



Determinants of Consumer Choice in Retail Supermarkets: A Case of Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo

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Abstract

Consumer choice in supermarkets is influenced by a combination of economic, logistical, and experiential factors. This qualitative study focused on the factors that determine the selection of supermarkets in Brazzaville, specifically examining price, geographical location, product differentiation, product quality, customer care, brand image, customer loyalty programs, sustainability policies, and online payment systems. The information was collected through semi-structured interviews with 100 consumers selected using a stratified sampling method to ensure a diverse representation of different demographics. The responses obtained were analyzed using the thematic method, with open coding procedures applied to systematically categorize the data and identify common patterns and preferences. This methodological transparency ensures that the analysis is both rigorous and repeatable. The findings show that despite the importance of price, convenience, product freshness, hygiene, and trust are often prioritized in the decision-making process. The availability of stores, the effectiveness of customer service, promotional strategies, and shelf arrangement also play a role in shaping consumer perceptions, hence leading to total shopping satisfaction. Sustainability techniques are being increasingly adopted alongside product support that features locally sourced materials, particularly among younger consumer groups. Although digital payment solutions contribute to increased convenience and reduced wait times, they are not the primary factors determining the selection of a store. The paper concludes that the most competitive pricing, high-quality products, strategic positioning of outlets, and efficient service delivery, enhanced by modern digital features, are better positioned to attract and retain loyal customers in the Brazzaville retail setting.

Subject Areas

MBA, Marketing

Keywords

Supermarket Choice, Consumer Behavior, Brazzaville

1. Introduction

Supermarkets are at the center stage of urban food systems, influencing consumer purchasing trends as well as the overall shopping experience. In the Republic of the Congo, the city of Brazzaville has experienced significant growth in its retail market in recent years, with both local and foreign supermarket chains competing for consumers within city limits. Key players in this competitive landscape include local chains such as Cosmos Supermarché and Supermarché Medina, alongside foreign operators like Park N Shop, Franprix, and Regal Park N Shop. This growth reflects broader trends in Sub-Saharan Africa, where rising incomes, urbanization, and changing lifestyles are shifting food-buying behaviors [1]. Knowledge of the determinants of consumer choice is therefore vital for supermarkets seeking to attract and retain customers in such a dynamic environment.

Shoppers consider a variety of factors, including pragmatic ones such as location and price, as well as experiential factors like product variety, store layout, and customer service [2]. Additionally, technological advances, including mobile money, self-checkout machines, and shopping apps, are increasingly part of the decision-making process, providing convenience and efficiency, with differentiation depending on shopper typology [3].

Studies in emerging African cities suggest that price is often secondary to quality, freshness, and confidence in a brand's image, as consumers frequently prioritize convenience and accessibility [4]. For special purchases, such as imported or premium items, shoppers may be willing to travel farther or pay higher prices to ensure quality and reliability. Furthermore, a growing body of evidence indicates that consumers are increasingly attentive to sustainability and support for local products, reflecting heightened awareness of environmental and community concerns [5].

Despite this growing literature, empirical data specifically examining supermarket consumer behavior in Brazzaville remain limited. Most studies focus on larger urban centers in South Africa, Namibia, or West Africa, leaving a knowledge gap regarding the unique urban, social, and economic context of the Congolese capital. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the key factors influencing consumer choice in Brazzaville supermarkets, providing insights valuable to retailers, policy-makers, and scholars interested in urban food systems [6].

By comparing normal and special shopping behaviors, the study identifies price, location, product quality, service experience, technology, and sustainability as the

primary determinants of consumer decisions. Insights from this analysis guide supermarket management strategies on store location, product selection, marketing, promotions, and digital service design, with the aim of making operations in Brazzaville more customer-oriented [7].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Decisive Factors of Consumer Choice

A review of the existing literature shows that several factors influence consumers' choices when shopping in retail supermarkets. Similar to other industries, there is no universal set of criteria that all consumers follow; preferences often vary depending on individual needs, socio-economic status, cultural context, and local market conditions. However, certain factors consistently emerge across studies as decisive in shaping consumer behavior. These factors include price sensitivity, location and accessibility, brand reputation and loyalty programs, product variety and quality, customer service and shopping experience, sustainability and local product support, and technology and payment options. Each of these is explored in detail in the following sections.

