer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

2.1.6 Type of Information Available on Social Media Platforms

43% of the Internet users in Sri Lanka use Facebook Messenger to get more details specially the price, availability, delivery options of a product or service that they are interested in buying (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, (2021). According to the Annual Market Insight Report 2021, 78% of the Internet users in Sri Lanka seek or check on online customer reviews before making a purchase decision (Asia Pacific Institute of Digital Marketing (Pvt) Ltd, 2021). Social media allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Newman and Fischer (2013), many customers have been searching for information online about other companies or products in social media rather than in google.

H₅ – There is a significant impact of type of information available on social media platforms on consumer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

2.1.7 Consumer's Perception Towards Social Media

According to Golden (2011), consumers see social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are dynamic tools that facilitate online relationships. Consumers believe that viral communication on social networks circulates faster and are more

believable than information generated by the Company (Makudza et al., 2020). According to pamphlets Bruno and Dariusz (2013), consumers perceive social media as a rich highway where information which relates to the product can be obtained in text, links or in downloadable magazines.

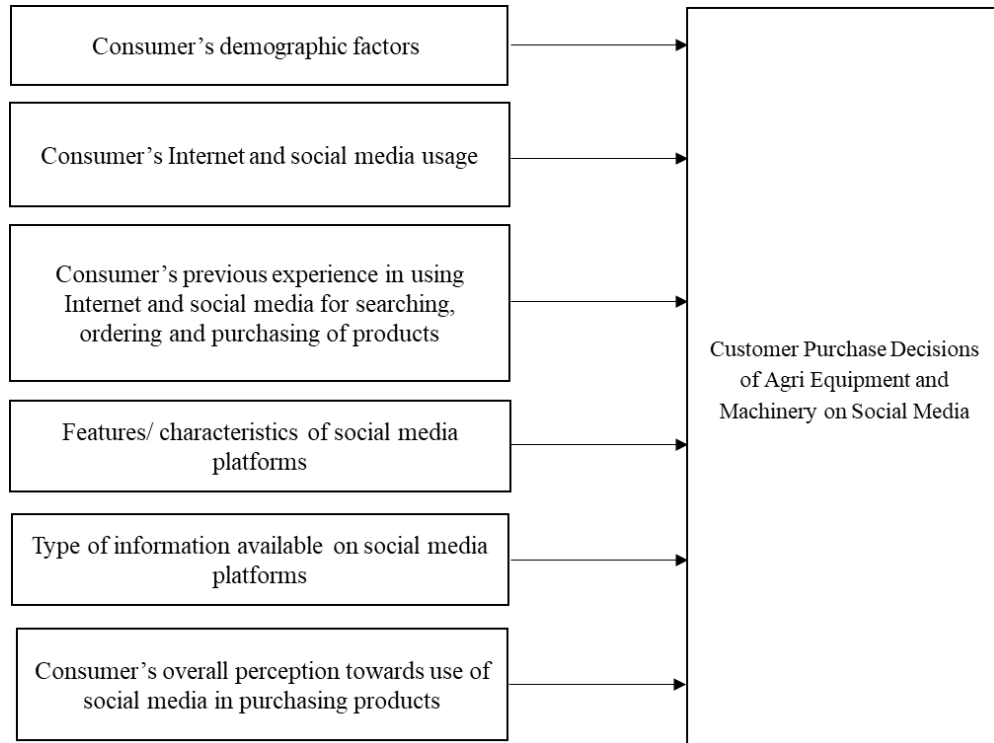
H₆ – There is a significant impact of consumer's overall perception towards social media on consumer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1 was developed based on the literature review and defined hypothesis. The study and data collection were carried out based on the conceptual framework.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Author Generated



DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Research Methodology

Quantitative research is used to confirm or validate a relationship amongst variables and logical conclusions are made based on scientific results by testing hypothesis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The data format is numerical and the analytical objectives of quantitative research are to quantify variation, predict causal relationships and describe the characteristics of a population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Accordingly, this study has adopted a quantitative methodology by using the survey method as the research strategy (Gaski, 2013). Data was collected from a sample of 318 Agricultural equipment using customers by sharing a structured questionnaire through email and through WhatsApp. The customer base of a prominent Agricultural equipment company operating in Sri Lanka was selected as the sample to obtain a rich perspective on their purchase decision as a result of social media marketing. Both English and Sinhala versions of the questionnaire were distributed. Scales related to the dependent variable of customer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery were adopted from Ramasunder (2011), for the independent variables of consumer's internet and social media usage too was adopted from Ramasunder (2011) as well as Nair (2017) and Balakrishna et al. (2017), scales related to consumer's previous experience in using the internet and social Media for searching, ordering and purchasing of products were adopted from Ramasunder (2011), while features/ characteristics of social media platforms were adopted from Resmi et al. (2020), type of information available on social media platforms was adopted from both Ramasunder (2011) and Resmi et al. (2020) and scales related to consumer's overall perception towards the use of social media in purchasing products were adopted from Nair (2017). All items were measured based on a five-point Likert scale with 1 being 'strongly disagree' and 5 being 'strongly agree'. The statistical software package was used as the technique to analyse data.



4.2 Sample Profile

The findings indicate that majority of the respondents; 77% were male and 23% were female. This implies that gender diversity is an important demographic factor. The findings also indicated that, 22% to be in the age group; 20-29 years, 21% in the age group; 40 - 49 years, and 8% were in the age group; 50-59 years. Further, 1% of the respondents indicated to be in the age group; Over 60 years. This implies that age diversity is an important demographic factor. Moreover, majority of the respondents, 37.42% (119) have attained only secondary education. Further, the findings indicate that 21.7% (69) of the respondents have attained tertiary education and 21.07% (67) of the respondents have attained only primary education. The findings indicate that 15.72% (50) of the respondent are degree holders where 4.09% (13) of the respondent are diploma holders. The findings highlight a population with a different academic attainment. Majority of the respondents, 25.47% (81) were from North Western province followed by 24.21% (77) from North Central and 10.69% (34) from Central provinces. The findings highlight a population from all over the country representing all nine provinces. In terms of crop cultivation, 49.06% (156) cultivate Paddy. Further, the findings indicate that 17.92% (57) of respondents cultivate Field crops, 14.15% (45) of respondents cultivate Vegetables, 13.21% (42) of respondents cultivate Plantation crops and only 5.66% (18) of respondents cultivate Fruits.

Then in terms of internet and social media usage data, 100% (318) of respondents stated that they are having access to the Internet and social media. About 100% (318) of respondents have selected Mobile phones as the first mode of accessing the Internet and social media. Further, 78.61% (250) of the respondents use Personal computer, 18.86% (60) of the respondents use a computer at work and 2.51% (8) of the respondents use Internet café as their second mode of accessing the Internet and social media. In terms of time spent, 8.36% (122) of respondents spend 3 to 5 hours on the Internet per day. Further, 27.36% (87) of respondents spend 1 to 3 hours, 2.20% (7) of respondents spend 30 minutes to 1 hour and only 0.63% (2) of respondents spend less than 30 minutes on the Internet and social media per day. 31.45% (100) of



respondents have stated that they spend more than 5 hours per day on the Internet. When considering reasons for using the internet, 54.09% (172) of respondents use the Internet to search for general information. Further, 39.31% (125) of respondents use the Internet for social networking, 3.14% (10) use Internet banking, 1.89% (6) use it to access e-mail and 1.89% (5) of respondents use the Internet for entertainment.

The most convenient online platform to search for information on products and services was calculated in frequencies and percentages. Around 62.26% (198) of the respondents have selected Social Media sites as the most convenient online platform to search for information on products and services. Further, for 34.28% (109) of the respondents, Company's official website is the most convenient online platform where for only 3.46% (11) of the respondents, Retailers' websites are the most convenient online platform to search information on products and services. Next in terms of the most preferred social media 100% (318) of respondents have selected Facebook as the most preferred social media platform. Further, 45.60% (145) of the respondents have selected YouTube, 32.39% (103) have selected TikTok, and 22.01% (70) of the respondents have selected Instagram as their secondly preferred social media platform. Additionally, in terms of problems when accessing social media, majority of the respondents 84.59% (269) have stated Poor Internet connectivity as the key issue they face when accessing social media. Further, 7.23% (23) of the respondents have stated High data charges, 5.03% (16) of the respondents have stated Poor knowledge and understanding about social media and 3.14% (10) of the respondents have stated Appearing of too many unwanted ads as the key issue they face when accessing social media. Furthermore, most searched Agri equipment and machinery types include 27.36% (87) searched for Land Preparation Machinery, followed by Spare Parts (18.55%), Sprayers (16.98%), Harvesting Machinery (14.15%), Planting Machinery (10.06%), and Irrigation Items (7.55%). The least searched Agri Equipment and Machinery type is Brush Cutters (5.35%) by the respondents. Finally, the most searched Agri Equipment and Machinery brands include, 32.70% (104) have searched for Hayleys, followed by Browns (28.30%),



DIMO (22.01%), Jinasena (14.15%), Hunters (1.89%), where only 0.94% of the respondents have searched for other Agri Equipment and Machinery brands.

