

Unlocking Loyalty: Exploring the Marketing Mix and Constraints in Marine Leisure Sports

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to empirically analyze the effect of the marketing mix and constraints on visitor loyalty among marine leisure sports participants. A survey was conducted in Geoje, South Korea, where marine leisure sports are practiced. The survey included 250 visitors with experience in marine leisure sports, and data from 230 respondents were used for the final analysis after excluding 20 invalid questionnaires. The analysis was conducted using SPSS 29.0 statistical software, employing frequency analysis, exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The results indicate that, first, among the sub-factors of the marine leisure sports marketing mix, product, price, and promotion have a significant positive effect on loyalty. Secondly, within the sub-factors of constraints in marine leisure sports, intrinsic constraints and structural constraints have a negative impact on visitor loyalty. Third, within the marketing mix sub-factor, place negatively affects intrinsic and interpersonal constraints, while price negatively affects structural constraints. These findings provide a basis for developing strategies to attract and retain loyal customers in marine leisure sports and contribute to expanding the scope of research in this field.

KEYWORDS

Marketing mix, constraints, loyalty, marine leisure sports

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has induced several changes in leisure activities, increasing interest in outdoor leisure activities over indoor ones. Specifically, marine leisure sports have gained considerable attention lately for satisfying various participant needs and offering the opportunity to enjoy nature. The continued growth in global participation in marine leisure sports evidences this. In the United States, participation in scuba diving increased by 7.3% in 2023 compared to the previous year (Weinman, 2022), while Australia reports that participation in surfing increased by nearly 50% between 2018 and 2021 (Manero, et al., 2023). More recently, specialized travel packages and resorts have been developed that combine marine leisure sports with tourism, focusing on yacht tours and diving expeditions. In Europe, cruise lines are launching cruises to Northern Europe and the Mediterranean to combine various marine leisure sports and tourism activities (Luxury Travel Magazine, 2022), and in the Maldives, resorts are offering various marine leisure activities such as parasailing and night diving through their dive and watersports centers (Sports Tourism News, 2023). This means the industry is expanding regarding individual participation and business opportunities, whereas marine leisure sports and other industries are converging to create new business opportunities. These developments highlight the economic potential and diversity of the marine leisure sports industry.

Through this, the increasing demand for marine leisure sports is significantly contributing to the growth of high-value-added industries and the promotion of the sports industry, thereby facilitating the development of local communities and demonstrating high growth potential. Considering the socio-economic value of these marine leisure sports, analyzing and studying them academically is essential.

As marine leisure sports continue to evolve into a high-value-added industry, competition among facilities to attract customers is intensifying due to the increased number of visitors seeking to participate in these activities. Most importantly, marine leisure sports are heavily influenced by seasonality, exhibiting a strong one-season character. Therefore, securing a dedicated base of enthusiastic users during peak season and off-peak times is crucial. From the perspective of marine leisure sports service

providers, acquiring loyal customers can be a vital source for gaining a competitive advantage. In this context, marketing studies have actively investigated the antecedents that affect customer loyalty.

Reviewing previous research identified factors like satisfaction, engagement, and involvement as influencing loyalty. These studies emphasize that improving these variables collectively is essential for enhancing customer loyalty. However, these factors are limited to research focusing solely on consumers' positive emotions. While positive emotions are important, minimizing negative emotions is essential for increasing customer loyalty. There has been research exploring the relationship between marketing mix and loyalty, but studies examining the relationship with constraints still need to be completed. For this reason, there is a need for research related to the marketing perspective and constraints, and this study aims to investigate how marketing mix and constraints affect customer loyalty. Therefore, this study aims to empirically clarify the relationship between the marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty in marine leisure sports to facilitate their development and encourage ongoing participation by visitors. The findings will provide foundational data for establishing effective marketing strategies and improving the operation of marine leisure sports.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS SETTING

2.1 The Relationship between the Marketing Mix and Loyalty

The marketing mix, which is defined as a strategy that enables companies to effectively deliver their product or service to target consumers in the market (Funk et al., 2008), is a key variable that may influence customer loyalty. The components of the marketing mix can vary depending on the type of marketing, and scholars have varied perspectives on how to categorize these factors. Among them, McCarthy's (1971) 4Ps of marketing mix—product, price, place, and promotion—are still used in marketing theory and practice. This study has classified them into these 4Ps.

