ISSN (Online): 3033-0106

BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT COMPASS
Volume: 69 (2025), Issue: 4
DOI: https://doi.org/10.56065/yh6vhs35, pp. 44-59

Issues since 2024: https://bi.ue-varna.bg/ojs/index.php/bmc
Previous issues: http://journal.ue-varna.bg/en/home

Dance School Choice: Exploring the Relative Importance of 7P Marketing Mix Elements across Segments

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JEL: M31, M37

Abstract

The aim of the study is to determine the relative importance of criteria within each element of the 7Ps marketing mix – Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Physical Evidence, People, and Process – in consumers' decision-making when selecting a dance school. The research was conducted in Varna, Bulgaria, using an online survey distributed via LimeSurvey. A total of 217 individuals participated in the study. The sample consists of a heterogeneous group of respondents in terms of gender, age, and prior experience in dance. Descriptive statistics were applied to examine the general tendencies and segment differences across the 7Ps. The findings reveal differences across age, gender, and prior dance experience, from the overall general tendency regarding the most and the least important factors within each element of the marketing mix. The study contributes to the limited literature on performing arts and dance marketing by exploring the relative importance of the elements and providing practical insights for dance schools to identify specific competitive advantages relevant to specific consumer segments.

Published by University of Economics – Varna

Key words:
Marketing, Dance Marketing, Advertising, Marketing Mix, 7P.

Citation: Aleksandrova, H. (2025). Dance school choice: exploring the relative importance of 7P marketing mix elements across segments. *Business & Management Compass*. University of Economics Varna, 69 (4), pp. 44 - 59. DOI: 10.56065/yh6vhs35

Received:14.11.2025.
Revised: 30.11.2025.
Accepted: 12.12.2025.
Published: 29.12.2025.

1. Introduction

In the academic literature, the main elements of the marketing mix are generally discussed through the well-known 4P model: product, price, promotion, and place (Borden, N. H., 1964; Jasin, M., Firmansyah, A., 2023; Walmsley, B., 2019; Olson, E. L., 2022; Kotler, P., 1972, p. 50). Over the years, and for the purposes of different areas of application, the 4P concept has expanded and/or been modified. For example, to address the specifics of services, the 4P was expanded to the 7P concept, with the addition of people, process, and physical evidence (Christopher, L. & Jochen, W., 2021; Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G., 2017; Rafiq, M., Ahmed, P. K., 1995, p. 4).

Another version of the marketing mix framework is 8P, which retains the elements of the 7P and adds one more – performance. There is also Sutton's (1991) 8P concept, adapted for sporting events and modifying the elements of the marketing mix to product, planning, packaging, promotion, price, place, positioning, and perception. In specialized literature, the concept has also been expanded to 10P, where, in addition to the 7Ps, the elements of proof, packaging, and personality are added. Another 10P framework introduces partnership, packaging, and policy perspective (Lim, W. M., 2021).

In recent years, the expansion of the marketing mix has even reached 12Ps, with several variations proposed (Berg, S. 2019; Hadfield, B. 2022). While retaining the original 4Ps, the authors propose the following additions: people, presentation, positioning, performance, process, persona, purpose, payment (Berg, S., 2019); packaging, positioning, personality, people, process, policy, performance, perseverance (Hadfield, 2022); and people, process, physical evidence, promise, picture (visual representation), proof, pitch, personalization.

There are versions of the marketing mix that replace the "Ps" with "Cs" within the concepts. Such transformation is Kotler's 4C concept, which includes: co-creation, currency, communal activation, and conversation (Kotler, P., 2017). A different modification was proposed by Bruner (1989), who also introduced a 4C concept, though with the following elements: concept, cost, channels, and communication mix. According to Bruner, G., for instance, the "concept" has a broader scope of application and more effectively represents exchange offerings compared to the term "product." In this framework, Brunner does not treat the elements in isolation, but rather presents them as partially overlapping (Bruner, G. 1989, pp. 72–74). After the 7Ps, Bruner's 4C concept is the next most commonly applied framework within the services sector.

Other authors have entirely replaced the term "marketing mix" with "marketing value." In this version, the elements are reduced to two main categories: the marketing offer (products and offerings, price, and method of sale) and marketing communications (the channels and means used for information exchange and maintaining relationships with customers) (Rafailova, G., 2021, p. 137).

Despite the wide range of variations of the marketing mix, for the purposes of this study, the focus is placed on the elements of the services marketing mix (7Ps), with some of the elements adapted and modified to suit the field of dance art.

2. Literature Review

The literature on services marketing provides extensive evidence on the role of the marketing mix elements in shaping consumer behaviour. In the field of performing arts, however, empirical research remains limited, particularly in the context of dance education. The following review examines existing studies on each of the 7Ps and their relevance to the arts and dance sectors.

