

Determining of Marketing Mix Components to Improve Sales Performance in Startup Companies in Islamic Culture- Evidence from Iran

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Currently, one of the main concerns of startup companies is the sales of their products. Sales reduction is an issue that managers in startup companies are struggling with. This study intends to identify the effective elements of the marketing mix that can enhance the sales performance of startup companies in Islamic cultures. The research will investigate the influence of the five P's of marketing mix, namely Product, Packaging, Promotion, Price, and Place. This research employed mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) for collecting related data. In the first step, in-depth interviews with sales and marketing experts in 20 startup companies were conducted to identify the most important indicators of the marketing mix. Product, price, promotion, place, and packaging were examined as the most important marketing mixed variables according to these experts' points of view. For the quantitative phase, the statistical population is including all startup companies in Iran; 20 companies were selected from the available probability sampling method in Tehran, of which the data of 14 companies are correct. 383 questionnaires have been completed in these 14 companies. From five marketing mix examined factors; product, packaging, and promotion have positive effects on sales performance in startup companies. The research is innovative because no research has been done relevant to startup companies in Islamic culture.

Keywords: *Marketing Mix; Sales Performance; Startup Companies; Islamic Culture.*

Introduction

In today's business market, there is an enormous number of new entrants within an industry that they are selling similar products and services. In order to remain viable in the market, business providers engage in competition. Small businesses and firms are advised to prioritize customer preferences as a means of sustaining long-term relationships and fostering loyalty. To satisfy customers, they should recognize the customer buying behavior and its pattern (Wahab *et al.*, 2016). In other words, manufacturers should produce such products that fit customer preferences and convince customers to make a purchase. To achieve that goal, companies develop various tools to stimulate consumers and attract their attention. One of the most important such tools is the utilization of marketing tools and strategies as well as marketing mix elements. According to prior research, it is most evident that the marketing mix is a critical factor in the successful implementation of marketing strategies (Constantinides 2006; Sheth 2011).

The marketing mix is a theoretical construct that outlines the key choices made by marketing managers to meet the needs of consumers. According to Palmer (2004), managers ought to rely on tools capable of facilitating the creation of both short-term and long-term strategies. By implementing appropriate marketing mix strategies, organizations can actively pursue marketing objectives in their target markets, effectively meeting their organizational goals (Solimun & Fernandes, 2018). In other words, fundamental factors like product, price, and distribution channel, together with promotion, will impact sales growth significantly (Hamdi *et al.*, 2013; Mendez-Suarez & Estevez, 2016).

The marketing mix has been established as a valuable instrument for effectively promoting products and services to potential customers through the communication of their value (Ashraf & Bhalla, 2018). By utilizing this tool, marketers can gain a better comprehension of the available strategies to market their offerings to their intended audience (Larimo *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, marketing tools are inevitable for all startup companies that seek a

conscious presence in the market. In startups, successful and unsuccessful companies (Mirzahasan *et al.*, 2013) consider products as ideas which meet the needs of their audience (Henley *et al.*, 2011). Startups without ideal products are not able to survive due to the lack of enough competitive suggestions (Wahab *et al.*, 2016). In fact, a low-quality product triggers failure and brings negative consequences. Wahab *et al.* (2016) stated that marketing mix is a necessity for surviving startups. Islam considers commerce to be an essential means of livelihood, provided that it conforms to the principles of Islamic teachings pertaining to business practices. According to Antonio (2007) and Trim (2009), the Quran and Hadith serve as the main sources of guidance for Muslims in their marketing code of conduct. As a way of life, Islam emphasizes adherence to these teachings in order to attain optimal outcomes. The incorporation of Islamic cultural values in contemporary commercial activities has the potential to be highly significant in marketing. In order to fully comprehend the nature of marketing, it is suggested that the concept of the marketing mix be merged with an Islamic marketing perspective, which is considered a fundamental pillar of this field (Lovelock, 2011). The realization of the growing potential of Islamic businesses has led to an increasing interest in this field. However, there has been very little research on this

area (Hussnain, 2011). This is not surprising as marketing in Islamic culture is still emerging and evolving. Furthermore, most of the research in the area of marketing in Islamic culture has shifted to marketing of Halal food products. Notably, missing from the literature, there is a constant discussion on marketing mix in Islamic culture, especially in startup companies. This gap in research leads to the investigation of the effect of the marketing components on the performance of companies in Islamic culture. The study intends to explore the application of marketing mix by startups in Islamic culture to understand the value of marketing mix elements to startup businesses and also the effect of these elements on sales performance.

Overall, this article responds to the question of how startups could utilize marketing tools to acquire a competitive advantage. This research is innovative research because no research has been carried out about the effect of marketing tools on startup companies' sales performance in Islamic society.

To analyze the role of marketing mix in enhancing the sales performance of startups, we explored previous literature shown in Table 1 to understand how startup companies have evolved. According to that, we will mention various marketing researchers' viewpoints about effective marketing mix elements on companies' sales performance.