Regarding the relationship between the marketing mix and loyalty, Hu (2011) noted that service quality, brand value, and marketing mix strategies have a meaningful and positive relationship with customer loyalty. Hermawan (2015) emphasized the interrelation between product marketing mix and price impacting customer satisfaction and loyalty. These previous studies suggest that the marine leisure sports industry should recognize the importance of the marketing mix factors and establish specific marketing mix strategies to attract loyal customers. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study is as follows.

H₁: The marketing mix in marine leisure sports will have a positive impact on visitor loyalty.

2.2 The Relationship between Constraints and Loyalty

Constraints are also important variables that can influence loyalty. Constraints are defined as factors that limit an individual's participation in leisure activities (Jackson, 1988), and scholars have diverse opinions on the components of these constraints. Most importantly, considering that the constraints perceived by marine leisure sports visitors can be understood in the same context as leisure constraints, this study categorizes constraints into three dimensions—intrinsic, interpersonal, and structural—based on the hierarchical model of leisure constraints presented by Crawford and Godbey (1987).

Reviewing previous studies on the relationship between constraints and loyalty indicated that constraints negatively affect loyalty across various fields. Alexandris et al. (2008) identified major constraints limiting the participation of recreational skiers and examined the relationship between leisure constraints, ski participation, and ski loyalty. They found that constraints significantly affect both participation and loyalty. Kontogianni, Kouthouris, Barlas, and Voutselas (2011) argued in their study on the relationship between participation and loyalty in recreational swimming that managers should provide services and opportunities to remove or reduce constraints related to swimming participation to increase individual involvement. Based on the findings of these previous studies, it is evident that the marine leisure sports industry should recognize the importance of constraints and establish specific marketing mix strategies to attract loyal customers. The second hypothesis of this study is as follows.

H₂: Constraints in marine leisure sports will have a negative impact on visitor loyalty.

2.3 The Relationship between the Marketing Mix and Constraints

Meanwhile, previous research on the relationship between the marketing mix and constraints has reported that the marketing mix has direct and indirect negative impacts on constraints. Funk (2013) claimed that a successful marketing mix strategy could facilitate the negotiation of constraints by sports consumers and contribute to overcoming their perceived limitations. Ritchie, Carr, & Cooper (2009) argued that by implementing effective marketing programs, one can respond to the constraints of

potential visitors. These prior studies imply that it is essential for marine leisure sports providers to present appropriate marketing mix strategies to minimize constraints for sports activity participation. The third hypothesis of this study is as follows.

H3: The marketing mix in marine leisure sports will have a negative impact on visitor loyalty.

2.4 Research Model

This study was conducted based on previous research, and three hypotheses were formulated. The research model is shown in Figure 1.

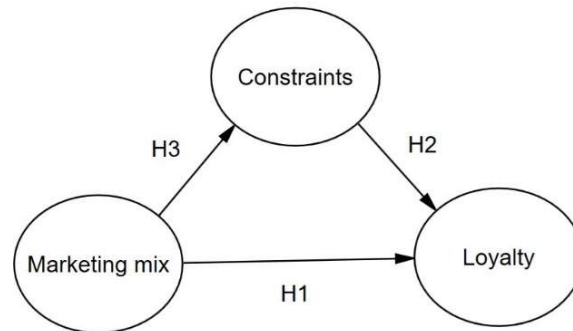


Figure 1. Research model

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Subjects

This study selected visitors with experience in participating in marine leisure sports in Geoje City, where marine leisure sports are active, as the population to understand the relationship between the marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty in marine leisure sports. The convenience sampling method, a non-probability sampling method, was employed to collect data; out of 250 questionnaires, 20 were excluded due to unreliable or insincere responses, leaving 230 as the final sample for analysis. The general characteristics of the research subjects are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. General Characteristics of Respondents (N=230)

