

K-Means clustering interpretation using recency, frequency, and monetary factor for retail customers segmentation⁴

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ABSTRACT

Efforts to retain customers represent a crucial customer relationship management (CRM) strategy in every business, offering the potential to enhance profits, particularly for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In the context of this study, which focuses on the transaction dataset of retailers in a developing market, Indonesia, the emphasis has predominantly been on customer attraction rather than the implementation of customer retention strategies. The primary objective of this research was to scrutinize customer transaction data within the dataset. The K-Means clustering (KMC) method, integrated with recency, frequency, and monetary (RFM) attributes, was employed to classify customers and formulate effective strategies for customer retention. Conducted through a descriptive research method with a quantitative approach, the study involved sequential stages of data preprocessing and RFM analysis for comprehensive data analysis. The outcomes revealed the identification of 5 distinct clusters with associated strategies based on the RFM scores obtained. These strategies, tailored to each cluster, serve as valuable insights in industrial and innovation for marketing and business strategic teams, offering practical approaches to customer retention that can lead to increased benefits for SMEs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business landscape, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) find themselves navigating a complex terrain, where the pursuit of sustainable growth is intricately tied to the twin challenges of customer acquisition and revenue expansion [1]. Amidst intense competition and ever-evolving consumer preferences, SMEs must not only strive to attract new customers but also strategically secure the ongoing loyalty and engagement of their existing customer base [2]. This duality of challenges underscores the critical importance of customer-centric approaches in shaping the trajectory of SMEs.

Following the Pareto principle, it's noteworthy that 20% of customers significantly contribute more to the company's revenue than the remaining 80% [3]. This phenomenon is explained by the fact that obtaining a new customer can incur expenses five times higher than maintaining an existing one [4]. A mere 5% increase in customer retention can lead to profit boosts ranging from 25% to 95%. Selling to an existing

customer has a success rate of 60-70%, while with new customers, it is only 5-20% [5]. Moreover, customers who are loyal demonstrate a probability five times greater of making repeat purchases, four times more inclined to recommend to others, and seven times more prone to trying a new product or service [6].

Given the significance of prioritizing customer retention over acquiring new customers to enhance company profits, the implementation of a customer segmentation model becomes imperative [7]. Customer segmentation involves utilizing various distinctive customer characteristics to assist business professionals in tailoring marketing strategies, recognizing trends, planning product development, advertising campaigns, and delivering relevant products [8]. This approach enables personalized messaging to individuals, facilitating more effective communication with targeted groups. The typical attributes employed in customer segmentation include location, age, gender, income, lifestyle, and past purchase behavior [9].

This study aims to focus on a pivotal question on how SMEs can increase revenue by deepening their relationships with customers. The objectives of this study are twofold. Firstly, we aim to determine customer segmentation within the transaction dataset of retailers in a developing market, Indonesia by implementing the recency, frequency, and monetary (RFM) method in conjunction with K-Means clustering (KMC). Secondly, we seek to provide insights into the interpretation of customer clustering assignments by leveraging the RFM factor.

In this study, segmentation is carried out using behavioral data, which is easily accessible and consistently evolves, providing insights into the ongoing changes in customer purchase history. The widely recognized RFM analysis is utilized as a methodology for assessing customers based on their purchasing behavior [10]. A scoring system is devised to assess individual RFM scores, enabling the anticipation of future patterns by examining the customer's present and past histories [11]. Importantly, it has been observed that the scores for the three RFM factors exhibit a direct correlation with the customer's lifetime and retention [12]. After computing the values for RFM, the K-Means algorithm is employed on these variables to generate clusters within the customer base. Analyzing the behavior of each cluster aids in identifying groups of customers that contribute more profits to the company. With the identification of customer clusters, understanding the distinctions between these groups becomes essential. A comprehensive analysis of the clusters is conducted to facilitate the identification of target customers and tailor appropriate promotions and offers to them. The resultant outcome of this proposed approach is a meaningful customer segmentation that proves beneficial for the marketing and business strategic teams in SMEs. The structure of the document is outlined as follows: section 2 explores the literature review, sections 3 and 4 present the methodologies, experimental results, and discussion, respectively, while section 5 provides the conclusion of this research.

