

Original Article

# Relationship Marketing in the Digital Age: Strengthening Customer Engagement and Partnerships in the Lifestyle Industry

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**Abstract.** The study looked into the impact of relationship marketing on improving customer engagement and long-term connections in the lifestyle company in the Philippines. Specifically, it examined the impact of trust, loyalty, commitment, relationship quality, customer happiness, Electronic Customer Relationship Management (E-CRM), strategic market orientation and competitor analysis on the success of digital marketing. The study design was descriptive-correlative. The respondents were 97 marketing professionals, digital marketers, and brand managers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire and Google Forms and analyzed using descriptive and correlational statistical techniques. The study results indicated that relationship marketing techniques were perceived to be well implemented, and that relationship quality and e-CRM were strengths for engaging consumers and promoting digital marketing strategies. The respondents also had a good perception of strategic market orientation and competition analysis, while there were still difficulties with market rivalry, consumer trust and credibility, and new technologies. Additionally, a significant correlation was found between some demographic and professional variables and various aspects of relationship marketing. This means that the respondents could have varied perceptions and applications of relationship marketing approaches. In conclusion, this study shows that building customer trust, leveraging digital relationship management, and executing smart marketing strategies are vital to boosting customer engagement and maintaining long-term partnerships in the lifestyle industry.

**Keywords:** Customer engagement; Digital marketing; E-CRM; Lifestyle industry; Relationship marketing.

In the digital age, relationship marketing has moved from a transactional model to a more participatory, data-driven, and customer-centric model. Relationship marketing is the development, creation, and maintenance of long-term exchanges built on trust, commitment, and reciprocal value (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This is especially true in the lifestyle sector, where the customer's decision is based not only on product features but also on their experience, emotional involvement, identity expression, and recurring interactions with the brand. CRM is therefore a strategic process involving people, information, communication channels, and customer-oriented

activities to create and deliver customer value, not merely a technological instrument (Payne & Frow, 2005; Kumar & Reinartz, 2018).

The advent of electronic customer relationship management (E-CRM) has provided firms with new possibilities for handling client relationships through digital media. E-CRM enables firms to collect consumer data, personalize emails, respond swiftly to issues, monitor comments, and maintain an ongoing dialogue with customers. E-CRM was found to improve relationship quality, customer loyalty, customer experience, brand trust, and repurchase intention (Magatef et al., 2023; Rachbini et al., 2024; Ali & Alfayez, 2024). The findings of this research reveal that maintaining contact with customers through digital channels is becoming increasingly vital for organizations that rely on repeat transactions and long-term loyalty.

The advent of social media and other forms of digital communication has also changed how lifestyle brands engage with their clientele. The previous one-way marketing has been replaced by digital platforms where customers can comment, share experiences, ask questions, promote products, and chat about the firm. Consumer brand engagement on social media is therefore about cognitive, emotional, and behavioural participation (Hollebeek et al., 2014). It is critical for enterprises for whom brand image and customer experience are of crucial value. Moreover, social CRM research shows that CRM has evolved from internal customer databases to interactive systems that employ social media to enhance customer engagement, advocacy, and relationship development (Perez-Vega et al., 2022; Lim & Rasul, 2022). The impact of social media customer contact on marketing outcomes, such as loyalty and word-of-mouth, has been demonstrated when the content is relational and interactive (Kulikovskaja et al., 2023).

Relationship marketing has never been so important in today's digital age with data analytics and artificial intelligence. This technology enables companies to study customer behavior, spot trends in consumer preferences, tailor their products and services, and enhance the customer experience at different stages of the customer journey. As Roy et al. (2025) suggest, AI's capabilities to perform relationship marketing enable companies to respond to the ever-changing market environment and facilitate the development of client relationships through sensing, personalization, and customer journey management. Digital marketing methods have been shown to generate higher customer interaction and brand advocacy in the tourism and hospitality industry. However, the success of digital marketing techniques is contingent on the organizational context and on the ability to adopt these activities (Kamyabi et al., 2025).

Despite these improvements, there are gaps in the literature. Secondly, research on E-CRM and digital relationship marketing has been conducted in banks, telecoms, airlines, hospitality, e-commerce, and luxury industries, and not much on the lifestyle industry as a whole. The second problem is that, in the literature, E-CRM, social CRM, artificial intelligence, customer contact, customer satisfaction, and loyalty are often treated as independent sectors rather than as related features of relationship marketing. Thirdly, much of the research focuses on customer-related outcomes such as happiness, loyalty, and repurchase intention, while placing less emphasis on how digital relationship marketing contributes to partnership formation and campaign performance. Finally, there are measurement gaps and contextual challenges in the research on customer engagement in social media, especially in translating online engagement into real marketing implications for some firms (Lim & Rasul, 2022; Perez-Vega et al., 2022; Xiao & Chen, 2025).

The study thus examines the role of E-CRM and other digital technologies in the development of relationship marketing in the lifestyle business. Specifically, it explores the effects of digital tools (E-CRM, Social CRM, artificial intelligence, data analytics) on customer engagement, satisfaction, trust, loyalty, partnership development, and campaign performance. The study employs the lifestyle business as the framework to provide industry-specific evidence of the value of digital relationship marketing in strengthening consumer relationships and marketing performance in the digital age.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component was used to determine the current status of relationship marketing practices, customer-centric metrics, Electronic Customer Relationship Management, strategic market orientation, competitor analysis, and the challenges encountered by

digital marketers in the lifestyle industry. The correlational component was used to examine the significant relationships between the respondents' profiles and the identified relationship marketing and digital marketing variables. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to describe existing practices and determine associations among variables without manipulating the research environment. Since the study focused on actual marketing practices and experiences of professionals in the lifestyle industry, a non-experimental design was suitable for generating evidence on how relationship marketing and digital marketing strategies are currently applied in professional settings.

### **Research Participants**

Participants in the study were marketing professionals, digital marketers, and brand managers involved in affiliate marketing, digital campaign management, customer relationship management, content creation, and other marketing-related activities in the lifestyle industry in the Philippines. For this study, the lifestyle industry refers to companies and brands associated with consumer-oriented products and services, including fashion, beauty, wellness, fitness, travel, hospitality, food, retail, and other experience-based marketplaces.

The study consisted of 97 respondents. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, which enabled the inclusion of only those with relevant expertise and practical experience in digital relationship marketing. To qualify, respondents had to: (1) be currently or recently involved in marketing-related work; (2) have experience in digital marketing, affiliate marketing, customer relationship management, or similar activities; and (3) be associated with a lifestyle-related business, brand, agency, or digital marketing campaign. The study did not cover anyone not directly involved in marketing efforts in the lifestyle industry. Initially, thirty (30) qualified marketing professionals who satisfied the inclusion criteria were purposively selected through the researcher's professional networks. These respondents served as the primary participants and subsequently referred other qualified professionals who met the study's inclusion criteria through snowball sampling. Recruitment continued until the required sample size of ninety-seven (97) respondents was attained.

Following the initial purposive selection, snowball sampling was used to identify more eligible participants via referrals from professional colleagues and current respondents. Recruitment was conducted through professional networks, company relationships, internet marketing forums, and referrals to reach individuals who met the defined eligibility criteria. This allowed the researcher to reach professionals with specific skills who might not have been easily identified using traditional sampling techniques.

The findings should be viewed with due caution as purposive and snowball sampling are non-probability sampling approaches. The statistical analyses explain the relationships observed among the respondents in this study and should not be extended to the broader community of marketing professionals in the Philippines. However, these sampling procedures were appropriate because the study explicitly aimed to recruit respondents with specialized expertise and practical experience in digital relationship marketing in the lifestyle sector. Thus, the data provide contextual insights into relationship marketing methods by experienced industry practitioners. The sample size of 97 respondents was considered suitable for the descriptive-correlational design adopted in this study, which was primarily intended to evaluate correlations among the study variables in a specialized group of marketing practitioners. Future research should adopt probability sampling methods and larger sample sizes to enhance the generalizability and external validity of the results.

