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“Digital Branding and Customer Engagement: A Case Study of Marketo Edge”



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ABSTRACT

The suggested study examines the extent of customer engagement and brand performance as the StimulusOrganismResponse (SOR) model of digital branding. Using it as a case study on Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd., a digital marketing agency, the paper explores how the external branding stimuli including the consistency of brand identity, authentic communication as well as aesthetic innovation contribute to the emergence of emotional and behavioral engagement among the clients, which, in turn, results in loyalty and advocacy.

Qualitative research design was employed in the study to get in-depth information about the perceptions of clients and their experience. The semi-structured online interviews were done to collect data on Google Forms SME clients. The responses were thematically analyzed and helped in NVivo to identify the major themes and how they related to one another. The analysis revealed three dominant dimensions according to the S -O -R framework namely: (1) Digital Branding (Stimulus), which arouses trust and attention; (2) Customer Engagement (Organism), comprising of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement; and (3) Brand Performance (Response), as manifested by loyalty, advocacy, and perceived business growth.

The findings reveal that the most prominent digital branding cues are natural communication and consistency of the brand, and the most important mediating process between branding stimuli and performance outcomes is emotional involvement. Based on the S-O-R model, the paper is used to apply the model to the B2B online branding, and emphasizes that the engagement is a psychological, as well as behavioral mediator between the perception and performance.

The research contributes to the theory by adding the concept of emotional branding and engagement into the S-O-R model and offers viable recommendations that can assist the manager to develop a consistent, authentic, and co-creative branding approaches. In total, it can be noted that the effectiveness of digital branding in the paper is conditional upon the capacity to create emotional trust and engagement, and this will convert the awareness into the customer relationships and the measurable brand success in the long run.

Keywords:

Digital Branding; Customer Engagement; Brand Performance; Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Model; Brand Loyalty; SME Marketing; Online Trust; Digital Marketing

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The fast-growing digital technologies have radically changed the way organizations build, communicate and maintain their brand identities. As the digital platforms, including social media and search engines, as well as interactive web sites, continue to expand, branding is no longer an act of promotion but rather an ongoing and interactive process that includes real-time customer interaction. According to the latest literature on branding, digital branding is no longer confined to the visual identity but to the holistic online experience based on which customers perceive, interpret, and emotionally relate to a brand (Keller, 2016; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). With more and more competition going digital, companies are finding it harder to distinguish themselves through constant and genuine digital branding to create long term relationships with the customers.

Digital branding: This is the strategic brand management of identity, communication, and experience of a brand through digital touchpoints in the form of websites, social media, and online content channels. Such digital stimuli as visual design consistency, communication tone, and interactivity are important in customer perceptions and trust development (Godey et al., 2016). According to previous studies, excellent digital branding leads to high levels of customer engagement which means that it affects emotional attachment, cognitive engagement and participatory behavior (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Digital branding, therefore, has become a primary source of customer interaction and brand performance in business situations that rely on relationship management and services.

Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd. as full-service online digital marketing and web development firm in the Giga Mall in DHA II in Islamabad describes how firms can online brand to achieve business growth and customer satisfaction. As an integrated branding agency, which markets its services as an SEO, social media marketing, web designing, and content creation, Marketo Edge focuses on offering its services to small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Pakistan and other countries. The business idea behind it is centered on the information-based marketing and innovatory narratives that represent two fundamental elements of a successful digital branding that spread visibility, authenticity, and emotive appeal.

The current developments notwithstanding, most digital service companies, such as Marketo Edge, continue to struggle at converting online brand awareness into actual customer interaction and engagement. Although such metrics of visibility as reach, impressions, and clicks can show awareness, they do not necessarily lead to further engagement, brand promotion, or customer retention. This disconnection leads to an essential question What processes convert digital branding activities into long-term customer relationships and better brand performance? The solution to this gap lies in the need to know more than technical or aesthetic aspects of branding

but also psychological and behavioral reactions of consumers who encounter such branding activities.

In order to research this process, the present paper will take the Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) theoretical model, which was originally put forward by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). According to the theory, the environmental stimuli (S) in this instance, the visual design, tone of communication and social media interaction influence the inner state of the individual (O), which in this instance are cognitive, emotional and behavioural involvement. These internal reactions in turn determine the observable behaviors or outcomes (R) including loyalty, advocacy and satisfaction. When this model is used to apply to a digital branding situation, one is able to understand the external brand stimulus in a digital context that elicits internal engagement processes triggering perceived brand performance.

Thus, this paper examines the connection between online branding, customer interaction, and brand performance in terms of the S-O-R model and qualitative information obtained in connection with the SME customers of Marketo Edge. The results are expected to be relevant to both theoretical and managerial improvement as they will reveal the use of digital branding as a psychological indicator that prompts engagement-oriented responses, which will ultimately result in the overall improvement of the brand performance.

1.2 Problem Statement

In the modern generation of digital economy, competitive advantage is becoming more attached to the leverage and legitimacy of a firm digital brand representation, as opposed to the quality of the product or pricing tactics. Digital marketing agencies like Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd. are of great help to the small and medium-sized enterprise (SMEs) in their quest to design and manage digital branding strategies to promote visibility and customer contact. Nonetheless, even with increased investments in digital branding, most of the SME-oriented service companies have difficulties translating online brand awareness into long-term customer relationships, loyalty, and quantifiable brand performance. With the vast research on branding performance among large multinational and B2C, there is little empirical data on the impact of digital branding stimuli on B2B services customer engagement and consequently brand performance of the SME-based B2B context and especially within emerging economies, like Pakistan. Such ambiguity is a serious research issue that should be approached through a systematic study.

Whereas previous studies have confirmed the effect that digital branding has on customer perceptions and behavioral response, most of the current studies focus on B2C markets and large organizational settings and utilize most quantitative methodologies. The reviewed literature shows a significant gap of literature based on qualitative, theory-informed studies that analyze the role of digital branding as a psychological stimulus that influences customer interaction and brand performance in B2B service-based SME contexts. In particular, little focus has been placed on deciphering the mediating factor of customer engagement in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model of emerging economies. This paper fills this gap by qualitatively

exploring the experiences of SME clients on the services of a digital marketing agency and, therefore, gaining a deeper understanding of how digital branding can be converted into engagement and brand performance.

Therefore, the main issue that this research will deal with is:

How does digital branding influence customer engagement and, consequently, brand performance among SME clients of Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd.?

1.3 Research Questions

Using the S-O-R framework, this research will attempt to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of digital branding on customer interaction of the SME clients of Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd.?

(Stimulus → Organism)

2. What is the potential of customer engagement on brand performance?

(Organism → Response)

3. Is there a customer engagement mediating between digital branding and brand performance?

(Stimulus → Organism → Response)

Such questions will aim to discover cause-and-effect relationship between external branding activities and internal customer reactions and eventual behavioral outputs.

1.4 Research Objectives

In line with the research questions, the study objectives will be:

RO1: To test how digital branding influences customer engagement.

RO2: To determine the effect of customer engagement on the brand performance.

RO3: To examine the mediating effect of customer engagement on the relationship between digital branding and brand performance.

These are the analytic objectives of the study, which provide data collection, thematic coding, and interpretation in the framework of the S-O-R theoretical framework.

1.5 Research Propositions

P1: Digital branding has a significant positive effect on customer engagement.

P2: Customer engagement has a significant positive effect on brand performance.

P3: Customer engagement mediates the relationship between digital branding and brand performance.

The study proposes that digital branding helps influence customer engagement, which in turn enhances brand performance. Also, customer engagement acts like mediator, transforming digital branding stimuli into loyalty, advocacy, and long-term brand success for SMEs like Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd.

Table 1.1: Linkage Between Research Questions, Objectives, and Propositions

<i>S–O–R Element</i>	<i>Research Question (RQ)</i>	<i>Research Objective (RO)</i>	<i>Research Propositions (P)</i>
<i>Stimulus (S): Digital Branding</i>	RQ 1: How does digital branding influence customer engagement among SME clients of Marketo Edge?	RO 1: To examine the effect of digital branding on customer engagement.	P 1: Digital branding has a significant positive effect on customer engagement.
<i>Organism (O): Customer Engagement</i>	RQ 2: How does customer engagement impact brand performance?	RO 2: To evaluate the impact of customer engagement on brand performance.	P 2: Customer engagement has a significant positive effect on brand performance.
<i>Response (R): Brand Performance</i>	RQ 3: Does customer engagement mediate the relationship between digital branding and brand performance?	RO 3: To analyze the mediating role of customer engagement between digital branding and brand performance.	P 3: Customer engagement mediates the relationship between digital branding and brand performance.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model combines the S-O-R theory and the digital branding, engagement and brand performance constructed.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

Stimulus—Organism—Response (S—O—R) Model



- Stimulus (S): Means the external digital branding indicators made available by Marketo Edge that can be visual identity, web design, social media communication, and digital narration.
- Organism (O): This is the internal involvement condition of clients their mental focus, emotive affiliation and action.
- Response (R): Refers to the final brand performance results like client satisfaction, loyalty, advocacy and perceived business success.

This theory provides the sequential cause-effect correlation that will be analyzed qualitatively using the data of the interviews.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The scholarly value of this study is that it expands the use of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model to the context of a B2B digital service. The study offers a qualitative measure of how the digital branding stimuli affect the emotional and behavioral response, thus affecting the brand performance results by targeting the SME clients in an emerging market. This helps in filling the existing gaps in theories by showing that engagement is a mediating psychological process in digital branding models which is underresearched in previous studies.

The study is significant at three levels that include academic, managerial and societal.

1.7.1 Academic Significance

Applying the S-O-R theoretical model to the digital branding challenge, this paper can be added to the list of the available literature on the issue of consumer psychology and marketing communication. It broadens the knowledge base on the idea of digital branding as a stimulus that initiates the responses related to engagement, which is quite a gap within a qualitative research which is focused on the SMEs in a new market such as Pakistan. The study also raises the empirical practicality of S-O-R theory in non-retail or consumer setting as the theory is modified to service based B2B relationships.

