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Social Sell: How Retail Merchants wield Social Media to persuade the Customers

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Abstract

Through targeted marketing strategies, businesses have been able to manipulate customer behaviour while maintaining control over their image. Social media is an online community where people congregate and exchange information, images, videos, and other types of media. Social media will be used by the shops for client connection management in their merchandising operations. It is used as a tool to analyse customers. This could improve customer loyalty. Social media can be a very helpful tool in today's dynamic lives, but it can also lead to conflicts that can have a detrimental effect on an individual. By focusing on particular goals, this study seeks to investigate social media and the retail industry from all angles. Initially, the research aims to determine which social media sites are most popular among merchants, providing insight into the channels that are most frequently used by the company. It then attempts to evaluate the significant influence that social media has on the overall performance and operational dynamics of retail organisations. Beyond the organisational framework, the study explores brand perception and customer behaviour with the goal of revealing the complex interactions between social media and these factors in the retail setting. The inquiry also looks into the wider range of retail success in an effort to determine how social media influences the course of retail enterprises. The study's overarching objective is to shed light on the intricate web of connections between social media and the retail sector, with consequences for both scholarly research and real-world business plans.

Keywords: Social Media, Retail Business, Retailers, Consumer Behaviour, Brand Perception.

Introduction

Businesses all over the world face a lot of challenges when it comes to social media, but very few have figured out how to use these tools successfully to govern their marketing and communication strategies, often opting to use more traditional methods instead (AKRÍROUT, 2021).

Reaching a larger spectrum of target clients is one of the most crucial strategic goals for retailers to ensure long-term profitability of their company. It can be done in the modern environment by implementing novel techniques, such as increased online participation (Ali, 2021). This choice is beneficial since it makes switching to new platforms easier, but it also depends on artificial intelligence systems being used (Arango-Botero, 2021). As a result, social media is rapidly altering standard business practices in the retail industry by giving businesses additional chances to boost earnings while gaining access to useful technology solutions (Bianchi, 2018).

Social media's widespread effect has become a disruptive force in today's business environment, changing the retail industry's dynamics (Colicev, 2018). Businesses are becoming more and more aware of the crucial role social media platforms play in influencing consumer behaviour, brand perception, and ultimately the success of retail operations as technology develops (Da Silva, 2017). This research attempts to explore the complex relationship between social media and retail, with the goal of determining which platforms are most popular among retailers and evaluating the significant influence these platforms have on their operational strategies and results. This research aims to provide comprehensive insights that are both academically illuminating and practical for business practitioners navigating the dynamic and interconnected domains of social media and retail. The overarching goal is to unravel the nuanced relationship between social media and consumer behaviour, as well as its role in determining the success of retail businesses.

Social Media

The 20th century saw the introduction of social media into our lives, particularly in 2005–2006, when its use and availability of several social networks made it a significant aspect of our daily lives (Hasanat, 2020). These days, social media not only permeates daily life but also shapes e-commerce's future. Advertisements on social media are more common. The fashion industry is one where advancements occur frequently, and social media is the most affordable and practical means of communication (Jokonya, 2019). Over the past ten years, social media has emerged as a significant marketing tool that offers advertisers numerous chances to raise consumer awareness of their brands in addition to providing an additional marketing dimension (Jordan, 2018). Social media caused a stir in the marketing industry right away because of its capacity to reach large audiences made up of typical consumers (Lu, 2019).

Retail business

The retail industry was undergoing a transition before to 2020. Global merchants are facing enormous hurdles as a result of COVID-19. Some retailers will prosper in its wake, while others may find it difficult to survive (Mainardes, 2019). The public's growing use of the Internet across the globe has sparked this shift, prompting businesses to introduce e-commerce programmes and include the multichannel approach into their business strategies (Mammen, 2019).

