



# Drivers of Customer Satisfaction, Retention, and Loyalty for Real Estate Agents and the Potential Mediating Impact of Social Media Marketing

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the key drivers of customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty in the German real estate industry. It draws on Justice Theory and the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing, both rarely applied in this context, offering a new perspective on how agents can optimize service delivery. The research also evaluates the role of social media marketing (SMM) in enhancing these outcomes, with practical relevance to the researcher's future role in the family real estate agency business.

A mixed-method approach was used, including a survey of 80 clients and expert interviews with local and international agents. Findings show that clients place high value on relational aspects of service – particularly fairness in procedures and interactions – while price-related outcomes are less critical than expected. Long-term retention and loyalty, which are essential for word-of-mouth referrals, require ongoing relational effort over time.

SMM was widely appreciated by clients, who reported positive experiences with real estate content online and now expect agents to use such platforms. However, agents remain skeptical, viewing SMM as ineffective in boosting sales. At best, it serves as a supplementary tool for retention and acquisition. German agents are encouraged to adopt SMM, not for immediate results, but to align with evolving client expectations.

Dissertation Title: Drivers of Customer Satisfaction, Retention, and Loyalty for Real Estate Agents and the Potential Mediating Impact of Social Media Marketing

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## Sumário

Esta dissertação analisa os principais fatores que influenciam a satisfação, retenção e lealdade dos clientes no setor imobiliário alemão. Baseia-se na Teoria da Justiça e na Teoria do Compromisso-Confiança do Marketing Relacional, raramente aplicadas neste contexto, oferecendo uma nova visão sobre como otimizar os serviços prestados. Também investiga o papel do marketing nas redes sociais (SMM) como ferramenta para melhorar esses resultados, sendo relevante para o futuro do autor no negócio imobiliário da família.

Foi adotada uma abordagem de métodos mistos, com um inquérito a 80 clientes e entrevistas a especialistas do setor, tanto locais como internacionais. Os resultados mostram que os clientes valorizam especialmente os aspetos relacionais do serviço, como a justiça nas interações e nos procedimentos. Resultados financeiros, como preço, são relevantes, mas não determinantes. A fidelização exige um esforço contínuo e de longo prazo.

Os clientes demonstraram grande apreço pela SMM, muitos com experiências positivas em conteúdos imobiliários online. Já os agentes mantêm-se céticos quanto à sua eficácia em gerar vendas. No entanto, reconhecem o valor da SMM como ferramenta de apoio na aquisição e retenção de clientes. Assim, recomenda-se a sua adoção, com expectativas realistas, para atender às novas exigências dos consumidores.

Título da dissertação: Fatores de Satisfação, Retenção e Fidelização de Clientes de Agentes Imobiliários e o Potencial Impacto Mediador do Social Media Marketing

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Palavras-chave: Agência Imobiliária; Satisfação do Cliente; Retenção do Cliente; Lealdade do Cliente; Marketing nas Redes Sociais

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Problem Statement

With over 5.3 billion users – or nearly 65% of the global population – actively using social media as of April 2025, its presence in our daily lives is undeniable (DataReportal, 2025). Even more striking, 94.2% of internet users are active on at least one platform, spending an average of 18 hours and 41 minutes per week scrolling, watching, and engaging (DataReportal, 2025). Dominant platforms include YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. While much of this activity is driven by entertainment, the opportunity for brands to connect with consumers has never been greater. Social media allows businesses to go beyond promoting – building authentic, lasting relationships through content (Bazi et al., 2023).

Given this attention economy, it is no surprise that social media ad spending is expected to hit \$276.72 billion in 2025, with projections reaching over \$433 billion by 2030 (Statista, 2025). By 2028, social media users are expected to number 6 billion globally (Business.com, 2025). For businesses, especially small ones, social media isn't just an option; it is a game changer. It boosts brand awareness, acting as a modern form of word-of-mouth, drives leads and sales, fosters trust, and offers affordable, targeted marketing that often outperforms traditional methods (Business.com, 2025). In short, social media has become one of the most powerful tools in the modern marketer's toolkit.

Social media opens major opportunities for the real estate industry – especially for agents looking to modernize a traditional business. As the link between sellers and buyers, agents are responsible for pricing, marketing, and negotiation (Le & Supphellen, 2016). In the real estate industry, social media doesn't just help attract new clients, it can actually improve the service itself by simply putting listings in front of more people, faster (Sambrana et al., 2024). In the U.S., this shift is already well underway, given that the National Association of Realtors already actively encourages its members to use social media platforms to grow their reach and connect with clients (National Association of Realtors, 2025). A standout example is Ryan Serhant, a New York-based agent who has turned his digital presence into a global brand. With over \$14 billion in sales, he's now one of the most followed real estate names worldwide (Serhant, 2025).

In contrast, the German market remains more reserved. Social media marketing is still underused by real estate agents, and little is known about how clients here actually perceive these strategies. Are sellers open to social media marketing? Do they trust it – or even expect it today? And how do local German real estate agents view these strategies? Are they already making the most of this powerful tool? These are exactly the questions this dissertation aims to explore.

## 1.2 Objective of the Dissertation and Research Questions

In preparation for joining the family's real estate agency, the researcher set out to better understand the core of the business – namely, what makes clients satisfied, what keeps them coming back, and what ultimately builds loyalty. At its core, this dissertation strives to explore the service delivery of real estate agents through the lens of customer satisfaction/loyalty theories, applying concepts that have rarely been explored in this industry, adding a fresh perspective to the field.

Once that foundation is laid, the focus shifts to social media marketing (SMM) and its potential to elevate service outcomes. Can SMM improve client satisfaction, strengthen retention, and foster loyalty? And how do both agents and clients perceive its value, particularly in a German market that is still catching up with digital trends?

These findings will not only guide the future direction of the family business – helping determine whether social media marketing is a worthwhile path – but also provide insight for other emerging agents aiming to stay competitive in a shifting landscape.

This dissertation is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1. What are the key drivers of customer satisfaction in the service delivery of real estate agents?
- RQ2. How do real estate agents ensure customer retention and build long-term relationships fostering loyalty?
- RQ3. Can social media marketing be used to enhance customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty for real estate agents? If so, how? What are the perspectives of both real estate agents and clients on social media marketing and its effectiveness?

### 1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation begins with a review of relevant literature on the key topics: the drivers of customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty, as well as the potential mediating role of social media marketing. Research from both the real estate sector and other industries is examined to build a solid theoretical foundation. Based on the literature and the researcher's interests, several hypotheses are developed and tested through a quantitative survey. Prior to testing, the methodology is outlined in detail, covering both the survey and a series of expert interviews.

Survey and interview findings are then analyzed to draw conclusions in response to the research questions. This is followed by a critical discussion of the results, including their practical implications for real estate professionals. Finally, the dissertation addresses its limitations, offers directions for future research, and concludes with a summary of the key insights.

## 2. Literature Review

To understand the drivers of customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty in real estate agencies, this literature review begins by clearly defining these concepts within the service industry context. It then explores Justice Theory – comprising Distributive, Procedural, and Interactional Justice – to examine how fairness perceptions within the service delivery influence customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty. The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing is used to further explore the role of trust and commitment in sustaining long-term customer relationships and fostering loyalty. Finally, literature on social media marketing (SMM) will be reviewed, with a focus on its potential to enhance customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty for real estate agencies. Collectively, this literature review aims to establish a robust theoretical foundation for optimizing real estate agency services and strengthening customer relationships.

### 2.1 Customer Satisfaction: Definition

Martínez-Tur et al. (2006) defined customer satisfaction as *“the favorability of the individual's subjective evaluations of the outcomes and experiences with his or her consumption activities.”* Customer satisfaction is often associated with the comparison between perceived service outcomes and prior expectations, in line with the expectancy-

disconfirmation paradigm (Martínez-Tur et al., 2006). According to this model, differences between expectations and actual performance determine the level of satisfaction. However, some critics argue that customers' expectations are frequently vague or ill-defined, which can lead to flawed assessments of perceived service performance (Chandrashekar et al., 2007). In response to these limitations, Justice Theory offers a more nuanced explanation of customer satisfaction by emphasizing fairness perceptions. This approach considers both outcome-oriented (distributive justice) and relationship-oriented (procedural and interactional justice) aspects of the service delivery (Oliver & Swan, 1989).

## 2.2 Customer Retention and Loyalty: Definition

Customer retention refers to a business's ability to maintain ongoing relationships with its customers while minimizing defection to competitors. Generally, retaining existing customers is more cost-effective than continually seeking to attract new ones (Seiders & Berry, 1998). Customer retention is a central objective of customer relationship management (CRM) and is linked to loyalty, which encompasses not only behavioral patterns but also emotional and relational dimensions necessary for long-term relationships. While retention is typically reflected in repeat purchases, loyalty (i.e., behavioral loyalty) fueled by a deeply held commitment extends further to include positive word-of-mouth – an essential factor in growing the customer base, particularly in the service industry (Bahri-Ammari & Bilgihan, 2017). Therefore, a business should not only focus on retaining its customers but, more importantly, on cultivating genuine loyalty. The extent to which customer satisfaction contributes to retention and loyalty will be explored in detail in the following sections.

## 2.3 Introducing Justice Theory

Jerald Greenberg's conceptualization of Organizational Justice, grounded in Adams's Equity Theory, explains how fairness perceptions across various organizational dimensions shape employee behavior – an idea later extended to marketing, where customers, like employees, evaluate fairness in their interactions with businesses (Greenberg, 1990). Perceived service fairness significantly enhances satisfaction and contributes to customer retention and loyalty, while perceived injustice can lead to dissatisfaction and defection (Martínez-Tur et al., 2006; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002; Oliver & Swan, 1989). Consequently, understanding the factors that influence customers' fairness perceptions within the delivery of a service should be a

strategic priority for businesses seeking to strengthen satisfaction and drive outcomes such as retention and loyalty.

While many customer satisfaction theories share common elements – such as the SERVQUAL model, Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory, and Equity Theory (Adams, 1965; Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman et al., 1988) – Justice Theory is particularly relevant for service providers like real estate agents. It categorizes customers' fairness perceptions into three key dimensions: Distributive Justice (fairness in outcomes), Procedural Justice (fairness of processes), and Interactional Justice (fairness in interpersonal treatment).