### **Research Instruments**

The study used a researcher-made survey questionnaire designed for marketing professionals, digital marketers, and brand managers involved in lifestyle-related marketing activities. The questionnaire was developed based on related literature and previous studies on relationship marketing, affiliate marketing, digital marketing strategies, customer-centric metrics, E-CRM, strategic market orientation, competitor analysis, and digital marketing challenges. The instrument was composed of six sections. Part 1 collected profiles of the respondents, including relevant demographic and professional information. Parts 2 to 6 measured the key variables of the study, namely relationship marketing strategies, customer-centric metrics, Electronic Customer Relationship Management, strategic market orientation, competitor analysis, and challenges faced by digital marketers. A 4-point Likert scale was used to measure the respondents' level of agreement with the survey statements. The use of a 4-point scale encouraged respondents to indicate a clear position by removing the neutral option. The responses were interpreted using a predetermined scale to describe the level of agreement for each variable.

Professionals with expertise in marketing, research, and digital marketing validated the questionnaire. The validators reviewed the instrument for clarity, relevance, alignment with the research objectives, language appropriateness, and coverage of the major constructs. Their comments and suggestions were used to revise and improve the questionnaire before pilot testing. To assess the instrument's reliability, a pilot test was conducted with 10 respondents who had qualifications similar to those of the target participants and were not included in the actual data collection. The pilot test yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93, indicating a very high level of internal consistency. However, given the small pilot sample, the reliability result was treated as preliminary and used primarily to assess the items' consistency and clarity before the actual survey administration.

The customer-related constructs used in this study that are related to the customer, such as customer satisfaction, customer retention, customer perception, and perceived customer value, are the professional perceptions of marketing practitioners based on their knowledge, experience, and observations. These measurements were designed to reflect respondents' views of customer-related outcomes in the context of digital relationship marketing, rather than direct customer evaluations. Therefore, the study did not collect data directly from customers, and the results should not be regarded as direct measures of actual customer attitudes, perceptions, or behaviors.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained consent from the appropriate academic office and research adviser. The researcher received approval and completed the online survey form on Google Forms. The survey form included an information sheet explaining the study's goal, respondent eligibility, the voluntary nature of participation, the estimated time to complete the questionnaire, and the measures in place to protect confidentiality and anonymity. A statement of informed consent was given before the questionnaire, and only those who consented to participate were permitted to proceed with the survey.

The link to the questionnaire was distributed to potential respondents via professional networks, company contacts, online channels, and referrals. Follow-up communications and reminders were provided to encourage participation and improve the response rate. The data collection session was kept open until the goal number of valid replies was met. After the data collection period, the replies were collected, evaluated, coded, and confirmed for completeness. Incomplete responses and incorrect entries were evaluated and deleted if needed. The final data set was then compiled and ready for statistical analysis.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

The data gathered from the survey were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Demographic and professional features of the respondents were described using frequency distribution and percentage. The respondents' level of agreement on relationship marketing, customer-centric metrics, Electronic Customer Relationship Management (E-CRM), strategic market orientation, competitor analysis, and challenges in digital marketing was determined by calculating the weighted mean and standard deviation.

Data were verified for completeness, accuracy, and consistency before inferential analyses. Assumptions of normality, linearity, and outliers were also examined. Normality was assessed visually using histograms and Q-Q plots, and statistically using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Scatterplots examined linearity, and outliers were found using standardized residuals. These diagnostic methods informed the choice of the correct statistical analysis.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to calculate the correlation between continuous variables that matched the assumptions of parametric analysis. Spearman's rho was used for variables that were measured at the ordinal level, or if the assumptions required for Pearson's correlation were not met. The level of statistical significance was set at 0.05, and the strength of the correlations was evaluated using the correlation coefficient criterion.

The data were coded, processed, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Data screening, assumption testing, and statistical techniques were appropriately used to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the findings.

## Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards throughout the research process. Informed consent was secured from all participants before they answered the questionnaire. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. No personally identifying information was disclosed in the presentation and interpretation of results. The data gathered were used only for academic and research purposes. Access to the collected data was limited to the researcher, and the files were stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. The study posed minimal risk because it required only that respondents complete a survey about their professional experiences and marketing practices. Nevertheless, the researcher ensured that participation was voluntary, respectful, and free from coercion.

## Results and Discussion

### Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents by age, sex, educational attainment, primary digital marketing platform, years of experience, and current position in the lifestyle industry. These profile variables provide an overview of the respondents' demographic and professional characteristics, an important basis for interpreting the study's findings. The respondents' backgrounds are important for the following analyses. Technological competence, professional experience, and platform use influence relationship marketing in the digital environment. Previous studies have demonstrated the significant influence of digital technologies and social media on the way organizations interact with customers and implement marketing strategies in the current business environments (Appel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

**Table 1.** *Distribution of the Respondents in Terms of Profile Variables*

| Profile Variables                 | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| <b>Age</b>                        |           |                |
| 18–25                             | 9         | 9.3            |
| 26–35                             | 67        | 69.1           |
| 36–45                             | 16        | 16.5           |
| 46 and above                      | 5         | 5.2            |
| <b>Sex</b>                        |           |                |
| Male                              | 69        | 71.1           |
| Female                            | 28        | 28.9           |
| <b>Educational attainment</b>     |           |                |
| Bachelor's Degree                 | 73        | 75.3           |
| Master's Degree                   | 24        | 24.7           |
| <b>Digital Marketing platform</b> |           |                |
| Facebook                          | 25        | 25.8           |
| YouTube                           | 19        | 19.6           |
| Tiktok                            | 23        | 23.7           |
| Instagram                         | 18        | 18.6           |
| Google Ads                        | 6         | 6.2            |
| E-commerce Platforms              | 6         | 6.2            |
| <b>Years of experience</b>        |           |                |
| Less than 1 year                  | 7         | 7.2            |
| 1–3 years                         | 49        | 50.5           |
| 4–6 years                         | 36        | 37.1           |
| 7 years and above                 | 5         | 5.2            |
| <b>Current Position</b>           |           |                |
| Marketing Professional            | 25        | 25.8           |
| Digital Marketer                  | 58        | 59.8           |
| Brand Manager                     | 14        | 14.4           |

With respect to age, most respondents were in the 26-35 age group, comprising 67 (69.1%). followed by 9 respondents (9.3%) in the age group 18-25 years and 16 respondents (16.5%) in the age group 36-45 years. The least-represented age group was respondents aged 46 and older (5 respondents, 5.2%). The findings indicate that the respondents were predominantly young professionals actively engaged in digital marketing activities. This age group is more familiar with emerging digital technologies, social media platforms, and evolving marketing trends, making them easily adaptable to the changing digital marketing landscape. Young professionals are early adopters of digital innovations and are key to online customer engagement and relationship-building efforts (Appel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Regarding the respondents' sex, the majority were male (69; 71.1%), while female respondents numbered 28 (28.9%). The distribution shows that most of the people involved in the study were male professionals working in digital and relationship marketing within the lifestyle industry. Data were collected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. However, the distribution is not representative of the industry's actual workforce composition; rather, it reflects the characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. Thus, generalizing the results about sex to other organizational or industrial settings should be done with caution. The degree of workforce involvement in digital marketing could be contingent upon the organizational structure, job specialization, technical skills, and recruitment activities (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

As for educational attainment, most respondents were bachelor's degree holders (73; 75.3%), and 24 (24.7%) had completed master's degrees. This finding implies that the respondents have mostly formal higher education, which may have equipped them with competencies in business, communication, marketing, and digital media. Such training can help them to understand digital marketing strategies, customer engagement practices, and relationship management. Marketers' capabilities in the use of digital platforms, understanding consumer behavior, and managing customer relations in competitive business environments have been shown to be enhanced with greater educational and professional training (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

