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DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN CHOOSING DISTRIBUTION STRATEGY AND CHANNELS

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Abstract

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The primary goal of this research is to identify and examine logical decision-making, intuitive decision-making, and business conversations in the selection of product distribution channels in Kosovo. The study's findings indicate that logical decision-making, intuitive decision-making, and business discussions have little influence on the selection of product distribution channels in Kosovo firms. Kosovo's trade deficit in 2022 was 4.7 billion euros, or 20.1 percent higher than in 2021. Total exports in 2022 were 920.4 million euros, with imports being 5.6 billion euros (Kosovo Statistics Agency [ASK], 2024). The issue of establishing marketing mix instruments in Kosovo is linked to the country's economic development. The use of rational decision-making and efficient management of distribution policies and strategies, in which, in addition to other measures within the framework of marketing and distribution development policies, the choice of distribution channels (CDC) is critical in the use of efficient product distribution channels in enterprises. The study recommends that marketing policy and strategy makers, with a special focus on the distribution instrument, manage policies and make productive decisions to create efficient distribution channels for enterprises in Kosovo and abroad, where distribution channel development is still at a low level, among other things.

Keywords: Marketing, Management, Decisions, Tourism and Development, Hypothesis Testing

Authors' individual contribution: Conceptualization — B.B. and F.B.; Methodology — B.B. and F.B.; Formal Analysis — B.B.; Investigation — H.B.; Writing — Original Draft — F.B. and H.B.; Writing — Review & Editing — B.B. and F.B.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Following the war, one of the most significant challenges for Kosovar firms was to build a genuine marketing service, in which, in addition to enterprise expansion, marketing activities must be expanded. In terms of distribution channels in Kosovo, Kosovar enterprises must consider a variety of parameters,

such as the enterprise's defined objectives, the policies it directs, the opportunities it possesses, and even external environmental factors, among others.

The primary goal of this research is to determine and assess the impact of logical decision-making, intuitive decision-making, and business conversations on product distribution channel selection in Kosovo-based businesses. The study will

help to promote distribution management methods and provide vital information to businesses looking to improve their decision-making processes when selecting distribution channels.

As a result, different factors must be considered in the policy when deciding on distribution channels. Distribution takes place through distribution channels, which are comprised of companies or individuals involved in the process. Channels include producers, service providers, wholesale trade, retail trade, marketing professionals, and consumers. Although the concept of decision varies, business decisions are similar or identical. The decision to choose distribution channels is based on both qualitative and quantitative data. There are various possibilities to consider when selecting distribution channels; decisions for selecting sales channels include expense ratios, sales volume ratios, and profit margins. It is not difficult for the firm to decide on the best channel; nevertheless, the challenge may be convincing the intermediaries to do the best work for the company so that if the company is successful, it may easily expand into other regions (Jakupi, 2000). During the channel selection process, the fund of the sales channels, their size and structure, the advantages and disadvantages, and the limiting factors that serve in decision-making should be emphasized. According to Szopa and Pekała (2012), implementing a company's marketing plan involves not only meeting production targets but also maintaining effective communication with receivers during the promotional phase. The linear regression analysis results show that rational decision-making, intuitive decision-making, and business conversations have no impact on the choice of product distribution channels, resulting in a negative correlation. In 2021, the hotel and tourist sector had a relatively low participation rate, accounting for approximately 2.1% of the gross domestic product (Kosovo Statistics Agency [ASK], 2023a). Making judgments in the consumer market is more challenging due to the large number of categories, varied consumer expectations, and increased competition.

The findings of this study will help to address a literature gap in Kosovo and, more broadly, regarding the decision-making process in the selection of strategy and distribution channels. This study is significant not only for completing the literature and filling a knowledge gap on the decision-making process in the selection of distribution channels, but also for contributing to the improvement of distribution policy, the decision-making process in the selection of distribution channels, and so on. In October 2023, 100 manufacturing enterprises in Kosovo were questioned for this study. The sample was chosen randomly, and administrative data were used to supplement the core data used in this study. The outcomes of this study reveal that distribution channel management in Kosovo is still at an inadequate level, thus enterprises who want to be successful in the decision-making process when choosing distribution channels must base their decision-making on proper studies. The study results show a limited number of businesses stating that rational thinking, intuitive decisions, and interactions with businesspeople influenced their choice of product distribution channels.

