

## Students' Perception of 4Ps Marketing Strategies on Sports Product Purchases in Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The rapid growth of e-commerce has transformed the retail landscape, especially among younger consumers who increasingly shop online. However, this environment may yield different results compared to traditional brick-and-mortar settings. **Purpose:** This study aims to investigate the students' perception of 4Ps Marketing Strategies on Sports Product Purchases in Malaysia. **Results:** Data analysis using SPSS version 28 revealed significant positive correlations between all four elements of the marketing mix and purchase decisions: place ( $r = 0.624$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), promotion ( $r = 0.523$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), price ( $r = 0.488$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and product ( $r = 0.311$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). Multiple regression analysis showed a strong correlation between the predictors and purchase decisions, with an  $R^2$  value of 0.497, explaining 49.7% of the variance. The regression equation predicted purchase decisions as:  $y = 0.624 + 0.001(\text{product}) + 0.311(\text{price}) + 0.087(\text{promotion}) + 0.428(\text{place})$ . **Conclusion:** These findings indicate that the online platform's convenience, based on the 4 Ps, significantly impacts students' purchasing decisions. **Implications:** The study suggests that online retailers should focus on enhancing platform accessibility and user experience while investing in effective promotional and pricing strategies to drive sales and generate revenue in the local market.

**Keywords :** 4P's, Sports Products, Purchasing Decision, Sports Students, Online Retail.

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of the marketing mix has its roots in microeconomic theory, which initially focused on the single element of price. In 1964, McCarthy expanded this concept into the "4 Ps"—product, place, price, and promotion—creating a practical framework for implementing marketing strategies. Rather than being a scientific theory, the marketing mix serves as a conceptual tool that helps managers make key decisions to align their products with consumer needs. This framework is often compared to baking a cake, where the baker adjusts ingredient ratios to achieve the desired outcome. Similarly, marketers adjust the elements of the mix to

tailor strategies for different products and target audiences (Thabit et al., 2018). Since its introduction, the marketing mix management paradigm has become a dominant force in marketing, profoundly shaping academic discourse, guiding research efforts, and informing practical applications. It remains a foundational tool for creating differentiation and competitive advantage in the marketplace.

In 2023, the global online retail market was valued at approximately \$5.7 trillion, with sports retail representing a significant and growing segment (Statista, 2023). As consumer behavior continues to evolve due to digitalization, understanding the dynamics of the 4 Ps—Product, Price, Promotion, and Place—has become increasingly crucial for retailers seeking to capture and retain market share in the competitive sports retail sector. While the traditional 4 Ps framework has effectively influenced consumer decisions, its application in online sports retail demands a nuanced understanding of how these elements function in a digital context. According to Saeed et al. (2021), the product mix in sports retail must accommodate a diverse range of consumer preferences, from casual fitness enthusiasts to professional athletes, requiring a broader and more adaptable product strategy. Furthermore, Jiang and Rosenbloom (2022) suggest that pricing strategies in online sports retail should incorporate dynamic pricing models that adjust according to demand and competitor actions to remain competitive and attract price-sensitive consumers.

Promotional strategies in the sports retail sector are increasingly driven by digital platforms, with social media and influencer marketing playing pivotal roles in shaping consumer perceptions and boosting sales (Chetioui et al., 2020). Le and Ratten (2021) argue that the concept of "place," traditionally understood as a physical location, now includes the entire online user experience, encompassing everything from website design to delivery logistics. This shift highlights the need for sports retailers to optimize their online presence to meet consumer expectations and enhance overall customer satisfaction. The reality of the 4Ps in sports retail demonstrates that while these fundamental marketing principles remain relevant, their application must be continuously adapted to align with the fast-paced, technology-driven landscape of online retail. The ability of sports retailers to effectively integrate these elements into their marketing strategies can significantly influence consumer behavior, driving both purchase decisions and brand loyalty in an increasingly competitive market.