When classified by their most utilized digital marketing platform, Facebook was the most popular, with 25 respondents (25.8%). Next was TikTok (23 respondents, 23.7%), YouTube (19 respondents, 19.6%), and Instagram (18 respondents, 18.6%). 6 respondents (6.2%) named Google Ads and e-commerce platforms. These findings indicate that social media sites remain the primary channels used by marketing practitioners to execute relationship marketing strategies and drive customer engagement. Lifestyle-oriented industries, such as fashion, food, and travel, rely on visual appeal and customer experience as key drivers of customer engagement. Social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram provide opportunities for brand visibility, content distribution, customer engagement, and community building. The results of this study support the existing literature that identifies social media marketing as an important tool for engaging customers, building relationships, and facilitating real-time communication between companies and consumers (Appel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

In terms of professional experience, most respondents had one to three years of experience, which was 49 respondents (50.5%). The next group, with 4-6 years of work experience, comprised 36 respondents (37.1%). Respondents with less than 1 year of experience were 7 respondents (7.2%), while only 5 respondents (5.2%) reported 7 or more years of professional experience. The results revealed that the majority of respondents were early-career professionals already engaged in digital and relationship marketing activities. However, such professionals may be up to date on digital technologies and emerging social media trends but may have had very limited experience with long-term strategic planning and advanced customer relationship management. Their responses thus provide useful information on current digital marketing practices, but also reflect the views of practitioners mainly involved in operational marketing activities. Previous studies have found that practical experience enhances the development of customer engagement, campaign management and organizational responsiveness competencies (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Saura et al., 2021).

Finally, regarding the respondents' current positions, most were Digital Marketers, with 58 respondents (59.8%). 25 respondents were Marketing Professionals (25.8%) and 14 were Brand Managers (14.4%). This distribution showed that most respondents were directly involved in implementing digital marketing campaigns, managing online communication, and promoting customer engagement through digital platforms. Therefore, the results are primarily operational views from the professionals responsible for implementing relationship marketing strategies. The Brand Managers were the smallest proportion of the sample, so the views of senior strategic decision-makers may be relatively under-represented. Previous research highlights the important role of digital marketing professionals in improving customer engagement, controlling brand communication, and developing long-term customer relationships in digital environments (Appel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

### **Key Elements of Relationship Marketing in Digital Marketing Strategies**

The results show that the respondents had a positive perception of relationship marketing tactics in lifestyle businesses.

**Table 2.** *Assessments of the Key Elements of Relationship Marketing Within Digital Marketing Strategies in the Lifestyle Industry*

|                              | <b>Indicators</b>                                                                                       | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b>   | <b>Interpretation</b> |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Trust</b>                 |                                                                                                         |             |             |                       |
| 1.                           | Affiliate marketing partners demonstrate honesty and transparency in all campaign activities.           | 2.88        | 0.44        | Agree                 |
| 2.                           | The information shared between brands and affiliates is reliable and accurate.                          | 3.79        | 0.57        | Strongly Agree        |
| 3.                           | Marketing partners consistently fulfill their agreed responsibilities in campaigns.                     | 2.89        | 0.53        | Agree                 |
| 4.                           | There is a high level of confidence in the integrity of affiliate marketing partners.                   | 2.97        | 0.46        | Agree                 |
| 5.                           | Digital marketing platforms used in campaigns ensure secure and trustworthy transactions.               | 2.85        | 0.39        | Agree                 |
| 6.                           | Communication between partners is clear, open, and dependable.                                          | 2.98        | 0.41        | Agree                 |
| 7.                           | Affiliates and brands adhere to ethical standards in promoting products and services.                   | 2.71        | 0.52        | Agree                 |
| 8.                           | The brand maintains credibility and trustworthiness in all its digital marketing efforts.               | 2.74        | 0.54        | Agree                 |
|                              | <b>Grand Mean</b>                                                                                       | <b>2.98</b> | <b>0.21</b> | <b>Agree</b>          |
| <b>Loyalty</b>               |                                                                                                         |             |             |                       |
| 1.                           | Affiliate partners consistently continue working with the same brand across multiple campaigns.         | 2.91        | 0.67        | Agree                 |
| 2.                           | Long-term partnerships are maintained between brands and affiliates in digital marketing efforts.       | 2.84        | 0.42        | Agree                 |
| 3.                           | Affiliates show a strong preference for promoting the same brand over competitors.                      | 2.79        | 0.40        | Agree                 |
| 4.                           | Marketing partners demonstrate commitment through repeated collaboration in campaigns.                  | 2.84        | 0.55        | Agree                 |
| 5.                           | Brands actively encourage loyalty by providing incentives and support to affiliates.                    | 2.72        | 0.76        | Agree                 |
| 6.                           | Affiliates remain engaged with the brand despite the presence of competing offers.                      | 2.95        | 0.36        | Agree                 |
| 7.                           | Strong relationships result in continuous participation of partners in marketing activities.            | 3.49        | 0.75        | Strongly Agree        |
| 8.                           | Both brands and affiliates value long-term collaboration over short-term gains.                         | 3.13        | 0.34        | Agree                 |
|                              | <b>Grand Mean</b>                                                                                       | <b>2.96</b> | <b>0.19</b> | <b>Agree</b>          |
| <b>Commitment</b>            |                                                                                                         |             |             |                       |
| 1.                           | Affiliate partners demonstrate a strong willingness to maintain long-term collaboration with the brand. | 2.86        | 0.38        | Agree                 |
| 2.                           | Marketing partners invest time and effort to sustain successful affiliate relationships.                | 3.28        | 0.45        | Strongly Agree        |
| 3.                           | Both parties show dedication to achieving shared campaign goals.                                        | 2.81        | 0.52        | Agree                 |
| 4.                           | Affiliates remain committed to promoting the brand even during challenging campaigns.                   | 2.92        | 0.92        | Agree                 |
| 5.                           | Brands provide continuous support to strengthen commitment among affiliates.                            | 3.11        | 0.32        | Agree                 |
| 6.                           | Marketing partners prioritize long-term relationships over short-term gains.                            | 2.77        | 0.77        | Agree                 |
| 7.                           | There is mutual effort to maintain and improve partnership performance.                                 | 3.15        | 0.66        | Agree                 |
| 8.                           | Affiliates and brands are willing to adapt strategies to sustain their collaboration.                   | 3.34        | 0.47        | Strongly Agree        |
|                              | <b>Grand Mean</b>                                                                                       | <b>3.03</b> | <b>0.19</b> | <b>Agree</b>          |
| <b>Relationship Quality</b>  |                                                                                                         |             |             |                       |
| 1.                           | The relationship between brands and affiliates is characterized by mutual respect and understanding     | 2.68        | 0.49        | Agree                 |
| 2.                           | Communication between marketing partners is effective and consistent.                                   | 3.24        | 0.43        | Agree                 |
| 3.                           | There is a high level of satisfaction with the overall partnership experience.                          | 2.66        | 0.79        | Agree                 |
| 4.                           | Conflicts between partners are managed professionally and constructively.                               | 3.65        | 0.50        | Strongly Agree        |
| 5.                           | The partnership demonstrates strong coordination in executing marketing campaigns.                      | 3.35        | 0.48        | Strongly Agree        |
| 6.                           | There is a shared understanding of goals and expectations between partners.                             | 3.39        | 0.89        | Strongly Agree        |
| 7.                           | The relationship between affiliates and brands is stable and reliable.                                  | 2.74        | 0.56        | Agree                 |
| 8.                           | Marketing partners perceive the relationship as beneficial and productive.                              | 3.67        | 0.47        | Strongly Agree        |
|                              | <b>Grand Mean</b>                                                                                       | <b>3.17</b> | <b>0.15</b> | <b>Agree</b>          |
| <b>Customer Satisfaction</b> |                                                                                                         |             |             |                       |
| 1.                           | Customers are satisfied with the products or services promoted through affiliate marketing.             | 2.79        | 0.47        | Agree                 |
| 2.                           | Marketing strategies effectively meet customer expectations.                                            | 2.88        | 0.41        | Agree                 |
| 3.                           | Customers express positive feedback regarding affiliate marketing campaigns.                            | 2.93        | 0.41        | Agree                 |
| 4.                           | The quality of products and services contributes to overall customer satisfaction.                      | 2.96        | 0.45        | Agree                 |
| 5.                           | Marketing efforts provide value that meets customer needs and preferences.                              | 2.89        | 0.43        | Agree                 |
| 6.                           | Customers are satisfied with their overall experience with the brand.                                   | 2.97        | 0.44        | Agree                 |
| 7.                           | Affiliate campaigns contribute to a positive perception of the brand among customers.                   | 2.92        | 0.47        | Agree                 |
| 8.                           | Customers are likely to continue engaging with the brand due to satisfactory experiences.               | 2.94        | 0.47        | Agree                 |
|                              | <b>Grand Mean</b>                                                                                       | <b>2.91</b> | <b>0.13</b> | <b>Agree</b>          |

