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Preface

We have the pleasure to compile these proceedings of the 29th RARCS conference. The conference gives delegates the option to include either an extended abstract or a full paper in the proceedings. In addition, a book of one-page abstracts of all presentations is made available to delegates. Proceedings are only distributed among participants and are not submitted to any repositories. Copyright is not transferred. Thus, delegates can submit their work to journals, without facing any formal self-plagiarism issues.

We trust these proceedings and the book of abstracts are useful material for delegates.

Soora Rasouli & Harry Timmermans

Co-Chairs



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The relationship between the net promoter score and loyalty

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Abstract. This research focuses on the relationship between loyalty and the Net Promoter Score (NPS), a widely used metric among companies for predicting growth. The main reason for the NPS's popularity is that the NPS is simple to measure, involves only one question, and makes both national and international comparisons possible based on its value. Although it is not always clear what the NPS measures, measuring the NPS is a process that is often free of extensive criticism. In his paper “The one number you need to grow,” Reichheld (2003) argues that the NPS is a powerful instrument and that using only one question makes it possible to collect simple and timely data that correlate with growth. However, others (e.g., Keiningham *et al.*, 2007) argue that the NPS is too simple, is not a strong predictor of growth, and has limited usability, since it is not linked to other measures or indicators of performance. This research challenges these criticisms, and the research question concerns whether the NPS is different based on loyalty status. The research is based on four surveys that were conducted in the falls of 2019 ($n = 2,682$), 2020 ($n = 2,680$), 2021 ($n = 1,701$), and 2022 ($n = 1,157$) with a total sample size of 8,220 that was weighted by gender and age. Several issues relating to food purchases were evaluated. The findings are based on the calculated NPS for the grocery stores that respondents visit most often and second most often. The findings demonstrate that the NPS is in most cases higher for the grocery stores that respondents visit most often. In one case of eight the score was higher but not significant, and in three cases the score was lower but also not significant. These findings therefore indicate that although the NPS might be useful for measuring loyalty and loyalty status regardless of which store the respondents visit most often.

Keywords: Net Promoter Score, visit frequency, loyalty

1 Introduction

This research focuses on the Net Promoter Score (NPS) and its relations with customer loyalty as a performance indicator. Reichheld (2003) argues that the NPS is a reliable scale for predicting growth as well as customer loyalty. He argues that the “sacrifice” of being ready to recommend the company or its product to friends or colleagues is a more reliable indicator for future growth than repeated purchases. The NPS has been heavily criticized (Kumar & Grisaffe, 2004; Keiningham *et al.*, 2005; Keiningham *et al.*, 2007; Hayes, 2008) but is nevertheless a popular scale among managers for measuring performance around the world (Customer Guru, e.d). Interesting findings from the Customer Guru database for 2023 show that Costco has the highest score (79), followed by Spar (57), Target (43), Aldi (42), Sainsbury's (16), Lidl (14), Walmart (-4), Tesco (-8), Marks & Spencer (-10), and Co-Op (-14), but all these brands are well known in the grocery market.

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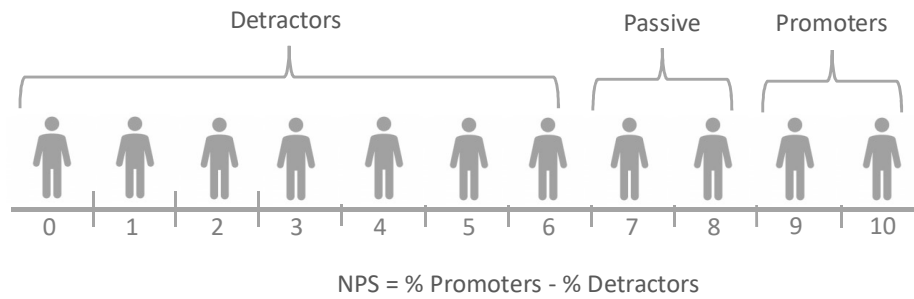


