

STRATEGIC MARKETING & BRAND MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Strategic marketing and brand management have emerged as critical determinants of organizational success in the contemporary hyper-competitive business environment. This empirical study investigates the intricate relationship between strategic marketing dimensions and brand management outcomes with specific reference to the Omani FMCG and D2C (direct-to-consumer) sector. The primary objective is to empirically validate how market segmentation, positioning strategy, integrated marketing communication (IMC), and digital marketing orientation influence brand equity, brand loyalty, and market performance. A quantitative research design was adopted, employing a structured questionnaire administered to 384 marketing managers, brand managers, and consumers in the Sultanate of Oman, covering Muscat and other governorates including Dhofar, North Al Batinah, and Ad Dakhiliyah. Data were collected using stratified sampling, both online and in person, between January and March 2026. Reliability was established through Cronbach's alpha (0.82-0.91), and validity through confirmatory factor analysis with Average Variance Extracted values exceeding 0.50. Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, ANOVA, and structural equation modeling (SEM) using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0. Results indicate that all four strategic marketing dimensions correlate positively with brand equity ($r=0.67$ to 0.78 , $p<0.01$), with the strongest correlation for positioning strategy ($r=0.78$). Regression analysis reveals that positioning strategy ($\beta=0.421$, $p<0.001$) and digital marketing orientation ($\beta=0.386$, $p<0.001$) are the strongest predictors of brand equity, within a model that explains 72.4% of its variance. The study contributes to existing literature by providing empirical evidence from Oman, an emerging GCC economy, and offers actionable insights for practitioners and SMEs aiming to build sustainable competitive advantage through strategic brand management, in line with the diversification agenda of Oman Vision 2040. Findings also support the mediating role of brand loyalty between brand equity and market performance, and show a significant difference in brand equity between Muscat and the other governorates.

Keywords: *Strategic Marketing¹, Brand Management², Brand Equity³, Consumer Loyalty⁴, Market Positioning⁵, Digital Branding⁶, Competitive Advantage⁷, Oman⁸, FMCG⁹*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, digital disruption, and empowered consumers, strategic marketing has transcended traditional promotional functions to become the core of organizational strategy[1]. Oman's retail market, valued at approximately USD 11.4 billion in 2025 and projected to reach USD 21.7 billion by 2034, with food and beverages accounting for about 41% of sales (IMARC Group, 2026), exemplifies a competitive, import-dependent consumer market in which brand differentiation is pivotal for survival. Within a population of roughly 5.4 million Omani nationals and resident expatriates (NCSI, 2026), global, regional, and local brands compete across hypermarkets, convenience stores, and a fast-growing online channel[2]. This research paper presents an empirical analysis of how strategic marketing practices influence brand management outcomes, addressing a critical gap in the literature on Oman and the wider Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. In this paper, the FMCG sector includes brands sold through conventional retail as well as direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands that reach consumers through their own online channels, social commerce, or delivery platforms[3].

1.1 Background of Strategic Marketing

Strategic marketing is defined as a market-driven process of strategy development that aligns organizational resources with market opportunities for long-term growth. Unlike tactical marketing, which focuses on short-term 4Ps execution, strategic marketing involves segmentation, targeting, positioning (STP), competitive analysis, and value creation[4]. According to Varadarajan (2010), strategic marketing orientation enables firms to anticipate market shifts and proactively reconfigure capabilities. In the Omani context, near-universal internet use (about 95% of the population according to ITU and World Bank estimates; World Bank, 2025), mobile connections equivalent to roughly 125% of the population (Kemp, 2025), the growth of electronic payments, and the expansion of grocery-delivery and quick-commerce platforms have fundamentally altered strategic imperatives[5]. Online retail growth is concentrated in Muscat and Al Batinah, where dense populations support same-day delivery (Research And Markets, 2026), while Omani-owned SMEs and entrepreneurs increasingly promote and sell through social media and influencers (U.S. International Trade Administration, n.d.). Furthermore, the integration of artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and customer relationship management (CRM) into marketing strategy has enhanced precision targeting[6]. However, SMEs, which account for about 98% of registered firms and roughly one-third of non-hydrocarbon GDP (IMF, 2025), vary widely in marketing sophistication, and firms outside the Muscat capital region may still rely on conventional approaches, resulting in suboptimal brand performance[7]. This divergence necessitates an empirical investigation into the effectiveness of contemporary strategic marketing tools. The resource-based view (RBV) suggests that marketing capabilities are valuable, rare,

inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources that drive sustained competitive advantage, thereby justifying the focus on strategic dimensions[8].

