

Paradigm Shift from Conventional Marketing Strategies to Digital Platforms: Consumer Behavior Evidence from Oman

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Abstract: This study investigates the paradigm shift from conventional marketing strategies to digital platforms and its impact on consumer behavior in Oman. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining a structured questionnaire survey (n = 72) with qualitative analysis of open-ended responses and in-depth thematic analysis of interview insights drawn from participating business owners and consumers. Descriptive statistics, one-sample z-tests for proportions, chi-square goodness-of-fit tests, and point-biserial correlation were applied to the quantitative data. Findings reveal that 87.5% of respondents have shifted their purchasing behavior toward digital platforms (z = 6.364, p < 0.001; 95% CI [0.799, 0.951]). Social media emerged as the dominant digital marketing channel (76.4%), with an overall composite digital attitude score of 3.99 out of 5.0 across three Likert-scale constructs. The point-biserial correlation between daily online hours and digital adoption was r = 0.462 (t = 4.354, p < 0.001), confirming a statistically significant positive relationship. Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses identified platform convenience, product variety, and the transformative role of e-commerce as key consumer-reported drivers of the digital shift. The study addresses a documented gap in Gulf region marketing research and offers actionable recommendations for businesses navigating the digital transition.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; Consumer Behavior; Paradigm Shift; Social Media; Conventional Marketing; Oman.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The global proliferation of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped the commercial landscape, compelling a paradigm shift in how businesses communicate with, attract, and retain consumers. For decades, conventional marketing strategies — including print advertising, television and radio commercials, billboard placements, and direct

personal selling — constituted the dominant promotional paradigm. However, the rapid expansion of internet access, social media ecosystems, and mobile computing platforms has catalyzed an accelerating migration toward digital marketing strategies such as social media marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), influencer marketing, content marketing, and email campaigns.

Consumer behavior has evolved in parallel with these technological forces. The modern consumer increasingly begins the purchase journey online — searching, comparing, reading reviews, and engaging with brand content across multiple digital touchpoints before committing to a decision. The COVID-19 pandemic served as an inflection point, dramatically accelerating existing trends: with physical retail constrained by lockdown measures, both consumers and businesses pivoted toward digital channels with unprecedented urgency (Sharma & Jhamb, 2020; Mehta, Saxena, & Purohit, 2020).

Despite extensive global scholarship on this topic, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region — and Oman in particular — remains underrepresented in the empirical literature. Oman's rapidly growing internet penetration, young demographic profile, and alignment with the national Oman Vision 2040 development agenda make it an especially relevant context for examining these dynamics. This study aims to fill that gap by providing empirical evidence from a mixed-methods investigation involving survey data and qualitative consumer and business insights.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

The transformation of marketing strategies from conventional to digital has been driven by technological innovation, changing consumer habits, and, most recently, pandemic-induced behavioral disruptions. Consumer behavior is observably shifting toward online channels, yet it remains unclear how deeply this shift has penetrated Omani consumer markets, which strategies most powerfully influence consumer decisions in this context, and what challenges businesses face in executing the transition effectively. This study addresses these questions through empirical investigation.

➤ *Objectives*

- To examine the role of digital marketing strategies on consumer behavior in Oman.
- To evaluate and compare the effectiveness of digital and conventional marketing strategies.
- To analyze the impact of the digital paradigm shift on consumer buying behavior.
- To identify the most influential digital marketing channels from a consumer perspective.
- To assess qualitative consumer attitudes toward digital marketing through open-ended and interview responses.

➤ *Research Questions*

- RQ1: What is the extent of the behavioral shift from conventional to digital purchasing among Omani consumers?
- RQ2: Which digital marketing strategies most significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions?
- RQ3: Is there a statistically significant relationship between daily digital engagement time and adoption of digital purchasing?

- RQ4: What qualitative themes emerge from consumers' accounts of the digital marketing transition?
- RQ5: What challenges and recommendations arise from consumer and business perspectives?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *From Conventional to Digital Marketing: A Paradigm Transition*

The theoretical framing of a shift from conventional to digital marketing as a 'paradigm' transition draws on Kuhnian notions of fundamental structural change in dominant practice. Nair and Subramaniam (2012) were among the early scholars to document this transition empirically, finding that social media networking platforms offer measurable advantages over conventional channels, including bidirectional communication, virtual buying experiences, and stronger consumer persuasion. Their longitudinal study (June–December 2011) found that social media networking delivers tangible marketing returns where traditional broadcast media cannot.

