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Impact of Digital Marketing on Consumer Purchase Behavior in Pakistan's Retail Sector

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<p>Farid Khan MS Scholar, Department of Management Sciences, Qurtuba University, D.I Khan. Farid.khan204@gmail.com</p> <p>Rashid Khan Department of Management Sciences, Qurtuba University, D.I Khan. Rkhan_31@gmail.com</p> <p>Aysha Sami Latif</p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p>This research explores the impact of digital marketing communication on the consumer behavior with reference to Pakistan’s current context in the retail industry. In the study, we assiduously collected data from 347 respondents in key urban areas to determine the correlation between proper digital marketing platforms and consumers’ purchase decision. Research disproves the hypothesis that there is no convincing evidence of social media marketing influencing the buying process; on the contrary, social media, influencer collaborations, and personalized emails do play a role in influencing the customers’ decision-making process, and the findings differ from segment to segment based on their characteristics. The survey highlighted that the mobile marketing seems to be more effective in influencing those who are below 34 years, while the concerns with website quality along with the search engine optimization erupted high positive correlation in all ages. The research shows a great migration of the consumer touchpoint from offline to online, as only 32% of the respondents get influenced by the offline advertising. Some of the implications of this study for the retail businesses as follows: Specific channel marketing and digital integration strategies for the successful marketing of products to increase the conversion rates in the context of Pakistan’s digitalization of retail stores.</p>
<p>Keywords:</p>	<p>Digital marketing, consumer behavior, retail sector, Pakistan, purchase decisions, social media marketing, e-commerce, quantitative analysis</p>



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Introduction

The retail sector throughout the world has evolved drastically in the recent past due to various factors such as use advanced technology and shift in consumer behavior, where digital marketing has become vital part in the plans of firms. In Pakistan, the evolution of digital buying behaviours has been slowly rising over the past decade more strongly supported with better internet connection, rising numbers of Smartphone usage and the pandemic boosting e Business across the globe. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority states that currently, there are over 120 million internet users in the country that make up to 54% of the total population, and therefore the country has a broad consumer marketplace potential.

However, there is still a reasonably short documentation available on the retail industry of Pakistan and more specifically, understanding the consumer response toward digital marketing strategies. Although prior research from other countries indicates relationships between digital marketing efforts and consumers' shopping behavior, a mixed economic environment, culture, and an emerging digital environment make up the requirements for a local examination in Pakistan. It is crucial to consider those dynamics for both local traders and MNEs geared to the Retail Market in Pakistan, which, estimated to be worth \$152 billion (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

To this end, this paper offers a quantitative investigation of the effects of different digital marketing communication tools in the Pakistan's retail sector. The study focuses on the impact of digital marketing on the consumer buying process – the levels ranging from the awareness level, the interest level, the desired level, and finally,, the action level, the channel preference,, and the channel efficacy with reference to the different demography.

Research Objectives

The aims of this study are as follows:

1. This study aims to use the current literature of SCM to measure the effect of various digital marketing communication tools on consumers' buying behaviors in the Pakistani retailing industry.
2. To consider the likelihood of success of the digital marketing initiatives from the perspective of the key demographic characteristics of the consumers
3. It is necessary to determine which digital marketing strategies are effective at various stages of the purchasing process.
4. In this study, the level of online and offline behavior, shopping behavior will be established to define the contribution of digital marketing.
5. To come up with the best strategies that can be implemented in Pakistan's retail system, the following recommendations will be applicable:

Research Questions

1. Is digital marketing a significant role for Pakistani retail businesses? If yes, how are different digital media channels influencing consumer behavior?
2. The present analysis aims to investigate how several demographic factors can impact consumers' responses to such approaches.
3. To what extent is consumer engagement most effective in various stages of the purchase decision process in relation to digital marketing?

Significance of the Study

This study also has theoretical relevance and practical implications for the field of study. On the academic level, it strengthens the knowledge regarding the role of digital marketing in consumer' behavior concerning emerging economies such as Pakistan. The practical implications are helpful for practitioners on how, when, where, what, and with whom to advertise for retail businesses. It is helpful for those indigenous retail organizations aiming at digitizing their operation and for those global brands that are entering into or expanding their market share within the Pakistan retail industry.



