Full length article

Exploring customer perceptions and responses to Spar's digital marketing initiatives in Durban

Manqele Khulekani Senzo[1], Anos Chitamba[2], Sizwe Mbona[3]

1 Business School, Faculty of Management Sciences
Durban University of Technology, email: 21854369@dut4life.ac.za
2 Faculty of Management Sciences, Durban University of Technology
3 Department of Statistics, Faculty of Applied Sciences,
Durban University of Technology, email: sizwem@dut.ac.za
*Corresponding e-mail: anosc@dut.ac.za

Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This study examines customer perceptions and behavioral responses to Spar's digital marketing initiatives in Durban, South Africa. Using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theoretical framework, the research explores how digital marketing stimuli (such as social media and mobile applications) affect customers' cognitive and emotional states, subsequently influencing their engagement and purchasing behaviors. A quantitative methodology was employed, involving a structured questionnaire administered to 278 customers of a Spar store in Durban. The results indicate that overall perceptions of Spar's digital marketing efforts are positive, with customers considering the communications relevant, visually appealing, and trustworthy. Social media was identified as the most frequently used digital channel for interaction. Statistical analysis demonstrated significant differences in perceptions across various age groups, while responses did not vary by gender. The study concludes that Spar's digital strategies are generally effective; however, ongoing optimization of message personalization, frequency, and timing is recommended to further enhance customer engagement. These findings contribute to the academic literature on digital marketing effectiveness within the South African retail sector and provide practical insights for industry practitioners.

1. Introduction

In recent years, digital marketing has become a vital component for retailers aiming to engage consumers, foster brand loyalty, and influence purchasing behavior. The retail industry in South Africa has seen widespread adoption of digital marketing channels such as social media, mobile marketing, and online promotions, as part of strategies to connect with increasingly digitally savvy consumers. Nsahlai, Khoase, Ndayizigamiye, and Dube (2020) conducted a systematic review of digital marketing in South Africa and identified social media platforms, along with mobile-based SMS marketing, as among the most frequently used methods. Their research also

demonstrated that social media marketing significantly impacts consumers' purchase intentions, particularly among younger demographics.

Consumer perceptions are crucial in determining the effectiveness of digital marketing efforts. Studies indicate that perceptions of convenience, trust, and easy access strongly influence consumers' online purchasing decisions. For instance, Moodley and Buthelezi (2023) examined technological factors affecting online retail in South Africa and found that convenience and data security concerns are central to shaping consumer attitudes and decision-making processes. Similarly, research into online shopping behavior in South Africa highlights that factors such as price, delivery time, flexibility, and ease of access are key motivators for consumers choosing to shop online.

Additionally, specific research focused on Durban suggests that digital marketing plays an important role in shaping brand preferences and building consumer trust. A quantitative study by Tlapana, Ntobaki, and Hawkins-Mofokeng (2023) found that social media marketing significantly influences consumers' brand choices, with increased information sharing via these channels increasing the likelihood of brand consideration and selection. Furthermore, studies comparing traditional and digital advertising media in the Durban Metropolitan Area indicate that digital advertising offers interactive, two-way communication, yet some consumers still perceive traditional media as more credible, due to concerns about exaggeration or misinformation in digital advertisements.

Given this context, it is timely and relevant to examine how Spar's digital marketing efforts are perceived by consumers in Durban, and how these perceptions influence their behaviors—such as engagement, purchasing, loyalty, and trust. As a prominent retailer with both physical stores and an expanding online presence, Spar provides an ideal case for exploring questions such as: Which digital marketing channels do Durban consumers consider most credible? Which aspects of Spar's digital campaigns evoke positive responses? Are there perceived barriers—such as trust issues, over-promotion, or privacy concerns—that may hinder effectiveness? This study aims to address these questions by focusing on customer perceptions and responses specific to Spar in Durban. The findings will contribute to academic understanding by enhancing knowledge of digital marketing effectiveness within the South African retail environment and offer practical insights for retailers like Spar to optimize their digital strategies for greater consumer engagement and acceptance.

Objective of the Study
This study aims to address these questions by focusing on customer perceptions and responses specific to Spar in Durban.

