

DEVELOPMENT OF MARKETING TOOLS FOR THE EXPRESS DELIVERY INDUSTRY TO INCREASE CONSUMER LOYALTY

Hubert BOCEVIČIUS , Vilma TAMULIENĖ 

Business Management Faculty, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Vilnius, Lithuania

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Abstract. This research explores how to develop and enhance marketing tools to increase consumer loyalty in the express delivery industry. The study analyzes the influence of these tools on customer loyalty by reviewing scientific literature. The theoretical framework examines various marketing tools, including digital marketing, social media marketing, and integrated marketing communications. Based on this analysis, hypotheses were created and then tested using a survey. The study's empirical section tests these hypotheses and develops a conceptual model that identifies four key tools for boosting loyalty. The findings offer new opportunities for both start-up and established Lithuanian express delivery companies to improve customer loyalty and gain a competitive edge in the market.

Keywords: marketing tools, consumer loyalty, express delivery industry, digital marketing, social network marketing, integrated marketing communication.

JEL Classification: M41, C83, L20.

✉ Corresponding author. E-mail: h.bocevicus@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Strategic business decisions focus on attracting and retaining loyal customers, which is essential for sustainable profitability and long-term success. As consumer satisfaction and loyalty are widely regarded as fundamental to a company's performance (Rannia & Syarief, 2025), companies utilize various marketing tools to bridge the gap between the provider and the consumer. While often studied separately, loyalty and marketing tools are fundamentally linked; loyalty secures consistent profit, while marketing tools facilitate the necessary communication with customers. In today's competitive market, building trust is vital for long-term retention (Ernestivita, 2024), as it reduces costs and signals market stability. This is particularly challenging in the express delivery industry, where service intangibility makes speed, reliability, and quality paramount (Battumur et al., 2023). Consequently, the relationship between loyalty and marketing tools in this sector is less explored in literature, creating a need for further academic inquiry. To provide industry insights and expand this theoretical framework, researchers continue to study this connection, including recent work by Al-Dmour et al. (2023), Battumur et al. (2023), Blut et al. (2023), Dávila Espuela et al. (2023), and Morkūnas and Grišmanauskaitė (2023).

Scientific problem: What marketing tools effectively enhance consumer loyalty in the express delivery industry?

Research objective: To develop a model for utilizing marketing tools in the express delivery sector and assess its effectiveness through empirical research.

Research tasks:

1. Analyze scientific literature on marketing tools in the express delivery sector that influence consumer loyalty to formulate hypotheses for a model supported by research findings.
2. Conduct an empirical study using consumer surveys to validate the hypotheses.
3. Develop a conceptual model that incorporates insights from the research.

Structure of the paper: the paper is divided into sections. Section 1: Introduction. Section 2: Theoretical background. Section 3: Empirical research. Section 4: Results. Section 5: Discussion and interpretation of results. Section 6: Conclusions. Section 7: Contributions, limitations, and future research.

2. Theoretical background

The express delivery industry is a crucial component of the digital economy, connecting businesses and consumers through fast, reliable, and convenient services. In 2022, global parcel volume reached 161 billion (Pitney Bowes, 2023), highlighting the sector's growing relevance.

Express delivery firms aim to ensure customer satisfaction, build trust, and foster long-term relationships (Bikulčius, 2018). Their marketing strategies differ from those in product-based industries, requiring the integration of logistics and marketing to enhance service quality and brand loyalty (Tokarski & Dąbrowska, 2023).

This study reviews relevant literature to develop hypotheses for a conceptual model, which will then be tested through empirical research.

2.1. Integrated marketing communication and its role in the express delivery sector

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is crucial for effectively combining digital and physical marketing tools to reach diverse consumer segments. It builds brand image and fosters loyalty by delivering consistent messages across multiple channels (Nesterenko et al., 2023).

As modern consumers lead individualized lives and form personal brand connections, traditional marketing alone is no longer sufficient (Prajapati & Goswami, 2023). IMC allows companies to reach broader audiences with a mix of tailored communication tools. It helps consumers recognize their need for a service and enhances brand perception (Tamulienė et al., 2020). Its main goals include raising awareness, sharing information, generating interest, and, most importantly, strengthening customer loyalty (Juan & Tarndhamrong, 2023; Adesanoye & Adegoke, 2023).

The Table 1 illustrates the impact of various IMC tools used in the express delivery sector.

Based on the literature review (Prajapati & Goswami, 2023; Tamulienė et al., 2020; Juan & Tarndhamrong, 2023; Adesanoye & Adegoke, 2023; Theodora, 2021), the first hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H1: Integrated marketing communication is important for the use of digital and physical tools in forming and increasing consumer loyalty in the express delivery industry.

Table 1. Impact of integrated marketing communication tools in the express delivery sector (source: Theodora, 2021)

Tools	Impact
META advertising and posts	Product awareness
LINKEDIN advertising and posts	Product image
Corporate blogs	Perceived quality
Press releases	Brand association
Consumer reviews	Brand loyalty
Company vehicles	Consumer experience
Word of mouth	Consumer satisfaction

2.2. Digital and physical marketing tools encourage interest in the company's services

In the competitive express delivery sector, companies must maintain active communication, gather feedback, and ensure customer satisfaction to prevent customers from switching to competitors (Uvet, 2020).

Marketing tools, both digital and physical, are essential for retaining customers and building loyalty. Customer retention is a key objective in competitive markets as it prevents customer loss (Rajagukguk et al., 2025).

To understand how the express delivery sector uses these tools, both digital and physical options must be examined (Table 2).

Table 2. Digital and physical tools used in the express delivery sector (source: Şenyapar, 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Al-Dmour et al., 2023)

Digital tools	Physical tools
META advertising and posts	Company vehicles
LINKEDIN advertising and posts	Word of mouth
Corporate blogs	
Press releases	
Consumer reviews	

The effectiveness of these tools depends on content quality and relevance. Engaging, well-targeted content attracts and retains customer attention (Dávila Espuela et al., 2023). Incentive-based promotions boost engagement, often measured by shares and likes (Woods, 2023), while word-of-mouth, frequently amplified by social media, enhances brand awareness and image (Ali et al., 2025). Visually appealing content also increases customer engagement and sharing (Anderson et al., 2023).

Based on the literature review (Uvet, 2020; Rajagukguk et al., 2025; Şenyapar, 2024; Dwivedi et al., 2021; Al-Dmour et al., 2023; Dávila Espuela et al., 2023; Woods, 2023; Ali et al., 2025; Anderson et al., 2023), the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: Digital and physical marketing tools encourage consumer interest in a company's services and help form or increase consumer loyalty.

2.3. Components of consumer experience in the express delivery sector affect the consumer experience

A literature review (Uvet, 2020; Taufiq-Hail et al., 2023; Morsi, 2023; Munawar, 2021) highlights key factors that influence consumer satisfaction, which are crucial for developing effective marketing strategies in express delivery (Table 3).

Table 3. Consumer satisfaction factors in express delivery marketing (source: Uvet, 2020)

Factors	Description
Quality of staff contacts	Professionalism and communication of customer service representatives
Timeliness	Speed and reliability of deliveries
Order status	Transparency and accuracy of tracking information
Handling discrepancies	Effectiveness in resolving delivery issues
Sharing operational information	Providing timely and accurate delivery updates

Meeting these expectations helps build trust and prevent customer churn in a highly competitive market. Trust in parcel delivery is another critical aspect, especially regarding data security and service reliability (Taufiq-Hail et al., 2023). A reliable service reduces perceived risk and builds consumer confidence.

Key factors contributing to consumer trust in service marketing are outlined in Table 4.

While not all factors must be present, even one can strongly influence consumer choice.

Core factors influencing consumer loyalty are outlined in Table 5.

Table 4. Factors influencing consumer trust in express delivery marketing (source: Morsi, 2023)

Factors	Description
Easy to use	Ease of ordering services (e.g., through the company website)
Easy to find information	Availability of information across various platforms
Consumer belief	Trust in customer service quality, interaction channels, privacy, and guarantees
Reliability	Security of data and fast system response times
Company year	Longevity of the company since its establishment
Resources on-site	Availability of service options and specific service features
Service provision relationships	Online assistance, personalization, and consumer-specific recommendations
Total price	Affordability and value relative to the market

Table 5. Core factors influencing consumer loyalty (source: Munawar, 2021)

Factors	Description
Time	Whether the delivery is timely and if the location is easy to access
Delivery	Accuracy of the delivery (i.e., all ordered items are received as expected)
Information	Clarity and usefulness of information provided during the ordering process
Assurance	Guarantees about shipment arrival and compensation in case of issues
Staff	Communication quality and professionalism of company personnel

Combined with tools like social media, websites, reviews, and branded vehicles, these factors help companies enhance loyalty, promote positive experiences, and build brand reputation across digital and traditional platforms.

Following an in-depth analysis of the components of consumer experience in the express delivery sector, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H3a: The quality of staff work determines the consumer experience in express delivery services.

H3b: Price determines the consumer experience in express delivery services.

H3c: The number of service options determines the consumer experience in express delivery services.

H3d: Reliability determines the consumer experience in express delivery services.

H3e: Information availability determines the consumer experience in express delivery services.

H3f: Delivery time determines the consumer experience in express delivery services.

H3g: Delivery assurance determines the consumer experience in express delivery services.

2.4. Consumer experience determines satisfaction with express delivery services

Examining customer experience helps identify what drives satisfaction and loyalty, especially in competitive sectors like banking (Vuong et al., 2024). Customer experience boosts both cognitive and emotional engagement, encouraging brand preference and reducing churn. Key factors influencing loyalty include responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and trust (Morsi, 2023).

Responsiveness is vital, as customers expect their needs to be prioritized and have a low tolerance for delays (Jafari et al., 2022). Empathy—understanding and addressing customer feelings—also strongly impacts satisfaction (Choi et al., 2024). Reliability ensures consistent service (Rizkina et al., 2025), while trust reduces uncertainty and risk (Soares et al., 2024). Both satisfaction and trust are critical but fragile, requiring consistently high-quality experiences (Morkūnas & Grišmanauskaitė, 2023).

Meeting consumer expectations fosters satisfaction and security, leading to repeated use and long-term loyalty.

This hypothesis aims to determine the connection between consumer experience and consumer satisfaction:

H4: Consumer experience determines satisfaction with express delivery services.

2.5. Satisfaction leads to customer loyalty in the express delivery sector

In the competitive express delivery sector, companies must actively engage with consumers to ensure high satisfaction and prevent customer churn (Uvet, 2020). The marketing department is vital for this effort, handling strategic decisions, campaigns, and sales (De Sousa Oliveira & Luce, 2020).

To remain competitive, marketing must continually innovate. Effective social media campaigns build trust and loyalty by engaging consumers and encouraging content sharing, which boosts brand exposure (Al-Dmour et al., 2023). Satisfied consumers are more likely to perceive prices as fair, enhancing brand satisfaction—a key driver of loyalty (Morkūnas & Grišmanauskaitė, 2023). High-quality interactions also strengthen both satisfaction and loyalty by meeting or exceeding customer expectations (Morsi, 2023).

In summary, strategic marketing combined with quality service fosters consumer satisfaction, leading to greater loyalty, stronger relationships, and increased sales.

H5: Satisfaction determines consumer loyalty to a fast delivery company.

2.6. Integrated marketing communication, along with its tools, directly determines consumer loyalty to the express delivery company

A review of literature indicates that integrated marketing communication (IMC) directly impacts consumer loyalty (Prajapati & Goswami, 2023; Tamulienė et al., 2020; Adesanoye & Adegoke, 2023; Nag & Gilitwala, 2022). Table 6 summarizes IMC components and their effects on brand equity.

Table 6. Integrated marketing communications and brand equity (source: Theodora, 2021)

IMC	Brand equity
Advertising, public relations, events and experiences, personal selling, sales promotion, direct and interactive marketing, word of mouth marketing	Brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, brand association, brand loyalty

All IMC elements must work together to build brand equity; no single channel is sufficient. This synergy boosts a message's impact, communicates quality, evokes positive emotions, and fosters loyalty (Theodora, 2021).

Thus, IMC is crucial for engaging consumers effectively—at the right time and place—and is essential for strengthening marketing in the express delivery sector.

H6: Integrated marketing communication, along with the tools, directly determines consumer loyalty to a fast delivery company.

2.7. Direct influence of digital tools on consumer loyalty

Consistent with previous findings, several studies confirm the direct impact of digital tools on consumer loyalty (Murwonugroho & Yudarwati, 2022; Tassiello et al., 2024; Thakar & Ganatra, 2023; Khuong et al., 2016). Mahamad and Saad (2018) stress the need for companies to be creative and proactive in meeting evolving global consumer demands.

In today's digital world, consumers expect active engagement. Loyalty often arises from personal values or emotional advertising—such as celebrity endorsements that create strong brand connections. Digital marketing tools, including social media and mobile ads, play a vital role in building and sustaining loyalty. While it may take time to develop, consistent, meaningful engagement helps maintain a loyal customer base.

H7: Digital tools can directly determine consumer loyalty in an express delivery sector.

2.8. Physical tools directly determine consumer loyalty in an express delivery sector

The independent impact of physical marketing tools on consumer loyalty is well-supported in the literature (Kalmegh, 2022; Tassiello et al., 2024; Thakar & Ganatra, 2023; Khuong et al., 2016). While digital marketing grows in importance, traditional marketing remains relevant due to its unique benefits. Table 7 highlights these advantages and disadvantages (Kalmegh, 2022).

Table 7. Advantages and disadvantages of traditional marketing compared to other marketing methods (source: Kalmegh, 2022)

Advantages	Disadvantages
Local Audience: Reaches public participants in their daily lives	Cost: More expensive due to upfront budget
Direct Contact: Engages participants live, without interruption	Measuring Results: Harder to measure effectiveness
Easy to Understand: Simple and quick message	Coercive Strategy: Can annoy participants
Very Successful: Effectively communicates messages	Ignoring: Ads are often overlooked

Though less interactive (Jibril et al., 2019), traditional marketing still attracts broad audiences and builds loyalty. Word-of-mouth, in particular, is powerful for building trust and loyalty (Tassiello et al., 2024). Print ads shape brand identity, while TV ads remain effective through humor, repetition, and trust-building (Thakkar & Ganatra, 2023; Khuong et al., 2016).

In summary, traditional marketing—via word-of-mouth, print, and TV—continues to play a key role in fostering consumer loyalty.

H8: Physical marketing tools directly determine consumer loyalty in the express delivery sector.

Based on the results of the study, the aim is to test the listed hypotheses and create a theoretical model for empirical research.

3. Empirical research

3.1. Research methodology

Research problem: What marketing tools effectively enhance consumer loyalty in the express delivery industry?

This study used a quantitative research approach with consumer surveys to examine how marketing tools affect customer loyalty in the express delivery industry. This method was chosen for its ability to provide measurable, statistical insights (Patel & Patel, 2019).

The choice of quantitative research was based on three factors: objectivity, which ensures data-driven findings; generalizability, allowing for broader population analysis; and efficiency, which speeds up data collection (Xiong, 2022).

Possible limitations of this method, such as a lack of population description and potential for self-selection bias among respondents (Andrade, 2020), were addressed. To mitigate these issues, the anonymous online survey's sampling was diversified by gender, age, and education level. This approach allowed for a representative sample of potential express delivery consumers, ensuring the method's transparency and credibility.

An anonymous survey was administered to the public, asking participants which express delivery companies they used. Respondents used a Likert scale to rate factors influencing their loyalty. This method effectively revealed consumer attitudes toward various marketing tools and their impact on brand loyalty.

The theoretical framework of the study is presented in Figure 1.

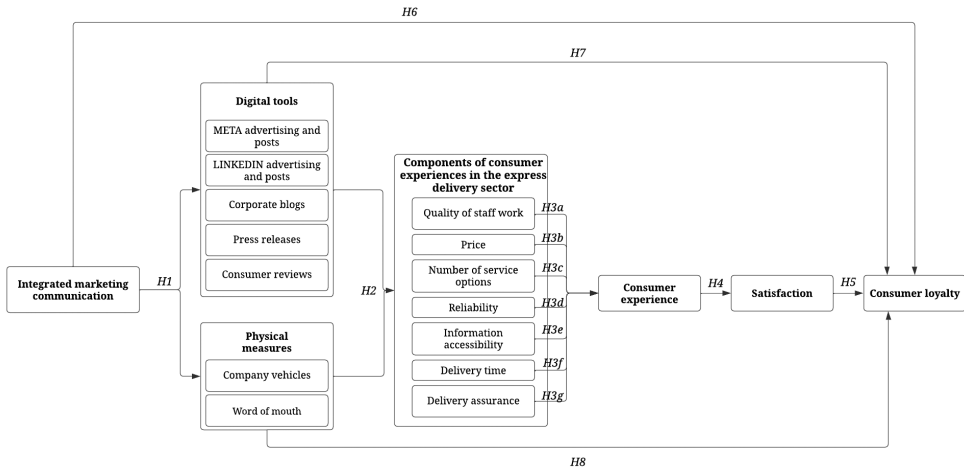


Figure 1. Theoretical model of the study (source: created by the authors)

The hypotheses are as follows:

1. **H1:** *Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is important for using both digital and physical tools to build and enhance consumer loyalty in express delivery companies. IMC is considered one of the most effective methods for fostering loyalty through a combination of marketing channels and tools, which is why it is divided into digital and physical components.*
2. **H2:** *Digital and physical marketing tools generate interest in a company's services and increase consumer loyalty. Digital tools like Meta and LinkedIn ads, company blogs, press releases, and consumer reviews are widely used by major Lithuanian express delivery companies to engage consumers and boost loyalty. These tools enable content sharing, which increases reach and potential loyalty, as confirmed by public statistics. Physical tools include branded vehicles, which attract attention, and word-of-mouth advertising, which spreads trustworthy recommendations based on consumer satisfaction. Public data also supports the effectiveness of these physical tools.*

Marketing tools shape consumer attitudes toward the company's services and help establish a relationship, influencing expectations and driving service engagement.

3. **H3** – Several service factors influence consumer experience, divided into the following sub-hypotheses:
 - 3.1. **H3a:** *Staff quality influences consumer experience.*
 - 3.2. **H3b:** *Price influences consumer experience.*
 - 3.3. **H3c:** *Range of service options influences consumer experience.*
 - 3.4. **H3d:** *Reliability influences consumer experience.*
 - 3.5. **H3e:** *Availability of information influences consumer experience.*
 - 3.6. **H3f:** *Delivery time influences consumer experience.*
 - 3.7. **H3g:** *Delivery assurance influences consumer experience.*

Consumer expectations link marketing to service engagement, influencing whether experiences are positive or negative. These expectations affect both short- and long-term loyalty—for instance, low prices may drive short-term loyalty, while consistent delivery builds long-term loyalty through satisfaction and trust.

4. **H4:** *Consumer experience determines satisfaction with express delivery services. Positive experiences aligned with expectations lead to satisfaction, while unmet expectations may result in dissatisfaction and reduced future engagement.*

5. *H5: Satisfaction determines consumer loyalty to an express delivery company.* A satisfied consumer is more likely to stay loyal, and loyalty suggests the consumer is content with the service, potentially maintaining this relationship over time.
6. Additional hypotheses based on assumptions:
 - 6.1. *H6: IMC directly influences consumer loyalty, independent of consumer experience.*
 - 6.2. *H7: Digital tools independently impact consumer loyalty.*
 - 6.3. *H8: Physical tools independently affect consumer loyalty.*

Empirical research was conducted to test the theoretical model shown in Figure 1. The data collection followed several stages:

- First, an anonymous consumer survey was administered to individuals who have used or currently use express delivery services.
- Second, the internal consistency of questionnaire scales was verified using Cronbach's alpha.
- Third, relationships between hypotheses were analyzed using the Spearman correlation coefficient.
- Fourth, linear regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses and predict values of one variable based on another.

3.2. Study sampling and process

An anonymous survey was conducted among individuals who have used or are currently using express delivery services. When selecting the sample, two key factors were prioritized: ensuring representativeness and minimizing sampling error (Kardelis, 2016).

The research sample was chosen based on specific user criteria:

- Consumers must be permanent residents of Lithuania. This criterion was chosen because the primary language for marketing tools in Lithuania's express delivery industry is Lithuanian. Therefore, individuals most likely to interact with these marketing tools are Lithuanian residents or foreigners with knowledge of the language.
- Consumers must be between 15 and 64 years old. This age range was selected because individuals under 15 typically lack the financial means to use delivery services independently, while those over 64 tend to use them less frequently.

After defining the target consumer population, the total number of potential respondents was determined to be 2,278,258 (Official statistics website, 2023). To ensure the results are as accurate as possible, the Paniott sample determination formula was used, with a 95% reliability and a 5% research error (Kardelis, 2016).

$$n = \frac{1}{\Delta^2 + \frac{1}{N}}, \quad (1)$$

where: n – sample size; Δ^2 – sample error; N – size of the general population.

The Spearman correlation coefficient formula:

$$r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \left(R_{xi} - \frac{n+1}{2} \right) \left(R_{yi} - \frac{n+1}{2} \right)}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n \left(R_{xi} - \frac{n+1}{2} \right)^2} \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n \left(R_{yi} - \frac{n+1}{2} \right)^2}}, \quad (2)$$

where: R_{xi} – x_i rank; R_{yi} – y_i rank; r – correlation coefficient.

Linear regression analysis:

$$Y = a + bX + e, \quad (3)$$

where: Y – dependent variable; a and b – unknown constants; X – explanatory variable; e – residual error.

The study used an anonymous questionnaire conducted via Google Forms, with 402 respondents participating. This method is popular in social sciences for its efficiency, accuracy, and time-saving nature, as well as its adaptability to diverse populations (Bihu, 2021).

The anonymous questionnaire was distributed via social media to Lithuanian residents aged 15–64, specifically targeting relevant audience groups. The survey link was disseminated across various Facebook groups (e.g., those for university students and express delivery service users) and sent directly to individuals actively discussing express delivery companies on social media.

The data collection period ran from July 15, 2024, to November 25, 2024. Out of a target pool of 1,000 potential respondents, 402 completed the questionnaire, resulting in a final response rate of 40.2%.

To enhance response quality, both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions were employed. The Likert scale, which includes five answer options (two positive, one neutral, and two negative), was used to measure consumer attitudes toward marketing tools applied by express delivery companies. Respondents rated their level of agreement using the following scale:

- 5 – Strongly agree.
- 4 – Agree.
- 3 – Neutral.
- 2 – Disagree.
- 1 – Strongly disagree.

By using survey results, this research aimed to provide insights into the marketing tools used by express delivery companies and their impact on consumer attitudes.

To assess the relationships between variables, the Spearman correlation coefficient was used. This statistical measure determines the strength and direction of monotonic relationships between variables (X and Y) and is less sensitive to extreme values because it is based on ordinal data (Yu & Hutson, 2022).

The correlation coefficient value ranges from -1 to 1 , with interpretations as follows:

- -0.3 to 0.3 → Very weak correlation.
- 0.3 to 0.5 (-0.3 to -0.5) → Weak correlation.
- 0.5 to 0.7 (-0.5 to -0.7) → Moderate correlation.
- 0.7 to 0.9 (-0.7 to -0.9) → Strong correlation.
- 0.9 to 1 (-0.9 to -1) → Very strong correlation.

Linear regression analysis was used to predict the values of one variable based on another. Regression analysis is a statistical method for determining predictive relationships within a dataset.

To assess the accuracy of the regression model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is used. R^2 values range from 0 to 1 , with interpretations as follows:

- <0.20 → Model is invalid.
- <0.25 → Model is only suitable in extreme cases.
- 0.89 → Model accurately describes data and is appropriate.

Using these methodologies, survey data were analyzed and insights from scientific literature were examined to validate the study's hypotheses.

3.3. Questionnaire reliability and Shapiro-Wilk normality test

To ensure the reliability of the survey instrument, Cronbach's alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire scales. The reliability coefficient values ranged from 0.901 to 0.923, with an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.929, confirming strong reliability (Table 8).

Table 8. Internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire scales (source: created by the authors)

Scale	Cronbach's alpha
Integrated marketing communication	0.917
Digital tools	0.919
Physical measures	0.922
Marketing factors and consumer expectations	0.923
Consumer experience	0.921
Satisfaction	0.922
Consumer loyalty	0.901

To analyze variable relationships, the Shapiro-Wilk normality test was performed. The results showed that all p -values were <0.05 , which confirmed that the data did not satisfy normality assumptions. As a result, non-parametric statistical methods were used in further analyses (Table 9).

By combining these statistical techniques, the study identified key insights into the role of marketing tools in shaping consumer loyalty in the express delivery sector.

Table 9. Analysis of the normality condition of scale distributions using the Shapiro-Wilk test (source: created by the authors)

Scale	Shapiro-Wilk test statistic	Cronbach's alpha
Integrated marketing communication	0.805	0.917
Digital tools	0.807	0.919
Physical measures	0.825	0.922
Marketing factors and consumer expectations	0.754	0.923
Consumer experience	0.746	0.921
Satisfaction	0.741	0.922
Consumer loyalty	0.880	0.901

4. Results

4.1. Data that distinguishes respondents

The anonymous survey was completed by 402 respondents, which is 18 more than the initially targeted sample. The demographic breakdown of the research sample indicates that 221 respondents (55%) were men, 179 (44.5%) were women, and 2 (0.5%) chose not to disclose their gender. The respondents' ages ranged from 15 to 61 years, with an average age of 35.27 years and a standard deviation of ± 16.39 years. The survey also revealed that the majority of respondents—276 individuals (68.7%)—had attained a higher university education.

Respondents also identified the express delivery service they used most frequently. The rankings were as follows:

- "DPD Lietuva," chosen by 93 respondents (23.1%).
- "Lietuvos paštas," selected by 86 respondents (21.4%).
- "Venipak Lietuva," with 83 respondents (20.6%).
- "Omniva LT," preferred by 82 respondents (20.4%).

The remaining companies were ranked as follows: "DHL Lietuva" was chosen by 24 respondents (6%), "FedEx Express Lithuania" by 18 (4.5%), and "Skubios siuntos" by 16 (4%).

This demographic data is crucial for further research, as it provides valuable insights into consumer preferences and facilitates the examination of relationships between different variables in the study.

4.2. Results of correlation analysis of consumer survey

This section analyzes the relationships between the model variables using the Spearman correlation coefficient. The coefficient, denoted by " r ", measures the strength of the relationship between each variable, allowing for hypothesis testing. For a strong correlation, the value of " r " should be close to -1 or $+1$. Statistical significance, represented by " p ", must be less than 0.01 or 0.05 for a variable to be considered reliable.

The relationship between integrated marketing communication (IMC) and its digital and physical tools was examined. The analysis confirmed the data's reliability, as the statistical significance for each variable was $p < 0.01$. The results indicate a strong relationship between IMC and digital tools ($r = 0.909$) and between IMC and physical tools ($r = 0.880$). Although the relationship with digital tools is slightly stronger, both are essential components of IMC in the express delivery sector.

Further analysis examined the relationship between digital and physical tools with marketing factors and consumer expectations. The correlation results showed statistical significance ($p < 0.01$), indicating relationships between digital and physical tools and various factors, such as service quality, pricing, reliability, and delivery assurance. These findings suggest that marketing tools influence consumer expectations and engagement.

The study also found significant relationships between consumer experience, satisfaction, and consumer loyalty. Strong correlations were observed between consumer experience and satisfaction ($r = 0.950$) and between satisfaction and loyalty ($r = 0.695$). These findings confirm the role of positive consumer experience in fostering long-term consumer relationships.

Overall, the analysis confirmed that all variables are interconnected and play a crucial role in increasing consumer loyalty in the express delivery industry.

4.3. Results of linear regression analysis of consumer survey

In the correlation coefficient analysis, it was determined that the variables are interconnected. Therefore, each variable was retained for the linear regression analysis to investigate the corresponding connections.

After analyzing the correlation data, hypothesis H2 was rejected. This decision was made because the correlation coefficient between marketing tools and consumer loyalty was weak. This result suggests that while marketing tools can stimulate interest in express delivery companies by promoting offers and providing information, the consumer's own expectations, influenced by various marketing factors, are the primary drivers of engagement. Marketing tools thus serve as a transitional factor rather than a direct determinant of loyalty (Boom-Cárcamo

et al., 2024). This finding is consistent across other service sectors, such as food delivery and tourism, where customer experience and satisfaction are the crucial components for loyalty (Ahmed et al., 2024). Based on this, the subsequent analysis separated the direct connection between digital and physical marketing tools and customer experience components.

The linear regression analysis and hypothesis testing were then conducted according to the adjusted model.

H1: Integrated marketing communication is important for the use of digital and physical tools, forming and increasing consumer loyalty.

The analysis indicates a statistically reliable linear relationship ($p < 0.01$). The overall coefficient of determination (r^2) 0.843, signifying a strong relationship between the variables. The unstandardized coefficient (B) of 1.811 and the standardized coefficient (B) of 0.918 confirm that IMC has a positive impact on digital and physical tools. Thus, the hypothesis is confirmed, and IMC is concluded to be important for the effective use of digital and physical tools.

H3a: The quality of staff work determines consumer experience.

The data show a significant linear relationship, with $r^2 = 0.741$. The data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 5.273, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.861, confirming a positive impact. It is concluded that staff quality directly influences consumer experience, which in turn affects satisfaction and loyalty.

H3b: Price determines consumer experience.

A significant linear relationship was identified, with $r^2 = 0.772$. The data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 5.758, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.879. It is concluded that price positively affects consumer experience.

H3c: The number of service options determines consumer experience.

The analysis indicates a significant linear relationship, with $r^2 = 0.755$. The data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 5.312, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.869. It is concluded that the number of service options influences consumer experience during the ordering or fulfillment process.

H3d: Reliability determines consumer experience.

