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Impact of Relationship Marketing on Customer Loyalty, moderating effect of Commitment and Trust: Age and Management Type as a moderator in SMEs
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Abstract

In today's extremely competitive market place, customer loyalty is believed to have a pivotal role in the achievement of corporate sector. This study investigates the influence of relationship marketing on customer loyalty, while interceding trust and commitment. Research in this area says that acquiring customers are cost effective, so companies must emphasize on retaining the existing customers. Relationship marketing is an effort towards identification of the factors which may have a positive bearing upon customer loyalty in SME's. The data collected was from 300 customers and 15 different stores in Rawalpindi/ Islamabad, Pakistan. Study was cross sectional and data collection was done on 5-point Likert scale which makes it a quantitative study. The outcome of testing hypothesis illustrates that the relationship marketing has a noteworthy role on the customer loyalty, along with customer trust and commitment, pays a vital role in maintaining a strong relation-ship between them. For store owners/managers, the present study has important implications in terms of creating an overall climate within store which stress the importance of creating and preserving relationship with clientele. Finally, implementations are strained from these outcomes, limitations and future research guidelines are also proposed.

Keywords: Relationship Marketing, Customer Loyalty, Trust, Commitment, SME's

1. Introduction

The business world is undergoing a significant transformation, where time is being tough and challenging, traditional marketing approach will no longer be enough for upcoming competitive markets. It may provide a short-term success, but for long term growth and companies future it may not be an appropriate approach. On the other hand, relationship marketing is about attracting new customers, which is a first step. What really matters is to retain them and stick to them -for loyalty and helps protect the firm in long run.(Nasir, 2015; Yau et al., 2000)

Through the past three eras, the financial circumstances have transformed meaningfully. A lot of markets have matured and competition among the firms have also increased alongside(Kurtz et al., 2019). In contemporary marketing a shift from transactional to customer centric marketing is notable. According to (Stone et al., 2000), a firm should meet customer essential and outlooks in highly competitive environment to retain the customers. Businesses need to create the sense of loyalty among customers and the best way is to generate and uphold a extended communal valuable relationship with them. It takes more effort and cost to obtain a new purchaser then to retain the prevailing ones(Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Long-term customer relationships are economically advantageous, primarily due to the high costs associated with customer acquisition. On average, firms experience an annual customer attrition rate of approximately 10%. Research indicates that a modest 5% reduction in customer defection can lead to a profit increase fluctuating from 25% to 85%, depending on the industry. Furthermore, the profitability of individual customers typically increases over the extent of the relationship, underscoring the strategic value of customer retention.

A drastic shift from transactional to relationship marketing, where customer is the prime focus of business events. Relationship marketing tends to be played a vital role where the customers need is changing rapidly. To attain customers retention, maximizing the profits while keeping the cost low, companies are now being more closed to the customers.

The idea of relationship marketing was firstly introduced in 1983. It's an initial and utmost important concept to keep the customers attracted towards the organization. In the current scenarios, marketing attention switched from traditional marketing to relationship marketing. The most crucial impact of business has always been, creating, maintaining and enhancing the relationships with the customers. Over the last few years significant increase in RM is seen related to research. The main purpose of it is to create a strong relationship and making loyal customers(Becker et al., 1992; Kamakura et al., 2005). It has been observed over the last few years that maintain the relationship with their customers and business associated can help in achieving success in the business for long run(Ngugen, n.d.).

In the modern era, the success of an organization is heavily depended to cultivate and strengthen long-term customer relationships by providing outstanding customer experiences.(Jones & Sasser, 1995) Customer Loyalty is sense of attachment and affection towards employees of organization, its products or services. Not a single definition could justify the meaning of customer loyalty completely, it is expressed in different ways as a favorable attitude towards a brand so that it could be purchased repeatedly(Day, 1969; Russell-Bennett & Parkinson, 2015). (F. F. Reichheld, 1993) said that when a company keeps on giving good value to the customers and wins loyalty, the market share of the firm and cost will definitely go up. While the acquiring cost of customer will surely decrease. The principal purpose of an organization is to entertain customers and to guarantee loyalty, that is to retain the existing customers and create repeatedly orders. It leads to the increased profit of the firm.(Anderson & Mittal, 2000)

