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RELATIONSHIP MARKETING FOR CUSTOMER LOYALTY AT AN ICE CREAM AND BEVERAGE COMPANY IN AYACUCHO, PERU

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ABSTRACT

This study rigorously examines the nexus between relationship marketing and customer loyalty within an ice cream and beverage company in Ayacucho, Peru. Employing a quantitative, correlational, and non-experimental design, the research draws on a purposive non-probabilistic sample of 386 consumers. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, whose content validity was established through expert judgment and reliability confirmed via (Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.80). The empirical findings demonstrate robust, positive, and statistically significant associations between the dimensions of relationship marketing (trust, satisfaction, and commitment) and the components of customer loyalty (retention, perceived value, and loyalty). More specifically, the evidence underscores that trust and satisfaction act as pivotal determinants in cultivating enduring customer relationships, whereas commitment performs a reinforcing function by consolidating retention and perceived value. Consequently, the study enriches the literature by providing context-specific empirical evidence from Latin America, thereby advancing the debate on relationship marketing as a strategic lever for strengthening loyalty in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In practical terms, the results underscore the imperative for managers to formulate customer-centric strategies that strategically enhance trust, satisfaction, and commitment as essential drivers of sustainable competitiveness.

Keywords: Relationship marketing, Customer loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, Retention Strategies, Services Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, marketing has acquired growing relevance, primarily because of its capacity to consolidate customer relationships, which constitute a cornerstone of business development. As Kotler and Keller (2002) contend, firms that place the customer at the epicenter of their operations secure substantial strategic advantages. In a similar vein, Lindgreen (2001) maintains that relationship marketing fosters customer loyalty through the deployment of appropriate management instruments. This approach transcends mere proximity, as it entails a profound understanding of customer preferences and behaviors, thereby enabling the provision of tailored solutions that cultivate long-term satisfaction and loyalty. Reinforcing this perspective, Grönroos (1994) underscores that relationships with customers and other stakeholders ought to rest on mutual benefits and the consistent fulfillment of promises, thus facilitating the attainment of shared objectives. Accordingly, relationship marketing

must be conceived as a strategic pillar for organizations committed to sustainable growth. Furthermore, Kotler and Armstrong (2012) highlight that the cultivation of robust customer relationships engenders delight, which not only consolidates loyalty but also stimulates favorable word-of-mouth advocacy for the brand. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to analyze the influence of relationship marketing on customer loyalty in an ice cream and beverage company in Ayacucho. Specifically, it will evaluate the interconnections among trust, satisfaction, and commitment, and their impact on loyalty and perceived value, with the ultimate aim of proposing strategies to strengthen the company–customer bond.

This research is anchored in the relationship marketing framework developed by Morgan and Hunt (1994), widely recognized as the Commitment–Trust Theory. As emphasized by Kleinaltenkamp and Ehret (2006), this model posits that trust and commitment constitute the fundamental pillars underpinning successful relational exchanges in the marketing sphere. Trust, understood as the perception of honesty and reliability in the counterpart, is pivotal insofar as it mitigates uncertainty and fosters cooperative behaviors. It is shaped by the quality of communication, the accumulation of positive past experiences, and the perceived competence and goodwill of the other party. Commitment, conversely, denotes a profound relational bond that facilitates closer and more personalized interactions with customers, thereby enabling a more accurate understanding of their needs. This commitment is expressed in three interrelated forms: input commitment, which enhances active customer participation; affective commitment, which engenders emotional attachment and brand loyalty; and temporal commitment, which underscores the relevance of sustaining long-term relationships for mutual benefit. Taken together, these elements constitute the theoretical scaffolding of the present study and elucidate the mechanisms through which robust and enduring customer relationships are constructed.

Relationship marketing constitutes a strategic approach that prioritizes the creation and preservation of long-term relationships with customers, placing loyalty and satisfaction above mere transactional acquisition. As Wakabayashi (2010) underscores, effective customer management necessitates a comprehensive understanding of needs, fears, habits, and behaviors, with trust, satisfaction, and commitment emerging as central dimensions. Likewise, Jobber and Fahy (2012) conceptualize relationship marketing as a continuous process of building and strengthening bonds with stakeholders, whereas Boone and Kurtz (2010) frame it as a holistic strategy aimed at sustaining mutually beneficial relationships not only with customers but also with suppliers and other partners. From the perspective of loyalty, Reinares and Ponzoa (2004) characterize it as a dynamic process that consolidates company–consumer ties, thereby fostering long-term relationships and enhancing organizational profitability. Such a bond, however, requires more than transactional efficiency; it rests on emotional underpinnings such as trust—defined by Rosendo and Laguna (2012) as the consumer's conviction shaped by experience—and satisfaction, which Reinares and Ponzoa (2004) describe as a favorable response arising from the surpassing of expectations.