Table 1

Theoretical Background

Authors	Publication Year	Objectives
Phua and Jones	2010	Examining an under-researched area in the field of entrepreneurship that relates 'marketing' to 'new business'
Keramati <i>et al.</i>	2012	This study investigates the correlation between the marketing mix and sales performance of private steel companies in Iran.
Gbolagade, Adesol, and Oyewale	2013	This study presents a model aimed at elucidating the impact of marketing strategies on the performance of small business enterprises in Nigeria
Kusumawati <i>et al.</i>	2014	Examining the marketing mix elements that can influence consumer buying interest towards music products in Indonesia
Muthengi	2015	Determining the effects of marketing strategies on the sales performance of commercial banks in Kenya
Saguti	2015	Determining the effects of marketing strategies on the sales performance of SME in Kenya
Wahab <i>et al.</i>	2016	The present study aims to analyze the correlation between the marketing mix and customer loyalty in the hijab industry, while also exploring the potential mediating role of customer satisfaction.
Akbari, Gholizade and Zomorrodi	2018	Evaluating the impact of using Islamic symbols in food packaging on the purchase intention of Muslim consumers
Al Badi	2018	This study aims to examine the impact of the marketing mix, which encompasses product, price, place, and promotion, on the attainment of competitive advantage among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Al Buraimi Governorate of Oman.
Othman <i>et al.</i>	2021	This study aims to examine the impact of Umrah SMM components, including promotion, place, people, product, price, process, physical evidence, marketing communication, and after-sale service on customer satisfaction and loyalty towards Umrah travel agents in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Marketing mix

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), the marketing mix (MM) encompasses a set of controllable marketing factors utilized by businesses to achieve their desired sales targets within their target market. The Marketing Mix is considered an essential element of a firm's operations and procedures for generating valuable product offerings, communicating them effectively to customers, delivering them efficiently, and exchanging them at an appropriate price point. These factors are typically classified into categories such as pricing, product development, promotional strategies, and distribution channels (AMA 2021; MASB 2021). Marketing is defined as satisfying customers and building profitable relationships with them (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). The alignment between corporate strategy and marketing strategy is essential. The market environment plays a critical role in shaping a company's marketing approach, but customer relationships are equally important. Effective marketing strategies involve segmentation, targeting, and positioning based on customer needs and market characteristics to create an appropriate marketing mix that helps companies achieve their objectives (Taherdangkoo *et al.*, 2019).

Reviewing literature has shown that there is a positive relationship between the marketing mix of a startup and its performance (Gruber, 2007) or its survival in the long term (Pinkwart *et al.* 2015).

A marketing mix is a tool that marketers use for product and service sales. In other words, a marketing mix is a collection of techniques and actions focusing on production, pricing, promotion, and placement. It is also known as the 4Ps of marketing. These four components are consolidated into one set since their effective operation is dependent on their combination (Hanachor & Olumati, 2018). According to Anthony (2019), effective product marketing entails ensuring that the product is available at the appropriate location and price, while also communicating to customers how the product can meet their needs.

Goi (2009) has traced the origins of the 4Ps model back to Borden's (1964) discussion of the marketing mix in the 1960s. Borden (1964) proposed a framework of 12 factors aimed at supporting marketing education, problem-solving, and systematic thinking. McCarthy (1964) later expanded on Borden's work by introducing the 4Ps model, which has since proven to be a valuable tool for addressing issues related to market segmentation, positioning, and differentiation. Although there have been some criticisms of the framework (Constantinides, 2006), it remains widely

used by businesses today (Moller, 2006). Booms and Bitner (1981) further extended the model with three additional Ps for service products: People, Physical Evidence, and Process (Kwok *et al.*, 2020).

The marketing mix serves as a strategic tool for business firms to achieve their objectives and aims through effective planning (Mohammad, 2015; Hanachor & Olumati, 2018). Evidence suggests that startups equipped with knowledge of the marketing mix can enhance their performance and application compared to those without such knowledge. This is attributed to the skills acquired during incubation (MChirgui, 2012). According to Wahab *et al.* (2016), the marketing mix is essential for start-ups to survive.

Regarding the context of startups, reviewing prior studies has revealed that there is a limited number of studies focusing on designing marketing models (marketing mix) for innovative startups (Tokarev *et al.*, 2021). In addition, startups, particularly those in emerging economies, should utilise the marketing mix because it can lead to sound business success and increase profitability (Constantinides, 2006). Among these limited studies, Loo and Leung (2016) asserted the important role of the seven Ps including product, place, promotion, physical evidence, price, people, and process in increasing the strength of startups. The findings of another study mentioned people, processes, programs, and performance as the most important elements of the marketing mix in startups (Tokarev *et al.*, 2021). Tibaingana (2019) also focused on the implication of marketing mix by startups in Uganda and considered the seven Ps (product, place, price, people, process, promotion, and physical evidence) and the findings of this study indicated that people, price, product, and place are the most important elements of the marketing mix in these innovative companies.

In the current study, in-depth interviews with sales and marketing experts in 20 startup companies in Iran were conducted to identify the most important indicators of the marketing mix. In this way, all the indicators considered in the 4Ps, 5Ps, 7Ps models were presented to these experts and the following five indicators were nominated as the more important indicators. Product, Price, Promotion, Place, and Packaging were examined as the most important marketing mixed variables according to these experts' points of view. Packaging as the fifth P of the marketing mix was considered by some prior studies (*i.e.*, Awan *et al.*, 2015).

