Research Paper

Customers' Perspectives on Promotion-Based, Permission-Based, and Service-Oriented E-Mail Marketing Strategies: A Qualitative Study

Chaitra Katti *
Belém Barbosa **

ABSTRACT

The purpose of ths artilde is to develop strong understanding of email marketing by investigating the value provided to customers by different types of e-mail marketing: permission-based, promotional oriented, and service oriented. In order to tackle the proposed research questions, this article includes a qualitative study with 15 participants from India. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and subject to thematic content analysis. This study demonstrates that the three types of e-mail marketing generate distinct effects on consumers. Service-oriented e-mail stands out for elevating customer experiences and building positive perceptions. Thus using evidences, the study defines and describe the art of email marketing This study fills a research gap, by examining the characteristics (advantages, disadvantages, and outcomes) of each type of e-mail marketing.

Keywords: Permission-Based E-Mail, Digital Marketing, Digital Touchpoints, E-Mail Marketing, Service-Oriented Email Marketing, Promotional E-Mail

––––––

* Sikkim Manipal University, India. E-Mail: chaitra.katti91@gmail.com
** School of Economics and Management, University of Porto, Portugal. E-Mail: marketing.belem@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

E-mail marketing continues to gain attention from practitioners. Despite the consistent increase in email marketing budgets each year (Direct Marketing Association, 2020), a significant challenge remains: 85% of consumers believe that the majority of brand emails they receive are not relevant. Previous literature has extensively studied e-mail marketing, highlighting its effectiveness as an advertising channel (Araujo et al., 2023; Chang et al., 2013; Cheng et al., 2009; Martin et al., 2003; Micheaux, 2011; Park et al., 2005; Sahni et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2022), as well as its role as customer service touchpoint (Gupta et al., 2013; Huang & Shyu, 2009; Murphy & Gomes, 2003; Yang et al., 2019). Additionally, some studies have explored the impacts of permission-based e-mail marketing, where emails are sent only to customers who have agreed to receive them from brands (Araujo et al., 2022; Bhatia, 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2019; Swain et al., 2023).

However, existing literature tends to focus on one specific approach to e-mail marketing, such as promotion-based, permission-based, or service-oriented e-mail marketing. To the best of the authors' knowledge, a comprehensive comparison of these different e-mail marketing strategies is lacking in the literature. Furthermore, the literature does not provide sufficient attention to understanding customers' perspectives on e-mail marketing (Barbosa & Carneiro, 2022; Swain et al., 2023). Given this gap, this article aims to analyse the advantages and drawbacks of these e-mail marketing approaches, by further understanding consumers' motivations, attitudes, and perceived benefits toward promotion-oriented, permission-based, and service-oriented e-mail marketing. Based the contributions in the literature, three research questions (RQ) were defined:

- RQ1: What are consumers' attitudes and perceived benefits of promotion-based e-mail marketing?
- RQ2: What benefits do consumers obtain from subscribed e-mail marketing?
- RQ3: How do customers' attitudes and perceived benefits differ between service-oriented and promotion-oriented e-mail marketing?

The article is based on a review of the main contributions in the literature regarding email marketing, which enabled the identification and characterization of three approaches. The

consumer behaviour towards email marketing is further explored with empirical evidence on the views of customers familiar with e-mail interactions with brands. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is one of the first studies that focuses on exploring different types of e-mail marketing and supports marketers and academicians in choosing the right type of e-mail marketing based on customers' complex behaviour. The study makes one of the first attempts to create a holistic definition of e-mail marketing by comparing the potential features of different forms of email marketing, which are still scarce in previous studies.

As such, this article makes several contributions. It fills a gap in the literature by comparing three common approaches to e-mail marketing, offering a holistic definition and understanding of this strategy. It conceptualizes e-mail marketing as a strategy that needs to deliver value to customers, either in term need satisfaction or in the improvement of the customer journey. It also offers evidence on the perspectives of customers, that enable to further understand the impacts of the different types of e-mail marketing. As such, the article offers valuable insights that can help practitioners and researchers choosing the appropriate type of e-mail marketing to build holistic customer experience via e-mail, namely to assist the choice of the considering the context and the marketing goals.

The reminder of this article is organised as follows. The next section includes a synthesis of literature on promotion-based, permission-based, and service-oriented e-mail marketing, by organizing the scattered literature into the identified three typologies, and exploring their advantages and disadvantages. To address the proposed research questions, a qualitative study was conducted with a diverse sample of 15 consumers aged between 25 and 40 years from India with prior experience with e-mail marketing. After the methods section, the results are presented and discussed. Based on the literature review and the findings, the conclusion proposes a broader definition of e-mail marketing, highlights the theoretical contributions, and points out managerial implications. Suggestions for future research are also provided.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

E-mail marketing is necessary for the long-term profitability of any business (Zhang et al., 2017). Evidence suggests that e-mails generate positive associations with the sender if the messages include persuasion knowledge (Thomas et al., 2022), triggered e-mails based on browsing history (Goic et al., 2021), personalized subject lines (Aiossa, 2020; Chaparro-Pelaez et al., 2022; Paulo

et al., 2022), emojis (Valenzuela-Galvez et al., 2023), meet customers' personal needs, and are sent at convenient times (Chiu et al., 2007; Miquel-Romero & Adame-Sanchez, 2013), and build long-lasting customer-firm relationships (Luo & Kumar, 2013). Although the uses of e-mail marketing are diverse, most of the studies mentioned in Table 1 support the effectiveness of different types of e-mail marketing, namely promotion-based, permission-based, and service oriented. Next sections explore each of the approaches to e-mail marketing in detail.