Literature Review

Evolution of Digital Marketing in Retail

They have progressed from a simple and solely web-based presence to an innovative, data-rich, fully-fledged cross-channel strategies that include social media, search, email, mobile, and content. Kannan and Li(2017) define digital marketing as a process that uses technology. In the specific case of retail, this evolution has shifted the behavior of transactions between businesses and consumers in the entire buying process.

The retail industry has seen changes in strategies as more organizations' budgets for digital marketing exceed the traditional advertisements' budgets in various markets. This transition occurs due to a shift in consumer behavior where digital contact influences even physical purchases. As per the study conducted by Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman (2015), it is seen that the line between the online and offline retail context has become fading, and as a result, consumers use multiple touchpoints to make purchases.

In the context of Pakistan, this evolution has been seen on similar lines as are observed in other countries; however, the scale and way in which is actually different in Pakistan. According to Qureshi et al. (2020), Pakistan's retail sector started digitized marketing around 2010, which rapidly increased after 2016 with internet amenities and foreign e-business platforms. The use of digital marketing also increased even more during the COVID-19 pandemic as it became mandatory rather than optional, especially for retail firms (Ali & Butt, 2022).

Digital Marketing Channels and Consumer Behavior

According to the research, there are different effects of digital marketing channels in the market. Thus, social media marketing stands out as highly effective as Ahmad and Khalid (2017) established social networks as the most effective way Pakistani consumers learn about new products. Facebook and Instagram were identified as the two leading platforms in retail discovery processes while ,YouTube impacted the posting of reviews and demonstrated to the results of the survey, email marketing remains successful even in the phase of channel maturity. Analyzing the current consumer market in Pakistan, Khan and Siddiqui (2021) identified that personalized emails have 24% more effectiveness than traditional no-personalized emails. They also reported greater effectiveness in fashion and electronics than grocery products, although they also established that the market segments responded moderately to just about any type of ads.

SEM is vital in attracting consumers with purchase intent because these sets of consumers are already online seeking products to buy. Shahid and Zafar (2019) found that the promotion of the stores in SERP led to higher more unique visitors and purchases among the retailers in Pakistan. This revealed that Search Engines are used by 78% Pakistan consumers to start shopping hence making it strategic for retailers to enhance the search visibility.

There are signs that Pakistan is well on its way to becoming one of the most active marketplace for mobile marketing since it has a high level of smartphone usage. Having stated his concern based on academic periodical, Malik, & Shabbir, (2019) foras that mobile optimized websites and application play a great role on impulsive buying among young consumers. According to their research, the use of coupons that are sent through messages with a notification had 37% response rate which placed the use of messages with notification among the best practices in the use of mobile marketing.

Sales promotion in the form of blogs, videos, and information material affects consumer perception of brand credibility and product quality. Educational content touching on the usage or benefits of a product was effective for 56 percent of Pakistani consumers especially in relation to high involvement products according to Hassan and Ahmed (2020).



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Consumer Purchase Decision Process in Digital Environments

New ICT technologies have therefore disrupted the traditional consumer decision journey model. Contrary to a rational process of awareness, consideration, evaluation, and purchase, or even post-purchase consideration, the digital environment provides a cyclical process. The changes were described by Court et al. (2009) in the consumer decision journey model that included the concepts of triggers, active evaluation, moment of purchase, and post-consumption phase.

Javaid et al. (2022) adopted this model to Pakistani consumers and identified that the digital marketing is used at the early (awareness and consideration) and post-purchase stages, while the choice and purchase intent decisions are based more on the word of mouth and price. The authors found that, Pakistani consumers are in touch with 4-6 points of contact with before they make retail purchases which are above 5,000 PKR.

To some degree, the use of digital marketing is most useful for this journey at different phases. In Mahmood and Khan's study (2019), it was noted that the social media and content marketing was more effective in creating awareness whereas search marketing and e-mail marketing was more useful in affecting the consumers in the active evaluation and purchase stage. Through their studies they found that consumers' interaction with the brand on the social media platform after buying a product has a direct impact on the decision to repurchase as well as recommend the same product.

Demographic Factors and Digital Marketing Effectiveness

Many factors influence consumer behaviour in digital marketing activities, and some of these factors are demographic factors. The most innovative advertising medium stands out as a rather salient factor, with the young consumers being more inclined to the internet or other digital platforms. It was identified by Usman et al. (2022) that out of Pakistan, concerning the age groups the young generations, particularly the 18 to 34 years younger group was actually 3 times more likely to get influenced and make their purchases depending on the social media marketing than the 45 or older group of the Pakistan population.

