**An empirical study of key critical factors of consumer’s buying behavior in the Union Cooperative Hypermarket in Dubai, UAE**

**Abstract:** *Union Coop is a chain of retail stores located across the emirate of Dubai. This store is specially designed to attract the Emirati customers but serves for all other nationalities. The critical factors involved in the success of business and operational excellence of the stores are price, quality, service and variety. The surge in the number of stores, increased customers are evidence that business has reached the optimality in Union Coop stores. The critical factors involved in the business success and operational excellence are analyzed through the customers buying behavior at stores.*

**Keywords:** *Critical factors, union Coop, Pricing, quality, convenience, variety*

1. **Introduction**

Dubai is one of the notable emirates in the UAE and a world-renowned tourist place in the GCC and MENA region.  Dubai is not only famous for tourism; it is the second home for millions of expatriates due to its elite lifestyle, human values, laws and morals.   Though Emiratis are much fewer in population compared to expats, their lifestyle and buying behavior is outnumbering all others in the world. They are fond of quality products and aesthetics and also prefer a quality lifestyle. The buying behavior of Emiratis in Dubai is discussed by many authors in various aspects. Union cooperative society is an Emirati consumer’ hypermarket situated in the Emirate of Dubai. It was established in the years 1982 by the Ministry of Labor and social affairs as an exclusive supermarket cum hypermarket for the Emirati consumers.  Union Coop is one of the largest hypermarkets in the UAE and in Dubai also. It was founded exclusively for the Emiratis and later the Ministry extended it services by opening branches and malls in and around Dubai’s cluster of Emiratis residences and main people gathering vicinities. After recent expansion it operates almost 27 branches across the Emirate of Dubai.

Consumers buying behavior is a buzzword, which is popular among the market researchers.  Market analyst is always keeping an eye on consumers buying behavior to do extended forecast study and to launching new products (Annamalai Chockalingam, 2016)   Union Coop is a hypermarket supplies consumables, household items, furniture, electronics, garments and other trendy items based on the market analysis.  Union Coop is known for its quality products, reliability, customer service and popularity for its loyalty programs, offers and subsidies. Emirati customers were given additional offers, subsidies and loyalty points more than other expat customers as per the ministry norms. Hence, Emirati customers’ first priority is union Coop than any other such hypermarkets and the number of expat customers are almost equal nowadays due to its serviceability and offers. The consumer’s buying behavior is based on their need initially and now the impulsive buying behavior of consumers play pivotal roles among market analysts.  The influencing factors and critical factors of buying behavior of consumers are discussed in much literature (Judith Gomes Nagar et al , 2017 ; Aysen Akyuz, 2018 ; Irshad Ahmad et al , 2020). Not only in store purchase, Union coop has now implemented online purchases with prompt delivery of all kinds of goods from their store to the customers. They take cash on delivery and pre-paid orders exclusively for Emiratis customers and only prepaid for other customers.  Developing their business model at par with current trends they have extended all kinds of easy shopping facilities within union coop stores.

Union Coop offers a Tamayaz card royalty program for Emiratis and other nationals and recently they have extended their service for self-checkout.  In addition, Union Coop has Emiratis share options too as an inclusive royalty program.   Though the chain of hypermarkets is available only in Dubai, the royalty program is extended for all Emirati and other national customers.  Union Coop has sections like, food products, grocery, vegetables, meat and Fish areas, utensils, furniture, electronic gadgets and other furnishing items all under one roof policy hypermarket.  Union Coop is playing as the number one customer preferred hypermarket in the Emirate of Dubai with the highest number of branches competing with other such hypermarkets, Carrefour, Lulu, Nesto, KM etc.    The number of branches, locations, customer​ service, product quality and offers, pricing and car parking facility are some of key points in the success story of Union Coop.

