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Empirical Study of Social Media Marketing's Impact on Brand Image and
Loyalty in Retail, Muscat

*Estudio empírico del impacto del marketing en redes sociales en la imagen
de marca y la fidelidad en el minorista, Mascate*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore SMM's influence on brand image and loyalty in the retail industry of Muscat. The study employs the quantitative method as it ensures valid and reliable results. The data for the analysis were collected from 150 employees in the retail sector through structured survey questionnaires. The data is analyzed using the SPSS tool through statistical approaches such as ANOVA, Correlation, and Regression. The findings of this research will illuminate the significance of SMM and identify factors that encourage SMM in the retail sector. The outcomes provide valuable insights into SMM initiatives that aid in increasing Muscat's brand reputation and image in the retail industry. This study's implications will benefit retail organizations in attaining a competitive advantage in the market.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing; Digital Marketing; Online Marketing; Brand loyalty; Brand Image; Retail industry; Muscat

JEL code: M31, L81



RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar SMM sobre la imagen de marca y la lealtad en la industria minorista de Mascate. El estudio emplea el método cuantitativo ya que garantiza resultados válidos y confiables. Los datos para el análisis se recopilaron de 150 empleados del sector minorista a través de cuestionarios de encuesta estructurados. Los datos se analizan utilizando la herramienta SPSS mediante enfoques estadísticos como ANOVA, Correlación y Regresión. Los hallazgos de esta investigación iluminarán la importancia del SMM e identificarán los factores que fomentan el SMM en el sector minorista. Los resultados proporcionan información valiosa sobre las iniciativas SMM que ayudan a aumentar la reputación y la imagen de la marca en la industria minorista de Muscat. Las implicaciones de este estudio serán beneficiosas para que las organizaciones minoristas obtengan una ventaja competitiva en el mercado.

Palabras clave: Marketing social; marketing digital; marketing online; fidelización de marca; imagen de marca; industria minorista, Mascate

INTRODUCTION

The retail industry is a rapidly developing industrial sector that contributes to the nation's growth (Zhu & Gao, 2019). The retail sector undergoes severe disparity due to the large sum of large-scale retail shops. Traditional marketing has slowly disappeared with the advancement of technology (Kim et al., 2020).

Recently, the firm has utilized the Internet as an extensive marketing network. Digital marketing (DM) is referred to as the usage of ECT (Electronic Communication Technology) with conventional marketing to attain and offer amenities to customers (Ram et al., 2023). Online marketing (OM) is the most popular term with modern potential and technical services to raise profit via sales and access the vast number of retail customers (Fuchs et al., 2024). It lowers the cost and creates customer engagement through frequent communication, which makes the customer retain.

OM is an effective instrument that helps firms achieve financial performance and growth. E-marketing is not the usage of the Internet but the facilitation of interaction among firms and customers (Carlson et al., 2019).

DM is performed on varied platforms such as email, websites, e-advertisement, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), and Social Media Marketing (SMM). SEO improves the quality and quantity of traffic from search engines to websites or web pages (Lewandowski et al., 2021). SMM is the only platform enabling firms to attain possible online consumers (Getaruelas & Gnanakumar, 2023).

Firms are capitalizing on technology to uplift their Social Media (SM) availability as marketers anticipate that SM will expand to 71% (Ebrahim, 2020). SMM is the process that allows firms to promote their products, services, and websites via online social platforms to extended communities. SM unites corporations, companies, and service suppliers with a broader audience of consumers (Zollo et al., 2020). Firms can drive website traffic, gain followers, and achieve brand awareness through SMM. Firms strive to increase sales, conversions, and profits and sustain a competitive market via SMM (Dolega et al., 2021). SMM impacts consumer behavior, including shopping behavior, attitudes, opinions, information acquisition, awareness, and communication. SMM contributes to building brand image, brand loyalty, and brand equity for organizations (Al-Haraizah et al., 2020).

Brand image is customers' perceptions of the firm and its products and services based on their experiences and interactions (Tirawani & Matondang, 2024). The company's values and mission also contribute to building brand image. A robust brand image can achieve brand

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recognition and loyalty. It influences the customer to differentiate the firm from rival companies (Cheung et al., 2019).

On the other hand, brand equity is consumers' outlook regarding the brand's reputation. It is regarded as a firm's intangible asset (Pham, 2020). The management and augmentation of brand equity gain the confidence of customers to purchase services or goods from the firm (Suharto et al., 2022).