Table 1. Studies on different types of e-mail marketing

TYPES OF E-MAIL MARKETING	RESEARCH FOCUS	AUTHORS
Promotion-based e-mail marketing	Personalisation of e-mail contents	(Aiossa, 2020; Chaparro-Pelaez et al., 2022; Paulo et al., 2022; Sahni et al., 2018; White et al., 2008)
	Brand awareness	(Ahmed et al., 2017)
	Persuasiveness and message formats	(Chaparro-Pelaez et al., 2022; Cheung, 2008; Lorente-Paramo et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2022)
	Consumer perceptions and perceived usefulness	(Martin et al., 2003; White et al., 2008)
	Apology advertisements	(Park et al., 2005)
	Consumer's attitude towards e-mail marketing	(Cheng et al., 2009)
	E-mail advertising frequency	(Micheaux, 2011)
	Unsolicited e-mails and Spam	(Chang & Morimoto, 2011; Ezpeleta et al., 2020; Melville et al., 2006; Moustakas et al., 2006; O'Connor, 2008; Sipior et al., 2004)
	Influence on consumer buying behaviour	(Goic et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2022)
	Incentive-based promotions	(Leung & Tsou, 2019)
	Relationship, functional, process benefits	(Lin et al., 2015)
	Features of PEM	(Grubor et al., 2018; Hartemo, 2022)
	interactive and personalized communication	(Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Hartemo, 2016, 2022)
	Spam and PEM	(Chang et al., 2013)

Permission-based e-mail marketing	Influence on online shopping	(Reimers et al., 2016)
	Opt in and opt out	(Hartemo, 2022; Kumar et al., 2014; Manganari et al., 2022)
	Newsletters	(Araujo et al., 2023; Kumar, 2021)
	Impact of e-mail marketing on brand loyalty	(Zhang & Liu-Thompkins, 2023)
	Perceived benefits	(Bhatia, 2020)
	Marketing automation and technological innovation	(Araujo et al., 2022; Swain et al., 2023)
	Customer beliefs and attitude	(Mahmoud et al., 2019)
Service oriented e-mail marketing	Emotion detection in customer care e-mail	(Gupta et al., 2013)
	E-mail open rate and purchase behaviour	(Zhang et al., 2017)
	Personalization, message copy, interactivity, financial and illustration	(Huang & Shyu, 2009; Yang et al., 2019)
	Customer service	(Murphy & Gomes, 2003)
	Customer relationship and brand engagement	(Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012; Huang & Shyu, 2009; Yang et al., 2019)

Source: The authors

2.1 Promotion-based e-mail

The mass mailing of unsolicited e-mails has been a prevalent practice for many years. However, such e-mail campaigns are commonly perceived as spam by consumers, leading to a negative view of e-mail marketing. Cold contacts for product sales have resulted in low efficacy and a general avoidance of e-mails in marketing campaigns (Ezpeleta et al., 2020), which has had a detrimental impact on consumers' attitudes (Micheaux, 2011). While there are exceptions, the literature consistently associates e-mail advertising with negative emotions among customers, particularly feelings of irritation and disappointment (Bhatia, 2020; Cheng et al., 2009; Kumar & Sharma, 2014; Micheaux, 2011; Morimoto & Chang, 2006). The unsolicited promotional e-mail messages often cause irritation and disturbance for consumers (Bhatia, 2020), which consequently reduces their willingness to be included in e-mail marketing databases.

Several researchers have examined the factors contributing to the failure of this type of e-mail marketing and have explored receivers' perspectives and reactions towards these messages. Being classified as spam remains one of the key challenges faced by this e-mail marketing strategy. Concerns related to spam can lead customers to avoid online shopping (Gratton, 2004), become less willing to grant permission for e-mail contacts (Krafft et al., 2017), and generally avoid interacting with brands via e-mail (Noble & Phillips, 2004). Consumers often find e-mail marketing intrusive and irritating, primarily due to their experiences with unsolicited e-mail advertisements from commercial sources (Cheng et al., 2009; Kumar & Sharma, 2014; Morimoto & Chang, 2006). Excessive e-mail advertisements from a single commercial source, in particular, contribute to the perception of intrusion and irritation (Micheaux, 2011).

It is widely acknowledged that advertisement messages sent without permission may have a negative impact on brand attitudes. However, some research recognizes the positive impacts of e-mail marketing on various aspects, including brand awareness (Ahmed et al., 2017), reducing cart abandonment (Thomas et al., 2022) and offline sales (Martin et al., 2003), personalized loyalty programs (Zhang & Liu-Thompkins, 2023), and incentive-based price promotions (Leung & Tsou, 2019; Lorente-Paramo et al., 2020). Accordingly, the literature emphasizes the importance of focusing on personalized content (Chaparro-Pelaez et al., 2022; Lorente-Paramo et al., 2020; Sahni et al., 2018), persuasion techniques (Cheung, 2008; Lorente-Paramo et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2022), and overall perceived utility (White et al., 2008). Despite the identification of positive impacts of e-mail advertising on customers by some authors (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2017; Kumar, 2021; Leung & Tsou, 2019; Thomas et al., 2022), unsolicited e-mails are generally perceived as intrusive and associated with negative attitudes, leading to them being considered as spam (Chang et al., 2013). Consumers are more likely to accept commercial contacts if they believe that those messages will offer them advantages (Bauer et al., 2005).

Considering the need for a deeper understanding of consumers' sentiments towards promotional e-mail marketing campaigns to assist practitioners in crafting effective campaigns, the following research question is defined:

RQ1- What are consumers' attitudes toward and perceived benefits of promotion-based e-mail marketing?

2.2 Permission-based e-mail marketing

Permission marketing is defined as an alternative to unsolicited push strategies (Godin, 1999). From the customers' perspective, it enables access to information with reduced investment in terms of cost, time, and effort (Swain et al., 2023). By definition, recipients can opt out or cancel their e-mail subscriptions at any time (Kumar et al., 2014; Manganari et al., 2022), addressing privacy concerns (Hartemo, 2022; Reimers et al., 2016). Consequently, the permission-based e-mail marketing strategy (PEM) reduces the perceived intrusiveness of campaigns (Hartemo, 2022). However, as noted by Reimers et al. (2016), a challenge of PEM lies in delivering accurate messages to customers, particularly when there is no clear distinction between spam and PEM.