Students often spend excessive amounts of money and time due to a lack of understanding of the 4 Ps principle in online purchasing. Without a solid grasp of how 'Product,' 'Price,' 'Place,' and 'Promotion' influence their shopping decisions, students may face issues such as overspending or inefficient time management. For example, a poor understanding of 'Price' might lead students to miss out on discounts or promotions, resulting in higher costs (Smith & Anderson, 2021). Similarly, a lack of awareness about 'Place' can cause students to overlook more convenient or cost-effective online retailers (Miller & Thompson, 2020). Misunderstanding 'Product' could result in purchasing items that do not meet their needs or are of poor quality, while ineffective use of 'Promotion' might prevent them from taking advantage of special offers or deals (Johnson, 2019; Taylor & Evans, 2022). By effectively applying the 4 Ps to their online purchasing decisions, students could better manage their budgets and save time.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *The Significance of Marketing*

In today's landscape, marketing's significance extends beyond traditional sales and advertising, focusing on innovative ways to fulfill customer needs. Modern strategies increasingly prioritize understanding and addressing customer needs rather than just driving sales (Kumar and Shah, 2023). The emphasis on creating value that aligns with customer

expectations further supports this shift (Lee and Lee, 2022). Additionally, marketing practices are evolving to meet customer needs better, moving away from conventional sales methods (Nguyen and Simkin, 2021). Digital advancements play a crucial role in driving this innovation (Choi and Kim, 2020) while stressing the importance of prioritizing innovation and customer needs in contemporary marketing practices (Harris and Rae, 2019).

Seen as essential to company performance, marketing bridges the gap between customer needs and available services or products. Today's research emphasizes understanding customer desires, producing desired products, competitive marketing, and facilitating accessibility. This involves planning and executing product/service design, distribution, promotion, pricing, and creating customer-oriented markets (Baker, 2012). Drucker (2008) asserts the pivotal role of marketing in business success, particularly for small and medium-sized apparel businesses, highlighting that without marketing, products—especially from smaller companies—would remain unfamiliar.

### ***Students Perception Based on the Hierarchy of Effects Model***

The Hierarchy of Effects model is a foundational framework in advertising and marketing. It details a consumer's steps, from initial awareness of a product to the final purchase decision. Introduced by Robert J. Lavidge and Gary A. Steiner in 1961, this model emphasizes the importance of structured marketing efforts to guide potential customers through a sequential process. Understanding these stages helps marketers craft strategies that effectively influence consumer behavior.

The first stage in the Hierarchy of Effects model is awareness. At this point, the primary goal of marketing efforts is to make potential consumers aware of the product or brand. This initial step is crucial because, without awareness, there is no possibility of progressing to subsequent stages. Effective advertising campaigns, social media presence, and public relations efforts are essential for high visibility. As Lavidge and Steiner (1961) noted, creating awareness is foundational in building a consumer base. Likewise, Stocchi et al. (2020) highlight that brand awareness is critical for new market entrants, as it significantly influences the effectiveness of subsequent marketing efforts and consumer decision-making processes.

Once awareness is established, the next stage is knowledge. Here, consumers seek to learn more about the product. This stage provides detailed information about the product's features, benefits, and usage. Knowledge can be disseminated through various channels, such as product descriptions, reviews, tutorials, and educational content. According to Barry (1987), consumers must gain sufficient knowledge to make informed decisions about the product. Moreover, the decision quality of purchasing the product is greater when consumers have in-depth knowledge about the product. (Swaminathan, 2003).

Following knowledge acquisition, the consumer moves to the liking stage. At this point, the consumer develops a favorable attitude towards the product. Positive experiences, endorsements, and engaging content can significantly influence this stage. Effective marketing at this level involves creating positive emotional connections and highlighting the product's advantages. Lavidge and Steiner (1961) emphasized that fostering a favorable attitude is crucial for progressing to the following stages.

The fourth stage is the preference, where consumers start to favor one product over competing alternatives. The perceived value and benefits of the product often influence this preference. Marketers aim to differentiate their products by emphasizing unique selling propositions and superior features. As Barry (1987) explained, creating a preference involves convincing consumers that the product is the best option, a key step in the decision-making process.

After developing a preference, the consumer enters the conviction stage. Here, the consumer firmly believes that the product is the right choice. This stage often involves addressing doubts and reinforcing the product's benefits. Marketing efforts at this stage focus on building trust and providing reassurance. Lavidge and Steiner (1961) described conviction as the stage where the consumer becomes convinced of the product's value and is ready to make a purchase decision.