2. RELATED WORKS

In this section, we will conduct a literature review examining previous research on customer segmentation. The discussion will emphasize significant discoveries and perspectives gleaned from prior studies in this domain.

2.1. Customer segmentation

Segmentation remains a crucial marketing concept, particularly within the framework of relationship marketing. Enhancing customer relationships becomes more compelling, yielding a deeper understanding of customer needs. Segmentation involves categorizing customers into clusters with loyalty distinctions, forming the basis for a tailored marketing strategy. Customer segmentation stands out as an initial step in shaping a business model [13]. This customer segmentation aligns with the principles of customer relationship management (CRM), a strategic approach that seeks to optimize profits and customer satisfaction, ultimately elevating the value of customer loyalty [14]. The objective of CRM is for businesses to comprehend customer needs, fostering close, positive, and transparent business relationships and communication, thereby mitigating the risk of customers shifting to competing companies [15].

2.2. Recency, frequency, and monetary analysis

RFM analysis emerge as a powerful and established method within the field of database marketing. Widely utilized, it involves the ranking of customers based on their historical purchasing patterns, proving to be invaluable in diverse domains like online purchases and retailing. This approach adeptly classifies customers by considering three crucial dimensions: recency (R), frequency (F), and monetary (M), providing a comprehensive means of comprehending and segmenting customer behavior. RFM analysis is particularly useful in scenarios with a large customer base, providing businesses with actionable insights for targeted strategies and personalized marketing approaches [16], [17].

Recency (R), referring to the timing of the customer's most recent purchase, is quantified by the number of days between two transactions. A lower recency value indicates frequent visits from the customer

within a brief timeframe, while a higher value suggests a reduced likelihood of the customer returning to the company in the near future. In essence, recency serves as a metric that reflects the customer's visiting patterns, influencing the company's understanding of their engagement over time [16].

Frequency (F), inquiring about the number of times a customer has made a purchase, is characterized by the quantity of transactions within a designated timeframe. A heightened frequency value signifies a greater degree of customer loyalty to the company. In essence, the more frequently a customer engages in purchases within a specified period, the stronger their allegiance to the company is perceived. This metric serves as a valuable indicator of customer commitment and the extent to which they consistently choose the company for their purchasing needs [17].

Monetary (M), assessing the financial expenditure of a customer, is characterized by the sum of money spent during a specific timeframe. A greater monetary value indicates a higher contribution to the company's revenue. Essentially, the more money a customer spends within a designated period, the more substantial their financial impact on the company [16]. This metric is a key indicator of a customer's economic value and underscores their financial significance to the overall success and profitability of the business [17].

2.3. Clustering and K-Means algorithm

Clustering is a technique employed to identify and categorize data sharing similarities with one another [18]. It is a data analysis method commonly integrated into data mining, aiming to group data exhibiting similar characteristics [19]. K-Means is a widely utilized algorithm that necessitates input parameters, including the specified number of clusters, to partition the data with the objective of ensuring high intra-cluster similarity. The algorithm operates iteratively, involving the calculation of centroid values before each iteration. Subsequently, data points are reassigned among different clusters based on the centroids computed during each iteration. This iterative process continues until further reduction in the sum becomes unattainable. Algorithm 1 offers a detailed explanation of the K-Means algorithm. The computational complexity of the K-Means algorithm is expressed as $O(n+k+i)$, where 'n' signifies the number of instances, 'k' denotes the number of clusters, and 'i' represents the number of iterations [20].

Algorithm 1. K-Means clustering algorithm

Input: Dataset containing 'n' instances

'k' represents the number of clusters

Output: Data divided into k clusters

Algorithm:

1. Initially, k random points are selected as initial centroids based on the value of k.
2. The Euclidean distance is calculated for each data point from the previously selected centroids.
3. The distances are compared, and each data point is assigned to the centroid with the shortest Euclidean distance value.
4. The preceding steps are iterated. The process concludes when the obtained clusters match those from the previous step.