Moreover, customer commitment embodies the emotional bond established with the brand. As Burgos (2007) argues, this attachment gradually deepens over time, stimulating not only repeat purchases but also active advocacy of the company. Equally significant is perceived value—an essential determinant in purchasing decisions—which reflects the customer's subjective assessment of the balance between benefits obtained and costs incurred. According to Baby and Lodoño (2011), such benefits encompass physical attributes, service quality, and technical support, whereas the sacrifices may include both monetary and non-monetary dimensions. Taken together, these elements—trust, satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, and perceived value—constitute the cornerstone of relationship marketing and function as decisive determinants of effective customer retention. Their systematic analysis, therefore, becomes indispensable for organizations striving to cultivate resilient and enduring relationships capable of delivering sustainable competitive advantages in an increasingly volatile and competitive market environment.

Recent studies underscore the multiplicity of perspectives linking marketing, innovation, and consumer behavior. Within the eco-hospitality sector, for instance, sustainable marketing has been shown to reinforce booking intentions by fostering community engagement and cultivating environmental sensitivity (Zhang et al., 2024). In the B2B context, by contrast, customer training emerges as a strategic lever to enhance relationship quality in transactional exchanges, with trust and positive emotions acting as mediating mechanisms (Brown & Lee, 2024). At the technological frontier, moreover, evidence indicates that artificial intelligence operates not only as a dynamic capability but also as a catalyst for adaptive customer engagement, thereby reconfiguring the entire customer journey (Roy et al., 2025).

From a strategic standpoint, research on supplier relationship management uncovers a persistent fragmentation between marketing and supply chain perspectives, leaving critical gaps unresolved in domains such as conflict resolution and relationship termination (Wieland & Ivens, 2025). In a parallel vein, empirical work on precision marketing corroborates that brand preference and emotional attachment operate as pivotal drivers of long-term loyalty, particularly when short-term behaviors are reinforced through social influence and contextual consumption scenarios (Huang et al., 2025).

At the organizational level, Nicolescu and Rîpa (2024) demonstrate that collective innovative work behavior exerts a positive and significant influence on CRM dimensions and overall marketing performance, whereas innovation at the individual level yields only marginal effects. Extending the analytical lens to the public health domain, Vergeer et al. (2024) provide strong empirical support that exposure to unhealthy digital food advertising constitutes a strong predictor of unhealthy dietary intake among Canadian youth.

Synthesizing these diverse perspectives, it becomes evident that relationship marketing research has progressively expanded into domains as varied as sustainability, B2B collaboration, digital transformation, and public health. Nevertheless, significant gaps persist—particularly with respect to conflict resolution in supplier relations, the scalability of AI-enabled marketing practices, and the regulatory complexities surrounding digital consumer exposure. Collectively, these unresolved issues delineate fertile ground for future inquiry and underscore the need to reconceptualize relationship marketing not merely as a business tactic, but as a strategic instrument capable of advancing both organizational competitiveness and broader societal well-being.

Several international studies have explored the influence of relationship marketing on customer loyalty, yielding nuanced insights. Carvajal et al. (2023) concluded that loyalty operates as a cohesive factor in the dynamic interaction among perceived value, satisfaction, and post-purchase behavior, while simultaneously underscoring the conceptual distinctions between value and satisfaction. In a complementary vein, Arcentales and Avila (2021) observed that although certain strategies proved effective, others failed to generate the anticipated outcomes largely due to deficient execution. Likewise, Torres and Jaramillo (2015) found that, despite companies' recognition of the strategic relevance of relationship marketing, its formal integration into corporate planning remains limited. Moreover, Peña et al. (2014), through simulations with Vensim PLE, demonstrated that well-designed loyalty programs can not only expand the customer base but also enhance business profitability, particularly within the pharmaceutical industry.

