

# Assessing customer loyalty in a shopping center with one-way anova approach

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### PREFACE

The Faculty of Business Economics and Entrepreneurship hosted another International Scientific Conference called "Employment, Education and Entrepreneurship" for the thirteenth time. The conference was held on October 25 in Belgrade, and this event was organized by professors and experts from the country, region, and other countries of the world.

The conference was opened by prof. dr Vlado Radić, who briefly pointed out the activities from the first conference until today, especially emphasizing the continuity of the event. He also pointed out that this year 86 papers from as many as 33 countries were accepted. Then he addressed prof. dr Dušan Cogoljević, founder and owner of the Faculty of Business Economics and Entrepreneurship, who originated the idea of holding the conference. He emphasized the importance of the conference, as well as the great response of scientific workers during all these years. Director of the Faculty of Business Economics and Entrepreneurship, prof. dr Zoran Radulović, emphasized that it is important to grow every day and wished for peace to prevail in the world. Prof. dr Mirjana Radović Marković, president of the scientific committee, then addressed the attendees, who emphasized the importance of following current events and world trends when it comes to science and pointed out that there is a close connection between employment, education and entrepreneurship. She noted that today's entrepreneurship is focused on new technologies, digitization, start-ups and new business modalities, which on the other hand leads to creative disruption. She pointed out that the labor market is rapidly changing, that some professions are slowly disappearing while new ones are being formed. She emphasized that we must not neglect education reform in accordance with the times we live in and reflected.

On behalf of the Ministry of Education, Snežana Ružić from the higher education sector addressed the audience and emphasized that the "Employment, Education and Entrepreneurship" conference is a significant event in the field of science and research and that it has the full support of the Ministry of Education. She had the honor of officially opening the conference.

After the introductory part, certificates were awarded to prominent experts who contributed to the success of the conference with their efforts and initiative (prof. dr Brahmi Mohsen from Tunisia and prof. dr Marisennayya Senapatthy from Ethiopia).

Plenary lectures followed, in which prof. dr Ouyang Yao from China, prof. dr Kemal Yildirim from Turkey, prof. dr Sebastian Stepien from Poland and prof. dr Hakan Kirbas from Turkey. Prof. Oujang Yao reviewed research in China related to the openness of the business environment and entrepreneurial performance in large economies. Prof. Kemal Yildirim pointed out the challenges in the field of education, employment and entrepreneurship in Serbia, the Balkans and Europe, as a result of multilateral relations in the new three-dimensional international context. Prof. Sebastian Stepien gave a lecture on the challenge of sustainable development and competitiveness in the field of agriculture, which seems to be a very current topic considering that it has also found its place in the round table. Prof. Hakan Kirbas concluded the plenary lectures, referring to the research on the impact of macroeconomic indicators on stock returns, and the Index 100 of the Istanbul Stock Exchange was analyzed.

The plenary lectures were followed by a round table, the topic of which was "Sustainable development and economic challenges for strategic planning in local communities". This topic was presented by prof. dr Dejan Molnar (Faculty of Economics from Belgrade), prof. dr Vlado Radić (from the Faculty of Business Economics and Entrepreneurship), dr Marko Jelocnik (Institute for Agricultural Economics), dr Thierry Capiere (from Paris, France) and the representative of the local government from Vranje, Nebojša Stamenković. The moderator of the round table was dr Jonel Subić, from the Institute for





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Agricultural Economics. After the speaker's presentation, a discussion was opened that raised many interesting questions.

After the round table, the work of the conference took place in three parallel sessions, where participants from different countries presented their works. A total of 35 works were presented (oral and online). Since the topics were varied, they occupied the attention of those present who actively participated in the discussions.

Employment is a relationship that is closely linked to human resources. Human resources, being the most critical aspect in determining the functionality of the employment system, plays a pivotal role. Employment means that workers or labourers receive pay or compensation in any form, according to the rules. The term of employment consists of people willing and able to work and do labour activities for themselves or others. Employment comprises citizens who have worked or are now working and are seeking a job while engaging in other activities, such as caring for the house. Employment boosts the economy of the country. However, it's the role of high-quality human resources that genuinely shape the workforce standards and, ultimately, the country's economy. Their contribution cannot be overstated.

In the modern digital age, the role of education in influencing digital marketing is significant in the corporate world; it's urgent. All companies or enterprises need to establish a solid online presence. With more customers than ever turning to the Internet for information and collecting quotations, orders with the help of digital marketing strategies are flexible, not just crucial. They are the need of the hour. These strategies attract customers or market stakeholders and help enterprises stay competitive in the digital landscape, ensuring their relevance and reach in the digital age. A solid online presence is a luxury and a necessity for marketing centres in today's digital world. Digital marketing has revolutionized the marketing sector by bridging the gap between companies or firms and customers in a radical way. This transition shift has not only generated growth rates of the enterprises but also exaggerated to attract global customers. To understand how digital marketing services have become a critical part of the business sector, check out some future-head challenges. It might be due to a need for marketing vision or better digital marketing strategies.