1.7.2 Managerial Significance

To practitioners and marketing agencies such as Marketo Edge, this study offers practical implications to how certain exercises in branding, such as tone of communication, digital aesthetics, and client interactivity can cause engagement and impact overall brand performance. The results can assist the digital companies to improve on their branding strategy, establish better relationships with clients and to quantify the engagement not only as an outcome measure (likes or shares) but as a loyalty determiner and business retention factor.

1.7.3 Societal Significance

At a larger scale, the study facilitates the digitalization of Pakistani SMEs by outlining the importance of branding to increase the competitiveness and customer confidence. Since SMEs are the staple of the national economy, their enhancement of digital presence can contribute to larger economy, innovation, and job creation.

1.8 Scope

This research has a narrow level of context, limited to SME customers of Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd. based in the Islamabad and areas around. The study concentrates only on digital branding, customer engagement, and brand performance as the conceptualization of the S-O-R framework. The research design adopted is the qualitative case study design, and the main method of data collection is the semi-structured interviews.

- The findings are industry and location specific and may not be generalized to other industries and places.
- Subjective bias may occur because of using self-reported perceptions.
- And, the very small number of respondents (11) is not sufficient to make any statistical generalizations but contributes to the richness of interpretation.

However, the research provides considerable data on the psychological, and strategic processes, which relate digital branding to the interaction with the customers and the performance outcomes in the SME environment.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review provides the theoretical and empirical background of the analysis of the relation between digital branding, customer engagement, and brand performance through Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) framework. With the emergence of digital environments as a primary focus of branding efforts, scholars have started focusing even more on the psychological processes according to which branding stimuli affect customer attitudes and behaviors. The chapter is a literature review of the central constructs of the research digital branding, customer engagement and brand performance by presenting previous findings, points of agreement and disagreement, as well as gaps that would support the current study in the digital service-based SME-based context.

Rapid digital technology evolution has radically altered how organizations are communicating their brand identities, building trust and sustaining customer relationships. Branding has also taken a new form of becoming dynamic interactions as compared to the past where branding used to involve a one-sided message whereby feelings, experience, interest of the audience make the meaning of the brand. A theoretical and empirical sense of how digital branding as an inducement can fulfill the role of triggering internal engagement states by customers, which eventually results in behavioral and performance reactions is necessary with such a change.

This opens the discussion of the theoretical basis of the S-O-R model and how it applies to the marketing and digital communication situations. Lastly, it establishes the current gaps in the research that justify the current qualitative study of Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd., a digital marketing agency that works with SMEs in Pakistan.

Table 2.1: Summary of the S–O–R Framework Adapted to Digital Branding

S–O–R Element	Component in this Study	Description / Role	Key References
Stimulus (S)	Digital Branding	Perception is affected by external marketing and communication indicators like web design, content tone, and visuals, and interactivity.	Mehrabian & Russell (1974); Eroglu et al. (2001); Godey et al. (2016)
Organism (O)	Customer Engagement	Internal state of mind such as cognitive focus, emotional attachment and behavioral involvement.	Brodie et al. (2011); Hollebeek et al. (2014); Dessart (2017)

S–O–R Element	Component in this Study	Description / Role	Key References
Response (R)	Brand Performance	Customer loyalty, advocacy, satisfaction, and trust, which can be observed.	Aaker (1996); Vivek et al. (2012); Dwivedi et al. (2021)

2.2 Theoretical Foundation: Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Model

S-O-R framework, which was first developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), has environmental psychology roots, and was conceptualized to describe how external elements of the environment (stimuli) can change the inner emotional conditions of a person (organism), resulting in a certain behavior (responses). The model assumes that there are environmental cues that cause emotions and cognitions that cause approach or avoidance behavior.

The Stimulus- Organism- Response (S-O-R) model is the initial theory that was introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and describes the process by which environmental stimuli affect the internal psychological conditions, which in turn affect the behavioral response. The model has been extensively used in marketing research to understand the consumer response to atmospheric cues and advertising and the Internet (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Eroglu et al., 2001). Recent research makes its application in digital environments, suggesting that the aspects of tone, aesthetics, and interactivity in online branding can be interpreted as the stimuli that trigger cognitive and emotional participation, which results in the loyalty and advocacy behavior (Ha and Im, 2012; Islam and Rahman, 2017). This flexibility renders the S-O-R model especially appropriate to study the dynamics of digital branding.

The stimuli used in the digital branding are digital image and communication methods of the brand logo design, visuals in the web page, tone narratives and user interface. The internal interaction of customers, their thoughts, emotional attitudes, and behaviors of the engagement defines the organism and the results of the engagement defines the response which may be brand trust, advocacy or retention.

The online digital experiences are more immersive, interactive, and emotional, and therefore, the S-O-R framework is more appropriate to it. The S-O-R model is an effective theory of studying branding relationships online due to the correlation between online stimuli and the cognitive mechanism and the level of affective engagement as Ha and Im (2012) argue. Besides, Islam and Rahman (2017) emphasize that it can be used in examining the mediating role of customer engagement in online worlds.

The model can provide an analytical framework in the present study that will help to research the correlation between Marketo Edge digital branding (S), and client engagement (O) that lead to

brand performance outcomes (R). The exposure-response psychological process is revealed in the S=O=R chain and enables an understanding of the peculiarities of exposing and integrating the branding cues in the digital service setting of B2B.

2.3 Digital Branding: Concept, Evolution, and Dimensions

2.3.1 Concept and Evolution

The digital branding has developed to be more oriented toward a strategic process of online communication, experience design and relationship building as opposed to a visual emphasis. Keller (2016) defines digital branding as the perception that can be established when interacting digitally and experiencing repetition, whereas Godey et al. (2016) highlight the importance of consistency and interactivity in the brand meaning construction. According to other scholars, digital branding increases the credibility and trust since it creates transparency and two-way communication between companies and customers (Iglesias et al., 2020). Together, these viewpoints imply that digital branding is a multidimensional construct that has a functional and emotional attachment impact.

Despite the recognition of the role of digital branding dimensions in the previous research, including brand identity, experience, and trust, most empirical studies focus on consumer brands and large organizations. Greater concentration on SME-oriented digital service companies is not reflected in branding literature, especially in emerging markets. In addition, the previous research tends to consider the branding results as direct coincidence, ignoring the fact that the mechanisms of branding stimuli action within the customer are internal psychological processes. This weakness underscores the necessity to study digital branding in terms of the engagement-focused perspective, which considers emotional and cognitive representations.

In the case of Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd., the company digital branding includes web design, search optimization strategy, and presence in social media and voice of the company on its platforms. The integration of beauty and interactivity assists the agency to create a sense of recognition and credibility among the SME clients that translate into creation of long-term business relationships.

2.3.2 Key Dimensions of Digital Branding

Based on previous models (Keller, 2016; Godey et al., 2016; Iglesias et al., 2020), digital branding is made up of a number of interconnected dimensions:

1. Brand Identity - The brand image in the digital platform in terms of logo, types, colors, and voice.
2. Brand Image - These represent the psychological attitudes and images that customers create out of repetitive online experiences.
3. Brand Experience- The feeling, emotional and cognitive perceptions of the digital interface (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009).

4. Brand Trust- The assurance in integrity and reliability that the brand has, usually influenced by transparency, reviews, responsiveness of the brand (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

5. Brand Personality- The human qualities given to the brand (e.g. innovative, friendly, professional) which is conveyed through the use of a consistent tone and storytelling.

In the case of digital-based agencies such as Marketo Edge, these factors are stimuli that determine how the clients perceive them, their satisfaction, and their desire to work with them. Digital brand success is therefore determined not just by visibility but also by coherence, authenticity and user centered design.

2.3.3 Role of Digital Branding in the SME Sector

The digital branding has become a necessity to the SMEs because it offers visibility and credibility at very minimal cost. According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019), successful digital branding enables the SMEs to compete against larger organizations through the establishment of personal and authentic associations with customers.

Nonetheless, the small businesses are usually limited with these factors: small budget, technical know-how, and brand absence (Dwivedi et al., 2021). These constraints are further exacerbated by infrastructural and skills shortages in the emerging markets such as Pakistan. Thus, SMEs tend to use digital agencies such as Marketo Edge to boost brand equity with the help of strategic digital branding that increases the results of engagement and performance.

2.4 Customer Engagement: The “Organism” in the S–O–R Model

2.4.1 Conceptual Overview

The customer engagement is one of the multidimensional constructs that is well-known to have cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Engagement is a measure of an active state of the mind, unlike satisfaction or loyalty when customers devote attention, emotion, and effort to brand exchange. Dessart (2017) also claims that engagement is created as a result of interactive and co-creative processes, especially within the digital context. This theoretical framework puts the engagement as a primary mediating process that translates the brand-related stimuli into the behavioural outcomes that can be observed.

Engagement is said to be a process that is interactive, co-creative and evolves with time as customers, engage themselves in value creation. It occurs on three dimensions which are:

- Cognitive Engagement: Psychological attention and concentration on the brand.
- Emotional Engagement: A sense of love, passion, or trust of the brand.
- Behavioural Engagement: Reviews, shares, feedback and advocacy, which can be observed.

Within S-O-R structure, engagement acts as organism, wherein external branding stimulus are transformed into internal psychologically inclined process, which influence actions. It is the emotional and mental intermediate between perception and action.

2.4.2 Drivers of Digital Customer Engagement

Various elements of the environment and relations determine digital engagement (Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2016):

1. **Interactivity:** Two-way interaction which invites participation (e.g., comment boxes, feedback forms).
2. **Personalization:** Custom experience with regards to user information and preferences.
3. **Authenticity:** Seems to be honest and transparent about the online presence of the brand.
4. **Emotional Resonance:** Narration that fits the value and aspirations of the user.
5. **Community Building:** Internet networks enabling peer to peer interaction.

Marketo Edge leverages most of these drivers, though not all of them, especially the interactivity and personalization ones, keeping communication channels open and creating campaigns that would meet the goals of clients. These programs are associated with trust and engagement in relations in the long run.