### 2.3.1 Distributive Justice

Distributive justice refers to a customer's perception of fairness regarding the outcomes of a transaction, and it is rooted in Equity Theory. According to this theory, individuals evaluate fairness by comparing their input-outcome ratio to that of others, forming judgments of equity or inequity (Adams, 1965). These perceptions have a significant impact on behavior. For instance, Greenberg (1990) found that employees who perceived unfair outcomes relative to their inputs – such as lower salaries compared to peers with similar effort – were more likely to reduce their contributions or engage in compensatory behaviors.

The research by Oliver and Swan (1989) on distributive justice in automobile sales transactions has been groundbreaking and remains highly relevant today. Their findings revealed that perceived fairness – defined as a balance between outcomes and inputs for both buyer and seller – has a greater impact on customer satisfaction than advantageous inequity (i.e., when buyers feel they received a better outcome than the seller). Notably, the study showed that perceptions of fairness are primarily influenced by buyer outcomes and seller inputs, while buyer inputs play a relatively minor role. Moreover, perceptions of unfairness related to seller outcomes – such as excessive fees – can negatively affect customer satisfaction (Oliver & Swan, 1989). These insights suggest that businesses must visibly invest effort and provide valuable inputs that lead to satisfying customer outcomes, while avoiding practices that create the impression of overcharging.

In real estate, perceptions of distributive justice vary between buyers and sellers. For buyers, the most significant outcome is typically the total price paid, whereas for sellers, it is the net

proceeds received from the sale. According to Turnbull and Waller (2018), homeowners prioritize achieving a high selling price combined with a quick sale. The agent's inputs include, among other things, pricing strategies, marketing, negotiation, and consultation, while clients contribute trust, patience, and financial commitment. However, Oliver and Swan (1989) argue that buyers (i.e., clients), often view their inputs as sunk costs or necessary expenses rather than as factors in fairness evaluations – a perspective that has yet to be fully examined within the real estate industry. Furthermore, under a commission-based model, real estate agents typically offer similar services regardless of property value yet earn significantly higher commissions on high-value sales. This might lead to perceived fairness imbalances, particularly among buyers and sellers of more expensive properties. This issue will be examined in greater detail in a later section.

### 2.3.2 Procedural Justice

While distributive justice concerns fairness of transaction outcomes, procedural justice focuses on the fairness of the processes used to achieve those outcomes (Greenberg, 1990). In the context of service recovery, foundational research by Tax et al. (1998) found that customers value timely and convenient procedures, especially those involving follow-ups, while delays and lack of responsibility significantly diminish satisfaction – reinforcing the notion that “*justice delayed is justice denied*”. Key elements of procedural fairness include consistency (uniform policies and behavior), bias suppression (equal opportunities and absence of self-interest), accuracy (minimizing informational errors), correctability (swift error resolution), representativeness (consideration of all parties' interests), and ethicality (alignment of the firm's motives with the client's best interests) (Seiders & Berry, 1998).

For real estate agents, procedural justice involves ensuring fair and transparent processes throughout property transactions, ultimately benefiting both buyers and sellers. Key elements such as consistency, bias suppression, representativeness, and ethicality help maintain impartiality and reinforce a client-centered approach. Seiler et al. (2008) emphasize that real estate agents should deliver consistent, dependable service with high levels of responsiveness. Similarly, Le and Supphellen (2016) underscore the importance of ethical standards, advocating for a strong customer-oriented mindset rather than one driven by self-interest. Overall, success in real estate relies heavily on signaling trust through consistent, ethical, and transparent procedures.

### 2.3.3 Interactional Justice

Interactional Justice refers to the quality of interpersonal treatment customers receive from business representatives. Effective service recovery relies on interactions characterized by honesty, empathy, and politeness, which help reinforce perceptions of fairness (Tax et al., 1998). While expectations for interactional justice are particularly heightened during service failure recoveries, businesses should consistently uphold these standards from the very first point of contact. Moreover, Oliver and Swan (1989) found that automobile buyers evaluate not only their own interpersonal treatment but also compare it to the treatment received by other customers. Perceived inequities in this regard can diminish fairness perceptions and reduce overall satisfaction. Ideally, customers should perceive consistent, respectful treatment across the board to foster a sense of equitable service.

Since real estate is a relationship-driven industry characterized by relatively low switching costs and minimal differentiation among top-performing agents, interactional justice may play a particularly critical role in shaping customer perceptions. Seiler et al. (2008) found that empathy is a key determinant of perceived service quality in real estate, further underscoring the importance of respectful, attentive, and emotionally intelligent communication throughout the client relationship.

### 2.3.4 The Influence of Justice Dimensions on Customer Satisfaction, Retention, and Loyalty for Real Estate Agents

Distributive justice plays a particularly critical role in the context of service failure recovery. Research indicates that fair compensation – such as refunds, discounts, or even sincere apologies to address emotional costs – has the most significant impact on customer satisfaction (Siu et al., 2013; Tax et al., 1998). Empirical studies across various service sectors support this claim. For instance, findings from the hospitality industry (Martínez-Tur et al., 2006) and telecom loyalty programs (Bahri-Ammari & Bilgihan, 2017) reveal that distributive justice is a stronger predictor of satisfaction than procedural or interactional justice. However, Martínez-Tur et al. (2006) also emphasized the typically brief nature of customer relationships in hospitality, noting that procedural and interactional justice can only become more powerful in predicting customer satisfaction as the duration of the relationship grows.

While distributive justice plays a central role in shaping fairness perceptions across industries, the interplay among the three justice dimensions should not be underestimated. Research has shown that procedural justice can lead customers to accept unfavorable outcomes, provided that the decision-making process is perceived as fair, convenient, and responsive to their concerns (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). Similarly, interactional justice can help offset perceptions of low distributive justice, especially when follow-ups and respectful communication are used to ensure problem resolution and customer satisfaction (Tax et al., 1998). These findings highlight that fair procedures and honest, respectful interpersonal treatment are crucial in sustaining satisfaction – even when customer outcomes are not entirely favorable.

According to Seiders and Berry (1998), the customer confidence required for long-term loyalty can only be reached from a firm's demonstrated fairness. Substantial evidence suggests that high levels of satisfaction with the service experience typically lead to customer retention (Oliver & Swan, 1989). Satisfaction, driven by perceptions of fairness, is a necessary antecedent and strong contributor to customer loyalty, which goes beyond retention and enables businesses to cultivate long-term customer relationships. Research indicates that high distributive and interactional justice, in particular, lead to strong satisfaction which in turn contributes to the development of customer loyalty (Chandrashekar et al., 2007). While each dimension of justice contributes individually to customer satisfaction, their combined effect can be especially powerful – even in challenging service recovery contexts. In such cases, high fairness perceptions across all three dimensions can transform initial dissatisfaction and potential defection into customer loyalty (Siu et al., 2013).

Given that the relationship between real estate agents and their clients is typically more personal and long-lasting (Le & Supphellen, 2016) than in industries such as hospitality, procedural and interactional justice may play a critical role in driving customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty. Building on the SERVQUAL model, Seiler et al. (2008) found that for real estate agents, high service quality – primarily influenced by procedural factors such as consistency, dependability, and responsiveness, along with interactional elements like empathy – has a greater positive impact on repeat business and customer referrals (i.e., loyalty) than outcome-oriented variables such as tangibles. Supporting this, findings emerging from Le and Supphellen (2016) revealed that perceived ethicality – an agent's ability to balance client needs with their own interests – was the most decisive factor in sellers'

repurchase intentions (i.e., retention). As a key component of procedural justice, perceived ethicality had a greater impact on retention than securing a high sale price, which is typically considered a central distributive objective for sellers. While a high sale price still played a role, it was less impactful than perceived ethical conduct on the decision to re-engage with a real estate agent (Le & Supphellen, 2016).

All these findings suggest that exploring the individual and combined impacts of justice dimensions on satisfaction, and their role in fostering customer retention and loyalty in the real estate context – an area still underexplored in the literature – could yield valuable theoretical and practical insights.

## 2.4 The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing

Justice Theory offers a valuable framework for understanding the conditions that drive customer satisfaction in service delivery leading to retention. While high satisfaction – stemming from fair distributions, procedures, and interactions – is a critical foundation for customer loyalty, the underlying relational factors that sustain these outcomes require deeper exploration. The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing, grounded in Social Exchange Theory, emphasizes the pivotal role of trust and commitment in maintaining long-term customer relationships and fostering loyalty. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), commitment and trust act as the glue that binds businesses and their customers over time. In the following discussion, we will examine how service providers, particularly real estate agents, can signal trustworthiness to prospective clients, build authentic trust throughout the service delivery, and ultimately strengthen trust and commitment to foster loyalty and build enduring customer relationships.

### 2.4.1 How Real Estate Agents can Signal Trustworthiness to Prospective Clients

*“Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of another.” (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000)*

The greater a customer’s vulnerability in their relationship with a service provider, the more carefully they will evaluate the provider’s trustworthiness before making a decision (Seiders & Berry, 1998). In the real estate context, services are characterized by technical complexity, significant financial stakes, and, particularly for sellers, limited direct involvement – factors

that collectively heighten client vulnerability (Le & Supphellen, 2016). Consequently, trustworthiness emerges as a cornerstone in the initial decision-making process. This reliance on trust can be further explained through the lens of Agency Theory, which addresses challenges such as information asymmetry, adverse selection, and opportunistic behavior (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000). These factors underscore the necessity of signaling trustworthiness to mitigate perceived risk and to attract prospective clients.

Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) suggest that service providers can signal trustworthiness by demonstrating three key attributes: operational competence (expertise and credibility), operational benevolence (putting customer interests first), and a problem-solving orientation (actively addressing issues during service delivery). In real estate, showcasing competence – through professional branding, client testimonials, and a strong online and offline presence – is crucial for attracting new clients. Since potential sellers often struggle to directly assess an agent’s skills or effort, they rely heavily on perceived market presence and reputation when choosing an agent (Turnbull & Waller, 2018). However, how agents can effectively signal benevolence and problem-solving orientation to new clients – addressing the challenge of adverse selection – remains an area needing further exploration.

Nonetheless, one of the most effective ways to attract new clients in the service industry is through personal recommendations. Research shows that customers are more receptive to word-of-mouth (WOM) than to marketer-generated messages (Söderlund & Mattsson, 2015). Naturally, trust in a recommendation depends on the closeness of the relationship between recommender and recipient. While loyal customers are often intrinsically motivated to share positive experiences, Söderlund and Mattsson (2015) found that explicitly asking customers to recommend a service significantly increases WOM activity without negative effects. Thus, service providers, including real estate agents, should proactively encourage satisfied clients to share their experiences to help them attract new clients.