The main success of digital marketing is due to the fabulous website of the company or organization, which plays a crucial role in creating a solid online presence for any entity. A good website is vital for digital marketing because it's the prospective stakeholders' first point of contact. A well-designed website can attract customers and persuade them mentally and psychologically to buy the commodities due to its extraordinary features. A seamless and informative user experience can also help build trust and credibility. Advanced technologies electronically influence the modern digital world in many terms and functions.

Digital technologies have revolutionized our lives and work and created numerous new income opportunities for micro, medium and small entrepreneurs. Digital entrepreneurship is the most significant type of entrepreneurship in today's world. It's not just about business, it's about driving personal prosperity, financial and social development, and productivity. Entrepreneurship inspires individual entrepreneurial attitudes, facilitating opportunity exploitation and value creation. Entrepreneurial initiatives occur mainly through new business ventures launched by individual entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial teams identifying and pursuing business opportunities. The role of digital technologies in this process cannot be overstated, as they have opened up a world of possibilities and created a more optimistic outlook for the future.

In many cases, these entrepreneurial endeavours occur in the corporate environment and are organized by innovative employees who share the same entrepreneurial spirit with entrepreneurs, also known as intrapreneurs. Both entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship are critical for economic and social



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development and heavily rely on human capital developed through formal education and training. The entrepreneurs' experience and education are closely related to the success of digital startups, and a solid educational background increases the probability of reaching entrepreneurial milestones. Furthermore, there are positive insights linking education with human capital and entrepreneurial outcomes confirmed by meta-analytic research, justifying the heavy investments in entrepreneurship education from governments, universities, and private organizations.

Entrepreneurship education also plays a significant role in providing the required knowledge to identify opportunities and exercise the cognitive mechanisms for opportunity evaluation through the available information. The transformation of entrepreneurial processes by utilizing emerging digital technologies offered competitive advantages to those investing in IT capabilities and created new opportunities for entrepreneurs through easy access to the global markets. Although information has become more accessible to more significant numbers of stakeholders through digital communication technology utilization, the scene of possible competitors has also widened compared to brick-and-mortar entrepreneurship. The increased competition intensified the demand for human capital regarding capabilities and made it a significant driver for digital innovation and entry into digital entrepreneurship.

Digital entrepreneurship conceptually emanates from the transformative power of digital technology. It acts as a facilitator, a mediator, the product itself, and finally, as the ubiquitous component of every entrepreneurial attempt. Traditional business models have been considerably transformed by digital technology, and new digital ones have been created. This relatively new phenomenon has shown accelerated dynamics of evolution in recent years, showing progress from theoretical and technological points of view. Digital entrepreneurship dominated the entrepreneurial landscape, especially during the restrictions and social distancing of the recent pandemic, due to the acceleration in digital technology adoption, which entrained rapid and groundbreaking changes in the entrepreneurial scheme. As more disruptive digital technologies intrude into business models, a complex combination of innovation, leadership, and management skills is required, which has severe implications for digital Entrepreneurship. Realize that the body of knowledge develops rapidly, in a relatively uncontrolled and fragmented fashion, and few papers cope with the digital entrepreneurship educational perspective, leaving a considerable void in the literature regarding the consecutive adoption of disruptive new digital technologies in business and how it should be addressed from an academic viewpoint. Despite the rapid developments in entrepreneurship education, the interdisciplinary growth of digital entrepreneurship as a research field often needs to improve instructional designs regarding required knowledge and skills.

Moreover, the effect of entrepreneurship education and training tends to be overestimated by mainstream studies, gasping to catch up with the latest developments. An opportunistic rivalry of studies presenting many success stories in traditional entrepreneurship frequently overestimates the impact of entrepreneurship education without sound empirical evidence. The lack of theoretical frameworks analyzing digital entrepreneurship education conceptual dimensions hinders the evolution of original research on the theoretical and practical implications of the new emerging technologies engaged in digital entrepreneurship. Lastly, the need for empirical research in digital entrepreneurship education is not just crucial, it's urgent. It must be organized productively, raising difficulties in evaluating and disseminating the results in policy and practice. The inability to assess the empirical results of educational interventions based on the new emerging technologies would create a non-factual image of the research field, with diverse consequences for practice.