Under these circumstances, e-mail campaigns can effectively initiate, sustain, and foster communication with customers (Kent & Brandal, 2003). They serve as platforms for showcasing new products, promoting special offers, and delivering interesting e-mail content (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Merisavo & Raulas, 2004). The open rate of newsletters is influenced by factors such as timing and message appeal (Araujo et al., 2023), while the consumer response is enhanced by the design elements of newsletters (Kumar, 2021).

Amongst the outcomes associated with PEM that stand out in the literature are:

- Customers' positive beliefs and behavioural responses (Mahmoud et al., 2019);
- Monetary incentives and perceived entertainment increases consumers' attitude towards permission based marketing (Bhatia, 2020);
- Customer retention and website traffic (Jolley et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2003);
- Build customer relationships (Waring & Martinez, 2002);
- E-mail open rates and purchase conversion (Kent & Brandal, 2003; Kumar et al., 2014; Merisavo & Raulas, 2004);
- Brand loyalty and consequently increase customer profitability (Kent & Brandal, 2003);
- Customer innovation, mobile technology, and frequency e-mails can improve positive response of consumers (Chaparro-Pelaez et al., 2022; Swain et al., 2023);
- Automation of e-mail communications based on subscriber's personalization could increase clicks throughs (Araujo et al., 2022; Hartemo, 2022).

Given the anticipated benefits in terms of campaign effectiveness, recent studies have predominantly focused on PEM (e.g., Bhatia, 2020; Grubor et al., 2018; Hartemo, 2022; Mahmoud et al., 2019; Reimers et al., 2016; Swain et al., 2023), underscoring the need for further research

in this area (Swain et al., 2023). Consequently, to gain deeper insights into the factors driving permission-based marketing, the following research question is defined:

RQ2: What benefits do consumers obtain from subscribed e-mail marketing?

2.3 E-mail as a customer service touchpoint

E-mail has emerged as one of the preferred communication channels for customer service (Yang et al., 2019). Customer service via e-mail offers several advantages for both customers and managers. For customers, it provides a convenient alternative to long wait times on phone calls with call centers and enables them to maintain a record of exchanged information with the company. The editing features of e-mail are particularly valued when expressing negative emotions (Ishii & Markman, 2016), which are often associated with online customer support (Gupta et al., 2013; McLean & Wilson, 2016). Resolving customer issues quickly through e-mails increases customer satisfaction and purchase intentions (Murphy & Gomes, 2003).

The literature acknowledges that service-oriented e-mail can effectively foster brand engagement and cultivate relationships with customers (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012; Huang & Shyu, 2009; Yang et al., 2019). Huang and Shyu (2009) recommend incorporating appropriate social content into messages to enhance relationship quality and improve service quality. Furthermore, Yang et al. (2019) highlight the importance of interactivity in e-mail, which is associated with customer attitudes and positively influences loyalty. Several authors emphasize that e-mail is a vital communication tool and method for delivering satisfying service experiences (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012).

Customer experience is crucial in e-mail marketing (Chang et al., 2013). Despite limited exceptions, the literature has largely neglected customers' perspectives on service-based e-mail marketing, particularly regarding customer attitudes, even though there have been a few studies and reflections on the role of e-mail in post-purchase customer service. Therefore, this article proposes the following research question:

RQ3: *How distinct are customers' attitudes toward and perceived benefits of service-oriented and promotional oriented e-mail marketing?*

3. METHOD

In consideration of the contributions presented in the previous section and the proposed research questions, qualitative exploratory research was conducted using in-depth semi-structured

interviews. Semi-structured interviews offer the advantages of incorporating elements from both structured and unstructured interviews. They involve designing a sequential set of questions while allowing flexibility to explore additional issues raised by the interviewees (Cachia & Millward, 2011), including their feelings and experiences related to the topic at hand. Additionally, the advantages of unstructured interviews, such as establishing rapport and creating a comfortable atmosphere, help researchers seek further clarification about the interviewees' experiences (Bryman, 2016).

By following the process of a structured interview, participants were asked the same set of questions, enabling comparison of answers using a detailed interview guide (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). This approach also allowed for flexibility to probe deeper, as is characteristic of unstructured interviews. The interview outline focused on eliciting participants' narratives and experiences associated with e-mail marketing. Furthermore, the advantages and disadvantages of each type of e-mail marketing were explored in-depth, drawing on the examples and narratives provided by the participants.

The participants in this study consisted of Indian citizens aged between 25 and 45, who met the following criteria: (i) frequent use of e-mail for professional or personal purposes, and (ii) prior experience with newsletters and e-mail marketing campaigns received from brands and companies across various sectors. India, with one of the world's largest young populations, has a significant number of active online buyers. Indian millennials, specifically those between 18 and 34 years old, constitute a significant portion of the country's growing workforce. They are highly connected to various digital technologies and possess substantial spending power with improved access to products and services (Deloitte, 2019). Hence, studying e-mail marketing behaviors in the Indian market is particularly relevant. To select the participants, a purposive sampling method was employed with the assistance of the researchers' contacts and social networks. This method aimed to include 15 participants with diverse characteristics in terms of their buying behavior and education (Table 2).

Table 2. Sample Characteristics

Participants	Age	Gender	Profession	Education
Participant 1	33	Male	Head of Marketing	Postgraduate
Participant 2	28	Male	Sales Manager	Graduate
Participant 3	37	Female	Database architect	Graduate
Participant 4	25	Male	Finance Executive	Graduate
Participant 5	26	Female	Software Engineer	Postgraduate
Participant 6	33	Male	Business Analyst	Postgraduate
Participant 7	32	Female	Fashion designer	Graduate
Participant 8	35	Male	Government Employee	Graduate
Participant 9	25	Male	Sales Manager	Graduate
Participant 10	28	Male	Data scientist	Postgraduate
Participant 11	33	Male	Trader	Graduate
Participant 12	33	Male	Floor Manager	Graduate
Participant 13	25	Male	Graphic designer	Graduate
Participant 14	23	Male	Data Scientist	Graduate
Participant 15	36	Female	Business development Manager	Postgraduate

The interviews lasted between 40 and 50 minutes and were audio recorded to facilitate transcription and subsequent data analysis. Participants were informed about the confidentiality of their data and provided detailed information about the research aims and methodological procedures. Ethical principles commonly accepted in social sciences (Bryman, 2016), such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation, were adhered to throughout the study.