We must have a long-term policy when selecting distribution channels because major investments are required and the structure cannot

be easily modified, therefore we must choose the best and most consistent option over the long run. Tourism growth is linked to the development of marketing mix instruments of product, price, promotion and distribution. Customer needs analysis is one of the key dimensions, implying orientations for making sales channel decisions. An enterprise typically recognizes multiple segments that require varying degrees of service from distribution channels (Warren, 1992). After identifying channel possibilities, the organization wants to select the one that will best achieve its long-term goals (Williams, 1989).

Simon (1977) defines decision-making as a reasoning process based on the decision-maker's values, preferences, and beliefs. Providing appropriate information is a crucial and necessary step for organizational decision-making (Mintzberg, 1973).

The enterprise's choice of distribution channels (CDC) is a critical decision, and channel participants must develop and implement the strategy collaboratively. Distribution is a component of the marketing mix that is intimately tied to product policy, price policy, and promotion policy.

A data-driven decision support system for increasing enterprise performance necessitates a huge volume of data and a method for extracting knowledge from it (Mohammed, 2019). The goal of business decisions is to achieve corporate objectives that meet the demands, needs, and expectations of stakeholders (Salameh, 2022). The very name intuitive decision-making indicates that this is decision-making based on intuition or the decision-maker's feelings. The structure of the question of how rational, intuitive decision-making and conversations with business people affect the CDC for company items in the target market, includes three sub-questions, which are as follows:

RQ1: How does rational decision-making influence the selection of product distribution channels?

RQ2: How does intuitive decision-making influence the selection of product distribution channels?

RQ3: Do business discussions influence the choice of product distribution channels?

The paper's structure includes the following sections. Section 2 focuses on the literature review, Section 3 describes the research methodology. Section 4 analyzes the dynamics of export and import, and presents the empirical findings of this study. Section 5 discusses the results and Section 6 concludes the study with recommendations for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Regarding the impact of intuitive decision-making, rational decision-making, and discussions with businessmen on the selection of distribution channels, both domestic and foreign literature as well as studies conducted by various researchers have been consulted (Andrejić & Kilibarda, 2015; Brown & Sims, 2016; Chen et al., 2014).

Effective distribution decision-making is becoming more vital in today's fast-paced business climate. To ensure the success of any business, it is critical to make timely decisions based on information that results in an efficient flow of commodities from producers to consumers (Agnusdei et al., 2023). A distribution strategy is

a strategy or plan that specifies how a company wants to make its products or services available to end customers across the supply chain.

A distribution plan aims to maximize product sales while minimizing distribution costs. Firms investigate equilibrium pricing and ordering decisions in the hybrid channel for a capacity-constrained supplier dealing with a retail platform, as well as the impact of capacity restrictions on the supplier's distribution channel selection (Bian et al., 2018).

Distribution channels are defined as the locations where a product is suited for easy discovery by consumers; this is how a company offers its products to consumers in the market, either physically or online (Zhu, 2020). Distribution strategies influence customer purchasing behavior, and distribution strategy is a critical component of determining consumer purchasing behavior (Riyadi & Arif, 2023). Recent research demonstrates that consumers have a definite inclination to utilize both online and offline channels, which has been significantly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in an increase in the number of consumers using online channels (Liu et al., 2021).

The online channel is expected to acquire traction in the overall market, changing the entire entrepreneurial environment (Song et al., 2022). Using the correct technologies, entrepreneurs can gain real-time access to data and expertise, allowing them to make informed decisions that can have a substantial impact on distribution channel selection (Khadriv et al., 2022).

When discussing the many forms of distribution channels, it is critical to understand the concept of distribution channels. Distribution channels refer to the course or route that the product takes from the site of production to its final customer.

A distribution channel is a network of firms or intermediaries through which a product or service travels before reaching the final customer or consumer. Wholesalers, retailers, distributors, and even the Internet are all potential distribution avenues. The distribution policy's objectives are determined by the level of distribution required by consumers as well as the enterprise's long-term desired outcomes. Global goals are significant because, when compared to other marketing decisions, channel form and choice are relatively long-term. With the rapid evolution of distribution channels and the expansion of multichannel dispersion, consumer studies must focus not only on understanding product choice but also on the reasons for channel choice (Jo Black et al., 2002).