1.2 Importance of Brand Management in Competitive Markets

Brand management is the process of building, measuring, and managing brand equity to enhance long-term profitability (Park et al., 1986; de Chernatony and Riley, 1998). Aaker's (1991) brand equity model identifies brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, brand loyalty, and proprietary assets as core dimensions. Keller's (1993) Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model emphasizes the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response[9]. In highly cluttered markets, strong brands reduce consumer search costs, mitigate perceived risk, and command price premiums. For Omani FMCG companies, brand management is not merely about logos or taglines; it encompasses consistent brand storytelling across touchpoints, from traditional neighborhood groceries and hypermarkets to delivery apps and Instagram[10]. Empirical evidence from Oman (in the automobile category) indicates that brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand association, and perceived quality significantly influence consumer buying behavior, and that loyal consumers tend to repurchase the same brand and recommend it to family and friends (Sadriwala and Sadriwala, 2017). Moreover, brand loyalty directly impacts customer lifetime value (CLV), with even a small increase in retention potentially raising profitability substantially (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990). Strategic brand management also facilitates brand extensions, co-branding, and internationalization, which is particularly relevant for Omani brands seeking to scale into the wider GCC market[11]. Despite its importance, brand management faces challenges such as brand dilution due to over-extension, negative word-of-mouth amplified by social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), and counterfeit or unauthorized products, which Oman's Consumer Protection Law (Royal Decree 66/2014) expressly prohibits and which the Consumer Protection Authority enforces against. Effective brand management requires alignment between internal brand identity and external brand image, supported by integrated marketing communication. This study argues that without a coherent strategic marketing foundation, brand management initiatives remain fragmented and fail to deliver sustainable equity[12].

1.3 Research Objectives and Significance

The overarching aim of this empirical study is to examine the impact of strategic marketing on brand management outcomes and to establish a data-driven relationship model applicable to the Omani FMCG sector[13]. The specific objectives are: (i) to assess the current status of strategic marketing practices (segmentation, positioning, IMC, digital orientation) among selected FMCG brands; (ii) to measure brand management outcomes in terms of brand equity, brand loyalty, and market performance; (iii) to empirically test the correlation and causal relationship between strategic marketing dimensions and brand equity; (iv) to identify the most significant predictor of brand equity; and (v) to propose a strategic framework for enhancing brand management effectiveness. The significance

of this research is threefold[14]. Theoretically, it extends the application of RBV and CBBE models to an emerging GCC economy, addressing the limited empirical evidence on Oman and calls for more research outside Western settings. Methodologically, it employs a robust quantitative approach with 384 respondents, utilizing SEM to validate complex relationships[15]. Practically, findings will benefit marketing managers in designing evidence-based strategies, especially for Omani brands and SMEs outside the capital region seeking to scale nationally and into the wider GCC market. The study also contributes to policy discussions on supporting SMEs through digital branding initiatives under Oman Vision 2040 (Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, 2020) and Riyadh's 2026 SME development plan, whose pillars include regional and global expansion of SMEs and maximising local content (In-Country Value) (Oman Observer, 2026)[16]. By establishing empirical linkages, this paper bridges the gap between abstract marketing theory and actionable brand management practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on strategic marketing and brand management is extensive yet fragmented, particularly concerning empirical validation in emerging markets[17]. Kotler and Keller (2020) posit that strategic marketing planning involves analyzing market opportunities, selecting target markets, and developing marketing mix strategies that deliver superior value. Morgan et al. (2019) review evidence that market orientation and marketing capabilities positively influence firm performance. In the Omani context, Belwal et al. (2025) identified five distinct consumer segments in Omani food and grocery retail (Practical Value Seekers, Discerning Shoppers, Selective Online Shoppers, Social Brand Seekers, and Instant Gratifiers), underscoring that segmentation matters in a market where shopping motivations are heterogeneous[18].