Relationship quality was the strongest component, indicating that marketing partners typically viewed their partnerships as useful and fruitful. However, the lowest composite mean was observed in customer satisfaction, indicating that outcomes related to the consumer may require closer attention. The lower indicator scores across

the five parts point to specific areas for improvement, such as ethical promotion, affiliate incentives and support, long-term orientation of the partnership, overall partnership satisfaction, and consumer satisfaction with the items or services being promoted. The findings show that in the lifestyle industry, digital relationship marketing should emphasize ethical practices, ongoing support, long-term collaboration, and customer value creation, as well as campaign execution and partner engagement. Table 2: Respondents' Assessment of the Key Elements of Relationship Marketing in Digital Marketing Strategies in the Lifestyle Industry: Trust, Loyalty, Commitment, Relationship Quality, and Customer Satisfaction.

Regarding trust, the construct had a composite weighted mean of 2.98, which was verbally rated as "Agree". The highest-ranked criterion was "The information provided between brands and affiliates is dependable and accurate," with a weighted mean of 3.79. This indicates that the respondents perceived the flow of information between brands and affiliates to be trustworthy. This is vital for structuring digital advertising and ensuring effective teamwork. The lowest-ranked factor is "Affiliates and brands observe ethical norms in the promotion of products and services," with a weighted mean of 2.71. This lower-but-still-in-the-"Agree" range grade indicates that ethical promotion remains a concern requiring improvement. Trust in affiliate and digital marketing is not only about providing accurate information but also about advertising in an open, honest, and responsible way. This is in line with the premise that trust allows for long-term digital engagement, transparent communication, and better cooperation between marketing partners (Dwivedi, 2021).

The loyalty construct yielded a composite weighted mean of 2.96, corresponding to "Agree". The element "Strong relationships contribute to continuous participation of partners in marketing activities" received the highest weighted mean of 3.49. This means the respondents have reported that strong professional relationships inspire partners in marketing operations. On the other hand, the indicator with the lowest rank is "Brands actively promote loyalty by providing incentives and help to affiliates" with a weighted mean of 2.72. Partners may be willing to continue participating in marketing activities. This suggests that firms may need to improve their incentive systems, support mechanisms, and retention tactics for affiliates and marketing partners. As long-term involvement may lead to recurring cooperation, the importance of digital relationship marketing loyalty is reflected in stronger partnerships and more consistent campaign performance (Appel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

The idea, commitment, had a composite weighted mean of 3.03 and was orally interpreted as, "I agree. The highest-ranking indication was "Affiliates and brands are open to modify strategies to retain their collaboration" with a weighted mean of 3.34. This suggests that the marketing partners are often open to change and flexibility in maintaining cooperative collaborations. Meanwhile, the indicator "Marketing partners prefer long-term connections over short-term gains" has the lowest weighted mean of 2.77. This research indicates a potential gap in digital marketing partnerships: partners may be eager to change their behavior, but some may still prefer to focus on the short-term repercussions of a campaign rather than build a long-term connection. This discovery is important since commitment is a key element of relationship marketing, especially to developing strong partnerships and maintaining collaboration among digital marketing stakeholders (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Saura et al., 2021).

The composite weighted mean for the five criteria on relationship quality was 3.17, corresponding to "Agree" in the verbal interpretation. The indication that received the highest rating was "Marketing partners see the relationship as mutually beneficial and productive" with a weighted mean of 3.67. This indicates that the respondents generally found their cooperation useful and results-oriented. However, the statement "There is a high level of satisfaction on the whole partnership experience" had the lowest weighted mean of only 2.66. This is an important caveat: while respondents may feel their partnerships are productive, this does not mean that they are entirely content with the experience as a whole. This could be greater communication, expectations, support structures, justice, and the overall partner experience. In digital marketing, the quality of the connection is important because the better the coordination, the higher the mutual benefit and the greater the professional involvement that can help to better implement the campaigns and increase the competitiveness of the firms (Harrigan et al., 2021; Tiago & Verissimo, 2014).

The concept obtained a composite weighted mean of 2.91 for consumer satisfaction, which was verbally labeled as "Agree". The top-rated indicator was "Customers are satisfied with their whole experience with the brand" with a weighted mean of 2.97. The lowest-rated indicator was "Customers are satisfied with the items or services

pushed through affiliate marketing” with a weighted mean of 2.79. This finding should be interpreted as respondents' perceptions of customer happiness, not customer feedback, because the respondents were marketing professionals rather than customers. Overall, the results indicate that respondents believed customers were satisfied with their brand experience. By contrast, satisfaction with items or services provided through affiliate marketing appeared to be far lower. This could mean that companies and affiliates need to make sure that the items and services that are advertised are compatible with what buyers expect, with campaign themes, and with the genuine value of the products. Positive experiences are a factor for customer retention, loyalty, and long-term brand engagement on digital platforms (Kotler et al., 2021; Appel et al., 2020), and customer satisfaction is one of the main results of relationship marketing (Kotler et al., 2021; Appel et al., 2020).

### Customer-Centric Metrics in Digital Relationship Marketing Strategies

In summary, the results indicate that the customer-centric metrics in digital relationship marketing were usually perceived positively by the respondents.

**Table 3.** Assessments of Customer-Centric Metrics in Digital Relationship Marketing Strategies in the Lifestyle Industry

