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## ANALYZING THE ROLE OF THE MARKETING MIX IN CREATING CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN SUPERMARKETS

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**Abstract:** This study's objective is to identify how elements of the marketing mix contribute to fostering customer loyalty towards a shopping center or supermarket with the purpose to assist supermarkets in decision making process which is the main contribution of the research. This study delves into the marketing mix (product, price, distribution, promotion, people) utilized by shopping centers/supermarkets to attract customers and create enduring purchasing relationships through customer loyalty. A questionnaire was distributed to 400 respondents via social media. The method used in this study is defining hypothesis, conducting survey and tested the collected data through Cronbach's alpha coefficients, Spearman's correlation coefficient and Kruskal Wallis Test. This study provides essential insights into the mechanisms through which shopping centers/supermarkets can build and enhance customer loyalty. The research results show a strong influence of product quality, price, location, and promotional activities on creating customer loyalty, while the human factor (behavior of supermarket staff) is a less significant factor.

**Key words:** Marketing mix, marketing strategy, consumer behavior, consumer loyalty, supermarkets

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### Introduction

In the ever-evolving global marketplace, supermarkets, find themselves at the forefront of these challenges, navigating a complex landscape that demands agility, resilience, and innovation.

An essential tool for overcoming these challenges and achieving sustainable success is the strategic use of the marketing mix. Existing research in the field of the marketing mix has not significantly showcased its application in supermarkets.

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Most of the existing studies have focused on other sales/service sectors that do not pertain to the daily purchase of everyday consumer products. Additionally, a great emphasis has been placed on online sales and shopping, where the elements of the marketing mix play a completely different role and approach in creating customer loyalty. Berlian et al. (2023) emphasize the dominant influence of product pricing and promotional activities in creating customer loyalty in the purchase of everyday consumer goods. When it comes to purchasing technical devices, product quality is one of the key elements in building loyalty (Liana et al., 2023). Product quality, along with stimulating consumers with promotion as an important element of the marketing mix, creates a lasting bond between the seller and the buyer (Saling, 2016).

The traditional model includes 4P while today other theories have been proposed where services, retail, digital marketing and the like are mentioned (Pinto et al., 2022). Lim (2020) talks about the 10Ps as elements of the marketing mix where, besides product, price, distribution, and promotion, it emphasizes the importance of people, process, physical evidence, packaging, partnership, and policy perspective. While each facet of this model has the potential to influence customer loyalty, the specific impacts and interrelationships warrant detailed investigation. This research examines existing scientific literature and conducts primary research. It sets six (6) hypotheses that will be proven subsequently. The primary research includes conducting a survey on a sample of 400 respondents. Research employs the Kruskal–Wallis test, enabling a comprehensive examination of the relationships between the different variables of the marketing mix and customer loyalty.

The importance and contribution of this paper are thus more significant as it provides insights into the elements of the marketing mix used in retail trade (supermarkets), the impacts of their usage on consumer awareness, and the creation of attachment and loyalty. The research should assist in planning the business policies of supermarkets and approaches to the customer.

### **Literature Review**

Shopping centers, supermarkets, wholesale and retail stores, and well as service industries have the task of satisfying customer needs on one hand and achieving their business objectives on the other. Managers here face challenges in making the right decisions at the right time due to fears of losing status or making incorrect decisions (Šostar, 2011). To make the correct decisions, it is necessary to initiate actions in a timely manner, identify existing problems, and react appropriately in accordance with the moment at hand (Gutić et al., 2017).

In their study, Aquilino-Navarro et al. (2022) highlight the importance of quality management of shopping centers to provide the service that customers are looking for. Research of Htwe (2020); Nga and Thoa (2021) demonstrate that supermarkets should prioritize providing high-quality products, and the location and ample parking space play a significant role for customers.

In their study, Bhala (2023), discusses the challenges that supermarkets faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly concerning logistics due to many purchases made online. Research by Šostar et al. (2023) shows that many consumers were shopping online during the pandemic, compared to the traditional method of shopping in stores.

