

Effects of 4Ps Marketing Mix Strategies on Profitability Enhancement of Petroleum Companies in Afghanistan – A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

In the current era of intense rivalry, organizations must develop effective marketing strategies to differentiate themselves and raise awareness about their products or services. The effective execution of optimal marketing mix strategies possesses the capability to augment brand equity as well as establish a formidable competitive position. Unfortunately, the implications of 4Ps marketing mix strategies on the profitability of petroleum businesses (especially automotive fuels and autogas, or LPG) in Afghanistan have received little attention and have not been adequately investigated. The current study sought to determine the effectiveness of 4Ps marketing mix strategies and their relationship to increasing the petroleum company's profitability in Afghanistan. A case study approach was used to evaluate the marketing mix strategies applied by Zhakfar Petroleum, operated by the company Zhakfar Logistics and Services Ltd. Primary and secondary data was collected via personal interviews with the CEO, branch managers, finance managers, and the website of the company. Content analysis was used to evaluate the data obtained from both the survey and the sales data of the company. The research suggested that the company employed various marketing strategies related to "Product", "Price", "Place", and "Promotion", which demonstrated a significant growth rate of 34.51% during three months of marketing campaigns.

Keywords: Marketing mix strategies, fuel industry, competitive advantage, sales performance, Afghanistan

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Introduction

Attraction is one of the fundamental forces of human nature that exists as an inevitable and incomprehensible phenomenon depending on the intrinsic features and attributes that develop among objects, people, or ideas. Armstrong et al. (2014) define marketing as "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large". Moreover, marketing is the art and talent of introducing, creating, and delivering value to specific potential market segments through a variety of activities that aim to build strong customer relationships that lead to boosting sales (Bennett, 1995; Cronje et al., 2007). Marketing starts with attraction, and the alignment of the intrinsic attributes of individuals or groups with the value of products or services will allow enterprises to compete with their competitors by having highly accurate consumer comprehension abilities.

In the business industry, in the contexts of marketing strategy and sales, alignment of the attraction phenomenon with accurate and reliable marketing strategies that address the consumer's intrinsic features and attributes could be a convenient approach to engage. The concept of "Marketing Mix" - first proposed by McCarthy (1964) and sometimes known as the "4Ps of Marketing" – is a method of putting marketing strategies into action (Borden, 1965). The marketing mix, commonly referred to as the 4 Ps, comprises four fundamental components, namely: "Product", "Price", "Place", and "Promotion". These elements have been widely acknowledged as pivotal factors in the formulation of an effective marketing plan (Parment et al. 2021). Furthermore, these factors pertain to the determinations made regarding the product or service being provided, its pricing structure, the channels through which it is distributed, and the promotional strategies employed.

As the marketing environment has undergone a continuous transformation, supplementary components have been recognized to augment the conventional 4Ps framework. In this sense, Booms and Bitner (1981) introduced the 7Ps of the marketing mix (Figure 1), which augments the original framework by integrating People, Process, and Physical Evidence.

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In the context of "People", it is relevant to note that the significance of customer service and the contribution of employees in providing value to customers is a topic of great emphasis among individuals, as highlighted by Gronroos (1994).

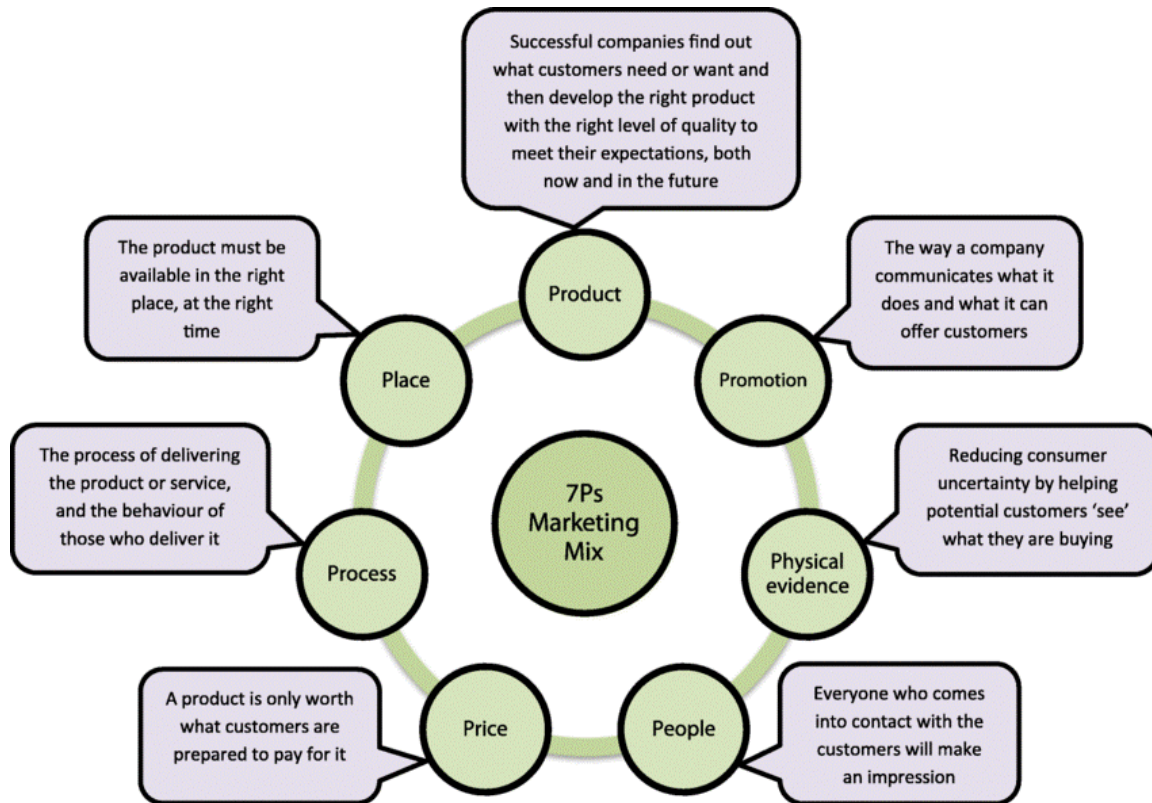


Figure 1. Booms and Bitner's 7Ps marketing mix (Hindi et al., 2019)

The term "Process" pertains to the established protocols and methodologies that regulate the delivery of goods or services, to achieve optimal efficiency and meet the expectations of customers (Zeithaml et al., 1985). According to Bitner (1992), "Physical Evidence" pertains to the concrete elements of the marketing proposition, including packaging, store ambiance, and website layout, that impact customer perceptions and encounters. The integration of supplementary components into the marketing mix enables businesses to embrace a more all-encompassing and consumer-focused strategy, recognizing the importance of individuals, procedures, and tangible evidence in fulfilling customer demands and cultivating enduring connections (Gronroos, 1994; Zeithaml et al., 1985). The marketing mix has had a significant impact on the evolution of both marketing theory and practice (Möller, 2006). Nevertheless, the marketing aspect of the mix's various elements has the potential to alter a company's competitive position (Gronroos, 1994) as well as increase customer satisfaction, and when designed accurately, it provides great sales, profits, and market share (Turner and Spencer, 1997).

The phenomenon of competition within industries is both ubiquitous and dynamic, necessitating companies to consistently pursue a competitive advantage. According to Kotler et al. (2003), a company's marketing mix integration of its "Product", "Price", "Place", and "Promotion" elements is a crucial factor in determining its competitive position. The component of the marketing mix known as "Product" pertains to the process of conceptualizing, creating, and distributing goods or services that align with the demands and inclinations of the target market. In this regard, the most effective approach to surpassing competitors is by providing exceptional products or services (Kotler et al., 2003). This is because by understanding the needs of their clientele and adjusting their merchandise accordingly, companies can establish a unique identity in the industry and attract customers.

The "Pricing" strategy, which is one of the essential components of the marketing mix, has a considerable impact on a firm's competitive position. Determining the appropriate price necessitates the contemplation of multiple factors, including expenses incurred during production, pricing strategies employed by competitors, and the subjective evaluation of the product's worth by the consumer. Therefore, a meticulously crafted pricing strategy can aid organizations in positioning themselves as providers of exceptional value or catering to distinct market segments. Porter (2011) highlights that the crux of strategy lies in the act of selecting what actions to avoid. In this sense, the determination of pricing becomes a crucial aspect in establishing a company's target market and differentiation strategy. On the other hand, the "Place" component of the marketing mix pertains to the strategic selection of suitable distribution channels and the assurance of product accessibility to the target market. To remain competitive in

the marketplace, companies must evaluate a range of factors, including geographic coverage, channel intermediaries, and customer convenience.

Eventually, the “Promotional” element of the marketing mix serves to enhance consumer awareness of the products, resulting in increased sales and fostering brand loyalty (Işoraitë, 2016). Organizations must devise efficacious promotional strategies to distinguish themselves and generate awareness regarding their offerings. The implementation of efficient promotional tactics and strategies has the potential to enhance brand equity and establish a robust competitive stance. Therefore, by correctly and accurately implementing the marketing mix strategies, firms will be able to execute their respective business goals in their intended core markets and so accomplish the goals of the organization. One of the best ways to ensure that the firm’s existing resources are used effectively is to employ and consider the correct product at the correct place with the correct price and promotion.

Organizational Sales Performance

In literature, scholars have identified various levels of performance based on the research objective. These levels include operating performance, as demonstrated by Jaworski and Kohli (1993), and financial performance, as exemplified by Zahra and Covin (1995). The complexity of differentiating industries and profit models poses a challenge in establishing a universal metric for evaluating organizational performance. The assessment of performance ought to be predicated upon distinct objectives and employ diverse indicators of performance. In this regard, some scholars asserted that the evaluation of performance is contingent upon the contextual factors of the environment, strategies, and objectives. Nevertheless, the 4Ps of the marketing mix are integral components that contribute to the achievement of a company’s goals and objectives. Numerous studies in literature and incredible sources offer perspectives on the characterization and evaluation of sales performance. According to Ingram et al. (2015), sales performance can be defined as the achievement of sales objectives and the fulfillment of quotas or targets set for a specific period. Organizational sales performance pertains to the assessment and quantification of the efficacy and productivity of sales operations within a given entity. The process entails evaluating the efficacy of sales teams or individual sales representatives in meeting the organization’s sales objectives and benchmarks.

The trend of internal mobility strategies, which involve the transfer of personnel across various positions or departments within a company, has been demonstrated to yield notable outcomes in terms of organizational sales performance. Although there may be a limitation to studies that establish a direct correlation between internal mobility and sales performance, extensive research on talent management, employee development, and organizational performance can offer significant perspectives. In this regard, a study was conducted by Benson et al., (2020) to create and evaluate an empirical framework for analyzing the difference in performance levels between internally and externally hired employees evaluating the internal mobility strategy within firms. The framework utilized human capital theory, contextual learning theory, and theories of commitment to analyze employee productivity and retention. The human capital theory predicted that employees hired internally would immediately be more productive than those hired from the outside. Moreover, it was hypothesized through contextual learning that employees promoted from within the company will gradually become more productive over time. Finally, theories of commitment, which had not been researched in this field, suggested that internal advancement would boost retention among strong performers, leading to "positive retention." This area had not been extensively researched.