2.1. Product (dance rehearsals and performance)

The marketing mix examined within the current research is that of a dance school. The first element of the 7P - the product - consists of dance classes and performances offered by such schools. As dance belongs to the field of performing arts and represents a service, it possesses specific characteristics that distinguish it both from tangible products and from other types of services.

As a service, dance rehearsals and performances have some common characteristics with other intangible

products, such as the possibility of prior trial. Similar to other services, they cannot be tested in advance, which makes the risk for the consumers higher. For a dance class, even if it is sometimes possible to try a class before you enroll in it, which can allow potential consumers to gain an impression of the rehearsal experience, it is still impossible for two rehearsals to be identical. Another characteristic of products in the art sector is that, unlike other businesses which deliberately attempt to adapt their products to specific desires of consumers, in the creation of an artistic product, this is generally not possible, as it would undermine the expression of the artist/choreographer/director. The unique signature of the individual creator contributes a key feature of products in this field and is a primary reason why audiences choose them (Kerrigan, F. et al., 2004, p. 60; Rentschler, R. et al., 2002; Mokwa, Dawson, & Prieve, 1983, Zaggelidou, E. et al., 2013, p. 223; Obreshkova, N, 2004, p. 53; Byrnes, W., 2015, p. 428; Ulziibadrakh, Z. and Szakály, Z., 2021). Vurbanova (1997) emphasizes that the arts exist to lead, not to follow the preferences of the audience (Vurbanova, 1997, p. 114).

A further distinctive feature of art products is that they are fundamentally designed to evoke emotions and experiences in consumers (Kerrigan, F., Fraser, P., & Özbilgin, M., 2004; Solomon, M. R., 2018, p. 519-521; Colbert, F., & St-James, Y., 2014; Williams-Burnett, N., & Skinner, D. H., 2017). In most cases, both in dance and in the arts more broadly, a product is defined as “quality, only if it provokes certain emotions in the consumers. They admire it due to the beauty and/or the emotions that it brings within them (Solomon, M. R., 2018, p. 519 – 521).

Moreover, in the context of dance schools and artistic products, it is common for some artists to avoid competing in the mass market. An art product perceived as “bad” or “strange” by the general public becomes “great” and “amazing” for niche consumers (Fillis, I., 2002, p.139). In this regard, Gustav Klimt (1899), referring to Friedrich Schiller, noted in his painting “Nuda Veritas”: ”If you cannot please everyone with your deeds and art, please only a few. To please many is dangerous.” The subjective judgment of what is a good or a bad product is most strongly pronounced within the arts. Also, the quality of the product often depends simultaneously on both parties (the provider – dancers or dance teacher and the consumer – the audience or the dancers).

2.2. Place as an Element of the 7P Marketing Mix in Dance

Similar to other services, the main products of a dance school - rehearsals and performances - are inseparable - meaning that production and consumption occur in the same place and at the same time. They cannot be produced in one place and consumed in another. Consumers experience the product directly at the moment of its creation – on stage or at the dance studio (in cases when events are conducted live rather than online). Although technological developments have made it possible to broaden audiences through live-streaming or recorded performances, such practices alter the essence of performing arts, which lies in the immediacy of the live experience. Accordingly, the present discussion considers only the physical locations where consumers receive the product. For dance schools, these are theatres, concert halls, and dance studios. This characteristic inherently restricts the number of markets and consumers that a dance school can reach (Jhanji, H., 2021, p. 5).

In the context of services, “place” is related to the specific location where the service is provided, which includes the ease of access, the sales channels, and the times at which the service is available (Jhanji, H., 2021, p. 45). Typically, marketing decisions concerning the choice of place are of critical importance for organizations, as they have long-term effects and are significantly more difficult to change compared to other elements of the marketing mix (e.g., price or promotion) (Perreault, W., & McCarthy, E. J., 2002, p. 306). This circumstance has led to a large number of studies focused on the influence of place on consumer behaviour. Brook (2013), for example, examined the impact of the distance between the opera building and the residence of visitors on their willingness to attend specific events at the opera. Based on studies related to the London Opera, where it is known that audiences are strongly divided along socio-economic lines, Brook concluded that the distance to the venue has a significant influence on consumers’ product choices. He defined factors related to place as elements of the services marketing mix (e.g., accessibility, availability of parking, location

and condition of facilities, seating in the halls) and described them as the "drivers of attendance in the arts sector" (Brook, O., 2013, p. 104). This statement is also supported by other researchers such as Hall, E., Binney, W., & Vieceli, J. (2016); Byrnes, W. (2015); Zaggelidou, E. et al. (2013); Crossick, G., & Kaszynska, P. (2016); Scholarworks, S., & Stegemiller, T. M. (1995), among others.