Union Coop is a retail chain with professional administration, well organized, accounting transparency, well organized supply chain management, resourcing and well-organized quality control aspects (A.Sabarirajan et al 2021), with multi billion business units​ per annum in the Emirate. Union Coop is proved with high customer experience and customer loyalty and reached customer excellence in recent years through their organizational behavior. ​

* 1. **Consumer Behavior**

Consumer buying behavior in the UAE is predicted with cultural, social, personal and psychological factors influencing consumers' shopping preferences during selection of their choice of shopping destinations (Vazeerjan Begum, 2016).  Consumer spending in the retail sector in the UAE saw a notable uptick of 13 per cent in the year 2023 compared to the previous years, showcasing sustained economic growth.  Consumer’s buying behavior in Ecommerce supported mainly the hike in the overall spending behavior. The UAE market is purely a consumer market and evidently the impulsive buying behavior and compulsive buying behavior played the pivotal roles in online stores and hypermarkets.  The UAE consumers are more concerned about the range of products, quality of the product and customer service, pricing, store ambience and convenience, value for money, availability of new products and offers with loyalty points and availability. The Union Coop stood tall in all these aspects for customer priority.

Psychological effect of impulsive buying behavior plays a major role in consumer’s buying habits online and offline purchases.  Buying behavior refers to choosing items, procurement, consumption or utilization of the items purchased in order to satisfy their desires.  A consumer's economic situation is a key influencing factor in his or her purchase decision and choosing of a certain brand or product (Ali & Ramya, 2016). In this scenario, credit cards played a pivotal role in influencing the consumers towards buying more products or commodities by the advantage of buy now pay later credit card facility.  The credit card played the major role of influencing consumers towards impulsive buying. Aditi Khanna (2021) investigated the compulsive buying behavior of consumers, how the consumers attempt to identify the needy commodity and selection, consumption of  the same with more benefits.  Ghaswyneh (2019) investigated the elements influencing consumer behavior in the purchasing of eco-friendly-energy-saving green appliances in nations that have transitioned to clean energy.​

**2.0 Problem Statement**

​​The Union co-op is serving niche customers and their goods and deliveries are exclusive with a unique business strategy. The factors influencing consumers buying behavior in Union coop stores are distinctive. The critical factors influencing the buying behavior of consumers vary from time to time in many hypermarkets but in the union coop the influencing critical factors are quite interesting to discuss.  Maria and Mark (2020) explain various aspects of impact factors and influencing factors of consumer​ buying behaviors and many critical factors of consumers buying behavior under study based on their ethnicity, culture, demographic and economic conditions involving in market analysis in their principles of marketing open Stax.  Literature from Rosa Isabel (2021), Joghee, S et al ( 2021) Kaveh Peighambari et al ( 2017) discuss impulsive buying behavior and other influencing critical factors in and around the UAE and globally.  Rajneesh Kler et al (2022), Dharani (2023), Prasanna Mohanraj (2017),  and many others discuss various factors impacting the consumers buying behavior in supermarkets. Mohammed Alnahhal et al ( 2023)  discuss in detail about the  impact of pricing on consumer buying behavior in the UAE. Accordingly, an empirical study of key critical factors involved in consumer’s buying behavior in the union cooperative hypermarket in Dubai will be considered for our study.

A recent study from the market analyst revealed that

* 63% of Emiratis shoppers are impressed by the Quality and Elegance of the products and they are more impulsive buyers than other nationalities.
* Dubai alone accounts to about 30% of Emiratis income is spent for luxury among that they spend a significant amount for shopping alone
* Demographic influence is higher in Dubai and a study found that Female Emiratis spend almost 43 % of their earnings in luxury and shopping.
* Shopping has become their hobby for Emiratis and their buying behavior is more and more impulsive.  Union Coop has a significant margin of income in their weekly shopping budget.

The empirical study of this project involves two parameters, one with Consumer buying behavior and the other is influencing key critical factors of consumers in the Union Coop specifically.  The behavior of UAE consumers, Emirati Consumers, shopping behavior at  Hypermarkets, Dubai lifestyle, Union Coop Hypermarket, stakeholder of union Coop, Eco friendly and  pricing , Ecommerce in union coop, affordability and accessibility and all other influencing  factors needs to be considered. This study will be evidence based though the customers of Union Coop in a few outlets in Dubai.