The final stage in the Hierarchy of Effects model is purchase. This is the culmination of all previous efforts, where the consumer makes the purchase decision. At this stage, ensuring that the buying process is as seamless and straightforward as possible is essential. Marketing strategies may include providing easy access to purchase points, offering incentives, and ensuring excellent customer service. Barry (1987) highlighted that facilitating the purchase process is vital for converting interest into sales. Consumer behavior experts like Courtland L. Bower and John J. Thrill (1992) argue that before consumers make a purchase, they must first be aware of the product's existence. This process involves exposure to stimuli representing the product, paying attention to these stimuli, and interpreting them to form an overall perception of the object. Perception plays a crucial role in establishing the meaning of a product or brand during initial consumer contact, known as consumer information processing in marketing.

In the realm of marketing, the perception process encompasses four distinct stages: sensation, attention, interpretation, and retention. Buyers' decision-making involves considering multiple alternatives and satisfying their needs through product knowledge integration, pricing, promotion, and availability, as emphasized by Kotler (2008) and Nugroho Setiadi (2008). In essence, the purchasing decision reflects a customer's determination to select among available alternatives that meet their needs (Kotler & Keller, 2009). This decision-making process is influenced by the marketing mix—product price, placement, and promotional strategies—ultimately shaping the consumer's choice.

Kotler and Keller (2012) outline five stages in consumer purchase decision-making: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, actual purchase decision, and post-purchase evaluation. These stages involve recognizing the need, seeking information, evaluating it, deciding to purchase, and finally assessing product satisfaction. Ultimately, consumers seek establishments offering products that align with their preferences and shops where they feel comfortable and receive satisfactory services. Kartajaya (2007) concludes that when consumers find products meeting their criteria after evaluating product information, they are more likely to make higher levels of purchase decisions.

#### **4Ps Marketing Mix**

The concept of the marketing mix originates from the single P (price) in microeconomic theory (Chong, 2003). McCarthy (1964) expanded this into the “marketing mix,” commonly known as the “4Ps”, to translate marketing planning into actionable practice (Bennett, 1997). Although the marketing mix is not a scientific theory, it serves as a conceptual framework highlighting the key decisions managers make to tailor their offerings to consumer needs. This framework aids in developing both long-term strategies and short-term tactical programs (Palmer, 2004). The marketing mix is defined as a set of controllable marketing tools that a company uses to elicit a desired response from its target market. These tools, typically called the 4Ps of Marketing—Product, Price, Promotion, and Place are controllable variables marketers use to achieve specific consumer engagement or revenue targets in the desired market (Riaz, 2011).

According to Kotler (2012), the mix includes Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Physical Evidence, and Process. In this study, the marketing mix refers specifically to the 4Ps of first-line marketing strategies: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. Jonathan Ivy (2008) describes the marketing mix as a set of controllable marketing tools that influence demand and



can increase it. The term "mix" implies that the four Ps (Product, Price, Promotion, Place) should be systematically coordinated to persuade customers effectively.

In other words, offering the right product at an affordable price, complemented by efficient distribution and appropriate communication techniques, can collectively influence customer perceptions (Rad & Akbari, 2014). The marketing mix involves different marketing decision variables that firms use to market their goods and services. After identifying and gathering fundamental information about the market, the next step is market programming, which involves deciding on the instruments and strategies to meet customer needs and address competitive challenges. This approach provides an optimal combination of all marketing elements, enabling companies to achieve profit, sales volume, market share, and return on investment goals. The marketing mix is grouped under four primary elements: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion (Singh, 2012).

Margarita Išoraitė (2016) emphasizes the positive impact of the marketing mix in meeting consumer needs and achieving the company's marketing goals. The main findings in Goi, C.L., (2009) include the influential nature of the 4Ps marketing mix, criticisms of its production-oriented nature, proposals to extend the marketing mix with a fifth P, emphasis on customer orientation in successful marketing plans, and the role of business marketing in managing relationships and networks. the importance of effectively planning and implementing all elements of the marketing mix to enhance product and service quality and increase customer satisfaction, as well as the significance of standardizing product quality, adapting strategies for global markets, making pricing decisions, and distribution and promotion strategies in driving organizational performance and success (Ivy, 2008).