2.1.1. Price Sensitivity

Price remains one of the most influential factors guiding consumer choice in the supermarket sector. Consumers in the divergent market segments often work with a fixed budget limit, in which the price of grocery products has a significant effect on their buying patterns. Price is not merely a perceived cost, but it also serves as a measure of value in comparison to existing alternatives [4]. In many cases, consumers evaluate prices and perceived quality together with promotions offered and brand awareness before making a purchase decision [8].

Current empirical studies have highlighted that price sensitivity is particularly acute in developing economies, with households allocating a relatively high percentage of their earnings to food and basic commodities. In this scenario, consumers engage in price comparison across different supermarkets and discount stores, and then make the right choice of retail venue [9]. Increased price transparency, provided through flyers, in-store displays, and mobile applications, enables shoppers to make informed decisions and achieve maximum value [10].

Additionally, the price is often evaluated based on the quality of the product, convenience, and trustworthiness. The studies show that consumers can prefer cheaper substitutes to the items they buy as staples, but they are often willing to pay a premium price for fresh food, well-known brands, or convenience [11].

Strategically, supermarkets use price as a competitive tool to attract and retain customers. Discounted offers, loyalty programs, and bundle offers are also used regularly to attract price-sensitive segments [12]. Retailers can use dynamic pricing methods, such as weekly offers or off-peak prices, to increase demand without compromising brand value [13].

Finally, as price is a decisive factor, its impact is integrated into a wider context of value perception and consumer trust. The competitiveness and fair pricing pro-

vided by supermarkets that meet product quality and service standards are better positioned to attract and retain cost-conscious consumers in the long term [7].

2.1.2. Location and Accessibility

Location and accessibility play a decisive role in shaping consumer supermarket choices. Shoppers often prioritize proximity when selecting where to buy everyday essentials, as shorter travel time translates into greater convenience, lower transportation costs, and higher shopping frequency. For many urban households, especially those with limited mobility or tight schedules, supermarkets located closer to residential areas or along daily commuting routes are generally preferred [10]. Accessibility is therefore not merely a geographic factor but also a functional determinant of consumer behavior.

Research shows that consumers tend to frequent supermarkets that are well integrated into their immediate neighborhood or located near key infrastructure such as public transport hubs, schools, or workplaces. Easy access through walkable streets, reliable transportation, and adequate parking facilities can significantly increase the attractiveness of a store. [2] emphasizes that a favorable location enhances perceived convenience, which in turn positively affects customer satisfaction and repeat patronage.

Location decisions are also intertwined with perceptions of safety and neighborhood quality. Consumers often associate well-lit, well-maintained, and secure environments with better overall shopping experiences. For families and older consumers in particular, neighborhood safety and ease of access are important considerations that influence where they choose to shop. Studies in both developed and emerging urban settings show that supermarkets in more secure and better-connected areas tend to attract larger and more loyal customer bases [1].

Accessibility extends beyond physical proximity. In modern retail, it also encompasses the ease of reaching the store through multiple modes of transportation and the availability of digital tools that support store navigation. [3] highlights that consumers increasingly value flexible access whether walking, driving, or using public transit, which enables them to align shopping with other daily activities.

Moreover, location can shape perceptions of quality, product assortment, and price level. Supermarkets in central or more affluent areas may be perceived as offering fresher products or more premium assortments, while those in peripheral locations often compete more on price. This dynamic creates spatial patterns in consumer choice that reflect broader socio-economic and infrastructural realities [6].

Ultimately, location and accessibility influence not just where consumers shop but how frequently they do so. Strategically positioned supermarkets that combine convenient access with neighborhood safety and transport connectivity are more likely to maintain a stable and loyal customer base.