Thematic content analysis was conducted independently by two researchers. Any contradictory opinions between the researchers were discussed and resolved. Content analysis, as described by Downe-Wamboldt (1992), allows for a systematic understanding of a phenomenon. Qualitative content analysis is particularly valuable for comprehending subjective phenomena (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), including underlying dimensions such as e-mail as a promotional tool, permission-based e-mail marketing, and service-oriented e-mail. The collected data was read multiple times and analyzed word by word to extract meaning and gain deep insights. The exact words from the data were highlighted in the results to capture key concepts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that participants clearly distinguished among the three e-mail marketing strategies. Consequently, the results are organized according to the typologies explored in this article.

4.1 Participants views on promotion-based e-mail marketing

As noted in the literature review, few authors (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2017; Chaparro-Pelaez et al., 2022; Kumar, 2021; Leung & Tsou, 2019; Martin et al., 2003; Merisavo & Raulas, 2004) identified positive impacts of e-mail advertising on customers. In the case of this study, one participant describes her experience with excitement:

> *"I get e-mails from my favourite brand to buy sneakers, especially when there is 70% off, I usually get this e-mail once a year during one particular season, and I wait for the e-mail, so that I can buy them"* (Participant 2).

Still, these positive emotions on e-mail marketing were quite rare among participants in this study. Aligned with most contributions in the literature, participants often associated e-mail advertising with negative feelings (Ezpeleta et al., 2020; Gratton, 2004), irritation (Bhatia, 2020; Cheng et al., 2009; Kumar & Sharma, 2014; Micheaux, 2011; Morimoto & Chang, 2006; Thomas et al., 2022). Deceit was also a common experience shared by participants.

> *"Some companies send offers like 10% discounts on specific categories. and when you click on it, there might be no such offer. Instead they would have increased the price and reduce it for 10%"* (Participant 3).

> *"The worst experience I had was: I bought a mobile phone for a specific price, just after two days, I got a recommendation to buy phones and I see that the phone I bought was being sold at half the price in the e-mail advertisement"* (Participant 7).

However, to avoid promotional e-mails, participants categorize different types of messages, such as promotions and social communications.

> *"I personally feel promotional e-mails are neither benefitting nor annoying because they move into my promotions category and I hardly check it"* (Participant 1).

This study also confirmed that the reactions to promotional e-mails may vary across industries, as pointed out in the extant literature (Ahmed et al., 2017; Kumar, 2021; Martin et al., 2003; Merisavo

& Raulas, 2004). Specifically, higher levels of perceived benefits and usefulness were observed in the B2B and education sectors.

> *"Many times, when we receive offers and discounts from vendors, we have built a relationship with them, because of their professional etiquette, during the conversation over e-mail"* (Participant 5).

> *"For trading purposes, I open all promotional e-mails linked to trading website"* (Participant 11).

> *"I am looking to do course in agile certification. And promotional e-mails related to certificate programs tend to be useful. I also get an idea about course price and syllabus"* (Participant 9).

Overall, promotional e-mails were perceived to have the least benefits and usefulness, except in professional contexts, especially in the B2B sector. The lack of relevance is identified as the main cause for the reduced effectiveness and negative impacts of promotion-based e-mail marketing on consumers.

4.2 Subscription based e-mails and permission based e-mails

Regarding PEM, participants views and experiences show that customers are motivated to open PEM from companies that offer valuable and timely information for them, in accordance with extant literature (Araujo et al., 2022; Chiu et al., 2007; Miquel-Romero & Adame-Sanchez, 2013).

> *"I keep searching for updates [related to my professional activity] on Google. Sometimes, some websites give very useful reports and so I subscribe"* (Participant 9).

> *"I have subscribed to job portals, and I get notification about new job opening and they are very useful"* (Participant 12).

> *I open arts specific e-mails because I am interested in exploring home décor ideas and I like them"* (Participant 15).

> *"I have paid and subscribed to a gymnastic blog. I receive weekly tips for my workout and it is very useful, I have even forward to my friends, if I find it very good"* (Participant 4).

However, some of the participants negatively expressed about forceful subscriptions:

> *"I would not be wanting to subscribe to the e-mails. But only if I provide my e-mail ID I can access my information. During the time of providing e-mail ID, some*

> *companies automatically add me to subscription lists. I usually spam the e-mails, because I am annoyed" (Participant 9).*
>
> *"If there is nothing special in the content, I usually unsubscribe or even ignore. Sometimes content will almost be same, as previous e-mails but with different title. But it is copy, paste content" (Participant 15).*

Overall, the results are in line with the literature (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Reimers et al., 2016), emphasizing that the value of permission-based e-mail marketing (PEM) lies in its capability to deliver information tailored to the specific needs of customers at the right time (Araujo et al., 2022).

4.3 E-mail as a service touchpoint

The results further support the idea that e-mail is an efficient and essential tool for delivering positive service experiences (Chang et al., 2013; Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012; Murphy & Gomes, 2003). Participants expressed that they particularly find service-based e-mails valuable and appreciate receiving real-time information, which enhances brand trust.

> *"E-mail is very useful, when I get booking confirmations, order confirmation and I can track my orders over e-mails" (Participant 8).*
>
> *"It is very convenient and beneficial, when banking sectors, food apps, travel portal updates us with transactions, refunds, order status" (Participant 13).*

However, regarding the interaction with customer service via e-mail, the study revealed diverse reactions.