The evolution of the marketing mix concept involves its progression, critiques, and attempts to widen its scope by introducing extra 'P's. This progression underscores the lasting impact of the 4Ps framework on both marketing theory and practice. Initially, the marketing mix concept centered on the 4Ps—Product, Price, Place, and Promotion—as a fundamental framework for marketers. However, criticisms arose, suggesting its oversimplification of marketing strategies and its neglect of crucial elements like people, processes, and physical evidence. Despite these expansions, the 4Ps framework remains a cornerstone in marketing. Its simplicity and adaptability continue to guide marketing strategies, while revised versions incorporating the additional 'P's provide a more holistic perspective for contemporary marketers. This enduring influence underscores the framework's relevance in shaping marketing practices and theories.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

In this research survey, the target population consisted of students from Bachelor of Sports Management who are studying at Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam (UiTM). The simple random sampling method ensures each eligible student has an equal chance of selection, enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A random sample of 100 students participated in this study. They were selected to study the relationship between the 4Ps knowledge towards their purchase decision on the product at an online sports retailer. Therefore, getting their feedback and opinions on some issues related to the studied phenomenon makes it appropriate for the study.

### **Instrument**

The study utilized a survey questionnaire as its primary data collection tool. Responses gathered from this instrument will be organized and analyzed according to specific themes. The

questionnaire comprised six distinct sections: the first section collected demographic information, while sections 2 through 6 drew from various scholarly works. Sections 2, 3, and 4 were adapted from Nugroho and Irena (2017), focusing respectively on product quality (6 items), price (6 items), and promotion (5 items). Sections 5 and 6 were adapted from Asdi and Putra (2020), assessing the location where products are sold (3 items) and students' purchase decisions (6 items). Sections 2, 3, 4, and 5 served as independent variables, whereas Section 6 was the dependent variable in the study.

The questionnaire items were evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, where responses ranged from 1 to 5. Sections 2, 3, 4, and 6 were rated on a scale from never to always (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always). Meanwhile, section 5 used a Likert-like scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly agree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).

**Table 1:** Questionnaire structure

Section	Scale
1 - Demographic Information	Nominal
2 - Quality (Nugroho and Irena 2017)	5-point Likert
3 - Price (Nugroho and Irena 2017)	5-point Likert
4 - Place (Asdi and Putra 2020)	5-point Likert
5 - Promotion (Nugroho and Irena 2017)	5-point Likert
6 - Which Assesses Students' Purchase Decision (Asdi and Putra 2020)	5-point Likert

## Implementation

Data will be collected through a structured, self-administered online survey via Google Forms within 6 weeks. This methodology aligns with the research objectives of examining the effect of the 4Ps of the marketing mix on students' purchase decisions for online sports retailers. Using simple random sampling in this context enhances the study's validity and potential to generate meaningful insights applicable to the broader student population in sports management programs, particularly in understanding their online purchasing behaviors and preferences.

Following the data collection phase, the team prepared the dataset for analysis using SPSS statistical software. While the process proved challenging, the rigorous approach adopted by the researchers ensures the integrity and reliability of the data collected. This comprehensive methodology lays a solid foundation for an in-depth analysis of students' perceptions of 4PS marketing mix strategies in the local market. The collected data were then prepared for analysis using SPSS, with plans to employ various statistical methods, including descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. Despite its challenges, this rigorous process ensured reliable data collection for a comprehensive analysis of students' perception of 4Ps marketing mix strategies towards generating revenue in the local market. The final step involves interpreting the results of these analyses.

## RESULTS

Table 2 below presents the correlation between the four constructs of the marketing mix (product, price, promotion, and place) toward purchasing decisions based on online platforms. The results indicate that all four elements have positive and statistically significant correlations on purchase decisions, suggesting they all play a role in influencing customers' buying choices. There is a positive, weak, and significant relationship between product and purchasing decision ( $r = 0.311$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), positive, medium and significant relationship between price and purchasing decision ( $r = 0.488$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), positive, medium and significant relationship between price and

purchasing decision ( $r = 0.523$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and positive, strong and significant relationship between promotion and purchasing decision ( $r = 0.624$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that the convenience and accessibility of online platforms strongly influence purchase decisions. All correlations are significant at the 0.05 level, based on a sample size of 100. These findings highlight the relative importance of each marketing mix element in shaping online purchase decisions for sports products, with the online platform itself (Place) emerging as the most influential factor.

**Table 2.** Pearson Correlation between the price, product, promotion, place, and students' purchase decision to buy from online sports retailers

		Purchase decision
Product	Pearson Correlation	.311**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
	N	100
Price	Pearson Correlation	.488**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
	N	100
Promotion	Pearson Correlation	.523**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
	N	100
Place	Pearson Correlation	.624**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
	N	100

A multiple regression analysis was conducted, yielding insightful results. The model demonstrates a strong correlation between the predictors and purchase decisions, with an  $R^2$  value of 0.497. It explains 49.7% of the variance in purchase decisions, as indicated by the  $R$  Square value. This analysis provides valuable insights for online sports retailers targeting students, highlighting the areas where marketing efforts may be most effective in influencing purchase behavior. The respondents predicted that purchase decisions to  $y = 0.624 + 0.001(\text{product}) + 0.311(\text{price}) + 0.087(\text{promotion}) + 0.428(\text{place})$ .