#### **2.4.2 How Real Estate Agents can Build Trust Throughout the Service Delivery**

As previously discussed, fairness in service delivery is a critical foundation for building trust between businesses and customers. This is evident in the alignment between trust-building factors and justice dimensions. Operational benevolence aligns with aspects of procedural justice, such as bias suppression, representativeness, and ethicality, while a problem-solving

orientation corresponds with correctness. Additionally, an agent's perceived operational competence appears influenced by all three justice dimensions – distributive, procedural, and interactional. This conceptual overlap underscores the central role perceived fairness plays in cultivating trust throughout the customer experience.

Le and Supphellen (2016) highlight the importance of real estate agents closely cooperating with clients, particularly sellers, to demonstrate transparency and minimize perceptions of opportunistic behavior. Since agents may be incentivized to maximize revenue by minimizing time per transaction, actively countering this conflict of interest can enhance perceptions of ethical conduct and reinforce operational benevolence. To foster trust and satisfaction, agents should involve clients in collaborative decision-making on key issues such as pricing strategy, room presentation, and market analysis (Le & Supphellen, 2016).

### 2.4.3 The Role of Trust and Commitment in Customer Loyalty

After delivering a service that excels across all justice dimensions, customer retention becomes highly likely, and a solid foundation for loyalty is established. However, to ensure customer loyalty and build long-term relationships that go beyond repeat purchases to include positive word-of-mouth and advocacy, trust and commitment must be continually nurtured. With trust established during service delivery, the provider's focus should shift toward stimulating lasting commitment to deepen the customer relationship.

Customers exhibit commitment only when they perceive ongoing value in the relationship, whether through tangible benefits, shared values, or the perceived costs of ending the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Consequently, when customers recognize value in the relationship, they are more likely to actively maintain and strengthen the relationship. While commitment can take several forms, research indicates that affective commitment – which stems from positive emotional attachment and a sense of identification with the service provider – is the most powerful driver of customer advocacy and recommendation behaviors (i.e., loyalty) (Fullerton, 2011).

Morgan and Hunt (1994) emphasize the interdependent relationship between trust and commitment, asserting that commitment can only develop in the presence of trust.

Conversely, once established, commitment serves to reinforce trust, within relationships characterized by reliability, consistency, and mutual investment over time. As trust deepens, so does commitment, creating a self-reinforcing cycle that solidifies long-term relationships between businesses and their loyal customers.

#### 2.4.4 The Role of Customer Loyalty in Real Estate and How to Build It Through Trust and Commitment

Most clients – regardless of cultural background – buy or sell property infrequently, often only once in their lifetime, making positive word-of-mouth, driven by trust and commitment, critical to an agency’s long-term success. In the U.S. in 2024, the average seller had owned their home for 10 years, was 63 years old, and 38% of those using an agent found them through a referral (National Association of Realtors, 2024). As previously noted, referrals are more effective than marketer-generated messages, making word-of-mouth a powerful tool for differentiation and risk reduction under Agency Theory. Agents should not only encourage satisfied clients to recommend them but also foster loyalty through trust and commitment to sustain advocacy over time, building emotional bonds that drive ongoing referrals.

Traditional post-purchase customer relationship management (CRM) strategies – such as follow-up communication, exclusive offers, networking events, and personal gestures like dinners – help build customer commitment and reinforce trust. Fullerton (2011) emphasizes that emotional attachment (affective commitment) develops only when customers are consistently satisfied with ongoing engagement and perceive the service provider as a friend, highlighting the depth of relationship needed to trigger loyalty and advocacy. However, in today’s digital landscape, modern and streamlined approaches are increasingly used to sustain long-term client relationships in real estate. These emerging strategies will be explored in the following section.

#### 2.5 Social Media Marketing and its Potential to enhance Customer Satisfaction, Retention and Loyalty for Real Estate Agents

Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook have become powerful marketing tools, enabling organizations to reach, engage, and interact with customers (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Features such as content sharing, real-time communication, and collaboration, support brand messaging and strengthen customer relationships (Jamil et

al., 2022). Key social media marketing activities (SMMAs) – including influencer partnerships, blogger endorsements, targeted advertising, original content creation, and management of user-generated content – enhance brand awareness and visibility (Jamil et al., 2022).

According to Kulikovskaja et al. (2023), three types of social media content are relevant across product and service contexts: infotainment (informative and entertaining material), remunerative (monetary rewards or incentives), and relational (fostering social interaction, such as user-generated posts). Their research found that remunerative content is largely ineffective for long-term engagement, while relational content consistently drives higher engagement across likes, shares, comments, and co-creation activities. This socially driven engagement strengthens customer loyalty, including word-of-mouth. Infotainment content showed similarly positive effects. Based on these findings, Kulikovskaja et al. (2023) recommend that firms prioritize relational and infotainment content when aiming to foster loyalty, while ensuring content strategies are tailored to customer needs and desired outcomes.

Similar findings emerge from Sohaib and Han's (2023) study on Chinese fashion brand consumers, showing that high-quality, informative social media content builds brand trust, driving deeper engagement and customer loyalty in line with Commitment-Trust Theory. They also emphasize the role of interactive features like live streaming and chat rooms in fostering real-time engagement between consumers and brands. Complementing this, Bazi et al. (2023) note that social media users often browse for hedonic reasons, making entertainment value and aesthetic content quality critical for sustaining engagement.

Real estate agents can effectively leverage social media to reach, engage, and interact with both existing and potential clients. For existing clients, social media allows them to stay connected with the agent's professional and personal life, thereby maintaining the relationship over time – an important consideration, as retention may take time (Sambrana et al., 2024). For potential clients, especially sellers, targeted advertising of content like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook can serve as a powerful tool for acquisition (Sambrana et al., 2024).

Based on current literature, agents should focus on two key content types: infotainment and relational. According to Ryan Serhant, content should primarily aim to educate buyers by addressing their limited knowledge of the home-buying process and sharing expertise in an

accessible way (i.e., infotainment content) (Forbes, 2022). It is important to position oneself as an expert within a specific area. Serhant also emphasizes the need to diversify content beyond real estate topics, encouraging agents to comment on recent news and share personal stories that reveal their personality and differentiate them from others (i.e., relational content) (Forbes, 2022). Relational content, in particular, helps build affective commitment and trust by encouraging stronger engagement (likes, shares, comments, and co-creation), making agents appear more relatable and helping clients identify with them personally, thereby fostering customer loyalty. Overall, social media marketing that combines infotainment and relational content offers a more authentic and trustworthy approach to client acquisition compared to traditional marketing.

A recent study on social media's effectiveness for real estate agents in the Philippines found that it can significantly increase reach and accelerate deal closures by simply finding the right buyers more quickly (Sambrana et al., 2024). Although these findings relate to a geographically distant market, they remain relevant and should be considered. Real estate agents are encouraged to promote their latest listings on social media to expand their reach and speed up sales, thereby enhancing perceptions of distributive justice and strengthening customer satisfaction. Serhant further emphasizes the importance of video formats, which are often the most convenient and engaging for clients (Forbes, 2022).

Although many agents already use social media – posting videos, market updates, personal content, and targeted ads – direct research on the role and effectiveness of social media marketing activities (SMMA) in the German real estate market remains limited. Conducting interviews with experienced agents, along with surveys of actual clients to capture their perceptions of SMMA, could provide valuable insights and address this gap. Figure 1 in the Appendix displays the theoretical framework linking justice theory, trust, commitment, and loyalty in real estate services.

In summary, while Justice Theory and Commitment-Trust Theory offer valuable frameworks for understanding customer satisfaction and loyalty, their specific interplay in the real estate sector remains underexplored. Even less is known about social media marketing and how it may help real estate agents within their service. These gaps not only require academic investigation but also offer significant practical implications for improving client relationships and business success in real estate.

### 3. Hypotheses Development

The first hypothesis addresses RQ1 concerning the drivers of customer satisfaction in the service delivery of real estate agents. While the literature identifies distributive justice as a strong predictor of customer satisfaction across various industries (Martínez-Tur et al., 2006; Siu et al., 2013; Tax et al., 1998), some studies suggest that procedural and interactional justice become increasingly important in relationships characterized by greater time intensity (Martínez-Tur et al., 2006). Given that interactions between real estate agents and clients – especially with sellers – often extend over several weeks or months (Le & Supphellen, 2016), it is plausible to assume that these relationship-oriented dimensions (procedural and interactional justice) have a stronger influence on customer satisfaction than distributive justice, which is outcome-focused. Although prior research has already indicated that procedural and interactional justice have a greater impact on customer retention and loyalty for real estate agents than distributive justice (Le & Supphellen, 2016; Seiler et al., 2008), their specific influence on customer satisfaction remains underexplored. This gap is notable, as clients may hesitate to re-engage with agents who were unfriendly or inconsistent, even when distributive outcomes such as price or sale speed were satisfactory. Building on these insights, it is plausible to suggest that procedural and interactional justice not only drive retention and loyalty but also exert a stronger influence on the initial satisfaction response compared to distributive justice. Furthermore, distributive outcomes are often less controllable than the quality of procedures and interpersonal interactions throughout the service process. Consequently, further exploration of these relationship-oriented dimensions in shaping customer satisfaction in the real estate context is warranted.

H1: Procedural and interactional justice have a greater positive impact on customer satisfaction in the service delivery of real estate agents than distributive justice.

These hypotheses aim to evaluate social media marketing (SMM) in the context of real estate agencies and are designed to address RQ3. As discussed in the literature review, SMM can serve several roles: strengthening relationships with existing clients through ongoing content engagement, supporting client acquisition via targeted marketing, and enhancing property marketing by reaching more potential buyers and accelerating sales (Forbes, 2022; Sambrana et al., 2024). While findings from markets like the United States and the Philippines offer useful insights, testing these assumptions in the German real estate market remains essential. These hypotheses therefore assess the perceived importance and effectiveness of SMM from

the client's perspective – both during agent selection and throughout the service experience – thus contributing to the broader goal of optimizing real estate agency services. The second and third hypotheses are exploratory, based on the global relevance of SMM, while the fourth hypothesis (a & b) draws more directly from existing research (Sambrana et al., 2024).