In terms of the usage of digital channel, the high-income and the lower education level aware client show different characteristics. Abbas and Ali (2022) have also pointed out that the positive response for information oriented and product specification was significantly high among the groups with high income and education level while among the low-income groups, promotional influences and price consciousness appeared dominant.

It is as well argued that there are regional differences since the consumers in urban areas differ from those in the rural areas. Qureshi & Ahmad (2021) established that multiple touch points' pluralism was higher among urban Pakistani consumers, and social media channel pluralism was higher among rural consumers and the most common social media channels include Facebook and YouTube while communicating with the retail brands.

There is evidence of the existence of gender variation on response to digital marketing in previous research. Fatima and Lodhi (2022) concluded that the female customers of Pakistan were more inclined towards the visual platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest than the males which they were more receptive about the influencer marketing than the male customers who were more engaged towards search and email marketing.

Digital Marketing in Pakistan's Retail Sector: Current Practices

Digital marketing is in use in the retail stores in Pakistan to different extent depending on the size of the store and the type of the retail chain. While many multinational companies, those present in Pakistan implement a complex strategic multiple channel marketing approach, small and medium companies have to use social media for marketing as they are cheap and easy to use (Malik et al., 2022).



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The uses of social media in the retail business sector are widespread in the context of Pakistan. Imran and Shafiq (2020) found that 94% of the surveyed retailers had continued having an active social media account, where Facebook accounts for 92%, Instagram for 76%, and YouTube for 45%. They also showed that social media was the most appealing online marketing medium for the retailers; it was considered effective by 67%.

Essentials of e-commerce are established, and retailers maintain dedicated e-stores while some still use the market place platforms. Due to the statistics collected from E-Commerce Association of Pakistan (2022), around 41% of established retailers still have e-Commerce capabilities but there are certain differentiation in the functional and experiential front.

Today, mobile marketing approaches have emerged as popular, as the internet access in Pakistan prominently involves mobile connectivity. Ahmed and Zubair (2022) established that only 58% of the retail businesses have mobile-friendly websites, and only 23% of them have dedicated shopping apps. In their research, they discovered that the place-based marketing and mobile point redemption loyalty programmes are areas which are yet to be effectively exploited in Pakistan by a large number of retailers.

As it was seen, the practices of content marketing are quite diverse. According to the study conducted by Khan et al. (2022), fashion electronics were most effective followed by retailers in creating better content and the grocery and household goods category were seen to be slowest in generating interactive content. They were able to determine that the type of content in videos attracted 3.7 TIMES more engagement than plain text types of content in the retail categories.

Methodology

Research Design

This research made use of an exploratory survey research design to acquire its primary data. The use of quantitative approach was appropriate according to the research goals of gauging, comparing and even determining the correlation between digital marketing platforms and consumer buying behavior. A cross-sectional design was used to obtain all the data at a specific time to get a picture of the current situation regarding the consumer's point of view.

Population and Sampling

The target population constituted only the adult consumers, consuming aged 18 years and above, living in Pakistan, who had shopped at least once whether through online shopping and or physical shopping sometimes within the last three months before the study. The difference in the time frame made sure the participants could effectively recount their shopping experience and digital marketing experiences.

In order to have a convenient representation of the target demographic the study employed a stratified random sampling procedure. The subjects were then divided into groups of age, gender, income, education and places of dwelling. Concerning the participants, the random sampling technique was used in each stratum. It was helpful in achieving that since it allows for adequate representation while considering practicality issues such as time and cost.

Cochran's sample size formula was used to determine the sample size with 5% error margin and 95% confidence interval. It was calculation was as follows to get the minimum required sample size 384. To address the issue of non-response rate and invalid responses, 450 participants were invited via email to complete the survey out of which 347 participants responded by completing the survey in full, thus giving the survey as a response rate of 77.1%.