Loyalty of customer is achieved when the customer has full trust on the firm and are purely committed towards it. Literature shows high significance between customer loyalty, trust and commitment. Organizations that tend to provide trust and commitment to their customers will keep on top of the market and their clients are more loyal towards them then other companies (Fallon, 2012).(Parasuraman et al., n.d.) detailed that "relationships are built on the foundation of mutual commitment". Whereas commitment was well-defined as (Moorman et al., 1992)"an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship". Trust is vital to creating a long-run customer relationship and is extensively studied concepts in the concerning literature (ShPakistanla et al., 2016)

The research aims to examine the degree to which relationship marketing can impact customer loyalty in context to small clothing stores. The major objective of the research is to develop a theoretical agenda that link relationship marketing with the customer loyalty in considering small clothing stores. Furthermore, conduct an empirical assessment of the indicators associated with each variable to strengthen the connection between relationship marketing and customer loyalty. Also, highpoint future investigates avenues for applying relationship marketing strategies in the context of small businesses.

Increasing interest in relationship marketing can be seen through various seminars and conference in the past. Relationship marketing is debated a lot in b2b market less emphases is on b2c marketing context. Looking at the potential of relationship marketing as an independent variable, it needs to be discussed in context to loyalty and the influence it made on the relationship marketing. (Menidjel et al., 2021) Gap in the study was analyzed from one of the studies which states to examine the relationship marketing trust commitment relationship with other variables , other states that (Pratama et al., 2024) to find the relationship of customer loyalty with other variables such as customer trust, connect more variables to the customer loyalty(Tashtoush, 2023) to find the relationship in that context, (Putit et al., 2021)more variables should be added to the research, large sample size was taken to find the customer loyalty (Sa'adah & Susilowati, 2023) particularly in SME(type of management) clothing retail outlets lastly another gap was to find the customer loyalty influence on moderating age variable.(Ahmad & Akbar, 2023)

2. Literature Review

Retail is the main sector in consumer marketing that charms clear interest in relationship-focused strategies. (Egan, 2011), highlighted further need of research on retail relationships(Athanasopoulou, 2009). Most retailers are investing in repeat purchase to keep up the customer engagement and customer loyalty towards the firm, as repeat purchase is usually the prime focus of the retailers(Gable et al., 2008). Since very less research is seen in the area of relationship marketing within solely retail setting, it is interesting to investigate and to bring additional light in this area of research.

Despite growing literature in relationship marketing, very small amount of data is to be seen in customer loyalty when it comes to SME's context. This research is aim to develop this vital linkage. It made sense, therefore, to explore the latter context and report on some evidence on a topic which is so far less developed. Clothing stores were selected due to the importance of relationship established pertinent to store loyalty.

2.1. Relationship Marketing

Relationship and transactional marketing were differentiated by Baron and Harris in 2004 (Baron & Harris, 2004). Transactional marketing is about attracting new customers using very aggressive approaches or strategies, like to switch the brand or employing new rivalry. Eventually results in dissatisfying clients whereas relationship marketing is a defensive strategy. Through RM the customer turnover is minimized and customer retention is maximized. In the past no such single definition could justify RM completely. (Grönroos, 2004) The process of moving from identification of possible customers to creating a strong relationship with them while maintaining and enhancing it so that more business along with promising word of mouth is generated. The researcher put an emphasis on creating a new customer and then maintain the relationship with the customers so that a strong bond will be created between them which will profit both the parties in the long-run. It was described as a corporate strategy that leverages technological advancements and customer interactions to attract, retain, and improve client relationships (Payne & Frow, 2017; Yadav & Singh, 2014).

The purpose of relationship marketing is to start and retain a long-term positive relationship with clientele(Gronroos, 1990). This approach priorities the long term relational ship over traditional marketing to enhance the customer loyalty and trust. Loyal customers are more attached to the company and switching rate towards competitor is pretty low., so they are willing to pay more and ad the value towards the company and the products(Melewar et al., 2017). Trust and commitment pays a vital role in creating the long-term successful relationship with the

customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust and commitment are the key factors of loyalty (Park et al., 2017).

Loyal customers who refer new clients at no cost offer a significant advantage, especially as a company scale and operates within a mature industry (F. Reichheld, 2004). In today's customer driven markets, all industrial corporations are retaining the existing customers and trying to gather new ones, whereas mostly offering similar products and services on a similar price.