Benson et al. (2020) utilized a comprehensive empirical framework to investigate these mechanisms, and it concentrated on a shop that had 109,063 commissioned salespeople and 12,931 managers as its subjects. The research led to the conclusion that positive retention was the primary factor responsible for the performance disparity that was spotted in this environment. It is interesting to note that high-performing employees who were hired internally often left for reasons that had nothing to do with their jobs or possibilities for promotion. The significance of internal advancement as a strategy for maintaining outstanding achievers was illuminated by this study. It brought to light the fact that analyzing performance and retention separately may result in an underestimation of the significance of internal promotion in terms of retaining talented people. Organizations can establish methods to improve employee productivity, increase retention rates, and make the most of the benefits of internal advancement programs if they first understand the elements that contribute to positive retention and then make use of this knowledge.

Organizational performance can be evaluated based on the effectiveness of a company’s utilization of marketing mix strategies, which enable businesses to increase profits and improve social benefits. In the current study, to measure organizational performance, the focal point of the conceptual framework is broken into three variables: the 4Ps of the marketing mix as independent variables; policies, rivalry, and financial resources as intervening variables; and sales performance as dependent variables (Gora et al., 2020) (Figure 2).

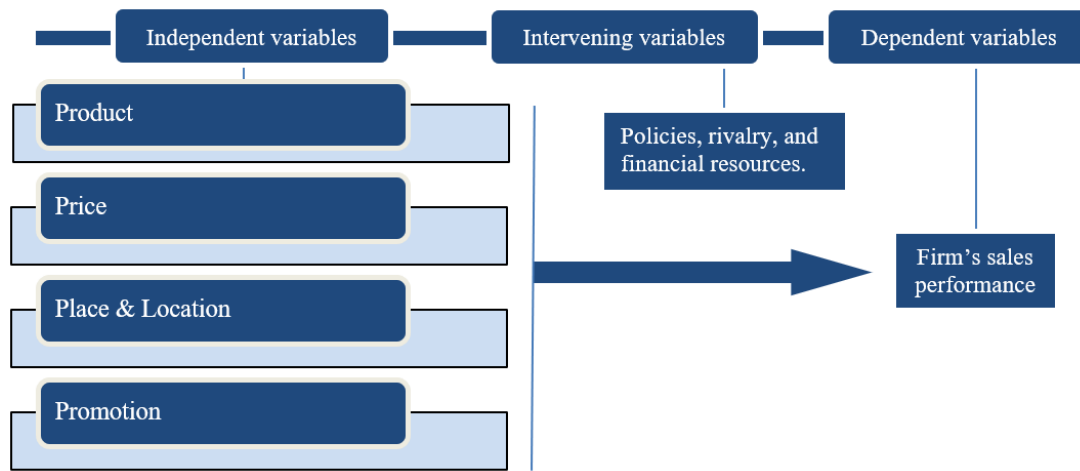


Figure 2. A conceptual framework of 4ps of marketing mix elements; having an impact on the sales performance of enterprises (Gora et al., 2020)

Afghan Petroleum Industry

In comparison to numerous other nations, Afghanistan’s petroleum industry is inadequately developed. The nation possesses a certain amount of petroleum reserves (Ulmishek, 2004). However, the exploration and extraction of these resources face significant obstacles due to persistent conflicts and inadequate infrastructure. Nevertheless, the competitive landscape in Afghanistan’s petroleum industry is crucial for its future advancement and financial expansion. At present, Afghanistan heavily relies on imported petroleum to meet its energy requirements. The nation procures processed petroleum commodities, including gasoline, diesel, and aviation fuel, with most of these imports coming from Central Asia in the northern region, Iran in the western region, and Pakistan in the southern and eastern regions (Rahmaty et al., 2020).

The focal point of competition in Afghanistan’s petroleum industry is centered on the acquisition of exploration rights and investment prospects. According to a report by Pajhwok (2020), there has been a notable expression of interest from various multinational corporations in investing in Afghanistan’s petroleum industry. The primary objective of these firms is to obtain exploration licenses and establish production facilities.

To stimulate investment and foster competition, it is important that enterprises accurately engage in marketing mix strategies. However, the implications of 4Ps marketing mix strategies on the profitability of petroleum businesses (especially automotive fuels and Autogas, or LPG) in Afghanistan have received little attention and have not been adequately investigated. Therefore, this research is motivated by this information gap. Moreover, the overarching goal of this study is to investigate how the 4Ps of marketing strategies might be engaged to boost the profitability of petroleum firms in Samangan province of Afghanistan, involving Zhakfar Petroleum Company Ltd. as a case study. Finally, the main contribution of this study is (i) to develop a theoretical framework on the subject to be used (ii) as a guide by the local industry, and (iii) as literature by other researchers on marketing mix strategies implementations in Afghanistan.

Resource-based and Competence-based Theories

This study is based on two theoretical frameworks, namely Resource-based Theory and Competence-based Theory. Resource-based Theory view posits the proficient and optimal utilization of a firm’s resources which is considered crucial in establishing a durable competitive edge. Porter (2011) highlights the significance of a firm’s resources as a determining factor in the competitive advantage of firms within the industry. The use of Resource-based Theory (RBT) in the field of marketing research has seen a significant increase of over 500% over the past decade, demonstrating its critical role as a conceptual framework for illuminating and predicting competitive advantages and performance outcomes (Kozlenkova et al., 2014). Besides this, over the past decades, scientists have made several changes to theory, using terminology such as resources, capabilities, assets, and "competencies" to describe the factors that affect a firm’s competitiveness.

Competence-based Theory is a comprehensive strategy theory that encompasses economic, organizational, and behavioral considerations within a dynamic, systemic, cognitive, and holistic framework (Sanchez and Heene, 2004). According to this theoretical framework, a company’s capacity is established on its core competencies, which are not attainable by its competitors. These competencies generate greater profits, thereby serving as the foundation for the firm’s overall performance (Prescott et al., 2002). One of the fundamental distinctions between the resource-based view and the competence-based view pertains to the

causal relationship between the two. While the resource-based perspective posits that variances in performance among firms can be attributed to their possession of superior resources, the competence-based outlook favors a more nuanced rationale (Freiling, 2004). This theory plays a significant role in assessing a firm's competitiveness and sales, which align with customers' perceptions, enhancing their overall market performance (Lovelock and Yip, 1996). Therefore, this theory can be readily applied to a company's capacity to analyze the ever-changing business landscape and formulate tactics for its sustenance.

This research sought to determine the effectiveness of 4Ps marketing mix strategies and their relationship to increasing a company's profitability. Finally, the main contribution of this study is the development of a theoretical framework on the subject to be used (i) as a guide by the local industry, and (ii) as literature by other researchers in the area of marketing in Afghanistan.

Literature Review

Afghan Petroleum Industry

The import market for petroleum fuels is significant in all regions of Afghanistan, particularly in metropolitan regions. The country imports fuel through eight ports (Shir Khan, Heiratan, Akina, Turgundi, Islam Qala, Zaranj, Spenboldak, and Turkham) from Central Asia countries Iran and Pakistan. In comparison to other countries, Afghanistan has a low level of demand for petroleum fuels, however, demand has increased since 2002 (Paterson, 2005). The statistics show that Afghanistan imported 566,873 tonnes of petrol, 951,910 tonnes of diesel, and 623,257 tonnes of LPG from Central Asia and Iran in 2016 (Khalazaie 2019). Paterson, (2005) indicates that Afghanistan is particularly subjected to worldwide petrol price fluctuations due to long distances and transport challenges which contribute to the cost of imports. Therefore, it will not be lacking in importance to consider the function of the 4Ps marketing mix, which enables the companies to determine and perceive the nature, way, conditions, and interaction among the marketing mix elements with the environmental situations under different circumstances (Jain and Punj, 2002).

Main Concepts of Marketing Mix

Marketing mix strategies help customers grasp what the product or service has to offer and aid in the planning of a successful product offering, as well as the conception, development, and implementation of effective marketing strategies that enable organizations to capitalize on their strengths while avoiding unneeded expenditures. Therefore, the influence of marketing mix elements in various industries using different methodologies has been reported in the literature. For instance, Srisorn, et al. (2019) used survey research as well as Yamane's formula¹ method to investigate the effect of the marketing mix on purchasing behavior of customers. They have found that by evaluating each item of the marketing mix in the selected locations, the "Product" strategy scored the highest. In contrast, the promotional strategy was calculated at the lowest. The demographic characteristics revealed a statistically significant relationship with the buying behavior of consumers, and that the average monthly income has a link with the buying behavior in all dimensions.

In the study conducted by Rahman et al. (2019), convenience sampling was employed as a sampling technique. Convenience sampling involves selecting samples that are easily accessible or readily available within a specific geographic location or online platform (Edgar et al., 2017). In their research, Rahman et al. (2019) focused on exploring the relationship between the effect of service marketing mix elements and tourist satisfaction, using a national museum as a case study. They utilized a structured questionnaire to collect data from conveniently available participants, allowing them to gain insights into the specific context of the museum and its impact on tourist satisfaction. This approach facilitated the gathering of relevant information within the constraints of the study's scope and resources. Several statistical analysis approaches were used, including descriptive, correlation, regression, and ANOVA. Finally, the study discovered a positive linear link between all factors and tourist satisfaction, apart from promotional activities. They highlight a paper novelty that stands for the display of the outcomes of visitor contentment and discontent for the guidance of decision-makers and to keep the emphasis on promotional operations.

Rahman et al. (2019) investigated the correlation between the service marketing mix and the level of contentment experienced by tourists. Their respective outcomes indicate a positive linear correlation between tourist satisfaction and all variables, apart from promotional activities. The study made a novel contribution by showcasing the implications of tourist contentment and discontentment, thereby providing valuable insights for policymakers. Additionally, the research underscored the significance of prioritizing promotional endeavors to enhance overall results within the framework of tourist contentment.

The research presented by Niazi et al. (2021) endeavored to investigate the correlation between the elements of the marketing mix,

¹ Taro Yamane, a mathematical statistician, established a formula for predicting or calculating sample size in relation to the population under investigation, allowing survey findings and results to be applied to the entire population from which the sample was collected. The formula is $n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$; the variable "n" denotes the size of the sample. The variable "N" denotes the population being examined, while the variable "e" represents the margin of error.

namely “Product”, “Price”, “Place”, and “Promotion” (commonly referred to as the 4Ps), and the construct of brand equity. Their study’s conceptual framework is founded on prior research conducted by Yoo et al. (2000), which delved into the various aspects of brand equity in connection with the marketing mix. The researcher has identified that the correlation between brand equity and brand loyalty is the most robust, whereas the relationship between brand equity and perceived quality is comparatively weaker. Their study offers significant implications for brand and marketing managers, emphasizing the significance of comprehending the interrelationship between the various dimensions of brand equity and the four fundamental elements of the marketing mix, commonly known as the 4Ps. The results of their study provide valuable insights for managers to make informed strategic decisions, highlighting the importance of adopting a long-term perspective toward marketing initiatives to establish and enhance brand equity.

Numerous studies, both domestic and global in scope, have been conducted to investigate the correlation between marketing strategies and organizational performance. Khan et al. (2012) conducted research on the adaptation of the Marketing Mix Strategy by a retail organization in response to the global economic downturn. The research revealed that Woolworths modified its marketing mix strategy in reaction to the worldwide economic recession. The impact of marketing mix elements on organizational performance remains uncertain based on the results of the study. On the other hand, the study conducted by Yasanallah and Bidram (2012) examined the current state of the Marketing Mix (7Ps) within consumer cooperatives. The study’s objective was to evaluate seven hypotheses using a one-sample t-test. They confirmed the hypotheses about price, location, promotion, product, operation management, and physical assets, which indicated a below-average status of these elements. The sole hypothesis that was deemed invalid pertained to the personnel component.

Terho et al. (2015) investigated the potential benefits and importance of sales strategy within the business-to-business marketing field and the dearth of research regarding its execution and influence on performance. This study employs a comprehensive sample size of 816 salespeople and directors from 30 sales organizations to investigate the correlation between sales strategy and selling performance. The study employs multilevel structural equation modeling to elucidate the causal pathway connecting sales strategy as an organizational construct to the performance of individual salespersons. The results of the study indicate that the sales strategy employed by a company has a significant impact on its market performance as well as having both direct and indirect effects on the performance of its salespeople. Furthermore, the research reveals that each aspect of sales strategy, namely segmentation, prioritization, and selling models, exerts a distinct influence on the performance of salespersons. The impact of segmentation on selling performance is direct, whereas the influence of prioritization and selling models is indirect, as they affect customer orientation and value-based selling. The findings presented in their study provide valuable insights that can be applied to enhance the implementation of sales strategies in business markets.

Sales teams in various industries have increasingly assumed a strategic role to gain a competitive edge. In contrast to marketing skills, sales capabilities have received comparatively less attention in terms of conceptual and empirical research. To address this gap, the paper by Guenzi et al. investigated the potential impact of the dual mechanisms of sales capabilities on organizational performance. Their respective study discussed the distinction between sales force management capabilities and personal selling capabilities, examined the interplay between these two factors, and assessed their collective impact on business performance. Based on their research findings, it has been determined that sales capabilities play a significant role in enhancing performance through two distinct mechanisms. Firstly, sales capabilities directly contribute to performance by enhancing the overall structure of the sales force. Secondly, sales capabilities indirectly impact performance by leveraging the proficiency of personal selling skills. They strongly emphasized that this can be achieved through the cultivation of sales talent and the effective targeting of clients. Nevertheless, this study contributes significant insights to the existing scholarly literature on sales and capabilities, as well as their association with business performance, through the experimental establishment, identification, and validation of sales force management and personal selling capability.

The study carried out by Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al., (2009) investigated the potential advantages that businesses may experience by enhancing collaboration between sales and marketing departments, with a particular focus on market orientation and firm performance. This research examines the influence of market intelligence systems and management attitudes toward coordination on the level of market orientation and collaboration between sales and marketing. Their research entails conducting a survey among senior executives employed by prominent business-to-business organizations in the United Kingdom, spanning diverse sectors. Their findings suggest a correlation between market intelligence systems, management’s attitude towards coordination, and the level of collaboration between sales and marketing. Furthermore, the empirical evidence indicates that the synergy between sales and marketing departments exerts a positive and statistically significant impact on both market orientation and business performance.

Rouziès et al. (2014) apply social capital theory to explore the marketing and sales interface as a network of links between separate groups of people. The objective of their study was to investigate the role that cross-functional interactions play in fostering the development of social capital, which is an essential component in the production of value. The results of this research show that the social capital that is ingrained in the connections that are formed via marketing and sales can have varying effects on the success of a company, depending on the characteristics of the customers that the firm serves. According to their findings, it is

revealed that it is essential to successfully manage the interface between marketing and sales for a company to achieve satisfactory performance outcomes. This is especially true when the company is dealing with varying degrees of customer focus. This indicates that it is essential to have a solid understanding of and make effective use of the interactions that take place between the marketing and sales teams to improve performance results in a variety of client contexts. Nevertheless, their study endeavors to show that by recognizing the significance of social capital and adjusting their business strategies in response to this awareness, companies may improve their ability to produce value and achieve the levels of performance they have set for themselves.

According to Kanten et al., (2017), the marketing strategy has substantial positive effects on customer satisfaction but negligible negative effects on business performance. The primary objective of their study was to investigate the correlation between consumer behavior, marketing strategy, customer satisfaction, and business performance. The research employed a sample size of 171 participants who resided in Villa units and Hotels under the management of Alpha Hotel Management in Bali, Indonesia. The process of data collection encompassed the utilization of questionnaires, with a combination of purposive and accidental sampling techniques being implemented. Furthermore, a quantitative methodology was adopted utilizing Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis conducted using AMOS software.

Kanten et al., (2017) indicate that consumer behavior exerts a favorable and substantial influence on both marketing strategy and customer satisfaction while demonstrating a lack of significance about business performance. Moreover, the study revealed that the marketing strategy had a statistically significant and positive effect on customer satisfaction, while its impact on business performance was statistically insignificant and negative. In contrast, it can be observed that customer satisfaction exerts a noteworthy and favorable impact on the overall performance of a business. Additionally, the research underscored the interplay between marketing strategy and customer satisfaction in bolstering the influence of consumer behavior on organizational outcomes. Kanten et al., (2017) concluded that to enhance business performance, marketers should consider a comprehensive range of variables, including consumer behavior, marketing strategy, and customer satisfaction, rather than exclusively concentrating on marketing strategy. They emphasize that the prioritization of customer satisfaction at the highest level is crucial to achieving optimal business performance. The authors further recommend that future research employ a comparable methodology but with a broader population and larger sample sizes. Additionally, it is advised to include supplementary variables and indicators to enhance the comprehensiveness of the study.

According to Banerjee et al. (2019), companies that participate in personal selling in both business-to-business and retail markets frequently dedicate substantial portions of their marketing budgets to generating leads through marketing agents and converting them into sales through sales representatives. Nevertheless, the arrangement of the marketing-sales interface is often considered inefficient as a result of the multi-channel attribution problem. To tackle this matter in their study, the utilization of analytical models is employed to ascertain the most advantageous designs for sales compensation, and to resolve the complexities presented by multi-channel attribution. Their research findings suggest that contracts that include revenue incentives, lead qualification, and sales automation have distinct trade-offs when it comes to optimizing profits. Moreover, they suggest that the presence of a disparity between the optimal profit and the realized profit can be attributed to a range of factors, including financial limitations, expenses related to lead qualification, and the sales team's restricted proficiency in marketing.

Banerjee et al. (2019) findings indicate that a higher level of aversion to risk tends to support the use of contracts that involve sales automation and lead qualification rather than revenue incentive contracts. Moreover, a greater degree of uncertainty in general tends to promote the adoption of lead qualification contracts. It is noteworthy that a specific form of remuneration system, namely a contest-based pay structure such as stack ranking, has been observed to attain the optimal profit outcome under conditions of moderate uncertainty. Their findings also provide valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of sales compensation design and offer guidance for organizations aiming to enhance their marketing and sales strategies amidst the challenges posed by multi-channel attribution.

The study by Thanabordeekij et al., (2020) tried to assess the relationship between marketing elements ("Product", "Price", "Place", and "Promotion"), brand image, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty within the domestic Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) market in Thailand. The primary area of interest for their inquiry was the Thai market. The study employed a quantitative research approach, and the results were validated by linear regression analysis. The survey encompassed the feedback provided by a collective of 400 individuals who possessed previous experience in the acquisition, transportation, and utilization of LPG cooking utensils. The study's findings indicate that the product dimension of the variables had a positive impact on customer loyalty. Additional factors that had a positive impact on customer loyalty included the perception of the brand and the level of customer satisfaction. The study's respected findings provide valuable insights for companies that are engaged in the LPG cooking gas industry in Thailand. Through the consideration of their findings, companies could be able to have the capability to develop effective marketing strategies that can enhance customer satisfaction and foster customer loyalty.

In contemporary society, characterized by its reliance on information and knowledge, it is commonplace for businesses to possess a human resources management system of some kind Mihalcea, A. D. (2015). In this regard the paper by Mihalcea, A. D.

(2015) endeavors that the employees' ability to adapt, effectively promote themselves, market ideas and initiatives, and generate sales are the key factors that differentiate the organization from its rivals. This study aimed to examine the relationship between marketing and human resources within the dynamic and complex oil and gas industry. This analysis delves into the significance and implications of the 4Ps framework ("Product", "Price", "Place", and "Promotion") and examines how employees can utilize these elements in their professional endeavors to establish a distinctive position for their organization within a society that values knowledge. This study specifically investigates the application of the 4Ps framework by employees in their respective work contexts. Organizations operating within the oil and gas industry can enhance their competitive advantage in a highly competitive environment by effectively leveraging the skills and capabilities of their workforce, through a comprehensive understanding of the interrelationship between marketing strategies and human resources policies.

The purpose of the study conducted by Sam (2017) was to investigate the impact that different marketing mix techniques have, both positively and negatively, on the profitability of businesses operating in the automotive industry in France. The purpose of this study is to uncover the determinants of effective marketing mix strategies and analyze the interaction among key factors. This will be accomplished by creating a link between the efforts that are put into implementing marketing mix strategies and the actual outcomes that they produce in this sector. These insights will help to gain a better knowledge of the automotive industry as a whole and indicate areas in which adjustments may be essential. The research makes use of secondary data gleaned from articles and studies that concentrate on the automotive sector on a worldwide scale as well as more particularly in France.

The product dimension is assessed by the number of models produced by each automaker that are included on the list of the top one hundred most desired automobiles in a certain year. Estimating the price dimension requires using the median price of passenger automobiles broken down by manufacturer. The amount of money spent on advertisements may be used as a proxy for the promotion dimension, while the number of principal dealerships present in France can be used to approximate the location dimension. According to the data, product, pricing, and marketing are the most important aspects for automakers to think about, but the place element requires extensive examination before judgments can be made. This research offers helpful insights for businesses operating in the automotive industry, assisting such businesses in making educated decisions concerning the marketing mix tactics they employ to increase their profitability.

According to the study of Singh, (2012), to develop strategic decisions that might lead to a competitive advantage, it is necessary to take these aspects into consideration, namely the product, the price, the location, and the promotion. The purpose of this article is to highlight the significance of the link that exists between the various components of the marketing mix to achieve a competitive advantage in the market. Both the product marketing mix and the service marketing mix are included in what is referred to as the "marketing mix." Considerations including "Product," "Price", "Place", and "Promotion" are included in the "Product" marketing mix, which is most used for movable, material items. On the other side, the essential variables in the product marketing mix for services are the people, the processes, and the physical proof.

After Neil H. Borden released his essay on the topic in 1964, the notion that would later be known as the "marketing mix" became more well-known. The marketing mix consists of four distinct factors, each of which is of equal importance. The first thing that must be done is to create a product strategy that details the primary, secondary, and tertiary features of the product. Price-related choices, such as maintaining consistent pricing throughout all markets or differentiating prices for specific regions, also play an extremely important part. The third factor, "Place," refers to the decisions that are made regarding the locations at which the product will be marketed. Decisions on "promotion" center on tactics that may be used to boost sales. The marketing mix is comprised of judgments on the availability of products at a range of prices, with consideration given to the possibility of price differences across various markets. When developing a suitable marketing mix for a product, managers of marketing must take into account a variety of aspects that are grouped under the heading of the "4 Ps."

In the study of Habibi et al., (2023), validated methods were used to develop the possibility of marketing mix integration based on industrial customer behavior. This research was conducted to develop a model for an integrated marketing mix that could be adapted to the preferences of industrial customers in the market for oil products. The sample comprised fifteen professionals and managers working in the oil business, all of whom had been chosen using methodical procedures. To collect data for this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted, and that material was subsequently analyzed utilizing grounded theory using axial, selective, and open coding procedures. The model that was developed consequently serves as a model for an integrated marketing mix that is based on the behavior of industrial customers. The findings of their study underscore how important it is for industry managers to carefully analyze all the categories and subcategories that were identified in this study and to acquire sufficient knowledge about them to establish an efficient integrated marketing mix. In addition, the research highlights how important it is to concentrate on the development of an integrated marketing mix that is especially suited for the actions of industrial customers. These insights offer helpful direction for industry practitioners who are looking to optimize their marketing strategies and efficiently respond to the requirements of industrial clients in the market for oil products.

The field of global marketing presents challenges that stem from the distinct characteristics of various markets. The distin-

guishing features between developed and emerging countries are attributed to several factors like market heterogeneity, unbranded competition, resource infrastructure availability, and sociopolitical governance, respectively. In this regard, an investigation of the relationship between marketing mix and brand sales in global markets, with a focus on the contingent role of country-market characteristics was conducted by Bahadir et al. (2015). Their research endeavored to investigate the impact of country-market characteristics on the association between diverse constituents of the marketing mix and brand sales. The study employs a hierarchical linear model and panel data obtained from 14 markets, which collectively account for 62% of the global GDP. Their findings revealed that the interplay between country-market characteristics and the relationship under investigation is moderated, with asymmetrical effects. Pointing out that in developed countries, brand sales are more influenced by distribution and price, whereas in emerging markets, product innovation and advertising have a notably greater impact. The respected outcomes of their study emphasize the significance of implementing a contingency approach to marketing strategy within the worldwide market.

Damirchi et al. (2011) investigated the potential benefits of the Islamic marketing mix according to the notion of Islamic marketing and its relevance as an economic establishment. This study delves into the diverse array of instruments that have the potential to impact consumers and foster triumph in commercial enterprises. Furthermore, the research incorporates the marketing mix, encompassing the mix's Product element as Customer Value, considering "Price" as Cost, "Place" as Convenience, and "Promotion" as Communication, within the context of the Holy Quran and Islamic Laws. They point out that the utilization of the "4Cs" in lieu of the "4 Ps" is not a mere semantic exercise. However, the rationale for this practice is to prompt individuals to adopt a further understanding of customer-centric perspective and view things from the vantage side of their customers.

The objective of the study conducted by Keramati et al., (2012) was to examine the correlation between the marketing mix and sales performance within the specific context of privately-owned steel companies in Iran. Furthermore, the study aimed to ascertain the specific amalgamation of marketing mix elements that exerted the most significant influence on enhancing sales performance. A model was constructed and subsequently evaluated through the implementation of a survey methodology that relied on a validated questionnaire. Data was collected from a sample of senior executives and marketing professionals through the administration of a survey. The findings comprehensively analyzed and substantiated the presence of a correlation between the marketing mix and sales performance. Hence, it is imperative to consider the generalizability of these findings. This study conducted the initial empirical investigation into the relationship between marketing mix and sales performance within the Iranian steel market. Hence, the study presented in the paper focused on an unexplored empirical domain.

Palmatier et al., (2019) mentioned that the field of marketing has witnessed substantial expansion in terms of data, frameworks, and analyses that have empowered marketers to formulate and execute efficacious strategies. Nevertheless, the abundance and intricacy of these resources may present potential challenges in the process of strategy formulation. In this regard, their article presents a concise and efficient framework for making marketing strategy decisions and the corresponding tools. The framework was established upon four fundamental assumptions or first principles, which were deemed essential for the efficacy of marketing strategies. The aforementioned principles can be outlined as follows: (1) Variations are observed among customers, (2) customers experience changes over time, (3) competitors react to these changes, and (4) there are limitations on available resources. By conducting a comprehensive examination of prior marketing research about the four principles, the article effectively showcased the potential application of existing analyses and frameworks in facilitating strategic decision-making that aligns with each principle. The authors additionally offered theoretical perspectives on the interconnectedness of these four principles, outlining a logical progression that informs the formulation and execution of marketing strategies.

Arif, (2022) investigated the influence of marketing mix on online business through a case study. It is mentioned in the study that the rise in popularity of online business has been observed since the onset of the twenty-first century. Especially amidst the pandemic, online commerce emerged as a crucial means of sustenance for individuals. Despite the gradual adaptation of individuals to the pandemic, online business continued to play a crucial role in daily life. Therefore, the necessity of conducting academic research has become crucial to enhance the efficacy of online business for both sellers and buyers. The objective of their study was to investigate the influence of Marketing Mix components on the online business sector in Sylhet City. Data was collected by administering a mixed questionnaire to members of different online business groups. The survey was completed by a total of 256 participants. The results of the study revealed that the various components of the Marketing Mix exerted a noteworthy influence on the performance of online enterprises.

Londhe, (2014) investigated the potential role of marketing mix for the next generation. He mentioned that over the last few decades, there have been significant shifts in the components that comprise the marketing mix. Everyone who was a part of the marketing process initially made achieving "Value" their top priority when they set out on their quest for an objective. Customers took an active role in the marketing process by actively looking for enhanced value propositions that would maximize the return on their financial investments. This put a significant emphasis on the concept of "Value to the Customer." The "valued customer" is given the utmost importance by marketers, and they work hard to derive value from the companies they work for, which is commonly referred to as "Value to the Marketer." The consideration of "Value to Society" is a concept that is important to both customers and marketers, and both groups have the same overarching goal of putting the welfare of society first. Although it is

still in its conceptual stage, the novel marketing mix model provides answers to several unresolved questions that contemporary marketers face but that traditional marketing mix theories are unable to address.

Varadarajan and Yadav (2009) investigated the role of marketing mix from a digital perspective including the initial decade of the Journal of Innovative Management (JIM), followed by a prospective examination of the forthcoming ten years. This retrospective analysis was undertaken to examine the developments of the previous decade that prompted businesses to reassess and adopt substantial modifications in their marketing strategies. The advancements encompassed the expeditious expansion of the Internet, the conversion of information products into digital formats, and the conversion of the informational characteristics of non-information products into digital forms. The evaluation centered on the examination of prior research about marketing strategy within the context of an Internet-enabled environment. More specifically, the analysis focused on scrutinizing publications from previous editions of the Journal of Interactive Marketing (JIM). Furthermore, the authors provided conjectures regarding the prospective developments of interactive marketing about marketing practice, marketing research, and marketing education. The review provided evidence that the Internet has already resulted in significant changes in marketing strategy and operations. It has been projected that shortly, the integration and interdependence of marketing strategy and operations will intensify within the market environment facilitated by the Internet.

The study of Candemir et al., (2011) investigates the influence of Internet utilization on the global economy, with a specific focus on developing nations such as Turkey. Despite the prevalence of sophisticated online business transactions and models enabled by the Internet, there is a notable dearth of comprehensive analyses about the efficient utilization of websites for marketing mix strategies in Turkey. This underscores the necessity for additional research to guide companies and institutions in enhancing their marketing endeavors via this emerging platform, which has become an indispensable prerequisite for contemporary business models in the current era. This study aimed to examine the utilization of marketing mix tools on Turkish websites owned by the top 1000 companies, as reported in the survey conducted by the Istanbul Chamber of Industry (ICI) in 2010. The study's findings indicate that the incorporation of Internet resources in marketing mix strategies was insufficient, as certain companies did not fully capitalize on the available opportunities due to ineffective corporate websites.

Marketing Mix Strategies

In the scope of business and strategic management, Campbell et al. (2002) define strategies as the collection of theoretical constructs, conceptual frameworks, practical methodologies, and analytical instruments that aim to elucidate the determinants of organizational performance and aid executives in strategic cognition, planning, and implementation. In essence, it is a mechanism by which a business can evaluate historical outcomes and, crucially, establish forthcoming measures aimed at attaining and maintaining exceptional outcomes. Nagle & Holden (2012) posit that strategy constitutes a fundamental concept within the domain of strategic management. Nevertheless, the marketing mix refers to a set of controllable variables that a marketing manager can utilize to meet the needs and wants of a specific target market (McCarthy, J. 1964). Thus, marketing mix strategies and efforts have the potential to respond to the enterprise's influence and the necessities of their target markets, as well as enable firms to focus on understanding their consumers' wants and developing further strategies accordingly.

Product Strategy

A product can be defined as an object or item produced or manufactured by enterprises that fulfill a distinct function or meet a specific demand or desire of individuals or groups. It represents the outcome of the involvement of human ingenuity, originality, and labor with the specific objective of providing benefits to consumers. The attractiveness and observability of a product are contingent upon its possession of distinct attributes such as usefulness, visual appeal, value, intention & objective, and the possession of commutation potential. McGrath (2001), in his book "Product Strategy for High Technology Companies," endeavored to define product strategy as the desire to describe and identify the market segments to be targeted and the value proposition that the product or service offers. This underscores the significance of comprehending the market and customer requirements when formulating a distinctive value proposition. On the other hand, it is deemed imperative that the strategies for the product be in alignment with the overarching strategy and vision of the company (Christensen and Raynor, 2013). This highlights the importance of the process of aligning the product strategy with the company's long-term objectives as a crucial consideration for ensuring sustained success in business.

The strategy for a product encompasses various components, including packaging, branding, labeling, and product attributes. These attributes may include high quality, appealing style, desirable features, and attractive design. The presence of a robust brand preference is an additional attribute of the product. A product undergoes four distinct phases in its life cycle, namely market inoculation, growth, maturity, and decline (Theodore L., 1965) (Figure 3). Therefore, the development of novel product strategies like market segmentation strategy, differentiation strategy, product pricing strategy, and product development strategy would not

be lacking in benefit to result in a diverse array of offerings that have a significant impact on the business's ability to attract and retain a large customer base.