Item		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	116	50.4
	Female	114	49.6
Age	Under 20	12	5.2
	20-24	34	14.8
	25 -29	50	21.7
	30-34	29	12.6
	35-39	37	16.1
	40-44	17	7.4
	45-49	24	10.4
	50 and above	27	11.7
Total		230	100

3.2 Research Tools

This study used a structured questionnaire to investigate the relationship between the marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty in marine leisure sports, as well as the general characteristics of the research subjects. Before conducting the survey, the purpose and intent of the study were explained directly to the visitors, and their cooperation was requested. Visitors who agreed participated in the survey through a self-administered questionnaire. Apart from the questions related to the general characteristics of the research subjects, all survey items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

For the marketing mix factors of marine leisure sports, this study adapted and revised a questionnaire by Jeon (2012) based on prior studies related to the marketing mix (Choi, 2009; Ha, 2005; Hwang, 2007; Kim, 2009).

For the constraint factors of marine leisure sports, this study adapted and revised a questionnaire by Jo (2023), which was based on previous studies (Baek et al., 2015; Ko et al., 2019; Oh et al., 2012; Raymore et al., 1994).

The loyalty factors in marine leisure sports were revised and complemented based on previous studies. Specifically, the questionnaire was restructured around those developed by Kang (2016), which had already been amended to include findings from loyalty-related studies by Heo, Kim, and Lee (2011) and Park (2012). Additionally, the questionnaire by Jeong and Jo (2018) was adapted to align with the research objectives of this study. Their questionnaire had been designed around the theory of Engel, Blackwell, and Kollat (1982) and was substantiated by research from Hallowell (1996) and Chi and Gursoy (2009). Loyalty was defined in this study.

The results of the exploratory factor analysis related to the marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty in marine leisure sports are presented in Table 2. The sub-factors of the marine leisure sports marketing mix consisted of 5 items for product, 4 for price, 4 for place, and 4 for promotion. The constraint factors were composed of 4 items, each for intrinsic, interpersonal, and structural constraints, while loyalty was a single factor with four items. The questionnaire on the marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty demonstrated an explanatory power of 76.824%, and its reliability showed internal consistency with α values ranging from .862 to .918.

Table 2. Factor and Reliability Analyses of the Questionnaire on Marketing Mix, Constraints, and Loyalty (N=230)

Item	Loadings	α
Marketing mix (product)		.908
Has excellent instructors	.870	
Offers a safe program	.845	
Has sincere and friendly instructors	.830	
Offers a variety of programs	.769	
Offers specialized programs	.705	
Loyalty		.918
Looking forward to the next visit to marine leisure sports facilities	.856	
Will actively consider visiting marine leisure sports facilities again	.836	
Will recommend the marine leisure sports experience to others	.814	
Likely to continue participating in marine leisure sports	.794	
Marketing mix (promotion)		.889
Conducts continuous post-management	.851	
Communicates effectively with customers	.843	
Actively engages in various promotional activities	.842	
Organizes a variety of events	.828	
Constraints (interpersonal constraints)		.896
People around me don't know how to do marine leisure sports	.917	
People around me do not like marine leisure sports	.895	
Coordinating time for marine leisure sports with others is difficult	.845	
There is no one to do marine leisure sports with	.790	
Marketing mix (price)		.868
The program fees are reasonable	.811	
Additional costs (equipment rental, food, parking, etc.) are reasonable	.808	
Auxiliary facility fees are reasonable	.796	
Offers a variety of discount benefits	.695	
Constraints (intrinsic constraints)		.867
I do not know how to participate in marine leisure sports	.907	
It is difficult to participate in marine leisure sports due to fear	.904	
Marine leisure sports seem uninteresting	.831	
I do not have the mental capacity to engage in marine leisure sports	.548	
Constraints (structural constraints)		.878
Places where I can do marine leisure sports are far away	.919	
Lack of time and high cost hinder marine leisure sports	.892	
The transportation to marine leisure sports venues is inconvenient	.880	
Desired marine leisure sports venues are rare	.592	
Marketing mix (place)		.862
Satisfied with the cleanliness and hygiene of the facility	.790	
Satisfied with the facility and surrounding environment	.756	
Provides quiet and comfort	.703	
The facility is easily accessible	.466	