Impact of Social Media on the Retail Business

Social media has undeniably altered consumer-company interactions and overall business practices in the retail sector. Social media platforms are dynamic avenues for marketing, communication, and brand promotion that let merchants build relationships with their target market directly (Nash, 2019). Retailers may develop their brand identity, increase awareness, and efficiently convey real-time updates, promotions, and product offerings by using these platforms. Social media has made information more accessible to all, enabling users to make well-informed judgements about what to buy based on suggestions, evaluations from peers, and endorsements from influencers. Furthermore, social media's interactive features enable two-way contact, which helps merchants get insightful feedback, resolve customer issues, and forge closer bonds with their customers (Nasution, 2022). Social commerce has become a major trend that goes beyond marketing and communication, with platforms integrating easy-to-use shopping experiences right within social media ecosystems. Using social media to promote products, increase sales (both in-store and online), build relationships with potential customers, and spread the word about their brand is a great move for retail businesses (Son, 2021). Retail firms that invest time and energy into developing a robust social media marketing plan can reap numerous rewards from social media, including:

- Boost revenue
- Promote by word-of-mouth
- Encourage client loyalty
- Establish a lively online community
- Establish ties with influencers and advocates
- Advertise goods and occasions
- A higher percentage of repeat business

Research objectives

The following is a summary of the study's main goals:

- To determine which social media sites are more popular and favoured by retailers.
- To evaluate how social media affects their firms' operational dynamics and results.
- To look into how social media affects brand perception and customer behaviour in the retail industry.
- To investigate how social media affects retail enterprises' ability to succeed.

Review of Literature

Ayodeji and Kumar (2019) concentrate on the social media analytics theoretical framework for online retail. They contend that by better understanding customers through the analysis of social media data, companies can better target their advertising, enhance their product lines, and provide superior customer care. Their study focuses on a number of social media analytics methods that can offer insightful information on consumer

preferences, brand perception, and the competitive environment. These methods include sentiment analysis, social network analysis, and brand monitoring(Ayodeji, 2019).

Begum, Yavuz, and Piotr (2020)adopt a more pragmatic stance and concentrate on the effects of social media within the particular setting of retail coffee. Their study shows how coffee companies may interact with consumers on social media, increase brand recognition, and even boost direct sales. They stress the value of social commerce tools, influencer marketing, and user-generated content in promoting coffee goods and building a devoted following(Begum, 2020).

Dolega et al. (2021)use a quantitative approach to investigate how social media activity affects a large online retailer's website traffic, orders, and sales. According to their research, there is less of a direct correlation between social media participation and website traffic in terms of orders and sales. Greater relationships between increased orders and sales and Facebook activity and larger campaigns indicate the significance of platform selection and effective targeting. This study offers insightful data-driven information for maximising social media marketing initiatives and assessing their efficacy(Dolega, 2021).

Haris et al. (2022)use a qualitative approach and concentrate on how social media usage affects retail customers' emotional attachment indirectly. According to their research, social media usage and emotional attachment are mediated by brand commitment and image. This implies that successful social media marketing techniques can promote favourable brand perceptions and client loyalty, which will ultimately strengthen the emotional ties that consumers have with the brand. This study highlights how crucial it is to have a compelling brand story and engage consumers in ways that go beyond simple transactions(Haris, 2022).

Mew (2020)carried out a thorough analysis of social media marketing tactics used by small businesses in the retail sector. Undertaken as a PhD dissertation at Walden University, the study explored the subtleties of how small businesses use social media's ever-changing landscape to improve their marketing strategies. Mew examined the particular opportunities and problems that social media poses for small firms by concentrating on the retail industry. The dissertation offers insightful information about the efficacy of various social media marketing techniques and how small retailers should respond to them(Mew, 2020).

Research Methodology

Study Design

To achieve its goals, this study takes a quantitative approach. To provide an overview of the current state of social media usage and its influence on shops, a cross-sectional study approach is utilised.

Sampling

Two hundred retailers who actively use social media for company operations make up the study's sample. The sample was chosen with purpose in mind, concentrating on retailers who use social media sites.

Data Collection

The main method of gathering data is by giving surveys to the chosen retailers. Each of the study objectives is addressed by the survey's questions, which span topics including preferred social media platforms, perceived operational dynamics and outcomes, customer behaviour, and brand perception.

Research Hypothesis

H0A: Social media has no appreciable impact on consumer choices and brand perception in the retail industry.

H1A: In the retail industry, social media has a significant impact on consumer behaviour and brand perception.

H0B: The success of retail businesses is not significantly impacted by social media.

H1B: Social media has a big impact on retail businesses' ability to achieve success.