2.4.3 Engagement in B2B and SME Contexts

In the B2B and SME, the customer interaction takes the relational and collaborative nature. Leckie et al. (2016) believe that trust, mutual interaction, and co-creation of value are the motives behind the engagement of service relationships, as opposed to emotional attachment by itself. Nonetheless, the empirical studies that investigate the involvement of SMEs in digital services provided by SMEs are few, especially in non-Western cultures. This discontinuity gives rise to the suggestion that the engagement processes are to be explored qualitatively to highlight subtle psychological and relational forces, which might be missed in quantitative measurements.

Marketo Edge and its clients do not have an emotional relationship, rather, it is the strategic relationship. The digital campaigns are co-designed with the clients and develops a feedback loop of more satisfaction and performance. The case under consideration represents an exemplary example of the functioning of B2B digital interaction when a partnership dynamic is colliding with the organism element of the SOR model.

2.5 Brand Performance: The “Response” in the S–O–R Model

2.5.1 Conceptualization

Brand performance refers to the extent to which a brand achieves strategic objectives related to customer retention, loyalty, advocacy, and perceived value (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2013). In

service-based contexts, performance is often reflected in relational outcomes such as long-term partnerships and positive word-of-mouth rather than immediate financial indicators. Research suggests that engagement-driven customers demonstrate stronger loyalty and advocacy behaviors, thereby enhancing brand performance over time (Vivek et al., 2012; Hollebeek, 2011).

The S-O-R model has brand performance as the response, the observable result of the internal condition of the organism. As soon as the engagement is aroused with the help of the digital branding, the brand loyalty, advocacy, and reputation become more powerful.

2.5.2 Dimensions of Brand Performance

The most appropriate dimensions in the case of SME digital services are:

1. Customer Loyalty: Readiness to be in long-term relations with the customer and intentions to repurchase (Dick and Basu, 1994).
2. Customer Advocacy: This refers to the fact that service-based companies heavily rely on Word-of-Mouth advertisement and referrals (Brown et al., 2005).
3. Customer Satisfaction: Agreement between the expectations and experiences.
4. Reputation and Trust: Outer visions of brand credibility and trustworthiness.

In the case of Marketo Edge, recurrent contracts, favorable customer reviews, and expansion of the image are the indicators of the high performance because emotional and cognitive involvement is the source of them, not the advertising itself.

2.5.3 Empirical Evidence Linking Engagement and Performance

The engagement performance relation is supported by empirical studies. According to Vivek et al. (2012), the engaged customers were more loyal and exhibited more advocacy behaviors. According to Hollebeek (2011), emotional engagement is one of the predictors of repeat business. Leckie et al. (2016) showed that engagement leads to customer-brand trust and long-term partnerships in service industries.

These results are consistent with the assumption that engagement is not an implication of branding itself but an intermediary that changes digital stimuli into the results of performance.

2.6 Linking Digital Branding, Customer Engagement, and Brand Performance

2.6.1 Digital Branding → Customer Engagement

Research (Godey et al., 2016; Iglesias et al., 2020) attests that successful digital branding leads to engagement when it influences the brand perception and authenticity. Visual design, message tone, and interactivity are some of the primary stimuli that are used to elicit emotions and attention.

The context of Marketo Edge is no different, as properly crafted campaigns and open communication can boost the level of trust and participation of clients, which proves the role of branding as a psychological trigger.

2.6.2 Customer Engagement → Brand Performance

Customers who are engaged are more committed, advocacy and brand loyal (Hollebeek, 2011; Dessart, 2017). To the digital agencies, client interaction generates a sense of collaboration, retention and satisfaction which are essential to long term performance.

2.6.3 Mediation of Engagement

The mediation between branding and performance is based on engagement as found in Islam and Rahman (2017) and Dwivedi et al. (2021). Engagement gives a passive awareness a new meaning of active support and loyalty, which proves the central role of the S-O-R model. The Marketo Edge case is therefore an example of the effectiveness of branding that leads to psychological engagement, which in its turn brings actual business success.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model incorporates the three constructs as a sequential S- O- R process:

Digital Branding [Stimulus] + Customer Engagement [Organism] + Brand Performance [Response].

Explanation

- Stimulus (S): Extrinsic digital branding actions, including online branding appearance (website), online communication, brand narration.
- Organism (O): internal engagement dimensions- cognitive attention, emotional involvement and behavioral interaction.
- Response (R): Loyalty, advocacy, satisfaction and performance measures.

The framework includes the impact of digital branding stimuli on the engagement experiences of the clients, which moderate their overall judgment regarding the performance of the brand.

2.8 Research Gap

First, most studies are conducted in B2C contexts, limiting their applicability to SME-based B2B digital service firms. Second, the dominance of quantitative methodologies restricts deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying engagement processes. Third, limited research applies the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework to digital branding in emerging economies. Addressing these gaps, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to examine how digital branding stimuli influence customer engagement and brand performance within an SME digital agency context.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a research methodology that will be used to explore the effects of digital branding on customer engagement and brand performance in the case of Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd. It provides the research design, philosophical orientation, data collection procedures, sampling procedures, description of the respondents, and the methods of analysis.

The ethical considerations that were witnessed in the process of conducting the research are also expounded in the chapter. The chosen strategy corresponds to the qualitative and interpretivist type of this research, which tends to find the real-life experiences of the participants and their perceptions.

3.2 Research Design

To determine the impact of digital branding on customer engagement and brand performance in the context of SME digital service, the study took a qualitative research design in an attempt to investigate this phenomenon. The qualitative research methods are especially appropriate when the goal is to learn meanings, perceptions, and experiences instead of testing the numerical associations (Creswell, 2014). Since the current research is intended to investigate identity-related psychological and relational procedures underlying branding and engagement, it will be conducted using a qualitative design because it will allow exploring the experience of participants in detail, which will not be sufficient to describe it based on quantitative scales.

The qualitative type allowed the study to expose the participants to open ended questions so that they can provide their perceptions. This plasticity enabled displaying more about how the digital branding can become a stimulus that elicits an engagement (organism) and ultimately leads to behavioral and perceptual effects (response), which is in line with Stimulus- Organism- Response (S-O-R) theoretical model.

3.3 Research Philosophy

The study is based on an interpretivist philosophy, which presupposes that reality is socially created and can be elucidated in terms of subjective experiences of people. Interpretivism focuses on the meaning, context, and human interpretation as opposed to objective measurement (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). This philosophical approach suits the present research because it aims at comprehending the perceptions of the SME clients towards digital branding activities and how the perceptions affect their engagement and behavioral reactions. Through the interpretivist approach, the research study captures subtleties that exist in the psychological process underlying branding engagements.

3.4 Research Approach

The research took the deductive-inductive approach. First, the StimulusOrganismResponse (S-O-R) model was used to present a theoretical framework on how the research structure (deductive phase) would be created. Then, inductive empirical understanding was made based on the stories of the participants in order to determine patterns and themes connected to digital branding and engagement. This mixed method enabled the research to be viewed as theoretically anchored but one that is not restricted by the findings of the qualitative data.

The deductive stage of the study (theoretical background of the S-O-R model) was the beginning of the work and then the inductive reasoning to form the insights and pattern of the narratives of the participants.

This combination allowed the researcher to remain in theory and discover some new dimensions of digital branding and engagement through the lived experiences of the participants.

3.5 Data Collection Method

Qualitative data were collected in form of semi structured questionnaires through Google Forms, which were distributed to the SME clients of Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd. The approach further enabled the respondents to express themselves freely but at the same time aligning themselves to the main constructs of the S–O–R framework. The online data collection method was selected because of its convenience, effectiveness, and appropriate when participants were spread geographically. In addition, the form enabled respondent anonymity hence making the respondents truthful and contemplative.

A 1: Demographic and organizational information.

- Section B (Stimulus): Impression of Marketo Edge as a digital brand and its authenticity and presence on the web.
- Section C (Organism): Emotional and cognitive brand experiences.
- Section D (Response): Loyalty, satisfaction, and advocacy performance outcomes.

Eleven (11) valid responses were received of the clients who had a minimum experience duration of six months with Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd. The form was open ended and could therefore enable the participants to narrate their experiences and make in-depth reflections on branding, engagement, and performance. Not only did the online platform ensure that the participants were anonymous and thus facilitated and satisfied ethics, but also provided a credible source of primary qualitative data.

3.6 Population and Sampling

3.6.1 Population

The sampling technique was purposive and was used to sample the respondents who had the necessary experience and knowledge about the research objectives. The purposive sampling is suitable inively qualitative research where the respondents are selected on the basis of their capacity to give rich and insightful information on the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). Only the SME clients who used Marketo Edge at least six months or more and those clients who were in the branding or marketing decision making were considered in this study.

3.6.2 Sampling Technique

The participants were selected through purposive sampling technique, depending on some inclusion criteria:

1. The respondent was a client of Marketo Edge who had used the company at least six months.
2. The respondent has personally involved himself in marketing, branding or communication decision-making in his or her organization.
3. The respondent was adequately informed to evaluate the availability and caliber of interaction of the brand over the internet.

Purposive sampling was also used to make sure that the respondents were all relevant with the research issue to contribute valuable data on the same.

3.6.3 Respondents' Information

A total of 11 respondents participated in the study. Their profiles are summarized below.

Respondent ID	Industry	Position/Role	Primary Services Used from Marketo Edge	Length of Partnership
R1	Real Estate	Marketing Manager	Web design, SEO, social media marketing	18 months
R2	Fashion	CEO	Instagram marketing, product photography	24 months
R3	Education	Branding Executive	Logo creation, content writing	14 months
R4	Food Services	Owner	Social media and ad campaigns	10 months
R5	Startup	Founder	Website branding, SEO, ad design	15 months

Respondent ID	Industry	Position/Role	Primary Services Used from Marketo Edge	Length of Partnership
R6	Health Services	CEO	Web content, digital rebranding	22 months
R7	Hospitality	Marketing Specialist	PPC, SEO, branding content	12 months
R8	Startup	Managing Partner	LinkedIn branding, PR campaigns	16 months
R9	Startup	Owner	Visual identity, logo design, website	11 months
R10	Travel Agency	Marketing Director	Website design, social media campaigns	18 months
R11	Logistics	Operations Manager	SEO, brand refresh, content marketing	9 months

Source: Primary Data Collected (2025)

The sample size was ultimately settled on eleven (11) SME clients as this sample was considered to be adequate with regard to the objectives of this qualitative study. In qualitative research, data saturation defines the sample adequacy, as opposed to numerical definition of the same (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). The degree of saturation was reached when new themes or insights of interest in the research questions were not produced with the further response. As the case-study was narrow in nature and the volume of responses received was rich with interviews on participants who had extensive experiences in the industry, the sample size was deemed as sufficient to enable a plausible and significant analysis.