| Indicators                 |                                                                                               | Mean        | SD          | Interpretation |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| <b>Customer Retention</b>  |                                                                                               |             |             |                |
| 1.                         | Organization marketing strategies contribute to repeat purchases from customers.              | 2.80        | 0.40        | Agree          |
| 2.                         | Customers continue to engage with the brand after being reached through affiliate campaigns.  | 2.46        | 0.50        | Agree          |
| 3.                         | Marketing campaigns effectively encourage long-term customer relationships.                   | 2.80        | 0.40        | Agree          |
| 4.                         | Affiliate marketing helps maintain consistent customer interaction with the brand             | 2.99        | 0.10        | Agree          |
| 5.                         | Customers are likely to return due to positive experiences from affiliate marketing efforts.  | 2.82        | 0.38        | Agree          |
| 6.                         | Retention strategies are effectively implemented in digital marketing campaigns.              | 2.72        | 0.45        | Agree          |
| 7.                         | Affiliate programs help reduce customer churn and increase customer loyalty.                  | 2.80        | 0.40        | Agree          |
| 8.                         | The brand maintains ongoing communication with customers to sustain engagement                | 2.80        | 0.40        | Agree          |
| <b>Grand Mean</b>          |                                                                                               | <b>2.78</b> | <b>0.07</b> | <b>Agree</b>   |
| <b>Customer Perception</b> |                                                                                               |             |             |                |
| 1.                         | Customers have a positive impression of the brand promoted through affiliate marketing.       | 2.63        | 0.78        | Agree          |
| 2.                         | Affiliate marketing campaigns enhance the credibility of the brand.                           | 2.82        | 0.38        | Agree          |
| 3.                         | Customers perceive the brand as trustworthy based on digital marketing efforts.               | 2.80        | 0.40        | Agree          |
| 4.                         | Marketing messages delivered through affiliates are clear and convincing to customers.        | 2.84        | 0.37        | Agree          |
| 5.                         | Customers view the brand as reliable due to consistent online presence.                       | 2.82        | 0.38        | Agree          |
| 6.                         | Affiliate marketing strategies improve the overall image of the brand.                        | 2.90        | 0.30        | Agree          |
| 7.                         | Customers perceive the brand as competitive compared to similar products or services.         | 2.71        | 0.45        | Agree          |
| 8.                         | Digital marketing efforts influence customers' perception of brand quality.                   | 2.76        | 0.43        | Agree          |
| <b>Grand Mean</b>          |                                                                                               | <b>2.79</b> | <b>0.06</b> | <b>Agree</b>   |
| <b>Value</b>               |                                                                                               |             |             |                |
| 1.                         | Customers perceive that the products or services offer good value for money.                  | 2.81        | 0.39        | Agree          |
| 2.                         | Affiliate marketing campaigns effectively communicate the benefits of the product or service. | 2.71        | 0.70        | Agree          |
| 3.                         | Customers believe that the brand provides benefits that meet their needs.                     | 2.87        | 0.34        | Agree          |
| 4.                         | Marketing strategies highlight the unique value of the product or service.                    | 2.71        | 0.70        | Agree          |
| 5.                         | Customers perceive that the quality of the product or service justifies its price.            | 2.75        | 0.43        | Agree          |
| 6.                         | Affiliate marketing efforts increase customers' perception of product usefulness.             | 2.77        | 0.63        | Agree          |
| 7.                         | Customers feel that engaging with the brand provides meaningful benefits.                     | 2.63        | 0.78        | Agree          |
| 8.                         | Digital marketing strategies enhance the perceived value of the brand offerings.              | 2.65        | 0.76        | Agree          |
| <b>Grand Mean</b>          |                                                                                               | <b>2.74</b> | <b>0.19</b> | <b>Agree</b>   |

The highest composite weighted mean was for customer perception among the three dimensions, followed by customer retention and perceived customer value. However, the slight disparities between the means and the relatively moderate ratings imply that these customer-centered outcomes are not yet strongly established. The lowest-ranked indicators point to opportunities for development, notably in customer engagement following campaigns, favorable brand impressions resulting from affiliate promotions, and the real benefits customers gain from ongoing contact with the company. This suggests lifestyle brands should not only try to attract clients through affiliate and digital efforts, but also have the means to maintain engagement, enhance campaign credibility, and deliver more value than a first promotional contact. Table 3 presents respondents' evaluations of customer-centric KPIs in digital relationship marketing strategies for the lifestyle business, i.e., customer retention,

customer perception, and perceived customer value.

In terms of customer retention, the construct had an overall weighted mean of 2.78, which translates to “Agree”. The top-ranked indicator was “Affiliate marketing helps to sustain regular consumer connection with the brand,” with a weighted mean of 2.99. This implies that participants viewed affiliate marketing as an effective tool for facilitating routine contact between customers and brands. However, the lowest-ranked indicator was “Customers continue to interact with the business after being reached through affiliate campaigns,” with a weighted mean of 2.46. This result implies a potential vulnerability in maintaining client interest after the initial marketing exposure. In other words, affiliate marketing can be good at getting people to pay attention and interact, but it is not always going to keep them engaged after the campaign ends. This is relevant because client retention is a fundamental issue in relationship marketing, where repeated interaction and continuous communication promote long-term loyalty and corporate sustainability (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Regarding customer perception, the total weighted mean of the construct was 2.79, which was read as “Agree”. The indication “Affiliate marketing tactics strengthen the overall image of the brand” got the highest weighted mean of 2.90. This suggests that the respondents largely viewed affiliate marketing as advantageous for improving brand image. The lowest-rated indication was “Customers have a positive opinion of the brand promoted through affiliate marketing,” with a weighted mean of 2.63. While the overall outcome remained good, the somewhat lower rating suggests that favorable brand perception may be contingent on the quality, legitimacy, and consistency of affiliate advertising. That implies affiliate marketing does not immediately create a strong positive impression, but needs to be underpinned by trustworthy messaging, a correct brand-affiliate fit, and a relevant customer experience. A positive brand impression is an important aspect of digital relationship marketing, as it can help boost trust, engagement, and client purchase behavior (Appel et al., 2020; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014).

The construct had an overall weighted mean of 2.74 and was interpreted as “Agree” regarding perceived customer value. The indicator “Customers believe that the brand provides benefits that suit their needs” had the highest rating with a weighted mean of 2.87. This shows that the respondents viewed lifestyle brands as typically able to provide benefits that meet clients' wants. However, the lowest-ranked indicator was “Customers feel that engaging with the brand gives real benefits,” with a weighted mean of 2.63. This finding means that although customers understand the utility of the items or services offered through digital marketing, the perceived value of a continuous connection with the brand needs improvement. Value in relationship marketing lies not just in the product but in the quality of interactions, content relevance, customer support, trust, convenience, and the overall brand experience. Customers tend to stay loyal to brands that continuously deliver useful, relevant, and meaningful experiences (Kotler et al., 2021; Saura et al., 2021).

### Operational and Technological Tools of Relationship Marketing in Digital Marketing Strategies

Overall, the results suggest that respondents regard operational and technological tools, especially E-CRM systems, as key supports for digital relationship marketing in the lifestyle industry. Responsiveness, contact monitoring, personalized communication, and platform integration were the strongest aspects. However, the lower ranking in delivering timely and adequate information suggests that the technological features of E-CRM may outweigh the quality of the content delivered to customers. The results suggest that lifestyle firms need to invest in E-CRM systems and improve the relevance, quality, timeliness, and utility of the information delivered through these platforms. The assessment of respondents regarding the operational and technological tools for relationship marketing within digital marketing strategies in the lifestyle sector is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Assessment of Operational and Technological Tools Used in Relationship Marketing Within Digital Marketing Strategies*

|    | Indicators                                                                                            | Mean        | SD          | Interpretation        |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | The organization uses E-CRM systems to manage customer data effectively.                              | 3.55        | 0.84        | Strongly Agree        |
| 2. | E-CRM tools enable personalized communication with customers.                                         | 3.58        | 0.49        | Strongly Agree        |
| 3. | Customer inquiries and concerns are promptly addressed through E-CRM systems.                         | 3.82        | 0.38        | Strongly Agree        |
| 4. | E-CRM platforms help track and monitor customer interactions across digital channels.                 | 3.67        | 0.74        | Strongly Agree        |
| 5. | The use of E-CRM improves the efficiency of marketing campaigns.                                      | 3.44        | 0.17        | Strongly Agree        |
| 6. | E-CRM systems support data-driven decision-making in digital marketing strategies.                    | 3.29        | 0.28        | Strongly Agree        |
| 7. | The organization integrates E-CRM with other digital platforms (e.g., social media, email marketing). | 3.57        | 0.50        | Strongly Agree        |
| 8. | E-CRM enhances customer experience by providing timely and relevant information.                      | 2.98        | 0.42        | Agree                 |
|    | <b>Grand Mean</b>                                                                                     | <b>3.49</b> | <b>0.11</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> |

The indicator “Customer questions and problems are responded to through the E-CRM systems rapidly” obtained the highest weighted mean of 3.82, which was verbally interpreted as “Strongly Agree”. This indicates that the respondents saw E-CRM systems as useful in providing timely customer support and prompt communication. Speed is the buzzword of digital relationship marketing. Customers want quick responses, especially when they are online and engaging with brands. Responding promptly can help build customer trust, improve the service experience, and maintain ongoing engagement. This aligns with earlier research that E-CRM solutions can increase organizational responsiveness and customer engagement through effective communication and personalized support (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Harrigan et al., 2021).