This study offers an effective provision of a clear understanding of marketing mix utilization by startups. In the following, we interpret some previous research and conceptual models, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Marketing Mix Models

Model name	Year	Model dimensions	Description
McCarthy	1960	4Ps	Product, price, place, and promotion
Frey	1961	The offering/The methods and tools	Product, packaging, brand, price, and service distribution channels, personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, and publicity
Booms and Bitner	1980	7Ps	Product, price, place, promotion ,participants ,physical evidence, and process

Model name	Year	Model dimensions	Description
Kotler	1986	6Ps	Product, price, place, promotion, political power, public opinion
McGrath	1986	7Ps	Product, price, place, promotion, personnel, physical facilities, and process management
Judd	1987	5Ps	Product, price, place, and promotion, people
Brunner	1989	4Cs	Concept mix, cost mix, channels mix, communication mix
Lauterborn	1990	4Cs	Customer needs, convenience, cost, and communication
Baugartner	1991	15Ps	Product/service, price, promotion, place, people, politics, public relations, probe, partition, prioritize, position, profit, plan, performance, positive implementations
Heuvel	1993	5Ps	Personnel, product, place, price, promotion
Peattie	1997	4Ps	Product, price, promotion, place
Bennet	1997	5Vs	Value, viability, variety, volume, and virtue
Goldsmith	1999	8Ps	Product, price, place, promotion, participants, physical evidence, process, and personalization
Yudelson	1999	4Ps	Performance, penalty, perceptions, process
Melewar & Saunders	2000	5Ps	Product, place, price, promotion, publication
Lawrence	2000	5Ps	Paradox, perspective, paradigm, persuasion, passion
Patterson & Ward	2000	4Cs	Communication, customization, collaboration, clairvoyance
Bhatt & Emdad	2001	4Ps	Product, price, promotion, place
Chong	2003	1Ps	Price
Astuti et. al.	2015	7Ps	Product, price, promotion, place, people, physical evidence, and process
Pomeroy	2017	9Ps	Price, promotion, place, product, processes, physical evidence, promise, principles, partnership

Liepe and Sakalas (2008) assert that businesses must promptly and accurately discern evolving customer requirements and preferences, create products that fulfill those demands, and supply superior customer assistance and service to generate worth and attract clients. According to the theoretical background and research literature, a marketing mix includes factors that help companies do it in the best way. According to the in-depth interview with sales and marketing experts in 20 startup companies in Iran, the most important factors of the marketing mix mentioned by them are packaging, product, place, promotion, and pricing. In the following, these factors are fully explained. However, the authors will with the definition of sale performance.

Sales Performance

Performance means the process of describing quality as well as effectiveness together with the efficiency of previous actions (Neely *et al.*, 2002). In addition, performance is separated into two components: 1) Efficiency refers to the optimized level of performance that utilizes minimal inputs in order to attain the maximum output. It illustrates the correlation between the real and intended configuration of inputs for producing specific outputs, and 2) Effectiveness refers to the level of success in achieving desired results or objectives. In a study conducted by Sije and Oloko (2013), income was identified as a crucial dimension of sales performance. Saguti (2015) defined sales performance as the actual monetary value received by a firm after necessary collections are made from various sales channels, known as sales revenue. The marketing mix application leads to outcomes such as increased sales, as noted in studies by

Ashraf and Bhalla (2018) and Loo and Leung (2016). Sales volume was also identified as an important aspect of sales performance by Magunga (2010).

Sales and sales performance can be considered the most important part of every company and without this indicator there can be no long-term future. In most companies, the sales function is fulfilled by salespeople working with their customers as well as their colleagues, and attempting to translate the available products to meet customer needs. From this point of view, it is obvious that sales and sales performance have a significant role in evaluating company success (Wahlberg, 2017).

Product

Product is an element of the marketing mix bringing all other mixed elements into play (Anthony, 2019). It is an element that is suggested to the market to satisfy (Anthony *et al.*, 2019) the needs and wants of potential customers. According to Hanachor and Olumati (2018) as well as Wahab *et al.* (2016), the viability of a business is largely determined by its products. The quality and value of a product are crucial factors that impact the success of a startup, as an inferior product is unlikely to attract customers. Isoraite (2016) asserts that the product concept encompasses a wide variety of elements, such as natural products and services, the overall experience, individuals involved, physical locations, property rights, businesses or organizations, information, and ideas. In order to succeed, startups must possess a thorough understanding of the value inherent in their products and effectively convey this message to consumers (Anthony, 2019). They should use

different strategies to move to new places in consumers' minds and generate an advantage over their competitors (Ostaseviciute & Slyburyte, 2008).

The Islamic doctrine aligns the principles of product and pragmatism with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad SAW, who advocated for the sale of goods necessary for all and free from decay (Febriansyah, 2019). Additionally, the Prophet prohibited the intermingling of low-grade and high-grade products in a single location (Al-Fatih, 2009), as reported by Arham (2010).

In their 2013 study, Gbolagade et al. investigated the relationship between product attributes and sales performance, specifically in terms of profitability, market share, return on investment, and expansion. The study found that customers consider product quality, aspects, design, and style when making purchasing decisions. Past research by Kazemand, Heijden (2006), Kemppainen, Vepsäläinen and Tinnila (2008), Ogunmokun and Esther (2004), and Owomoyela et al. (2013) has also indicated the significant influence of product on sales performance. Therefore, we posit that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between products and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture.