> *"The problem with chat and phone is that every time we call or chat, we have to narrate the incident all over from the beginning to another person. With e-mail that is not the case" (Participant 2).*
>
> *"I prefer e-mail to raise complaints, because there is a record of all our conversations and I can forward those conversations for further clarification from companies. This is not the case for phone or chat" (Participant 9).*
>
> *"For international calls or language barriers, I think e-mails are best to communicate with companies" (Participant 6).*

Hence, the findings further support the notion that e-mail communication is an effective tool for fostering customer relationships (Huang & Shyu, 2009; Luo & Kumar, 2013; Murphy & Gomes, 2003; Waring & Martinez, 2002; Yang et al., 2019). Participants in this study expressed a

preference for using e-mail to connect with companies for issue resolution, inquiries, information retrieval, feedback, tracking details, and task completion. Overall, participants perceived greater benefits in service-oriented e-mail marketing compared to PEM or promotion-based e-mails.

4.4 Summary of findings and discussion

Table 3 presents a summary of the findings, enabling a comparison between the three types of e-mail marketing.

Table 3. Summary of the findings

Type of e-mail marketing	Main advantages	Main disadvantages	Impacts on customers
Permission-based e-mail marketing	Meets professional and personal goals.	High repetition, and low quality, and irrelevance.	Satisfies safety, cognitive and aesthetic needs.
Service-oriented e-mail marketing	Creates and builds an integral value during all the buying phases for a customer, derived from seamless interactivity, real time purchase notification, feedbacks, resolutions, frequent communication. Communicating with the company.	Slow response rate; No Instant response.	Builds reliability, trust, safety, integrity, and confidence. Helps develop customer relationships and loyalty.
Promotion-based e-mail marketing	Satisfies professional and very specific personal goals	Lack of transparency, manipulation, high repetition, and low quality, and irrelevance, wrong timing	Leads to frustration, disappointment, and lack of trust

This study confirmed that there are few perceived benefits from promotion-based e-mails, consistent with previous studies (Bhatia, 2020; Kumar & Sharma, 2014; Micheaux, 2011; Morimoto & Chang, 2006), except in certain cases such as for professional reasons, particularly in B2B contexts, where promotional e-mails are accepted with satisfaction by customers. The study considered factors within promotional e-mails, including personalized loyalty programs (Zhang & Liu-Thompkins, 2023), incentive-based price promotions (Chaparro-Pelaez et al., 2022; Leung & Tsou, 2019), personalized subject lines (Aiossa, 2020; Araujo et al., 2023; Chaparro-Pelaez et al.,

2022; Paulo et al., 2022), and design elements (Kumar, 2021). It was discovered that while personalized loyalty and incentive-based price promotions were accepted by some customers, personalized subject lines and design elements were not effective enough to ensure customer satisfaction through e-mail marketing. Moreover, e-mails triggered by browsing history (Goic et al., 2021) raised concerns about manipulation. In general, as observed by participants, promotion-based e-mail marketing negatively affects customer attitudes and often leads to frustration, disappointment, and a lack of trust. Additionally, factors such as lack of transparency, manipulation, repetitiveness, and low-quality content in e-mail marketing further contribute to negative perceptions towards promotional e-mails, resulting in a tendency to avoid e-mail interactions with companies.

Furthermore, it was found that PEM is a more effective approach to e-mail advertising and elicits better behavioral responses from customers compared to promotional e-mails. This study considered several factors from the existing literature, such as perceived benefits (e.g., Bhatia, 2020), personalization (Araujo et al., 2022), and customer attitude (Mahmoud et al., 2019), and aligns with these factors. However, the study observed that e-mail as a professional communication channel and the frequency of e-mails (Chaparro-Pelaez et al., 2022; Swain et al., 2023) or repeated automated e-mails (Araujo et al., 2022) could raise customer privacy concerns. In particular, this study discovered that PEM is highly effective when it fulfils a specific personal need or professional goal of customers. Additionally, in line with the existing literature (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003; Reimers et al., 2016), this study highlights that despite granting permission to companies, customers may still mark e-mails as spam, unsubscribe, or decrease their open rate if PEM fails to meet their needs and preferences.

Lastly, the study also demonstrated the relevance and effectiveness of e-mail marketing as a customer service touchpoint. This type of e-mail marketing creates and enhances integral value throughout all stages of the customer buying process, facilitated by seamless interactivity, real-time purchase notifications, feedback, and resolutions. These findings align with points made in the literature (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012; Murphy & Gomes, 2003; Yang et al., 2019). Specifically, such e-mail marketing initiatives contribute to building reliability, trust, safety, integrity, and confidence in the company. Customers develop a positive perception of a brand when its e-mail marketing incorporates distinctive features such as seamless interactivity, effective problem resolution, valuable feedback, and timely notifications about their purchases.

5. CONC LUSION

This article aimed to analyze the advantages and drawbacks of different e-mail marketing approaches, while gaining insights into consumers' motivations, attitudes, and perceived benefits towards promotion-oriented, permission-based, and service-oriented e-mail marketing. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of various aspects of e-mail marketing that are noteworthy, including:

- E-mail serving as a customer service touchpoint, creating integrated value throughout the customer journey.

- The negative effects of promotional e-mails on customers (Bhatia, 2020; Cheng et al., 2009; Kumar & Sharma, 2014; Micheaux, 2011; Morimoto & Chang, 2006), with exceptions when they align perfectly with professional and personal interests.

- Acceptance of permission-based e-mail marketing (PEM) by customers when it satisfies their safety, cognitive, and aesthetic needs.

- The enhancement of customer experiences and the development of positive brand perceptions through service-oriented e-mail marketing.

- The potential negative effects on customer perceptions for all types of e-mail marketing (permission-based, promotion-based, and service-oriented) when manipulation, high repetition, low quality, and irrelevance are present.