Kapoor and Kapoor (2021) traced the evolution of e-marketing in India's hotel industry, documenting the shift from conventional relationship-marketing approaches to digital-first strategies integrating social media, AI tools, and online reputation management. Their qualitative investigation of 30 hotel managers highlighted both the opportunities and friction costs associated with the transition. Batat (2022) proposed the 'experiential marketing mix' (7E) framework as a theoretical alternative to the outdated 4P model, arguing that in the contemporary 'phygital' marketplace — where physical and digital retail converge — marketers must engineer holistic consumer experiences rather than merely managing promotional channels.

➤ *Digital Marketing and Consumer Behavior*

The causal link between digital marketing exposure and consumer behavioral outcomes has been documented across diverse geographic and sectoral contexts. Sharma, Singh, and Sharma (2017) confirmed that digital marketing significantly influences brand awareness, purchase intention, and loyalty through a case study of the Indian e-commerce platform Flipkart. Li and Ding (2018) identified social influence, trust, and perceived value as the key mediating variables through which social media marketing shapes online consumer behavior, reinforcing the need for trust-building communication strategies in digital campaigns.

Lee, Kim, and Lee (2020) established that mobile application marketing exerts a significant influence on consumer brand loyalty and purchase intention among Korean fashion consumers, underlining the importance of mobile-first strategies in digital marketing portfolios. Zhang, Li, and Liu (2021) extended this analysis to the COVID-19 context, demonstrating that digital marketing became even more impactful during the pandemic as consumers increasingly relied on digital platforms for essential purchases. Wu (2024) observed that digital tools have made consumer purchasing paths more complex and diverse,

requiring businesses to adopt personalized, data-driven marketing approaches to maintain effectiveness.

➤ *Social Media as the Primary Digital Marketing Vehicle*

The academic consensus consistently identifies social media as the dominant channel within digital marketing ecosystems. Mehta, Saxena, and Purohit (2020) documented the COVID-19 pandemic's role in intensifying social media engagement, finding that the crisis catalyzed a paradigm shift in consumer behavior — from collaborative to competitive consumption — with social media serving as the primary amplifier of changed preferences. The International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (2025) further confirmed that digital technologies have transformed consumer decision-making from a linear individual process to a dynamically interactive, socially embedded one, in which platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook simultaneously serve as discovery engines, evaluation forums, and purchase channels.

➤ *Artificial Intelligence and the Next Wave of Digital Marketing*

An emerging frontier in digital marketing scholarship concerns the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into marketing operations. Miah (2024) identified AI-driven digital marketing as a pivotal force shaping consumer interactions with products and services, arguing that the convergence of digital platforms with AI capabilities constitutes a second-order paradigm shift beyond the initial online transition. Spais, Phau, and Jain (2025), reviewing the state of AI and machine learning in digital marketing, projected that AI-enabled personalization, conversational marketing tools, and predictive analytics will increasingly define competitive differentiation in digital channels.

Acatrinei et al. (2025), using structural equation modeling (SEM) on a sample of 501 social media users, found that perceived transparency significantly enhances consumer trust in AI-driven marketing, while perceived benefits and satisfaction drive tool acceptance. These findings carry direct implications for Omani businesses considering AI marketing investments, particularly given that trust and transparency are culturally salient values in Gulf consumer markets. Castillo et al. (2025), in a Scopus-based systematic review of 117 articles, documented exponential growth in AI-consumer behavior research — from 14 publications in 2021 to 45 in 2024 — establishing AI as the most rapidly expanding frontier in the field.

➤ *Research Gap and Conceptual Framework*

Despite extensive global scholarship, empirical studies focusing specifically on Oman and the Gulf region are sparse. Lacarcel and Huete (2023) noted that digital communication has become a crucial enabler of lifestyle aspirations globally, yet regional differences in digital literacy, cultural context, and market maturity necessitate context-specific investigation. The present study addresses this gap by providing granular empirical evidence from Omani consumers and businesses, situating local findings within the broader global literature.

The conceptual framework of this study posits that Digital Marketing Strategies (comprising social media promotion, SEO, content marketing, influencer marketing, and email marketing) directly influence Consumer Buying Behavior, mediated by factors including product variety perception, brand engagement, and digital channel accessibility. The conventional marketing strategies (billboard advertising, print media, personal selling) serve as the baseline comparator. Figure 1 illustrates this framework.