H2 (Exploratory): The presence of a real estate agent on social media platforms is perceived as an important factor by clients (i.e., sellers) when selecting an agent to work with.

H3 (Exploratory): Sellers are generally open to having their property marketed through social media platforms.

H4a: Marketing properties on social media platforms may contribute to a faster sale and a higher final sale price, thereby enhancing perceived distributive justice in the service delivery of real estate agents and potentially strengthening customer satisfaction.

H4b (Exploratory): Clients who believe that social media marketing can improve real estate sales outcomes will assign greater importance to an agent's social media presence during the agent selection process.

The remaining aspects of RQ3 – specifically how social media marketing should be utilized to enhance customer retention and loyalty – will not be addressed through hypotheses. Instead, these topics will be explored qualitatively through interviews with real estate agents. Similarly, RQ2, which focuses on how real estate agents can ensure customer retention in general and build long-term relationships fostering loyalty, will also be examined using a qualitative approach rather than through hypothesis testing. Addressing relationship-focused questions – particularly those concerning the drivers of customer loyalty – requires a greater level of depth due to their complexity. Therefore, quantitative approaches alone are insufficient and must be complemented – or even replaced – by qualitative research methods to adequately answer these questions.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction to Methodology – Research Approach

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining a quantitative online survey distributed to existing clients of the researcher’s family real estate agency, alongside qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with multiple real estate agents. Gathering insights from both clients and agents provides a comprehensive understanding of the issues related to the research questions. As mentioned previously, the survey is primarily designed to test the hypotheses, thereby contributing to answers for RQ1 and partially RQ3. More specifically, the survey focuses on clients’ perspectives regarding the use of social media marketing and the key drivers of customer satisfaction. In contrast, the in-depth interviews aim to provide deeper insights into all three research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3). These conversations explore the role of justice dimensions in shaping customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty, as well as the strategies employed by agents to foster long-term client relationships. Additionally, the interviews capture agents’ perspectives on the effectiveness of social media marketing and its potential to enhance customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty.

### 4.2 Method and Measurement Instruments of Survey

The survey was originally created in German using the Qualtrics platform and responses collected were analyzed using R Studio. A visual translation of the survey can be found in the Appendix. It consisted of seven structured questions, organized into two thematic blocks: social media marketing (five questions) and drivers of customer satisfaction (one question). The latter was followed by a qualitative, open-ended question that allowed participants to share additional factors or insights they felt were missing. Below is a summary of the two thematic blocks along with their respective measurement instruments.

#### 4.2.1 Content and Measures of Survey Questions on SMM

The first thematic block, focused on social media marketing, consisted of five questions. The first question asked participants to rate the importance of a real estate agent’s active presence on social media when looking to sell their property and still being in the process of choosing an agent. Responses were captured on a 10-point scale, where 10 indicated the highest level of importance and zero the lowest.

The second question explored past experiences with real estate agents on social media by asking whether participants had ever been drawn to a property through such platforms. Response options included: 'Yes', 'Possible, but I can't remember exactly', and 'No'.

The third question presented the following statement: 'Additional marketing of properties through social media can result in them being sold faster and for a higher price'. Participants could choose from 'Agree', 'I am neutral in this regard', or 'Disagree'.

The fourth question, posed out of curiosity, asked participants to rank the effectiveness/suitability of various social media platforms for property marketing. Options included TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and 'A combination of all platforms'.

The fifth and final question in this block assessed participants' comfort level with having their own property marketed on social media, under the condition that all content would be pre-approved and would not disclose sensitive information such as the full address. Response options were: 'Yes, I would have no problem with that', 'I am unsure', and 'No, I would feel uncomfortable with that'.

#### 4.2.2 Content and Measures of Survey Question on Customer Satisfaction

The second thematic block consisted of a single question, asking participants to rank a set of nine key qualities related to real estate agent services from the perspective of a property seller. This question was adapted to previous research measuring the constructs of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Le & Supphellen, 2016; Martínez-Tur et al., 2006; Seiler et al., 2008; Siu et al., 2013; Tax et al., 1998). The instructions specified that the first-ranked option should reflect the most important attribute. The nine qualities were subsequently categorized into the three dimensions of justice for the purpose of analysis.

- Distributive Justice: 'Get the highest possible price', 'How quickly the property is sold', and 'Reputation and popularity'
- Procedural Justice: 'Responsiveness and clear communication', 'Openness to feedback', 'Fairness and integrity', and 'Professional competence'.
- Interactional Justice: 'Charisma and sympathy' and 'Trustworthiness'

Due to the early-stage nature of the research during survey development, some options proved challenging to assign unambiguously to a single justice dimension. For example, ‘Reputation and popularity’ was categorized under distributive justice, due to its limited relevance to procedural or interactional dimensions. Similarly, while ‘How quickly the property is sold’ could conceptually relate to procedural justice – as the quickness of procedures is an important element – it was treated here as well as throughout the dissertation as a distributive outcome, given that the speed of sale is ultimately not controllable by the agent and is better viewed as a result rather than a process. Lastly, ‘Trustworthiness’, as discussed in the literature review (Le & Supphellen, 2016), is viewed more as an outcome of procedural justice rather than a component of it, which is why it is assigned to interactional justice for the purposes of this research.

It is important to note that the ranking order questions, including those regarding preferred social media platforms and, more importantly, the customer satisfaction question, were presented with randomized option order to minimize potential biases. However, despite this precaution, ranking questions come with inherent limitations, which will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

Finally, this question was followed by an open-ended qualitative prompt, allowing participants to share any additional qualities they felt were important but not represented among the nine listed options. A text box was provided for participants to elaborate freely on any relevant factors they believe should also be considered in evaluating a real estate agent’s service.

### 4.3 Method and Design of In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study to allow flexibility in the conversation and to enable deeper exploration of participant experiences. Open-ended questions were prioritized in order to minimize constraints or priming, allowing interviewees to respond freely and in their own words. A purposive sampling approach was used – a non-probability method in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics relative to the purpose of the research (Henline-Hall, 2024). The final sample consisted of three real estate agents, each with over 20 years of experience. As Henline-Hall (2024) notes, qualitative

research typically involves smaller sample sizes, as the goal is to generate rich, in-depth understanding rather than generalizable data. To ensure confidentiality, participants are referred to with their initials. A full description of each interviewee can be found in the Appendix. The interview guide (see Appendix) consisted of 15 open-ended questions focused on core topics: customer satisfaction, client retention and referrals, and social media marketing.

#### 4.4 Procedure of Survey

The survey was distributed via email to actual clients of the researcher's family real estate agency. The email included a brief greeting, an explanation of the purpose behind the outreach – namely, the intentions behind the researcher's dissertation and his future involvement in the family business – and a link to the survey itself. It was explicitly stated that the primary aim of the survey was to gain insights to further improve the agency's overall service quality. Clients were also assured of complete anonymity to encourage open and honest feedback.

Upon opening the survey, additional context was provided to ensure a shared understanding of the term 'Social Media Marketing (SMM)'. Specifically, an illustrative video featuring Ryan Serhant, a well-known American real estate agent, was presented to demonstrate what SMM in the real estate industry might look like. It was noted that watching just the first minute of the video would be sufficient to gain a clear impression.

The survey then proceeded with the five questions related to SMM, followed by the question on customer satisfaction and the open-ended qualitative question to share any additional insights or aspects that were missing. Participants were able to navigate back and forth between questions in case they wished to review or amend their responses.

Towards the end of the survey, a short section was included to gather basic demographic information (i.e., gender and age group), with the explanation that such data would help contextualize the responses and enhance the interpretation of results. Finally, the survey concluded with a message thanking participants for their time and highlighting the importance of their input in helping the agency better understand and meet client needs.

## 4.5 Procedure of Interviews

Two interviews were conducted in German in an in-person format with local real estate agents, while the third interview was conducted via Zoom in English with a real estate agent based in Florida, who has also worked in Germany for many years. The audio recordings of all three interviews are available upon request from the author. The data collection period spanned one week, from 23.04.2025 – 30.04.2025. Interview durations varied, as there were no strict time constraints, but each lasted approximately 35 minutes on average. Since all three participants were recruited through personal connections, no formal introduction was necessary, and interviews began directly with topic-relevant questions.

## 5. Quantitative Data Analysis (Survey)

Once all responses were collected from the clients of the real estate agency, the data was downloaded, cleaned, and analyzed using R Studio, a powerful statistical software, well-suited for such tasks. Responses were screened for completeness, and cases with substantial missing data were excluded, resulting in a final valid sample of 80 participants (N=80).

Among these 80 participants, 53 were male and 27 were female:

- 11 participants were under 30 years old.
- 22 participants were in the 30-50 years age group.
- 32 participants were in the 50-60 years age group.
- 15 participants were over 60 years old.

### 5.1 Testing H1 – Question 6 Data Analysis

Before grouping the nine ranking options into the three justice dimensions to test whether procedural and interactional justice have a greater impact on customer satisfaction in the service delivery of real estate agents than distributive justice, it is essential to first analyze how participants ranked the individual items. Table 1 in the Appendix presents the mean rank, median, and standard deviation for each of the nine options based on their perceived importance by participants (i.e., the clients). A lower mean rank indicates higher perceived importance.

As shown in Table 1, the options ‘Trustworthiness’, ‘Openness to feedback’, and ‘Fairness and integrity’ – with the first categorized as interactional and the latter two as procedural – clearly emerged as the most important factors for participants. These items received the lowest mean ranks and medians. However, their standard deviations (2.37, 2.13, and 2.34, respectively) indicate a moderate degree in variability in perceptions, suggesting that while these factors were generally considered important, not all participants ranked them equally.

Following the top three in terms of mean rank were ‘Responsiveness and clear communication’ (procedural) and ‘Charisma and sympathy’ (interactional), with mean ranks of 4.79 and 5.41, respectively. Distributive factors such as ‘How quickly the property is sold’ and ‘Get the highest possible price’ appeared only after these, with higher mean ranks of 5.48 and 6.14. Though, these distributive items had some of the highest standard deviations (2.38 and 2.56), indicating significant variation in participants’ views on their importance. Interestingly, the option ranked the lowest in importance was ‘Professional Competence’, which is also assigned to procedural justice, suggesting that not all procedural items were uniformly valued by clients.