**3.0 Research Objective**

​The main objective of this study is to analyze the key critical factors of two different type of consumer’s buying behavior in the union cooperative stores of Dubai. Though their target customers are Emiratis, they have extended their serviceability to other customers too by opening various branches across the Emirate and through online purchases.  The Economist Intelligence Unit (2020) provides a detailed study about UAE consumers buying behavior towards instore purchase and online purchases, pre pandemic and post pandemic situation with a key insight of surge in Ecommerce in the UAE. Types of customers, behaviors, impulse behavior, influencing factors are clearly depicted by the experts. A report by Euromonitor International (2024) visually explores everyday habits and behaviors which reflect consumers' beliefs and values, linking behavioral trends with purchase and consumption habits in the UAE. A market research team gives the insights of the changing UAE consumer behavior post pandemic situation. GfK, a well-known global market research company and involved in consumer intelligence has recently conducted an intensive consumer life study in the UAE, unveiling insights about the preferences and  habits of the  UAE consumers. Their study lights up the top concerns of the UAE consumers, their shifting lifestyle priorities, and their expectations from brands and companies. These findings carry significant implications for businesses operating in the region. This makes the main objective of this project to have an understanding by analyzing the key critical factors of two different type of consumer’s buying behavior in the union cooperative stores of Dubai.

Our Study consists of two objectives: primary and secondary.  The Primary objective is to study the consumer buying behaviour/ pattern in the Union Coop. inclusively for all types of customers. How the hypermarket is standing tall in this and becoming a benchmark solution for the customers.  Secondly, the critical factors impacting the shopping behaviour in the Union Coop and the influencing factors to reach the service excellence and product quality in the hypermarket.

Though there are a number of other branded hypermarkets in the UAE, Union Coop is the most​ preferred shopping destination for nearly one million customers in the UAE. The success motivated the management to increase their outlets in and around more densely populated areas.  The main aim of Union Coop is to improve the social and economic conditions of the local producers and to serve the local community.

The following propositions were made for our study

* Identifying the key critical factors influencing buying behaviour in the Union Coop
* Identifying the Impact of those influencing factors
* Correlating factors with buying behaviour in the union Coop

**4.0 Motivation for the study**

​Various critical factors are involved in deciding the consumers buying behavior in the hypermarkets. Like Pricing, Quality, serviceability, offers, convenience, loyalty programs, product availability, variety, multiple options at single stores and available under one roof are some of the key factors discussed and analyzed by various authors in various situations. Our study is focusing on union co-op stores in a Unique hypermarket in the emirate of Dubai with focused primarily Emirati customers and equally other national expat customers. Hence, we limit our critical factors to three or four major common factors for all types of consumers which impacts the buying behavior of consumers in Union coop will be carried out in our study.

The advantages of Union hypermarkets are

* Emirati Customer service personnels
* Ample car parking with car wash facility
* Spacious stores with helper/labor assistance
* Arab speaking and/mostly multilingual specialist personnel
* kind service and Some stores with prayer room facilities
* Recent self-checkout facility
* Cleanliness
* Pricing, Quality, Offers, variety and ambience
* Convenience with promising service online and in-store purchases.

The consumer decision-making process involves five steps initiated by impulsive behavior and recognition of the goods and end s with post purchase behavior.  In this decision-making process the key critical factors, Pricing, Quality, variety and convenience are the four traits playing a vital role in hypermarket shoppers’ behavior.  For our study, we consider these four critical factors and how they influence the buying behavior in union Coop Hypermarket.

|  |
| --- |
| Consumer Buying Behavior |

Fig 1: Consumer Buying Behavior

Consumer decision-making processes and consumer-buying behavior is fostered by influence of internal and external factors. Internal factors include personal needs and motivations and the external factors include social and economic influences. But price and promotions increase sales by increasing customer loyalty. Mohammed Alnahhal, et al (2024) depicted that the Pricing and strategy plays pivotal in consumer buying behavior in the UAE especially in post Pandemic era. Customer satisfaction and customer loyalty is the ultimatum of success in business. The Key critical factor Pricing and impact, Product Information on Consumer Buying Behavior ([Huiliang Zhao](https://loop.frontiersin.org/people/1361107) st al 2021 ) , Impact of product quality on customer satisfaction (Anuj Bhowmick, 2023), impact of Price and product quality in consumer purchase decisions (Rizky Ferrari Oktavian, 2022), the Influence of Quality by Md. Faisal (2020)., are supporting strongly the key critical factors of consumer buying behavior and decision making.