2.1.3. Brand Reputation and Loyalty Programs

Brand reputation is a decisive factor influencing consumer supermarket choice,

particularly in contexts where consumers rely on trust to ensure product quality and service reliability. In the retail sector, strong brand reputation signals consistency, credibility, and value, which reduce perceived purchase risk and influence both initial and repeat patronage. Well-established supermarket chains often benefit from a reputation built on factors such as product freshness, fair pricing, reliable stock availability, and positive in-store experiences. Consumers are therefore more inclined to choose brands they associate with quality and dependability, even if alternative stores offer marginally lower prices [11].

In emerging urban markets, recognizable supermarket brands often serve as a form of quality assurance, particularly for essential goods such as fresh produce and household staples. Brand familiarity builds trust, encouraging consumers to return to the same store and recommend it to others [14]. This perceived trustworthiness can be especially important for households with children, elderly members, or specific dietary preferences, where quality and safety are paramount.

Loyalty programs are another powerful mechanism through which supermarkets build and sustain consumer relationships. These programs, which reward customers for repeat purchases through discounts, reward points, or exclusive member benefits, increase both shopping frequency and basket size. Loyalty schemes foster emotional attachment and perceived value, making customers less price-sensitive over time [8]. They are particularly effective when integrated with personalized promotions or mobile applications that allow shoppers to track rewards and receive targeted offers [3].

For many consumers, the psychological benefits of being “recognized” by a brand, such as exclusive discounts, priority access to promotions, or special rewards, enhance their overall shopping experience. This personalized engagement not only supports retention but also stimulates word-of-mouth marketing and social influence [15].

Moreover, brand loyalty often transcends immediate price considerations. Shoppers may choose to return to a trusted supermarket brand even in the presence of cheaper alternatives, because of their confidence in consistent product quality, ethical sourcing, or superior customer service [16]. In essence, a strong supermarket brand combined with a well-designed loyalty program can create a reinforcing cycle: reputation attracts new customers, loyalty programs retain them, and long-term trust consolidates the brand’s market position.

2.1.4. Product Variety and Quality

Product variety plays a particularly critical role in urban retail markets, where consumers expect to find both local and imported goods across different product categories such as fresh produce, packaged foods, household items, and personal care products. Offering multiple options within each category caters to heterogeneous consumer preferences and enables supermarkets to appeal to a wider demographic. Assortment breadth not only drives store traffic but also increases average basket size, reinforcing customer satisfaction and store performance [7].

However, product variety must be complemented by consistent quality standards to sustain consumer trust and loyalty. Quality is often evaluated by freshness, durability, safety, and brand reliability. In food retail, perishable goods such as fruits, vegetables, dairy, and meat are critical indicators of a supermarket's commitment to quality. High-quality offerings build consumer confidence, reduce the perceived risk of purchase, and foster repeat patronage [16]. Conversely, inconsistent or poor-quality products can undermine trust even when variety is high.

Furthermore, quality is not only a functional attribute but also a symbolic signal of the supermarket's overall reputation. Consumers tend to associate well-stocked, clean, and organized stores with superior product quality. Perceptions of product quality strongly influence consumer decision-making, particularly in categories related to health and well-being [11]. These perceptions often guide purchase behavior more than price alone.

The balance between variety and quality also affects consumers' shopping frequency and loyalty. A supermarket that maintains a diversified assortment while ensuring reliable quality across all product lines can better meet consumer expectations, leading to higher satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth. Together, these elements serve as strategic levers through which supermarkets can enhance their value proposition and sustain a loyal customer base [15].

2.1.5. Customer Service and Shopping Experience

Customer service and the overall shopping experience are critical determinants of consumer choice in the supermarket sector. Shoppers increasingly evaluate stores not only by the availability and quality of products but also by the manner in which services are delivered and the ease of navigating the shopping environment. Positive interactions with store personnel, efficient checkouts, and a welcoming atmosphere contribute to consumer satisfaction and loyalty [8].