The analysis revealed a significant linear relationship, with $r^2 = 0.778$. The data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 5.426, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.882. It is concluded that reliability influences consumer experience, which in turn promotes satisfaction and loyalty.

H3e: Information accessibility determines consumer experience.

The analysis found a significant linear relationship between information accessibility and consumer experience, with $r^2 = 0.785$. The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 5.448, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.886. The data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). It is concluded that information accessibility affects consumer experience, leading to satisfaction and fostering loyalty.

H3f: Delivery time determines consumer experience.

The results confirm a significant linear relationship, with $r^2 = 0.785$. The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 5.448, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.892. The data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). The results indicate that delivery time impacts consumer experience.

H3g: Delivery assurance determines consumer experience.

The results confirm a significant linear relationship, with $r^2 = 0.753$. The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 5.534, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.868. The regression data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). It is concluded that delivery assurance influences consumer experience.

H4: Consumer experience determines satisfaction.

The results confirm a significant linear relationship between consumer experience and satisfaction, with $r^2 = 0.924$. The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 0.987, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.961. All data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). Based on these results, it is concluded that consumer experience directly determines satisfaction.

H5: Satisfaction determines consumer loyalty.

The results confirm a significant linear relationship between satisfaction and consumer loyalty. The relationship is supported by $r^2 = 0.507$, the unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.880, and the standardized coefficient (B) of 0.712. The data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). The results indicate that satisfaction is a significant determinant of consumer loyalty; however, the lower r^2 value suggests other factors may also influence loyalty.

H6: Integrated marketing communication, together with marketing tools, directly determines consumer loyalty.

The analysis confirmed a significant linear relationship, with $r^2 = 0.685$. The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 0.929, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.828. The data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). Based on the results, it can be stated that IMC not only attracts consumer interest but also directly promotes loyalty.

H7: Digital tools directly determine consumer loyalty to the express delivery company.

A significant linear relationship was determined, with $r^2 = 0.692$. The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 0.912, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.832. The data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). The results indicate that digital tools not only attract consumer interest but also directly enhance loyalty.

H8: Physical tools directly determine consumer loyalty to the express delivery company.

The final hypothesis analysis revealed a significant linear relationship, with $r^2 = 0.642$. The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 0.881, and the standardized coefficient (B) is 0.801. The data are statistically reliable ($p < 0.001$). The results suggest that physical tools encourage consumer interest and directly impact loyalty.

After conducting linear regression analysis for each hypothesis (Figure 2), it was determined that the adjusted model's hypotheses were confirmed and that each variable maintains a linear relationship. The results indicate that digital and physical tools do not directly

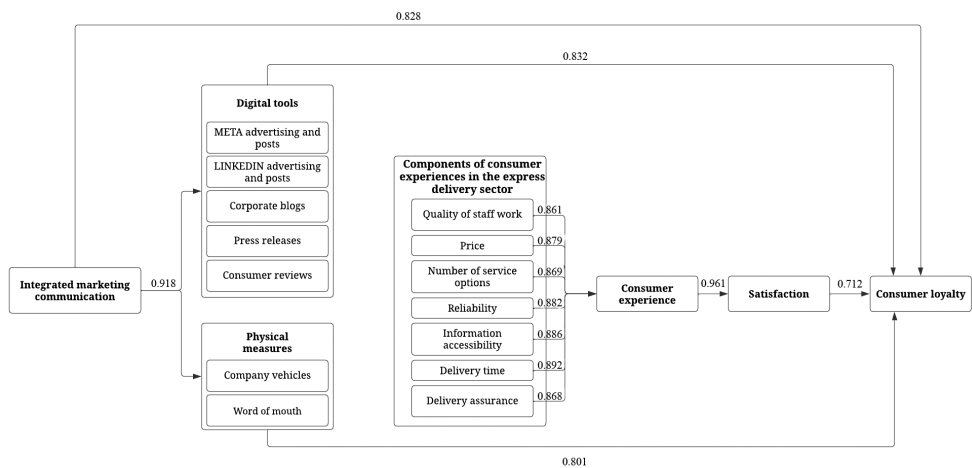


Figure 2. Adjusted model of forming and increasing customer loyalty in the express delivery sector with linear regression results

influence marketing factors and consumer expectations but should still be used to inform consumers about a company's presence. Additionally, the findings highlight four key factors influencing consumer loyalty: integrated marketing communication, digital tools, physical tools, and a combination of marketing factors with consumer expectations, all of which are mediated by consumer experience and satisfaction (Figure 2).

5. Discussion and interpretation of results obtained

5.1. Discussion of key findings

After summarizing the results, the key findings can be divided into two interconnected parts.

An anonymous survey was conducted among consumers of express delivery services, with a total of 402 respondents participating, which exceeded the targeted sample size. Their responses were used to assess the reliability and validity of the collected data. The results demonstrated that consumers are aware of the marketing tools employed by express delivery companies and recognize that these tools influence their loyalty toward a company. By analyzing the overall findings of the study, it was confirmed that the proposed conceptual model is valid and applicable to express delivery companies. Since marketing tools play a significant role in consumer decision-making, they contribute to shaping positive experiences, increasing satisfaction, and ultimately fostering consumer loyalty.

