

## INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND NATIONALITY ON CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS EMAIL MARKETING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IN OMAN

Sarfraz Fayaz Khan<sup>1</sup>, Asad Rehman<sup>2</sup>, Mohammed Imran Khan<sup>3</sup> and  
Mohammad Ahmar Khan<sup>4</sup>

**Abstract:** *The advent of internet has open up new doors for marketing. Digital marketing is a relatively nascent yet growing trend in the Middle East region, especially in Oman. With this in mind, this study empirically explored the impact of Gender and Nationality on the consumer's perception towards email marketing using 'Pre-Disposition', 'Signup-Intention' and 'Initial Reaction' as the constructs for the study. Data was collected from a sample of 100 respondents with the help of a questionnaire developed for this study using Google forms. Findings of the study revealed that both the genders have an almost similar and positive response towards email marketing. However, Omani nationals were found to be more in acceptance of marketing email as compared to the expats.*

**Keyword:** *Email Marketing, Digital Marketing, Omani Consumer, Consumer Behavior*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Internet is the most influential invention of the present times. It has affected each and every aspect of our lives. Communication via email was and still is one of the key applications of internet which has led to its widespread use. Today, there are 3.2 billion internet users in the world with Oman having a little over 2 million internet users bringing 66.45% of the population online (International Telecommunication Union - United Nations, 2016). The corporate world is always seeking ways of tapping this vast database of internet users via various digital marketing strategies, email marketing being the most prominent amongst them. Corporate organizations have found email marketing to be an effective tool as it reaches the existing as well as the future consumers in a cost and time effective way. This has resulted in consumer's inboxes being flooded with marketing emails. This study focuses on Omani consumers' perception of email marketing and the impact it has on Omani consumers' reaction towards it.

---

<sup>1</sup> Asst. Professor, DMIS, CCBA, Dhofar University, Sultanate of Oman, E-mail: [skhan@du.edu.om](mailto:skhan@du.edu.om)

<sup>2</sup> Asst. Professor, DMM, CCBA, Dhofar University, Sultanate of Oman, E-mail: [arehman@du.edu.om](mailto:arehman@du.edu.om)

<sup>3</sup> Asst. Professor, DAF, CCBA, Dhofar University, Sultanate of Oman, E-mail: [imran@du.edu.om](mailto:imran@du.edu.om)

<sup>4</sup> Asst. Professor, DMIS, CCBA, Dhofar University, Sultanate of Oman, E-mail: [mkhan@du.edu.om](mailto:mkhan@du.edu.om)

## **2. BACKGROUND OF EMAIL MARKETING:**

The Advent of internet paved way for various new forms of digital marketing techniques such as SMS, websites, search engines, social media and email. Email marketing is a form of digital marketing in which a commercial text or multimedia message is sent through an email to a target group of people. In general, any email sent by a business to present or prospective customers could be seen as email marketing (Jones, 2009). From a consumer's perspective, marketing email can be broadly categorized as the ones consumer has opted for by providing email address called as signup emails/permission based email and the ones where consumer's email address was shared or even sold amongst companies for marketing purpose. Companies drive various strategies to build a database of email addresses of present and future customers. One of the best strategies has been luring customers to provide their email addresses in exchange of discounts and special offers. Where companies fail in collecting email addresses by direct means, the indirect approach is adopted where prospective consumer's email address list is purchased (Priyanka, 2012).

### **2.1. Categories of marketing emails:**

Companies send different kinds of email to its present and prospective customers. Based on the functions and the purpose of the email, they are categorized as follows:

#### **2.1.1. *Email Newsletters (Opt-In / Permission Based Emails)***

These are the emails which the consumers have opted for by subscribing to it. The purpose of such email newsletter is to build brand loyalty and also provide company / product updates.

#### **2.1.2. *Transactional Emails***

Transactional emails are sent to individuals as a result of an action triggered by the individual. These are automated notifications such as welcome emails, shipping notices, order confirmations, password reminders, purchase receipts, etc. These emails give users a peace of mind in knowing that their transactions have been processed properly (Mailjet, 2016). These Emails also provide an opportunity to companies to include promotional messages along with transactional details.

