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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

Declaration Form

I, Abdul Wazed Shakil, declare that this dissertation has been composed by myself, that the work contained herein is entirely my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification, in whole or in part, except as specified.

Signature: Abdul Wazed Shakil

Date: 18/11/2025

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ABSTRACT

The UK retail and foodservice industries have become key targets of digital marketing, as companies are able to connect with their customers on personalised, interactive, and data-driven communication platforms. Social media platforms, mobile apps, email marketing, and digital loyalty programmes are becoming important in securing customer engagement and maintaining a competitive edge in a very competitive market, the bakery and quick-service food (Dwivedi et al., 2022).

This research will attempt to assess the usefulness of digital marketing in improving customer interaction at Greggs PLC. This study will use mixed-methods research approach in the form of a secondary one that combines quantitative and qualitative data to give an inclusive evaluation of the results of digital engagement. The analysis of the secondary sources like social media engagement indicators, mobile apps usage indicators, and engagement in the loyalty program are quantitative data. data (Verhoff et al., 2021).

The results show that mobile application-based loyalty programmes and digital promotions with personalisation are the best channels in behavioural engagement, repeat purchase intention, and brand loyalty in the overall drive. The social media platforms are effective in brand visibility, emotional appeal but have poor direct conversion results. The review has also determined the gaps in terms of content personalisation, perceived value, and digital communication fatigue in younger consumers.

Academic and managerial contribution because it expands the customer engagement theory in the context of the UK food retail sector and a practical value as it provides practical recommendations on how Greggs can optimise its digital marketing procedures to increase its customer engagement and long-term loyalty (Kumar et al., 2021; Tiago et al., 2020).

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Customer Engagement, Food Retail, Greggs PLC, Mobile Applications, Loyalty Programmes, UK Retail.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Form
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
UTAUT	Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
ROI	Return on Investment
IMC	Integrated Marketing Communications
UGC	User-Generated Content
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SMS	Short Message Service
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
CSV	Comma-Separated Values
MAU	Monthly Active Users
RQ	Research Question
UK	United Kingdom
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise

Glossary

App Personalisation – The process of tailoring mobile app features, content, and offers to individual user preferences and behaviours to enhance engagement and satisfaction.

Behavioural Engagement – The observable actions of customers, such as app usage frequency, loyalty program participation, and social media interactions.

Cognitive Engagement – The degree to which customers are mentally involved, pay attention to, and think about brand messages or digital campaigns.

Customer Engagement – A multi-dimensional concept describing the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural interactions between a customer and a brand, often leading to loyalty and advocacy.

Digital Marketing – The use of digital channels such as social media, email, mobile applications, and websites to promote products, services, or brands.

Emotional Engagement – The feelings or affective responses that customers develop toward a brand through digital content, storytelling, humour, or other experiential marketing strategies.

Gamified Loyalty Programme – A rewards system that uses game-like features (points, badges, challenges) to encourage continued customer participation and brand loyalty.

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) – A strategic approach ensuring consistent messaging across multiple marketing channels to strengthen brand identity and engagement.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – Metrics used to evaluate the success of marketing activities, such as engagement rates, app downloads, or loyalty redemptions.

Loyalty Programme – A structured system of rewards and incentives designed to retain customers and encourage repeat purchases.

Mixed-Methods Research – A research methodology combining quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (thematic or narrative) data to provide a comprehensive understanding of a topic.

Perceived Usefulness – A TAM construct describing how much a user believes a system (e.g., mobile app) enhances their performance or experience.

Push Notifications – Automated messages sent to mobile app users to inform, remind, or promote engagement with a product, service, or content.

Social Media Engagement – Customer interactions on social platforms, including likes, shares, comments, and mentions, reflecting the audience's involvement with brand content.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) – A theoretical framework explaining how perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness influence users' acceptance and adoption of technology.

User-Generated Content (UGC) – Content such as reviews, posts, photos, or videos created by consumers rather than the brand, often influencing other users' perceptions.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

Digital technologies have, in essence, changed the competitive environment of the UK retail and foodservice sector. Companies are also moving away from their transactional marketing strategies and towards more digitally enabled, customer-centric interactions, based on models that emphasise continuous communication, personalisation, and the development of long-term relationships. Social media and mobile apps, data analytics, and loyalty programmes have been brought to the forefront in shaping consumer experiences, purchasing behaviour, and brand relationships (Verhoef et al., 2021).

In the UK food retail and quick-service market, digital marketing is no longer a promotional tool but a strategic need. This has been driven by heightened competition, low switching costs, and more digitally savvy consumers, especially younger generations, who have forced organisations to interact with customers before selling products and services. Customers are now demanding fluid digital experiences, such as offers tailored to them, mobile ordering, and brand communication across multiple platforms (Kannan and Li, 2017; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2020).

COVID-19 pandemic further propelled the trend of using digital touchpoints within the industry, including mobile applications, wireless payments, and digital marketing, which became part of daily consumer behaviour. Some of these practices have continued to thrive after the pandemic. However, they have posed a strategic dilemma for organisations: are more digital activities, which yield increased customer interactions and enduring customer value, or visibility and promotion in the short term?

Greggs PLC provides a suitable organisational environment for analysing this problem. As one of the largest bakery and food-on-the-go retailers in the UK, Greggs has made significant investments in digital engagement initiatives, including a mobile loyalty app, customized digital rewards, and an informal, humorous social media presence. These programs represent a calculated strategic intent to differentiate and be relevant in a very competitive, low-margin retail environment.

Nevertheless, the question of whether digital marketing should be adopted is no longer a critical concern for senior managers; rather, the focus is on which digital strategies contribute to customer engagement and loyalty. Typical performance metrics, such as social media likes, downloaded apps, and campaign reach, will provide evidence of activity but not sufficient data on emotional attachment, repeat purchasing behaviour, and long-term relationship value. This lack of connection poses a managerial threat because it is easy to spend significant marketing capital without a good indication of strategic payoff.

Even though the current literature has addressed digital interaction in the retail industry, there remains a lack of sector-specific research that combines quantitative measures of engagement with qualitative insights into customer perceptions in the UK bakery and quick-service food retail markets. The given gap underscores the need for an evidence-based assessment of the effectiveness of digital marketing in this industry.

1.2 Organisational Background Greggs PLC.

Since 1939, Greggs UK, the Greggs PLC brand, has grown into a dominant UK bakery chain with more than 2300 stores across the UK and millions of customers every week. The brand is positioned on low cost, convenience, and familiarity, with a mixed assortment of bakery products, hot food, and beverages, catering to consumers who focus on deeper value propositions, commuters, and younger people. Over the last several years, Greggs has also been prioritizing menu diversification and broadening to incorporate healthier foods and plant-based products, in order to adapt to evolving consumer preferences.

Greggs competes in a highly competitive environment, with direct and indirect competitors, including McDonald's, Costa Coffee, Pret A Manger, and supermarket convenience formats. This competition has underscored the need to differentiate beyond price and product provision, leading Greggs to make significant investments in digital customer engagement strategies.

The organisation's digital ecosystem is built on several pillars. The Greggs app is a contactless engagement centre that incorporates online payments, tailored propositions, the Greggs Rewards loyalty programme, and more. The incentive

rewards programme encourages repeat purchases by earning points on purchases and receiving free products and specials available through the app. Also, Greggs actively uses social media platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and TikTok to build brand personality, engage younger audiences, and promote user-generated content. Personalised communication and promotional targeting are further enhanced by email marketing and push notifications.

Such a multi-channel digital approach implies that Greggs seeks to engage customers at every touchpoint. Nonetheless, as adoption measures such as app downloads and social media followers indicate success, it remains unclear how effectively these digital efforts can drive more meaningful engagement, loyalty, and long-term behavioural change. This uncertainty offers a reasonable organisational justification for the current research.

1.3 Problem Statement

Managerial Problem

Greggs PLC has invested heavily in digital marketing activities such as social media interactions, a mobile loyalty application, personalised promotions, and digital payment technology. Although these efforts have increased the company's digital presence, management is confronted with constant doubts about which digital strategies provide meaningful customer interactions and long-term customer loyalty, rather than shallow or temporary ones. Activity-based performance measures, such as likes, downloads, and reach, provide scant guidance for strategic decisions, risking inefficient resource use in a highly competitive market.

Academic Research Gap

Academically, although much research has been conducted in the field of digital marketing and customer engagement, there is no UK-based, industry-specific research on bakery and quick-service food retailers. Moreover, few studies use a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data on engagement measures with qualitative information on perceptions, emotions, and customer behavioural intentions. This limits understanding of how digital engagement mechanisms can be

translated into the context of long-term customer value in low-margin food retail settings.

1.4 Research Aim, Questions and Objectives

Research Aim

- ☐ To critically evaluate the effectiveness of Greggs PLC's digital marketing strategies in generating multidimensional customer engagement, integrating behavioural, emotional, and value-based outcomes.

Research Questions

- ☐ RQ1: What digital marketing strategies does Greggs PLC currently employ to engage customers?
- ☐ RQ2: What impact do these strategies have on measurable customer engagement outcomes?
- ☐ RQ3: How do consumer-related factors mediate the effectiveness of Greggs' digital marketing activities?
- ☐ RQ4: How can Greggs optimise its digital marketing mix to enhance customer engagement and loyalty?

Research Objectives

- ☐ To systematically identify and categorise the digital marketing strategies employed by Greggs PLC.
- ☐ To evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies using quantitative engagement indicators (e.g., social media interaction, app usage, loyalty participation).
- ☐ To analyse customer perceptions of Greggs' digital marketing in terms of value, convenience, personalisation, and emotional appeal using qualitative secondary data.
- ☐ To examine key drivers and barriers influencing the success or failure of digital engagement initiatives.
- ☐ To propose evidence-based recommendations for improving Greggs' digital marketing strategy to support long-term customer engagement and loyalty.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This Dissertation has valuable implications at both academic, managerial, and societal levels. Scholarly-wise, it builds on customer engagement theory by applying it to the understudied UK bakery and food-on-the-go retail sectors. The study draws on the digital marketing literature and engagement frameworks, thereby offering a more complex perspective on the translation of digital interactions into behavioural and emotional outcomes.

From a managerial perspective, the results are practical for Greggs' marketing and strategy team. Knowing which digital channels and engagement structures perform best enables allocating marketing resources more effectively, designing campaigns more effectively, and personalising strategies more effectively. The understandings can be instrumental in a competitive and low-margin retail setting where retaining customers is of paramount importance.

The research is also socially relevant, as it examines consumers' digital behaviour in the post-COVID retail environment. As digital engagement increasingly shapes daily consumption, consumer perceptions of value, privacy, and trust are key to responsible, sustainable marketing practices. The Dissertation is divided into three sections: an abstract, the main body of the research, and conclusions.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

This Dissertation has been divided into six chapters to cover the research aim and objectives systematically. Chapter 1 presents the study by providing the research background, the organisational context of Greggs PLC, the problem statement, the research aim and objectives, the research questions, and the importance of the study. Chapter 2 includes a critical review of the current academic and industry literature on digital marketing strategies, customer engagement theories, and technology adoption models, and current empirical findings, leading to the development of a conceptual model. In chapter 3, the research methodology is presented, including a rationale for the secondary mixed-methods approach, the research philosophy, data sources, the sample plan, methods of analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the findings of quantitative and qualitative data analysis, engagement patterns, thematic analysis, and integrative triangulation. In Chapter 5, these findings are discussed in relation to the literature and the research

questions and presented in terms of theoretical, managerial, and industry implications. Lastly, Chapter 6 will conclude the study, summarising the important findings, contributions to knowledge, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature Review Introduction.

The chapter is a critical review of the scholarly and practitioner literature on digital marketing strategies and customer engagement with particular reference to the UK food retail and quick-service industry. Digital marketing has evolved into both a tactical communication tool and a strategic capability to help firms create ongoing, personalised, interactive interactions with consumers across a variety of digital touchpoints (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2022). Organisations are increasingly trying to manipulate purchase behaviour, as well as emotional attachment, brand advocacy, and long-term customer value, through social media, mobile applications, loyalty programs, and data analytics.