The indicator “E-CRM solutions help monitor and evaluate client interactions across digital channels” was also verbally interpreted as “Strongly Agree,” with a weighted mean of 3.67. This shows that the respondents considered E-CRM systems useful for monitoring customer interactions across different digital platforms. This monitoring helps organizations understand customer behavior, identify engagement patterns, and measure the effectiveness of digital communication efforts. However, this finding should be interpreted in light of respondents' perceptions of E-CRM use, rather than as direct evidence from system analytics. e-CRM systems, when properly integrated in organizational processes, can be useful for acquiring customer insights, developing personalized marketing strategies, and building long-term customer relationships (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Moreover, the indicators “E-CRM technologies enable personalized interaction with customers” and “The organization integrates E-CRM with other digital platforms” got the weighted means of 3.58 and 3.57, respectively. Both were coded verbatim as “Strongly Agree”. The findings indicate that E-CRM systems are perceived as enabling personalized communication and integration with other digital platforms used by lifestyle brands. This is relevant in relationship marketing, as customers are more likely to communicate with brands across multiple channels (e.g., social media, websites, messaging platforms, and e-commerce systems). In these channels, you can use e-CRM tools to provide consistent messaging, track customer needs, and personalize engagement. This is consistent with the idea that digital platforms and CRM technologies can enhance customer interaction and relationship building in the context of online marketing (Appel et al., 2020; Tiago & Verissimo, 2014).

The lowest weighted mean, 2.98, was obtained for the indicator “E-CRM improves customer experience by providing timely and appropriate information” and was verbally interpreted as “Agree.” The result remains positive but is significantly lower than the other indicators. This indicates that the respondents were very confident that E-CRM systems provide quick responses, interaction monitoring, personalization, and platform integration but less confident about E-CRM’s ability to provide timely, relevant, and useful information to customers. This indicates an important area for improvement. E-CRM technology alone does not guarantee a meaningful customer experience; organizations need to ensure that the content, timing, and relevance of customer communications align with customer needs and expectations. The effective delivery of information is still the key to increasing customer satisfaction, building customer trust, and developing long-term relationships (Kotler et al., 2021; Saura et al., 2021).

### **Strategic Market Orientation and Competitor Analysis in Digital Marketing Strategies**

The results indicated that companies in the lifestyle industry were perceived as reactive to market developments and attuned to consumer preferences. The ratings for market segmentation and competitor analysis, however, are lower, suggesting that strategic market orientation may still be more reactive than systematic. Companies seem to be reacting well to shifts in market conditions, but may need to improve their use of customer data, segment-specific strategies, and structured competitor monitoring. The findings imply that digital marketing strategies for the lifestyle sector should be more than just broadly responsive; they should include finer segmentation, more targeted audience focus, and constant competitor analysis to increase campaign relevance and long-term success in customer relationship marketing. Table 5: Respondents’ Assessments of Strategic Market Orientation and Competitor Analysis in Digital Marketing Strategies for the Lifestyle Industry. Findings show that companies were generally perceived as responsive to market changes, customer preferences, and competitive conditions. The results also indicate, however, that firms seem adaptive and customer-oriented, yet their market segmentation and competitor analysis practices may still need improvement.

**Table 5.** *Assessments of Strategic Market Orientation and Competitor Analysis in Digital Marketing Strategies Within the Lifestyle Industry*

|    | <b>Indicators</b>                                                                                 | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b>   | <b>Interpretation</b> |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | The organization regularly analyzes customer needs and preferences to guide marketing strategies. | 3.61        | 0.79        | Strongly Agree        |
| 2. | Marketing campaigns are aligned with current market trends in the lifestyle industry.             | 2.82        | 0.38        | Agree                 |
| 3. | The organization continuously monitors competitors' digital marketing activities.                 | 2.89        | 0.32        | Agree                 |
| 4. | Competitive analysis is used to improve affiliate marketing strategies.                           | 2.86        | 0.35        | Agree                 |
| 5. | The organization adapts its strategies based on changes in the market environment.                | 3.67        | 0.74        | Strongly Agree        |
| 6. | Customer feedback is actively used to refine marketing approaches.                                | 2.87        | 0.34        | Agree                 |
| 7. | The organization identifies and targets the appropriate market segments effectively.              | 2.81        | 0.39        | Agree                 |
| 8. | Marketing decisions are based on data-driven insights about customers and competitors.            | 2.85        | 0.36        | Agree                 |
|    | <b>Grand Mean</b>                                                                                 | <b>3.05</b> | <b>0.18</b> | <b>Agree</b>          |

The indicator “The firm changes its objectives in response to the changes in the market environment” received the highest weighted mean (3.67) and was described in words as “Strongly Agree.” This means that respondents perceived lifestyle industry companies as sensitive to changes in the market environment, including customer preferences, digital trends, and competitive pressures. This flexibility is critical in digital marketing, where lifestyle brands operate in a dynamic landscape characterized by evolving customer preferences, platform algorithms, content trends, and market demands. This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that market-oriented organizations are more likely to perform well because they are more likely to respond to changes in the environment and technology (Narver & Slater, 1990; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

The statement “The firm regularly reviews customer demands and preferences to guide marketing strategies” had a weighted mean of 3.61, which was also verbally interpreted as “Strongly Agree.” This suggests that the respondents considered customer preference analysis an important basis for developing digital and relationship marketing strategies. In the lifestyle industry, understanding customer needs is even more important because trends, personal identity, brand experience, and emotional connection often influence purchase decisions. By regularly checking what customers want, businesses can produce more relevant content, choose the right platforms, improve their campaign messaging, and build stronger long-term customer relationships. This finding supports the view that analysis of customer behavior and preferences supports targeted marketing strategies and relationship building in competitive digital markets (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kotler, 2021).

However, the statement “The firm identifies and targets the right market segments effectively” was rated the lowest weighted mean, 2.81, which was verbally interpreted as “Agree.” The result remains positive, but the lower rating suggests that the firms' ability to segment and target the market may be weaker than their ability to respond to broader market and customer-preference changes. This means that even if businesses are aware of changing market conditions, they still have to work on classifying customer groups, identifying priority segments, and designing campaigns for specific audiences. Digital marketing is important because customers have different lifestyles, purchasing behaviors, content interests, and platform use; thus, effective segmentation is essential. Better segmentation can help companies send more relevant messages and avoid broad campaigns that may not completely address the needs of specific customer groups. Previous literature has shown that segmentation and competitor analysis help with strategic decision-making and the effectiveness of digital marketing (Appel et al., 2020; Saura, 2021).

As for the indicators of competitor analysis, the statements “The company regularly tracks the digital marketing activities of competitors” and “Competitor analysis is utilized to improve affiliate marketing strategies” received weighted means of 2.89 and 2.86, respectively, with a verbal interpretation of “Agree.” The results suggest that firms are aware of the value of monitoring competitors, but the practice has not yet been firmly established. Competitor analysis is important because it allows businesses to identify market trends, compare campaign strategies, assess brand positioning, and optimize their digital marketing tactics. The relatively moderate ratings suggest lifestyle companies may need a more systematic approach to tracking competitors' content strategies, platform usage, customer engagement strategies, pricing strategies, promotional strategies, and affiliate marketing strategies. Previous research has established that competitor awareness and market orientation may result in improved digital planning, innovation and customer engagement (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014).

### Challenges Faced by Digital Marketers in the Lifestyle Industry Sector in Achieving Success

The findings indicate that digital marketers in the lifestyle industry experience moderate yet consistent challenges in achieving success in digital and relationship marketing outcomes. The biggest challenge was competition, but a close second was trust and credibility. Also important were technological adaptation, changing digital trends, platform management, and consistent customer engagement. The findings indicate that lifestyle brands should enhance their differentiation strategies, execute transparent and credible campaigns, constantly upskill digital marketers, and adopt a more integrated approach to managing customer engagement across platforms. Table 5 presents respondents' assessment of the problems faced by digital marketers in the lifestyle industry.