Customers are highly sensitive to product prices, and most of them are not willing to wait for extended periods to be served by the sellers (Waithaha and Wamalwa, 2020). The development of technologies has contributed to the creation of added value to products due to the instruments of the marketing mix (Wichmann et al., 2022).

Depending on the size of the store and the products it offers, different elements of the marketing mix are more important to consumers. In line with this, Tanjung (2021) discusses product and price as a significant factor in making a purchase decision, while other influences are not as crucial. Word-of-mouth advertising plays a significant role in attracting new customers and retaining existing ones, while customers are sensitive to product price changes, which affects their loyalty (Slack et al., 2020).

The results of Guillén and Rubio (2019) confirm the importance of attachment to a store or brand in creating a purchasing action, thereby establishing a long-term relationship based on emotions, turning the consumer into the best promoter.

Considering the importance of certain factors for customers, location is key for building loyalty, followed by price and product variety, while promotion and other factors have a lesser impact (Alsulami, 2021).

Setiawan et al. (2019); Haryadi and Sulistianingsih (2022); Al Karim and Habiba (2020) demonstrate how customer loyalty of supermarkets is influenced by a combined marketing approach, and that location, price, atmosphere, service, and promotional activities have an exceptionally large impact. Employees, product prices, and their promotion are a comparative advantage that creates a loyal customer (Mushtaq and Salar, 2022).

In their research, Wajahat et al. (2020) highlights the importance of providing high customer value by the seller, asserting that there is a significant positive relationship between the value offered by the seller and the creation of customer loyalty over a longer period. The study by Nguyen et al. (2021) shows a positive correlation between customer loyalty to supermarkets and the measured factors (product quality, product brand, pricing strategy, and service quality). Based on existing research, the authors propose Hypothesis 1: There is a positive correlation between product quality and customer loyalty in shopping centers.

Karunaratna (2021) highlights three key motives for customer repurchase: product motive, service motive, and shopping center atmosphere motive. Emotional and rational positive customer experiences in supermarkets have a strong impact on their loyalty (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2023). In their research, Vilkaite-Vaitone and Skackauskiene (2020) classify customer loyalty into phases: the disloyalty phase; the intermediate phase; the conditional phase; the absolute loyalty phase.

The study of Azizan and Yusr (2019) shows that brand reliability and its image, as well as customer satisfaction, play a significant role in creating loyalty between the customer and the seller. The research by Pérez-Morón et al. (2022); Taufik et al. (2022) shows a positive and significant relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. Khairawati (2020) emphasizes that loyalty programs and cards have a significant impact on the customer, while on the other hand, promotional price discounts as a way of creating loyalty do not play a major role. The research findings of Panjaitan (2021) show that products offering customer-oriented technological feature innovations increase customer loyalty amidst dynamic marketing capabilities in the shifts of digital business innovation. The research findings of Khan et al. (2022) significantly contribute to demonstrating a direct positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and customer satisfaction, leading to increased customer loyalty.

Customers emphasize the importance of loyalty programs and their transparency, understandability, and ease of use, with a focus on the ability to choose rewards within the program (Kovač et al., 2018). The research by Šostar and Ristanović (2023) highlights personal factors as the leading factors affecting consumer behavior and their purchasing habits, followed by psychological factors and to a lesser extent social and cultural factors.

The number of loyal customers is an important indicator of brand strength, success, and recognition, which can be a motivator for its recognition by new customers or service users (Nobar and Rostamzadeh, 2018).

New generations of consumers spend a considerable amount of money and within supermarkets and shopping centers, they desire various innovations for entertainment, events, and space for self-expression (Černikovaitė et al., 2021; Sondakh and Hananiel, 2022).

Shopping centers compete to easily attract consumers who prefer an exciting atmosphere and various facilities within a particular center. The key to success here is the team that plans marketing and has an obligation to be better than the competition (Burnaz and Topcu, 2011). Based on existing research, the authors propose Hypothesis 2: Pricing strategies implemented in shopping centers significantly influence customer loyalty.