Based on the findings, e-mail marketing can be viewed as a process that provides specific value at every stage of the customer journey. Therefore, aligning with the definition of the American Marketing Association (2017), which states that "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large", this article suggests that e-mail marketing should be seen through the same lens, proposing a comprehensive definition of e-mail marketing that encompasses all its modalities and highlights its potential as a digital marketing strategy:

> *"E-mail marketing is a process that delivers specific value to the customer by offering benefits that either satisfy their cognitive needs or enhance their customer journey. This marketing approach assumes various forms, including permission-based, promotion-based, or service-oriented strategies".*

5.1 Theoretical contributions

This article expands the existing literature on the impacts of e-mail marketing on consumers by examining three distinct types of this strategy from the customers' perspective. It addresses a gap in the literature, which often focuses on a single type of e-mail marketing, such as permission-based typology. A significant contribution of this research is its demonstration that customers differentiate between the three types of e-mail marketing and hold distinct views on their effects. Furthermore, this article emphasizes the importance of perceived content value in influencing consumer behaviour, regardless of the type of e-mail marketing employed. While there are clear indications that permission-based e-mails lead to more favourable reactions compared to promotion-based ones, the ultimate effectiveness of e-mail marketing strategies lies in their ability to offer value to the customer (Figure 1). In this context, perceived value emerges as a relevant factor, providing an additional lens to better comprehend this marketing strategy beyond message relevance, which has been highlighted in previous literature (Swain et al., 2023).

Additionally, the study's location in India constitutes a valuable contribution, as much of the research on this topic is predominantly conducted in a limited number of Western countries (Swain et al., 2023).
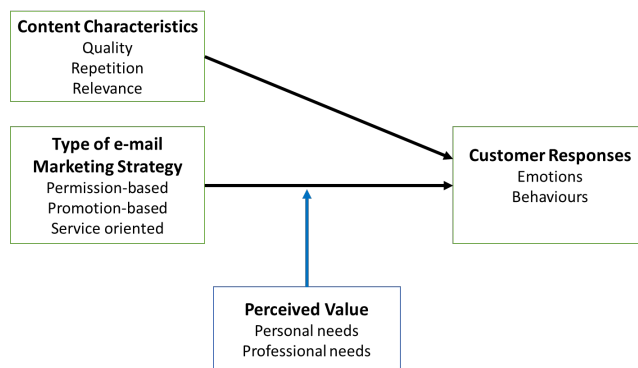

Figure 1. Summary of findings

5.2 Managerial Implications

This study categorizes e-mail marketing into three alternative strategies (permission-based, promotion-based, and service oriented), and identified the expected impacts of each modality on customers. In this sense, this study helps managers to address challenges of e-mail marketing effectiveness, by further understanding customers perceptions, emotions, attitudes towards particular type of e-mail marketing. This study concludes that, both PEM and service-oriented e-

mail marketing provide most positive outcomes and are recommended as main approaches to e-mail marketing. In contrast to this, study finds the major potential in elevating customer experience through service-oriented e-mail marketing. However, value-creation and customer-centric strategies of e-mail marketing may still be effective even for promotion-based e-mails. For this reason, one main insight for managers that result from this study is that e-mail marketing should have as main goal to create valuable experiences to customers.

5.3 Research limitations and directions for future research

This study is not without limitations. A limited number of consumers participated in this study, and having particular characteristics, namely being all from India and belonging to limited age groups. Arguably, different ages or different countries may be associated with different behaviour regarding e-mail. Hence, researchers can use this opportunity to explore age or country specific motivations. In addition, combining both quantitative and qualitative approach enrich the findings related to this topic.

As suggested by the participants in this study, behaviours and emotions regarding e-mail marketing seem particularly different in B2B and B2C sectors. Future research should explore e-mail practises that are specific of B2B contexts affect the impact of e-mail marketing on customers.

Finally, it is recommended that future research further explores value creation within e-mail marketing strategies by examining moderating effects on the outcomes of e-mail marketing strategies. In particular, quantitative approaches will be essential to validate the findings and expand our knowledge and understanding of e-mail marketing strategies' effectiveness. As such, we recommend that future research includes surveys to evaluate the statistical significance of the impacts of different e-mail marketing approaches on customer responses, as well as the moderating effects of perceived value.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, R. R., Vveinhardt, J., & Streimikiene, D. (2017). Interactive digital media and impact of customer attitude and technology on brand awareness: evidence from the south Asian countries. *Journal of Business Economics and Management*, *18*(6), 1115-1134. https://doi.org/10.3846/16111699.2017.1400460

Aiossa, E. (2020). The anatomy of an effective e-mail subject line: How to stand out in a crowded inbox. *Journal of Digital & Social Media Marketing*, *8*(3), 244-250.

Araujo, C., Soares, C., Pereira, I., Coelho, D., Rebelo, M. A., & Madureira, A. (2022). A novel approach for send time prediction on email marketing. *Applied Sciences-Basel*, *12*(16), Article 8310. https://doi.org/10.3390/app12168310

Araujo, C. R., Pires, P. B., Delgado, C., & Santos, J. D. (2023). Persuasive determinants in the hotel industry's newsletter opening rates. *Sustainability*, *15*(4), Article 3358. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15043358

Barbosa, B., & Carneiro, R. (2022). Opening e-mail marketing messages on smartphones: The views of Millennial consumers. In P. Hájek & O. Vít (Eds.), *Proceedings of CBU in Economics and Business* (Vol. 3, pp. 13-18). https://doi.org/10.12955/peb.v3.285

Bauer, H. H., Reichardt, T., Barnes, S. J., & Neumann, M. M. (2005). Driving consumer acceptance of mobile marketing: A theoretical framework and empirical study. *Journal of electronic commerce research*, *6*(3), 181.