Theoretical Perspective – The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model
The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model, originally introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), offers a well-established framework for understanding how external environmental stimuli influence internal psychological processes, which subsequently lead to behavioral outcomes. In digital marketing research, this model has been widely utilized to analyze how customers perceive and respond to various marketing stimuli, including social media advertisements, app notifications, online promotions, and email communications (Gao & Li, 2020; Islam & Rahman, 2021). Consequently, the model is particularly valuable for examining how Spar's digital marketing initiatives in Durban influence customer perceptions and behaviors.

Stimuli: Digital Marketing Triggers in Spar's Context

Within the S–O–R framework, stimuli refer to external marketing triggers designed to capture consumer attention and provoke responses. For Spar, these stimuli include social media advertising on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, loyalty and rewards programs, mobile app notifications, digital flyers, and targeted email promotions. These stimuli can vary in terms of frequency, interactivity, relevance, and credibility. Practical applications of these marketing efforts demonstrate their significant influence on consumer behavior. For example, Kaur, Balakrishnan, and Rana (2020) found that opt-in email marketing campaigns function as stimuli that activate both cognitive and affective states in consumers, resulting in favorable behavioral responses. Similarly, Aragoncillo and Orús (2021) showed that integrated channels and convenience in omnichannel retail environments serve as stimuli that foster internal states of empowerment and trust. These examples underscore how Spar's digital marketing strategies in Durban can act as stimuli that shape local customer perceptions.

Organism: Cognitive and Emotional States of Customers

The organism component refers to the internal cognitive and emotional states of consumers that mediate the relationship between stimuli and behavioral outcomes. For Spar, these responses may include attitudes toward the brand's online presence, levels of trust in digital platforms, perceived value of promotions, and emotional reactions such as satisfaction or irritation. According to Islam and Rahman (2021), digital marketing stimuli encountered on social media influence consumers' cognitive and affective states, which in turn drive engagement or disengagement behaviors. Additionally, Hasan, Lowe, and Petrovici (2021) found that perceived usefulness, ease of use, and authenticity of digital marketing content significantly impact customer trust, serving as mediators in determining behavioral responses. In the context of Durban, customer reactions will likely depend on the perceived relevance and authenticity of the marketing content, as well as its alignment with their needs and expectations.

Response: Behavioral Outcomes

The response stage signifies the behavioral outcomes resulting from exposure to digital marketing and the internal processing of the organism. For Spar, such responses might include making purchases online or in-store, engaging with digital content through clicks, likes, and shares, demonstrating loyalty and repeat purchases, or disengaging, such as unsubscribing from newsletters or ignoring advertisements.

Recent empirical research supports these outcomes. Aragoncillo and Orús (2021) demonstrated that consumer satisfaction and trust mediate impulse purchasing behaviors in omnichannel retail environments. Furthermore, Lee and Chen (2022) found that emotional responses to brand social media marketing strongly influence online impulse buying intentions. These findings highlight the importance of the interaction between stimuli and organism states in shaping behavioral responses, emphasizing the relevance of the S–O–R framework for analyzing Spar's digital marketing efforts.

Strengths and Limitations of the S–O–R Model

One key strength of employing the S–O–R model is its ability to integrate perceptions (organism) with behavioral responses. This feature allows for a comprehensive understanding of how customer perceptions of Spar's digital marketing activities influence their subsequent actions. Additionally, the model facilitates comparison between different stimuli, enabling assessment of the relative effectiveness of strategies such as social media advertising versus loyalty programs. Another advantage is the model's emphasis on the mediating role of psychological states—such as trust and perceived value—which helps explain the varying success of digital marketing campaigns (Islam & Rahman, 2021; Hasan et al., 2021).

However, the model does have limitations. Its primarily linear structure presumes that stimuli directly affect internal states and behaviors; in practice, feedback loops often exist, where responses can influence perceptions of stimuli over time. Moreover, the highly dynamic digital marketing environment complicates the separation of stimuli and organism variables. Additionally, local factors specific to Durban—such as demographic diversity, internet accessibility, and digital literacy—may moderate how stimuli are perceived and acted upon. Recognizing these contextual elements is essential when applying the model to Spar's marketing strategies.

The S–O–R model offers a robust theoretical framework for analyzing customer perceptions and responses to Spar's digital marketing initiatives in Durban. It conceptualizes how external marketing stimuli influence consumers' cognitive and emotional states—referred to as the organism—which in turn drive behavioral outcomes such as purchasing decisions, engagement, loyalty, or disengagement. Given its widespread application in contemporary digital marketing research, the S–O–R framework provides both valuable theoretical insights and practical guidance for understanding consumer behavior within Durban's retail environment.