Most of the literatures identifies surge in online purchase and ecommerce as evidence convenience shopping, consumer still enjoy and prefer tangible and choice-based purchase fashion. [Jusuf Zeqiri](https://www.tandfonline.com/author/Zeqiri%2C+Jusuf) et al (2023) strongly advocates the effect of perceived convenience and perceived value of the goods aligning with consumer behavior. Along with availability, offers, pricing, variety, advertisements and marketing messages, two more critical factors as convenience and variety impacting consumer buying behavior (Marianne Ylilehto, et. al. (2021), [Shahid Ali Shah](https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/Shahid-Ali-Shah-2270069834?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19) et. al. (2023), [Anitha Devaraj](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anitha-Devaraj?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19) and [Sathya Rangasamy](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sathya-Rangasamy-2?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19) (2016), and [Md Rashaduzzaman](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Md-Rashaduzzaman-2?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19) (2020)).

**5.0 Materials and Methodology**

Our study involves in two folded analyses. Initial with secondary data collection from deep literature review in accordance with the consumer behavior in Hypermarkets, UAE resident shopper behavior, the sprawling Union coop, then key critical factors impacting Union Coop from various literatures being carried out. Secondly, to confirm the initial literature survey, we conducted collecting primary data from the customers of Union coop from various store locations from all nationalities included. We collected almost 511 feedback from customers with limited questionnaire using online devices. The completed data collection involved only by voluntary services, using electronic gadget inputs, The incomplete Data were eliminated and completed final data were taken into consideration for further analysis and Insights.

**5.1 Data Collection**

The Key critical factors were fixed from the understanding of various literature reviews and opinion polls from experts and office from Union coop management. This survey data collection involved in eleven stores of union Coop in Dubai. This store selection involved using convenient sampling method with suggestions from Union Coop HR manager and Admin Manager. The stores involved in this survey is a mix of largest store at Al Barsha to recently opened drive in facility at corniche mini supermarket to avoid the data to be biased. The samples were collected using a simple random sampling methods in different days including crowdy week ends and other weekdays in different timings too. This tedious sample collection work was completed due to time limited frame and ended up with 511 completed data sets.

**5.2 Data Analysis and Result interpretation**

1. Table 1: Gender of Respondents

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Gender** | **Male** | **Female** | **Total** |
| **Number of Respondents** | **391** | **120** | **511** |
| **%** | **76.5%** | **23.5%** | **100%** |

The number of respondents of our survey shows 77 % male and rest 23 % female. Though shopper is not alone and accompanied by family and/ friends, the respondents mostly male and few occasions female members answered.    The mood of the respondents and shopping behavior impacts the gender of the shoppers and influencing factors too.  The female shoppers need and shopping behavior is different from the male shoppers. But our location is mostly dependent on home shoppers or family shoppers' destination and the mostly the respondents are head of the family or the first buyer (​bill ​payer). For our study we collected data mostly from bill payers or their spouse only not from the window shoppers and/ companions.

1. Table 2: Age of respondents

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Age ( in Years ) | 18 – 25 | 26 - 35 | 36 - 45 | 46 - 55 | Above 55 | Total |
| **Number of Respondents** | 46 | 139 | 189 | 96 | 41 | 511 |
| **%** | **9.0%** | **27.2%** | **37.0%** | **18.8%** | **8.0%** | **100%** |

1. Table 3 : Nationality /Ethnicity of respondents

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nationality /Ethnicity | Emirati | GCC | MENA | Non- Arabs | Total |
| Number of Respondents | 255 | 41 | 94 | 121 | 511 |
| % | 49.9% | 8.0% | 18.4% | 23.7% | 100% |

This Hypermarket is exclusively designed and operated for Emirati customers, and the store locations are only in the vicinity of Emirati residences. The service excellence, pricing, product quality, offers attracted other national inclusion of Arab national and non-Arab nationals. Later the opalizations opened new stores in more locations to attract all country customers as extension of business and services. Obviously, the number of Emirati customers lead the show with 50% respondents and Arab nationals with 26 % followed by non-Arabs with 24 %. The recent extension of stores and mini supermarket facilities attracts more customers with small purchases.