Relationship marketing establishes a trustworthy and loyal connection with the customer which provides a mutual benefit to both the parties. Relationship marketing focuses on the customer needs, wants and desires and then tailors marketing efforts to fulfil those needs. This tactic highlights creating robust customer relationships. The literature shows that trust has a vital part in creating a strong promise between a firm and customer (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

2.2. Trust

(Morgan & Hunt, 1994) Trust is extremely vital relationship building. (Mayer et al., 1995) defined it as, "the willingness of the party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trust or, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer et al., 1995). The portion of trust is measured as a significant aspect in the growth of relations between customers and retailer. Trust can be understood in very different ways which means there is no particular explanation of trust (Rousseau et al., 1998). He also mentioned -trust is vital for creating long term relationship. This means that trust cannot be developed at one time purchase of the product, it is developed and the strong bond is created after many repeated purchases over a period of time.

A relationship built on trust thrives through mutual exchange and understanding. Marketing managers functioning globally must give a thought to these complicated issues, as it affects steadiness of a firm and its durability. Certainly, retailers who are moving into partnership must guarantee that their staff acts in a reliable manner, and they should be able to illuminate the sense of trust and integrate trustworthiness into the firm. In addition, trust should be treated as a core value.

(Krause & Ellram, 1997) Higher the trust more crucial it will be to create and maintain for long term basis So, (Doney & Cannon, 1997) trust plays a very important role in achieving the significant long term relationship, as there is a continuing desire of sharing complex information. (Mohr & Nevin, 1990) believes that relationships can only be fruitful if buyer validates and shows trust in store.

Confidence level of the customer in retailers' consistency and honesty is known as trust according to different researchers. Trust is defined as a confidence, reliability and honesty of a retailer in front of consumers (De Wulf et al., 2001). Trust is an important mediating variable for creating long time exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Higher the trust level by consumers the more they are loyal towards the retailers. Consumers who show higher trust (Ball et al., 2004) are more loyal to a retailer. Past literature that's analytically established shows a significant relationship exists between trust and commitment (Ball et al., 2004; Rousseau et al., 1998; Saleh et al., 2014) and also among trust and loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001a; DeWitt et al., 2008). Trust is frequently observed as an vital driver of (Albert et al., 2013; Verma et al., 2016) commitment. Trust is significantly connected to commitment (Aurier & N'Goala, 2010; Leonidou et al., 2006).

2.3. Types of management

Over the past years, SME's (Small Medium Enterprises) have been hit strongly by large enterprises. Numerous self-governing businesses, like clothing outlets, pharmaceutical companies and many other retail stores are struggling to live. Famous retailers have been

squeezed by decreasing margins(Clou & Cole, 2004). Large enterprises latest trend is to keep the stock which will decrease the cost and buying and selling of the products will be done at low cost. This cannot be the scenario of the SME's as they cannot keep up with a huge amount of stock so they have to come up with a new plan to keep marinating with their customers(McCaig, 2000). One way that the small firms can improve their business process is through stabilizing the cash flows in the business, through increasing the repeated purchase of the customers.(Russell-Bennett et al., 2007) Loyalty of the customer is the key contributor in steady growth of the firm with respect to small business.

There are two types of advantages that a customer of apparel stores seeks while entering into an association with the store, functional and social. Functional benefits are categorized as productivity enhancing, styling recommendations or wardrobe tips etc., whereas customers repeatedly pursue personal contact and accompany from retail associates(Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). The SME provide better social assistances to the customers then large outlets. The possibility that the retail associates will interact to the customer is more in small enterprises beside in bigger firms the retail staff is often occupied with assisting a lot of customers at similar time , (Bitner, 1990) which limits the individual customer's attention. This opens the door to repetitive sales which in return creates strong relationship. Frequent purchases are strong benchmark for consumer trust in a retail store. When a customer purchase products from a similar store/brand it predicts that the store provides reliability of the products as well good quality , which in turn reinforce the brands reliability and aids in creating a long term mutual benefited relationship and customers loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001b; Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005).