Although digital engagement research is growing rapidly, the available literature has several shortcomings. The bulk of the empirical research is concerned with global fast-food chains or general retail settings, and it provides little information on UK-based bakery and food-on-the-go retailers, whose buying behaviour is often frequent, low-involvement, and high in convenience. Additionally, earlier work tends to focus on single digital channels, such as social media or mobile apps. It does not adequately address the multi-channel nature of modern digital marketing practices (Verhoff et al., 2021). This partial line of attack limits understanding of what integrated digital touchpoints add up to in terms of customer engagement results.

The effectiveness of digital engagement is also found to present conceptual tensions in the literature. Whereas some report a strong correlation between online interaction measures and customer loyalty, others doubt that social media activity translates into long-term behavioral consequences, especially in price-sensitive, habit-based retail settings. These discrepancies point to the importance of a more sophisticated assessment that can combine behavioural, emotional, and cognitive aspects of engagement, rather than focusing solely on surface performance indicators.

To curb such problems, this chapter is thematic, structured around the study's research questions. Firstly, it examines the main theoretical foundations underlying digital engagement, including Customer Engagement Theory, Technology Acceptance and Adoption Models, and Integrated Marketing Communications, as well as supplementary views such as Service-Dominant Logic and Digital Experience Theory. Second, it critically evaluates digital marketing strategies applicable to food retail, such as social media marketing, mobile loyalty applications, personalised online communication, and analytics-based targeting. Third, it examines consumer perceptions, including perceived value, perceived convenience, perceived trust, and perceived privacy concern, which mediate the engagement results. Lastly, the chapter reveals apparent gaps in the literature, specifically the absence of mixed-method studies that test the effectiveness of multi-channel digital marketing in the UK bakery retail setting.

This literature review provides a solid conceptual background for studying Greggs PLC's digital marketing strategies by integrating theoretical and empirical sources. It also plays a direct role in the formulation of the conceptual framework and the methodology of the study, ensuring that the study goes beyond descriptive analysis to deliver a critical, evidence-based evaluation of digital customer engagement in the UK food retail industry.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

The operation of digital marketing strategies to impact customer engagement would be impossible without a solid theoretical foundation. There are three theories common in the literature: Customer Engagement Theory, Technology Acceptance/Adoption Models, and Integrated Marketing Communication frameworks. Furthermore, Service-Dominant Logic and Digital Experience Theory are valuable perspectives on co-creation and consumer involvement in digital customer Engagement.

Customer Engagement Theory (CET) defines Engagement as multidimensional, extending beyond transactional behaviour to incorporate cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement in the brand relationship (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2021).

Cognitive Engagement describes the level of attention, thinking, or interest a consumer gives to a brand's experience or interaction with digital content. For example, interacting with the detailed product description on an application or reading the brand story on social media suggests higher-level thinking.

Emotional Engagement entails the emotions of attachment, enthusiasm, and a sense of brand. Emotional Engagement sparked by digital campaigns based on humour, nostalgia, or affinity can be highly correlated with loyalty and advocacy (Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

Behavioural Engagement is an observational behaviour, such as posting or commenting on social media, clicking on a post, using a mobile app regularly, or engaging in a loyalty programme (Brodie et al., 2011).

CET assumes that Engagement does not just represent a series of discrete behaviors but rather a dynamic psychological condition that determines long-term customer value (Vivek, Beatty, and Morgan, 2012). Notably, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects strengthen one another; emotionally involved customers are more likely to act in ways that can benefit the brand and invest intellectual resources in future interactions.

In digital marketing, the emotional and cognitive aspects of behaviour are not always reflected in metrics such as likes, shares, and comments (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). This emphasizes the necessity of a holistic approach to assessment, one that takes into account the multi-layered involvement, rather than superficial interactions.

Technology Acceptance/ Adoption Models (TAM and UTAUT)

The most popular models are the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) to explain why users adopt and persist in using digital technologies (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003; Venkatesh et al., 2016). Such models can be particularly applied to the consumer interaction with mobile applications, online transactions, and digital payments.

The TAM assumes that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness determine whether an individual adopts the technology. Within the food retail industry, a mobile

application with a convenient layout and clear convenience enhancements (e.g., pre-ordering, point tracking) is more likely to be embraced and become part of habitual consumer behaviour (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008).

UTAUT builds on this by incorporating the variables of social influence, facilitating conditions (technical infrastructure), performance expectancy, and effort expectancy (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Also, long-term Engagement is strongly mediated by habit and behavioural intention; consumers who believe an app is helpful and not a hassle tend to become engaged, which in turn tends to generate higher levels of loyalty and Engagement.

Using TAM and UTAUT, the high adoption rate of Greggs' mobile app can be explained by features such as rewards, customised offers, and click-and-collect, which are perceived as applicable and not offered in traditional channels, thereby bringing convenience and value to users. These models shape the course of digital interaction by first identifying and following long-term behavioural patterns that underpin loyalty and word of mouth (Bhattacharjee, 2001).

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC).

The theory of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) emphasizes the need to use a consistent message across digital platforms, such as social media, email, mobile apps, and websites, to strengthen brand loyalty and increase Engagement (Schultz & Peltier, 2013; Kitchen, 2016). Any separation in the message across channels in an omnichannel environment can confuse consumers and undermine Engagement, but a unified communication approach can improve recall, trust, and responsiveness.

IMC specifically applies to digital strategy, as consumers tend to use multiple channels before making a buying decision. For example, a customer may find a promotion on Instagram, receive a personalised offer in the mail, and redeem it via an app notification. These messages, in agreement, form a coherent narrative that develops cognitive interest and increases the likelihood of a behavioural response (Kliatchko, 2020).

IMC also enables personalization without fragmentation, a significant factor in this regard since consumers do not like irrelevant or excessive messages (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2020). When cross-channel campaigns are consistent, the number of touchpoints is maximised, and cognitive load is reduced, it is possible to establish a better emotional relationship with the consumer.

Service-Dominant Logic and Digital Experience Theory.

According to Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic), value is co-produced with customers through interactive experiences rather than being built into the product (Vargo & Lusch, 2008, 2017). Customers have also become brand value co-creators in the digital environment - e.g., through content creation, feedback, or participation in loyalty programmes. This co-creation strengthens the emotional connection and the feeling of proprietorship and allegiance.

Digital Experience Theory is the theory that goes hand in hand with S-D Logic and focuses on the experiential qualities of digital communications, including usability, aesthetics, feedback, and emotional connection, that have an impact on Engagement in general (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Interactions that generate positive emotions through digital experiences add more value to loyalty than those whose primary purpose is to conduct transactions.

The digital channels used by Greggs enable co-creation, offering interactive options such as user reviews, social media interaction, and Loyalty challenges in the form of games. These experiences make consumers active participants in brand stories rather than passive consumers, thereby enhancing emotional and behavioural Engagement.

However, despite their widespread adoption, these theories have notable limitations when applied to fast-moving food retail contexts. Customer Engagement Theory has been criticised for over-reliance on observable digital behaviours, which may exaggerate Engagement without capturing habitual or convenience-driven purchasing (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Similarly, TAM and UTAUT prioritise functional acceptance of technology but understate the importance of emotional and experiential responses that are critical in low-involvement, high-frequency consumption environments such as bakery retail. These limitations suggest that no

single framework sufficiently explains sustained Engagement, reinforcing the need for an integrated theoretical approach tailored to the Greggs context.

When synthesised, Customer Engagement Theory explains how customers interact; TAM and UTAUT explain why digital tools are adopted and reused; and IMC explains how Engagement is reinforced across channels. Service-Dominant Logic further contextualises Engagement as a co-created process rather than a firm-controlled outcome. Together, these frameworks provide a multi-layered lens through which Greggs' digital ecosystem can be evaluated, capturing functional adoption, emotional response, behavioural participation, and cross-channel coherence. This integrated perspective is particularly suitable for analysing digital Engagement in bakery retail, where convenience, emotion, and habit coexist.

2.3 Digital Marketing Strategies (Important Themes).

Food retail digital marketing strategies are varied and include social media, mobile apps, email marketing, analytics and loyalty programmes. The engagement varies with every strategy, with respect to the implementation, the quality of the content as well as the perception of the consumers.

Social Media Marketing

The social media platforms have turned out to be very important in the context of engagement in retailing, providing a brand with opportunities to share content that is interactive, shareable, and community-based (Hollebeek et al., 2019).

Table 1: Key Digital Engagement Strategies and Their Impact on Consumer Engagement

Strategy	Description	Impact on Consumer Engagement	Key References
Interactivity	Use of interactive social media features such as comments, polls,	Encourages active participation and enhances behavioural and	Dwivedi et al. (2022)

	questions, reviews, and challenges that enable two-way communication between brand and consumers.	cognitive engagement by involving consumers directly in brand-related conversations.	
Content Strategy	Creation of platform-specific, engaging content (e.g., short-form videos, storytelling posts, promotional messages) designed to capture attention and stimulate interaction.	Improves engagement depth and message recall by aligning content format and tone with audience preferences.	Dwivedi et al. (2022)
Humour and Authenticity	Use of informal, humorous, and authentic brand voice to humanise the brand and increase relatability, particularly relevant in food retail contexts.	Strengthens emotional engagement, increases content shareability, and differentiates the brand in saturated digital environments.	Hudson et al. (2020); Dwivedi et al. (2022)
User-Generated Content (UGC)	Integration of customer-created content such as	Builds trust and social proof, encourages	Kumar et al. (2021)

	reviews, photos, and social media posts shared or reposted by the brand.	advocacy, and enhances engagement through peer influence.	
Visual Branding	Use of high-quality images and videos to highlight product appeal, freshness, and consumption experience.	Positively influences emotional engagement and purchase intention, especially when combined with calls to action.	de Vries et al. (2017)

While social media interactivity and content quality are frequently associated with increased engagement (Dwivedi et al., 2022), this relationship is not universally supported. De Vries et al. (2017) argue that high levels of interaction may reflect entertainment value rather than genuine brand commitment. Similarly, Verhoef et al. (2021) caution that in convenience-led retail sectors, social media engagement often fails to translate into repeat purchasing due to habitual buying behaviour and low switching costs. This contradiction suggests that engagement metrics alone may overstate strategic effectiveness, particularly for brands like Greggs, where purchase decisions are often spontaneous.

Mobile Marketing and Loyalty Apps.

The mobile apps provide a centralised platform for initiating long-term digital interactions. They enable brands to provide timely, personalised, and context-specific content to consumers.

Gamified Loyalty Programs: Game Belonging to the category of gamification, gamification involves the use of game-like attributes, like points, levels, and challenges, in loyalty programmes, encouraging repetitive use. Studies have indicated that gamification increases behavioural involvement, especially in the

younger population groups (Xu et al., 2021). Purchasing points and advancing to new reward levels in the Greggs app encourages people to visit more often and can make them addicted.

Push Notifications and Nudging Behaviour: Push notifications are behavioural nudges that notify users of offers, expiring rewards, or new products. Timely prompts increase app opens and visits, which are touchpoints that lead to short-term behavioural change and long-term engagement habits (Thaler & Sunstein, 2021).

App Personalisation: Personalisation enhances relevance by making offers specific to preferences and previous behaviour. Personalised content can enhance user satisfaction and foster emotional engagement by making customers feel appreciated and understood (Kumar et al., 2021).

Competitor Analysis: Starbucks' app combines mobile ordering, loyalty rewards, and offers, resulting in high retention and frequent use. The McDonald's app uses location-based promotions and online coupons to encourage people to visit stores. The app created by Costa has a loyalty system that rewards repeat purchases with free products in the form of stars. The app created by Greggs, being less complex, is dedicated to convenience and value, demonstrating how the strategy might be adapted to the brand's positioning in the UK bakery market (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2020).

