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Can Digital Tools Help Sustain Customer Loyalty Amid the Economic Crisis? Evidence from the Telecom Sector

Samir Hammami[1] | Hazem Ghaleb Al Samman[2] | Omar Durrah[3]* | Mahjabin Banu[4] | Tareq Alhousary[5]

[1]*Department of Management Information Systems, College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dhofar University, Salalah, Oman*
[2]*Department of Finance and Economics, College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dhofar University, Oman*
[3]*Department of Management, College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dhofar University, Salalah, Oman*
[4]*Department of Management, Gitarattan International Business School, New Delhi, India.*
[5]*Department of Management Information Systems, College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dhofar University, Salalah, Oman*

*Correspondence to: Omar Durrah, Department of Management, College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dhofar University, Salalah, Oman.
E-mail: odurrah@du.edu.om

Abstract: This research examines how to enhance customer loyalty in the telecom sector in terms of economic challenges. A conceptual model was developed and tested empirically by employing structural equation modelling techniques using data collected through a questionnaire from 250 samples working in the telecom sector in Syria. The results showed that customer relationship management (CRM) system, organisational management, and staff readiness significantly and positively affect customer loyalty. The study shows how digital tools influence customer retention in a challenging context, contributing to knowledge of crisis management and consumer behaviour in unstable markets. Practically, the study offers telecom companies strategies for improving customer relationships and maintaining market share using digital solutions during economic difficulties. The research explores the potential of digital technology to enhance social stability and economic resilience by retaining customers and fostering connectivity and access to essential services in challenging economies. This study is one of the first to investigate the relationship between its constructs in its setting.

Keywords: customer relationship management, digital tools, economic crisis, loyalty, telecom sector.

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INTRODUCTION

Crises can significantly impact businesses and customer relationships, especially in unstable economies, which are often more fragile and vulnerable to external shocks. However, digital tools and strategies can be crucial in sustaining customer loyalty and navigating these challenging times. A customer relationship management (CRM) system is an essential tool that combines technological solutions with business strategy to give the

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firm an edge in interacting with its customer base to maintain and grow customer loyalty and trust. During the crisis, technological solutions under the umbrella of CRM can be utilised to ensure business continuity and survival throughout high-uncertainty timeframes. The Syrian economy has been experiencing severe GDP contractions, high inflation rates, and currency devaluation. These factors have led to decreased purchasing power and increased economic hardship for many Syrians. The telecom sector has been affected by these challenges, with damage to infrastructure, reduced investment, and increased operating costs. Despite these difficulties, the telecom sector has shown resilience, with mobile penetration rates remaining relatively stable and operators adapting to the changing economic environment to play a vital role in connecting Syrians and supporting economic activity. The World Bank estimates that around 22.1 million people were living in Syria as of December 2022, and it continues to provide them with vital services. One of the prominent participants in the telecommunications market is the Syrian Telecommunications Establishment (STE). According to a study released by the Ministry of Communications and Technology (Ministry of Communications and Technology, 2022), this state-owned company provides internet and fixed-line services. While there are several ISPs in the nation, none have a market share of more than 5%, which is an important consideration here. STE dominates the leased lines market with an 87% share and is the only supplier with a fixed site for voice services. Additionally, it was noted that Syriatel is the second most prominent participant in the mobile subscriber market, with 63.0% of the total. Syriatel is a big mobile operator that offers several mobile services, including 3G and 4G. The third operator is MTN Syria, with 37.0% of the country's mobile phone users.

In a realm where loyalty thrives, consumers' feelings are the goal of any organisation. By embracing technology, telecom firms strive to keep the customer's needs alive. In the intricate art of establishing trust in business (Hong & Cho, 2011; Kim et al., 2009; Ko, 2008), they adeptly adjust to keep the flames of loyalty ablaze. Through the digital realm, such companies are entrusted with harnessing technology as a must (Zhang et al., 2021). For instance, amid the turmoil in the Syrian telecom domain, a crisis unfolded, causing much strain. The industry, once thriving, now faces its plight as challenges emerge, casting shadows of blight. Once so precise, communication channels now falter and waver, causing great fear (Ahmed et al., 2020). The networks that connected people are now disrupted, leaving people disconnected and feeling ruptured.