The part of owner/manager in small medium enterprise marketing is considered to be crucial as he is prime focused in minor firms' events. SME possessor is a all-rounder who has a vision to direct the business along with taking care of the maintenance of the business (Burns, 2022). In past, its been claimed that the marketing in minor firm is connected to the possessor attitude, skill and expertise in marketing because these are the critically important for the firm itself (Gilmore et al., 2001; McCartan, 2023). Manager's decision making kills influence marketing practices opted in the small companies.(O'Dwyer et al., 2009). The necessity for marketing is documented , but usually an improvised, responsive tactic is accepted (McPherson, 2007). There is significant empirical evidence on the value of an owner/manager to SME marketing, makes their contribution essential for helping develop and establish a consideration set of trust amongst customer. Followed by following hypothesis,

H1: Relationship building has positive impact on customers' trust in the store.

H1a: type of management is moderated in between relationship marketing and customer trust.

2.4. Longevity of Business

The length of survival of a firm (Mayfield et al., 2007) is defined as longevity of business. (Inggris, 2010) Moreover, it is also stated as the relationship where customer has a direct link to producer of product/services. Furthermore (Papadopoulou et al., 2001) states that, long-term relationship orientation reflects a team's intent and ability to establish and withstand lasting networks, increasing- effectiveness and competency. (Fernandus & Ihalauw, 2006).

Other researchers define it as ,the continuity of corporations even after the deceased founder (Haugh & Talwar, 2010), continuity of the business beyond the professional duration of its creators(Sharma & Salvato, 2013). Due to serious financial and economical world-wide crises, mortality of firm is maximized(Alayo et al., 2016; Chandler & Hanks, 1993; Gallo, 2004; Iwasaki, 2014). A lot of well-established business suddenly moved to failure and leave the rest of the world in complete shock(Balcaen & Ooghe, 2006; Gargeya & Brady, 2005), this usually happens

when a change in the customer need is established and is not well catered or opted with in your business (Jacobs et al., 2013; Lozano, 2014).

The sustainability of a firm is generally conceptualized by its age. The older the firm, seems to be more stable and durable (Pawlowski, 2000). Most firms address the problems as they emerge or they set to adapt the change in the environment right away as it emerged, these cause a more stable and durable firm and helps the business in its continuity. The most bothered question till date to firms is, what they develop now, will be significant for the customer in upcoming days. This requires to opt the change as it occurs in the market which keeps the cash flows and continuity of the organization. Business longevity donates significantly to customer loyalty through increase trust, awareness, and consistency. Longevity should be viewed as a pillar not a left-over option to enhance relationship marketing,

2.5. Commitment

Commitment is extremely imperative to advertising funding (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006) and is important for constructing fruitful relationships (Gundlach et al., 1995; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It is a vital factor in creating and maintaining the beneficial relationship (Nusair et al., 2013). Commitment point toward the wish to endure long lasting relationship while exerting full efforts to ensure its continuity (Wilson, 1995).

(Morgan & Hunt, 1994) describes commitment in B2B settings, as a trading business partner who reflects the association so valued that they dedicate their greatest effort to sustaining and maintaining it open-endedly. He also states that commitment hold a dominant role and plays a crucial role in the interpersonal exchange due to its robust linkage to the consumer belief which lead to significant results in relationship term. (Aaker, 1991) Customers who are highly committed to the brand demonstrates high loyalty, are assets to an organization and its brands. Past literature has emphasized the significance of investigative the part of trust and commitment in forecasting relationship outcomes (Verma et al., 2016).

A number of academics define commitment as a state in which one exchange partner believes the ongoing relationship is so important that it is worth the effort to preserve it. This indicates a high level of psychological commitment to relationship continuity while others define commitment as, relationships are developed on the basis of joint commitment (Berry, 2002; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, it could be argued that commitment plays an important role in the accomplishment of long run relationships-customers and sellers. Research shows that building higher level of commitment shows a noteworthy impact on repurchase intention advocacy, willingness for more price and altruism, which is why it's been a prime focus of many organizations. (Pritchard et al., 1999) .So this leads to these hypotheses,

H2: Customer trust in the store has positive impact on commitment.

H2a: longevity of the store is moderating between customer trust and commitment.

2.6. Customer Loyalty

Loyalty can be shown by the customers toward a brand, could be a service of a store or any product or an activity (Uncles et al., 2003). More advertising expenditure to obtain customers is a pointless due to two reasons. Getting new customer through promotional means is six time more expensive for the firm then to retain the older customer (Oliver, 1999) and secondly service failure and switching rate to other stores is pretty higher. As customer gets dissatisfied very easily (FIKADU, 2022). So, more customers should be retained which eventually promotes the company through free WOM.