Table 4: Details of respondents

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nationality / Gender | Emirati | | GCC | | MENA | | Non- Arabs | | Total |
| Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Number of Respondents | 201 | 54 | 30 | 11 | 60 | 34 | 100 | 21 | 511 |
| % | 39.3% | 10.6% | 5.9% | 2.2% | 11.7% | 6.7% | 19.6% | 4.1% | 100% |

1. Table 5: Marital Status of respondents

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marital Status | Single | Married | Divorced | Separated | Total |
| **Number of Respondents** | 133 | 345 | 22 | 11 | 511 |
| **%** | 26.03% | 67.51% | 4.31% | 2.15% | 100% |

1. Table 6: Shopping Partner(s) of respondents

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Shopping Partner(s) | Family Members | Friends | Alone | Total |
| Number of Respondents | 411 | 88 | 12 | 511 |
| % | 80.4% | 17.2% | 2.3% | 100% |

​Among the influencing factors for shoppers, the shopping partners are psychological and societal influences makes impulsive buying.  Judith Gomes Nagar et al (2017) list the factors family, education, shopping partners as influencing factors.  Shanmugan Joghee (2021) depicted that shopping partners are pivotal influencing factor for impulsive buying in the UAE.  Dati Al Shishani (2020)​ demonstrates that family and friends are social environment factors that influences shopping behaviors.  Xi Li et al (2021), found that shopping time and shopping partners are the most influencing factors for impulsive buying behavior of consumers. It is clearly understood that the shopping partners makes significant time spent in the stores, excess needs, increased impulsive buying, especially with kids, and more commonly, the parents also become impulsive buyer because of the hypermarket shopping style.

* It is clearly understood that, single shoppers spend less time and limited buying with control over their spendings.
* Shoppers with friends purchased more than their needs due to social and environmental influences and impulsive buying, their time spent and money spent on shopping is much higher than single shoppers
* The family supported shoppers spend more time on Stores, spent more money, buy lots of impulsive buying, makes unwanted buying and spent huge amount. All four critical factors directly influence their buying behavior in store and online.
* Need of the shoppers increased highly for family shoppers.

1. Table 7: Level of Education of respondents

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Level of Education | Doctorate (Ph.D.) | Master’s degree | Bachelor’s Degree | Diploma | Secondary | Others | Total |
| **Number of Respondents** | 18 | 90 | 205 | 98 | 72 | 28 | 511 |
| **%** | 3.52% | 17.61% | 40.12% | 19.18% | 14.09% | 5.48% | 100% |

1. Table 8 : Monthly Income (Dirhams) of respondents

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Monthly Income  (in AED) | Less than 5000 | 5001 - 10000 | 10001-20000 | 20001-30000 | 30001- above | Total |
| Number of Respondents | 45 | 59 | 81 | 160 | 166 | 511 |
| % | 8.8% | 11.5% | 15.9% | 31.3% | 32.5% | 100.0% |

Unanimously, all authors have accepted that monthly income has direct positive correlation with shopping behavior. The monthly income makes highly significant impact in the spending behavior and shopping needs. More than compulsive and needy shopping, the most influencing factor of impulsive buying is monthly income. Literatures from Annamalai C. et. al. (2016), Ramya N ( 2016), Aditi Khanna (2021), Asim Mehmood (2023), Shanmugan Joghee et al (2021), Fang Zimu (2023), Aysen Akyuz (2018), Marianne Ylilehto (2021), [Muhammad Turki Alshurideh](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-31801-6_23#auth-Muhammad_Turki-Alshurideh) (2024), Mohammed Alnahhal (2024) have confirmed that the most influencing factor for shopping behavior is monthly income and especially in UAE, monthly income being the pivotal element of consumer buying behavior. Our Study identified that, the Monthly income has monotonically increased behavior among customers. That is, the as income increases, the shopping experience increases and spending capacity increases, and consumer buying behavior is high in this scenario. The monthly income verses shopping behavior trend line is monotonous in increasing trend.