Vargas et al. (2020) set out to validate a theoretical model examining the interrelations among trust, commitment, and brand loyalty at the Rock in Rio (RIR) Festival in Brazil. To this end, structured surveys were administered to 725 participants, drawn from a total of 1,018 responses through non-probability sampling. The questionnaire, designed in Portuguese and based on a ten-point scale, had undergone prior validation. Data analysis, performed using SPSS and AMOS, revealed that commitment achieved an explanatory power of $R^2 = 57.7\%$, while loyalty reached $R^2 = 83.1\%$, thereby evidencing a strong relationship between the constructs. Convergent validity was confirmed (AVE > 0.500; CR > 0.700), and model fit indices were within acceptable thresholds (GFI = 0.922, AGFI =

0.892, RMSEA = 0.070). Ultimately, all hypotheses were supported, substantiating the existence of statistically significant associations among trust, commitment, and loyalty.

Álvarez et al. (2024) conducted a study that examined the impact of relationship marketing on customer loyalty at the Tía Manta commissary, focusing on key variables such as trust, satisfaction, service quality, and engagement. The research employed a quantitative, descriptive, correlational, and applied approach, using a non-experimental cross-sectional design. Data were collected through 153 surveys administered via simple random probability sampling, utilizing a structured Likert-scale questionnaire that demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.965). The findings revealed robust and statistically significant positive correlations: relationship marketing and customer loyalty (r = 0.856), trust (r = 0.777), satisfaction (r = 0.860), service quality (r = 0.943), and engagement (r = 0.931). On this basis, the study concluded that relationship marketing exerts a strong and positive influence on customer loyalty, thereby reinforcing its role as a critical strategic driver of sustained organizational performance.

Jawab et al. (2013) investigated the influence of trust, commitment, communication, and conflict management—considered as independent variables—on customer loyalty, treated as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed that these relational dimensions exert a positive and statistically significant effect on loyalty, as demonstrated by the regression coefficients and explanatory power of the model (R^2 = 0.419, p < 0.05). These findings indicate that improvements in trust, commitment, communication, and conflict management consistently translate into higher levels of customer loyalty within the context of BTPN KCP Sepanjang Bank.

Rozak et al. (2022) investigated the influence of relationship marketing on customer satisfaction and loyalty, treating satisfaction as a mediating variable. The study adopted a quantitative and explanatory design, drawing on a purposive sample of 200 PT Unilever consumers in Bandung. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS 25, applying multiple regression and path analysis. The findings revealed that relationship marketing exerts a significant effect on satisfaction (coefficient = 0.379, p < 0.001) and loyalty (coefficient = 0.317, p < 0.001). Furthermore, satisfaction exhibited a robust association with loyalty (coefficient = 0.824, p < 0.001), thereby functioning as a mediating mechanism. All coefficients were statistically significant, confirming that the strengthening of relationship marketing practices and the enhancement of satisfaction jointly contribute to fostering higher levels of customer loyalty.

Trenggana et al. (2022) examined the impact of relationship marketing on customer loyalty and retention at JNE Bandung. Adopting a quantitative approach with a path analysis design, the study surveyed 100 frequent users through Likert-scale questionnaires. The descriptive results indicated that relationship marketing achieved a score of 72.5% (classified as good), while retention (67.6%) and loyalty (65.6%) were rated as adequate. Inferential analysis demonstrated a significant direct effect of relationship marketing on loyalty (β = 0.419), alongside an indirect effect mediated by retention. These findings lead to the conclusion that the relationship marketing strategies implemented by JNE not only exert a direct influence but also indirectly reinforce loyalty through retention, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the enterprise's customer relationship practices.

Riza and Santoso (2023) investigated the influence of relationship marketing on customer loyalty, with trust conceptualized as a mediating variable. The study adopted a quantitative, causal design and employed structural equation modeling (SEM-PLS) on a sample of 110 respondents. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire that demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7). The results revealed that relationship marketing exerts a significant influence on both trust (coefficient = 0.665; T = 11.125; p < 0.05) and customer loyalty (coefficient = 0.264; T = 3.939; p < 0.05). Furthermore, trust itself displayed a positive effect on loyalty (coefficient = 0.265; T = 3.939; p < 0.05). On this basis, the study concluded that trust functions as a partial mediator in the relationship between relationship marketing and loyalty, thereby strengthening customer retention and underscoring its strategic relevance.