Choosing an effective distribution channel is critical for ensuring profit, reducing costs, increasing customer happiness, and developing loyal customers. The significance of selecting a suitable distribution channel is well acknowledged both in practice and in academic settings (Xie et al., 2021).

The primary objective for distribution could include providing an effective level of service to the market, which implies that they must be linked, at the very least, to global objectives and be sustainable in terms of quality indicators. The level of channel coverage and support for the needs to meet the objectives are critical components of distribution activity (Monaku et al., 2021).

Based on the RQs, what is the impact of rational, intuitive decision-making, and conversations with businessmen on the choice of distribution

channels in the enterprise? As well as three sub-questions in the framework, the following hypotheses were developed on which this paper is based:

H1: The company's choice of product distribution channels was not influenced by rational decision-making.

H2: Intuitive decision-making has had little impact on the choice of product distribution channels in the enterprise.

H3: Conversations with the businessmen had little impact on the choice of product distribution channels in the company.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the role of rational, intuitive decision-making and commercial interactions in the selection of distribution channels in Kosovo. For this paper, secondary data was gathered from trustworthy local and international agencies, while primary data was collected by means of a questionnaire. The enterprise survey for this report was created in October 2023, with 100 manufacturing businesses interviewed. The sample was selected at random and distributed throughout 17 municipalities in Kosovo. The respondents were mostly business directors and data processing and analysis were done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. The survey questionnaire contains seven questions and 13 sub-questions, which are divided into four sections, which we offer below: the first element of the enterprise's decision-making process for product distribution channels consists of one question and three subquestions.

The second section is about the state of physical distribution in the firm, which consists of two questions and four subquestions. The third component companies featured a question with four sub-questions. The fourth portion consisted of three questions, each with two sub-questions.

The data analysis in this study focuses on the first phase, which examines the impact of decision-making on the selection of product distribution channels by manufacturing businesses. The study is based on the idea that the selection of product distribution channels is influenced by rational, intuitive decision-making and talks with enterprise businessmen, among other factors. The dependent variable in this case study is the *CDC* and was tested against the independent factors. Rational decision-making in the selection of product distribution channels — *RDMSPC*; intuitive decision-making in the selection of product distribution channels — *IDMSPC*; and businessmen conversations in the selection of product distribution channels — *BCSPDC*. The hypotheses presented in this research are based on the literature review. The database was used to extract empirical analyses of correlations, regressions, coefficients, and other variables. Based on a theoretical analysis of the aforementioned literature as well as actual evidence, the multiple linear regression model provided by Studenmund (2017) was adopted in the present research.

This analysis was performed using the following regression model with constant factors:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_i x_i + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where, Y — dependent variable; x_i — independent variable; β_i — partial regression coefficients; ε_{ij} — random residue, with normal distribution.

The influence of the independent variables *RDMSPCD*, *IDMSPCD*, and *BCSPDC* (as defined above) on the dependent variable *CDC* was investigated in this study.

The linear regression model shown below was used:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

where, x_1 — *RDMSPCD*; x_2 — *IDMSPCD*; x_3 — *BCSPDC*. The dependent variable *Y CDC* was compared to the independent variables *RDMSPCD*, *IDMSPCD*, and *BCSPDC*, as stated below:

$$Y CDC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 RDMSPCD + \beta_2 IDMSPCD + \beta_3 BCSPDC + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

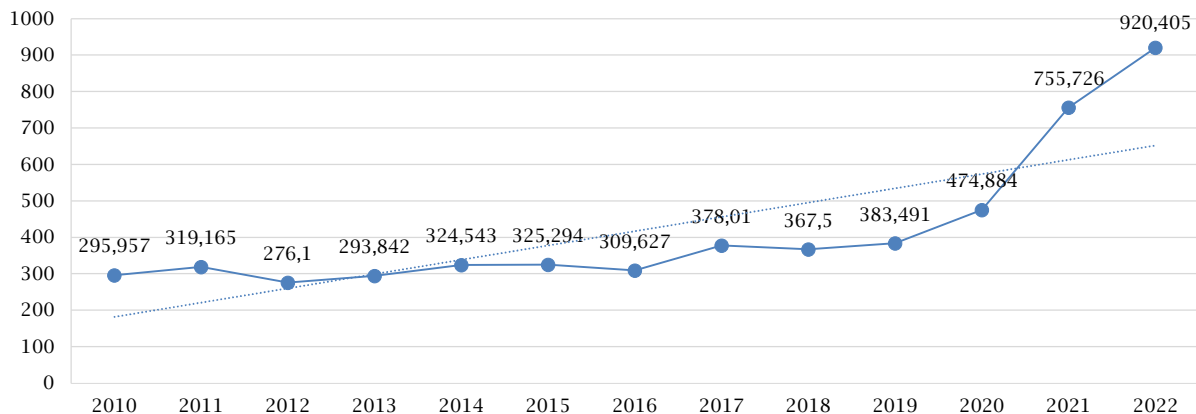
An alternate method is the full consistency method (FUCOM) method, which is based on pairwise comparison and outcome validation via divergence from maximum consistency. This model has a subjective impact on ultimate decision-making by representing the values of the criteria's weights. This notably applies to the first and second steps of the FUCOM approach, in which decision-makers rate the criteria based on their personal preferences and compare the ranked criteria pairwise.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Import and export trends in Kosovo, 2010–2022