The firm concentrates on brand loyalty as it can influence the customers' shopping intentions (Ceyhan Günay, 2019). Customers who are committed to the brand can show optimistic word of mouth. Further, loyal customers tend to purchase and repurchase with the same brand. Brand loyalty is regarded as the key factor in estimating the value of a brand (Hwang et al., 2021). A firm with a vast loyal customer base can be predicted to have more profits and sales than a brand without a loyal customer base (Johansson & Hiltula, 2021).

Significance of the Study

SMM is rapidly developing in the retail sector of Muscat; comprehending its impact on brand image and customer loyalty is significant for businesses to remain competitive in the digital era (Al Ramadhani, Al Badri, & Rais, 2024). Investigating the association between DM and brand trust of customers can aid in comprehending the efficacy of SMM tactics in forming customer outlooks about the brands and nurturing loyalty across consumers. This knowledge can notify decision-making procedures linked to resource allocation, campaign optimization, and building marketing strategies. By using SMM effectively, firms in the retail sector can influence consumer behavior, drive sales and conversions, and develop brand awareness among Muscat's customers.

Problem Identification

In the digital world, SMMs are the most essential for firms and companies in the retail sector. The growth of the Internet has increased the number of users in the retail industry. Effective business handling through traditional marketing is complex in the competitive market (Irshad et al., 2020). Firms need to improve in embracing DM to avoid loss of customer base, sales, profits, and overall growth. Hence, SMM can aid in establishing brand awareness, brand image, and loyalty in the retail sector (Bernarto et al., 2020). Though much research exists on SMM, there needs to be more research on its impact on brand image, loyalty, and brand equity. Additionally, a study gap must be analyzed to identify the SMM and its impact on Muscat's retail sector. The proposed study investigates the SMM factors and explores their influence, which is valuable to obtaining information regarding their importance and customer trust in the retail industry.

Objectives of the Study

The current research investigates the SMM and its effect on Muscat's brand image and loyalty in the retail sector. The key objectives are deliberated as follows:

To evaluate the significance of implementing OM in the retail industry

To determine the factors influencing the adoption of digital technologies in the retail industry.

To analyze the association of digital marketing and consumer brand trust in the retail industry.

To evaluate the impact of digital marketing on the brand equity and brand loyalty of the consumers in the retail industry.

To recommend the theoretical framework for the effective implementation of OM to elevate brand loyalty in the retail sector.

Paper Organization

The current research is structured consecutively. In section 1, the outline regarding SMM and its effect on retail sectors' brand image and loyalty was deliberated. Furthermore, the introduction covers the background of the research, its significance, problem detection, and the study's objective. Section 2 will discuss the prevailing research associated with the current research. Additionally, the research gap and research hypothesis will be elaborated. Section 3 will elucidate the methodology of the proposed study with the support of utilized methods for data collection and analysis. In section 4, the outcomes of the performed data analysis will be exposed. Section 5 will discuss the results of the preceding research and current research. The limitation of the present research will be mentioned in section 6. Finally, section 7 will emphasize the conclusion and implications of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Marketing in the Retail Sector

The Internet gave birth to varied platforms for businesses and other purposes in the 21st century. A successful business depends on various factors, such as marketing, production, and operation. Digitalization significantly impacts marketing functions for organizations in multiple industries (Rossato & Castellani, 2020; Dastane, 2020).

E-marketing offers several benefits for sellers, retailers, and customers in the retail sector, including many market users (Veleva & Tsvetanova, 2020). The OM can influence customers' perceptions and purchasing intentions. Therefore, the conventional study (Kaur et al., 2021) has evaluated several tools and methods utilized in OM. Further, it has extended to investigate the impact of e-marketing tactics on customers' purchasing intention. The research is based on a quantitative approach.

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The data has been congregated from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data has been collected from 211 common public through a structured questionnaire distributed online. The secondary data is obtained from websites and published journals. The outcomes have been identified as a positive association between customer shopping behavior and DM. Further, it has been detected that the OM significantly influences customers' purchasing intentions.

Organizations are often striving to attain new consumers and maintain existing customers. In previous days, traditional marketing, such as print, television, and radio, was utilized to connect with people (Othman et al., 2021). The establishment of the Internet has shifted the way of marketing from traditional to digital to meet the potential audience. The prior study (Abdulraheem & Imouokhome, 2021) examined SM sites' impact on customer purchasing behavior in Shoprite Nigeria Limited in Lagos and Ibadan. It has been considered an SM site on YouTube, Google+, Facebook, blogs, and Twitter. The study has been based on a descriptive quantitative research design. The data was collected from 321 respondents through a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The results have found that the SM sites significantly impact the shopping characteristics of consumers in Shoprite Nigeria Limited.