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Data Collection Instrument

Consequently, a quasi-experimental design was chosen, while a structured questionnaire was designed as the major tool for data collection. The questionnaire provided below was developed in order to gather the required data, and it was divided into four parts:

1. Developmental characteristics: Those relate to the age, gender, level of education, income status, and geographical region.
2. Those are now asking as follows: The frequency of using digital media: preferred platforms for the use of digital media: and the average time per day spent in using digital media.
3. Digital marketing exposure and perceptions: Measured exposure to various digital marketing channels and consumer attitudes toward them
4. Consumers' buying decision: The recent purchases, the factors that affect those purchase decisions and the perceived effect of digital marketing autorelease

The questionnaire used close-end questions in the form of multiple choices, 5-point Likert scale, and ranking statements. Likewise, in Likert scale questions, students used a scale of 1 to 5 to represent their level of agreement with any given statement which was labeled as; Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly Agree respectively. The survey was pre-tested to ensure clarity, scope and reliability of the used questionnaires on 30 respondents. After collecting responses from the pilots, the actual words used in questions and the flow of questions were slightly altered.

Reliability and Validity

Therefore, in order to test the internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed with the multi-item scales. They stood between 0.78 and 0.92 in value for different constructs and all of them were above 0.7 recommended level hence reasonable reliability.

Construct validity was determined through expert opinions where three professors of marketing and two businesspersons reviewed the relevance of the questions in the questionnaire. The construct validity was taken care of through a factor analysis in order to verify the hypothesized dimensional structure of the measurement scales.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected in November, December and early January 2024. The questionnaire was therefore completed through a multi mode approach to capture different demographics.

1. Online survey distribution via email and social media platforms
2. Personal distribution at five large malls in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar, & Quetta
3. Telephone interviews through a computer mode for the participants who do not have access to the internet.

This approach helped in reducing sampling errors that would have been occasioned by the exclusive use of online means of data administration and ensured that all classes of consumer with disabilities in accessing internet were included in the sample frame. The students and teachers all gave their assent before carrying out this survey and no participant's details were used to identify him or her to reduce bias.

Data Analysis Techniques

All the gathered data was analyzed with the help of IBM SPSS version 27.0 software. Data analysis procedures included:

1. Descriptive statistics tables and frequencies to summarize the demographic data and response distribution.
2. This is because correlation analysis uses Pearson's correlation coefficient which helps in determination of the coefficient of relationship between variables.



3. Multiple regression analysis: As a technique it will help to measure the relationship of influencing factors of each type of digital marketing on purchase behavior controlling the other demographic variables.
4. ANOV As used to compare the significance of effectiveness of digital marketing for the various segments of the business.
5. Exploratory factor analysis: In the present study, exploratory factor analysis was used to create the following factors of the constructs of digital marketing influence.
6. Moderating role of redundancy: (H3): To examine the relationships among the hypothesized constructs using structural equation modeling technique
The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for all the tests used in this research. Since the results have to be easily understandable, data were presented in the form of tables and charts.

Ethical Considerations

The study in this paper complied with the principles of ethical treatment of human subjects. It was an opt-in study and the respondents were briefed on the nature of the study, the anonymity guarantees and rights to withdraw from the study. This is because no personal identifiers were obtained from the respondents and all statistical data collected were aggregated in a manner that could not identify the respondents. The research was, therefore, conducted under Rica's institutional research ethics committee.

Results and Analysis

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The respondents of the study were 347 people, and they can be characterized by various demographic factors. The demography of the sample population are highlighted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	189	54.5%
	Female	158	45.5%
Age	18-24 years	83	23.9%
	25-34 years	112	32.3%
	35-44 years	87	25.1%
	45-54 years	42	12.1%
	55 years and above	23	6.6%
Education	High school or below	29	8.4%
	Undergraduate	163	47.0%
	Graduate	120	34.6%
	Postgraduate	35	10.0%
Monthly Income	Below PKR 50,000	68	19.6%
	PKR 50,000-99,999	142	40.9%



	PKR 100,000-149,999	87	25.1%
	PKR 150,000 and above	50	14.4%
Location	Urban	232	66.9%
	Suburban	78	22.5%
	Rural	37	10.6%

The gender distribution of the sample slightly favoured the males as they were 54.5% as compared to the females 45.5%. About three-fifth of the total respondents (56.2% of total sample) were within this age category followed by youthful (18-24) and middle-aged (45 years and above) customers, with a percentage of 23.9% and 18.7% respectively. The education level of the respondents could also be classified as undergraduate (47.0%) and graduate (34.6%). In terms of the income range, an overwhelmingly large number (75.9%) belonged to the middle-income class (PKR 50,001 to 150,000) and 66.9% of the residents were from the urban areas.