Variables of the study

Independent Variable

Social media

Social media, the independent variable in this study, is the key component that is purposefully changed and investigated to see how it can affect other variables that fall under the purview of the investigation. The independent variable in the context of merchants using social media for their commercial operations includes a

wide range of platforms, approaches, and interaction techniques. The study attempts to clarify the influence of social media on important elements like consumer behaviour, business outcomes, operational dynamics, and brand perception in the retail industry by methodically altering its presence and use among the chosen sample of merchants. Since social media is dynamic and participatory, it can act as a catalyst for change. The goal of the study is to identify trends, correlations, and causes between the independent variable and the variables that are being studied. Social media is essentially the independent variable that drives the inquiry, enabling a thorough examination of its complex impact on several aspects of the retail sector.

Dependent Variables

Success of retail businesses

In this study, the dependent variable "Success of retail businesses" is a comprehensive measure that reflects the general prosperity and performance of retail businesses. Achieving success is a complex idea that includes things like long-term viability, market share, consumer satisfaction, and financial metrics. By analysing how social media has affected the success of retail businesses, this research hopes to draw conclusions about the nature of the connection between social media usage and the achievement of critical company objectives. This covers elements like revenue growth, market expansion, and building a strong brand image, eventually offering insightful information on what helps or hinders retail enterprise success.

Consumer behaviour and brand perception in the retail sector

The dependent variable "Retail sector consumer behaviour and brand perception" explores the nuances of how customers interact with retail offerings and how social media shapes their opinions. This includes looking at consumer preferences, buying habits, and sentiments on retail brands in general in relation to their online presence. By examining this dependent variable, the research aims to clarify the complex interactions that occur between merchants' social media presence and how customers form their thoughts, decide what to buy, and form impressions of companies in the ever-changing retail industry.

Analysis Techniques

One important statistical technique used in the research to compare various data sets is percentage analysis. This approach works especially well for summarising relationships and giving a relative assessment of the data distribution across different categories. Clear measurements were used, the field data were presented using a PC and the Factual Bundle for Social Science (SPSS 23.0 version), and pertinent hypotheses were tested using regression analysis and Pearson's Relationship and Relapse at the 0.05 alpha level.

Data Analysis and Results

Demographic profile analysis

Table 1: Respondents' demographic attributes

Demographic characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	107	53.5%
	Female	93	46.5%
Age	Below 25	31	15.5%
	25-35	69	34.5%
	36-45	57	28.5%
	46 and above	43	21.5%
Income	Below 1.5 lakh	52	26%
	1.5 lakh -3.5 lakh	76	38%
	3.5 lakh -5.5 lakh	44	22%
	Above 5.5 lakh	28	14%

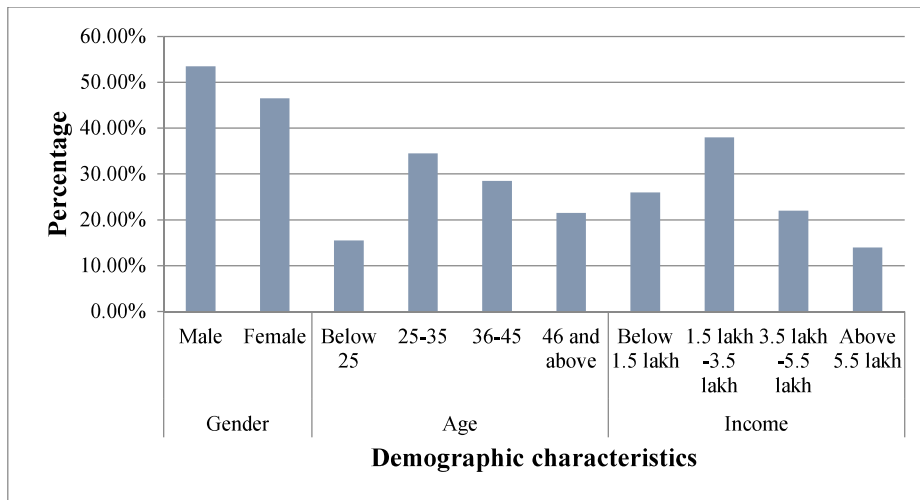


Figure 1: Graphical depiction of the respondents' demographic characteristic percentage

Table 1 presents a thorough summary of the study's participant profile and offers insightful information about the respondents' age, gender, and income bracket distribution. With 53.5% of respondents being male and 46.5% being female, the gender distribution shows a well-balanced representation, representing a diversified sample. The age distribution of the respondents shows that most are between the ages of 25 and 35 (34.5%), 36 to 45 (28.5%), and under 25 (15.5%). Individuals who are 46 years of age or older make up 21.5% of the sample, with a diverse representation across several age groups. In terms of income distribution, the information displays a wide range of economic conditions. Notably, the highest income band is the 1.5 lakh - 3.5 lakh range, with 38% of the respondents, followed by those earning less 1.5 lakh (26%), 3.5 lakh - 5.5 lakh (22%), and above 5.5 lakh (14%). In order to contextualise and interpret the study's findings within the diverse demographic landscape of the surveyed stores in Kochi, Kerala, researchers and practitioners can benefit from this demographic breakdown, which offers a comprehensive perspective of the participant composition.