Table 2 further reinforces these findings. According to the data, the most frequently selected rank-1 to rank-3 choices were: ‘Trustworthiness’ (ranked 1<sup>st</sup> by 25 out of 80 participants; 31.25%), ‘Fairness and Integrity’ (ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> by 23 participants; 28.75%), and ‘Openness to feedback’ (ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> by 25 participants; 31.25%). This provided a clear indication of the priorities among participants.

When the individual options are grouped into their respective justice dimensions, as detailed in section 4.2.2, the overall trend remains consistent. As shown in Table 3, interactional justice had the lowest (i.e., most favorable) mean rank of 4.24, followed by procedural justice at 4.68, and distributive justice at 5.93. These values do confirm that participants, on average, placed a greater importance on interactional and procedural justice over distributive justice in the context of real estate agent service delivery from the viewpoint of a seller.

To go beyond descriptive statistics, a General Linear Model (GLM) with repeated measures was used to test whether the differences between justice dimensions were statistically significant within participants. The repeated-measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect of justice type on satisfaction ratings:

- $F(2, 158) = 20.11, p < .001$ , generalized eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) = 0.20

Post-hoc comparisons (Bonferroni-adjusted paired t-tests) showed that:

- Procedural Justice was rated significantly higher than distributive justice,  $t(79) = -4.43, p < .001$
- Interactional Justice was rated significantly higher than distributive justice,  $t(79) = -5.07, p < .001$
- There was no statistically significant difference between procedural and interactional justice,  $t(79) = 2.24, p = .083$  (Bonferroni-adjusted)

These results support H1, indicating that clients value both procedural and interactional justice more than distributive justice in real estate service delivery. The similarity between procedural and interactional scores suggests that both are perceived as comparably important. The statistical trends support the confirmation of H1: clients place greater importance on the interactional and procedural aspects of real estate service delivery compared to distributive outcomes. However, caution is needed when interpreting these results, particularly due to the high standard deviations – especially among the distributive justice items – which indicate notable variation in individual responses. While the overall trend suggests a preference for how services are delivered rather than the outcomes themselves, it is evident that not all clients share the same priorities.

### 5.1.1 Question 7 – Content Analysis

Some clients added insights they felt were missing; however, most comments reflected elaborated versions of the ranking options. Having an “*excellent network*” or a “*buyer profile*” stood out, being mentioned three times. This reflects an outcome-oriented view, suggesting a faster process of finding the right buyer, preferably through the agent’s network. Another participant emphasized the importance of treating all clients equally, regardless of the “*deal value*.” This links back to the literature review, which highlighted the importance of equal treatment and the absence of preferential treatment as key aspects of perceived fairness in service delivery (Oliver & Swan, 1989).

## 5.2 Testing H2 (Exploratory) – Question 1 Data Analysis

A one-sample intercept test revealed that participants rated the importance of the presence of a real estate agent on social media platforms from the viewpoint of a seller when looking for an agent to work with significantly above the midpoint of the scale ( $b = 1.41$ ,  $SE = 0.30$ ,  $t(80) = 4.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The magnitude of the mean difference (1.41 points on a 0-10 scale) reflects a practically meaningful level of importance attributed to social media presence. The 95 % confidence interval is [0.83, 2.00]. The median rating was 7, indicating that at least half of the participants considered social media presence fairly important, further supporting a general lean toward higher perceived importance. This is also visually documented in Graph 1, which can be found in the Appendix. More precisely, the graph shows that 42 out of 80 participants (52.5%) rated the importance as 7 or higher. However, the standard deviation of 2.64 reveals notable variability in responses, indicating that opinions on this topic were not uniform.

Table 4 (see Appendix) provides a breakdown of the mean, median, and standard deviation of ratings across different age groups, revealing a clear trend: younger participants placed greater importance on an agent's social media presence when wanting to sell their property and still being in the process of finding the right agent to work with. For instance, the 30-50 years age group had a median rating of 8, a mean of 7.05, and a standard deviation of 2.63, suggesting both higher importance and 'relatively' consistent views. In contrast, older participants (particularly those aged 50-60 and over 60) rated the importance significantly lower. For example, the 50-60 age group had a mean of 5.97.

It is important to note that the sample was skewed toward older participants, with 47 out of 80 falling into the 50+ age categories. This distribution should be considered when interpreting the overall results, as it may limit the generalizability of the findings. The data clearly reflects generational differences in social media usage and perceived relevance. Still, the statistical analysis reveals that participants do view the presence of a real estate agent on social media as important when wanting to sell their property and still looking for an agent, so that H2 (Exploratory) can be confirmed.

### 5.3 Testing H3 (Exploratory) – Question 5 Data Analysis

A total of 56.25% of participants (45 out of 80) indicated that they would feel comfortable with having their property marketed through social media platforms. In contrast, 25% (20 participants) were unsure, and 18.75% (15 participants) stated they would feel uncomfortable with having their property marketed through social media platforms. These findings appear to be relatively consistent across different age groups, as can be seen by the results summarized in Table 5 in the Appendix, suggesting no strong age-based divergence in opinion.

As such, H3 (Exploratory) can be confirmed, as assuming that unsure participants could potentially be persuaded, around 81.25% of participants would be comfortable with having their property marketed through social media platforms. Still, more than half of the participants already feel comfortable with the new technologies, allowing for a confirmation of the third exploratory hypothesis. However, it is still important to explicitly discuss and agree upon marketing strategies with the seller in advance, to ensure alignment with their preferences and expectations.

### 5.4 Testing H4a – Question 3 Data Analysis

The answers to the third question revealed that 60% of participants (48 out of 80) agreed on the statement that the additional marketing of properties through social media can result in them being sold faster and for a higher price. 32.5% of participants (26 out of 80) chose the option of neutrality in this regard, while only 6 participants (7.5%) disagreed and viewed social media as an ineffective tool in marketing properties. When controlling for the difference in age among participants, these findings still remain relatively consistent (see Table 6 in the Appendix). Interestingly, results were even more clear in the age group of 30-50 years: 72.7% of participants agreed with the statement, 27.3% remained neutral in this regard, and quite remarkably, no one questioned the effectiveness of social media in marketing properties.

These results do show a clear trend and confirm H4a. As such, most clients that were asked agreed that marketing properties on social media platforms may contribute to a faster sale and a higher final sale price, thereby, at least theoretically, enhancing perceived distributive justice in the service delivery of real estate agents and potentially strengthening customer

satisfaction. It is important to note that this does not constitute direct evidence of SMM's effectiveness but rather confirms that clients perceive it as potentially contributing to a faster sale and higher final sale price, as suggested in H4a.

#### 5.4.1 Testing for Correlations in Answers to Question 2 and 3 – Chi-Squared Test

At this point in the analysis, it is valuable to assess whether positive prior experiences with social media in a real estate context influenced how participants perceived the effectiveness of such marketing. As previously outlined in section 4.2.1, Question 2 of the survey asked participants whether they had ever been drawn to a property through social media. Among the 80 participants, 47.5% (38 participants) reported having been attracted to a property via social media before, 13.75% were unsure (11 participants), while 38.75% (31 participants) stated they had not previously encountered such content leading to serious interest.

To determine whether past exposure influenced perceptions of effectiveness, a Chi-squared test of independence was performed to assess the relationship. The results of the test were statistically significant:

- $\chi^2(4, N=80) = 18.82$
- $p < .001$

This suggests a strong association between experience and belief in the effectiveness of SMM. Among those who had previously encountered properties on social media ( $n=38$ ), 78.9% (30 participants) agreed with the statement, 21.1% were unsure, and none disagreed. In contrast, among those with no prior exposure ( $n=31$ ), only 45.2% (14 participants) agreed, while 35.5% (11) were neutral, and 19.3% (6) disagreed.

These findings highlight that successful exposure to social media-based property marketing is positively linked with belief in its efficacy. Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that as social media becomes more prevalent and visible, it may also become increasingly important in the eyes of clients due to the belief in its effectiveness.

### 5.5 Testing H4b (Exploratory)

A one-way ANOVA examined whether participants' agreement with the statement that additional marketing of properties through social media can result in them being sold both faster and for a higher price (Question 3; categorical independent variable with three levels) influenced their rating of the importance of real estate agents' social media presence when selling and still being in the process of selecting an agent (Question 1; continuous dependent variable). The analysis revealed a statistically significant group difference,  $F(2, 77) = 6.94$ ,  $p = .0017$ . Post-hoc Tukey's tests indicated that participants who agreed with the statement rated social media presence as significantly more important (Mean = 7.25, SD = 2.31) than those who were neutral (Mean = 5.15, SD = 2.60),  $p = .0023$ . No significant difference was found between 'Neutral' and 'Disagree' groups (Mean = 5.17, SD = 3.06),  $p = .99$ . However, only 6 participants were in the 'Disagree' group, making it harder to detect a significant difference due to the small sample size and high SD (3.06). These findings support H4b (Exploratory), suggesting that clients who believe that SMM can improve real estate sales outcomes assign greater importance to an agent's social media presence during the agent selection process.

### 5.6 Limitations of Survey

In hindsight, ranking nine options (Question 6) may have caused cognitive overload for many participants, potentially leading to more random selections, particularly in the middle range. Additionally, ranking enforces a strict order without revealing how strongly one option is preferred over another. For instance, a participant might view the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> ranks as nearly equal, though this is not captured in the data. Since forced ranking requires differentiation, true preferences may be distorted. It may have been better to let clients choose among the three justice dimensions rather than rank items from all of them. Still, the pattern remains clear: clients prioritize procedural/interactional factors over distributive ones. Here, interviews help explore H1 further and address these survey limitations. Lastly, as already mentioned, the sample was drawn exclusively from clients of one family-run real estate agency, with most clients being above 50 years of age, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to the broader market.