2.3. Price as an Element of the 7P Marketing Mix in Dance

Over time, the understanding of price as part of the marketing mix has also undergone some changes. According to Vasileva (2016), similar to Kotler, the price of a product no longer includes only cost and profit, but also encompasses other expenses (financial and non-financial) associated with meeting consumer needs (Vasileva, B., 2016, p. 18). In the specialized literature, many authors emphasize that price is undoubtedly one of the elements with the greatest impact on consumer behaviour, while at the same time being one of the elements that organizations can most easily adjust (Levrini, G. R. D., & dos Santos, M. J., 2021, p. 2; Hall, E., Binney, W., & Vieceli, J., 2016, p. 33; Rajan, R., Oswal, K.; Zhao, H. et al., 2021). Due to that, empirical tests are often conducted to study the effect of price on consumer behaviour in different areas, including arts and dance in particular. For example, a research paper by Rajan and Oswal (2021) found that for 96% of respondents, price matters when purchasing any type of product. Consumers generally feel satisfied with a purchase when the perceived value of a product matches its price. It should be noted that perceived value is formed through a complex process and does not always reflect the actual price of the product (Levrini, G. R. D., & dos Santos, M. J., 2021, p. 3).

In relation to opera attendance, Hall, Binney, and Vieceli (2013) in their empirical research found that price had the strongest influence on consumers' choice of performance compared to other elements of the marketing mix. Interestingly, their findings differed from respondents' stated attitudes, according to which they were willing to pay higher prices, and that their choices were influenced more by other elements than by price (Hall, Binney, & Vieceli, 2016, p. 33). Another piece of research related to examining the influence of the price within the performing arts was conducted by Warne and Drake-Brooks (2016) on theatre tickets. In their study, the price again proved to be the most important factor influencing the audience's attendance. In contrast, Obreshkova (2004) argues that in the case of art products, price does not exert a significant influence on consumers. She equates artistic products with socio-cultural goods, for which "consumption is far more sensitive to non-economic factors (social, demographic, value-based, etc.) than to purely economic ones" (Obreshkova, N., 2004, p. 59).

2.4. Promotion as an Element of the 7P Marketing Mix in Dance

Although the influence of promotion on consumer behaviour has attracted the interest of numerous scholars (Kotler, P. & Armstrong, G., 2017; Soeswoyo & Choiri, 2018, 2023), there are few studies focused on the promotions within the dance sector.

A typical feature of private micro and small organizations in the arts sector is that they have extremely limited budgets for marketing and often cannot afford to hire a dedicated marketing specialist (Bennett, R., 2014, p. 59). Despite the opportunities offered by online advertising, dance schools and other art organizations still widely rely on print advertising - flyers, posters, etc. (Obreshkova, N., 2004, p. 91). They are relatively inexpensive, have visual impact (Varbanova, L., 1998, p. 130), and the distribution of flyers also requires personal contact with consumers, which is particularly important in the arts.

Social media has become an inseparable part of daily life. In the online space, dance schools primarily emphasize the school and their dancers by posting videos, photos, and other visualizations (Gagliano, A. and Frosch, J., 2020; Zaggelidou, 2013; Gu, C. et al., 2022). These visualizations can help consumers form an initial impression of what to expect. Video, in particular, is a stimulus that can strongly affect consumer emotions and, consequently, shape audience evaluations (Gu, C. et al., 2022, p. 4).

Sales promotion contributes to short-term increases in sales. One method is "package incentives," which combine several products into a bundled offer at a lower price (Varbanova, L., 2004, p. 139). Examples of bundled offers include tickets for a single class, season tickets for all classes, or passes for selected ones

(Scholarworks, S. and Stegemiller, T.M, 1995, p. 15; Hall, E., Binney, W. & Vieceli, J, 2016, p. 5; Bakos, Y. and Brynjolfsson, E., 1996, p. 1). In their research on consumer loyalty in the arts, Hall and colleagues (2016) confirmed that package pricing, as a sales promotion technique, increases attendance by facilitating access to artistic productions and positively influences consumer choice (Hall, E., Binney, W. & Vieceli, J., 2016, p. 32; Varbanova, L., 2004, p. 138-139).

Publicity also exerts a relatively strong influence on consumer behaviour in the dance sector. Through publicity, audiences primarily become informed about new works (Obreshkova, N., 2004, p. 92) and upcoming open rehearsals and performances, while also shaping the public image of the dance school (Varbanova, L., 2004, p. 141).

2.5. Physical Evidence as an Element of the 7P Marketing Mix in Dance

Due to the specific characteristics of services (intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability), consumers experience a relatively higher perceived risk compared to the purchase of tangible products (Jhanji, H., 2021, p. 42). In this respect, it is necessary for organizations to provide a certain degree of tangibility to the services they offer. One possible way to achieve this is through physical evidence. Such evidence may relate to the appearance of buildings, interior design, the atmosphere in rehearsal rooms/changing rooms/waiting areas, landscaping around the facility, and other features (Wickham, M. et al., 2020; Jhanji, H., 2021, p. 42; Lovelock, C. et al., 2011, p.19; Grădinaru, C. et al., 2016; Solomon, M. R., 2018, p. 264).