2.4. Related research

Customer segmentation problems are prevalent in industry and innovation marketing concepts. Numerous studies have explored customer segmentation using various approaches. The study described in reference [21] centered around the implementation of explainable customer segmentation through KMC. This research aimed to merge explainability with clustering, an unsupervised method. To enhance interpretability, this study introduced a decision tree-based approach for explainability in customer segmentation, applicable to both small and large datasets. Through the utilization of the elbow method and silhouette score, the research determined an optimal number of clusters, subsequently implementing the explainable KMC (ExKMC) algorithm for both datasets.

The study presented by [22] concentrated on customer segmentation and personalized marketing through the utilization of K-Means and APRIORI algorithms. This paper employs RFM and KMC for customer segmentation. Additionally, it introduces a combo offer recommendation feature that can be integrated into any commercial website using the ECLAT and APRIORI algorithms. This feature aids in analyzing product performance and identifying customers who can be targeted more effectively for product sales.

Research conducted by [23]-[27] delved into elucidating the process of visualizing customer clusters through graph plotting and studying data using the KMC algorithm. The ultimate data-driven decision-making, derived from examining the final clusters, provides businesses with valuable insights. In the meantime, [16] provided a comparison of three algorithms in the realm of customer segmentation, namely KMC, fuzzy C-Means, and repetitive median K-Means. Additionally, in their work [28], introduced three

distinct clustering algorithms (K-Means, Agglomerative, and MeanShift) for customer segmentation, ultimately comparing the outcomes of clusters derived from these algorithms.

3. METHOD

In this section, we will offer a comprehensive overview, covering the utilized dataset, data preprocessing techniques, and the proposed methodology. This detailed explanation will provide valuable insights into the methodologies employed for determining retail customer segmentation.

3.1. Dataset and data preprocessing

This study utilized the transaction dataset of retailers in a developing market, Indonesia, covering the period from April 1, 2020 to July 31, 2020. The RAW dataset comprised three types: transaction data, customer data, and store data. The transaction data encompassed 9,640 transactions with six columns, including transaction ID (TrxID), transaction date (TrxDate), store ID (StoreId), customer ID (CustomerId), transaction status (TrxStatus), and amount. In the customer data, there were 958 customers with six columns, including customer ID, first name, last name, email, birthday, and gender. Lastly, the store data included information on seven stores, featuring two columns: store ID and store location.

In this study, data preprocessing is undertaken, involving both data cleaning and data frame filtering from the raw dataset. Data cleansing is employed to ensure the accuracy and compliance of information within the dataset. Since our raw dataset is structured as heterogeneous tabular data with labeled axes (rows and columns), we conducted data frame filtering, selecting only TrxID, CustomerId, TrxDate, and Amount for further processing in the subsequent steps. The detailed dataset can be seen in Figure 1.

Transaction Data

TrxId	TrxDate	StoreId	CustomerId	TrxStatus	Amount
0	14	2020-04-01 09:21:25	10	accepted	366940.0
1	14	2020-04-01 09:22:06	10	accepted	1814330.0
2	14	2020-04-01 09:37:40	15	accepted	170870.0
3	14	2020-04-01 10:00:37	10	accepted	384895.0
4	14	2020-04-01 10:01:19	15	accepted	995610.0
...
9635	16	2020-07-31 20:01:06	13	accepted	1090040.0
9636	16	2020-07-31 20:07:11	13	accepted	390390.0
9637	16	2020-07-31 20:22:45	13	accepted	489510.0
9638	16	2020-07-31 20:31:59	13	accepted	56980.0
9639	16	2020-07-31 20:46:53	13	accepted	825860.0

Customer Data

CustomerId	FirstName	LastName	Email	Birthday	Gender
0	682.0				Female
1	281.0				Male
2	275.0				Female
3	640.0				Female
4	752.0				Female
...
953	322.0				Female
954	853.0				Male
955	429.0				Female
956	160.0				Female
957	118.0				Male

Store Data

StoreId	StoreLocation
0	Jakarta Selatan
1	Jakarta Barat
2	Jakarta Pusat
3	Jakarta Timur
4	Bogor
5	Jakarta Utara
6	Bekasi

Figure 1. Transaction dataset of retailers in Indonesia

3.2. Proposed method

Figure 2 illustrates our proposed method. Following data preprocessing, the information undergoes input into the RFM model for the computation of RFM values. These attributes are subsequently fed into the K-Means algorithm. Prior to clustering using the K-Means algorithm, data scaling is performed. To detect outliers during scaling, the Robust Scaler is employed, demonstrating its capability to handle outliers effectively.