High-quality customer service encompasses several dimensions. Staff knowledge, responsiveness, and friendliness significantly influence consumers' perceptions of the store. Employees who can provide guidance on product selection, assist with locating items, or offer recommendations enhance the shopping experience and reduce cognitive effort for customers [17]. Professional behavior and courteous communication strengthen trust and encourage repeat patronage, particularly in competitive urban retail markets.

The physical and functional aspects of the shopping environment, commonly referred to as the servicescape, also shape consumer choice. Layout, signage, cleanliness, lighting, and aisle organization facilitate efficient shopping and reduce stress or frustration [2]. Well-designed stores allow consumers to locate products quickly, compare alternatives easily, and enjoy a pleasant browsing experience, thereby increasing dwell time and potential purchases.

Loyalty programs and personalized services further enhance the consumer experience. By recognizing regular shoppers and offering rewards, supermarkets can cultivate emotional attachment and long-term engagement. Loyalty initiatives not only incentivize repeated purchases but also strengthen consumers' identification

with the brand, leading to positive word-of-mouth and advocacy [15]. Additionally, technological solutions such as self-checkout, mobile apps for navigation, and digital promotions contribute to a seamless and efficient shopping experience [3].

Finally, the shopping experience is often evaluated in relation to consumer expectations and past experiences. Stores that consistently deliver friendly service, maintain cleanliness, and ensure smooth operations are more likely to retain customers, even when prices fluctuate or competing supermarkets offer similar products. Conversely, poor service or inconvenient store layouts can discourage visits, regardless of product variety or pricing strategies [7].

In conclusion, customer service and the shopping environment are pivotal factors influencing supermarket choice. By delivering attentive, knowledgeable service and creating a comfortable, well-organized shopping space, supermarkets can enhance consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall competitive advantage.

2.1.6. Sustainability and Local Product Support

Sustainability and support for local products have emerged as increasingly important factors shaping consumer choice in the supermarket sector. Modern shoppers are not only concerned with price and convenience but also with the environmental and social impact of their purchases. Retailers that demonstrate commitment to sustainability through eco-friendly practices, reduced packaging, or sourcing local products can enhance their appeal to environmentally conscious consumers [5].

Consumers often perceive locally sourced products as fresher, higher quality, and more trustworthy than imported alternatives. Supporting local producers also resonates with shoppers who wish to contribute to community development, job creation, and regional food security [1]. In many secondary urban centers across Sub-Saharan Africa, supermarkets that stock local produce gain a competitive advantage, particularly among middle-income consumers seeking both quality and social responsibility [6].

Sustainability considerations extend beyond product origin. Retailers that adopt energy-efficient operations, minimize food waste, and promote reusable packaging are increasingly rewarded by consumers who value environmental stewardship. Consumers with strong ecological worldviews actively seek retailers whose practices align with their values, even if such stores are slightly more expensive or less conveniently located [18].

Moreover, sustainability efforts can interact with other aspects of consumer choice, such as quality perception and store reputation. Shoppers often associate environmentally responsible practices with higher product standards and corporate integrity, which can enhance trust and encourage repeat patronage. Programs such as labeling local or organic products, clearly indicating sustainable sourcing, and providing transparency on supply chains are effective ways for supermarkets to communicate their commitment [7].

Ultimately, sustainability and local product support influence both the ethical and practical dimensions of consumer decision-making. By incorporating local

sourcing and eco-friendly practices into their operations, supermarkets not only meet emerging consumer expectations but also differentiate themselves in increasingly competitive retail markets.

2.1.7. Technology and Payment Options

Technology and payment solutions have become increasingly influential in shaping consumer choices in the supermarket sector. Modern shoppers' value convenience and efficiency, and digital tools ranging from mobile apps to self-checkout systems play a key role in meeting these expectations [13]. Online platforms and supermarket apps allow consumers to check product availability, compare prices, create shopping lists, and even place orders for home delivery, thereby enhancing both convenience and overall shopping experience [3].