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# ROUND TABLE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES – A REVIEW

The law defines local community as "the right of citizens to manage public affairs of direct, common and general interest to the local population, directly and through freely elected representatives in local self-government units, as well as the right and ability of local self-government bodies to manage affairs and manage public affairs which are in their jurisdiction and of interest to the local population".

Local self-government is not part of the central, state government or state administration, but is an autonomous system of management of local communities, constituted in narrower parts of the state territory. One of the key responsibilities of the local self-government is its general, long-term development for the benefit of the citizens who live there. Do local governments in Serbia have enough capacity to carry out such a task – is one of the most important questions to which there is no simple answer.

Sustainable development is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present so that future generations are not endangered in meeting their own needs" (World Commission on Environmental and Sustainability, 1987). This concept has been declared the key to the development policy of both the European Union and of the United Nations.

When analyzing the strategic planning of the sustainable development of a local self-government unit, one must take into account five significant, more or less generally accepted components (dimensions): social, cultural, spatial, economic and management.

Of the above five elements, two are key, namely: management structure and economic sustainability. It is clear that without a clear system management structure, citizens can hardly feel their belonging to the system and their role in making important decisions in their place of living. Also, a poorly developed economy cannot contribute to a healthy spatial environment, stable social policy or comprehensive cultural development. Likewise, a strong economy is not an end in itself, but must contribute to the development of local self-government in all the above-mentioned segments - meeting social needs, developing culture, creativity and innovation, and respecting legal conditions in the spatial conditions of living and environmental protection.

When it comes to the importance of strategic planning for economic development, local communities must have a clear insight into the current situation, as well as an idea of the situation they want to achieve. In this process, local communities should first look at their own capacities, funding sources, partnerships and other important aspects. Great help in these activities of local communities can be provided by scientific research and educational institutions (institutes and faculties). In coordination with them, local communities can successfully assess the current situation and the key challenges that enable sustainable development.

On the other hand, institutes and faculties can provide local communities with a quality definition of the role and importance of sustainable development for the challenges they face. Also, they can contribute to the cooperation of the most important actors and institutions as creators and bearers of sustainable development policy in local communities. In this context, institutes and faculties continuously improve the quality of research, analysis, studies and projects, education and training of personnel in order to better include economics, management and law in the sustainable development of local communities.



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Knowledge from many scientific fields (project management, human resource management, innovation management, human resource management, corporate management, financial reporting, entrepreneurship, organizational behavior, business planning, investment management, strategic management, etc.) is a prerequisite for successful strategic planning based on the concept of sustainable development. Strategic planning at the level of local communities presupposes the initiation and opening of development opportunities primarily in the area of economic, social and environmental development. To that end, systemic measures and actions are necessary, which points to the need to create a strategy for the sustainable development of local communities.

Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable development of local self-government, there must be a will and a strategy must be developed with full, clearly identified responsibility for the possible impacts of its implementation on future generations. The sustainable development strategy of the local self-government unit defines the necessary (desired) needs that it would satisfy if it were to move in the direction of achieving them. In other words, the sustainable development strategy gives local self-government units the opportunity to look at their long-term needs and define the steps towards their realization.

Strategic planning is a process that helps local communities in Serbia realize their development visions by setting goals and tasks in a systematic way. This process identifies decisions and goals that are fundamental and arise from strategic problems, that is, a system is created that is capable of responding effectively to unexpected challenges and changes in a dynamic environment over a long period of time.

For the above reasons, knowledge-based economic development and sustainable development strategies of local communities should provide clear guidelines for the future development of the economy, society and environment. Such development of local communities in Serbia should be based on local specificities and perceived needs of the economy and society, as well as on clear determinations and official documents.

Based on the identified strengths and weaknesses of the local community, as well as chances and threats from the environment, the sustainable development strategy is a kind of guide that directs the actions and efforts of all participants in increasing the competitiveness of the economy and improving the quality of life and work of the residents of the local community. The sustainable development strategy should contribute to the support of the economic sector and social development at the level of the local community in Serbia (introduction of uniform terminology, defining measures and activities, etc.), and administrative structures should facilitate operational planning. By adopting a sustainable development strategy, local communities get a basis for applying for financial resources from the state budget, EU funds and other donor programs, for the implementation of various projects in the field of economic, social and environmental development in Serbia. The Sustainable Development Strategy also provides a basis for the development of inter-local, regional, inter-regional and cross-border cooperation, as well as for the establishment of local action groups and public-private partnerships.

Seen from the point of view of the scientific research and educational activities of institutes and faculties that are carried out at the level of local communities in Serbia, the sustainable development strategy is a document that is the result of the systematic work and cooperation of the research team, the department for the economy, social activities and local economic development and numerous stakeholders interested in development of the economy, society and environment of the local community. There are no universal principles for creating a strategy for the sustainable development of a local self-government unit, but each strategy is specific in some way.