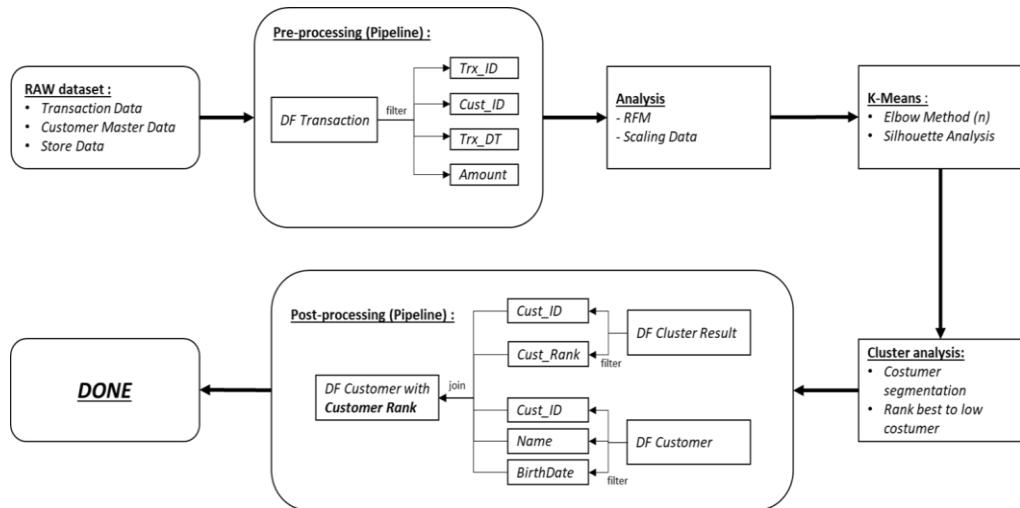


Figure 2. Proposed method

The RFM model is comprised of three components: R (recency), which reflects the customer's most recent transaction date. Determining the R value involves assessing the range of the customer's last transaction date. F (frequency) indicates the number of purchases a customer makes within a specific timeframe. Calculating the F value entails summing the totals across all columns from April 1, 2020, to July 31, 2020. Meanwhile, M (monetary) corresponds to the amount of money spent by the customer during a specified period. The calculation of the M value involves summing the total amount of customer data from April 1 to July 31, 2020.

In the subsequent phase, Algorithm 1, the K-Means algorithm explained in subsection 2.3, is applied. The determination of the optimal number of clusters is not arbitrary. Two primary methods are employed for this purpose: the elbow method and silhouette analysis [18], [20]. The elbow method, frequently employed, entails applying KMC to the dataset with a range of K values. For each K value, an average score for all clusters is calculated, using the sum of square distances, also known as Euclidean distance, from each point to its assigned center as the default score. Simultaneously, the silhouette method is utilized to gauge the quality of clustering, where a high silhouette score indicates effective clustering. This study incorporates both the elbow method and silhouette analysis for cluster determination.

After identifying the optimal number of clusters, this algorithm segments customers and assigns a ranking from best to low based on the RFM model. Subsequently, post-analysis is conducted for each customer cluster in connection with the RFM model. Furthermore, specific business strategies are proposed for deepening relationships with customers within each cluster.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section delivers an elaborate presentation of the research findings, providing insights into the achieved results. It also engages in an extensive discussion to further clarify the significance of the outcomes.

4.1. Experimental results

Our experimental results were obtained using the Python programming language and the Matplotlib library. We extracted data from Figure 1 and processed it into an RFM model. Each variable of RFM was calculated as detailed in subsection 3.2 and the results were combined, as illustrated in Figure 3. These attributes were then input into the K-Means algorithm. Before clustering using K-Means, it was necessary to scale the data, taking into consideration the presence of outliers. The seaborn.distplot() function was employed to visualize the distribution of the RFM analysis formed earlier, specifically, the univariate distribution of a variable against the density distribution. Following this, the Robust Scaler was utilized to identify outliers during the scaling process. The Robust Scaler is effective in reducing the influence of outliers by standardizing features, removing the median, and dividing each feature by the interquartile range [29]. After scaling, the data preprocessing is complete, resulting in 954 rows with 4 columns: RecencyNew, Frequency, Monetary, and CustomerId, as presented in Figure 4.