FIGURE 1 – The NPS model. Based on calculations by Reichheld (2003), adapted by author

The scale is based on solely one question: *How likely is it that you would recommend [company X] to a friend or colleague?* (Reichheld, 2003). The scale is between 0 and 10 where 0 represents not at all likely and 10 very likely. Respondents are divided into three groups where those with the rating of 0–6 are detractors, 7–8 are passive, and 9–10 are promoters. The NPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters; that is, the $NPS = \% \text{ promoters} - \% \text{ detractors}$. The NPS therefore has a simple execution and may be used to compare actors in the same industry based on the score. Figure 1 shows a common graphical representation of the NPS.

As mentioned before, the NPS has been strongly criticized. Keiningham *et al.* (2005) argue that the NPS is too simple as a scale for measuring growth because the relationship between loyalty and growth is much more complicated than what can be concluded based on it. Keiningham *et al.* (2007) did not find any support for the claim that the NPS is the single most reliable indicator of a company’s ability to grow, as argued by Reichheld (2003), and they did not find evidence that shows that the NPS performs better than the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for measuring customer loyalty. Kristensen & Eskildsen (2014) made similar arguments and found that the NPS is not a reliable indicator for customer loyalty or customer satisfaction. Schulman & Sargeant (2013) did not find a connection between the NPS and repeated donations of supporter, and Paixao (2022) argues that the NPS is not a reliable indicator for short-term purchases in the telecommunication market. Schmith *et al.* (2016) investigated the relationship between the NPS and the customer lifetime value (CLV) and did not find a significant relationship between the NPS on the one hand and loyalty and the CLV on the other hand. There have also been investigations into how the NPS is used or misused. Bendle & Bagga (2016), for example, measuring customer satisfaction or employee satisfaction, image and other things that might be useful for the operation but is not what the NPS is intended to measure.

Rassens & Haans (2017) criticize how the NPS is calculated and argue that there is no such thing as a passive customer. There the variance might be high, and therefore it is important to investigate that group thoroughly. Melnic (2016) makes the same point: the same NPS can be achieved with different results. For example, the NPS will be 20 whether the promoters are 30% and the detractors are 10% or the promoters are 60% and the detractors are 40%. The findings are very different by nature, and the strategic decisions by managers, based on the score, might very different. Fisher & Kordupleski (2018) advance a similar argument and argue that there are no passive customers and although the promotor and detractor groups might be important, the passive group is also important. The passive group could express an opinion about the product or service they were buying and transform easily from being passive to being promoters or detractors. The authors also observe that on the scale 0–10, a score of 7 or 8 (the definition of passive customers) is in fact relatively high. To deal with this, common internet-based survey solution providers, for example QuestionPro, who includes the NPS question in their tool, offer users the opportunity of

manually defining the groups. Furthermore, Bendle & Bagga (2016) argue that the NPS is more focused on keeping existing customers than acquiring new customers.

Despite heavy criticism, the NPS is widely used, mainly because of its simplicity. However, the NPS's simplicity is also its main weakness since the NPS does not provide information about what to do to achieve better scores the next time the NPS is measured (Burnham & Wong, 2018).

