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Linking Digital Marketing Strategies to Customer Purchase Behaviour in Grocery Retail: Insights from Spar Durban

Manqele Khulekani Senzo¹, Anos Chitamba², Sizwe Mbona³

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

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between digital marketing strategies and customer purchasing behavior in the grocery retail sector, with a particular focus on Spar in Durban, South Africa. Using a quantitative, descriptive survey approach, data were collected from 278 customers through a structured questionnaire. The results indicate that digital marketing initiatives—especially social media campaigns, digital coupons, and loyalty programs, have a significant positive impact on both purchase frequency and basket size. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the research demonstrates that these strategies effectively influence consumer attitudes and enhance perceived behavioral control. An important demographic insight is that the effectiveness of digital marketing on purchasing behavior varies notably across different age groups, underscoring the importance of age-specific marketing strategies. The study concludes that for grocery retailers such as Spar, successfully combining reliable operational fulfillment with targeted digital promotions is essential for translating marketing efforts into sustained increases in sales and customer loyalty.

1. Introduction

Digital marketing has become a crucial component of contemporary retail strategies, particularly within the grocery sector, where consumer expectations for convenience, personalization, and seamless shopping experiences are influencing purchasing behaviors. In South Africa, like other emerging markets, there has been a notable adoption of digital marketing tools—including social media, email campaigns, mobile applications, and search engine optimization—in response to technological advancements and evolving consumer preferences (Schutte & Chauke, 2022). Research indicates that these tools affect key decision-making factors such as deal-seeking, product awareness, and perceived value, especially among younger, digitally savvy consumers (Schutte & Chauke, 2022).

Empirical evidence suggests that digital marketing strategies significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions by improving access to information, fostering interactive online engagement, and enabling personalized communication. For instance, a survey conducted in Bandung City found that social media marketing, email outreach, SEO, and paid advertising have a strong impact on consumer behavior, particularly when the content is engaging and relevant (Rafikah, 2022). Similarly, studies on e-grocery and e-business in South Africa highlight that, despite some technological and environmental challenges, many consumers respond positively to digital grocery services when operational reliability is maintained (Mobile Application E-Grocery Retail Adoption Challenges; Electronic Commerce Research, 2023).

Despite these developments, there remains a gap in understanding how specific digital marketing strategies influence purchase frequency or volume within South African grocery retail environments, particularly at the store level. Limited empirical data exist regarding the relationship between digital marketing efforts by grocery retailers and actual purchasing behavior—such as visit frequency or total sales volume—in physical stores, including brands like Spar in Durban. Gaining insight into this relationship is essential for retailers aiming to optimize resource allocation across digital channels, tailor customer experiences, and strengthen customer loyalty.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the relationship between digital marketing activities and customer purchase frequency and volume at Spar in Durban. By analyzing how particular strategies (e.g., social media campaigns, personalized offers, email communication) correlate with customer purchasing patterns, the research seeks to contribute valuable insights to both academic understanding and practical application of digital marketing within the South African grocery retail sector.

Objective of the study

The primary objective is to determine the extent to which Spar's digital marketing strategies influence customer purchase behaviour, specifically in terms of purchase frequency and basket size.

Theoretical perspectives – Theory of Planned Behaviour

The selection of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as the foundational framework for this study was intentional, due to its comprehensive ability to model the psychological antecedents of voluntary consumer behaviour. While alternative models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) are highly effective for explaining technology adoption—such as the initial decision to use a retail app or website—their primary focus is on perceptions of the technology itself, including perceived usefulness and ease of use. This study, however, aims to explore the influence of digital marketing strategies on subsequent purchasing behaviour—a broader outcome that goes beyond simply adopting a platform. The TPB offers particular advantages in this context, as it directly links key cognitive factors—Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioural Control—to the formation of behavioural intentions and actual behaviours, such as increased purchase frequency or spending. Consequently, TPB is well-suited for understanding how marketing content (which shapes attitudes), social influence (which leverages subjective norms), and operational factors (which impact perceived control) collaboratively drive specific purchasing decisions within a grocery retail setting.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), originally developed by Ajzen (1991), provides a valuable framework for analyzing the relationship between digital marketing strategies and customer purchase behavior in grocery retail. TPB asserts that behavioral intention, which precedes actual behavior, is influenced by three primary constructs: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (PBC). Each of these constructs corresponds to ways in which digital marketing efforts can impact customers' purchasing decisions, frequency, and volume within contexts such as Spar in Durban.