(Rusbult et al., 1988) When the satisfaction level increased so does the loyal, (Gronroos, 1990) quantified that trustworthy customers are eager to pay a best price which increases organization's productivity. (Izogo et al., 2017; Tendean, 2011) (Izogo et al., 2017) Loyalty is

extremely held commitment to buy back a favored product or service constantly in forthcoming. (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) Loyalty varies from commitment as the latter is frequently measured in virtuously cognitive terms which measure customer attitudinal attachment.

A French Italian Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), (Freidman, 2018) was an economist contended that firm originates 80% of its revenue from 20% of its clientele (80:20 rule). To guarantee maintainable development in the marketplace, the organization should be envisioned not only to entice new customers but also to obtain buyers loyalty Now the challenge is not to obtain a position in the market but to stay there for longer period of time, which can happen with customers are loyal towards your firm and trust your products completely.

Customer loyalty brings repurchase intentions for many years, but this can only happen if they feel valued. (McIlroy & Barnett, 2000). A satisfied buyer is not meant to be loyal, misconception ruling in today's world. To be loyal to a firm they need to be valued. They would be more loyal to the firm if they feel that they are not just another customer for the firm. (Newell, 2000).

Customer loyalty is of prime interest in marketing researchers and practitioners (William D, 1999) The proportion of purchases in a specified group that buyer makes from the same brand, relative to their total purchases in that section, knowing that acceptable alternatives are readily accessible. (Dick & Basu, 1994) states that loyalty of customer fortifies the relationship among an individual's relative attitude towards a product/service, the store/ vendor and repurchase. Thus, the concept of customer loyalty was conceptualized both psychological and behavioral for this study. Trust and commitment play an significant part in shaping perceptions about the relationship customers have with suppliers.

Not much research is done on commitment and loyalty (Pritchard et al., 1999). Quality of relationship leads to increase sales whereas the real time experience with the product determines loyalty. (Gruen, 1995) commitment is a stimulus to act, besides the act itself. Therefore, this can't be neglected that, commitment and association between firm and customer, effects loyalty of customer. Following hypothesis is advanced:

H3: commitment has positive impact on customer loyalty.

2.7. Grounding Theory

Older business gets a lot of trust from the customers. As according to the commitment and trust theory of relationship marketing by (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) trust is a an vital factor to customer loyalty. A firm that is active since a long time tends to perceived more credibility in the market and results in minimized upcoming risk in exchange, which foster a long-term strong commitment. Longevity improves familiarity with brands, which can lead to repeated purchase. Connection with store/brand is made over the period of the time which results in loyalty (Lin & Ismail, 2024). Customers with repeated purchase behavior tends to remain satisfied and loyal due to convenience or psychological commitment.

(Sheth & Mittal, 2004; Tendean, 2011) thinks that trust is a vital factor in creating a association in business and social framework. If their isn't any trust there is no commitment, which extend to the longevity of business. Trust is the key component in purchase decisions and longevity of business. (Tendean, 2011; Traiyarach et al., 2025).

This paper is grounded by commitment and trust theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and relationship marketing theory (Berry, 2002). This theory states that Commitment and trust are leading in the achievement of relationship marketing. This study opts the theory of relationship marketing and commitment and trust theory to justify the model . As Relationship marketing theory states that relationship should be customer based with the firm, which creates the loyalty, while increasing the commitment and trust of the customers. The commitment and trust theory states that the trust is built through constant reliability over the period of time. Commitment appears when

customers believe in the long-lasting benefits for maintain the relationships. Longevity of the firm creates firms integrity, benevolence and competencies which are the key factors of achieving the trust(Mayer et al., 1995). Business longevity enhances commitment and trust.

3. Methodology

3.1. Population & Sampling

20 retail outlets were connected to gather the data but out of which only 15 responded back positively. Similarly, 375 respondents were targeted for data collection but out of which only 300 replied. The data was collected in PAKISTAN (Rawalpindi/ Islamabad). Total response rate of store was 75% to 85%.