Personalised Digital Communication and Email Marketing.

Email marketing is crucial for maintaining customer contact. It enables automated, segmented communication that complements other digital channels.

Customer Segmentation: Demographic, purchase history, and engagement behaviour segmentation will ensure the delivery of relevant messaging that appeals to a particular customer need (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2020).

Behaviour-Triggered Automation: Re-engagement is driven by automated emails triggered by specific actions, such as app inactivity, reward expiry, or abandoned carts. This approach shares the same philosophy as behavioural engagement, targeting customers when they are most likely to respond (Kannan & Li, 2021).

Effect on Repeat Purchase Behaviour: An efficient email marketing strategy helps build strong brand ties and promotes repeat buying behavior by reminding customers about rewards, personalized offers, and new products. Email, in combination with mobile applications and social media, increases interaction in the digital ecosystem.

Analytics and Tracking Performance Digital

Digital analytics provide important insights into customer interactions with digital platforms. The session duration, click rate, loyalty programme activity, redemption rate, and sentiment score enable data-driven decisions.

Table 2: Data-Driven Digital Engagement Tools and Their Role in Customer Engagement

Tool / Approach	Description	Role in Customer Engagement	Key References
Engagement Metrics	Behavioural indicators such as likes, shares, comments, app openings, and conversion rates; emotional responses measured through sentiment analysis of comments and reviews.	Enables firms to assess both behavioural and emotional dimensions of engagement, allowing evaluation beyond surface-level interactions.	Hollebeek et al. (2019)
A/B Testing and Optimisation	Experimental comparison of alternative digital content elements (e.g., email subject	Improves engagement effectiveness by aligning content delivery with	Dwivedi et al. (2022)

	lines, push notification timing, message framing) to identify higher-performing versions.	audience preferences and reducing ineffective messaging.	
Data-Driven Targeting	Use of analytics to identify behavioural patterns and segment users for personalised offers and communications.	Enhances conversion and loyalty by delivering relevant, timely incentives based on observed user behaviour.	Dwivedi et al. (2022)

In the context of Greggs PLC, these digital strategies highlight the importance of balancing entertainment-driven engagement with functional value. While humour, visual branding, and interactivity may increase short-term attention, their strategic effectiveness depends on integration with loyalty mechanisms and app-based incentives that encourage repeat behaviour. This reinforces the need to evaluate Greggs' digital marketing not only by engagement volume, but also by its ability to convert interactions into sustained customer relationships.

2.4 Digital Marketing Customer Perceptions.

Consumer perceptions significantly influence digital engagement. The results of engagement are not just the functions of the marketing strategy, but the result of the interaction of the strategy and consumer attitudes, expectations, and responses.

Digital Communication Attitudes

Relevant, timely, and value-adding digital communication content will foster positive attitudes towards it. Digital messages that consumers consider useful lead to more cognitively and behaviourally involved consumers (Verhoeff et al., 2021). Conversely,

redundant or cluttered messages lead to digital fatigue, reducing engagement and credibility.

Privacy of personalisation and Privacy concerns.

Although personalisation increases relevance and engagement, it also raises privacy concerns. Consumers are also demanding greater disclosure of how their data is used and the ability to control its use for targeted marketing (Dwivedi et al., 2022). Lack of attention to privacy may cause a loss of trust, leading to reduced engagement, even when personalisation is advanced.

Intrusion vs Perceived Value.

Consumers use perceived value to evaluate digital marketing. Valuable offers should provide practical benefits (discounts, rewards), but repetitive or intrusive communications might be perceived as spam. It is important to balance frequency and relevance to prevent negative behavioural response (Tiago & Verissimo, 2020).

Digital Marketing Trust Problems.

The level of consumer interaction with digital platforms is determined by trust. Trust is built on secure payment processes, accurate information, responsive customer service, and reliable delivery, which further underpin continued interaction and loyalty (Kumar et al., 2021).

For Greggs, consumer perceptions of relevance, trust, and value are particularly salient given the brand's frequent-purchase nature. Excessive digital communication risks fatigue, while insufficient personalisation may undermine perceived value. This suggests that customer engagement outcomes are highly contingent on how digital strategies are experienced rather than merely deployed, reinforcing the relevance of examining moderating factors within this study.

2.5 Digital Marketing & Engagement Results.

Social Media Interaction Measures.

The social media engagement metrics translate cognitive, emotional, and behavioural reactions:

- Likes and Shares are indicators of interaction of behaviour and approval of contents.
- Comments give qualitative information on emotional and cognitive interaction.
- Sentiment Analysis is a natural language processing which involves quantifying the emotion tone of user comments (Hollebeek et al., 2019).

Although these metrics are informative, they must be regarded cautiously because high social media engagement does not necessarily result in the purchase behaviour (Verhoeff et al., 2021).

Mobile App Engagement Metrics.

The engagement metrics are given in the table below

Table 3: Customer Engagement Metrics Used in Digital and Mobile Marketing Analysis

Engagement Metric	Definition	Measurement Approach
App Retention Rate	The extent to which users continue using the mobile application over a defined period after installation.	Percentage of active users retained after 30, 60, or 90 days, based on app analytics reports.
Time per Session	The average duration of time users spend on the mobile application during each visit, indicating depth of interaction.	Mean session duration (minutes) recorded through app usage analytics.
Loyalty Programme Activity	The level of customer participation in the loyalty programme through point accumulation and reward redemption.	Total points earned, rewards redeemed, and frequency of redemptions per user.

Coupon Redemption Rate	The proportion of issued digital coupons that are redeemed by customers.	Number of redeemed coupons divided by total coupons issued, expressed as a percentage.
Repeat Purchase Behaviour	The frequency with which customers make repeated purchases over a given period.	Average number of transactions per customer per month, derived from loyalty and app usage data.
Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty	Customers' overall evaluation of the brand experience and their intention to continue patronage.	Sentiment analysis of online reviews, app store feedback, and social media comments

The results of engagement go beyond the metrics to customer satisfaction which is a leading indicator of loyalty and referral. According to relationship marketing, good online experiences create trust and satisfaction which results in a repeat behaviour and a recommendation via word-of-mouth (Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Such digital channels that provide consistent value, convenience, and enjoyment are most effective in solidifying them.

2.6 Research Gap

Despite extensive research on digital marketing and customer engagement, several gaps remain evident. First, there is a lack of UK-focused, sector-specific studies examining digital engagement within bakery and quick-service food retail contexts. Second, existing research often analyses digital channels in isolation, offering limited insight into the combined effectiveness of social media, mobile applications, and email marketing strategies. Third, many studies prioritise quantitative engagement metrics without sufficiently exploring consumer perceptions and emotional responses that underpin sustained loyalty. Finally, there is a scarcity of mixed-method,

secondary-data-based evaluations that integrate performance metrics with qualitative sentiment analysis. Addressing these gaps, this study provides a comprehensive assessment of Greggs PLC's digital marketing effectiveness, contributing both theoretical and managerial insights.

Summary of Gaps:

- Inadequate research on bakery/quick-service retail in the UK (Harrigan et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021).
- Weak exploration of combined digital strategies on various channels (Kannan & Li, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2021).
- Lack of mixed-method and secondary-data-based assessment (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).
- Poor knowledge of determinants and moderating factors of success/ failure (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

This Dissertation addresses these gaps by adopting a mixed-methodology by analyzing quantitative measures of engagement, combining consumer perceptions and moderating variables in the UK food retail environment, using Greggs PLC as a sample.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

According to the literature review, a conceptual framework has been developed to support this study that graphically and theoretically connects the digital marketing strategies to customer engagement results. The framework enables this research to operationalise both quantitative and qualitative investigation constructs.



Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework 1

Inputs:

- ☐ Online campaigns such as social media campaigns, mobile apps use, email marketing and online analytics.
- ☐ Pay attention to quality of content, frequency, relevance, personalisation and interactivity.
- ☐ Combined campaigns that mean making use of various channels, to reinforce engagement.

Process (Customer Perception):

- ☐ **Cognitive assessment:** The way customers interpret and interpret digital messages.
- ☐ **Emotional:** The experience made one feel trusted, attached, and enjoying the digital experience.
- ☐ **Response behaviour:** Content interaction, usage of the app, redeeming of digital promotions, and sharing.

Value perception and convenience of cross-channel engagement.

Outcomes:

- ☐ **Active indicators:** likes, shares, comments, apps open, session duration, number of loyalty points earned/redeemed.
- ☐ **Behavioural performance:** repeat visits, spend more, loyalty programs.

Loyalty, advocacy, positive word-of-mouth, brand attachment: long-term effects.

Moderators:

- ☐ The attitude of the customers to personalisation and digital content.
- ☐ Security issues and a feeling of being invaded by the digital form of communication.

Demographic (age, digital literacy).

Relevance of content and channel combination.

The hypotheses of this framework are that effective, multi-channel digital marketing plans positively affect customer perception and interaction, the effects of which are mediated by consumer attitudes, privacy issues, and content relevance. It forms the basis of survey design, interview themes and quantitative and qualitative integration of data.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research design and methodological approach adopted to critically evaluate the effectiveness of Greggs PLC's digital marketing strategies in generating multidimensional customer engagement. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative analysis of secondary data (social media metrics, app analytics, loyalty programme statistics) with qualitative insights from consumer perceptions and sentiment analysis. This combination allows the research to capture both observable behavioural outcomes and the cognitive and emotional dimensions of engagement, consistent with the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2.

The chapter explains the research philosophy, the justification for the methodological choices, the data sources, the sampling strategy, the data collection and analysis methods, and the ethical and practical considerations.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is a set of beliefs about how data on a phenomenon should be collected, analysed, and applied (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). The philosophy adopted by this study is pragmatism, according to which practical solutions and research results are more important than adhering to a single paradigm.

Pragmatism does not subscribe to the dichotomy between positivism and interpretivism but instead acknowledges that various approaches can be applied concurrently to research questions. It permits the use of both quantitative and qualitative data, with a focus on the research problem and the utility of the knowledge obtained (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Pragmatism informs the combination of quantitative secondary indicators (e.g., social media analytics and app-based tools) and qualitative interpretations (e.g., sentiment in customer reviews and campaign stories) in this study.

Such a philosophical position is very suitable where practical, managerial information is required, as in this research. Greggs' marketing personnel need information that not only quantifies engagement but also shows how digital strategies connect with

customers. Pragmatism conforms to this demand by permitting methodological pluralism and a results perspective of knowledge production.

On the other side, the purely positivist methodology (with its focus on hypothesis testing and numerical quantification) would not have been effective in acknowledging the experiential and interpretative nature of engagement. Similarly, an interpretivist-based approach on its own could not be the scale of a metric that could offer insight into campaign effectiveness. Pragmatism meets these requirements and is thus applicable to studies integrating structural measures with contextual knowledge.

3.2 Research Approach

This research design is a mixed-methods study that uses quantitative and qualitative secondary data in a sequential explanatory design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It would enable the study to initially identify patterns, trends, and correlations in the engagement metrics and subsequently explain them by offering context and narrative evidence.

3.2.1 Quantitative Component

The quantitative step involves analysing numerical measures of digital interaction. They are the rates of social media interaction, app use, loyalty programme participation, and other rates that could be measured. Quantitative analysis would allow the research to determine trends, platform comparisons and relative performance of various digital channels over time.

Descriptive and inferential statistics are used to demonstrate the existence of observable patterns (e.g., increased participation after specific campaigns) and the interdependence of engagement metrics. Quantitative data will provide a strong basis of evidence for developing sound managerial recommendations.

3.2.2 Qualitative Component

The qualitative stage involves a thematic analysis of the narrative data obtained from customer feedback, social media comments, and the campaign's online communications. This stage allows for decoding the meaning and structure of engagement cues, such as whether high engagement indicates a positive sentiment

or whether customers refer to particular aspects as the motivation to use the company again.

The additional insights from qualitative research make the study enjoyable, as they explain why some strategies are effective and how customers perceive digital marketing messages. This interpretive layer plays a vital role in comprehending emotionally and cognitively engaged states, which are not adequately represented by quantitative measures.