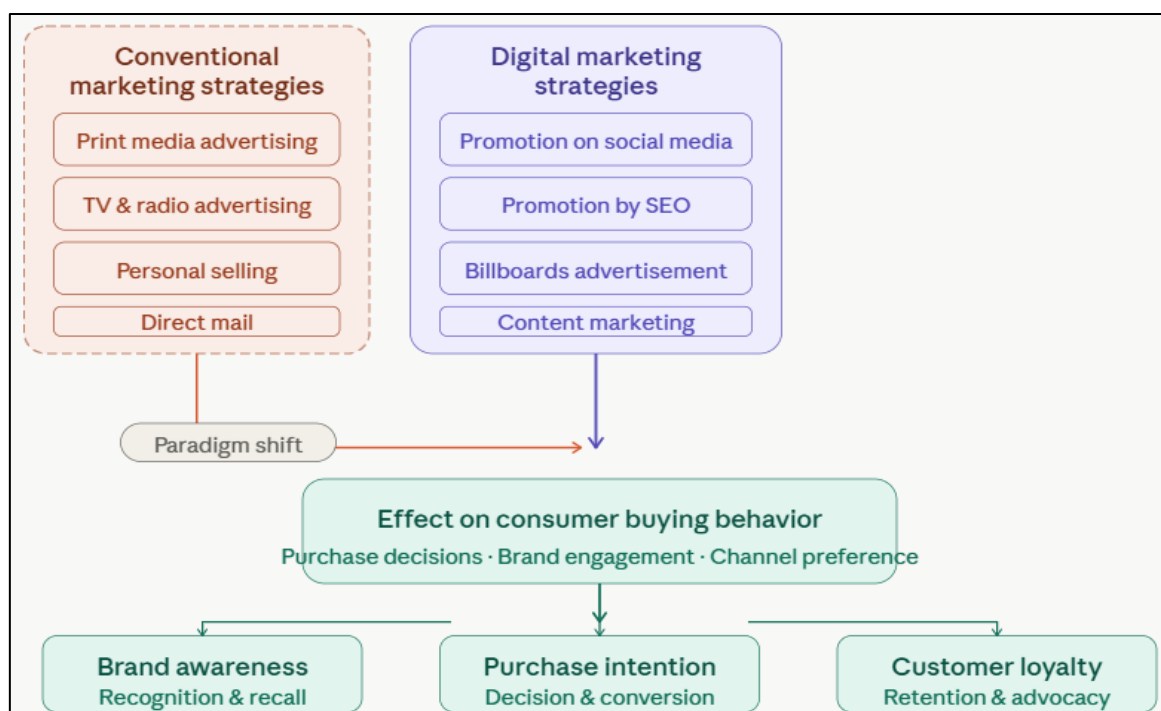


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Paradigm Shift from Conventional to Digital Marketing and its Impact on Consumer Buying Behavior

The conceptual framework of this study is adapted from Al Kurdi et al. (2022) and Nair and Subramaniam (2012). Al Kurdi et al. (2022) established that digital marketing channels — including social media, search engine applications, online advertising, and email marketing — exert a significant direct effect on consumer buying decisions, providing the structural logic for treating each digital strategy as a discrete independent variable. Nair and Subramaniam (2012) demonstrated that 21st-century marketing communication platforms show a clear tendency to shift away from conventional channels such as TV and print media toward technology-bound social networking ecosystems, with social media networking progressively shaping how consumers make purchase decisions, establishing the theoretical basis for framing this transition as a paradigm shift rather than a mere channel addition. Building on these two foundations, the framework positions Digital Marketing Strategies — comprising social media promotion, SEO-based promotion, billboard advertising, and content marketing — as the core independent variable, contrasted against Conventional Marketing Strategies as the baseline comparator. Both converge through the paradigm shift construct into the dependent variable, Effect on Consumer Buying Behavior, measured across brand awareness, purchase intention, and customer loyalty. The framework thus captures both the macro-level structural transition documented by Nair and Subramaniam (2012) and the channel-specific causal pathways identified by Al Kurdi et al. (2022), adapted to the Omani consumer context of this study.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

➤ *Research Design*

This study adopts a sequential mixed-methods design. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire and subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. In the second phase, qualitative data from open-ended survey responses and structured consumer interviews were analyzed thematically. This design is consistent with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) recommendation for sequential mixed-methods approaches in consumer behavior research, as it enables quantitative generalization to be complemented and enriched by qualitative depth of understanding.

➤ *Participants*

Participants comprised business owners, entrepreneurs, and SME operators in Oman who had directly experienced the transition from conventional to digital marketing, as well as consumers familiar with both marketing paradigms. A convenience sampling strategy was used, targeting respondents through digital channels including Google Forms distributed via social media networks and professional associations. A total of 72 valid survey responses were collected, along with qualitative data from open-ended questions embedded in the survey. While the sample is not statistically representative of the entire Omani population, its

composition — predominantly young, digitally active individuals with first-hand experience of the marketing transition — is well-suited to the exploratory objectives of the study.

➤ *Research Instruments*

• *Structured Questionnaire*

The structured questionnaire comprised twelve items covering: (1) demographic profile (gender, age, income); (2) digital behavior (daily online hours); (3) behavioral shift (perceived change in purchasing behavior); (4) strategy awareness (preferred digital marketing channels); (5) product variety perception; (6) Likert-scale constructs measuring brand engagement, buying behavior influence, and purchase decision alteration (Strongly Agree = 5 to Disagree = 1); and (7) an open-ended recommendation item.