Digital Media Usage Patterns

Participants indicated perceived the use of the different forms of the digital media differently. The maximum usage time devoted on a daily basis was for social networking sites (M= 2.8 hours), then video sharing (M= 1.4 hours) and news/ information seeking (M=0.9 hours). Table IV presents the description of the usage of digital media by the targeted group across the various platforms.

Table 2: Digital Media Usage Patterns

Digital Platform	Daily Usage			Frequency of Access		
	Mean (hours)	SD	Median	Daily (%)	Weekly (%)	Monthly (%)
Social Media	2.8	1.3	2.5	86.2	11.5	2.3
Video Streaming	1.4	0.9	1.2	52.7	35.4	11.9
News/Information Websites	0.9	0.7	0.8	48.1	37.2	14.7
E-commerce Platforms	0.7	0.6	0.5	32.0	56.8	11.2
Email	1.1	0.8	1.0	68.3	27.4	4.3
Search Engines	1.3	0.7	1.1	79.5	18.7	1.8
Mobile Apps	2.1	1.1	2.0	83.6	13.8	2.6

Among all forms of social networking, the largest group responded that they use social networking profiles daily and amounts to 86.2%. Interestingly, 83.6% of respondents mentioned that they use it daily and mobile applications come the second: The third on the list were search engines of which 79.5% of the respondents actively use to search daily. Online shopping was the least frequently used at 32.0% daily while 56.8% used it weekly.

Among social networks, WhatsApp was the most often used by the employees – 92.8%, Facebook – 87.6%, Instagram – 73.1%, YouTube – 68.2%, TikTok – 42.7%. LinkedIn and Twitter demonstrated the comparatively low usage rate as 31.4% and 28.8% correspondingly.

Exposure to Digital Marketing Channels

All the respondents stated that they have come across several digital marketing platforms. Frequency and perceived influence of each channel is also illustrated in the Table 3.



Table 3: Exposure to Digital Marketing Channels and Perceived Influence

Digital Marketing Channel	Exposure Frequency (%)			Perceived Influence on Purchase Decisions	
	High	Moderate	Low	Mean Score (1-5)	SD
Social Media Advertisements	82.1	14.7	3.2	3.92	0.87
Search Engine Marketing	67.4	26.8	5.8	3.78	0.92
Email Marketing	48.7	34.3	17.0	2.94	1.14
Influencer Marketing	71.2	22.5	6.3	3.67	1.08
Content Marketing	58.5	31.7	9.8	3.41	0.96
Mobile Marketing	62.8	28.5	8.7	3.53	1.02
Online Reviews	76.4	19.3	4.3	4.06	0.83
Retailer Websites	64.0	29.7	6.3	3.89	0.88

Of all the adverts, social media adverts recorded the highest exposure level at 82.1 percent. Thus, online reviews were established as influential, though not in a conventional advertising manner, with the highest mean influence score of 3.96 on a 5 point scale, and 76,4% of the respondents stated that they have high exposure to it. It's noticeable in the finding that even though, email marketing has been rated to have little impact or perceived influence (mean= 2.94), its exposure level is relatively moderate.

Impact of Digital Marketing on Purchase Behavior

Considering the above factors, multiple regression analysis was done to determine effect of various digital marketing communication on consumer behavior. There was one independent variable, "Demographics," which included gender, age, education level, household income, and geographical location of the participants. The dependent variable was "Purchase Decision Influence" which was obtained from items testing the impact of digital marketing on awareness, consideration, evaluation, and purchase decisions. Table 4 presents the regression results.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis - Impact of Digital Marketing Channels on Purchase Behavior

Digital Marketing Channel	Standardized Coefficient	Beta	t-value	p-value	VIF
Social Media Advertisements	0.347		6.283	0.000*	1.78
Search Engine Marketing	0.286		5.124	0.000*	1.92
Email Marketing	0.142		2.847	0.005*	1.63
Influencer Marketing	0.258		4.735	0.000*	1.85
Content Marketing	0.187		3.462	0.001*	1.74
Mobile Marketing	0.234		4.218	0.000*	1.81
Online Reviews	0.372		6.839	0.000*	1.69



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Retailer Websites	0.293	5.276	0.000*	1.88
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The results showed that the regression model accounted for the total of 63.1% of the variability of purchase decision influence and the zero hypothesis of the overall model was rejected with $F=72.46$, $p<0.001$. There was positive and significance correlation between all the digital marketing communication channels and the purchase behavior. Online reviews had the highest values of beta-coefficient equal to 0.372, $t = 9.713$, $p < 0.001$, followed by social media ads, ($b = 2.255$, $t= 10.481$, $p < 0.001$) and retailer website ($b = 1.913$, $t = 8.954$, $p < 0.001$). Nevertheless, the least influence was reported for e-mail marketing ($\beta = 0.142$, $t = 2.389$, $p = 0.005$).