Silva-Treviño et al. (2021) underscored the strategic relevance of customer service for small and medium-sized enterprises operating in highly competitive environments. The study applied Spearman's correlation and exploratory factor analysis to examine the relationships among key constructs. The findings revealed strong and positive correlations between service quality and customer satisfaction (r = 0.820), as well as between service quality and customer loyalty (r = 0.803), with tangible aspects emerging as particularly salient. The factor analysis accounted for 73.713% of the total variance, thereby confirming the robustness of the model. Although the research was limited to a single company, it nevertheless highlighted the pivotal role of high-quality service as a cornerstone for business sustainability and long-term competitiveness.

Tuguinay, Prentice, and Moyle (2022) demonstrated that social interaction functions as a pivotal moderator, enhancing both visiting frequency and average spending. From a relationship marketing standpoint, their study underscores that experiential and social dimensions are decisive in consolidating long-term customer relationships, particularly in contexts where entertainment-driven motivations shape loyalty. Complementing this view from a retail perspective, Cardoso et al. (2022) analyzed a Brazilian retail chain and confirmed that trust and loyalty constitute the foundation of brand–customer relationships. Their results revealed that trust in consumption decisions strengthens loyalty and satisfaction, thereby establishing a strategic triad that sustains the brand–customer bond over time. This evidence highlights the necessity of cultivating positive emotional connections with the brand as a mechanism for ensuring sustainable favorable behaviors, which remains a core principle of relationship marketing. Similarly, Salam, Abu Jahed, and Palmer (2022) examined corporate social responsibility (CSR) in B2B markets across the Middle East and Africa, concluding that customer satisfaction and loyalty fully mediate the relationship between CSR orientation and firm performance. This finding provides compelling evidence that intangible, stakeholder-oriented dimensions can evolve into sustainable sources of competitive advantage, thereby consolidating loyalty as a central pillar of relationship marketing strategies.

Collectively, these studies converge in affirming that the effective implementation of relationship marketing substantially enhances customer loyalty and constitutes a critical driver of sustainable organizational growth. In synthesis, the reviewed literature consistently underscores the strategic relevance of relationship marketing as a determinant of loyalty, albeit with notable variations across sectors, methodological approaches, and reported outcomes. Nevertheless, the bulk of existing research has been concentrated in urban settings and large-scale enterprises, thereby leaving a significant gap concerning the dynamics of small and medium-sized organizations in emerging regions. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to advance the literature by empirically examining the influence of trust, satisfaction, and commitment on customer loyalty within an ice cream and beverage company in Ayacucho, Peru. By providing context-specific evidence, the study not only enriches the academic debate but also generates actionable insights for business management in comparable markets.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a quantitative approach, employing statistical and mathematical techniques to describe, analyze, and interpret the relationship between relationship marketing and customer loyalty. The study is correlational and basic in nature, framed within a non-experimental design, insofar as the variables were not subjected to manipulation but rather observed in their natural context.

The study population comprised consumers of an ice cream and beverage company in Ayacucho. The sample size of 386 participants was calculated using a statistical formula for unknown populations, which yielded the reference figure. Nevertheless, owing to practical constraints in accessing respondents, the sampling strategy was ultimately non-probabilistic and purposive, targeting customers who had consumed the company's products at least once during the year 2024.

The inclusion criteria encompassed consumers aged 18 years or older, residing in the city of Ayacucho, and willing to voluntarily complete the questionnaire. Conversely, questionnaires with incomplete responses were excluded from the analysis to ensure the reliability and integrity of the data.

For data collection, a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was administered. The instrument was specifically designed to capture the dimensions of relationship marketing—trust, satisfaction, and commitment—as well as customer loyalty, operationalized through loyalty, perceived value, and retention. Content validity was established through expert judgment provided by three academics specializing in marketing and statistics, who assessed the clarity, relevance, and coherence of the items. In addition, a pilot test with 30 respondents was conducted to verify the instrument's applicability and comprehensibility. Reliability was subsequently confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients, all exceeding 0.80, thereby demonstrating satisfactory internal consistency across the measured dimensions.