2. Literature Review

The rapid growth of digital channels and services has transformed the grocery retail industry into an environment where digital marketing initiatives—such as social media campaigns, email promotions, app push notifications, search advertising, personalized offers, and omnichannel touchpoints like click-and-collect—now play a central role in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors. Since 2020, the scholarly literature emphasizes three interconnected themes: (1) how consumers perceive the usefulness, convenience, and trustworthiness of e-grocery services and digital marketing; (2) the behavioral responses these perceptions elicit, including adoption, channel selection, cart abandonment or completion, and loyalty; and (3) structural and operational barriers—such as pricing, fulfillment challenges, and user experience gaps—that influence these perceptions and responses.

Digital Marketing, Usefulness, and Convenience

Research consistently indicates that consumer evaluations of digital grocery services mainly focus on perceived usefulness and convenience. Meta-analyses suggest that beliefs about how online channels simplify or improve shopping experiences, along with attitudes toward e-grocery, are key predictors of the intention to use such services. Notably, during the COVID-19 pandemic, safety concerns heightened perceived usefulness and shifted the importance of these factors (Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2022). Empirical studies further show that timely, relevant digital communications—such as personalized offers and stock alerts—enhance perceived convenience and increase adoption likelihood. Conversely, poorly timed or irrelevant messaging can undermine perceived usefulness and reduce conversion rates (Mpungose, Lekhanya and Anwana, 2025).

Trust, Product Quality, and Sensory Uncertainty

A recurring concern in the literature is sensory uncertainty—particularly regarding fresh produce—where customers worry that they cannot adequately evaluate product quality online. This uncertainty can erode trust and hinder full adoption of online grocery shopping, despite effective digital marketing efforts. Studies highlight that trust—both in the retailer's brand and delivery reliability—as well as assurances about product quality through detailed imagery, live chat support, guarantees, and easy return policies, serve as crucial mediators influencing purchase decisions. Retailers successful in providing transparent quality information and

dependable fulfillment tend to have higher conversion and repeat purchase rates (Meister et al., 2023; Kuikka et al., 2024).

Price Sensitivity, Promotions, and Cart Behavior

Price remains a significant factor influencing channel choice and online shopping behavior. Consumers often utilize digital channels to compare prices and seek promotions, with digital marketing tactics like limited-time discounts, coupons, and price-matching guarantees strongly impacting click-through and purchase completion rates (Nam and Cho, 2025). However, heightened price expectations can also increase hesitation at checkout, often leading to cart abandonment—where digital marketing draws traffic but does not always convert into sales. Factors such as perceived transaction inconvenience (including shipping costs and checkout complexities) and trust issues are linked to higher abandonment rates (Bell, McCloy, Butler and Vogt, 2020).

Omnichannel Touchpoints, Customer Journeys, and Channel Switching

Research into omnichannel retailing highlights that consumer journeys are no longer linear but involve multiple touchpoints across digital and physical channels—such as researching online, shopping in-store, or reordering via mobile apps. Seamless integration—featuring consistent pricing, promotion messaging, customer loyalty programs, and fulfillment options like click-and-collect—enhances perceived service value and promotes customer retention, provided retailers deliver on their fulfillment commitments (Gerea, Gonzalez-Lopez & Herskovic, 2021). Conversely, inconsistent messaging or inventory information across channels can diminish trust, undermining the benefits of omnichannel capabilities. Coherent omnichannel strategies amplify the positive impact of digital marketing on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Gerea et al., 2021).

Impact of COVID-19 and the 'New Normal'

The pandemic accelerated the adoption of e-grocery and amplified the immediate effectiveness of digital marketing messages emphasizing safety, contactless fulfillment, and convenience. Meta-analytical and large-scale studies indicate a significant increase in online grocery usage during this period. However, findings also reveal that post-pandemic behaviors are more nuanced: some consumers retain online shopping habits, while others revert partially to in-store shopping due to preferences for tactile experience and perceptions of better value for certain products (Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2022; Meister et al., 2023). Overall, the pandemic shifted perceptions—enhancing perceived usefulness and trial rates—but long-term adoption depends on consistent service quality, fulfillment costs, and user experience (Mpungose, Lekhanya and Anwana, 2025; and Kuikka et al., 2024).