4.3 Multivariate Assumptions

Multivariate assumptions which are considered include linearity, normality, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Regression requires the relationship between the independent and dependent variables to be linear (Draper, 1998). The linearity assumption can best be tested with scatterplots between the independent and dependent variables. According to the scatterplots, the independent and dependent variables show a liner relationship confirming the assumption of linearity.

Skewness and Kurtosis are the mainly used for measuring normality (Kaur et al., 2018). According to the results shown in Table 1, skewness of the data lies between -1 and +1 range, except for Perception on social media (-1.1159), Gender (1.292) and Total area of cultivation (3.236). The values, -1.1159 and 1.292 which are closer to zero can be acceptable for the study assuming an approximate normal distribution. Total area of cultivation variable will be removed from the study. According to the results shown in Table 1, kurtosis of the data lies between -1 and +1 range for all variables, except for Prior experience in searching and ordering products online (1.577) and Total area of cultivation (14.697). The values, 1.577 which is closer to zero can be acceptable for the study assuming an approximate normal distribution. Total area of cultivation variable will be removed from the study. Hence, the data is normally distributed and meets the assumption of normality. The third assumption of multicollinearity can be checked by the Correlation matrix of Pearson's bivariate correlations among all independent variables. The magnitude of the correlation coefficients of independent variables should be less than 0.80 (Draper, 1998). According to the Pearson's bivariate correlations, there is no multicollinearity between independent variables confirming the assumption. Finally, in terms of homoscedasticity, there should be no clear pattern in the distribution; if there is a cone-shaped pattern the data is heteroscedastic (Draper, 1998). According to the

scatterplots of residuals versus predicted values, there is no clear pattern in the distribution confirming the assumption of homoscedasticity.

4.4 Reliability

Cronbach's alpha is the most common measure of internal consistency or the reliability, how closely related a set of items are as a group. According to Gliem and Gliem (2003), when using Likert-type scales, it is imperative to calculate and report Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency/ reliability for any scales or subscales. The acceptable values should be greater than 0.7 (Sekaran, 2006) and indicate that the survey or questionnaire is reliable. Reliability of the data set was tested and the resulted Cronbach's alpha values are presented in the Table A1. According to the results, the questionnaire is reliable at 95% confidence level.

Table A1: Reliability Statistics

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Internet and Social Media awareness and usage	3	0.774
Prior experience with online product searching and shopping	7	0.922
Features and characteristics of social media	5	0.872
Availability of product information	8	0.921
Perception on social media	5	0.918
Purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery	4	0.846

Note: Cronbach's Alpha at 95% confidence level

4.5 Multiple Regression

In this study, a multiple regression analysis was conducted through an ordinary least squares (OLS) method to evaluate the impact of social media marketing on customer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery. Multiple regression analysis is an extension of simple linear regression, which is used to model the relationship between one dependent variable and more than one independent/ predictor variables. OLS regression is a common statistical method of analysis for estimating coefficients of linear regression (simple or multiple linear) equations which describe the

relationship between one or more independent quantitative variables and a dependent variable (International Encyclopedia of Education, 2010). Least squares stand for the minimum squares error (SSE).

4.5.1 Test for Correlation

Correlation between the dependent variable; Customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery and independent variables was tested using Pearson correlation coefficient at 95% confidence level. According to the results presented in Table A2, the dependent variable highly correlates with independent variables; Internet and social media awareness and usage, Prior experience with online product searching and shopping, Features and characteristics of social media, Availability of product information and Perception on social media.

Table A2: Correlation between predictors and customer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery

Independent variables	Pearson correlation	Significance
Age	0.001	0.982
Gender	0.026	0.647
Education	0.033	0.555
Number of members in the household	-0.060	0.283
Internet and social media awareness and usage	0.961**	0.000
Prior experience with online product searching and shopping	0.883**	0.000
Features and characteristics of social media	0.962**	0.000
Availability of product information	0.988**	0.000
Perception on social media	0.673**	0.000

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.5.2 Regression

The following section discusses the SPSS results for the regression, Model summary, ANOVA and Coefficients. According to the regression model summary shown in Table A3, R Square is 98.3% and the Adjusted R Square is 98.2%. Distance between both values is 0.1%. The model is a good fit to explain the variance in customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery. The model explains 98.3% of

the variance in customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery by its predictors; Age, Gender, Education, Number of members in the household, Internet and Social Media awareness and usage, Prior experience with online product searching and shopping, Features and characteristics of social media, Availability of product information and Perception on social media. According to the ANOVA presented in Table A4, the model is significant at 95% confidence level.

According to the resulted coefficients shown in Table A5, at 95% confidence level; the predictors; Age, Internet and Social Media awareness and usage, Prior experience with online product searching and shopping, Features and characteristics of social media, and Availability of product information are significant. Since the predictor; Features and characteristics of social media is significant, a separate analysis was conducted to identify the most influential features and characteristics of social media that affects customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery. As per the coefficients for features and characteristics of social media, Rewards and Promotions has the highest impact on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery followed by Quick response from the Company and Games, interactive posts and competitions. Since the predictor; Availability of product information on social media is significant, a separate analysis was conducted to identify the most influential product information that affects customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery. According to the results under Coefficients for product information, Machinery or Equipment brand is considered as the most important information on social media by the consumers. Other important information is Machinery / Equipment availability in the market, Price and Dealer information respectively.

Table A3: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	0.991 ^a	0.983	0.982	0.10889

Note: a. Predictors: (Constant), Age, Gender, Education, Number of members in the household, Internet and Social Media awareness and usage, Prior experience with online product searching and shopping,



Features and characteristics of social media, Availability of product information and Perception on social media.

Table A4: ANOVA

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	209.462	9	23.273	1962.763	<0.001 ^b
	Residual	3.652	308	0.012		
	Total	213.113	317			

Note: a. Dependent variable: Customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery

b. Predictors: (Constant), Age, Gender, Education, Number of members in the household, Internet and Social Media awareness and usage, Prior experience with online product searching and shopping, Features and characteristics of social media, Availability of product information and Perception on social media.

Table A5: Coefficients a

Model		Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	Constant	-0.080	0.048		-1.649	0.100
	Age	0.002	0.001	0.019	2.519	0.012
	Gender	0.018	0.015	0.009	0.183	0.238
	Education	0.004	0.005	0.006	0.823	0.408
	Number of members in the household	0.003	0.005	0.005	0.614	0.540
	Internet and Social Media awareness and usage	0.191	0.032	0.196	6.014	<0.001
	Prior experience with online product searching and shopping	-0.040	0.020	-0.042	-2.036	0.043
	Features and characteristics of social media	0.112	0.030	0.117	3.761	<0.001
	Availability of product information are significant	0.736	0.029	0.703	25.657	<0.001
	Perception of social media	-0.003	0.009	-0.004	-0.325	0.745

Note: a. Dependent variable: Customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery.

4.6 Hypotheses Testing

According to the results of the analysis (significance of the coefficients), the acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis were tested at 95% confidence level. As presented in details in Table A6, there is a significant impact of Age, Internet and social media awareness and usage, Features and characteristics of social media, Availability of product information on social media, and Prior experience with online product searching and shopping on customer purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery while there is no significant impact of gender, education, and perception of social media.

Table A6: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Path	Hypothesis	Standard β value	p value	Decision
Age	There is a significant impact of age on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery	0.019	0.012	Accept
Gender	There is a significant impact of gender on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery	0.009	0.238	Reject
Education	There is a significant impact of education level on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery	0.006	0.408	Reject
Number of members in the household	There is a significant impact of number of members in the household on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery	0.005	0.540	Reject
Internet and social media awareness and usage	There is a significant impact of Internet and social media awareness and usage on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery	0.196	<0.001	Accept



Features and characteristics of social media	There is a significant impact of features and characteristics of social media on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery	0.117	<0.001	Accept
Availability of product information on social media	There is a significant impact of availability of product information on social media on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery	0.703	<0.001	Accept
Prior experience with online product searching and shopping	There is a significant impact of prior experience with online product searching and shopping on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery	-0.042	0.043	Accept
Perception of social media	There is a significant impact of perception of social media on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery	-0.004	0.745	Reject



4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

According to the results of the study, there is a significant positive impact of age on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media. Hence, it can be suggested that age (demographic factors) affects customer purchase decisions. The finding is supported by the study results of Stelzner (2010), where it was stated that the relationship between use of social media and age demographics is significant. This finding provides answer to the first research question by identifying a factor affecting customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media.