RESULTS

Table 1. Evaluation of Relationship Marketing and Its Dimensions among Customers of an Ice Cream and Beverage Company in Ayacucho

	Trust		Satisfaction		Commitment		Relationship Marketing	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	74	19.2	52	13.5	46	11.9	54	14.0
Moderate	205	53.1	185	47.9	202	52.3	192	49.7
High	107	27.7	149	38.6	138	35.8	140	36.3
Total	386	100.0	386	100.0	386	100.0	386	100.0

The assessment of relationship marketing and its core dimensions—trust, satisfaction, and commitment—among customers of an ice cream and beverage company in Ayacucho reveals that overall perceptions predominantly fall within a moderate range. Specifically, in the trust dimension, 53.1% of respondents evaluated it as moderate, 27.7% as good, and 19.2% as low. These findings suggest that although more than half of the customers maintain a moderate level of trust in the company, the proportion reporting low trust is far from negligible. This outcome underscores a critical managerial challenge, as trust constitutes the cornerstone of enduring and mutually beneficial commercial relationships.

With respect to satisfaction, 47.9% of customers evaluated it as moderate, 38.6% rated it as good, and only 13.5% classified it as low. Among the assessed dimensions, satisfaction received the most favorable evaluation, as reflected in the highest proportion within the "good" category. This outcome suggests that a considerable share of customers perceive the company's products and services positively, thereby indicating a solid basis upon which to strengthen long-term loyalty strategies.

As for commitment, 52.3% of respondents perceived it as moderate, 35.8% as good, and only 11.9% as low. Although the majority demonstrate an intermediate degree of commitment, these results reveal the necessity of reinforcing customer loyalty and deepening the emotional bond with the brand, since sustained commitment remains indispensable for fostering enduring and value-generating relationships.

Finally, when assessing relationship marketing as an integrated construct, 49.7% of respondents evaluated it as moderate, 36.3% as good, and 14.0% as low. This distribution points to an overall moderate perception among customers. Consequently, it becomes imperative to strengthen strategies that enhance trust, satisfaction, and commitment, thereby fostering stable and sustainable long-term business relationships capable of generating enduring competitive advantages.

Table 2. Evaluation of Customer Loyalty and Its Dimensions by Clients of an Ice Cream and Beverage Company in Ayacucho- Peru.

	Loyalty		Perceived Customer Value		Customer Loyalty	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	56	14.5	43	11.1	59	15.3
Moderate	206	53.4	206	53.4	202	52.3
High	124	32.1	137	35.5	125	32.4
Total	386	100.0	386	100.0	386	100.0

The analysis of customer loyalty and its dimensions—loyalty and perceived value—within an ice cream and beverage company in Ayacucho indicates that customer perceptions are predominantly situated at a moderate level, both across the specific dimensions and in overall loyalty. In the case of loyalty, 53.4% of respondents rated it as moderate, 32.1% as good, and 14.5% as low. These results suggest that while the majority of customers sustain an intermediate relationship with the company and a notable segment exhibits strong loyalty, the proportion reporting low loyalty represents a potential retention risk that warrants strategic attention.

With respect to perceived value, 53.4% of customers also rated it as moderate, 35.5% as good, and only 11.1% as low. This dimension obtained the most favorable evaluation, suggesting that a substantial share of customers acknowledge tangible benefits in the products and services offered. Finally, overall customer loyalty followed a similar pattern, with 52.3% assessed as moderate, 32.4% as good, and 15.3% as low. Collectively, these results indicate that customer loyalty remains at a moderate level, thereby underscoring the necessity of implementing more effective strategies to reinforce the customer–company relationship and secure long-term retention.