In a study by Zaggelidou, E. et al. (2013), it was found that when presenting an artistic product on stage in front of an audience, attention should be paid to factors such as acoustics, lighting, stage floor, stage size, seating capacity, and accessibility for elderly individuals and those with reduced mobility or disabilities (Zaggelidou, E. et al., 2013, p. 226). Examining the school environment within the field of dance, Zaggelidou and colleagues further observed that the facilities available within the building are an important factor influencing consumer behaviour. They emphasized that for students, factors such as modern and safe equipment, improved interior design, and clean changing rooms and showers are of great importance (Zaggelidou et al., 2013, p. 226). Similar conclusions were reached by Budakova, S. (2021), who investigated music lessons in kindergartens (Budakova, S., 2021).

Most performances offered as creative products by organizations engaged in amateur dance are staged in public buildings, which are often inadequately maintained, leaving consumers with negative impressions (Crossick, G., & Kaszynska, P., 2016). Brook (2013) highlights that, in addition to place-related factors as elements of the services marketing mix, physical evidence – such as the condition of facilities and seating in auditoriums – also serves as a “driver of audience attendance in the arts” (Brook, O., 2013, p. 104).

2.6. Process as an Element of the 7P Marketing Mix in Dance

Based on the reviewed literature, it has been established that, compared to the other elements of the marketing mix, process is the least represented in research. For instance, Zaggelidou, E. (2013) found that, when choosing an art school or performance, consumers attached great importance to having quick and easy access to information regarding rehearsal schedules, upcoming performances, venues, ticket purchase options, opportunities for donations, and ways to easily contact the organization. This seamless process fosters positive impressions, enhances consumer retention, and increases the likelihood of recommending the dance studio or other art organization to others (Zaggelidou, E., 2013, p. 224).

Similarly, a study within the music industry indicated that process-related factors play a critical role in consumers’ purchase intentions. However, it also demonstrated that in order to improve overall consumer satisfaction and purchase intention, the process of accessing music must be complemented by other factors, such as service quality and website usability (Kusumawati, R. D. et al., 2014). The importance of clearly defined and simplified processes has also been confirmed by Colbert, F. (2009) and Ulziibadrakh, Z. and Szakály, Z. (2021), who noted that clarity, accessibility and transparency of the process are essential to reaching broader audiences and enhancing satisfaction (Colbert, F., 2009; Ulziibadrakh, Z. and Szakály, Z.,

2021).

Drawing upon multiple studies (Hristova, D. & Palamarova, P., 2023; Grădinaru, C. et al., 2016; Kusumawati, R. D. et al., 2014; Dickman, S., 1997), the main process-related elements for dance school products – specifically dance classes – can be summarized as follows:

- the speed of notifying consumers in case of rehearsal cancellation;
- punctuality and consistency of rehearsals;
- adherence to the published schedule;
- organization of the distribution and storage of rehearsal costumes and props;
- regular provision of feedback;
- efficiency of the booking and inquiry system.

2.7. People as an Element of the 7P Marketing Mix in Dance

People are the last element of the services marketing mix to be discussed. In services, people are simultaneously involved in both the preparation stages of creating the artistic product and its live delivery to consumers (Jhanji, H., 2021). A specific feature of services is the necessity for the simultaneous presence of both the service provider and the client. In the case of dance art products, the quality of the service often depends on both sides (the provider and the recipient of the service).

A characteristic of dance art is that the creation of a stage performance as a creative product depends on both the choreographer/director and the participants (artists/dancers), as it is a collaborative process. The vision of the choreographer/director must be appropriately combined with the technical preparation and temperament of the dancers (Wickham, M., Lehman, K., & Fillis, I., 2020, pp. 17–18; Ulzibadrakh, Z. & Szakály, Z., 2021). Moreover, the actions and reactions of the audience during the performance can also influence the live artistic product presented on stage.

Employees (choreographers, directors, administrative staff, etc.) influence consumer behavior through the way they communicate, their qualifications, the clothes they wear, their overall appearance, the manner in which they deliver the service, their friendliness, and so on (Nengsih, S. et al., 2024, p. 141; Lovelock, C. et al., 2011, p. 15; Dickman, S., 1997, p. 8). Most services are less standardized compared to tangible products (Jhanji, H., 2021, p. 4). For example, one coach or choreographer may have a different previous experience than another and may explain more calmly and in more detail compared to a colleague; thus, the overall attitude toward clients can vary significantly among professionals (Kotler, P. & Keller, K., 2016, p. 425).

2.8. Research Gap

Despite the wide range of research on the marketing mix, its empirical application within the context of dance rehearsals and performances remains limited. Existing studies in the performing arts predominantly focus on opera, theatre, or classical music, leaving dance as a performing art form underexplored. Moreover, prior research rarely explored segment differences across the 7Ps when choosing a dance school or performance. By offering a segment-specific, rank-ordered evaluation of 7P criteria in the context of dance school choice, this study extends the services marketing and the performing arts marketing literature.