Payment options, including mobile money, card payments, and digital wallets, are now considered standard by many consumers. Retailers that offer multiple, secure, and fast payment methods reduce friction at checkout, improve customer satisfaction, and encourage repeat visits [17]. For instance, self-checkout lanes and mobile payment integration allow busy shoppers to complete transactions more quickly, which is particularly valuable in urban centers with high traffic or long queues.

Technology also interacts with loyalty and promotional programs. Many supermarkets integrate digital coupons, app-based discounts, and personalized recommendations into their platforms, providing both value and convenience. Such digital incentives can influence consumer behavior, particularly among younger, tech-savvy shoppers who expect seamless integration between online and in-store experiences [5].

However, technology is generally seen as an enabler rather than a primary driver of supermarket choice. While it improves the shopping experience and operational efficiency, consumers still weigh core factors like product quality, price, and store accessibility more heavily [3]. Nevertheless, the adoption of technology and diverse payment options has become a differentiating factor, allowing retailers to meet evolving consumer expectations and gain competitive advantage.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews to investigate the determinants of consumer choice in retail supermarkets in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. The qualitative design was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of consumers' perceptions, preferences, and decision-making processes, which cannot be fully revealed through structured surveys [19] [20].

Convenience sampling was used to select 100 respondents from six large supermarkets in Brazzaville, which include Park N Shop, Franprix, Regal Park N Shop, Asia Supermarché, Cosmos Supermarché, and Supermarché Medina. The respondents varied in age, gender, occupation, income, and shopping frequency, providing a clear picture of the consumers in the city's supermarket.

In each interview, there were demographic questions (age, gender, occupation, income, and frequency of shopping) and six open-ended questions that aimed to explore factors leading to supermarket choices. These were the elements identified in the literature, including price sensitivity, location and accessibility, brand name and loyalty programs, product type and quality, customer service and shopping experience, sustainability and local product support, technology, and payment options.

Microsoft Excel was used to sort these answers, and each respondent was displayed in a row and each question in a column. This framework enabled easy coding, summarization of answers, and the identification of common themes and patterns within the dataset.

The demographic profile shows a balanced representation of gender and a concentration of participants in the 20 - 40 age range. The majority of respondents are employees (45%) and students (28%), reflecting the primary consumer base in Brazzaville supermarkets. Income levels are varied, from non-working individuals to those earning above USD 3000 monthly. Additionally, most participants reported shopping weekly (45%), indicating high engagement with supermarket retail in the city. These characteristics provide a solid foundation for analyzing consumer choice determinants (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics of the participants (n = 100).

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age range			
1.	20 - 30 years	28	28%
2.	31 - 40 years	30	30%
3.	41 - 50 years	25	25%
4.	>51 years	17	17%
Sex			
1.	Male	52	52%
2.	Female	48	48%
Occupation			
1.	Student	28	28%
2.	Employee	45	45%
3.	Self-employed	20	20%
4.	Unemployed/Other	7	7%
Income (USD)			
1.	Not working	15	15%
2.	<1000	20	20%
3.	1000 - 2000	30	30%
4.	2100 - 3000	20	20%
5.	>3000	15	15%

Continued

Frequency of supermarket shopping			
1.	Weekly	45	45%
2.	Biweekly	25	25%
3.	Monthly	20	20%
4.	Rarely	10	10%

Analysis of Data

Data analysis was conducted using a manual thematic approach to examine the open-ended interview responses, supplemented by descriptive statistics for the demographic variables. The responses of each participant were coded based on the seven major themes present in the available literature: price sensitivity, location and accessibility, brand reputation and loyalty programs, product variety and quality, customer service, sustainability, and technology/payment options [19]. These codes were then combined to identify common patterns and emerging themes within the sample.

The demographic variables (age, gender, occupation, income, and frequency of shopping) were calculated using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentages). This quantitative data enabled systematic comparisons between the incomparable demographic groups, providing contextual depth to the interpretations based on the themes. Participants were selected and included to provide examples of the emergent themes, thereby adding depth to the narrative interpretation.