• *Qualitative Data Instruments*

Qualitative data were derived from two sources: (a) open-ended responses to Question 12 of the survey, which invited suggestions and personal reflections; and (b) personal interviews conducted with a sub-sample of business owners and marketing managers to explore the organizational experience of the digital transition in greater depth. Interviews were semi-structured, guided by themes of digital adoption drivers, barriers, consumer response, and strategy effectiveness. Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework.

➤ *Analytical Approach*

Quantitative analysis proceeded in two stages. Descriptive statistics — including frequency distributions, percentages, means, standard deviations, and medians — were computed for all variables. Inferential analyses included: (1) one-sample z-tests for proportions to test hypotheses about the prevalence of digital behavioral shift; (2) chi-square goodness-of-fit tests to examine whether digital strategy preferences were uniformly distributed; and (3) point-biserial correlation to assess the relationship between daily online time and digital adoption. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was used throughout. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, with codes developed inductively from open-ended and interview content and organized into higher-order themes.

IV. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

➤ *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

The sample ($n = 72$) was predominantly male (51.2%, $n = 37$) with a substantial female representation (47.2%, $n = 34$). Age distribution was strongly skewed toward younger respondents: 68.1% ($n = 49$) were aged 15–25, followed by 23.6% ($n = 17$) in the 26–35 bracket, 6.9% ($n = 5$) aged 36–45, and 1.4% ($n = 1$) aged 46 and above. This profile reflects Oman's demographically young population and the expectation that digital marketing transitions are most acutely experienced by younger cohorts. Income distribution revealed that 59.7% earned in the 100–300 OMR range, consistent with the predominantly student and early-career

composition of the sample, while 13.9% fell in the 900–1200 OMR bracket and 11.1% earned above 1,200 OMR.

• *Table 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents*

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (n = 72)

Variable	Category	n	% of Total
Gender	Male	37	51.4%
	Female	34	47.2%
Age	15–25 years	49	68.1%
	26–35 years	17	23.6%
	36–45 years	5	6.9%
	46+ years	1	1.4%
Monthly Income	100–300 OMR	43	59.7%
	300–600 OMR	6	8.3%
	600–900 OMR	5	6.9%
	900–1200 OMR	10	13.9%
	> 1200 OMR	8	11.1%

➤ *Daily Online Engagement*

Respondents reported substantial daily digital engagement. The modal category was 4–6 hours per day (45.8%, n = 33), followed by 2–4 hours (27.8%, n = 20), 6–8 hours (19.4%, n = 14), and more than 8 hours (6.9%, n = 5). The coded variable yielded a mean of M = 2.056 (SD = 0.870) on a four-point ordinal scale, indicating that the average respondent spends between 4 and 6 hours online daily. This

level of digital engagement is consistent with GCC regional statistics documenting among the world's highest social media usage rates (Lacarcel & Huete, 2023).

• *Table 2: Daily Online Hours — Frequency Distribution and Descriptive Statistics*

Table 2 Distribution of Daily Online Hours Among Respondents (n = 72)

Daily Online Hours	n	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
2–4 Hours	20	27.8%	27.8%
4–6 Hours	33	45.8%	73.6%
6–8 Hours	14	19.4%	93.1%
More than 8 Hours	5	6.9%	100.0%
Total	72	100.0%	—
Mean (coded 1–4)	2.056	SD = 0.870	Median = 2, Mode = 2

➤ *Behavioral Shift Toward Digital Platforms*

A near-unanimous 87.5% (n = 63) of respondents confirmed a perceived shift in their purchasing behavior from conventional to digital platforms, with only 12.5% (n = 9) reporting no such shift. Similarly, 87.5% agreed that digital platforms provide a wider range of product options compared to traditional marketing methods. These proportions are

remarkably consistent across both items, suggesting a robust and coherent perception of digital platform superiority among this cohort.

• *Table 3: Behavioral Shift and Product Range Perception*

Table 3 Behavioral Shift Indicators (n = 72)

Item	Response	n	%
Q5: Shift to digital purchasing	Yes	63	87.5%
	No	9	12.5%
Q7: Digital offers wider product range	Yes	63	87.5%
	No	9	12.5%

➤ *Digital Marketing Strategy Awareness*

Social media was identified as the primary digital marketing strategy by a commanding 76.4% (n = 55) of respondents. This was followed by influencer marketing (6.9%, n = 5), email marketing (5.6%, n = 4), catalog marketing (4.2%, n = 3), website optimization (2.8%, n = 2),

content marketing (2.8%, n = 2), and SEO (1.4%, n = 1). The dominance of social media over all other channels is consistent with global patterns documented in the recent literature (IJRISS, 2025; Wu, 2024) and reflects the pervasive social media culture of Oman's young consumer population.