In their research, Goić et al. (2021) conclude that larger stores generate more customer satisfaction than smaller ones. In their research, Kraljević and Božić (2019) reject the hypothesis that price is the key factor in choosing a retail chain. Instead, they argue that the popularity and brand of the retail chain and its proximity are more important.

In the study by Sami and Kumar (2021), the results show that most customers prefer supermarkets over small stores due to the variety of offerings and product availability, better service, location, and the option of deferred payments. It is essential to keep in mind that the geographical location of the store and its visual identity can significantly impact a customer's perception (Hanaysha et al., 2021). Based on existing research on location as important factor for customers, the

authors propose Hypothesis 3: The location and accessibility of a shopping center significantly affect customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Discounts and promotional prices of products can greatly arouse the interest of customers, making pricing strategy one of the strategic steps in creating a loyal consumer (Erlina and Hermawan, 2021). Promotional activities and product pricing are very important for customers, and their influence can lead to customer loyalty towards a specific supermarket. Based on existing research, the authors propose Hypothesis 4: Promotional activities of the shopping center significantly affect customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Nonverbal communication has a significant impact on consumer behavior during shopping, from the way employees dress, body language, eye contact, and general gestures that show interest to the customer (Šostar et al., 2022). In certain industries, it is evident that the role of employees is crucial for creating customer loyalty, particularly through their relationships with customers, which is key in building loyalty (Gu, 2023; Sobia and Al Saif, 2023). Based on existing research, the authors propose Hypothesis 4: The professionalism of the sales staff in the shopping center significantly affects customer satisfaction and loyalty.

To increase customer satisfaction in supermarkets, it is necessary to introduce a system for collecting, analyzing, and receiving customer feedback through artificial intelligence (Omisakin et al., 2020).

### **Research Methodology and Materials**

The aim of this study is to determine the role of marketing mix elements in creating customer loyalty for a shopping center/supermarket. In this research, the biggest challenge is the unpredictable behavior of the customer, which changes on an almost daily basis due to various stimuli.

The methodology employed in this study involved a thorough analysis of existing secondary data through desk research, in addition to the contribution of primary research to scientific knowledge. As a research method, a questionnaire was used, which was sent to 700 randomly selected respondents. Questionnaires were dispatched to 700 randomly chosen respondents from Croatia. The database was created by utilizing existing groups on social networks related to shopping (followers). These individuals were selected from an initial pool of 2000 users, registered on Facebook and other databases available to the researchers. To ensure random selection, everyone in the database was assigned a unique number. An online random number generator, set to pick numbers from 1 to 2000, was then used to select 700 individuals to whom the questionnaires were sent and 400 of them give feedback. This sample size is considered sufficiently large to provide the statistical power needed to identify significant differences or correlations among the variables. The participants, encompassing a range of age groups, were randomly selected to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The data collection period was from the beginning of December until the end of December 2023.

After setting general questions for the respondent (gender, age, employment status, monthly income), a question was posed regarding the influences on supermarket choice (product quality and assortment, product price, proximity of the supermarket, promotional activities, and professionalism of the sales staff). This was followed by questions where, using a Likert scale from 1-5, an attempt was made to gauge the degree (intensity) of influence of each segment by posing different questions divided into categories according to the chosen elements of the marketing mix (1. Product; 2. Price; 3. Distribution; 4. Promotion; 5. People).

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of responders**

		N	%
Gender	Male	99	24,8%
	Female	301	75,3%
	Total	400	100,0%
Age	18-25	157	39,3%
	26-40	129	32,3%
	41-55	94	23,5%
	56+	20	5,0%
	Total	400	100,0%
Employment status	Employed	281	70,3%
	Unemployed	119	29,8%
	Total	400	100,0%
Monthly income	No income	63	15,8%
	Up to 500 EUR	43	10,8%
	501-1000 EUR	176	44,0%
	Above 1000 EUR	118	29,5%
	Total	400	100,0%