Given that there is no institution in Serbia that trains personnel to work in local self-government bodies, the question arises whether it would make sense to form such an institution or to continue to ignore the



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problem. In the case of the education of such an institution and the realization of a curriculum that would include the legal, economic, technical and organizational whole, we would get experts who can answer all challenges in terms of solving problems in local self-government.

However, regardless of the education and effort of employees in local self-government bodies, it is the citizens who give their opinion on the most important problems that exist in the local community and that slow down its development. The biggest problem facing experts is how to get the less active population interested in participating in decision-making that concerns the local community.

During the round table, there were several discussants, who pointed out certain specificities related to local communities. One of them was Thierry J. CIPIÈRE, who presented a presentation entitled: "Systemic, financial and legal risks for entrepreneurs to win the confidence of investors in the new international context".

In the end, the undivided opinion of the conference participants is that the development of local communities has its own specificities that should be analyzed comprehensively and planned, pointing out problems and harmonizing needs, all for the benefit of citizens living in local governments. Only in this way can citizens become interested in participating in making decisions that are important for their life and work.

Belgrade, October 2024

Dr Jonel Subić, Institute for Agricultural Economics, Belgrade, moderator  
Prof. dr Dejan Molnar, Faculty of Economics, Belgrade, panelist  
Prof. dr Vlado Radić, Faculty of Business Economics and Entrepreneurship, Belgrade, panelist  
Dr Marko Jeločnik, Institute for Agricultural Economics, Belgrade, panelist  
Nebojša Stamenković, representative of the local self-government, Vranje, panelist



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# ASSESSING CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN A SHOPPING CENTER WITH ONE-WAY ANOVA APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates customer loyalty levels in a shopping center using a one-way ANOVA. The aim of the research is to determine if there is a significant difference in loyalty among three groups of customers: first-time shoppers, second-time shoppers, and regular shoppers. A total of 102 respondents were surveyed, with an equal number of respondents in each group (34). Loyalty levels were measured on a scale from 1 to 10. Three hypotheses were formulated to test the differences in loyalty among the different customer groups. Data analysis was conducted using the JASP software. The research results show that there are significant differences in loyalty between first-time shoppers and those who are shopping for the second time, as well as between these groups and regular shoppers.*

### KEYWORDS

*customer loyalty, shopping centers, marketing mix, one-way ANOVA*

## INTRODUCTION

Customer loyalty is not easily achieved and that it is easier to retain an existing customer than to conquer new markets. For this reason, companies must monitor market changes and adapt to them, i.e., be in the right place at the right time and take the right steps. We are certainly confident that the elements of the marketing mix, with the aim of retaining existing and attracting new customers, will continue to evolve in the future. Supermarkets that are conveniently located, easy to access, and provide a pleasant shopping environment contribute significantly to a positive customer experience. This not only attracts customers but also plays a key role in retaining them. Effective promotional strategies, including advertising, in-store promotions, and digital marketing campaigns, are imperative. Personalized promotions and communication, especially through loyalty programs or targeted advertising, make customers feel valued and more inclined to return.

The behavior and attitude of supermarket staff can also influence customer perceptions of the supermarket brand. Positive interactions can lead to increased customer loyalty, as shoppers often return

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to places where they feel welcomed and valued. Supermarkets investing in employee training and development, ensuring their staff are well-equipped to provide excellent customer service, will likely see a positive impact on their customer loyalty. Well-balanced marketing mix addressing these four aspects is crucial for creating and maintaining customer loyalty to supermarkets. It's about creating a positive shopping experience that fosters trust, satisfaction, and a sense of value among customers, leading them to consistently choose the same supermarket for their shopping needs.

In today's competitive market environment, customer loyalty is crucial for the success and sustainability of shopping centers. Understanding the factors that influence customer loyalty can help shopping centers create strategies for retaining customers and increasing their satisfaction. One way to assess customer loyalty is through the analysis of their behavior and attitudes toward the shopping center. Customer loyalty can be defined as the tendency of customers to return to the same shopping center and recommend it to others. This study investigates the loyalty levels of different groups of customers - those who are shopping for the first time, those who are shopping for the second time, and regular shoppers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In creating customer loyalty in restaurants and the service sector, it is evident that employees are a very important factor, and their relationship with customers is crucial in terms of building loyalty (Gu, 2023; Sobia, Al Saif, 2023). In the purchase of fresh products in supermarkets, Azhar et al. (2023) demonstrate that price has a significant impact. In the telecommunications business, service quality, employee relations, and pricing have a strong influence on loyalty creation (Saputra, Yulfiswandi, 2023). Traditionally comprised of Product, Price, Promotion, and Place (Distribution), recent developments in the field have led to the inclusion of a fifth P, People, acknowledging the significance of human interaction in shaping customer experiences and building loyalty. This expanded 5P model serves as the fulcrum around which a supermarket's marketing strategies revolve.