## 6. Qualitative Data Analysis (Interviews)

### 6.1 Customer Satisfaction Questions

When asked about the key drivers of customer satisfaction in the service delivery of real estate agents (RQ1), all three interviewees (SH, UK, and AC) identified multiple factors aligning perfectly with the three justice dimensions. For sellers, the most important aspects include reliable and consistent service (procedural), strong representation of their interests (procedural), clear communication (procedural), honest feedback on market responses to the property (procedural), and achieving the agreed-upon price (distributive). For buyers, satisfaction is primarily driven by a consistent process without unnecessary delays (procedural), clear communication (procedural), and trust in the agent's information and interpersonal conduct (procedural). UK emphasized that the interactional dimension becomes especially significant for buyers, given the emotional nature of purchasing a home. While there were no notable differences in the comments regarding satisfaction drivers – indeed, many points were repeated – it already became clear that procedural justice plays a crucial role in service delivery. As UK noted, *“satisfaction for both sides really depends on mainly communicating correctly, and dependently and consistently,”* further adding that *“the main reason for changing your sales agent is an unsatisfactory communication from the broker to the buyer or seller.”* AC and SH stressed the importance of honesty and trustworthiness: *“it’s often the most-valued possession of sellers which is why they highly value trustworthiness and honesty.”* (AC)

When further asked whether clients value tangible outcomes like sale price (i.e., distributive justice) more than relationship-focused aspects of service, responses varied slightly. UK, with experience in both Germany and the U.S., observed that Americans are more transactional and price-driven – especially sellers – while Germans prioritize trust and relationships. In UK's market, agents with strong networks can secure higher prices and retain clients regardless of behavior. In contrast, SH and AC stressed that in Germany, interpersonal factors carry more weight. They also noted that prices mostly reflect market conditions and buyer willingness to pay – factors beyond the agent's control. As sellers often begin with unrealistic price expectations, satisfaction tends to shift toward how the process is managed and how the agent interacts. All three interviewees highlighted the importance of transparent feedback during the listing phase to help sellers accept market realities. When communication is strong, unsatisfactory distributive outcomes can be offset by fair procedures and respectful interactions – consistent with prior research (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002; Tax et al., 1998).

Still, aligning the initial price with market demand remains crucial to avoid dissatisfaction. Overall, while distributive outcomes are largely market-driven, satisfaction – particularly in Germany – is shaped more by procedural and interactional justice, as reported by both clients (survey) and agents (interviewees), supporting H1. Consequently, SH noted, these elements are key differentiators between agents, echoed by UK’s statement: “*my service is me.*” Nonetheless, distributive outcomes shouldn’t be overlooked: “*in the end, the more the final sale price meets the demands from the buyer/seller the more happy they are*”, he concluded, “*it’s a combination of all factors.*”

The criticism of real estate commission structures was acknowledged by SH and AC. AC admitted discomfort and expressed a preference for more performance-based models (e.g., higher price achieved, higher commission). Both noted that commissions are legally regulated and only paid upon a successful sale. Given the time investment and risk of losing clients if sales stall or targets aren’t met, SH argued the commission offsets this risk. He is open to offering enhanced services for high-value properties – like drone footage – but warned such investments could result in losses if deals fall through. In contrast, UK noted that in the U.S., commission models are widely accepted and rarely questioned.

## 6.2 Customer Retention and Referrals Questions

SH noted that client retention is rare in his experience, as most clients buy or sell infrequently. In contrast, it accounts for around 50% of AC’s and UK’s business, highlighting how retention varies by agent and client base. All three agreed that procedural and interactional justice during initial service delivery matter more for retention than distributive outcomes, which are largely market-driven – echoing Le and Supphellen (2016) and Seiler et al. (2008). From a U.S. perspective, UK added that securing a high sale price due to personal network advantages can also encourage repeat business. Still, long-term relationships require consistent effort. SH stressed that a good experience alone doesn’t ensure retention – ongoing contact is key. UK and AC similarly cited a mix of strong service, relationship-building, and staying in touch. As UK put it, “*the underlying transaction needs to be a good one, but staying in touch beyond that is essential for retention.*” SH noted clients often forget their agents after years or switch unintentionally, which challenges the assumption – common in industries like auto sales (Oliver & Swan, 1989) – that service fairness guarantees retention. To stay top-of-mind, UK uses regular outreach like email marketing and calls: “*We try really*

*hard to stay on top of their mind.*” AC also values gestures like birthday greetings and informal meetings to maintain client ties.

Similar patterns emerged regarding recommendation behavior (i.e., customer loyalty). While the literature highlights the role of affective commitment and trust in driving referrals over time, SH, UK, and AC rely on the same strategies they use for retention, which likely do exactly what the literature deems important (i.e., strengthening trust and commitment). As UK put it, *“recommendations come with the efforts associated with retaining a client.”*

Supporting Söderlund and Mattson (2015), SH and AC actively prompt referrals by reminding clients, *“If you ever know someone who is interested in selling their property, think about me!”* (SH) UK prefers a more passive approach, believing it is *“obvious”* clients know he welcomes referrals – though he acknowledges asking likely would not hurt. SH stressed that referrals are critical to his business, stating, *“90% of my current business results from client referrals”*, likely resulting from him actively requesting referrals and having maintained relationships over time. AC similarly gains most clients through recommendations.

### 6.3 Social Media Marketing Questions

SH and AC have not used social media marketing (SMM), though they are aware of it. SH attributed this to his current career stage and lower ambition, saying he welcomes tools that may speed up sales but doesn’t need them personally. Both noted that sellers currently don’t expect social media marketing. As AC put it, *“for selling real estate (residential), social media marketing is still in the beginning and absolutely not expected.”* However, based on his experience in commercial real estate, AC observed higher expectations in that sector. This contrasts with survey findings (H2), where clients rated social media presence as important – possibly due to a lack of communication on the topic. SH and AC also questioned client comfort, noting many may hesitate to promote properties publicly online. They stressed the need for clear communication to gain acceptance. SH added that in Germany’s luxury market, discretion is key, making SMM culturally unsuitable unless handled carefully. This partially contradicts survey results for H3, where most participants felt comfortable with SMM, though this may reflect SH’s and AC’s limited discussion of the topic with clients.

SH and AC see modern tools like social media marketing (SMM) as more relevant for younger agents, mainly for personal branding rather than service delivery – reflecting some

skepticism. When asked about SMM's effectiveness in selling real estate, both doubted its current impact on speeding up sales or increasing prices. AC suggested this might change as social media use grows but sees it currently as more effective for rentals, which are often coincidence-based, unlike purchases where buyers usually actively search on standard property platforms. This contrasts with survey findings for H4a, where clients believed in SMM's potential. The gap may stem from SH and AC's limited experience with SMM, given that many clients agreed they have been drawn to properties through social media marketing in the past.

In contrast, UK – currently working in the U.S. – actively uses social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn for marketing. He posts videos, photos of listings, Open House announcements, success stories, and educational content on local trends, using targeted ads to boost reach. Clients expect this, wanting maximum exposure for their properties, which supports H2 and H3. However, UK is skeptical about its effectiveness: *“social media is a self-marketing tool and nothing else... I have not gotten one buyer through social media.”* This view aligns with SH and AC, who also see it mainly as a personal branding tool. UK added that sellers want it *“just in case”*, because *“it looks beautiful and makes both me and my clients happy.”* He emphasized that Zillow – a widely used U.S. real estate platform – accounts for 95% of property visibility, far surpassing what social media can offer.

All three interviewees saw potential in social media marketing (SMM) for supporting client retention and encouraging referrals. SH and AC noted that seeing an agent's content could help clients remember them when it's time to sell again. UK agreed but emphasized that agents must still maintain personal contact – SMM is just a helpful add-on. The same applies to client acquisition: while SMM shows promise, it cannot yet replace traditional marketing or referrals. As AC put it, *“I believe it's going to become more important over time.”* He added that its true value will only emerge once it proves effective in closing deals, retaining clients, and generating loyalty and leads.

## 7. Discussion: Summary of Findings, Implications, and Limitations

### 7.1 Summary of Findings – Drivers of Customer Satisfaction (RQ1)

The literature review explored the three justice dimensions and their impact on customer satisfaction. While most research identifies distributive justice as the strongest predictor of customer satisfaction across industries (Bahri-Ammari & Bilgihan, 2017; Martínez-Tur et al., 2006; Siu et al., 2013; Tax et al., 1998), evidence in real estate has already pointed toward the greater influence of procedural and interactional justice on retention and loyalty (Le & Supphellen, 2016; Seiler et al., 2008). However, little was known about their role in shaping initial satisfaction of customers.

Given the relationship-driven nature of real estate agency services, it was hypothesized (H1) that procedural and interactional justice would have a stronger effect on satisfaction. To test this, a mixed-method approach was used, combining a client survey with interviews from three experienced agents. Survey results showed clients valued procedural (e.g., responsiveness and clear communication, fairness and integrity, and openness to feedback) and interactional justice (e.g., trustworthiness, charisma) more than distributive justice (e.g., highest price or fast sale). These findings were statistically significant and confirmed H1. Interview data supported these results, emphasizing the importance of procedural and interactional elements such as honest communication and trust. While all agents acknowledged the dominance of procedural and interactional factors, they also noted that distributive outcomes still matter – especially in the U.S., where, as UK stated, “*money rules*”. In Germany, however, outcomes like price are largely market-driven and hence clients place greater value on procedural and interactional factors within the service delivery of an agent.

Consistent with prior research (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002; Tax et al., 1998), the findings from interviews show that poor outcomes can indeed be offset by fair processes and respectful interactions. While procedural and interactional justice are stronger predictors of satisfaction, distributive justice should not be overlooked. This was also reflected in the survey by the higher standard deviation in responses related to distributive outcomes. Ultimately, agents should aim to satisfy clients across all three dimensions of justice.

## 7.2 Summary of Findings – Customer Retention and Loyalty (RQ2)

The interviews supported findings by Le and Supphellen (2016) and Seiler et al. (2008), confirming that procedural and interactional justice have a stronger impact on customer retention – except in the U.S., where, according to UK, the ability to secure higher prices through personal networks can also drive retention. While the literature (Oliver & Swan, 1989) suggests customer satisfaction leads to retention and is a necessary precursor to loyalty (e.g., word-of-mouth), the interviews revealed a more complex reality in real estate, where transactions are infrequent.

All three interviewees emphasized that retention requires ongoing effort, particularly staying in touch to avoid being forgotten. Common post-sale strategies mentioned included email marketing, occasional calls, birthday wishes, and informal meetings – serving both retention and referral purposes. Client referrals were viewed as the most effective acquisition tool, with SH stating they account for a large share of his business. SH and AC reported actively encouraging referrals, aligning with Söderlund and Mattson (2015), while UK believes satisfied clients will refer naturally if the relationship is maintained correctly.