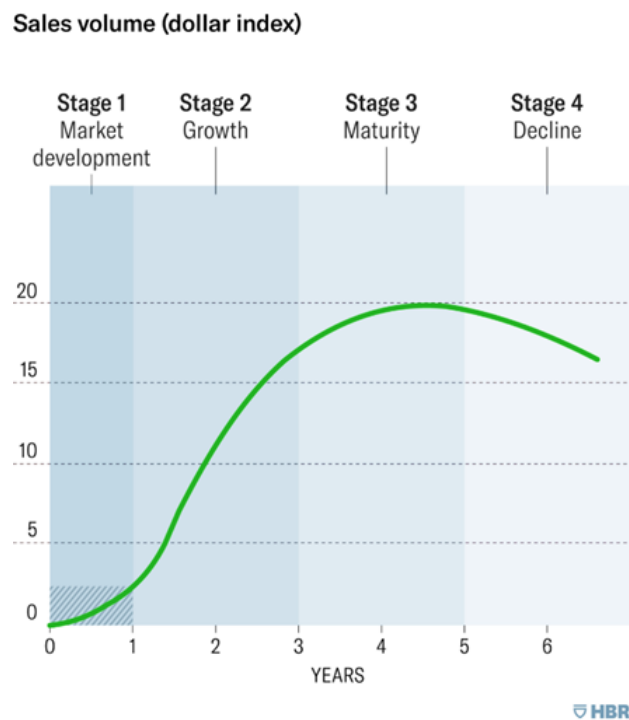


Figure 3. Product Life Cycle; Entire Industry (Theodore, 1965)

Place Strategy

The distribution strategy, also commonly known as the place strategy, is a pivotal component of marketing that centers on the methods by which products or services are rendered accessible to consumers. The process entails making choices about the identification of suitable channels of distribution and the effective management of inventory, transportation, and storage. According to Louis and Ansary (1998)'s book, a distribution channel is a group of autonomous entities that facilitate a product or service's use, or consumption, and its main goal is to provide enough of the right product or service at the right time and place. Distribution strategy differs from other marketing mix components because it relies on geographical positioning (Pitt et al., 1999).

Customers always express a high need for convenience in the product offering, particularly in terms of physical accessibility and delivery. Therefore, the significance of various place strategies like; intensive distribution, selective distribution, exclusive distribution, direct and indirect distribution strategies, as well as distribution channels, cannot be overstated in determining a firm's level of competitiveness. This is due to their impact on both the product's delivery time and its ultimate cost, which also play a considerable role in gaining a competitive advantage. Consequently, as Whetton (2011) mentioned, the distribution strategy of an organization facilitates an improved understanding of sales channels, including enhanced knowledge, better segmentation within sales channels, intermediary roles in the sales process, identification of centers of influence within the sales channel, and the positioning of the firm relative to the sales channels.

Price Strategy

The term "price" denotes the monetary value that a consumer must exchange for the acquisition of a particular product or service (Zimmerman and Blythe, 2017). The price of a product or service represents the aggregate of all the costs that consumers incur to obtain the associated benefits. The process of establishing the selling price may rely on cultural and ethical values, as well as the prevailing societal ideologies. It is noteworthy that business operations are not exclusively driven by profit motives, but rather encompass broader considerations (Sugianto, 2022). Therefore, pricing strategies such as customer value-based pricing, cost-based pricing, and competition-based pricing, play a crucial role in the sales performance of firms, as they are "considered highly adaptable within the marketing mix and are the sole components of the marketing mix that generate revenue, while all other elements represent costs" (Kotler and Armstrong, 2020).

Promotion Strategy

Promotion refers to the synchronization of all seller-initiated endeavors aimed at establishing channels of information and persuasion for vending goods and services or propagating an idea (Lamb et al., 2021). Promotional activities like; personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and publicity significantly have the potential to create a valuable relationship with the effective establishment of accurate channels of communication and persuasion for marketing efforts as well as products or services. Therefore, it is recommended that organizations adopt a standardized promotion strategy or sales promotion strategy to enhance their sales and profits (Aghara et al., 2018; Morimura and Sakagawa, 2018), subject to the condition that they efficiently administer the sales promotion program to attain the intended outcomes (Aghara et al., 2018).

The Efficacy Measurement of Marketing Mix.

The assessment of the effectiveness of the marketing mix involves the scrutiny of the influence of each element of the marketing mix (“Product,” “Price”, “Place”, and “Promotion”) on the comprehensive triumph of marketing strategies. Various methodologies are employed to evaluate the efficacy of the marketing mix components. The financial performance of a company can be evaluated through various methods, such as the shareholder-based approach, the balanced scorecard, and the triple bottom line (Schulz et al., 2016; Neri et al., 2021; Hourneaux et al., 2018). The concept of the triple bottom line encompasses the consideration of societal interests. The premise underlying this concept is that entities must assess their performance by considering the economic, environmental, or social value they generate. The practice is efficacious in terms of its capacity to raise awareness regarding a firm’s performance among managers, while also contributing to the enhancement of accountability levels for said firms. Organizations should consider embracing the shared value framework as a means of incentivizing the generation of increased profits and enhanced social advantages.

The primary responsibility of managers is to provide the highest feasible return to shareholders. In this regard, the balanced scorecard can be a useful tool to assess the performance of organizations concerning financial metrics, customer satisfaction, employee motivation, and internal processes for learning and efficiency. The utilization of the balanced scorecard and triple bottom line is a comprehensive strategy for assessing organizational performance. This approach extends beyond financial metrics and incorporates other factors that contribute to a more robust and discerning evaluation of financial performance.

Research Methodology

Motivation and Value

Marketing mix elements are critical to boosting the sales performance of petroleum enterprises, specifically in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the implications of 4Ps marketing mix strategies on the profitability of petroleum businesses (especially automotive fuels and autogas, or LPG) in Afghanistan have received little attention and have not been adequately investigated. This research is motivated by this information gap to investigate the effects of the 4Ps of marketing elements and how these strategies might be engaged to boost the profitability of petroleum firms in Afghanistan’s circumstances, involving Samangan province as a case study.

This study’s outcomes possess the potential to fill knowledge gaps in the existing pool in this field. Furthermore, the study will assist petroleum companies in comprehending how the 4Ps of marketing mix enhance profitability and consumer awareness; allowing them to have a clear and comprehensive understanding of marketing mix elements and their related effects on the sales performances of numerous services overall. Given how fiercely competitive the petroleum industry is, the return on investment (ROI) must be justifiable. Therefore, this study will further assist stakeholders, including current and upcoming investors and donors, in comprehending Afghanistan’s petroleum marketing status, allowing them to make future business decisions based on sales performance through marketing strategies. Moreover, the study will be valuable to the petroleum companies in shaping their marketing decisions for profitability in Afghanistan, especially in the selected locations, and to oil marketers in discovering the optimal blend for controlling sales of automotive fuels to boost their profit margins as competition increases. This study will also help future researchers by disseminating the data across the country in different geographic locations to assess the sustainability of the findings.

Research Design

The study was structured employing case study and phenomenology methods. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that specifically examines an individual’s own experiences in the world (Neubauer, B. E., et al., 2019). A case study is qualitative research as well as a comprehensive examination of a particular person, organization, or occurrence. Case studies prioritize a comprehensive analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, along with their interconnections within a given context

(Cooper et al., 2006). In the designing of a research project, case studies provide marketers with an additional instrument to investigate the complexities of business-to-business marketing, encompassing its processes and the multifaceted operational context in which it operates (Johnston et al., 2001) as well as the case study approach, delineates two distinct capabilities that (i) effectively amalgamate research and development with marketing, consequently (ii) generate supplementary value (Prašnikar et al., 2008). For instance, Bandinelli et al. (2011) conducted research employing a case study methodology, which revealed that the existing body of knowledge is supported by the findings. The study by conducting a case study approach found that the oil and gas industries typically lack a standardized methodology for the development of new Product-Service Systems (PSS) in Italy.

This comprehensive investigation, involving phenomenology and case study methods, becomes imperative in the process of decision-making processes, benchmarking a company, including its marketing strategies, and subsequently improving its sales performance (Ardley, B. 2005). Therefore, this research employed phenomenological design used primary as well as secondary data, and incorporated a combination of survey and literature review methodologies to gather insights and to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The research utilized the personal interview survey method to conduct the case study on the branch managers, marketing specialists, financial managers, and CEO of Zhakfar Logistics and Services Company Ltd, aiming to examine the impact of the 4ps marketing mix on the sales performance of petroleum enterprises in Afghanistan.

While certain qualitative research scholars refrain from discussing the precise number of interviews required, there is variation in the advised minimum. A vast quantity of articles, book chapters, and books advocate for direction and propose that anything between 5 and 50 participants is sufficient for conducting qualitative survey research (Dworkin, S. L. 2012). In this research, a qualitative personal interview survey with two branch managers, two financial managers, one marketing specialist, and the CEO of the company was conducted to get insights and obtain proper data for the research (Table 1).

Table 1. Research Participants' Profile

No.	Participant	Gender	Position	Years of Experience	Department	Interview Date	Interview Duration
1	Branch Manager 1	Male	Branch Manager	10	Operations	20.06.2023	40 min.
2	Branch Manager 2	Male	Branch Manager	9	Sales	22.06.2023	40 min.
3	Financial Manager 1	Male	Financial Manager	5	Finance	25.06.2023	40 min.
4	Financial Manager 2	Male	Financial Manager	6.5	Accounting	26.06.2023	40 min.
5	Marketing Manager	Female	Marketing Specialist	6	Marketing	27.06.2023	40 min.
6	CEO	Male	Chief Executive Officer	12	Executive Office	30.06.2023	30 min.

The interview was conducted online in a structured manner and was guided by a pre-established interview protocol that was customized to align with the research objectives. The research protocol encompassed inquiries that addressed various facets of the marketing mix, including product strategies, pricing determinations, distribution channels, and promotional undertakings in the petroleum industry of Afghanistan specifically in target locations.

According to Table 1, most participants were male, and the individuals selected for the interviews were those who hold significant decision-making roles and possess extensive knowledge regarding the organization's marketing practices. The utilization of online interviews facilitated expedient and convenient communication, surmounting geographical impediments. Throughout the interview, the respondents were queried regarding their viewpoints about the constituent components of the marketing mix and their perceived impact on their organization's efficacy within the petroleum industry of Afghanistan through obtaining Zhakfar Petroleum as a case study.

The participants were questioned regarding the challenges they encountered in executing successful marketing strategies and the measures they took to overcome them (Figures 5 and 6). The participants' responses were duly recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. A content analysis was performed to ascertain prevalent patterns, trends, and insights concerning the impact of the marketing mix on the profitability enhancement of petroleum companies in Afghanistan.

Research Protocol

The present study adopts a methodological approach (Figure 4) that centers on the examination of the 4Ps marketing strategies implemented by Zhakfar Petroleum during three months of marketing campaigns. In this context, data about sales during May, June, and July 2021, when marketing campaigns were executed, were gathered. Additionally, control data from August, September, and October 2021, when no marketing campaign was conducted, were also collected. Moreover, following the conclusion of the interview and the examination of literature reviews, all findings and data were subjected to analysis and cross-validation and subsequently used to conclude. The control data signifies a time interval during which no marketing campaigns were executed. Through a comparative analysis and evaluation of the results obtained from the implementation of 4Ps marketing mix strategies over three months, in conjunction with the control data, a comprehensive assessment of their efficacy will be attained.

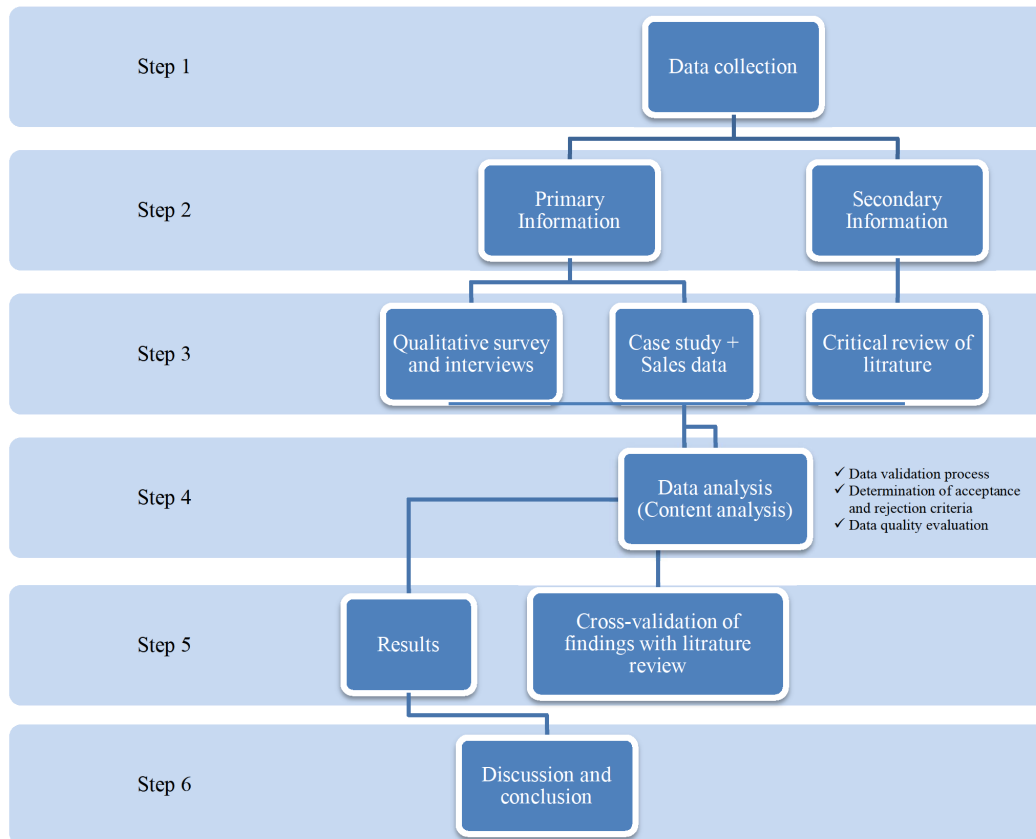


Figure 4. Methodological Process and Steps

Zhakfar Logistics and Services Company Ltd.

Zhakfar Logistics and Services Ltd. is an Afghanistan-based commercial enterprise engaged in various profit-oriented sectors, including petroleum, contracting, FX trading, and other related activities, since 2010. In the petroleum industry, the firm has its storage facilities for various fuel products in the country. Zhakfar Petroleum is operating within its specialized area, fostering business growth through the implementation of stringent cost-control measures, a structured regimen, and a steadfast commitment to pursuing actions that align with long-term objectives.

The organization also has significant expertise in managing projects for governmental and international entities, with a particular focus on logistics, supply chain management, procurement, and fixed-term & fixed-price turnkey projects. The petroleum industry has made noteworthy investments in the energy sector, which involve the establishment of fuel pump stations and the dissemination of petrol, diesel, and LPG gas via their two branches located in Samangan and Badakhshan provinces. The primary objective of the organization is to establish a robust brand image in this industry through the consistent delivery of superior-quality products and services to its clientele. Since 2010, facility management has emerged as a pioneering force in the provision of services to government service contracts and UN agencies across diverse military and civilian compounds in Afghanistan. The array of services provided in this regard by the organization includes general engineering as well as electrical and mechanical maintenance, waste management and disposal, and other crucial life support services.

Sales Data Before Implication of Marketing Strategies in Zhakfar Petroleum

Detailed information on this section has been censored for publication by the company. However, the result section presents an overall sales percentage as well as a summary of outcomes (Figure 4), which serves as an indicator of the effectiveness of the 4Ps marketing mix strategies following their implementation.

Data Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of the data, this research employed content analysis as a means of assessing the responses, making inferences, examining the literature review, as well as generating recommendations. Content analysis involves a thorough examination and review of interview responses to elicit and identify meanings and commonalities as well as distinctions, to establish themes and construct categories (Bengtsson M., 2016). The results obtained from the survey and sales data of the company were cross-validated with the knowledge acquired from the analysis of existing literature. Through a comparative analysis of survey findings and sales data as well as extant scientific works, a comprehensive comprehension of the relationship between 4Ps marketing mix elements and the profitability enhancement of petroleum companies in selected locations was made.

A meticulous examination of the collected data was undertaken to ascertain its precision, pertinence, and dependability. Ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the subsequent analysis and conclusions drawn from the data is contingent upon the completion of this critical step. The initial step in the data validation process involved evaluating the suitability of the data for addressing the research questions and objectives. The analysis exclusively included data that was directly relevant to the implementation of marketing strategies in the company and the evaluation of sales performance metrics. This encompassed various key indicators, such as revenue figures, customer acquisition costs, conversion rates, product type and quantity, sales date, sales price, and total sales amount. During this phase, any data that did not conform to the study's scope or appeared to be unrelated to the research focus was omitted.

The acceptance and rejection criteria were determined by pre-established guidelines and industry norms. Data points were deemed acceptable if they satisfied specific predetermined quality standards, including criteria related to completeness, consistency, and accuracy, e.g., data records that exhibited missing values or apparent errors were excluded from the analysis. In addition, data that was obtained from sources lacking reliability or proper validation procedures was excluded from the analysis.

A rating system was implemented to evaluate the quality of the data. A quality score was assigned to each data point, taking into consideration factors such as the credibility of the source, the method used for data collection, and the historical consistency. The data that exhibited high quality and originated from reputable sources, as well as the data collected through consistent procedures, received higher scores and attention. Conversely, data that displayed potential bias or uncertainty received lower scores and were subsequently excluded from the focal point.

To determine the growth rate, the formula $[(\text{New Value} - \text{Old Value}) / \text{Old Value}] * 100$ is employed. Here, "New Value" denotes the data about the current period, while "Old Value" refers to the data from the previous period. The formula facilitates the quantification of the percentage change observed between the two data points, thereby offering a distinct metric to evaluate the extent of growth or decline.

Results

The current study employed a comprehensive interview guide to gather primary data from senior management personnel across key divisions, as well as select middle-level managers who possess direct involvement in marketing. The process of devising and executing a plan of action is commonly referred to as strategy formulation and implementation. The study utilized secondary data obtained from the official website of Zhakfar Logistics and Services Ltd., which included the organization's present strategic plan. After data collection, a content analysis approach was employed to examine the data by the study's objectives. The results were subsequently organized and presented by distinct themes, evaluating the socioeconomic background of respondents to the survey, the 4Ps marketing mix strategies adopted by the company, as well as the efficacy of each mix's elements on the firm's sales performance, and finally making comparative observations and discussions on pre and post-three-month sales data, as outlined below:

The Socioeconomic Background of Respondents

The research findings indicate that the individuals who took part in the study possess either a bachelor's or a master's degree as well as years of experience in marketing and management. The participant's advanced level of education enabled them to comprehend and provide accurate responses throughout the interview. The duration of employment within a specific or similar

organization fosters a perception of stability and imbues the interviewer with a heightened level of assurance regarding the anticipated result. Nevertheless, during an interview with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the company, it was disclosed that the company’s organizational culture mandates managers to participate in the process of hiring well-specialized and experienced staff. The study found that the respondents had accumulated a decade of work experience for the company, indicating a significant level of acquaintance with the organization’s culture and marketing strategies amidst environmental challenges. This is attributed to the company’s frequent use of the “internal mobility or transfer” strategy. Zhakfar Logistics and Services Ltd. frequently employs the “internal mobility” strategy to cultivate the positive retention and competencies of their personnel, furnish them with a range of experiences, and adapt to the evolving demands of the enterprise.

The findings of the research underscore the notable consequences of the company’s adoption of the internal mobility strategy. The implementation of this strategy has facilitated the acquisition of varied experiences and expertise by employees, resulting in a heightened level of familiarity and awareness of the organization’s culture and marketing strategies. The employees’ familiarity with the company landscape proved advantageous in addressing environmental challenges, as they possess the necessary skills to navigate the challenges that arise. The adoption of internal mobility has demonstrated its efficacy in facilitating the growth of employees’ competencies, promoting their flexibility, and nurturing their comprehensive understanding of the organization’s culture, thereby augmenting the company’s ability to effectively tackle geographical challenges.

Marketing Mix Strategies in Zhakfar Petroleum

The responses provided by the participants exhibited a diverse array of viewpoints and personal encounters, thereby illuminating the intricate and multifaceted characteristics inherent in Zhakfar Petroleum’s 4Ps marketing mix strategies. Several participants indicated a significant inclination towards the company’s focus on environmental sustainability, highlighting its positive impact on their purchasing choices and their perception of the brand. They emphasized the importance of Zhakfar Petroleum’s endeavors to advance renewable energy sources and mitigate carbon emissions through their promotional initiatives. Moreover, the participants offered valuable perspectives on the efficacy of individual components within the marketing mix. The impact of Zhakfar Petroleum’s digital marketing initiatives, such as engaging social media campaigns and targeted online advertisements, has been emphasized by some, as they have effectively captured the attention of consumers and cultivated brand loyalty. Alternative viewpoints were presented by some individuals who indicated a predilection for conventional marketing channels, including television commercials and print advertisements. These individuals underscored the importance of employing a varied marketing mix to effectively target distinct customer segments. Additionally, the data collected from the participants’ responses indicated a significant impact of Zhakfar Petroleum’s marketing strategies on their perception of the company’s overall reputation. The participants also observed that the marketing campaigns conducted by the company had a significant impact on influencing their perception of Zhakfar Petroleum as an organization that embraces innovation and forward-thinking strategies. The company’s branding was linked to attributes such as dependability, technological progress, and a dedication to environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, the study participants’ varied responses contribute to a comprehensive comprehension of the efficacy, merits, and areas requiring enhancement in the firm’s marketing mix strategies. These insights provide valuable contributions toward improving future marketing initiatives and customizing strategies to align more effectively with the expectations and preferences of the target demographic.