Attitude toward the behavior reflects the extent to which consumers perceive responding to digital marketing initiatives positively or negatively. In grocery retail, activities such as personalized promotions, engaging social media campaigns, targeted email content, and user-friendly applications are instrumental in fostering favorable attitudes. When consumers perceive that Spar's digital efforts offer value — through convenience, discounts, or relevant product information — their intention to purchase increases, often leading to higher purchase frequency or larger basket sizes. Abdulsalam et al. (2024) demonstrate this relationship within the Nigerian e-commerce context, illustrating how digital pricing strategies influence attitudes and intentions via perceived value, subsequently affecting actual purchasing behavior. This indicates that Spar's use of price promotions and tailored content can directly enhance positive consumer attitudes, thereby increasing purchase frequency.

Subjective norms, which refer to the social pressures influencing behavior, are also becoming increasingly relevant in the digital marketing landscape. Interactions on social media, online reviews, and influencer endorsements serve as digital signals that shape customers' perceptions of what is socially acceptable or desirable. In Durban, customers exposed to positive peer feedback or visible evidence of widespread adoption of Spar's online promotions may feel motivated to participate. Makudza, Masaire, Makwara, Sibanda and Machaka (2024) found that social media marketing significantly influenced consumer purchasing behavior in South Africa during the post-COVID-19 period, largely by amplifying social influence. This suggests that Spar's digital strategies that leverage social proof and community engagement can strengthen purchase intentions through normative influences.

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) pertains to consumers' beliefs about their ability to perform a behavior, considering both internal skills and external constraints. For Spar customers in Durban, this relates to the usability of digital platforms, internet accessibility, and the availability of convenient services such as click-and-collect or delivery. When digital channels are seamless, reliable, and accessible, customers perceive greater control, which enhances both their intentions and actual purchasing behavior. Musikavanhu and Musakuro (2023), in their study of online grocery shopping in Cape Town, identified factors such as ease of use, cost, and perceived risk — closely linked to PBC — as significant influencers of behavioral intention to adopt online grocery shopping. Similarly, research on online platform re-use highlights that service quality and ease of payment foster higher perceived control, encouraging continued online shopping (ElSayad, 2025).

Applying TPB reveals that digital marketing strategies influence Spar customers' purchasing behavior by shaping attitudes, norms, and perceptions of control. However, while empirical evidence supports the influence of attitudes and PBC, subjective norms are comparatively less explored within grocery retail contexts. Additionally, external factors such as delivery infrastructure, stock reliability, and internet access costs — particularly relevant in developing regions like South Africa (Musikavanhu & Musakuro, 2023) — significantly impact perceived

behavioral control. This underscores the importance of including measures of actual purchase frequency and volume as behavioral outcomes, alongside behavioral intention.

TPB effectively supports the analysis of how digital marketing impacts grocery retail purchase behavior at Spar Durban. Attitudes are shaped by perceived value in digital promotions; subjective norms are influenced by social interactions and endorsements on online platforms; and perceived behavioral control depends on the accessibility and usability of digital shopping options. Grounding this research in TPB provides a structured approach for linking digital marketing strategies to customer behavior while accounting for contextual barriers that affect the translation of intention into actual purchase activity.