**Table 3.** Multiple Regression Analysis of Students' Perception Of 4Ps Marketing Mix Strategies Towards Purchasing Decision Of Sports Products In the Local Market

Purchasing Decision Of Sports Products In the Local Market						
Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.705 <sup>a</sup>	.497	.476	.40861		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Place, Price, Product, Promotion						
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.666	4	3.916	23.457	<.001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	15.862	95	.167		
	Total	31.528	99			
a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decisions						
b. Predictor: (Constant), Place, Price, Product, Promotion						
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	.624	.368		1.697	.093
	Product	.001	.083	.001	.007	.995
	Price	.311	.096	.299	3.226	.002
	Promotion	.087	.096	.090	.910	.365
	Place	.428	.079	.486	5.434	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decisions

## DISCUSSION

The strongest correlation is observed with place ( $r = 0.624$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), showing that the convenience and accessibility of online platforms have the most substantial impact on purchase decisions. This highlights the importance of a well-designed, user-friendly website or app in driving sales for online sports retailers. Smith and Johnson (2023) found that user experience and website design were crucial factors driving young adult online purchases. The high correlation suggests investing in a seamless, intuitive, and engaging online interface could significantly boost sales. Retailers might consider features such as virtual try-ons, 360-degree product views, or augmented reality applications to enhance the online shopping experience.

The promotion follows with a moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.523$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), implying that marketing efforts and advertising strategies significantly influence buying behavior. promotional activities are crucial in influencing purchase decisions. This could encompass various strategies, from social media marketing to influencer partnerships. Lee et al. (2022) indicated that personalized promotions were particularly effective in engaging young consumers in the sports retail sector. Online sports retailers might benefit from leveraging data analytics to create targeted promotional campaigns that resonate with student demographics.

Price also shows a weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.488$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that pricing strategies are crucial in purchasing decisions. This could indicate a willingness to pay for perceived value or brand prestige. Yulistyarini et al. (2020) found that price perception significantly affects purchasing and repurchase intentions, particularly in online shopping contexts. Additionally, Ali and Bhasin (2019) emphasized that perceived price, along with perceived value, plays a critical role in consumer decisions, especially in e-commerce environments. These studies underscore how strategic pricing can influence consumer behavior and drive sales in various retail settings.

Interestingly, the Product has the weakest and positive correlation ( $r = 0.311$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that while product features and quality influence buying decisions, they may have less impact than the other factors in the online retail context for sports products. In some online sports retail scenarios, products may be perceived as relatively homogenous, with less differentiation between competitors. Thus, product features may have a less pronounced effect on purchasing decisions compared to other factors. This observation is supported by Thompson and Williams (2024), who discuss the role of product homogeneity in online retail.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the crucial role of effectively balancing the 4Ps—Product, Price, Promotion, and Place—in shaping purchase decisions in online sports retail. The findings reveal that while product quality is important, the greatest impact comes from a seamless, user-



friendly online platform (Place), competitive pricing strategies (Price), and compelling promotional tactics (Promotion). For online sports retailers, this means prioritizing the enhancement of the digital shopping experience, leveraging strategic pricing, and integrating dynamic promotional efforts. A strategic alignment of these elements is essential for maximizing appeal and driving sales in today's competitive online market.

### **Suggestions / Improvements**

The convenience of online shopping and the quality of website design were highlighted as critical factors in the study. To provide an exceptional online shopping experience, retailers should continuously invest in improving their website design and functionality. This includes ensuring the site is user-friendly, with intuitive navigation and a clean, appealing layout. Features such as high-quality images, detailed product descriptions, and customer reviews can help students make informed decisions. Implementing advanced search filters and personalized recommendations based on browsing history can enhance the shopping experience. Ensuring the website is mobile-friendly is also essential, as many students prefer smartphone shopping. Optimizing the site for fast loading times and secure payment options can reduce cart abandonment rates. Providing excellent customer service through live chat support and easy return policies can further enhance the overall experience, building trust and loyalty among students.

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