**Table 6.** *Assessments of the Challenges Faced by Digital Marketers in the Lifestyle Industry*

| Indicators        |                                                                                              | Mean        | SD          | Interpretation |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1.                | Rapid changes in digital marketing trends make it difficult to sustain effective strategies. | 2.79        | 0.40        | Agree          |
| 2.                | Managing multiple digital platforms creates challenges in campaign execution.                | 2.82        | 0.38        | Agree          |
| 3.                | Limited budget affects the effectiveness of affiliate marketing campaigns.                   | 2.81        | 0.39        | Agree          |
| 4.                | Difficulty in measuring campaign performance impacts decision-making.                        | 2.84        | 0.37        | Agree          |
| 5.                | Maintaining consistent customer engagement across platforms is challenging.                  | 2.82        | 0.38        | Agree          |
| 6.                | Competition within the lifestyle industry makes it difficult to stand out.                   | 2.92        | 0.28        | Agree          |
| 7.                | Adapting to new technologies and tools requires continuous learning and adjustment           | 2.86        | 0.35        | Agree          |
| 8.                | Ensuring trust and credibility in digital marketing campaigns remains a challenge.           | 2.91        | 0.29        | Agree          |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |                                                                                              | <b>2.85</b> | <b>0.05</b> | <b>Agree</b>   |

The composite weighted mean for the construct was 2.85, which was interpreted verbally as "Agree". This implies that the respondents faced difficulties applying digital and relationship marketing strategies in general. The challenges were mainly competition, trust and credibility, technology adoption, shifting digital trends, campaign management, and ongoing customer engagement.

The statement "Competition within lifestyle business makes it tougher to stand out" received the highest weighted mean score of 2.92, which was verbally interpreted as "Agree". It indicates that the biggest challenge for the respondents in the lifestyle industry was market competition. Lifestyle brands usually compete on image, trends, customer experience, and online visibility, making it hard for digital marketers to differentiate their campaigns from those of similar brands and competitors. The finding is in line with research indicating that the saturation of the online market and high competition can negatively affect brand awareness, customer retention, and marketing effectiveness (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Appel et al., 2020).

The statement "It is difficult to maintain trust and credibility in digital marketing activities" had a weighted mean of 2.91 and was verbally interpreted as "Agree." The respondents felt that building trust was a major problem in digital marketing. The online environment exposes consumers to numerous ads, sponsored posts, influencer promotions, affiliate campaigns, and more, which may affect their perceptions of brand credibility. That is why digital marketers have a responsibility to ensure campaign messaging is accurate, transparent, and reflective of the actual customer experience. Trust and credibility in relationship marketing are critical as they have an impact on customer loyalty, engagement, and brand reputation on digital platforms (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

"Adapting to new technologies and tools requires constant learning and adjustment" had a weighted mean of 2.86 and a verbal interpretation of "Agree". This revealed that respondents were struggling to keep up with technological changes in digital marketing. New platforms, analytics tools, content formats, advertising features, and automation systems come and go, and digital marketers need to keep their skills up to date. The finding emphasizes the importance of adapting to technology to keep campaigns relevant and improve marketing performance in the lifestyle industry. It has demonstrated the importance of digital skills and the acceptance of technological change, leading to marketing effectiveness and organizational sustainability (Saura et al., 2021; Kotler, 2021).

The statement "Digital marketing trends change fast, so it is difficult to sustain effective strategies" had the lowest weighted mean (2.79) and was verbally interpreted as "Agree". Even though this is the lowest rating, the result still indicates that rapid trend changes are a known challenge for respondents. The relatively high standard deviation suggests that respondents may have had different experiences with this problem. Some marketers are better at jumping on trends than others are at keeping their campaigns on strategy and consistent. The rapid pace

of change in technology, algorithmic platforms, customer tastes, and market behaviours places continuous pressure on organisations to innovate and meet customer expectations (Harrigan et al., 2021, 2022).

Other indicators related to campaign management and customer engagement, such as “Managing multiple digital platforms is a challenge when running campaigns” and “Maintaining consistent customer engagement across platforms is a challenge,” had weighted means above 2.80 and were verbally interpreted as “Agree”. Results suggest that digital marketers face the challenges of managing content, messaging, customer interactions, and campaign activities across multiple channels. In the lifestyle industry, this is doubly so, as you can find your brand on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, websites, e-commerce platforms, and other digital channels. If these platforms are not managed properly, they can lead to a disjointed customer experience and message of the brand. Therefore, a combined digital marketing management is needed to improve customer interaction, cross-channel communication, and relationship building (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Appel et al., 2020).

### Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Spearman Rho Analysis

The correlation findings revealed selective associations between respondents' profile variables and the relationship marketing indicators. Certain dimensions were significantly related to age, education, platform type, years of experience, current position, and firm type. However, none of the profile variables were significantly related to all five relationship marketing elements. The results imply that professional and demographic characteristics may affect perceptions of relationship marketing in the lifestyle industry. However, the analysis is correlational, so the results do not show cause-and-effect relationships. Interpretation of the direction of the coefficient for categorical variables such as sex, platform type, current position, and firm type should also be approached with caution and supported by adequate coding and appropriate statistical procedures. Table 7 shows the results of the relationship between respondents' profile variables and key elements of relationship marketing, namely trust, loyalty, commitment, relationship quality, and customer satisfaction.

**Table 7.** Relationship Between the Respondents' Profile Variables and the Key Elements of Relationship Marketing

| Correlations                      |                         | Trust  | Loyalty | Commitment | Relationship Quality | Customer Satisfaction |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------|---------|------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Age</b>                        | Pearson Correlation     | .435** | -.260*  | 0.017      | 0.16                 | .212*                 |
|                                   | Sig. (2-tailed)         | 0      | 0.01    | 0.867      | 0.118                | 0.037                 |
|                                   | N                       | 97     | 97      | 97         | 97                   | 97                    |
| <b>Sex</b>                        | Correlation Coefficient | -0.004 | .326**  | .242*      | -0.121               | -0.116                |
|                                   | Sig. (2-tailed)         | 0.967  | 0.001   | 0.017      | 0.237                | 0.258                 |
|                                   | N                       | 97     | 97      | 97         | 97                   | 97                    |
| <b>Educ Attainment</b>            | Correlation Coefficient | 0.023  | .256*   | .317**     | -.224*               | -0.072                |
|                                   | Sig. (2-tailed)         | 0.821  | 0.012   | 0.002      | 0.027                | 0.483                 |
|                                   | N                       | 97     | 97      | 97         | 97                   | 97                    |
| <b>Digital Marketing Platform</b> | Correlation Coefficient | -.251* | .418**  | .303**     | -0.049               | -0.001                |
|                                   | Sig. (2-tailed)         | 0.013  | 0       | 0.003      | 0.63                 | 0.99                  |
|                                   | N                       | 97     | 97      | 97         | 97                   | 97                    |
| <b>Years of Experience</b>        | Pearson Correlation     | -.208* | .277**  | 0.013      | -.303**              | -0.155                |
|                                   | Sig. (2-tailed)         | 0.041  | 0.006   | 0.902      | 0.003                | 0.131                 |
|                                   | N                       | 97     | 97      | 97         | 97                   | 97                    |
| <b>Current Position</b>           | Correlation Coefficient | 0.089  | -0.041  | -.516**    | 0.184                | 0.051                 |
|                                   | Sig. (2-tailed)         | 0.385  | 0.689   | 0          | 0.072                | 0.622                 |
|                                   | N                       | 97     | 97      | 97         | 97                   | 97                    |
| <b>Type of Company</b>            | Correlation Coefficient | 0.193  | -.273** | -0.078     | .294**               | 0.18                  |
|                                   | Sig. (2-tailed)         | 0.058  | 0.007   | 0.445      | 0.003                | 0.078                 |
|                                   | N                       | 97     | 97      | 97         | 97                   | 97                    |

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

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Age and trust were significantly and positively correlated ( $r = .435$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and customer satisfaction ( $r = .212$ ,  $p = .037$ ). This indicates that the older the respondent, the more likely they were to exhibit high levels of trust and customer satisfaction with digital marketing engagement strategies. Trust was moderately correlated with age, whereas customer satisfaction was weakly correlated. Age was significantly and negatively correlated with loyalty ( $r = -.260$ ,  $p = .010$ ). This indicates that younger respondents showed more loyalty towards affiliate marketing partnerships. However, age was not significantly associated with relationship quality,  $p = .118$ , or commitment,  $p = .867$ .