Brand equity research has evolved significantly since Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Yoo et al. (2000) developed a multidimensional scale to measure brand equity and found that marketing mix elements have differential effects. For instance, high advertising spending and favorable store image enhance brand equity, while frequent price promotions erode it[19]. In Oman, Sadriwala and Sadriwala (2017) found, in the automobile category, that brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand association, and perceived quality all significantly influence consumer buying behavior, while Mbaga et al. (2018) reported ethnocentric tendencies among Omani consumers toward locally produced (primarily agricultural) products, suggesting that origin-based cues can strengthen brand associations[20]. More recent Omani work has centered on digital engagement: Al-Mashrafi and Khan (2022) showed that valuable campaigns, relevant content, frequent updates, popular content, and brand presence across platforms significantly shape customer-brand relationships among young Omani social media users, and Rais (2025) examined the influence of social media marketing on brand image and loyalty in Muscat's retail industry[21].

The linkage between strategic marketing and brand management has been explored through several theoretical lenses. The resource-based view argues that strategic marketing capabilities lead to superior brand equity. Srivastava et al. (1998) introduced the concept of market-based assets, distinguishing between relational and intellectual assets, both of which contribute to brand value[22]. Slotegraaf and Pauwels (2008) showed that brand equity and innovation strengthen the long-term effectiveness of promotions, underscoring the value of sustained brand investment. Brexendorf et al. (2015), in turn, point to the importance of aligning internal brand management with external communication. Relationship-oriented perspectives (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Fournier, 1998) add that brands build durable bonds with consumers, and customer value anticipation has been linked to satisfaction and loyalty (Flint et al., 2011), which motivates treating brand loyalty as an outcome in the present model[23].

Digital transformation has added a new dimension. According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2022), digital channels now command a growing share of marketing budgets across sectors, including FMCG. Verhoef et al. (2021) argue that digital touchpoints create a continuous brand experience, enhancing perceived quality[24]. However, Rust et al. (2021) caution that excessive digital automation may reduce brand authenticity. In Oman, social media is a key component of marketing communication (Al-Mashrafi and Khan, 2022), e-marketing tools shape the online consumer behavior of Muscat's youth (Al-Haraizah et al., 2020), and Omani SMEs increasingly sell through social media and influencers (U.S. International Trade Administration, n.d.). Despite these advances, there remains a paucity of studies integrating all four strategic marketing dimensions (segmentation, positioning, IMC, digital) into a single comprehensive model predicting brand equity, especially with primary data from Oman. This gap forms the rationale for the present study, which synthesizes prior work and tests an integrated framework[25].

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive and causal research design with a quantitative approach to empirically test the hypothesized relationships between strategic marketing and brand management constructs. The philosophical stance is positivist, emphasizing objective measurement and hypothesis testing. A cross-sectional survey method was employed, as it allows collection of data from a large sample at a single point in time, suitable for testing correlation and regression[26]. The research framework was developed based on extensive literature review, identifying four independent variables (market segmentation effectiveness, positioning strategy clarity, IMC consistency, digital marketing orientation) and three dependent variables (brand equity, brand loyalty, market performance). Hypotheses H1-H4 posit positive significant relationships between each strategic dimension and brand equity, H5 posits the mediating role of brand loyalty between brand equity and market performance (following Baron and Kenny, 1986, and tested with the Sobel test), and H6 tests regional differences in brand equity[27]. The study area covered the capital region of Muscat and three major regional centers, namely Salalah

(Dhofar), Sohar (North Al Batinah), and Nizwa (Ad Dakhiliyah), representing a mix of the capital-region market and other governorates to ensure geographic coverage within the Omani context[28].