In fact, customer retention is one of the key objectives for maintaining a sustainable business model that focuses on long-term engagement and resultant cash inflows (Torkzadeh et al., 2022; Leong et al., 2022; Quach, 2022). For this, managers aim to provide more and more value with their offerings to enhance customer loyalty and improve the firm's relationship with their current customers (Kim et al., 2021; Hawkins & Hoon, 2020; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). This is where the customer relationship management (CRM) system becomes highly relevant for businesses to build and consolidate customer loyalty in the current business environment characterised by high complexity to gain a competitive advantage (Jamil et al., 2023).

It entails developing and maintaining a connection with a client that regularly purchases goods or services over an extended period (Monferrer et al., 2019). Better client connections can lead to a better market presence and an enhanced chance for future business opportunities with the same clients (Becker et al., 2009). On the other hand, a resilient client base can lead to unnecessary drainage of the firm's resources for customer loyalty efforts that could have been better utilised in different business spheres (Lin & Wang, 2006). Calculated CRM efforts are crucial to a firm's focus area for growth and long-term survival in any industry (Constantin & Simona, 2008).

The research provides telecom firms with techniques for strengthening customer interaction and sustaining revenue amid financial crises using digital technologies. The study has societal consequences since it investigates the potential of digital technology to improve societal stability and economic resilience by keeping

clients safe while boosting connectedness and access to critical services in a challenging economy. Accordingly, the authors can raise the following research question: To what extent do digital tools contribute to customer loyalty in the telecom sector during an economic crisis? This research can be considered as one of the earliest to look at the link between its elements in the telecom industry due to a financial crisis.

METHODS

The primary data for this research was gathered through an empirical inquiry using a survey technique to evaluate the conceptual model's validity. The data comprises 250 respondents representing a diverse range of people working in the telecom sector in Syria. A convenient sampling mechanism was used to draw samples from the population for three primary reasons: population size, safety, timeframe, and accessibility. As a result, the researchers opted to pick participants for the sample only from readily available and easily accessible. This decision was based on the constraints of the participants' availability during the designated period for the study, as well as considerations of their demanding work schedules and safety concerns. The researchers administered the questionnaire to all eligible participants they encountered. The selection of variables to be included in the sample is not determined by any other criterion. Considering this fact, a unique dataset was used to test the research hypotheses. Secondary data were gathered from articles published on the constructs of the proposed model.

According to this research, the dependent constructs are the CRM System, organisational management, and staff readiness. Each of these constructs represents a latent factor, which has various characteristics. On the other hand, CRM system, organisational management, and staff readiness are all considered entities. Several statistical techniques were employed to meet the goals and stages of the research. The first phase is the descriptive analysis using the SPSS package. The test performed was factor analysis, which is used to verify and evaluate the internal consistency of a construct. Various variables, including standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, determine how closely the sample data distributions resemble those predicted by the normal distribution theory. The hypotheses were tested in the second step, which included applying the partial least squares technique (EQS 6.1) to the data gathered. The interaction between each set of indicators and their underlying constructs was discovered and studied using this approach. Therefore, the findings of all hypothesis testing were accurate and reliable.

Firms can use CRM technology to ensure business continuity and survival in times of crisis. This paper assesses its applicability in Syrian firms. The researchers use a research epistemology that involves constructing a conceptual model based on previous literature and testing it through an electronically distributed survey sent to staff members utilising IT systems within the Syrian telecom sector.

The allocation of financial resources towards information technology (IT) within the telecommunications industry has a beneficial impact on the overall economic performance of a country. The researchers used an empirical technique to examine the impact of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems on customer loyalty within the telecommunications industry in Syria. The study's target population consists of staff who work in telecom companies in all governorates under the Syrian government's control. The authors distributed the prepared questionnaire in Arabic as the data collection tool paper and used the non-simple random sampling method of 250 people as the study sample.

The demographic characteristics of the sample respondents indicate that 58.75% are male and 41.25% are female. Out of the surveyed population, 75.08% held a bachelor's degree, 19.80% had completed secondary school, and 5.12% had a postgraduate degree. Out of the sample group, 45.40% are employed at the operational

level, while 54.60% work in management departments. In addition, 26.38% have less than five years of work experience, 27.36% have been working for six to ten years, 18.62% have been working for eleven to fifteen years, and 27.64% have more than fifteen years of work experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model

The constructs' descriptive and convergent validity data are presented in Table 1. To assess the validity of the measurement model, the authors conducted a reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR), as mentioned by (Hammami et al., 2022; Durrah et al., 2023). All values of the latent construct (α) that exceed the expected threshold of 0.6 are considered above the presumptive criteria, as pointed out by (Durrah et al., 2014; George & Mallery, 2019; Hammami et al., 2022). Kock (2015) stated that the CR values exceeded the cut-off value by 0.70. To further validate the measurement model, AVE was used to examine convergent validity; according to (Durrah & Kahwaji, 2023; Hair et al., 2014), AVE values greater than 0.5 are considered acceptable.

Table 1 Descriptive Analysis, Assessment of Normality Characteristics of Reflective Constructs

CONSTRUCT	Code	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	VIF	Convergent Validity		
							α	CR	AVE
IT Infrastructure	ITINFRA	3.28	1.044	-.432	-.544-	2.354	0.865	0.709	0.624
System Scalability	SYSSCAL	3.00	1.049	-.089	-.559-	3.658	0.846	0.836	0.754
System Feedback	SYSFEED	3.13	.918	-.214	-.524-	2.741	0.768	0.954	0.691
Organisational Structure	ORGSTRU	3.14	1.004	-.419	-.791-	3.265	0.763	0.807	0.647
Organisational Culture	ORGCULT	3.61	1.191	-.393	-.994-	1.265	0.839	0.788	0.897
Organisational Planning	ORGPLAN	3.87	.985	-1.010	.908	2.174	0.847	0.856	0.876
Employee Qualifications	EMPQUAL	3.53	1.029	-.646	-.187	1.985	0.836	0.943	0.825
Employee Learning	EMPLEAR	3.37	1.054	-.478	-.359	2.238	0.731	0.815	0.576
Employee Adaptability	EMPADA	3.23	1.032	-.224	-.539	2.483	0.729	0.874	0.587
Churn Rate	ChRate	3.51	.926	-.427	-.049	2.016	0.922	0.742	0.613
Trust	TRU	3.46	.760	-.431	-.090	3.254	0.873	0.905	0.879
Satisfaction	SAT	3.36	.787	-.260	-.334	3.259	0.743	0.759	0.693
Response	RES	3.39	.770	-.399	-.164	1.968	0.851	0.748	0.626
Quality of Service	QoS	3.24	.835	-.400	-.346	1.338	0.931	0.935	0.653

Normality

Standard deviation measures the variation or dispersion within a set of values. A low standard deviation means the values are close to the mean of the set. On the other hand, a high standard deviation indicates that the values are spread out over a broader range. It is possible to determine if the data is normally distributed by analysing its distribution's skewness and kurtosis values. Skewness represents the symmetry of the distribution, while kurtosis indicates whether the data is flatter or more peaked than a normal distribution. Based on the results in the Table 1, the authors confirm that the sample satisfies the normality assumptions.

Structural Equation Modeling

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is the second generation of data analysis methods that are used for testing the statistical conclusion validity, i.e., "testing the extent to which research meets recognised standards for high-quality statistical analysis," as defined by the National Institutes of Health (Gefen et al., 2000; Tawfik et al., 2023). SEM has several advantages over first-generation statistical techniques such as regression, including the ability to analyse measurement errors of observed variables as part of the model and combine factor analyses with hypothesis testing in the same study. Ultimately, this results in a more accurate examination of the suggested research model and, in most cases, improved methodological evaluation methods. SEM techniques provide more information about the extent to which data support the study model than regression techniques (Durrah et al., 2024; Gefen et al., 2000).

Fit Statistics

Goodness-of-fit indices measure the degree to which the proposed model predicts the actual or observed input matrix. Goodness-of-fit measures can be classified into three types as follows:

1. Absolute fit measures (AFM): assess the overall model fit; these measures include:
   a) Chi-square (X^2)
   b) Goodness-of-fit index (GFI): This compares the proposed model to no model; it ranges from 0 to 1.0, and when its value is above 0.90, this means a good fit (Ghouse et al., 2023).
   c) The Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) estimates discrepancy per degree of freedom in the model. The recommended value is less than 0.08 (Hammami et al., 2022).
2. Incremental fit measures (IFM) allow for the comparison between the proposed model and the competing models, and they are used to assess the incremental fit of the model compared to the null model. The IFM measures include:
   a) Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI).
   b) Comparative Fit Index (CFI).
   c) Incremental Fit Index (IFI).

   These three measurements should be greater than 0.9 to indicate a good fit (Alkhaldi et al., 2017a).
3. Parsimonious Fit Measures (PFM): "adjust" the measures of fit to compare between models with different numbers of estimated coefficients so that the amount of fit achieved by each estimated coefficient can be determined."

These measures include the normed fit index X^2/df (the adjusted Chi-square by the degree of freedom) according to (Alkhaldi et al., 2017b):

a) If the value is > 5, the model does not fit the data.
b) If the value is between 2 – 5, then the model may fit.
c) If the value is < 2, a fair fit of the model to the data.

The proposed model was analysed using SEM. A confirmatory modelling approach was used to examine the significance of the research model using EQS 6.1 Software. The results are shown in Table 2.

In addition, the values obtained from the research model are shown in Table 2, the Chi-square value is significant at the 0.05 level of significance (X^2 = 83.156, P = 0.064), and all other fit measures indicate that the revised model is acceptable, with (df = 65, X^2/df = 1.28) showing that the revised model is acceptable, GFI =.945, RMSEA = .040, IFI = .987, CFI = .986, NFI = .942, NNFI = .978, AGFI = .898, RMR = .041 and SRMR = .045. The model was thus approved and used to test the hypothesis of this research.

Table 2 Benchmarks and values of the model fit indicators

Absolute Fit Measurement			
Index	**Abbreviation**	**Accepted level**	**Model Calculated Values**
CHI Square	X^2	-	83.156
Degree of freedom	df	-	65
X^2/df	X^2/df	≤ 2 (fair fit)	1.28
Probability	P	P ≥ 0.05	.06404
Bentler-Bonett Normed Fit Index	NFI	≥ 0.9	.942
Bentler-Bonett Non-Normed Fit Index	NNFI	≥ 0.9	.978
Comparative Fit Index	CFI	≥ 0.9	.986
Bollen's Fit Index	IFI	0 to1	.987
Goodness of fit index	GFI	≥ 0.9	.945
Adjusted Goodness of fit index	AGFI	≥ 0.9	.898
Root Mean-Square Residual	RMR	Close to 0	.041
Standardised RMR	SRMR	≤ 0.05	.045
Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation	RMSEA	≤ 0.1	.040

Structural Model Testing

A variety of methods were used to evaluate the model's assumptions. The first approach is the overall coefficient of determination (R square value), which measures the whole structural equation. The second method is the standardised estimation coefficients, which measure the entire structural equation (Beta). This Beta may be used to estimate the size of the effect; when the value of Beta is near zero, the connection is weak; nevertheless, when the value of Beta rises, the relationship is strong; and when the value of Beta is close to zero, the association is weak. Table 3 shows the evaluation test results for the data used in building the research model.

Measurement Analysis

Standardised Beta was employed to test for a significant direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, which was found to be substantial in this case. Table 4 shows a statistically significant positive association between the variables. The significance of the t-test is investigated to test hypotheses and analyse the system's structural model. In Table 4, the t-values are statistically significant at .05. This implies that all of them are a component of each pillar.

Analysis of the Structural Model

Specifically, the structural model is divided into three segments: The first part is devoted to the research topic and discusses the impact of customer relationship management systems on customer loyalty. Standardised Beta was utilised to test for significant direct links between the two constructs, and a significant effect was found. According to Table 4, a solid, significant and positive effect of customer relationship management systems on customer loyalty sustains the result of (Hammami et al., 2015).

Second part: This segment represents the research topic, which addresses organisational management's statistically solid and positive impact on customer loyalty. Standardised Beta was employed to indicate this

impact. Table 4 shows organisational management's statistically significant solid and positive impact on customer loyalty (Campbell, 2003; Coltman, 2007).

Third part: This segment represents the statistically significant effect of staff readiness on customer loyalty; standardised Beta was also employed to indicate this impact. According to Table 4, a statistically significant influence of staff readiness exists on customer loyalty, as mentioned by (Hammami et al., 2015).

Table 3 Test statistics

Test statistics - Measurement Model					
Regression path		**Standardised Beta (β)**	**t - Test**	**R^2**	**Significance @ .05**
CRM System Sub-model					
IT Infrastructure	CRM	.426	9.161	.182	√
System Scalability	CRM	.659	8.214	.435	√
System Feedback	CRM	.780	7.216	.609	√
Organisational Management Sub-model					
Organisational Structure	Management	.618	8.159	.381	√
Organisational Culture	Management	.735	6.870	.541	√
Organisational Planning	Management	.631	8.038	.398	√
Staff Readiness Sub-model					
Employee Qualifications	Staff Readiness	.778	7.266	.605	√
Employee Learning	Staff Readiness	.770	7.566	.593	√
Employee Adaptability	Staff Readiness	.796	6.891	.633	√
Customer Loyalty Sub-model					
Churn Rate	Loyalty	.768	7.225	.235	√
Trust	Loyalty	.885	7.369	.325	√
Satisfaction	Loyalty	.721	6.250	.208	√
Response	Loyalty	.749	7.254	.411	√
Quality of Service	Loyalty	.781	6.841	.596	√

Table 4 Structure Statistics

Test statistics - Structure Model				
Hypo. No.	**Path**		**Standardised Beta (β)**	**Significance @ .05**
H5	CRM System	Customer Loyalty	.79	√
H6	Organisational Management	Customer Loyalty	.77	√
H7	Staff Readiness	Customer Loyalty	.71	√

This paper investigates customer loyalty and technology utilisation during the crisis in the Syrian telecom industry. We propose and test a conceptual model. The statistical analysis findings are utilised to formulate a

practical recommendation businesses may implement to increase client loyalty. Each hypothesis was examined and evaluated by employing an empirical inquiry, and the study's overall findings confirmed the framework in the research model. Several suggestions and conclusions have been given as a consequence of this study to raise awareness about the significance of the CRM system, organisational management, and staff readiness inside the company. The empirical analysis verifies the proposed model's validity, identifying three factors affecting customer loyalty. The study utilised SEM to analyse the proposed model's fit measures, which included the Parsimonious Fit Measures (PFM). PFM adjusts the fit measures to compare models with different numbers of estimated coefficients. The results of the model fit indicators are presented in Table 1, where all fit measures indicate that the revised model is acceptable, except for the Chi-square value, which is significant at the 0.05 significance level.

The study used the overall coefficient of determination (R square value) and standardised estimation coefficients (Beta) to evaluate the model's assumptions. These coefficients were used to measure the entire structural equation and estimate the effect size. Table 2 shows the evaluation test results for the data used in building the research model, where significant positive effects were found. The study also analysed the structural model and divided it into three segments. The first segment discussed the impact of customer relationship management system and client loyalty, where a significant association was found. The second segment addressed the statistically substantial link between organisational management and customer loyalty, where a meaningful effect of organisational management was found on customer satisfaction. All three heads have also been discussed regarding their underlying factors, and the consequent significance is empirically tested. The model was developed to assist in understanding the areas in which the sampled organisations should concentrate their efforts to improve customer loyalty amongst their customer base for long-term sustainability. This study also encourages these organisations to adhere to the research discipline properly. The researchers aim to highlight the significance of customer loyalty during a crisis and enable organisations to utilise information systems appropriately. They hope that this study will contribute towards achieving these goals.