Bhatia, V. (2020). Drivers and barriers of permission-based marketing. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *14*(1), 51-70. https://doi.org/10.1108/jrim-07-2018-0088

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Cachia, M., & Millward, L. (2011). The telephone medium and semi-structured interviews: A complementary fit. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, *6*(3), 265-277. https://doi.org/10.1108/17465641111188420

Chang, H. H., Rizal, H., & Amin, H. (2013). The determinants of consumer behavior towards email advertisement. *Internet Research*, *23*(3), 316-337. https://doi.org/10.1108/10662241311331754

Chang, S., & Morimoto, M. (2011). Electronic marketing communications: an evolving environment, but similar story regarding the perception of unsolicited commercial e-mail and postal direct mail. *Journal of Promotion Management*, *17*(3), 360-376.

Chaparro-Pelaez, J., Hernandez-Garcia, A., & Lorente-Paramo, A. J. (2022). May I have your attention, please? An investigation on opening effectiveness in e-mail marketing. *Review of Managerial Science*, *16*(7), 2261-2284. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-022-00517-9

Cheng, J. M. S., Blankson, C., Wang, E. S. T., & Chen, L. S. L. (2009). Consumer attitudes and interactive digital advertising. *International Journal of Advertising*, *28*(3), 501-525. https://doi.org/10.2501/s0265048709200710

Cheung, M. (2008). 'Click here': the impact of new media on the encoding of persuasive messages in direct marketing. *Discourse Studies*, *10*(2), 161-189. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445607087007

Chittenden, L., & Rettie, R. (2003). An evaluation of e-mail marketing and factors affecting response. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing*, *11*, 203-217. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jt.5740078

Chiu, H. C., Hsieh, Y. C., Kao, Y. H., & Lee, M. (2007). The determinants of email receivers' disseminating behaviors on the internet. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *47*(4), 524-534. https://doi.org/10.2501/s0021849907070547

Deloitte. (2019). *Unravelling the Indian consumer*. https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam Deloitte/in/Documents/consumer-business/in-consumer-RLS-2019-noexp.pdf

Direct Marketing Association. (2020). *Marketer email tracker 2020*. https://dma.org.uk/uploads/misc/marketer-email-tracker-2020.pdf

Downe-Wamboldt, B. (1992). Content analysis: Method, applications, and issues. *Health care for women international*, *13*(3), 313-321. https://doi.org/10.1080/07399339209516006

Ellis-Chadwick, F., & Doherty, N. F. (2012). Web advertising: The role of e-mail marketing. *Journal of Business Research*, *65*(6), 843-848. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.01.005

Ezpeleta, E., de Mendizabal, I. V., Hidalgo, J. M. G., & Zurutuza, U. (2020). Novel email spam detection method using sentiment analysis and personality recognition. *Logic Journal of the Igpl*, *28*(1), 83-94. https://doi.org/10.1093/jigpal/jzz073

Goic, M., Rojas, A., & Saavedra, I. (2021). The effectiveness of triggered email marketing in addressing browse abandonments. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *55*, 118-145. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2021.02.002

Gratton, E. (2004). Dealing with unsolicited commercial emails: A global perspective. *Journal of Internet Law*, *7*(12), 3-13.

Grubor, A., Djokic, N., & Milicevic, N. (2018). The use of e-mail marketing in accordance with permission marketing approach in promotion of a study program. *Strategic Management*, *23*(4), 26-31. https://doi.org/10.5937/StraMan1804026G

Gupta, N., Gilbert, M., & Di Fabbrizio, G. (2013). Emotion detection in email customer care. *Computational Intelligence*, *29*(3), 489-505. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8640.2012.00454.x

Hartemo, M. (2016). Email marketing in the era of the empowered consumer. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *10*(3), 212-230. https://doi.org/10.1108/jrim-06-2015-0040

Hartemo, M. (2022). Conversions on the rise - modernizing e-mail marketing practices by utilizing volunteered data. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *16*(4), 585-600. https://doi.org/10.1108/jrim-03-2021-0090

Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *15*(9), 1277-1288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687

Huang, J. H., & Shyu, S. H. P. (2009). Building personalised relationships with customers via emails. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, *20*(6), 585-601, Article Pii 912446503. https://doi.org/10.1080/14783360902924234

Ishii, K., & Markman, K. M. (2016). Online customer service and emotional labor: An exploratory study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *62*, 658-665. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.04.037

Jolley, W., Lee, A., Mizerski, R., & Sadeque, S. (2013). Permission email messages significantly increase gambler retention. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(9), 1617-1622. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.12.006

Kent, R., & Brandal, H. (2003). Improving email response in a permission marketing context. *International Journal of Market Research*, *45*(4), 489-503.

Krafft, M., Arden, C. M., & Verhoef, P. C. (2017). Permission marketing and privacy concerns: Why do customers (not) grant permissions? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *39*, 39-54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2017.03.001

Kumar, A. (2021). An empirical examination of the effects of design elements of email newsletters on consumers' email responses and their purchase. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *58*, Article 102349. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2020.102349

Kumar, S., & Sharma, R. R. (2014). An empirical analysis of unsolicited commercial e-mail. *Paradigm*, *18*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0971890714540363

Kumar, V., Zhang, X. A., & Luo, A. (2014). Modeling customer opt-in and opt-out in a permission-based marketing context. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *51*(4), 403-419. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.13.0169

Leung, D., & Tsou, M. (2019). The impact of incentive framing format and language congruency on readers' post-reading responses to email advertisements. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *31*(8), 3037-3057. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijchm-06-2018-0514

Lin, H. H., Li, H. T., & Wang, Y. S. (2015). Permission-based e-mail marketing websites success: An integrated perspective. *Journal of Global Information Management*, *23*(2), 1-23. https://doi.org/10.4018/jgim.2015040101

Lorente-Paramo, A. J., Chaparro-Pelaez, J., & Hernandez-Garcia, A. (2020). How to improve e-mail click-through rates - A national culture approach. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *161*, Article 120283. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2020.120283