The target population comprised marketing managers, brand executives, and consumers with high brand involvement in FMCG categories (personal care, food & beverages, household) residing in Oman, including both Omani nationals and resident expatriates. Sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for infinite populations (Cochran, 1977) at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, yielding $n=384$. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across gender, age, and income strata[29]. Data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire, made available in Arabic and English, divided into three sections: Section A - demographic profile (6 items), Section B - strategic marketing dimensions (20 items, 5 items per dimension adapted from Morgan et al., 2019 and Chaffey, 2022), Section C - brand management outcomes (15 items adapted from Yoo et al., 2000 and Aaker, 1991). All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree)[30]. The questionnaire was pre-tested with 30 respondents for face validity and pilot reliability, resulting in minor wording modifications. Content validity was established through expert review by three academicians and two industry practitioners. Data were collected both online (Google Forms) and offline (personal interviews) from January 15 to March 30, 2026, achieving a response rate of 89%. Ethical considerations including informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly adhered to, in line with the consent and confidentiality principles of Oman's Personal Data Protection Law (Royal Decree 6/2022)[31].

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26.0 and AMOS version 24.0. Initial data screening included checking for missing values (less than 2%, replaced by mean substitution), outliers (Mahalanobis distance), and normality (skewness and kurtosis within ± 2). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with threshold >0.70 considered acceptable, and composite reliability (CR) >0.70 . Convergent validity was examined through Average Variance Extracted (AVE >0.50) and factor loadings >0.60 (Hair et al., 2019)[32]. Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were computed to understand data distribution. Pearson correlation was used to examine bivariate relationships. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to identify significant predictors of brand equity, checking multicollinearity via VIF <5 . ANOVA was employed to test differences across demographic groups[33]. Finally, structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to validate the conceptual framework and test overall model fit using indices: CFI >0.90 , TLI >0.90 , RMSEA <0.08 , and Chi-square/df <3.0 . This multi-technique analytical approach ensures robustness and triangulation of findings, enhancing the empirical rigor of the study[34].

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Primary data were collected from 384 respondents as per the sampling plan. The analysis proceeds from demographic profiling to hypothesis testing, presenting five key tables that empirically support the research objectives and establish the relationship articulated in the abstract and conclusion.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=384)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	210	54.7
	Female	174	45.3
Age Group	18-25 years	98	25.5
	26-35 years	142	37.0
	36-45 years	88	22.9
	Above 45 years	56	14.6
Education	Graduate	145	37.8
	Post-Graduate	167	43.5
	Professional (MBA etc.)	72	18.7
Monthly Income	<400 OMR	76	19.8
	400-800 OMR	158	41.1
	>800 OMR	150	39.1
Region	Muscat Governorate	202	52.6
	Other governorates (Dhofar, Al Batinah, Ad Dakhiliyah)	182	47.4

The sample shows balanced gender distribution with majority in 26-35 age group (37%), representing young working professionals. High educational qualification (62.2% post-graduate and above) ensures informed responses on brand perceptions. Income distribution indicates middle to upper-middle class dominance, aligning with FMCG purchasing power. Almost equal representation of Muscat and the other governorates allows comparative analysis.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Validity Analysis

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach α	CR	AVE
Market Segmentation (MS)	5	3.89	0.71	0.84	0.86	0.55
Positioning Strategy (PS)	5	4.02	0.68	0.88	0.89	0.62
IMC Consistency (IMC)	5	3.76	0.74	0.82	0.84	0.52
Digital Marketing Orientation (DMO)	5	4.15	0.66	0.91	0.92	0.69
Brand Equity (BE)	5	3.94	0.70	0.87	0.88	0.60
Brand Loyalty (BL)	5	3.81	0.77	0.85	0.86	0.56
Market Performance (MP)	5	3.88	0.73	0.86	0.87	0.58

All constructs show mean values above 3.75, indicating positive perception of strategic marketing practices. Digital Marketing Orientation has highest mean (4.15), reflecting digital-first mindset. Reliability coefficients exceed 0.82, well above 0.70 threshold, confirming internal consistency. CR values >0.84 and AVE >0.52

establish convergent validity, supporting robustness of measurement model for further analysis. Discriminant validity under the Fornell-Larcker criterion was met for most construct pairs, but not for pairs involving the outcome constructs: the square roots of AVE for Brand Equity (0.77), Brand Loyalty (0.75) and Market Performance (0.76) are slightly below some inter-construct correlations (0.77 to 0.81, Table 3). These three constructs are therefore empirically close and are interpreted with caution.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix between Strategic Marketing and Brand Outcomes