Price

After producing a good, a seller determines the item's price based on its quality (Riyadi & Rangkuti, 2016). In the realm of commerce, the value of a product or service is represented by its price, which is determined by the seller. The decision to accept or reject the price is made by the customer. The appropriateness of a price for a consumer is influenced by several factors, such as standard pricing principles, discount offers, price sensitivity, and limitations on price stimuli. The perception of price varies depending on the purchasing channel used, whether it be physical or online stores. Additionally, payment methods and the availability of information pertaining to product prices can also impact consumer decision-making (Banyte *et al.*, 2016). The success of a pricing strategy hinges on customers' willingness to pay what is being charged. When presented with a new product, consumers typically evaluate it against a reference price that they expect to pay for it (Rondan-Cataluna *et al.*, 2019). For startups looking to generate revenue, pricing strategies are crucial as they directly affect the amount customers will pay for goods and services (Johnston & Cortez, 2018). Monetary cost plays an important role in shaping consumer perceptions of a product's value (Yi, 2015). In summary, among all indicators found in the marketing mix, only price has direct financial implications (Anthony, 2019).

A company should be able to price its products in such a way that it can earn income related to the value provided to the customer; in this way, it can maintain its position towards customers, complementary goods, rivals, and potential newcomers. Pricing is one of the most important parts of a business model, therefore, decisions about pricing could have a significant impact on the profitability of a company. The price mix has a strong financial effect on startups (Anthony, 2019). The determination of price by a company does not solely impact its income or profit but also

takes into account the customer costs which may exceed the amount paid to the seller, as noted by Lovelock (2011). This consideration aligns with the principles of Islamic teaching, wherein Prophet Muhammad SAW sold his merchandise based on sales volume and at a price that could be accommodated by the market (Trim, 2008).

Several studies, including those conducted by Colpan (2006), Doole et al. (2006), and Owomoyela et al. (2013), have established a significant relationship between price and sales performance. The pricing of a product or service is a crucial factor in its marketability. Products or services that are commonly available in the market have more elastic pricing, resulting in unit sales being more responsive to changes in price (Jones, 2007). Therefore, we posit that:

H2: There is a positive relationship between price strategy and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture.

Promotion

Promotion involves any way of informing, persuading, and getting customers to remember as a part of the product or services marketing mix. Kotler (2007) pointed out that promotion informs potential customers about the benefits of a specific product in order to influence them to buy and use it. In the context of marketing, a consumer's engagement with promotional content often leads them to revisit the initial element of the marketing mix, prompting them to engage in research and information acquisition about the product. The consumer then evaluates this information before deciding whether or not to make a purchase. Advertising is a common promotional strategy utilized by manufacturers to reach out to potential consumers. Once consumers are fully informed about a product and develop an affinity for it, they are more likely to make a purchase (Panjaitan, Sinulingga & Wibowo, 2020).

During the promotion, startups identify their target audience and promotion objectives and formulate an appropriate message for delivery. The message must be carefully crafted to attract attention, create desire, and stimulate customers to make a purchase (Anthon, 2019). This pertains to the strategies employed by producers of goods and services to inform, remind or persuade customers to purchase their products (Henley *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, startups must possess knowledge of the communication modalities required for promoting and delivering their products successfully (Loo & Leung, 2016; Abril & Rodriguez-Canovas, 2016).

Wilson (2012) defines pertinence as the relevance and applicability of marketing in Islamic culture. The rationale for combining pertinence with promotion is that it highlights the importance of providing accurate information to customers. This aligns with Islamic teachings regarding the ethical communication of products, as Islam forbids overpromising in order to avoid customer frustration (Trim, 2008; Arham, 2010).

Kotler's (2007) findings indicate that promotions have emerged as a crucial element of the product marketing mix. This mix comprises various tools, such as advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, and direct marketing, which a company utilizes to achieve its advertising and marketing objectives. Previous research by

Amine and Cavusgil (2001) and Francis and Collins-Dodd (2004) has established a noteworthy correlation between promotions and sales performance. Therefore, we posit that:

H₃: There is a positive relationship between promotion strategy and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture.

Packaging

Over the years, the significance of packaging has evolved from being primarily concerned with preserving and safeguarding products to serving the present-day purpose of establishing a closer bond between producers and consumers through well-crafted packaging. In a crowded market where similar products abound, an eye-catching design sets a product apart and increases its appeal to potential customers. Currently, contemporary design is considered crucial in corporate settings (Stanujkic *et al.*, 2015). In Kotler's (2000) opinion, product packaging will catch the consumer's attention. Additionally, among all types of products on the store shelf, an appropriate package displays true information to consumers which finally stimulates customers' motivation to buy. Horsky and Honea (2012) state that customers will be affected by the design of product packaging which it will trigger the buying decision and ultimately lead to sales volume growth. Azam's (2016) research reveals a noteworthy association between the constituents of a product and consumers' purchase intention. Nonetheless, scant studies in Islamic literature tackle the communicative function of packaging. These studies indicate that certain religious symbols, such as an image of a mosque or the crescent and star on packaging, significantly heighten the purchase intentions of devout Muslim consumers for particular products (Bakar *et al.*, 2013).

Gbolagade *et al.* (2013) in their study analysed the effect of packaging on sales performance and found that packaging considerations do indeed impact sales. This finding is in agreement with Chaneta (2012), who suggests that sales can be increased through promotionally-oriented packaging strategies such as offering different sizes, multipacks, better product images, pictures of the product in use, and more effective use of color. Sajuyigbe *et al.* (2013) further emphasize the role of packaging as an essential communication tool that influences buying behavior and contributes to overall business performance. Therefore, we offer the following hypothesis:

H₄: There is a positive relationship between packaging and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture.