Luo, A., & Kumar, V. (2013). Recovering hidden buyer-seller relationship states to measure the return on marketing investment in business-to-business markets. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *50*(1), 143-160. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.11.0295

Mahmoud, A. B., Grigoriou, N., Fuxman, L., Hack-Polay, D., Mahmoud, F. B., Yafi, E., & Tehseen, S. (2019). Email is evil!: Behavioural responses towards permission-based direct email marketing and gender differences. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *13*(2), 227-248. https://doi.org/10.1108/jrim-09-2018-0112

Manganari, E., Mourelatos, E., Michos, N., & Dimara, E. (2022). Harnessing the Power of Defaults Now and Forever? The Effects of Mood and Personality. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, *26*(4), 472-496. https://doi.org/10.1080/10864415.2022.2123646

Martin, B. A. S., Van Durme, J., Raulas, M., & Merisavo, M. (2003). Email advertising: Exploratory insights from Finland. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *43*(3), 293-300. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021849903030265

McIntosh, M. J., & Morse, J. M. (2015). Situating and constructing diversity in semi-structured interviews. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, *2*, Article 2333393615597674. https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393615597674

McLean, G., & Wilson, A. (2016). Evolving the online customer experience ... is there a role for online customer support? *Computers in Human Behavior*, *60*, 602-610. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.084

Melville, N., Stevens, A., Plice, R. K., & Pavlov, O. V. (2006). Unsolicited commercial e-mail: Empirical analysis of a digital commons. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, *10*(4), 143-168. https://doi.org/10.2753/jec1086-4415100405

Merisavo, M., & Raulas, M. (2004). The impact of e-mail marketing on brand loyalty. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *13*(7), 498-505. https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420410568435

Micheaux, A. L. (2011). Managing e-mail advertising frequency from the consumer perspective. *Journal of Advertising*, *40*(4), 45-65. https://doi.org/10.2753/joa0091-3367400404

Miquel-Romero, M. J., & Adame-Sanchez, C. (2013). Viral marketing through e-mail: the link company-consumer. *Management Decision*, *51*(10), 1970-1982. https://doi.org/10.1108/md-08-2012-0592

Morimoto, M., & Chang, S. (2006). Consumers' attitudes toward unsolicited commercial e-mail and postal direct mail marketing methods: intrusiveness, perceived loss of control, and irritation. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *7*(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2006.10722121

Moustakas, E., Ranganathan, C., & Duquenoy, P. (2006). E-mail marketing at the crossroads - A stakeholder analysis of unsolicited commercial e-mail (spam). *Internet Research*, *16*(1), 38-52. https://doi.org/10.1108/10662240610642532

Murphy, J., & Gomes, L. (2003). E-mail customer service by Australian educational institutions. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, *11*(2), 56-69. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1441-3582(03)70129-3

Noble, S. M., & Phillips, J. (2004). Relationship hindrance: Why would consumers not want a relationship with a retailer? *Journal of Retailing*, *80*(4), 289-303. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2004.10.005

O'Connor, P. (2008). E-mail marketing by international hotel chains. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, *49*(1), 42-52. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010880407305553

Park, H. S., Lee, H. E., & Song, J. A. (2005). "I am sorry to send you SPAM" - Cross-cultural differences in use of apologies in email advertising in Korea and the US. *Human Communication Research*, *31*(3), 365-398. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2005.tb00876.x

Paulo, M., Migueis, V. L., & Pereira, I. (2022). Leveraging email marketing: Using the subject line to anticipate the open rate. *Expert Systems with Applications*, *207*, Article 117974. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2022.117974

Reimers, V., Chao, C. W., & Gorman, S. (2016). Permission email marketing and its influence on online shopping. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, *28*(2), 308-322. https://doi.org/10.1108/apjml-03-2015-0037

Sahni, N. S., Wheeler, S. C., & Chintagunta, P. (2018). Personalizationin email marketing: The role of noninformative advertising content. *Marketing Science*, *37*(2), 236-258. https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.2017.1066

Sipior, J. C., Ward, B. T., & Bonner, P. G. (2004). Should spam be on the menu? *Communications of the Acm*, *47*(6), 59-63. https://doi.org/10.1145/990680.990681

Swain, S., Jebarajakirthy, C., Maseeh, H. I., Saha, R., Gupta, N., & Grover, R. (2023). Permission marketing: a systematic review of 22 Years of research. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, *41*(3), 310-328. https://doi.org/10.1108/mip-05-2022-0187

Thomas, J. S., Chen, C. Q., & Iacobucci, D. (2022). Email marketing as a tool for strategic persuasion. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *57*(3), 377-392, Article 10949968221095552. https://doi.org/10.1177/10949968221095552

Valenzuela-Galvez, E. S., Garrido-Morgado, A., & Gonzalez-Benito, O. (2023). Boost your email marketing campaign! Emojis as visual stimuli to influence customer engagement. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *17*(3), 337-352. https://doi.org/10.1108/jrim-02-2021-0033

Waring, T., & Martinez, A. (2002). Ethical customer relationships: A comparative analysis of US and French organisations using permission-based e-mail marketing. *Journal of Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management*, *10*(1), 53-69. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jdm.3240094

White, T. B., Zahay, D. L., Thorbjornsen, H., & Shavitt, S. (2008). Getting too personal: Reactance to highly personalized email solicitations. *Marketing Letters*, *19*(1), 39-50. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-007-9027-9

Yang, K., Min, J. H., & Garza-Baker, K. (2019). Post-stay email marketing implications for the hotel industry: Role of email features, attitude, revisit intention and leisure involvement level. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, *25*(4), 405-417. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766718814081

Zhang, J. Z., & Liu-Thompkins, Y. (2023). Personalized email marketing in loyalty programs: The role of multidimensional construal levels. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-023-00927-5

Zhang, X., Kumar, V., & Cosguner, K. (2017). Dynamically managing a profitable email marketing program. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *54*(6), 851-866. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.16.0210

How to cite this article: