



Faculty of Business, Law and Politics

**Qatar Services Marketing and Customer Relationship
under Political Blockade by Saudi Arabia, United Arab
Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt**

**A Thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD Management
Marketing**

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List of Abbreviations

B2B – Business-to-Business

B2C – Business-to-Customer

CBs – Conventional Banks

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CIP – Customer Information Processing

CRM – Customer Relationship Management

CTRM - Commodity Trade and Risk Management

DM – Database Marketing

GATS – General Agreements on Trade in Services

GCC - Gulf Cooperation Council

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

IAS - International Accounting Standards

IBs – Islamic Banks

ICT – Information Technology and Communication

IFRS - International Financial Reporting Standards

IM – Interaction Marketing

KPIs – Key Performance Indicators

KSA – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

LNG - Liquefied Natural Gas

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NM – Network Marketing

QCB – Qatar Central Bank

RBV – Resource Based View

RM - Relational marketing

RM – Relationship Manager

RPD – Recognition-Primed Decision

SCRM – Social Customer Relationship Management

TM - Transactional Marketing

UAE - United Arab Emirates

Abstract

Contemporary businesses face multiple challenges in attracting and retaining customers, particularly in the service industry, due to geopolitical events such as the Qatar blockade, the Russia-Ukraine war, and economic downturns. In particular, the Qatar blockade had various implications for businesses due to the severance of transportation routes, closure of borders and severance of economic ties, prompting businesses to take drastic measures to counter the effects of the blockade to attract customers, boost customer satisfaction, and enhance consumer loyalty and trust. Therefore, this study investigates Qatar's services marketing and customer relations amid the continuous political blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. It also aims to explore Qatar's attempt to continue to pursue its services marketing and customer relationship amidst its current political and economic situation. This study is informed by the fact that human beings are rational thinkers who make rational decisions to cushion themselves from disadvantaging environments. It also follows from other theories, such as the game theory and resource-based view, to understand the blockade's impact and solutions taken by services industries. The study uses interpretive research philosophy to collect qualitative data through qualitative interviews from purposefully sampled seven senior managers and CEOs of seven study services companies in Saudi Arabia based on the aviation industry, healthcare, private sector, banking sector, oil and gas, and insurance market. Data analysis is done through thematic analysis, and their presentation follows verbatim. The study findings indicate drastic measures that service industries took to retain and attract customers, including diversification, effective communication, risk assessment, employee training, operational adjustments, marketing adjustments, pricing, and promotions strategies. All these form part of the response plan that businesses could undertake in the face of similar events (economic blockade).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

21st-century corporations face multiple challenges in attracting and retaining customers, particularly in the service industry. These challenges often lie within the macro-environmental (external) and micro-environmental (internal) environment, most of which are interrelated based on the processes, strategies and outcomes of companies (Happold & Eden, 2019). Whereas the factors associated with the internal environment are easy to manage, the external environment presents a set of dynamics whose effects are challenging to predict and manage, especially during geopolitical events. Although the nature and impact of these variables and circumstances are studied as a monolith, differences depend on whether the firm operates in the manufacturing industry or operates services, which is the focus of this study, as well as the nature of precipitating events

The severance of diplomatic relations between Qatar and the blockading countries, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt, on June 5, 2017, serves as a case study for such an external shock to services marketing (Ali, 2020). This precipitating event (the blockade), which included the expulsion of Qatari diplomats, removal of these countries' ambassadors from Doha, and impositions of limitation of Qatari nationals' and vessels' entry and transit to their territories, including land, water, and airspace, disrupted the environment under which most of the strategies and tactics of Qatari service firms. This event necessitates

a probe to understand how service marketing and customer relations adapt amid political crises.

The sanction declarations undulated through Qatar's energy and financial markets, affecting its political, economic, social and cultural norms, including its observance of Ramadan, as there were fears of food shortages caused by import sanctions (The National, 2017). However, the country's commitment to social and economic development positioned it to maintain economic robustness during the blockade. This aspect of the study establishes how Qatar leveraged its customer relations and services marketing to uphold its financial integrity. Furthermore, despite the blockade's challenges, the country's status as the leading exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the Gulf region and the world provided economic leverage to implement stopgap measures. These measures, formulated to maintain service marketing and customer relationships, included securing essential goods and services from Western corporations to mitigate immediate supply chain disruptions (Smith, 2019).

The grievances on the part of the sanctioning governments, including concerns over Qatar's foreign policy to interfere with the internal affairs of other Arab states and its alleged support for Islamist terrorists, led to a political blockade that had significant implications for Qatari's services marketing and customer relations (Hennessy-Fiske, 2017).

Although Qatar decried the blockade, it was open to a diplomatic resolution of differences, citing Gulf security as a consideration for the negotiation (Hennessy-Fiske, 2017). A list of 13 demands, including ending the economic alliance with Iran, was laid down to Qatar, with which it refused to comply and turned down any measures that would threaten its sovereignty. Moreover, the boycotting countries wanted Qatar to end its support for Islamist groups, which include the Muslim Brotherhood, and to stop Al Jazeera, the region's most

popular broadcaster, from operating (The Economist, 2017). Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and UAE were not seen to yield to Qatar's claim that the accusations were all complete fabrications and that although it admitted assisting some Islamist groups, it denied extending its support to militant groups like Al-Qaeda (BBC, 2017). At present, Qatar is confronted with trying to influence world opinion into perceiving that it is not a terrorist supporter and that it remains an excellent place to invest. Qatar is trying to overcome the economic blockade by obtaining alternative supply channels through Iran and Turkey. Furthermore, the Qatari government continues to be an essential driver of growth in the tourism sector, pictured as a family-friendly country (Oxford Business Group, 2019). This research will explore how these strategies were employed to sustain services marketing and customer relations amidst the political blockade by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE.

The blockade on Qatar raised questions about the viability of adapting customer relations and services marketing as a strategic response to sanctions. This study will investigate how Qatar navigated the challenges of re-establishing relationships at downstream and upstream levels of its service supply and value chains, focusing on crucial services impacted by the blockade.

1.1.1 Services Marketing

The service sector has significantly contributed to the growth of most world economies, both developed and developing countries, with developing nations experiencing a shift from the agricultural industry to the services industry as the mainstay of their economies. The changes have shifted the definition of goods and services from separate entities towards an integral part of one another. The American Marketing Association defines services as benefits, activities, and satisfactions offered for sale or provided in connection

with the sale of goods. The defining characteristic of services is the intangibility aspect. Services are inherently intangible, and their physical existence does not exist. They cannot be touched, smelt, tasted, or held. Each service offering is unique and cannot be exactly repeated by the same service provider. Services cannot be stored, returned, resold, or saved once used. Another characteristic of services is that they are generated and consumed within the same time frame. For instance, services offered by a banker are delivered to and consumed by a customer simultaneously, unlike the takeaway tea or coffee in a coffee shop. Services may either be core services or supplementary. A core service is one whose primary purpose is the transaction, while supplementary services are rendered as a corollary to the sale of goods (Malik and Malik, no date). This uniqueness and perishability of services were evident during Qatar's blockade, where service providers had to adapt quickly to changing circumstances to maintain customer relations and market presence.

The intangibility aspect of the services makes its marketing particularly challenging. However, marketing challenges are different from its value in the economy. In the face of the blockade, services marketing became a key differentiator in Qatari businesses. Service quality is essential in distinguishing companies from their competitors and attracting new potential customers. In addition, service marketing plays a crucial role in building stakeholder relationships. Consumer buying decisions depend on the degree to which they trust the seller. When customers are offered appropriate services depending on their needs, this customer-tailored service is a long-lasting relationship that would lead to repeat sales and positive word of mouth to other potential consumers.

Furthermore, service marketing fosters customer retention in a competitive market. Multiple service providers are vying for a limited number of customers in the same market;

therefore, retaining customers is more important than the prospect of attracting new ones. Because of replicability issues in service provision, service providers are keen on individual customer needs and feedback. Therefore, they aim at customer satisfaction through customising services, which is a bait to lure more customers to come for repeat services later when needed (Malik and Malik, no date).

There are many elements involved in service marketing that help it meet its targeted objectives. The perishability, heterogeneity and intangibility of services necessitate a unique marketing approach. In addition, the production and consumption of the product is inseparable. The other element of services marketing is the pricing, which is more challenging to determine. Factors such as labour and overhead costs are factored in during the price determination of the services. Since service delivery and production happen concurrently, it cannot be stored or transported. Therefore, the location of the services is essential. For instance, a fine dining restaurant in Doha cannot be located in a sparsely populated area; instead, it can do well when it is located in a busy city.

Promotion of services is essential to differentiate service offerings in the minds of the consumers. Service providers offering identical services, like airlines, may invest heavily in advertising their services to attract customers. People are the most crucial element of service marketing since a service is inseparable from the person providing or receiving it. Therefore, an airline will be known for the quality of its vessels and staff. Thus, staff customer service training has become a top priority for many industries. Service delivery is also a crucial aspect of service marketing as it ensures that the same standard of offering services is maintained and repeated to all customers. Therefore, most companies have a service script that blueprints how they offer and retain their services among their employees. The last element

of the services marketing is the physical evidence. Since services are intangible, most service providers incorporate certain tangible elements into their service delivery to enhance customer satisfaction. For instance, the hospitality industry can enhance well-designed waiting areas with plush sofas and magazines. In addition, the management can invest heavily in interior design and decorations to offer tangible experiences to their guests (Malik and Malik, no date). The political blockade has necessitated a strategic pivot in Qatar's services marketing, focusing on customer reassurance, adaptability and the tangible aspects of service delivery to navigate through the challenges posed by the geopolitical event.

1.1.2 Services Marketing: Focus on Qatar

Qatar, a small but influential country in the Middle East, is experiencing notable economic growth driven by a booming service sector. Services marketing in the Middle East presents peculiar challenges and opportunities, making it an attractive investment prospect for businesses (Hajhamad, 2024). With a cosmopolitan and diverse population, a commitment to hosting global events like Expo 2023 and FIFA World Cup 2022, and an emphasis on luxury and high standards, Qatar presents a diverse and dynamic landscape for services marketing (David, 2024). In addition, Qatar strongly emphasises service sectors like hospitality, education, and healthcare, making it a fertile ground for businesses looking to promote and provide services. These sectors, which form the service industry, are the key areas from which this study gets its data.

Qatar's population comprises a diverse and significant expatriate workforce and population from all over the world, bringing together diverse languages, cultures, practices, and preferences (Hillman and Eibenschutz, 2018). Population diversity is an essential factor

in the Qatari population as it informs business owners and service providers to exhibit cultural sensitivity when they strive to create solid relationships and build trust among their customers. Qatar has a population of 2.8 million, comprising a large expatriate population from more than 200 countries (Adomaitis, 2023). The Qatar National Vision 2030, created in 2017, includes the goal of creating a more inclusive society, which is in synergy with several policies and programs that promote diversity and inclusion (Hassen, 2022). These programs and policies include the passage of Labor Law, which shuns discrimination of any form; the establishment of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, which works to promote family values and protect the rights of children and women; and the establishment of the National Human Rights Committee to monitor and promote human rights in Qatar. Therefore, services marketing in Qatar is only effective if it is indiscriminate, inclusive and sensitive to diverse needs (*Diversity and inclusion in Qatar - Qatar Guide - Expat.com*, 2023). Qatar services marketing is also a sign that services marketing should adapt to culture; for example, using the local language (Arabic) in addition to English is a sign of respect.

Qatar has substantial investments in tourism and hospitality, positioning itself as a global destination for business travellers and leisure. In particular, Qatar is known for its luxury offerings, shopping centres, and world-class restaurants that cater to affluent travellers and ensure exceptional customer service. In addition, Qatar continues to emphasize sustainable tourism by implementing eco-friendly practices and promoting tourism to align with their national priorities (Yap, Saha and Alsowaidi, 2022).

The healthcare sector in Qatar is another sector that is expanding rapidly with a focus on international standards of care. The healthcare system adheres to international healthcare standards to instil trust among residents and expatriates (Bashir, 2024). It also has cutting-

edge facilities that emphasize modern equipment, technologies, and state-of-the-art facilities to meet the expectations of Qatar's diverse population. The healthcare sector leverages research and innovation that aligns with Qatar's vision for developing its healthcare sector (Goodman, 2015). The healthcare sector is one of the elements that form part of the services industry and is worthy of consideration in this study.

Qatar also leverages providing educational services to both local and international students. The country focuses on offering international curriculum and qualifications, like the American or British education systems, to meet the needs of the expatriate population. The government provides a modern enabling environment that is well-equipped to meet the high standards expected by students and parents. In addition, it is renowned for its prowess in forging international partnerships with other educational institutions to improve the quality of education and attract students from all over the world (Kayan Fadlelmula and Koç, 2016).

Qatar leverages financial services as part of the services industry since it is crucial for business and national economic growth. The Qatar Banking system embraces innovation by embracing financial technology (Fintech) and digital banking systems to respond to the demands of the tech-savvy population (Bouheni and Ammi, 2015). It caters to all population members, including high-net-worth individuals and expatriates seeking investment services and wealth management. It also explores opportunities in Islamic banking and finance that align with Qatar's commitment to Islamic banking principles (Onunka *et al.*, 2023).

The digital transformation in Qatar, particularly in the realm of e-services, is not merely a response to consumer demand but a strategic pivot within the context of the Qatar blockade (Albasoos, Hassan and Al Zadjali, 2021). The country maintains a robust online presence through websites and mobile apps that offer convenient e-services. On the

government side, the Qatar government offers E-Government services, making the processes more efficient for businesses and residents. However, with the increased reliance on e-services, Qatar ensures online security for its population against malicious platforms that breach data agreements and steal personal data (Al-Shafi and Weerakkody, 2007; Li and Shang, 2020). This solid online presence serves as a resilience mechanism that allows Qatar to circumvent blockade-imposed restrictions to maintain economic and social stability. Therefore, strategic digitization is a multifaceted approach that reinforces Qatar's customer relationships and service marketing amidst geopolitical tensions.

The Qatar government's initiatives in bolstering the services industry are supportive and a strategic manoeuvre within geopolitical tensions (Mcsparren, Besada and Saravade, 2017). The Qatar government actively promotes the services industry's growth by exploring opportunities to participate in government projects and initiatives related to a specific sector. The government also forges public-private partnerships, which enhance collaboration to deliver services and contribute to the development of the services industry. Qatar is focusing on Sustainability and environmental awareness and therefore encourages service providers to endorse and practice Eco-Friendly Practices such as reducing waste, using sustainable materials, and conserving energy (Cochrane, 2022). It also engages in awards and certifications related to sustainability to position businesses as environmentally friendly while creating awareness through customer education about the importance of sustainability and its role in contributing to a greener future. In addition, service providers in Qatar must comply with data protection and privacy regulations that require data encryption and secure storage (Holt, Slim and Vasic, 2022).

Service marketing is a continuum of activities starting with interpersonal interactions between the seller and customer and ending with distinct transactions to fulfil a need or want. The definition by Awara and Anyadighibe (2014) emphasizes the tangible nature of these offerings, which may be challenging to quantify but crucial in differentiating a company's services in a B2C or B2B context. The focus on relationship management, quality service development, and customer loyalty is a testament to the evolving nature of services marketing, where the transaction is not the end but a part of a continuous engagement process. Furthermore, Mahajan and Golahit (2019) point out that establishing relationships for subsequent services has become an integral part of services marketing due to the increased complexity of the needs and wants of customers, as well as the competitiveness in the globalized marketplace. This shift from a transactional to a relational perspective in service marketing indicates a deeper understanding of customer value creation. It is about more than meeting the required needs. Still, it is about anticipating them, shaping them through good public rapport, complaint resolution, and nurturing a long-term bond that is more significant than merely an individual transaction, making this a holistic view of service marketing as a dynamic and essential component of modern business strategies.

Services marketing has experienced monstrous growth, with the total services export quadrupling from US\$1.2T to US\$4.89T between 1996 and 2013 (Oyewole, 2018). The changes are driven by the emergence of specialised and stand-alone services, such as technology-oriented services, in addition to the servitisation for value creation by companies in the manufacturing sector. Service marketing is designed in a manner that takes into account the inseparability, variability and intangibility of the service being delivered to the customer. These innate features imply that trust is integral in the outcome of service marketing since the credence of quality plays a role in the purchase decision-making process.

Existing research reveals that countries can develop services marketing procedures built around policies aimed at promoting the goods and services, as well as the country itself, for tourism, political and other objectives (Constantinides, 2006). In applying these procedures at a micro-level, most organizations facilitate the purchase decision-making process by reducing the uncertainty through after-purchase services (warranty, guarantees and after-purchase service contracts). The Case of Qatar is fascinating as it reflects the uniqueness and specificity of services marketing strategies within the GCC. Despite this, it is evident that other GCC countries also adopt similar programs, suggesting a regional trend towards leveraging service marketing for broader economic objectives (Tok, Koç and D'Alessandro, 2020).

As early as 2007, Mansfeld and Winckler identified six factors that drove most of the countries in the GCC to perceive the services sectors as potential catalysts for diversification from the oil-based economies. The factors include the increased potential for the creation of employment for their citizens, promotion of private-public partnerships, enhancement of the activities in the private sector (such as construction, real estate and manufacturing), and the indirect effects in the improvement of the reputation and national image of the countries.

1.2 Customer Relationship Management (CRM): Focus on Qatar

Markets are changing in the globalized and commercial world, and the customer lies at the value chain's beginning, centre and end. Therefore, the central focus of businesses and marketers has been and will always be taking advantage of opportunities and discovering new ways of meeting the ever-changing customer expectations. In the contemporary world, a

customer is considered the business engine and therefore, companies need the right tools to collect crucial management information to meet customer needs (Guerola-Navarro *et al.*, 2022). This is particularly important for Qatar, where the blockade necessitates a deeper understanding of customer needs and a strategic approach to service marketing.

CRM is among the modern business management tools that enable organizations to navigate the Qatar Blockade by fostering customer-centric information management strategies (Vicedo *et al.*, 2020). CRM aims to improve performance and enable firms to achieve better business results. CRM's blend of technology, people, and processes is a cornerstone for organizations and companies in Qatar to maintain performance and adapt their services sustainably to customer needs, even under political duress (Vicedo *et al.*, 2020).

The essence of CRM in the context of Qatar is the creation of value through consistent engagement with customers, addressing customer needs and fostering satisfaction (Suharnoyo & Djamhur, 2015). Customer relationships arise from mundane actions carried out on a day-to-day basis to the long-term policies framed to generate the satisfaction of customers. Customer relationships aim to acquire and retain customers to optimize the organisation's performance. Laketa *et al.* (2015) and Vogt (2010) concur that customer relationships are customer-oriented and are determined by the ability of the customer to experience satisfaction every instance they interact with the organization consistently. The complexity of customer relationships arises from the fact that the outcomes are determined based on interactions with current, past and future customers (Salah, Yusof, & Mohamed, 2021), whose needs and wants change across time and space (Chetioui & Abbar, 2017). An organization can achieve organic growth through a robust relationship marketing strategy by retaining and satisfying current customers. In addition to being cost-effective, relationship

marketing is cost-efficient since the organization is assured of repeat purchases and consumption without the challenges associated with attracting new customers. Customer relationships have qualitative and quantitative dimensions and vary from one type of institution to another, including the following.

Table 1: Categories of Customer Relationships

Type	Description
Transactional	There is no actual relationship between the customer and the organization since all interactions are designed to meet the prevailing and current needs; hence, there is no need to consider future outcomes.
Long-term	The relationship spans long durations, with the interactions occurring recurrently.
Personal assistance	The relationship is founded on human interactions, whereby the customer communicates with actual customer representatives from the company. Such interactions occur at the point of sale or those other face-to-face or mediated forms of contact.
Dedicated personal assistance	As part of personal assistance, dedicated personal assistance involves the assignment of specific customer representatives who are versed in the custom needs of the customer. The objective is to tailor the relationship to the customer's unique needs, aiming for long-term interactions. Essentially, such relationships are reserved for premium clients.
Self-service	The company designs a framework for mediating the relationship, whereby customers can assist themselves without interacting with the company. This involved systems that offer a portfolio of multifaceted solutions to potential problems.

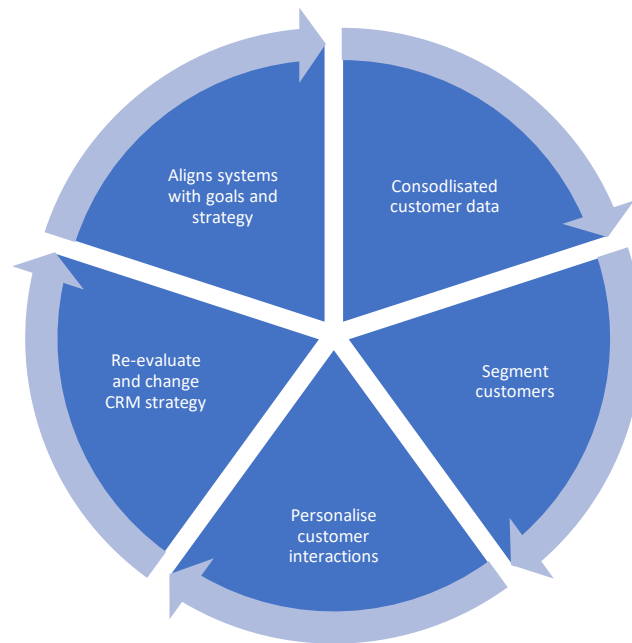
Automated services	The approach blends sophisticated customer service tools with information technology to ensure the relationship is developed and maintained through processes that do not require human interaction. Automation facilitates the identification of customer's needs and the creation of value with limited or no input. Such mechanisms replicate some of the forms of personal assistance due to the presence of intelligent alternatives.
Communities	This type of relationship involves products and services integral to the satisfaction of a group of homogenous customers, who then come together to facilitate the creation of mutual value. Although fuelled by online platforms, relationships built around communities have existed for a long. The company works together with the members of the community to create knowledge and resolve problems.
Co-creation	The increase in the power of customers has led to the emergence of co-creation relationships, whereby customers participate in creating value that benefits them, other customers, the company, and the industry. An example is Amazon (which relies on customer reviews) and YouTube (whereby user-generated content is the essential product and service).
Proprietary	Proprietary relationships arise when customers and companies need one another to create value. An example is the creation of proprietary software for tourism. The fact that the value is validated by the relationship between the customer and the organization implies a high level of interrelationship.

Source: Firouzi, Chakrabarty and Nassif (2020) and Nicoletti (2020).

The generic customer relationship process model, developed with tenets of social psychology and communications, provides an objective circular framework through which

companies can build and maintain optimal customer relationships, regardless of the relationship category in place.

Figure 1: Customer Relationship Process Model



Source: Adapted from Salah, Yusof, & Mohamed (2021).

The measures proposed in the circular customer relationship model provided in the figure above and the entire customer relationships process are designed to achieve the goals of the four key functional areas of customer relationship management: marketing, sales, services and support. Jalal et al. (2019) define marketing as the processes through which an organization targets a particular audience and develops robust relationships centred around how the organization can create value for individuals in return for consideration. Selling is defined as the process of exchanging a commodity for money. Services and support include the actions undertaken to enhance the value of the sold commodity. Enhancement focuses on several forms of utility, including lengthening the life span of the satisfaction and helping customers avoid or reduce certain costs and expenses. These actions aim to optimize customer satisfaction (Ghazian, Hossaini, and Farsijani, 2016).

1.3 History and Impact of the Blockade on Qatar

On June 5, 2017, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bahrain started a campaign against Qatar. The countries involved in the blockade banned the Qatari ships and airlines from using their land, sea and air routes (Davidson et al., 2017). Demands had to be made for them to lift this blockade. These demands were issued to Qatar to ensure that the Crisis will end if (Qatar) fulfils them in 10 days. Among these demands were reducing their diplomatic ties with Iran, closure of Aljazeera TV channel and cessation of Qatar's Military coordination with the Turkish government. However, this did not bear any fruit. Instead, Qatar rejected the demands made by the blockading countries. They claimed that these demands eroded the sovereignty of Qatar and the state of national security (Asari et al., 2018). By then, the Gulf countries had a perfect relationship with Kuwait, a mediator during this Crisis.

1.3.1 Qatar Crisis

The Qatar blockade led to the declaration of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates that they were cutting off diplomatic relations with the State of Qatar. Therefore, they enforced a blockade that shut down all land, sea and airlines connecting Qatar to the mentioned states. The implications of this led to the immediate commencement of an increased and unprecedented escalation in a wide-ranging and systemic campaign against Qatar. Qatar was accused of publishing fabricated and false information that involved Qatar News Agency's Qena web piracy. However, Qatar's foreign policy was the main reason for the split between the blockading countries (*"Government Communication Office, 2017"*). These

countries claimed that Qatar sponsored various political movements and protests, which included the support of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. They also accused the Al-Jazeera TV channel of broadcasting subverted and unverified news in those countries. Following this blockade, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, responded through a speech to the residents of Qatar on July 17, 2017. His message was full of the future directions and the prevailing situation. He said that the countries involved in the blockade decision were unaware that people did not joke with justice. He accused the countries that took part in the blockade of having been influenced by the Western countries on allegations of terrorism. He also reassured every Qatari they would get maximum security and stability (DePetris, 2017). Overall, the crisis's antecedents affected the trade processes of both goods and services in Qatar.

1.3.2 The Roots of the Qatar Crisis

Numerous disagreements between the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) states have greatly threatened its existence. In March 2014, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE (United Arab Emirates) withdrew their long-serving ambassadors from Qatar. This was an unfamiliar phenomenon among the GCC member states since its formation in 1981. This led to an expectation of a dispute resolution between the GCC member states. The aftermath of this incident is the negative effect the GCC member states felt on the shift of their independent political strategies and balance of power (Ulrichsen, 2017). Since these disagreements were not new to the GCC, the differences in opinions between the countries led to the start of scrutinizing the role of the GCC, its nature, and its performance in the region (Hassan, 2015). In theory and function, the GCC is a regional organization that provides prosperity and security among the Gulf States. However, the numerous disagreements and its lack of

mediation lenders are operationally ineffective. This is evidenced by its prior failure to prevent the invasion of Iraq to Kuwait and its threats to Saudi Arabia in the early 1990s.

Since the 2011 Arab uprisings, the foreign policies of the GCC member states have changed. Moreover, GCC countries had agreed to a policy of non-interference by the member states in their bid to optimize their securities from the outside. Furthermore, they decided on a policy of condemning support to any individual, organization or party that seeks to denature the security and stability of any GCC member states (Hassan, 2015). The initial Crisis was successfully resolved by the return of the ambassadors to Qatar. However, lack of confidence within the member states continued to remain a central dilemma within the GCC member states, and this may have led to the 2017 blockade.

Qatar's independent foreign policy is the leading root cause of the Crisis (Smith, 2019). Qatar has leaned more towards political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, and this has been seen as a threat to the legitimacy of its neighbours. Therefore, Saudi Arabia particularly accuses Qatar of supporting and financing extremist organizations and being the voice of UAE (United Arab Emirates) and KSA opponents. On the other hand, Qatar presented some accusations to KSA and UAE countries for being despotic and on the wrong side of history, which dates back to 2011, the Arab Spring. The year 2011 is the origin of the demands for the closure of Al-Jazeera (AL Jazeera, June 5, 2017), and this is a guide on what might be behind this Crisis.

Qatar Foreign Policy & Arab Spring: As all countries do, Qatar has been working tooth and nail to shape its independent policy since 1995. To achieve this, they built a new system for international relations while finding ways to reduce Saudi Arabia's influence. For this reason, Qatar has made measurable and seen milestones in its economic development. It is

currently an economically stable country within the region and throughout the world, and it owes some assets to other countries like Germany, France, and Britain (Abu Sulaibn, 2017). Scholars have reported that this foreign policy and the Arab Spring are the main factors that contributed to the tension between Qatar and the neighbouring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members. In particular, the Arab Spring led to ideological differences in the vision of Qatar and the blockading countries. Moreover, over the years since the 2011 Arab revolutions, Qatar's policy has clashed with that of Emirati diplomacy (Al-Eip, 2020).

Allegations of funding Terrorism: Doha's political support for the Islamic groups, which are politically in association with the Muslim Brotherhood, has been the primary and long-term cause of unending disputes between the blockading countries. The perceptions of the blockading countries in this matter coincide. For instance, the Saudi Arabia camp postulates that there is no distinct difference between the militant terrorist groups they face regarding the danger posed by the Islamic Brotherhood. On the other hand, the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia consider Qatar to be the engineer for supporting Islamic groups with terror beliefs and perceptions that political Islam was an Ascendant in the region both politically and militarily (Al-Mokh, Z., 2019). Moreover, Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi led the Egyptian political regime in crashing and banning all activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was their primary opponent. Having recognized the Muslim Brotherhood as a terror group, Egypt joined the Saudi-led coalition against Qatar. Consequently, this led to Egypt becoming the main actor in the Crisis as the blockading nations had declared and considered the Muslim Brotherhood as terrorists supported by the Qatar government. However, Kuwait, being a member of the GCC, thinks the Muslim Brotherhood is a political party that needs representatives in parliament.

The Role of Mass Media. Media can foster post-conflict cooperation (Shoemaker & Strenlau, 2014). Due to its ability to unite, it can also lead to international conflicts. Al-Jazeera TV is the primary source of information in Qatar and all Arab countries. It has been a source of conflict because it supports the interests of some political movements that conflict with UAE and KSA's interests, like the Muslim Brotherhood (Ghanem, 2018).

The root causes of the Qatar blockade have inadvertently catalysed a transformation within the service industry. While the embargo was initially intended to exert economic pressure and isolate the country, it spurred Qatar to enhance its self-reliance and diversify its economy, particularly in the service industry (Kabbani, 2021). This shift has been associated with a surge in domestic production and an increased focus on service-oriented sectors as a means of economic diversification (Sekhar, 2021).

1.3.3 Information wars, bots and hacking

Some US-based investigators delved into this matter to understand why Qatar had to air fake news deliberately. They hypothesized that the Russian hackers might have been behind some of the hacking of the Qatar News Agency that initiated the Qatar blockade. However, this was unlikely considering the homegrown GCC cyber battle that led up to the spat. Initially, tensions ran high in Qatar when the young Emir of Qatar affirmed the excellent relations between Qatar and other countries, including Iran Ham and the Muslim Brotherhood. He also recognized Iran as an essential asset in regional power. However, Qatari officials denied that the Emir had made such comments and claimed their news agencies and social media accounts had been hacked. Coincidentally, an anonymous group of hackers identified as "GlobalLeaks" released emails that belonged to the Emirati Ambassador to the US, Youssef al-Otaiba. These seemingly legitimate emails showed detailed communication

between the Foundation for the Defence of Democracies, the Washington-based think tank and the UAE. The correspondences suggested that specific UAE determinations prevent Iran from allowing its nuclear deal to the West so that it can stand a chance to improve its position in the region (C Free, 2017).

Following Qatar's claim of being targeted by an orchestrated smear group, the hacks proved that these allegations must have been well anticipated, and these hackers accused Qatar of supporting terrorism. Some days before the Qatar hacking claims, a hashtag that is translated to "*Qatar is a treasury of terrorism*" had gone viral. This was followed by a massive social media uproar, primarily through bot accounts that echoed similar themes that criticized Qatar for having a relationship with Iran, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. However, most of these numerous hashtags were propaganda produced by anti-Qatar-bots Twitter accounts. Some of the shared images on Twitter pinpointed Qatar's media channels as misinformation (C Free, 2017).

These bot armies were not intended to represent an organic trickling of genuine public anger at Qatar and the ambassador to the US, but they were designed to build around an idea, to make it grow and become more legitimate. These bots intended to legitimize the discourse that Qatar was a big supporter of terrorism. It is factual that these bot armies had been installed earlier before Qatar's claim of being hacked. Following the claim, they acted quickly, indicating that those institutions had invested in popularizing an ill-intent notion towards Qatar for their selfish gain.

Answering the 'who' in this is unclear, but much propaganda steers toward the existing animosity between the Arab countries and Iran. However, if unchecked, these allegations threaten regional stability (C Free, 2017).

1.3.4 Qatar's response to the Crisis

Qatar's response to the blockade imposed by other GCC countries and Egypt is a significant milestone towards reassessing its internal and external trade strategies of goods and services and establishing sustainable counter mechanisms suitable to respond to the Crisis appropriately. For instance, under the two months of the Qatar blockade, Qatar approved a draft law that gave their permanent resident status to certain noncitizens, including children of Qatari women married to non-Qatari men, a move that shows strategic use of the blockade to Qatar's advantage (Abu-Ras *et al.*, 2022). This contradicts the country's long-standing traditions of recognizing only children born to Qatari men as citizens while omitting those born to Qatari women to foreign fathers. However, after the Crisis, the Qatari new law was the first to bestow noncitizens with equal economic benefits to citizens. These benefits included access to free education, preferential hiring and free health. While the GCC member states called for Qatari citizens to evacuate from their countries, Qatar did the opposite by allowing and bestowing these rights to non-Qatari Citizens.

In understanding the impact of the blockade on services marketing and customer relations, this study reviews the findings from Jin, Qu and Bao (2019), Seyfi and Hall (2020) and Yap *et al.* (2020), who studied related and similar events, such as sanctions imposed by the international community towards a specific country, terrorist attacks or events leading to political instability. These events present motifs that are emblematic of a country's circumstances when its reputation is compromised due to events with crisis-level effects. Although political instability tends to be overlooked due to the diversity of their domains and characteristics, their impact on service delivery becomes more pronounced over time.

First, risk perceptions regarding a country portrayed as unsafe influence trade partners' decision-making, thereby influencing foreign investment decisions. The adverse economic outcomes can be attributed to multiple industry-specific outcomes, with evidence from extant empirical research. Pratt and Alizadeh (2018) indicated that the negative portrayals generate psychological effects that are intercepted to present an adverse risk to travellers, with the outcome being a reduction in tourist arrivals. These effects can extend to non-sanctioning countries, especially when extensive regionalization is practised.

The blockade featured extensive and intensive information warfare tactics, with increased use of social media tools and compromise to cyber security systems to disseminate false news and information (Mitchell, 2019). Despite the vitriolic approach in the coverage of the events by Saudi Arabia, Qatar was limited in presenting a resolute and unified façade. Its primary focus was to counter and deny the accusations of wrongdoing without confrontations. Contrary to the duality in the coverage and information warfare between the two parties to the blockade, the coverage by the international media was exceedingly unpredictable since the objectives of their actions were based on the newsworthiness of the events in the region. The apparent influence of the critical drivers of the coverage by the international media included public diplomacy, propaganda targeting to sway outcomes, active information/ disinformation/ misinformation, and the national interests served by the individual media houses. Ultimately, this resulted in unexpected information warfare between nations and media houses.

The effects are also apparent at a sector level. The prominence of the tourism sector in the diversification of the economy of the country is represented by the development of the National Tourism Sector Strategy of 2020, with the primary goal being to "...lead to the

sustainable development of Qatar into a world-class hub with deep cultural roots." (Yap et al., 2020, p 2). The strategy focuses on developing diverse products and services in the tourism sector, featuring elements of cultural artefacts, education, and urban and natural attractions.

As shown by the data from the Qatar Tourism Authority Report of 2017 hereunder, Qatar experienced an increase in international tourists from all major regions except other Arab countries between 2012 and 2016, leading to a 264% growth in five years. However, following the blockade announcement, the number of tourist arrivals from most locations dropped, with the most significant drop of 46.6% reported from the rest of the GCC and 25.5% from other Arab countries. Despite the 43.4% growth in tourist arrivals from Africa, the absolute numbers needed to be increased to compensate for the drops in numbers from other locations, leading to an overall 23.2% drop in arrivals between 2016 and 2017. There were commensurate changes in revenues from tourism, which further magnifies the effects of the changes in arrivals.

Figure 2: Tourism Arrival Data on Qatar

Region	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% Change 2016-2017	CAGR 2012-2017	Cumulative Growth 2012-2017
GCC	952,870	1,090,264	1,124,333	1,300,221	1,410,657	752,876	-46.6%	-4.6%	-21.0%
Other Arab	278,161	287,177	313,491	267,349	221,894	165,318	-25.5%	-9.9%	-40.6%
Other Africa	31,909	35,475	35,742	36,558	32,390	46,460	43.4%	7.8%	45.6%
Other Asia including Oceania	579,649	651,957	782,794	732,964	660,364	652,102	-1.3%	2.4%	12.5%
Europe	361,943	413,829	437,842	457,940	455,076	483,834	6.3%	6.0%	33.7%
Americas	119,041	133,267	145,171	146,098	157,715	155,900	-1.2%	5.5%	31.0%
Total	2,323,573	2,611,969	2,839,373	2,941,130	2,938,096	2,256,490	-23.2%	-0.6%	-2.9%

Source: Yap et al. (2020) based on the Qatar Tourism Authority Report 2017.

On the same note, the banking sector experienced similar changes due to the blockade. Data provided by the Qatar Financial Centre (2017) revealed that between 2012

and 2017, the entire financial sector experienced a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) in the asset by 9%, while Islamic Banks (IBs) reported an 11% growth over the same period. Following the blockade, recent data by Kumar (2020) revealed that between 2018 and 2019, conventional banks reported a 0.2% drop in assets growth, while IBs reported an 11.8% growth in assets. These drops were experienced in other performance metrics. First, Charfeddine and Al Refai (2019) report a drop in deposits by non-residents from 25% to 17% in 2017 alone, amounting to US\$40B, with such customers demanding higher interest due to the increased risk. Bank Audi (2019) reports a change in interest rates on short-term deposits from 2.52% to 3.73% between 2016 and 2019, with a corresponding change from 4.49% to 5.35% for long-term deposits over the same period. Due to the risks associated with liquidity, banking institutions were forced to increase their cash and reserves from 3.5% to 5.1% over the same period. There were changes in the credit and investments by the banking sector, with a drop in overseas credit and investments from 12.2% to 9.7%, while domestic credit grew from 58.9% to 61.%. These changes in the compositions of assets held by the banking sector and other related changes influence the options available to the banking sector. Specifically, the products and services are available to its customers in the domestic and international markets. These changes led to a downgrading of Moody's credit rating for the banking sector from stable to negative, while S&P categorized the banking sector as the 'most vulnerable' in the GCC region.

Several economic effects are reported at the onset of the blockade, most of which are known to directly and indirectly impact the external environment in which businesses in the service sector operate. According to Bank Audi (2019), the average inflation rose from 1.8% in 2015 to 2.7% in 2016, with the annual growth in monetary supply dropping to 4.6% in 2016. The effects of these changes are also experienced at the macro level, with the IMF (2019) reports revealing that Qatar experienced a 19% drop in its gross domestic product. Although Qatar has adjusted its operations to survive the blockade, the stopgap measures are reportedly sub-optimal due to their effects on the investment sentiments from domestic and foreign development partners.

The discourse highlights the problem's background and the fact that the effects of the blockade were felt at the national and institutional levels. The effects of the embargo

presented challenges that differ based on the circumstances, and this is outlined in the problem statement.

1.4 Problem Statement

The 21st-century industries face multiple challenges in attracting and retaining new customers (Happold & Eden, 2019). The challenges result from the external and internal environmental factors contributing to any industry's success. While the internal environment may be manageable, external environmental factors such as sanctions and blockades may pose devastating business disruptions that require special attention (Hajhamad, 2024). Most of these challenges are shared with a slight difference existing in how services businesses and manufacturing industries experience and manage them. Services marketing and CRM activities are measures by organizations to attract and retain customers while enhancing the nature of the relationships. Institutions and businesses in Qatar adopt effective and unique services marketing and CRM strategies to respond to political, social, economic, environmental, legal and technological disruptions as part of the main antecedents of maintaining their strategic position (Hole, Pawar and Bhaskar, 2018; Vicedo *et al.*, 2020).

The Economic Blockade imposed on Qatar by other GCC member states in June 2017 was an unprecedented crisis that sent devastating shockwaves to the services industry and CRM. Faced with uncertainties on the prospects of how the blockade will unfold and a lack of clarity on how long the sanctions would last, these institutions were forced into a state of trying to respond to the new crisis, failure to which would amplify the uncertainty, thereby leading to the magnification of the cost of recovery (Abu-Ras *et al.*, 2022). Ultimately, the centrality of services marketing and CRM activities in the strategies for intervention to the Crisis was necessitated by the fact that part of the measures under the Saudi-led blockade was a media-oriented campaign to tarnish the country's reputation. Essentially, the siege, as well as the accompanying campaign to portray Qatar negatively, created a cascading effect of negative portrayals backed by disinformation and misinformation campaigns deployed across different media channels, including social media. These campaigns had primary and secondary outcomes, with the secondary effects being attributed to the actions of the witting and unwitting participants, most of whom propelled the various themes associated with the blockade and sanctions campaign beyond the national and regional borders. This is why a

combination of services marketing and CRM activities were included in the intervention. However, empirical research reveals that some of these strategies lose their effectiveness over time due to the changes in the operating environment and response to adjustments in the tactics of the originators of the blockade. As a result, any measures taken must be insulated against such outcomes by integrating strategic approaches that link the short-term and long-term goals and outcomes while accounting for market dynamics.

This research seeks to unravel the intricate balance between economic robustness and the commitment to maintaining service quality and customer relations, enabling businesses to thrive even in the most formidable circumstances. Therefore, this study aims to investigate Qatar's services marketing and customer relations amid the continuous political blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. It also aims to explore Qatar's attempt to continue to pursue its services marketing and customer relationship amidst its current political and economic situation. Overall, the research contributes to an indirect exploration of human perseverance and the fundamental importance of sustaining the well-being of businesses, individuals, and society, even in the face of formidable challenges.

1.5 Aims and Objectives

1.5.1 Aims

This study aims to investigate Qatar's services marketing and customer relations amid the continuous political blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. It also aims to explore Qatar's attempt to continue to pursue its services marketing and customer relationship amidst its current political and economic situation.

1.5.2 Objectives

The objectives that the study aims to achieve are:

- 1) To examine the strategies employed by Qatar service companies to manage their customers during the Qatar economic blockade.

2) To analyse the effectiveness of different CRM strategies used by Qatar service companies during the Qatar economic blockade.

3) To investigate the impact of the Qatar economic blockade on CRM practices in the Qatar services industries.

1.5.3 Research Questions

Below are the research questions that this study will answer:

1) What is the present status of services marketing and customer relations in Qatar amid the continuous political blockade by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates?

2) What measures do Qatar services marketing and customer relations companies undertake to remain operational despite the ongoing political blockade?

These research questions will be answered in the entirety of the study.

1.6 Contribution to Research

The study contributes to marketing research in Qatar and how it is impacted by the effects of the current political blockade imposed on it by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt. As there is currently no empirical research towards this end, the study is the first of its kind in this field, which can be used as evidence by future research. It can, therefore, initialize an enriching body of knowledge regarding services marketing and CRM in Qatar under continuous political blockade by the so-called quartet (Hennessy-Fiske, 2017).

1.7 Chapter Organisation

This study is organized into six main chapters, each discussing distinct yet linked issues. This chapter provides the background to the research and explores the problems of Customer Relationship Management in Qatar during the blockade period. The chapter also introduces the aim and objectives of the study, as well as the problem statement, showcasing the study's relevance.

The following (second) chapter, Literature Review, explores existing literature on Customer relationship management. In this chapter, the definition and context of the concept. The chapter also examines the theoretical framework by discussing the rational choice theory and the concept of service marketing. The chapter has closed with a preliminary determination of the existing gap in knowledge.

Chapter three has provided the research process by exploring the research methodology. The Research Onion by Saunders et al. This interpretive study seeks to place social actors within the research process and interpret their views. To this extent, this is an inductive study with semi-structured interviews used to collect data, which were then analysed using the thematic analysis method.

Chapter four provides the Findings and Analysis: This chapter explains the findings of this study.

Chapter five is the Discussion Chapter: This chapter discusses the findings where a link will be developed between the findings and existing literature. Chapter 6 provides the Contribution, Recommendations and Conclusion. This chapter contributes to the study and concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews previous research on services marketing and customer relationships amid geopolitical tensions such as the Qatar Blockade. The chapter begins by examining theories (Rational Choice Theory, The Game Theory, The Recognition-Primed Decision Model, Resource View, and Social Contract Theory) that inform the choice of research methods and connect the researcher with existing knowledge on CRM and services marketing during geopolitical tensions. The review is followed by a relational endeavour that seeks comparative literature between the Qatar Blockade and other geopolitical crises of the 21st century, including the Russia-Ukraine war, which is essential to gain expansive knowledge of the study objectives. This is followed by a general literature review of CRM and services marketing globally and systematically to the context of Qatar to gain an in-depth knowledge of the correlation and applicability of global CRM and services marketing principles in Qatar, especially during the Qatar blockade. The review examines specific service sectors, including the banking, tourism, technology, healthcare, aviation, education, and energy sectors (oil and gas industries).

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Rational Choice Theory

The Rational choice theory (Scott, 2000) can be used to gain theoretical knowledge and understand how customers, the government and other stakeholders in Qatar made

decisions about services during the blockade. For instance, it helps drive answers to the study's inherent questions: Did the stakeholders choose to switch to local service providers and utilize local services due to limited options, or were other factors considered in decision-making? In addition, the theory is helpful in this study in analysing the actions of service companies in Qatar, which include whether they rationally chose to adapt to their customer service strategies or marketing campaigns based on a cost-benefit analysis.

The rational choice theory (Scott, 2000) can be used as an economic underpinning of an examination of service marketing and customer relationship management amid the political blockade in Qatar. Its origin dates back centuries. It is believed that the proponent of this theory was a philosopher named Adam Smith (Witztum, 2005). In one of his essays, "*An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*," he proposed that the tendency of human nature toward self-interest results in prosperity. From a standard perspective, rational choice pertains to identifying available options and selecting the most preferred one based on some criteria (Ishiyama and Breuning, 2011). The rational choice theory assumes that decisions result from conscious choices undertaken by individuals to advance the realization of their preferences.

Furthermore, the reward of an action or relationship must outweigh the value of the action that is intended to be completed. However, diminishing the value of the reward below the value of the incurred costs will compel the person, nation or group to end the relationship or stop the action. The theory concludes that nations or individuals will use the resources at their disposal to optimize their rewards (Smith, 2010). The theory moves to infer the choices based on an existing context, which may include the anticipated valuation of alternatives with probabilistic results (Oppenheimer, 2012). The rational choice model is an optimisation-based approach. It is linked to the utility maximization model, which emerged as a notable intellectual convergence that began in the 19th century. If policies to be adopted are based on attaining the greatest good for most people, a utility index is needed to measure the extent of the benefits of various policies to various people (Floudas & Pardalos, 2009).

Applying the rational choice theory to the present political blockade confronting Qatar, the Qatari government has adopted some valuable measures to respond to the situation, such as proposing diplomatic solutions to end the embargo. For them to achieve the desired economic growth, the rational choice theory will likely inform decision-makers to

set objectives and preferred outcomes that are deliberately and carefully calibrated to achieve optimum results. The Qatari blockade is a crisis in itself. Therefore, the initiator of economic growth projects and wealth creation may face unpleasant alternatives, the likelihood of undirected escalations, accusations of irrationality, abandoning and backing down objectives, and risking credibility and outcomes. However, some of the Qatar blockade came with demands submitted by Kuwait on behalf of the anti-Qatari coalition, including suspending all diplomatic relationships with Turkey and Iran. However, according to Qatar, these demands were unreasonable, and they complicate the issues in the Gulf that may lead to armed conflict (Harb, 2017). The complication of the demands arises from what is perceived as two flaws. First, the demands of the anti-Qatar coalition are extreme, and no nation or state will accept them, no matter how weak or guilty they are. The second is that these conditions do not satisfy any international agreements or norms of behaviour, which means that the coalition should make actionable and reasonable demands (Harb, 2017). About its economic state, it may be expected that the services marketing sector and customer relationship management of businesses in the country are attempting to make the most of what the situation presents to them.

Therefore, the premises of Rational Choice Theory are essential in this study to understand the reasons behind the country's choices in the services industry and customer relations management during the Blockade.

2.2.2 The Game Theory

The game theory model is essential in this study as it helps examine the strategic interactions between the blockading countries and Qatar, including how involved parties anticipate each other's actions and select their course of action or strategies accordingly. Furthermore, the Game Theory sheds light on examining the competitive landscape within the Qatar service sector and CRM during the blockade, including reactions to the emergency of new local service providers seeking to fill the international gap left after the embargo.

Game Theory is used to model competitive situations where organizations or individuals try to maximize their outcomes in the face of economic or market uncertainty and

strategic independence. As a persuasive act, marketing drives and builds brand loyalty. Game theory is one of the exciting frameworks that can be used to develop effective marketing strategies. Game theory is a branch of mathematics which analyses strategic decision-making. Developed in the mid-20th century, it has proven to be an essential tool for studying human behaviour in different situations (Maschler, Zamir and Solan, 2020).

Game theory was traditionally used to formulate military strategy (Camerer, 2011). Some studies have alluded that market competition is similar to the battlefield (Kotler and Singh, 1981). In their research, Kotler and Singh (1981) conclude that marketing managers must learn their attacking strategies to beat opponents and defend themselves against possible attacks. Since it was first proposed by Neumann and Morgenstern (1944), researchers have continuously debated the possibility of applying the theory to solving marketing problems and predicting competitive behaviour (Chevalier-Roignant and Trigeorgis, 2011). Later, the debate extended to the application of game theory in all aspects of marketing. The game theory is essential due to its exciting assumptions.

Game theory aims to provide formal language to describe a goal-oriented and conscious decision process that involves one or more players (Owen, 2013). The theory requires complete information about the game, where each player must be acquainted with the rules of the game and the other players' preferences. In addition, the information must be perfect about choices preceding the decision-making time. The third assumption of the game theory requires rational decision processes based on maximizing their utility function. During uncertainties, the player can make subjective decisions (Owen, 2013). The other assumption is intelligence, which requires every player to be rational and able to predict the choices of other players, thinking about their next move and what their rational choice might look like if they were in the same situation as the other player. Competitive and non-cooperative behaviour is another assumption that alludes to individual decisions as a consequence of maximization of each individual's utility function and not as a total function of all players. All players work as a team. However, a non-cooperative assumption bias leads to non-optimal choices and dilemmas (Owen, 2013). The player's situation is dynamic. Therefore, most games are dynamic and do not supply a single-move solution. Interdependence is another game theory assumption which portrays individual success as a consequence of another player's contribution. This assumption refutes the possibility of

unilateral decision-making in a team. Time is essential in game theory as the result of each game is affected by the length of the game. The last assumption is intractability, where attempts to establish equilibrium between different players result from individual or group interaction (Owen, 2013).

The criticism of game theory in its application to marketing strategy is that it is based on the behaviour of a rational player (Maschler, Zamir and Solan, 2020). In game theory, a player must demonstrate and portray a character of rationalism, normative behaviour or an understandable deviation from it (Maschler, Zamir and Solan, 2020). In services marketing, or marketing any products, instead, the relation between objective quality of goods and price is not the main driver of the consumer's decision to purchase. Irrational and intangible factors also contribute to price, and physical factors determine consumers' market decision-making. The reason for marketing is that consumers need to be rational in their decision-making. In marketing, the environment is unknown and uncertain and not knowable completely. Therefore, the task for managers is to promote the product or service to an increasingly unpredictable changing market. Therefore, players need to learn all the game rules that apply to all players. Therefore, the assumption of complete information in the game theory needs to be revised in decision-making during marketing. In addition, results in many games are not fixed but are as a circumstance of probability.

On the other hand, managers prefer using tools that give accurate results. Also, the game theory considers competition to prevail in cooperation, which is different for many markets due to a lack of collaboration. Lastly, the game theory needs to consider the creation of the brand's image and the effects it can have in the market (Owen, 2013).

However, several great arguments favour game theory in marketing decisions. Di Benedetto (1986) argues that it is possible to demonstrate, with some revisions, the relation between the marketing decision process and the economic definition of the game (Di Benedetto, 1986). In addition, according to Bacharach (1977), game theory has various attributes that can be applied to marketing decisions (Bacharach and Aiken, 1977). These attributes include the following: game theory has a well-defined set of possible ways for action for every player; every player in the market has a well-defined preference within the possible results; results and relations are determined by the choices of the style each player makes an action; and that each player has complete knowledge of all the rest of the attributes.

According to a study, the choices made by marketing managers coincide with the ways of action (Wilson and Gilligan, 2012). For instance, results and relations depend on the competitor's choices in the market; the best decision increases and optimizes the decision process; the player's preferences are directly proportionate to the product's objective decided by the management; and the rationality assumption is the main limit for applying game theory to marketing. However, an irrational action can be added to the game theory if the player can assert deception (bluff and threat) from other players. The ability to identify cheating in the game makes it possible for games to have situations of incomplete information that require irrationality.

Some scholars, Kreps and Wilson (1982), added a reputation factor to their game model. They stated that a player's reputation has a significant influence on the behaviour of other players. This relates to the assumption of complete information, which makes it challenging to think backwards to determine the intent of every manager or player and translate it into payoffs (Kreps and Wilson, 1982). To solve this problem, Chatterjee and Lilien (1986) proposed that the game theory model could be expounded to include incomplete information about the payoff functions.

Another scholar, Di Benedetto (1986), argues that it is possible to include the competitor's information or intentions by conducting qualitative surveys or interviews submitted to experts in the industrial sector. The results of the interviews could be used to test the empirical soundness of the model. Also, another scholar points out that it is possible to establish an equilibrium with games with incomplete information by gathering specific information on marketing signals that capture players' specific moves and reactions (Owen, 2013). Therefore, game theory is a model that analyses interdependencies and effects of competitor interactions

Game theory can be applied in the various parts of marketing, including making decisions on pricing. It can be used to determine whether there is a first-mover advantage and, therefore, present a guideline on formulating offensive and defensive moves against the competitor. Product innovation increases consumer utility but is more effective when a firm invests in innovative marketing that involves conspicuous communication with the target market (Maschler, Zamir and Solan, 2020). Game theory is applied here; when new services

are introduced, there is a tendency that their market will increase while older products and services decrease.

Distribution ensures products and services reach financial consumers through a strategic supply chain. Several studies utilize game theory to analyze relations among producers and dealers along the distribution channels (Weitz and Wang, 2004). Competition problems along the distribution channels are solved by other studies that demonstrate that double marginalization is reduced by increased competition at the retailer level (Coughlan, 1985). A study on price competition in a channel structure with a common retailer (Choi, 1991) analyzed a distribution channel with two producers and one retailer selling products from the two producers. (Choi, 1991) approaches the problem with three non-cooperative games and demonstrates that all results depend on the shape of the demand function. For instance, it is convenient for producers to have more exclusive retailers, and these retailers are stimulated to deal with several producers. It is also convenient for all operators involved in the distribution channel and consumers to avoid dominance over others. In addition, the retailer gains more than the producer in case of a symmetrical reduction of production costs. Also, when products are less differentiated, there is a tendency that their prices will grow. Therefore, it is convenient for operators in the distribution channel to have exclusive retailers.

This theory is helpful in this study for many reasons. It can be used to model competitive situations and identify optimal strategies. Modelling competitive situations involves identifying the players in the game, like employees, businesses, and consumers. It also involves identifying their possible actions and the payoffs associated with each action (Maschler, Zamir and Solan, 2020). The ability to model is possible since game theory provides enabling tolls-like situations. Modelling the competitive situations in a business will lead to maximising outcomes in the face of uncertainty and strategic interdependence. Game theory will also be a valuable tool for understanding consumer behaviour. Consumer behaviour can first be determined by identifying factors influencing customer decision-making, like social norms, cognitive bias, and decision-making heuristics. Game theory is also relevant to this study since it helps design persuasive marketing messages. When businesses understand consumer behaviour during uncertain moments like the Qatar blockade, they can create marketing messages that more effectively convince consumers to buy their services. Game

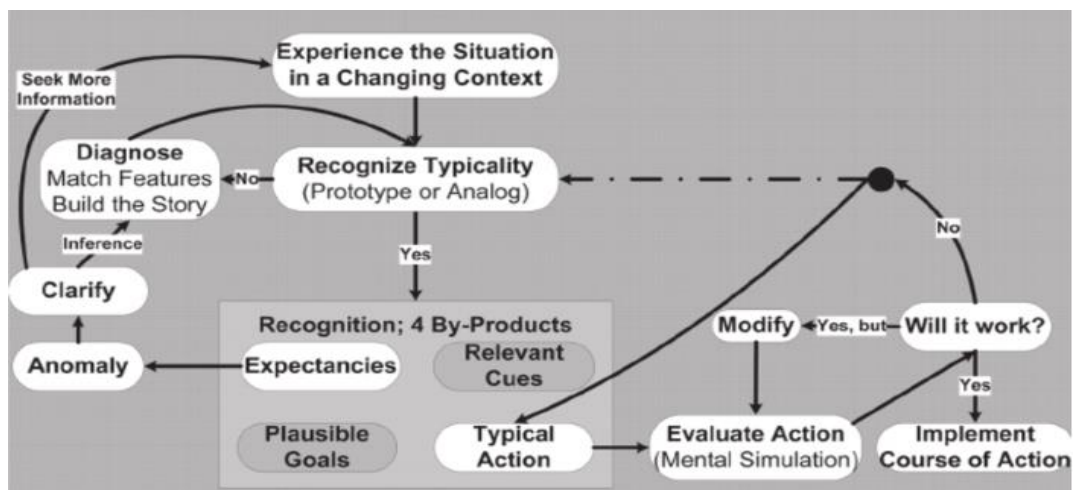
theory is used in developing social proofs that are more likely to influence customers when faced with similar situations.

2.2.3 The recognition-primed decision (RPD) model

The main focus of using the RPD model in this study is to understand how habits and automatic responses influence decisions. In the context of Qatar, RPD gives the basis for understanding how existing CRM with service companies in Qatar might have helped them in customer attraction and retention during the blockade, even when choices were limited, where customers were likely to be stuck with familiar service providers due to positive past experiences and established trust.

The RPD model was first proposed by research psychologists Gary Klein, Anne-Cirocco, and Roberta Calderwood in the late 1980s (Klein, 1997). Following the identification of the model, Klein then published the model in his book "Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions" (Klein, 2001)." The model, presented as a process, was developed after Klein, Caderwood, and Clinton-Cirocco studied professionals like nuclear technicians, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, and firefighters, who routinely make quick and life-or-death decisions (Klein, 2017). They realized that existing models at the time did not adequately explain how people make good decisions under pressure. The model is suitable when time pressures such as political blockades and sanctions are present, goals must be better defined, and information needs to be completed. The model is based on the idea that professionals and other experts make quick and effective decisions by recognizing patterns in current situations and matching them to their past experiences. The process is automatic and unconscious. It allows decision-makers to make quick decisions without engaging in conscious deliberations. For instance, professionals within the services industry may make fast and impactful decisions that could respond to the impacts of the political blockade in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 3: Key Features of RBD



Source: *Sources of Power: How do People Make Decisions* (Klein, 2001)

The key features of the PRD process are the emphasis on situational (impacts of Qatar Blockade) reading rather than the generation of options for possible actions, dependence on the recalled response to the situation based on past experiences, and the generated response should result in a course of action that is workable and satisfactory even if it is not up to the optimal standards (Klein, 2017).

RPD model fuses two processes: how decision-makers size up situations to identify the course of action that makes sense and how they assess the course of action they take by imagining it. The model is presented in three formats: the simple match, where decision-makers recognize the type of situation, identify the appropriate response and implement it; the second format, level two. This happens when decision-makers face familiar or more complex situations requiring a more pronounced diagnosis. Decision-makers must think through several possible interpretations of the situation and search for environmental cues to match any of them. Some circumstances require decision-makers to make sense of the available cues by constructing explanations that account for the situation. The third format is

in level three, which is an evaluation phase. At this level, the decision maker is confident of the cause of action and conducts a short mental simulation to assess possible problems arising from implementing the cause of action. The model proponent calls the third phase as 'pre-playing a course of action'. The phase allows for modifying the action if it does raise concerns. If the cause of action is rejected, a second action could be considered. Therefore, decision-makers deal with one solution at a time and cannot compare multiple options (Klein, 2017).

The critical components of RPD include pattern recognition, mental simulation, intuition, and monitoring and adjusting. Pattern Recognition needs decision-makers to draw extensive expertise and experience to recognize patterns in various situations. It requires them to quickly assess similarities between the current situations and situations they have encountered. Mental simulation requires the decision-makers to simulate possible courses of action and to anticipate the likely outcomes of the actions. Intuition is a component of the model that requires decision-makers to use their intuition to select a course of action that is more likely to succeed depending on their mental simulation and understanding of the situation. Lastly, Monitoring and adjusting require the decision-makers to continuously monitor the situation and adjust their actions to suit the current situation. However, they must adapt in real time if the situation evolves differently. Also, marketers monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) to gauge the success of their strategies.

Pattern recognition is essential in CRM and services marketing in responding to uncertainties during the Qatar blockade; services companies operating within Qatar would have to swiftly recognize shifts in the market, evolving political and economic landscapes, and changes in customer behaviour. Just as Practitioners used in the RPD study respond to emergencies, business leaders and marketing managers in the region would have been

attuned to patterns in the business environment like sudden decreases in customer demand, disruptions in the supply chain, and shifting customer preferences. Companies in the region during the Qatar blockade would have had to mentally simulate various scenarios, such as decision-makers in emergency settings, to consider potential courses of action. In addition, intuition is an essential aspect of the Qatar blockade when choosing such strategies. Intuition informed by market knowledge and experience would play a role in making quick decisions on resource allocation, market adjustments and retention of customers (Klein, 2017). Marketing and monitoring are of paramount importance as companies need to closely monitor evolving situations and prepare to adjust their strategies by revising their marketing plans, finding alternatives, and modifying pricing structures to maintain customer loyalty.

RPD is relevant in predicting and understanding consumer behaviour (Klein, 2017). Therefore, Marketers use historical patterns and data to identify shifts in consumer preferences, trends and purchasing habits. The recognition of these patterns guides the development and enhancement of marketing strategies. In addition, the RPD can be used as a model that aids in developing new products and services. Marketers anticipate how consumers will respond to the service features, branding, and pricing. In institutions where companies need to explore new markets or expand their customer base, the RPD helps recognize relevant patterns and conducts mental simulations that assist in deciding whether it is the right move and the strategies that are supposed to be employed. RPD is also a crucial tool in competitive analysis that helps marketing managers understand and respond to competitor's actions. RPD can be used to recognize competitor strategies and simulate potential responses to gain or maintain a competitive edge. In an economic crisis like that brought about by the Qatar Blockade, RPD can help marketing professionals quickly assess the situation and decide the most appropriate course of action to manage the crisis. RPD is

also relevant in the day-to-day decision-making for marketing managers. Marketing managers use RPD to optimize their marketing campaigns by monitoring campaign performance and making real-time adjustments based on intuitive assessments and patterns recognized in customer feedback. The RPD model contains unique features that allow marketers to conduct personalized and customer engagement and recognize individual preferences crucial in delivering customised content and experiences. RPD, therefore, enables marketers to make rapid decisions on how to tailor their marketing efforts to meet each individual's needs. When combined with data analytics, RPD identifies patterns and trends in large datasets, which, when used by marketers, enables them to develop data-driven strategies for targeting specific customer segments. Furthermore, deciding how to allocate the marketing budget across different channels and campaigns requires patterns in past performance and simulating potential outcomes of various allocation scenarios.

RPD is a crucial model in marketing as it allows marketers to make quick decisions in a fast-paced marketing environment (Klein, 2017). This will enable them to seize existing opportunities and address challenges promptly. It also leverages the expertise of marketing managers who deeply understand market dynamics and consumer behaviour. Moreover, in the constantly changing marketing landscape, RPD can guide marketers in recognizing and adapting to emerging trends and consumer preferences. Through mental simulations, RPD is an essential tool in effective risk management, made possible by mental simulations and pattern recognition. Therefore, it helps marketers to assess and mitigate risks associated with marketing decisions and reduce the likelihood of costly mistakes.

2.2.4 Resource-Based View (RBV).

Resource-Based View model guides the researcher in understanding and assessing how Qatar's resources in the services industry, such as skilled workforce, advanced technology, and infrastructure, helped the services sector adapt to the impacts of the blockade and maintain their operations and quality of services. Furthermore, the model directs the researcher to inquire into how the blockade may have been a catalyst for developing new capabilities and resources in terms of localization of supply chains, development of e-commerce platforms, and innovation, leading to a more resilient and diversified sector.

The resource-based View argues that a company's sustained competitive advantage is based on its rare, valuable, no substitutable, and inimitable sources (Madhani, 2010). The ability of companies to create and acquire these resources affects their performance and competitiveness over their competitors. Penrose (2009) first proposed the theory as a model for effectively managing a company's resources, productive opportunities, and diversification strategy. The model provides a framework to predict and highlight the fundamentals of organizational competitive advantage and performance (Penrose, 2009). RBV focuses on the firm's performance based on Meso perspectives and a more macro perspective. It addresses the internal-driven approach by focusing on the internal organization of resources instead of the external organization of resources to understand accomplishments and failure.

RBV is based on two assumptions related to explaining how a firm's resources generate sustained competitive advantage and how some companies consistently outperform others by gaining a higher competitive advantage. One of the cornerstones of RBV is the heterogeneity of capabilities and resources in a population of companies, which

are distinct from each other. The main assumption of heterogeneity of resources is that firms possess unique resources in specific situations and may be more skilled to perform some activities and create a competitive advantage. The RBV assumptions assume that firm characteristics are not merely modified; the RBT resources refer to business processes, assets, knowledge, information, attributes, and capabilities (Olavarrieta and Ellinger, 1997).

According to RBV, a resource must fulfil the criteria to provide a competitive advantage and sustainable performance among economic sanctions, Blockades and embargos. First, the resource must be valuable. Resources provide value to the firm, and it helps companies to exploit market opportunities and help reduce market threats. Hence, posing a resource is advantageous if it does not improve value. The second criterion is that the resources must be rare and difficult to find among the potential and existing competitors. The unique and rare resources offer a competitive advantage since shared resources in the market cannot provide a competitive advantage (Madhani, 2010). In addition, a resource should be complex and unique to allow for imperfect imitability, and a copy or imitation of the resource will not be feasible. The last criterion is non-substitutability, which implies that another alternative resource cannot substitute resources.

Valuable resources must enable a firm or company to do things and behave in a manner that leads to low costs, high sales, financial value, and high profit margins (Barney, 2000). Barney (2000) emphasizes that resources are valuable only when they enable firms to implement or conceive strategies that enhance effectiveness and efficiency. The essence of RBV is to help managers understand why competencies can be perceived as the company's most important asset⁶ and appreciate how these assets can be used to enhance business performance. The RBV model accepts that elements or attributes related to past experiences,

competencies and organizational culture are essential for the company's success (Madhani, 2010).

2.2.4.1 RBV in marketing

The main role of marketing services and products is to achieve business-wide objectives and goals (Wernerfelt, 2014). Marketing is a strategy to cushion a firm's service or product through the shifting marketing paradigm by adopting marketing as a process rather than a separate entity in organizational management. The View of experts, theorists and marketers who use the RBV approach is to gain a competitive advantage that enables a company to survive. One of the company's resources involves intangible assets like brand reputation, patents, and services. RBV model encourages companies to identify critical resources relevant to their marketing efforts. Resource valuation is important in the RBV model and, therefore, important for companies and firms to assess the value and potentiality of each resource in the context of marketing. Valuable resources are highly engaged during marketing, attracting a wider customer base that provides valuable insights and data (Wernerfelt, 2014). The data and insights from these customers are more effective in personalized and targeted marketing strategies. In addition, according to RBV, firms can achieve competitive advantage by possessing distinct resources that are not easily duplicated or copied by competitors. In marketing, these unique resources can include proprietary customer data, partnerships, and innovative marketing technologies that competitors may not easily replicate (Wernerfelt, 2014). Resource immutability is another aspect of RBV that is relevant to marketing strategies. RBV model suggests that sustainable competitive advantage comes from resources that are difficult to change and, therefore, are deeply embedded in the organization. Thus, resources like a highly skilled marketing team and well-

established brand identity can be challenging for competitors to replicate and provide a long-lasting competitive edge (Wernerfelt, 2014).

The RBV model recognizes that resources can work together to create synergy and complement each other. Complementary resources in marketing include effective marketing strategies, a strong brand identity, and a skilled sales force that enhances a company's market presence (Wernerfelt, 2014). Also, RBV informs marketing strategy by identifying how firms can utilize their unique resources to gain a competitive advantage. Companies use the RBV principles to determine better resource allocation methods to focus on targeted marketing campaigns that leverage customer insights. RBV also strongly encourages forms to be innovative in their marketing strategies and tactics to sell their unique resources (Wernerfelt, 2014).

Furthermore, by leveraging unique marketing resources, forms can position themselves effectively in the market through resource differentiation. RBV steers sustainability and adaptability in the marketing of resources. It encourages companies to nurture, develop, and protect valuable resources (Wernerfelt, 2014).

2.2.4.2 RBV in CRM

The resource-based view is relevant to Customer Relations management as it provides insights into how a company's internal resources and capabilities can be utilized to build and maintain effective customer relations. It should be recalled that RBV sees companies as a diverse pool of unique resources and capabilities that, when utilized, can create and preserve competitive advantage. The RBV is an essential multi-dimensional perspective for implementing CRM since it links a firm's performance and resource and capability pools (Coltman, 2007).

Maintaining Customer Relations through CRM is an essential competitive advantage of the modern era (Drohan *et al.*, 2009). A study indicated that companies need five capabilities for successful CRM implementation: Integration capabilities, Learning and MO capabilities, directional capabilities, operational capabilities, and analytical capabilities (Plakoyiannaki and Tzokas, 2002). The RBV model stresses that resources can only deliver value if they seize opportunities and negative threats (Plakoyiannaki and Tzokas, 2002). The knowledge about individual or group preferences, attained from data analysis and conversions, cross-selling, and up-selling of salespersons, allows companies to exploit market opportunities. The constant interaction between service employees and customers makes firms more resilient against competitive threats.

Moreover, ways processes and people are integrated may be challenging to duplicate. The strategy, implementation philosophy, and management of CRM can be hard to copy or be non-substitutable, hence making it a distinguishing element of a firm. Therefore, successfully implementing a CTM requires unique resources like technological tools (Barney, 2000).

A firm's workforce is the primary element of building Customer relations since its capabilities are knowledge-based components that comprise know-how and skills embedded in employees (Olavarrieta and Ellinger, 1997). A firm's capabilities include developing, flowing, and accumulating important information for CRM initiatives. Information Technology (IT) tools may be used to store, analyze, and retrieve data more efficiently.

RBV helps organize and understand how to develop and utilize unique CRM resources, like personalized marketing algorithms, innovative customer engagements, and proprietary customers. In addition, a firm's CTRM should be unique so that it does not allow for

replicability by other competitors. Therefore, CRM will always create long-term customer relationships and a strong brand identity since it is unique and cannot be replicated by any other company. The RBV guides companies to determine the best ways to allocate resources and enhance CRM. Firms can apply RBV to develop a CRM strategy that can leverage their unique resources to create a competitive advantage in customer relationship management. One of the components that is shared between RBV and CRM is customer data management. Effective customer data management is essential for CRM and RBV. RBV informs companies on how to manage and protect customer data. It also encourages companies to invest in privacy compliance, data security and analytics capabilities to derive meaningful knowledge and insights from customer feedback. CRM encourages firms to innovate in customer management strategies, data analysis, and technology adoption to improve relationships and enhance customer loyalty. The RBV model emphasizes the need for companies to assess their resources and adapt to the changing market landscape and customer conditions. This can be utilized in the CRM to enable companies to update their strategies and invest resources to maintain and improve customer relationships in response to the new and evolving customer preferences and market dynamics. Therefore, by adopting the RBV framework to the CTRM, firms can better understand how to leverage their unique and personalized resources to maintain and build customer relationships effectively.

Therefore, RBV is a helpful model that will contribute to understanding the measures undertaken by Qatar to maintain its services and CRM despite the blockade. It will also aid in deciphering Qatar's position to maintain its economic robustness during the blockade, possibly through leveraging its resources and creating new capabilities and resources.

2.2.5 Social Contract Theory

Social contract theory is essential in this study as it helps the researcher understand the government-citizen relationship through implicit agreements, where cooperation is on mutual benefit. The relationship between the government and its citizens is always important in any industry, as the government may or may not support service companies through streamlined regulations and financial aid to encourage its citizens to be loyal to local service providers.

Social contract theory is a philosophical underpinning of the political and moral obligations of people in a social setting that depends on an agreement or contract among the members of the society. The social contract theory has been posited by modern philosophical thinkers – Thomas Hobbes, Hugo Grotius, John Locke, Samuel Pufendorf – as an account of two things: the moral origins of the principles that make sovereign power legitimate and just and the historical origin of sovereign powers (Laskar, 2013).

According to Hobbes (Sorell, 2023), the state of nature had no criteria enforceable of wrong and right. Therefore, people took to themselves all they could, and human life was brutish, nasty, poor, solitary, and short. Human life was generally a state of chaos and war, which could only be ended by individuals agreeing to give the sovereign liberty on the condition that the sovereign power safeguarded their lives. However, hopes feel like the authority of the sovereign is absolute. However, that does not mean the sovereign is all-encompassing; subjects must remain free to go about their lives as they please when the sovereign power is silent (Laskar, 2013). This theory is also based on man's desire for order and security. To secure self-preservation and self-protection and to avoid pain and misery,

man has to enter into a contract. Surrendering all their freedom and rights led to an emergency of a ruler or monarch authority (Laskar, 2013).

According to John Locke (Laskar, 2013), man lived in a reasonably good and enjoyable state of nature. However, the property was not secure. This is different from the contemplated miserable way of life postulated by Hobbes. Locke attributes the state of nature to a Golden Age characterized by goodwill, peace, preservation, and mutual assistance (Laskar, 2013). Men had all the rights that nature could give them. However, this state of nature could have been better; it was one with no freedom to do anything that pleases one or do anything perceived to be good by people. Though this state of nature had no rules or civil body governing people, it was a state with morality. It was pre-political but not pre-moral. Persons were perceived as equals and equally bound by the law of nature. However, according to Locke's argument, private property was created when one mixed labour with the raw materials of nature. However, one could not take more than his share. However, Locke considers property in the state of nature as insecure because of the absence of an established law, the absence of natural power to execute natural laws and the absence of an impartial judge. This poses a need for the state of nature to protect their property and prosecute the protection of property, which necessitated men to enter into a social contract (Laskar, 2013). However, when individuals surrendered their rights, they never surrendered all their rights to a single power; they retained other rights like the right to liberty and the right to life since they were considered inalienable and natural rights of men. Therefore, according to Locke, the purpose of the law and the government is to protect and uphold the natural rights of men. When the government stops fulfilling its obligation, the laws will have no validity, and the government can be overthrown out of power. Therefore, applying this in the context of the Qatar blockade, the Qatar people depend on their government and its internal businesses for

survival. It is during this economic crisis that the style of service marketing should consider human rights and unburden human beings from the harsh reality of the Blockade by being fair and just in pricing (Laskar, 2013).

Social contract theory has many applications in service marketing. For instance, in a crisis like the Qatar blockade, customers and services marketing enter a similar social contract. Service providers expect to offer their services with the expectation of receiving trust, loyalty, and patronage from customers. In turn, customers expect to receive support and quality services. Therefore, understanding this reciprocal relationship is crucial in the marketing strategies and building of the CRM. The theory underscores the value of accountability and transparency in social interactions. In services marketing, transparency and accountability during disruptions caused by economic Blockades are essential to maintaining trust and upholding the implicit social contract. In addition, social contract theory in services marketing is a tool that ensures equity and fairness relevant to the Qatar blockade. Services providers may use the principles of social contract theory to offer equitable solutions that address customer needs and concerns, including offering services in reasonable terms, fair pricing, and flexible responses to unexpected challenges caused by the Blockade.

Furthermore, social contract theory underscores the importance of conflict resolution by providing guidelines to follow during conflicts and challenges. Therefore, customers and service providers have a shared interest in conflict resolution to ensure continued cooperation and a positive service experience. The antecedents of the theory aim at ensuring mutual benefit and satisfaction. In this sense, service providers strive to offer quality and highly valued services while their customers reciprocate with support and loyalty. Upholding this mutual benefit may be crucial during challenging times.

2.2.6 Summary of theories

The above-presented theories, rational choice theory, the game theory, the recognition-primed decision (RPD) model, and the resource-based model (RBV), offer great insights and a guide on how firms respond to various situations like an economic blockade to ensure that they remain at a better competitive position and maintain customer satisfaction. The theories provide valuable frameworks for understanding and predicting customer behaviour and preferences that inform marketing strategies. On the other hand, the theories serve as a foundational concept that helps businesses to tailor their strategies to meet the needs and expectations of their customers. For instance, the rational choice theory can be applied to understand how customers during the Blockade choose between different service providers. These models help in understanding the factors that influence customers to stay loyal or switch to other competitors. This helps marketers and decision makers to address these factors, which aid them in formulating CRM strategies and services to retain customers and enhance long-term relationships.

The game theory presents a model that helps businesses maximize their outcomes in the face of economic or market uncertainty and strategic independence. The game theory offers various directions from which individual businesses learn about their competitors and try outperforming them based on certain known rules. Game theory can be applied in the different parts of marketing, including making decisions on pricing. It can be used to determine whether there is a first-mover advantage and, therefore, present a guideline on formulating offensive and defensive moves against the competitor. It can be used to model competitive situations and identify optimal strategies. Modelling competitive situations involves identifying the players in the game, like employees, businesses, and consumers. It

also involves identifying their possible actions and the payoffs associated with each action. The ability to model is possible since game theory provides enabling tolls-like situations. Modelling the competitive situations in a business will lead to maximising outcomes in the face of uncertainty and strategic interdependence.

The recognition-primed decision (RPD) model is based on the idea that professionals and other experts make quick and effective decisions by recognizing patterns in current situations and matching them to their past experiences. The process is automatic and unconscious. It allows decision-makers to make quick decisions without engaging in conscious deliberations. The critical components of RPD include pattern recognition, mental simulation, intuition, and monitoring and adjusting. Pattern Recognition needs decision-makers to draw extensive expertise and experience to recognize patterns in various situations. Marketers use historical patterns and data to identify shifts in consumer preferences, trends and their purchasing habits. The RPD model contains special features that allow marketers to conduct personalized and customer engagement and recognize individual preferences crucial in delivering personalized content and experiences. RPD, therefore, enables marketers to make rapid decisions on how to tailor their marketing efforts to meet each individual's needs. RPD is a crucial model in marketing as it allows marketers to make quick decisions in a fast-paced marketing environment. This allows them to seize existing opportunities and address challenges promptly. It also leverages the expertise of marketing managers who deeply understand market dynamics and consumer behaviour.

The resource-based View (RBV) model postulates that a company's sustained competitive advantage is based on its rare, valuable, no substitutable, and inimitable sources. According to RBV, firms can achieve competitive advantage by possessing distinct resources

that are not easily duplicated or copied by competitors. In marketing, these unique resources can include proprietary customer data, partnerships, and innovative marketing technologies that competitors may need help replicating. RBV helps organize and understand how to develop and utilize unique CRM resources, like personalized marketing algorithms, innovative customer engagements, and proprietary customers. In addition, a firm's CTRM should be unique so that it does not allow for replicability by other competitors. The RBV model emphasizes the need for companies to assess their resources and adapt to the changing market landscape and customer conditions. This can be utilized in the CRM to enable companies to update their strategies and invest resources to maintain and improve customer relationships in response to the new and evolving customer preferences and market dynamics. The RBV, therefore, is an important model that informs marketers during economic uncertainties on unique strategies they may use to stay relevant and competitive.

Social Contract theory provides the basis through which businesses should learn the rules of society, what challenges they go through, their desires, and their needs, and tailor their CRM and services marketing according to generally acceptable principles and regulations.

These theories and models will help the researcher understand service marketing indicators and CRM amid economic uncertainties like the Qatar blockade and formulate short-term and long-term strategies to remain operational in the Red Ocean and Blue Ocean markets.

2.3 Comparing the Qatar Blockade with the recent Russia-Ukraine war

2.3.1 Geopolitical Crises and Conflicts of the 21st Century

Geopolitical crises and conflicts are a recurring feature of the international landscape (Rajmil and Morales, 2023). Geopolitics crises have a long history and include sanctions and blockades. Economic sanctions and blockades are modern economic weapons against countries and regions that do not subscribe to regional and global peace and trade agreements (Rajmil and Morales, 2023). The sanctions and Blockade began during World War 1 when France and Britain tried to isolate Germany and its allies from the global economy. Like the 21st century, the global economy in the early 20th century was complex and interconnected. The economic interconnection allowed countries such as Germany to draw on global trade for resources they did not possess (Farrell, 2022).

The existing doctrines of free trade liberalism were a shield from wartime measures, and they protected countries such as Germany from targeting their foreign dependence. France and Britain blockaded Germany and its allies with the intent of starving their economies of food and resources. After the world war, commentators believed that economic blockades and sanctions were weapons that could bring aggressors to their knees without a drop of blood (Farrell, 2022). Financial sanctions and economic blockades are part of the register of actions contained in the Geneva-based experts during the inter-period (Slobodian, 2018). In the 21st century, sanctions and blockades may inflict wounds that cannot heal when used as economic weapons. Sanctions are often unprecedented. One of the case studies is the sanctions placed on Russia due to the Russia-Ukraine war (Farrell, 2022).

On February 24, 2022, a few months after intense speculation and diplomacy, Russia invaded Ukraine. Before this war, NATO allies, led by the US, warned that any aggression into Ukraine would unleash severe sanctions on Russia, a threat that was echoed by NATO allies and the EU on multiple occasions. However, Russia defied these warnings and began a full-blown invasion of Ukraine. Though several multinationals have appeared in Russia, the sight of the war seems to have no end (Farrell, 2022).

The roots of the Russia-Ukraine war are traced back to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (ECONANT, 2023). In 1991, Ukraine gained its independence from the Soviet Union. However, Russia remained a powerful influence in the country (ECONANT, 2023). In 2014, Russia took over the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine, and this led to a pro-Russian insurgency in eastern Ukraine (Fisher, 2014). Several factors contributed to the Russia-Ukraine war, including Russia's desire to maintain influence over Ukraine, hence reluctant to allow Ukraine to Join NATO. Also, there is a rise in Ukraine's Nationalism to assert its independence from Russia, which has led to tensions between the two countries. The third reason for the Russian invasion of Ukraine is economic factors, which are based on the fact that Ukraine is a gateway to Russian oil and gas exports (Lawrence, 2022).

The war has had a devastating impact on both Russia and Ukraine. It has led to the displacement of thousands of people and killed many as well. The war has also significantly affected the global economy, causing energy prices to rise and disrupting supply chains (Lawrence, 2022).

The war triggered international reactions with a mix of sanctions and condemnations. Western countries, led by the European Union and the United States, imposed economic sanctions on Russia, which have had a lasting impact on the Russian Economy. It has also

strained relations between Western institutions such as the EU and NATO with Russia, resulting in NATO increasing its military presence in Eastern Europe. The conflict has also led to attempts for a diplomatic resolution through Minsk agreements that seek to establish a political settlement and ceasefire. However, Russia has shown no signs of withdrawing its armed forces, and the government of Ukraine has refused to surrender any territory (Shah and Gedamkar, 2022).

2.3.2 Russia-Ukraine War vs Qatar Blockade

Geopolitical crises and conflicts are recurring phenomena in the international landscape. Among such events are the Russia-Ukraine war and the Qatar Blockade. While these events are separate and unique in their implications and origins, comparing them offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics of the global geopolitical landscape.

Comparing historical backgrounds: The Qatar Blockade, which started on June 5, 2017, is mainly a diplomatic and economic crisis that involves a group of GCC countries (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain). These countries accused Qatar of promoting regional instability and supporting terrorism, basically through its support of extremist groups in the Middle East. In addition, the Blockade led to the closure of borders, severed diplomatic ties, and disrupted economic agreements with its neighbours.

On the other hand, the Russia-Ukraine war that commenced in 2014 is a protracted armed conflict taking place in eastern Ukraine. The war was triggered by Russia's takeover of the Crimean Peninsula. The conflict resulted in the loss of thousands of lives, geopolitical tensions, and displacement of populations.

Comparing Root causes: The primary cause of the Qatar Blockade stems from disputes over regional influence in the GCC. Key issues include perceived Qatar alignment with GCC enemy Country Iran, Qatar's support for terrorist extremism groups, and the role of Qatar in contributing to regional unrest. The Saudi-led coalition of the GCC countries demanded that Qatar take measures to address these concerns.

Unlike the Qatar blockade, the Russia-Ukraine is rooted in Russia's annexation of Crimea, which the international community has widely condemned. In addition, Russia's support for separatist movements in eastern Ukraine contributed to increased conflict between the two countries. The conflict has its roots in Ukraine's history with Russia, the broader geographical rivalry between Western Powers and Russia, and the ethnic composition of the region.

Comparing the Geopolitical impacts: The Blockade against Qatar by GCC member states had a significant regional impact that caused the shifting of relationships and alliances with other GCC member states. In addition, it influences the flow of people and goods in the region since Qatar's geographic location is a major transit route for travel and trade. On the other hand, the Russia-Ukraine war had broader international implications, including sanctions by the Western and EU countries. It also increased the tensions between Russia and NATO and increased efforts by Minsk to resolve the conflict peacefully.

Key Differences: The Russia-Ukraine war is an armed conflict with military operations and military support from Russia to separatist groups in the region. In contrast, the Qatar Blockade is rooted in diplomatic and economic disputes with no armed or military involvement. The Russia-Ukraine war constitutes wider international dimensions, with the European Union and NATO actively engaged. In contrast, the Qatar Blockade only involved

the GCC member countries. In addition, the Russia-Ukraine war is a protracted military conflict with ceasefires and intermittent escalations, while the Qatar Blockade had a prolonged diplomatic crisis.

Similarities: Closely examining both crises will conclude that they disrupted regional economic, political, and social stability. While the Russian-Ukraine war strained international relations and disrupted stability in Eastern Europe, the Qatar Blockade resulted in disputes among GCC member states and shifts in regional alliances and agreements. In addition, the international actors and the United Nations had a hand in trying to mediate and seek possible resolutions in the Russia-Ukraine war and the Qatar Blockade. Furthermore, in both scenarios, the events experience intermittent escalations and diplomatic attempts at a possible resolution. Both conflicts had a significant effect on the world economy. That is, the Qatar blockade caused disruptions to global investment and trade, and the Russia-Ukraine war caused energy prices to skyrocket and disrupted supply chains. Both conflicts had impacts on Humanity, with the Qatar blockade causing shortages of essential goods, including medicine and food, while the Russia-Ukraine war caused a refugee crisis and displacement of people from their homes.

Russia-Ukraine war vs Qatar Blockade: Comparison of services marketing

As geopolitical events, the Russia-Ukraine war and the Qatar Blockade have profoundly impacted businesses and their marketing strategies. While both crises have distinct characteristics, they have resulted in businesses needing to adapt rapidly to the changing circumstances. For instance, it has been noted in this study that the Qatar Blockade had a great impact on the Gulf region and the Middle East by disrupting transportation, trade, and diplomatic relations, leading to economic uncertainties and devastating impacts on

businesses across different sectors. In comparison, the Russia-Ukraine war brought military conflict in eastern Ukraine, disrupting the supply chain, bringing security concerns, and resulting in economic sanctions.

In both events, businesses had to adapt to new marketing strategies. For instance, Businesses in Qatar enhanced their CRM strategies to convey trust and loyalty through reassurance strategies. They also developed effective communication strategies that enabled them to share information about service changes and address customer concerns related to the Blockade. Moreover, businesses mitigated the impact of the Blockade by diversifying their services and exploring new markets and service niches to maintain their presence and strategic position in the market. On the other hand, Businesses in the Warring areas in Ukraine faced safety challenges, and it took a lot of work for them to ensure customer satisfaction. Therefore, their CRM strategies involved concentrating on security concerns, maintaining consistent service delivery, and accommodating the changing customer needs. The businesses further provided a more critical communication strategy to provide clear and accurate information to their customers about service adjustments and safety measures in response to the conflict. In addition, to sustain their business operations, businesses in Russia and Ukraine explored the prospects of service diversification by adapting to the offerings that align with the changing demands of the local populations.

As mentioned in this paper, businesses in Qatar faced numerous challenges during the Blockade, including reduced customer traffic, economic uncertainties, and supply chain disruptions, which required innovation and flexibility to adapt to the changing business landscape. On the other hand, Businesses in the conflicting regions in the Russia-Ukraine war posed unique challenges that included uncertainties of the future, destruction of

infrastructure, and security threats. These unique challenges required a rapid adaptation response strategy to the veiling circumstances.

During the Qatar Blockade, Customer feedback was a crucial tool that helped businesses understand the evolving needs of their customers and other business stakeholders. Customer feedback was necessary to allow the companies to develop an informed strategy for service adjustment and advertisements, leading to stronger customer relationships. On the other hand, during the Russia-Ukraine war, customer feedback was a crucial component of the businesses that helped companies tailor their services to address emerging customer concerns and needs, resulting in maintaining their customer base.

Although the nature of the Russia-Ukraine war and the Qatar Blockade differed, their businesses faced several common challenges. For instance, both crises led to economic uncertainties and instabilities that affected customer spending and the revenue realized by the businesses. Moreover, Businesses were affected by supply chain disruptions, such as difficulties in maintaining production, reliability and service quality. In addition, both crises resulted in security threats in the conflicting regions and security uncertainties among the GCC countries that necessitated a focus on customer reassurance and safety.

Businesses in the conflicting regions during the Russia-Ukraine war and those in Qatar adopted similar strategies to navigate through these challenges. For instance, services like the banking sector, healthcare, and aviation industries developed and enhanced communication strategies that enabled businesses to inform customers about business changes and safety measures. In addition, they enhanced their CRM with up-to-date technologies and techniques to collect and analyze customer feedback vital for maintaining customer trust and loyalty during crises. Furthermore, businesses adapted to service diversification to meet the evolving

customer needs and to enable businesses to remain resilient. Many companies explored new market opportunities, reconstructed their business models, and diversified their services. In both cases, customer feedback was crucial for developing CRM and decision-making on strategies and services to enable businesses to respond to their actual needs.

Both crises, the Russia-Ukraine war and the Qatar Blockade, underscore the importance of adaptive services marketing. Businesses that can pivot quickly and respond to overarching customer needs are more likely to thrive. From this comparison, businesses demonstrated the ability to navigate through conflict and uncertainty before underscoring the need to be prepared to adjust their strategies as the circumstances under which businesses operate are dynamic.

2.4 Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) aims to build relationships that affect customer retention, acquisition, profitability, and loyalty. Technological use of CRM to establish relationships and develop customer loyalty and retention is increasing. These technologies are used in data gathering and management. CRM is acquiring, storing, and analysing large amounts of data to provide insights into customer behaviour and treat customers differently based on their exhibited behaviour. The success of a CRM system is measured by customer attraction, improving customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer share, and customer lifetime value. Customer satisfaction is the customer's attitude toward the service or organization (Fattah and Al Azzam, 2022). Specific service features and customer-specific perceptions of the quality of service offered influence customer

satisfaction. Customer profitability tracks customer financial performance concerning transactions. Profitability is determined in light of the customer's lifetime value to an organization, considering the expenses and income associated with the customer. In terms of customer acquisition, many resources are used to attract new customers. The cost of attracting new customers is estimated to be five times more than keeping a company's existing customers. Customer retention ensures customers remain loyal to an organization due to perceived benefits. It is widely known that organizations can increase their profitability by 125% if they boost their customer retention rate by five per cent per year. Royalty is directly associated with the provision of excellent services. The customer also provides free advertising by discussing the organization's services (Viljoen *et al.*, 2005).

The complex and dynamic nature of CRM, which contributes to the need for a unified definition, leads to challenges in implementing projects and strategies designed to establish, maintain and improve the relationships between organizations and customers (Chetioui & Abbar, 2017). Salah, Yusof, and Mohamed (2021, p2) define CRM as the "practices, strategies, and technologies used by firms and businesses for the management and analysis of customer interactions and data through the customer lifecycle." CRM is the concept of utilizing information, processes, technologies, and people to manage customer interactions and organization interactions. Over time, most of these elements have remained fairly static, except for technology.

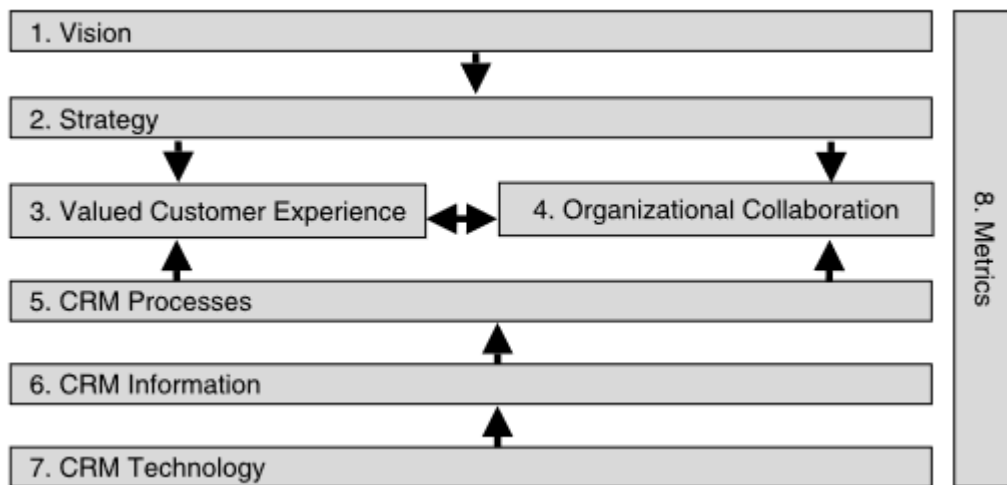
Carmen and Marius (2016) define CRM as an approach through which an organization understands the behaviours and the underlying factors that cause those behaviours to determine how to attract and retain them. Medjedel and Abdul-Hamid (2020) hold a different view by identifying four key objectives of CRM, including providing information to attract new

customers, improving customer satisfaction, retaining existing customers, and improving lifetime value to and from customers.

Al-Omoushet al. (2021) adopt a company-oriented approach to defining CRM based on its objectives and indicate that it enables the company to retain customers through loyalty programs, increase profitability from customers, reduce costs of operations, reduce the costs of attracting new customers, and achieve stability in revenues due to low customer turnover. Most of these outcomes are linked to performance advantages, which account for the differences in CRM among institutions. Similarly, the increased attention to CRM has led to huge investments in infrastructures designed to retain current customers while laying down the foundation for attracting and satisfying the needs of new customers. These relationships can be explained through the tenets of Garner's Competency model of CRM (Chetty, 2019).

Gartner's competency model is defined as comprising of the 'True CRM practices.' The model suggests that to attract and retain customers while enhancing their experience and satisfaction, an organization has to focus on eight key components, as shown hereunder.

Figure 4: Garner's Competency Model for CRM

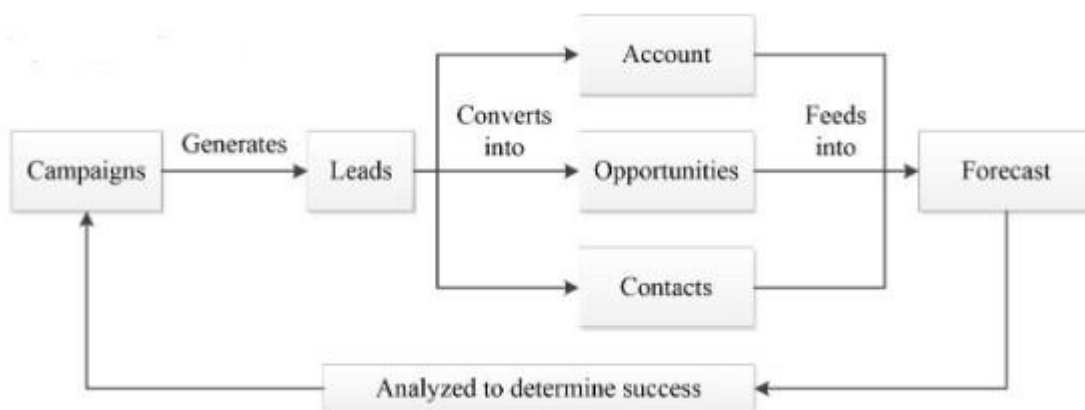


Source: Peelen et al., (2009).

As shown in the model, CRM tenets, including technology, information, and processes, are integrated into strategy management (vision, metrics, and strategy) to create customer experiences. The competency model also recognizes the centrality of intra- and inter-organizational collaboration in achieving the goals of CRM. Normally, the implementation of CRM occurs in four dimensions (technology, processes, people, and strategy) and has to work in harmony and optimally. Over time, the changes in each of these dimensions have played a unique role in the conceptualization of CRM. The most recent changes relate to information technology (IT), which has led to the emergence of social CRM (SCRM), which is different from traditional CRM. The internet heralds new customer rapport-building opportunities (Rahimi *et al.*, 2017). For instance, search engines make it easier for customers to find and interact with online merchants. The E-CRM has simplified the bi-directional communications to merchants. It offers an environment with zero latency where communication is done in real-time over a long distance, and products are ordered and received in real-time (Rahimi *et al.*, 2017).

Jalal et al. (2019) point out that social media technologies, and indeed the entire portfolio of Web 2.0 technologies, have led to novel components, assets and standards for achieving the goals of CRM. Kubina and Lendel (2015) further differentiate between traditional CRM and SCRM by identifying the role of modern techniques, metrics and processes in developing, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships in the contemporary world. A study focusing on Slovakian companies attributes the difference between the approaches to how customer data and information are applied in CRM processes.

Figure 5: Traditional CRM



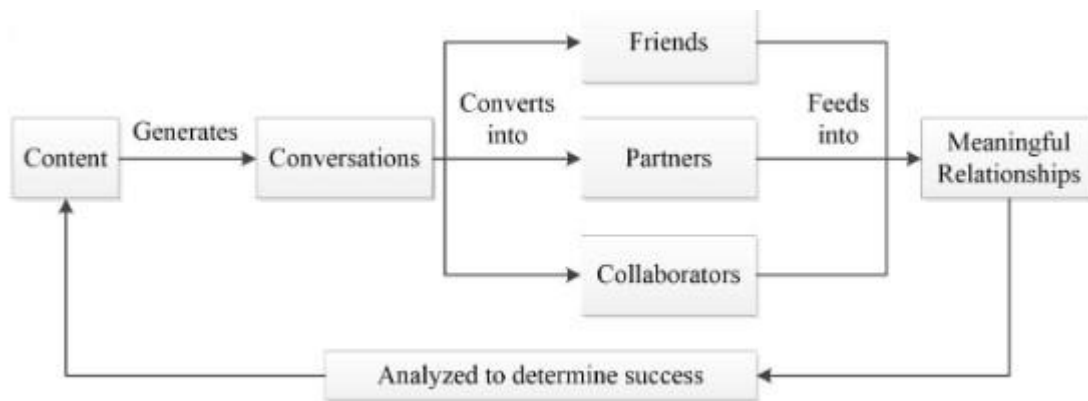
Source: Kubina and Lendel (2015).

SCRM is treated as a derivative of traditional CRM by Sigala (2017). Sigala (2017, 6) defines SCRM as a "philosophy and a business strategy, supported by a technology platform, business rules, processes and social characteristics, designed to engage the customer in a collaborative conversation to provide mutually beneficial value in a trusted and transparent business environment." Küpper et al. (2015) reiterate that SCRM is a business strategy and philosophy triggered by technological innovations. However, just like traditional CRM, SCRM is deployed through specific organizational rules and processes and is influenced by the social characteristics of the parties and the technological platforms adopted. By adding social

elements, SCRM catalyzes an organisation's ability to utilize traditional CRM processes, functions, and features to improve customer interactions, partners, and communities. Sheth (2017) defines SCRM CRM 2.0 while recognizing that it is still subject to technological advancement and changes in customer trends. Based on these trends, organizations must adopt a new mindset characterized by the following positions.

- Customers are co-creators of value who can collaborate and partner with the organization.
- Customers are resources, as well as input, through user-generated content and market insights.
- The SCRM, an organization, can facilitate and support the engagement of customers for mutually advantageous value co-creation

Figure 6: Social CRM



Source: Kubina and Lendel (2015).

Several studies have raised questions on the utility of SCRM in the context of modern institutions. Researchers such as Chris, Alphonso and Chris (2018), Sigala (2018) and Diffley, McCole, and Carvajal-Trujillo (2018) display scepticism towards the ability of organizations to integrate SCRM and implement the procedures necessary for the creation of value for the

customers and the organization. The study by Sarah, Patrick and Elena (2018) identified the main causes of these challenges, including the ability of organizations to transform the institutional culture to fit the customer orientation, scrutinize the suitable data available on the Web 2.0 platforms, respond to the dynamic observations available on the platforms and adapting to the emergent communication channels preferred by the customers among others. Other studies identify novel challenges that are particular to SCRM, including concerns about privacy and confidentiality in handling customer data (Küpper et al., 2015), monetization of the systems due to the uniqueness of the value-creation streams (Acker et al., 2011), failure to integrate traditional and social CRM, to tap into the pre-existing relationships (Diffley & McCole, 2015).

These challenges highlight the need to determine customer relationship orientation, especially under SCRM. In the study by Choudhury and Harrigan (2014), quantitative data from 170 respondents were analyzed through multivariate analysis and structural equation modelling. The study finds that CRO implies that although SCRM is built around the social links among customers, organizations, and societies, the organization must focus on the market without interfering with the social interactions between customers as they engage in their day-to-day lives. The situation is also recognized by Kumar et al. (2010), who indicate that technology enables relationship marketing and, ultimately, the indirect recruitment of customers to market the products and services by making the messages 'viral' through the organic spread.

The study by Al Kindi (2016) highlights how social media platforms can contribute to CRM for institutions, specifically in crises similar to those faced by Qatar during the blockade. The study utilizes the media authoritarian theory to analyze how the media operates

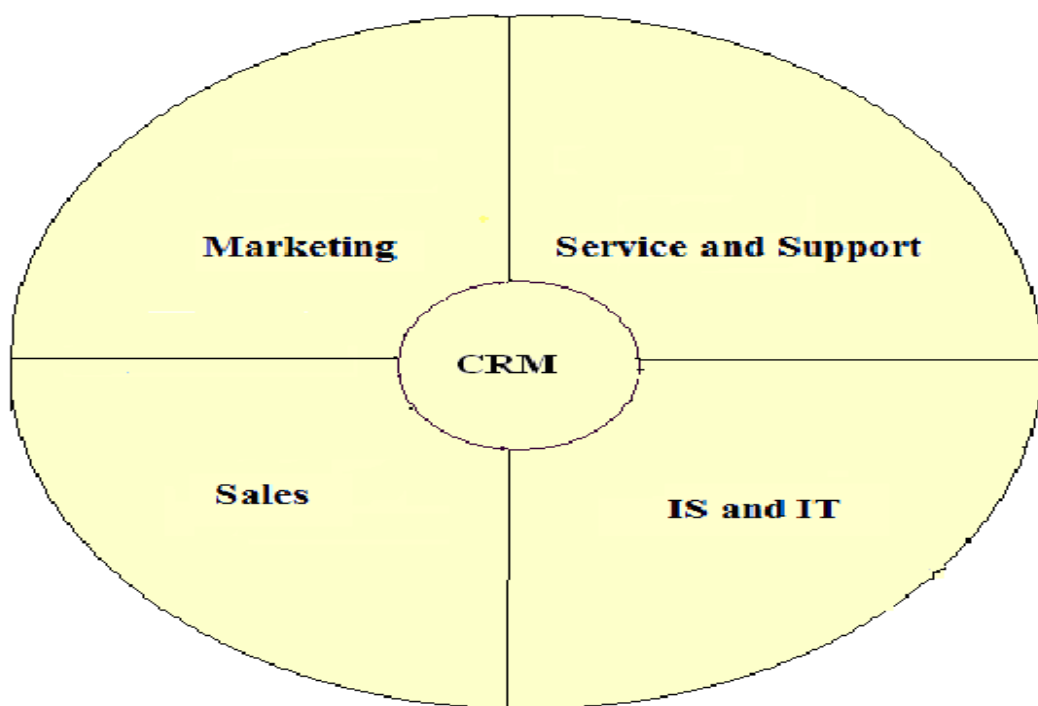
regarding the government. The study finds that most channels, including social media, were targeted as tools for reforming the Arab World. Several strategies are adopted, including changes to the leadership in the media, rules and policies and freedoms for expression, all to create state media. The utilization of media platforms to spread information and reorient the views and perceptions of the users regarding most aspects of daily life. However, it is necessary to consider that social media and the elements of non-traditional CRM are only universally utilized in some locations.

According to a study (Peppers and Rogers, 1995), CRM works when it follows four steps. Peppers and Rogers (1995) conclude that getting as much information on the company's clients, like demographics, preferences, habits and psychographics, is the first step of a CRM process, followed by differentiating between them in terms of their profitability. The third step is establishing a conversation with the clients most effectively and efficiently, and lastly, using individual tailoring or bulk customization to personalize the company's offerings to individual customer demands (Peppers and Rogers, 1995). Peppers and Rogers (1995) explain that the ability of a company to learn and understand its customers is enhanced as it progresses through the four stages by allowing the company to make specific and customized solutions.

The large number of publications in CRM provides a productive field for researchers to describe the image of CRM research by identifying disciplines and trends. An earlier review of the CRM research by Romano and Fjermestad (2003) studied the majority and status of electronic commerce in CRM for articles published from 1984-2002 (Romano Jr and Fjermestad, 2001). In addition, the first academic literature review on CRM conducted by Ngai (2005) covered publications of CRM from 1992-2002, including approximately 205 published

articles. The study sample classified CRM research into four main facets: information technology and information systems, service and support, sales, and marketing. Before the review, previous studies were centralized on Information technology and information systems. Information Technology and Information systems play a crucial role in developing CRM. Nevertheless, some publications take different directions, such as customer privacy and management (Ngai, 2005).

Figure 7: Ngai's CRM lifecycle

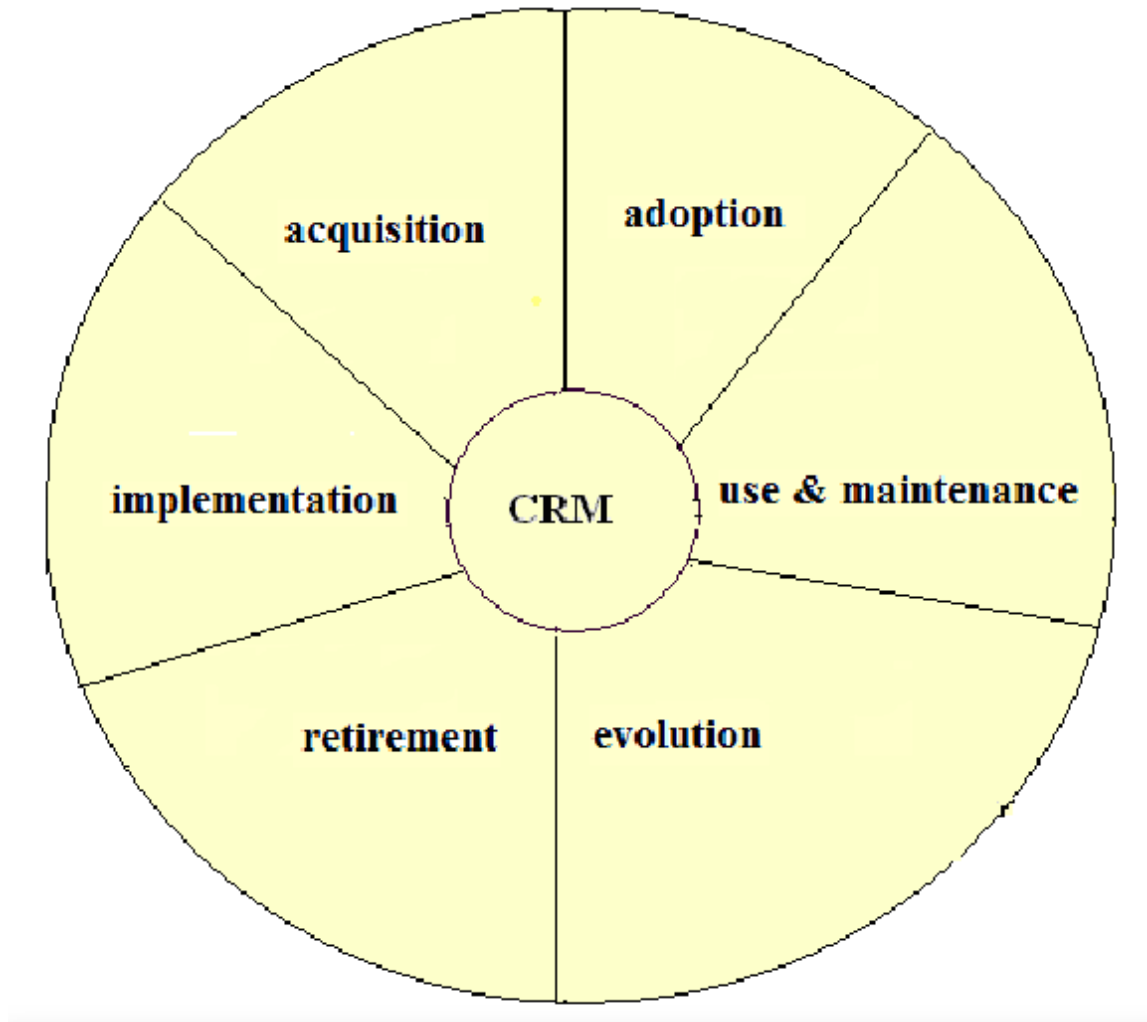


Source: (Ngai, 2005; Alokla *et al.*, 2019)

When the volume of published research on CRM was compiled up to 2005, Paulissen *et al.* (2007) selected CRM publications concerned with management and Information Systems in international conferences and top journals. In this review, 510 articles were considered and classified depending on a new lifecycle model of CTRM. Paulissen's CRM research review of publications between 200 and 2005 classifies a new CRM scheme into the

following categories: Acquisition, adoption, implementation, maintenance and usage, evolution and retirement (Paulissen *et al.*, 2007).

Figure 8: Paulissen's CRM Lifecycle.



Source: (Paulissen *et al.*, 2007; Alokla *et al.*, 2019).

Early sources maintain that Paulissen's phases were already used to describe the image of (the ERP) Enterprise Resource Planning system (Esteves and Pastor, 1999). While Paulissen's research offers excellent insights into CRM, it is set back by the fact that it concentrates on journals and conferences for marketing and Information systems while

leaving out other important disciplines like technology, management, customer behaviour and organizational behaviour (Paulissen *et al.*, 2007).

Another study by Wahlberg *et al.* (2009) reviewed CRM publications from 1998 to 2006. The review identified 468 articles classified according to their CRM lifecycle. The lifecycles included strategic, operational, analytical and collaborative CRM. The review found that the CRM publications involved have been growing but significantly decreased from 2004 to 2006. In addition, CRM topics were centred on analytical CRM and strategic CRM. Their study saw the need for more research on collaborative and operational CRM (Wahlberg *et al.*, 2009).

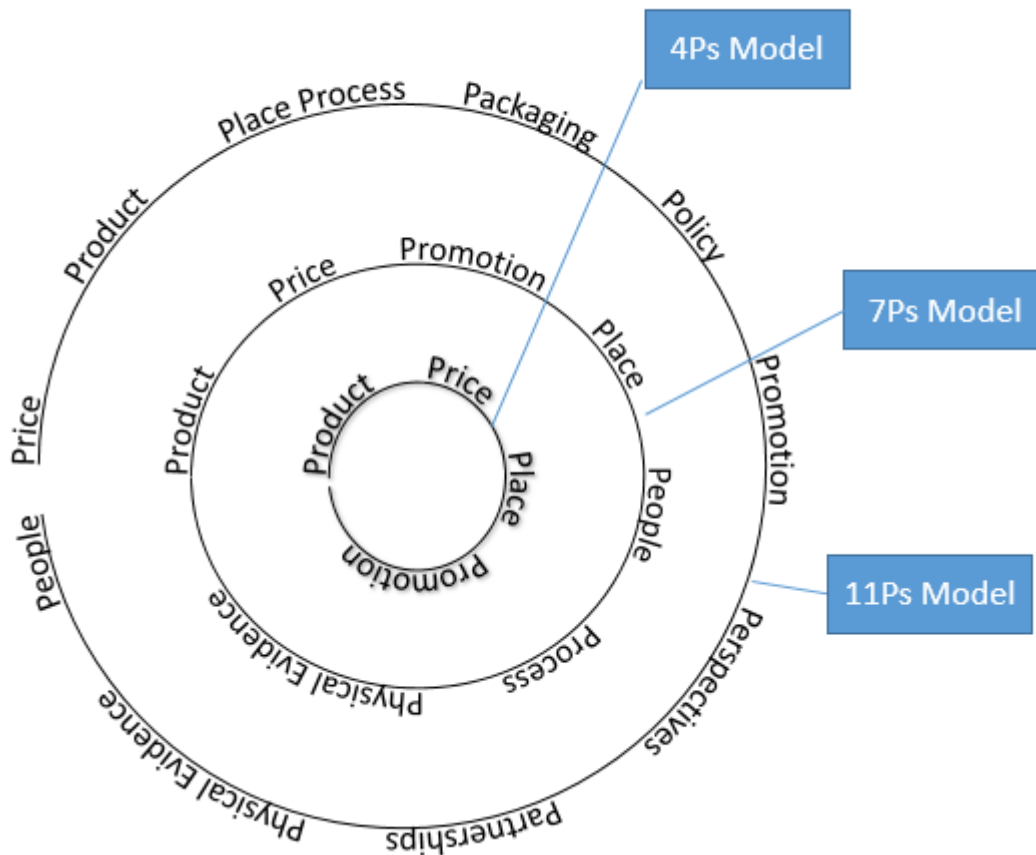
A study by Kevork *et al.* (2008) reviewed studies on CRM by analyzing CRM keywords between 2000 and 2006. The study used approximately 396 articles in 135 journals. The keywords related to CRM research papers are CRM overall, information systems, knowledge management, marketing, e-commerce, CRM software, CRM culture environment ethics, and CRM attribute. The study concluded that the issues of environment, culture, and ethics in CRM are important factors that affect the dimensions of CRM implementation (Kevork and Vrechopoulos, 2008).

2.5 Services Marketing: A Critical Review

The primary concept of Service marketing is to improve marketing strength and formulate better production and customer relationships (Hole, Pawar and Bhaskar, 2018). The service sector is prominent in the prevailing global economy due to its competitive nature. In developed countries, employment promotion is done through service jobs, which

elucidates the impact of service marketing in industries (Tansuhaj, Randall and McCullough, 1988). Services marketing is deployed through the various marketing mix models, a toolkit for archetypical operational marketing planning and transaction marketing (Alafeef, 2020). Existing research reveals that the marketing mix has been deployed with variations in the conceptualization of the components, thus leading to a 4P marketing mix model. Oyewole (2018) and Powers and Loyka (2010), who support the superiority of the 4P model, perceive it as comprising of the vital controllable parameters capable of influencing the consumer purchase processes. In addition to being simple and easy to apply, the 4P model is practical, with large-scale and broad-based endorsement across different industries. However, the dynamics of services marketing, coupled with variations in market conditions and consumer preferences, have led to propositions for minor modifications, resulting in the development of the 7Ps (Paul & Mas, 2019) and the 11Ps marketing mix models (Mahajan & Golahit, 2017 and Ridwan, & Nungsih, 2021). Constantinides (2006) cites the emergence of the marketing mix portfolios that add to the generic 4Ps models to changes in marketing domains, including the emergence of sub-disciplines such as retail marketing, relationship marketing, consumer marketing, industrial marketing, services marketing, and more recently, electronic marketing (e-marketing). In support, Lim (2020), who utilizes the 10Ps model (price, product, place, promotion, process, packaging, policy perspectives, partnerships, physical evidence and people), attributes the typology to the custom nature of the services, especially the need for delivering integrated care services.

Figure 9: Components of Marketing Mix Models for Services Marketing



Source: Developed by Author from different sources

Existing research reveals that countries can develop services marketing procedures built around policies that promote the goods and services and the country itself for tourism, political and other objectives. Powers and Loyka (2010) attributed the measures by a government to develop a services marketing mix at a national level to the need to produce services that appeal to global consumers (service standardization) or to adapt the service qualities and characteristics for a specific market (service differentiation). Through the qualitative study targeting 154 respondents, Powers and Loyka (2010) found that. In contrast, there is a need for adaptation of all elements of the marketing mix; there were quantitative

differences in the level of adaptation, with price requiring the highest levels of adaptation, while the service characteristics (product) were least affected. Similarly, the variations in the form of adaptation for promotion were closely correlated with those linked to differentiation, while price showed close links to service quality (product). Finally, the adaptation of the elements of the services marketing mix was influenced by different variables.

Although studies such as Alafeef (2020) and Teviana et al. (2017) define services marketing as a monolith concerning corporate (B2B) and individuals (B2C), Awara and Anyadighibe (2014) indicated that there are critical differences in specific domains. First, individual consumers are more responsive to advertising than institutional consumers. Such consumers are more responsive to contact marketing, with reinforcements through follow-up and personalized or proprietary CRM. Second, since institutional consumers are less than individual consumers, Chatterjee (2018) and Wongsansukcharoen, Trimetsoontorn and Fongsuwan (2015) argue that services marketing targeting institutions can be tailored to fit their needs without compromising the cost-benefit considerations.

2.5.1 Services Marketing Practices

Scholars in services marketing argue that service firms must emphasize rational marketing when making decisions or taking action on the market (Abela and Murphy, 2008; Williams and Aitken, 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2014). This argument is supported by the fact that service firms differ from nonservice firms as their mode of business is considered intangible rather than the tangible aspect of goods, which is often discussed using the elements of heterogeneity, perishability, and inseparability of the firm's offerings (Brax, 2013). Several literature also noted that many services marketing firms use a combined approach to marketing, including relational marketing and Transactional marketing (Brodie *et*

al., 1997; Pels, Coviello and Brodie, 2000; Coviello *et al.*, 2002). There are two approaches through which someone can understand the different marketing practices. The first approach adopts a dichotomous stance that separates Relational marketing (RM) and Transactional Marketing (TM) as the opposite ends of each other in the continuum (Harker and Egan, 2006; Gilaninia *et al.*, 2011). This means that the approach places traditional goods-centric marketing at one end and the emerging area of service marketing at the other end. The second approach conceptualizes services marketing along a continuum. However, the system adopts a more pluralistic view with a broad spectrum of services. These services include Database marketing (DM), Transactional Marketing (TM), Network marketing (NM), and Interaction Marketing (IM) (Brodie *et al.*, 1997; Coviello *et al.*, 2002); Broad and Narrow-relationship marketing; Value-adding exchanges collaborative exchanges, and Transactional exchanges (Coviello *et al.*, 2002).

The two approaches differ in the aspect of diversification. While a dichotomous approach is a simplified relationship for the services marketing, which makes it easy for marketers to understand the market dynamic, it needs to capture the diverse practices that can be found between the two poles essential for a deeper understanding of activities involved in marketing. The second approach is pluralistic and gives the crucial elements between the two poles. Based on an extensive research approach, a study by Coviello, Brodie and Munro (1997) developed a classification scheme with two themes (management activities and relational exchange). These two themes correspond to nine other dimensions that capture how firms interact with markets. The first five dimensions relate to rational discussion, and the four relate to management activities. The analytical exchange dimension was developed to incorporate reasonable and transactional exchange properties. The rational exchange has five indicators to measure it: the nature of communication between parties,

the focus of the relational exchange, the type of exchange, the kind of contact, and the level of formality (Burgoon and Hale, 1984). Conversely, the managerial dimension relates to how managers use their energies, enthusiasm, available financial resources, and time (Albrecht *et al.*, 2015). The organizational size is measured using four dimensions: the intent of managerial decisions, investment, managerial decision-making, and managerial level of implementation (Damanpour, 1992; Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1994).

Contemporary marketing practices identify four strategies that may be used instead of the above two themes. Transactional marketing reflects on marketing management school focusing on attracting and satisfying prospective buyers through managing marketing mix elements (Pels, Coviello and Brodie, 2000; Lancaster and Massingham, 2010). It also focuses on maximizing the efficiency and volume of individual sales compared to developing buyer and seller relationships. The seller becomes an actor, and the communication is with the customer rather than with the customer to attract and attain new customers. Database marketing is a tactical part of relationship marketing, focusing on retaining customers using technological tools (Baran and Galka, 2016). The seller becomes an active member, communicating with the customers rather than with the customers. Interaction marketing seeks to develop interpersonal relationships with customers (Colgate and Alexander, 1998). The main focus is to cooperate with customers for mutual benefit. Unlike database and transactional marketing, interaction marketing uses face-to-face communication to communicate with customers and retain them by creating a cooperative mutual benefit. Lastly, network marketing always needs clarification, as does interaction marketing. Network marketing carries all elements of Interaction marketing, but its primary aim is to formulate relationships between firms at different levels to necessitate coordination of activities

between multiple parties. Its goal is to build an organization's position in a web or network of numerous firm-level relationships (Tyre, 2016; Vătămănescu *et al.*, 2017).

2.5.2 Services marketing practices and culture.

Culture is a total repository of human actions, which are socially transmitted from one generation to another. It has been shaped, developed and practised over many years as a way of life for people (Ortner, 2006). Culture encompasses values, customs, and traditions, unique elements from one culture to another. Culture also includes language, religion, history, education, and location. Some studies allude culture to the two beliefs, symbols, rituals, and thought processes. Culture includes technology, social institutions, and aesthetics in the contemporary world. Defining culture, including all these elements, has been challenging and can be described as a way of life for people (Ortner, 2006).

The impact of culture on services marketing may appear straightforward since marketing directly considers the cultural elements of the target population (De Mooij, 2019). Cultural beliefs, norms and values impact the formation of preferences and attitudes. With this in mind, it is reasonable to say that culture affects the thought processes and decisions of marketing managers and their perceptions of managerial concepts and issues (Kaynak and Herbig, 2014; De Mooij, 2019). Thus, an organization's decision and administrative practices, including services marketing practices, differ from culture to culture within the same organization.

National culture is an essential determinant of managerial and organizational behaviour (Nazarian, Atkinson and Foroudi, 2017). Scholars argue that National culture influences administrative thinking patterns, including the marketing orientation they should adopt. Studies show that Qatari services firms place less emphasis on database marketing

practice and put more effort into interaction marketing that involves face-to-face interaction (Smith, 1992; Nazarian, Atkinson and Foroudi, 2017; Owusu Ansah and Louw, 2019).

Qatari culture is rooted in family traditions, Islamic beliefs, and a strong sense of their community (Asmi, 2016). Because of their strong culture, marketing strategies must follow the cultural rules. The preferred official language is Arabic, and marketing materials must be written in Arabic or bilingual to ensure maximum engagement and reach out to the targeted audience (Al-Shehari, 2022). Regarding consumer expectations and behaviour, the wealthy people in Qatar have high standards for quality and luxury and, therefore, must be captured in digital marketing. Social media usage in Qatar uses sites like Twitter and Instagram. However, these and others have different ways of usage, and depending on the form of usage, services marketing in Qatar must create content to fit their needs (El-Sherif, 2016; GEORGE, 2020; Mohamed, 2020). Marketing plans in Qatar also feature religious customs and times since people tend to be selective during essential days like Ramadan. In addition, Qatar has rules and regulations regarding the kind of content used in media and advertising (Samuel-Azran, 2013). For service marketers, these rules and regulations are essential and should be implemented during the designing and actual advertisement of their services in any media. The country's dominant guardianship law restricts women's rights (Abadeer, 2015; Maktabi, 2016; Al-Ghanim, 2019). Traditional roles are enshrined in laws and regulations that differentiate between men's and women's rights and responsibilities. Marketers often consider these facets during promotions and advertisements to stay within what is socially acceptable. Marketing themes that focus on family and community values connect with Qatari people (Elshenawy, 2017; Abaalzamat *et al.*, 2021).

Ultimately, the decision on which CRM approach to use is based on an intersection between the customers' characteristics and the organisation's objectives.

2.6 Services Marketing and CRM in the Gulf Region

Before it experienced blockade from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt, Qatar's services marketing was focused on the long-term strategy of non-reliance on oil and gas reserves towards adoption of export diversification by developing service industries, such as finance and tourism industries, among others (Morakabati *et al.*, 2014). This is a rational option, considering the presence of available capital and the scarcity of non-energy resources. However, Qatar's efforts to attract tourists have been limited, combined with its challenges regarding its economic diversification scheme via tourism, such as instilling a compelling destination image and securing personal safety and steadiness in a region that has yet to be known for these features. The results of the study of Morakabati *et al.* (2014) revealed that Qatar is perceived not as an appealing tourist destination. Their study is relevant to the proposed research as it presented the state of services marketing in Qatar, which can help analyze it within its current political situation. Similarly, in his study comparing Oman and Qatar regarding destination development in the Gulf region, Henderson (2014) pointed out that international tourism resulted from globalization that introduced radical changes in the Gulf. Approach variations were observed between the two countries, suggesting alternative models for tourism development.

Wali and Wright (2016) stated that managing customer relationships was first developed to improve service quality and effectiveness by responding to customer feedback

and complaints, tracking their orders, communicating with them directly, and keeping them satisfied and loyal to the company. The results of Wali and Wright's (2016) study revealed that an effective program for customer relationship management could lead to improved service quality. Similarly, using customer relationship management, Hassan *et al.* (2015) noted that maintaining a positive relationship with customers is essential as it can provide a satisfying experience for them. Their study validated the notion that managing customer relationships affects customer satisfaction significantly. In addition, companies with robust and reliable customer relationship management lead to satisfied and loyal customers. The study inferred that customer relationship management is crucial in enhancing customer satisfaction, market share, productivity, and loyalty. This study is helpful to the proposed research as it clarifies the benefits of customer relationship management, which can be used to analyze how it operates in Qatar's current situation.

In current practices, e-customer relationship management is also utilized to obtain insights about customer behaviour and what they value, using the help of technology. This is the direction of Alnassar's (2014) study as it examined the precedence of performance of e-customer relationship management in an Arab country. The relevance of computer technology to business is highlighted as a way to optimize the full use of technology to keep customers satisfied and loyal. This idea is worthy of note because businesses in Qatar retain their customers amidst the current political blockade confronting the country, thereby affecting its economic activities (International Trade Administration, 2019).

Although researchers treat the topic as a monolith, services marketing and CRM in the Gulf region are influenced by some industry-specific variables that become apparent when internal and external environmental factors are considered. Ultimately, organizations

determine the qualitative aspects of the services marketing models (based on whether they choose the 4Ps, 7Ps or 11Ps model), while the quantitative dimensions are influenced by how customers respond to the services marketing mix.

2.6.1 The Banking Sector

The banks are trusted places for customers, and they face a high degree of competition. Therefore, the quality of their services plays a crucial role in ensuring customer satisfaction, improving customer experience, and attracting and retaining customers. Public and private sector banks should change their services marketing strategy and functioning. Marketing in the banking sector took a milestone after 1950 in Western countries and then in Turkey after 1980. Fresh banking perspectives focusing on marketing influenced banks to create new markets. Banks started using marketing and planning techniques to offer new services efficiently. In the service industry, bank marketing should be categorized under the service marketing framework. Bank marketing includes service selling and its function, which gets the customer's image and personality in the bank's mind. The scope of marketing in the bank is to change its demographic structure in terms of customer variabilities, to place it in a better market position, and to increase its profit (Rieker and Thune, 2015).

Being an amalgamation of technology, processes and people who seek to understand a company's customers, Customer Relationship Management is known to increase customer loyalty and long-run profitability (Nazir *et al.*, 2014), maintain good relationships with the customers, and provide consistent and faster services (Rigby and Ledingham, 2004). In the banking industry, CRM is a crucial weapon that enhances the quality of service delivery (B. A. Dalayeen, 2017). One study conducted in 10 private and 10 public banks in two metropolitan cities, Kolkata and Mumbai in India, established that the retail banking industry's future

depended on providing quality services to customers (Christopher, 2001). Electronic Customer Relationship Management (E-CRM) in the banking industry leads to increased revenues, improved customer service rating, increased sales, increased convenience, improved speed of information dissemination, increased ability to start and introduce new schemes faster than usual, and decreased administrative costs (B. Dalayeen, 2017). A study conducted to establish the impacts of CRM practices on customer satisfaction in Bank Al-Etihaad and Jordan Ahli Bank established that the main CRM objectives are to create customer loyalty, increase productivity, meet customer needs and demands, cost minimization and maintain profitable relationships with customers by employing methods that have a direct impact on their perceptions in Bank reliability, elicit their responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (B. Dalayeen, 2017).

Studies on services marketing and CRM in the banking sector are performed with recognition of the fact that the industry is highly regulated through domestic and international legal frameworks. Hassan et al. (2008) and Widana et al. (2015) concur that part of the decisions by banking institutions on measures to attract and retain customers are influenced by external regulators. Similar influences are apparent under the marketing mix, whereby monetary and fiscal policies affect pricing (through interest rates) and the place (locations where they can operate).

The study by Laketa et al. (2015) identifies the three components of CRM in the banking sector, including operational CRM (relating to the specific sources of data about customers), analytical CRM (measures to collect, process and systematize the data to generate information and create knowledge), and organizational CRM (cooperation between

the functional departments in the company to optimize the value created for the customers across the various service channels). In addition, collaborative CRM is a technique whereby many departments within a particular company, such as technical support, marketing, and sales departments, share gathered information (Chai, Ehrens, and Kiwak, 2007). Collaborative CRM is essential in establishing business-to-business touchpoints, constructing online groups, and personalizing services (Dazagbyilo *et al.*, 2021). Analytical CRM requires business and technological procedures to determine what happened with clients in order to improve business decisions. Analytical CRM elucidates establishing Customer Call Centres, Email usage, Web access, bots, and others that gather more data for analysis (Dazagbyilo *et al.*, 2021). Operational CRM may also be referred to as front office CRM, which entails places where clients directly contact the organizations. These contact places are referred to as touch points. Touchpoints can be inbound (the company's customer service hotline direct call) or outbound (visiting the company's website). In addition to being a supportive CRM in communication, Operational CRM is also another way a company can collect information from clients (Dazagbyilo *et al.*, 2021).

2.6.1.1 CRM in the Islamic banks.

2.6.1.1.1 CRM in the Islamic banks: Development of Islamic banks

All Islamic banks receive positive attention from the international banking system (Bouheni and Ammi, 2015). Islamic banking has become a fast-growing antecedent of the global capital market in the last two decades. Muslim banks comprise three-quarters of international Islamic finance (Bouheni and Ammi, 2015). The World Islamic Banking Competitiveness Report of 2016 by Ernst and Young estimated the size of global Islamic assets as of 2015 to be over \$1 trillion ('World Islamic Banking Competitiveness Report 2016', no

date). The growth rate was computed to be 17.6% between 2008 and 2012. While many of these banks exist in densely populated Muslim regions like the GCC countries, over 300 Islamic banks operate from more than 75 countries, constituting the largest share of global Islamic assets ('World Islamic Banking Competitiveness Report 2016', no date). In 2017, Islamic banking assets grew by 11.10%, which was higher than the total banking system growth in the world, which stood at 6.78%. The key features and principles in the Islamic finance systems emphasize the need for equity, sharing of risk, and stakes with the customers (Rafiki, 2019). The main requirement in the Islamic banking system is the sharing aspect that suggests the project outcome, whether non-profitable or profitable, will be equitably shared. Islamic principles in the banking sector are formulated to ensure a fair distribution of wealth. The Islamic banking system, therefore, shields the benefits and interests of all parties involved in the economic transaction. It also promotes the society's welfare through equity and shared responsibility.

Islam has Shariah law, which avoids harm and always benefits everyone (Dusuki and Abdullah, 2007). Products, activities, and methods in Islamic banks must comply with the provisions of the Shariah law. CRM is a method or tool used to collect consumer data, create consumer satisfaction and retention, and build relationships. According to the law, companies can collect data beneficial to their business. However, the data must be genuine and not be used for speculative actions due to malicious and dubious activities like cheating and stealing. Through CRM, consumers and sellers build relationships that help them collaborate and support each other for mutual benefit. These relationships help banks expand their networks, promote services, convey offerings, and update features.

In general, CRM tools in Islamic banks are implemented to manage customer communication and improve organizational visibility to customers. It also acts as a one-stop shop where customers interact, get informed, and access databases. It acts as an information management tool that generates, characterizes, stores, presents, reproduces, and translates the information into understandable and readable formats (Rafiki, 2019).

In Islamic organizations, just like other institutions, two main CRM components are widely used: Organizational and technological factors. While organizations spend much on the technical aspect of CRM, organizational factors should also be supported and implemented for the better functionality of CRM (Rafiki, 2019).

Organizational factors directly or indirectly relate to human, the structural, managerial, and operational sides of a business entity. The CRM can work or fail depending on the interaction between its elements. For instance, a few numbers of dedicated workers may contribute to the CRM implementation failure. This calls for companies to engage with workers with the required transformation and advancements to accommodate CRM systems. The organizational factors associated with CRM include the company's structure and its operational procedures (Rafiki, 2019).

In Islamic banks, Top management support for the CRM is depicted in their plan to design and conduct motivational programs, which help employees work for the purpose and dedicate themselves to achieve organizational goals best. Leaders act as role models to transform employees to cultivate good morals, attitudes, and behaviours suitable for customers. Leadership commitment generates trust that is essential in forging long-term relationships. For instance, the Shariah Board advisor monitors and guides Islamic banks on implementing Shariah Principles in their day-to-day activities. Regarding service marketing,

the Shariah Advisors are adverse to the best ways to promote the service in compliance with the Shariah law (Rafiki, 2019).

Therefore, adequate training is an essential CRM requirement to achieve success. Employee training helps in the continuous learning process and advances employee knowledge by accommodating seeking, disseminating, and using the information to respond to stakeholder's inquiries and problems. Employees interact with customers in their daily activities, and training them enhances their features of quality creation like administrative excellence, communicating with customers, and improving behaviour and attitude. Training contributes to better service delivery outcomes measured through customer satisfaction. In the Islamic context, training relates to one's soul, understanding Allah's philosophies, acquiring and utilizing Islamic values, working as a representative, submitting to Allah, and away to success. Therefore, successful CRM implementation depends on investing in the training and development of employee's skills. Payne and Flow conclude that institutions can't develop and operate customer-focused systems like CRM if they lack trained employees. In addition, (Kim and Kim, 2009) postulate that improving CRM performance leads to customer satisfaction and organizational profitability. Plakoyiannaki *et al.* (2008) conclude that CRM practice failure is directly related to a lack of commitment and attention to the role of workers. A well-trained employee creates a good customer relationship by delivering essential, high-quality services.

In a study conducted by Rafiki (2019) on customer Relationship management practices in Islamic banks, 45% of the study respondents agreed that top management frequently discusses CRM with the involved staff, while 49% of them decided that CRM is regarded as an essential and high priority component of an organization. In addition, 68.2 of the study

respondents agreed that training facilitates employee learning on effective ways to address customer complaints, while 59.1% agree that retaining customers is a top priority in the organization. The study findings also indicate that training facilitates learning and improves service quality, facilitates interpersonal skills to build customer relationships, and helps employees understand customer needs.

Technological factors deal with information technology and communication (ICT), which organizations utilize as instruments of communication, knowledge management, and formulation of strategies. In the context of Islamic banks, they adopt ICT as an essential element in CRM implementation. ICT is important as it gives updates on the current strategies. Some companies fail in CRM because they need the latest or required technology, and they need to choose the best method for their customers. Technological components essential in CRM include customer information processing, customer data, and CRM integration (Dusuki and Abdullah, 2007).

Customer data is essential; therefore, Islamic banks must collect and analyze it to decide. When customer data is complete and non-biased, the marketing staff can formulate and execute the right plan for approaching customers and maintaining relationships. The banking sector can also partner with other bodies to get primary and secondary data for future actions. However, they face the danger of inaccurate, fabricated, dirty, and old company data full of errors and mistakes and, therefore, must be avoided. According to Nelson and Kirkby (2001), the top cause of CRM failure is customer data quality, which may lead to poor decision-making. Therefore, the primary factor for the success of CRM is an efficient and effective link to customer data to fulfil customer satisfaction and needs (Nelson and Kirkby, 2001).

Customer information processing (CIP) encompasses organizations' specific routines to set up long-term customer relations. CIP is a component that gives a clear image of the customer and market behaviours, hence leading to effective decision-making. CIP is essential in Islamic banks in Qatar since it deals with the constantly changing way services are offered to customers (Cook, 2010).

On the other hand, CRM integration is essential to CRM success. Two factors emerge as being necessary for CRM in RM integration. These are connected to legacy systems, organizational applications, and other functional customer information. Islamic banks integrate this system and have had a profound, significant, and positive influence on the organization's strategic and operational benefits (Rafiki, 2019).

A study conducted by Rafiki (2019) on customer Relationship management practices in Islamic banks found that the main challenge to data acquisition was the cost involved in data acquisition. In the study, 18.1% of the respondents agreed they can access quality data on time based on their robust CRM systems. In addition, 36.4% of the study respondents agreed that their banks collect customer data. The adoption of CRM in Islamic banks creates a more satisfied and loyal customer, resulting in better organizational effects both long and long term. Most Islamic banks have leveraged the creation of management programs to enhance customer relationships. A collaboration between technology and people in an institution effectively realises holistic approaches to CRM models.

Islamic banks have upgraded CRM database systems, including names, phone links, and other data, enabling businesses to converse with customers directly. The CRM in Islamic banks updates customer details for every transaction performed through an automated process. In this regard, customer data retrieval is also done with a single click. In addition,

CRM complies with Shariah law, which allows society to obtain more benefits. Islam encourages Muslims to have goodwill, actions, and processes that result in valuable outcomes that harm others. In general, CRM is an evolving aspect of the Islamic banking system and other financial institutions that will enhance the chances of companies to retain and attract new customers (Rafiki, 2019).

Among most countries in the GCC region, CRM in the banking sector has been studied from the perspective of Islamic and Conventional banks (Rafiki, 2019). Generally, CRM in Islamic banks (IBs) is discussed from two perspectives: the fundamentals of Islamic finance. First, the institutions focus on profit/loss sharing. The institutions practice *riba*, where charging interest on loans or deposits is prohibited (Sulaiman & Jorah, 2013). By using *Murahaba*, the financing institution structures the loan or deposit to accommodate the markup and cost of the service to the buyer and seller. Second, Islamic banking operates according to moral and ethical norms. Suharnoyo and Djamhur (2015) identify ethics as benevolence (*ihsan*), justice (*adl*), and trust (*Amanah*). The utility of these moral and ethical norms in attracting, retaining, and satisfying customers arises from achieving trustworthiness, honesty, justice, tolerance, integrity, and mercy as and where necessary. Past studies attribute part of these norms to CRM-related outcomes. Hassan, Chachi and Latiff (2008) conclude that these ethical and moral standards play a statistically significant role in the satisfaction of customers. In support, Abbas et al. (2020) argue that the resultant customer satisfaction is linked to the marketing mix, implying that the pricing, placement, positioning and promotion of its services are also vital to CRM outcomes. Widana et al. (2015) recognize the impact of moral and ethical norms on relationship marketing, whereby CRM outcomes

entail mutuality in the benefits between the company and the customers. Ashraf et al. (2020) cite religiosity as a critical consideration by customers when selecting their preferred banking institution, and in turn, this indirectly influences the institutions' actions as they design their services, marketing and CRM activities.

The existing study points out that, whereas changing such norms may be rigid, there are numerous opportunities to utilize CRM to attract, retain, and satisfy customers. For instance, Elkhansa and Hamid (2020) used the qualitative case study approach to investigate the implementation of CRM at AL Rajhi Islamic banks. The findings reveal that the bank relies on technological tools to acquire data and inputs about customers. The institution then uses those inputs to design programs for customer loyalty for most customers. Specifically, those segments are deemed integral to the institution's profitability. Medjedel and Abdul-Hamid (2020), who studied CRM at Al Rajhi Bank, conclude that the bank's technology adoption is to deploy their strategies further and target domestic and foreign customers more cost-effectively.

On the other hand, services marketing in the banking sector in Qatar is directly influenced by the implications of the commitments for liberalization under the GCC General Agreements on Trade in Services (GATS). According to Samman and Shahnawaz (2014), the commitments for liberalization under GATS, as well as the inter-country exemptions, influenced the marketing of services among the GCC countries, with the results being the expansion of the availability of credit at low interest rates. The duality also influences services marketing in the banking sector in the GCC region in the principles of Islamic and Conventional banking systems. Alafeef (2020), who studied the effects of marketing mix on customer satisfaction and loyalty among Jordanian IBs, relied on data from 344 respondents. The data

is analyzed through structural equation modelling. The study focuses on a services marketing mix comprised of 7Ps (price, product, process, people, promotion, place and physical evidence). The study finds that all seven marketing mix elements have a positive statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction, leading to customer loyalty. However, the blockade compromised the applicability of such agreements, necessitating the development of custom strategies for service marketing.

Several peculiarities in the GCC countries, including Qatar, influence services marketing and CRM in the banking sector. First, the national governments own most of the banking sector institutions, thus leading to increased alignment between services marketing and the national goals. Second, the sector is oligopolistic, with less than five significant banks holding 60-80% of the market share, with each institution offering similar products and services. As a result, the ability to attract and retain customers while keeping them satisfied depends on the deployment of how the services are marketed and the CRM activities. Finally, the banking sector dominates the financial industry, with limited participation of the non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs), such as venture capitalists, insurance companies and micro-credit entities. According to Widana et al. (2015), the absence of NBFIs implies that companies in the banking sector have to play the role of channelizing financial services to different customer segments, especially in the rural and marginalized areas, while also catering to the mainstream domestic and international institutional and individual clients.

Existing studies, including Abdullah (2017), Ahmadova (2016) and Hashim and Hamzah (2013), point towards the prominence of Shariah compliance in services marketing among GCC countries. In practice, these considerations are more prominent in the finance and banking sector, where the differentiation between conventional and Islamic banking is more

prominent than in any other industry included in this research. The differentiation is magnified due to legal, socio-cultural, and, in some cases, operational norms integrated into marketing services. Samman and Shahnawaz (2014) also indicated that these norms reduce the effects of moral hazard and adverse selection. The reduced moral hazard arises from the fact that lenders and borrowers have limited motivation to engage in risky behaviour due to the mutuality of transaction benefits.

On the other hand, customers and banking institutions are motivated to share information, reducing adverse selection effects. Third, in every transaction, lenders and borrowers share the risk since the venture's success is the product of cooperation rather than the actions of either party (Hassan et al., 2008). According to Akram and Ur Rahman (2018), credit risk plays an integral role in the ability of these actions to position Islamic banks as joint venture operations between the institution and its customers (Sulaiman & Jorihah, 2013). These circumstances have led to the design of CRM strategies, starting from the design of the products to the selection of technologies and markets in which they operate.

Despite the comparative attractiveness of the services by IBs to those from CBs, it is widely acknowledged that most customers view the services from IBs as preferable since they are aligned with the values that the customers consider essential in decision-making.

2.6.2 The Tourism Sector

Tourism is a social phenomenon involving people's motion to and from locations away from their daily routines or environments. As a sector, tourism plays a crucial role in the development of economies across the world. Therefore, many countries, including Qatar and other GCC nations, have created policies and structures to leverage the tourism sector to enhance the gross national product. Tourism is also a significant job, creating an arena and

an avenue for foreign exchange, and it is part of the industry that provides governments with tax income. As a service industry, the production of tourism products is immovable and unique depending on the place. Therefore, competition arises both domestically and across borders. Thus, marketing tourism institutions is crucial worldwide (Othman and Khorsheed, 2019).

Tourism marketing is a process by which the needs of tourists are balanced against the objectives of a tourist region. It is an activity where tourism institutions communicate, innovate, share, and deliver value in addition to partners, customers, and the community. Halal Tourism marketing mix includes seven elements: tourism marketing mix, place, price, promotion, distribution, people, and customer service (Othman and Khorsheed, 2019).

Services marketing in the tourism sector integrates several tangible elements with intangible services, thereby accounting for the high differentiation in the value created for customers (Esteval et al., 2018). Essentially, tangibility arises from the elements associated with hospitality and the tourist attractions in specific destinations. However, due to the customizability of each aspect of the attractions and hospitality services, services marketing and CRM play an integral part in the success and sustainability of the tourism sector. Vogt (2010) cites the Ritz Carlton in arguing that companies in the industry were among the earliest adopters of CRM and internet marketing since the company was among the earliest recipients of the Malcolm Baldrige awards for innovations targeting customer needs and wishes for improved service delivery. Similarly, most companies in the sector rely on complex and multifaceted loyalty programs to entice customers from different market segments.

CRM is extensively accepted as an instrument that supports customer-oriented decisions in organizations, especially in formulating hotel best practices and strategies (Fattah

and Al Azzam, 2022). Several peculiarities make CRM and services marketing unique in the services sector. First, the industry is built on the backbone of robust alliances and partnerships. Kolosinska et al. (2018) attribute the industry orientation to the fact that the decisions by customers are influenced by personal factors (motivation to travel, lifestyles and past experiences) and interpersonal factors (cultural factors, influence of opinion leaders, family and social class). Second, the industry is highly integrated, following the growing prominence of mega-branding to gain market and bargaining power (Teviana et al., 2017). Third, the industry has adapted to more personalized service provision techniques like revenue management systems. These measures enable tourist companies to personalize services, marketing, and CRM.

Fourth, the adoption of technologically advanced systems has led to improved organization of data relating to products, customer profiles and purchase preferences, among others (Rahimi, 2017). Consequently, CRM is influenced by the availability of current and past data relating to customers in digital format. As a result, those entities can analyse and identify trends and norms across different dimensions, including time-specific dimensions (seasonal variations), geographical (host and destination country level), and demographic factors.

Services marketing in the tourism sector occurs in an environment of multiple sovereign nations faced by macro-economic, inter-boundary barriers and domestic socio-cultural factors. Awara and Anyadighibe (2014) found that organizations in this sector must utilize a modified 7Ps approach to mobilize, adapt and deploy their services marketing strategy. The studies by Cosic and Djuric (2010) and Yap et al. (2021) recognize the scarcity of empirical and theoretical research on new services development (NSD) in the hospitality sector. Knowledge in this area is necessary to determine the potential suitability of

innovations in the tourism sector. However, despite the absence of formalized knowledge, the tourism sector remains innovative, with various strategies and tactics deployed, albeit with varying success. These variations in success, attributed to the efforts under services marketing, need more longevity and sustainability.

2.6.2.1 Tourism sector in Islamic states

In Qatar, just like any other Islamic state, the tourism industry must conform to the required standard of the Shariah law, which is considered Halal. All tourism activities must be allowed within the country halal. Halal Tourism is a term used in the GCC countries and other Islamic countries to refer to an economic commodity that creates a niche market with economic potential (Slamet, Abdullah and Laila, 2022). Halal Tourism is increasing in demand, contributing to the economic advancement and growth of the GCC countries. Halal tourism is the understanding of the meaning of Shariah and its implementation in all tourism activities, ranging from transportation facilities, lodging facilities, food and beverage facilities, financial systems, and tourism service provider facilities. Halal tourism is the foundation used to instil motivation or religious values and, therefore, appears to be religious tourism. Islamic principles are also implemented in other tourism principles like infrastructure, halal food, hotels, transportation, Islamic finance, travel packages, and logistics. The growing current affairs of halal tourism in Qatar caused the country to carry out tourism marketing and promotion within the scope of halal tourism. Several hotels have changed their infrastructure in line with halal tourism, including constructing prayer rooms, separate swimming pools, and gym rooms for females and males. In addition, the hotels have changed the interior design and atmosphere to bring out the cultural values of Islam. The hotels also conduct training for the hotel staff to provide halal-quality services.

The government plays a crucial role in the development of tourism. Although it is deemed a private service delivery sector, the government holds authority through policy. The state is responsible for regional construction through tourism due to its influence on the leaves of locals, international partners, and other stakeholders. The form can build or destroy the tourism industry through governance strategies and international policies (Slamet, Abdullah and Laila, 2022).

A literature review by Musinguzi (2016) sought to determine the trends in research on tourism in Qatar to determine the critical areas of interest that influence services marketing and CRM. The literature review revealed that most researchers focused on sports and cultural tourism, the planning and development of tourism, and tourism heritage. However, there is limited focus on some elements that influence the marketing of tourism services, including the sociology of tourism, the motivations for tourism, the relationships between hosts and guests, the development of new ventures, the history of tourism and education in the sector, all which contribute to the success of the industry.

Giampiccoli and Mtapuri (2014) indicate that Qatar targets its tourism development trajectory to fit into the 3S model, including Sea, Sand and Sun. Over time, the industry has seen extensive improvements to accommodate multiple products and services under tourism attractions facilitated by the 3S model. Qatar offers a diverse range of tourism categories, including cultural, heritage, sports, culinary and cuisine, medical, and mega-events. Khodr (2012) indicated that the combination of tourism services marketed by Qatar makes it a key destination for business, educational, professional and leisure travellers, thus attracting a broad range of consumers from across the globe. Khodr (2012) concludes that the services marketing strategies established around these mega-events aim to highlight and drive the

modernization of domestic systems, promote international recognition and integration, and acquire a competitive edge in the region. Although sounding vague, these goals have positioned Qatar as a meeting point between the West and East, enabled the country to prove its ability to adapt to the social and cultural differences that are integral for the delivery of certain services in the tourism sector, proven the ability of Qatar to adhere to global standards of human rights, democratic governance and solidarity, and finally, enabled Qatar to respond to international trends thereby making visitors 'feel at home' (Amara, 2013). However, the study notes that the services marketing and CRM in Qatar's entire tourism sector focus on primary and secondary motives, which feature both economic and non-economic outcomes. As a result, and as observed in other studies by Giampiccoli and Mtapuri (2014) and King (2008), the application of generic models and theories may need to be revised to capture the entirety of the objective behind services marketing and CRM in the country. Still, it may also culminate in incorrect and misleading conclusions about the reality. A case in point is the development of the Aspire Zone in Doha, which, according to Smith (2010), exemplifies the opportunism in tourism theming and planning to create a bigger demand for tourism in the country. Based on its success and utility in signalling, the multiplicity of development similar to Aspire Zone played a significant role in proving the ability of Qatar to host mega-events, including sporting activities such as the World Cup finals scheduled for 2022. As a result, what may appear to be random practices that fail to meet the metrics oriented toward cost-benefit outcomes play a crucial role in signalling the country's emergence while stimulating the growth and expansion of tourism.

Taking the example of sports tourism, it is apparent that Qatar's services marketing activities have targeted all three dimensions identified by Nauright and Pope (2017), including active sports tourism, sports event tourism and celebrity and nostalgia sports tourism. The

decision is attributed to the implementation of a strategy built around the sports-media tourism complex (Khodr, 2012). The goals of the complex are to promote sports diplomacy, develop elite sportspersons, drive investment in the industry, and lay the foundation for hosting sports mega-events. Additional activities include active involvement in European Football through sponsorship of sporting events outside the country (including the sponsorship of Barcelona Football Club (FC)) and ownership of soccer teams, such as Paris St. Germain FC and Malaga FC (Garcia & Amara, 2013).

As a result, most studies reviewed herein reveal that the tourism sector's services marketing and CRM activities are driven by the need to create, modify (change or boost) or reposition the country's image. The development of the Qatar brand is at the centre of the country's services marketing and CRM activities, which are meant to diversify the services and products on offer.

2.6.3 The Technology Sector

New Technologies in the marketing landscape present cutting-edge scholarly research that identifies the role of new technologies in driving market practice and theory. According to Prior knowledge, technology is scientific knowledge and its applications. Technology relates to both services and products that follow scientific knowledge. Technology is always young, and it is evolving with time, making it one of the sectors that is maturing over time. Technology is always new in terms of recent applications of scientific knowledge.

Technology Impacts marketing in four ways: new technology supports new forms of interaction among industries and consumers, provides new types of data that enable new

analytic tools, requires new strategic marketing frameworks, and creates marketing innovations. Different technologies can serve these functions at the same time and to varying levels. New technologies are deployed to enhance firm-consumer interactions. For instance, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a powerful engine that may replace human representatives in the service industry with machine agents, facilitating firm-consumer exchange through the word of machines (Longoni and Cian, 2022). New technologies enhance firm-consumer interactions by providing new marketing tools when effectively deployed. For instance, anthropomorphized chatbots may influence consumer feedback in consumer-initiated service interactions. In addition, augmented reality (AR) may be used in the services industry to facilitate firm-to-consumer interactions.

New services marketing and CRM technologies give rise to new data and release new analytic methods. Studies also forecast a future where consumers may be required to consent to the automated collection of genetic information to enhance and inform new product development and service delivery mechanisms (Hoffman *et al.*, 2022). By changing consumer-to-consumer, firm-to-consumer, and consumer-to-form interactions, new technologies produce new forms of data, which require new methods to process and analyze data. Computer vision technologies through live streaming offer an avenue for personal selling. New technologies enable new strategic frameworks and new marketing strategies. Digital platforms are places where consumers crowd-send and crowd-sourced products and services. Some avatars' typologies guide marketers in designing and deploying marketing strategies.

New technologies enhance the quality, richness, and volume of consumer data and the market. For example, some computer applications create data streams that capture how consumers interact, behave, feel, and think with firms and other consumers at various

junctions along the customer journey (Hoffman *et al.*, 2022). Digital data-capture technology has enabled firms to produce data on consumer-firm interactions through speech, video, images, text, and facial expressions, enabling large-scale experiments that allow companies to assess the visual effects of their marketing actions. Therefore, marketers may decide to optimize website designs, retarget advertisements, attribute marketing effects to their marketing actions, and evaluate the impact of their new marketing tools. Increased availability of genuine data leads to new and improved consumer and firm decision-making methods. Technology avails complex machine learning apps [roaches and complex models that analyze the richness of data from different sources and databases like search, reviews, location, images, speech, blogs, hand, body, and volume. Large-scale usage of computer vision models for image analysis with the help of complex statistical techniques leads to a high degree of prediction of sales outcomes (Hoffman *et al.*, 2022).

Hongchindaket, Kittisarn and Neck (2013) and Oyewole (2018) identify services marketing in the technology sector as a critical driver in the volume of services marketed internationally. Unlike in other sectors, companies in the technology sector compete in terms of the utility of the service and their effectiveness in marketing. Due to the technical nature of their services, services marketing activities are determined through a complex process that involves determining the value of technology to the customers and the costs of developing it. Steele (2013, 23) indicated that generally, the determination of the price, placement, product (service characteristics) and promotion is based on the fact that "...if communication actions produce unique, positive and accessible associations in the minds of the customers, they also will increase the customer's utility (i.e., desirability) for the brand, thereby shifting the firm's demand curve outward at a given price". As a result, the marketing activities of the services, such as decisions relating to the marketing mix, are adjusted as the perceived and actual

product performance changes. The centrality in the return on investment (ROI) in services marketing for technology-related services arises from several circumstances. First, the utility of technology-related services depends on how dynamic the technology is, implying that services marketing and CRM are deployed to recover investment costs at the earliest opportunity (Mohammadi & Jafarpanar, 2014). These outcomes are influenced by market uncertainty (the uncertainty in demand for the technology-based services), technological uncertainty (whether the customer value created by the service is as promised), and competitive volatility (the speed with which competitors launch competing services) (Yadav, Swami and Pal, 2006). Second, technology-related services tend to have multiple or subsequent revenue streams, necessitating adjusting the marketing mix, including pricing, placement, positions and promotion to ensure residual benefits (Priem, Li & Carr, 2011).

Early research by Shanklin and Ryans (1984) captures the situation facing high-technology companies in their services marketing activities. The report argues that these companies tend to start from scratch since their products and services are often the outcomes of innovation and inventions through internal research and development activities. Such companies have proprietary and unique information protected through intellectual property rights. As a result, these companies must create a marketing mix for the entirely new service to introduce it to the consumers (Yadav, Swami and Pal, 2006) through strategies associated with supply-side factors (Steele, 2013). Over time, companies in the technology sector transition from innovation-driven strategies to market-driven objectives, which are achieved through a combination of CRM and services marketing activities. These include specialized committees and work groups to provide proprietary and personalized CRM across all phases of new product/service development stages, such as testing, development, research, selling and support. At this stage, the services attain regular demand-side conditions marked by the

influence of quantity and price and, in turn, become responsive to the generic marketing mix variables as represented by the 4Ps, 7Ps and 11Ps models.

In a different study by Al Dmour, Al-Zubi and Kakeesh (2013), services marketing was found to influence customer-oriented brand equity, proxied by brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty and perceived quality of services. The services marketing mix used in the study comprised decisions based on factors under the 7Ps model, including price, distribution (place), promotion, processes, physical evidence, people, and service quality (product). The findings revealed that services marketing had a statistically significant effect on brand equity across the four outcomes (equity, quality, loyalty and perceived quality of services). The impact of the services marketing mix is influenced by all characteristics of services, including inseparability, perishability and heterogeneity, although intangibility has the most influence on brand equity among the four. These findings reveal that most customers can only determine the quality and value of the service after using it. As indicated by Huang, Cheng and Chen (2017), this means low levels of trust among the customers in the sector, which arises from poor customer engagement.

The study by Mohammadi and Jafarpanar (2014) presents a unique insight into services marketing and CRM for companies in the Middle East, taking into account the operating environment, like most countries in the region are adopters of technology rather than inventors. Data from 60 executives from the ICT sector were used in the analysis, with the study seeking to determine the business strategies, including the marketing strategies, for knowledge-based companies in the ICT services sector. The findings highlight the challenges associated with an investment in marketing and CRM activities because of insufficient budgetary allocations for such functions.

In summary, despite the disparity in the services marketing and CRM activities at the sector (banking, tourism and technology) or country level, it is apparent that the underlying objective is to promote a particular brand for Qatar while signalling the uniqueness of the value created for consumers.

2.6.4 The Healthcare sector

The healthcare industry plays a central role in the lives and well-being of people worldwide. The healthcare industry entails a range of sectors that provide goods and services to ensure people stay healthier (FutureLearn, 2020). Qatar's healthcare sector has a high-quality healthcare system that is arguably among the best in the Middle East and the world. It offers subsidized or free basic healthcare services to all its citizens in the GCC, including those from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Qatar provides public health services through two organizations: The Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), which operates public hospitals, national ambulance service and community clinics, and the Primary Health Care Center (PHCC), which runs 27 regional centres. In addition to the two public healthcare organizations, the country has a massive private healthcare option whose services contribute to the general health of the GCC citizens. The Qatar healthcare sector requires all medical care providers in both the public and private sectors to register with the Department of Healthcare Professionals, which is part of the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), which oversees the Qatar healthcare system (Most, 2023).

Healthcare services marketing is creating, offering, and communicating healthcare information. It draws from marketing, communication, patient care, and healthcare analytics (Glanz, 1997). Therefore, healthcare marketing is a multidisciplinary practice that involves traditional marketing principles and science-based health promotion and prevention.

According to Gandolf (2022), Healthcare services marketing has various benefits to the healthcare industry, such as enhancing patient experience, keeping healthcare consumers engaged with personalized, relevant, and timely outreach, empowering consumers to make healthier and more intelligent decisions that lead to better healthcare outcomes, and to increase local and international referrals. Other benefits include driving more qualified leads and generating revenue, increasing the consumer base and enhancing loyalty, building the healthcare brand, enhancing the online reputation, expanding the company's strategic advantage to attract healthcare consumers, and positioning involved physicians as leaders in the industry.

The healthcare system is unique since it deals directly with human life. (Whitt, 2021) suggests that other fields' philosophy and marketing techniques may not apply to healthcare services since healthcare needs its approach and features not found in different industries. Purcarea (2019) posits that healthcare specificity in marketing results from using certain methods, concepts, and techniques specific to social and classical marketing. Purcarea (2019) adds that the specificity of healthcare services marketing is that there are markets and services but no money equivalent, which means that the effectiveness of its application may be found in the image of a healthy population, social reintegration of an ill population, professional reintegration, treatment of ill populations, and detection of chronically ill people.

Purcarea (2019) argues that a practical healthcare services marketing approach uses an in-depth investigation of the needs of patients, identifying latent needs and giving them new health services. The marketing of health services also differs depending on the service demand. In addition, the beneficiary may be different from the target audience for marketing campaigns as healthcare decisions are made mainly by physicians handling patients.

Purcarea (2019) also points out another challenge in healthcare services marketing, as not all potential customers are considered desirable for a particular service. In essence, service providers must provide services for all, regardless of their ability to pay. However, there are some categories of applicants for whom the marketing manager may want to avoid advising them to request a particular service. Therefore, the market faces the dilemma of attracting patients or customers to the healthcare organization without attracting too many from the category of potential clients who are likely to accrue economic debts. Farsi (2021) notes some trends in healthcare marketing over time as follows: from brand marketing to services marketing; from mass marketing to a more specific approach to marketing; from one measure for all to a more personalized action; from the emphasis on a health incident to building a long-lasting relationship; from ignoring the market and market intelligence; and from low tech marketing to high-tech services marketing.

Healthcare professionals create, communicate, and provide value to their target market through marketing. While consumers typically receive most marketing information about products in commercial media, the most critical information comes from publicly available and independent bodies.

CRM in healthcare is a solution that helps medical service providers store and manage patient information, enhance healthcare services, automate marketing and sales processes, and enhance patient acquisition strategy (Anshari and Almunawar, 2012). A reliable healthcare CRM contains patient information, including medical history, date of past and upcoming appointments, history of medical bills and clinical notes (Anshari and Almunawar, 2012).

2.6.5 The Aviation Industry

Islam encourages its followers to travel through pilgrimage in the holy city of Mecca to perform Hajj. Muslims throughout the World are also encouraged to visit places to gain reminders. However, Islam does not allow their faithful to visit corrupted places that involve immoral acts and alcohol (Battour, Ismail and Battor, 2010). Muslims are required to preserve and perform their religious obligations. With the requirement to stick to Muslim Shariah Law, Muslims travelling need Muslim-friendly services like halal foods, Muslim-friendly hotels, Muslim-friendly reports, and Muslim-friendly phone applications (Battour, Ismail and Battor, 2010). Therefore, airlines are trying to adapt to the Shariah law by establishing Muslim-friendly airlines to comply with the needs of Muslim travellers (Battour, Ismail and Battor, 2010). Qatar Airways is a state-owned airline in the state of Qatar. It began operations in 1995 and has become one of the fastest-growing carriers in aviation history. Qatar Airways reached a milestone, reaching over 100 destinations on its global route map. In June 2011, the Airway was named the Airline of the Year at the annual Skytrax World Airline Awards with more than 18 million travellers globally ('The Story of Qatar Airways - English.pdf,' no date). The Airline maintained its title in July 2012. In 2013, Qatar Airways joined One World by integrating the global alliance, and it remains the only Gulf airline among three extensive global partnerships.

The Qatar Blockade of 2017 involved other GCC countries issuing instant Notice to flight Crew (NOTAMS) announcing the immediate closure of their airspaces to all Qatar Aircraft, a step that saw Qatar Airways services losing its two largest markets – UAE and Saudi Arabia – for both cargo and passengers.

By international law, the Sovereign airspace corresponds with the airtime definition of territorial water as being 12 nautical miles out from a nation's coastline. The airspace that is not claimed by any country is considered international (Macheras, 2018). The map below shows the shape of Qatar Airspace. During the Blockade in 2017, the Citizens of Qatar questioned how Bahrain ended up with such vast airspace, given that it is the smallest country among the GCC countries.

Figure 10: Saudi Arabia AIR SPACE map



Source: (Macheras, 2018)

Before the Blockade, Bahrain and Qatar enjoyed good relations and were both signatory members of the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Transit Agreement. These countries committed to permitting scheduled flights from Qatar to overfly their airspace. However, the continued tension in GCC countries led to the breach of ICAO agreements. In addition, before the Blockade, data shows that the UAE was Qatar's biggest destination country, with a capacity accounting for about 7.3% of departures from the

government. Moreover, Saudi Arabia came second with a market share of 6.8% ahead of India, represented by 4.7% of the total withdrawals, and the US and UK, followed by 4.6% and 4.5%, respectively. Moreover, The UAE was Qatar's largest market by weekly flight numbers, and about 8.8% of the total departures' destinations were in the UAE. In total, Egypt, Bahrain, UAE, and Saudi Arabia made up about 17.5% of the weekly capacity from Qatar (Casey, 2021).

Immediately after the crisis, due to the blockading of Qatari airspace, Qatari representatives held a first hearing meeting at ICAO headquarters in Canada, stating that the blockading states were in breach of ICA treaties. Following the hearing, ICAO advised that all member states comply with the conventions to preserve aviation security, sustainability, efficiency, and safety in the region. However, due to the Blockade, Qatar Airways responded by opening up new routes in the Gulf of Oman and directing their travel to Russia, Thailand, Turkey, the Czech Republic, and Poland (Macheras, 2018).

One of the challenges Qatar Airways faced during the Blockade was a decline in its activities, which required a proper model for marketing and maintaining customer trust, loyalty, and attraction. For instance, Qatar Airways prioritized CRM during the Blockade to preserve trust and customer loyalty. To ensure proper CRM management, the Airline confirmed that its customer support teams were available to address concerns posed by passengers. This quick response plan was vital in preserving and building trust. It also leveraged its loyalty programs to retain and reward its frequent flyers. The Airline created a loyalty program to reward and retain its frequent travellers. The rewards included incentives for customers to continue choosing Qatar Airways despite the Blockade. CRM services also include service personalization strategies. Personalized services include programs ensuring customer-specific needs are met during travelling (Casey, 2021).

Qatar Airways leverages effective communication to reassure its customers and demonstrate its commitment to maintaining high-quality services. Effective communication strategies include ensuring a transparency approach that emphasizes how it adapted to the Blockade and the measures it takes to ensure minimal flight disruptions. Qatar Airways deployed a crisis communication strategy to inform customers of potential itinerary changes. The crisis communication plan kept passengers updated about flight routes, alternative arrangements, and possible delays. An effective communication plan also entailed a public relations strategy to keep passengers engaged and to address various misconceptions about their service and the impact of the Blockade (Casey, 2021).

For adaptation, the Qatar Aviation industry had to be innovative in every process to demonstrate resilience. For instance, it leveraged the diversification of its routes to other countries like Thailand to increase their connectivity. It also enhanced its service delivery by offering unique, high-quality amenities and experiences to set itself apart. Qatar Airways expanded its services to a global network to compensate for losing its prominent destinations (Casey, 2021).

2.6.6 The education sector

Qatar's education system has historically experienced massive growth within half a century. For instance, with a population of 20000 people and 15 schools in 1891, Qatar has grown to nearly 3 million people with 529 secondary and primary schools serving approximately 327841 students during the 2019/2020 academic year. In addition, it is indicated that, during the same period, literacy rates also rose significantly from low levels to more than 93%, and these changes are mainly attributed to the past 50 years that amplified the depth and pace of development (Amin and Cochrane, 2023).

With the current World's increasing globalization efforts, the schooling system has not been left behind, and this has led to the push of neoliberal reforms in the field of education, including medium policies, neoliberal English and the adoption of Western education services and products in ways that led to the transformation of the Qatar Education system into a multi-stakeholder and multi-level actors. Driving this agenda is a notion that the global market and a robust education system in Qatar can be obtained by successfully mastering the English language (Amin and Cochrane, 2023). Qatar believes that globalization largely depends on the knowledge of the English language, technology, and Western educational curricula and educational tools since they are known to have the ability to spread neoliberal political, academic and social norms that have given a new form to knowledge and education (Amin and Cochrane, 2023).

The UNDP Human Development Report 2016 established that Arab communities perform way below the world average in achieving equitable access to education ('adhr-report-2018-full-report.pdf', no date). Luckily, the GULF region, including Qatar, has opted for a social and economic disengagement policy reflecting their integration into a capitalist world system and private institutions (Amin and Cochrane, 2023). These educational reforms have aimed to raise the quality of the education system by improving pedagogies that inspire critical thinking and enhance teacher training as opposed to the curriculum enshrined in rote memorization (Amin and Cochrane, 2023).

Education is the heart of building a knowledge-based economy and realizing national transformation plans for economic diversification. Education in the GC countries includes a heated desire for internationalization and transnational education, western forms of education, a new ethos of curricula, classroom pedagogical practices, English-medium formal

education, and the desire to purchase Western services and goods. This high demand for a quality education system is attributed to the enormous numbers of expatriates that outnumber the local educated population in their countries. Therefore, in the quest to enhance their educational standards for the local people, Qatar and other GCC countries have partnered with Western consultants who have recommended the standard neoliberal Western models for education reforms.

The Qatar blockade had a significant impact on Qatar's education sector. The end of the diplomatic relations between Qatar and the GCC countries led to the immediate isolation of international schools. It also led to the expulsion of foreign educators. There was also a shift in staffing and curriculum as the Qatar authorities brought in qualified staff from other countries to maintain the quality of education (Staff, 2017). The Qatari Blockade had a technological impact on the education system since it prompted an increased investment in online teaching and e-learning. All education institutions adopted digital platforms to ensure that students and teachers Continued their studies despite the geopolitical crisis (Staff, 2017).

Furthermore, the Qatari government provided humanitarian services to all students affected by the Blockade (Gangji, no date). Humanitarian assistance included financial aid and scholarships to alleviate the economic burden on families during the crisis (Staff, 2017). The authorities operating in the education sector focused on accreditation and quality assurance to ensure that the Blockade did not compromise the quality of education in Qatari (Staff, 2017). One of the strengths of the education system during the Qatar blockade was the ability to be adaptable and resilient: the education sector continued to be innovative and functional

and implemented alternative solutions, such as distance learning, to maintain the educational process (Staff, 2017).

2.6.7 Insurance industries

2.6.7.1 CRM in the Insurance Sector?

The business insurance market is a significant service sector with a global reach. According to McKinsey and Company (2019), the premium insurance market has experienced average annual growth rates of 4% over the past few years, with a turnover of €4.7tn worldwide. Within this industry, life insurance accounts for 46 per cent of worldwide insurance premiums, followed by health insurance at 23 per cent and property and casualty insurance at 30 per cent. With a growth rate of 5.1%, the health insurance sector looks to be growing fastest (McKinsey and Company, 2019). The Middle East (Bahrain, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates) has contributed just 3% of the recent global growth.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data indicates that Islamic insurance options- like takaful- in countries with substantial Muslim populations—are gradually replacing commercial insurance coverage (OECD, 2019). In contrast to other nations in the region, the insurance market in Qatar focuses primarily on the energy, maritime, and construction industries (Darwish, 2014). Aside from that, health insurance is still minimal due to the complimentary treatment offered to citizens and foreigners; nevertheless, this industry could see the most expansion shortly after the Supreme Council of Health opted to mandate obligatory health coverage for all Qatari citizens and visitors in 2014 (Albaz,2019).

The Qatar Islamic Insurance Corporation was the first business founded in the *takaful* industry in 1995. According to Dahdal, Walker, & Arner (2017), the insurance industry in Qatar is distinct since it is governed by two regulating bodies: the Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) and the Qatar Central Bank (QCB), which both issue licenses to insurance companies. Insurance Decree No. 1 of 1966 was the basis for insurance companies' operations until December 2012. According to the statement, the Ministry of Economy and Commerce oversaw the insurance industry.

Regulations controlling the insurance sector have been discussed and improved for centuries, ever since laws were enacted in Genoa, Barcelona, and Bruges in the fourteenth century to prevent insurance exploitation and illegal activities (Alshammari & Altartrui, 2021). The insurance sector is vulnerable to several risks as a component of the economic system, which could cause the whole thing to collapse. Van Vuuren (2017) states that although modern market conduct standards were developed in the US in the mid-19th century and in the UK between 1986 and 2000, the history of the insurance industry's conduct extends back over five centuries. With time, the insurance industry evolved and became better and more competitive. The primary goal of the Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB) and the International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS) is to safeguard all insurance product customers (AlNemer, 2016). The rivalry among insurance providers in Qatar and other countries has sprouted the need to adopt a practical CRM approach to ensure complete optimization and retention of their clients. Owing to the low market penetration of insurance companies, there is intense competition to remain the best-serving insurance provider in the country.

The insurance industry in Qatar is fiercely competitive and largely stable, and it has limited space for growth due to the emphasis on building and retaining clientele that generates revenue while preserving customer retention (Otedo, 2017). Insurance companies in Qatar must reflect on more than just offering appealing products if they want to outperform their rivals in today's fiercely competitive market (Singh, Singh, & Chavan, 2020). Insurance businesses must realize that customer retention is a significant commodity that rivals need help duplicating (Clemons & Clemons 2019). In Qatar, most people are Islamic; therefore, establishing products and providing services in line with this is a crucial aspect of customer management practices. Thus, insurance companies should have a strong integration between customer-focused strategies, such as client orientation strategies for acquisition and retention (Boadu & Achiaa, 2019). The approach adopted takes into account improving post-purchase services, particularly in damage mitigation and complaint handling, as well as developing elaborate and enticing product packages that closely match the client's needs.

Studies conducted in many regions and industries delineate the advantages of customer relationship management. An investigation the impact of electronic customer relationship management in the banking industry, for example, was carried out by Abu-Shanab, E., & Anagreh, L. (2015). They concluded that banks have implemented electronic customer relationship management (e-CRM) due to ICT advancements to enhance client relationships, boost profitability, and improve client satisfaction and loyalty. A study on the impact of customer relationship management on customer retention at Pakistani Shell enterprises conducted by Hassan et al. (2015) provided evidence supporting this. The study found that CRM plays a significant role in increasing sales, efficiency, and staff retention while improving comprehensive consumer knowledge and client satisfaction. Moreover, CRM

enhances client loyalty because businesses will have more precise insight into what consumers want and what will satisfy them.

According to Pambudi, Widayanti, & Edastama's (2021) research on trust and acceptance of e-banking technology influence of meditation on customer relationship management performance, CRM performance aims to establish and sustain good relationships. In their study on customer relationship management, Roya and Metin (2017) found that customer management has numerous advantages for the hotel industry. The study employed qualitative methods to examine how managers' opinions of CRM software and consumer expectations overlapped. According to the survey, efficient hotel performance results from effective customer relationship management.

CRM technology also helps businesses manage their interactions and correspondence with both present and potential customers (Swift, 2001). According to a study by Buttle & Maklan (2019), CRM technology is designed to make a variety of customer management functions, including data collection and analysis, customer communication, and relationship building, more accessible and better. According to Kumar & Reinartz (2018), insurance companies can increase their revenues by utilizing CRM technology, giving staff members access to additional resources that support them in offering personalized customer care. After the customer database and information storage system are finished, CRM technology assists insurance companies with an effective marketing strategy for keeping the targeted consumers, cultivating strong relationships, and increasing revenue (Cavaliere, 2021). This is achieved using mobile applications to provide customers with simple, excellent services.

According to Kampani & Jhamb (2020), businesses are using the client data they have obtained and swiftly implementing a variety of media outlets that consumers can readily access, such as electronic mail, mobile devices, satellite televisions, or company websites. Redjeki and Affandi (2021) explain that businesses cannot thrive by providing help for only one channel, as customers seek out several options during the purchasing process and after-sale support based on their comfort level. However, the primary problem of organizations is determining when customers want to utilize particular media and how to best guide them toward the medium of choice (Cornelissen, 2020). Each media has a unique set of capabilities. Serving clients more effectively requires constantly customising while selling goods and services through various channels following their tastes, preferences, leisure activities, and buying habits (Kampani & Jhamb, 2020). Data sharing and integration are necessary to provide the most incredible experience for clients consistently. A thorough review of the data is essential to determine which portions of the data are either unstructured or structured and can be used further. It is more effective with the proper application tools and web services (Tawalbeh et al., 2020).

2.6.7.2 Service Marketing Insurance Sector.

Many of the advances in services marketing, particularly in the insurance industry, have occurred recently. The factors impacting the developments in insurance services marketing are corporate layout and elements, regulatory agencies, the growth of the service industries, the type of services, the relationship between consumers and employees, and specific service sectors (Muriuki, 2013). Mengistu (2019) argues that as consumers are an essential resource for any service-oriented business, those with them may need help generating revenue and controlling costs. The marketing process is very different from the

manufacturing of commodities because of the insurance industry's unique characteristics, including robust goods, ongoing relationships, and financial sustainability. The introduction of takaful has increased the number of companies in the insurance market in Qatar, increasing competitiveness (Alshammari & Altartrui, 2021).

The majority of research on service marketing focuses on financial institutions. Very few studies that examine the insurance industry's marketing tactics and performance have taken the quickly expanding insurance industry markets into account. Hidayat and Abdulla (2015) compared the marketing plans and financial outcomes of takaful and traditional insurance businesses in Bahrain in light of research that concentrated on the general performance of takaful enterprises. The study shows standard products are more lucrative, effective, and marketable than their takaful equivalents. The latest study conducted in Malaysia by Bao et al. (2018) concentrated on the general performance of conventional and Islamic insurance providers. According to the study's findings, eight effective businesses were in 2014 and nine in 2015. The analysis also revealed that a takaful company went from 19th to 12th place in one year, making it the most notable shift in its effectiveness rating. This does highlight how fiercely competitive the dual-financial institutions are. This indicates that takaful insurance products are well-known and easily trustable among Islamic-related countries.

Previous studies have shown that insurance companies need help creating the flexible company structures required to thrive in this new environment (Jarzabkowski et al., 2019). There are only so many effective techniques for vying for market share since conditions vary depending on the situation. Consequently, insurance providers must adopt a better strategy to make them stand out. Insurance marketing might present a service according to

information and statistics gathered over time, as well as wants indicated by the consumer, by utilizing a method known as relationship marketing (Kememu, 2017). A marketer can more effectively approach a customer with adequately targeted items when they have a deeper understanding of them, which can lead to a considerable increase in earnings and sales (Kamau, 2022). One of the main components of service marketing and an essential component of company success is creating long-lasting customer relationships. This relates to the ability to retain clients, contingent upon agents possessing the "appropriate" attributes. What constitutes "appropriate" varies according to the client's status: individual or business. In the context of insurance, these two groups of consumers may be referred to as individual coverage clients and policyholders with a business connection, respectively (Sewu, Octora, & Lusiana, 2022).

Businesses that use distinctive marketing strategies can effectively contact their target markets, which boosts performance. Market orientation affects performance, while product style and design have a beneficial effect on firm performance. Superior quality products add value to the clientele. Elshenawy (2016) conducted a study on the relationship marketing model for the banking industry in Qatar, demonstrating the connection between customer sentiment and partnership quality—both crucial factors in determining customer loyalty. Furthermore, the study verified that organisational and social interactions are the only factors that significantly influence the durability of relationship quality.

As insurance products become more challenging to distinguish in highly crowded marketplaces, there has been an upsurge among insurance companies to change from a product-focused to a customer-focused perspective (Siddiqui & Sharma, 2010). Throughout the approval procedure, consideration is given to an insurance product's capacity to satisfy

needs and flexibility in response to changing customer demands in the marketplace. Here, customers are expected to start to understand the worth of approved items as they grow more commonly acknowledged. Studies on the topic of service marketing usually concentrate on creativity, customization, and the development of policies. For example, Coviello & Di Trapani's (2012) study found that tailoring insurance solutions to individual needs and preferences increases customer fulfilment and commitment.

According to Theodoresch, Pop, & Stancioiu (2008), price is one of the essential components of the service marketing strategy. According to Noone, Canina, & Enz (2013), price is the main component of positioning, and it must be determined with consideration for the demographic targeted, the level of rivalry, and the mix between the products and services offered, among other factors. Although every business's primary price objectives are different, they may all be generically classified into four categories: power, amount, financial sustainability, and achieving competitiveness objectives (Teodoresch, Pop, & Stancioiu, 2008). According to a study on the variables influencing general takaful insurance businesses' financial performance in Malaysia, takaful and insurance companies are comparable in the premium version. Takaful, however, yields higher investment income. The Insurance Act establishes commissions for various insurance categories; it doesn't regulate the cost of insurance goods (Swedloff, 2020). The purpose of the guidelines is to help the general public's insurance costs decrease. The price range of the clients and the company's projected earnings are considered while developing pricing guidelines. Sreedharan & Saha's (2021) research indicates that consumers' perception of the value of insurance plans about premiums paid is a critical factor in their decision-making.

Academic studies such as the one conducted by SP (2019) underscore the importance of accessible distribution strategies. The study found that when insurers employed a multidimensional marketing approach that comprised agents, branch offices, and online platforms, they had more success reaching and serving clients. The distribution networks of well-established businesses may facilitate the most vital relationships between buyers and sellers and play a critical role in cutting expenses and preventing the growth of unnecessary dealers (Sheffi, 2012). Working with organizations to distribute insurance makes sense because that's who most insurance businesses' clients are. Other ideal practices include effectively educating the clientele and possessing administration skills to collect premiums from clients without sending money to providers (Churchill, 2007).

According to Chibvura (2017), promotion is necessary to increase consumer awareness and influence them to buy insurance goods. Ndeudjeu (2021) defines promotion as educating, convincing, and influencing consumers' buying decisions. He continued by saying that the role of promotion within the strategy for product marketing has increased. The product marketing strategy is the specific mix of communication, public relations, direct selling, advertisements, and direct marketing tactics the company uses to achieve its marketing and advertising objectives (Ndeudjeu, 2021). Therefore, the primary purpose of promotion is to provide target customers with all the exact information they need to justify visiting a specific website. Academic studies have demonstrated that persuasive advertising, mainly when it is educational and emotionally charged, can favour customers' opinions and trust (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Increasing public insurance awareness requires resources and work (El Monayery, 2013). What will work depends on various variables, including history, society, and public trust in institutions. As a result, the policies, sales, and servicing strategies

change. Guidelines must be simple to comprehend and should only impose a few limitations. The claims procedure must also be reasonable, practical, and straightforward.

2.6.8 Gas and oil industries

Customer Relationship Management in the Gas and Oil Industry

The importance of businesses and corporations in regional advancement is growing as Qatar advances toward realising the aspirational objectives of its national vision 2030 (Mohamed et al., 2022). The foundation of Qatar Vision 2030 has four primary pillars: Human Growth, Social Growth, Economic Growth, and Environmental Sustainability (Al-Suwaidi, 2018). Because of its richness of natural resources, Qatar saw a significant social and economic revolution in a relatively short period (Zumbrägel, 2021). The gas business in Qatar is expected to modify its customer relationship management (CRM) tactics in response to evolving worldwide energy dynamics and stakeholders' expectations. To achieve this, considerable adjustments would need to be made to the industry sector and national and regional energy strategies, considering interpersonal, technical, political, and economic variables (Abulhussain, 2021). Qatar established its long-term vision, "Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030, to convert the country into a modern nation capable of maintaining the growth of its economy and ensuring an excellent standard of living for its people and future generations (Sarrakh, 2021). The country's astounding economic advancements and excessive consumption could be considered the platform on which Qatar launched this vision (Sarrakh, 2021).

Academic sectors are increasingly interested in sustainability as research highlights its importance and the need to see it as a significant advantage for enterprises. Moreover, there is immense demand for firms to maintain their clientele in mind while simultaneously becoming more mindful of the environment and socially responsible (Al-Shuridah & Ndubisi, 2023). As a result, customer relationship management (CRM) has evolved toward ecological responsibility, considering social, economic, and environmental ramifications while cultivating successful, long-term connections with customers (Li, Lin, & Zhang, 2023). According to Mohammedi and Sohrabi (2018), CRM helps boost customer satisfaction among existing clients and get recommendations from new ones. CRM systems use technology to gather data, maintain customer connections, and maximise their long-term worth to manage these relationships (Srivastava, 2012) effectively. Research indicates that most CRM initiatives must catch up to their full capabilities for several reasons, including planning and implementing activities, even if CRM systems have long-term benefits (Buttle & Maklan, 2019). A shift in customer relationship management (CRM) toward sustainable customer relationship management (SCRM), which is characterised as taking the effects on society, the economy, and the environment into account when building successful, long-term relationships, has been compelled by the growing demand on businesses to be environmentally friendly and socially responsive while maintaining a focus on the needs of their customers (Al-Shuridah & Ndubisi, 2023).

CRM encompasses suppliers and partners (Chakravorti, 2009). Managing client interactions has become essential for businesses to succeed in the face of internationalisation and economic uncertainty (Sharma et al., 2020). The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which significantly impacted the gas and oil supply, is a prime example (Allam, Bibri, & Sharpe, 2022). A robust supply network is essential in times of economic catastrophe and

unpredictability, and it is ensured by having strong ties with multinational partners and suppliers (Zafari, Biggemann, & Garry, 2020). Businesses using CRM know that interacting with and integrating partner companies in the value chain is nearly always necessary to provide customer value (Chakravorti, 2009). The COVID-19 epidemic and geopolitical tensions offer a severe challenge to the gas business in Qatar, as they do to other worldwide energy sectors (Asiri, Liu, & Liu, 2022). CRM is vital for handling these difficulties and fostering strong bonds with participants, allowing the industry to adjust and prosper in the face of ambiguity. To ensure an effective CRM execution, an elaborate plan that outlines the goals of the CRM, the methods and technologies that can be used to achieve those goals, how to garner support from multiple groups, and how to evaluate the implementation's accomplishment must be developed (Piskar & Faganel, 2009).

Musa & Nasiru (2020) contend that Customer relationship management, or CRM, differs from the more traditional approach in the oil and gas industry since it emphasises project engagement more. Business developers prioritise project-based sales over a single client or organisation as their primary source of income. To support this project-focused pipeline administration, the CRM offers forecasts for gross profit, volume, and closing dates (Künzel & Lohse, 2022). The oil and gas sector does not supply goods to customers directly. To optimise field worker security and boost corporate productivity, they still require a CRM to ensure all procedures are followed within guidelines. CRM allows businesses to monitor operations in real-time and send help out for any issues that may arise (Musonnafa & Djazuli, 2022).

Customers and businesses alike know that customer happiness is one of the most essential elements to ensure success. However, unlike a few decades ago, corporations today

are involved in more than just internal competition to make their clients happy. Rather than the industry participants, supply ties are now the focal point of competition within a given industry. Even though client happiness has been the subject of extensive research for many years, most of the literature concentrates on the satisfaction of retail customers rather than industrial ones (Shin, 2015). Most recent studies on customer satisfaction have focussed on consumer products and services. According to Pham (2019), most consumer goods and services studies recently link satisfaction to a distinct interaction. However, research on industrial customer satisfaction has shown how crucial supplier-customer connections are (Yahin et al., 2016). Porter (1996) contends that any activity in a company's value stream that doesn't improve or give it a competitive advantage should be outsourced to a company that can perform it for less money. By doing this, the company expands its network of suppliers beyond its internal framework. The industrial sector views customer pleasure as a relationship-specific concept rather than a transaction-specific one (Shin, 2015). This is brought on by expanding global markets and their interconnectedness and the rise in international corporate collaboration (Coe, Yeung, & Yeung, 2015).

According to Raj et al. (2017), industrial client fulfilment is a relationship-specific design that describes how well an organisation satisfies a client's needs in the following areas: services, management of complaints, management of orders, communication with the internal staff, and managing product characteristics. Customer happiness in the industrial sector is directly related to the calibre of goods and services offered to them, and it is essential for any business to strive for outstanding and continual improvement (Chalikias et al., 2016). Industrial clients' happiness is linked to business performance and creating a competitive edge, just like consumers. However, it turns out that industrial consumer satisfaction is far more intricate (Homburg & Rudolph, 2001).

Consumers are becoming increasingly picky about the quality of the goods and services they receive daily (Pham 2019). They insist that the goods or service they pay for must satisfy their requirements, be of excellent quality, and be provided at a reasonable cost. Gaining an advantage over competitors, the company must also fundamentally alter its approach to customer relationship management, which encompasses communication across organisational boundaries, particularly between suppliers, manufacturers, and consumers, who are all connected in the production chain (Panayiotou et al., 2020). In addition, it is a reality that any business, no matter what industry it works in, must figure out how to remain profitable and competitive while retaining its current clientele and drawing in new ones (Yahin et al., 2016).

In light of this, CRM comes in as an aid to draw in more satisfaction and industry performance. CRM may be divided into four main branches that may necessitate the project-engagement role of industries based on an analysis of numerous studies published in reputable journals: strategic, analytical, collaborative, and operational (Wahlberg et al., 2009). According to Soltani and Navimipour (2016), strategic CRM is the systematic analysis and use of customer data as the promotional management system's platform for operation. Analytical CRM entails several data analyses for market effectiveness (Ranjan & Bhatnagar, 2010). According to Kampani and Jhamb (2020), collaborative customer relationship management (CRM) collaborates across many communication channels, including email and web pages, to provide a more vital message.

The gas industry in Qatar can leverage Customer Relationship Management (CRM) methods and capabilities to improve its performance and foster stronger interactions between partners and consumers. Strategic CRM can help divide Customers in the gas

business into groups according to several factors, including the type of industry, geography, and usage habits (Iriana & Buttle, 2007). Furthermore, the firm can ascertain the consumer lifetime value of its clients with the aid of Strategic CRM. The industry can maximise customer relationship investments and more effectively manage resources by knowing the long-term worth of consumers (Damm & Rodríguez Monroy, 2011). Energy providers can use analytical CRM to examine information on pricing plans, projections of demand, and consumption patterns. According to Ranjan and Bhatnagar (2010), this data-driven strategy can improve market effectiveness and optimise demand and supply. The gas business can gather opinions and recommendations from stakeholders and customers by using collaborative CRM (Kracklauer, 2004). This insightful feedback can be utilised to resolve problems, enhance services, and enhance overall customer experience.

Service marketing in the Gas Industry

Since implementing its gas strategy in the middle of the 1990s, Qatar has evolved from a political and financial wilderness to a small but comparatively significant sovereign actor in the global system (Miller, 2020). It rose to the top of the LNG export rankings globally in 2010 (Kirat, 2015). During the same time frame, it became a mediator with a forward-thinking, multifaceted, and sometimes contentious foreign policy involvement in the Arab and larger Muslim nations. Developments in technology and management are driving a significant upsurge in the discovery and production of oil and gas (Maugeri, 2012). Among many oil and gas-producing and supplying countries, Qatar has witnessed this. However, a few other things have also contributed to this, one of which is that Qatar has been a significant supplier of gas and oil to several nations worldwide (Krane & Wright, 2014). Technology and Qatar's convenient production of high-quality gas and oil have contributed to the country's increasing

recognition as a provider. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine further enhanced Qatar's prominence as the leading gas and oil provider. Undoubtedly, Qatar has achieved an excellent reputation and surpassed most barriers in promoting its services.

Service marketing is one of the most critical tasks in the oil and gas sector (Akinyele, 2010). Consumers must be informed through advertising about the degree of effectiveness and long-term financial advantages available to them. The degree of integration between marketing initiatives and consumer value generation determines how successful an advertising approach will be (Rosário & Raimundo, 2021). The advertising focus of a company is crucial for oil and gas companies. Moreover, the marketing focus is the foundation for a business's approach to marketing, resource acquisition, allocation, and utilisation, all of which are directed toward accomplishing a predetermined purpose, target, or aim (Shehata, 2020). Namagembe (2022) asserts that by aligning competencies with potential markets, marketing focus empowers businesses to be driven by demand. Providers must keep one step ahead of the fiercely competitive oil and gas sector competition. Customer satisfaction has been a widely acknowledged tool in service marketing efforts in recent years. O'Sullivan and McCallig (2016) assert that a company's worth is positively impacted by its client satisfaction.

Additionally, a company must have funds to fund their marketing strategies. This could be costly in the oil and gas industry, as they must advertise their services locally and globally (Tordo et al., 2013). One of the ways these companies have found effective in maintaining efficient service marketing is outsourcing. Companies typically outsource non-core tasks and tasks requiring specialised knowledge and equipment to specialised firms that can provide these services more effectively and affordably (Kolawole & Agha, 2015). Businesses outsource jobs to guarantee output, realise cost savings, and enhance service performance and delivery

capacity (Bustinza, Arias-Aranda, & Gutierrez-Gutierrez, 2010). The service provider gains partial authority and accountability over these operations. Generally speaking, outsourcing is viewed as a long-term tactical service marketing choice (Kolawole & Agha, 2015). Companies in the oil and gas sector frequently contract out tasks, including facility building and alteration, geological harvesting, drill completion, and drilling activities. Recently, several operators have resorted to contracting out the management and upkeep of their manufacturing facilities to specialised businesses that can operate the facilities at lower costs (Toluwase, 2017). In doing so, the company saves operational expenses and can use this to market its services.

Apart from those above, broad marketing research indicates that there may be a relationship between marketing perspective and marketing abilities. Marketing focus is a requirement for marketing capabilities (Szromnik, 2019); it also helps businesses develop more valuable capabilities (Varadarajan, 2020); strong marketing introductions are associated with superior advertising capabilities (Faroque et al., 2021); it is a prerequisite to features (Murray, Gao, & Kotabe, 2011); and some researchers argue that marketing orientation influences marketing strategy. It has been discovered that marketing strategy is built upon the focus on marketing. According to Kanagal (2017), marketing focus is the capacity of the company to tailor its advertising strategy to the consumer's needs and continuously modify it in response to shifts in the industry and business context. The notions of marketing approach and focus on marketing have been introduced previously. Nevertheless, most of the research elucidating the connections between these ideas is primarily speculative.

The core goal of the marketing concept and its variations, such as the whole quality control concept, is to effectively serve the requirements and desires of customers (Faroque et al., 2021). Choosing an audience to be successful and creating an effective combination of

marketing ingredients are natural steps in developing and executing efficient and effective marketing strategies that incorporate pertinent aspects of the marketing concept (Varadarajan, 2020). The services sector has rapidly embraced marketing theory and practice (Berry & Parasuraman, 2004). Part of the literature addresses the question of how tangible good marketing differs or is comparable to service marketing, and it concludes that the distinctions between the two may have more to do with emphasis than with nature or kind. Marketing is one of the prominent and crucial natural roles that support service firms in overcoming obstacles in their business and achieving their aims and objectives (Akinyele, 2011).

According to a study by Vechiato (2012), Organisational strategists in the oil and gas sector may need help implementing strategic marketing due to the uncertainty and volatility of environmental elements. Organisational managers need assistance with various variables when creating and executing effective marketing strategies. The efficiency and efficacy of managers regarding strategic marketing concerns are impacted by the generally astounding interactions between environmental elements (Akinyele, 2011). Still, tailored offerings have always helped companies maintain closer ties with their customers. According to the theory behind partnership marketing, a business must first connect with each client through the services it offers to maintain better client relationships (Berry, 1995). The gas and oil industries can use this in their service marketing to create more networks.

2.7 Service Marketing and CRM in Qatar under the Sanctions Regime

Based on the discussion in the previous section, it is apparent that sector-specific characteristics significantly influence service marketing and CRM activities, which account for the differences in these past studies. Considering that Qatar has adopted a differentiation strategy in some of these sectors, such as tourism, while the banking and technology sector is influenced by regulatory mandates, the services marketing and CRM activities are bound to feature custom and generic strategies, including the elements predicted under the rational choices theory above.

The response feature changes to services marketing, including variations to the services marketing mix and the CRM activities. Some of these techniques are derived from pre-existing strategies implemented to elevate Qatar from a diplomatic and soft-power perspective, including creating Brand-Qatar, while others were designed purposefully for the evolving challenge. The study by Khodr (2021) indicated that Qatar has gradually and consistently placed itself on the itinerary for meetings by experts, professionals and technocrats by expanding its role and contribution to regional and global finance, politics, sports, trade, industry and culture. Some of these events are annual and cumulative, enabling the country to attract visitors while reasserting itself as an indispensable party to decision-making and formulating strategies on a horde of global events. These actions were crucial in how customers and suppliers responded to the services marketing and CRM activities under the sanctions regime.

The effects can also be understood from the perspective of the resistive economy strategies. Seyfi and Hall (2018) utilise the term resistive economy to describe the situation in

which a country finds itself after a sanctions regime is deployed by another nation(s). The resistive economy denotes the multiplicity of coping mechanisms and responses a country deploys after sanctions are imposed upon its economic and political systems. Isaac, Hall, and Higgins-Desbiolles (2015) also applied the term to the situation facing Palestine following the blockades deployed by Israel on Gaza. The objectives of a resistive economy are to nullify the adverse effects of the sanctions imposed on a country while establishing mechanisms to reinforce the country's self-sufficiency. As Smyth (2016) indicated, the strategies feature fiscal policies, technological innovation improvement, sustainability focus, and the development of novel international relationships. More literature on the structure and efficacy of resistive economies needs to be published. The contemporary punishment theory predicts that the adverse economic effects of sanctions lead to political pressure within the domestic governance frameworks, thereby forcing the current leader to submit to the demands under the sanctions regime (Seyfi & Hall, 2018). Such pressure originates from citizens and corporations, with corporations utilising multiple novel strategies to achieve their goals under the restrictive economy.

The role of news and information on media platforms is also evident as an influence in marketing services and CRM activities. The data, information, and knowledge provided through media influence individuals' emotions, perceptions, decisions, and community members (Pratt & Alizadeh, 2018). The study by Al-Maadid et al. (2019b) examines the role of business and political news from different media channels on the stock market. The analysis relies on econometric models to determine the differences in the effects of the type of news on the returns in the stock market, which is a reliable determinant of the changes in the market in general. The findings reveal that stock markets respond more to business news than political news.

Similarly, media reports on reliable platforms have the most significant effects due to the magnification across borders. The outcomes are predicted by Caporale, Spagnolo and Spagnolo (2018), who indicate that, in most cases, developing nations cannot prevent the initial shocks from such news. These findings also highlight the rationale behind the conclusions in the study by Mitchell (2019). The study concludes that despite the novelty of social media and how it is deployed by the parties who implemented the blockade, it is simply a new battleground and an extension of pre-existing rivalries.

On a different note, by implementing measures to limit the effects of that news in specific dimensions, specifically the political arena, Qatar was able to limit the political fallout. These measures are founded on the premise that news and information's secondary and tertiary effects have self-propagating effects on the economy, hence the need to employ services marketing and CRM strategies to prevent such outcomes. Al-Maadid et al. (2019a) investigate the role of political tensions on the performance of the stock markets in the GCC. The study relies on econometric modelling to determine the effects of political tensions, which tend to influence the inter-country activities associated with trade and security and, ultimately, the level of certainty and trust in the sector. The findings reveal that the crisis led to a reduction in the performance of stock markets based on returns-based metrics. The tensions also led to increased volatility, which influenced decisions on investment and the provision of capital. The findings from this study reaffirm the rationale for the national government's involvement in influencing services marketing and CRM in the financial sector, as described in the study by Ali (2020).

The study by Ali (2020) focuses on determining the effects of the economic blockade on Qatari banks through a comparison between Islamic and conventional banks. The study is

founded on the premise that there are differences in the operational and strategic norms that influence services marketing and customer relationship management between Islamic Banks (IBs) and conventional banks (CBs), among other variables. Furthermore, the study posits that these differences influence the performance of the institutions under the categorisation, thereby providing insights into whether the fundamental differences between the two financial systems are relevant to the outcomes. In addition to group-wise comparison, the study performs a time-specific analysis of the changes in the industry. The analysis relies on data from 4IBs and 5CBs, collected from 2015 to 2019 and separated into the pre- and post-blockade periods. The data is analysed through t-tests focusing on the financial ratios. The findings reveal that IBs outperform CBs, albeit slightly.

There was, however, a marked influence on the banking sector due to the blockade. These effects can be attributed to a multiplicity of measures designed by Qatar to enhance service marketing and customer relationships while operating under the resistive economic model. First, the government injected US\$40B from its sovereign fund into the financial sector, with an additional US\$19B from the public sector institutions and US\$9B from the Qatar Central Bank (QCB) (Ali, 2020). These measures led to an increase in deposits by non-residents by US\$9B a year from when the crisis first hit. Similarly, Qatari commercial banks, comprised of IBs and CBs, reported a 3% growth in the loans to the service sector, 8% growth in consumption loans (by customers), an 11% increase in assets, 13% growth in credit facilities from other banks, 15% growth in loans to domestic institutions, and a 42% growth in cash and cash equivalents. The study attributes the changes in operations that influence services marketing and CRM to several factors. First, the QCB imposed guidelines on the reporting and oversight mechanisms to enhance the risk aversion of the CBs, with mandates to adopt IFRS 9 as a replacement for IAS 39 (Ali, 2020). Mahmoud (2018) points out that changes in

accounting principles influence how banking institutions deliver services to their customers. The mandates led to changes in the manner in which CBs classify their assets, derivatives, and liabilities as a way of mitigating possible volatility and impairment. This led to an increase in the capital reserves by CBs as a way of harmonising the perceived and actual risk between CBs and IBs in the country. The mandates are influential in regulating the services marketing practices since they limit some of the dimensions through which the services by CBs are perceived as being different from those of IBs.

Qatar also implemented sector-specific strategies for the tourism sector due to the uniqueness of the service models utilised by the country. Yap et al. (2020) studied the effects of the blockade on the arrival of international tourists into Qatar, with the primary objective of investigating whether the changes in the prevailing circumstances influenced the sector. The study used the standard tourism demand model but introduced a variable representing the effects of the blockade and a dummy variable for testing the political incidence, with specifications of the durations over which the blockade was in place. Other variables taken into account include the effects of the origin and destination of the tourists, to integrate the effects of competitiveness of Qatar as a tourist destination, perceptions towards the reputation of the country, as well as the openness of the country to international trade.

The measures are supported by a study by Seyfi and Hall (2019), who identified the effects of politically motivated sanctions on both inbound and outbound tourism performance. The effects of sanctions influence the movement of nationals and foreigners while creating psychological uncertainties for foreigners who lack assurances of protection while in a foreign country. The ambiguous nature of sanctions also contributes to the persistent and pervasive negative views of the destination, with those risks associated with

other forms of travel into and outside the country. Avraham and Ketter (2016) further indicate that the imposition of sanctions by or on one country leads to a change in the views of that destination, with tourists preferring alternative destinations. As a result, lifting the sanctions may have limited effects on reversing the adverse effects. Due to the dependency of the sustainability of the tourism industry on a continuous inflow of travellers, the decrease in numbers, even in the short run, can set off a chain of events that leads to more significant effects in terms of the marketability and attractiveness of the industry. These outcomes, which were also studied by Hall (1994) and more recently by Pratt and Alizadeh (2018), include the revenue drop leading to the loss of crucial workforce and capital resources. However, some researchers who focused on specific case studies revealed that using the right service marketing tools and strategies can fast-track the recovery of the tourism sector in the post-sanctions period. Seyfi and Hall (2018), who researched the tourism industry in Iran, indicated that following the temporary suspension of sanctions in 2015, there was an increase in the number of inbound tourists to 5 million, nearly three times what was reported in 2010. Despite these changes, researchers such as Hall (2017) and Khodadadi (2018) pointed out that the country faced challenges in achieving pre-sanction performance due to the inability to offer assurances of the quality of service and safety of travellers. In developing solutions to the current problem, Khodadadi (2018) found that Iran targeted tourism services marketing to countries not involved in the sanctions. A different case study by Rastorguev, Belokonev and Pyrma (2018) investigates the effects of sanctions on Russia's tourism industry. The political and economic sanctions from major European and US countries created the perception that Russia is an unattractive destination, decreasing inbound tourist arrivals. However, there was an influx of tourists from countries that opposed the sanctions, including China.

In addition to being the least unpalatable option for coercing Qatar into capitulating to the demands under the Saudi-led front, using a blockade is effective due to the extensive integration of information, technology, communication and trade activities in the regionalised and globalised world. These domains of integration are integral to the operations of corporations and citizens in the target country, as well as those from other countries. According to Avraham (2015), corporations and individuals need differing sanction-oriented bottlenecks to engage in business, especially if the sanctions are framed to cut off or compromise primary markets or sources of raw materials/ inputs. This explains the differences in B2B and B2C services marketing approaches.

Happold and Eden (2019) indicate that over time, the deployment of sanctions has morphed from the comprehensive sanctions regime, which has extensive adverse effects on the domestic systems of the targeted country, to more 'smart' or targeted sanctions, such as the blockade on Qatar, which is premised on its fulfilment of specific requirements. As a result, rather than utilise a methodology and structure of sanctions that paint the originator of the blockade as an overbearing entity compromising the sovereignty and freedoms of the target nation, the current blockade is framed in a manner that paints Qatar as being responsible for the outcomes for failing to fulfil the requirements for lifting of the sanctions. The scenario obfuscates the antagonist-protagonist duality in such scenarios, raising the need for an in-depth analysis through research.

2.8 Conceptual Gaps and Theoretical Basis to Examine the Problem at Hand

The current focus of investigation in this proposed study is very new – barely two years – and empirical studies on the political blockade in Qatar and its effects on marketing services and customer relationships are very limited if not none. In addition, it is recognised that a Middle Eastern country like Qatar has limited published studies on services marketing and customer relationships, lacking empirical studies. With the infancy of the issue at hand, the ongoing political blockade in Qatar has been based mainly on online news articles, and attempts at examining and analysing it within a broad research spectrum are presently lacking. These areas are, therefore, rich spaces for future research that may be suitably undertaken about Qatar's services marketing and customer relationship management. As a result, the extant literature lacks links between Qatar's political blockade and the present state of its services marketing and customer relationship management. There are, however, a few recent separate studies on services marketing in sectors like banking (e.g., Askoul *et al.*, 2016; Tabash and Dhankar, 2016), m-commerce (Khan *et al.*, 2015; Musa *et al.*, 2015), and tourism (Henderson, 2014; Morakabati *et al.*, 2014). Additional studies informed by theories based on services marketing and CRM (and, in general, the responses at a national and sector level) under a sanctions regime are also reviewed. Those relating to the banking sector include Ali (2020), who studies the CRM and services marketing under the banking sector in Qatar during the current blockade, focusing on IBs vs CBs. Al-Maadid *et al.* (2019a) and Al-Maadid *et al.* (2019b) study the stock market's response to unexpected news and changes in the political climate. Among those related to the tourism sector include Khodadadi (2018), who studies the Iranian tourism sector under the sanctions regime by the US. These studies reveal

that countries must change their services marketing and CRM activities in response to the sanctions regime, with the decision influenced by the prevailing circumstances. Due to the uniqueness of the sanctions regime under the current blockade, it is apparent that there is a gap between the existing body of knowledge on how a country responds to a sanctions regime and how Qatar has responded to the ongoing political blockade. These gaps relate to Qatar's services marketing and customer relationship and their effectiveness for the intended purpose.

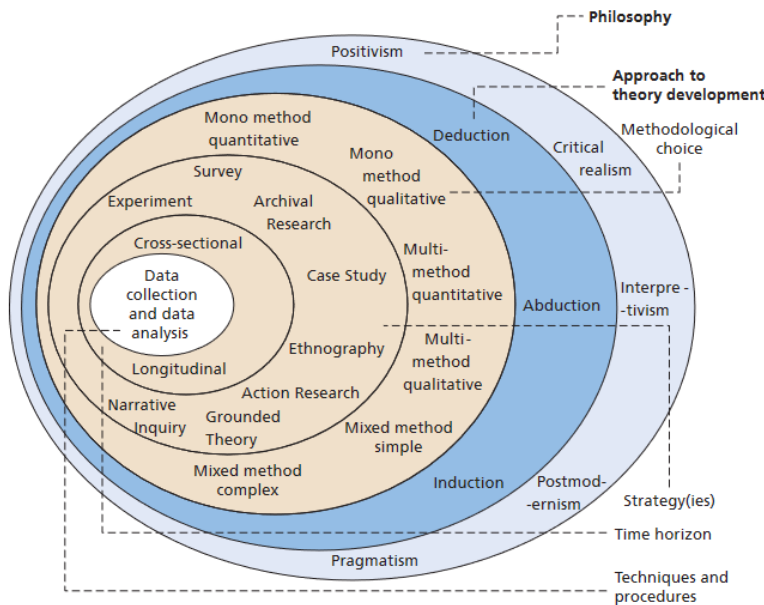
While Qatar experienced unrest and some uncertainty in the current market environment due to economic restrictions imposed by the so-called quartet, these issues have impacted Qatar dramatically. For example, the problems have considerably impacted regional travel, as exemplified by Qatar Airways being forced to block all flights to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, and Egypt. Their governments also suspended several airlines in the region from flying to and from Qatar (International Trade Administration, 2019). The rational choices available for Qatar to respond to such a situation left it with selecting what could best work for the country's economy. This discussion is helpful in the proposed study as it clarifies the effects of the political blockade on Qatar, which can solicit ideas regarding the extent of its impact on the marketing services sector and customer relationship management.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section presents the methods of research used to tackle the research questions. It provides a systematic direction for the research investigation. It discusses the study's research design (qualitative), research philosophy (interpretive), sampling technique (purposive sampling), data analysis method (thematic analysis), and ethical considerations. Since the research focused on social sciences, the methodology was modelled around the research onion in the figure below.

Figure 11: Research Onion Model



Source: Saunders et al. (2019).

3.2 Research Philosophy

Saunders et al. (2019) define the research philosophy as how the study's reality is interpreted and defined. As a guiding framework for the study, the preferred philosophy influences how the researcher makes sense of the findings from the study and, ultimately, the conclusions drawn from the project. Five philosophical paradigms can be used in the study. However, Novikov and Novikov (2013) indicate that not all paradigms apply to research in social sciences. For this study, the research philosophy is identified from a continuum of choices from the definition of the reality about the research topic in a rigid and scientifically constructed manner (positivist) or a flexible and socially constructed approach (Interpretivist).

Saunders et al. (2019) define the positivist paradigm as a philosophy whereby the reality of the research is defined as is. It emphasises the understanding of the meaning and experiences of human actors in social contexts based on the premise that reality is subjective and socially constructed. The utility of this scientifically constructed reality lies in physical sciences, whereby prevailing circumstances do not influence observations and conclusions from such observations. Seawright (2016) indicated that positivism is utilised in studies where extensive background information and knowledge regarding all potential outcomes and their implications have been determined in past studies. In the context of Qatar services and CRM during the blockade, a positivism approach would focus on quantifiable data (economic indicators, statistical scores, and market performance) to analyse the blockade's impact. As a result, the reality does not vary depending on the social actors in the study. Positivism presents numerous limitations when examining Qatar's CRM and services marketing strategies during the blockade. While positivism focuses on quantifiable data, it overlooks

complex cultural and social-political dynamics that influenced Qatar's strategic response to the effects of the blockade. The blockade's impact on CRM and services marketing is embedded in specific cultural, political, and historical contexts, which may need to be fully examined through quantitative analysis alone.

Furthermore, positivism aims to simplify phenomena into measurable valuables, neglecting the multifaceted nature of organisational strategies and human behaviours, whereby measures taken by Qatar in response to the effects of Qatar are likely to be influenced by external and internal factors that a positivist approach may not capture. In addition, the Qatar situation is dynamic, which demands a flexible research approach which does not apply to the rigid structure of positivism. In general, the Positivism approach fails to be an ideal approach for this study due to the presented limitations of inflexibility to evolving situations, use of a reductionist approach, and lack of contextual sensitivity.

On the other hand, the interpretivist perspective entails the definition of reality based on the researcher's interpretation. According to Saunders et al. (2019), the outcome variations depend on the interests, views, past experiences and knowledge of the researcher as a social actor. As Hesse-Biber and Johnson (2015) indicated, interpretive philosophy embraces the view that all knowledge is based on human practices and is formed out of human interactions and interactions between individuals and the world around them conveyed within a social framework. It holds that human beings are confronted by multiple realities, which should be understood contextually. Furthermore, it views the social world as something that can be investigated regarding people's use of language, meanings, and symbols. Since it assumes that knowledge and meaning emanate from interpretation, interpretive philosophy holds that objective reality is separate from the observer's frame of

reference and that the observation process induces reality (Klenke, 2008). Therefore, unlike the positivism approach, interpretivism approach is well suited for this study because the approach is inherently flexible and adaptable, acknowledges the interconnectedness and complexity of social phenomena, and provides rich contextual insights through in-depth explorations of how the Qatar blockade impacted Qatar's CRM and services marketing, and the emphasis on human experience through the engagement of marketing professionals, customers, researchers, and business leaders.

The resultant research philosophy of this research was interpretive due to the novel nature of the research topic and the need for past studies on the research area. Similarly, due to the ongoing nature of the research topic, the dynamic nature of reality limits the utility of rigid and scientifically definitive research paradigms. The review of literature and background information about the research topic reveals that in fulfilling the research goals, the researcher must take into the views of the individuals who provide the data and understand them based on the context. Interpretivism approach involves conducting qualitative studies, such as focus groups and interviews, to gather in-depth information on how the Qatar blockade has impacted services marketing strategies and CRM. This approach also directs the researcher to explore how social, political, and cultural contexts influence marketing strategies and CRM to gain rich and detailed insights into the impacts of the blockade from multiple perspectives.

3.3 Approaches to the Development of Theories

The development of theories about the research topic is an integral phase of the study, in addition to signposting how the findings will be interpreted concerning the existing knowledge base and the development of theories. Saunders et al. (2019) identify three

approaches: deductive, inductive and abductive. Deductive development of theories entails the application of existing models, theories and knowledge to formulate hypotheses about the study (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). The approach is facilitated by sufficient background knowledge of the research topic, thus making it possible for the researcher to identify variables, develop and test hypotheses based on normative knowledge, and then utilise the knowledge to interpret the outcome of hypothesis testing.

On the contrary, the inductive approach involves the use of the findings from the current study to develop theories, models and hypotheses about the relationships between the variables (Seawright, 2016). Since the approach is utilised when there is a need for more knowledge about the research topic, it is impossible to test the hypotheses developed in the study. Abduction involves a combination of deductive and inductive approaches.

In this study, the inductive approach was adopted. In line with the justification for selecting the interpretivist philosophical paradigm, the processes of developing theories about the study will be informed by the lack of previous studies in the area of knowledge. As a result, the researcher utilised the study's findings to develop hypotheses since the lack of knowledge from previous empirical studies limits the possibility of hypothesis testing. The induction enabled the researcher to contextualise the findings based on the prevailing circumstances. Therefore, the interpretivism approach guided the researcher to perform a thorough and nuanced literature review to critically engage with various perspectives and interpretations and provide a richer foundation for this study. Furthermore, interpretivism approach necessitated the choice of qualitative methods to identify specific measures undertaken by Qatar services industries to maintain services and CRM. Lastly, the interpretivism approach helped uncover Qatar's economic robustness and provided the

necessary tools to assess how different strategies were experienced and perceived by various service industry stakeholders.

3.4 Methodological Approach

The study employed a qualitative research design grounded in interpretivism to assess how Qatar managed its services marketing and CRM strategies in the wake of the economic and political blockade. A qualitative study approach captures stakeholders' complex and subjective experiences through textual materials, such as interview transcripts, which are essential for understanding comprehensive adaptations and responses to the blockade (Saldana, 2011). As opposed to quantitative research, qualitative research focuses on the investigation of phenomena using an insider perspective. It adopts interpretive perspectives and demonstrates that power is embodied in social frameworks. The qualitative design embedded in this proposed research assumes a social construction of reality. Moreover, the research design should be open to change during the research process (Lapan *et al.*, 2012).

The use of qualitative research design in this study is justified by the character of the research problem, which merits an in-depth investigation of services marketing and customer relationships in Qatar that quantitative design cannot provide. Ontologically, this study design is justified by its recognition that reality is context-dependent and socially constructed, which allows for the exploration of unique influencers of Qatar's responses to the blockade.

3.5 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling is a qualitative sampling technique that selects the sample using a set of criteria (Emmel, 2013). Purposive sampling was used to ensure that interview

participants were selected based on their experience and relevance to the research topic and objectives, specifically those impacted by the blockade in the context of CRM and services marketing. Purpose sampling is essential as it allows for collecting context-rich and detailed data from people who possess the required first-hand and in-depth insights into the adaptations and strategies used by Qatari service businesses during the blockade. The criteria that were used to select the interview participants were:

(1) The target participants held a position in their organisation that allowed them to talk about the existing state of marketing services/customer relationships despite the present economic impositions on Qatar;

(2) The target participants were either a general manager, marketing manager, or sales manager of a bank, tourism business, or technology company.

(3) They were willing to participate in the study.

By focusing on these key informants, the study delved into the nuanced perspectives and subjective experiences crucial to understanding complexities in the economic and socio-political realities faced by the Qatar services industry during the blockade, which general random sampling techniques may miss. Therefore, purposeful sampling ensures that the data collected is specific, highly relevant, meaningful, and comprehensive to understand the phenomena under investigation (Emmel, 2013).

3.6 Data Collection Technique

The data collection process for this study involved using a qualitative interview method to capture the rich and in-depth insights and experiences of purposefully selected individuals directly impacted by the blockade in the services industry. According to Jamshed

(2014), interviews allow researchers to gather first-hand and uncensored insights into how the study participants (business leaders and marketing professionals) perceived and responded to the impacts of the blockade. This study is designed to gather first-hand information from the study participants to gain rich, in-depth knowledge on services marketing and CRM strategies in Qatar during the blockade, which aligns with Jamshed's 2014 explanation of the kind of data collected through qualitative interviews. An interview schedule was developed for this purpose. Ten participants from three companies in the tourism sector, banking sector, and technology sector of Qatar were involved in the interviews. The interviewees included these companies' general, marketing, and sales managers. The use of these companies for data collection is justified because the blockade directly influences their industries, and their marketing services and customer relationship activities are integral to their success. Similarly, the framing of the blockade targeted these industries because of their centrality to the dominance and prominence of Qatar.

The interviews were conducted through a semi-structured approach. According to Saunders et al. (2019), the semi-structured approach entails using a loosely defined approach to collecting data, with a guide in questioning and investigation. The preference for the semi-structured approach is two-pronged: On one hand, the researcher/interviewer has sufficient knowledge, based on the literature review, to appreciate what is relevant in fulfilling the research objectives, thus making it possible to develop an interview guide. On the other hand, the interviewees, comprised of managers in their respective organisations, have unique knowledge about the research topic to contribute data and information unavailable in existing publications. As a result, the researcher may find it necessary to adjust the line of questioning to capture all dimensions of the findings. The semi-structured, in-depth character of the interviews sheds light on the performances of these companies amidst the present

blockade imposed on Qatar by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt on the country. It should also be noted that a small sample is not an issue in qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, which gives a high premium to generalisability, which means that the findings should be generalised to the given population (Given, 2008).

3.7 Data Analysis Method

The determination of the data analysis methodology is derived from the tenets of the interpretivist perspective, the inductive approach to the development of theories, and the qualitative methodological approach. Edson, Henning and Sankaran (2016) identify several methodologies for analysing qualitative data, including thematic analysis and content analysis. The interview data was analysed thematically. According to Saunders et al. (2019), thematic analysis involves the identification of themes and patterns of these themes from the qualitative data. In this process, themes and patterns from the data set will be identified and analysed in relation to the aim of the study. The thematic analysis considerably uses text segmentation, so that a clear segmentation strategy may be necessary (Guest *et al.*, 2012).

In this study, thematic analysis is deployed through the 7-phase methodology proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the approach to thematic analysis entails a multidirectional analysis of the findings, featuring back-and-forth progression from the first to the last phase. Due to the need for more structure in the data, the researcher includes the following.

First, the researchers familiarised themselves with the qualitative data collected through interviews. As indicated by Hesse-Biber and Johnson (2015), the process of familiarising themselves with the data starts way before the analysis begins, and the review

of background information during the literature review, as well as the process of conducting the interviews and transcribing the original data to text format. Clarke and Braun (2013) treat transcription as the phase during the thematic analysis due to the diversity of ways it can be carried out, including edited, intelligent and verbatim. In this study, the verbatim approach was adopted so the researcher could capture all aspects of the interviewees' verbal and non-verbal communication. This familiarisation was performed multiple times since it enabled the researcher to understand the views.

Second, the assignment of initial codes to the data, which are the descriptions of the data rather than the interpretation of what it means for the study (Goertz, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) state that these initial codes represent the initial outcome and are determined based on what is obvious about the data regarding the study's aims. The assignment of initial codes is also instituted during the data collection and transcription process since the researcher has a general idea regarding what is required from the analysis process.

Third, based on the codes, the researcher identified the themes and patterns in the codes, which determine the relevance and validity of the themes in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) indicated that the themes are derived from combining related themes.

Fourth, review themes to determine whether they fully represent the data and facilitate the fulfilment of the research aim and objectives. According to Clarke and Braun (2013), this review involves a reassessment of the data to determine whether the knowledge gained after the first analysis changes the content's relevance. The review is necessitated by the fact that with increased familiarisation with the data, the relationships between or among themes lead to downgrading to sub-themes and vice-versa.

Fifth, the themes were defined and named with descriptive and comprehensive critical analysis. The phase involved the definition of the essence of each theme, with the identification and inclusion of supporting evidence from the interview data. The critical analysis involves the identification of links between the themes to provide a complete picture of the respondents' views.

Finally, the report was developed to fulfil the research objectives. This study aimed to fulfil three objectives, with objectives 2 and 3, as well as the generic objective of providing recommendations and the development of theories and assertions about the research topics.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Saunders et al. (2019) highlight the importance of considering ethical considerations when conducting research involving human subjects. In addition to ensuring research integrity, ethical considerations influence the quality and substance of the study by providing credibility and integrity in the processes associated with contact with persons who provide data for the study (Ary *et al.*, 2019). The ethical considerations that were taken include the following. First, informed consent is when the research participants are informed of the purpose of the study and that participation is voluntary. As a result, since participating in this study is purely voluntary, the participants could withdraw at any point before the data analysis phase. At this phase, all data was included in the analysis despite the voluntary withdrawal of a participant. Second, measures to ensure data confidentiality include keeping the identity of the research participants anonymous. Third, measures to achieve privacy goals, whereby the data provided, including copies in audio and transcribed format, was secured in a password-protected database that can only be accessed by the researcher. The research participants may, however, request access, but only within two years. After this period, the

data will be eradicated, and access requests can no longer be accommodated. Fourth, the researcher utilised the principle of benevolence to ensure they took the necessary measures to prevent harm from befalling those who participated in the study. These measures were determined on a case-by-case basis. They also feature elements of respecting the social and cultural norms as well as the professional commitments of the participants. Finally, the researcher acknowledged the contribution of past researchers through the proper referencing methodology; the study ensured that all secondary data obtained from books, journal articles, and online sources were cited accordingly and entered into the reference page and within the text in the form of in-text citations (Troidi et al., 2012). This is integral since some of the data and information about the study were sourced from online publications.

3.9 Summary

This proposed study deals with services marketing and customer relationships in Qatar amid the continuous political blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt. The study aims to examine Qatar's services marketing and customer relations in light of the ongoing political blockade. It contributes to the wider research by emphasising this subject, first in the field of marketing within the Qatari context, thereby providing evidence for future research. A review of the literature was carried out in this study, focusing on services marketing and customer relationship management in the Gulf region, conceptual gaps, and a theoretical basis for examining the problem at hand. The rational choice theory embodies the theoretical basis to examine the problem. Alternatively, the study adopts a qualitative design, interpretive philosophy, interview method, purposive sampling, and thematic analysis method. Ethical considerations present the groundwork for ensuring the integrity of the

proposed study. These are informed consent, data confidentiality, voluntary withdrawal from the study, and proper citation of secondary information.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we delve into the results of the research, exploring a comprehensive landscape of Qatar Services Marketing and Customer Relationships under the political Blockade by Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain. The study findings provide a multi-faceted and interesting perception of how businesses approach economic blockades. A total of 7 responses were considered for analysis. The respondents were senior management officers in different industries, including insurance, oil, bank, commerce, healthcare, aviation, and the private sectors. Specifically, the study findings aim to reveal consumer shifts through consumer behaviour analysis and reveal the transformation in preferences and decision-making processes in the wake of the blockade. Therefore, the study will results include key factors influencing consumer choices in the face of geopolitical challenges like the Qatar Blockade. In addition, the data will reveal business managers' views on brand perception and loyalty based on their perceptions. The study findings will also reveal marketing strategies for adaptability and resilience adopted by various businesses to navigate through the restrictions imposed by the blockade. These may include the identification of areas and methods that require refinement and CRM amidst political uncertainty.

The study results concentrate on the Customer service dynamics to accommodate the shifting consumer expectations and maintain customer satisfaction. This may include exploring the role of innovation and technology in sustaining and evolving Business-to-customer relationships. It also observes the various innovative solutions by Qatari businesses to improve marketing and communication to bridge communication gaps. Through the

analysis of challenges faced by companies in maintaining CRM during the political blockade, the result reveals important patterns and similarities in decision-making and strategies used by various businesses to enhance CRM and identify unexpected opportunities that arise amid adversity. The results will look at multiple models used by different companies and sectors such as hospitality, tourism, and healthcare and unravel lessons learnt and the best practices for resilience and adaptability in a politically charged environment. In addition, the results section will be an important chapter that will inform a critical synthesis of trends and patterns and critically analyse the implications for the future of services marketing and CRM in a politically volatile environment. Therefore, the study findings will help the user gain a deeper understanding of the strategies used, the challenges overcome, and the lessons learned in the context of the Qatari Blockade.

4.2 General Perspectives on the Blockade

The question to enquire on respondent's views on the Qatar economic blockade is wide and nonspecific but essential to determine if the participants involved in the study have the necessary background knowledge, exposure, experience and expertise in handling the topic under investigation (marketing services and CRM during Qatar Blockade), it also helps to boost confidence in the reliability and validity of their answers to further questions in the study. Table 1 below shows themes and subthemes that have been generated from the general views of respondents on the economic blockade sanctioned on Qatar by some member states of the GCC.

Table 2: General Perspectives on the Blockade

Theme	Sub-theme	Quote example
Diplomatic relations	Diplomatic engagement	“A balanced approach, careful analysis, stakeholder consultation, and diplomatic engagement may be necessary to seek a resolution that promotes regional stability and economic growth” (respondent D).
	Diplomatic strain	“In 2017, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt imposed an economic boycott on Qatar, accusing it of sponsoring terrorism. Qatar refused to comply with their demands, resulting in severed diplomatic ties and a significant impact on its economy” (Respondent C).
Political Allegations	Media and Cyber Warfare	“In May and June 2017, hackers breached the Qatar News Agency and posted 'fake news' attributed to Qatar's Emir, which was picked up by Saudi and UAE media outlets” (Respondent F).
	Terrorism Accusations	Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt imposed an economic boycott on Qatar, accusing it of sponsoring terrorism. Qatar refused to comply with their demands, resulting in severed diplomatic ties and a significant impact on its economy. (Respondent E).
Economic impact	Long-term Economic strategies	“As a Director of an Aviation company, it is crucial to assess the risks and opportunities arising from the blockade and make informed decisions to ensure the company's long-term sustainability” (Respondent A).

	Disruption of Trade	“The Blockade on Qatar imposed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt in June 2017 severely impacted Qatar's economy due to the closure of borders and the imposition of economic sanctions” (Respondent A).
	Sector-specific disruption	“...has disrupted various sectors, including health and foreign affairs, impacting the import and export of goods and services...” (Respondent B).
	Economic and social upheaval	“Qatar has experienced economic upheaval, resulting in potential social and political unrest, with families facing separation, job losses, and denial of visitation rights” (Respondent C).
Humanitarian concerns	Impact of human rights	“...complaints have been lodged with Qatar's National Human Rights Committee, highlighting the effects of the blockade on people's lives” (Respondent C).
Resilience and Recovery	Diplomatic resolution	“The blockade was lifted in January 2021, and diplomatic relations were re-established” (Respondent E).
	Economic Adaptation	“Qatar has been able to withstand the blockade by diversifying its economy and developing closer economic ties with other countries” (Respondent A).

Table one reveals five main themes, including Resilience and recovery, Humanitarian concerns, Economic impact, political allegations and diplomatic relations, for which the views

of the seven respondents from various industries revolve. From the table, it can be noted that the respondents mention a range of sanctions imposed on Qatar, ranging from border closure, travel restrictions, and diplomatic disagreements. Furthermore, it is observed that the respondents were able to identify the effects of the economic blockade, including economic effects, effects on health, impact on foreign affairs, and political and social effects. Indicated by the following subthemes: diplomatic strain, sector-specific disruption, disruption of trade, economic and social upheaval and impact on human rights. In addition, the table shows that the respondents were able to mention both in-place and desired solutions to the blockade indicated by the following subthemes: Economic adaptation, diplomatic resolution, and diplomatic engagement. To be specific, these solutions include diversification of the economy, commitment to unity and stability of GCC member states and development of economic ties with other countries. It can also be noted that the respondents were able to outline some of the reasons for the blockade, including media and cyber warfare and Terrorism accusations.

4.3 The Main Reasons for the Blockade

Examining the reasons for the Qatar blockade from the perspective of business managers and CEOs is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by businesses in times of geopolitical turmoil. Understanding the reasons for the economic blockade and its implications for business managers is essential in understanding the level of preparedness of management to navigate through uncertainties, explore alternative markets, foster adaptability and resilience, and adjust supply chains. In addition, knowledge of the factors behind the economic blockade helps shape effective advocacy strategies, engage in diplomatic efforts, and leverage their influence to advocate for peaceful resolutions.

The table below shows results on the reasons for the economic blockade mentioned by the respondents.

Table 3: Reasons for the Blockade

Theme	Sub-theme	Quotes
Terrorism allegations	Sponsoring extremism	"...Accusation of sponsoring terrorism..." (Respondent D).
	Islamist Organization	"Qatar's cultivation of relationships with opposition groups, particularly those linked to the Muslim Brotherhood" (Respondent B).
	Support for Terrorism	"...Alleged support for Islamist organisations like the Muslim Brotherhood..." (Respondent D). "...Alleged support of state-sponsored Islamic extremism" (Respondent C).
Diplomatic relations	Establishment of Iran's relationship with Turkey	"The presence of a Turkish military installation on Qatari territory" "...Alleged connections with Iran" (respondent D).
	Regional tensions	"...Diplomatic crisis in the region" (Respondent D). "Longstanding tensions between Qatar and neighbouring countries" (Respondent B).

Specific incidents	Historical events	<p>“Withdrawal of ambassadors by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt in March 2014, citing Qatar's alleged interference in their internal affairs” (Respondent B).</p> <p>“Deteriorating relations with Egypt after condemning the coup in 2013” (Respondent B).</p>
External influences	International influence	“...Support and opposition from various countries regarding the Blockade” (Respondent D).
Sovereignty	Issues with Qatar Sovereignty	“Qatar denied the allegations and viewed the blockade as an attempt to curtail its sovereignty” (Respondent A).
	Increased independence of Qatar	“Concerns about Qatar's growing independence in foreign affairs” (Respondent B).
Propaganda and Media	Fake News and hacking	“...Hacking of Qatar News Agency and circulation of "fake news" story” (Respondent F).
	Media coverage	<p>“Criticism of Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring protests...” (Respondent B).</p> <p>“...Media onslaught portraying Qatar as a destabilising regional actor” (respondent F).</p>
Political and Economic factors	Economic and political tensions	“Other factors, such as political and economic tensions between the countries involved, also likely played a role” (Respondent E).

The table reveals a complex conglomerate of reasons leading to the Blockade of Qatar by other GCC countries, primarily revolving around maintaining contentious relations and supporting terrorism. Accusations of Qatar supporting Islamic organisations and terrorist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, along with controversial ties with Turkey and Iran, appear to be the principal reasons for the blockade. The study respondents underscore the implication of these reasons to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and UAE, as they were perceived as threats to these countries, leading to the severing of diplomatic relations. In addition, the table highlights the role of propaganda and media, with mentions of critical media coverage and hackers propagating fake news, leading to tensions. Furthermore, economic and political disputes, including concerns over Qatar's policy of independence, further led to the financial blockade. In summary, the embargo is a result of complex issues revolving around regional influence, sovereignty, and the reaction of international actors, creating contentious and challenging geopolitical tension in the GCC economic region.

4.4 Financial Implications of the Blockade for Services Business

Finance is an important element in the economy, and it is important to look at the financial implications of Qatari businesses during the economic blockade. For instance, export-oriented has disrupted learning, reduced production, and led to potential layoffs and financial instability. In addition, import-dependent industries grapple with the scarcity of raw materials, supply chain disruptions, and increased cost of production. Moreover, exchange rates escalate due to exchange rate fluctuations and currency devaluation. Table 6 below

shows some financial implications for business operations due to the economic blockade in Qatar.

Table 4: Financial Implications of the Blockade

Theme	subtheme	Quotes
Decline of Revenue	Decreased Business Activities	“The blockade disrupted trade and financial flows, which led to a decrease in business activities in the region” (respondent E).
	Reduced demand for services	“The banking sector was particularly affected as the reduced economic activity resulted in decreased demand for loans and other financial services” (respondent E). “The economic Blockade on Qatar had significant financial implications for the aviation company, including rerouting of flights, supply chain disruption, and decreased demand for flights, resulting in losses in revenue” (respondent A).
	Impact on Government Revenue	“Limited trade and economic relations with Qatar resulted in reduced government revenue” (Responded B).
Disruption of the Supply Chain	Shortages and Delays	“The blockade also affected the supply chain of Shell's operations in Qatar, as many goods and services had to be sourced from other countries due to the restrictions imposed by the blockade. This led to delays in project timelines and increased costs for Shell” (respondent F). “The supply chain was disrupted, and businesses had to look for alternative routes to import and export their goods, which resulted in additional costs” (Respondent C).

	Increased Cost	<p>“It also affected the cost of goods and services, as prices increased due to supply chain disruptions and restrictions on trade” (Respondent B)</p> <p>“This resulted in decreased revenue, disrupted supply chains, increased costs for alternative sourcing, and potential loss of business relationships” (Respondent D)</p>
	Alternative sourcing	<p>“This resulted in decreased revenue, disrupted supply chains, increased costs for alternative sourcing, and potential loss of business relationships” (Respondent D).</p>
	Disruption of financial flow	<p>“The blockade disrupted trade and financial flows, which led to a decrease in business activities in the region” (Respondent E).</p>
Operational challenges	International cooperation and partnership	<p>“The blockade impacted international collaborations and partnerships that the government may have had with Qatar in areas such as health and foreign affairs, which led to a loss of funding and resources for these initiatives” (Respondent B).</p>
	Service Accessibility	<p>“The blockade affected our industry's supply chain, as our airlines were unable to access certain airports or utilise the services of Qatari companies” (Respondent A).</p>
	Project Timelines	<p>“This led to delays in project timelines and increased costs for Shell” (Respondent F).</p>
	Loss of funding and resources	<p>“The blockade impacted international collaborations and partnerships that the government may have had with Qatar in areas such as health and foreign affairs, which led to a loss of funding and resources for these initiatives” (Respondent B).</p>

Financial Market Impact	Demand for Insurance Premiums	“The increase in demand for insurance coverage, coupled with the disruption of the insurance market due to the blockade, led to a rise in premiums. This increase in premiums made it challenging for businesses in the region to obtain the necessary insurance coverage at an affordable price, affecting their ability to operate and grow” (Respondent G).
	Inflations and Costs	“The blockade resulted in a shortage of certain goods and services, which led to inflationary pressures on prices. This had an impact on our clients, who were facing higher costs and reduced purchasing power, affecting their ability to repay loans” (Respondent E).
	Decline in Investments	“The blockade had an impact on the value of Qatari assets, including stocks, bonds, and real estate. This led to a decline in investment returns and created uncertainty in the market” (Respondent E).

According to the table above, the Qatar economic blockade had significant financial implications across various services industries, including disruption of supply chains resulting in delays and increased costs, shortages and the need for alternative sourcing. In addition, it is noted that revenue decline was due to decreased business activities, reduced demand for services, and impacts of government revenues. Furthermore, the financial market was affected by inflationary pressures, increased insurance premiums, and a decline in Qatari assets. Difficulties in accessing services, impacts on international partnerships, and delays in project timelines form part of the operational challenges that are impactful to the financial markets. Moreover, the table shows that specific industries such as the banking sector,

health, aviation, insurance, and oil and gas experienced these impacts, underpinning the multi-faceted and widespread effects of the blockade on different services industries.

4.5 Effect of the Qatar Blockade on Customer Management

Examining the effects of the blockade on customer management from the perspectives of business CEOs and managers is of essential importance in understanding the dynamics that unfolded during the imposition of the blockade in Qatar. The table below presents findings on the effects of the Qatar blockade on customer management in various industries and sectors. Business managers are essential in maintaining and improving customer relations. Understanding their perspectives on how the Qatar blockade affected their customer satisfaction, interactions, and loyalty is crucial in revealing the challenges faced in sustaining a customer-centric approach. The knowledge is indispensable for formulating strategies to retain and rebuild clients in the aftermath of geopolitical disruptions. CRM management affects the management directly. In addition, customer acquisition, satisfaction, and retention are directly linked to revenue streams. Therefore, examining the challenges and experiences of business managers, stakeholders, and policymakers can help gain an understanding of the economic implications and ensure preparedness for future disruptions.

Table 7 below is a presentation of data on thematic areas of the effects of the blockade on customer management based on the perspectives of Managers and CEOs of businesses involved in services management.

Table 5: Effect of the Qatar Blockade on Customer Management

Theme	Subtheme	Quote
Operational and financial impact	Increased costs	“The blockade disrupted supply chains for essential medical equipment and medication, which had to be sourced from alternative suppliers. This caused delays and increased costs, which had a knock-on effect on the delivery of healthcare services” (Respondent B).
	Revenue reduction	“The economic blockade resulted in reduced demand for air travel, as business and leisure travellers were discouraged from visiting the affected countries. This had a significant impact on our aviation company's revenue and profitability” (Respondent A).
	Loss of revenue	“With the blockade, the company's branch in Qatar was affected, resulting in a decline in business and loss of revenue” (Respondent G).
	Economic uncertainty	“Additionally, the blockade caused uncertainty and instability in the market, making it difficult for the company to make sound financial decisions and plan for the future” (Respondent G).
Disruption to Operations	Import restrictions	“The restrictions on the import of goods also affected the company's ability to provide services to its customers in Qatar, leading to a strain on customer relationships” (Respondent G).
	Availability of Goods and services	“The economic dislocation caused by the blockade led to changes in consumer behaviour. With uncertainty surrounding the availability of goods and services, consumers become more hesitant to spend money,

		resulting in decreased sales for companies” (Respondent B).
	Transportation routes	“The blockade affected Shell's approach to managing its customers as it disrupted the transportation routes and trade in the region, affecting the supply chain and logistics of the company's operations in Qatar” (respondent F).
	Supply Chain Disruptions	“Furthermore, the blockade disrupted supply chains for essential medical equipment and medication, which had to be sourced from alternative suppliers. This caused delays and increased costs, which had a knock-on effect on the delivery of healthcare services” (Respondent B).
	Travel and Flight Disruptions	“One of the most significant challenges we encountered was the disruption to our flight schedules, which led to cancellations and delays. This caused frustration and inconvenience for passengers, who were forced to make alternative travel arrangements” (Respondent A).
CRM Strategies	Digital solutions	“We had to adopt new strategies to support our customers during this challenging time, such as developing digital banking solutions to enable customers to conduct transactions remotely.” (Respondent E)
	Support and Guidance	“We also had to provide additional support and guidance to customers on navigating the changes in the business landscape caused by the blockade” (Respondent E).

	Effective communication	<p>“...communicating regularly with customers about changes to flight schedules...” (Respondent A).</p> <p>“...Ensuring effective communication with customers to minimise disruptions and delays in their services” (Respondent F).</p>
	Flexible booking options	<p>“To manage these challenges, we implemented a range of strategies, such as offering flexible booking options and alternative routes, communicating regularly with customers about changes to flight schedules, and providing compensation and refunds where appropriate” (Respondent A).</p>
	Maintaining relationships	<p>“...we had to focus on maintaining strong relationships with our customers, providing them with the necessary financial tools and resources to navigate through the difficult economic climate” (Respondent E).</p>
	Alternative markets and suppliers	<p>“The blockade disrupted supply chains, forcing many enterprises to seek alternate suppliers and markets in order to continue operations. As a result, customer management practices changed as organisations had to adjust to changing market conditions and discover new ways to service their consumers efficiently” (Respondent D).</p>
	Marketing Adjustments	<p>“We also adjusted our marketing and promotional activities to focus on other markets and destinations that are not affected by the blockade” (Respondent A).</p>
	Pricing and promotions	<p>“Furthermore, the blockade created economic uncertainty, which reduced consumer confidence and expenditure. As a result, our businesses were forced to</p>

		reconsider their customer management methods, such as pricing strategies and promotional activities, in order to remain competitive in a difficult market” (Respondent D).
Risk Management	Navigating political dynamics	“The department had to navigate complex political dynamics to maintain its relationships with both Qatar and the GCC member states involved in the blockade’ (Respondent B).
	New Risk Strategies	“The company also had to reassess its risk management strategies and incorporate new measures to mitigate the impact of similar situations in the future” (Respondent F).

The table shows respondents from different services offering sectors, including consistently reporting disruptions to operations, particularly in the transportation routes, availability of goods, and supply chains, necessitating adjustments in their CRM strategies. For instance, as shown in the table above, the health sector encountered difficulties in procuring medical supplies, while the aviation industry faced delays and flight cancellations, and the baking sector had to be digitally innovative to maintain customer service. Furthermore, financial impacts are also observed, with increased costs and reduced revenue being common themes, as indicated in the table above. In addition, Organisations had different adaptation strategies through the implementation of flexible booking options and seeking alternative markets and suppliers. Another important theme is the navigation of complex dynamics, and

the need for robust risk management merges as an essential element for maintaining CRM and operational stability during the blockade.

4.6 Company Adjustments to Support Customers

This section highlights the perspectives of CEOs and managers of services companies and businesses in Qatar on the adjustments made by their companies to support customers. This assessment may provide essential insights into the adaptive capabilities of service providers in the challenging geopolitical situation. The study aims to understand the modifications and strategies implemented by various companies as a benchmark for crisis management, fostering resilience in the face of unforeseen disruptions.

Table 8 below shows findings on the adjustments made by various companies to support their customers.

Table 6: Company Adjustments to Support Customers

Themes	Subthemes	Quotes
Diversification of operations	Customer Base	“Firstly, we had to diversify our customer base to include more customers from other countries and regions rather than solely relying on customers from the GCC countries” (Respondent D).
	Supply chains and Routes	“Due to the Blockade, we had to suspend flights to Qatar and some other destinations. To continue serving our customers, we had to diversify our routes and focus on different destinations that were not affected by the blockade” (Respondent A).

	Business operations	“...take measures such as finding alternative supply routes, increasing stockpiles of essential goods, and diversifying their business operations” (Respondent F).
Adaptation of procedures and policies	Policy adjustments	<p>“In addition to the relocation, Lloyd's also had to adjust its underwriting policies and procedures to account for the increased risks associated with doing business in a politically unstable region” (Respondent G).</p> <p>“Another adjustment we made was to review our credit and lending policies to ensure they were still viable despite the economic Blockade” (Respondent E).</p> <p>“We also needed to adjust our policies and procedures to provide consular services and support to citizens affected by the blockade” (Respondent B).</p>
	Diplomatic efforts	“In the case of my department, "Health, Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth", we had to adjust our diplomatic efforts and relationships with Qatar and other countries in the region to manage the political and economic fallout of the blockade” (Respondent B).
Transparency and Communication	Stakeholder coordination	“Strengthening communication and coordination with stakeholders, including customers and suppliers, to ensure transparency and address any concerns or questions” (Respondent B).

		<p>“...we had to maintain close communication with our customers to keep them informed of any changes in our operations and provide them with regular updates on the situation regarding the blockade. This helped to build trust and confidence in our services and enabled us to better manage our relationships with our customers during this challenging period” (Respondent E).</p>
	Customer Engagement	<p>“For customers who were affected by the suspension of flights, we had to offer alternative options, such as rerouting flights through other airports or providing refunds and rebooking options” (Respondent A).</p> <p>“Provide regular updates and advice on the evolving situation, as well as develop customised insurance solutions to address the unique challenges faced by each client” (Respondent G).</p>
Enhancement of Customer service	Training and Development	<p>“We also provided additional training to our team to equip them with the necessary skills to handle the unique challenges posed by the blockade” (Respondent A).</p>
	Customer Support	<p>“Provide regular updates and advice on the evolving situation, as well as develop customised insurance solutions to address the unique challenges faced by each client” (Respondent G).</p> <p>“When faced with the economic blockade, we had to make some adjustments to our operations to</p>

		continue supporting our customers and managing our relationships with them” (Respondent E).
Technological Integration	Digital Technologies	“we had to increase our focus on digital technologies to stay connected with our customers, as face-to-face meetings and events were not possible due to travel restrictions” (RESPONDENT D).
Strategic Adjustments	Market exploration	“We also had to explore new markets and partnerships to maintain our revenue streams and ensure the sustainability of our operations” (Respondent D).
	Pricing strategy	“Due to the changes in demand caused by the blockade, we had to adjust our pricing strategy to remain competitive and attract customers. This included offering discounts and promotions to stimulate demand in other destinations” (Respondent A).
Contingency plans	Developing and reviewing contingency plans	“Developing contingency plans to mitigate any potential disruptions to services or supplies and regularly reviewing and updating these plans as needed” (Respondent B).
	Customer needs assessment	“Furthermore, Lloyd's had to work closely with its clients to understand their specific needs and concerns in light of the Blockade” (Respondent G).

The table above shows adjustments made by service companies to support their customers during the Qatar economic blockade. The data reveals that service companies diversified their operations through alternative supply chains and routes and expanded their customer base to include more regions. Furthermore, transparency and communication were essential, with service companies, through the respondents, enhancing customer engagement and focusing on digital services to keep their customers well informed. Companies also strengthened stakeholder coordination to address their concerns and ensure transparency. In addition, adaptations in procedures and policies were essential, including consular services, underwriting policies, and diplomatic efforts to manage risks. Service enhancement is necessary when companies provide alternatives such as offering refunds, giving regular updates through effective communication, and rerouting flights. The study participants cite that additional training for customer service teams helps in handling unique challenges, while strategic adjustments, such as exploring new methods and modifying prices, ensure the continuity of services businesses. Companies also diversify products and services and offer alternative policies and guidelines, products and services, business mechanisms, customer base, new markets, and partnerships through agility and innovation. Moreover, leveraging technologies is essential, as indicated in the above table, with an increased focus on online customer engagement events and digital banking services. In general, the table highlights the importance of communication, innovation, and flexibility in managing CRM during the political blockade.

4.7 Measures to be Taken by Services Companies in case of a Repeat Economic Blockade.

The table below indicates the measures that may be taken by companies in face of a future economic blockade. This act as a contingency plan for future crisis and therefore helps in responding to similar events quickly and efficiently. Contingency plans when having baseline data such as lessons from the 2017 blockade provides a referencing scenario whose strategies can be copied and emulated in future economic blockades.

Table 7: Measures to be Taken by Services Companies in case of a Repeat Economic Blockade.

Theme	Subtheme	Quotes
Diversification	Diversifying customer base	<p>“We have diversified our customer base and are exploring new markets to reduce our dependence on any single market. This will help us maintain our operations and customer relationships even if there is a blockade or other economic disruptions” (Respondent D).</p> <p>“Diversifying their client base and expanding their operations to other markets to reduce reliance on a single market” (Respondent G).</p>
	Diversifying partners suppliers	<p>“We explored alternative suppliers and partners in different regions to reduce reliance on any one source” (Respondent B).</p>
	Diversifying Network/supply chain	<p>“We are working to expand our network to include more destinations and routes, thereby reducing our reliance on a small number of key markets” (Respondent A).</p>

Communication	Transparency and proactive	“Thirdly, Shell had to communicate proactively and transparently with their customers to inform them of any changes in their operations and supply chain” (Respondent F).
	Internal communication	“Communication is key during times of crisis. Organisations can improve communication within their teams and with external stakeholders to ensure everyone is on the same page” (Respondent B).
	Enhancing business-to-customer communication	<p>“Strengthening their remote work and digital capabilities to enable their employees to work from anywhere and communicate with clients virtually” (Respondent G).</p> <p>“We are improving our communication channels with our customers, providing regular updates on any changes to our services or routes, and offering alternative options where possible” (Respondent A).</p>
Strengthening partnerships	Relationships with Financial institutions	“We have also established closer relationships with other financial institutions and regulators both domestically and internationally to ensure better coordination and collaboration in case of any future challenges” (Respondent E).
	Building partnerships	“We are strengthening our partnerships with other airlines and ground-handling companies to ensure that we have alternative options for providing our services and support to our customers” (Respondent A).

	Strong relationships	“We worked to build strong relationships with customers and partners, which can help to weather difficult times and maintain loyalty” (Respondent B).
Risk management/needs assessment	Stress Tests and Monitoring	“We have strengthened our risk management frameworks and procedures to enable us to identify and assess potential risks more effectively. This includes monitoring geopolitical developments, conducting stress tests, and implementing contingency plans” (Respondent E).
	Developing contingency plans	“Developing contingency plans and risk management strategies to address potential future disruptions in the market” (Respondent G).
	Regular risk assessments	“We regularly conduct risk assessments to identify potential threats and challenges that could impact our operations and develop contingency plans to manage these risks” (Respondent A).
Investment in Technology	Digital capabilities and Remote work	“Strengthening their remote work and digital capabilities to enable their employees to work from anywhere and communicate with clients virtually” (Respondent G).
	Investment in Digital and	“Technology helped us maintain operations and continue to serve customers even during disruptive events” (Respondent B).

	technological solutions	
	Improving Technological infrastructure	<p>“We have invested in technology and infrastructure to increase our operational efficiency and agility” (Respondent C).</p> <p>“We are investing in our technology infrastructure to improve our ability to manage operations and customer support remotely” (respondent A).</p>
Employee training	Skills Development	<p>“We have prioritised employee training and development to ensure that our teams are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond to any challenges that may arise’ (Respondent C).</p>
	Crisis management training	<p>“This includes regular training on crisis management, risk assessment, and communication strategies to ensure that our teams are prepared to handle any situation” (Respondent C).</p>
Operational adjustments	Supply Chain Resilience	<p>“We have established contingency plans for various scenarios, including supply chain disruptions, financial instability, and other risks that may arise” (respondent D).</p> <p>“Finally, they had to invest in new technology and infrastructure to improve their supply chain resilience and reduce their dependence on a single trade route” (Respondent F).</p>

	Pricing strategy	“Secondly, Shell had to adjust their pricing strategy to remain competitive in the market while taking into account the additional costs associated with finding alternative supply routes” (Respondent F).
	Adjusting Supply Routes	“Shell UK had to find alternative supply routes to ensure that they could still provide their products to their customers” (Respondent F).

The table above shows how various respondents in the services industry are set to overcome challenges posed by the economic and political blockade. As it can be depicted, business leaders indicate that they could diversify their networks and supply chains, reducing reliance on single suppliers, key markets, and customers. In addition, they will strengthen partnerships by putting efforts into forging strong relationships and building relationships with financial institutions, customers, and other companies. The table shows that business managers will improve communication by enhancing communication with customers, including better internal communication, transparency, and proactive customer updates about changes. Further, Technological investment is essential and could be made possible through enhanced infrastructures, maintaining operations through digital capabilities, and supporting remote work. Study respondents also indicate that risk management strategies, such as regular risk management, stress tests and monitoring, and contingency planning, are essential in managing the impacts of the economic blockade. Also, the table shows that operational adjustments in supply chain resilience, pricing strategy, and supply routes are key considerations in responding to financial crises. Lastly, employee training has been identified as important. Employee training can be achieved through tailoring it to risk assessment, crisis

management, and skills development to ensure preparedness to tackle future economic blockades.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The study aims to investigate Qatar's service marketing and customer relations amid the political blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain and explore Qatar's pursuit of service marketing and customer relationships amid the economic and political crisis. To achieve the study's purpose, the study reviewed literature relating to Qatar's services marketing and customer relations during the political and financial blockade. Moreover, the researcher identified the measures undertaken by Qatar to maintain the marketing of services and customer relations and establish Qatar's position to retain its economic robustness during the blockade. Economic blockades may significantly disrupt operations, market stability, and supply chains, necessitating effective strategies to mitigate these impacts. The study draws on qualitative data from interviews with key stakeholders in services sectors such as health, aviation, commerce, energy, banking, private sector management, and insurance. To achieve the study's objective, key questions revolved around critical general views on the blockade, the reasons for the blockade, the blockade's financial implications, the effect of the blockade on customer management, critical adjustments made in industries to continue supporting and maintaining relationships with customers, and unique approaches in preparation for another related disruptive event. The discussion focuses on relating the findings of this study to the research objectives and driving the user to its contribution to literature, knowledge, future studies, and future studies.

5.2 General views on the blockade

Palinkas *et al.* (2015) argue that everything must be done appropriately in research, including seeking reliable sources for data collection. Therefore, this study used a purposive sampling technique to ensure that selected interview participants were selected based on their experience and relevance to the research topic and objectives, specifically those impacted by the blockade in the context of CRM and services marketing. This study endeavoured to ensure that data generated from the seven study participants was reliable; therefore, their general views about the blockade were an essential assessment. Linking the shared knowledge from other studies about the blockade (Ali, 2020; Gluskin-Braun *et al.*, 2021; Kabbani, 2021; Al-Tamimi, Amin and Zarrinabadi, 2023), it is evident that the perspectives of the selected study participants appeared to be similar with every participant expressing common knowledge of how why when the blockade happened and the then what? For instance, the study participants mentioned that the sanctioning included closing borders and disrupting air and sea routes, indicating a potential loss of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Dixon *et al.*, 2011).

Further, the results reveal that the closure of borders and sea routes has been associated with economic, health, political, and social effects, which is commensurate to a study conducted by (Zweiri and Abusharar, 2022), whose findings indicated that economic sanctions involving an embargo are meant to control or cut off exports to the sanctioned economy. Furthermore, similar to the study's literature review, the study participants point out that these sanctions damaged trade patterns and induced Qatar's endeavour for new destinations, routes and origins, which could result in high import costs, leading to a decline

in the county's overall economic welfare. These views are indicated in the literature review (Zweiri and Abusharar, 2022).

Further deliberations into the assessment of general views about the Qatar blockade indicate an awareness that Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt imposed an economic boycott on Qatar, accusing it of sponsoring terrorism like Islamic extremism groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and close ties with Iran. The respondents are also aware that the blockade was as a result of hackers breaching the Qatar News Agency and posting 'fake news' targeting Qatar's Emir, the diplomatic crisis and tension resulting from Qatar's non-compliance to its commitments under the GCC's "Riyadh Agreements" to stop supporting terrorist groups, leading of issues related to media freedom and Criticism of Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring protests and media reports of Qatar as a destabilising regional actor, and the presence of a Turkish military installation on Qatari territory, interference in the internal affairs of other countries and political and economic tensions between the countries involved also likely played a role. These are not new findings but a manifestation that services industries are aware of matters affecting businesses and customer relationships from the government side. Awareness of the root causes of a problem is always the first step towards finding short-term and long-term solutions to any business's external and internal challenges. A study by Sakka and Akyar (2021) identifies almost all of the above reasons. The study reports that the mainspring of the conflict between Qatar and other GCC member states was the constant disagreements between the country's stand and the stand of the other GCC countries. Such issues include Syria, Libya, Yemen, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Qatari-Turkey's relationship with Hamas. Qatar was accused of having political connections with governments and organisations that are seen as a threat to the GCC member states, accusations that Qatar refused (Sakka and Akyar, 2021). Cutting economic ties means that

services marketing would be hampered and forced to reorganise and streamline their marketing strategy to the government's new financial strategy.

The results of this study show that participants are aware that economic sanctions affect diplomatic relationships, pose potential political and social unrest, weaken the reigning regime and make people lose trust in a government that has failed to form strong political ties. To respond, the targeted governments may use a self-efficiency mechanism to promote internal products. For instance, during sixty years of sanctions, North Korean leaders adopted a reform-based bombast in response to negative sanctions to appease the population (Jaeger, 2016). Sanctions cause separation of families, loss of jobs, and denial of visitation rights by blood ties on foreign soil. These findings are similar to Peksen and Drury's (2010) research that sanctions negatively influence democratic freedoms and deteriorating human rights or make human rights situations less likely to improve. Such findings reveal that sanctions may intensify political oppression and damage the human rights of affected member states (Peksen and Drury, 2010; Peksen, 2017).

The economic blockade disengaged Qatar economically from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE. Respondents believe that some of the solutions that Qatar may have taken to solve the puzzle of its economic decline are to forge new political and economic ties with other countries. It is true that some of the steps that Qatar took to make sure it became economically stable include the formulation of alternative supply routes. Expand its Hamad Sea Port and strengthen its economic and political ties with Turkey. In addition, Qatar is looking forward to developing and enhancing diplomatic relationships with its neighbours for more significant mutual benefit (Kabbani and Mimoune, 2021). In addition, after many countries imposed economic sanctions on Russia following Russia's invasion of Ukraine,

Russia strengthened its political ties with China, South Africa, India, and Brazil to maintain financial independence (Lin *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, marketing the services industry will be done internally and to a country's new political and economic friends.

The managers believe that the economic blockade can be resolved by dialogue. Dialogue is a peaceful way of discussing the points of friction among the disputing parties (Kulgami, 2018). According to Kulgami (2018), many international conflicts have been resolved through dialogue, including the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, the Afghan war, the Russo-Ukraine conflict, tension over Iran's nuclear program, and conflict between Gaddafi's Libya and Western powers (Kulgami, 2018). In the book, 'Dialogue and Conflict Resolution,' there are different situations that can be resolved through dialogue, how dialogue has been used in a peaceful reconciliation, and how tensions between conflicting parties can be determined (Rieker and Thune, 2015). More important is the willingness of governments, actors, and international organisations to engage in the dialogue. Dialogue involves finding solutions through a change of mind, new approaches, and fresh thinking. Dialogue is still a good option for solving the Conflict between Qatar and GCC member states.

True to this argument, the economic blockade between Qatar and other Persian Gulf states ended through dialogue. A GCC meeting held in Saudi Arabia saw the new kings of Qatar and Saudi Arabia meet for the first time and sign an agreement to end the blockade and resume their economic and diplomatic relationships (Gluskin-Braun *et al.*, 2021). The study respondents, who are top officials in various services industries in Qatar, feel that they need to conduct a risk assessment and identify other opportunities arising from the blockade to ensure the sustainability of their respective companies. According to a review, one of the failures of the corporate world during a crisis is the failure of risk management. After the 2008

financial crisis, the review study indicates that many companies needed a risk management strategy. Effective risk management requires companies to have a widespread approach rather than treating each enterprise unit individually. A good risk management strategy involves the board, managers, and stakeholders (OECD, 2014). Service industries should also follow and remain neutral to government rules and policies. According to this study, participants believed loyalty to the government rule of law is vital in maintaining services marketing and customer relationships. The government can be a friend of businesses, providing services, advice, and decorum through the rule of law. Following government rules, especially during sanctions, is an enabler of companies rather than a destroyer (Davis, 2022). Following government rules includes following new directions in economic and political ties. For instance, the Qatar government can forge significant political and economic relations with Turkey to benefit businesses that follow its rules and regulations.

These views correspond to the study background and literature review, indicating that the study participants have the necessary knowledge through exposure and experience on the impacts of the blockade on the country and their domestic and international businesses. Therefore, their input can be trusted as a reliable source of information to investigate Qatar's services marketing and customer relations amid the political blockade imposed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain and explore Qatar's pursuit of service marketing and customer relationships amid the economic and political crisis.

5.3 Reasons for the Qatar Blockade

The primary theme that emerges in this study is the allegations of terrorism, with study participants relating it to the accusations that Qatar-backed Islamist Organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, sponsored extremism and supported terrorism. This narrative

was exacerbated by media campaigns that portrayed Qatar as a destabilising agent in the GCC region. For instance, one respondent states,

“Qatar's cultivation of relationships with opposition groups, particularly those linked to the Muslim Brotherhood”

(Respondent B).

These findings reflect the role of media and terrorism in shaping international actions and perceptions, which, according to Drakos and Kutan (2003), may result in negative gains in services industries such as tourism. Terrorism is not only a threat to regional security but also jeopardises and jeopardises businesses that depend on peace and international relations. Therefore, whether actual or false alarms, allegations from media coverage contribute to consumer decision-making. This corresponds to the antecedents of the RPD model (Klein, 1997), which states that decision-makers will identify the best course of action that makes sense through rigorous interpretations of possibilities. This will lead to another possible argument that allegations alone without the blockade in place will have negatively impacted services industries in the region, and the embargo serves to increase its effects.

Another critical theme is diplomatic relationships, particularly Qatar's complex relationships with Turkey and Iran, which were against the GCC members' stance. Regional cooperation comes with a cost, with members required to adhere to certain conditions, including sharing a "common enemy." Iran and Turkey contributed substantially to severing economic ties with Qatar as a common enemy to the blockading countries. This country had established a Turkish army on their soil and had forged international relationships with Iran. However, whether this is enough reason to impose economic sanctions on a country that contributes much to the region's financial stability arises. Middle Eastern countries have long-

standing geopolitical rivalries; therefore, supporting Iran may be seen as a regional adversary, especially for Saudi Arabia, which raises concerns about regional security and shifting alliances (BBC, 2021). Shifting alliances alone without the increasing effect of the blockade can affect how consumers perceive the safety of new product sources and change brand strategy, including marketing strategies (Decker and Baade, 2016).

A country's independence may be perceived as a threat to other regional nations since it comes with an assertive position in defence and foreign policy, which may lead to regional power imbalances. Increasing a country's sovereignty may lead to pursuing interests that often clash with other regional members, potentially resulting in ideological conflicts, economic competition, and territorial disputes. Moreover, increased sovereignty may be manifested through strategic alliances and military capabilities that regional states may perceive as a direct challenge to their influence and security in the region, compelling these nations to respond to countermeasures such as regional tensions that undermine collective security efforts (Mahncke, 2009; Leonid, 2013). The findings corresponding to these assertions are "issues with Qatar sovereignty" and "increased independence in Qatar". The respondents commented that there were concerns about Qatar's growing independence in foreign affairs and a feeling that the blockade was meant to sever Qatar's sovereignty. Bosio and Scheiber (2022) agree with these findings by stating that a country's sovereignty leads to the exercise of independent decisions, which may impact consumer behaviour and regional market dynamics. Therefore, comprehending these and adapting to shifts in sovereignty is essential for maintaining effective CRM in the geopolitical landscape.

Rapid economic growth in a country may cause insecurities among its neighbours, who may fear losing economic clout and regional influence (Yusuf and Mohd, 2023). Economically,

Qatar had grown from \$6 billion in 2000 to \$300 billion in 2015 (MSGCT, 2015). This growth, coupled with political factors such as cordial relationships with Iran and its increased sovereignty, may have led to the assertion of the blockade by blockading countries (MSGCT, 2015). The study findings confirm this claim to be accurate, as respondents indicate that economic and political factors such as political tensions and economic sanctions played a significant role in the imposition of the blockade.

Media propaganda and fake news from mainstream media may be used to justify and sustain economic and political unrest (Dice, 2017; Waisbord, 2018). Themes of Media and propaganda have been mentioned by the study participants as possible players in the imposition of the blockade on Qatar. This is true according to the literature review, which indicates that there was a massive social media uproar, primarily through bot accounts that echoed themes that criticised Qatar for having a relationship with Iran, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. However, most of these numerous hashtags were propaganda produced by anti-Qatar-bots Twitter accounts. Some of the shared images on Twitter pinpointed Qatar's media channels as misinformation (C Free, 2017). This indicates a more excellent strategy to use information warfare to undermine Qatar's position regionally and internationally.

National and international interests also greatly influence geopolitical tensions, such as sanctions and blockades (Boyd and Ufimtseva, 2021). One highlighted reason for the embargo is Qatar's opposition and support from various countries. This also includes specific historical events, including the deteriorating relationships with Egypt after condemning the 2013 coup and the withdrawal of Qatar's ambassadors from the blockading countries in March 2024. While these may have been used as a pretext for the blockade, they may have fuelled the imposition of the blockade on Qatar.

The Qatar blockade was born out of a multifaceted and profoundly political and economic move driven by both illegitimate reasons and legitimate security concerns, attempts to suppress Qatar's rising independence and influence in the region and geopolitical rivalry. In addition, the use of allegations of supporting terrorist groups reflects broader regional power dynamics in GCC countries. Evidence suggests that security concerns may have been exaggerated and used as a pretext for a wider strategy to sever Qatar's regional influence and sovereignty, as these security concerns were unfounded. Understanding the reasons for the blockade is essential for decision-makers and business managers in the services industry to make informed decisions necessary to ensure that businesses remain functional and are cushioned by the effects of the blockade.

5.4 Financial implications of the blockade

Finance is an essential element of businesses as it serves as the fuel for all business activities. It is a fundamental resource that provides necessary funds for establishing, expanding and sustaining business activities (Ledgerwood, 1998; Seelos and Mair, 2007; Mason and Brown, 2014). Therefore, the effective management of finances ensures that businesses meet their obligations, buffer against economic downturns such as those experienced during sanctions and other geopolitical vents, and invest in growth opportunities (Mason and Brown, (2014). Finance enables planning and risk management through insurance and diversification. It is the cornerstone that supports businesses to compete, innovate, and generate value in the economic world (Mason and Brown, (2014). Therefore, examining the financial implications of the Qatar blockade to businesses, especially in the services industry, is essential in understanding the country's position to maintain its economic

robustness and identify measures to sustain services and CRM during the economic blockade, as the blockade may have impacted financial flow.

Some sectors hit by the economic blockade were the banking industry, the aviation industry, the private sector, aviation, and other services marketing industries. According to this study, the blockade disrupted trade and financial flows, reducing economic activities and decreasing demand for loans and other financial services. The blockade affected the value of Qatari assets, including real estate, bonds, and stocks, leading to a decline in investment returns. Other studies have shown some similarities with the findings of this study. For instance, Ali (2020) established that commercial banks in Qatar witnessed bank runs whereby customer deposits dropped from 25% to 17%. In addition, blocking and non-blocking countries withdrew all their promises, demanding higher interest (Ali, 2020). The withdrawals may have left the banking sector in liquidity limbo, making it a big lesson for banking systems that rely on external funds. Qatar's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined due to liquidity battles among their banks (Ali, 2020).

The results indicate that the blockade directly impacted the supply chain and caused a loss of resources to service companies. The supply chain was affected primarily by the adverse effects of the embargo on Qatar Airways and sea routes. The GCC countries prevented Qatar Airways and ships from using their airspace and sea routes and suspended all flights from Qatar's capital, Doha. According to Ali (2020), Qatari was forced to seek alternative solutions to compensate for its losses in large markets. This study found that the disruption of the supply chain and restrictions on trade affected the cost of goods and services. Financial flows in the healthcare sector and foreign affairs were significantly reduced. Loss of business ties directly impacted the economic embargo on Qatar, a potential

barrier to access to mutually shared resources. When companies are blocked from accessing resources, the demand increases, and the cost of the available resources increases. Companies are forced to use other routes and find new sources of their resources, which may be expensive. According to Rational Choice Theory, the tendency of human nature toward self-interest results in prosperity. Therefore, the services industry, like the banking sector, aviation, and healthcare, had to seek new alternatives to remain operative. Operational challenges also emerged as a critical theme, with increased costs resulting from delayed project timelines for companies like Shell. Overall, the financial effects of the Qatar blockade underscore widespread and profound implications, including economic stability and measures in business operations.

5.5 Effect of the Qatar Blockade on CRM.

Our findings reveal the blockade of several themes in how Qatar affected customer relations: Operational and financial impact, disruptions to operations, strategies to CRM, and risk management.

Respondents highlight significant operational disruptions such as import restrictions, availability of goods and services, Transportation routes, supply chain disruptions, and travel and flight disruptions. All these are characterised as human activities that, when they remain unchallenged, lead to business success. The subtheme, 'import restrictions,' affects CRM, especially regarding the cost and availability of services. For instance, import restrictions can restrict human resource movements, causing delays in the production and delivery of services and resulting in increased costs of the available services, which may be in high demand. The consequence of this is the strain on customers in accessing essential services. Delays in customer service delivery are expected when supplies are cut off, and the supply chain is

disrupted. Supply chain disruptions cause shortages, increasing service costs and decreasing customer satisfaction. This study identified delays as one of the major bottlenecks to service delivery to customers. Delays in medical care, flights, banking, and other services lead to customer frustrations, hesitation in purchasing, decreased sales, and cause customers to seek alternative services. A study conducted to examine the economic blockade of Yemen and its humanitarian consequences refers to the effects of delay as *Torture in Slow Motion* (OMCT, 2022). What follows is to solve the problem at the root, the economic blockade. However, this is the role of the state, and they have to find alternative solutions like risk management plans, diversifying supplies, and leveraging technology (Hans, 2023). The consequence of delays is preceded by reduced customer service efficiency, and frustrations indicate customer dissatisfaction. The Rational Choice Theory forces companies to seek alternatives to increase efficiency and customer satisfaction.

For instance, the affiliation industry will have to look for flexible booking options; all service industries will evaluate their communication strategy, introduce or change the rationale of compensation and refunds, and include product promotions. In addition, Qatar may have been limited to strict GCC rules, including dependency on its neighbours for the supply of essential services and goods, which may, in turn, lead to the deprivation of essential and quality services. For instance, study responses indicate this effect,

“The restrictions on the import of goods also affected the company's ability to provide services to its customers in Qatar, leading to a strain on customer relationships”

(Respondent G).

In addition to import restrictions, transportation routes are also disrupted due to travel and flight disruptions, leading to disruptions in the supply chain. For instance, one participant says,

“The blockade affected Shell's approach to managing its customers as it disrupted the transportation routes and trade in the region, affecting the supply chain and logistics of the company's operations in Qatar”

(respondent F).

A literature review highlights the increasing frequency and effects of supply chain disruptions that necessitate the design of more resilient strategies to mitigate financial and operational impacts (Hans, 2023). These disruptions can lead to delays in service delivery and reduced customer loyalty and satisfaction since customers face uncertainty and longer wait times regarding the availability of services. These effects are also explored in research on operations management, which discusses how global supply chain disruptions lead to conflicting pressures and demands from society, the government and businesses. This complexity leads to re-evaluating CRM strategies in the Services industry to maintain customer satisfaction, loyalty and trust (Herold and Marzantowicz, 2023). In addition, travel and flight disruptions impact customer management, where the result of travel restrictions leads to reduced service availability. A study published in Springer on production disruption in supply chain systems indicates that supply chain disruptions affect supply chain agents, consumers, and society (Liu and Ren, 2024). While the services industry relies on customer interactions and timely supply, it faces challenges in meeting customer experiences and requirements, necessitating contingency planning and flexible CRM (Jain *et al.*, 2023). This

study's responses indicate a similar scenario where one of the many quotes on the same state that

"... the blockade disrupted supply chains for essential medical equipment and medication, which had to be sourced from alternative suppliers. This caused delays and increased costs, which had a knock-on effect on the delivery of healthcare services."

(Respondent B).

The economic blockade and other related events lead to panic buying, changes in discretionary spending and herd mentality (Loxton *et al.*, 2020). The economic embargo caused uncertainties that may have triggered similar responses, where customers or consumers may engage in panic buying but become more hesitant to spend time as the crises increased. Hesitancy is driven by the desire to conserve resources and fear of scarcity due to unpredictability, leading to a decline in sales of non-essential services and prioritising spending on limited and essential services (Loxton *et al.*, 2020). The study findings reveal a positive correlation to this claim as it indicates that the blockade's impact on the availability of services led to changes in consumer behaviour, where consumers became more hesitant to spend money, resulting in low sales for service companies.

"The economic dislocation caused by the blockade led to changes in consumer behaviour. With uncertainty surrounding the availability of goods and services, consumers become more hesitant to spend money, resulting in decreased company sales."

(Respondent B.)

Research on consumer purchase behaviour and impulsiveness during economic downturns reveals that consumers are likely to develop more rational ways of buying, including opting for lesser-known brands, reducing expenditures, and less expensive services.

Therefore, the blockade-induced effects on consumer preferences affect immediate sales and have long-term impacts on service marketing strategies, where businesses may adapt to these shifts and reorient their operations to meet consumer needs as they evolve. A possible explanation for this scenario is based on the existence of black market and intermediary goods. According to some studies, targeted states for the economic sanctions experience negative impacts in the services industry, have additional logistics costs, higher risk premiums, and a slowdown in long-run economic development, forcing customers to start buying goods through third parties or products of lower cost and selling them at lower prices (Haidar, 2017; Özdamar and Shahin, 2021). The thesis that economic blockades reduce demand for services in the service industry calls for positive and unique solutions in marketing services and customer relationships to maintain operational potency in the Kingdom.

The game theory provides a valuable lens through which one could understand the strategic interactions between service businesses during the Qatar blockade, culminating in uncertainties and strategic decision-making. Based on this theory, some businesses may have perceived the situation as a zero-sum game, where they may have developed fierce competition for a limited and shrinking customer base. This may have led to aggressive pricing and marketing strategies as they sought to secure a larger market share. On the other hand, businesses may have employed a cooperative approach and partnered with other business entities to pursue a non-zero-sum game. They could have recognised the value of collaboration in mitigating common challenges such as blockade adaptation challenges. According to the results of this study, financial institutions responded to this blockade by recognising that customers make rational choices based on their self-interest. Therefore, to

attract and retain customers, financial institutions like the banking and insurance sector adjusted their services, communication strategies, and pricing and ensured that the benefits of staying with their institutions outweighed the costs.

The blockade negatively affected the social relationships among the Qatar Citizens and between the Qatari people and other GCC countries. This implication is indirectly linked to the ineffectiveness of business operations due to behaviour change. Customers' behaviour, just like any other human being, is affected by social, political, economic, and personal preferences. In this case, political and social choices contribute to their decision-making processes. What their country says is wrong will affect their purchasing decisions. Some businesses could close while others could plummet under the same conditions when the complex political and social dynamics are stronger or weaker depending on how they are conditioned to believe and behave. These findings are supported by Eissa (2020), who found that the Qatari community followed the government's guidance and opinion leaders during the blockade. They showed a high sense of patriotism in their buying and purchasing decisions. In addition, the political factors at the time pushed consumers to form negative connotations, with some brands coming from the blockade countries. This means that the Qatari population was more willing to buy brands that abide by their social advice and political rules, with little contribution from advertisement and price sensitivity (Eissa, 2020). Therefore, businesses had to change their market conditions and discover new ways for efficient service delivery to customers.

CRM strategies are an essential theme in this study as they highlight strategies that different service businesses use to curb the impacts of the blockade on customer management. These strategies are reflected in the following subthemes: digital solutions,

support and guidance, effective communication, flexible options, maintaining relationships, promotions and price changes, marketing adjustments, and alternative sourcing. Research highlights the effectiveness of digital solutions during restrictive moments such as blockades and sanctions, which enable service companies to maintain CRM and operations despite physical barriers (Özdamar and Shahin, 2021). Flexible options such as flexible booking options in the aviation industry, delivery routes, and payment methods allow service businesses to adapt to changing scenarios and events and maintain service delivery (Lambert, Haley-Lock and Henly, 2012; Kankaew, 2022). This has been reflected in study findings where one respondent states,

“To manage these challenges, we implemented a range of strategies, such as offering flexible booking options and alternative routes, communicating regularly with customers about changes to flight schedules, and providing compensation and refunds where appropriate”

(Respondent A).

This response indicates a range of strategies, including refunds and compensation where customers feel like service delivery has been inadequate, changes in flight schedules and regular communications that ensure customers are satisfied and remain loyal throughout the challenging economic times during the blockade. Building and maintaining customer trust and relationships can lead to customer loyalty. Therefore, marketing strategy adjustments ensure that messaging remains relevant to the target population and sensitive to the evolving situation of the economic blockade, while price changes and promotions incentivise and incentivise continued patronage in businesses. In addition, the study outlines that alternative

sourcing is one of the strategies for customer management aimed at circumventing disruptions in the supply chain to meet customer needs.

Risk management is essential in a successful business aiming to withstand economic shock waves, especially during blockades and sanctions. Therefore, a sanction risk assessment tool is necessary for the services industry to expose their exposure to blockade-related risks and the adequacy of their management systems (Monini and Aniasi, 2024). Risk management allows involved companies to identify potential risks and formulate effective strategies to mitigate them, such as effective communication, alternative sourcing, and digital solutions to manage customer expectations, circumvent supply chain disruptions and ensure continuity of operations. Study participants reflected on how their companies had to conduct risk reassessment and incorporate new measures to mitigate the blockade's impact:

“The company also had to reassess its risk management strategies and incorporate new measures to mitigate the impact of similar situations in the future”

(Respondent F).

Adopting a comprehensive risk management strategy enables service businesses to have unfailing customer relationships while adapting to maintain their pricing and marketing frameworks and remain more resilient in the face of geopolitical events such as sanctions or blockades.

The Qatar blockade impacted how customers were managed across various service industries, leading to economic challenges, customer dissatisfaction, and operational disruptions. However, these companies remained resilient by implementing digital solutions, alternative sourcing, and flexible options while emphasising risk assessment, cost

management, and effective communication to navigate through the challenges of the blockade.

5.6 Adjustments made by service companies to support their customers

In response to the effects of the economic sanctions imposed by GCC countries on Qatar, various companies and mechanisms support their customers whose decision-making has been affected. Services companies will likely make strategic adjustments to help their customers during the economic blockade (Pape, 1997; Alexander, 2009; Ngoc *et al.*, 2022; Meyer *et al.*, 2023). The study has identified various themes essential in understanding the adjustments made by businesses to support their customers: Diversifying operations, adaptation of policies and procedures, transparency and communication, enhancement of customer service, technological integration, strategic adjustments, and contingency plans.

Diversification is a concept of economic recovery that all respondents supported. Diversification is a practice that mixes a wide variety of assets, investments, and industries within a portfolio to reduce portfolio risk (Smith and Schreiner, 1969; Cesarone and Colucci, 2018). The respondents mentioned different aspects of the portfolio in businesses that need to be diversified: products and services, policies and guidelines, business mechanisms, new markets, customer base, and partnerships, and the company's agility in the supply chain, particularly in delivery, inventory management, and procurement. On the government side, diversification involves different approaches to strengthening the economy, even in risky situations. It involves practices like diversification of economic partnerships, exportation, and import sources (Kabbani and Mimoune, 2021). The study findings indicate that businesses will

diversify their customer base to include more customers, diversify their supply chains and transportation routes, and other business operations.

“Firstly, we had to diversify our customer base to include more customers from other countries and regions rather than solely relying on customers from the GCC countries” (Respondent D).

Studies indicate that diversification reduces risks in investments; That is, if one option or market fails, success in another option may minimise the impact of failure. Therefore, diversification helps businesses to increase their market potential and increase a company’s overall market share (Cornil, Hardisty and Bart, 2019).

Adaptation of procedures and policies, including diplomatic efforts and policy adjustments, is essential when managing customers during geopolitical events such as the Qatar economic blockade. For instance, Qatar Airways adopted an industry-leading procurement strategy to maintain its strategic position in the customer base. The airline ensured that all flights were equipped with the services needed by its customers by working with suppliers, maintaining the quality of customer experience and showcasing their resilience and commitment to the unique needs of their customers (Mullan, 2020). Similarly, this is reflected in our study findings. For instance, one participant reflects on the adjustments its company made to ensure they were viable despite the impacts of the blockade:

“Another adjustment we made was to review our credit and lending policies to ensure they were still viable despite the economic Blockade”

(Respondent E).

Another response from a study participant reflects on how their company adjusted its procedures and policies to provide its customers with their specific needs amid the blockade:

“We also needed to adjust our policies and procedures for providing consular services and support to citizens affected by the blockade.”

Such adaptations maintain the quality of customer experiences and indicate the necessities of companies that are not only committed to the success of their businesses, but also that strive to preserve their brand position.

Developing and reviewing contingency plans is a solution mentioned by the study participants to mitigate the effects of the economic blockade on the marketing of their services and Customer Relations Management. A contingency plan is a strategic plan created by executives to help businesses tackle unfavourable events that may or may not happen (Courtney, Kirkland and Viguerie, 1997). Contingency plans are meant to speed up disaster recovery, reduce business risks, and ensure the smooth execution of business processes. In other words, contingency plans minimise the impact of unforeseen events and outline the plan for carrying out regular business without being affected by anticipated disruptions. Contingency plans act as backup or disaster recovery plans (Plan and Supplies, 2009). Contingency plans are only feasible if companies know the blockade. That may be why this study's respondents encourage leaders to study the economic embargo, monitor and analyse its impacts on various sectors, and support affected business areas and individuals.

Research indicates that clear communications during geopolitical events such as the Qatar blockade are crucial for companies to navigate the complexities of the prevailing disruptions associated with the blockade and maintain customer loyalty and trust (Patsalos, 2023). The study respondents indicate that they will modify a company's communication strategies to keep their customers informed, provide regular updates, and enhance coordination with relevant stakeholders, leading to mutual trust and confidence in their

services and enabling them to manage CRM during the blockade. Every business's main target is building a solid customer relationship (Patsalos, 2023). Customers need to be engaged in every matter of a company and be at the discussion table to be heard and listened to. Disputes in terms of customer complaints should be responded to quickly and satisfactorily. In addition, customer needs are core to business success; therefore, businesses need a better communication strategy to engage with their customers. More importantly, amid the Qatar economic blockade, businesses are affected from all avenues, and their operations are prone to essential changes that must be communicated to their customers.

Technological integration strategies are essential in customer management as they enable businesses to maintain adaptability and continuity in customer service amidst economic challenges (Schilling, 1998). According to the study respondents, leveraging digital technologies to stay connected to customers and increase services as digital banking is a better solution for mobility and marketing challenges. In addition, they needed digital solutions to stay connected to their customers virtually in an environment with restricted travel.

“...we had to increase our focus on digital technologies to stay connected with our customers, as face-to-face meetings and events were impossible due to travel restrictions.”

(Respondent D).

According to a study, Mobile CRM has been shown to increase sales productivity by 15% (A, 2021), indicating that digital solutions are not only for communication purposes but may also lead to increased service delivery virtually. Technology reduces the gap between

customers and the accessibility of services. It also increases efficiency and customer knowledge of the state of businesses.

Market exploration, forging new partnerships, and pricing strategy are some strategic adjustments done by service companies to ensure resilience and sustainability in their operations.

"...We had to explore new markets and partnerships to maintain our revenue streams and ensure the sustainability of our operations."

(Respondent D)

These findings are in line with the claim that, in the face of economic downturns, businesses may adjust some of their procedures and processes to support their customers by engaging in market exploration aimed at the identification and penetration of services to alternative markets, hence reducing the reliance of areas that are affected by the blockade (Mandal, 2022). Moreover, adaptive measures such as adaptive pricing strategies are necessary to maintain customer loyalty amid the negative impacts of the embargo. Adaptive pricing strategies may include offering discounts and flexible payment terms to respond to financial constraints experienced by customers (Shibata and Boersch, 2024). The study findings align with these assertions as business managers reflect on adjusting their prices to remain attractive and competitive.

"Due to the changes in demand caused by the blockade, we had to adjust our pricing strategy to remain competitive and attract customers. This included offering discounts and promotions to stimulate demand in other destinations."

(Respondent A).

These strategies attract customers, help the business remain competitive, and contribute to long-term profitability and viability of services business in Qatar in a volatile global world.

One of the central themes in this study is customer service enhancement through customer training and development of staff and offering customer support as illustrated in the following response quotes:

“...provided additional training to our team to equip them with the necessary skills to handle the unique challenges posed by the blockade,” “...regular updates and advice on the evolving situation, as well as develop customised insurance solutions to address the unique challenges faced by each client.”

(Respondent A).

Research indicates that comprehensive training programs focusing on reflective listening, crisis communication, and sensitivity training can empower service representatives to respond to customers' concerns and needs, ensuring trust and security (Barron, 2024). Training programs and customer service enhancement strategies may also include streamlining CRM systems and technologies to enhance customer interactions and ensure efficient and personalised support even when disruptions occur during the blockade (Wavetec, 2024). The effect of these improvements is improved customer experience, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and business continuity.

Customers also include important actors within a specific industry. At the same time, the blockade is attributed to the disruption of business relations with stakeholders in the blockade GCC countries and within Qatar. The study respondents would re-establish their social ties in the region to manage the economic and political fallout of the blockade. Social

networks focus on relationships among social actors, patterns that emerge within the social network, and their implications (Ansari and Mani, 2019). According to social network research, actors are embedded within a network of relations to form ties and regular patterns concerning business structure. The linkages formed by actors help flow resources and financial flows. When some actors withdraw, the patterns of social relations are broken, and so is the smooth running of the business (Ansari and Mani, 2019). Therefore, re-establishing social networks within Qatar and forging new social relationships with new Qatari political and economic countries forms part of the services marketing and customer relationships management solutions. The re-establishment of social ties includes strategies like stakeholder collaboration. This study's participants would ensure a more substantial customer management relationship by collaborating with the stakeholders. As discussed elsewhere, this includes involving the different stakeholders in the decision-making, hearing them out, and considering their views important.

According to the resource-based view (RBV) marketing model, extensive marketing of services would ensure that businesses realise their broader objectives and goals amid economic uncertainties. The RBV model suggests that honing the abilities and expertise of marketers can enable firms to gain a competitive advantage, enabling the company to survive in hard times. The model informs companies to identify critical resources relevant to their marketing efforts. One of the most valuable resources, according to RBV, is customer insights. Customer insights are specific and personalised to the target company. Through this, companies in the banking sector, healthcare, and other sectors could develop and possess specific and unique resources that competitors cannot easily copy or duplicate. Diversification of resources is only a little crucial when having these fantastic products. Amazing products also require relevant and unique marketing strategies that competitors cannot replicate.

These tremendous products and marketing strategies are part of the resources that should be deeply embedded in an organisation. Exceptional products, such as the Qatar blockade, cushion a company from unprecedented economic uncertainties. Diversification of resources also includes having a highly skilled marketing team and a well-established brand identity that cannot be replicated to provide a long-lasting competitive edge.

5.7 Proposed measures by companies to face events similar to the blockade.

The study developed seven main themes and twenty subthemes from the participants' responses on measures their companies could take in the face of a similar blockade. These measures are essential in this study as they indicate the effects of the embargo on services industries and CRM strategies that led to the onset of contingency plans. Contingency plans are strategic blueprints developed by companies to prepare for anticipated and unforeseen events that may disrupt the normal operations of businesses. Contingency plans must include a range of scenarios, such as economic downturns and economic blockades, that require regular updates necessary to inform adaptation mechanisms. Therefore, contingency plans enable businesses to respond swiftly and effectively to economic crises and maintain critical functions such as offering services, which is essential for the resilience and long-term success of the company (Plan and Supplies, 2009; Vicedo *et al.*, 2020; Guerola-Navarro *et al.*, 2022).

Study participants indicated that they will continue their pursuit of service diversification through Customer base diversification, diversification of partners and suppliers, and diversifying supply chain network. The participants claim that diversification will cushion them from over-reliance on any one source of supplies, reduce reliance on single

markets and customers, and help them maintain their operations and CRM even with a blockade or other geopolitical events such as sanctions and economic embargo. Studies confirm that diversification is a vital contingency strategy by attributing the spread of investments and marketing efforts to various geographic locations, production processes, supply chains, transportation routes, and markets as a way of reducing market volatility and economic blockades (Smith and Schreiner, 1969; Cornil, Hardisty and Bart, 2019; Ben Hassen, 2022).

Effective communication strategies are essential components of a contingency plan to cushion companies from the impacts of economic blockades. The study participants stress proactive and transparent communication strategies for informing customers of any changes in their operations and supply chain, enhancement of communication with the internal and external stakeholders to ensure that everyone is informed of what is happening and strengthening digital capabilities and remote work to ensure jobs are not limited to the office of physical space. Studies have indicated that a communication plan is part of the contingency plan by attributing effective communication during unprecedented events as it creates a sense of involvement and belonging to stakeholders (Bacharach and Aiken, 1977; Plan and Supplies, 2009; Mazzei *et al.*, 2022). Effective communication should, therefore, ensure nobody is left behind in any progress made by services companies and any changes due to internal and external forces that lead to changes in production processes.

Building and strengthening partnerships with other companies and relevant stakeholders in the service industry is an essential strategy that may be effective during an economic blockade such as the Qatar blockade by other GC countries. According to studies, partnerships may provide critical support networks that ensure businesses offer services and

maintain operations even when essential channels are disrupted (Miller and Verhoeven, 2020; Gamso, Inkpen and Ramaswamy, 2024). For instance, one respondent states, "*We are strengthening our partnerships with other airlines and ground-handling companies to ensure that we have alternative options for providing our services and support to our customers.*" This indicates that one of the primary reasons for seeking partnerships is to diversify their options regarding suppliers, supply chains, and markets, which could cushion them from overdependence on single business items.

Customer need assessment is a strategy that unveils the precise customer needs, how they are being fulfilled, and what is required to improve their loyalty and satisfaction. Study participants attribute customer needs assessment to be the first step towards feasibility tests of any business organisation's steps. It is the reference point for all other strategies discussed in this paper. It is an essential method of discovery before developing solutions. According to a review study, customer needs assessment holds high importance compared to the development priorities of any company (Kärkkäinen and Elfvengren, 2002). According to the Rational Choice Theory, businesses will make choices based on the existing context, which includes the anticipated valuation of alternatives with probabilistic results. Results from options are based on attaining the greatest good for most people to achieve the maximum output possible. Under the same argument, needs assessment remains the only way of unveiling what most customers need to help make decisions based on their needs, including customisation-based customisation-based decisions. Therefore, companies' adjustments during the Qatar Blockade involve performing continuous needs assessments for all the stakeholders and actors involved in business operations.

Risk management strategies such as developing contingency plans, regular risk assessments, stress tests, and monitoring have been identified as steps that service industries can take in the face of another economic blockade. The study participants confess that for the preparation of another similar event, they have strengthened their risk management frameworks and procedures to enable them to respond to risks effectively by conducting stress tests, implementing contingency plans and monitoring geopolitical developments: *“We have strengthened our risk management frameworks and procedures to enable us to identify and assess potential risks more effectively. This includes monitoring geopolitical developments, conducting stress tests, and implementing contingency plans.”* According to a review, one of the failures of the corporate world during a crisis is the failure of risk management. After the 2008 financial crisis, the review study indicates that many companies needed a risk management strategy. Effective risk management requires companies to have a widespread approach rather than treating each enterprise unit individually. A good risk management strategy involves the board, managers, and stakeholders coming together to assess, develop and allocate responsibilities for effectively managing the blockade (OECD, 2014).

Investment in technology has been presented in three major themes: digital capabilities and remote work, investment in digital and technological solutions, and technological infrastructure. According to studies, Technology Impacts the marketing of services in four ways: (1) by new technology supporting new forms of interaction among industries and consumers; (2) by providing new types of data that enable new analytic tools; (3) requires new strategic marketing frameworks, and (4) creates marketing innovations (Longoni and Cian, 2022). New technologies enhance firm-consumer interactions by providing new marketing tools when effectively deployed. For instance, anthropomorphised chatbots

may influence consumer feedback in consumer-initiated service interactions. In addition, augmented reality (AR) may be used in the services industry to facilitate firm-to-consumer interactions. In this study, respondents will be required to invest in technology to strengthen their remote work, where employees can work from anywhere and communicate to clients efficiently and virtually since it enables them to solve the challenges of limited movements during the blockade. Furthermore, to further strengthen digital capabilities, service companies will invest in technological infrastructure to increase operational efficiency and agility to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

According to the literature review in this study, adequate training is an essential CRM requirement to achieve success. It ensures a continuous learning process that advances employee knowledge by accommodating seeking, disseminating, and using the information to respond to stakeholders' inquiries and problems. Training employees could enhance their quality creation features, such as administrative excellence, communication with customers, and improving behaviour and attitude, contributing to better service delivery outcomes measured through customer satisfaction. This is in line with the Islamic context; training relates to one's soul, understanding Allah's philosophies, acquiring and utilising Islamic values, working as a representative, submitting to Allah, and a way to success (Plakoyiannaki *et al.*, 2008; Kim and Kim, 2009). This positively corresponds to the study findings, where study participants will engage in employee training and development to ensure that their teams are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to respond to challenges that may arise during another blockade. Furthermore, this study's participants indicated that they conduct regular training for their employees on specific areas such as crisis management, risk assessment, and communication strategies to ensure that they are well prepared to handle any situation, including the impacts of the economic blockades in their industry.

Operational adjustments are essential in preparing for a future crisis, such as an economic blockade in Qatar. While there are many operations within an industry or company, the study has selected three places of consideration for operational adjustments as indicated by the study responses: resilience in the supply chain, pricing strategies, and adjustments on supply routes. According to Gordian (2020), though any adjustment made during a crisis may feel like progress, swift measures may not necessarily be effective, and therefore, staying focused on making informed decisions is essential. Thus, when adjusting supply routes, pricing strategies, and supply chains, services industries must use the 2017 blockade as a baseline for their strategic adjustments during another crisis.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND

CONCLUSION

6.1 Recommendations

While this study has given great insights into the crisis management process, the following may be better for protecting economies from scrambling during a crisis. Therefore, the study recommends the following:

Economic independence policies within a country are essential in conjunction with robust bilateral and unilateral business agreements. Diplomatic ties and a free market agreement within countries sharing the same region are crucial. However, it should be noted that a time comes when disagreements arise, and certain countries are sanctioned. What happens is that the economy that depends on regional trade allies ends up in economic turmoil. However, financial independence means a government can seek trade partnerships with other countries worldwide. In the contemporary world, globalisation has increased the number of unilateral and bilateral trade contracts, increasing the number of ways in which sanctions can be circumvented. In his concept of the invisible hand, Adam Smith (an economic philosopher) argued that people who pursue self-interest in a free market economy would unintentionally contribute to the overall well-being of the society's economy (Bishop, 1995). Therefore, economic independence policies in a country manifest the individual pursuit of self-interest. With a particular emphasis on the significance of domestic financial strength, financial independence policies may ensure that a nation's economic well-being is

safeguarded. The robust unilateral and bilateral business agreements are external factors that facilitate international trade and cooperation while preserving domestic economic interests.

Furthermore, the principles of utilitarianism, as coined by John Stuart, posits that policies and actions (Anuradha, 2000) should be evaluated based on their ability to maximise the general well-being and happiness of customers. The economic Independence policies in Qatar may align with the utilitarianism concept of improving the general well-being of the population if they are designed to bolster domestic industries and create a stable economy. Using the principles of utilitarianism, robust unilateral and bilateral business agreements have the potential to contribute to general global economic independence, and this may lead to greater global happiness through enhanced cooperation and trade. These concepts are also backed up by Friedrich Hayek's Individualism and Free Markets (Clark, 1949). Hayek is an advocate of free markets and individualism. About his principles, economic independence policies in a country are seen as an embodiment of individual financial freedom and self-determination. Bilateral and unilateral agreements of a country should be based on achieving further economic independence by fostering trade agreements independent of the economic bloc. Using the social contract theory that highlights the need for cooperation and agreements to maintain security and order, financial independence within a country may be perceived as a shared responsibility and commitment to securing monetary stability. Therefore, economic independence is a critical concept that cushions a nation from economic sanctions and embargoes and from other unprecedented occurrences.

The GCC countries are similar in every way. Similar government structures govern them and depend on the same resources. However, Qatar should consider diversifying and liberalising its economy as a country. Regional integration is helpful when countries specialise

in commodities, sectors, and services that can permit gains from trade. Economic diversification will act as a cushion for member states who want to impose sanctions on any member states. They stand a chance to lose more from what they bring to the table and, therefore, act as security. Realism in international relations emphasises the pursuit of national interest and the importance of self-help and power in the global system (Korab-Karpowicz, 2023). Economic diversification, according to Kenneth Waltz's realism in international relations (Korab-Karpowicz, 2023), ensures that countries such as Qatar reduce their economic dependence on others. It also means that diversification is a means of enhancing self-power and self-sufficiency. Diversification of the economy cushions and reduces a country's vulnerability to external pressures that include economic blockade imposed by other member states. In addition, the concept of social contract emphasises the importance of protecting individual property interests and rights (Dienstag, 1996). Therefore, economic diversification is a measure that Qatari, a member state of GCC countries, can independently take to protect its economic interests. When a state diversifies its economy, the country safeguards its economic sovereignty. Financial independence is also an act that applies the principles of Justice and fairness. Economic diversification is seen as a strategy that ensures more equitable resource distribution within Qatar. Economic diversification also means that the country will reduce economic dependence and, therefore, not be vulnerable to external sanctions as a state preserves its internal economic fairness and stability. According to the game theory, economic diversification is a crucial move when other players try to outsmart a key player. Being stable and more independent cushions a player or a team from being dominated by the other groups. Therefore, regional integration is more about having each country have a robust economic foundation that is different from the rest.

Blockades cause an economic embargo and may come unexpectedly. The study recommends that nations and service industries should stay informed and keep a close eye on the evolving situation and its impact on the industry. By visiting informed and understanding specific challenges and opportunities of the blockade, the service industry can help tailor their marketing strategies effectively. This can be drawn from the principles of pragmatism, hermetic, reflective equilibrium, social contract theory, game theory, and virtual ethics. These concepts highlight the importance of knowledge, practical wisdom, interpretation, moral virtues, and responsible action in the face of unprecedented economic challenges like the Qatar blockade. For instance, pragmatism is a concept that posits that staying informed and closely monitoring the evolving situations will ensure that businesses remain adaptable to respond to the unforeseen opportunities and challenges presented by the Qatar blockade. The principles of pragmatism encourage focusing on the results and the effectiveness of tailoring marketing strategies to respond to specific circumstances (Ormerod, 2006).

On the other hand, the recommendation to stay informed and to understand specific opportunities and challenges draws from hermeneutic and epistemological considerations. Epistemology is the nature of knowledge and understanding. Being informed is a manifestation of the pursuit of knowledge. Hermeneutics deals with the art of interpreting and understanding ability. Therefore, by closely examining the evolving situation, the services industry in Qatar may engage in a process of interpretation. Combining knowledge through interrelation is essential in making informed decisions and helping businesses tailor their marketing strategies based on their environmental analysis. In addition, the reflective equilibrium coined by John Rawls's theory of Justice invokes reconciling moral intuitions with ethical principles through rational reflection (Daniels, 2003). Therefore, Qatari businesses

aiming at services marketing and strengthening their CRM are encouraged to regularly assess their marketing strategies in light of new information and evolving circumstances. In the game theory, information is seen as a valuable resource. Having more information is an ingredient of any business that helps it stay at a strategic advantage. Information helps one to stay informed and make market decisions based on the information.

From the study, it is evident that relying on a single market or source of business may make a company vulnerable to external disruptions. Therefore, the study recommends that companies should diversify their market channels both internationally and domestically as a cushion from channel-specific challenges. Developing new markets includes forging partnerships with hard-to-reach markets. It also includes formulating local partnerships with local businesses and organisations to help in navigating the challenges of the blockade and increase accessibility within Qatar. In addition, companies in Qatar could rethink their investment in the red economy and venture into new and untapped markets. Borrowing from the blue ocean strategy, instead of competing for the already shrinking market due to the economic blockade, businesses could create new demand for their services, proliferate and become profitable, set their own rules, avoid completion, explore new opportunists that have not been studied, and develop their boundaries. Rather than fighting for demand, leveraging the continued discovery of new market forms cushions industries during challenging economic times. The blue ocean economy does not necessarily mean that businesses should search for new markets; it can also mean being innovative and adding value. Innovation may be information about new methods of service delivery, new ways of marketing, the creation of awareness, and the attraction of new customers who have never been interested in the company's products. The blue ocean strategy is one of the methods of market diversification. Therefore, Qatar businesses need to ask themselves the essential questions that form the

basis of discovering blue ocean markets: What can we reduce to cut costs at the current industry level? What can we eliminate among the elements that the industry considers necessary? What factors can we increase to exceed the industry's current quality level? What features can we create that are already unavailable in the industry? To cut costs, companies could withdraw unimportant services such as human labour that earn a lot of money with little effort towards attaining the firm's objectives. The company could increase some aspects of the industry, such as services marketing, value addition, and innovation efforts. Companies could also create based on customer insights and need through actions such as customisation of services and products.

With increased globalisation, technological advancement enables businesses to have an international presence through online platforms. Therefore, to solve the challenges of close border marketing, the Services industry should consider having an online presence. In times of disruption, digital marketing becomes more essential. Therefore, businesses should enhance their websites to include content marketing and utilise social media to reach the target audience. According to the game theory, the players in the companies are required to anticipate the next move of their competitors. One such move, according to this study, is digitisation, automation and increased online interaction. Rationally, in a competitive world, technology is a demand that, when realised, puts a business ahead of other companies. A rational thinker will not only consider leveraging technology but also strive to gain a competitive advantage by customising digital tools and developing unique and user-friendly interfaces.

In terms of Customer relationship management, adapted messaging is an important strategy to ensure that during unprecedented times like the Qatar blockade, businesses

provide that they communicate effectively and avoid confusion among the audience. Messages that offend the audience have short- and long-term implications for the service industry, which may be difficult to change through marketing. Adapted messaging works in cross-association with offering customer support by responding to increased customer concerns and questions during the blockade. This concept has been adapted from the principle of utilitarianism advocated by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham (Anuradha, 2000). The focus of utility posits that the ethical course of action concentrates on maximising overall happiness and minimises the suffering of people. In the context of adapted messaging during the Qatar blockade and other unprecedented times, it helps businesses avoid offending their customers and causing confusion among their audience. This reduces potential negative psychological and emotional impacts. Utilitarianism prioritises the contentment and well-being of the target market base to promote ethical customer relationship management. Hans-George Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics emphasises interpreting and understanding human interactions (Regan, 2012). Adapted messaging embodies this philosophical view as it acknowledges that different audiences have different ways of interpreting messages due to various perspectives and circumstances. Adapted messaging, therefore, demonstrates a commitment to respect the moral dignity and autonomy of their customers.