As per the results of the study, there is a significant positive impact of Internet and social media awareness and usage on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery. This finding provides answers to the second research question by indicating that more awareness on the internet and social media would impact the customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery. When the awareness and usage increase, customers tend to search and order more on online platforms. The results confirm the findings of previous studies consumers who frequented social media platforms were more likely to be influenced in their final purchase decision (Cuming, 2008), multimedia campaigns must include social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs to ensure maximum consumer reach (Brandzcom, 2022), social networks, particularly Facebook is most suitable information sharing platform at the beginning of the consumer purchase decision as many consumers relied on social recommendations (Fauser et al., 2011) and many consumers use Facebook reviews and ratings as the means to seek recommendations, peer advice and find product information (Fauser et al., 2011).



According to the findings, there is a significant positive impact of features and characteristics of social media on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media. The features which promote customer interaction and engagement like; Rewards and Promotions and Games, interactive posts and competitions has the highest impact on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery. Apart from these, Quick response from the company is also having a significant impact on purchase decision. These findings are backed by the results of previous research work done by various researches which stated that; human interaction is the core of any business (Silk, 2006), relationship building has taken on significance in online environments (Court et al., 2009), the social web represents an increasingly important point of interaction between marketers and consumers (Fauser et al., 2011), having a strong presence in social media can greatly assist sales people as this platform engages both the sales people and their customers and develop social capital which can act as an impetus for customers to interact, engage and form relationships with the sales people (Agnihotri et al., 2012), beyond quality and reliability, consumers expect to have a feel-good and interactive association with the brand (Brandzcom, 2022), and consumers are aware of the influence they command over social media therefore marketing strategies need to be highly interactive and they must facilitate real time feedback between consumers and marketers (Evans & McKee, 2010). These findings answer to the third research question by identifying more impactful elements of social media on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery.

According to the results of the study, there is a significant positive impact of availability of product information on social media on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery. This finding supports the work of Fauser et al. (2011), where the study stated that whilst communication was the core of any social media platform, information sharing, collaboration and relationship building was necessary to support ongoing communication. The research findings also strengthen the results of a research study in the United States of America (USA) to explore consumer's relationships on social media platforms by Cuming in 2008. The analysis



revealed that, overall online information played an influential role in the consumer's final purchase decision (Cuming, 2008). In this study, Machinery or Equipment brand is considered as the most important information on social media by the consumers. This is backed by the finding of Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000), where they highlighted the importance of focusing on marketing strategy on brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality of the brand and consumer loyalty to the brand in order to appeal to consumers as they make their purchase decisions.

According to the results of the study, there is a significant negative impact of prior experience with online product searching and shopping on customer purchase decision of Agri Equipment and Machinery. This indicates that respondents of the study do not have a good experience with online product searching and shopping which leads to demotivate them in searching and ordering online again. This can be explained by the findings of Mangold and Faulds (2009), which stated that in virtual worlds where perception and first impressions are critical influences facilitate brand association with consumers. So, marketers should position the brand in terms of quality specifications and ultimately influence the consumer to purchase the brand and make repeat purchases (Brandzcom, 2022).

These findings seem to provide answers to the research questions of the study and support to achieve the research objectives by identifying the factors affecting customer's purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery on social media, identifying the impact of social media marketing on customer's purchase decisions of Agri Equipment and Machinery and identifying the most effective social media platforms and elements which bring in more benefits to organisations.