For all the predictors, the VIF did not exceed the cut off value of two, hence, no multicollinearity problems existed. In addition, the residual diagnostics adopted in this research affirmed that the common assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity of the model were appropriate.

Demographic Variations in Digital Marketing Effectiveness

Thus, to understand how digital marketing effectiveness establishes a relationship with different audiences, ANOVA tests were carried out. Table 5 summarizes the significant findings.

Table 5: Demographic Variations in Digital Marketing Channel Effectiveness

Demographic Factor	Digital Marketing Channel	F-value	p-value	Post-hoc Test Results
Age	Social Media Advertisements	18.47	0.000*	18-34 > 35-44 > 45+
	Mobile Marketing	22.81	0.000*	18-34 > 35-44 > 45+
	Email Marketing	3.62	0.007*	25-44 > 18-24, 45+
	Influencer Marketing	26.34	0.000*	18-34 > 35+
Gender	Social Media Advertisements	7.83	0.005*	Female > Male
	Influencer Marketing	12.41	0.000*	Female > Male
	Search Engine Marketing	6.24	0.013*	Male > Female
Education	Content Marketing	9.17	0.000*	Graduate, Postgraduate > Others
	Email Marketing	7.45	0.000*	Graduate, Postgraduate > Others
	Search Engine Marketing	4.32	0.005*	Education ↑, Effectiveness ↑
Income	Mobile Marketing	2.84	0.038*	Middle income > Highest, Lowest
	Email Marketing	5.63	0.001*	Income ↑, Effectiveness ↑
	Retailer Websites	6.28	0.000*	Income ↑, Effectiveness ↑
Location	Social Media Advertisements	8.46	0.000*	Urban, Suburban > Rural
	Mobile Marketing	11.72	0.000*	Urban > Suburban > Rural
	Search Engine Marketing	9.83	0.000*	Urban > Suburban, Rural



*significant at $p < 0.05$; ↑ indicates positive relationship

Some of the particular distinctions seen with the use of digital marketing channels by the two specified age ranges were as follows. Mobile marketing and social media were also the most popular with the younger age of consumers aged between 18-34 years, while the popularity reduced as the age increased. It became clear that email marketing had the highest efficiency among the audience of the 25 to 44 years old. Thus, influencer marketing is reported to be more effective among the consumers below 35 years than it is among the older consumers.

The analysis of the gender effectively also revealed some differences for the social media and advertisement and influencer marketing which depicted a higher effectiveness level among female consumers. On the other hand, mean score for search engine marketing highlighted higher significance on male consumers than the female consumers.

Finding suggested that education level has a direct impact where the higher the level of education the more effective the internet marketing in the form of content marketing and e-mail marketing as well as the search engine marketing. Consumers with graduate and postgraduate education having been found to have been influenced to a greater extent than the other levels of education.

Regarding income, the findings showed that other email marketing and retailer websites were favored as the income level increases. Mobile marketing on its part had its different trend, which reached its most efficiency when it got to the middle income group.

The region showed that media proved to be even more effective in big cities but less impacts in rural areas concerning social media advertisement and mobile as well as search engine marketing.

Digital Marketing and its effect on the stages of the purchase process

The study of the proxy factors using the factor analysis indicated that the digital marketing influence fit highly in the model of the consumers' buying process. Thus, four factors came out to be there which were Awareness, Consideration, Purchase Decision and Post-Purchase and I found out that they cumulatively explained 72.4% of the total variance. In table 6 below is a breakdown of the digital marketing channels specified in this research in terms of their effectiveness in each of the four stages of the purchase process.