5.2. Interpretation of key findings and propositions

Interpretation of the research

Based on a thorough analysis of each respondent's answers, it was determined that the conceptual model, with appropriate modifications, is suitable for application in the express delivery sector. Regression analysis enabled the assessment of the causal relationships between variables, confirming statistically significant linear influences between:

- Marketing tools and integrated marketing communication.
- Marketing factors and consumer expectations.
- Consumer experience and satisfaction.
- Satisfaction and consumer loyalty.
- Integrated marketing communication and consumer loyalty.
- Digital tools and consumer loyalty.
- Physical tools and consumer loyalty.

Each of these variables plays a crucial role in the conceptual model, offering a pathway to increasing consumer loyalty. A more detailed interpretation is as follows:

- Multiple pathways to consumer loyalty: The model, supported by linear regression analysis, identifies four primary ways to increase consumer loyalty: (1) the direct impact of integrated marketing communication, (2) the impact of digital tools, (3) the impact of physical tools, and (4) the impact of order fulfillment. Lithuanian companies should consider these four methods and select the most suitable approach based on their available resources.
- A holistic approach to customer loyalty: Companies should view the conceptual model as a complete process rather than focusing solely on individual methods. The model begins with integrated marketing communication applied to various marketing tools, which then inform consumers about the company's ability to meet their expectations

(e.g., staff quality, delivery assurance). Following this, consumer experiences influence satisfaction, ultimately leading to consumer loyalty. Understanding this full process allows express delivery companies to optimize their marketing strategies.

Propositions for companies

The primary recommendation for companies is to review their current marketing strategy and the tools they use to achieve their objectives. If the goal is to improve consumer loyalty, companies should consider implementing the proposed model. This implementation should lead to noticeable efficiencies in material and human resources. Additionally, companies should take a gradual approach to applying all four loyalty-building methods, as each method is unique and can independently contribute to increased consumer loyalty.

6. Conclusions

This study provides an overview of marketing in the express delivery sector, focusing on social media, digital, and traditional marketing tools. Based on a literature review, a conceptual model was developed, identifying key factors: integrated marketing communication (IMC), digital and physical tools, consumer experience, satisfaction, and loyalty. Hypotheses were then formulated to examine the relationships between these factors. The study confirms that marketing in this sector integrates these elements to build market presence and foster customer relationships. Effective marketing tools enhance consumer loyalty, which is a unique relationship that turns customers into valuable assets.

An anonymous survey of 402 respondents revealed that marketing tools, along with marketing factors and consumer expectations, significantly impact consumer perceptions, leading to positive experiences, satisfaction, and loyalty. The study's findings confirmed the conceptual model's validity and concluded that IMC is a crucial factor in improving marketing tools and increasing consumer loyalty.

Using correlation coefficient and linear regression analysis, the study confirmed that the variables are interrelated. However, it found that digital and physical tools do not directly impact marketing factors and consumer expectations. Instead, marketing measures either directly influence loyalty or serve as informational tools. The study concludes that consumer loyalty is built through four key approaches: IMC, digital tools, physical tools, and order fulfillment. The model not only helps increase loyalty but also offers a way to refine marketing tools for more effective implementation.

7. Contributions, limitations and future research

The *theoretical significance* of this study lies in its contribution to addressing the scientific problem of increasing consumer loyalty in the express delivery sector. This is highlighted by the development of a new conceptual model of marketing tools, the classification of these tools, and a deeper analysis of their application to improve consumer loyalty.

The *practical significance* is that the findings present new opportunities for both Lithuanian startups and established express delivery companies to enhance consumer loyalty. By applying these results, companies can gain a competitive advantage in the Lithuanian market.

Limitations. While this study discusses all publicly available information, it lacks internal insights that are only accessible within companies. These insights are difficult to obtain, as not all companies are willing to disclose data related to their marketing strategies due to

potential risks to their competitive advantage and profitability. Consequently, this research relies on statistical data and consumer attitudes. Another limitation is the inability to analyze marketing tools that are rarely used or statistically challenging to measure, such as television and radio advertising. Methodological limitations of the online survey include the lack of geographic boundaries, which allows respondents to participate freely and without anticipating the results, and the possibility of unexpected demographic outcomes, which can influence data conclusions. The main shortcomings that may prevent accurate answers are the respondent's failure to fully engage with the survey questions, the distortion of answers, and a reduced ability to provide broad responses to open-ended questions.

Future research. Based on the results of this empirical study, future research could explore various aspects, including:

- Analyzing marketing strategies in different industries to compare their impact on consumer loyalty.
- Expanding the conceptual model by incorporating additional marketing concepts.
- Further investigating the most effective marketing tools for consumer retention.
- Conducting content analyses to assess the effectiveness of marketing messages.
- Examining the real-time application of the conceptual model in express delivery companies.

This research topic and the findings of this study offer significant potential for further exploration. However, the current study has successfully identified key indicators in both the literature and empirical research that contribute to improving consumer loyalty in the express delivery sector.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no financial, professional, or personal interests in any external parties. For legal reasons, it should be noted that Hubert Bocevičius will use this article as part of his application for PhD studies at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University.

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