5.2 Implications

This study which attempts to investigate the impact of social media marketing on purchase decisions tends to proffer several implications. Some of the more theoretical implications include the extension of similar studies which have focused on the impact of social media marketing on the purchase intention of consumers such as the study by Agnihorti et al. (2012), which attempted to identify the impact of social media usage by salespeople on service behaviour, as well as the study by Ahmed et al. (2014) which have attempted to identify the impact of social media marketing on brand equity. Similarly, it appears that the current study seems to extend numerous other studies such as Bojei and Abu (2016), Bruno and Dariuz (2014), Kim and Ko (2012), etc. Additionally, it can be suggested that the current study seems to extend studies that have focused on the impact of social media marketing on the purchase decisions of agricultural equipment, specifically such as the study by Balkrishna et al. (2017). Accordingly, it is likely that this study seems to shed light on an often-overlooked sector such as the agricultural sector.

From a practical perspective, the current study tends to highlight the importance of selecting appropriate social media which appeals to agricultural equipment-purchasing customers, as well as implementing necessary measures to create awareness on social media among the customer base, through traditional marketing campaigns such as farmer visits, machinery field promotions, farmer training programmes etc.

5.3 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

According to the latest statistics, the number of households with agricultural operators in Sri Lanka is approximately 2.1 million (Department of census and statistics, 2020). But the sample size of the study was only 318. To address the limitation of the smaller sample size used for the study, future researches should focus on larger evidence from a bigger sample pool to improve the confidence in the findings and support generalization of the results. Another major limitation would be the use of



questionnaires based on a survey strategy. Instead, in-depth interviews could have been used to gain rich information related to your study. Future researchers can also adopt mixed-methods approach by combining survey and in-depth interview strategy which will allow them to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the related research problems.

Additionally, another limitation stems from the fact that all the respondents are customers (potential or actual) of single organization and this impacted the views of the participants which could have been more forthright. To overcome this limitation, respondents from multiple organizations and respondents from the general farming community can be included to further improve the generalizability of future studies.

Since most of the agricultural households in Sri Lanka are located away from the capital and most of the areas are villages, Internet, social media and reach are comparatively limited. Social media itself is a work in progress and research on social media, particularly in Agri Equipment and Machinery market is still in its embryonic stage. Hence, further research in this domain is highly recommend.

5. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of social media is connectivity; the ability to meet new people, create new contacts and develop networks and create new customers and business associates (Mayfield, 2011). If managed and maintained appropriately, organizations can utilize the power of social media marketing to promote its brand, gain insight into the market and assess how consumers feel about its brands (Court et al., 2009). As thousands of users visit social media platforms daily, social media marketing allows marketers to reach and talk to a mass audience at little or no cost (Fauser et al., 2011).



The Agri Equipment and Machinery marketing team of the Company should identify Facebook as the most popular and most used social media platform followed by YouTube, TikTok and Instagram among the customers. The Company should focus more on Facebook marketing and then move to other identified platforms. As almost all the customers are using their mobile phones to access social media, the content (ads, Images, videos, etc.) should be developed and optimized for mobile phones; both Android and iPhone. By improving awareness on social media and usage through the Company's traditional marketing activities, marketing team will be able to bring in more customers to Company's social media platforms. The marketing teams can introduce these platforms to the customers during field visits, field promotions, farmer training programmes and ask them to like and follow the profiles. Social media posts with product and brand information required by the customers such as brand, price, availability and dealer details will reach out to customers easily. As the customers see the Brand as the most valuable information, brand names, logos, colors, slogans, jingles, etc. should be highlighted when developing content. By incorporating rewards, free coupons, promo codes, and engaging with consumers through quizzes, online competitions on social media, the Company will be able to improve customer engagement. Since the age demographic of the customer affects the purchase decision according to the results, marketing team should analyze the age profile of customers and develop social media content accordingly. The design, tone, language, etc. should be differed with the age profile of the customers of a certain Agri Machinery or Equipment.

The Company should improve response rates and communication with customers by responding to customers quickly and thereby give the customers the feel that they are valued and not neglected. Automatic responses and chatbots can be used to reply to customers. Thereby, marketing team can assess how consumers are viewing their brands, assess how consumers feel about the competition and allow them to understand what consumers are looking for. This presents the Company the opportunity to engage in real time with its consumers, improve on service delivery and aligns its brand strategies to ensure that the future generation products are in



accordance with the markets needs and wants; this is the core of marketing strategy. By providing a customer with a good impression, the Company will be able to bring back the customers to the same platform for repurchases.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that no competing financial interests or personal relationships could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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