	CustomerId	FirstName	LastName	Email	Birthday	Gender	TrxDate	Frequency	Monetary	RecencyNew
0	682.0					Female	2020-05-29 14:16:59	1	4829300.0	59
1	281.0					Male	2020-07-02 11:29:49	1	1129765.0	93
2	275.0					Female	2020-07-30 15:10:47	16	2457210.0	121
3	640.0					Female	2020-07-31 14:25:27	15	9655555.0	122
4	752.0					Female	2020-07-22 14:10:14	3	458115.0	113

Figure 3. RFM analysis for each customer

To initiate clustering with the K-Means algorithm, determining the appropriate value for K is essential. This determination can be achieved through the utilization of both the elbow method and silhouette analysis. The elbow method provides an initial estimate of a suitable range for K, and the subsequent application of silhouette analysis refines the selection within that range. Employing this dual approach ensures that the chosen K yields clusters that are not only statistically meaningful but also well-defined [30].

In the implementation phase, we utilize a dataframe containing attributes acquired in the previous stage, as illustrated in Figure 4. These three attributes undergo clustering through the K-Means algorithm with K values ranging from 1 to 50. The results of the elbow method visualization in Figure 5 lead to the conclusion that the optimal K value, according to the elbow method, falls within the range of 5 to 10. Subsequently, silhouette analysis is performed. Experimental findings reveal that the average silhouette score for K(5) is 0.4245, for K(6) it is 0.4060, for K(7) it is 0.4084, for K(8) it is 0.3808, for K(9) it is 0.3823, and for K(10) it is 0.3850, as shown in Figure 6. Thus, it is deduced that the optimal value of K, or the number of clusters formed, is 5.

	RecencyNew	Frequency	Monetary	CustomerId
0	-1.862069	-0.333333	0.359340	682.0
1	-0.689655	-0.333333	-0.252528	281.0
2	0.275862	0.916667	-0.032981	275.0
3	0.310345	0.833333	1.157557	640.0
4	0.000000	-0.166667	-0.363612	752.0
...
949	-1.620690	-0.333333	-0.343259	322.0
950	0.172414	1.250000	1.140869	853.0
951	0.310345	0.000000	0.223828	429.0
952	-2.862069	-0.333333	0.120176	160.0
953	-2.172414	-0.250000	-0.282907	118.0

Figure 4. Scaled data

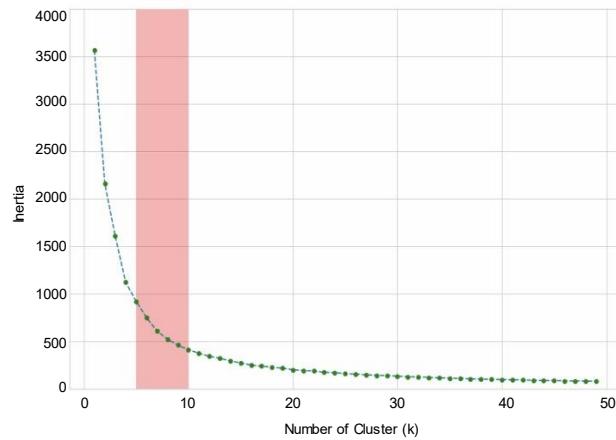


Figure 5. Elbow analysis

Following the clustering process, we now have five clusters, representing distinct customer segments or, as referred to, customer levels. The RFM model is employed to interpret the outcomes of KMC and analyze the unique characteristics of customers within each identified level. As depicted in Figure 7, each customer level is characterized by specific RFM values. Customers displaying the highest values in all three variables—RFM—are categorized as ‘5-star’ in the customer level, and vice versa. Accordingly, for all customers identified by CustomerId, their respective customer level is determined based on their RFM attributes, grouped into labels, as illustrated in Figure 8. We utilize a mapping mechanism to assign star ratings to customers based on their clustering labels. If a customer’s label is 2, they are categorized as ‘1-star.’ Similarly, a label of 0 corresponds to ‘2-star’, a label of 1 is assigned ‘3-star,’ and if the label is 3, the customer is labeled as ‘4-star.’ In cases where none of the specified conditions are met, the default assignment is ‘5-star.’