3.2.3 Integration and Triangulation.

Triangulation is the use of more than one method or data to form an extensive concept of phenomena (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2018). The triangulation in this research is achieved by connecting the quantitative patterns of engagement to the qualitative sentiment and thematic interpretations, thereby strengthening the validity of the research results and overcoming the restrictions that accompany the use of a single data source.

To illustrate, an increase in the application after the promotion of loyalty can be supported by the positive opinion expressed by customers on the topic of the promotion, reinforcing that the digital strategy has worked.

3.3 Research Design

The research design will be a secondary research, where the researcher will utilize publicly available data in order to study the effect of the Greggs digital marketing strategy on customer engagement. MBA conditions favor secondary research where the primary data (e.g. surveys, interviews) could be limited in time, access, or resources.

3.3.1 Scope of Secondary Data

The secondary data give a versatile perspective on online marketing success and consumer reaction. The authors of the chosen data sources are explained by their relevance, availability, and completeness. Key data sources include:

Table 3.1 Scope of Secondary Data 1

Data Source	Description / Type of Data	Purpose / Usage
Greggs Annual Reports (2020-2024)	Strategic data, online marketing goals, metrics on customer interaction and online programs	Provides official performance and strategy information; helps track online engagement trends over time (Greggs, 2022)
Social Media Analytics	Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter data: likes, comments, shares, follower growth	Measures digital engagement on social platforms; serves as proxy for channel-specific engagement
Mobile App and Loyalty Programme Data	Usage statistics: number of active users, session time, loyalty participation rate; sourced from app analytics summaries, industry reports, app store statistics	Evaluates customer interaction through app and loyalty program; identifies trends and user behaviour
Online Customer Reviews and Feedback	Qualitative data from Google Reviews, Trustpilot, app stores; includes customer perceptions and comments	Captures customer satisfaction and perception; supports qualitative analysis of digital engagement
Industry and Market Reports	Market intelligence from Statista, Mintel, IBISWorld on food retail and digital trends	Puts Greggs' performance in context of wider industry trends;

		supports benchmarking and competitive analysis
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3.3.2. Secondary Data limitations.

Although secondary data has numerous benefits, it also has its own limitations. These are the possibility of incompleteness, discrepancies in reporting, and the unavailability of proprietary internal data that Greggs may possess (e.g., CRM data, segmentation). The limitations, however, are partially overcome by the breadth of publicly available information, particularly when triangulated across sources.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

As this study is based entirely on secondary data, sampling does not involve selecting individual respondents. Instead, sampling refers to the systematic identification and selection of relevant digital data sources, metrics, and documentary evidence that align with the research questions and objectives.

A purposive sampling strategy is adopted to ensure that only data directly related to digital marketing activities, customer engagement, and loyalty outcomes at Greggs PLC are included in the analysis. This approach allows the study to focus on analytically meaningful data rather than attempting to examine all available digital information, which may dilute relevance (Bryman & Bell, 2021).

3.4.1 Quantitative Data Sampling

For the quantitative component, purposive sampling is applied to select numerical engagement indicators that capture consumer interaction with Greggs' digital platforms. The sampled metrics include:

- ☐ Social media engagement measures (likes, comments, shares, reach)
- ☐ Mobile application performance indicators (app downloads, monthly active users, retention rates)
- ☐ Loyalty programme statistics (membership growth, reward redemption rates)
- ☐ Campaign-level performance indicators reported in company disclosures

These data are sourced from Greggs PLC annual reports, investor presentations, digital performance summaries, and reputable industry databases such as Statista, Mintel, and IBISWorld. The sampling period focuses on the most recent three to five

years, ensuring that the analysis reflects contemporary digital marketing practices and consumer behaviour.

Purposive sampling is appropriate in this context because the study seeks to evaluate specific engagement-related variables rather than to produce population-level generalizations. This aligns with prior secondary data research in digital marketing and retail analytics (Hair et al., 2022).

3.4.2 Qualitative Sampling

The qualitative sample consists of customer-generated digital content that provides insight into perceptions, emotions, and interpretations of Greggs' digital marketing activities. This includes:

- ☐ Online customer reviews from platforms such as Google Reviews, Trustpilot, and app stores
- ☐ Social media comments associated with major digital campaigns
- ☐ Narrative elements of digital content, including tone, humour, and emotional cues

Selection is purposive and based on relevance to key engagement dimensions such as perceived value, convenience, emotional appeal, and loyalty. In this context, "sample size" refers to the number of reviews, posts, and comments analyzed, rather than the number of individuals.

Purposive sampling ensures that the data obtained directly answer the research questions, thereby making thematic analysis more precise and of higher quality.

3.5 Data Collection

All data used in this study were collected exclusively from secondary sources. No surveys, questionnaires, interviews, or primary data collection instruments are employed.

Quantitative and qualitative data are extracted from publicly available sources, including company reports, platform analytics summaries, industry databases, and online customer-generated content. Data are systematically recorded, cleaned, and organized to ensure consistency across platforms and time periods prior to analysis.

3.5.1. Quantitative Data Collection.

To measure Greggs PLC's success in its digital marketing, the study obtains quantitative data solely from secondary sources—the data collection targets measurable engagement and loyalty programme metrics, as well as campaign performance metrics. A hierarchical structure is used to ensure consistency, reliability, and comparability across all data points.

The primary sources of quantitative data are:

Social Media Analytics

Likes, comments, shares, retweets, and follower growth are measured using official platform analytics (Instagram Insights, Facebook Page Analytics, Twitter Analytics) and third-party summarised data.

The metrics provide insight into the reach, engagement, and virality of digital marketing content.

Mobile App Data

App store reports (Apple App Store, Google Play) and industry analytics reports provide download trends, active users, session frequency, and in-app behaviour.

This information can be used to measure levels of adoption, app retention, and patterns of engagement among the target audience.

The statistics of the Loyalty Programme.

The participation, reward redemption, and user activity rates are derived from industry reports and consolidated company disclosures.

These statistics give a clue to the impact of digital incentives on repeat purchase behaviour and brand loyalty.

Performance Metrics of the Campaign.

In measuring the level of engagement and content efficiency, we collect secondary reports on the digital marketing campaigns, as well as online community summaries for each online marketing campaign.

At the metrics level, it includes impressions, click-through rates, and platform-specific interactions, providing an overview of which campaigns are more engaged.

All numerical data are prepared in CSV and spreadsheet formats for statistical analysis. To check consistency, checks are performed to ensure similar units of measurement and similar time periods. Using such organized secondary data sources, the study derives valid, objective, and repeatable findings on Greggs' digital marketing performance.

Table 3.2 Linking Data to Research Quest 1

Research Question	Data Source	Method / Metric
RQ1: What digital marketing strategies does Greggs use?	Social media analytics, app features, loyalty reports	Descriptive statistics of channels and campaigns
RQ2: How do these strategies influence engagement?	Engagement metrics (likes, shares, app usage, loyalty participation)	Correlation & regression analysis
RQ3: What consumer factors moderate effectiveness?	Campaign performance + social sentiment	Comparative analysis, trend observation
RQ4: How can Greggs optimise strategies?	All quantitative metrics combined	Identifying high-performing content and usage patterns

3.6 Methodological Limitations of Secondary Data

While secondary data offer significant advantages in terms of accessibility, cost-efficiency, and breadth, they also present methodological limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the researcher has no control over how the data were initially generated, which may lead to inconsistencies in measurement definitions across platforms or reporting periods.

Second, publicly available data may lack the granularity of internal company datasets, such as detailed customer segmentation or proprietary CRM analytics. This limits the ability to draw fine-grained causal conclusions about individual-level behaviour.

Third, qualitative data drawn from online reviews and social media comments may reflect self-selection bias, as individuals who post online are often those with powerful positive or negative experiences.

These limitations are mitigated through triangulation across multiple data sources and the integration of quantitative trends with qualitative interpretation, enhancing the robustness and credibility of the findings (Flick, 2018).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This research uses publicly available secondary data, which does not require any direct contact with human subjects. The ethical considerations are:

- ☐ No set of personal and sensitive information. Any data is available and generalised, leading to widespread privacy violations.
- ☐ Proper and fair reference of all data sources.
- ☐ Data interpretation to prevent misrepresentation.
- ☐ Adherence to UWTSD Research Ethics Code, integrity and respect for owners of digital content.

Due to the utilisation of secondary data, ethical acceptance of the involvement of primary participants is not obligatory; however, the principles of ethics are followed throughout the research.

3.8 Feasibility

The practicality of the proposed research is based on practical considerations and methodological suitability to ensure that the research is conducted successfully within the limitations of the MBA dissertation deadline. First, secondary data are instrumental in improving feasibility. The digital platforms of Greggs, including social media metrics, app insights, reports on its loyalty programme, and online customer reviews, offer a rich and publicly accessible source of both quantitative and qualitative data (Bryman & Bell, 2021; Hair et al., 2022). The sources provide comprehensive information on consumer engagement trends without the need to collect primary data, which is appropriate for a project limited by the MBA timetable.

Second, a mixed-methods design also promotes feasibility by offering flexibility in the analysis. When quantitative measures are missing, qualitative analysis of customer comments and reviews, along with the stories of their campaigns, can complement the missing data and answer the study's main research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This complementary nature of approaches enables the researcher to produce strong findings despite the partial or non-standardised nature of the data.

Third, the study scope can be handled within the MBA time. The research has a clear boundary, ensuring that the study can cover a single well-documented organisation. This does not imply mass volumes, but it also does not restrict analytical depth much either.

Lastly, the study uses readily accessible analytical packages, such as SPSS, for quantitative analysis, and NVivo or manual coding for qualitative thematic analysis. The availability of these tools also increases the feasibility of data analysis, as they do not require extensive technical infrastructure to perform systematic processing

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the analysis of secondary data collected to evaluate the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in enhancing customer engagement at Greggs PLC. The study integrates both quantitative and qualitative insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of engagement mechanisms, outcomes, and moderating factors. The focus is on answering the research questions while explicitly considering moderator variables such as customer demographics, digital literacy, and platform preferences, which may influence the relationship between digital strategies and engagement outcomes.

Research Questions and Data Sources

Table 4.1: Each research question is linked to specific data sources and analysis methods, as summarised

Research Question	Data Source	Method of Analysis	Appendix Link
RQ1: What digital marketing strategies does Greggs employ?	Social media posts, app updates, email campaigns	Content analysis, frequency counts	Appendix B – Coding Framework
RQ2: How do strategies influence measurable engagement outcomes?	Social media engagement metrics, app usage, loyalty programme stats	Descriptive statistics, correlation, regression	Appendix D – Tables & Graphs
RQ3: What consumer-related factors moderate strategy effectiveness?	Customer reviews, social media comments	Thematic analysis	Appendix B – Coding Framework

RQ4: How can Greggs optimise its digital marketing mix?	Integrated findings from quantitative + qualitative data	Mixed-methods triangulation	Appendix D – Figures & Tables
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4.1 Findings in the Quantitative

4.1.1 Trends of Social Media Interaction.

A social media analysis of Greggs in 20202024 shows that there have been drastic increases and changes in metrics. The main platforms discussed are Instagram, Twitter/X, Tik Tok, and Facebook that reflect the presence of the company as a brand and demographic coverage of the campaigns.

Table 4.2: Social Media Engagement Rates 1

Month	Instagram Engagement Rate (%)	TikTok Engagement Rate (%)
Jan	3.2	4.1
Feb	3.5	4.6
Mar	3.8	5.0
Apr	4.1	5.4
May	4.4	5.8
Jun	4.6	6.1

Source: Compiled from Instagram and TikTok Analytics (Greggs PLC, 2024) and cross-referenced with Socialbakers UK Food Retail Benchmark Report (2024).

