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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	η^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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