Numerous indicators suggest that businesses should not just focus on costs and prices. Instead, they should pay more attention to customer satisfaction, changing their strategy from exclusively targeting profit maximization to overall profit maximization. Thus, the challenge of improving customer satisfaction and loyalty to occupy a larger market share has become a key issue hindering the development of businesses (Lei et al., 2022). The role of the marketing mix (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People), is integral in fostering customer loyalty to supermarkets. The 'Product' aspect involves offering a diverse and high-quality range of products. Supermarkets that provide a variety of goods that meet customer needs, including exclusive products or brands, tend to build a strong, loyal customer base.

Supermarkets that adopt competitive pricing strategies, offering good value for money, regular discounts, and loyalty rewards, are more likely to attract and retain customers. This aspect of the marketing mix is essential in encouraging repeat purchases and establishing a loyal customer following. By deepening our understanding of these dynamics, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on resilience and adaptability in the supermarket sector amidst an era of rapid change and uncertainty. In addition to creating long-term customer satisfaction and loyalty to the same shopping experience, it is necessary to consider the profitability of the business. In addition to shopping, this particularly relates to creating a pleasant place where entertainment and consumption come together. Additionally, they argue that lower product prices and better marketing compared to competitors also play a crucial role. Madeira (2019), Houghtaling et al., (2019), Gustavo et al., (2021), Karanarathna et al., (2020), Kazibudzki, Trojanowski (2020) points out that the green marketing mix utilized by supermarkets



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represents a comparative advantage in attracting customers and influencing their purchasing decisions compared to competitors.

Furthermore, it has substantial positive effects on the environment and health. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the purchasing habits of consumers. Customer satisfaction and building their loyalty cannot be achieved by just one element of the marketing mix; it is essential to use all elements that must be interconnected and create a unified marketing strategy (Othman et al., 2021; Marušić, 2019). In their research, Thabit and Raewf (2018) present findings where as much as 79% of consumers say that price does not have a significant impact on their satisfaction with the purchase made, while on the other hand, a quality marketing campaign increases sales revenue by more than 80%.

Here, it would certainly be desirable to motivate employees to increase their interest in the entire process (Adeleh, Eleyan, 2021). The study by Donndeliger and Ferguson (2020) highlights the advancements the design community has made in each segment of the marketing mix. It shows how decisions about place and promotion are based on a key element - considering price within the context of an engineering design problem. According to the results of factors motivating consumers to purchase, Adera (2018) highlights price as an element emphasized by more than 60% of consumers, while all other elements cover the remaining 40% of respondents' answers. The importance of the marketing mix elements also varies depending on the sales it relates to. Thus, we can say that in the service sector, the emphasis is on location, promotional activities, market positioning, but also price and product, which we certainly cannot ignore (Olivar et al., 2022).

In marketing, we cannot limit ourselves to only four elements of the marketing mix. It is important to mention, in addition to product, price, distribution, and promotion, people, processes, and physical evidence as significant factors of the modern age (Dhanuandra et al., 2022). The value perceived by customers (CPV) has a favorable effect on their contentment. Notably, when consumers feel they are getting a worthwhile deal for their money (functional worth linked to price), this sentiment has a stronger positive influence than the social worth aspect (Slack et al., 2020). Customer expectations have a significant impact on their satisfaction, and the level of satisfaction is higher if the product, price, and shopping experience meet or exceed their expectations (Suchánek and Králová, 2019; Ali et al., 2021). The research findings by Pradnyadewi and Giantar (2022) show that data protection, convenience, reliability, and operational efficiency have a significant impact on the customer, which ultimately affects their satisfaction.

The author's opinion is that the key elements of the marketing mix applicable in supermarkets are Product, Price, Distribution, Promotion, and People (employees), and that these elements have a direct impact on consumer behavior and their purchasing actions. Furthermore, marketing mix elements such as physical aspects, processes, etc., are already partly contained within the marketing mix elements and are not significantly important to analyze from the perspective of everyday shopping in supermarkets. Given these turbulent times, price and availability play a major role in consumer consciousness, while competition influences the products to be of an acceptable quality level for consumers. Inflation, natural disasters, wars, and pandemics have made consumers more sensitive to price and more cautious about what and how much they purchase. The research results of Xu et al. (2022), demonstrate that the combination of different stores within a shopping center is an important factor in creating a loyal customer. In this way, the customer feels greater satisfaction and is more willing to return and make repeated purchases.