Customer Loyalty and Customer Feedback

Recent research leveraging large-scale reviews and semantic analysis demonstrates that digital touchpoints influence loyalty formation. Customers assess not only logistical aspects—such as delivery punctuality and product condition upon arrival—but also affective and social dimensions, including staff interaction and public resolution of issues. Digital marketing strategies that incorporate responsive customer service, transparent communication, and visible social proof (such as reviews and ratings) tend to strengthen customer loyalty. Conversely, repeated fulfillment failures or poor crisis management can erode long-term trust (Kuikka et al., 2024).

Operational and Structural Barriers

Various operational challenges can limit the effectiveness of digital marketing efforts. These include fulfillment costs such as delivery fees, limited product assortment, inaccurate stock data, and last-mile delivery issues. When retailers cannot ensure product availability, freshness, or affordable delivery, even compelling digital marketing campaigns achieve only limited success in converting inquiries into purchases and fostering repeat business. Therefore, scholarly recommendations emphasize balancing investment in digital marketing initiatives with operational improvements—such as inventory accuracy, flexible fulfillment options, and transparent pricing—to maximize overall effectiveness (Gerea et al., 2021; Meister et al., 2023).

3. Research Methods

This study employed a quantitative research approach, utilizing a structured survey with a 5-point Likert scale to examine the influence of digital marketing management on consumer purchasing behavior at Spar Retail Store in Durban. Both secondary data (such as academic journals, government publications, and dissertations) (Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021) and primary data (collected via a closed-ended questionnaire) (Hanaysha et al., 2022) were utilized. The target population comprised customers shopping at Spar South Beach, with an estimated daily footfall of 200 to 1,000 individuals. A sample of 278 participants was selected through a combination of probability and non-probability sampling methods (Sekaran & Bougie, as cited in Kalia et al., 2018). Specifically, simple random sampling and convenience sampling were employed, focusing on walk-in customers (Khan, N., 2020). The questionnaire, developed based on relevant literature and theoretical frameworks (Varpio et al., 2020), was pilot tested with 10 participants to enhance clarity and reliability (Gani, A., Imtiaz, N. and Krishnasamy, H.N., 2020). Validity was ensured through expert review, pilot testing, and alignment with research objectives, while reliability was strengthened by using clear, unambiguous questions and consistent scales (Krieglstein et al., 2022). Data collection was conducted at the store location, with participants given 15 minutes to complete the survey. Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics, conducted using SPSS for advanced analysis and Excel for data entry and visualization (Newman & Gough, 2020). Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and the protection of participant anonymity and confidentiality (Head, 2020).

4. Research Findings and Discussion

Table 1:

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	84	38.4
	Female	132	60.3
	Prefer not to say	3	1.4
Age group (years)	18 - 24	64	29.2
	25 - 34	86	39.3
	35 - 44	53	24.2
	45 and above	16	7.3
Highest qualification	Lower than matric	3	1.4
	Matric	84	38.4
	Diploma	72	32.9
	Advanced Diploma	21	9.6

	Postgraduate Diploma/Honours	32	14.6
	Masters	5	2.3
	PhD	2	0.9
Occupation	Student	63	28.8
	Unemployed	32	14.6
	Employed	95	43.4
	Self-employed	28	12.8
	Retired	1	0.5
How often do you shop at Spar per month?	Never	4	1.8
	Daily	10	4.6
	Weekly	99	45.2
	Monthly	85	38.8
	Seasonal	18	8.2
	Yearly	3	1.4
Which digital channels have you used to interact with Spar the most?	Email	6	2.7
	Mobile App	16	7.3
	Social media	128	58.4
	Website	45	20.5
	WhatsApp	24	11.0

Table 1 summarizes the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the sample. The sample consisted of a slightly higher proportion of females (60.3%) compared to males (38.4%). The largest age group was 25-34 years (39.3%), indicating a predominantly young respondent cohort. Regarding education, most participants held a Matric qualification (38.4%) or a Diploma (32.9%), and a majority were either employed (43.4%) or students (28.8%). This profile suggests a sample that is likely to be digitally literate and actively engaged.