3.3 Data Analysis

Data collected in this study were analyzed using the SPSS 29.0 statistical program. Descriptive statistical analyses, such as mean and standard deviation, were conducted to determine the characteristics of the collected data on the marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty in marine leisure sports. A reliability analysis was conducted to validate the reliability of the measurement items, and an exploratory factor analysis was performed to validate the measurement tools. A correlation analysis was conducted to identify the degree of interrelation between the extracted factors and to check for multicollinearity. In contrast, a multiple regression analysis was used to validate the research hypotheses. All statistical significance tests in this study were verified at the $\alpha = .05$ level.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis Results

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics and correlations for the marine leisure sports' marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty. All the measured variables showed significant positive correlations, excluding the correlation between the product and structural constraints. Moreover, all correlation coefficients among the variables were below .9, indicating no multicollinearity issues. An analysis of the correlations between the marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty in marine leisure sports revealed that the marketing mix factors have a negative correlation with constraints. Additionally, the marketing mix factors demonstrated a positive correlation with loyalty. On the other hand, constraints exhibited a negative correlation with loyalty.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis between Research Variables (N=230)

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Product	4.30	.65	1							
Price	4.00	.57	.464**	1						
Place	3.92	.59	.574**	.603**	1					
Promotion	3.82	.62	.139*	.279**	.340**	1				
Intrinsic	2.48	.79	-.153*	-.210**	-.282**	-.190**	1			
Interpersonal	2.30	.66	-.144*	-.206**	-.291**	-.113	.170**	1		
Structural	3.24	.88	-.076	-.242**	-.224**	-.212**	.268**	.109	1	
Loyalty	3.95	.73	.402**	-.385**	.411**	.250**	-.444**	-.071	-.316**	1

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

4.2 Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Table 4 presents the regression analysis results regarding the marketing mix's impact on loyalty in marine leisure sports; the marketing mix had a statistically significant impact on loyalty. It accounted for 24.3% of the total variance in loyalty, and among the marketing mix factors, product, price, and promotion had a positive impact on loyalty. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, posited that the marketing mix in marine leisure sports influences loyalty, was accepted.

Table 4. Impact of Marketing Mix on Loyalty (N=230)

	Loyalty		
Variable	B	SE B	β
Product	.261	.082	.231**
Price	.204	.095	.159*
Place	.173	.102	.140
Promotion	.148	.073	.073*
R ²		.243	
F		18.051	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The regression analysis results regarding the impact of constraints on loyalty in marine leisure sports are shown in Table 5; constraints had a statistically significant impact on loyalty. Constraints accounted for 23.9% of the total variance in loyalty, and among the constraints, intrinsic and structural constraints had a negative impact on loyalty. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was accepted, which stated that constraints in marine leisure sports affect loyalty.

Table 5. Impact of Constraints on Loyalty (N=230)

	Loyalty		
Variable	B	SE B	β
Intrinsic constraints	-.358	.056	-.390***

Interpersonal constraints	.020	.065	.018
Structural constraints	-.177	.050	-.213**
R ²		.239	
F		23.672	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6 presents the regression analysis results regarding the marketing mix's impact on constraints in marine leisure sports; the marketing mix had a statistically significant impact on constraints. The marketing mix explained 9.1% of the total variance in intrinsic constraints, and among the marketing mix factors, only place had a negative impact on intrinsic constraints. Additionally, it explained 8.7% of the total variance in interpersonal constraints, and among the marketing mix factors, only place had a negative impact on interpersonal constraints. Lastly, it explained 9.2% of the total variance in structural constraints, and among the marketing mix factors, only price had a negative impact on structural constraints. Therefore, Hypothesis 3, which stated that the marketing mix in marine leisure sports affects constraints, was accepted.