The findings also indicate that age may be related to some relationship marketing perceptions, such as trust, loyalty, and customer satisfaction, but not to all. This finding may further indicate that older, more experienced marketing professionals have gained greater professional exposure and established stronger long-term business relationships throughout their careers.

Their extensive involvement in customer engagement, digital marketing initiatives, and partnership management may contribute to higher baseline levels of trust and more favorable perceptions of customer satisfaction. In contrast, younger professionals may still be developing their professional networks and practical experience, which could influence how they perceive trust and customer-related outcomes in digital relationship marketing. Age and professional maturity have been shown to affect digital engagement, trust building and customer relationship behavior (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Sex was significantly correlated with loyalty ( $r = .326, p = .001$ ) and commitment ( $r = .242, p = .017$ ). The results showed a statistically significant relationship between respondents' sex and their perceptions of loyalty and commitment in digital relationship marketing. Sex was not significantly related to trust ( $p = .967$ ), relationship quality ( $p = .237$ ), or customer satisfaction ( $p = .258$ ). Sex is a categorical variable, and, due to the coding used in the analysis, the direction of the correlation should be interpreted with caution. This finding may suggest that respondents' characterization is associated with perceptions of loyalty and commitment in digital marketing partnerships. This is consistent with the literature that demographic characteristics can influence communication patterns, engagement, and participation in digital marketing environments (Appel et al., 2020; Harrigan, 2021).

There was a significant positive association between educational attainment and loyalty ( $r = .256, p = .012$ ) and commitment ( $r = .317, p = .002$ ). This implies that the higher the respondents' education level, the higher the reported levels of loyalty and commitment toward relationship marketing practices. However, educational attainment was significantly and negatively correlated with relationship quality ( $r = -.224, p = .027$ ). The unexpected negative association may suggest that the more educated were more critical when evaluating the quality of the marketing relationship. However, there was no significant relationship between educational attainment and trust ( $p = .821$ ) or customer satisfaction ( $p = .483$ ). The results suggest that education can affect how respondents perceive loyalty, commitment, and relationship quality, but not necessarily trust or customer satisfaction. Studies have shown that education and professional development may be involved in digital marketing and strategic relationship building (Kotler et al., 2021; Saura, 2021).

The type of digital marketing platform used was significantly related to trust ( $r = -.251, p = .013$ ), loyalty ( $r = .418, p < .001$ ), and commitment ( $r = .303, p = .003$ ). Moderate association with loyalty. Moderate-to-low Trust and commitment relationships. The results suggest a possible association between the respondents' platform and their perceptions of trust, loyalty, and commitment in digital relationship marketing. The digital marketing platform was not statistically significantly related to relationship quality ( $p = .630$ ) or customer satisfaction ( $p = .990$ ). The sign of the coefficient should be interpreted with care, and only in the context of the coding scheme used, since the platform type is a categorical variable. In general, the results indicate that digital platforms may have different capabilities for building trust, loyalty, and commitment in online marketing interactions. This finding is consistent with previous literature highlighting the importance of digital platforms for customer engagement and relationship building in online marketing contexts (Appel et al., 2020).

Years of experience were positively and significantly correlated with trust ( $r = .208, p = .041$ ), loyalty ( $r = .277, p = .006$ ), and relationship quality ( $r = .303, p = .003$ ). The results suggest that the more years of experience the respondents had, the higher the levels of trust, loyalty, and relationship quality they reported in the digital marketing practices. The correlations were low to moderate, suggesting that experience may be related to these relationship marketing indicators, but the strength of association was not strong. There was no significant association between years of experience and customer satisfaction ( $p = .131$ ) and commitment ( $p = .902$ ). These results imply that professional experience might be beneficial in the development of perceptions of trust and relationship quality, but not for all facets of relationship marketing. This is in line with findings that professional experience may affect perceptions of digital marketing strategy and organizational relationships (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Commitment was significantly negatively correlated with current position ( $r = .516, p < .001$ ). This points to a moderate-to-strong link between participants' current status and their perceptions of commitment in affiliate and

digital marketing relationships. As the current position is a categorical variable, the negative direction should be taken into the interpretation in coding of the dataset. This finding suggests that perceptions of commitment may differ depending on the respondent's professional role, such as that of a digital marketer, marketing professional, or brand manager. The reported results did not show any significant association between current position and other indicators of relationship marketing. This result implies that the roles in the organizations may influence the experience or evaluation of commitment in digital marketing collaborations (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Dwivedi, 2021).

Firm type was significantly and negatively related to loyalty ( $r = -.273$ ,  $p = .007$ ) and significantly and positively related to relationship quality ( $r = .294$ ,  $p = .003$ ). A relationship was found between the type of firm respondents were part of and their perceptions of loyalty and relationship quality. However, no significant relationship was found between firm type and trust ( $p = .058$ ), commitment ( $p = .445$ ), or customer satisfaction ( $p = .078$ ). Firm type is a categorical variable, and the sign of the relationship should be taken with caution and relative to the coding. The results indicate that the organizational context is linked to perceptions of loyalty and relationship quality in digital marketing practices. This is consistent with previous studies showing the influence of organizational factors on digital marketing communication, strategic management, and relationship quality (Harrigan et al., 2021; Saura, 2021).

## Conclusions

This study concluded that marketing professionals in the lifestyle industry generally perceived relationship marketing practices positively, particularly in terms of trust, loyalty, commitment, relationship quality, and customer satisfaction. Electronic Customer Relationship Management (E-CRM) was likewise recognized as an effective tool for strengthening customer communication, campaign management, and data-driven decision-making. Strategic market orientation and competitor analysis further supported the implementation of digital relationship marketing strategies, although respondents acknowledged persistent challenges related to technological change, customer engagement, trust, credibility, and market competition. Moreover, selected demographic and professional characteristics were significantly associated with specific dimensions of relationship marketing, indicating that perceptions of digital relationship marketing vary across respondent groups.

The findings suggest that organizations in the lifestyle industry should strengthen their relationship marketing initiatives by investing in E-CRM technologies, promoting ethical and transparent digital communication, enhancing customer engagement, and continuously monitoring customer needs and competitor activities. Continuous professional development in digital marketing and customer relationship management is likewise essential to ensure that marketing professionals remain responsive to evolving technologies and market conditions.

The study also highlights implications for higher education and professional training. Academic institutions and training providers should further integrate relationship marketing, E-CRM, customer analytics, digital marketing strategies, and ethical digital communication into their curricula to better prepare future marketing professionals for an increasingly digital and customer-centered business environment.

Finally, future studies are encouraged to employ probability sampling techniques and larger sample sizes to improve the generalizability of findings. Researchers should also gather data directly from customers and incorporate objective organizational performance indicators, such as customer retention, campaign effectiveness, and return on investment, to complement perception-based measures. Comparative studies across different industries and geographical contexts may likewise provide broader insights into the application and effectiveness of relationship marketing in the digital era.

## Contributions of Authors

**Author 1:** Conceived and designed the study, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted and finalized the manuscript.

**Author 2:** Provided academic guidance, research supervision, and technical support throughout all stages of the study.

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## Conflict of Interests

No conflict of interest.

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