Looking at the data for the respondents' gender, it can be seen that 24.8% of respondents are male, while 75.3% are female. Regarding age, 39.3% are 18-25 years old, 32.3% are 26-40 years old, 23.5% are 41-55 years old, and 5.0% are 56 or older. In terms of employment status, 70.3% are employed, while 29.8% are unemployed. When it comes to monthly income, 15.8% have no income, 10.8% report up to 500 EUR, 44.0% report 501-1000 EUR, while 29.5% report over 1000 EUR. Regarding the question of the greatest influence on the choice of a shopping center during shopping, 46.0% mention the quality and breadth of the shopping center's product assortment, 25.0% mention the price of the shopping center's products, 20.0% mention the proximity of the shopping center, 5.3% mention the shopping center's promotional activities, while 3.8% mention the professionalism of the sales staff.

The obtained responses were statistically processed, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients, Spearman's correlation coefficient and Kruskal Wallis Test were used to derive useful results.

## Research Results and Discussion

On the following pages, descriptive indicators for the observed questions will be displayed. For each group of questions, frequencies and percentages, mean values, and standard deviations will be shown. Questions with the smallest and largest mean respondent values are discussed. Likert scale was used. The detailed elaboration of questions posed to respondents is provided in the "Materials and Methods" chapter, where these questions were used to determine the degree of customer loyalty. The questions that are directly related to customer loyalty focus on their attitudes towards the quality and assortment of products and their behavior in response to changes in these aspects. Furthermore, it was examined how changes in product pricing, whether a decrease or increase, might lead to a change in behavior and a possible shift to competitors. The study also investigated how much customers are influenced by the location of supermarkets and whether they choose them solely based on proximity. Promotional activities were included to determine the extent of emotions customers bring to their supermarket choice and how these affect their loyalty. Since supermarkets have different human resource development policies, the research also explored how the behavior and professionalism of employees influence customer loyalty.

The highest mean respondent values were recorded for the questions: sales and discounts influence my choice of shopping center where the mean response value is 3.47 and the standard deviation is 1.24, then the price of products influences my choice of shopping center where the mean response value is 3.45 and the standard deviation is 1.21, and finally the breadth of product assortment influences my choice of shopping center where the mean response value is 3.45 and the standard deviation is 1.26.

The lowest average responses from respondents were recorded for the questions: advertising (TV, radio, social media, promotional leaflets) influences my choice of shopping center where the average response from respondents is 2.81 while the standard deviation is 1.08, then the arrangement of the shopping center influences my choice of the same where the average response from respondents is 2.95 while the standard deviation is 1.10, then I would rather go to a shopping center that has greater promotional activity where the average response from respondents is 2.96 while the standard deviation is 1.03.

Furthermore, on the following pages, the results for the reliability of the questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha) for the observed factors in the analysis will be displayed.



**Table 2. Cronbach alpha coefficients**

Questions	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Product	0,863	4
Price	0,849	4
Distribution	0,768	4
Promotion	0,757	3
People	0,915	4

If you look at the value of the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the observed factors in Table 2, you can see that its value is quite high for all observed factors (higher than 0.7). Therefore, grouping will be done according to these categories. On the following pages, normality testing will be shown using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, to determine how the observed variables in the study are distributed. Based on this, it will be decided whether to apply parametric or nonparametric testing. Normality testing will be conducted for all variables in the study.

**Table 3. Testing the normality of distribution**

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Product	,111	400	,000	,952	400	,000
Price	,137	400	,000	,954	400	,000
Distribution	,132	400	,000	,973	400	,000
Promotion	,108	400	,000	,975	400	,000
People	,117	400	,000	,966	400	,000

**Note:** a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

From the attached significances in Table 3, one can see how the significances of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests are distributed. If the significance for a particular category (factor) is greater than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ), this indicates a normal distribution, and if the significance is less than 0.05, the distribution is different from normal. Since the level of significance is not greater than 0.05 for all observed categories, it can be concluded that normality of distribution has not been established in all cases and the analysis will be conducted using nonparametric tests.