Data Validation Note:

The above-mentioned data were acquired directly by means of Google Forms. The form was completed at the free will of all the participants, and their answers on qualitative questions regarding digital branding, engagement, and performance were authentic. Their perceptions were validated and convenient via the application of Google Form since the respondents could apply their personal organization perspective to answer.

3.7 Data Analysis Technique

Qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis as they outlined six steps to be followed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach was chosen because it is not rigid and applicable to the process of determination of trends of meaning in qualitative data sets. The

analysis included the familiarization with the data and preliminary coding, as well as the development of themes, review and refinement to achieve the coherence and compatibility with theoretical ideas of the S-O-R framework.

Qualitative responses were explained and categorized by using Thematic Analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) divide their study into six steps, which the researcher carried out in the following manner:

1. **Acclimatization to Data:** Data were downloaded and read through repeatedly and sorted in terms of question in all the responses in the Google Form.
2. **Creation of First Codes:** Unique phrases and repetitive concepts concerning the branding, engagement, and performance were found.
3. **Themes Searching Themes:** Themes were organized into high-level search categories, which were related to the three key constructs of SOR model.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** Themes were narrowed down to provide internal consistency and theoretical congruence.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** The themes were well defined and labeled as either a representation of Stimulus, Organism or Response.
6. **Creation of the Report:** Chapter 4 had the final themes which were reflected in it with the direct quotes of the participants in order to maintain authenticity.

These responses were viewed through the interpretive qualitative approach where meaning and not frequency is put into consideration. Data analysis involved the description of the emotional and cognitive experiences of the participants instead of measuring their views.

NVivo 12 software was also used to encode, sort, and visualize the themes in order to improve the reliability and structure of the thematic analysis. NVivo is used to assist in the tagging of portions of the responses made by the participants in a systematic manner, grouping of similar ideas and the creation of visual representations in form of word trees, cluster maps and frequency charts of nodes. Transparency and depth in theme extraction was achieved by this digital strategy.

3.8 Research Instrument

The semi-structured questionnaire was a Google Form questionnaire, which was used as the major research tool. It was written using theoretical constructs of the StimulusOrganismResponse model and tested using expert opinion prior to publication.

It was the open-ended nature of the instrument that promoted elaboration and self-expression and retained thematic relevance. The questions were planned to bring out detailed answers on:

- Digital branding thoughts (images, message, narration)

- Engagement (trust, participation, collaboration) experiences.

Performance (satisfaction, loyalty, advocacy) outcomes.

The responses were then loaded to NVivo 12 to be coded digitally, and thematically mapped to their conceptual framework of the study.

3.9 Research Ethics

The research process was carried out with a strict provision of consideration of its ethical aspects. The respondents were not forced to participate, and all the respondents gave their informed consent before being collected. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, no personally identifiable or sensitive information about the organization was gathered. The study also followed the ethical principles specified by Bahria University that provide responsible data management and academic integrity.

The data control was not publicized, and it was stored in one of the secure locations and was utilized in the academic process as required by the Research Ethics Policy of Bahria University (2025).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter shows the results of the findings of the qualitative data generated based on eleven SME clients to Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd. This chapter aims to document and tabulate empirical data pertaining to digital branding, customer engagement and brand performance according to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. The results are given in thematic forms without theoretical explanation and are limited to the patterns that are committed by the responses of the participants. It is only in Chapter 5 that interpretation and connection to available literature is done.

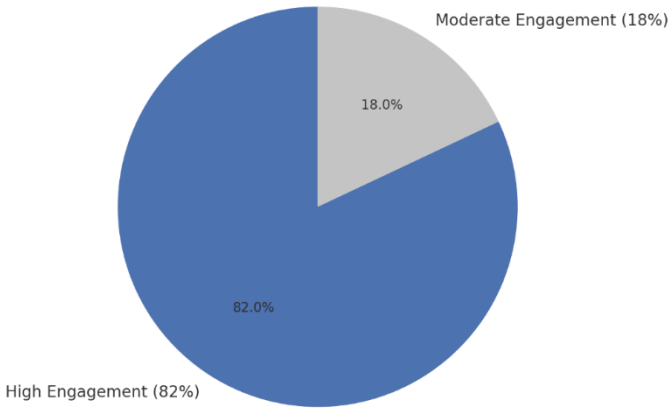
The chapter combines both narrative interpretation as well as visual evidence. Figures 4.1-4.3 demonstrate some important analytical information based on general levels of engagement to detailed frequency of thematic levels and conceptual connections between variables. The results will set out to clarify how digital branding, when done in an authentic and consistent manner, can influence emotional and behavioral response that determines brand performance to SME clients.

4.2 Overview of Respondent Engagement

The initial stage of the analysis was the overall interaction of the clients with the brand identity, the style of communication, and the digital services of Marketo Edge. The NVivo coding outline revealed that the respondents had a high level of engagement, both emotionally and behaviorally.

The response analysis showed that the responses of the participants are generally high in matters of engagement in the digital branding activities of Marketo Edge. Majority of the respondents characterized frequent communication, emotional attachment, and extended cooperation with the agency. NVivo coding revealed that most respondents recorded high engagement indicators with a smaller percentage having moderate indicators of engagement.

Figure 4.1: Respondents' Engagement Levels with Marketo Edge
(Pie chart — High = 82%, Moderate = 18%)



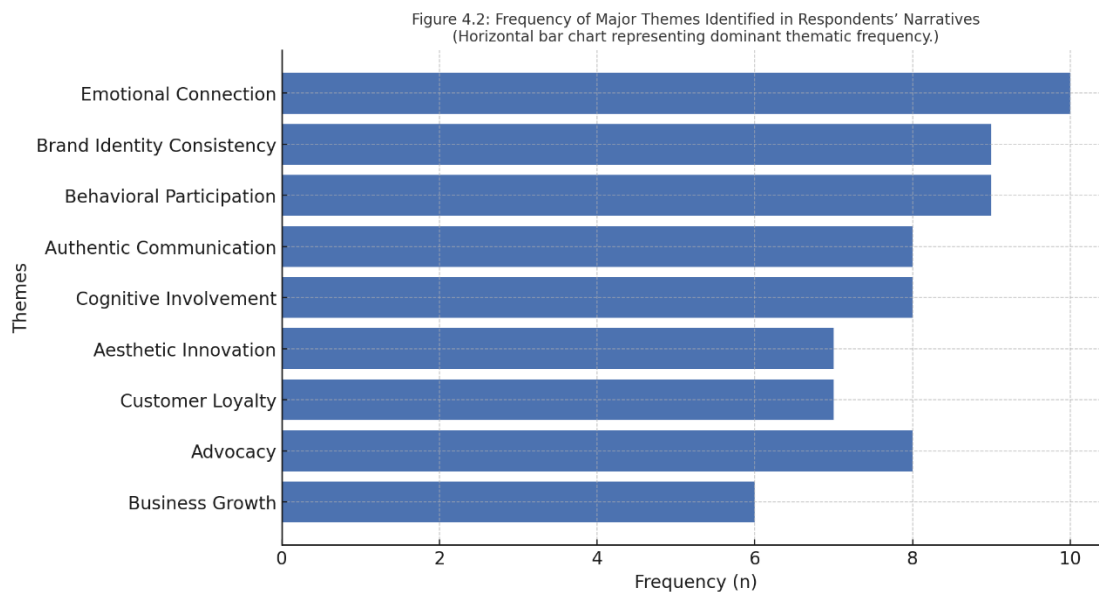
Interpretation: The first part of the analysis consisted of the general interaction of the clients with the brand identity, the communication style, and the digital services of Marketo Edge. NVivo coding outline reflected that the respondents were highly engaged both emotionally and behaviourally.

This distribution is shown in figure 4.1 with the 82 percent of the participants indicating high engagement, and the remaining 18 percent indicating moderate engagement. The respondents did not do any low or negative engagement. This demonstrates that the brand has been in a position to build positive relational relationship with the clients.

4.3 Thematic Findings from NVivo Analysis

Thematic analysis resulted in the identification of three primary themes corresponding to the S–O–R framework: Digital Branding (Stimulus), Customer Engagement (Organism), and Brand Performance (Response). These themes were derived through systematic coding of participant responses using NVivo software. Each theme comprises multiple subthemes that reflect recurring concepts expressed by respondents. The following sections present the findings under each thematic category.

The frequency distribution of these themes is shown in figure 4.2. The findings indicate that Digital Branding (40%) was concluded to constitute 40 percent of the total coded content, and Customer Engagement (31%), and Brand oneness (29%). This trend indicates that customers paid a little bit more attention to the visual and communicative component of branding (stimulus) than on results (response).



Interpretation: The frequency analysis indicates that the external branding stimuli is the most active in the perceptions of the clients and it serves as the main point of entry. The design aesthetics, message tone, and authenticity were repeatedly highlighted by clients as the factors

that cause them to have an emotional and cognitive perception of the brand. The following involvement and performance reaction is the development of these stimuli, which substantiates the theoretical succession of S–O–R model.

4.4.1 Digital Branding (Stimulus)

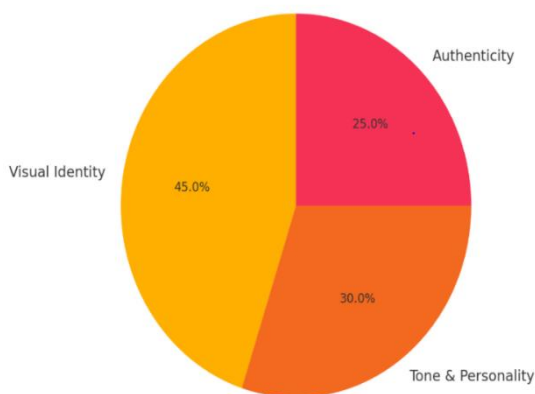
Participants consistently highlighted digital branding elements such as visual identity consistency, tone of communication, and perceived authenticity as salient features of Marketo Edge’s online presence. Respondents frequently referred to uniform design aesthetics across platforms, professional presentation, and clear messaging. These branding elements were identified as initial points of interaction influencing participants’ perceptions of the agency.