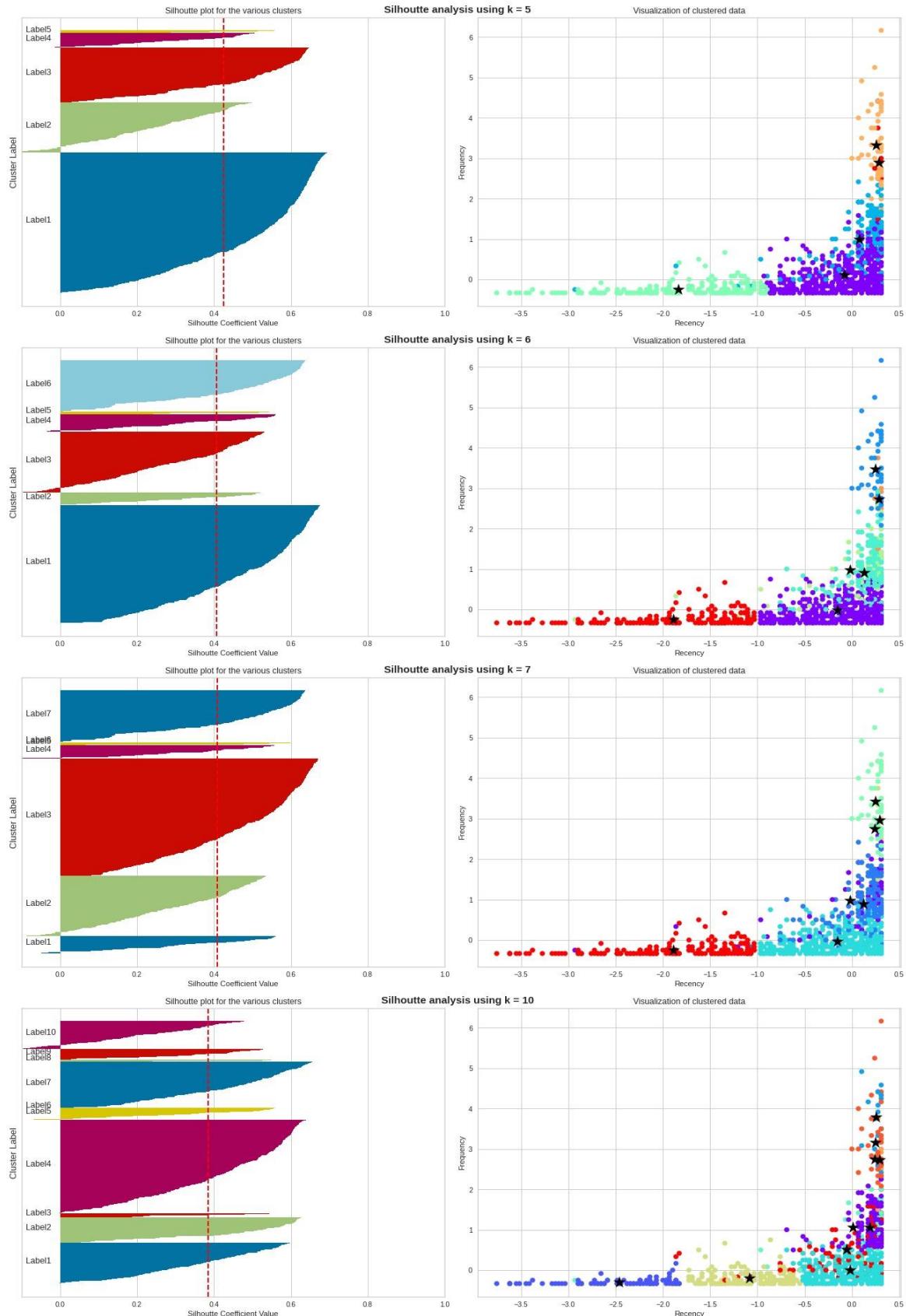


Figure 6. Silhouette analysis scores

CustLevel	RecencyNew	Frequency	Monetary	Labels
1 star	59.804020	2.075377	1.685349e+06	199
2 star	110.621569	6.421569	2.543365e+06	510
3 star	115.153846	16.928571	1.225677e+07	182
4 star	120.358491	44.943396	1.574449e+07	53
5 star	121.300000	39.800000	6.060632e+07	10