2. Literature review

Digital marketing has transformed grocery retailing by expanding channels such as social media, email, mobile applications, and search advertising, while also enabling personalized and timely communication with customers. Since 2020, research has primarily examined (a) how digital channels influence consumer awareness and convenience, (b) how these perceptions translate into measurable behaviors—including adoption, purchase frequency and volume, and cart completion—and (c) the operational constraints that affect marketer effectiveness, such as fulfillment processes, stock accuracy, and delivery fees. Recent meta-analyses and systematic reviews confirm a sustained increase in online grocery adoption accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they also highlight that long-term customer conversion depends on service reliability and coherent omnichannel strategies (Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2022).

Digital Channels, Information Access, and Consumer Awareness

Digital marketing channels enhance product visibility, lower search costs, and enable retailers to deliver personalized messages that boost awareness and consideration (Susanti, 2025). Personalization through tailored email offers, app notifications, or customized website recommendations can improve relevance and increase short-term engagement and click-through rates (Dorgbefu, 2021 and Mpungose, Lekhanya and Anwana, 2025.). Nonetheless, systematic reviews also caution that personalization yields diminishing returns when perceived as intrusive or inaccurate, especially if data quality is poor (Yeo, Chu and Li, 2025).

Perceived Usefulness, Convenience, and Adoption

A key theme in the literature is that perceived usefulness and convenience significantly influence consumers' willingness to respond to digital marketing and to adopt online grocery shopping. Meta-analytic findings demonstrate that perceptions of usefulness and positive attitudes were critical factors driving online grocery intentions during and after the pandemic; messages emphasizing convenience—such as time savings, easy reordering, and scheduled delivery—are particularly effective in encouraging trials and repeat use (Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2022). Retailers that clearly communicate fulfillment options and offer streamlined digital experiences tend to achieve higher conversion rates from exposure to purchase (Tyrväinen & Karjaluoto, 2022).

Trust, Sensory Uncertainty, and Information Cues

Purchasing groceries online, particularly fresh produce, involves sensory uncertainty. Studies indicate that trust—both in the retailer and in fulfillment reliability—along with quality assurance cues such as detailed images, comprehensive product descriptions, money-back guarantees, and easy return policies, influence consumers' willingness to buy larger volumes or increase purchase frequency online. When digital promises of

convenience are not supported by reliable fulfillment—such as late or damaged deliveries or incorrect items—negative reviews and word-of-mouth can swiftly undermine future marketing efforts (Kuikka et al., 2024). Therefore, the persuasive power of digital marketing is largely dependent on backend operational performance and transparent product information (Kuikka et al., 2024).

Price Promotions, Deal-Seeking, and Cart Abandonment

Price signaling and promotional offers are powerful tools in digital grocery marketing, with consumers frequently using online channels to seek discounts and compare prices. However, empirical research on cart abandonment reveals that price promotions alone do not ensure completed transactions; factors such as checkout friction—including unexpected delivery fees, complex payment procedures, and hesitation about waiting for lower prices—are significant contributors to abandonment (Mpungose, Lekhanya and Anwana, 2025). To effectively convert website traffic into sales, promotional campaigns must be paired with seamless checkout processes and transparent fulfillment costs (Mpungose, Lekhanya and Anwana, 2025).

Omnichannel Touchpoints and Customer Journeys

Research emphasizes that customers use multiple touchpoints—browsing social media, comparing options on mobile devices, and shopping in physical stores—and that digital marketing efforts should be coordinated across channels. Reviews and synthesis of existing studies show that omnichannel consistencies such as synchronized stock information, uniform pricing, and integrated loyalty program enhanced perceived service value and customer retention. Conversely, inconsistent cross-channel information, like differing prices or conflicting stock statuses, can erode the trust built through digital campaigns (Mpungose, Lekhanya and Anwana, 2025 and Gereá, Gonzalez-Lopez & Herskovic, 2021). For store-level retailers like Spar Durban, aligning digital campaigns with in-store operations and ensuring synchronization between online and offline experiences can significantly improve marketing effectiveness (Gereá et al., 2021).