3. Research Design and Methodology

The study was conducted in Bulgaria using an online survey created and administered via LimeSurvey. It was conducted during the period 11 December 2024 - 11 May 2025. The aim of the study is to examine the relative importance of factors within each of the 7Ps of the extended marketing mix - Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Physical Evidence, People, and Process - in the context of dance schools.

The questionnaire consisted of three blocks of questions:

1) Block related to the relative importance of the factors;
2) Block containing demographic questions;
3) Block containing questions related to prior experience.

Each element of the 7Ps includes several items (Table 1) evaluated on a five-point Likert scale (1-”Not

important at all"; 5-"Very important"). The data from the closed-ended questions were analysed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25.

A total of 217 individuals participated in the study. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. For all respondents under the age of 18, written consent was obtained from a parent prior to participating in the study. The sample consists of a heterogeneous group of respondents in terms of gender, age and prior experience in dance. Women account for 86,2 % of the participants, whereas men account for 13,8 % of those. The distribution aligns with previous research (Kaali-Nagy, C. and Garrison, L., 1972; Andreasen, A. and Belk, R., 1980), demonstrating a relatively higher female presence and interest in performing arts activities, including dance. which documents a substantially higher female participation rate and stronger engagement with performing arts, particularly dance. Therefore, while the sample may appear gender-skewed, it reflects the actual demographic structure of the dance education market rather than a sampling bias. Nevertheless, this overrepresentation of female respondents should be acknowledged as a contextual limitation when generalizing the findings to other performing arts segments or to broader populations.

In terms of age distribution, 51,4 % of participants are between 18 and 24 years old, 20,2 % are aged 25-34, 10,6 % are aged 45-54, 10,1 % - age 35-44, 5 % are under 18 and 2,8 % are over 55. Moreover, 75 % of the participants have previous experience with dance classes, while only 15 do not.

4. Results and Discussion

This study explores the relative importance of the 7P elements of the services marketing mix in the selection of dance schools in Varna, Bulgaria. To operationalize each element, variables were identified from prior research as well as from insights provided by dance school owners during preliminary consultations.

Table 1 presents variables included under each element of the 7Ps and their corresponding Cronbach's Alpha values.

Table 1

Included Variables and Internal consistency of the scales for the 7Ps in Dance School

7P elements	Variables - Code	Code	Cronbach's Alpha
Product			
	opportunity for a stage performance	Stage	
	participation in competitions	Comp	
	number of awards won in previous competitions	Awards	
	number of people in a group	Gr	0,776
	schedule	Sched	
	availability of individual lessons	IndivLessons	
	existence of different groups according to participants' level (beginner, intermediate, …)	PLevel	
Price			
	different payment options (cash, online, card)	PayOp	
	price in comparison with other schools	PComp	
	possibility of paying for single class	PClass	
	availability of monthly or annual passes	PCard	0,872
	transparency and publicity of prices	PTransp	
	options for fee reimbursement in case of absence	Reimb	
	the possibility of a reduced overall fee when more than one family member enroll	RedFee	
Place			
	proximity to place of work, study, or residence	ProxWSR	
	proximity to a bus stop	ProxBS	
	availability of nearby parking	Parking	0,743
	accessibility for people with disabilities	Disability	
	proximity to cafés or restaurants	ProxCafRes	
	presence of nearby parks or green areas	ParksGA	

Promotion			0,800
	active social media profile	SocMedia	
	existence of a functional website	Web	
	opportunity for a first free training session	Trial	
	availability of an application (app)	App	
	promotional materials (T-shirts, sportswear, bags)	PromoMat	
	joint campaigns with influencers;	Influencers	
	positive reviews;	Reviews	
	availability of a loyalty system (e.g., one free class after attending ten)	Loyalty	
Physical evidence			0,913
	spacious halls	Halls	
	good lighting	Light	
	good ventilation	Vent	
	availability of changing rooms	Change	
	availability of showers in the changing rooms	Shower	
	presence of a waiting area	Wait	
	cleanliness of the hall	Clean	
	good equipment in the hall (mirrors, dance floor, barres).	Equip	
People			0,723
	qualification of the teachers	Qual	
	ease of contacting the teachers outside of class and opportunity for additional questions	Contact	
	courtesy, responsiveness, and willingness to assist from the administrative staff and support team.	Assist	
Process			0,863
	organization of rehearsals (clear structure, accuracy, and sequence of lessons)	Organize	
	easy and convenient registration system	Regist	
	regular provision of feedback and evaluation of participants' progress	Feedback	

Source: SPSS output from the conducted research

The obtained Cronbach's Alpha values for the scales assessing the criterion for a dance school selection by the elements of the 7Ps fall within the interval $0,7 < \alpha < 0,9$, which is interpreted as indicating good to very good internal consistency (reliability) of the scales used.