Table 6. Impact of Marketing Mix on Constraints (N=230)

	Intrinsic constraints			Interpersonal constraints			Structural constraints		
Variable	B	SEB	β	B	SEB	β	B	SEB	β
Product	.017	.097	.013	.043	.081	.042	.132	.108	.097
Price	-.075	.114	-.054	-.064	.095	-.055	-.263	.126	-.170*
Place	-.300	.122	-.223*	-.311	.101	-.279**	-.197	.135	-.132
Promotion	-.129	.087	-.101	-.009	.073	-.008	-.188	.097	-.132
R ²	.091			.087			.092		
F	5.639			5.373			5.668		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study empirically analyzed the relationships between the marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty perceived by marine leisure sports participants. Based on the findings of this study and previous research, the following discussions and conclusions have been made.

First, the factors of product, price, and promotion in the marketing mix for marine leisure sports had a positive impact on loyalty. The product showed the highest relative impact on loyalty, followed by price and promotion. Research by Moon (2012) supports the present study's findings by showing that the marketing mix's product, price, and promotion factors for marine leisure sports affect loyalty. Additionally, Muala and Qurneh (2012) suggested that the product factor could significantly impact both loyalty and tourists' satisfaction levels.

Above all, marine leisure sports taking place at sea, on beaches, or underwater inherently involve many services in their product factors, such as guides and programs. Thus, improving service quality can strengthen relationships by making a positive impression on visitors regarding marine leisure sports, ultimately influencing their decisions to revisit or discontinue participation. To encourage ongoing visits, operators in marine leisure sports must focus on improving service quality and expanding and enhancing their programs. This study proposes a new marketing strategy for the product aspect of the marine leisure sports marketing mix: promoting a professional instructor certification program. This strategy aims to enhance the credibility and professionalism of instructors by offering a program that grants internationally recognized certifications. With such credible certification, visitors can confidently take lessons, thereby improving the quality of service. Consequently, this certification program is expected to attract more visitors and improve the overall service standards in marine leisure sports.

A study by Jo, Lee, and Shin (2015) mentioned that the high cost of participating in marine sports prevents its substantial growth and confines it to an experiential level. Additionally, research by Reza Jalilvand et al. (2014) suggests that retaining tourists and increasing loyalty originates from cost, indicating that the participation cost in marine leisure sports can also directly impact loyalty. Therefore, an appropriate downward price adjustment is needed to improve visitors' loyalty to marine leisure sports. However, while a low-cost strategy can retain existing customers and attract potential visitors, it may instill a perception of lower quality among visitors compared to higher-priced products. Thus, it is essential to strategically offer cost-effective products that maintain quality while also reducing price. This

study proposes a new pricing strategy in the marketing mix of marine leisure sports: usage-based pricing. This strategy aims to enhance cost-effectiveness by charging visitors based on the actual time or number of uses. This approach allows visitors to pay only for what they need through hourly billing or by purchasing a set number of usage tickets.

A study by Park and Yoon (2005) showed that promotional factors have a direct impact on loyalty, and research by Michels and Bowen (2005) indicated that promotional events and activities can enhance loyalty. Additionally, research by Sin et al. (2022) suggests that all promotional activities can evoke loyalty and enthusiasm for a product or service. As a business and an industry under continuous development, Marine Leisure Sports must recognize the vital role of advertising, publicity, and events in promotional activities. More effective targeted marketing can be realized if these sports segment visitor media usage patterns are actively promoted based on each medium's degree of use. This study proposes a new promotion strategy in the marketing mix of marine leisure sports: social media campaigns. This strategy involves creating and sharing content related to marine leisure sports on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Tailoring the content to the unique characteristics of each platform is expected to attract and engage customers effectively.

Next, intrinsic and structural constraints in marine leisure sports showed a negative impact on visitor loyalty. As the intrinsic and structural constraints among visitors increased loyalty toward marine leisure sports decreased. According to the constraint model by Crawford et al. (1991), factors affecting an individual's decision to participate in leisure activities operate sequentially from intrinsic to interpersonal to structural constraints. The study further posits that individuals who cannot overcome intrinsic constraints are more likely to decide not to participate in leisure actively, partially supporting our findings. In a study by Kim and Seo (2020) and Yan Bing, Yunyi Mo (2020), intrinsic constraints were identified as the most critical factor limiting participation in activities and had a negative impact on satisfaction and behavioral intentions. In research by Yamashita et al. (2023), structural constraints tended to change an individual's desires and intensity, negatively affecting their will to satisfy these desires.