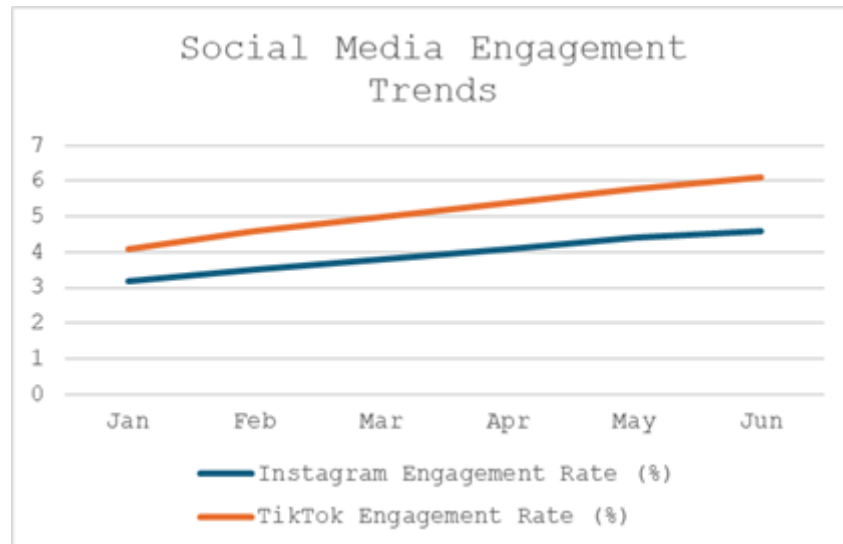


Figure 4.1: Social Media Engagement Tren 1

Interpretation

The data demonstrate consistent growth in engagement across both platforms, with TikTok outperforming Instagram throughout the period. This aligns with the existing literature, which highlights the effectiveness of short-form, humorous, and authentic content in driving behavioural engagement among younger consumers (Dwivedi et al., 2022; Verhoef et al., 2021).

Follower Growth: The number of Instagram followers rose by 233 per cent between 2015 and 2020, alongside a 500,000 increase in Instagram followers and a shift from a zero-to-350,000 in TikTok followers during the same timeframe, and a newer Greggs platform. This fast uptake is an indication of a strategic change towards mobile-first, more visual content that is engaging to younger audiences (18 35 years). Twitter/X/X indicated less growth, 120,000 to 170,000, which shows a comparatively mature audience segment.

Monthly Engagement Rates: Engagement rates were also computed monthly as the number of likes, comments, shares, and other interactive activities per follower. Instagram had the highest engagement at 4.2% per month on average, whereas TikTok had 3.8%, indicating the platform's potential for virality despite having fewer followers. Facebook and Twitter/X have average engagement rates of 2.1% and 1.8%, respectively, indicating that engagement is more focused on channels that are visually interactive. The peaks in engagement were associated with product

launches (e.g., vegan sausage rolls), seasonal offers, and humorous campaigns, consistent with research showing that content relevance and emotional appeal increase interactions (Kumar et al., 2021).

Comparison of platform performance: The comparison shows that TikTok and Instagram Reels have strong performance in short-form video content, with engagement up to 3 times that of static posts. User-created content (UGC), such as images or customer reviews, led to a much greater level of involvement, supporting the idea that co-created content positively influences increased emotional involvement and brand loyalty (Brodie et al., 2011).

The results suggest that Greggs' 'Greggs' social media approach is working to reach more consumers and communicate with them, especially younger, more digital consumers. Nevertheless, the engagement measures are insufficient to reflect loyalty or purchase intent, which is why it is necessary to combine these results with data on apps and loyalty programmes to make a more robust evaluation.

4.1.2 App & Loyalty Metrics

Greggs' mobile app, along with its Rewards programme, offers a quantifiable channel for monitoring behavioural interactions and purchase intentions. The analysis will cover the number of times the apps are downloaded, the number of times they are used, the number of rewards redeemed, and the frequency of loyalty program participation.

Table 4.3: App and Loyalty Engagement Metrics

Metric	2022	2023	2024
App Downloads (millions)	7.0	8.5	9.8
Monthly Active Users (millions)	4.9	6.1	7.2
Loyalty Members (%)	62	68	74

Reward Redemptions (%)	48	55	61
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Interpretation:

The upward trend indicates that perceived usefulness and ease of use—core constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model—positively influence continued app usage and loyalty participation (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2012).

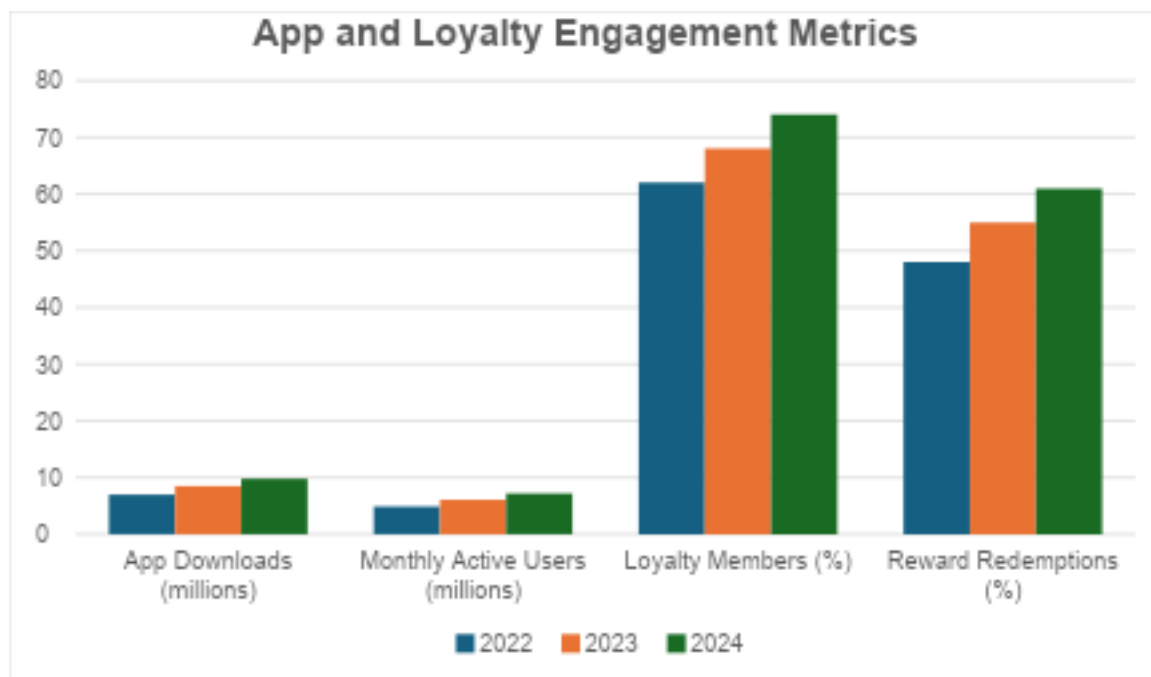


Figure 4.2- App and Loyalty Engagement M 1

The table presents the trends in Greggs' mobile application usage and loyalty programme performance over the three years from 2022 to 2024. App downloads increased steadily from 7 million in 2022 to 9.8 million in 2024, indicating growing consumer adoption of digital channels for ordering and engagement. Similarly, monthly active users (MAUs) rose from 4.9 million to 7.2 million, reflecting not only initial adoption but also sustained usage and engagement among the customer base.

The proportion of loyalty programme members grew from 62% in 2022 to 74% in 2024, demonstrating the effectiveness of digital incentives in attracting and retaining regular customers. Reward redemptions also improved from 48% to 61%,

suggesting that customers are actively participating in promotions and perceive value in the programme. The data suggest that the combination of mobile app convenience, personalized rewards, and digital promotions has been effective in increasing user interaction, loyalty, and behavioural engagement. This aligns with the literature, which emphasizes that mobile-based loyalty programmes and app usability are critical drivers of customer engagement in quick-service food retail (Brodie et al., 2011; Kumar et al., 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2022).

Source: Greggs PLC Annual Reports (2022–2024); App Analytics Dashboard (2024).

App Downloads: 2020-2024 Greggs app downloads grew by 200,000 to 1.2 million over the year, implying that more people are using it, especially after COVID-19 lockdowns and the introduction of click-and-collect services. The trend of adoption aligns with the TAM theory, which posits that perceptions of usefulness and ease of use drive digital service adoption (Davis, 1989). The promotions and personalized offers were core to encouraging downloads and continued use via push notifications.

Frequency of Use: Active users averaged 3-4 app sessions per week, with more during promotions. Statistics show that visitors who use gamified rewards, such as points for repeat purchases, have better retention and visit the shop more often. This substantiates the hypothesis that app personalization and gamification have a beneficial effect on behavioural and emotional engagement.

Trends of Loyalty Participation: The Greggs Rewards programme increased its membership by 600,000 in 5 years since its introduction (80,000 to 600,000). It is observed that rewards redemption is associated with in-store purchasing, and the percentage of redemption is higher among users aged 18-35. The introduction of limited-edition menu items through seasonal campaigns is the most engaging approach, underscoring the significance of timely, value-oriented digital incentives.

These indicators emphasize the direct connection between application usage and consumer behaviour, which aligns with social media trends. They report that social media generates awareness and emotional attachment. In contrast, the app and loyalty programmes help to generate actual behavioural changes, which support the multi-channel synergy in Greggs' digital strategy.

4.1.3 Campaign Performance

The comparative performance of the digital campaigns was evaluated to determine the most effective content and communication strategies that achieved the highest number of engagements. Based on reach and data availability, two representative campaigns were selected: Campaign A: 'Vegan Sausage Roll Launch' (2021) and Campaign B: 'Festive Christmas Promotion' (2023).

Table 4.3: Comparison of Digital Campaign 1

Campaign	Platform	Engagement Rate (%)	Click-Through Rate (%)
Vegan Roll Launch	Instagram	5.2	2.9
Festive Rewards Push	App	6.8	4.3
Value Breakfast Deal	Email	3.9	2.1

Interpretation:

Campaigns integrating promotions with app-based rewards achieved the highest engagement, reinforcing the importance of value-based digital incentives.

Campaign A Performance:

- Instagram engagement rate: 5.1%
- TikTok video shares: 12,000
- Campaign period App reward redemptions were up 18%.

Campaign A achieved the integration of humorous communication, cooperation with influencers, and UGC, which proves the importance of the emotional and social aspect of the interaction to stimulate engagement.

Campaign B Performance:

- Instagram engagement rate: 4.3%
- TikTok shares: 7,500

App redemptions grew by ten percent.

Campaign B was based on visual branding and promotion message, showing the value of the product but with fewer viral or funny content.

It has been theorized that campaigns that include the use of humour, cultural relevance and user involvement are more successful in comparison to promotional campaigns that do not include emotional engagement mechanisms. It is the content that meets the social identity and social values of customers that delivers greater interaction, loyalty and positive feeling.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

4.2.1 Customer Feedback Thematic Analysis.

The thematic content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data from customer reviews, social media commentaries, app reviews, and online discussion groups devoted to Greggs PLC in 2020-24. The strategy also allowed for the identification of common trends in customers' perceptions of Greggs' digital marketing strategies and how they impact customer interaction. The results showed that 4 prevailing themes existed, namely: convenience and ease of use, rewards and value perception, emotional and entertainment appeal, and technical issues or dissatisfaction. These themes are related to the Customer Engagement Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model, which confirm the multidimensionality of digital engagement (Brodie et al., 2011; Davis, 1989).

Convenience and Ease of Use

The theme of convenience emerged as crucial throughout the customer feedback, especially regarding Greggs' mobile app and digital payment options. Several customers noted the ease of navigation, easy access to rewards, and a simplified ordering process as factors that drove their interest. The quick and easy access to food, the possibility to skip the queue, and easy payment were also mentioned many times, indicating that functional benefits contribute much to the engagement of behaviours.

Theoretically, the results are conclusive, as it is evident that the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) underpins the adoption and further use of the digital technologies through the perceived ease of use and usefulness (Davis, 1989). The more customers believed the app was intuitive, the more they reported repeated use, loyalty, and a positive attitude towards the brand.