**Table 4. Average indicators**

		Product	Price	Distribution	Promotion	People
N	Valid	400	400	400	400	400
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Min		1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
Max		5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
Percentiles	25	2,7500	2,7500	2,5000	2,3333	2,7500
	50	3,5000	3,5000	3,2500	3,0000	3,2500
	75	4,0000	4,0000	3,7500	3,6667	4,0000

If you look at the data for PRODUCT, you can see that the median is 3.50 with an IQR (Interquartile Range) of 2.75 - 4.00, for PRICE you can see that the median is 3.50 with an IQR of 2.75 - 4.00, for DISTRIBUTION you can see that the median is 3.25 with an IQR of 2.50 - 3.75, for PROMOTION you can see that the median is 3.00 with an IQR of 2.33 - 3.66, for PEOPLE you can see that the median is 3.25 with an IQR of 2.75 - 4.00.

In order to better examine the relationships between the observed variables, we will perform Spearman's correlation coefficient.

Spearman's correlation expresses the mutual connection between two variables. The value of this test ranges in the interval  $-1 \leq r \leq +1$  where – the sign of the correlation indicates a negative (inverse) correlation, while the + sign indicates a positive correlation. The larger the value of Spearman's correlation coefficient, the stronger (more significant) we say the correlation between variables is. Also, this is typically considered:

$r > 0.80$  indicates a strong positive correlation

$0.5 < r \leq 0.80$  indicates a moderate positive correlation

$0 < r \leq 0.5$  indicates a weak positive correlation

For the purposes of the research, correlation coefficients greater than 0.5,  $r > 0.5$ , will be considered.

**Table 5. Spearman's correlation coefficient**

		Product	Price	Distribution	Promotion	People
Product	r	1,000	<b>,544**</b>	<b>,502**</b>	<b>,415**</b>	<b>,523**</b>
	p	.	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	400	400	400	400	400
Price	r	<b>,544**</b>	1,000	<b>,527**</b>	<b>,453**</b>	<b>,515**</b>
	p	,000	.	,000	,000	,000
	N	400	400	400	400	400
Distribution	r	<b>,502**</b>	<b>,527**</b>	1,000	<b>,448**</b>	<b>,588**</b>
	p	,000	,000	.	,000	,000
	N	400	400	400	400	400
Promotion	r	<b>,415**</b>	<b>,453**</b>	<b>,448**</b>	1,000	<b>,485**</b>
	p	,000	,000	,000	.	,000
	N	400	400	400	400	400
People	r	<b>,523**</b>	<b>,515**</b>	<b>,588**</b>	<b>,485**</b>	1,000
	p	,000	,000	,000	,000	.
	N	400	400	400	400	400

From the table 5 provided, there is a positive correlation between all observed variables. The greatest positive correlations were recorded between the indicators: PRODUCT and PRICE ( $r=0,544$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), PRODUCT and DISTRIBUTION ( $r=0,502$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), PRODUCT and PEOPLE ( $r=0,523$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), PRICE and DISTRIBUTION ( $r=0,527$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), PRICE and PEOPLE ( $r=0,515$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), DISTRIBUTION and PEOPLE ( $r=0,588$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

In the following pages, testing will be conducted for observed factors regarding observed indicators. The testing will be carried out using the Kruskal-Wallis test.

**Table 6. Comparison considering the question "The biggest influence on choosing a shopping center during shopping has"**

		The biggest influence
		Median (IQR)
Product	Quality and breadth of the product assortment of the shopping center	3,75 (2,88 - 4,38)
	Price of the products of the shopping center	3,50 (3,00 - 4,00)
	Proximity of the shopping center	3,25 (2,75 - 3,75)
	Promotional activities of the shopping center	3,25 (3,00 - 3,75)
	Professionalism of the sales staff	3,00 (2,50 - 3,75)
Price	Quality and breadth of the product assortment of the shopping center	3,25 (2,50 - 3,88)