• *Table 4: Awareness of Digital Marketing Strategies (Q6)*

Table 4 Awareness Distribution Across Digital Marketing Strategies (Q6, n = 72)

Digital Marketing Strategy	n	% of Sample	Rank
Social Media	55	76.4%	1
Influencer Marketing	5	6.9%	2
Email Marketing	4	5.6%	3
Catalog Marketing	3	4.2%	4
Website Optimization	2	2.8%	5=
Content Marketing	2	2.8%	5=
Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	1	1.4%	7
Total	72	100%	—

➤ *Likert-Scale Constructs: Descriptive Statistics*

Three Likert-scale items assessed consumer attitudes toward digital marketing across key behavioral dimensions. Q9 (brand engagement superiority of digital channels) yielded M = 4.085, SD = 0.751 — indicating strong agreement that digital channels deliver superior brand engagement. Q10 (digital marketing influence on buying behavior) produced M = 3.944, SD = 0.918, and Q11 (digital channels altering purchase decisions) yielded M = 3.929, SD

= 0.937. All three means clustered above the 'agree' threshold (> 3.5) on the five-point scale. A composite digital attitude score computed as the mean across all three constructs was 3.986/ 5.0, indicating a consistent positive orientation toward digital marketing across the sample.

• *Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Constructs (Q9, Q10, Q11)*

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Scale Constructs (5 = Strongly Agree, 1 = Disagree)

Construct	n	Mean	SD	Median	Mode	Scale Range
Q9: Brand engagement (digital vs. conventional)	71	4.085	0.751	4 (Agree)	4 (Agree)	1–5
Q10: Digital marketing influence on buying behavior	72	3.944	0.918	4 (Agree)	4 (Agree)	1–5
Q11: Digital channels altered purchase decisions	70	3.929	0.937	4 (Agree)	4 (Agree)	1–5
Composite Digital Attitude Score	72	3.986	—	—	—	1–5

Table 6 provides the full frequency distributions for each Likert construct to allow inspection of response patterns.

• *Table 6: Frequency Distribution of Likert Responses (Q9, Q10, Q11)*

Table 6 Full Frequency Distributions for Likert-Scale Constructs

Response	Q9: Engagement (n, %)	Q10: Buying Behavior (n, %)	Q11: Purchase Decisions (n, %)
Strongly Agree (5)	20 (28.2%)	20 (27.8%)	18 (25.7%)
Agree (4)	40 (56.3%)	35 (48.6%)	36 (51.4%)
Neutral (3)	8 (11.3%)	11 (15.3%)	12 (17.1%)
Strongly Disagree (2)	3 (4.2%)	5 (6.9%)	1 (1.4%)
Disagree (1)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.4%)	3 (4.3%)
Combined Agree + Strongly Agree	60 (84.5%)	55 (76.4%)	54 (77.1%)

V. INFERENCE STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

➤ *One-Sample Z-Test for Proportions: Behavioral Shift*

A one-sample z-test was conducted to determine whether the observed proportion of respondents reporting a shift to digital purchasing ($\hat{p} = 0.875$) was significantly greater than a neutral reference proportion of 0.50, representing an even split between conventional and digital adoption.

- H_0 : $p = 0.50$ (no directional preference for digital platforms)
- H_1 : $p > 0.50$ (majority shifted toward digital platforms)

- Result: $z = 6.364$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.799, 0.951]. The null hypothesis is rejected at $\alpha = 0.001$. The observed behavioral shift toward digital platforms is not attributable to chance; the data provide statistically overwhelming evidence that the majority of Omani consumers in this sample have adopted digital purchasing behavior. The 95% confidence interval indicates that the true population proportion of digital adopters falls between 79.9% and 95.1%.

Table 7 One-Sample Z-Test Results for Proportion Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Observed \hat{p}	H_0 (p_0)	z-statistic	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Decision
H_1 : Shift to digital > chance	0.875	0.50	6.364***	0.799	0.951	Reject H_0
H_2 : Wider product range > chance	0.875	0.50	6.364***	0.799	0.951	Reject H_0

Z-Test Results. *** $p < 0.001$. CI = 95% Confidence Interval for Proportions.

➤ *Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit: Digital Strategy Preferences*

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was conducted to examine whether consumer awareness of digital marketing strategies was uniformly distributed across the seven channels surveyed (H_0 : equal awareness of all channels). The

test yielded $\chi^2(6) = 227.83$, $p < 0.001$, decisively rejecting the null hypothesis of uniform distribution. Consumer awareness is heavily concentrated in social media (76.4%), confirming that social media occupies a qualitatively distinct position in Omani consumers' digital marketing landscape — far exceeding all other channels combined (23.6%).