When it comes to shopping centers, Salazar (2022), emphasizes that an increasing number of customers are shifting towards online shopping channels, which leads to greater satisfaction for them. For sales to be successful and to create customer loyalty, it is important to develop a relationship and friendly connection with consumers, which will significantly influence the increase in revenue of the sales outlet.





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Developing long-term relationships is essential in creating customer loyalty, and this can make it easier to overcome difficult times in business (Arikan et al., 2016). In their research, the author emphasizes the importance of location and quality of a product that has good features to create customer loyalty (Jesus, Villanueva, 2022, Biesok et al., 2018). When we talk about the traditional market, considering the 7P's (product, price, place, promotion, people, process, physical evidence), consumers are extremely loyal, with over 75% who will repeat their purchase in the same supermarket, with the greatest investment in people and the least in promotion (Anjani et al., 2018).

Customer loyalty is not easily achieved, and it is a long process through which supermarkets must be willing to provide their best services through various loyalty cards and programs for discounts and a wide range of available products that is better compared to the competition (Alsulami, 2021, Lawrence, Muathe, 2022, Fook, Dastane, 2021, Arslan, 2020). The research results by Nesett et al. (2021) show that the product range, price, and service have almost equal total effects when it comes to customer loyalty towards a particular supermarket. The research shows that product traits, service quality, and shopping convenience significantly contribute to customer satisfaction, which in turn has a strong positive impact on emotional loyalty and behavioral loyalty (Fan et al., 2020).

Consumers faced with unexpected stock shortages often choose products of the same brand, but brand loyalty does not occur if non-brand attributes, such as price or quantity, provide greater emotional value, which managers often mispredict (Khan, De Paoli, 2023). In their research, Närvänen et al. (2020) talk about several different types of customer loyalty: binding loyalty where the relationship resembles a marriage and can be good for the seller but also feelings of restriction at the buyer leading to termination of the relationship; freedom of choice loyalty which includes the buyer's loyalty to the brand of the product; loyalty as belonging where customers expect the seller to be loyal to them which is a good way to build long-term relationships.

Companies in the sales and trade sector should, to make the right managerial decisions, focus their efforts on analyzing the factors that influence consumer behavior and the reasons why customers become loyal (Kyurova, Koyundzhiyska-Davidkova, 2021). Trust between the seller and the customer is built over a longer period and is the result of product consumption during that time. The quality of the service offered, the expectations and experiences that the customer has, realistically acceptable product prices, and the perceived value of the brand strengthen the customer's sense of loyalty (Sharma et al., 2020). Ahmad et al. (2022) results suggest that in e-sales, the approach to creating a loyal customer mainly relates to the time the customer spends on the online platform, as well as the satisfaction they get, with an emphasis on the importance of personalizing the approach to each customer.

The study by Bisschoff, Schmulian (2019), Sunday, Olasoji (2023) highlights the importance of a product's brand in creating loyalty with customers, and it is essential to implement it in the company's marketing strategies. Research of Tartaglione et al. (2018) indicates a complex interplay between attitudinal and behavioral dimensions in customer loyalty, emphasizing the significance of emotional content, trust, satisfaction, and engagement. The analysis of Mittal et al. (2023) reveals a direct link between customer contentment and metrics both at the individual consumer level (like retention rate, referrals, expenditures, and pricing) and the organizational scale (encompassing performance in the product market, accounting outcomes, and financial market success).

Cognitive and affective factors create a significant prerequisite for shaping the level of customer satisfaction and are an important cog in achieving the success of any sale (Palaci et al., 2019, Vera and Espinosa, 2019), while other research (Conner et al., 2017) confirms that the mentioned factors independently affect decisions to purchase domestic products, but this is not necessarily the case for imported products. Rua et al. (2020) demonstrate that customer loyalty is influenced by quality and satisfaction, while satisfaction directly mediates the relationship between quality and the loyalty of the customer themselves. To create loyal customers, the



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retailer needs to stimulate imagination and creativity in the store, which would in turn spark customer curiosity (Cachero-Martínez, Vázquez-Casielles, 2017).

As brand communities and social media emerge as pivotal tools for customer relationship management, there's a call for further empirical research on these platforms to understand consumer attitudes and the co-creation of value. The author's view is that creating loyal customers is a long-term process and that it is more cost-effective and profitable to influence existing customers rather than attempting to acquire new ones. Combining all elements of the marketing mix is the best approach to fostering loyalty, while customer relations, product availability, assortment, and price competitiveness are key to success. The study by Simangunsong et al. (2018); Vasquez-Parraga and Sahagun (2020) shows that the marketing mix has a greater impact on customer loyalty than on their satisfaction with a particular purchased product. The research by Djunaidi et al. (2021), El Moussaoui et al. (2022), Febrianti et al. (2022), Javed et al. (2021), Leecharoen (2019) states that customer satisfaction is directly related to an increase in loyalty to supermarkets as well as other fields of sales and services.