In terms of export trends, it is well recognized that countries with the highest exports have better economic growth rates and more stable economic growth. Kosovo's trade deficit in 2022 was 4.7 billion euros, a 20.1% increase over 2021, indicating that despite an increase in exports, Kosovo still has a negative trade balance. Kosovo's total exports in 2022 were 920.4 million euros, with imports being 5.6 billion euros. Exports cover imports by only 16.3%. According to the comparison research, there was a minor increase in exports from 2010 to 2011, however, this increase was unstable, implying that exports continued to decline in 2012. Kosovo saw a significant increase in exports from 2019 to 2022, with the highest increase occurring in 2022 when the value of exports reached almost 920 million and 405.000 euros. When we examine the export trend from 2021, which was 755 million and 726 thousand euros, to 2022, we see a 21.79% growth (ASK, 2023b). The following graph depicts the export trends from 2010 to 2022.

Figure 1. Export trends in Kosovo from 2010 to 2022 expressed in million euros

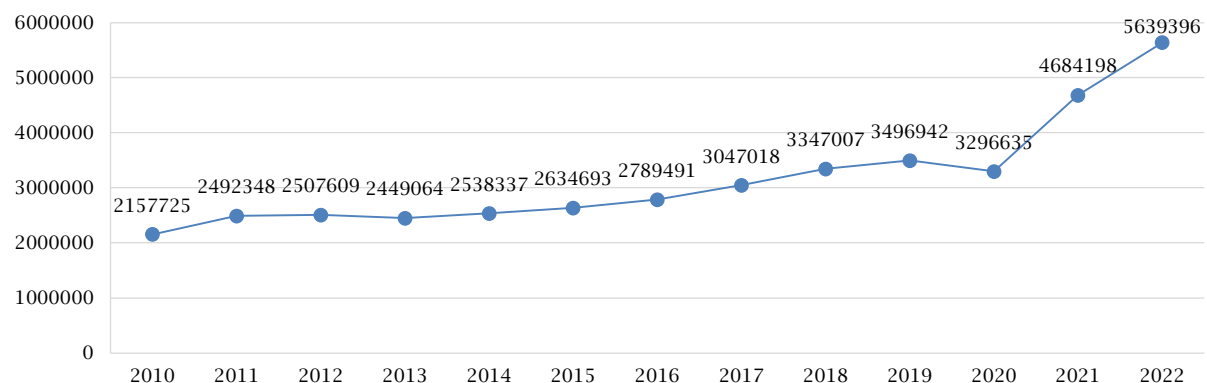


Source: Authors' analysis based on ASK (2023b).

In the period 2010–2022, imports in Kosovo remained relatively high, indicating a growing trend over time, with the biggest growth in 2022 totaling 4.6 million euros. In 2022, Kosovo's imports totaled 5 billion 639 million 396 thousand euros, up from

4 billion 684 million 198 thousand euros in 2021, representing a 20.4% rise. So, based on the comparative analysis of imports, it shows that imports of goods have increased from 2010 to 2022 (Bellaqa et al., 2023). Figure 2 illustrates import trends from 2010 to 2022.

Figure 2. Import trends in Kosovo from 2010 to 2022 expressed in euros



Source: Authors' analysis based on ASK (2023b).