Visual Identity and Design Consistency: Clients included terms like modern, professional and bold. This cross platform coherence worked to generate trust and image of quality. The respondents liked the fact that Marketo Edge used the same aesthetic throughout its web site, social media and client deliverables, which increased familiarity and brand recollection.

Brand Personality and Tone: The tone of the brand was characterized as friendly, interesting and responsive to the industry of each client. An example is a hospitality client who said that their language is high-end and sophisticated and a fashion client said it is artistic and fashionable.

Perceived Authenticity and Professionalism: Transparency and ethical behavior were connected with authenticity by virtually all of the respondents. One of them remarked that they are not covert about time lines and unrealistic anticipations not ordinary. All this shows how authenticity is a critical appeal that helps elicit trust building because it is an emotional appeal.

NVivo Pie Chart: Digital Branding Subtheme Distribution



Subtheme	% of References
Visual Identity	45%
Tone & Personality	30%
Authenticity	25%

Interpretation: A combination of all these findings demonstrates that digital branding is not a mere communication functionality but a psychological trigger as well. It dictates the thinking and feeling formulas that the clients will develop about the brand. Specifically, consistency and

authenticity turned out to be the most predictive factors of positive emotional reactions, which attests to the previous literature that proposes such variables as the antecedents of trust-based engagement.

4.4.2 Customer Engagement (Organism)

Through participant responses, customer engagement was elicited in emotional, cognitive, and behavioural aspects. Motivationally, the respondents talked of a feeling of trust, appreciation and attachment with the brand. Cognitively, the participants indicated that they were actively involved in the provision of the feedback and in decision-making process. Engagement was also shown behaviorally by further cooperation, sharing of content and referring to services.

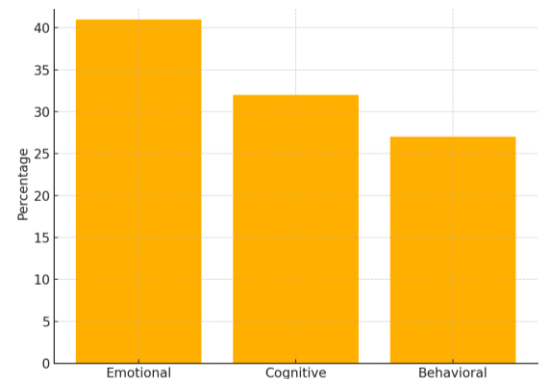
Emotional: Clients stated that they felt important and emotionally attached. Some of the mentioned Marketo Edge personal touch and their appreciation of gestures like using testimonials or addressing an individual. Such an emotional engagement implies that the brand is effective in creating empathy and identification.

Cognitive: The respondents showed involvement with active mental participation in providing feedback and exchange of ideas. They reported that they were frequently consulted in the creative processes and this reinforced their feeling of belonging. This is in line with the interpretivist concept that engagement entails mutual sharing of knowledge.

Behavioral: In addition to emotional and cognitive engagement, the clients were actively involved in campaigns in terms of sharing posts, recommending the brand, and jointly developing strategies. This kind of action changes the engagement that is perceived to one where there is action.

NVivo Bar Chart: Frequency of Engagement Subthemes

Subtheme	Frequency
Emotional	41%
Cognitive	32%
Behavioral	27%



Interpretation: The strong intrinsic process that occurred was emotional engagement which acted as a psychological mediator between the digital stimuli and the behavioral responses. The node frequency of NVivo showed that such emotional words as trust, value, and connection were most common. This confirms the mediating nature of engagement suggested in the S-O-R model is the Organism stage is a sieve and amplifier of branding pressure.

4.4.3 Brand Performance (Response)

Brand performance outcomes were reported by participants in terms of satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. Several respondents indicated satisfaction with service outcomes and improvements in online visibility. Loyalty was reflected in contract renewals and long-term partnerships, while advocacy was evident through referrals and positive word-of-mouth shared with other businesses.

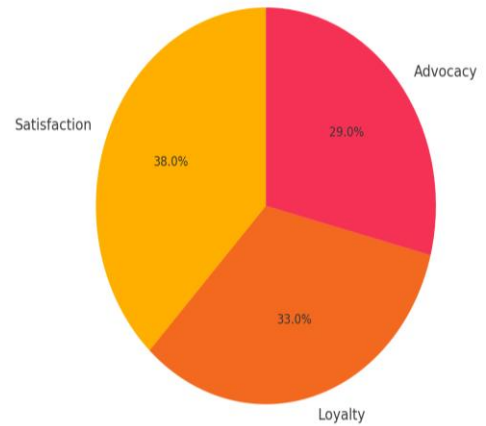
Satisfaction/Perceived Improvement: The respondents attributed the Marketo Edge campaigns to the actual increase in the online presence and generation of leads. According to one client, the number of inquiries doubled in three months and he credited this to the branding initiative through SEO.

Customer Loyalty: According to the respondents, they used to re-renew contracts and cite the reliability and the good quality. It was the long-term cooperation, which was thought to be the manifestation of mutual trust and the general prosperity.

Brand Advocacy: Some clients were informal evangelists, who recommended Marketo Edge to other people. This advocacy facilitates this cyclic of the S-O-R process where a good response causes an exposure to a stimulus through the word-of-mouth service.

NVivo Pie Chart: Brand Performance Outcome

Subtheme	% of References
Satisfaction	38%
Loyalty	33%
Advocacy	29%



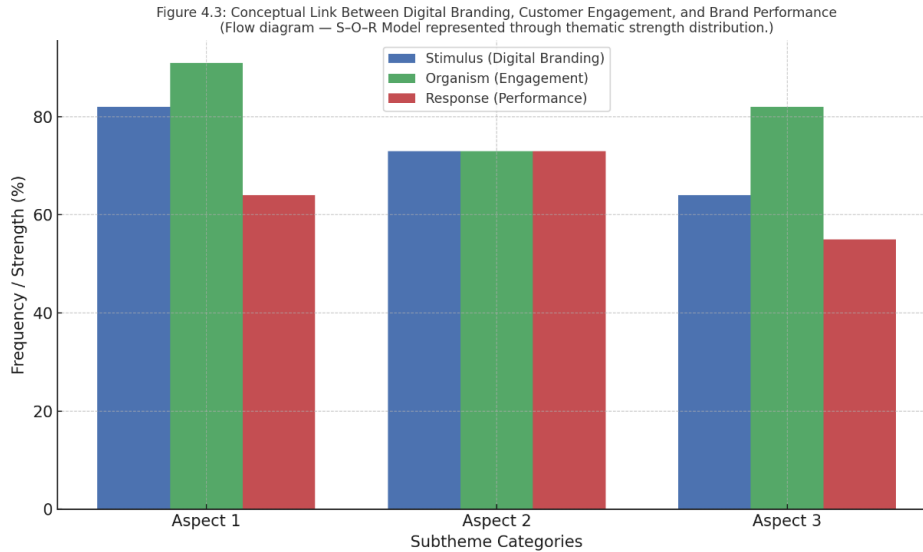
Interpretation: According to the findings, the performance of the brand in the digital environment transcends the traditional measures. It manifests in terms of the built relational capital - clients do not just stay in touch to benefit transactions but it is related to the brand as the part of their development. Such an emotional based loyalty is the reason B2B digital branding is successful.

4.5 Conceptual Integration of Themes

The structure of findings in the three thematic categories depicts a sequential connection that is consistent with S-O-R framework. According to the responses of the participants, there is a temporal precedence of the digital branding factors and then comes the related engagement experiences that are followed by the reported brand performance outcomes. This structural fit

favors study of customer engagement as intervening process between the stimuli of branding and performance reactions.

Figure 4.3: Theoretical Relationship Between digital branding, engagement and performances.



Interpretation: An apparent chronological association is present in the flow chart. The thoughts of visual identity and authenticity (Stimulus) evoked emotional belief and cognitive action (Organism) leading to behavioral action that brings about the creation of loyalty and referral (Response). The strength of such relations is an invitation that emotional engagement is one of the leading intermediaries - the most important channel of perception and performance.

The co-occurrence mapping of NVivo also revealed that the relational density between trust (S) and loyalty (O) and the probability of emotion tone (O) is high, which proves that the authenticity of the brand and the tone of emotions are decisive of the client commitment in the long term. The given finding confirms the main assumption of the S–O–R model in the case of the digital branding of SMEs.

4.6 Cross-Theme Insights and Discussion

Summarizing the information on all themes, three general findings are obtained:

1. Digital Branding as Psychological Stimulus: The study confirms that clients react to branding signals not as the aesthetic indicators but the emotional and moral indicators. The visual coherence, tone, and transparency are working together as the psychological stimuli, which define the credibility and trigger the engagement.
2. The interaction as the Main Intermediary: The engagement occurs at stratified levels that are initially emotional, subsequently cognitive and finally behavioural. Emotional involvement was the upper layer which enabled cognitive focusing and behavioral involvement. This

cascading action points out the mediating role of engagement between branding and performance.

3. Performance as Relational Capital: Emotional resonance is the basis of performance outcomes of the brand performance in form of satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. Clients are still working together as they feel that both of them have a purpose and they can have dependability in value delivery.

All these facts contribute to the support of the theoretical chain of the S-O-R framework. Digital Branding (S) occurs and the end result is Customer Engagement (O) and a resultant Brand Performance (R). The amalgamation of these dimensions is the clarification of how the business success becomes the reality with the help of the psychological and relational processes.