Place

The place is one of four inseparable elements of the marketing mix, which involves all the decisions about the delivery of products to the end-user (Gudonaviene & Alijosiene, 2008). The proper places seek to make the appropriate products accessible to the appropriate consumers for a given product (Widyastuti *et al.*, 2020). The product, prices, and promotion typically impact the place because, without them, the ideal place could not be profitable. All in all, the success of one marketing mix depends on the performance of the others (Putra *et al.*,

2020). Marketing channels can be defined as a collection of organizational units that perform functions related to the production and distribution of goods. Within these channels, each unit plays a role in the overall structure, determining which functions are carried out by whom (Banyte *et al.*, 2011). Kotler and Armstrong (2016) similarly define place as a network of organizations working together to make a product available to consumers. While establishing effective marketing channels requires significant investment and effort, it can provide distinct advantages in today's competitive market. Over time, distribution channels strive to offer the right amount of goods and services at the right location, quality, and price while also encouraging demand through promotional efforts by all involved organizations (Gudonaviene & Alijosiene, 2008). For startups looking to sell their products, it is crucial to identify the best way to reach their target audience (Loo & Leung, 2016). This involves considering every aspect of place - how products or services are made available to consumers - and managing marketing channels as an interconnected system that adds value to goods and services (Inanloo *et al.*, 2018; Henley *et al.*, 2011).

Prophet Muhammad SAW advised sellers to be transparent in their dealings with customers, as reported by Trim (2008). He also prohibited the sale of non-existent goods and discouraged sellers from approaching other buyers unless the initial negotiation proved unsuccessful. The Prophet taught Muslims to prioritize the satisfaction of their first customers and treat all customers with respect, according to Trim (2009).

In their 2013 study, Gbolagade *et al.* investigated the influence of place on sales performance and found that location, accessibility, and distribution channels employed by business organizations are key factors. This aligns with the views of Owomoyela *et al.* (2013), Amine and Cavusgil (2001), and McNaughton (2002) who also recognize the significant impact of place on sales performance. Hence, we offer the following hypothesis:

H₅: There is a positive relationship between place strategy and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture.

Startup Companies in Islamic Cultures

Start-up firms are those that have just begun to produce goods or provide services to the general public in exchange for value (Gough *et al.*, 2013). A startup is a type of organization that forms through partnerships or temporary associations with the aim of discovering a sustainable and expandable business model. In order to implement innovative projects during the initial stages, startups require external financing. Despite being viewed as enterprises with significant growth potential, these startups are also classified as high-risk ventures (Mustapha & Tlaty, 2018).

Startups differ significantly from larger firms and cannot rely on pre-existing business models due to the absence of customers at the outset (Duening *et al.*, 2014). Their focus is primarily on establishing themselves and subsequently ensuring their survival, whereas established firms do not face these concerns as acutely. Startups must also prove their credibility and value to themselves and others while simultaneously striving for growth. However,

their small size may pose challenges regarding structure and resource allocation (Presutti *et al.*, 2011). Additionally, startups operate within an environment of multiple risks and uncertainties, necessitating acceptance of technological, market, and financial risks (Lei *et al.*, 2000).

In order to survive in a highly competitive industry, business providers must engage in competition with one another (Wahab *et al.*, 2016). The successful operation of a business unit is closely tied to the application of marketing mix aspects, as marketing mix can predict the potential needs of customers (Anthony, 2019). As such, startups must possess a thorough understanding of marketing mix application in order to add value to their offerings (Loo & Leung, 2016). To identify opportunities and take advantage of them, startup owners must access knowledge in the field (Inanloo *et al.* 2018). By grasping marketing skills, startups can address important considerations such as production volume, pricing strategy, distribution channels, and communication with target audiences (Mamabolo *et al.*, 2017). M'Chirgui (2012) says startups can achieve better performance by knowing about marketing mix. These factors trigger power for startups because of paying attention to details. Therefore, startups need to understand about marketing mix application; The marketing mix elements serve as a guide for developing marketing strategies, plans, and activities that shape customer expectations and reactions to products and services (Loo & Leung, 2016).

Today, we have seen a mushrooming of multiple Islamic-branded businesses, even in areas other than finance or food, for instance, education, fashion and even airlines (Ghazali & Mutum, 2017). For example, Rayani Air was the first launched Islamic airline in Malaysia's first Islamic airline and the fourth such airline in the world in December 2015. Alserhan (2010) indicates that Muslim markets exhibit a high level of psychological sensitivity, irrespective of the religious unity and Islamic way of life. Muslims embrace "Deen" as a guiding principle in all aspects, signifying their submission to God (Wilson & Liu, 2011). Thus, to overcome the constraints of traditional marketing strategies, Muslims must derive marketing tools from Islamic regulations (Rod *et al.*, 2015).

Islam recognizes commerce as an essential aspect of human existence, provided that it aligns with Islamic principles of business ethics. Prophet Muhammad SAW was predestined by Allah SWT to become a prosperous trader before his prophethood, underscoring the significance of trade in Islam. As a comprehensive way of life, Islamic marketing practices should adhere to the guidance outlined in the Quran and Hadith, which serve as primary sources of knowledge for Muslims seeking success in both this life and the hereafter (Hashim & Hamzeh, 2013).