To present the results from the evaluations of the components of each element of the marketing mix (7Ps) as a criterion for dance school selection, descriptive statistics (Mode) were applied. This approach highlights the central tendency and variability within the internal structure of each element of the 7Ps (product, price, place, promotion, physical evidence, process, and people). The analysis was conducted both overall and across different groups ((1) with and without dance experience, (2) different age categories, (3) genders, and (4) roles (parent and dancer)), for all seven elements of the marketing mix. To examine whether the observed differences between groups were statistically significant, Kruskal-Wallis H Test was performed.

In Table 2, which presents the results for the **Product** element, it can be observed that the relatively most important criterion overall is the schedule, while the least important is the availability of individual lessons.

Table 2

Mode values across different segments to the components within the element "Product" of the 7P marketing mix

Groups		Stage	Comp	Awards	Gr	Sched	IndivLessons	PLevel
Experience								
With experience	Mode	5	4	3	4	5	3	5

Without experience	Mode	4	4	3	4	5	3	5
Gender								
Male	Mode	4	4	5	4	5	4	5
Female	Mode	4	4	3	4	5	3	5
Age								
Under 18	Mode	5	4	5	4	5	4	5
18-24	Mode	4	4	4	4	5	3	5
25-34	Mode	4	4	3	4	5	3	5
35-44	Mode	2	3	1	4	5	3	5
45-54	Mode	4	4	2	4	5	4	5
Over 55	Mode	5	1	5	5	4	4	5
Role								
Parent	Mode	4	4	3	4	5	4	5
Dancer	Mode	4	4	3	4	5	3	5
Total	Mode	4	4	3	4	5	3	5

Source: Own elaboration

Statistically significant differences in the distribution of importance scores were observed across different age groups for 3 of the factors, e.g. the opportunity for stage performance and the number of awards won in previous competitions ($p<0,05$). For the oldest segment (respondents aged over 55), the most important criteria (Mode 5) are the existence of different groups according to participants' level, as well as the opportunity for stage performance, the number of people in a group and the number of awards won in previous competitions whereas for respondents aged 18-24, 25-34, 34-44 and 45-55, the factors that are most frequently rated as the most important ones are the schedule and the existence of different groups according to participants' level.

Variations are also found in the most frequently rated as the least important criterion. Respondents aged over 55 identified the number of awards won in previous competitions, while those aged 25-54 rated the number of awards won in previous competitions as the least important criterion.

No statistically significant gender differences are identified ($p>0,05$). The Mode for the most highly valued factor remained 5 for both male and female respondents. However, female respondents rated most frequently the availability of individual lessons as the least important, whereas male respondents considered the number of awards won in previous competitions as such.

Further no statistical differences appear between groups with and without experience. Both groups most frequently rated the availability of individual lessons and the number of awards won in previous competitions as the least important factors.

Finally, when comparing parents and dancers, no statistically significant differences ($p>0,05$) are found. Both groups rated most frequently as the least important factor the number of awards won in previous competitions, but dancer also identified as least important factor the availability of individual lessons.

In Table 3, are presented the results for the **Price** element.

Table 3

Mode values across different segments to the components within the element "Price" of the 7P marketing mix

Groups		PayOp	PComp	PClass	PCard	PTransp	Reimb	RedFee
Experience								
With experience	Mode	4	4	4	4	5	4	4
Without experience	Mode	5	4	4	5	5	3	4
Gender								
Male	Mode	5	3	3	4	5	3	3
Female	Mode	4	4	4	4	5	4	4
Age								
Under 18	Mode	3	1	3	3	3	2	4

18-24	Mode	5	4	4	5	5	3	4
25-34	Mode	4	4	5	4	5	5	5
35-44	Mode	4	4	4	4	4	4	5
45-54	Mode	3	3	3	4	5	4	5
Over 55	Mode	1	3	4	5	5	4	5
Role								
Parent	Mode	4	4	3	4	5	3	5
Dancer	Mode	5	4	4	5	5	3	3
Total	Mode	4	4	4	4	5	3	4

Source: Own elaboration

The general tendency indicates that the relatively most important criterion overall is the transparency and publicity of prices (Mode 5), while the least important (the one with the lowest Mode score) is the possibility of a reduced overall fee when more than one family member enroll (Mode 3).

Modal differences are observed across several groups regarding the most and the least important factors.

Statistically significant differences ($p<0,05$) are observed between the ratings of the parents and dancers in only two of the variables (different payment options (cash, online, card) and possibility of paying for single class).

Further, statistically significant differences ($p<0,01$) are observed across the age groups. Respondents under 18 (Mode 1) and over 55 (Mode 3) most frequently considered the price in comparison with other schools as the least important, while those aged 18-24 (Mode 3) considered the possibility of a reduced overall fee when more than one family member enroll as such.