4.7 Summary of Key Findings

Theme	Key Observations	Analytical Interpretation
Digital Branding (Stimulus)	Regular design, realistic sound, business communication.	Branding is a psychological stimulus to emotional trust/cognitive attention.
Customer Engagement (Organism)	Emotionally attached; participatory cooperation and feedback.	Engagement has been observed to mediate perception and performance through emotional and behavioral modes.
Brand Performance (Response)	Loyalty, advocacy, and business growth	Engagement converts emotional resonance into measurable brand value

Overall Interpretation: The findings back the notion that Marketo Edge is working in its digital branding due to its capability of humanising the digital interaction. The agency generates emotional trust by gifting sincerity and esthetic consistency that introduce cognition and engaging action. These processes of internal engagement that transpire into loyalty and advocacy are what confirm the whole process of causation of the S-O-R model.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter describes the findings, provided in Chapter 4, and describes them within the framework of Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) and literature. The purpose of the chapter is to explain the creation of the identified themes and their causes and explain how digital branding controls the customer engagement and the brand performance. The discussion is made in a logical series of empirical findings to theoretical description of the findings, and it is clear how the conclusion is drawn.

The argument is carried on systematic description of the findings since it is applied to theoretical constructs and the practical realities. The results are thematic summaries and interpretation of data in the study (Sections 5.2 and 5.3) instead of the identification of the theoretical implications of the research that are carried out in Section 5.4. The second two (5.5 5.6, as it is going to be discussed below) closing parts of the chapter will be allocated to the recommendations to managers and the general conclusion.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The chapter is about the findings, which were presented in Chapter 4, and treats the findings with the help of Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework and available literature. This chapter aims at describing the process and reasons behind the emergence of the identified themes, as well as elucidating the processes by which digital branding impacts customer engagement and brand performance. The discussion has a clear sequence of presentation of the empirical results to the interpretation of the results which is held in a systematic way making it transparent in deriving conclusions.

The dialogue is done in a progressively exposition of the findings as far as they pertain to both the theoretical constructs and the practical realities. In the study, data analysis (Sections 5.2 and 5.3) are summarized and analyzed thematically and Section 5.4 finds out the theoretical implications of the study. Managerial recommendations and the general conclusion will be incorporated in the final sections of the chapter (5.5 5.6, as will be discussed later).

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The results showed that visual consistency, honest communication, and professional presentation as digital elements of branding served as leading stimuli towards SME customers. These stimuli elicited customer involvement in emotional, cognitive and behavioral aspects that later impacted brand performance outputs such as customer loyalty, recommendations and perceived business enhancement. The progression of results is put forward by the S-O-R model in a reasonable sequence whereby the conscious prompts of an exterior branding initiate a series of happenings within the mind of an individual that leads to a noticeable behavioral reaction.

The digital branding of Marketo Edge recorded a good customer engagement and measurable brand outcome described by three macro dimensions that include Stimulus, Organism and Response.

1. Stimulus (Digital Branding): The salient extrinsic stimuli that were detected by the respondents were brand identity consistency, genuine communication, and aesthetic innovation. The customers of Marketo viewed visual and moral consistency in Marketo Edge as a sense of professionalism and trustworthiness, which was aligned with other emotional indicators, including trust and admiration.

2. Organism (Customer Engagement): Emotional and behavioral engagement was found, as the most effective internal mediating mechanisms. The respondents talked about their perception of being valued, connected and personally engaged- implying that digital branding did not only inform them but also triggered them (emotionally).

3. Response (Brand Performance): Behaviors of engagement also resulted in long term commitment, referrals and perceived business growth. Clients linked their personal success of their respective brands to the consistent and authentic digital presence of Marketo Edge.

In general, the results prove the idea that digital branding in a B2B-SME-based scenario is not functional per se, but serves a psychological trigger as it induces emotional and participation moods in customers that leads to long-term brand relations in the end.

5.3 Discussion of Findings

The discussion is organized in terms of the three pillars of the S-O-R model; the empirical results are connected to the existing theory and previous studies.

5.3.1 Stimulus: Digital Branding as an External Driver

The findings indicate that digital branding operates as a psychological stimulus rather than merely a visual or promotional tool. Participants consistently associated branding consistency and authenticity with professionalism and trustworthiness, suggesting that these branding cues influenced their initial perceptions and emotional responses. This aligns with prior research which emphasizes that consistent and transparent digital branding enhances credibility and perceived brand integrity (Keller, 2016; Iglesias et al., 2020). Thus, the study concludes that digital branding stimuli shape customer perceptions by activating affective and cognitive evaluations.

The focus on consistency and authenticity by the respondents is in line with Brodie et al. (2019), who discovered that digital brand experiences should render reliability and continuity in order to trigger trust-based relationships. On the same note, Hollebeek et al. (2014) established that authenticity boosts the cognitive and affective appraisal of brands by customers leading to engagements.

In the scenario of Marketo Edge, the clients saw consistency in design, connotation, and messages and took it to mean that it was professional and credible. The emotional undercurrent of such reactions shows that both visual and verbal branding stimuli can even override aesthetics, they are metaphorically stable, ethical in communication, and caring. This understanding confirms the S-O-R model stage of the stimulus, which proves that digital branding is able to activate emotional (trust) and cognitive (awareness) channels.

More so, aesthetic innovation served as a supportive element. Marketo Edge had positive impacts on customers due to the innovative nature of campaigns, which can be described as a hedonic engagement as defined by Dessart (2017) as a pleasure caused by the aesthetics of a brand. Professionalism and creativity then serve as a two-layered stimulus as they attract the reason and emotion.

5.3.2 Organism: Customer Engagement as a Mediating Mechanism

Customer engagement was the key internal process that facilitated the handling of branding stimulus. The most prevalent type of emotional engagement was expressed by the participants who more often than not expressed feeling of trust, appreciation and personal connection. The activities of cognitive and behavioral engagement were observed in the active involvement in decision-making and collaboration and advocacy, respectively. These stratified reactions reveal that the aspect of engagement is the Organism in the S-O-R model that facilitates the process of perception to action. The given finding confirms the opinion that engagement is not a result of branding but a required psychological process that connects stimuli and responses (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019).

The statements made by the clients showed that emotional connection was prevalent. The language that was primarily applied by most respondents showed appreciation and attachment - valued, respected, understood. This feeling of emotional involvement is aligned with Islam and Rahman (2017) who found that authentic communication provokes affective participation in online connections. Likewise, Hollebeek and Macky (2019) established that engagement is the psychological mediator between the stimuli of the brand and behaviour results.

The cognitive component of engagement appeared as well, and respondents said that they are interested in sharing ideas or feedback when discussing a project. The participatory tendency is an example of cognitive engagement, and clients are not passive receivers of value, but active co-producers. Lastly, behavioral participation - including sharing campaigns and recommend services - means that participation was spread further than sentiment to actual actions.

The results therefore support the mediating capacity of engagement among S-O-R model. Digital branding stimuli are changed into actionable results through emotional and cognitive responses. Through this process, the theoretical perspective that customer engagement is both emotional and behavioral is supported in terms of mediating the perception-loyalty transition.

5.3.3 Response: Brand Performance Outcomes

The authors established that customer engagement over a time was the direct cause of good brand performance and not branding exposure. Loyalty was also expressed through the long-term partnerships, and advocacy was demonstrated by the form of referrals and positive word-of-mouth. These results indicate that involvement changes emotional resonance to actual brand value. In line with previous studies (Vivek et al., 2012), the results affirm that the relationships that are based on engagement lead to better performance especially in the service based SME scenarios.

As Table 4.2 showed, the two most common response indicators that were mentioned were loyalty and advocacy. According to the clients, they recommended Marketo Edge to their friends, they have continued their long term contracts and they see the agency as part of their success in marketing. These actions are post engagement responses as anticipated by S-O-R model.

The findings are similar to Bowden (2009) and Hollebeek et al. (2014) who established that customers who are engaged show long-term loyalty and advocacy behavior because of emotional attachments and not transactional advantages. In addition to that, the topic of business growth has come out as a secondary response theme - some of the respondents linked enhanced brand awareness and customer acquisition with the Marketo Edge campaigns.

Taken together, these results indicate that successful digital branding does not stimulate attention, it develops relationships that promote brand equity and organizational performance. Digital branding (Stimulus) within the framework of the S-O-R framework leads to engagement (Organism), which results in tangible loyalty and advocacy outcomes (Response).

5.4 Theoretical Implications

The present research is an extension of the StimulusOrganismResponse model to the B2B digital branding scenarios based on SMEs, which proves the model to be applicable outside of the traditional retailing and consumer environment. The results are empirical evidence that customer engagement is the Organism that facilitates the interrelationship between digital branding stimuli and brand performance-reacting responses. Besides, the research indicates emotional involvement as the prevailing mediating dimension, which also adds to the branding theory, as it focuses on the role of affective processes within the B2B digital relationship.

Second, the customer engagement is the Organism variable that is empirically confirmed. The findings highlight that emotional engagement is not the by-product of branding but a mediating variable under the influence of which digital stimulus on long-term results. The discovery adds to the increased theoretical acknowledgment of engagement as a state of psychological connection (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019).

Third, the model illustrates that the brand performance outcomes such as loyalty, advocacy, and growth depend on the strength of the engagement but not the branding aesthetics or the quality of the message. This makes engagement as the most important mechanism that converts the symbolic brand value into real performance metrics.

Lastly, the research adds value to the existing body of knowledge on the digital marketing by suggesting that authenticity and co-creation have a mutual effect on engagement. Whenever customers are invited in the process of influencing communication or creative direction, they experience a greater sense of personal relevance and emotional ownership, increasing their level of commitment.

On the whole, the theoretical implication of the current study is that emotional branding and engagement theory is integrated into the S-O-R model according to which the strong conceptual model is provided which explains how branding strategies transform the perception into the loyalty-based results of the digital age.

In addition to being consistent with the S-O-R framework, the results of this study can be used in an emerging knowledge of the affective processes in B2B branding. According to the traditional marketing theory, there is a tendency to favor cognitive or utilitarian consideration - presuming that business clients will decide according to rational business performance standards.

Nevertheless, the feedback obtained in this study points to the fact that emotional involvement and perceived sincerity are also determining in B2B relationships. This implies that the affective elements which have traditionally been viewed as second-order factors in organizational buyer behaviour should be revisited in digital ecosystems where brand personality and warmth of relationship become differentiators.