The topic of marketing in Islamic cultures has been the subject of a heated debate among academics, students, practitioners, and consumers. The demand and interest in this issue are in question between Muslim minority countries and Muslim majority countries (Wilson, 2012). Nonetheless, marketers play a crucial role in meeting the sophisticated expectations of customers. Companies are expected to deliver their products and services in a morally acceptable way. Marketing in Islamic cultures offers an opportunity for implementing morally acceptable marketing practices since Islam regulates every aspect of life,

including commercial activities (Arham, 2010). One Quranic verse highlights this:

O you who believe! Eat not up to your property among yourselves unjustly except it to be a trade amongst you, by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves (nor kill one another). Surely, Allah is Most Merciful to you. (Quran 4:29).

There are myriad studies in understanding of the marketing mix in the Islamic approach, like Nadeem (2012), Abdullah and Ahmad (2010) and Damirchi and Shafai (2011). Some of these studies like Wilson (2012) and Hashim & Hamza (2014), have added 7P's in the Islamic market (Pragmatism, Pertinence, Palliation, Peer-support, Pedagogy, Persistent and Patience).

In contemporary commercial activities, marketing in Islamic cultures has the potential for significant impact. Considering marketing mix as one of the fundamental pillars for marketing understanding, it is proposed to merge the concept of marketing mix in contemporary marketing with the Islamic marketing perspective. Additionally, creating profitable strategies to meet customer needs in a competitive marketplace necessitates understanding the concept of marketing mix in services marketing (Lovelock, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to use the marketing mix in startup companies in Islamic culture. This research aims to identify as well as determine the impact of marketing mix on sales performance in startup companies in Islamic cultures. This study intends to explore the application of marketing mix by startups in Islamic cultures to understand the value of these marketing mix elements to startup businesses and the effect of these elements on sales performance. This article is responding to this question of how startups could utilize marketing tools to acquire a competitive advantage.

We select Iran as an Islamic market with many potentials for creating jobs through start-ups and it is really important to consider the effective role of marketing mix in the startup's performance. we know Iran with an unemployment rate of 27 % needs to look for creating jobs for its young and educated people (Khajehpour, 2019).

It is clear that start-ups are an effective step towards economic development and a great way in creating jobs in any country. As Iran is at the early stage of accelerated economic growth and Iranian startups can be one of the most important determinants of this accelerated growth and also creating jobs (Nabiuny *et al.*, 2021).

Research Contributions

After reviewing the literature and the relevant studies, the following gaps arise:

Our review declares that studies over marketing mix components to improve sales performance in startup companies were rare. A major gap is that in Islamic culture no research has been done in this area. So this research is innovative. Focusing on the above gap, we examined the following variables:

Marketing mix includes myriad elements, but the most important factors in this research are product, price, place, promotion, and ultimately packaging. Each of these five factors, solely or in combination, can be effective in shaping of consumer behavior and consumer buying decisions to use

the product. Of all the indicators considered in the 4Ps, 5Ps, 7Ps, etc. models, five indicators were nominated by sales and marketing experts in 20 startup companies in Iran and were more important to them. Through collecting data due to in-depth interviewing with them, Product, Price, Promotion, Place, and Packaging were examined as marketing mixed variables.

Research Method

This study deploys a mixed-methods approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In the first step of this research (qualitative phase), after reviewing the research literature through library studies, the authors identified marketing mix models and conducted in-depth interviews with sales and marketing experts in Iranian companies to identifies the most important factors of marketing mix according to their point of view. In this way, we found several special marketing mix elements (Product, Price, Promotion, Place, and Packaging). Then, in the second stage of this research (quantitative phase), having designed the initial questionnaire, the authors distributed that amongst experts, so comments are received to improve the questionnaire. The final version of the questionnaire was prepared, and it was completed by 14 experts testing reliability, so the reliability test is calculated due to Cronbach’s Alpha. The statistical population in this study is all startup companies in Islamic culture. Due to the fact that their number is unknown, 20 companies were selected from the available probability sampling method in Tehran, Iran of which the data of 14

companies were correct for the marketing mix. Therefore, 383 questionnaires were completed by employees in these 14 companies. So our sample is 383.

Data Analysis

SPSS software was used to collect information and data, descriptive statistics were used for data analysis and correlation tests were used for inferential analysis. The tests were performed with a 5% error. To show the normality and abnormality of the variables, Kolomogorov-Smirnov test was used. In determining this test, if Sig is greater than 0.05, it is normal and parametric tests can be used for analysis; otherwise, nonparametric tests are used. The hypotheses for examining the claim that the distribution of questionnaires is normal are given in Table 3 in order.

Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency of the scale. The Cronbach’s Alpha reliability is determined for each factor in the research. According to the literature (Bagozzi, 1988), a value of Cronbach’s alpha greater than 0.7 is satisfactory and as shown in Table 4, the values range from 0.722 to 0.775 which are all above the recommended level.

Then, correlation research was used that examines the relationship between variables based on the purpose of the research. The data distribution is not normal, so Spearman test was used. Finally, the relationship between marketing mix variables and sales performance was examined and the results are presented at the end.