1. Table 9: How many years you are customer for Union Coop

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Being customer  for years | 0 – 2 | 2 – 4 | 4 – 6 | 6 – 10 | More than  10 years | Total |
| Number of Respondents | 36 | 62 | 96 | 145 | 172 | 511 |
| % | 7.0% | 12.1% | 18.8% | 28.4% | 33.7% | 100% |

Study found that the customer loyalty monotonically increases year by years from seven percent to 34 percent in ten years periods. Customer retention rate is the highest in the nation as per Tamayaz card usage and market analyst.

1. Table 10: How frequently you are visiting Union Coop

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Visiting  Union Coop | Twice a week | Once in a week | Occasionally | Often | Very Often | Total |
| Number of Respondents | 88 | 241 | 45 | 65 | 72 | 511 |
| % | 17.2% | 47.2% | 8.8% | 12.7% | 14.1% | 100% |

1. Table 11 : Average Monthly Spending in Union Co-op (in AED )

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Monthly Spending | 0 - 1500 | 1501 - 3000 | 3001- 5000 | 5001- 10000 | More than | Total |
| 10,000 |
| Number of Respondents | 44 | 69 | 86 | 115 | 197 | 511 |
| % | 8.6% | 13.5% | 16.8% | 22.5% | 38.6% | 100% |

1. Table 12 : Key Critical Characteristics

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Characteristics** | **Very poor** | **Poor** | **Neutral** | **Satisfied** | **Highly Satisfied** | **Total** |
| Experience with staff | 1 | 2 | 66 | 245 | 197 | 511 |
| Customer service | 0 | 2 | 56 | 266 | 187 | 511 |
| Retail store ambiance | 0 | 0 | 60 | 290 | 161 | 511 |
| Parking experience | 0 | 0 | 12 | 300 | 199 | 511 |
| Pricing | 0 | 0 | 88 | 200 | 223 | 511 |
| Quality of the products | 0 | 0 | 45 | 201 | 265 | 511 |
| Variety | 0 | 0 | 56 | 199 | 256 | 511 |
| Convenience | 0 | 0 | 48 | 202 | 261 | 511 |
| Advantages of Tamayaz Cards | 1 | 1 | 79 | 200 | 230 | 511 |
| Overall Shopping experience | 0 | 0 | 66 | 199 | 246 | 511 |

Likert scale scores used : Very Poor =1; Poor = 2; Neutral = 3; Satisfied = 4 ;

Highly Satisfied = 5;

The key characteristic of influencing factors for consumer shopping behaviors are assessed using five-point Likert scale with weights given one to five for very poor to highly satisfied. Customer satisfaction level for each characteristic is registered carefully and tabulated for understanding. It is clearly identified that lower limits very poor and poor category is nowhere mentioned by any customer for any characteristics. It is a clear sign that operational and service excellence being achieved a bench mark situation in Union Coop Stores in Dubai. Studies from the management of Union coop is keen on customer service and feedback time to time enhance their excellence through every stage of their services. This feedback confirms the same. Neutral responses given by few customers due to their mood and hurry ness and to avoid skewness of resultants. Remaining more than 85% of consumers gave absolute positive responses for every trait of the key critical characteristics. The first key critical factor Pricing showed 83% responses with happy customers and only 13% turned neutral. Remaining three key critical factors, convenience, variety and quality are all reached more than 90% satisfaction level to endorse the influencing factors buying behavior.

The literature from Rizky Ferrari (2022), reported that purchase decision of the consumers is highly influenced by product quality and pricing. Firoz Khan (2016) identified that promotional tools (pricing) used by the hypermarkets are highly influencing the buying behavior, Prodromos Chatzoglou et al (2022) strongly suggested that perceived value increases repurchase intentions and customer loyalty in retail stores. Huiliang Zhao et al (2012) confirmed that pricing and product information playing the mediating role in consumer buying behavior. Dati Al Shishani (2020) gave a detailed insight consumer buying process an influencing factors as psychological, societal and environmental, cultural and personal attitude towards buying behavior especially in Hypermarkets.