Analyzing the Effectiveness of Product Strategies Adopted by Zhakfar Petroleum

The findings of the study were supposed to shed light on the product strategies pursued by the company. The study uncovered the following product strategies that were put into action in May, June, and July of 2021 (Table 2):

Table 2. Product Strategy Trends Adopted by Zhakfar Petroleum

Month/Year	Product strategies
May 2021	1. Diverse product portfolio 2. Providing premium products
June 2021	3. Customizing the product portfolio 4. Transparent pricing and visible labeling
July 2021	5. Monitoring and controlling product distribution. 6. Data-driven product decisions

Initially, the participants were requested to specify the range of petroleum products offered by the company, its competitive edge, the procedure for making decisions regarding the introduction or discontinuation of certain products (such as Diesel, Petrol, and LPG), and to provide some real-life examples of how they have personalized their product portfolio to meet the requirements of particular customer segments. They indicated that they sell a range of petroleum products, including petrol, diesel, and LPG gas, based on customer demand, and that these products are prominently displayed at their petrol station with clear price labels on the tanks. They strive to differentiate the firm through several key factors. Firstly, the company takes pride in offering high-quality petrol with a rating of 92, superior diesel labeled as 02, and premium LPG gas, delivering exceptional quality, and providing free gas transfer services to specific customer ranges using mobile tankers, offering convenience and flexibility. Customers have expressed satisfaction with the usability of these products, leading to their continued availability. They also mentioned that another aspect that sets Zhakfar Petroleum apart from its competitors in the region is its commitment to providing Only High-Quality products. They do not compromise on quality, which has attracted customers away from competitors who offer lower-grade options, and in terms of product sales, they have observed that their fuel sales exceed those of other gas stations as they closely monitor and control the distribution of their products by tracking their country of import, such as Iran, Russia, and Turkmenistan, as the quality of the fuel directly impacts its sales performance.

The study also reported that the company's decision-making process for products is influenced by a careful examination of daily sales records, which enables them to recognize demand trends and consumer preferences. The company gains important insights into the popularity of its products and pinpoint areas for development by regularly monitoring sales performance and actively growing its customer base.

Analyzing the Effectiveness of Place (Distribution) Strategies Adopted by Zhakfar Petroleum

The research aimed to ascertain from the respondents the place strategies implemented by the company and found the following place strategies that had been implemented during May, June, and July of 2021 (Table 3):

Table 3. Place Strategy Trends Adopted by Zhakfar Petroleum

Month/Year	Place (distribution) strategies
May 2021	1. Convenient and accessible locations 2. Clean and attractive surroundings
June 2021	3. Catering to diverse customer needs 4. Special services for targeted categories
July 2021	5. Multiple distribution methods 6. Targeted distribution agreements

The interviewees indicated that, firstly, the positive code of conduct demonstrated by Zhakfar Petroleum's staff contributed to enhancing customer satisfaction as it created a welcoming and helpful atmosphere. Moreover, they demonstrate a keen understanding of the diverse needs of their customer segments. For instance, by providing free parking lots for trucks as well as specific requirements for truck drivers, ensuring a convenient and easily accessible refueling solution. This tailored approach not only contributed to enhanced customer satisfaction but also fostered customer loyalty within the targeted segments. Moreover, the strategic positioning of the firm's station (adjacent to the highway) coupled with its pristine surroundings and dining establishment, serves as an added incentive for the customers. People visit petrol stations not solely to refuel their vehicles, but also for leisure, relaxation, prayer, and enjoying their time, thereby enhancing the competitive standing of the company.

The corporation utilizes a varied array of distribution channels to optimize the expeditious conveyance of its petroleum commodities to its customers. Mobile tanks are employed for gas transportation, with consideration given to branding aspects to maintain consistency and reinforce brand recognition throughout the distribution process. To maximize efficiency and punctuality, Zhakfar Petroleum implements contractual agreements between its station and clientele, which incorporate a commitment to deliver fuel within a specified timeframe. This dedication guarantees the timely delivery of products to customers. In addition, the organization has successfully executed efficient distribution strategies, including targeted distribution to various retail establishments, hotels, and corporate settings. The aforementioned strategies function within the context of formal agreements, augmenting ease of access and simplifying the process of dissemination. Consequently, the proficient implementation of these distribution strategies led to an enhancement in sales performance.

Analyzing the Effectiveness of Price Strategies Adopted by Zhakfar Petroleum

In this section, the company’s pricing strategies were the topic of discussion for the respondents. It is revealed that this was mainly attributed to the adoption of a systematic daily report system as well as, competitive pricing, cost-based pricing, market-based pricing, volume-based discounts, customized discounts, loyalty discounts, and promotional pricing strategies to drive the firm’s overall pricing strategy during May, June, and July of 2021 (Table 4).

Table 4. Price Strategy Trends Adopted by Zhakfar Petroleum

Month/Year	Price strategies
May, June, and July. 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Competitive Pricing 2. Cost-Based Pricing 3. Market-Based Pricing 4. Volume-Based Discounts 5. Customized Discounts 6. Loyalty Discounts 7. Promotional Pricing Strategies

Through a comprehensive analysis of market trends, costs, and other pertinent factors, they determined competitive prices for their products. To ensure ongoing competitiveness, the company diligently collected and examined daily weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly statistics. This data-driven approach allowed them to evaluate their market position and make well-informed decisions regarding pricing adjustments. They have successfully implemented a pricing strategy that involves procuring cost-effective petroleum products and anticipating future price increases. By offering these products at lower prices compared to their competitors’ fuel stations, they effectively capture the interest of new customers, stimulate sales, and enhance overall customer satisfaction.

Consequently, this strategy yielded numerous benefits, including increased sales volume of petroleum products and elevated levels of customer satisfaction. On the other hand, the company considers several factors regarding pricing strategies. Initially, the pricing rate is determined based on global rating volatility as well as the prices at Aqinah and Hairatan ports.

Additionally, they factor in the rate of the US Dollar, the purchase rate, and payroll expenses. They also include a tax of 2 Afghani per liter. To ensure competitive pricing in the market, the Provincial Office of Petrol and Gas Distribution grants the company the flexibility to compete on price; previously, the company had control over setting the prices, but as of now it falls under the authority of the city Provincial Office, which determines and implements the prices across the area. For instance, the provincial Directorate of Petroleum and Liquid Gas Materials provides a reference rate, such as 65 Afghani for Diesel, and gives the option to sell at a lower price if desired. The company performs calculations considering factors such as price fluctuations at Aqinah and Hairatan ports, staffing costs, and the US Dollar Rate. If they find themselves in a profitable position, they lower the price, enabling them to offer a more attractive price in the market.

To cater to distinct customer segments, the company provides customized discounts and benefits. Valued and loyal customers who are daily drivers and reside in the Hazrat Sultan area of Samangan province can receive exclusive discounts on their fuel purchases. Zhakfar Petroleum also offers a discount of approximately 1 Afghani per liter to customers who purchase more than 200 liters of diesel for their truck vehicles. This discount is implemented through adjustments made to the company’s profit systems. These promotions assist in preserving differentiated customer segments and promoting sustained customer loyalty. The respondents indicated the positive impact of the implementation of pricing strategies on Zhakfar Petroleum’s sales performance. One such strategy involved setting a rate of 66 Afghani for new customers in the first fuel dispenser, while long-time customers or those purchasing more than 30 liters of fuel were given a discounted rate of 65 Afghani in the second fuel dispenser. This approach proved effective in driving up sales, particularly as new customers were attracted by the opportunity to avail themselves of the long-time customer discount benefit.

Analyzing the Effectiveness of Promotion Strategies Adopted by Zhakfar Petroleum

The study aimed to ascertain the existence of promotional strategies implemented by Zhakfar Petroleum. The research findings indicate that the following promotional strategies were adopted by the company during May, June, and July 2021 (Table 5):

Table 5. Promotion Strategy Trends Adopted by Zhakfar Petroleum

Month/Year	Price strategies
May, June, and July. 2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Media Marketing 2. Local WhatsApp Groups 3. Group SMS 4. Roadside Banners 5. Promotional Merchandise

With regards to promotion, the company employed a range of promotional strategies to raise awareness and effectively market their products. As a key approach, they consider harnessing the power of social media platforms and local WhatsApp groups. They were able to reach a wider audience, build brand recognition, and spark interest in their products by utilizing these digital channels. The business effectively connects with potential clients through social media and conveys the benefits of its petroleum products. Their marketing initiatives are aimed at raising awareness, providing useful information, and encouraging interaction with their target market. These endeavors aim to stimulate interest and drive sales for their petroleum products.

The company employs several channels to make sure that customers receive their petroleum products. Initially, they used digital marketing platforms as well as Facebook and other media channels for marketing efforts, but they soon realized that their target demographic, especially drivers, was not actively using these platforms. Consequently, they shifted their focus slightly away from social media marketing. The company also uses group messaging (SMS) on mobile devices and through WhatsApp, which has been successful in drawing customers' attention. Another strategy used by the company to advertise its products is the placement of advertising banners on public roads and highways. Lastly, the company has incorporated a branding strategy by free distribution of travel safety handbooks and prayer hooks to drivers that can be hung on the rear-view mirrors of vehicles. This approach has proven to be an effective marketing strategy that has resulted in a notable increase in sales attributed to heightened brand recognition. The use of these diverse channels and promotional activities proved to have a positive effect on addressing customers' specific preferences and needs.

Based on the sales data provided by the company and a thorough examination of the 4Ps marketing mix strategies employed by Zhakfar Petroleum throughout May, June, and July 2021, in contrast to the control data from August, September, and October 2021, there is a clear and significant correlation between the 4Ps marketing mix and the notable surge in sales. The results indicate a significant increase in sales of 34.51% during the period in which targeted marketing initiatives were actively implemented. The analysis of the sales data collected over the three-month marketing campaign period, in comparison to the control data, provided additional evidence supporting the direct influence of the 4Ps marketing mix on the observed increase in sales. The lack of marketing campaigns during the designated control period spanning from August to October 2021 brought to light a discernible disparity in sales performance, thereby highlighting the efficacy of the 4Ps marketing mix strategies employed by Zhakfar Petroleum. The results of this study highly underscore the significant impact of the 4Ps marketing mix on the enhancement of sales growth. Through the strategic alignment of product, price, promotion, and place, Zhakfar Petroleum successfully leveraged market opportunities, effectively attracting customers, and significantly boosting sales. These insights offer valuable guidance for the company's future marketing endeavors, allowing them to enhance and optimize their marketing strategies to sustain growth and uphold a competitive advantage in the market.

Sales Data After Implication of Marketing Strategies in Zhakfar Petroleum

Sales data from May, June, and July 2021, during which marketing campaigns were implemented, compared to the control data from August, September, and October 2021, during which no marketing campaign was conducted, revealed a statistically significant growth of 34.51%. Detailed information in this regard has been censored for publication by the company due to the presence of sensitive data. Table 6 denotes a summary of the outcomes from seven major aspects.