Figure 7. Customer level summary

CustomerId	RecencyNew	Frequency	Monetary	Labels	CustLevel
0	682.0	59	1 4829300.0	2	1 star
1	281.0	93	1 1129765.0	0	2 star
2	275.0	121	16 2457210.0	0	2 star
3	640.0	122	15 9655555.0	1	3 star
4	752.0	113	3 458115.0	0	2 star
...
949	322.0	66	1 581175.0	2	1 star
950	853.0	118	20 9554650.0	1	3 star
951	429.0	122	5 4009950.0	0	2 star
952	160.0	30	1 3383240.0	2	1 star
953	118.0	50	2 946085.0	2	1 star

Figure 8. The assignment of a level for each customer

4.2. Discussion

According to Figure 8, each customer is assigned three scores for RFM variables, ranging from 5 to 1, as illustrated in Figure 7, denoted as the customer level. In this level, the top quintile is assigned a score of 5, while the remaining customers receive scores of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The combination of RFM scores is utilized to determine the level of customer loyalty, guiding the formulation of strategies applicable to the respective SMEs. The distribution of customer loyalty levels in categories based on the RFM score is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. RFM score description

Score	Characteristics
5	Champions
4	Potential loyalist
3	Need attention
2	At risk
1	Hibernating

We also conduct post-analysis related to customer segmentation, categorized in our experimental results as customer levels based on the RFM model, as presented in Figure 9. The 5-star customer segment, identified as Cluster 4, represents the epitome of customer loyalty within the dataset. These customers boast the highest RFM scores, signifying a blend of factors contributing to their premium status. Specifically, they exhibit a remarkably short procurement interval, indicated by an increase in recency (Δ recencynew). Additionally, these customers engage in transactions with impressive regularity, highlighting an elevated frequency of purchases (Δ frequency). Moreover, their monetary contribution is substantial, reflected in a high spending value (Δ monetary). This combination of characteristics positions the 5-star segment as the most valuable and engaged group of customers, showcasing a consistent and lucrative interaction with the business.