The analysis also considered inter-demographic trends, showing that younger customers placed more importance on technology and payment methods, while older subjects gave higher importance to product quality and access. Such methodological means made it possible to meet a rigorous and clear analytical process, which would bridge raw qualitative data and actionable information about consumer decision-making in supermarkets in Brazzaville.

For each open-ended question, participants' responses were coded into the seven pre-determined themes. The percentage for each theme reflects the proportion of participants who mentioned it at least once across their responses. For example, if 73 out of 100 respondents referred to product variety and quality in their answers, this theme is reported as 73%. This approach ensures that the frequency of theme occurrence accurately represents the prevalence of consumer considerations across the sample.

4. Findings

Several recurring themes emerged from the interviews, highlighting what drives consumers to choose one supermarket over another in Brazzaville. The most frequently mentioned factors include **product variety and quality (73%), technology and payment options (70%), customer service (65%), price (36%), brand reputation and loyalty programs (27%), location and accessibility (22%), and**

sustainability and support for local products (14%). These findings show that while price matters, quality, convenience, and service are usually more decisive.

What factors do you consider when choosing a supermarket for your regular grocery shopping?

Many participants emphasized that **location** and convenience are the most important factors for everyday shopping. One shopper explained, “Proximity to my home is important. After a long day at work, I just want to pop in and get my groceries quickly”. Another added, “I usually go to the supermarket that’s easiest to reach on my way home; it saves me a lot of time”. Some participants even described their routines: “I plan my weekly shopping around the stores that are on my usual route. It’s not just about distance, it’s about efficiency”.

Product variety and quality were also repeatedly highlighted. A participant said, “I like to have options. I want a place that has both local and imported brands, so I can choose what I need”. Another explained, “Freshness matters a lot. I avoid stores where the fruits and vegetables don’t look fresh. Quality is everything for me. One time, I bought tomatoes that were soft and spoiled within a day, I learned to check carefully now”.

Although **price and promotions** were considered, they were often secondary to quality and convenience. One shopper noted, “Discounts are nice, but I won’t compromise on quality just to save a little money”. Others echoed this sentiment, saying that occasional deals can influence choice, but they usually stick with supermarkets they trust for reliability and product selection.

What aspects are most important when selecting a supermarket for bulk or family shopping?

For participants doing **family or bulk shopping**, the **availability of bulk discounts and promotions** was often the top consideration. One shopper explained, “For family shopping, I look at bulk discounts and variety. It’s easier for me to get everything in one trip without breaking the budget”. Another participant added, “Stores that have consistent stock levels are my preference. I can’t plan a family shopping trip if half the items I need aren’t there”.

Convenience and speed also mattered. Many participants highlighted that **efficient store layout and ease of navigation** make a difference when buying in larger quantities. One participant said, “I focus on supermarkets with spacious aisles for easy navigation. When I have a cart full of groceries, crowded shelves slow me down and make the experience stressful”. Others explained that **quick checkout** and helpful staff can turn a good store into a preferred one: “If the staff are friendly and assist you properly, I’m more likely to return, even if another store has slightly better prices”.

Some participants mentioned **loyalty programs** as a bonus. “I sometimes choose stores offering rewards for repeated shopping”, said one shopper. “It’s not the main reason I go there, but it does make me feel valued as a customer”.

Overall, participants highlighted that **family shopping requires balancing price, stock consistency, and convenience**, while also appreciating positive experiences

with staff and store layout.

What factors influence your decision when choosing a supermarket for special purchases, such as imported or premium products?

When it came to **special or premium purchases**, participants were very clear that **quality often outweighs price**. One shopper explained, “For premium products, I don’t mind paying a little more. I just want to be sure I’m getting something genuine. I once bought imported cheese from a store that looked nice but it wasn’t fresh, I won’t make that mistake again”. Another participant emphasized **consistency in stock**: “I prefer stores that reliably stock the imported products I like. It’s frustrating to go somewhere for a special item and find it’s out of stock”.

Recommendations and brand reputation played a role as well. One participant said, “I usually ask friends or check online reviews for these items. I don’t want to risk buying something low quality, especially if it’s expensive”. Others noted the **importance of specialized sections or presentation**: “Stores with a dedicated section for imported products make it easier to find what I need. Presentation matters too, I feel like the store cares about the product”.