Table 3. Normality Tests of the Variables and Their Dimensions among Customers of an Ice Cream and Beverage Company in Ayacucho, Peru

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Test Statistic	gl	Sig.	Test Statistic	gl	Sig.
Trust	0.051	386	0.019	0.989	386	0.005
Satisfaction	0.064	386	0.001	0.984	386	0.000
Commitment	0.055	386	0.008	0.986	386	0.001
Relationship Marketing	0.051	386	0.018	0.983	386	0.000
Customer Loyalty	0.065	386	0.000	0.980	386	0.000
Customer perceived value	0.056	386	0.006	0.986	386	0.001
Customer Retention	0.057	386	0.004	0.981	386	0.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

To evaluate the distribution of the study variables, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with Lilliefors correction and the Shapiro–Wilk test were applied to a sample of 386 customers. The results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test yielded significance values below 0.05 for all variables: trust ($p = 0.019$), satisfaction ($p = 0.001$), commitment ($p = 0.008$), relationship marketing ($p = 0.018$), loyalty ($p = 0.000$), perceived value ($p = 0.006$), and customer loyalty ($p = 0.004$). These outcomes clearly indicate the rejection of the null hypothesis of normality in every case. Consistently, the Shapiro–Wilk test corroborated this finding, as all variables also exhibited significance levels below the 0.05 threshold, thereby confirming their non-normal distribution.

Table 4. Spearman's Rho Correlation Coefficients of the Variables and Their Dimensions among Customers of an Ice Cream and Beverage Company in Ayacucho, Peru

	Trust	Satisfaction	Commitment	Relationship Marketing	Loyalty	Perceived Customer Value	Customer Loyalty
Trust	1	,743**	,689**	,901**	,695**	,638**	,689**
Satisfaction	,743**	1	,765**	,919**	,714**	,670**	,712**
Commitment	,689**	,765**	1	,890**	,769**	,749**	,781**
Relationship Marketing	,901**	,919**	,890**	1	,796**	,750**	,797**
Loyalty	,695**	,714**	,769**	,796**	1	,847**	,951**
Perceived Customer Value	,638**	,670**	,749**	,750**	,847**	1	,966**
Customer Loyalty	,689**	,712**	,781**	,797**	,951**	,966**	1

The findings derived from the Spearman correlation analysis provide substantive correlations in favor of all the proposed hypotheses, as they not only reveal but also consolidate positive, robust, and statistically significant associations ($p < 0.001$) between the dimensions of Relationship Marketing—namely trust, satisfaction, and commitment—and the core components of customer loyalty, encompassing overall loyalty, behavioral loyalty, and perceived value.

With respect to hypothesis H1.1, the analysis demonstrates that trust is significantly associated with overall customer loyalty, as evidenced by a correlation coefficient of $\rho = 0.689$. This robust association unequivocally suggests that, insofar as customers' trust in the company increases, so too does their propensity to sustain long-term loyalty, thereby reinforcing the pivotal role of trust as a foundational determinant of enduring relational bonds.

In relation to hypothesis H1.2, customer satisfaction exhibited an even stronger correlation with overall loyalty ($\rho = 0.712$), thereby substantiating the premise that satisfied customers are considerably more inclined to sustain long-term relationships with the company. Furthermore, regarding hypothesis H1.3, customer commitment emerged as the dimension most powerfully associated with overall loyalty, attaining a coefficient of $\rho = 0.781$. These findings highlight the decisive role of emotional attachment and active customer engagement in sustaining loyalty.

In the case of customer behavioral loyalty, corresponding to hypotheses H1.4, H1.5, and H1.6, the analysis revealed consistently strong associations. Specifically, trust correlated with loyalty at $\rho = 0.695$, satisfaction at $\rho = 0.714$, and commitment at $\rho = 0.769$. Collectively, these results compellingly demonstrate that customers who not only trust in but are also satisfied with and committed to the company exhibit a markedly greater propensity to cultivate and sustain robust behavioral loyalty over time.

Similarly, in examining perceived customer value (hypotheses H1.7, H1.8, and H1.9), the analysis yielded equally significant correlations: trust ($\rho = 0.638$), satisfaction ($\rho = 0.670$), and commitment ($\rho = 0.749$). These findings show that the core dimensions of relationship marketing strongly influence how customers perceive their experience, reinforcing the importance of trust, satisfaction, and commitment in shaping perceived value.

Finally, when Relationship Marketing was assessed as a global construct integrating all its dimensions, the results proved even more compelling: a correlation of $\rho = 0.796$ with behavioral loyalty, $\rho = 0.750$ with perceived value, and $\rho = 0.797$ with overall loyalty. Collectively, these findings unequivocally reaffirm that a holistic relational strategy exerts a substantial and enduring impact on the consolidation of customer loyalty within the ice cream and beverage company evaluated in Ayacucho.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study furnish compelling empirical evidence in support of the proposed hypotheses concerning the influence of relationship marketing on customer loyalty. The results disclose positive, robust, and statistically significant associations between the dimensions of relationship marketing—trust, satisfaction, and commitment—and the core indicators of customer loyalty, namely overall loyalty, behavioral loyalty, and perceived value. Moreover, these outcomes not only align with and extend prior scholarly contributions but also substantively enhance the theoretical robustness and cross-contextual applicability of the relationship marketing model.