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OM is the best instrument for retail brands to cheaply connect with a targeted global audience. The prevailing study (UNNISA, 2023) has examined the impact of DM on the retail sector. Further, it has scrutinized the various types of DM and its challenges in the retail sector. The study has considered the responses of fashion retailers. The study detected various DM channels, such as SMM, SEO, email marketing, radio promotion, television advertising, and instant messaging marketing. It has been found that advanced promotions are the common DM challenges in the retail industry. Further, the outcome has been recognized as DM significantly impacting the retail sector. The DM has created rapport with customers, brand loyalty, and increased sales and conversion. Therefore, DM's contribution is significant to the retail industry.

Decisive Factors for using digital technologies

Retailing is experiencing a significant revolution because of recent advancements in technology. Digitalization has made the retail sector embrace digital technologies for marketing decisions and sales. The retail sector has adopted digital technologies in its various operations, such as marketing, production, and supply chain. The preceding study (Arango-Botero et al., 2021) investigated the factors that promote the use of SMM in retail firms.

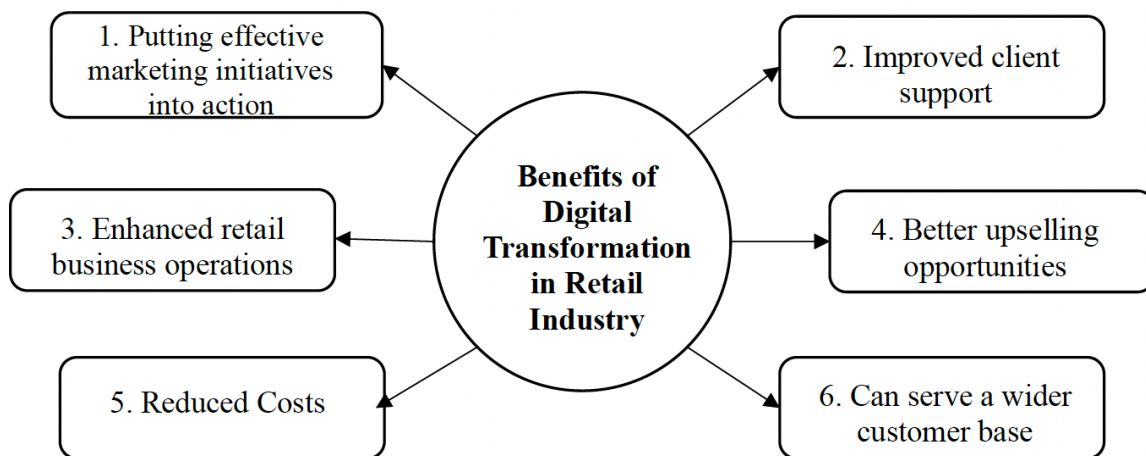
The research has been based on field, cross-cutting, and quantitative probing techniques. The data has been gathered from 421 managers in the marketing department of Medellin's retail

industry. The data has been congregated via a questionnaire. The results have detected that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and trust are the factors that increase the usage of SMM in the retail sector. The outcomes have revealed that, through SMM, the firm can attain a competitive advantage in the market.

The SM is one of the leading digital platforms utilized as a medium for business marketing. Traditional research (Razak & Latip, 2016) has examined the factors that influence the use of SM in marketing across SMEs (Small and medium enterprises) in Malaysia. The results show that factors such as perceived usefulness, enjoyment, and ease of use have positively impacted the usage of SM as a marketing tool for SMEs in Malaysia. The usefulness is the belief level of SMEs that utilizing SMM can uplift productivity and performance. Ease of use is the belief level of SMEs that employing SMM is a simple practice. Further, enjoyment is considered in the prevailing study as SMM does not require any obligation, as people love to enjoy using SM.

Figure 1

Benefits of digital transformation in the retail sector (Thakker, 2023)



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 1 illustrates the benefits of the digital revolution in the retail industry. Digital technologies in the retail sector have benefits for marketing initiatives, enhanced client support, business functions, sales, reduced costs, and offering services to a broad consumer base.

Digital marketing on brand equity and brand loyalty

Currently, SM is a popular platform for transferring information. For business purposes, OM has a high potential to reach more audiences. Firms concentrate on achieving brand image, trust, and loyalty from the customer to sustain themselves in the competitive market. The characteristics of brand trust are the positive outlook of customers about the product based on their experiences and satisfaction (Seo et al., 2020). On the other hand, brand loyalty is

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the customer's relationship with the brand. Thus, the prior research (Haudi et al., 2022) has determined the impact of SMM on brand trust, brand equity, and brand reliability.

The study has utilized a quantitative research approach. The data has been collected from 450 respondents through online questionnaires using Google Forms. The study considered the participants who had used SM for at least six months. The results have identified that the SMM significantly positively impacts brand equity, brand loyalty, and brand trust. Furthermore, it has been recognized that brand equity, brand loyalty, and brand image significantly impact the performance of SMEs.