3.2. Research instrument

Study is qualitative and a deductive approached was used. A cross sectional study that uses well defined instruments for this research for measuring the variables relationship marketing (Gronroos, 1990; Palmer, 1994), trust & commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and loyalty(Schijns & Schröder, 1996; Sirohi et al., 1998). Items were measured on 5-point Likert scale. SPSS 14 was used for testing the hypothesis.

3.3. Result and Discussions

Table 1-Respondent Characteristics

<i>Demography</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Respondents</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender	Female	237	80.9
	Male	56	19.1
	Total	100	100
Visited before	Yes	293	97.6
	No	7	2.3
	Total	100	100
Age	Under 20	101	34.5
	20-35	99	33.8
	36-50	67	22.9
	51-65	21	7.2
	Over 65	5	1.7
	Total	100	100
Marital status	Single	172	58.7
	Married	101	34.5
	Other	20	6.7
	Total	100	100
Income	Less than £ 20k	160	54.6
	£20,000- £ 40,000	110	37.5
	£ 40,000- £ 60000	18	6.1
	More than £ 60,000	5	1.7
	Total	100	100
Occupations	Homemaker	63	21.5
	Students	103	35.2
	Sales/marketing	29	9.9
	Customer services	22	7.51
	IT	8	2.7
	General Administration	17	5.8

Others	58	17.39
Total	100	100

According to the above table its shows that mostly female customers target visited the stores that we targeted for data gathering, with 237 female respondents and only 56 male respondents. Out of which most of them were either home make or students with the frequency of 63 and 103 respectively. People from sales and marketing background visited stores with 9.9 percent that make 29 respondents out of 300. Rest that visited stores were from the IT Customer services and general and admirative backgrounds with frequency of respondents 22,8 and 17 respectively. As highest frequency of the students was seen visiting the targeted stores so the income level was under 20,000 pounds annually. Mostly customers visited on the stores are unmarried with frequency of 172 out of 300. Mostly people who visited the stores before were visiting them again with frequency 293, which shows that people are loyal to the store and they are going for repetitive purchase decisions.

Table 2- Loading Factors

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Loading Factors</i>	<i>Variance %</i>
Relationship marketing ($\alpha=0.79, p=0.000$)			44.0
	RM1	0.84	
	RM2	0.83	
	RM3	0.85	
Trust ($\alpha=0.79, p=0.000$)			27.9
	t1	0.50	
	t2	0.85	
	t3	0.87	
	t4	0.86	
Commitment ($\alpha=0.72, p=0.000$)			8.5
	C1	0.78	
	C2	0.68	
	C3	0.70	
	C4	0.82	
Customer Loyalty ($\alpha=0.80, p=0.000$)			19.4
	clyt1	0.75	
	clyt2	0.87	
	clyt3	0.78	
	clyt4	0.76	

All of the factor loadings are greater than 0.5 which shows that the statistics is efficient for exploratory factor analysis. All variables excluding the first factor of trust, rest of them are highly co related. The Cronbach alpha was computed to find the internal consistency of reliability of multiple item scales measuring relationship marketing, trust, commitment, customer loyalty. Each of the variables had alphas greeter than 0.60. which shows the good internal consistency.

Table 3- Hypothesis testing without moderators

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R square</i>	<i>T value</i>	<i>Significance</i>
H1: RM-Trust	0.65	0.429	0.427	14.7	0.00
H2: Trust-Com	0.18	0.032	0.029	3.1	0.00
H3: Com-CL	0.13	0.019	0.016	2.3	0.00

The H1 is the first hypothesis that takes relationship marketing (RM) as an independent variable and Trust as a dependent variable. In this context beta is 0.65 that shows that RM has a significant positive relationship on trust, which means that 1% change in RM will increase 0.65% in trust. AS far as explanatory power of independent variable RM is concern which is 42.9%, means that RM explains 42.9% variation in the relationship with trust. Since relationship marketing shows significant positive relationship with trust, this means that out hypothesis is accepted.

In order to test H2, trust is independent and commitment is dependent variable. This relationship shows beta value as 0.18, which means that if there is a 1% change in trust commitment will increase by 0.18% only. If we look at R square, 0.032, it means that trust explains only 0.032 % variation in the relationship with commitment. So, hypothesis is rejected. Customer trust has no noteworthy impact on customer’s commitment when it comes to clothing store.