Fig 2: Bar graph showing Characteristics and Satisfaction level

Further, Rajneesh Kler et al ( 2022), Md. Faisal-E-Alam (2020), Md Rashaduzzaman (2020), Dharani and Praveen (2020) , Renukadevi et al (2023), Rosa Isabel Rodrigues (2021), Fang Zimu (2023), Asim Mehmood(2023), Anuj Bhowmick( 2023), and many other authors have depicted the four key critical factors and how it influence the consumer buying behavior in supermarkets and hypermarkets in the UAE and other nations.

Table 13: List of characteristics

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Characteristics** | **Mean** | **S.D** | **Category** |
| Experience with staff | 4.24266 | 0.70001 | **Highly Satisfied** |
| Customer service | 4.24853 | 0.65595 | **Highly Satisfied** |
| Retail store ambiance | 4.19765 | 0.62785 | **Highly Satisfied** |
| Parking experience | 4.36595 | 0.52872 | **Highly Satisfied** |
| Pricing | 4.26419 | 0.73476 | **Highly Satisfied** |
| Quality of the products | 4.43053 | 0.64971 | **Highly Satisfied** |
| Variety | 4.39139 | 0.67696 | **Highly Satisfied** |
| Convenience | 4.41683 | 0.65711 | **Highly Satisfied** |
| Advantages of Tamayaz Cards | 4.28571 | 0.74134 | **Highly Satisfied** |
| Overall Shopping experience | 4.29216 | 0.95842 | **Highly Satisfied** |

fig 3: Bar graph showing mean values of key characteristics

The mean Likert scale values for each key characteristics fall not less than four with minimal standard deviation values confirms that all said ten key characteristics are categorized highly satisfied by the consumers. The graph shows the goodness of fit line with equation

with . This Mean value is fit to the line with intercept value Zero and slope of the curve is positive with coefficient 0.6189. The regression coefficient is positive implies that the slope is positive and coefficient of determination is 79% and the correlation coeffects 89% yields highly positive correlation data is good to fit the study. The customer shopping experience in the UAE is innovative, convenient and the new formula happy customers introduced by the Union Coop is identified that they enforce the key critical influencing factors of consumer buying behavior to reach the operational cum service excellence.

**5.3 Discussion:**

**​**The key critical factors of our study are pricing, quality, convenience and variety.   Price and quality are dual always having strong positive correlation.  The pricing of same brand and quality will be common in all supermarkets, But Union Coop offers competitive pricing with higher quality of commodities.  The pricing is proportionate to the quality of the ​goods, and they offer variety of products in each category.    The veggies, food items, branded goods, other stuff are at par to meet the customer satisfaction with elite community standards.  Their target customers are niche, and they do not compromise with quality of the product as primary concern.  The quality plays the pivots role in all items in the store and accordingly the ricing is set to attract customers.  The store avoids monopoly of item and always provides variety of items in each category to give good choices to the customers. Then they give convenience of purchase environment with extended service of self-checkout, labor assistance, door delivery options, online purchase, etc.  They serve extensively to satisfy the customers at all levels and make them shopping easier. Spacious parking, trolley assistant, valet parking are some fringe services offered by Union coop.  Other supermarket customer say pricing is bit higher in Union Coop, but they compromise with quality. The Union Coop customers first priority is quality, and they never compromise with the same and agreed to pay pricing at with.