Although the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing was discussed in the literature as key to achieving loyalty, interviewees did not reference it directly. Still, their responses underscored the need for continuous relationship investment to foster commitment. Trust – a central theme during discussions of service delivery – was closely tied to procedural justice and reflected elements such as operational competence, benevolence, and a problem-solving approach (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). While not explicitly framed within theory, actions like birthday greetings and follow-ups reflect personal engagement and, as noted by Fullerton (2011), help build affective commitment and strengthen trust to maintain recommendation behaviors over time.

## 7.3 Summary of Findings – Mediating Impact of Social Media Marketing (RQ3)

The literature review showed that social media marketing (SMM) has gained global importance. It can strengthen existing relationships and attract new clients through targeted advertising (Jamil et al., 2022), especially using infotainment and relational content (Kulikovskaja et al., 2023). In real estate, SMM has been explored for its role in service delivery and client acquisition/retention (Forbes, 2022; Sambrana et al., 2024).

In the German market, survey participants from the researcher's family agency confirmed this potential: many valued an agent's social media presence when choosing who to work with (H2) and felt comfortable with this form of marketing (H3). Most also believed SMM could help sell properties faster and at higher prices (H4a), especially those who had prior positive experiences. Those who saw outcome benefits from SMM also rated it as more important overall (H4b).

However, interview findings diverged. SH and AC have not used SMM and assume most clients neither expect nor want it – likely due to a lack of discussion on the topic. In contrast, UK, working in the U.S., reported high client expectations for SMM, though he too doubts its direct impact on sales, calling it more of a self-branding tool, just like SH and AC. AC agreed it may help in rentals but not necessarily with improving outcomes in property sales, raising questions about H4a.

All three interviewees view SMM as useful for maintaining relationships with existing clients through the increased visibility and for supporting client acquisition – but not as a replacement for traditional retention/acquisition methods. Even UK, despite his experience, sees it only as a helpful supplement. SH and AC, or younger agents in general, may benefit from engaging in SMM just in case – as clients value it, even if it doesn't directly impact sales. Over time, with more proof on its effectiveness, agents may rely on it more. For now, SMM can enhance client satisfaction, retention, and loyalty, but should be seen as a complementary tool – not a substitute for traditional strategies used to achieve those outcomes.

## 7.4 Practical Implications

German real estate agents should aim to deliver high fairness across all three justice dimensions, especially procedural and interactional justice, which are more within their control than distributive outcomes. In a current buyer's market with only moderate outcomes for sellers, these dimensions become crucial for maintaining satisfaction. To ensure repeat business and referrals, ongoing contact and relationship-building are essential – even if retention happens less frequently for some. Client referrals remain the primary source of new business, and while asking for them is optional, it often helps.

Regarding commission models, no concrete alternatives were proposed. However, offering premium services like drone footage in high-value deals may help justify higher commissions, though this carries financial risk if the sale doesn't close.

Although social media marketing (SMM) is valued by most clients of a German real estate agency, local agents report that it has not yet proven as effective in accelerating sales or achieving higher prices as commonly believed. Many clients have witnessed its potential in promoting properties; however, traditional platforms still outperform social media in reaching buyers – even in the U.S., according to one local agent. Nonetheless, because clients increasingly expect agents to use SMM – and because it may support client acquisition, retention, and loyalty – agents should adopt it, albeit with modest expectations. For now, SMM is best viewed as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, traditional marketing strategies.

## 7.5 Limitations and Suggestions for further Research

This study has several limitations that significantly constrain the generalizability of its findings. The theories in the literature review are mostly drawn from broader service industries and often outdated, making their direct application to real estate – particularly in Germany – challenging. Furthermore, real estate-specific research on these topics remains limited, especially from comparable markets.

The survey data, while relevant to the researcher, was drawn largely from existing clients of the researcher's family agency, introducing clear sample bias. Many participants were previous clients or personal acquaintances, which may have led to overly positive or socially desirable responses, particularly regarding SMM. With only 80 responses – mostly from older participants within a single German region – the sample lacked both demographic and geographic diversity, limiting the applicability of findings even within Germany. The researcher tried hard to get as many legitimate participants as possible, though was constrained due to the limited number of previous clients of the agency. Additionally, the ranking question posed analytical challenges, and while the survey captured perceptions (e.g., the belief that SMM enhances outcomes), it provided no factual evidence of effectiveness.

The interview component, though valuable for in-depth insights, was limited to three agents, all older and highly experienced – useful for evaluating traditional practices but possibly less relevant for modern marketing methods like SMM. UK’s perspective, mostly U.S.-based, added contrast but was less applicable to the German market, where he has not worked in many years. As with any qualitative data, subjectivity and personal bias were present throughout.

Given the growing importance of SMM in real estate, further research is needed – especially in the German market – to provide data-driven evidence of its impact on outcomes and client relationships. Future studies should also explore which types of content resonate most with clients, helping agents refine and optimize their SMM strategies and their overall service delivery.

## 8. Conclusion

This study examined factors influencing client satisfaction, retention, and loyalty for real estate agencies. Procedural and interactional elements of service delivery emerged as crucial to client satisfaction, while distributive outcomes – though less central – still play an important role. Notably, strong procedures and interpersonal interactions can help mitigate dissatisfaction with less favorable outcomes.

Retention and loyalty require consistent effort, unlike in other industries, due to the infrequent nature of real estate transactions. Social media marketing (SMM), currently used mainly for property promotion, is seen as important by clients – particularly of a Germany-based agency – who believe it helps attract buyers more quickly and may lead to higher final sale prices. However, agents interviewed within this study were skeptical, viewing SMM as largely ineffective for driving sales. Instead, they see it as a supplementary tool that may support retention and acquisition, though with limited success so far.

While SMM holds potential, it does not yet replace traditional marketing strategies for acquiring or retaining clients, let alone selling properties. Its role may grow in the future, especially as digital habits evolve, highlighting the need for further research with measurable data – particularly in markets like Germany.

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# Appendix

Figure 1: Theoretical Diagram

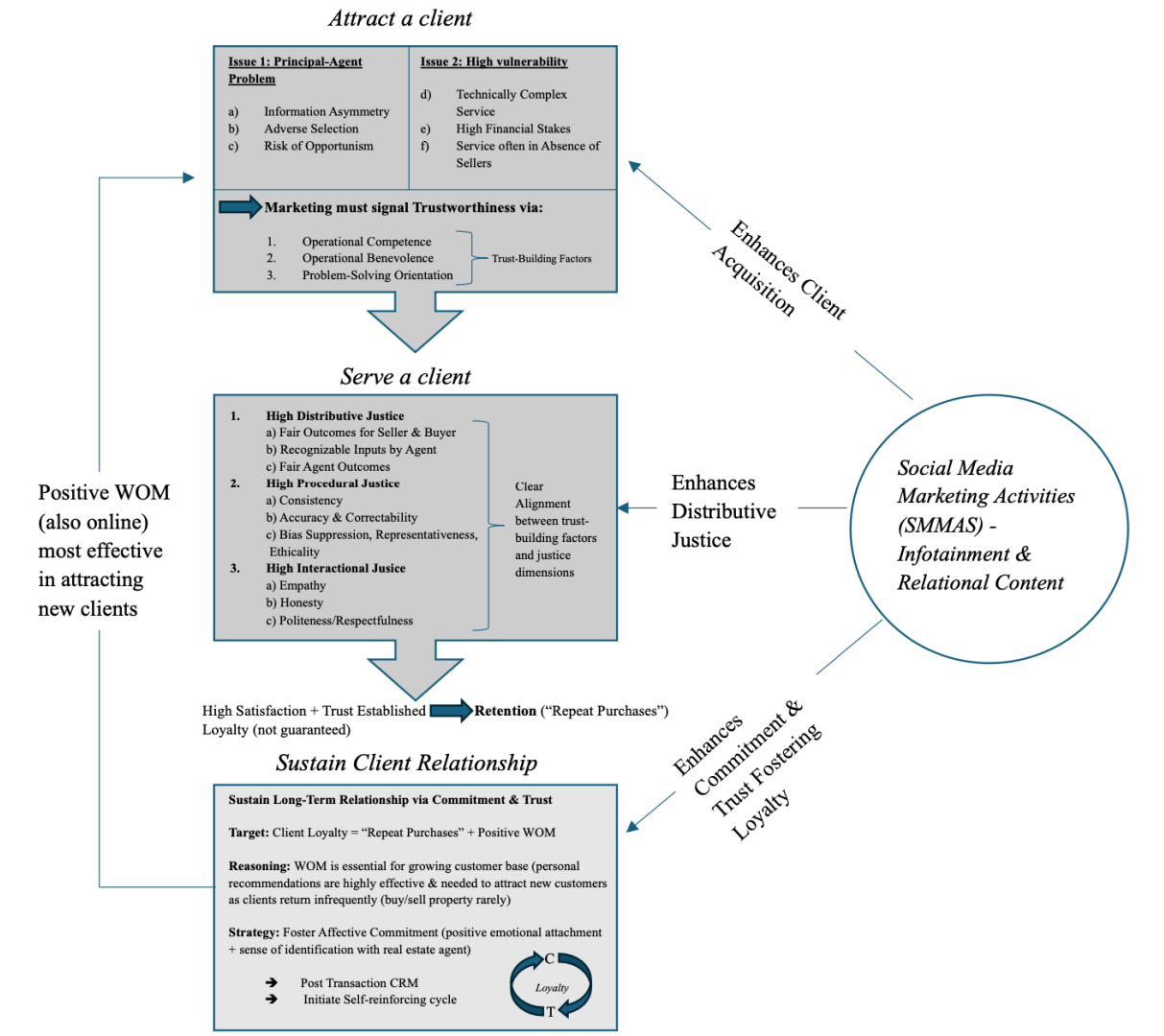


Table 1: Question 6 – The mean, median, and standard deviation of the ranking distribution of each option

<b>Options</b>	<b>Mean Rank</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<i>1. Trustworthiness</i>	3.08	2	2.37
<i>2. Openness to feedback</i>	3.45	3	2.13
<i>3. Fairness and Integrity</i>	3.8	3	2.34
<i>4. Responsiveness and Clear Communication</i>	4.79	4	1.93
<i>5. Charisma and sympathy</i>	5.41	5	1.87
<i>6. How quickly the property is sold</i>	5.48	6	2.38
<i>7. Get the highest possible price</i>	6.14	7	2.56
<i>8. Reputation and popularity</i>	6.18	7	2.87
<i>9. Professional Competence</i>	6.69	6.5	1.95

\*Important Note: the lower the rank, the higher the importance.