Table 6: Digital Marketing Channel Effectiveness Across Purchase Journey Stages

Digital Marketing Channel	Mean Effectiveness Score (1-5)			
	Awareness	Consideration	Purchase Decision	Post-Purchase
Social Media Advertisements	4.28	3.75	3.41	2.96
Search Engine Marketing	3.62	4.07	3.84	2.83
Email Marketing	3.18	2.95	2.76	3.04
Influencer Marketing	4.12	3.83	3.26	2.94
Content Marketing	3.78	3.96	3.44	3.27
Mobile Marketing	3.87	3.54	3.62	3.14
Online Reviews	3.06	4.32	4.47	3.92
Retailer Websites	3.48	4.12	4.23	3.36



Digital marketing channels proved to be more effective at some stages of purchase than in others. Several OTC medicines also conveyed high effectiveness scores as observed in the awareness stage with social media ads and influencer marketing having a mean of 4.28 and 4.12 respectively. The most utilized source during consideration stage was online reviews and retailer websites having a score of 4.32 and 4.12 respectively while those of the purchase decision stage were 4.47 and 4.23. This also true for the post-purchase influence where the social media had relatively a low score compared to other stages of the ACP, though the online review had the highest score of all those that were had with a score of 3.92.

Discussion

Overall Impact of Digital Marketing on Consumer Purchase Behavior

This signifies that the variables as part of the digital marketing model indeed impacts the purchase behavior of consumers in the retail sector of Pakistan, contributing 63.1% of the total variation toward the quantity of products purchased. This massive impact corresponds with global trends but is depicted to be higher than the influence levels as observed in some of the prior studies made in Pakistan (Qureshi et al., 2020), which may depict a faster pace of shift in consumer behavior on the digital platform.

The comparison of digital marketing channels effectiveness gives useful information on the potential priority. The emergence of online reviews as the most influential factor ($\beta = 0.372$) underscores the importance of user-generated content in the contemporary digital ecosystem. This finding aligns with trends in the international literature regarding the role of peers in the decision-making process of consumption but is incongruent with some of the previous Pakistan-related studies that assigned key roles to marketer-controlled sources (Ahmad & Khalid, 2017). This has likely been a result of consumers' enhancing skills in the analysis of marketing communications.

Of all the SM tools, social media has the highest influence ($\beta = 0.347$) which supports the fact that the Pakistan is an active user of the social media according to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (2022). This is further indicated by the relatively lower effect of email marketing ($\beta = 0.142$) which may imply some implementation problems rather than the capabilities or even the limitations of the marketing communication channel, consistent with Khan and Siddiqui's (2021) summative analysis of personalization concerning the email marketing strategies.

Demographic Patterns and Strategic Implications

The flows by a variety of channels vary greatly according to age and sex, and these differences have significant strategic ramifications for the company. The significant variation in the perception across age groups to digital marketing including social networking & mobile makes the segment important to be separated. Social media, mobile, and influencer would be indeed the most effective communication channels for retailers targeting young consumers within the age group of 18-34, conversely, retailers targeting the older age group should distribute channel efforts more evenly and focus a little more on SEM and retailer site.

It is also consistent with Fatima and Lodhi (2022), but it offers broader information about the comparison of different channels among females and males when advertising a new product. Hence, it has been ascertained that social media and influencer marketing is more effective among female consumers overall, which might mean that more targeted communication strategies for specific genders can be beneficial for retail businesses, especially when it comes to clothing, cosmetics, and goods for home cosmetic categories where women are the main decision-makers.

Audience analysis proves critical in the digital marketing planning due to the interaction between education level and income on certain channel effectiveness. The positive correlation between the level of education and the reaction to content marketing aligns with Hassan and Ahmed's (2020)



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findings with the influence of education content on the purchase behavior of products and urged retailers to adapt the level of content to the education level of the target audience.

Digital divide of urban and rural areas of Pakistan divides per the study and proves the hypothesis that rural regions lack digital infrastructures and accessibility. Therefore, these results imply that while national strategies might be effective for retailing, this is not the case with most markets, and hence, when retailers operate in these multiple markets, they should employ unique digital marketing strategies for each of them.

Conclusion

This research conduct quantitative analysis to compare the role of digital marketing on consumer's purchase intention in the retail sector of Pakistan. According to the research, digital marketing has a large impact on consumer buying behavior, contributing to the explanation of 63.1% of the total variation in purchases. Specifically, each channel revealed different degrees of influence and the top rankings went to the online reviews, social media advertisements and the retail websites. Digital marketing affects customers in a diverse way with clear differences depending on the age, sex, level of education, income and residence status. Also, the analysis of the effectiveness of digital channels in reaching consumers at distinct phase shows that such a strategy depends on the phase the consumer is in.