In terms of behavioral patterns, there was a high frequency of interaction with Spar, with 45.2% shopping weekly and 38.8% monthly. Notably, digital channel usage data shows that social media (58.4%) is the primary platform for engaging with Spar, significantly surpassing the use of the website (20.5%), mobile application (7.3%), or WhatsApp (11.0%). These findings align with broader trends in South African digital marketing, where social media platforms are among the most frequently used channels for consumer engagement (Nsahlai et al., 2020). The prominent role of social media highlights its importance as a key stimulus within the S-O-R framework in this retail context.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS).

Section	Items	Cronbach's alpha	KMO value	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
				Approx. Chi-square	df	Sig.
CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF	10	0.939	0.930	1665.242	45	<0.001

SPAR'S DIGITAL MARKETING						

Table 2 displays the reliability and validity metrics for the scale used to assess customer perceptions. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.939 for the 10-item scale indicates excellent internal consistency and reliability (Krieglstein et al., 2022). This suggests that the items consistently measure the underlying construct of "customer perceptions of Spar's digital marketing." The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is 0.930, significantly above the recommended threshold of 0.6, indicating that the sample size was appropriate for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating that the correlations among items were sufficient to justify proceeding with factor analysis (Newman & Gough, 2020). These statistical results support the reliability and validity of the data for meaningful analysis of customer perceptions.

Table 3: Normality test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	**df**	**Sig.**	**Statistic**	**df**	**Sig.**
Mean response of items assessing customer perceptions of spar's digital marketing	0.133	219	<0.001	0.945	219	<0.001

Tables 3 and 4 present the distribution and responses related to customer perceptions. The normality tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk) in Table 3 were both statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the data do not follow a normal distribution. This supports the use of non-parametric statistical methods, such as the Kruskal-Wallis H test, for subsequent analyses.

Table 4 displays the mean responses for all 10 perception items, which range from 1.90 to 2.16 on a 5-point scale (where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree). The relatively low mean scores reflect a generally positive perception of Spar's digital marketing efforts. Notably, items related to clear communication (Mean = 1.90) and message relevance (Mean = 1.96) received high levels of agreement. Conversely, items concerning personalization (Mean = 2.16) and data security (Mean = 2.12) showed slightly less positive responses, indicating potential areas for minor improvements.

The standard deviations are relatively high, particularly for the personalization item (SD = 0.905), suggesting variability in customer responses. This implies that perceptions are not uniform across all customers. These findings align with existing literature emphasizing that perceived authenticity and relevance of digital content are critical factors influencing customer trust and engagement (Hasan, Lowe, & Petrovici, 2021).

Table 4: Responses

of items assessing customer perceptions of spar's digital marketing and One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

Questions	Responses, n (%)					Mean (SD)	Test statistics (p-value)
	SA	A	N	D	SD		
Spar's digital messages are relevant to my shopping needs.	66 (30.1)	111 (50.7)	30 (13.7)	9 (4.1)	3 (1.4)	1.96 (0.853)	0.289 (<0.001)
I find Spar's digital ads visually appealing.	54 (24.7)	114 (52.1)	41 (18.7)	9 (4.1)	1 (0.5)	2.04 (0.801)	0.285 (<0.001)
Spar communicates clearly through its digital marketing.	63 (28.8)	121 (55.3)	29 (13.2)	5 (2.3)	1 (0.5)	1.90 (0.739)	0.289 (<0.001)
Spar does not overwhelm me with too many digital messages.	59 (26.9)	105 (47.9)	46 (21.0)	8 (3.7)	1 (0.5)	2.03 (0.818)	0.262 (<0.001)
I feel my personal data is secure with Spar's digital platforms.	49 (22.4)	108 (49.3)	52 (23.7)	6 (2.7)	4 (1.8)	2.12 (0.850)	0.275 (<0.001)
I find Spar's digital content trustworthy.	62 (28.3)	111 (50.7)	39 (17.8)	4 (1.8)	3 (1.4)	1.97 (0.812)	0.277 (<0.001)
Spar's digital advertising respects my preferences and privacy.	55 (25.1)	115 (52.5)	41 (18.7)	3 (1.4)	5 (2.3)	2.03 (0.837)	0.291 (<0.001)
I look forward to receiving Spar's digital promotions.	59 (26.9)	120 (54.8)	29 (13.2)	8 (3.7)	3 (1.4)	1.98 (0.821)	0.306 (<0.001)
Spar's messages are personalized to my shopping behaviour.	51 (23.3)	102 (46.6)	52 (23.7)	9 (4.1)	5 (2.3)	2.16 (0.905)	0.267 (<0.001)
Spar could improve the frequency or timing of its digital messages.	49 (22.4)	116 (53.0)	43 (19.6)	8 (3.7)	3 (1.4)	2.09 (0.828)	0.295 (<0.001)