H3 consist of two variables, commitment as an independent variable and loyalty as a dependent variable. Beta value shows that 1% increase in commitment will have 0.13 % of increase in customer’s loyalty only. Whereas R square shows that commitment explains 1.9% variation in the relationship with loyalty. So, this hypothesis is also rejected. According to above scenario the relationship between customer’s commitment and customer’s loyalty is insignificant.

Table 4- Hypothesis testing moderators

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R square</i>	<i>T value</i>	<i>Significance</i>
H1a: RM-Type of management-Trust	0.442	0.195	0.192	8.394	0.00
H2a: Trust-Longevity of business-Comm	0.187	0.035	0.032	3.249	0.001

The above table shows the summary of regression analysis of moderators. H1a shows relationship marketing impact on customers trust while type of management is moderating among the two variables. The results depict that beta shows the important impact of moderator on the viable. While R square shows 19% variance in trust. As the relationship between the variable is significant this means that Relationship marketing does have impact on trust while being moderated by types of management the store. Coming to H2a hypothesis, the result on beta which is 0.187 is a measure that how strong the moderator will impact the commitment factor.3.2% variance is shown by the moderator which also rejects the current hypothesis.

4. Conclusion

This research was undertaken to link prevailing gap in the literature by looking at the effect of relationship marketing on customer loyalty within SME clothing retail settings—a field that has historically been given scant empirical focus. Based on the RM Theory and Commitment-Trust Theory, the study examines how RM creates trust, reinforces commitment, and eventually drives loyalty of customer, while also assessing the roles of type of management and business longevity as moderators.

The findings show that relationship marketing has significant effect on trust. This agrees with earlier studies and the theory that trust is an important factor in long-term customer relationships. However, while trust was positively linked to commitment, this connection is statistically weak in this study. The association among commitment and customer loyalty, although expected, was not backed by data in this study as well. These results suggest that the trust, commitment, and loyalty connection may not be as straightforward or strong in small and

medium-sized enterprises, especially in clothing retail, as it could be in larger or service-based companies.

The management style exercised a critical moderating effect: owner-managed or lower management-tier stores exhibited more robust relationships between RM activities and customer trust. This identifies the critical nature of personalized, consistent contact in lower-sized retail outlets. In contrast, business age displayed little but not negligible moderating influence on the trust–commitment connection, implying that age alone is not enough to assure greater customer commitment without corroborative consistent relational quality.

This research supports that SME retailers need to look beyond elementary relationship strategies. Trust underlies but is not enough; other drivers like value co-creation, tailor-made experience, and uniform service delivery can be necessary to drive higher commitment and loyalty. Although long-established companies enjoy built-up goodwill, their customer retention ultimately still relies on continuing contact and flexibility in responding to evolving customer expectations.

In conclusion, management type increases the efficiency of relationship marketing in trust generation, whereas business age does not particularly enhance the trust–commitment relationship. These observations highlight that internal managerial framework are more essential than firm age in expanding relational outcomes in SME retail contexts

5. Implications and Future Recommendations

This research emphasizes relationship marketing as a function in establishing customers' trust in SME clothing retail. Personalized interactions and recurring engagement must be emphasized by managers to establish trust. The research further indicates that owner-managed stores perform better at establishing trust, implying direct intervention by managers can strengthen the relationship with customers. Yet, because commitment and loyalty were not notably affected, companies cannot solely bank on emotional connections but must provide real value, e.g., loyalty programs or special offers. Additionally, business longevity by itself does not reinforce customer commitment, highlighting the importance of continuous active customer interaction irrespective of the length of time the business has been around.

Scholarly, the research challenges the conventional trust–commitment–loyalty model, specifically in retail SMEs, in which trust did not significantly predict commitment or loyalty. This would imply that the relational route could vary depending on the industry or business sector. The research also presents type of management as a significant moderator and proposes new avenues for investigating how management style influences relational outcomes. The limited role of firm age promotes upcoming research to pay greater attention to dynamic relational strategies than to static characteristics such as age.

In Future the research would do well to investigate additional variables such as customer satisfaction or brand experience to further explain loyalty. It is also possible that research can cross-compare findings across other retailing sectors or internet portals. Since management type had an effect, future research might investigate leadership style or employee-customer interaction. Finally, employing electronic marketing tools (digital marketing strategies) in relationship building and comparing small firms with big businesses may yield richer insights.

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