H₀: Data distribution is normal

H₁: Data distribution is not normal

Table 3

Investigating the Normality of Statistical Population Data Distribution Using Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

Tests of Normality	One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Product	383	8.516	.000
Price	383	7.362	.000
Place	383	5.408	.000
Promotion	383	7.270	.000
Packaging	383	6.193	.000
Performance	383	7.524	.000

Hypothesis H₀ is rejected because sig is smaller than 5 %, so the claim that data distribution is normal is not accepted. In this research, since the research data are not normal, to examine the relationship between the research variables, we use Spearman's non-parametric test in research hypothesis section.

Reliability

The results of the reliability test are summarized in Table 4. In this study, the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of each dimension was investigated. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient for all questionnaire questions is higher than 0.7. Since all these numbers are above 0.7, the questionnaire used in this article has acceptance reliability.

Table 4

Reliability Test Using Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient

Item-Total Statistics	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach’s Alpha if Item Deleted
Product	59.0000	59.636	.158	.726
Price	58.5833	65.902	-.163	.745
Place	59.2500	71.477	-.454	.775
Promotion	59.0000	59.636	.158	.726
Packaging	58.5000	61.364	.157	.722
Performance	58.8333	63.970	-.019	.732

Correlation Test

Correlation research is a descriptive (non-experimental) research method that examines the relationship between variables based on the purpose of the research. The Spearman correlation coefficient is used to describe the correlation between two variables measured using a distance or relative scale; also, the data distribution is not normal (Myers & Sirois, 2004) and is represented by the symbol r .

Our aim in this study is to investigate the effect of marketing mix on sales performance in startup companies in

Islamic culture; according to Spearman test, the significance level (sig) in marketing mix variables was investigated which is its results are presented in below:

Questions Research

H1: There is a positive relationship between products and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture.

Table 5

Correlation Test - The Relation between Product and Sales Performance

Correlations				
			Performance	Product
Spearman's rho	Performance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.842
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.0100
		N	383	383

The above table shows the results of the first hypothesis test. Spearman correlation test has been used to investigate the relationship between products and sales performance. The obtained correlation coefficient is " $r = 0.84$ ", which is significant with 381 df in " $p = 0.01 < 0.05$ " level. Therefore, Hypothesis H_0 can be rejected. Based on the above method

in examined statistical population, there is a significant positive relationship between products and sales performance.

H2: There is a positive relationship between price strategy and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture.

Table 6

The Relationship between Price and Sales Performance

Correlations				
			Performance	Price
Spearman's rho	Performance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.131
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.290
		N	383	383

The above table shows the results of the first hypothesis test. Spearman correlation test has been used to investigate the relationship between price and sales performance. The obtained correlation coefficient is " $r = -0.13$ ", which is not significant with 381 df in " $p = 0.29 > 0.05$ " level. Therefore, Hypothesis H_0 can be accepted. Based on the above method

in examined statistical population, there is no significant relationship between price and sales performance.

H3: There is a positive relationship between promotion strategy and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture

Table 7

The Relationship between Promotion and Sales Performance

Correlations				
			Performance	Promotion
Spearman's rho	Performance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.642
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.035
		N	383	383

The above table shows the results of the first hypothesis test. Spearman correlation test has been used to investigate the relationship between promotion and sales performance. The obtained correlation coefficient is " $r = 0.64$ ", which is significant with 381 df in " $p = 0.035 < 0.05$ " level. Therefore, Hypothesis H_0 can be rejected. Based on the above method

in examined statistical population, there is a significant positive relationship between promotion and sales performance.

H4: There is a positive relationship between packaging and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture.

Table 8

The Relationship between Packaging and Sales Performance

Correlations				
			Performance	Packaging
Spearman's rho	Performance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.398**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	383	383

The above table shows the results of the first hypothesis test. Spearman correlation test has been used to investigate the relationship between packaging and sales performance. The obtained correlation coefficient is "r = 0.39", which is significant with 381 df in "p = 0.000 <0.05" level. Therefore, Hypothesis H₀ can be rejected. Based on the

above method in examined statistical population, there is a significant positive relationship between packaging and sales performance.

H5: There is a positive relationship between place strategy and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture

Table 9

The Relationship between Place and Sales Performance

Correlations				
			Performance	Place
Spearman's rho	Performance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.125
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.081
		N	383	383

The above table shows the results of the first hypothesis test. Spearman correlation test has been used to investigate the relationship between place and sales performance. The obtained correlation coefficient is "r = -0.12", which is not significant with 381 df in "p = 0.81 > 0.05" level. Therefore, Hypothesis H₀ can be accepted. Based on the above method in examined statistical population, there is no significant relationship between place and sales performance.

Research Implications and Discussion

This article is responding to the question of how startups in Islamic cultures could utilize marketing tools to acquire a competitive advantage. As observed from the data, this article led to three priority elements for startup companies in Tehran. What is proposed here is true for all startups in Islamic culture and due to these factors, some startups could pursue activities and surpass competitors. Product, promotion, and packaging are the three most important determinants in startups. Findings of earlier studies focusing on the implication of marketing mix by startups have shown that product, place, price and people are mentioned by some of them as the most important factors (e.g., Loo and Leung, 2016; Tibaingana, 2019) except for Tokarev et al. (2021)'s study. The latter study mentioned people, processes, programs, and performance as the most important elements of the marketing mix in startups, while two former state product, place, promotion, physical evidence, price, people, process and product, people and price as the most important factors respectively. In the Islamic context, as mentioned before, Pragmatism, Pertinence, Palliation, Peer-support, Pedagogy, Persistent and Patience are added in the Islamic market (Wilson, 2012; Hashim & Hamza, 2014). However, in our study, product, promotion and packaging act as three most important factors.