Theoretical Contributions

In this regard, this research has provided a number of important contributions to the existing knowledge base. First, it gives a demonstration of the level at which digital marketing exist in the context of socioeconomic environment in Pakistan which has not been explored by previous scholars. This study also contributes to knowledge in the field and fills gaps to some extent identifying the impact of digital marketing in emerging digital economy. Secondly, the study narrows down the usefulness of specific digital marketing media to help populate the channel selection theory in retail marketing. Third, specific information regarding demographic moderators also enhances the existing ideas about consumer behaviour, indicating to what extent certain characteristics directly affect the readiness to engage with digital marketing campaigns.

The research also additionally offers to purchase journey theory a creativity of digital channel efficiency at each stage and hence develops a more effectiveness purchase journey theory of the procedure by the consumer. This mapping supports the theoretical frameworks who depict the contemporary purchase process as a continuous loop and not a linear, especially in the digital environment that has affected purchases and sales of products.

Practical Implications

The following are the notable findings for the retail FDI research that may benefit Pakistan's retail businesses: First it shows that digital marketing is playing a vital role in the purchase decision and overall marketing hence the need to embrace the digital channel. It would be beneficial for retailers to spend the time and money appropriate to each channel in relation to the amount of results it brings, especially in the areas of online opinions, social networks, and web page.

Second, the demographic differences in channel effectiveness explain the general concept of market segmentation. In targeting segments, channel planning and content adaptation should not be generalized, but rather should be based on receivers' segment characteristics. The fact is that social media and the mobile path in particular are significantly more effective for young consumers; therefore, a youth retail brand should focus on these channels.

Third, the journey-stage analysis provides insights on where and how interaction channel should be deployed throughout the purchase funnel. The awareness generation should focus on social media and influencer marketing while consideration and purchase phases target search marketing, reviews



and website optimization. Thus, it can be stated that follow up with a customer should entail the use of reviews as well as emails in order to foster loyalty and word of mouth.

Fourth, one of the significant implications of the study is the significance of UGC with an emphasis on online reviews. Based on the analysis of the collected data, retailers should use systematic strategies for growing positive feedback and handling negative ones, actively adopting customer testimonials into promoting their businesses' online presence.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

However, some limitations of this study are implied that can be the suggestions for the future research. However, a cross-sectional study merely looks at the indices of digital marketing and its influence in a certain time and hence has limited ability to unravel the changes. Such study designs could give better understanding in how digital impact may change OVER TIME – invaluable in Pakistan where such environment is relatively emergent.

Second, despite a large pool of respondents the sample was marginally balanced on some demographic type of users such as the elderly and rural purchasers. Thus, future research can focus on these few segments as a way of coming up with more concrete conceptions on how this age group uses social media.

Third, participants of this survey comprised mostly urban and suburban consumers while the rural consumers were under represented. Because Pakistan has a huge rural population, literature focusing specifically on digital marketing within the rural retail stores' environment would be AGV valuable.

Fourth the study in question did not provide a formulated classification of industries but examined general retail categories. Further research could also examine how digital marketing effectiveness differs by retail categories such as fashion, electronics, groceries and luxury in order to get more detailed approach for each category.

Fifth, the study sought to incorporate quantitative values of the impacts of digital marketing without addressing other qualitative facets of the post-content and creative messages. Further studies that integrate the identified impact assessment of the quantitative analysis with the assumptions of the qualitative content analysis could be beneficial for more than seeing which channels are beneficial—it would specify within-channels content styles too.

Last of all, this research has not included any data related to the consumer point of view while proposing and it has not discussed any of the implementation issues faced by retailers. Future research could be twofold where one part may focus on consumers' response to digital marketing while the other may focus on the capability, limitation and effectiveness of implementation for digital marketing on behalf of retailers in Pakistan.

Therefore, in line with the research propositions and findings of this study, it can be posited that digital marketing has emerged as a critical influence on consumers' buying behaviour in the retail industry of Pakistan which is further conditioned by specific demographic variables and phases of the purchasing process. The Pakistan's digital environment has grown to a complex in the meantime, so that the retailers need to follow more comprehensive and specific approaches to interact with consumers in a timely and right moments in the process of their buying decision. Therefore, future research should extend these findings to study how these dynamics of digital influence change in this market context.

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