The growth of the Internet has transformed marketing practices, where SMM is the novel practice in DM. Firms are targeted to achieve sustainability in the competitive market. To accomplish this purpose, comprehending how to develop and govern brand equity is significant to establishing a competitive advantage across rival firms. The traditional study (Hafez, 2022) has inspected the influence of SMM practices on brand equity via brand experience as a moderating factor. The research has been based on quantitative research techniques.

40 The data has been gathered from 222 bank clients through an offline survey questionnaire. The outcomes have been detected as SMM activities have an optimistic and significant influence on brand equity. Additionally, the brand experience has mediated the association between SMM practice and brand equity. The perceived uniqueness slightly impacts the relationship between brand equity and SMM practices.

RESEARCH GAP

Even though the existing studies have strived to examine SMM and its effect on brand loyalty and brand image in the retail sector, there is scope for additional advancements in data collection. For example, the study (Haudi et al., 2022) collected many responses. The large amount of data can result in biases in the data and outcomes.

The research (Kaur et al., 2021) has gathered data from secondary sources, which can reduce the reliability of research results. Hence, it is necessary to concentrate on sample size and data collection method to gain ideal results. Although there are numerous endeavors in traditional studies, several facets still need to be included.

For instance, the research (Hafez, 2022) has disregarded the aspect of brand trust and loyalty.

The study (UNNISA, 2023) has ignored the association of DM with customer trust in the retail sector. Similarly, few studies have yet to offer recommendations about the theoretical framework for effectively implementing DM to elevate brand loyalty.

Thus, considering several features can augment the organization's decision-making, performance, and productivity. More research studies on SMM in Muscat's retail sector are needed. Hence, the proposed study embraces the analysis of SMM in Muscat's retail sector. Further, the proposed study reveals the impact of SMM on brand loyalty and brand equity.

Research Hypothesis

The research hypotheses of the present study are addressed as follows:

H₁1: Online marketing has a significant impact on the retail sector

H₀1: Online marketing has no significant impact on the retail sector

H₁2: The factors significantly influence the adoption of digital technologies in the retail industry.

H₀2: The factors do not significantly influence the adoption of digital technologies in the retail industry.

H₁3: Digital marketing has a significant relationship with the brand trust of the customer in the retail sector

H₀3: Digital marketing has no significant relationship with the brand trust of the customer in the retail sector

H₁4: Digital marketing has a positive effect on the brand equity and brand loyalty of the consumer in the retail sector

H₀4: Digital marketing has a negative effect on the brand equity and brand loyalty of the consumer in the retail sector

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The research is performed among retailers and employees of retail firms in Muscat, Oman. The survey is conducted with the support of a researcher. The participants were explicitly selected from the Muscat area, enhancing the study's relevance and simplifying the data collection process.