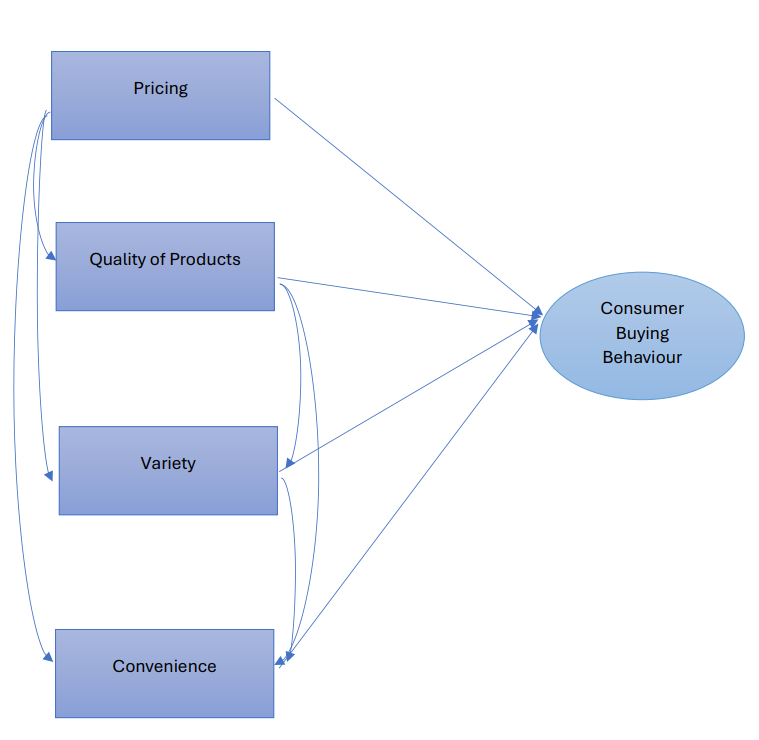


Fig 4: Flow chart showing consumer buying behaviour

All the four key characteristics, having mean values ranging between 4.264 to 4.431 shows strong evidence of highly satisfied customers with union Coop. Even the cross correlation is highly positive among the four factors and pivotal to the influencing factors of increased consumers buying behavior in union Coop.

The two critical factors convenience and variety are proximities preferred by the consumers. Though online purchases have surged highly with a significant market share in post pandemic situation in the UAE, still the physical retailing habit among consumers is highly perceived. Fixing a hypermarket is not an easy job, the concern company and management takes utmost survey and feasibility business analytics before they prefer a location. And the store format is central to a retailer’s strategy, representing the operations used to serve target markets, as defined by Levy et al. (2018, page 121):  Likewise, store format decisions are often difficult to reverse due to the costs involved in changing store format attributes such as store size, location (or proximity to consumers), store layout, customer service levels, and price strategy André Bonfrer et al (2022). Union Coop played smart role in setting up stores around Dubai with utmost success to reach maximum target customers. The store proximity is an added advantage for Union Coop to conform convenient shopping and the required variety of items available in the store based on the target customers need and imposition. Though consumer buying behavior rely on multiple factors, our study has confirmed that the four critical factors influenced the consumer buying behavior in the union Coop positively.

**6.0 Conclusion**

​The success of any business including retail and hypermarket is consumer-oriented market, with service. The consumer's economic status has a significant impact on his purchasing habits (Aditi Khanna, 2021).  The UAE is shopper’s destination for years either residents or tourist. The shopping festivals and offers and business model of the UAE is especially designer a consumer market and successfully on going.  The shopping behavior of UAE residents are analyzed by many Marke Analyst and researchers evidenced in literatures.  The new PwC survey (2023) found that the UAE shoppers are healthier, more digital and prioritize more sustainability, and prefer green shopping experiences too.

As consumer optimism continues to grow in the region, the Union Coop takes and made it essential to retain customer loyalty increases shopping behaviors by creating new features, technology-oriented shopping convenience, locate items feasibility in-store purchases, and shifting and adapt their priorities and strategies accordingly. Gulf business has revealed that UAE consumer spending has increased 13 % in retail sectors. B.RAMESH  (2016) revealed that strategies adopted by hypermarkets is the success story of consumer buying behavior in the organized hypermarkets and Judith[Gomes](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Judith-Gomes-4?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19) (2047) identified that the some of the key critical factors designed by the retails stores strategically become the success story of consumer buying behavior.   Various studies have confirmed that the consumer is influenced by many factors, and key critical factors set by the business units strategically are pivotal for the success of retail business. Consumer shopping experiences are increasingly influenced by innovations and Marianne Ylilehto et al (2021) demonstrated the critical factors shaping customer shopping experiences with innovative technologies.

Hence, our study has identified​ that the four critical factors, pricing, quality, convenience and variety are the shopper preferences for being loyal customers at union Coop in the UAE. And the other extraneous factors are inclusiveness in the four major critical factors.  The success of union Coop in extension of business units, huge number of loyal customers, increased economy, profitability and all other established success are their strategic approached inclusiveness of the four key critical factors, pricing, quality, convenience and variety.

**Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)**

Option 1:

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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Details of the AI usage are given below:

1.

2.

3.

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