Trust as a relational foundation. The significant correlations between trust and overall loyalty ($\rho = 0.689$), behavioral loyalty ($\rho = 0.695$), and perceived value ($\rho = 0.638$) are congruent with the findings of Riza and Santoso (2023), who conceptualize trust as a pivotal mediating mechanism between relationship marketing and loyalty. Analogous conclusions were drawn by Jawab et al. (2013) in the banking sector, where increases in trust translated directly into higher customer retention. Likewise, in the context of large-scale events, Vargas et al. (2020) confirmed that trust, together with commitment, accounts for more than 80% of the variance in brand loyalty, thereby reinforcing its strategic role as a stabilizer of long-term relationships.

Satisfaction as a loyalty driver. The correlations observed ($\rho = 0.712$ with overall loyalty, $\rho = 0.714$ with behavioral loyalty, and $\rho = 0.670$ with perceived value) compellingly demonstrate the critical role of satisfaction in sustaining durable business relationships. Rozak et al. (2022) emphasize that satisfaction mediates the nexus between relationship marketing and loyalty, whereas Silva-Treviño et al. (2021) highlight its close connection with service quality and loyalty in SMEs. Taken together, these findings reaffirm that satisfaction constitutes a cornerstone of contemporary customer relationship strategies.

Commitment as the central predictor. The strongest correlations were observed for commitment ($\rho = 0.781$, $\rho = 0.769$, $\rho = 0.749$), thereby positioning it as the primary determinant of loyalty. Consistently, Vargas et al. (2020) identified commitment as the principal predictor of brand loyalty ($R^2 = 57.7\%$), while Álvarez et al. (2024) reported a correlation of $r = 0.931$, further reaffirming its centrality within relationship marketing. Thus, commitment transcends transactional exchanges, evolving into a long-term psychological and emotional bond that anchors customer–company relationships.

Relationship marketing as a holistic construct. When assessed globally, relationship marketing displayed strong correlations with overall loyalty ($\rho = 0.797$), behavioral loyalty ($\rho = 0.796$), and perceived value ($\rho = 0.750$). These findings mirror those of Álvarez et al. (2024), who observed a robust association between relationship marketing and loyalty ($r = 0.856$), as well as Trenggana et al. (2022), who emphasized its direct and indirect effects on retention in service companies. The consistency of results across diverse sectors suggests that relationship marketing functions as an integrated, systemic strategy rather than as a mere aggregation of isolated dimensions.

Instrument reliability and robustness. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs—trust ($\alpha = 0.84$), satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.86$), commitment ($\alpha = 0.88$), loyalty ($\alpha = 0.85$), perceived value ($\alpha = 0.87$), and overall loyalty ($\alpha = 0.89$)—exceeded the 0.80 threshold, thereby confirming the reliability of the measurement scales. Moreover, 95% confidence intervals further reinforced the statistical validity of the correlations, thereby ensuring the robustness and replicability of the results.

Integration with recent debates. The present findings converge with emerging scholarly debates examining how relationship marketing intersects with innovation, sustainability, and digital transformation. In the field of eco-hospitality, Zhang et al. (2024) demonstrated that sustainable marketing enhances booking intentions through community engagement and heightened environmental sensitivity. Within B2B contexts, Brown and Lee (2024) identified customer training as a crucial mechanism for strengthening relationship quality by fostering trust and emotional attachment. At the technological frontier, Roy et al. (2025) contended that artificial intelligence

functions not merely as a dynamic capability but also as a transformative force reshaping adaptive engagement throughout the customer journey. Collectively, these perspectives broaden the conceptualization of relationship marketing as a multidimensional construct capable of adapting to diverse business logics.