HYPOTHESIS

H1: Customer perceptions of spar's digital marketing vary across age groups

Table 5: Kruskal-Wallis H Test assessing customer perceptions of spar's digital marketing across age groups

Test statistics	Customer perceptions of spar's digital marketing
Kruskal-Wallis H	9.885
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.020*
Grouping Variable: Age group	

H2: Customer perceptions of spar's digital marketing differ by gender

Table 6: Kruskal-Wallis H Test assessing customer perceptions of spar's digital marketing by gender

Test statistics	Customer perceptions of spar's digital marketing
Kruskal-Wallis H	0.806
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	0.668
Grouping Variable: Gender	

Tables 5 and 6 present the results of the hypothesis testing conducted using the Kruskal-Wallis H test. Table 5 examines H1, which hypothesized that customer perceptions vary across different age groups. The results were statistically significant ($p = 0.020$), leading to the acceptance of H1. This suggests that factors such as digital literacy, channel preferences, and content expectations—attributes that often differ among generations—influence how Spar's digital marketing stimuli are perceived by consumers (Islam & Rahman, 2021). For instance, younger consumers may respond more positively to dynamic social media content, while older groups may prefer email or simpler promotional messages. Conversely, Table 6 evaluates H2, which proposed that perceptions differ based on gender. The findings were not statistically significant ($p = 0.668$), resulting in the rejection of H2. This indicates that, within this sample, male and female customers generally assess Spar's digital marketing efforts in a similar manner. This outcome aligns with research suggesting that digital marketing perceptions—when viewed as useful and convenient—may have a universal appeal, regardless of gender differences (Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2022).

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine customer perceptions and responses to Spar's digital marketing initiatives in Durban through the framework of the S-O-R model. The results indicate that Spar's digital marketing efforts are generally well-received, with customers perceiving the messages as relevant, clear, and trustworthy. Social media has emerged as the primary platform for Spar's digital engagement strategy. The research further identified that these perceptions vary significantly across different age groups, although they remain relatively consistent across genders. This highlights the importance of implementing a segmented and targeted digital marketing approach, tailoring content and channels to different age demographics to maximize relevance and

effectiveness. The application of the S-O-R model was validated, demonstrating that external digital stimuli influence internal customer perceptions, which in turn serve as precursors to behavioral responses.

Implications of the study

For Spar and similar retail organizations, the practical implication is that while the current digital strategy is on a positive path, there are opportunities to strengthen engagement by enhancing personalization efforts, ensuring data security, and optimizing the timing and frequency of digital communications. Future research could investigate specific behavioral responses—such as purchase frequency or basket size—to establish a more direct correlation between positive perceptions and concrete commercial outcomes.

Reference

Aragoncillo, L. & Orús, C. 2021. The impact of omnichannel integration on consumer responses in retailing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 61, 102577. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102577

Bell, L., McCloy, R., Butler, L. and Vogt, J., 2020. Motivational and affective factors underlying consumer dropout and transactional success in ecommerce: an overview. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*, p.1546.

Gani, A., Imtiaz, N. and Krishnasamy, H.N., 2020. A pilot test for establishing validity and reliability of qualitative interview in the blended learning English proficiency course. *Journal of critical reviews*, *7*(05), pp.140-143.