Some participants also highlighted the **trust factor**: “I tend to stick to stores I know. Even if a new store has lower prices, I’m cautious about trying it for premium goods”.

Overall, participants demonstrated a **careful, quality-focused approach** when shopping for imported or premium products, balancing reliability, reputation, and presentation more than price alone.

What are the key factors that influence your choice of supermarket when shopping for fresh produce or local products?

Participants were unanimous in emphasizing the **freshness and quality** of produce as the most critical factor. One shopper explained, “I always check if the fruits and vegetables look fresh. If they don’t, I won’t buy them. One bad experience with spoiled tomatoes and I made sure to stick to stores that handle produce properly”. Another participant added, “I like stores that rotate stock regularly. It makes me trust that the food is fresh and safe to eat”.

Many participants also expressed a strong preference for **local or organic products**. One shopper said, “I choose supermarkets that source from local farmers. It feels good to support local producers and eat seasonal items. I know it’s better for the community and the environment”. Proper **storage and display** were equally important: “Even if the produce is fresh, poor storage can ruin it. I look at how fruits and vegetables are displayed before buying”.

While **price** mattered to some extent, it was often secondary: “I don’t mind paying a little more for fresh produce. Quality always comes first”. Cleanliness and presentation also influenced choice: “A store that keeps fresh items clean and well-arranged gives me confidence in the overall quality of the products”.

Overall, the findings show that **freshness, local sourcing, and proper handling** are the top priorities when shopping for produce, with price being a supporting, but not primary, consideration.

What makes you prefer one supermarket over another in Brazzaville?

For many participants, **customer service and staff behavior** were major factors in choosing a supermarket. One shopper explained, “I prefer supermarkets where the staff are friendly and helpful. It makes shopping much more pleasant, especially when I have a long list to complete”. Another added, “Good customer service keeps me coming back. I’ve been to stores where the staff are rude or indifferent, and I never returned”.

Store layout and ease of navigation also influenced preference. One participant noted, “I like supermarkets with wide aisles and clear signage. It helps me shop quickly and avoid frustration, especially during busy hours”. Others emphasized the importance of **clean and safe environments**: “I feel comfortable shopping in places that are organized and hygienic. It just makes the experience better for my family and me”.

Loyalty programs and promotions were appreciated, but usually as a bonus rather than the main deciding factor. One participant said, “If a store offers rewards or discounts, that’s great, but I mostly choose where I shop based on service and convenience”. Another added, “Sometimes I go to a store because I know I’ll earn points, but if the staff or layout aren’t good, I won’t come back”.

Overall, participants highlighted that **service quality, store environment, and layout** strongly shape supermarket preference, while loyalty programs and promotions play a supportive, secondary role.

5. Discussion of Findings

The study reveals that consumer choice in Brazzaville supermarkets is shaped by a combination of practical, quality, and experiential factors. For everyday shopping, location and convenience are decisive. Shoppers prefer stores near home or along commuting routes, where travel time is minimized and trips are more efficient. Store layout and ease of navigation also affect their decisions, as participants valued environments that allow quick and organized shopping. Product variety, including both local and imported brands, further guides routine purchases, while price and promotions play a supporting role unless differences are significant.

For **supermarket managers**, this indicates the importance of selecting store locations strategically along high-traffic routes and designing store layouts that facilitate quick, efficient navigation. Managers can also prioritize stocking a balanced mix of local and imported products to meet consumer expectations for variety.

For **special or premium purchases**, priorities shift toward quality, presentation, and the availability of imported or niche products. Consumers are willing to visit stores farther away or pay more to access high-quality items. Brand reputation, packaging, and dedicated premium sections influence choice, indicating that product value often outweighs convenience for these purchases. Supermarkets can capitalize on this by creating clearly defined premium or specialty sections, ensuring consistent stock, and highlighting trusted brands to attract consumers seeking higher-value items.