No statistically significant differences are observed between groups with and without previous dance experience. Both groups most frequently defined the price transparency as the most important factor. Respondents without prior dance experience also most frequently rated the factors different payment options and the availability of monthly or annual passes with the highest score (Mode 5). There are no differences between the most frequently rated scores for all other factors for the respondents with prior experience (Mode 4), whereas those without experience most frequently considered the options for fee reimbursement in case of absence as the least important one (Mode 3).

Between genders, there are statistically significant differences ($p<0,05$) for two of the variables (price in comparison with other schools and availability of monthly or annual passes). While both groups most frequently rated the transparency and publicity of prices as the most important factor (Mode 5), the male respondents also rated the different payment options (cash, online, card) as such (Mode 5).

In **Table 4** are presented the Mode values for the **Place** element of the marketing mix of dance schools.

Table 4

Mode values across different segments to the components within the element "Place" of the 7P marketing mix

Groups		ProxWSR	ProxBS	Parking	Disability	ProxCafRes	ParksGA
Experience							
With experience	Mode	5	4	5	3	3	3
Without experience	Mode	5	4	5	4	3	3
Gender							
Male	Mode	4	3	3	3	3	3
Female	Mode	5	4	5	3	3	3
Age							
Under 18	Mode	3	4	4	4	2	2
18-24	Mode	5	4	5	3	3	3
25-34	Mode	4	4	5	3	3	3
35-44	Mode	5	3	5	3	1	3
45-54	Mode	5	4	4	3	1	3

Over 55	Mode	4	4	5	1	1	4
Role							
Parent	Mode	4	4	5	3	3	3
Dancer	Mode	5	4	5	3	3	3
Total	Mode	5	4	5	3	3	3

Source: Own elaboration

The general tendency shows that most frequently as the relatively most important criterion within the **Place** element of the marketing mix when choosing a dance school is the proximity of the dance school to home, work, or school (Mode 5) and the availability of nearby parking (Mode 5).

In this case, no differences were observed between most of the groups regarding the most important factor, as most of the groups followed the general tendency. The male respondents followed the general tendency with the factor proximity of the dance school to home, work, or school as most frequently choosing it as an important factor (Mode 4). In contrast, for them (the male respondents) the factor availability of nearby parking was most frequently rated as neither important nor not important (Mode 3).

The proximity to cafés or restaurants was most frequently rated as the least important factor (Mode 1) from respondents aged 35-44, 45-55 and over 55.

Statistically significant differences were observed only between genders with regard to the component proximity of parks to the dance school. Male respondents most frequently rated it as neither important nor not important (mode 3) while female respondents most frequently rated it as very important (Mode 5).

The next element of the marketing mix that was examined is **Promotion**. Table 5 presents the Mode values for the components of the Promotion element of the dance school marketing mix, both overall and across the different respondent groups.

Table 5

Mode values across different segments to the components within the element "Promotion" of the 7P marketing mix

Groups		SocMedia	Web	Trial	App	PromoMat	Influencers	Reviews	Loyalty
Experience									
With experience	Mode	4	5	4	3	3	3	5	3
Without experience	Mode	4	4	3	3	3	3	5	4
Gender	Mode								
Male	Mode	4	3	3	3	3	3	5	3
Female	Mode	4	4	4	3	3	3	5	4
Age	Mode								
Under 18	Mode	4	5	5	1	5	3	5	3
18-24	Mode	5	5	4	3	3	3	5	4
25-34	Mode	4	5	5	2	2	1	5	4
35-44	Mode	4	4	4	3	3	1	5	3
45-54	Mode	4	4	5	3	3	1	4	3
Over 55	Mode	4	4	4	3	5	4	5	5
Role									
Parent	Mode	4	4	5	3	3	1	5	3
Dancer	Mode	5	5	4	3	3	3	5	4
Total	Mode	4	5	4	3	3	3	5	4

Source: Own elaboration

The general tendency, as shown in Table 5 for the next element of the marketing mix - **Promotion,** indicates that the factors existence of a functional website and the presence of positive reviews are most frequently rated as very important (Mode 5).

The factor joint campaigns with influencers is rated as least important factor when choosing a dance school (Mode 1) from the segment parents and regarding different age groups from respondents aged 25-54.

For respondents aged under 18 the factor availability of an application (app) is most frequently rated as the least important one (Mode 1).

In **Table 6** are presented the Mode values for the **Physical evidence** element of the marketing mix of dance schools.