Survey on Social Media Usage: Kochi Retailers

Retailers in Kochi, Kerala who use social media for their company participated in the survey. This section presents data that was gathered from 200 respondents utilising a scheduled interview schedule.

Table 2: Social media is being used by retailers for their company.

Is social media appropriate for corporate use?	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	111	55.5
No	89	44.5
Total	200	100

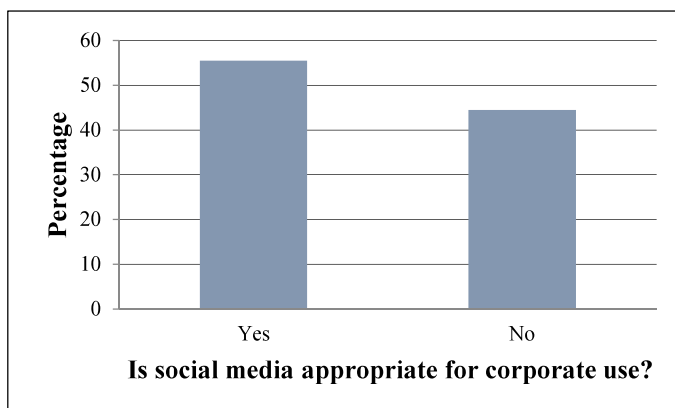


Figure 2: Graphical depiction of the percentage of views about retailers' use of social media for retail

Table 2 highlights the widespread adoption of social media in the retail sector by showing that 55.5% of retailers in the research actively use it for their company. On the other hand, 44.5% said they didn't use social media for business-related purposes. This demonstrates how important social media is to the plans of most of the businesses polled, which encourages more research into the particular tactics and their possible effects on financial results.

Table 3: Do you feel at ease running your company without social media?

Opinion	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	102	51
No	98	49
Total	200	100

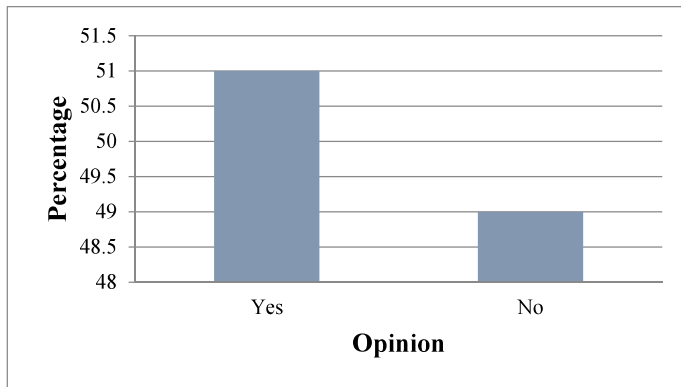


Figure 3: Graphical depiction of the percentage of respondents that say they feel comfortable running their business without using social media.

Table 3 presents a fair viewpoint from retailers: 51% say they are comfortable running their company without social media, while 49% disagree. This suggests that different people have different perspectives about how important social media is to their company plans, which calls for more research into the variables driving these viewpoints and how they could affect business outcomes.

Table 4: Which social media sites have you used from the list below?