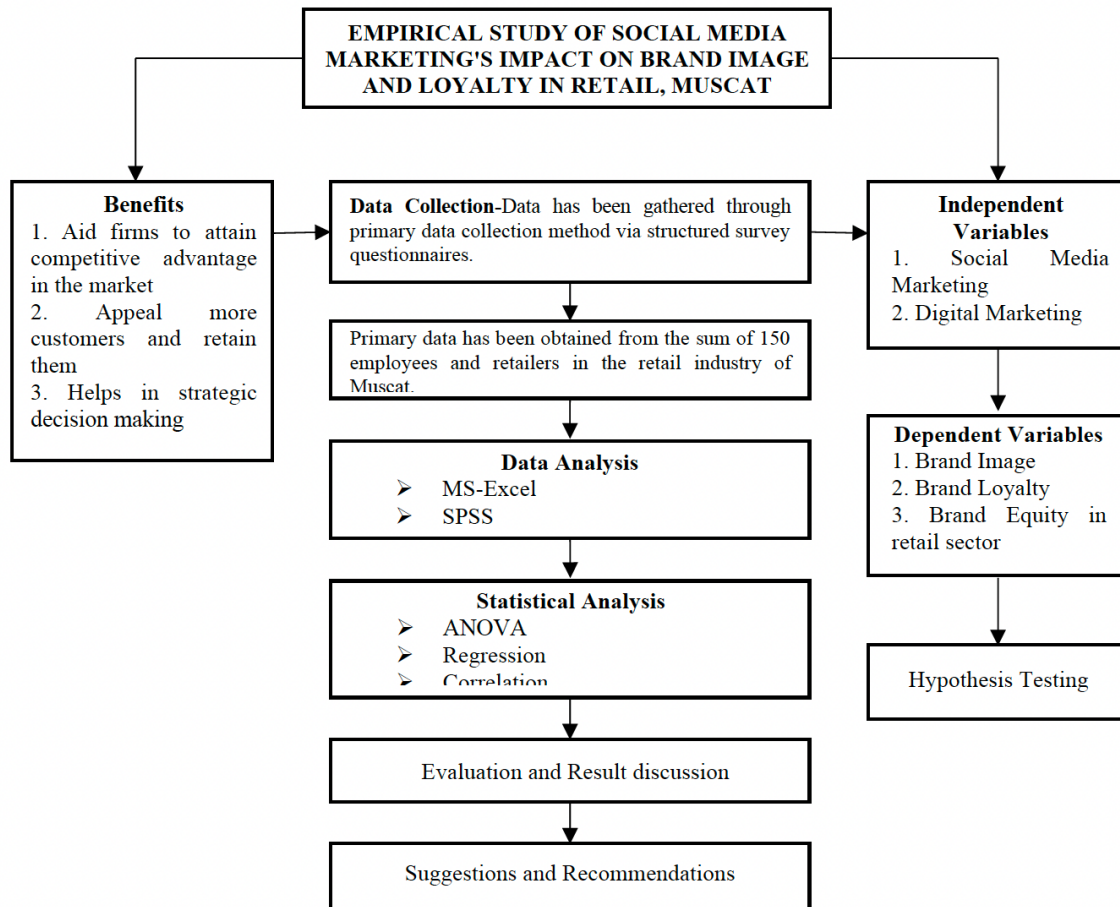
Research Design

The proposed study employs a quantitative research method to analyze congregated data. This approach focuses on collecting numerical data that can be measured using mathematical methods. This technique offers statistics on how, what, how much, when, and where. The quantitative technique is grounded in logic and objectivity, making it an innovative approach

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for investigating specific research objectives and gathering quantifiable participant data. Additionally, it evaluates the data using statistical analysis. It utilizes questionnaires and surveys to collect data from the selected respondents. The results derived from quantitative data are considered accurate and reliable. It allows the collection of data rapidly and secures respondents' data. Therefore, this study utilizes quantitative research techniques to gather data through a structured questionnaire.

Figure 2
Research Design



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2 illustrates the comprehensive research design of this study. Initially, primary data are collected from 150 employees and retailers in Muscat's retail sector. The data are gathered through a structured interview questionnaire. Concurrently, the study assesses brand image, loyalty, and equity in retail firms determined through SM marketing and DM. Following this, the research hypotheses are tested. Later, the SPSS tool is used to analyze the congregated sample data. Statistical analysis such as ANOVA, Regression, and Correlation are performed.

ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) is a statistical tool employed to evaluate variations in means across three or more groups to distinguish remarkable discrepancies among them (Potvin, 2020). Regression is a statistical technique used to analyze and model the connection between dependent and multiple independent variables (Alita et al., 2021). Correlation is a numerical evaluation that indicates the intensity and alignment of a connection between two factors (Jebli et al., 2021). Finally, the results obtained from the analysis are interpreted and discussed. Based on the results, relevant suggestions and recommendations are provided.

Sampling Method and Participants

The sampling technique is vital for collecting specific data from a population rather than focusing on the entire population. Selecting an appropriate sample size is essential, as it impacts the reliability of the results. The present study utilizes a purposive sampling method to select an appropriate sample from the population. It is one of the non-probability sampling methods. In this method, researchers can choose the defendants according to their knowledge and judgment. Selecting respondents is designed to yield precise and accurate data for the study.

The primary reason for opting for purposive sampling over other techniques is that it adheres to specific rules in the sample selection process. The rules in this process provide detailed outcomes. The data are collected from the 150 retailers and employees of retail firms in Muscat. The study focuses on enthusiastic participants willing to volunteer to participate in the survey, ensuring the validity of the research and its findings.

Research Instruments

The current study utilizes a primary data collection technique to gather data relevant to its research objectives. The present research will collect data through a structured questionnaire from the retailers and employees in retail firms in Muscat. It is the easiest technique for acquiring data from respondents compared to other approaches, such as indirect interviews, in-depth interviews, or informal discussions. The data was collected from their experience, knowledge, practice, and observation of the firm in the retail sector in Muscat.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data analysis systematically gathers and applies computational, statistical, and mathematical methods. It employs subjective inference to measure values based on non-quantifiable data. Quantitative analysis collects data from a population using sampling techniques to produce results relevant to the research purposes. The outcomes of quantitative analysis are expressed numerically, whereas the outcome of qualitative analysis is determined descriptively. The results of these analysis methods are used to build the future of the study and create relevant adaptations.