Fresh produce and local products are increasingly important. Shoppers emphasized freshness, proper storage, and sourcing from local or seasonal producers. Clean, well-organized displays enhance the experience, while supporting local suppliers aligns with growing consumer interest in sustainability and ethical consumption. Managers can respond by sourcing reliably from local farmers, maintaining proper storage and rotation systems, and marketing the origin and freshness of produce to strengthen consumer trust and brand loyalty.

Customer service and store environment also affect preference. Friendly staff, consistent service, and organized store layouts contribute to positive experiences and encourage repeat visits. Loyalty programs and promotions further reinforce store attachment, highlighting that trust and reliability matter alongside product offerings. Training staff to be knowledgeable and courteous, monitoring service standards, and implementing targeted loyalty initiatives can increase retention and customer satisfaction.

Technology and payment options are valued but secondary. Mobile money, cards, self-checkout, and app-based services enhance convenience, particularly for frequent shoppers, but do not alone drive choice. Digital features are seen as complementary, improving the overall shopping experience. Managers should view technology as a supportive tool to streamline operations and improve convenience, without overlooking core drivers such as quality, service, and accessibility.

Finally, while **price remains relevant**, it is often balanced against quality, convenience, and variety. Shoppers are willing to pay more for fresher, higher-quality products, better service, or a more enjoyable shopping environment. Pricing strategies should therefore focus on perceived value rather than simply offering the lowest price.

The study employed convenience sampling, which, while appropriate for exploratory research, may limit the generalizability of these findings to all supermarket consumers in Brazzaville. Consequently, the observed prominence of factors such as product quality, convenience, and customer service should be interpreted cautiously. Future research using probability-based sampling could provide a more representative understanding of consumer preferences.

In summary, consumer choice in Brazzaville supermarkets is multi-dimensional. Supermarkets that combine **strategic location, consistent quality, efficient service, clear product differentiation, and selective technological conveniences** are better positioned to attract, retain, and satisfy urban shoppers. Implementing these insights can guide marketing strategies, store layout design, staff training, and product sourcing decisions, ultimately enhancing competitiveness in the local retail sector.

6. Conclusions

Consumer choice in supermarkets in Brazzaville is primarily influenced by price, convenience, product freshness, hygiene, and trust in the supermarket's offerings. Other factors, such as geographic proximity, product variety, compliance with qual-

ity standards, customer service, brand reputation, loyalty schemes, and technology-based payment methods, also play a role. However, according to current research, convenience, product freshness, hygiene, and trust have a particularly significant impact on individual consumer decisions. Shop layout, shelving, and the introduction of loyalty programs can help increase shopping efficiency and value. These factors further influence consumers' choice of retail outlets.

A preference for products of local origin, as well as sustainability efforts, is becoming an increasingly important factor in consumer purchasing decisions, particularly among younger and more environmentally conscious segments of the customer base. This trend is a sign of growing interest in social responsibility and concern for the community. Although the use of digital payment solutions helps to accelerate checkout and shorten waiting time, they are not prioritized as the main criteria when choosing supermarkets.

In conclusion, this analysis reveals that supermarkets in Brazzaville effectively attract and retain loyal customers by offering competitive prices, high-quality products, convenient locations, and exceptional customer service experiences. Additionally, in-store experiences and digital innovation play a role. To ensure future success, adapting to shifting consumer preferences while maintaining efficiency remains essential.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Supermarket managers should prioritize convenience, freshness, and quality, as these factors strongly influence consumer choice. Strategies could include optimizing store layouts, ensuring consistent stock levels, and highlighting fresh and local products.
- 2) Pricing strategies should remain competitive and transparent, with regular promotions, loyalty programs, and bundled offers to attract and retain price-sensitive shoppers without compromising perceived value.
- 3) Digital payment options and technology-driven services should be expanded, including mobile payments and online platforms, to enhance customer convenience and satisfaction.
- 4) Future research could examine additional factors such as cultural preferences, household size, and dietary habits to better understand consumer behavior in urban retail settings.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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