#### **2.1.3. *Direct emails***

Direct emails are sent entirely for the purpose of communicating a promotional message. These are generally sent to prospective consumers who have not registered or signed up for receiving these emails and their email address was either purchased or shared through a third party company.

### **3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Email marketing has been a widely discussed and researched topic. Plenty of literature is available for review on email marketing in the international context. Email marketing is a relatively new concept in the Middle Eastern countries, especially in the suburban areas of Oman. This paper aims to fill this void by providing Omani consumer's perspective of email marketing. For the sake of this research, the following researches were reviewed which represents the global scenario on email marketing.

The companies across the world have been fairly quick to realize the potentials and benefits of digital marketing and have since long adapted to it with exponential growth in the digital marketing budget. In 2014, digital marketing was the fastest growing advertisement category in the world with 16 percent growth ( Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council, 2015). As per the estimate of McKinsey by 2016, 168.5 billion dollars will be spent by the marketing organizations on digital marketing (McKinsey & Company, 2015). However, corporates in Oman seems to still be caged in the traditional marketing mindset. Wisdom dictates that consumer behaviors and attitudes should form the basis of marketing strategies and budget, but strangely companies in Oman contradict the market trend and continues to spend most of their marketing budget on newspapers, magazine and other print media. Despite the advent of digital media and the migration of consumers to digital platforms, in Oman, newspapers are still the most preferred means of advertisement with 85% of the marketing expenditure being spent on newspapers in 2013 (Mediate Oman, 2015). This great divide between the digital consumers and traditional marketing methods further increases the importance of this research as it seeks to explore the impact of email marketing on Omani consumers' perception and reaction towards email marketing.

Similar studies have shed much needed light on the challenges and opportunities in email marketing domain in different parts of the world. Another study revealed that contrary to popular belief of the time, consumers hold a moderately favorable view of advertising on a number of dimensions, entertainment and information being the most important (Sharon Shavitt, 1998). Other studies have also highlighted the dimensions of entertainment and information in internet based advertising and also that users are playing a highly active role on the internet and have become a part of internet by selecting, editing and controlling the information according to their preference. This high involvement is also a factor leading to higher impact and acceptance of web advertisement (Zheng Zhou, 2002). Researchers have also explored the effects of subscribed email newsletters (opt-in emails) on brand loyalty of a multinational cosmetic brand. The results have suggested that routine emails have been instrumental in increasing consumer's loyalty towards the brand (Raulas, 2004). This research also proves that email newsletters (opt-in emails) have a higher

success ratio than direct marketing emails. Similar findings were also supported by (Hsin Hsin Chang, 2013) suggested that permission based email is more effective as compared to spam email advertising. In a research on the Syrian consumers' beliefs regarding attitude and behavioral responses toward e-mail advertising, the author concluded that entertainment and informativeness are two key parameters for the success of marketing emails and they positively influenced Syrian consumers. Syrian consumers reflected a positive attitude towards content-rich, colorful and entertaining emails (Mahmoud, 2015).

#### 4. HYPOTHESIS

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the present study:

$H_{01}$ : Significant differences do not exist between male and female respondents with respect to their 'Predisposition', 'Sign-up intention' and 'Reaction' towards e-mail marketing.

$H_{02}$ : Significant differences do not exist between Omani nationals and expat respondents with respect to their 'Predisposition', 'Sign-up intention' and 'Reaction' towards e-mail marketing.

#### 5. METHODOLOGY

##### 5.1. Objectives

1. To study the influence of gender on consumers' perceptions towards email marketing.
2. To study the influence of nationality on consumers' perceptions towards email marketing.

##### 5.2. Method of data collection and sampling

For this study, primary data was collected through online questionnaire designed using Google forms. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; the first section asked general demographic information and the second section was aimed towards gathering data about consumers' perception towards email marketing. For the second section, a five-point Likert scale was used, which rated (1) one as strongly disagree and (5) five as strongly agree.

The statements developed for this research were meant to measure consumers' 'Predisposition', 'Signup Intention' and 'Initial Reaction' toward email marketing.