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The quantitative data analysis technique uses a structured questionnaire from sample respondents. The gathered data are loaded in MS Excel for quantitative analysis to expose the study variables. Subsequently, the data are analyzed using SPSS software. The research results are evaluated with the help of ANOVA, regression, correlation, and demographic analysis. The data are gathered from selected respondents, such as retailers and employees in retail firms. Utilizing SPSS in this research provides efficient calculation of the relevant values. The collected data was assessed through MS Excel and the SPSS tool.

Analysis techniques such as ANOVA, correlation, and reliability tests are employed to test research hypotheses. The data assessment occurs in three levels; in level 1, Excel compiles demographic details and creates frequency distributions. It is used to list the collected data via statistics to forecast the mean (M), median range (MR), and standard deviation (SD) of several study variables in the proposed research. In level 2, the SPSS tool is employed to analyze the study variables of the present study. In level 3, correlation, ANOVA, and regression are conducted to evaluate the research hypotheses.

Ethical Consideration

The primary data collected was used for the study. It was assured that the information was strictly for the objective of education and that all the details would be kept confidential.

44 Before the survey, the respondents' demographic details will be collected. The demographic details comprise name, age, gender, marital status, education, work experience, and other personal details. They will be kept securely for each participant contributing to the survey process.

RESULTS

Demographic Data of Respondents

The 150 retailers and employees working in Muscat's retail sector are the sample participants for this research. The demographic details of these participants are presented in Table 1. Table 1 represents the demographic details of the employees and retailers in the retail sector of Muscat who participated in the survey. According to the table, 86% of respondents are 25 years old, while the age groups of 26-40 years, 41-60 years, and above 60 years account for 10%, 3%, and 1%, respectively. The data indicates that 70% of participants are female and 30% are male. Most respondents are single, with a value of 79%, while only 21% are married.

Table 1
Demographic Data

<i>Demographic Factor</i>	<i>Parameter</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Age</i>	Up to 25 Years	129	86 %
	26-40 Years	14	10 %
	41-60 Years	5	3 %
	Above 60 Years	2	1 %
	Total	100	100 %
<i>Gender</i>	Male	45	30 %
	Female	105	70 %
	Total	100	100 %
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single	119	79 %
	Married	31	21 %
	Total	100	100 %
<i>Education</i>	Under Graduate	102	68 %
	Post Graduate	40	27 %
	Doctorate	8	5 %
	Total	100	100 %
<i>Work Experience</i>	1-5 Years	117	78 %
	6-10 Years	7	4 %
	11-15 Years	16	11 %
	More than 15 Years	10	7 %
	Total	100	100 %
<i>Employment Status</i>	Trainee	105	70 %
	Temporary	11	7 %
	Contract Basis	15	10 %
	Permanent	19	13 %
	Total	100	100 %

Source: Own elaboration.

Most participants completed undergraduate studies with a value of 68%; in contrast, those with postgraduate and doctoral degrees make up 27% and 5%, respectively. The data shows that 78% of participants have work experience between 1-5 years, while 4% have experience ranging from 6-10 years. The respondents with job experience of 11-15 years and more than 15 years account for 11% and 7%, respectively. 70% of respondents are trainees, and 7% of defendants are temporary employees. On the other hand, only 10% of defendants work on a contract basis, and 13% of respondents are in permanent employment status.

Reliability Test

Tables 2 and 3 present a case processing summary and the $C\alpha$ value from the reliability test. The calculated $C\alpha$ value is 0.738, indicating a high level of internal consistency for the reliability scale within the defined sample.

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Table 2
Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	150	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	150	100.0

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's alpha (C α)	N of Items
.738	24

Source: Own elaboration.

H₁1: Online marketing has a significant impact on the retail sector.

H₀1: Online marketing has no significant impact on the retail sector.

Regression

Table 4 demonstrates the model summary of the regression analysis related to the hypothesis. The R square value is 0.511, which is above 0.50.

Table 4
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.740 ^a	.511	.425	.706

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5
ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	15.149	3	5.050	13.769	.000 ^b
	Residual	53.545	146	.367		
	Total	68.693	149			

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 6 presents the result of the regression analysis. It highlights the impact of OM in the retail sector. The p-value in the results is below 0.05. Consequently, the outcomes of the regression test confirm that OM has a significant effect on the retail sector. Therefore, the first hypothesis is accepted.

H₁2: The factors have a significant influence on the adoption of digital technologies in the retail industry.

H₀2: The factors do not significantly influence the adoption of digital technologies in the retail industry.

Table 6
Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.704	.194		3.620	.000
	The integration of appropriate and blended marketing strategies, which are necessary to reach as many potential clients as possible and develop brand loyalty and awareness	.222	.071	.260	3.130	.002
	Well-designed Omni channel experiences can capture the attention of their target audience and increase customer loyalty	.155	.072	.179	2.154	.033
	Personalized communication permits retailers to influence purchase decisions effectively at the right moment of the customer journey	.249	.065	.281	3.811	.000

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 7
ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The advantages of adoption depend on the organizations compatibility to use the technological innovations	Between Groups	6.101	3	2.034	3.110	.028
	Within Groups	95.472	146	.654		
	Total	101.573	149			
The expansion of readily available digital technologies, such as computers, cell phones, and e-commerce platforms, are one of main causes of the emergence of digital marketing	Between Groups	5.670	3	1.890	3.390	.020
	Within Groups	81.403	146	.558		
	Total	87.073	149			
Organizations worldwide are facing a market pressures which are forcing them to undertake digital transformation projects or initiatives	Between Groups	13.776	3	4.592	9.435	.000
	Within Groups	71.057	146	.487		
	Total	84.833	149			
Top management support is important for resource allocation and influences organizational readiness	Between Groups	13.597	3	4.532	6.030	.001
	Within Groups	109.737	146	.752		
	Total	123.333	149			

Source: Own elaboration.

ANOVA

Table 7 illustrates the results of an ANOVA analysis assessing the impact of triggering factors on the adoption of digital technologies. The p-value is below 0.05. The results of the

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ANOVA test reveal that market pressure, firm readiness, compatibility, and widespread use of technology significantly influence the adoption of digital technologies in the retail industry. Therefore, the second hypothesis is accepted.

H₁₃: Digital marketing has a significant relationship with the brand trust of the customer in the retail sector.

H₀₃: Digital marketing has no significant relationship with the brand trust of the customer in the retail sector.

Table 8
Correlations

		Well-designed Omni channel experiences can capture the attention of their target audience and increase customer loyalty	Customers put their faith in particular brands, market researchers which strengthen customer relationships	Flawless design presented by retailers attract consumers to navigate easily and find all the information they need to make a purchase
Well-designed Omni channel experiences can capture the attention of their target audience and increase customer loyalty	Pearson Correlation	1	.229**	.213**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005	.009
	N	150	150	150
Customers put their faith in particular brands, market researchers which strengthen customer relationships	Pearson Correlation	.229**	1	.315**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005		.000
	N	150	150	150
Flawless design presented by retailers attract consumers to navigate easily and find all the information they need to make a purchase	Pearson Correlation	.213**	.315**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.000	
	N	150	150	150

Source: Own elaboration.

Correlations

Table 8 presents the correlation results. The test is utilized to determine the significant relationship between DM and brand trust. The p-value of the correlation is less than 0.005. Thus, the correlation results confirm that OM has a significant association with customer brand trust in the retail industry. Therefore, the third hypothesis is accepted.

H₁₄: Digital marketing has a positive effect on the brand equity and brand loyalty of the consumer in the retail sector.

H₀₄: Digital marketing has a negative effect on the brand equity and brand loyalty of the consumer in the retail sector.

Table 9
ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Through digital media companies constantly improve themselves and try to create a good image about the product.	Between Groups	11.542	3	3.847	9.828	.000
	Within Groups	57.152	146	.391		
	Total	68.693	149			
Digital media provides the marketers a mechanism through which they can interact and communicate effectively and cheaply	Between Groups	9.008	3	3.003	5.557	.001
	Within Groups	78.885	146	.540		
	Total	87.893	149			
Customers put their faith in particular brands, market researchers which strengthen customer relationships	Between Groups	15.582	3	5.194	7.651	.000
	Within Groups	99.111	146	.679		
	Total	114.693	149			
The integration of appropriate and blended marketing strategies, which are necessary to reach as many potential clients as possible and develop brand loyalty and awareness	Between Groups	18.061	3	6.020	11.449	.000
	Within Groups	76.773	146	.526		
	Total	94.833	149			
Well-designed Omni channel experiences can capture the attention of their target audience and increase customer loyalty	Between Groups	18.552	3	6.184	12.270	.000
	Within Groups	73.588	146	.504		
	Total	92.140	149			

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 9 displays the results of the ANOVA analysis to determine the impact of OM on brand equity and loyalty among retail industry customers. The p-value is below 0.05. Therefore, the results of the ANOVA test demonstrate that DM has a significant impact on both brand loyalty and brand equity in the retail industry. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is accepted.

DISCUSSIONS

Investigating the aggregated data from participants, analyzed using SPSS, has led to several significant interpretations in the present study. The results indicate that SMM significantly affects Muscat's brand image and loyalty within the retail sector. Additionally, the outcomes of ANOVA and regression analysis confirm that OM has a significant impact on brand equity and brand loyalty among customers in the retail industry. The correlation results reveal that e-marketing and brand trust among consumers are positively associated. The results of the ANOVA test have revealed that market pressure, firm readiness, compatibility, and widespread use of technology are the factors that decide the adoption of digital technologies in the distribution industry.

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The prevailing study (Moslehpour et al., 2021) investigated the association between SMM practices and purchase intention with mediating factors such as brand image and trust. The outcomes have shown that SMM's trust and brand image significantly impact customers' buying behavior. Likewise, the present study also analyses the association between DM and customers' trust. The results illustrate that customer trust in the retail sector is essential in e-marketing to attain brand loyalty.

The preceding research (Cheung et al., 2024) has analyzed the impact of SMM components on customer brand engagement and awareness. The study has regarded elements such as electronic word of mouth, trendiness, interaction, entertainment, and customization. The outcomes have been recognized as trendiness; electronic word of mouth and interaction significantly impact customers' brand loyalty and awareness. Similarly, the current research examines the effect of SMM on brand equity and brand loyalty. The results determined that organized Omni-channel experience, integration of relevant marketing strategies, communication, and trendiness have aided firms in increasing equity and attaining brand loyalty in the retail sector.

50 The conventional study (Haudi et al., 2022) has explored the effect of digital marketing, social media marketing, and electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM)'s influence on purchase intention, with brand equity acting as a moderating factor, signifying that substantial brand equity enhances the positive effects of marketing techniques on consumer purchase decisions. Similarly, the present study assesses the importance of adopting Omnichannel marketing (OM) in the retail sector, indicating that a unified OM approach boosts customer interaction and loyalty towards the brand. It also recognizes essential elements that impact the acceptance of digital technologies, highlighting their contribution to building brand trust and enhancing brand equity. Ultimately, the research suggests a theoretical model for successful OM execution to increase brand loyalty in the retail industry.

The existing study (Behera et al., 2024) investigated how artificial intelligence in e-marketing affects customer engagement, emphasizing the importance of AI technologies for e-retailers to succeed in Retail 4.0. The research indicates that incorporating customer data and personalized marketing tactics improves customer interaction and brand performance. In the same way, the recent study looks into the importance of integrating Omni-channel marketing (OM) in the retail sector, with a specific focus on the factors that affect the adoption of digital technology, the connection between digital marketing and brand trust, and the overall effects on brand equity and loyalty. The results indicate that a carefully implemented OM plan can improve customer connections and increase brand devotion in a fast-changing retail environment.

LIMITATIONS

Every study has its limitations when it comes to achieving accuracy in research results. The current research also has a few boundaries, such as focusing only on Muscat's retail industry. Hence, the outcomes may limit the generalizability. It is limited to SMM only. However, the insights gained from this present research could be valuable for enhancing SMM strategies and improving brand reputation among retail firms in Muscat.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of SMM's impact on brand image and loyalty in Muscat's retail industry highlights its important theoretical and practical consequences. The demographic analysis shows that most of the workforce is young, with 86% of those surveyed being under 25, suggesting that younger consumers are incredibly open to social media marketing tactics.

The high proportion of individuals who are not in a relationship (79%) illustrates fluctuations in brand loyalty and buying choices, strengthening theories on relationship marketing. The research affirms that online advertising significantly impacts brand loyalty and equity, backing up previous theories that highlight the crucial role of online visibility in establishing brand confidence. Moreover, market pressure, firm readiness, compatibility, and technology usage are essential factors recognized for adopting digital technologies and following technology acceptance models.

The study focuses on how social media marketing (SMM) can improve brand trust, equity, and loyalty in the retail industry. It emphasizes that successful digital marketing can boost sales, profits, and customer loyalty in a challenging market. Practically, retailers in Muscat need to tailor their social media marketing tactics to connect with the younger audience and launch specific campaigns for female customers, who comprise 70% of survey participants. Investing in employee training programs can improve their ability to use social media efficiently, increasing customer interaction. Establishing consumer loyalty requires creating trust in a brand through open communication and user-generated content.

Retailers should also embrace digital technologies to enhance operational efficiency and customer experiences. It is crucial to constantly monitor market trends to adjust strategies according to changing consumer behaviors and technology usage. In general, these results offer an important understanding of the influence of social media marketing on brand reputation and customer loyalty, as well as valuable suggestions for industry players to gain a competitive edge in the market. Future research could investigate marketing tactics in various industries like finance, education, healthcare, and banking to enhance this study area.

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