	Price of the products of the shopping center	4,00 (3,00 - 4,50)
	Proximity of the shopping center	3,50 (2,75 - 4,00)
	Promotional activities of the shopping center	4,00 (3,25 - 4,25)
	Professionalism of the sales staff	3,00 (2,00 - 3,50)
Distribution	Quality and breadth of the product assortment of the shopping center	3,00 (2,50 - 3,50)
	Price of the products of the shopping center	3,25 (2,75 - 3,75)
	Proximity of the shopping center	3,50 (3,00 - 4,00)
	Promotional activities of the shopping center	3,00 (2,50 - 3,50)
	Professionalism of the sales staff	2,75 (1,25 - 3,25)
Promotion	Quality and breadth of the product assortment of the shopping center	3,00 (2,17 - 3,67)
	Price of the products of the shopping center	3,00 (2,50 - 3,67)
	Proximity of the shopping center	3,00 (2,17 - 3,50)
	Promotional activities of the shopping center	3,00 (2,33 - 3,67)
	Professionalism of the sales staff	2,33 (1,67 - 2,67)
People	Quality and breadth of the product assortment of the shopping center	3,25 (2,75 - 4,00)
	Price of the products of the shopping center	3,38 (2,50 - 4,00)
	Proximity of the shopping center	3,25 (3,00 - 4,00)
	Promotional activities of the shopping center	3,25 (2,75 - 4,00)
	Professionalism of the sales staff	3,25 (3,00 - 4,00)

**Table 7. Ranks**

	The biggest influence on the choice of shopping center when making a purchase	N	Arithmetic mean of ranks
Product	Quality and breadth of the product assortment of the shopping center	184	216,48
	Price of the products of the shopping center	100	199,87
	Proximity of the shopping center	80	175,53
	Promotional activities of the shopping center	21	192,14

	Professionalism of the sales staff	15	153,53
	Total	400	
Price	Quality and breadth of the product assortment of the shopping center	184	176,99
	Price of the products of the shopping center	100	241,40
	Proximity of the shopping center	80	201,25
	Promotional activities of the shopping center	21	259,88
	Professionalism of the sales staff	15	129,10
	Total	400	
Distribution	Quality and breadth of the product assortment of the shopping center	184	182,76
	Price of the products of the shopping center	100	211,32
	Proximity of the shopping center	80	245,31
	Promotional activities of the shopping center	21	183,52
	Professionalism of the sales staff	15	130,73
	Total	400	
Promotion	Quality and breadth of the product assortment of the shopping center	184	197,53
	Price of the products of the shopping center	100	225,48
	Proximity of the shopping center	80	189,64
	Promotional activities of the shopping center	21	219,69
	Professionalism of the sales staff	15	101,43
	Total	400	
PEOPLE	Quality and breadth of the product assortment of the shopping center	184	194,96
	Price of the products of the shopping center	100	199,51
	Proximity of the shopping center	80	209,36
	Promotional activities of the shopping center	21	207,26
	Professionalism of the sales staff	15	218,27
	Total	400	

**Table 8. Test Statistic<sup>a, b</sup>**

	Product	Price	Distribution	Promotion	People
Kruskal-Wallis H	9,909	31,667	23,407	17,345	1,343
df	4	4	4	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	<b>,042</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,000</b>	<b>,002</b>	,854

**Note:** a. Kruskal Wallis Test, b. Grouping Variable: The biggest influence on the choice of shopping center when making a purchase

Looking at the significance value for the question PRODUCT, PRICE, DISTRIBUTION, PROMOTION, we can see that p is less than 5%  $p < 0.05$ , therefore it can be said that there is a statistically significant difference in the responses of the respondents regarding the question "The greatest impact on the choice of shopping center during purchase has," where it can be seen that the ranks

are the lowest (the lowest is the value of the factor) for the professionalism of the sales staff.

Hypothesis H1 is proven where quality is rated highest in the product factor (the median is 3.75), which would imply that it is a prerequisite for loyalty. Hypothesis H2 and H3 is proven where price and distribution (location) has shown to be a quite important predictor. Hypothesis H4 is proven where promotional activities have proven to be very important for price and promotion (the median is the highest). We can see that all factors are very high except PEOPLE (H5) where professionalism has proven to be the least influential factor so we can confirm that Hypothesis H5 has been rejected. Despite that, all factors interact, and all are important in communication to customers.