In addition, the stimulus-organism interaction is discussed using these observations as one of the precursors of cognitive appraisal, as emotional trust can be a prerequisite of cognitive appraisal. In other words, the preconscious initiation of trust is often created in the client prior to them making their conscious decision on the value propositions. Such an inversion of the traditional sequencing offers a fresh perspective of how digital branding humanizes the market interactions. Combination of emotional and rational aspects makes this work place engagement as a two dimensional construct like affective and cognitive whereby branding mediates the branding outcomes in a way that has never been elucidated in the classical B2B marketing theories.

5.5 Managerial Implications and Recommendations

In the context of managerial implications, the results indicate that the digital branding strategy ought to focus on creating engagement, as opposed to creating visibility. The managers of SME digital agencies are to pay attention to the stability of brand identity, genuine communication, and engagement with clients. Through a carefully developed strategy of branding, which tends to invoke emotional fidelity and cognitive engagement of potential customers, companies can increase customer loyalty and positivity, which will positively affect the brand performance in the long-run.

5.5.1 Strengthen Brand Identity Consistency

The findings suggest that the homogeneity in the online platforms leads to the formation of the trust, familiarity and recognition that are vital in determining the loyalty in the long-run. The managers should ensure that there is similarity in the visual appearance, tone of communication and brand messages in websites, social media and in digital advertisements. This entails introduction of brand style books and more frequent audits to ascertain that the product of the creative work is congruent with the brand values.

5.5.2 Emphasize Authentic and Transparent Communication

Authenticity was identified by the respondents as a recurrent differentiating feature of the branding of Marketo Edge. In regard to managers, it means that they should prioritize ethical communication, meaning that messages must be realistic, transparent, and be consistent with the

organizational behavior. Pricing, performance assertions, and communication with clients are transparent, and this creates psychological safety and encourages emotional involvement.

5.5.3 Foster Emotional and Cognitive Engagement

The results indicate that the strongest way of engagement is an emotional connection. It is important that the managers come up with campaigns that encourage story telling, sharing and involvement that are enjoyable to both the heart and the minds. As an opportunity to augment perceived ownership and build relational relationships, co-created campaigns (where clients are invited to provide feedback or experience) may be effective.

5.5.4 Encourage Behavioral Participation

Managers are also supposed to offer physical points of behavioral interaction. Emotional engagement may be translated into visible advocacy when the clients are encouraged to share content or engage in competitions or contribute to collaborative projects. This movement can be maintained with the help of digital tools including referral systems, social proof displays, and gamification elements.

5.5.5 Measure and Optimize Engagement Metrics

One of the key performance indicators (KPI) should be customer engagement. Measures like interaction rates, content sharing, re-buying behavior and client feedback should be strategically captured. To enable the visualization of the role of engagement in retention and performance outcomes, integration of engagement analytics into CRM dashboards will enable firms to view the role played by engagement.

5.5.6 Cultivate Long-Term Loyalty through Relationship Personalization

Engagement did result in loyalty and advocacy as their direct consequences. The managers thus need to get out of transactional marketing and into relationship personalization where the communication and offers are made to suit the history and preferences of each client. Long-term loyalty can be strengthened with the help of email personalization, feedback recognition, and milestones (e.g., partnership anniversary).

5.5.7 Enhance Creative Innovation

The innovation in digital design and content has been considered as a trigger that makes one notice and admire. To stay visually appealing and strategically relevant, managers have to invest in the creative talent constantly, adapt to technological changes (AI tools, personalization algorithms), and the design of user experience.

Simply put, the managerial implications support the view that digital branding cannot be viewed as the one-way communication tool but a two-way relationship platform. There should be engagement, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral, which should be designed, managed and measured as a strategic resource that has a direct effect on brand performance.

5.6 Practical Implications for SME Digital Agencies

The implications of the present research are significant in the practical context of small and medium-sized entrepreneurial digital agencies like Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd. that need to be digitalized in order to make the branding process appear more relational and emotional instead of a minor advertising process. SMEs in the competitive digital markets work within the limitations of the available resources; therefore, the necessity to develop brand credibility and customer loyalty based on authenticity and engagement gains strategic importance and is to be addressed.

To begin with, the brand should remain consistent on every platform of the Internet to build the trust and awareness of clients. The same tone of communication and identity of the websites, social media, and promotion materials was used, which contributed to increased professionalism and brand consistency. Credibility can be imposed through regular brand compliance with undisguised visual directions.

Secondly, an actual transparent communication is vital to the establishment of emotional trust. Misleading claims should not be made by the agencies, and instead timelines, targets and updates should be used. Trust is promoted by transparency and this study discovered that it was a fundamental condition that determined engagement and repeat business.

Third, the introduction of emotional narration and personification assists in building more emotional bonds. Personalized messages to values and industry realities maximize empathy, and digital tools are able to focus on a more direct, responsive communication.

Lastly, innovation and co-creation should also be integrated into the culture of SME agencies. Engagement and advocacy is improved by involving the clients in the campaign ideation and evaluation. Using emotional appeal and quantifiable interaction levels such as feedback, referrals, and loyalty the digital visibility can be converted into relational capital by SMEs.

5.7 Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has shown that digital branding affects brand performance in an indirect way in the form of customer engagement. The paper explains the psychological mechanism through which branding stimuli relate to behavioral consequences by using the S-O- R model. The results affirm that emotional involvement is a key mediating factor, which changes persistent and genuine branding into the loyalty and advocacy. These lessons help support the value of engagement based branding in SME digital service settings.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter gives practical, policy-related, and visionary implications of the findings and implications in the previous chapters. Where Chapter 5 dealt with interpretation and implications, the current chapter deals with practical advice that can be taken to increase the digital branding behavior, customer engagement, and brand performance. The recommendations are organized in a way that is beneficial to the SME digital agencies, policymakers and future researchers so that the study can make a contribution beyond the academic discussion.

The mentioned theoretical implications and empirical findings are converted into action-oriented recommendations in this chapter and aimed at enhancing branding strategies, quality of engagement, and organizational performance. The recommendations are developed in the five major areas as follows: (1) business-level recommendation to be applied to firms such as Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd.; (2) policy and industry-level intervention in building a sustainable brand; (3) recommendation that must be made by the future researchers to develop the conceptual model of this study; (4) how digital and operational practices are developed in SMEs; and (5) conclusion synthesis that summarizes all the recommendations in an integrated approach to sustainable brand success.

6.2 Business Recommendations

Considering the results, the effectiveness of digital branding in case of SMEs is based on the ability to integrate consistency, authenticity, and engagement-driven interaction. Digital firms like Marketo Edge ought to stop the short-term promotional strategy and embrace relationship-based branding strategy. The SMEs can enhance the involvement and long-term interaction with the brand through branding systems that strategically trigger emotional credibility and client involvement.

In the case of SMEs and such agencies as Marketo Edge, the recommendations that are business-related will be as follows:

6.2.1 Maintain Brand Consistency Across Platforms

Logical consistency of the brands turned out to be a decisive factor of reliability and remembrance. Companies ought to create elaborate guides on the brand style, including tone, typography, logo application and primary message patterns. Internal audits in a regular fashion should control that all content including social media posts, newsletters, or advertisement follows the same voice and visual standard. Poor communication may disjoint perception of the brand and credibility.

6.2.2 Cultivate Authentic and Transparent Communication

It was also observed that respondents always related genuine communication to professionalism and dependability. Thus, brands are to make sure that all messages to the public can be accurate regarding their values and operation. Emotional equity is achieved in the long term by avoiding inflated statements or false pretensions. Being open about prices, policies, and social impact programs could make people believe that the company is honest.

6.2.3 Foster Emotional Storytelling and Client Empathy

The paper identifies emotion involvement as a key mediator between branding and performance. Thus, SME online agencies are supposed to include emotional narration in their branding by emphasizing customer success tales and common values and partnership experiences. Emotionally relevant stories make digital brands more human, and a stronger sense of psychological connection is built, leading to loyalty and promotion.

6.2.4 Implement Data-Driven Personalization

The technologies of online allow segmenting the audience and experience. The analytics must be able to make the business customize the content and suggestions based on the way the user engages the related business, previous engagements, and preferences. One-on-one interaction creates the impression of concern and appreciation, both of which strengthen satisfaction and loyalty.

6.2.5 Encourage Client Co-Creation and Participation

Motivating clients to engage in the branding and content creation processes can become an important way to increase the level of engagement. The agencies are supposed to engage clients in campaign ideation, feedback loops and creative decision-making processes. The sense of ownership and commitment via this co-creation strategy enhances commitment and engagement as well as long-term relationships among clients.

6.2.6 Integrate Engagement Metrics into KPIs

Businesses should use quantitative and qualitative measures such as likes, shares, comments, dwell time and sentiment analysis to measure engagement. The dashboards of performance containing engagement KPIs may enable a manager to visualize the brand health beyond the sales information that will facilitate the feeling of continuous improvement and accountability.

6.2.7 Commit to Continuous Innovation

To stay abreast of the competition, the organizations ought to inculcate an environment of creative flexibility. The innovation will not be restricted to design only, but the new technologies of AI-based content creation, virtual reality branding, and augmented user experiences should

also be implemented. Consistent and innovative companies can safely preserve the novelty without turning into unknown.

All this business advice can be reduced to the fact that the engagement is no longer an incidental result of branding, but, in fact, the strategic heart of engagement, which can be used by the organization to maintain its growth, differentiation, and customer loyalty.

6.3 Policy / Industry Recommendations

On the one hand, taking into account the fact that companies like Marketo edge pay attention to the microlevel, the success is determined by the overall digital ecosystem, regulatory standards, and the industry standards. Therefore, the sustainable digital transformation in Pakistan and the other emerging markets is the key to macro-level policy and industry reforms.

On an industry level, the results indicate that there is the requirement of more robust ethical and professional guidelines in digital branding activities. Digital literacy initiatives ought to be encouraged by policymakers and industry associations and ethical standards developed that focus on transparency, authenticity and responsible communication. These actions can contribute to the competitiveness of SMEs and increase the confidence in online markets in developing markets.

6.3.1 Promote National Digital Literacy Programs

The government and the private sector should consider making the focus of digital literacy and the marketing education of SMEs a priority. The training activities that should be conducted in chambers of commerce, incubators, and universities are branding ethics, content strategy, data analytics, and social media governance.