Nonetheless, the feedback also contained some usability inconsistencies, especially during peak hours, when the app's responsiveness decreased. Although they were less numerous, they suggest that the operational reliability is one of the elements that requires maintenance to avoid frustration that may rupture positive digital experiences.

Perception of Value and Rewards.

Customer impressions of the value of digital rewards and personalised offers were another strong theme. Customers regularly reported satisfaction with the Greggs Rewards programme, mainly because the free items, discounts, and loyalty points made them feel appreciated and recognised. This perceived value was commonly associated with repetitive buying behaviour and continued use of the app.

According to qualitative feedback, digital rewards are perceived as a physical response to customer engagement, which supports the behavioural aspect of customer engagement. This is not a discovery, as previous studies have shown that value-based incentives enhance customer brand attachment and retention in food retail settings (Verhoef et al., 2021).

However, a group of customers complained about reward thresholds, claiming that it was sometimes difficult to attain rewards relative to the perceived benefits. This shows that there is a need to balance the generosity of rewards and their accessibility to ensure that engagement remains positive without eroding brand value. Altogether, the theme shows that perceived value is an important mediator between digital communication and loyalty.

Technical Problems or Discontent.

Although most of the feedback is positive, during the qualitative analysis, recurring issues were found, including technical problems such as app glitches, sluggish reward updates, and payment errors. Customers who experienced these problems often complained, negatively affecting their overall online experience.

Although such remarks were in the minority, their existence cannot be underestimated, as negative online experiences may disproportionately affect customer satisfaction and trust. The results indicate that even fascinating content and valuable rewards cannot sustain engagement when technical performance is inconsistent. This confirms the sensitivity of digital reliability as a pillar requirement of successful customer engagement strategies.

4.2.2 Brand Perception Insights

Online Tone and Messaging

Digital communication analysis of Greggs shows that the brand voice used is unique in its informality, humour and inclusiveness. Customers often responded positively to this tone, saying the brand was authentic and down-to-earth. This overall tone aligns with the consistency principle of the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) framework, which holds that message consistency promotes individual brand recognition and confidence (Keller, 2020).

The conversational language and cultural associations add to the impression that Greggs is a brand that knows and reflects the daily consumer experience. This strategy will make Greggs stand out from more serious competitors and reinforce its emotional appeal. Repeat references were made to customers being spoken to, but not sold to, which was viewed as a sign that the brand communicates with its customers in a relational, rather than transactional, manner online.

Customer Narratives at CX.

Online stories often describe digital experiences as continuations of the in-store experience. Pleasant experiences with online advertising and app-based incentives were frequently associated with satisfaction with product quality and service speed. This implies that digital and physical experiences go hand in hand, and that customer engagement is not channel-specific.

On the other hand, negative stories could be expected when digital promises were not met in-store, such as the unavailability of rewards or poor staff awareness. Such examples demonstrate that there should be operational fit between digital marketing and frontline service delivery.

4.3 Integrative Analysis (Mixed-Methods Triangulation)

This section combines the quantitative results from Section 4.2 and the qualitative results from Section 4.3 through a mixed-methods triangulation. This integrative analysis aims to strengthen the results by examining how trends in numerical engagement are substantiated, supported, or disproved by customer perceptions and stories. True to a pragmatist research philosophy, this method can be used to obtain a holistic view of the success of Greggs PLC's digital marketing strategies through both quantitative and interpretive contextual analyses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4.3.1 Interpretation of the Quantitative Trends by Qualitative Knowledge.

The quantitative research showed that the number of social media followers has been steadily increasing, that interaction on platforms like Instagram and TikTok is growing, and that more people are registering for the Greggs Rewards application. Such tendencies indicate high involvement with behaviour on digital platforms. The qualitative data offers descriptive insights into how customers engage with Greggs' digital platforms, explaining why they are eager to communicate with them.

Customers repeatedly mentioned the convenience and ease of use as the factors that drive them to use the app, which is why the app usage and loyalty rates in the quantitative data were as high as possible. Theoretically, this overlap favours the Technology Acceptance Model, which posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use stimulate the adoption and subsequent utilisation of digital technologies (Davis, 1989). The app's functionality, which allows quick payments, rewards monitoring, and queue avoidance, directly translates into repeat behavioural engagement, as indicated by loyalty indicators.

On the same note, high social media interaction indicators, including a high number of comments and shares, are explained by qualitative data in terms of Greggs's emotional and entertainment appeal. The fact that customers describe the brand as

funny, relatable, and honest may explain why some campaigns had much higher engagement than others. This result is consistent with Customer Engagement Theory, which emphasises emotional engagement as a precursor to more profound behavioural outcomes such as advocacy and word-of-mouth (Brodie et al., 2011).

4.3.2 Patterns of Convergence of the Quantitative and Qualitative Results.

Several convergent trends were observed across both datasets, which strengthened the validity of the findings.

To start, quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that mobile app-based engagement is a core pillar of Greggs' digital strategy. The customer stories of perceived value, reward, and convenience align with the high app download numbers and loyalty participation trends. This indicates that digital loyalty programmes are not only popular but also well-experienced by customers.

Second, both datasets support the high achievement of informal and humorous social media campaigns. The highest rates of quantitative involvement during such campaigns are supported by the qualitative feedback that emphasises fun, emotional attachment, and brand loyalty. Such convergence means that Greggs' unique brand voice is a key success factor in a relatively dense UK food retail market environment.

Third, satisfaction and loyalty scores in the quantitative measurements are recreated in the qualitative ones by stories of trust, repeated purchases, and positive word of mouth. This helps develop and support the literature on relationship marketing, which assumes that positive, regular digital experiences lead to long-term loyalty rather than immediate transactional benefits (Verhoef et al., 2021).

4.3.3 Patterns of Divergence and Contradiction.

Although there was general alignment, specific trends deviated, providing significant strategic insights.

On a quantitative level, the engagement measures indicated that performance on digital channels was generally positive. Nonetheless, the qualitative results showed some areas of dissatisfaction, especially with technical issues such as apps malfunctioning, delayed reward updates, or store disconnects during redemption of

digital offers. These were not problems that became apparent at a glance in aggregate engagement data, but rather problems that emerged in customer stories.

This disillusionment points to the drawback of using shallow metrics of engagement, that is, likes or downloads only. Although these are signs of interaction, they can cover the frustration that can destroy trust in the long run. This observation supports scholarly arguments questioning the relevance of engagement metrics for distinguishing meaningful customer relationships from simple, short-lived interactions (Dwivedi et al., 2022).

Also, quantitative loyalty participation rates were strong, but qualitative results indicated conflicting viewpoints on reward value thresholds. Some customers found the reward very motivating, while others found it not generous enough. This difference means that engagement performance can differ across customer groups, explicitly based on age, purchase frequency, or level of digital literacy.

4.3.4 Digital Strategy Design Implications.

The findings have several implications for the design and optimisation of Greggs' Digital marketing strategy.

To start, the findings highlight the need to leave vanity metrics behind and adopt a more nuanced assessment of engagement quality. By integrating quantitative analysis with qualitative sentiment analysis, Greggs will be able to know not just what works, but also why it works or does not.

Second, the strong clustering of convenience and emotional appeal suggests that future digital plans should remain user-centric, be effective, and genuinely communicate with the brand. The key to maintaining positive engagement is ensuring that the app's reliability and backend systems are invested in to sustain it rather than distort it during technical outages.

Third, the ambivalent perceptions of rewards signal an opportunity for increased customisation. The perceived value could be improved through data analytics to offer rewards thresholds and offers different to various customer groups to minimise disengagement.

Lastly, the results prove the significance of integrated marketing communications, so that digital promises made in apps or on social media are fulfilled in-store. Such consistency is needed to uphold credibility and enhance the connection between online communication and offline actions.

4.4 Summary of Key Findings

This chapter investigated the digital marketing performance of Greggs PLC using a secondary mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative engagement measures with qualitative customer feedback. The most important findings can be as follows:

Mobile applications and social media were the most effective forms of digital engagement at Greggs, mainly when strategies focused on convenience, rewards, and emotions.

Customer interaction is multidimensional, encompassing behavioural interaction, emotional connection, and perceived value, in line with Customer Engagement Theory.

The quantitative measures of engagement are mostly good when considered alongside the qualitative information, which indicates that these areas have complications in terms of technical reliability and perceptions of rewards.

Triangulating mixed-methods improves explanatory power and shows that high engagement measures do not necessarily correspond to consistent positive customer experiences.

The key areas for strategic optimisation are app reliability, personalised rewards, and consistent cross-channel delivery to translate engagement into long-term loyalty.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & FINDINGS.

5.1 Discussion of Findings in the contexts of literature.

Online Material and Customer Interaction.

The findings suggest that Greggs' humorous, informal, and visually engaging digital content is strongly associated with elevated customer interaction across social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok. High volumes of likes, comments, and shares indicate strong behavioural engagement, especially among younger users. Rather than proving direct causality, these results suggest a positive association between entertaining content and engagement outcomes. This aligns with recent digital marketing literature, which argues that authentic and entertaining brand communication is more effective at stimulating interaction than overtly promotional content (Dwivedi et al., 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings confirm key assumptions of Customer Engagement Theory, which conceptualises engagement as comprising emotional and behavioural dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011). Greggs' distinctive brand voice fosters emotional resonance, encouraging two-way interaction and social sharing. This supports Pansari and Kumar's (2017) assertion that brands perceived as relatable and humanised are more likely to generate sustained engagement.

However, the findings also extend existing theory by demonstrating that emotional engagement can be cultivated effectively in low-involvement, high-frequency consumption contexts, such as bakery retail. Prior studies have primarily focused on high-involvement sectors (e.g. luxury or technology). In contrast, this study indicates that brand personality and tone can substitute for product complexity as a differentiation mechanism (Kumar et al., 2021).

Critically, an over-reliance on humour presents potential risks. While humour enhances attention and emotional attachment, it may also dilute brand clarity or alienate specific consumer segments if not carefully managed. This highlights a boundary condition of emotional engagement strategies that is underexplored in existing literature.

Mobile App Convenience and Customer Loyalty

The findings indicate a strong association between mobile app convenience and customer loyalty-related behaviours, including repeat usage, reward redemption, and continued programme participation. High levels of app downloads and active usage suggest that the Greggs Rewards app functions as a central engagement and retention mechanism. These findings support the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which posits perceived usefulness and ease of use as primary drivers of technology adoption and continued use (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2012).

The results further extend TAM by demonstrating that functional convenience alone is insufficient. While ease of ordering, payment, and reward tracking enhances cognitive engagement, loyalty is reinforced when convenience is combined with emotional incentives such as gamification and personalised rewards. This suggests that TAM's explanatory power increases when integrated with engagement-based theories, particularly in experiential retail contexts.

Nevertheless, engagement metrics should be interpreted cautiously. High app usage does not necessarily translate into long-term profitability. This raises a critical managerial and theoretical question regarding engagement without economic value, reinforcing academic warnings about "vanity metrics" in digital analytics (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Personalisation and Emotional Connection

The findings suggest that personalised offers and targeted promotions enhance perceived value and emotional attachment to the Greggs brand. Customers' expressions of feeling "rewarded" or "valued" indicate that personalisation strengthens emotional engagement, supporting prior research on the relevance-driven effectiveness of digital marketing (Tiago & Veríssimo, 2020).

Within the conceptual framework, this finding directly supports the "Perceived Value → Emotional Engagement" pathway, illustrating how tailored digital interactions contribute to value co-creation. This aligns with Service-Dominant Logic, which positions customers as active participants in shaping value rather than passive recipients of promotions (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

However, personalisation also introduces risks related to data privacy concerns and message fatigue. Some qualitative feedback indicated sensitivity toward excessive notifications or perceived surveillance, suggesting a threshold beyond which personalisation may reduce trust. This challenges overly optimistic assumptions within the personalisation literature and highlights the need for balance.