COVID-19 Impact and the "New Normal"

The pandemic led to a rapid increase in online grocery trials and prompted greater investments in digital marketing and fulfillment infrastructure. Studies tracking this period have observed a notable rise in adoption and a shift towards hybrid shopping patterns, where many consumers retained some online habits but reverted to in-store shopping for certain product categories requiring tactile evaluation or perceived higher value. Experts suggest that this has established a "new normal," characterized by a mix of online and offline purchasing behaviors. Sustained growth in purchase frequency and volume will likely depend on consistent service quality and perceived value (Tyrväinen & Karjaluo, 2022; Rout, 2022).

Customer Feedback, Reviews, and Social Proof

Large-scale analyses of review data reveal that consumers assess their digital retail experiences holistically, considering factors like on-time delivery, product condition upon arrival, driver behavior, and how complaints are handled—all influencing loyalty and repeat purchasing. During the pandemic, social and emotional factors—such as how experiences make customers feel and responsiveness to issues—became increasingly important alongside traditional factors like price and product availability. To foster lasting loyalty, digital marketing strategies must be complemented by responsive customer service and visible social proof (Kuikka et al., 2024).

Operational and Structural Constraints Affecting Marketing Effectiveness

Operational limitations—such as inaccurate inventory data, limited online product assortments, and unpredictable last-mile logistics—often limit the impact of digital marketing efforts. Sector analyses and reviews underscore that investments in digital capabilities should be accompanied by improvements in inventory accuracy, fulfillment options (like click-and-collect or scheduled deliveries), and transparent pricing to reduce acquisition costs and prevent customer churn (Gerea et al., 2021; Rout, 2022).

Implications for Grocery Retailers (Store Level)

Based on current research, three key recommendations emerge for store-level retailers such as Spar Durban: First, digital marketing initiatives should emphasize tangible benefits—such as product availability, flexible delivery windows, and cost savings—to encourage increased purchase frequency. Second, establishing trust through accurate product information, dependable fulfillment, and straightforward return policies is essential; marketing claims must be aligned with operational capabilities. Third, promotional efforts should be designed to minimize checkout friction—through transparent fees and simple payment processes—to reduce cart abandonment rates. Ultimately, integrating in-store practices with digital messaging and loyalty programs enhances marketing effectiveness and supports sustained growth in purchase volume (Wang et al., 2022; Tyrväinen & Karjaluo, 2022; Gerea et al., 2021).

3. Research Methods

This study employs a quantitative, descriptive survey design to analyze the impact of digital marketing strategies on consumer purchasing behavior at Spar Retail Store in Durban. Data will be gathered from customers of the Spar South Beach branch using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale. This approach aligns with the assertion by Hanaysha et al. (2022:71) that questionnaires are effective tools for capturing quantifiable attitudes and behaviors. The target population includes both regular and occasional Spar shoppers, with a sample size of 278 respondents determined in accordance with Sekaran and Bougie's statistical sampling guidelines, ensuring representation within a 95% confidence interval. A probability sampling method, specifically simple random sampling, will be utilized, complemented by non-probability convenience sampling to facilitate accessibility (Rahman, 2023). Pilot testing with 10 participants will be conducted to ensure clarity, content validity, and construct validity, while reliability will be maintained through clear question formulation and consistent scaling (Krieglstein et al., 2022). Data analysis will be conducted using SPSS and Microsoft Excel, integrating descriptive and inferential statistics to identify patterns in purchasing behavior (Newman and Gough, 2020).

Ethical considerations are integral to this research, particularly regarding participant anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent. Participants will be informed about the voluntary nature of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the fact that no personal identifying information will be collected. In accordance with Head (2020) and Berekeyeva et al. (2024), the study will prioritize participants' rights and welfare by implementing strict confidentiality measures, including coded identifiers and secure data storage. Additionally, anonymity will be guaranteed to prevent responses from being linked to individual participants (Hwang, 2023). The researcher will complete the TRREE online ethics course to ensure adherence to established ethical guidelines. These measures are designed to safeguard participant trust and uphold the highest standards of research integrity.