	MS	PS	IMC	DMO	BE	BL	MP
MS	1						
PS	0.62**	1					
IMC	0.58**	0.64**	1				
DMO	0.55**	0.69**	0.61**	1			
BE	0.67**	0.78**	0.71**	0.74**	1		
BL	0.59**	0.72**	0.68**	0.70**	0.81**	1	
MP	0.61**	0.75**	0.69**	0.73**	0.79**	0.77**	1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, $N = 384$. MS=Market Segmentation, PS=Positioning Strategy, IMC=Integrated Marketing Communication, DMO=Digital Marketing Orientation, BE=Brand Equity, BL=Brand Loyalty, MP=Market Performance

Strong positive correlations exist among all variables ($r = 0.55$ to 0.81 , $p < 0.01$). Positioning Strategy shows highest correlation with Brand Equity ($r = 0.78$), supporting H2. Brand Equity strongly correlates with Brand Loyalty ($r = 0.81$) and Market Performance ($r = 0.79$), consistent with the mediating role tested formally in Table 5. No correlation exceeds 0.85, ruling out severe multicollinearity, though high inter-construct correlation suggests integrated nature of strategic marketing.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis - Impact of Strategic Marketing on Brand Equity

Independent Variable	Unstd. B	Std. Error	Standardized β	t-value	p-value	VIF
(Constant)	0.452	0.186	-	2.43	0.015	-
Market Segmentation	0.184	0.052	0.187	3.54	0.000	1.89
Positioning Strategy	0.412	0.058	0.421	7.10	0.000	2.14
IMC Consistency	0.201	0.049	0.213	4.10	0.000	1.95
Digital Marketing Orientation	0.368	0.055	0.386	6.69	0.000	2.08
Model Summary: $R = 0.851$, $R^2 = 0.724$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.721$, $F(4,379) = 248.6$, $p < 0.001$, Durbin-Watson = 1.92						

Regression model is highly significant ($F = 248.6$, $p < 0.001$) and explains 72.4% variance in Brand Equity ($R^2 = 0.724$), indicating strong explanatory power. All four strategic dimensions are significant predictors ($p < 0.001$). Positioning Strategy ($\beta = 0.421$) is the strongest predictor, followed by Digital Marketing Orientation

($\beta=0.386$). This implies that clear differentiation and digital engagement contribute most to brand equity building. VIF values <2.14 confirm absence of multicollinearity. Durbin-Watson 1.92 indicates no autocorrelation.

Table 5: ANOVA and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β / F-value	p-value	Result
H1	MS $\rightarrow$ BE	$\beta=0.187$	<0.001	Supported
H2	PS $\rightarrow$ BE	$\beta=0.421$	<0.001	Supported
H3	IMC $\rightarrow$ BE	$\beta=0.213$	<0.001	Supported
H4	DMO $\rightarrow$ BE	$\beta=0.386$	<0.001	Supported
H5	BE $\rightarrow$ BL $\rightarrow$ MP (Mediation)	Sobel $z=6.42$	<0.001	Supported
H6 (ANOVA)	Muscat vs Other Governorates Brand Equity	F=12.84	0.000	Significant Difference
Model Fit (SEM)	CFI=0.942, TLI=0.931, RMSEA=0.059, $\chi^2/df=2.34$	-	-	Good Fit

Hypotheses H1-H5 are supported, confirming positive impact of strategic marketing on brand equity and mediation of brand loyalty. SEM model fit indices meet recommended thresholds (CFI >0.90 , RMSEA <0.08), validating conceptual framework. ANOVA reveals significant difference in brand equity perception between Muscat (Mean=4.08) and the other governorates (Mean=3.79) (F=12.84, $p<0.001$), supporting H6 and suggesting that brands serving consumers outside the capital region need stronger positioning efforts.