Furthermore, social contract theory aligns itself with adapted messaging. Businesses have a moral obligation to communicate to their customers in a way that respects their expectations and norms, even during unprecedented times. In general, adapted messaging is a principle that minimises harm, fosters mutual understanding, respects the moral autonomy of people, and upholds the implicit social contract to attract new customers and maintain the existing ones.

The blockade and other local, national and international business disruptions are an avenue to business innovations in technology and strategy of service offering. Therefore, the study recommends that the banking sector, hospitality industry, and other industries offering services be open to adapting to innovations and actively participate in creation. Changes brought about by the blockade are a great avenue to remodel the strategies of service offering, and this may necessitate changes to the business model, which requires flexibility to adapt and innovate. According to the rational choice theory, when a business is faced with hardships, the general response of the affected to the crisis is to formulate strategies or actions to mitigate the effects of the problem. However, the reward of an activity must outweigh the value of the activity that is intended to be completed. However, when the tip is below the value of the incurred costs, it will compel the business, a nation, or a group to stop the action. Borrowing from RBV, the study recommends that Qatar and its companies should use resources at their disposal to optimise their rewards in the market.

Customer feedback has been backed up as the backbone of the CRM strategy. The services industry has the mandate to leverage customer feedback as a way of collecting information necessary for innovation and offering services tailored toward customer needs. It is also an avenue to formulate contingency plans for further disruptions, which help minimise the impact of the interruption on business operations. Customer feedback provides direct insights into what customers expect, need and want from a business. According to the RBV model, understanding customer needs is essential for tailoring services and products to meet customer requirements effectively. In essence, customer feedback acts as the epistemological fulcrum through which CRM strategy pivots. It contains the conduit for understanding and acquiring the desires, expectations, and subjective experiences of the customer. Philosophically, customer feedback engenders epistemic information, facilitates

the assimilation of experiential wisdom and refines strategies to align with nuanced epistemic domains that enhance customer relations. In addition, customer feedback is an existential voice that defines every being of the CRM system. Also, customer feedback is a moral compass that directs the CRM strategy toward a constructive engagement rooted in transparency, responsiveness, and empathy.

The study also recommends that service industries like the banking sector, hospitality, and aviation industries avoid taking a stance on political matters and embrace being politically neutral. While the blockade has a direct impact on the services industry in terms of exploiting international markets, being politically neutral will necessitate the retention of customers. According to Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, deontology ethics is enshrined in the epicentre of rules and professional duties that are universally applicable without exception (Barrow and Khandhar, 2023). In customer retention, being politically neutral may be seen as an adherence to the deontology framework; by taking a political position, a business will treat all its customers impartially without considering their political beliefs (Barrow and Khandhar, 2023). With this approach, all customers in a market experiencing political unrest and economic blockade will see it as a safe environment for conducting business and, therefore, foster trust and loyalty. Being politically neutral can also be associated with John Rawls' notion of the "veil of ignorance" (Huang, Greene and Bazerman, 2019). The veil of ignorance is taken as a tool of moral reasoning designed to promote impartial decision-making by denying stakeholders and decision-makers access to information with potential bias about beneficiaries. Rawls argued that decision-making should be behind a veil of ignorance, where decision-makers make decisions by being unaware of their circumstances, including their political beliefs. In the context of this study, this means treating all customers impartially as if

you are unaware of their political affiliation. Fairness fosters a sense of inclusivity and Justice, which can lead to more muscular customer retention.

Moreover, the social contract theory postulates that people live together in the community with agreements establishing political and moral rules of behaviour (Ritchie, 1891). By being politically neutral, respect an unspoken social contract with a diverse customer base. Therefore, they have to refrain from imposing their political views on customers and in return, customers tend to continue patronising the business.

6.2 Implications of the study

6.2.1 Policy implications

6.2.1.1 Policy Implications for Qatar

The study highlights that the blockade is a result of existing tensions within GCC and, therefore, raises questions about the future of regional cooperation. These findings imply that there is a strained regional relations among GCC countries. However, research indicates that regional collaboration is essential in addressing global challenges, such as geopolitical events, through collective well-being (World Bank, 2024). Regional cooperation is important as it enhances market efficiency, facilitates large infrastructure, and enables the sharing of costs for public goods, contributes to other non-economic benefits such as the promotion of security and peace, therefore enhancing sustainable development (Drakos and Kutun, 2003; World Bank, 2024). Therefore, the Qatar government, as well as the GCC countries, need to reassess their policy and strengthen their regional cooperation.

The study highlights media influence in propagating propaganda that led to the blockade. However, GCC countries have a mandate to learn from the embargo and ensure that several principles that guide media should be adhered to by all media channels. These principles include Fact-checking to verify accuracy, Transparency by disclosing context and sources of information, presentation of multiple viewpoints to avoid bias, ethical journalism by being truthful and fair, and ensuring integrity in reporting, accountability, and media literacy (Guess and Lyons, 2020; Anderson, 2021; WANPRC, 2022). By evaluating how media channels follow these principles, Qatar could ensure that the media fulfils its role as a disseminator of accurate information.

The economic blockade resulted in the economic diversification of Qatar, which moved it away from reliance on its neighbours to become a more sovereign and independent country. Sovereignty policies are important as they prioritise domestic production and reduce the dependency on imports, hence cushioning a country's economy against external attacks such as geopolitical events (IEA, 2018).

The study highlights that the blockading countries blocked transportation routes, which are important for supply chains and accessibility of suppliers. This calls for alternative trade routes and the need to strengthen ties with other countries (non-sanctioning countries) to maintain financial stability and trade flows. This has also been illustrated in the study explaining why democratic targets are disadvantaged (Early and Peksen, 2020). Establishing alternative trade routes also has another policy implication that requires Qatar to develop alternative infrastructure that connects them to their new partners, who can be their suppliers and trade partners.

The study also highlights the need for a strong international mediation organisation and strategies to solve regional and global disputes that have strong impacts on the flow of essential goods and services such as food, clothing and medicine.

6.2.1.2 Policy implications for services industries

The Qatar blockade severely impacted the importation of essential resources into the country, affecting the production of Qatar's companies. Therefore, companies should reassess their resources and focus on local marketing strategies, encourage the government to introduce incentives and subsidies for marketing services on domestic brands and markets and encourage "Made in Qatar" campaigns that promote local services.

Digital solutions came out as a strong theme in this study, and this has strong policy implications for services companies who could use the effects of the blockade that hinders face-to-face interactions with relevant stakeholders to invest in digital media and training programs for sustainable production and sales. This could also include policy initiatives to streamline e-commerce regulations to facilitate online marketing and sales activities.

The study also indicates the importance of maintaining a broader customer base at all times, including during economic blockades. Due to the blockade's impact that cuts down the customer base and comes with challenges of change in consumer purchasing behaviour and declining consumer power, individual companies could change several corporate policies to ensure that they acquire a new customer base and maintain the existing ones.

With the establishment of digital solutions, service companies need to formulate and reassess their consumer protection and data privacy policies to ensure consumer trust in online marketing activities. These include regulations on advertising practices to mitigate potential discrimination and manipulation concerns.

6.2.2 Implications for future study

This study offers valuable insights and prompts several recommendations for future studies. These recommendations are based on the various gaps that have been identified in the discussion. The recommendations span several disciplines, including healthcare, environment, social sciences, technology, and the interdisciplinary nature of the contemporary challenges and opportunities in Qatar. For example, the study underscores that all participants were aware of the economic blockade imposed on Qatar by GCC member states. However, the reasons for the embargo given by the participants are fewer than those highlighted in the literature review. Future studies should look into these disparities and try to understand the relationship between awareness and strategy.

Also, a deeper exploration of the geopolitical dynamic that surrounds the Qatar blockade is needed to present a rich scholarly inquiry. Future research, therefore, should delve into the reasons and decision-making processes of the GCC countries with an emphasis on political, diplomatic, and security considerations that influenced their unanimous actions on Qatar. A scholarly enquiry into the relationships between rivalries, alliances, and historical tensions that may have contributed to the blockade can offer valuable insights into the greater power dynamics for Middle Eastern countries.

In addition, researchers need to conduct a thorough analysis of the role of international actors in exacerbating or mediating the Qatar economic blockade. The involvement of external powers such as the European Union, the United States of America, and other countries in trying to perpetuate or resolve the crisis adds a layer of complexity. Therefore, future studies need to investigate the extent of the motivations behind the interventions of external powers and the implications of global diplomacy on the Qatar

blockade. Conducting this research could contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how regional conflicts interest global politics.

Another compelling area for future study, as revealed by this study, is an understanding of economic resilience in the face of geopolitical challenges. The Qatar blockade highlights the importance of self-sufficiency and diversification. Therefore, researchers could explore how Qatar's economy and businesses adapted to the embargo and identify strategies employed to mitigate the negative impacts of the blockade on trade and investments, as well as the overall economic stability of the country. Researchers seeking to prop into this area should conduct comparative studies with other nations facing similar challenges to offer valuable benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness of economic resilience and adaptability strategies.

Being a key player in the global energy market in terms of the global liquefied natural gas (LNG) market, an examination of the impact of the blockade on the energy markets is essential. Disruptions caused by border closures had a significant effect on the supply chain in the energy markets. Investigating the implications of adaptability and resilience of the energy markets in the face of geopolitical shocks such as the Qatar blockade can contribute to the understanding of the interconnectedness of the global energy markets and vulnerabilities that may arise in times of political disagreements.

Furthermore, one of the overarching themes in this study was matters concerning security issues arising from the blockade. These matters demand scholarly attention from researchers. Future studies need to contextualise and analyse how the crisis influenced regional security dynamics such as alliances, proxy conflicts, and military posturing. Research

on the security implications of the blockade can inform policymakers and contribute to the development of a robust security framework in the GCC countries.

The Qatar blockade had Socio-political implications that affected services marketing in the Gulf countries. This offers a fertile ground for research. Scholars can explore how the Qatar blockade impacted social cohesion and identify political activism and formation within the blockading countries and Qatar. The research propping may also include the role of media in shaping the perceptions of the public and narratives during the blockade.

Also, the findings of this study indicate the importance of family and how the blockade disrupted family ties. In addition, the blockade impacted family preferences for the products and services in the market. Therefore, a gendered analysis of the blockade's impact may give valuable insights into how the blockade may have affected women and men differently in terms of social roles, employment, access to resources, and marketing preferences. Gender dimensions are important in marketing services as gendered marketing strategies take into consideration gender preferences. Therefore, gendered research may contribute to more inclusive and gender-sensitive policy-making after the blockade to inform future crisis and marketing strategies.

There is also a need to have an interdisciplinary approach in conducting future studies that integrate perspectives from economics, international relations, sociology, and political science to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of the Qatar blockade imposed by various GCC countries. Collaborative research efforts may bring together experts from multiple disciplines to provide a holistic view of the dimensions of the blockade and its aftermath.

This research is purely qualitative. However, in future, researchers should consider a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. For instance, qualitative approaches to the study, such as case studies, content analysis, and interviews, can offer comprehensive insights into the subjective experiences of individuals and the challenges of diplomatic and political processes. Also, quantitative analyses such as econometric methods and statistical modelling can provide a broader perspective by examining correlations, patterns, and trends in large datasets related to economic indicators, trade, security, and services marketing. Longitudinal studies will help track the post-blockade developments in Qatar and other GC countries to understand the long-term consequences of the blockade in the marketing and CRM landscape. This approach could allow researchers and scholars to assess the sustainability and adaptability of economic remedies, the evolution of regional relationships, and changes in political dynamics over time.

6.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the blockade against Qatar occurred in the contemporary landscape, castigated by fear of supporting terrorist groups and disagreements. However, it brought economic shockwaves to the Qatari economy, negatively influencing the services industry and customer management relations. Mediate economic recovery did not include mediation to re-establish diplomatic ties. Instead, Qatar diversified its economy by forging stronger relationships with GCC enemies like Turkey, hence becoming more economically independent than before. For services industries and CRM efforts, the country's foreign affairs and companies had to think of diversification of their services and goods, supply chain, increased demand for their interests, and patriotic purchase decision-making. In addition, they had to

embark on customer needs assessment to uncover new trends in customer behaviours and tailor their decisions towards customers. They had to leverage the latest technologies to bring services closer to the people with limited mobility, educate their customers and other stakeholders and forge new or strengthened ties with business actors.

The extensive analysis presented in this study gives insights into the impact of the economic blockade on Qatar services marketing and CRM. Findings highlight a web of challenges faced by various sectors, including aviation, banking, healthcare, hospitality, and education, due to disrupted trade and financial flows. The study shows that the economic blockade imposed on Qatar by the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain severed economic ties but also triggered numerous repercussions affecting Qatari citizens and businesses alike. The study delves into the multifaceted effects of the blockade on CRM. The study underscores the strain on customer service efficiency due to disruptions in the supply chain, resulting in customer frustrations and delays. The study underscores the effects on customer behaviour, including changes in social relationships and reduced demand for services influenced by limitations on customer movement and political dynamics. The study explored the role of dialogue in conflict resolution, as demonstrated by the eventual end of the economic blockade through diplomatic negotiations. The study also highlights the need for businesses to adapt to the changing environment by diversifying resources, conducting risk assessments, and embracing technological interventions such as the use of digital platforms to reach out to customers and digital banking.

Respondents, who were top officials in various service industries in Qatar, expressed the importance of maintaining a neutral stance toward government policies and rules. This will enable businesses to work easily in aligning their businesses with the changing and

adaptable government regulations during challenging economic times during the blockade. In response to the impacts and challenges posed by the blockade, Qatar companies have adopted various strategies, including diversification. Diversification emerged as the common theme that entails the diversification of policies, services, products, partnerships, customer base, and markets. In addition, effective communication strategies and leveraging digital technologies are given paramount importance as a way of staying connected with customers and enhancing services by breaching the gap of mobility challenges. The study also emphasises the significance of customer needs assessment as a foundational step for service industries to navigate through the complexities of the economic blockade. The various adjustments made by companies in response to the effects of the economic blockade, such as price adjustments, contingency plans, and stakeholder collaboration, reflect their proactive approach to mitigate the impact of the blockade on services marketing and customer relations. In general, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between political, economic, and social factors that shape the Qatari services industry.

The study offers a pivotal moment in contemporary Gulf politics and offers a wealthy source of gaps that inform future studies. Researchers can explore economic adaptations, geopolitical crises, implications of regional security, and socio-political consequences of the Qatar blockade to enhance an understanding of the complexities between economics and politics in the GCC countries. By addressing the research recommendations of this study, scholars can contribute valuable insights that enrich academic discourse, inform policymakers and guide future strategies for resolving and navigating geopolitical changes in Qatar.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Time Plan

The activities that the researcher will be involved in to complete the project are included in the following table. These proposed activities are slated for the next two years.

Table 8: Time Plan

Duration	Activity	Progress
October 2021	Development of introduction chapter and Literature review and annual review report on progress	Done
January 2022	Finalisation of methodology section	Done
	Review with supervisor	Done
March 2022	Finalisation of Literature review and review of background information in preparation for data collection.	Done
April 2022	Design of interview guide	Done
	Review with supervisor	Done
May 2022	Acquisition of authority to conduct interviews	Done
June 2022- November 2022	Collection of data	Done

January 2023	Analysis of interview data	Done
July to October 2023	Development of final project report and completion of program	Done

Appendix 2: Interviews Questions

S/N	RESPONDENTS	POSITIONS	INDUSTRY
1	RESPONDENT A	Director	Aviation Company
2	RESPONDENT B	Civil Servant	Department Of Health Foreign And Commonwealth
3	RESPONDENT C	Manager	Private Sector
4	RESPONDENT D	Chair Of Chamber Of Commerce	Chamber Of Commerce
5	RESPONDENT E	Chief Operations Officer (C)	Banking Sector
6	RESPONDENT F	Director	Shell UK
7	RESPONDENT G	Insurance Market	Lloyd's Of London

1. What is your designation?
2. View about the economic blockade sanctioned on Qatar by some member states of the GCC?

S/N	RESPONDENTS	POSITIONS	INDUSTRY	VIEW ON ECONOMIC BLOCKADE BY GCC
1	RESPONDENT A	Director	Aviation Company	The blockade on Qatar imposed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt in June 2017 severely impacted Qatar's economy due to the closure of borders and the imposition of economic sanctions. However, Qatar has been able to withstand the blockade by diversifying its economy and developing closer economic ties with other countries. As a Director of an Aviation company, it is crucial to assess the risks and opportunities arising from the blockade and make informed decisions to ensure the company's long-term sustainability.
2	RESPONDENT B	Civil Servant	Health Foreign and Commonwealth	The UK government is committed to the unity and stability of the GCC and calls for peaceful resolution of differences through dialogue. The economic blockade on Qatar has disrupted various sectors including health and foreign affairs, impacting the import and export of goods and services, straining diplomatic relationships, and requiring civil servants to remain neutral and follow government policies.
3	RESPONDENT C	Manager	Private Sector	The Saudi-led blockade on Qatar has caused significant disruptions in the availability of food, fuel, and flights in the region. Qatar has experienced economic upheaval, resulting in potential social and political unrest, with families facing separation, job losses, and denial of visitation rights. Numerous complaints have been lodged with Qatar's National Human Rights Committee, highlighting the impact of the blockade on people's lives.

4	RESPONDENT D	Chair of Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Of Commerce	As the chair of the chamber of commerce, one's view on the blockade would depend on various factors including economic ties and interests, potential economic impact, and diplomatic implications. The 2017 blockade imposed by several GCC member states on Qatar resulted in border closures, air and sea route disruptions, and a diplomatic rift. A balanced approach, careful analysis, stakeholder consultation, and diplomatic engagement may be necessary to seek a resolution that promotes regional stability and economic growth.
5	RESPONDENT E	Chief Operations Officer (COO)	Banking Sector	In 2017, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt imposed an economic boycott on Qatar, accusing it of sponsoring terrorism. Qatar refused to comply with their demands, resulting in severed diplomatic ties and a significant impact on its economy. The blockade was lifted in January 2021, and diplomatic relations were reestablished.
6	RESPONDENT F	Director	Shell UK	In May and June 2017, hackers breached the Qatar News Agency and posted 'fake news' attributed to Qatar's Emir, which was picked up by Saudi and UAE media outlets. These reports accused Qatar of supporting terrorist groups. The Washington Post later reported that U.S. investigators suspected the UAE, with help from Russia-based hackers, orchestrated the hack.
7	RESPONDENT G	Insurance Market	Lloyd's Of London	In 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the UAE imposed sanctions on Qatar, accusing it of not fulfilling its commitments under the GCC's "Riyadh Agreements" to stop supporting terrorist groups and individuals. Qatar was also accused of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and Houthi rebels in Yemen, as well as having a concerning relationship with Iran.

3. What do you think were the main reason(s) for the blockade?

S/N	RESPONDENTS	POSITIONS	INDUSTRY	REASONS FOR THE BLOCKADE
1	RESPONDENT A	Director	Aviation Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blockade on Qatar by GCC member states was due to allegations of Qatar's support for terrorism and close ties with Iran. • Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt accused Qatar of financing and supporting terrorist groups and destabilizing the region. • Qatar denied the allegations and viewed the blockade as an attempt to curtail its sovereignty. • The dispute also involved issues related to media freedom, regional influence, and foreign policy
2	RESPONDENT B	Civil Servant	Health Foreign and Commonwealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longstanding tensions between Qatar and neighboring countries • Concerns about Qatar's growing independence in foreign affairs • Qatar's cultivation of relationships with opposition groups, particularly those linked to the Muslim Brotherhood • Criticism of Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab Spring protests • Deteriorating relations with Egypt after condemning the coup in 2013 • Withdrawal of ambassadors by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt in March 2014, citing Qatar's alleged interference in their internal affairs.

3	RESPONDENT C	Manager	Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alleged support of state-sponsored Islamic extremism • Complex relationship with Iran • Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain severing all diplomatic ties and transportation links with Qatar
4	RESPONDENT D	Chair of Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accusation of sponsoring terrorism • Alleged connections with Iran • Alleged support for Islamist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood • Presence of a Turkish military installation on Qatari territory • Refutation of charges by Qatar • Diplomatic crisis in the region • Support and opposition from various countries regarding the blockade
5	RESPONDENT E	Chief Operations Officer (COO)	Banking Sector	There were several stated reasons for it, including accusations of supporting terrorism, interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, and having close ties with Iran. Other factors such as political and economic tensions between the countries involved also likely played a role. However, the specific reasons and motivations behind the blockade remain a matter of debate and interpretation.
6	RESPONDENT F	Director	Shell UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hacking of Qatar News Agency and circulation of "fake news" story • Media outlets in Saudi Arabia and UAE picking up the story • Media onslaught portraying Qatar as a destabilizing regional actor • Accusations of supporting terrorist groups • U.S. investigators suspecting UAE and Russia-based hackers in orchestrating the hack
7	RESPONDENT G	Insurance Market	Lloyd's Of London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The branch was significantly affected by the economic and diplomatic blockade imposed on

				<p>Qatar in 2017 by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The blockade resulted in closures of borders, severance of diplomatic ties, and travel and economic sanctions on Qatar.• Lloyd's of London's branch in Qatar faced operational challenges and had to make adjustments to continue serving customers and managing relationships with them.
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4. How did the economic blockade have financial implications for your operations?

S/N	RESPONDENTS	POSITIONS	INDUSTRY	FINANCIAL IMPLICATION FOR YOUR OPERATIONS
1	RESPONDENT A	Director	Aviation Company	The economic blockade on Qatar had significant financial implications for the aviation company, including rerouting of flights, supply chain disruption, and decreased demand for flights, resulting in losses in revenue. the blockade affected our industry's supply chain, as our airlines were unable to access certain airports or utilize the services of Qatari companies. This impacted the availability and cost of services such as aircraft maintenance, ground handling, and fuel supply.
2	RESPONDENT B	Civil Servant	Health Foreign and Commonwealth	Limited trade and economic relations with Qatar, which resulted in reduced revenue for the government. It also affected the cost of goods and services, as prices increased due to supply chain disruptions and restrictions on trade. the blockade impacted international collaborations and partnerships that the government may have had with Qatar in areas such as health and foreign affairs, which led to a loss of funding and resources for these initiatives.
3	RESPONDENT C	Manager	Private Sector	The blockade resulted in the closure of all transportation links, including air, sea, and land, which made it difficult for businesses to import and export goods. The supply chain was disrupted, and businesses had to look for alternative routes to import and export their goods, which resulted in additional costs. For instance, many businesses had to rely on air freight, which is more expensive than sea freight, to import goods. The hospitality sector was also severely affected by the blockade. Many hotels

				and restaurants saw a sharp decline in bookings and revenue, as tourists and business travelers were deterred from traveling to Qatar. The retail sector was also hit hard by the blockade. Many retailers experienced a shortage of goods, as the supply chain was disrupted.
4	RESPONDENT D	Chair of Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Of Commerce	This resulted in decreased revenue, disrupted supply chains, increased costs for alternative sourcing, and potential loss of business relationships. The impact may vary depending on the nature of the business and the duration and severity of the blockade. It is important for businesses to have contingency plans and adapt to changing economic conditions to mitigate potential financial losses.
5	RESPONDENT E	Chief Operations Officer (COO)	Banking Sector	The blockade disrupted trade and financial flows, which led to a decrease in business activities in the region. The banking sector was particularly affected as the reduced economic activity resulted in decreased demand for loans and other financial services. Furthermore, the blockade had an impact on the value of Qatari assets, including stocks, bonds, and real estate. This led to a decline in investment returns and created uncertainty in the market. Additionally, the blockade resulted in a shortage of certain goods and services, which led to inflationary pressures on prices. This had an impact on our clients who were facing higher costs and reduced purchasing power, affecting their ability to repay loans

6	RESPONDENT F	Director	Shell UK	<p>Shell is an oil and gas company that had operations in Qatar through its Qatargas 4 liquefied natural gas (LNG) project, which produces LNG for export. The blockade disrupted transportation routes and trade in the region, causing difficulties for Shell in exporting its LNG from Qatar to other countries.</p> <p>The blockade also affected the supply chain of Shell's operations in Qatar, as many goods and services had to be sourced from other countries due to the restrictions imposed by the blockade. This led to delays in project timelines and increased costs for Shell.</p> <p>Overall, the blockade had a significant impact on Shell's operations in Qatar, affecting its ability to export its products and creating challenges in its supply chain.</p>
7	RESPONDENT G	Insurance Market	Lloyd's Of London	<p>The economic blockade had significant financial implications for the insurance market, including Lloyd's of London, which had a branch in Qatar. The blockade disrupted trade and supply chains, resulting in a decline in economic activity and an increase in the cost of goods and services. This had a ripple effect on the insurance market as businesses sought to mitigate their risks by purchasing insurance coverage. However, the increase in demand for insurance coverage coupled with the disruption of the insurance market due to the blockade led to a rise in premiums. This increase in premiums made it challenging for businesses in the region to obtain the necessary insurance coverage at an affordable price, affecting their ability to operate and grow.</p>

5. In what ways did the blockade affect your approaches to managing your customers?

S/N	RESPONDENTS	POSITIONS	INDUSTRY	HOW DID THE BLOCKADE AFFECT CUSTOMER MGT
1	RESPONDENT A	Director	Aviation Company	<p>One of the most significant challenges we encountered was the disruption to our flight schedules, which led to cancellations and delays. This caused frustration and inconvenience for passengers, who were forced to make alternative travel arrangements.</p> <p>In addition, the economic blockade resulted in reduced demand for air travel, as business and leisure travelers were discouraged from visiting the affected countries. This had a significant impact on our aviation company's revenue and profitability.</p> <p>To manage these challenges, we implemented a range of strategies, such as offering flexible booking options and alternative routes, communicating regularly with customers about changes to flight schedules, and providing compensation and refunds where appropriate. We also adjusted our marketing and promotional activities to focus on other markets and destinations that are not affected by the blockade.</p>
2	RESPONDENT B	Civil Servant	Health Foreign and Commonwealth	<p>The blockade had significant implications for the operations of the department, as it disrupted diplomatic relations between Qatar and several GCC member states, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE. This resulted in restrictions on travel and trade, which impacted the movement of goods and people, including healthcare professionals and patients.</p>

				<p>Furthermore, the blockade disrupted supply chains for essential medical equipment and medication, which had to be sourced from alternative suppliers. This caused delays and increased costs, which had a knock-on effect on the delivery of healthcare services.</p> <p>In addition, the blockade impacted the ability of the department to maintain relations with Qatar, which was seen as a key partner in the region for its efforts in promoting health and social care. The department had to navigate complex political dynamics to maintain its relationships with both Qatar and the GCC member states involved in the blockade.</p> <p>Overall, the economic blockade had significant financial and operational implications for the Dept of Health; Foreign and Commonwealth, and required careful management to ensure that the delivery of healthcare services was not compromised.</p>
3	RESPONDENT C	Manager	Private Sector	<p>The economic dislocation caused by the blockade led to changes in consumer behavior. With uncertainty surrounding the availability of goods and services, consumers become more hesitant to spend money, resulting in decreased sales for companies.</p>
4	RESPONDENT D	Chair of Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Of Commerce	<p>The economic boycott imposed on Qatar by various Gulf Cooperation Council member states had a substantial impact on enterprises, especially customer management strategies. The blockade disrupted supply chains, forcing many enterprises to seek alternate suppliers and markets in order to continue operations. As a result, customer management practices changed as organizations had to adjust to changing market conditions and</p>

				<p>discover new ways to service their consumers efficiently.</p> <p>Furthermore, the blockade created economic uncertainty, which reduced consumer confidence and expenditure. As a result, our businesses were forced to reconsider their customer management methods, such as pricing strategies and promotional activities, in order to remain competitive in a difficult market. Ultimately, the economic embargo had a substantial impact on businesses and their ability to successfully manage their consumers.</p>
5	RESPONDENT E	Chief Operations Officer (COO)	Banking Sector	<p>As the COO of a banking sector, the blockade had a significant impact on our approach to managing our customers. With limited access to banking services and restricted movement of people and goods, our customers faced significant challenges in conducting their day-to-day business operations.</p> <p>We had to adopt new strategies to support our customers during this challenging time, such as developing digital banking solutions to enable customers to conduct transactions remotely. We also had to provide additional support and guidance to customers on navigating the changes in the business landscape caused by the blockade.</p> <p>Furthermore, we had to focus on maintaining strong relationships with our customers, providing them with the necessary financial tools and resources to navigate through the difficult economic climate. We had to remain agile and adaptable to ensure that our customers received the support they needed to continue their operations in the face of the blockade.</p>

6	RESPONDENT F	Director	Shell UK	<p>The blockade affected Shell's approach to managing its customers as it disrupted the transportation routes and trade in the region, affecting the supply chain and logistics of the company's operations in Qatar. As a result, Shell had to make adjustments to its operations to continue supporting its customers and managing relationships with them. These adjustments included finding alternative routes for transportation and sourcing supplies from other countries, as well as ensuring effective communication with customers to minimize disruptions and delays in their services. The company also had to reassess its risk management strategies and incorporate new measures to mitigate the impact of similar situations in the future.</p>
7	RESPONDENT G	Insurance Market	Lloyd's Of London	<p>With the blockade, the company's branch in Qatar was affected, resulting in a decline in business and loss of revenue. The restrictions on the import of goods also affected the company's ability to provide services to its customers in Qatar, leading to a strain in customer relationships. Additionally, the blockade caused uncertainty and instability in the market, making it difficult for the company to make sound financial decisions and plan for the future. In summary, the blockade disrupted the normal functioning of insurance markets and made it challenging for companies like Lloyd's of London to manage their customers effectively.</p>

6. What adjustments did they have to make in its operations in order to continue supporting its customers and managing its relationships with them?

S/N	RESPONDENTS	POSITIONS	INDUSTRY	ADJUSTMENT MADE BY YOUR COMPANY TO SUPPORT CUSTOMERS
1	RESPONDENT A	Director	Aviation Company	<p>As a director of an Aviation company, the economic blockade had a significant impact on our operations, including customer management. To continue supporting our customers and managing our relationships with them, we had to make several adjustments, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversifying our routes: Due to the blockade, we had to suspend flights to Qatar and some other destinations. To continue serving our customers, we had to diversify our routes and focus on other destinations that were not affected by the blockade. • Offering alternative options: For customers who were affected by the suspension of flights, we had to offer alternative options, such as rerouting flights through other airports or providing refunds and rebooking options. • Providing clear communication: We had to ensure that our customers were well-informed about the situation and the steps we were taking to support them. We communicated through various channels, including email, social media, and our website. • Enhancing customer service: We made sure that our customer service team was readily available to handle inquiries and

				<p>complaints from affected customers. We also provided additional training to our team to equip them with the necessary skills to handle the unique challenges posed by the blockade.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusting our pricing strategy: Due to the changes in demand caused by the blockade, we had to adjust our pricing strategy to remain competitive and attract customers. This included offering discounts and promotions to stimulate demand in other destinations. <p>Overall, we had to be flexible and adaptable to the changing situation caused by the economic blockade. Our focus remained on providing excellent customer service and supporting our customers during this challenging time.</p>
2	RESPONDENT B	Civil Servant	Health Foreign and Commonwealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example, if a company relied heavily on importing goods from Qatar, they would need to find alternative sources or adjust their supply chain. If a business had customers in Qatar, they would need to find alternative ways to communicate and provide services, potentially using virtual or digital means. • In the case of my department “Health, Foreign Affairs and commonwealth”, we had to adjust our diplomatic efforts and relationships with Qatar and other countries in the region to manage the political and economic fallout of the blockade. We also needed to adjust our policies and procedures for providing consular services and support to citizens affected by the blockade.

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adjustments that were made in operations to continue supporting customers and managing relationships with them during the GCC economic blockade on Qatar include: • Identifying alternative supply chains and routes for goods and services to ensure continuity of operations. • Strengthening communication and coordination with stakeholders, including customers and suppliers, to ensure transparency and address any concerns or questions. • Developing contingency plans to mitigate any potential disruptions to services or supplies, and regularly reviewing and updating these plans as needed. • Monitoring and analyzing the impact of the blockade on various sectors, including healthcare and tourism, and providing support to affected businesses and individuals as necessary. • Engaging in diplomatic efforts to address the underlying issues causing the blockade and promote a resolution.
3	RESPONDENT C	Manager	Private Sector	<p>In order to manage customers effectively during a blockade, we communicated more frequently and transparently with customers. We also explored alternative methods for delivering goods and services, such as using alternative transportation routes or digital platforms.</p> <p>Overall, the blockade had significant impacts on company's ability to manage its customers, but with proactive communication and a willingness to explore alternative methods, we worked to mitigate these</p>

				impacts and continue to provide quality service to our customers.
4	RESPONDENT D	Chair of Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Of Commerce	<p>As a chair of chamber of commerce, we had to make several adjustments in our operations to continue supporting our customers and managing our relationships with them. Firstly, we had to diversify our customer base to include more customers from other countries and regions, rather than solely relying on customers from the GCC countries. We also had to explore new markets and partnerships to maintain our revenue streams and ensure the sustainability of our operations. We also had to adapt our communication strategies to keep our customers informed about any changes or disruptions caused by the blockade. This involved being transparent about any supply chain disruptions, delays or increased costs, and working collaboratively with our customers to find alternative solutions.</p> <p>Furthermore, we had to increase our focus on digital technologies to stay connected with our customers, as face-to-face meetings and events were not possible due to travel restrictions. We organized webinars, online workshops and networking events to continue engaging with our customers and providing value to them. Overall, the economic blockade required us to be agile, creative and resilient in managing our relationships with our customers and adapting our operations to the changing market conditions.</p>

5	RESPONDENT E	Chief Operations Officer (COO)	Banking Sector	<p>When faced with the economic blockade, we had to make some adjustments to our operations to continue supporting our customers and managing our relationships with them. One of the main adjustments we had to make was to increase our focus on digital banking services. This was important because the blockade led to a reduction in physical movement across borders, which meant our customers had limited access to traditional banking services. We also had to increase our customer engagement efforts to help reassure our customers that we were still able to provide them with the necessary support and services they needed.</p> <p>Another adjustment we made was to review our credit and lending policies to ensure they were still viable despite the economic blockade. We had to consider the potential impact on our customers' ability to repay loans and adjust our lending criteria accordingly. Additionally, we had to be more vigilant in monitoring the financial health of our customers and take proactive measures to mitigate any potential risks.</p> <p>Finally, we had to maintain close communication with our customers to keep them informed of any changes in our operations and provide them with regular updates on the situation regarding the blockade. This helped to build trust and confidence in our services and enabled us to better manage our relationships with our customers during this challenging period.</p>
6	RESPONDENT F	Director	Shell UK	<p>However, in general, companies facing such disruptions in their operations due to geopolitical or economic issues tend to take measures such as finding alternative supply routes, increasing stockpiles of essential goods, and diversifying their business operations. It is possible that Shell UK may have taken similar measures to ensure the continuity of its operations and the provision of its services to customers during the blockade.</p>

7	RESPONDENT G	Insurance Market	Lloyd's Of London	<p>As a result of the blockade, Lloyd's of London had to make several adjustments in its operations to continue supporting its customers and managing its relationships with them. One of the key adjustments was to relocate its branch in Qatar to the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) in the UAE. This was done to ensure that Lloyd's could continue to service its clients in Qatar and the surrounding region despite the blockade.</p> <p>In addition to the relocation, Lloyd's also had to adjust its underwriting policies and procedures to account for the increased risks associated with doing business in a politically unstable region. This meant that the company had to carefully evaluate its exposure to political risk and ensure that it had appropriate risk mitigation strategies in place to protect its interests and those of its clients.</p> <p>Furthermore, Lloyd's had to work closely with its clients to understand their specific needs and concerns in light of the blockade. This involved providing regular updates and advice on the evolving situation, as well as developing customized insurance solutions to address the unique challenges faced by each client.</p> <p>Overall, the adjustments made by Lloyd's of London and other insurance markets in response to the blockade highlight the importance of agility and flexibility in the face of unexpected challenges. By quickly adapting to changing circumstances and proactively addressing the needs of their clients, these companies were able to minimize the financial impact of the blockade and maintain their position as trusted partners in the insurance industry.</p>
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7. What measures have you put in place to help overcome the challenges that you faced under the blockade should a similar situation arise again?

S/N	RESPONDENTS	POSITIONS	INDUSTRY	MEASURES TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THE BLOCKADE
1	RESPONDENT A	Director	Aviation Company	<p>As a Director of an Aviation company, in order to prepare for any potential future economic blockades or similar situations, we have implemented several measures to help mitigate the impact on our operations and customers. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversifying our network: We are working to expand our network to include more destinations and routes, thereby reducing our reliance on a small number of key markets. This will allow us to continue to serve our customers even if there is a disruption in one or more markets. • Building stronger partnerships: We are strengthening our partnerships with other airlines and ground handling companies to ensure that we have alternative options for providing our services and support to our customers. • Improving communication: We are improving our communication channels with our customers, providing regular updates on any changes to our services or routes, and offering alternative options where possible. • Enhancing our technology infrastructure: We are investing in our technology infrastructure to improve our ability to manage operations

				<p>and customer support remotely, including the use of digital platforms and automation tools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting regular risk assessments: We are regularly conducting risk assessments to identify potential threats and challenges that could impact our operations, and developing contingency plans to manage these risks. <p>By taking these measures, we hope to be better prepared and equipped to manage any future economic blockades or similar situations, and to continue providing our customers with the best possible service and support.</p>
2	RESPONDENT B	Civil Servant	Health Foreign and Commonwealth	<p>Diversifying suppliers and partners: We explored alternative suppliers and partners in different regions to reduce reliance on any one source.</p> <p>Strengthening internal communication: Communication is key during times of crisis. Organizations can improve communication within their teams and with external stakeholders to ensure everyone is on the same page.</p> <p>Developing contingency plans: Having contingency plans in place helped us respond quickly and effectively to unexpected events, such as an economic blockade.</p> <p>Investing in technology and digital solutions: Technology helped us maintain operations and continue to serve customers even during disruptive events.</p> <p>Building strong relationships: We worked to build strong relationships with customers and partners, which</p>

				can help to weather difficult times and maintain loyalty.
3	RESPONDENT C	Manager	Private Sector	<p>As a private sector manager, we have put in place several measures to help overcome the challenges that we faced under the blockade should a similar situation arise again.</p> <p>Firstly, we have diversified our supply chain to reduce our dependence on any one country or region. This includes sourcing raw materials and goods from a variety of countries, as well as establishing local partnerships to ensure that we can continue to provide our products and services to our customers.</p> <p>Secondly, we have improved our communication and coordination with our customers to ensure that we are aware of any potential disruptions or challenges they may face. This includes regular communication to keep our customers informed of any developments and to provide them with alternative solutions.</p> <p>Thirdly, we have invested in technology and infrastructure to increase our operational efficiency and agility. This includes the implementation of digital platforms and tools to streamline our operations and supply chain, as well as the establishment of backup systems and facilities to ensure continuity of our operations in case of any disruptions.</p> <p>Fourthly, we have enhanced our risk management strategies and protocols to better anticipate and mitigate any potential risks that may arise. This includes regular risk assessments, scenario planning, and contingency planning to ensure that we are prepared for any possible disruptions.</p> <p>Lastly, we have prioritized employee training and development to ensure</p>

				<p>that our teams are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond to any challenges that may arise. This includes regular training on crisis management, risk assessment, and communication strategies to ensure that our teams are prepared to handle any situation.</p> <p>In conclusion, we have taken a proactive approach to address the challenges that we faced under the blockade and have implemented measures to ensure that we are better prepared to overcome any similar challenges in the future. Our focus on diversifying our supply chain, improving communication with our customers, investing in technology and infrastructure, enhancing our risk management strategies, and prioritizing employee training and development will help us to minimize the impact of any potential disruptions and continue to provide high-quality products and services to our customers.</p>
4	RESPONDENT D	Chair of Chamber of Commerce	Chamber Of Commerce	<p>As a chair of chamber of commerce, we have learned valuable lessons from the experience of the blockade and have taken measures to ensure that we are better prepared in case of a similar situation in the future.</p> <p>Firstly, we have diversified our customer base and are exploring new markets to reduce our dependence on any single market. This will help us maintain our operations and customer relationships even if there is a blockade or other economic disruptions.</p> <p>Secondly, we have enhanced our communication channels with our customers and stakeholders, including regular updates on our operations and any changes that may affect them. This will help us maintain their trust and confidence in our ability to navigate difficult situations.</p>

				<p>Finally, we have established contingency plans for various scenarios, including supply chain disruptions, financial instability, and other risks that may arise. These plans will help us respond quickly and effectively in case of any future challenges.</p> <p>Overall, our goal is to be better prepared and more resilient in the face of any future challenges, and we are taking proactive steps to achieve that.</p>
5	RESPONDENT E	Chief Operations Officer (COO)	Banking Sector	<p>Firstly, we have diversified our client base by expanding our services to customers outside the affected regions. This has helped us reduce our reliance on customers from those regions and minimize the impact of any future blockades.</p> <p>Secondly, we have strengthened our risk management frameworks and procedures to enable us to identify and assess potential risks more effectively. This includes monitoring geopolitical developments, conducting stress tests, and implementing contingency plans.</p> <p>Thirdly, we have increased our investment in technology and digital transformation to enhance our remote banking services. This will enable us to continue serving our customers even if there are travel restrictions or other disruptions in the future.</p> <p>Lastly, we have also established closer relationships with other financial institutions and regulators both domestically and internationally to ensure better coordination and collaboration in case of any future challenges.</p> <p>These measures will help us better prepare for any future blockades or other challenges that may arise, and enable us to continue supporting our customers and managing our relationships with them effectively.</p>

6	RESPONDENT F	Director	Shell UK	<p>Firstly, Shell UK had to find alternative supply routes to ensure that they can still provide their products to their customers. This would involve identifying and establishing new trading partnerships with other countries and regions that were not affected by the blockade. Secondly, Shell had to adjust their pricing strategy to remain competitive in the market while taking into account the additional costs associated with finding alternative supply routes. Thirdly, Shell had to communicate proactively and transparently with their customers to inform them of any changes in their operations and supply chain. This would help to build trust with their customers and ensure that they are aware of any potential disruptions to their service. Finally, they had to invest in new technology and infrastructure to improve their supply chain resilience and reduce their dependence on a single trade route. This could include exploring new transportation modes, such as air freight or alternative shipping routes, as well as investing in technology that could help to optimize their supply chain operations.</p>
7	RESPONDENT G	Insurance Market	Lloyd's Of London	<p>However, based on general industry practices, measures that they may have put in place could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversifying their client base and expanding their operations to other markets to reduce reliance on a single market. Strengthening their remote work and digital capabilities to enable their employees to work from anywhere and communicate with clients virtually. Building strong relationships with local partners and regulators to gain a better understanding of the local market and regulatory environment. Developing contingency plans and risk management strategies to address potential future disruptions in the market. Conducting regular scenario planning exercises to anticipate and prepare for potential future challenges.

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