Strategic and societal implications. Nevertheless, recent research also reveals unresolved tensions. Wieland and Ivens (2025) underscore the fragmentation between marketing and supply chain perspectives, particularly in the domains of conflict management and relationship termination. Similarly, Huang et al. (2025) confirm that precision marketing enhances brand preference and long-term loyalty, yet caution against the transient influence exerted by social consumption scenarios. At the organizational level, Nicolescu and Rîpa (2024) highlight that collective innovative work behavior significantly drives CRM effectiveness, while in the public health arena, Vergeer et al. (2024) demonstrate that digital exposure to unhealthy food advertising predicts detrimental consumption patterns among youth.

Synthesis and research agenda. Taken together, these perspectives underscore that relationship marketing research is increasingly branching into sustainability, B2B collaboration, artificial intelligence, and societal well-being. However, persistent gaps remain concerning conflict resolution in supplier relationships, the scalability of AI-enabled marketing strategies, and the governance of digital consumer exposure. Addressing these challenges represents fertile ground for future inquiry, where relationship marketing may evolve beyond a business strategy into a comprehensive framework that simultaneously fosters organizational resilience and advances social equity.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study furnish robust empirical confirmation of the proposed hypotheses, demonstrating that the principal dimensions of relationship marketing—trust, satisfaction, and commitment—exert a positive, strong, and statistically significant influence on customer retention, loyalty, and perceived value. Among these dimensions, customer commitment emerged as the most decisive factor, exhibiting the strongest correlations with all dependent variables and thereby consolidating its role as the primary predictor within the relational model. Consequently, these results underscore the strategic relevance of fostering emotional bonds and cultivating active customer engagement as indispensable conditions for sustaining long-term loyalty. Moreover, customer satisfaction was unequivocally confirmed as a critical determinant of enduring business relationships. Its strong association with retention-related outcomes indicates that the effective management of this dimension not only enhances the overall customer experience but also amplifies loyalty and perceived value. Trust, although displaying comparatively lower coefficients than satisfaction and commitment, continues to function as the relational cornerstone of the model, providing long-term stability, reinforcing credibility, and underpinning the broader process through which commitment is cultivated. When relationship marketing was assessed as an integrated construct, it displayed high correlations with retention, loyalty, and perceived value, thereby confirming that comprehensive, coherent, and well-structured relational strategies substantially strengthen the customer–company bond. These findings acquire particular salience in the food and beverage sector of Ayacucho, where the empirical evidence was collected. They not only converge with the insights of the international literature but also generate context-sensitive contributions for emerging markets, which are often characterized by fragmented competition and a pronounced reliance on close customer relationships.

Nevertheless, certain limitations warrant acknowledgment. The use of non-probabilistic sampling constrains the generalizability of the findings; reliance on self-reported measures introduces the risk of social desirability bias; and the cross-sectional design precludes the establishment of causal inferences. Future research should therefore address these constraints by incorporating probabilistic sampling procedures, longitudinal approaches, and comparative studies across diverse regions. Furthermore, extending the scope to digital service sectors and cross-cultural contexts would

substantially enrich both the theoretical refinement and the practical applicability of the relational marketing framework.

In conclusion, this study underscores the strategic importance of relationship marketing as a pivotal instrument for reinforcing customer loyalty and retention. Beyond validating the effectiveness of its dimensions, the findings illuminate significant managerial implications for enterprises operating in highly competitive environments. Businesses are thus encouraged to design and implement relational programs across both physical and digital contexts, with particular emphasis on strengthening trust and commitment as indispensable pillars for sustainable, long-term growth.

Given the strong nexus between relationship marketing and customer loyalty, enterprises in Ayacucho are advised to intensify their efforts toward gaining a nuanced understanding of their customers through rigorous market research aimed at identifying evolving needs and preferences. Such insights will ensure the delivery of more satisfying consumption experiences. Equally, the adoption of personalized communication strategies—particularly through direct marketing—can facilitate effective feedback loops while simultaneously reinforcing trust between the brand and its customers. Moreover, cultivating a consistent and emotionally resonant brand identity represents a powerful means of fostering deeper customer commitment by engaging them in processes of continuous improvement. In parallel, delighting customers with unexpected benefits—such as targeted discounts or incremental service enhancements—can render the relationship dynamic and thereby fortify loyalty. Finally, the assurance of superior product quality relative to competitors is essential for elevating perceived value and securing a sustainable competitive advantage.

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