Table 2: Question 6 – Rank 1, 2, and 3 – the most ranked options

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Option</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<i>1</i>	Trustworthiness	25 (31.25%)
<i>2</i>	Fairness and Integrity	23 (28.75%)
<i>3</i>	Openness to feedback	25 (31.25%)

\*Important Note: the lower the rank, the higher the importance

Table 3: Question 6 – Mean Rank of each Justice Dimension

<b>Justice Dimension</b>	<b>Mean Rank</b>
<i>1. Interactional Justice</i>	4.24 out of 9
<i>2. Procedural Justice</i>	4.68 out of 9
<i>3. Distributive Justice</i>	5.93 out of 9

\*Important Note: the lower the rank, the higher the importance

Table 4: Question 1 – Mean, median, and standard deviation of ratings on importance of social media presence of real estate agents for each age group

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<i>Under 30 years (11)</i>	7	7	1.61
<i>30-50 years (22)</i>	7.05	8	2.63
<i>50-60 years (32)</i>	5.97	6	2.74
<i>Over 60 years (15)</i>	6	6	3

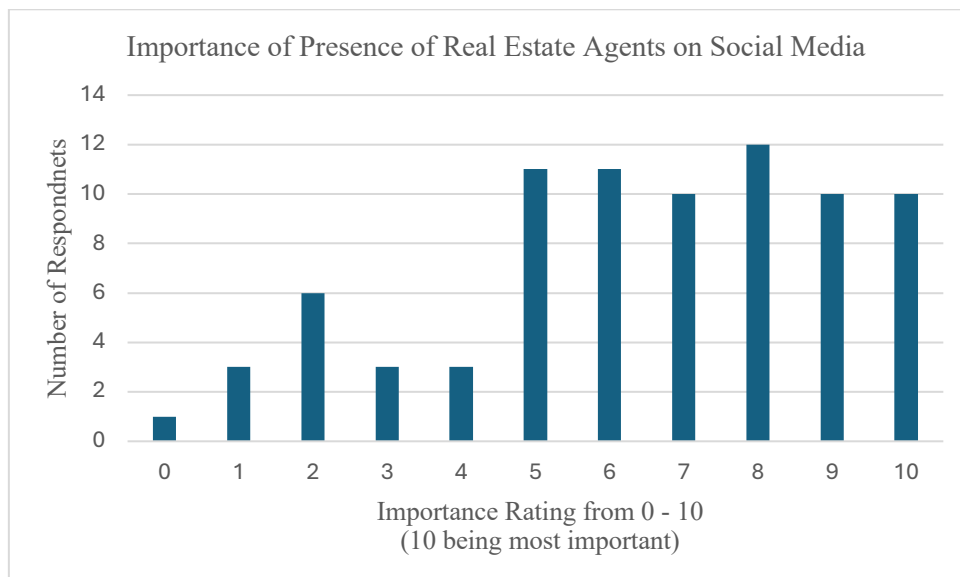
**Table 5: Question 5 – Distribution of responses across different age groups**

	<b>Under 30 years</b>	<b>30-50years</b>	<b>50-60 years</b>	<b>Over 60 years</b>
<i>'Yes, I would have no problem with that'</i>	54.6%	59.1%	56.2%	53.3%
<i>'I am unsure'</i>	27.3%	22.7%	25%	33.3%
<i>'No, I would feel uncomfortable with that'.</i>	18.1 %	18.2%	18.8%	13.4%

**Table 6: Question 3 – Opinions on effectiveness of SMM across different age groups**

	<b>Under 30 years</b>	<b>30-50years</b>	<b>50-60 years</b>	<b>Over 60 years</b>
<i>'Agree'</i>	54.6%	72.7%	59.4%	46.7%
<i>'I am neutral in this regard'</i>	27.3%	27.3%	34.4%	40%
<i>'Disagree'</i>	18.1 %	-	6.2%%	13.3%

**Graph 1: Question 2 – Distribution of ratings on importance of social media presence of real estate agents**



## Survey questions translated on the Qualtrics platform (Screenshots):

### Information:

English

#### Important information:

When social media is mentioned in the context of real estate marketing, please consider it an additional form of property marketing—complementary to a real estate agent's usual sales channels, such as uploading listings or contacting potential buyers from the agent's network . To illustrate what we mean by additional marketing through social media, we've prepared a short example from the USA on the YouTube platform (the one minute should be enough to give you a good idea). Simply click on the middle of the video to watch it!



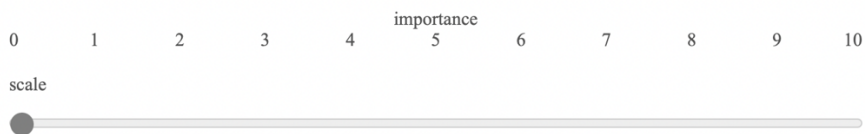
### Survey Question 1:



English

#### Question 1:

Imagine you want to sell your property, but you're not familiar with us and are still looking for a suitable agent. On a scale of 1 to 10: How important would the agent's presence on social media, such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, or YouTube, where the agent regularly presents new properties for sale or rent, be to you when choosing? (Where 10 means "very important"). **To do this, simply move the scale bar with your finger or mouse.**



## Survey Question 2:



English

### Question 2:

Have you ever seen a post or video from a real estate agent on social media that piqued your interest in a property?

Yes

Possible, but I can't remember exactly

No

## Survey Question 3:



English

### Question 3:

"Additional marketing of properties through social media can result in them being sold both faster and for a higher price."

agree

I am neutral in this regard

Disagree

## Survey Question 4:



English

### **Question 4:**

**Which social media platforms do you consider most suitable for successfully marketing a property?** Please use your finger or mouse to rank the following platforms according to your preference, with number **1** being the most suitable.

- Facebook
- YouTube
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- TikTok
- A combination of all platforms

## Survey Question 5:



English

### **Question 5:**

**As a seller, would you feel comfortable if your property were also marketed via social media (with pictures and videos)?** This would mean that significantly more people, including many potential buyers, could see your property. (Of course, without disclosing the exact address and after prior consultation with you regarding the choice of pictures and videos.)

Yes, I would have no problem with that

I am unsure

No, I would feel uncomfortable with that

## Survey Question 6:

English

### **Question 6:**

**Below, we've listed possible qualities a real estate agent should look for, along with the quality of their service.** We'd love to hear how important these qualities are to you from a real estate seller's perspective. You can use your finger or mouse to determine the order of importance, with the **first choice** being the most important and the last choice being the least important.

Responsiveness and clear communication

Charisma and sympathy

Professional competence

Reputation and popularity

How quickly the property is sold

trustworthiness

Get the highest possible price

Fairness and integrity

Openness to feedback

## Survey Question 7:



English

### **Question 7:**

**Have we perhaps missed an important characteristic of a real estate agent or a relevant quality feature of their service that you think is also important?** Then please let us know in the text box below this question!

Survey Information of participants:

1:



English

Below we need some personal information from you so that we can better understand the data!

2:



English

Please specify your gender!

Man

Woman

3:



English

Please select your age group!

Under 30 years

30-50 years

50-60 years

Over 60 years

**Customer Satisfaction Interview Questions:**

1. From your experience, what are the main drivers of customer satisfaction in your services?  
Optional: Could you highlight any differences between buyers and sellers?
2. Do you find that customers value tangible outcomes (like sale price) more than how the service was delivered (communication, empathy, relationship-focused aspects)? Again, feel free to distinguish between buyers and sellers.
3. What part of your service do you believe sets you apart most from competitors in the eyes of your clients?
4. Have you seen cases where a client was unhappy with the outcome (e.g., low price or long wait), but still satisfied overall because of how the service was delivered? What made the difference?
5. Do clients ever question your commission structure, especially when property values are high? How do you handle or prevent perceptions of unfairness?

**Customer Retention and Referrals Interview Questions:**

6. How common is it for customers to return to you for future transactions? How important is that aspect of your business?
7. What do you think encourages clients to return – is it a positive transaction alone, or do you need to stay in touch beyond that?
8. In terms of repeat business, what's more powerful: achieving excellent results, or building strong relationships during the process?
9. How important are client recommendations in helping you acquire new customers? Do you actively encourage referrals?
10. How do you maintain long-term relationships with past clients to ensure they continue to recommend you?

**Social Media Marketing Interview Questions:**

11. What role does social media play in your marketing strategy today? Do clients expect you to promote their property on such platforms?
12. Do you find that most clients are generally comfortable with social media marketing?
13. What is your opinion on social media marketing helping sell properties faster or at better prices compared to other methods? If so, how?
14. Do you believe social media also helps with customer retention and encouraging long-term relationships with clients ensuring recommendation behaviors over time? If so, how?
15. Do you believe that being present on social media platforms can be more effective at attracting new clients than traditional advertising?

## **Description of Interviewees**

### 1<sup>st</sup> Interviewee: SH

SH, aged 59, is a highly experienced real estate agent with over 25 years in the industry, specializing in representing property sellers. For the past 18 years, he has operated his own agency in Cologne, Germany, where he leads a team of employees. Over the course of his career, SH has successfully sold hundreds of properties, with transaction values reaching up to €9 million. He focuses primarily on high-end residential properties in Cologne's most prestigious neighborhoods. In addition to sales, he has experience in property development and rental management. SH is also the owner of the agency whose clients participated in the survey conducted for this dissertation.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Interviewee: AC

AC, aged 58, is another highly experienced real estate agent, with approximately 30 years of industry experience, primarily in Bonn, Germany, where he runs his own agency. Over the years, he has sold hundreds of properties for clients, ranging from apartments and multi-family homes to luxury mansions valued in the millions of euros. In addition to residential sales, AC has extensive experience in the commercial real estate sector, having been involved in major transactions involving office buildings. He has collaborated with SH on numerous deals, and the two regularly consult each other on significant transactions, reflecting a long-standing professional partnership.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Interviewee: UK

UK, aged 64, is a German real estate professional currently based in Florida, USA. He brings a combined 35 years of industry experience – 15 years in the German real estate market and the past 20 years in the United States, where he manages his own branch of a larger real estate agency. UK specializes in a specific geographic area and operates as both a buyer's and seller's agent. His expertise lies in the high-end residential market, having successfully closed over 100 transactions ranging from \$3 million to \$15 million. Given his German background, UK frequently represents German clients in U.S. transactions, offering valuable insights into potential cultural differences that may affect the real estate process.