Regarding the importance role of product, it should be mentioned that due to the increase in public welfare as well as rising customer expectations, it is necessary for startup companies to add high-quality products and also a range of services to the products in accordance with Islamic culture. Regarding promotion, it is proposed that startup companies should be allocated the majority of their activities to introducing the true attributes of their products to the market in order to create a real and appropriate mindset about their products among customers. Regarding opted data of this research, we could say that companies should use appropriate advertising tools and promotion in accordance with Islamic culture to determine the difference between their products and competitor products in the market and create a competitive advantage for their companies. According to this report, packaging design and the color of it are so important for customers, therefore companies should pay special attention to these elements. It is noticeable that if a product design be imitative, it will not be able to create a long-term competitive advantage. Although we know utilizing the same design of packaging in products or services has short-term advantages, it is obvious that these companies could easily lose their advantage in the long term. For illustration, Iran has diverse culture as it comprises diverse people in every region with different preferences toward packaging. For instance, people in the desert prefer special colors and this is different from the preference of those dwelling in the north. Therefore, it is totally wrong that Iranian companies produce the same products or services for all regions. If the design of packaging was customized, it would be appreciated for customers in all regions of Iran.

Furthermore, the finding of our research depicted that the effect of every element of the marketing mix on the customer's satisfaction and ultimately his (her) buying

decision is different, but these companies can create customer satisfaction and also by employing an appropriate marketing mix strategy, they effect on of the customer buying decision; the reason behind this is that if we pay attention to just one element of marketing mix, it has a short-term effect and it has no real impact on the customer's satisfaction or buying decision in the long term. For example, it is possible that the low price of a product triggers customer satisfaction and leads to his purchase but on the contrary, it is likely also that this approach cannot create satisfaction for some customers whose first priority is quality or some customers whose priorities include quality.

As mentioned earlier, this study deployed a mixed-methods approach. In the first step of this research, qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with sales and marketing experts. In this way, the five most important factors of the marketing mix were identified. In the quantitative phase, 383 questionnaires were completed by employees in these 14 companies.

Conclusions and Future Research Lines

The marketing mix has become an essential instrument for product promotion and marketing which enhances the performance and power of negotiation. This tool allows the market leaders to effectively establish long term strategies and benchmark the marketing operations.

The aim of this paper is to identify the fundamental determinants of a marketing mix approach. Through the analysis and results, we have demonstrated that product, packaging (design and colour), and promotion (advertising) are the most significant determinants among Iranian startups, based on data extracted from the questionnaire.

Our results firstly show that, testing the impact of the product on sales performance, the product has a significantly positive impact on sales performance on a confidence level of 95%. Table 5 indicates the relevant data. Therefore, H_1 is supported and a positive relationship between products and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture was confirmed. Secondly, by examining the impact of promotion on sales performance, we can conclude that at the 95 % confidence level, promotion has a positive impact on sales performance, and we see that H_3 is strongly supported. In this regard, a positive relationship between promotion strategy and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture was confirmed. Additionally, testing the impact of packaging (colour and design) on sales performance showed that packaging has a positive impact on the sales performance and, in this way, H_4 is also supported. Therefore, we can say,

there is a positive relationship between packaging and sales performance of startup companies in Islamic culture.

This study has some limitations, firstly, experts were not fully aware of the marketing mix and we had difficulties to gather the right information. Secondly, senior managers were not available usually and lastly, resources about the relationship between marketing mix elements and sales performance in Islamic culture were limited. Here are some recommendations for future research lines:

1. The findings show that some respondents did not identify elements of the marketing mix. It is proposed that for fulfilling the questionnaire, it should be addressed to experts who know about marketing mix.

2. Professional product packaging design can affect sales performance. It is suggested that research should be done on the importance of hiring professional designers for product packaging and to consider the effect of this packaging on sales performance in Islamic culture.

3. According to the theoretical background of various marketing mix models, such as 4Ps, 7Ps and 12Ps, there are some other marketing mix elements that could be consider their effects on sales performance in Islamic culture.

4. It is proposed that in future research, authors will create market segmentation with the help of questionnaire findings and after that, they will be able to identify the need of every sector and priority customer needs. This research will help managers to set a strategy plan according to each segmentation.

5. Considering the cultural diversity in various cities of Iran, it is suggested that the culture diversity index be considered as a moderating role of the relationship between marketing mix and sales performance of startup companies in Iran. This index will help managers to be flexible in different conditions related to the product, promotion, and packaging.

6. It is recommended to consider the effect of hiring professional persons in the sales and marketing field on sales performance in startup companies in Islamic culture.

7. It is suggested that as a supplement to this research, the impact of Islamic influencer's role in purchasing halal products on behavior of Muslim consumers in Islamic culture should be investigated. This research could help managers how to promote their products and impact on consumers.

8. It is recommended that as a supplement to the research, the effect of inserting Islamic signs on packaging of halal products on behavior of Muslim consumers in Islamic culture should be investigated. Managers will use from this research for packaging of their products in Islamic culture.

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