5. DISCUSSION

The empirical findings provide compelling evidence that strategic marketing is a significant antecedent of brand management outcomes, explaining 72.4% variance in brand equity. The strongest predictor, positioning strategy ($\beta=0.421$), aligns with the notion that clear differentiation is paramount in cluttered FMCG markets. Brands that articulate a distinct value proposition whether based on natural ingredients, affordability, Omani heritage and local origin, or aspirational lifestyle achieve higher perceived quality and associations[36]. Digital marketing orientation ($\beta=0.386$) emerged as second strongest predictor, underscoring digital transformation's role in a market with near-universal internet access and heavy social media use. Which suggests that digital channels are an important route to building brand equity, and the Muscat versus other governorates difference (Table 5) indicates that this may be especially relevant for consumers outside Muscat, where social-media-led discovery and delivery platforms are widening access to brands[37].

Correlation analysis reveals brand equity as central hub linking strategic inputs to loyalty and performance. The high correlation between brand equity and loyalty ($r=0.81$) supports Oliver's (1999) loyalty framework where cognitive equity precedes affective loyalty[38]. Regression results also validate IMC's contribution ($\beta=0.213$), though relatively lower, indicating that while consistency matters, content relevance and channel effectiveness

matter more. Market segmentation ($\beta=0.187$) shows modest but significant effect, possibly because segmentation benefits are indirect, mediated through positioning. The ANOVA finding of a Muscat vs other-governorates difference ($F=12.84$) suggests a capital-interior divide in brand perception; consumers outside Muscat may prioritize functional benefits and familiar, trusted brands over symbolic ones, requiring adapted positioning. Because Omani consumers have also shown ethnocentric tendencies toward locally produced goods (Mbagi et al., 2018), origin-based positioning may be a particularly effective lever for local brands competing against imported ones[39].

SEM model fit ($CFI=0.942$, $RMSEA=0.059$) confirms conceptual framework's validity. The mediation analysis (Sobel $z=6.42$) supports brand loyalty as a mechanism translating equity into market performance, reinforcing need for loyalty programs. Overall, discussion indicates that integrated strategic marketing, rather than isolated tactics, drives brand management success.

6. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF DATA AND COMPARISON WITH PAST WORK

Critically analyzing the data reveals both convergence and divergence with extant literature, offering nuanced insights. First, the R^2 of 0.724 indicates stronger explanatory power than is typically associated with single-factor models of brand equity, such as the social-media-centered Omani studies of Al-Mashrafi and Khan (2022) and Rais (2025), suggesting that our integrated four-dimension model captures more comprehensive variance. This improvement may stem from the joint inclusion of positioning and digital orientation within one model. Direct comparison of coefficients is not possible, however, because the Omani studies differ in sample, constructs, and measurement[40]. Moreover, high inter-correlation among independent variables (0.55-0.69) raises concern of conceptual overlap, though VIF values mitigate multicollinearity statistically. Compared to Yoo et al. (2000) who found price promotions negatively affect equity, our study did not include price as variable, potentially overestimating positive effects; future research should control for pricing strategy, which is especially salient in Omani grocery retail where, as Belwal et al. (2025) show, Practical Value Seekers form a distinct segment.

Positioning strategy's dominance ($\beta=0.421$) corroborates Keller (1993), who emphasizes clear and differentiated brand associations as an equity driver, and is consistent with Sadriwala and Sadriwala (2017), who found that brand association and perceived quality significantly influence buying behavior in Oman. It contrasts, however, with the digital-centered emphasis of Omani studies such as Al-Mashrafi and Khan (2022) and Rais (2025), where digital engagement was the primary focus by design. This divergence may be contextual: our sample includes managers and consumers, whereas those studies concentrated on young, social-media-active Omanis or retail employees, which may inflate the apparent digital effect. Our finding that IMC has the lowest beta (0.213) among the four dimensions suggests that message consistency alone is not a differentiator[41]. A possible explanation is media fragmentation; traditional IMC consistency is less effective when consumers encounter brands across

hypermarket promotions, social media, messaging apps, and delivery platforms with varying message control. Digital orientation's strong effect ($\beta=0.386$) aligns with the Verhoef et al. (2021) digital experience argument, yet its correlation with brand equity ($r=0.74$) is lower than that of positioning ($r=0.78$), perhaps because respondents outside Muscat still value offline experiences in hypermarkets and traditional groceries, tempering digital impact.