Table 6

Mode values across different segments to the components within the element "Physical evidence" of the 7P marketing mix

Groups		Halls	Light	Vent	Change	Shower	Wait	Clean	Equip
Experience									
With experience	Mode	5	5	5	5	3	4	5	5
Without experience	Mode	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Gender									
Male	Mode	5	5	5	5	5	3	5	5
Female	Mode	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5
Age									
Under 18	Mode	5	5	5	5	2	4	5	5
18-24	Mode	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
25-34	Mode	5	5	5	5	3	4	5	5
35-44	Mode	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5
45-54	Mode	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5
Over 55	Mode	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5
Role									
Parent	Mode	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5
Dancer	Mode	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	5
Total	Mode	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	5

Source: Own elaboration

Further, the results for the next element of the marketing mix - **Physical Evidence** - are presented in Table 6.

The general tendency indicates that all factors are most frequently rated as very important except for the factor availability of showers in the changing rooms that is most frequently rated as neither important nor not important (Mode 3) overall. There are statistical differences for this factor between the Mode values of different age groups. The availability of showers in the changing rooms is most frequently rated as not important (Mode 2) from respondents aged under 18, while the same factor is most frequently rated as very important (Mode 5) from respondents aged 18-24 and 45-54.

Between genders the same factor is most frequently rated as very important (Mode 5) from female respondents and important (Mode 4) from male respondents.

Experience based this factor is most frequently rated as neither important nor not important (Mode 3) from respondents with experience and very important (Mode 5) from those without prior dance experience.

In Table 7 the relative importance of the factors within the **People** element is presented.

Table 7

Mode values across different segments to the components within the element "People" of the 7P marketing mix

Groups		Qual	Contact	Assist
Experience				
With experience	Mode	5	5	5
Without experience	Mode	5	5	5
Gender				
Male	Mode	5	5	5
Female	Mode	5	5	5
Age				

Under 18	Mode	5	5	5
18-24	Mode	5	5	5
25-34	Mode	5	5	5
35-44	Mode	5	5	5
45-54	Mode	5	4	5
Over 55	Mode	5	4	5
Role				
Parent	Mode	5	5	5
Dancer	Mode	5	5	5
Total	Mode	5	5	5

Source: Own elaboration

The general tendency indicates that all three factors are most frequently rated as very important (Mode 5). Deviation from the tendency is observed only within the older age segments (respondents aged 45-54 and over 55) who most frequently rated the factor ease of contacting teachers outside class as important (Mode 4).

The final element of the 7P marketing mix examined in the study is the **Process** element. Table 8 presents the Mode values for all components of this element, both overall and across the respondent groups.

Table 8

Mode values across different segments to the components within the element "Process" of the 7P marketing mix

Groups		Organize	Regist	Feedback
Experience				
With experience	Mode	5	5	5
Without experience	Mode	5	5	5
Gender				
Male	Mode	5	5	5
Female	Mode	5	5	5
Age				
Under 18	Mode	5	4	5
18-24	Mode	5	5	5
25-34	Mode	5	5	5
35-44	Mode	5	5	5
45-54	Mode	5	5	5
Over 55	Mode	5	5	5
Role				
Parent	Mode	5	5	5
Dancer	Mode	5	5	5
Total	Mode	5	5	5

Source: Own elaboration

The final results presented form the descriptive statistics analysis are the factors within the **Process** element. The general tendency indicates that all three factors are most frequently rated as very important (Mode 5). Deviation from the tendency is observed only within the youngest respondents (aged under 18) who most frequently rated the factor easy and convenient registration system as important (Mode 4) when choosing a dance school.

Conclusion

This study determines the relative importance of the criterion within each element of the 7Ps marketing mix in consumers' decision-making when selecting a dance school within Varna, Bulgaria. Drawing on a heterogeneous sample (N=217) and reliability-checked for each "P" scale, the general tendency within each scale and nuanced segment-level deviation from the overall pattern are identified.

The findings extend the existing literature by (1) providing a rank-ordered map of 7P criteria specific for dance classes; (2) pointing that credence, organizational and hygiene factors (clear structure, accuracy, and sequence of lessons; the schedule; transparency and publicity of prices; cleanliness; good ventilation, etc.)

outweigh add-on features (apps, influencer collaborations; proximity to cafés or restaurants; availability of individual lessons, etc.) in stated importance; (3) evidencing segment heterogeneity that aligns with age, prior experience and role (parent or dancer) - thereby identifying specific competitive advantages relevant to each segment.

Dance schools should prioritize clear and easy to find schedule (Product), transparent pricing (Price), location convenience (Place), authentic consumer reviews over influencer spend (Promotion), dance school cleanliness and good ventilation (Physical Evidence), the courtesy, responsiveness, and willingness to assist on the part of administrative staff and support team (People) and clear structure, accuracy, and sequence of lessons (Process).

Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

This study has several limitations that offer opportunities for further research. First, the sample is geographically restricted to Bulgaria. Future research could expand the geographical scope by including participants from different regions or countries and conducting comparisons across segments, which can help with the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts.

Additionally, the current research focuses on all dance schools as a unified category without differentiating between specific dance styles. Segmentation by dance styles in future research could provide more nuanced insights into the differences between consumers of different styles when choosing a dance school.

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