Table 8 Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit Test — Digital Strategy Awareness

Strategy	Observed (n)	Expected (n, uniform)	(O-E) ² /E
Social Media	55	10.29	194.28
Influencer Marketing	5	10.29	2.73
Email Marketing	4	10.29	3.85
Catalog Marketing	3	10.29	5.17
Website Optimization	2	10.29	6.68
Content Marketing	2	10.29	6.68
SEO	1	10.29	8.39
Total / $\chi^2(6)$	72	—	227.83***

Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit Test. *** $p < 0.001$.

➤ *Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit: Brand Engagement Distribution (Q9)*

A second chi-square test assessed whether responses to Q9 (brand engagement through digital channels) were distributed uniformly across the five response categories. The test yielded $\chi^2(4) = 74.99$, $p < 0.001$, again rejecting the null

hypothesis. Responses were heavily concentrated in the 'Agree' (n = 40, 56.3%) and 'Strongly Agree' (n = 20, 28.2%) categories, with negligible disagreement. This distributional asymmetry corroborates the finding that Omani consumers perceive digital channels as superior engagement platforms.

Table 9 Chi-Square Test for Q9 Brand Engagement Response Distribution

Response	Observed (n)	Expected (n, uniform)	(O-E) ² /E
Strongly Agree (5)	20	14.20	2.37
Agree (4)	40	14.20	47.09
Neutral (3)	8	14.20	2.71
Strongly Disagree (2)	3	14.20	8.81
Disagree (1)	0	14.20	14.20
Total / $\chi^2(4)$	71	—	74.99***

Chi-Square Test Results for Q9 Response Distribution. *** $p < 0.001$.

➤ *Point-Biserial Correlation: Daily Online Hours and Digital Adoption*

To examine the relationship between digital engagement intensity (daily online hours) and behavioral shift toward digital purchasing, a point-biserial correlation was computed (digital shift coded as binary: 1 = shifted, 0 = not shifted). The result was $r = 0.462$, $t(70) = 4.354$, $p < 0.001$, indicating a statistically significant moderate positive

correlation: respondents who spend more hours online per day are significantly more likely to have shifted their purchasing behavior toward digital platforms. This finding is consistent with the expectation that cumulative digital exposure functions as a driver of digital consumer adoption, and aligns with the theoretical framework proposed by Miah (2024) regarding the dose-response relationship between digital engagement and behavioral transformation.

Table 10 Point-Biserial Correlation — Daily Online Hours and Digital Adoption

Variable 1	Variable 2	r	t-statistic	df	p-value	Interpretation
Daily Online Hours (ordinal 1-4)	Digital Behavioral Shift (binary)	0.462	4.354	70	< 0.001	Moderate positive correlation***

Point-Biserial Correlation Results. *** $p < 0.001$. Critical Value $t(70) = 1.994$ at $\alpha = 0.05$.

VI. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

➤ *Overview of Qualitative Data Sources*

Qualitative data were collected from two sources embedded within the study design: (1) open-ended responses to Q12 ('Any Suggestions/Recommendations?') from the survey instrument, which yielded 5 distinct textual responses alongside coded non-responses; and (2) thematic insights derived from personal interviews conducted with business owners and marketing professionals who participated in the broader research process. These interviews explored the organizational and strategic dimensions of the digital marketing transition, including drivers, barriers, and consumer response patterns. Interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis protocol,

proceeding from initial coding through theme development and review.

➤ *Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses (Q12)*

Of the 72 survey respondents, 39 responded 'No' and 26 indicated 'No suggestion,' together constituting 90.3% (n = 65). This high rate of non-substantive responses is itself informative, suggesting that many consumers are either satisfied with existing digital marketing approaches or have not yet articulated specific demands for improvement — consistent with passive consumption patterns often observed in high social media engagement contexts. The five respondents who provided substantive suggestions yielded the following responses:

Table 11 Open-Ended Responses to Q12 (Suggestions/Recommendations)

Response Category	n	Representative Verbatim / Paraphrase	Emergent Theme
No response / No suggestion	65	No specific suggestion offered	Passive digital acceptance
Recognition of transformative change	1	'Digital marketing makes huge changes when it's coming'	Transformative impact of digital marketing
Reference to specific platforms as purchase drivers	1	Online platforms (eBay, Amazon, Steam, Epic Games) have driven significant personal purchasing behavior change	Platform convenience and variety as adoption drivers
Request for more channel-specific information	3	'More details about type of channels'	Information deficit about digital marketing channels

Qualitative Coding of Open-Ended Responses (Q12, n = 72)

➤ *Thematic Findings from Open-Ended and Interview Data*

• *Theme 1: Transformative and Irreversible Nature of Digital Marketing*

The most recurrent theme across both interview and open-ended data was the perception of digital marketing as a transformative and fundamentally irreversible force. Participants consistently described the digital transition not as an optional business strategy but as an environmental condition to which businesses and consumers alike must adapt. One respondent's characterization — 'digital marketing makes huge changes when it's coming' — encapsulates a widely shared fatalistic acceptance of digital dominance. Interview participants echoed this framing, with several business owners describing their shift to digital channels as a survival imperative rather than a strategic choice, particularly in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic disruptions that effectively shut down conventional marketing channels.