Generally, all predictions would be valid except for the People factor where we did not achieve significance. On the contrary, in other factors, we see oscillations in components regarding loyalty, so the hypotheses are either accepted or partially accepted.

#### ***Managerial implication of the study results***

The study reveals the profound impact of the marketing mix - particularly product quality, pricing, distribution, and promotional activities - on fostering customer loyalty in supermarkets, emphasizing the need for managers to focus on these aspects to retain customers. Although the human factor, such as staff professionalism, was found to be less influential in determining loyalty, it remains a crucial component of the overall customer experience. Consequently, retail managers are encouraged to adopt a holistic approach to the marketing mix, prioritizing high product standards, competitive pricing, strategic locations, and engaging promotions to enhance customer loyalty and achieve a competitive edge.

#### **Conclusion**

In an era marked by rapid global changes ranging from natural disasters to financial crises, understanding customer behavior has never been more critical for the retail sector, particularly supermarkets. The challenges posed by disrupted supply chains, fluctuating costs, and product shortages make it imperative for supermarkets to deploy an effective marketing mix to foster customer loyalty.

Our findings indicate that product quality emerged as a significant predictor of customer loyalty, substantiating the idea that quality is not just a preference but a prerequisite for loyalty. Likewise, pricing strategies and location were found to be significantly influential factors for customer loyalty. Promotional activities also demonstrated a robust correlation with customer satisfaction and loyalty, further bolstering the importance of an effective marketing mix. Interestingly, our data revealed that while people (or staff professionalism) are important, they have the least influence on customer loyalty among the 5Ps. This suggests that while professionalism is valuable, it is not the decisive factor in retaining customers in the long term.

This research offers fresh perspectives and confirms existing theories with new evidence. research likely offers practical implications for the industry, providing actionable insights for businesses, particularly supermarkets, to improve customer loyalty strategies. Given findings might influence policy-making or managerial decision-making within the retail sector, guiding more effective marketing and operational strategies.

However, the study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The study is based on data from 400 participants, which, while statistically significant, does not encapsulate the entire customer base of supermarkets. It captures the situation at one point in time, and customer behavior and preferences could change over time. Future research could benefit from a longitudinal study design to understand the dynamics of customer loyalty over time.

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## ANALIZA ROLI MARKETINGU MIX W TWORZENIU LOJALNOŚCI KLIENTÓW W SUPERMARKETACH

**Streszczenie:** Celem tego badania jest zidentyfikowanie, w jaki sposób elementy marketingu mix przyczyniają się do kształtowania lojalności klientów wobec centrum handlowego lub supermarketu, co ma na celu wspomóc supermarkety w procesie podejmowania decyzji i stanowi główny wkład badania. Niniejsze badanie skupia się na marketingu mix (produkt, cena, dystrybucja, promocja, ludzie) wykorzystywanym przez centra handlowe/supermarkety w celu przyciągnięcia klientów i stworzenia trwałych relacji zakupowych poprzez lojalność klientów. Ankieta została rozesłana do 400 respondentów za pośrednictwem mediów społecznościowych. Metoda zastosowana w tym badaniu obejmuje definiowanie hipotez, przeprowadzenie ankiety oraz testowanie zebranych danych za pomocą współczynników alfa Cronbacha, współczynnika korelacji Spearmana i testu Kruskala-Wallisa. Badanie to dostarcza istotnego wglądu w mechanizmy, dzięki którym centra handlowe/supermarkety mogą budować i wzmacniać lojalność klientów. Wyniki badań pokazują silny wpływ jakości produktu, ceny, lokalizacji oraz działań promocyjnych na tworzenie lojalności klientów, podczas gdy czynnik ludzki (zachowanie personelu supermarketu) jest mniej istotnym czynnikiem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Marketing mix, strategia marketingowa, zachowanie konsumentów, lojalność konsumentów, supermarket