Loyalty is an important indicator for performance (Kotler *et al.*, 2022), but the concept itself is complicated and complex. Loyalty can be defined as “the willingness of someone – customer, employee or friend – to invest in or sacrifice something for the purpose of strengthening the relationship” but there are many other similar or different definition in the literature. As demonstrated, there is a strong relation between loyalty and relationship, but both concepts are important in the marketing theory. Neither concept is new in the literature, and Drucker (1958), for example, stresses the importance of reapplying some of the capital from selling to marketing and the importance of understanding customer needs and building customer relationships. The concepts of loyalty and relationship can also be found in old marketing textbooks (Lynn, 1969) as well as in much older economic textbooks (Hansen, 1918). Loyalty and relationship are also well-known concepts in the management literature (see Levine & White, 1961; Evan, 1966; Van de Ven, 1976) but were only firmly established in the marketing literature in the seventies (Anderson & Narus, 1984). Kotler *et al.* (2022) argue that there is a strong relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty and emphasize that building loyalty is a process that might require a company to focus on several market segments simultaneously while selling the same product or services. In this regard, they introduced the so-called customer acquisition funnel which can be seen in Figure 2.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the first step in building a loyal customer is awareness. This is based on the view that if there is no or limited awareness, it is very unlikely that customers will buy the product or service, and therefore it is impossible that they will be an advocate, which is the final step in the model. Tong *et al.* (2017) makes a similar argument – building loyalty is a process that has several steps. Reichheld (2003) also makes some interesting comments on what is a loyal customer and what is a disloyal customer. For example, someone might repeatedly use the same airline simply because that is the only airline which flies to the places one wishes to go. In addition, a loyal customer may reduce the frequency of purchases for the sole reason that their need for the product has decreased. Based on the above research, it can be concluded that purchase frequency alone is not necessarily a good measure of loyalty.

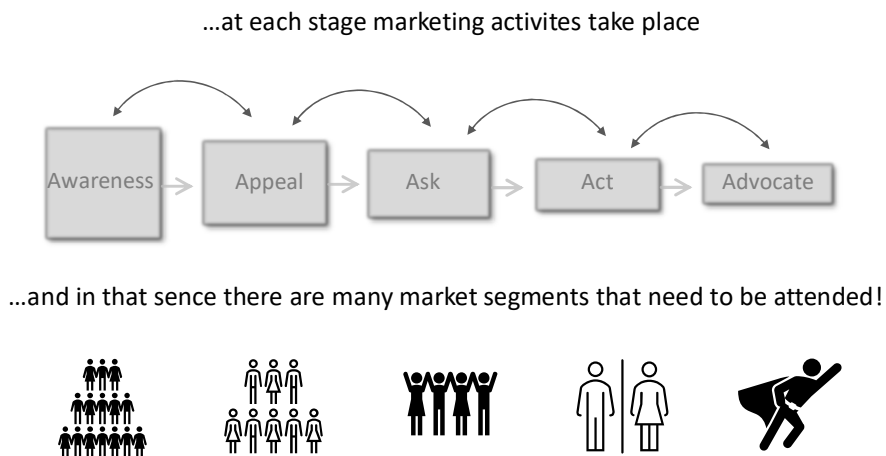


FIGURE 2 – The customer acquisition funnel, Kotler *et al.*, (2022), adapted by author.

Hayes (2008) is one of those who strongly criticizes Reichheld's (2003) method, primarily for his idea that only one question might be a good way to measure loyalty and thereby predict growth. Hayes (2008) demonstrates that the following four questions are in fact all measures of loyalty:

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with Company ABC?
2. How likely are you to recommend Company ABC to friends/colleagues?
3. How likely are you to continue purchasing the same product and/or service from Company ABC?
4. If you were selecting [a company within the industry] for the first time, how likely is it that you would choose Company ABC?

Hayes (2008) observes that these four loyalty questions together might give a much better indication of loyalty than question 2 (which is the NPS question) alone. Hayes (2008) therefore concludes that Reichheld (2003) is wrong: Reichheld's (2003) single-item measure is not the simplest and most reliable method for measuring loyalty. This was based on the view that normally, single-item measures are less reliable (contain more measurement error) than multiple-item measures. Kato *et al.* (2022) suggest that the solution is a new scale: the next purchase intention brand (NPI). This is notwithstanding the fact that the NPI is unlikely to be more reliable than the NPS because it is also a single-item measure as criticized by Hayes (2008). Given the above discussion, the following research question is presented: *What is the relationship between the NPS and loyalty?* After this introduction, section 2 explains the research design, the study sample, and the techniques of data analysis. Section 3 then presents the results, and chapter 4 concludes with a discussion about those results.

2 Methodology

This section describes the study methodology: the research design, the study sample, and the data analysis.