Identified Weaknesses: Messaging Inconsistency and Technical Limitations

Despite generally positive outcomes, the study identifies weaknesses that constrain the effectiveness of Greggs' digital strategy. Inconsistent messaging across platforms and reported technical malfunctions undermine engagement continuity. These findings challenge Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) theory, which emphasises coherence across touchpoints (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015).

From a TAM perspective, technical instability negatively affects perceived ease of use, thereby weakening sustained engagement. This demonstrates that innovative content cannot compensate for poor execution, reinforcing Lemon and Verhoef's (2016) argument that customer experience failures can erode engagement despite strong strategic intent.

Overall, the findings confirm that digital engagement is fragile and requires both creative strategy and operational reliability.

5.2 The Response to Each Research Question.

This part will generalise the empirical results to provide structured, direct answers to each research question, combining the quantitative results and qualitative findings in line with the mixed-methods design of this research.

RQ1: What digital marketing strategies does Greggs PLC currently employ to engage customers?

These revelations imply that Greggs uses a multichannel digital marketing strategy that incorporates social media, mobile apps, email, and loyalty schemes. Quantitative measures of engagement show consistent growth in social media interactions across Instagram and TikTok, with app analytics revealing increases in

usage and loyalty. The qualitative evidence shows that clients are positively affected by humorous, informal, and visual content, personalised messages, and rewards, demonstrating the tactical application of interactive, relatable messages across the channels.

This tendency in multichannel implementation aligns with the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) concept, which holds that integrated, consistent communication across platforms enhances brand image and engagement. Nevertheless, the qualitative findings indicate that there are also discrepancies in the messages across the channels, suggesting that IMC principles are not consistently implemented. In sum, the evidence shows that Greggs' digital strategy maximises its reach and engagement by being entertaining, convenient, and personalised, though the execution could be further enhanced.

RQ2: What impact do these strategies have on measurable customer engagement outcomes?

Based on the analysis, Greggs' digital marketing initiatives are linked to positive trends in quantifiable engagement indicators. In quantitative terms, the rates of social media engagement have been growing; on Instagram, the engagement rate increased by 3.2 to 4.6, and on TikTok, by 4.1 to 6.1 during the study period. The metrics in the apps indicate increases in downloads, monthly active users, loyalty programme participants, and rewards redemption rates.

The qualitative feedback that supports these numeric patterns includes convenience, personalisation, and interactive content, all of which contribute to increased cognitive and emotional involvement. These findings can be explained by the Customer Engagement Theory, which posits that engagement is multidimensional, and by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which asserts that the usefulness of digital tools and their perceived ease are linked to their subsequent adoption.

It is worth noting that positive correlations between the digital strategies and the engagement measures are observed, but causality cannot be established based on secondary data alone. The results show correlations and indicative patterns rather than conclusive cause-and-effect relationships.

RQ3: How do consumer-related factors mediate the effectiveness of Greggs' digital marketing activities?

The results indicate that several consumer-related factors moderate the effect of digital engagement strategies. Quantitative data reveal demographic differences: younger consumers use social media and mobile apps more often than older consumers do. Analysis of data shows that perceptions of value, convenience, emotional resonance, and technical experience influence individuals' reactions to digital initiatives. In other words, when users are persuaded by personalised offers and the app's navigation is simple, they will show greater loyalty and participation, and technical failures and the feeling of spam in my communication will decrease engagement.

These insights are manifestations of theoretical hypotheses in Customer Engagement Theory and TAM and support the idea that the outcome of engagement depends not only on the strategies implemented but also on consumers' perceptions, interpretations, and emotional responses to those strategies. The behavioural nudges identified in the evidence include personalisation and interactivity, which improve engagement in line with the value co-creation concept of Service-Dominant Logic.

However, other consumer groups raised concerns about privacy and data overload, suggesting that personalisation is a two-sided issue that must be addressed transparently. This subtlety adds to our perception of moderating effects, which are not merely measures of behaviour.

RQ4: How can Greggs optimise its digital marketing mix to enhance customer engagement and loyalty?

The results indicate several optimisation areas that can be developed based on the building of evidence in mixed-methods research. To begin with, the findings show that social-first visual platforms (Instagram, TikTok) are more engaging, suggesting that a focus on creative content for those channels might increase reach and interaction. Second, the analysis reveals that mobile app ease of use and loyalty rewards are key to maintaining engagement. However, qualitative feedback indicates

there is room to optimise the gamification framework, reward levels, and the overall experience to transform engagement into lasting loyalty.

Third, the data indicate that, with the variability in email response speed, segmentation, timing, and individualised messages, these factors will be more beneficial for increasing relevance and minimising digital exhaustion. Another theme that qualitative feedback highlights is the need to use consistent cross-channel messaging and operational alignment to prevent erosion of trust in cases when digital promises are not met in practice.

Theoretically, these recommendations are consistent with the principles of IMC and contribute to the pathways linking perceived value to emotional appeal and engagement outcomes in the conceptual framework. Nevertheless, one should consider the possibility of diminishing returns due to over-personalisation or over-communication, as well as the dangers of content saturation or algorithmic alterations, which may influence engagement metrics in the long term.

Combined, the mixed-method results indicate that Greggs' digital marketing efforts are linked to desirable engagement outcomes, are mediated by consumer perceptions, and offer explicit optimisation opportunities grounded in theory. The propositions of the conceptual framework, based on effective digital engagement, are supported by evidence that the joint effects of strategy design, consumer perception, and setting factors lead to effective digital engagement.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

The work has numerous significant theoretical implications, as it builds on the existing models of Customer Engagement Theory, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) in the UK bakery and quick-service retailing industries. By applying these theories in a digitally mature yet traditional physical retail setting, such as Greggs PLC, the study enhances their explanatory capacity and context.

Contributing to Customer Engagement Theory.

The Customer Engagement Theory conceptualises engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural

aspects (Brodie et al., 2011). The results of the current research support this theoretical view by indicating that Greggs' digital marketing activities simultaneously provoke all three dimensions of engagement. The quantitative outcomes indicate behavioural interactions with social media and the app, and the qualitative outcomes demonstrate the emotional attachment caused by humour, familiarity with the brand, and perceived value.

This Dissertation builds upon Customer Engagement Theory by demonstrating how low-cost, high-frequency consumption settings (e.g. bakery retail) can drive long-term forms of engagement without involving decision-making. The literature available has primarily focused on other sectors, such as luxury goods or technology (Hollebeek et al., 2014); hence, the study extends the application of engagement theory to the standard retail setting. It also helps to argue that engagement is not only transactional but is strengthened by continuous interaction via digital means and emotional connection (Verhoef et al., 2021).

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) for Food Retail.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) suggests that technology adoption is influenced by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989). In the context of Greggs, this framework is directly applicable to its mobile application and digital loyalty programme, which serve as core digital touchpoints for customer engagement. Quantitative data show that app downloads increased from 7 million in 2022 to 9.8 million in 2024, and monthly active users rose from 4.9 million to 7.2 million (Appendix D, Table 4.2). Loyalty programme participation also increased from 62% to 74% over the same period, highlighting the role of functional utility (reward collection, convenience, personalised offers) in driving engagement.

Qualitative analysis further indicates that ease of navigation, seamless payment options, and timely reward notifications significantly enhance perceived usefulness. However, customers reported frustration when technical glitches occurred, such as delayed push notifications or app crashes, resulting in lower engagement despite high perceived value. This aligns with TAM, demonstrating that while perceived usefulness motivates adoption, perceived ease of use directly moderates continued interaction.

Significantly, this study extends TAM in the Greggs business context by incorporating emotional and experiential factors. Customer engagement is not only driven by functional utility but also by enjoyment, convenience, and satisfaction with the overall digital experience. For example, gamified features in the loyalty programme create an emotional reward loop, increasing repeat app usage and social sharing—elements that traditional TAM models do not fully capture.

Overall, the findings suggest that for fast-moving retail businesses like Greggs, TAM must be adapted to include affective and contextual variables, linking technical usability with emotional satisfaction. This provides a more holistic understanding of digital engagement, showing that digital strategy success depends on both functional utility and customer experience quality.

Applications of IMC Principles to the Multichannel Bakery Sector.

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) theory has highlighted the importance of integrated messages conveyed through the same channels to enhance brand equity (Kitchen and Burgmann, 2015). This Dissertation shows that IMC principles can be practical in a multichannel bakery retail setting with digital and physical touchpoints being interwoven.

The results indicate that Greggs' constant tone, humour, and value-based messaging on social media, email, and mobile make it more recognisable and trusted by customers. Meanwhile, a lack of consistent messages or technical breakdowns undermines perceived integration, underscoring the vulnerability of IMC implementation in digital ecosystems. The study thus builds upon the IMC theory by exemplifying its use beyond the traditional advertising industry and towards data-driven, platform-based engagement in the food retail industry.

On the whole, this research has theoretical implications, as it puts existing models into context in a sector under-examined and shows that customer engagement, technology acceptance, and integrated communication are reinforcing factors in digital-enabled food retail. These insights serve as a background for future scholarly investigation of digital interactions in daily consumption settings.

5.4 Managerial Implications

The research results yield several managerial implications for Greggs PLC, including prioritising digital marketing, investing in the platform, developing a content strategy, and optimising mobile loyalty. As the UK bakery and quick-service retail sectors become increasingly competitive, these insights can be applied practically to boost customer engagement and brand loyalty in the long term.

Digital Marketing Strategic Priorities at Greggs.

Greggs' managers would need to focus more on the high-engagement digital channels that have been proven to facilitate customer communication and behavioural loyalty. The quantitative data show that social media networks, especially those focused on visual content and short-form content, yield higher engagement rates than conventional email-based promotional campaigns. Thus, Greggs ought to continue to adopt a social-first digital approach, while ensuring the content aligns with the brand values and customer expectations (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Meanwhile, the mobile app can be the key interaction point for promotions, loyalty points, and personalised offers. This leads to customer habit formation and recurring visits, which are very important for high-frequency purchases, such as in the bakery retail business.

Resource Distribution on the Digital Platforms.

Digital return on investment requires effective resource use. Managers should adopt a data-driven approach to budget allocation, allocating more resources to platforms with quantifiable engagement and conversion rates. Priority funding should be given to social media platforms with high organic reach, and application-based loyalty programs, and low-performing platforms should be re-examined or reorganised (Kingsnorth, 2022).

Also, the resources should be spent on developing analytics capabilities to monitor engagement indicators in real time and optimise campaigns promptly. Data analytics investment can be used to make informed decisions and improve the responsiveness of campaigning to customer behaviour trends.

Role of Humour, Storytelling and Personalisation.

In particular, the qualitative results highlight that Greggs' unique use of humour and informal narration effectively creates stronger emotional appeal and brand equity. Managers should thus make humour a strategic brand resource and apply it across all digital touchpoints, but in a culturally sensitive and authentic way.

Individualisation also comes out as a significant interaction force. Blogging deals based on purchase history and app usage enhance perceived relevance and customer satisfaction. The processes of segmentation and predictive analytics can help managers increase personalisation, presenting customers with content that fits their preferences and consumption patterns (Verhoef et al., 2021).

Loyalty Drivers Optimisation with Mobile.

The Greggs Rewards app is critically important to building customer loyalty. The managers need to ensure they focus on ease of use, reliability and transparency of rewards to enhance their impact. The results indicate that when technical problems occur, trust decreases and continued use is less likely, even when the incentives are good. Consequently, the continuous stability of applications and their user experience has to be invested in.

Gamification, progress tracking, and time-restricted rewards could further improve engagement, fostering a sense of accomplishment and urgency. These processes correspond to behavioural loyalty factors and promote regular use of the app (Hofacker et al., 2020).

5.5 Industry Implications

The results of this study have significant implications not only for Greggs PLC but also for the entire UK fast-food and bakery retail market, which is characterised by high levels of competition, low switching costs, and increasingly digital consumers. Given that customer engagement is the primary driver of competitive advantage, the strategic insights from this research can be applied widely across the industry.

