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Highlights

- The Role of Club Communication
- An Extension of the UTAUT2 Model
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Qualitative Studies in Marketing

Discovering Thoughts, Inventing Future

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Understanding the Age Differences in Adopting WFTs: An Extension of the UTAUT2 Model

By Mohammad Alauddin
University of Chittagong

Abstract- Though the use of Wearable Fitness Trackers (WFT) is advancing at an unprecedented pace in developed countries, Bangladesh is still fall behind far away to cope with the proliferate features of advanced technologies, whereas age differences play a vital role for technology adoption especially WFT devices in the context of developing countries. Thus, this study, based on the factors used in Extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) along with an additional construct 'Health consciousness', explore the relationship among the endogenous and exogenous variables to develop a clear-foresightedness regarding the WFT adoption in Bangladesh. To achieve this, a survey was employed to collect primary data from 288 WFT users. The data were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method, a statistical analysis technique based upon Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). However, this study explored that hedonic motivation, health consciousness, effort expectancy, facilitating conditions, habit as well as performance expectancy ($p < 0.05$) are the most cardinal factors that have a strong influence on behavioral intention of the users to adopt WFT devices. Moreover, the impact of effort expectancy, habit, health consciousness on intention-to-use of WFT is further multiplied the usage behavior by the virtue of the moderating effect of the age differences.

Keywords: WFT, adoption, UTAUT2 model, age, developing countries.

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UNDERSTANDINGTHEAGEDIFFERENCESINADOPTINGWFTSANEXTENSIONOFTHEUTAUT2MODEL

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:

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Keywords: WFT, adoption, UTAUT2 model, age, developing countries.

I. Introduction

The vast dissemination of smartphones and wearable devices has facilitated consumers to check, record and convey information about their physical pursuits, such as heart rate, temperature, calories incinerated and time elapsed while they were active physically (Talukder, Chiong, Bao, Malik, & Systems, 2018). A topic of global discussion is now centered on the impetuous inundation of technology and the continuous increase in the number of elderly people worldwide (Sharit & Czaja, 2017). According to data from World Population Prospects: the 2019 Revision, by 2050, one in six people in the world will be over age 65 (16%), up from one in 11 in 2019 (9%) (United Nations, 2021). For instance, world's total elderly population aged 60 and above years is expected to rise by 56% from 1 billion in 2019 to 2.1 billion in 2050 (Keating, 2022)(United Nations, 2021), where in Bangladesh, the number of older people is projected to stand at 36 million in 2050, with an annual growth of 21.9% of the nation's total population (Help Age International, 2019), which means that one in every five Bangladeshis will be an older adult. Moreover, 50% of world's total senior citizen will reside in Bangladesh along with other four Asian countries, namely, China, India, Indonesia and Pakistan together by 2025 (Chaklader, Haque, & Kabir, 2003). As the number of older adults in the country increases, so does the amount of non-communicable chronic diseases like heart attacks (Powell, Thompson, Caspersen, & Kendrick, 1987; Waxman, 2004), hypertension (Waxman, 2004), stroke (Wendel-Vos et al., 2004), diabetes (Sigal, Kenny, Wasserman, & Castaneda-Sceppa, 2004; Waxman, 2004), certain cancer (Slattery et al., 2003; Waxman, 2004) and obesity (Hill & Wyatt, 2005; Waxman, 2004), but people of all age-group can augment the quality of life by engaging themselves in physical activity. The World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2010) has echoed that every adult should put their endeavor in moderate-level outdoor activities at least 150 min per week to ameliorate the physical and mental health as well as control the prevalence of chronic diseases. Since one third adults reside in Bangladesh exhibits physical in-activeness (Moniruzzaman et al., 2016), there is a need for a continuous effort to motivate them for engaging in physical exercise by the help of technologies, which can assist elderly people to change their behavior (Połap, Winnicka, Serwata, Kęsik, & Woźniak, 2018) though the rate of technology adoption by Bangladeshi is very poor (Barua & Barua, 2021; Barua et al., 2018; Sagib & Zapan; 2014). For example, wearable fitness trackers (WFT) are seen as a promising tool for individuals to take responsibility of one's own life and assist to self-monitor and self-regulate their fitness goals (Mercer et al., 2016). To achieve this, WFTs are designed to continuous keep tracking of physical activities such as steps walked, miles pedaled or traveled, number of calories intake or consumed, body temperature, heartbeat rate measurement, level of blood sugar, perspiration, sleeping pattern, floors climbed and sweat

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rate (Epstein, Jacobson, Bales, McDonald, & Munson, 2015; Shih, Han, Poole, Rosson, & Carroll, 2015) to provide users for getting easy access to their health-related information at any time and at any place (Akter, D'Ambra, & Ray, 2010). In current years WFT sales have risen and moreover, are going to be increased continuously by 16.5% annually by 2023 (Prescient & Strategic Intelligence, 2018). The readily available WFTs not only keep tracking and monitoring physical activity but that also motivate or remind their users to do more—e.g., walked at least 250 steps per hour—are one way to promote healthy habits among health-conscious individuals (Lidynia, Brauner & Ziefle, 2017). Conversely, younger adults or generation Y who were born between the early 1980s and early 2000s (Horovitz, 2012), consists of about 35% of the total population of Bangladesh (Statistics, 1991), accustomed to sedentary lifestyle like reading books or magazines, spending time in gossiping with friends and family or watching television, entertaining oneself by engaging in video games, or spending time in mobile phone/computer for significant time of the day instead of practicing sufficient physical activities like walking, playing, which is injurious to health and major contributor of many curable causes of mortality (WHO). Kruk (2009), clearly mentioned some adverse effects of the physical inactivity and the consequential health problems on countries. As a result, individuals either show their absenteeism in the workplace or they cannot exhibit their optimum performance due to illness; and a substantial number of resources have to expend for ensuring better treatment of these people that could be better used otherwise. Since younger adults in Bangladesh, similar to other developed nations, have no techno phobia as compared to other group of the marketplace (Sinkovics, Stöttinger, Schlegelmilch, & Ram, 2002), the mobility of a WFT, a big part of the internet of things (Sun, Ji, Wang, & Liu, 2016), has presented a ubiquitous stage for communication and personal fitness (Vooris, Blaszka, & Purrington, 2019). Rather than considered as 'technology', many younger adults also perceive WFT as 'fashion' or 'fashionology' (Hein & Rauschnabel, 2016). WFT could also move beyond the traditional devices that typically monitor health parameters in performance and hence can potentially obsolete these technologies in forthcoming healthcare system.

Whilst the efficacy of WFT is promising in this digital age (Butryn, Arigo, Raggio, Colasanti, & Forman, 2016; Mercer et al., 2016; Strath et al., 2011), their adoption has not met the expectations like other technological innovations, e. g., smartphones and tablets (Chau et al., 2019). This is because there has been relatively little research on the influence of age on fitness devices (Ehmen et al., 2012), although researchers on psychology have brought forward the role of age differences on technology adoption over the last few decades (Girard, 1993; Mc Carty & Shrum, 1993; Minton & Schneider, 1985). Additionally, WFTs are still in the early stage of commercialization, not much literature has been found on WFT in the context of Bangladesh. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the intention of Bangladeshis to use WFTs and to comprehend the role of factors that affect this. To do this, this study could potentially present a starting point for the eventual successful introduction and implementation of the technology to address the issue of low physical activity levels among the Bangladeshi population. The results from this research may form part of the basis on which WFTs can be successfully implemented in Bangladesh to facilitate increased levels of physical activity among the population. Additionally, this research may contribute to the gap in knowledge that exists in regard to the adoption of wearable fitness trackers and the non-technical factors that affect it, as well as the gap that exists in literature about wearable fitness trackers and technology adoption in developing countries such as Bangladesh.

II. Literature Review and Research Model

Several models have been used for measuring innovative technology adoption. Models such as the Theory-of-Reasoned-Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), Technology-Acceptance-Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), TAM2 (Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1989), TAM3 (Venkatesh et al. 2008), the Theory-of-Planned-Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), the Unified-Theory-of-Acceptance-and-Use-of-Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003), UTAUT2 (Venkatesh, Thong & Xu, 2012), the Combined-TAM-and-TPB (C-TAMTPB) (Taylor & Todd, 1995), the Innovation-Diffusion-Theory (IDT) (Rogers, 1995) are employed to study the acceptance and/or use of technology. However, the research domain of technology acceptance has been ruled by the TAM and UTAUT, which are extensively used for inspecting IS adoption intention (Rahia et al., 2018). On the other hand, both of them were developed for measuring technology adoption from the organizational perspective (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Further, the explanatory power of the endogenous variables of those two models is low compared to the model UTAUT2, which was developed to measure individual consumer acceptance of technology. For instance, UTAUT model depict 56% of the variance in BI and 40% of the variance in use behavior (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Further, the UTAUT has four predicting variables (performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions) whereas UTAUT2 is extended with three additional predicting constructs (habit, hedonic motivation, and price value). In addition, the explanatory power of UTAUT2 is better than the UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2012). The variance explained in BI and UB is 74% and 56% respectively in the UTAUT2, considered as substantial (Venkatesh et al., 2012).

However, previous research for investigating WFT adoption and use in the different contexts of the world used UTAUT2. For instance, Owen, Archibald, & Wickramanayake (2019) studied WFT adoption using UTAUT2 in Jamaica. Talukder et al. (2019) also used UTAUT2 in the Chinese context for investigating the key predicting variables of WFT adoption and use. Owen et al., (2019) extended the UTAUT2 by integrating 'perceived privacy and security risk' in the model as external variables. Further, Talukder et al. (2019) also extended the UTAUT2 model incorporating 'compatibility' and 'innovativeness' in the model. Further, Sergueeva, Shaw, & Lee (2020) suggest that the UTAUT2 model should further develop by incorporating other antecedents.

Considering the previous studies as well as better predictability of UTAUT2 for individual acceptance and use of technology, the current study also employed the UTAUT2 model. In addition, the model is further extended by encompassing 'health consciousness' of consumer as an additional variable to predict the WFT adoption and use in Bangladesh. The reason for incorporating health consciousness in the model is that, according to Hong (2011), it can influence the health behavior. Further, Cho, Park, & Lee (2014), regarding health technology use, noted that there is a substantial rapport between health consciousness and behavioral intention.

The current study also considered the role of age as moderating variable to investigate the differential effect of age on the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables. The baseline UTAUT model and the extended UTAUT2 model also considered the age as moderating variable and found significant differences on the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables. Researchers also stressed to investigate how age moderate the relationship among major accountable predictors of technology embracement (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Though age plays a critical role as moderator on the technology adoption and use (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Venkatesh et al., 2012), the variable did receive scant attention in the WFT adoption and usage in both developing and developed countries. However, the proposed model is presented in the Fig 1.

III. Hypotheses Development

a) Performance Expectancy (PE)

PE, the premier construct of UTAUT2 model, is explicated by Venkatesh, Thong, and Xu (2012) as it refers to the magnitude to which one perceives that a certain job will be successfully carried out by using innovative technologies. In regard to WFTs, this predictor variable sets point to which an individual believes that the device has potential working power to track and monitor his/her physiological condition in a daily basis which finally do well his/her physical and mental health by reducing health related hazards. Reyes-Mercado and Technology (2018) reverberated that PE plays a pivotal role to augment the behavioral intention of users to adopt fitness wearable. Other studies reveal that older adult users residing in the community form certain specific expectations from technologies (Choudrie, Alfalah, & Spencer, 2017), which are not consistent with those expected by other segments of the marketplace. The above discussion wielded this research work to posit the following hypothesis:

H_1: PE is positively associated with the elderly's intention to use WFT.

b) Effort Expectancy (EE)

Another cabbalistic construct of extended UTAUT model, EE point to the level of simplicity related with the use of a system (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). Technologies which are adroit at hassle avoidance and simple to use, users generally feel free to adapt these innovations swiftly to their own lives (Alalwan, Dwivedi, & Rana, 2017). In respect of WFTs, it is important to design these devices as unobtrusive technology which are easy to learn and get-at-able to operate for which consumers will hold firm determination to motivate users to adopt the technology (Dwivedi et al., 2016; Oliveira et al., 2014). In previous studies, it is explored that customers' chance of attaining comfort depends on the types of click and the age of customers (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Many of prior findings confirmed that perceived and real ease-of-use should take into consideration for making older adults highly inclined to adopt the technology (Cimperman et al., 2016). Therefore, we postulated the following hypothesis:

H_2: EE is positively associated with the elderly's intention to adopt WFT.

c) Social Influence (SI)

SI, another important constructs which have profound effect on consumer behavior to adopt a technology, is demarcated as the extent to which a person discerns that other people, who are placed by that person as reference group to which she/he belongs or hope to belong, envisage that a particular innovation should be adopted by him or her (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al, 2012). Although Venkatesh et al. (2003) did not notice a considerable effect on users' intention to adopt a technology in an organizational context in their study, Venkatesh et al. (2012) observe a remarkable influence of SI. A number of extant literature revealed that consumers are likely to conform to others' expectations of their immediate reference groups for adopting new products (Venkatesh et al., 2003), i.e., WFTs, especially, when they have insignificant experience of the related innovation. Thus, based on these above findings, this study postulates:

H_3: SI is positively associated with the elderly's intention to use WFT.

d) Facilitating Conditions (FC)

FC, a salient construct used in the research, is defined as the degree of perception to which an individual believes that an organizational and technical infrastructure remain to facilitate the use of an innovative system (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Extant literature opined that lacking sufficient FC, may create reluctance to actual use and thus significantly reduce the intention-to-use of a technology (Mahadeo, 2009). Because of age differences and inaptness with new innovations, the older adult users may demand more assistance than other age segments of the population to adopt and use of WFT (Gao et al., 2015). Likewise, we surmise that an augmentation in FC positively shaping the behavior of older adult users to adopt and use intention of WFT. Therefore, the stated argument urges to develop the following hypotheses:

H_{4a}: FC has a positive influence on the elderly's intention to use WFT (BI).

H_{4b}: FC is positively associated with elderly's actual use of WFT.

e) Hedonic Motivation (HM)

HM is related to fun or pleasure, an individual perceived from using a technology regardless of the performance consequences (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Theoretically, HM can be enunciated in terms of the intrinsic motivations that is driven by internal rewards from using new products, services, and applications; hence, such feelings of inherent satisfaction could drive the users to scrutinize the uniqueness of a new innovation (Venkatesh et al., 2012). For example, by wearing the sensors, users can continuously monitor the health related information such as sleep and calorie intake (Wei, 2014). These features assist WFTs to consider themselves more than just a fitness device and molding the intention of users to adopt and use it. Compared to other age groups of the population, young adults are tech savvy (Sultan et al., 2009) and are the early adopters of innovative technologies because of their eagerness for personal satisfaction or fulfillment (Gao et al., 2012). We, therefore, propose the following hypothesis:

H_5: HM has a positive effect on behavioral intention to use WFT.

f) Price Value (PV)

PV, an important theoretical addition to the UTAUT2, is demarcated as settlement in consumers' thought process between the perceived values of the systems and the monetary cost incurred for using the technology (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Although WFTs are marketed to assist users to track and monitor the physical activities daily, some WFTs are deemed costly to purchase for low-income people (Gao et al., 2015). If users can obtain their health related information by using these devices, they can save both monetary and non-monetary costs by avoiding an unnecessary visit to the clinic or hospital. Since the inception of PV in the UTAUT2, some researchers (Alalwan et al., 2017; Arenas-Gaitán et al., 2015; Venkatesh et al., 2012) have demonstrated a positive relationship between PV and intention-to-use of a technology, while Oliveira et al. (2016) failed to report that PV has any significant impact on behavioral intention. Though these kinds of mixed findings are found in extant literature, this study support the view that PV will significantly influence behavioral intention. So, this study has speculated the following hypothesis:

H_6: PV positively influences behavioral intention to adopt WFT.

g) Habit (HT)

HT, an antecedent of behavioral intention to research technologies, is defined as the extent to which an individual exhibit instinctive behavior from learned behavior (Venkatesh et al., 2012). It is an acquired mode of behavior that is formed through frequently practice until it can be executed spontaneously and involuntarily (Huang and Yang, 2020). If an individual is accustomed to monitor physical condition by using WFTs, it will create an inside urgency to wear the devices automatically. Besides, it would be logically said that when an individual participate in health related activities, preliminary usage intentions will be rejuvenated, which positively drive to use frequently (Demiris et al., 2013). To agree with Alalwan (2020) and Barua and Barua (2021) HT is a regular tendency or practice by an individual to act automatically because of his or her holistic learning experience. Repeated usage behavior makes a habit, and, in turn, creates a positive inclination to adopt the technology. Amoroso and Lim (2017) found that customers who are delighted with their former experience of WFTs, show their constant eagerness to wear these devices incessantly. We, therefore, hypothesize that:

H_7: HT has a positive effect on behavioral intention to use WFT.

h) Health Consciousness (HC)

HC is the extent to which an individual is concerned about ameliorating or maintaining his/her

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health (Lee & Lee, 2017). In addition, HC is an indication of the quality of people's life that drive him to undertake health actions (Kraft & Goodell, 1993). Prior studies on wearable technology devices have supported that there is a significant relationship between HC and BI (Lee & Lee, 2017; Wen et al., 2017). Patel, Asch (2015) proposed that wearable devices motivate users to increase physical activities, which in turn, improve healthy behavior. However, they admonish that one cannot improve his/her health by simply wearing these devices alone and to gain proper health, one have to engage himself/herself in positive health behavior practices. Hence, we deem that if an individual possess more health interest, she/he shows more intention-to-use the WFT. Based on these literatures, therefore, we posited the following hypothesis:

H_8: HC affects an individual's intention to adopt WFT.

i) Behavioral Intention (BI)

The relationship between the behavioral intention (BI) and actual use behavior (AUB) is well documented in many research fields and that indicates BI is the extent to which one intentionally determined to execute a given action (Islam et al., 2013). It has been experimentally proven that BI is positively related with the actual usage behavior of customers in different context (Taylor & Todd, 1995, Alam et al., 2020) BI was repeatedly used to measure as the attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Furthermore, extant literature revealed that BI has significant impact on actual usage behavior (Goulão, 2014; Cimperman et al., 2016) Therefore, causal link between BI and the wearable use can be hypothesized as:

H_9: BI has a positive impact on the actual use of a WFT.

j) Age as Moderator

Technology acceptance and use decision is significantly influenced by individual differences (Arning & Ziefle, 2009). Age differences of the users plays a critical role in the technology adoption intention (Zhang et al., 2014). Technology adoption literature attracted the researchers to consider age as a moderator between endogenous and exogenous variables (Tavares and Oliveira, 2016). Morris & Venkatesh (2000) noted that technology usage decision is significantly differ for younger and older users. An empirical study by Alsswey and Al-Samarraie (2019) revealed that the relationship between ease of use and BI and usefulness and BI are significantly and positively influenced by age differences of the respondents (Alsswey and Al-Samarraie, 2019). Further, Zhu et al. (2018) noted that young people has shown strong association in adopting technology than middle-aged and older people. The above evidences helped the author to propose the following hypotheses:

H_{10a}: PE and WFT adoption intention is significantly moderated by age of the respondents.

H_{10b}: EE and WFT adoption intention is significantly moderated by age of the respondents.

H_{10c}: SI and WFT adoption intention is significantly moderated by age of the respondents.

H_{10d}: FC and WFT adoption intention is significantly moderated by age of the respondents.

H_{10e}: FC and WFT use behavior is significantly moderated by age of the respondents.

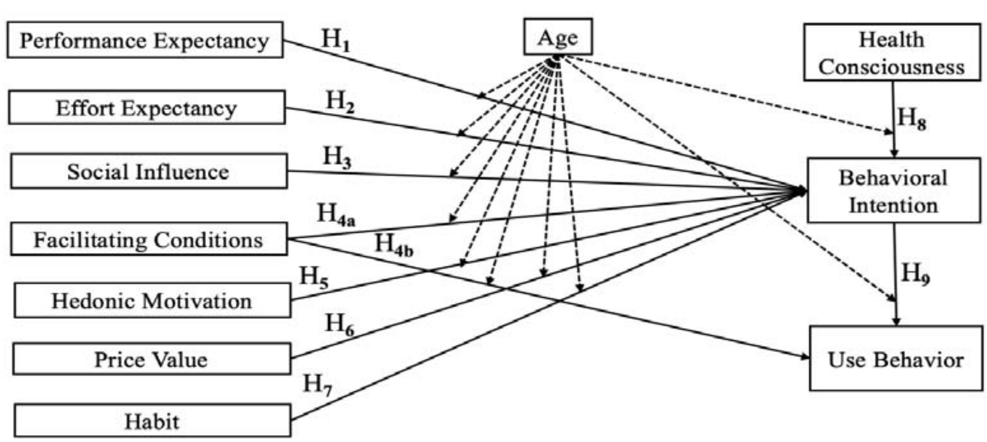
H_{10f}: HM and WFT adoption intention is significantly moderated by age of the respondents.

H_{10g}: PV and WFT adoption intention is significantly moderated by age of the respondents.

H_{10h}: HT and WFT adoption intention is significantly moderated by age of the respondents.

H_{10i}: HC and WFT adoption intention is significantly moderated by age of the respondents.

H_{10j}: BI and AUB adoption intention is significantly moderated by age of the respondents.



Source: Venkatesh et al. (2012)

Fig. 1: UTAUT2 Model with Extended Construct

IV. Research Methodology

a) *Measurement of Constructs*

To test the proposed model, a survey was conducted introducing all the constructs' measurements statements of the conceptual model. The measurements items for all the constructs were adapted from the previously validated scale for ensuring the content validity. Considering the context of the study, some items were modified to fit the context. All the measurement items and their sources are listed in the appendix B.

b) *Questionnaire Design, Sample Size and Data Collection*

A well-structured questionnaire was developed in two parts. First part of the questionnaire contains the demographic information of the respondents. At the very first of the questionnaire it was mentioned that the respondents are free to answer and they can withdraw their responses anytime from online submission. Further, at the last part of the first part of the questionnaire it was also mentioned that the respondents with no experience of using WFT to not to attempt to answer second part since the study only considered experienced users of WFT. Experience users are critical for truly depicting the picture of understanding influential factors as well as the differential effect of in deciding to adopt and use WFT. However, the questionnaire was developed on Google Docs and disseminated using email as well as social media platform such as Messenger, Whats App, IMO, etc. This method of data collection is best suitable during the pandemic as well as ease of use, and time-saving.

However, sample size was determined following the recommendation of MacCallum, Widaman, Zhang, and Hong (1999) who recommended that respondents to construct ratio is 20: 1. Our proposed model contains 10 constructs. Accordingly, a minimum sample size of 200 is suitable for this study. However, following the convenient sampling technique, the data were collected from 300 respondents for better explanatory precision of the model. Some responses were found problematic because of non-response bias, outliers problems etc. Finally, 288 responses were retained to test the relationship between variables and a set of hypotheses.

c) *Data Analysis Technique*

This study is an attempt to explore the key influential factors determining the use of WFT as well as to investigate the differential effects of age on the influential factors and dependent constructs. This study used Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to investigate the measurement and parameters of the constructs and the relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables. PLS-SEM is widely used in information system research (Marcoulides and Saunders, 2006). An important advantage of PLS-SEM is that the small sample size could be operated in PLS-SEM. PLS-SEM is more appropriate for the analysis like determination of influential factors (Hair et al., 2016). As a PLS-SEM technique, this study employed SmartPLS 3.0 to analysis the data. Further, this study also employed SPSS 23 for determining the reliability and validity of the data.

V. Results

a) *Demographic Properties of the Respondents*

Out of 288 respondents, 54.51% were males and 45.49% were females. 51.40% respondents were less than the age of 40 and rest of them were 41 to 55 years. The majority of the respondents were service holders (41.66%). 30.23% respondents were engaged in business and 28.11% were students. The majority of the respondents completed their Masters (52.08%), where as 30.21% respondents completed their Honors. Few of the respondents completed Higher-Secondary School Certificate (13.55%) and PhD (4.16%). 40.97% have been using WFT for less than a year, whereas 34.02% respondents have 1 to 2 years of using WFT. 24.99% respondents have 2 years of experience using WFT.

b) *Common Method Bias (CMB)*

Since the data is self-reported, CMB was inspected to circumvent the future risk to the outcome of the analysis. For examining CMB, primarily, this study checked the Harman's single factor test and found that 27.54% variance is explained by a single factor from the overall variance where Podsak off & Organ (1986) suggested that less than 50% indicates no presence of CMB problem. Correlation matrix was also checked and the correlation matrix indicates that there was no correlation greater than 0.90, a sign of absence of CMB. In addition, the CMB issues was also investigated based on Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) values (Table 1). All the VIF values range was 1.371 to 2.617 which are less than 3.3 (Kock, 2015). The statistical evidence indicates that CMB is not an issue for this study.

c) *Measurement Model Validation*

PLS algorithm was carried out in the SmartPLS3.0. One-tailed test with 0.05 significance level was employed. Based on the result, we checked the internal reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity for assessing the measurement model fit and validation (Hair et al., 2013). Internal reliability was ensured by assessing Cronbach's Alpha and Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA). Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs ranged from 0.752 to 0.894 (Table 1) and Henseler's rho values ranged from 0.786 to 0.901, indicates the reliability criteria successfully surpassed (Henseler et al., 2009).

Table 1: Internal Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	CR	AVE	VIF
Performance	PE1	0.859	0.881	0.883	0.918	0.737	2.210
Expectancy	PE2	0.876					2.390
	PE3	0.838					2.104
	PE4	0.859					2.248
Effort	EE1	0.875	0.888	0.891	0.923	0.749	2.496
Expectancy	EE2	0.859					2.165
	EE3	0.881					2.550
	EE4	0.847					2.203
Facilitating	FC1	0.804	0.831	0.832	0.888	0.664	1.720
Condition	FC2	0.821					1.873
	FC3	0.813					1.858
	FC4	0.821					1.786
Social	SI1	0.839	0.853	0.865	0.900	0.693	1.958
Influence	SI2	0.845					2.109
	SI3	0.826					2.110
	SI4	0.821					2.006
Price Value	PV1	0.905	0.809	0.894	0.884	0.717	1.785
	PV2	0.810					1.729
	PV3	0.822					1.781
Hedonic	HM1	0.759	0.752	0.786	0.858	0.669	1.371
Motivation	HM2	0.896					1.869
	HM3	0.793					1.618
Habit	HT1	0.824	0.887	0.891	0.922	0.747	1.982
	HT2	0.859					2.281
	HT3	0.889					2.611
	HT4	0.884					2.614
Health	HC1	0.854	0.894	0.901	0.926	0.759	2.287
Consciousness	HC2	0.879					2.617
	HC3	0.866					2.472
	HC4	0.885					2.440
Behavioral	BI1	0.883	0.858	0.859	0.913	0.778	2.103
Intention	BI2	0.878					2.148
	BI3	0.886					2.205
Actual Use	AU1	0.723	0.794	0.801	0.866	0.619	1.439
Behavior	AU2	0.823					1.826
	AU3	0.826					1.932
	AU4	0.770					1.576

The convergent validity of the study was ensured by checking the criteria of item loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). Item loadings are found higher than 0.723 and composite reliability is greater than 0.884. further, AVE was found larger than the threshold limit 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker 1981). All the values of item loadings, CR, and AVE suggested that the model is convergently valid (Table 1 and Fig 2).

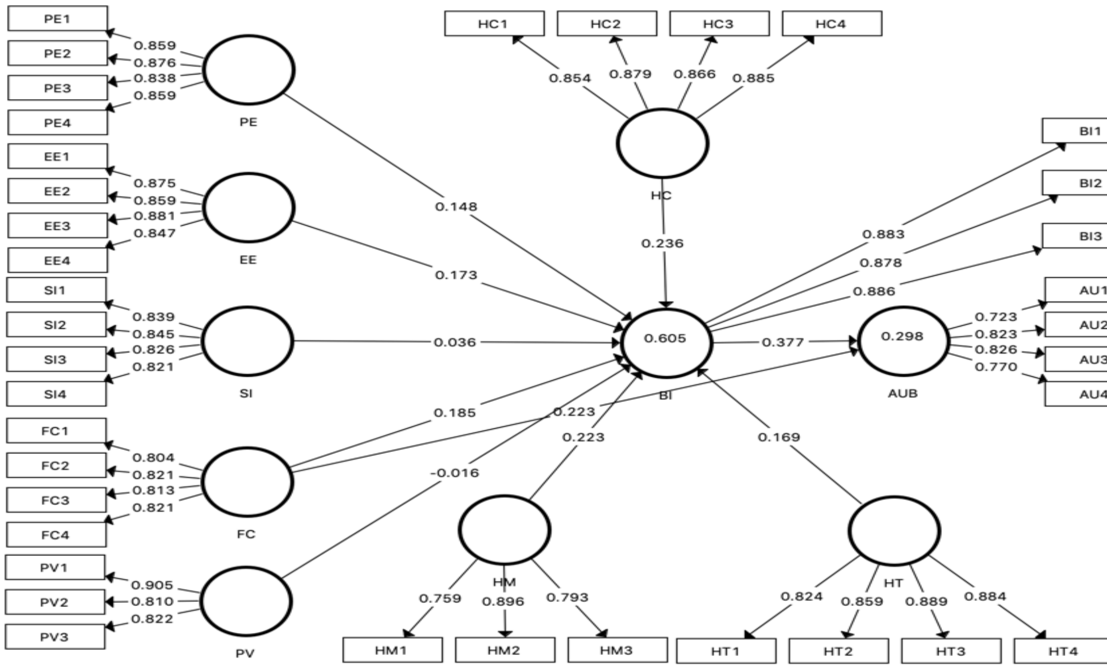


Fig. 2: Measurement model (PLS result)

For discriminant validity, this study checked the Fornell-Larcker criterion and found that the square roots of AVEs are greater than the inter-correlation coefficients (Table 2). In addition, HTMT criteria was also checked and explored that all the HTMT ratios are much smaller than 0.90 (Table 3), indicates that model is discriminantly valid.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

	AUB	BI	EE	FC	HC	HM	HT	PE	PV	SI
AUB	0.787									
BI	0.517	0.882								
EE	0.405	0.561	0.866							
FC	0.460	0.628	0.513	0.815						
HC	0.235	0.484	0.349	0.427	0.871					
HM	0.240	0.378	0.181	0.271	-0.026	0.818				
HT	0.440	0.572	0.521	0.591	0.335	0.174	0.864			
PE	0.476	0.607	0.539	0.590	0.386	0.307	0.534	0.858		
PV	0.336	0.308	0.375	0.380	0.266	0.089	0.316	0.329	0.847	
SI	0.272	0.323	0.251	0.337	0.149	0.191	0.330	0.340	0.115	0.833

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	AUB	BI	EE	FC	HC	HM	HT	PE	PV	SI
AUB										
BI	0.623									
EE	0.48	0.64								
FC	0.57	0.74	0.60							
HC	0.27	0.55	0.39	0.49						
HM	0.31	0.46	0.22	0.34	0.09					
HT	0.52	0.65	0.59	0.69	0.38	0.21				
PE	0.57	0.70	0.61	0.69	0.43	0.38	0.60			
PV	0.41	0.35	0.43	0.46	0.31	0.10	0.38	0.37		
SI	0.33	0.37	0.29	0.40	0.17	0.24	0.37	0.38	0.14	

VI. Structural Model

After surpassing the satisfactory requirements for measurement model, this study evaluated the structural model with 5000 resampling bootstrapping technique. Chin (1998) noted that the value of R2 of dependent construct can be used as the predictive power of the model. Falk and Miller (1992) noted that more than 30% of variance explained by an endogenous construct indicates that a model is satisfactory and substantial. This study revealed that the R2 value for BI is 60.50% and AUB is 29.80%, indicates the model is suitable.

On the other hand, the result of hypotheses testing suggests that the SI (H3) and PV (H6) were not significant considering the significant level at P<0.05. All other hypotheses i.e., eight out of ten hypotheses were revealed significant (Table 4 and Fig 3).