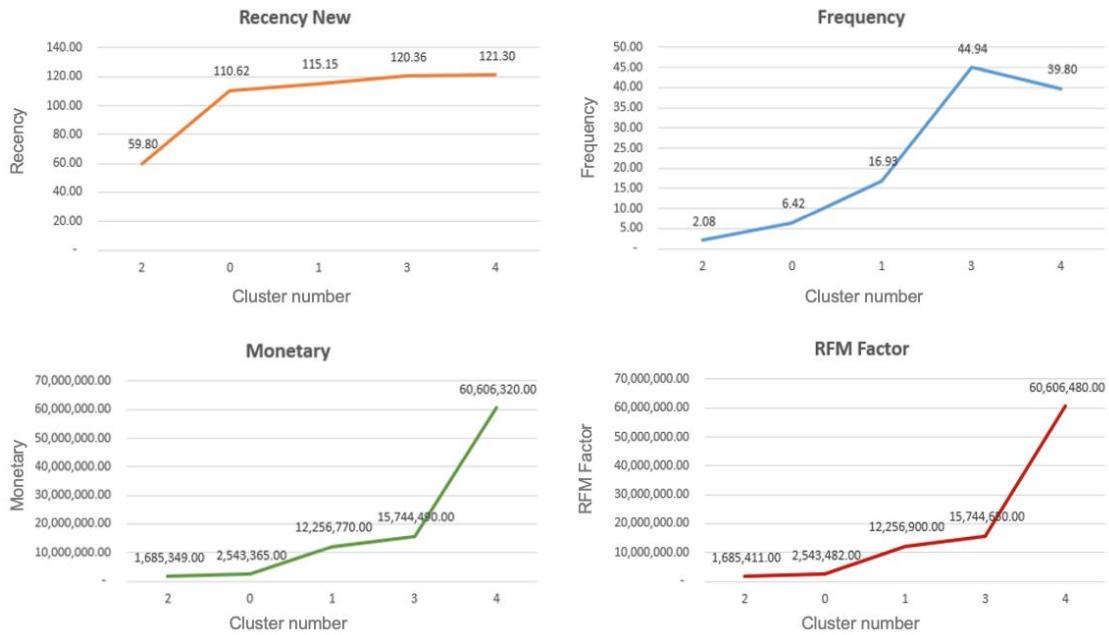


Figure 9. Customer segmentation based on RFM factors

Conversely, the 1-star customer segment, identified as cluster 2, represents customers with the lowest RFM scores, indicating a less favorable engagement pattern. These customers exhibit an extended procurement interval, as reflected in a decrease in recency (\blacktriangledown recencynew). Furthermore, they engage in fewer transactions, signifying a reduced frequency of purchases (\blacktriangledown frequency). In addition to these factors, the spending value of this segment is relatively low (\blacktriangledown monetary). Collectively, these attributes position the 1-star segment as having a less active and financially impactful relationship with the business. Understanding these distinctions between customer segments enables businesses to tailor strategies to enhance the loyalty and value of each group.

In conclusion, we present suggested business strategies that can be executed by the marketing and business strategic teams in SMEs, aligning with the 5 customer levels identified in our experimental results. The proposed actions encompass offering rewards on special occasions, suggesting discounted products based on past purchase patterns, and sending personalized emails containing regular discount programs. Further details can be found in Figure 10.

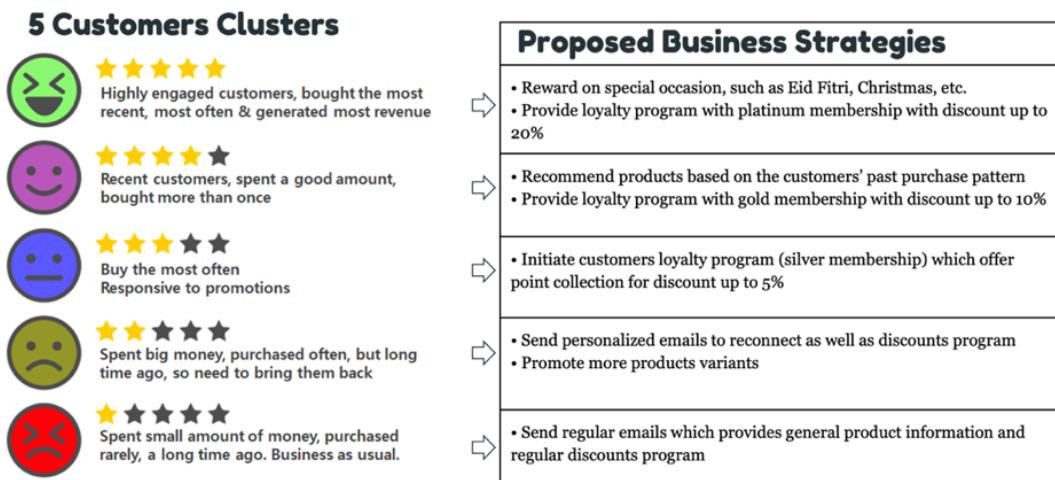


Figure 10. Customer segmentation and proposed business strategies

5. CONCLUSION

Segmenting customers proves instrumental in fostering stronger customer relationships in industrial and innovation. While acquiring new customers is crucial for business growth, retaining existing clients holds even greater significance. The main findings of this study center around the analysis of customer consumption behavior, employing an improved RFM model through the utilization of the KMC algorithm. The application of the KMC algorithm facilitates the classification of customer behavior indicators, with a thorough examination of the results. Given that segmentation relies on RFM values, SMEs now can tailor their marketing strategies to align with customer buying behavior. Future work will involve assessing the performance of customers within each segment, focusing on frequently purchased products by segment members. This approach enables more targeted and effective promotional offers for specific products, contributing to a more nuanced and strategic customer engagement.

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