The mediation result ($BE \rightarrow BL \rightarrow MP$) supports Srivastava et al. (1998) market-based assets theory and Oliver's loyalty chain, and echoes Sadriwala and Sadriwala (2017), who found that loyal Omani consumers tend to repurchase the same brand and recommend it to family and friends. The strong brand equity-loyalty correlation of 0.81 may also reflect the collectivist character of Omani society, where family recommendations and word-of-mouth carry substantial weight in purchase decisions; because our multi-brand design differs from the single-category Omani studies cited, the strength of mediation should be interpreted with caution.

Critical limitation is cross-sectional design, which limits causal inference despite SEM; longitudinal data would better establish temporal precedence. Self-reported Likert data may suffer common method bias, though Harman's single-factor test showed 28% variance, below 50% threshold, mitigating concern. Discriminant validity among the outcome constructs was not fully established (Table 2), so brand equity, brand loyalty and market performance should be read as closely related constructs, and future work should test HTMT and bootstrapped mediation rather than rely on the Sobel test alone. In addition, Muscat Governorate accounts for roughly 29% of Oman's population (NCSI, 2026) but 52.6% of this sample, and because part of the data were collected through an online link, strict random selection cannot be guaranteed; national-level generalization should therefore be cautious, and D2C and conventional FMCG brands were not analyzed separately. The sample is skewed toward educated, middle-income respondents (all respondents hold at least a graduate degree, and 62.2% are postgraduate or above), which limits generalizability to less-educated and remote rural segments where brand awareness drivers differ. Omani nationals and resident expatriates were not analyzed separately although their consumption patterns and brand preferences may differ, and data collection partly coincided with Ramadan 2026, when shopping and media habits typically shift. Additionally, focus on FMCG may not generalize to durables or services where brand decision journey is longer. Compared to Rust et al. (2021) caution on digital authenticity, our data did not measure authenticity, potentially missing negative side of over-digitalization. Future studies should include moderators like brand authenticity, consumer ethnocentrism, nationality (Omani vs expatriate), and product involvement.

Nevertheless, study advances literature by empirically validating an integrated model in Oman, a relatively under-researched GCC market. The significant Muscat vs other-governorates ANOVA difference highlights geographic heterogeneity within Oman, challenging assumptions that brand strategies developed for the capital region transfer unchanged to other governorates, and is consistent with Belwal et al. (2025), who identified distinct consumer segments in Omani grocery retail. Practically, findings suggest resource allocation should prioritize positioning and digital, while maintaining baseline segmentation and IMC. Theoretically, results support RBV: marketing

capabilities indeed are VRIN resources explaining performance variance, but with contingency that digital capabilities are becoming threshold rather than differentiating.

7. CONCLUSION

This empirical study provides evidence that strategic marketing dimensions significantly influence brand management outcomes in the Omani FMCG sector. Based on primary data from 384 respondents, findings demonstrate that positioning strategy and digital marketing orientation are the most potent drivers of brand equity, within a model that explains 72.4% of its variance. Strong correlations and SEM validation confirm conceptual framework robustness. The study shows that brand loyalty mediates the relationship between brand equity and market performance, and that geographic context (Muscat vs other governorates) is associated with significantly different equity perceptions. Directly align with abstract propositions and reinforce importance of integrated strategic approach. For practitioners, implication is clear: invest in clear, differentiated positioning and digital-first engagement while ensuring segmentation precision and IMC consistency. For Omani brands and SMEs outside the capital region, leveraging digital channels to overcome geographic limitations offers a viable path to national and GCC competitiveness, consistent with the diversification goals of Oman Vision 2040. Limitations include cross-sectional design and educated sample bias, suggesting future longitudinal and rural-inclusive research. Overall, study contributes empirical evidence from an emerging GCC economy (Oman), advancing RBV and CBBE theories and providing actionable roadmap for sustainable brand building through strategic marketing excellence.

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