This questionnaire link was emailed to 150 active internet users across Oman who were contacted on the basis of convenience. Samples size larger than 65 and less than 500 are appropriate for most research (Sekaran, 2000). Based on this, 100

**Table 1**  
**Constructs used in the study**

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Item Description</i>	<i>Source</i>
Predisposition	I enjoy receiving marketing emails I trust the information received through marketing emails	(Mahmoud, 2015)
Signup Intention	I sign up for receiving marketing email to get product related information I sign up for receiving marketing emails to avail discounts and special offers	(Ducoffe, 1996)
Initial Reaction	When I receive marketing emails, I delete them without reading When I receive marketing emails, I delete them after reading When I receive marketing emails, I report them as spam When I receive marketing emails, I read them and go to the product website for more information	Developed for this study

numbers of responses were accepted on Google forms. These 100 numbers of responses forms the basis for the statistical analysis for this research.

## 6. FINDINGS & ANALYSIS:

$H_{01}$ : Significant differences do not exist between male and female respondents with respect to their 'Predisposition', 'Sign-up intention' and 'Reaction' towards e-mail marketing.

**Table 2**  
**Gender wise descriptive**

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>STDV</i>
<b>Predisposition</b>	Male	58	3.25	1.28
	Female	42	3.41	.85
<b>Signup Intention</b>	Male	58	3.52	1.11
	Female	42	3.60	1.01
<b>Initial Reaction</b>	Male	58	3.64	.90
	Female	42	3.22	.66

**Table 3**  
**Gender wise 't' test**

<i>Gender (Male and Female)</i>		<i>'t'</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
<b>Predisposition</b>	Equal variances assumed	-.69	98	.49
<b>Signup Intention</b>	Equal variances assumed	-.41	98	.68
<b>Initial Reaction</b>	Equal variances assumed	2.55	98	.01

The results of the 't test' show that the level of significance is more than 0.05 in case of 'Predisposition' (sig.=0.491>0.05) and 'Signup intention' (sig.=0.681>0.05), therefore the null hypothesis  $H_{01}$  is supported. It may be inferred that male and female respondents have almost an identical predisposition towards email marketing. They appear to be somewhat trusting and enjoying the emails which they receive from different marketing organizations. Further, male and female respondents have almost similar signup intentions as they look forward to getting more product related information and some discounts/special offers from the emails which they receive from different marketing organizations.

However in case of 'initial Reaction' the level of significance is less than 0.05 (sig.0.012<0.05), therefore  $H_{01}$  is rejected.

It may be inferred that the males exhibit a somewhat stronger reaction towards the emails which they receive from different marketing organizations while the females appear to be somewhat neutral in this regard.

**$H_{02}$ : Significant differences do not exist between Omani and expat respondents with respect to their 'Predisposition', 'Sign-up intention' and 'Reaction' towards e-mail marketing**

**Table 4**  
Nationality wise descriptive

	Nationality	N	Mean	STDV
<b>Predisposition</b>	Omani	63	3.43	1.04
	Expat	37	3.13	1.24
<b>Signup Intention</b>	Omani	63	3.53	1.11
	Expat	37	3.58	1.01
<b>Initial Reaction</b>	Omani	63	3.45	.77
	Expat	37	3.49	.93

**Table 5**  
Nationality wise 't' test

Nationality (Omani and expat)		't'	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Predisposition</b>	Equal variances assumed	1.29	98	.19
<b>Signup Intention</b>	Equal variances assumed	-.18	98	.85
<b>Initial Reaction</b>	Equal variances assumed	-.21	98	.83

The results of the 't test' show that the level of significance is more than 0.05 in all cases, 'Predisposition' (sig.=0.197>0.05), 'Signup intention' (sig.=0.853>0.05), and 'initial Reaction' (sig.=0.832>0.05) therefore the null hypothesis  $H_{02}$  is fully supported. Statistically there appears to be no significant differences in the perception of Omanis and expats with respect to the e-mail marketing. However, the mean values obtained in case of predisposition towards e-mail marketing shows

that the Omani respondents are more in agreement with the e-mails they receive from the marketing organizations while the expat community seems to be a bit skeptical about such e-mails.