Marona and Wilk (2016) highlight in their research that 20% of respondents go to supermarkets for fun, 15% for the culinary offerings, and as much as 19% just to meet up with friends. Many supermarkets monitor online events with an emphasis on social networks where they collect information about their own and competing companies, and in this way plan their sales and communication with customers (Pantano et al., 2021; Kebede, 2023). In their research, Blut et al. (2018) highlight seller communication, corporate brand of the product, and low price as the most influential factors for purchase, while the distance to the supermarket and product brand are of lower priority in creating loyalty. When consumers consider the possibility that retailers can check competitors' prices and match them, it can encourage greater competition among retailers and result in lower prices for consumers.

However, if consumers do not consider this possibility, retailers could abuse the situation and discriminate prices, meaning they could charge different consumers differently for the same product, which could harm consumers (Nalca et al., 2019). The research by Hanaysha (2020), Moisescu (2018) demonstrates that socially responsible behavior and increased investment in advertising with a focus on social media are essential factors for the success of supermarkets. Considering that most supermarkets offer the same or similar products, the elements of the marketing mix are a crucial factor that differentiates them from one another. In addition to the fact that the elements of the marketing mix influence customer loyalty in supermarkets, it is essential for owners to invest in technology to reduce operating costs.

The value of the brand, the credibility that the product demonstrates, and the customer's experience when consuming the product have a significant impact on strengthening the relationship between the seller, the product, and the customer (Rather et al., 2022). Rahman et al. (2019) emphasize that store managers should focus their efforts on saving customers' time, services and quick responsiveness of employees, the possibility of returning purchased goods, and innovative payment methods. Some studies (Goić et al., 2021; Yokoyama et al., 2022) show that larger stores generate more customer satisfaction but fail to confirm the main reasons for such trends. The study by Lei et al. (2022) shows that the popularity of the store/brand, credibility, and fulfillment of agreed commitments are the main common factors affecting customer satisfaction. The author's opinion is that strategic and marketing plans of supermarkets, as well as management, are crucial in proper communication with customers. Planning, monitoring competition, regularly examining consumer preferences, and collecting feedback are important to offer the market what it demands. The goal of supermarkets is not just to attract customers once but to create a long-term relationship and achieve repeat purchases. Keeping up with modern market and business trends that should be implemented in the company's strategic plans is essential.



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# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to explore customer behavior at a specific shopping center, ranging from first-time purchase to repeat purchases, and eventually to becoming a regular customer, and how repeat purchases influence loyalty towards the shopping center. On the graph 1 we can see the research hypothesis that was defined:

H1: There is a significant difference in loyalty between customers who make their first purchase at the shopping center and customers who make repeat purchases for the second time;

H2: There is a significant difference in loyalty between customers who make their first purchase at the shopping center and regular customers;

H3: There is a significant difference in loyalty between customers who make repeat purchases for the second time and regular customers.

The study was conducted through a questionnaire survey with 102 respondents in the Republic of Croatia during 2024. The sample of respondents was randomly selected, with the researcher standing outside the shopping center for 7 days, collecting responses anonymously from consenting participants. Many potential respondents declined to complete the questionnaire, which was one of the main limitations of the study. Following the collection of the questionnaire data, data analysis was conducted using the JASP software, performing one-way ANOVA.

# RESEARCH RESULTS

After the survey was conducted using a questionnaire, the results were analyzed to either confirm or reject the established hypotheses of the study. This involved a thorough review of the participants' responses to ascertain if the evidence aligned with or contradicted the initial assumptions. The findings from these analyses are essential for enhancing the understanding of the subject and guiding future research based on the validated or disproved hypotheses.

Table 1. ANOVA - Loyalty Score

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	$\eta^2$
Group	712.471	2	356.235	243.321	< .001	0.831
Residuals	144.941	99	1.464			

*Source: Authors research, 2024*

These results in table 1 show that the variability between groups (712.471) is much greater than the variability within groups (144.941). This suggests that there is a significant difference in loyalty levels between the different customer groups (first-time, second-time, regular), confirming that the hypotheses about differences in loyalty between these groups are justified.