2.1 Research design

The findings are based on four online surveys that were carried out in the same way in the fall of the years 2019 to 2022. In all the surveys, the same questionnaire was used. The questionnaire consists of 25 questions and is divided into four parts. Part one contains questions relating to awareness and asks which grocery store the respondent visits most often, which grocery store the respondent visits second most often, and how likely or unlikely it is that the respondent would recommend these stores to friends or colleagues (the NPS question). Part one also has questions related to the factors that are important to respondents when choosing a grocery store. Part two contains nine questions related to the image of certain grocery stores or chains, and part three asks the respondents how often or how rarely they visit these same stores. Finally, part four contains the background variables of gender, age, income before tax, education, and postal code of residence. This study uses five of the 25 questions in the questionnaire, which are:

1. *Which grocery store or chain do you go to most often (choice of Ejarðarkaup, Netto, Hagkaup, Bonus, Iceland, Costco, Kronan, and other)?*
2. *Overall, how likely are you to recommend the store you go to most often to a friend or colleague (the NPS question)?*
3. *When you don't go to the store you go to most often, which will be your choice then (same choices as in question 1)?*
4. *Overall, how likely are you to recommend the store you go to second most often to a friend or colleague (the NPS question)?*
5. *How often or how rarely do you go to the following grocery store or chain (where 1 stands for very rarely or never and 9 stands for very often or only. Here were the same choices of stores as in question 1 except other).*

TABLE 1 – Valid answers by year

Year	Count
2019	2.682
2020	2.680
2021	1.701
2022	1.157
	8.220

TABLE 2 – Calculation of weights

	Population		Sample		Weights	
	Male (1)	Female (2)	Male (1)	Female (2)	Male (1)	Female (2)
18-30 years old (1)	14,8%	13,5%	20,1%	26,6%	0,73	0,51
31-50 years old (2)	20,7%	18,8%	11,1%	18,2%	1,87	1,03
51-70 years old (3)	16,2%	16,0%	7,9%	16,1%	0,21	1,00

2.2 Sample

The population of interest in this study was customers of grocery stores aged 18 to 70 years old. The total number of valid answers (after deleting incomplete or inadequate answers) was 8,220 and is divided between years, as can be seen in Table 1. This research used online surveys, and it is my experience that more women participate in these surveys than men. It is also not uncommon for more younger people to participate than older people. Both things were true for this study, and therefore the data were weighted so the findings would better reflect the attitudes of the population considering gender and age. This can be seen in Table 2. As can be seen in Table 2, the percentages of younger people and female are much higher in the sample than in the population, and therefore it is appropriate to weight the data based on gender and age.

2.3 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to examine which store was visited the most and the second most often, and a 95% confidence interval was calculated according to the following formula:

$$\text{Sample error} = 1.96 \times \sqrt{\frac{p \times q}{n}}$$

where 1.96 is the Z-value ($Z^{\alpha/2}$) for a 95% confidence interval, p is the measured percentage, q is $1-p$, and n is the number of responses. To investigate whether the NPS was higher for the store that the person went to most often compared to the store that the person went to second most often, the numerical values of the NPS scale (0–10) were used and compared using the one-sample t-test. To examine the relationship between the NPS and visit frequency, a regression analysis was used.

3 Results

This section presents the results of this study. First, this section describes the results for which store is visited the most and the second most often. Second, the section compares the NPS between the stores that are visited most often and those that are visited second most often. Finally, this section explains the relationship between the NPS and visit frequency.