Table 6. Outcome Summary

No.	Major Aspects	Result
1	Socioeconomic Background of Respondents	Interview participants had strong academic background degrees as well as several years of specialized and experienced marketing and management experiences. The interviewee's advanced education helped them understand and respond accurately. The interviewer feels more confident about the outcome if the candidate has worked for a specific or similar company for a long time.
2	HR-Internal Mobility Strategy at Zhakfar Logistics and Services Ltd.	This research underscores the notable impacts of the company's internal mobility strategy on the performance of human resources. This strategy has helped employees gain diverse experiences and expertise, increasing their knowledge of the company's culture and marketing strategies. The company's familiarity with environmental issues gave employees the skills to overcome challenges. Internal mobility improved the company's ability to overcome geographical challenges by helping employees develop their skills, flexibility, and cultural understanding.
3	Marketing Mix Strategies in Zhakfar Petroleum	The digital marketing initiatives undertaken by Zhakfar Petroleum, including interactive social media campaigns and focused online advertisements, have successfully attracted customer interest and fostered brand loyalty. There exists a segment of individuals who exhibit a preference for conventional marketing channels such as TV and print ads.
		The marketing campaigns implemented by the company had a notable influence on shaping the perception of Zhakfar Petroleum as an entity that embraces innovative and forward-thinking strategies.
		The findings of this study highly underscore the significant impact of the 4Ps marketing mix on the enhancement of sales growth.
		By implementing these 4Ps marketing mix strategies in Afghanistan, particularly in Samangan province, over a three-month period, petroleum companies' sales performance be able to increase significantly, as in this study it was evidenced a 34.51% growth rate.
4	“Product” Strategy Efficacy at Zhakfar Petroleum	The continuous provision of fuel products of superior quality has been found to result in customer satisfaction, thereby ensuring the sustained availability and loyalty of customers.
		The quality of fuel products directly impacts sales performance. Therefore, it has been found that closely monitoring and controlling distributions by tracking the country of import has a paramount and inevitable connection with sales performance.
		It has been found that daily sales records as well as data-driven products influence the company's decision-making process by revealing demand trends and consumer preferences. Monitoring sales success and aggressively developing the customer base gives valuable data into product popularity and development opportunities.
5	“Place” (Distribution) Strategy Efficacy at Zhakfar Petroleum	The implemented "Place" strategies, e.g., providing convenient and accessible locations, catering to diverse customer needs, special services for targeted categories (mobile tanks), targeted distribution agreements, as well as other multiple distribution methods, crafted a positive code of conduct toward individual customers and corporations, which consequently led to WOM (word of mouth) marketing.
6	“Price” Strategy Efficacy at Zhakfar Petroleum	A timely data-driven approach proved to be a prevalent technique to evaluating the market position and making updated and well-informed decisions regarding pricing adjustments.
		Through cost-effective procurement, it was possible to successfully implement pricing strategies to anticipate future price volatility.
		Customized Discounts and Benefits for Loyal Customers proved an effective price strategy in driving up sales, particularly as new customers were attracted by the opportunity to avail themselves of the long-time customer discount benefit.
7	“Promotion” Strategy Efficacy at Zhakfar Petroleum	Social media platforms - at a low rate - and local WhatsApp groups - at a high rate - as well as direct messaging (SMS) on mobile devices have been demonstrated as effective digital channels for expanding outreach, establishing brand visibility, and generating interest among petroleum consumers in Afghanistan.
		The branding strategy of Free Distribution of Travel Safety Handbooks under the brand name of the company and the distribution of Prayer Hooks to drivers - that can be hung on the rear-view mirrors of vehicles - played a pivotal role in heightened brand recognition.

Discussion of Outcomes

Zhakfar Petroleum has experienced an increase of 34.51% in sales within a three-month timeframe, which can be attributed to the successful execution of the company's 4Ps marketing mix strategies. This section discusses the various strategies implemented by

the company and their impact on the enhanced sales performance of the business - addressing the research question and objectives of the study.

The company's strategy of supplying a wide-ranging array of products has contributed to the company's success in producing greater revenue, which in turn has contributed significantly to the company's overall performance. By carrying such a wide variety of petroleum products, Zhakfar Petroleum can cater to its customer's varied wants and satisfy their specific tastes. This strategy approach helps the business broaden its position in the market by targeting a variety of consumer subgroups, which results in improved sales performance as a direct consequence. It has been demonstrated that emphasizing the delivery of high-quality items may be a successful strategy for increasing sales. Zhakfar Petroleum has established itself as a respected brand in the business by delivering petroleum products of excellent quality that not only meet but significantly exceed industry benchmarks. This has allowed the company to position itself as a leader in the market. Consumers who are willing to pay a higher price have been tempted by the appeal of greater quality and perceived value that are attached to high-end items. These consumers have made a substantial contribution to the overall rise in sales because of their willingness to pay a higher price.

In terms of sales performance, Zhakfar Petroleum has seen positive results thanks to the deployment of a product portfolio customization approach. The company tailors its products and services to meet the specific demands of its many diverse types of customers by having an in-depth grasp of those customers' individual needs and preferences.

It is guaranteed that consumers will be able to find items that are suitable for their requirements and preferences when customization techniques are put into effect. Consequently, customer satisfaction levels will increase, and there will be a greater possibility that customers will make additional purchases.

A significant contributor to the rise in revenue generated by Zhakfar Petroleum is the company's unwavering commitment to maintaining open and understandable pricing and labeling practices. Customers are given a sense of trust and confidence in the company thanks to its offering price structures that are open, simple, and easy to understand, as well as exhaustive information on its products. Customers are given the ability to make well-informed judgments regarding their purchases because of the openness that is offered, which leads to a noticeable rise in sales. The success of Zhakfar Petroleum's sales efforts may be directly attributed to the company's decision to install an all-encompassing monitoring and control system for product distribution. The firm can efficiently maximize its market penetration and boost its accessibility thanks to its rigorous control of distribution routes and strategic positioning of products. This strategic approach ensures that the firm's products will be more easily accessible to clients, which will subsequently lead to an increase in sales.

At Zhakfar Petroleum, the adoption of decision-making processes that are driven by data has been crucial to the company's success in increasing revenue from product sales. The company makes well-informed judgments on its product offerings since it conducts thorough research on market trends, client preferences, and sales statistics. The adoption of a data-driven methodology assists in lessening the possible risks and challenges that are inherent in the process of product creation while simultaneously enabling Zhakfar Petroleum's capacity to match its product offerings with the demand that is currently being seen in the market. Zhakfar Petroleum places its gas stations in areas that have elevated levels of traffic, are not far from residential areas, and are next to key transit routes and highways. This ensures that its products can be easily accessed by the company's consumer base conveniently. The availability of this convenience element makes a substantial contribution to the overall pleasure of clients and acts as a catalyst for the development of repeat business, which leads to a noticeable increase in sales. The formation of a welcoming atmosphere that is meticulously cared for is beneficial to the development of a favorable brand image and assists in enhancing the experience that a company provides for all its customers. This specific strategy plays a significant role in improving customer satisfaction and encouraging customer loyalty, both of which contribute to brand image and consequently to an increase in total sales.

Zhakfar Petroleum provides individualized services that are tailored to meet the demands of certain client groups. These specialized services include fleet oil change services, priority fueling, and dedicated support. The application of these strategies has the effect of increasing the level of customer satisfaction and cultivating relationships that are maintained over time, which in turn propels the increase in sales in these specific areas. The utilization of internal staff mobility within Zhakfar Logistics and Service Ltd. has demonstrated significant efficacy in the development of managerial competencies through training and skill enhancement. The company has established a comprehensive development program that strengthens the skills and expertise of employees and managers by offering them opportunities to transition between various roles and departments. This approach not only facilitates managers in obtaining a comprehensive comprehension of the organization's operations but also empowers them to develop cross-functional competencies and more profound insight into the company's culture and values, as well as having a positive impact on employee engagement and retention rates.

In conclusion, the implementation of the 4Ps marketing mix greatly enhanced the sales performance of Zhakfar Petroleum in Samangan province. Upon analyzing three months of sales data in comparison to the control set, it was found that there was a

significant 34.51% rise in the growth rate. This confirms that the "Product," "Price," "Place," and "Promotion" components have a beneficial impact on overall profitability.

Research Limitations

- This study employed a case study methodology, thus confining the research scope to a particular organization.
- To enlighten the discussion, it is crucial to acknowledge that the understanding of the effects of 4Ps marketing mix strategies on profitability improvement primarily stems from the specific context of Zhakfar Petroleum. Hence, these findings may not reflect enough to be universally applicable to other industries within Afghanistan.
- The utilization of a personal interview for data collection posed challenges in scheduling interview appointments, primarily due to the limited availability of stable internet connections among the targeted senior management individuals. Consequently, the duration of the data collection process exceeded the initially anticipated timeframe.
- The study centered on conducting interviews with the executive team members who were occupied with numerous responsibilities, thereby presenting challenges and limitations in coordinating suitable interview schedules. Nevertheless, the research succeeded in acquiring data from the primary stakeholders within the company.

Research Suggestion for Further Investigations

- Given the current study's focus solely on Zhakfar Petroleum company's 4Ps marketing mix strategies, it is imperative to conduct additional research to ascertain the remaining components of the mix's strategies (7Ps) that have the potential to enhance the sales performance of petroleum companies.
- Research can be conducted in various industries apart from the petroleum industry.
- The research employed a personal interview methodology, resulting in findings that were reliant on the subjective viewpoints of individual respondents. For future investigations, it is recommended to incorporate alternative data collection instruments and data analysis techniques.
- This study focused exclusively on the marketing mix strategies implemented by ZHAKFAR Petroleum. Hence, other organizations within the Afghan industry can potentially replicate this research.

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Appendixes

SECTION 1: Background data of interviewee

1. Name of department.
2. What is your status in the organization?
3. What is your educational attainment?
4. For how long you have worked in the organization?
5. What is your strategy on development policy?

SECTION 2: Marketing strategies in the ZHAKFAR Petroleum

Product:

6. How would you describe the range of petroleum products offered by your company?
7. What differentiates your products from those of your competitors? (*Competitive advantage*)
8. How do you determine which products (Deiseal, Petrol, LPG gas) to introduce or phase out?
9. Can you provide examples of how you have tailored your product offerings to specific customer segments?

Price:

10. How do you determine the pricing strategy for your petroleum products?
11. What factors do you consider when setting the price for different products?
12. How do you ensure that your pricing remains competitive in the market?
13. Have you implemented any pricing strategies that have positively impacted sales performance? Can you provide examples?

Place (Distribution):

14. Can you describe the channels through which your petroleum products reach the customers?
15. How do you determine the optimal distribution channels for your products?
16. How do you ensure efficient and timely delivery of your products to customers?
17. Have you implemented any distribution strategies that have improved sales performance? Can you provide examples?

Promotion:

18. How do you create awareness and promote your petroleum products?
19. What marketing channels and tools do you utilize to reach your target audience?
20. Have you implemented a successful marketing campaign? If yes what was?
21. Do you measure the effectiveness of your promotional activities? If yes, how?

Addition questions (if time remained):

22. How do the different elements of the marketing mix work together to achieve your sales objectives?
23. Can you provide an example of how changes in one element of the marketing mix affected the performance of the other elements?
24. How do you assess the overall impact of the marketing mix on sales performance?

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Figure 5. Interview questionnaire form; Sections 1 and 2

SECTION 3: Marketing strategies and sales performance

25. How do you consider the effectiveness of the marketing mix strategies adopted by ZHAKFAR Petroleum on sales performance? It would be great if you could provide some statistics and percentages based on sales data.

- *Effectiveness of product strategies*
- *Effectiveness of place (distribution) strategies*
- *Effectiveness of price strategies*
- *Effectiveness of promotion strategies*

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Figure 6. Interview questionnaire form; Section 3