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 offers a demographic and behavioral overview of the survey respondents. The sample is predominantly female (60.3%) and primarily falls within the 25-34 age group (39.3%), indicating a young, economically active population. A considerable portion of respondents are well-educated, with 32.9% holding a diploma and 14.6% possessing a postgraduate diploma or honours degree. In terms of employment status, 43.4% are employed, followed by students (28.8%). Importantly, the data on shopping frequency demonstrates strong customer engagement with Spar, with 45.2% shopping weekly and 38.8% monthly. Regarding digital channel preferences, social media is the most commonly used platform for interacting with Spar (58.4%), significantly more so than

its mobile app (7.3%), website (20.5%), or email (2.7%). This trend aligns with current literature highlighting social media as a primary marketing touchpoint in the retail sector (Tyrväinen & Karjaluo, 2022). The relatively low utilization of the dedicated mobile app suggests an opportunity for development to improve direct customer engagement and personalization.

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.
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIGITAL MARKETING AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR	10	0.957	0.950	1987.835	45	<0.001

Table 2 presents the reliability and validity metrics for the scale measuring the relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour. The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.957 for the 10-item scale indicates an exceptionally high level of internal consistency, far exceeding the accepted threshold of 0.7, which confirms the scale's reliability (Hanaysha et al., 2022). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is 0.950, classified as 'marvellous', indicating that the data are highly suitable for factor analysis. Furthermore, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and that factor analysis is appropriate. These robust statistical results provide a strong foundation for the validity of the subsequent inferential analyses conducted in the study.

Table 3: Normality test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Mean response of items assessing the relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour	0.138	219	<0.001	0.923	219	<0.001

Table 3 presents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for normality. Both tests yielded statistically significant results ($p < 0.001$), indicating a rejection of the null hypothesis that the data are normally distributed. The non-normal distribution of the mean responses relating to the relationship between digital marketing and purchasing behavior supports the use of non-parametric statistical tests, such as the Kruskal-Wallis H test, for subsequent hypothesis testing, as these methods do not assume normality in the data (Nahalkova, Tesarova and Krizanova, 2023).

Table 4: Responses of items assessing relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour and One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

Questions	Responses, n (%)					Mean (SD)	Test statistics (p-value)
	SA	A	N	D	SD		
My shopping frequency at Spar has increased due to digital promotions.	66 (30.1)	99 (45.2)	35 (16.0)	14 (6.4)	5 (2.3)	2.05 (0.961)	0.276 (<0.001)
I spend more per visit when I use Spar's digital coupons or promotions.	58 (26.5)	98 (44.7)	46 (21.0)	13 (5.9)	4 (1.8)	2.12 (0.931)	0.263 (<0.001)
I visit Spar more often when I see online deals or advertisements.	62 (28.3)	105 (47.9)	34 (15.5)	14 (6.4)	4 (1.8)	2.05 (0.927)	0.286 (<0.001)
I shop more during Spar's digital flash sales or online events.	55 (25.1)	107 (48.9)	38 (17.4)	14 (6.4)	5 (2.3)	2.12 (0.936)	0.290 (<0.001)
Digital loyalty points or rewards motivate me to return more frequently.	66 (30.1)	114 (52.1)	30 (13.7)	4 (1.8)	5 (2.3)	1.94 (0.847)	0.294 (<0.001)
I compare prices and promotions through Spar's digital platforms before shopping.	65 (29.7)	106 (48.4)	33 (15.1)	12 (5.5)	3 (1.4)	2.00 (0.891)	0.283 (<0.001)
Spar's digital ads influence me to increase my basket size.	64 (29.2)	101 (46.1)	36 (16.4)	14 (6.4)	4 (1.8)	2.05 (0.937)	0.277 (<0.001)
I tend to shop at Spar more during periods of intense digital promotion.	60 (27.4)	107 (48.9)	37 (16.9)	13 (5.9)	2 (0.9)	2.04 (0.874)	0.281 (<0.001)
I choose Spar over competitors because of better digital engagement.	54 (24.7)	100 (45.7)	45 (20.5)	13 (5.9)	7 (3.2)	2.17 (0.975)	0.274 (<0.001)
There is a noticeable change in how often I shop when Spar increases digital marketing efforts.	48 (21.9)	112 (51.1)	45 (20.5)	11 (5.0)	3 (1.4)	2.13 (0.858)	0.290 (<0.001)