TABLE 3 – Visit frequencies

Store	Which store do you go to most often					If not there, then where?				
	Choice 1	Count	+/-	From	To	Choice 2	Count	+/-	From	To
Fjarðarkaup	1,6%	135	0,3%	1,3%	1,9%	3,8%	325	0,4%	3,4%	4,2%
Netto	7,8%	657	0,6%	7,2%	8,3%	15,2%	1285	0,8%	###	15,9%
Hagkaup	5,0%	427	0,5%	4,6%	5,5%	11,8%	1002	0,7%	###	12,5%
Bonus	44,6%	3.779	1,1%	43,5%	45,7%	29,8%	2528	1,0%	###	30,8%
Iceland	1,0%	84	0,2%	0,8%	1,2%	2,4%	204	0,3%	2,1%	2,7%
Costco	0,7%	62	0,2%	0,6%	0,9%	3,6%	304	0,4%	3,2%	4,0%
Kronan	37,1%	3.140	1,0%	36,0%	38,1%	30,9%	2623	1,0%	###	31,9%
Other	2,2%	190	0,3%	1,9%	2,6%	2,5%	210	0,3%	2,1%	2,8%
Total	100%	8.474				100%	8.481			

TABLE 4 – NPS findings

Test value = 0						
	t	Df	Mean	Std. Deviation	Confidence interval Lower	Confidence interval Upper
Overall, how likely are you to recommend the store you go to most often to friends or colleague (Choice 1)?	289,3	8413	7,16	2,27	7,11	7,2
Overall, how likely are you to recommend the store you go to second most often to a friend or colleague (Choice 2)?	271,8	8420	6,69	2,26	6,64	6,74

Table 3 shows that over the period 2019–2022, Bonus was the store that the respondents visited most often: 44.6% (+/- 1.1%) of respondents reported that they visit that store most often (Choice 1). Kronan was next with 37.1% (+/- 1.0%) of respondents. Other stores had a much lower percentage. When the respondents do NOT visit the store that they visit most often (Choice 2), Kronan (30.9%, +/- 1.0%) and Bonus (29.8%, +/- 1.0%) were most often visited, but there was no significant difference between them. Other stores had much lower percentages.

Table 4 shows the findings for the NPS using the numerical value of the NPS, while Table 5 shows that differences are revealed in four cases (Fjarðarkaup, Bonus, Costco, Kronan) out of eight when considering the individual stores and chains. In all cases where there is a difference, the NPS is higher for the most frequently visited store than for the second most often visited store. In one case (Netto), the mean is greater but insignificant, and in three cases (Hagkaup, Iceland, Other), the average score for the most visited store is lower but also insignificant. Table 6 shows the results of the regression analysis on visit frequency and the NPS. Generally, the NPS explains a very small part of the variation in the frequency of visits to the respective store or chain. The lowest percentage is for Bonus (4%), and the highest is for Fjarðarkaup (10%). In two cases (Iceland and Costco), there is no significant relationship. Similarly, the correlation (measured as β) is strongest in the case of Fjarðarkaup (0.32) but weakest in the case of Bónus (0.20). Based on Cohen’s criteria (Cohen, 1988), there is a weak relationship when the correlation coefficient is in the range of 0.10–0.29, a medium strength relationship when the correlation coefficient is in the range of 0.30–0.49, and a strong relationship when the correlation coefficient is in the range of 0.50–1.00.

TABLE 5 – Differences in NPS

Store	Choice	Count	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% CI	
Fjarðarkaup*	C 1	134	9,39	0,99	9,22	9,56
	C 2	134	6,69	2,00	6,35	7,03
Netto	C 1	650	6,96	2,12	6,80	7,12
	C 2	647	6,89	2,13	6,73	7,06
Hagkaup	C 1	425	6,41	2,49	6,17	6,64
	C 2	425	6,67	2,36	6,45	6,90
Bonus*	C 1	3.752	7,13	2,25	7,05	7,20
	C 2	3.751	6,90	2,18	6,83	6,97
Iceland	C 1	84	6,51	2,47	5,97	7,04
	C 2	84	6,95	2,38	6,43	7,46
Costco*	C 1	62	8,37	1,87	7,90	8,85
	C 2	62	6,75	2,30	6,17	7,34
Kronan*	C 1	3.111	7,29	2,17	7,21	7,37
	C 2	3.122	6,41	2,32	6,33	6,49
Other	C 1	188	6,27	3,23	5,81	6,74
	C 2	189	6,53	2,56	6,17	6,90