6.3.2 Establish Ethical Advertising and Branding Standards

Regulators in the digital marketing sector, such as the Pakistan Advertising Association (PAA) should also specify the ethical principles of digital marketing to prevent deceptive communication and culturally sensitive digital marketing. These conventions would help in institutionalizing the authenticity and transparency as unacceptable values of branding.

6.3.3 Encourage Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs)

The collaboration between the state innovation departments and the digital marketing agencies may provide the access of SMEs to low cost branding tools, cloud applications and analytics services. Such relationships would contribute to accelerating the digital inclusion and sustainability in marketing.

6.3.4 Foster Industry–Academia Collaboration

Digital marketing labs should be developed by universities and research institutes, to allow students and professionals to jointly develop campaigns based on actual data. This would

increase applicability of research and also encourage a culture of innovation in the academic world.

6.3.5 Incentivize Sustainable and Responsible Branding

Tax incentives can be proposed by the policymakers or recognition programs can be offered to the firms that follow sustainable branding practices, encourage inclusivity, or have corporate social responsibility (CSR) incorporated into the marketing strategies.

These industry-wide programs will assist in changing the digital environment of Pakistan into being more transactional-based marketing rather than ethically based, knowledge-based, and innovation-oriented.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Researchers

This study can be further developed in future research through quantitative or mixed-method designs that will be used to test the relationships found in the S-O-R framework in a statistical manner. The additional validation of the generalizability of findings could be achieved by comparative studies across industries, countries, or between B2C and B2B settings. It is also suggested to use longitudinal research designs in order to investigate the dynamic of digital branding and engagement over time.

The existing study has offered substantial qualitative data of digital branding in relation to customer interaction and brand performance. It is however the challenge of the future researchers to expand this research to more quantitative and comparative methods. The correlation between the S-O-R constructs could be statistically verified and validated with the assistance of such methods as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM). More industries and countries in the sample should be better to enhance the external validity and further understanding of cultural implications on the engagement processes.

Other constructs which may be incorporated by future scholars in the S-O-R model include brand trust, customer satisfaction and perceived authenticity in order to come up with a holistic framework. Due to the high pace of technology changes in the digital marketing environment, studying the role of artificial intelligence, automation, influencer marketing, and virtual reality may offer new information on how these methods redefine the psychology of engagement.

Lastly, the gap between the perception and behavior can be filled by implementing mixed-method solutions that would integrate qualitative interviews with digital behavioral analytics, i.e., site visits, the number of clicks, and heatmap engagement. The relationship of the human emotional perception and technological accuracy should be kept on a balance in the future research when the dynamic sphere of digital branding consumers is maintained to be empirically based, contextually oriented and ethically aware.

6.5 Digital Practices and Operational Strengthening

In order to translate engagement theory into operational excellence, the organizations will have to incorporate branding values into their daily operations. The practices that can be improved to improve the creative efficiency and depth of relationships include:

6.5.1 Establish Integrated Brand Management Systems (IBMS)

A design assets management system, post representation and tracking system is centralized to provide consistency and minimize redundancy. IBMS platforms have the ability to rationalise approval procedures, monitor engagement outcomes and archive updated brand templates that can be accessed by teams.

6.5.2 Conduct Regular Brand Audits

Organizations are recommended to spend some time in every quarter analyzing their presence in the digital environment in terms of tone, relevance of content, and ethical considerations. This will enable them to modify the messages depending on the changing expectations of the audience and the market conditions.

6.5.3 Adopt Data-Driven Decision-Making

The performance of different campaigns in terms of data analytics should be measured with the help of Google analytics, HubSpot, and NVivo dashboards. Data should be used to determine how resources are allocated, the weak areas, and optimizing the customer journey touchpoints.

6.5.4 Enhance Workforce Skills and Digital Literacy

Printing ethics, design and communication techniques in employees creates an organizational capacity. Interdepartmental work between creative, analytical, and managerial teams will promote the overall thinking and the uniformness in action.

6.5.5 Automate Engagement Processes

Automation solutions such as incorporation of AI-based personalization, chatbots and customer relationship management (CRM) systems can be used to make the engagement process more efficient, quicker, and customer-satisfying without losing the personal touch.

6.5.6 Foster a Culture of Innovation and Reflection

Problem-solving is improved by encouraging experimentation, prototyping and open communication. The leadership must encourage reflective behaviors with teams evaluating the results of campaigns and learning the lessons of both success and defeat.

With such operational improvements, SMEs will be able to transform themselves into content producers and become experience creators and each interaction will become an engagement, empathy, and loyalty opportunity.

6.6 Future Prospects for AI-Driven Branding and Digital Engagement

As digital branding is further developed, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has created the possibility of creating hyper-personalized and emotive customer experiences. AI driven analytics, predictive algorithms and generative tools now allow brands to see consumer sentiment and change of tone on the communication in real time. This is more of a paradigm shift of responsive brand communication to proactive empathy whereby the technology can anticipate customer needs before they are discussed in the case of agencies like Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd.

However, these inventions cause immense problems in connection to morality, authenticity and human faith as well. Emotional cues that are automated in the wrong manner expose themselves to the risk of producing interactions that seem to be manipulative or unnatural. The future policies of digital engagement will also be based on balancing between individualization and transparency. Brands will need to ensure that AI applications should not interfere (and even extend) the actual relationship that underpins the long-term loyalty.

The results of this paper offer a valuable platform on which to consider how S-O-R framework can adjust to such technological settings. To understand the redefining of emotional involvement through the mediated experience of AI, the variables of algorithmic transparency (Stimulus), perceived authenticity (Organism), and sustained trust (Response) could be incorporated into the future research. This theoretical model can be extended to enable scholars and practitioners to comprehend the process of digital branding between human-controlled creativity and human-machine co-creation of hybrid types, by which technological innovation enhances, instead of eroding, the emotive nature of brand relationships.

6.7 Limitations of the Study

The research contributes to the literature of the studies associated with digital branding, customer interaction, and brand performance based on the StimulusOrganismResponse (S-O-R) framework, although the research is qualitative and contextual, emphasizing the study of a single research on Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd. A micro digital marketing organization based at Islamabad. In spite of the fact that it is possible to discuss one case study and description of the emotional and cognitive engagement, the case study will be hardly relevant to other industries and regions. The presented case was adequate due to the small area of geography and structure, but the research is deficient in external validity. The marketing is likely to be perceived differently and more likely to be engaged by people in the larger or the geo diverse markets. The other significant limitation is the size of the respondents (n = 11), all of whom

were among the current SME clients of the agency. The experiential descriptions of the respondents were rich; however, the small sample size on respondents restricts the representativeness of the data. In future research, we would recommend the sampling of a broader set of industries and geographic areas to enhance the external validity. Further, the authors recognize the possibility of the self-administered online questionnaire through which the respondents responded being biased. Subjectively speaking, the respondents can have defended their positions in a manner that avoided the non-favorable views and which were not documented.

This study has some limitations although it contributes to some content. This qualitative design and small sample size restrict the application of the study to other settings. Also, it could be subjected to bias where self-reported perception is used. Nonetheless, such restrictions are in line with the exploratory characteristics of a qualitative research, and they do not negate the richness and applicability of the insights produced.

Finally, the cross-sectional characteristic of the research captures the perception at one time and does not address the changes in engagement and brand relations in the long term. The effectiveness of branding and emotional loyalty usually evolves under the impact of the constant interactions and external market changes. Hence, the mixed method research design is suggested to be used in future research to monitor the long-term effect of the digital branding strategies on the results of performance.

6.8 Recommendations & Way Forward

Going forward, SME digital agencies need to consider digital branding as an ongoing engagement-based process as opposed to a marketing role. Through collaboration of branding tactics and emotional appeal, customer engagement and ethical communication, companies can turn online communications into brand equity. To both researchers and practitioners, these findings also highlight the need to incorporate psychological mechanisms of engagement in digital branding structures in the future in order to realize sustainable brand performance.

In the instance of researchers, the study opens up new dimensions of multilayered engagement models that combine both the psychology and technology and culture. More studies to explore and broaden the S-O-R model ought to be conducted in future to transform it into a robust theoretical framework that is applicable in understanding digital behavior in dynamically evolving markets.

The key conclusion, to which all the recommendations are associated, is that digital branding must be humanized. Emotional authenticity and relational depth are not more stable foundations of brand differentiation in an algorithmic and automated global environment than ever before. Not only will it attract attention, but it will also turn into a long term trust business asset because

SMEs that can strike a balance between technological savvy and actual empathy will not only gain attention, they will also gain a long-term business asset.

Anyway, these recommendations are a strategic path of the Marketo Edge and the likes, and it will open the way to a situation when branding, engagement and performance will be integrated in the digital intelligent, ethically-oriented and customer-focused ecosystem.

Appendix A: Research Instrument (Google Form)

Questionnaire for Interviews (Qualitative Study)

Section A: Basic Information

1. Can you briefly describe your role and how long you have been working with Marketo Edge Pvt. Ltd.?
2. Which digital marketing services have you primarily used from Marketo Edge (e.g., social media marketing, SEO, branding, web design, etc.)?

Section B: Digital Branding (Stimulus)

3. How would you describe Marketo Edge's overall digital brand identity?
4. What aspects of their online presence (e.g., website, social media, campaigns) attracted your attention most strongly?
5. Do you feel their digital communication and visuals represent the values or personality of the brand effectively? Why or why not?

Section C: Customer Engagement (Organism)

6. How do you feel emotionally attached or involved to the brand or the services of the Marketo Edge?
7. What is your level of engagement with the company online content (likes, comments, sharing post, feedbacks, etc.)?
8. Do you remember a time when the branding activities of Marketo Edge left you personally special or engaged?

Section D: Brand Performance (Response)

9. What has the visibility of your brand, customer retention or reputation done since interacting with Marketo Edge?
10. You can suggest Marketo Edge to other people based on your experience? Why or why not?

(Consent Form)

"The purpose of this interview is to learn about the perception of digital branding, engagement, and brand performance. The involvement is voluntary and all the answers will be kept as confidential information and will be utilized in the academic research only."

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