Social media platform	Number of respondents	Percentage
Facebook	59	29.5
WhatsApp	65	32.5
Twitter	29	14.5
Blogs	22	11
LinkedIn	25	12.5
Total	200	100

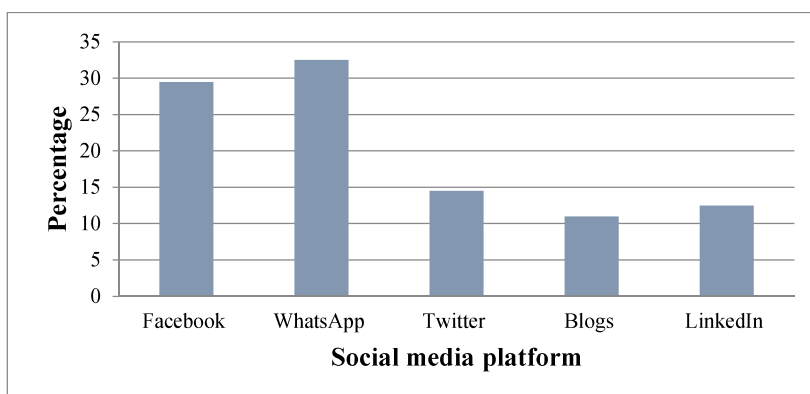


Figure 4: A visual depiction of the percentage of opinions regarding the social media network that you have utilised.

Table 4 displays the various social media platforms that shops choose. At 32.5%, WhatsApp is the most popular, followed by Facebook at 29.5%. The information highlights the various tactics used by shops, demonstrating the significance of a multi-channel strategy in their social media campaigns by utilising platforms such as Twitter, Blogs, and LinkedIn to varying degrees.

Table 5: Do you use social media to interact with customers?

Opinion	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	111	55.5
No	89	44.5
Total	200	100

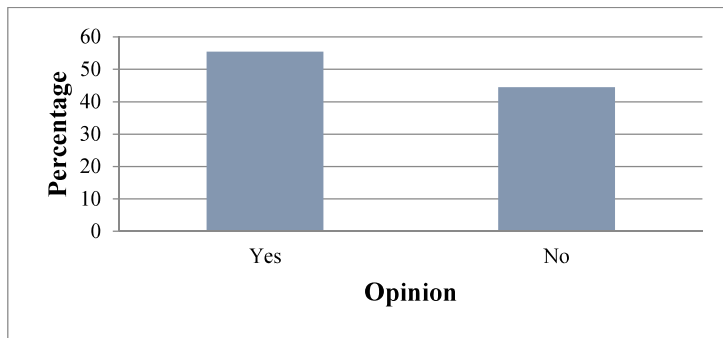


Figure 5: A visual depiction of the percentage of respondents' opinions regarding the use of social media for customer relations

Table 5 highlights the significant significance that social media plays in building relationships with customers by showing that 55.5% of retailers use it for customer interactions. This emphasises how important social media is as a tool for improving consumer interaction in the retail industry.

Table 6: Do you interact with suppliers and other agencies through social media?

Opinion	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	103	51.5
No	97	48.5
Total	200	100

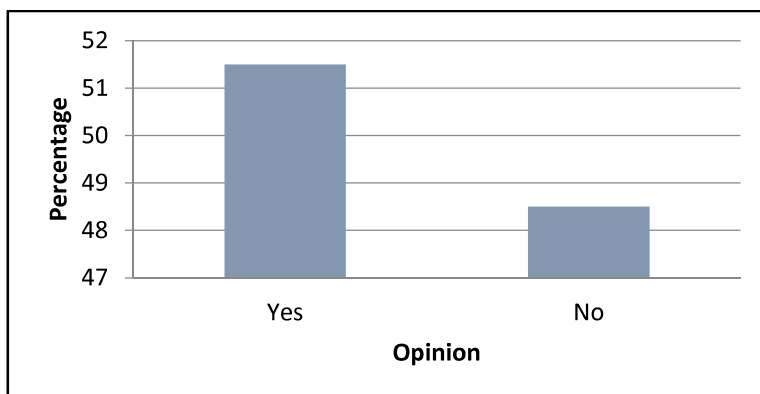


Figure 6: Graphical depiction of proportion of thoughts concerning Are you using social media in communicating with suppliers and other agencies?

Table 6 shows that merchants use social media in a balanced way, with 51.5% using it to communicate with other agencies and suppliers. This demonstrates social media's dual function as a tool for customers and a way for shops to interact with other parties. The results call for more investigation into the particular tactics and ramifications of utilising social media in these corporate partnerships.

Table 7: What is the average weekly time spent on business-related social media platforms?

Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1 Hour	47	23.5
1-5 Hours	42	21
5-10 Hours	30	15
10-20 Hours	28	14
20-40 Hours	27	13.5
40 Hours and Above	26	13
Total	200	100

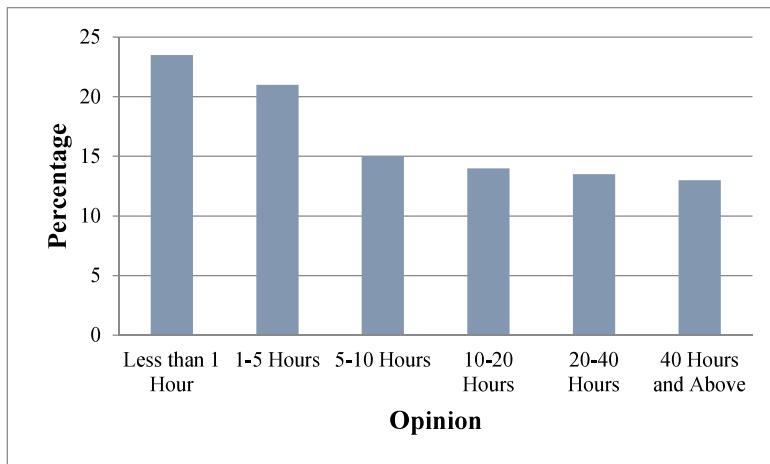


Figure 7: Graphical depiction of the percentage of views regarding the average amount of time spent each week on social media for business matters?

The varied amounts of time that merchants devote to social media for business matters are seen in Table 7. Remarkably, 34.5% of people work 1–5 hours per week; the figures gradually decline over longer time periods. This indicates that merchants' levels of engagement are variable but moderate, highlighting the necessity of taking a strategic approach when integrating social media into their business operations.

Pearson Correlation

Table 8: A Correlation Matrix

		Success of retail business	Consumer behaviour and brand perception in the retail sector	Social Media
Success of retail business	Pearson Correlation	1	.621**	.441**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0
	N	200	200	200
Consumer behaviour and brand perception in the retail sector	Pearson Correlation	.621**	1	.586**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0
	N	200	200	200
Social Media	Pearson Correlation	.441**	.586**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	
	N	200	200	200

As evidenced by the correlation coefficient of 0.441 in table 8, there is a considerable connection between success of retail business and social media. The significance of this link is indicated by the P-value for this connection coefficient, which is .005. The retail industry's social media usage, consumer behavior, and brand impression have a 0.586 connection coefficient, indicating a modest relationship.

Regression Analysis

Table 9: Model summary of variables

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.773 ^a	.597	.589	.90069
a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media				

Table 10: ANOVA summary

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	234.071	2	58.518	72.165	.000 ^b
	Residual	158.124	197	.811		
	Total	392.195	199			
a. Dependent Variable: Consumer behaviour and brand perception in the retail sector, Success of retail businesses						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media						

Table 11: Coefficient of Determination of the Variable

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.761	.307	-.623	-7.501	.017
	Social Media	.698	.087	.529	6.952	.003
a. Dependent Variable: Consumer behaviour and brand perception in the retail sector, Success of retail businesses						

The purpose of the relapse inquiry was to determine what free factors meant for a dependent variable. In this study, there was one independent variable and two dependent variables. Relapse analysis also uses the R square value to demonstrate the model's appropriateness. One method for testing hypotheses is relapse investigation, which ascertains the degree to which an independent variable influences a dependent variable. Table 11 presents data from a relapse analysis that looked at the influence of social media on a dependent variable. The stable term has a pessimistic coefficient at the point when social media usage is at its lowest, indicating a significant negative impact on the dependent variable. With p-upside of 0.003, social media have positively normalised coefficients (Beta upsides) of 0.529, making this development truly critical. This demonstrates the substantial relationship between social media and consumer behaviour and brand perception, and success of retail businesses.

Discussion

The social media usage survey conducted among retailers in Kochi, Kerala, offers a nuanced view of the tactics and acceptance of social media by companies operating in the retail industry. Table 2 highlights the extensive integration of social media in the industry, with 55.5% of respondents indicating that they actively use it for company operations. On the other hand, Table 3 presents a balanced viewpoint, as 51% of respondents said they feel comfortable avoiding social media, suggesting a range of opinions regarding its importance. Table 4 presents a range of social media platform preferences, with the majority being WhatsApp at 32.5%. This highlights the necessity for retailers' plans to adopt a multi-channel approach. Additionally, Table 5 shows that 55.5% of users utilise social media for customer interactions, highlighting the critical function that social media plays in building relationships. Table 6 demonstrates social media's dual use by showing a balanced utilisation (51.5%) for interactions with suppliers and other agencies. Lastly, Table 7 shows a varied time commitment: 34.5% of respondents report spending 1–5 hours per week, indicating a modest but varied degree of

participation. Together, these results highlight social media's complex function in the retail industry and call for more research into certain behaviours and their possible effects on financial results.