4.2. Results of the survey

Based on the results of the descriptive analysis of 100 observations for the three variables, the average influence of *RDMSPC* is 3.24, with a standard deviation of 4.334. The average impact of *IDMSPC*

is 6.21, with a standard deviation of 3.737, whereas the statistical average for the impact of term *BCSPDC* is 0.03, with a standard deviation of 0.180. Table 1 shows the descriptive data for the aforementioned high variable.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	Std. error	Statistic	Std. error
<i>RDMSPC</i>	100	0	9	3.24	4.334	0.589	0.198	-1.675	0.394
<i>IDMSPC</i>	100	1	9	6.21	3.737	-0.604	0.198	-1.638	0.394
<i>BCSPDC</i>	100	0	1	0.03	0.180	5.252	0.198	25.931	0.394
Valid N (listwise)	100								

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The range of the variables should not depart significantly from zero to ensure a normal distribution (Wooldridge, 2012). According to Wright and Herrington (2011), deviation levels ranging from -1 to +1 are statistically acceptable. Based on the descriptive analysis results, which showed that the variables' bias values ranged from +1 to -1, we may conclude that the variables fall within the statistically accepted ranges and have a normal distribution. The normalized coefficients for all variables in the preceding results show that the data

fits normal parameters and is statistically acceptable. The significance level of the correlation coefficient (RHO) in correlation analysis is influenced by sample size. After formulating the hypotheses, we tested them to see if there is a relationship between the dependent variable *Y*, which in this case is the *CDC*, and the independent variables x_1 , x_2 , and x_3 , and at the end of the correlation analysis, correlation coefficients between variables are provided. See Table 2 for further information.

Table 2. Regression coefficients of independent variables

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity statistics	
	β	Std. error	β			Tolerance	VIF
1	Constant	12.986	0.715	18.150	0.000		
	<i>RDMSPC</i>	-1.194	0.068	-17.444	0.000	0.005	202.216
	<i>IDMSPC</i>	-0.441	0.079	-5.555	0.000	0.005	202.242
	<i>BCSPDC</i>	-0.309	0.093	-3.330	0.001	0.992	1.008

Note: Dependent variable: *CDC*. VIF — variance inflation factor.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Hypotheses were assessed in terms of acceptance or rejection, hence we used the sig. 0.05 value to determine which hypothesis was accepted or rejected. Verification of hypothesis reveals:

The linear regression for *H1* indicates that *RDMSPC* does not have an impact on Kosovo, since it is significant and negative ($t = -17.444$, $\beta = -1.194$, $p = 0.000$). As a result, a unit of the influence of rational decision-making in the choice of product distribution channels in the firm will reduce the performance of the *CDC* by 1.194, as well as the value of $p = 0.000$, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. Based on this finding, we can conclude that *H1* rational decision-making had no influence on the selection of product distribution channels and hypothesis *H1* is verified or accepted.

H2 indicates a substantial and negative correlation between intuitive decision-making and product distribution channels in Kosovo ($t = -5.555$, $\beta = -0.465$, $p = 0.000$). This demonstrates that one unit of the influence of *IDMSPC* in the enterprise reduces the influence of *IDMSPC* by -0.441, resulting in a value of $p = 0.000$, which is less than the 0.05 value. Based on these results, we can infer that *H2* *IDMSPC* in manufacturing organizations had no effect on the selection of product distribution channels, implying that this hypothesis is verified or accepted.

The linear regression analysis for *H3* indicates a substantial and negative link between talks with the deadline and the choice of product distribution channels in Kosovo ($t = -3.330$, $\beta = -0.020$, $p = 0.001$).

This demonstrates that one unit of the influence of business conversations on the *CDC* of products reduces the influence of business conversations on the *CDC* by -0.309, with $p = 0.001$, which is less than the significant value of 0.05. Based on this, we may conclude that *H3*, the influence of business talks on the *CDC*, has no effect on the choice of product distribution channels, and so this hypothesis is proven or accepted.

For model summary, $R = 0.997$, $R^2 = 0.995$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.995$. See Table 3 for more information.

Table 3. Model summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. error	Durbin-Watson
1	0.997 ^a	0.995	0.995	0.255	1.955

Note: ^a Predictors: Constant, *RDMSPC*, *IDMSPC*, and *BCSPDC*.

^b Dependent variable: *CDC*.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The average inter-correlation between the test items and the total number of test items can be used to calculate Cronbach's alpha (University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA], n.d.). In this section of the study, we used the regression test to conduct a reliability test for data accuracy. See Table 4 for more information.

Table 4. Reliability statistics

Cronbach's alpha	N of items
0.875	4

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The result of testing Cronbach's alfa in the table above of this study is 0.875, indicating that these results are acceptable.

5. DISCUSSION

The formation and development of a modern marketing system, as well as the expansion of the function of distribution channel management in Kosovo, remain at an insufficient level in order to keep up with European and global economic trends. The establishment of distribution rules and channels should get more assistance from relevant institutions at both the government and local levels. Even while exports have increased, Kosovo still maintains a negative trade balance, or export coverage of approximately 16.3%, according to 2022 data. Comparing the export statistics for Kosovar goods in 2022 to the data in 2021, the results reveal an annual rise of 21.8%, which contributes to Kosovo's negative trade balance.

The goods trade figures for Kosovo's imports in 2022 show an annual growth of approximately 20.4% over the previous year 2021. Enterprises must consider all choices when choosing distribution channels in order to make effective decisions. Once the most successful distribution channels have been chosen, they must be implemented and managed. Based on the survey results, we have a moderate statement from the companies surveyed who stated that rational considerations, intuitive decisions, and discussions with acquaintances influenced the CDC.

The linear regression analyses for *H1-H3* show that the relationships between channel selection and the hypotheses raised in this study in Kosovo are significant and negative; thus, based on the results of the t-test, β -values, and p-value, we can conclude that the hypotheses raised in this study can be verified or accepted.

6. CONCLUSION

The development of distribution policies in Kosovo remains at a low level due to poor economic development and ineffective distribution policy management. Manufacturing businesses still lack the necessary skills and experience in using rational decision-making to select effective distribution channels, therefore it is beneficial for these organizations to acquire professionals to address those gaps. Based on the correlation regression analysis results and the coefficient values between the constant variable and the independent variables, *H1*, *H2*, and *H3* appear to be accepted or verified. Companies need to utilize logical decision-making to identify which distribution channels will be most successful in the long run. To ensure corporate efficiency, they must increase connectivity and cooperation, which will be manifested through the formation of vertical and horizontal integration associations. More emphasis should be placed on network training for the support and development of both small and medium-sized businesses and larger corporations. To make stable decisions about distribution channels, businesses in Kosovo must

conduct market research in addition to other analyses in order to increase competitiveness, choose a better product assortment, and create an efficient managerial information system. The Kosovo government should be at a higher level in terms of fostering internal and external competition, as well as their economic impact, therefore, policy and strategy should be developed to overcome hurdles to the advancement of distribution policies. Enterprises must establish efficient decision-making when selecting consumer-focused distribution channels. Companies should consider various marketing mix instruments when deciding on distribution channels, as the choice of a distribution channel influences all marketing decisions. Enterprises must design a distribution policy that focuses on achieving the best possible proximity between supply and demand. Enterprises should choose distribution channels based on both qualitative and quantitative data.

The execution of this research is also beset with constraints; among these is the lack of funding for the preparation of the study and report, which would have allowed for the enlargement of the research sample on the grounds that the data in the study are more representative while the sample's scope would have been as broad as feasible.

In addition to the previously indicated high limitation, during the study, we met a lack of data or incomplete data, time constraints, funding limitations, the influence of external factors, cultural and geographical changes, and so on. These are some of the primary restrictions we discovered while analyzing the decision-making process for selecting distribution channels.

In order to prevent any distortion of these indicators for the distribution field, we advise future researchers to take into account the results of this study on distribution and make comparisons between years.

One of the reasons why this study is significant for future research is that it helps businesses respond to market changes by selecting the most successful and cost-effective channels, lowering operating expenses, and increasing profits. Raising awareness of the newest techniques and trends in the distribution business can provide a competitive advantage in selecting the appropriate distribution channels that will directly impact consumer needs. The research aids in determining the best ways to provide faster service, hence enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The administration of marketing policies will be improved by the study's conclusions, particularly with regard to the distribution of marketing mix instrument's incentive policies.

Distribution channel research can provide significant information for new product development and marketing initiatives, allowing the product range to be expanded and diversified. In conclusion, ongoing study into the decision-making process for selecting distribution channels is critical to ensuring that decisions in this area are educated, strategic, and appropriate to fulfill market needs and enterprise objectives.

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