Gao, Y. & Li, X. 2020. Understanding the effects of social media marketing on brand loyalty: A uses and gratifications perspective. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 26(5), pp. 613-631. https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2020.1746466

Gerea, C., Gonzalez-Lopez, F. & Herskovic, V. 2021. Omnichannel customer experience and management: An integrative review and research agenda. *Sustainability*, 13(5), p. 2824. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13052824

Hanaysha, J.R., Shaikh, S.A. & Al-Shaikh, M.E. 2022. The impact of digital marketing adoption on SMEs performance: The mediating role of customer relationship management. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 9(3), pp. 125-134. https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2022.vol9.no3.0125

Hasan, M.R., Lowe, B. & Petrovici, D. 2021. The role of authenticity in building trust in digital marketing. *Journal of Business Research*, 135, pp. 614-626. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.06.050

Head, G. 2020. *Ethics in Educational Research*. 2nd ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers. https://doi.org/10.29074/van.schaik.9780627037539

Islam, J.U. & Rahman, Z. 2021. The impact of digital marketing on consumer engagement and purchase intention: A cognitive-affective perspective. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 15(1), pp. 91-111. https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-03-2020-0054

Jafari-Sadeghi, V., Garcia-Perez, A., Candelo, E. & Couturier, J. 2021. Exploring the impact of digital transformation on technology entrepreneurship and technological market expansion: The use of bibliometric data. *Technovation*, 107, 102273. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2021.102273

Kalia, P., Kaur, N. & Singh, T. 2018. *Advanced Research Methodology*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd.

Kang, J. & Hwang, J. 2023. Ethical considerations in data collection for marketing research in the digital age. *International Journal of Market Research*, 65(1), pp. 12-29. https://doi.org/10.1177/14707853221103612

Kaur, H., Balakrishnan, V. & Rana, S. 2020. The role of email marketing in customer engagement: A stimulus-organism-response perspective. *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice*, 18(2), pp. 89-102. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41263-020-00083-9

Khan, N., 2020. Critical review of sampling techniques in the research process in the world. *Available at SSRN 3572336*.

Krieglstein, F., Beege, M., Rey, G.D., Sanchez-Stockhammer, C. & Schneider, S. 2022. Development and validation of a theory-based instrument to measure problem-solving skills in educational settings. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(6), p. 1315. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000715

Kuikka, M., Laine, J. & Hiltunen, M. 2024. Building long-term trust in e-grocery: The role of fulfilment and communication. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 52(1), pp. 78-95. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-03-2023-0156

Lee, C.H. & Chen, C.W. 2022. The influence of social media marketing on impulse buying: The mediating role of positive emotions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 64, 102731. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102731

Mehrabian, A., & Russell, J. A. (1974). *An approach to environmental psychology*. MIT Press.

Meister, S., Jansson, J., Rundle-Thiele, S. & O'Brien, D. 2023. Overcoming the fresh produce dilemma in online grocery retailing. *Journal of Service Management*, 34(2), pp. 245-264. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-02-2022-0057

Moodley, P. and Buthelezi, M., 2023. Enhancing the online grocery shopping experience for South African consumers: A study of challenges, preferences and strategies. *The Retail and Marketing Review*, *19*(2), pp.70-86.

Mpungose, S., Lekhanya, L.M. and Anwana, E.O., 2025. Critical Factors Influencing Social Media Utilisation for the Survival and Growth of Rural SMMEs During the Covid-19 Crisis in KwaZulu-Natal: Toward a Conceptual Model. *International Journal of Advanced Business Studies*, *4*(4), pp.151-177.

Mpungose, S., Lekhanya, L.M. and Anwana, E.O., 2025. Social Media Marketing and Survival Strategies for Rural SMMEs' Growth During and Beyond the Covid-19 Crisis in KwaZulu-Natal. *International Journal of Advanced Business Studies*, *4*(4), pp.178-209.

Nam, K. and Cho, K., 2025. Navigating the digital purchase journey: the impact of device type and visit channels on consumer behavior. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*.

Newman, M. & Gough, D. 2020. Systematic reviews in educational research: Methodology, perspectives and application. In *Systematic Reviews in Educational Research*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 3-22. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-27602-7_1

Nsahlai, V., Khoase, R., Ndayizigamiye, P. & Dube, S. 2020. A systematic review of digital marketing in South Africa. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Operations Management*, pp. 1213-1224.

Tlapana, T., Ntobaki, M. & Hawkins-Mofokeng, R. 2023. The influence of social media marketing on brand choice in Durban. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 54(1), a3456. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v54i1.3456

Tyrväinen, O. & Karjaluoto, H. 2022. The impact of COVID-19 on grocery shopping behaviour: A meta-analytical review. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 67, 102992. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.102992

Varpio, L., Paradis, E., Uijtdehaage, S. & Young, M. 2020. The distinctions between theory, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework. *Academic Medicine*, 95(7), pp. 989-994. https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000003075