*Difference 95% confidence interval

TABLE 6 – Results regression analysis

Dependent variable	Independent variable	R ²	α	B	B
	NPS				
Rarely or often <Fjarðarkaup>	<Fjarðarkaup>	0,10	<,001	0,51	0,32
Rarely or often <Nettó>	NPS <Nettó>	0,06	<,001	0,02	0,24
Rarely or often <Hagkaup>	NPS <Hagkaup>	0,08	<,001	0,14	0,27
Rarely or often <Bónus>	NPS <Bónus>	0,04	<,001	0,09	0,20
Rarely or often <Iceland>	NPS <Iceland>	na	na	na	Na
Rarely or often <Costco>	NPS <Costco>	na	na	na	Na
Rarely or often <Krónan>	NPS <Krónan>	0,07	<,001	0,12	0,25

Note: R² variance explained, B unstandardized coefficients and β standardized coefficients

Accordingly, in all cases in this study the relationship is weak except for the store Fjarðarkaup where the relationship is moderately strong. The results indicate that the NPS explains a very small part of the variation in the frequency of visits to a particular store and that the relationship between those variables is rather weak.

4 Discussion and conclusion

This paper assesses the relationship between the NPS on the one hand and loyalty on the other. Most researchers characterize the NPS as a measure of loyalty, although there are different opinions as to whether the NPS alone is sufficient to assess loyalty (Hayes, 1988). There is also research on whether there is a relationship between the NPS and visit frequency, but some researchers express strong views that visit frequency is an overestimated measure of loyalty (Hayes, 1998; Reichheld, 2003; Kristensen & Eskildsen, 2014). The results show that Bonus is the store that the respondents say that they go to most often (44.6%,

+/- 1.1%), and the percentage is quite stable over the period covered by the study (44.4% in 2019, 44.8% in 2020, 44.3% in 2021, and 45% in 2022). Kronan is in second place: 37.1% (+/- 1.0%) of respondents say that they go there most often. This percentage is also quite stable, although there are indications that Kronan is catching up to Bonus and or other stores (36.7% in 2019, 37.5% in 2020, 35.5% in 2021, and 39.4% in 2022). Other stores have a much lower percentage. When the respondents were NOT visiting the store that they visit most often, the respondents most visited Kronan (30.9%, +/- 1.0%) and Bonus (29.8%, +/- 1.0%), with the difference between the two being insignificant. These two chains have a dominant position in the grocery market, and 74.4% of respondents report that Bonus is the store that they visit most often or second most often, and 68% of respondents report that Kronan is the store that they visit most often or second most often. Since the combined percentage is higher than 100, it can be assumed that there is significant competition between Bonus and Kronan. The results also show that of those who say that they visit Bonus most often, 55.8% visit Kronan as a second choice, and of those who say that they visit Kronan most often, 58.8% visit Bonus as a second choice.

The findings also show that the average NPS for the store that is visited most often is 7.16, while the average score for the store that is visited the second most often is 6.64. Therefore, a conclusion may be drawn that the NPS is on average higher for the store that a person visits most often compared to the store that a person visits second most often. Loyalty is therefore stronger for the first choice. This view is supported by the high visiting frequency found in relation to Bonus and Kronan. In general, this suggests that the NPS might be a strong predictor of loyalty, despite the arguments that assert that a multi-item measurement tool is more reliable than single-item measurement tool when evaluating a specific concept like loyalty (Hayes, 1998; Keiningham *et al.*, 2007; Kristensen & Eskildsen, 2014; Sadhewa & Arifin, 2017).

In this analysis of the relationship between the NPS and visit frequency, this study has found that, in general, the NPS explains a very small part of the variation in visit frequency, and in all cases the relationship was rather weak. This supports the argument that visit frequency or repeated purchases are not necessarily a good indicator of loyalty, as the reason for a visit could be explained by various factors, such as limited access, oligopoly, or location of the store.

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