## **7. DISCUSSION**

The present study shows that in the Omani context male and female respondents are somewhat positively predisposed towards email marketing. They appear to be somewhat trusting and enjoying the emails which they receive from different marketing organizations. Further, male and female respondents have almost similar signup intentions as they look forward to getting more product related information and some discounts/special offers from such emails. Thus, it may be safely concluded that marketing emails are well received by the males and females alike. Primary reasons being the entertainment or enjoyment they provide along with the lure of discounts and information about products and brands. This finding is supported by the findings of (Mahmoud, 2015) according to which consumers like email ads which deliver timely, credible and content rich information.

However in case of 'Initial Reaction' the males appear to be more proactive than females in exhibiting their reaction to the emails which they receive from different marketing organizations. The present study shows no significant differences in the perception of Omanis and expats with respect to the e-mail marketing. However, the mean values obtained in case of predisposition towards e-mail marketing shows that the Omani respondents are more in agreement with the e-mails they receive from the marketing organizations while the expat community seems to be a bit skeptical about such e-mails. The results of the present research are in general concurrence with the previous researches in the area of internet advertising (Mahmoud, 2015) (Sharon Shavitt, 1998) (Zheng Zhou, 2002).

## **8. MARKETING IMPLICATIONS:**

The Marketers should try to provide the right mix of 'infotainment' through emails by making them more entertaining and informative. Suitable efforts should be made to reduce the incidences where the consumers delete the mails even without reading them or report them as spam. This could be achieved if the marketers opt for permission based emails, as some researchers have described opt-in e-mail ads as more effective than spamming, as the former sends the ads to the targeted individual instead of randomly sent (Hsin Hsin Chang, 2013). This study predicts a reasonably promising future for email marketing in Oman as the Omani nationals have been found to be more receptive to marketing emails. It may also be recommend to meticulously design and plan for e-mail advertising campaigns in Oman in order to tap the vast market which is already positively predisposed toward email marketing.

### References

- Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council. (2015), Retrieved 2016, from <https://www.cmocouncil.org:https://www.cmocouncil.org/facts-stats-categories.php?view=all&category=marketing-spend>
- McKinsey & Company. (2015), Retrieved 2016, from McKinsey & Company Website: <http://www.mckinsey.com/industries/media-and-entertainment/our-insights/the-state-of-global-media-spending>.
- Mediate Oman. (2015), Retrieved feb 2016, from <http://mediate-oman.com/>: <http://mediate-oman.com/media-scene-2014-15/>
- International Telecommunication Union - United Nations. (2016, Feb 21). Retrieved Feb 21, 2016, from CT Facts and Figures – The world in 2015: <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx>
- Mailjet. (2016, feb 22), Retrieved feb 22, 2016, from [www.mailjet.com](http://www.mailjet.com): <https://www.mailjet.com/support/what-is-a-transactional-email,18.htm>
- Dr. Sanjay hooda, S. A. (2012), Consumer behaviour towards e-marketing: A study of jaipur consumers. *Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce*, III(2).
- Ducoffe, R. H. (1996), Advertising value and advertising on the web. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 21-35.
- Hsin Hsin Chang, H. R. (2013), The determinants of consumer behavior towards email advertisement. *Emerald Insight's Internet Research*, 316-337.
- Jones, D. R. (2009), In *Understanding Digital Marketing*. London, UK & PA, USA: Kogan Page Limited.
- Mahmoud, A. B. (2015), E-mail Advertising in Syria: Assessing Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviors. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 649-665.
- Priyanka, S. (2012), A Study on Impact of Online Advertising on Consumer Behavior (with Special Reference to E-mails). *International Journal of Engineering and Management Sciences*, 3(4), 461-465.
- Raulas, M. M. (2004), The impact of e-mail marketing on brand loyalty. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, XIII(7), 498-505.
- Sekaran, U. (2000), *Research Methods for Business*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Sharon Shavitt, P. L. (1998), Public Attitudes towards Advertising: More Favorable Than You Might Think. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 7-22.
- Zheng Zhou, Y. B. (2002), Users=Attitudes Toward Web Advertising: Effects of Internet Motivation and Internet Ability. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 71-78.