• *Theme 2: Platform Convenience and Product Variety as Primary Adoption Drivers*

The spontaneous citation of specific digital commerce platforms — eBay, Amazon, Steam, and Epic Games — by one respondent reveals a concrete and platform-specific understanding of digital purchasing. This finding is significant because it moves beyond generic attitudes toward digital marketing to identify the tangible mechanisms through which adoption occurs: the intersection of platform convenience, product variety, and seamless transaction processing. Interview participants confirmed this pattern, with multiple business owners reporting that their customers explicitly cited product range, 24/7 availability, and price

comparison capabilities as the primary factors driving their shift from physical to digital channels.

This theme is consistent with the quantitative finding that 87.5% of respondents agree digital platforms provide wider product options (Table 3), and with Verma's (2016) identification of Time, Price, Trust, and Security as the critical factors influencing online shopping behavior. The qualitative data add texture to the quantitative signal by revealing that platform-specific familiarity — developed through engagement with global e-commerce ecosystems — plays a significant role in shaping Omani consumer digital competence and comfort.

• *Theme 3: Information Deficit About Digital Marketing Channels*

Three respondents explicitly requested 'more details about type of channels,' revealing a meaningful information deficit in consumer understanding of the digital marketing landscape. While social media is widely recognized as a dominant channel (76.4%), channels such as SEO (1.4%), content marketing (2.8%), and website optimization (2.8%) are poorly understood by the majority of the sample. This theme has direct implications for digital marketing practitioners: there is a demonstrable need for consumer education about the full spectrum of digital marketing tools, as current awareness is narrowly concentrated.

Interview data elaborated on this gap, with business owners reporting that many of their customers engage exclusively through Instagram or WhatsApp, unaware of or unengaged with other touchpoints such as email newsletters,

loyalty apps, or brand websites. This narrow channel awareness creates vulnerability for businesses that rely solely on social media, as algorithm changes or platform disruptions could significantly reduce reach.

- *Theme 4: COVID-19 as a Structural Accelerator*

Across interview responses, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged as the most frequently cited structural accelerator of the digital transition. Business participants described a period of intense disruption during which conventional marketing activities — trade shows, billboard campaigns, in-store promotions, direct personal selling — became operationally impossible, forcing an emergency pivot to digital channels. For many SME operators, this forced adaptation became permanent: having invested in social media presence, online payment systems, and digital customer service, they found no compelling reason to revert to the higher-cost conventional approaches.

This finding converges with the quantitative literature. Sharma and Jhamb (2020) documented that COVID-19 produced lasting changes in online shopping behavior in India, while Mehta, Saxena, and Purohit (2020) identified the pandemic as a catalyst for permanent behavioral shifts. The Omani interview data suggest that the same structural dynamics were operative in the Gulf context.

- *Theme 5: Trust, Transparency, and Consumer Hesitancy*

A countervailing theme emerging from interviews concerned consumer hesitancy around digital marketing and e-commerce, particularly among older demographic segments not captured in the predominantly young survey sample. Interviewed business owners described encountering customers who expressed concerns about data privacy, product authenticity, and payment security — concerns consistent with Verma's (2016) identification of Trust and Security as primary online shopping adoption barriers. One interview participant noted that many of their older customers preferred to view products online but complete purchases in-store, illustrating the hybrid 'research online, purchase offline' (ROPO) behavior documented in the broader digital marketing literature.

This theme carries forward into the emerging AI marketing context: Acatrinei et al. (2025) found that perceived transparency significantly enhances consumer trust in AI-driven marketing tools — a finding that extends directly to the Omani context, where trust is a culturally central value in commercial relationships.

VII. DISCUSSION

- *Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings*

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings provides a mutually reinforcing picture of a deeply embedded digital marketing transition in the Omani consumer context. The statistical evidence — $z = 6.364$, $p < 0.001$ for behavioral shift prevalence; $r = 0.462$ for online engagement-adoption correlation; $\chi^2(6) = 227.83$, $p < 0.001$ for social media dominance — is not merely technically significant but substantively large. An 87.5% behavioral shift proportion in

a young, digitally engaged sample represents an advanced stage of adoption rather than early experimentation.