In fact, during a crisis, businesses prioritising customer loyalty are more likely to retain and attract new customers. This is because when a company goes the extra mile to support its customers during difficult times, it tends to create a positive impression in the customers' minds, which, in turn, helps increase customer satisfaction and retention rate. Therefore, businesses need to prioritise customer loyalty during a crisis to build a solid and loyal customer base. In times of crisis, technology can help companies to improve their operational efficiency. Tasks Automation, improved communication and collaboration, and streamlined processes are ways technology can help. This, in turn, frees staff to focus on critical tasks such as serving customers. These processes and procedures can also help reduce operational costs, improving business efficiency.

Management Implications

In this context, there are several management implications. Businesses must clearly understand their customers' needs and expectations during a crisis. This can be achieved by performing customer research and gathering feedback. Once businesses thoroughly understand their customers' needs, they can create effective strategies. Businesses should strategically invest in technology to enhance customer experience and efficiency. Companies should provide comprehensive technology training to their staff, encompassing both the technical aspects of using technology and best practices for using it to serve customers. Businesses can prioritise customer loyalty and technology utilisation during a crisis by implementing various methods. For instance, they can offer struggling customers flexible payment options and discounts. Additionally, businesses can keep customers informed by providing regular updates on the status of their orders and any changes to business operations. In addition,

technology can be leveraged to deliver a personalised customer experience by recommending products based on previous purchases, providing self-service options, and enhancing communication and collaboration between staff and clients. Automating tasks and streamlining processes such as order processing and customer support can significantly benefit a business. It can help save time, reduce errors, increase efficiency, and improve customer satisfaction. All through a catastrophe, companies can improve customer experience, efficiency, and finances by prioritising customer loyalty and tech utilisation.

The authors urge telecom companies to develop a new customer loyalty program that offers discounts or rewards to customers who stay with the company during a crisis. Also, we encourage telecom companies to use the findings to invest in new technology that can improve network reliability and uptime. Moreover, it is recommended to use the findings to develop a new customer service training program that teaches employees how to handle customer inquiries and complaints during a crisis, as the study findings could be used to improve customer service, retention strategies, and operational efficiency. The authors suggest that the extent to which a service provider engages in two-way communication correlates positively with customer loyalty, indicating that firms should strategically invest in communication practices to enhance customer retention.

Theoretical Contributions

This research aims to provide Syrian telecom companies with essential insights into maintaining and expanding their customer base during challenging times. The study thoroughly investigates critical factors that customers prioritise during crises, such as dependable service, competitive pricing, and exceptional customer service. Additionally, the authors examine how telecom companies can utilise technology to optimise their operations and deliver top-notch customer service. The study has practical applications for telecom companies facing crises and has the potential to contribute significantly to theoretical knowledge. Creating a new model for customer loyalty and technology utilisation in such contexts is a significant achievement, and it could be adopted by other telecom companies facing similar situations.

Also, it highlights the most critical factors that influenced customer loyalty in the Syrian telecom industry during the crisis. Moreover, knowing how telecom companies use technology to improve operations and provide better customer service during a crisis is crucial in discovering the challenges and opportunities of prioritising customer loyalty and technology utilisation in the Syrian telecom industry. Scholars and telecom companies in Syria and other developing countries could also use the study's findings to improve customer loyalty and technology utilisation strategies. Policymakers could also use the results to create better regulations for the telecom industry.

Overall, a study on prioritising customer loyalty and technology utilisation in the Syrian telecom industry during the crisis would make a significant theoretical contribution to the field of telecommunications management. The study would provide insights into how telecom companies can maintain and grow their customer base during difficult times, and it could develop a new model of customer loyalty or technology utilisation in a crisis.

Practical and Management Implications

Even amid economic crisischallenges, businesses can find strength and control through digital tools and strategies. These tools empower businesses to maintain customer loyalty and navigate through challenging times, providing a sense of confidence and control. Digital technology can support customer loyalty in several vital ways during an economic crisis in the context of the Global South.

The first suggested way is to build a cost-effective engagement practice by employing digital channels to engage customers and create relationships. Businesses can leverage the adaptability of social media, email marketing, and mobile apps to communicate with customers, provide updates, offer promotions, and personalise their experiences. This method allows businesses to stay connected with customers, providing a sense of reassurance and flexibility even in the face of tight budgets.