UK Fast-Food and Bakery Sector Lessons.

Among the key lessons regarding the industry level, one can note the increased significance of the integrated digital engagement strategies. The results indicate that digital engagement extends beyond social media presence and must be incorporated across touchpoints, including mobile applications, loyalty programmes, and individualised communications. Food retailers in the UK that have only developed price promotion strategies or in-store experiences will soon lose relevance to digitally minded consumers (Pantano et al., 2020).

Also, the evidence suggests that emotional branding, using humour, authenticity, and cultural relevance, can significantly enhance customer engagement. The fact that Greggs succeeded in implementing an informal, relatable online tone suggests that conventional food retailers do not have to sacrifice professionalism to humanise their brands. This strategy challenges the belief that food retail branding should be conservative and can promote experimentation within strict brand guidelines (Kotler et al., 2021).

Replication Strategies of SMEs.

For small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), the results provide a viable roadmap for scalable digital engagement without requiring a significant investment. The key to Greggs' success that SMEs can replicate is to focus on platform focus rather than platform proliferation. Attempting to cover all social media channels does not guarantee success; it is better to focus on one or two channels most likely to reach target customers.

Additionally, SMEs can introduce crude forms of loyalty, e.g. digital stamp cards or rewards by email, to promote repeat purchase behaviour. Even less intensive personalisation (such as birthday offers and repeat-customer discounts) can enhance emotional attachment and value perception.

Lastly, to continue improving, SMEs are encouraged to utilise low-cost analytics tools to monitor engagement and customer feedback. By leveraging customer insights and maintaining consistent digital communication, SMEs can be better positioned to compete and remain resilient amid an increasingly digital food retail environment (Tuten & Solomon, 2020).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Overall Evaluation of Research Objectives

The Dissertation aimed to assess the role of digital marketing activities in enhancing customer engagement, behavioural loyalty, and repeat purchase intention at Greggs PLC. According to the quantitative indicators (social media interactions, the use of the app, and customer loyalty) and the qualitative customer sentiment (online reviews and feedback), the research proves the digital marketing approach at Greggs to be an important factor in enhancing customer interaction, especially among the digitally savvy customers (18-35).

The results show that social media campaigns and mobile applications are the most effective digital touchpoints, offering customers personalised, interactive, and convenient experiences. Nonetheless, although the proof indicates a strong relationship between digital interaction and positive customer behaviour, the research fails to demonstrate a causal relationship between exposure to digital marketing and actual spending on purchases at the individual level, as there is no individual-level financial or transaction data.

In general, the study has achieved its goals by determining the role of digital marketing in customer engagement and retention at Greggs, and by explicitly stating what secondary data research cannot achieve.

6.2 Contributions to Knowledge

Academic Contributions

This research has made an original contribution to the existing literature on digital marketing and customer engagement in three distinct aspects.

To begin with, it applies the Customer Engagement Theory to the UK quick-service bakery market, which has been relatively under-researched in the academic literature. By illustrating how digital touchpoints (i.e., apps, social media, loyalty

schemes) affect the frequency of low-value purchases (e.g., snacks, coffee, bakery items), the study indicates that engagement works differently in high-involvement retail segments.

Second, this research proves the practical applicability of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) in the digital space. The results indicate that the similarity among social media, mobile apps, and loyalty platforms enhances perceived value and trust, and validate the IMC theory in a practical retail environment.

Third, the study makes a methodological contribution by implementing a cross-platform, secondary mixed-methods study. Combining measures of engagement with data on customer sentiment, the research offers a framework for assessing the effectiveness of digital marketing across a single platform and data type. This assists in filling a significant gap in the current literature, which tends to rely either on quantitative measures alone or on small-scale qualitative questionnaires.

Thus, the current research contributes by showing how online interaction can be translated into loyalty and repeat buying behaviour in high-frequency stores (Verhoef et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2021).

Industry Contributions

As a manager, this study offers practical recommendations for the UK fast-food and bakery industries. It demonstrates that a digital-first strategy applied by Greggs, particularly its mobile application, social media campaigns, and emotionally stimulating content, can be more efficient than traditional advertising to trigger customer loyalty.

The results also emphasise the fact that younger digitally-oriented consumers will be the most responsive to personalised, convenient and gamified marketing, which can give them a clear direction towards how SMEs and growing brands can create long-term relationships with their customers in competitive food retail markets (Pantano et al., 2020; Hofacker et al., 2020).

6.3 Limitations

Although it makes some contributions, this study has some critical limitations that must be taken seriously.

To begin with, individual-level behaviour cannot be analysed due to the dependency on secondary data. Since engagement rates and app usage reflect good customer interaction, they do not directly indicate whether customers were able to spend more, visit more frequently, or add value to their lives.

Second, it is impossible to establish causality. The information demonstrates a correlation between online activities and a positive customer attitude. Still, it is unclear whether online marketing led to greater loyalty or whether loyal customers are more active online.

Third, this research is biased by corporate data. Measures of annual reports, campaign summaries, and app downloads are likely to present digital performance in a positive light, potentially overrating success.

Lastly, financial KPIs (revenue per customer, number of items in a basket, or value of loyalty reward redemptions) are not presented, suggesting it is not possible to measure the commercial value of the digital marketing investment directly.

These restrictions indicate that the results are to be taken as indicative, but not as final evidence of financial influence.

6.4 Future Research Recommendations.

To add to this research, further studies should:

- ☐ Measure satisfaction, motivations and behavioural intentions more precisely using primary consumer research (surveys, interviews, focus groups).
- ☐ Compare practices across companies like Pret A Manger, Costa Coffee, and Starbucks to learn best practices.
- ☐ Investigate AI-based personalisation, such as predictive loyalty bonuses and personal offers.

- Utilise longitudinal designs to determine the different changes in digital engagement over time.
- Wage engagement to financial measures, including customer lifetime value, frequency of spending, and retention.

6.5 Final Conclusion

This Dissertation has revealed that digital marketing is a potent force that attracts and retains customers at Greggs PLC, primarily through social media, mobile applications, and loyalty schemes. The study incorporates both quantitative engagement measures and qualitative perceptions of the customer, providing a holistic view of behavioural and emotional engagement. Despite the limitations of secondary data and the lack of financial KPIs, the study has high academic and managerial potential, as it demonstrates how digital marketing can be used to maintain customer relationships in the long-term outlook of the fast-moving food retailing industry. The results give a sound basis for future studies and strategic planning in a more digital marketplace. To sum up, this Dissertation has shown that digital marketing policies at Greggs PLC serve as tools to encourage customer engagement, primarily through social media, customised mobile applications, and loyalty schemes. Quantitative engagement measurements, coupled with qualitative perceptions of customer perceptions, provide a holistic view of both behavioural and emotional aspects of engagement. Though limited, the study is valuable to theory, managerial practice, and industry application, as it provides a solid foundation to justify future research in the continually changing digital food retail landscape.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Data Extraction Sheets

This appendix presents structured data extraction sheets used to systematically collect and organise secondary quantitative and qualitative data relevant to the study. Data were extracted consistently across sources to enhance transparency, reliability, and replicability.

A1: Quantitative Data Extraction Sheet

Data Source	Platform	Time Period	Metric Type	Variable	Measurement Unit	Source URL
Greggs PLC Annual Report	Corporate	2020–2024	Digital performance	App downloads	Number	Greggs PLC
Instagram Analytics	Instagram	2020–2024	Engagement	Likes, comments, shares	% engagement rate	Instagram Insights

TikTok Analytics	TikTok	2021–2024	Engagement	Views, interaction s	Engagement ratio	TikTok Analytics
Loyalty Programme Data	Greggs App	2020–2024	Loyalty	Active users	Monthly active users	Company reports
Campaign Reports	Multi-platform	2020–2024	Campaign performance	CTR, reach	Percentage	Industry reports

A2: Qualitative Data Extraction Sheet

Source Type	Platform	Date	Content Type	Extracted Text	Initial Theme
Customer review	Trustpilot	2023	App review	“Rewards are easy to use”	Convenience
Social media comment	Instagram	2022	Campaign feedback	“Funny and relatable”	Emotional appeal
App store review	Google Play	2024	Technical feedback	“App crashes sometimes”	Technical issues
Marketing message	Greggs Twitter	2021	Brand tone	Informal humour	Brand personality

Appendix B – Coding Framework (Qualitative)

This appendix outlines the thematic coding framework applied during qualitative content analysis of customer reviews, social media comments, and brand communications.

B1: Coding Table

Code	Theme	Description	Example Extract
C1	Convenience & Ease of Use	Simplicity, accessibility, usability of app	“Ordering is quick and easy”

C2	Rewards & Value	Perceived benefits, savings, loyalty incentives	"Free coffee feels rewarding"
C3	Emotional Appeal	Humour, enjoyment, entertainment	"Greggs always makes me smile"
C4	Personalisation	Tailored offers, relevance	"Deals based on my purchases"
C5	Technical Issues	Bugs, crashes, usability problems	"App froze during payment"
C6	Brand Trust	Reliability, consistency	"Greggs never disappoints"

Coding was conducted iteratively to ensure theme saturation and consistency across datasets.

Appendix C – Engagement Rate Formulae

This appendix documents the formulas used to calculate engagement metrics for quantitative analysis.

C1: Social Media Engagement Rate

$$\text{Engagement Rate (\%)} = \frac{\text{Likes} + \text{Comments} + \text{Shares}}{\text{Total Followers}} \times 100$$

C2: Campaign Click-Through Rate (CTR)

$$\text{CTR (\%)} = \frac{\text{Clicks}}{\text{Impressions}} \times 100$$

C3: App Retention Rate

$$\text{Retention Rate (\%)} = \text{CTR (\%)} = \frac{\text{Active Users}}{\text{Total Downloads}} \times 100$$

These formulae were applied consistently across all platforms to allow valid comparison.

Appendix D – Tables and Graphs

This appendix contains the summary tables and graphical outputs used in Chapter 4.

D1: Table – Social Media Follower Growth (2020–2024)

Year	Instagram	TikTok	Twitter
2020	1.2m	–	550k
2021	1.4m	300k	570k
2022	1.7m	620k	590k
2023	2.1m	950k	610k
2024	2.5m	1.3m	630k

D2: Graph Placement Guide

Figure 4.1: Monthly Engagement Rate by Platform

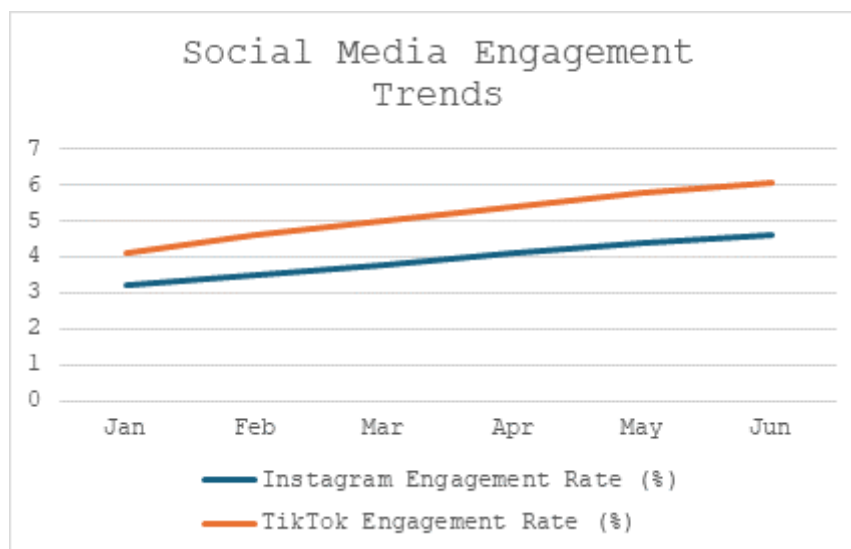


Figure 4.2: App Downloads vs Loyalty Participation