The qualitative data contextualize and enrich these statistics in several important ways. First, they reveal the lived experience behind the behavioral shift: consumers are not abstract statistical units but individuals who have discovered the convenience of specific platforms (Amazon, eBay), experienced COVID-19 as a forcing function, and developed strong social media habits that channel their purchasing behavior. Second, the information deficit theme (Theme 3) provides a nuanced qualification of the quantitative finding: while digital adoption is near-universal, deep digital marketing literacy is not — awareness is concentrated in social media while other channels remain poorly understood.

- *Theoretical Implications*

The composite digital attitude score of 3.99/5.0 across three constructs, combined with the behavioral shift proportion of 87.5%, provides strong empirical support for the theoretical proposition that digital marketing now constitutes a distinct and dominant marketing paradigm in Oman — consistent with Batat's (2022) 'phygital' marketing framework and Nair and Subramaniam's (2012) foundational work on the social media marketing paradigm. The study also contributes to the AI marketing literature by establishing a trust and information landscape in Oman that is receptive but not yet saturated — the information deficit theme suggests that AI-powered personalization and recommendation tools could significantly increase digital marketing effectiveness by addressing the channel awareness gap.

- *Limitations*

Several limitations merit acknowledgment. The sample size ($n = 72$) limits statistical power and generalizability beyond this context. The predominantly young (68.1% aged 15–25) and relatively low-income (59.7% earning 100–300 OMR) sample profile may overrepresent digital natives and underrepresent older or higher-income consumer segments with potentially different adoption trajectories. The self-reported nature of all measures introduces common-method bias. The qualitative component, while analytically valuable, is based on a limited number of open-ended and interview responses, constraining depth of thematic saturation. Future research should employ larger, more stratified samples, longitudinal designs, and richer qualitative data from structured in-depth interviews.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Conclusions*

This study has provided rigorous mixed-methods evidence of a profound and statistically confirmed paradigm shift from conventional to digital marketing in Oman. Quantitative analysis demonstrates that 87.5% of respondents have shifted their purchasing behavior toward digital platforms ($z = 6.364$, $p < 0.001$), with social media as the overwhelmingly dominant channel (76.4%). The point-biserial correlation ($r = 0.462$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that digital

engagement time is a significant predictor of digital adoption. Across three Likert-scale constructs, the composite digital attitude score of 3.99/5.0 reflects a consistent positive orientation toward digital marketing.

Qualitative analysis adds crucial depth: five emergent themes — transformative and irreversible change, platform convenience as an adoption driver, consumer information deficits, COVID-19 as structural accelerator, and trust/transparency dynamics — reveal the experiential, organizational, and sociocultural dimensions of the digital transition. Collectively, these findings establish Oman as a context in which the digital marketing paradigm has achieved near-dominant status among young consumers, while noting that broader consumer education and trust-building remain important challenges.

➤ Recommendations

- *Prioritize Social Media Strategy*

Given the overwhelming consumer concentration on social media (76.4%), businesses should allocate the largest share of digital marketing investment to social media content, community management, and paid social advertising — especially on platforms with high GCC penetration such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok.

- *Address the Digital Channel Awareness Gap*

The qualitative finding that consumers lack awareness of SEO, content marketing, and website optimization points to an opportunity for businesses to invest in multi-channel digital presence building and to educate customers about the full range of digital interaction points.

- *Invest in AI-Driven Personalization*

Building on the findings of Spais et al. (2025) and Acatrinei et al. (2025), Omani businesses should invest in AI analytics platforms that deliver personalized recommendations and targeted communications, addressing the product variety and convenience expectations that drive digital adoption.

- *Build Trust Through Transparency*

The trust/transparency theme from qualitative data, corroborated by Acatrinei et al.'s (2025) SEM findings, underscores the importance of clear data privacy policies, authentic user reviews, and transparent business practices as foundations for sustainable digital consumer relationships.

- *Develop Omnichannel Capabilities*

The ROPO (research online, purchase offline) behavior identified in interviews suggests that businesses should develop seamless omnichannel capabilities, integrating digital discovery and comparison with in-store fulfillment options to serve consumers who research online but prefer physical purchase completion.

- *Capitalize on COVID-19-Driven Digital Infrastructure*

Businesses that developed digital capabilities during the pandemic should leverage these investments strategically

rather than reverting to conventional channels, as the behavioral shifts documented in this study appear structurally embedded rather than transitional.

➤ Future Research Directions

Future studies should address the methodological limitations of this work by employing larger, randomly stratified samples representative of the full Omani adult population across all age groups and income brackets. Longitudinal designs would enable causal inference about the directionality of the digital shift over time. Comparative research across GCC countries would illuminate regional variation in digital marketing dynamics. Dedicated investigation of AI marketing acceptance in the Omani and Gulf context would fill a critical emerging gap, particularly given the trust dynamics documented here and the rapidly accelerating deployment of AI marketing tools globally.

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