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Table 2. Descriptives - Loyalty Score

Group	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Loyal (regular)	34	9.647	0.812	0.139	0.084
New (first time)	34	3.176	1.424	0.244	0.448
Returning (second time)	34	6.588	1.305	0.224	0.198

Source: Authors research, 2024

Table 2 show the average loyalty scores among the groups are significantly different: regular shoppers have the highest average loyalty (9.647); first-time shoppers have the lowest average loyalty (3.176); and returning shoppers have a mid-range loyalty score (6.588). Based on these average values and the results of the ANOVA analysis, we can evaluate the hypotheses: H1: There is a significant difference in loyalty between first-time shoppers (New) and second-time shoppers (Returning). Accepted, as the average loyalty score for first-time shoppers (3.176) is significantly different from the average score for returning shoppers (6.588); H2: There is a significant difference in loyalty between first-time shoppers (New) and regular shoppers (Loyal). Accepted, as the average loyalty score for first-time shoppers (3.176) is significantly different from the average score for regular shoppers (9.647); H3: There is a significant difference in loyalty between second-time shoppers (Returning) and regular shoppers (Loyal). Accepted, as the average loyalty score for returning shoppers (6.588) is significantly different from the average score for regular shoppers (9.647).

Table 3. Post Hoc Comparisons - Group

Consumers group	Mean Difference	95% CI for Mean Difference		SE	t	pbonf
		Lower	Upper			
Loyal – New (first time)	6.471	5.772	7.169	0.293	22.049	< .001
Loyal – Returning (second time)	3.059	2.361	3.757	0.293	10.423	< .001
New – Returning (second time)	-3.412	-4.110	-2.713	0.293	-11.626	< .001

Source: Authors research, 2024

In table 3 we can see that difference in mean loyalty scores between first-time shoppers (New) and returning shoppers (Returning) is -3.412 (95% CI: -4.110 to -2.713,  $p < .001$ ). Since the p-value is less than 0.001, there is a statistically significant difference. H1 is accepted. The difference in mean loyalty scores between first-time shoppers (New) and regular shoppers (Loyal) is 6.471 (95% CI: 5.772 to 7.169,  $p < .001$ ). Since the p-value is less than 0.001, there is a statistically significant difference. H2 is accepted. The difference in mean loyalty scores between returning shoppers (Returning) and regular shoppers (Loyal) is 3.059 (95% CI: 2.361 to 3.757,  $p < .001$ ). Since the p-value is less than 0.001, there is a statistically significant difference. H3 is accepted.



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Table 4. Marginal Means - Group

Consumers group	Marginal mean	95% CI for Mean Difference		SE
		Lower	Upper	
Loyal (regular)	9.647	9.235	10.059	0.208
New (first time)	3.176	2.765	3.588	0.208
Returning (second time)	6.588	6.176	7.000	0.208

*Source: Authors research, 2024*

In table 4 we can see the Marginal Means by Groups. Regular shoppers (Loyal): They have the highest marginal mean loyalty score (9.647) with a confidence interval from 9.235 to 10.059. First-time shoppers (New): They have the lowest marginal mean loyalty score (3.176) with a confidence interval from 2.765 to 3.588. Returning shoppers (Returning): They have an intermediate marginal mean loyalty score (6.588) with a confidence interval from 6.176 to 7.000. The table confirms significant differences in loyalty among the customer groups. Regular shoppers have the highest level of loyalty, first-time shoppers have the lowest, and returning shoppers fall in between. The confidence intervals are quite narrow, indicating the precision of the estimates. Based on all the above, we can confirm all three hypotheses.

## CONCLUSION

Customer loyalty is crucial for the success of shopping centers in today's competitive environment. Achieving and maintaining loyalty requires careful planning and adjustment of marketing strategies. The Pareto principle suggests that 20% of customers generate 80% of purchases, highlighting the importance of retaining existing customers. Supermarkets that are conveniently located, easily accessible, and provide a pleasant shopping environment significantly enhance customer experience. Personalized promotions and communication, especially through loyalty programs or targeted advertising, make customers feel valued and more inclined to return. The behavior and attitude of supermarket staff also significantly influence customers' perceptions of the supermarket brand. Positive interactions can lead to increased customer loyalty, as shoppers often return to places where they feel welcomed and valued.

Quality training for staff to deliver excellent customer service is crucial for achieving customer loyalty. Supermarkets that invest in the development and training of their employees to ensure they are well-equipped to provide excellent service are likely to see a positive impact on customer loyalty. In today's dynamic environment, a balanced marketing mix that addresses these aspects is crucial for creating and maintaining customer loyalty towards supermarkets. It's important to create a positive shopping experience that fosters trust, satisfaction, and a sense of value among customers, encouraging them to consistently choose the same supermarket for their needs. This research confirms that customer loyalty is highest among regular shoppers, lowest among first-time buyers, and intermediate among second-time purchasers. This indicates that repeated shopping at the same shopping center correlates with increased levels of loyalty.



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