To promote marine leisure sports, it is essential to emphasize that they offer unique fun and excitement that cannot be experienced in other sports and an escape from daily life while operating in an aquatic environment. Therefore, promoters should underscore safety to minimize the stigma associated with its inherent risks. To enhance visitor loyalty, operators can consider experiential marketing strategies like offering free trial sessions, setting up free-experience zones, and offering experience packages. Moreover, emphasizing safety through psychological support, appropriate group activities, and safety training can mitigate intrinsic constraints.

The 2023 Geoje City Marine Sports Development Plan Research Service Report identified structural constraints like insufficient infrastructure and underdeveloped surrounding environments, including transportation and accessibility. Strategies like expanding marina construction and enhancing facilities and infrastructure for marine leisure sports, as well as improvements in amenities and transportation, can be devised to alleviate these constraints. This would facilitate sustained participation and ensure visitor loyalty.

Finally, the marketing mix in marine leisure sports has been shown to impact constraints. Specifically, within the marketing mix, the place factor exhibited a negative effect on intrinsic and interpersonal constraints, while price negatively affects structural constraints. In other words, as the visitors' dissatisfaction have with the location of marine leisure sports decreases, their levels of intrinsic and interpersonal constraints decrease. Similarly, the fewer burden they feel concerning price, the lower their levels of structural constraints.

A study by Lee, Jeon, and Kim (2017) supported these findings, showing that among the marketing mix strategies, place has a negative influence on intrinsic and interpersonal constraints. Based on previous research and the results of this study, to attract visitors, operators of marine leisure sports need to focus on reducing perceived constraint levels through appropriate location strategies. To overcome intrinsic constraints, location strategies such as improving facilities and infrastructure to enhance visitor familiarity and leisure quality, constructing nearby facilities to improve accessibility, and providing mobility services for convenience can create a better environment and experience for visitors, ultimately aiding in overcoming intrinsic constraints. Additionally, to address interpersonal constraints, location strategies like fostering sports communities, providing group training programs, and organizing community events and activities can promote interaction and camaraderie among people enjoying marine leisure sports, which is expected to aid in overcoming interpersonal constraints.

Subsequently, research by Malasevska, Haugom, Lien, Hinterhuber, and Alnes (2021) explains that various pricing strategies can be used as negotiation tools to overcome structural constraints, thus supporting the results of this study. Based on previous research and the results of this study, implementing strategies, such as price diversification and flexible pricing plans, package offerings and discount promotions, customer loyalty programs, and data analysis for optimal pricing, can mitigate the negative impact of price on structural constraints and offer diverse visitors opportunities to participate in marine leisure sports.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The significance of this study lies in its provision of foundational data for strategic planning to attract visitors while simultaneously expanding the scope of research in marine leisure sports by examining the relationships between the marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty. However, there are some limitations in conducting this study and suggestions for future research.

First, this study was conducted on visitors to marine leisure sports facilities in Geoje City, South Korea. To provide a more thorough evaluation of the generalizability and potential biases of the study, it is necessary to address several limitations, such as the use of convenience sampling and the focus on a specific geographic area.

Next, given that the factors affecting constraints can vary with individual characteristics and circumstances (Godbey et al. 2010), future research should examine how the demographic characteristics of the participants impact constraints and explore corresponding marketing mix strategies.

Lastly, the criteria for determining the factors that constitute loyalty vary among scholars; this study measured loyalty as a single factor. While measuring loyalty as a single factor has the advantage of capturing its overarching dimensionality (Pan et al., 2012), a multi-dimensional perspective should be considered for developing more specific customer management strategies. Therefore, future research that empirically clarifies the relationships among the marketing mix, constraints, and loyalty by categorizing loyalty into multi-dimensional factors should provide a more detailed understanding of the relationships from various perspectives.

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Authors' contributions

All authors contributed toward data analysis, drafting and revising the paper and agreed to be responsible for all the aspects of this work.

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Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Availability of data and materials

Not Applicable

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Not applicable

Declarations

Authors declare that all works are original and this manuscript has not been published in any other journal.

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