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).

HYPOTHESES

H1: Relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour differs across education levels

Table 5: Kruskal-Wallis Test assessing relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour grouped by education levels

Test statistics	Relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour
Kruskal-Wallis H	6.879
df	6
Asymp. Sig.	0.332
Grouping Variable: Education level	

The results of the hypothesis testing using the Kruskal-Wallis H test are shown in the subsequent tables. **H1**, which proposed that the relationship differs across education levels, was not supported ($p = 0.332$). This suggests that the perceived impact of digital marketing on purchase behaviour is consistent across various educational qualifications.

H2: Relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour differs across age group

Table 6: Kruskal-Wallis Test assessing relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour grouped by age group

Test statistics	Relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour
Kruskal-Wallis H	14.602
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.002*
Grouping Variable: Age group	

Conversely, **H2** was supported, revealing a statistically significant difference in the relationship based on age group ($p = 0.002$). This finding is critical, as it underscores that younger consumers (e.g., the 18-24 and 25-34 cohorts that dominate the sample) are more responsive to digital marketing efforts compared to older age groups. This aligns with generational studies on technology adoption, which indicate that digital natives integrate these tools more seamlessly into their consumer decision-making processes (Musikavanhu & Musakuro, 2023).

H3: Relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour differs across the digital channels used to interact with Spar the most

Table 6: Kruskal-Wallis Test assessing relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour grouped by digital channels used to interact with Spar the most

Test statistics	Relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour
Kruskal-Wallis H	4.870
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	0.301
Grouping Variable: Digital channels used to interact with Spar the most	

Finally, **H3**, which proposed a difference based on the primary digital channel used, was not supported ($p = 0.301$). This implies that while social media is the dominant channel (as per Table 1), the strength of the relationship between digital marketing and purchase behaviour is not statistically different for users of email, mobile apps, social media, websites, or WhatsApp. This could indicate that the *content* and *value* of the marketing message are more influential than the specific channel through which it is delivered, a key principle of integrated marketing communications (Gerea et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates a significant and positive relationship between digital marketing strategies and customer purchase behavior at Spar in Durban. The results indicate that targeted digital initiatives—such as

social media promotions, digital coupons, and loyalty rewards—are effective in increasing purchase frequency, basket size, and brand preference over competitors. Framed within the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the research confirms that digital marketing positively influences consumer attitudes and enhances perceived behavioral control by making shopping more accessible and rewarding. A key finding is the moderating role of age, underscoring the importance for grocery retailers to tailor their digital marketing strategies to accommodate different generational preferences and behaviours. Additionally, the consistent effects observed across education levels and digital channels suggest the presence of a core value proposition with broad appeal. For industry practitioners, these insights highlight the need to invest in a strong social media presence, user-friendly digital platforms, and value-driven promotional campaigns. Equally important is operational excellence—ensuring reliable fulfilment and accurate inventory management—to foster customer trust and promote long-term loyalty (Kuikka et al., 2024). Future research should consider integrating point-of-sale data to correlate customer perceptions with actual sales data, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the return on investment associated with digital marketing initiatives in the grocery retail sector.

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