The factors examined in this study have significant correlations, as shown by the Pearson correlation analysis, which is shown in Table 8. The study reveals a significant positive correlation of 0.621 ($p < 0.001$) between the variables "Success of retail business" and "Consumer behaviour and brand perception in the retail sector." The significance of this link is highlighted by the statistically significant P-value (0.005), which shows that positive consumer behaviour and brand perception increase in tandem with retail businesses' performance. Furthermore, the analysis shows a moderately significant but large correlation between "Social Media" and "Consumer behaviour and brand perception in the retail sector," with a significant correlation of 0.586 ($p < 0.001$). These results highlight the interdependence of these factors and highlight the critical role that social media plays in influencing consumer sentiments and retail firms' overall success. The investigation reveals strong correlations that provide useful insights into the complex relationships between social media, customer behaviour, brand perception, and merchants' overall success in the modern retail environment.

The study's regression analysis, detailed in Table 9, reveals a robust relationship between the independent variable, "Social Media," and the dependent variables, "Success of retail businesses" and "Consumer behaviour and brand perception in the retail sector." The inclusion of the "Social Media" predictor may account for almost 59.7% of the variation in the dependent variables, according to the model summary, which shows a significant R-square value of 0.597. With a statistically significant F-value of 72.165 ($p < 0.001$), the ANOVA summary in Table 10 highlights the regression model's resilience and highlights its ability to provide a dependable fit for the data. Table 11's coefficient of determination corroborates these results, showing that the predictor variable "Social Media" has a standardised coefficient of 0.529, indicating a moderately strong and positive influence on retail businesses' success as well as consumer behaviour and brand perception. These findings highlight the empirical connection between retailers' use of social media and the observed differences in customer behaviour, brand perception, and overall retail industry success.

Table 12: Main findings of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Findings
H0A: Social media has no appreciable impact on consumer choices and brand perception in the retail industry.	Rejected
H1A: In the retail industry, social media has a significant impact on consumer behaviour and brand perception.	Accepted
H0B: The success of retail businesses is not significantly impacted by social media.	Rejected
H1B: Social media has a big impact on retail businesses' ability to achieve success.	Accepted

The alternative hypothesis (H1A) was supported by the findings of the hypothesis test, which asserts that social media significantly influences these aspects, is accepted, while the null hypothesis (H0A), which suggests social media has no significant influence on consumer behaviour and brand perception in the retail sector, is rejected. Similarly, the alternative hypothesis (H1B), which suggests that social media has a large impact on retail firms' success, is accepted, while the null hypothesis (H0B), which suggests that social media has no major impact on retail businesses' success, is rejected. These findings point to a statistically significant correlation between social media use and consumer behaviour, brand perception, and retail firms' overall success in the setting under study.

Conclusion

Internet use is now considered a need rather than a luxury in all spheres of life. Social media use in retail is a practical and less expensive substitute for traditional brick and mortar businesses. Our survey's retailers are likewise aware of this. The rise in popularity of social media has brought about changes in the retail industry. The retail industry's adoption and methods of social media vary widely, according to a survey conducted among shops in Kochi, Kerala. Although 55.5 percent of them actively incorporate social media into their business operations, 51% of them seem content enough to operate without it, indicating a balanced viewpoint. A multi-channel strategy is crucial given the disparate preferences among social media sites, with WhatsApp leading the pack at 32.5%. The 55.5% of people who use social media for customer relations purposes highlight how important these platforms are. Furthermore, social media fulfils a second purpose: 51.5% of users use it to communicate with vendors and other organisations. The variable time commitment—34.5% of participants devote one to five hours each week—indicates a somewhat high degree of engagement. Further highlighting the connections between social media, consumer behaviour, brand impression, and overall success in the retail sector are the Pearson correlation and regression studies. Together, these results demonstrate the complex

influence of social media on the dynamics of Kochi's merchants and call for more research into certain behaviours and the possible effects they may have on financial results in the changing retail environment.

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