Second, telecom firms can foster a sense of security and reassurance during an economic crisis by building trust and transparency. Digital tools are pivotal in providing clear and consistent communication about the business's situation, any changes to operations, and how they support customers. This transparency helps to build trust and reassure customers that the telecom firm is committed to them.

Third, employing data mining and analysis technologies for service personalisation and segmentation as a digital platform will enable telecom firms to personalise customer interactions and tailor their offerings to individual needs. By leveraging data and analytics, businesses can understand their customers better and segment them into different groups based on their needs and preferences. This allows them to deliver targeted messages, offers, and relevant support to each customer, creating a more positive experience and fostering loyalty. Digital platforms provide valuable data and insights that businesses can use to measure the effectiveness of their efforts and track customer loyalty. This data can be used to refine their strategies, improve their customer experience, and make better decisions about allocating resources.

Fourth, Telecom firms can employ digital platforms to build community and support because online platforms can create a sense of community and support among customers. Businesses can use online forums, groups, and social media communities to encourage customers to interact, share experiences, and find support. This is especially important during a crisis when customers feel anxious or isolated.

Fifth, it can be employed to build resilience and adaptability because digital tools can help businesses be more resilient and adaptable in the face of economic challenges. By leveraging digital technologies, companies can quickly adjust their operations, introduce new products and services, and find new ways to reach and engage customers. This agility allows them to stay competitive and meet the changing needs of their customers during a crisis.

Sixth, it can leverage mobile technology to reach a wider audience and engage with customers in a more convenient and accessible way. Mobile apps, SMS marketing, and chatbots can provide customers with information, offer support, and personalise their experiences.

By leveraging these strategies, businesses in the Global South can effectively use digital tools to sustain customer loyalty and navigate challenging economic times. However, it is essential to remember that successful digital customer loyalty strategies require a holistic approach that combines the right technology with effective marketing, customer service, and organisational practices.

This will also help telecom companies focus on long-term value. While economic crises can present short-term challenges, businesses need to focus on long-term value creation. By investing in digital strategies that build trust, loyalty, and customer relationships, companies can position themselves for success when the economy recovers.

CONCLUSION

This work concludes that technology is a critical factor in the current working environment in all countries, given its effect on customer perception and indirectly on attitudes to retain customers. A sector-specific approach was necessary to provide focus to the study. However, other sectors with fewer barriers to entry should be

considered if more general conclusions are to be drawn. Despite the study's originality within its application area, numerous caveats should be noted before drawing any broad conclusions. The research had limitations, including the fact that it was done in Syria's telecom sector during a crisis. Although the ideas explored in the study have the potential to be used in other countries in crises, further research is required to establish if the findings are relevant in the setting of smaller organisations. Until such a study has been completed, care should be taken when extrapolating the results to peaceful countries. However, before long, this will offer a good topic for further exploration to compare the results presented in the research outcomes directly. Future research might benefit from data collection from more settings and industries such as manufacturing, tourism, education, and finance. Lastly, discussions of customer loyalty are always limited in Syria, even at the height of the crisis. Scholars are pondering similar issues in various settings and job environments. The telecommunications industry in challenging economies faces several complications, including a lack of qualified workforce and inadequate infrastructure. However, the government is working to address these issues by crafting new policies, rules, and regulations. This study's overarching goal is to shed light on how digital technologies affect telecom customers' loyalty during economic challenges. This research adds to our understanding of crisis management and consumer behaviour in challenging economies by demonstrating the impact of digital tools on client retention in a complex setting. The article provides telecom firms with actionable tactics to enhance customer connections and hold onto market share in the face of economic challenges via digital technologies. According to the study, digital technology can increase social stability and economic resilience by keeping consumers and encouraging connection and access to vital services under challenging economies. When studying the connection between its components in context, this research is among the pioneering ones.

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ORCID

Samir Hammami https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4003-5705
Hazem Ghaleb Al Samman https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9377-1004
Omar Durrah https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8923-9450
Mahjabin Banu https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3647-2507
Tareq Alhousary https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9912-8199

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