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing for Direct Effects

Hypotheses	Relationships	Std Beta	Std Error	T-value	P Values	Comments
H1	PE -> BI	0.149	0.065	2.290	0.022	Supported
H2	EE -> BI	0.168	0.054	3.207	0.001	Supported
H3	SI -> BI	0.036	0.037	0.964	0.335	Not Supported
H4a	FC -> BI	0.183	0.064	2.866	0.004	Supported
H4b	FC -> AUB	0.226	0.076	2.942	0.003	Supported
H5	HM -> BI	0.224	0.042	5.296	0.000	Supported
H6	PV -> BI	-0.010	0.042	0.386	0.700	Not Supported
H7	HT -> BI	0.169	0.061	2.764	0.006	Supported
H8	HC -> BI	0.236	0.048	4.872	0.000	Supported
H9	BI -> AUB	0.379	0.076	4.974	0.000	Supported

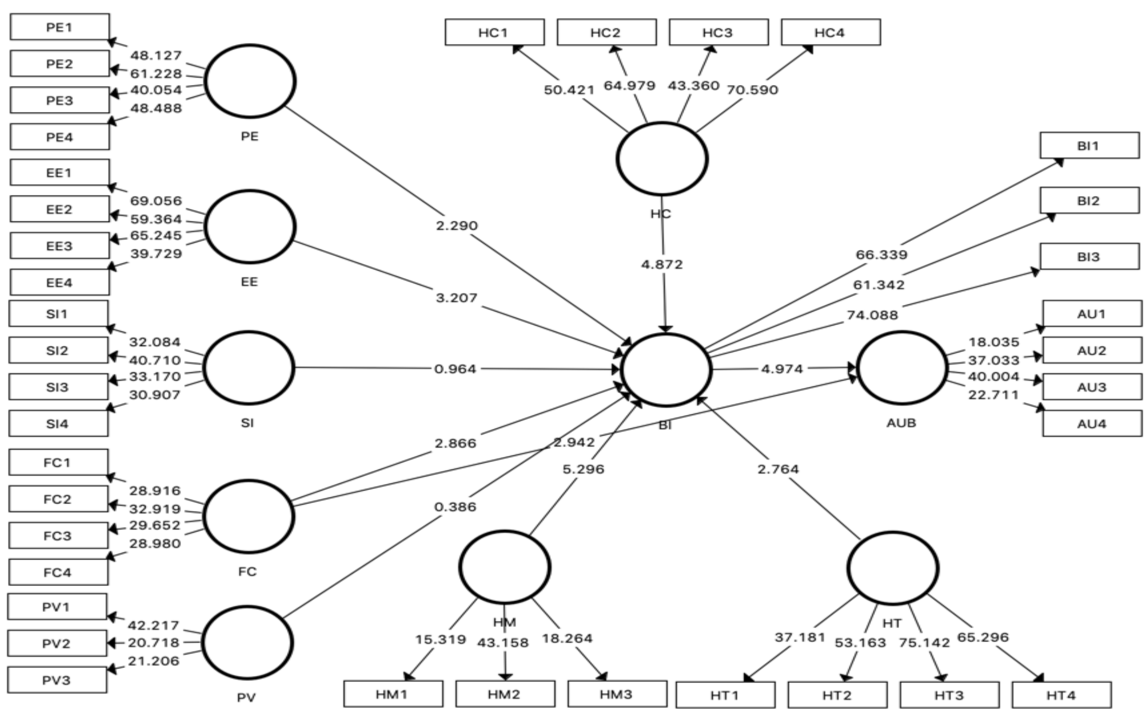


Fig. 3: Structural Model (Bootstrapping Result)

a) *Moderating Effect of Age*

The moderating effect of age was tested by employing PLS- multigroup analysis (PLS-MGA). The respondents were divided into two groups namely, young (age less than 40) and elderly (age higher than 40) for operating PLS-MGA. As stated by Sarstedt et al. (2011), PLS-MGA is the very conservative technique for assessing significant variations in multi-group. Significant variance in the two groups were tested and identified that the relationships between EE and BI, HT and BI, and HC and BI were significantly different for two groups as presented in the (Table 5).

Table 5: Testing the Moderating Effects of Age

						Parametric Test		
		Young		Elderly		Young VS Elderly		
Hypotheses	Relationships	Path coefficient	T-values	Path coefficient	T-values	T-values	P-values	Comments
H10a	PE -> BI	0.067	1.021	0.209	2.209	1.256	0.210	Rejected
H10b	EE -> BI	-0.011	0.215	0.267	2.833	2.568	0.011	Accepted
H10c	SI -> BI	-0.023	0.488	0.111	2.054	1.888	0.060	Rejected
H10d	FC -> BI	0.145	1.763	0.073	0.743	0.572	0.568	Rejected
H10e	FC -> AUB	0.276	3.094	0.148	1.085	0.796	0.427	Rejected
H10f	HM -> BI	0.191	2.686	0.184	3.756	0.080	0.937	Rejected
H10g	PV -> BI	0.051	0.908	-0.113	2.008	0.823	0.412	Rejected
H10h	HT -> BI	0.294	3.064	0.001	0.022	2.647	0.009	Accepted
H10i	HC -> BI	0.063	1.086	0.588	6.233	4.813	0.000	Accepted
H10j	BI -> AUB	0.316	3.236	0.433	3.526	0.751	0.453	Rejected

VII. Discussion, Implications, and Limitations

a) *Discussions*

This study applied the UTAUT2 model in Bangladesh context and attempted to extend it with the moderator of age. It examined age differences in perceptions of technology adoption and the relative importance of the factors affecting future intention to use WFT devices. Turning to the hypotheses, the results supported prior research indicating PE significantly influences an individual's acceptance of technology (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). The results indicate that WFT provides momentous benefits by allowing consumers to monitor, store and transmit information about their physiological and health related information, in turn, increase adoption and use among elderly people.

Along with PE, this study also aligned with literature suggesting EE is a direct determinant of usage behavior (Davis, 1989; Lee, Fiore, & Kim, 2006). For practitioners, perceiving EE as a vital construct in adoption and use is critical, especially during the diffusion process. The results suggest that lower effort in using WFT may result in higher propensity to adopt WFT. One of the key findings of the study does not support the role of SI on WFT continuance, describing the fact that factors that may lead to technology adoption may vary from culture to culture. Surprisingly, role of HM exhibit considerable relationship with WFT usage continuance. Consumers' inclination to use of wearables is motivated by the enjoyment they experience when using the technology. Today, WFTs are more than a simple self-tracking technology; they provide entertainment such as text message notifications and heath information in the form of colorful graphs, which consumers can easily read and share with their health care providers. This provides strong ground to belief that usage continuance is more intrinsically motivated rather than socially governed. In line with self-determination perspective, users of WFTs who have high health consciousness, they are more likely to continue the use of WFTs for continuously tracking their physiological condition. Contrarily, less motivated individuals may discourage to engage in physical activities to lead a healthy life and hence, discontinue the use of WFTs.

In addition, the results show that habit has significant positive influence on behavioral intention to adopt WFT. This indicates that continuously using WFT becomes the habit of users, as they need to wear 24/7 to monitor their daily activities. However, the results also show that price value is found to be not relevant to the context of WFT adoption which is consistent with the findings of other studies related to wearable devices (Talukder et al., 2019), as both have shown that price has no significant effect on intention to use technology. The most plausible reason for this that users are more conscious about attaining total perceived benefit by using WFT (Chan et al., 2012), in that case, the price issue do not play a major role for WFT adoption.

Facilitating conditions have a contributing effect on consumers' intention to use WFTs, which is consistent with other studies on adoption of wearable technology (Kim & Shin, 2015; Gao et al., 2015; Talukder et al., 2019; Kranthi & Ahmed, 2018; Reyes-Mercado, 2018). While a number of devices are marketed by addressing the target audience, there are few studies which have examined whether wearing the device strengthen a person's health consciousness (Coughlin & Stewart, 2016). The results of this study provide a preliminary realization about the potential benefit enjoyed from wearable devices regarding health consciousness. These findings recommend that people who wear a physical tracker are more health aware and active, as we considerably notice that wearing WFTs potentially increase the physical activity levels and create awareness among targeted population. Therefore, if the usage rate of WFT devices can be multiplied, users are likely to live a healthy lifestyle and be more active in engaging physical activities. This recommend that WFT devices have the potential to facilitate health behavior change.

b) Theoretical Contributions

This research has applied the UTAUT2 model to determine elderly behavioral intention to adopt WFT in the context of developing countries, e.g., Bangladesh. By ushering the moderating influence of age on the path-relationship among the constructs of UTAUT2 model along with an additional constructs, HC, however, this empirical research moves beyond the path-relationship what Venkatesh et al. (2012) have already suggested in their model. Prior studies have empirically investigated crucial factors from a technology perspective (Dehghani, Kim, Dangelico, & Informatics, 2018), but very few have examined WFT factors that affect consumers' intention to use WFTs in Bangladesh Context (Debnath, Kobra, Rawshan, Paramita, & Islam, 2018). The results explore that the proposed model has a good explanatory power in forecasting behavioral intention to use WFTs and this research provides a theoretical foundation for future emerging health information technology research from a behavioral perspective.

Age-specific differences played a moderating role in the relationship of EE and BI. For older adults, the EE played the main role in the adoption of WFT devices, whereas the EE had a lower explanatory power for younger adults. In addition, the causal relationship between HC and BI was more influential for older adults than for younger adults. This result provides a valuable insight into intention-to-use of WFT to monitor personal health among elderly people specially. One of the biggest concerns for practitioners is keeping consumers engaged with technology (Rejcek, 2016). In the past, consumers have discontinued the use of WFTs because the technology failed to meet their expectations regarding functionality and individual differences (Ledger & McCaffrey, 2014) (Ericsson, 2018; Ledger & McCaffrey, 2014). The results of this research provide some insights into WFTs to help market practitioners attract potential customers and retain existing customers. Many new improvements to WFTs will allow for the real-time consultation of personalized data by consumers and health care providers (Salah, MacIntosh, & Rajakulendran, 2014). This may ultimately increase engagement with the device and help elevate the level of consumer satisfaction about technology acceptance mostly among older people. In addition, Marketers are also advised to make realistic claims about technology to create realistic consumer expectations and avoid future abandonment, thus engaging consumers to use this technology.

c) Practical Implications

However, regarding the moderating effects of user age, the findings show clearly, the relationship between HT and BI was stronger for participants of the younger age group. Since HT was a significant factor affecting a younger adult's intention to use WFTs, practitioners should put their endeavor on strengthening the habitual use of the product by proactively reinforcing the relationship with consumers. For example, companies might focus the personalized benefits and promote features that could assist in managing personal health. Customers and marketers, governments, insurance companies and the healthcare industry have great implications through the usage of WFT. As this research identified hedonic motivation, performance expectancy, and facilitating condition to be significant factors in behavioral intention to use WFTs, we recommend that to retain consumers, providers should design these technologies in a new-fashioned way for the end users to enhance enjoyment and engagement with WFTs. The recommendations can be used as new research model to foster the adoption intention of WFTs among users.

d) Limitations and Future Research Directions

Even though the present study provides some valuable insight with respect to intention-to-use and usage behavior of WFT in developing country context, this study is not out of some limitations that should be considered for the broader generalization and application of findings. The results assured that age has an important influence on technology usage in developing countries. However, two critical keystones should be envisaged in this context. The first is the taken sample of older adults is not representative for the population of the older age group. The older participants investigated here were comparably young and their academic qualification is quite satisfactory, therefore, future studies should examine older, and more representative samples. In doing so, older adults may retrieve optimum benefit from the utilization of WFT devices. Another shortcoming is that to overcome time and budget constraint, convenience sampling was used here as survey instrument for which the present study is suffered from some biasness because sample data failed to represent the entire population. In addition, only age differences as moderating variable is considered here, but other important individual differences e.g., the moderating effect of gender, experience of using technological devices, and educational level were not considered in this study. Therefore, since moderating effect reveal the deep insight (Barua et al., 2020; Barua, 2022), examining the effect of these moderating variables on the relationships among the endogenous and exogenous variables could provide some additional strong findings.

Based on these limitations, it is suggested that future studies should put their endeavor on identifying the preferences (e.g., color, language, layout and images) of elderly people from a cultural perspective and increase the adoption rate of these devices among them. In addition, future studies should focus on longitudinal surveys for better explanation of adoption and use behavior. Finally, the effect of other individual differences, such as gender, attitude and experience, should be taken into consideration to enhance the usage rate of WFTs among elderly people in future work.

Appendix A: Cross Loadings

	AUB	BI	EE	FC	HC	HM	HT	PE	PV	SI
AU1	**0.723**	0.332	0.223	0.354	0.121	0.168	0.286	0.282	0.165	0.280
AU2	**0.823**	0.461	0.356	0.390	0.223	0.214	0.361	0.436	0.257	0.178
AU3	**0.826**	0.439	0.377	0.339	0.235	0.205	0.381	0.385	0.277	0.237
AU4	**0.770**	0.385	0.306	0.364	0.148	0.164	0.350	0.381	0.352	0.171
BI1	0.444	**0.883**	0.519	0.606	0.437	0.328	0.535	0.565	0.258	0.263
BI2	0.448	**0.878**	0.471	0.525	0.394	0.367	0.506	0.519	0.233	0.280
BI3	0.477	**0.886**	0.494	0.528	0.450	0.308	0.471	0.521	0.323	0.314
EE1	0.371	0.479	**0.875**	0.441	0.314	0.158	0.439	0.457	0.310	0.227
EE2	0.365	0.516	**0.859**	0.435	0.308	0.117	0.422	0.415	0.354	0.199
EE3	0.310	0.497	**0.881**	0.431	0.297	0.167	0.473	0.527	0.313	0.219
EE4	0.358	0.445	**0.847**	0.474	0.288	0.191	0.474	0.470	0.318	0.224
FC1	0.376	0.513	0.440	**0.804**	0.366	0.215	0.485	0.476	0.344	0.264
FC2	0.387	0.501	0.381	**0.821**	0.279	0.269	0.482	0.447	0.284	0.280
FC3	0.333	0.505	0.440	**0.813**	0.320	0.222	0.502	0.565	0.317	0.311
FC4	0.401	0.527	0.413	**0.821**	0.422	0.177	0.458	0.442	0.296	0.248
HC1	0.226	0.394	0.319	0.402	**0.854**	-0.053	0.297	0.331	0.209	0.161
HC2	0.193	0.410	0.279	0.358	**0.879**	-0.028	0.311	0.332	0.219	0.145
HC3	0.156	0.391	0.311	0.354	**0.866**	-0.048	0.280	0.320	0.276	0.114
HC4	0.236	0.481	0.309	0.375	**0.885**	0.027	0.282	0.359	0.226	0.105
HM1	0.134	0.281	0.061	0.152	-0.119	**0.759**	0.116	0.200	0.050	0.158
HM2	0.239	0.370	0.210	0.257	0.032	**0.896**	0.161	0.288	0.110	0.148
HM3	0.208	0.263	0.157	0.251	0.006	**0.793**	0.148	0.262	0.048	0.170
HT1	0.416	0.451	0.423	0.538	0.313	0.091	**0.824**	0.415	0.319	0.229
HT2	0.368	0.485	0.428	0.477	0.258	0.167	**0.859**	0.481	0.292	0.253
HT3	0.348	0.537	0.470	0.542	0.324	0.152	**0.889**	0.506	0.246	0.312
HT4	0.397	0.499	0.478	0.487	0.263	0.186	**0.884**	0.439	0.243	0.340
PE1	0.413	0.534	0.463	0.540	0.348	0.258	0.464	**0.859**	0.257	0.321
PE2	0.395	0.553	0.470	0.478	0.346	0.259	0.457	**0.876**	0.297	0.286
PE3	0.444	0.480	0.462	0.487	0.310	0.294	0.440	**0.838**	0.271	0.277
PE4	0.386	0.513	0.455	0.523	0.318	0.248	0.472	**0.859**	0.303	0.283
PV1	0.328	0.336	0.361	0.345	0.253	0.119	0.272	0.347	**0.905**	0.131
PV2	0.227	0.201	0.279	0.260	0.212	0.049	0.214	0.184	**0.810**	0.008
PV3	0.279	0.206	0.296	0.358	0.203	0.035	0.323	0.268	**0.822**	0.135
SI1	0.219	0.305	0.232	0.365	0.170	0.150	0.296	0.324	0.139	**0.839**
SI2	0.239	0.295	0.192	0.238	0.121	0.183	0.299	0.309	0.057	**0.845**
SI3	0.249	0.228	0.203	0.225	0.065	0.155	0.231	0.236	0.058	**0.826**
SI4	0.198	0.232	0.207	0.281	0.128	0.145	0.261	0.244	0.128	**0.821**

Appendix B: List of Indicators

Item	Constructs and Statements	Sources
	Performance Expectancy (EE)	Venkatesh et al. (2003); Venkatesh et al. (2012)
PE1	I find Wearable Fitness Technology is useful in my life.	
PE2	Using Wearable Fitness Technology increases my chances of meeting my needs.	
PE3	Using Wearable Fitness Technology helps me in managing my daily health fitness more quickly.	
PE4	Using Wearable Fitness Technology service increases my capability to manage my health fitness.	
	Effort Expectancy (EE)	Venkatesh et al.

EE1	Learning how to use Wearable Fitness Technology is easy for me.	(2003); Venkatesh et al. (2012)
EE2	My interaction with Wearable Fitness Technology is clear and understandable.	
EE3	I find Wearable Fitness Technology easy to use.	
EE4	It is easy for me to become skillful at using Wearable Fitness Technology.	
	Price Value	
PV1	Wearable Fitness Technologies are reasonably priced.	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
PV2	Usually, Wearable Fitness Technologies are a good value for the money.	
PV3	At the current price, Wearable Fitness Technologies provide a good value.	
Social Influence (SI)		Venkatesh et al. (2003);Venkates h et al. (2012)
SI1	People who are important to me think that I should use Wearable Fitness Technology.	
SI2	People who influence my behavior think that I should use Wearable Fitness Technology.	
SI3	People whose opinions that I value prefer that I use Wearable Fitness Technology.	
SI4	People in my society who use Wearable Fitness Technology are more prestigious than those who do not.	
Facilitating Condition (FC)		Venkatesh et al. (2003); Venkatesh et al. (2012)
FC1	I have the resources necessary to use Wearable Fitness Technology.	
FC2	I have the knowledge necessary to use Wearable Fitness Technology.	
FC3	Wearable Fitness Technology is compatible with other technologies I use.	
FC4	I can get help from others when I have difficulties using Wearable Fitness Technology.	
Hedonic Motivation (HM)		
HM1	Using Wearable Fitness Technology is fun.	
HM2	Using Wearable Fitness Technology is enjoyable.	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
HM3	Using Wearable Fitness Technology is entertaining.	
	Habit (HT)	
HT1	The use of Wearable Fitness Technology has become a habit for me.	Venkatesh et al. (2012)
HT2	I am addicted to using Wearable Fitness Technology.	
HT3	Using Wearable Fitness Technology would be a regular activity for me.	
HT4	Using Wearable Fitness Technology has become natural to me.	
	Health Consciousness (HC)	
HC1	I think it is important to know well how to stay healthy	Chen (2011)
HC2	My health is so valuable to me that I am prepared to sacrifice many things for it	
HC3	I have the impression that I sacrifice a lot for my health	
HC4	I consider myself very health conscious	
Behavioral Intention (BI)		Venkatesh et al. (2012); Taylor and Todd (1995)
BI1	I intend to continue using Wearable Fitness Technology in the future.	
BI2	I will always try to use Wearable Fitness Technology in my daily life.	
BI3	I plan to continue to use Wearable Fitness Technology frequently.	
Actual Use Behavior (AUB)		
AUB1	Wearable Fitness Technology provide me a pleasant experience.	Venkatesh et al. (2012); Taylor and Todd (1995)
AUB2	I really use Wearable Fitness Technology to keep my health fit.	
AUB3	I spend a lot of time on Wearable Fitness Technology.	
AUB4	I use Wearable Fitness Technology on regular basis.	

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Methodological Nature and Epistemological bases of Qualitative Studies in Marketing

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I. Introduction

Epistemology is a field of knowledge that elaborates a critical discourse on the sciences (SERVA, 2014). Lima, Kraemer and Rossi (2014), when investigating the epistemological discussion in marketing, emphasize the importance of these studies, as they promote the development of theories in marketing, as well as a critical evaluation of the discipline's theories and the production of pragmatic knowledge. It should also be noted that the hegemonic paradigm in marketing is positivism and its functional-structuralist derivations. Furthermore, the inclusion of categories generated in other fields such as psychology, anthropology, neuroscience, does not mean an epistemological rupture within the discipline, but instrumentalization for empirical verification, maintaining the positivist approach (LIMA, KRAEMER and ROSSI, 2014).

As a result, it can be conjectured that specific epistemological analyses, such as in the field of marketing, envisage a critical debate that allows reviewing its foundations, its methods, revealing its paradigms and the structure of its field; allow understanding the set of assumptions on which research in the area is based, promoting a reflective analysis.

The legitimacy of quantitative research in studies in the field of marketing can be understood from its relationship with positivist thinking, which still predominates in the area. This statement is corroborated by Motta and Iizuka (2016) who, when analyzing the *Journal of Marketing* publications, found that the methodology used in the area is predominantly quantitative. Following this perspective, marketing as a scientific discipline is anchored in the logical-empiricist paradigm, in which it seeks to prove the consistency of its studies through statistical models, measurements and validity criteria (SCUSSEL, 2017).

Arndt (1985) points out that marketing follows an empiricist logic that values rationality, objectivity, measurement, and neglects alternative research approaches. This prerogative seems to have been maintained over time, as stated by Castro Junior et al. (2015), logical empiricism is the dominant paradigm within the evolution of marketing thinking. And yet, as evidenced by Lima et al. (2014), the vast majority of research published in the most important marketing *journals is empirical in nature.* Furthermore, the objection regarding marketing does not refer to its form or content, but to its method (BOAVA and MACEDO, 2012).

This situation perpetuates the quantitative *versus* qualitative debate that, on the one hand, calls for the need for qualitative studies that help the researcher to understand the complexity of the phenomena; and, on the other hand, defends quantitative studies and their objectivity as the best way to explain the world (CASTRO JÚNIOR et al., 2015).

The search for recognition of studies with qualitative bases establishes, in the field of marketing, a methodological debate that has as its backdrop the belief in a dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research that, for Vieira (2004), is false. In this controversy, the defense of the superiority of quantitative research prevails over qualitative research, arising from its supposed objectivity and greater scientific rigor.

Furthermore, according to Diniz et al. (2016), studies focused on the critical approach are incipient and distanced from marketing theory. Particularly in the

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area of marketing, in which complex social, behavioral and marketing phenomena are investigated, as well as issues directly related to social well-being, such as ideological, hegemonic, gender and ethical issues; the wealth brought by qualitative research is necessary. In the field of marketing, there are many reasons to use critical and qualitative research, such as achieving understanding of particular reasons and social phenomena, understanding consumers' preference for brands, discovering underlying motivations, developing an initial understanding of a problem, among others (CAHILL, 1998, DINIZ et al., 2016).

Therefore, critical studies in marketing are important, mainly due to two aspects: the function of marketing is the one that most interacts with society; and the exclusion of marketing from critical discussions constitutes a harmful and alienated practice, notably with regard to the ideological and economic consequences for society (MARANHÃO; PAES DE PAULA, 2012). In the same sense, non-reductionist studies are essential, which have as their object the effects of marketing as a social practice (TADAJEWSKI; BROWNLIE, 2008).

When conjecturing that the conventional epistemological bases have a direct approach to quantitative studies and the non-conventional ones to qualitative studies, the question remains whether there is an effort to suggest alternative paradigms to positivism for research in marketing. In the meantime, another question arises: are qualitative studies in marketing anchored in the critical and/or constructivist paradigm or do they maintain close approximations with the positivist paradigm? It is also questioned what are the epistemological bases and what is the methodological rigor of research of a qualitative nature in marketing?

To help with reflection, the present work aims to analyze how qualitative research is constructed in articles published in the Revista Brasileira de Marketing – ReMark, in the period of 2018, based on conventional and unconventional epistemologies.

ReMark aims to promote Brazilian scientific production in the field of marketing. The choice of said magazine is justified by the fact that it is focused on the Marketing area, and is, among the four specific Revista Brasileira de Marketing, the one with the best classification in 2021 by the Qualis/CAPES system – Plataforma Sucupira, B1. Despite the Qualis classify-cation, the aforementioned magazine has prestige and *status* in the national academic environment, in particular, related to marketing.

Added to this is the fact that in 2018 the Journal launched two special editions, one of which specifically deals with the state of the art of marketing research. Among the works published in this issue are contributions that broaden the debates on the impact and challenges that marketing research will have to face in the coming decades to continue contributing to academia and the market. One of them is the article by Hair, Harrison and Risher (2018), for whom the marketing function has changed rapidly and the analysis methods used by researchers in the field are also changing due to changes in management skills, technological innovations and the consumer behavior. Also according to Hair, Harrison and Risher (2018), these advances have directed marketing research towards the use of increasingly quantitative methods, such as the use of *big data* and artificial intelligence.

Moreover, this work is part of the discussion about epistemologies, scientific rigor and the particular aspects of qualitative research. Guided by the aforementioned questions, it is characterized as a documentary research. For this purpose, the epistemological assumptions of the conventional and non-conventional bases will be used as criteria and the classification of qualitative studies according to the research strategy, data collection techniques, as well as the form of data analysis.

II. Epistemological Bases

The concept of epistemology is used flexibly and serves to designate either a general theory of knowledge or more restricted studies, questioning the genesis of the structure of science; thus constituting an interdisciplinary discipline character (JAPIASSU, 1991). Given the importance of epistemological reflection on the construction of knowledge in the most diverse areas of knowledge, but especially in Marketing, it is up to the researcher to apprehend his object of study, in such a way that he is able to legitimize an epistemological posture that solidly supports their conceptions.

With such reflections in mind and observing the various epistemological positions, it can be noted that science is not static, quite the contrary, it is dynamic. Like the world, nature, society and people, it undergoes several changes, transforming itself in the course of History; it influences and is influenced by the context, by behaviors and revolutions, it changes and is modified. Scientific knowledge has evolved throughout history, and new possibilities for doing science arise every day.

In the field of investigation of Administration phenomena, Martins (1994) presents conventional and non-conventional epistemological conceptions. The conventional ones are based on positivism, while the non-conventional ones are based on dialectical and historical materialism. Martins (1997), considering the classification suggested by Triviños, propose the following typology: empiricist-positivists, phenomeno-logical-hermeneutics and dialectical critics, with systemic and functionalist approaches being treated in the empiricist-positivist block.

The following briefly presents the epistemological currents that will serve as the basis for

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the analysis of this research: conventional basis (positivism, functionalism and systemic) and unconventional basis (critical theory).

In a simplistic way, the conventional basis has positivism and the empiricist-systemic-functionalist approach as its central assumption. These are studies based on empirical data, analyzed quantitatively with objectivity and neutrality, in which, based on a theoretical framework, the researcher usually raises hypotheses and tests them.

The unconventional basis is anti-positivist. It is based, therefore, on the use of dialectical logic and is focused on the emancipatory interest. Non-conventional methodological approaches use, more frequently, qualitative analyses. They are researching that start from the social reality in its complexity, totality, and then build appropriate methods to capture and transform it. The apprehension of the subjects is a basic characteristic, based on historical and social aspects. The main strategy is comprehension and interpretation.

In order to carry out the analysis, the analytical categories that follow in Chart 1 were structured. It should be noted that the summary presented is the result of the literature used, namely: Padovani and Castagnola (1990); Bentham (1979); Demo (1985); Triviños (1987); Popper (1980); Paes de Paula (2016); Durkheim (1978); Evans-Pritchard (1972); Radcliffe-Brown (1973); Malinowski (1970); Chanlat and Séguin (1987a, 1987b); Kast and Rosenzweig (1992); Parsons (1967); Foulquié (1978); Gurvitch (1987); Lefebvre (1983); Benson (1983); Gamboa (1987; 1997); Martins (1994; 1997); Faria (2007); Guba and Lincoln (1994).

Table 1: Epistemological Bases

	Bases Epistemológicas	Pontos Centrais	Caracterização Geral	Características Metodológicas
Base convencional	Positivismo	Explicar e predizer o que acontece no mundo social por meio de regularidades e relacionamentos causais entre os seus elementos constituintes	Utiliza como técnica de investigação os estudos descritivos, estabelecimento de causalidade e relações entre variáveis e fatos. É orientado por planos amostrais, estruturados, com a utilização de questionários fechados, experimentos, e análise estatística de dados.	Se utiliza, com maior frequência, do delineamento quantitativo. Estratégia de pesquisa: experimentos e levantamentos. Técnica de coleta de dados estruturada como questionários e escalas. Uso da estatística na busca da objetividade científica. Trabalha com variáveis (dependentes e independentes); operacionalização de conceitos e generalizações.
	Funcionalismo	Concepção sistêmica, sincrônica, teleológica, a-histórica, integradora e harmônica.	Apoiado em técnicas descritivas. Envolve análises e avaliações de papéis, funcionamento das organizações, avaliação, planejamento etc. A causalidade é concebida como a explicação do para quê dos fenômenos ou da lógica entre proposta e ação. Relação funcional entre o todo e as partes.	
	Sistemismo	Privilegia a síntese e a visão da totalidade. Aspecto relacional. Sistema aberto e em interação com o meio.	Utiliza o método hipotético dedutivo e técnicas descritivas para avaliar programas, métodos e afins. A causalidade é entendida através da lógica do inter-relacionamento de subsitemas com suas entredas, processos e saídas.	
Base Não Convencional	Teoria Crítica	Abordagem humanística do ato de pesquisar. Questiona o *status quo* procurando compreender os sujeitos e suas relações sociais. Almeja uma construção coletiva da realidade e da história. Investe contra o individualismo, mas instrumentaliza e conscientiza indivíduos para compreensão das necessidades da sociedade enquanto grupo. Fundamenta-se em critérios específicos para análise social.	É principalmente antipositivista. Pesquisas críticas exigem um esquema teórico-metodológico dialético. O pesquisador deve buscar estabelecer diálogo dialético com o objeto investigado. Busca a racionalização e conscientização coletiva. Não exclui os métodos quantitativos, mas ressalta a importância da análise qualitativa dos dados, a partir da revisão história e social que circunda o objeto.	Se utiliza, com maior frequência, do delineamento qualitativo. Estratégia de pesquisa: pesquisa etnográfica, pesquisa participante, pesquisa-ação, pesquisa naturalística, pesquisa histórica, *grounded theory*, análise crítica do discurso e pesquisa documental. Técnicas de coleta de dados: estudo de casos, entrevista em profundidade, entrevista de grupo, entrevista não-diretiva, observação participante, história de vida e análise documental. Forma de análise dos dados baseadas no discurso, conteúdo e/ou narrativa.

Source: Prepared by the Authors (2021).

Once the analytical categories referring to the epistemological bases have been defined, it is worth noting that, when reviewing the literature on qualitative research, one can notice that, frequently, this research is not being defined by itself, but in contrast to quantitative research. Therefore, Bryman (1988) observes the differences and similarities between qualitative and quantitative research. From the point of view of the researcher's relationship with the research subject, quantitative research is distant and neutral, while in qualitative research the researcher knows the space and lives the time experienced by the investigated. Thus, the qualitative researcher interacts with the researched object/subject, with the intention of giving it a voice and building a plot of meanings. For this, the researcher's worldview is part of the investigative process, and it is impossible to detach oneself from it. This dialectical process is inductive, makes generalization lose strength for discovery and standardized language is freed and evolves to new narrative possibilities, which seek to integrate a scheme of multiple voices (GERGEN; GERGEN, 2006).

As for the image of social reality, the quantitative approach is characterized as static and external to the actor, and the qualitative, procedural and socially constructed by the subjects. The objective of quantitative research is to explain and predict (establishing causal relationships and/or testing hypotheses) and qualitative research is to understand, describe and characterize (at most, point out association relationships) (BRYMAN; 1988).

The subjects, from a quantitative perspective, must be sufficient to guarantee representativeness; on the other hand, in the qualitative one, all people who elaborate knowledge and/or produce adequate practices to intervene in the problems object of the research are considered. The central quantitative concern is statistical validation and the scope of the findings is nomothetic, that is, it intends to generalize; the qualitative focuses on understanding the meanings and the scope of the findings is ideographic, as it treats each individual as a unique universe. Furthermore, the quantitative data collection strategies are structured and the technique for dealing with them is statistics; on the other hand, qualitative research has unstructured and semi-structured strategies and the treatment of data aims at the meaning of the contents (BRYMAN; 1988).

III. Methodological Paths

ReMark, according to the electronic library SPELL (2021), has 789 citations, 812,398 accesses, 165,809 downloads, 551 available documents and an H: 9 index. The types of texts published are: theoretical and theoretical-empirical scientific articles, in Spanish, English and Portuguese.

The Journal is published quarterly, is of an academic nature, publishing articles that are the result of scientific research, which must necessarily bring an innovative theoretical or empirical contribution to the area of Marketing knowledge. In addition, there is a deliberate position to publish articles by all research groups in the country, privileging researchers from regions in the consolidation phase and encouraging joint production. It is characterized by being aimed at a broad, highly qualified public that works in the marketing area in public, private and third sector, national and international organizations. The article evaluation process is characterized by a triple evaluation system and involves two sequential steps: the *desk review* and the evaluation by the reviewers (ReMark, 2020).

Its focus is the publication of scientific contributions in the following areas: research methods and theory in marketing; consumer behavior; marketing management and strategy; and marketing in specific contexts.

The next step was to define the criteria for classification, evaluation and analysis of the articles, structuring the documentary research in three stages. First step: a) reading the articles in full: b) classification of the articles according to the type of research (quantitative, qualitative, quali-quantitative and essay) and; c) elimination of articles classified as quantitative research, quali-quantitative and essay. Second stage: a) evaluation of qualitative research according to the research strategy (case study, multicase, documentary, ethnographic, *grounded theory*, action research and participant); b) evaluation of qualitative research according to the data collection technique (interview, observation, document analysis and focus group); and c) evaluation according to the data analysis method (discourse analysis, content analysis and narrative analysis) (BRYMAN, 1988; SANDELOWSKI, 1997; ALVES-MAZZOTTI and GEWANDSNAJDER, 1999; DENZIN and LINCOLN, 2006; BANDEIRA DE MELLO, 2006; CHUEKE and LIMA, 2012). Third stage – analysis: a) content analysis according to the epistemological bases and analytical categories specified in Table 1.

For the purposes of analysis, this identification was achieved based on the objective of each work, the analysis of the methodological procedures explained and through the detailed reading of each article, as well as the way in which the data were presented and analyzed, which made clear the nature that the authors give to their investigation, even if implicitly. From this, a survey of the Journal's publications was carried out in the period of 2018, where the publication of four annual editions was identified. In the first three, ten articles were published each, and in the last, twelve articles were published. Of the total of forty-two articles published, five are of a qualitative nature, twenty-eight are quantitative, five are characterized as both qualitative and quantitative, and four are theoretical essays. That said, the object of study of this article were the five identified qualitative articles.

It is pertinent to add that, in the year 2018, ReMark published two special editions. The first, entitled "Marketing Research: the state of the art and next steps", consists entirely of theoretical essays. And the second, in which twelve articles were published, of these 4 qualitative ones. These were not considered in this research for two reasons: they deal with themes alluding to certain theoretical perspectives and, as a result, they may be directed and aligned with certain epistemological bases and/or methodological assumptions, which could cause biases in the analysis proposed here.

IV. Analysis of the Methodological Nature and Epistemological Basis

This section aims to investigate the methodological nature and basic epistemological bases of the articles under analysis. Initially, each article was assessed separately, through the study of each work in full. Next, the analysis highlights the objective and methodological nature, pointing out the research strategy, the collection technique and the way of data analysis, together with the observation of the predominant epistemological bases.

Article 1 establishes that the central purpose of the research is "to investigate the relationship between brand love and the direct sales professional of a global cosmetics brand" (BERNARDO et al., 2018, p.19, emphasis added). It is observed in the passage of the text, an approximation with the conventional epistemological bases, mainly the systemic one, since this advocates the relational aspect.

Also, there is the statement that the "emotional meanings_of a *brand love* of the consultants of a global cosmetics brand were identified" (Ibid., p. 20, emphasis added). The plot of meanings, according to Gerfen and Geren (2006), is a characteristic of qualitative research.

The study also sought to investigate whether the feelings and emotions identified in the research coincide between consultants *from two Latin American countries* (BERNARDO et al., 2018, p.20, emphasis added). The comparative analysis of phenomena in different cultures, according to Malinowski (1970), was developed from functionalism. Thus, there is a certain approximation with the functionalist assumptions.

The research strategy used was *the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET).* A qualitative research technique for understanding consumer *behavior that investigates the mental models that drive thinking and behavior.behavior*__through storytelling, analyzing non-literal expressions [...] (BERNARDO et al., 2018, p. 20, emphasis added). It is worth noting that behavior is an implicit occurrence related to Durkheim's (1978) social fact. The social fact has strength and imposes a set of reactions on the individual, as a dynamic system in the face of interactions and renewal provided by the environment in which he is involved. Thus, the research strategy used presents an epistemological posture aligned with functionalism.

Sampling by quota was used, as this provides for the "classification of the population according to the relevant characteristics for obtaining the objectives proposed in the research, in such a way that the total sample can contain the proportion of each stratum, aiming to guarantee the minimum of *representativeness"* (BERNARDO et al., 2018, p. 21, emphasis added). Hence, quantitative and functionalist characteristics are inferred; functionalists, given the ahistorical conception in the selection of subjects (EVANS-PRITCHARD, 1972; CHANLAT and SÉGUIN, 1987b), which was based exclusively on representativeness, the focus of quantitative research.

Data collection was operationalized according to the ZMET protocol, which uses images that can represent the feelings and thoughts about the researched topic, followed by the application of in-depth interviews. "The dealerships were asked to look for 10 images that could *represent their feelings and thoughts* on the researched topic" (BERNARDO et al., 2018, p.22, emphasis added). Understanding meanings, such as images *versus* feelings and thoughts, is an aspect of qualitative research (BRYMAN; 1988). And in-depth interviews are more usual on unconventional epistemological bases. However, when evaluating the form of operationalization and analysis of the interviews, an emphasis is observed on the general frequency and on the weighted percentage of words, in view of which one can verify the predominance of the positivist paradigm (PADOVANI and CASTAGNOLA, 1990; DEMO, 1985; TRIVIÑOS, 1987).

The form of data analysis used was the consensus map based on the most cited words in the interviews. To carry out this, the NVivo software was used, designed to organize information into un-structured or qualitative data. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the results and discussions shows that most of the data was presented in the form of tables with percentages, maps, according to the frequency of occurrence of the answers, confirming that the most prominent epistemological bases in the research are the conventional ones.

Article 2 "aimed at *analyzing the strategies used* by companies in the management of online complaints and proposed an *effective management model"* (RÍMOLI and MELO, 2018, p. 49, emphasis added).

The authors point out that the objective and methodology of the research were the following: to analyze the online complaints received regarding the company's Lojas Americanas, Magazine Luiza, Submarino and Ponto Frio and how they behave in the face of these posts, in order to propose a model of *effective* management of complaints online. For this, a *descriptive research* was carried out through the *content analysis* of 379 online consumer complaints posted on the ReclameAQUI website (Ibid., p. 50, emphasis added).

In view of this, one perceives the influence of conventional and non-conventional epistemological bases. As for the conventional ones, these assumptions are closely related to functionalism and the systemic, functionalist approach, as it involves analysis of the strategies used and systemic in terms of input *and* output *analyzes* and the proposition of an effective model (PARSONS, 1976; CHANLAT and SÉGUIN, 1987b). The unconventional bases are portrayed through content analysis.

It is characterized as a qualitative, descriptive research, with the site reclameaqui.com.br as the basis for data collection, in which, through documentary research, analyzes of the management of complaints by companies in relation to claimants were carried out. As for the classification of the research, the authors define it as "descriptive, that is, that seeks to *describe* the particularities of a population or phenomenon, and may also *define relationships between the variables present* (RÍMOLI and MELO, 2018, p. 53, emphasis added). The description of the phenomenon characterizes the research as qualitative, however, the descriptive techniques are also typical of conventional epistemological bases, and defining the relationships between variables brings the study even closer to conventional bases (PAES DE PAULA, 2016; CHANLAT and SÉGUIN, 1987a, 1987b; KAST and ROSENZWEIG, 1992).

The configuration given to data collection for documentary research is close to that proposed by Bryman (1988) for qualitative research, because: *the ideal number* of published complaints *is how much the researcher thinks is enough* to discover and verify what he is looking for. The intention, therefore, *was not to obtain a significant sample* of a population, but rather *to choose complaints with the greatest potential to provide the desired information,* (RÍMOLI and MELO, 2018, p. 53, emphasis added).

Data analysis was performed through content analysis of the collected data. The study of textual transcripts of data was carried out, following the steps below: clipping contents, definition of analytical categories and final categorization of units of analysis. The NVivo11 software was used for content analysis. Therefore, there is an approximation to the unconventional bases, portrayed in documentary research and content analysis.

However, when analyzing the results and discussions chapter, it can be seen that the entire discussion is predominantly based on percentages and indices, such as, for example, "main reasons for complaints and the percentage of each in relation to the total" *and* "the *main causes* of complaints in the stores surveyed", "the *number, in percentage,* of complainants who had their problems resolved" (Ibid., p. 54-58, emphasis added), confirming the influence of conventional epistemologies.

At the end, when proposing the model, there is a qualitative analysis of the information gathered during the research, and based on these, it was "possible to develop and *propose an effective model* for management [...]" (RÍMOLI and MELO, 2018, p. 59, emphasis added). The fact that the proposition of a model presupposes limits and limits is a feature of functionalism. Furthermore, the intention of generating a previously expected result, that is, in a prescriptive way, and the utilitarian logic of this, reinforces support on conventional bases.

Continuing with the analyses, throughout the introduction of Article 3, some questions are found that indicate the epistemological bases that underpin the study, which are:

1. The objective of this work is to *analyze the relationship* between integrated marketing communication and its advantages for companies with a differentiation strategy via the franchising process. It can be shown that there is *greater potential for success* in marketing communication when franchising companies position marketing communication in the *strategic instance* (QUEIROZ et al. 2018, p. 265, emphasis added).
2. "We are *proposing* a series of factors that should be considered to guide retail companies in building this *link* between current value and value creation" (QUEIROZ et al. 2018, p. 267, emphasis added).
3. *"To propose a conceptual model* that will assist in the planning of companies' marketing communication, involving the evaluation of results" (QUEIROZ et al. 2018, p. 268, emphasis added).

Assertion a) is in line with conventional bases, and the establishment of causality and relationships between variables and facts indicates the domain of positivism, the analysis of the relationship and evaluation are based on functionalism and systemic, the emphasis on the process is based on the systemic question, the success function refers to functionalism, and the teleological conception of the strategic instance refers to functionalism. The factors highlighted in b) and c) refer to the functionalist and systemic approaches (GAMBOA, 1987 and 1997; MARTINS, 1994 and 1997).

It is characterized as a qualitative research, study of multiple cases, application of in-depth

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interview, and data analysis based on triangulation. "The survey was carried out in more than one company, thus ensuring greater depth in the issues [...] and robustness in the data analysis" (QUEIROZ et al. 2018, p. 268, emphasis added). This prerogative, supported by the use of in-depth interviews, constitute precepts that confirm the performance of a qualitative research. Furthermore, the in-depth interview and the content analysis logic of the triangulation are supported by critical epistemological postures.

However, what is actually observed is the expressiveness of conventional scientific foundations, as evidenced in the following explanation:

The presented case studies A and B formed the basis of our current work, through the development of a *comparative synthesis* of the marketing communication planning *process and the mechanisms for evaluating* the contribution of marketing communication at the point of sale in companies that use the franchise format for marketing and *building relationships* with their consumers (Ibid., p. 269, emphasis added).

The issue of comparative synthesis, according to Gamboa (1987; 1997), is one of the criteria of dialectical scientific, as it is based on the internal logic of synthesis; however, the synthesis and the vision of the totality are also systemic prerogatives, Demo (1985), and, on this occasion, one perceives more inference from the systemic approach than the dialectical one.

Furthermore, a tenuous critical nuance is inferred, as a dialectical dialogue with the investigated object is lacking (GUBA; LINCOLN, 1994), as well as a historical and social review of the analyzed cases.

After analyzing the data, the authors propose a conceptual model of integrated marketing communication. The development of the model follows stages of planning, development, implementation and control. Thus, a logic that emphasizes functionality, rationality and measurement is confirmed, and an instrumentalization that brings research closer to systemic-functionalist-positivism.

The penultimate article analyzed, Article 4, defines that the objective of the research is "to ascertain the involvement of users in relation to smartphone ownership and to verify whether it represents an extension of the user's self. We also sought to identify paradoxical perceptions regarding this mobile technology" (MARTINS, OLIVEIRA and CORSO, 2018, p. 329). These relations between subject and object, between knowledge and action, between theory and practice (MARTINS, 1994; 1997) underline an approximation with dialectics, and, consequently, with critical theory, since the use of a dialectical theoretical-methodological scheme is a feature of critical theory (FARIA, 2007).

Of self and extended *self,* information technologies and technological paradoxes are discussed. A considerable part of the theoretical foundation focuses on the question of the *self,* formulated by Belk in 1988 and reformulated in 2013 and 2014. Belk's assumptions present an epistemological posture aligned with functionalist thinking, since the theory of the *self* (I) emphasizes that goods, things and places are identified as parts that constitute the individual's I and, as parts, they have different functions. It also approaches a systemic view, since the author highlights the parts as important constituents of something bigger, in this case, the Self. Thus, a systemic view is emphasized, similar to that defended by Demo (1985). The authors also carry out a historical review of the development of the theory of the *self,* thus inferring nuances of a critical stance (GUBA; LINCOLN, 1994).

The methodological procedures are defined as qualitative in nature, with a sample by accessibility, conducting in-depth interviews, using the technique of content analysis. Consequently, the design brings the study closer to unconventional epistemological bases.

After reading the characterization of the method, as well as the discussions presented in the work, it can be observed that the qualitative nature corresponds to the problem and objective of the research. However, despite the description of the format and participants of the interviews, there is no identification of the time, which makes it difficult to measure the depth or not. Furthermore, the content analysis technique is operationalized in a deep and reflective way, and the categories used for the organization, analysis and interpretation of this material were defined.

According to Faria (2007) and Tadajewski and Brownie (2008), critical contributions are reflective, guided and grounded through the following categories: contradictions, dominant ideology, dominant rationalities, historical social context, individual and collective emancipation and awareness, ontological denaturalization, epistemological reflexivity and non-performative posture. Therefore, the study is characterized as analogous and inspired by critical theory, given the reflective analysis, but it is not configured as a critical study itself (Critical*Marketing)*, because the categories used and the breadth of analysis are not consistent with the critical theory.

Finally, Article 5 has as its main objective: to identify the incidence of *greenwash* in the *supposedly sustainable actions* of organizations of personal hygiene care products, perfumery and cosmetics, called *beauty care.* More specifically, "to analyze the *discrepancies between the discourse and practices of companies* that are part of the Brazilian *beauty care context,* based on the focus on eco-innovation" (SILVA, SCHERER and PIVETTA, 2018, p. 503, emphasis added).

As a result, dialectical and, consequently, critical nuances can be inferred, as it is based on the dynamic conception of reality and in the dialectical relationships between theory (in this case, the supposedly affirmed and the discourse) and practice. The dialectical method seeks to locate contradictions and privileges experiences, actions and a contextualized analysis (MARTINS, 1994; 1997; GURVITCH, 1987). Furthermore, critical theory has the totality of social praxis as a central dimension for dialectical criticism, as opposed to the logic of systemic functioning proper to positivism (FREITAG, 1986).

It should be noted that the term *greenwashing* is "used to define the discourse that seeks to promote a positive environmental image that does not correspond to reality". (SILVA, SCHERER and PIVETTA, 2018, p. 504). It is a concept that must be investigated within a complex context, and, at the same time, establishes and points out possible contradictions among the investigated phenomena. Such a perspective is characterized as dialectical and critical, and as a totalizing and dialectical understanding, it is capable of making contradictions emerge (FARIA, 2007).

The authors define the work methodology as exploratory, descriptive, of a qualitative nature, developed through a documentary analysis of secondary data, through the use of a data collection protocol (a script provided the direction for mapping practices). The exploratory, qualitative nature and document analysis are inserted in an unconventional epistemological context, while the descriptive design and a structured data collection script tend to be configured as a conventional epistemological posture.

Different sources of evidence based on secondary data obtained through institutional documents and corporate websites were used. Complemented by press information, based on news and pressure entities on the *greenwash effects* related to the selected companies. There was also a survey of data based on consultations about the personal hygiene, perfumery and cosmetics sector in documents, mainly in reports and panoramas of the Brazilian Association of Personal Hygiene, Perfumery and Cosmetics Industry (ABIHPEC), data available at the Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services (MDIC), industry overview developed by the National Development Bank (BNDES), reports and regulations on the sector available by the National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA) (SILVA, SCHERER and PIVETTA, 2018). The use of these bibliographical and documentary techniques, with research in texts, records and empirical data, prioritizing the analysis of discourse and/or content configures the study as critical-dialectic, according to Martins (1997).

In addition, for the analysis and discussion of the results, a comparative mapping was carried out and Bardin's content analysis technique was used. The study's findings have several implications for society, for management, for consumers and for the development of public policies, among others. However, a more accurate reading of the chapter on the analysis and discussion of the results demonstrates a much more descriptive logic of the data, rather than a deep and reflective one. The critical-dialectical influence is present (relationships between man and nature, between reflection-action and between theory-practice, in methodological procedures), however, nuances of conventional epistemologies are also perceived.

V. Discussion

The first point to be highlighted is the primacy of quantitative studies compared to those that used qualitative techniques. From the survey carried out, of the total of forty-two articles published, only five are of a qualitative nature.

As for the paradigms that anchor the methodological procedures, the predominance of the conventional basis can be verified; this encourages the development of research of a dialectical, constructivist, interpretive and critical nature, which would open space for a more effective and broader understanding of the most subjective dimensions in understanding consumer behavior and consumption processes. In view of this, Scussel (2017) states that the interpretivist perspective in marketing research represents an incipient, but well-founded, revolution in the understanding of the area's processes, and critical studies signal an expansion of research horizons.

Despite the relatively small number of qualitative studies in the field of marketing, another issue that arises is how they are constructed and what methodological rigor is adopted. Thus, the analysis regarding the research strategies used and their coherence with the objectives of the work and the corresponding epistemological basis, showed a certain vulnerability, since, in many cases, such correspondence is not specified, nor evident and/or justified.

As for the data collection techniques, these demonstrated that the structure, the form of application and selection of subjects are not sufficiently explained. It should be noted that both the in-depth interview and the document analysis have requirements that configure them as such and are essential for the development of qualitative research. The non-explicitness of these requirements raises doubts about the methodological paths related to the instruments.

With regard to the form of data analysis, the method is often indicated in methodological procedures, however, it was observed that in the analysis of results this method is not properly operationalized, demonstrating the prominence of

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numerical/quantitative analyses, rather than based on in-depth and reflective methodological techniques. It is also relevant to point out the superficiality in the way in which the data are discussed, as the depth in the understanding of the phenomenon in its empirical reality is the focus and the final objective of qualitative research.

In addition, a detailed observation about the coherence between the epistemological bases, the methodology and the results obtained indicated inconsistency, mainly regarding the methods of data collection, data analysis and the way of presenting and discussing the results. The critical posture built in the process of discussing the results of the research allowed the verification of methodological fragility in the analyzed works.

Despite the fact that all analyzed articles (5) are characterized as qualitative, three of the five works are closer to traditional epistemological bases, with a predominance of functionalist and systemic approaches; although the methodological nature often presents nuances of unconventional epistemological bases.

The other two articles, specifically s 4 and 5, despite being inspired by critical theory, are not configured as critical studies in the strict sense (Critical *Marketing)*, as they do not broadly appropriate the general categories that characterize, guide and support the analysis of that theory. The grammar of critical marketing is characterized by theoretical and methodological pluralism surrounded by three commitments: ontological denaturalization, epistemological reflexivity and a non-performative posture (TADAJEWSKI; BROWNLIE, 2008). Furthermore, critical marketing researchers must emphasize the development of a systematic critique of social conditions; question the assumptions of the dominant social paradigm that sustain the marketing system (FIRAT; TADAJEWSKI, 2013). These factors were not observed in the aforementioned articles.

Another interesting aspect, identified in the two works that are aligned with the unconventional epistemological base, is that the approach to critical theory and critical marketing is limited; often circumscribed in methodological characteristics, but not in the research as a whole. To configure them in a critical-dialectical context, studies should be centered: (a) on the inclusion of a historical, critical and emancipatory perspective; (b) in the sociological understanding of human life and marketing itself; (c) in the use of investigation methods different from the traditional ones coming from the natural sciences, capable of examining certain meanings emanating from the social world, which could be captured with the use, for example, of ethnographic research, grounded theory, life history, *among* others; and (d) decontextualize and reconceptualizing the analytical categories and constructs of the field of marketing (BURTON, 2001); and in overcoming the current limits of marketing studies.

According to Tadajewski and Brownie (2008), criticizing the theory and practice of marketing must be done through a continuous process of analysis of assumptions and reassessment of the values in which marketing is anchored. Research based on critical theory assumes that social reality is a social fact, however individual consciousness is dominated and subservient to ideological superstructures, where criticism has the ultimate goal of stimulating positive social transformation. Critical marketing studies must include alternative themes and phenomena to the dominant paradigm.

In this sense, Firat and Tadajewski (2010) warn of three “fronts” that can be worked on when thinking about critical marketing. The first one has to do with that position in which the body of speeches is evaluated in order to find flaws or problems that can be modified or corrected in a given marketing strategy. Another way of thinking about criticisms of marketing is to bring to the discussion the perspective of the Frankfurt School known as Critical Theory. Finally, a third approach would be to discuss the approach based on the broader political, economic and social system – modern capitalism.

The search for this reference involves hard research work, since the concern with epistemology and methodology must be constant in any scientific work, in order to avoid misunderstandings.

VI. Final Considerations

Reflecting on the epistemological bases makes it possible to apprehend a totality of elements on which research is based; makes it possible to unveil its objects, contours, methods, allowing a more critical look. Moreover, it is important for the researcher to take ownership of his object of study, in such a way that he is able to legitimize an epistemological posture that supports his conceptions.

In the field of Marketing, a number of authors claim that the hegemonic paradigm is positivism and the superiority of quantitative research prevails. Under this approach, the present work aimed to analyze how research of a qualitative nature is constructed in the articles published in the Revista Brasileira de Marketing – ReMark, in the period of 2018, based on conventional and unconventional epistemologies.

The critical evaluation of the construction of the methodological nature of the analyzed qualitative researches signaled a certain inconsistency, mainly regarding the way of analyzing the data; there is a certain divergence between the way of analyzing the data proposed in the articles, and the way in which the data are effectively analyzed and presented in the results and discussions.

Of the set of five articles analyzed, three have a strong emphasis on the conventional basis and have positivism and the empiricist-systemic-functionalist approach as their central assumption; corroborating the thesis that the dominant paradigm in marketing is logical-empiricist. This panorama is ratified by Arndt (1985), Lima et al. (2014), Castro Junior et al. (2015), Motta and Iizuka (2016) and Scussel (2017).

However, studies influenced by non-traditional epistemological bases point to the emergence of critically oriented studies. However, they are still approaches to critical theory, rather than actual critical studies.

By way of conclusion, it is worth noting that constructivist, critical and interpretive studies in marketing are still incipient in relation to the number of traditional studies, as well as being marginalized/ forgotten or undervalued by academia and the scientific field that surrounds it.

Marketing is a social and historical phenomenon, closely linked to social facts, organizations and individuals. Consequently, conventional epistemological postures impact on the development of the discipline itself, outlining reductionist, circumscribed and decontextualized prisms. The richness brought by the constructivist qualitative research, as well as the critical, dialectic and interpretative, is necessary, since several questions and social themes are left out of the discussions. With the influence of such approaches, new possibilities for investigation, debates in the area, and expansion of the theoretical and methodological scope are possible. The intention is not to discredit or diminish the classical approach, but to promote reflections on possible gaps that can be deepened/expanded; encourage other forms of research outside the *mainstream* – to break the current hegemony and present new perspectives on marketing.

The limitations of this work are also highlighted. First, this work selected a specific period and, therefore, some specific editions of the journal. The year 2018 was chosen due to the fact that in that year two special editions were published in the Journal, one of which deals with the state of the art of research in marketing, a topic that is of interest to the study carried out in this article. One of the works in this issue is by Hair, Harrison and Risher (2018), who point out that the analysis methods used by marketing researchers are changing due to a series of changes in management skills, technological innovations and consumer behavior. Another important point by Hair, Harrison and Risher (2018) is that advances in marketing studies have directed research in the area towards the use of increasingly quantitative methods.

Therefore, it is noted that the study did not exhaust the literature on the subject, since the cut for the investigation was limited to the period analyzed, the selected epistemological bases and the journal studied. This study, however, presents paths of analysis that can, in future works, be expanded with the addition of new articles from the same journal or from other *journals* in the area. Therefore, the discussions presented here need to be weighed with their limitations.

Finally, it is pointed out that the results achieved are not conclusive: they point to the need for further studies and thus raise suggestions for future research: other studies may expand the research carried out in this work, including other bases and epistemological approaches, a period of longer time, and the main national and international journals of Marketing and Administration.

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Traditional Marketing and Digital Marketing in Bangladesh Context

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Abstract- Promotional activities destine the future of your business. Once Beth Comstock says, "You can't sell anything if you can't tell anything." The thriving of your business totally depends on how you present your products. Long since there, various types of marketing methods have been used from time to time. But in modern times, the channel of marketing and promotional activities started to rely on "Digital Marketing." Because it's way easier to get in touch with, collect feedback, and real-time communication with customers.

Keywords: *advertising, digital marketing, traditional marketing.*

GJMBR-E Classification: *DDC Code: 658.872 LCC Code: HF5415.1265*

TRADITIONALMARKETINGANDDIGITALMARKETINGINBANGLADESHCONTEXT

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:

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Abstract- Promotional activities destine the future of your business. Once Beth Comstock says, "You can't sell anything if you can't tell anything." The thriving of your business totally depends on how you present your products. Long since there, various types of marketing methods have been used from time to time. But in modern times, the channel of marketing and promotional activities started to rely on "Digital Marketing." Because it's way easier to get in touch with, collect feedback, and real-time communication with customers.

Keywords: advertising, digital marketing, traditional marketing.

I. Introduction

Our world is changing very fast and new technologies are coming which means communication is also changing the concept of marketing from traditional to digital. Primitive human exchange practices are considered to be the beginning of the business. However, over the past 200 years, this business has developed remarkably. Due to the progress in all aspects of human life at different stages of evolution, their living and working methods have also undergone great changes (Efendioglu, 2016). When the world is under the scope of digital marketing, Bangladesh is not out of it (Mohammad Waliul Hasanat, 2020).

Internet and technology use has increased at an astonishing rate in Bangladesh like any other developed and rising/developing country in the world. By 2022 the number of internet users in Bangladesh has increased to 100 million. Currently, the total population of Bangladesh is approx 16 crores and 31.5% of the total population is an internet user (KEMP, 2022). With the internet growth, many small moderate brands have started focusing more on digital marketing (Hanieh Mirzaei, 2012).

a) *What is the Most Significant Role of Digital Marketing?*

Digital marketing has changed the tactics of communication between consumers and marketers. Consumers generally prefer shopping without any hassle. That's why there is so much demand for digital marketing and digital marketing is much smarter than offline marketing methods (Rahman, 2015)(TODOR, 2015).

In this research, we will differentiate between digital marketing and traditional marketing in the context of Bangladesh, and we will try to figure out why digital marketing is more important than traditional marketing in Bangladesh.

II. Research Method

Research is an effective method that plays an essential role in data collection and selection. The methodology helps to finance specific objectives. This research paper has been written based on the data obtained from primary and secondary (Mohammad Waliul Hasanat, 2020). Now is the age of technology. Day by day the internet is becoming more accessible in our country, and internet speed has also improved a lot. Now, most people of Bangladesh use smartphones and this digital marketing in our country has brought a revolution. Many small and medium brands are easily reaching thousands of people with their services, which is possible due to good internet speed. Most of the people of Bangladesh can now buy their favorite things at home. Now, most people like to spend their time on various social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. And through these social networks, different brands do their advertising campaigns to reach their targeted customers very easily. I was conducting a survey. The people I surveyed were between 22-25 and all BBA students. The number of students was 200 boys' number was 125 and the girls' number was 75. Everyone knows about Google AdWords, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn advertising.

When they are all told if you have a small business, what type of marketing will you do for your business, traditional marketing or digital marketing? Among them, the largest number of people answered that they prefer digital marketing. When asked the reason, they said that due to digital marketing, their products can be easily reached many people, and their products can be reached specifically targeted customers. Some of the remaining students said they would follow traditional marketing strategies. As a result of traditional marketing, a product and brand image seems more trustworthy to people, on the other hand, in digital marketing, people continue to advertise on various social media such as news portals, YouTube, Facebook, etc., which some-times causes irritation.

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Now the question may arise that digital marketing has replaced analog marketing. The answer is, no. Digital marketing has made analog marketing easier. Where earlier one had to go door to door to campaign or distribute a card of one's identity to people for campaigning, nowadays one can introduce oneself through a single post or some kind of advertisement on social media (Ms. Sudha Lawrence, 2018).

Marketing is still seen through ordinary billboards in many places in Bangladesh. This is a type of analog marketing. But in New York's Times Square or in Japan's Tokyo and cities. Why is such a modern country doing marketing in such an old way? In fact, all of their billboards have a touch of advanced technology. They use display screens on almost all their billboards because they understand the importance of digital marketing. The key to success in marketing is how well you attract your audience. The more impressive your advertising is, the more visitors will be attracted.

III. Results and Analysis

Digital marketing is gaining more acceptance than traditional marketing in Bangladesh (Farjana Akter, 2020). That's because traditional marketing is time-consuming and expensive, with less expected results. On the other hand, compared to the amount of money spent on digital marketing, the result is much more than traditional marketing; as the result of advertising, there is only partial data available. It is possible to get all this data in the case of a digital marketing platform. Through traditional marketing, it is not possible to advertise to the targeted customers, but through digital marketing, it is possible to advertise to the targeted customers (Mayank Yadava, 2015). Traditional marketing medium is very less and is losing their effectiveness daily. On the other hand, digital marketing mediums are increasing daily.

As a result of which, acceptance is increasing for everyone. It will take many days for any company or organization that is currently established through traditional marketing to become a billion-dollar business. On the other hand, many companies or organizations established today through digital marketing have become billion-dollar businesses. An example is Pathao -Transport Company. They started in March 2015 with just a compromise and have run major promotional campaigns for their services across various social media sites. As a result, their market value is now more than 100 million dollars. Besides Ali Express – Online Retail Service is one of the examples among foreign companies (Dr. Madhu Bala, 2018).

a) When is Digital Marketing Needed?

Do we do digital marketing everywhere? As mentioned earlier, the main objective of marketing is to attract an audience. If the viewer's eye can turn to your ad once, they will read what you are writing. Suppose you want to advertise your company by placing a billboard on the side of a road in the middle of the desert. Now in the desert, will you display billboards to attract human attention?

Those who walk the desert road see nothing but the desert around them. So, if you put up a very simple billboard, that will attract people's attention. In other words, despite the importance of digital marketing nowadays, it does not mean that marketing can be something other than digital. Depending on the location and situation, it can be made old-fashioned and effective (Valentina Simona Pașcalău, 2020).

IV. Conclusion

Finally, if you want to become an entrepreneur, you can easily promote your products or services through digital marketing, which will play a huge role in your business expansion.

In addition, if you want to promote the products or services of other businesses, then you can easily promote the products or services currently assigned to your target customers through digital marketing compared to traditional marketing. By doing this, you can play a major role in any business expansion by selling products or providing services by creating targeted customers.

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Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility on Customer Loyalty: The Case Study of Beverage Consumption in Vietnam

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Abstract- The study aims to analyze the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on customer loyalty to beverage products. Although there have been many studies on the impact of CSR on customer loyalty, there was little concern in the beverage industry, especially in Vietnam. The data were collected by a survey of 287 consumers with differences in gender, age, education, income, and frequency of product use. The data were quantitatively processed using Structural Equation Modeling. Research results show that implementing CSR positively affects customer loyalty through its direct impact on customer satisfaction. This research contributes to the theoretical review of the indirect effects of CSR on loyalty with the mediating role of customer satisfaction. The results remarkably suggest recommendations for businesses in the beverage industry that desire to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty through enhancing CSR practices.

Keywords: corporatesocial responsibility, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, beveragebrand.

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EFFECTSOFCORPORATESOCIALRESPONSIBILITYONCUSTOMERLOYALTYTHECASESTUDYOFBEVERAGECONSUMPTIONINVIETNAM

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:

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Dien Pham [α] & Hu yen Le [σ]

Abstract- The study aims to analyze the influence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on customer loyalty to beverage products. Although there have been many studies on the impact of CSR on customer loyalty, there was little concern in the beverage industry, especially in Vietnam. The data were collected by a survey of 287 consumers with differences in gender, age, education, income, and frequency of product use. The data were quantitatively processed using Structural Equation Modeling. Research results show that implementing CSR positively affects customer loyalty through its direct impact on customer satisfaction. This research contributes to the theoretical review of the indirect effects of CSR on loyalty with the mediating role of customer satisfaction. The results remarkably suggest recommendations for businesses in the beverage industry that desire to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty through enhancing CSR practices.

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I. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a global phenomenon, which is gradually becoming an inevitable trend worldwide. However, the concept of CSR is still new to many businesses in Vietnam, and limitations in a management capacity and professional knowledge when implementing CSR still exist. Moreover, not every company adheres to business ethics, understands the benefits of implementing CSR. According to the latest research by Ha (2019), out of 100 listed companies in Vietnam, 12 companies do not provide any information related to social responsibility, and only 14 companies disclose information above 80% on request.

Previous researchers have extensively discussed corporate social responsibility and the implementation of social responsibility associated with corporate business practices. However, the link between corporate social responsibility and customer loyalty in the context of developing countries remains little known (Islam et al., 2021). Some studies have discussed the impact of CSR practices on consumer behavior, but a few studies have delved into the influence of CSR awareness on consumer repurchase behavior or repeat purchase behavior. With the explicit objective of extending previous literature, this study examines the association between CSR and customer loyalty by incorporating a mediating structure of guest satisfaction.

The report of the Ministry of Industry and Trade shows that the average Vietnamese consumes 23 liters of soft drinks per year. It is forecasted that by 2025, the revenue of Vietnam's beverage industry will reach nearly 6 billion USD, with an average growth of 6.3%/year. A representative of the market research group Euro-monitor International (UK) informed that Vietnam has young population, with the age group of 15 - 54 accounting for nearly 62.2%, so there is a high demand for different types of water. Beverage market has great potential. In addition, beverage products are diverse, and have many different categories and that directly affects the health of consumers. Therefore, beverage products would be appropriate to study specifically on the impact of CSR on customer loyalty. The study's conclusion will supplement the theoretical basis on the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on loyalty. From there, recommendations for beverage businesses will be to improve CSR implementation to improve customer satisfaction, loyalty and brand trust.

II. Literature Review

a) *Corporate Social Responsibility*

The term "social responsibility" was first coined by Bowen (1953) for the purpose of propaganda and calling for property managers not to harm the rights and interests of others, calling for charity. To compensate for the damage caused by businesses to society. However, since then, there have been many studies worldwide, and the term CSR is being understood in many ways.

In 2010, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) released ISO 26000, a voluntary set of standards aimed at helping companies fulfill their corporate social responsibility. Accordingly, CSR is defined as the responsibility of an organization for decisions and activities that impact community and the environment, leading to ethical behavior and transparency to contribute to the sustainable development of that company. That organization covers the health and well-being of society, considers stakeholder expectations, complies with applicable laws, and is

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consistent with international standards of conduct. All are integrated throughout the organization and implemented in relationships.

b) Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is defined by Dick and Basu (1994) as the relationship between the individual and the repurchase with the same supplier in a sustainable way. Oliver (1999) defines loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to the purchase of a preferred product /service consistently in the future, and to make repeated purchases of that brand of product or service regardless of circumstances and marketing efforts to change that buying behavior".

Previous studies approached customer loyalty in different ways. Bandyopadhyay and Martel (2007) and Liang et al. (2009) suggested that behavioral loyalty is approached on future repurchase behavior, quantity, frequency of repurchase as well as brand change in each time. Evanschitzky et al. (2006) approached loyalty in terms of customer attitudes, emphasizing experience and affection in customer loyalty.

c) Carroll's CSR Pyramid Model

Carroll (1991) expanded on the areas that he believes are important when implementing CSR in an organization and proposed four aspects of CSR: economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility.

Philanthropic Responsibilities are business activities that have surpassed society's expectations, including public activities beneficial to society, ensuring to improve the community's quality of life and promote development of the whole society.

Legal Responsibility is part of the commitment between business and society. The government should consider social and ethical rules into legal documents. It evaluates the benefit or harm to community at its simplest when evaluating a business. Legal responsibility is a guarantee between companies and consumers, companies are expected to pursue economic goals within the framework prescribed by law.

Ethical Rresponsibility includes socially accepted norms and rules that are expected, expected, and not prohibited by members of society that are not mentioned in the law. It is closely related to legal responsibility because they are all influenced by the habits and culture of individuals in community.

Economic Responsibility is the most basic responsibility, the basic purpose of a business is to produce goods and services that consumers need and want, and to generate an acceptable level of profit through the process of doing business. business. All other types of corporate responsibility are built on economic responsibility, without economic purpose, other liability cannot be fulfilled.

Based on the inheritance of Carroll's CSR model, several other studies have added the *Environmental responsibility* component from the perspective of the World Bank's Private Economic Development Group on Corporate Social Responsibility. Accordingly, CSR is enterprise's commitment to contribute to sustainable economic development through activities that are beneficial not only the business itself but also valuable for life of employees, and the community. To conclude, CSR is expressed explicitly on five factors: *legal, economic, ethical, charitable, and environmental*. This perspective on CSR with these five components is also the approach to corporate social responsibility that the author implements in this study.

d) The Relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

Empirical research shows that satisfied customers tend to be more loyal than less satisfied ones and they are therefore crucial to a company's bottom line (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Conversely, dissatisfaction can lead to customer churn. Such satisfaction is positively related to customer loyalty, and discontent can lead to customer defection. Mohsan (2011) affirmed that customers discontinue using aa brand only when there is something makes them unhappy. Customers who are satisfied with a business are likely to repurchase a product and share their experience with the company's product or service with others (Gronroos, 2000, Zairi, 2000). Many studies conclude that the higher the customer satisfaction, the higher the level of loyalty.

e) CSR Issues in the Beverage Sector

An analytical study of the beverage sector in Algeria (2013) with the aim to highlight the most important issues of social responsibility for companies in the beverage sector, listed five significant topics, including:

i. *Health Concerns*

If you drink a lot, carbonated soft drinks may have potential health risks for children, the amount of caffeine in carbonated soft drinks will cause effects on the nervous system (restlessness, anxiety, headache, insomnia, nausea), cardiovascular system (rapid heart rate), digestive disorders (abdominal pain, diarrhea), tooth erosion, tooth decay, and increased absorption of calcium into the muscles, which can easily cause muscle fibrosis, obesity, diabetes, metabolic disorders, etc.

ii. *Sugar Levels in Soft Drinks*

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the recommended sugar intake per day is six teaspoons of sugar. This means that if you drink at least one can of soft drink a day, you have exceeded the allowable amount of sugar in your body. According to a study by Malik et al., (2010), people who consumed from 1 to 2 cans of soft drinks per day had a 26% higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes than people who didn't drink a lot of soft drinks.

iii. *Sweetener ASPARTAME a Dangerous Sugar Substitute*

Aspartame powder E 951 is a chemical sugar used instead of natural sugar in food and pharmaceutical products, it is used a lot in soft drinks, and carbonated soft drinks. Although it contains fewer calories than regular sugar. Although beverage manufacturers say aspartame is not harmful to health, in fact, up to 92% of independently funded studies detect aspartame side effects. According to the Ramazzini Institute, a longtime cancer research center in Europe, "Based on the evidence of the potential carcinogenic effects of aspartame, for normal people, aspartame should be used only for urgent public health problems." (Soffritti et al., 2014).

iv. *Packaging Products*

Common materials for soft drinks are aluminum cans, Polyethylene terephthalate plastic, glass, and paper. Following the trend of being environmentally friendly, businesses have begun to use many different solutions for their products, such as changing the composition of materials or producing recyclable packaging products, which can be reused. However, this activity must be carefully monitored because it directly affects the health of consumers.

v. *Misleading Labeling*

In the beverage industry, labeling is a huge problem. It is sometimes considered as misleading to consumers. That becomes a reason for driving CSR practices in this industry. Especially for liquid the packaging indicates that the product is made from natural ingredients while it is produced from artifactual flavorings.

f) Beverage Sector in Vietnam

According to the report "Vietnam Beverage Market 2020" by ANTS Market Research and Analysis Company Limited (2021), 85% of the annual production and consumption of Vietnam's beverage market comes from soft drinks, instant teas, fruit juices, and energy drinks. The remaining 15% is due to mineral water making up the rest. 85% is also the percentages of beverage businesses are holding the production rate in the whole beer and alcohol industry. On average, Vietnamese people consume over 23 liters of beverage per person per year. The plan is that by 2021, the output of all kinds of soft drinks in Vietnam will reach from 8.3 to 9.2 billion liters per year.

The beverage market in Vietnam has developed impressively due to the following reasons. First, the climate in Vietnam is hot and humid, so the beverage market is increasing rapidly. The service industry of non-alcoholic beverages, especially carbonated ones comes with ice to drink in hot weather to help satisfy users on hot summer days. Second, the diverse food culture has pushed the demand for beverage production to skyrocket by about 18% in 2018 (only stalled by the Covid-19 pandemic). Third, Vietnam has a young population, the age group from 15 to 50 years old accounts for 63% of the demand for soft drinks.

On the current economic development momentum of Vietnam, there are many beverage production enterprises have been formed and developed very successfully. They are constantly evolving and making more and more products. Currently, according to the Vietnam Beer and Alcohol Association, there are about 1,800 beverage production facilities. The annual growth rate increases steadily at around 7%, while in other markets such as France and Japan, it is only expected to reach 2% per year.

g) Trends of Beverage Consumption in Vietnam

i. *Trends of using Nutritional Supplements*

According to the report by Vietnam Report in October, 2021, the trend of using nutritional foods and beverages has increased in the monthly expenditure table of Vietnamese people. Specifically, since the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic, the demand for food fortifying nutrition - the immune system increased by 37%, in the 'new normal' increased by 54%. Milk and dairy products (including nut milk) at the beginning of the COVID-19 epidemic increased by 29%, while the "new normal" spiked to 53%. A quick survey on the change in consumer behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic by Nielsen in May 2020 also shows that the consumption habits of Vietnamese people - especially young people have a significant change. In addition to cutting spending, they want to get many different values in one item.

ii. *Trends of using Canned Soft Drinks of Natural Origin*

A study by Heng, House and Kim (2018) on the competition of beverages in the market asserted that consumers are considering healthier or lower-calorie drinks. Furthermore, fruit drinks are a alternative to regular soft drinks that the majority of the consumers can easily switch to a fruit-infused, fruit-flavored beverage even if its cost is more expensive than regular soft drinks.

Vietnamese consumers tend to pay more for convenient products, which can be used immediately without spending a lot of time preparing. Environmentally friendly and safe products, especially canned soft drinks of natural origin, are favorable. Drinks of small size, and canned form are currently being used by many people. Furthermore, beverages of natural origin, ingredients, low in sugar, and good for health, such as herbal energy drinks, fruit juices, herbal teas, nut milk, etc.

III. Previous Studies

Numerous studies have been devoted to understanding the roles of CSR in corporate performance, and many of them confirmed the positive impacts of CSR on the performance of companies. Research by Matthew and Liu (2019) clarify that corporate social responsibility affects customer loyalty behavior in the hotel industry. The mediating influence of brand image and customer trust on the relationship between CSR and customer loyalty behavior is also considered. Their results show that customer behavioral loyalty can be enhanced by CSR performance. The performance of implementing social responsibility to customers, employees and to society affects customer loyalty behavior to different degrees, in which, CSR performance with customers has a significant impacton customer loyalty behavior. Research shows that CSR activities are not all equally effective. The findings also support the view that Chinese consumers are beginning to consider CSR when evaluating brands or businesses. Upamannyu, Gulati, Chack and Kaur (2015) investigated the relationship between customer trust, customer loyalty, and repurchase intention in India. The study suggests to businesses that they must do their best to make customers loyal because this is the group of customers who continue to buy products, repeat their purchases, and reuse services.

There is increasing attention paid to the impact of CSR on the outcomes of business conducted in Vietnam. A study by Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) examined the relationship of corporate social responsibility to customer loyalty through customer engagement with the business. The results show that corporate social responsibility activities have a positive impact on customer loyalty. From those research results, the authors have suggested governance implications for managers to develop more effective corporate development policies, and at the same time, help them have a new perspective on CSR and its benefits and values that it brings. From the customer's point of view, when they have a positive view of the business through CSR activities, the brand value of the business will be enhanced, the business will create a competitive advantage and, most importantly, towards the trend of sustainable development. From a theoretical perspective, Nguyen and Nguyen (2021) provided a theoretical foundation of Corporate Social Responsibility for the Vietnamese market. Another study by Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) invested in testing and evaluating the impact of corporate social responsibility on the quality of the brand-customer relationship and the intention to switch brands in Vietnam. The results showed that CSR has a strong and positive impact on the customers' loyalty to the brands. Moreover, CSR has the effect of reducing customers' intention to switch brands. An intermediary relationship that the study refers to is the impact of CSR on the intention to switch brands with the intermediary being the Brand-Customer relationship. Thus, when customers feel good about corporate social responsibility activities, their relationship with the brand will be enhanced, thereby reducing the intention to switch brands. The study concludes and implies that for businesses to develop a brand. It is necessary for companies to spend budget and resources to support CSR activities. Research by Thi and Van (2016) aims to explore the relationship between customers' perception of CSR and their intention to pursue a product among the customers living in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings assume that the CSR component has become an influencing factor on customer repurchase intention, especially for consumer goods. The authors encourage companies to implement corporate social responsibility to capture customer repurchase intention and, thereby, customer loyalty. Based on the related theories and current findings in related studies, the model and its hypotheses are proposed in the following.

a) *Hypotheses and Research Model*

Previous research conducted by Tan and Komaran (2006) showed that the economic responsibility of CSR initiatives positively affects customers' purchasing decisions. Lee, Kim, Lee, and Li (2012) found that economic CSR is positively associated with the degree of trust that leads to customer satisfaction and retention. For every business that that is crucial to serve what customers want by creating more values for their products and services. When buying a product, customers always expect the value of using that product. If the actual value of the product is equal to or greater than desired, cusotmers will be satisfied. On the contrary, if the existing use value of the product is lower than that of their expectation, customers will not be satisfied with the product, and also with the product provider. Therefore, the quality and value of using products and services are the sources of customer satisfaction (Le & Dang, 2018). Another critical aspect of economic CSR is wealth maximization and shareholder return, where most studies show that when the organization engages in wealth maximization activities, it enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty (Onlari and Rotchanakitumnuai, 2010).

H1: Businesses that perform well in economic responsibility will positively affect customer satisfaction.

The legal CSR aspect has been explored as part of CSR activities and has a significant influence on customer satisfaction and retention (e.g., Onlaori and Rotchanakitumnuai, 2010; Galbreath, 2010; McDonald and Thiele, 2008; Tan and Komaran, 2006). Studies show that consumer protection compliance is positively related to satisfaction and that consumers show more confidence when an organization acts in accordance with the law. When enterprises implement proper labor regimes following the law, employees will be satisfied. They will contribute better to the business. As a result, they can improve quality of products, and services to satisfy customers more. Besides, they can also spread good things about the business by word of mouth, which helps build community satisfaction (Le & Dang. 2018).

H2: Businesses that perform well on their legal responsibilities will positively affect customer satisfaction.

Numerous studies show that an organization's ethical practices improve customer satisfaction and retention (e.g., Nareeman & Hassan, 2013; Lee et al., 2012; Galbreath, 2010; Onlaor & Rotchanakitumnuai, 2010; Shaw et al., 2007;). Honesty, fairness, and integrity are closely linked to the ethical responsibility of the CSR aspect (Galbreath, 2010). Most previous studies have shown that justice in providing products and services is associated with customer satisfaction and loyalty (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002; Goodwin & Ross, 1992; Oliver & Swan, 1989). Similarly, employee ethical behavior affects behavioral intentions and customer satisfaction (e.g., Hazratiet al., 2012; Cooper & Frank, 2002). The relationship between ethical behavior and customer loyalty is mediated by the degree of trust, commitment, and reliability (Alrubaiee, 2012). Similarly, brands that deliver on promises improve customer satisfaction (Hanif et al., 2010).

H3: Businesses that perform well in their ethical responsibilities will positively affect customer satisfaction.

b) Charity Responsibility to Customer Satisfaction

Recent studies conducted on the impact of CSR on customer satisfaction and retention show that charitable CSR has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Nareeman & Hassan, 2013). Corporate philanthropy can directly influence customer needs through high levels of customer satisfaction and retention (Lee et al., 2012; Lev, Petrovits & Radhakrishnan, 2010; Galbreath, 2010; Onlaori and Rotchanakitumnuai, 2010; Tan & Komaran, 2005). Charitable aspects such as career-related marketing (CRM) activities, charitable donations or contributions, sponsorships, and volunteering activities (Onlaori & Rotchanakitumnuai, 2010; Roy, 2010) are detected. positively related to customer satisfaction and retention. A research done by Lev et al. (2010) showed that charitable contributions to community development by the organization have a positive impact on customer satisfaction, thereby resulting in high revenue growth, and customer retention.

H4: Businesses that perform well in their charitable responsibilities will positively affect customer satisfaction.

c) Environmental Responsibility to Customer Satisfaction

A study by Le and Dang (2018) concludes that protecting the environment is protecting one's own life and that is the responsibility of everyone in the community. Enterprises must be pioneers in the process of protecting and improving the environment to bring the message of environmental protection to the community. Enterprises that have suitable environmental protection activities, pay efforts to improve the enviromental conditions will satisfy customers and community better.

H5: Environmental performance of the business positively affects customer satisfaction.

d) Satisfaction to the Relationship between CSR and Customer Loyalty

Rychalski and Hudson (2017) found that organizations with satisfied customers also experience customer loyalty. He, Li, and Keung Lai (2011) researched and found that CSR is significantly related to customer satisfaction. In this study, the author hypothesized the influence of CSR on customer satisfaction as well as on customer loyalty. Therefore, this study expects customer satisfaction to be a mediator in the proposed model. Martínez, and del Bosque (2013) reported that customer satisfaction mediates the link between Corporate Social Responsibility and loyalty. Many studies also use customer satisfaction to mediate consumption behavior (Chadha & Kapoor, 2009; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). Therefore, CSR will directly affect customer satisfaction and indirectly affect customer loyalty.

H6: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between corporate social responsibility and customer loyalty.

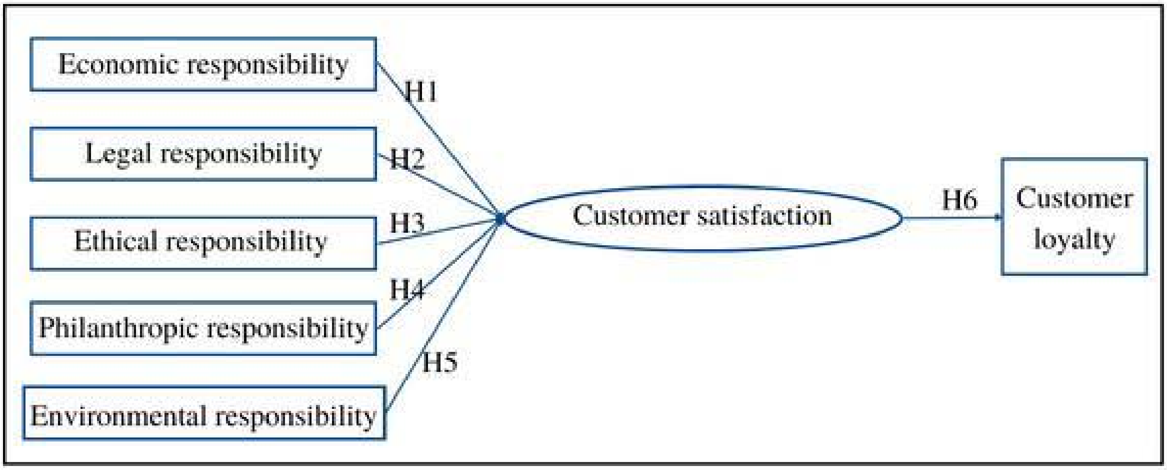

Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

IV. Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative research was carried out by group discussion with beverage consumers in the city. Ho Chi Minh. Group discussion is used to check the appropriateness of the questionnaire design applied in the research context. The questionnaire needs to enable the respondents to express their views and opinions without any language constraints. As a result, the scales or texts in the questionanire have been adjusted accordingly.

The research topic uses a 5-point Likert scale: from 1 point - indicating the degree of completely disagree to 5 points - showing the degree of completely agree as follows: "1" = Totally disagree, "2" = Disagree, "3" = Partially agree, "4" = Agree, "5" = Totally agree. Five dimensions of CSR practices are categorized into (I) "Performing economic responsibility", (II) "Performing legal responsibility", (III) "Performing ethical responsibility", (IV) "Performing charitable responsibilities", (V) "Performing environmental responsibility", one intermediate variable is (VI) "Customer satisfaction", and one dependent variable (VII) "Customer loyalty" row.

The non-probability sampling method is convenient due to time, space and cost limitations. Data were collected through an online survey. The Google Form was sent through social networking platforms such as Facebook and Zalo. The final 287 observations passed the cleaning process for appropriation, then they were available for analyses (Table of measurement items present in Appendix).

The scales first were tested for reliability by Cronch's Alpha index, which was used to analyze EFA exploratory factors to adjust accordingly. Afterward, the confirmatory factor analysis method (CFA) was employed to test the scale, and at the same time, the SEM linear structural model was applied to test the research hypotheses.

V. Research Results

a) Descriptive Statistics

The survey was conducted with 300 beverage consumers in Ho Chi Minh City who were willing to participate. The sample is rather diverse in terms of demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education level, as well as their frequency of beverage uses and income. Through the survey data screening, only 287 valid results remained and could be used to conduct quantitative research. Descriptive statistics show that there is no significant difference in gender between men and women. Regarding diverse age groups, the age from 18 to 26 group takes most of the sample with 51.2%. Regarding education, 63.4% of the respondents are currently studying at universities. The majority group of the respondents who consume soft drinks less than three times per week account for 41.5% of the sample. The average consumption of the respondents is about 5 million VND per month, taking 50.9%.

b) Scale Reliability Test

The results show that Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of all scales are greater than 0.6. The correlation coefficients of all the component scales are above the minimum standard of 0.3. No observed variable has the coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha when excluding variables larger than the common Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that all of the scales are reliable for further analysis.

c) Exploratory Factor Analysis

i. KMO Coefficient and Bartlett's Test

The results achieved the coefficient KMO = 0.872 that is larger than 0.5 and Bartlett's test has the value of Chi-Square is 3767,567 with the Sig significance level of 0.000 which is much smaller than 0.05, showing that factor analysis is appropriate.

ii. *Eigenvalues Coefficients and Explanatory Percents of the Factors*

Performing factor analysis according to Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation gives the results that show that the 29 observed variables were initially grouped into seven groups. The total value of variance extracted is 55.121% that is larger than 50%: satisfactory; then it can be said that these seven factors explain 55,121% of the variation in the data. The Eigenvalues of the factors are all high (>1), the 7th factor has the lowest Eigenvalues of 1,131 is larger than one, meeting the criteria for factor analysis.

d) *Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

i. *Test for Unidirectionality and Fit with Market Data*

Result of the CFA analysis shows that the Chi-squared statistic is 560,365, with 356 degrees of freedom (p= 0.000), CMIN/ df= 1.574 < 3. Other indicators such as IFI = 0.943; TLI=0.934, CFI=0.942 are both greater than 0.9 and RMSEA = 0.045<0.08. Therefore, the scale in the model achieves unidirectionality and is compatible with market data.

FRegarding the GFI index, some studies discussed about its limitation since it is much dependent on the size of the sample and number of scales. Sometimes, it is hard for this indicator to reach 0.9. According to Baumgartner and Homburg (1995) and Doll, Xia, and Torkzadeh (1994), the GFI is still acceptable at 0.8. Therefore, even though GFI = 0.888 < 0.9, this index does not lose the model's fit.

ii. *Check the Convergence Value of the Scale*

The scale achieves convergence value if the normalized regression weights are all higher than 0.5 and the extracted variance is ≥ 0.50 (Gerbing & Anderson 1988); the normalized regression weights of the observed variables, in which the smallest value is 0.652 > 0.5 and the relationships are statistically significant (P-value < 0.05 and extracted variances ≥ 0.50). It can be concluded that the scales of the research concepts are all convergent.

iii. *Evaluate the Reliability of the Scale*

The scale is assessed as reliable when the composite reliability of Composite Reliability CR > 0.6 and total variance extracted AVE > 0.5 (Hair et al.; Nunnally, 1978). The reliability values and the extracted total variance of each scale were checked, and it is found that they both satisfy the requirements of being beyond the thresholds of CR > 0.6 and AVE > 0.5. Thus, the results shown in the table can confirm that the scales meet the requirements.

iv. *Check the Discriminant Validity of the Scale*

The correlation coefficients with standard deviation in the table show that they are all different from 1, in other words, the scales reach discriminant value.

Table 1: Result of Discriminant Value Test between Variables

Relationship			r	SE	CR	1-r	P
LTT	<-->	THTNTT	0.145	0.028	5.155	0.855	***
LTT	<-->	THTNMT	0.101	0.027	3.782	0.899	***
LTT	<-->	THTNKT	0.193	0.031	6.269	0.807	***
LTT	<-->	THTNPL	0.125	0.025	4.939	0.875	***
LTT	<-->	THTNDD	0.072	0.023	3.167	0.928	0.002
LTT	<-->	SHL	0.191	0.029	6,655	0.809	***
THTNTT	<-->	THTNMT	0.209	0.033	6.41	0.791	***
THTNTT	<-->	THTNKT	0.101	0.027	3.714	0.899	***
THTNTT	<-->	THTNPL	0.148	0.027	5.408	0.852	***
THTNTT	<-->	THTNDD	0.052	0.024	2.218	0.948	0.027
THTNTT	<-->	SHL	0.208	0.03	6.88	0.792	***
THTNMT	<-->	THTNKT	0.125	0.028	4.388	0.875	***
THTNMT	<-->	THTNPL	0.126	0.027	4,751	0.874	***
THTNMT	<-->	THTNDD	0.099	0.025	3,925	0.901	***
THTNMT	<-->	SHL	0.199	0.03	6.613	0.801	***
THTNKT	<-->	THTNPL	0.121	0.026	4,701	0.879	***
THTNKT	<-->	THTNDD	0.054	0.023	2.337	0.946	0.019
THTNKT	<-->	SHL	0.171	0.028	6.057	0.829	***
THTNPL	<-->	THTNDD	0.041	0.021	1,988	0.959	0.047
THTNPL	<-->	SHL	0.166	0.027	6.223	0.834	***
THTNDD	<-->	SHL	0.109	0.023	4,708	0.891	***

Note: LTT denotes customer Loyalty; SHL denotes customer Satisfaction; THTNTT denotes Philanthropic responsibility; THTNMT denotes Environmental responsibility; THTNKT denote Economic responsibility; THTNPL denotes Legal responsibility; THTNDD denotes Ethnic responsibility

From the above test results, the data in this research are suitable for applying CFA model and the results are statistically significant. As a result, the data are eligible to analyze the SEM linear structure model to prove the study's hypotheses.

e) Structural Equation Modeling

The results of the linear structure analysis show that the model has 361 degrees of freedom with the Chi-squared statistical value of 587,657 (P- value = 0.000); Chi-squared/df= 1.628 (<3). In addition, we consider additional measures of conformity such as IFI=0.936; TLI=0.927; CFI=0.935 are both greater than 0.9 and RMSEA=0.047 (<0.08). The estimated results of the parameters show that the relationships are statistically significant (p<5%).

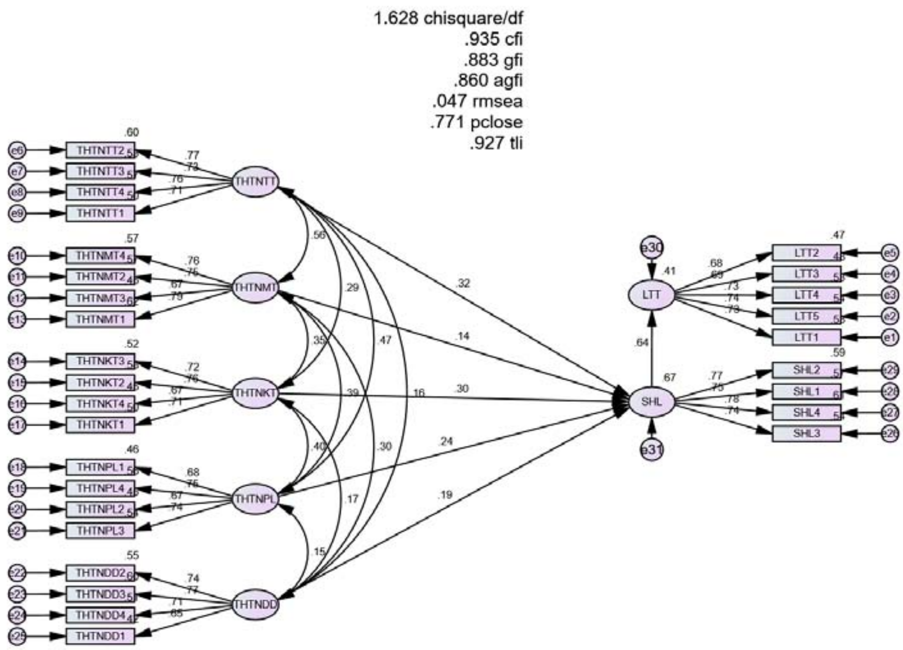

Figure 2: SEM Results of the Normalized Linear Model

Note: LTT denotes customer Loyalty; SHL denotes customer Satisfaction; THTNTT denotes Philanthropic responsibility; THTNMT denotes Environmental responsibility; THTNKT denotes Economic responsibility; THTNPL denotes Legal responsibility; THTNDD denotes Ethnic responsibility

Based on the standardized regression coefficient table of the SEM model, we see that the factors that directly affect Customer Satisfaction (SHL) in the order of the strongest are "Performing charitable responsibilities (THTNTT)" (with beta = 0.312). The second is "Performing moral responsibility" (THTNDD) (with beta = 0.299). The third is "Performing legal responsibility" (THTNPL) (with beta = 0.237). The fourth is "Performing economic responsibility" (THTNKT) (with beta = 0.299). With beta= 0.192). The fifth is "Performing Environmental Responsibility" (THTNMT) (with beta=0.145) and the impact of "Customer Satisfaction" (SHL) on "Customer Loyalty" (LTT) with beta = 0.636.

Table 2: Test Results (Normalized)

Hypothesis	Direct relationship	Regression coefficient (standardized)	P	Conclusion
H1	THTNKT → SHL	0.192	0.000	Accept
H2	THTNPL → SHL	0.237	0.000	Accept
H3	THTNDD → SHL	0.299	0.000	Accept
H4	THTNTT → SHL	0.321	0.000	Accept
H5	THTNMT → SHL	0.145	0.000	Accept
H6	SHL → LTT	0.636	0.000	Accept

Note: LTT denotes customer Loyalty; SHL denotes customer Satisfaction; THTNTT denotes Philanthropic responsibility; THTNMT denotes Environmental responsibility; THTNKT denotes Economic responsibility; THTNPL denotes Legal responsibility; THTNDD denotes Ethnic responsibility

The authors also conducted testing for the differences in customer loyalty for different groups of respondents in terms of demographic characteristics. F-test of ANOVA shows that there is only significant difference in loyalty among different groups who have different frequency of using beverage products. There is no significant differences in loyalty levels among the respondents in terms of gender, age, education, and income.

VI. Result Discussion

The analysis results indicate that hypothesis H1 holds, as such, Economic responsibility has a positive effect on customer satisfaction with the converted regression coefficient of 0.192. Similarly, the hypotheses H2, H3, H4 and H5 were confirmed that indicate the positive impacts of Legal responsibility, Ethical responsibility, Charity responsibility and Environmental responsibility on Customer satisfaction. The regression coefficients of the above variables respectively are 0.237, 0.299, 0.321, and 0.145. Moreover, THypothesis H6 holds at the 95% confidence level with $p < 0.05$, tto confirm that customer satisfaction has a positive impact on customer loyalty with a standardized regression value of 0.636. The higher customer satisfaction, the more loyal customers are to the business, and its products.

The overall results show that the relationship between the factors built in the model is statistically significant (all hypotheses are accepted). The out-standing implementation of CSR contributes to strengthening the satisfaction and loyalty of consumers for the company's products, leading to repeat purchase behavior of consumers.

Finally, CSR components have different impacts on customer satisfaction, in order from largest to smallest namely Charitable Responsibility, Ethical Responsibility, Legal Responsibility, Economic Responsibility, and Responsibility. Environmental Responsibility.

VII. Conclusion and Implications

Based on the theoretical review, a research model was developed for this study. The study questions were answered by analyzing data collected from a sample of 287 beverage consumers in Ho Chi Minh City. With the results obtained, this study has positive contributions in practice. Regarding the scale used in the study, the research results show that the entire scale used is reliable and can be used for other studies. Regarding the influence of corporate social responsibility on the continued purchase behavior of beverage consumers, research has shown that all five CSR components have an impact on customer loyalty through mediating variables Customer satisfaction.

The research questions have been answered. Accordingly, the level of consumer awareness of beverage products with CSR is high, consumers are increasingly interested in corporate social responsibility activities to have a favorable or harsh view of the business and then have the trust or take repurchase of the company's products. The higher the level of consumer awareness about CSR, the higher the loyalty and continued buying behavior of consumers with the company's socially responsible products. Research results confirm that the implementation of CSR components has an intermediate impact on customer satisfaction and the impact level of each component is different. In which, performing charitable responsibilities has the greatest impact on customer satisfaction. That is the explanation that beverage customers are interested in corporate charity activities.

Managers need to have a long-term strategy in building and implementing Corporate Social Responsibility according to an appropriate roadmap. Enterprises will have to outline step by step the implementation of the content and components of CSR (economic, legal, ethical, charity, environment) not only to ensure the correct criteria but also to be appropriate and to ensure the benefits by stakeholders.

Beverage enterprises should consider the following evidence-based implications to improve their social responsibility to develop strategies to improve the quality of people's lives, as a foundation for the quality of future products including employees and employees, and community such as creating more jobs for the local people or building more professional staff.

Regarding Economic Responsibility: Beverage enterprises need to take social benefits for employees and other stakeholders into their business strategies. As a result, they will improve the benefits that they share with their stakeholders including their employees, and communities.

Regarding Legal Responsibilities: The enterprise must ensure compliance with the provisions of the law, show the spirit of " respect the law", and the product of the enterprise must ensure that they concern issues such as are qualified certificates, food safety, consumers' rights, and environment. Enterprises must be transparent about recruitment and employee benefits in accordance with regulations. They need to ensure equal opportunities for employees in reward and promotion to create an equal environment for all members to strive for the job position. At the same time, they should regularly update the legal regulations related to the beverage industry such as labor regulations for all employees.

Regarding Ethical Responsibility: Beverage consumers will care about the company's business activities in accordance with social standards and basic ethical categories. Companies need to respect ethical standards in their behaviors toward employees, partners and especially customers.

Regarding Charity Responsibilities: Companies should involve more in activities that aim to improve charitable responsibilities including coordinating with local authorities and functional agencies to organize charity activities. They also need to ensure that charity is meaningful, targeted, and timely. Some activities need to be considered including pandemic aftermaths, floods, donations to support the poor, scholarships for students. Companies can also cooperate and set up several charitable organizations, serving the community and society.

Regarding Environmental Responsibility: Companies need to pay more attention to the natural environment. They need to concern how the production process affects the environment. The recommended solution for beverage businesses is to completely recycle packaging, collect and recycle all plastic bottles and cans sold on the market. Beverage businesses are encouraged to cooperate with stakeholders, non-profit organizations, and the community to implement environmental programs such as recycling, reuse, and water safety programs.

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Appendix

Table 1: Measurement Items

TT	Encode	Statements	Source
I	Carrying Out Economic Responsibility		
1.1	THTNKT1	You see that the beverage company always focuses on developing sales channels of goods and services to maximize income.	Saleem & Gopinath, 2015; Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008
1.2	THTNKT2	You see that the beverage company always has to improve the quality and variety of products to increase sales profits.	
1.3	THTNKT3	You see that the company always creates beverage products that compete with other companies in the market.	
1.4	THTNKT4	You see that the beverage company always creates new products and has higher use value for customers.	
II	Carrying Out Legal Responsibilities		
2.1	THTNPL1	You see that the beverage company conducts business activities in accordance with the policies and regulations of the State and the law.	Saleem & Gopinath, 2015; Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008
2.2	THTNPL2	You see that the beverage company always ensures legal compliance with the residents and the locality.	
2.3	THTNPL3	You see that the beverage company always fulfills all its legal obligations to its employees.	
2.4	THTNPL4	You see that the beverage company always complies with the necessary legal obligations to customers.	
III	Carrying Out Ethical Responsibilities		
3.1	THTNDD1	You see that the beverage company always operates in accordance with social standards and basic ethical categories.	Saleem & Gopinath, 2015; Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008
3.2	THTNDD2	You see that the beverage company always respects ethical standards for employees.	
3.3	THTNDD3	You see that the beverage company always ensures business ethics standards for its partners.	

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3.4	THTNDD4	You see that the beverage company always tries to respect ethical standards in its relationships with customers.	
IV	Carrying Out Philanthropic Responsibilities		
4.1	THTNTT1	You see that the beverage company always tries its best to participate in charity and sponsorship activities for the locality.	Saleem & Gopinath, 2015; Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008
4.2	THTNTT2	You see that the beverage company always sends its officers and employees to participate in social volunteering activities.	
4.3	THTNTT3	You see that the beverage company always establishes funds or sponsors for the development of education, local medical schools and the community.	
4.4	THTNTT4	You see that the beverage company always takes care of the difficult issues of employees such as during the epidemic period, welfare regimes and a safe working environment.	
V	Carrying Out Environmental Responsibility		
5.1	THTNMT1	You see that the beverage company always has an exhaust and waste treatment system in accordance with the law.	Saleem & Gopinath, 2015; Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008
5.2	THTNMT2	You see that the beverage company always develops and publishes a plan to treat and conserve energy.	
5.3	THTNMT3	You see that the beverage company is always aiming to produce and develop environmentally friendly products.	
5.4	THTNMT4	You see that the beverage company is always trying to upgrade its waste and waste water recycling systems.	
VI	Customer Satisfaction		
6.1	SHL1	I am satisfied with my beverage purchase decision and with the brand's product	Helm et al., 2010
6.2	SHL2	I feel safe when using beverage products from a company that does a good job of social responsibility.	
6.3	SHL3	I am completely satisfied with the beverage brand that I use.	
6.4	SHL4	The company delivers exactly what I would expect from a beverage product.	
VII	Customer Loyalty		
7.1	LTT1	My top choice is the product of beverage companies that do good CSR	Wu & Wang, 2014
7.2	LTT2	When a beverage company does a good job with CSR and launches a new product, I will definitely choose to buy it to support it.	
7.3	LTT3	I feel attached to a beverage brand that does a good job of corporate social responsibility.	
7.4	LTT4	I always want to buy soft drinks from the company and will continue to buy in the near future.	
7.5	LTT5	I will recommend the company's soft drinks to family, friends and colleagues when they want to purchase.	

Note: LTT denotes customer Loyalty; SHL denotes customer Satisfaction; THTNTT denotes Philanthropic responsibility; THTNMT denotes Environmental responsibility; THTNKT denote Economic responsibility; THTNPL denotes Legal responsibility; THTNDD denotes Ethnic responsibility

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Brand Positioning and the Consumer Mind Case Study: Maggi Noodles

By Manya Sinha & Ms. Abhilasha Raj

Abstract- This research paper discusses Brand Positioning and its effects on the Consumer Mind.

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To study the same, a case study of the famous brand, "Maggi Noodles" has been done. Maggi is a brand that produces sauces, seasonings, soups, and their most famous noodles. Maggi noodles are found in almost every Indian Household.

An empirical analysis of its positioning in the minds of the consumers has been completed with the help of a questionnaire. The questionnaire has been filled out by consumers belonging to different age groups. This analysis will help one find how Maggi impacts its consumers.

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BRANDPOSITIONINGANDTHECONSUMERMINDCASESTUDYMAGGINOODLES

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I. Introduction

a) What is a Brand?

A brand is a product, service, or concept that is publicly distinguished from other products, services, or concepts so that it can be easily communicated and usually marketed. (Hanna, 2022)

They are identified by their logos, taglines, and/or other graphical representations.

b) Brand Positioning and Consumer Mind

In this era of globalization, consumers have n number of choices of products and services in the market. To dominate the market, the producers need to establish their brand in the mindsof the consumers.

Brand positioning is the unique space a brand occupies in the brains of the customers.

It makes customers view a specific brand in a unique way by associating emotions, traits, feelings, and sentiments with it. These associations make it stand out from the competition.

Positioning is usually the reason why customers buy a specific brand whose product doesn't necessarily differ from the competitors. (Pahwa, 2021)

A brand positioning strategy requires the answer to the following questions:

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1. What is the target market?
2. What is the product/service?
3. How is the product/service beneficial?
4. What makes the product/service different from other similar products/services?

A good brand positioning strategy has the following features:

1. *Target Market:* A good brand strategy should hit the target market of theproduct/service.
2. *Purpose- Defining:* A good brand strategy should clearly define the purpose of theproduct/service.
3. *Benefits:* The benefits of the product/service should be elucidated in the saidstrategy.
4. *Uniqueness:* The strategy should explain how the product/service is differentfrom others of its kind.
5. *Brief:* A good brand strategy should be short and crisp and not have unnecessaryinformation that is of no use to the consumers.
6. *Attractive:* It should catch the eyes of the customers right away with its attractive logos and tagline and language that can be easily comprehended by the customers.

c) Types of Brand Positioning Strategy

There are various ways in which marketers position their brand in the minds of consumers. The factors include the product's Unique Selling Point (USP), current market conditions, etc. The types of brand-positioning strategies that umbrella other strategies as well.

1. *Comparative:* In this strategy, products/services are compared with others of a similar kind. For example, Stayfree advertisements show using Stayfree pads as compared to normal pads and how their pads have better leak protection and do not cause bad odor as compared to the others.
2. *Differentiation:* In this strategy, the unique features of the product/service are highlighted. This makes the brand stand out in the market. For example, Apple advertises its products as a luxury.
3. *Segmentation:* In this strategy, products/services are segmented for a specific group of people according to their needs. For example, the women's Horlicks advertisement focuses on the bone health ofwomen after they reach their 30s.
4. *Value-Based:* In this strategy, products/services are marketed by associating a certain value with them. For example, Maggi advertises its product by

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ascertaining that it brings family and friends together.

5. *Problem and Solution-based Positioning:* In this strategy, the product/service are advertised as the solution to a particular problem. For example, the "5 problems, 1 solution" advertisement for Loreal Paris Shampoos.
6. *Lifestyle Positioning:* In this strategy, the products/services are marketed by making them a positive addition to one's lifestyle. For example, Lipton Green Tea advertisements portray that the product helps in weight loss and that it should be added to one's lifestyle.

(Squareup, 2021) (Pahwa, 2021) (Patel, 2022)

d) Case Study: Maggi

"Maggi" is a brand that predominantly supplies noodles along with sauces, seasonings, and soups. It originated in Switzerland in the late 19th century. It was later acquired by Nestle in1947.

In India, Maggi noodles are a product that will be found in almost every household. These instant noodles are enjoyed by everyone ranging from kids and teenagers to even adults andsenior citizens.

They are a must-have for every hosteller and a midnight snack for all students pulling all- nighters for exams. While Maggi noodles are enjoyed normally, some consumers like to customize them with various ingredients ranging from vegetables, corn, and different seasonings to butter, cheese, chicken, and eggs as well. Some people like to have them drywhile some like the soupy version. Some people enjoy eating Maggi noodles in solitude while others enjoy them with friends and family. It becomes a companion in all gatherings.

Maggi has positioned itself in the minds of consumers as an instant snack that only requires 2 minutes to be prepared. It can be enjoyed when one is happy and is a mood-uplifter when oneis sad.

Maggi has launched its variety including Chicken Maggi, Maggi Pasta, Maggi Masters of India, Maggi Hot Heads for spice lovers, and many more.

Maggi uses a Value-Based strategy to advertise its product. It portrays how Maggi brings people together from friends to family. It also shows that Maggi is a constant in everyone's life and while life moves on, the taste and the vibe of Maggi remains the same.

e) Maggi Controversy

In May 2015, food safety regulators from Barabanki a district of Uttar Pradesh, India reported that samples of Maggi 2 Minute Noodles had unexpectedly high levels of Monosodium.

Glutamate (MSG), as well as up to 17 times the permissible limit of lead. This finding led to multiple market withdrawals and investigations in India and beyond. (Wikipedia, n. d.)

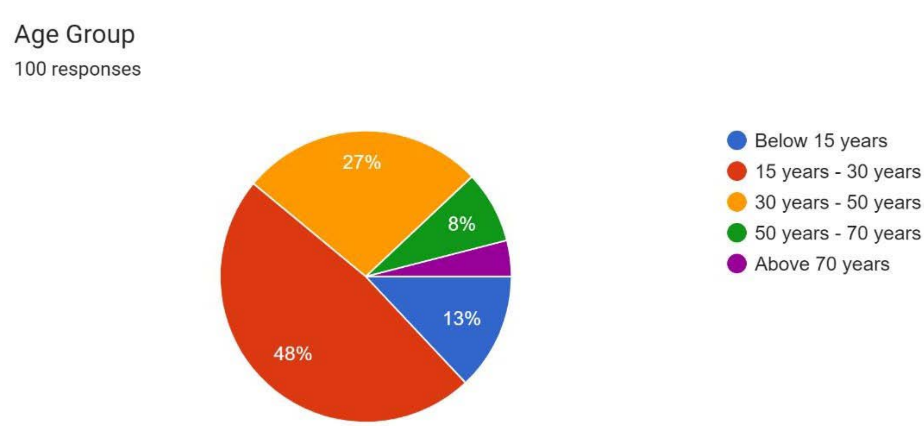
During the controversy, consumers switched to different brands like Yippee noodles, Top Ramen, etc. After the controversy was over, Maggi noodles came back into the market and foundtheir position yet again. Its consumers were unhappy about the same but the consumption beganagain in no time post its come-back.

The following questionnaire seeks to find how Maggi Noodles has positioned itself in the minds of its consumers. The questions are simple and easy to answer. The questionnaire has been filled by people of various age groups. The analysis of the same has been done further.

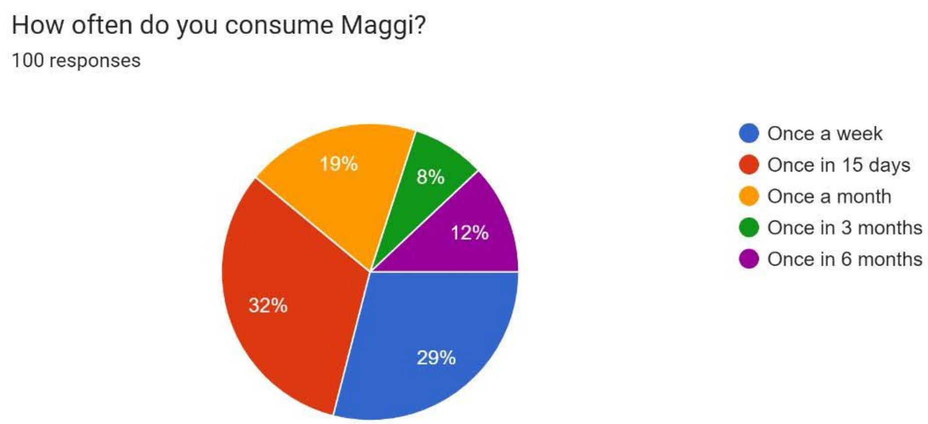
II. Methodology

The method of empirical analysis has been used. 100 respondents have filled out thequestionnaire. The data is analysed using pie charts.

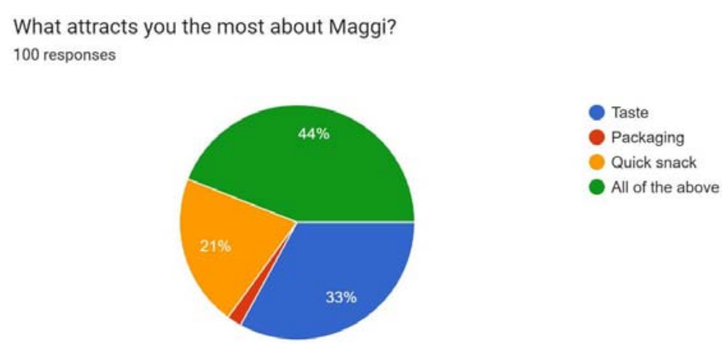
III. Data analysis and Result



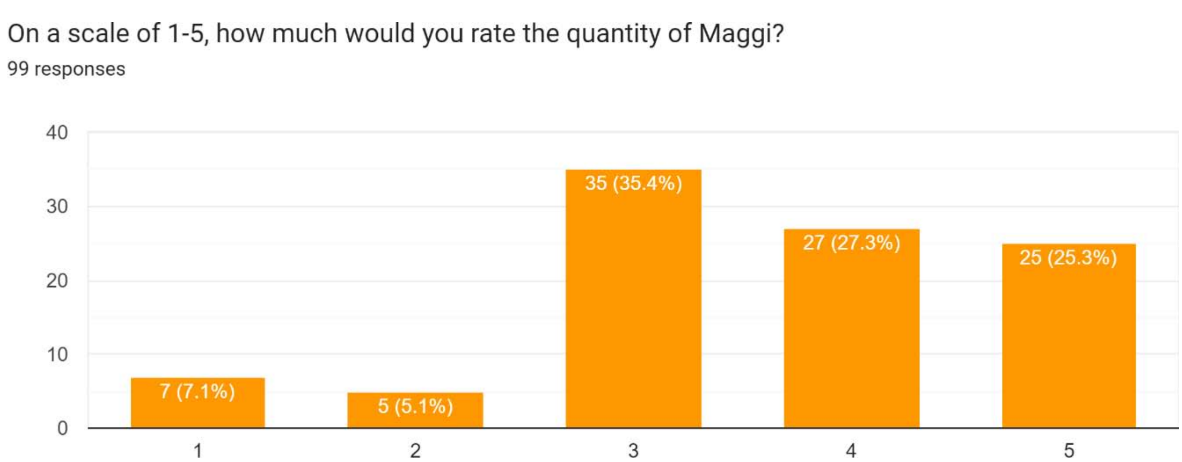
Most of the consumers belong to the 15 years-30 years age group. This includes school and college-going students and some working professionals. At the same time, it is clear consumers also belong to the 30 years- 50 years age group. This analysis shows that peopleof all age groups (especially 15 years – 50 years) enjoy consuming Maggi Noodles.



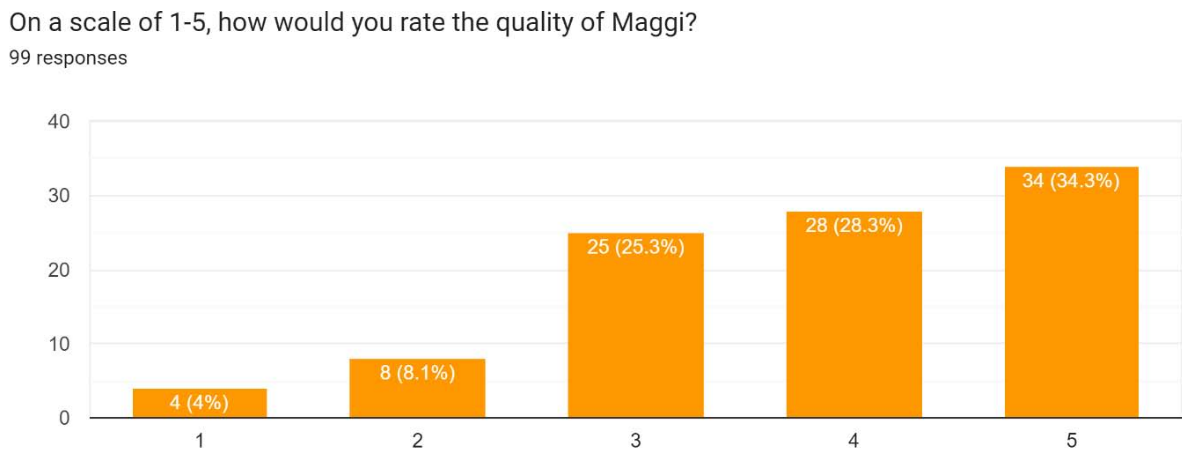
32% of consumers consume Maggi Noodles once in 15 days. 29% of consumers consume Maggi Noodles once a week. This indicates that Maggi Noodles is a frequent snack in theIndian Households.



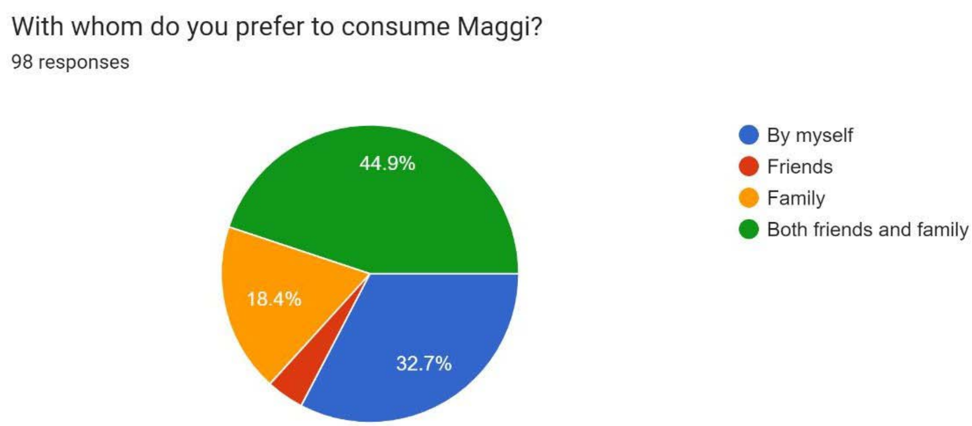
While 33% of consumers are attracted by the taste, 21% of them are attracted as it is a quick snack. 44% of consumers are attracted by all three qualities i.e., taste, packaging and it beinga quick snack.



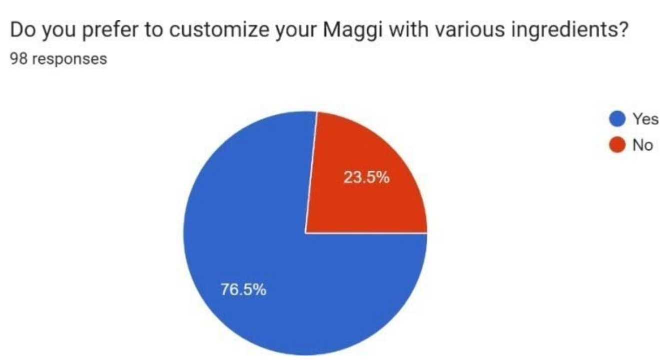
Most consumers have rated the quality of Maggi Noodles from 3-5.



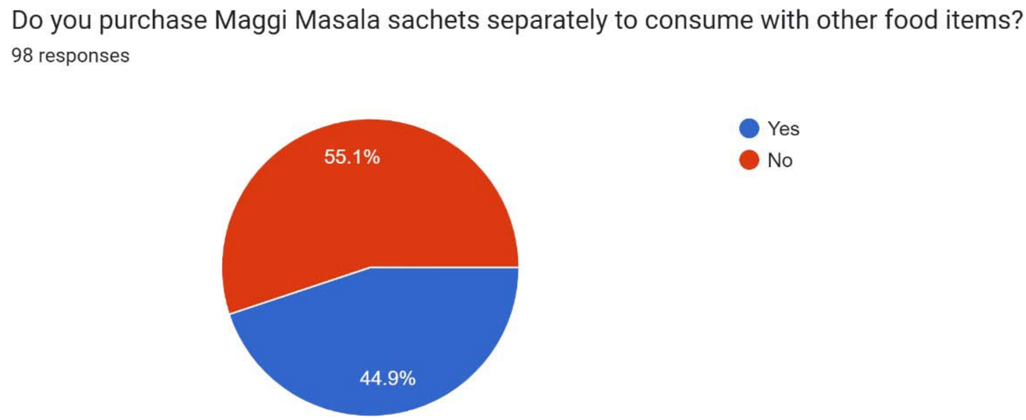
Most people have rated the quality of Maggi to the highest i.e. 5.



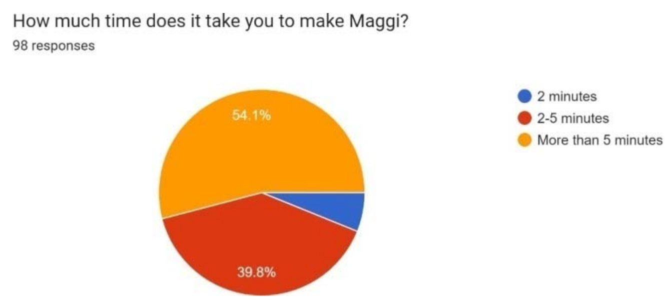
While 44.9% of the consumers consume Maggi noodles with friends and family, 32.7% of them consume it by themselves. This indicates that Maggi keeps one company in solitude andalso is a great snack to enjoy with friends and family.



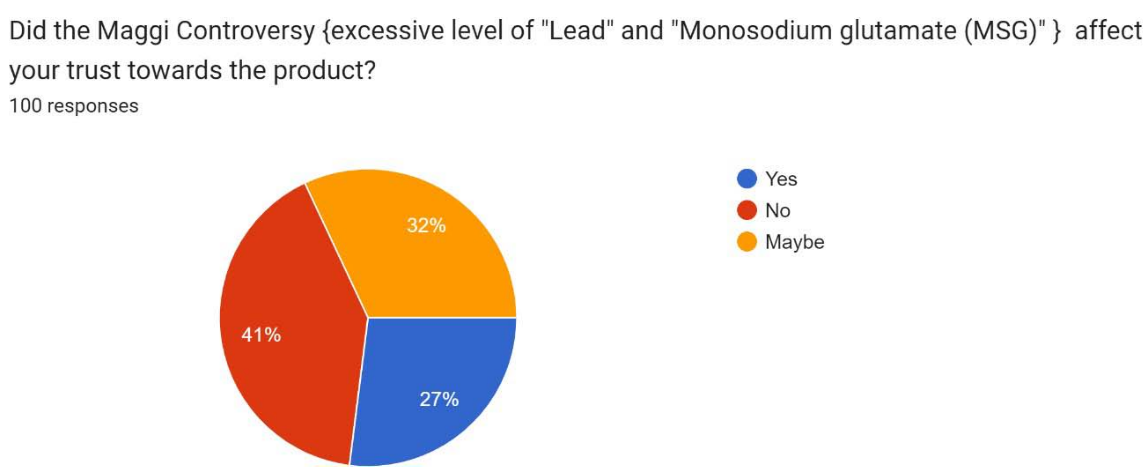
76.5% of consumers enjoy customising their Maggi Noodles with various ingredients while 23.5% of them enjoy it simply. This shows that while Maggi tastes good as it is, it also givesone the opportunity to customise their meal.



55.1% of consumers do not purchase separate Maggi Masala sachets while 44.9% of them do. This indicates that almost half the consumers do enjoy putting Maggi Masala in other meals.



Contrary to what is shown in the advertisement, most consumers take more than 5 minutes toprepare their Maggi Noodles.



The Lead and MSG controversy affected the trust of mere 27% of consumers' poplulation. While 41% of them did not lose trust regarding the same, 32% of them were not sure.

IV. Result

Maggi Noodles have successfully positioned itself in the minds of its consumers as a product that can be consumed by people of all age groups. It is enjoyed by consumers ranging from 15 years to even above 70 years (predominantly from 15 years to 30 years). Overall, they feel that the quality and the quantity of the product are good. It can be enjoyed with family and friends and also in solitude. Most consumers were unaffected by the Lead and MSG Controversy which indicates the love they have for the product. Most of them approximately take more than 2 minutes to prepare and they like to customize their meal with various ingredients. Some of them prefer to purchase separate Maggi sachets for their meals.

V. Conclusion

A brand is a product, service, or concept that is publicly distinguished from other products, services, or concepts so that it can be easily communicated and usually marketed. Brand positioning is the unique space a brand occupies in the brains of the customers. It makes customers view a specific brand in a unique way by associating emotions, traits, feelings, and sentiments with it. These associations make it stand out from the competition.

Maggi has done a good job when it comes to brand positioning and impacting the minds of consumers. They enjoy consuming the product frequently (most of them). They enjoy the taste and the fact that it is a quick snack. They enjoy consuming it with friends and family and even when they are alone. Hence, Maggi keeps them good company. The Lead and MSG controversy did not affect most consumers which shows their love (and maybe their habit of consuming) the product.

VI. Recommendations

Maggi noodles are doing a pretty good job with its brand positioning. However, as its consumers love it so much, it should keep into account its health factors and not let a controversy like the Lead MSG one happen again.

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Customer Loyalty in the Fitness Club Industry: The Role of Club Communication, Customer Expectation and Perceived Service Quality

By Mohammad Alauddin
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Abstract- Recently, fitness clubs have become very popular among urban Chinese people due to increased health awareness and the lack of outdoor physical exercise space. The study aims to provide an extended view of industrial business-to-consumer (B2C) connections by linking the theoretical steams of marketing communication. The study examines how firms' marketing communication (FMC) affects customer expectations (EXP) and perceived service quality (PSQ), subsequently influencing fitness club customer satisfaction (CS) and customer loyalty (CL). An online survey was conducted in China, and 300 valid respondents were taken as samples from large fitness club chains. Elementary analyses were done using IBM SPSS version 25; structural equation modeling (SEM) was tested using SmartPLS version 3.2.8. The study demonstrates that FMC is positively linked to EXP and PSQ, which subsequently helps build CL toward fitness clubs in China. Moreover, communication has a negative complementary full-mediation effect on CL through expectation and satisfaction and a positive complementary full-mediation effect on CL through PSQ and CS.

Keywords: consumer expectation, consumer satisfaction, perceived service quality, consumer loyalty, firm marketing communication, fitness club, china.

GJMBR-E Classification: LCC: GV557 .C86

CUSTOMERLOYALTYINTHEFITNESSCLUBINDUSTRYTHEROLEOFCLUBCOMMUNICATIONCUSTOMEREXPECTATIONANDPERCEIVEDSERVICEQUALITY

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:

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Abstract- Recently, fitness clubs have become very popular among urban Chinese people due to increased health awareness and the lack of outdoor physical exercise space. The study aims to provide an extended view of industrial business-to-consumer (B2C) connections by linking the theoretical steams of marketing communication. The study examines how firms' marketing communication (FMC) affects customer expectations (EXP) and perceived service quality (PSQ), subsequently influencing fitness club customer satisfaction (CS) and customer loyalty (CL). An online survey was conducted in China, and 300 valid respondents were taken as samples from large fitness club chains. Elementary analyses were done using IBM SPSS version 25; structural equation modeling (SEM) was tested using SmartPLS version 3.2.8. The study demonstrates that FMC is positively linked to EXP and PSQ, which subsequently helps build CL toward fitness clubs in China. Moreover, communication has a negative complementary full-mediation effect on CL through expectation and satisfaction and a positive complementary full-mediation effect on CL through PSQ and CS. Lastly, the theoretical and practical implications of communication on CS and CL in the fitness club sector are discussed.

Keywords: consumer expectation, consumer satisfaction, perceived service quality, consumer loyalty, firm marketing communication, fitness club, china.

I. Introduction

Over the past few decades, China has seen a proliferation in the health and fitness market, from large-scale chains to small independent gyms that offer workout facilities for a membership fee (Kaur et al., 2020b). This fitness club typically offers members weightlifting, cardio, yoga, Pilates, and state-of-art fitness equipment (Hu, 2004; Wang & Lin, 2000). Since China opened its economy to the rest of the world, the nation has become a global economic powerhouse, and millions of its citizens have entered the middle-income bracket (Shira & Cyrill, 2019). With the increased disposable income and health awareness, more individuals prioritize a healthy and aspirational lifestyle, resulting in more sports and fitness-related service openings and membership registrations in almost all Chinese cities and urban areas(Zhang et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2022). Many large and well-known local and international companies have entered the market, offering various services and products and competing for market share. In addition, the Chinese government has invested heavily in public sports programs and facilities to promote physical activity and health among the population (Chikán et al., 2022). According to Daxueconsulting (2022), as of December 2020, the number of fitness clubs in mainland China was approximately 100,000. The Chinese fitness industry has been further boosted during the 2022 Winter Olympics (Hou et al., 2019; Pizzo et al., 2020), which has created an environment for people to join fitness clubs easily and maintained the fitness club industry growth as well as become more competitive (Ainsworth & Sallis, 2022; Chikán et al., 2022).

Prior research indicates that the Covid-19 outbreak ushered in a new era in the fitness sector (Davalos, 2021). Conventional fitness clubs have experienced a substantial drop in popularity since early 2020 (Rada & Szabó, 2022), prompting them to pursue a hybrid approach combining online and in-person workouts to survive and remain competitive (Almasri et al., 2020; Shandilya, 2021). The widespread usage of online media has created a demand for fitness apps, virtual training, online classes, and in-home equipment (Wang et al., 2023; Ziółkowska & Taraszkiewicz, 2022). Greater digital transformation investment has made the customer decision-making journey increasingly non-linear, allowing them to engage with different brand channels. More and more members have become accustomed to exercising at home (Kaur et al., 2020a). According to Mardhiah (2022), 90% of participants agreed to incorporate virtual classes into their daily routine exercise even after the epidemic. At this time of globalization, customers are demanding and mostly prefer high-quality products and services (Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Health and fitness club chains must continually evolve strategies to communicate with target customers to understand their expectations to possess a competitive advantage (Xu et al., 2021). Generally, customer expectations (EXP) are pre-consumption beliefs about products and services (Robinson, 2006). Customers may form their expectations based on their knowledge, past consumption experiences, and how the firm or brand

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communicates with them (Ofir & Simonson, 2007; Pedragosa & Correia, 2009). Expectations are also in overdrive and only satisfied if met or exceeded (Peitzika et al., 2020). Conversely, when they cannot meet, this may lead to current customer churn (Lu et al., 2012) and affect customer loyalty (CL) building to the firm (Kwon et al., 2022).

In today's increasingly competitive marketplace, customers are the organization's primary focus (CİZRELİOĞULLARI et al., 2021). Developing consumer satisfaction and loyalty by providing desired products or services has become more critical to retain customers and gaining competitive advantages over competitors (Almsalam, 2014; Čáslavová & Čmakalová, 2014; Gonçalves & Diniz, 2015; Pedragosa & Correia, 2009). Traditionally, firm marketing communication (FMC) has been linked to advertising and one-way communications in mass channels that aim to persuade new prospects and share information(De Pelsmacker et al., 2007). Recently, however, communication has taken on a more comprehensive and interactive approach, including engaging with customers through digital channels such as social media, email, and web-chat (Järvinen et al., 2012). It also includes content marketing, such as blogs and videos, to educate customers and build relationships(Keller, 2009; Kwak et al., 2006). This type of FMCs aims to create a two-way dialogue with customers and form an emotional connection to inspire loyalty and advocacy (Dimyati, 2015). Additionally, this type of FMCs success depends on understanding customer needs and preferences and delivering relevant and timely messages to customers (Peltier et al., 2006; Sashi, 2012). It requires combining traditional and digital communication techniques, building relationships, and creating experiences that generate customer satisfaction (CS) and customer loyalty (CL) (Hänninen & Karjaluoto, 2017; Sayekti et al., 2019).

However, most previous studies have predominantly concentrated on marketing communication from diverse industrial business-to-business perspectives (Gilliland & Johnston, 1997; Hänninen & Karjaluoto, 2017; Järvinen et al., 2012; Yadava et al., 2022). By contrast, very little scholarly attention has been paid to the beneficial effects of marketing communication, particularly in industrial business-to-consumer settings (Bakator et al., 2017; Dimyati, 2015; Halimi et al., 2011; Zephaniah et al., 2020). Furthermore, even relatively fewer empirical investigations thus far have investigated the relationship between FMCs and brand loyalty from the fitness club context (Lim et al., 2016; Meesala & Paul, 2018; Nursanti & Tomoliyus, 2021). The study mainly examines whether and how fitness club FMC affects the EXP and PSQ of fitness clubs. Additionally, to examine whether and how FMC, EXP, and PSQ comprehensively influence CS and CL toward fitness clubs.

Prior empirical research has demonstrated that approximately 80 percent of the revenue generated by health and fitness centers comes from membership fees (Gacek, 2017; Lim et al., 2016). Nevertheless, retaining current club members is the most pressing challenge for the health and fitness club industry, as the average club loses more than 40 percent of its members annually (MacIntosh & Law, 2015), resulting in unstable revenues and high marketing costs to attract new customers (Henry, 2019; Santos, 2016). Therefore, fitness facilities must prioritize CS and CL to maintain and expand customer flow and gain a competitive advantage (Gonçalves et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018). The study is one of the first studies that utilized the marketing communication theory to understand how the communications of fitness clubs influence EXP and the service quality of fitness clubs. Secondly, the study conducted a comprehensive study, including FMC, EXP, and PSQ, to comprehend its beneficial effect on loyalty building, particularly toward a fitness club in China. Finally, the study demonstrates the mediating role of EXP, PSQ, and CS in the link between FMC and CL.

II. Literature Review

a) *Chinese Fitness Club Industry*

With the continuous growth of the world's population in the 21st century, urbanization has expanded, improving education, transportation, and jobs (Hou et al., 2019). Nevertheless, urbanization has raised the likelihood that residents will develop chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, lung cancer, stroke, heart disease, asthma, depression, and loneliness (Lopez & Hynes, 2006). China has experienced rapid urbanization predominantly due to the industrial revolution, which has increased the number of factory and mill laborers (Wan et al., 2022). This has led rural people to migrate to urban areas, putting pressure on infrastructure and housing (You et al., 2022). As a result, the surrounding environment of cities is severely impacted by pollution, overcrowding, and noise (Aziz et al., 2012; Zhang & Li, 2014). Moreover, most residents reside in densely populated locations (Hong, 1997; McMichael, 2000). Under this circumstance, fitness clubs have become essential to a healthy lifestyle for urban citizens (Pedragosa & Correia, 2009; Zhai, 2021). China's fitness industry has undergone numerous phases of development over the past few decades (Hong, 1997), demonstrating its tremendous growth (Holman, 2018; Sims, 2011). In the 1980s, Beijing had the first commercial Chinese fitness club (Malleret, 2021). According to the recent report of "the China Gym and Health Club Industries market Report 2022," the fitness sector has risen by about 20% annually, and the gym-goer population reached 70.29 million, accounting for 5.02% of the population (Daxueconsulting, 2022). In addition, the 2022 Winter Olympics increased China's

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fitness business by offering additional workout options. The Chinese fitness industry comprises commercial and traditional fitness clubs (Deloitte, 2019; Nan, 2022). Commercial fitness clubs are privately owned clubs providing personal training and group sessions (Nan, 2022; Zhou & Tuo, 2022). However, the Chinese fitness business is highly fragmented and lacks a clear market share leader (Reogma, 2020). According to Deloitte (2019), "the top 10 gym and fitness clubs in China account for only about 10% of the total market." United Fitness, Anytime Fitness, and Orange Fitness dominate this industry and compete for market share among foreign fitness clubs (Henry, 2019). Thus, new entrants and network expansions are likely to increase competition (Malleret, 2021; Santos, 2016).

b) *Consumer Loyalty*

Building customer loyalty (CL) has become a primary goal for many sports and fitness organizations, as loyal customers provide the financial foundation for a program and support all of the organization's objectives (Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003; Butcher et al., 2001; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Oliver (1999defines CL as a firmly held commitment to continuously buy a chosen product or service from the same organization or brand set, despite situational factors and marketing efforts that may trigger switching behavior (Kim et al., 2020). Thus, it is important to comprehend the needs and expectations of customers, and to gain the aims, an organization needs to focus on CL. CL can be understood as a two-dimensional variable, attitudinal and behavioral (Rowley & Dawes, 2000). Attitudinal loyalty is a deeply held commitment to consistently repurchase or patronize a specific product, service, or brand in an exchange relationship based on experience (Czepiel et al., 1987). Behavioral loyalty, the usual emphasis highly on the behavioral aspect of consumers, can be defined as a going propensity to buy repetitively from the same brand or store, usually as one of several (Khajeheian & Ebrahimi, 2020). CL is critical for businesses as it shows consumers' biased responses over time toward a particular product or stores out of a set of stores (Suchánek & Králová, 2019). Marketing practitioners are increasingly concerned with CL patronizing a profitable customer relationship with their clients (Chiou & Droge, 2006). It was previously estimated that wining new customers creates six times more cost than maintaining existing customers (Rosenberg & Czepiel, 1984). Hence, CL becomes a crucial trait that underpins the success or failure of an organization (Lee et al., 2010).

c) *Consumer Satisfaction*

Customer faces a diverse range of products that can satisfy their certain needs (Kotler, 1997). They choose among those products that best fit their expectation (Suh et al., 2019). Spreng et al. (1996) state that satisfaction is a feeling of content that arises when one compares their perception of the quality of a product as a whole with their expectation. According to Fornell et al. (1996), consumer satisfaction (CS) is a feeling of pleasure and disappointment after the consumption or use of a particular product or service. According to the "expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm, "CS is also based on perceived value (Zhang et al., 2022), leading to a personal comparison between EXP and the PSQ given by firms to their customers (Oliver, 1980). The paradigm suggests that CS is a relative concept that is always judged against a standard about a product or service, brand or business (Mittal & Lassar, 1998). Moreover, consumers always buy goods and services with anticipated service quality. The expectation level then becomes a standard against which the product is judged. Once the product or service has been used, outcomes are compared against expectations. If the outcome matches the EXP, confirmation occurs. Conversely, disconfirmation occurs where there is a difference between EXP and PSQ. In this stage, a customer may be either satisfied or dissatisfied as a result of a positive or negative difference between EXP and PSQ. When service quality is better than initially expected, there is a positive disconfirmation between EXP and PSQ that results in satisfaction. However, when service quality is not as good as expected, there is a negative disconfirmation between EXP and PSQ, which causes dissatisfaction. This causal sequence has also been supported in the sports and fitness club context (Bhattacherjee, 2001). Earlier literature has also viewed satisfaction as transactional and global (or cumulative) (Gonçalves & Diniz, 2015; Tsitskari et al., 2014b; Xu et al., 2007). Transactional satisfaction focuses on assessing a consumer's perception following a particular transaction experience (Fournier & Mick, 1999). Transaction satisfaction is short-term, and research in this context focuses relatively on narrow conceptual boundaries (Jones & Kim, 2010; Theodorakis et al., 2004). Global satisfaction is determined by comparing the overall EXPs of the firm's delivered products or services to their perceptions of product quality (Fornell et al., 1996; Hallowell et al., 1996). Since fitness clubs are service-oriented, global satisfaction research is more appropriate to understand CS to gain a competitive advantage over competitors (Daryanto et al., 2010; Marandi & Harris, 2010).

d) *Marketing Communication*

Communication is the exchange of knowledge and information with others (Dimyati, 2015). Marketing communication educates and persuades new and potential consumers and builds long-term relationships with existing customers (Kwak et al., 2006). Based on these considerations, we may conclude that marketing communication is a continuous cycle of ideation, structure, and information transmission to achieve the goal. A firm's marketing communication is a management technique to communicate and interact with its diverse audiences (Yeboah, 2013). Understanding the audience's communication environment helps firms to create and convey messages to target demographic groups to successfully connect with them and evaluate and act on their responses (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007; Keller, 2009). Marketing encompasses product attributes and pricing to store locations and promotional campaigns. Firms utilize two-way communication to persuade and listen to their stakeholders to build long-term relationships (Sashi, 2012). Commonly, there are four levels of stakeholders. First, at the corporate level, they communicate to convey the business's identity to all stakeholders through a clear and distinctive corporate identity that incorporates mission, values and objectives, supported by sponsorship and public relations. Second, when branding products or services, firms communicate with customers regarding product features, product quality, warranty and guaranty through advertising, personal selling, and sales promotions. Third, while delivering products or services, i.e., they communicate by delivering products timely at the right locations using intermediaries of distribution channels and providing necessary support services. Forth, at the retail stage, they directly communicate with existing customers regularly to build close relationships through the marketing information system (MIS) (Peltier et al., 2006). Marketing communication also considers the "marketing mix" strategy, including storefronts, personal selling, direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations, and social media marketing. A business may use these methods to build customer knowledge and influence them to purchase products and services (Wang et al., 2023). Thus, FMC is crucial in marketing literature for identifying EXPs and delivering timely information with quality service through multiple communication channels to increase CS and build long-term customer relationships (Percy, 2023; Smith & Taylor, 2004).

Figure 1 depicts the proposed research model, which comprises CL's antecedents and factors determining CS in fitness clubs. These factors include EXPs, PSQ, and FMC. All of these elements subsequently contribute to an increase in the loyalty of club members.

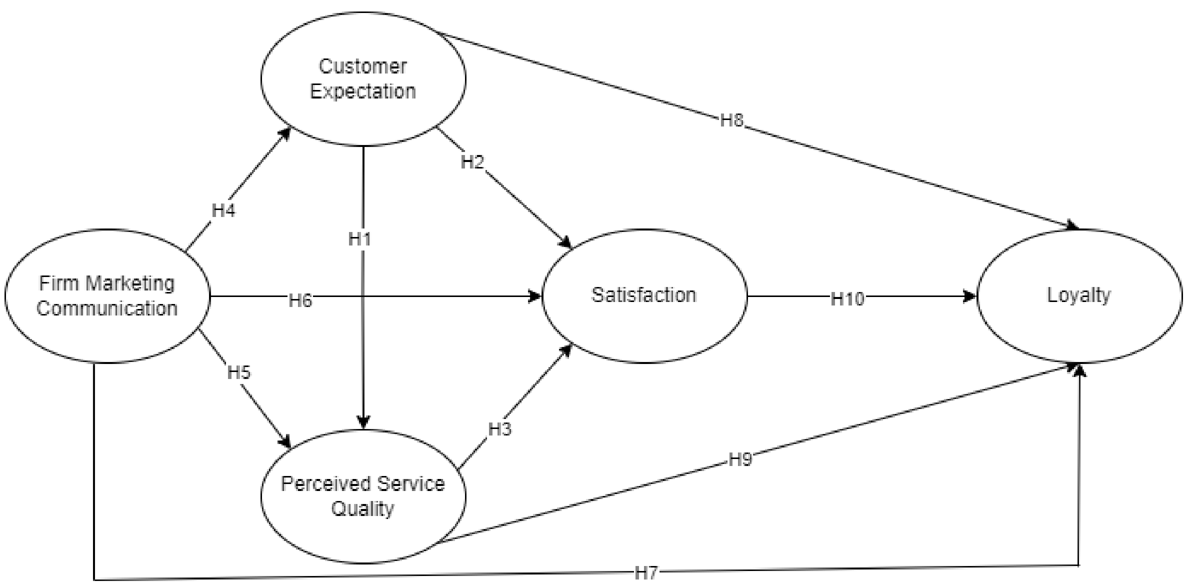

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

III. Hypotheses Development

a) *The Effect of Customer Expectation (EXP)*

EXP is an essential aspect of service quality and is vital in determining CS and CL (Oliver, 1980; Olson & Dover, 1979). Knowing what the consumers expect is critical for developing successful marketing strategies (Anderson et al., 1994; Barros & Desbordes, 2009). Many factors generally influence EXPs in reality, including past use experiences, personal needs, expert opinion, word-of-mouth, and marketing campaign (Yeon et al., 2006). Fitness club members also expect amenities terms, e.g., modern and high-quality equipment, professional instructors, a clean environment, a variety of classes, affordable membership fees, and good customer service (Afthinos et al., 2005; Gonçalves et al., 2016; Robinson, 2006; Zeithaml et al., 1993). According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), EXP is a customer's belief or perception about what a product and service should offer. This means that consumers usually implement their stated expectations to determine whether the service is provided at an acceptable level of quality and satisfaction (Hu et al., 2010; O'Neill & Palmer, 2003;

Oliver, 2014; Parasuraman et al., 1994a; Robinson, 1999). However, current research suggests a conflicting characteristic of expectations (Habel et al., 2016; Ofir & Simonson, 2007). Contrary to the standard assumption, expectations are either confirmed or disconfirmed based on any discrepancy between expectations and service quality. Regarding the confirmation effect, EXP increases CS by providing ways to meet or exceed EXPs (Almsalam, 2014; CİZRELİOĞULLARI et al., 2021; Ryker et al., 1997; Zhang & James, 2020). Inversely, as higher expectations are more challenging to meet, increasing EXPs tends to evoke disconfirmation and thus negatively influences satisfaction (Habel et al., 2016; Poister & Thomas, 2011) and loyalty (Rahman et al., 2017). To meet the growing demand for fitness clubs and stay fit and healthy, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic (Chankuna & Sriboon, 2022), fitness clubs are diversifying their services by offering more specialized services tailored packages to meet EXPs better than competitors. Under this rivalry situation, the increasing popularity of fitness clubs is also driving up the competition in the industry (Zhai, 2021). As a result, firms start to follow niche marketing by customizing their service plan and communicating directly with their target customers, which ultimately increases customer service expectations (Alexandris et al., 2001). In these circumstances, the higher customer's expectations of the fitness services, the less likely it is that the customer's expectations are met or exceeded by the club's service quality (Habel et al., 2016). Considering the rivalry attitude of fitness firms in the Chinese fitness industry, the study proposes that customer expectations negatively affect satisfaction and loyalty. We derive this proposition from the literature on confirmation-disconfirmation (Ashfaq et al., 2019; Oliver, 1980). Thus, we developed the following relationships to explore the linkage from the Chinese fitness clubs market:

H1: EXP Positively Affects PSQ.

H2: EXP Negatively Affects CS.

H8: EXP Negatively Affects CL.

b) The Effect of Perceived Service Quality (PSQ)

The quality of service has long been perceived as one of the most important issues in marketing literature, as it is directly related to CS and business profitability (Xu et al., 2021). PSQ is an evaluation method in which customers rate the excellence of a service relative to their expectations (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Grönroos, 1984). Parasuraman et al. (1988) indicated this viewpoint, defining service quality as "a global judgment or attitude relating to the superiority of a service" (p. 16). The quality of a service depends on the customer's opinion of the service itself, the service's delivery, and the customer's overall experience with the service (Grönroos, 2000; Ko & Pastore, 2004; Zeithaml et al., 1996). A consumer's satisfaction with a service depends on how well it satisfies their expectations (CİZRELİOĞULLARI et al., 2021). CS pioneered all novel endeavors (Parasuraman et al., 1994b). When consumers' perception of service exceeds their expectations, they will likely be satisfied with it (Hussain et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2011; Tsitskari et al., 2014a). In today's competitive and ever changing economic climate, businesses compete by distinguishing themselves through the quality of their services (Albayrak & Caber, 2014; Freitas & Lacerda, 2019). In marketing literature, numerous studies revealed that service quality is linked to several customer outcomes, including (Dias et al., 2019; Gonçalves et al., 2014; Javadein et al., 2008; Miranda et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2014). Levesque and McDougall (2000) contend that PSQ influences levels of satisfaction, which in turn determines future behavior intentions; they acknowledge a causal relationship between the two concepts (Afthanorhan et al., 2019; Alexandris et al., 2001; Pedragosa & Correia, 2009). Accordingly, Moreira and Silva (2016), the quality of service is crucial for satisfaction and word-of-mouth in health clubs. Zopiatis et al. (2017) found that hotel guests' ratings of their fitness centers and the friendliness of their personnel are significant contributors to their satisfaction with these services as a whole. Recent research by García-Fernández et al. (2018a)conducted a study on low-cost fitness centers in Spain, and research results revealed that PSQ has a positive link with CS and CL. As such, the following hypothesis is advanced.

H3. PSQ has a Positive Relationship with CS.

H9: PSQ has a Positive Relationship with CL.

c) The Effect of Firm Marketing Communication (FMC)

Previous research suggests that a firm's relationship with customers through FMC to share messages shapes customer perceptions in the markets (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Communication is an interactive dialogue between the organization and its customers during the pre-selling, selling, consuming, and post-consuming stages (Sitepu et al., 2019). The evaluation of CS in a firm highly depends on how well its marketing communication meets receiver-specific needs and wants (Hänninen & Karjaluoto, 2017). Prior empirical research has revealed that CS and dissatisfaction with a brand, product, or service may affect subsequent consumer behavioral patterns (Agarwal & Kapoor, 2014). Satisfied customers always return to the firm, repurchase the product, and recommend it to others. Inversely, a customer who is not satisfied may file a complaint to the company. Dimyati (2015) conducted an empirical study on the IM3 user community in Jember Regency, and the study findings reveal that communication has a significant positive relationship with CS and loyalty. Similarly, Gaurav (2016) conducted a study on the automobile industry in India, and the research result shows that FMC, as a part of relationship marketing, helps to build CL. Recently, Fadila et al. (2022) also found that communication affects CL. In today's competitive world, organizations should deliver and maintain timely and trustworthy information in a person-to-person format to satisfy customers and build long-term relationships with them (Halimi et al., 2011; Naveed et al., 2017). However, customers will quickly move to competitor brands if they do not get the quality of service they want. Therefore, delivering quality service has become an essential strategy for survival and success in the market. Recently, Gakii and Murigi (2019) conducted a study on the mobile phone industry in Kenya, revealing that integrated marketing communication (IMC) significantly affects service quality. In addition, marketing literature suggests that employees and managers must understand better and respond to better customer expectations to improve their value delivery to the organization and, ultimately, the customers (Varey, 1995). Yeboah (2013)suggested that marketers take communication seriously to meet and exceed customer expectations in the ever-changing competitive landscape. Consequently, we can form the following hypotheses:

H4: FMC Positively Affects EXP.

H5: FMC Positively Affects PSQ.

H6: FMC Positively Affects CS.

H7: FMC Positively Affects CL.

d) The Linkage of Customer Satisfaction (CS) and Customer Loyalty (CL)

Many leisure and sports researchers have studied CL in the domain of health and gym activities (Bodet, 2008; Lee et al., 2010; Oliver, 2007). Some of these works contain theories from other academic fields, including buyer behavior, business behavior, sociology, and mental health (Lee et al., 2018; Yu & Dean, 2001). It is appropriate to argue that studying consumer satisfaction provides insight into consumer loyalty and buying behavior (Butcher et al., 2001). CS is widely accepted as a psychological state resulting from fulfilling pre-purchase customer expectations with the quality of service provider (Chiou & Droge, 2006). According to Hallowell et al. (1996), CS is defined as the customer's reaction to fulfilling expectations, i.e., the customer's evaluation of the service quality of the delivered items. When the level of service quality exceeds expectations, satisfaction is the result(Bolton & Lemon, 1999). Satisfied consumers are more likely to repurchase and recommend the service to their peers (Kim et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2023). Increasing the level of CS also increases consumer tolerance for higher prices, creating brands' images, and reduces the cost of acquiring new customers(Park & Kim, 2000). CL must encompass a positive attitude and a sense of commitment to the organization (Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Prior empirical studies have assumed that CS significantly predicts repeat sales and loyalty (Bolton et al., 2000; Jones & Suh, 2000a; Kim et al., 2009; McDougall & Levesque, 2000). According to Oliver (1999), global satisfaction performs better than transactional satisfaction in predicting the effect on loyalty. Recognizing a positive relationship between satisfaction and repurchase intentions emphasizes the necessity of identifying and describing the variables that contribute to satisfaction (Jones & Suh, 2000b). accordingly, Macintosh (2007) claims that CS depends on the character of interpersonal relationships and customer-oriented employees. The study additionally established a link between satisfied customers and their company loyalty. Based on the above discussion, the following assumptions regarding the connection between satisfaction and loyalty in the fitness service market are proposed.

H10: CS Positively Affects CL.

IV. Research Methodology

a) Research Sample

The current study has sampled comprised fitness club members who had a membership in a fitness club. The study was conducted in China using a convenience sampling technique. For that, an online questionnaire was developed using a prominent website, namely www.wjx.cn. The targeted sample was approached through emails, We Chat, and We Chat groups collected from three fitness clubs of three well-known fitness cub chains. These institutes have around six thousand members in Dalian, China, and more than five hundred fifty branches nationwide. The original English items of the questionnaire were translated into Chinese through the translation and back-translation process with the assistance of two lab fallows and a marketing professor to ensure consistency in meaning (Leung et al., 2022). Before making the survey public, the questionnaires were distributed in English and Chinese (Latif et al., 2020) and comprised two sections. Initially, a pilot study was conducted through a questionnaire link, randomly selecting 50 fitness club members from a club database. After the necessary modification and changes of the questionnaire items, the survey was open from December-mid 2022 to January-mid 2023. All participants were anonymous and voluntary. A total of three hundred forty-five respondents participated in the study. We reviewed all responses and eliminated 30 of them with the same score. Due to missing data, 15 questionnaires were disregarded. Finally, 300 questionnaires were suitable for further investigation, with a 65% response rate (Dabholkar et al., 1996).

Table 1: Demographic Information (N = 300)

Subjects	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	127	42.3
Female	173	57.7
Age (years)		
Young (18-44)	165	55.0
Middle-aged (45-59)	110	36.7
Old ($\geq$60)	25	8.3
Marital status		
Single	190	63.3
Married	93	31.0
Unwilling to disclose	17	5.7
Education		
Below high school or below	70	23.3
Junior college	93	31.0
Bachelor's degree or above	137	45.7
Occupation		
Student	195	65.0
Private employee	56	18.7
Government employee	28	9.3
Businessman	21	7.0
Monthly income		
1000 CNY or less	9	3.0
1001 to 5000 CNY	123	41.0
5001 to 8,000 CNY	52	17.3
8,001 to 12,000 CNY	84	28.0
More than 12,000 CNY	32	10.7
Gym subscription		
Less than 1 year	24	8.0
1 – 2 years	65	21.7
2 - 3 years	110	36.7
More than 3 years	101	33.7
Weekly Gym visits		
1-2 times a week	61	20.3
3-4 times a week	149	49.7
$\geq$ 5 times a week	90	30.0

Note: Chinese Yuan (CNY) = 0.15 United States Dollar (USD)

b) Instruments of Measurement

To operationalize the conceptual model, items from earlier research were adjusted to reflect fitness club characteristics. The first portion of the questionnaire examined consumer perception of fitness clubs using a 7-point Likert scale from "1= strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree." Except satisfaction was rated on a 7-point Likert scale from "1 = strongly dissatisfied to 7 = strongly satisfied". In Appendix A, the items and sources of each variable are shown. The second part of the questionnaire includes the demographics of respondents, and fitness club usage experience and frequency, shown in Table 1. The mean age of the participants was 25.01 (SD = 4.83) years old, and females (173 replies, 57.7%) outnumbered males and unmarried (63.3%). The major education categories were junior college (31%) and university graduates (45.7%). Regarding occupation and monthly income, the majority (65.0%) are students, and 61.3% have a monthly income of 8000 CNY or less. Concerning fitness club membership and weekly use, 70.4% of them have at least two years of fitness use experience, and 21.7% have at least one year. Almost respondents (79.7%) show that they use fitness clubs at least three times a week.

V. Data analysis and Results

Quantitative analysis was performed with IBM SPSS 25.0 and SmartPLS version 3.2.8. PLS-SEM was used because it is a reliable method for analyzing complex cause-effect relationships in marketing and management research (Bascle, 2008; Gudergan et al., 2008). Sample size and indication dispersion standards are also lax (Hair et al., 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2020). Anderson and Gerbing's two-stage analytic technique was used to evaluate this study's hypotheses (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The initial measurement model test verified the instrument's reliability and validity. The second stage estimated the study's hypothesized linkages using the structural model.

a) Measurement Model

The reliability of the elements was tested by Cronbach's alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR). The Alpha and CR value of the construct should be at least 0.70 or higher(Hair Jr et al., 2006). At first, the whole sample was evaluated, and items with factor loadings under 0.70 were removed (Chin, 1998). Hair et al. (2019) state that factor loadings must be at least 0.50. Table 2 shows that all items have loadings of more than 0.70, ranging from 0.892 to 0.800. This study's alpha values vary from 0.903 to 0.825, and CRs values from0.925 to 0.895. Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) value is higher than0.50. It means that the constructs are clarified more than half of the variance in its measures on average. Generally, an AVE value higher than 0.50 is acceptable (Hair et al., 2010). This study's results are reliable since the AVE value varies from 0.672 to 0.776.

Discriminant validity examines the uniqueness of constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). The current study examined the Fornel-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait and Monotrait (HTMT) ratio to investigate the discriminant validity. The cross-loadings of items are provided in Table 3. Discriminant validity is shown by all factor loadings greater than cross-loadings. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the discriminant validity of a construct may be determined by comparing the square roots of all AVE values to the relationships of the latent variable. Table 4 shows the strong discriminant validity by demonstrating that the square root of AVE for each item is greater than the sum of its correlations with the other factors. Table 5 shows that none of the HTMT scores were higher than 0.90.

Although discriminant validity was adequate, multicollinearity might be an issue. Thus, a variance inflation factor (VIF) test was performed to assess multicollinearity. All constructs had VIF values between 1.906 and 3.525, much lower than the criterion of 5 (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001). Multicollinearity had not been an issue. A standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), normed-fit index (NFI), and Chi-Square were also used to assess the overall goodness-of-fit of the structural model. Hu and Bentler (1999) state that lowers SRMR values indicates increased goodness-of-fit. The SRMR value of the current study is 0.054, which is below the recommended cutoff limit (0.08) (Hu & Bentler, 1999).According to Bentler (1990), NFI should be between 0 and 1, with higher values suggesting a good model fit. The NFI score is 0.872, which is near 1 and acceptable (Bentler, 1990). The chi-Square value is 446.045, which exceeds the cutoff point (Sarstedt et al., 2020).

Because the samples were self-reported and obtained from a single source, Harman's single-factor test was used to exclude the possibility of common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff et al., 2012). A single factor explained 27.19% of the variance, just below the 50% criterion. Thus, the results of this investigation indicate that CMB is not a major issue.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Results

Items	FL	α	CR	AVE	VIF
Customer expectation (EXP)		0.903	0.925	0.672	
EXP1	0.843				2.54
EXP2	0.818				2.139
EXP3	0.822				2.245
EXP4	0.815				2.157
EXP5	0.800				2.013
EXP6	0.822				2.166
Perceived service quality (PSQ)		0.843	0.895	0.680	
PSQ1	0.850				2.03
PSQ2	0.827				1.917
PSQ3	0.805				1.841
PSQ4	0.816				1.772
Firm Marketing Communication (FMC)		0.825	0.895	0.740	
FLC1	0.839				1.824
FLC 2	0.887				2.101
FLC 3	0.854				1.775
Customer satisfaction (CS)		0.886	0.916	0.686	
CS1	0.857				2.528

CS 2	0.835				2.077
CS 3	0.823				2.095
CS 4	0.812				1.999
CS 5	0.814				2.009
Customer loyalty (CL)		0.857	0.912	0.776	
CL1	0.892				2.117
CL2	0.873				2.174
CL3	0.878				2.121

Note: FL= Factor loading; α= Cronbach's Alpha; CR= Composite reliability; AVE= Average variance extracted; VIF= Variance inflation factor; EXP = Customer expectation; PSQ= Perceived service quality; FMC= Firm marketing communication; CS= Customer satisfaction; CL= Customer loyalty.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity – Cross-Loadings

Item	EXP	PSQ	FMC	CS	CL
EXP1	**0.843**	0.199	0.391	-0.123	-0.109
EXP2	**0.818**	0.245	0.424	-0.148	-0.112
EXP3	**0.822**	0.274	0.402	-0.06	-0.052
EXP4	**0.815**	0.193	0.403	-0.188	-0.132
EXP5	**0.800**	0.278	0.403	-0.08	-0.016
EXP6	**0.822**	0.283	0.441	-0.015	0.001
PSQ1	0.198	**0.850**	0.298	0.33	0.356
PSQ2	0.282	**0.827**	0.297	0.264	0.323
PSQ3	0.296	**0.805**	0.33	0.22	0.272
PSQ4	0.224	**0.816**	0.315	0.346	0.325
FMC1	0.401	0.284	**0.839**	0.035	0.107
FMC2	0.443	0.349	**0.887**	0.061	0.089
FMC3	0.448	0.331	**0.854**	0.032	0.111
CS1	-0.1	0.253	0.02	**0.857**	0.388
CS2	-0.138	0.33	0.061	**0.835**	0.455
CS3	-0.135	0.261	0.015	**0.823**	0.409
CS4	-0.021	0.328	0.075	**0.812**	0.392
CS5	-0.113	0.29	0.033	**0.814**	0.394
CL1	-0.081	0.381	0.082	0.479	**0.892**
CL2	-0.063	0.305	0.156	0.387	**0.873**
CL3	-0.078	0.334	0.083	0.433	**0.878**

Note: EXP= Customer expectation; PSQ= Perceived service quality; FMC= Firm marketing communication; CS= Customer satisfaction; CL= Customer loyalty.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	CL	FMC	CE	PSQ	SAT
CL	***0.881***				
FMC	0.119	***0.86***			
EXP	-0.085	0.502	***0.82***		
PSQ	0.388	0.375	0.3	***0.825***	
CS	0.494	0.05	-0.124	0.355	***0.828***

Note: The italic-bold diagonal is the square root of average variance extracted (AVE), correlations (non-bold); EXP = Customer expectation; PSQ = Perceived service quality; FMC = Firm marketing communication; CS = Customer satisfaction; CL = Customer loyalty.

Table 5: Discriminant Validity: HTMT Ratio

	CL	FMC	EXP	PSQ
CL				
FMC	0.145			
EXP	0.104	0.58		
PSQ	0.452	0.449	0.346	
CS	0.561	0.06	0.145	0.405

Note: EXP = Customer expectation; PSQ = Perceived service quality; FMC = Firm marketing communication; CS = Customer satisfaction; CL = Customer loyalty.

b) Assessment of Structural Model

The structural model determines and evaluates the hypothesized underlying links between variables (Hair et al., 2017). The validity of the model was assessed using the path coefficients (β), the explanatory power (R2), the predictive relevance (Q2), and the effect size (f2). A bootstrapping method was utilized with a random sample of 5000 to determine whether or not the hypotheses were significant (Hair et al., 2012). First, direct relationships were tested. Figure 2 and Table 6 describe the significant direct relationships of all hypotheses, except for EXP →PSQ (β= 0.126, t= 1.28, p=0.201), FMC →CS (β= 0. 017, t= 0.193, p=0.847), AND FMC →CL (β= 0.092, t= 1.294, p=0.196). Accordingly, H2 (β= -0.325, t= 4.391), H3 (β= 0.513, t= 7.154), H4 (β= 0.58, t= 11.075), H5 (β= 0.375, t= 4.231), H8 (β= -0.204, t= 2.634), H9 (β= 0.319, t= 3.871), and H10 (β= 0.40, t= 5.129) are supported, and H1, H6 and H7 are not supported. H4 and H5 show a positive link between firm-level marketing communication (FMC) and customer expectation (EXP), and perceived service quality (PSQ). H2 and H8 indicate that EXP has a significant negative relationship with customer satisfaction (CS) and loyalty (CL) in the context of the fitness club industry in China. Additionally, H3 and H9 show that PSQ positively influences CS and CL. Furthermore, H10 establishes significant positive associations between CS and CL.

The suggested model explained 25.6% of the variance in CS and 40.3% of the variance in CL. Moreover, the value of Q2 for CS is 0.12 and 0.23 for CL. These outcomes demonstrate that the present research model has high predictive power (Hair Jr et al., 2014; Sarstedt et al., 2019). In addition, f2 is employed to evaluate the effect size of predictors. The f2 value of FMC is 0.106 for CL, 0.061 for CS, 0.507 for EXP, and 0.318 for PSQ. EXP has 0.221 and 0.288 values for CL and CS, respectively. PSQ has CL and CS scores of 0.278 and 0.387, respectively. CL has a CS of 0.295. The f2 value was ranked as small (0.02), moderate (0.15), and large (0.35) (Cohen, 1988). Overall, the yielded values are between moderate and substantial. None of the control variables was significant. With an SRMR of less than 0.08, it can be concluded that the proposed model provides a good fit (Hair et al., 2017).

Additionally, the current study evaluated the role of EXP, PSQ, and CS as mediators between FMC and CL (Nitzl et al., 2016; Zafar et al., 2021). Initially, the indirect effect of EXP on CL is evaluated. The yielded value is significant and partially mediated when β= -0.13, t= 3.441. Second, we evaluate the indirect impact of PSQ on CL. As β= 0.205, t= 4.108, the yielded value is statistically significant and partially mediated. Finally, the indirect effects of FMC on CL are evaluated. A significant relationship exists between FMC -> EXP -> CS -> CL (β= -0.075, t= 3.209) and FMC -> PSQ -> CS -> CL (β= 0.077, t= 2.837). The study also reveals that FMC has an insignificant direct effect on CL (β= 0.092, t= 1.294). Thus, FMC -> EXP -> CS -> CL and FMC -> PSQ -> CS -> CL are accepted with complementary partial mediation, as detailed in Table 6.

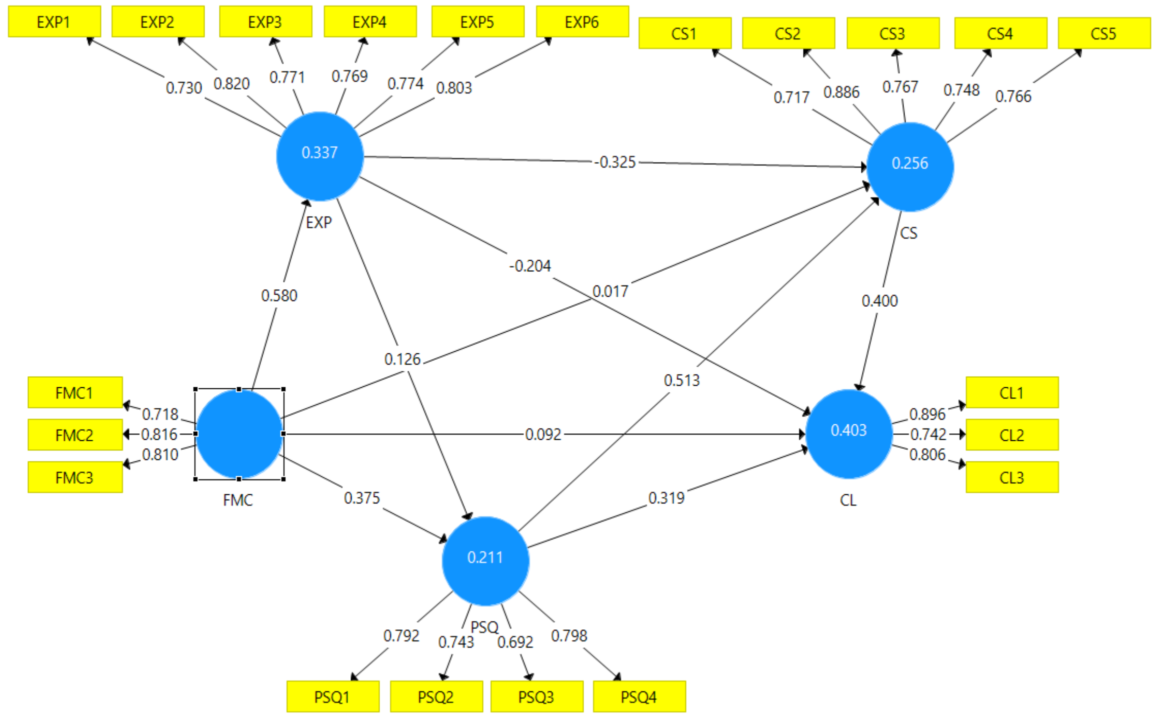

Figure 2: PLS-SEM Structured Model

Table 6: Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses Code	Structural Paths	Path Coefficients	T Statistics	P Values	Decisions
H1	EXP -> PSQ	0.126	1.28	0.201	Unsupported
H2	EXP -> CS	-0.325	4.391	***	Supported
H3	PSQ -> CS	0.513	7.154	***	Supported
H4	FMC -> EXP	0.58	11.075	***	Supported
H5	FMC -> PSQ	0.375	4.231	***	Supported
H6	FMC -> CS	0.017	0.193	0.847	Unsupported
H7	FMC -> CL	0.092	1.294	0.196	Unsupported
H8	EXP -> CL	-0.204	2.634	***	Supported
H9	PSQ -> CL	0.319	3.871	***	Supported
H10	CS -> CL	0.4	5.129	***	Supported
	Indirect Effects				
	EXP -> CS -> CL	-0.13	3.441	***	Partial Mediation
	FMC -> EXP -> CS -> CL	-0.075	3.209	***	Complementary Full Mediation
	PSQ -> CS -> CL	0.205	4.108	***	Partial Mediation
	FMC -> PSQ -> CS -> CL	0.077	2.837	***	Complementary Full Mediation
	FMC -> EXP -> CL	-0.118	2.525	***	Full Mediation
	FMC -> PSQ -> CL	0.12	2.877	***	Full Mediation
	FMC -> EXP -> CS	-0.189	3.998	***	Full Mediation
	FMC -> PSQ -> CS	0.192	3.574	***	Full Mediation

Note: *$p<0.05$; **$p<0.01$; ***$p<0.001$. EXP = Customer expectation; PSQ = Perceived service quality; FMC = Firm marketing communication; CS = Customer satisfaction; CL = Customer loyalty.

VI. Discussion and Implications

a) *Summary of Main Findings*

In the current business climate, it is difficult for a fitness firm to stand out (Hu, 2004). To establish and maintain long-term customer connections, a firm must prioritize communication that caters to customers' needs and desires. This implies that for a fitness firm to be recognized and acknowledged by its stakeholders, it must continually communicate with its customers instead of merely providing space, installing the latest gym services, offering attractive pricing, and making it accessible to its target markets (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007). Thus, fitness firms must communicate with current and potential customers to reach their goals and objectives. This paper aims to elucidate the beneficial effect of FMC of fitness clubs in China on CS and CL building in a competitive environment (García-Fernández et al., 2018b).The study explicitly investigates a hypothetical, theoretical model to demonstrate the empirical connection between FMC and EXP, PSQ, CS, and CL. The study found that communication significantly impacts customer expectations and perceived service quality, and these variables also play a critical mediatory role in the link between FMC and CL in the Chinese fitness market. As a result, the study demonstrates the efficacy of FMC strategies for fitness firms or clubs to understand better customer expectations and better responses in a constantly evolving environment. According to our knowledge, the current study is a pioneering effort that sheds light on relationship marketing and consumer buying behavior studies by empirically examining the beneficial effects of FMC on EXP, PSQ, CS, and CL building toward a fitness club in mainland China (Avourdiadou & Theodorakis, 2014; Pedragosa & Correia, 2009; Theodorakis et al., 2004).

Firstly, contrary to Hypothesis H1, the findings of this study indicate that customer expectations have no significant effect on the perception of service quality. This indicates no correlation between how consumers perceive a fitness club's service quality and their expectations. Extent research indicates that EXP and PSQ are separate variables (Robinson, 2006). Customers' expectations constantly evolve, resulting in a situation in which they continue to set higher standards. Regarding fitness club services, when customers' specific needs and desires are met, they must seek out high-quality, expensive products that give and place them in a higher social class and status. As the changing characteristics of expectations, current fitness club services become unimportant, and club members' expectations cannot identify PSQ (Habel et al., 2016).

Secondly, the study findings of Hypotheses H2 and H8 reveal that club member expectations may negatively affect their satisfaction and loyalty toward a fitness club in China. This means that CS and CL deteriorate when customer expectations increase with the influence of competitors' marketing communication. Although consumers have expectations in each encounter for the services, sentiments of satisfaction may also form (Tse & Wilton, 1988). CS results from customers' comparison of service quality with their prior established expectations. If customers' perception of service quality as lower (higher) than their expectations, customers may experience negative (positive) disconfirmation, leading to dissatisfaction (satisfaction) (Habel et al., 2016). According to information processing theory (Sujan et al., 1986), when customers are highly motivated and capable of evaluating service quality, increasing the expectations of customers in an organization may reduce satisfaction, subsequently decreasing loyalty. Expectations that lead to satisfaction consist of what consumers think the fitness-club industry must offer. When fitness firms deliver more information through communications, it may increase their attractiveness to customers and simultaneously increase members' expectations. Higher customer expectations are more challenging to meet and thus cause dissatisfaction. As a result, customer evaluations of fitness firms' products and services with high customer expectations become negative, which may subsequently impact CL toward the fitness club. These findings are consistent with prior literature by Rahman et al. (2017) and Tukiran et al. (2021).

Thirdly, Hypotheses H3 and H9 demonstrate that PSQ is significantly associated with CS and CL. This study presents a positive relationship between perceived service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty. Service quality is essential for the performance of the fitness business. Because customers play a critical role in the success or failure of businesses today and in the future, they are demanding quality and expecting to be given that quality. However, not all service providers can offer quality service to customers who have an opportunity to assess the quality given to them in comparison with their quality expectations. Meeting expectations and quality of service are two essential factors that make loyal customers who also determine the firm's competitiveness in the market. This study validated hypotheses H3 and H9, demonstrating that PSQ is a critical antecedent of CS and CL. The study's findings are consistent with prior literature Moreira and Silva (2016) and Coye (2004).

Fourthly, regarding firm-level marketing communication, the results report that Hypotheses H4 and H5 are significantly positively related to customer expectation and perceived service quality. In the fitness industry, numerous competitors exist in urban areas, and intense competition among themselves is also visible. Competitors' promotional activities increase customer knowledge which may help to create customer expectations (Peltier et al., 2006). Businesses make more effort to fulfill customer expectations by delivering superior services in a competitive environment. When customers receive desired services from organizations, they become more satisfied. However, in Hypotheses H6 and H7, the result shows that FMC is not significantly related to CS and CL. This result means that members' satisfaction and loyalty to fitness club does not directly depend on the fitness club's change level of communication (Dimyati, 2015). Firms must understand EXP and provide desired services to receive CS and CL to survive in today's competitive environment. Thus, high expectations are always tricky to fulfill and cause dissatisfaction. Considering it from an organizational context may reduce CL toward fitness clubs (Varey, 1995). These findings are consistent with prior literature by Frimpong (2017).

Fifthly, as hypothesized, the information in Hypothesis H10 shows that CS has a significant association with CL. This means that satisfaction is a critical precursor of CL (Osayawe Ehigie & Taylor, 2009). Organizations can only survive in the market if their customers are loyal. Satisfied customers are more likely to renew or continue their membership and recommend it to others (Holman, 2018). In fitness clubs, consumers can evaluate the service quality of fitness clubs before committing to membership. The greater the level of CS, the greater the degree of CL to a fitness club. This means that customers will remain loyal to their current fitness club despite the entry of new competitors offering new services. They will buy a membership card once again. Building CL is a source of competitive advantage and an essential intangible asset for any business (Gures et al., 2014).

b) Theoretical Implications

Our research results have both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the results indicate that CS is essential in comprehending consumer loyalty (Alexandris & Palialia, 1999; Murray & Howat, 2002). Previous research has demonstrated a significant relationship between PSQ and CS, CL (García-Fernández et al., 2018a), and the current study demonstrates that service quality is the most influential factor in CL. However, incorporating consumer expectations into our model demonstrates the need for academicians to expand their analysis of this construct in fitness-club industry sectors. In addition, the research contributed to marketing communication theory in three distinct ways. First, the study discovered a significant positive correlation between FMC, EXP, and PSQ. Second, the study holistically examined the influence of FMC, EXP, and PSQ on CL toward a fitness club, concentrating on mainland Chinese fitness club members. Finally, the study demonstrates the role of EXP, PSQ, and CS as mediators in the relationship between FMC and CL.

c) Practical Implications

The present study reveals that, in order to thrive and endure in a competitive market, management must constantly be aware of the need to evaluate its FMC strategy. This is especially true for fitness-club managers. According to the study, communication impacts EXPs in such a way that demand grows, and communication is seen more favorably. In this regard, effectively managing consumer expectations is a significant managerial challenge (Habel et al., 2016). According to information theory (Sujan et al., 1986), management should elevate their expectations if consumers' ability and motivation to use the service are inadequate. In contrast, if customers are willing and motivated to review the service, managers should avoid creating unrealistic expectations, which might afflict CS. Secondly, the research outcomes indicate that communication improves PSQ, enhancing service quality from the client's perspective. Therefore, marketers do not need to worry about providing "information overload" to their clients, as the current study found that communications via accessible channels, such as advertising, social media marketing, or blogging, enhance PSQ. Finally, the study findings demonstrate that PSQ and CS mediate the relationship between FMC and CL. The study's findings indicate that existing members, regardless of their apparent personal traits, do not perceive the current state of fitness clubs as productive. The study recommends that managers construct their service operations as fluid and streamlined as feasible by providing discounted prices and free gym courses to acquire hands-on experience with all instruments.

VII. Limitations and Future Research

During the course of our investigation, we uncovered a number of limitations that will govern future investigations. In this study, we examined fitness clubs belonging to well-known franchised fitness club chains that have been functioning in mainland China for an extended period of time. The study's findings were based on information provided in a questionnaire completed by fitness club members in Dalian, China. As a result, the findings and conclusions may not be globally applicable and may be limited to Chinese franchised fitness club chains. In future research, more public and private fitness centers should be included. Other variables, such as perceived value and brand image, should also be included in the analysis. Our research concentrated significantly on marketing communication at the firm level. In future studies, it might be fascinating to classify the effectiveness of each variable under consideration. Our research focused heavily on firm-level marketing communication. In future investigations, it could interact to categorize the efficiency of each variable under consideration (Xu et al., 2021). Moreover, customer expectations have been assessed globally to assess their impact on global satisfaction and their link with CL. It would be interesting to disaggregate customer expectations into predictive and normative expectations and then test the effects and relationships they establish with global PSQ, CS, and CL by attributes. The phrase "predictive expectation" relates to consumer views about the

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degree of service that a business is likely to provide. These expectations are typically utilized as a service quality barometer against which CS is assessed (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982). The optimal quality of services desired by consumers, also known as their expectations, is referred to as the normative expectation. The expectations and global satisfaction data gathered can explain members' loyalty to their fitness centers.

Appendix A

Construct	Items	Source
Customer Expectation	1. I believe that I will appreciate the fitness club as having modern equipment. 2. I believe that I will enjoy the fitness club with various class exercises. 3. I believe that I would really like the available services to members. 4. I believe that the fitness club will be visually appealing. 5. I believe that the fitness club will pay attention to consumers individually. 6. I believe that the fitness club will handle customer problems immediately.	(Gonçalves & Diniz, 2015; Habel et al., 2016; Thanabordeekij, 2017)
Perceived Services Quality	1. I receive the fitness club services I expect. 2. The fitness service outcome meets my expectation. 3. The fitness club provides reliable service. 4. The quality of service provided by the club is outstanding.	(Chang & Chelladurai, 2003)
Firm Marketing Communication	1. I like the advertising and promotions of this brand. 2. I feel positive about the advertising and promotions of this brand. 3. The advertising and promotions of this brand do a good job.	(Zehir et al., 2011)
Customer Satisfaction	1. I am satisfied to have joined this fitness club. 2. Choosing this club was a good decision. 3. If I had to do it again, I would make the same choice. 4. The fitness club always fulfills my expectations. 5. My experiences with the fitness club are excellent.	(Alexandris et al., 2004)
Customer Loyalty	1. I have determined that I will renew and keep my membership in this fitness club. 2. I will recommend this club to a friend. 3. If I had to do it over again, I would make the same choice.	(Bodet, 2008; Oh et al., 2011)

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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A Data-Driven Approach and Framework to Social Media Strategy and Performance Measurement for Brands

By Shashank Katare

Abstract- The pandemic, rising inflation, and dynamic changes in the market have increased the importance of having a solid and effective omnichannel strategy. Social media channels form a crucial pillar of a brand's omnichannel strategy and can be used to achieve various business objectives such as acquisition, engagement, brand awareness, etc. This paper highlights the significance of having a well-defined and robust social media strategy. The report will describe the important pillars of a social media strategy and establish the importance of driving brand stickiness, deepening customer relationships, and driving business growth. It presses upon the need for brands to develop clear objectives, align content strategy to customer needs and continuously measure and iterate to optimize the social media strategy.

Keywords: social media, strategy, marketing, metrics, measurement, kpis, facebook, instagram, twitter, tiktok, content strategy, content calendar, performance measurement.

GJMBR-E Classification: JEL codes: L83, Z32

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I. Introduction

Today, with the ever-evolving digital landscape, social media has become a powerful force for brands to transform their business and accelerate growth. Customers are increasingly active on social media, spend countless hours, and consume tons of content. Therefore, social media channels have become indispensable tools for brands to acquire, engage, convert, and drive loyalty. Let us dive deeper into the key pillars of a social media strategy and measurement and look at critical insights by analyzing some of the leading brand's social media performance.

II. Concepts

a) Goals Aligned with Business and Marketing Objectives

Setting a clear goal is highly crucial for the success of the campaign. Focusing on defining clear goals and a plan to achieve and measure the goals provides the utmost clarity in direction to the teams in executing the strategy. In addition, a brand should take additional steps to make sure that the goals tie back to the overall business and marketing objectives, such as increasing traffic to the site, generating leads, or increasing customer engagement, etc.

Following are examples of a few of the metrics mapped to the overall business objectives.

Table 1: Social Media Metrics Mapping to Business Objectives

Sample Social Media Metrics	Sample Business Objectives
• Reach (#of users who saw the content) • Impressions (#of times the content was viewed)	• Brand/Product Awareness • Acquisition • Customer Engagement
• Followers/Mentions/Shares	• Brand/Product Awareness • Customer Engagement • Loyalty
• Traffic	• Customer Engagement • Lead Generation • Acquisition
• Conversion	• Revenue • Customer Growth • Loyalty

- Smart Goals: when setting goals, teams must follow the SMART technique - specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time specific goals for easier tracking and measurement.

Let's look at an example SMART goal – "Acquire 200 new email subscribers through a Twitter campaign in 3 months".

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- *Specific:* Goal is clear and well-defined e.g., Acquire 200 new e-mail subscribers through a Twitter campaign.
- *Measurable:* Goal is quantifiable and can be measured e.g., acquire 200 new email subscribers.
- *Attainable:* The goal should not be chosen at random or based on gut but should be based on data, e.g., historical data, industry benchmarks, competitive analysis, resource, and budget constraints, etc. The goal should be attainable and adjusted accordingly.
- *Relevant:* As stated above, the goals should be aligned with the broader business objective.
- *Time specific:* Time frame helps prioritize and secure resources and budget, e.g. acquire 200 new email subscribers *in three months*.

b) *Cross-Functional Agile Team*

Social media constantly evolves with new platforms, features, or even regulations increasing complexity. Therefore, it requires a team with specific skills, ability, and agility to execute a successful social media campaign across multiple platforms.

Below are sample roles you need in a team to run an effective social media campaign.

Table 2: Social Media Team Composition and Responsibilities

Social Media Team Role	Responsibility	Example Skills
Social media manager/lead	• Overall Strategy & Targets • Planning and organizing • Goals & Metrics	• Digital Marketing • Communication • Leadership
Content Specialist	• Trends/Competitive Research • Content creation, manage, publish.	• Creative/Copy • Research & Analysis • SEO
Paid Media Specialist	• Planning & Budgeting • Ads testing & publishing. • Audience Segmentation & Targeting	• Media management • Budgeting • Buying/Bidding
Community/Event Manager	• Engage with users. • Build Brand visibility & credibility. • Manage Brand advocates	• Interpersonal & Relationship building • Social media monitoring
Measurement & Performance Analyst	• Set up tracking & tagging. • Create and share reports • Analyze data & metrics	• Analytical/Statistical skills • Platform Reporting knowledge

c) *Audience Targeting*

Defining audiences and creating content aligned to the audience's preferences and needs enhances the targeting and effectiveness of ads and campaigns. This is a challenging task and requires a lot of data and careful planning. The audience should be aligned with the campaign's goals, reach, and brand values. It also should be rooted in research, data, and analysis. Following best practices will help in defining a target audience.

– Data and insights leveraging 0P/1P/2P/3P data sources can help define broader and granular segments.
– Competitive research, industry trends, and other social media tools can provide understanding and insights into the target audience.
– Further, refine the audiences using additional data

- Demographic (e.g., age, gender, income, etc.)
- Psychographic (e.g., lifestyle, values, interests, etc.)
- Behavioral (e.g., browse, intent, purchase, etc.)
- Geographic (e.g., location, climate, language, etc.)

d) *Content Needs*

Create compelling content that aligns with the needs and preferences of the audience. Also, the content should be published regularly and at an asset cadence to achieve maximum impact. Below are a few best practices for creating compelling social media content.

– Create content tied to the needs and preferences of the audience and should align with the campaign strategy. The content should highlight the critical message the brands want to deliver to the audience. It is best to follow the rule of thirds of social media content strategy.

- One-third of the content should be promotional type, focusing on business, products, or services.
- One-third on thought leadership to share ideas.

- o One-third should be to share personal interactions and build relationships with the customers.
- – Create content of various types, including User-generated content (UGC), videos, live streams, infographics, etc.
- – Create a social media calendar to help with timing the content creation and publishing process and drive automation in the content process. A typical simple calendar will consist of content topics by day or week and the platform where it will be published as demonstrated below.

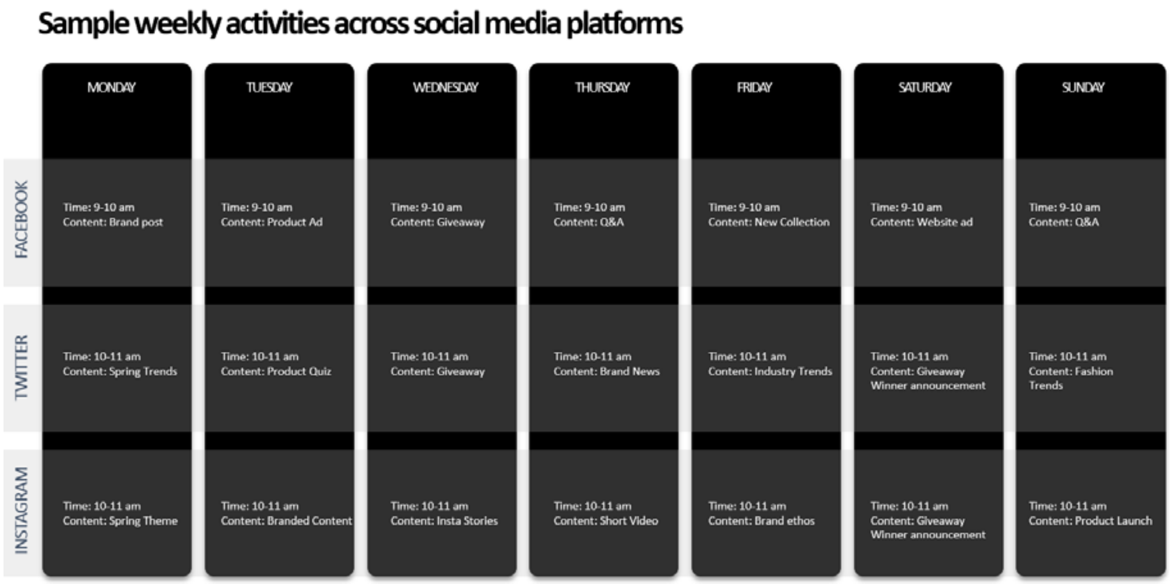

Figure 1: Illustrative Social Media Calendar with Sample Content Ideas

e) *Performance Measurement*

Measure how social media campaigns are performing to understand the impact of the social media strategy. It can be achieved by defining the right metrics, setting up detailed tracking, and capturing and analyzing data regularly. Moreover, it is essential to measure the performance against overall business and marketing goals. Below are key metrics that are a good starting point:

- o *Reach:* # of users who see content in a specified time
- o *Click-through Rate (CTR):* # of users who see the content end up clicking on it
- o *Engagement Rate:* # of followers interacting with the content (e.g., likes, shares, comments, retweets, etc.)
- o *Subscribers/Followers:#* of subscribers on a platform

III. Research Method

The report analyzes social media strategy and performance of three leading department stores in the US – Macy's, Nordstrom, and Kohl's. The data captured using RivalIQ includes information on various metrics (posts, likes, tweets, comments, etc.) across five social media – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YoutTube, and TikTok from April 21, 2023, to May 20, 2023. One thing to note is that all three brands don't have Twitter performance data other than the number of followers. Below is sample data collected to analyze how the brands approach their social media strategy and their performance reflected through total followers and how they engage with social media posts.

Table 3: Total Number of Followers Across the Social Media Platforms (April 21, 2023, To May 20, 2023)

Total Number of Followers						
	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	TikTok	Total
Macy's	14.7M	2.3M	.9M	.1M	.5M	18.5M
Kohl's	11.6M	1.5M	.8M	.3M	.1M	14.3M
Nordstrom	5.1M	3.5M	.7M	.2M	.M	9.5M

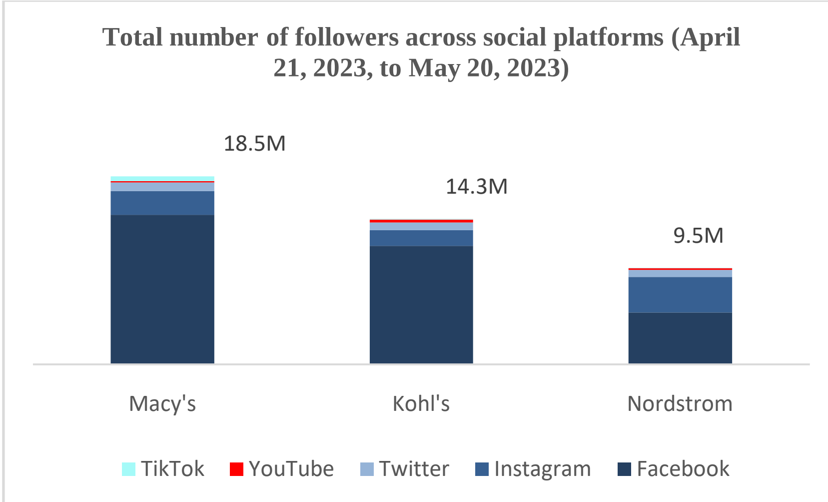

Figure 2: Total Number of Followers Across Social Media Platforms

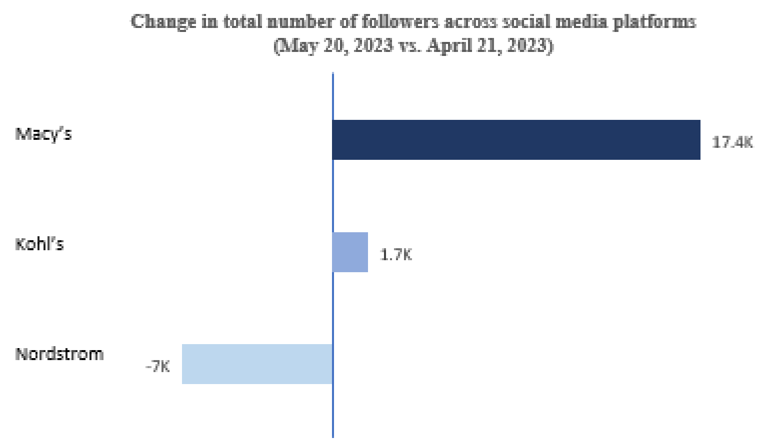

Figure 3: Change in Number of Followers (Increase or Decrease) Across Social Media Platforms.

Table 4: Total Number of Posts Across the Social Media Platforms (April 21, 2023, To May 20, 2023)

Total Number of Posts						
	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	TikTok	Total
Macy's	10	25	0	12	18	65
Kohl's	29	25	0	0	19	73
Nordstrom	47	74	0	4	21	146

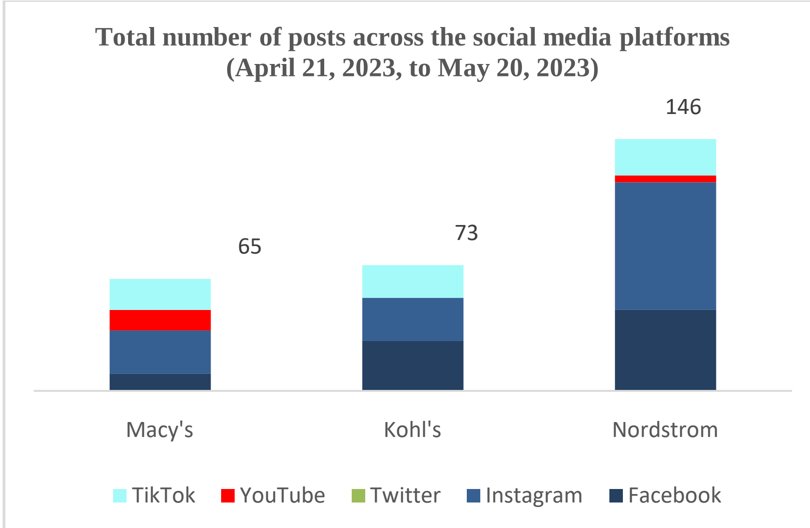

Figure 4: Total Number of Posts Across Social Media Platforms

Table 5: Daily Posts Across the Social Media Platforms (April 21, 2023, To May 20, 2023)

Brand	Date	Twitter Tweets	YouTube Posts	Instagram Posts	TikTok Posts	Facebook Posts	Total
Nordstrom	4/21	0	0	2	0	2	4
Nordstrom	4/22	0	0	1	0	1	2
Nordstrom	4/23	0	0	1	0	1	2
Nordstrom	4/24	0	0	3	1	2	6
Nordstrom	4/25	0	0	3	0	1	4
Nordstrom	4/26	0	0	1	1	2	4
Nordstrom	4/27	0	0	2	0	2	4
Nordstrom	4/28	0	0	2	1	2	5
Nordstrom	4/29	0	0	4	0	2	6
Nordstrom	4/30	0	0	3	0	1	4
Nordstrom	5/1	0	0	3	0	1	4
Nordstrom	5/2	0	0	4	1	2	7
Nordstrom	5/3	0	0	2	0	4	6
Nordstrom	5/4	0	0	4	1	2	7
Nordstrom	5/5	0	0	3	0	2	5
Nordstrom	5/6	0	0	2	0	1	3
Nordstrom	5/7	0	0	1	0	0	1
Nordstrom	5/8	0	0	3	3	3	9
Nordstrom	5/9	0	0	1	1	1	3
Nordstrom	5/10	0	1	1	2	1	5
Nordstrom	5/11	0	0	3	0	0	3
Nordstrom	5/12	0	0	3	4	2	9
Nordstrom	5/13	0	1	3	1	2	7
Nordstrom	5/14	0	0	2	0	0	2
Nordstrom	5/15	0	0	3	0	2	5
Nordstrom	5/16	0	0	3	1	2	6
Nordstrom	5/17	0	0	3	1	3	7
Nordstrom	5/18	0	0	4	3	1	8
Nordstrom	5/19	0	1	4	0	2	7
Nordstrom	5/20	0	1	0	0	0	1
Kohl's	4/21	0	0	1	2	3	6
Kohl's	4/22	0	0	1	1	1	3
Kohl's	4/23	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kohl's	4/24	0	0	1	1	1	3
Kohl's	4/25	0	0	0	1	0	1
Kohl's	4/26	0	0	1	0	1	2

Kohl's	4/27	0	0	0	1	0	1
Kohl's	4/28	0	0	1	1	2	4
Kohl's	4/29	0	0	1	1	0	2
Kohl's	4/30	0	0	1	1	0	2
Kohl's	5/1	0	0	1	1	1	3
Kohl's	5/2	0	0	2	1	1	4
Kohl's	5/3	0	0	1	0	1	2
Kohl's	5/4	0	0	1	0	2	3
Kohl's	5/5	0	0	1	1	2	4
Kohl's	5/6	0	0	1	0	0	1
Kohl's	5/7	0	0	1	0	0	1
Kohl's	5/8	0	0	1	1	1	3
Kohl's	5/9	0	0	1	1	0	2
Kohl's	5/10	0	0	1	2	2	5
Kohl's	5/11	0	0	1	0	1	2
Kohl's	5/12	0	0	1	0	2	3
Kohl's	5/13	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kohl's	5/14	0	0	1	1	1	3
Kohl's	5/15	0	0	1	0	2	3
Kohl's	5/16	0	0	1	1	1	3
Kohl's	5/17	0	0	1	0	1	2
Kohl's	5/18	0	0	1	0	2	3
Kohl's	5/19	0	0	0	1	1	2
Kohl's	5/20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Macy's	4/21	0	0	0	0	1	1
Macy's	4/22	0	0	1	1	0	2
Macy's	4/23	0	0	1	1	0	2
Macy's	4/24	0	0	1	0	1	2
Macy's	4/25	0	0	1	1	1	3
Macy's	4/26	0	0	1	1	0	2
Macy's	4/27	0	0	1	0	0	1
Macy's	4/28	0	1	1	0	1	3
Macy's	4/29	0	0	0	1	0	1
Macy's	4/30	0	0	1	1	0	2
Macy's	5/1	0	1	1	0	0	2
Macy's	5/2	0	1	1	1	1	4
Macy's	5/3	0	1	1	0	1	3
Macy's	5/4	0	1	0	0	0	1
Macy's	5/5	0	0	1	0	1	2
Macy's	5/6	0	0	0	1	0	1
Macy's	5/7	0	1	1	1	1	4
Macy's	5/8	0	1	1	0	0	2
Macy's	5/9	0	0	1	1	0	2
Macy's	5/10	0	0	1	1	0	2
Macy's	5/11	0	1	1	1	0	3
Macy's	5/12	0	0	1	1	0	2
Macy's	5/13	0	0	0	1	1	2
Macy's	5/14	0	0	1	0	0	1
Macy's	5/15	0	0	1	0	0	1
Macy's	5/16	0	1	1	1	0	3
Macy's	5/17	0	1	2	2	0	5
Macy's	5/18	0	1	1	0	1	3
Macy's	5/19	0	1	1	1	0	3
Macy's	5/20	0	0	0	0	1	1

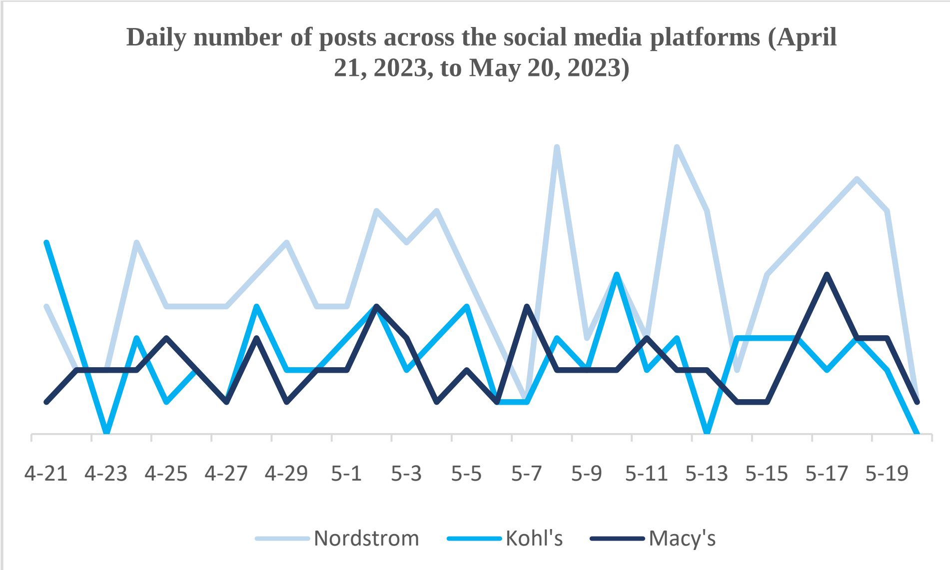

Figure 5: Daily Number of Posts Across Social Media Platforms

Table 6: Total Engagement (Likes, Comments, Shares, Etc.) Across the Social Media Platforms (April 21, 2023, to May 20, 2023)

Total Engagement Across Platforms						
	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	TikTok	Total
Macy's	58399	60596	0	252	1139	120.4K
Kohl's	7674	9308	0	0	50491	67.5K
Nordstrom	7776	56077	0	68	234	64.2K

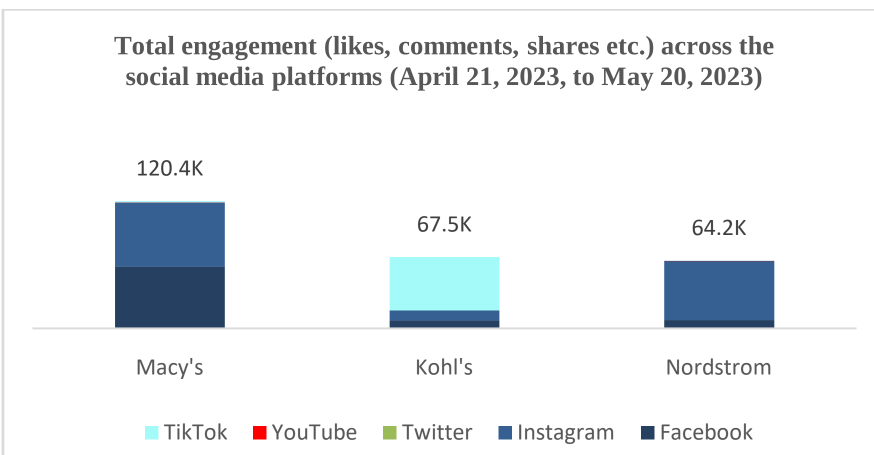

Figure 6: Total Engagement Across Social Media Platforms

Table 7: Total Engagement/Posts Across the Social Media Platforms (April 21, 2023, to May 20, 2023)

Total Engagement/Posts			
	Total Posts	Total Engagement	Engagement/Posts
Macy's	65	120.4K	1852
Kohl's	73	67.5K	924
Nordstrom	146	64.2K	439

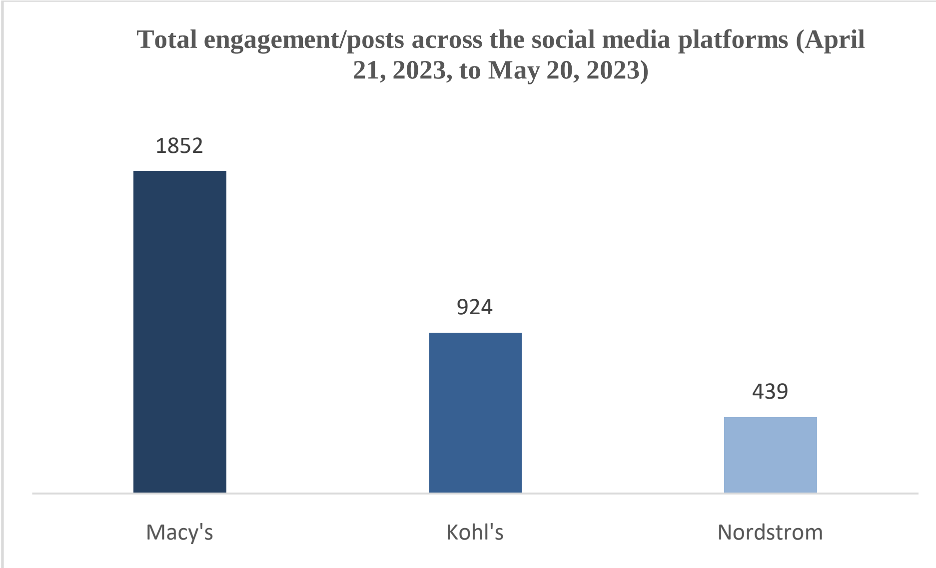

Figure 7: Total Engagement Rate (Engagement Across Posts/Total Posts)

IV. Finding and Discussion

The data shows that the three brands have taken a very different approach to their social media strategy. When looking at the results closely, it is evident that the three brands engage with the users very differently and are also seeing varied results in terms of performance. Below are a few key takeaways based on the analysis that other brands can learn from.

1. *Macy's is leading the competitors in the total number of followers and has seen tremendous growth in followers despite not posting as frequently as peers, as shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4.* Nordstrom, on the other hand, has lost approx. 7K followers across the platforms, and Kohl's has slightly grown. The analysis indicates that Macy's is doing an impressive job of acquiring followers while optimizing their content publishing cadence.
2. *A higher number of posts or publishing multiple posts per day does not result in a higher follower count or higher engagement from users.* Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7 indicate that Macy's has the lowest number of posts during the analyzed time (less than half of that of Nordstrom's total posts) but enjoys twice the engagement (likes, comments, shares, etc.) compared to both Nordstrom and Kohl's. It is clear that Macy's has optimized its social media strategy and is creating high quality content that is sufficient for them to garner higher engagement from their users.
3. *The proliferation of social media channels provides an opportunity to engage users uniquely and can form the base for content strategy.* Figure 6 indicates that each brand can target effectively on specific channels. For example, Macy's is doing equally well on Facebook and Instagram, whereas Kohl's sees higher engagement on TikTok, and Nordstrom sees higher engagement on Instagram but not on other channels.
4. *Brands should take a data-driven approach and continuously iterate and change course based on performance results.* Table 1 and 4 and Figure 6 showthat brands are not getting the same engagement from Facebook as they are getting from Instagram and TikTok. For example, Kohl's has more followers on Facebook and posts relatively more on Facebook vs. other channels but has significantly higher engagement on TikTok vs. Facebook. We see similar insights from data for Macy's and Nordstrom. Therefore, Brands should re-evaluate their strategy on Facebook and emerging channels such as TikTok to increase followers and engagement. They should analyze their target audiences across these channels and refine their content strategy to ensure they are creating content for the right audience and allocate resources and campaigns across the channels based on performance.

V. Conclusion

The analysis has highlighted the need for brands to consider various aspects of social media strategy, from target audience to content, and leveraging data to refine and iterate on their strategy continuously. This will help the brands to optimize their strategy, save costs, and drive higher engagement from the users. For a social media strategy to have successful outcomes, marketing teams should be able to adapt quickly, be agile and nimble to respond quickly to ever-changing market dynamics. While the above will help brands and practitioners with the foundational skills, metrics, and tools to create a social media strategy successfully, it is essential to review and

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continuously monitor and refine the strategy throughout the year to ensure that it is meets the business objectives.

a) Limitations and Scope for Future Research

This study highlights excellent theoretical and conceptual frameworks, skills, and tools that Brands and practitioners can implement. However, researchers can explore additional topics in this area to further expand the insights in this study.

The measurement techniques and metrics covered in this paper are not comprehensive, and future studies can build upon those mentioned in this paper.

Further studies can also dive into the details of the type of content these brands publish across the platforms and understand the type of contents perform better in terms of engagement across these platforms.

Author's Note: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Company.

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3. Ask your guides: If you are having any difficulty with your research, then do not hesitate to share your difficulty with your guide (if you have one). They will surely help you out and resolve your doubts. If you can't clarify what exactly you require for your work, then ask your supervisor to help you with an alternative. He or she might also provide you with a list of essential readings.

4. Use of computer is recommended: As you are doing research in the field of management and business then this point is quite obvious. Use right software: Always use good quality software packages. If you are not capable of judging good software, then you can lose the quality of your paper unknowingly. There are various programs available to help you which you can get through the internet.

5. Use the internet for help: An excellent start for your paper is using Google. It is a wondrous search engine, where you can have your doubts resolved. You may also read some answers for the frequent question of how to write your research paper or find a model research paper. You can download books from the internet. If you have all the required books, place importance on reading, selecting, and analyzing the specified information. Then sketch out your research paper. Use big pictures: You may use encyclopedias like Wikipedia to get pictures with the best resolution. At Global Journals, you should strictly follow here.

6. Bookmarks are useful: When you read any book or magazine, you generally use bookmarks, right? It is a good habit which helps to not lose your continuity. You should always use bookmarks while searching on the internet also, which will make your search easier.

7. Revise what you wrote: When you write anything, always read it, summarize it, and then finalize it.

8. Make every effort: Make every effort to mention what you are going to write in your paper. That means always have a good start. Try to mention everything in the introduction—what is the need for a particular research paper. Polish your work with good writing skills and always give an evaluator what he wants. Make backups: When you are going to do any important thing like making a research paper, you should always have backup copies of it either on your computer or on paper. This protects you from losing any portion of your important data.

9. Produce good diagrams of your own: Always try to include good charts or diagrams in your paper to improve quality. Using several unnecessary diagrams will degrade the quality of your paper by creating a hodgepodge. So always try to include diagrams which were made by you to improve the readability of your paper. Use of direct quotes: When you do research relevant to literature, history, or current affairs, then use of quotes becomes essential, but if the study is relevant to science, use of quotes is not preferable.

10. Use proper verb tense: Use proper verb tenses in your paper. Use past tense to present those events that have happened. Use present tense to indicate events that are going on. Use future tense to indicate events that will happen in the future. Use of wrong tenses will confuse the evaluator. Avoid sentences that are incomplete.

11. Pick a good study spot: Always try to pick a spot for your research which is quiet. Not every spot is good for studying.

12. Know what you know: Always try to know what you know by making objectives, otherwise you will be confused and unable to achieve your target.

13. Use good grammar: Always use good grammar and words that will have a positive impact on the evaluator; use of good vocabulary does not mean using tough words which the evaluator has to find in a dictionary. Do not fragment sentences. Eliminate one-word sentences. Do not ever use a big word when a smaller one would suffice.
Verbs have to be in agreement with their subjects. In a research paper, do not start sentences with conjunctions or finish them with prepositions. When writing formally, it is advisable to never split an infinitive because someone will (wrongly) complain. Avoid clichés like a disease. Always shun irritating alliteration. Use language which is simple and straightforward. Put together a neat summary.

14. Arrangement of information: Each section of the main body should start with an opening sentence, and there should be a changeover at the end of the section. Give only valid and powerful arguments for your topic. You may also maintain your arguments with records.

15. Never start at the last minute: Always allow enough time for research work. Leaving everything to the last minute will degrade your paper and spoil your work.

16. Multitasking in research is not good: Doing several things at the same time is a bad habit in the case of research activity. Research is an area where everything has a particular time slot. Divide your research work into parts, and do a particular part in a particular time slot.

17. Never copy others' work: Never copy others' work and give it your name because if the evaluator has seen it anywhere, you will be in trouble. Take proper rest and food: No matter how many hours you spend on your research activity, if you are not taking care of your health, then all your efforts will have been in vain. For quality research, take proper rest and food.

18. Go to seminars: Attend seminars if the topic is relevant to your research area. Utilize all your resources.

19. Refresh your mind after intervals: Try to give your mind a rest by listening to soft music or sleeping in intervals. This will also improve your memory. Acquire colleagues: Always try to acquire colleagues. No matter how sharp you are, if you acquire colleagues, they can give you ideas which will be helpful to your research.

20. Think technically: Always think technically. If anything happens, search for its reasons, benefits, and demerits. Think and then print: When you go to print your paper, check that tables are not split, headings are not detached from their descriptions, and page sequence is maintained.

21. *Adding unnecessary information:* Do not add unnecessary information like "I have used MS Excel to draw graphs." Irrelevant and inappropriate material is superfluous. Foreign terminology and phrases are not apropos. One should never take a broad view. Analogy is like feathers on a snake. Use words properly, regardless of how others use them. Remove quotations. Puns are for kids, not grunt readers. Never oversimplify: When adding material to your research paper, never go for oversimplification; this will definitely irritate the evaluator. Be specific. Never use rhythmic redundancies. Contractions shouldn't be used in a research paper. Comparisons are as terrible as clichés. Give up ampersands, abbreviations, and so on. Remove commas that are not necessary. Parenthetical words should be between brackets or commas. Understatement is always the best way to put forward earth-shaking thoughts. Give a detailed literary review.

22. *Report concluded results:* Use concluded results. From raw data, filter the results, and then conclude your studies based on measurements and observations taken. An appropriate number of decimal places should be used. Parenthetical remarks are prohibited here. Proofread carefully at the final stage. At the end, give an outline to your arguments. Spot perspectives of further study of the subject. Justify your conclusion at the bottom sufficiently, which will probably include examples.

23. *Upon conclusion:* Once you have concluded your research, the next most important step is to present your findings. Presentation is extremely important as it is the definite medium though which your research is going to be in print for the rest of the crowd. Care should be taken to categorize your thoughts well and present them in a logical and neat manner. A good quality research paper format is essential because it serves to highlight your research paper and bring to light all necessary aspects of your research.

Informal Guidelines of Research Paper Writing

Key points to remember:

- Submit all work in its final form.
- Write your paper in the form which is presented in the guidelines using the template.
- Please note the criteria peer reviewers will use for grading the final paper.

Final points:

One purpose of organizing a research paper is to let people interpret your efforts selectively. The journal requires the following sections, submitted in the order listed, with each section starting on a new page:

The introduction: This will be compiled from reference matter and reflect the design processes or outline of basis that directed you to make a study. As you carry out the process of study, the method and process section will be constructed like that. The results segment will show related statistics in nearly sequential order and direct reviewers to similar intellectual paths throughout the data that you gathered to carry out your study.

The discussion section:

This will provide understanding of the data and projections as to the implications of the results. The use of good quality references throughout the paper will give the effort trustworthiness by representing an alertness to prior workings.

Writing a research paper is not an easy job, no matter how trouble-free the actual research or concept. Practice, excellent preparation, and controlled record-keeping are the only means to make straightforward progression.

General style:

Specific editorial column necessities for compliance of a manuscript will always take over from directions in these general guidelines.

To make a paper clear: Adhere to recommended page limits.

Mistakes to avoid:

- Insertion of a title at the foot of a page with subsequent text on the next page.
- Separating a table, chart, or figure—confine each to a single page.
- Submitting a manuscript with pages out of sequence.
- In every section of your document, use standard writing style, including articles ("a" and "the").
- Keep paying attention to the topic of the paper.

- Use paragraphs to split each significant point (excluding the abstract).
- Align the primary line of each section.
- Present your points in sound order.
- Use present tense to report well-accepted matters.
- Use past tense to describe specific results.
- Do not use familiar wording; don't address the reviewer directly. Don't use slang or superlatives.
- Avoid use of extra pictures—include only those figures essential to presenting results.

Title page:

Choose a revealing title. It should be short and include the name(s) and address(es) of all authors. It should not have acronyms or abbreviations or exceed two printed lines.

Abstract: This summary should be two hundred words or less. It should clearly and briefly explain the key findings reported in the manuscript and must have precise statistics. It should not have acronyms or abbreviations. It should be logical in itself. Do not cite references at this point.

An abstract is a brief, distinct paragraph summary of finished work or work in development. In a minute or less, a reviewer can be taught the foundation behind the study, common approaches to the problem, relevant results, and significant conclusions or new questions.

Write your summary when your paper is completed because how can you write the summary of anything which is not yet written? Wealth of terminology is very essential in abstract. Use comprehensive sentences, and do not sacrifice readability for brevity; you can maintain it succinctly by phrasing sentences so that they provide more than a lone rationale. The author can at this moment go straight to shortening the outcome. Sum up the study with the subsequent elements in any summary. Try to limit the initial two items to no more than one line each.

Reason for writing the article—theory, overall issue, purpose.

- Fundamental goal.
- To-the-point depiction of the research.
- Consequences, including definite statistics—if the consequences are quantitative in nature, account for this; results of any numerical analysis should be reported. Significant conclusions or questions that emerge from the research.

Approach:

- o Single section and succinct.
- o An outline of the job done is always written in past tense.
- o Concentrate on shortening results—limit background information to a verdict or two.
- o Exact spelling, clarity of sentences and phrases, and appropriate reporting of quantities (proper units, important statistics) are just as significant in an abstract as they are anywhere else.

Introduction:

The introduction should "introduce" the manuscript. The reviewer should be presented with sufficient background information to be capable of comprehending and calculating the purpose of your study without having to refer to other works. The basis for the study should be offered. Give the most important references, but avoid making a comprehensive appraisal of the topic. Describe the problem visibly. If the problem is not acknowledged in a logical, reasonable way, the reviewer will give no attention to your results. Speak in common terms about techniques used to explain the problem, if needed, but do not present any particulars about the protocols here.

The following approach can create a valuable beginning:

- o Explain the value (significance) of the study.
- o Defend the model—why did you employ this particular system or method? What is its compensation? Remark upon its appropriateness from an abstract point of view as well as pointing out sensible reasons for using it.
- o Present a justification. State your particular theory(-ies) or aim(s), and describe the logic that led you to choose them.
- o Briefly explain the study's tentative purpose and how it meets the declared objectives.

Approach:

Use past tense except for when referring to recognized facts. After all, the manuscript will be submitted after the entire job is done. Sort out your thoughts; manufacture one key point for every section. If you make the four points listed above, you will need at least four paragraphs. Present surrounding information only when it is necessary to support a situation. The reviewer does not desire to read everything you know about a topic. Shape the theory specifically—do not take a broad view.

As always, give awareness to spelling, simplicity, and correctness of sentences and phrases.

Procedures (methods and materials):

This part is supposed to be the easiest to carve if you have good skills. A soundly written procedures segment allows a capable scientist to replicate your results. Present precise information about your supplies. The suppliers and clarity of reagents can be helpful bits of information. Present methods in sequential order, but linked methodologies can be grouped as a segment. Be concise when relating the protocols. Attempt to give the least amount of information that would permit another capable scientist to replicate your outcome, but be cautious that vital information is integrated. The use of subheadings is suggested and ought to be synchronized with the results section.

When a technique is used that has been well-described in another section, mention the specific item describing the way, but draw the basic principle while stating the situation. The purpose is to show all particular resources and broad procedures so that another person may use some or all of the methods in one more study or referee the scientific value of your work. It is not to be a step-by-step report of the whole thing you did, nor is a methods section a set of orders.

Materials:

Materials may be reported in part of a section or else they may be recognized along with your measures.

Methods:

- Report the method and not the particulars of each process that engaged the same methodology.
- Describe the method entirely.
- To be succinct, present methods under headings dedicated to specific dealings or groups of measures.
- Simplify—detail how procedures were completed, not how they were performed on a particular day.
- If well-known procedures were used, account for the procedure by name, possibly with a reference, and that's all.

Approach:

It is embarrassing to use vigorous voice when documenting methods without using first person, which would focus the reviewer's interest on the researcher rather than the job. As a result, when writing up the methods, most authors use third person passive voice.

Use standard style in this and every other part of the paper—avoid familiar lists, and use full sentences.

What to keep away from:

- Resources and methods are not a set of information.
- Skip all descriptive information and surroundings—save it for the argument.
- Leave out information that is immaterial to a third party.

Results:

The principle of a results segment is to present and demonstrate your conclusion. Create this part as entirely objective details of the outcome, and save all understanding for the discussion.

The page length of this segment is set by the sum and types of data to be reported. Use statistics and tables, if suitable, to present consequences most efficiently.

You must clearly differentiate material which would usually be incorporated in a study editorial from any unprocessed data or additional appendix matter that would not be available. In fact, such matters should not be submitted at all except if requested by the instructor.

Content:

- Sum up your conclusions in text and demonstrate them, if suitable, with figures and tables.
- In the manuscript, explain each of your consequences, and point the reader to remarks that are most appropriate.
- Present a background, such as by describing the question that was addressed by creation of an exacting study.
- Explain results of control experiments and give remarks that are not accessible in a prescribed figure or table, if appropriate.
- Examine your data, then prepare the analyzed (transformed) data in the form of a figure (graph), table, or manuscript.

What to stay away from:

- Do not discuss or infer your outcome, report surrounding information, or try to explain anything.
- Do not include raw data or intermediate calculations in a research manuscript.
- Do not present similar data more than once.
- A manuscript should complement any figures or tables, not duplicate information.
- Never confuse figures with tables—there is a difference.

Approach:

As always, use past tense when you submit your results, and put the whole thing in a reasonable order.

Put figures and tables, appropriately numbered, in order at the end of the report.

If you desire, you may place your figures and tables properly within the text of your results section.

Figures and tables:

If you put figures and tables at the end of some details, make certain that they are visibly distinguished from any attached appendix materials, such as raw facts. Whatever the position, each table must be titled, numbered one after the other, and include a heading. All figures and tables must be divided from the text.

Discussion:

The discussion is expected to be the trickiest segment to write. A lot of papers submitted to the journal are discarded based on problems with the discussion. There is no rule for how long an argument should be.

Position your understanding of the outcome visibly to lead the reviewer through your conclusions, and then finish the paper with a summing up of the implications of the study. The purpose here is to offer an understanding of your results and support all of your conclusions, using facts from your research and generally accepted information, if suitable. The implication of results should be fully described.

Infer your data in the conversation in suitable depth. This means that when you clarify an observable fact, you must explain mechanisms that may account for the observation. If your results vary from your prospect, make clear why that may have happened. If your results agree, then explain the theory that the proof supported. It is never suitable to just state that the data approved the prospect, and let it drop at that. Make a decision as to whether each premise is supported or discarded or if you cannot make a conclusion with assurance. Do not just dismiss a study or part of a study as "uncertain."

Research papers are not acknowledged if the work is imperfect. Draw what conclusions you can based upon the results that you have, and take care of the study as a finished work.

- You may propose future guidelines, such as how an experiment might be personalized to accomplish a new idea.
- Give details of all of your remarks as much as possible, focusing on mechanisms.
- Make a decision as to whether the tentative design sufficiently addressed the theory and whether or not it was correctly restricted. Try to present substitute explanations if they are sensible alternatives.
- One piece of research will not counter an overall question, so maintain the large picture in mind. Where do you go next? The best studies unlock new avenues of study. What questions remain?
- Recommendations for detailed papers will offer supplementary suggestions.

Approach:

When you refer to information, differentiate data generated by your own studies from other available information. Present work done by specific persons (including you) in past tense.

Describe generally acknowledged facts and main beliefs in present tense.

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Topics	Grades		
	A-B	**C-D**	**E-F**
Abstract	Clear and concise with appropriate content, Correct format. 200 words or below	Unclear summary and no specific data, Incorrect form Above 200 words	No specific data with ambiguous information Above 250 words
Introduction	Containing all background details with clear goal and appropriate details, flow specification, no grammar and spelling mistake, well organized sentence and paragraph, reference cited	Unclear and confusing data, appropriate format, grammar and spelling errors with unorganized matter	Out of place depth and content, hazy format
Methods and Procedures	Clear and to the point with well arranged paragraph, precision and accuracy of facts and figures, well organized subheads	Difficult to comprehend with embarrassed text, too much explanation but completed	Incorrect and unorganized structure with hazy meaning
Result	Well organized, Clear and specific, Correct units with precision, correct data, well structuring of paragraph, no grammar and spelling mistake	Complete and embarrassed text, difficult to comprehend	Irregular format with wrong facts and figures
Discussion	Well organized, meaningful specification, sound conclusion, logical and concise explanation, highly structured paragraph reference cited	Wordy, unclear conclusion, spurious	Conclusion is not cited, unorganized, difficult to comprehend
References	Complete and correct format, well organized	Beside the point, Incomplete	Wrong format and structuring

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